# City Council to assist

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — Clemson City Council on Monday night voted to provide funding assistance to the South Carolina Botanical Garden for repairing flood damage that occurred last month.

Council approved a motion by Jeremy Wright to match funding received by the Botanical Garden up to $10,000. Wright said the concept was the equivalent of a challenge grant.

"Once a month, they'll show us what they've raised and we'll match that amount up until we reach $10,000," Wright said.

Patrick McMillan, director of the South Carolina Botanical Garden, said a historic rainfall July 12 and 13 caused around $225,000 in existing infrastructure damage. However, the actual cost to repair and replace the damage, as well as fix the problems that caused the damage and prevent them

# Botanical Garden in flood recovery costs

from occurring again, is more than $500,000.

"We have begun the process of rebuilding the garden, from the very top to the areas that were flooded, but we're going to need your help as a city because we still need to raise $230,000," McMillan said.

In addition to the entire route of the Natural Heritage Garden sustaining damage, several bridges were compromised or

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FILE PHOTO

Volunteer Cole Hancock, left, and South Carolina Botanical Garden employee Guy Castles install new pavers in a walkway at the garden in Clemson. Clemson City Council Monday night agreed to match up to $10,000 in funding received by the Botanical Garden to help repair some of the extensive flood damage that occurred last month.

# GARDEN: Attracts 250-450K visitors a year

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washed away along with the entire irrigation system. During the days initially following the flooding, volunteers spent time saving, replanting or strengthening more than 1,000 varieties of native plants in their natural habitats. They also worked to minimize damage to the foundation of the Hunt Cabin located at the edge of the garden.

"The garden is a place we all have an attraction toward, every one in Clemson," McMillan said. "It's where I had my first date and where I got married. The garden's very special and attracts between 250,000 and 400,000 visitors a year.

"We had 32 weddings there this year and a lot of people who attended were not from the city. We have a visitor's book and almost no one is from the city; there are hundreds of signatures in that book. Many conferences held at the conference center include the botanical garden as a tour. There are more than 40 tours that benefit organizations."

Wright agreed, adding that his initial reaction when first approached was to help because the garden is one of the city's top tourist attractions.

"We wanted to do something to help them function at the level it has historically functioned," Wright said. "It does have an impact on the town because not everyone comes here to see a sporting event. There are some natural resources people want to see here, as well."

City Administrator Rick Cotton recommended hospitality or accommodations tax monies be used to fund the city's portion of assisting financing improvements to the site. Mayor Pro Tem Tim Fowler, while pointing out he supports the Botanical Garden and its impact on the city, questioned why council would provide funding when the city sustained serious flooding damage of its own at Nettles Park, as well as to the homes of some residents.

"I understand the problem, believe me, I do; it's all over the place," Fowler said. "We're looking at it from all sides, from people who think we are responsible for a lot of things. "Do you think the university will help us pay for some of the damages at Nettles Park? I believe that the garden is an absolute asset to the city, just as Nettles Park is an asset for students and something the university benefits from."

Though acknowledging the financial benefit the Botanical Garden brings is hard to quantify, since there is no gate to take up money when visitors arrive, council members as a whole said it is a treasure for which its value goes far beyond money.

"I've been taking my children and grandchildren there for years," Butch Trent said.

Anyone interested in donating funds for the garden rebuild can visit https://cualumni.clemson.edu/give/scbg, www.clemson.edu/scbg or Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-Carolina-Botanical-Garden/103813554908.

goliver@upstatetoday.com