

Guidance coming for Coleman Memorial Park

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This boxwood garden is located by the pavilion on the southwest side of Coleman Memorial Park. (LEBANON DAILY NEWS JIM ZENGERLE)

A suburban Philadelphia firm has embarked on designing a master site plan for improvements to Coleman Memorial Park.

Last week, Peter Simone, president of the Berwyn landscape architecture firm Simone Collins, introduced himself to Lebanon City Council at its workshop meeting and explained how the eight-month process of developing a plan will proceed.

The creation of the master plan coincides with the 75th anniversary of the park. The Coleman and Brock families deeded their nearly 100 acres and six mansions to the city in 1936. Because of their expensive upkeep, all of the mansions were eventually demolished. The last to be razed was G. Dawson Coleman's "Homestead," in 1961.



Lebanon's Coleman Memorial Park, the main entrance of which is shown here, will be the topic of a master site plan that will guide improvements to the facility. (LEBANON DAILY NEWS JIM ZENGERLE)

Only a few original buildings remain in the park, including two gate houses and the carriage house, which once held the Colemans' stable of horse carriages. It also contains the Lauther Water Complex at Gingrich Memorial Pool, an amphitheater, baseball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, picnic pavilions and a playground.

"We are very excited, and I wanted to thank the city and the Coleman park board for selecting our team," Simone said. "It is a great opportunity for us because it is a very interesting site. You know the history. It has tremendous resources. And our goal is to make a very good park better and bring it through the next 75 years."

Creating the master plan will involve a large public-input component, Simone said.

"This process is going to take us through next April to arrive at the final plan," he said. "We have four public meetings planned, the first of which is Sept. 8 at the Senior Center."

The process is being guided by a steering committee, which met for the first time on July 12 at Christ Presbyterian Church, located at the entrance to the park, said Simone. It generated a list of goals and ideas for improvements, including restoring the carriage house, adding pedestrian connections to the park and making a pedestrian connection to Union Canal Tunnel Park. Refurbishing the amphitheater band shell for rental purposes and adding more parking were also on the list.

All of the suggestions were preliminary and done to create a foundation from which to build, said Simone. More suggestions will be solicited at the public hearings and with a survey - which is already available online at the park's website, www.colemanmemorialpark.org, he said.

Simone Collins will be assisted in its endeavor by two West Chester firms, said Simone.

"We have a fairly extensive team," he said. "Frens and Frens Architecture is going to be looking at the buildings in the park. Interpretive Solutions Inc. is going to be developing a model for the story for how the park is going to be interpreted and for a possible museum at the park, which is one of the things the RFP (Request For Proposal) asked us to look at."

The \$80,000 plan will be funded with a \$40,000 state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant that is being matched with local funds from the county, the Coleman Park Board of Trustees and city Community Development Block Grant funding.

Simone promised to give council frequent updates on the progress of the master site plan.

Once the final plan is adopted the job of raising money for the project will begin. That will also likely involve state grant money, which can only be obtained after a master plan has been created, he said.

A DCNR Growing Greener grant of \$120,000 will be used for repairs to the carriage house, which currently serves as a workshop for park custodian Craig Henninger. That grant is separate from the master plan and involves repointing the building's brick, said Lebanon's community-development coordinator Melissa Quinones. A contract will be awarded this week, and work should begin on that project next month, she said.