



SCOTT KEELER/STAFF

Mauldin City Council has approved the purchase of land to expand Sunset Park by 17.5 acres. Supporters of the plan believe it will help ease congestion at all of Mauldin's parks, including Springfield, which is seen here.

## Mauldin's Sunset Park will expand

Current programs will get more space as new ones are added, including lacrosse and rugby

**By Scott Keeler**

Staff Writer  
dskeeler@greenvillenews.com

A proposal that will expand Sunset Park has been approved by Mauldin City Council. The final reading to purchase 17.5 acres adjacent to the park entrance carried by a 4-2 vote.

The purchase price for the land, which is owned by the family of former Mauldin Mayor L.S. Green, is \$439,362. It will be paid out of Mauldin's Hospitality and Accommodations Tax fund. Councilman Taft Matney said the purchase comes without a bond or tax increase, and that there will still be more than \$1 million remaining in the fund.

"We can afford to do this with the money we have," said councilman Scott Crosby. "We will not be developing with money we don't have, and we won't be creating debt on this."

Matney said the land has enough space for two regulation-size football fields. He believes that will provide a boost Mauldin's Recreation Department. The department currently has one dedicated football field, which is just 80 yards

long, at Springfield Park.

"It will allow us to expand field usage for our existing programs as well as provide for the expansion into new programs such as lacrosse and rugby," Matney said. "As a town of 25,000 people, we shouldn't have our residents going somewhere else for recreation."

Councilmen Dale Black and Larry Goodson voted against the purchase, reiterating their concerns from the first reading about the current physical state of Mauldin's three parks — City, Springfield and Sunset.

"I think we owe it to residents to take our existing facilities and make them top notch before we expand," said Goodson. "I just think that amount of money could put us in contention with Greenville's Little League, with Heritage Park and with Northwood."

"I believe we're putting the cart before the horse with this."

Black added, "Until we get the three facilities we've got up to date with fencing, restroom facilities, concession stands and scoreboards where needed, I just can't support the purchase of this 17.5 acres knowing

we're going to have to spend another million or \$2 million to build it up."

Matney agreed with their sentiment about the current state of the parks, but stressed that the space will be vital for the rec program.

"The facilities at those parks are deplorable. We have no soap to wash your hands. Those things absolutely, 100 percent, need to be taken care of," Matney said. "But all of our current field space is being used."

Matney said that some football teams currently have to practice on baseball outfields and some of those same fields are used by fall baseball teams during football season.

"The fact of the matter is there's no more land being produced," said Matney. "Being adjacent to the park, that property is ideal for what we hope to be able to do in the not-too-distant future."

Matney added that the timing was also a factor.

"The Green family has been in discussion with the city for a number of years and been very patient," said Matney. "If we didn't get the land, the reality is that somebody else would buy it. A developer would come in and potentially put in something that did not fit with the park atmosphere."

In addition helping provide more space for rec teams to practice on, Matney believes the new land will help ease safety concerns. Matney says that often multiple teams practice or play at the same time at each park and that has led to overcrowding issues. He specifically mentioned seeing cars parked on the sides of the road at Springfield Park because there were no spaces available during those practice/game times.

"Public safety is ultimately local government's primary concern," said Matney. "While recreation is important, we've got to make sure that our families stay safe while they participate. Forcing families to walk into that roadway isn't focusing on their safety."

Matney said there's no timetable on when the land will be transformed into playing fields as the purchase approval was the first step in that process.

In the meantime, Matney is confident that improvements will be made to all three parks.

"We do have facilities that need more than tender, loving care," said Matney. "It's always a challenge when you're dealing with public parks to maintain facilities, concession stands and restrooms. ... But we have to do a better job."