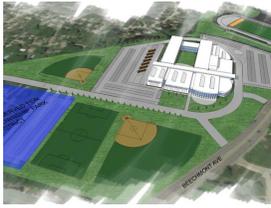


High school plan faces multiple obstacles

Forrest Sellers and Sheila A Vilvens, Cincinnati 12:51 p.m. EDT July 24, 2015



(Photo: Thanks to Tom Fernandez)

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Is a plan for a new Anderson High School at Beech Acres realistic?

Forest Hills Board of Education President Randy Smith said moving forward is likely a moot point if Beech Acres Parenting Center decides to sell the property to the Anderson Township Park District.

“It’s a great potential opportunity,” he said. “(However), the devil is in the details. Once we got into the details it didn’t come together.”

Those pushing the plan see it differently.

“This could be an amazing game changer for A-Town,” Anderson Township Trustee Josh Gerth wrote in a Tweet.

Smith cited a few additional concerns.

Even with the tax increment financing that has been proposed to build the new school, additional money would still be needed, he said.

“No source of revenue was cited for infrastructure needs,” he said.

Further, Smith said this particular TIF funding model may have some potential issues under current state law.

“There are some significant legal barriers,” he said.

The governmental agencies working on this project are the Anderson Township Board of Trustees, Anderson Township Park District Board of Commissioners and the Forest Hills Board of Education. Representatives of the three first met March 19.

Before joint talks started, the park district had invested months of talks and negotiations toward the purchase of the Beech Acres Parenting Center, 6881 Beechmont Ave., dating to September. The parenting center property is adjacent to Anderson Township Park District’s existing Beech Acres Park.

Seeing no financially feasible alternative plan, the park board in June voted, with three yes votes and two abstentions, to place a 0.7-mill levy on the November ballot with the intention of buying the Beech Acres Parenting Center Property and RecPlex should voters approve the measure.

The two abstentions were from Board Members Dale Turchiano and Dale Bartholomew. Both cited personal reasons for their abstentions. Their terms as park board members are thought to have expired in May. Legal opinions differ, however, between the park district and township trustees regarding when the terms expired. Anderson Township Trustees are responsible for appointing park board members.

This is what the *Forest Hills Journal* knows so far.

Who are the players?

The three governmental agencies mentioned above and a team of businesses:

- Vandercar Holdings Inc. - master developer Rob Smyjunas.
- Continental Real Estate Cos. - master developer, high school site, Mark A. Damante, executive vice president and counsel.
- Geis Consulting Group Ltd. - public/private partnership specialist, Ken Geis, GEIS Consulting Group Ltd.
- Fifth Third Securities - Andrew Brossart, managing director.
- SMBP (Schroeder/Maundrell/Barbiere/Powers) - Legal, Lawrence E. Barbiere.

- SFA (architecture, engineering, interior design, planning) - design/architect and engineering.

- Turner Construction – builder, Turner Construction.

What could happen to the existing Anderson High School?

Anderson Township and Forest Hills would enter into an inter-governmental agreement that would allow for the Anderson High School site to be tax increment financed for 30 years. The TIF would go toward financing the new Anderson High School on the Beech Acres site (*per documents obtained by the Forest Hills Journal*).

The site could then be developed into community uses such as offices, apartments, early development, medical and limited retail.

What could be located on the Beech Acres site?

A new Anderson High School could be constructed for 1,300 students to include: football/soccer stadium, baseball stadium, softball stadium and stadium parking, an auditorium and natatorium. (*per a document from Turner Construction*)

Land (about 4.4 acres) could also be reserved for a new Recreation Center (RecPlex) replacement. Funding for a new RecPlex is not included in this proposal. The park district would receive land only (*per documents obtained by the Forest Hills Journal*).

What would happen to money designated for renovations to Anderson High School as the result of passage of the bond levy in 2014?

The \$25 million designated for renovations to AHS would be reallocated for construction of the the new high school on the Beech Acres property (*per documents obtained by the Forest Hills Journal*).

How much money would be generated by the TIF?

The existing Anderson High School site would be redeveloped and a TIF area would generate \$48 million in guaranteed TIF funding (*per documents obtained by the Forest Hills Journal*).

Is this deal feasible?

A managing principal of SFA Architects, a member of the “Team” listed above, Tom Fernandez said the design and construction team is very comfortable with guaranteeing that the new Anderson High School could be brought in for \$57 million in addition to the site addition costs of \$5.5 million.

“This is the most doable deal I’ve been involved with,” Fernandez said. “Simply because the development team is willing to provide the guarantee on the TIF dollars generated by the redevelopment of the existing Anderson High School.”

[In a guest column to the Forest Hills Journal \(/story/news/local/anderson-township/2015/07/23/column-update-beech-acres-parenting-center/30564821/\)](#), Anderson Park District Board of Commissioners President Nadine Gelter expressed doubt that the plan is financially possible.

“Despite many executive sessions with the Forest Hills School District and the Township Trustees, the park board determined the concept had too many financial holes and red flags Additionally, the park district was not included financially in the concept – it did not include a tax-free, new recreation building for the community as is being implied.”

Why is the park district pursuing a 0.7-mill levy to buy the land and RecPlex rather than allowing the other deal to move forward?

In her guest column, Gelter wrote, “The park board determined at its June 23, 2015, meeting there was no viable plan that warranted the park district to pass on the opportunity to purchase the property for the community. For this reason, and due to the June 24 deadline imposed by the landowner, the park board decided to move forward with a levy to purchase the property which includes Anderson’s only public recreation facility.”

The park board entered into formal negotiations with Beech AcresGelter in September. In March the park district was approached by the Forest Hills School District and Anderson Township Trustees to explore a collaborative concept for this property.

Which of these uses would you like to see at the Beech Acres Parenting Center property?

- A new Recreation Center for the community
- A new Anderson High School
- A combined use of a new high school and new recreation center
- Something else



Mobile readers: [Tap here to vote in our poll \(http://projects.cincinnati.com/Polls/andtwpollmobile.html\)](http://projects.cincinnati.com/Polls/andtwpollmobile.html).

Your turn

What questions do you have about the proposal to build a new Anderson High School at Beech Acres?

Email your questions to rmaloney@communitypress.com or svilvens@communitypress.com.

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