

Volunteers and City clean up Scott Tower and Community Field

By Dennis P. Hohenberger
Turley Correspondent

HOLYOKE – With the assistance of the Parks & Recreation Department and the DPW, volunteers fanned out and picked up trash and other debris at Community Field and Scott Tower last Saturday morning.

Crews removed around 40 bags of garbage from both sites, as volunteers swept up broken glass and litter that stretched from the Cherry Street entrance of Community Field to the steps of Scott Tower. The tower, which offers a near perfect view of the city and surrounding area, has suffered from neglect and abuse over the years. Until the clean up, broken glass and remnants of camp fires ringed the tower. Empty bottles of booze, dumped by late-night revelers, were tossed in the overgrown vegetation, as graffiti and nonsensical scrawls cover the tower's base.

Councilor Todd McGee, who spoke on Tuesday, said besides the overgrowth, the path leading to the tower was a "glass walkway" before the cleanup. "You name it, there was stuff up there. The clean up got rid of all that stuff," he said.

Crews from the DPW, according to McGee, will cut down the brush around the tower, which is barely visible for the road, and either power-wash or sandblast the graffiti. He said crews need to maintain the area and open up the roads and the paths that lead to the tower. "Scott Tower, itself, is pretty solid. It just needs

to be fixed up," said McGee.

He said there must be a way to unlock the tower during the day and lock it up at night, which could lessen the chances of the tower being vandalized.

He added that the planned renovation of Community Field and increased use by residents will "drive trouble away." McGee said eight to 12 cameras will be installed around the field, which should improve safety and security. "The issue with Scott Tower is, is that there's really no lighting. It's wide open and there's no gates to protect it so that people can't damage it," he said.

McGee was joined at the clean up by fellow city councilors Brenna Murphy, James Leahy and Linda Vacon.

Erin Fontaine, of the Friends of Scott Tower, said the clean up went well, especially with the high turnout by volunteers. She said most of the broken glass was swept up and that a DPW crew removed the piles on Monday.

"It's safe to walk your dog, safe to bring the kids. It's just a great place to walk, now that all the glass is gone," she said. "That was the biggest problem up there, all the broken glass." She concurred that the main goal is to renovate

Community Field below and then concentrate on Scott Tower.

Besides the tower, said Fontaine, there is plenty of land available for picnics and other recreational uses. "So many people had no idea it was even up there, that are now aware, which is great," she said.

Keeping people from partying, spray painting and starting fires, she said, is difficult without the tower being reopened and with improved security.

She wants those who vandalize the tower to have more respect for the community and their surroundings. "If you want to throw a party, throw it in your backyard. Clean up after yourself. It's for recreational uses and not trash," said Fontaine.

Peter Leclerc, of the Parks & Rec Department, said most clean ups attract a dozen or so persons. He felt that the interest in the planned renovation of Community Field and the history behind Scott Tower were responsible for the large turnout of volunteers.

He said the greatest challenge was the separation of trash for disposal, particularly the broken glass around the tower. "We went over a lot of different procedures and how to handle different situa-

tions when you come across it," he said, as volunteers wore thick gloves and were armed with equipment for removal.

Leclerc said residents or groups who want to plan similar efforts, should coordinate with the DPW or the Parks & Rec Department. Exposure to hazardous or dangerous materials and proper disposal of them are his main concerns.

"While their efforts are appreciated, sometimes they might not do it in the right manner," he said of volunteers. "When you lump different types of trash together, and the city goes to dispose of it, the disposal company won't take it. So we're stuck with a load of glass and trash and everything mixed in together that we can't rid or anywhere."

He said some volunteers climbed to the top of the tower. With the good weather on Saturday, said Leclerc, there were clear views of Hartford from the south to points far north. He said the volunteers are interested in staging another clean up in the next few weeks.

At the end of the day, plans were unveiled for Community Field's renovation. Mayor Elaine A. Pluta was also present. He said final plans will probably be completed by June, with the project then going out-to-bid. "If we stay on schedule and everything goes smoothly, we'll probably break ground in early-fall," said Leclerc of the estimated \$2.3 million renovation.

For more information on the Friends of Scott Tower and future clean up, please visit the group's Facebook page.

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-Friends of Scott Tower member Erin Fontaine.

Library holds community meetings on expansion design

By Dennis P. Hohenberger
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HOLYOKE – On May 13, the Holyoke Public Library hosted a series of community meetings to review plans for the renovation and expansion of the structure.

With the recent approval by the Holyoke City Council of \$14.5 million in bonding for the project, representatives from the architectural firm of Finegold Alexander & Associates presented three expansion options to residents.

James G. Alexander, of Finegold Alexander, said his firm is seeking input from the community on the overall design of the library. "We designed 20 or 30 libraries, but every community, as I said, is different. We trying to figure out what's going to make this library special for this community and how can we really bring people back to the library," he said.

Alexandar said residents want an entrance that is more welcoming and accessible with improved nighttime access. He said most residents agreed to keep the front entrance untouched. But, he added, that the long flight of stairs to the main door can be "off-putting and intimidating" to some people.

"The question is if there is a new entry on Chestnut Street, but how will people know and recognize that as a significant entrance, just as important as the one on Maple Street?"

The challenge is to integrate the original structure with a modern extension on the Chestnut Street side. Alexandar envisions opening up the structure along an axis that would give a clear view from the Chestnut Street entrance to the one on Maple Street. "Here, if you come in at one end, we stay on the axis that is established by the historic building. We can come in right up into this grand space,

using another stair from the other side, just like the one outside, and creating a very nice entry," said Alexander.

He said the new section would be around 40,000 square feet, while incorporating 18,000 to 20,000 square feet of the existing library. He said the stack wing might have to be eliminated and build out around that section.

Tony Hsiao, the lead designer, and Elliot Guerrero, the project architect, presented the options on expanding the footprint of the library. The first option would be flanking wings on the north and south sides of the library. The second, would a large wing on the north side of the structure. But it was the third option that garnered the most attention from residents, which would incorporate a modern, two-story structure on Chestnut Street.

That design would bring in natural light, have a large atrium that would bridge both buildings, and create a gathering place for the community. The open feel would present a natural flow throughout the building. Most of the original structure and the front entrance would stay in place.

Some residents were concerned that the young adults section would be relegated to a corner in the library. Others want the return of the city's historical documents, as most of the research material is currently stored at Holyoke Community College.

While talk of design dominated the day, Terry Plum, president of the library's board, said the library and the city are still working on the bonding council language, as well as the future governance of the library and how the endowment money will be used for the project.

"We put them up as securities. But there's having it as security and having it available," he said. According to Plum, the library's endowment is currently \$4.6 million.

Holyoke City Councilor Aaron Vega, who was in attendance, said community participation is crucial in moving the project forward. Besides resolving the issues with bonding, he said the library is waiting to hear about a \$4.4 million Massachusetts Library Association Building Grant.

"Once that is official, making sure we can have a community conversation about the governance of library now that it will become a full municipal department and how that will work," he said. Vega said the city must also receive approval from the state on the use of adjacent and protected parkland.

He added that the design team understood the importance of maintaining the integrity of the original structure. "They talked a lot about crossroads between the old and the new. Crossroads between the community and utilizing some new technologies to maintain this old structure and keep it going for another hundred year," said Vega.

Another community meeting is scheduled at the library on May 25.

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