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Volunteers began work on a new biking area at Walhalla City Park last month.

Work begins on biking area at Walhalla City Park

BY LAUREN PIERCE
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Volunteers with Friends of the Walhalla City Park began construction in April for a new biking area at the park to attract children outside for a fun, safe and low-cost activity. Empower Oconee Youth Em-

powerment Team co-lead Lorilei Swanson helped spearhead the project, which received support from Walhalla City Council in December.

Swanson said the biking area for beginners would create “safe community spaces for youth in the community.”

“We want all kids to begin to

learn bike skills. Biking is a lifelong life skill, and we are surrounded by an area that has many opportunities for biking — Stumphouse Mountain Biking Trail, Oconee State Park and the Palmetto Trail,” she said. “The bike park is important because our youth

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and families need safe, clean community spaces in which to gather, socialize, exercise and play."

Swanson said the bike park would also supply a space that's family friendly and stimulate "protective factors" for Walhalla youth to offset adverse childhood experiences.

She added 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."

"Tony Tiller is refurbishing used bikes and giving them away to children in the community who live near the park," Swanson added. "He has probably given away 30-40 bikes to date."

DESIGN PLANS

A game plan was made by Swanson's design team, which 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 at 101 N. Maple St.

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

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

FUNDING

In December, work was originally projected to cost about \$2,800, Swanson said.

"Community outdoor enthusiasts and Empower Oconee volunteers will provide all the labor for building and maintaining the bike skills area," she said, adding Steve Miles of Milestones provided four loads of dirt and the equipment and labor needed to spread the dirt free of cost.

As of Monday, Swanson said the group still needed to purchase more wood to finish the wood features and wanted to buy another picnic table. She expects they'll spend up to \$2,000 more on the project.

George, the director of Issaqueena's Last Ride, allocated a percentage of the event's proceeds to go toward the bike skills area.

BIKE PARK OPENING

The bike park is slated to open Saturday, as long as rain this week doesn't delay progress, Swanson said.

"The jumps, berms and dirt track are ready to go," she said. "They are about halfway completed with the wooden platform and features. There have been many volunteers putting in long days to get the track done — John Bodiford, Ed Kizer and Andy Smith to name a few. We've also had volunteers picking up trash and mowing the grass."

She added they'll give away free bike helmets and Earth Day T-shirts at the opening.

FUTURE PLANNING

Wechter said there's plenty of space at the park to "make this bigger."

"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.