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Fairfield, visitors bureau officials excited about Marsh's potential

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FAIRFIELD — The top executive for the Butler County Visitors Bureau is excited about the potential Marsh Park not only gives Fairfield, but the county.

After touring last week the undeveloped portions of what will eventually be a 170-acre park, visitors bureau Executive Director Mark Hecquet said, "The expanse of this place presents tremendous opportunity." That includes bringing in regional and national recreation and athletic competitions to the eastern portion of the city of Fairfield.

"It is literally a blank canvas, and I think the true trick is coming to a decision of what is the best use of the space," he said. "It has all kinds of opportunities, all kinds of ideas."

But all of the planning can't move full steam ahead until Martin Marietta officially vacates the quarry and deeds the property to the city, said Bell. While the exact date is fluid, it could be a few years.

Hecquet and city of Fairfield officials toured Marsh Park to get a full understanding of exactly how big the park property is, and to evaluate the potential and challenges the L-shaped park with three large lakes. It had two lakes before Martin Marietta began gravel and sand mining operations some five decades earlier.

"It's going to require a lot of input from a lot of people to narrow it down," said Hecquet. "It can be whatever the community wants."

The park sits on top of the Great Miami Buried Valley Aquifer which runs from Logan County to the Ohio River. That aquifer fills up the now three lakes at Marsh, the largest of which is the current fishing lake to the south and is 70 to 80 feet at its deepest. The other two lakes range from 10 to 30 feet deep.

Fairfield Parks Director Jim Bell said the city has an overabundance of ideas of what could go onto that "blank canvas."

The city has received initial input from the public, consultants and officials from the visitors bureau and MetroParks of Butler County, but now Bell said city planners need to "massage" all of the ideas and answer the question, "How do we prioritize this in order to move forward?"

Some of the potential activities include expanding the water-based activities and bringing in events such as open swim, sailing and triathlon competitions.

City engineer Ben Mann said the city can take advantage of the unique and natural topography of the land — which includes a large hill overlooking all bodies of water — for many of the ideas being discussed, though not discussed publicly.

"There's a few bigger ticket ideas, and bigger items that have to be programmed out for several years," said Mann.

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