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Wednesday, 25 July 2012 18:25

South end of lakefront land will open to public soon, but north end won't be accessible until next June

The south coal dock will open to the public in the coming weeks, Port Washington officials said Tuesday, but the bulk of the dock won't be accessible until next June.

Although the city had hoped to get infrastructure work on the north dock under way earlier this year, plan revisions needed to meet state requirements meant construction was delayed, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said last week.

Design work is being completed for the walking paths, promenade, parking areas, access road and a bridge that will connect the north and south portions of the former coal dock, he said.

"We're building essentially the body of the park," he said.

However, there's more to the project than the work on the north dock.

Work to naturalize the bank of Sauk Creek is expected to be completed this fall, Vanden Noven said.

A bird sanctuary built by We Energies on the south dock is expected to open Aug. 6, Vanden Noven said. At that point, people will be able to walk from the south beach through the south dock to the intake channel.

Vanden Noven told the Coal Dock Committee Tuesday that he hopes to obtain bids for the north dock work in August. The Common Council could then award the bids in September, with construction beginning in October.

"Because there are no residents in the area, the contractor can work on and off throughout the winter," Vanden Noven said.

In spring, city crews will build an elevated boardwalk along the east end of the north dock, he added.

The boardwalk will extend off the 1,000-foot promenade that will run along the north end of the property adjacent to the west slip. There will be no railing along the 18-foot-wide promenade to allow maximum flexibility for boats docking next to the dock, Vanden Noven said.

Five pedestals with low-light fixtures are expected to be installed on the promenade to service as many as 10 ships, he said.

The city now needs to consider what the park will be used for and the amenities that should be added, Vanden Noven said.

The park's master plan called for everything from a water feature to an interactive children's garden to a community center.

There is plenty of space for events and amenities, Vanden Noven said, noting that Rotary Park, where several festivals are held, is one acre while the coal dock is 13 acres.

A public meeting to garner input on the future amenities is scheduled for 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 2.

Mayor Tom Mlada, a member of the committee, suggested the first event should be relatively modest, perhaps something that will draw a few hundred participants rather than a large festival.

Others suggested the first event could be a grand opening for the park.

To help fund the future park development, Mlada said, the city should look into public-private partnerships.

A number of businesses and community groups have expressed interest in that, said committee member Sara Grover, executive director of Port Washington Main Street.

The committee also agreed the park should be called Coal Dock Park, which has been the working title for it.

Committee member Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development, said, "People know where the coal dock is, just like they know where Upper Lake Park is. It's a destination."

The name could be amended in the future, members agreed.

The city also needs to emphasize the connection between the dock and the downtown, committee members agreed.

"The harborwalk (which runs from the north beach to Fisherman's Park and will eventually connect with the coal dock) feels like a long, out-of-the way journey," said committee member Bob Mittnacht, who said the city should emphasize the park's connection to Wisconsin Street.

The walk shouldn't be too intimidating, especially for a city that prides itself on being pedestrian-friendly, Vanden Noven said, noting the distance from Veterans Park to the dock is the same as walking from Summerfest's north gate to the main stage.

"Once the entry to the park gets more inviting, people won't think about how long the walk is," said committee member Kathy Tank, the city's director of tourism. "They're going to want to get there."