

City to begin overhaul of Magnolia Bridge over Bayou St. John in January

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After a few false starts, the Magnolia Bridge over Bayou St. John will soon get its long-awaited facelift.

A \$1.3 million contract has been awarded to Hard Rock Construction LLC, which in January will begin refurbishing the pedestrian bridge — one of the oldest bridges in the city.

Crews will clean and paint it, seal cracks in the substructure and replace some of the decking, beams and other structural components.

City Councilwoman Susan Guidry, who has worked along with civic groups such as the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association for years to get the project off the ground, said Monday that the roughly 10-month job should restore the bridge to its “fairly original, glorious state.”

“It’s a part of our history,” she said of the bridge, which is sometimes known as the Cabrini Bridge because of the nearby Cabrini High School. “It’s iconic. People often take photos of the bridge as a symbol of New Orleans and our way of life.”

The Magnolia Bridge was built in the late 1800s and originally included streetcar tracks. As a swing bridge, it had a center piling that allowed it to rotate, turning the bridge parallel to the waterway so that boats could pass on either side, though the bayou was closed to river traffic in the early 20th century.

The bridge was restored and stabilized in 1937 and again in more recent decades, though it's unclear when it was converted to being strictly for pedestrians.

These days, numerous walkers, joggers and cyclists cross the bridge, while neighbors often sit on on its decking among the peeling beams. Photographers shoot pictures of and from the bridge, which has been the site of more than a few weddings.

“It’s really the only waterway we have within the city that draws people to its banks to use, whether it’s families having picnics or the festivals we now have there,” Guidry said of Bayou St. John. “The bridge connects the two sides of the bayou, so for those of us who like to walk, run and bicycle, it connects our neighborhoods.”

The cost of the work is being shared by the city’s Department of Public Works, the Regional Planning Commission and federal funding through the state Department of Transportation and Development.

Mary Jo-Webster, who founded the group Re-Bridge about seven years ago to rally support for rehabilitation of the Magnolia Bridge and the nearby Dumaine Bridge, said she is glad to see the project finally move forward.

“To me, it’s important historically,” she said, noting the nearby Pitot House and other landmarks, “but it’s also just gorgeous.”

Unlike the Magnolia Bridge, the Dumaine Bridge's issues are only cosmetic, not structural, so Webster said the bulk of the money the group raised will likely be used for that work when it happens. She said the city recently informed her it is working on a cooperative endeavor agreement for that project.

Webster said the community is going to handle the spot painting and graffiti abatement on the Magnolia Bridge after the rehab project is complete.

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http://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/news/article_f9a66d86-b040-11e7-b126-ef36b74086e6.html