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*The Desmare Playground may soon get swing sets, landscaping and more thanks to a new donation*

By Kristen Himmelberg

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In late February, the Faubourg St. John neighborhood got a \$10,000 boost for one of its biggest projects, the Desmare Playground project.

Located at 3456 Esplanade Avenue, right off of Bayou St. John, the new playground may soon get a new swing set, landscape work and more thanks in part to the donation from the Zemurray Foundation, a local nonprofit that supports arts and recreation around New Orleans.

The neighborhood association has had plans to revamp the entire park space since 2013, because there were a number of new young families moving into the neighborhood, said Linda Landesburg, the board member heading the project.

“Our neighborhood is always thinking about open spaces,” Landesburg said. “We have always taken ownership of those spaces.”

A master plan was drawn up by Dana Brown and associates in late 2013 after hosting a Kid’s Charrette, which allowed neighborhood children a chance to give their own ideas about what should be in the park. The plan to revamp the park was broken down into four manageable phases.

With the \$10,000 donation from the Zemurray Foundation, founded by Samuel Zemurray, long time New Orleanian and the man behind the United Fruit company and Chiquita Banana’s, the Faubourg St. John neighborhood association now has more than half the money needed to fund the first phase of the playground project.

The first part of the master plan includes a new swing set, a bike rack and a secondary entry gate for handicap access.

“We want to revamp the worn down playground. After Katrina they took down the swing set because it was damaged by the levees, and how can you have a playground for kids without a swing set?” Landesburg said, adding that the swing sets are “first in line.”

“It is a huge huge thing,” Landesburg said. “We are doing the project in bite size pieces.”

Including the \$10,000 donation, the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association has now raised \$34,000 — more than half of the fundraising goal for the first phase. Now, she said, the association is ready to meet with the city to discuss construction.

“The next step is to meet with Council Member Guidry and NORD, because we do have enough money to get the swing sets, but the city still has to decide what we can and can’t do because it is a city playground,” Landesburg said.

Neighborhood association members want to start work in October. Members hope landscape work can be done with volunteers and donated plants, trees and equipment, which should cut down on some costs.

The playground will stay open while the construction is done, Landesburg said.