

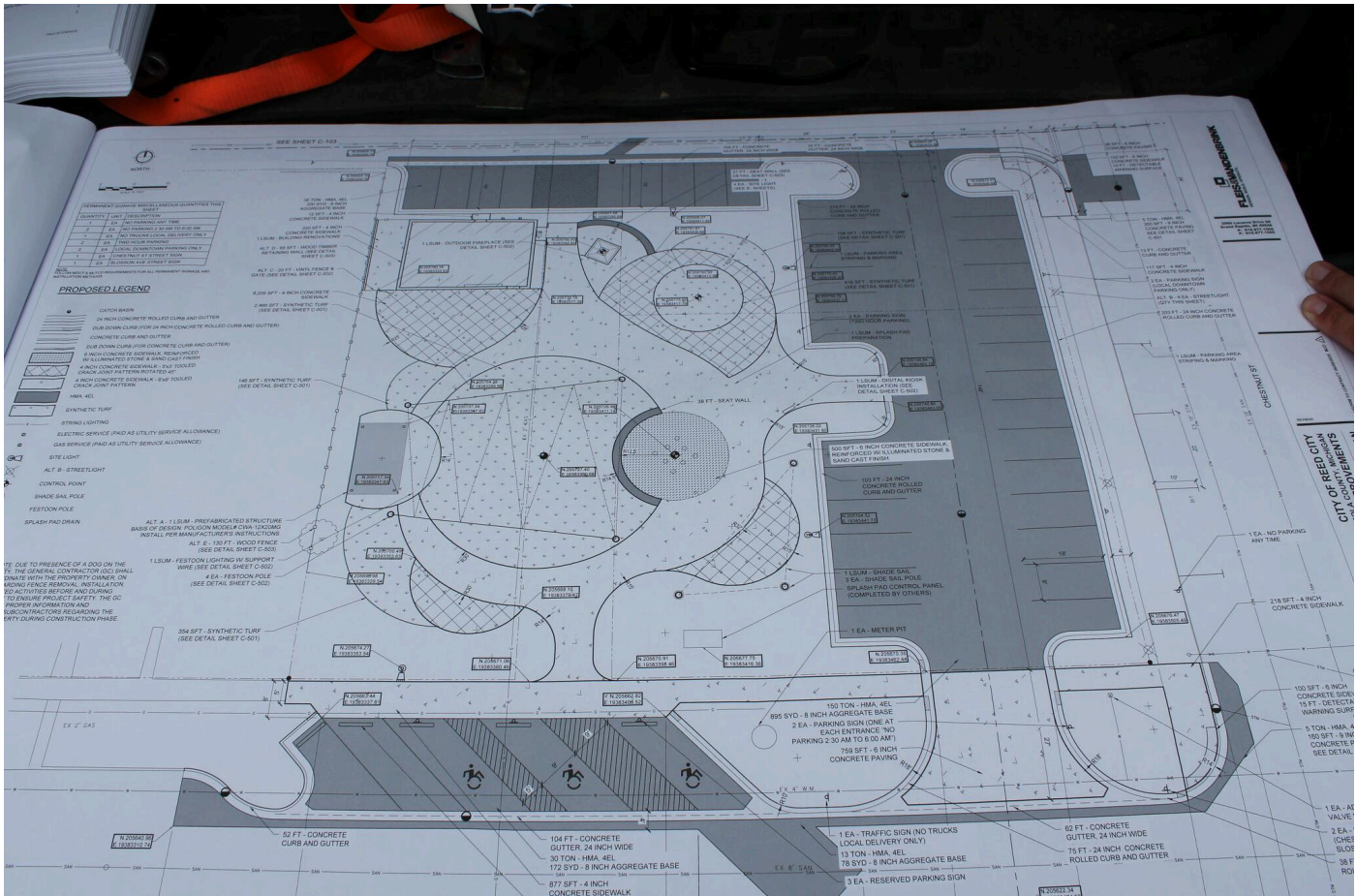
Reed City breaks ground on a new pocket park



Representatives of Fleis & VandenBrink and Gerber Construction look at plans for the new pocket park in Reed City, July 17. The companies worked on the effort together.



City and community leaders break ground on the new pocket park on July 17. Construction is to begin July 28 and wrap up by Dec. 1.



Plans are laid out on the bed of a pickup, showing what the new Reed City pocket park will look like. A groundbreaking ceremony was hosted at the site on July 17.



City and community leaders pose for a photo after breaking ground on the new pocket park on July 17.

BY REMINGTON HERNANDEZ
STAFF WRITER

REED CITY — As Reed City celebrated its past with its sesquicentennial, city and community leaders also celebrated what lies ahead, breaking ground on a new pocket park on Thursday, July 17.

Golden shovels pierced a pile of sand in the center of what once was a factory, but has been a vacant lot for decades, at the intersection of Chestnut Street and Slosson Avenue.

Plans for the park have been in the works for years, first spearheaded in 2021 by resident Ellen Finkbeiner. She founded Crossroads Recreation Connection, a nonprofit originally meant to advocate for a splash pad in Reed City.

Her organization has since grown to offer a whole host of other events, but the advocacy never stopped, even as she plunged her shovel into the dirt Thursday.

“I figured we’re not just going to talk about it, we’re gonna’ do it,” she said.

CRC Vice President Stephanie Boyce said the original post about the idea got 600 comments.

“This is something the community really wanted,” she said. “Now, here it is.”

A large sign has marked the spot of the future park for some time, after CRC worked with the city to find the most suitable location. The lot was chosen for its access to utilities and because it had not seen any permanent use.

An existing building on the site will also be renovated to include bathrooms, lockers and seating to accommodate visitors.

“I think it’s great for our town because it’s going to be convenient for people to come,” Finkbeiner said. “Kids will have some splash area to play in, people can listen to music.”

The plans for the park still include a splash pad, but also a removable ice skating rink and a fireplace in the winter. A stage for live music and other performances are in the plans as well.

“I used to work at the rehab and nursing center, and I’m excited that they can bring residents down and have a picnic and enjoy watching the kids and just get out with the community,” Finkbeiner said.

Finkbeiner joked that she needed the park just as much as Reed City did.

“(Reed City) just needs things that bring the community together, which is what Crossroads Rec is all about,” Boyce said.

CRC’s members called the effort a labor of love and thanked the city for working with them. Reed City Manager Rich Saladin is looking forward to the park being a focal point for downtown.

“It’s going to be where somebody can sit down and read a book in the shade, it’s going to be a place where somebody, you can have some guitar players or bands and have music at night,” he said. “It’s close to the restaurants and where they can grab a bite to eat and come on over here, and that’s the biggest thing is it becomes a social gathering place and it’s safe.”

Saladin said the lot has seen some community use before as parking and for farmers markets, but noted it's still a barren, overgrown gravel patch.

"This (park) is going to really change the whole appearance of it," he said. "It's going to be a diamond here in the downtown area."

Saladin feels the overall aesthetics of the part of the city will be augmented.

"We're going to be changing these old light fixtures here, and they're going to be decorative," he said. "There's going to be bushes and plants and flowers and so it's really going to change."

Shade will also be provided by structures and trees, once grown, will add to that, Saladin said.

Construction is set to begin July 28, leading to the eventual closure of the paved parking lot adjacent to the gravel area. Saladin said the project includes a parking lot in the same space, but it will be smaller, as the park will take 15 feet away from it.

Parking, however, will actually increase as spots are added on Slosson Avenue, he said. In the interim, parking on Chestnut Street in the area will be restricted to two hours in an effort to aid businesses.

"Some of these businesses that are here right now are going to be affected by losing some of this parking here in construction," Saladin said. "Continue to support those restaurants, continue to support the small businesses, and find a way to support them."

Once the park is complete, he said he hopes businesses continue to thrive with the help of the park.

Reed City Mayor Roger Meinert looks forward to visiting the park once it's finished, saying he's happy to see more recreational opportunities for the city.

"It's just a really welcome addition to our awesome community," he said. "Just to come out and enjoy our community, sit down at the park. I'm looking forward to the concerts that are going to be held here. Who knows, maybe in the future, I might even throw on some ice skates in the winter."

The project is slated to cost \$1.72 million, with the bulk coming from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Osceola County Community Foundation and Corewell Health through grants. The city is also matching about \$224,000.

“Without their support and other people that have made smaller donations, we couldn’t do it,” Saladin said. “It’s truly a community project.”

Fleis & VandenBrink designed the park and Gerber Construction, of Reed City, is building it.

“Having a local contractor here in Reed City do the work is awesome because that means those dollars stay local,” Saladin said. “That’s really exciting.”

The goal is to have the park finished by Dec. 1, with at least the asphalt and concrete poured in November.

“We’re really hoping that this will be available for ice skating if the weather cooperates this winter,” Saladin said. “Then, next spring, it’ll be fully open. Hopefully we get those splash pad features going, kids start getting wet, and it just becomes a great addition to our community.”