








NEWS

Pottstown plans to spruce up Memorial Park in 2012

Published: Thursday, December 29, 2011; Last Updated: Thu. Dec 29, 2011, 10:59am

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POTTSTOWN — The coming new year promises to see a lot of activity at borough-owned properties at Pottstown's western gateway.

The ahead-of-schedule Dec. 16 opening of the High Street bridge over the Manatawny Creek was more than an early Christmas gift for travelers through and to town. Borough Manager Jason Bobst told Borough Council that it also marks "the unofficial start of our mini golf construction."



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That project, which will erect a mini golf course and offices for the Parks and Recreation Department on the High Street side of the Carousel at Pottstown building, was approved and funded but then put on hold when the High Street bridge project was announced. PennDOT had asked the borough for permission to use that property as a staging and storage area during the bridge replacement.

The borough agreed, but negotiated to also have the contractor take down one of the smaller buildings on the site that would have had to be demolished anyway.

With bridge work complete, the mini golf project will soon get under way, Bobst said.

Bobst said an analysis of the heating and ventilation system is currently being done to determine if the building on the site can be used as parks and recreation offices, or if it is more economical to tear it down and build new.

He said bidding will be accepted in February or March and that "if all goes smoothly, we could be open by mid-summer."

Following a similar timeline, the Carousel at Pottstown is making its push to complete its project. On Dec. 11, more than 500 people got their first look at the carousel, which has been assembled inside the former Metal Works building. Organizers hope to have it up and running in 2012.

Across King Street from that site, Memorial Park is also scheduled to get some work done as well in 2012, said Bobst.

The borough is the recipient of a \$200,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which has been matched by the Pottstown Area Health and

Wellness Foundation. This money will be used for the refurbishment of one of Memorial Park's very busy baseball fields, an expansion of the walking path network in the park and construction of a "skate park" behind the Trilogy Park BMX track.

For the past few years, Trilogy Park has been the host for "The Pottstown Classic," a national BMX tournament that brings 7,000 people to Pottstown from as far away as China, Australia and Canada.

Bobst told council that the event may leave Pottstown unless greater effort is made to promote it and get the community more involved.

"We consider it an exciting challenge," said Bobst. "We want to showcase this, which is really one of the hidden gems in Pottstown."

Another potential gem also recently won endorsement from Borough Council. Nathaniel Guest made a presentation to council Dec. 12 about his proposal to establish a tourist train on the Colebrookdale rail line between Pottstown and Boyertown.

Guest, a 1994 Pottsgrove High School graduate, thinks the Colebrookdale spur is an excellent candidate to become a tourist attraction in much the same way tourist railroads in Strasburg and New Hope operate.

It was Guest who wrote the historical analysis of the line's importance when the federal government was considering a request to abandon the line.

Those who have traveled it, he said, including people familiar with tourist railroads across the country, have declared it one of the most scenic in Pennsylvania.

Guest is currently seeking funding for a market and feasibility study to examine how many visitors a tourist rail line might attract, when it should run, and what type of amenities should supplement it, primarily food and retail operations.

The line's Pottstown terminus would most likely be Memorial Park, Guest said.

As he envisions it, the train, which would have a 19th century steam engine and period passenger cars, and would run on weekends, holidays and special events, such as Halloween, Easter and Christmas.

During a Dec. 11 event when hundreds visited the Carousel at Pottstown building and the candlelight tours of Pottsgrove Manor, several were heard to remark "how great it would be" to also have a historic "Christmas train" running on the Colebrookdale line, which Guest has tentatively dubbed the "Hidden Valley Railroad."

Three other tourist railroads operate in southeastern Pennsylvania: Strasburg Railroad in Lancaster County; the New Hope and Ivyland Railroad in Bucks County; and the Wanamaker, Kempton & Southern Railroad in Lehigh and Berks counties.

Two of them operate all year-round and all offer amenities, such as historic passenger cars, dining, and some even offer liquor service.

The Strasburg has roughly 375,000 riders annually, the New Hope line carries 80,000 annually and the Wanamaker roughly 15,000 annually.

Starting small, running weekends and in conjunction with special events, Guest believes the Colebrookdale line could attract as many as 10,000 riders in its first year.

The nine-mile ride along the Colebrookdale spur takes about one hour.

Riders could depart and frequent shops or restaurants in Pottstown or Boyertown before returning, he said.

"We could really have an important attraction and reach a critical mass where people come from all over to southeast Pennsylvania to ride these trains," said Guest. "Then it becomes a sustainable attraction for the community and has a positive impact; it's not just a series of excursions."

The idea sounded good to council, which voted immediately and unanimously to endorse the concept.

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