



Memorandum

TO: John Cooley, Chairman – Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee
CC: Sara Deuster, Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation
FROM: Doug Reinert, Director of Parks & Recreation *DSR*
DATE: August 1, 2019
SUBJECT: Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan Update

At the request of the Board of Directors, Mayor, City Administrator, and the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee, I have prepared the following report in order to update these individuals and citizens with relevant information and projects as they relate to the Parks Department's goals, accomplishments, and activities.

The primary funding source for Parks projects falling in alignment with the goals of Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the ¼% Sales and Use Tax approved by voters in 2012. This tax is split evenly among the Fire Department and Parks Department. As of June 2019, this tax has generated over \$17 million in revenue for the Parks Department. Additionally, over \$3.4 million in grants and private contributions have supplemented the tax revenue. In total, these combined funds have been used to complete twenty-seven (27) capital projects, is currently funding nine (9) projects in progress, address capital equipment needs, provide additional personnel, and will continue to fund upcoming projects in the Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan.

Below is a list of current and upcoming projects since last year's update that reflect the goals and outcomes of the Comprehensive Plan.

Trails & Greenways

The Trails & Greenways Master Plan includes approximately 34 miles of trails. Since 2013, a total of 6.3 miles of trails have been completed, 7 miles of sharrows completed, 1.88 miles currently being constructed, 9.6 miles of paved trail evaluated, 5.23 miles currently being designed, and 2.9 miles for which interest letters from engineering firms are being sought. This totals 32.91 miles of trails and greenways projects.

Greg Smith River Trail Phase III:

This project has been completed. This 1.5-mile trail begins at the end of Phase II and extends past Fort Smith Park, ending at the railroad tracks along Riverfront Drive. With the completion of this trail, the Greg Smith River Trail now extends 6.3 miles from the River Park Events Building to Fort Smith Park. Friends of Recreational Trails (F.O.R.T.), a group of trail advocates dedicated to raising private dollars to aid in the expansion of the trail system, contributed \$550,000 towards this phase of the trail.

Chaffee Crossing Trail System:

This trail system is divided into three segments that jointly total approximately 7.1 miles. The City and the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority (FCRA) have entered into an agreement in which FCRA agrees to equally share the cost of the trail with the City up to \$500,000 for each segment. F.O.R.T. has committed to providing additional funding for each segment. Mickle, Wagner, Coleman of Fort Smith is serving as the engineers for the project. The design for Segment Two is nearing completion and Segment Three is in the preliminary design phase. The Notice to Proceed for Segment One was issued to Steve Beam Construction, Inc. on May 1, 2019 with a completion date of December 26, 2019, weather permitting.

Maybranch (Old Railroad) Trail

This is an approximately three (3) mile trail, historically referred to as the Old Railroad Trail. This trail will essentially connect Creekmore Park to the Greg Smith River Trail. A Letter of Interest (LOI) has been advertised in which the City is requesting qualified engineering firms to present their credentials to be considered for this project. Construction of the trail will be performed in conjunction with the Utilities Department, who is laying a sewer line along the path of the trail. Working with the Utilities Department will significantly reduce the cost to the Parks Department.

The above trails align with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

ED-6.1	Ensure that economic development objectives are included in the evaluation of all future City infrastructure projects, including parks and recreation facilities.
HN-1.7	Provide convenient, safe connections between neighborhoods and important destinations, such as downtown, employment centers, schools, parks, shopping areas, and neighborhood services.
CCD-1.1	Support beautification efforts along key corridors, at gateways, and in growth centers identified in the Preferred Future.
TI-1	Improve access and connectivity through enhancements of all modes of transportation.
TI-1.2	Make major destinations highly accessible by all modes of transportation.
TI-3	Provide and enhance non-vehicular access for residents.
PFS-5	Improve the health and well-being of Fort Smith residents.
NCR-1.4	Develop greenways and trails that serve to connect the City.
PFS-1.2.1	Identify opportunities to reduce the City's cost burden by establishing public/private partnerships on significant revitalization projects.

In addition to those mentioned above, Greg Smith River Trail Phase III aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-2.3	Provide recreation activities and access to the Arkansas River while preserving and protecting the natural environment, watershed, and critical wildlife habitats.
NCR-3.6	Encourage the inclusion of public art and facilities and major private development.

In addition to those mentioned above, Maybranch Trail aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-3.4.2	Build Maybranch bike trail for connectivity.
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Soft Surface Trails

The City of Fort Smith purchased 312 acres from the Kansas City Railroad to be used for soft surface trails. These trails will accommodate running, mountain biking, walking, and potentially have bridle paths. Frontier Ozark Off-Road Cyclists (FOORC) and Friends of Recreational Trails (F.O.R.T.) have committed to both building and maintaining these trails at no cost to the City.

This project is in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-2.3	Provide recreation activities and access to the Arkansas River while preserving and protecting the natural environment, watershed, and critical wildlife habitats.
NCR-1.1	Increase the amount of open space and opportunities for recreation throughout the City by supporting the dedication of land and resources for the creation of parks and open spaces.
NCR-4.1	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.

Riverfront Drive Sports Fields

Through participation during multiple public meetings, a Master Plan was developed for this property, commonly referred to as the 51 Acres. Currently, the plan calls for two adult competition soccer fields, two additional adult soccer fields, four youth soccer fields, a Miracle League Field, all-inclusive playground, agility course, concession area, restrooms, water amenity, walking trail, ample parking, and a proposed multimillion-dollar recreation center. The total projected cost for the full development of the park is a little over \$35 million, \$26 million of that being for the recreation center. As was noted last year, Phase I of the Master Plan has been completed, which consisted of two adult-size soccer fields and a gravel parking lot.

Since last year’s update, significant progress has been made to set the stage for continued development of this property. Most notably, the waterline that will service the property will be completed in the coming weeks. This was a jointly funded project between the Parks Department and Utilities Department. This project allowed for the completion of the maintenance building at the southeast corner of the property. This building allows for heavy maintenance equipment to be housed securely and at a location in close proximity to the downtown park areas that require this equipment.

Phase II of the project is currently under design. The general design concept has been prepared and the electrical design for the property has been completed. Crafton Tull, our engineering firm for the project, is working with our staff to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) from playground companies to design and construct an inclusive playground. This will be a design-build project in which our engineers, staff, and citizens will work together to design the park amenities. In order to ensure we are adequately meeting the needs of our citizens, a focus group

of citizens and representatives from local agencies who serve individuals with special needs will be created. Staff has already began identifying local organizations, parents of children with special needs, and individuals with special needs who can serve on this focus group.

This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-1.5	Provide opportunities for mixed-use development to occur in Downtown Fort Smith and identified emerging centers in order to provide access to a variety of uses; promote walkable, pedestrian friendly development; and encourage physical activity.
FLU-2.1	Encourage a mix of housing, retail, and entertainment activities along the City’s waterfront that support day and nighttime activity and a vibrant urban lifestyle.
FLU-2.2	Comprehensively plan access and development along Riverfront Drive to reflect passive and active recreation, pedestrian, bicycle, and tourist activities.
FLU-2.3	Provide recreation activities and access to the Arkansas River while preserving and protecting the natural environment, watershed, and critical wildlife habitats.
ED-6.1	Ensure that economic development objectives are included in the evaluation of all future City infrastructure projects, including parks and recreation facilities.
NCR-1.1	Increase the amount of open space and opportunities for recreation throughout the City by supporting the dedication land and resources for the creation of parks and open space.
NCR-1.6	Encourage multi-use public spaces that can function in a variety of ways to serve the recreation needs of the surrounding neighborhoods (e.g., park space, community events, etc.).
NCR-4.1	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
TI-5.2.1	Coordinate land use planning and capital programming to ensure infrastructure improvements and extensions are phased to support the future land use pattern.
PFS-2.3	Promote public awareness and participation by holding open Town Hall events modeled after the Future Fort Smith Community Forums.

Riverfront Drive Skate and Bike Park

This is a public-private partnership. Phase I of this project consisted of the design and construction of the only skate and bike park of its kind in the nation. The park features skating and biking amenities for all skill levels, a bicycle playground, and a pump track. The private sector raised \$600,000 for the construction of the skate and bike park. The City’s contribution to Phase I was the purchase of land, engineering services, expanded parking, and other infrastructure such as sidewalks and lighting.

The Board of Directors recently approved the purchase of an additional 2.36 acres adjacent to the Riverfront Drive Skate and Bike Park, which will accommodate Phase II of this project. The private sector has secured pledges for at least \$500,000. While not yet determined, possible amenities for this phase include a ropes course, climbing obstacles, and similar activities. In addition to purchasing the land, the City will pay for the engineering and design services and any needed infrastructure, such as sidewalks and lighting.

This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-2.3	Provide recreation activities and access to the Arkansas River while preserving and protecting the natural environment, watershed, and critical wildlife habitats.
ED-6.1.1	Invest in beautification of major transportation corridors; the provisions of trails, open lands, and public gathering spaces; innovative architectural and site design; and alternative transportation choices to all business areas.
NCR-1.5	Plan recreation facility land, space, and programming needs with other service providers in order to meet community needs and national standards.
NCR-1.6	Encourage multi-use public spaces that can function in a variety of ways to serve the recreation needs of the surrounding neighborhoods (e.g., park space, community events, etc.).
PFS-1.2.1	Identify opportunities to reduce the City’s cost burden by establishing public/private partnerships on significant revitalization projects.
PFS-2.3	Promote public awareness and participation by holding open Town Hall events modeled after the Future Fort Smith Community Forums.

Fort Smith Park

Since last year’s update, the inclusive playground has been completed. The playground features an Aeroglider, artificial turf berms, Expression swing, and other inclusive features. This playground was impacted by the recent flood event. Maintenance Staff have cleared the roadways and will begin to address turf damage in the coming weeks. In addition to the playground, the dog park has been completed. Play pieces from the old playground at Fort Smith Park were able to be repurposed into additional amenities for the dogs to enjoy. As a cost savings measure, Maintenance Staff performed the majority of the work: installing equipment, running water lines, pouring concrete, and repurposing old fire hydrants into drinking fountains.

At the beginning of this year, Maintenance Staff constructed two regulation-size sand volleyball courts. Due to the flood event, staff has not been able to install the volleyball nets and boundary lines. However, once the turf has been properly cleaned of debris, staff will install these features and the courts will be ready for play.

The abovementioned projects are in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-2.1	Encourage a mix of housing, retail, and entertainment activities along the City’s waterfront that support day and nighttime activity and a vibrant urban lifestyle.
FLU-2.3	Provide recreation activities and access to the Arkansas River while preserving and protecting the natural environment, watershed, and critical wildlife habitats.
ED-6.1	Ensure that economic development objectives are included in the evaluation of all future City infrastructure projects, including parks and recreation facilities.
NCR-1.1	Increase the amount of open space and opportunities for recreation throughout the City by supporting the dedication land and resources for the creation of parks and open space.
NCR-1.6	Encourage multi-use public spaces that can function in a variety of ways to serve

	the recreation needs of the surrounding neighborhoods (e.g., park space, community events, etc.).
NCR-4.1	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.

Neighborhood Parks

Tilles Park and Woodlawn Park Splash Pads

Since last year's update, the splash pads at both Tilles Park and Woodlawn Park have been completed and opened last month. We are currently battling vandalism to the amenities at both locations. In order to address this and minor warranty work, the splash pads have had periods of downtime. As a refresher, these projects were directed based on student input. The splash pad at Tilles Park is comprised primarily of surface water features with one large aboveground water feature voted on by the students. Wilson Park features more aboveground water features, which were also determined by the students.

Wilson Park

With the exclusion of the Aeroglider, an inclusive park feature, the existing playground at Wilson Park is has extended beyond its useful life and is in desperate need of an update. There is a large hill in the park that was once the foundation for a school. Given the history of this hill, a public meeting is scheduled for July 30th during which citizens will be invited to speak in favor or opposition to the leveling of the hill. Based on citizen input, the hill will either remain or be leveled. Once this determination has been made, a playground design will be determined and then installed.

Both neighborhood park projects are in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.3	Develop neighborhood parks amenities within walking distance to residents.
NCR-4.1	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
PFS-2.3	Promote public awareness and participation by holding open Town Hall events modeled after the Future Fort Smith Community Forums.

Recreation Programming

The Parks Department continues to expand citizen participation in our recreation programs. One of the most significant event growths was the annual Father-Daughter Dance in February. Historically, there has been an average of 175 attendees. However, this year's event had over 300. This growth was in large part due to a partnership between our department and Fort Smith Public Schools. The district paid for students enrolled in their preschool programs and their parents to attend the event. This partnership will continue for next year's event. Zepata's Mexican Restaurant partnered with our department to donate everything for a taco bar. This significantly reduced our department's cost and we have utilized these funds for other recreation programs. Given the rapid increase in attendees, this event has outgrown Exhibit Hall C at the Convention Center. As a result, we have reserved Exhibit Halls A and B for 2020. While this

change in venue will necessitate additional funding allocations, this is a major step forward in promoting our park programs throughout the community.

Another program that has grown since last year is the free event offered during the week of Spring Break. Last year was our first year for the event and we averaged 80-90 children each day. This average grew to 125 this year. Thanks to a small, yet dedicated, group of volunteers we are able to keep this event open to everyone and not set a limit on the number of children each day. Many children cannot afford to go on vacations during this break, so this is an important program we offer for any child to attend.

Our Pop Up Play Day program is in its second year. Our department hosted the first of four activities this year on June 6th. The activity offered was water gun tie-dye. Given our limited budget, we asked participants to bring their own shirt, bag, etc. to tie-dye. There were quite a few families in the park who did not know about the event until they saw others participating. Thanks to several parents who donated extra shirts, everyone who wanted to participate in the activity was able to do so. Our second event, giant slip n' slide, took place on June 27th at Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. This was a relatively simple event in terms of preparation, expenses, setup, and execution. The third event, Ninja Warrior Course, was hosted on July 11th at Creekmore Park. Our Maintenance Staff constructed a course modeled after the television show American Ninja Warrior. Our final Pop Up Play Day event will be held at the wading pool at Creekmore Park Pool. Children will be provided with all the materials necessary to construct floating towers. There will also be a "fishing" activity in which children will have to catch a fish from the pool to win a prize donated by local restaurants. Additionally, given the growth and popularity of this program, Dustin Booth State Farm has partnered with our department to provide free water and popsicles to all participants during each of our events. This is an excellent addition to our event and encourages proper hydration while being active in the summer months.

Another event in its second year is the weeklong Baking Bootcamp event. This event is limited to ages 6-12 and one day is reserved for toddlers ages 3-5. Due to the amount of preparation time, oven and stovetop space, and limited staffing, we did have to limit this event to 20 children per day. However, we will be able to increase this number next year, as staff has learned ways to increase efficiency with the limited resources available.

While not a new event, our Movies in the Park Series has grown from past years. A contributing factor to this growth is the partnership with local businesses who have generously donated an assortment of items to be given away at each movie. City Play Day is also an annual event that continues to grow thanks to local organizations. This is a family-friendly event that lasts approximately three (3) hours the first Saturday in August at Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. Multiple organizations volunteer their time to come to the event and offer education, prizes, and activities for families. Our department also hosts a free Halloween event in which children can come out and enjoy an afternoon of games, activities, refreshments, and prizes/candy. Again, thanks to donations from local organizations, we were able to offer non-traditional prizes, such as a free bag of peanuts and child's meal from Texas Roadhouse. Holiday Express is another annual event that continues to grow. Local organizations volunteer each night to provide refreshments, activities, giveaways, and/or entertainment for park patrons.

In addition to these events, our department has added four programs to our lineup. The first program, Catch n’ Release, utilizes the lake at Carol Ann Cross Park. Our Maintenance Staff built fishing poles out of donated bamboo poles, fishing line, and some minor hardware. This event is another example of our community partnerships. Our department also introduced Free Play Game Days every Tuesday and Wednesday during the months of June and July at Creekmore Community Center. Various games (ping pong, cornhole, connect-4, card games, etc.) are setup for everyone to come enjoy and/or cool off from playing in the park. Another addition is Pancakes in Pjs and Cookies with Santa. Given our staff was not sure what to expect last year, both events were limited. Staff has made modifications to the event, which will allow for the event to open to everyone in December. The fourth event is being introduced this September. We have had several requests for a Mother-Son event, and we have one planned that will consist of various STEM challenges, games, prizes, and food. Like most of our new events, we will limit the number of participants this year, but will expand it based on interest level.

These programs are in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.5	Plan recreation facility land, space, and programming needs with other service providers in order to meet community needs and national standards.
NCR-1.6	Encourage multi-use public spaces that can function in a variety of ways to serve the recreation needs of the surrounding neighborhoods (e.g. park space, community events, etc.).
NCR-4.1	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
PFS-2.1	Ensure that the City’s planning and implementation process is transparent.
PFS-2.3	Promote public awareness and participation by holding open Town Hall events modeled after the Future Fort Smith Community Forums.

Creekmore Park Parking Lot

The repair and resurfacing of the Creekmore Park parking lot is one of this year’s capital projects. McClelland Consulting Engineers, Inc. was selected to evaluate and prepare plans and specifications for this project. Due to the funding timeline, this project will be broken out into phases. It is evident the parking area around the tennis center and pool are the most deteriorated and has been designated as the first phase. This project is currently being advertised and bids will be opened on July 25th. Construction will not begin until the pool is closed for the season. Construction will also be scheduled around tennis tournaments. Phase I of this project is expected to be completed by Spring 2020 or sooner.

This project is in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-1.4	Ensure adequate, well-maintained infrastructure, public safety, and public facilities for all development and prevent development ahead of infrastructure and service provision.
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Facility Use Agreements

Harry E. Kelley Park, Riverfront Amphitheater, and the River Park Events Building continue to serve as hosts to several large events throughout the year. These events include the Blues Festival, Peacemaker Festival, and Ales for Trails. Several nonprofits continue to utilize our facilities to host fundraising events. In order to aid in providing services to citizens, the City allows nonprofits to utilize the facilities at no cost for these special events, apart from the standard refundable deposit.

These large events are in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-2.1.3	Incorporate a variety of venues that accommodate the interests of diverse demographic groups to develop an appropriate balance of day and nighttime businesses and activities.
FLU-2.1.4	Leverage special events to reinvigorate the riverfront district.

The Parks Department also has three lease agreements with organizations who provide daily, weekly, and/or monthly events for citizens. The agreement with the Western Arkansas Tennis Association (W.A.T.A.) was extended an additional three years, through 2022. W.A.T.A provides several events for all ages and all skill levels year-round. There are also multiple leagues and tournaments hosted throughout the year. The tennis courts at Creekmore Park and Tilles Park also host the junior high and high school tennis teams.

This agreement is alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.2	Promote and establish regional support for Fort Smith Parks and Recreation through agreements, user fees, programs, and grant applications with counties and neighboring towns.
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The Fort Smith Farmers Market has been successfully operated in the Downtown Historic District on the municipal parking lot at North 2nd Street and Garrison since 2003. The Market has expanded its vendors to as many as 90 on file. The market recently made a major advancement by being able to accept SNAP/EBT Cards on Saturdays. This allows citizens on a fixed income to enjoy the fresh, homegrown produce provided by vendors. Currently, the Market offers produce, meats, baked goods, homemade wooden fixtures, and crafts. The River Valley Artisan Market (RVAM) utilizes Ross Pendergraft Park on the first Tuesday and third Saturday during the months of April through November. RVAM also partners with organizations to host events in conjunction with their events. Most of the vendors specialize in handmade crafts, such as jewelry, soaps, and wooden goods.

The above agreements are in alignment with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-3.4	Develop and promote niche markets that distinguish the downtown from other retail and entertainment options, and reinforces downtown's position as a destination.
CCD-3.1.1	Improve the City's approach to public relations to promote what there is to do in Fort Smith.

NCR-1.2	Promote and establish regional support for Fort Smith Parks and Recreation through agreements, user fees, programs, and grant applications with counties and neighboring towns.
NCR-1.5	Plan recreation facility land, space, and programming needs with other service providers in order to meet community needs and national standards.

If you have any questions or need further explanation regarding this update, please feel free to contact me.