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New football field planned at Rahway River Park

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A public presentation of the proposed design for a new football field at Rahway River Park will be held Wednesday at the Hamilton Stage in Rahway.

Story Highlights

- A new football field at Rahway River Park is planned as part of an upgrade of the Union County owned park
- The county is looking to replace the grass field with a turf field and install field lights
- The City of Rahway is looking to add restrooms and bleachers for 1,200 people

UNION COUNTY – From her backyard adjacent to Rahway River Park, Kelly Tropeano of Clark oftens sees deers, wild turkeys and hawks.

She is concerned plans for a new football field in the county-owned park could impact the environment.

Tropeano, Coalition to Save Historic Rahway River Park president, is among a group of residents expected to attend a public presentation 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Hamilton Stage, 360 Hamilton St., Rahway on the proposed design for the Rahway River Park Field. The doors open at 6:30 p.m.

“This is a proposed design and scope of plan,” said Sebastian D’Elia, Union County communications director about the meeting that will include a visual of the proposed design, presentation by consulting engineer Neglia Engineering Association of Lyndhurst, comments by county officials regarding parking and information about the next steps in the process.

About an hour of the program will focus on answering questions from the audience. The public is invited to submit written questions on a card or piece of paper. Questions will be answered on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The field is planned for the footprint of an existing field, used mostly for soccer, and athletic track in an existing sports complex that Tropeano said is near the swimming pool. A synthetic turf and field lights is planned by the county. The City of Rahway, plans to install restrooms, and aluminum bleachers with a capacity of about 1,200 seats.

Tropeano said Rahway is looking at the new field as a replacement for Veterans Field on Central Avenue where Rahway High School plays home football games. Veterans Field, located in a low-lying area near the Rahway River, has flooded during severe storms.

With the addition of the restroom, bleachers and possible concessions and lighting, Tropeano sees the \$4.5 million project as much larger than what was originally envisioned and perhaps not the

most appropriate use of public land.

"This is a major upgrade from what exists there," she said.

But information from a county fact sheet on the project disagrees. The fact sheet indicates the existing track and field is part of the park that includes a dozen other facilities, including five baseball diamonds with bleachers, four tennis/pickleball courts with lights, a basketball court, a playground with restroom concessions and a swimming complex with diving tank, restrooms and changing facilities. The new field is not expected to impact any baseball field, the World War II memorial tree grove or the nature conservation areas in the park.

Tropeano said she has questions about the safety of a turf field and its possible impact on the water table as well as the availability of parking. She said the park only holds about 400 vehicles. With seating for 1,200 she questions where the overflow of cars will go. She also concerned the seating capacity will be increased in the future.

Tropeano whose lives off Valley Road in Clark, one of two access points to the park, said residents have not received answers to many questions.

"I'm not opposed to kids having a safe place to play," said Tropeano, adding the field should be on Rahway or school district property, not a county park. She said the money should be spent to fix Rahway's existing field.

Tropeano also is concerned kids will try to run across St. Georges Avenue, a four-lane, heavily traveled roadway which is the other access road to the park, to get to football games.

"It's an accident waiting to happen," she said.

Tropeano said research is underway to determine if the park, designed by the Olmstead Brothers firm in 1925 has historical significance. The county fact sheet indicates the park is not on a state or federal historic register.

"It was developed as open space. Putting buildings up , concessions, bathrooms, a public address system, it changes what's there," said Tropeano, adding if residents can't stop the project she's hoping they will be able to reduce the project's impact on the park.

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Learn more

Additional information about Union County Parks is available at <http://ucnj.org/parks-recreation/>.

Information about a group of residents efforts to preserve the park is available at <http://www.gofundme.com/saverahwaypark>.