

Caramoor grounds improvement plan moves forward

By JESS FASANO

Caramoor, the year-round cultural center located at 149 Girdle Ridge Road, Katonah, received preliminary site plan approval from the Town of Bedford Planning Board on Tuesday to make significant improvements to enhance the safety and experience of its visitors.

Caramoor aims to make the improvements over the course of approximately one year, with construction starting Aug. 1, immediately after its 2019 Summer Festival.

‘Our primary goal is to follow the aesthetic of Caramoor that’s there now.’

—JEFFREY HAYDON, CARAMOOR CEO

Plans call for construction to finish before the opening of Caramoor’s 2020 summer season, which will mark the venue’s 75th anniversary as a public destination.

Caramoor board member William Cordiano is leading the \$5 million construction project, dubbed the Visitor Experience Enhancement Project. JMC Site Development Consultants, based in Armonk, developed plans for the site improvements.

The Caramoor campus covers an approximately 80-acre site. Main elements include the historic Rosen House, Venetian Theater, Spanish Courtyard, Sunken Garden and Education Center.

The proposed work area of less than 2 acres is located in the center of the site. According to project leaders, the slated improvements will not change the traffic patterns or volume of visitors at Caramoor.

According to Caramoor’s site plan, the work aims to separate vehicular and pedestrian traffic; better regulate the flow of automotive traffic by providing a dedicated drop-off area and adding seven parking spaces to accommodate visitors with disabilities; enlarge the entry plaza and relocate the equipment loading area to the opposite side of the Venetian Theater. The improvements also seek to make the entry to the Venetian Theater larger and more accessible; upgrade existing landscaping through additional plantings and add upgraded lighting and appropriate signage.

The plan includes the installation of a new stand-alone box office next to the Venetian Theater and a new Pavilion Terrace next to the Pavilion Tent. A stormwater management plan will also be implemented as part of the work.

At its meeting Tuesday, the planning board granted Caramoor conditional approval for the construction proposal. The board is asking Caramoor officials to submit and gain board approval of details on the proposed lighting fixtures to be installed as part of the enhancements, as well as on the stormwater management plan.

While presenting the project at Tuesday’s planning board meeting, Caramoor’s chief executive officer, Jeffrey Haydon, explained that the planned improvements are “the result of about six years of audience surveys, patron feedback and best practices from a lot of other performing arts venues.”

He noted that the project aims to improve on the site’s existing features, saying, “We very much love the aesthetic of Caramoor, and our primary goal is to follow the aesthetic of Caramoor that’s there now.”

“We’re very excited about this,” he added.

In a subsequent interview this week, Mr. Haydon explained that while Caramoor’s family estate-feel is part of its charm, the site was not built to support thousands of visitors each year. This is why, he said,



ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF CARAMOOR

Rendering of Caramoor’s Visitor Experience Enhancement Project showing planned improvements at Friends Field.



ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF CARAMOOR

Enhancements are also planned at the entry to the Venetian Theater, Caramoor’s largest concert venue.

it is important to make key areas more accessible and easier to navigate, with better lighting and additional benches.

Mr. Haydon also noted that Caramoor is having a lot of success with its outdoor programming, however, currently some of its prime outdoor space, particularly Friends Field, is utilized for parking. He explained that with the forthcoming site improvements, cars would be parked in a different area, freeing up the field to be used for more outdoor family programming and festivals.

According to Mr. Haydon, another goal of the improvements is to make Caramoor more accessible to visitors as a public park where they can explore the grounds from Memorial Day to Columbus Day, picnic, tour the Rosen House and participate in programs.

Caramoor has also been growing its sound art collection and is looking to expand it throughout the grounds, Mr. Haydon said. This type of art consists of sculptures that produce sound, or features that change the sound within a particular area of the

grounds, such as speakers hidden in rows of trees. Mr. Haydon explained that the art helps teach visitors “how to become better listeners,” which is one of Caramoor’s goals.

Caramoor operates as a nonprofit organization that relies on annual donations to cover over 60 percent of its operating expenses.

In 2013, Caramoor launched its \$40 million Inspire campaign to raise money for its endowment and various improvements. To date, Caramoor has raised over \$35 million through the campaign. Mr. Haydon noted that most of these funds have gone into Caramoor’s endowment, as well as toward making improvements and restorations in Rosen House, which will be completed by April 2019.

According to Mr. Haydon, funds for the Visitor Experience Enhancement Project are being raised through the Inspire campaign. He noted that Caramoor is still seeking to raise \$2 million for the project.

More information about the project and the Inspire campaign can be found at caramoor.org/inspire.