Opinion: Time for Louisburg to vote ‘Yes’ on rec commission

In the midst of one of the most talked about national elections in recent history, the residents of Unified School District #416 will have a decision to make of their own.

When they hit the voting booth in November, those residents will see a question on the ballot that might not seem as crucial as who is going to be the next President of the United States, but it is important to the growth of the Louisburg community.

It will read something like this.

Should the Louisburg Unified School District #416 and the City of Louisburg create a joint recreation system, and levy one mill through the School District taxing authority, to provide for recreational needs of all ages, allow for a separate means by which to oversee recreational activities, and fund a number of current of future recreational functions within the Louisburg Unified School District #416 and the City of Louisburg?

The correct vote on this should be a resounding YES! At least it will be from me anyway.

The rest of you will have the opportunity to vote whether or not there should be a joint School District and City

Recreation System. In other words, the two entities will come together to run a recreation commission and provide programs for area citizens to help improve a better quality of life.

A similar measure was tried almost 15 years ago, but was voted down.

Louisburg citizens Diana Moore and Cindy Apple approached Louisburg city manager Nathan Law about trying to get something put together on the November ballot.

Law informed the two that the best option to get something passed would be to go to the city council and USD #416 board of education to see if the entities would be interested in a joint venture and both groups voted unanimously to team up and see if the voters would be interested in having a recreation commission.

When Law took over as city manager in 2015, he looked at Louisburg's 5×5 plan that was adopted the city council in 2013, and one of the items on that list was an updated parks and recreation system.

"That is why it was on my radar to begin with," Law said. "When Diana and Cindy came to me and asked what I thought about a recreation commission, I already had some rough thoughts put together as far as what a school district rec commission would look like versus a city. It is something the community could find value in, but it is whether or not the school district would see the same value that city council does or vice versa. Both clearly saw the value in it to save Cindy and Diana the time of having to go door to door and get a petition put together."

So, the No. 1 question I am sure everyone is going to ask themselves first is how much is it going to cost.

Well to form a rec commission, there will be a one mill increase to property values within borders of USD #416. So,

yes that means your taxes will go up.

For example, on a $150,000 home, your property tax will go up $17.25 a year – yes that is a right – A YEAR! On a $200,000 home it would be $23 a year, on a $250,000 home it is $28.75 a year and so forth.

So if you were taxed $23 a year, that works out to $1.91 a month or close to 6 cents a day.

The question you have to ask yourself is this: Is less than $2 a month worth having better recreation programs for not just area youth, but infants and senior citizens as well? Is less than $2 a month worth having a better quality of life.

For me, this is a no-brainer people. Yes, I understand some people have strict budgets and don't want to see their taxes go up at all. I totally get it as it seems a lot of us live paycheck to paycheck. I am one of them.

At the same time, even if none of these so-called recreation programs affect you, you have to understand that this would be an investment in your community and should be one worth making.

You cannot look at this as just youth sports. This recreation commission issue is much more than that as it encompasses a majority of our population, whether it would be infant programs or programs that would benefit senior citizens.

This would take away our dependency on volunteers for our programs. Every organization in Louisburg is comprised of volunteers and rely on groups of people – most who already have full-time jobs and families of their own – to help run programs to give our children something to do.

There is also a chance the cost of current programs would decrease with a new rec commission.

Groups like the Louisburg Area Recreation Association (LARA)

and Louisburg Soccer Club are made up entirely of volunteers and they never know if they are going to have enough to make it through a year.

“We struggle at times and we have had to send emails out parents asking for help for certain age groups or they won’t be able to have teams because we don’t have enough volunteers,” Moore said, who is also the president of the Louisburg Soccer Club. “I know LARA does too. A lot of the volunteers we have are the same people we are calling over and over again and it is tough.

“I want people to know it is not just youth sports. That is just one aspect of it. This would benefit senior citizens, all the way down to kids who haven’t started school yet. We have lots of ideas of what we can do. It will just be better for the community overall to have everything under one hat.”

That “one hat” will be comprised of a recreation commission board and a director. Two or three members of the city council, two or three members of the board of education and an at-large member will serve on the board, while the one mill increase will allow for the hiring of a director to oversee day-to-day operations when it comes to the scheduling of fields at Lewis-Young Park to promoting programs.

Apple, who is a member of the LARA board, believes this would be a win for everyone.

“A rec tax means so much more than sports,” Apple said. “Sports activities can absolutely be a part of the recreation program – but there are so many possibilities. I like to phrase it as more of a Parks and Programming Tax because this money will be specifically earmarked for improvements to our parks and sports fields and it will also offer programs that we do not yet have in Louisburg. This could include enhancements to our parks to make them more accessible to those of all ability levels, providing activities for children

birth to age 5, and even providing adults more options. Many of the improvements to our baseball and softball fields are done by volunteers and LARA. The budget for the city for the parks and fields are line items and that takes away from our improvements to things like roads or other areas of business.

“On the programming side, we are looking at the hiring of a dedicated person who will oversee not just sports activities, but also programming from birth to seniors.

Apple has stated that if this ballot question is passed, that LARA will transition all of its money, equipment and resources over to the city to carry on the programs it started. However, not all recreation organizations will be forced to do it.

Programs like the Louisburg Soccer Club, the Louisburg Barracuda swim program, the Louisburg Kids Wrestling Club and Louisburg Senior Center will still be able to run separate from the commission, but it gives them an option to keep the program alive if volunteers become scarce.

“As a volunteer for LARA, we are extremely excited for this opportunity,” Apple said. “It is a full time job to run LARA because it offers year-round athletic opportunities. We offer basketball, T-ball, baseball/softball, volleyball and flag football. When a season is not happening, we are prepping for the next season. The group of volunteers are incredible and we have worked hard to bring new opportunities to Louisburg since taking office. However, the reality is that the turnover for volunteers is inevitable and you hope that another strong group will take over – but that may not be the case. LARA has built a strong organization both in memberships and financially.

“Now, not every organization in Louisburg may want to do this. We have lots of groups, organizations, and businesses that offer athletic or enrichment opportunities and they may want to remain independent. The city is not looking to take over

their programs, but will help by supporting and partnering up with them to give our community as many opportunities at home as possible.”

So, when you go to vote on Nov. 8, please consider voting “Yes.” This is something that has been long overdue.

I hear a lot of people say how great the Louisburg community and its surrounding area are – and they are spot on. So why not make a small investment and turn a great community into a greater one?

It is time.