

ESSEX COUNTY

Two county parks get upgrades



Staff photo by Adam Anik

BLOSSOM BUDDIES: Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo, left, and NJ Transit Executive Director George D. Warrington admire the latest improvements to historic Anderson Park, which include new trees, shrubs, and plants.

Advancements adorn Anderson

By ERICA ZARRA
of The Montclair Times

Anderson Park will see more trees, less erosion and an historical design revival.

County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr., joined by NJ Transit Executive Director George D. Warrington and Essex County Parks Foundation President Louis LaSalle, discussed these latest upgrades this past Monday, May 22, while touring the green space.

"Do you see all the new trees?" DiVincenzo asked. "And all of the shrubbery has been added so fast. With the help of NJ Transit and Montclair neighbors, work is getting done."

The 14.5-acre park, located within the perimeter of Bellevue and North Mountain avenues and Parkside Place, is in its eighth month of a \$915,000 revitalization.

The most recently announced improvements call for new landscaping to prevent erosion along Toney's Brook and the restoration of famous designer Frederick Law Olmstead's 1903 pastoral landscape, all to cost \$25,000.

DiVincenzo credited the Friends of Anderson Park, a non-profit conservancy group of 70 families, which has been working closely with the Essex County Department of Public Works and Department of Parks, for realizing these initiatives.

"They have been very involved from the beginning, from researching to locating historical documents," DiVincenzo said. "The many partnerships that we created have brought new energy in our parks and the progress we have made is remarkable."

The appreciation is mutual.

"I can only say positive things about the county executive. He is a model for any relationship the government has with residents," Friends member Scott Kevelson said. "It was important that [Anderson Park] be historic."

Kevelson traveled to Boston to obtain a copy of the original Olmstead Firm design. The 1903 Anderson Park map shows what was planted and where. The Friends of Anderson Park has followed this layout, planting 38 trees in the park's main area and 180 shrubs and plants, including Japanese lilacs and magnolias.

"Olmstead is highly respected for his designs," Kevelson said.

"For pure aesthetics, you go to the master."

Essex County is receiving \$14,000 from NJ Transit and \$11,000 from the Essex County Parks Foundation to pay for the new plantings.

This is the second time Essex County and NJ Transit have partnered to improve conditions in Anderson Park. In 2004, both entities and the township of Montclair collaborated to improve the flow of water through Toney's Brook and reduce flooding in the park. The county removed debris and de-snagged the brook, while NJ Transit replaced eight inlets to enable water to drain more easily from the park into Toney's Brook.

"This was a mess," Warrington said of the NJ Transit property along the eastern side of the now empty basin. "We contributed to the historical drainage problem ... We will clean the brook every June and September."

The advancements includes the rehabilitation of the lacrosse/soccer field, entryway enhancements, drinking fountains and landscaping, in addition to the now-reduced number of decorative streetlights, benches atop new concrete slabs and waste receptacles. There will also be Tudor-style bathrooms to be supervised by an attendant from April to October during daylight hours and locked at night.

The roughly 6-foot-high wire fence erected around the area while new irrigation and drainage systems for the athletic field were installed will remain for now.

Essex County collaborated with the Green Fields Foundation to receive a \$500,000 Green Acres grant in 2004. Matching funds for the improvements were provided from a 2004 park improvement bond, of which half will be repaid by the Essex County Open Space Trust Fund.

Remington and Vernick Engineers of Haddonfield received a \$105,556 contract to design the project and provide construction inspection services. Zenith Construction Service Inc. of East Newark was awarded an \$810,000 contract to do the improvements.

Simultaneously, an existing maintenance shed is being renovated into a restroom building. Remington and Vernick designed the improvements under its existing contract and Zenith received a \$391,000 contract to modernize the building.

Anderson Park's upgrades are slated for completion June 21.