

Notes on Stony Creek restroom project

Last fall, the restroom building committee had met with the first selectman and town engineer and several options were discussed for the project, one of them being a mobile restroom, on a trailer. We told the first selectman that we were open to all options, but preferred a permanent structure; should that not be possible, we would consider any alternatives. He said he would look into trailers, but we have not had further updates.

Subsequently last fall, I spoke to the town engineer and learned that the town had not applied for needed flood plain certification because first selectman had not directed the application be made and because she didn't want to spend the money and effort (A2 survey needed, etc) if the project was dead on arrival. She also told me that the STEAP grant could not be used to buy a trailer restroom.

After that conversation, I spoke to Jeff Caiola at DEEP, who has authority over this approval, about the project and he affirmed he had had conversations with the town engineer but application. I sent him all our drawings and site plan and the grant description, and asked for his guidance on how to proceed. I had no response.

This spring, Mike Infantino told me that, in a meeting with the first selectman on other association matters, he was told that we "had turned down" the mobile restroom idea. I told Mike that was not the case and, moreover, we did not have the authority to "turn down" such an option.

In late March, I again attempted to contact Caiola at DEEP and eventually managed to speak with him. He told me that our designated location almost certainly would not be approved, because it is too exposed to the flood zone (the old one as well as the new flood zone created by FEMA, as well as the stricter guidelines applied to building in those areas). The only possible location he saw was in the left front corner of Bayview Park, at the corner of Sachem and TI Rd, where the water fountain is. I explained that our location was chosen in large part for consideration of neighboring residences. He replied that it is a public park. He also told me he was unsure that regs would allow a basement (needed for a composting toilet, which is the only system we can use in that location).

We also discussed the mobile restroom, and he said we could do that without a permit. When I brought up the STEAP grant, he said he would have an informal chat with the DEEP official in charge of it, and called back to say that OPM, which issues the grants, does not want bonded money used for equipment, only "brick and mortar" projects.

With Sandy not yet returned home, Greg and I met Tuesday with the first selectman and the town engineer. We discussed what would be necessary to put a composting toilet in the park: even if at the very corner of Sachem and Thimble Islands Rd, you would need two feet of fill; if we put it in the middle of the wall along Sachem, which we had considered, it would require six feet of fill and presumably an escalator to get into the thing.

As Greg points out, it is technologically possible to build a flood proof basement that could accommodate our composting system, but it has become nearly impossible within the regulations (you can build in a flood zone if you provide the necessary elevation of fill).

There was some consensus that the only way we can improve the restroom facilities in Stony Creek, within the existing regulations and the available properties, is with a mobile trailer.

They are themselves not aesthetically pleasing, but are far, far more pleasant on the inside than the disgusting cans we now have (even Janice refused to go in them when she came to Stony Creek on a job recently; they had not been pumped after a weekend). I submitted some cost numbers for mobile toilets, and we discussed the possibility of staging one next to the post office, which would require leasing a parking space. If our grant could be used, we could buy two, one for the p.o. and one for Bayview. These are advantageous in that they are far nicer inside than the things we have, and can be moved away in the event of a serious storm. I am sure there is some way we could make the exterior a little more palatable, with plants or screen fencing, or even a pavilion roof. MAKE

We also discussed maintenance, and learned that all the public restroom facilities in Branford have full time seasonal attendants, except ours, which never have been pumped as frequently as they should be (Alex Paluzzi at park and rec contracts this, I think without a clue as to actual use). Greg and I emphasized the critical need for constant maintenance.

We left the meeting with Stan endeavoring to contact a high-ranking friend at OPM about the possibility that there could be a waiver and the grant money applied to mobile restrooms (STEAP grants are used for playgrounds, which also have a limited life). Failing that, the first selectman said the town would buy one, or rent on a trial basis, but a "funding source would have to be found.

My friend at OPM recommended, rather than attempting to get a waiver of the STEAP grant criteria, that the town apply for a Local Capital Improvement Project grant, which are available for "improvements to a public park" and flood plain management. The town could ask that the STEAP grant be used for another purpose, he said. I am providing that guidance to the first selectman and town engineer.