

Grand Island: Master plan project gets green light

BY KAREN CARR KEEFE
Senior Contributing Writer

The Town Board on Monday gave thumbs up to two measures that are expected to enhance recreational opportunities for Grand Islanders young, old and in-between.

• In the first, council members OK'd a bid of \$89,900 to complete the Parks, Recreation and Senior Services master plan. The bid was awarded to Labella Associates, subject to town attorney approval. The company projected a timeline of 18 to 24 months to complete the master plan.

• In the second, the board approved a quote from the company Surface America to replace the Miracle League field and playground surfaces for \$358,081.66.

The OK is contingent upon attorney approval. The town incurs no out-of-pocket expense on this because the funding is included as part of a \$1.1 million grant from Erie County for Miracle League upgrades.

The Miracle League serves individuals who can't be accommodated by established baseball leagues due to the special needs of their disabilities.

Three companies submitted bids on the recreation master plan project. Council member Tom Digati said Labella Associates was recommended because its proposal came in at a reasonable cost and boasted an expert staff of recreational professionals, according to a town committee's research.

Having a master plan can help in obtaining grant funding to then complete the work of building new facilities and establishing recreational programs, Town Board members said.

Digati said community engagement – getting a real feel for what residents want – should be a part of the recreation master plan.

In summarizing the committee's findings, Digati said Labella has "a deep bench when it comes to this particular type of planning, including having a certified park and recreation professional on the staff who would serve as a point person for putting together this type of plan."

The company "can focus on programming for youth, adults, adaptive needs and senior services, in

addition to facility needs," according to the Parks, Recreation and Senior Services master plan committee.

The tab for the first year of the master plan project is \$45,000. That includes \$35,000 from Erie County and \$10,000 from the town. Digati said it's hoped the county and town would share funding in a similar way for the second year of the project, which is budgeted at an additional \$44,900.

"Labella has proven experience creating master plans and in assisting in grant funding," the committee's report said. "The cost for Labella to help with grants comes out of the administrative portion of the grant, not from the town."

"I was impressed by everything

they seemed to know," Town Supervisor Peter Marston said. "They did research. They knew a lot about our town."

Digati credited committee chair Jim Sharpe for helping obtain county funds for the project.

"He basically had some contacts at the county and said to them, 'Hey, we are the only community in Erie County that doesn't have a county park,'" Digati said. "The county doesn't spend any money whatsoever with respect to parks on Grand Island."

• In other business, the board awarded a bid of \$19,116.90 to 84 Lumber for construction materials for a Nike Base Park picnic shelter. The construction of the picnic shelter will go out to bid separately.

Jose Garcia sworn in as newest Grand Island Town Board member

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ALICE GERARD

Senior Contributing Writer

Jose Garcia, who was sworn in as Grand Island's newest council member on Nov. 25 at a ceremony in Town Hall, said his hope is "to help this Town Board push along and perfect the projects that are facing

the town to include our sewer improvements and water upgrades. My goal is to try and come up with a standard of how people should expect their town to look like."

Garcia was elected Nov. 5 in a special election to fill the board seat vacated a year ago when Peter Marston was elected as



Above: Jose Garcia with his wife, Dorothy, and his daughters, Samantha and Isabella. • At right: Garcia signs the town's logbook after being sworn into office.



supervisor. Garcia's term will expire at the end of 2025.

Garcia talked about his hopes for the Island.

"Aesthetically, I would love our main thoroughfare to be

pleasing to anyone driving through and to invite people to engage in our local commerce, to visit our local stores and restaurants," he said. "I also want to encourage building in the



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vacant areas on Grand Island Boulevard to try and join our commercial footprint together.

"There are some vacant parcels – and some of them are challenging to develop, based on the DEC regulations and other matters – but I think we should be encouraging and working toward getting those sites developed and bringing in the types of businesses that Grand Islanders want and need, to include more entertainment."

Garcia said being the newest member of the Town Board is like "drinking from a fire hose, but (I am) learning quickly, and everyone has been wonderful in Town Hall, giving me advice and advising me how things work. I'm incredibly honored and humbled. It's a very special thing, and I'm very proud to be a part of it."

Garcia said he is grateful for the support he received during the process of being elected.

"I absolutely would love to thank my wife and children – Dorothy, Samantha and Isabella – for unquestionably supporting this endeavor," he said. "In addition, I would like to thank Erie County Sheriff John Garcia, the Grand Island Republican Committee, the entire Town Board, and everyone on Grand Island who stood up for me and came out and supported me and trusted me with their town."