

Scranton city council to vote on remediation for pocket park on Wyoming Avenue

BY FRANK WILKES LESNEFSKY, STAFF WRITER / PUBLISHED: MARCH 2, 2020

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SCRANTON — Dotted with patches of dead grass, the dilapidated lot at Linden Street and Wyoming Avenue could become a pocket park by the end of the year.

City council will vote Tuesday on whether to hire Doylestown-based AMO Environmental Decisions to remediate the polluted quarter-acre lot at 248-256 Wyoming Ave. A dry cleaning business that operated there from 1956 until 2000 polluted the land.

In its proposal to the city, AMO estimated the remediation would cost \$334,300. Funding sources include \$337,500 from a state Department of Community and Economic Development Industrial Sites Reuse Program grant, \$62,500 from a Local Share Account grant and \$50,000 from a DCED Keystone Communities grant, according to the city.

Council introduced the legislation last week.

"We're finally at the point where they're going to remediate the property," council President Bill Gaughan said during the meeting.

Gaughan also asked the city clerk to find out a timeline for the remediation, which he wanted before Tuesday's vote.

The project is a joint effort involving the city, Lackawanna County and Scranton Tomorrow, which is a nonprofit focusing on downtown economic development. The county is administering the remediation, and Scranton Tomorrow will lead the development of the park when remediation is complete.

The cleanup will involve excavation and disposal of soil and several deteriorated concrete building slabs, well monitoring and a health and safety plan update.

Development firm RSM Properties LLC purchased the land in 2008 for \$595,000 for

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FRANK WILKES LESNEFSKY / STAFF PHOTO
The dilapidated site of the proposed pocket park at Wyoming Avenue and Linden Street in Scranton on Friday. The park sits between St. Luke's Episcopal Church and St. Peter's Cathedral.



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The dilapidated site of the proposed pocket park at Wyoming Avenue and Linden Street in Scranton on Friday.

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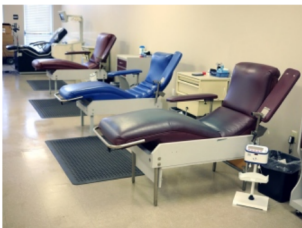
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commercial and residential use. RSM was under an agreement with the city to pay for building demolition and environmental remediation, but the firm sued the city in 2016, claiming it had reneged on the deal. In late 2017, the city bought the property for \$375,000 to settle the lawsuit and convert the land into a park.

Leslie Collins, the executive director of Scranton Tomorrow, hopes to have the park completed by the end of the year, but that's dependent on both the weather and the remediation, she said.

"Until the remediation is 100% completed, we can't begin the construction phase," she said.

Scranton Tomorrow is working on the park's design, and they intend to seek public input in the coming months, Collins said. The organization received a \$400,000 DCED grant for the park, as well as a grant from the William and Mary Scranton trust in the honor of Mary Scranton, she said.

Plans for the pocket park include grass, shrubbery, flower beds, tables and benches, she said.

"Our hope is that the park will really be a community gathering space," Collins said.

"That it will be a tranquil space, and that it would be able to serve many different needs."

The unoccupied lot wrapped in tall chain-link fences stands in stark contrast to the adjacent St. Luke's Episcopal Church and its well-manicured memorial garden.

"To have this space beautified and made something that will benefit the whole community is something that we think is going to be very exciting," said the Rev. Rebecca Barnes of St. Luke's.

The park's location — next to St. Luke's and across from St. Peter's Cathedral — is an ideal spot for a park that everyone can enjoy, she said.

The park will be a significant contribution to the city's downtown, and being located in a highly-trafficked area near the entrance of the city, the location is perfect, Collins said.

Successful cities throughout the country are incorporating green space, she said.

"It can't be all brick and mortar in your downtown," she said. "You do need those spaces of greenery."

Council will meet at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday in City Hall with an informal caucus at 5:45.

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