

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
NEW ORLEANS BUILDING CORPORATION

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Reinventing the Crescent Downriver Park
Public Meeting Four
Schematic Design Phase
January 14, 2009
Meeting Minutes

Sean Cummings, CEO of the NOBC, opened the meeting at 7:00 pm. He explained that this meeting is specifically about Phase 1A of Reinventing the Crescent which we have been calling the Downriver Park. He introduced David Adjaye and Michael Maltzan noting the intent to introduce new young bright people to New Orleans like these talented architects.

Allen Eskew explained that this is the 4th meeting of Phase 1. This is the end of the Schematic Design Phase which followed the Program Advancement Phase. The next phase beginning in February will include fixing and designing the concepts shown tonight and is called Design Development. Next week, we will meet with the various agencies concerning permitting. The permitting process will provide an additional public forum for everyone to have a voice in the project. He then introduced the team – the firms of George Hargreaves, Michael Maltzan, David Adjaye and Eskew+Dumez+Ripple. There are many other consultants but the entire core team is here tonight.

Allen oriented the audience by showing an image of the project relative to the existing accessible Riverfront. The project is 40 acres in footprint but only 20 acres are usable park space due to some off-limits areas including the rail right of way.

The project is on schedule to meet the December 1, 2009 groundbreaking.

George Hargreaves reviewed the program elements, as they were determined during the Program Advancement Phase. A slide showed the feedback that was received during that phase as well.

Allen announced that the team is pleased to announce that we are working with the Audubon Institute on an agreement for them to manage the project once it is complete. Members of their team are here tonight, and that process is moving forward.

George explained that the team had learned that we could not plant in the ground due to the regulations set by the Army Corps of Engineers for the flood wall, bature and box levee. There are two strategies for landscaping – in fill with berms and in fill on a slope. Both will work here successfully.

The Hargreaves team has been looking at several strategies for landscape design. One of these strategies is based on banding, similar to the bands that exist along the Riverfront and the repetition of the River including the cars of the train. Another concept for inspiration is the current of the River. The team tested this and decided that it was relentless as it stretched the full the mile and a half. The third inspiration was the historic nature of the site, its parcels and the railroad lines that existed. Using this perpendicular nature of the parcels ensures that view corridors are maintained. And the railroad lines which were once on the site have real resonance, creating an interesting diagram for placement of landscape elements. George then showed how this is implemented throughout the project along the promenade between the Mandeville and Piety Wharves.

The Piety Wharf is in fairly bad condition on top. The team has developed an idea to inset medallions that commemorate the musicians and songs of New Orleans. Piety would be a nod to the performing culture of New Orleans – through the medallions and the small performances which will happen against the back drop of the fire wall.



David Adjaye then described the environment he was hoping to create with the pavilion. It will be a contemplative space made of timber but illuminated in a unique way that draws people to it. The approach to the pavilion is a field of timber elements that are similar to a forest. After walking through this field one finds the pavilion which is like a vessel in the water, surrounded by a reflecting pool, tying the entire concept to the River itself. There is an idea here about creating something that is not about walls, but rather something that is about the river, space and light.

George then showed that Downriver from Piety is a children's playground, picnic area, pier through the batture and a dog run. There is also some parking near the Pauline Street wharf.

Moving back to the upriver end of the project George pointed out the pedestrian connection between the Moonwalk and the Downriver Park along the street side of the floodwall.

Allen explained that the NOBC has two partners that they are working with regarding public use and access. The Port is moving forward with its plans for Cold Storage. We are working with whatever plans they resolve to set forth. And the Public Belt has been working with the team throughout the design process. The NOBC has asked for eight access points. We have worked out four of those already with the Public Belt. He also reminded the public that the parking strategy is being developed by Urban Systems in a sophisticated way to provide plenty of parking for the Park.

Michael Maltzan described the structure of the up and over that begins at Elysian Fields and crosses over into the Mandeville Street Wharf. It has three elements – the ramp up over the floodwall, the experience within the Mandeville Wharf with its unique perspective, and then the down ramp which reaches out to the river. The Mandeville Wharf will act as a foyer to the park. At night it will have a completely different quality. The space can be animated by light, using the skylights that were created during the demolition process of the wharf. The Mandeville Wharf becomes the façade of the entire park at night from downtown.

George then described the outdoor space associated with the Mandeville Wharf deck. There is small green space that acts as a buffer between the interior space and the recreational space beyond. There are now three full size basketball courts due to community requests and only one volleyball court. There is also a large green space with soccer space.

George explained that the landscape is basically the same as previously presented, but more fully developed and responding to the community's requests. Taking a step back, there is 1.5 miles of access that the public didn't have before. The team has tried to fuse the tremendous past, the present and the future of the site and New Orleans for this park. He then opened up the floor for questions.

Questions & Answers

Chris Costello said that it's a shame that there are not more spaces for sports near the Piety area. George explained that part of it has to do with geometry but also with use. The only place where there is space for a basketball court is next to the pavilion, which didn't seem an appropriate juxtaposition.

Someone asked if there are bicycles in this park and if there is access on the ramp. Allen answered that there is a bicycle path throughout the entire site and ramp access.

A member of the audience asked Allen to list the access points. Allen showed the seven at (1) Esplanade, (2) Elysian Fields, (3) (4) Clouet, (5) Piety, (6) Gallier and (7) Mazant. These are still be negotiating along with their various criteria – i.e. whether they will be an up and over, at grade access, etc.

Shea Embry asked whether the proposed Cold Storage facility would impede access to the park. Allen responded that the Cold Storage facility is a project of the port. The design team will work with whatever the port decides to do there. Allen also referred the public to the Port's website as the development of the facility is a separate process.

Gene Cizek asked about the type of access throughout the park. Will it be at grade or up and overs? Allen explained that the NOBC and the design team are in advanced conversation with the Public Belt. We still have not determined

which are at grade or up and overs, but that will be determined through the conversations. It is a work in process and we're trying to maximize access.

A member of the audience thought that three basketball courts were too much. Allen explained that in working with Audubon, there will be open and closed hours. It will not be 24 hour basketball. In terms of the number, we chose it based on the conversation with the community. It is a delicate balance between neighborhood park and a park for the city. There will be limitations to the use.

Julie Jones asked about Piety's performance space. Allen answered that it will be small scale and intimate. It is an open deck area for spontaneous activity and limited planned performances. It would be ideal for a NOCCA performance.

A member of the audience asked about the total number of parking spaces, where there would be parking, and how many handicap spaces would there be. Allen referenced the October 30 meeting which demonstrated both the analysis for determining the number of spaces, the 202 newly created spaces for daily use, and the number of special events parking spaces (1000). The traffic consultant has also offered the idea of limitations on street parking if the neighbors so desire.

Andy asked if the boundaries have been expanded. Allen explained that some there was a misprint regarding the boundaries through one of the media outlets and that, no, the boundaries have not been changed. There are a few small slivers on the landside of the floodwall that will be support spaces for the park with parking and access functions. But those have been shown in the design of the Downriver park since the very first meeting.

A member of the audience asked about the status of the CDBG? Allen explained that the article in the paper the other day was behind in its facts. The project is fully funded.

A member of the audience asked for a review of performance space and if there would be an amphitheater. Allen answered that no, there is no formal amphitheater. The performance spaces include the Mandeville shed and the space at Piety. The design team has also met with the RSD as they imagine this a great opportunity for the schools in the area. They see the shed as a great place for the high school marching bands in the area to practice.

Chris asked if there was any intent to include walls on the shed for weather protection. Allen answered that no, there is no intent as when it rains there is still plenty of space that is dry. Michael said that is important to keep it very open and inviting. It has the ability to transform with various events. The structure is going to allow for anything. It is dynamic. It will feel like a living organism on the wharf.

Gene added that he liked the layer of historic imagery that has been placed in the design. It's also a great balance of sports spaces. The elements of the past that have been pulled in to contemporary uses are wonderful. He also agrees that the open front porch is the right condition for the Mandeville Wharf. The exploration of the batture through the pier is also a unique opportunity. Allen thanked Kirt for pulling up the history of the site and bringing it forward.

Another member of the audience voiced concern of the clustering of sports. Allen said the concern has been noted.

Larry Schmidt asked what will be the funding source for the ongoing maintenance and costs of the park. Allen answered that we are exactly at the point with Audubon where we are beginning to discuss that issue. We cannot commit yet to the specifics, but that will come with more discussion. There is no commercial activity to support the property, but we want to make sure we have the appropriate level of services including concessions. We will have more work to do there.

Another member of the audience expressed appreciation for the design and support for the clustering of the sports. She noted that there are far more children in the neighborhood than people realize. It has become apparent with the new Marky Park playground.

Someone asked if the design is within the budget. Allen answered that the budget is appropriate, and architectural teams do not work without budgets. In the next phase there will be cost estimating.

An audience member asked about the other phases of Reinventing the Crescent. Allen explained that the \$30 million is just for this phase of the design. The remainder has not yet been funded.

Carolyn Leftwich said that she loves the progress and especially the vision of David Adjaye.

Someone asked if there could be new openings in the floodwall. Allen explained that the Corps is overly concerned with creating new openings in the existing condition. It would be cost prohibitive as well.

Someone asked the number of restrooms. Allen said there will be two sets – one in Mandeville and one near the child's playground near Piety.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.