

# Park place?



KRISTEN OLSON/Staff photo

Carlos Acevedo, 6, covers first base during a game of kickball, while Christopher Pagan, 10, throws the ball to the next "batter" on Brook Street, where residents and community workers hope to build a park soon.

## Pushing for a new city park

### Efforts redoubled to clean up polluted Brook Street parcel

BY TIM WACKER  
STAFF WRITER

LAWRENCE — What was once one of the city's largest tax liabilities could become a green asset of another sort, as residents, community groups, the city and the owners try to change a polluted parcel at the end of Brook Street into a community park.

The 2.7-acre Spickett River parcel owned by the former Fleet Bank, was burdened with \$800,000 in back taxes when a city collection effort uncovered

*“It’s one of our most notorious stretches of river. It’s very hard to take care of, but it could be one of the few places where the public has access along the river.”*

Andre Leroux, associate director of Groundwork Lawrence

the neglected plot last year. The bill was paid, but buried pollution and unfinished financing still impede a three-year effort to turn the garbage-strewn parcel into a verdant riverside park in the heart of one of the city's most overlooked neighbor-

hoods.

“That site is a big problem in terms of dumping because nobody can see it back there,” said Andre Leroux, associate director of Groundwork Lawrence, a nonprofit community rehabilitation group that’s been pushing

the reclamation for the past three years.

“It’s one of our most notorious stretches of river. It’s very hard to take care of,” he said. “But it could be one of the few places where the public has access along the river.”

First, plenty of paperwork must be filed and even more money must be raised.

Fleet Bank acquired the property, and with it a few environmental headaches, eight years ago when it acquired Shawmu

Please see **BROOK**, Page 1

Dg10f2

## **BROOK:**

# Vacant lot city's next park?

■ *Continued from Page 11*

Bank. A coin-operation laundry that predated the bank left contamination underground, presenting just one of a variety of hurdles the property must clear before it becomes a park.

As Fleet worked to settle the back taxes owed the city, it was also working with Groundwork Lawrence, and sister organization Lawrence Community Works, to turn the property over to the city. Then Fleet was acquired by Bank of America recently and officials involved aren't sure where the new owners stand on the park project.

Bank of America spokesman George Owen said only that the company was working with Groundwork Lawrence and the city to settle the ownership issue.

"Basically, we're still working with the community groups to come up with a plan for the land," Owen said. "Whatever Fleet said their commitments to the property are, we'll honor those commitments."

That's good news for the park. Fleet said it would contribute \$200,000 toward a park project that Leroux estimates will cost about \$800,000. Still, more money is needed and one possible source is looking a little doubtful.

The state's Urban Self Help grant program could provide another \$250,000, and Leroux said Brook Street is the perfect candidate. But a riverwalk proposed in front of some Merrimack Street mill buildings and a park planned for some federally owned flood-plain parcels elsewhere in the city may be on this year's grant application instead, said acting city planner, Frederick Carberry.

"We'd have to look at which project appeared to be most feasible and benefits the greatest number of people," Carberry said. "There is a lot of enthusiasm and excitement about the proposals at the Merrimack Street area."

Marianne Paley, disagrees. The former head of Groundwork Lawrence says the riverwalk off Merrimack Street is a worthy project she'd love to see completed. But the Brook Street park, despite the pending paperwork, is actually much farther along than most realize.

There is a preliminary design for the park and \$50,000 in federal grant money has already been received. If the city endorsed a Self Help grant, it would mean a total of \$500,000 toward an \$800,000 project.

"We have a project that's almost fully funded," Paley said. "This is a critical parcel along the Spickett River in the most challenging socioeconomic demographic in city. The Brook Street site is an opportunity to completely change the issue of lack of open space in a neighborhood that needs it most."