

Memo

To: All Attendees

From: Jose Barro

CC:

Date: December 19, 2005

Re: Meeting minutes of December 13, 2005 – Ascension Parish Riverfront Development.

Attendees:

Lamar Hale-USACE
Greg Becnel – HA
Mark Wingate- USACE
Carl Capone - Ascension Parish
Brant Richard – Shaw
Barton Rogers – Shaw
Jason Lockhart- SUBR
Archie Tiner, Jr.- SUBR
Jarrett B. Davis- SUBR
Matt Wilks- JFDS
Samuel Washington- SUBR
Kent Schexnaydre- Ascension Parish
Douglas Diez - Pelican Point Properties
Joey Furr-JFDS
Brent Soileau-SJB Gourp.

The meeting started a bit late with some preliminary discussion about the location of a proposed ferry launch. Mr. Carl Capone noted an existing DOTD right-of-way from the end of Lassard St. over the levee and to the river's edge. Mr. Mark Wingate expressed concern about locating a ferry launch between the water plant discharge [sic] and the Le Pelican wreck. Mr. Wingate noted that "Don would build it now if the shipwreck was moved." Mr. Greg Becnel suggested contacting a military demolition team and offering the wreck as a training exercise.

Afterwards, with most attendees present, introductions were made.

The first item discussed was the need to establish a definitive timeline for the riverfront project. Mr. Wingate stated that Mr. Joey Furr of Joey Furr Design Studio, a subcontractor of SJB Group, work with Mr. Archie Tiner, Jr. of the Southern University School of Architecture and Mr. Brant

Richard of the Shaw Group to establish the timeline for this project. Mr. Furr deferred to Mr. Jose Barro, manager of Parks and Planning for SJB Group. Mr. Wingate stressed that there is a need to have something by late February 2006 in order to have something to show when they go to Washington D.C.

Mr. Furr then presented the design for the riverfront project. He discussed the need for connectivity across the divide of the Mississippi River and to develop Donaldsonville as the cultural center of Ascension Parish. He then spoke about the development of the Bayou LaFourche headway and waterway as a site for water tours, and developing the banks of the bayou with waterfront developments such as outdoor markets. He spoke about a greenlink system that would provide circulation through Donaldsonville and back to the riverfront development.

He then spoke about the proposed trail system, which could have interpretive panels about the river and the batture area. One of the committee members, possibly Mr. Kent Schexnayder noted that when the trail system was flooded during high-water periods the trail system could be used as a canoe trail.

The main feature of the development as Mr. Furr presented it would be the riverboat dock and observation tower with riverboats utilizing the existing dolphins. Mr. Wingate asked why the riverboat dock was not larger than the approximate 130 feet length that was illustrated on the plan. Mr. Furr said that the purpose of a smaller riverboat dock was to keep people from spending too much time on the riverfront. He said that it should quickly move visitors from the dock and into the town itself.

He then discussed the lawn area featuring a ramp and terraces to create an outdoor amphitheater. He stated that the area, with some improvements, could be used as a festival area during low-water periods, or rented out to churches and other organizations for carnivals and other socials. He stated that the idea was to keep the development of this area inexpensive by using lots of earthwork to design the space instead of using large superstructures.

The Councilman in attendance, Mr. Schexnaydre, strongly suggested the placement of an RV park overlooking the river, which he felt could generate a substantial amount of money.

Mr. Furr discussed the concept of developing the riverside district as a mixed-use area with strict controls over architectural styles and land uses, possible tax incentives for developers, etc. He discussed the possibility of locating twin mid-rise towers (i.e. 4 to 5 story condominium developments), which would encourage people to live in the area, thus causing it to thrive.

At this point he again discussed the development of the Bayou LaFourche headway in relation to the development of Fort Butler as an interpretive area. He felt the flow of the Fort Butler interpretive development would lead into the Bayou LaFourche headway and on into the bayou tour.

One of the attendees pointed out that lots of “pretty pictures” were getting old and that the people of Donaldsonville were getting tired of “pretty pictures” and wanted to see something actually being built. He stated that we need to find a way to get this project off of “square one”.

Mr. Doug Diez, a developer who was in attendance, was asked for his opinion of what would induce developers to invest in such a project. Mr. Diez stated that they would want something built, a “draw”, indicating that the city was actually moving forward with the development of the area before they would invest money to develop. He said that developers would want a guarantee that the project would be built out within a certain amount of time with a caveat that the city would be responsible to buy back the land from them if it was not.

Questions were raised by Mr. B.J. Francis about who would pay for the removal of the water tower. Mr. Furr said that the water tower should be moved and that private developers should be responsible for moving it. Mr. Francis wondered what incentive private developers would have to participate in such an endeavor. It was mentioned that developers might be favorable to moving the tower once their anxieties were calmed by having architectural, land use, and zoning controls in place.

Mr. Francis again raised questions about who would pay for the items in this project when so many federal funds were frozen in the wake of the hurricanes.

Mr. Schexnaydre again stressed his desire for an RV park on the river.

Mr. Jason Lockhart of the Southern University School of Architecture raised a question about how we would attract potential visitors to the east bank of the river so that they would see the ferry landing and want to take the trip across to Donaldsonville.

Mr. Tiner stated that we must all be cognizant of the massive change that the hurricanes represent to the state and how surrounding areas will change with the influx of ex-New-Orleanians. He made the observation that people will settle where the “quality of life items” are.

Again, ways to obtain possible funding for the removal of La Pelican were discussed. It was mentioned that federal funds might be obtained as part of riverfront development preparation. That it shouldn't be portrayed as funds for specifically moving the wreck, but rather funds for site prep and debris removal. Several attendees made notes to research marine demolition.

Mr. Wingate noted that Mr. Jose Barro would be responsible for making sure that plans were ready in time. He stated that Ms. Kasey Couture will set up the next meeting for the second week in January to discuss the report and coordinate with Mr. Barro about notifying attendees about the next meeting, which should include Mr. Brant Richard and Mr. Tiner.

The meeting was then adjourned.