

County approves park's master plan

By Russell Tanton
DeKalb Neighbor Staff Writer

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As soon as March of next year, Dresden Park visitors will have an open field the size of four football fields to use for any sport they choose.

The DeKalb County Board of Commissioners approved a \$1.6 million renovation plan for Dresden Park last week which paves the way for construction of multi-purpose fields.

Originally built 40 years ago, the 25-acre park currently contains five softball fields and a baseball field. The new plan calls for the softball fields to be razed in favor of two open play fields. A softball field will remain, but will be renovated and used as a baseball field.

DeKalb County District 2 Commissioner Gale Walldorff said the community asked for baseball and softball fields to be converted into open fields to accommodate the growing popularity of soccer in the area.

"We're finding now that soccer is a much more popular game," Ms. Walldorff said.

The Dresden East Civic Association, Dresden Elementary School, St. Pius X Catholic School and other community members worked with DeKalb County for close to two years



Russell Holloway/Staff

Reviewing the master plan for the renovation of Dresden Park are, from left, Gary Dalton, general manager of Parks Operations; Marilyn Drew, director of DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department; Jeanie Allen, Parks and Recreation project manager and Mark Kelly, athletic director of St. Pius X School.

to formulate a plan for the park.

"We wanted it to be accessible for every age level, that was the key thing," said Dresden East Civic Association member Cynthia Von Soosten.

Accessibility will be improved by moving the park entrance to the southeast side of the park, which is more visible from the road. The playground will be moved to be adjacent to the parking lot so those wishing to use it will not have to walk across the park to reach it.

"For visibility and access, this is a lot better," said DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Director Mari-

lyn Boyd Drew.

The park is located close to Saint Pius X Catholic High School, which hopes to use the fields for soccer, football and lacrosse practices, said Saint Pius athletic director Mark Kelly. Saint Pius will contribute funds to help with construction and upkeep.

The \$1.6 million allocated for construction comes from the \$125 million parks bond referendum approved by DeKalb voters in 2001.

Dalton said he hoped construction would begin on the park in the fall and that the renovated park will open in March or April of 2004.

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County unveils plan to redo

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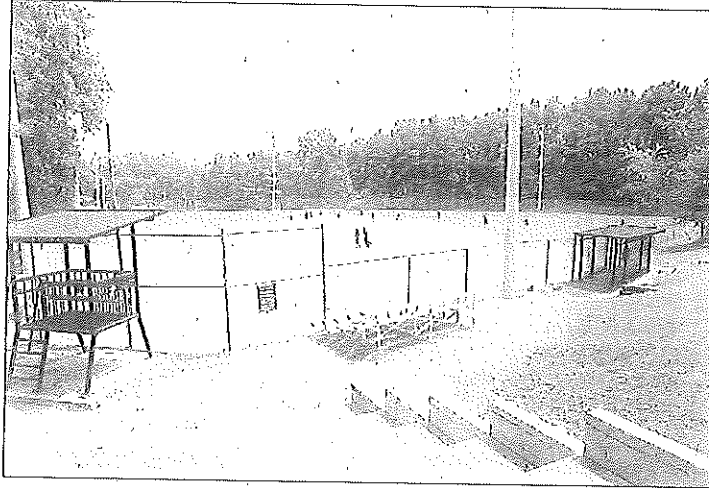
After two years of study and consulting area residents, DeKalb County officials last week unveiled a \$1.6 million plan to give Dresden Park a face-lift to meet the changing needs of those who play there.

The park, located less than a mile east of DeKalb-Peachtree Airport, currently has a playground for small children, four softball fields and a baseball field.

The plan would remove the softball fields and convert them into a large open field for soccer and other sports, design two walking trails and add picnic tables.

County Commissioners Gale Walldorff and Judy Yates said they will use funds from the county's \$130 million parks bond program to pay for the changes. Each commissioner can allocate up to \$4.2 million for park improvements.

DeKalb County bought the 25 acres that became Dresden Park in 1963. The park was built for the national pastime,



KEITH HADLEY / Staff

A \$1.6 million plan to renovate Dresden Park will convert softball fields into open space to accommodate soccer.

but for many residents, that sport is now soccer.

In recent years, the surrounding neighborhood has seen a large influx of Mexican residents.

On a recent evening, the thud of soccer balls being kicked by young men speaking in Spanish could be heard throughout the park.

Crisoforo Tlacuati, a 39-year-old Mexican immigrant

who was coaching a group of boys playing soccer, said he hoped the plans included soccer goalposts.

"I think everybody wants them," he said.

Residents involved in the park plans recognized the changes in how the park is being used. They also wanted more room for families to play or have a picnic. By deciding to create more open space, residents hoped to fulfill the desires of soccer enthusiasts and families.

County parks officials are pushing for more open space in park redesigns, believing they give users more options.

Dresden Park ↙

"I think that people do not understand the importance of passive green space, the versatility it lends to so many activities," said Walldorff, who represents the area.

Residents said they were largely pleased with the proposed changes, but there are still several problems, such as the lack of a maintenance staff to clean the park and the need for more police protection,

reflecting complaints about vagrants.

Dan Magee, Walldorff's representative on the county's Parks & Recreation Citizens Advisory Board, said residents should be able to spruce up Dresden Park, citing the many ways they can communicate with each other to organize a park clean-up.

"There's no excuse if it doesn't get done," he said.