

Washington Borough Business Improvement District will add small park with downtown parking lot

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WASHINGTON | A downtown parking lot is nearly completed, and it looks like the borough will get an extra little park in the deal.

With money left over from its Midtown Limited Building parking lot off East Washington Avenue, the Washington Business Improvement District will construct "a small green space" on adjacent land, BID Executive Director Sandi Cerami said Thursday.

The park is planned for the property once occupied by the Washington Antique Center, destroyed by fire in August 2006. Plans include a walkway, some greenery and landscaping, benches and tables and possibly a small stage area, Cerami said.

"It will be a little hub for downtown," she said.

The BID took control of the borough-owned parking lot in July to add 122 spaces and repave it. The BID will hold the property title for five years, after which the borough will buy the lot back for \$1 and assume the balance of the BID's loan from Skylands Community Bank.

The BID will be able to complete the parking lot with a \$490,000 loan and still have \$100,000 to devote to the park, Cerami said.

Most of that will go toward purchasing the plot, and BID plans to seek donations of time and money from residents and businesses to help complete the project, which could be done within a year, Cerami said.

"We're able to deliver not just a parking lot ... but a little gathering place for the benefit of the community," she said.

The BID had to get borough council's permission for the park because the property will become the borough's again in five years. Council on Tuesday voted 5-2 to approve the additional use.

"In my personal opinion it was no brainer," said Mayor Scott McDonald, who recalled plans for the park going back more than a decade.

Councilmen Victor Cioni and Terry Housel dissented. Cioni said the project would add to the debt the borough will start paying off on the project in five years.

Debt is a sensitive topic for borough officials, who two months ago realized that long-term debts from eight to 12 years ago are coming due over the next several years.

"We can't keep adding to our debt, because that's the mindset that got us into trouble," Cioni said. "It's unfortunate that these types of projects need to suffer."

He also said that the entire council agreed the park was a good concept, but was a "nice-to-have, not need-to-have" project. However, because the council approved the park, he said he will support it.

"If the consensus is to move forward, I want to make it perfect," Cioni said.

