

Lebanon's Coleman Park Amphitheater gets facelift

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Scott Balsbaugh, an electrician for Woodland Contractors, pulls wire through a conduit buried underneath the new terraces at Veterans Memorial Amphitheater in Coleman Memorial Park. The wires will be connected to light stanchions that were removed to allow the asphalt to be removed and the hillside terraced. (John Latimer / Lebanon Daily News)

Improvements to Coleman Memorial Park being funded with a state grant are well under way, and park administrators hope they will be finished in time for the annual July 4 fireworks display.

The most noticeable change at present is a new design for seating at the Veterans Memorial Amphitheater. Crews have been working since late February, removing all of the asphalt and wooden benches and terracing the hillside with cement benches to provide a better view of the stage.

In the coming days, topsoil and grass seed will be spread and other landscaping done with the intention of making it a much cooler place to enjoy a concert, said Irv Siegel, secretary of the park board of trustees.

Changes are also under way at an adjacent parking lot near the baseball fields, where traffic islands are being installed.



A sign along Bashore Road in Coleman Memorial Park asks visitors to Please excuse our appearance during park construction. Be cautious of construction equipment. If all goes according to plan, the project, which includes landscaping Veterans Memorial Amphitheater and reconstructing the entrance off of Route 72 should be completed by the annual fireworks display on July 4. (John Latimer / Lebanon Daily News)

The project is being managed by Woodland Contractors and is being funded with a \$567,000 grant the park received last year from the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority, also known as PennVEST. PennVEST's mission is to give grants and loans for water, sewer and stormwater project that place a premium on helping the environment, Siegel said. Less asphalt means less stormwater run-off, he noted.

"This is all an effort to reduce the amount of asphalt at the park and to make the amphitheater a lot greener," he said. "The PennVEST grants are based on being ecologically friendly."

The project also includes building a parking lot near the Bandshell, located in the central portion of the park. The design does not require any trees to be removed, and the lot will accommodate 35 vehicles. The lot will be paved with a porous stone that allows rain water to seep into the ground, further reducing storm water runoff. Also made of the porous stone will be a walking path along Bashore Drive - the road that loops the park - across from the Lauther Memorial Water Complex. The path will make it safer for visitors walking to and from the pool, explained Siegel. "One of the problems we've had is pedestrians using the same roadway as the cars use to exit the park," he said.

Siegel said park trustees have been working closely with the city on obtaining grants and planning the projects, which also include construction of a new entrance with a southbound turning lane. "I think I can speak for the entire board when I say Mayor (Sherry) Capello and all the city departments have been very cooperative," he said. The changes to the entrance on Route 72 should begin in a couple of weeks and have been coordinated with PennDOT by public works Director Gordon Kirkessner, Siegel said.

That project includes constructing a new park entrance with a southbound turning lane just to the north of the existing entrance and making the present entrance an exit, Kirkessner said. The exit will be accessed from Krauss Road, the lane that runs behind the miniature golf course, he said.

A second exit at the bottom of Furnace Hill will remain. It will allow vehicles to access North 12th Street, making it a more convenient option for city residents, Kirkessner said. "A sign will be placed at the top of (Furnace Hill) that will say to the right is the city and to the left is Route 72 north and south," he said. There are no plans to have a traffic signal at the new entrance, but that could change if volume to the park increases, Kirkessner added. All of the changes should be finished by July 4, Siegel said.

They are the first improvements made to the 100-acre park since a master plan for it was completed in 2011. That plan will be used as a guide for future improvements to the park over the next 20 years and includes projects totaling \$11 million. More improvements will be made next year using a \$225,000 from a state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant, Siegel said. They include updating the park's playground equipment.

The park, which belonged to the Coleman family before being deeded to the city in 1936, celebrated its 75th anniversary under city ownership in 2011.

Although a lot of construction is taking place, the park is looking good thanks to the work of new caretaker Scott Moyer and his crew, Siegel added. It also benefited from a spring cleaning provided by more than 100 volunteers on the United Way's Day of Caring two weeks ago, he said. "The park is definitely on an upswing right now," Siegel said. "There are a lot of positive things happening, and we are really trying to feed on that momentum to make the park a place that will celebrate many more milestone anniversaries."

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