

**Submitted By:** Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc.

Mack Duncan

Phone: (706) 340-5474 Alt. Phone: (706) 613-3615

Email: SCNCInc@gmail.com

**Project Classification:** Environmental Protection

**Project Focus:** Quality of Life

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

**Previously Submitted and Rejected:**

**Continuation Project:** Yes - SPLOST 2005 027-ENSAT Phase 2 - Sandy Creek Nature Center

**Project Total Cost: \$ 308,000**

**Total Operating Cost: \$ (4,000)**

---

**Project Description:** This project will upgrade and better focus the aging Coast and Wetlands Interactive Learning Centers (ILCs) at Sandy Creek Nature Center. These ILCs are the oldest "exhibits" at SCNC, dating to 1998 and 2001, respectively. They are wearing out and are not up to the same standards for interactivity, sustainability and multi-generational learning as the new Agriculture, Woodlands, Urban, & Sky Center ILCs created through SPLOST 2011. This project will build on previous investments by SPLOST, donors, and the community to help ensure the environmental education mission of SCNC remains robust and relevant.

The Coastal ILC features a 2,000-gallon aquarium with smaller viewing tanks. Visitors investigate subjects such as the variety of life that inhabits the ocean off the Georgia coast. The exhibit displays live sea turtles, fish, and other creatures to help visitors explore the coastal environment and how actions we take in Northeast Georgia impact the coast and our local environment.

Upgrade: Install features to enhance interactivity and educational graphics that convey current & anticipated relationships between Athens & the coastal environment. Concepts will include sea level changes, habitat loss, and the importance of marshes and barrier islands. Upgrade pumps, lighting and other "backroom" systems to current, more energy-efficient standards. Two substandard aquariums will be replaced with a larger aquarium better representing near-shore areas of the Georgia coast.

The Wetlands ILC introduces visitors to a local freshwater pond system. It features live turtles, fish, salamanders, frogs, and plants. A panoramic pond-side mural with full-size, touchable models of animals, projecting microscopes, and other features provide interactive experiences. Underwater viewing of two 1,000-gallon freshwater aquariums allows observation of animal behaviors not easily seen in the natural environment.

Upgrade: Better align messages with Athens-Clarke County environmental protection and

sustainability goals related to stormwater, wastewater, and water quality. Update aging audio-visual messages using current technology and enhance accessibility to a variety of visitors. Enhance understanding of local water issues including pollution, demand from a growing city, and the importance of rivers, creeks, and wetlands in our urban landscape. As with the Coastal ILC, pumps, lighting and "backroom" systems will be upgraded for enhanced efficiency and sustainability.

**Project Mission Statement/Goals & Objectives:** The project supports the mission of Sandy Creek Nature Center to encourage individuals, through science-based education and preservation of the center's natural environments, to better understand and appreciate the natural world and their interrelationship with it, so that they will be wise stewards of the land, the water, the air, and the plants and animals with which we share our community and planet.

Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc. partners with Athens-Clarke County's Leisure Services Division to augment, promote, protect and guide the mission and services of the nature center. This partnership, formed in 1981, ensures that critically needed science, natural science, and environmental education programs and services are available to all segments of the local and regional community.

The goals and objectives of the Coastal ILC are to:

- A. Educate the community about basic concepts related to Georgia's barrier islands, marshes and coastal ecosystems
- B. Enhance understanding of connection between local actions and impacts on marine life. This aspect of the ILC will be greatly enhanced through this SPLOST project
- C. Form the basis of a personal connection between people in our service area and the coast, especially for individuals from underprivileged backgrounds who may never have an opportunity to visit the coast, especially not an undeveloped island such as Sapelo or Cumberland.

The goals and objectives of the Wetlands ILC are to:

- A. Educate the community about the diversity and abundance of plant and animal life in Piedmont wetlands, including those at Sandy Creek Nature Center
- B. Provide opportunities for observing local wetlands plants and animals that are not possible in a natural setting due to issues such as low water clarity and accessibility, including the need to wade into a pond
- C. Educate the community about the benefits of Piedmont wetlands, especially biological protection and enhancement of water quality and the richness and diversity of plant and animal habitat found within wetlands
- D. Improve community understanding and acceptance of stormwater runoff mitigation, water pollution control and wetlands preservation.

**Projected Useful Life of Project:** Museum-style educational exhibits lose effectiveness after 20-25 years. As with the Coastal and Wetlands ILCs, they are "loved to death," leading to wear and tear that is increasingly difficult to repair without loss of function and visual appeal over time. Exhibits also become routine - novelty or a new experience is important to visitors. When visitors see the same exhibit year after year with no significant updates or enhancements, they lose interest and the

appeal of the facility diminishes. In addition, educational technology and visitor expectations change over time. In 1998, no one could imagine visitors would want (or be able) to access video content or other information via their cell phones. In 1998, no one had cell phones. Now, it is easy to make connections through technology with live video feeds, satellite monitoring, and other innovative ways to interact in real time with the environment. Moreover, the technology for behind-the-scenes systems such as pumps, filters, and lighting improves over time, increasing energy efficiency, providing for advanced animal husbandry techniques, reducing demands on staff time and reducing maintenance costs.

**To meet the Project Goals & Objectives, when should this project be completed?** The Coastal Exhibit is now 20 years old and is nearing the end of its anticipated functional life. The Wetlands Exhibit is approximately 15 years old and will reach the end of its anticipated functional life within the timeframe of SPLOST 2020. Ideally, both exhibit upgrades will be completed in 5 to 10 years - before the Coastal Exhibit reaches its 30th anniversary in 2028.

**The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building System compliance:** The Sandy Creek Nature Center Education & Visitors Center was designed to meet green building standards when it was constructed. The 16,000 square-foot facility is an exhibit in its own right, highlighting sustainable techniques and technologies, including solar light shelves that reduce the need for electrical lighting, rainwater collection systems for gardening and stormwater abatement, solar water heating, and high efficiency heating and air conditioning systems. The SPLOST 2020 project will enhance green building compliance by updating older exhibit lights and pumps to more efficient modern standards and by enhancing signage and messages about the sustainable features of the building and its surroundings.

**How will this project help meet the Public Safety, Basic Facilities/Infrastructure, and/or Quality of Life needs in Athens-Clarke County?** The Coastal and Wetlands ILC upgrades align perfectly with many of the goals and priorities of Envision Athens, including:

A. Land use: Understanding the impacts of upstream communities on Athens and of Athens on downstream communities can help citizens make better decisions regarding riparian buffers, wetland preservation and other land uses.

B. Environment: Envision Athens calls for "Stewardship of the natural environment, including improved water and air quality and conserved areas - woods, farms, streams and wetlands." These upgraded exhibits align perfectly with this goal.

C. Education: Each year, tens of thousands of children from public, private and home schools come to SCNC for structured and unstructured environmental education. Exhibit upgrades will enhance their experience and will align with curriculum objectives. The exhibits also will provide exceptional opportunities for multi-generational learning. Because the center is heavily used by Clarke County Public Schools and is open to all without any admission fee, it promotes educational equity - another goal of Envision Athens.

D. Tourism and recreation: SCNC is one of the top tourism destinations in our community, with 60,000 visitors annually. Enhancing these exhibits enhances the center's value as a destination. Lessons learned in the indoor ILCs can be carried outdoors onto the Nature Center's trails and the North Oconee River Greenway, creating a seamless experience for visitors.

E. Health: Envision Athens lists as a priority creating "a culture of healthy lifestyles" and access to facilities that promote better mental and physical health. The Nature Center's trail system and adjoining greenways promote an active lifestyle and better connection with the natural world, which is beneficial to mental

health. By highlighting the importance of clean water and instilling a sense of respect, responsibility and love for the natural world, this project will promote the culture Envision Athens aims to create.

F. Infrastructure: Envision Athens calls for maintaining, expanding, and upgrading infrastructure "to unlock economic potential and help meet the needs of individuals in full consideration of environmental practices." This project addresses the aging educational infrastructure of SCNC and promotes sound environmental practices such as energy efficiency, water pollution control, reducing plastic waste, and reducing stormwater runoff, one of ACC's most significant infrastructure challenges.

**How is this Project recommended/included in any approved ACCGOV Land Use Plan, Master Plan, Study, Service Delivery Plan, Envision Athens, etc.?** This is a continuation and update/upgrade of the previous SPLOST educational plan for the nature center.

### Triple Bottom Line Impacts

**Positive Benefits for the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County:** A. Upgrading the Coastal and Wetlands ILCs through SPLOST 2020 ensures that both exhibits will be brought up to modern standards without a loss of functionality. Delaying this project to a future SPLOST would guarantee the degradation of both exhibits before they are upgraded, impairing their ability to meet the needs of ACC and SCNC for a significant period of time and perhaps leading to the need to fully replace both exhibits at considerably higher cost.

B. This project represents a continuing community investment in SCNC's environmental education mission, providing continuing education and lifelong learning for people of all ages and backgrounds.

C. The project will enhance stewardship of our local, state, national and global environment by building a better understanding of the relationship between individuals, our community, streams and wetlands, and the ocean

D. Upgrading the Coastal and Wetlands ILCs will create better understanding of, and compliance with, state and local stormwater management, all-source pollution control, wetlands preservation, riparian buffers, and water resource management. This benefit assists numerous other departments within the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government in implementing their missions.

E. The project will help ensure that SCNC continues to be one of our community's top tourism and recreation destinations for schools, retirement communities, families and individuals.

F. As part of the Education & Visitors Center, the ILCs are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Because SCNC has no admission fee, the entire facility is accessible to the entire community, regardless of socio-economic status. Greenway access allows people without motor vehicles to access the center and its resources, removing even the barrier of needing a car to get here.

**Detrimental Impacts to the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County:** None anticipated.

**Positive Benefits for our Citizens and Visitors:** This project:

- A. Enhances SCNC as a destination and a trusted source for environmental education and recreation for citizens and visitors of all ages and abilities
- B. Helps SCNC remain a vital partner in assisting local and regional schools with achieving science learning objectives.
- We host every student in the Clarke County School District for formal educational programming multiple times during their elementary school years, and many private schools, home-schools and out-of-county schools also take advantage of educational resources here.
- C. Helps SCNC continue to be a premier location where families and individuals can engage in active and passive learning, recreation, and "rainy day" activities.
- D. Promotes understanding of environmental stewardship & justice through barrier-free education and outdoor opportunities.
- E. Strengthens SCNC as a beloved resource for persons with disabilities. Not only are people with orthopedic limitations able to access our ILCs, classrooms, and ADA trail, but hundreds of people with learning disabilities visit SCNC each year, including groups from Hope Haven, Fine Finish and Advantage, and a group from Hope Haven is the official trail-keeper of our ADA trail.
- F. Enhances SCNC as a facility that embraces diversity and is welcoming - and relevant - to the whole community, regardless of race, age, ability, religion, sex, gender, military status or socioeconomic status
- G. Reinforces the unique attributes of Athens-Clarke County's ecosystems, human and natural environment, and history. With more than 60,000 visitors a year, SCNC is one of ACC's top destinations.
- H. Is located just a few miles north of downtown and just off Loop 10, making it easily accessible to the entire community
- I. Helps satisfy the Envision Athens priority area of agriculture-related eco-tourism. SCNC is already a destination for eco-tourism because of its diverse habitats, trail system, managed forest and Agriculture and Woodlands ILCs. Upgrading the Coastal and Wetlands ILCs will enhance SCNC as an eco-tourism destination.
- J. Improves a much-used and much-needed resource for the Clarke County School District, private schools, and home schools.
- K. Enhances partnership opportunities with the University of Georgia, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and other organizations/agencies involved in natural resource education, management and protection.

**Detrimental Impacts for our Citizens and Visitors:** This project could increase demand for additional formal programming. Any such increase is not expected to exceed the capability of existing staff, especially as augmented by trained volunteers.

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

- A. Create heightened citizen awareness of environmental science and the need to be good stewards of our natural resources, specifically the benefits of protecting wetlands and the streams that provide drinking water and carry discharged wastewater (including stormwater runoff) downstream to the coast.
- B. Create additional opportunities to get involved in improving our local environment. SCNC already has one of the most robust volunteer programs in our community, with approximately 300 volunteers donating some 6,600 hours of time and talent each year. With completion of this project, the opportunities for additional docents and volunteer experts to create and lead programs will increase.
- C. Create positive and clear connections back to the work of community environmental engagement organizations and activities such as Rivers Alive, the Audubon Society and others.
- D. Augment SCNC's existing relationships and research activities with the Warnell School of Forestry and other facets of the University of Georgia.
- E. Convey facts and well-supported scientific findings about our local environment and our community's impacts upon it, allowing visitors to consider impacts and alternatives for themselves. SCNC follows the motto, "teaching, not preaching."
- F. Make big concepts personal, and put those big concepts into context - such as how climate change affects our state's shrimp and oyster industries, or how changes in local temperature and rainfall patterns impact local plants and wildlife. Individuals are able to learn ways to make a difference and decide what is right for them and their family.
- G. Enhance SCNC as a resource for engagement. Nature centers across the country are leaders for citizen involvement in environmental and quality-of-life issues in our communities. They provide an accessible bridge for citizens to learn, understand, and participate in the local government's efforts to improve our urban, suburban and exurban environments.

**Detrimental Impacts for the Environment, including but not limited to Negative impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems:** Potential for increased motor vehicle traffic to SCNC. No mitigation required.

**Positive/Negative Impacts on ACCGOV Departments, Agencies, or other Organizations, if not covered in one of the above questions:** ☐Enhances the reputation of Leisure Services for meeting or exceeding visitor

expectations and creating a fun, family-friendly environment for learning and rainy-day activities.

- A. Provides a small reduction in SCNC operating costs, including reduced electrical costs for lighting, water pumping and water filtration, as well as better use of staff time through reduced needs for maintenance and enhanced animal husbandry facilities.
- B. Enhances Sandy Creek Nature Center as a highlight destination of the Greenway Network
- C. Assists the Public Works Department Stormwater Division in educating the public about the importance of streams and wetlands, the benefits of stormwater mitigation, and the damaging impacts of unrestricted runoff
- D. Assists the Planning Department in educating the public about the benefits of natural areas, woodlands, buffers and other aspects of zoning and environmentally sensitive development
- E. Supports the work of the Economic Development Department by enhancing Sandy Creek Nature Center and the Greenway as an attraction and destination for residents and tourists
- F. Supports the work of the Sustainability Office in numerous ways, from demonstrating the importance of sustainable practices that protect water quality to enhancing the energy and water efficiency of the nature center
- G. Supports the work of the Solid Waste Department in educating the public about the importance of recycling and proper waste control in protecting wetlands and water supplies. Other ILCs, especially the Urban ILC, educate extensively about recycling.
- H. Supports the Public Utilities Department's mandate to protect drinking water supplies from pollution and to ensure wastewater meets state and federal standards for quality at discharge.

## 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.)	\$ 36,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees: (Min. Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.)	\$ 9,000
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.	\$ -
5. Construction:	\$ 194,000
6. Construction Contingency: (10% of the Construction line item)	\$ 20,000
7. Acquisition of Capital Equipment:	\$ -
8. Testing:	\$ -
9. Project Management: (4% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 11,000
10. Project Contingency: (10% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 27,000
11. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$ 2,000
12. Other 1:	\$ -
13. Other 2:	\$ -
<b>Project Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$ 299,000</b>
14. Program Management (3% of Project Subtotal):	\$ 9,000
<b>SPLOST 2020 Project Total:</b>	<b>\$ 308,000</b>

## Operating Cost

### Total Annual Net Operating Costs when Project is complete:

Only identify additional or net operating costs to be paid by ACCGOV. Identify the additional or net costs needed above ACCGOV's current operating budget to operate the requested project and any additional project related revenues that would be generated. Provide budget costs for each identified category below.

Operating Costs (round to thousand)	Estimated Impact for Annual Operating Expenditures
<b>TOTAL PROJECTED REVENUES FROM PROJECT</b>	-
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURES</b>	
1. Personnel Costs: from Appendix A	-
2. Annual Utilities:	
• Gas:	-
• Electrical:	(2,000)
• Water:	(1,000)
• Sewer:	-
• Phone:	-
• Solid Waste Collection:	-
• Other:	-
3. Operating Supplies:	-
4. Equipment Maintenance:	-
5. Facility Maintenance:	(1,000)
6. Fuel:	-
7. Other:	-
8. Other:	-
9. Other:	-
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	(4,000)
<b>NET OPERATING COSTS OF PROJECT:</b>	<b>\$ (4,000)</b>

## Project Financing

**Is the proposed Project to receive funding from source(s) other than SPLOST 2020? Yes**  
 If yes, please fill in information below.

**Total Capital Financing for Project:**

*If the proposed Project is to receive funding other than SPLOST 2020, provide a listing of amounts from each of the categories listed below. Please round all dollar amounts to the nearest \$1,000.*

Project Sources (round to thousand)	Amount
1. SPLOST 2020 <sup>1</sup> :	\$ 308,000
<b>OTHER SOURCES</b>	
2. ACCGOV General Fund:	\$ -
3. ACCGOV Enterprise Fund:	\$ -
4. State Grant:	\$ -
5. Federal Grant:	\$ -
6. Previous SPLOST:	\$ -
7. Other (describe): \$30,000 donation from Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc. to augment funding for the project.	\$ 30,000
8. Other (describe):	\$ -
<b>TOTAL SOURCES:</b>	<b>\$ 338,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> If any additional sources of funding other than SPLOST 2020 are indicated above, please provide information related to the source here. Be specific and be prepared to provide all necessary written approvals. (For example: Roadway projects that have approval for Federal Aid and will utilize SPLOST 2020 funding for matching funds, you would need to provide specific written approval by GDOT)

**Describe the current commitments for the other sources funding this project:** Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc., will provide an additional 10 percent over the \$300,000 SPLOST request to augment funding for this project. The \$30,000 will be made available to Athens-Clarke County to use as needed or to fund one or more specific aspects of the project that otherwise could not be created with SPLOST funds alone.

SCNC Inc. has a long history of effective partnership with our local government, beginning in 1981 when the organization donated Sandy Creek Nature Center's first 100 acres to Clarke County. Since that time, the non-profit has provided more than \$2.4 million in supplemental funding, from small grants that allow staff to pursue continuing education opportunities to major projects such as the managed forest project and the new outdoor playscape (currently in design and fundraising stage).

SCNC Inc., also funded construction of the Fireside Building and Walker Hall, acquisition of the planetarium projector, and completion of the ADA Trail, and has provided technical and promotional assistance with the SPLOST projects that have benefitted the Nature Center.

## Project Site

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

**Will the proposed Project be on a site currently owned by ACCGOV?** Yes

**Approximately how many acres is available or will be needed for the new facility or Park?** None - will be completed within existing footprint of existing building.

**Project Location/Address (Existing or Proposed):**

Within the Education & Visitor Center building at 205 Old Commerce Road, Athens GA 30607

**Will the Project require fee simple additional land acquisition?** No

**Will the Project require Rights-of-Way or Easement acquisition?** No

## Site Criteria and Standards

**Current Property Owner (if applicable):** No

**Minimum acreage necessary for Project.** None needed for project - exhibit hall in current center.

**Topography:** N/A

**Estimated cost per acre:** N/A

## Location/Accessibility

**Define location relative to the Project's service area that best meets the Goals and Objectives.**

¶Sandy Creek Nature Center is located approximately 2.5 miles north of downtown Athens at the confluence of the North Oconee River and Sandy Creek. It is accessible by automobile via Commerce Highway/US 441 North. The center is located about 1 mile north of Loop 10, making it accessible to people from anywhere in Athens-Clarke County. Currently, Athens Transit does not have a route serving the Commerce Highway corridor, but the center's parking is designed to accommodate school buses and tour buses. Bicyclists, runners and walkers can reach SCNC safely and without the danger and discomfort of riding/walking on the highway by using the North Oconee River Greenway, which currently has its northern terminus at the EVC building. Additional Greenway expansions are planned that will enhance bike/pedestrian access to SCNC from points east and west, and extend bike/pedestrian possibilities further north, as well. Cook's Trail, a wilderness-style path for walking and running, connects SCNC with Sandy Creek Park via the Sandy Creek Greenway.

¶Looking farther afield, SCNC is a destination for many people from counties surrounding and near Athens-Clarke, including some eastern parts of the Atlanta Metro Area. Access is entirely by automobile via Loop 10

and/or U.S. 441 unless visitors park along the Greenway and walk/bicycle to the nature center. School groups frequently access the center via school buses. SCNC is utilized frequently by several school systems in North Georgia as an alternative to Atlanta-area environmental education facilities.

**If necessary to meet the Goals and Objectives, describe what types of vehicular access will be required.**

Via U.S. 441/Commerce Highway and Old Commerce Road. See above

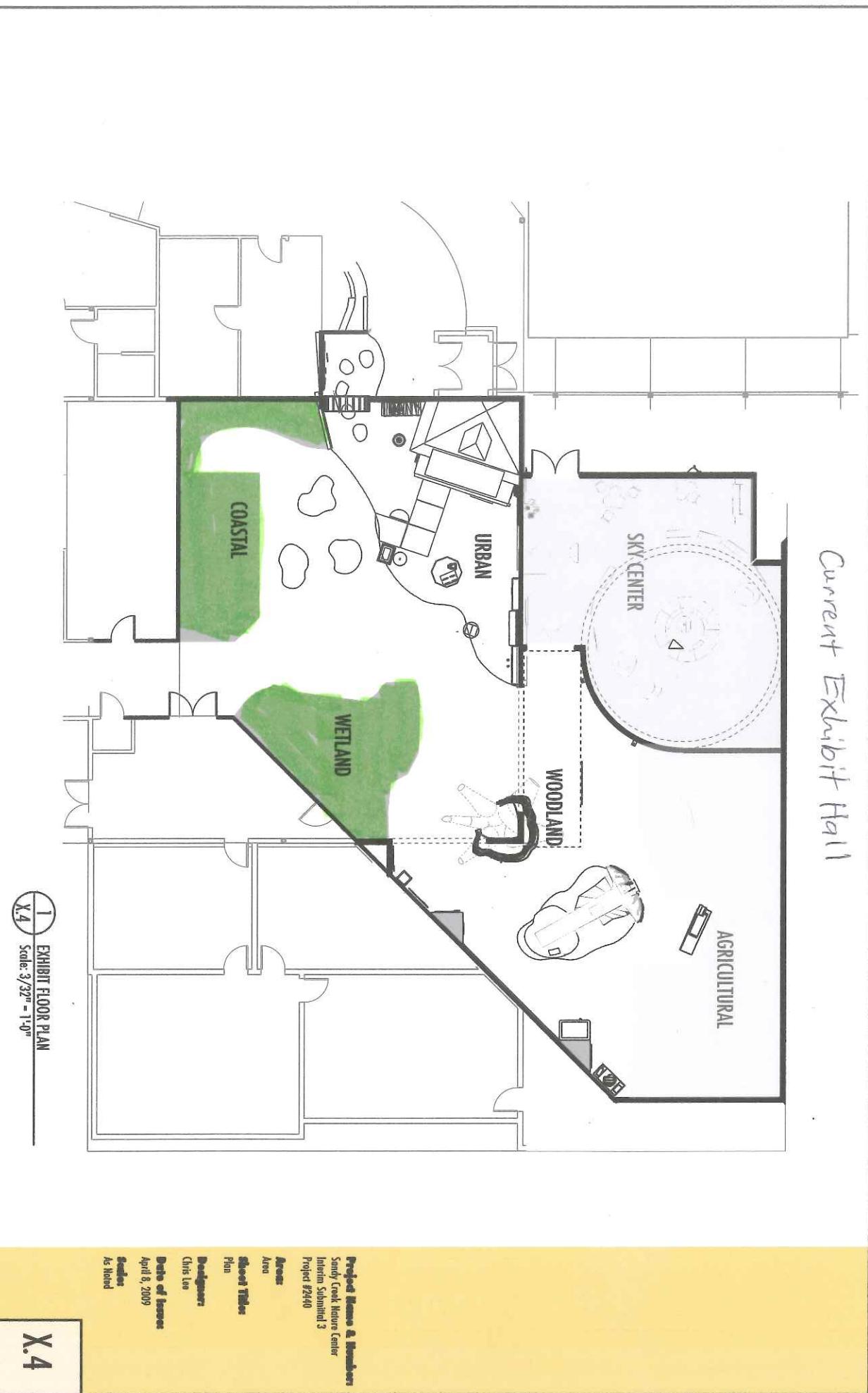
**If necessary to meet the Goals and Objectives, describe what types of pedestrian access will be required.**

Sandy Creek Nature Center, the Education & Visitor Center, and the updated ILCs can be accessed by pedestrians via the North Oconee River Greenway. The EVC is located approximately 1.7 miles north of the Greenway's Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard parking area, 2.5 miles north of City Hall via College Avenue and the Greenway, and 2.9 miles north of the Chicopee Building Greenway parking area at Dudley Park via the Greenway.

**If necessary to meet the Goals and Objectives, describe what types of Bicycle access will be required.**

Sandy Creek Nature Center, the Education & Visitor Center, and the updated ILCs can be accessed by bicyclists via the North Oconee River Greenway. The EVC is located approximately 1.7 miles north of the Greenway's Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard parking area, 2.5 miles north of City Hall via College Avenue and the Greenway, and 2.9 miles north of the Chicopee Building Greenway parking area at Dudley Park via the Greenway. With the opening of a portion of the Firefly Trail and new Greenway extensions, SCNC is now also accessible without the use of a car from large parts of East Athens and the College Station Road area.

Project will renovate Coastal & Wetland Interactive Learning Centers marked in green.



<b>Sandy Creek Nature Center Exhibit Improvements</b>					
<b>Renovation Cost Estimate Based on Museum Planner Estimation Models</b>					
11/8/2018					
		<b>Unit Price</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Sub-Total</b>
	<b><i>Exhibit Renovation - all materials included in construction costs.</i></b>				
	Coastal ILC - Infrastructure - Aquariums	\$200.00	SF	350	\$70,000.00
	Coastal ILC - Exhibits	\$250.00	SF	150	\$37,500.00
	Wetland ILC - Infrastructure - Aquariums	\$200.00	SF	280	\$56,000.00
	Wetland ILC - Exhibits	\$250.00	SF	120	\$30,000.00
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>				<b>\$193,500.00</b>

<b>Sandy Creek Nature Center Exhibit Improvements</b>						
<b>Cost savings based on energy savings &amp; utility savings</b>						
11/8/2018						
						<b>Sub-Total</b>
	<b>Replace Lighting, Pumps, Motors, &amp; Water Systems</b>					
	Coastal & Wetland ILC - Energy & Water Savings		\$1,450.00			\$1,450.00
	Coastal ILC & Wetland - Exhibit Maintenance Savings		\$500.00			\$500.00
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>						\$1,950.00