

On July 21, 2009, the Rice County Board of Commissioners directed the formation of a task force to study the McCullough Park/Campground facility. Appointed to the Task force were Commissioners Steve Bauer and Jeff Docken, along with Chief Assistant County Attorney Meredith Erickson, Planning & Zoning Director Julie Runkel, Parks & Facilities Director Joe McGough and County Administrator Gary Weiers.

This group met on August 5, 2009 to review the situation and discuss options. The task force spent time discussing the current issues with the facility which have been articulated in previous correspondence and include:

- Failing septic system
- Condition of structures at the facility
- Lease agreement
- Long term facility issues

The task force discussed the need for a clearly articulated vision for the future of the facility to help direct the significant improvements to the facility that are needed. The task force discussed the pros and cons of continuing to operate a campground at this location versus the establishment of a traditional county park.

The task force concluded that providing a quality campground to the area citizens is a positive and desirable goal. However, with the current arrangement/lease, any public investment made in the facility will directly benefit the operator of the facility without any mechanism in place for the county to recover a return on investment. With this in mind the task force concluded continuing with the current lease is not preferred. Research conducted by the Park Director has shown there are numerous ways to manage a publicly owned campground facility. Since public dollars will need to be invested in order to bring the facility up to acceptable standards, the task force recommends that the taxpayers directly benefit from the operation of the campground.

The task force believes that a campgrounds facility can be viable and result in a positive cash flow for the taxpaying public. However further research and charting a new course for the facility is necessary before those positive outcomes are achievable. Additionally, in order to realize a return on capital investment a new business model needs to be implemented that can be sustained over the long term.

The task force recommends the county board take the following actions:

1. Terminate the current campground lease effective October 30, 2009.
2. Temporarily suspend operations during the 2010 camping season to allow for facility improvements and continued development of a new operational plan. This suspension could last the entire camping season or a portion of the season depending on a variety of variables.

3. Establish a new business model for possible continued operation of the campground. This business model will include a new method for management of the public facility. Several counties successfully operate public campgrounds, so there are an abundance of options to study.
4. Seek public input regarding future options in November 2009.
5. Continue having the task force analyze options and prepare a work plan by January 15, 2010. This work plan should include an outline of necessary facility improvements, a comprehensive management plan and other pertinent details for continued campground operation.