Anderson City Council members gave preliminary approval Monday to a proposal to change the zoning of Anderson University property, which would allow the school to construct new athletic fields and facilities.

The proposal would change the zoning of Anderson University’s athletic campus, the site of the old Anderson County fairgrounds, from light industrial to multifamily residential. The change would also affect a vacant lot of almost six acres on Gossett Street across from the athletic campus.

“This would be a great thing for the city and Anderson College,” said council member A.B. “Buck” Roberts, whose district includes the school’s athletic campus.

The city’s planning commission unanimously recommended the zoning change.

If approved, the zoning change will allow the university to build new athletic fields, tennis courts and a pool on the 44-acre site. The facilities will not be open to the public, said Dane Slaughter, associate vice president for facilities and procurement at the university.

The university’s long-term plans include new buildings on the athletic campus and surrounding property on Williamston Road, Old Williamston Road and Gossett Street. The plans will likely include creating student housing on Old Williamston Road across from the athletic campus, said university President Evans Whitaker.

The athletic campus and Gossett Street zoning changes were recommended by city officials, said university spokesman Barry Ray.

The current light industrial zoning allows for parking lots, manufacturers, restaurants and retail businesses, said Sherrie Williams, zoning administrator for the city. It does not allow for retail offices, which would include university coaches’ offices, she said.

The university’s main campus is zoned for multifamily residential construction. Since the planned athletic fields and facilities are part of the university, the property should be zoned the same way the university’s property is zoned, Williams said.

Before spring, university officials plan to complete construction on a synthetic-turf softball
field and eight to 12 tennis courts, Slaughter said. The pool is also scheduled to be finished by then.

Officials have already begun demolishing many of the old fairground buildings left on the athletic campus in preparation for the construction.

In the coming years, university officials plan to add a baseball stadium and a stadium that can be used for soccer, lacrosse or possibly football, Slaughter said.

There is no time frame for that construction, Ray said.

The proposal to change the zoning must be read two more times before council members can vote on a final approval.

“It is a very handsome-looking site,” city manager John Moore told city council members.

Also at the meeting, council member Rick Laughridge assumed the duties of mayor pro tem. He will take on the duties of mayor in Mayor Terence Roberts’ absence.

Roberts, who was selected last week to become president of the Municipal Association of South Carolina, and four council members were sworn in with their families in attendance. Each was re-elected in April.