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Last summer the city of McKinney took a major step in furthering its efforts to provide a state-of-the-art parks system by implementing a new funding strategy for its parks and recreation department.

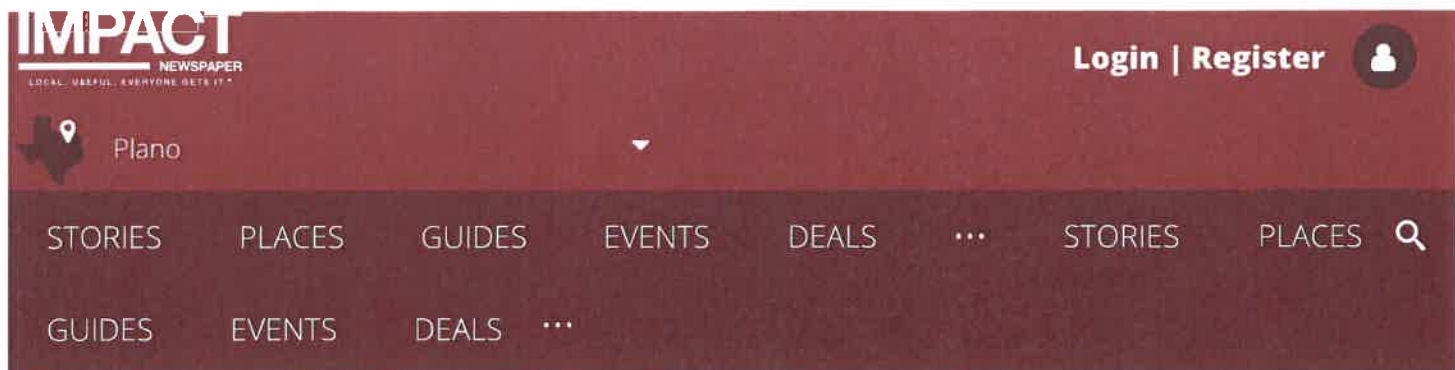
Since then, the department has entered into negotiations for the purchase of 62 acres of land, started construction or design work on nine projects, and completed seven projects.

As McKinney continues to grow, city officials said the city's parks department is working to purchase land at a reasonable price before more development comes into the area and land prices increase. Before the parks department purchases any large tracts, Assistant City Manager Barry Shelton said two things must be considered: the department's 10-year capital improvement program and the parks master plan, which is currently being updated.

"We are not doing our master plan in a way that anyone else has ever done," Parks and Recreation Director Rhoda Savage said. "Ours is intertwined with the city's comprehensive plan, which breaks the city down into 16 different districts. Our master plan has a streetscape chapter, a trail chapter and the 'string of pearls,' which is a looped park system we are hoping to facilitate. We want to reinforce the storyboard of all the things McKinney has that make it so unique and special."

Updating the parks master plan

Every three to five years city departments in McKinney revamp their master plans, said Jenny



the plan.

“Hike and bike trails are always one of the top two items that are always asked for, whether on the phone or online surveys or in the public input meetings,” she said. “There’s also a high request level of preserving our open spaces, and creek corridors, and a request to recognize that with all our growth we need to preserve our land and create a space where people can enjoy nature.”

To better accommodate resident requests, Savage said the parks department has been planning and executing land acquisitions in a different way than it has done in the past. Previously, Savage said the city purchased land in a fairly traditional manner—taking what was available at a price the city could afford and then planning the park. Now, she said, the new master plan calls for a cohesive, looped park system.

“It means that our parks will follow the greenbelts that we have from [Lavon Lake], taking the east fork of the Trinity River and Wilson Creek, which come around in a loop and almost connect,” Savage said. “So our park system will be a continuous park that goes along both of those creek corridors. Now, instead of shopping for a community park within a neighborhood, we are trying to make trails that connect to these creeks. Then you will be able to get to any of our city parks by riding your bike along these beautiful creeks. I don’t know of any city that has quite that opportunity to do that.”

Savage said land shopping will now consist of looking at the flood plain and finding available pockets of land next to it to make trail connections and complete the system.

“The end result is just going to be off-the-charts cool,” Savage said.

Upcoming major projects

While the parks department works to finalize its master plan, several projects will soon come online, including two major projects at two existing parks.

Construction on Bonnie Wenk Park’s Phase 2 will begin as soon as construction documents are finalized. Parks officials hope to bid the project out to contractors within the next couple of months, Savage said.

The park is 250 acres and includes 25 acres of existing development and a dog park. Phase 2 will include roughly 115 more acres of development, including the extension of the park road to



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begins.

Gabe Nesbitt Community Park is also about to see a major transformation. The McKinney Parks and Recreation Department has \$7 million set aside for the first phase of the project, which includes adding signage throughout the park, a tennis court expansion, a new restroom facility near the skate park, additional parking and landscape enhancements from Alma Road to the skate park.

Once construction begins, it will take 12-18 months for completion.



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