



FACT SHEET

Warm Mineral Springs Park

TRANSPARENCY

The Warm Mineral Springs Park Master Plan was adopted in April 2019 following extensive stakeholder meetings, community engagement sessions and public surveys. The City Commission has since held numerous public meetings to discuss the future of the springs. City Code requires that a transparent procurement process be followed before any public-partnership agreement is approved by the commission. All commission meetings are open to the public and can be viewed live or on demand at NorthPortFL.gov.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

In June 2022 - several months before Hurricane Ian damaged the park on Sept. 28 - the City Commission directed staff to explore a potential public-private partnership to achieve the goals of the Warm Mineral Springs Master Plan. Bids for the initial phase of construction had come in at more than double the \$9.3 million budget the City has available in park revenues for the project, and the historic buildings at the springs continued to fall further into disrepair. The City Commission has determined that a public-private partnership is the best option for achieving the shared vision of the master plan without burdening the City's taxpayers.

REOPENING ASAP

The City has been working to safely reopen the park as soon as possible since the damage caused by Hurricane Ian. We are projecting a reopening sometime in March, based on the time needed to mobilize a modular admissions building and portable restrooms, install ADA accessible walkways, restore electrical and potable water connections and successfully hire, train and certify the 10 staff members needed to operate the park.

PRESERVING THE SPRINGS

The City is pursuing the designation of Warm Mineral Springs as an Outstanding Florida Spring, which would limit or prohibit certain activities nearby that could harm or pollute the water. An extensive archaeological study conducted for the City in 2019 found that the acreage surrounding the spring and buffer area does not contain dense concentrations of artifacts or archaeological sites. As part of the City's permitting and development review process, any future development at the site may require additional cultural resource assessment surveys or other testing. The City is committed to protecting the springs' natural environment and historic character. We are seeking a partner who will enhance the service and quality of life while preserving the integrity of this unique amenity.

STAY INFORMED

Park status updates have been shared weekly with local media outlets and posted on the City of North Port's social media accounts and online at NorthPortFL.gov/WarmMineralSpringsPark. On the website, you can also enter your email address and subscribe to receive updates directly in your inbox.



MORE INFO

NorthPortFL.gov/WarmMineralSpringsPark

Plans to reopen Warm Mineral Springs in the works

Hurricane Ian brought many negative impacts to the city of North Port, and some of those can still be felt months later. One that still lingers involves Warm Mineral Springs Park, which has remained temporarily closed since Sept. 27.

This beloved attraction and the historic structures around it suffered extensive damage as Ian tore through our city. In addition to the debris the storm left behind and the safety hazards that were created in its immediate aftermath, the facilities at the park have not met the criteria for safe reopening. These include the necessity for reliable power, safe air quality and drinking water, air conditioning and buildings that are safe to occupy.

All of us in North Port, including our city commissioners and professional staff, recognize the importance of Warm Mineral Springs Park to our community. We understand and appreciate the passion of city residents and visitors from around the world who are drawn to the springs' unique character and history. At the direction of the commission in a special meeting last week, we are working to reopen the park to the public as soon as possible. But what does ASAP mean, and what does it entail?

Our priority as a local government is the health, safety and welfare of our citizens. While we've made significant progress on repairs to the buildings at the park, they are still not safe to be occupied at this time, so we're considering other options. There's been much discussion about bringing in a modular building and portable restroom trailer, but that's not as simple as you might think.

There's an increased demand for those structures in the aftermath of the hurricane, and they also require building permits as well as electrical and plumbing connections. Ideally, we'd love to repair and reopen the historic buildings in time for our grand comeback, but we're not going to wait for the perfect solution. The modular units, although not ideal, will be the simplest and fastest way to get the park safely reopened for people to enjoy.

There's other behind-the-scenes work that needs to be done, such as the installation of ADA-accessible pathways to and from the parking lot, repairs to the pump house, water quality testing of potable water and the recruitment and training of city staff to operate the park. Our goal is to reopen before spring break.

At the same time, we are also pursuing a strategic partnership for the restoration of the buildings and the future development and operation of the park. While we are grateful for the service provided by the previous concessionaire, the City Commission's recent decision to terminate their management agreement allows us greater flexibility to keep both these efforts moving quickly. We must still do a competitive solicitation, which takes time, but our outside legal counsel has commended us for our transparency throughout this process so far and the swift pace that this approach allows.

We are committed to keeping the public informed throughout this process. Regular status updates are available at NorthPortFL.gov/WarmMineralSpringsPark, shared with local media outlets and posted on the city's social media pages. You can also sign up to receive email updates directly to your inbox. We'll keep you posted on our progress and hope to see you all again ASAP at the springs.



JEROME FLETCHER, *North Port City Manager*