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Port master plan charts direction for waterfront

By RODGER REES Jun 14, 2019

The Port of Galveston moves forward with a master plan that charts the direction for the waterfront.

- Moving more cruise passenger traffic to an interior port road to ease congestion on Harborside Drive.
- Adding a second walkover to connect Galveston's downtown and waterfront for cruise passengers and visitors.
- Developing a pedestrian-friendly waterfront commercial area at Pier 14 with shops, restaurants, a marina and trolley service.
- Improving the Port of Galveston's West End to accommodate more cargo business and the East End to maximize the waterfront for our growing cruise business.

These are just a few of the ideas envisioned in the port's Strategic Master Plan draft rolled out to the Wharves Board of Trustees, the community and stakeholders the week of June 3.

When completed later this year, this detailed plan will give the port a sustainable, unified vision and direction for the next 20 years. It will be guided by solid data, sound business decisions and community input and support.

The plan is being built on extensive research to assess the state of the port's infrastructure; cargo, cruise and commercial market opportunities; and financial analysis and forecasting.

Remarkably, we believe that this may be the first such plan in the port's 194-year history. Our board of trustees has shown great leadership and vision to retain an internationally recognized consulting firm with great expertise in this field.

Community input is essential to creating and executing the very best plan to help us continue to strengthen the local economy, and enhance the quality of our island life. To date, we've held two rounds of public and stakeholder meetings in February and June. Another round of meetings will be held to present the final plan later this year.

We're reaching out to civic and neighborhood organizations to share information and gather input on the draft plan. We also will continue to look for mutually beneficial opportunities to collaborate with the Galveston tourism industry and city hall.

Based on input from the public and our stakeholders, we'll conduct a traffic study in the port area to identify ways to improve traffic and pedestrian flow on Harborside Drive, and to better connect the waterfront and downtown.

Interestingly, these and other opportunities for the port are included in the Vision Galveston plan, which is being created with input from thousands of Galvestonians.

Public input confirms what we already knew — that port business and the waterfront are woven into the fabric of this community and essential to its future.

The good news is that the Port of Galveston is strong and growing stronger. It's a major economic engine for the city, generating almost 14,000 direct and indirect jobs, and almost \$900 million in income for Texas workers. In 2018 we hosted almost one million cruise passengers and moved more than four million tons of cargo, up 21 percent from 2017.

This Strategic Master Plan will guide us to maximize our waterfront assets, our financial resources and our benefits to the community. Read more at www.portofgalveston.com.

Rodger Rees is the director and CEO of the Port of Galveston.

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