

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 23, 2009

FROM: Park & Recreation Commission *Jimmy Northake, Chair*

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

RE: Waterfront Plan, 2009

Below are some items that have been discussed by the Park and Recreation Commission that we would like to offer for discussion as the Waterfront Plan begins. Our Commission looks forward to engaging in the creative process that lies ahead and we are anxious to hear the ideas of other Boards, Commissions and citizens as the process gets underway. We come with open minds and hearts and wait to be surprised and delighted at what may lie ahead. Our comments are offer with this in mind.

First, the basic principals that were a part of the Waterfront Plan done in the 1980s should still serve as the underpinning for this plan: Open views to the Potomac River at the street ends and continuous, unobstructed public access the entire length of our waterfront, from top to bottom must be the foundation from which the plan is built. Beyond these basic tenets we see the challenges ahead in three parts:

Waterfront Operations/ Programming + Maintenance + Planning

Operations/ Programming Public Spaces:

1. As a part of the initial investigation, a compilation must be undertaken of the property rights associated with the various properties that have settled their title claims in Federal Court. In various places the underlying title may be privately held but there is a legal right of public access. It will be critical to understand what entity owns and/or controls the public use of these areas, particularly what can be programmed and/or permitted in these areas. Also a clearer understanding of the operational responsibilities of each parcel is a part of this. We do not believe that the lines of property demarcation (and pieces of the bundle of property rights associated) and the authority to control and even issue permits for activities beyond simple "access" are understood either by City departments or by neighborhoods. It has been a point of contention in the past for certain uses and it must be clearly researched understood across the length of the waterfront before plans are crafted.
2. While the publicly owned parks will continue to be open space and park land in perpetuity, we encourage and endorse making them a part of the broader examination of a plan that knits the various pieces into a larger and more cohesive whole. We are willing to look at beneficial changes to the existing park uses along the waterfront and ask other to consider looking at the same. Together we, as a community, can decide what changes should or should not be undertaken, but we should never be afraid to investigate positive changes.

3. A Ranger position must be created and funded for the waterfront. This Park Ranger would be “roaming” the length of the waterfront to monitor uses and permits, regulations and provide aid and assistance. It is already a critical need and it will be more important as uses increase.

Maintenance:

The maintenance of the waterfront currently is a challenge for the City crews charged to keep the trails, docks and parks in top condition. There is no “back of house” on the waterfront to store trash, the necessary tools and equipment, the Cushman’s used to service the length of the public land assets. The number of visitors and uses on our waterfront increases every year and the maintenance challenges increase at the same rate. The continuous public access, or walkway, along with the string of parks, plazas, and decks that may line it will be maintained as a single park unit and budgeted accordingly. To meet the challenge this waterfront plan must account for and locate a small but highly functional park maintenance building. It can be designed to fit with the character of the waterfront and does not have to be unsightly to function well. But we do need to plan for it or the best laid plans for everything else will falter.

Planning:

Other items discussed by the Park and Recreation Commission include the following that are more primarily related to the creation of the over all plan and are offered in no particular order. They do not represent a consensus of our Commission but are meant to stimulate creative ideas as the plan is developed :

- Waterfront dog parks: Dogs and their owners are a critical part of our community and there should be some forward-looking accommodations and activities in the plan area for this group of users. We need to find the best location(s) and some interesting and fun uses, but that may involve moving one or more of the existing parks to a location better suited both for the dogs and owners and for the rest of the waterfront activities. Along the rest of the waterfront dogs are always welcome, but on leash at all times. Newly configured dog/owner area(s) might include
 - Accommodations like high/low water fountains
 - Dog obstacle course
 - “Water dog” access location to river
- Urban design + architecture on the waterfront should be of high quality and be focused on creating vibrant public spaces wherever it occurs. Buildings and businesses most likely developed at the two Robinson Terminal sites should have:
 - Good contextual modernism
 - Elevate commercial design quality
 - Support and enhance community uses
- Future discussion + PRC positions
- Study road closures or relocations along the entire waterfront to see what might be supportive of the public good. This has been discussed for some time at the foot of Windmill Hill Park and it should be looked at again, along with other locations, either permanent closures or for closures at specific times.

- Union St.
- Robinson Terminal
- King St.
- Seasonal closures/temporary
- Coordinated events
- Active uses on waterfront – we suggest that a series of small scale active recreational sites be developed along the length of the waterfront, building on the few volleyball courts that already exist. These should range in age and activity levels to serve from the very young, to those that are more mature but active, to those that have limited mobility. It could be thought of as a string of recreation pearls, with something for everyone. They need to be fairly small in footprint, interesting to play AND watch, readily maintained. They should require only equipment that you might have in your garage that you can bring with you to the park. These activities might include one or all of the following – and more ideas are welcome:
 - Small scale (recreational areas)
 - Croquet
 - Bocce/lawn ball/petanque
 - Horse shoes
 - Chess garden (4-10 tables)
 - Badminton
 - We could create a “Game stops” brochure describing and giving directions to games locations on the waterfront
- Vibrancy/intensity of uses of the parks, trails and public spaces should mirror or respond to the urban context in which they occur. Those located closer to the King Street core area should probably be more active and vibrant and be planned and designed to handle larger events and crowds without sever impacts to the underlying resources. Those located in the more residential areas to the north and south should have a tapered level of active events and programmed uses.
- There should be a mix of urban commercial uses, with close attention to the appropriate scale and type of retail uses.
- The areas that are located toward the “central district” of the waterfront should be designed to have the infrastructure necessary to accommodate events of variable size/type that will be programmed there. This might include water supply, power supply, public restrooms, surfaces that can withstand intense use (even natural surfaces).
- Additional active & event uses that the waterfront should be designed to carry should be defined in general so accommodations, like those noted above, can be planned for, even if these change over time.

- We should determine if an emergency boat launch area needs to be included on the waterfront and where that might best be located (rescue functions.) While other motorized boating uses should be accommodated in various areas, launching of these craft should occur elsewhere. Non-motorized small watercraft launch areas in several locations should be accommodated.
- The history of the waterfront should be woven carefully into the planning and design of the waterfront. However, it should not be overbearing, but the stories told subtly and with creativity, in layers that available depending on the visitor's level of curiosity and interest.
 - Industrial heritage
 - Architectural evolution
 - Rail & transportation/trolley
 - Colonial
 - Civil War
 - Others
- As the planning will likely address the eventual re-use of the waterfront all the way to the Mirant plant, we would offer that this would be the location for larger active recreational uses including:
 - another rowing facility
 - other watercraft uses
 - commercial large boat/ship access (recreational or leisure)
 - athletic fields
 - larger picnic pavilions
 - other uses not appropriate further south
- This plan should be crafted in response to, and integrate to some degree, other existing approved (but not yet implemented) plans, though some changes could occur to those existing plans if there were good reasons to do so:
 - Windmill Hill Park
 - Jones Point Park
- Residential areas should have the option to rezone neighborhood areas for commercial uses.