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Athens receives grant for Vine Street area drainage and infrastructure improvements

Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks said an area of Athens west of downtown that is impacted by flooding during heavy rains will undergo improvements.

Today (Thursday, Jan. 20) Gov. Kay Ivey and ADECA Director Ken Boswell announced Athens is receiving a \$500,000 grant for its Vine Street Area Neighborhood Improvement Project. The funding is through the Community Development Block Grant program that aims to improve low and moderate-income areas. The total project estimate is \$970,000, so the City of Athens will provide \$470,000.

Ivey announced grants totaling \$18.2 million for over 50 Alabama cities, towns and counties at an awards ceremony in Montgomery today.

The Athens project will address drainage issues such as failing inlets, pave streets and provide more sidewalks. The project area includes Vine Street, Westmoreland Avenue, Hardy Street, Bailey Street, Westview Avenue, Brownsferry Street and Levert Avenue.

Residents, business owners, churches, Rep. Danny Crawford, the local NAACP and the Athens-Limestone Community Association that oversees the historic Trinity/Fort Henderson site provided letters of support for the project. Some of the businesses in this area rely on pedestrian traffic, and both businesses and residents experience water rising to their doorways during heavy rains.

"I want to thank ADECA and the Governor's Office for listening to Athens about the importance of addressing these issues for our citizens," said Marks, who attended the ceremony. "This investment will have a positive impact on residents, business owners, church goers and those who utilize Lincoln-Bridgeforth Park and the Pincham-Lincoln Community Center on the historic Trinity/Fort Henderson site."

The project area is in both Councilman Frank Travis and Councilman Wayne Harper's districts. Travis said he is delighted by the news and what it will mean for District 3 as well as the portion located in District 5.

"This will mean a great deal to those who live in that area," Travis said. "This has been a few years in making, but I'm so thankful for Mayor Marks and Gov. Ivey, and I'm thankful to God for blessing this project and coming through with the funding. This will brighten up that whole area. It will be a highlight of Athens with the improvements, the park and Trinity site."

The Athens-Limestone Community Association continues to work on additions at the Trinity/Fort Henderson site such as a walking trail and museum. The Trinity/Fort Henderson site tells the story of slave to soldier to student because the area was home to a Union Civil War fort where runaway slaves fought for freedom, and then housed the county's only black high school until integration in 1970.

"The drainage improvements, new sidewalks and paving will add to ALCA's efforts at the site," Marks said.

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is administering the grants from funds made available by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"Community Development Block Grants are a means in which local governments can address some of their more pressing needs," Ivey said. "I am pleased to award these grants, and I commend those local officials who recognized those needs and took the time and effort to seek an answer through this grant program."

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ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said, "We look forward to seeing the positive impacts that these projects have on the quality of life for residents of these communities."

The project will undergo steps including engineering, ADECA review and the bid process before any construction work will begin. Updates will be posted on the City of Athens website at www.athensal.us and via Nixle alerts. To sign up for Nixle alerts go to www.nixle.com.