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City hosts informational open house for U.S. 17 pedestrian path

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Brunswick Public Works Director and City Engineer Garrow Alberson details some features of a proposed pedestrian path over the marsh along U.S. 17 from Overlook Park to the F.J. Torras Causeway.

Taylor Cooper/The Brunswick News



This rendering, provided by the city, is an concept of what a pedestrian pathway along U.S. 17 from Overlook Park to the F.J. Torras Causeway may look like.

City residents got a closer look on Thursday at plans to build a pedestrian and bike path over the marsh along U.S. 17.

Alice Keyes with the environmental advocacy group One Hundred Miles spoke with Michael DeMell of Terracon, an environmental consulting firm, while a dozen or so people milled about and spoke with city officials and planners.

DeMell said several environmental factors go into the design and planning process to make sure the project will not harm the ecology of the marsh or any endangered species.



Keyes said One Hundred Miles will, as with any such project, keep tabs on it, but that she was glad to see the precautions the city is taking. Based on the plans she's seen so far the project seems like a positive for the community.

Glynn Environmental Coalition Executive Director Rachael Thompson said the prospect is great for city residents, but she had one concern. She is worried people would try to fish off the overlook platforms, which is a bad idea as the water is contaminated. Contaminants from the nearby Terry Creek Superfund site make the fish in the area unsafe to eat, she noted.

Four such overlooks are evenly spaced along the 10-foot-wide pedestrian bridge, which are shown in concepts to include overhead sun shades, benches and trash cans.

The project serves the practical purpose of completing an uninterrupted trail between the city, St. Simons Island and Jekyll Island, but it also opens up more of the city's waterfront to the public, which is currently one of City Hall's driving motivations.

"If you can bike from Jekyll over the bridge and then onto St. Simons, that's big," said Regina McDuffie, Brunswick city manager. "This connects the city to the islands."

The 2,800-foot-long trail will follow along the east side of U.S. 17 from Overlook Park to the F.J. Torras Causeway to connect with the bike path there, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation.

GDOT is paying for part of the design work on the project via a \$380,000 grant. The city is contributing \$95,000.

It's not happening in the near term, though. City Engineer and Public Works Director Garrow Alberson said the city is following a three-year design and planning framework recommended by the GDOT. The city is a year into the process, Alberson said Thursday.

Today, the bridge would cost around \$5 million to \$6 million to construct.