

# HORIZON WEST REGIONAL PARK

## BIG PLANS ARE ON THE HORIZON



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**H**orizon West Regional Park (HWRP) is located between New Independence Parkway and Bridgewater Middle School, with the main entrance on Hamlin Groves Trail. At 215 acres, it is among Orange County's largest urban parks. By 2025, HWRP will have all the amenities of a typical neighborhood park and more. Because of its size and unique geography, the park's "natural use" areas include several distinct Florida ecosystems.

For the past decade, residents have used HWRP for recreational purposes like cycling, horseback riding, hiking and dog-walking. During much of that time, Orange County Parks and Recreation has kept about five miles of grass trails cleared, which is unusual. Typical policy is to close undeveloped park land during the pre-construction process.

The decision to allow natural space usage in HWRP has turned out well — generating public interest in the park

by Jerry Blank  
Community Contributor



and leading to steadily increasing visitation. I discovered Horizon West Regional Park soon after moving to Horizon West in 2021. Since then, I've had the pleasure of doing volunteer trail maintenance, trail mapping, sharing photos of the park's wildlife and natural beauty on Facebook, and making new friends on the trail.

The seeds for park improvements that are currently taking place were planted in 2019, when our District 1 Commissioner joined County Parks staff to host public meetings and conduct surveys collecting public input on development plans. That level of grass-roots participation in the planning process is a welcome change from how such projects were planned in the 1900s — a trend worth continuing!

AMENITIES ON NEXT PAGE...

The resulting master plan, revealed in 2020, was divided into construction phases, with the first phase subsequently split into Phase 1A (currently under construction) and Phase 1B (in design stage). It also defines four usage zones.

## ACTIVE ZONE

The central portion of the park will soon have a shaded playground and restrooms adjoining the west parking lot. Future construction will add a splash pad, opportunities for field sports, basketball, tennis, pickleball and a community recreation center.

## LAKE ZONE

Adjacent to Lake Hartley, the south third of the park will soon have a picnic shelter/event pavilion surrounded by a small network of paved trails. It's a natural setting for hiking, fishing and viewing wildlife. Potential future amenities include a kayak/canoe launch, a disc golf course and additional trails.

## NATURAL ZONE

The northeast corner is part of the park's "natural space" which encompasses 5 acres of long-leaf pine sandhill and 15 acres of old-growth sand live oak forest. The future HW Library (opening in 2025, see page 56) is located here. Additional land has been set aside for possible future use by Central Florida YMCA, but there are no current development plans.

## PASSIVE RECREATION ZONE

Another natural zone, this quadrant has about 30 acres of sand pines, live oaks and other native trees, plus another five of upland Florida scrub. With the most developed network of hiking trails in the park, it's already a popular destination for hikers. A small picnic shelter will be built in Phase 1A. Possible future development includes a dog park, nature-based outdoor education, a botanical garden and trail network expansion.

CONSTRUCTION PHASES ON NEXT PAGE...



**ACTIVE ZONE** will feature a playground with shade sails at first. Future plans call for a community center with performance/events areas.



**LAKE ZONE** will feature a large event pavilion/picnic shelter, paved trails and a boardwalk/fishing pier at Lake Hartley.



**NATURAL ZONE** will preserve a bit of "old Florida" with dense sand live oak forest. It offers paved walking trails and unpaved hiking and equestrian trails.



**PASSIVE ZONE** will include 35 acres of natural landscapes, picnic shelter plus future planned dog park, botanical garden and trail network expansion

# HORIZON WEST REGIONAL PARK CONSTRUCTION PHASES

## PHASE 1A CONSTRUCTION

Phase 1A, already underway, will provide basic infrastructure, paved access, utilities, signage, and retention ponds, plus amenities:

- Two paved parking lots, including EV charging
- Pedestrian/bicycle sidewalk access from Hamlin Groves Trail and Tiny Road
- Restroom with water fountains and bottle filler
- Large playground with shade sails
- Picnic shelter with three picnic tables
- Larger event pavilion, with eight picnic tables, charcoal grills, bicycle rack and water fountains

## PHASE 1B CONSTRUCTION

This phase will begin the addition of major amenities. Currently budgeted amenities and facilities include:

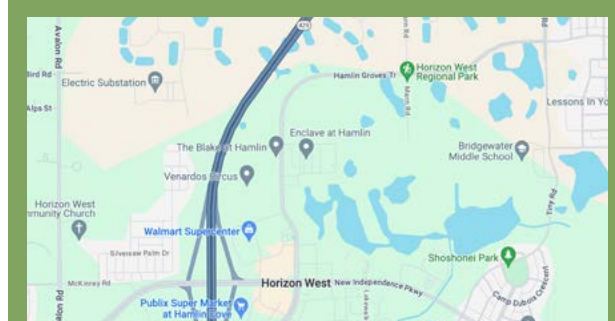
- Splash pad
- A third picnic shelter/pavilion
- Boardwalk and fishing pier at Lake Hartley
- 3-acre open mowed grass area
- Additional trails, including a perimeter trail around the northwest pond
- Extension of the west parking lot and two new parking lots, which can facilitate farmer's markets and food truck events
- Overflow parking area (grass) for larger events

## FUTURE PHASES

The evolution of HWRP through its final phase may take place over decades, since each phase must be funded before construction plans can be drawn. The master plan has a list of possible amenities to be included in future phases:

- Dog park
- Kayak/canoe launch
- Baseball/softball fields
- Pickleball
- Basketball courts
- Multi-purpose fields
- Tennis courts
- Disc golf

## GETTING THERE



HWRP can be conveniently accessed from the nearby 429 expressway, as well as from an extensive network of local streets and paved pedestrian/cycle trails. Orange County's 2012 Trails Master Plan envisions the eventual connection of the Tiny Road trailway to the West Orange Trail in downtown Winter Garden.

The park has not been assigned a street address, but Google Maps will provide the correct location of the park entrance if you search for "Horizon West Regional Park".

- Outdoor exercise stations
- Community center and performing arts stage
- Botanical garden
- Landscape restoration
- Additional trails

After construction of Phase 1A facilities is completed (tentatively, early in 2025), the park—which has already grown in popularity—will be an even more attractive regional amenity for Orange County, and specifically Horizon West, residents!

## HW REGIONAL PARK UPDATES

Follow the journey of the Horizon West Regional Park as each phase unfolds.

[www.jerryblank.com/hwrp](http://www.jerryblank.com/hwrp)

