

Riverside Park will get \$400g makeover

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METHUEN — The home of the city’s Fourth of July fireworks celebration will get a long-needed makeover with \$400,000 of state funding.

Methuen received the funding for overall improvements and renovations to Raymond J. Martin Riverside Park from the Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs’ Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) program. The funding was announced Monday in Taunton, though the Methuen City Council voted to accept the grant at its meeting last week.

William Buckley, director of community and economic development for the city, thanked the local delegation of state officials for their help securing the PARC funding and praised his staff for putting together the grant, which he said was a “very competitive” process.

“Riverside Park is a wellused park in the city that has been in need of a makeover for many years,” he said, adding, “It’s really pretty much just an overall park improvement.”

Mayor Stephen Zanni said the improvements would be a “big plus” for a park that has been “neglected over a number of years.”

PARC grants are awarded to cities — or towns with a population of 35,000 or more year-round residents — that are seeking to acquire and develop land for parks and outdoor recreation. The money can also be used for renovation of existing parks or recreation facilities, according to the state.

In Methuen, Raymond J. Martin Riverside Park has been used for more than 30 years as a home for community events including the Fourth of July fireworks, movies and concerts, while also allowing walkers and joggers to enjoy views of the Merrimack River. But over the years, the park has begun to show “wear and tear,” and is in need of improvements, according to state Rep. Linda Dean Campbell, D-Methuen.

“This park is located in a very densely populated area and used by all generations every day,” Campbell said.

“It is indeed a treasured and popular city asset,” she continued in a statement. “This funding will make the park more usable and ensure that it is a safe and accessible option for children, families and senior residents who use it everyday.”

With the grant funding, the city hopes to make improvements to the walking trails at the park, repave the area, improve lighting, put in new plantings, and add signage and new furnishings such as tables and benches. The city is also seeking to provide an access ramp

to the gazebo and a new fishing platform. There will also be changes to make the park and playground compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“Most of the budget is refurbishing the gazebo,” Buckley said. “We have an option in here to add some playground structures for very small kids, 1- to 5-year-olds.”

Buckley said the city intends to spend the next few months working on the design and engineering for sprucing up the park, with the hope of going out to bid early next year. Construction would then begin in fiscal year 2018.

With the announcement of the funding on Monday, several state legislators offered praise for the project, including state Rep. Frank Moran, D-Lawrence, and state Sen. Kathleen O’Connor Ives, D-Newburyport.

“This state funding for park improvements will enhance recreational opportunities for Methuen residents and visitors to Riverside Park by improving walkability, creating more picnic areas, and increasing accessibility for individuals of all ages with a new ADA-compliant playground and gazebo,” O’Connor Ives said.

State Rep. Diana DiZoglio, D-Methuen, said Riverside Park was an “invaluable resource” for bringing together the city’s residents.

“The investment made with this important PARC grant, toward new and improved amenities and more, will help to make Riverside an all the more desirable place to visit,” DiZoglio said.