

Plans are underway to improve the Lake Country Soccer complex at Cooper Park.

# Council reviews \$10M in soccer complex upgrades



BY: CHRISTINE MORTON, REPORTER [CMORTON@SBJ.NET](mailto:CMORTON@SBJ.NET)

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A \$10 million upgrade to the Lake Country Soccer Inc. complex at Cooper Park is in the works.

Last night, Springfield City Council unanimously voted 9-0 in declaring the intent to financially assist and fully support the plan.

Bob Belote, director of the Springfield-Greene County Park Board, told council members the Park Board and soccer club have had a 35-year partnership. He said there is a crucial need to update the complex.

“The facility is older, it’s 25-30 years old on some of the infrastructure,” Belote said in an interview with Springfield Business Journal. “We also need it to be competitive with other communities in the sports tourism world.”

Belote said the planned improvements include the addition of eight turf fields and enhancements to the 10 existing grass fields. In his PowerPoint presentation at last night’s council meeting, Belote said there is currently only one artificial turf field. Upgrades include a FIFA-approved championship field with seating for 3,500 people, new locker rooms, restrooms and meeting areas, according to his presentation.



“It would also include a spectator concourse area that would make us a lot more fan friendly with new food and beverage options, fan-friendly zones, picnic play area, additional shade spectator areas for families to kind of hang out while they are there on a busy tournament day,” Belote told council.

Belote said the upgrades would allow the city to bid on state championships, as well as national and regional tournaments. He said the improvements would make the park an anchor tournament destination, one of the recommendations made last fall in a sports tourism report by Phoenix-based

consulting company Huddle Up Group.

Tracy Kimberlin, president and CEO of the Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau, spoke in favor of the project at the meeting, noting the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the travel industry. “This kind of development, at this point in time, is music to the ears of the entire travel industry, particularly the hotels who are in desperate need of any kind of help that can be given,” Kimberlin said.

Belote said the city would invest \$5 million upfront on the project and then challenge the soccer communities or private donors to come up with a \$5 million match. John Markey, executive director at Lake Country Soccer, said local donors are interested in the project but declined to disclose names. He said the club has hired Oregon-based capital campaign company Cogeo to help raise funds.

“What I am super excited about is that we won’t have to do this in phases over the next two to three or four years. The idea is to do it all at once,” Belote said. “To do it all at one time is really a dream come true.”