Horse Farm planners mum on funds

Major fundraising campaign to launch in September to raise needed $30 million

By Katie de la Rosa edelarosa@theadvertiser.com

It’s been a little more than a month since the Lafayette City-Parish Council approved the master plan for the Park at the Horse Farm, but considerable progress has been made toward breaking ground on the 100-acre property by either late this fall or early next spring.

Lafayette Central Park Inc., the nonprofit created solely for the creation and maintenance of the park, is mum on fundraising numbers, though. Executive Director David Calhoun said the organization is taking “a broad approach.”

“We don’t want to reveal our major donors in case other people might take their foot off the gas and let them handle it,” Calhoun said at the Acadiana Press Club meeting on Monday. “We’re also looking for a lot of people to think about how to contribute. They’re the ones who will take their future grandchildren and say, ‘I helped build this park’.”

The nonprofit will launch a major fundraising campaign in September, Calhoun said. Until then, the park is gaining its money “in a quiet way.”

For the first phase of construction, Lafayette Central Park is seeking $30 million—$15 million for the construction itself and $15 million for operational costs once it is built. The first phase will ideally be a third of the entire master plan, which in its entirety includes a great lawn, a dog park, a treehouse and play area. But the nonprofit is still waiting to finalize construction documents before the extent of the first phase will be known.

The nonprofit is hoping to sign a contract with Design Workshop — the Austin-based design and landscaping firm that helped draft the master plan — to work on the construction documents by Friday, said Lafayette Central Park director of planning and design E.B. Brooks.

The first phase won’t

See PARK, Page 6A
Continued from Page 3A

necessarily include the first section of the master plan, the area nearest Johnston Street and Bertrand Drive that will feature a boardwalk, mini golf and a multi-use pavilion for the Lafayette Farmers and Artisans Market.

“We will include whatever we can to draw in young people, who are our market,” Calhoun said.

Currently, the Horse Farm remains under the city’s jurisdiction—a technicality lingering from the 2012 deal in which the University of Louisiana at Lafayette sold it for $5.8 million. Calhoun said the city has leased the Horse Farm to Lafayette Central Park for 99 years, and the organization will assume control whenever it breaks ground for construction.

After the first phase is complete—the timeline for which is unknown considering the uncertainties of fundraising—the nonprofit will wait roughly two to three years before moving forward with phase two.

“We want it to age, like a good wine,” Calhoun said. “We need to sit back and see whether there were some things we missed, and there will be.”

Countless parks from across the U.S. served as inspirations and models for the design of the park, Brooks said. One in particular, though, is nearly identical to what the nonprofit hopes to achieve here.

Another product of Design Workshop, the Blue Hole Regional Park in Wimberley, Texas, has origins similar to the Horse Farm. The Blue Hole is a popular swimming destination in town, Brooks said, and whenever plans to commercially develop the area arose, the community rallied to save it. They created the nonprofit Friends of the Blue Hole to protect, promote and maintain the park. Brooks said almost every aspect of the Horse Farm resembles Blue Hole—save for swimming, as the Lafayette park’s pond will be utilized for other purposes.

More than 7,400 citizens participated in either public forums or online surveys to help develop the master plan, and now Lafayette Central Park is asking for their continued support with fundraising to help move forward. Brooks said more than $20,000 alone was raised through the Buy the Board program, which, for $100, gives donors their own planks of wood with personal inscriptions that will be placed in the future boardwalk.

“The idea is really just come out and enjoy this land,” Calhoun said. “We just want people to enjoy their park.”