



© Copyright 2017 \ All Rights Reserved



Playground likely to open in August



COURTESY PHOTO

THIS IS A FINAL mock-up of what Embrace Park will look like in Norfolk once completed. Emily Afrank, a physical therapist who worked with a planning committee and the City of Norfolk to create this all-inclusive park, said construction should start on the project at the end of June or beginning of July as the fundraising goal has almost been met and equipment is being ordered.

Park construction expected to start soon



WANT TO HELP?

Donations for Embrace Park can be sent to the Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund at 609 W. Norfolk Ave., Norfolk, NE 68701 or made at www.nebcommfound.org/affiliated-funds/donate/1937/ or by scanning the QR code below.

Date: Friday, June 9, 2017
 Frequency: DAILY
 Circulation: 15960
 Clip Size: 126.47 sq. inches
 Ad Rate: \$21.75
 Page/Section: 0001

© Copyright 2017 \ All Rights Reserved

By ERIN BELL

ebell@norfolkdailynews.com

The finish line is near for Norfolk's Embrace Park project.

Emily Afrank, a physical therapist who saw the need for this all-inclusive park and splash pad in the community, said the fundraising goal is almost met and construction is likely to begin at the end of June or beginning of July.

Once started, the park should take — weather permitting — anywhere from four to six weeks to complete, meaning it should be open for use by mid-August.

The park will be built on City of Norfolk land west of the Norfolk Family YMCA.

"It's exciting that we are so close," Afrank said. "I'm excited for it to be done,

"I came into this with a dream and willing to go sell 500,000 cupcakes for a dollar if I needed to, but the committee members stepped up right away and got behind this project."

EMILY AFRANK

NORFOLK PHYSICAL THERAPIST

for the kids to play on it. I'm excited to take my kids there in therapy and do therapy out there on it."

The process of creating the park has taken more than two years — one year with just Afrank working on the project and then another with a committee of fel-

low community volunteers helping.

Afrank said donations are still being accepted, with \$640,000 of the \$700,000 needed for the project having been raised.

But a plan for playground equipment has been finalized with Creative Sites, a company out of Omaha, and the ordering of equipment has started.

"The neat thing about the company that we're going with (is that) the entire playground is fully accessible via wheelchair or walkers or crutches — all the way up to an 8-foot deck," Afrank said. "It is really cool that these kids can go all the way up there."

There will be eight to 10 slides on the playground, and a new feature, called the

► Please see **PARK**, page 10

Park

Continued from Page 1—

cruiser, has been added to the plan.

The cruiser is a piece of equipment that acts like a teeter-totter but which allows a wheelchair to wheel onto it. It's also accessible to kids who may not have the core stability to enjoy a traditional teeter-totter by having something for them to hold onto.

Handicap-accessible swings and a saucer swing are other fun features.

Providing opportunities for integrated play at the park was also important to Afrank.

"For example, we have a net climbing structure that's in the middle of the playground equipment and so someone who may not necessarily be able to use that climbing structure can be on the sidelines (near it)," she said. "A typical game that we've seen played ... is 'monkeys on a tree.' Children who are able to climb the netting climb while maybe a child in a wheelchair shakes the net and has to shake

all the monkeys off. It's just a fun game where kids are able to interact. There's multiple opportunities for that throughout the park."

For activities such as these, the playground will be covered with a soft foam surface. It will be flat to make it accessible, but it will be graded depending on the risk of a fall. That means areas — like under a taller slide — will have more padding than areas where standing activities take place.

"So if a child does fall, the risk of them getting hurt decreases greatly," Afrank said.

The contract for delivering and installing the surface was approved at Monday's Norfolk City Council meeting along with a contract for construction of the play equipment.

Next, the city will seek bids for the installation of the splash pad, Afrank said.

She noted that more than 75 percent of the park would be shaded, which she said was important because there are chil-

dren who are medically fragile and need to be shaded from the sun.

There will be a bike theme throughout the park since it is next to the Landon Bos Memorial Bike Park. A path complete with stop signs, yield signs and a cafe where kids can pretend to order food will surround the playground.

All donors will be recognized on a display at the park.

"We think that's a big important thing we really wanted to do with this park because whether it's \$50 or \$10,000, every donation matters and has helped bring this park to where it is," Afrank said. "We really want it to be a community effort."

One particular donor — the Johnny Carson Foundation — will be recognized at a check presentation on Friday, June 16, at the site of the park. The foundation donated \$180,000 to the park. The second largest donor is Faith Regional Health Services, contributing \$100,000.

There was also a special donation made in memory of Sadie Swan — a young girl who died unexpectedly — in the amount of \$10,000. It will be used toward music boards at the park, Afrank said, since Sadie loved music.

These donations are just a few examples of the support Afrank is thankful for. She's also equally grateful for the committee that helped her make this idea into a reality.

"Honestly, I came into this with a dream and willing to go sell 500,000 cupcakes for a dollar if I needed to, but the committee members who are on our committee stepped up right away and got behind this project," she said. "It wasn't their dream, it was mine, and they kind of made it their dream and they were just as passionate about it as I was. ... Without them and without the Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund, I really don't think we'd be starting on this project right now."