By EARL WATT

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Last year, a transformation began at Light Park with the mission of taking a 50-year old public space into the 21st century.

And while many may be pleased with the offerings the park has now, it's still only the beginning of what Light Park will be when all of the renovations are complete.

Adventure Bay Water Park opened last July that erased a dated swimming pool and replaced it with a family water recreation center, complete with four water slides, a lily pad walk, a large water splash, fun zones for the young, and at the centerpiece, a pirate ship complete with squirting water cannons.

Outside of the water park area, another transformation was under way.

Old playground equipment was uprooted and replaced with futuristic devices that have been crowded this week with families enjoying Spring Break.

A concert pavilion was installed, and the Jean Randall Girl Scout Building was recently completed.

All of those upgrades alone have made Light Park a refreshing, fun, family-oriented recreation space.

But continued upgrades to those facilities and more are still in store for the park.

Items yet to come include a basketball court, horseshoe pits, sand volleyball, a skate park and more.

“We’re working very hard on the skate park,” Liberal Parks and Recreation Director Gary Scott said. “We’re getting things arranged for construction.”

The skate park will be in the northeast corner of Light Park, near Walgreens.

“Alongside that will be a multipurpose court,” Scott said. “It will be for basketball and a space for soccer. We’re trying to create that space. We will have lighting planned for the facilities. The lighting will be more security-type, not tennis court or softball field type lighting, but it will be lit.”

The sidewalks will be joined into a common walking space throughout the park.

“We still have two to three shelters we need to install,” Scott said.

There will still be room reserved just north of the water park for future expansion, something Scott said will occur.

“We feel confident that it will take place due to the support from the public and the commission and city staff,” he said. “There has been a lot of support for looking into that. We are planning to the north a second phase with the water park.

Other enhancements to the water park for the upcoming season will include additional loungers.

The overwhelming response to Adventure Bay last year demonstrated a need for more loungers. Traffic through the water park has been as high as 1,500 in one day.

There will also be competitive swimming at Adventure Bay when the Southwest Aquatics Team will be able to participate in their first home event in the swimming club’s history.

“As far as I know, Liberal has never hosted a competitive swim meet,” Scott said. The main pool at Adventure Bay was designed to be able to host competitive events by being built to a length of 25 meters. The meets will draw teams from around the region to Liberal, another economic advantage of Adventure Bay Water Park.

Scott also said that some drains were being replaced.

“We didn’t like some of them,” he said. “People stubbed their toe. These new drains will be more friendly to the public.”

The cool deck, a surface coating that drops the temperature of the concrete by about 20 degrees, will also be added, keeping bare feet from getting hot.

Other facilities in the park will also see enhancements, including the music pavilion location.

“We are adding about 20 8-foot benches with backs,” Scott said. “We are looking for input from

the community when they would like to see concerts there, but we are expecting to have some concerts in the park this summer."

In addition to the seating, there will be an area for lounge chairs and blankets for those who want to enjoy a concert in the park.

The winter weather deflected city staff to work on other projects, including the scout building and a renovation of the Mary Frame Park community building.

But as the weather improves, Scott said workers will return to Light Park to continue the upgrades which have been funded with the 1-cent sales tax.

"We have had great cooperation with all of the city departments to get these things done," Scott said. "We do not have a completion date, but we want to get it done as soon as possible. We just ask for the public's patience while we are still under construction."

The work may disrupt access to some of the playground equipment, but the end result will be a full-service park with activities for all ages, which should continue to draw patrons to Liberal from surrounding communities.