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Plans in place for recreational improvements for two neighborhoods - by Frank Picozzi

February 10, 2023 - Rhode Island



Frank Picozzi

As the winter months continue on, many folks' thoughts are no doubt turning to warmer days ahead and the chance to enjoy the great outdoors. In Warwick, plans are at the ready to begin improvements to recreational areas in the Apponaug and Oakland Beach neighborhoods.

Thanks to a \$320,000 grant from the R.I. Department of Environmental Management and a \$469,950 allocation from the city's Office of Housing and Community Development, the complex that is home to the Apponaug Babe Ruth Baseball League will be getting a much-needed facelift. Work, slated to begin this spring, will include installation of new equipment, upgrades to walking paths that loop through the property, additional handicapped-accessible parking, and installation of new Little League Baseball safety netting. Plans also call for the planting of additional trees and other landscaping upgrades, new handrails for staircases, and surface enhancements. New benches, tables, and bleachers will also be installed for players' and spectators' comfort and enjoyment.

The complex is located adjacent to city hall and the future home of the City Hall Plaza, which will offer an outdoor ice skating rink and associated amenities in winter and a public space for concerts, food truck nights, special events, pickleball, and a myriad of other community-minded activities and programs in the warmer months. The Apponaug library branch and the Warwick Center for the Arts, both of which are included in the National Register of Historic Places along with city hall, are also being improved aesthetically and to increase accessibility for all patrons. All of these improvements are expected to further the revitalization of the historic village, which is the seat of municipal government and home to a number of small businesses and non-profit organizations.

In the warmer months, especially, locals and out-of-town visitors alike flock to Oakland Beach, a seaside neighborhood with stunning views of Narragansett Bay. People enjoy gathering on an expansive grassy area near the seawall, often picnicking with a take-out meal from one of the local restaurants. On Tuesday nights from May through Labor Day, oldies car aficionados gather to display their vehicles and enjoy music from yesteryear as it's carried along on a summer breeze.

Now, the Office of Housing and Community Development, in conjunction with the Oakland Beach Association, is proposing a variety of improvements to the area, including the removal and replacement of the existing playground equipment and corresponding pervious safety surface (poured-in-place rubber), the installation of a seasonal splash pad with integrated shade structure, ADA-compliant walkways and access points, site furnishings (including tables, benches, and trash receptacles), coastal dune restoration along the beach and boardwalk areas, and storm-water improvements that will capture the run-off from the facility and from Oakland Beach Ave.—all of which will only add to efforts to ensure that the area remains a favorite summertime destination.

We invite you to learn more about our community and discover why it's recently been named the second best city in the U.S. to raise a family by Scholaroo, one of Livability.com's top 100 best places to live in the country, and one of the safest cities as assessed WalletHub. Log onto visitwarwickri.com and warwickri.gov, or contact the Department of Economic Development at (401) 738-2014.

Frank Picozzi is the mayor of the city of Warwick, R.I.

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