

Saratoga Springs City Council resumes talks of making Saratoga Lake property purchased in 2006 into a park

Published: Tuesday, April 19, 2011

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — City residents who have driven by the land the city purchased in 2006 on Saratoga Lake may have wondered what was happening behind the padlocked gates. On Tuesday night, Mayor Scott Johnson said he still plans to move forward with the city's waterfront project.

Johnson said the area has been closed off for public safety and liability reasons.

"I don't think it is serving the public," he said. "It could better serve our residents and advance the very purpose it was bought for."

The land was purchased for approximately \$2 million in 2006 under a state open space bond.

In 2008, city officials, including the engineer, gathered with landscaping architects and the director of the department of public works and came up with a \$1.8 million three-phase master plan to create a park for city residents.

"Then, of course, the recession hit," Johnson said. "We decided not to pursue the development of that land during the hard economic times."

The city received a state grant for \$200,000 for the project, with matching funds coming from the city. Johnson said the city could "satisfy our portion with a combination of amenities," which could include man-hours invested in the project by city employees like the city engineer. "It could reduce the out-of-pocket cash that has to go toward matching our \$200,000," he said.

The mayor said the city had not "been simply sitting" on the money from the grant, but only received the contract from the state for review and approval last week. "Nothing is ever as simple as it seems when applying for grant money," he said.

"I'm not advocating that we go out and spend fresh money on this project," the mayor said, "but I do think it's important that we don't throw away blindly money from the state."

Johnson also added that there was nearly \$200,000 left over from the open space bonding of the original purchase of the land. "It will not be newly bonded now, but rather previously bonded," he said. "The long and short of it is that we do not envision a significant cash outlay from the city."

The first phase of the project — to take place at the highest-elevation area on the site — would include various site improvements, including parking, roadways, picnic areas, canoe access to the lake and general landscaping.

"I'm really glad we are moving forward on this; it's a really great piece of property down there," Commissioner

Anthony “Skip” Scirocco said. “It’s the only access we have at the city for Saratoga Lake. I think the people in the city are kind of chomping at the bit to get down there.”

“The next step for the city is to address what needs to be removed from the site,” Johnson said, referring to the now-closed lakeside restaurant structure.

The city determined that there was asbestos on the property, and Tuesday the City Council approved spending \$3,700 for a consultant to assist in preparing bids to have the materials removed. The city would then perform the actual demolition of the restaurant.

Johnson also said an environmental analysis of the site is currently under way in conjunction with the state, and that there are more grants the city will be applying for.