

Village square to become Patriot Park

Kristi R. Garabrandt

Cambridge Daily Jeffersonian
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Byesville Village Square will undergo a transformation to become Patriot Park.

Byesville Village Administrator Brennan Dudley presented the plans for the new park to council members Wednesday.

According to Dudley the goals for the park include:

- Creating a place where people can appreciate the beauty of our community while enjoying the company of each other

- Provide support for downtown businesses in the form of improved aesthetics and an assembly site

- Recognition and remembrance of veterans and first responders
- Community concerts

The cost of the project is estimated to be \$99,744.43, and paid for through private funding and grants.

The park will include picnic tables and benches, new sidewalks, a gazebo or pergola, permanent barbecue pit, interchangeable murals, a fountain and a stage.

The village plans to make some infrastructure changes to provide additional water access at multiple locations for vendors and electric upgrades for lighting. New landscaping will be added to the area, as well.

Dudley said the village has applied for a grant that if received would cover 90% of the cost. If the grant is not awarded, the village will consider other grants, he said.

"We are not really asking for taxpayer dollars to be...



TRANSFORMATION

Village hopes to change school into retail, community space

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Brennan Dudley, Byesville village administrator, presented a plan to council Wednesday night to preserve the nearly 100-year-old Byesville Elementary School and turn it into retail and community space.

Rolling Hills Local School District is building a new campus. The \$43.8 million Ohio Facilities Construction Commission project calls for the current high school to be renovated with a new wing being added to house Meadowbrook Middle School stu-

dents in grades sixth through eighth. A second new structure will be attached to the high school building to house the pre-kindergarten to fifth-grade students. In all, an estimated 1,582 students will be housed at the new complex.

"We are talking about the future of the school and the future of the Village of Byesville," Dudley said. "We are kind of at crunch time with the school. The school has to make some decisions and the Village of Byesville has to make some decisions on what we want to look at for the future there."

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School

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Dudley presented a plan to repurpose Byesville Elementary as an extension of downtown and using it as a hub for commercial and community activity.

He said other communities have successfully transformed older buildings into new retail space.

"So preservation is always a first option I think for a village our size," Dudley said.

Plans include repurposing the 10 to 13 classrooms for retail or mixed use, repurposing the cafeteria as a sit-down restaurant, utilizing the gymnasium to serve youth league sports, and a reception hall or community space for event such as concerts or winter movie nights.

Additional long-term plans would in-

clude the establishment of a Byesville Main Street organization and housing that in the building as well.

Dudley said there are a variety of funding sources available to cover the cost of necessary improvements, including the possibility of historic tax credits.

Council members enthusiastically supported the plan to rehab the school into the Shops on Main if the school district opts to let the Village obtain the building.

Dudley planned to address the school board Thursday night and present three options — sell the elementary school, tear it down or do nothing.

The school property is zoned community business, which he said could be a factor for someone purchasing it. He voiced his concerns regarding the type of business that may located there.

"Storage buildings is a permitted use

in community business," Dudley said. "Can you imagine tearing down this 100-year-old school and now you're driving into town and you are just seeing a bunch of storage buildings. I don't think that would be conducive to what we are doing and would not certainly be conducive to our vision of the future or the businesses around that."

Dudley said the cost to demolish the building would run between \$200,000 and \$300,000. The school district would have to pay 51% the cost, which, at the low end of the estimate, would be \$102,000.

The last option Dudley noted was what he referred to as the "kick-the-can method" which is do nothing with the building and let it deteriorate and become an eye sore with safety concerns.

"So it's important that no matter what we have a plan, even if it is demolition," Dudley said. "I don't think kick the can

and let someone else deal with it is a vision and an option at all and I don't think the school has that type of intention either. We want to very quickly transition from the school being empty to the school being full with something else."

According to Dudley, Byesville has become a place where entrepreneurs/business owners in Guernsey County want to be, but the village is running out of space.

"We are seeing that every day. We are seeing phone calls increasing, foot traffic in downtown increasing quite rapidly," Dudley said. "If you look around almost every building has been rehabilitated and renovated for occupancy."

The village has seen the addition of 19 new businesses since 2019.

"The acquisition of Byesville elementary would expand the economic opportunities for our community," Dudley said.

Square

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grant funding," Dudley said. Obviously, we may seek out individuals for private donations and that type of thing, but we are not asking council to appropriate any funds towards that."

The village plans to start working on fundraising while waiting to hear back on the grant. Any money raised above

sidewalks while tree removal would be contracted out.

Project start and end date is dependent on how soon the village hears back on the grant application. If awarded in the next 60 days, the park could possibly be completed by the end of the year.

If it takes longer for the grant, Dudley said the completion would probably be spring of 2023.

Anyone interested in donating to the new park can contact Dudley or Byesville Mayor Jay Jackson by calling 740-685-6562.

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