

INSIDER

CITIZEN NEWSLETTER

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New Park Plans Moving Along



leased by the City. Planners are looking to include three soccer fields - one college and two high school. The site will also feature an approximate one-mile paved walking trail, disc/Frisbee golf area and restrooms. A meeting was held in mid-September to get public input before a new FRDAP application is submitted for the coming year's funding cycle. Construction isn't expected to begin until the 2009-10 budget year.

Several smaller park improvements are also underway in other areas of the City. Many of the new projects include play areas that will be accessible to those with disabilities.

R.H. Malcolm Park is currently undergoing a renovation that includes a new playground, sidewalks and sod, as well as a small parking area. The City budgeted \$80,000 for this project on Avenue N Southwest, at one of the City's oldest parks.

The playground at the Winter Haven Recreational and Cultural Center is also in the middle of a renovation project. This \$160,000 endeavor is funded by \$80,000 from the City, with the balance coming from Community Development Block Grant funding. The playground will be closed until the end of October during renovation that includes new play apparatus and rubber surfacing.

About this time next year, work will also have started on the Chain of Lakes Downtown Trailhead, Avenue E and Fifth Street Northwest. This project will be jointly funded by the City of Winter Haven and the Florida Department of Transportation. The project will include a trailhead center with restrooms and a vending area, a municipal green/plaza area, bike lockers and a transportation-themed playground.

Wow, that's a lot, but recreation is an important element for any successful community. Economic development, beautification, redevelopment, lakes preservation, animal habitat, infrastructure and transportation enhancements are all connected. In an age when tax reform is being adopted across the board, Winter Haven officials are attempting to get the most value from all funding. The City's No.1 priority - to be the premier live, work and play community - is still being realized.

Big recreation plans are in the works for several areas of the City of Winter Haven.

The first large park project is being planned on the shore of Lake Maude. What is currently being called the Lake Maude Natural Area will be funded by the City, with help from a \$200,000 Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) grant. Plans for the nine-acre park include a one-half mile loop walking trail, two fishing piers, picnic area, playground, parking, restrooms and wetlands and shoreline restoration.

By April, when construction is expected to be completed, the project will be a beautiful addition to the entire City, especially the nearby neighborhoods around the Lake Maude Drive and Avenue O Northeast intersection.

Another project that will complement the Lake Maude Natural Area, but won't be completed for a few years, is the Lake Maude Recreation Complex across Lake Maude Drive from the Natural Area. Although still in the planning stages, current ideas call for a multi-generational activity center that would serve as a senior center by day, but would also serve as a recreation center for all ages at other times. The center might include activities like cooking classes, aerobics, rental space and more. The 27-acre site would also be home for a new City shuffleboard center, as well as a tennis center featuring more than a dozen clay and hard courts, a dog park, loop walking path, fishing pier and a canoe and kayak launch. A destination playground and multi-purpose fields are also being planned. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months.

Plans are also being developed for the City's first soccer complex. The project is being planned on Polk Community College property

Chain of Lakes Art Show



The Ridge Art "Chain of Lakes" art show is on display at City Hall through April 1. Heather Duncan's acrylic painting "The Lakes at Sunset" (left) won "Best of Show." The show's 60 entries are available for public viewing Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

2008-09 Budget Highlights

The new City of Winter Haven 2008-09 budget year begins Oct. 1. What does that mean for City of Winter Haven residents? To start off, it means a reduction in property taxes you will pay to the City. The new property tax rate will be \$5.79 for each \$1,000 of taxable property value (that's after deducting all qualifying exemptions).

This year's \$117 million budget is a responsible spending plan that provides you - our City residents - with the same or higher level of service as in previous years, despite the fiscal challenges presented by two recently adopted phases of Property Tax Reform. It also calls for spending almost \$3 million less than last year. Besides decreased property tax revenue, state revenue sharing, from things such as sales and gasoline taxes, is also expected to be reduced due to the economic slowdown.

Four additional Firefighters and four additional Police Officers will be added while the overall city workforce will be decreased by 13 full time and 52 part time positions through retirements, job reorganizations and the transfer of 16 Police Dispatcher positions to the Polk County Sheriff's Office. All employees are slated to receive a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment; and another 2 percent is budgeted as a variable merit increase that will be based on employee performance.

The budget includes \$10,401,383 in County, State and Federal grant funding that will provide an array of services ranging from human services to funding capital improvements. New revenue sources such as the recently adopted Motor Vehicle Crash Emergency Response Fee, Security Alarm Fee and the revised Fire Inspection Fee are expected to generate \$515,000 in additional revenue.

Thirteen local agencies - the Citrus Center Boys and Girls Club, Girls', Inc., Winter Haven Area Transit, Neighborhood Service Center, Family Emergency Services, Fellowship Dining, Keep Winter Haven Clean and Beautiful, Marching Wolverine Band, Polk Museum, East Polk County Development Council, the Ritz Theatre, Haven Day Care and Ridge Art Association - are also included in the budget.

The Land Acquisition Fund, established two years ago, is also funded. This year \$155,450 will be set aside from property tax proceeds for the program that helps fund the acquisition of environmentally sensitive land and lands which serve a public purpose for activities including recreation and stormwater retention. At the end of 2009, the account will have a \$374,652 balance.

Winter Haven City staff is successfully doing more with less every day to make our City as "distinctively different" as possible. For a more detailed look at the budget, visit www.mywinterhaven.com.

Rebates Available



The City of Winter Haven and the Southwest Florida Water Management District can help you save money with every flush of your toilet. Beginning Oct. 1, 2008, Winter Haven Water Utility customers may qualify for a \$100 rebate for each large-tank toilet replaced with a new water-saving model. New toilets use about half the water per flush as those used prior to 1995.

To participate, call **863-298-5470** and request program guidelines and a rebate reservation for up to two toilets per home. Only ANSI-approved toilets using 1.6 gallons per flush or less are eligible. Upon approval, you will be notified by mail and then you can purchase and install a low-consumption toilet. Send receipts, with parts and labor listed separately, and your qualifying rebate will be mailed to you.

Thanks for Your Service



The Community Redevelopment Agency board presented Dr. Ken James with a plaque in thanks for the eight years he chaired the CRA's Florence Villa Advisory Committee. At the Sept. 8 board meeting, pictured from left are City Commissioners Yvonne Brooks and Jeff Potter (CRA Board Chair), Dr. James, Mayor Nat Birdsong, Commissioner Mike Easterling and at-large board member Dr. Jim Threlkel. Committee members elected the Rev. Ronnie Clark the new chairman.

October, November and December Special Events

Cruisin' Winter Haven	Downtown	First Saturday of every month, except Dec.; 4 - 9 p.m.
Downtown Alive	Downtown	Third Friday of every month; 5 - 9 p.m.
Pops in the Park	Central Park	Oct. 24; 7:30 - 9 p.m.
Wine Taste	Virginia Miller Park	Oct. 24; 6 - 9 p.m.
Ghoul's Night Out	Downtown	Oct. 25; 6 - 9 p.m.
National Election Day	All precincts	Nov. 4; 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Veterans Day Holiday	City offices closed	Tuesday; Nov. 11
Thanksgiving Day Holiday	City offices closed	Thursday and Friday; Nov. 27-28
Christmas Parade	Havendale Boulevard	Dec. 5; 7 p.m.
Carols in the Park	Downtown	Dec. 6-7; all day
Snow Central	Downtown	Dec. 18; 6 - 9 p.m.
Christmas Holidays	City offices closed	Wednesday, Dec. 24 at noon; all day Thursday-Friday

The Winter Haven Insider is a City of Winter Haven publication intended to inform area residents and businesses. If you have any questions or comments, please call 863-291-5600, ext. 232; or write Joy Townsend, editor, at 451 Third St. NW, Winter Haven, FL 33883, or email at jtowndsend@mywinterhaven.com.

Recycle with "Go Green with Big Blue." Nov. 15 is "America Recycles" Day