

Morrow Park vacated; cemetery controversy remains

(KAIR)--Action of the Atchison City Commission removes the south-side Morrow Park as the City's responsibility.

That happened Tuesday, following long-term discussion about vacating the location as part of the City's efforts to "right-size" city parks.

Atchison Mayor Shawn Rizza spoke prior to the vote, saying a review of the City's parks shows the Morrow Park location as underutilized. "Morrow Park is consistently the least used," Rizza said. "We do have a community garden out there that we need to look at relocating...we are in discussions with several different groups on where that could be. I think this is a good way to move forward, dedicate our resources to fewer parks, and actually have an improved product."

With no further discussion following his comments, Rizza called the vote, which passed unanimously.

Atchison City Manager Becky Berger told MSC News the property now reverts back to the original property owners. If the land is not maintained, and taxes not paid, it will eventually be placed up for auction at a tax sale.

Assistant City Manager Justin Pregont told MSC News there are portions of the park property that are no longer under the original deed restrictions, and those sections will likely be placed into the City of Atchison's Land Bank.

Morrow Park was formed following the donation of several parcels of land to the City in 1963.

Primarily used as a single youth baseball field during its lifetime, the park also once housed a skateboard park later converted to a basketball court.

In 2012, with the opening of the Atchison County Sports Complex, the ball field became obsolete.

Despite no public opposition prior to the vote, more than a dozen members of the public addressed the Commission at the start of the meeting, voicing their concerns regarding the future of Oak Hill Cemetery.

The controversy follows the City in January approving a resolution that headstones deemed to be a safety threat would be removed and replaced with a metal plaque. The removed monuments would be placed in storage and destroyed after three years if they are not claimed.

The members of the public, including three former City Commissioners, questioned the policy, as well as funds received by the city designated for use at the cemetery, as well as other factors.

The Commission took no action on the issue.

On February 7, the City announced that the cemetery policy was under review.

Many Signals Communications