



**City of Richmond
Department of Planning
and Development Review**

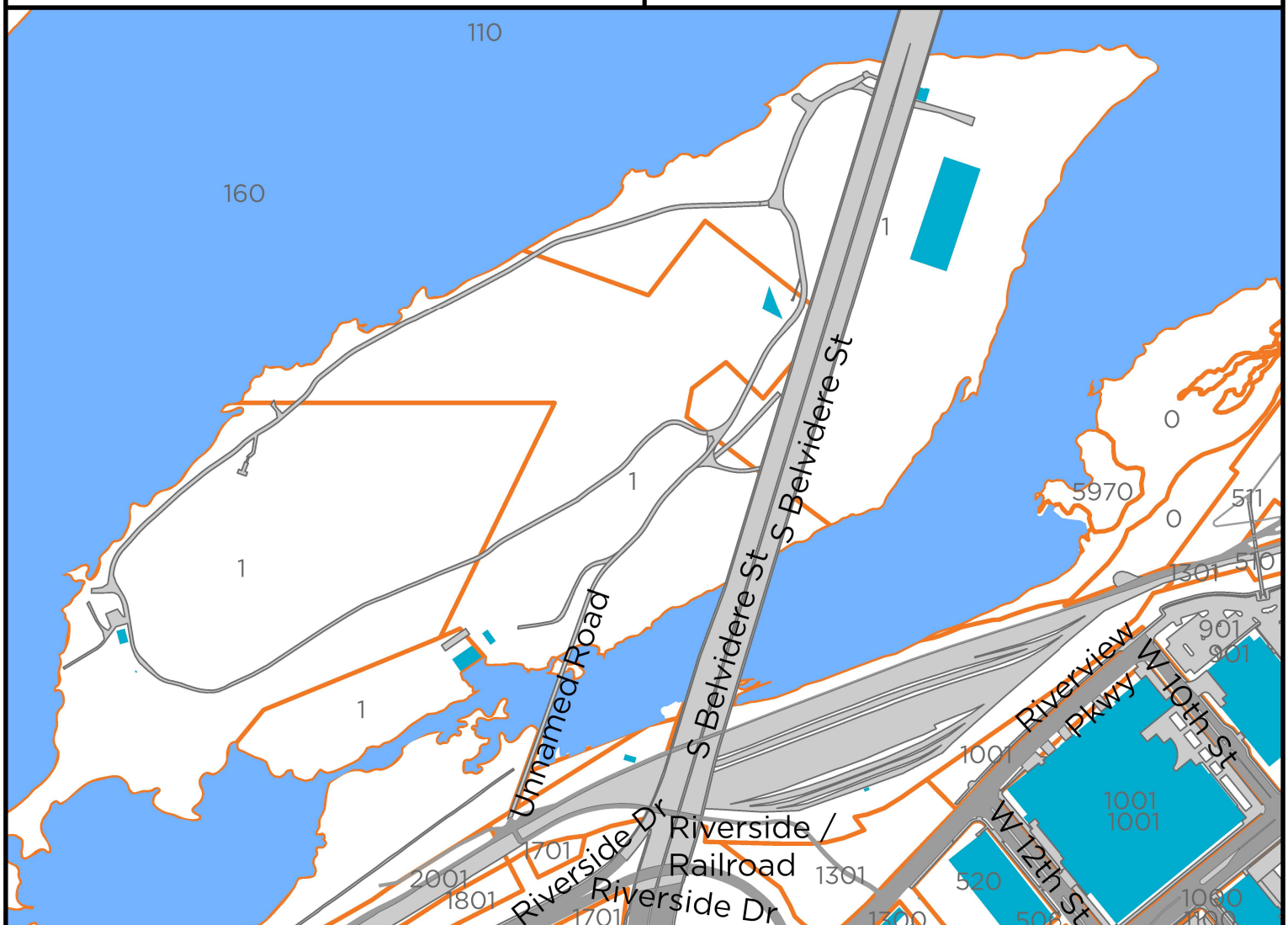
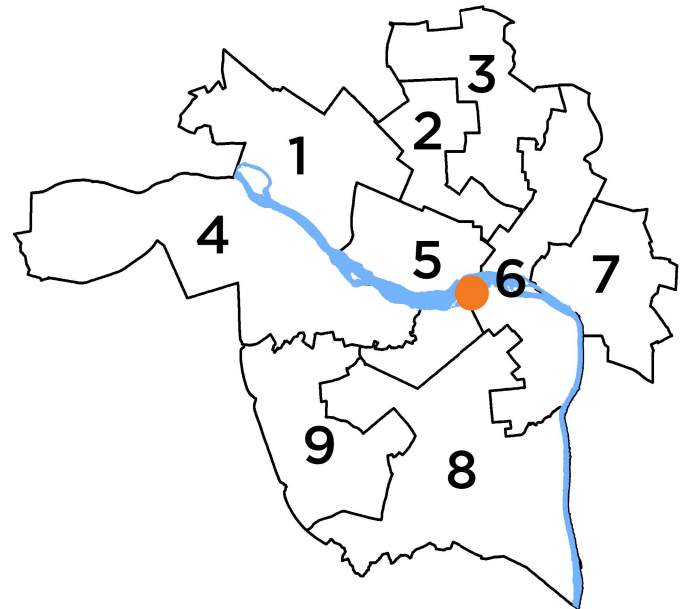
Urban Design Committee
Location, Character, and Extent

Address: Belle Isle

Council District: 5, 6

Description: Conceptual
Review of Belle Isle
Interpretive Signage

For questions, please contact Alex Dandridge
at (804)-646-6569 or alex.dandridge@rva.gov





Application for Urban Design Committee Review

Department of Planning and Development Review

Planning & Preservation Division

900 E. Broad Street, Room 510

Richmond, Virginia 23219 | (804) 646-6335

<https://www.rva.gov/planning-development-review/urban-design-committee>



Application Type (select one)

☐ Location, Character, & Extent

☐ Section 17.05

☐ Other:

☐ Encroachment

☐ Design Overlay District

Review Type (select one)

☐ Conceptual

☐ Final

Project Information

Submission Date: _____

Project Name: _____

Project Address: _____

Brief Project Description (this is not a replacement for the required detailed narrative):

Applicant Information (a City representative must be the applicant, with an exception for encroachments)

Name: _____ Email: _____

City Agency: _____ Phone: _____

Main Contact (if different from Applicant): _____

Company: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Submittal Deadlines

All applications and support materials must be filed no later than 21 days prior to the scheduled meeting of the Urban Design Committee (UDC). Please see the schedule on page 3 as actual deadlines are adjusted due to City holidays. **Late or incomplete submissions will be deferred to the next meeting.**

Filing

Applications can be mailed or delivered to the attention of "Urban Design Committee" at the address listed at the top of this page. **It is important that the applicant discuss the proposal with appropriate City agencies, Zoning Administration staff, and area civic associations and residents prior to filing the application with the UDC.**

Submittal Deadlines

The UDC is an 11 member committee created by City Council in 1968 whose purpose is to advise the City Planning Commission (CPC) on the design of projects on City property or right-of-way. The UDC provides advice of an aesthetic nature in connection with the performance of the duties of the Commission under Sections 17.05, 17.06, and 17.07 of the City Charter. The UDC also advises the Department of Public Works in regards to private encroachments in the public right-of-way.

last revised 12/21/2020



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Submission Requirements

- An electronic copy (PDF preferred) of all application materials, which can be emailed, or delivered by FTP or USB.
- Three (3) copies of the application cover sheet and all support materials (see below).
- Plan sheets should be 11" x 17", folded to 8 1/2" x 11". If it is not possible to scale plans to these dimensions, please provide one set of larger, scaled plans.
- All applications must include the attached cover sheet and the following support materials, as applicable to the project, based on Review Type:

Conceptual Review:

- A detailed project narrative which includes the following: purpose of the project, project background, project budget and funding sources, description of construction program and estimated construction start date (description should also provide information on the surrounding area to provide context).
- A site plan for the project indicating site characteristics which include: building footprints, parking areas, pedestrian routes, recreation areas, open areas, and areas of future expansion.
- A set of floor plans and elevations, as detailed as possible.
- A landscaping plan which shows the general location and character of plant materials and notes any existing tree to be removed.

Final Review:

- A detailed project narrative which includes the following: purpose of the project, project background, project budget and funding sources, description of construction program, and estimated construction start date (description should also provide information on the surrounding area to provide context).
- A site plan for the project indicating site characteristics which include: building footprints, parking areas, pedestrian routes, recreation areas, open areas, and areas of future expansion.
- A set of floor plans and elevations, as detailed as possible.
- A landscaping plan that includes a complete plant schedule, the precise location of all plant materials, and a landscape maintenance analysis. The plant schedule must show number, size and type of each planting proposed. If existing trees are to be removed, their size, type, and location must be noted on the landscape plan.
- The location of all lighting units should be noted on a site plan, including wall-mounted, site, and parking lot lighting. Other site details such as benches, trash containers, and special paving materials should also be located. Include specification sheets for each item.
- Samples of all proposed exterior building materials, including but not limited to brick, mortar, shingles, siding, glass, paint, and stain colors. When an actual sample cannot be provided, a product information sheet that shows the item or a photo of an existing item may be substituted.

Review and Processing

- Once an application is received, it is reviewed by Staff, who compiles a report that is sent to the UDC.
- A copy of the report and the meeting agenda will be sent to the applicant prior to the meeting.
- At the UDC meeting, the applicant or a representative should be present or the application may be deferred to the next regularly scheduled meeting. It is also strongly suggested that a representative of the City Agency which will have final responsibility for the item be present at the meeting (if the applicant and the representative are not the same).
- Once the UDC recommends action on the application, it is automatically placed on the agenda for the next City Planning Commission (CPC) meeting. Exceptions to this are encroachment applications, recommendations for which are forwarded to the Department of Public Works.
- At the CPC meeting, the applicant or a representative should be present, or the application may be deferred to the next regularly scheduled meeting.



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Regular meetings are scheduled on the Thursday after the first Monday of each month at **10:00 a.m. in the 5th floor conference room of City Hall, 900 E. Broad Street**. Special meetings are scheduled as needed.

Meeting Schedule 2021

UDC Meetings	UDC Submission Deadlines	Anticipated Date of Planning Commission Following the UDC Meeting
December 10, 2020	November 12, 2020	December 21, 2020
January 7, 2021	December 17, 2020	January 19, 2021 ¹
February 4, 2021	January 14, 2021	February 16, 2021 ²
March 4, 2021	February 11, 2021	March 15, 2021
April 8, 2021	March 11, 2021	April 19, 2021
May 6, 2021	April 15, 2021	May 17, 2021
June 10, 2021	May 13, 2021	June 21, 2021
July 8, 2021	June 17, 2021	July 19, 2021
August 5, 2021	July 15, 2021	August 16, 2021 ³
September 9, 2021	August 12, 2021	September 20, 2021
October 7, 2021	September 16, 2021	October 18, 2021
November 4, 2021	October 14, 2021	November 15, 2021
December 9, 2021	November 10, 2021 ⁴	December 20, 2021 ⁵

¹ Monday January 18, 2021 is a City of Richmond Holiday

² Monday February 15, 2021 is a City of Richmond Holiday

³ This meeting is subject to cancellation. If so, Planning Commission hearing would be Tuesday September 7, 2021.

⁴ Thursday November 11, 2021 is a City of Richmond Holiday.

⁵ This meeting of the Planning Commission is subject to cancellation.

The Richmond Urban Design Committee is an 11 member advisory committee created by City Council in 1968. Its purpose is to advise the City Planning Commission on the design of City projects. The Urban Design Committee reviews projects for appropriateness in "location, character, and extent" and for consistency with the City's Master Plan and forwards recommendations to the City Planning Commission. The Urban Design Committee also advises the Department of Public Works in regards to private encroachments in the public right-of-way.

For more information, please contact the Planning and Preservation Division staff at (804) 646-6335 or Alex Dandridge at (804) 646-6569 or at alex.dandridge@richmondgov.com.



Belle Isle Interpretive Signs Project Narrative

Friends of the James River Park has collaborated with the City of Richmond's James River Park System on this proposal for a new set of interpretive signage for Belle Isle, in the James River Park System. The purpose of this project is to replace the existing mismatched signs with a set of modern signs with updated information and a consistent design. The design process began in the fall of 2021 with a summer 2022 installation goal.

These signs are modeled after traditional "wayside" signs that are a standard fixture in any state or national park. The design elements and colors were selected by senior Parks and Recreation staff members. The interpretive text was developed by JRPS education team members with input from Friends of the James River Park. Project funding is being provided by Friends of the James River Park through a grant from the Herndon Foundation. Fabrication of the signs can begin as soon as this application is approved. JRPS staff and volunteers will complete the installation as soon as fabrication is complete.

Eight uniform signs have been designed to replace the existing sixteen signs that have been placed throughout Belle Isle over the years. The existing signs do not conform to any consistent design elements and are in various states of disrepair. The new signs would be placed in accordance with the included map and will be near the locations of the signs they are replacing.

All signs contain between 250 and 300 words of interpretive text up to two images (or one image and one map), and a relevant quote from a historical figure that helps to put the sign into a more personal context. The selected colors are in line with the Riverfront Plan signs. Sign images have been pulled from a variety of sources including the Library of Virginia, the Richmond Times-Dispatch, and the National Archives.

Location, Character, Extent of Information

Location, Character, Extent of Information- Please reference the included sign mockups and map for Location, Character, and Extent of Information.

Sign 1 - Welcome to Belle Isle (Image 1, Map Location 1)

Sign 2- Old Dominion Iron and Steel (Image 2, Map Location 2)

Sign 3- Fall Line of the James River(Image 3, Map Location 3)

Sign 4- The Civil War on Belle Isle (Image 4, Map Location 4)

Sign 5- Hollywood Rapids (Image 5, Map Location 5)

Sign 6- Quarrying Broadrock Island (Image 6, Map Location 6)

Sign 7- First Break Rapids (Image 7, Map Location 7)

Sign 8- Headgate Cleaner/Power Plant(Image 8, Map Location 8)

Sign 1- Welcome to Belle Isle

WELCOME TO BELLE ISLE

Year Here

Image caption here, to include year, and some background information.



The Jewel of the James River Park System

At 54 acres, Belle Isle is one of the largest islands in the James River and one of the most historic sites in Richmond. The people that have called this section of the James River home have always found a use for Belle Isle.

The earliest records of Belle Isle show that it was once an important fishing site for the Powhatan Indians. The island also played an important role in the settlement of the region by Europeans in the early 1600's. William Byrd II, the person generally regarded as the founder of Richmond, would eventually come to own the island in the early 1700's.

Sold by the Byrd family in 1776, the island quickly became one of Richmond's first industrial centers. Belle Isle became home to a nail factory, an ironworks that operated for more than 100 years, and granite quarries that operated throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. From 1904 to 1967 a hydroelectric power plant operated on the Southern bank of the island.

Saved from development in the 1990's Belle Isle lives on as an important part of the urban wilderness that makes up Richmond's James River Park System today. Today the island is host to more than 2 million visitors each year who participate in a wide variety of recreational activities. Enjoy your time exploring this important piece of history.



This island would make an agreeable hermitage for any good [person] who had a mind to retire from the world.

– William Byrd II



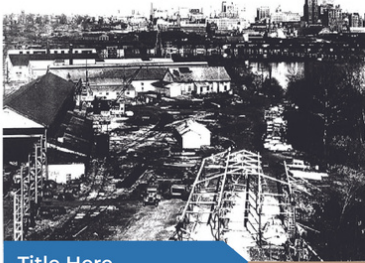
Sign 2- Old Dominion Iron and Steel

OLD DOMINION IRON AND STEEL

150 Years of Industry

The factory remains before you were owned by Old Dominion Iron & Steel (formerly Belle Isle Works) which operated on this site from 1814 – 1972. As people harnessed the power of the James River, what began as a mill race and small nail factory quickly became a much larger operation.

A partnership with the Richmond & Danville Railroad transported coal mined in nearby Chesterfield directly to the furnaces here on Belle Isle. Early owners claimed that coal could travel from the pit to the furnaces without being handled by men. This simplification of the process made business here very profitable. By the 1860's, Old Dominion Iron & Steel (ODIS) ran 48 nail factories, a granite quarry, a rolling mill, several sawmills, seven puddling furnaces, and three heating furnaces – all here on Belle Isle. ODIS was famous for its advanced metallurgy and casting abilities, which allowed it to produce nails, bar iron and boiler plates.



Title Here

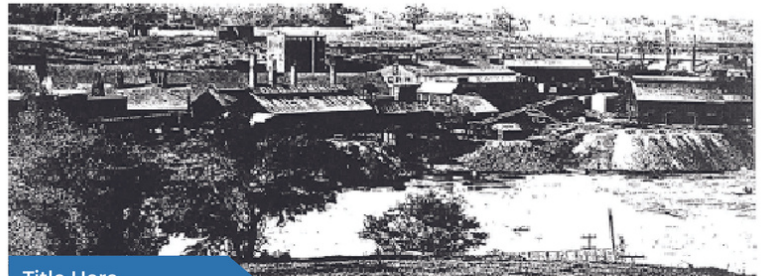
Caption will go here. With some historical background information.

“William Crawford, a colored man employed at ODIS, was caught in a belt yesterday morning and quite painfully injured. He was carried around quite rapidly and unpleasantly for some minutes”

– The Richmond Dispatch,
March 1, 1900

More than 200 men worked here to process over 5,000 tons of iron annually. The company used both paid workers and slave labor, both before and after the American Civil War. ODIS employed approximately 200 free men and 23 enslaved men. After the War, a large number of the free workers and laborers were people of color. Work here was dangerous and difficult, and often resulted in injury or death.

ODIS continued to flourish after the American Civil War, further developing its metallurgy and manufacturing techniques. From 1939 – 1945, metal hatches for tanks were forged here. The tanks were built by Chrysler Motors, and the structure became known as “The Chrysler Building”.



Title Here

Caption will go here. With some historical background information.



Sign 3- Fall Line of the James River

JAMES RIVER FALL LINE

The Unique Geography That Made Richmond

Richmond was settled where the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions of Virginia meet on the James River. The Fall Line is the point where boats could no longer proceed upstream due the rapids formed by the change in elevation. The elevation drops around 120 feet over the course of seven miles.

The rapids are formed by water tumbling over hard granite rocks. This is part of the 900 miles Atlantic Seaboard Fall Line, which stretches from New York to Georgia. Here, water flowing from the Appalachians makes its final descent to lower tidal estuaries. These igneous rocks formed over 330 million years ago when North America and Africa collided in the formation of Pangea.

In Virginia, the Fall Line has impacted the settlement of many of our major cities. Alexandria, Fredericksburg and Petersburg all sit on the same Fall Line. To the west, the Piedmont Region is marked by hard bedrock. To the east, the Atlantic Coastal Plain is characterized by softer soils, the result of over 150 million years of erosion of the mountains that once stood here.

INFOGRAPHIC ABOUT THE FALL LINE WILL GO HERE



Sign 4- The Civil War on Belle Isle

THE CIVIL WAR AT BELLE ISLE

An Infamous Prisoner of War Camp

In 1861, Virginia seceded from the United States and Richmond became the capital of the Confederate States of America. The James River was an important waterway for military uses, and Belle Isle was fortified with defensive gun placements that protected the city from a river approach. The remains of the gun placements can be found on the western edge of the island. Across the James, you can see Tredegar Iron Works, where the Confederacy built many of its largest guns and cannons.

During the Civil War, an infamous prisoner of war (POW) camp was located here. Designed to hold 3,000 prisoners, it was packed at times with as many as 10,000 Union soldiers. By the time the Confederacy surrendered in 1865, more than 20,000 POWs had spent time here.

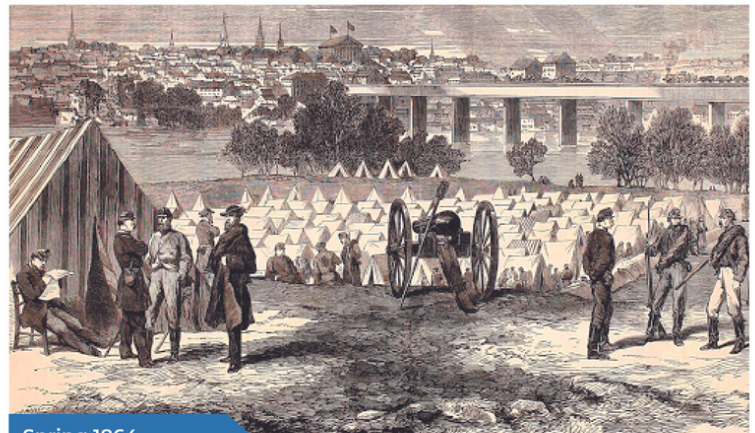
Title Here

Unidentified emaciated prisoner of war, from Belle Isle, Richmond, at the U.S. General Hospital, Div. 1, Annapolis.



“Men became, under such surroundings, indifferent to almost everything, except their own miseries.”

— Warren Lee Goss
Gunner, 2nd Massachusetts



Spring 1864

Confederate Prison Camp at Belle Isle, outside Richmond, Virginia. Artist's rendering.



Sign 5-Hollywood Rapids

HOLLYWOOD RAPIDS

Class III and IV Rapids in the Heart of Richmond

Listen to the roar of the rapids. This is Hollywood Rapid, named for the cemetery on the hill across the river. It is one of the largest rapids as the James River passes through the Fall Line.

Look for drill holes in the rocks. People long utilized the power of falling water to catch fish in traps and nets anchored into the granite. The holes are the results of fisheries or quarrying efforts. Later, sluices and water wheels were built to power the machinery on Belle Isle during the Industrial Revolution.

PHOTO WILL GO HERE

Title Here

Caption will go here. With some background information.

The whitewater you see is the result of air bubbles formed as the water tumbles over and around the rocks. This aeration improves water quality, as the increased oxygen is utilized by plants in the river.

See if you can spot the V-shaped tongues of smooth water entering the rapids. These are the safest passages and skilled boaters make use of them as they navigate this challenging rapid. Hollywood Rapid is for experienced paddlers and is unsuitable for swimming or paddling by novices. Avoid swimming near the mouth of this rapid.

If you are swept into moving water, assume a safe whitewater swimmer's position: feet pointed downstream, and toes and nose up! Remain in this position until you reach calmer water and safety. Please remember to wear close-toed shoes while in the river.

“The murmur of the Falls remains loud enough to drown the noise of the surrounding City.”
– Benjamin Latrobe



Sign 6- Quarrying Broadrock Island

QUARRYING BROAD ROCK ISLAND

Taking Belle Isle for Granite

Early settlers to Richmond called Belle Isle “Broad Rock Island” because of the large, flat granite found here. Imagine, if in the place of this pond, there stood a granite dome reaching from your feet to the top of the cliff in front of you. Granite was quarried here from the mid-18th Century until early 1923. Workers struck a seam that allowed water from the James River to fill the quarry.

Work here was dangerous, and many were injured or died. The workers were often enslaved people or convicts. Using steam-powered drills and dynamite, large chunks of granite were removed. Smaller pieces were cut by hand using a wedge-and-feather system. The derrick to your left would lift the granite onto rail carts. The carts followed the trail you use today to reach the eastern end of Belle Isle.



Title Here

Caption with historic information will go here.

“He had just finished drilling a hole, and it was still warm from the friction when he placed a stick of the powerful explosive inside. Immediately there was a loud explosion, and McQuinn was hurled several yards away. When his companions reached him he was sightless and speechless.”

– Richmond Times Dispatch
May 18th, 1909

Straight lines and right angles are usually the result of human activity. Do you see evidence of quarrying around the river? See if you can find the large holes of steam drills and the smaller holes of hand drills used to wedge-and-feather.

PHOTO OF THE WEDGE AND FEATHER SYSTEM WILL GO HERE

Title Here

Caption with historic information will go here.



Sign 7- First Break Rapids

FIRST BREAK RAPID

A Paddlesports Playground

Imagine walking across the James River from here to Hollywood Cemetery without getting wet! From 1905 until 1969, this was possible using the dam in front of you. The W-shaped Belle Isle Dam forced water to the hydroelectric power plants on Belle Isle and below Hollywood Cemetery. When the dam was operational, the rocks to the south were under water and those in front of you were dry.

In 1969, Hurricane Camille created a hole in the dam. Repairing the dam was deemed too costly, and the James resumed its normal course. Today, this spot is popular with recreational boaters. Rafts, canoes and kayaks can float downstream, and then ride the V-shaped train of waves and eddies to float back upstream, allowing them to continually re-run First Break Rapid.

If you are swept into moving water, assume a safe whitewater swimmer's position: feet pointed downstream, and toes and nose up! Remain in this position until you reach calmer water and safety. Please remember to wear close-toed shoes while in the river.

Can you see any other breaks in this dam?

INFOGRAPHIC ABOUT WHITEWATER NAVIGATION WILL GO HERE



In time and with water, everything changes.



– Leonardo Da Vinci



Sign 8-Headgate Cleaner and Hydro Plant

HEADGATE CLEANER AND HYDRO PLANT

Straining the Water

The catwalk in front of you sits atop the headgate marking the entrance of the feeder canal supplying water to the power plant 200 yards to your left. The Belle Isle Hydroelectric Power Plant operated from 1904 until 1967. It ceased operation when the cost of maintenance and repair to the plant and associated dams rendered it unable to compete with cheaper fossil fuels.

The steel slats of the headgate prevent wood and debris from reaching the turbines of the electric generators. Logs and larger debris floated through the gate in the dam straight ahead and could return to the river. Pieces of fabric, wood and trash trapped in the headgate were removed with a special headgate cleaner, seen on your right.

The headgate cleaner rolled along the pathway you walk today. The tracks of the cleaner support the handrails of the catwalk. This large mechanical rake kept these "trash racks" free of leaves and small debris. Notice how the steel teeth fit between the metal slats to slide up and down. In spite of the cleaner, small bits of debris still made their way to the blades of the turbines.

INFOGRAPHIC/DIAGRAM OF THE HEADGATE CLEANER WILL GO HERE

“ The ideal turbine...would be one that was prepared to take whatever might come, to sit there and react calmly in any situation, to respond evenly to wild and sudden demands, to make the best of difficult circumstances, to remain steadfast in time of adversity, to keep going, above all to press on, to persevere, and not vibrate, fibrillate, vacillate, cavitate, or panic - in short, to accept with versatile competence...the run of the river. ”

— John McPhee





Sign Holder/Frame Example

