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By: D.E. Smoot, Phoenix Staff Writer

## City to seek trail construction grant

City officials will pursue grant funding for construction of a recreational trail along the banks of Coody Creek through parts of Muskogee's south side.

The move comes 38 years after Muskogee voters approved a \$250,000 bond issue to fund the development of a park alongside the creek. Much of the money was used to acquire property and clean up parts of the creek bed, but the linear park envisioned in 1974 by advocates of the bond proposal never materialized.

During the next four years, what was intended to be a three-phase project waxed and waned as city officials wrangled over the scope of the project. Since 1978, when park supporters complained about "foot-dragging and inflation" but accepted the realities of a scaled-down project, the creek has continued to meander toward the Arkansas River with minimal development.



Mark Wilkerson

Parks and Recreation Director Mark Wilkerson said interest in picking up where past efforts left off by developing the proposed Coody Creek Trail is "pretty high" now. He said at least two factors make the project appealing.

"We already own the land, and the project opens the trail system up to that part of town," Wilkerson said, noting that much of the land that would be included in the first phase of the project is clear because of recent sewer line projects. "Ultimately we want to try to get to Gulick Street—it's all part of our trails master plan."

The first phase of the proposed Coody Creek Trail would begin at Centennial Trail and follow Seventh Street toward Coody Creek, where it would turn toward U.S. 64. At that point, the trail would parallel the highway to where it crosses the Creek.

Wilkerson said a trailhead—an area that would feature parking spaces, benches, a drinking fountain and other amenities—would be built where South Second Street converges with Madison Street.

He estimated that first-phase construction would cost about \$250,000, with 80 percent—or \$200,000—from the trail fund grant, provided that it is approved. The rest would come from the city's capital improvements program funds dedicated for trail development.

The trail ultimately would be extended from U.S. 64 and follow Coody Creek southeast to Gulick Street, just north of Burbank Street. Wilkerson said the termination point would be near the trail at Ruby Park, about a half-mile north at Gulick and Augusta streets.

Doug Walton, the coordinator of the Muskogee County Turning Point Coalition's food and fitness initiative, said the city has made great strides with its trails system. The addition of the Coody Creek Trail would provide additional opportunities for physical activities and serve other functions, he said.

"With more trails, we ... get to see people being active, and that helps other people become more active," said Walton, who has walked the length of the proposed trail. "It's a really nice area that could serve as a gateway feature people could see as they come into town."

Wilkerson, who is expected to get authorization to apply for the grant Monday when the City Council meets, said it would be May or later before he learns whether the grant will be approved.

If the state Department of Tourism and Recreation approves the grant, work could begin by next January, he said.

Reach D.E. Smoot at (918) 684-2901 or [dsmoot@muskogee phoenix.com](mailto:dsmoot@muskogee phoenix.com).