

Park Strip due for a spruce-up

VOLUNTEERS: Laborers of love will minister to city's shabby civic heart.

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Anchorage's favorite downtown gathering space, the Delaney Park Strip, will get a huge dose of attention this summer. United Way plans to marshal 1,000 to 1,500 volunteers to rehabilitate the park Aug. 10-13.

Their biggest project, announced Wednesday, is building a 20-foot-wide brick pathway next to Ninth Avenue between E and I Streets. It will take 100,000 bricks, United Way president Michele Brown said.

The existing Ninth Avenue sidewalk that runs right next to the road will be ripped out. The new walkway will be separated from the road by 30 feet of greenery, primarily Norway maple trees, said city parks director Jeff Dillon. The trees will be bought and planted next spring, which means people will have an opportunity to contribute by paying for a tree.

The park strip covers 14 blocks between Ninth and Tenth Avenues. It's flat, mostly grass, with memorials here and there. In recent years, softball fields took up several blocks, but now most softball games have moved to newer fields. Festivals and picnics frequently happen on the park strip. Delaney has also hosted historic events such as the 1958 statehood party and a Mass by Pope John Paul II in 1981.

The city is working on the final design.

Planners, consultants and citizen participants have already concluded, though, that Delaney is neglected and in decline and have decided on basic improvements, from new benches to landscaping.

The brick pathway being built this summer along Ninth will eventually cross the park strip at E and I streets, Dillon said. Another path across the park, at G Street, will also get special treatment, he said.

United Way of Anchorage annually picks a "day of caring" community project. This year, because it is the organization's 50th anniversary, the group chose an especially large project, promising 5,000 hours of volunteer time to Delaney.

The city and the Anchorage Parks Foundation plan to spend \$250,000 to \$300,000 on materials, Dillon said. The volunteer work is worth another \$70,000, the city estimates.

Besides building the walkway, United Way volunteers will plant crab apple trees and flowering shrubs, create flower beds, build seating areas, sand and paint park benches, pull out some unruly pine bushes and repair damaged turf.

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