

DES PLAINES

Grant for Apache Park project on hold

By Lee V. Gaines
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Renovations to a park in one of Des Plaines' most challenged neighborhoods is in jeopardy following a grant freeze imposed by Gov. Bruce Rauner.

The city was set to receive \$251,000 to help offset the approximate \$500,000 cost of installing a walking and jogging path, splash pad and youth soccer field to the 1.8-acre Apache Park at 2100 Pine St.

The park is "in desperate need of renovation," Don Miletic, Des Plaines Park District executive director, said earlier this year.

But 165 previously-approved Open Space Land Acquisition and Development grants, including the one for Apache Park, from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources have been placed on hold indefinitely, according to Chris Young, agency director of communications.

Without the OSLAD grant, the renovation project is only about half funded, with \$150,000 from the park district and an additional \$100,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Miletic said in an emailed statement that "the project is on hold due to OSLAD funding and the Des Plaines Park District will be reviewing options for the Apache Park project later this year."

Before the grant freeze was announced, park renovations were slated to begin this year and end sometime next spring. No new timetable has been set, said Davorka Kirincic, the city's Community and Development Block Grant administrator, and alternative funding sources are being sought.

Kirincic said the city has contacted HUD about rolling over the CDBG funds and about whether more money would be available.

Illinois Association of Park Districts president and CEO, Peter Murphy, said park districts and municipalities "really can't make up for the loss of the [OSLAD] money."

"The OSLAD grant program is matched 100 percent, at least at the local level," he said. "So that money is a great investment by the state because it is matched by local governments, park districts or municipalities, and whatever is created or built is maintained in perpetuity by the local park district or municipality."

Many of these agencies were blindsided by the loss of the funding, Murphy said, and it's resulted in projects either not starting or being stopped mid-stream. Still, he is optimistic that the governor's office will take into account the benefits that the OSLAD grants provide both on the state and local level, and ultimately reinstate the funding, he said.

But Des Plaines and park district officials won't wait, Kirincic said. Renovation of Apache Park is part of an overall improvement plan for the area previously developed by city and park district officials, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and Evanston-based planning firm Teska Associates.

The goal of that plan, she said, is to improve the low-income neighborhood through a number of strategies and renovation of Apache Park is an important component.

Gaines is a freelance reporter for the Chicago Tribune.

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