

‘Dynamic trio’ strikes again

City, RunningBrooke, Rebuilding Together Alexandria join forces for Taney Avenue park revamp

BY CHRIS TEALE

After a successful partnership last year, the city again will work with nonprofits RunningBrooke and Rebuilding Together Alexandria to revamp the Taney Avenue Neighborhood Park this fall.

Together, the three organizations will collaborate to rehabilitate the 2.6-acre park at 4149 Taney Ave. on the West End. The renovations will be in keeping with recommendations made by the city’s neighborhood park plan, endorsed by city council earlier this year.

It represents the second time the three groups have joined together for neighborhood park improvements. Last year, the trio

helped renovate Hume Springs Park on 100 Dale St. in Arlandria, adding new play equipment, fencing, fitness equipment and other features to its playground.

“It seems like we’re a dynamic trio,” said Brooke Curran, president and founder of RunningBrooke. “...It’s kind of a meeting of minds, where all of us have similar objectives. Our deal is that we want to get kids moving, knowing that kids that move more are ready to learn. Rebuilding Together Alexandria wants to help improve neighborhoods, as do we, and the parks and recreation department is interested in upgrading the park.”

The renovations will provide a new children’s play area and improve access to the park by removing overgrown brush and other plants that can im-

pede entry and movement. The bike trails will also be widened and connected, while preserving the park’s passive character.

The improvements will be implemented on two volunteer build days: one led by Rebuilding Together Alexandria later this month featuring volunteers from one of its corporate partners, and another led by RunningBrooke.

Curran said her group’s volunteers will plant a number of native Virginian trees and perennials as well as finish off paths that will navigate through existing tree growths. Curran said there are still spaces available for those who wish to volunteer with RunningBrooke at its September 17 build day, and that registra-

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tion is available on its website.

Katharine Dixon, president and CEO of Rebuilding Together Alexandria, said her group’s volunteers will build the walking paths, clear out overgrown areas to improve access and add playground equipment and other amenities.

Dixon said projects like the one at Taney Avenue Neighborhood Park go hand in hand with Rebuilding Together Alexandria’s overall goal of improving the lives of lower-income residents.

“The core mission is for us to go into low-income homes and provide free home repairs,” she said. “That’s all well and good, but if those

RunningBrooke raised money through Spring2ACTion, the city’s one-day online fundraiser for its nonprofits, run by community charitable foundation ACT for Alexandria. Judy Lo, a park planner in the city’s department of recreation, parks and cultural activities and the project’s manager, said the department is looking to formalize more and more of these so-called “PARKnerships.”

“We’re basically building on what’s already happening with the department’s partnerships and hoping in the future that projects like this get done through partnerships,” Lo said. “It brings the community together when you have the community involved with building

Lo said the improvements will be done in two phases: the first phase will take place this summer and involve both organizations and their volunteers. Then, during the second phase, contractors from the city’s department of transportation and environmental services will install a new bike path. Lo said that second phase is anticipated to begin in spring 2017.

“We targeted the Taney Avenue Neighborhood Park because we know that about 1,500 kids live right in that neighborhood. It was a prime opportunity to make a difference together. Not only do

residents don't have safe places to experience the outside, then how large is our impact? We decided to start working on community spaces that serve our low-income populations."

With so many children and families living near the park, Curran said the improvements will have a big impact for everyone in the neighborhood, and hopefully curb some of the nuisance behavior that takes place there.

"We targeted the Taney Avenue Neighborhood Park because we know that about 1,500 kids live right in that neighborhood," Curran said. "It was a prime opportunity to make a difference together. Not only do we know that park needed some significant TLC, but it's a beautiful outdoor space in its landscape, but nothing to draw you there."

RunningBrooke, an organization that encourages at-risk children in the city to be active physically to maximize their learning capacity, raised \$105,000 to help support the project, matched by funds in the city's capital budget for park improvements.

park improvements. Having volunteer build days, fundraising, it just makes the project more special and more meaningful for the community."

All parties agreed that there is likely to be continued collaboration to enhance parks throughout the city, especially given the financial constraints that currently exist in the city's budget.

"We hope so, because the need is there in the city and the budget is not necessarily there," said Dixon. "When the three of us can bring funds and other resources to the table, then great things get accomplished."

"There's a level of trust there that we're all going to do what we say we're going to do and commit the moneys promised and come through," Curran said. "There's also a level of trust, because there are a couple of volunteer build days, so it takes a lot of work to facilitate both of those. Each organization is happy and gets what its organization needs."

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