

HPC asks for brick, not stone, in Lafayette Street Park

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has requested plans to use stone walls in phase one of the proposed Lafayette Street Park be changed to brick.

During a special joint meeting of the city's Planning Board and HPC on Dec. 8, HPC Chairman Warren Coupland said stone walls in the park would not fit in historically.

Mayor Edward Mahaney said the city project was going before the boards for an informal review. Coupland questioned the use of stone walls, calling it "contemporary" and an unusual product to use in Cape May.

Joe Cairone, landscape architect for the project, said the park would be accessible to the disabled and the fields brought up to construction codes.

"They'll be nice, generous pathways and walkways and places for people to sit, places that will engage the children," he said.

Cairone said the park would have portals or gateways that include use of ledger stone. He said the existing 6-foot-high chain-link fence along Lafayette Street would be replaced with a cast-aluminum powder coat-finished fence with columns, stone walls and garden walls.

Cairone said stone was used in some of Cape May's churches and some homes had stone columns. He called stone a compatible material that would provide a nice texture and detail.

Coupland said the use of brick would be more in keeping with a National Historic Landmark city.

Cairone said he traveled extensively and saw stone in combination with brick particularly in New England. He



An artist's rendering of the Lafayette Street Park shows stone being used to construct walls. Historic Preservation Commission Chairman Warren Coupland requested that brick be used, as more fitting with the historical design of the city, but the landscape architect was not very receptive to the idea.

said the park design needed to be viewed as a big picture including lighting, plant material, walkway surfacing, grading and vertical finishes. Cairone said use of stone columns would be "striking."

Coupland said while the

historically imported to Cape May. He said using brick in the park "would be a big step forward for maintaining the continuity we're looking for here."

Mahaney said phase one of the project was completely funded for \$1.5 million by New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

Phase one is to the west of Cape May Elementary School between Lafayette Street and the tree line on the property, said Mahaney. Phase one of the park incorporates side entrances to the school and its playground, a multipurpose field with a practice baseball field, he said.

He said phases two, three and four would follow in successive years. Mahaney said phase two includes Dellas' Field which would be completely reconstructed as a softball field with open space in front developed as park land with sitting areas and

courts for shuffleboard and Bocce ball.

Mahaney said phase three would incorporate the area of contamination from a former coal gasification plant including the basketball courts, dog park, a sitting area and a performance area. Construction would not begin until the state Department of Environmental Protection deems the site safe, expected by spring 2017, said the mayor.

He said phase four would include nature trails beyond the tree line including a freshwater pond that was once part of a golf course on the property.

Mahaney said phase two of the project would be funded through a Green Acres loan and city open space funds accumulated during the past 15 years. He said phase three would be fully funded by county open space funds at \$1.1 million. The city is working on obtaining funding for phase four, said the mayor.

Lafayette Street

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Meier said. "Not only that, we can make about \$100,000 a year if it's metered."

He said using a piece of the proposed Lafayette Street Park for parking was one of the last opportunities to create a significant amount of parking and bring in revenue. He said the extra spaces could also accommodate visitors who come to Cape May for special events.

"If we give our visitors more parking, we can accommodate more visitors, which means more revenue for the city and businesses," Meier said.

Planning Board Chairman Bill Bezaire said he concurred with Meier.

"We're being shortsighted for not taking into account the fact we need to have parking in this town, and not 16 spaces, we

need to be somehow fitting in a substantial parking facility," he said.

Mayor Edward Mahaney asked Bezaire how many years he had been a member of the Planning Board. Bezaire replied he has been a member of the board for 35 years.

"What have you done to solve it?" Mahaney asked.

"We have an opportunity here to do that," replied Bezaire.

"No you don't," said the mayor.

Bezaire said an opportunity existed on the proposed park site to create additional parking.

"You're going to stop this project?" Mahaney asked.

He said funding was assured for future phases of the park.

"I'm not adverse to a parking garage for having parking, the point is it's not on this site where you put your massive parking,"

Mahaney said.

"That's a matter of opinion," Bezaire said.

While the city has a parking problem, the manner in which the land for the park was purchased comes with a deed restriction limiting the number of parking spaces, Mahaney said. He said there were other sites in town for parking facilities.

Mahaney said he worked on parking during the 20 years he served on the Planning Board.

"There's been very little interest in really getting down to brass tacks and solving it," he said.

Cape May's major parking problems exist about six weeks of the year, said the mayor. He said building a parking garage would require a public/private partnership with the private partner having to put up the vast amount of money.

"We've looked at that intensely over the last few years and there's no viable business including the big parking companies that want to get into it because they don't see a return on their investment," Mahaney said. "I think we can take some area that we have and pave it, but not in a sensitive spot where we have environmental and sensitive areas that we can't develop and that doesn't belong to us over the long haul."

"We're trying to make a statement here in the one open space we have for active and passive recreation to bring it up to date and enhance it and have it be adjacent to our business central district and our historic district, so it's an economic development initiative," he continued.

Mahaney said that was the only reason the state Economic

Development Authority was involved with the project. He said the Planning Board had two meetings each month for the past year and he asked the board to look at zoning of the town and at the resiliency and sustainability of the town in light of Hurricane Sandy and the city's master plan.

"None of that was done. You canceled at least half of the meetings this year," Mahaney said. "I'm just saying fair is fair. You have a criticism, fine. I'll be glad to meet you halfway and work on it."

Bezaire said the city should somehow be trying to address its parking problem. Mahaney said the Lafayette Street Park "was not the vehicle to address it."

City Manager Bruce MacLeod said if one looked at the ownership and restric-

tions from Green Acres/Blue Acres on the Lafayette Street properties, public parking is not something that would be permitted, particularly if a fee would be charged.

"We will have some parking to provide support to the park," he said, adding that it would be between 40 and 48 spaces.

MacLeod said when the former Vance's Bar property was purchased, the idea was to remove an eyesore visible to visitors entering Cape May. He said creating a 100-space parking lot with meters would be contradictory to the idea of beautifying the property and offering passive and active recreation.

MacLeod said additional parking may be developed along St. Johns Street for the park.

"Beyond that, I don't see this as a location for commercialized parking spaces," he said.

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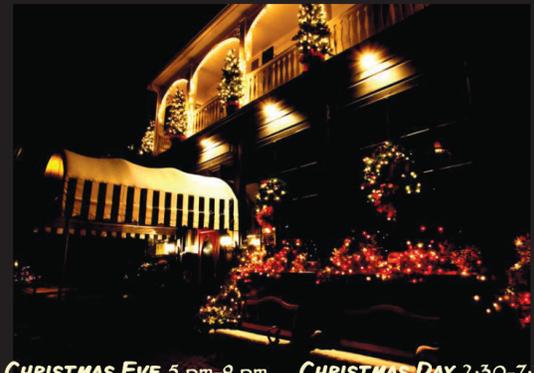
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