

## MIDDLETOWN

## Supervisors seek funds for plan to fix parks

By CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES

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Major improvements are needed at two township parks, Middletown supervisors agree, but they aren't sure where the money will come from.

The board has approved master plans for the 15.9-acre Beechwood Park at Beechwood and West Maple avenues, and the 7.5-acre Lance Corporal Harry J. Simmons Jr. Memorial Park on Brownsville Road. Improvements called for in the plans would cost \$1.2 million at each park, township Parks and Recreation director Debby Lamanna estimated.

The necessary funding has not been approved, though. The board won't know for a few weeks what will be done at the parks next year and how it will be paid for, Supervisor Robert McMonagle said. The township will see if grants are available and look at doing the work in phases over two or three years.

"It's part of the budget process [for 2008 township budget] and we've really just initiated that process," said McMonagle. The board is not scheduled to take a final vote on the 2008 budget until at least the Dec. 11 meeting.

"We'll turn over every rock and leave no stone unturned to find external sources to fund projects like these," he added.

Township officials also could look at scaling back the projects, said Supervisor Jasper Caro, who had no argument with the merit of the upgrades. "People in those areas have been wanting improvements to those parks for quite awhile," he said.

The master plan for the parks was put together by Gerald DeFilicis Jr. of the engineering firm CMX, formerly Schoor, DePalma, with help from Lamanna and others. They held meetings to seek input on what residents thought was needed at the parks.

Among proposed improvements at Beechwood Park are relocating and improving the softball field, reconstructing the entrance-exit to make it safer for drivers, installing a gazebo and playground, enhancing the trail system, removing invasive plants and replacing them with native plants and installing a detention basin to improve drainage.

Lance Corporal Harry J. Simmons Jr. Memorial Park, formerly Veterans Park, was renamed in honor of a township Marine killed in the Vietnam War. Among the proposed upgrades, they are adding a second entrance and exit, relocating the softball field, building a restroom, relocating basketball courts, relocating and rebuilding three tennis courts and adding a fourth asphalt area that could be used for various sports and improving and expanding plant buffer areas.

No substantial improvements have been done at the two parks in at least 20 years, according to the master plans.

"Simmons is a very busy park and, basically, this master plan reconfigures things to make it more user friendly," said Lamanna.

Relocating playing fields and surfaces at the parks would put them farther away from streets and keep the sun out of players' eyes, she said.