



City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: December 18, 2023

Re: Gans Creek Recreation Area Improvements

Executive Summary

Public hearing to authorize improvements at Gans Creek Recreation Area and appropriate \$30,000 in donated funds. The proposed improvements at the park includes the construction of a small shelter and a medium shelter, installation of a playground and the construction of a 7-mile natural surface trail for hiking and biking. In addition to project approval, staff is requesting City Council approval to use the design/build process for the natural surface trail design and construction. The project budget is \$380,000, which includes \$225,000 in Park Sales Tax funding, a \$125,000 donation from the Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust and a \$30,000 donation from the Columbia Trail Association. All aspects of the project will be bid through the City's Purchasing Department and will be completed using a combination of contract and force account labor. The project is anticipated to be completed by October 2024.

Discussion

The 320-acre Gans Creek Recreation Area (GCRA) is located at 3360 E. Gans Road and includes five multi-purpose athletic fields, a championship level cross country course with supporting facilities, multiple parking lots, concession/restroom facility and expanded green space across the regional park. The construction of the cross country course and update to the master plan for the park was approved by City Council on Aug. 20, 2018. P&R staff held a dedication and inaugural race, the Gans Creek Classic, on Friday, Sept. 27, 2019 and the first season of races on the course ended with the Missouri State High School Cross Country Championships on Saturday, Nov. 9, 2019. Since the first season, the cross country course has hosted the Missouri State High School Cross Country Championships each year, 2021 SEC Cross Country Championships, 2022 NCAA Midwest Regional Cross Country Championships and will host the 2025 NCAA Cross Country Championships.

The Parks and Recreation Department is requesting approval to authorize improvements at Gans Creek Recreation Area, an appropriation of donated funds and use of the design/build process for the project. The proposed improvements include the construction of a small shelter at the cross country course, a medium shelter at the circle drive in the northeast corner of the park, installation of a playground and the construction of an 7-mile natural surface trail for hiking and biking.

Park staff held a public input meeting at Gans Creek Recreation Area on Aug. 24, 2023 to discuss the project with the community. Staff met with citizens to discuss the proposed plans and gain feedback about the proposed improvements. The public had an additional opportunity to provide comments about the project on BeHeardCoMo.gov. All feedback



from the public input meetings and BeHeardCoMo.gov are included with this Council memo and can be found at the CIP web page: <https://bit.ly/3sITcOD>.

Park staff introduced the proposed GCRA improvements to the Parks and Recreation Commission on Oct. 19, 2023. After discussion of the project, the commissioners voted to endorse the proposed improvements at the park and recommended that Council approve the plans as presented. After considering all citizen comments and the P&R Commission recommendation, staff believes the proposed improvements represent a consensus of park users and staff.

The proposed improvements at Gans Creek Recreation will include the following:

1. Contract labor will be used to install a playground designed for children ages 5 to 12-years-old adjacent to the restroom/concession facility. The new ADA compliant play structure will meet current ASTM safety guidelines and park staff will install wood fiber mulch throughout the playground area to complete the project. Activities such as cross country races, soccer games and mountain bike races are family events and the playground is needed as an activity to offer for younger park patrons.
2. Park staff will install a 20-foot by 20-foot prefabricated metal shelter at the cross country course that will be used for athlete check-in for cross country races. The shelter will be located near the start line of the cross country course. Park staff will install electric and fiber in the shelter for use by different race timing companies. Staff has used a portable tent in this location for events since the course opened in 2019. The permanent shelter will reduce maintenance set-up for each race and eliminate issues related to the weather and high winds.
3. A professional trail design and construction firm will be utilized for the installation of a 7-mile natural surface trail at the park. A natural surface trail for hiking and biking was shown on the original master plan for the park in 2010 and was included in the 2018 revision of the park master plan.

Trail Design & Construction:

The Parks and Recreation Department has been working with the Columbia Trail Association (COMOTA) over the past three years to identify a suitable location for a beginner-friendly natural surface trail for hiking and biking. A natural surface trail is normally 18 inches to 36 inches in width and is composed of a variety of dirt, grass and gravel. This type of trail provides park patrons with the opportunity to access nature while focusing on their health and fitness. The trail at Gans Creek Recreation Area has been identified in the park master plan since it was adopted by Council in 2010. GCRA is a desirable location for the trail as it provides a variety of topography and enough acreage to get to the desired trail length. The proposed trail will be approximately 7 miles in length and include areas on the north and south side of Gans Creek. Park staff has a desire to use a professional trail contractor for the project to ensure the trail will be properly designed and constructed to minimize erosion by utilizing best practices



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for trail benching, switchbacks, climbing turns and stream crossings. The selected trail design and construction firm will be a member of the Professional TrailBuilders Association and have extensive experience in all types of trail design and construction. The trail will include approximately 4 miles on the north side of Gans Creek and this section of the trail will be rated as a beginner skill level (green) trail. The trail will cross the Gans Creek and includes an additional 3 miles on the south side of creek. This section of the trail will progress to an intermediate skill level (blue) trail to offer progressive skill building and appeal to more experienced riders. The construction of the new trail will allow for daily hiking and biking use, expansion of trail programming by recreation staff and creates a destination location for mountain bike racing for Missouri youth.

Sports Tourism Impact:

Due to the facility infrastructure already present at the park, the construction of the beginner-friendly trail will also allow Columbia to become a destination race facility for the Missouri National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA). Missouri NICA was created in 2020 and offers competitive mountain biking for female and male middle school and high school athletes. Park staff has talked to staff with the National Interscholastic Cycling Association about the trail at Gans Creek Recreation Area becoming a NICA-sanctioned facility for state and regional championship mountain bike racing. NICA staff members will be involved in the initial design of the trail and throughout the trail construction process by the contractor. Missouri NICA mountain biking events take place each fall from August through November and events average between 400 to 500 student athletes at each competition. Each race will also bring a plethora of coaches, family members and spectators to Columbia for the two-day events. As the National Interscholastic Cycling Association grows throughout the Midwest, plans are also being made to create regional championship events for youth mountain biking that will bring cyclists together from 8 to 10 states. Gans Creek Recreation Area has been identified as an ideal location for this type of event based on the existing infrastructure at the park and success hosting cross country championships. Similar to cross country events, these mountain bike races will utilize the existing parking, restroom/concession facility, open sports fields and Greg Hall Champions Plaza.

Environmental and Adjacent Property Impacts:

During the public input process, park staff discussed potential impacts related to the construction of the trail with multiple citizens. Staff met with individuals from the Friends of Rock Bridge organization and the Sierra Club to address concerns related to crossing the Gans Creek, protection of the heron rookery at the park and the proximity to the Gans Wild Area at Rock Bridge State Park.

One concern from the public was related to potential erosion issues due to hikers and bikers crossing of Gans Creek to access the section of the trail located on the south side of the creek. Creek crossings are standard features of hiking and biking trails and are present at other parks in Columbia including Grindstone Nature Area and Rock



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Bridge State Park. Staff plans to suggest the creek crossing be located in the same location that the previous landowner utilized for crossing the creek with trucks, equipment and implements. Staff also wanted to confirm that there would be no issue with this type of crossing for the trail and consulted with staff from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Neither organization had issues with the construction of the recreational trail and the creek crossing.

A second concern presented to park staff was in regards to a heron rookery present on the park property along the Gans Creek. There is concern that the presence of hikers and bicyclists will disturb the heron rookery causing the birds to stop nesting at the park each year from February through August. Staff met with members of U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Missouri Department of Conservation at the location of the heron rookery to discuss the correct steps to protect the rookery. Park staff proposed a plan to create a 200-foot buffer surrounding the rookery, avoid construction in this area during the nesting season from February through August and also avoid large hiking and cycling events during the nesting season. U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Missouri Department of Conservation staff are in support of the department's plan and the 200-foot buffer is reflected on the proposed park plans.

Lastly, the southern-most portion of the trail will be adjacent to the Gans Wild Area at Rock Bridge State Park. Bicycles are not allowed within the Gans Wild Area. City park staff will work with state park staff during the design process to determine if a connector between the parks is needed for hikers and determine how the trail should be signed to alert hikers and bikers of the property change/rules. Staff will also make sure all signage is approved by both parties before installation in Gans Creek Recreation Area.

4. Park staff will install a 20-foot by 30-foot prefabricated metal shelter at the northeast circle drive at the park that will be used as a trailhead for the natural surface trail. The shelter will have electric available to the public and three additional LED lights will be installed around the circle drive. In addition to the shelter installation, staff will complete the construction of a sidewalk from the east edge of the property adjacent to the Missouri Department of Conservation's Central Office to the circle drive.

The improvements at Gans Creek Recreation Area will require City Council to adopt a revised master plan for the park. Staff will return to City Council once the design of the natural surface trail is completed by the contractor to complete this process. The revised plan has multiple changes that should be highlighted as they relate to the protection of preserved areas and wildlife. The 2010 GCRA Master Plan included 13 sports fields and 4 tennis courts that would have required overhead sports field/court lighting. The plan would have also included 26 parking lots with LED lighting. The revised GCRA Master Plan will only include 5 sports fields with no lights and 7 parking lots with LED lighting. This greatly reduces the total amount of light pollution within the park. In addition to the overhead lighting, total parking spaces and impervious surfaces has a major reduction as well. The 2010 GCRA



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Master Plan included 2,076 parking spaces and 19.3 acres of impervious surface. The revised GCRA Master Plan will only include 286 parking spaces and 4.4 acres of impervious surface. The impervious surface changes result in a considerable reduction in stormwater runoff that would have entered adjacent creeks, lakes and ponds.

The \$380,000 capital improvement project at Gans Creek Recreation Area is funded by the Park Sales Tax, a donation from the Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust and a donation from the Columbia Trail Association. The donation from the Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust, totaling \$125,000, is designated for the construction of the natural surface trail and the \$30,000 donation from the Columbia Trail Association is to be used for the design of the trail. The project is included in the City's FY-2024 Capital Improvement Program budget. Portions of the project will be bid through the City's Purchasing Department, and the proposed improvements will be completed using a combination of contract and force account labor. The improvements at the park are anticipated to be completed by October 2024.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: The total project cost is \$380,000 and is funded by \$225,000 from the Park Sales Tax, a \$125,000 donation from the Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust and a \$30,000 donation from the Columbia Trail Association.

Long-Term Impact: The improvements at Gans Creek Recreation Area will result in a small increase in operating costs due to the installation of additional LED lighting, annual mulching of the playground, trail maintenance and shelter maintenance. Park staff already visit the park multiple times each week to pick up trash and clean the existing restroom/concession facility. It is also anticipated that trail maintenance will be completed in cooperation with volunteers with the Columbia Trail Association.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Reliable and Sustainable Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Resilient Economy, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Economic Development, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
5/16/2022	B143-22: Authorizing a donation agreement with Community Foundation of Central Missouri and the Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust for the planning and development of the Cosmo Bike Park, and the development of the Gans Creek Recreation Area natural surface trail and the Stephens Lake Park trailhead; amending the FY 2022 Annual Budget by appropriating funds. City of Columbia, Missouri - File #: B143-22 (legistar.com)



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8/20/2018	B193-18: Approving a revised Gans Creek Recreation Area Master Plan; authorizing construction of improvements at the Gans Creek Recreation area to include a cross country course, starting and finishing line structures, a parking lot and ADA walkways. https://gocolumbiamo.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3590779&GUID=2D6EBA2C-2250-4EFD-8D51-D88218A1C1C5&Options=&Search=
5/03/2010	B86-10: Approving the 2010 Southeast Regional Park Master Plan – A. Perry Philips Park and Gans Creek Recreation Area; and fixing the time when this ordinance shall become effective. Microsoft Word - cb21.doc (granicus.com)

Suggested Council Action

After the public hearing, approved the ordinance for the construction of improvements at Gans Creek Recreation Area and appropriating funds for the project.