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No dance music in Forks for now

Township officials, residents discuss what needs to be done before dances will resume.

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FORKS TWP. | Once chaperones are better trained, children dance appropriately and existing rules are better enforced, the music will be turned back on for the Forks Township Youth Sports Organization dances.

About 20 residents joined township supervisors and members of the sports organization and recreation board Tuesday to discuss how dances can be improved to avoid problems that prompted supervisors to cancel them last month.

"I think everyone here doesn't want to see dances end," Supervisor Don Miller said at the start of the meeting.

Karen Haduck complained at a supervisors meeting last month that chaperones at the Oct. 27 dance ignored fifth-, sixth- and seventh-grade children dancing in a sexually suggestive manner.

Dan Martyak, vice president of the FTYSO, said Tuesday most of the rules are well enforced.

He listed two rules that must be revised: inappropriate dancing and children not showing identification.

Volunteer-parent chaperones should help stop misbehavior, residents agreed.

Supervisor C. David Howell suggested all chaperones wear the same shirt so they are easily identified. He said chaperones will likely be judged at future dances to make sure they are doing the job right.

The identification system is not as easy.

Some schools do not give out identification cards at the beginning of the school year or at all, and parents typically drop children off before signing them in, Martyak said.

About 80 percent of the children who attend the dances are from the Easton Area School District, officials said.

Some children who are too young or too old might be getting into the dances, officials said.

Suggestions from Tuesday's meeting will be considered by a subcommittee including FTYSO parents and supervisors before dances resume.

One Easton Area High School senior recommended calling on high school students to help chaperone the dances.

"Students need to be involved and act as a buffer between children and parents," Kara Hamerstone, 17, suggested.

Hamerstone attended the supervisors meeting last month when the dances were cancelled and decided to ask her peers if they would be interested in helping the dances resume.

More than 20 high school students expressed interest, Hamerstone said. She said the high school chaperones could be selected partially by teacher recommendation.

Hamerstone said she remembers attending Forks dances and being embarrassed by parent chaperones.

Not everything about the dances are bad, Wayne Hultgren reminded those in attendance. Hultgren runs the dances and the snack bar.

"Look at the positive side," Hultgren said, calling the dances a safe place for children.

He said there haven't been problems with drugs or alcohol, and children really enjoy going to the dances.

About 400 children attended the October dance, and chaperones had a problem with about 15, Hultgren said.

"We can control 15 and stop it," Hultgren said.

Haduck said she agrees with the rules but doesn't see how dances will be better.

"What's going to change so they are enforced now?" Haduck asked.

Haduck's fifth-grade daughter won't be attending the dances unless Haduck is able to chaperone, Haduck said after the meeting.

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