

Funding Secured For Monmouth Park Project

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MONMOUTH -- The state of Oregon has picked up most of the bill for upgrades to Monmouth's largest city park. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission awarded Monmouth a \$350,000 local government grant earlier this month for improvements to Madrona Park.

Going back to the city's 2008 parks master plan, Madrona Park has been third on a list of priorities for the parks and recreation department -- the first two being the Main Street Park fountain and the amphitheater also for Main Street Park.

"In 2010, we worked on the designs and we had some public input out there on the site," Monmouth Community Development Director Mark Fancey said. "In 2011, the (city) council prioritized some projects and where the funding was going to come from. They indicated that their preference was that we find grant funding to make the Madrona Park project happen." Improvements to the park include a two-acre arboretum with a native plant garden, irrigation for a sports field, additional playground equipment and permanent restroom facilities.

Construction on the park is set for a summer 2014 start date, with planting of the arboretum and native plants taking place toward the end of construction in the fall. "One of the ways I describe the project is really transformative," Fancey said. "It's going to provide for a lot of user groups to be able to access and use the facility."

The city was awarded its full request of \$350,000 for the general improvements but is awaiting final approval from the Federal Highway Administration in September on a \$68,000 grant for a half-mile walking trail circling the park. Stipulations with the grants were that they could only go toward acquiring land for parks, developing parks or rehabilitating existing parks.

The state also required that cities match a certain percentage of the grants before they would be awarded. In Monmouth's case, a 40 percent grant match was required. "It's a \$620,000 project and we have parks funds available that we contributed as a match," Fancey said. "Between the grant funding and what we have accumulated in park system development charges, we have the money."

At its July meeting, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission advisory committee scored and ranked projects from across the state for consideration to receive the grants. Thirty-five projects were considered and 22 were awarded grants. "They don't really say 'yes' or 'no' to the projects, they give them a number score and rank them," Oregon Grant Program Coordinator Mark Cowan said. "Those that fall at the upper end of the ranking criteria get funded. We just work our way down until we run out of money."

The maximum request was \$750,000. Monmouth's \$350,000 request was about the average amount requested by cities and counties, Cowan said. Monmouth received many letters of support during the grant application process from organizations and businesses across the city.

Fancey has been in talks with some of these groups to form partnerships once the improvements are complete. "The senior center is very excited about it because they just started a walking program and they need a place where they can have sure footing and be able to use it on a regular basis," Fancey said. "Our local Boy Scout troop said they would volunteer to help with a fall cleanup every year."