

# NAPERVILLE SUN

## High school students map out how they'd build new park



Neuqua Valley High School team members Brady Moody, from left, Ethan Smith, Ryan Gareis, Nick Tassone and Jack Skarr presented their plans for Southwest Central Park as a team Tuesday. A group of Naperville business and city officials will decide if their plan was better than those presented by Metea Valley and Waubonsie Valley high schools. **Jane Donahue**  
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Growing up in Naperville, Jenna Jeffirs said she took advantage of the many area parks and classes offered by the Naperville Park District. But on Tuesday, she shifted from park-goer to park planner when she and her team presented their proposal to develop Southwest Community Park, a 33-acre parcel of land at 3252 Wolf's Crossing Road.

"I have been participating in camps through the park district my whole life and I have seen how the park district has really developed," said Jeffirs, a Metea Valley High School senior. "We have a different perspective than the adults have, so it was really cool to share what we know during this project." The Southwest Community Park project – a unique assignment for marketing students in each of the three Indian Prairie District 204 high schools – challenged teens to find the best use of the park district's largest remaining plot of undeveloped land.

**"Opportunities like this are important for students because of the authentic aspect they provide," said John Hanson, Neuqua Valley High School's business department chairman. "It's empowering for them to proceed in the role of the experts, as well as to know that their hard work is being applied to a real situation that they can see unfold in their own community."**

Since December, more than 300 marketing students from Metea Valley, Neuqua Valley and Waubonsie Valley high schools have been learning everything they can about the area on Wolf's Crossing Road. As the final step, the students presented their plan at the high school level and the top team from each school advanced to the finals Tuesday at the Naperville Municipal Center.

"This is a unique interactive learning experience for the high school students," said Eric Shutes, the park district's director of planning. "We are thrilled to be collaborating with them and the City of Naperville and others to explore new ideas for developing Southwest Community Park."

Each team delivered a 10-minute presentation to a panel of judges that included Mayor Steve Chirico, members of the Naperville Park District, City Council, Naperville Development Partnership and other local business leaders.

Proposals included things like an aquatic center, water playground and miniature golf course as well as a fishing pond, trails and a variety of sport courts and fields. One team suggested a band shell for concerts while another pitched a plan to include a spa and an ice rink. Naperville Park District Executive Director Ray McGury said he was excited to hear the students' ideas about how the park should be developed and that the timing of the project was ideal.

"The timing of this challenge is a perfect way to kick off a year of planning for the park district, with plans for a community-wide survey, new strategic plan and updated master plan all part of our 2017 goals," McGury said. "We value their creativity and perspective on how this park can benefit the community." The winning team will be announced at the Naperville City Council meeting on March 9.