



Compromise: Edgemont could get 6 parking spots in response to senior outcry



Edgemont Park improvements to the entrance and parking lot.
ADAM ANIK/ FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

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The town is investigating the possibility creating six parking spots at Edgemont Memorial Park after seniors lobbied the town over the lack of parking with the new configuration of the driveway and loss of the parking area.

Earlier in the year, the 15.5-acre Edgemont Memorial Park underwent a \$900,000 upgrade, which included a new parking area in front of the house, decorative benches, gas-like lights, widened paths, two new water fountains and the planting of 30 trees.



The plan with the six spots added.

But in March, the seniors who use the Edgemont House as the township's only current senior program facility discovered plans called for the parking lot to be aesthetically overhauled, from a blacktopped square to a curved, Belgium-block-lined driveway and grassy areas. Seniors learned then that the driveway would allow for parallel parking only along the curve which seniors said would be too difficult to maneuver. They were also concerned with safety issues getting from their cars to the building with no sidewalks.

Although the former parking lot did not have delineated spaces, seniors claim there were about 20 parking spots.

The council had maintained the renovations enhanced the green space which is foremost a park. Seniors however, have been attending meetings contending the town was responsible for providing parking for the approximately 400 seniors who use the facility monthly. They called for 25 parking spots.

Last month after 25 seniors attended the council meeting, a committee was formed with council members Rich McMahon, Robert Russo and Renée Baskerville, who later visited the park and came up with the compromise of six additional spots.

“We didn’t hear about the new parking configuration until March 19, after breaking ground on the lot,” said Ann Lippel, Chairman of the Montclair Senior Citizen Advisory. “We welcome the upgrades of the park, but no one reached out to us in a timely manner.”

At the June 26 council meeting, several seniors spoke during the public comment portion requesting not only more parking but also more barrier-free access.

Senior Patricia Kenshaft said the current parking conditions are “drastic and undermine public participation” at the house.

Belinda Plutz said the lack of parking was not only inconvenient for seniors, but for families with small children as well.

“There just simply isn’t enough parking. We need more parking, we need more access,” Plutz said.

Virginia Cornue said the town should seek both beauty and function.

Although he originally thought green space should be preserved, Russo said he did find parking problems.

“There is a parking deficit I believe, and there is parking difficulty, especially with seniors like myself,” Russo said.

Plans call for the six spaces to be added along the curve across from the house.

“This would be a compromise solution,” he said.

Russo emphasized that Edgemont Memorial Park should be considered a park, not a senior center. A permanent senior center should be sought out, he added.

Lippel agreed that there should be an official senior citizen center located elsewhere in town other than the park.

“We’ve been lobbying for a senior center somewhere in Montclair, but that does not negate the fact that the park house will still be offering programs for seniors,” Lippel said.

Baskerville felt the additional parking spaces would not take away from aesthetics. She recommended

designating four of the six spaces for handicapped accessibility, including further renovations to the ramp/drop-off area. She also pointed out that there was plenty of parking on Valley Road and on the side streets as well.

Parking issues may exist at other town parks and residents may now want to improve conditions at those locations, she said.

“We have to try to do the most good for the most people, but if we do this for this park would it open up the floodgates for other parks?” she said. Baskerville did concede more community activities are typically planned at Edgemont Park.

Deputy Mayor Robin Schlager who has lobbied for more green space and the aesthetics of the renovations said everyone seems happy with the look of the circle.

Lippel said that 25 parking spots were originally desired, even though they would not be aesthetically pleasing.

Editor's note: A previous version of this story conveyed the council had decided to create the six spots. The council has instead directed the town manager, engineer and architect to review the plans and come up with costs. It will be voted on at a later date.