Community Destination

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Overview

The goal of this park reboot is to create a community destination that benefits the residents in the area and provides a connection to nature. Located in Opelika, Floral Park is the chosen space to be redesigned and reimagined. It is the hope of this project that everyone will want to visit this park, from young children to senior citizens; therefore, a multitude of areas will be created. Some of the proposed additions include play zones, sporting spaces, walking paths, gardens, entertainment spaces (verandas), interactive water feature, dog park, and an area for a farmer's market. In order to make the park unique to Opelika, historical elements will also be implemented. We plan to incorporate natural vegetation and landscape design that will increase the number of pollinators and ease the amount of physical care the park will need. Overall, we want to provide the Opelika community with a place that better meets the needs and desires of the community to enrich the lives of the citizens. We also strive to better utilize ecosystem services to help promote the well-being and uniqueness of the community.

Goals

1. To increase the number of individuals visiting the park
2. To increase natural vegetation and landscape design
3. To connect the park with Opelika's history and culture
4. To better meet the needs and desires of the community
5. To better utilize ecosystem services to help the wellbeing of the local community

Utilizing Already Existing Structures

One of the main goals in striving for a more sustainable park is utilizing already existing structures. The idea of 'reuse' is not only sustainable, but will save money in the development of Floral Park. The park currently contains impervious pathways that we want to use to create trails that are accessible to everyone in the community despite age and disability. In addition to utilizing the already existing pathways, we would like to use the existing seating used for the softball fields. Through meetings with Matt Mosley, city planner for Opelika, we learned that softball is not the primary sport for the community of Opelika. Instead, we would like to create a soccer field. This would encourage more residents to visit the park and to meet the desires of the community. Finally, the park is seeing a lot of usage for its recycling containers. This is definitely something we would like to keep in place at Floral Park.



Fostering Community Involvement

Floral Park provides a unique location for the community of Opelika to flourish. With its neighborhood location and large acreage, the ideas we are wanting Floral Park to adopt will help facilitate the growth of the Opelika community. Implementing a farmer's market, community garden, areas for social cohesion, and areas for educational resources will foster environments that will promote growth between the residents of city of Opelika.

The parking lot of Floral Park is an excellent place to have a farmer's market because it is surrounded by a large amount of homes. The market would allow for people to go produce shopping right down their street; thus influencing them to develop healthier habits. Also, this would increase the economic benefits for local farmers and build relationships among local business owners. There has been a drastic increase in the demand for locally sourced food in restaurants and at home.

The community garden idea is a concept that has grown worldwide. For Floral Park we see the community garden becoming a place where locals can learn about farming techniques, and to become another resource for restaurants to supply healthier local foods for their customers. Recently, in the East Alabama magazine, several restaurants in our area were highlighted for the 'Farm to Table' movement. This is the movement of restaurants using locally grown foods in their menu items. In the Opelika and Auburn area residents can visit a number of restaurants following this movement including: Amsterdam Café, Maestro 2300, The Hotel at Auburn University, Café 123, Jimmy's Restaurant, SpringHouse, and Ham and High. Our goal is to allow restaurants to sponsor different areas of the community garden within Floral Park. Giving them an area to grow specifically what they would like to use in their restaurants, with the help of employees and community members.

Finally, we would like to see Floral Park become a place where children can thrive. One way we would like to see this happen is through incorporating the school system with our renovations of the park. Currently, the park is very bare, and lacking an attractive landscape to bring in visitors. We would love to see the implementation of native plant species into the park. What is a better way to learn about your carbon footprint and the native plant life of Alabama? Planting trees like Dogwoods, Magnolias, and Longleaf Pines, allow children to learn about the native species of Alabama, as well.

Ecosystem Services

Direct and Indirect Health Benefits

Through the implementation of the new proposed structures in Floral Park, there will be an increase of direct and indirect health benefits. Providing an area that allows for residents to exercise and enjoy the aesthetics of the park will result in reduced stress and mental disorders. By providing interconnected trails and area for recreational activities, this will encourage the increase of physical activity, reduced health inequalities, increased perception of life quality and self reported general health. You will also be able to see an increase in satisfaction of living environment and social interactions. Overall, an increase in public health will result from a well functioning public park.

Social Cohesion

Floral Park is unique because of its large size and location. Its 24 acres lies within a residential area teeming with life, but unfortunately, the park does not reflect that. The

Floral Park Reboot project will help to utilize this land by giving residents a space to come together for social cohesion. It will also give a place for families to come out together and enjoy an area outside the walls of their home and take their eyes from their phones to a spectacular experiences in Floral Park. This ecosystem service helps to provide an area for community and family development and social interactions.

House Prices

Who doesn't want an incredible park outside their front door? If Floral Park becomes an area that is desired by residents, then there will be a desire to be closer to this area. Research has shown that having a successful park in residential areas increases the surround housing prices. Many families love to have a place where their children can go to exercise and feel safe. Along with children, an area for the parents and grandparents to relax and enjoy the aesthetics of the park. This would help not only the city with property value increase but also homeowners.

Biodiversity

The implementation of native species into the park will help incorporate birds and pollinators back into the local area. Increasing the species of pollinators is important when thinking about the farmers and gardeners in our region. This will make their yields higher and lives easier. This increase in biodiversity will be an attractive aspect to the park, and will bring in many residents to enjoy the natural landscape. Also, incorporating native species in the rain garden and community garden will lower maintenance allowing for work time to be spent in more productive ways.

Air Quality and Carbon Sequestration

Through increasing the tree and other plant species in Floral Park there will be an increase in carbon sequestration and improved air quality. A role of plants in ecosystems is to harbor carbon and release oxygen back into the atmosphere. This helps with greenhouse gas emission and providing better air quality. This ecosystem service is a simple solution to help provide residents with a healthier living environment even outside of the park.

Water Management

Water management will become an easier task if our proposed structures are implemented. The implementation of more plant species and rain gardens help reduce the effects of storm water disservices like erosion and flooding . The planting of more trees

gives rain a place to be stored both in the tree and below ground in the roots. The rain garden gives an area for rainwater to collect and settle without being rushed into drains and over following creeks. In the following sections there is a breakdown of how Floral Park will utilize the implementation of the proposed structures to help manage water more effectively.

Cooling

In many urban areas there is a heat island effect due to a decrease in natural landscapes. With the increase in plant species we are hoping to see a cooling effect in the areas surrounding Floral Park. Within Floral Park there will be a cooling effect due to shade from trees and an increase in other plant species, as well. This will give a space for residents to come during hot summer months, that will be cooler than other surrounding areas.

Plant Species

The various plant life that we would like to propose for implementation are all native species that would promote biodiversity in the park. After an interview with Auburn Arboretum's employee, Patrick Thompson, we found a number of floras that would be excellent options to bring into Floral Park. All of the species listed below can thrive in rain gardens and Alabama's climate. They are low maintenance and low cost care due to being native to the region. One of the desirable features of combining these species, is the blooming patterns. You will always have some kind of color in your park because of the flowering times are different for these floras.

Thelypteris Kunthii - Perennial Fern



Hibiscus Coccineus - Red Star Hibiscus



Spartina alterniflora - Louisiana Grasses



Ilex Verticillata - Winterberry Hollies



Rhododendron Austrinum - Orange Florida Azalea



Chionanthus Virginicus - Grancy Grey Beard



Iris Giganticaerulea - Louisiana Iris



Silphium - Common Sunflower

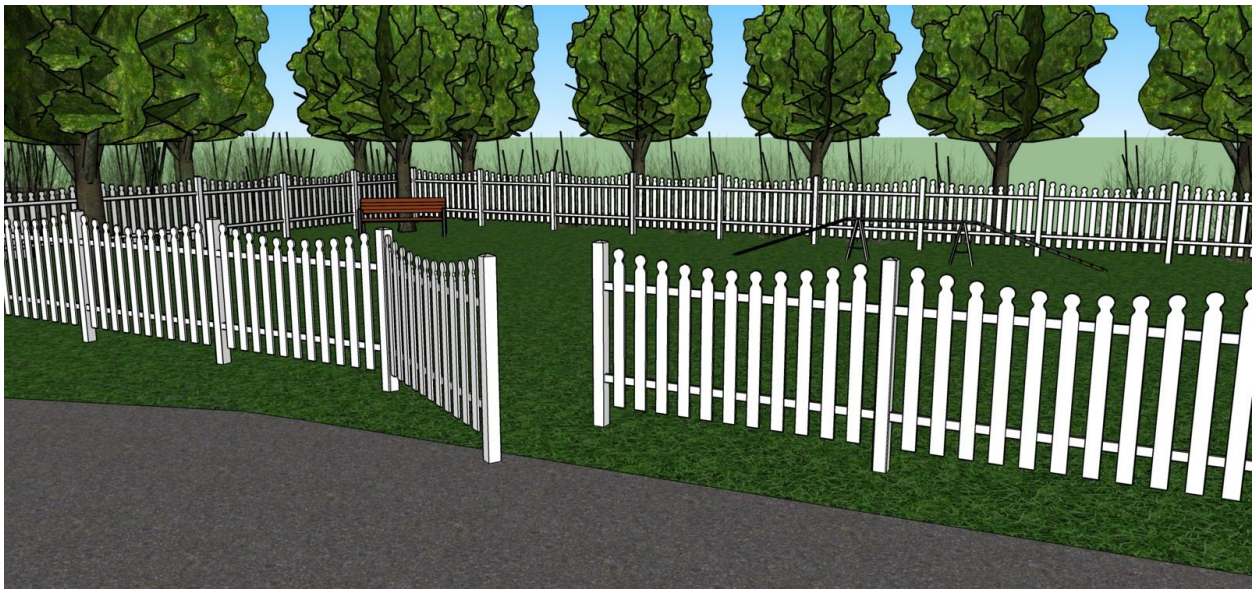


Monarda - Bee Balm



Dog Park

Currently existing in Floral Park is a very active dog park. The park is fenced in with black wire and has areas for small and large dogs to enter. Since the dog park is already established, the only proposed ideas are cosmetic. With a newly added plastic, white picket fence and additional seating arrangements, dog lovers will be able to enjoy themselves more comfortably. The goal is to encourage more pet owners to bring their dogs and enjoy Floral Park and its updated dog park.



Playground

To provide the growing youth population with a form of entertainment, a large playground is included in the new park design. The new feature will be located on the east side of the park by Floral Street. Within the playground area there will be a variety of slides, climbing walls, bridges, and monkey bars, ranging in size to allow children of various ages the ability to play. Tying in with the train history of Opelika, a playset that looks like a train is included on the north side of the playground. Sand will surround the entire playground to provide cushion in case of falls, and it will be inexpensive to maintain.



Soccer Field

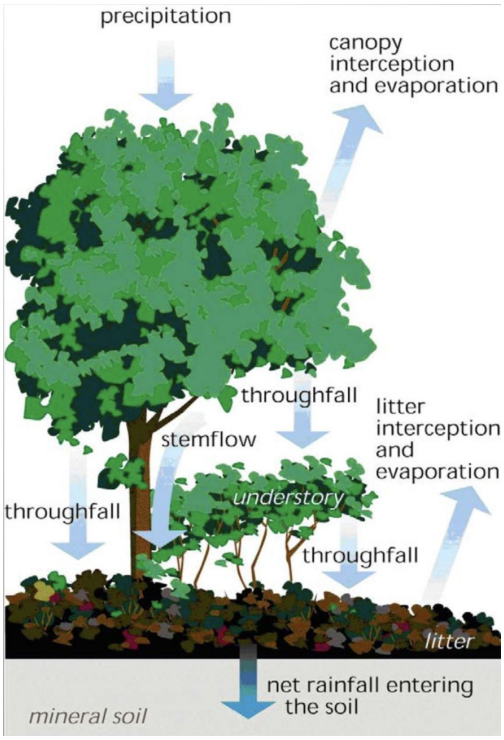
On the north east side of the park, located next to the playground and floral street, is the soccer field. During an interview conducted with Matt Mosley, a public official in Opelika, it was revealed that soccer is a prevalent sport for kids in the Opelika community. However, because the sport draws a lot of members, many of the games are held out of town in a sports complex. In order to prevent families from traveling far for practices and games, a soccer field was added to the design of Floral Park. This vital addition would draw more visitors to the park during soccer season, and it would be an inexpensive feature, only needing two goals, benches, and fresh paint lines.

Paths

In the park are existing trails that allow for people to maneuver through the park. The plan is to expand upon the trails that are already in the park, while incorporating new, connecting trails. Floral Park offers the opportunity to be physically active by either walking or running the trails and the ultimate goal is to enhance that experience. Along these paths, visitors will take pleasure in the newly added rain garden and water features, as well as natural vegetation. The new design for trails in mind will encourage people of all ages to come and explore what the new Floral Park has to offer.

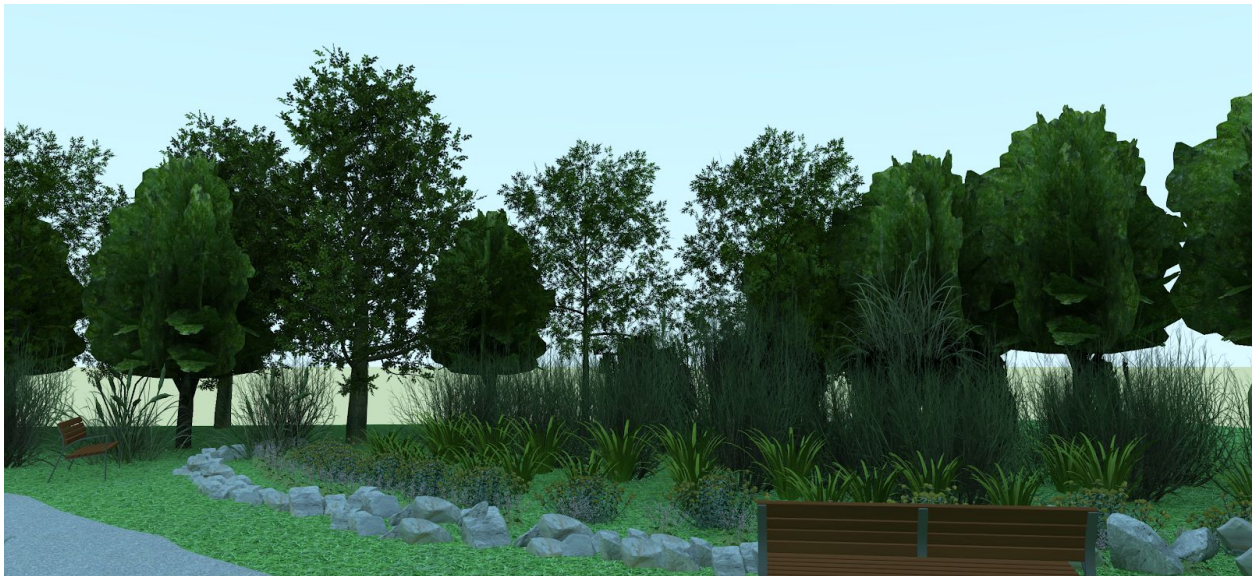
Stormwater

In urban areas there is an increase in impervious areas, which increase the amount of runoff from rainfall. This can create issues with stormwater management, flood control, water quality, and erosion. One of the strategies to increase vegetation, especially trees, into Floral Park is to utilize the tree's ability to help manage stormwater. Trees and other ground covers help transpire water from the soil into the atmosphere, intercept rainfall, provide a litter layer that can absorb rainwater, and create a soil environment conducive for infiltration. These benefits from trees will help to manage the issues that come with having an urban area. Floral Park is important to its neighborhood for this reason. The surrounding homes have created an increase in impervious structures, and as a consequence rainwater will be left to flow freely through man made infrastructure to alleviate these issues. If you increase the natural solutions to stormwater management you will find less cost involved when dealing with large rainfall.



Rain Garden

A rain garden is a combination of native perennials, shrubs, and flowers that lie in a sloping area. The goal of a rain garden is to help manage stormflow. Rain gardens are effective in removing up to 90% of nutrients and chemicals and up to 80% of sediments from the rainwater runoff. Compared to a conventional lawn, rain gardens allow for 30% more water to soak into the ground. The design of a rain garden should drain within 12-48 hours to keep mosquitoes from breeding. This means that these plants do not lie in rain but soak the water up. A rain garden should be aesthetically pleasing and give an area for residents to come and enjoy beauty. The rain garden utilizes natives species making maintenance and cost extremely low, and also gives back to the community. A rain garden will be a very beneficial attribute to have in Floral Park.



Community Garden

To achieve making Floral Park a place to have a sense of community, we want to implement a community garden. This would be an area for the community to come together through volunteer work to provide food and an area to relax. The Farm-to-Table movement is a growing industry in the Opelika and Auburn area. Giving the park a community garden will help provide restaurants with the local produce they desire. Having restaurants sponsor slots in the community garden will limit the amount of costs needed to up keep the area. Through using volunteer workers there is an area for education on gardening and a place for the community to grow together.



Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to enlighten individuals on the untapped potential of Floral Park. Currently, the park is not drawing in the attendance that is desired, which in turn begs the question if the park will be sold for development. Through extensive research and interviews, the community destination team discovered that changes could be made to the park to attract more visitors, provide benefits to the community, and to increase ecosystem services. With the information presented in this document and the digital presentation, we demonstrated that both short term and long term changes can be implemented to make this a successful community destination.

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