

**THE UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY  
COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM**

**SUBJECT:** Bishop Park Master Plan Revision

**DATE:** June 27, 2018

**BUDGET INFORMATION:**

REVENUES: \$0

EXPENSES: \$0

ANNUAL:

CAPITAL:

OTHER:

FUNDING SOURCE: N/A

**COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON:** August 7, 2018

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**PURPOSE:**

To request that the Mayor and Commission accept the proposed revised Bishop Park Master Plan. To view this document please go to the following link:

<https://www.accgov.com/DocumentCenter/View/52453/Bishop-Park-Master-Plan-2018---reduced>

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**HISTORY:**

1. On January 1, 1972, Athens Mayor Julius Bishop announced a purchase agreement for the Athens Fairground property for the development of a recreational park. The initial 23-acre property on Hawthorne Avenue was held by the Athens Fairgrounds Association, who at the time used the property for the annual county fair.
2. In December 1973, the City of Athens began construction of the park. The first phase included site preparation and grading, two basketball courts, three softball fields, six lighted tennis courts, picnic tables, and parking for 275 cars.
3. In 1974, the Athens City Council voted to name the park, originally conceived as the Athens Fairgrounds Park, in honor of Mayor Bishop for his pivotal role in its development.
4. In 1975, construction of the Bishop Park gymnasium began and was completed the following year.
5. In summer 1977, the park's swimming pool opened.

6. In 1984, the parking area was expanded using additional land acquired along Sunset Drive.
7. In 1989, three tennis courts were constructed in the park near Sunset Drive.
8. In 1996, SPLOST IV Project #27 provided for the construction of two covered tennis courts.
9. In Fall 2013, nine tennis courts were reconditioned as a part of SPLOST 2011 Project #16, Sub-Project #3, Park Facilities Improvements. During this same time period, repairs were made to the pool as a part of SPLOST 2011 Project #16, Sub-Project #4, Park Facilities Improvements.
10. From September 27 to October 10, 2014, Leisure Services Department staff, with assistance from the University of Georgia (UGA) Masters of Environmental Planning & Design (MEPD) students, conducted an on-line and field survey of park users, staff received 502 responses.
11. On October 6, 2014, approximately 40 people attended a public input session led by UGA's Center for Community Design & Preservation (CCDP) with Leisure Services Department staff to gather input and ideas on park improvements. The session included an overview of the project and facilitated round-table discussions.
12. From October 17-19, 2014, CCDP staff conducted a three-day design charrette with UGA students to generate design concepts for the park based on public input.
13. On October 27, 2014, CCDP presented concepts produced during the charrette and gathered public feedback on elements of those alternatives at a public meeting. Approximately 40 people attended.
14. Between November 4 and November 19, 2014, Leisure Services Department staff conducted stakeholder interviews with contracted/permitted park users, including representatives from the Athens Farmer's Market, Downtown Falcons Football program, Dolphins Swim Team, and WOW Boot Camp.
15. On March 25, 2015 and April 4, 2015, Leisure Services Department staff held open houses at the Athens Farmer's Market to gather feedback for the proposed master plan concepts. Citizens were able to view the concepts and respond via an on-line survey from March 9 to April 13, 2015. 153 responses were received to the preliminary concept survey in person or on-line.
16. On August 11, 2015, the Draft Master Plan was presented to the Mayor and Commission at their August work session.
17. In August 2015, the Mayor withdrew the Draft Master Plan from the Mayor and Commission meeting agenda.

18. On March 14, 2017, staff presented an updated Draft Master Plan to the Mayor and Commission at their March work session.
19. Between June 7 and June 12 of 2017, staff solicited public input on the updated Master Plan with three open house sessions and online comments. Fifty people attended the open houses and 57 comments were received online and in person.
20. On June 14 and 17 of 2017, staff responded to questions about the basketball court location by visiting the courts, talking with basketball players, and sharing the plan. Verbal feedback was received from 33 players along with a posting on their community basketball group Facebook page.
21. On July 10, 2018, staff presented the draft master plan revision to Mayor and Commission at their July work session.

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**FACTS & ISSUES:**

1. Regular attendance counts by staff housed at Bishop Park show that the park receives approximately 400,000 visits per year.
2. Some of the park's infrastructure dates back to the original fairgrounds construction in the 1950's with most of the remaining infrastructure added during the park's construction in the 1970's. This infrastructure has exceeded its useful life and is in need of replacement. Water, sewer, and electrical failures are regular issues throughout the park. All of the original infrastructure and structures predate modern building codes and fail to meet accessibility standards. The proposed master plan reconfigures portions of Bishop Park's infrastructure as part of needed renovations and projects to better support current patterns of use, while preserving the community character.
3. The park has a number of erosion and stormwater issues. Many athletic fields do not drain properly, resulting in significant standing water on fields, as well as flooded dugouts, limiting their use and recovery following storms. In several locations around the park, sedimentation due to erosion frequently occurs on park walkways. A comprehensive approach to on-site stormwater management is included in the proposed master plan. A network of proposed rain gardens and bioswales will capture water from athletic fields, walking paths and parking areas. Stormwater detention will be provided through attractive stormwater amenities that also serve as scenic park features.
4. The park's current design does not support biking or walking access. The Hawthorne Avenue entrance is limited to an informal trail to access the park. A single sidewalk adjacent to parking areas provides access to the park from Sunset Drive. The proposed master plan provides park access via several new pedestrian entry points along with improved streetscaping on Hawthorne Avenue, Oglethorpe Avenue, and Sunset Drive. The Master Plan also includes future Greenway connections as part of the Normaltown Connector.

5. The current design for parking areas is a confusing network of one-way drives, creating conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. At peak times during the year, the parking areas are at or near capacity several times per week. The proposed reconfigured parking area includes a simplified layout that improves vehicular circulation while increasing access to all parts of the park, and parking bays that are efficiently configured and provide safe pedestrian circulation. A pick up and drop off space is provided for the Gymnastics and Wellness Center as well as the Event Pavilion. The proposed reconfigured parking area also increases the total parking spaces from 305 to 361, which includes 28 on-street parking spaces on Sunset Drive.
6. Currently, park users frequently incorporate parking areas into their walking or jogging loops, as the park's path network is confusing and disconnected. The proposed master plan provides for approximately a ½ mile loop and a ¼ mile loop through different areas of the park to facilitate walking and jogging activities.
7. The park's primary structure, originally conceived as a multi-purpose facility, is now dedicated to the Leisure Services Department's gymnastics program, which functions all year with various sessions and is at capacity with waiting lists. The structure was not originally intended for use as a dedicated gymnastics facility and is undersized (approximately 5,000 SF) for this scope of program. A proposed new Gymnastics and Wellness Center (GWC) will be approximately 15,000 SF, which will provide adequate gymnastics and support space for the program, in addition to providing space for wellness activities, administration, and other programs. There is the possibility to add an indoor teaching pool as part of the facility as the Gymnastics and Wellness Center phase is initiated.
8. The Athens Farmer's Market is held seasonally each Saturday at the Park's covered Tennis Pavilion with some spillage into adjacent parking areas. A proposed Event Pavilion and plaza in the same location as the covered Tennis Pavilion provides for flexible configuration of events such as the Athens Farmer's Market, allowing for these events to be fully covered during times of inclement weather, or partially or fully outdoors during more pleasant weather. The proposed Pavilion could be a retrofit of the existing building, or a new structure that is properly designed to function as an event space.
9. The currently available multi-use field space along Sunset Drive is inadequate, requiring youth soccer and football programs, and adult fitness classes, to frequently use the softball outfields for their programs. Fencing is removed from field one to allow flexible uses as a multi-purpose field. Usable field space will be increased while preserving the passive characteristics of the park.
10. The basketball courts have been relocated to another area of the park in order to accommodate the stormwater quality and quantity treatment that is necessary in the area of their current location. Conversations with basketball court users resulted in the

recognition of the need for improved courts and backboards, with a desire for covered courts. The new location of the courts was not objectionable to the users. Their concerns were more about the quality of the courts rather than the location.

11. The park is located near the UGA Health Sciences Campus, Athens Regional Medical Center, numerous medical offices, and other healthcare-related entities, which provide opportunities for coordination in providing health and wellness-related programming. New walking loops, outdoor spaces for fitness classes, and wellness programming space in a new structure will serve to facilitate these collaborations.
12. The plan recommends a mix of funding sources to complete the Master Plan, including SPLOST, capital improvement funds, grants, partnerships with health and wellness-related organizations, and community-driven fundraising.
13. This recommendation supports the following FY19 Mayor and Commission Strategic Commitment:
  - Healthy, Livable, Sustainable Athens-Clarke County

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**OPTIONS:**

1. Mayor and Commission accept the proposed Bishop Park Master Plan.
2. Mayor and Commission deny acceptance of the revised Bishop Park Master Plan.
3. Mayor and Commission defined option.

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**DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Option #1

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**DEPARTMENT: Leisure Services**

Prepared by: Melinda Cochran Davis, Nature Division Administrator  
Kent Kilpatrick, Director



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Kent Kilpatrick

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Date: 06/27/2018

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**ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENTS:**

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**ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION: Option #1**

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Manager

July 11, 2018

Date:

**ATTACHMENTS:**

<https://www.accgov.com/DocumentCenter/View/52453/Bishop-Park-Master-Plan-2018---reduced>