

City of Crestview Environmental Center  
Revitalization and Rehabilitation

# Master Plan



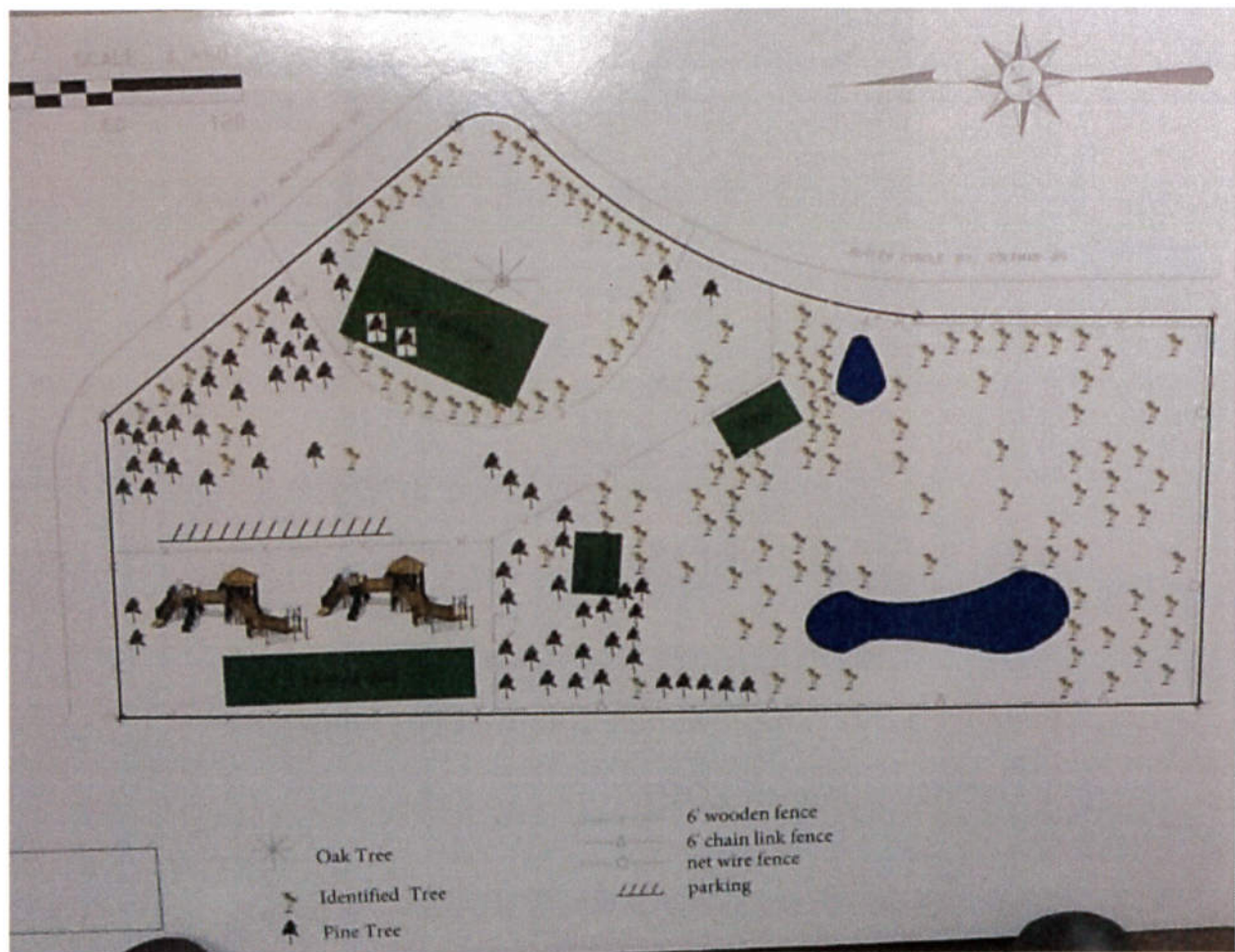
Prepared by: The Kiwanas Club of Crestview

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## Crestview Environmental Center Revitalization and Rehabilitation

The Kiwanis Organization of Crestview, FL; would like to submit it's master plan for the rehabilitation and revitalization of the John McMahon Environmental Center. The Kiwanis Organization took on this Project in 2013, as it's community project. The Kiwanis Club of Crestview is committed to spearheading the efforts with the City to revitalize the Center.

In 2014, the Kiwanis Club received approval from the City Council to develop a master plan for the refurbishing the facility and means of fund raising. A preliminary concept was presented, and an open house held to receive input from the community as to how best utilize this space.



## OBJECTIVE

To provide a local facility for education of local environmental displays and a facility for the entire community and community organizations to utilize and grow as the City grows.

PRELIMINARY CONCEPT – as presented to the Public









**Environmental Center Property**

Aerial View of Existing Grounds (next page)

- 1 – City Street Department Storage
- 2 – Fire Tower
- 3 – Picnic Pavillion
- 4 - Environmental Center Structure
- 5 & 6 – water ponds
- 7 – Butterfly garden

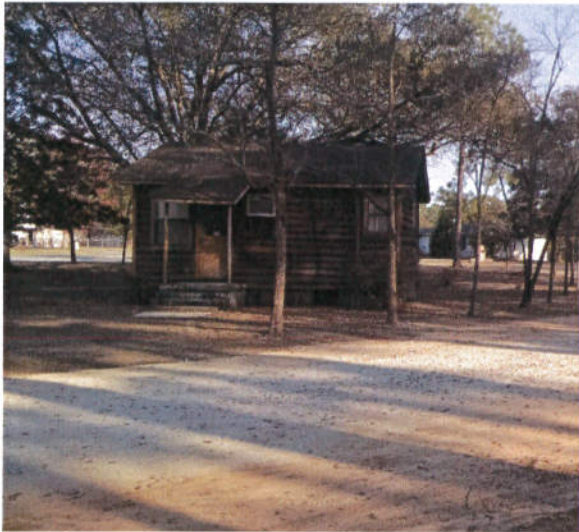






### Property Description

The property consists of 2.53 acres and has three buildings and a fire tower. One building is the Environmental Center, another is a scout building, and another is a storage building for the fire tower. The 2 small buildings will need to be torn down because they are rotting and falling down. Additionally, there is a covered pavilion with picnic tables for the public use.



On the north side of the property is a large chain-link fenced area, which currently has a covered storage barn that houses miscellaneous street department items for the City.



The property's main grounds are fenced in with a 6 ft wooden privacy fence on the northwest corner of the main building and continuing around to the southeast corner of the building. The remaining property is fenced in with a chainlink fence.



There are 2 ponds on the property, each stocked with fish. One of the ponds was project of the scouts, and includes a waterfall recirculating the pond water. There are over 100 native trees on the property, all have been identified, thanks to the efforts of the Boy Scouts.

The property is bordered by Mapoles Street and Butler Avenue.

During the 1950's, the Forest Service erected a fire tower on this site and staffed it until the early 1970's. The tower and site was then deemed surplus and the Forest Service discontinued the maintenance of both.

In 1979, retired forest ranger and local resident John McMahon opened the Environmental Center to share his love of the outdoors with the community.

In 2004, the Florida State Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services deeded the property, including the tower, to the City of Crestview. Since that time the City and Mr. McMahon have maintained the property.

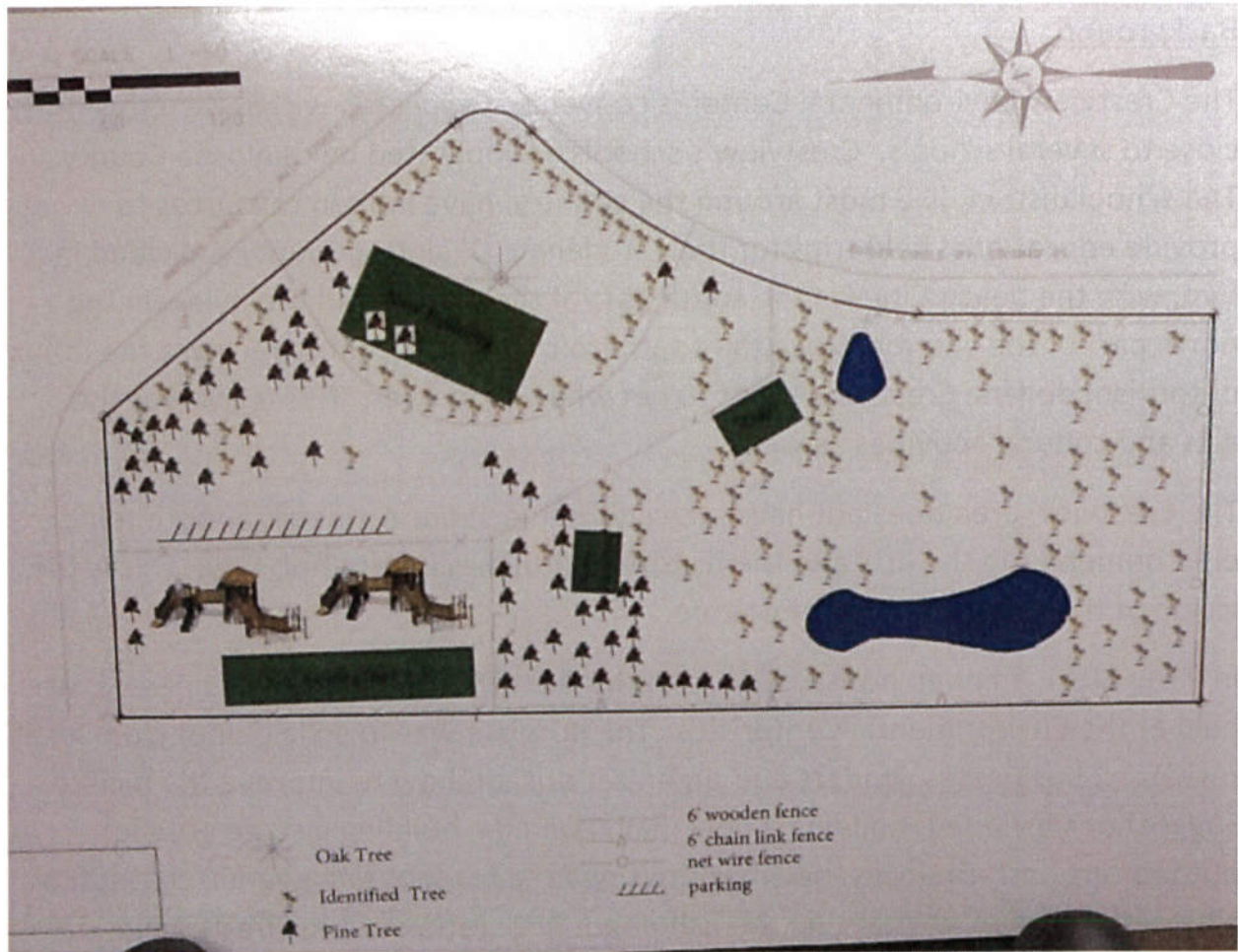


## **Background**

The Crestview Environmental Center is conveniently located within the City limits, close to several schools. Crestview's schools are operated by Okaloosa County. The school district, like most around the country, have limited resources to provide educational field trips for their students. Okaloosa County is divided in two; with the beach Cities in the south part of the county and Crestview in the north part of the county. Since the southern part of the county receives the influx of tourism dollars; Crestview tends to get what is left over. This is true for the arts and cultural activities as well.

The Crestview area does not have a facility to teach our residents about their environment and the arts and the history that makes up the Hub City. This is the vision of the rehabilitation committee.

In early 2014, an open house, sponsored by the Kiwanis and local businesses, was held at the Environmental Center site. The purpose was to solicit input from local residents, businesses, leaders and organizations, on how to improve the facility. Suggestions included; building a new main building, building a stage area for outdoor art performances, having a fire ring area for scouting events; creation of a butterfly garden, revitalizing the fish pond, restoration of the Fire Tower; installing a playground, etc. One thing was clear from the input, is that residents feel this is an underutilized City asset and could provide a facility for several community organizations and cultural events, to be held. Below is a concept drawing incorporating many of the ideas from this event.



In late 2014, the fire tower was listed on the National Look Out Registry. A dedication ceremony took place in early 2015.





### **Potential Uses or Projects**

1) The facility is home to the largest arborarium in Florida, with 100 identified types of trees. The trees have all been identified, thanks to the efforts of eagle scouts of the past. Visitors receive a list of all of the trees and their corresponding identification number. It is important to our Center to maintain the award winning Arborarium. The Plan recommends replacing any trees that have died or have fallen over the years, with new saplings. Some of the trees will need trimming, to maintain their health. An arborist would be consulted, through the County Extension Office to determine the extent of any trimming. (The trees will all stay in tact. However some of the smaller brush trees will be transplanted to a new location on the grounds, if needed, for their protection during construction activities.) The goal is to maintain the arborarium at 100 trees. This work would be done with volunteers. Tree donations can be secured from locally nurseries.









2) The covered picnic pavilion, also located on the property, currently has 4 large picnic tables with benches for visitors to use. The structure is in good shape and would need cosmetic work to brighten up the area.





3) The grounds are home to 2 ponds. The plans call for the larger pond to be refurbished and outfitted with new pumping facilities and aquatic flora to promote a healthy environment for the fish. The large pond is also home to another Eagle Scout project, a water fall feature. This feature also needs to be rehabilitated with new pumping facilities. The ponds would then be tentatively stocked with koi or native fish. Visitors would be able to sit by the pond and enjoy the sound of the water fall while trying to identify the fish, as displayed on a kiosk type information board. Park benches would be placed around this area as well as a picnic area.

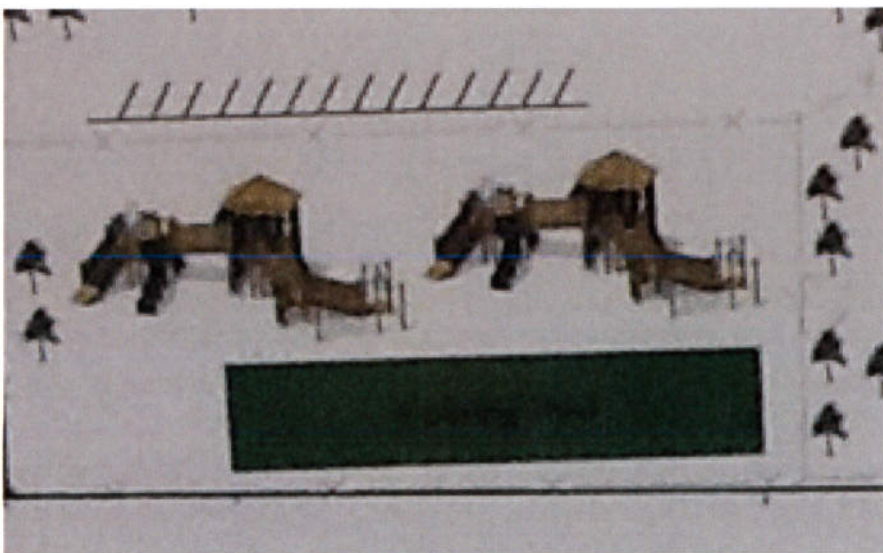








4) The area on the north west side of the property, which currently houses storage for the City streets department, would make a good location for a playground. The playground would be designed to fit into the surrounding park setting. This area is located next to the covered pavilion, which makes this ideal for families to watch their children play.





5) The main building would need to be replaced. It currently has many building code violations, and has asbestos shingled siding. The plan is to build a new prefabricated building as the main building. The old building would need to be demolished, but not before historical photos are taken. These photos will be part of the history display in the new Center. The new building would consist of different areas for specific displays, such as fish displays, butterfly displays, historical displays, animal's displays, etc. Additionally, there would be a multi-purpose room for use for organizations, clubs, etc. The room would be treated like all other City facilities and would be rented to the organization. This would be a source of income for the Center. Restrooms would also be housed in this structure. There are many designs for the building, including added solar panels to provide part or all of the electrical needs of the facility. This would be part of the design phase. Currently, there are several ideas for a building that incorporates the fire tower as a display. This would limit egress into the tower area only when the facility is open.







6) The displays from the current building would be updated and placed in the new facility. The community will be asked for donations for exhibits at the Center. Each piece will display the donator's name, and a description of the exhibit article.



7) Incorporate a walking path within the main grounds. The path would meander through the trees, the gardens, and the ponds. The path would be covered with mulch to preserve the natural setting and protect it from the heavy foot traffic as well as adding nutrients back into the ground. Interactive displays would discuss the ponds, butterfly gardens, etc.



8) An outdoor covered stage could be constructed with grass seating areas, so residents can enjoy local talent, and presentations, while sitting in the shaded grassy area in their favorite lawn chair or blanket. Local theater groups and musicians have expressed their interest in this type of venue. The stage size is not large, and would tentatively sit where the current main building is located, facing to the west.



*Conceptual view from an outdoor stage*

9) The grounds also have a butterfly garden. This garden would need to be totally redone, and new plants brought in as well as nurturing the existing plants. The University of Florida Cooperative Extension Office would offer their assistance in developing and maintaining the garden.



10) The Fire tower has been listed on the National Historical Lookout Tower listing. The Fire tower history will be a cornerstone of the Center. Currently, a new chapter of the Fire Tower Association is in the infancy of forming. Grants will be sought to restore and preserve the structure.





## **Support**

The schools in the area; particularly the elementary and middle school students would benefit from this facility because it would provide valuable local knowledge of their surroundings; environmentally and culturally, in one spot. The cost to bus the students would be a minimum burden on the tax payers, verses out of town trips. School children would be challenged with providing displays and would provide opportunities for contests, such as poster contests, etc. The teachers would be able to utilize the facilities resources into their lesson plans. When the students see and/or touch what they are learning about in the classroom, it will reinforce the lesson. Additionally, high school students have to earn several hours of community serviced prior to graduation. The Center would benefit from this volunteer force, to keep the facility staffed and maintained.

The local scouting community has already been involved with projects. The vision is to have more of them involved. Having meetings held around a fire pit, learning about the outdoors; outdoors. Scouts would be given an active role in maintaining the facility in order to achieve their merit badges.

The local arts groups, have embraced the idea of an outdoor stage. This could be home for musical performances, plays, lectures, and poetry readings. Having an outdoor stage would provide the artists with a different type of arena that they currently don't have access to.

## **Resources**

Businesses in the Crestview area are very generous. One potential idea is to offer sponsorships for local companies who donate their time or materials to the Project. One local company that is supporting this effort is CH2MHill. They are a contractor for the City operating the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant. They have been active with the Kiwanis and the City providing services and insight into the vision. Their vision is to coordinate, through the Center; to provide tours of the City's wastewater treatment plant operations.

Many of the contractors in and around Crestview have expressed their willingness to provide their services for the rehabilitation of the Center. The feeling is, that the majority of the labor for the entire rehabilitation project would be free. However, funding is needed to procure resources for the rehabilitation and potentially the abatement of the asbestos siding.

The City recently applied for an AmeriCorp grant, but were unsuccessful at securing any funding.

Issues that need to be addressed, listed in priority;

1) The current structure that is the Environmental Center is not up to building code standards. The structure is covered in asbestos shingles. These shingles would need to be abated and disposed of by a licensed asbestos abatement contractor. If the building were to stay, it would need major rehabilitation, plumbing, electrical, structural and be brought up to ADA standards. The existing building is too small for it's purpose. New building options include; pre-fabricated units that can be put together with staff or volunteers under the direction of a local contractor, or having a building constructed by a local contractor.

2) The fire tower needs to be incorporated into the new Center. Options include; connecting a new environmental center building around the fire tower, making access to the fire tower restricted to when the facility was opened and staffed, or having the structure be a stand alone structure and provide perimeter security fencing to restrict access to the tower.

Additionally; the City will need to determine if the fire tower will be open to the public for tours to the top. This is a large liability issue for the City, however it would draw more people to the Center by having tours. Admission could be charged and maybe even have a 'club' where after so many trips to the top, they get a shirt or bumper sticker; both of which will provide advertising for the Center. If tours will not be allowed, then a suggestion of a virtual reality tour could be a display in the center.

3) The facility grounds will need a new 6 foot wooden privacy fence on 2 sides of the property, which currently have a chain link or barb wire fence.





### ***Let's get started....***

The Kiwanis would like to begin work on a walking path. This would get the community in to visit the Center. It is a starting place, while the logistics of the rest of the facility are worked out. The Kiwanis will be presenting a layout of the path to Council for their approval in the near future.

