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NEW ALBANY PARKS BOARD TO TRY BOND ISSUE AGAIN

\$5 million request to build new park, improve another failed in November

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The New Albany-Plain Local Joint Park District will try a second time to persuade voters to endorse plans to expand recreational facilities.

A 0.75-mill bond issue failed at the polls earlier this month. The identical measure will appear on the ballot in a February special election.

"We only lost by 230 votes when we really had everything working against us," said **Keith Karr**, chairman of the park board. "I think this time it's going to work."

Bad timing killed the first attempt, according to voters who responded to a park-board request for reasons for the defeat. The Saturday before the election, the school board warned that an income tax would be necessary next year.

That news came days after homeowners opened letters from Franklin County Auditor Joe Testa informing them that their property taxes in 2003 will rise an average of \$7.69 per month.

The average New Albany home -- valued at \$376,500 this year -- will be worth \$409,500 effective in January, according to Testa's estimates.

"I really think we would have passed it if surprises weren't thrown at us," Karr said.

Voters will be asked to approve \$5 million in bonds to complete development of Bevelhymer Park and begin construction of a 45-acre park on Thompson Road.

The Bevelhymer plans call for picnic shelters, restroom facilities, four tennis courts, four basketball courts, two baseball diamonds, two sand-volleyball courts and paved parking lots.

Thompson Park, now raw land, would get picnic areas and bike trails.

The bonds would be paid off with a property tax that would average 0.75 mills annually over 20 years. Homeowners would pay about \$23 for each \$100,000 of home valuation for

that period.

"It's a small price with a huge reward," Karr said.

After the election, New Albany-Plain Local Schools shifted gears from an income-tax proposal to a three-year levy that also will appear on the February ballot. The 19.1-mill schools measure would add \$585 a year to property-tax bills per \$100,000 of assessed home value, beginning in 2004.

Park-board members didn't want the bond issue to be on the same ballot as a schools measure but didn't see any alternative to a February vote. Bond proceeds could be used to seed fields for fall soccer. A delay would make additional fields unavailable until 2004.

"It was a resolution of necessity," Karr said. "We have to do it in order for kids to play."

The 600 who played soccer and 600 who played baseball this year were the upper limit of what the parks system could accommodate. As New Albany's population continues to climb, children would have to travel to Westerville or Gahanna to participate if the bond issue fails again.

A second bond-issue failure would mean no enhancements to Bevelhymer Park and only grading work at Thompson Park, officials said.

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