Pickens moves forward with amphitheater plans

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The landscape in downtown Pickens could soon have a new addition designed to attract residents and visitors and entice more businesses to establish roots in the town.

Plans are moving forward for a downtown amphitheater park to be created on about 5.5 acres on West Main Street near Ann Street. Pickens City Council recently voted to adopt a master plan for the project.

"It's just part of our focus to revitalize downtown, give people more reasons to come downtown, more reasons to live downtown, to open a business downtown," said City Administrator Katherine Brackett.

"We're just trying to do our part to drive people to Main Street," Brackett said.

The master plan calls for an amphitheater, green space, open-air pavilion, trails and boardwalks, parking areas and possibly an outdoor classroom area, she said.

"It will preserve a lot of the greenery that's there and do a lot of creek bed restoration, too, to make that a feature," Brackett said.

The total project cost is estimated to be about $1.3 million, she said.

Brackett said funding for the project will come from a hospitality bond, grants, and sponsorships and naming rights.

She said City Council voted earlier this year to issue a $2 million hospitality bond that will be used to start the amphitheater park and likely start a bike park at Town Creek Park as well as other recreation endeavors.

About $400,000 of the hospitality bond is earmarked for the amphitheater park project, Brackett said.

Mayor David Owens said the project is a big part of continuing efforts to attract more visitors and businesses to the community and downtown.

"If we bring more people in, it's going to keep downtown alive. It's going to keep our merchants going, keep our stores open," Owens said. "We're excited about it."

George Case, co-owner of Case Interior Design Group and East Main Treasures in downtown Pickens, said the amphitheater park will be a great addition.

"There's really nothing around the Pickens area quite like what they're going to build so it's going to be something totally new," he said.

Case, vice chairman of the board for the Pickens Revitalization Association, said the amphitheater could be used for music, outdoor theater and during festivals and events, like the spring Azalea Festival and the Cruise-In & Music on Main series in June.

He said events like the Azalea Festival have a "huge impact" on his business.

"Anything we can do to create activity in downtown is a good thing for business," Case said.

Brackett said the project will be done in phases. The master plan calls for three phases, but she said it could take longer.

Phase one, estimated around $400,000, would include paving the main front parking lot, building the main amphitheater structure and doing some stream restoration, site cleanup and landscaping, Brackett said.

Phase two, estimated around $600,000, would include building the open air pavilion, creating some of the boardwalks and trails, increasing parking and doing more stream restoration, finishing touches to the amphitheater and additional landscaping, she said.

Phase three, estimated around $300,000, would include creating more boardwalks and trails, an outdoor classroom and pedestrian bridge as well as final landscaping, Brackett said.

"It's a quality-of-life asset for the community," she said. "We hope it gives people a reason to want to stay in downtown Pickens on a Friday and Saturday night and bring people in from the outside, to draw in tourists."

Brackett said the amphitheater will have grass seating and could potentially hold 1,000 people.

She said the park could be used for concerts, events and a possible farmer's market and areas could be rented by residents for birthdays, weddings, reunions and other gatherings.

Work on the first phase of the project could start in the next two to three months, Brackett said. She said how long it takes to complete the whole project will depend on grant funding.

Owens said the city has already built a sitting area at the front of the property on Main Street.