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Recreation decision will have to wait

By [James Shea](#)

Times-News Staff Writer

Published: Wednesday, January 6, 2010 at 4:30 a.m.

Soccer fields. Trails. A local community center.

Three organizations asked Henderson County commissioners for help funding recreation projects this year, but the board said it would wait until after a Jan. 20 budget workshop to make a decision.

The N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund is accepting applications for grant money until Jan. 31. If a project is funded, however, the organizations must have money to match it.

Chairman Bill Moyer said he had several local groups ask if the county would be willing to help with some of the matching funds. Moyer in turn asked that organizations seeking money from the county give a presentation to the board Monday about their plans.

"We have been successful in the past of getting (the) grants," he said.

Commissioners asked the county Recreation Advisory Board to review the projects and rank them before the Jan. 20 workshop to help with the decision.

HIKING TRAILS

Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy wants to build a vast trail system and preserve the top of Bearwallow Mountain in eastern Henderson County.

The organization is seeking \$450,000 from the trust fund, \$365,000 from Henderson County, \$75,000 from the North Carolina Recreational Trails Program and \$35,000 in landowner donated value.



MIKE DIRKS/TIMES-NEWS

The Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy hopes to have a conservation easement placed on the top 470 acres of Bearwallow Mountain on the eastern side of Henderson County.

CMLC already owns several pieces of land in the Hickory Nut Gorge area. Executive Director Kieran Roe said the organization wants to use its existing land holdings and a future conservation easement on top of Bearwallow Mountain to build the hiking trail system.

The top of the mountain is cleared and used to graze cattle in the summer. The property owner, the Barnwell family, wants to preserve the 470 acres and allow public access.

"It's a really spectacular viewpoint from up there," Roe said. "If you have not been up there, it's an important part of Henderson County."

Roe said the trail network would be a positive project for the area and something the public would support.

EDNEYVILLE COMMUNITY CENTER

Representatives from the Edneyville Community Center also pitched their project to commissioners. The community center had received funding from the trust fund in the past, which was used to complete the first phase of the project.

Margaret Davidson, who has been instrumental in the community center project, said the Edneyville community wants the county commissioners' help with the second phase. They want to complete the landscaping and build a ballfield at the center.

The project is estimated to cost \$502,074. Davidson said the community center would donate \$50,000 to the project and would look to the trust fund and the county for the rest of the funds.

"The (grant) started this for us, and we feel it can finish it," said Fred Pittillo, who is also active with the Edneyville Community Center.

Pittillo said the organization will work with the county and do whatever is necessary to move the project forward.

FLETCHER SOCCER FIELDS

The Henderson County Soccer Association wants to build multiple soccer fields in Fletcher and has signed a lease for property with ArvinMeritor.

New soccer fields are badly needed in the county, Association President Clement Riddle said. Jackson Park is where most people play soccer, but it is overused.

"The field there has been great," Riddle said. "It has been loved, but it has been pounded."

The association, he said, is not requesting funds from the trust fund, but from the

county. The first phase of the project calls for four full-sized fields and four youth fields. The project is estimated to cost \$710,000 and would contain 180 parking places.

The association has received pledges from businesses and private individuals for \$119,000 and \$100,000 in in-kind donations. It would like Henderson County to contribute \$355,000 over the next three years.

A recent study showed a strong interest in new soccer facilities. The county has 1,300 youth soccer players and 600 adult players, Riddle said.

Commissioner Charlie Messer said the county has needed new soccer fields for years and the Fletcher project might be something the county could support.

"A soccer complex would be a good addition to Henderson County if we could put the pieces of the puzzle together," Messer said.

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