



CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE

February 3, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Council

From: Joe Spadafino, Director of Parks and Recreation JS

Via: Thomas Coleman, City Manager TC

Subject: Old Paper Mill Road Park Preliminary Design

Newark Parks and Recreation is in the preliminary design process for the Old Paper Mill Road Park plan that is included in the 2023-2027 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). We have \$1,400,000 in project financing through the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) Funding. To give you some updates and history about the project, I have attached the Old Paper Mill Road Park Preliminary Design presentation that will be shown at the February 13 Council meeting. This project was included in the Curtis Paper Mill and Old Paper Mill Road Park Master Planning Project completed in 2011. At that time, the preliminary plan called for a skate park, large playground area, tennis wall, a basketball court and 45+/- parking spaces among other amenities. Changes were made to the existing plan due to the following:

Why was an updated design needed?

Trends among park users and amenities evolve over time. The Parks and Recreation Department is constantly analyzing our park users' needs and updating our long-range plans. Major revisions are noted below:

- The preliminary 2011 design included a skate park, which would have been the first in a Newark Park. While this project was put on hold, two skate parks (Handloff Park and Phillips Park) were constructed in 2013, satisfying the need for skate parks in Newark.
- The preliminary 2011 design included a basketball court. Two basketball courts were constructed at nearby Kershaw Park in 2019, eliminating the need for additional courts at the park.
- With the popularity of the Reservoir and Preston's Playground, it became apparent that additional parking would be needed to support the new park and overflow reservoir parking. The preliminary 2011 design provided 48 parking spaces, while the new plan proposes 103.
- The development of Hillside Park eliminated a well-used sand volleyball court on the University of Delaware property. During the design process, staff committed to relocating

sand volleyball courts to another park as they did not fit the planned use of Hillside Park, but are needs identified through the public process.

How is this park different from existing Newark Parks and how does this design meet our needs?

Multi-Purpose Field Area:

- Currently, our youth soccer leagues play and practice at Fairfield Park and Kells Park. Neither park has ample room for parking. Families are forced to park along the roads, creating safety issues with cars driving along the road and families exiting and entering their cars along the street. This also eliminates parking for other activities in the parks such as basketball and tennis while soccer is being played. Old Paper Mill Road Park will have ample parking for our youth soccer leagues and other activities simultaneously.
- The 46 team Newark Outdoor Volleyball League currently plays at Downes Elementary School, a Christina School District property. The league plays on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings with 40-50 teams divided into the three leagues. We are not permitted to mow the grass on this field as it is not our facility. During the spring season, when the grass is growing more rapidly, our leagues are quite often playing in high grass. We would prefer to play on a City of Newark field, but that is not an option as we do not have fields available due to our softball leagues playing in other parks and parking restraints. This league would move to the new park and alleviate this issue and potentially increase downtown business as we have a minimum of 250-300 adults per week playing in the league. This would be in close proximity of Main Street. The park will also feature sand volleyball courts, another amenity that is not currently in our park system.

Other Amenities and Opportunities:

- Pickleball is America's fastest growing sport and there are no dedicated pickleball courts in the City of Newark. Old Paper Mill Road Park will be an ideal area to have Newark's first pickleball courts.
- Most of the City of Newark parks are either too small or do not have enough parking to provide a large community event. This area would enable us to hold outdoor concerts in the park, outdoor movie night, food truck events and other potential one day events at our park.
- We will also have an opportunity to provide environmental education and watershed awareness as we will have natural areas that overlook the White Clay Creek. With 6.23 acres in the flood plain, we will have ample room to plant additional trees and plantings to enhance the natural beauty of the area.

Some of the concerns expressed during the June 29 public meeting:

- Some residents had concerns about the addition of the park creating traffic issues along Old Paper Mill Road. DelDOT publishes average annual daily traffic counts for major roadways. Old Paper Mill Road has an annual average daily count of 875 vehicles per DelDOT's data in 2021. This 875 number includes the existing reservoir parking and all

subdivisions off of Old Paper Mill Road. The new park will generate additional trips, but on the order of hundreds per day on weekends and significantly less on weekdays. A traffic impact study (TIS) is only required if the roadway generates more than 2,000 trips per day. As a result, a traffic study is not proposed (or required) for this project. Our engineering firm is taking into account all of the required DeIDOT road and cross walk improvements required for Old Paper Mill Road as a result of the park.

- Generally, those who attended the public meeting were in favor of the park amenities shown on the preliminary plan.

Please let me know if you have any questions.