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By Magen McCraey

Staff Writer (<http://www.sentinel-echo.com>)

LAUREL COUNTY, Ky. — A historic silo will do a 360 degree turn-around as a skateboard park. The city of London has approved a \$50,000 grant for construction of a skate park in front of Somerset Community College's Laurel Branch and down from the Laurel County Public Library.

The grant has been renewed a couple already and time has been running out for the grant's acceptance with a deadline of Feb. 28, 2011.

Forty-seven acres at College Park in front of Somerset Community College's Laurel Branch is prime grounds for the park, said Rick Cochrane, City of London Director of Risk Management and Safety Officer.

The decision Monday night from the city's council will help push the grant along, Cochrane said.

The vacant property with crackled pavement and two silos will continue to uphold historic significance, he said, while also promoting community wellness.

"We have talked about looking past our nose in the future," he said.

The skateboard park is just phase one. In phase two, the city hopes to build the Laurel County Wellness Park which will engulf the 47 acres with hiking, mountain biking trails, a children's course and areas for basketball, volleyball, picnics, a playground and splash pad. This phase is pending approval of a \$100,000 matching grant in partnership with the county. Cochrane said Judge Executive David Westerfield is more than willing to support the endeavor.

There are some property line issues with the nearby community college, but Cochrane believes it won't be too much of a problem considering the park will be utilizing the land to its fullest potential. The park's entrance is proposed to use existing roads that access College Park.

Third Rock Consultants will be working with the city to plan out the future wellness park. This will become the third community park in Laurel County and there's talk that a parks and recreation team may be hired in the future for the public's safety.

"The statistic surprised me of the number of bikes in the city," Mayor Troy Rudder said.

About 7,500 kids use bicycles in the Laurel County School District.

“Kids are dying to have somewhere to ride,” Cochrane said. “This will get them out of the house and away from video games.”

Darren Henson, Third Rock Consultant says the project is rich environmentally and recreationally.

“A child with training wheels won’t have to worry about going down a hill or getting run over,” Henson said.

“I may even ride with my granddaughters on tricycles,” Rudder added.

A public hearing will be provided on Feb. 16, at 5 p.m. at the London-Laurel County Chamber of Commerce in order for the community to view the master plan for the park and ask questions.

Staff writer Magen McCraey can be reached by e-mail at mmccraey@sentinel-echo.com



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