



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Beaufort day dock project earns federal grant

A federal grant received this month is the final funding needed to move forward with plans for a day dock boating facility at Beaufort's Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park.

This is the third award to Beaufort through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Boating Infrastructure Grant program. The day dock is a focal point within the vision of the 2012 Civic Master Plan.

The City of Beaufort, through a series of other grant and local funding sources, set aside in prior years \$300,000 toward the \$500,000 budgeted project, said Kathy Todd, finance director for the city. In addition, the City has welcomed two public partners: Main Street Beaufort and Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce. These partners pledged a combined \$22,368 toward actively marketing the day dock to transient boaters on a local, regional and national scale.

"This is the final piece of the funding puzzle that can make this project work," Interim City Manager Bill Prokop said. "Beaufort has been very fortunate to have received so much federal money through the Boating Infrastructure Grant program over the past three years."

The Downtown Marina has emerged as the largest market opportunity for improving revenue from tourism. Transient boaters represent a demographic of above-average disposable income and are a substantial opportunity for economic development in Beaufort's core commercial area.

Dozier's Waterway Guide, an authoritative annual publication for Intracoastal Waterway boaters, estimates the average household income of transients at \$240,000 per year, are approximately 56 years of age, spend 36 nights per year in a marina, and eat in restaurants a third of the time they are boating.

“This demographic is an ideal tourist consumer group for the Beaufort market and it’s consistent with findings in our Seth Harry and Associates Retail Market Study conducted in 2011,” Todd said.

Then there are the long-term benefits: Beaufort leaders wrote in the grant application that they expect the attractiveness of day dock facilities and access to the Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park will cause some transient boaters to consider relocating to Beaufort. If Beaufort captures just four boaters over five years as permanent residents and they build typical infill housing in the City’s historic core, then the resulting economic activity will be between \$1.5 million and \$2 million. That’s about \$780,000 in wages for skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen – who were among the hardest hit of the City’s workforce during the recession.

In late November, several dozen boaters with the Sail Magazine Winter Rally came through Beaufort. Their visit, hosted by the Beaufort Yacht and Sailing Club and coordinated through the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce, included shopping, touring and a special dinner at a downtown waterfront restaurant (for details, visit <http://icw.sailmagazine.com/blog/11/southern-hospitality-in-beaufort-sc/>).

The Beaufort day dock is an active capital project where the City has set aside funding from other grant and local sources over the past two years. The receipt of the federal grant completes the funding needed to begin the project, Todd said.

The Boating Infrastructure Grant program is funded through the Sport Fish Restoration & Boating Trust Fund from excise duties charged on fishing tackle and equipment, motorboat fuel and import duties on recreational boats and fishing equipment. It is a “user-pay” system. The program was created to develop and maintain boating infrastructure facilities such as docks, and mooring buoys for transient, non-trailerable recreational boats 26 feet or longer.

The design of the day dock facility is one side for transient non-trailerable boats over 26 feet in length, and the other side for use by boaters in the area for the day or as a dinghy dock for boats over 26 feet that are using the nearby mooring field -- which was federally funded by a BIG Tier II grant in 2013.

The day dock would serve day-use boaters who could enjoy the park and patronize adjacent downtown businesses through this facility. According to the City’s grant application:

The waterfront park seawall is approximately 1,015-feet long with water depths ranging between 10 and 15 feet at low tide. The seawall is able to moor small cruise ships; however, docking of smaller vessels doesn’t work due to the tidal variation, the tall vertical face of the seawall, and heavy marine growth. A floating day dock located along the seawall would provide convenient access to boats 26 feet long or longer without hindering small cruise ship docking.

Existing geotechnical information from borings performed in 2001, as well as previous underwater investigations indicates that this is an ideal location for a transient boating facility that would connect boaters directly to the park, as well as surrounding retail shops, restaurants and historic attractions.

Tentative specifications call for a 200-foot long by 10-foot wide heavy-duty floating dock in an orientation parallel with the existing seawall and approximately 500 feet from the edge of the navigation channel. Gangways that meet federal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act will connect the floating dock to the existing seawall.

Environmental impacts are minimized by not offering fueling and pump out services at the day dock and by incorporating solar lighting.

The nearby Beaufort Downtown Marina received and used Tier 1 and Tier 2 Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) funding to increase the size and capacity of the transient mooring field located in the Beaufort River as well as to perform extensive repairs and upgrades to its transient docking facility.

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