

Rec park

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went out to look at the 80-acre plot — and were amazed at what they saw. "This is an excellent piece of land for what we want to do," Sutton said, noting it had flat land, gradual slopes, wooded hill-sides, rustic areas, fields — all the ideal kinds of terrain for the project. In a further stroke of luck, there were 50 additional acres, contiguous to the plot, owned by private individuals. When Sutton and Baker detailed to the owners what they hoped to do with the land, they said, "For that kind of purpose, we'll sell the property."

Later, when Sutton, Baker and Rick Allen were in Senator Lemmond's office in Harrisburg to discuss the project with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), they looked at the properties on a map, and discovered they were almost exactly geographically in the middle of 10 Back Mountain communities.

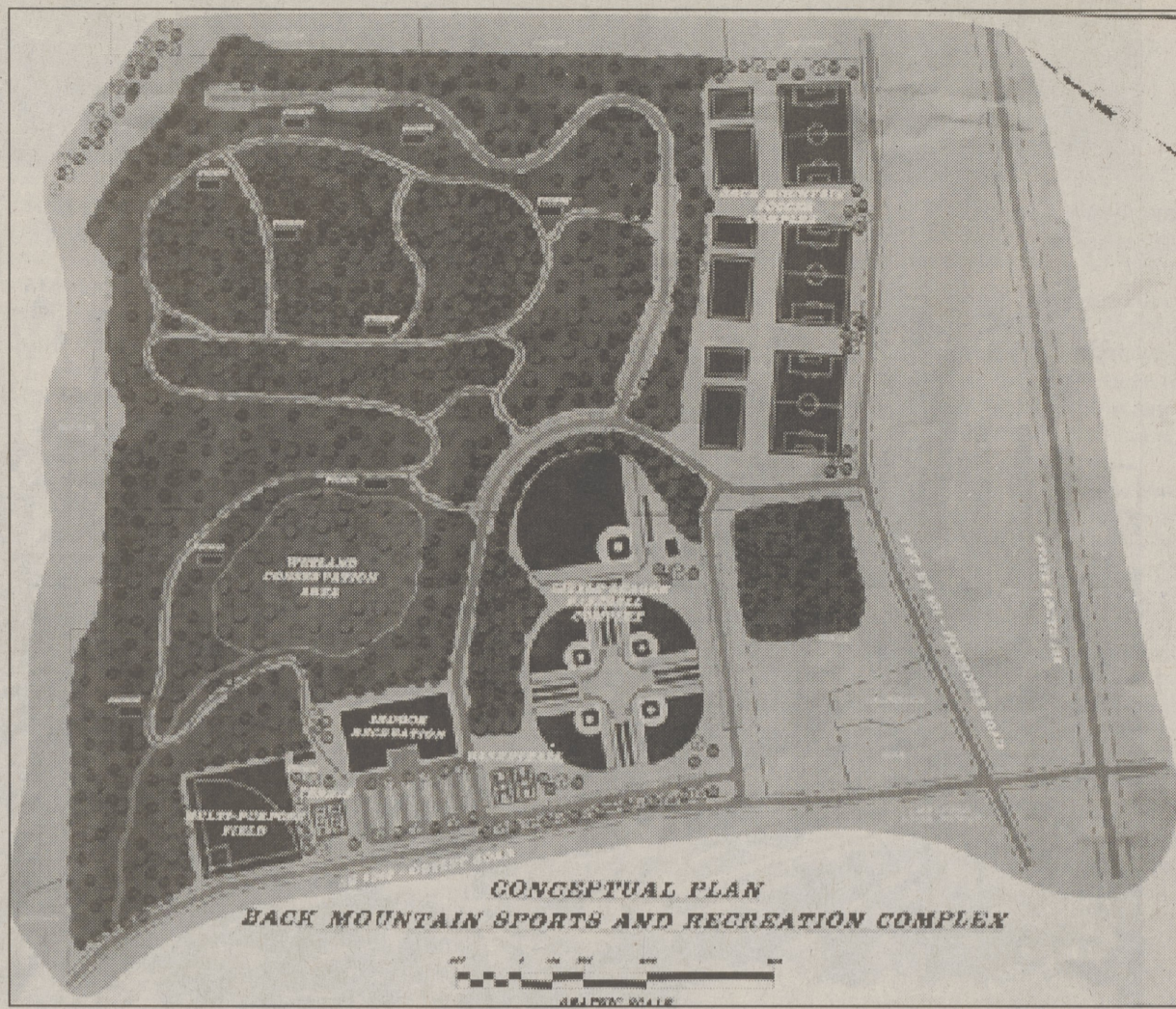
"We intend to build, construct, and maintain this project without a tax increase."

Gary Baker
Rec board member

The BMR Board has since purchased options for both properties, and intends to buy them within the year. Rep. George Hasay helped with a grant from the Department of Community Economic Development; other funds came from the Sordani Foundation and anonymous donors. Once the properties are bought, they will be used for recreation or environmental conservation purposes only — they will never be developed.

Baker explained there would be three main phases to the project. The first and most critical phase is to acquire the land and do a feasibility study. It is hoped funding will come primarily from grants, Baker said. "We feel confident, but grants are very competitive," he added. DCNR will pay 50 percent of the property value, but the remainder needs to be raised by BMR.

Estimated cost for the entire project is \$15 million. "How is it going to be paid for?" Sutton asked. "I haven't the slightest idea." Various fund-raisers and contributions from individuals



A drawing shows the proposed Back Mountain Sports and Recreation Complex.

and corporations are the most likely means of raising money; using tax money is not an option, Baker said. "We intend to build, construct, and maintain this project without a tax increase."

The feasibility study is to ensure the project can be done, funds can be obtained, and the project can be managed and maintained long-term. This study is funded by a "peer-to-peer" grant from DCNR; Julie McMonagle has been hired as the peer counselor for the project, and she will direct the studies and help to get the community involved. "It's important to understand how important phase one is," Baker said. McMonagle agreed. "There's a lot of funding through DCNR to build, but there's not a lot of money available through the state to maintain," she said, which is why it's so crucial to do these studies.

The first phase has already started, and should be done by August, 2001, which is when the 12-month options to buy the properties end; by fall of that year, the second phase will begin, once DCNR reviews the report and decides whether or not to fund the

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Julie McMonagle
Peer counselor for project

project. The second phase entails the development of the outdoor, or passive, part of the recreational complex. All the outside work will be done during this phase: the fields, the trails, the picnic areas, and so on will all put into place. "From there the project becomes sort of a work-in-progress," Baker said.

After the second phase is completed, the third will begin: deciding on the indoor facilities, which will be the last and most difficult — not to mention most expensive — phase of the project. "We're going to do this project whether phase three happens or not," Sutton said. "The indoor facilities will be the icing on the cake."

Baker said the surveys showed, interestingly, the most requested feature for the indoor facility was a coffee shop. Dr. Griffiths said a

coffee shop would be "a place for adults to go and gather and have a place for themselves" while their children are playing sports.

"I love indoor facilities," BMR board member Rich Coslett said. Coslett said he had done studies on indoor facilities and visited many. There are already several gyms in the area, he said, and they are all filled to capacity; the proposed one at the recreational complex would be for organized and unorganized sports, from basketball and volleyball to track and weightlifting. "I envision an indoor facility that doesn't have bleachers — a heavy-use facility,"

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Coslett said. "Sports are a great way to bring people together ... sports are the great equalizer."

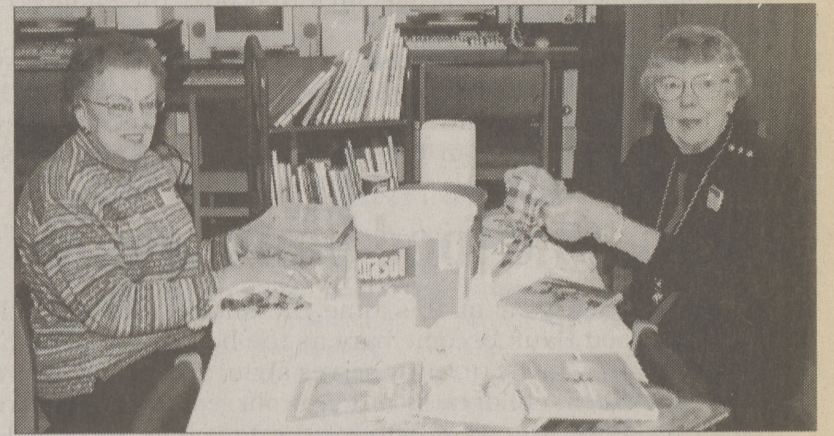
Several members of the audience asked questions about such concerns as lighting, traffic safety, and the opportunity for further growth of the recreation center. Rich Gorgone of Dallas, the athletic director at Lake-Lehman, asked if the Back Mountain Little League would move into the facilities, and whether its fund-raising money would go to the recreation center. Sutton said the board had spoken with the Back Mountain organizations and they have yet to decide what to do. As for the fund-raisers, Sutton said, there would be a small fee for use of the fields which would go towards maintenance, but the League

would keep most of its money. Jim McCarthy of Lehman asked whether a pool at the recreation center would have an influence on the pool being built at Dallas. Karen Kyle, a member of the Dallas School Board, said the demand for pool use was greater than the current facilities could provide.

Gary Baker implored people to get involved. "Talk with a neighbor, talk with a friend, go out for coffee and talk about the project," he said. Dave Sutton agreed. "If we have another one of these," he said at the end of the meeting, "make sure you come and bring your friends and relatives."

Who's on board?

The Back Mountain Recreation board of directors are: Dave Sutton, Chairman; Rick Allen, Gary Baker, Jeff Box, Richard Coslett, Gilbert Griffiths, Joe Killeen, Karen Kyle, Joan Makowski, Eric Marquart, Shirley Moyer, Kevin Rose and Kathleen Savage.



Volunteers clean up children's books

A "Wash, Repair, Replace or Withdraw" project in the children's room at the Back Mountain Memorial Library was launched recently to remind the children to care for the books they check out by respecting them and keeping them from being damaged. They shouldn't eat or drink while handling library books, and they should return them on time so that others may read them.

Pictured washing books are Janna Schmid, left photo, and Rita Rusnak and June Jones, above. Rita and June have been volunteers for five years. Janna, who lives in Shavertown, is a sophomore at Bishop O'Reilly High School. Another volunteer, Lucy Messersmith of Dallas, has been mending and covering books.

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