



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

A child shows off his skills on a biking area at Santos Trailhead and Campground in Ocala, Fla. Empower Oconee Youth Empowerment Team co-lead Lorilei Swanson is spearheading a campaign to construct a beginner's biking area like the one in Ocala at the Walhalla City Park.

## Biking area project to go before Walhalla City Council

BY LAUREN PIERCE  
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Walhalla City Park could soon see a new biking area to attract children outside for a fun, safe and low-cost activity.

Empower Oconee Youth Empowerment Team co-lead Lorilei Swanson went before city council at Tuesday night's committee meeting to ask city leaders to consider the project.

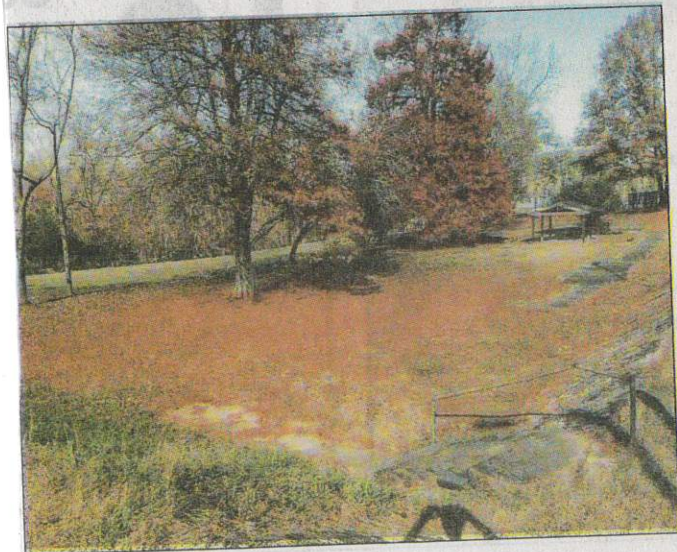
In her presentation, Swanson said the biking area for beginners would create "safe community spaces for youth in the community."

"Since we are kind of building ourselves a biking community — we have Stumphouse — what about a simple area where we can just have a bike skills area for children?" she said. "A space to be out of traffic, be able to work on their biking skills and even building some mountain biking skills."

The biking area would feature a combination of a wooden board and dirt trail that's low to the ground with a low environmental impact.

Swanson said the project would also supply a

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Pictured is the area where Empower Oconee Youth Empowerment Team co-lead Lorilei Swanson hopes to build a biking skills area for youth at the Walhalla City Park.

# BIKING: City council members on board

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space that's family friendly and stimulate "protective factors" for Walhalla youth to offset adverse childhood experiences.

She said a biking area would be safer than "kids being out on the road or in a parking lot."

"It's a very walkable, accessible area," she said of Walhalla City Park. "Lots of kids already go there. It really is going to help build this sense of community. ... If it's younger children using the space, there is a very nice space for families to just be there and supervise. And we are going to encourage riders wear a helmet."

## DESIGN PLANS

A game plan was made by Swanson's design team that includes bike skills area designers Don

George and Mike Wechter.

The design plan puts the biking area in Walhalla City Park, adjacent to the soccer field, basketball courts and the Walhalla City Pool, Swanson said.

"It's really a dirt area with a pavilion, and where the pavilion is there really is no other recreational things there, so it's a space that's not really used right now," she said. "It would not interfere with anything that's already there. We will not cut down any trees."

Swanson added the designs were modeled after several other areas throughout the country, but focused on the DuPont State Recreational Forest in North Carolina.

"They have tons of mountain bike trails, but they also just had this little simple area for beginners to work on their

skills," she said. "And the features are very minimal, very low to the ground, so you're not going to have a lot of risk there."

The trail could see "a couple of little jumps" that would be 6 or 12 inches, Wechter said.

"This is something that if you guys are interested in and it gets built and then it takes off, there's actually space in that field to do like a phase two or even a phase three," he said. "There's plenty of space to make this bigger into something Walhalla likes."

Swanson added in the future there could be a space that's "a little bit more technical" if needed.

## FUNDING AND PROJECTED TIMELINE

If the project receives

council blessing, costs are projected at about \$2,800 right now — \$2,000 for lumber and \$800 for around two truckloads of dirt.

"Community outdoor enthusiasts and Empower Oconee volunteers will provide all the labor for building and maintaining the bike skills area," Swanson said.

Funding for the project will come from a few routes if approved, Swanson said, including a disc golf tournament fundraiser at Sertoma Field on Feb. 13 that would raise an estimated "\$2,500 to \$3,000."

"Any expenses not covered will be funded by a percentage of proceeds from Issaqueena's Last Ride and through an Empower Oconee mini-grant," Swanson said.

Once funding is secured after the fundraiser, Swanson said, the project could start in March 2022, with help from volunteers and service days.

The biking area would open for the public in May 2022 with "free bike helmets for youth," Swanson said.

## COUNCIL IN FAVOR

Councilman David Underwood was the first to say the project was "a good idea."

"It falls into mountain biking. You can take your kids there and they can get their skillset learning how to ride, because that's

all we did," he said. "We'd ride our bicycles to the pool when I was growing up, so we actually rode our bicycles through (Walhalla City Park)."

Councilman David Woodward, chairman of the recreation committee, agreed the area would be an asset. The biking area would also support mental health, Councilwoman Sarai Melendez said.

With the project receiving favorable comments from everyone on council, the biking area was approved by the recreation committee to be presented to full council on Dec. 21.