

Site for new ball fields sought

PURVIS — Officials with Purvis Youth Sports say they have few options as they look for room to accommodate hundreds more players in the next few years.

The nonprofit organization is asking the Lamar County School Board if it can build new ball fields on land owned by the county's school district.

The land is near the district's Center for Technical Education in Purvis, but school district officials wonder whether they will need it some day for the center's own growth needs.

Purvis Youth Sports board member Chris Taylor presented a proposal to the school board on Monday, asking if the organization could lease a 5- to 6-acre parcel of land near the center.

The parcel is also near Purvis Youth Sports' baseball and softball fields on College Drive off Main Street.

In an interview with the American, Taylor said the organization would be able to build an additional four to seven baseball fields and a football/soccer field on the parcel.

Currently, Purvis Youth Sports serves 630 baseball and softball players - up from 350 in 2007. Those numbers do not

include soccer, football and cheerleader participants, Taylor explained.

Purvis Youth Sports officials estimate by 2014, the organization will be serving an additional 210 baseball and softball participants.

"Based on our current facilities, there's no way we can support that," Taylor said.

The group has four fields at its current location with no room to grow.

"That is the facility we have occupied for the last 30 years, and there have not been many modifications to it," Taylor said.

The organization's board has been looking for land within Purvis and Lamar County boundaries, and found the options were limited, he said.

After Taylor presented his proposal to the school board, Board President Mike Pruitt suggested a five-year lease on the land - one that could be renewed at the board's

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discretion.

"We were hesitant to get into an arrangement that took away our opportunity to expand on that parcel," Pruitt told the American.

"We've got a couple of concerns about our long-term space needs for the district. We've got to look out forward. Our population (at the Center for Technical Education) is growing."

Superintendent Ben Burnett said he is supportive of granting Purvis Youth Sports a series of five-year leases.

"We have a ways to go before we are outgrowing (the center)," he said. "Even if we do have to add on to the center, there is a good bit of growing room there."

Burnett said he wouldn't expect Purvis Youth Sports to make an investment in building sports fields and then take the lease away after just five years.

"I don't foresee having to add on to the technical center in five years," he said.

Taylor said he would prefer a longer lease.

"Ten to 15 years would make us more comfortable," Taylor said. "But if five years is the best they can do, that's what we'll do."

"Our options are extremely small. Whatever terms the school board can grant us, it is OK with us."

Taylor said Purvis Youth Sports has already gotten the OK for expansion from the Lamar County Board of Supervisors.

Board President Joe Bounds confirmed that.

"They definitely need to expand," he said. "They need some more room."

Taylor will take the organization's request for expansion to the Purvis Board of Aldermen on Nov. 1.

The school board will vote on whether to grant Purvis Youth Sports a five-year lease at its next meeting on Nov. 7.

The organization plans to spend between \$1.5 million and \$2 million on an expansion to be completed around 2013.

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