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**New soccer fields, tennis court resurfacing next on recreation list**

By JOEY HOLLEMAN

Staff Writer

Richland County Recreation Commission has approved spending nearly \$135,000 to build new soccer fields, help get a new school started, keep a tennis tournament in the area and make basketball courts safer.

While the commission waits to see whether Richland County Council will allow a new construction bond, it has to keep tweaking current facilities and finishing the last project from its previous building spree, the Garners Ferry Road complex.

At its Feb. 21 meeting, the commission approved a nearly \$30,000 contract with AAA Well Drilling for the Garners Ferry Road water well and nearly \$15,000 with W.P. Law for a drive control for that system. The lighting contract for the complex was approved last month.

If the weather performs perfectly — little rain in the next few months then just the right amount when the grass needs to push down its roots — the soccer fields could be ready for play as early as the fall, executive director Lewis Leopard said. If the weather doesn't cooperate, that pushes the play back to the next spring.

Construction crews also could be cutting it close on another project, a new air-conditioning system for part of the former Crane Creek Elementary School. The recreation agency is adapting the school for other uses. One section will be leased to Carolina School for Inquiry, a new charter school. They need the air-conditioning by the time teachers start work in July.

Carolina School for Inquiry is paying its \$25,000 annual lease up front to help pay for the air-conditioning system. The recreation commission agreed to spend \$50,000 on the system. Leopard said if the air conditioning isn't ready, the agency temporarily can house classes in another section of the school with working air-conditioning.

The commissioners also approved spending an additional \$7,300 on new tennis court surfaces. They already have resurfaced 20 courts and had about \$53,000 left in the budget to resurface more courts. But that wasn't quite enough to finish all 12 remaining courts.

Robert Redfern, a deputy executive director of the agency, explained that the new court surface will be important in the bid to keep the Southern 12s tennis tournament in Richland County. Other areas have begun to lure tournament organizers to their courts. Because the summer tournament pumps millions of tourism dollars into the local economy, the extra \$7,300 is a good investment, Redfern said.

Also, the commission voted to spend \$32,000 on new padding for the walls around basketball courts in 14 gyms. Leopard said the gyms meet safety regulations, but the padding would make them even safer. The Richland County Recreation Foundation is working to defray the expense by raising private funds. BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina already has put up \$5,000 for the project.

Reach Holleman at (803) 771-8366 or [jholleman@thestate.com](mailto:jholleman@thestate.com).