



At Gaslight Village, created in the 1950s by legendary theme park-builder Charley Wood, natural wetlands will be restored to filter and absorb sediments, nutrients and pollutants from West Brook and surrounding highways and parking lots before they can reach Lake George. Governor David Paterson has announced that the project will receive a \$2.5 million grant.

Conservation Plan Closer to Reality

By Anthony F. Hall

Lake George Village will receive \$2.5 million to help construct the artificial wetland at Gaslight Village, New York State officials announced in April.

Because the site will treat urban runoff from Route 9N and include walking and biking trails, the Village was eligible for a grant for "a non-traditional transportation project," said Wilson Moore of the state transportation department.

The conservation initiative was one of only four projects selected to receive funding from that particular grant program, said Walt Lender, the executive director of the Lake George Association.

The LGA applied for the grant on behalf of the Village.

"When the Lake George Association submitted the application for this program last June, we were confident that the project was a good fit with the program's guidelines," said Lender. "With this funding, we know the project is a 'go'. We are feeling more and more assured that the project will come to fruition."

The funds cannot be used to rehabilitate buildings or create parking space on the 2.5 acre site reserved for economic development, Moore said.

"We're funding whatever was in the application for the grant," said Moore. "The scope of the project cannot be changed."

The project will nevertheless contribute to local economic development, said Lender.

"I can't think of a better way to jump start the local economy than with a project of this scale that will not only put people to work but will also leave the community with assets such as a beautiful public space and a protected Lake George," said Lender.

Lake George Village will be required to match the award with a contribution equal in value to 20% of the grant, officials said.

But Village Mayor Bob Blinis said state officials had informed him that some portion of the \$2 million spent by Warren County, the Town of Lake George and Lake George Village to acquire Gaslight Village could, in all likelihood, be

treated as the local match.

Blais said the grant was one more indication that New York State recognizes the significance of the Gaslight Village project, which is intended to protect the lake's south basin from pollution.

"It's the most important initiative ever undertaken on Lake George," said Blais. "It's uniquely important for residents of the Village, because the lake is the source of our drinking water."

With Governor David Paterson's announcement that Lake George would receive \$2.5 million for the conservation initiative, and as a result of several other state and federal grants secured over the past year, "we are several million dollars closer to our goal" of covering the costs of engineering wetlands and constructing a park, said Lender. But, he added, "We still have a long way to go."

"These funds are mostly directed toward engineering, site preparation, and construction of the wetland complex and stormwater infrastructure," said Lender. "We need to raise funds to meet local match requirements for some of the grants. Some of the public amenities still need funding identified."

Peter Bauer, executive director of The Fund for Lake George, estimated the costs of constructing the storm water project and the public park to be at least \$10 million, of which approximately \$8 million has been raised.

"The terrific support we've received from federal, state and local officials is a testimony to the environmental importance of Lake George and its economic significance for the region," said Bauer.

The entire cost of the project is approximately \$15 million, said Bauer. That figure includes the repayment of a \$2.1 million loan to acquire a conservation easement over the property and the purchase price of nearly 1,500 acres surrounding the headwaters of West Brook. The Lake George Land Conservancy secured that property, known as the Berry Pond Tract, for \$2.64 million in 2008.

"We are forging ahead with all of our fundraising efforts with the hope that we can have the whole West Brook Conservation Initiative fully funded in the upcoming year

of so," said Lender.

"This will be a big fundraising season for us," said Bauer. "We need to reach out not only to government, but to foundations, companies and individuals."

While the effort to raise funds has strained the resources of the local conservation organizations, the effort has been a worthwhile one, said Lender.

"If we had not made the leap of faith that we made last year to secure Gaslight Village and commit ourselves to its transformation to a buffer to protect Lake George, this property and this opportunity might have been lost forever," said Lender.