

Other views

'Penny for parks' an investment in quality of life

This ballot question will determine whether parks and open space are a priority in Greenville County.

By Brad Wyche

Greenville County voters will be making many important decisions on Nov. 5, but none is more important than the "penny for parks" referendum. The question on the ballot will be whether to approve adding one cent to the sales tax in the county for no more than one year in order to implement an exciting plan for new and expanded parks, greenways and neighborhood improvements.

If approved, the penny would make the following projects a reality:

■ 10 new parks throughout the county, including the acquisition and protection of the Poinsett

Bridge, the state's oldest bridge, and parks at or near North Greenville College, Lake Conessee, Simpsonville and Fork Shoals;

■ 16 park expansions; and
 ■ Sidewalks, streetscapes and other neighborhood improvements in the various municipalities in the county.

By state law, all proceeds from the penny must be spent on the projects described in the plan. (They also will be listed on the ballot.) The penny would remain in effect from May 1, 2003, to April 30, 2004, or until \$50.5 million is raised, whichever first occurs.

Parks and open space are es-

GUEST COLUMN

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sential elements of a community's quality of life, providing wonderful places to play, walk or simply relax. Passive parks such as natural areas and greenways pro-

vide habitat for wildlife and contribute to improved air and water quality.

It is no coincidence that the perennial winners of the "Best Places to Live" contests, such as Austin, Texas, and Boulder, Colo., have made parks and open space a top priority. For the best and brightest workers being sought by every community, the place is now as important as the job. They are looking for places with good schools, high-quality developments, many cultural opportunities and lots of parks and green space.

On Nov. 5, the voters will have the opportunity to say whether parks and open space are a priority in Greenville County. Are we willing to provide better and more accessible recreational facilities for a population that is growing at the rate of 16 people per day? Is it important to us that

our young people should not have to play games late at night and travel long distances to find a field?

Land is being developed in Greenville County at the rate of nine acres per day — that's the equivalent of a brand-new Haywood Mall every 10 days. Isn't it time to strike a better balance between development and conservation in our county?

We are building and widening roads throughout Greenville County. Shouldn't we also be building and expanding our parks?

No one likes taxes, but this one has several features that make it much less offensive than most others:

■ It cannot last for more than one year.

■ All of the proceeds from the penny have to be used for the projects listed in the plan.

■ Residents and visitors from other places will pay for some of it.

We have a window of opportunity that is quickly closing shut in Greenville County. Already there is insufficient land in four of the 12 County Council districts for new parks. Since it was created in 1969, the Greenville County Recreation District has not been allowed to use any of its tax-generated funding for parkland acquisition. If this referendum is defeated, another one cannot be considered for two years, and by that time, many potential park sites will have been lost. Soon it will be too late.

Greenville County Council and city leaders should be commended for giving us the opportunity to make a big difference for the quality of life in our county. Now it's up to us.