

Project Narrative

Project Description

The City of Jonesboro will provide outdoor facility upgrades to include additional tennis courts, walking trail and a pump track at the Earl Bell Community Center and land acquisition for Craighead Forest Park. These amenities will enhance the area that already includes a playground and basketball court. With the rise of Jonesboro population and neighborhood developments, families are looking towards areas that create a pedestrian oriented atmosphere through connectivity to parks, health and fitness opportunities, as well as entertainment, restaurants and commercial establishments. The Earl Bell Community Center can serve downtown Jonesboro the necessary advantages to attract and retain new residents. Craighead Forest Park is considered as the hidden jewel for not only Jonesboro but for all of Northeast Arkansas. This park consists of 680 acres of fishing, boating, paved and unpaved pedestrian trails, playgrounds, pumptrack bicycle course, camping grounds, ATV trails, ballfields and other amenities.

SCORP Priorities

Priority:

- *Improve access to, and quality of, health and fitness related recreational areas and facilities.* Earl Bell Community Center is the gate to the downtown area. This center has been providing recreational activities to Jonesboro for 82 years. The population is increasing by 2% every year and with such growth our area parks need to provide more recreational activities for our citizens. This project would allow the city to maximize the park's usage by offering safe walking trails, additional tennis courts and a pumptrack to provide a variety of exercise and skills enhancement for those individuals of all ages. These additions will help preserve the community center's life for years to come for our future generations in Jonesboro.

Strategies:

- *Promote safety within parks, especially playgrounds and trails.* The walking trail has several uneven areas that provide a hazard while walking in the park. The priority is to fix the trails and extend them for a safer walking environment and decrease the chances for injury. The other priority is to provide the bike enthusiast a more elaborate place to ride safer than in the parking lot or on the streets. Safety at all city-owned facility is a top priority every year.

Action:

- *Create parks and recreation facilities near or in residential areas, with connecting walkways and trails.* The Earl Bell Community Center is centrally located; city-owned and operated recreational facility in Jonesboro. This community centers is located just southeast of and within walking distance of downtown with sidewalks extending from the community in all directions. The Senior Citizens Community Center is located north and shares the parking lot to the Earl Bell Community Center. There is a strong residential area surrounding

the Community Center including 1 of the 5 Jonesboro Public Magnet Schools for grades first through sixth.

Need for Assistance

Currently, Earl Bell Community Center has tennis and basketball courts , playground area, an indoor courts, rockwall and exercise rooms; however, there is not any safe walking trails or enough equipment that provide healthy activities for all ages outdoors. This project would be considered as an inexpensive cost that will have an enormous impact on the community center by attracting visitors to spend more time outdoors and at the facility. This activity increases recreational and healthy activity for residents and visitors alike while preserving our community center.

This request for \$250,000 in land acquisition at Craighead Forest Park shows the City's commitment to this project and to its residents. The funding request is \$500,000 for land acquisition at Craighead Forest Park and outdoor facility upgrades to include tennis courts, walking trail and pump tracks at the Earl Bell Community Center

The project budget estimate for the proposed project includes:

- Additional tennis courts
- Resurfacing and extending the walking trail
- A new pumptrack addition

The City of Jonesboro has not had any additional revenues through sales taxes nor does the City have a hamburger tax for its parks. This lack of revenue has reduced the funding levels for implementation of new activities and/or facilities for the Parks and Recreation Department. Annually, the City of Jonesboro allocates about \$1.8 million for the Parks and Recreation Department to maintain all of its many parks and recreational centers throughout the city. However, quality of life is a high priority for the City; therefore, maintaining and improving the parks and recreation sites and facilities are important to establish and offer the amenities residents' desire and deserve.

Benefits Expected

Earl Bell Community Center is used throughout the year hosting basketball tournaments, NEA Rock Club, NEA Tennis, Jonesboro School activities and fitness classes. A large number of people are local but with tournaments we have several visitors that stay at the facility for long periods of time. The fitness trail will give them a place to exercise and stretch their legs while at the facility. We want to keep visitors returning to our area and increase the usage of the center. Visitors will come to Jonesboro and will spend the weekend, stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants, and shop in our stores. There is both a quality of life benefit, as well as, an economic development benefit from this project. The return on investment will be a significantly increased quality of life, as well as hundreds of dollars in sales tax revenue in the years to come.

Agreements

The City of Jonesboro owns all property related to the proposed project. There is no lease agreement on the property. The City of Jonesboro Parks and Recreation Department manages the daily operations of the entire Earl Bell Community Center grounds and building; therefore, there is no operational agreement associated with this project.

Income Produced

This is a city owned and operated park managed by Parks and Recreation Department with sales tax funds provided annually. This project will not produce program income.

Competition

We do not compete with any other parks in the area that are not city owned. The walking trail throughout the community center park adds another level of interest that the surrounding neighborhood parks can't accommodate. The neighborhood parks only have playground equipment and greenspace.

Parks & Recreation Department Director's Information

Director: Danny Kapales

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Danny Kapales has served the City of Jonesboro in the Parks and Recreation Department for sixteen years.

Directions to Site

1212 S. Church St., Jonesboro, AR 72401.

From the Intersection of Southwest Dr and Alexander Dr., continue North down Southwest Drive. Continue straight on Main St./AR 141. Turn right on E. Strawn Ave and then left onto S. Church St., Earl Bell Center will be on your right.

Overhead Utility Lines Statement

There are no overhead utility lines in the project area. There are lines located outside of the project area, but there are no plans to extend the lines within the project boundary.

Minority Participation:

The Director of Community Development had a radio interview with KLEK, which is owned and operated by The Voice of Arkansas Minority Advocacy Council, on July 18, 2018 at 9:00am. The Director presented the overview of the outdoor projects at Earl Bell Center or an amphitheater at Craighead Forest Park. The director also visited with the participants of Northeast Arkansas Area on Aging and the Hispanic center. Project announcements were made on the local radio stations, the city social media pages, and our local tv stations. We encouraged citizens to express their suggestions about the Parks and Recreation Department plans through email or comment cards provided at the public hearing on July 18. After over 150 comments from the public, the majority would like to see updates to the Earl Bell Community Center outdoor projects.