



## ANDERSON TOWNSHIP PARK DISTRICT

8249 Clough Pike  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45244-2746  
Phone: 513.474.0003  
Fax: 513.388.2494  
[www.andersonparks.com](http://www.andersonparks.com)

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### **An Update from Your Board of Park Commissioners: Beech Acres Property ~ A Community Decision, November 3, 2015**

The Anderson Township Park District Commissioners want to take a moment to address the misconceptions that are swirling around regarding the potential Beech Acres Parenting Center property purchase and various proposed plans for the property. Much of the community is aware that we have been in conversations both publicly and in executive sessions with the Township and the school board regarding a joint partnership related to the Beech Acres' property. The information that has been disseminated would have you believe that we, the Park District, have walked away to pursue our own interests. That could not be farther from the truth.

We entered into the discussions under the premise that it would be a win-win-win solution that would not require any additional tax levies. Over the course of the last few months, we have not been able to come up with a scenario that fits that solution.

We want to offer some detail on why we have chosen to move forward with our plan and not pursue the new school concept at this time:

1. First and foremost, the concept that has been presented has a \$13 - \$17 million shortfall. The Park District would require a levy regardless of what we do. However, even with our levy, there remains a \$3 - \$5 million gap. This is a huge concern for us. We do not want to enter into a partnership that is not financially feasible. We have seen what happens when projects do not have adequate funding. For example, the Anderson Towne Center garage contractors ran out of money and declared bankruptcy. There seems to be no recourse and the community is left with an unfinished project.
2. During July's school board meeting, Randy Smith voiced concerns that this venture may not even be legal. This was a concern 4 months ago and the fact that it still remains a concern is a huge red flag for us.
3. We have also heard that the Anderson High School property would, in its new form, generate TIF revenues. This also presents a concern for us. We have seen projects done based on TIF projections and in reality, they produce significantly less than anticipated. The Rookwood property and Belterra are two examples. This project already has shortfalls so to rely on TIF projections as a means of support seems risky.
4. A general concept is really all that has been discussed publicly. If you look at details, the plan actually shows that the features of Beech Acres Park today would change. One example is that the new RecPlex

would in fact intrude on, if not completely dismantle, the amphitheater area. We have worked long and hard to get Beech Acres Park where it is today. We do not consider it a win to lose any part of what the community has invested in and uses today.

5. The school board cannot guarantee us that park visitor parking would not be impacted by school functions and have indicated that in fact, it would be. This means that our patrons, of the park and its facilities, may not be able to park thus making it difficult to access park facilities and programs.

6. We cannot rush into a decision of this magnitude without ensuring that all details are covered and the budgets secured. This will require time to do due diligence. As we have previously described, there is a financial shortfall, among other concerns. These are not issues that can be resolved in a matter of weeks but will take several months to work through. We have been told this will take anywhere from 4 - 6 months. That being the case, we cannot afford to wait. It is our understanding from the school board that they need to decide now whether or not to continue with renovation plans for Anderson High School as they are under deadlines. We also have deadlines and need to act now to secure the funds to acquire the property as Beech Acres Parenting Center is moving forward with their own plans. At this point, the Park District's plan is the most financially secure and thus what we are pursuing.

7. Beech Acres Parenting Center presented an RFP to the Park District to purchase the property in September 2014. At that time, we chose to involve the Township in our plans and we were the ones to initiate partnership conversations. In November 2014, the landowner was "inclined to move forward" with the Park District. They were open to the joint collaboration and representatives from all three entities met with the Beech Acres Parenting Center team. However, the joint collaboration could not provide a financially sound venture so we moved on with the agreement between Beech Acres Parenting Center and the Park District. Recently, the Township and school board chose to contact them independently to try to push the school concept. In recent public statements, Beech Acres Parenting Center made it clear that they do not want to pursue that path. Their preference is to preserve the property for the use of all residents. Again, they believe the Park District's plans best fit the community and how they want the land used. It is, in fact, our hope that Beech Acres Parenting Center even considers staying on a small portion of the property so that they remain a part of Anderson as they have been a long-standing member and vital part of our community.

8. We are always interested in pursuing partnerships where it makes sense. We function, as a board, to provide the best parks, facilities and amenities that we can in the most financially sound way possible. We continue to be open to future conversations. In addition, what has not been mentioned is that we are exploring other options with private entities which we believe would offer a better opportunity to serve all of Anderson - young children, students, parents, professionals and seniors - not just a subset of the population. This is something that we are continuing to explore at the moment.

As commissioners, we take our roles seriously. We hold volunteer positions with no form of compensation and have no further agenda than we are here solely because we love Anderson and want to see it grow and prosper. We believe we have been painted unfairly in this. We did not walk away for selfish reasons but rather simple economics. The plans presented to us were not financially feasible, nor legal, and did not create the win-win-win scenario that has been proposed. In fact, they are quite the opposite as the community would lose part of what exists at Beech Acres Park today.

Our plan is to seek a levy on the November ballot to be decided upon by the residents of Anderson. The funds from this levy would be used to purchase the Beech Acres Parenting Center property, extend walking trails and renovate the existing RecPlex as we will then own the building and not just lease it. Once we have secured the property, we will determine our options and work to ensure that its use meets our community's needs.

We have received many phone calls, emails and had face to face conversations. We have heard opinions both for and against the various options. We always appreciate our residents' passion and welcome their opinions. However, we ask that you trust that we are looking at this from a bigger picture. We agree that a new school would be fantastic but it has to make sense, be well thought out and not create a burden. We also are trying to balance the needs for today as well as make sure that there will be something to provide for the community's recreational needs in the future. Again, we do not take these decisions lightly, especially when we are asking the community to make a choice on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Your Board of Park Commissioners,**

Dale Bartholomew, Nadine Gelter, Tom Turchiano, Rob Herking and Angie Stocker