

Foundation unites east and west to serve residents

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Sun-Sentinel

5:15 p.m. EDT, July 7, 2010

Uniting the greater Boynton Beach area is now in the metaphoric hands of a new foundation that has been bubbling up for quite some time.

The Greater Boynton Beach Foundation for the Advancement of Recreation, Education and Culture incorporates representatives from the city of Boynton Beach, the Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations and the Greater Boynton Beach Chamber of Commerce. The new foundation has been in the works for years but is just now in the final stages of incorporation.

The foundation's first project is a barrier-free park on Congress Avenue, south of Woolbright Road.

Ken Lassiter, president of COBWRA, who serves on the new foundation board in an advisory capacity, said the foundation is key in that the west and east parts of the greater area are forever linked.

"The unincorporated West Boynton is right next to the east and there are no walls between us," he said. "In the near future there will be projects that they [the foundation] will propose that will be in the west."

As for the first initiative, the concept of the barrier-free park, Lassiter said it is something people from the west can enjoy just the same as if they lived near Woolbright Road and Congress Avenue.

Lassiter said he has been joining the foundation's meetings every other Wednesday, sometimes in the Boynton City Library and sometimes elsewhere around the city.

Boynton Beach City Commissioner Bill Orlove said the new foundation's benefit would be to look for areas where it can step in and augment or speed up processes to help.

Orlove, a veteran of the city's Parks and Recreation Board, said he couldn't be happier with the potential movement forward for the barrier-free park, since it has been six years in the making and that plans for the first phase of the park are already complete.

"This is a park with no limitations that anyone can enjoy," he said. "The first phase includes the playground and a track."

Orlove said by no limitations it means anyone, even with a handicap or disability, can enjoy it in some capacity.

He said the city has some money left over to move forward with the park and is only about \$500,000 short on a ground breaking, which the foundation is confident it could raise to help speed up the process.

Mike Penn, the foundation's inaugural chairman, said the idea for the new park inspired the group but then the foundation quickly realized a larger goal of engendering enthusiasm for all public projects in the city moving forward.

"The barrier-free park will be our signature project but we will have a platform for growing the community further after that," he said.

Penn said after years of meetings and talks, the new foundation is in the final stages of incorporation as a nonprofit.

"This park is close to home for me because I have two nephews, one with cerebral palsy that passed and another who will always be developmentally delayed," he said. "I understand how difficult it is for the family and this park can provide help."

Penn said a park that can be enjoyed by everyone, despite physical or mental limitations, is key for the goodwill of the city.

He said the park should break ground later this year or early 2011 with completion by April 2012. As for funding, Penn didn't find the \$500,000 needed to be a daunting task.

"The sources are out there," he said. "We are looking at a number of nonprofit and other targets."