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City awarded grant for Oakland Beach improvements - by mayor Joseph Solomon

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Shown is a conceptual rendering of a splash pad, playground, and other improvements at Oakland Beach

provided to RIDEM as part of the city's Recreation Grant Application.

The city's Planning Department will be meeting with the community in the near future to garner input and refine plans.

People throughout the country are looking forward to the waning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the eventual lifting of many "stay-at-home" orders that have been in place in countless communities throughout the United States. We, too, are looking forward to the time when our residents and out-of-state guests alike will once again be able to enjoy Warwick's many recreational facilities and neighborhood amenities, and have continued to work throughout the past few months to move forward with projects to improve and enhance our community.

Mayor Joseph Solomon

The city had applied for, and recently was awarded, a \$400,000 grant for the construction of a splash park as well as playground and boardwalk improvements at Oakland Beach. With sweeping views of the bay, an eclectic variety of area restaurants, a public beach and commons area, Oakland Beach is a perennially popular summertime destination.

Funding is from the state Department of Environmental Management, which awarded \$5.79 million to 21 Rhode Island communities for 27 projects through a very competitive grant process. Projects include various site improvements, shoreline access, construction of walking trails, basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts, new playgrounds, athletic fields, and splash parks.

In addition to the splash park, new boardwalk, and playground enhancements, the Oakland Beach project will entail coastal buffer improvements, low-impact bio-swales, and pedestrian plaza entry improvements. Work is expected to begin this spring, with a projected completion date of September

2021.

One of the goals of this project is to improve handicapped access in the area. With that in mind, the boardwalk will have a fully handicapped-accessible boardwalk to increase beach access and connectivity within the neighborhood. The boardwalk and associated ADA-approved beach mats will provide direct wheelchair access to the waterfront zone, and the handicapped-accessible splash pad and improved playground will surely be a draw for local residents and visitors alike.

The reconstructed pedestrian entrance will lead from the existing sidewalk/parking area to the beach and playground amenities and will feature a new seat wall, paving, signage, walkway transitions and site furnishings, with a goal of improving ADA access and pedestrian safety while defining area access and maintaining separation from habitat restoration areas.

In addition, bio-swales will be installed adjacent to existing parking areas and development zones to help improve overall water quality through better management and treatment of stormwater flows. These improvements will provide an attractive, functional landscape area, offer a potential pollinator habitat and help to reduce beach closures.

My administration is proud to be spearheading this project, which has also received the support of the area councilwoman Donna Travis and the entire City Council, the Oakland Beach Neighborhood Association, the Greater Warwick Lions Club, and many area residents and businesses. Our Planning Department and Office of Community Development will continue to work closely with the neighborhood association and other interested stakeholders as the project moves along.

We are all eagerly anticipating the arrival of the day when our recreational facilities and other amenities are reopened for public enjoyment, and look forward to celebrating the completion of the Oakland Beach improvement project.

Joseph Solomon is the mayor of the city of Warwick, R.I.

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