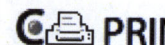




THE BUFFALO NEWS



Former landfill has new future as a park

By Janice L. Habuda NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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The dirty work was finished years ago, but other issues need to be cleared up before a former landfill can be redeveloped into a riverfront park in the Town of Tonawanda.

Approximately 15 years in the making, the progress of Cherry Farm Park was discussed Thursday by more than two dozen people interested in its coming to fruition.

“This is a project we think is consistent with the mission, goals and priorities of the Niagara River Greenway Commission,” said Town Supervisor Ronald H. Moline, who is a commission member.

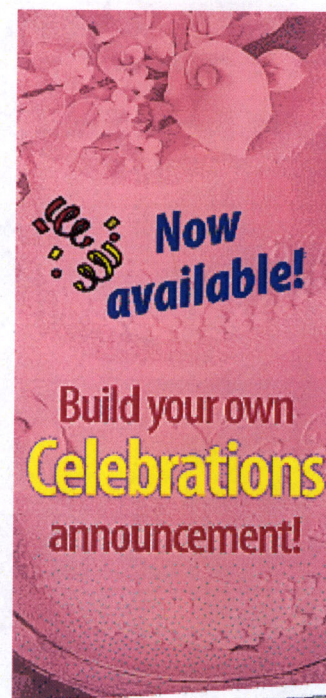
Named for the family that once owned the land, Cherry Farm Park is a 55-acre site, south of the South Grand Island bridges, that features 2,550 feet of shoreline on the Niagara River. Waste from steel manufacturing was dumped there between 1908 and 1963, and from 1963 to 1970 it was an industrial landfill.

Companies that contributed to the mess paid for the cleanup, which was completed in 2000. That work went as far as the installation of substructure for an almost 14,000-squarefoot facility that could include a banquet hall, restaurant and interpretive center.

Plans also include fishing piers; docks to launch “car-top boats” such as kayaks and canoes — motorized crafts will be prohibited; sports fields and picnic areas; and nature trails to the site’s wetlands, Riverwalk and a restored piece of the Erie Canal.

“This is a very effective use of a former commercial, remediated site. It has a lot of potential,” said Karl R. Scherer, engineering coordinator for the town’s Technical Support Department.

But the most recent master plan for the site is several years old, and that needs to be updated before the



project moves forward. That was one of the topics discussed Thursday. Ownership was another.

According to Deputy Town Attorney John W. Dorn, the state isn't particularly interested in taking title to the property, which is owned by National Grid. One possibility under consideration is the town taking title, with a nonprofit organization managing the site.

Moline said the state's position isn't necessarily a bad thing. "The state park budget is very limited," he noted.

Nevertheless, "We are very interested . . . in this project," said Mark W. Thomas, western district director of the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Commissioner Carol Ash is committed to working with the town to obtain grants to develop the park, he said.

The most recent price tag, from 1997, was estimated at \$9 million.

Additional issues include insurance liability, and operating and maintenance costs related to ongoing environmental monitoring and testing. They must be resolved before the town seeks a grant from the Niagara River Greenway Commission to pay for a new master plan.

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