

Feasibility of proposed project receives scrutiny

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(Photo: Eric Spangler)

Members of three Anderson Township governmental entities have four separate action items to explore as a result of their Oct. 1 joint public meeting.

The Anderson Township Board of Trustees, Forest Hills Board of Education and Anderson Township Park District Board of Commissioners came together to determine the feasibility of a proposed project that would include construction of a new Anderson High School and the renovation of the RecPlex on the Beech Acres Parenting Center property, and a multi-use development on the site of the former Anderson High School.

The three agreed that it's to the benefit of the community to move forward with the project, but acknowledged many unanswered questions remain. Over the course of the meeting, the three agreed to:

- secure an opinion regarding the legality of using a third party to develop the site;
- meet with Beech Acres Parenting Center to discuss the possibility of Anderson Township buying the property for schools or parks or both;
- the funding of infrastructure improvements in the areas of the existing and proposed AHS sites, and
- develop lists of questions and needs regarding the project.

The three will meet again by the end of October to continue discussions.

The park district entered talks with Beech Acres Parenting Center over a year ago about buying new property on Beech Acres Avenue. The park district leases the RecPlex from Beech Acres. In June the park district entered into a contract for the passage of a 0.7-mill, 15-year parks levy which will appear on the Nov. 3 ballot.

Because the park district has a contract to buy, representatives from the park board will approach the township about the possibility of the township buying the land and holding it until the feasibility of the proposed project is determined within its borders. The schools or parks foundation will need to buy that piece of land located within the township.

If all parties agree to the township purchase of the property, the park district could withdraw its fall ballot.

Funding continues to be a source of concern for the proposed project. Board President Randy Smith said that the school district has a guarantee from Continental Real Estate Cos., previously identified as a master developer for the proposed project, that all costs of the high school will be covered. However, there are no such financial guarantees for the parks or township.

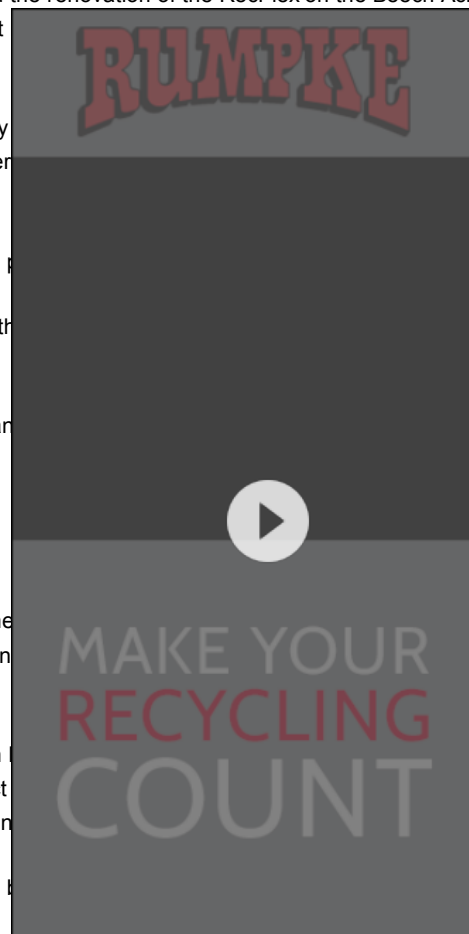
This means that the township would initially have out-of-pocket costs to address infrastructure needs and would later recoup that money once the TIF begins producing excess dollars beyond the costs of the new AHS. The park district would need a levy to pay for land and the renovation of the existing RecPlex or construction of a new indoor facility.

School Board Member Jim Frooman, an attorney, said he's not an expert in the area, but doubts that the township can initially funnel 100 percent of the TIF dollars toward construction of the new high school.

Trustee President Russ Jackson said that there are specific guidelines established for how TIF dollars can be used. Based on the guidelines, the township cannot pay for construction of a new high school. For this reason, the township will explore the legalities of working through a third party, such as the port authority, to allocate dollars to the high school project.

Another concern is whether both a high school and a recreation center can physically fit on the Beech Acres Parenting Center property. Park Board Member Angie Stocker said that park district's minimum need is for 10 acres and a 50,000 square foot indoor recreation facility.

Given those minimum requirements, Frooman said that the high school and recreation center could not co-exist on the Beech Acres property.



Park Board members did agree that a recreation facility could be constructed on another site that's centrally located in the heart of the township. Land at Ayer Elementary school was suggested by board of education members.

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