

Snowden Square, Central Park redevelopment plan reviewed in Brownsville

By Steve Ferris sferris@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Wednesday, April 1, 2015 2:00 am

BROWNSVILLE — Planners and borough officials reviewed the master plan for redeveloping Snowden Square and Central Park in downtown on Tuesday.

The plan would be carried out in phases in 10 to 15 years, beginning with construction of a stage in Snowden Square.

With \$300,000 in state and foundation grants in hand, the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is looking for an engineering firm to design the stage.

The stage roof will be built on top of iron trusses salvaged from an old freight station, which was the B. Bob Lumber yard when it was last in use, along the Monongahela River. The authority owns the property now. The trusses mimic the structure of the Dunlap Creek Bridge giving it a look unique to Brownsville, said Joe Hackett of LaQuatra Bonci Associates, a landscape architectural firm from Pittsburgh.

“That’s Brownsville and nowhere else,” Hackett said.

The stage design has evolved from the idea a group of Brownsville Area High School students first came up with several years ago, said Councilman Jack Lawver.

Initially, the Brownsville Students in Action wanted to recycle the wood frame of an old trailer for the stage, he said.

Construction is expected to begin in the fall and will proceed regardless of when or if grant funding is secured for the other phases, Hackett said.

By November or December the borough will find out if the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has approved its \$50,000 grant application for the second phase, which is renovating Central Park.

The application will be submitted in mid-April and a grant from the Benedum Foundation is in place for the required match, said Cathy McCollom of McCollom Development Strategies of Pittsburgh.

If the application is approved, construction would start in spring 2016, Hackett said.

Existing fencing and lighting would be restored and native trees would be planted, he said.

Restoring Dunlap Creek from Central Park to the Brownsville Avenue Bridge is the third phase.

An old wall along the creek would be removed and the banks would be graded and planted with native trees for stabilization.

A trail would be built along the creek bank.

“To have a stream running through an urban park is pretty unique,” Hackett said.

He called it an “ecological restoration” and said grants from a number of sources are available for those types of projects.

The National Road Heritage Corridor is re-applying to the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in July for a grant to stabilize the banks along the entire length of the creek through several municipalities, said Donna Holdorf, executive director of the heritage corridor.

She said the DEP denied the application last year, but officials told her it came close to being approved.

The state Department of Transportation’s transportation improvement program (TIP) includes plans for rehabilitating the Dunlap Creek Bridge sometime after 2020, and some bank stabilization work could be included in the bridge project, Holdorf said.

Responding to questions from Council President Jim Lawver and Mayor Lester Ward, Hackett said the bank restoration work will be designed to withstand flooding and to require minimal maintenance.

Further in the future, Central Park would be expanded in the fourth phase.

“This is a long-term dream. This is beyond the next 10 years,” Hackett said.

The park and stage are the centerpiece of the master plan and the involvement of the students will distinguish the borough’s grant applications from others, he said.

Jack Lawver said a new group of students is carrying on what the original group, which has graduated, started, and he was dazzled with their ideas and vision for the stage.

“I was really impressed with the students,” Lawver said.

“This is one of the best urban parks I’ve ever seen,” Hackett said, noting that his firm

has designed parks throughout the country.