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A bare patch of land south of the main branch of the Central Arkansas Library System, seen here on Saturday, will be developed into a public park after approval from the city of Little Rock. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Colin Murphey)

LR park funding push OK'd

Library foundation to raise money to convert downtown lot

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Little Rock city officials have authorized the Central Arkansas Library System's foundation to raise money to convert a vacant patch of land in downtown Little Rock into a public park.

The land — currently an open lawn with several small trees — encompasses the half-block along East Second Street between Cumberland Street and River Market Avenue, just south of the Central Arkansas Library System's Main Library.

The area previously was occupied by highway ramps that were removed as part of the state's 30 Crossing construction project, which re-worked highway infrastructure in the downtown core.

The Main Library re-opened to the public in late September after it was closed for two years for a multimillion-dollar overhaul.

On Tuesday, the Little Rock Board of Directors approved a resolution authorizing the library system's foundation and other interested parties to conduct the

fundraising campaign and develop the approximately 618 linear feet of land.

The measure lays out certain conditions. Funds cannot be spent on the development of the land without the approval of the city's parks and recreation director and consultants who have worked on a park master plan for the larger swath of acreage freed up by the 30 Crossing changes.

Additionally, developing the land for commercial purposes will not be allowed. The target for implementa-

tion is the first half of 2026, according to city board documents.

The Central Arkansas Library System's foundation is a nonprofit entity with its own board of directors that can accept tax-deductible contributions in support of the library system.

The improvements to the parcel near the Main Library are meant to be compatible with the long-term vision for the newly available 30 Crossing land. The master

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Park

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plan for a future park that would make use of the 30 Crossing acreage recently was finalized by Sasaki, an architecture, planning and design firm that Little Rock tapped to develop the plan.

According to city board documents, any improvements to the vacant land near the Main Library must comply with Sasaki's "phase zero" design: a series of low-cost improvements like lawns and pathways that could be implemented in the lead-up to the construction of the plan's grander, more expensive elements.

The [master plan](#) for the proposed 30 Crossing park calls for adding numerous amenities to the area underneath and adjacent to the Interstate 30 river bridge while making other improvements to the west along East Second Street, including the portion across the street from the Main Library.

Implementing the vision



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laid out in the master plan could cost up to \$128 million, a Sasaki official said earlier this month.

Making some simple additions to the [vacant land](#) near the Main Library, such as shade trees, paths and a programming stage, has been of interest to Nate Coulter, executive director of the Central

Arkansas Library System, for some time.

Coulter told the library system's board in August that Rogers Yarnell, a resident of one of the nearby towers, had estimated those improvements could cost \$100,000. He and Yarnell were in discussions with local Master Gardeners as well as a retired

University of Arkansas at Little Rock botanist regarding the plan, Coulter said at the time.

During Tuesday's board meeting, at-large City Director Dean Kumpuris gave special thanks to Yarnell and Coulter for their efforts, explaining that "they're taking the position that something needs to be done and needs to prove to the community that something can be done."

"Now Rogers Yarnell and I have to get busy raising the money needed to make the space a functioning park next year," Coulter wrote in an email to supporters Wednesday. "We need to raise \$150,000."

He added that City Director Kathy Webb of Ward 3 was "instrumental" in securing the passage of the resolution.

"She committed to donate \$2,500 last night to the project!" Coulter wrote. "If you see her, please thank her for her leadership. This wouldn't be moving forward if she hadn't gotten on board with the resolution weeks ago."