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GRANT FUNDING BOOSTS MANY FAYETTE COUNTY PROJECTS; BOLSTERS RECREATION AND TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Uniontown, PA - Fayette County ended 2022 on a high note by receiving a string of state and federal grant awards.

The county-owned, community-run Mill Run Park in Springfield Township was awarded \$70,000 for development from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Community Conservation Partnerships Program.

Fayette County Chief Community Development Specialist Art Cappella said the grant will be leveraged by \$40,000 in county funds and used to make the 10-acre park's parking lots handicap accessible.

"That's the first thing we have to do, and then we can move to the next phase," Cappella said. "We're going to build a nice walking trail around the facility, because the trail that's there now was man-made over time and is not (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant."

Located just off state Route 381, Mill Run Park currently boasts baseball fields, basketball courts, concession stands, pavilions, a playground and seasonal ice skating. Engineering for future phases of park improvements began last fall, and initial construction is slated to begin this year.

"This grant is a big deal for the community, because the park has been in need of some upgrades for a long time. Springfield isn't a very big township, but it has several campgrounds, and tourism is the number one economic development generator in the county, next to agriculture," Cappella said. "A girls' soccer team from another state used the park for practice last year while they were staying at Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park. The church next door to the athletic field uses it for softball games and activities at the pavilion. The park benefits both the local community and visitors, and really enhances that end of the county."

Cappella said that, while the county often receives recreational grant funding, the Mill Run Park Project is sentimental to him.

"I can remember playing ball on that field at the park as a teenager," he said. "It's kind of neat to be part of this now, when we're improving the park for future generations. Everything comes full circle."

Not far from Springfield Township, the City of Connellsville also rang in the new year with grant funding that will bolster its recreation and tourism.

As part of Pennsylvania's most recent round of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding through the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) Act of 2020, Connellsville was awarded \$662,447 for improvements to the 12 Street Playground.

The funds will be used to construct new ADA-compliant restrooms, a pavilion and picnic area, splash pad and other water features, parking facilities and sidewalks. Additionally, the playground's existing basketball courts will get new surfacing, poles and hoops; while the Dek Hockey court fence will be replaced and new bleachers installed.

Connellsville will also benefit from a \$500,000 Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grant from the state Office of the Budget, which was awarded to AriRory Enterprises for construction of a micro-resort along the Great Allegheny Passage.

Once completed, the micro-resort will include lodging, retail shops, an outdoor gathering space, treehouses, cafe and more. Initial funding will be used for construction, which is slated to begin this year.

Another \$500,000 RACP grant was awarded to Outpost Cabins, LLC for major sitework at the Outpost at Confluence in Henry Clay Township. According to the grant award, the project aims to turn a "neglected property at a prominent corner" into a "local economic driver," through installation of new lodges.

Other recent grant awards include:

- A \$1.2 million CDBG CARES Act grant awarded to Fayette County for Phase II of the Fairchance Borough Water System Improvement Project. Funds will be used to replace several main distribution lines within the borough that are antiquated and highly compromised. Additionally, fire hydrants will be installed to help the borough with fire protection and emergency services. Phase II focuses on state Route 857, from the Green Street and Lyons Avenue intersection to Sheldon Avenue, and along Sheldon Avenue from 857 to Kyle Avenue.
- A \$1.5 million Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative grant awarded to Fayette County for construction of a Health Sciences Workforce Development Center at Fayette County Career and Technical Institute (CTI). The 6,000-sq. ft. facility will enhance the school's Licensed Practical Nursing Program and meet the region's growing healthcare workforce needs.
- A \$500,000 RACP grant awarded to Fayette County for ongoing work at the Gallatin Bank Building in Uniontown. Funds will be used for building stabilization and renovation of the third and fourth floors.

Many of these grants were acquired through Fayette County's partnership with Aspire Grant & Development, LLC. For more information about their work, visit www.aspiregrants.com.

Commissioner Chairman Dave Lohr said Fayette County has been "blessed to succeed where others have not," because of its "active and aggressive approach" to pursuing grants.

"We're thinking outside the box. That has not always been the case. Once upon a time, when presented with a project, if it fell outside the tried-and-true funding streams we had been relying on, we looked to internal funding and loans, or the project didn't get done," Lohr said. "We're now using a completely different approach, a different mindset. When presented with a project, we start by asking, 'Is there a grant that would help with this?' We've developed a wonderful collaboration between Art Cappella, our internal grant writer, and an independent grant-writing agency. It's made a huge difference in how we do business and what we're able to accomplish, all to the benefit of the citizens of Fayette County."

Commissioner Scott Dunn said working with Aspire Founder Michele Beener and her team has been a "game-changer."

“Anytime we’re awarded grant funding, it’s a great day in Fayette County,” Dunn said. “With Aspire’s help, we’re now able to pursue bigger and better funding opportunities that may not have been in the cards before. We plan to keep this momentum going through 2023 and beyond.”

Commissioner Vince Vicites said Fayette County has an “aggressive” grant team in Cappella and Aspire.

“We apply for every grant possible to help various projects. I personally use my years of contacts and working relationships with state and federal officials to help our chances of receiving these grants by writing letters of support for each grant,” Vicites said. “Our team has delivered millions of dollars in grant funding the past several years, and every grant dollar the county receives means that less local tax dollars are needed to fund projects that help Fayette County’s future.”

To learn more about other Fayette County grants, contact Art Cappella at acappella@fayettepa.org.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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