

Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program

Project Data Page

1. Project Sponsor: City of Florence, South Carolina
2. Property: Levy Park
3. Project: Levy Park Redevelopment
4. Property Title Holder: City of Florence
5. Address: 356 South Jeffords Street
Florence, SC 29506
6. 2020 Census City Population: 39,899
7. Poverty Level: Census Tract 7, 61.4%
8. Project Type: Renovation
9. This project expands an existing park by increasing outdoor recreation amenities at an existing site.
10. This park has not previously benefitted from LWCF or Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) funding, and the park was not obtained through the Federal Lands to Parks Program.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Levy Park project will redevelop an aging recreation complex that is currently serving an impoverished community lacking in walkable, publicly accessible outdoor recreation. Portions of the park are heavily used by athletes in the community, particularly the basketball courts, baseball and softball fields which were all built in the 1960s and '70s.

The planned physical and facility improvements include: Full renovation and/or reconfiguration of the sports fields and courts, development of over a mile of walkways consisting of 10-foot wide multi-use pathways and internal looping sidewalks that will provide ADA accessible connections to the existing and proposed ballfields, playgrounds, fitness equipment, and parking, plus a public broadband wi-fi system. The renovated amenities will also be accentuated with improvements such as shade trees, sensory gardens, and native plantings.

This rehabilitation and replacement of existing recreation facilities is essential to transform Levy Park into an updated recreation complex fitting the needs of all members of the neighboring community, increasing passive and active recreation experiences.

PROJECT NARRATIVE – Project Overview (2-page limit)

The existing park is 20 acres and includes baseball and softball fields, basketball courts, playground equipment, and tennis courts. Levy Park has been used as a gathering place for the community, reunions, and local sport league play. A recent addition of three acres is currently being used as passive outdoor recreation. The park location is near downtown and a separate walking trails system. State Road S 21-978/East Pine Street bisects the park separating the baseball field from the remainder of the park.

Levy Park was established in 1966 with a single baseball field. Most of the park amenities were constructed in 1975, when the park was expanded to 17 acres with playground equipment, four basketball courts, two tennis courts, and a practice football field. In 2022, an adjacent three-acre parcel, along Palmetto Street, was cleared of abandoned buildings and connected with Levy Park, increasing the park area to 20 acres.

The City of Florence has worked diligently to maintain the park to meet the needs of the community. However, because of its age a major renovation is needed. Currently, a softball field is being used for football practice, as it is the only lighted field on site. The baseball fields are in need of significant upgrades and renovations that include new dugouts, rest rooms, and concession stands. Parking within the park is inadequate, necessitating unsafe parking on the road shoulder.

Facilities that are to remain in place and will continue to be used are the youth center and senior center. These two buildings, and a municipal facilities station on the premises will not be included in this outdoor recreation grant.

Facilities that are to be refurbished or reconstructed include: the baseball field, softball field, football practice field, three basketball courts, playground equipment, tennis courts (pickleball adaptable), concession stands, and restrooms.

Property Constraints include:

- Abandoned sewer line that runs under the southern baseball field, across the roadway and through the eastern most portion of the property.
- City of Florence water treatment plant, currently not in use, with multiple water lines through portions of the property
- Undeveloped right of way (extension of Cemetery Street) off Jeffords Street with dry (power, cable vision, telephone) utilities located within the rights of way.
- State Road S21/East Pine Street, a public road, bisects the park.
- The property is bordered to the north by Hwy 76/Palmetto Street, a small community cemetery, and two adjacent commercial lots. A 1600' long section of Pye Branch creek flows from the southwest into the southeast portion of Levy Park. Crossing Pye Branch to the east is the community which Levy Park serves.

The project includes rehabilitation of existing recreation facilities including:

- Baseball fields, reconfigured with the addition of concession stands, storage, scoreboard, lights, restrooms.
Reasons –The baseball field has differing foul line length and left field is extremely close to the public road right of way. There is currently no concession stand. Lighting is needed for early evening play in the winter months. Closest restrooms are 350' away. Reconfiguring the baseball and softball fields would provide a location for centrally located facilities such as the concession, restroom and storage building.
- Multi-purpose field
Reasons – A multi-purpose field will provide playing area for several different sports branches including soccer and football, better meeting the needs of the community.
- Basketball courts relocated, shaded, lighted

Reasons – Currently four basketball courts are dispersed across the park area. The community holds local league tournaments with full day schedules, making shade structures and lighting necessary. Locating the basketball courts in one area will allow for more unified sports gatherings and would enhance the possibility for new tournaments and leagues.

- Tennis courts will be relocated and reconfigured to allow for pickleball adaptation
Reasons – Pickleball is becoming very popular, particularly with retirees. The tennis courts will also be lined for pickleball play and relocated in proximity to an existing senior center at Levy Park.

The project also includes planned physical improvements and facilities, including:

- Outdoor fitness station – stationary equipment for resistance training – new development
Reasons – This equipment would provide additional opportunities for physical fitness for all age groups. It can be used to burn excess energy in teens, young adults, and those with ADHD. It also aids in self-confidence and focus.
- Limitless playground equipment – new development
Reasons - Currently the playground at the park is a traditional playground meeting the bare minimum requirement for ADA accessibility. The proposed Limitless Playground new equipment would be designed to allow for all equipment and areas to be fully accessible and provide enriching opportunities for those that may face cognitive and physical challenges.
- Walking paths – new development
Reasons – Currently, there are no walking trails or fitness paths at Levy Park. Most of the park does not have ADA accessible pathways leading park users to the various park amenities. Access to accessible walking paths surrounded by greenspace aids in physical exercise while relieving stress and anxiety.
- Concession stands – new development
Reasons – There is currently one concession stand servicing the softball field. A centralized concession stand and restroom area will provide services for all park attendees.
- Restrooms – rehabilitation of existing facilities, and new development
Reasons – Current restrooms are located at the softball field. A centralized restroom facility will serve all park attendees.
- Increased parking – new development
Reasons – There is inadequate parking area at the existing site. Park fields and road shoulders are often used for overflow parking. This causes maintenance issues for the park and safety issues for attendees.

Project Narrative Project Criteria Information

The City of Florence Parks & Recreation operates over 450 acres of property, including regional parks, sports complexes, a trails system, historical sites, conservation areas, splash pad, activity centers, and event facilities. The City of Florence also offers a variety of recreational services – festivals, camps, classes, programs, and more.

Levy Park is currently operating as a community park near downtown Florence, South Carolina. The address is 356 South Jeffords Street, Florence, SC 29506. The park was established in 1965 as a baseball park on four acres of land. It has since expanded to twenty acres with playground equipment, basketball and tennis courts, and a softball field.

The property owned by the City of Florence shall be used and maintained for the public park and recreation purposes in perpetuity.

The current park contains 20.09 acres of land. Included is an aerial tax map showing the property ([Appendix 1](#)).

The project entails fully redeveloping the community park, updating the outdoor sports amenities that were installed between 1965 and 1980, incorporating new passive park uses, and bringing the facilities up to current expectations with fully inclusive components to serve those with challenging conditions, including those on the autism spectrum.

Photos of the existing park are included ([Appendix 2](#)).

The City of Florence has focused on the area surrounding Levy Park as one that holds much potential to offer a higher standard of living to its surrounding communities. The 17-acre park recently gained 3 acres when the city demolished a prior motel site and created passive recreation space. This prompted residents in the community to bring forth requests to upgrade the park. As a result, a Master Plan for the park has been created by Bolton & Menk, Inc. The Master Plan for the Park is included with this proposal ([Appendix 3](#)).

The format of this proposal follows the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program Notice of Funding Opportunity guidelines.

1) Extent of Outdoor Recreation and Economic Needs:

The City of Florence intends to redevelop Levy Park for public access that will better meet the needs of the neighboring community. With no other outdoor recreation facilities or parks within a one-mile radius and Levy Park's needing to be updated, the area has become a park desert. Levy Park has heavy use, often hosting local basketball and baseball league play, specifically serving the African American and Hispanic populations.

Levy Park serves 2850 residents within a Low-Income Opportunity Zone. This 2.3 square mile Census Tract 7 has a median household income of \$18,165, 68% lower than the median household income in South Carolina and 65% lower than that of Florence. Per capita income is \$10,416 compared to \$32,823 for the state and \$32,482 for the city. In this community, 61.4% of people are below the poverty line, compared to 14.6% in the state and 18.1% in the city. 92% of all homes have a value below \$100,000, with a median value of \$62,200. The racial makeup of this community is predominantly African American (91%) with a growing number of Hispanic residents.

DEMOGRAPHIC	LEVY PARK COMMUNITY	FLORENCE	FLORENCE COUNTY	STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
POVERTY LEVEL	61.4%	18.1%	17.6%	14.6%
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$18,165	\$52,425	\$51,902	\$56,000
PER CAPITA INCOME	\$10,416	\$32,482	\$28,360	\$32,823

Approximately 1700 residents live within .5 miles of the park site, and 1850 total live within one mile of the park project. No more than 2% live 20% above the poverty level.

Included in this report is an aerial map of the households in the vicinity of Levy Park (Appendix 4).

The facilities at Levy Park were built between 1965 and 1980. The four basketball courts, one softball and one baseball field all need full renovation. The recreation park amenities planned in the Levy Park project include trails, picnic areas, interactive outdoor recreation, renovated softball, baseball, tennis, and basketball facilities, inclusive play area, and parking.

In comparison to outdoor recreation facilities in other areas of the city, the Levy Park area is lacking in access to recreational resources. The City is in the process of building new recreation complexes and renovating existing ones. This project will bring Levy Park up to the standards of the new complexes.

The City of Florence plans to continue and add programs and recreational activities once the park is redeveloped. The Florence Tennis Association is providing tennis programming, and recreation and fitness specialists will lead groups in connecting with nature and recharging their energy with community-minded, nature-inspired fitness programs, races, and runs.

Examples of the programs and events by the City of Florence are provided (Appendix 5).

2) Appropriateness of Project to Meet Identified Community Outdoor Recreation Needs and Increase Access to Nature's Benefits:

The redevelopment of Levy Park will provide shade trees, picnic areas, and natural landscaping which will be installed along the one mile of walkways, encouraging walkers and runners to complete the loop through the park. With higher quality outdoor recreation facilities, residents of the targeted communities will no longer need to travel 3-4 miles to access adequate facilities.

Currently, use of the park is limited primarily to those interested in basketball. It is estimated that use of the park will increase three-fold as residents of the neighboring community use the walking paths and hold family reunions at the park. Updated baseball and softball facilities, tennis/pickleball courts, and fitness stations will attract community members that don't currently use the park.

Outdoor sports areas such as baseball, basketball, tennis, pickleball, and softball will be much improved with the redevelopment of Levy Park. In addition, there will be facilities for those who may not have made use of Levy Park in the past.

- Senior citizens will have access to pickleball and to walking paths throughout the 20-acre park.
- Programming will be organized by Florence Tennis Association to teach the youth in the community to play tennis.
- Fitness equipment will be installed for those with more active lifestyles.
- 100% inclusive playground equipment will be installed for children with special needs. In addition to access for wheelchair-bound, sliding boards that do not cause friction to affect cochlear implants will be available. Specially built installations will allow children on the autism spectrum to feel more secure. A sensory garden will be planted nearby for those with sight deficiencies.
- Local sports leagues will have access to lighted practice fields and competition level softball, baseball, and basketball courts.
- Interactive practice walls with lighted targets will improve coordination, balance, spatial awareness, and footwork, particularly for soccer and tennis.

Accessibility to outdoor recreation and nature's benefits results in smarter, stronger, happier, healthier, and more productive children. Just 20 minutes in nature can improve concentration, improves cognitive function and memory. Exercising outdoors can reduce stress and lower cortisol levels by 15%, and leads to greater health benefits than exercising indoors. Walking in nature reduces inflammation and boosts the immune system. (NPS.gov)

Green space is key to social resilience, particularly for the community surrounding Levy Park. This redevelopment will affirm the equality of all people and encourage inclusive social gathering and unification.

3) Community Involvement in, and Support of, Proposed Project:

Community organizations and public entities have formed a partnership which will facilitate the project. Included in the partnership are the City of Florence, Florence County, the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation, McLeod Health Services, and Florence Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The City of Florence has long been interested in park projects as a means for neighborhood sustainability. In its Five Year Update to its Comprehensive Plan performed in February of 2020, the City identified key stakeholders comprised of civic leaders, neighborhood advocates, land and business owners and operators, and downtown merchants, as well as department managers and members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council. Through two days of back-to-back listening sessions and engaging conversations led by Kendig Keast Collaborative, the 56 stakeholders in attendance voiced opinions and thoughts about the progress the City has made in the last five years and what has yet to be accomplished, particularly in the area of recreation.

The Covid pandemic halted meetings in public, and a series of surveys were sent electronically. There were 328 respondents with comments such as:

- The increase in programs is very much needed to have somewhere for children and teens to have a place to interact and come together. The strengthening of programs will decline the number of juvenile crimes and will keep kids off the street. Programs will give them an outlet and also encourage them to become active in their community.
- Community-oriented events in local parks, outdoor recreation, quality of life for the younger generation, more greenspace
- Need new facilities in this area, want to see more places where children can play; a variety of types of spaces – to exercise, to bring dogs, kids, etc., better lighting for safety. Need for improvement of recreation amenities especially in neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, the East Florence Neighborhood group held numerous meetings over many years, expressing their concerns regarding an abandoned motel site bordering Levy Park and voicing their desire to see an expansion of and improvements to Levy Park.

At the January 12, 2022, Florence City Council meeting, a Resolution was passed authorizing the expenditure of up to \$1 million dollars for improvements on the East Palmetto Street Gateway, including improvements to Levy Park. The City purchased the 3-acre abandoned motel property on January 19, 2022. A community gathering was held at the demolition site on September 12, 2022.

This property adjoins the 17-acre Levy Park. This 3-acre project involved a partnership between City, County, non-profit, and corporate entities. Funds were provided by the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation (\$358,000) and McLeod Health Services (\$358,000) to purchase the property, and funds from Florence County (\$ 242,000) and the City of Florence (\$936,000), razed the building and cleared the property. It now serves as green space, increasing Levy Park to 20 acres. Florence Convention and Visitors Bureau assisted in hiring the design team of Bolton-Menk for the Levy Park Master Plan, sharing the cost of \$25,725 with the City of Florence.

(Appendix 6)

Advertisement requesting public input was placed in the Morning News on March 3, 2023. The newspaper's distribution is approximately 35,000.

(Appendix 7)

The Levy Park project has broad support from the community, including hospital systems, land trusts, tourism entities, and the chamber of commerce. (Appendix 8)

4) Embracing New Parks and Innovative Project Attributes:

The project site has not received LWCF, UPARR, or ORLP assistance in the past.

The new park will serve as an oasis in a fast-growing commercial area. Community residents will be able to walk the trails and allow their children to learn about nature while playing in a safe environment. Community ball players will have access to renovated and modernized fields for baseball, softball, basketball, pickleball, and tennis.

This project includes several innovative systems such as a large checkerboard wall for practicing soccer and tennis. Squares on the wall will light up as targets to improve coordination, balance, spatial awareness, and footwork. Having interactive play is key to involving youth in outdoor exercise when they are not involved in team play. (Image of practice wall, Appendix 9)

Another innovative feature to encourage family-oriented exercise is the use of glow-in-the-dark multi-use pathways, perfect for walking with children at dusk. Innovative safety features include light posts which provide solar lighting, wifi, phone charging ports, and an emergency call button. Solar benches will also provide phone charging outlets.

In addition to an inclusive playground, equipment such as play tunnels and hideouts will be installed specifically for children on the autism spectrum. Sliding boards that do not create friction that interferes with cochlear implants will be installed for those with hearing disabilities. Sensory gardens will invite children to experience nature with all five senses.

Solar panel opportunities will be incorporated into the various picnic shelters, providing power for lighting and USB charging stations.

5) Project's Alignment with SCORP and other applicable plans:

South Carolina updated its Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in 2019. The SCORP aligns with many of the City of Florence's principles.

SCORP Goal 1: Improving Access to Public Recreation Areas

Accessibility is one of the City's Core Values – Removing barriers to make programs and facilities accessible to all. All capital projects are constructed using American with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. Currently, the City of Florence is conducting an accessibility audit of all its parks and facilities, and improvements have been made in two major parks. The City is developing a transition plan to retrofit existing parks so that they are in compliance with ADA standards. The Levy Park redevelopment will follow all ADA standard guidelines.

The City of Florence has offered programs and events for individuals that otherwise would not be able to enjoy the parks. Currently, the Florence Tennis Association is scheduled to provide no-cost tennis programming at Levy Park.

The completion of this project will provide access to the park for the surrounding neighborhoods, enabling residents to relax and exercise, and to benefit from the green space and outdoor recreation facilities.

SCORP Goal 2: Stewardship of Resources

The City of Florence utilizes stewardship guidelines in planning. To accomplish the goal of becoming more environmentally responsible toward the land and its resources, environmentally sustainable objectives and materials are incorporated wherever possible in the planning, construction,

and operation of new or renovated park facilities. For this project and for all construction projects the City of Florence utilizes design guidelines that are drawn from standards such as the US Green Building Council's LEED Green Building Certification program.

The City established a Resiliency and Sustainability Advisory Committee in 2022 consisting of community leaders and naturalists who guide the City in equitably addressing climate and development pressures. Included in the committee's action plan is education of citizens to become better stewards of their surroundings. The plan addresses the negative impact of littering and planting invasive species near waterways, and the positive impact of planting native trees and plants that require less maintenance. Community residents will be encouraged to take part in planting shade trees on site.

SCORP Goal 4: Adapting to Changes in Recreation Demand

The City of Florence plans and designs projects with the changing demographics in mind. In addition to providing ADA accessible amenities for those with physical impairments, the project includes several free play areas to promote socialization and build cognitive skills.

As Generations Z and Alpha make more frequent use of park facilities, demand has increased for unstructured play areas to aid in development of social, cognitive, and language skills. According to a 2005 report in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, between 1981 and 1997, there was a 25% decrease in time children spent on unstructured activities resulting from an increase in structured play and the prevalence of free time being used as screen time. These needs are being met with the installation of multiple limitless play zones, a splash pad, and an interactive practice wall with lighted targets for soccer and tennis players.

City of Florence Comprehensive Plan 2017-2022

The City of Florence 5-Year Comprehensive Plan Update 2017-2022 lists in its Principles of Progress / Community Livability:

- Added recreational programming and parks serving all areas and neighborhoods
- Repurposing parks and multi-use public places as anchors of neighborhood and community gatherings

An objective of the City is developing parks, recreation areas, greenways, and other natural conservation areas as centers that anchor well-defined neighborhoods and help to create community.

The City is examining older facilities which require updates and neighborhoods void of parks or recreational programming that warrant added focus and investment. The City recognizes that a lack of park facilities and programming limits the opportunities for achieving neighborhood livability and sustained reinvestment.

Parks are among the most recognized public amenities that contribute substantially to quality of life. The City is intent on developing and then maintaining a balanced system of neighborhood, community, and regional parks within a convenient distance of all residentially developed areas of the community.

NPS RTCA Master Trails Plan for City and County of Florence

A Master Trails Plan for the city and county was facilitated by the National Park Service RTCA program in 2020-2022. In the public meeting regarding the subject, the greatest interest was in trails and improving trailheads. This project will add more than one mile to our existing trail system. A trailhead will be created near the south parking lot.

Future City: City of Florence Comprehensive Plan Draft January 2023

The most recent draft of the City Comprehensive Plan notes that the design, intensity of development, and planned use/activities within parks should match area character. Plans for Levy Park follow community interests and character, emphasizing sports-related play while still providing passive park areas and playgrounds.

Florence County Comprehensive Plan – Land Use January 2023

The 2023 draft of the Florence County Comprehensive Plan regarding land use states, “Active and passive recreational opportunities are important for maintaining and increasing the quality of life for residents and visitors.” It further states that development of residential communities will benefit from close proximity to parklands.

6) Project Feasibility and Likelihood of Success:

Contributions:

In 2022, the City of Florence purchased the site of an abandoned motel near downtown Florence. This 3-acre property adjoins the 17-acre Levy Park. Funds were provided by the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation (\$358,000) and McLeod Health Services (\$358,000) to purchase the property. The City of Florence (\$936,000) and Florence County (\$242,000) partnered to raze the building and clear the property to serve as a passive park area, increasing Levy Park to 20 acres.

The City of Florence manages over 600 acres of recreational land in 18 locations throughout the community, a trail system, ball fields, tennis courts, outdoor basketball courts, playgrounds and many other support facilities for the various sporting amenities. The City of Florence funds the day-to-day operations and maintenance of these facilities within its General Fund Budget with additional supporting funds from accommodations tax revenue. The City of Florence staff annually completes an internal assessment on all city facilities and makes a determination of needs for improvements, maintenance, and repairs to help determine annual budgetary decisions on completing the identified best management practices. This is how the deficiencies at Levy Park were identified.

Currently, the City of Florence is managing several grant projects that range from planning grants to implementation grants. The most recent grant projects awarded to the City are three Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) stormwater mitigation grants totaling an awarded amount of approximately \$7,121,000, and a Federal HUD planning grant for a stormwater master plan with an awarded amount of \$250,000. The City of Florence has dedicated staff who manage the grant programs including the Assistant City Manager, City Engineer, and Grants Coordinator. Management for these projects includes contracting, procurement, engineering study, financial management, and all other requirements of the grants.

The City of Florence employs multiple staff with experience in construction management, design, engineering, and other like fields that provides significant support from the beginning of design through completion of construction. The Finance Department staff has vast knowledge and experience in managing grant funded projects and the requirements of the various funding agencies (CDBG Funds, State Historic Preservation Funds, South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority, etc.). The City of Florence has partnered with private foundations in the development of multiple sports facilities including a 10-field soccer complex with a 6,000 sq. ft. main building; a tennis center featuring 24 asphalt courts, 6 clay courts, and a 5,000 sq. ft. center; and a 31,500 sq. ft. basketball center that offers courts for basketball, volleyball, and pickleball.

The Master Plan for Levy Park has been completed with input from the public. Currently, the project is in the Design Development stage. Within a year of receipt of the grant, the City of Florence intends to publicly bid the construction of the new park. The park is open and will continue to stay open until construction begins. Projected milestones are as follows:

- 50% Design Development Complete by 3/1/2024
- Construction Documents Complete by 6/1/2024
- Permitting Complete by 8/1/2024
- Bidding Complete by 12/1/2024
- Construction Start by 1/31/25
- Construction Complete by 12/31/2025

There are no foreseen issues with the site that would prevent it from being open and available to the public in 2-3 years.

Costs are submitted by design engineering consultants, Bolton & Menk Southeast.