

## Our Town

# Southington lucky as Rell looks to cut bonding promises

By ED HARRIS  
 Editor

As Gov. Jodi Rell looks to clear some space on the state's credit card, some long-awaited state funds for local projects are on the chopping block.

"The bottom line is the state has reached its debt limit," said Adam Liegeot, a spokesman for the governor's office. "Connecticut's credit card is maxed out. Hundreds of millions of dollars worth of old bond authorizations need to be canceled."

Rell has proposed repealing more than 300 projects on the state's bonding list that total nearly \$390 million. The governor has final approval over what projects make the agenda for state's bonding commission.

Although the projects slated to be cut have gained legislative approval, no money has been allocated for the most majority of the projects and they have been languishing in bonding limbo for years.

Rell's proposal would further delay a planned expansion of Lake Compounce Amusement Park's water park.

Included in the proposed bond cancellations is a \$3.3 million grant to the town to move a section of Mount Vernon Road. Moving the road is a necessary step before Lake Compounce can begin a \$20 million expansion of its water park.

Plans to expand the water park have been in the



State bonding issues could cut into Lake Compounce's expansion plans.

works for the past several years, and the grant was anticipated to be on the bonding commission's agenda for last year.

Although the funds are designated for Southington, area officials have been touting the expansion project for years as an economic development boom for the region.

Bristol Mayor Art Ward said the expansion of the park would mean more jobs

for the region and more revenue as the larger water park would attract more people to the area.

State Representative Zeke Zalaski (D-Southington) agreed, stating that the funding would have been a win for the town.

"It was going to be a windfall for Southington," Zalaski said.

Zalaski said that the funds were not put in the

bonding agenda because Rell believed it to be an earmark for state Senator Tom Colapietro (D-Bristol).

After years of waiting for the state funding, patience at the park is wearing thin.

Sara Webb, director of marketing for Lake Compounce, said the park has already invested money into the project, including paying for design and planning work to move the road.

The last piece yet to fall into place is the state funding. But, as the time has passed, Webb said park officials are now considering to just move the road itself.

In a past interview, Lake Compounce General Manager Jerry Brick has said that if the park had to pay to move the road itself the money would come out of the funds to expand the water park.

No decision has been made yet. "But," Webb said, "It's definitely something we are looking at moving forward with sooner rather than

later."

Southington still has a few other items on the bonding list, though the town no longer needs the money for the redevelopment of the drive-in theatre property and \$150,000 for the reconstruction of the intersection of Marion Avenue and Mount Vernon Road are still listed as bonds.

Two years ago the former Speaker of the House James Amann used money

from a discretionary fund to finance the redevelopment at the drive-in. Work is currently ongoing at the property.

Zalaski said the town went ahead on the reconstruction of Marion Avenue and Mount Vernon Road on its own, due to the critical safety hazard of the intersection.

"We tried to go back after [to recoup the money]," Zalaski said.

Reporter Elio Gugliotti contributed to this story.

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