

## Local News

# Township considers Teen Court

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ZION-BENTON NEWS

Zion Township Supervisor Cheri Ditzig raised the idea of a Teen Court for Zion at the town board meeting Tuesday night. The board began preliminary discussions for the budget for the new fiscal year. The Township finances, unlike many taxing bodies, is in the black, and Ditzig would like to take advantage of that to provide some proactive services.

Ditzig asked the trustees to consider a Teen Court coupled with a teen community service program. She explained that Teen Court is for first-time youth offenders. An attorney acts as the judge and the offender goes before a jury of peers. The offense stays off the books and the required punishment is community service.

Ditzig said the city has adult community service program but no similar program for teens. Her proposal is to partner with Youth Build, which would supervise teens taking part in the community service.

Trustee Frank Flammini said the work orders for the teen community service would come from Blake Rogers, director of the city's

adult community service program. "It would mostly be cleaning up, trash pick up and things like that.

Ditzig said the program would be limited to young people from the Zion-Benton Township High School District. She said this would also get kids to know about Youth Build which is a terrific program. Youth Build is a program that provides job skills, counseling and education to unemployed youth, especially high school drop outs. Students learn construction skills working to better their own communities.

Ditzig also asked that the board approve donating \$5,000 to the Boys & Girls Club and \$2,000 to ESDA.

Trustee Jim Taylor said the schools had tried a youth community service program at one time and gave it up due to liability, control and supervision issues. "We have extra money and we're looking for ways to spend it. These are good programs but at some point we will have to pass it on to the taxpayers, and I can't support it." Taylor said the understanding when the Boys and Girls Club was proposed that it would be supported by fund raisers and community donations. He said ESDA is the city's

responsibility not the Township's.

Ditzig said the community service program would focus on a more preemptive effort and keep young people from becoming adults who would need township services. She said the Boys & Girls Club provides a component of service that adds to what the Township provides for their parents.

The proposals will be discussed further. A public hearing will be held on the budget in April prior to the board voting on it.

Zion Township Assessor Larry Wicketts said his office is in the midst of the required quad reassessment of all residential property values. He said he is currently looking at land values, many of which are too high. "Some people may see a reduction in their land value by 5 percent. We are trying to make it all equitable."

Wicketts said when the assessed valuation of property goes down, tax rates go up. Property is losing value but the government still needs money to operate.

Wicketts said an open house will be held at his office on April 14 for senior citizens who need help with Circuit Breaker applications.