

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS ANDERSON TOWNSHIP PARK DISTRICT

SEPTEMBER 15, 2015

Nadine Gelter, President, called the special meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Anderson Township Park District (“ATPD”) to order at 5:30 pm at Park District Headquarters, 8249 Clough Pike, Cincinnati, OH 45244. Present were Board Members: Angie Stocker, Dale Bartholomew, Rob Herking, and Tom Turchiano.

Also present were: Ken Kushner, Executive Director; Emily Armstrong, Assistant Director/Board Clerk; Brian Jordan, Financial Officer; Jessica Fall, Recreation Manager; and Sheila Fehn, Office Manager.

GUESTS: Sheila Vilvens, Forest Hills Journal; Stephen McGhee, Duffy Beischel, Cathy DiBiagio, Joyce Gundling, Janice Crago, Kevin Crago, Kathleen Oetgen, Tom Fernandez, Brad Motz, Kathleen Wagoner, Moira Griesser, Maria Kelley, Jen Maginnis, Yan Nasilevich, Beverly Robinson, Jean Wakefield, Dee Stone, Lynn Dorsten, Scott Dorsten, Josh Gerth, Elsa Basler, Kim Loseff, Steve Loseff, Amy Miller, Mike Ward, and Art Daniels.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mrs. Gelter stated the Board did not have a need for an Executive Session and recommended the Agenda be revised to reflect no Executive Session.

AGENDA: Mrs. Stocker moved the Board approve the Agenda as amended. Mr. Herking seconded the motion. Voting: Yes: Mrs. Stocker, Mr. Bartholomew, Mrs. Gelter, Mr. Herking, and Mr. Turchiano. (5); No: None. The motion carried unanimously.

Beech Acres Property Purchase and Levy:

Mrs. Gelter read the following statement on behalf of the Board of Park Commissioners:

Since September of 2014 the park board has been navigating the process to acquire Beech Acres Parenting Center’s property as public parkland. We are currently in contract with the landowner to purchase the property, contingent upon a levy passing on November 3, approving the funds to purchase the property, by all residents of Anderson Township.

Over the last several months, officials from the Forest Hills School District, Anderson Township Government, and the Anderson Township Park District explored opportunities to work together toward the betterment of the future of our community. One of the opportunities, which resonated with the community, involved a private developer’s proposal to bring new development to the current Anderson High School site which would generate revenue to partially fund construction of a new Anderson High School on the Beech Acres property. While we all agreed many benefits may be derived from this concept, all three entities determined there were too many insurmountable hurdles to overcome. Therefore, in a joint statement (August 25, 2015) all three entities were unanimous in the decision that the project was not feasible.

That being said, it has been made clear to the park board by community members that they believe the Anderson High School/economic development concept is still possible and actively being pursued today. The park district values the trust our community has in the park board that we do what we say we are going to do. Because of the significant confusion and frustration the Anderson High

School/economic development concept is causing in our community, we specifically want to address the park board's position on this matter and clarify what the upcoming park levy is about.

The common themes we have heard over the past year are:

- *The community wants the Beech Acres Parenting Center's 36 acres to be public property.*
- *The community needs the three entities to work together for the betterment of the community.*

The park board continues to explore both public and private partnerships for development of this property. Should the Anderson High School/economic development concept still be viable, which would be a decision to be made by the Forest Hills School District and Anderson Township Government boards, the Anderson Township Park District is still open to the idea. But, the community should be the ultimate decision maker at the ballot box on November 3 to make it parkland, with opportunity for future input to decide whether or not they want a school to be built there. This affords the entities the time required to thoroughly explore the high school/economic development concept and to present the plan to the public.

The bottom line is the community will ultimately decide on the Beech Acres Parenting Center's property:

On November 3, 2015, voters will decide if they want the Beech Acres property to be in the public's hands, at least as parkland. The 0.7 mill, 15-year levy would generate approximately \$12.86 million to acquire the 36 acres including the RecPlex, renovate the RecPlex, and prepare the property for use by the public. The cost to the owner of a \$100,000 home would be \$24.50 per year. A positive vote would assure this property would be held for the community's best interest.

*If a plan to put Anderson High School on the property is determined to be viable and a win-win scenario is agreed to by all three entities, **the community should be presented with another choice to decide whether or not they want a school to be built there.** If the community approves the school option, the park board will cooperate in conveying the property to the school district.*

The park board believes this to be a diplomatic and ethical way to go forward with this very important property and community issue. The only opportunity to capture this property for the community is through the park district this November. How better to decide this outcome than to put the decision in the hands of the community we all serve?

She further stated the community is welcome to contact Ken Kushner at any time with questions.

Mr. Dorsten asked how long it would take to come to a decision on a second vote.

Mrs. Gelter said the entities would need to work through the second vote component together.

Mrs. Stocker said the timeline is for the Township and the Forest Hills School District ("FHSD") to come to terms with. They are the ones with the deadlines.

Mr. Loseff asked how long the ATPD could wait before investing in the property.

Mr. Bartholomew said the priority for the ATPD is to continue the programs, events, and leagues at the RecPlex. The ATPD would need time to raise money to build a RecPlex somewhere else.

Mr. Herking said the levy allows the ATPD to acquire the property for the community while the FHSD figures out if the Anderson High School relocation plan can work. The ATPD is open to it. The FHSD has deadlines and sunk costs to consider and they have to answer to the community for the levy the community passed last year to renovate the schools to new. The ATPD is willing to give the FHSD and the Township time to make a decision in the best interest of the community. We want them to make their decision in public and on the record. Until they say it is dead, we would wait to move forward with major improvements.

Mrs. Stocker said the ATPD could not move forward right away because the landowner would need time to vacate the property.

Ms. Miller asked how much of the land is in the City of Cincinnati, how does City property affect the land conveyance, and what would the ATPD do with the money from the land.

Mr. Kushner said the portion of the property that is in the City of Cincinnati is about eight acres and is to the west of the cottages with the large beech trees surrounding the house. The ATPD can own property outside the Township. The ATPD would invest the funds from the levy on indoor recreation.

Mr. Bartholomew said the ATPD could rescind the levy if the levy passes and the ATPD determines it does not need the levy. The Trustees rescinded the Greenspace levy after they determined they no longer wanted to acquire such property, therefore, they discontinued collecting the taxes.

Ms. Oetgen asked how the voters would chose to move forward with the school.

Mrs. Gelter said the mechanism to determine the second public input opportunity is not established. The three entities would explore the options and determine what is legal and appropriate.

Mr. Kushner stated if the project is determined to be a win-win-win, then the community would ultimately win. There are still uncertainties about the legal and financial aspects of the concept, which are issues the Township and the FHSD have to vet.

Mr. Herking suggested the second input option might be another professional survey.

Ms. Wagoner asked what Beech Acres Parenting Center will do if the ATPD levy fails.

Mrs. Gelter said the ATPD cannot answer for the landowner, but that in the beginning the other interested buyers were developers.

Mr. Beischel said the land could be sold for a development. He said he no longer lives in Anderson Township, but is in attendance at the meeting on behalf of his resident daughter.

Mrs. Gelter introduced Mr. Beischel as a former park board member, who currently sits on the Foundation for Parks and Recreation board.

Mr. Daniels said the facts and information need to go out quickly because the community thinks negatively about the park levy. The community wants the Beech Acres property to be public land as a

school or a park. He said if people knew the land could go to a developer, then there is a better chance for the park levy to pass.

Mr. Turchiano said the ATPD needs the guests help as advocates to reach out to let the public know this is what everyone wants. While the ATPD does not have all the answers now, we are committed to working towards the answers. This is what everyone in this room wants. This gives the FHSD the opportunity to fully vet their plan.

Mrs. Gelter said the ATPD has heard repeatedly that the school concept does not have enough time to know whether it can work or not. The ATPD board is enabling them to have the time they need to figure things out, without the community missing out on the opportunity to get the property.

Mr. Kushner said there were many timing constraints, most importantly the timeline established by the landowner. Everyone involved was well aware of the timing issues. The ATPD understands the community wants the land as public property and the park levy makes sure the land would be in the public's hands.

Mr. Loseff asked if the ballot language could be changed on the November ballot to reflect the options for a school and a park.

Mrs. Stocker said it is too late to change the ballot language. One of the time constraints Mr. Kushner mentioned includes the Hamilton County Board of Elections August 5th deadline to file. The ATPD has always done what we said we were going to do. The park board gives the community our word that if the park levy passes and then the school concept gets figured out, we would work with the FHSD to enable the school to go there. We are asking the community to trust us. She asked the guests to help get the word out to the community.

Mr. Herking said he has heard that some people want the property for a school and some people want the property as a park. He said the park board is open because if the school concept is possible, it would be a win-win-win for the community, and therefore, he thinks the effort would get community support. He said Trustee Gerth is a prolific Facebooker, which would help reach the community with the information.

Ms. Miller said she worked hard on the last FHSD levy. She came to tonight's meeting thinking she was going to oppose the park board. She said the park board's statement has changed her perspective because they would capture the land for the public and be open to the school concept if it can all work out.

Mr. Dorsten said people are looking for assurance the park board is committed to real collaboration. The community wants to know with some certainty when they vote in November that there will be a school there.

Mr. Herking said all three entities have worked together for many years, and the park board is committed to continuing the effort.

Mr. Turchiano said the park board members stand by their names being on such a document because it is their true intention. He stated the second input opportunity is to maintain the board's integrity, so that changing the purpose for the property is not a bait and switch to the community.

Mrs. Stocker said the ATPD has been very clear all along that the intention is to make the Beech Acres property parkland. The park board has had many meetings over the last few years to determine what the public wants and conducted a professional community survey. The ATPD has been transparent and was willing to explore the partnership concepts. The park board believes the land should be saved for the public. If the concept for the new school is vetted and works, then the park board would be ok with it because it would be what is best for the community. The ATPD cannot change the ballot language at this point and it would be difficult to be clear with the possibilities. The park board put in writing our intentions to go forward with our plan to acquire the property as parkland, while the Trustees and the FHSD board determine their part. If the new school is possible, then the ATPD will go back to the table with the three entities.

Mr. McGhee said the park board should be commended for operating with transparency. People need to be apprised of the park board's different position since last week. He further stated maybe the public did not give the park board a chance to listen to ATPD's intentions.

Mr. Herking stated there were many intentions that could not be discussed.

Ms. Oetgen said she appreciates the ATPD's transparency and encouraged it of the other entities before the November 3rd election. The park board's statement should be made public to give others the same reassurance.

Mr. Loseff asked if the vote on November 3rd is for parkland, does the park board have the flexibility needed to make it into a school.

Mr. Kushner said that is why the second public input opportunity is so important, because it needs to have the approval of the community.

Mrs. Stocker said we would have to go back to the community to see if it's what they want. The ATPD is asking the community to help us get the property for the community. The ATPD is obligated by its word.

Mrs. Gundling said she called Beech Acres Parenting Center and they told her if the park levy does not pass the landowner could sell the property to the FHSD for the new school. She does not want the community to be scared into their vote.

Mr. Herking said there is no guarantee for anyone for the property beyond the results of the ATPD's levy. The ATPD is not trying to scare anyone. The fact is that the ATPD has the property under contract, and if the levy passes, the community gets the property.

Mrs. Wakefield said she is confused about the ATPD's November levy, and asked if the levy passes if the money generated would go to the FHSD. She further asked if the FHSD would put facilities in their new school that the ATPD could use.

Mrs. Gelter said the levy is to acquire the land. Assuming the levy passes, and if the FHSD and Trustees say the new school concept works out, then after a community vote or approval, the ATPD would convey the property to the FHSD and invest in indoor recreation either there or possibly elsewhere. The schools are busy with their own facilities with limited time for the public.

Mrs. Stocker said there would be some immediate maintenance required for the RecPlex, which the ATPD would need to continue to use until a new facility was built elsewhere. The largest portion of the levy is for the property purchase. There are many questions, including if the school concept is even possible. At a minimum, the property would exist as parkland.

Mrs. Crago asked how the park board defines a win-win-win scenario for the ATPD.

Mrs. Stocker said a win-win-win scenario includes indoor recreation space, dedicated to the ATPD's year-round use. In addition to the gym at the RecPlex, the ATPD rents additional gym time from the FHSD and area churches because the RecPlex is busting at the seams.

Mr. Kushner said members of the public have asked how the ATPD plans to maintain the additional acreage, if the levy passes. He said the ATPD has been maintaining 28 acres of the Beech Acres grounds for the last six years as part of a barter-trade agreement in exchange for the use of various facilities, besides the RecPlex. The ATPD typically has a very good relationship with neighbors of the parks. We consider ourselves easy to work with. He further stated he has heard from many park visitors and neighbors that they want the property for the public and that they are not interested in the property being developed for apartments or housing.

Ms. Miller asked if there would be a zoning issue because part of the property is in the City of Cincinnati.

Mr. Kushner said the beech grove is approximately eight acres and resides in the City of Cincinnati. The ATPD's plans do not call for buildings in the beech grove, resulting in minimal matters for city zoning. The school idea calls for something entirely different and significant. Such zoning implications would need to be vetted during the process. The FHSD and Township would have to answer these sorts of questions regarding their school plan.

Ms. Griessor asked if the ATPD levy passes, how would the issue for the new school go back to the community. She said the ATPD's survey was only about the parks.

Mrs. Gelter said the mechanism to determine the second public input opportunity is not established. The three entities would explore the options and determine what is legal and appropriate.

Mr. Kushner said the ATPD heard from the community that it wants public collaboration among the entities. The ATPD is committed to the collaboration. He said he talked to FHSD Board of Education member, Jim Frooman this past Sunday who said the concept for the new school is dead. The Boards of the other two entities have said it is dead, but individuals are insisting the concept is not dead. The ATPD believes the Board statement read tonight by Mrs. Gelter is a way to navigate this matter. The ATPD does not want the community to miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capture this special property for future generations.

Mr. Herking said if the school plan is viable, he is on board for the school to be built there.

Mrs. Stocker said the ATPD does not make decisions in a vacuum. The ATPD is willing to make this work if the FHSD and Township say the school concept is doable. The park board's goal is to serve the community with more indoor recreation space because the RecPlex benefits more than just school

children. The work to figure out if the school plan can happen is on the shoulders of the Township and the FHSD. The ATPD's inability to answer the community's questions about the new school is because the questions are simply not the ATPD's to answer.

Mr. Turchiano said the second public input process would be a collaborative effort on behalf of all three entities.

Ms. Griessor stated the ATPD's survey was only about the parks and did not ask about the new school.

Mr. Kushner said the ATPD's community responsibility is for parks and recreation. When the FHSD passed its levy last fall, he thought the schools got what they said they needed to bring our schools up to standards. When the opportunity for the Beech Acres property came up, the ATPD was excited to present the news to the community. He was surprised when suddenly Anderson High School was so terrible it needed to be torn down, considering while he served on the FHSD facilities committee, Anderson High School was described as the easiest building to renovate to new.

Mrs. Stocker said the timeline for the survey was well underway before the school idea surfaced. Surveys take several weeks to produce, especially considering that Beech Acres Parenting Center had editing rights.

Mrs. Armstrong stated the survey process began in December when Beech Acres Parenting Center said they required it in order to be willing to wait until the November election. The pre-marketing survey materials were at the printer's in February. The results were required for Beech Acres Parenting Center's May 8th deadline.

Mr. Turchiano stated the results indicated the community wants recreation space for all demographics. The FHSD needs to figure out if they can make their plan for a new school work.

Mr. Kushner said the ATPD's first conversation with the FHSD about a partnership at the Beech Acres property was in February when he called Rick Toepfer to discuss the idea of moving the bus garage from Anderson High School to this new property. He said he knew the bus garage was a real problem the ATPD could help the FHSD solve, and that auxiliary gym space and a new rec center could be a great benefit to both the FHSD and the ATPD. Then the idea turned into the FHSD taking over the entire property for a new Anderson High School, including the existing Beech Acres Park. He said the ATPD knew it was in trouble when the ATPD's most popular park, which was only ten years old, was erased in the name of collaboration.

Mr. Dorsten said he appreciates the change in the park board's tone. He believes there is momentum behind a recreation center, and that whatever it is should be nice. Everyone he knows wants a new Anderson High School and the immediacy for the project is real.

Mrs. Gelter said the park board is willing to continue the conversation with the other entities but that the ATPD will require future meetings to be in public, open meetings from here on out. Part of the problem for the community is all the meetings behind closed doors, after which board members leave saying something different to their contacts.

Mrs. Stocker encouraged the group to ask their questions which pertain to the other entities at the other entities' meetings.

The park board provided the guests with copies of the Commissioners' statement and indicated it would be sent to the Township and the FHSD, and posted on the ATPD's website.

Guests suggested the ATPD generate a joint statement with all three entities, including the park board's statement from tonight.

Mrs. Stocker said the last time the entities issued a joint statement, the ATPD was apparently the only entity that released it to the community. The ATPD will release the statement and will stand by what was said as a board at tonight's meeting.

At 6:32 pm, there being no further business to be brought before this Board, Mrs. Stocker moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Herking seconded the motion. Voting: Yes: Mrs. Stocker, Mr. Bartholomew, Mrs. Gelter, Mr. Herking, and Mr. Turchiano. (5); No: None. The motion carried unanimously.

I hereby certify that the foregoing are the minutes of the September 15, 2015 special meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners, which minutes reflect the essence of the meeting and are not verbatim.

Emily Armstrong
Board Clerk

Dale Bartholomew

Nadine Gelter

Rob Herking

Angie Stocker

Tom Turchiano