



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Wednesday, July 15, 2015

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Beaufort Waterfront Park day dock project presented to City Council

With a federal grant covering most of the costs, a day dock in downtown Beaufort's Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park is closer to construction with the goals of increasing boater access to downtown shops and restaurants.

Engineer David McSweeney presented initial design ideas to the Beaufort City Council Tuesday during a work session.

"There's a large element in the public that's been waiting to see this happen," Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling said at the meeting. "I don't want to see us slip backwards" with endless debate about where along the almost 1,000-foot seawall to build the day dock.

While no formal action is taken during City Council work sessions, Keyserling asked City Manager Bill Prokop to prepare recommendations on next steps, including siting, for the July 28 meeting.

Several people spoke in favor of building the 200-foot by 10-foot structure at the east end of the park, near the playground, public restroom and parking. Mike Sutton, a former Beaufort City Councilman, said having a day dock there wouldn't block views of the river, would be convenient to amenities and is closest to the core commercial district and restaurants.

To comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, there will be an 80-foot ramp leading from the seawall to the floating day dock.

Conversation touched briefly on whether the day dock should be built at the western end of the seawall, near the Waterfront Park pavilion and the Downtown Marina. While water is deepest

there, the current also runs strong – plus it’s the favored docking site for cruise ships that ply the Intracoastal Waterway, noted Rick Griffin, who manages the Beaufort Downtown Marina.

A federal Boating Infrastructure Grant awarded to the city in February will help fund the project’s cost, McSweeney said.

The day dock is a focal point of Beaufort’s Civic Master Plan. It will serve day-use boaters who could enjoy the park and patronize adjacent downtown businesses through this facility.

“Right now, there’s no safe way for me to take people on my boat to go downtown for cocktails and dinner, because there’s no place to tie up my boat,” Sutton said. He pointed to the hundreds of boaters in Beaufort, Lady’s Island, Dataw and surrounding areas who are potential downtown customers if access from the river can be arranged.

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.

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 typical transient boater has an above average income and eats in restaurants 33 percent of the time they are boating.

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 influence 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.

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.

According to the City’s federal 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 without hindering small cruise ship docking.

Existing geotechnical information from borings performed in 2001, as well as previous underwater investigations, indicates 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 likely placed about 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.

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