

Reinventing the Crescent

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Reinventing the Crescent Steering Committee Meeting March 16, 2007

Sean began the meeting by welcoming the Steering Committee.

Those present introduced themselves: Larry Schmidt, Andy Wisdom, Kathleen Turner, Stephen Perry, Keith Butler, Joe Cocchiara, Gen. Dave Mize, Leslie Alley, Reed Kroloff, Warren Reuther, Ron Cole.

Allen Eskew introduced the team members 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.

He said that June 28 is the completion date for the project. By June 21st, there will be a new vision for riverfront.

He said that the purpose of the steering committee and stakeholders' meetings are primarily to "feed back the assessment and the development framework."

He said that the visitor experience is still intact; not damaged by flood. This is 4.5 miles of "sweet spot," and there is tremendous traction in Holy Cross. He explained that the team has analyzed the river in segments in the way that the Port talks about it – in wharf nomenclature.

He said that the team will take all the previous planning and look at it as backdrop, but the team doesn't want this vision to be tied to the master plan. "We will respect it and the UNOP work."

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.

Joe Cocchiara said the warehouse buildings at St. Andrew are now gone. The concept of maritime operation is that it needs to be in the water, but cannot be people-occupied structures. Non-cargo uses are impacted by box levee issue.

Keith Butler asked for the definition of box levee. Joe said it is a concrete wall – not current floodwall. Box levees were part of the construction of the wharves. It does not exist except at wharves.

Kirt said there are various kinds of levees all along the riverfront. In those locations buildings, wharves, etc. have been identified. Since the 1996 Brightfields incident, the Port does not allow building on the river-side of box levee.

George Hargreaves said that so far the team has figured out where on box culverts that they can set guidelines for development.

He said there are two types of green space:

- Woldenberg built on a wharf. Open space can go on wharves.
- In areas of damage to wharves, the city can look at different use – developed open space.

He presented four strategies:

01. 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 view.

02. 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 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.

03. Reductive strategy

In this scenario, the team said they work with are they have, take out more and more wharf and let it become natural ecology.

04. Hybrid strategy

- 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.
- Bring the cruise terminals closer to downtown.
- Development could pay for cruise terminal and make it the centerpiece. It would be at Riverwalk area.

The goal is to develop this with a public, philosophical framework for waterfront.

Alex discussed Precedent Studies and 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

- Can have more height “somewhere.” Doesn't have to be conventional housing.

Landmarks

- Starbursts of activity in various locations, beckoning people to visit.

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. It is hard.
- 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 said that everything is up for discussion. The team, with the help of the public, needs to find what works best for New Orleans. At the Industrial Canal – a large space –there could be a cultural institution, plus housing. The team is testing capacity of each area.

Allen said there will be digital and 3-D models.

“We want the riverfront to be intrinsically New Orleans. Culture is the connection.” He introduced Carol Bebel.

Carol Bebel said she is looking at this project as a great opportunity. Culture is connective tissue. River doesn't just belong to those who own land, but to everyone. The city is full of cultural celebration, ritual and opportunity. This puts a “front” to the city, which is inviting to people.

“There are gathering points of many types, and we need to make them accessible to the community. We have to think about how people use space. Large cultural locations may not be appropriate in all areas. Memorial parks, totems, meditation parks, etc. need to indicate the importance of water to people.”

There is a need to let people know there is a place for them in this effort, and Carol will be talking with cultural community at cultural roundtable. “How do you broker some symbolic ways to bring iconic landmarks and community culture together?”

Allen said that Carol taught him that the total mosaic must feel connection...not just those immediately affected. These are programming opportunities.

“Mahalia Jackson is severely damaged.. We think the opportunity is on the river, but at the same time, we need to honor the sacred space of Armstrong Park and Jackson Square.”

Keith Butler said that most of what is on the Riverfront is now non-profit entities.

One device for financing cultural is a TIF, but the Riverfront is dominated by tax-exempt entities. If you can get 5000 housing units at \$200,000, you could finance culture with a cash stream. “Maybe it makes sense to start with how you pay for cultural facilities, rather than how they are going to be designed.”

Alex answered that whatever is built on water will unleash development all around, so it can finance culture “We should not over-champion culture at the expense of housing.”

Keith said that we need to stimulate population growth by showing New Orleans as an interesting place to live. “We have to think about \$1 billion in taxable property.”

George said that to do that the development will have to reach beyond the floodwall. “We think most will be taxable development, but we have to think about expansive scheme.”

Allen said there are opportunities... Tulane is looking for a partner; the Convention Center expansion site may have opportunity.

Larry Schmidt said if the Convention Center uses the land, it should be MORE than just a Convention Center.

Sean said that Warren (Reuther) understands and wants to make it happen. He endorses the project.

Stephen Perry said NOMCVB is all excited about this project. “This is going to be stunning. The city core is critical to the vitality. To think that community and business are exclusive is wrong; the greatest places to visit are the greatest places to live. What we really want to see is something dramatic, something visionary, becomes branding mechanism for city.”

He said Phase 4 is a massive piece of riverfront. The Pre-K design was gorgeous with promenades, parks, etc. Whether it happens is problematic. One thing the city does need is first class corporate meeting space.

“We have been experiencing gridlocks with cruises and conventions; we could not move people effectively. Transportation is important. We want to be a part of this and support this.”

Allen said, “We want to play above the rim on this. That 40 acre site—we are making recommendations for visionary use of the property.”

Reed Kroloff said he wants to encourage three things:

1. Don't shy away from intensity – land use, density, etc.
2. The project needs to be enhanced by physical connectivity.
3. Don't be locked into presumptions of the current program. “You can be ones to propose outlandish uses, like the Ferris wheel outside of city hall in London. Not just markers, but things that can reshape people's thinking.”

Carol said, “We sell culture, but we don't invest in it. We need to bring two impetuses together. Had the disaster not happened, we would not have opportunities for leveraging.”

Allen said 2018 is a major opportunity. This will be a signature gift to the city.

Ken Ferdinand said he thinks the sense of history needs to tie to commercial industry. He would like to see three things added from an industrial history standpoint:

1. Coffee – extraordinary history. It is huge commodity.
2. Sugar – Domino at parish line. Part of Louisiana. They have historical grounding, but also a huge future. We are the source of sugar.
3. Cotton – NOCCA is built on a cotton wharf. Press Street is named so because of the wagons that left the wharves and traveled to the cotton presses. “We do need to be sensitive, but come to the truth of it – the social, political and economical aspects of it.”

David Mize said he would like to see a timeline – 10,20,50 years and asked about the size of the city, economy of city. “Is that a problem or does it spur public money?”

Alex said the team would look for some catalytic things that could start immediately.

Allen said he will talk to Stephen about branding opportunities. Feedback is important while “all of it is cooking.”

Sean asked how long it took Pittsburgh and Louisville?

Alex and George said five-10 years. Then it should sustain itself for long period of time.

George asked for feedback regarding the strategies to present to the public.

Leslie Alley said that showing all the strategies, including reductive, is a logical approach to show process.

Joe said it looks like it is heading in exactly the right direction.

“We aren’t experts, but we serve a role as public entity. If you find creative ways that are better, we appreciate it. We think the concept of perpendicular buildings is great. I would love to see the entire riverfront done to so you don’t know the RR and floodwalls are there.”

Leslie said the team will need to be expansive or they can’t deal with the transportation aspect.

“We have truck traffic, residential and tourist. Freeman wants to move truck marshalling. Maybe there are other opportunities for them. We need to allow access to the space.”

Allen pointed out that One River Place was exercised at 11th hour, but it was possibility to add residential to the project. We need to create the structure to open opportunity vertically.

Keith asked if there is room for 10 more River Places?

George said yes, in expansive strategy.

Sean said yes, but it would take all developable property on waterside of box levee. Maybe it could be dotted with mid-rise.

Allen said some could straddle the RR.

George said that the team has to look at more than one use for buildings, with housing on top, etc.

Alex said that development needs more than 38 acres for 5000 units...thus the expansive strategy. Cars, transportation, roads, etc. have to be considered.

Joe asked when marketplace factors would be brought to the table.

Allen said Development Strategies would be beginning work immediately.

Sean asked Allen to introduce Keith to Development Strategies. “He is helping us figure out this strategic plan is being created in a way to finance so we can come out of the box with some stuff.” He also said Ken (Ferdinand) sits on RPC, so he can be plugged in to get some government funding.

Allen said Moffet & Nichol and Kulkarni will get with the Port on maritime issues.

The meeting ended at 12:40 p.m.