



An article in the January 3rd edition of The Gainesville Sun discussed the progress of Wild Spaces - Public Places (WSPP) Projects. As City Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Director, I wish to provide you with more information to help clarify the status of projects funded through the Wild Spaces - Public Places tax initiative. The City of Gainesville will receive approximately \$12 million for park renovations, improvements and to acquire environmentally sensitive lands. My department is responsible for these projects, and contrary to assertions in the recent article, our staff and community partners have made great progress in moving these projects forward.

The City expects to use approximately \$2.5 million of WSPP funds, together with existing funding of \$850,000 in green space acquisition funds to purchase environmentally sensitive lands. With assistance from City's Nature Centers Commission, Alachua County Forever staff and representatives of the Alachua Conservation Trust, City staff developed a potential list of acquisition sites which was approved by the full City Commission on November 20, 2008.

Currently, two potential sites from the list are receiving further consideration as land acquisition targets and the Alachua Conservation Trust is under contract to provide land acquisition services. Another WSPP land acquisition approved by the City Commission is the purchase of the state-owned Smoky Bear Park, located in northeast Gainesville. City and state representatives are finalizing the acquisition agreement. When complete, City staff will meet with nearby residents to discuss the agreement, new playground equipment and park benches, trash cans and tables for the park.

Twenty capital facilities and park improvement projects were approved for partial or total funding by the City Commission at a September 2009 City Commission meeting. A list of these projects and their renovation status update can be viewed online at: <http://wspp.cityofgainesville.org>.

Approved large-scale projects currently underway include: the development of a much needed Senior Recreation Center at Northside Park. Early design phases for the Senior Center will begin in February; \$1,000,000 is allocated toward renovating and landscaping the Depot Park historic train building, which should be completed by July 2011; a large eight-lane rubberized track at Cone Park is in the construction design phase and, upon City Commission approval, will be completed before the end of 2011.

WSPP funds were also approved to upgrade the City's community pools. Within the next 30 days, installation of a geothermal heating and cooling unit will be completed at the city's Northeast Pool. This unit will enable year-round access for swimmers at the Olympic-sized pool. Other improvements at this facility include renovations to the locker rooms and pool decking which are 90 percent complete. In addition to recent improvements, such as the deck resurfacing and locker room renovations, the Albert "Ray" Massey Westside Pool will soon feature a new pool slide. Other projects underway at various city parks include boardwalk development and replacement. Development and/or removal and replacement of boardwalks and bridges at Alfred A. Ring Park, Possum Creek Park, Morningside and John Mahon Nature Park will begin very soon.

Hogtown Creek Headwaters Park development is being partially funded through a \$250,000 donation from Home Depot and \$150,000 in WSPP funding. A site development plan should be finalized by early February, with construction beginning shortly afterward. The park will include a tennis court, picnic pavilion, restroom, playground and nature trails.

We have also renovated several of our existing restroom facilities at Lincoln Park, Northeast Park and the T.B. McPherson Center. We have also installed, or are installing, restroom facilities at Possum Creek Park, Cofrin Nature Park and Hogtown Creek Headwaters Park.

The skate park at Possum Creek Park is an exciting development that should be completed within the next few months. The skate park will include both concrete bowls and streetscape features for skate boarders ranging from beginning enthusiasts to advanced individuals. Funding for this project is comprised of WSPP funds, city and state funding. When completed this summer, Possum Creek Park will feature a skate park, dog park, nature and exercise trails, playground equipment, parking and restroom facilities.

WSPP has also funded \$188,000 in improvements to the historic Thomas Center. Work to restore this community treasure includes new interior and exterior wall paint, new floor tiles, new acoustic ceiling tiles, new carpeting and track lighting for community events held at the facility.

In summary, during the first quarter of fiscal year 2010, the City dedicated resources to carefully plan the development of each of these projects. This front-end planning takes time, but is necessary to ensure that WSPP-funded projects are of high quality, and are cost-efficient. We owe that to the taxpayers who supported this initiative. Going forward, the public will see increasing amounts of activity as each remaining project is successfully bid-out between now and March, 2010.

Over the next few months many of the approved WSPP projects will be well underway or nearing completion. These projects and land acquisitions will be posted with WSPP signage and their progress can be followed on our Web site. We will continue to update residents on the progress of these projects. Most importantly, we thank you for your support of these dramatic improvements to the City's parks, recreation facilities, and environmentally sensitive land holdings.

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