

## COUNTY PULLS PLUG AT PLATTE RIDGE

Lee Stubbs  
and Jeanette Browning  
Editors

Without any fanfare, the Platte County Commissioners last week terminated the county's three-year-old agreement with Platte City Parks and Recreation for the management of Platte Ridge Park.

"The struggles of the City park board have been well documented and have been going on for some time," said Brian Nowotny, director of Platte County Parks and Recreation.

For more than a year, the City and County have been at odds over what the County terms as a lack of city maintenance at the park, which is located north of Platte City off Highway 371. In late December, the County sent the City notice it had 90 days to address issues at the park or face termination of the cooperative agreement. Last month, the Commissioners unanimously approved an addendum to the County's agreement with the Platte City Park Board. The addendum stipulated the exact remedies to the maintenance issues and required county oversight of the City board's progress and budget.

The Platte City Board of Aldermen rejected the addendum, as did the City park board. Both entities maintained that tremendous progress had been made at the park in the last two years, with the construction of soccer and baseball fields and concession/restroom facilities.

The County's reaction to the addendum rejection last week was termination of the agreement.

Monday night, Platte City's Board of Aldermen met with the City Parks Board to discuss a response to the County's action. Present at the meeting was City attorney Keith Hicklin, who outlined possible legal action the Parks Board could take to challenge the termination.

Eventually, the Parks Board voted to authorize Hicklin to meet with County attorney Bob Shaw to work out a termination agreement. Before it made that decision, though, the two boards weighed in on the legal action option.

Feelings were mixed among the combined boards.

Parks Board member Ron Porter said he was not opposed to taking the County to court.

"If we don't, in their eyes, we have done nothing," he said. "Enough is enough."

Others were opposed to taking legal action, including Aldermen Aaron Jung and Andy Stanton.

"I don't think we need to spend \$15,000 — or whatever — on going to court," Stanton said. "I think the Parks Board can bow out gracefully. Your work out there will not go in vain. Everyone knows you have done an A-1 job out there.

"I have talked to several key people with the County and the bottom line is the kids will still get to play (soccer and baseball) there."

Parks Board member John Kurtz agreed.

"We don't need a judge to tell us we have made progress out there," he said. "You can see it when you go out there."

Discussion also was held on the future of City youth athletic programs and about the Parks Board financial investment to date at the park.

City Parks Director Dannie Stamper met with County officials Monday morning and said they wanted to know the schedules of the City's sports programs. The soccer season is at its midway point and some baseball teams will begin play the first week of May.

Stamper said the County asked him about the status of projects the City is working to complete, including erosion control grading, the baseball field dugouts, other concrete work and the re-wiring of the ballfield lights, which were stripped of copper wire by thieves last month.

"I told them, at this time, we were not planning to complete the work," he said. "I mean, if they kick us out of there, why should we continue to spend money?"

Stamper said the City Parks Board had already spent approximately \$1 million at the park.

The City Parks Board was also concerned about its annual lease payment of about \$70,000 — scheduled to run four more years — for the lights at the four-plex. Board president Bill Burnett suggested that the lights lease payment could be used as a "bargaining tool" with the County in its negotiations about continuing its youth programs. He also said the Parks Board had done a good job at Platte Ridge.

"We saved the taxpayers a lot of money by doing much of the work ourselves," he said. "I feel we did the best we could."

Kurtz then made a motion to accept the agreement and move on.

"I want to make this as painless as possible," he said. "I say we accept the termination and say good riddance."

The motion was rejected by a 4-2 vote. A motion was then made to authorize Hicklin to negotiate with Shaw on terms of the termination agreement. That measure passed by a 4-2 vote.

County said  
impasse reached

At last week's meeting, Commissioners heard a report from Nowotny before accepting his recommendation to terminate the partnership.

"We've inspected the park within the last 24 hours," Nowotny said. "There has been limited progress made on some items and others haven't even been started."

Platte City Parks Board member Jason Tinder asked the Commissioners to be patient in light of the bad weather, which delayed work over the winter.

"I'm here as a citizen and a father," he said. "I just want the kids to have a good park."

Presiding Commissioner Betty Knight thanked him for his input.

"I want to assure you that a good park is what we're interested in providing," Knight said.

She said the addendum had been portrayed in various ways, but the intent of the agreement addendum was to insure the public had an appropriate park and protect County interests.

"It wasn't any high-handed effort by the Commission to control anything," Knight said.

At the Platte City Board of Aldermen meeting following the March Commission approval of the addendum, the budgetary oversight aspect of the addendum was questioned as County interference in the operation of a city organization.

Commissioner Tom Pryor said a great deal of time had been spent trying to rectify this problem, and it was time to move on.

"It's clear we're at an impasse here, and we've been at an impasse for some time," he said. "I just want the park to be in good condition for summer."

Nowotny told The Citizen Monday that the County is committed to "taking care of the park." He said the County Parks and Recreation department has a contingency fund of approximately \$500,000 that it would draw from to fix the current problems, including surface restoration and parking issues.

He also added that he has had preliminary talks with some groups interested in taking over management of the park.

"The main thing is we want to take care of the park for the taxpayers of Platte County; we think we can do better out there," Nowotny said. "And we want area residents to know that the athletic programs in place will continue on."

He said he told Stamper to conclude the soccer season and also said the County will work with the City on its upcoming baseball/softball season.

"Right now, those ballfields are not suitable to play on," he said. "We hope we can work something out with the City as far as them finishing their programs at Platte Ridge Park."

## **CAFO talks intensify**

Jeanette Browning  
Assistant Editor

Local discussion heated up recently on a bill proposing changes to local control of agriculture that is working its way through the Missouri State Senate this year. Hal Swaney, a Missouri Farm Bureau's District I board member, spoke briefly to the Platte County Commissioners asking for their support of SB 364.

If passed, the bill, which was placed on the Senate's discussion calendar earlier this month, would allow state laws to preempt local laws regarding agricultural operations and provide that any farm-related activity or farm in compliance with state and federal laws would be in compliance with any local law or ordinance. The law would effectively override Platte County's existing agricultural health regulations, established approximately 10 years ago.

Known as both the “local control” bill and the “Missouri farm and food preservation act,” it has attracted controversy both for and against because of its potential benefits to the approval of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO) in counties with laws prohibiting them, such as Platte County.

“That aspect of the bill has been subject to a tremendous amount of emotion, and not a lot of logic,” Swaney said.

Presiding Commissioner Betty Knight said while she was familiar with the bill she was not prepared to address it or voice an opinion on it without further review.

“Well, I would hope the commissioners react not only with emotion in this matter,” she replied.

Swaney said while statewide the bill had attracted attention for its potential benefits to CAFO’s, locally support was necessary to avoid nuisance lawsuits.

“Really, the growth in the county means we probably won’t have to worry about any large livestock operations,” Swaney said. “The dust, noise and light pollution protections are the primary issue for Platte County.”

Under current law, farms are protected against nuisance suits resulting from changes in the land around the farm, provided the farm or activity has been in existence at least one year.

SB 364 would protect farms from suits of nuisance or trespass resulting from planting, cultivating, harvesting, mowing, applying pesticides or herbicides, land clearing, livestock management or construction of farm roads, lakes and ponds. Farmers are not protected from suits of nuisance or trespass resulting from negligent conduct. The bill was introduced early this year by District 31 Sen. Chris Koster, who represents Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties.

Concerned Citizens of Platte County still sees CAFOs as the primary beneficiary of the bill, and opposes it — the group is a member of the statewide anti-SB 364 lobbying organization Missourians for Local Control. Approximately 10 years ago, Concerned Citizens was formed during discussions on the development of a CAFO in Platte County and the establishment of the county health ordinance that stopped that development.

“We think this is a terrible idea (SB 364) since the state has such a dismal record in protecting our health and property values from the smell and the waste,” said Concerned Citizens chair Susan Brown.

## **One more time for all the marbles**

### **Citizen Staff Report**

The lucky pick of a green marble last week made LeAnn Jones one of the new members of the North Platte Board of Education.

Jones, along with re-elected incumbent Kevin Cook was sworn in Tuesday evening at a special reorganization meeting following the April 3 election. While Cook clearly won enough votes in the election to be re-elected, when Buchanan County votes were added to the Platte County tally, Jones, the majority winner in Platte County alone, was tied with candidate Bill Matney.

Jones said the options were to run another election or let fate decide by drawing straws or picking marbles. Superintendent Dr. Francis Moran said he had estimated the cost of running another election at approximately \$2,500.

“Neither of the candidates wanted the district to foot the additional expense,” Moran said. “I’m proud they put the district first in this.”

Both candidates agreed to pin their chances on marbles.

Cook conducted the marble draw last Wednesday at the superintendent’s office in Dearborn.

“I’m really happy and excited,” Jones said. “Bill is a great guy, so I wouldn’t have been upset if this had gone his way, but I’m happy. The best part is it didn’t cost the school any money.”

Jones, 42, grew up in Plattsburg and graduated from Plattsburg High School in 1983. She has lived in the North Platte district with her husband, Mike, and son, Del, for 19 years. She is currently a bookkeeper for Sur-Gro, where she has worked for five and a half years.

Jones wants to maintain the quality of education the district provides and address specific issues as they arise.