

COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Rec upgrades coming for Hoover Reservoir

Will include accessible boat launch as well as replacement boardwalk

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The Columbus Recreation and Parks Department is upgrading the Walnut Street boat launch on the Hoover Reservoir in Westerville. BEN LANKA/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Columbus is upgrading amenities at Hoover Reservoir: a boat ramp and a 1,500-foot boardwalk across the reservoir to replace one that was demolished after being deemed unsafe.

The new boat launch will be designed to allow people with disabilities to enter and exit boats. Columbus owns the 2,800-plus-acre reservoir on the city's northeast side, adjacent to Westerville and several townships, and the dam on Big Walnut Creek that creates the reservoir. It is a vital source of drinking water for the Columbus area and a popular fishing and boating spot.

The Columbus City Council voted 7-0 at its meeting on Oct. 6 to authorize more money for the project, bringing the total authorization to up to about \$5.1 million. Two council members were absent.

In a string of ordinances under the council's Recreation and Parks committee, the council also voted 7-0 to approve \$2 million toward upgrades at the Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens and about \$1 million to create a 24-acre wetland inside the Three Creeks Park.

Columbus City Councilmember Nancy Day-Achauer said this legislation highlights the city's commitment to parks and recreation.



Hoover Reservoir in Westerville as seen in an aerial photo on Sept. 28.
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“This really impacts the quality of life in our city and creates more opportunities for the residents of our city to be able to be in nature and to recreate in

safe and beautiful outdoor spaces,” Day-Achauer told The Dispatch before the meeting.

Upgrades at Hoover Reservoir boat launch, boardwalk

Columbus Recreation and Parks Director Bernita Reese said the two projects at Hoover Reservoir should hopefully be completed and open to the public sometime in 2026.

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The department closed the Walnut Street Boat Launch in Westerville for the fall and winter while a construction crew demolishes and reconstructs a new boat launch.

The new facilities will include a docking and launching system that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and an additional dock to manage traffic. To help pay for the new boat launch, the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department received a \$1.5 million grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.



The Columbus Recreation and Parks Department is upgrading the Walnut Street boat launch on the Hoover Reservoir in Westerville. Improvements will include making a boat ramp accessible for people with disabilities. BEN LANKA/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Reese told The Dispatch she’s excited for the project to serve all people who want to boat on the water.

“It’s super exciting to make our places more and more accessible,” Day-Achauer said.

The Mudflats Boardwalk was previously located at the northern end of the reservoir, near Galena in Delaware County. The city closed the boardwalk in 2022 and later demolished it in 2024 after engineers determined it was not safe for continued use.

Franklin Park Conservatory gets city dollars

The council authorized \$2 million in bond funds for capital improvements at the Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, a privately held conservatory located within a city-owned park on the Near East Side.

Of that, \$1 million will support the renovation of the John F. Wolfe Palm House. The planned makeover recently received a record-setting \$35 million gift from the Wolfe family, which formerly owned The Dispatch.

Half a million dollars will go toward improving the guest experience with upgrades, including upgrading the Children's Garden.

The Franklin Park Conservatory announced its North Star Master Plan last year, which calls for 15 major changes to improve the attraction.

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Day-Achauer said the conservatory is already amazing, but it is working on becoming a premier botanical garden that will be a boon for tourism.

Three Creeks wetland planned

The council authorized up to \$955,000 for the Three Creeks Wetland Restoration Project. The initiative will restore a 24-acre wetland inside the 1,097-acre Three Creeks Park on Columbus' Southeast Side. The wetland will be in a 30-acre restored area north of Watkins Road and to the east of the Alum Creek Trail.

"Recreation and Parks is committed to preserving and restoring wetlands," Day-Achauer said.

Three Creeks Park, named for the convergence of the Alum, Big Walnut and Blacklick creeks, is jointly managed by the city and Franklin County Metro Parks.

The wetland will include a natural walking trail and educational signage.

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