

Board considers replacing park rangers

By Liz Carey

Community Press Staff Writer

ANDERSON TWP. — The days of the Anderson Township Park Rangers may be numbered.

The Anderson Township Park Board of Commissioners voted to consider a proposal from the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department to replace the Anderson Township Park Rangers.

"We've been looking at any way we can to save money, and outsourcing is one way to do that," park board commissioner Nadine Gelter said.

The proposal would replace the five

part-time and one full-time park rangers with one sheriff's deputy, Ranger Capt. Skip Berger said.

"They're going to be paying more for less services," he said.

Berger said he and his men patrol the parks maintaining the safety and security of buildings, as well as that of park patrons, from 8 a.m. to midnight, seven days a week.

Berger presented to the commissioners a proposed budget of \$149,018. His budget included 5,936 man-hours including a presence at all events. Berger said his proposal provides services at a cost of \$24.20 an hour.

"Originally, what they said they were

looking at was all the departments within the park district for economical purposes they were trying to cut expenses," Berger said. "They were seeing if the sheriff's could actually do it cheaper than the current ranger department could. But that did not turn out to be the case, but they decided to go with the sheriff's department anyway. Why? I do not know."

In the sheriff's proposals, either one or two deputies would be contracted to the park district at a total projected cost of \$148,303 for one deputy, or \$204,085 for two deputies.

The proposal included nearly \$2,000 in

one-time costs for new uniforms per deputy, and \$576 for cellular telephones, \$1,000 for supplies, \$12,000 for vehicle maintenance and gasoline, and between nearly \$18,000 and \$40,000 for additional deputies, as needed.

For the commissioners, the services the rangers provide are similar to those the sheriff's deputy could provide.

"We requested a formal proposal from the sheriff's department," Gelter said. "We realized there would be significant cost savings by going through the sheriff's depart-

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ment. ... Ranger services are somewhat duplicated."

According to the sheriff's department's proposal, deputies already assist the rangers in their daily duties.

"Over the course of the last three years, deputies from District 5 have made numerous arrests to include possession of drugs, alcohol offenses, curfew violations, thefts, criminal damaging, and other criminal offenses," the proposal stated. "The sheriff's office has investigated several felony offenses, the most notable being the pipe bomb incidents at Kellogg Park and Veteran's Park."

Additionally, the proposal stated, Anderson Township Park Rangers call in deputies to take reports, investigate crimes and make arrests.

"On several occasions, park rangers have called upon sheriff's deputies to make arrests for violations they have observed with the parks," the proposal said.

According to Berger, the park rangers are all certified police officers, with the same capabilities as the sheriff's department as far as arrests and investigations are concerned.

But rangers also serve as protectors, Berger said.

"We're the guys who help out the kid with the flat tire on his bike, or help people start their cars," he said. "We do a lot more than patrol."

In the sheriff's departments proposal, the sheriff's department would evaluate other responsibilities of the rangers and consider reassigning some of those responsibilities to non-law enforcement personnel at "a considerable cost saving."

Gelter said the request for proposal had also been sent to the Hamilton County Park District, but that they had declined to bid unless the township decided not to accept the sheriff's bid.

Gelter said she did not anticipate moving forward on the formal contract before December.

Berger said as a resident, he is just concerned for the township.

"I live here in the township and I want to make sure that the township residents get the best bang for their buck and are treated fairly," he said.

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