

CANAL PLACE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Minutes of Wednesday, March 6, 2024 Public Information Session
Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority

Pursuant to notice distributed to members of the Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority, posted in the main entrance of the Western Maryland Railway Station, circulated to the press, and posted on our website, a River Park public information session was held at the Allegany Museum, 3 Pershing Street, Cumberland, Maryland on Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

Authority Members Present: Janice Keene; Rebecca Ruppert, Michael Mudge, Brad Nixon, Al Feldstein, and Ray Morriss.

Staff Present: Deidra Ritchie, Executive Director; Nicole Gray, Financial Manager; Kim Folk, Administrative Specialist/Marketing Director; and Crystal Lloyd, Administrative Aide.

Others Present: Local dignitaries in attendance were Robin Summerfield, Senator Cardin’s Office; Bill Shepherd, Mayor of Ridgeley, WV; Eugene Frazier, Laurie Marchini, and Jimmy Furstenberg, City of Cumberland Council Members; Robert Smith, Director of Engineering for the City of Cumberland; and Matt Sell, MD DNR Western Region 1 Freshwater Manager, and a total approximately 100 community members were in attendance as well.

I. INTRODUCTION & MEETING AGENDA

Mrs. Keene welcomed attendees and initiated the River Park public information session at 6:00 p.m. She introduced the presenters and the topics to be discussed during this session. Mrs. Keene requested that attendees save their questions and comments until after all of the information has been presented.

II. ASHLI WORKMAN

Mrs. Workman announced that she would like to start her presentation by noting that she had been asked to provide a statement on behalf of Allegany County Commissioner, Bill Atkinson, who was unable to attend the session. Mr. Atkinson’s message was; “I believe the River Park Project will be transformational to the downtown Cumberland area, be a key driver to outdoor recreation in our area, improve the quality of life for our residents, attract new businesses, enhance the water quality of the river, create fish passage upstream, and return the river into

a more natural environment.” Mrs. Workman stated that she believes the River Park Project will be a major driver for economic impact to our area. Mrs. Workman further stated that we have the natural resources in our area to provide outdoor recreation to our residents and visitors alike.

III. DEIDRA RITCHIE

Ms. Ritchie began her presentation with the introduction of Cumberland Director of Engineering, Robert Smith, who stated that the City of Cumberland has entered a design agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the C&O Canal Rewatering Project. Mr. Smith said the agreement combines installation of a 78-inch pipeline with the rewatering project, and that the work will include removal of a 1950s levee and 15 to 20 feet of earth to install the pipeline. Mr. Smith expects it to be a three to four-year design permitting phase. Subsequent construction would add another three or so years to that timeline. Design cost is estimated at approximately \$4,000,000 of which the Corps of Engineers would pay approximately \$2,800,000. Mr. Smith closed by saying that he is “looking forward to the position of engineer for Canal Place be hired to assist with this project.”

Ms. Ritchie then provided details about the history of the River Park Project from its inception in 2017 to the present day. Ms. Ritchie noted that Canal Place has had overwhelming support from the community and a variety of stakeholders within the State of Maryland, and she recognized the numerous entities that had provided funding support. Ms. Ritchie also noted that Canal Place is collaborating with officials in West Virginia and that she believes that this project will be beneficial to both states. She further stated that trail connections with the State of Pennsylvania and West Virginia will be extended as a result of this project. She further stated that 2023 has been “a big deal” because of the earmark that was received and the tremendous amount of progress that has been made.

IV. COLIN MCCARDLE

Mr. McCardle stated that he was an Assistant Project Manager with Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. (CEC) working with Jim Christie on the River Park Project. He began his presentation covering a timeline of completed tasks beginning with the Dam Removal Feasibility Study and the Sediment Phase I Report (2010), the Sediment Study (2015), Riverpark Preliminary Concept (2016), Feasibility and Masterplan (2020), and the Preliminary Engineering Report and Masterplan which is 30% complete (2024). Mr. McCardle listed the next steps as

hydrologic analysis revisions, sediment study below and above the dam, construction documentation, pertinent permitting through involved parties, and finally, project bidding and construction. Mr. McCardle went on to clarify questions concerning potential flooding once the dam is removed. He stated that the industrial dam is not part of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) flood control system, the dam was constructed independently of the Blue Bridge, and the removal of the dam will not affect the structural integrity of the bridge. Several PowerPoint slides were presented providing details on how this conversion will affect the water flow. Studies will continue to determine sediment control and water quality. Mr. McCardle believes that the removal of the dam will enable the American Eel to swim upstream which will allow freshwater mussels to reproduce and benefit the entire ecosystem. Mr. McCardle closed with a detailed slide of the Whitewater Design at its' 30 percent completion point for the attendees to view.

V. JIM CHRISTIE

Mr. Christie stated that he has been working as a landscape architect for the past 26 years. He explained that he and Mr. McCardle are the two main consultants assigned to the River Park project, but that CEC office employs 120 staff, and at this time 30 of those staff are assisting with the work on this project. Mr. Christie's presentation included an explanation of the masterplan for the project. This plan will provide numerous opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Activities will be spread throughout the park and will not just offer canoeing, kayaking and white-water activity, but will also offer cycling, fishing, train rides, and should draw a vast number of spectators. Mr. Christie also explained there will be a 1-mile loop trail to the trestle bridge to Carpendale, which will open opportunities to the West Virginia side of the river. The water trail map presented four connecting boat launches that include the Allegany County Fairground, Upper Potomac Industrial Park, Mason Sports Complex, and Maple Street launch. Mr. Christie stated in conclusion, that the final goal will be the conversion of an industrial dam to a family-friendly whitewater park, enhanced water and wildlife quality and fishing opportunities, and ADA accessibility from a parking lot to the Potomac River and the surrounding area. Mr. Christie and Mr. McCardle initiated a video that showing some examples of successful whitewater parks throughout the United States, which ran throughout the public comment section of the meeting. Ms.

Ritchie then opened the floor to any questions or comments from those in attendance.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Greg Larry, of the Cumberland Times-News, asked if this project would be able to provide adequate parking due to the limited parking currently available in the City of Cumberland. A discussion ensued between Mr. Larry, Ms. Ritchie, and Mr. Christie about potential parking around Cumberland and on Canal Place property. A question was raised about the timeline for the permit process. Mr. Christie discussed how the permitting process will work during the various stages of the project. A gentleman asked if the basin would be narrowed once construction began. Mr. Christie said that it would not, and that there would be the same amount of water flowing in the river. Another attendee asked whether patrons question raised was will patrons have to have kayaks or canoes to enjoy the River Park or could they use water tubes for floating? Mr. Christie answered that patrons will not be limited to the use of kayaks or canoes to enjoy the water park. Mrs. Keene took over the mic and stated that she believes that our legislators will support the River Park going forward due to the benefit to the community. An attendee suggested that the river be used for ice skating during the Winter. Mr. Christie stated that the river area near the fairgrounds would be best suited to ice skating and a discussion ensued.

At the conclusion of the meeting, an attendee asked “what the public could do to make the project happen”? Ms. Ritchie stated that they could continue to support the project by attending meetings like this one. Mr. Christie concluded by stating that a project like this involves a long process, but we are progressing and the project will be completed. The public meeting ended at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Janice Keene

Chair