

# Feds OK parkland swap deal

## County TID to buy scout camp for Liberty Interchange project

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**HAMILTON** — County officials now have the long-awaited approval from the federal government needed to trade parkland for a Fairfield Township Girl Scouts camp, officials said Thursday.

The deal will allow the Butler County Transportation Improvement District to buy the 57-acre Camp Timber Hill from the Girl Scouts, then trade that land to MetroParks of Butler County for about 15 acres near Interstate 75 needed to build the Liberty Interchange.

That deal almost went sour a week ago when the Girl Scouts Great Rivers Council voted instead to sell the land to PBM Development, the development arm of Hamilton-based Dixon Builders. That action was reversed the following day when an attorney for the TID showed the scouts they still were under a legally-binding purchase agreement.

"It's amazing how quickly this has all turned around," MetroParks Director Mike Muska said. "I think (TID Director John Fonner) and I are fighting tooth and nail now to get this done."

Although the scouts, TID and MetroParks had been in agreement on the land sale and trade for months, they were waiting for the National Park Service to OK the deal.

The 15 acres now owned by the county are part of a roughly 200-acre parcel that once was the federal government's Voice of America facility. The deed under which the land was transferred to the county required the property to be used forever as public parkland.

The National Park Service would agree to the land swap only if the 15-acre parcel was traded for land of greater monetary and recreational value. The letter to MetroParks from the Park Service's Federal Lands to Parks Program manager this week gave that approval, Muska said.

Fonner said special deeds have to be created by lawyers that will transfer the park use restrictions from the land near I-75 to the Camp Timber Hill property.

"I've instructed our attorney to begin preparing the deeds and other closing documents," Fonner said. "My interpretation of the letter is that the NPS gets one more look

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at the final deeds before we are authorized to close on the property. I don't have a good feel for how long that will take, except that I don't anticipate a prolonged process."

The Butler County Board of Commissioners voted Monday to tie up another loose end in the deal by advancing to the TID the \$1.6 million needed to buy Camp Timber Hill. Fonner said the TID Board of Trustees still has to vote

at its next meeting to accept the money.

He said earlier this week that the TID expects to be able to reimburse the county with revenues from an anticipated sale of part of the 15-acre parcel not needed for the interchange right of way. The Liberty Interchange project would create a new interchange at Hamilton-Mason Road and I-75, extend Cox Road northward and widen some local roads.

Transportation officials said some local road improvements could begin by the end of this year.

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