

# Cass Park athletic complex work moving forward

## Questions remain about community center project

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WOONSOCKET – City Council members approved a contract with a planning and construction firm to move forward with developing the athletic facilities at Cass Park.

While amenities like the new turf field, track, bleachers, parking lot and field lighting have been part of the project since the beginning, plans for a new community center located at the site have split the council.

The community center project became public to-

ward the end of January when, during a special City Council meeting, American Rescue Plan Act Administrator Paul Luba informed the council that the city was about to receive a \$5.4 million grant from an application process two years in the making. The grant is specifically for the construction of a community center, and comes with the conditions that certain programming is provided at the center once the building is constructed.

Luba explained that a handful of service

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providers, including Thundersmist Health Center, the Boys and Girls Club of Northern Rhode Island and Community College of Rhode Island, had already agreed to run health monitoring, education and job training programs out of the new building.

At the time, the council reacted favorably to the additional funding for a building at Cass Park and suggested it could also house some of the amenities for the athletic complex, such as a weight room and locker rooms. Soon after, at a February 5 meeting, the council approved a resolution authorizing Mayor Christopher Beauchamp to enter into an agreement to secure the funding.

On Monday, Beauchamp told the council he met with leaders from the School Department to assess their needs and see if those needs could be incorporated into the plan for the community center by expanding the building's footprint. School Committee chair Paul Bourget and Superintendent Patrick McGee spoke at public comment to advocate for including certain features for the student athletes.

"The biggest thing that was missing in the original [Cass Park] plans was a clubhouse," Bourget said. He listed a storage room,

training room, weight room, lockers, showers and laundry as the School Department's wishlist.

Council President John Ward said his resolution on Monday stripped out funding for work related to the community center because of concerns from other council members about combining the community center with the athletes' clubhouse. He suggested the council can approve a separate resolution moving the community center project forward after meeting again to hash out more of the details.

"It's very important sitting up here to learn how to count to four, and there was enough concern and expressed hesitation about combining this that I thought it merited a separation," he said. "The concern was about putting the community center, which is for social services, outside the normal scope, geographically, of community minded service areas, which tend to be down in the social flatlands areas, and putting in some services that might be considered too close to student athletes using the clubhouse."

The contract itself specifies that the athletic complex and community center will be bid separately and constructed at different times, with Pare Corporation "coordinating size, location and details of the building" with an undeter-

mined architect. Because both the athletic complex and the community center are ultimately being funded with ARPA money, they will need to be completed by the end of 2026 because of the rules governing the use of the federal pandemic aid.

Council member Dan Gendron called for a work session next week to discuss the community center in more depth and settle on the details of which service providers would use the building. He cautioned the council against "moving forward" without a full plan.

"Nobody knows for sure what the community center portion of this development will be," he said. "For instance, if you bring a drug rehab facility into that community center, and then we are now bringing drug rehab to our state of the art athletic complex. A work session is not too much to ask to make sensible decisions."

Beauchamp pushed back and said the council has known providers will use the building since the January meeting with Luba. He promised to share the 14-page grant proposal, which lists that information, with Gendron.

"I can tell you exactly what's going to be in it," he said. "You weren't here but you seem to be picking this apart for some political reason."

He said he was also

against separating funding for the community center and the athletic complex, since doing so could jeopardize both projects or drive up their costs. The grant for the community center is tied to the facility's location at Cass Park; moving it would cause the city to lose the \$5.4 million, without which it would be difficult to build a separate clubhouse.

"If we do not build the community center, which incorporates some of the athletic complex, at this site, that athletic complex will not be built," Beauchamps said. "This is incorporating both of them."

Ward and Council member Brian Thompson pointed out that part of their hesitation stemmed from the fact that they didn't know until Monday that the grant was site-restricted to Cass Park, not because they don't support the center itself and the proposed services operating there.

Council Vice President Valerie Gonzalez also spoke against separating the projects and said the city has more time to figure out how best to use the community center.

"There's years and different agencies that are going to be in and out of our city and we will have a facility to offer them to bring things that are beneficial to the community," she said. "That's what a community center does."

Public Works Director

Steve D'Agostino convinced the council not to table the resolution for another week, which would have further held up the start of construction on the other athletic facilities.

"I'd like to just get the facility built and I think it would be foolish to not include this," he said. "Even in the services now, you can discuss who goes there and still vote on keeping this moving forward."

The council still passed the unamended resolution unanimously and agreed to hold a work session on the community center project on Monday.

## COASTAL CREDIT UNION

### NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Shareholders of the Coastal Credit Union will be held Monday, April 15, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. in the Atrium Room at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 801 Greenwich Avenue, Warwick, RI for the Presentation of the Annual Reports, Election of Directors and to transact such other business as may legally be presented to said meeting.

Paul F. Lefebvre  
April 1, 2024 Secretary

## LOTTERY NUMBERS

Thursday's RI Daily  
Mid-day: 0-5-3-1  
Evening: n/a

Wednesday's Wild Money  
19-24-28-34-35 EB 8  
Wednesday's Mass Cash  
2-4-12-23-31

Thursday's Mass. Daily  
Mid-day: 2-7-0-8  
Evening: n/a

Wednesday's Powerball  
11-38-41-62-65 PB 15



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