

Walk in the park will focus on its future

Officials who have been working to revamp India Point Park will be on hand at Saturday's tour to talk about plans for the waterfront site.

BY KAREN A. DAVIS

Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE -- India Point Park today looks like a major construction zone.

But members of Friends of India Point Park are urging residents to take heed: a bigger and better transformation is in the works.

Plans are under way to expand the park, create more parking spaces, expand regional bike paths into it and make the park a place that everyone can enjoy.

"There's a lot of exciting things that are happening," said David Riley, president and cofounder of Friends of India Point Park. "You go down there and you think, 'Oh my God, this place is falling apart,' because there's so much construction. But things are going to get a lot better."

The group is sponsoring a walk through the park on Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon. The event kicks off at the Gano Street entrance. Riley said the event is designed to give residents a chance to ask about what is taking place at the park, when work will be completed and what the future holds.

Officials from the state Department of Transportation, the city Parks Department and the City Council, and landscape architects who have been working on the project will answer questions and provide insight about the design.

The waterfront park has become the subject of redesign and improvements because it lies in the shadow of the state's multimillion-dollar realignment of Route 195.

The park includes 18 acres of open space -- trees, fields and walking paths that bend around 3,600 feet of shoreline. The park -- located at the confluence of the Seekonk and Providence Rivers, where they converge into Narragansett Bay -- is the only "broad expanse" of shoreline in the city still accessible to the public.

About 75,000 people use the park each year, according to figures compiled by the Friends group.

Riley said residents will be able to ask about the schedule and design of new Route 195 bridges and how that project will affect the layout of the park. They will also learn about new landscaping projects, ongoing plans to have three bike paths converge at the park, expanded parking and the development of India Street.

Riley said members of his organization have been told that construction of the new Route 195 bridges over the Seekonk and Providence Rivers will allow 80 new parking spaces to be created adjacent to the park, beneath each bridge.

He said the highway construction has already opened up a huge area on the east side of the park, near Gano Street. With the removal of the Gano Street highway ramps, park patrons will enjoy more open green space and an unobstructed view of the waterfront.

Initially, transportation officials envisioned having to take down numerous trees to complete the realignment project, Riley said. However, Friends of India Point Park -- formed five years ago to protect the park -- worked with them to find ways to preserve some of those trees.

At the beginning of this year, Friends of India Point Park launched a capital campaign to raise \$25,000 to build a bulletin board kiosk, complete the mosaic mural at the playground, install more picnic tables and trash cans and enhance the landscape with plantings, cobblestones and mulch.

Transportation officials are also planning to preserve a portion of the old Washington bridge -- a move that would save thousands of dollars in demolition costs, Riley said.

For more information on the walk through, call (401) 273-9244.