



(SUBMITTED ART)

Visitors to the Westwood Hills Nature Center stroll toward a raptor area in an artist's rendering of a planned facility.

## Center

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Sometimes people enter the existing building, see a group of students and leave due to the small space, the mayor said.

“We obviously don’t want that,” Spano said. “We want the public to be able to use this along with our students.”

The city’s Climate Action Plan means investments related to energy are necessary, he added.

To city staff, he said, “These projects are big and they’re tough. There’s always different decisions that you can make and different priorities that you could emphasize, but I think you all landed in a really, really good place.”

The council is scheduled to approve bid packages Monday, Nov. 19. Under the time line, the new building would be complete in 2020. The current building then would be deconstructed. The city plans to recycle materials when possible.

# Commission will pay for bog, rivers and ponds at nature center

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Visitors to a planned building at the Westwood Hills Nature Center will be able to learn about bogs and water quality through an anticipated new feature.

The Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission approached St. Louis Park officials about adding a new water feature north of the anticipated new nature center building, which would be located by an existing parking lot. The St. Louis Park City Council unanimously approved an agreement Oct. 1 in which the commission agreed to pay up to \$405,000 for its installation.

The water feature would include pedestrian bridges, interactive pumps and signs that would describe the bog and water cycle.

The feature would reduce the volume of stormwater runoff and help clear sediments and nutrients from the water.

The city had already planned on including landscaping that would help handle stormwater in front of the planned building, but the watershed district’s project will build upon that.

Nature center staff members plan to add to curriculum about watersheds to help educate students about bogs and stormwater.

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## Water

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The water feature north of the new building would run its entire length, said Westwood Hills Nature Center Manager Mark Oestreich.

A solar-powered pump would move water through the feature. People would be able to increase the flow using four hand-crank pumps. The solar-powered pump would cease moving the water after the sun set.

While running, the water will move through a series of shallow rivers into ponds. A company that rescues bogs in northern Minnesota would install a bog as part of the feature. The bog can be used to educate

students outside the classroom about a type of wetland that had been typical in the Twin Cities area but is not as prominent anymore due to development, Oestreich said.

After passing through the bog, the water would continue through a river into another pond and then would recirculate back underground.

A water feature that includes a waterfall near the existing building will remain, although it is not used for education as extensively as the new feature would be.

"We did such a great job planting sensitive plants in there that we don't get to use a lot of programs in there because the kids destroy it," Oestreich said. "We use it for observation. It's really a great spot for wellness, for reflection, for quiet space. We see that

being completely a different type of water feature than this one."

While planners anticipate adding benches for a peaceful spot to sit by the existing water feature, the new one will allow people to actually walk around in the shallow rivers, he said.

The water feature will become a focus of a four-hour program for fifth-graders that includes an overview of the nature center's Westwood Lake.

"We take them around the whole lake and show them different areas where the water flows off the street and into the lake and where it exits," Oestreich said. "I can see enhancing that program and then developing a middle school or high school curriculum as well and tying it in."

Panels and exhibits inside and outside the planned nature center building would tell the story of sustainability and environmental initiatives at the site.

Councilmember Rachel Harris said of the water feature, "This is a terrific feature and enhancement to a building that is already architecturally stunning."

Mayor Jake Spano said the agreement with the watershed commission is an example of the type of partnership the council has wanted to form.

"I think water is so important to this site because it is Westwood Lake, right?" he said. "Water plays a huge role on this site."

Councilmember Tim Brausen added, "This is a tremendous project for our community and for Bassett Creek."

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