



An after-hours decision: Calhoun basketball pad closed during 'government business'

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HARDIN - A small basketball pad located near the developing Calhoun County Courthouse has been the subject of controversy in the county due to the opinions of three members of the Calhoun County Board.

The basketball pad, which contains a single hoop, was established four years ago by The Crunch Fitness Center, located across the street. To many parents and two members of the Calhoun County Board, the basketball pad represents an opportunity for children in a small town without a lot of available green space to play outside. To three of the board members, the most vocal of whom is Calhoun County Board Chairman Douglas Wilschetz, the court presents a liability - especially during normal business hours.

After the board unanimously voted to remove the pad to make room for improvements through a \$175,000 grant for parking done by the USDA, board members Larry Wieneke and Phil Robeen supported keeping the small pad open until a replacement for it could be found, either by renovating the gym inside the former grade school, which is now the courthouse, or somewhere within the Village of Hardin.

Wilschetz and fellow board member Terry Woelfel vocally opposed the pad being opened during normal business hours, however. This sentiment was challenged by a

petition containing 324 signatures created by Calhoun County resident Kimberly Eilerman, which she delivered to the Calhoun County Board at its Monday, June 19 meeting.

"Kim, thanks for taking the lead and being a community leader," Wilschetz said upon her delivery of the petition. "But, I see a real liability issue with the court being where it is, especially when we have other options. I would rather be a bad guy on Facebook than be a bad guy if a child is harmed."

He then used the example of a child running to receive a ball and accidentally being harmed or even killed by a vehicle parking or leaving from a nearby gravel lot. He said he accidentally hit a fireplug while on vacation, because he could not see over the tailgate of his large Dodge truck, which he parked directly adjacent to the basketball pad Monday.

The petition quoted Wilschetz as saying the pad was an "eyesore," which was sourced from other local media outlets. Wilschetz claimed at the Monday meeting he was misquoted and said he simply wanted to close the pad during business hours, because the courthouse is a government building, and he does not want people coming to do government business to be liable for the death or maiming of a child.

Before the board voted three to two in favor of closing the pad during regular business hours, both the board and community members at the meeting suggested several replacements as well as methods to make the current pad safer. Suggestions including renovating the gym and utilizing a fence around the pad to prevent the ball from rolling into dangerous areas.

"We could get that gym ready for pickup games probably in less than a week," Wilschetz assured.

However, that gym's ambitious plan of one day becoming a community center is a pretty distant possibility at this point. Currently, it lacks HVAC. Despite the lack of climate control, Wilschetz assured the court was roughly the same temperature as the outside air.

Eventually, the board hopes that gym will be able to have security cameras, so children can play safely under the watchful eyes of dispatchers in the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office. Calhoun County Sheriff Bill Heffington said the cameras would be able to dissuade bullies and allowed problematic kids to be identified.

In the meantime, there is no immediate replacement for the outdoor pad, despite it being closed during business hours. Both Wieneke and Robeen asked for such an extension before action could be taken, and both voted against the closure.

