

CAPTAIN ROYAL MELVIN HERITAGE PARK AND PLAZA

SUMMARY

The purpose of this project is to construct The Capt. Royal Melvin Heritage Park and Plaza that will serve as a public gateway to the Destin Harbor and its charter fishing fleet, its recreational fishing opportunities, and its fresh Gulf seafood restaurants. This project has been envisioned prior to the completion of the first phase of Destin's Harbor Boardwalk in 2012. The new gateway and plaza will provide additional harbor access, open space, and recreational/educational opportunities along the Destin Harbor as detailed in the City's adopted Harbor Community Redevelopment (CRA) Plan.

The City acquired the project site, 206 Harbor Boulevard, in December 2006 through the Trust for Public Land and a 40% match from the Florida Forever grant program. The City demolished and removed two old structures, removed invasive exotic Chinese Tallow and put the property into its present condition. While the site has been used to support events such as the annual Destin Seafood Festival, the economic downturn and impacts from the Deep Horizon oil spill have kept the city from fully executing the construction of the park in accordance with the Management Plan.

The site lies within the City's adopted Harbor Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). The acquisition furthers the City's adopted policies for the South Harbor Mixed Use Area (SHMU) as described in the Future Land Use Element of the Destin Comprehensive Plan. The SHMU area is intended to accommodate a festive mixed-use market place. The City wants to encourage tourist commercial development designed to preserve waterfront views, preserve water dependent activity, foster a pedestrian oriented environment, and promote convenient public access to the recently constructed Harbor Boardwalk project (first phase) and charter fishing fleet activities. A major intent of Destin's Comprehensive Plan is to preserve the SHMU area as a world-class fishing village open to the public. The project site will be managed only for public outdoor recreation that is compatible with the conservation, protection, and enhancement of the site, which provides urban open space and access to the Destin Harbor. Additional aspects of the management plan provide opportunities for environmental education and awareness, preservation of local history and heritage, and access to passive recreational opportunities.

Specific improvements outlined in the park's state management plan include a Harbor and Wildlife Observation Platform with educational signage, Kayak/canoe lift, Picnic pavilion, Resource Center for educational classes and informational brochures, Terraced walkway from Harbor Boulevard to harbor boardwalk, Undergrounding of utilities, Trash cans at various locations throughout park (continued participation in the FWCC Monofilament Recycling Program), Benches, Drinking fountain and restrooms at resource facility, and Bike racks near park entrance at Harbor Boulevard.

Recognizing the need to move forward with plans for the site, the Destin City Council approved funding in FY 2013 in the amount of \$126,090 to complete a design for the park which would allow phased opportunities for future embellishments. That design work is currently 65% complete. The initial construction phase of the plan has been tentatively estimated to cost approximately \$1.5 million, and provides a transformative alteration of the property which enhances environmental protection while providing an attractive and useful space for the public, substantially meeting all the objectives of the Management Plan.

Permitting for the project is not expected to be difficult or time-consuming, since the majority of state-level permitting along the waterfront was accommodated during design and construction of the Harbor Boardwalk. Some permitting will be required to incorporate entry elements to the park within the Florida Department of Transportation Right-of-Way; the balance of the permitting required will strictly be for Development Order and related building permits required by the City Land Development Code (LDC).

The completed project will serve to replace a commercially utilized property that had buildings, deteriorated paving, gravel surfaces and unimpeded flow of storm water and other chemicals and materials into the harbor with an open space park, designed to store and filter storm water before allowing it to drain to the harbor. Maintenance of the final product can be combined with the current maintenance of the Destin Harbor Boardwalk with the increase of one part time job, or conversion of a part time to full time position.

Short-term job creation for during the construction phase will total approximately \$750,000 in labor for approximately 15 FTEs. The long-term economic benefit of developing a view corridor from Harbor Boulevard (US 98) and a public gateway to the state's largest fishing charter fleet at Destin Harbor cannot be forecast but certainly cannot be underestimated. A 2014 "Economic Impact Analysis of Charter Fishing and Recreational Boating along the Destin Harbor" by the Haas Center states that both large and small fishing businesses alone currently "generate \$248 million in total spending for the local economy... 2,473 jobs are supported...along with more than \$83 million in labor income. " This can only increase as additional access and exposure is provided through the Captain Royal Melvin Heritage Park and Plaza.

One needs only to look at other cities such as San Antonio, Savannah, or Fort Lauderdale with waterway boardwalks (or riverwalks) to understand the import of these public amenities to the economic vitality of their communities. The design of Destin's Gateway to its boardwalk outshines all of those, and will be a proud and significant addition to Okaloosa County.