

City of Lafayette Finalizes Winding Stairs Park

Written by Debbie Gregory
Tuesday, April 15, 2014



On Friday, April 11th the City of Lafayette combined two properties to form Winding Stairs Nature Trails and Park and a deed was made between the City of Lafayette and Pipkin Farm Partners to swap two parcels of land so the city would have land on both sides of the waterfall.

According to Councilman Roger Russell, the City of Lafayette purchased 112 acres of the Christine Harris property for the purpose of constructing an industrial park and the south east corner of the land contains the winding stairs waterfalls. “The City Council with full support of the Mayor Richard Driver, set aside 35 acres as a park,” said Councilman Russell. “Although Winding Stairs is well known to current residents it belonged to private property owners and you could only visit it by getting permission from the land owners. The cities land extended to the west side of the stream containing the winding stairs but to apply for a grant to make the park successful, we needed the land on the east side of the stream.”

Council members had been discussing obtaining additional land from the Pipkin family. “The Pipkins agreed to swap 2.8 acres of land adjacent to the falls for 2.8 acres of hillside land from the city,” said Russell. “The deed was drawn up and signed and that gave the city access to both sides of the falls all the way down toward the Hartsville Road.”

“The City of Lafayette has applied for a state grant in the amount of \$186,000 to construct walking trails and a park at the Winding Stairs location,” continued Councilman Russell. “There is a small local match to this grant, however much of this match is being provided by volunteer contractors, city council members and other citizens of Lafayette and Macon County doing work to construct the trails.”

“When the city receives the grant,” said Councilwoman Pam Cothron, “trails, three overlooks including an ADA accessible overlook, restrooms with shower stalls, camp site, parking area and other facilities will be constructed.”

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The councilmen said that additional facilities are planned for the future including a RV parking area, tent camping area, picnic pavilion, a swinging bridge over the cascade, bicycles trails from the Winding Stairs park around the perimeter of the other land owned by the city.

“Who we envision using the park are boy and girl scouts and other youth organizations camping, observing the falls and studying nature on the various trails,” Councilman Russell continued. “As well as regional and local visitors who want to view the beauty of the falls, cascade and bluffs. We see families enjoying the nature trails, picnics, and opportunity for nature photographs. Parents and grandparents with their children observing wildlife, foliage and the natural beauty of the falls, bluffs and cascades. Local schools providing field trips for science and other classes to study the outdoors. Local and regional hikers enjoying walking the trails of varying elevations and enjoying the cascades and other scenic views during their hikes, and citizens who desire to walk the trails up and down the sloped terrain for healthier living.”

“Another thing we envision is weddings, family reunions and clubs who want to spend some time at the park,” added Councilwoman Cothron.

Councilman Russell said that due to the location of the park and how good it looks, there is a real good chance that the grant will be approved. “If we get the grant approved in July, then the engineers will start designed the overlooks and the bathrooms. After we get the parking lot finished (which will be built by volunteers and city employees), the volunteers can start building the trails at the same time they are designing it and we should have some of the work completed for the public to be able to hopefully use the park by late fall.”

The councilman said although they have two years to complete the project he thinks they may have it done in one year. “The gate will be opened during the day and closed at night unless there are people camping.”

“This park is going to be another attraction for people who come to Lafayette, a nature area,” said Mayor Richard Driver. “Winding Stairs has always been called Macon County’s best kept secret and now we will be able to open it up and let everybody come and see this natural wonder that we have here. This is something that Macon County has been needing for a long time and it looks like we are on the right tract to get it.”

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“We certainly hope the grant goes through,” said the Mayor. “We are all proud to be a part of this and it has evolved quicker than we thought it would. What has really pleased me about this whole project is the response we have gotten from the community. Everybody supports this from young to old and to me this is the key to making the park work. If the community supports it, they can help when we need clean up or help financially by giving donations so we can improve the park. So we are really making it a community park.”

“A non-profit organization called “Friends of Winding Stairs” will be established for concerned citizens who wish to help support the park,” noted Councilwoman Cothron. “This organization will be like a membership, where you pay annual dues, which won’t be much but it will help us to keep up the maintenance on the park.”

“The city is really excited about the Winding Stairs Nature Trails And Park,” said Mayor Driver. “It is going to be a plus for the town and we are proud of what we have done and continue to do. I would like to thank the council members, the Pipkin family, city employees and anybody else who has helped with this project, their support is the reason the project is moving forward like it is.”