

March, 2022

LEGION COMMUNITY PARK

History: In 2013 the Town's Parks and Recreation Department published its Comprehensive Parks Plan. It proposed a Community Park for the northeastern part of town. If the town were to buy the American Legion site, a Community Park could be composed of the 36.2 acres of the Legion property and the 10 acres of the existing Ephesus Park. A Community Park is defined as 20 to 50 acres of parkland. In December 2016 the Town bought the Legion property. Due to the 8.6 acres of the RCD plus 1.3 acres of steeply sloped land, only 28 acres are available for any active purpose. This land comes in two parcels, 19.5 acres from Legion Road to the RCD area and 4.6 acres behind the RCD plus the pond which is a bit over 3 acres. In 2017 a community charrette was held, involving over 100 attendees. Also that year the Town convened a task force to help plan for the use of the Legion property. Since then little has happened at the Town level, but a hardy band of citizens, known as Friends of Legion Park, has been clearing out invasive species of plants and cleaning up the forest lands on the property.

Proposed Use of ARPA funds: The availability of ARPA funds now offers an opportunity for the Town to finally make some investments toward establishing a Community Park on the Legion site. We propose first funding the basic infrastructure needed for the Park, but indeed these changes are necessary no matter how the property is used. According to remarks made by Mayor Pam Hemminger to Friends of Legion Park in the summer of 2021, the pond's dam is leaking and must be rebuilt. (Homeowners in the Meadows have pictures of the damage from the leaking dam plus there is considerable general rain runoff onto Meadows property.) To do the repair, the pond must be drained of water. After a new dam is completed, the pond can be refilled with water or with dirt. Either way, the cost is the same: roughly \$500,000.¹ Also the mayor stated that the American Legion building must be razed; it is in such disrepair that it cannot be repaired. The cost of that is estimated at \$50,000² (The cost for fixing up the Legion Building is estimated to be \$1.9 million so a demolition is more likely to happen than an improvement.) So the infrastructure total we request is \$550,000.

After the basic infrastructure is installed, then depending on the desires of neighbors and others involved in the planning process, here are some possibilities that might be included in a Community Park. I have included some ballpark financial estimates.

- 1) A one-acre dog park: \$30,000
- 2) A playground costs around \$1000 per child. Let's say we build a playground to accommodate 30 children playing at once: \$30,000.
- 3) A pavilion with restrooms and picnic tables: \$150,000 to \$200,000 is the most likely range, depending on the plumbing involved.
- 4) A splash pad: the cost ranges from \$250,000 up to \$1 million if there is a building with changing rooms and bathrooms, and the cost depends on the plumbing needs.

¹ In 2017 the estimates ranged from \$406,500 to \$600,000. So I have picked the midpoint of \$500,000, though it is surely higher by now, five years later.

²The demolition cost may be higher due to the building's lead paint and asbestos.

So recreational possibilities total \$460,000 to \$510,000. The total cost for both infrastructure and recreational structures ranges from \$1,010,000 to \$1,060,000. Or fewer recreational structures could be chosen to lower the total cost.

No courts are included here because the Parks and Rec Commission has proposed improvements to both the tennis and pickleball courts in Ephesus Park, which will become part of Legion Community Park.

Rationale: The above proposal supports the following funding categories for ARPA funds:

--A community park definitely supports public health (including physical and mental health) by providing a venue for children and adults to enjoy free outdoor recreation.

--A community park addresses negative economic impacts by providing jobs in constructing the park, in attracting businesses such as food trucks that might sell food on weekends at the park, and by enticing apartment dwellers to the Blue Hill District and the businesses that serve them.

--Using ARPA funds for a community park replaces town revenue that would be needed for a project of this scale. A plan for this park has been on the books for nine years now, and the Town never has enough money to build the park.

--Finally the major portion of this request for ARPA funds is to provide infrastructure for a dam, a pond, and razing a decaying building. These infrastructure improvements are necessary for a park or any other conceivable use of the space.

In addition, our proposal to make the Legion property a Community Park will help move Chapel Hill into the nationwide movement for a **10-Minute Walk to a Park**.

Our request also enhances equity among citizens by providing a Community Park in the northeastern part of Chapel Hill which has no park comparable to Southern Community Park. Our request also supports the Town's Climate Action Plan by preserving forest and open space that will be part of the "lungs" of the Town.

Thanks for your consideration of our proposal.

Sincerely,
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