

Principal
To Head
Mascot
Panel

Times Record
7-24-15

SHS's HAVER
TO ASSEMBLE
CITIZENS GROUP

By Chad Hunter
TIMES RECORD • CHUNTER@SWTIMES.COM

Southside High School's longtime principal will oversee a committee tasked with identifying a new mascot as the Rebel is put to rest.

On Monday, the Fort Smith School Board voted unani-



Haver

mously to phase out the Rebel, Southside's mascot since opening in 1963.

A new mascot is expected to be in place for the 2016-17 school year.

The School Board also voted to retire the school's fight song, "Dixie," immediately.

Wayne Haver, who is beginning his 34th year as principal, will chair and assemble the new mascot committee.

"The committee is going to be composed of former students, former faculty, current students, and we'll have current faculty and some citizens," Haver said Tuesday. "We'll end up with probably 20 people on the committee. Today, I've already had six email me or call about wanting to serve."

An attorney suing members of the School Board is among those seeking inclusion on the committee.

SEE MASCOT PAGE 3A

MASCOT: No Rush, Haver Says

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

"I love Southside High School and everything it has stood and stands for, including academic, athletic and extracurricular excellence," attorney Joey McCutchen, a 1981 Southside graduate, wrote in an email to Superintendent Benny Gooden.

Last week, McCutchen filed a lawsuit against six members of the School Board on behalf of Fort Smith resident Curtis Sorrells. The lawsuit alleges the board members violated the open meetings provision of the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act in June when, meeting as the Committee of the Whole, voted to recommend retiring the mascot and fight song.

In light of the lawsuit, Monday's vote by the School Board was not treated as a Committee of the Whole recommendation.

Once assembled, the mascot committee will likely begin meeting some time in September, Haver said.

"We're going to get school started before we

jump into this," he added. "We're not going to be in a gigantic hurry because we've got all year to do this."

Students return to school Aug. 17.

Exactly how the new mascot will be chosen is uncertain.

"I do know we'll take suggestions from people," Haver said. "We'll look at those and maybe come up with a short list, then figure out how to come up with the final choice. Somebody's got to choose it for the rest of history."

The mascot change will affect uniforms, signs, the football field, stadium, scoreboard, gymnasium, concession stands, band trailer and more. Of the associated costs, Superintendent Benny Gooden estimated "\$200,000 or so" Monday.

"I really think it will hit the \$300,000 mark," Haver said. "I think there are just some hidden things we haven't thought about. I don't think anybody yet has a total grasp."

DIRECTORS: Price Tag Concerns City Leaders

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

The annexation idea itself surfaced during a Board of Directors retreat in July 2013. At the time, At-Large Director Kevin Settle suggested "doing whatever we can to get ourselves down to that corner as soon as possible."

Tuesday, he described the target area as "a major intersection" and "the third focal point to our city."

"We can't go north," Settle said. "We can't go west, and we can't go east. The future growth of our city is in that area."

Fellow directors were

concerned with the price tag associated with offering city services to the annexation area, which is approximately 875 acres.

"Why are we talking about this?" At-Large Director Don Hutchings asked. "Where's the money going to come from? Even if it's an extra dollar, where are we going to get any more money?"

Cost estimates are \$10 million-plus for water system improvements and sewer-related utilities over time. In addition, the expansion would likely have "a significant impact" on

fire and police services, Planning Director Wally Bailey said.

"It's obvious it's going to be a worthwhile investment at some point," Ward 2 Director Andre Good said. "But where we are right now, I can't see the investment."

Lau agreed.

"For me, we've got too much stuff going on," he said. "There's too many economic pressures, too many budget issues. From my perspective, I would be for shelving this until we fix our other problems, then come back to it."