

ORANGE PARK FOR NORTH WARD

BY WALTER ELLIOTT

ORANGE: The entire Orange Municipal Council considered one particular resolution from among 13 set before them at their Jan. 3 meetings here at City Hall.

That particular resolution, 2-2012, would authorize engineering and landscape design work by Hatch Mott MacDonald, of Millburn, on a rectangular lot off the southwest corner of High and Alden Streets. The proposed \$74,250 project contract would help turn the remediated U.S. Radium Corporation factory site and adjacent properties into a baseball diamond and football field.

Valerie Jackson, wearing both her Planning & Economic Development Director and Acting Deputy Business Administrator hats, told the council, the attending or broadcasting public and "Local Talk" that the contract is for the

lot's third phase of transition. The new park would be larger than the nearby Bradford Street playground and Alden Place triangle field.

"Local Talk," during the five-minute break between the council's conference and regular meetings, remembered the Erie Orange Branch, Alden Coal and an Esso service station fronting along High Street to the Alden Street corner into the 1980s. There also used to be a candy store, motorcycle club, Elliott-Greene plastic sequin factory (no relation) and a vacant lot running west on Alden from that corner towards the McGraw Edison complex in West Orange.

Jackson, when asked if the above sites were included in the proposed contract. She nodded her head and said "Yes" to each individual question.

Jackson also affirmed that any petroleum, coal, ash or plastic residue from the sites were either cleaned up

in Phase One or Two - or during the earlier 12-year EPA radium cleanup there.

"Local Talk" remembers being an Alden Coal customer and getting gasoline at T. Cava Esso there in the 1960s and 70s. A neighbor used to stamp plastic at Elliott-Greene. The Erie-Lackawanna Railway was reducing its daily freight train run to McGraw-Edison to three times a week, then weekly, and finally ripping up the tracks in 1979.

The overgrown wooded lot to Elliott-Greene's immediate west in the 1960s, however, was where U.S. Radium Corp. inadvertently set precedent in worker health and safety. U.S. Radium had employed 100 local people, 75 of whom were women, to paint radium onto watch dials and hands 1917-28.

The factory processed two tons of ore for "glow-in-the-dark" radium daily.

Some of the workers, who became known as "The Radium Girls," began to take sick and die from radium poisoning. U.S. Radium, under court order in 1930, would set up a medical and pension fund for them.

Most thought the "Radium Girls" story ended when U.S. Radium sold the factory in 1940 and the later owner demolished it. An EPA survey discovered in 1980, however, that U.S. Radium had allowed the dumping of its ore spoil onto some 339 properties in Orange, West Orange, East Orange, Montclair and Glen Ridge.

The EPA placed the U.S. Radium plant and related sited near the top of its Superfund list. The \$218 million cleanup included the demolition of the above said buildings plus several homes among the five towns. The radium-contaminated soil was taken for secured burial in Utah and Idaho.