



OAK CLIFF 18 HRS AGO



Oak Cliff deck park gets unanimous OK from Dallas City Council

 *Julie Fancher, Staff Writer* [t](#) [e](#)



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The Dallas City Council unanimously authorized funding for a new deck park over Interstate 35E with the hopes of physically reconnecting north and east Oak Cliff, areas that had been torn apart decades ago by years of highway building.

The vote at Wednesday's council meeting will allow the Texas Department of Transportation to move forward with building the foundations and part of the deck park as part of the Southern Gateway highway redevelopment project. Construction is expected to begin later this summer, but TxDOT officials say they will proceed at the city's direction once the city signs a funding and maintenance agreement.

The proposed deck park, which would eventually be a 5.5 acre park, would stretch from Marsalis Avenue to Ewing Avenue. It was part of recommendations from the Texas Department of Transportation's CityMAP report last year that suggested a revamp of that part of I-35E now dubbed the Southern Gateway, as well as the city streets around it.

The study estimated the changes could spur more than \$166 million in development for one of the poorest parts of Dallas.

As part of Wednesday's vote, the council authorized about \$7 million in funding to build the full foundations for the project, but only half the deck, from Ewing Avenue to Lancaster Road.

The cost to build the full foundations but only half the deck park is about \$38.5 million, though the city would only pay for 20 percent, or about \$7 million. The rest of the project would be paid for by the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

Though the park would be built within TxDOT's right of way, it would be owned and operated by Dallas. City officials would later have to identify a funding source for the park's amenities and programs.

Securing funding for the deck park had been a struggle for the city, which ultimately led to a unique funding proposal from the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

Michael Morris, director of transportation for the Council of Governments, suggested the city use transportation development credits, given to the city by the Regional Transportation Committee, as a contingency under the assumption that the city would include the project as part of the bond program now expected to be taken to voters in November.



Sandra Williams (left), environmental specialist with TxDOT, speaks to Linda Smith, an Oak Cliff resident, before a public hearing on the proposed Oak Cliff Deck Park at Yvonne A. Ewell Townview Magnet Center in Dallas on April 25. The deck park, similar to Klyde Warren Park, would be over Interstate 35E in Oak Cliff. (Rose Baca/Staff Photographer)



An aerial view from Ewing looking south, in a rendering from a Conceptual Plan for the Southern Gateway Public Green, a deck park over I-35E from S. Marsalis Avenue to S. Ewing Avenue, adjacent to the Dallas Zoo. (City of Dallas)

The credits would come from money held by the Council of Governments that is earmarked for local governments that develop policies related to air quality, sustainable development, travel demand and other issues.

If the council approves using the credits and the bond later passes, the \$8 million in credits could then be used for other projects.

If the bond fails the credits would remain dedicated to building the park, but the city wouldn't have that money for other future projects, such as improving intersections.

The source of funding hasn't been the only point of contention about this project. Former Council member Carolyn King Arnold, who represented the east side of the proposed bridge park, criticized the price of the project and said that impacted residents were being shut out of the process.

Two area residents spoke in favor of the project Wednesday.

"We 100 percent support the deck park," said resident Lester Houston. "We want this deck park in our community where we can expand. ...It's long overdue and we believe this deck park will improve the quality of life in this area and lastly we hoping [it] will encourage middle income people to move back to these areas."

Arnold lost her bid for re-election last month and was replaced with her predecessor, Dwaine Caraway, a strong deck park proponent.

Shortly before the vote, council member Scott Griggs, who represents north Oak Cliff, praised the work council members had done with community leaders, TxDOT and the North Central Texas Council of Governments to find a new way to build interstate highways in urban areas and to help reconnect the community.

"We talked about how this road had damaged a community and we wanted to bring a deck park to stitch back together Oak Cliff, east and west of I-35," he said. "So not only is this a great day for the communities on the east and west side, but this is a good day for Dallas, for the COG and for TxDOT because this represents going forward the next generation of how highways are going to be built in the city of Dallas."