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Arbor footing problems delay Canalfront Park work in Lewes

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Problems with 30 reinforced concrete footings for Lewes' Canalfront Park shade arbors will push the project off schedule as work to remove the supports begins. Officials said the footings are too high.

The added work extends completion of the second phase of the park's construction by about one month.

Lewes Mayor Jim Ford last week said Canalfront Park project engineer Preston Lee, Ballard Builders LLC owner Dennis Ballard and city officials met Wednesday, April 30, to discuss methods to correct elevation errors on the footings, all of which had been completely installed.

Ford said discussions focused on how best to continue moving the park project forward and then later working out how the error occurred.

He said completion of the current phase of the park, which includes the shade arbors, restroom facilities with a rooftop overlook, plantings and a plant watering system, had been scheduled for May 30.

"It looks now like it might be complete around the end of June or early July," Ford said.

He said it's possible the park's restroom facility could be made safely accessible to the public as shade arbor construction continues nearby.

Ford said the footings are a substantial component of the top-heavy arbor structures. A 2-foot diameter footing secures each arbor support.

He said project engineers determined the footing heights were incorrect – a few inches higher than they should have been.

Ballard, however, said the footings were constructed exactly where and how engineering drawings specified.

He said initial site survey inaccuracies could have contributed to the error.

Ford said project engineers, Ballard and others working on the project discussed possible modifications to the footings, but he said city representatives determined the only acceptable solution would be new footings installed at the original grade intended.

Ford said everyone working on the project wants to see it be completed, but not at the cost of compromising construction quality.

Ballard said initial excavation at the site for the footings was tricky, and digging new holes would be trickier yet.

The park is built on land once occupied by a commercial boatyard. Before construction of the park began in 2005, several tons of contaminated soil was removed from the site. New soil was trucked in to cap the ground, but pockets of rubble, stone and unknown material remain beneath the surface.

The park opened in June after completion of Phase 1, which included a boat dock and marina, walking paths, seating and lighting.

The final phase, a Village Green consisting of an open, grassy area sloping toward the Lewes-Rehoboth Canal, will be constructed on the site of the adjacent boat ramp and parking lot.

Construction of the Village Green would begin when the state has completed its new boat ramp, which is under construction, at the end of Pilottown Road.

When complete, construction of Canalfront Park will have cost an estimated \$4.9 million.

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