



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED, BETH HEILE

This rendering is a side view of Royal Park in Hildebran, which is currently under construction.



Tex's Fish Camp owners and associates are, from left, Jeanne Wade, Tommie Spake, Robin Burns, Jackie Crump and Tamika Garrison. Seated in the front is Tex Burns, who helped his dad (Tamika Garrison's grandfather) build Tex's Fish Camp.

## Hildebran

From A1

The first building phase of the park includes a covered stage for bands, a splash pad, concession stand with restrooms, walking track and inclusive playground equipment, Heile said.

Hildebran Mayor Wendell Hildebrand said after the school burned in 2016, town leaders wanted to put something in its place. He said people like coming out for the cruise-ins and to hear a band, but the town only has a temporary stage.

"So that's why we want to put the permanent stage up," Hildebrand said.

He said the town decided on a splash pad as a water element to take the place of the community pool that closed and has since been filled in. Hildebrand said the concession stand will replace the one that had to be torn down.

Heile said the town's fundraising campaign, in partnership with the trail association, is aimed to ensure the park is completed without having to scale back on the project.

Some businesses have already stepped up with donations.

Heile said DDI of Hickory has donated \$15,000 for the amphitheater made in memory of Wayne Davis.

Wayne Davis' son Dustin Davis said he wants to give back to the community where his family settled in the late 1700s, Heile said. Very involved in town sports, Wayne Davis and Dustin Davis coached the Hildebran Storm. Four generations of the Davis family have spent hours playing baseball in the field that joins Royal Park, he said.

When Dustin Davis found out about the Royal Park project, he knew he wanted to be involved, Heile said.

Davis' company, DDI of Hickory, is the general contractor overseeing the downtown revitalization.

Heile said two years ago, for its 50th anniversary celebration, Tex's Fish Camp chose to support Royal Park before details were finalized, Heile said.

Heile said seeing an inclusive playground as a need in Hildebran, the family wanted to bridge the gap and hoped to be able to fund one piece of equipment. With the help of the community, the restaurant raised \$3,600, enough to sponsor the entire playground at Royal Park, she said.

The Burke River Trail Association donated \$5,000 for the walking trail. With Royal Park being the eastern end of the Burke River Trail and a key trailhead, it made sense for the organization to support the town's efforts, Heile said.

Heile said the developing 40-mile Burke River Trail will run along Center Street as it connects Long View to Henry River Mill Village through the Hildebran town center.

"Supporting Royal Park is in line with our mission as a downtown gathering space (and) will continue to foster a sense of community that has been important to the families that donated to the park, and all the families with ties to Hildebran," Heile said. "It will also bring more people downtown to eat and shop before or after spending time at the park."

Mayor Hildebrand said the park should be ready by spring but the town will hold a grand opening in fall 2025 to allow the grass to be seeded and fully come up.

"I just hope the people enjoy it," Hildebrand said.

To make a donation to Royal Park or find out more information, visit <https://rivertrail.betterburke.com/royal-park/>.

## Repair

From A1

Morganton Parks and Recreation Director Bryan Fish said the smell was rancid when staff first made it into the flooded park. He said the combination of the contaminants in the water plus the wet food from the concessions stand sent a putrid odor throughout the building.

Catawba Meadows wasn't the only park that took a hit.

On the Catawba River Greenway, sand covers the path in some parts. An ice machine was carried from the Town Tavern area all the way to the greenway at Catawba Meadows, where it still sat nearly two weeks after the storm.

Trees fell on different parts of the greenway. Bridges and boardwalks over or near the river have been damaged.

Pieces of the greenway boardwalk behind the River Village shopping center were torn apart and mangled, moved by the flooding and current.

The water was so high and powerful at the Catawba River Soccer Complex, next to the greenway and behind the Ingles grocery, that the soccer goals were lifted over the fencing, which was also battered.

"I was devastated, probably a little emotional," Fish said. "But the times we're in right now? Yes, the ball fields are not in great shape and are going to need some work, but there's people who have lost homes and possibly family members to the storm. So in comparison, it's not as bad as some other people may have it."

Fish estimated repairs for Catawba Meadows could cost millions of dollars. City Manager Sally Sandy said the city's insurance, including flood insurance, plus FEMA funding would help, but it will take time before the city knows exactly how much repairs will cost.

For now, the city is in the cleanup phase. Fish said city staff have been suiting up in gloves, masks and boots to clean out the buildings hit hard by flooding.

"It's been a full team effort," Fish said.

It could be months before Catawba Meadows can be reopened.

The city has reopened the following parks:

- Freedom Park (Independence Boulevard)
- Martha's Park (Collett Street)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Park (Alphabet Lane off Bouchelle Street)
- Skate park (King Street near Collett Street)
- Carbon City Park (Carbon City Road near Morganton Department of Public Safety Station No. 2)

Until the other parks can be fully assessed for safety, the city asked people to stay out of the parks and off the greenway. Sandy said the



CHRISSY MURPHY PHOTOS, THE NEWS HERALD

The fencing around Field 5 at Catawba Meadows Park was destroyed by floodwaters from Hurricane Helene.



Workers pick up debris at Catawba Meadows Park after floods from Hurricane Helene tore through the park.

storm damage could be dangerous.

"We know how important our facilities are for people, so we're going to do our best to make this as short a time as possible. But it is going to take some time, and we ask for people's patience.... We don't need to add more tragedy to this event," Sandy said.

She said once the damaged parks and the greenway have been evaluated,

the city will look at reopening each park in phases.

There may be opportunities to volunteer to help with cleaning up the parks sometime in the future, Sandy said.

Seeing the dedication of city employees and community members has been a light in a dark place throughout the storm, Sandy said.

"I could not be prouder of the city of Morganton

employees and their response to this disaster, or more grateful to all of the outside help and our community's offers of help," Sandy said. "In the face of the devastation, those are the sides of this that let you know how much good is still out there."

Chrissy Murphy is a staff writer and can be reached at [cmurphy@morganton.com](mailto:cmurphy@morganton.com) or at 828-432-8941.

# Sossoman

Funeral Home & Crematory Center

Hannah Lipford

**Professional Service with Compassion and Care**

**Our Family Serving Yours Since 1949**  
1011 South Sterling Street • Morganton, NC 28655  
Phone: (828) 437-3211 • [www.Sossomanfh.com](http://www.Sossomanfh.com)

**Be prepared before the next power outage.**

# It's not just a generator.

# It's a power move.™

Receive a free 5-year warranty with qualifying purchase\* - valued at \$535.

**Call 877-335-0846 to schedule your free quote!**

**GENERAC®**

\*Terms and Conditions apply.