



Buckingham Fountain project waits for funding

Work on 82-year-old landmark on hold in 'tough economy'

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The \$25 million makeover of Buckingham Fountain has been put on hold, according to city officials.

Though part of the renovation has been completed, Chicago Park District officials said the project would miss its May 30 completion date.

"This is strictly a fundraising issue," Park District spokeswoman Jessica Maxey-Faulkner said. "We would like to start on Phase 2, but there isn't enough money."

The Park District spent nearly \$13 million updating the fountain's surrounding plaza last year. Loose pink gravel and asphalt was replaced with a permeable pavement and handicapped-accessible walkways. More than 100 benches were restored. New trees and other landscaping were added around the perimeter.

Funding for the renovation — an almost 50-50 split between public and private sectors — has been a problem since the project was announced in July 2008. The Park District and the city each pledged \$4 million, with another \$4 million expected to come from the State of Illinois.

Despite multiple requests by the Park District, the state has yet to commit any funds to the project, said Maxey-Faulkner.

"It's a tough economy and it's impacted fundraising. There's a capital bill that's tied up in the state and (the funding) could be a portion of that," she said. The bill calls for \$30 million for the Park District, she said.

Much of the renovation work left to be done is on the 82-year-old fountain itself, said Park District preservation architect Michael Fus. The project included plans to rebuild the fountain's 280-foot-long outer basin, refurbish and modernize the pump house and treat the marble coverings and bronze sculptures adorning the Chicago landmark, he said.

"There's still a lot of equipment infrastructure and preservation work to be done," Fus said. "We're still working off that 1927 pump."

Though the initial renovation was completed in time for the International Olympic Committee's visit to Chicago last spring, Park District officials said the city's lost bid had nothing to do with the delays.

The Parkways Foundation, a private nonprofit organization that focuses on park improvement, has raised half of the \$4 million it pledged to the project, said executive director Brenda Palm said. Another \$8 million would come from an endowment fund that Kate Buckingham founded in 1927 when she dedicated the fountain to her late brother, Clarence.