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The Baldwin County Board of Commissioners, state officials, and members of the Milledgeville-Baldwin Chamber of Commerce cheer as local youth cut the ribbon to officially open Oconee Heights Mini Park.

Baldwin County opens Oconee Heights Mini Park

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The Baldwin County Board of Commissioners, County Manager Carlos Tobar, and many other county employees, state representatives, and citizens gathered Aug. 14 for Fun in the Heights, the

debut of the Oconee Heights Mini Park.

"The commissioners never gave up on Oconee Heights. This is the first evidence of the county's commitment to revitalize this neighborhood," said Tobar. "We are here to dedicate this park to this community and celebrate its

rebirth."

The Oconee Heights Mini Park is located at 124 Coombs Ave. and is the first project completed in an over \$10 million investment into Oconee Heights infrastructure over the next three-and-a-half

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years.

Director of Georgia College's Center for Health & Social Issues Dr. Damian Francis assisted the county in creating the Oconee Heights Collaborative that met for over four years on a monthly basis in the neighborhood to discuss needs, changes, and more.

"Many of the ideas, including this park, were birthed at these meetings," said Tobar.

The park was funded by a \$50,000 grant from T-Mobile and completed with the partnership of many individuals and organizations. The park features playground equipment including a rock wall, two slides, climbing structures, and musical instruments such as a xylophone and

drums.

Georgia College wrote the grant to T-Mobile for funding for the park and GCSU Professor of Art Valerie Aranda, the Department of Public Health's SHINE, and Aranda's students created the crosswalks around the park. County Engineer Brian Wood designed the park and Road Superintendent Keith Green graded the parcel it was built on.

Leading to the project's completion, Assistant Road Superintendent Deryl Nelson coordinated with Fowler Flemister's team to get the concrete down, Georgia Power put up the lighting at the park, Brighter Days Ministry assisted in bringing the project to fruition, T-bones Nursery provided the landscaping, and Code Enforcement Officer Lisa Marks cleaned up parcels of land around the area.

"Governments work slowly, and this has been almost eight years of work," said District 1 Commissioner Emily Davis, who represents Oconee Heights. "Our partners have worked hard and have impacted our community. This is an awesome development, and we will be working hard over the next three years to improve the requests that you have shared to us. We have appreciated all the feedback, the good and the negative."

The initial infrastructure improvements were announced in June 2023, funded by a \$5 million federal investment by U.S. Senators Rev. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff. Warnock was not present at the ribbon

cutting but Regional Outreach Coordinator Reggie Cofer was on hand to represent Ossoff.

"We're here to be of service however and whenever we can. Senator Ossoff joins you in celebrating this awesome occasion and he plans to continue to work for you in D.C. to support Georgians and Baldwin County," said Cofer.

On Aug. 19, Baldwin County received \$1.25 million for sewer, streets, flood, and drainage improvements in the Oconee Heights target area for Phase I of the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy.

"The project will benefit 223, of whom 217 (97%) are low-to-moderate-income, persons. Additionally, the county proposes to reconstruct two substandard housing units, benefiting six persons, of which 100% are low-to-moderate income persons," said Tobar. "The total project cost is \$1,626,989 with \$376,989 in match and leverage."

State Representative Floyd Griffin, who grew up in Oconee Heights, was present at the ceremony and spoke to how meaningful it was to see development on the south side. He reminisced about growing up with attendees of the ceremony and stated he looked forward to future developments.

"I want to thank everyone involved with improving the quality of life on the south side of town. I feel very proud of what is going on today and what is in the future for the south side and Oconee Heights," said Griffin.