



new orleans

riverfront:

Reinventing the Crescent

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Reinventing the Crescent Stakeholder Meeting May 25, 2007

Sean Cummings opened the meeting and introduced the team.

Allen Eskew said that while initial discussions included 4.5 miles of riverfront, the full study area is more than 6 miles.

He said since the last stakeholder meeting, there had been some meetings with downriver, upriver and off-river neighborhood groups and some other one-on-one meetings.

Alex Krieger said that there is an Emerging Vision, which includes the original five major principles, as well as two additional objectives:

- 1-Place of distinct character and civic energy
- 2-Breaking down barriers and gaining access
- 3-Continuous access along great public open space
- 4-Building and sustaining great places to live
- 5-New icons and social landmarks (places and structures)

6-Respect and enhance the qualities of the place.

7-Facilitate the renewal of the local economy and new regional competitiveness.

He presented a brief analogy to Detroit in terms of design, scope and project size. He said they are in their 40th year of recovery following a downturn in the automobile manufacturing industry and other out-migration issues. He said Detroit reintroduced itself to the river and built a five-mile public promenade. This \$70 million public investment unleashed \$1 billion in collateral investments.

Allen Eskew said that of the New Orleans Riverfront CEU footprint of 174 acres, only 22 percent is buildable. There are nine or ten nodes along 6.4 miles. It's about half of the east bank riverfront. It is anticipated there are 45-50 current openings.

The streetcar is proposed for upriver (Jackson to St. Charles) and downriver (Poland to St. Claude), and the team is adopting the pre-Katrina routing proposed by the RTA.

Carol Bebel and Allen Eskew have been considering cultural markings based on historic events:

- Where Bienville landed his canoe to found the city
- Native American portage from Bayou St. John to the Mississippi River
- Plessy v Ferguson at Press Street
- Slave trade/transfer locations
- Steamboat landings
- Immigration portal

From Canal upriver, George Hargreaves, Enrique Norton, Alex Krieger, Kirt Reider and Mark Dwyer explained the conceptual planning:

Downriver

Spanish Plaza

This is an opportunity to encourage WTC to think about retail on first 2 floors and spill out into the surrounding land. How does the reconfigured plaza meet with the Riverwalk?

Make a lateral connection from ferry to Spanish Plaza with café interaction that works on both sides of terminal.

Woldenberg Park

The recommendation is to introduce water features for kids outside the aquarium and a wet garden with freshwater wetlands as an interpretation piece.

The question is “how can it be better for festivals, but keep the shade?” The idea is to make it more of a day-to-day park. Introduce traveling sculpture and art. Frame it on one end with a pier and Moonwalk and the other end with water features.

Extend the park, connecting to Canal Street and through parking areas.

Jackson Square

Jackson Square was originally located at waters’ edge, but later railroad tracks, trolley, street, etc. interrupted its direct connection to the river. Use of an elevated walkway will allow people to get to riverside, which becomes a destination with pier and terraces. There will be at-grade and above-grade connections, creating a special quality and expanding capacity.

Esplanade/Elysian Fields

Make the connection at the intersection, which can be done “very poetically.”

Alex Kreiger said that there is a “magical opening at Esplanade for breaking down barriers. The public can arrive at a great place and engage people who do not live on river.”

The idea is to make a cut through the wharves and glaze the opening so people can see the working wharves.

George Hargreaves said there are two principles: getting to river and honoring working wharves.

A larger promontory with canopy is also proposed.

Press Street

NOCCA is important to the neighborhood, and Press Street is the old road to the cotton press. Proposed is a series of linear parks that could connect NOCCA and bring it to the water. The park would be lifted 23 feet to get above the railroad and connect the neighborhood to the school and water. This also helps to reinforce the revitalization of St. Claude Avenue, to help it become more like Magazine Street in its retail and service diversity.

Poland Avenue

There is a re-envisioning of the military site with a new opportunity for the city to connect to the proposed cruise ship terminal and keep pressure off neighborhood streets. There would be a mid-rise development with a landscaped park on the point. A new access road would keep the traffic off Chartres and Poland.

George Hargreaves said a major element is the public terminating at the point. Earthworks can mitigate the buildings and create a peninsula to the canal and river. At the end would be a shade pavilion or amphitheatre.

Alex Krieger said he recognizes that neighborhoods fear the cruise ship terminal and more density. This is a large piece of land and can accommodate a new road. “Old beloved New Orleans comes to a juncture with new beloved New Orleans without negative impact.”

Allen Eskew said little is proposed for Holy Cross with a few amenities at the crown of the levee only. With Holy Cross High School relocated, this is now a high priority recovery site and complements the Global Green site. There is an opportunity to improve Bywater traffic and connect Holy Cross back to other neighborhoods, to “weave together the wonderful existing fabric with a new neighborhood fabric.”

Upriver

Julia Street

Mark Dwyer said that Julia Street would have an elevated green terrace over the railroad tracks. A plaza and gardens would make this a public destination at the riverfront.

Allen Eskew said plans include a 900-room hotel by developer Jerry Barrouss, already in planning.

There is a rethinking of the configuration of the Convention Center, with a proposal to renovate the Julia Street end of the facility.

Upriver of the Convention Center, there is limited land except for the proposed Phase IV Convention Center site and the Tulane University Riversphere property. NOBC also has property on the riverfront that is large enough to develop.

Alex Krieger said this could be a whole new neighborhood. There is plenty of additional building capacity, if the market is there. The distinct qualities remain, but it would be more future-oriented in scale.

George Hargreaves said he proposes to extend the influence of the river back into the development site to create a contemporary interpretation of Jackson Square: three distinct spaces with the ability to present some exterior intellectual concepts in conjunction with Riversphere programming.

Alex Krieger said this is a way to do some major decongesting by three-dimensionalizing the park, thereby providing vehicles access over the rail corridor.

Entergy Power Plan

At the Entergy Power Plant, the team proposes an urban plaza and fountain, since this is a more urban condition. They see it as a major day and night time gathering place with cafe use, outdoor screens, heavily programmed for festivals, etc.

Alex Krieger said it is complicated, as there must be consideration of how to use the NOBC blocks and leverage them for the most economic value.

Jackson Avenue

Near Jackson Avenue, the team proposes to take out wharves, then let river ecology reassert itself. A pavilion and naturalized landscape would be featured so you would get 4 or 5 distinct landscape designs/uses

Three to four piers are suggested along this area.

There will be ability to walk and bike the entire area, primarily on the water side, thus creating a linear experience.

Allen Eskew mentioned that the team was setting additional meetings with property owners and key neighborhoods to review work in progress.

Questions and Answers

Chris Costello, Marigny

One concern is at Poland and Jackson...traffic and parking. The plan showed Chartres would go into the neighborhood. He asked if access to any new development would be blocked off. At Jackson Avenue, where will people park? If everyone takes a car, it will be an issue. It is important to consider how to add accessibility without a major traffic jam.

Allen Eskew said that at Poland they will look at parking options. Jackson and Tchoupitoulas sites require additional study for parking issues.

Alex Krieger said that they can stop the streets, or make them one way. It will continue to be studied at the next level.

Kurt Weigle, DDD, asked about how the elevation would be changed at Julia Street.

Allen Eskew explained that there would be a 23 ft tilt from the Convention Center Blvd. to the Julia Street Wharf. It does require removing a piece of Riverwalk. This scheme highlights Julia as an art corridor that allows strollers to arrive at a nice set of gardens, and a hotel that will have a prominent address – No. 1 Julia Street.

Alex Krieger offered the analogy of walking up a shallow dune and having ocean in front of you. It's a gradual incline – the entire landscape, not just the street.

Allen Eskew said there are two assumptions:

Hilton will expand, and Riverwalk will rethink its retail density. As they are rethought, there will be a need to offer a planning roadmap.

Sean Cummings said that traditionally, there has been no vesting of property, so there is a “hodge-podge” and thus no civic energy. This will take more of an effort because Hilton is privately owned. When reconstituted, it may be done in a more thoughtful way.

Kurt Weigle offered the suggestion that if Hilton uses the lot to expand, it should consider changing its front door.

Allen Eskew said he is not aware of any groups looking at Poydras Street and opening it to the river. Right now it is just a placeholder available when the marketplace allows.

Kurt W. asked about Corps of Engineers issues, and said a transient marina should be considered. There is an opportunity for sensitive commercial use. “Some people think that's an anathema, but it will animate the space.” He also expressed his concern about the lack of shade at the moonwalk seating area and suggested a manmade structure to introduce shade.

Gene Cizek, Bywater

Gene said there are some exciting ideas but he doesn't like the high rises in the neighborhoods. “When you peel away from downtown, you dilute what could be good urban space. I am not against building in Bywater, but there are some other ways of getting traffic through.” He said wharves go back to early 20th century. They are historic.

“High-risettes” don't fit at Poland, he said, and suggested spreading density to keep with the visual character of neighborhood. 19th century ambiance is extremely valuable and the small scale of Bywater and Holy Cross needs to be preserved.”

A Bywater resident

A female Bywater resident asked who would live in the high rises on the point at Poland? She said affordable housing is needed.

Allen Eskew said it will be a mix of market rate, workforce and low income to accommodate a spectrum of housing choices.

George Hargreaves noted. “This is valuable property, so a lot will be for high-end. You have to have a citywide answer to that question.”

Allen Eskew said the military property is being surplus. Part of the criteria for transfer is proposed land use. The team has recommended housing as the top priority for that site.

Lynn Walters, RiverWalk

Lynn said General Growth Properties does have plans for the Riverwalk and said it was presumptuous to talk about what would happen without talking to General Growth.

Allen Eskew said it has always been the intention to talk to adjacent businesses about long-term plans. “We had to advance our work so we could have the conversation. We made a working decision to push forward a bit to get more planning definition.”

Lynn Walters asked that in presenting to the community, that the information be presented in a more positive manner.

Allen Eskew said the team would use more neutral terms.

Kurt Weigle said that Sean Cummings alluded to the fact that all plans property owners should come out ahead when it’s over. The assumption is that it will be beneficial.

Sean Cummings made apologies for the word choice. He said there is public money to fix some things, and he hopes to work with private investors to make it all work together.

Lynn Walters said Riverwalk has plans, and those plans are not in sync with the presentation.

Nathan Chapman, VCPORA asked if the presentation could be made again since the public meeting will be on Memorial Day weekend.

Allen Eskew said the team has been discussing additional outreach and communications. “We haven’t figured it out yet. We will add some additional meetings.”

George Hargreaves said at Jackson Square/Artillery Park that the walls will be entombed in the slope, and the grass turf becomes a departure point. Some parking will have to be eliminated.

Gene Cizek said that there is a negative view back toward cathedral. Before the storm, the crape myrtles at least gave shade.

Allen Eskew said there will be approximately two dozen parking places removed to make room for the Jackson Square extension.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.