

Supporters hear report on Canalfront

By Henry J. Evans Jr. Cape Gazette staff

As the Lewes Canalfront Park enters the first phase of construction, which includes a 22-slip marina, and installation of underground utilities, park supporters left few empty chairs in the Lewes Public Library meeting room to hear about the project's progress. Michael Rawl, campaign manager of Friends of the Lewes Canalfront Park, provided a brief history of how the idea for the \$ 4.9 million park was born six years ago. Park supporters saw preservation of the property for the public as a better use than the private development that had been planned. However, nearly everyone who attended the Jan. 11 meeting knew the park's history. It was the park's present and future that attendees wanted Rawl and Project Manager Preston Lee, Mayor Jim Ford and Dennis Forney, co-chairman of the park's steering committee, to talk about. Lee said an underground utilities bid that was accepted by the city in November but withdrawn by the contractor last month would only minimally affect the project's schedule. He said the city had received bids from four companies interested in doing the underground work. Lee said George & Lynch of New Castle submitted a bid of \$ 732,500, the lowest bid for the job. In November George & Lynch was awarded the bid to build the park's marina after submitting a bid of \$ 1.3 million. It was the only bid submitted to build the facility. Lee said work on the marina is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, Jan. 17. He said the start of utilities work could follow by about two weeks. Lee said the marina and underground utility projects are 180-day contracts. He said under those contracts, the marina would be completed in mid-July and the utilities by early August. Ford said nothing about the project has been easy. " It's all very complicated and time consuming but things have worked out well. It's the public that have made this project happen," Ford said. Still unclear is the precise timing of the demolition of the boat ramp and parking lot and the installation of the village green, the sloping grassy area to be installed where the boat ramp now is. Plans call for a new boat ramp to be built in 2007 at the state's multi-use facility to be constructed at the end of Pilottown Road. Demolition of the existing ramp would not occur until the new ramp is in service. " We're going to take down the parking lot and put up a little piece of paradise," Forney said of village green plans. He said the park campaign has set a \$ 1 million fundraising goal, an amount expected to be enough to see the project through to completion. " We'll need the money," Forney said. He said the cost to construct the village green is too far in the future to precisely estimate. Forney said rising costs have been one of the

persistent problems the project faces. " Everything we're doing is 50 to 75 percent higher than the professional estimators told us it would be Forney said. Lewes resident Kim Ayzazian asked park panelists why plans to expand the net house, now serving as headquarters for park fundraising and park social functions, appear to have been dropped.

" We have to constantly adjust and shift focus," Forney said. " Something will happen to the net house, just not at this time," Ford explained. Lewes resident Sam Gossage asked who made decisions on design changes and the various additions or deletions of park elements. Gossage said he's concerned that citizens might have been left out of the decision- making process. " We're the body that is elected to make those decisions with the public's input," Ford said. " It's a public project and a public process. If one person was doing it, it would have been done by now," Ford said. Dennis Forney is publisher of the Cape Gazette.

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