

264 'valuable' acres going up for sale

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Land once targeted for a recreation area in Murrysville will be going up for sale, and the money will be used to develop a community park on the former Cline farm.

Council has authorized Solicitor George Kotjarapoglus to prepare a sales agreement for 264 acres of parkland on Pleasant Valley Road. The asking price is \$975,000.

"The property is valuable as far as property in Murrysville, but it's not valuable as far as a park," said council President Andy Yourish. "Just to keep it for passive recreation, those of us that voted in favor of the sale didn't think it was worth it. I think we have a better opportunity for more enhancements at the community park or for phase two of the (Cline farm) park."

An offer has been made on the Pleasant Valley Road property, but it must be put up for public bid. And other steps must be taken before a deal can be reached.

Murrysville must seek court permission to sell the land because it originally was purchased with bond money.

"Technically, it's property that belongs to the community. We have to get permission to sell the community's property," Yourish said.

After the bids are received, council also must pass an ordinance authorizing the sale.

Councilwoman Joan Kearns said she hates to lose the land.

"It's beautiful ground. Once you sell something like that, you never get it back," she said. "I think we're acting too quickly, because we can't use it the way it was intended. I don't think we took a good, long look at how it can be used.

"Murrysville is growing," Kearns added. "Losing large parcels is a huge mistake."

Murrysville purchased the property for Pleasant Valley Park in 1999 at a cost of more than \$600,000. Two additional parcels were added later, pushing the cost to more than \$700,000.

A recreation committee report in 1996 provided the impetus to develop Pleasant Valley Park. That report said additional land was necessary to satisfy Murrysville's growing recreational needs.

But officials hadn't counted on the cost -- an estimated \$11 million to create a park from the land.

Uneven topography meant that earth work alone could have cost an estimated \$1.8 million. Gas wells and transmission lines, wetlands and other site constraints increased costs and limited options.

That spurred the municipality to look elsewhere. In 2001, Murrysville purchased the Cline farm on Wiestertown Road for \$1.35 million. The land has been used for two Community Days events.

"The Cline farm allows more flexibility," said Michele Clark, Murrysville's parks and recreation director. "(Pleasant Valley Park) is a beautiful piece of land, but the Cline farm is much better for park development."

The first phase of development at the Cline farm property is under way. Four of the six playing fields targeted for the park are being finished, and sites are being seeded for two more.

When it's done, the park will have 11 athletic fields: two for softball, three for soccer, five for youth baseball and one for football or lacrosse.

Murrysville's chief administrator, Don Pepe, said most of the park's first phase should be completed within the next couple of years. The entire park may take 20 years to complete.

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