

# Beech Acres Parenting Center revisits strategic plan

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(Photo: Sheila Vilvens/The Community Press)

There will be no new high school or new park on the grounds of the Beech Acres Parenting Center, at least for now.

In a press release, Beech Acres Parenting Center announced that it was suspending discussions regarding the sale of its 36-acre Beechmont Avenue property.

“Given the magnitude and long-term impact of these decisions, we must ensure that our choices are right for our mission, our organization and our community,” BAPC Board Chair Dave Wallace said in the release.

This statement comes about one week after the Anderson Township Park District Board of Commissioners authorized Executive Director Ken Kushner to enter negotiations with Beech Acres Parenting Center for possible purchase of property.

The Park Board is disappointed that talks will not resume, but is grateful to BAPC and its board for providing the opportunity to obtain their property, Park Board President Nadine Gelter said.

“They are a mission driven organization and the needs of their clients are always foremost,” she said in an email. “It is a similar mission of the ATPD, serving the recreational needs of our residents the best way we can. In the year and a half since we began discussions with them on the property purchase, their needs have apparently changed to the point they may have a need to expand on this campus.

“While I am grateful for this opportunity, I am not pleased with the result. This truly was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I remain disappointed the community was prevented from having a voice in determining its own future.”

BAPC’s Beechmont property has been the focus of much interest over the last year. After the Anderson Park District announced about one year ago that it had the opportunity to buy the property and the RecPlex located there, a proposal called the Anderson 2020 Plan was presented. The plan proposed building a new Anderson High School on the land and a mixed use development for the existing AHS campus.

In order for this plan to be fully vetted the park board, in October, transferred its BAPC purchase agreement to Anderson Township Board of Trustees. The trustees offered to buy and hold the land until its future could be determined. Also in October, the park district pulled its levy from the ballot that would have financed the BAPC purchase.

Ultimately, the Forest Hills Board of Education found the Anderson 2020 Plan not feasible. In early February the township discontinued negotiations to buy the property.

In its release, BAPC said that it has experienced tremendous growth and now “impacts the lives of more than 23,000 children, parents and caregivers annually.” The need for parenting, family support and foster care services has steadily increased across Central and Eastern Hamilton County, Clermont County and throughout the region. This change prompted the parenting center to revisit certain aspects of its strategic plan, including locations and facilities needed to serve the community.

“Through the process of clarifying its long-term expansion strategy, Beech Acres Parenting Center will explore all potential options for its 36-acre Beechmont Avenue campus, ranging from maintaining, to transforming, to potentially selling it,” the release said.



“Our relationships with Anderson Township and the Park District are a very important part of our history, our current success and our future,” BAPC CEO Jim Mason said in the release. “Community collaborations have always been, and will continue to be at the heart of our organization’s growth and expansion.

“Given the pace of our recent growth, it is vital now more than ever that we proceed in a thoughtful, intentional manner. The significance of our work within the local community is too important to do anything less.”

Gelter said she expects no changes in the park district’s lease agreement with BAPC that allows the park district use of the RecPlex.

“This allows us to assure our residents that our indoor recreation programs will remain intact for the foreseeable future,” she said.

The residents of Anderson Township recognize the need for indoor recreation and community space, Gelter said.

“If I should remain on the park board beyond May or not, I plan on working with our parks supporters to create a resident-driven effort to improve this situation,” she said. “It has been a long-term goal of the ATPD to acquire or build its own recreation center. The idea always would require a capital levy just as it has in other communities where quality public space is built. Our timetable was simply pushed up a few years when this opportunity was presented.”

Gelter said she also has a personal goal of protecting and preserving the history of Anderson Township, namely the Beech Grove which lies on the Beech Acres property.

“I believe the next steps for the park district would be to secure our operating levy to ensure we stay open for business,” she said. “And, secondly, begin some type of fund raising effort to ensure our community has the indoor recreation space our residents want.”

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