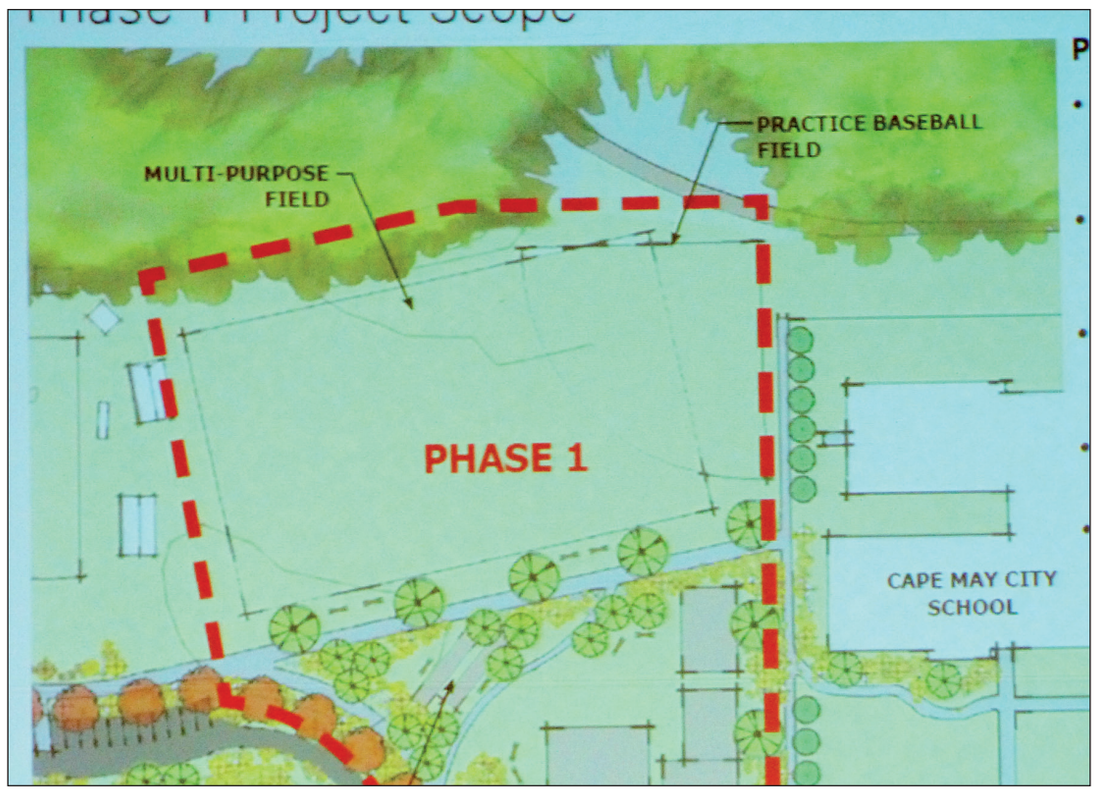
Lafayette Street Park design, construction on horizon

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave



Phase one of the Lafayette Street Park project will include creation of a multipurpose field with new topsoil and irrigation, renovation of existing playground equipment, ball fields and fencing, improving public access to the park, creating outdoor educational opportunities and ensuring school security.

CAPE MAY — When Cape May City Elementary School was built 50 years ago, landscaping was not part of the project, according the Superintendent Victoria Zelenak. The fields next to the school are as plain as a newly erased blackboard.

In addition, adjacent city-owned property on Lafayette Street received basic amenities over the years now in need of replacement.

A special City Council meeting was held Monday to gather public input for phase one of Lafayette Street Park. In total, the park will cover 40 acres from the elementary school's parking lot to St. John's Street and from Lafayette Street back to Cape Island Creek

Mayor Edward Mahaney, who has spearheaded the project, said the city acquired a $1.5 million Green Acres/Blue Acres grant to purchase the former Vance's Bar property and two properties on St. John's Street.

Part of the property will undergo remediation from Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L), primarily the area of the dog park and lots on St. John's Street, from October through June 2016, then resuming in September 2016. Completion is anticipated in June 2017. The acreage was part of a coal-gasification plant that provided gas for lighting and cooking to city residents from the late 1800s to the 1940s. The plant left a cocktail of hazardous substances below ground.

He said when remediation is complete by summer 2017, the city will take possession of the property from JCP&L at no cost "if there is a free and clear from DEP (Department of Environmental Protection)."

Mahaney said JCP&L and the DEP have an agreement if any further remediation is needed in the future, JCP&L maintains the responsibility for the work.

"That property can only be used for surface recreation," the mayor said.

As part of the remediation, JCP&L will replace a certain amount of soil and install a 55-foot-deep retaining barrier to treat contaminated ground water and soil, he said. Mahaney said if the water is clear enough, it will go through a series of pumps and drain into Cape Island Creek.

Mahaney said the goal is to create an active and passive recreational area with environmental education amenities. He said the park would be constructed in phases without using taxpayer money.

Phase one of the project extends from the elementary school through Della's Field. Mahaney said the city obtained a $1.5 million grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority for the project, which covers all costs for phase one.

He said the city has a deadline of June 3, 2016, to complete phase one of the project to receive the grant funding. The city has a 25-year lease for 13 acres owned by the school.

Grants consultant Jim Rutala said a conceptual design prepared by Temple University landscape architecture students would be used as the template for the design of the park. He said additional phases of the park would be addressed as funding becomes available.

Design Engineer and Landscape Architect Joe Cairone said his firm designed other projects such as Cooper River Park in Camden County, the William Penn Charter School campus in Philadelphia and Washington Crossing National Cemetery, and worked extensively with government entities including the Department of Defense.

He described phase one as having a multipurpose field with new topsoil and irrigation. The field would receive new lighting, Cairone said.

Goals of phase one are renovation of existing playground equipment, ball fields and fencing, improving public access to the park with clear entrances and paths, creating outdoor educational opportunities and ensuring school security, he said.

During public comment, Jay Schatz, a member of the city's Shade Tree Commission, asked whether trees planted along Lafayette Street, outside a chain link fence, would be retained.

He said the trees were purchased by residents who live across the street from the fields and are maintained by the commission.

Cairone said he would like to look at phase one in terms of the bigger picture as a gateway into the city. He said they would be looking at the trees and "the condition they're in."

The fence will be removed, Cairone said. Mahaney said when plans move from the conceptual into the more finite in the next month, Cairone will attend a Shade Tree Commission meeting. The mayor said security concerns of the school also need to be considered.

Medevac helicopters use the field as a landing zone to transport patients with life-threatening conditions. Resident Dennis Crowley asked whether the helicopter landing zone would remain after phase one of the park is created.

Cairone said the park would be illuminated, which would not obscure landing patterns. He said the landing zone would be taken into consideration.

"It is the directive to thoroughly explore keeping that helipad here if at all possible, and we have some ideas to try and make that happen," Mahaney said. "If we do that, there is a way to access that field and there is a way to light it so it is even more formalized than it is now."

Crowley expressed concerns of parking spaces being removed from Lafayette Street.

Deputy Mayor Jack Wichterman said he had been in contact with City Manager Bruce MacLeod for two years to assure parking is improved by the project, perhaps constructing something similar to the city's parking lot adjacent to Collier's Liquor Store, if the grant money would allow it.

Zelenak said she supported the concept of Lafayette Street Park. She said the city's lease of school property contains several items including the school's right to review plans and submit comments regarding the security of the leased premises.

The lease includes a clause stating the city shall take all necessary steps to provide for the security of all areas of leased premises that are utilized by students, which may include installation of fences, security cameras and other appropriate measures, she said.

Zelenak said the school would have exclusive use of the leased area while school is in session.

"It's going to be a wonderful park," Mahaney said at the conclusion of the meeting.

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25	2:54	3:48	9:06	9:43
26	3:49	4:38	9:52	10:39
27	4:44	5:27	10:38	11:31
28	5:37	6:13	11:25	
29	6:28	6:58	12:21	12:11
30	7:16	7:41	1:07	12:57
1	8:02	8:25	1:53	1:44

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