



Southwest Parks Getting Some Attention

BY WILLIAM RICH

It is budget season at the Wilson Building and just like every other year, several groups are vying for funding from a pool of limited resources. Pending legislation in the DC Council that will receive final approval on June 5 would reserve at least \$650,000 for Southwest park initiatives in the District's FY2013 Budget, allocated by Ward 6 Council Member Tommy Wells' Committee on Parks, Libraries, and Recreation.

The Southwest Playground Project is projected to receive \$250,000 in the FY2013 Budget to bridge the funding gap needed to build a playground adjacent to the Southwest Branch Library at 3rd and I Street SW. The group already raised over \$100,000 on its own to build the playground, but several infrastructure issues need to be addressed at the city-owned park, such as storm water drainage, broken concrete pathways, and the need for retaining walls. These infrastructure improvements added nearly \$250,000 to the budget estimate made by DC-based Landscape Architecture Bureau, who has been hired to design the playground. With the additional funds from the District, design work can proceed and a land survey can be conducted. Since the fiscal year begins on October 1, 2012, the District funds cannot be used until after that date.

"I'm so excited that the FY2013 Budget will include money for the Southwest Playground Project," said Felicia Coutts, who is the project director of the group and is a mother of two young children. "We've been working on plans to install a new playground at the Library Park for a year and a half now. This park has been neglected and overlooked for a long time, and it needs several infrastructure repairs, so it's good to see

the City doing its part by pitching in to ensure we can pay for the infrastructure repairs. Finally, this park will get the proper attention it sorely needs, and neighbors will have a nice place to sit, read the paper, have a cup of coffee, and let their children play. This park is going to be great!"

Lansburgh Park

Meanwhile, another \$400,000 is reserved in the FY2013 Budget for improvements to Lansburgh Park, the large underutilized park located to the east of Greenleaf Gardens along Delaware Avenue SW. At the December 2011 Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6D meeting, approval was given to designate a group called "Friends of Lansburgh Park", which would allow the organization to join the Parks Partners program under the District Department of Parks and Recreation and use the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly's 501c3 status to do fundraising to make improvements to the park. The Friends group is working with the PAWS of Southwest, a group of dog owners who are advocating for an off-leash dog park in Southwest, to help raise funds for a dog park at Lansburgh. It would be located at the SW corner of Lansburgh Park, adjacent to the District's Department of Motor Vehicle Inspection Station. DPR estimates that \$350,000 is needed to just build the dog park, according to Bridget Gonzales, who heads up the PAWS group. Funds would go towards ground modification, fencing, running water, and to make the site ADA accessible. "We have three main hurdles to cross," said Gonzales. "The size, location and shape of the dog park; priority over other dog park applications in the city; and the cost."

PAWS made a request for a dog park of 25,000 square feet in their application to DPR in order to have enough room for larger dogs to run, but the agency will most likely approve only 15,000 square feet. Currently, the largest dog park in the District is Langdon Dog Park in NE, at 11,500 square feet, so the proposed Lansburgh Dog Park would become the largest dog park in the city if approved. There are two other dog park applications that are ahead of Lansburgh and are already approved, but Gonzales hopes their application can leapfrog over the others since SW is the only quadrant still without a dog park. However, Lansburgh's application is still in the public comment phase, which will last until June 11. DPR currently does not have money in the budget to build dog parks, so the PAWS group is looking to fundraise. The first PAWS fundraiser was the Running of the Chihuahuas, which took place at 7th Street Landing on cinco de mayo. Over 50 dogs participated and \$1,500 was raised for the dog park.

The proposed dog park will not

take up all of Lansburgh Park. Planning is underway for how to better utilize Lansburgh, with ideas including a dog park, playground, community garden, and skate park. An open house was held in April and a charrette is planned for sometime this summer. District funds reserved for Lansburgh will go towards restoring the overhead lights, as well as installing basketball courts to replace the tennis courts that are currently in bad shape.

Southwest Duck Pond

One project whose funding future is still uncertain is the Southwest Duck Pond, located in the western portion of Town Center Park. According to Bob Craycraft, ANC Commissioner for single-member district 6D 01, which includes the Southwest Duck Pond area, there was \$56,000 allocated in the FY2012 Budget for brickwork improvements including the coping around the water's edge, as well as the crumbling retaining walls. In addition, the appropriation included the installation



Tommy Wells unveils a new sign for the Duck Pond. Photo: Andrew Lightman



TOP: Revelers enjoy a barbershop quartet. Photo: Bob Craycraft



BOTTOM: ANC Commissioner Bob Craycraft. Photo: Bob Craycraft

of new globe lighting with outlets at the base to allow lights to be strung around the light poles for special occasions. However, the improvements were delayed – first due to Hurricane Irene last September and then due to winter, which further delayed the project to this past spring. The latest delay is not weather-related, but is due to bureaucracy with the newly-formed Department of General Services, which now has jurisdiction over the capital improvements planned for the Southwest Duck Pond instead of DPR.

In addition to capital improvements, the Neighbors of Southwest Duck Pond, a volunteer group which has made great strides to improve the park, applied for a grant from the District Department of Transportation's Performance Parking program to restore the underwater lighting in the pond that have long been disabled. Unfortunately, the group did not receive the grant. Despite the efforts of the Neighbors group, the passive park has been suffering recently from deferred

maintenance by the city. On at least two occasions so far this year, the autofill valve that helps maintain the level of the pond has malfunctioned, causing the pond to flood onto the walkway. Trash has also accumulated in the park. Seniors from nearby Waterside Towers visit the park daily as a part of their exercise routine and pick up litter, but the trash continues to pile up.

However, the Southwest Duck Pond's future is looking brighter. At the park's annual Volunteer Recognition Event and sign unveiling ceremony on May 24, Wells announced that there will be funding set aside in the FY2013 Budget for improvements to the park. While no specifics were mentioned at the ceremony, Zen McManus, President of Neighbors of Southwest Duck Pond, was optimistic. "I hope there will be enough funding to at least make basic repairs to the park," said McManus.

Will Rich is a blogger at Southwest...The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com). ★



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