

Pool, Wellness Center, and Homeless: Coffee with Mayor Vonderheide 11/1

By: *Corbin Lingenfelter, News Director*

Jasper- An early morning meeting with Jasper Mayor Dean Vonderheide was held Wednesday at the Jasper Train Depot.

Mayor Vonderheide discussed a number of projects and topics, from the new outdoor pool to addressing the homeless population in the city.

Outdoor Pool

When discussing the new outdoor pool for Jasper, a question concerning the pool size was made. Mayor Vonderheide and Jasper Parks and Recreation Director Tom Mooreman addressed this.

“If we wanted to put a fifty meter pool in where the pool is now, we couldn’t do it,” said Mooreman.

Mooreman would explain due to regulations involving ADA and pool deck requirements, the current location of the Jasper City Pool would not be possible.

“The way the regulations are today versus nineteen fifty-five or whenever they planned this, there has to be so much deck space, there has to be so much room in bath houses, ADA compatible,” Mooreman said, “There’s no real estate.”

Mayor Vonderheide would go on to say that there is a 50m pool just south of Jasper in Huntingburg. The pool will however have lap lanes for high school practice, but not for collegiate practice.

“We do not have any college swimming around here,” Vonderheide said, “It’s a recreational pool. That’s what it is intended for.”

The new Jasper City Pool will go for bids during the November Parks and Recreation board meeting and is expected to accept a bid in January or February 2024.

Regional Wellness Center

Another project the city is looking at is the proposed Regional Wellness Center.

“We’re in a silent phase, but it is not really silent, of fundraising,” Mayor Vonderheide addressed, “We’re meeting with corporations and individuals to come up with the funds we know we’re going to need.”

In the Spring, the city will look at those funds and start their capital stack. This will tell them what they can afford to build. The Mayor reiterated the city will only build what they can afford.

There is also talks of a referendum to help fund the wellness center. This is intended to only be a property tax backed bond. The city is hoping for a 2% less rate.

“That’s why we are doing a property tax backed bond,” Mayor Vonderheide said, “We want to have the capital tax in place so we can build what we can afford and get it at the lowest rate.”

The city is looking to get \$15 Million in private donations, with the total project estimated at \$37 Million. The twenty-two million dollar gap will be aided with the one cent food and beverage tax, which will go into effect on January 1, 2024. The city will also put grants and other funding towards the gap as well. Jasper is currently applying for a Ready Grant, but may not receive a decision on their application until the spring. Should the city not receive enough funding to move forward all at once, they will instead do the project in phases.

Homeless Population

To end the conversation, Mayor Vonderheide addressed the homeless population in the city.

“We do have homeless people in Jasper,” Mayor Vonderheide admitted, “We do have homeless people in Dubois County.”

Churches, in the past, are how Jasper has addressed these situations. The Jasper Police Department is another facilitator, who reaches out and provides vouchers for individuals who are homeless for food and a one night stay in a hotel.

Vonderheide says while the city does a good job addressing the population, they struggle aiding those battling mental illness and are homeless.

“To see repetition from individuals that are probably from a mental health standpoint that have chosen this as a lifestyle, that’s where we struggle a lot,” Vonderheide said.

Vonderheide says he is for facilities that help those with mental health, but it’s not the government's solution.

“I am not a proponent of building a homeless shelter,” Vonderheide said, “but I do not want to necessarily attract and overwhelm our system. I am more of a proponent of having a facility somewhere else. I do not want to attract dozens and dozens.”

According to statistics on [Hoosier Data](#), Dubois County as a whole had an estimated 18,832 total housing units in 2022, ranking them 36th out of Indiana’s 92 counties.