

New Anderson High discussed

Sheila Vilvens, svilvens@communitypress.com 12:54 p.m. EDT July 20, 2015



(Photo: File photo)

Anderson Township governmental leaders are discussing a plan that could deliver a new Anderson High School, RecPlex and mixed use development to the community.

The plan calls for a new Anderson High School to be built on property owned by Beech Acres Parenting Center, a new Anderson Township Park District RecPlex, and a \$100 million-plus development at Beechmont Avenue and Forest Road where the existing Anderson High School sits.

Documents obtained by the *Forest Hills Journal* in a public records request to Anderson Township show the idea has progressed to the point where a cooperative agreement is in the works. The bulk of the project, as proposed, would be paid for from tax increment financing dollars generated by the current 48-acre Anderson High School property, which would become a mixed-use development.

The three governmental agencies working on this project until the end of June were the Anderson Township Board of Trustees, Anderson Township Park District Board of Commissioners and the Forest Hills Board of Education. The first meeting of the three was March 19.

Trustee President Russ Jackson said that many questions need to be answered regarding the concept. In light of that, the school district has essentially taken the lead.

“We have taken the position that we will sit back and wait and see what happens,” he said.

During the April Anderson Township Board of Trustees meeting, Trustee Josh Gerth shared that while he could not provide specifics, he wanted the community to know that he has been talking for months about alternatives for Beech Acres. The alternatives include a renovated recreation building or a brand new recreation building at no cost to tax payers.

“Everyone agreed to explore an option that could be a game-changer for this community,” Gerth said at the meeting.

While he could not be specific because much of the discussion regarding the Beech Acres property has been in executive session, Parks Executive Director Ken Kushner said that the park district’s focus is on passage of the 0.7-mill levy that will be on the November ballot.

If approved by voters, the issue would raise more than \$12.8 million and make possible the park district’s purchase of 36.71 acres of land from the Beech Acres Parenting Center on Beechmont Avenue and the RecPlex.

An exchange of questions and answers between Anderson Township Administrator Vicky Earhart addressed to Rob Smyjunas of Vandercar Holdings offers some insight into who and what is involved in this deal. A team of businesses is identified as being part of this concept with Vandercar Holdings LLC and Continental Real Estate Cos., identified as the “master developers.”

In his letter of response to dated July 8, Smyjunas stated that, “This team is uniquely positioned to bring experience, innovative thinking and financial wherewithal necessary to fully complete the new Anderson High School on budget and redevelop the existing Anderson High School site into a mixed-use development that will create the necessary revenue that will ultimately pay off the financing issuance.”

Two of the listed team members, Turner Construction and SFA Architects, are identified in the correspondence as the “Master Developer team” involved with similar project accomplished by West Clermont School District and Union Township Board of Trustees.

“This innovative approach to school construction funding is accomplished by using well-tested and established financing tools which have historically been used in other applications, yet not typically in combination,” Smyjunas wrote in response to Earhart’s question requesting examples similar projects.

West Clermont is the first project to use this specific strategy in Ohio, and the proposed development/design/finance and construction team is working to complete the design and construction of a new 2,400-student, 378,000 square foot, \$90 million consolidated high school and athletic complex there.

“The project is a public-private partnership with the district, the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission/Ohio School Facilities Commission (OFCC/OSFC) and Vandercar Holdings,” Smyjunas wrote. “By utilizing the current Glen Este site as a future private TIF development site, the district has been able to proceed with the new high school project with no tax payer funding or bond issue necessary.”

An email shared with the *Forest Hills Journal* referenced the “Anderson 2020” project and provides a sample letter directed to the Anderson Township Park Board and questions and answers regarding the plan.

The sample letter asks park board members to reconsider their recent vote to place a levy on the ballot to buy property from the Beech Acres Parenting Center.

The sample letter expresses concern that this action could “prevent construction of a new Anderson High School” at that same site.

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