

**Submitted By:** Leisure Services Department

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**Project Classification:** Social Well-Being

**Project Focus:** Basic Facilities & Infrastructure

**Project Type:** Park Renovation, Improvements, or Expansion

**Previously Submitted and Rejected:**

**Continuation Project:** Yes - SPLOST 2011 16-Parks Facilities Improvements

**Project Total Cost:** \$ 24,944,000

**Total Operating Cost:** \$

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**Project Description:** The Parks Facilities Improvement Project is envisioned to provide a high level of relief from the capital budget burden for the Leisure Services Department. It is not feasible for this project to completely replace the entirety of the capital budget during the SPLOST period, but this submittal would address some of the most significant and imminent life cycle replacement, and additions that are critical for the long term safety and usability of park facilities across the entire Leisure Services Department. This project is a continuation of the SPLOST 2011 Park Improvements Project and the extension of this project into SPLOST 2020 is an integral part of accomplishing many of the long term capital projects identified in the department's capital budget plan. These projects are larger in scope and represent solutions for long standing issues that impact user's safety and quality of their experience. Some examples of the types of projects include ethical and legal accessibility compliance to provide access to our facilities for people with disabilities, playground replacements and additions, new picnic pavilions, shade structures, athletic fields, hard surface courts, restrooms, dog parks, and similar projects as identified by staff and park users. Specific examples of some of the current project needs include accessibility improvements to the basketball courts and recreation hall at Memorial Park. Sites like playgrounds and dog parks become unbearably hot in the warm seasons and park users have been clamoring for the addition of shade structures. Ben Burton Park needs safe access to and interpretation of the historic dam ruins as well as a new playground near the recently funded pavilion and restroom. The vehicular and pedestrian circulation in the park is in dire need of update and improvement as well. Paving has been a recent addition to the capital cycle, and many of the department's parking lots and vehicular circulation areas are crumbling and in need of significant replacement. Milling, repaving, patching, and pedestrian safety improvements for the dual-use greenway and road segment within the Sandy Creek Nature Center property is an additional immediate need. Phase two of the World of Wonder playground is another identified project which includes the addition of a more natural play space and construction of new pavilions over the existing picnic table pads. There are other project that have been identified, these are but a few examples.

**Project Mission Statement/Goals & Objectives:** The Park Improvement Project provides important funding that enables the Leisure Services Department to address larger scale park needs and safety concerns as well as providing funding for additional park amenities to meet the needs of the public. This project is central to the overall mission of providing the necessary care to our department's existing facilities.

The majority of our parks just meet the minimum ADA requirements and many park features are inaccessible for people with disabilities. These funds will help make the parks meet ethical accessibility goals in order to better serve our entire community.

Our playgrounds are very popular and many have outlived their life expectancy. Our newer playgrounds require regular replacement of parts due to their popularity while our older playgrounds are in dire need of replacement. An example of a newer playground equipment replacement need is the roller slide at the World of Wonder playground. Heavy use requires replacement of the slide rollers every 6 months.

Phase two of the WoW playground currently lacks the funding for implementation. That sub-project includes construction of pavilions over the existing picnic pad, the addition of two more pavilions and pads, and the addition of a natural play area through the small, forested area within the playground enclosure.

Shade structures are one of the most abundant request from park users. This project would allow the department to install structures at the most in-demand areas across our facilities such as Trail Creek Park playground, Wiggle Field Dog Parks, and outdoor gathering spaces at our community centers.

Athletic fields need frequent renovation due to heavy use, and hard surface courts require regular resurfacing to allow safe play for users.

Older portions of the Greenway Trail, including the segment between Sandy Creek Nature Center and Walker Hall are beyond their life expectancy. Time and the natural setting have caused the pavement to heave, crack, and crumble. This creates tripping hazards for users and complaints are increasing as a result. Pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles share this segment of greenway as there is currently no delineated area for each of the users, creating a safety hazard.

The Parks Facilities Improvements project provides the necessary funding to address these critical needs to ensure the present and future enjoyment of our existing facilities by all members of our community. In general, this project will fund capital infrastructure improvements at all of the Leisure Services Department facilities to include subprojects such as ADA access improvements, additional picnic pavilions, playground improvements or replacements, significant repairs to pool areas, gym floors and tennis courts, playground improvements, installation of field lighting, addition or replacement of park equipment including picnic tables and grills, addition and replacement of signage, general improvements to park access, and erosion control of park areas.

**Projected Useful Life of Project:** With a variety of facilities and amenities identified in this project, there is a wide array of life expectancy. For example, the minimum life expectancy for playgrounds is

20 years while other amenities such as pavilions could last in excess of 75 years. Asphalt repaving can range from 10 - 30 years depending on traffic, surrounding vegetation, and use, while concrete can last in excess of 50 years.

**To meet the Project Goals & Objectives, when should this project be completed?** This project should be distributed evenly across each tier of funding for the SPLOST 2020 period in order to adequately address annual department needs.

**The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building System compliance:** This project does not include any structures that would fall within the purview of LEED, but every project that is a part of this proposal will follow best practices for sustainability.

**How will this project help meet the Public Safety, Basic Facilities/Infrastructure, and/or Quality of Life needs in Athens-Clarke County?** The National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) 2017 survey on American's engagement with parks found that people on average will visit their parks and recreation facilities twice a month. 70% of the respondents reported having visited a local park within the previous 7 days. People visit parks to be with family and friends, be more physically active, to be closer to nature, to access quality child enrichment opportunities, and to learn a new skill or craft.

Four in five Americans agree that NRPA's Three Pillars - Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity - represent what they see as the priorities for their local park and recreation agency. These pillars are core to the mission of the Leisure Services Department here in Athens-Clarke County.

The Leisure Services Department is the largest provider for Parks, Recreation, Arts, and Nature based facilities and program opportunities in our community. This project allows the department to properly care for and maintain our park infrastructure in a way that not only provides for a safe and enjoyable experience, but also makes our community a more desirable place to live.

**How is this Project recommended/included in any approved ACCGOV Land Use Plan, Master Plan, Study, Service Delivery Plan, Envision Athens, etc.?** This project meets the following action agenda items outlined in the Envision Athens Plan:

### Infrastructure

I1 - Repair and replace infrastructure assets commensurate with physical depreciation.

I4 - Reduce the risk of flooding events and improve the quality of streams and rivers through proactive and innovative stormwater programs.

### Civic Engagement

CE1 - Create gathering spaces that are available and accessible to all

### Social Services

SS2 - Create a community that is supportive of, and provides opportunities for individuals with limited opportunity

SS3 - Develop and expand youth development programming that is accessible and provide adequate and affordable child care

### Health

HE7 - Continue to support healthy living initiatives

### Education

EC4 - Provide a variety of learning opportunities for both adult and nontraditional student's education and development, which support a variety of learning styles and emotional/health needs.

EC5 - Enhance the learning environment to provide student support for the variety of needs within our community.

### Economic Development

ED3 - Provide the facilities and services necessary to attract, incubate, and grow businesses from a variety of sectors

### Environment

E4 - Improve the health and quality of our rivers to meet local standards for public use and enjoyment.

### Land Use

LU2 - Develop incentives to reuse existing development before new developments in greenfields

LU9 - Establish incentive for new development to incorporate environmentally sustainable standards...

## Triple Bottom Line Impacts

**Positive Benefits for the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County:** Numerous studies show that parks clearly improve quality of life, and that quality of life has been demonstrated to be a strong driver of economic development.

In May of 2018, the NRPA published a study from The George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis titled "Promoting Parks and Recreation's Role in Economic Development. The following findings are noteworthy for the positive benefits of this project for the citizens of Athens-Clarke County:

-Investing in improving a community's quality of life can create a virtuous cycle: high-quality places attract workers, which attract employers, which in turn attract more investments and jobs.

-Places with landscape, climate, and recreational appeal are more likely to grow creative and entrepreneurial industries.

-Research and development facilities, technology companies, and corporate headquarters are more likely to prioritize quality-of-life and cultural amenities when making site location decisions. In contrast, manufactures are more likely to prioritize traditional factors such as wage rates, transportation costs, and proximity to markets instead of quality of life factors.

-The competition for talent makes technology firms more likely to locate in amenity-rich communities. They also find that quality of life factors matter more in the decision of where a firm's employees live than to the

company's actual site location. This means that quality of life factors are more significant in selecting a city or region than selecting a specific work site.

72% of communities use images of urban parks and public spaces, outdoor amenities, or recreational and cultural facilities in their economic development marketing materials.

This project allows the Leisure Services Department to continue providing and further enhance the quality of our parks and facilities so that our community can attract high quality companies that promote higher paying jobs for members of our community.

**Detrimental Impacts to the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County:** Improving the conditions of our parks will raise property values, possibly resulting in gentrification. Leisure Services is committed to working with other agencies and citizens in our community to develop policies to address affordable housing.

**Positive Benefits for our Citizens and Visitors:** Leisure Services provides a diverse abundance of benefits for people of all ages and abilities. One of the most critical benefits that we provide is opportunities for improving health and wellbeing through our parks, facilities, and programming. Physical activity is critical to good health, and parks provide a venue for that physical activity to occur. A report by the Trust for Public Land provides strong evidence that people exercise more when they have better access to parks. Regular physical activity can improve health and reduce the risk of diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes. Exercise and active lifestyles can also provide psychological benefits, improve mental health, and alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety. Increased access to places for physical activity leads to a 25% increase in people exercising three or more days a week.

Parks also strengthen community ties and bring diverse populations together.

Recent studies have shown that children from lower income homes face barriers to participation in sports and recreation related activities. The parks, facilities, and programs of Leisure Services provide opportunities for low income families to have access to the facilities and programs through our scholarship program and PLAY fund. According to an analysis of social equity and parks conducted by NRPA, public parks provide equal access to all citizens regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or ability. Parks and recreation facilities can foster community pride, bring people together, create destination-oriented places, and connect people to each other and nature.

Parks can also promote safety in the community. In Macon, Georgia, a revitalized park that included new programming and beautification efforts reduced incidents of crime and violence by 50%.

Parks have the power to strengthen communities, transform lives, and protect the future. Parks are the most powerful aspect of every community. The power of parks and recreation is enduring.

**Detrimental Impacts for our Citizens and Visitors:** There are none.

**Environmental Benefits, including but not limited to Positive impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems:**

Parks play an important role in making communities more environmentally resilient. Parks have long mitigated the impact of extreme weather and flash flooding, help to reduce our carbon footprint, clean air and water, and provide a respite from the heat island effect. Trees, shrubs, and vegetation purify the air of gases, ozone, and pollutants that cause respiratory problems and corrode and damage buildings. Tree canopies, garden vegetation, grassy areas, and other green spaces in parks capture and filter rainwater, reducing the amount of oil, salt, and pollutants flowing from roads and lawns into nearby waterways. By refocusing our approach to park design, we can utilize green infrastructure to reduce runoff, preserve space for water infiltration, protect watersheds from erosion, and preserve natural floodplains to reduce flash flooding.

Parks and recreation infrastructure and facilities promote conservation and environmental sustainability. According to a report by the NPRA, parks facilities conserve natural resources and wildlife habitat, protect air and water quality, and preserve open space for current and future generations. Through stewardship activities, parks can involve the public in conservation efforts and increase awareness of environmental needs. Parks and open space conserve scenic vistas, maintain healthy ecosystems, and provide carbon reducing sustainable landscapes.

According to NRPA, 1 acre of trees absorbs the carbon dioxide of driving a car 11,000 miles.

One of the core aspects of the facilities and stewardship of Leisure Services is sustainability. In addition to the environmental benefits that our parks provide, we are dedicated to improving habitat with ecological restoration projects through our office of Trails and Open Space. We take pride in our parks and the ecological benefits they provide for the entire community.

**Detrimental Impacts for the Environment, including but not limited to Negative impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems:** There are no detrimental impacts on the environment by funding parks facilities improvements.

**Positive/Negative Impacts on ACCGOV Departments, Agencies, or other Organizations, if not covered in one of the above questions:** This project has an overwhelming positive impact on ACC Departments, the Leisure Services Department, and our partner agencies. Funding Parks and Facilities Improvements will allow the department to continue providing high quality parks, facilities, programs and services while allowing us to continue building partnerships with community nonprofits and other partnership agencies. Our ability to engage with at-risk youth reduces crime and therefore the impact on police services and correctional facilities. Our focus on green infrastructure helps alleviate stormwater damage that Transportation and Public Works deals with on an ongoing basis. Our parks provide positive benefits to the Housing and Community Development Department and helps aid in their community building efforts. This investment in the community's park infrastructure is vital to the core operations and services that our community has come to need and expect.

## Project Costs

**Detailed project capital budget costs (to be funded from SPLOST 2020 only):**

Project Costs (round to thousand)	Amount
1. Land Acquisition / ROW / Easement:	\$ -
2. Design Fees: (Min.12% of New Const.; 14% of reno.; 16% for LEED proj.)	\$ 671,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees: (Min. Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.)	\$ 336,000
4. Fixtures, Furniture, and Equipment (for a facility): A detailed estimate is preferred – but dependent upon the specific project, utilize at a minimum \$15 to \$20 per square foot.	\$ 6,918,000
5. Construction:	\$ 11,172,000
6. Construction Contingency: (10% of the Construction line item)	\$ 1,118,000
7. Acquisition of Capital Equipment:	\$ 105,000
8. Testing:	\$ 750,000
9. Project Management: (4% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 843,000
10. Project Contingency: (10% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 2,192,000
11. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$ 112,000
12. Other 1:	\$ -
13. Other 2:	\$ -
<b>Project Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$ 24,217,000</b>
14. Program Management (3% of Project Subtotal):	\$ 727,000
<b>SPLOST 2020 Project Total:</b>	<b>\$ 24,944,000</b>

## Operating Cost

**Total Annual Net Operating Costs when Project is complete: No Change**

## Project Financing

**Is the proposed Project to receive funding from source(s) other than SPLOST 2020? No**

## Project Site

**Will the proposed Project require any land, whether existing sites, new site, easements, or Rights of Way?**  
No.