

Wildwood Opts for Ipe Wood Over Black Locust in Boardwalk Construction

Black Locust | 1 week 3 days ago | Comments 8
By Lauren Suit



Construction continues on the Schellenger Avenue section of the boardwalk. Photo by Lauren Suit

WILDWOOD — The rebuilt section of the Wildwood boardwalk won't be as environmentally friendly as city officials had hoped.

With a looming Easter weekend in 2009 deadline and a gaping hole in the Wildwood's famous walk, Mayor Ernie Troiano, Jr. and Commissioner Bill Davenport voted Dec. 17 to use ipe tropical hardwood to replace portions of the city's aging pine wood boardwalk. Commissioner Gary DeMarzo abstained from voting on the resolution.

The decision to switch lumber came after the city was sent "an absolutely deplorable" shipment of black locust lumber, according to Troiano.

"What we got was horrible," Troiano told the Herald. "Absolutely terrible and there was still bits of bark on it. There was no way we were comfortable using that wood to rebuild."

The decision over what wood to use for the boardwalk's facelift had been under scrutiny from environmental groups since August of 2005. Environmentalist spoke at numerous city meetings to voice their fears that without an independent third party to certify the materials, the boardwalk would be rebuilt at the cost of acres of rainforest wood. They had urged the city to look into alternative materials, specifically black locust.

The black locust is a multi-purpose hardwood that is rated by the United States Forestry Service. The wood is yellowish in color and is commonly used in marine construction due to its resistance to rot.

Troiano had said that he use black locust because city engineers deemed it durable and would support emergency equipment such as ambulances and fire engines. The eco-friendly aspect, he had said at the time, is an added bonus.

But the sample of wood city engineers received at the planning phases and what was actually shipped this month was like night and day, according to Troiano.

"Ipe was available and we had to move on it," Troiano said. "It has the board strength we need, especially for emergency vehicles."

Troiano said that alternatives like pine and plastic "would never hold up" and he was concerned about waiting and giving the black locust another chance.

"We would never make the Easter opening," he said. "I couldn't do that to the piers and all the businesses up there."

Demolition of the Schellenger Avenue section of the Boardwalk began in October 2008.

Replacing the entire boardwalk is a ten-year, \$10 million project. So for now, the city will focus time and money on the first phase of the project.

Phase I of the project will cost over \$4 million and encompass approximately three blocks of boardwalk, including a tunnel at Schellenger Avenue to facilitate emergency vehicles.

Phase I of the reconstruction boardwalk replacement is a fully-funded project with grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zone Authority.