

[back to article](#)



Printed on page BCE1

Laishley Park's future unveiled

Plan calls for fountain, fish and produce markets, restaurant

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PUNTA GORDA -- The second phase of the city's riverfront Laishley Park will be a \$4.3 million project with a restaurant, interactive fountain, and fish and produce markets, Mayor Larry Friedman announced Wednesday.

The project will be designed and built by Marina Park, LLC, a partnership of five local businessmen, including the son of the man whose name is on the city park.

Friedman surprised an audience of community leaders during his State of the City address, an annual tradition in Punta Gorda.

Other projects he called "goodies" included wireless Internet connections throughout the town that anyone could access, mooring fields off Gilchrist Park, a bike and pedestrian path along the railroad track that runs through the city, and a "shop Punta Gorda" card that would reward residents for shopping in the city.

He also said the city would move forward with a parking garage and make its design complement other downtown buildings.

The first phase of Laishley Park is expected to be completed by the end of March. It has taken about 16 years for the project to become a reality along the Peace River.

The \$7.6 million Phase I boasts the city's first public marina, a 7,100-square-foot building with a marina dockmaster's office, ship store, a sailors' day room, restrooms, showers and a community room.

An 85-slip marina will have 68 floating and 17 fixed docks. The park's renovated boat ramp opened in December

Chris Evans, the managing partner with developer Marina Park, said he will go before the Community Redevelopment Area Wednesday with the \$4.3 million price tag he



Mayor Larry Friedman outlined several "goodies" for Punta Gorda.

negotiated with city staff for Phase II.

Marina Park was the only company to bid on the project. The other partners are: Bruce Laishley, son of Phil Laishley, for whom the park is named; Rick Treworgy and Bruce Laishley, who are co-owners of Southwest Land Developers; Robbie Sifrit, a real estate agent with Five Star Reality; John Hall, a Washington Redskins NFL kicker; Chris McMillan, a real estate agent with Re/Max Harbor Reality; and Evans, operations manager for Smugglers Enterprises.

Evans said Marina Park hopes to break ground on the restaurant, which will either be called Laishley Crab Shack or Laishley Crab House, and the retail space by the end of 2007 and complete it in 18 months to 23 months from that date.

The restaurant would occupy the second floor of the building and the yet-to-be-defined retail space would be on the first floor.

Because the city does not have the funds to complete Phase II of the park, Evans and his partners have proposed completing two markets under pavilions, putting in a fountain where children can play, laying the other half of a parking lot and completing the landscaping for the entire park.

In return, the city would lease Marina Park the land for its restaurant and retail space. The retail part of the project could be anything ranging from an ice cream parlor to a real estate office to a guide service business.

"The city gets what it wants and doesn't have to pay a dime. We get the building," Evans said.

"It's a win-win for all parties involved.

This story appeared in print on page BCE1
