

Hurricane brings opportunities to zoo



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Being able to visit the world-class Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens after a boat ride on the magnificent St. Johns River has always been a great idea.

However, the zoo's dock on the Trout River that would allow this is difficult to reach,

especially for larger boats, because of the shallow water leading to the dock.

For years, there have been discussions about what to do but very little action.

Dredging a deeper channel to the dock would cost an estimated \$1 million, according to a previous study, and the channel would likely silt in again in just a few years.

The zoo dock has an even bigger problem now. Hurricane Irma destroyed much of it. But you know the old saying about not letting a crisis go to waste; view it as an opportunity instead.

Steve Swann is a civil engineer who serves on the Jacksonville Waterways Commission.

City Councilwoman Lori Boyer, who chairs the commission this year, has made taking advantage of our wonderful waterways a top priority.

As part of reaching that goal, Swann accepted the task of searching for a solution to the zoo's dock problem. He presented his finding during the commission's meeting last week.

Instead of repairing the damaged dock, he said consideration should be given to relocating the dock to zoo property farther to the east where deeper water would make it more usable.

That had been discussed before, but the location wouldn't have provided easy pedestrian access to the zoo's attractions.

However, the stars sometimes align.

The zoo is in the process of updating a master plan that would include development in that area.

Jed Davis, who chairs the zoo's board

and who also serves on the Waterways Commission, said he's excited about Swann's suggestion.

Of course, it would cost money but probably not as much as a \$1 million dredge that would need to be redone in a few years.

If we are serious about really activating our waterways as Boyer is determined to do, this is one project we need to get right to show off our river and our zoo.

In other waterway related news, it looks like bringing the USS Charles F. Adams to the Downtown riverfront is actually going to happen.

The group that has worked for almost a decade to get the ship here and use it as a naval museum announced last week it had secured the necessary funding — about \$3 million — to get the job done.

"The funds raised thus far will cover dry docking and preservation for tow, towing to Jacksonville, work on the pier and improving the grounds on the site," the group said in a news release.

The plan is to dock the Adams along one of the piers on the old Shipyards property, and that is included in Shad Khan's redevelopment proposal for the area.

If successful — and this is a Navy town — the Adams could bring thousands of people to Downtown annually, giving another boost to our resurgent Downtown and adding another reason for people to enjoy our St. Johns riverfront.

On a down note for our waterways, the public floating docks along the Northbank Riverwalk, the wooden docks at Metropolitan Park and sections of the riverwalk itself are still in shambles after Hurricane Irma's visit.

And some of the damage was leftover from when Hurricane Matthew hit a year ago and had never been fixed.

Visitors coming to town for the Florida-Georgia football game will unfortunately once again see an unsightly mess.

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