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Study Should Help City Address Recreational Needs

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With a growing sports program and limited fields to handle the influx of young athletes, Vestavia Hills city and recreational officials commissioned a study to address the city's future recreational needs earlier this year.

That study is expected to be released this month, city officials said.

City leaders hope the study will provide more clarity on how they should proceed in acquiring and utilizing land for parks and recreation.

The city currently has several recreational projects pending but doesn't plan to move until it gets more clarity through the study, which will form the basis for its Recreational and Athletics Master Plan.

"Vestavia Hills is a very linear city, 19 miles long, with various uses and demands for our resources," Jeff Downes, city manager, said. "Part of the study is going to determine what the future holds for all of these from a convenience standpoint and utilization standpoint. Part of the study will look at how many hours we're using certain fields and should we be using it for those number of hours. That will drive how we ultimately take our full supply of assets and how we shift them around and use them."

In March, the city council hired Atlanta-based Brailsford & Dunlavey to conduct the study. The study includes a survey taken of Vestavia Hills residents on what they envision in parks and recreational amenities, said Brian Davis, the city's public service director. Nearly 3,000 residents participated in the survey.

“They’re taking all the data and comments and putting it together and are going to come back with something for us,” Davis said. “And once we receive that information, it should give us a better idea of what we need.”

The city currently has two deals pending which could give it more land to use as parks and recreation space. The city is working with David Keith of Keith Development Co. for the Altadena Valley Country Club property. Keith Development wants to acquire about 90 acres for single-family homes and donate 64 acres to the city for park space.

Preliminary plans for the property include walking and biking trails and athletic fields, although these plans also are subject to the master plan.

The city now is in the process of annexing the property from Jefferson County into Vestavia Hills. The annexation process takes 90 days and is scheduled to be approved by the council Sept. 28.

City leaders also are trying to decide if they want to purchase about five acres off old Columbiana Road at Chateau Vestavia for lacrosse and soccer fields. The city currently leases the fields from the property owner for lacrosse and soccer.

Four years ago, Vestavia Hills officials built sports fields for lacrosse, football and soccer at the Sicard Hollow Sports Complex. But even those fields now aren’t enough.

“We had close to 500 kids who played in two of the tackle football leagues and a flag football league last year,” Davis said. “So our needs just continue to grow, and as the city changes, we’ve got to adapt and make sure all the recreations needs are met.”