

## Little League drops plan to build facility

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN  
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### Organization cites fundraising shortfall in effort to build \$2.5 million project on land leased from village

The Grafton Little League has shelved plans to build a \$2.5 million playing facility.

League President Mark Koehler told the Village Board on Monday that his organization will be unable to meet a Dec. 31, 2011, deadline to begin building a state-of-the-art baseball complex on 20 acres at the northeast corner of Lakefield and River Bend roads.

The deadline is part of a 30-year lease the league signed with the village in 2009, paving the way for the project. Plans called for construction of 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 for municipal yard-waste collection and other public works operations.

Koehler told the board the league has been unable to raise enough money to start construction and decided not to ask the village for another extension of the Dec. 31 deadline. The league received a one-year extension in 2010.

“We have raised a substantial amount of money, but not enough,” he said, noting that the economic downturn was the biggest obstacle in fundraising efforts.

“It comes down to cold, hard cash.”

Koehler said league officials agreed to ask donors if they want their money back or if it should be used to improve existing playing facilities.

Dropping the project at this time “doesn’t solve our long-term problems, we know that,” he added.

The village has approved all plans for the complex, which the league originally intended to begin building in phases last year. League officials said the complex is needed to meet a growing demand for youth baseball facilities in Grafton, where the program has expanded to more than 400 children on more than 30 teams.

Late last year, league officials reported having raised more than \$100,000 in donations and pledges for the project, plus \$40,000 in other funds. Donations of supplies and labor from businesses and groups were also expected to defray the cost.

An initial fundraising goal of \$1.5 million was expected to cover the cost of the first phase: four

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playing fields, an equipment shed, the restrooms/concessions stand and parking.

Koehler said the league worked with a fundraising group to meet its goal but struggled to attract major contributors.

“It’s not a donation, but an investment. That’s the feeling in the corporate world right now,” he told the board.

Village President Jim Brunquell said he was sorry to see the league drop the project.

“We applaud the efforts you did put forward. It’s understandable how you came to your decision,” he said.

Because the village has no alternative use for the project site, the land could be available for some time, Brunquell added.

“The village doesn’t have any plans for it except for some nursery space,” he said.

Trustee Jim Grant voiced support for the league and suggested the board should give the league a right of first refusal if someone else comes forward with another project for the site. He asked the board to consider that option at its next meeting

“It would give you the option of coming back,” Grant told Koehler and other league officials in attendance.

Grant also said he appreciates the league’s fundraising problems.

“You’ve got a great cause but a lousy time to do it,” he said.