




Memorandum

TO: John Cooley, Chairman – Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee
CC: Doug Reinert, Director of Parks & Recreation
FROM: Sara Deuster, Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation 
DATE: September 30, 2022
SUBJECT: FY22 Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan Update

Please find below a report of the progress the Parks and Recreation Department has made in its continued actions regarding the goals, accomplishments, and activities as they relate to the Future Fort Smith Comprehensive Plan.

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 initially approved by voters in 2012 and extended through 2030 during the May 24, 2022 election. This tax is split evenly among the Fire Department and Parks Department. As of August 2022, this tax has generated over \$25 million in revenue for the Parks Department. Additionally, almost \$5 million in grants and private contributions have supplemented the tax revenue. An additional \$1.25 million in grants and contributions is anticipated for fiscal year 2023. These funds continue to expand, improve, and address capital needs throughout our parks system.

Below is a list of projects that reflect the goals and outcomes of the Comprehensive Plan the Parks Department has completed or are in progress since last year’s update.

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park Inclusive Playground & Outdoor Restroom

Martin Luther King, Jr. Park served as the first step towards inclusion in our parks system with the installation of a playground structure with a wheelchair ramp several years ago. This allows children confined to a wheelchair and those with mobility issues to gain access to the amenities.

While this was an excellent start to making our parks inclusive to individuals of all abilities, the playground structure only focused on mobility impairments and did not address social, cognitive, and visual impairments. Additionally, the equipment was



outdated and needed to be replaced, as it is one of city’s most heavily utilized parks. The inclusive playground, which includes amenities that accommodate children of all ages and abilities was completed in July. Featured amenities include poured-in-place rubber surfacing, artificial turf mounds, roller table, and inclusive seesaw and merry-go-round.

In addition to the inclusive playground, a new outdoor restroom has been ordered to replace the existing restroom next to the playground/splash pad. The restroom is anticipated to be delivered next spring and be ready for use by summer. Any remaining funds will be used to add seating/shade next to the skate park and basketball court, as Phase I of the Maybranch Trail will terminate at that location.

This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.5	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-5.2	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
PFS-3.2.3	Transition from ADA accessibility to inclusion for individuals of all abilities in the renovation and development of all facilities.
PFS-2.3	Promote public awareness and participation by holding open Town Hall events modeled after the Future Fort Smith Community Forums.

2. Maybranch (Old Railroad) Trail

Last year’s update noted the final plans for the trail were nearing completion and had been sent to the State for approval. There have been additional delays due to grant requirements, which has resulted in the project not yet being advertised for bids. The required cultural resources survey has been completed and is waiting on additional approvals. We expect this project to be bid in early 2023. Below is the project description:

This is an approximately three (3) mile trail historically referred to as the Old Railroad Trail. 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, as most easements will have already been acquired.

Phase I of the trail will begin at Riverfront Drive and extend approximately 1.7 miles in length through Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and is estimated to cost \$2,130,000. The Board has approved an agreement with Morrison-ShIPLEY Engineers, Inc. to serve as the engineer for Phase I of the trail. An aerial view of the proposed route for Phase I can be viewed at the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZUdmRkht_s. The City is expected to receive funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund grants program. However, at this time the exact amount of funding is not known, as there are ongoing discussions among the involved

entities regarding grant provisions. Phase II will continue from Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and tie into Creekmore Park. Phase III (FY2024) will pave the existing crusher dust trail that extends behind Girls, Inc., The Gregory Kistler Center, and Flocks Field at Kelley Park Ballfields, and terminating at South “O” Street.

This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

FLU-3.4.2	Build Maybranch bike trail for connectivity.
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-1.6	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.
FLU-3.2.3	Create safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle connections within downtown and riverfront, and between adjacent neighborhoods (bike lanes, trails, and complete sidewalks).

3. John Bell, Jr. Park Inclusive Playground

As a reminder, the development of John Bell, Jr. Park, previously referred to as Riverfront Drive Sports Fields (51 Acres), is a multi-phase project. Phase I consisted of the construction of two tournament-quality soccer fields and a gravel parking lot. Phase II consisted of the construction of underground storm drainage improvements, laying of water pipe, paving of the parking lot, and the placement of select fill material sufficient to construct an inclusive playground, pavilion, restrooms, and ADA baseball/softball field. The construction of an all-inclusive playground (Phase III) reached final



completion earlier this year. This inclusive playground features a variety of amenities designed to accommodate individuals of all abilities, poured-in-place rubber surfacing, perimeter fencing, and large shade structures across the main play areas. Thousands of citizens, including tourists, have already visited the inclusive playground since late March of this year.

A permanent restroom was recently placed at the park and will be ready for use next spring. Phase IV is currently under design. This phase will consist of the construction of a large, covered pavilion and pickleball courts.

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.
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-1.5	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-5.2	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-5.2	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.

4. Creekmore Park Walking Trail

This project consists of the construction of an 8ft wide concrete walking path around the park. An asphalt trail was originally selected for this project to reduce costs. Once this project was evaluated by an engineer, it was determined concrete would be the better option due to the frequent use of the trail and stability for erosion control. Concrete also has a longer useful life and requires minimal maintenance. To address drainage issues and prevent pooling of water after rainfall, the trail will deviate from the existing walking path in certain areas. The trail will remain approximately the same length (6/10 mile). The portion of trail along Rogers Avenue has been completed is reopen for citizen use. We anticipate the portion of trail along 34th Street to also open to the public within the next few weeks. This project is progressing according to schedule, with an estimated final completion date of December 2022.

This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.5	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-5.2	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.

5. Creekmore Park Inclusive Playground

Creekmore Park is one of the most heavily utilized parks due to it being centrally located in the city. As such, it serves to set the overall tone of what citizens can expect throughout our park system. The inclusive playground is expected to be complete next month. This playground will feature a variety of amenities designed for individuals of all abilities, including multi-play artificial turf in lieu of the traditional wood fiber mulch. This playground will also feature a unique feature to our region: Goric EUROFLEX® Half Balls. These half spheres provide a distinctive tactile amenity with their spongy surface and encourages imaginative play and social interaction.



This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.5	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-5.2	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
PFS-3.2.3	Transition from ADA accessibility to inclusion for individuals of all abilities in the renovation and development of all facilities.
PFS-2.3	Promote public awareness and participation by holding open Town Hall events modeled after the Future Fort Smith Community Forums.

6. Carol Ann Cross Park Improvements

Following last year's update, significant progress has been made regarding the plans and specifications for this project. Once the plans receive approval from the City, this project will be advertised for bid. To help expedite completion, the two prefabricated restrooms were ordered earlier this month, as they take a few months to construct. Below is the project description:

The two restrooms at Carol Ann Cross Park are in desperate need of repair, both structurally and in terms of accessibility. In addition, most of the pavilions are not accessible for individuals with mobility impairments. Improvements to the park will be completed in two phases. The first phase of improvements will address the restrooms and accessibility from the northwest parking area. The restroom located at the southside of the park and on top of a steep hill will be removed, as it cannot be easily accessed by members of the public and is severely dilapidated. An ADA restroom will be installed adjacent to the playground area. The restroom located on the west side of the park will also be removed and replaced with a new, ADA accessible restroom. Furthermore, the parking area on the northwest side of the park will be repaved and an accessible walkway installed to allow citizens of all abilities adequate access to the pavilion and paved walking trail. The next phase of the improvements will involve repaving and expanding the parking area in the southeast corner of the park. An accessible path to the fishing dock and walking trail will also be constructed. As funding allows, inclusion improvements will be made to the playground area and an additional fishing pier will be constructed at the northwest corner of the lake. These improvements will better accommodate the multiple annual fishing derbies held at this location.

Examples of access points to restrooms and picnic pavilions.



This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

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PFS-5.2	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
PFS-3.2.3	Transition from ADA accessibility to inclusion for individuals of all abilities in the renovation and development of all facilities.

7. Chaffee Crossing Dog Park

This will serve as the replacement to the dog park formerly located on property owned by the airport. The Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority (FCRA) has agreed to donate 24-acres of land at the intersection of Fort Chaffee Boulevard and Taylor Avenue. Phase I of this project will include perimeter fencing, water, seating, and shade amenities. The next phase(s) will include additional amenities based on citizen input provided during the planning workshops earlier this year.

This project aligns with the following of the Comprehensive Plan:

NCR-1.5	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-4.3.1	Identify opportunities to reduce the City's cost burden by establishing public/private partnerships on significant revitalization projects.
PFS-5.2	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.

8. Recreation Activities

This year's recreation programming began with a one-day event held during Fort Smith Public School's spring break. Our staff setup our ninja warrior courses, 35ft inflatable water slide, Connect-4 basketball, and provided hotdogs and beverages to citizens. Our Movies in the Park Series began on June 10th and concluded on July 22nd. Our department sets up a large inflatable movie screen at a different park each Friday and shows a movie at no cost to our citizens. Our Pop Up Play Day events continue to attract hundreds of citizens. This is a four-event program that is held on Thursdays during the months of June and July. However, due to extreme temperatures, only three Pop Up Play Days were held this summer. This year's events included water blaster tie-dye, giant slip n' slide, and a Parks Amazing Race and egg drop. Again, this is a free event that is open to all citizens of any age. Our annual Kids in the Kitchen event was held



June 14th – 16th. This event continues to grow, and we will try to increase the number of registration slots available, provided volunteers are available.

City Play Day is our largest single-day event that is provided at no cost to citizens. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park serves as the host site for this event, which was held on August 6th. We partnered with Fort Smith Police Department for this year's event and plan to continue this partnership for future years. This year's event offered a variety of activities for families, including our ninja warrior course, toddler ninja warrior course, Adrenaline II inflatable obstacle course, refreshments, and activities provided by local organizations. An organization also setup a voter

registration table at the event. Our department plans to host a Halloween Hoopla and Breakfast with the Grinch later this year. This year’s recreation programming will conclude with our annual Holiday Express event. This event attracts over 10,000 patrons annually, featuring hundreds of light displays throughout Creekmore Park and Downtown Fort Smith. At Creekmore Park, citizens can take a ride around the park on our Creekmore Express miniature train. Local organizations volunteer each night to provide refreshments, activities, giveaways, and/or entertainment for park patrons. Our Maintenance Staff are working tediously on constructing a few new displays for this year’s event.



Our department is fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers who can assist our staff with these events. If it were not for these volunteers, our department would not be able to offer year-round activities to citizens and would have to limit participation at several of these events.

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-4.1	Increase the use of parks, open space, and recreational programming to improve the health of Fort Smith residents.
PFS-5	Improve the health and well-being of Fort Smith residents.

Please contact me should you have any questions or need further explanation.