

Duplin Journal



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Trillium presents \$150,000 to town of Wallace for inclusive playground

ABBY CAVENAUGH | [News](#) |

WALLACE — The town of Wallace is one step closer to a brand new inclusive playground, thanks in part to a \$150,000 grant from Trillium Health Resources.

Victoria Jackson, vice president for Trillium Health Resources' south central region, presented the check to Mayor Jason Wells and Parks and Recreation Director David Bizzell during a special ceremony on Nov. 20 at Clement Park.

"This playground would not only be a place where children can play, it will also be a place where everyone can feel welcome and supported, regardless of their abilities," Jackson said.

The project stems from a request made by the Parks and Recreation Department in December 2021, which emphasized the need for recreational opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities. "It started as a request for a handicapped swing," Bizzell said, "and grew from there to include an entire playground."

The playground will feature updated equipment, rubberized flooring, fencing, and improved sidewalks and parking for ADA accessibility. The existing playground equipment at Clement Park will be relocated to Dobbins Park, giving the town one more playground area for local children.

"When David first came to the town board a couple of years ago and started talking about building an inclusive playground, it sounded like a great idea," the mayor said. "We have a lot of great ideas in the town of Wallace, and the biggest challenge we usually have is, 'how do we pay for these things?'"

In addition to the \$150,000 grant from Trillium Health Resources, the town council allocated \$75,000 to the initiative, while fundraisers organized by Parks and Recreation have added an additional \$25,000. The town also has received a \$400,000 PARTF (Parks and Recreation Trust Fund) Accessibility Parks Grant.

"Next year, we plan to apply for a \$150,000 matching grant from Cunningham Recreation," said Town Manager Rob Taylor. "Together with the funds already allocated by the Town Council, this will bring our total funding for the playground and accessibility enhancements at Clement Park to \$800,000."

Bizzell said he hopes the inclusive playground will be finished and operational by late 2025.

Mayor Wells talked about how important it is for the town of Wallace to have an inclusive playground. "If you think about kids having a place to go where they can feel included, the word inclusive says a lot," he said. "They get to feel included, and participate in everyday activities, but it's not just the kids that need this. It's families that need to be teaching their kids how do you treat others with respect, how do you include others, and it just from a moral standpoint, it's an educational opportunity, not just for the kids that need special equipment but for the kids who are learning how to socially interact with others who

may be a little different from them.”

Trillium Health Resources is a managed care organization (MCO) that oversees mental health, substance use, traumatic brain injury, and intellectual/developmental disability services across North Carolina. Their Inclusive Playground Grants have enabled the creation of 35 inclusive playgrounds for individuals with special needs throughout eastern North Carolina, though the closest one to Wallace is at Wrightsville Beach.

“We are especially excited because any time we can partner with our communities, it just brings forth so much excitement,” Jackson said. “We commend you for building a place where everyone can belong. It reflects the mission of our agency and what we want to accomplish.”

Wells pointed out that without grants like the one from Trillium, an inclusive playground can’t become a reality. “None of this is possible without the generosity and support that your organization has shown us,” he told Jackson. “A special thanks to our Parks & Rec, our town manager, our town staff... without all the hard work that has taken place, none of this would be possible. I look forward to seeing the vision come to fruition.”