

'World-class facility'



The Fort King replica is seen in this 2019 file photo. The recently approved master plan for the Fort King National Historic Landmark calls for almost \$15 million in new construction projects. [DOUG ENGLE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/FILE]

Fort King master plan includes \$15 million in projects

By Carlos E. Medina
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Plans for the Fort King National Historic Landmark include a \$7.4 million museum, education and archaeological complex, as well as millions more in extensive changes to the current site.

Both the County Commission and the Ocala City Council separately approved the plan during their regular meetings on Tuesday. All told, the plan calls for nearly \$15 million in new construction through 2036.

"We believe this will end

up as a world-class facility that will bring people in from all over the United States to study the Seminole Wars and the lifestyle of that time," said Bill Tucker of the

Fort King Heritage Association, which supports the preservation and promotion of the site. The association "has committed to leading the charge to secure local,

state and federal funding for the project," according to the master plan.

The nearly 42-acre site,

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An artist's rendering of the planned Fort King Historic Landmark museum, education and visitor center.

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located at 3925 E. Fort King St., is the nexus of Ocala and Marion County. There, in and around an early 19th century Army outpost built during the Seminole Indian Wars, the county first organized.

Right now, the park features a replica wooden fort on the same footprint of the 1837 version of the building. That replica structure went up in 2017. The park is owned jointly by Ocala and the county, with the city managing the site.

One of the first items planned is the new museum and education building, which will also serve as a visitor center. Officials hope to complete construction of the 16,000-square-foot building by 2025. It will go up in

the southeast corner of the property near Southeast 41st Avenue.

The main entrance to the park, now off of Fort King Street, will shift to Southeast 41st Avenue.

The facility would include a permanent exhibit area, a rotating exhibit area, classrooms and a lecture hall, as well as administrative offices.

The building now serving as the museum and visitor center, a former residential family home, is set for demolition.

Plans also include a new archaeological resource center. That \$1.7 million project will integrate into the museum/education center facility. At 5,000 square feet, the archaeological resource center will serve as the center of ongoing archaeological study at the site.

While a public park, the surrounding area is home to

centuries worth of potential archaeological sites. Before disturbing any area of the park, a nationally recognized historical site, there must be an archaeological study of the area.

The temporary archaeological center, just off Fort King Street, is another former residential home. That building also will come down.

The first project is a replica blacksmith shop located outside the fort. Plans call for the shop to be finished by 2022.

Construction will then shift to the interior of the fort, where barracks and other buildings existed. The park will use archival plans for the fort to try and pinpoint the site of the original buildings through archaeological digs. Those structures should be done by 2026.

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An aerial illustration of the Fort King National Historic Landmark site. [SUBMITTED]

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