



The Myrtle Beach Boardwalk

By James M. Wooten, PE, FASCE
Dale Gaff, ASLA

The Myrtle Beach economy is of vital importance to the economic welfare of South Carolina. Tourism is the state's top industry and tourism in the Myrtle Beach area contributes approximately 35 percent of the tourism dollars generated. Myrtle Beach came to prominence in the early 1900s, with a hotel, Pavilion and later an amusement park being the destinations.

Tourist traffic grew exponentially over the years with the Pavilion being the focal point. Tourism waned in the mid-1980s and the decision was eventually made to close the amusement park and Pavilion.

Revitalizing Tourism

As the next logical step after the success of the streetscape improvements, the Myrtle Beach Downtown Redevelopment Corporation (DRC) believed that construction of a boardwalk would spur a resurgence of tourism in the downtown area, possibly providing a catalyst for redevelopment and improving the revenues for existing businesses.

The vision for this new boardwalk was for it to provide a very strong pedestrian alternative to the vehicular traffic orientation of Ocean Boulevard.

The DRC commissioned The LandArt Company, a division of DDC Engineers, Inc. to develop a master plan for the proposed boardwalk. LandArt had provided the design for the streetscape projects and for Plyler Park, which is located adjacent to the proposed boardwalk while the parent company, DDC had been responsible of the major stormwater and ocean outfall project design and permitting.

Boardwalk Plan Realized

The design of the Boardwalk responds strongly and effectively to the distinct physical characteristics, the agency restrictions and the programming needs of each of the three districts. The northern district is impaired by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (SCDHEC/OCRM) Base Line



PHOTOS: SHADE SYSTEMS, INC.



PHOTO CREDIT: MARK KUREA, CITY OF MYRTLE BEACH



PHOTO CREDIT: DDC ENGINEERS / THE LANDART COMPANY



PHOTO CREDIT: DDC ENGINEERS / THE LANDART COMPANY

Above: This structure by Shade Systems Inc. provides for a respite from the South Carolina heat during the day and is being uplit to highlight the sails in this evening view. The shade structure is located at the central boardwalk and covers the scored concrete of Plyler Park. The structure frames the ocean view from Ocean Boulevard and tree grates were used to allow the shade sail poles to go thru the deck.

Top, right: This section of the boardwalk is constructed of southern yellow pine planks turned at 45 degrees in a grid pattern. The flags are illuminated at night by a combination of light from the adjacent light poles and uplights that are installed flush with the boardwalk surface. Due to oceanfront requirements, the lighting could not be pointed towards the ocean, as this would have had an adverse effect on nesting sea turtles.

Middle, right: The Myrtle Beach Boardwalk spans roughly 1.2 miles and features three distinct sections. The first section features a raised wooden deck, with dune landscaping and vegetation. The second section, the high-intensity portion of the boardwalk, adjoins beachfront stores and shops. The third section, the South Promenade is a lineal park promenade with benches and natural landscaping. The section pictured is from the North Boardwalk (Dune Walk) that runs from Plyler Park to 14th Avenue North (the northern terminus of the boardwalk) and consists of Trex decking.

Bottom, right: The boardwalk project includes this 12-foot wide main concrete walkway located at the south promenade. The landscaping in this area includes restored secondary dunes, dune plantings and palmettos to the east (left - beach front) and sod, palmettos, native shrubs and grasses to the west (right - Ocean Boulevard).



PHOTO CREDIT: DDC ENGINEERS / THE LANDART COMPANY

Left, top: Looking south towards the main oceanfront retail / restaurant / entertainment section of "downtown," the boardwalk serves as an extension of existing buildings and links businesses to the oceanfront.



PHOTO CREDIT: MARK KUREA, CITY OF MYRTLE BEACH

Left, middle: The concrete walkway and the boardwalk meet at this section of the project near the shade sails. Access to the ocean from the walkway is possible by using the Trex decking dune crossovers. The project includes the restoration of secondary dunes and plant materials include palmettos, native shrubs and grasses and dune plantings such as sea oats and beach grass.



PHOTO CREDIT: DDC ENGINEERS / THE LANDART COMPANY

Left, bottom: This detailed view of available seating on the walkways shows the custom concrete benches and paver panels inset in concrete. The shade sail poles have been painted white in Tnemec coating to protect from salt and sand.

location, affording no public property for a Boardwalk. The agency restriction in this area limited the boardwalk to an elevated eight-foot wide all wood structure located totally landward of the primary dunes. Programming requirements for this section focused primarily on the connection between the pier at 14th Avenue North with the central Boardwalk section and with the abutting hotels while providing multiple, controlled access points to the beach. Lighting had to be reduced to the absolute minimum to avoid light impacts on nesting sea turtles.

The design of the central section was of critical importance to the success of the project. The central section is at the heart of the downtown area and is occupied with existing shops, restaurant and entertainment venues. This section, more than any other portion of the project needed to be an exciting and interactive lineal space, a traditional boardwalk with ample width to accommodate large crowds, extensive seating, views of the ocean, shade, lighting, signage, strong vertical architecture and continuous connectivity to abutting restaurants and businesses.

Given the large number of people that would be moving to and gathering within this district, beach access points had to be numerous and ample in width. Outdoor dining space was such a high priority that the city revised their municipal codes to allow dining and consumption of alcohol within the public boardwalk rights-of-way. As was the case in the northern section, lighting had to be designed with sharp cut-offs to minimize sea turtle impacts.

The southern segment of the project included a wide and continuous parcel of city owned property located between the dune line and the adjacent hotel properties. This afforded the opportunity for development of a lineal park with strong connectivity function and with landscaping, sun bathing and gathering lawns. LandArt included shade structures and pedestrian crossings to the beach and each street end. In addition, each hotel was afforded access to the Boardwalk.

The project was completed on time and within budget. The Myrtle Beach Boardwalk, by all accounts and all methods of measurement, has been a resounding success. The economy in the downtown area has experienced a tremendous revival. Tourists and, for the first time in many years, locals returned to the downtown area.

The Boardwalk has also been the catalyst for other improvements. The pier at the southern end of the project underwent a complete renewal and a hotel property on the northern end is being redeveloped as a 200' Ferris Wheel. The value of these two projects exceeds \$15 million.