

Historic Town of Santa Rosa Landing

Proposal to Walton County Board of County Commissioners *for Land Use Map Amendment Promoting Public Boat Access to Choctawhatchee Bay*

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Prepared for:

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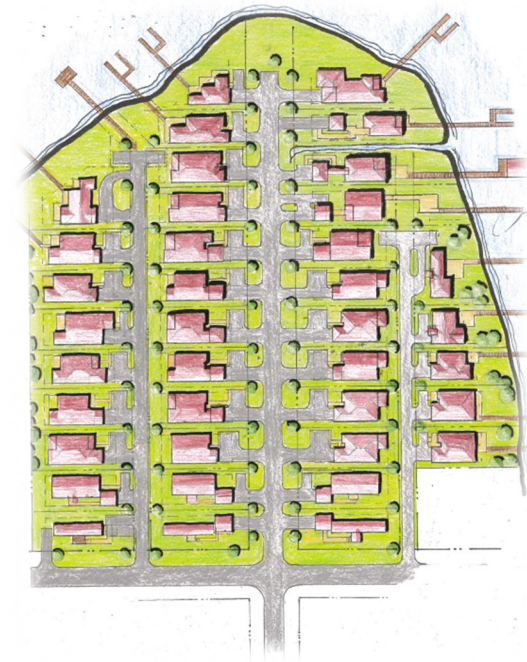
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Proposal of Historic Town of Santa Rosa Landing

A Community Historic Park, Boat Ramp, and Boat Storage

Waterside Investors, Inc., owns +/- 9.18 acres adjacent to Hogtown Bayou. The subject property is currently subdivided into 40 lots as part of the plat of Old Town Santa Rosa.¹



The rendering in Figure 1 is a depiction of single-family homes built on the platted lots from 1905 plat of Old Town of Santa Rosa, Plat Book 2, Page 61, Walton County, Florida.

Each home has the right to request a dock permit from FDEP.

Impacts from this type of development are extensive.

Figure 1. Rendering of potential build out of the platted lots.

The property contains a substantial amount of wetlands and is located in an AE 7 flood zone. Although the current land use designation is Conservation Residential 1:2.5, the lots were platted long before the current Walton County Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code were adopted. The lots predate the “lot of record” date, meaning that the lots can be built out with one single family home per lot of record. This would place 40 single family homes in an area characterized by wetlands and subject to flooding during hurricanes, tropical storms, or intense rain storms.

Waterside Investors would like to propose an alternate development plan that they believe will benefit the county, minimize impacts to the wetlands and flood zone, and also allow them to develop profitably. They are proposing to donate land for a park, boat ramps, docks, picnic area, children’s playground, and associated boat and boat trailer parking. Waterside Investors plans to dedicate the park to Walton County via plat thus donating the property outright to Walton County,

¹ Platted in 1905 and recorded in the official records Plat Book 2, Page 61, of Walton County, Florida.

³ This contribution by the developer is based on the proposed boat storage facility that will pay for park upkeep and maintenance as well as provide for a 24-hour attendant onsite for park safety.



Cessna Landing is a county owned park on the eastern side of Hogtown Bayou, diagonally across from this property, that contains a simple boat ramp and a small number of parking spaces for vehicles and boat trailers (15 spaces). This park is heavily utilized and often overcrowded, with inadequate parking to handle the boat traffic during the busy season. The Waterside proposal would greatly expand the available boating facilities and parking areas, and add restrooms, a picnic area, and a children's playground to the offerings.

Next to and ancillary to the park, Waterside would like to place a boat storage facility. The boat storage facility would consist of mainly pole-barn type structures, and would contain storage for boats, boat trailers, paddle boards, kayaks, and other water recreational vehicles. One building would also contain a small apartment for a manager to oversee the operation.

The storage facility would allow boat owners to store their boats near a water access. It would also allow Waterside to offer boaters the option to call ahead and have their boats already in the water before they arrive, or to have Waterside employees remove and store their boats after their day on the water.

Because the predominant style of development in South Walton leans toward single family homes on small lots with minimal parking, many homeowner's associations ban their homeowners from parking boats or recreational vehicles within the subdivision. Other residents live in condominiums or townhouses with no available parking for large vehicles. Many second homeowners wish to leave their boats near their vacation homes, but don't want renters to have access to them. These conditions have created a large and underserved market for storage facilities for boats and recreational vehicles.

Both the park and the boat storage facilities are planned to create minimal impacts to the wetland areas on the property and would produce far less impact than the currently allowed single family homes. The boat storage facility and docks would also be a far preferable development for a flood zone than single family homes.

As part of the development order application review, it will be necessary to provide engineered drawings for the stormwater management for the park and facilities. It is during this process that our project engineers will coordinate with the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance in creating a stormwater treatment plan for optimal stormwater treatment to reduce impacts on the bayou. Some of the types of extra measures include a reef breakwater and living shoreline combo, which reduces shoreline erosion and increases aquatic habitat.

The current land use of Conservation Residential 1:2.5 does not allow either the park or the storage facilities, so Waterside Investments is seeking to obtain a small-scale amendment to the future land use and zoning district map to Parks and Recreation.

If Walton County agrees that the public/private partnership described above would fall within this category, and that it would allow the boat storage facility as an ancillary accessory

structures needed to support the recreational use. Waterside Investors is willing to bind the property to this use in perpetuity via permanent covenants and restrictions, plat, deed or other measures so that adjacent property owners can be reassured that no other commercial uses will develop on the land at a later time.

Before moving forward, Waterside would like to know that this proposal has the support of the commissioners. If the County Commission feels that this public/private partnership to provide active recreation and supporting facilities will benefit the county, Waterside Investors would request that Walton County consider giving the planning staff and other departments direction to work with the developer on the small-scale land use amendment for the property as well as grant approval processes that will benefit the county and public in getting the public portion of the development built with little or no cost to the citizens of Walton County. Waterside would also like to partner with the county in developing the park project to best benefit the county.

History

The plat map, as shown below, appears to date back to March 26, 1905, drawn by H. Heinze, C.E., of Chicago, Illinois, and Surveyed by T. Collins, county surveyor, as shown in the official records for Walton County, Florida. The lots are laid out east to west, measuring 50' wide by 120' deep, and each lot faces a platted 60' street and backs up to a 20' alley.

The area never developed as proposed in the plat. However, there is a great deal of history to this site. In the late 1800s, towns were beginning to form south of the Choctawhatchee Bay. By the early 1900s, Hogtown Bayou in Santa Rosa Beach was a bustling town center. Steamboats bringing in residents from Mobile and Pensacola helped to quickly grow the area's population to nearly 1,200 people. Unfortunately, a crop disaster followed by a hurricane spelled doom for the town. The town eventually took on a lawless "Wild West" vibe and many residents boarded steamboats and left en masse. The town's hotels, churches, stores, cafés, and cottages took on the feeling of a true ghost town. The few remaining locals eventually dismantled the town for lumber. Today, Cessna Landing (named for the town founder) is a public park and quiet place with picnic areas and a fishing dock. Next to the park, the Bayou Arts Center of Walton County hosts groups for art classes, workshops and other cultural events.⁴ The Property is the site of the hotel and few other historical buildings.

Proposal

Waterside Investments is actively working with several agencies in order to provide the best possible park for the community. The list of agencies working to achieve this park include:

- Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance – education, stormwater treatment, shoreline protection
- Walton County Sheriff – boat slips with lifts for the emergency vehicles with access to the bayou

⁴ <https://www.visitsouthwalton.com/history-of-south-walton>

- Boy Scouts of America – meeting place for the Boy Scouts
- Seed Starters – garden plots to educate locals on growing small gardens

Proposed Amenities:

- Boat Ramp
- Restrooms
- Playgrounds
- Parking
- Picnic Tables
- Boardwalk
- Dock
- Fishing Pier
- Tree House
- Office/Security/Manager Quarters
- Boat Storage
- Play Structures (Steam Boat)
- Scout Lodge
- Boat Trailer Parking
- Sheriff Department Boat Dock
- Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance Parking/Storage (water quality testing equipment storage)
- Community Garden

Conclusion

Waterside Investments is asking the Walton County Commissioners to schedule a workshop before the June 10, 2019 county commission meeting to be held at the South Walton Courthouse Annex for public involvement. At which workshop there will be a presentation of the conceptual plan for the park, answering questions of the public, and discussion of the proposed grants for building the park. Thereafter, we seek to be scheduled on the regular June 10, 2019 county commission meeting to ask the board to vote whether they want a public park on the Property and to direct staff to work with the applicant through the amendment and development order application process, including the grant process coordination with Walton County, Florida.