



Legislation Text

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Lynch Park (B)

Lynch Park is an approximately 1.4-acre park located along the 400 block of South Main Street. The park, which is adjacent to the Porters Neighborhood, consists of an open grassy space punctuated by numerous shade trees. The location of the park provides excellent potential to serve the central city and adjacent neighborhoods; however the park is poorly linked to the surrounding area and is currently underutilized. The site does not operate as a functional public space, and draws very few visits (if any) for its intended recreational use. Because the site is almost always vacant, it has essentially created a void in the downtown cityscape. Members of the community have no reason to visit the park, which contains no recreational amenities/facilities (such as benches, exercise equipment, playgrounds, etc), and the space serves no particular purpose. These factors contribute to the park's isolation.

At the October 31, 2007 meeting, DRAB members suggested converting a portion of Lynch Park into an off-leash area for dogs; the CRA subsequently approved this concept on December 17, 2007. Such a facility would provide a purpose to the park space and would also attract a variety of new visitors to the park. Pet ownership is an increasing trend, particularly in urban areas where residents may have little or no private yard space in which to exercise dogs. Residents of downtown Gainesville currently do not have access to an off-leash facility within walking distance of the area. The closest off-leash area is located in the Northeast Park, off of NE 16th Avenue, so an additional facility downtown would likely draw many new visitors to Lynch Park on a daily basis. New visitors using the park for recreation green space, as it is intended, will contribute greatly to continued redevelopment and revitalization efforts in the Porters area. Two buildings adjacent to Lynch Park have applied for façade grants. The anticipated renovations of these buildings will provide a much needed facelift to South Main Street and will facilitate the introduction of new office, restaurant, retail, and art gallery space around the park. Along with the proposed dog park, these projects will bring investment and activity to the area.

Improvements to the park will also compliment ongoing revitalization efforts in Porters. The park is situated along SW 4th and 5th Avenues in the Porters neighborhood. Both of these corridors were identified by CRA and City staff as key elements of the neighborhood framework with a high redevelopment potential. Visually, Lynch Park serves as a gateway from the central business district to Porters for travelers along South Main Street. In this fashion, the park functions similarly to the Porters Oak fence along Depot Avenue. Both features, due to their prominence and positioning with respect to the neighborhood, operate as gateways to the community. Because the park serves as a "face" of Porters to the surrounding city, it is especially important that the park project a positive image, in order to attract reinvestment to the area. Along with other projects such as infrastructure upgrades, fencing improvements, and Southwest 3rd Street streetscaping, Lynch Park improvements will help restore the fabric of the neighborhood. Additionally, investment in Lynch Park has the potential to create high visual impact, signifying revitalization not only in Porters, but also in Depot Park, the GRU site, and the South Main area as a whole.

Implementation of the off-leash dog area in Lynch Park will require the installation of a fence around approximately 1 acre within the park. This size is approximately equal to the facility in Northeast Park and is in keeping with dog park design recommendations from the American Kennel Club. The off-leash facility will be comparable to other facilities in the City. The fence will include a double gate system in order to prevent dogs from escaping and to facilitate wheelchair access. Staff also envisions two benches and a waste bin, and, if possible, a water spigot that will provide hydration for pets. All park furniture will adhere to CRA Streetscape Design & Technical Standards, and the proposed fencing around the off-leash area will be upgraded from standard chain link to reflect the high quality reinvestment in the Porters area. Preliminary estimates for fencing and park furniture for the future off-leash facility total approximately \$12,000. If the park concept is approved, Staff will compile more exact figures before moving forward with the project. It is also important to note that once implemented, the dog park will not require substantial changes from current levels of park maintenance. The new facility will require grass trimming and waste bin emptying, maintenance activities which already occur at the park.

In addition to the off-leash area, the CRA also recommends improvements for the remainder of Lynch Park. The vision for the park is that the entire space will become an inviting, positive amenity for Downtown and for the Porters neighborhood. Based on input from the Porters Oaks Homeowners Association, the CRA recommends a floral garden space in the remainder of Lynch Park. In addition, CRA requests that the City examine additional locations in the neighborhood where a potential fruit/vegetable garden could be sited.

Gardening and urban agricultural uses would provide a unique, productive element to the existing cityscape, and would provide a positive, unique activity for local residents. Staff has discussed the possibility of a garden space and associated seating areas with the City of Gainesville Parks & Recreation Department. Parks & Recreation approves of the concept, and may split costs with the CRA.

Porters Neighborhood improvements were approved in the 2007 CRA budget in the amount of \$80,000 in account # 610-790-W231-5520. An additional, \$131,502.29 has been approved in the 2008 budget.

CRA to the City Commission: 1) Approve conceptual plan for Lynch Park; 2) Request the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs Advisory Board and the Parks, Cultural Affairs & Public Works Committee provide input and comment to CRA staff; and 3) Request the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs Advisory Board and the Parks, Cultural Affairs & Public Works Committee examine the potential for additional locations in Porters which could accommodate a fruit/vegetable garden