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State money to help fix trails in Waveny

By Colleen Flaherty

Waveny Park may or may not get a skating rink, but it will definitely be getting \$150,000 from Hartford.

The money comes as a Small Town Economic Assistance Program State grant, and will go toward improving drainage along the neediest parts of Waveny's four-mile trail, according to Senior Engineer Tiger Mann.

"We're picking out the worst areas," he said, explaining that a thorough upgrade of the Waveny's entire trail would cost \$600,000.

With this \$150,000 grant, said Mr. Mann, he'll address the mile of trail along the Merritt Parkway at South Avenue, which gets "wiped out every rainstorm."

The Public Works Department will install a drainage system on both sides of the mile of trail, as well as larger drainage crossings underneath it.

"Right now, they're undersized, so they flood," Mr. Mann said. "You'll see the gullies in the trail. Anybody who walks the trail knows."

Mr. Mann said he did not know when construction would begin, but in a press release Wednesday, First Selectman Jeb Walker said that work on the trails would begin in early June.

"The trails are frequently used by hundreds of strollers, walkers and runners on a daily basis," he said. "It is imperative we keep them safe for all to use."

"Waveny Park offers so many benefits for the people of New Canaan — it really is a community gathering place," said 125th District State Rep. John W. Hetherington, a New Canaan Republican. "When the trail improvements are complete, the park will offer even greater opportunity for exercise and enjoyment while making sure the environment is protected and preserved."

While this Small Town grant is a victory for Waveny Park, it is also a victory for Fairfield County towns like New Canaan, 147th District State Rep. William Tong, a Democrat, told the Advertiser.

"As a freshman, I learned right away how hard it is to get people in Hartford to pay attention to New Canaan's needs. But we worked hard, pushed our fellow legislators on both sides of the aisle, as well as the Governor, and it paid off. I'm hopeful we can build on this and continue to fight for projects important to New Canaan."

"The trail system at Waveny Park is an open invitation to enjoy nature all the year round," Gov. Jodi Rell said in a March 28 press release announcing the grant, in which she thanked Rep. Tong for his support. "However, the trails need to be updated to enhance drainage and improve access. This is the kind of project that benefits the entire region and I am pleased to see it moving forward."

"I am delighted that the State will be a partner with the Town of New Canaan in improving this outstanding recreational facility," said 36th District State Sen. William H. Nickerson, a member of the Bond Commission. "I thank Gov. Rell for her decision to make this possible. The Governor announced today that she was faced with the task of paring \$50 million in original STEAP applications down to the \$20 million allocated today, and I appreciate her including New Canaan."

He added, "I also want to thank First Selectman Jeb Walker for his initiative in applying for this STEAP grant and the persuasive job he did in making the case for this grant."

A Small Town grant application was originally filed to fund the paving of Irwin Park's trails, but was withdrawn after those funds were raised privately this fall. A new application for Waveny Park, said Town Administrator George Maranis, was filed February 26.

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