

## Augusta parks plan calls for more parks

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One finding in a new Augusta Recreation master plan released Wednesday might surprise Augusta residents familiar with the city's 60-plus parks and recreation facilities.

Included in the 94-page document is the recommendation that Augusta needs more park space – an additional 47 acres of “neighborhood park” and 64 acres of “community park” space – to meet a national standard of service.

A team of consultants, including Cranston Engineering's Tom Robertson, presented the plan to Augusta Commission members Wednesday in a presentation later obtained by *The Augusta Chronicle*. Cranston Engineering is the lead consultant hired to do the plan.

According to the plan, neighborhood parks include Sand Hills, Eastview and Apple Valley and are up to five acres in size. Each neighborhood park serves 1,000 people, and Augusta has underserved areas across south Richmond County and in southwest Augusta.

Community parks such as Warren Road Community Center and May Park serve 1,000 people per 1.5 acre. Empty spots include much of west and southwest Augusta.

The plan suggests a few areas for the new park space, which will cost a combined \$14 million. They include a new Flowing Wells and Rae's Creek Park for which Robertson said discussions had already begun with the Richmond County Board of Education. Other sites include the Springfield Village Park downtown now managed by Augusta Tomorrow, it said.

Other cost estimates included in the plan are \$43.7 million to restore all parks to “good” condition, \$394,260 for four needed off-leash dog parks and \$789,924 to fill a void of three skate parks.

All told, the plan calls for \$75 million in capital spending.

The plan didn't name the 16 parks Augusta either needed to upgrade or close as a result of underuse but Robertson said it created a scoring system staff could use to identify them.

It also did not analyze needs or conditions at Riverwalk Augusta – the city's most popular and used by residents, according to survey results – but instead included the park on a list of ones needing new site-specific master plans.

The riverwalk, which Robertson designed in the 1980s, was “not part of the scope,” Robertson said. “We had 60 parks to deal with.”