

Reinventing the Crescent Stakeholders Meeting March 16, 2007

Sean Cummings introduced the project by saying, “New Orleans is all about authenticity, but we are talking about doing something in contemporary times. This riverfront is very much rooted in this culture. I have asked them to think outside the box to create something remarkable and wonderful.”

Allen Eskew said the team is not looking for literal transfer, but there is incredible opportunity. He explained that the scope of work is a 4.5 mile section from Jackson Avenue to Holy Cross. A cooperative endeavor agreement with the Port defines the primary project area.

The team is working with the City Planning Commission to honor the Riverfront Vision 2005 and the UNOP plan. He said it will be described in Port nomenclature, or wharf language.

He said that while height seems to be the concern, height is not the only dimension to consider, and the team is looking for opportunities to express that. The City Planning Commission’s Riverfront Vision 2005 is imbedded in the process. He said that the team has adopted the UNOP plan recommendation for the French Quarter parking lots.

Nathan Chapman said while there was a lot of participation in the Riverfront Vision, it is not quite settled. Duany’s charrette didn’t provide enough time to see it fully developed.

Allen said they will recognize and work with material in place and they understand that there are a variety of levels of buy-in, but they want to get the work finished to dovetail with the LRA process.

Alex Kreiger said that the project area is a very complicated site with many constraints. Other cities have engaged in waterfront development, and Sean has challenged the team to keep aspirations very high.

He showed a slide with arrows pointing toward the river, “that go toward a bulls eye... what the bulls eye is located is where we need input.”

Alex pointed out that New Orleans has the busiest shipping channel in North America. He pointed out nine inspirational principles:

Great public gathering places at river’s edge.

- Open space, cultural facilities, gathering places, housing.

Importance of Great Perpendicular Corridors to River

- Canal Street, Jackson Square do it.
- What about developing others – places where special things happen, which translates itself into open space and development.

Linear Connectivity along River’s Edge

- Not homogenous, but the public deserves continuity.
- Expand the palette along the riverfront.

Interacting with the Water

- Australia – built pools on riverside – recreation
- Copenhagen- created environment so can interact. Get as close as you can. Overcome harshness.

New Housing/Scale and pattern

- Punctuate bulls eye with height – not in the French Quarter – but somewhere.
- It doesn't have to be conventional housing. It is about intensity more than it is density.
- Contrasts sometimes are preferable to preserving existing structure.

Landmarks

- Starbursts of activity in various locations, beckoning people to visit.
- It's about activities, not just statues.

Variation of Scale of Open Space and Parks

- Broad and simple, public, narrow, naturalistic. Variety will make it more interesting.
- Shaping in relation to programming.

Iconic Nature of Great Places (establishing tradition)

- Create institution that is instantly identifiable such as in Venice.
- Alcoa in Pittsburgh built headquarters and funded housing
- Chicago – Millennium Park. Last piece of 100 year plan.
- Need to establish tradition to allow the development to continue. We anticipate the 300th anniversary in 2018.

Mark Dwyer said his group was trying to understand the capacity of the site by looking at limits of area. He broke it down as follows:

- 174 acres
- 22.2 percent of area is open to development
- Some area is too "thin"
- 90-120 foot width makes it buildable.
- 38 acres are left.
- Buildable footprint is from box levee.

Kirt Reider said the study area is above sea level. The river is higher than sea level. The waterfront has been engineered and pushed to where it is today. The area is well positioned – tight and narrow – but elevated.

They cut sections in several areas through existing conditions.

- St. Andrew St.
- Henderson St.
- Julia St
- St. Peter St.
- Clout St.
- Desire St.
- Reynes St.

George Hargreaves presented four strategies:

1. Adaptive strategy

Markers in certain areas – sculptural elements. Make the riverfront present and mark the way to go to get to it since you can't see it.

In the adaptive strategy, there will be a need to manage "wall crawl." Bring development without blocking the view. You can build buildings on top of box levee, not on wharves. The Port does not allow habitable space on wharves. We can build open space on wharves.

2. Expansive strategy

If the development can straddle the RR track and additional land harvested, the buildings can be designed so that the visible part is the thin piece, not wide side. “Utilize some air rights and put the tall stuff behind the wall, then make connections for pedestrians.”

George said that a lot of this ground has to stay open. It is possible to extend streets to piers. Historically, that’s how wharves were, so it is inspired by history. This is really a less expensive strategy that can exist in any scheme.

Development can bring in millions and millions, and bringing in mixed use, create partnerships to pay for the cultural space.

3. Reductive strategy

In this scenario, the team said they work with what they have, take out more and more wharf and let it become natural ecology. Public may want to just have open space, in which case, they might then just tear down wharves and let it evolve ecologically.

4. Hybrid strategy

In this strategy, it can be both approaches.

- This takes ideas of piers and landscape.
- Use different strategies in different areas.
- Bring Spanish Plaza back and forward- making it a significant part of the waterfront.

There is a way to make Spanish Plaza more prominent, create partnerships with Hilton Parking... create a cruise ship terminal there. “The goal is to develop this with a public, philosophical framework for the waterfront.”

Allen introduces the rest of the team present: Deron Brown, St. Martin Brown; Mark Dwyer, Ten Arquitectos; Kirt Reider, Hargreaves; Alan Mountjoy, Chan Krieger; Allen Lewis, Eskew +Dumez+ Ripple; Alex Krieger, Chan Kreiger, Valerie Robinson, Robinson et al.; Carol Bebel and Twyla Rattler, Ashe Cultural Center.

He said he made a working assumption that it was the neighborhoods adjacent to the riverfront that were impacted. Carol Bebel reminded him that the magic of this 4.5 miles is that it is for the entire city.

Carol said there is a need to manage barriers by connecting people with people, connect industry with community, etc.

“The river is divine force...it is threat and opportunity. It is about what people do, not just what is built there. It is important that this is a gift that is for everyone. This bracelet of place will have pathways created to connect.”

She said community development and arts and culture are connected, and that there are often creative solutions to cultural issues.

Allen announced the next Stakeholder Meeting on April 13 and stated that this month was about analysis. Next, the team will take these frameworks and advance them, then a framework will be selected, and chosen framework advanced, then finally the final presentation.

Q&A/Comments

Unidentified woman said it was a “thoughtful process” and asked about access – is it bike paths, monorail or what?

George said there will be continuous pedestrian access, but the team is not to the point of defining transportation.

Allen said his firm was working with Tulane, and had worked with RTA to extend the Riverfront streetcar from Poland to St. Claude to Jackson Ave. -- that routing is already conceptually approved.

Sue Klein said she appreciates the sensitivity of the presentation. She noted that it looked like the Esplanade node was one of the areas of dense development, but that is in the Vieux Carre, and the maximum height is 50 feet. "We don't want the old part of the city walled off."

Allen said the circle represents a general area; it would not be in the French Quarter.

Steve Maklansky said he is excited about plans for the Mint and suggested that its redevelopment needs to be coordinated.

Alex said the circle simply indicates an area of excitement.

Larry Hesdorffer said his main focus is the French Quarter. Planning is valuable now. "This is a large swath of ground, and we understand how important little areas can be. I can't help but think that in looking at the future of Canal Street, it was so much more people-friendly in the early days. Spanish Plaza is not a successful spot. We shouldn't regret the evolution of the Convention Center, but it is just another wall. We need to look at each piece as to their scale. Scale will be critical. I believe in juxtaposition of design so we aren't just a document to the past. There are opportunities all along the way, and it's good to see how quickly it has come to this point."

Daniel Winkert said the team needs to think about the natural environment and the health of the river. He asked about the research on the Poland Avenue property. What is the process for this?

Joe said the property is being supplused by the Navy.

Belinda Little-Wood introduced herself as the new Executive Director of the organization that will accept the Poland Avenue site. She said the first board meeting is March 26, 2 p.m. She said it will be a long process. Some of the commands are being relocated to Algiers, but Federal City has to be built first. It will start by Sept. 2008. She offered her assistance.

George said there is a lot of opportunity for open space. He said he has been involved in base closure and the City needs to make sure the military cleans toxins. He suggested getting the money from them and doing it instead of waiting for the military to do it. He said typically, as the military leaves, they let the facilities fall apart.

Nathan Chapman complimented the team on the presentation. He said he wants to schedule a meeting with the downriver groups

"I've been on Riverfront committee for 20 years. We just want to give you everything we can to help."

He asked that the team be very sensitive to the potential negative impact of entertainment spaces. If it's right next to where people live, it's not good planning.

"The downriver parts are pretty wonderful as they are now. We don't want to lose that. Try to see the beauty of the smaller scale."

He said the city hasn't really done a good job of thinking outside the box. He used the analogy of the streetcar system. "They felt a need to modernize; it was just about function. We now appreciate the streetcars as more than transportation. The wharves are not just industrial; they are cultural...you can sit and watch industry. There must be some way to incorporate that."

Sean asked what he would have the team do that has not already been done. He said Gov. Nicholls will remain. The other wharves immediately adjacent are "toast." Esplanade and Mandeville are deteriorated.

Nathan said he thinks the educational value of the working wharves is important, but it seems there is a security issue because he has asked about occasional tours. The wharves need to be interactive, educational.

Sean said he thinks the community needs to come to public meetings and bring participation to the established forum.

Sally Perry said it appeared that the visioning and planning are based on the Railroad forever being there.

Alex said it is difficult to change the Railroad. It can be very expensive and disruptive. A better solution is to create continuous platforms in a gentle way, and it can be more interesting.

Allen said the railroad volume has gone up 10 fold. The team hopes to talk about long-term interventions.

Reed Kroloff: "Chicago has fabulous waterfront, but it is a wall of high rises. Don't get caught in what New Orleans was, but what it can be. History is written by looking not only at the past but toward the future. We can integrate those ideas without destroying any particular fabric."

Doug Meffert complimented the team on the presentation. He said micro-industry is an icon of the future. This reinforces sustainability. He said Tulane is exploring the river as an energy source. In the expansive development scheme, there is the issue of the big footprint of the Convention Center both for visual access and people access. Recognizing that June is the deadline for the project, the Convention Center may not have decision, but may have opportunity on top of it.

Allen said Warren Reuther has offered to work with the group to find options. There is a possibility of building on top of the Convention Center and new mixes. "As designers, we are going to take some direction and be proactive. This might be the silver lining on that 40 acres."

Nathan said that again, he wants to invite the team to visit the site with him.

Allen said the team is doing hard, good work. If anyone wants to talk, he and Joy will discuss it with them. He announced the next Stakeholder Meeting will be April 13.