

League gets extra year to start work on new ball fields

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

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Village OKs lease change so group has more time to raise money for \$2.5 million project

The Grafton Little League will have another 15 months to begin building its \$2.5 million playing facility.

The Village Board last week unanimously agreed to amend a lease agreement that now gives the league until Dec. 31, 2011, to start the project.

That decision came at the request of league officials, who recently told the village they would not be able to meet a

Sept. 1, 2010, deadline to start construction included in the original 30-year lease.

“We asked for the new deadline to have more time for fund raising,” said Mark Koehler, league president.

“We are going to regroup and look at potential changes in what we’re asking supporters to contribute. We’ve also started talking to professional fund-raisers.”

Last year, the village approved a site plan for the project, which calls for a state-of-the-art complex to be built on 20 acres at the northeast corner of Lakefield and River Bend roads. The league plans to construct in phases four lighted playing fields, two practice fields, indoor and outdoor batting cages, a restrooms/concessions building, playground and parking areas for nearly 300 vehicles.

The project site is on the west side of a village-owned parcel, the east side of which is used by the village for yard-waste collection and other public works operations.

League officials said the complex is needed to meet a growing demand for youth baseball facilities. This year, the league had more than 400 children on more than 30 teams.

After the project plans were approved, the league launched a fund-raising campaign but has fallen well short of the amount needed to begin work. Koehler estimated the organization has about \$150,000 available for the project, including \$30,000 in donations, \$30,000 in league funds and \$90,000 in pledges.

However, the league needs significantly more money before it can start construction, he added.

“To be fair to the league and the kids, we needed to do this,” Koehler said of the lease amendment. “Is the money going to be there in a year and three months? I don’t know.

“Hopefully the economy will improve, and companies and people will be more willing to contribute.”

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Koehler said he also expects the \$2.5 million cost to be pared through donations of materials and labor.

League officials originally planned to begin construction this year with the hope of having the fields ready to use in 2011. However, if construction is not started until late 2011, the fields will probably not be available for league play until 2013, Koehler said.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the lease amendment requires the league to obtain a building permit and begin work on the four playing fields and restrooms/concessions building by the end of next year.

The request for a deadline extension came after village officials asked the league to make a decision on the project's future.