

Anderson trustees to consider possibility of park issue

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(Photo: Sheila Vilvens/The Community Press)

Anderson Township residents in November may get to vote on a 20-year bond levy that, if approved, would be used to buy the RecPlex and land from Beech Acres Parenting Center, and make additional park upgrades and improvements.

The 1-mill levy would raise nearly \$24.5 million, and taxpayers would see a \$35 annual increase on a \$100,000 home.

With the support of more than 60 percent residents surveyed in March, Anderson Township Board of Park Commissioners were given the green light to pursue the levy, but Anderson Township Board of Trustees first must approve the plan. The trustees are expected to consider the request at the next regular meeting, April 16. During a special meeting April 8, the park board approved a resolution officially asking the township trustees for permission to move ahead with the issue.

Levy passage would enable the park district to purchase the RecPlex and 28 acres along Beechmont Avenue for \$5.4 million. Additionally, if approved, the levy would provide enough funds to make upgrades and improvements to the RecPlex and the district's other parks and facilities.

The estimated cost to renovate the RecPlex and property for immediate public use is nearly \$3.5 million. A RecPlex addition is estimated at \$9 million. The remaining dollars would be used for general park improvements and upgrades.

The park district has sought to purchase the RecPlex and additional land from the parenting center for more than 20 years, Parks Executive Director Ken Kushner said. Beech Acres is the last large parcel of land in the middle of the township.

"Beech Acres offered us a piece of land that's never going to come up again," he said.

Prior to making a decision to move ahead with the purchase, the park board reached out to the community via survey in March to measure the community's support for all, some or none of the following:

- Purchase the Beech Acres Parenting Center's property and the RecPlex adjacent to Beech Acres Park, upgrade the RecPlex, and extend the Beech Acres Park trail.
- Build a new community recreation center.
- Improve the eight existing outdoor parks.

The survey, conducted by John Fox Consulting, included 269 completed random telephone surveys of residents and more than 900 online responses. Preliminary results indicate more than 60 percent of the survey participants in the sample group support the purchase of Beech Acres and the additional improvements/upgrades throughout the park district.

Final survey results are expected during the week of April 12. The survey results will be available on the park district's website – www.andersonparks.com (<http://www.andersonparks.com/>) -- by week's end.

The park board members were pleased with the community's support as indicated by the survey. During its April 8 special meeting, park board members considered the pros and cons of millage rates ranging from .5- mill to 1-mill.

Board Vice President Nadine Gelter did not favor a 1-mill bond due to concerns that the community would not support the larger millage, which would jeopardize the Beech Acres purchase.

"We need to do what we need to do to secure the RecPlex property," she said.

Other board members agreed that securing the property is the top priority, but they also believed it important for the park district to have money for infrastructure improvements.

"You can't just have land and not do anything with it," Board Member Tom Turchiano said.

Board member Rob Herking said that he hates levies but favored placing the 1-mill bond levy on the ballot giving the community the opportunity to vote on the issue.

"We might as well do it for the larger amount and get what we want done if it passes," he said. "If it doesn't pass, then the 41,000 township residents had their opportunity to respond to the biggest opinion poll."


Park Board President Dale Bartholomew said that if the park district is successful in getting the bond levy approved, it could open up the opportunity for other grants and donations.

"Once we have that land, we can really look at grants and donations in a fashion we've never looked at them before," he said.

If the bond levy is successful, improvements to the other parks would be basic but are what residents identified in the survey as desirable - restrooms, trails and shade structures, Kushner said. Other improvements, based on each park's specific needs, could include parking area improvements, public Wi-Fi, playgrounds, and ball field and dugout improvements.


"We're trying our hardest to get this piece of property because it was offered to the community," Kushner said. "We're trying our best to meet the community's wants and desires. We're here because of partnerships over the years – schools, the township and Beech Acres."

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