



Ray Starr, owner of Ray Starr Masonry and Roof Restoration, removes the old retaining wall on the south side of West Park Drive at Sunken Gardens in Huntington on Monday, June 21. The wall demolition is part of a larger project to restore the masonry in the park. Photo by Matt Murphy.

Grant pushes restoration forward

By

MATT MURPHY

Work is progressing on the newest phase of the Sunken Gardens restoration project, thanks to a grant from the Federal Historic Preservation Fund administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources

Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.

In this phase of restoration, the west retaining wall near the entrance of the tunnel on the south side of West Park Drive will be replaced, after it was determined that neither the wall

nor the soil behind the wall was stable, said Denise Bard, superintendent of the Huntington Parks Department.

"We need to preserve the park now before it costs more money in the long run," Bard said.

Indiana Landmarks, formerly the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, was the main sponsor of the grant, and Cathy Wright of IL's North Central Field Office in Wabash wrote the grant itself.

Wright said the Huntington Historic Preservation

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tion Review Board, of which she is also part, decided to push Sunken Gardens as a possible grant recipient in 2008, and in 2009, the DNR announced that Sunken Gardens had received federal funding for the east footbridges, masonry staircases and the retaining wall.

In addition to the federal funds, Huntington Alert, a local non-profit dedicated to historic awareness and preservation, donated \$25,000 it had received from the Efrogmson Family Fund, part of the Central Indiana Community

Foundation. Other local matches as well as state money were all combined for the project.

The east footbridge was remodeled in 2009, while restoration of the staircases was completed earlier this year. The retaining wall was scheduled to be complete by June 1, but due to the discovery of the unstable soil and the fragility of the rock, the entire wall will have to be replaced.

The deterioration of the wall prevents accurate restoration because new stone will have to be used,

unlike the restored staircases, which use all the original stone.

"It's gotten to the point of safety," Bard said.

A gas line supported by the wall and the soil behind it is also in jeopardy if the wall would have collapsed.

The work is being performed by Starr Masonry of North Manchester. The retaining wall follows restoration of the West Park Drive bridge, which was completed with a grant in 1999; the west footbridge, restored with Park Department funds in 2008;

the east footbridge, completed with grant money in spring 2009; and the staircases, completed this spring.

Bard says the Park Department will continue to look for funding to restore the more stable masonry parts of Sunken Gardens next year.

Sunken Gardens will remain open for patrons during construction, especially as Bard noted that weddings are scheduled for the park each weekend through the end of the summer.