

## Greenway planned south of 17th Street bridge

BY LISA ZAHNER  
STAFF EDITOR

A few years from now, Vero Beach residents and eco-tourists may be wandering along hiking trails, bird watching from a raised boardwalk, and biking through woodland and riverfront paths in a unique 187-acre

park-like setting a half-mile south of the western end of the 17th Street bridge.

The Indian River Lagoon Greenway, as the project is known, will run along a one-mile stretch of the lagoon—more or less directly across the water from the barrier island neighborhood of Castaway Cove—ex-

tending from behind the southern end of Provence Bay all the way south to the wetlands behind Vista Royale and McKee Gardens.

As part of the Greenway Plan, the site will link lands owned by a private developer, the Florida

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Page 4

### Greenway

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Inland Navigation District, St. John's River Water Management District, the Indian River Land Trust and Indian River County in a cooperative effort to promote conservation and recreation.

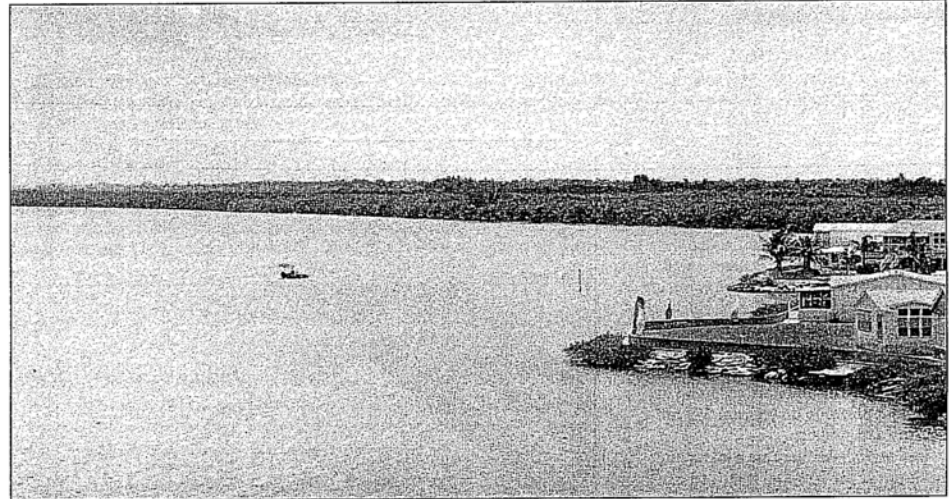
On this tract, the developers would construct an educational kiosk, trails, boardwalks, and observation decks which will offer visitors scenic vistas looking out over the Indian River Lagoon to the barrier island.

Birding enthusiasts will also enjoy a wetland outpost at a pond where native water birds including a variety of ducks, herons, pelicans and egrets, as well as bald eagles, hawks, ospreys, owls and seasonal migrating birds, can be viewed in their natural habitat.

If all goes well, construction is slated to begin in the fall of 2010.

Since the Greenway will be just a hop over the 17th Street bridge from the barrier island, it's fitting that beachside residents are spearheading citizen support for the project, including a substantial gift this month from a John's Island family.

"It is very important to save open space and provide access to the Lagoon," said the Buck Family about their commitment to the Greenway project. "Too much development will make it difficult to maintain the beauty and resources of Indian River County."



Photos: Mark Schumann

Ken Grudens, executive director of the Indian River Land Trust, said the donation is part of a long-standing relationship between the Bucks and the Land Trust and that he appreciates the vote of confidence in the project from a loyal donor and supporter of the environment.

"This gift will be a catalyst to move this project forward and make it a reality," Grudens said. "I expect we would use the funds for the design phase of the project

to make it grant worthy and shovel ready."

Beachside engineer David Knight of Knight McGuire and Associates donated his services to create maps of the site. As a 25-year resident of Vero Beach and avid cyclist, Knight wanted to lend his environmental consulting expertise because of both the conservation and recreation aspects of the Greenway project.

"I like the idea that it will be open to the public and that it will make a way for people to take a nice walk in the woods. I like the idea of the trails and can't wait to bike them myself," Knight said. "This is just a great piece of property just typical of the coastal areas that usually get developed. I think it's significant that it's nice and close by, right in town."

A burgeoning Friends of the Indian River Lagoon Greenway group founded by barrier island resident Victoria Clark Jones will partner with the local agencies to promote and enhance the greenway, similar to the relationship that the Pelican Island Preservation Society has with the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge.

The Friends will work to raise aware-

ness, coordinate volunteers and work projects, conduct education programs and work on the informational kiosk.

Grudens said Board members of the Indian River Land Trust, including long-time directors and beachside residents Kathleen Schulke and Bonnie Verone, have been very supportive of making the project a reality.

County Commissioners have given staff the go ahead to work with the Land Trust on drafting a management agreement for the greenway. Chief of Environmental Planning Roland DeBlois and other staffers were urged to provide support to the land trust in applying for grants to offset the expected \$460,000 cost of initial facilities, which will include parking areas and restrooms.

The Florida Inland Navigation District will be one possible source for the funding for the needed improvements to the site, located near the corner of Indian River Boulevard and 8th Street. FIND Chairman Bruce Barkett, a long-time beachside resident, is a real estate attorney with Collins Brown Caldwell Barkett and Garavaglia Chartered.

At the County Commission meeting



Vero Beach 32963 / July 30, 2009

Page 5

where the issue was considered, Commissioner Bob Solari said he was excited about having the Indian River Lagoon Greenway in his district and that he plans to "dust off" his bicycle to ride the trails when it's completed. But the greenway, he said, is of larger importance than just another park.

"People say that this is about conservation or about recreation and it is, but this is also about eco-tourism and making Indian River County an eco-tourism destination," he said.

Chairman Wesley Davis agreed, adding that he encountered eco-tourists on his last trip to the St. Sebastian River Buffer Preserve.

"There was a whole group of people there from Palm Beach County and they must have stayed somewhere," he said. "These are the kind of people who come here, spend a lot of money, and then leave—and that's exactly what we need."

Beyond providing recreational and eco-tourism opportunities, Grudens said there are advantages to having the lands

made into a greenway as opposed to just remaining vacant, undeveloped property.

"The bonus is that you are more actively managing the land for the natural resources, keeping the exotics out and educating people about the Indian River lagoon. We're improving, enhancing and educating."

The Indian River Land Trust acquired 66 acres of the proposed greenway site in conjunction with the redevelopment of McKee Gardens in the 1990s. The land trust will be contributing money from its

fund and raising private dollars toward the greenway effort.

The next step for the Greenway is execution of a Memorandum of Agreement with Indian River County to outline roles and responsibilities. This should happen in the next few weeks, then the grant-writing work can move ahead.

For more information about the Indian River Lagoon Greenway, visit the Indian River Land Trust website at [www.indianriverlandtrust.org](http://www.indianriverlandtrust.org) and click on projects and the Lagoon Greenway tab.