

Alexandria's Park Will Be Enhanced

By John Monteith

ALEXANDRIA TWP. — Extension of the walking trail and the creation of a pavilion and two basketball courts at Alexandria Township Park, which opened almost five years ago, are among the 2008 goals of the Park and Recreation Commission outlined by commission chairman Paul Abraham.

A nonprofit organization, Friends of Alexandria Park, was recently formed, said Mr. Abraham, to promote facility improvements and cultural events at the park. It has already raised \$10,000, with the bulk earmarked for construction of the basketball courts.

The money was raised by "folks excited about putting courts in there," he said. Noting the rapid development of the playground at the park — \$65,000 was raised within a year — and the township's popular youth football and lacrosse leagues, he said that Alexandria has a "history of passionate people doing good things." There are no basketball courts at the park currently, although grading was done as part of the original park construction. Six baskets over two courts are planned. The site is a "nice level area directly to the east of the playground," said Mr. Abraham.

The pavilion, among the items most requested in a survey sent out in April 2000, would be stone-faced with a fireplace, according to the current design, he said. Architectural services have been donated by Susan Rochelle. The pavilion would be a year-round facility available for everyday use and special events, such as family picnics, reunions and parties.

Mr. Abraham asked the Township Committee to consider making an expansion of the walking trail a road crew priority. "Without the DPW's full commitment to this project, it simply won't get done."

The walking trail is one of the most popular facilities at the park no

matter what the weather, he said. More than 80% of respondents to the 2000 park survey requested a walking trail. About 3,600 feet have been completed, and 2,100 feet remain to be done.

Mr. Abraham noted that the trail is "disproportionately used by older residents for daily exercise, one of the few exercise and recreation alternatives we can provide to this demographic."

Committeeman Harry Swift, the township's road chairman, said that he would review the road department's work schedule with the department foreman to see if some time could be found for the trail project.

The Parks and Recreation Commission would like to develop another survey about the park, said Mr. Abraham, the first since the 2000 survey. "We've accomplished most of the high-impact facilities within the park — ball fields, the playground and passive features such as open space... Now the commission feels it's time to ask the residents, 'What's next?'"

Bocce, horseshoes, volleyball — "passive, small-group, family-oriented kinds of things over there by the playground" — could be possibilities for development, he said.

He also asked the Township Committee to formalize the commission's responsibility for township-owned land, formerly part of the Pepe farm, bordering the existing park property on the east and north, including a 300-foot eastern buffer of the Harihokake Creek.

The area would be used for passive recreation, he said, such as riding and walking trails, perhaps expansion of the existing disc-golf course and the addition of a dog park.

"As stewards of the park's natural resources," said Mr. Abraham, "any usage we would undertake would be consistent with and sensitive to existing environmental features, such as the creek."