



Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: July 6, 2021

Re: MKT Wetlands Development

Executive Summary

The Parks and Recreation Department is requesting a resolution to set a public hearing that would authorize the construction of the MKT Wetlands project. The construction project, located approximately 0.4 miles from the Scott Boulevard Trailhead of the MKT Trail, will include the construction of two wetland pools, 0.45 mile gravel trail, boardwalk overlooking one of the wetland pools and a series of grass trails. The total project budget is \$120,000 and includes \$80,000 in Park Sales Tax funding and a \$40,000 donation from Tom and Ann Smith. Staff will return to Council to appropriate the donated funds of \$40,000 at a later date. 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. Contract labor will be used for site grading and installation of the gravel trail. Park staff will complete all other work associated with the project. Improvements at the park are scheduled to begin late summer 2021, with an anticipated completion date of winter 2022.

Discussion

The MKT Trail is a 10-foot wide crushed limestone trail that serves as a multi-use trail for bicyclists, walkers, joggers, nature enthusiasts, and non-motorized commuters. The trail is constructed on the former rail bed of the MKT Railroad and is recognized as one of the first ten Rails to Trails Projects in the United States. The 8.9 mile trail begins in downtown Columbia at Flat Branch Park at 4th and Cherry Streets and connects to the State of Missouri's Katy Trail State Park. Park staff has had continuing discussions about development and access of adjacent buffer land to the trail. The MKT Wetlands project, located approximately 0.4 miles from the Scott Boulevard Trailhead, will focus on increased access for trail users while also creating an area that will improve the nature corridor for urban wildlife and stormwater collection for area runoff.

The Parks and Recreation Department is requesting approval of a resolution setting a public hearing that would authorize the MKT Wetlands construction project. The improvements will include the construction of two wetland pools, 0.45 mile gravel trail, boardwalk overlooking one of the wetland pools and a series of grass trails.

After reviewing information related to trails construction, nature area development and improvements related to urban wildlife and habitat management in the *2013 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan*, staff discussed the different portions of the MKT Wetlands project to determine what needed to be included to improve the ecological functions of the area while also allowing trail user access. Due to the pandemic, staff



City of Columbia

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gathered all public input via an online survey at CoMo.gov from December 30, 2020 to April 9, 2021. All feedback from the online survey is included with this Council memo and can also be found online at:

<https://www.como.gov/parksandrec/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2021/04/Online-Comments-MKT-Wetland-Forum-Nature-Area.pdf>

Park staff introduced the proposed MKT Wetlands construction project to the Parks and Recreation Commission on March 18, 2021. After discussion of the proposed improvements, the commissioners voted to endorse the improvements and recommended that Council approve the plans as presented. After considering all citizen comments and the P&R Commission recommendation, staff believes that the proposed improvements represent a consensus of park users and staff.

The proposed phase one improvements at the park will include the following:

1. A combination of park staff and contract labor will be used to construct two wetland cells on the property. The two wetland cells will act as permanent pools with the ability to hold and treat stormwater entering the site. Wetland pool #1 will be approximately 2.9 acres in total size and wetland pool #2 will be approximately 6.7 acres in total size. The area for the proposed wetland pools is currently comprised of open bottom land and non-climax forest consisting of cedar trees, silver maple trees, box elders and sycamores of varying sizes. Park staff will be responsible for all necessary tree removal and contract labor will be used for final grading of each wetland pool. The location of the wetland cells was determined based on the preservation of other quality trees in the area, existing wetland cells and the flow of water through the property.
2. In wetland pool #2, park staff will construct a 100' x 65' wooden boardwalk, which will allow for trail user access over the wetland pool. The boardwalk will include a 15' x 20' lookout deck in the middle of the boardwalk. The boardwalk will also include bench seating in different areas for seated viewing of the wetlands. The cost of the boardwalk is estimated at \$40,000 and will be constructed using donated funds provided by Tom and Ann Smith. Their donation and construction of the boardwalk will be in remembrance of their son and a small plaque will be placed at the entrance of the boardwalk for him.
3. Contract labor will be used to construct a 0.45 mile gravel trail that will be used for access to the entire site including the wetland pools, boardwalk and grass trails. The 10' wide spur trail off the MKT Trail will have two connections to the MKT Trail allowing for easy access to the site. The two entry/exit points of the trail will be located adjacent to bridge #12 and bridge #13.
4. A combination of park staff and contract labor will be used to create a collection of grass trails south of the wetlands to provide additional access to the area. The grass trails will be approximately 1 mile in length and will utilize an existing stormwater control berm for a large portion of the trail system. The grass trails will tie back into the new gravel trail



at multiple points and provide access from the adjacent open sports fields to the west of the project site.

The \$120,000 improvement project is included in the City's FY2021 Capital Improvement Program budget. The funding includes \$80,000 from the 2015 Park Sales Tax and \$40,000 in donated funds from Tom and Ann Smith. Staff will return to Council at a later date to appropriate the \$40,000 in donated funds for the project. 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. Contract labor will be used for site grading and installation of the gravel trail. Park staff will complete all other work associated with the project. Construction of the improvements is anticipated to begin late summer 2021, and staff anticipates the park improvements will be completed by winter 2022.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: The total project cost is \$120,000 and is funded by the 2015 Park Sales Tax and a private donation.

Long-Term Impact: Park staff anticipates annual maintenance expenses after completion of the phase one improvements totaling \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year. The maintenance costs associated with the wetlands development will include mowing and general trail maintenance. Staff already mows adjacent park property and portions of the MKT Trail.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

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

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
N/A	N/A

Suggested Council Action

Approve the resolution to set a public hearing for the construction of the MKT Wetlands improvement project.