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Funds earmarked for courthouse park; Pine Trace to town planning

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Dorchester County Council voted Monday to set aside \$850,000 from the \$5 million parks bond for the development of the St. George courthouse park.

In the meantime, it's moving forward with the rezoning request for the Pine Trace property.

The Summerville Planning Commission will have a public hearing at 4 p.m. Monday on the county's request to change the current planned development for Pine Trace.

At this week's county council meeting, the county also approved, in concept, a plan prepared by Locklair Consulting for two Little League baseball fields, two high school baseball fields, a football/lacrosse/soccer field, restrooms and concessions buildings, playground, picnic area, walking trail and a rental pavilion by a new, 3.5 acre deepwater pond.

The total cost for developing the park is estimated at \$2.35 million, with the first phase coming in at \$1.34 million.

Council didn't budget for the full amount of the first phase because it's hoping to get matching funds to help cover the cost.

Councilman David Chinnis emphasized that earmarking the \$850,000 isn't spending "new" money.

The \$5 million bond approved by voters in November 2010 has already been issued, he said.

"You are already paying for that," he said.

"It's sitting in the bank and doing nothing," Councilman Jay Byars agreed.

Byars chairs the parks commission that has been developing ideas for county parks.

"I believe we have come up with some pretty good concepts," he said.

The new plan for the courthouse shifts the park to the northeast quadrant from the northwest quadrant.

Water and sewer isn't available in the northwest quadrant, which had significantly increased the cost in the original plans.

By moving the park to the northeast quadrant, the county saves the cost of bringing water and sewer to the site and preserves a tract that was slated in the original courthouse plans to be sold to a retail developer with the thought that law offices and other businesses might locate there.

Councilman George Bailey has been working on obtaining additional funds to develop the park.

Because of its location, it qualifies for funds set aside for rural areas, Bailey said.

Of the \$5 million bond, the county has spent \$1 million to assist with the purchase for Pine Trace; expects to spend approximately \$1.5 million on the purchase of the Ashley River park site; set aside \$500,000 for conservation, pending

approval of projects proposed by the conservation commission; and now has set aside \$850,000 for the courthouse park.

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