

Trustee Gerth: Anderson Township-park-school plan a no-go

Gerth said plan would 'capitalize momentum'

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ANDERSON TOWNSHIP, Ohio -- A discussed deal between Anderson Township (<http://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/anderson-township/anderson-township-a-small-town-community-with-big-town-opportunity>) trustees, the Township Parks District and school board to purchase Beech Acres for collaborative use will no longer proceed, township Trustee Josh Gerth announced on [AroundAndersonTownship.com](http://aroundandersontownship.com) (<http://aroundandersontownship.com/2015/07/response-to-the-park-school-township-concept-josh-gerth-anderson-township-trustee/>) Saturday.

The posted statement was an open letter by Gerth (<http://aroundandersontownship.com/2015/07/response-to-the-park-school-township-concept-josh-gerth-anderson-township-trustee/>), and he specified was not indicative of the board's collective stance on the matter.

Gerth, a proponent of the plan and former parks district board member, gave a detailed account of the seven month-long discussion of purchasing Beech Acres for the use of the park district and to relocate Anderson High School. Discussion began after the Forest Hills school district passed a tax levy in November 2014 (<http://www.wcpo.com/news/political/elections-local/at-a-glance-issues-on-the-ballot-in-ohio>).

The trustee said the plan encompassed moving Anderson High School to the Beech Acres plot, to build a new township recreational complex or renovate the current recreational complex and to use the old school's real estate for "mixed use development."

The plan would, ideally, not cost anything additional for taxpayers, Gerth said in the open letter.

"This would be a huge game changer for A-Town, one which has the potential to completely change the landscape of the Township," Gerth said (<http://aroundandersontownship.com/2015/07/response-to-the-park-school-township-concept-josh-gerth-anderson-township-trustee/>) in the letter.

Discussion of revamping the Forest Hills School District's schools came to a head in May 2014, when the school board president announced (<http://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/anderson-turpin-high-schools-to-remain-separate-due-to-high-merger-cost>) that the two schools, Turpin and Anderson, could not afford to be combined. An online survey (<http://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/anderson-turpin-high-schools-to-remain-separate-due-to-high-merger-cost>) collected data, which included the option to build a new Anderson High School.

"For me, this is simply a wants versus needs issue," Gerth said in the letter. "I supported the school levy last year. I did so because that can has been kicked down the road for 20+ years and no one has done anything about it. We finally had the opportunity to address the critical needs that the district had to address with their facilities."

School Board President Randy Smith worked with Vandercar Holdings (<http://www.vanhold.com>) to draft a plan to purchase the Beech Acres property to construct a new high school.

The deal was similar to the Union Township deal (<http://www.wcpo.com/news/education/union-township-trustees-approve-merging-of-clermont-county-schools>), approved in January 2015, to combine Glen Este and Amelia high schools. The deal was the first of its kind in Ohio (<http://www.wcpo.com/news/education/union-township-trustees-approve-merging-of-clermont-county-schools>).

Beech Acres ultimately decided to sell exclusively to the Anderson Parks District, Gerth said in the open letter. The park district has leased the property since 2004, according to their website (<https://www.andersonparks.com/ParkRexPlexinfo.html>).

The township's plan to renovate or build a new recreation center, called the RecPlex, currently located on Beech Acres' property, wasn't feasible in the end, and could not be completed without cost to taxpayers.

And with that, the township-school district-parks-plan closes, at least including the Beech Acres property.

Gerth said (<http://aroundandersontownship.com/2015/07/response-to-the-park-school-township-concept-josh-gerth-anderson-township-trustee/>) in the letter that he will continue to pursue the plan, or another similar plan that will "capitalize momentum."

"I still believe in the proposed plan and would still very much like to figure out a way to get this done," Gerth said in the letter. "I'm not sure that my fellow trustees or the school board members feel the same given the delays, unanswered questions, and now this news of an agreement between Beech Acres and the Park District."

Gerth said (<http://aroundandersontownship.com/2015/07/response-to-the-park-school-township-concept-josh-gerth-anderson-township-trustee/>) he did not want to elicit an uprising against the Parks District.

"The Parks District is doing what the Parks District thinks is best as it relates to the mission statement. I was there. I get it," he said in the letter.

Gerth then proceeded to encourage people to show up at Anderson Days this Friday, Saturday and Sunday night at Beech Acres, where he confirmed that board of trustees members, school board members and parks district members will all be present.

The Anderson Parks District (<http://www.andersonparks.com/infoparkcomm.html>) is comprised of president Nadine Gelter, vice president Rob Herking, Tom Turchiano, Dale Bartholomew, Angie Stocker and executive director Ken Kushner.

The Forest Hills School Board (<http://www.foresthills.edu/districtBoardEd.aspx>) consists of president Randy Smith, vice president Tony Hemmelgam, Dr. Forest Heis, Jim Frooman and Julie Bissinger.

This story was corrected to identify Vandercar Holdings as developer that worked with the school district to draft a plan to use the Beech Acres property for a new high school.

The story was also corrected to reflect the newest elected leadership for the Anderson Township Parks District Board, effective May 2015.

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