

Riverfront Commission
Meeting Minutes
1/20/2023

Opening:

Co-Chair Marc Geil called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. in the City of Sterling Community Room.

Present:

Terry McGuire, Marc Geil, Skip McCloud, Kris Noble, Heather Sotelo, Peter Dillon, John Brady, Joe Strabala-Bright, Janna Groharing, Larry Schuldt, Alderman Josh Johnson, Alderman Chris Wilen, Alderman Jim Wise, City Manager Scott Shumard and Mayor Skip Lee, Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader. Also Present, were Ron Clewer of Gorman, Ashley Sarver and Gary Anderson GWA (Zoom), Mark Sauer of Mead and Hunt, and Administrative Assistant Deb Dillow

Absent:

Nick Lareau, Mike Sprague, Joel Zirkle and City Clerk Teri Sathoff.

Approval of November 28, 2022 Minutes

Minutes were reviewed and approved as presented.

Marc stated the Riverfront Commission Chairs presented the recommendations for proceeding with the Riverfront Masterplan to City Council on December 5, 2023. Council approved the proposal as presented.

Quiet Zone Study

Scott Shumard reported that Council approved the Quiet Zone Study at the January 16, 2023 meeting. The City received six (6) firm responses to the RFQ and SRF Consulting was selected. SRF anticipates 6 months maximum for the study and with the information to build out for the Quiet Zone in 2024. The first step is the Police Department will place a speed trailer to do traffic counts at the crossings. Additionally, a meeting will be coordinated with Federal Railroad Administration, ICCA, IDOT and UP. The City's cost will be approximately \$42,000 and Union Pacific will charge us for their consultant to represent them.

Surf Broadband

Scott reiterated that he had contact with Broadband on December 12 and 17 with no response. Scott stated he did run into an actual Broadband person and they indicated we should have an answer soon.

Wallace Street

Corey Buck reported that Com Ed and NICOR are putting in new utilities along Wallace Street and as long as they are finished with their part when Gensini is ready to start, the project should be on track for completion summer of 2023.

Masterplan Update

Ron Clewer gave an update on the progress of the Riverfront Masterplan. He stated that regarding the Lawrence building and all the work done prior through GWA guidance and the market study is all still relevant moving forward.

The recommendation building is to move forward with the first project and that is the Workforce Housing Project at the far east end. The reason is the ready resources available for this project including incentives at the federal and state level.

Other projects like parking, hotel and an event center are not possible to fund right now. Even with incentives with historic tax credits, the debt on those projects make it impossible. No one wants to fund operations of this type right now.

He stated the development the east end to the street will continue but will require a look at options because of the need for more developers. He indicated that there might be a hotel developer interested in investing so marketing will be key to bring in potential investors. Gorman is willing to market as they feel it is definitely worth it and recommends continuing to investigate other potential funding. If this does not happen, environmental remediation will continue and hope for a better economy.

Regarding the parking, he reported that the lower level parking is completely self-contained therefore, no additional parking needed on the residential space.

Lawrence the plan will include the following:

Community room

Offices for Property management

Exercise Facility

Office space

View on top of the property management space

Residents will have access the rooftop and a river view

Rooftop patio and barbecue facility

Ron reported that there is no significant traffic so the plan is to demolish the loading dock giving access to the site in the current condition without going under the railroad tracks.

Ron discussed the issue of under the tracks and stated that he and Scott need to look at the engineering side and get the contract out to market and build momentum. This will be an effort to keep the community involvement and excitement. Ron stated that the City needs to be in the position for Congressional directive spending when that opportunity is presented, so the plan is to market this to gain advocacy.

Mayor Lee asked about the cosmetics for the Lawrence building and the need to address this. Ron stated the plan is to remove broken windows, demo clean up and building lighting and stated this is included in the budget. He is waiting to hear about Senator Durbin's directive spending and it sounds promising but no official word. Ron will continue to monitor this potential funding.

Ron stated that he has not heard where we are with the EPA grant. If the grant comes through, on the Lawrence side, the City funds can be used for other things. So want to be ready to redirect that funding to the National side because this is ineligible for the EPA funds so need to shift funds from the City side. Ron states Gorman's recommendation is that the money \$1.4 million be moved over to the National side because it is ineligible for the EPA grant. The reason National is ineligible for this particular EPA grant is due to the way it was donated to the City.

Ron emphasized that the group will need to be more aggressive with businesses in the City for the National side. Therefore, once approved, it will be important to market the National Building side, currently only one (1) business is showing interest. Creating new businesses is the Gorman goal. He recommends tabling spending the funds in the first phase until the use of the funds is confirmed. Will need to start to market the spaces.

Kris Noble asked about the historic tax credits issue changing from 2013. Ron cautioned the process and recommended that only the Lawrence building needs to be placed on the register at this time. Although the site plan makes sense when removing portions of the buildings, it is the buildings are the ones to get the historic tax credit so the City will need to use caution before making the final decision. Recommendation is to hold off on demo of any of National building or applying for the historical register at this time.

Discussion followed regarding the long-term use of the Lawrence and National buildings. Heather Sotelo stated it is a struggle to fill space at National and does not feel the space will not ever be filled with the building as is.

Mayor Skip Lee stated that not having manufacturing in these buildings was not an official policy but a philosophy to only allow light manufacturing and as long as it does not create the same type of problems as the City has spent years fixing. Kris Noble discussed the potential of the building as manufacturing museum type space. Ron stated that Hydroponics is also an option, and could be considered in the future.

The group discussed the historical tax credit for the hotel project and questioned if the funding is worth the tax credit. Ron stated that without the tax credit funding we are limited to \$3 million legislative cap, therefore, would lose 40% to 60% of funding if the City does not apply for the tax credit. There is really no way to offset the loss of the funding.

Ron briefly highlighted EB 5 funding and the value versus the public perception tied to this funding and said this could be a discussion for the future.

Marc discussed Committee Assignments. The following were determined:

Playground & Aesthetics Committee – Kris Noble Chair – Brad Schrader Co-Chair
Data will be gathered from families etc. for the playground equipment.

Pavilion Committee – Janna Groharing Chair – Joe Strabala-Bright Co-Chair
A separate RFP will be done with a planned July bid opening. Construction to begin in the fall of 2023.

Fundraising – John Brady and Josh Johnson will Co-Chair – All will need to be a part of fundraising for Phase II and Phase III. It was noted that visuals will be key for fundraising and all opportunities for sharing the design and plans for the parks and the progress should be utilized. Masterplan Boards can be provided to members who want to share at meetings or their own respective groups, any community events etc. are great opportunities to share what the Phase II and Phase III will include and the emphasis for needed funds.

EB 5 – Gorman and Heather Sotelo will collaborate on this possible source

The group discussed the need for future and the frequency of full Riverfront Commission meetings. It was the consensus that every other month is sufficient. Committees will provide updates and communicate if further guidance is needed to the Commission.

John Brady asked that the full commission be updated when committee meetings are scheduled.

Based on the discussion, it was decided that the Gorman would present the Riverfront Masterplan document with Council as a study session at the February 6, meeting. The Council will have the opportunity to ask questions, gain more insight on the Masterplan.

As determined at the November meeting, the Commission will host an Open House/Public forum for the community to view the Masterplan with a Q and A opportunity on March 22, in the evening. Gorman will work on the planning of this event.

The next meeting for the Riverfront Commission will be Wednesday, April 5, at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 2:24 pm.

Deb Dillow

Administrative Assistant
City of Sterling