

# RIVERFRONT

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## Officials debate Owens Park utilities

### Veterans officer says Owens board should stop looking for help

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MOULTON — A Veterans Memorial Park board member complained that his counterparts at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park are not doing enough to help themselves.

Floyd Morgan, Veterans Park's second vice president, said the Owens Park board members are "sitting around wanting everyone to help out."  
"They've got their hands out wanting

money and don't want to help themselves," Morgan said, at a Monday Lawrence County Commission meeting.

Owens Park board member Thurman White said Morgan "should stop and think before he opens his big mouth."

White said he doesn't know Morgan. White didn't attend the Monday meeting where commissioners discussed what to do about the utility bills at the Jesse Owens Museum. Although Veterans

The Veterans Park board members said they want their utility bills paid if the county pays the Owens Park bills. White said that is not using sound logic.

"The ball fields operate four months out of the year (at Veterans Park), and we operate 12," he said. "How can we operate on the same amount of money?"

During the winter, the Owens museum bills have been \$900 to \$1,000. Three commissioners have complained that the bills are excessive, but White said Monday that commissioners could have ended the problem long ago.

He said commissioners could have used the money they distributed among the other parks to replace the ineffective wall-heating units at the museum. Commissioners have since replaced the wall units with heat pumps, but not before the costly bills became a constant source of debate.

Contractors are ready to install the pumps, which commissioners said should cut the museum bills in half. But that still left the question of who should pay the museum's delinquent utility bills. Commissioners discussed the matter Monday.

After a brief discussion and Morgan's comments, commissioners agreed to pay the utility bills that the museum accumulated since Sept. 30. Commissioners set that date as the cutoff to pay utilities at the three county parks. The Owens bills for service from the Joe Wheeler Electric Membership Corp. cost \$501. The county also paid a \$100 water bill so that the water supply would not be cut off.

Three commissioners, Bradley Cross, Barkley Lentz and Hutson Parker said they are tired of the Owens Park not being able to support itself. Cross said he thinks it's time to appoint board members at Owens Park who will show some enthusiasm and get things started.

"I don't mind supporting them with the county's money if we have it, but you know we don't have the money," he said. "We've got to do the parks like everything else."

Commissioners implemented a 5 percent across the board cut in each department this year, except in the Sheriff's Department.

"Just letting a park sit there idle and not generate any money . . . that's not going to work," Cross said. "Pretty soon it's going to go down, and attendance at the museum is going to go down."

Chairman Randall LouAllen said the county should hire a coordinator for its parks. Cross agreed and said that person could attend seminars on acquiring grants for improvements at the parks.

In previous discussions about paying the Owens Park's utilities, LouAllen reminded commissioners that few museums are able to be self-supporting.

After the Monday discussion, Cross said he would be willing to do what is necessary to ensure that the Jesse Owens Memorial Park and Museum becomes self-sufficient. That would include providing money to light the ball field at the park and money for a promotions company that could promote events. He said both measures would generate enough revenues to pay the park's bills.

The county already has applied for a grant that would provide money to light the ball field.

Commissioner Moses Jones, who agrees with LouAllen on matters pertaining to the Owens' facility, said despite some commissioners' reluctance to pay its bills, the county park belongs to the county, and it is the commission's responsibility to pay its bills.

White made a similar statement in a later interview.

"In reality it's the County Commission's responsibility, and it's our responsibility as board members to try to help them where we can," he said. "In many cases the County Commission did not listen, and they got themselves into a jam by not listening."



Thurman White  
Owens park  
board member

Park board members say they have no problem with the Jesse Owens Memorial Park, they attend commission meetings and comment whenever commissioners plan to discuss paying bills at the park.