Andy Romano Beachfront Park design approved

By JOHN BOZZO

For The Hometown News

ORMOND BEACH - Children and maybe even adults will frolic in a beachfront splash park.

Family pavilions will host oceanfront reunions.

Dunes will be restored, children will have a separate shaded playground and viewing areas will be provided for people to merely sit and enjoy the splendor of the beach and the Atlantic Ocean.

Those features and more were all approved Tuesday as the City Commission unanimously gave its blessing to a concept plan for the new Ormond Beach's Andy Romano Beachfront Park.

Named after the city's first lifeguard, first beach concessionaire and a longtime recreation enthusiast who remains active today, the park will be a popular addition to this city, whose voters approved issuing $5 million in bonds last year to help buy the property.

Volusia County's ECHO program, which pays for environmental, cultural, historic and outdoors programs with a voter-approved tax, chipped in with $3.5 million to help secure the site.

Developing the park with the amenities envisioned in the concept plan will cost about $2.6 million.

Restrooms and a concession area are included in the plan, which will also provide 190 parking spaces, 50 picnic tables, 16 pavilions of various sizes, 14 grills and 40 benches. All told, the park will have a seating capacity of 488.

A drop-off area will be provided by the restroom-concession area, which will be designed to

resemble the city's historic beachside coquina fire department building.

In the park concept, planning officials used comments from residents in public forums, city advisory boards, city staff and the City Commission.

"It was pretty clear the community wanted these items in the park," said Beth Lemke, of Zev Cohen & Associates, the consulting firm that put together the design.

However, there were residents who wanted less parking and opposed features such as the splash park, playground, pavilions and concession area.

Those critics continued to lobby the City Commission on Tuesday.

Pat McMullen, an Ormond Beach resident, wanted the design flip-flopped.

"Move the parking to the front because I bet you can't see the ocean from your car," she said.

A Zev Cohen representative said people would be able to park and see the ocean from their vehicles.

Mimi Monroe, an Ormond Beach resident, said the parking plan for the park would create an overcrowded beach.

"I propose a maximum of 100 parking spaces, footpaths and more dune restoration," she said. "It's a wonderful part of the beach. Please don't mess it up."

Charlie Wilkes, another resident, lobbied for a more simplified park.

"Let's keep it natural, save some money and maybe we can buy another park farther up the road and spread out the crowd," he said.

Mayor Ed Kelley said some people wanted 100 parking spaces and some wanted 250.

"It was difficult to arrive at a number," he said. "We can't please 100 percent of the people."

The mayor worried about the future success of the park.

"As nice as we're making this, we're going to have to have staffing there," he said.

Several commissioners proposed saving money by building fewer pavilion structures.

"I think this park has a little bit of something for everyone," Commissioner Troy Kent said.

As the design and bidding process continues, the City Commission can make more changes before the park is scheduled to open in January 2013.

But the man whose name is honored at the park, Mr. Romano, said he's happy with the proposed park concept.

"The main thing we need is a place for people to park and access the beach," he said after the meeting.