

# The big reveal

## Public beach, playground, amphitheater all part of \$12.5M revamp at Lakefront Park



A new playground is among the improvements included with the transformation of Lakefront Park in Fox Lake. Most new amenities are expected to be complete in time for Memorial Day. (Joe Lewnard/jlewnard@dailyherald.com)



A band shell under construction is among the new attractions at the renovated of Lakefront Park in Fox Lake. Village officials are hoping the band shell and other amenities will be ready for Memorial Day. (Joe Lewnard/jlewnard@dailyherald.com)



Phase 1 of a \$12.5 million transformation of Lakefront Park in Fox Lake is expected to be complete by Memorial Day weekend. (Courtesy of Village of Fox Lake)



Improved parking is part of the transformation of Lakefront Park in Fox Lake. Officials hope the first phase of work is complete by Memorial Day. (Joe Lewnard/jlewnard@dailyherald.com)

Anticipation is building for the reveal of a transformed Lakefront Park as a refreshed community hub and catalyst for investment in Fox Lake's downtown.

"After a lot of work and planning, Fox Lake has a public beach," Mayor Donny Schmit recently posted on Facebook. "While there is still a lot of work to do, we are hoping to have it open for Memorial Day."

Besides having the only public access swimming beach on the Chain O' Lakes, Lakefront Park, known for scenic views of Nippersink

Lake, will be nearly unrecognizable to those who haven't visited in awhile. Nippersink Road remains the park's entry point but the rest has changed considerably.

An outdoor amphitheater for concerts and events, two outdoor pickleball courts, an enhanced splash pad, new playground, nature play area, restrooms and more are part of the first phase of a \$12.5 million revamp and expansion.

"We've been planning this for three years. We tried to meet everyone's needs," said Schmit, a Fox Lake native whose family has called the village home for generations. "I want to keep this a great place to raise a family and we didn't have a lot for the kids. The enhancements are intended for residents but also to attract development."

A boardwalk and floating pier won't be part of the grand opening but are considered Phase 1.5, meaning those features will come soon and long before Phase 2, said Jodi Luka, community and economic development director.

The Lakefront improvements began in 2018 with the hiring of a consultant to develop a master parks and recreation plan. Adopted the following year, it included a two-phased plan to revitalize the village's most visited park and acquire other lakefront property over time.

The design was finalized last spring and the village issued \$12.5 million in general obligation bonds to fund the transformation.

Officials during a ceremonial groundbreaking last June said the event signified the beginning of construction and realization of the village's collective aspirations.

"The park not only has a significant number of new amenities that will appeal to all ages, it will also contribute to a sense of health and wellness to the community as parks usually do," Luka said.

Fox Lake is seeking proposals to help draft the village's next comprehensive plan, which likely will see the upgraded park as a tool to attract new development.

"Having the park, so close to downtown, open and ready will support our efforts to increase development at the lake, downtown and all around the village," Luka added.

The beach was completed about week ago. A shade structure that will be available to rent is proceeding, and the playground is nearly done and awaiting a surface, said Jessica Chernich, assistant to the village administrator.

An outdoor play space called a mud kitchen is part of the mix to encourage sensory exploration and pretend play with dirt and other natural elements.

"We're expecting most everything to be complete prior to opening," Chernich said. "We'll be moving a lot of village events to that space."