

## Council backs rezoning for riverfront park proposal

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The New Orleans City Council voted unanimously Thursday in favor of rezoning the 1.4-mile industrial riverfront stretch from Elysian Fields Avenue in the Marigny to Poland Avenue in Bywater. The move cleared the last legislative hurdle required to allow for construction to begin on a \$30 million project to redevelop the section of Mississippi riverfront into a public park.

The approval came despite lingering concerns from representatives of a neighborhood in the vicinity of the project. New Orleans Building Corp. Director Sean Cummings, who serves as landlord for city properties, says construction on the project should begin in February.

Faubourg Marigny Improvement Association members have repeatedly asserted there are serious outstanding questions related to the maintenance and operation of Crescent Park, the first phase of the \$250 million Reinventing the Crescent project. FMIA officials argue the venue as planned poses potentially deleterious effects to their neighborhood.

Some of the primary complaints have centered around reports of insufficient parking, the possibility of excessive noise stemming from a park facility's operation and concerns over how the park will be maintained.

In one good neighbor agreement proposed to the city, FMIA representatives proposed that the organization receive a 10 percent cut of the revenue from events held at the Mandeville Street Wharf, which will be made available for lease for concerts and other events. The money, the proposal suggests, would go toward maintenance of the neighborhood's Washington Square Park and other Marigny infrastructure improvements.

In a more recent version of the proposal, the group calls for the creation of a new entity to collect that money and oversee some park maintenance and operation.



The NOBC submitted its latest good neighbor agreement proposal to FMIA in late December. In an e-mail to FMIA President Chris Costello outlining some of the changes made, Cummings invokes the novelist Ursula LeGuin.

"The idea is like grass," Cummings writes, quoting from the author. "It craves light, thrives on crossbreeding and grows better for being stepped on."

"You all have challenged and stepped on our ideas," Cummings wrote in his own words. "We have listened. We have compromised. And, this agreement is better for it."

The city, Cummings said, is not "able or willing to pay you or cede control" of park facilities to a new improvement association, as per FMIA's proposal.

Still, he noted that the city has made certain concessions, listing among them ensuring that events held at the Mandeville Street Wharf operate below legal noise limits, that the number of special events held at the facility annually be capped at 24 instead of 36 and that a "skilled operator" will be hired to, among other services, prepare a park business plan.

"It is time to build our city," Cummings wrote. "It is time to inspire everyone around us to greatness. And, Reinventing the Crescent is one of the rare, transformative, lifetime opportunities to inspire the human spirit.

"Please join us," Cummings urged Costello in the letter. "Sign this agreement. More than good neighbors, we will be great ones."

Cummings said a request for construction bids on various elements of Crescent Park has been advertised and a bid date of Jan. 27 set. He anticipates construction on the project to begin in February and require 18 months to complete.

Neither Costello nor Councilman James Carter responded to requests for comment. To sign up for CityBusiness Daily Updates, click [here](#).



New Orleans Building Corp. Director Sean Cummings discusses Reinventing the Crescent at the Mandeville Street Wharf, which will be reconfigured in the first phase of the project. (photo by Frank Aymami)

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