

Converse seeking grants for park development

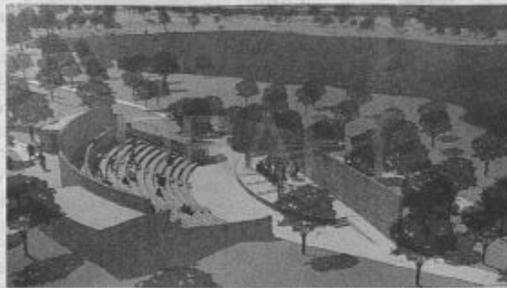
By Jeff B. Flinn
STAFF WRITER

Converse is going to shop its recent parks master plan to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission to see if there are any grants within the state agency that can help bring long overdue development to the Converse Lake area.

City Manager Lanny Lambert detailed a "recreational vision study" during the Jan. 19 Converse city council meeting that included a number of proposed park improvements — a 17-mile hike-and-bike trail that would connect all four of the city's existing and planned parks; an amphitheater at City Lake Park; a campground next to the lake; and revamped and improved sports facilities, including soccer fields, basketball courts and tennis courts.

The study — prepared by the Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research from the University of Texas at San Antonio's College of Architecture, Construction and Planning — incorporates the city's existing parks, extols the benefits of creating Heritage Park along with the Converse Heritage Museum, and spurs development at City Lake Park, behind Converse City Park.

Lambert said the city approached Texas Parks and Wildlife last year about potential funding for a parks grant to cover updates and renovation. "We were basically told, 'Get a parks plan, a master plan, and then we'll talk,'" Lambert said. The city went to its Economic Development Corp. board to see if it would fund a



Courtesy Photo

A parks master plan draft shows an amphitheater and hike-and-bike trails on the shores of Converse Lake.

parks master plan that the city could use.

The EDC agreed, and soon the city was in contact with the university. Seven months and \$7,000 later, the university released its "draft plan" for the city just before an approaching grants deadline in Austin.

Bert Moyer of the UT-SA urban and regional planning department walked council through a presentation that produced the draft plan that Lambert wants the council to digest and familiarize themselves with, while Lambert's office submits the plan by Texas Parks and Wildlife's grants deadline.

Moyer told the council that the city's current 277 acres of parkland factors out at about 15.2 acres per 1,000 population and allocates about \$19.31 of its budget per 1,000 people for park upkeep and development. That compares to \$31.05 spent on parks in Live Oak, \$37.48 spent in Schertz and \$15.06 spent in Universal City.

To qualify for the TPW's Local Park Grant Program, the city must develop a master plan that covers a 10-year period and includes updates at five-year intervals.

Rick Smith, the city's parks and environmental commission chairman, urged the council to approve the plan. He said the parks commission added five points to the UTSA draft, which included a study of redoing, revamping or adding a new pool, and an assessment of a skate park. The remaining three topics included creation of a community garden, combination tennis-basketball courts at North Park, and lighting at the city's ball fields.

City Councilwoman Nancy Droneburg said the first thing that caught her eye is the fact that all of Converse's parks can be hooked together with a hike-and-bike trail that would stretch more than 17 miles through City Park, on to North Park, over to the planned Heritage Park area and down to the city's undeveloped East Park, before winding back to City Park.

But it all depends on securing the funding from any of a number of funding sources.

The draft will be on the council's next agenda on Feb. 2 for discussion and approval.

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