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Future skateboard park

A burned-out car appears to be the most prominent feature of this city-owned parking lot at Cate and Church streets. The Streets Subcommittee of the Jonesboro City Council's Infrastructure Committee voted Thursday to recommend setting aside half of the property for development as a skateboard park. —Sun photo by David Stout.

Streets panel favors plan for new park

By **Keith Inman**

Sun staff writer

Alderman Chris Moore said Thursday that he sees an opportunity to solve several problems with one no-cost decision.

The Streets Subcommittee of the Jonesboro City Council's Infrastructure Committee endorsed a plan to convert half of a city-owned downtown parking lot into a skateboard park. A burned-out car and a few service trucks for nearby businesses were the only vehicles parked at the lot at Cate and Church streets Thursday afternoon.

Moore said the Parks and Recreation Department had surveyed city residents last

March and found that a place for skateboarding, roller skating and rollerblade facilities was among the top 10 requests.

Moore said the Street Department could put up a barricade on a concrete median. "Roughly divide that parking lot in half and allow skateboarders, rollerbladers and roller skaters to utilize half of that park as a skate park," Moore said. The other half could be used by vehicles, he suggested.

Parks Director Jason Wilkie said last week that city or federal grant funds could be used to develop a skateboard park.

"The advantage of this will

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be that we can then enforce the 'no skating' on the city equipment downtown," Moore said, adding that the city has received numerous complaints about skateboards and rollerblades on Main and surrounding streets.

Moore said Mayor Hubert Brodell has endorsed the idea.

In other business, the subcommittee recommended appropriating \$57,660.20 to develop a small strip park on Main Street, across from the Craighead County Courthouse.

The park was originally part of the Jonesboro Main Street Enhancement project but had to be dropped from the grant that funded the overall project because the city does not own the property.

Wallace Fowler, a member of the Central Planning Association, said the group has received tentative agreement from the owner, Bank of America, to release the small strip of land. He said local bank officials have turned the proposal over to the Charlotte, N.C.-based bank's real estate section for review.

"We feel very comfortable that they're going to go along with donating the 16 feet to the city," Fowler said.

Committee members also discussed possible solutions to drainage and traffic problems in the area of First Baptist Church. Church officials have been attempting for more than a year to work out an agreement with the city to take steps to protect pedestrian traffic while also alleviating street flooding. Committee members and City Engineer Claude Martin said it may be possible to implement those improvements into planned improvements on East Matthews Avenue.

The city, through the Metropolitan Area Traffic Authority (MATA), already has issued a contract to convert Matthews into a 3-lane road. Martin said he could develop plans that could be implemented into the project as a change order.

The committee will review the plans next month.

Other issues endorsed by the subcommittee included a recommendation to raise the speed limit on Washington Avenue east of Bridge Street from 25 to 30 mph. Moore said the increased speed was warranted following completion of street improvements.

The committee also instructed Street Supt. Gene Barnett to install signs to bar tractor-trailers from traveling on Mallory Court. Resident Scott Aycock said several 18-wheelers have gone through his yard after drivers discover that "it's physically impossible" for them to go down that street.

There's no reason for them to drive through that neighborhood, Aycock said. Drivers may simply be getting lost after turning south off of Nettleton Avenue, he said.

Barnett also agreed to have the signal division make adjustments on the traffic signals along Main Street on Sundays. While there's very little traffic on Main early on Sundays, Main Street resident Jane LeBlanc complained that the signals at the Cherry and Oak intersections force cars to wait for extended periods before changing.

The General and Building Subcommittee also heard a presentation from Mark Taylor of Professional Audio of Arkansas Inc., on ways to improve the sound system in the city council chambers at the Huntington Building. He recommended utilization of more microphones, equalizers, automatic "smart mixers" that would eliminate feedback and control sound levels and installation of acoustical panels on the walls.

Since the project would cost more than \$10,000, the committee voted to ask city Purchasing Officer Steve Kent to use the recommendations to advertise for bids.