

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
NEW ORLEANS BUILDING CORPORATION

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Reinventing the Crescent Downriver Park
Public Meeting Three
October 06, 2008
Meeting Minutes

Allen Eskew of Eskew+Dumez+Ripple opened the meeting. Kyle Wedberg of NOCCA welcomed everyone and mentioned how much he loves hosting these meetings as NOCCA is centrally located within this project. This might be the greatest use of funds in the city since NOCCA.

Sean Cummings, CEO of the New Orleans Building Corporation (NOBC), thanked NOCCA for hosting and acknowledged JP Morrell as a great champion for these neighborhoods and for helping to reinvent politics in the same way that we are reinventing the Riverfront. New Orleans is in the quality of life business, as the future of our city is not oil and gas or tourism. It is essential that we attract young educated creative people like those that already live in the neighborhoods adjacent to the proposed Downriver Park. This project helps us accomplish that necessary goal.

Sean explained that in this meeting, the public is going to see the final programming plans. We are also going to talk for the first time in concrete terms about governance and how we maintain and boost the quality of life for the neighborhoods and for the city at large.

Allen welcomed everyone to the third of eight public meetings concerning the Downriver Park. The design team has been working on programming the 1.5 miles of park using the public's ideas and feedback. He expressed hope that after this third meeting we'll have a final set of programming ideas to move into schematic design phase.

Allen announced that, as usual, and in our effort for complete transparency, everything from this meeting will be posted on the website just as all previous meetings are posted.

For those who are here for the first time, he explained the location and length of the project from the end of the Moonwalk to Mazant Street. The footprint is 40 acres. Excluded from that is the Governor Nichols Street Wharf. Deborah Keller is here from the Port, which will maintain control of that property for the proposed New Orleans Cold Storage facility. They are moving forward and have their own process for that project.

Allen explained that there are only 20 usable acres of park space within the Downriver Park when we exclude the rail and batters.

The next meeting is December 3. As for key milestones, we are on schedule. This third meeting represents the end of the Program Advancement Phase which will answer what the uses, functions, and activities are within the park.

Allen explained that the first part of the meeting is an opportunity to review some common themes that emerged from the public's feedback. There are five themes to which we now have much more definitive information.



1. Permitted Uses

The design team has been working with Leslie Alley of the City Planning Commission who has put together a task force of various City agency representatives to define all the legal parameters of the Park. The team and the task force is treating this as a traditional P-Park designation since it is primarily open park space with accessory uses that are all permitted in P-Park. Architectural components will require specific conditional uses but the team doesn't know exactly which elements those are yet. The framework for permitting will be established in the next few weeks.

2. Governance

As a traditional P-Park district, all applicable city ordinances will come into play including noise. The team and the NOBC realize that the ordinances are not the problem, but enforcement is. We are currently in discussion with Audubon to establish a management agreement. Under a series of lease agreements, Audubon has been operating public spaces successfully for 18 years. While they had isolated challenges in the beginning, they have fine-tuned their governance structure and found some balance.

Jennifer Zurik of the NOBC then described the current approach to governance and enforcement. She explained that the NOBC would like to work with the neighborhoods to determine provisos that will be supplemental to the conditional use applications that protect the neighborhood from too much traffic or noise.

3. Access

The current design asks for multiple access points. The team is going to have to balance the request of the public for access and the needs of the Public Belt and the Port. There is also a desire to protect the future expansion of the streetcar.

4. Locally Inspired Design

This project will go through the normal and customary regulatory reviews including the HDLC, CPC, VCC and Section 106 processes. Site specific design strategies that include implementing cultural scripting narratives will ensure that the project is architecturally specific to New Orleans. There is an opportunity to weave in the post-industrial artifacts, and the design team is mining the site for inspiration. There have also been questions about the past planning work of the neighborhoods. The team has incorporated all of the requests made in the UNOP plan, particularly to increase the amount of access.

5. Parking & Traffic

For daily use, the team is proposing 202 parking spaces, 170 of which are new. There are no parking requirements per zoning which is common in other cities. Allen proceeded to show several examples of other parks in New Orleans and in other cities. He offered an analysis of parking spaces per acre that compared these parks. The Downriver Park will have more than 10 places per acre, which according to the team's research and analysis is a higher ratio of all parks with similar programming.

There is also the opportunity to create a residential permit system for the neighborhood if so desired by the residents. The traffic consultant believes that traffic signalization would be necessary as Mazant Street and Esplanade Avenue.

In terms of special events parking, there are an additional 880 spaces available in the French Market parking lots, the South and North Farmer's Markets on Elysian Fields, and on the Poland Avenue Wharf. This provides for almost 1100 spaces for special events.

The presentation shifted gears as landscape architect George Hargreaves began a discussion concerning programming. He reminded the public that the images they are reviewing are not designs but suggested uses. Not a lot has changed in the last few weeks.

He began his description of the project at the downriver edge of the Moonwalk with the pedestrian connector. The sidewalk along S. Peters will need some widening to create this pedestrian connection to the park. Once we cross Esplanade Avenue, a ramp begins and there is an opportunity for head in parking. The ramp will be ADA compliant so it is 500 feet long. Since the last iteration of the plan, the ramp has been moved upriver and is now engaging the structure of the Mandeville Wharf.

Another discovery, thanks to the RSD and Constance Caruso, is the number of schools and their facilities in the area. The schools are all short on outdoor facilities. There are about 4400 children in the area. Therefore the design team wants to emphasize education and recreational opportunities in the Mandeville Wharf area. There will be some green space right by the river with informal play space on the Wharf deck. Beach volleyball, bocce ball, and a playground are also elements that will attract a variety of age ranges. This playground, which is one of two in the park, will be more of an urban styled playground. There are also educational interpretation opportunities to learn about the river through art and play. There is also room for basketball courts.

The intent is to preserve and enhance the character of the Mandeville shed. The team is considering adding emphasis to the shed by highlighting the treatment of the upriver exterior wall so that it is a visual indicator from the Moonwalk or Woldenberg. The ramp, which crosses the railroad tracks, will enter the shed and may also serve as a structure for a stage. Restrooms and concessions will be inside the building as well.

Between the Mandeville Wharf and the Piety Wharf Deck, the team is sticking with the post industrial character. Some of the paving will be retained. A naturalized landscape will be developed, one that is very specific to this place. There will also be separate bike and pedestrian lanes.

The first of two piers will be at Press Street. The inspiration for the piers is the historic character of the 19th Century riverfront. The design of the pier can be many things that may or may not include architectural lighting or public art.

At the Piety Wharf, the firewall could be similarly marked as the upriver side of the Mandeville shed. The changes since the last meeting are a result of the architect, David Adjaye's observations. He suggested we move the meditative pavilion onto the wharf deck set in a reflective pool. The firewall could also act as a backdrop for very small scale performances. Around it is a series of gardens. The meditative pavilion will be artfully created as an open-air space so that it is not necessary to condition. It will be an ideal setting for cultural events, weddings, etc.

Just downriver of the Piety Wharf deck will be more park space of a neighborhood scale with a playground, pier, picnic area, and dog run. The playground here will be greener and more natural in character when compared with the one at the Mandeville wharf. The second pier is here and will emerge through the batture.

George then opened the floor for questions concerning programming.

Chris Costello asked if it was possible to get soccer on the green space on the Mandeville deck. George explained that he can't get the width out of the site.

A member of the audience noted that St. Claude Avenue could tie in well with the Riverfront. The street is being developed as the New Orleans food district and she wonders if there is an opportunity to provide wharves for fishing. Allen responded that the team is enthusiastic about the development of St. Claude. The River is extremely dangerous at this point and no small vessels can get in the water here.

Julie Jones asked if the dog run and playground are a duplication of amenities provided at Markey Park. George explained that they were aware of this, but the Riverfront park will generate higher use and more needs than Markey Park currently draws.

Nathan Chapman asked if there were any ideas to tie the project in with the history of the River. George responded that it could definitely be part of the design and will take that on board during schematic design.

Gene Cizek reminded the team that there are plaques behind the French Market that emphasize the history of the River. He agreed that the Mandeville Wharf is an opportunity to tell the story much better. He has always envisioned that for the Wharf. George agreed and explained his intent to incorporate both how the river works now and the history as well.

Gene also offered the idea of using the river's power for electricity. Allen explained that there is an opportunity here for river turbines, and the NOBC is currently in conversation with a private firm to install a demonstration project near the Mandeville Wharf. This turbine installation will hopefully power the lighting for the Riverfront park. The design team would also like to create an interpretive exhibit.

Kyle Wedberg said that he would appreciate some soccer goals even if they aren't FIFA regulated. Allen said absolutely. Kyle also suggested that the dog run be more central because of Markey Park's.

A member of the audience asked if there would be a water feature. George responded that it would most likely be in the playground, if it fits within the budget.

A participant suggested that the elevated walkway be as wide as possible to provide for pedestrians and bikers. There was also support for a few rolling hills for kids to play on.

A member of the audience suggested that the kids in the neighborhood would most likely prefer a basketball court rather than a volleyball court – if they had to choose one. George said they would take that into consideration as they wrestle with the ratio during design.

Someone asked about the risk of losing the ball over the edge and into the River. George responded that that will be solved in the design as well.

Another audience member asked if the team had considered a basketball court at the Piety end of the project. George answered that the team thinks of this area as more contemplative and passive.

A woman offered concern about the amount of parking at Piety. George explained that it is a very intimate performance space of less than 2000 square feet to which she consented there would be enough.

Gene noted that there may be conflict between the kids playing various sports, and the design should define each of these courts. He asked where the edge is and how do you keep it safe. George agreed and said they will be able to answer his question in the design process. He noted that the turf of the field will be pulled back from the edge to allow for a promenade.

Kyle expressed enthusiasm for the pavilion and projection wall at Piety. He asked that any sound projection be directed toward the river rather than toward the neighborhood.

With all programming questions and concerns answered, the conversation turned to the five outstanding issues previously discussed in the first half of the presentation.

Someone asked about the streetcar. Allen answered that the team is working with the RTA to embed the alignment for any future extension along the riverfront.

Another member of the audience asked how many points of access would be included in the design. Allen answered that ideally access will be provided at six locations including:

- (1) St. Philip Street at Woldenberg
- (2) The ramp which begins as Elysian Fields (access at Elysian Fields is restricted by the Port due to the activity of New Orleans Cold Storage)
- (3) At grade existing opening in the flood wall at Clouet
- (4) At grade existing opening in the flood wall at Piety
- (5) At grade existing opening in the flood wall between Gallier and Congress Streets
- (6) At grade existing opening in the flood wall near Mazant

Bob Kollman representing the Public Belt Railroad asked to speak. He explained to the group that they use this stretch of the railroad for parking long stretches of cars. As a key stakeholder, the Public Belt is committed to making this project happen. The Public Belt is working with the NOBC and the design team to identify the key issues and opportunities. There are four issues at this point:

- (1) The Public Belt is concerned about public safety with both parked and moving trains alongside the park. They do not want to have to block access so that kids are taking short cuts under the trains to get to the playground. They request that the design include overpasses.
- (2) Operationally, it is difficult for the Public Belt to break the freight trains apart as they are being staged.
- (3) There also need to be barriers and fences between the linear recreational space and the trains.
- (4) The Public Belt also needs access to the emergency road so that it can provide maintenance to the track.

Allen assured everyone that the team will continue to work with the Public Belt to make sure we strike the right balance of meeting everyone's needs. The community has been asking for this type of access since the 80s. There was success with providing similar access at Woldenberg. We have to continue to work together and see if there are some compromises.

Gene noted that at the last Marigny Board meeting there was a conversation about access. The neighborhood would prefer that another access point be provided rather than money be spent on another part of the project. Otherwise if there was a train parked, there would only be one point of access. Allen told him that the team would continue to work on this.

Chris Costello asked Jennifer if it was not possible to have both a community benefits agreement (CBA) and provisos to protect the neighborhood. Jennifer explained that the provisos have a greater force of law and are the proper legal mechanism. Chris voiced concern that if the provisos are not upheld, then there will be no one held accountable. It is impossible to sue the City if they are not enforcing the zoning code. Jennifer agreed and assured him that this conversation is continuing. The proper legal mechanisms will be utilized and worked out over the upcoming months. It is necessary to have the operator at the table as well when we make these kinds of decisions. Regardless, the NOBC plans on working with the

neighborhoods to ensure they are protected. Jennifer asked Chris if he knew of any CBA in place within the City because none had turned up in her research. He said that there is one at the Roberts on Carrollton and that he would send her others.

Nathan Chapman asked Jennifer where she had done her research on CBAs. The primary source is a nonprofit that seeks to establish CBA's throughout the country. They define CBA's as opportunities to encourage developers to include amenities such as green space in their private developments. They are usually not characterized as methods for protecting neighborhoods from problems which may arise on public property. The website for that organization is the Partnership for Working Families (www.communitybenefits.org) and they provide a CBA Handbook for guidance.

Another member of the audience mentioned that the neighborhood parking permit system would not work, as the meter maids will not go beyond Elysian Fields. Allen responded that the traffic consultant, who regularly works with the City on such processes, did not think there would be a problem, but he would continue to explore the possibilities.

A participant reminded the group that there is also a Master Plan being developed and that there are currently overlays in the neighborhoods that prevent certain uses at corners, but if that overlay were removed, there would be a completely different traffic pattern. Allen encouraged all to participate in the Master Planning process.

As there were no more questions, the meeting was concluded.