

Boardwalk kicks off swash plan

By David Wren
THE SUN NEWS

A long-planned revitalization project for Withers Swash has gotten a major boost with a \$90,000 federal grant that will help pay for a boardwalk along the downtown waterway.

The approximately 1,500-foot lighted boardwalk will connect Kings Highway with Ocean Boulevard and will include nature-oriented observation points, and sitting and picnic areas.

The walkway, designed in part to improve beach access, will cut through the middle of the Family Kingdom amusement park located between Third Avenue South and Fifth Avenue South. Construction is scheduled to be completed by next summer.

"This project really has an exciting potential," City Planning Director Jack Walker said. "While the boardwalk itself will give visitors and people that live in that area a nice walkway and better access to the beach, it's really only a small part of the big picture."

"The long-term plan calls for an area that will be much like the San Antonio Riverwalk with a boardwalk, shops, a park, amphitheater and a full marina."

Plans for a Withers Swash park have been in the works for more than six years and cost estimates for

Withers Swash boardwalk

Myrtle Beach received a \$90,000 federal grant to help pay for a 1,500-foot lighted boardwalk along Withers Swash. The boardwalk is slated to open next summer.



Jeff Thompson/

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the finished project have ranged from \$10 million to \$40 million.

The boardwalk will cost about \$180,000 with a federal grant from the National Park Service paying about half that. The city will pay the remainder.

According to Walker, the city will build the boardwalk on a 10-foot recreational easement it obtained as the result of a land swap with Family Kingdom owner Neil Ammons two years ago.

Future plans call for the boardwalk to extend from the west side of Kings Highway through a city-owned park that will surround the Withers Swash lake. A pedestrian bridge over Kings Highway will join the two boardwalk sections.

Walker said the city already has purchased some land on the north side of the lake for development of the park. Plans call for an amphitheater, parking area with restaurants, picnic areas and a section set aside for family reunions.

"The city plans to put interpretive signs along the boardwalk that will include information about area wildlife and plant life," said Walker.

"We'll also include historical information [on the signs] detailing what part the land has played in the evolution of the city, how hurri-

canes have changed the location of the creek . . . those types of things."

Walker said the city also hopes to work with business owners in the area to create a shopping district that will complement the boardwalk. Long-term plans call for a Mediterranean-style shopping center with cafes, plazas and a marina along the Ocean Boulevard side of the boardwalk.

While the boardwalk east of Kings Highway will be completed in about six months, Walker said any future Withers Swash plans could be decades away.

"The boardwalk will be a reality by the start of the next season," said Walker. "The rest of the plan . . . it's hard to tell at this point when we'll be able to budget more money for it."

Walker said the city has already spent more than \$650,000 buying land for a park bordering the lake.

"Our next phase really should be the development of a full master plan for the site," Walker added. "We need to determine exactly what is going where. We're hoping that this project will evolve over time."

Withers Swash, a six-acre tidal estuary, receives storm water runoff from one-third of the city. Myrtle Beach has spent several years trying to fix drainage and pollution problems in the swash in anticipation of building the boardwalk and park.

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