

Union County Details Rahway River Park Track and Field Project at Public Meeting



Approximately 100 people attended the presentation at the Hamilton Stage in Rahway on Wednesday night.

Credits: Susan Roselli Bonnell

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RAHWAY, NJ - Union County presented its plans for improvements at Rahway River Park to a crowd of approximately 100 local residents at the Hamilton Stage on Wednesday night. The presentation focused on the scope and design of a proposed synthetic turf track and field. The proposed improvements, a joint venture between the county and the City of

Rahway, have **come under fire by concerned citizens** who have rallied to stop the development.

David Atkinson of Neglia Engineering began the presentation with an overview of environmental constraints that were considered during the project design phase. These included flood hazards, wetland restrictions and endangered wildlife assessments. Based on currently-approved FEMA and recent New Jersey GeoWeb maps, the project does not encroach on permit-required areas, Atkinson said.

He then discussed site constraints that included a consideration of the field location, orientation, targeted use, impact on existing trees, impact on existing facilities and storm water run-off concerns.

“The current track has reached its useful life,” Atkinson said. He said that in

order to limit the impact to surrounding trees and structures, the “ideal situation is to locate the proposed track within the confines of the existing track.”

He said that the slightly larger track will encroach to the west in the direction of existing development and that the eastern edge of the current track will be maintained. An existing tree line along a paved path will remain intact and the development will not impact a nearby baseball/softball field.

Storm water run-off will be controlled through an underground series of perforated PVC pipe and storm drains.

The track will increase from its current six lanes to eight lanes, in keeping with current high school competition standards. The synthetic turf field in the center of the track will be lined for football, lacrosse and soccer. Shot put, discus, javelin, triple jump, high jump, long jump and pole vault areas are included in the design.

Ten-row high, ground-mounted, handicapped-accessible bleachers will accommodate 800 people on the home side of the field and 400 people on the away side of the field. A “coaches’ box” will be installed atop the bleachers on the home side of the field. A 10.5-foot high by 18-foot wide scoreboard will be mounted approximately 10 feet off the ground. Atkinson said that higher structures were placed along existing tree lines so they would blend in.

The field will be surrounded by a 4-foot high, black vinyl-coated fence.

“The fence is not to keep the public out,” Atkinson said. “The purpose is to keep unwanted motorized vehicles from damaging the track and the turf.” He said the complex would be accessible to the public during the park’s normal operating hours.

Four 70-foot high light stanchions will be placed at approximately the 15-yard line on either side of the field. Atkinson said the lights will be fitted with shields to direct the light flow downward onto the field and limit light disbursement beyond the complex. He said that the nearest residential building, on St. Germaine Drive in Clark, is 660 feet from the far edge of the track, but that light

from the field complex will not extend past 200 feet.

A 56-foot by 25-foot building will house a concession area, equipment storage and ADA-compliant restrooms. Two open-air pavilions will be erected in a nearby existing picnic area.

Atkinson's presentation met with weak applause and several loud boos as he left the podium.

According to the plan, no new parking spaces will be built in the park. The park currently has 207 lined parking spaces and 23 roadside spaces. County Public Safety Director Andrew Moran said that satellite parking lots in Rahway will be utilized if necessary during specific events.

Union County Counsel Robert Barry briefly discussed "potential next steps in the process." These include a review by the county freeholder's park committee, negotiations with the City of Rahway and Rahway Board of Education, review by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the preparation of bid specifications. No timeline was given.

Members of the audience were invited to submit written questions after the presentation. Only questions that were deemed directly relevant to the presentation were read by County Manager Al Faella and responded to by the panel. No open dialogue was permitted, and on several occasions Faella cut-off people who tried to pose a verbal question. Angry shout-outs from the crowd were a clear indication, at the conclusion of the meeting, that not every question had been read or answered.

Questions primarily sought clarification about lighting, drainage, parking and noise issues. Faella indicated that the standard protocol for lights-out in county parks is 10 p.m. Garbage cans and trash receptacles will be placed throughout the complex but, Atkinson said, "we can't guarantee that people will use them."

"They keep talking about improving the park," 45-year Clark resident Rayna Warner said during a break in the meeting. "That's the biggest joke of all. They're not improving the park."

