

MIDDLETOWN

Panel to work on site plan for Twin Oaks

The committee approach has been used to develop improvement projects at other township parks.

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Before building, brainstorm.

That's been the formula for major improvement projects at township parks in Middletown, and it will be used again when officials and residents look at what needs to be done at one of the township's largest and busiest parks, Twin Oaks at Trenton and Woodbourne roads.

At Tuesday's meeting, the township supervisors authorized Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna and her staff to form a committee to work on a master site plan for Twin Oaks. The committee would be made up of "stakeholders," or people with interests in the park, including nearby residents and members of the Middletown Athletic Association, said Lamanna.

The athletic association is the park's main user and maintains the fields there in lieu of paying the township to use them, she added.

The 18-acre Twin Oaks Park, second in size among township parks behind the 42.6-acre Middletown Community Park, has a playground, but is otherwise made up almost exclusively of baseball, softball and soccer fields for organized league play.

Located in a densely populated area in the Levittown section of Middletown, Twin Oaks Park was built on land donated to the township by Bill Levitt when he built the community in the 1950s.

"Hundreds of children use it," Lamanna said. "It kind of fit into a very tight spot, and so we're dealing with neighborhood conflict all the time."

Township officials haven't drawn up any list of suggested improvements for Twin Oaks. That would be included in the master site plan to be formulated by the committee, said Lamanna.

One of the issues identified in the township's comprehensive parks and recreation plan is that much of the parking is located too far away from the park's athletic fields. That causes Twin Oaks users to park on nearby residential streets, which can lead to conflicts with neighbors, said Lamanna. She added that she hopes the committee could address that issue.

The supervisors also have directed township Manager Ray Stepnoski to negotiate an agreement with the engineering firm CMX to sit in on committee meetings and draw up the Twin Oaks master site plan based on committee recommendations.

"(CMX) would make sure the (committee) stays within the parameters of what is doable," said Supervisor Robert McMonagle.

"We've worked very successfully with CMX in the past and they've always come up with plans we can successfully implement at a reasonable price," said Lamanna.

The firm was paid a total of \$41,258 for master site plans, which led to planned improvement projects at two other township parks, Lance Cpl. Harry J. Simmons Jr. Memorial Park and Beechwood Park. A \$1.24 million renovation at Simmons Park is supposed to start in a few weeks. A \$1.1 million improvement to Beechwood could start late this year, Lamanna said.

Both those projects started by forming stakeholder committees, she said.

There is \$35,000 in this year's township budget for Twin Oaks, said Lamanna. Other than some minor administrative expenses related to the committee, whatever is spent on the park this year would go to CMX if the firm is hired, she added.

Lamanna said she hopes a Twin Oaks master site plan could be finished by early next year. Improvements recommended in the plan would be done as finances allow, she said.

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