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Forks takes steps to improve youth dances

Events stopped after complaint. Chaperones, rules to be examined.

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

Suggestions Tuesday night in Forks on how to improve monthly youth dances at the township community center focused on increasing the effectiveness of volunteer chaperones.

Township Supervisor Donald Miller, chairman of the supervisors' Parks and Recreation Committee, said a small group, including representatives from the Forks Township Youth Sports Organization, would be convened to discuss the issue and report back with recommendations.

"I don't think we're going to solve the problem here tonight," said Supervisor Chairman David Hoff.

The supervisors voted Nov. 2 to suspend the dances after receiving a complaint from resident Karen Haduck, who said chaperones were not enforcing dance rules, specifically those against sexually suggestive dancing. Miller said previously that the vast majority of the dance attendees behaved responsibly, a point echoed Tuesday by Wayne Hultgren, a Youth Sports member who has been coordinating the dances for about 10 years. Hultgren said there hasn't been a major problem at the events, including drugs or alcohol.

"Everyone here in this room tonight does not want to see the dances end," Miller said. "I think the children don't want to see the dances end. I think it's a matter of just getting together and working on all these problems and coming up with an agreement on how to run the dances to everybody's satisfaction. As soon as that happens, the board of supervisors will allow the dances to continue."

Dan Martyak, Youth Sports vice president, said the group has met several times to come up suggestions for improvements. He said the dances, for Grades 5-7, are a social outlet for youth. The dances are not a huge fundraiser for township sports, but do contribute toward the programs, officials said.

"I think it's time for us to revisit some of our rules and guidelines to make sure they are enforced, published and that they meet the expectations of the board of supervisors," Martyak said, adding "almost all the rules are well enforced."

All five supervisors attended Tuesday's meeting, along with Youth Sports members and about 15 residents.

Suggestions included making chaperones more visible, possibly through special shirts or name tags, and possibly coming up with a different ID system. Currently, students attending the dances must show a school identification badge, or be signed in by a parent or guardian.

A suggestion was also made to place a sign outside the community center to note the 9:30 p.m. dance ending time, and to remind students and parents that ID's are necessary for admission. Martyak said there were potential logistical problems with the township coming up with its own ID card system.

One suggestion that may be considered came from Kara Hamerstone, an Easton resident and a senior at Easton Area High School, who suggested high school students could volunteer to work alongside adult chaperones. "We could act as a buffer," said Hamerstone, a member of the school's National Honor Society.

"My concern is just enforcement of the rules," Haduck told the supervisors. "What's going to change that they are going to be enforced now?"

Supervisors David Howell and John Ackerman said the township will monitor the dances once they restart. "They [dances] will in fact be judged," Howell said.

Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas said more parents need to get involved as chaperones.

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