

Memorial Park gets support from state Local park project receives \$390,000 in grant funding

By Danielle Killey dkilley@republican-eagle.com

Plans to renovate and improve Memorial Park got a boost this week that will help make the project a reality.

The city of Red Wing received a \$390,000 reimbursement grant from the state's 2012 Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program, it announced this week. Total project costs are estimated at about \$440,000.

The work includes installing picnic shelters and restrooms in the Lower and Upper Quarry areas, renovating a number of the historic elements around the park, putting in kiosk panels with historical and park information and trail improvements and enhancements.

The work is dubbed "Phase II" and follows efforts last year to clear out invasive plants, improve safety at spots such as the Sugarloaf and other work to improve the quarry areas. Many of the groups that helped with that project also are working to move this second piece forward.

The grant the state awarded to the project is actually more money than the city requested, Planning Director Brian Peterson said.

He said he knew the city had a good application, but was still surprised by the project's selection and the amount it was funded.

"The competition's so stiff," he said.

Nearly \$47 million in requests came in for the \$7.5 million in available grant funding, and Red Wing was among only 13 applicants that were awarded a portion of the money.

One of the key elements that Peterson thinks made the Memorial Park project stand out is the community involvement, both in funding and participation in the grant and plans for the park.

"I think that's probably the single biggest contributor to our success — the level of community support," he said. The application included 29 letters of support from local entities, most of which also were pledging funds or volunteering time to make the project happen.

Financial contributions will come from the Red Wing Area Fund as well as Live Healthy Red Wing, Friends of the Bluffs, Mayo Clinic Health System in Red Wing, Red Wing Area Mountain Bike Organization and the Aurora Ski Club. Many other groups chipped in with labor commitments.

Peterson said the project also met many of the criteria for the state funding, especially in that it is an area with regional impact and involves renovating an existing, historical park.

"The fact that our park has a lot of different activities that people can take part in also was a factor, I think," Peterson said.

Within the next month or so the city and state will develop a grant agreement and lay out a schedule for the project. Peterson said work likely will start this summer. The grant allows up to two years to complete the project.

"We've got a lot of work to do to kind of prepare final design specifications and figure out how we're going to get the work actually done," Peterson said.

Peterson said a "Phase III," has not been planned, but other work could be done at the park. Local groups such as the Friends of the Bluffs might take over the focus there while the city turns its attention to other locations, he added.

The project fits in well with recent goals highlighted by city leaders, Peterson said.

"Something (the City Council) identified as something they really wanted to work on is making improvements and enhancements at the city's open space resources and working with partners to do that," he said. "It fits really perfectly with that strategic plan outline."

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BRIAN PETERSON

Planning director