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Highland Village getting \$3.5 million for I-35E project's impact on park

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Expansion of Interstate 35E in Denton County means Highland Village will receive over \$3.5 million from the Texas Department of Transportation as compensation for the impact of construction on the city's largest park.

About 12 acres of Copperas Branch Park on the south shores of Lewisville Lake will be needed for construction of a new bridge as part of the larger \$1.1 billion expansion project.

Highland Village leases the 75-acre park from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It has a boat ramp, a fishing pier, baseball and soccer fields and a picnic area. It will be closed for four years while TxDOT uses it as a staging area.

The Highland Village council late last month authorized the city manager to execute the agreement between TxDOT and the city.

While the city won't have the same lake access for a while, city spokeswoman Laurie Mullens said the TxDOT funds will allow development of nearby Doubletree Ranch Park. The city purchased that land from the Trust for Public Land in 2009.

The ranch property has a long history in Highland Village. It was owned by Robert DuVall, who helped incorporate the city and was its first mayor.

DuVall's great-grandparents had a dairy farm on the land, and the first council meetings were held in a barn on the grounds.

About \$2.8 million of the \$3.5 million will be used in developing the 37 acres. Doubletree Park will have soccer fields, a pavilion, walking trails and a natural habitat viewing area.

Additional funding from the city's 4B sales tax, which must be designated for community development projects, will allow the Doubletree Ranch project to be bid for construction in January.

Due to the revenue lost at Copperas Branch, the Corps of Engineers is requiring that \$641,834 of the money be used for other areas the corps leases. Some of the money will be used to build biking and walking trails on both sides of highway.

The first phase of the highway expansion, designed to ease traffic gridlock between Dallas and Denton, will add two reversible lanes and one general-purpose lane in each direction for 28 miles. along the 28-mile route.

All of the affected cities and agencies — including TxDOT, the Army Corps of Engineers, Highland Village, Lewisville, Hickory Creek and Lake Dallas — had to sign off on the plan. So far, no loans have been taken out to fund the project.

"Denton County has been a great partner because they come to the table with their regional toll revenues," TxDOT spokeswoman Donna Huerta said. Revenue generated by new toll lanes will help fund the second phase of the expansion project.

Construction should begin in late fall and is expected to be complete by late 2016.

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