

## Gordonsville considers pool, park options

Discusses on-site expansion,  
purchasing vacant VFW property

BY HILARY HOLLADAY  
Staff Writer

Dix Memorial Pool in Gordonsville is the only public pool in Orange County, but the modest facility built in 1956 is not large enough to accommodate today's swim meet competitions and is showing its advanced age.

Verling Park, adjacent to the pool, is of nearly the same vintage. Located partially on land owned by CSX Railroad, the park is pretty and green—but small.

With those facts in mind, and a desire to accommodate local residents and visitors seeking a spacious park where they can swim, play ball and enjoy a picnic, Gordonsville Town

Council has been slowly piecing together a plan for a new pool and a bigger park.

One tangible sign of progress is the town's purchase of 112 Linney St., at the corner of Linney and Piedmont streets, on the same block as the pool and park. According to Town Manager Debbie Kendall, the demolition of the house on the property, scheduled for later this month, will open up more space for the park.

But Kendall and members of Gordonsville Town Council are grap-

pling with a number of interrelated issues before they can move ahead with the proposed park and pool project that has been under discussion for more than a year.

One crucial issue is the most logical location of a larger pool. Another is the nagging matter of CSX's ownership of the land where Verling Park sits. Still another is the estimated \$1.2 million cost of the proposed project.

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Adding a tantalizing variable to the puzzle is the recently vacated VFW property at 10271 W. Gordon Ave. just outside town limits. Council members are asking whether this property would be a good place for a new community park and large pool.

If so, they also are wondering if the old pool could be replaced with a splash park where children could frolic among jetting fountains from late spring through early fall.

Preliminary discussions of the park and pool project began in the summer of 2017, when the Town of Gordonsville hosted several community meetings to find out what local residents would like to see in an updated community park.

The town then hired Land Planning Design Associates of Charlottesville to draft a conceptual plan reflecting input from the community meetings. Funding for the plan came from the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)—more specifically, donors to PEC with an interest in seeing the park project come to fruition.

Kendall said the draft plan, presented to the council last fall, includes an expanded pool and a renovated park area at Verling Park.

When will council decide what to do next? A cautious Kendall said, "That depends on the disposition of the park property itself, the part owned by CSX."

But CSX may not be a stumbling block. Kendall said CSX is aware of the town's interest in acquiring the park property.

"We have reached out to [CSX executives] and are working with them now on that particular matter. We don't expect any issues in working with them on this. We haven't had any issues with them so far. It just takes time to work that through," she explained.

Mayor Bob Coiner said the town previously tried to get CSX to give the park property to the town. Now, council is planning to go back to the table with the railroad and work out a deal even if it comes with a price tag.

Coiner sounds more concerned about the location of an expanded pool than about negotiating with CSX.



PHOTO BY JEFF POOLE

Gordonsville officials are considering options to renovate or expand Dix Memorial Pool—the only public pool in Orange County. The pool and adjacent Verling Park, between Market Street and Linney Street, date to the mid-1950s.

"The bottom line of all this is making a pool work as part of the park," he said.

Building a larger pool on the Verling Park site would take a big bite out of the green space—and Coiner wants to preserve open land for recreational activities.

"If you let all the green space go, that's not good planning," he said.

Although some Gordonsville homeowners have enough land to accommodate ball games and other recreational activities, he pointed out that a typical quarter-acre lot offers limited options.

"You have room in the backyard for flowers, not a ball field," he quipped.

Both Coiner and town council member Elizabeth Samra are eager for the town to have a large new pool that will accommodate a swim team.

Stressing the importance of offering swimming lessons and instruction in water safety to local residents, especially children, Samra said a competition-sized pool would enable Gordonsville to participate fully in the Jefferson Swim League.

In the past, the regional swim league has allowed Gordonsville to have its own team, even though the Dix pool is too small to host regulation swim meets. For the season just ended, Kendall had

no luck hiring a swim team coach or swimming instructor.

The hope is that a spiffy new pool would be a game-changer.

Coiner said a competition-sized pool would bring in visiting swim teams and their families. Once these newcomers got a glimpse, he speculated, they would want to explore Gordonsville and patronize its businesses.

That, of course, would be happy news for all involved with economic development. But funding a new pool, renovating Verling Park, perhaps buying land from CSX, maybe buying the VFW property and possibly throwing in a splash park for good measure—that is a puzzle of its own.

Kendall said there are grant opportunities available through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. However, such grants typically require matching funds. And in this case, matching funds will mean asking local citizens to open up their wallets and pitch in.

For Gordonsville residents wondering when they will be diving into a bigger pool and strolling around a fancier park, Kendall advises patience: "Know that the town council is committed to developing this plan and completing this project as time and funding will allow."