



MEDIA RELEASE



For Immediate Release

Date: October 30, 2013

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Stepping into Fort Smith riverfront's future

Trails & Greenways Plan earns significant philanthropic investment

Fort Smith citizens and their local elected representatives are placing a premium on riverfront development, and implementing an ambitious trails and greenways plan encircling our city. A one million dollar gift makes strides toward both of these objectives.

Mayor Sandy Sanders announces that the [Walton Family Foundation](#) has awarded [Fort Smith Parks & Recreation](#) a grant totaling \$1 million. The funds are to be used to construct a two mile section of the River West Trail from River Park to the Rice Carden Levee Trail. This is a high priority trail in the [Trails & Greenways Master Plan](#) adopted in 2004 by the Board of Directors and Parks Commission.

Fort Smith Mayor Sandy Sanders praised visionary citizens who years ago saw the need for recreational amenities. “The topic of trails and greenways is just now working its way into our community conversation. Nearly a decade ago, a group of citizens pushed – and pushed hard – for an extensive plan. Those same citizens have spent the past 10 years digging, pruning, trimming, and building trails – a mile or two at a time. These acts of faith and determination allow us to accept this generous gift from our neighbors at the Walton Family Foundation.”

The Director of Fort Smith Parks & Recreation, Mike Alsup, says planning and construction on the new two mile trail will most likely commence in the next six months and should be completed in mid-2015. “Our Master Plan calls for more than 80 miles of inter-connected trails. This two mile trail is the most significant stretch to be completed to date. The citizens who steered the greenways plan are encouraged by the growing interest in building out the plan. This investment certainly gives us momentum.”

Alsup cites the Trails & Greenways plan in explaining the benefits of a trail network, on the first page of the trails and greenways master plan, which include:

- Health & recreation for citizens
- Increased property values
- Increased tourism
- Safety, quality of life, and educational opportunities
- Inexpensive mode of transportation
- Reduction of traffic congestion
- Preservation of air quality
- Water quality
- Plant, animal, aquatic life enhancements

Alsop states “The development of the riverfront will play an important role in the future of Fort Smith and the region. The River West Trail is an investment in the future which will connect our citizens and tourists to the Arkansas River through wildlife observation and fitness from Garrison Avenue to Fort Smith Park.”

Richard Griffin, speaking in behalf of the Central Business Improvement District Commissioners, offers thanks for this generous contribution which enables our City to move forward with its vision of recreational and economic development of our downtown riverfront. This “Trails Project” improves the viability of our riverfront as an immediate commercial and public development opportunity. This beautiful walking trail will offer an additional amenity for our downtown visitors and our area residents. We are elated!

The City of Fort Smith also gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Westphal family, the Griffin family, and the U.S. Marshals Museum in donating easements for the trail.

The city’s match for the grant funds is \$1 million, making the trail project a \$2 million investment.