

# Livonia prepares for \$5M overhaul of Shelden Park, but closed library a sore spot



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The Detroit News

*Livonia* — On the sunny first day of July when the midday temperature hovered above 80 degrees, Shelden Park sat empty.

The pool shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic and never reopened. Weeds have poked up through cracks in the tennis courts. The shuttered Noble Library branch, closed since 2019 because of mold issues and water damage, sits on Plymouth Road just north of the park, its neat landscaping belying its crumbling interior.

But the city of 93,100 residents plans to breathe new life into the park with a \$5 million improvement project, including a new pavilion and restrooms, replacing the pool with a splash pad, adding pickleball courts and replacing the tennis courts. Livonia hopes to begin early work later this year, such as site surveying and putting up fencing, and finish the project by the end of next summer.

"We pride ourselves on having a lot of park space available for folks, and that means all different experiences that we can create for them," Livonia Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan said in an interview at Shelden Park. "This one is the piece that really needed an upgrade and a facelift. ... We need to bring better amenities so that people start using it."



Brosnan said the park doesn't see a lot of use currently, despite its location in one of the city's most densely populated areas, and she hopes a new splash pad and pickleball courts will attract people again. The pool doesn't have any shade, a shortcoming of its design, and Brosnan said a splash pad will be less expensive to maintain and accessible to people with disabilities.

Livonia resident Kelly Fleck, 48, was the only person at Shelden Park at midday Tuesday. He said he comes three or four times a week during his lunch break from work. The pool's closure has been a detriment for the park, he said, because people go to other parks in the city instead.

"People just go to other pools, and they get crowded, too," Fleck said.

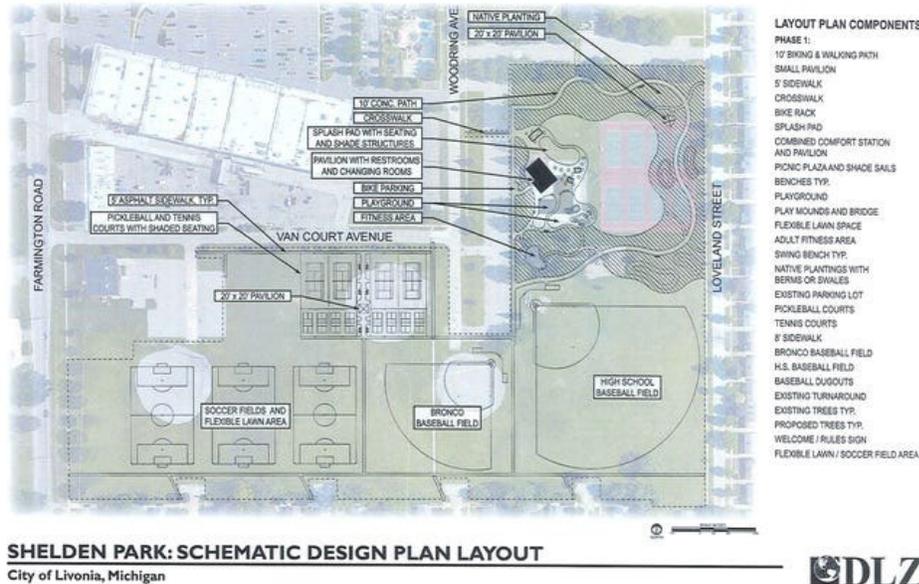


The project will be financed by a bond issue of up to \$5 million, the estimated cost. The City Council [plans to approve a notice of intent](#) to issue the bonds at its Monday meeting. The Plymouth Road Development Authority will take on 45% of the bond debt, and the city will repay the rest with money from its Parks and Recreation budget.

The city has also accepted a \$100,000 donation from Bill Brown Ford for the project, as well as a grant of more than \$140,000 from Wayne County for the redevelopment.

Not included in the redevelopment plan is the Noble Library branch. The building on Plymouth Road closed in 2019 because of mold issues and water damage. Livonia's library commission has recommended it no longer be used as a library because of the availability of the city's other branches. Brosnan said she intends to approach the City Council this year about funding to develop a master plan for the library's

future, something Livonia has done for other city amenities such as its parks and recreation facilities and an overhauled city center.



But the library's future has caused disagreement among some top city officials.

City Council President Brandon McCullough said he is frustrated that it has sat unused for so long and is not included in the redevelopment plan for Shelden Park. Raised in Livonia's south end, he grew up going to the Noble Library branch.

Though he recognizes the building isn't needed as a library anymore, the council president said it could be well used as space for nonprofits and other organizations providing community services. He said he has a "chip on his shoulder" about the issue.

"It's something that has pulled at my heartstrings and something that not gonna to let go," McCullough said.

"I love the (Shelden Park) development. I think that enhancing our parks is something we needed to do. I am totally not happy with not including Noble in this."

Brosnan told The Detroit News it doesn't make sense right now to devote city funds to the library without a clear idea of what it would be used for.

"We don't have a rationale for putting money into that building. So it becomes very difficult to take this building in isolation, without a master plan guiding, and appropriate funding for it," Brosnan said.

Brosnan declined to say what she would like to see done with the library. But she did say she does not want the building sold to a private owner.

"I am interested in figuring out how we create more value along the Plymouth Road corridor using that property," Brosnan said.

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