

**July 2, 2024**

BLOUNTVILLE – Site preparation began Monday, July 1, for construction of the long-planned Sullivan County Recycling Facility on county-owned land off Cross Community Road. As a result, Bernie Webb Ball Park is to be relocated.

Expected to be completed in about a year, the 16,000-square-foot enclosed recycling facility will feature state-of-the-art equipment to separate, process and bundle cardboard, glass, plastics, tin, and aluminum.

### **Not a Landfill**

The project does not include a landfill component and the facility will not accept garbage.

### **No Tires**

Tires will not be accepted at the facility, which will not include the equipment required to process tires.

### **Bid Out and Contract Awarded**

The construction portion of the project was let to bid earlier this year and awarded to Kingsport-based Casey Construction in late May. The contract calls for the \$2,247,243 grant-funded project to be completed within 360 days.

### **Needed**

“Our current facilities have reached capacity in recent years,” Sullivan County Solid Waste Director Mark Torbett said. “As the county has experienced growth in recent years, we’ve seen more waste in general. And more people are recycling than ever before. Fortunately, new opportunities to raise revenue through the sale of recyclables have come about as well. This new facility will help us meet state mandates to divert a certain percentage of waste from landfills and will help generate revenue to offset the overall cost of solid waste operations.”

### **Ball Park**

The site of the new facility has for decades been Bernie Webb Ball Park, which the county has allowed the Blountville Little League to use for its seasons each spring.

Working to provide new (and improved) playing fields was a key factor in developing plans for the recycling facility. The primary plan to do so is to relocate Bernie Webb Ball Park to new ball fields at the former campus of Blountville Elementary and Middle Schools.

“We are excited about this opportunity to improve community park space, especially the addition of ball fields of a higher standard and with much improved accessibility,” Mayor Richard Venable said. “The Sullivan County Commission is to be commended for having the foresight to save the 27-acre campus when the county school system put it up for sale and to commit \$8 million for improvements to the former Blountville Elementary School and Blountville Middle

School complex. We are in the design portion of Phase 1 of those improvements, including the addition of two ball fields and improvements to an existing third field. Our goal all along has included providing the families who participate in Little League to continue doing so in a county-owned park under much better conditions.”

The new fields are not likely to be ready for play before the 2025 season begins, Venable said, but he has offered the Blountville Little League use of the one softball field currently available at the former school campus.

“I met with them on Friday,” Venable said. “They asked for ‘exclusive’ rights to use the softball field. I explained I couldn’t grant that request, but we would give them first scheduling preference. Our facilities are used by other groups in the community, and I don’t see how we could fairly give them exclusive use of the one ball field. I suggested some other potential athletic fields they can seek to use until the new fields here are completed. And I will continue to assist them.”

### **Blountville Little League**

The Blountville Little League Board of Directors posted a statement on their website Sunday, in part stating they will need to find more than just the softball field to continue their programs until Bernie Webb Park begins anew at the campus of the two former schools.

“We are currently reaching out to the school board and other contacts suggested by (Mayor Venable) to see what may be an option for us to use,” the board stated. “This is our number 1 priority, and we will do everything in our power to make sure there is a Little League available for our young men and women. As we find out more about what is available, we will keep you updated.”

The board’s statement also noted a relocation was expected, but they had anticipated having use of the old park until the new fields are completed.

“To be fair, it has been known for a few years that the county intends to build new baseball fields at the old Blountville Middle School that they purchased in 2022 and it was part of the plan that BLL would move to those new fields to play,” the statement reads. “In fact the board of BLL has been very excited at the idea of being part of the incredible community center they are going to develop.”

The board’s letter said their plans to begin “fall ball” this year were “most immediately affected” by the start of construction on the recycling facility.

Venable said he and other county officials involved had only last week been told of plans for the League, which boasts 260-plus players, to have games prior to next year.

“I’m glad we were able to allow them to finish out all their scheduled games this spring,” Venable said.

