

Parks Committee Members Present:

David Dickinson, Chairman
Charles Boyce
Tyler Gregory
Lee Malcom

Staff Present:

John Howard
Logan Propes
Debbie Kirk
Chris Bailey
Chris Croy
Chris Schmitt
Beth Thompson
Les Russell

Visitors:

Joseph Harmon

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chairman David Dickinson

1. Roll Call

Chairman Dickinson noted that all Committee Members were present. There was a quorum.

2. Approval of Agenda

To approve the agenda as presented.

*Motion by Gregory, seconded by Malcom.
Passed Unanimously.*

II. MATTERS BEFORE COMMITTEE

1. Overall Parks Update

Mr. Chris Bailey gave an update on the parks. He discussed the parks within the City Limits of Monroe, their locations, histories, and what has been done. Mr. Chris Schmitt is the parks manager and has been taking care of the parks for the last two years. Mr. Deon Gray started at the first of this year and is now the second parks person. Mr. Chris Croy is now the Central Services Manager; Mr. Dwain Day and Mr. Keith Hester complete the team. Staff will have to be increased as the City continues to grow. The cost for the initial cleanup at Childers Park was \$114,935, and the walkway rehabilitation was \$37,200. The key features and events at Childers Park are the Dog Park, Tinkergarten, Magical Lights Parade, and Spring on the Green. Mr. Bailey discussed the history of Pilot Park. The main project cost for Pilot Park was \$311,134, the sun shades were \$17,607, the drainage repairs were \$25,334, and the restrooms were \$69,157 totaling \$423,232. The restrooms are still waiting on the locks, and the concrete is scheduled to come on June 15. He stated the speed bumps requested by Ms. Malcom have helped to slow people down. Pilot Park is completely ADA Accessible. The key features and events at Pilot Park are the book box and Community Garden.

City Administrator Logan Propes stated that Placer Artificial Intelligence shows there have been 24,900 visits to Pilot Park, and almost 10,000 of those were unique visitors. He explained this information is collected from cell phone tracking and does not include children. The average dwell time at Pilot Park is 59 minutes.

Mr. Bailey stated the cost of Phase I at Mathews Park was \$165,510, Phase II was \$194,698, the restrooms were \$69,132 totaling \$534,642. Phase II is still in progress and has \$105,302 remaining. Bids are being received to rework the front parking lot. The back parking lot area and chain link fence will be removed, privacy fence will be installed, and the area will be re-grassed. The Walton County Disc Golf Club is looking to have a yearly sanctioned PDGA Event at Mathews Park. He explained they are talking with the High School concerning upgrades and repairs for Green Street. Hammock Park, Pocket Park, Coker Park, Hammond Park, and EC Kidd Park are also all part of the Park System in the City of Monroe.

No Action.

2. Town Green Update

Mr. Chris Bailey discussed the timeline for the Town Green and gave an update. The preconstruction meeting will hopefully be held within the next couple of weeks. The low bid amount is currently about \$3.8 million. Land and Water Conservation and the Walton County Healthcare Foundation are contributing some funds, and the DCA Grant is pending. The key features and events at the Town Green are the concert stage, amphitheater, splash pad, fountain, and green space.

City Administrator Logan Propes stated the low bid for the project was \$3.8 million, but there will be a few change orders. The electrical still needs to be installed, which was not included in the bid. It has been a really complicated project, which has been worked on for about five years. He discussed the environmental remediation, the Brownfield Program, and ADPD. The Town Green will be the center piece for Monroe; it will be a passive place for everyone to hangout. Three quarters of the property will have sidewalks.

Chairman David Dickinson stated it is absolutely amazing what the City has done with the parks so far. He discussed the upgrades that have been done since he moved into Monroe. The City needs to prioritize what needs to be done at the parks that have become problematic. He believes Hammond Park needs to be focused on next, and then Coker Park.

No Action.

3. Pocket Parks Discussion

Chairman David Dickinson stated that pocket parks can be done easily, and they don't cost a tremendous amount of money. There is a lot of space available throughout the City, where they could be located. Some locations need to be identified in order to come up with some plans. He stated a concern is making sure they are safe and don't get destroyed.

Mr. Chris Bailey explained there are 15 to 20 properties owned by the City in different locations that are under half an acre. He discussed possibly making the front entrance of Coker Park into a pocket park until everything can be fixed completely. There are sites in the Mill District that could be used that would be huge. He discussed meeting with the citizens in the areas on what they would like to see in a pocket park.

Mr. Dickinson suggested putting together a target list of locations to come before the full Council. The Council Members can then discuss the matter with the neighborhoods in their districts to find out their interests. This will get the neighborhoods involved, while encouraging them to protect and take care of it.

No Action.

4. River Park Discussion

Mr. Chris Bailey explained there were 123 acres donated to the City of Monroe in 2021. It is headed to being a real nature type of park; he has reached out for information and help from the DNR. There will obviously be walking trails, hiking trails, biking trails, and kayaks coming down the river.

Chairman David Dickinson discussed having each park set with primary activities specific to that park. Hammond Park will have the tennis and pickle ball courts. There could be a pedestrian bridge off of Hubbard Street to be used for pedestrian access only. The River Park should have a multimodal trail or a linear park that goes from downtown all the way out to River Park. This is a golden opportunity that could be started now before development becomes a problem.

Mr. Bailey discussed possible connectivity routes and various ways to minimize costs. He stated there are so many different possibilities for connecting the trails.

City Administrator Logan Propes discussed using local funds and future grant funds for the in-between sidewalks.

Mr. Dickinson discussed getting private entities to contribute money for the community. He stated if the City waits five years the trail won't be possible, and he wants to see the project get done. He stated it would also be a huge health and wellness aspect.

Mr. Bailey, Mr. Propes, Mayor Howard, and the Committee Members further discussed concepts, connectivity routes, grant funding, river access, and features.

Mr. Dickinson stated that he would not want to see the park commercialized; it needs to be more of a low-key type of park. He thinks the key features should include walking trails, hiking trails, biking trails, and birding trails. He does not think there should be a playground; it should be more of a nature and activity park. The other parks have playgrounds.

Mr. Bailey stated there could be a dedicated educational area and an activity component could be tied to it.

No Action.

5. Downtown Pedestrian Mall Discussion

Chairman David Dickinson discussed the possibility of closing off downtown on the weekends. The majority of Broad Street in downtown could be closed on the weekends to make it a pedestrian mall. This would encourage people with kids to come downtown if they didn't have to worry about safety. He stated the question is what sections should be done and on what days.

Council Member Lee Malcom questioned whether GDOT will work with the City to do it one weekend a month.

City Administrator Logan Propes stated once the Bypass is completed, GDOT will gladly give the City control of Broad Street. He explained the City could pilot a little of this program here now. It would not be a full closure of the street, but a few parking spaces could be given up to

expand the sidewalk, which would create extra gathering area or restaurant seating. This would give people room to move around and congregate. The sidewalk areas, waterlines, and water meters will need to be redone. It would be a great time to revamp downtown, and cobblestone type pavers could be used.

No Action.

6. Other Business & Discussion

Council Member Lee Malcom stated it all sounds phenomenal. She questioned whether other Cities that offer street closures have alternative parking for downtown. The Visionary Plan from a few years ago had a great concept for a parking deck. She feels that it needs to be addressed as a long-range plan.

Chairman David Dickinson stated that Ashville has a small parking deck.

City Administrator Logan Propes discussed using TSPLOST Funds for a parking deck. It could be put on the City of Monroe property located on Wayne Street. A parking deck costs \$26,000 per parking space. He stated the City could try to expand the Wayne Street lot now, and some of the parking on the backside of the Library can be enhanced. There is a lot of peripheral parking that can be enhanced.

Mr. Bailey, Mr. Propes, Mayor Howard, and the Committee Members further discussed parking possibilities.

Council Member Tyler Gregory questioned whether there will be water fountains in the parks and discussed adding sunshades around to make it more inviting.

Mr. Dickinson discussed redesigning the fountains to keep birds from perching on them.

Mr. Propes stated the Downtown Green is a big item, which is just getting started. The City currently has \$966,000 in the Parks SPLOST Fund. Some of the little park-related items can be done prior to the Downtown Green, but he doesn't want to stretch the City too thin.

Mr. Gregory discussed building a stage at Childers Park for local people to perform for the community.

Mayor Howard requested for a report on the items discussed to be presented to Council next week.

Council Member Charles Boyce, IV, questioned whether there is a timeline for getting started on Green Street. He stated that he and a friend will match the funding amount.

Mr. Bailey explained he has not heard back from the High School about their proposal yet; it is still very early in the process.

No Action.

III. ADJOURN

By Acclamation.