

School board gets update on Lafayette Street Park

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The Cape May City Elementary School Board of Education viewed conceptual plans for the next three phases of Lafayette Street Park during a meeting Oct. 18.

Some of the property is owned by the school. Michael Jones, chairman of the Lafayette Street Park Advisory Committee, introduced himself to the board and the few people in attendance. He explained the advisory committee was created to be placed in charge of finishing the project, which was started by the previous administration. Jones explained how there were four phases to the project initially established.

Phase one of the project is located where the soccer fields and playgrounds have been completed. However, phase two and phase three, according to Jones, have evolved from the original designs and the city gave the committee the charge to putting what they can in the park.

"It was pretty much what was planned all along," he said. "We just have to fit it all into the space."

Using an illustrated map, Jones showed the area of phase two, which would involve the school board land, including a grassy area, which could be used for free play or picnics, as well as a pavilion. The advisory committee also suggested a utility field to be built for the rest of the complex which was indicated on the map by a diamond.

The utility field could not be used for baseball / softball practice, but if the school wanted to have a satellite softball tournament site on the grounds, according to Jones, another 250 feet could be added to the playing area by simply removing one of the soccer goals temporarily. According to Jones, high schools can do this in about an hour's time.

"We (the advisory committee) have been through this pretty well," Jones said. "We tossed around the idea of having a base-

ball field. We think the utility field can be better. North Wildwood has an identical field just like this for an identical situation. I also know Linwood and Northfield has this type of field the same way."

Phase three of the project, according to Jones, is all on city-owned property. This would involve the construction of free parking, basketball courts and tennis and pickleball courts. He also explained how when the committee started the process, they noticed phase four, which is a meadow area near the elementary school, would be an excellent eco-tourism spot which the city should try to develop.

"We think even though all the natural foliage has been there all along, this is where our emphasis for the area should be," Jones said.

However, before the committee can start on phase four, phase two and three need to be completed first. Jones said about \$750,000 was needed to finish what is needed for the phase two area of the project and it would be the city's responsibility to handle the cost of the phase three construction.

As for phase four, which would include the building of bike paths and boardwalks, Jones said the construction would be contingent according to how much finances are gathered.

"It will be an 'as you go' construction," he said. "We'll build as long as there is money. If the money runs out, we will stop construction until more is gathered. Construction like this has been done in the past and has been very successful."

Another topic of the

school board meeting was an upcoming "run through" of a parent/child unification process, which will involve the students and parents of the elementary school. The exercise, scheduled on a withheld date in early November, will involve practicing what to do in the event an emergency situation occurring at the elementary school forces an evacuation. This will be the third year the school has been involved with this type of student unification process but it will be the first time involving parents of the students.

"In the past we practiced with 80 recruits from the Coast Guard," said Superintendent Victoria Zelenak, "They all had badges so they knew which role they were playing. About two thirds of them played the role of students. The other one third played the role of parents."

According to Zelenak, a letter was sent to all the parents of students explaining when the exercise will occur and what will be involved in the exercise since there is whole reunification process involving text messaging, several secure locations located throughout the city and ID cards.

When the situation is deemed "safe," the students will then be taken to one of the several safe sites. When the students arrive, parents will receive a text message as to where they can go to pick up their child. The letter also states for parents in this exercise,



John Alvarez/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Michael Jones, chairman of the Lafayette Street Park Advisory Committee, outlines plans for future development at the park before the Cape May City Elementary Board of Education.

or in an emergency situation, not to panic and not try to anticipate which site to arrive. The best thing for them to do is to wait at home for instructions, she said.

"It is required by the state to do this," Zelenak said, "and it involves so much planning. But if parents don't know what to do, they could get hysterical. It can become even more chaotic. They could go to the school, which is where they are not supposed to go. So after speaking with local police, who have been so helpful, we decided it was time to do this."

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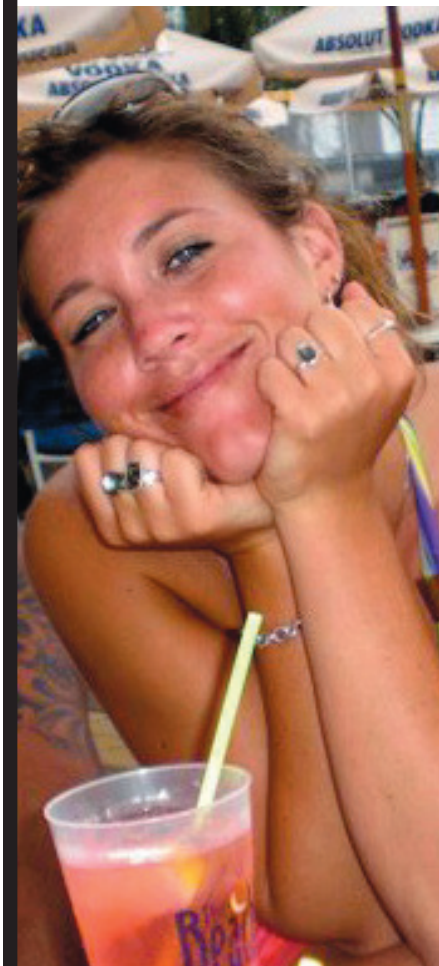
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