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Beech Acres votes to sell Anderson property to park district

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The board of directors for Beech Acres Parenting Center voted Tuesday night to sell 36 acres of land to Anderson Township Park District, but at least one township trustee and a developer are not giving up on a "once in a lifetime opportunity" in the township.

Anderson Township and Forest Hills School District have a letter of intent from real estate developer **Vandercar Holdings LLC** [to purchase Beech Acres' property, build a \\$73 million Anderson High School](#) at 6881 Beechmont Ave. and redevelop the current high school site into a more than \$120 million mixed-use development. The new project was expected to bring luxury apartments, offices, a hotel, more retail, and other amenities to the area. It would be done via a public/private partnership, using tax increment financing from the redevelopment of the existing high school property at 7560 Forest Road, to pay for more than \$48 million of the costs associated with the new school.

But that deal is unlikely to move forward if Beech Acres sells the property to the park district. Beech Acres signed a contract July 28 for the sale of its entire Beechmont Avenue campus to the Anderson Township Park District.

The park district doesn't have the money to buy the property from Beech Acres, a nonprofit that provides programs and services to help parents and caregivers to raise children. So, the park district plans to ask voters to approve a 0.7 mill levy that would generate \$12.8 million over 15 years, giving the park district enough money to purchase the Beech Acres property and make some upgrades to the existing recreation center. The park district must file paperwork to put that levy on the ballot by early August.

[Josh Gerth](#), an Anderson Township trustee, still believes the Beech Acres property would better serve the community if the high school were moved there.

"The only way we have a chance to explore the bigger, better community project is if the park

district changes its mind before it has to file," Gerth said.

[Steve Wessler](#), chief operating officer for Beech Acres, said the nonprofit is still determining what would happen with the property if the levy fails.

In March, officials with Forest Hills School District and Anderson Township trustees brought forward the idea of putting a new Anderson High School on the Beech Acres land and redeveloping the site of the existing high school. Beech Acres had been negotiating with the park district since the fall of 2014 and said it would not accept other proposals, but invited the three Anderson entities to present a joint proposal by May. In a news release, Beech Acres said no collaborative agreement involving all three parties came forward, and Beech Acres resumed its negotiations with the park district.

Gerth said it's possible the park district could change its mind about being part of the larger plan even after putting a levy on the ballot, but that would not send a clear message to voters.

Jim Frooman, a member of the Forest Hills Board of Education, said the park district still has time to reconsider and be part of the larger plan.

"I see too much promise and good that can come from this plan not to be willing to work through it," Frooman said.

On July 27, Vandercar Holdings and SFA Architects sent a letter to the school board with supporting financial documents and legal analysis addressing some of the specific issues. A financial analysis by Fifth Third Securities with financial projections that show the TIF potential for the Forest Road site is \$48.6 million.

An additional letter from Schroeder, Maundrell, Barbieri & Powers, on behalf of client Vandercar, that states the firm believes the project meets the legal requirements for the use of funds in Ohio as would be generated under the proposed TIF.

In the letter, it states that planned expansion of Anderson Township's business core and construction of a new high school campus "will not be possible without full cooperation from the park board."

"It is the intention of the development team to answer any and all questions you may have regarding the Anderson Township 2020 plan," the letter states.

Beech Acres plans to find a new headquarters location in Hamilton County, but that location has not been determined yet. Beech Acres will continue to have a presence in eastern Hamilton County.

As for the plan for a new Anderson High School, which would unlock the existing school property for redevelopment near Anderson Towne Center, Gerth they are looking at the idea of other options.

"Can we do this somewhere else? I don't know," Gerth said. "Nothing is a centrally located. Nothing makes as much sense."

But the idea is one he still wants to investigate.

"I don't want to give up on it," he said.

Gerth said it's unlikely the school district would be able to wait until November to see the outcome of the levy vote before moving forward with other options.

For now, Gerth continues to hold out hope that the park district sees the benefit of the larger plan and will continue to look at it.

Demeropolis covers commercial real estate and development.