

Boasting two championship fields and state-of-the-art irrigation systems, the Jack Allen Recreation Complex received rave reviews from the soccer community for the past three years.

But Decatur's Parks and Recreation Department wants more.

Officials want to secure the complex's place as a top soccer establishment in the Southeast and the country.

Cementing the recognition requires additions to the 11-field facility. The highest priority, according to Tami Reist, is a press box.

While the city attracts state youth soccer tournaments, many regional and national tournaments demand a press box, said Reist, the president of the Decatur-Morgan County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The press box provides an area for television, radio and Internet coverage, typically associated with larger tournaments.

To increase Jack Allen's allure, the bureau aligned with Parks and Recreation to request funds from the capital budget for the press box. Parks and Recreation Director Jeff Dunlap said building and installing the structure would cost an estimated \$150,000.

The department submitted the request to the City Council for consideration when discussing stimulus and capital funds.

Whether the dream of a press box will become a reality depends on the distribution of money, Dunlap said.

"We're at a point where Jack Allen is bringing enough money for the city that improvements to the center should be considered," Reist said.

Along with the press box, Parks and Recreation requested financing for two additional fields, a dressing room and shower facility, family park, recreation center, maintenance building and splash pad at the soccer complex. Combined, the requests total \$10.7 million.

Dollar for dollar, Dunlap said, the press box and the dressing room facility would impact the city most when considering the projected revenue generated.

"One way we first evaluate projects is to see what's going to create an economic impact and create more revenue," Dunlap said. "The high school state championships won't

even consider us without a dressing room, and we could lose other tournaments because we don't have a press box.”

During 2008, soccer tournaments hosted at Jack Allen generated an economic impact of more than \$2 million, Reist said.

The soccer complex will generate more funds when the city hosts the Alabama Youth Soccer Association's Division I and II State Cup tournaments, scheduled for the next two weekends. The first weekend of the tournament will bring in 116 teams, with the top performing teams returning for the second weekend.

This is the second year the city will host the State Cup tournaments. The youth soccer association awarded Decatur the three-year contract in 2007, which includes hosting duties for the 2007 to 2009 Governor's Cup in November and the 2008 to 2010 State Cup in May.

Last year, the State Cup tournament generated a \$480,684 economic impact and filled 788 hotel rooms.

“Where would the city and the hotels be without the tournaments brought in by Jack Allen, Wilson Morgan and the tennis center?” Dunlap said. “With the corporate business down, the one thing sustaining the hotels and bringing revenue to the city is the tournaments.”

The convention and visitors bureau plans to submit a bid to retain the hosting duties for the November and May tournaments, Reist said.

Scott Spencer, the association's director of coaching, said the organization will begin reviewing the bids at the end of May.

Dunlap credited the success of the Jack Allen Recreation Complex to former Mayors Lynn Fowler and Don Kyle and the previous City Council, who authorized funding.

“They chose to build a first-class facility, and we wouldn't be where we are today without their support,” Dunlap said. “We need the support of the council and the mayor to keep improving the complex.”

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