Recreation plan starts with repairs

Ideas range from pools to trails, but experts say existing parks need work

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Members of Pickens County Council are only a few weeks away from receiving recommendations for a 20-year master plan to guide efforts to address recreational needs of residents countywide.

And while county residents, through two public meetings and a telephone survey, have expressed desires for everything from swimming pools to horseshoes, the firm designing the master plan says the main goal is to bring all the existing parks up to code, which could cost around $6 million.

Council members Monday night heard a presentation from Milone & MacBroom, the Raleigh, N.C.-based engineering, landscape architecture and environmental science firm that is only a few weeks away from finishing its recommendations.

Rachel Cotter, a landscape designer with the firm, said tough economic times increase the need quality, neearby recreational opportunities.

"Economic tough times — less funding and less family money to spend traveling, going on vacation and doing things for leisure," Cotter said, "which makes it really important to have opportunities that are close to home and puts a greater demand on recreation departments to provide these facilities."

Although Cotter said the firm's final recommendations are still being tweaked, the first concern is upgrades to provide "safe, code-compliant recreational opportunities."

When asked by council, Cotter said the cost to make all existing parks — county and city-owned — code-compliant would be approximately $6 million.

To make the master plan happen, Cotter recommended the county explore joint-venture agreements, including joint-use agreements with the school district, which could involve sharing existing, district-owned facilities, she said.