

## **Westvale Park project suffers another setback**

Thursday, July 29, 2010

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Pascack Valley Community Life  
OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Westwood – The Westvale Park improvement project will require an additional \$187,000 to fix the clay cap of the former Westwood landfill in some areas and change the size of pipes that will be installed for field drainage, due to an unexpected setback, Westwood Borough Engineer Stephen Boswell reported at the July 20 council meeting.

While excavating parts of the park to install drainage pipes, Boswell said that workers encountered conditions different than they expected, using plans provided by Malcolm Pirnie, the engineering firm that originally capped the landfill, and approved by the state.

Boswell said that while the cap was supposed to be 18 inches deep, there were some areas where it was much shallower and will require a switch from the planned 12-inch pipes, which were already ordered, to 8-inch pipes for drainage to be installed on the field. In addition, workers will have to remove clay that had been dug up, separate garbage that emerged from the landfill, and replace the clay.

"When we were doing the excavation down there we found it wasn't consistent with the plans provided," he said. "It's not a particular knock on anyone, because getting it exactly right can be difficult to do, but we relied on those plans and as a result of that we had anticipated not having to pierce the clay liner in any way to put in the drainpipes."

When initially presented with the change order, the contractor, Let it Grow, Inc., submitted a price of \$340,000, which Boswell said his firm negotiated down to \$187,000. The setback should not delay the park's progress he said, because Let it Grow is willing to work 10-hour days to get the project done quickly.

While the council approved the additional funding for the change order, many expressed disappointment in what is the latest of a series of unexpected setbacks since the landfill was first ordered closed by a judge in 1978. The current \$2.5 million project to revamp the park was approved in early May and would include the replacement and re-grading of all existing athletic fields, repair of the existing asphalt walkway and bike path, construction of drainage and irrigation systems, a restroom and concession facility and the installation of lighting to the walkway and soccer, football, softball and baseball fields.

Mayor John Birkner said he was "beside himself" when he heard the cap wasn't deep enough for the project to go ahead as planned. "It's unexpected, and quite frankly if the project had been right the first time we wouldn't be having these problems. We're trying to make sure everything's done properly this time," he said.

The borough was awarded a \$325,215 Bergen County Open Space Grant for part of the project and is slated to receive \$500,000, plus an additional \$123,000 from the state's Green Acres Program, but some members of the council are growing wary counting on the money, since it is not yet in hand. According to Borough Administrator Bob Hoffmann, the borough hopes Green Acres funding will be approved and released to the county sometime in October. The Board of Chosen Freeholders would then have to pass a resolution to give the money to the borough.

"There are a lot of unknown variables in getting the money for this project," said Councilwoman Cindy Waneck. "We need to be careful that we do the infrastructure, which is key, but that we don't back

ourselves into a corner where we're going to be stuck having stuff that we would have possibly omitted from the plan if we had known ahead of time."

Boswell advised that if the council wanted to wait and ensure the funding is in place before pieces of the project move forward, he would wait to order the lights and concession stand, which totals \$784,000. "We don't want people playing on the field till at least June, maybe later, so you don't need the lights if no one is playing on the field at that time," he said.

Councilman John "J" Sciara said he would be against moving ahead with those pieces of the project if the grant fell through and the borough had to bond the money. "If we don't have the money then we can't spend the money, because it's not fair to the taxpayers to throw another burden on them in these hard economic times, and you can't count on the governor to give us the money," he said. "On any given day the governor could say the funding is frozen because the money isn't there. We have to move very cautiously with this."

Borough Attorney Russell Huntington said that if it is simply a matter of when, not if the funding will fall into place, then there are ways to temporarily finance the field lighting and concession stand.

An informal poll taken among members of the council last Tuesday was unanimous in the desire to wait until funding was securely in place before moving ahead with the lighting and concession stand elements of the plan.

Birkner said he is confident the grant money will be there, but that he understands the council's concern. "The council is understandably squeamish about spending money that we don't actually have. But we do have a signed management agreement [with the county] and the funds have been allocated. It just takes time because of the bureaucratic process. Unfortunately, in government, that's the cost of doing business."

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