

Firing up the Field of Dreams

Design group seeks local feedback

By **MARTY FINLEY**

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ELIZABETHTOWN — Lexington-based m2d Design Group hopes to wrap up its final design on the Field of Dreams sports complex within the next four to five weeks and looked to the public this week for direct feedback before moving forward.

The design group, in conjunction with the Elizabethtown Tourism and Convention Bureau, held an open reception in the Elizabethtown Police Department's



Terri Rosenberger holds her daughter, Gracie, as she asks questions Wednesday to Elizabethtown Tourism and Convention Bureau board member Jim Long about the Field of Dreams during a public meeting in the Elizabethtown Police Department community room.

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DREAMS: Tennis currently not included in plan

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community room Wednesday, where they mingled with local residents and members of local sports leagues exchanging information. Visuals were placed on display, highlighting photos and master plans from a number of parks in Tennessee and Mississippi visited by tourism and city officials during a recent fact-finding trip.

Most of the sports to be featured at the park were represented by local leagues, with the Elizabethtown Tennis Commission boasting a large contingent.

Tennis is not included in the current master plan, but the group made an appearance to make sure it is not forgotten in the city, said ETC Chairman Bo O'Brien.

The commission plans to approach the Elizabethtown City Council later this month with a proposal to erect tennis courts on property at Freeman Lake Park. O'Brien said the idea first surfaced about three months ago and he approached Mayor David Willmoth. He said it would be advantageous to put courts at the park because the city already owns the land.



m2d representative Mark Arnold, left, shows members of the community a map of the Field of Dreams and how the park may be laid out Wednesday at a public meeting at Elizabethtown Police Department.

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With sports tourism continuing to prosper despite the recession, tennis' appeal is gradually increasing, he said.

"(And) it's a whole lot more fun than walking on a treadmill," he added.

As for the Field of Dreams, O'Brien said his only wish is they build something nice to attract tourism dollars. He said it's one of the largest projects Elizabethtown has ever attempted and officials need to do it right.

Charlie Hopkins, a commissioner with Hardin County Youth Football, said he is excited about a multi-sport complex in Elizabethtown, particularly one geared toward youth sports.

"(This) could be the

centerpiece of the state," he said.

Hopkins said football often is overlooked in these projects, despite its popularity. The inclusion of football in the Field of Dreams offers a lot of opportunities, but he voiced concern about the use of artificial surfacing. He said he is unsure if the fields would be able to withstand the wear and tear football causes.

Mark Arnold, principal landscape architect for m2d Design Group, said he appreciated the input from the football community and expects the suggestion will be addressed in the design. Arnold said the design likely will include 12 soccer fields, with two functional for football.

One will be an all-purpose field, he said, with artificial surfacing, while the other could use Bermuda grass. Arnold said using Bermuda grass on one of the fields should quell concerns because it's a sturdier turf with a higher wear tolerance.

In addition to the soccer fields, Arnold expects eight baseball fields geared toward children 9-12 years of age. Two larger Babe Ruth fields, which would primarily serve kids between 13 and 15, also are projected.

Four of the fields could have stripped dirt infields rather than grass infields, Arnold added, to accommodate girls' softball.

Aaron Howell, assistant softball coach at North



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Dean Thomas, right, of Daihoff, Thomas and Dawes, points out amenities of parks the firm has designed to Corky Morse and others during a public meeting Wednesday at the community room at Elizabethtown Police Department.

Hardin High School, said including softball was one of his major concerns coming into the meeting, in addition to the need for temporary fencing for warmups. He said it appears both will be covered under the design.

"I just can't wait for them to break ground," he said.

Howell said he has been clamoring for something of this caliber in Elizabethtown and believes it will be a viable source to bring tournament teams from across the state and nation.

Arnold said the overall response was positive, and he believes the finished product will give locals and visitors something to enjoy. The community can use it through the week, he continued, while it will bring in tournaments and cash on the weekends.

"I think that's a perfect marriage of a project for tourism," he said.

M2d is working with a number of other firms and a turf specialist to hammer out the details of the project, but he doesn't expect the final design to deviate drastically from the master plan already completed. He said the soccer fields likely will stay the same, with some modifications made to the placement of the baseball fields.

Once the final design is complete, the project team will begin working out details of the project, Arnold said, with a hope to begin construction by spring or early summer.

Tourism officials have been reluctant to give hard cost estimates, but ETCB Executive Director Sherry Murphy recently told the city council the project could cost upwards of \$25 million.

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