

Residents work for children's playground

■ The new park — tentatively called Placid Way Park — could be ready by next summer if things go smoothly.

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Alicia Zarbo was taking a walk with her three children on a warm day last February when she realized they were going in a circle around the neighborhood. There was no place to go.

"They needed a park, she decided. Through the grapevine in her subdivision, Traver Vistas-Traver Lakes in north Ann Arbor, she was advised to talk to Teresa Welsh, a neighbor who had come to the same conclusion a couple years earlier.

"It had been on my list of things to do since 1990," Welsh said. "I needed somebody to team up with." Since February, the two women and Tom Litzler, a homeowner in the neighboring Foxfire development, have led the fight for a small children's park on a strip of land between their subdivisions.

They have talked to city officials, written letters, lobbied for funding, attended meetings, conducted meetings, surveyed their neighbors, held fund-raisers, drummed up neighborhood support, picked out play-ground equipment, developed a preliminary site plan, and offered to assemble a volunteer corps to install play equipment and keep the project's costs down. They hope to raise \$12,500 and convince the city's Park Advisory Commission to match it.

They estimate that at least 70 people have helped out one way or another. "The level of support has been incredible," Welsh said.

The land the residents have their eyes on is about an acre and a half that had been intended for the extension of Tuebingen Parkway north to Dhu Varren Road. Two years ago, homeowners successfully lobbied against the road project, leaving the site vacant.



NEWS PHOTO • ROBERT CHASE

Teresa Welsh, left, and Alicia Zarbo are hoping to make this vacant parcel of land on Tuebingen Parkway into a park.

Developer Robert Guenther is giving the property to the city and has graded and seeded the plot and paved a walkway from one end to the other.

While the city has no money set aside for the project, the Park Advisory Committee may agree, in November or December, to match money raised by the residents.

It's uncommon but not unprecedented for residents to initiate a park project, said Tom Raynes, manager of park planning and development for the city.

In the past, Ann Arbor residents lobbied, worked and/or raised money for Sylvan, Rose and White parks and park projects near some local elementary schools, among others. "It certainly is not the rule," Raynes said.

But such an effort gives a neighborhood pride and a sense of ownership and responsibility for the park that often spurs them to watch out for vandalism and other problems.

"And that really helps quite a bit," he said. If all goes well, the new park — informally called Placid Way Park — could be ready by next summer, along with Tuebingen Park, another neighborhood park that the city plans to develop nearby.

For the parks department, the decision on Placid Way Park will affect how they develop Tuebingen Park, because they want the two sites to complement each other.

For example, if Placid Way is designed for young children as proposed, Tuebingen Park will be geared toward older kids.

The project and its spinoff activities — fund-raising ice cream socials, garage and bake sales, and an ongoing Tupperware sale, for example — have brought people in the area together, Welsh said.

"It's really a good feeling to know your neighbors. ... It's really made the neighborhood much more close-knit than it was in the past," she said. They hope a neighborhood park will continue bringing them together in the future.

