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Dallas moving forward with Trinity park plan, mayor says

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Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings said Friday that a nonprofit will fund a \$1 million comprehensive plan for “a grand park in the Trinity River corridor between the two Margaret bridges.”

The mayor’s statement came months after public meetings about the Trinity

Parkway toll road revealed that residents are divided on the riverside highway but overwhelmingly supportive of the park.

“It’s No. 1 on their list,” Rawlings said, “and I think they want the city to take this very seriously.”

The city has been planning a downtown park along the river for decades, but only this year received federal approval to build it. City officials hope the \$1 million comprehensive plan will flesh out details about the project — from where to put landscaping and trails to benches and connector roads — and help fast-track it.

Assistant City Manager Mark McDaniel will brief the council’s Transportation and Trinity River Project Committee about the plan on Tuesday.

Some park supporters weren’t enthusiastic. Former City Council member Angela Hunt, who spent much of her time on the council demanding a park over a toll road, called the mayor’s announcement bittersweet.

“We’re tired of millions being spent on consultants,” Hunt said. “We’d like to see it spent on a park. We’d like to see some very quick planning that would cost next to nothing by our park department to put some usable park amenities down there now.”

City officials said they have already chosen several consultants to work on the development plan for the river bottoms between the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge and the new Margaret McDermott Bridge. The full council has not voted on the matter because the nonprofit Trinity Trust Foundation will pay the consultants directly, instead of sending the money to the city to then disburse. But the city selected those who will work on the project, said Trinity Trust president and CEO Gail Thomas.

“The city wants this park,” Thomas said. “The citizens of Dallas want this park. And we’re so grateful we had this fund to draw from so we could hire the

consultants and do the planning.”

Thomas has been pushing for a park between the levees for 30 years, ever since her tenure on the initial Town Lake Task Force.

“I want a place where all the citizens of Dallas can come together and have a place to be simply for the joy of being together,” she said. “And I want us to get to know each other and enjoy being together. That’s what a real city is for and about.”

The city faced criticism this year after *The Dallas Morning News* reported that the Trinity Trust provided \$105,000 so the city could hire a firm to design amenities around planned lakes near the river. The council resolution accepting the donation said the money was “in exchange” for awarding the work to a particular firm.

Trinity Trust and city officials later said they regretted that wording and denied that the nonprofit decided who received city contracts, even if the nonprofit financed them.

Latest plan blasted

Park and Recreation Board member Paul Sims took to social media Friday to criticize how the latest plan was handled. He said it was “astounding” and “unacceptable” that the city would move forward with a \$1 million plan for its largest park ever without including the park board.

Sims, who is married to Hunt, could not be reached for comment.

Among the consultants lined up to work on the park plan are three who were part of the team that made recommendations for a first phase of the \$1.3 billion toll road that is planned next to the park.

Those consultants are:

John Alschuler, who worked on New York City's High Line, a "linear park" in Manhattan built on an elevated section of a disused railroad spur.

Larry Beasley, who spearheaded the so-called Trinity Parkway dream team.

Alex Krieger, who last year apologized for being part of the 2003 plan that evolved into the large-scale version of the toll road that many people oppose.

City officials said there will be locals involved as well, including Brent Brown of the CityDesign Studio; recently retired city transportation planner Keith Manoy; and architect Larry Good.

City limits funds

The City Council last month unanimously voted to restrict particular city funds to a toll road of no more than four lanes. The version federal officials expect to eventually be built is at least six lanes wide and has several large interchanges with other highways and city streets.

Last month's vote, a symbol of council support for the dream team's vision for the first phase of road construction, does not preclude the larger toll road from being built. City officials don't yet know whether federal officials will allow the road developed by the dream team to be built.

A team of local, regional and state officials are currently working to see how many of the suggestions for a heavily landscaped, meandering road can be implemented.

Council member Sandy Greyson, a longtime opponent of the large version of the road, will join Ambit Energy founder and former North Texas Tollway Authority board member Jere Thompson on the so-called Parkway Technical Committee, created by the council in mid-April.

Officials have yet to estimate the cost for a scaled-down four-lane road, but

the full-scale Trinity toll road is expected to cost \$1.3 billion.

According to city documents, construction on the park could begin in fall 2018, with the parkway beginning to take shape in 2021.

McDaniel says there will be public town halls during the park planning process.

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