

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
NEW ORLEANS BUILDING CORPORATION

MAYOR C. RAY NAGIN
President

SEAN B. CUMMINGS
Chief Executive Officer

Reinventing the Crescent Downriver Park
Public Meeting One
September 17, 2008
Meeting Minutes

The public meeting began at 7:00 and was convened in the Marsalis Jazz Studio at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) at 2800 Chartres Street, New Orleans, Louisiana. Kyle Wedberg, NOCCA's President/CEO welcomed the crowd and expressed his enthusiasm for the Riverfront's development.

Sean Cummings, CEO of the New Orleans Building Corporation, welcomed everyone. He emphasized the importance of placing this project in the context of the city and its growth. It is important to understand where we are going and this project purports to answer that question. We want to deliver the sort of excellence that we all deserve in this city. He continued by offering a new global trend: Great cities are increasingly places where we must go, but rather places we choose to go to because of the quality of life. New Orleans is in the quality of life business. The Riverfront is one of our competitive advantages in this race. It boosts the quality of life for us but is an important tool in attracting people to stay and move here. Sean offered two examples of companies that recently relocated to New Orleans – a Seattle music business and a Boston-area hydrokinetic energy company – because of the quality of life. For this reason it is important that we revisit Reinventing the Crescent as we begin implementing Phase One of the Development Plan. Sean introduced the design team including Exkew+Dumez+Ripple as local lead, world-renowned landscape architect Hargreaves Associates, urban design firm Chan Krieger Sieniewicz, and young up and coming architects, Michael Maltzan and David Adjaye. He then invited Dr. Ed Blakely to speak to the gathering about the \$30 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding directed by his office that will pay what is currently being called the Reinventing the Crescent Downriver Park.

Dr. Blakely expressed that this is the people's money and that he was in attendance because this is a great day for this city. Today the Master Plan for the city was announced, and now he is here to talk about a project that will make a new New Orleans, a greater place to live. This funding was given to us as a result of tragedy and will be molded into something great. This \$30 million is part of the nearly \$400 to \$500 million that the City will receive. We are not neglecting any neighborhoods to do this project. All of these things will be done strategically, and to do so we need your attention and contributions. We need to get there together and to do so, we all need to think about the places we've all traveled and think about how we can make New Orleans the best of all those places.

Allen Eskew, of Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, reminded everyone that this work is a result of the document already created known as the Reinventing the Crescent Development Plan. He informed the public that everything from that process including all of the meetings, as well as everything that we are now doing, is available on the website. To complete this new task, there are eighteen consulting firms working together to create a comprehensive design for the Downriver Park.

Allen then began describing the scope of the project. Everyone has experienced the Moonwalk and Woldenberg Park. This project is about connecting that portion of the Riverfront with additional open public space spanning to Poland Avenue. The current access includes 2/3 of a mile and this project will add another mile and a half to the Riverfront.

Allen explained the schedule for the project. Within the first seven to eight weeks, the team will complete Program Advancement. This will be followed by a six-month period of design work. There will be eight public meetings throughout this design process. Allen also asked for a summit of the community leaders and offered to work with the community in a variety of formats. The team is aiming for a public opening of the Park in June 2011. In eleven months, it will be under construction.

Allen reviewed the goals that were established during the creation of the Development Plan. The goals were set up as an if/then statement. The first four goals, the “if” goals, pertain to the design team’s commitment and include

- (01) Removing the barriers that thwart access to the River,
- (02) Creating continuous access and a network of great green spaces along the water’s edge,
- (03) Creating places and moments of distinct character and civil energy, and
- (04) Building new architectural icons that offer an authentic 21st century design for New Orleans.

According to the economic studies performed by Dr. Jim Richardson of LSU, if we complete these four goals, then we reach the following five goals that include certain economic development benchmarks including private investment, job creation, and increased tax revenues.

Kirt Rieder of Hargreaves Associates explained that the Development Plan was completed almost a year ago. We’ve had the change to step back and revisit previous assumptions, allowing the team to reengage the public. The team wants to trigger in each individual the ability to see the future of the Riverfront so that they can determine the direction for the project. This is just a kick-off event and the team does not yet know the design. It is a public park and will be accessible to everyone, but for it to succeed, everyone must enjoy it. He then presented a “cloud thought” with various activities that may be located on the Riverfront.

Allen noted that this is about programming and the types of activities that the community expects. By working in the fashion, the team is acting as design facilitators. This will eventually affect how the governance structure is created. We can not talk about governance until we know what we are trying to govern.

Kirt and Allen then launched a presentation that accomplished three things:

- (01) Reminded everyone of the guiding principal and how those goals may be accomplished,
- (02) Examine the existing features that are part of the industrial, man-made landscape that currently exists on the Riverfront which may act as both constraints and inspiration, and
- (03) Describe potential uses.

With reference to the first principal – removing barriers – one must determine how to get from the city to the water. There are floodwalls that act as a barrier, and existing gates that are potential access points. Access must be determined in cooperation with the Public Belt, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Port of New Orleans. The box levee and rail corridor are also barriers to access. The tracks are going to stay and will have a physical impact on the site. Pedestrian access is limited and there will be the potential to be caught by a train. The design team therefore suggests an up and over somewhere close to Spain Street. However the Riverfront is accessed, it needs to be a terrific experience and set a standard to the rest of the Riverfront’s development. There is also the question of parking strategies and how it

relates to the access points. There will be improvements to adjacent properties and Dennis Finnigan who is here representing Urban Systems, the traffic consultant for the team, will determine how to balance the number of spots.

The second guiding principal – continuous linear access – purports that once you reach the Riverfront, you will be able to go up and down without interruption. There is a great deal of existing pavement which will allow us to accommodate multimodal non-vehicular traffic. There is also quite a bit of residual grass and gravel. We need to determine if it should be lawn, native landscape, or hardscape.

The third goal – moments of civic energy – may be accomplished in a variety of ways. One is the creation of pedestrian piers that offer the opportunity to move out on to the river to the regulatory edge, landside of the navigational channel. The team offered two possible locations for these piers. The team suggested playgrounds and tot lots, asking where would they be most appropriate. They also suggested recreation courts, asking if they should be closer to the neighborhood or closer to the water. There will be a need for restrooms.

The fourth goal – creating new architecture – may be attained through the adaptive re-use of several post-industrial artifacts including the Mandeville Wharf. It is the intent of the team to keep these all in place including the Piety Wharf and wall. There is also a desire to keep or reuse the cobblestones. This is a magical opportunity to keep the old and weave it in with the new, celebrating the post-industrial landscape that is there. Of note, there will be a Section 106 Review that determines the impact on the historic structures and the neighborhood. There will also be an HDLC review. To be clear, there is no high-rise development on this site and no zoning changes regarding height. As for zoning, the team has met with Goody Clancy, the firm performing the Master Plan for the City. Goody Clancy is very enthusiastic about this work and will fold it into their own product. Other architectural opportunities include the introduction of wind turbines, which won't power the entire neighborhood, but can at least power the Riverfront as a demonstration. There is also a possibility for river turbines as this is one of the highest velocities on the River. Private consultants have determined that this is an ideal study site and see it as a beta test for an international opportunity.

Allen and Kirt then asked for ideas from the public so that they can come back with diagrams at the next workshop. Allen then took a moment to answer two additional frequently asked questions:

- (01) Will this project disrespect the Port's maritime activity? No, everything is consistent with the Port's activity.
- (02) Why is this project eligible for CDBG funding? There are various categories for funding the recovery, one of which is long term community benefit. This project falls in that category.

Councilmember Clarkson then addressed the gathering. She thanked everyone for their participation and the great meetings with the neighbors. There had been objection because of a lack of knowledge. Sean's plan is visionary, but the public needed some clarification about what was possible. The second clarification that was needed concerns use. In addition to these meetings, there will multiple opportunities to weigh in through the normal processes. She stated that she had not complaints at this point and thanked everyone including Juan Lafonta and James Carter, and especially the neighbors who were finding common ground.

Councilmember Fielkow applauded the number of public meetings. He expressed that this is one of those once in a lifetime transformative projects. We must be able to multi-task and think bigger while we recover. Other cities are doing great things and we have our own amazing opportunity. He expressed

hope that this will be a reality, that when we come up with visionary ideas like this, we need to put them to action.

Sean told the gathering that this design team, in addition to leading with great talent, is also very good at listening. He then opened the floor for suggestions and questions.

Mary Cunningham, representing Councilmember Carter, explained that he knows how important this project is but was unable to attend.

One participant asked how the time frame meshes with the construction of the cruise ship terminal. Allen explained, with the help of Joe Cocchiera from the Port of New Orleans, that the Downriver Park has a 33 month construction phase and the future terminal will not be under construction in that time frame.

A member of the audience noted that the project had changed a lot over time and he appreciated seeing the lower profiles. Allen responded that he looked forward to everyone enjoying the Mandeville Wharf deck. He suggested that we may have one of the public meetings there.

Someone asked if there will be additional opportunities for comment, for those who do not feel comfortable speaking in a public forum. Allen responded that we will be posting material on the website and in key community locations, for example at the library. Allen expressed that he is willing to meet collectively and individually.

Gene Cizec commended the team on the use of the existing wharves, which is something Marigny has always wanted. He did not want to eliminate the industrial quality and asked the team to stick with that. Allen noted that George Hargreaves in his most recent visit to town was really moved by the industrial artifacts and landscape that may be woven into park.

Shea Embry thanked the team for listening so carefully to all the hopes of the Bywater neighborhood and for incorporating all of these ideas. She is particularly enthused by the retention of the firewall at Piety.

A member of the crowd asked about the status of New Orleans Cold Storage. Joe Cocchiera of the Port answered that the current plan is to place New Orleans Cold Storage at the Esplanade and Governor Nichols Wharves. He announced that there would be a public meeting On September 30 at 6:00 pm at the Port Headquarters.

Someone asked about the extension of the streetcar. Allen answered that the team anticipates the streetcar and the plan will be future proofed for its extension, but that the team cannot tell you when RTA will implement those plans.

A participant asked where the money for this is coming from. Allen explained that the project is fully funded by the Federal government through the LRA, including their professional contract which has been approved. Alexandra Evans of the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) explained that she worked to craft the policy that allowed the city use these funds. The City set the priorities, of which the Riverfront is one. For each project, they determine if it is eligible for the funds as determined by HUD guidelines. The project is currently pre-approved. All funding is set up at a reimbursement of money spent by the City.

Kristen Evans asked what can be expected at the public meetings. Allen explained that at each meeting, half of the time will be devoted to giving a status report and half will be for questions and suggestions. The next two meetings will specifically target the issue of use. The remaining five will be mostly status

as the design is formally developed. Allen said he is also prepare to do a lot of smaller meetings and special focus groups.

Andy Gallagher asked if there will be a parking study. Allen answered yes. Once the openings are determined, the team will be able to model the parking and traffic routing. There will be a comprehensive traffic and vehicular study. As for parking, particularly with regard to rentals, the team needs to first determine what uses we are talking about before Urban Systems can complete their impact analysis.

A participant asked if the development of a concert venue is necessary for the economic viability of the project. Allen answered no. As for usage of these types, the team is examining the Audubon's uses and governance at Woldenberg for precedent which have been well developed over 18 years. The team is also looking at another template in Pittsburgh and one in Brooklyn. It is important to understand that this is not about creating a mile and a half of revenue generators.

A member of the audience noted that he would like to see more pictures in addition to the ones that were currently being shown. He also would like to hear about Riverfronts that don't work, such as St. Louis.

Another audience member asked about the benefits of job creation and if there would be jobs for locals. Allen recommended that she look at the report by Dr. Richardson on the website. It explains how the jobs will be created with reference to the entire Reinventing the Crescent Development Plan.

Andrew Yon asked if there were any prospects for the upriver portions of the riverfront and its financing. Sean explained that we have to start somewhere. He told Andrew that he needed the help of the upriver neighborhoods to get things going and that they are the greatest asset with regard to how quickly this moves. He asked that the public tell their representatives about their want for the Riverfront, saying that we all need to go to Baton Rouge together. The State benefits immeasurably with regard to this project. He encouraged the public to partner with NOBC to really let them know how important it is. Allen added that this plan remains the active plan and that there is no patience for a 10 year time line. New Orleans celebrates its 300th birthday in 2019 and we need this done by then. We want people to see results so that other neighborhoods see it and say "I want one of those." The next year is utterly pivotal.

Someone commented that they love the Charleston Riverfront because it is simple green space with fabulous swings.

There were no more questions or suggestions and the meeting was adjourned at 8:30.