

Parks and Recreation requests 16-acre plot

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Community News

The Morgan County Parks and Recreation Board has asked the Morgan County Commission to turn over the 16-acre plot adjacent to the ball field complex to Parks and Recreation.

Parks and Recreation board president Kenny Mason said they would like to see the 16-acre property leveled and have additional sports fields put in. They would also like to have an indoor facility on the land so that sports could be played year-round.

A plan for the 16 acres was proposed by the Park Planning and Advisory Board in 2004, but nothing has been done with the property.

Commissioner Tommy Swaim thought the plan should be thrown out. Commissioner Brenda Hutchinson said that maybe the original park advisory committee could be reconvened or a new committee could be formed to look at what to do with the site.

Mason noted that a future fire station was proposed for a corner of the acreage. Emergency Services Director Dave Michael said that only an acre of the property would be needed for the fire station. A joint parking lot for the fire station and a multi-use recreation building could be arranged.

Michael suggested that the county look into grants that were available for building evacuation shelters to help fund the multi-use recreation building.

Resident Tom Zahnow said that a long-term goal would be to get all the sports leagues to meet and be on the same page about building a recreation facility. Fundraisers could be held.

"The 16 acres has been there for 20 years and nothing has been done," he said.

Zahnow was concerned about the sports fields at the complex that aren't regulation-size fields. Girls could get hit in the back of the head with a softball, he said. He hoped that the commission could help Parks and Recreation work toward a common goal.

Ways to fund Parks & Rec

Zahnow also suggested some ways of funding Parks and Recreation, which included a gun raffle and fees on the sale of homes in Morgan County. A fee on home sales was considered similar to an impact fee. Transfer fees on property sales help fund the Farmland Protection Program.

Commissioner Hutchinson said she would look into how Parks and Recreation projects are funded in other counties. Bill Clark said that some counties ran an excess levy for three years to fund capital projects for Parks and Recreation. Such an excess levy would need 60% of the vote to pass, he said.

An idea was also suggested that Morgan County Schools could build the recreation facility in a joint venture with Parks and Recreation. The schools could use the facility during the day and Parks and Recreation could use it in the evening.

Commissioner Swaim suggested that Parks and Recreation think about what they want to do at the site and design a site plan.

"Before we release the land, I want to see a plan," Commissioner Stacy Dugan said.

On tomorrow's agenda

Parks and Recreation's request for the 16 acres and their request for a hotel-motel tax increase from 3% to 6% will be further discussed at tomorrow's commission meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Commissioner Hutchinson asked Mason and acting Parks and Recreation director Bruce Beadenkopf to bring a detailed plan for their use of the property as well as a full list of needed improvements to the ball field complex.

The commission is researching the 2004 recommendations for the 16-acre property.

2004 recommendations

In March, 2004, the Park Planning and Advisory Board recommended that the best use of the 16-acre site would be two or three multi-use playing fields, a circular roadway for walking, hiking, skating and biking, parking for the site and ball field complex, picnic areas and water and sewer facilities.

Their report said that without extensive modification and/or fill, that most of the site wasn't well-suited to structures, major roads or substantial parking lots.

One section of the land formed a natural amphitheater, which could be used for outdoor concerts and events. Poor soil and drainage issues are a problem on about 60% of the site, which includes a small stream and wetland area. The central wetlands and poor drainage area could be used for a small lake, they said.

Without additional acreage, the 16-acre site wasn't recommended as an ideal location for large special events, such as the Morgan County Fair and carnivals or concerts.

The advisory board's report also recommended that the county develop as soon as possible a short-term and long-term parks and recreation plan for the county in the face of escalating land costs and development.

Just one of a kind

July 1, 2010

- Editorials

Plenty of eulogies for U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd will be written this week. Most of them will tell how he rose from poverty to become one of Washington's most powerful people and the longest-serving member of Congress in U.S. history. Some will mention his early association with the Ku Klux Klan and how he evolved through the years.

But when we think of Senator Byrd, we picture a series of more personal encounters.

There was a morning in the 1980s when we were in our office typing away and sensed that someone was behind us. We looked back to find Robert Byrd standing in the doorway. "Where's the closest

grocery store?" he asked. At the time, he'd just bought a house near Hedgesville and came to Berkeley Springs to do his shopping.

Another time, we spotted him walking his dog on Fairfax Street as we were driving to work. It was an early 1990's day when there was a political crisis in the disintegrating Soviet Union. We stopped and said, "I'd have thought you'd be at the Capitol on a day like this?"

He smiled and said, "I don't know what's happening in Russia, and if I were in Washington, everyone would be asking me." He didn't care about sound bites on the evening news.

We spent the next couple hours walking around town. Given his love of learning, he was particularly interested in the renovations and construction plans for the new library at the time. That was also the day he gave us an autographed copy of his history of the U.S. Senate, a memento we treasure.

Other times he came to town for more formal reasons. When the Morgan County Recreation Area was dedicated in the mid-1980s, he stopped at the newspaper office for directions. He'd arranged for the Army Corps of Engineers to do much of the earth-moving at the ballfields and he wanted to be at the ceremony. So, with Byrd behind the wheel, the two of us headed out there. He had no entourage. He certainly needed none in West Virginia.

As we recall, he gave a warm speech that day, but speaking always was one of his great skills. He had a knack for quoting the Constitution, lines of poetry, Bible verses, bits of history and political oratory all in one stream-of-consciousness speech. When he talked at the dedication of the Paw Paw Industrial Park, he managed to work in the names of nearly half of the people in the crowd.

Byrd was a proud man who could be politically fearless.

While he supported the coal industry because of its importance to the state's economy, he was not one to kowtow to King Coal like so many Mountain State politicians. He spoke out against the way that coal companies control the life and politics of so many places in southern West Virginia.

While he was a steadfast supporter of U.S. troops, he opposed wars that he didn't feel were in America's interest.

During last year's battles over health care reform, he chimed in on the progressive side, favoring coverage for all and showing up for late-night votes even with his health failing. He wasn't bought by insurance company lobbyists.

No matter how long he stayed in Washington, or how powerful he got, Robert Byrd never forgot that he came from working people in West Virginia. He tried to make our lives better.

If only there were more like him.