

Park board votes to remove rangers

By Liz Carey

Community Press Staff Writer

ANDERSON TWP - Starting possibly as soon as Nov. 19, the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office will take over law enforcement responsibilities for the Anderson Township Park District.

In a special meeting Monday, Oct. 10, the park board agreed to accept the sheriff's office proposal to provide a full-time deputy for the park district, as well as additional hourly deputies, as needed.

Molly McClure, executive director of the park board, said the decision was a financial one.

"It's an economic decision that will conservatively save the park board \$30,000, if not more," she said.

According to a Hamilton County Sheriff's Office proposal discussed in September, one 40-hour deputy would have cost the park board \$81,950, which includes \$75,000 for the officer's salary/benefits, \$1,500 for a new uniform, \$450 for a new weapon and \$5,000 for a new mobile data computer. The estimated total yearly expense was \$141,353, which included \$12,000 vehicle maintenance, \$12,000 communication center fees and other costs.

According to the updated contract provided by the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, the final proposal has an estimated cost of \$86,405.69 for one deputy patrolling the parks for 40 hours a week without a replacement during off days, vacation days, court time or sick days. This term of the

agreement is four years from the date it's executed, according to the contract, and will be in addition to the patrol service the sheriff's office already provides Anderson Township.

The updated contract includes \$3,500 for a new uniform, \$745 for a Smith & Wesson weapon and \$2,500 for a new mobile data computer to replace the outdated terminal that will become obsolete when the sheriff's office moves to the new mobile data computer system.

The contract requires the park district to pay for vehicle maintenance and gas, but does not estimate that amount in this contract for a total yearly expense and did not mention the communication center fees. The contract also sets up performance stan-

dards and procedures.

As previously reported, Anderson Township Park Board Ranger Capt. Skip Berger's proposal in September was \$143,651 a year for six part-time employees and one full-time employee. He based this on an estimated 5,936 employee hours per year. Berger's proposal didn't include gas or vehicle maintenance.

Berger said park district policy prevented him from commenting on the decision.

McClure said rising costs, coupled with a flat tax revenue, forced the board to make strategic cuts to the budget.

"We have always operated on a tight budget and this outsourcing is an example

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of the tough review that we have performed on ourselves routinely," she said.

Additionally, park board President Duffy Beischel said the move was more than financial. It was about providing better services, and focusing on the board's core competencies.

Beischel said the decision would make better use of existing resources.

"The other thing is Molly is stretched to the max on time and commitments and this frees her up on managing our law enforcement department. Every time there is a complaint against one of our

rangers, Molly has to get into the middle of it," Beischel said. "Law enforcement is not our core competence. Why not take that additional burden off of Molly? That alone is an undetermined cost savings."

Beischel said there had not been many complaints against the rangers, and only noted two in the past year.

The rangers, Beischel said, started originally when the sheriff's office was not routinely on patrol. Now, he said, with five or six Hamilton County deputies already patrolling the township, it made more sense to outsource the ranger duties to the sheriff's office.

"They have more knowledge of potential criminals, problems occurring in the schools, that sort of thing," he said. "They just have more knowledge of law enforcement that will make them more effective. ... It's kind of the same reason the schools pay for a school resource office."

Of the five members on the board, Park Board Member Nadine Gelter said, the four present at the Oct. 10 meeting approved the contract. Now, she said, the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office must sign off on the contract.

lcarey@communitypress.com

248-7139