

Public voices speak on fate of Atchison mascots

▣ Members of the Atchison community listen as comments are offered on the future of the city's public school mascots/Credit:Brian Hagen/MSC News

(KAIR)--Around 40 members of the public were in attendance Tuesday evening, as the Board of Education for the Atchison Public Schools hosted a forum to hear public voices regarding the future of the school district's Native-American themed mascots.

The forum follows the work of a committee which collected the pros and cons of keeping the Redmen mascot, at the high school and the Braves mascot, at the middle school.

It was the high school mascot that gained the focus of those who spoke in opposition of making a change.

Of the 11 voices heard during the forum, three were in favor of doing away with the mascots, while one voiced no allegiance, instead presenting an online survey she independently conducted through Facebook.

The first to speak in opposition of the change was longtime high school football coach Jim Smith. "I talked to three friends of mine that are Native-Americans, and my thought was, if anyone of them say...get rid of it, I would have said ok. All three were in favor of keeping [the mascot]. One of them in particular made the comment, I sent my kids to Atchison High because I want them to be Redmen."

Smith also said concerns that the current mascot reflects negatively on the district's league membership has been the opposite in his experience.

Among the minority speaking in favor of changing the mascot was Brown County Attorney Kevin Hill.

Citing his past observations of a similar mascot change at the Hiawatha schools, the Atchison County resident asked the school board to make the same decision as USD 415. "The term Redmen, like Redskins, and a lot of other Native-American mascot names, is offensive in nature, and origin, to a lot of people. We're here as a community and school for the children, and for their future, and a mascot that's offensive to any segment of our student population really shouldn't have a place in our educational system."

The forum, which was moderated by Brian Jordan, of the Kansas Association of School Boards, served as a special meeting of Atchison's USD 409 Board of

Education.

The School Board made no immediate decision, with that to happen at some yet unstated point in the future.

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