

Committee to suggest reopening of field

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The Southside Advisory Committee will recommend that the Elmira school board reopen McNaught Field.

Committee members made the decision about the athletic field after hearing the conclusions of two separate environmental consultants Monday night during a public meeting at Southside High School.

Also Monday, the committee:
■ Agreed to work with an alumni directory publisher in locating students who have attended Southside High School since it opened in 1979.
■ Accepted a team of technical experts who will assist the committee in interpreting and reviewing environmental data.

■ Heard preliminary reports from two independent environmental firms that the state's investigation was thorough and adequate.

■ Asked for a third extension from the state Department of Health that would give the committee until Jan. 15 to issue formal comments on the state's August Health Consultation. The current deadline for public comment on the report is Friday.

■ Rick Kennedy and Craig Slater, environmental attorneys hired by the district and the city respectively and co-chair of the committee, said they would call the health department today to ask for the extension on the formal comments. If they do not receive it, they said they will rush to get general comments together to be included in the revised Health Consultation.

On Monday, Kennedy told committee members that two environmental firms hired by the district did not think testing the soil at McNaught Field for contaminants was warranted.

McNaught Field, an athletic field between Maple Avenue and Moore Parkways along Miller Field, was used by Southside's football team. It was closed Aug. 28 along with the athletic fields on the school premises at 775 Main St.

The property was a residential farm until 1969 when people started using it as an athletic field, Kennedy said. There was no heavy industrial use at the site, unlike the fields on the school property.

The environmental firms did an extensive review of the history of McNaught Field, examining aerial photographs, maps and property titles and talking with longtime residents in the area, Kennedy said.

The school board will discuss reopening McNaught Field at its upcoming meeting on Dec. 18, said Superintendent Laura Sherwood.

"Every indication is that it should be opened back up," said Jim Falser, committee member and the



Online

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director of athletics at Southside High School. The sign should be taken down so that the neighbors will know it is safe.

The committee hasn't recommended that the fields on the school property be opened. The group is awaiting reports from several independent agencies that are reviewing the state Department of Environmental Conservation's investigation of possible contamination in the soil, water and air at the school.

The committee hopes to make a recommendation to the district about the other sport fields before the spring athletic season begins in March.

The state began investigating the school property in May after some parents and community members expressed concerns about an elevated rate of cancer among students and former students at Southside, which is built on a former industrial site.

The state Department of Health is studying an elevated rate of testicular cancer among students since 1997. Health officials will also review any additional data gathered about out-of-state Southside alumni who have developed cancer.

During Monday's meeting, the advisory committee recommended that the school district move forward in its attempt to recruit help from Harris Publishing in contacting alumni.

Harris Publishing Inc., a company that creates and sells alumni directories, has agreed to assist the district by tracking down alumni and turning over their database to the district.

The district can then expect to reach about 60 percent of all students who have attended Southside since 1979 when it mails out a letter informing alumni of the state's cancer investigation, Sherwood said. The mailing will also include a survey and medical release that alumni with cancer can fill out and return to the state health department.

The district has located old addresses for students on microfilm and will send the six rolls of film to Harris Publishing as a starting point, Sherwood said.

The publishing company said it would need four months to get the address lists prepared, so a mailing to students is not likely to be sent out before that.

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