

Soccer, social services on board's agenda

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Tue Jun 30, 2009 - 04:28 PM

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Fútbol in Bland County will no longer have to make way for football this fall. Or, more importantly, horse manure.

After struggling for years to find a playing space of its own, the Bland County Youth Soccer Association ended that problem last week when it received approval from the Board of Supervisors to establish fields on county-owned property south of the courthouse.

In an interview after the supervisors' meeting, Todd Hoge, president of the soccer association, said the group hopes to have four fields ready for play by this fall.

"I think it's a pretty big thing for us," Hoge said.

Hoge and Randy Newberry of the Bland County Recreation Committee approached the supervisors during their June 23 meeting to ask for permission to have access to the property off Main Street approximately one mile past the courthouse.

"We don't really have a good place to play," Newberry said.

Hoge explained that the league had in the past played games near the football field in Bastian, but had struggled to schedule matches around football activities. They had then moved to the fairgrounds, he said, but faced similar scheduling conflicts with horse shows and cleanup issues with the equine aftermath.

The supervisors approved the soccer association's request with little discussion; however, they required the group to either drain a pond or build a safety fence around the water hole near the fields before games begin.

Board of Supervisors Chairman John Thompson also appropriated \$1,000 toward the project from the Seddon District community development fund to help with the fencing or other development costs.

"Any funds we can get to help out is great," Hoge said after the meeting.

In the next few months, Hoge said the association will be leveling the ground, checking for holes, mowing and putting down gravel for a parking lot.

While he said that it'll take plenty of hard work to have the fields ready for the fall, he added that there should be less week-to-week preparation for the fields as they will not have to be continually re-measured as they were at the past locations.

Hoge said the number of youth soccer participants in the county keeps increasing and the new fields will help further establish the sport.

"We feel like we've got it moving in the right direction," he said.

Two Appointed to DSS Board

Also at last week's meeting, the Board of Supervisors stopped yet another brewing Department of Social Services Board controversy.

At their May meeting, the supervisors appointed local foster parent Mark Wilburn to take the spot on the DSS Board vacated by Lois Shupe at the end of June when her term expired.

Although no problems with the appointment were raised at the meeting in May, Thompson reported last week that County Attorney Paul Cassell, who was not at the June 23 meeting, had found that there was a conflict of interest in having a current foster parent serve on the department's supervisory board.

The supervisors thus last week rescinded their May motion to appoint Wilburn, ending the issue before Wilburn's term was set to officially begin.

The supervisors' action prevented a larger controversy similar to the brouhaha that occurred in early 2009 after former Board of Supervisors Chairman Frank Chandler questioned the appropriateness of Sonya Ramsey, wife of Supervisor Jason Ramsey and sister-in-law of Thompson, having a spot on the DSS Board.

Although she denied any impropriety regarding her appointment, Sonya Ramsey resigned her seat in January and the supervisors appointed Karen Hodock to the DSS governing body.

After rescinding Wilburn's appointment last week, the supervisors asked Shupe for recommendations for her replacement.

She named Stephen Kelley and Cathy Strock as good candidates, and Jason Ramsey, saying he had discussed adding a fifth member to the board after the controversy surrounding his wife, recommended appointing both Kelley and Strock to create a five-member (instead of four) DSS Board.

The other supervisors agreed with Ramsey's suggestion and appointed both candidates to four-year terms beginning July 1.

The extra DSS Board member will cost the county no more than \$600 a year as acting County Administrator Carol Hall said after the meeting that the DSS Board members receive a stipend of \$50 for each monthly meeting they actually attend.

Budget Passed

The supervisors formally passed the county's budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 after adding in an extra \$56,000 for the school system due to higher-than-expected attendance numbers during the 2008-09 school year.

With the school system increase, the total budget for the county amounts to \$18.57 million.

All tax levies will remain unchanged from last year's rates.

Windmill Ordinance Discussed

During Building Official/Zoning Administrator Joel Cagle's update to the supervisors, board member Henry Blessing inquired about Cagle's progress in researching windmill ordinances.

Tazewell County and other localities around the state have recently developed ordinances after wind energy companies sought to locate windmills on their ridge tops.

In recent months, Bland County has also been mentioned as a possible site for turbines.

Cagle reported that he's done some preliminary work on the issue, but has found no simple template for a Bland County law to model.

"No two seem to match," he said regarding other localities' ordinances.

Nevertheless, Cagle said he'll continue his research and try to have something to present to the board by August.

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http://www.swvatoday.com/comments/soccer_social_services_on_boards_agenda/news/521/