

# Scouts OK deal to swap land

## Group sells to county instead of developers

By Janice Morse  
Enquirer staff writer

**LIBERTY TWP.** — A change of heart and a handshake on Friday resealed a deal that will boost a \$30 million Butler County road project, permanently preserve parkland and allow Girl Scouts to continue enjoying day camps.

"The executive directors of two organizations looked each other in the eye and said, 'We have a valid contract, let's get on with it,'" said John Fonner, the county's transportation director, after meeting in Blue Ash with Barbara Bonifas, chief executive officer of the Girl Scouts-Great Rivers Council Inc.

The council board had voted Wednesday to sell its Camp Timber Hill to a housing developer instead of to Fonner's agency, the Butler County Transportation Improvement District.

But in a reversal of that decision, council executives and Fonner "reached a mutual understanding regarding our original contract," Fonner said.

"I know there are a lot of travelers, park users and Scouts in the region that will be happy to know that we've landed in the right spot," he said.

Council spokeswomen repeatedly declined to answer questions about the deal, but issued statements via e-mails and on the council's Internet site.

Karin Drake, leader of Troop 5907 in Fairfield, said she thinks that the council "didn't like the negative publicity" that their Wednesday vote generated. She also thinks the council didn't want to fight an eminent domain battle that Butler County Commissioner Mike Fox threatened to wage.

Drake said she and other scout leaders were outraged at the council's vote to sell the camp to PBM Development.

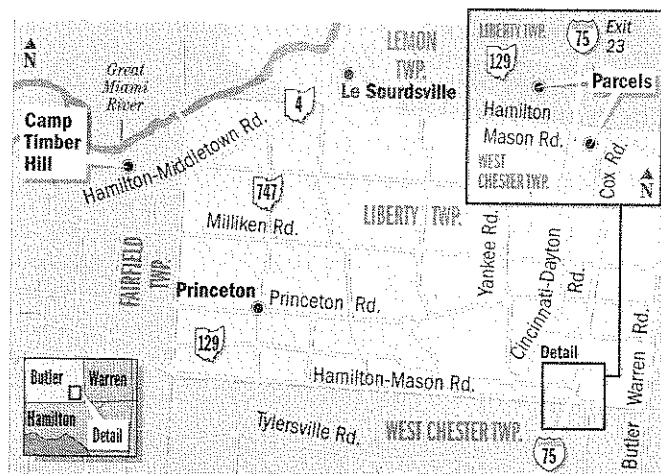
"That property was given to them as a gift, from someone who realized how awesome it would be for girls to have that kind of area as a camp," Drake said. "For them to even consider selling it to a developer is unthinkable. It goes against everything we teach the girls about conserving resources and enjoying the outdoors."

Fonner said the original land-swap deal was revived after he and council executives cleared up a misunderstanding over contract deadlines.

Fonner said council executives also apparently didn't realize the key role the camp sale would play in the Liberty interchange project.

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It wasn't until council executives saw news reports indicating the council's action would delay the interchange.

Although the Fairfield Township camp sits miles away from the proposed interchange off Interstate 75 and Ohio 129, the camp's sale will set off a chain of events that will allow officials to complete the first phase of the interchange project.

The TID plans to transfer the camp land to the Butler MetroParks. In exchange, MetroParks would give two parcels of former federal park land near the interchange site in West Chester Township to the TID.

The parcels, totaling 15 acres, are considered useless as parkland. But they cannot be sold outright.

They can only be transferred in exchange for other land to be used as parkland forever, Muska explained. And the National Park Service must approve the swap.

On Friday, Fonner said the Council's executive officers pledged to sell the camp to the TID rather than to PBM Development. Fonner said he doesn't know whether the council will meet again to officially rescind its Wednesday vote to sell to PBM. A spokesman for that developer did not return phone calls Friday.

Butler County commissioners on Monday will consider whether to lend the TID the money needed to complete the \$1.6 million sale, with the understanding that the TID will repay the county.