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Wellington board to take legal action to regain village park

WELLINGTON—A mistake nearly nine years ago has Wellington officials squabbling with a resident over who owns the village park.

At a special meeting Monday, the Wellington Village Board voted unanimously not to pay to get the park back from Bill Warner, who inadvertently purchased the park when he bought the former Wellington High School building in 1993.

Warner has refused to sign a modified deed which would separate the park from the high school property, said Wellington Mayor Grover "Bud" Wise. The problem, Wise said, stems from a personal conflict Warner has with Wise.

Warner, who did not attend Monday's meeting, admit-

ted he has a problem with Wise. In a telephone interview Monday night, Warner said he wants the village to lease the park from him and provide a certificate of insurance to cover liability until the matter is straightened out which will not happen until the administration changes. "I don't want to own the park but I do want to see some changes," he said, adding he has "several things" against Wise. Warner declined to elaborate on those things.

In 1993, Warner was a village trustee when the village purchased the high school from a church based in the Chicago suburbs. The church experienced internal problems and sold the building to the village for \$12,500.

See PARK on other side



Night work

AmerenCIPS crews work on power lines in the 400 block of East Seminary following a storm that hit Hoopeston shortly before 5 p.m. High winds and rain combined to knock power out in parts of town and knock tree limbs to the ground. Large limbs temporarily blocked the 800 block of East Lincoln Monday night but crews cleared the street an returned traffic to normal. Hoopeston received 2.34" of rain Monday, said weather watcher Audrey Mushrush. The July total is 6.10", higher than the norm of about 5". Monday's storm was no comparison, however, to what hit Hoopeston on July 8 last year when a tornado swept through town, dumping 1.05" of rain in just 10 minutes and dropping the temperature 20 degrees.

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Park continued from other side

The village then sold what they thought was school property to Warner for \$10,000, according to Merle Lockhart who was mayor when the transaction took place.

Warner started a tire recycling business there, then closed it and started WilKare Trucking.

Then-village attorney Calvin Hultquist Jr., a member of attorney Paul Manion's Hoopeston-based office, handled the transaction. That office may be sued as part of getting the park back, said current village attorney Dale Strough, who urged the board to act quickly to get the park back.

After the meeting, Strough said the village cannot enforce eminent domain statutes because those laws cover forced purchases and the village does not want to buy the land, which he said was "mistakenly conveyed" to Warner. Strough advised village officials to continue to maintain possession and use of the park, allowing Lockhart to continue scheduling functions there despite the dispute. He would not discuss the matter further saying such things should be covered in closed session between himself and the board.

Lockhart has served as an intermediary between the board and Warner, and was the one who asked Warner to

sign a new deed. Lockhart said Monday that Warner told him he has known of the glitch for about seven years but was unwilling to correct it "because he didn't get along with the board."

Lockhart said he asked Warner whether he would be willing to sign the new deed after next April's elections and that Warner said no. However, Warner said Monday night that he might be willing to sign the deed then if Wise is no longer mayor. "I said I might, I don't know," he said.

Officials said the park is not just a town park but a community park. "People from everywhere worked on that park," Wise said. Several thousands of dollars have been donated to make the park better, from residents and groups like the Wellington Lions Club which paid to have a shelter erected in the park.

Residents at Monday's meeting expressed similar sentiments. Samantha Bruens, wife of trustee Steve Bru-

ens, said one man should not be able to affect the whole town over a personal disagreement.

Carol Puffbarger spoke of how the community pulled together to help her when her house burned last year. "We have to stick together and do what we have to do to get the park back," she said.

Although Warner did not attend the meeting, his daughter, Jamie, did. When asked if she wished to speak at the meeting, she told the board she was "just here to observe."

No matter what the outcome, Wise hopes Wellington residents will have a park. "If we don't get that park back, if I live long enough, by God we'll have another park," he said. "It may not be as big, it may not be a pretty but there'll be one."

Warner is sure the issue can be resolved. "We'll work this out in the long run," he said. "All I want to do is run my business, take care of my family and be left alone."



Police News



Linda L. Brown, 39, of #44 Parkview Court, was arrested was arrested following an altercation at 2:40 p.m. Monday in the 700 block of South First Ave.

She was charged with battery and criminal damage to property on a complaint from a 38-year-old Hoopeston woman.

A **56-year-old** Hoopeston woman reported Monday that someone broke a window in her garage and kicked in the back door of a house in the 500 block of North Ninth Ave.

Two people were arrested at 9 p.m. Monday at 719 S. Fifth St.

Anthony J. Chandler, 20, and Tiffany F. Lile, 19, of that address, were removed from the property at the request of the property manager.

Chandler was wanted on Vermilion and Iroquois county warrants for failure to appear. Lile was wanted on a juvenile warrant.

Both were taken to the Public Safety Building in Danville.

A **23-year-old** Hoopeston man reported Tuesday that someone kicked the side mirror of his vehicle.

Maria D. Torres, 38, of 905 S. Second Ave., was ticketed for operating an uninsured motor vehicle after an accident at 2:02 p.m. Monday.

Police said Torres, in a 1997 Toyota, hit a 1993 Mercury driven by Heather Pratt of 14008 E 4000N Rd., in the 900 block of South Second Ave.

Torres was at fault for improper backing, police said.

Weather



Mostly sunny today. High 82. Tonight, clear. Low 58. Tomorrow, sunny, chance of rain late. High 85, low 65.

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