

CAPE CHARLES: Town bolsters its amenities

Beach replenishment, walking trails are among current town projects

BY CERI LARSON DANES • STAFF WRITER • JUNE 29, 2010

CAPE CHARLES — Cape Charles is adding amenities and improvements within its incorporated limits that will not only improve the quality of life for residents but also will help attract tourists — a significant revenue source for the waterfront community.

From development of a new central park and walking trails that will connect it with the town's other major assets, to a new wastewater treatment plant and beach replenishment,

Cape Charles is humming with the sounds of progress.

Walking trails

The system of non-motorized trails eventually will traverse historic residential neighborhoods and connect the town park with the historic downtown shopping district and harbor, the beachfront, and the Cape Charles Historical Society museum on Randolph Avenue near the future Fig Street trail.

To date, the town has received about \$1.4 million in matching transportation enhancement grants in funding through the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, or TEA-21. Of that, \$334,000 was awarded in May but will not be disbursed until 2011.

The grants require a 20-percent match from the town, which can be in the form of in-kind costs such as staff time.

The cost of Phase 1 was \$900,000. A volunteer group called Citizens for Central Park has raised more funding.

"We continue to apply every November to continue the project," Town Manager Heather Arcos said of the years-long trail project.

"The town has been saving for this project since 2004," she said. "This is federal money coming down to VDOT, and I don't see anything happening to it." Existing projects take precedence for the funding, further ensuring completion.

Phase 1 includes improvements to the town's central park with construction of sidewalks around it, four mini-park areas at compass points on the perimeter, as well as landscaping, lighting, benches, fencing and a fountain.

A large gazebo and pergola also have been installed. Finishing touches were being made last week to a paved stage area perfect for performances.

The contract was awarded in January to Excel Paving Corp. of Norfolk.



Cape Charles Town Manager Heather Arcos, right, Code enforcement inspector Jeb Brady, left, and Town Planner Tom Bonadeo look over plans for the Cape Charles Central Park project and other walking trails throughout town. (Jay Diem photo)

Code enforcement inspector Jeb Brady said the six-month completion schedule was pushed back by wet weather, “and because we’re adding some major improvements late in the game,” he said, explaining that some features were eliminated to save money, but then savings were found in other areas that allowed the enhancements to be added back.

Norfolk-based Land Studio handled landscape architecture for all phases and Massey Design of Virginia Beach, which since was acquired by Chantilly-based Bowman Consulting, are the engineers.

Thirty-five donated memorial trees that were scattered all over the three-acre park were transplanted along the trails, further delaying construction.

But the change allows for an expansive central lawn that will be covered in barefoot-friendly sod. An underground irrigation system with shallow wells will keep plant material happy.

The park will approximate a mini-arboretum with its variety of trees planted along the perimeter, including crape myrtle, magnolia, redbud, cedar, hollies, dogwood, willow oak, live oak, sycamore, beech, maple and loblollies. Sixty new trees will be added to the memorial transplants.

“There is virtually no sidewalk from Plum to Strawberry (streets) along the Madison (Avenue) side of the park,” said Town Planner Tom Bonadeo. In addition, its former state was low, soggy and prone to flooding.

Phase 1 enhances the walkability of the entire park and controls stormwater runoff.

“There are a lot of parts to it other than just a pretty park, but it is pretty good looking,” he said.

Planning for a grand opening celebration begins in July with a possible Labor Day weekend kickoff.

Town Beach

Cape Charles boasts the only free public beach in the county, but frequently much of it disappeared during storm events.

Breakwaters have been built over the years, with three added recently to two larger rock formations installed more than a decade ago.

Sand continued to wash away, eroding beach real estate up to the underpinnings of the boardwalk.

A lot of the damage was caused by the November 2009 Nor’easter, and the town received \$30,000 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to make repairs, and may receive an additional \$10,000 to fully fund the project cost.

Work started the first week in June to move sand dunes. “We felt the sand would serve us better away from the boardwalk,” said Dave Fauber, Director of Public Works and Utilities.

A total of 3,500 cubic yards of sand was added — a larger grain than what was currently on the site was selected in hopes it will stay in place better — and new snow fence was installed.

“Whatever you put out there is going to wash away,” Fauber said, adding that FEM wants the town to develop and implement an annual beach maintenance plan as a funding requirement.

The plan was reviewed by the town's wetlands board, the Virginia Marine Resource Commission and The College of William and Mary's Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

The two-week replenishment work focused on the beach between Jefferson and Madison avenues. Seagrass will be planted in the fall if necessary.

"We need to make sure we have money in the budget every year for the beach," Arcos said.

"The sand is going to blow and wash away," said Fauber. "It is unavoidable. If you have a beach, you are going to need to replenish it."

Wastewater

Cape Charles is also in the process of constructing a new wastewater treatment plant under requirements of the state environmental agency.

The new plant will be a state-of-the-art membrane bio-reactor system that is designed to produce high quality effluent with an ultra-filtration system with a nutrient-removal process that exceeds state requirements.

The \$19 million price tag includes plans for piping treated water to Bay Creek for reuse on golf courses and other areas.

The town wastewater use currently tops out around 150,000 gallons per day. The new plant will handle 250,000 gpd and can be built out to a 750,000 gpd when necessary.

Most of the project is funded with stimulus money received through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, with an estimated \$5.4 million financed by the town. A zero-interest loan through the Virginia Resource Authority is in the works to cover that amount plus other costs like decommissioning the old plant.

The ultraviolet tanks were built first, which is the last treatment stage of effluent before being discharged into the bay or being reused.

"We kind of started at the tail end and are working forward," Fauber said. The headworks of the reactor tanks and membrane tanks are currently under construction.

Completion of the plant is scheduled for October 2011.