

REPORT ON HIAWASSEE MAYOR'S PARK PUBLIC HEARING HELD ON NOVEMBER 17, 2015 AT 5:30 P.M.

A Public Hearing was held on November 17, 2015 at 5:30 PM to update the Public on plans for the new Mayor's Park. At the meeting, the Mayor, the City Engineer and Manager reviewed Park Concept Plans, Grant Requests, and Initial Facilities Costs. public input on park priorities. The Hearing took place at the Hiawassee City Hall, 50 River Street.

The Update was attended by over fifty residents of Hiawassee and Towns County. Overwhelming support was voiced for the Mayor's Park by those in attendance.

The Public was advised the City of Hiawassee has obtained a long term lease from the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) for approximately Six (6) acres on Lake Chatuge. This area adjoins the City and was dedicated to the City for a new Mayor's Park and Recreational activities. TVA has also donated \$15,000.00 to the City to assist with initial for Park facilities. The money will need to be obligated as soon as possible.

Those in attendance were also advised the City has entered into an agreement to sublease approximately one and one-half (1&1/2) acres to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This area will be for state construction of a Public Boat Ramp, Boat Dock and Parking. The Ramp, Dock and Parking are being built at state expense. The DNR will design and install Boat Ramps throughout the state and has the experience to install the Hiawassee Project. The City will work with DNR, TVA, the Corp of Engineers and the Department of Transportation to obtain all required permits in a timely fashion.

The City will have approximately four (4) acres of greenspace and woodlands to install city facilities. The City plans to maximize the property's greenspace and utilize the existing woodlands as a natural buffer for Lake Chatuge. Concern was voiced by several attending that the existing woods remain in place. The City Engineer stated that the buffer will only be altered to the extent necessary to install walking trails, handicapped fishing piers and the boat launch. The City intends to maximize the woodland buffer.

Additionally, the City Manager stated that only low level lighting would be installed in the green space, pavilion and trails. It is the City's plan and goal that no light leave the park area. Only lights necessary for public safety will be installed.

Mayor Mathis reminded those in attendance that Hiawassee has no parks or playgrounds despite the demand for recreational facilities. A City Park was identified as a priority in the City's 2010 Comprehensive Plan and funding for a park was overwhelmingly approved in a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) Referendum. A City Park has been a City's priority for the past twenty years.

The City is actively seeking partners and sponsors to construct the pavilion and bathrooms, walking trails, and children's playgrounds stated the City Manager. The City Council has initially budgeted One Hundred and Twenty Five Thousand (\$125,000.00) in SPLOST proceeds for the Mayor's Park. TVA has committed \$15,000.00 and the City is seeking over \$150,000.00 in other state, federal and private grants to fund the Park.

The Manager also reported that the new park with lake access, boating facilities and mixed use activities will serve as an economic anchor and attract visitors. Currently, boaters leave the city to put boats on the Lake and city businesses lose equipment, gasoline and food sales. The City along with the County and the Chamber of Commerce has supported several lake activities including college bass tournaments and fishing events. However, these events have taken place outside the town due to Hiawassee's lack of boating access.

A couple of individuals expressed concern over future over use of the Park due to expected large number of park visitors. The Mayor, Engineer and Manager expressed their hope that this will be an issue in the future. The City intends for the Mayor's Park to be in high demand.

Those attending were advised that the Park will target recreational opportunities for at least three under-served populations in Hiawassee. The City recognizes that youth obesity is a national problem. The City is seeking to promote healthy youth lifestyles by promoting a safe place for children to play. Many of our older citizens have requested an area wherein they can exercise or walk in a safe and secure location. Our seniors want an area where they can simply sit, relax and enjoy the beauty of the lake. Handicapped residents have sought lake access for fishing. Handicapped piers and wheel chair access throughout the park are critical part of the concept plan. Mayor's Park will be multi-functional and is intended to unite all three groups identified – youth, elderly and handicapped - and provide recreational opportunities for ages two to eighty.

One person expressed support for a "dog park". Allocating an area for dogs will be considered as a part of future plans dependent on demand. Another individual express support for concrete picnic tables. Another individual expressed his opposition to the City's annexing the City Park into the City. Another individual expressed concern over future maintenance. All these concerns will be evaluated as the Park moves forward and based on the Public's Priorities.

After the meeting, several individuals who work with the elderly approached the City Manager expressing their concern over negative remarks made regarding elderly exercise stations. They expressed that this was a need in the elderly community and should be a priority for the City since it is a growth population. They offered to attend a Council meeting to discuss recent trends for the elderly or sit on any Mayor's Committee looking at Park facilities.

The public briefings give city officials and staff the chance to hear from the public on their priority for park elements. Everyone attending had their chance to vote on their priority element. The following page contains the Public Priority List.

Hiawassee Budget/Cost Estimate Mayor's Park				
Priority		#	Cost	
1	Building/Pavilion			\$75,000.00
2	Restroom	1		\$30,000.00
3	Trails			\$3,000.00
4	Playground Equipment			\$15,000.00
5	Tables	10	\$1,000.00	\$10,000.00
6	Mulch/Gravel Trails			\$5,000.00
7	Benches	5	\$750.00	\$3,750.00
8	Trash Cans	3	\$500.00	\$1,500.00
9	Playground Fencing	3		\$5,000.00
10	Pet Waste Disposal	1		\$500.00
11	Concrete/Pads	6	\$500.00	\$3,000.00
12	Ground Lighting			\$5,000.00
13	Signage	1		\$1,000.00
14	Overflow Parking			\$5,000.00
15	Bike Rack	1		\$300.00
16	Information Center	1		\$1,000.00
17	Dog Park			\$5,000.00
18	Concrete Tables	4		\$4,000.00
	Contingency			\$10,000.00
Total				\$183,050.00
Budget				-125,000.00
TVA				-15,000.00
Additional Funding Needs				43050