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# News Release

## V.J. Wilkins Foundation announces \$500,000 Challenge Grant

*Matching grant provides for up to \$1 million in Wilson Park Master Plan funds*

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (May 12, 2017) — The V.J. Wilkins Memorial Foundation has generously announced a \$500,000 Challenge Grant toward the advancement of the Wilson Park Master Plan.

The grant is contingent on matching funds, but could result in up to \$1 million being invested to kick off the plan if the full \$500,000 can be matched. The City of Arkansas City's goal is to raise \$1 million.

"We are extremely grateful to the V.J. Wilkins Foundation and Board of Trustees for their support of this important community project since the very beginning," said City Manager Nick Hernandez. "This grant is both a gift and a challenge, but it is a challenge I am confident Arkansas City will rise to meet."

To generate momentum for the project and demonstrate that funds will be used as their donors intended, the City of Arkansas City has initiated the Friends of Wilson Park, a contribution fund residing with Legacy Regional Community Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Winfield.

Legacy accepts cash, checks and credit or debit cards. Payments may be made online at [www.legacyregionalfoundation.org/Donations](http://www.legacyregionalfoundation.org/Donations) or mailed to Legacy Foundation, P.O. Box 701, Arkansas City, KS 67005.

Checks should be made payable to Legacy Foundation with "Friends of Wilson Park" indicated on the check's memo line. Donations may be made to individual components of the Master Plan, if so desired. This also should be noted in the check's memo field. (See next section for further details.)

Legacy also can set up payment plans for donations that span up to three years, with reminders. It also will provide receipts that validate the tax-exempt status of any donations to Friends of Wilson Park.

Park donors will be recognized and thanked publicly on the Friends of Wilson Park Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/WilsonParkFriends](http://www.facebook.com/WilsonParkFriends), unless they specifically request to remain anonymous.

**For immediate release**

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Funds donated for specific portions of the Wilson Park Master Plan will be disbursed to the City only as each portion of the plan enters the planning and construction phase.

Please call the Legacy Regional Community Foundation at (620) 221-7224 or email Executive Director Yazmin Wood at [yazmin.legacy@yahoo.com](mailto:yazmin.legacy@yahoo.com) with any questions about the donation process.

## **Master Plan components and committees**

For those interested in donating to only a portion of the Wilson Park Master Plan, rather than the overall fund, the following options are available — please indicate preferred portion(s) on memo line:

**Phase 0** — currently under way

- **Train Improvements** — fundraising target: \$109,000.

**Phase 1 (Challenge Grant)** — total fundraising target: \$1 million

- **Farm and Art Market;**
- **Restrooms;**
- **Rotunda Improvements;**
- **Splash Pad or Interactive Fountain.**

**Phase 2**

- **Memorial Garden or Peace Garden** — fundraising target: \$366,000;
- **Playground** — fundraising target: \$872,000.

**Phase 3**

- **Events Center** — fundraising target: \$4.5 million.

**Phase 4**

- **Library Expansion** — fundraising target: \$2 million.

The following committees are in the process of being formed and applications can still be submitted:

- Fundraising Committee
- Peace Garden Design Committee
- Playground Design Committee
- Public Art Advisory Committee
- Splash Pad Design Committee

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To apply for a committee, pick up a Wilson Park Master Plan brochure in the Utility Billing Office at City Hall, located at 118 W. Central Ave., and return it to Public Information Officer Andrew Lawson.

The brochure and accompanying volunteer interest form also can be found online and downloaded or printed at [www.arkansascityks.gov/Government/Parks/Master-Plan-Brochure.pdf](http://www.arkansascityks.gov/Government/Parks/Master-Plan-Brochure.pdf). Interest in a particular committee also may be submitted by email to [alawson@arkansascityks.gov](mailto:alawson@arkansascityks.gov).

“We urge people to let us know soon on which committees they would like to serve,” Lawson said.

“This is especially true of the Fundraising Committee. We would like to see it up and running by the end of May. These committees will have a lot of creative design control over each element of the Master Plan. You do not have to be a resident of the city to apply — just someone who loves Wilson Park!”

### **Challenge Grant details**

The V.J. Wilkins Foundation Challenge Grant is contingent on the City of Arkansas City and/or other private donors providing matching dollars.

Without confirmation of this achievement or documentation of sufficient efforts being expended to meet the Challenge Grant, the Challenge Grant will expire July 1, 2018.

If the Challenge Grant is achieved, funds will be disbursed in equal amounts no later than calendar years 2019 and 2020. If other applications for funding for 2017 and 2018 do not materialize, the Wilkins Foundation may provide funding earlier than in the years originally identified.

The foundation has requested memorializing this gift with naming rights associated with the splash pad and the Farm and Art Market, in an appropriate plaque identifying the foundation as initiating the funding for the Wilson Park Master Plan renovation project.

### **About the Wilson Park Master Plan**

Since the inception of the V.J. Wilkins Memorial Foundation, Wilson Park has been identified as a central community gathering point that is crucial to the cultural and artistic life of the Ark City community.

The Wilkins Foundation’s investment in the park began early in 2014. The movie projection equipment, sound system and V.J. Wilkins Memorial Stage at the Wilson Park rotunda all were made possible by a grant received in 2014 from the foundation, in order to promote arts throughout the city.

In 2015, the City of Arkansas City was awarded a \$33,500 grant from the Wilkins Foundation to develop a master plan for Wilson Park and the vacant City-owned lot just to the north.

The scope of the plan included looking at the potential for a cultural events center and possibly expanding the park into the recently vacated hospital property at Birch Avenue and First Street.

A steering committee of citizens and affiliated representatives was formed to direct the process.

The Wilson Park Master Plan steering committee members are:

- City Commissioner Charles Tweedy III — originally appointed as a planning commissioner;
- Jill Wineinger — Arkansas City Beautification and Tree Advisory Board vice chair;
- Pam Crain — Arkansas City Convention and Visitors Bureau tourism specialist;
- Kristi Old and Brittany Carder — Arkansas City Farm and Art Market coordinators;
- Blanche Schmidt — Arkansas City Public Library Board of Trustees president;
- Angie Bruce, Richard Hensley and Dr. Nick Rogers — citizens at large.

Also present at most of the meetings were V.J. Wilkins Foundation board members Otis Morrow and Karen Zeller, as well as Hernandez and Lawson.

LK Architecture, of Wichita, was retained by the City to assist with developing the master plan and related materials. The architects who worked on the project were Jeff Best, director of landscape architecture; Aaron Smith, design architect; and William Wells, landscape architect.

The steering committee met four times in 2015 — on Sept. 29, Oct. 14, Nov. 2 and Dec. 7 — to discuss and develop the master plan. The plan was finalized at a meeting June 6, 2016, for presentation to the Wilkins Foundation last July in Denver, Colorado. A rollout planning meeting was held March 13.

The Wilson Park Master Plan has been rolled out throughout March and April at a variety of community events, including the 2017 Outdoor Friday Family Movie Series, Arbor Day, Cowley's Outdoor Market, the Cowley County Health and Safety Fair, and a Chamber of Commerce coffee.

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