

# Anderson Park District gets 'once-in-a-lifetime offer'

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(Photo: File photo)

Anderson Township Park District has the opportunity to add property to its system that many might be surprised to learn the district does not already own.

The RecPlex and some of the surrounding land along Beechmont Avenue used by the park district are actually owned by Beech Acres Parenting Center, according to district Executive Director Ken Kushner. The community has been the benefactor of a long-standing relationship between the park district and Beech Acres.

"We now have the possible chance to own that," he said. "This is unbelievable what is being offered to the community by Beech Acres. They are offering us a chance, if the community wants this property, they are offering it to us."

The purchase would require a capital campaign to raise funds. Before moving forward the park district will conduct a random telephone survey of 300 residents and post an online survey. Both are being conducted by

John Fox of John Fox Consulting, Kushner said. The phone calls will come from Fields Research.

The survey will focus on the community's support for all, some or none of the following items:

- Buy the Beech Acres Parenting Center's property and the RecPlex adjacent to Beech Acres Park, upgrade the RecPlex, and extend the Beech Acres Park trail.
- Build a new community recreation center.
- Improve the eight existing outdoor parks.

Survey results will determine the park district's next steps, Kushner said. The survey will go out March 18. The capital campaign would involve a bond issue being placed on the November ticket. By law, the park district can not place an issue larger than 1-mill on the ballot, he explained. The range of possibilities under consideration could cost homeowners between \$20 to \$35 per \$100,000 home valuation.

"We believe this is such an iconic piece of property here in Anderson Township," Kushner said. "We think people will really like to keep it as park land."

The Beech Acres Board of Directors is evaluating whether the current use of its Anderson property best meets the needs of today's families and of Anderson Township, Beech Acres Parenting Center President and CEO James R. Mason said in a press release. "Among the possible outcomes is the potential sale of all or part of the property. Proceeds from a sale would enable Beech Acres to buy, build, or lease new facilities that can best serve our mission, whether on a portion of the current property or in another location," he said in the statement.

Beech Acres is not soliciting or entertaining proposals for the property at this time. In fact, the center asks proposals not be submitted as they will not respond.

Kushner said that Beech Acres is a signature feature of Anderson Township and called the RecPlex and surrounding property a gateway to the community. Anderson residents have been using the property as a recreation space since the 1950s. The additional property would expand Anderson's most popular park into a center for active, healthy life-style opportunities, he said.

The RecPlex is the park district's only indoor recreation area. This is a once-in-a-lifetime offer and the property purchase is time sensitive, Kushner said.

"When it's gone it's gone. You can't get it back. It will never come back to the community," he said.

The park district does own Beech Acres Park. Between 1993 and 1997, the property fronting Salem Road was leased from the Beech Acres Parenting Center. In 1997 the park district purchased the land containing the athletic fields and redeveloped the park into a multi-use facility. The RecPlex and some of the surrounding land is still owned by Beech Acres Parenting Center and leased by the park district.

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