



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

CPCR.2019.109: To adopt the updated James River Park Master Plan as a complimentary document to the Richmond Riverfront Plan with the expectation that the James River Park Master Plan will be incorporated into Richmond 300 once completed.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: November 4, 2019

PETITIONER

Christopher Frelke, Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

LOCATION

The James River Park System

PURPOSE

To adopt the updated James River Park Master Plan as a complimentary document to the Richmond Riverfront Plan with the expectation that the James River Park Master Plan will be incorporated into Richmond 300 once completed.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The original James River Park Master Plan was developed in 1968 by Abbot and Associates. With the passing of 51 years since the original Master Plan's adoption, the park has both grown in size and visitation beyond what was originally conceived. To reflect the current reality and sustain the park into the future, the Friends of James River Park raised \$250,000 in conjunction with the City of Richmond's Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities Department to develop an updated Master Plan for the James River Park System.

The updated James River Park Master Plan covers the entirety of the riverfront in the City of Richmond from Huguenot Flatwater Park to Deep Water Terminal and incorporates recommendations from the Riverfront plan adopted in September of 2012.

The plan proposes city wide connectivity to the riverfront via multi-modal transportation based off community input as well as the City of Richmond's Bike Master Plan, support for Park Operations in the form of staff needs and facility needs, Land and Ecological Conservation and Park Expansion by way of fee simple land purchases as well as incorporating lands that are City owned into the James River Park for river access development.

The updated James River Park Master Plan is a ten year planning document for Richmond's

Riverfront encompassing the entire Riverfront throughout Richmond in a cohesive and unified vision. The plans focus on Equitable Access, Land and Ecological Conservation, Park Operations and over all Park expansion.

The Plan has gone through an extensive public participation process and enjoys broad community support.

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 17.06 of the City Charter, the adoption and amendment processes commences with a public hearing and passage of a resolution of the City Planning Commission.

Staff recommends approval of the Resolution.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Background

The updated James River Park Master Plan utilized funds raised by Friends of James River Park System who obtained the services of a consultant project team, led by Vanasse, Hangen, Brustlin (VHB) and supported by Hargreaves Associates. Between the Months of December and July 2019, the VHB team with Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities and Friends of James River Park convened a team of internal City of Richmond staff from diverse agencies referred to as the “Technical Team” to ensure recommendations from the plan where viable as well as “Steering Committee” made of representatives from eight different supporting non-profits who were tasked with vetting all recommendations to ensure alignment with the James River Park’s mission.

Goals & Objectives

The James River Park System Master Plan lays out the following Goals/Objectives:

EQUITABLE ACCESS

- Facilitate greater access for diverse visitors to and through the Park and the James River
- Provide connections between noncontiguous Park properties and to regional greenways

ENVIRONMENT AND STEWARDSHIP

- Conserve wilderness by protecting un-programmed areas for discovery and adventure
- Protect sensitive natural resources, reduce invasive species, and restore degraded habitat within the Park and the James River
- Increase Park conservation easement coverage
- Preserve cultural and historic assets in the Park

EDUCATE AND EXPAND

- Educate school children and visitors on the history, natural resources, and conservation aspects of the Park and the James River
- Expand and sustain recreational opportunities within the Park, where appropriate
- Acquire additional parcels to improve connectivity and increase the size of the Park

Public Participation

The plan document was developed through a number of public presentations at various Council District meetings, independent meetings in Council Districts and pop-up events. Major meeting bench marks are as follows:

- January 22, 2019 – 9th District Meeting
- January 29, 2019 – 7th District Meeting
- February 7, 2019 – 4th and 5th District Combined Meeting
- February 12, 2019 – 2nd District Meeting
- February 19, 2019 – 8th District Meeting
- February 27, 2019 – 1st District Meeting
- February 28, 2019 – 3rd District Meeting
- March 5, 2019 – 6th District Meeting
- March 6, 2019 – First City Wide Public Meeting
- July 17, 2019 – City Wide Draft Maser Plan Review Meeting

At each meeting, the VHB team presented a short overview of the park and the project. The attendees then dispersed around the room to review a series of park maps where they drew on and gave comments related to park access, operations, conservation, and park expansion. All comments were photo recorded for accuracy from 40 Maps throughout the process.

Concurrently, the VHB team initiated an English/Spanish survey hosted on the Friends of James River Park website to cast a wider net for community input and prioritization of elements within the plan. Survey responses far exceeded expectations with 2,353 surveys collected on line and in person. All meeting and survey results were reviewed by the Technical team as well as the Steering Committee for viability and Mission/Objective relevance. Results from those reviews were then presented to the public in draft format for further comment and review at the July 17th public meeting.

Staff Contact:

Nathan Burrell, Operations and Maintenance Superintendent – Southern District, Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities 646-9620

Matthew Ebinger, Principal Planner, Land Use Administration 646-6308