

# County Eyes Land Swap

Once And Future Park May Grow Tenfold Under Deal

By **JEREMY HUNT**

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**HARRISONBURG** — The next iteration of Rockingham County’s Albert Long Park may be much bigger and better than the original.

The Board of Supervisors voted last week to enter into an exchange agreement with Indian Trail Farm LLC to trade the 6.5-acre former park for 75 acres west of the intersection of Indian Trail Road and U.S. 33 east of Harrisonburg.

Local businessman Terry Taylor and his wife Lorri own the Indian Trail Farm property, and Terry Taylor said they are excited about the potential for it to contribute to recreation in Rockingham County.

“It’s going to be spectacular for ball fields and walking trails and stuff like that,” he said. “The view is just awesome.”

The land swap is contingent upon both properties being rezoned.

For the deal to go through, about 9.8 acres fronting U.S. 33 of the Indian Trail Farm property would be rezoned from agricultural to business, and the current park property would be changed from residential to business.

The remaining 65 acres of the farm would be zoned agriculture with the condition it be used for recreation, representing a tenfold increase in the size of Albert Long Park.

Billy Vaughn, director of community development for Rockingham County, said he is aiming to get the rezoning requests before the Planning Commission in June.

A public hearing would be held before the commission makes a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, which has the final say in the matter.

The Indian Trail Farm property has an assessed value of about \$840,000, according to county real estate data, and the former park was assessed at about \$235,000.

The park’s location, however, could increase its value, as it’s in an increasingly developed area that’s sure to see more growth in the next several years.

Located off Reservoir Street near Rockingham Memorial Hospital, Albert Long Park was bequeathed to the county in the early 1970s by its namesake on the condition that recreational facilities be built on it.

Youth baseball games were held there until May 2010, when a chunk of the park was lobbed off

to make way for road improvements in the area.

The following month, RMH moved from downtown Harrisonburg into its new complex southeast of the city near Reservoir Street, Port Republic Road, and the new section of Stone Spring Road that's part of the southeast connector road project.

The southeast connector will eventually provide a route from U.S. 33 west of Harrisonburg to U.S. 33 east of the city near Boyers Road.

With development springing up all around the park, supervisors determined it was no longer suitable for recreation. The board declared it surplus property in July 2010 with the intent of selling it.

At the time, supervisors vowed to replace Albert Long Park with another facility in Rockingham County's District 3, which includes Massanetta Springs, Keezletown, Port Republic, Grottoes and North River.

County Administrator Joe Paxton said the deal would provide recreational facilities in a growing part of the county with a lot of residential development.

Paxton described it as a "unique opportunity."

Supervisors hope the sale of the 9.5 acres of the Indian Trail property being eyed for business use will pay for some of the facilities.

"These kinds of opportunities don't come along very often, and I think it was good timing for both Indian Trail LLC and the county," he said.

Paxton said "really rough plans" have been made for what could be built at the new park, including little league fields, softball fields, soccer fields and walking trails.

Taylor said he made a request to the county that if the deal goes through, officials will consider naming ball fields there after volunteer coaches from eastern Rockingham County.

"There's so many little league baseball and softball coaches who give their time tirelessly volunteering year after year," he said. "I thought it'd be nice to recognize them."

Taylor said his little league coach, the late Mensel Dean, had a significant impact on him growing up. His and Lorri's sons also grew up playing sports in Rockingham County.

"Not having a dad, he really had a positive effect on me, and on through elementary school there were other people like that," he said. "Sports pretty much directed my life."

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