



# Vineland gets design drawings for 'all-inclusive' park. Here's what it would include

Joseph P. Smith, Cherry Hill Courier-Post  
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VINELAND — A year after hiring engineers, Vineland now has a good sense of what the first city playground specifically designed for children and adults with disabilities is going to offer and look like. The financial framing of the multi-million-dollar “Jake’s Park” project also firmed up at the City Council meeting Tuesday night.

## One of a kind for Vineland area

“We are so excited with the final concept,” said Mayor Anthony Fanucci. “A lot of careful thought has gone into the design, and it will be the only park of its kind in the area.”

The new park is going in the Joseph E. Romano Youth Sports Complex off Maple Avenue. The complex is on state-owned land the city leases.

## Price tag has climbed

The total project price tag now is nearly \$5 million, much of that due to the COVID-19 pandemic’s continuing impact on supply chains and material costs, said City Administrator Robert Dickenson.



A ‘Jake’s Place’ playground that the city of Vineland will build is to include this equipment in one area. The park will be in the Joseph E. Romano Youth Sports Complex off Maple Avenue. The engineering drawing is from February 2023.

The council on Tuesday night adopted a bond ordinance appropriating \$1.2 million for the park. Additionally, the city has a previously obtained \$1.2 million grant from New Jersey Green Acres Program, giving it \$2.4 million in hand.

The City Council also approved seeking another Green Acres grant of more than \$2.5 million to cover the cost inflation. City Hall promises waiting to hear from Trenton will not affect its timetable to complete construction in late spring 2024.

## Sensory garden, splash space

The city says the final design includes eight distinct areas. Seven areas feature a variety of inclusive equipment and a sensory garden for children and adults on the autism spectrum. Most areas have permanent canopies against bad weather. The eighth area is an “aquatic splash” space.

Vineland plans to build a version a “Jake’s Place,” an “all-inclusive park” concept named after Jacob Myles Cummings-Nasto. The original Jake’s Place playground is in Cherry Hill.

Cummings-Nasto <<https://www.buildjakesplace.org/ourinspiration>> died at age 2 from a rare heart condition that kept him from using typical playgrounds.



An engineering drawing from February 2023 shows a play area that is planned for a ‘Jake’s Place’ playground that the city of Vineland will build in its Joseph E. Romano Youth Sports Complex off Maple Avenue.

City Solicitor Richard Tonetta said a 2018 state law directs all counties have at least one all-inclusive park, and the state prioritizes grants for the purpose. The park concept is “phenomenal,” he said.

## Inclusive park to be “destination place”

“And the thing about it is ... not only does it benefit the family and the kids, but it’s a destination place,” Tonetta told council members last week. “People come from all over to go to these parks.”

“I’ll guarantee the (Vineland) Developmental Center will have everybody out there, once it’s done,” Dickenson said.

Dickenson said the city would like to have the park where the Vineland Blitz Flag Football team was going to create fields at the complex.

“But now, we’re in the process of moving Blitz from there over to Gittone Park,” Dickenson said. “So, we’re going to look into having the Jake’s Park possibly inside the fenced area where the football field was.”

Initial city interest in the project dates to 2019. In February 2021, it let a contract with Vannote-Harvey Associates for design and construction oversight roles.

*Joe Smith is a N.E. Philly native transplanted to South Jersey more than 30 years ago, keeping an eye now on government in South Jersey. He is a former editor and current senior staff writer for The Daily Journal in Vineland, Courier-Post in Cherry Hill, and the Burlington County Times.*

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