



City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: January 6, 2025

Re: Gans Creek Recreation Area (GCRA) Park Master Plan Update and Trail Construction

Executive Summary

Public hearing for the updated master plan for Gans Creek Recreation Area. Staff is also requesting approval to construct an additional 3.5 miles of natural surface trail to construct the entire design of the trail as part of the Gans Creek Recreation Area capital improvement project. At the December 18, 2023 City Council meeting, Council members approved a capital improvement project at Gans Creek Recreation Area that included utilizing the design/build process for the construction of a 7-mile natural surface trail within the park. Staff notified City Council during the meeting that they would return at a later date for approval of an updated master plan for the park once the design process was completed by the contractor. Nomad Trail Development is ready to move forward with the construction phase of the 10.5-mile trail project once the master plan update is approved by the City Council. Trail construction will start immediately and is anticipated to be completed by winter 2025.

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 Southeast Regional Park Master Plan – A. Perry Philips Park and Gans Creek Recreation Area was approved by City Council on May 3, 2010. An updated master plan for the park that includes the cross-country course was approved by City Council on August 20, 2018.

The Parks and Recreation Department is requesting approval of an ordinance approving an updated master plan for Gans Creek Recreation Area. The updated master plan will include the final layout of the 10.5-mile natural surface trail at the park. In addition to the master plan update, staff is requesting to construct an additional 3.5 miles of natural surface trail to complete the construction of the full trail design as part of the Gans Creek Recreation Area capital improvement project.

Parks and recreation staff have been working on approval of the Gans Creek Recreation Area capital improvement project since summer 2023. Staff held a public input meeting for the project on August 24, 2023 at Gans Creek Recreation Area. 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. At the December 18, 2023 meeting, City Council approved the capital improvement project at



Gans Creek Recreation Area that included utilizing the design/build process for the construction of a natural surface trail within the park.

After completion of the design of the trail, park staff introduced the updated Gans Creek Recreation Area master plan to the Parks and Recreation Commission on November 21, 2024. Staff provided copies of the proposed master plan to all citizens before the meeting started. After discussing the highlights of the plan related to the final route of the natural surface trail, the commissioners voted to endorse the master plan update for the park and recommended that Council approve the plan as presented. Park staff also shared the plans on BeHeardCoMo starting on November 27, 2024 to gather additional public input and all comments can be found at the [Gans Creek Recreation Area CIP Webpage](#).

Gans Creek Trail Description:

The design of the 10.5-mile natural surface trail at Gans Creek Recreation Area consists of a 4.5-mile green loop, 4.5-mile blue loop and a 1.5-mile creek loop.

- The 4.5-mile green loop trail is designed and constructed for mountain biking and hiking at beginner skill levels. The trail is located on the north side of the Gans Creek and is designed to introduce individuals to hiking, mountain biking and trail running. The trail will consist of relatively smooth surfaces, minimal obstacles and gradual inclines and declines.

The trail meets the Missouri National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) mountain bike competition trail design requirements. The green loop will be used for one Missouri NICA middle school and high school mountain biking competition each fall. It will also be considered for NICA Midwest Regional Mountain Biking Championships that are awarded annually through a competitive bid process. Staff will work with the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau to complete the bid process for the annual event.

Staff has targeted the northeast corner of Gans Creek Recreation Area as one area for extensive removal of invasive species, including autumn olive, honeysuckle and honey locust, and planting native tree species to assist with the reforestation plan in this area of the park. The green loop trail will be constructed through this area and planting will take place once trail construction is completed. This section of the park is adjacent to the property that is leased by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). The City has signed a trail license agreement with MDC to cross through the leased property and MDC staff will assist with the reforestation plans at the park.

- The 4.5-mile blue loop trail is designed and constructed for intermediate skill levels related to hiking and mountain biking. The trail is located on the south side of Gans Creek and will consist of smooth surfaces with moderate obstacles such as roots, rocks, and small drops. The trail will include steeper climbs and descents compared to the green level trail. The blue loop trail will provide a more difficult trail experience for experienced cyclists and hikers, allow new hikers and cyclists to practice skill



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advancement and provides access to the entire park from the trailhead off East Gans Road at the north side of the park.

The blue loop trail includes the habitat buffer for the heron rookery, which exists along the Gans Creek within the south section of the park. The 200-foot habitat buffer boundary is set based on the center point of the Gans Creek. Based on citizen feedback, staff extended the length of the habitat buffer south of the original location to include a larger area along the southern portion of the Gans Creek. The final park master plan has been shared with U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Missouri Department of Conservation staff and no additional comments have been provided to park staff.

This section of the trail also borders the Gans Wild Area, a portion of the acreage that comprises Rock Bridge State Park. Staff has shared the park master plan with Missouri State Parks staff. As the trail is constructed in this area of the park, Missouri State Parks staff will be notified to monitor the construction process. Park staff and Missouri State Parks staff will also collaborate on the signage plan to designate the property boundary and inform trail users that bicycles are not allowed in the Gans Wild Area. The signage will be in place before the official opening of the Gans Creek Trail.

Forestry staff has targeted the southwest corner of Gans Creek Recreation Area as an additional area for native tree plantings to assist with reforestation. This area of the park was pasture land that park staff continues to mow with a wide-area mower once per year. The blue loop trail will be constructed through this area and planting will take place once trail construction is completed.

- The two loop trails will be tied together with a 1.5-mile creek loop trail. This section of trail will mix green and blue skill levels and allows trail users to mix the number of miles utilized for their hiking and biking trail experience. This section of trail borders the Gans Creek on the north side of the creek.

The creek crossing for the trail is included in this section of trail system and is located in the same location as previously discussed with City Council. Staff consulted with Missouri Department of Conservation staff regarding the creek crossing during the planning process. Park staff will implement the MDC recommendation to create a 100-foot wide wooded stream buffer on the upside of the creek to minimize erosion, reduce runoff and improve the creek.

Gans Creek Recreation Area Master Plan Changes:

The 2018 update to the GCRA master plan (to construct the cross-country course) and the proposed 2024 update will greatly change the final amenities located within the park as it compares to the 2010 master plan. The original park 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. The total parking spaces and impervious



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surfaces has a major reduction as well. The 2010 GCRA Master Plan included 2,076 parking spaces and 19.3 acres of impervious surface. The revisions to the GCRA Master Plan reduce these numbers to 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 changes to the master plan since 2010 meet current goals outlined in the Climate Adaptation and Action Plan (CAAP) as well as the City's Strategic Plan.

Final Trail Length and Construction:

At the December 18, 2023 meeting, City Council approved the capital improvement project at Gans Creek Recreation Area that included utilizing the design/build process for the construction of a 7-mile natural surface trail within the park. The City of Columbia followed the Purchasing Department procurement process to enter into a contract with Nomad Trail Development to complete the design/build process for the natural surface trail.

After completion of the design process, Nomad Trail Development presented park staff with a plan for a 10.5-mile natural surface trail within Gans Creek Recreation Area. Staff is requesting to proceed with the construction of the entire 10.5-mile natural surface trail plan at this time. As outlined below, funding is in place to construct the additional 3.5 miles of natural surface trail and the additional mileage is spread throughout the trail plan. This includes an additional 0.5 miles of green trail, 1.5 miles of blue trail and the 1.5-mile connector loop trail. The additional mileage allows the green loop trail to be used for NICA events without being located in the area adjacent to Gans Creek and extends the intermediate trail into open grass areas in the southwest corner of the park. The full length of the trail can be constructed while meeting the goals for the extended wildlife buffer, single creek crossing and natural resource management plan. The plan for construction will be to start with the green and yellow portions of the trail and finish with construction of the blue trail. The nesting period for herons in the rookery is February through August and staff will work with the contractor to avoid the rookery during this time period.

Funding and Timeline:

The \$380,000 capital improvement project at Gans Creek Recreation Area is funded by the Park Sales Tax, donations from the Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust and a donation from the Columbia Trail Association. The original 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 Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust has pledged an additional \$25,000 for the construction of the trail if City Council approves construction of the entire 10.5-mile natural surface trail. No additional Park Sales Tax funding is needed at this time to complete the full construction of the 10.5-mile natural surface trail. The improvements at the park are anticipated to be completed by winter 2025.



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Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: The total current 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. The Frank W. Morris Memorial Trust is willing to donate an additional \$25,000 for the project creating a total project budget of \$405,000. No additional Park Sales Tax funding will be needed to complete the trail construction by Nomad Trail Development.

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, 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 |
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| 12/18/2023 | B304-23: Authorizing construction of a playground, two (2) shelters, and natural surface hiking and biking trail in the Gans Creek Recreation Area; calling for bids for a portion of the project through the Purchasing Division; providing for the design and construction of the proposed trail improvement using a design/build contract; amending the FY 2024 Annual Budget by appropriating donated funds. B304-23 |
| 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. B143-22 |
| 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. B193-18 |



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| 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. B86-10 |
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Suggested Council Action

Following the public hearing, approve the ordinance for the updated park master plan for Gans Creek Recreation Area and authorizing construction of the additional 3.5 miles of natural surface trail at the park.