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A mixture of youngsters and committee members break ground on the Diamond Discovery Zone all-inclusive park Thursday at Hidden Diamonds Park in Albion.

MATT GETTS

Ground broken: Diamond Discovery Zone

Completion of Noble County's first all-inclusive park set for late summer/fall 2027

BY MATT GETTS
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ALBION — It's far from the first step taken in the project, but the Diamond Discovery Zone planned for Hidden Diamonds Park marked a milestone Thursday night.

The committee that spurred the efforts, aided by bunches of children, helped break ground on the project that will bring Noble County's first all-inclusive park to fruition.

Construction is set to begin in the spring, with completion targeted for late summer or early fall

next year.

The total cost of the project is \$520,000, with \$450,000 being put toward the playground equipment. The remainder will fund bringing power and water service to the location, fencing and curbing, among other costs.

The website PlayWorld.com provides a definition for both ADA accessible and inclusive playgrounds.

"Accessible: Any playground that can be entered or reached without challenge, making it open to any and every child, can be considered accessible. For example, a wheelchair-accessible playground is designed to allow wheelchairs to easily maneuver between pieces of equipment so anyone in a wheelchair can access all the playground features without issue."

"Inclusive: An inclusive playground helps children of all backgrounds and abilities feel a sense of belonging by ensuring every child can fully engage with the equipment without limitations. An inclusive playground enriches play for everyone by providing a variety of sensory experiences that children of all abilities can enjoy."

PlayWorld.com calls

all-inclusive parks the "gold standard" for parks.

The website explains that "Inclusive playgrounds expand upon accessibility by creating an environment that encourages both disabled and able-bodied kids to interact with the playground equipment and each other to build connections."

It's really a togetherness thing.

Committee member Jamie Howard's son, Levi, is in a wheelchair. That's what spurred her on.

"This project has been a labor of love," Howard said. And seeing everything come together?

Howard spoke during Thursday's ceremony, which was attended by 40 or so community members.

For Howard, it shows Albion is a community "where (Levi is) seen, valued and wanted."

"Thank you so much for making this happen."

Committee co-chair Jalyssa Kessler praised her fellow committee members, the park board and the various civic and philanthropic wings of the community that made it all happen.

"This project has been a true team effort," Kessler said. "We're incredibly proud

of how this project has come along."

Kessler said having a playground that is accessible for all isn't simply an add-on.

"It's a fundamental part," she said.

Committee co-chair Casey Myers said the plan for an additional park at Hidden Diamonds has been in the words for more than a decade.

About 10 years ago, trees were planted to allow for the space now going to be utilized near the main parking area and ball diamonds.

SEE PARK, page A3

MATT GETTS
A section of the nice crowd that gathered for the ground breaking at the Diamond Discovery Zone all-inclusive park at Hidden Diamonds Park in Albion on Thursday.



Diamond Discovery Zone committee co-chair Jalyssa Kessler makes some remarks during Thursday's groundbreaking for the park at Hidden Diamonds Park in Albion. At left is committee co-chair Casey Myers.

MATT GETTS

INFORMATION

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Albion leaf pick-up scheduled to begin Oct. 13

BY MATT GETTS
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ALBION — It might be early in the season to be getting your rakes ready, but the Albion Street Department is planning for the annual leaf-pick.

Street Department Superintendent Corey Miller announced at last week's Albion Town Council

meeting that leaves will begin to be picked up by the town beginning Oct. 13. The end date is scheduled for Dec. 9.

Both dates are weather — and department workload — determinant.

Also at the regularly scheduled meeting:

- Albion Fire Chief Bob Amber reported that the

Sept. 13 Albion Fire Department Block Party was a success, with plans already in the works to repeat the event in 2027.

"We had wonderful weather," Amber told the council. "We had a good crowd."

Councilwoman Chris Magnuson asked Amber about how plans were

progressing with the fire department's new auxiliary building were progressing.

In September 2024, the council voted to officially reject all of the bids for the project which would have built a 3,200 square foot auxiliary fire building north of the current fire station.

With the majority of the Albion Town Council citing

the expense at its Aug. 13 meeting, a motion to request \$30,000 in additional funding TIF funding for the \$230,000 project died without a second.

The proposed building, directly north of the current fire station, was 40-feet by 80-feet. The building could have housed, among other

SEE LEAF, page A3

Albion council flips on sale of old town hall building

BY MATT GETTIS
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ALBION — The Albion Town Council spent a lot of time at its Sept. 8 meeting before deciding to put its old town hall up for sale.

On Tuesday, the council spent a lot of time undoing what it had done on Sept. 8.

The council voted 4-1 Tuesday to rescind the 3-2 vote it had made at that prior meeting to to put up the 2,288 square-foot old town hall up for public bid with a minimum ask of \$120,000.

It then rescinded that just-made vote when the original motion contained giving the Albion Redevelopment Commission the authority to demolish the old town hall which is located at 110 S. Orange St.

By the time the dust had settled, the council voted to work with the Albion Redevelopment Commission on the RDC's proposal to hire an architect to get tentative costs to build public restrooms and a pavilion on the site.

A joined meeting with the RDC and Town Council will be held to hash out some

issues — including whether the RDC wants to run the project or simply fund the project as the council runs it.

At its Sept. 16 meeting, the RDC had voted to recommend to the town council that it rescind its vote from the week before so the RDC could fund a project that would solve a couple of issues: the need for public restrooms in the town's downtown and the need for a covered, community space.

The council has been discussing what to do with the South Orange Street building since January 2025, when its former tenants — the Noble County Economic Development Corp. and the Convention and Visitors Bureau — moved their respective operations to the Community Learning Center in Kendallville.

The condition of the old town hall building was a factor in both groups' decisions to leave. An extensive inspection of the property revealed multiple deficiencies which need to be addressed.

Remedying those



MATT GETTIS

The former Albion Town Hall, shown in this file photo, has been vacant after the Noble County Economic Development Corporation and the Noble County Convention & Visitors Bureau moved out in January 2025.

deficiencies figured to be cost-prohibitive.

The council has been discussing what to do with the building ever since. In June, it put together a request for proposal form on its website with a deadline of this month.

On Aug. 26, 2025, the council discussed two proposals.

A businessman expressed interest in purchasing the building, with the next requested step for the

Magnuson said.

Councilman Darold Smolinske had seemed to agree that the RDC's 11th-hour proposal had come too late.

"It would have worked earlier," Smolinske said. "We're too far down the road to reverse our decision."

RDC member Mike Selby said that the RDC, which is responsible for recommending the spending of TIF funds, was unaware the issue to sell the building was going to come up at the Sept. 8 meeting.

"Yes, we are late to the game," Selby said.

Councilman Zane Gray made the motion to rescind the original vote from Sept. 8. Councilwoman Abby Lindsay provided the second.

When Council President Vicki Jellison brought the matter for a vote, Gray and Lindsay both voted to rescind. The measure hung in the balance before Smolinske eventually also voted yes.

After Smolinske's vote, Jellison made it a 4-1 decision, with Magnuson voting again.

The vote tally fell along an identical line when Gray made a motion to rescind his original motion made earlier that meeting.

Town attorney Kurt Bachman told the council he had worked with another community on a similar restroom project, and that price tag had come close to \$600,000 — and that didn't include a pavilion.

According to Albion Clerk-Treasurer Carol Selby, TIF 1, which umbrellas the area the old town hall is located, currently has \$1.5 million in it. TIF 2 has \$1.7 million.

The council will still need to figure out a way to fund putting a new roof on its current Albion Municipal Building.

Those same TIF monies would be necessary — at least in part — to fund the new roof.

In August 2025, the RDC balked at the high price of a 40-year roofing solution, saying it didn't want to spend so much money on that project.

The council at that time pushed the project off until 2027.

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PARK: Council president praises community

FROM PAGE A1

"We saved this area for a playground," Myers said. "I didn't expect it would be this big or expensive."

Myers said getting the right people involved has been key.

"Just getting the right team together has been a lifesaver," Myers said. "It shows you the support of the the whole county in general."

Albion Town Council

Praised the committee and the entire community for how it has rallied around the effort.

"This is an incredible project," she said. "They have put in a lot."

LEAF: High level of code violations in August

FROM PAGE A1

equipment, the department's rescue boat which is currently located in the main fire station, the tables and chairs used for community gatherings at the station, the department's survival trailer and spare hose.

Amber said at that time that moving at least some of that equipment would allow more room for the town's trucks.

The council gave the fire department the authority to resubmit the projection, which Amber has done.

Plans are now in the hands of the state's building department for approval.

- Albion Town Marshal Scott Cole reported that his department had an unusually high number of high-grass and weed warnings issued in August.
- Cole said a wet August was the determining factor.
- The Albion Plan Commission's meeting on Oct. 7 figures to be busy with a discussion on permit fees.

Because of a new state law, new fees have to be set by Dec. 31.

After that date, the process required to increase fees will be much more intensive.

The plan commission also need to schedule a public hearing to go over its current Unified Development Ordinance before Dec. 31 — again a requirement made by new legislation.

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