



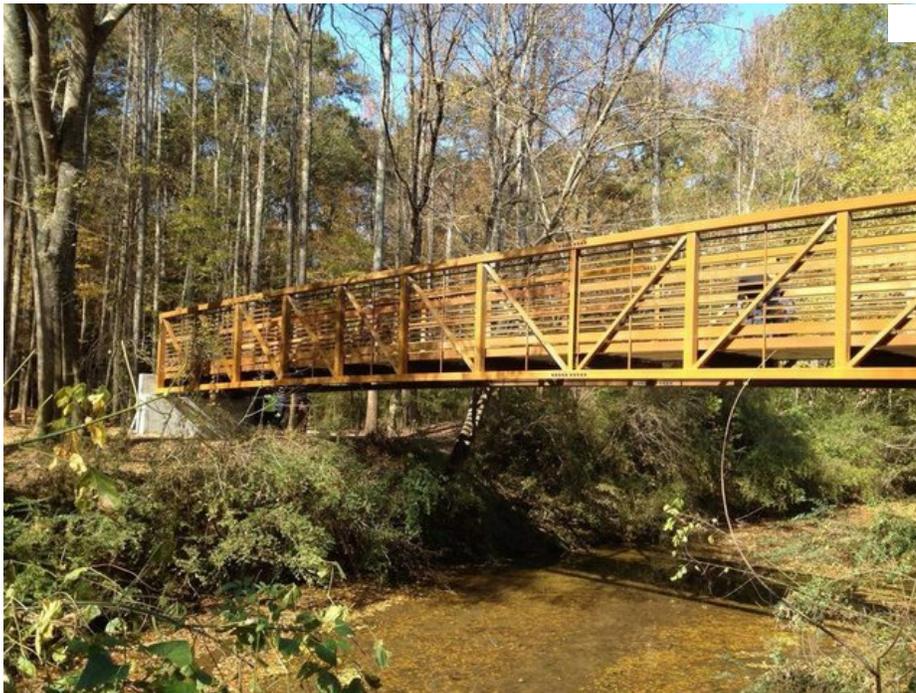
Weather

## City presents results, recommendations of parks survey to public

by Sydney Cromwell

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In a survey of about 1,700 Vestavia residents, the firm found that 2/3 of respondents agreed that the city's current recreational capacity is not enough.

Residents and city officials agree: improving parks is a major step to improving quality of life for Vestavia Hills children and adults. At an Aug. 25 meeting, public services director Brian Davis shared the results of a survey of the city's parks and recreation facilities.

Vestavia Hills employed the firm Brailsford and Dunlavey to create a comprehensive review of the city's recreational facilities. The study was finished in July and found that the number, quality and location of these facilities is not sufficient to meet city needs. In a survey of about 1,700 Vestavia residents, the firm found that 2/3 of respondents agreed that the city's current recreational capacity is not enough.

Resident satisfaction with recreation varied widely: 99 percent of survey respondents were satisfied with the new Sicard Hollow Athletic Complex, while only 15 percent were satisfied with the Wald Park Pool, one of the oldest city facilities.

Davis said the study showed that Vestavia needs more rectangular athletic fields and an indoor recreational facility to meet the needs of the hundreds of children and adults playing soccer, basketball, baseball, flag football, lacrosse and other sports. He also said the city is looking at cutting the number of tournaments it hosts to use more fields for teams within the city.

Studies of the rectangular and diamond fields in the city show that location is key to supply and

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demand. At Liberty Park and Sicard Hollow, the fields are meeting needs, but other facilities are overburdened. Davis said this is because about 90 percent of the city's population is not close enough to easily access Liberty Park and Sicard Hollow facilities.

Living farther from recreational facilities also discouraged participation in youth sports, especially since facilities on the west side of Vestavia were more likely to have satisfaction rates of 30 percent or less.

Brailsford and Dunlavey recommended that the city build between two and four small diamond-shaped fields and eight to 10 youth rectangular fields, or four to five adult fields, to match city need. In the immediate future, Davis said they plan to improve the quality of current facilities through amenities like turf, seating and parking, as well as rearranging play schedules so fields with lighter use can take the pressure off fields with heavier use. An accessible field for athletes with disabilities was also discussed.

"Our recommendation from here is we need to focus on our residents," Davis said.

In the long term, the firm also recommended the construction of a new indoor facility, with three to four basketball courts and an aquatic center with multiple swimming lanes. Davis said the city wants to do this, but has no plans or timeline for such a project right now.

The proposed Altadena Park, which will go before the council for annexation and zoning approval on Sept. 28, could bring some relief to overcrowded athletic fields in the near future. The current concept has four rectangular and two diamond practice fields, and it is also closer to most Vestavia residents than Liberty Park or Sicard Hollow. However, the current proposed timeline would have the park's first phases opening in early 2017, so it is not an immediate solution.

Davis also mentioned the possibility of making Wald Park focused on baseball and softball, with covered batting areas and diamond fields. Liberty Park could be used as a competition venue, and the city has looked at building a pavilion and more seating for spectators.

Both short and long-term projects will have to be prioritized due to the expense, but Davis said they want better parks to remain important.

"[City manager] Jeff Downes has challenged us to say, 'Don't let finances get in the way of parks,'" Davis said.

To help with this, the Parks and Recreation Foundation is campaigning to raise money for several park projects. Parks and Recreation Superintendent Jason Burnett said the Wald Park planning committee is also looking to expand its role and study the possibility of tearing down Wald Park to either build a new facility or sell as commercial property.

"We obviously didn't need a study to tell us we need a new recreation center and a new pool," Burnett said, noting that Wald Park was built in the 1960s.

After the presentation of the study's results, Davis said the council's decision on Altadena "sets the whole thing in motion" so the public services department can plan its budget and projects. Some short-term projects to improve the facilities' quality will start soon, and Davis said the resident survey will be valuable as they look at long-term possibilities.

## Tags

[Parks and Recreation Board](#), [Sicard Hollow Athletic Complex](#), [Recreation](#), [City of Vestavia Hills](#)

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