

Alternative uses fail to materialize for grant

BY SONIA KANIGEL
Of Suburban News

WALDWICK - A \$37,000 grant originally earmarked for a neighborhood redevelopment study is going back where it came from, Mayor Rick Vander Wende said - and members of the residents' group now looking to improve the same neighborhood say they're glad the borough plan is officially off the table.

Plans to use the state Smart Growth grant on a redevelopment study of the neighborhood surrounding Waldwick's train station were canceled after more than 150 residents spoke out against the project at a July 2005 council meeting. Subsequent uses proposed for the money have been rejected by the state, Vander Wende said.

"It's one of those things where we went back to the people in Trenton twice - kept tweaking the plans to try to come up with a

compromise," said the mayor.

The borough tried to re-allocate the funds toward an update of Waldwick's zoning code, which is adjusted periodically to reflect the changing character of the town, borough officials said. That proposal was turned down by state administrators of the Smart Growth grant, which is used primarily to fund projects related to parking and traffic.

"We tried to convince them that it would be a shame to lose this money when we could do something good with it, but we would rather give it back than to waste it," said Vander Wende.

"We're very glad that, officially, the money for that Smart Grant study was returned," said Douglas Cowie, vice president of the Waldwick Community Alliance, the residents' group that has taken charge of improvements to the borough's historic train station building and its surrounding neighborhood.

Residents had feared that the borough's plan for the neighborhood could include the use of eminent domain, though borough officials say no such measures were ever planned.

"It was always kind of - what really became of that money?" Cowie said. "We are disappointed the town couldn't use it for other useful purposes, but we're just glad that it's officially put to bed now."

Alliance members say they hope to hold a public forum shortly to discuss their plans for the neighborhood, which they intend to fund through grants, donations and corporate sponsorships.

Initial repairs of the historic station building are expected to be completed between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Cowie said. The building, which dates to the 1800s, has significant structural problems, including a hole in the roof.

Alliance member Randy Reveley of RF Reveley Construction Co.

has been approved by the state historical society to do the preliminary work on the structure, which appears on the state and national historic registers. Reveley plans to donate materials and labor to the project, Cowie said.

"We're very lucky he's part of our Alliance, but he had to go through a pretty stringent review process from the State Historical Society," said Cowie. "Basically they needed to know that he's worked on historic properties. When something's on the historic register, you can't just do anything to it."

The state historical society requires that renovations made to historic buildings be in keeping with the time period in which they were built, and that materials used in the improvements be historically authentic.

The Alliance is currently putting together a bid package for improvements to sidewalks and

lighting on the streets surrounding the station, members said.

"We're looking at our downtown area; we're breaking it up into individual segments and going property to property and assessing each one," said Cowie. "It's going to take a while to get all that data together."

Artist's renderings of the group's plans for the neighborhood depict paver sidewalks and vintage street lamps along with plantings and benches. The Alliance also hopes to institute a historic walking tour.

"Without the artist's renderings, I think people would have been like, 'Oh, that's nice; good luck,'" said Cowie. "But I think when people see it, a lot of people have seen how nice it could be and have gotten on board."

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Handicapped playground moved to Borough Park

BY SONIA KANIGEL
Of Suburban News

WALDWICK - The time is still right to build the borough's first entirely handicapped-accessible playground, Mayor Rick Vander Wende said - it's just being moved across the pond.

The borough will look into constructing the playground within Borough Park, on the north side of Whites Pond, rather than on an undeveloped strip of parkland on its western shore, the mayor said. Residents from nearby Lakeview Drive criticized the original location at an October council meeting, citing space and safety prob-

lems, among other concerns.

"The area was very small, and it wasn't safe because the property slants right down to the water," Lakeview Drive resident Marilyn Schmidt said. "The main thing was that we didn't think handicapped children should be segregated from [able-bodied] children, because when they're in school, they insist that you integrate the kids. Why, at a playground, would you not?"

Borough officials responded last week by saying that they would plan to integrate the new equipment into the standard playground already existing at the park.

"We threw this out there for discussion," said Vander Wende. "We

got our feedback, which I was looking for, and now we'll adjust accordingly."

A \$42,150 Community Development grant is expected to cover the bulk of the project. Any remaining expenses would come out of borough recreation funds. The grant application is not expected to be approved until July 2007, officials said, and construction could begin later that year.

The recreation area would be equipped with picnic tables, benches, walkways, parking and playground equipment designed to accommodate people with physical challenges.

The 1990 Americans With Dis-

abilities Act (ADA) mandated that public parks improve accessibility for the handicapped. Borough Park already includes accommodations such as a wheelchair-accessible fishing ramp, but the proposed playground would exceed ADA requirements by offering specially-modified playground equipment.

A number of manufacturers offer playground equipment designed for children with disabilities, including jungle gyms with wheelchair ramps, swings with extra back support, chimes and Braille games for the blind and rings and bars that are reachable from wheelchair height. Pathways

are constructed in rubber or other "wheelchair-friendly" materials, and surfaces are padded to minimize injuries from falls.

"You really have to live with a disability to see where the obstacles are," said Waldwick resident Linda Brunner, whose daughter Katie, 13, uses a wheelchair.

Something as simple as a standard picnic table with attached benches can present limitations for a person in a wheelchair, Brunner said. Any ground surfaced in mud, dirt or wood chips poses a challenge.

Fully accessible parks in Bergen County include Van Saun Park in Paramus, Chelsea Park in Clifton and Pioneer Park Playground in Ringwood.

The borough's original plan would have "killed two birds with one stone," borough officials said at the time, by sprucing up the neglected-looking strip of land along the western shore of Whites Pond. The borough now has no immediate plans for that location, but may do a cleanup and basic maintenance of the area in the future, Vander Wende said.

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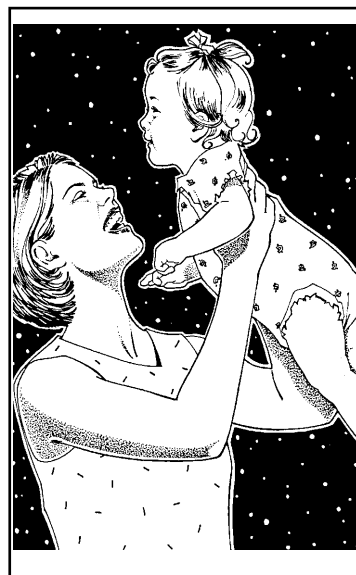
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