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## Spartanburg leaders tour city parks with eye on future

By **LYNNE P. SHACKLEFORD**, Staff Writer

City leaders must now map their strategy for rebuilding city parks, a move they hope could lead to renewed neighborhoods.

City Manager Mark Scott led council on a 2 1/2-hour bus tour Monday through many of the city's parks described in detail in the new Parks and Recreation master plan. Some parks, which also are included in the master plan, were not on the tour but will be discussed when council prioritizes projects within the next month.

The tour was the first step toward implementing the plan, or at least parts of the plan, which calls for \$11.8 million in capital improvements to city parks over a five-year and 10-year period. The city reclaimed its parks from the county in 2004.

The plan calls for the city to use several funding sources, including money from its capital improvement budget, hospitality taxes, grants and, in some cases, private funds.

"This is neighborhood rehabilitation," Scott told council as they looked at each park for its strengths and weaknesses. "This isn't just about parks; it's really about much more than parks."

Mayor Bill Barnet added that improving the city parks system will re-energize the neighborhoods and encourage them to improve.

"It's a move in the right direction," Barnet said. "It's improving the infrastructure so people will want to reinvest in their communities, much like what's happening in Hampton Heights."

Barnet said the parks plan is also about investing in the city's youth by improving the city's recreation centers.

Council was able to witness firsthand how city residents take advantage of programs at the Northwest recreation center on Saxon Avenue. The gym's floor was packed with residents Monday participating in free aerobics classes and using the center's weight room at a discounted rate.

Northwest provides fitness services five days a week, but could expand its services with more equipment and staff members, center director Joe Crosby explained to several council members. The center is also heavily used by children in the community.

Northwest is scheduled to have \$1.4 million in improvements, the majority allocated to architectural repairs, in the master plan. The plan also calls for new signs, a multi-use field, a new playground, picnic area and basketball court, new landscaping and a walking trail.

Scott explained the challenges in the Duncan Park project, including why the outfield wall must come down. The city also must deal with rainwater runoff, repave the parking lot and finish work on the restrooms.

There is also an area where a fishing pier could be built, and Scott suggested the city research the idea of having paddle boats there.

"That's a great idea because that's a great lake out there," Councilman Joe Spigner said.

The plan calls for \$684,250 in improvements to Duncan Park, mostly in adding trail segments around the lake, resurfacing tennis courts and building a large picnic pavilion. This work is independent of a fundraising effort under way by the Friends of Duncan Park, who are working to reopen the stadium.

Work also is progressing at the new skate park on Union Street, located near the Rail Trail. The skate park is being funded with \$150,000 in hospitality taxes and \$150,000 near the Rail Trail. The skate park is being funded with \$150,000 in hospitality taxes and \$150,000 in private donations.

"In the next two months, it will be nice to see us pushing dirt on other projects, too," Councilman Kenneth Smith said.

The tour led council through smaller, neighborhood parks such as Park Hills, Summer Hill, Farley Avenue, Irwin, Stewart and Chapel Street. They are set to receive improvements like new water fountains, picnic shelters and new fields.

A lively discussion ensued when Scott mentioned, during a tour through the Beaumont Mills neighborhood, that the city consider relocating T.K Gregg recreation center, currently on Oakland Avenue, to that area.

Scott explained that the city, in the next three years, will commit at least \$2 million to sewer improvements to that neighborhood, which is comprised mostly of older homes left from the era of Spartan Mills.

Scott suggested the recreation center be relocated to keep current residents there and entice others to move in.

Councilwoman Linda Dogan said she opposes that idea, saying T.K. Gregg should stay where it is.

Dogan argued there are few children who live in the Beaumont Mill neighborhood so there would be few students to serve.

Scott also said an option would be to build a passive, or green space, in Beaumont Mills.

"There will be transition here over the next 20 years, or the neighborhood will die," Scott said. "The reason why we need this is to rally the neighborhood."

Barnet said council will now decide on which projects to target. "This was a good first step," Barnet said. "This is a pre-cursor to council sitting down and discussing what we want to do for the next one to two

years."

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