



Port Richey Plans A Walk On Water

By KEVIN WIATROWSKI The Tampa Tribune

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PORT RICHEY - City officials hope to build a water's edge walkway along the Pithlachascotee River to give pedestrians safe passage beneath U.S. 19.

The footbridge will be the topic today when the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the county's chief transportation planning agency, meets in New Port Richey.

The LPA Group, the consultants Port Richey hired, says the city should build a walkway under the bridge, using the existing riverbank instead of any kind of bridge. The riverbank is frequented by the area's homeless.

Port Richey officials have grander plans, however. They want a floating structure moored just off the bridge embankment, City Manager Jerry Calhoun said.

"That way you're always above water," Calhoun said.

That option has its problems, though. Namely, it could touch the ground at extreme low tides, damaging oyster beds that line the river's shallow sides.

"We may come up with a combination of the two," Port Richey Mayor Mark Abbott said.

The route beneath the bridge would go between Baylea Avenue on the east side of U.S. 19 to the parking lot of Catches Restaurant on the highway's west side.

The goal is to give pedestrians and cyclists access to the Gulf without having to cross U.S. 19 on foot, Abbott said. For pedestrians, Pasco County's stretch of U.S. 19 is one of the nation's deadliest pieces of highway.

LPA Group also offered the city the option of building a wooden walkway on piers driven into the river bottom under the north end of the bridge. The walkway wouldn't block the boat channel beneath the bridge in plans devised by the consultants.

The land-based route would cost a little more than \$165,300. The wooden walkway, by comparison, would cost about \$230,000.

The floating concrete walkway would cost more than \$250,000.

The consultants didn't recommend a floating walkway because of the cost. They also said the floating dock could pose a safety risk if it broke loose during a storm.

City officials see the path as part of a larger pedestrian route tying into the Suncoast Trail along the Suncoast Parkway. The path would go from the trail, cross J.B. Starkey Wilderness Park then follow streets and Port Richey's wellfield to U.S. 19.

West of the highway, the path would wend north along the edge of Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park to U.S. 52, then back to the Suncoast Trail, Abbott said.

For now, most of the trail is just a dream.

Port Richey is looking for help from the rest of the county to build the footpath and integrate it into a larger regional network, Calhoun said.

The city paid for the LPA Group study but can't afford to build the path, Calhoun said.

Abbott said he hopes the county can win transportation grants by tying the bridge to a variety of issues, from homelessness to traffic fatalities.

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