

Parkville board hears citizen's concerns

Jerry Keuhn
Reporter

With an audience that included a group of area Boy Scouts working on community service badges, the Parkville Board of Aldermen took steps to appease a citizen's concerns about the steps into the south entrance of the new City Hall.

Virginia Ground approached the board with complaints about what she said was a potentially hazardous situation at City Hall.

"I have come here to urge you to do something (about the steps)," Ground said. "When the sun shines on them, it's like an optical illusion."

Ground said she had successfully traversed the steps on Sept. 9, but another lady fell nearby. She said she believed it was just a matter of time before someone fell and hurt themselves, leading to a potential lawsuit. In response, Mayor Kathy Dusenbery said corrective measures were already being taken, and public works director Dan Koch said a \$15,000 bid for handrail installation had been obtained, and that \$6,000 in funding was already available to be used for safety precautions.

"I also don't think the City should have to pay for this because of an oversight by the architect," Dusenbery said. "As a matter of public safety, I think this should be done as soon as possible. These stairs are awkward and Virginia is right."

The board also determined to send a letter to the Platte County Planning and Zoning Commission and the Platte County Commissioners relaying concerns about the traffic impact that could be caused by the Brentwood Parc development, which is located just south of Barry Road and east of Weatherby Lake. Parkville community development director Sean Ackerson said that although the size of the development had been reduced, that he still thought the traffic concerns were valid. The mayor said she believed a letter would be sufficient and that Parkville should follow Weatherby Lake's example and not develop a resolution.

In other business, the board:

- Set a public hearing concerning a sewer rate increase for Nov. 6.
- Heard a positive report from the mayor on the Tour of Missouri bicycle race, including planned participation in next year's race.
- Approved the final plat with conditions for a convenience store and carwash at the intersection of Brink Meyer Road and Hwy. 45 to be developed by Vertical Ventures II.

Building purchase still on agenda

Lee Stubbs
Editor

The Platte County R-3 Board of Education has been mulling the purchase of the Stiles Building for weeks. The issue will be on the agenda again when the Board meets Thursday night at Central Office in Platte City. Though the agenda item calls for a Board vote, whether or not any definitive action will take place is not certain.

"It's still a work in progress," Board president Bob Shaw said Tuesday. "If I were a betting man, I would say the issue would not be resolved Thursday night."

Shaw said that he could not comment on specifics, but added, "there could be discussion during closed session (Thursday) that might impact the situation."

R-3 Superintendent Dr. Mark Harpst acknowledged that the Board's direction may not be set after Thursday's meeting.

"There's still much to be considered," he said.

The 27,000 square-foot building is located at 998 Platte Falls Road, next door to the new Platte City Middle School. District officials have discussed the purchase of the building for the consolidation of district administrative and maintenance offices, and a relocation of the district's bus fleet operation, which is currently housed south of Platte City on land the district leases from developers John and David Barth.

At a public forum earlier this month, Harpst outlined the advantages for purchasing the building, as well as financial information.

In addition to centralizing its administrative offices, Harpst said the purchase of the building would offer the opportunity to expand the district's early childhood, special education and other student services programs. He also added that the warehouse space gained would result in an estimated \$10,000 per year for bulk buying of paper products, maintenance and custodial supplies and other daily materials.

One of the main advantages would be the relocation of the bus fleet operation. Harpst said the district spends about \$5,100 per month on lease and gasoline fees for the fleet. Numerous bus drivers were on hand at the meeting and voiced support for the purchase of the building and fleet relocation.

"We're in favor of it, or in favor of doing something to improve on where we're at," said R-3 director of transportation Dave Lane.

Lane and the bus drivers said they would like to see improved restroom facilities for drivers and the rural road leading to the bus barn is too narrow. They also like the idea of a central transportation office and improved maintenance and convenience.

Harpst said the asking price for the building was \$2.4 million. He said the Board had three appraisals of the property. In 2005, the Platte County assessor's office appraised the \$19,000 square-foot downstairs portion of the building at \$1.6 million. Also in 2005, Bliss Appraisals appraised the same square footage at \$2.1 million. Recently, Belke Appraisals put a \$1.9 million estimate on the building, including the projected upstairs footage.

Harpst said cost estimates to reproduce the building range from \$2.9 million to \$6.4 million. The 1.7-acre parcel of land it sits on is estimated at \$450,000. He also said the estimated cost to retrofit the building for school district usage would run between \$1.5 million and \$2.5 million, depending on what the Board wanted to do with the space.

Board member Trish Stinnett, who voted against placing a bond issue on the April 2008 ballot to fund a classroom addition at Siegrist, a new vocal music room at the high school and significant renovations at the Barry campus, provided a list of concerns for Board consumption. The list included bonding capacity concerns, estimated costs for operating the Stiles Building and questioning whether the Board was overlooking potential uses for East Platte.

Harpst said if the Board decided to move forward with the purchase, it could be funded through a bond issue, a lease-purchase deal or a combination of both.

Shaw said he was not in favor of using lease-purchase to fund capital improvements and distributed information outlining suggested governmental uses for lease-purchase financing.

Harpst said the key component to considering the purchase was "looking forward and preparing for future growth."

"The bus barn and warehouse are one of five components that our community planning team recommended for our five-year plan," he said. "If the district wants to achieve what the community has identified as a facility goal, this opportunity will never be more cost-effective."

Sodomizer gets 75 years in prison

Citizen Staff Report

A Leavenworth, Kan. man has been sentenced to 75 years in prison for sodomizing a 4-year-old Platte City girl. Shawn M. Jones, 29, received the sentence last week after he was convicted of first degree statutory sodomy on July 10 following a two-day jury trial.

"It was our goal to make certain this young girl never had to worry about the defendant walking the streets again," Platte County Prosecutor Eric Zahnd said. "Fortunately, he will not even become eligible for parole until he is 70 years old."

Judge Abe Shafer sentenced Jones to 75 years in prison. Because first degree statutory sodomy is classified as a "dangerous felony" under Missouri law, Jones must serve 85 percent of his sentence or reach age 70 before he becomes eligible for parole.

Prosecutors proved at trial that Jones sexually abused the girl, who first reported the abuse in December 2003. She was taken to Children's Mercy Hospital the day after Christmas, where a nurse examined a bruise on her upper, inner thigh. The girl said Jones bit her on her thigh and sodomized her.

The girl told the jury during the trial that Jones made her take her clothes off, “threw her around,” and then abused her. She described Jones’ acts as “torture.”

The girl’s adopted mother testified at trial and during sentencing that the girl feared being left alone, would hide under her bed and just recently began sleeping with her lights off at night.

The girl was adopted after her biological mother lost her parental rights for refusing to keep Jones away from the girl after he had been discovered abusing her.

The case was investigated by the Platte City Police Department.