

## **Reinventing the Crescent Steering Committee Meeting Notes April 13, 2007**

*Attending: Joe Cocchiara, Leslie Alley, Ken Pickering, Reed Kroloff, Andy Wisdom, Kathleen Turner, Ken Pickering, Pam Dashiell, Larry Schmidt, Keith Butler (via phone).*

Sean welcomed the group and introduced Ken Pickering, representing DOTD/Crescent City Connection, which operates the ferry.

Alex Krieger said that the work has evolved to five major themes:

- 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)

He said that there are financial linkages with Richard Ward from Development Strategies and Keith Butler will create the economic framework.

He said that this is not one long continuous green space, but a modular landscape, therefore, the hybrid strategy that was presented in the second meeting will be the one that will work best.

In some areas there will be programmed public space:

- Poland Avenue – perhaps a performance venue
- Moonwalk –extending Jackson Square to have more presence on the river
- Spanish Plaza – how to bring back its glory and reconnect it
- Riversphere/TPL land development
- Woldenberg will remain open space

TPL land, power plant, warehouses and the other side of industrial canal can become a river ecology.

Investment nodes were described by Alan Mountjoy.

### **Riversphere site**

Additional land around the power plant may be available for development. There needs to be something that maximizes private investment and allows public use. Private development can be accomplished behind it. He proposed a rising deck/inclined plane from Orange to Henderson (roughly) to get over the railroad tracks and access to cruise ship terminal/convention center.

This is a place for an icon; it could be cultural and/or social institution.

Allen Eskew said Steve Perry wants to rethink Phase 4 of the convention center in terms of high-tech, high-performance vertical space.

### **Julia Street**

There are a variety of things at play here: second cruise ship terminal, reconceptualization of Phase 4 of the Morial Convention Center, future development on Hilton site, and an additional hotel adjacent to terminal. This is a great portal to the harbor, where you have an overview the activity. The Riverwalk could continue to convention center.

### **Spanish Plaza**

George said that Spanish Plaza needs to be rethought and reworked to bring back its glory and to be a fitting end point for Canal Street.

The ferry terminal needs to be removed to establish a link to Spanish Plaza, and there is a lot of work to do to even begin to think about it. The key thing is to keep the infrastructure intact, but to rearrange it to make it one of the most significant spaces in downtown New Orleans.

He suggested bringing the Moonwalk to Jackson Square, extending it via a terraced space as a green park. A pier could be built over the railroad track down to river. He noted that you cannot plant trees on levee so the architectural element of the terrace is important.

### **Esplanade/Elysian Fields**

Allen Eskew said the neighborhood groups want the UNOP plan for this area. He thinks that the team is helping them to realize that what they want and what the team is offering is the same. Their work is being respected in the process.

Alann Mountjoy said that the two wharves, Gov. Nicholls and Esplanade will remain. There are no immediate plans for them.

The foot of Esplanade is great opportunity for ecology and for landscape and iconic marker. He said it would be interesting to see if it can evolve as uses changes.

Mark Dwyer talked about the Coffee Company site and parcels behind the site situated between the Mint and NOCCA. It's a generous flat condition, but tracks get wide before there is any solid ground. It's a small buildable footprint. 300x300 is the general size.

These parcels have great views to the water.

### **Press Street**

Allen Eskew said the Press Street corridor will be site of NOCCA expansion; it goes all the way to St. Claude. The neighborhood wants green space and expansion of NOCCA.

### **Piety Street**

At the Piety Street Wharf there is a real opportunity to build something at this site, to catalyze resurgence of the neighborhood.

### **Poland Avenue/Port of Embarkation**

After looking at alternatives, there is considerable land and an opportunity for bringing housing closer to the river. This is a good site for perpendicular towers with public access up and over.

Enrique Norton said this keeps lower scale close to the neighborhood and adds height at the river to extend the skyline.

Alann Mountjoy said that living directly on the riverfront is untapped in New Orleans. There are only two railroad tracks here and enough land to do it.

Mark said that contamination is an issue at the Poland Avenue site. This was a large, heavy construction onsite. The buildings can be removed or adapted. There is a place for something tall here.

Enrique said the River at the Industrial Canal marks the beginning of the crescent. Belongs to both sides of industrial canal. It's federal land. It is a "very important moment for an iconic element." He said that it would be wrong to let go this opportunity.

“It’s both old and new New Orleans, goes inland into the lakes, where two water arteries meet.”

Allen Eskew said that Dr. Blakely has made Holy Cross the #1 place for investment. The “loaded condition” Enrique noted makes it a hotter site.

Mark said infrastructure work is needed to handle traffic and existing buildings can be used if it’s possible to create residential space there.

Alan Mountjoy said it is a logical anchor with plans for the downriver streetcar, etc. “We need to make it something so people want to go there.”

A continuous façade that hints at long size of ship, hides uses – parking, customs, etc. – is an option for the space.

There is a lot of land on Chartres Street for additional development. The train goes away there, so there is a self-contained, controlled environment to work with at this site.

Alex said when you operate in an existing city, you have to nurture what’s there.

“At Spanish Plaza, we are being modest in our approach. Some of the other sites need to be transformed, not just nurtured.” He cited Julia, Poland, Felicity as transformative spots.

Leslie Alley said she is encouraged by the plans for Julia and reworking of the convention center. Apartments at Poland will take some massaging with the neighborhood, but she will work with them on height. She thinks that there needs to be more explanation of the perpendicular thought process. The landscape plan is incredible, and she likes the stepping and the ecological areas.

Joe Cocchiara said the team has been respectful of needs of Port. Concepts of up and over have been talked about for years. The comments about seeing ships rise above the flood wall is dramatic. Reconnecting Canal Street should be encouraged, but the team should look at other areas to maximize current openings in floodgates.

At Poland, what is suggested will require changes to maritime berths for ships.

Allen Eskew said the group needs to acknowledge maritime administration.

Ken Pickering, representing the CCC, said that at Canal Street, MCC, Riverwalk, City, Spanish Plaza and DOTD all have to be involved. CCC will work with the group in any regard. He said the ferry is an historical monument. It is not possible to affect its operation.

He said his personal recommendation is that the two current warehouses should go. They don’t fit with everything else. He also noted that the appropriate view of the river is 3-4 to maybe 7 stories...looking at ships, not down at them. The ships from Poland Avenue should go to Federal City in Algiers. Ken offered his balcony for videotaping of the working river at the appropriate level.

George said that the ferry terminal will remain with car access as it is. Pedestrians will have access, but it should be improved.

Ken said queuing lane for vehicles on Canal Street and in front of WTC, and there is not enough land to double queue. Pedestrians walk through queuing lane to get to Aquarium. To get pedestrians from Riverwalk to Aquarium is a problem.

Reed Kroloff said this is a “remarkably ambitious” plan. It is a critical place. Turn this site and Riversphere into campuses. In your planning, gestures like high-rises are important.

“I encourage the team to push. There’s nothing magic about the number 75 (ft.)”

He said Julia Street is a great idea, but the plan should maintain the smaller wharf areas in Marigny and Bywater.

“I think the Moonwalk proposal holds the key. Because the river is large body, Moonwalk needs a broad gesture. This is a big body of water, so it needs impact.

Spanish Plaza is hinky-dinky.”

“At Esplanade, this is working wharf. The wharf offers an advantage. Re-skin it...wharves are industrial and dirty, but they are exciting. Don't look beyond it; look at it.”

Ken said to put restaurants or something else on top of the wharves so people can view the river at work.

Sean asked if there is a reason why when two boulevards come to river, is there something else...something more translucent for the buildings.

Pam Dashiell asked if there are other working wharves in other places with that look? What does “re-skinning” it mean?

Reed says don't do much. “Just open it up physically, or visually to see through it.”

George said he is in favor of the gap. “It's not a glass wall...it needs to be a bigger urban design issue. The power of the gap is tremendous.”

Allen Eskew asked if it's possible to shave off some of Gov Nicholls and Esplanade. Joe said yes.

Allen Eskew said you would still have 90 percent of Esplanade.

Kathleen Turner said that currently the Moonwalk has a park that stays locked, and vagrants congregate there. She said to be careful not to create the same thing with the up and over concept. She also said that Poland Avenue must be something more than a token. A cultural institution must be part of this, not an afterthought.

Andy Wisdom said at each of the targeted zone, it is the cultural hooks that will make it work. You need to convince the population that change isn't necessarily bad.

“In case of Spanish Plaza, it's not just about perpendicular, but we need to show how it affects quality of life for residents. You need to manage expectations. Let them know you are not proposing major things at all locations...just that there will be some marker.”

Sean asked if the traffic issue around the cruise ship terminal has been addressed? Allen Eskew said the team thinks they will solve it.

Sean said he is ready to constitute a finance team to begin working – led by Keith Butler – involving Danny Hughes, Andy Wisdom and Larry Schmidt – to start addressing some of the financial issues.

“This is the inventive thinking that we need. Here is the opportunity for New Orleans to put forth a 21<sup>st</sup> century face.”

Allen Eskew asked Leslie whether they should pull residential buildings from presentation and have a discussion with the neighborhood. She agreed.

Larry said that if neighborhood saw they are getting something, they might be ok.

Carol Bebelles said there are considerations and possibilities. This is part of the design process. It is critical that people understand that this is consideration, not a done deal. She said it is important that people don't come away “feeling like you went without me.”

She said the team should help people understand how the process works...that information is continually being gathered, and what they say may still resonate in the process.