

Giant mural could be centerpiece of future Lawrence park

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LAWRENCE — The long retaining wall beneath a railroad track that runs through the back of an industrial area where a trash-to-energy incinerator once stood could become the backboard of the biggest mural this city has ever seen.

“We want to see something colorful that represents the spirit and history of the community, its neighborhoods and the significance of the Spicket River,” said Kate O’Brien, executive of Groundwork Lawrence, as she stood on a lot littered with brick and concrete rubble.

That’s one of the visions that O’Brien shared yesterday after leading a neighborhood tour of the site for the future Manchester Street Park.

The five-acre park — which also will include a community garden, a children’s playground, a nature area, a great meadow, an overlook to Stevens Pond and a place for people to fish — is expected to be completed by the end of next summer.

O’Brien said the park’s components are based on suggestions from people in the community who attended public sessions like the one last night in the basement of a Malden Mills building at 530 Broadway.

“This site was envisioned by the community in 2006 as the capstone park along the developing Spicket River Greenway, on the edge of Lawrence’s Arlington and Tower Hill neighborhoods,” O’Brien said.

PARK PLANS

Here are the latest features of the future city park outlined yesterday by David Walsh, director of the Boston-based landscape architecture group The Collaborative.

- Community garden that will accommodate 10 to 20 families. It will be fenced in to keep dogs out.
- Playground that will include swings and slides, ages 2 through 12.
- A colorful, roofed overlook that will allow people to look at Stevens Pond with a protective barrier to keep them from falling in. Current plans call for a spot to fish from. There are requests for the project to include stocking the pond with fish.
- Nature areas filled with wildflowers and development of habitats for wildlife.

The project is being funded by a \$500,000 state grant, a commitment by the city to pay 25 percent of the park’s construction costs and a \$150,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

More than \$5.5 million in state and local funds have already been invested in the Spicket River Greenway projects in a 2.5-mile stretch along the river’s banks, from the Merrimack River to Methuen.

Eric Allshouse, an arts teacher at Lawrence High School and four of his students, showed up at last night’s meeting to listen to ideas and do their own brainstorming about the mural that will be painted on 8-foot-high plywood boards against the retaining wall.