

3 Cities Near Deal That Would Grant Them Parks Funds

But Chamblee, Lithonia and **Pine Lake** Report Slow Progress In Negotiations

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Doraville is nearing the completion of its new recreation building, and Stone Mountain, Decatur and Clarkston are close to settling the terms under which the county will grant them the park bond funds they were promised almost 16 months ago. Officials in Chamblee, Lithonia and **Pine Lake** - the three other participant cities in the county's \$33 million park renovation plan - reported little progress, however.

After openly supporting the county's parks-improvement plan, city officials balked when they learned, after the referendum had passed, that they would have to deed city parks to the county for a 30-year period before they could receive park improvement funds. Of the seven DeKalb municipalities participating in the park renovation plan, only Doraville accepted the contract terms and began building its 17,000 square-foot gymnasium and recreation building.

Forest Fleming, Doraville councilman and the project's general contractor, said he hoped to have the building completed by March 15. "Because we've acted as our own contractor we've been able to do more with the money," he said. The \$275,000-gymnasium, located in Honeysuckle Park, is being built with city funds. The county will reimburse Doraville for that amount after the completion of the structure, said Mr. Fleming.

According to Stone Mountain Mayor Jane Rhodes, county park officials have agreed to let the city lease park property to the county instead of following the original deeding provision. Legal clauses in city-park deeds, which stipulated that park property would return to the original donors if the land left city ownership, prevented Stone Mountain officials from accepting the county's original terms. "This way we're not giving anything away," said Mayor Rhodes of the new contract terms. "We'll lease them that area of the park they'll work on and then get [the land] returned when they're finished. But until I have the actual paper in my hand, I'm not going to believe this is settled," she said. Stone Mountain had been allocated \$220,000 in park renovation funds when the bond referendum was passed in October 1987.

Clarkston also reported that an agreement with the county on the contract terms was forthcoming, according to Mayor Ernest Whaley. "I got tired of having to pay attorney fees and called [Chief Executive Officer Manuel Maloof] and said 'Let's me and you work this out'," said Mayor Whaley. He said no formal agreement had been reached yet but that he believed the new terms would either be a greatly reduced period in the deeding provision or an easement provision which would allow the county to carry out park renovations on city property. Clarkston is slotted to receive \$110,000 for park renovations. Mayor Whaley said those funds would be spent on the

paving of tennis courts and parking areas, a combined city/county nature trail, and the construction of covered cook-out areas in Friendship and Milam parks.

County attorney Sid Johnson would not comment on his discussions with city officials saying only that his office was "working on it." DeKalb County Chief Executive Officer Manuel Maloof said things were "working fine." "I'm not going to discuss the details, but we're working as hard as we can on it," he said. "Whatever the problems are we work with it within the legal confines."

Meanwhile, Chamblee Mayor Johnson "Dub" Brown said that no agreement with the county had been reached on the \$250,000 the city was promised for park renovations at Keswick Park. Chamblee agreed last September to deed the city-owned Dynamo Swim Club to the county for the \$500,000 in renovation funds.

In Lithonia, Mayor Al Venable said that he had last communicated to county park officials that he would agree to deed the city park for three years. "The ball's in their court now," he said, "it's just a matter of getting the legalities settled." A total of \$100,000 was slotted for improvements in Lithonia's 40-acre park.

Decatur Mayor Mike Mears said he was waiting for the county to provide him with a revised agreement similar to that of Clarkston's. "The understanding is that the [deed] is not to exceed the time funds are actually being used during construction," he said. "They're supposed to be putting the final touches on it." Mayor Mears said he expected to begin construction by mid-February so as to be through before summer started.

Pine Lake, promised \$40,000 in park renovation funds, has not heard from county park officials, according to that city's new mayor Neil Copeland. "It's still up in the air, but if something agreeable to the city came up we would settle it," he said. Mayor Copeland said the deed to **Pine Lake** park prohibited the city from deeding the property to another party.

The last paragraph did not appear in the final edition.