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## Macon's riverwalk to get six more miles of trails by end of summer

Joggers and walkers in Macon will have more space to stretch their legs by the end of summer, officials said Wednesday.

Ocmulgee Heritage Trail representatives announced construction will begin soon on two new extensions that will add six miles to the river trail, commonly known as Macon's riverwalk. The first — a widening of the sidewalk on the north side of Riverside Drive — will start at Gateway Park and follow Riverside, ending where Riverside and New Street meet. The second extension will add a quarter of a mile to the existing levee trail that currently ends in Central City Park.

The Riverside Drive project will cost \$500,000 to complete, officials said. Money will be provided through a \$400,000 earmark grant secured by U.S. Rep. Jim Marshall, D-Ga., in addition to \$100,000 provided by NewTown Macon.

Dale "Doc" Dougherty, director of Macon-Bibb County Parks and Recreation Department, said the Riverside Drive project is worth the cost, despite budget cuts facing the city.

"One of the best parts of recreation is the improvement in people's lives," he said. "Unfortunately, because of the recession and budget costs, a lot of people think recreation is a luxury we can't afford. I couldn't disagree more. Often times, the only way people can connect to local government is through recreation."

Projections for both projects predict completion before the end of the year, said NewTown Macon CEO Mike Ford. Construction is expected to end on the Riverside Drive project in six months, and on the levee trail project by the end of summer, according to current plans.

The two additions will extend the total trail length from nine miles to about 15 miles, as well as provide a restroom to trail users, Ford said. The restroom will be built near the riverwalk's parking lot off Spring Street.

“This will be the first time there will be a restroom on the circle for people to use,” he said.

Plans for the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail began in the early 1990s as part of a project to protect natural environments in Macon. The trail is the only riverside trail and park system in Middle Georgia. Portions of it pass local historic sites such as the Ocmulgee National Monument and Riverside Cemetery. Master plans for future trail extensions detail up to 22 miles of trail, including the connection of a future trail through Riverside Cemetery with a trail through Water Works Park.

Mayor Robert Reichert said he looks forward to the upcoming additions and hopes to begin plans for further park and landscaping developments.

“We’re going to try and leverage additional improvements, so people can have the best experience of our walkways and parks,” he said.