

Fresh start for Riverside walk



Fresh start for Riverside walk. Work at the south end of the new boardwalk has been completed and could be open to the public in the next few weeks. *Ray Martin, Times Staff*

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It's been almost 30 years since the boardwalk was created through the marshes at the east end of Riverside Park. And today, it's never looked so good.

"In its day it was one of the first accessible trails in the city," said city landscape architect Susan Reise, "but it would never make the grade today."

The original boardwalk opened in 1982. It was built by the Rotary Club and officially dubbed the Charles J. Whitney Nature Interpretation Trail after a longtime club member. But most people know it as either the Whitney Boardwalk or Riverside Boardwalk.

It was a narrow structure, which was elevated about a foot above the marsh in some areas and floated on Styrofoam blocks in others.

Last year, the city, with the approval of the Grand River Conservation Authority, decided to give the aging and vandalized boardwalk a significant facelift.

In the first phase, a 91-metre section was overhauled. The original wooden walkway was demolished to make way for a much wider, more robust structure built on aluminum piers. The piers are screwed into the bottom of the marsh to support the expanded boardwalk. The city first used this system when it built the boardwalk that is part of the Devil's Creek Trail.

The boardwalk starts at the foot of the Russ Street pedestrian bridge and extends north to the middle marsh.

This year, the second phase of the project got underway in late July.

"We couldn't get going until the end of July, after the bird breeding season was over, but the construction has gone really well," Reise said.

Project foreman Jamie McCaffery, of CSL Group, anticipates the job will wrap up in the next few weeks and he has no doubt the new boardwalk will be well used.

"It's amazing how many people are interested in what we are doing, and can't wait to see it done," he said. "It's going super and it's going to look awesome when it's done."

To date, the project has cost \$265,000, but the city trails advisory committee wants to add another element.

"On the original boardwalk there had been an extension and observation deck.

But when we designed the new boardwalk, we had to eliminate that part of the project because we didn't have the money to build it," Reise said.

Last week, the trails committee passed a motion to spend \$30,000 to build a 21-metre extension and a hexagonal observation deck with seating on three sides.

The money would come out of the \$150,000 budget earmarked for trails each year.

"All the trails money has been spent for this year, so I'll have to see what we can do," she explained.

Reise will have to talk to her bosses to see if the additional funding can be found this fall to tackle the boardwalk extension and observation deck.

"It would definitely be cheaper to do it now, but if the money can't be found, we'll just have to do it next year."

Even if additional funding is found, Reise said work crews will have to come back next year to install interpretive signs at three points along the new boardwalk.

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