

County tentatively agrees to buy Belews Lake land for park

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Forsyth County commissioners voted to explore buying Belews Lake land from Duke Energy for a future park last week after hearing from concerned residents in the area.

The county tentatively agreed to buy the 216 acres of vacant land in the northeast corner of Forsyth for \$640,000. However, the county won't pay that money until after a year long due diligence period and can cancel the purchase at any time. The due diligence period will include environmental assessment, boundary survey, recombination plat and title work. It'll also include community meetings to see what nearby residents think of the potential new park.

Three residents who live near the land said they wished that the outreach had started even earlier, saying they already had concerns about the park increasing traffic on both the roads in the area and in the lake itself.

They voiced concerns about the county's only



Deacon

public boat ramp to the lake, known as the Piney Bluff Access Area, located on Belews Creek Road/Highway 65 just south of the land the county is looking at. Scott Deacon said he thought the county's concept was good, but was worried how it would affect the poplar access point that he says is already "overloaded" and "overwhelmed."

"It's a narrow finger of water that goes out to the main lake and we have people who are parking on 65 who are walking down to the lake with their paddle boards, their kayaks or swimming right in that little narrow channel," he said. "There have been many close calls. It's only a matter of time before someone gets run over by

one of the boats coming from that launch ramp."

Deacon said the potential park land is surrounded by homes. He hopes the county will consult residents on the park.

Residents Roy Boykin and Brad Carrier agreed. Carrier added that he has a problem giving taxpayer money to Duke because of its issues with coal ash and other environmental issues. He said residents with pollution concerns about Duke's power plant at the lake may also have an issue with it.

County Manager Dudley Watts said the county has been in discussions for about 10 years with Duke about having a potential park on the lake, and it was only recently that a deal came together for the property. He said the county didn't want to do outreach on the project until they had the property under control, and now plans to hold as many community meetings as needed. County Commissioner Vice Chair Don Martin assured the residents that the due diligence period was purposely long to allow the county to get res-



Forsyth County Image

This map shows the land the county has agreed to buy with the residential areas that surround it. The Piney Bluff Access Area is just south of Belews Creek Road.

ident feedback.

Also during the meeting:

* Commissioners approved changes that will go into effect on Jan. 1 that will make the Smith Reynolds Airport, which is owned by the county, a county department. It will have a seven-member board, that includes all of the current Airport Commissioners, which will oversee day-to-day operations. Things like land acquisition and inter-local agreements will be voted on by the county commissions.

* Commissioners approved the first playground improvements from the voter approved 2016 county parks bonds for Union Cross Park, 421 River Park and

Walkertown Community Park. The \$234,223.65 contract for new playgrounds was awarded to Cunningham Associates, Inc, which is an authorized distributor and installer of Gametime playground equipment.

* Commissioners appropriated \$100,000 the Public Health Department received from a state opioid mitigation grant to the non-profit Twin City Harm Reduction Coalition. The needle exchange, located at Green Street United Methodist Church, will use the funds to expand its hours and outreach.

* Commissioners approved a three year lease of 6.6 acres at Tanglewood Park to Gassy Tees, LLC doing business as Softgolf. The land near

Tanglewood's dog park is used by the company for soft golf, which is a sort of golf played with a large styrofoam ball. The lease, which covers March through September, is \$5,250 annually, plus 15 percent of annual gross sales above \$60,000 and a 2 percent escalation each year.

* Commissioners awarded a \$183,474 contract for a new ambulance to Northwestern Emergency Vehicles.

* They awarded a \$329,369.93 contract to Quality Refrigeration Concepts Inc. to replace four walk-in rollers and a walk-in freezer in the kitchen of the Forsyth County Law Enforcement Detention Center.

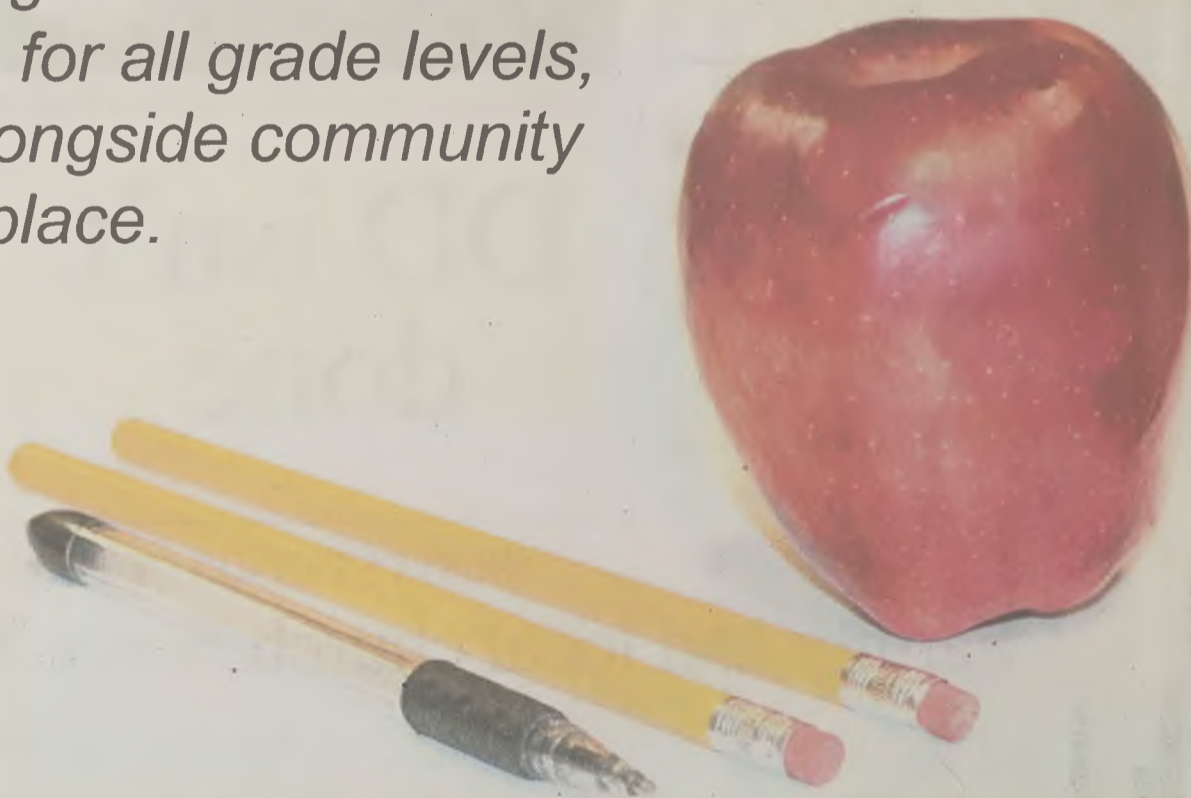


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