

CLEMENT E. TAYLOR PARK RESTORATION

SUMMARY

The proposed project for ORAC funding is one element of a larger redevelopment project located in "West" Destin along Choctawhatchee Bay where the City was initially settled. The entire \$1.98 million project includes: a) the construction of a ten foot wide pedestrian pathway, with landscaping, lighting and underground utilities, from Clement Taylor Park to the Harbor Boardwalk vicinity; and b) the much-needed restoration of Clement Taylor Park itself. The pathway portion of the project will be 76% funded through FDOT Transportation Alternative Funds (\$928,706.30) with a 24% City match of \$300,000. The City requests Restore Act funds for the renovation of the park.

The site of Clement E. Taylor Park was once the location of Destin's one-room school house, used until the 1950's. After the school building was deserted and demolished, the area was used and designated as a park. Since Destin's incorporation in 1984, the City has continued to make improvements, the last of which was in 2002 when the city added a swimming area, small gazebo and fishing pier, and playground equipment. The park covers 3.39 acres and is located north of the Destin Bridge on the Choctawhatchee Bay in the midst of old Destin. Accessible by foot, bike, and car, it is the city's most popular and utilized park. More and more visitors are discovering this hidden "jewel" as it abuts the edge of Destin's Historic Harbor District and parking areas for the Harbor Boardwalk. Covered with large shade trees of oak and magnolia, carpeted with grass, and fed by bay breezes, the park is a cool retreat for families to play and picnic even on the hottest of summer days. This park is also the site for numerous weddings and reunions each year. Typical wildlife, such as squirrels and birds, abound. The park's habitat is also home to less observable creatures such as the red fox, the hermit crab, and the endangered Little blue heron.

The management intent of Clement Taylor Park is to protect and enhance the natural coastal habitat along Choctawhatchee Bay while providing passive recreational amenities and environmental awareness for the public. As beautiful as the natural setting is, the current amenities are in great need of a "facelift!" Needed improvements include: demolition of the existing 30+ year-old restrooms to be replaced with a new bathroom facility and second picnic pavilion; demolition of the existing playground to be rebuilt for ADA compliance, expanded ages, and special needs, with new equipment and safety surfacing; reconfiguration of the non-impervious parking area for more capacity; renovation of the fishing dock; addition of a kayak launch; replacement of concrete pathways; removal of old pilings from the Bay; enhancement of the littoral exfiltration system previously installed through a city partnership with the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA); and additional environmental education signage.

The City is partnering with both the CBA and the Kiwanis Club of Destin in completing this project. The Kiwanis Club is seeking a \$25,000 grant to supplement the purchase of new playground equipment specifically for Clement Taylor Park; the CBA has pledged its continuing support in enhancing the littoral system as needed and assisting in the development of a seagrass protection education sign near the dock area. The design for the park upgrades is at time of application 30% complete but will be 100% complete by end of June 2015. Permitting is expected to take three to six months.

First-quality public parks, water access, and open space are integral to enhancing the quality of life of a region. Okaloosa County's long-term sustainability and economic growth are based on attracting people, businesses, and visitors to our community. Investing in our recreational infrastructure is a key ingredient to being competitive - and successful - in this venture. Surprisingly, pavilion rental records at Clement Taylor Park reveal that 40% of the events scheduled at the park are done so by out-of-towners. The new pavilion planned nearer the water will create an even more beautiful setting for a wedding, and with two pavilions, recreation staff believe that rental revenues will more than double.

Furthermore, the City's investment of adding a wide, lighted and landscaped pathway wending its way south along the Bay will link Clement E. Taylor Park to visitor parking areas, the Harbor Boardwalk, and the Destin History and Fishing Museum. The overall redevelopment will serve as a catalyst for visitors to spend more time leisurely exploring and enjoying the entire Harbor District's diverse offerings and be a significant addition to our area's economic vitality.