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Waterfront Park could get makeover soon

By Carl Orth



Now you don't see it, now you do, Port Richey officials hope after taking the first step to gain more visibility for seldom-used Waterfront Park.

Even though the park was dedicated 15 years ago, the scenic area on Old Post Road a bit north of Grand Boulevard hasn't gained much attention among the public, city officials think.

Many dog owners have discovered the area to walk their pets, while exercisers use the trail and anglers appreciate the pier. A playground beckons children.

Kathy Rebholz was walking her dog Bruno, a 13-year-old terrier mix, when she wandered over to the pavilion to learn more during the public workshop Saturday. Mayor Eloise Taylor petted Bruno while explaining the goals for the park.

The entire City Council toured the area with workshop attendees, along with City Manager Tom O'Neill

and other staff members.

The majority of some 50 survey respondents want more festivals and special events at the spacious park, city consultants from WadeTrim revealed Saturday.

"By and far (that's) the most common response," Brad Cornelius, the WadeTrim project manager for the park master plan, said.

Another 87 percent of the survey takers, or 40 people, are convinced that improvements to the park would boost the city's redevelopment efforts. Officials noted the eyesore of the nearby, dilapidated mobile home park has been torn down at U.S. 19 and Grand.

"We've got good feedback so far," Cornelius told about 18 people at the workshop. Attendees struggled to keep strong gusts of wind from blowing maps off tables at the park pavilion.

State preservation officials are "very supportive" of city efforts to bolster the park, Cornelius said. Pasco County sent a representative, Smita Ambadi, a planner, to the workshop. Natalie Earley represented Paddling Pasco to determine how kayakers could use the park more often.

"It helps get us different perspectives about what people would like to see here at the park," Port Richey's administrative analyst, Jocilyn Martinez, told participants. "We have our own ideas, ... but we don't use the park as often as the residents do."

"Up and down the coast, there are so few pieces of property like this," David B. Gildersleeve, senior vice president of WadeTrim, commented. "It is truly strategically located."

In 1991, private developers had obtained permits for a marina for much of the 13.5 acres now occupied by the park, Gildersleeve recalled. The financing fell through, however.

Federal and state authorities then acquired the property for about \$2 million, Gildersleeve said. By 1997, the city inherited the deed to the site, with some restrictions by Florida Communities Trust officials.

"They don't want any ball fields here," Gildersleeve said about state directives. "They don't want very high, intense active uses." The city built a trail and pavilion for the park, then built a canoe launch and playground.

"We want to focus on big ideas today," Chris Anuskiewicz, landscape architect for PlaceMaker Design Studio, in Clearwater, said as participants broke up into two focus groups.

Perhaps the city can borrow some ideas from Pinellas County's Wall Springs Park, in the Palm Harbor area, Martinez suggested in a focus group. "I love that park," she said. The facility on DeSoto Boulevard, west of Alt. 19, includes an observation tower in addition to its trails, boardwalk and pier.

"In hindsight, it would have been great to do what we're doing today, back 20 years ago," Gildersleeve concluded.

The online survey about Waterfront Park will remain active for about another week at the SurveyMonkey website, consultants said.

For more information contact Jocilyn Martinez at (727) 816-1900, ext. 111.

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