



OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER



Memorandum

To: Patrick Urich, City Manager

From: Christopher Setti, Assistant City Manager
Ross Black, Community Development Director

Re: Public Engagement for Riverfront Planning

Date: August 9, 2016

City staff is excited to create, launch and manage a robust public engagement effort towards planning the future of Peoria's Riverfront. The opportunity to acquire the rights to Riverfront Village and raze the structure, if exercised by the City Council, would provide approximately 2.6 acres of additional open space.

According to the current plan, the City Council will be asked to approve a "Cooperation Agreement" at its August 23, 2016 meeting. The Agreement will provide the framework for acquiring the development rights and planning the future of the property. Closing on the sale is planned to occur in stages with the first closing set for August 2016. Closing on the final segment may not happen until spring 2017. This provides staff an opportunity to work with the community to gather input concerning features of a new park, prioritize those ideas, and create a design to be used once the structure can be razed. Given the expertise and knowledge of the Peoria Park District, City staff will work closely with District staff to conduct outreach, refine ideas and plan the future space and amenities. In addition to direction from the City Council, staff will also coordinate efforts with the Downtown Advisory Commission (DAC) and Riverfront Programming and Policy Committee (RPPAC).

We propose a four phase planning effort, outlined in brief below.

Phase 1: Input Gathering (September 1 – October 31)

Peoria's downtown riverfront is an asset that has value across a wide cross section of stakeholders, all of whom need to have a voice in its future. First and foremost are the citizens of the City. In addition to that important group, however, staff will seek to gather input from other groups such as employees of downtown businesses; visitors (including business, convention and leisure travelers); and residents of surrounding communities.

The primary tool for collecting input will be the Civic Art Works web platform that has been in place for the past few months. The City has created a vanity website, www.planpeoria.com, which takes users directly to "A Vision for Downtown Peoria," the project dedicated to planning downtown Peoria. The site allows visitors to submit their own idea ("create a campaign"), comment on an existing campaign, pledge financial or volunteer support for a campaign, or simply "support" a campaign. The backend of the site allows staff to monitor traffic and collect data.

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To drive visitors to PlanPeoria.com, staff will conduct the following activities:

- Repeated utilization of City communication channels (i.e. press releases, Facebook, NextDoor, Twitter, etc.)
- Work with stakeholder partners like the Convention and Visitors Bureau and Peoria Riverfront Association to create prominent links on their websites.
- Craft an email message for Peoria businesses to send to their employees, asking them to visit the site.
- Distribute brochures or postcards at events such as the Riverfront Market, Art Fair, Erin Feis, etc. that inform visitors of the effort.
- Work with area hotels to include information on the website to their guests.
- Visit neighborhood associations and other stakeholder meetings to discuss the effort.
- Traditional advertising (local media, public service announcements, billboards).

In addition to driving traffic to the website, the DAC and RPAC, in concert with the Community Development Department, will host 2-3 public meetings over the two month input gathering phase. The meetings will include a discussion of the project and its parameters, a walking tour of the riverfront, and table discussions. Participants will be asked to work together to develop preliminary plans for the area.

Concurrently with the input gathering, City staff will also work to identify any issues or opportunities within the project. This includes working with the Army Corps of Engineers and Illinois Department of Natural Resources to explore any limitations the floodplain or floodway may present; investigating grant opportunities; identifying infrastructure such as utilities; and exploring capital and operating budget issues.

Phase 2: Prioritization (November 1 – December 31)

Given the planned efforts to drive traffic to the web platform, staff anticipates a good number of ideas to be generated and posted. While the site can measure the popularity of ideas through the number of “supporters,” it is likely that more ideas will be generated than can be realized in the eventual plan. Furthermore, two well-supported ideas might conflict with each, such as claiming the same physical space. The survey can also be used to refine individual ideas. Staff will use a survey instrument to prioritize among the projects as well as inform choices between competing ideas. The survey will be sent to all registered users of PlanPeoria.com as well as being sent to stakeholders through many of the channels listed above.

Concurrently in this phase, a steering committee will be formed to help guide efforts. The committee will be comprised of a cross section of stakeholders and representatives of key organizations. Stakeholder groups would include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Peoria Park District
- Downtown Living Association (the neighborhood association for downtown)
- Peoria Riverfront Association

- Peoria Area Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Downtown Development Corporation
- Warehouse District Association
- Young Professionals of Greater Peoria

The steering committee would also include individual citizens and representatives of the City Council, DAC and RPAC.

Phase 3: Conceptual Design (January 1 – March 31)

Armed with a list of prioritized public ideas, the City will work with a design professional to create alternative concept plans for the 2.6 acre site and immediately surrounding area. Additional public meetings can be used to refine these plans and select a final concept. The final concept plan will be used to determine the capital budget as well as plan for ongoing operating costs.

Phase 4: Final Design and Implementation (April 1 – completion)

The final design and budget will be brought to the City Council for approval.