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**Ijams Nature Center Announces Campus Master Plan**

*Upgrades and improvements will cultivate community and connect more people to the natural world*

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, 1/30/24 – What was once a small, quiet nature center with approximately 100,000 visitors a year is now one of the Southeast’s premier destinations for nature lovers, engaging 620,000 visitors annually from East Tennessee and around the world.

Ijams Nature Center is proud to be one of the most spectacular jewels in Knoxville’s recreational crown and one of Knoxville’s top tourist destinations. “Today, Ijams is a bustling, beloved institution,” Ijams President and CEO Amber Parker said. “We offer the wonder of a wildlife sanctuary in the heart of Knoxville, world-class nature education programs for all ages, and a huge array of recreational activities. Our staff members are also sought-after nationwide for their expertise and environmental best practices.”

To serve the greater Knoxville area’s growing population and its needs, Ijams has developed a Master Plan to modernize existing facilities, improve access and safety for all people, and create new facilities to support increased usage – all while working within existing developed footprints to limit impact on natural areas.

“Ijams is a nonprofit nature center,” Ijams Board President Andy Oakes said. “While we have a wonderful and close working relationship with our City and County Parks, only 9% of our annual operating budget comes from government funds. Ijams relies on community support, memberships, donations, and grants to hire staff and maintain our programs, facilities, and trails.”

To accomplish all its envisions, Ijams invites everyone to become a member and strengthen their connection to nature. “Our memberships are valuable and fun, with tangible benefits,” Oakes said. “We want more East Tennesseans to cultivate a relationship with Ijams and become part of the community that makes Ijams great.” New membership levels include access to free monthly programs, and free parking when a daily \$5.00 fee is implemented on Feb. 19. Annual passes will be available for \$50. The nature center will offer free parking days during the year.

Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon said, "I'm a proud member of Ijams Nature Center and spend many happy hours hiking and biking its trails. Ijams' new Master Plan is exciting and smartly done. These improvements will provide increased access for everyone, and parking fees will sustainably support the future facilities and program growth our citizens need."

"Knox County values its partnership with Ijams Nature Center," Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs said. "I've seen this nonprofit's commitment to our citizens and am proud of its efforts to provide so much to our community and visitors. I'm particularly pleased that visitors from outside Knox County and East Tennessee will help protect and maintain this special resource."

Work is already underway to improve parking lots, and improvements to the section of Island Home Avenue that runs through the nature center's footprint will start this summer. The Master Plan also includes a new Homesite Pavilion for events; significant Visitor Center renovations; a new, accessible canopy walkway allowing all visitors to move through treetops and over bluffs; infrastructure improvements; and new buildings at Mead's Quarry.

*Schematic designs for these projects can be viewed at [ljams.org/master-plan](http://ljams.org/master-plan).*

#### About Ijams Nature Center

Ijams Nature Center is a 318-acre nonprofit educational center in the heart of Knoxville and serves visitors of all ages, stages, and abilities. Its mission is to encourage stewardship of the natural world by providing an urban greenspace for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors through engaging experiences. Ijams features 14 miles of hiking and mixed-use trails, a public access river dock, swimming, boating, biking, and so much more. Hundreds of world-class educational programs and events are coordinated and offered annually. Ijams' grounds and trails are open every day from 8:00 AM until dusk. For more information, visit [ljams.org](http://ljams.org) or call 865-577-4717.

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