

Lease change buys Little League more time

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 24 July 2013 19:25

Group gets five years to build first two playing fields, also strikes deal for free removal of fill from project site

The Grafton Little League has yet to break ground for a new baseball/softball complex it plans to build, but the organization continues to take steps to make the project a reality.

The Village Board last week agreed to amend a 30-year lease with the league to give the group more time to complete the project. Under the latest change, the league will have until Sept. 1, 2018, to construct two playing fields and a gravel parking lot for 150 vehicles.

Previously, the league had been required to build four lighted fields, a paved parking lot and other facilities, including a restroom/concessions stand, by Sept. 1, 2018.

“We thought that was too much to bite off, and we asked the village to help us out,” League President Jerry Faust said.

“Our intention is to complete the project as originally planned, but this way we can take it one step at a time. It gives us more time to raise the funds we need for each phase.”

Plans call for the league to build the complex on 20 acres of village-owned land at the northeast corner of Lakefield and River Bend roads.

In 2009, the league secured a 30-year lease with the village and unveiled plans for a \$2.5 million complex that would include four playing fields, an indoor practice facility, a playground, picnic area, equipment sheds, parking lot and other amenities built in six yearly phases. However, the league abandoned the project in October 2011 after failing to raise enough money to begin construction during the economic downturn.

Last month, league officials resurrected the project in downsized form and secured a new 30-year lease with revised terms. The project, they said, is still needed to meet a growing demand for youth baseball/softball facilities in Grafton.

The league currently leases playing fields from the Grafton School District and shares them with other groups, including school softball and baseball teams.

The revised agreement with the village gives the league use of the land until Sept. 1, 2043, for \$1 per year.

Although no starting date for on-site work has been set, Faust said the league is being aided by an arrangement that will remove fill from the project site at no cost. Under a plan coordinated through the village, New Berlin Excavating will transport the fill to the site of Meijer store to be built on Port Washington Road in Grafton this year.

The removal of 60,000 to 80,000 yards of fill will give the league a head start in on-site work,

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including grading, Faust said.

“It will save the league a lot of money,” said Faust, who estimated the fill removal and excavating work would cost at least \$250,000. “It’s also helping everybody involved.”

Once the league is able to begin construction, playing fields won’t be available for use until grass has taken root. Typically, that requires as long as a year, Faust said.

In the interim, the league is forming a committee to oversee fundraising efforts.

“It will be easier to get people involved once we can show them a tangible product,” Faust said.