



July 18, 2009

Cascade Park Project expected to begin in November

By Will Brown

DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Construction on the long-awaited downtown amenity Cascade Park is expected to begin in November.

The 2.3 mile project will feature an amphitheater with seating for 4,000; the relocated historic Lake Hall School House; trails and sidewalks for bikers and runners; a "Smokey Hollow" misting fountain; a cascading waterfall; the Centennial Field Commemorative Plaza; and the "Boca Chuba," a stormwater-control structure that looks like a giant fish and sucks up floodwaters with its mouth.

The park, which will cost nearly \$6.5 million to build, is expected to open in mid-2011. The project is being overseen by Blueprint 2000, a voter-approved, city of Tallahassee/Leon County partnership funded through a 1 percent sales tax.

It is the second of four planned components of Capital Cascade Trail, a mix of stormwater facilities and recreational amenities that stretches more than 4 miles from Franklin Boulevard downtown to southwest of Orange Avenue. It will be the first of the four segments to be built.

"We wanted to create a park that related to the cultural heritage of Tallahassee," said Peter Martin of the Carr, Lynch and Sandell firm. "It's a historic town and an important city. That was an underpinning of our design. It's called Cascade Park because there was a cascade and a stream running through originally."

On July 12, Blueprint 2000 solicited requests from companies looking to build the park, and three finalists are expected to be named next month. A ground-breaking ceremony is tentatively scheduled for Nov. 16.

The park will serve an important environmental purpose — it will retain more than 32 million gallons of water — or enough for a 100-foot deep puddle on top of a football field.

"My boss likes to say, 'This is a major storm-water facility designed as a world-class park,' " said Blueprint 2000 planning manager Dave Bright, referring to Executive Director Jim Davis.

Mark Llewellyn, president of engineering and urban-design firm Genesis Group, said the park will have two storm-water management ponds just east of what is currently Madison Street and South Meridian Road.

Water will then flow through a stream bed to the larger Boca Chuba pond a block of East Bloxham and Monroe Street. The park will also have a rain garden with plants to improve water quality.

Though the park will have whimsical elements, it will also pay tribute to Tallahassee history. The Lake Hall School House will tie into the Riley House Museum of African-American history. A fence with 16 custom panels will feature a historic time line. The commemorative plaza will recall Centennial Field, once the center of Tallahassee's community activities and sporting events.

Blueprint 2000 officials say they want the park to be the equivalent of downtown revitalization that continues in Chattanooga, Tenn.

"Downtown Chattanooga is now a tourist destination," Bright said. "Thirty-five years ago, you would have driven through downtown and not been able to see anything because of the smog. We hope (similar) improvements in our downtown will get people to stay and walk and enjoy our green space."

Jon Coddington, visiting professor of architecture and urban design at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, said Chattanooga has focused on creating a public realm where people can gather, develop a sense of community and share in a marketplace of ideas.

"While it's really important to design your city to be attractive to tourists, what's fundamental is to design a first-class facility for your residents," he said. "And then the tourists will come."

- Contact reporter Will Brown at (850) 599-2312 or wbrown@Tallahassee.com.
-