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Jan. 10, 2023

Athens approved for \$250,000 grant to turn chicken plant site into a park

The City of Athens will utilize a \$250,000 grant from Dekko Foundation to turn an abandoned chicken plant site into a park featuring a splash pad and all-inclusive playground.

In 2009, Pilgrim's Pride, located on 32 acres on Pryor Street closed its doors and walked away – leaving 600-plus without jobs and an eyesore by Athens State University and near Downtown Athens. After years of negotiations, the City reached an agreement with Pilgrim's to purchase the property. That led to the removal of asbestos, dilapidated buildings and holding ponds; an inspection of bridges crossing the waterway; and the sowing of 32 acres with grass.

The City held community meetings and created preliminary design plans for Sunrise Park. ADEM performed the Phase 1 and 2 environmental studies at its cost to support the City's efforts.

The Athens City Council has allocated \$1 million from the General Fund 2021 surplus to start the project and match Dekko's \$250,000 grant. The project will increase outdoor recreation opportunities for children and their families, giving them an area to become more physically fit and learn to socialize with members of the community.

"We had a dangerous eyesore in the middle of our city that will become a destination spot for families and tourists and an asset for Athens," Mayor Ronnie Marks said.

The Limestone County Legislative Delegation has awarded \$28,967.50 in community grants toward the project, and the Athens Ladies Civitan has donated \$2,500 and is discussing a second donation. Local developers have donated about 20,000 cubic yards of dirt valued at \$1.08 million, and Athens crews are doing site work on the property.

The initial phase will include the entrance from Pryor Street, the playground and splash pad with bathrooms, parking and shade structures.

The goal is to complete and open this phase by spring of 2024.

Future phases include a dog park, amphitheater, green space, food truck area, Singing River Trailhead and retail mixed with residential on the west side.

About Dekko Foundation: The mission is fostering economic freedom through education. Dekko invests in projects that help children and youth, up to age 18, build the skills, knowledge, and character that they'll need to travel the path toward economic freedom.