

Friends pull for park

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From left, Jane Bailey, vice president, and Mike and April Saine, members of the Friends of Camp McDonald Park, stand in front of the site in Kennesaw on Sunday. Friends of Camp McDonald Park, a nonprofit formed in 2010, is working to develop a master plan for the park, which it hopes will include walking trails, restoration of a stream, benches and a foot bridge.

Photo by Jon-Michael Sullivan



April Saine shows her necklace in support of the park.

Photo by Jon-Michael Sullivan

KENNESAW — A small nonprofit group has made a mission this year to get a master plan for Camp McDonald Park approved in downtown Kennesaw.

Camp McDonald once served as a Confederate training camp during the Civil War and is believed to have been a regional meeting point for Native American tribes before that. Today, several wooded acres of the former training camp remain along Watts Drive, directly behind Kennesaw City Hall.

The park is officially closed to the public.

Friends of Camp McDonald Park, a nonprofit formed in 2010, is working to develop a master plan for the park, which it hopes will include walking trails, restoration of a stream, benches and a foot bridge. However, the master plan must first be approved by the city of Kennesaw and Cobb County.

“This is a unique piece of land, not only for its historical significance but also for its location and potential,” said Jim Hamby, president of Friends of Camp McDonald Park.

In May 2009, the county purchased 7.57 acres of the land as a passive park from the Hamby family for \$825,599, when it was at risk of falling into private hands to be turned into a mixed-use development. The funding came from the 2006 parks bond.

The Kennesaw Development Authority purchased 2.39 acres adjacent to the property for future development, possibly townhouses, retail space and a parking garage, which have continued to be discussed.

At least one recent meeting about conceptual ideas for the park has taken place between the county and city. But since the county owns the park, Kennesaw Mayor Mark Mathews said the city is letting the county take the lead on the matter. He said the future of Camp McDonald Park is currently not up for discussion by the City Council.

“We see it truly as a county park and a county project,” Mathews said. “While we are helping the Friends of Camp McDonald in whatever way we can, we would just basically be providing input, if anything, to the master plan process.”

Presently, the county is working with Friends of Camp McDonald Park, city of Kennesaw and a design firm to complete a master plan, according to a county spokesman. “We don’t know how much development of the park will cost,” said Robert Quigley. “A cost estimate will be one of the deliverables of the master planning process.”

Approximately \$5,700 in private funding for the master plan is being raised by the Friends of Camp McDonald Park.

“We really need the master plan, to move forward,” said group treasurer April Saine of Kennesaw. “We are committed to funding that plan.”

While the park’s master plan is being developed, the handful of members that comprise Friends of Camp McDonald Park is trying to fundraise and get the word out about the park by hosting tours during city

events and maintaining a website and Facebook page. They say many people, including city residents, aren't even aware of the history attached to the property that sits in the middle of downtown.

Group vice president Jane Bailey was born and raised in Kennesaw and remembers neighborhood children during her childhood playing on the property. But it wasn't until a few years ago, when it was up for sale, that the self-proclaimed nature lover learned about the property's history as Civil War-era training grounds. The retired dental hygienist then became committed to protecting its natural beauty.

"We constantly run across people that are not aware of this property," said Saine, a bookkeeper, pointing to a small waterfall.

"I can imagine soldiers being here, living in tents. This was their water supply. I can imagine tribal Indian meetings and this being their water supply."

Before the land was purchased, the city hired New South Associates of Stone Mountain in the summer of 2006 to conduct an archeological study of the property to determine its historical significance. The study concluded that while it was within the historic boundaries of Camp McDonald, research indicated there were no historic structures or archaeological sites that had been preserved, and was primarily where troops were housed in tents.

Sallie Loy, an archivist at the nearby Southern Museum of Civil War & Locomotive History, said Camp McDonald was established in 1861 and was named after former Gov. Charles C. McDonald of Marietta. The parade ground was located near Highway 41 and Pine Mountain Road, but the camp was eventually destroyed by Union Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman in 1864, she said.

"This was an ideal location because of the close proximity to the railroad for transportation and supplies, as well as being located near a creek for fresh water supply," said Loy.

Saine's husband, Mike Saine, a retired Kennesaw police officer, is also an active member of Friends of Camp McDonald Park. He said he particularly enjoys its peaceful atmosphere, which blocks out much of the surrounding traffic noise. In addition, the park has special meaning to him because he thinks his great-great-grandfather may have trained at Camp McDonald during the war.

"It's just going to be a natural, passive park," he said. "It's something that no other city has."

To learn more about Friends of Camp McDonald Park, visit <http://www.campmcdonaldpark.org>