



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

CPCR 2017-016: To update the City's Master Plan to include the recommendations of the Richmond Riverfront Plan Amendment 1: Downriver Update 2017.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: May 15, 2017

PETITIONER

City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

LOCATION

The public spaces, transportation infrastructure, and certain properties in the Downriver area along the James River identified in the Richmond Riverfront Plan, extending from Great Shiplock Park east to the border with Henrico County and extending a minimum of 200 feet back from either bank to align with the existing street grid or rail tracks and relating to the surrounding neighborhoods.

PURPOSE

To update the City's Master Plan and Richmond Riverfront Plan to provide long-range policy direction for the physical development of public space and priorities for investment.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This Resolution would amend the City's Master Plan and Richmond Riverfront Plan to include the recommendations and results of the recently-completed Richmond Riverfront Plan Amendment 1: Downriver Update 2017. The recommendations are updated from the 2012 Richmond Riverfront Plan to take into account current conditions and opportunities, specifically in the Downriver area, that have changed significantly since the 2012 plan. This item was deferred at the April 3, 2017 Planning Commission meeting to allow for further discussions with stakeholders, including Stone Brewing. There are no changes proposed to the Master Plan at this time.

Staff recommends approval of the Resolution.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Background

The Richmond Riverfront Plan was adopted by Planning Commission and City Council in 2012 as an amendment to the City's Master Plan, superseding all other Master Plan amendments for the areas in question. Since adoption, implementation of the Riverfront Plan through the City's Capital Improvement Program has proceeded apace, with the first major project, the T. Tyler

Potterfield Memorial Bridge, opening to the public in December 2016. Another Phase 1 Implementation effort was the vacation of a City-owned “Lehigh” parcel by the cement company leasing the location, and the demolition of the silos on the site in August 2015. That site is bisected by the Virginia Capital Trail, which opened shortly afterward and connects Downtown Richmond to Jamestown, Virginia with 52 miles of shared use path. In addition to these developments in the Riverfront Plan Phase 1 Implementation, the City of Richmond, the Economic Development Authority, and Stone Brewing also initiated a major economic development effort in the Downriver and Fulton area since 2014. The brewery is now open and bottling, redeveloping land, parking lots, and other amenities in the area. The Pulse BRT project is under construction, with a projected opening at the end of 2017, including a station at the Downriver area along E Main Street. The East Riverfront Transportation Improvements project reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2016 is underway to build a new roundabout at the intersection of Dock and reconstruct E Main Street as a complete street, including bicycle lanes, some on-street parking, and the BRT Pulse station and pull-over lane. When this project is complete, Water Street, which currently provides vehicular access to the city-owned “Lehigh” parcel will no longer exist. All of these infrastructural updates have made the Downriver area a Phase 1 Priority for Riverfront Plan Implementation, and also have created new opportunities and constraints for the physical form eventual implementation will take.

This updated Master Plan responds to these new opportunities and constraints to set out an updated vision for further design development and implementation, with the most detailed focus on the City-owned Riverfront property of the Lehigh parcel, about 1.7 acres, and the Intermediate Terminal parcel, about 2.5 acres. It also looks at the distribution of on- and off-street parking potential within the area, to address concerns about providing parking on the site, and establishes a conceptual alignment for the Gillies Creek Greenway, from the Lehigh parcel up to Williamsburg Ave. This conceptual alignment ensures that crossings installed as part of the E Riverfront Transportation Improvement Program can be utilized to provide ADA-compliant connections to the two Riverfront parcels.

Master Plan

The Richmond Riverfront Plan is a long-range vision for the Riverfront for improved access to the river and substantially enhanced programming and facilities. Its overarching goal is to create a single, cohesive Riverfront system that expands access to and utilization of the James River for the citizens of Richmond and our visitors. This unified system will leverage the Riverfront’s natural assets to create an enticing, coordinated, diverse array of open spaces, destinations, and programs.

The goal of the plan is to:

...redefines the City-River relationship, dramatically expanding both visual and direct physical access to the James River. The Plan maps out a transformation comprised of incremental interventions, some bold and sweeping, and some subtle and strategic; together they describe an enhanced urban landscape. The long-term vision for the Richmond Riverfront is a sustainable public landscape corridor seamlessly connected with the River’s significant resources upriver and downriver, and a reaffirmed focus on the James River as the heart of the Richmond region.

Public Participation & Plan Development

A large public forum was held in March 2016 to discuss the new context for Downriver, and gather public input on conceptual ideas and values for the site.

Based on the concepts and ideas raised at the March 2016 forum, the consultant team developed three approaches to the site to focus discussion on the various comparative strengths and weaknesses of various components and their relationships to one another, and then use the public feedback of what works and does not work in those approaches to determine a consensus hybrid approach that selectively drew choice aspects of all three of the initial approaches. Another set of stakeholder meetings occurred in June 2016, with a large public forum to review the approaches in August 2016.

The Amendment lists elements that are common to all of the approaches, including: ADA-compliant access from the top of the bank on the Lehigh parcel down to the river; the ability to physically touch the James River at the site; non-motorized watercraft launch and recovery; selective removal of invasive plant species and the infill of native & adaptive riparian species, with a focus on shade trees; site furnishings, including picnic tables and lighting; drinking fountain; fish cleaning station with plumbed water and sanitary utilities in multiple locations, signaling fishing as an encouraged activity; restrooms; Ash Street as a cobblestone pavement, even if separate d from the functioning street grid; continued use of Ash Street as a prominent fishing location; ADA-accessible connection from Lehigh up to E Main St at Gillies Creek, anticipating later Greenway development; pedestrian connections from the Lehigh parcel up to the proposed roundabout upriver of Ash Street; limited vehicular parking at Intermediate's Commercial Dock; anticipated future realignment of the Virginia Capital Trail to the water side of the USP parcel; continued presence of Kickstand, the existing vendor on site as well as space for vendors; a balance of mown lawn and seasonally mown meadow on the Lehigh parcel punctuated with shade trees and footpaths; reuse of the Water Street bridge structure over Gillies Creek; existing Gillies Creek bridge retained; net reduction in Intermediate Wharf pavement in favor of expanded vegetated surfaces, as well as addition of shade trees; continued berthing of large water vessels at the Commercial Dock. One of the approaches focused more on active recreation, one on native landscape, and one on a cultural approach.

After the August 2016 public forum, as well as additional internal and external stakeholder meetings and a public comment period, a consensus approach was developed. Major elements of public comment reflected in the consensus approach are where to re-route the Virginia Capital Trail on both the Lehigh and Intermediate parcels; how to maximize green space on both parcels; how to maintain the social culture of fishermen at Ash Street, without adverse impact; expanding fishing as an encouraged activity through additional fish cleaning stations; highlighting Richmond history related to the site through interpretive overlooks; targeting vendors focused on river sports and food concessions; emphasizing that any play environment should be custom and site-specific; acknowledging the limited size of the site and not over-crowding it with amenities.

The consensus approach is illustrated and described in detail in the plan, incorporating the elements listed above. It is described in the plan as thus:

- The Virginia Capital Trail hugs the back of the site, following Water Street, before dipping down across the new Gillies Creek bridge along the current trail alignment of

Intermediate Wharf. This maintains the use of the recently rehabilitated bridge as well as the existing Cap Trail pavement traversing Intermediate

- River access on the Lehigh parcel is a single run, ADA-accessible slope, traversing a +/- 13' descent and flanked with terraced seatwalls overlooking the river
- A play environment on the Lehigh parcel, custom-designed with climbing structures for kids of all ages and a Richmond theme
- Additional restroom on the Lehigh parcel
- One fish cleaning station at Ash Street as well as additional stations near Gillies Creek and on the Intermediate parcel
- Minimal pedestrian paths across the Lehigh parcel
- Commercial Dock is exclusively concrete decking at the water's edge
- Removes the least riverside vegetation of all options, focused on the corner with Gillies Creek
- Kickstand located perpendicular to Ash Street
- The full 370'-long Warehouse Dock is removed and replaced with lawn terraces stepping down from the Trail to the River, with a mix of lawn and riparian-resilient shrubs and intermittent seat walls included as design elements.
- Maximizes green/vegetated surfaces Intermediate
- Integrates a Richmond-based historical narrative across both parcels, with multiple interpretive overlooks with prose and images. Focus of historical narrative to be determined, though both parcels were well-documented as the intersection of transport for traveling passengers, people, industrial material, raw & finished goods, and war material

This approach was presented to the public for feedback in advance of a January 2017 public open house, as well as public comment period, and presented to the Planning Commission at their March 20, 2017 meeting.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Resolution
- Draft Richmond Riverfront Plan: Amendment 1 Downriver Update 2017