



Riverfront Vision 2005

City Planning Commission
of New Orleans
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Base orthographic aerial photographs used to produce the map images in this document were created by the US Geographic Society (USGS).

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Imagery Information:
The panchromatic aerial photography was flown in December of 2002. The photography was projected to State Plane, South Louisiana, NAD 83, unit of measure is feet. The photographic spatial resolution is approximately a 12" pixel.





Woldenberg Park and the Aquarium of the Americas



Port of New Orleans cargo facility

New Orleans and the River

New Orleans' physical and cultural geography has been inexorably linked to and defined by the Mississippi River. The River and its commerce has nurtured the growth and prosperity of the city for almost three centuries. New Orleans' unique sense of place and fascinating cultural heritage reflect this long-term exposure to diverse cultural regions. For much of this time, the New Orleans riverfront was primarily a maritime resource. However, fundamental changes in maritime industry taking place over the last 20 years, have resulted in major restructuring and consolidation of port operations into areas that can accommodate contemporary industry needs. As larger and improved facilities are constructed, older wharves and warehouses along the riverfront became inactive and gradually abandoned. This ongoing dynamic makes possible the consideration of alternative, non-maritime uses for these underutilized segments of the riverfront. This provides a tremendous opportunity for transforming additional segments of the New Orleans riverfront in a way that further advances the residential quality of life and the city's economic development potential.

The transformation of the obsolete industrial landscape along the downtown segment of the Riverfront began in the late 1960's. These changes gave the city some of its most treasured and unique public spaces along the River's edge: the Moonwalk promenade, Spanish Plaza, and Woldenberg Park with the Aquarium of Americas. The development of the World Trade Center, the Hilton Hotel, the Riverwalk Shopping Mall, and Jax Brewery market place added new opportunities for the public to access and experience the River's edge. These commercial, cultural and recreational facilities are also contributing factors to the ever growing tourism industry of the city.

Despite previous riverfront planning efforts, for the past several decades development along New Orleans' riverfront has progressed in a fragmented way. Individual projects have been pursued in a manner more or less isolated from one another. During this time, development pressure along the riverfront has continued to grow.

Today, New Orleans is in a position to further reclaim its riverfront. With almost three miles of prime waterfront property having the potential for redevelopment, the City has a unique opportunity to partner with the Port of New Orleans and open up additional segments of the riverfront for public use while maintaining a maritime presence. Furthermore, the emergence of more than three dozen riverfront projects attests to the need for a planned and carefully guided redevelopment of this major public asset which is also the determining factor for the economic future of the city. This Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan is a starting point for realizing that future.

Purpose and Scope of the Plan

The purpose of the Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan is to provide the following:

1. Articulate a shared vision for future development of the riverfront through a community-oriented planning process;
2. Recommend strategies that will guide riverfront development projects toward realization of that vision; and
3. Ensure coordination and partnership among key stakeholders.

The Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan articulates the community's vision for a 25 mile long corridor, stretching along the river's edge from parish line to parish line on both sides of the river, and encompassing the adjacent industrial areas and neighborhoods. The Plan highlights issues and opportunities for particular riverfront segments and the adjacent neighborhoods in terms of land use and zoning, transportation and access needs. It examines security and environmental concerns, and discusses the issues of governance and funding. The Plan further examines the adequacy of the current zoning and development standards to determine if these tools will support the stated goals of the Plan and the community vision for the riverfront.

The Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan embraces planning ideas developed over the course of several decades which are still relevant either for the riverfront as a whole or for some of its distinct segments. These, along with recent ideas and findings shaped through an extensive public process, provide a basis for the Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan. This vision then informs, and is reflected in, the key goals and recommendations of the Plan.

The Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan is intended to provide a framework for land use and investment decisions within the entire Plan area for the next 20 years. However, the principal focus of the planning effort for the immediate future will be on the central riverfront area (Jackson Avenue to the Industrial Canal) due to the wealth of redevelopment opportunities.

Vision, Goals, and Key Recommendations

Key Recommendations of the Plan

The Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan takes advantage of new opportunities to open up the riverfront to the public, better utilizing it as a resource for both adjacent neighborhoods and the entire city. The key recommendations of the Plan involve the realization of projects or specific actions that will have a significant impact on shaping and redeveloping the riverfront's character.

The major recommendations are as follows:

- Development of two new riverfront parks, one in the Lower Garden District, the other in the Bywater neighborhood;
- Development of two new mixed-use areas, one involving the Market Street Power Plant site and the wharves from Orange to Julia Streets; the other involving wharves from Esplanade Avenue to Piety Street;
- Development of a new cruise ship terminal at the Poland Avenue wharf;
- Creation of a continuous pedestrian and bicycle promenade along the water's edge from Jackson Avenue to the Industrial Canal;
- Designation of the neighborhood access corridors and nodal points as gateways to the riverfront;
- Implementation of the Riverfront Overlay Zoning District for the area from Jackson Avenue to the Industrial Canal;
- Development of a detailed Urban Design Plan for City owned riverfront property,
- Designation of a Riverfront Managing Entity to spearhead funding and implementation of the Plan, and
- Increase opportunity for public review and input for major development proposals along the riverfront.

Vision of the Plan

Here, the community's aspirations and values are expressed as the following vision:

"We envision the riverfront as a vibrant place, a center of cultural and educational opportunities, where citizens are drawn to and reunited with the River. We see the riverfront enhancing the economy of the city with prosperous maritime and non-maritime activities. New development will complement the historic character of adjacent neighborhoods. We envision strengthened links to the neighborhoods and continuous access, connecting riverfront communities via transit, pedestrian and bicycle improvements. New development will respect the riverfront as a public amenity and augment its role as a gateway to the city and its neighborhoods. We see the riverfront as a safe and unique place to live, work and visit."

Goals of the Plan

The overarching goals of the plan formulated through the planning process seek to:

- Maximize public access, open space, and public use of the riverfront;
- Create stronger links along the riverfront and between the riverfront and adjacent neighborhoods;
- Support and guide redevelopment of the riverfront in a way that enhances the economy of the city and the quality of life of its residents;
- Guide riverfront development to accommodate a diversity of uses, from passive parks to vibrant commercial attractions;
- Maintain a strong maritime/port presence along the riverfront;
- Provide and plan for a range of transportation options along and to the riverfront including streetcars, ferries, busses, and bicycle and pedestrian paths;
- Design mechanisms that will ensure coordination of development projects and their consistency with the vision and goals of the Plan;
- Create development standards that will support sustainable development and enhance the unique identity of the distinct riverfront segments; and
- Ensure public input when considering major development proposals.



Audubon Park, Riverview Section promenade and gazebo



Pedestrian bridges over railroad and floodwall from Hilton Riverside Hotel



New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts viewed from Algiers Point



Riverfront Charrette Workgroups, January 2004
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Method of Developing the Plan

The conclusions and recommendations reached by the Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan are based upon careful planning analysis informed by a wide variety of sources. These include previous plans and documents, current and past policies, review of planning precedents, interviews with pertinent agencies and stakeholders, public workshops and meetings, surveys and a riverfront design charrette. A variety of sources were used to ensure a diversity of viewpoint and a highly inclusive vision for the riverfront.

Previous Planning Efforts

Previous planning efforts have informed the various aspects of the Plan. Particularly valuable and still relevant were recommendations contained in five major planning documents concerning riverfront as a whole: the 1990 "New Orleans Riverfront in Transition: A Citizen's Mandate for Planning," the 1992 Riverfront Strategic Policy Plan," the 1992 "New Orleans Riverfront Evaluation of the Area from Press Street to Jackson Avenue," the 1999 "Land Use Plan," and the 2002 "Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan." A list of these and other relevant plans can be found in the appendix of this document.

Riverfront Development Advisory Committee

The Riverfront Development Advisory Committee (RDAC) was formed in the early 1990's. Composed of elected officials, public agency representatives and private stakeholders, the RDAC was to resolve development issues relative to large projects in the CBD and Lower Garden District. The committee provides a forum where stakeholders, neighborhood groups, and public agencies can discuss current development issues along the riverfront. In 2001, The City Planning Commission convened the Mississippi River Corridor Committee whose scope focused on long-range planning for the entire New Orleans riverfront. In 2003, this committee was folded into the RDAC, thus broadening the scope and purpose of the committee and creating a forum for a broad range of riverfront issues. The RDAC also became an advocate for comprehensive planning for the riverfront. The RDAC, currently chaired by Councilmember at-large Oliver Thomas, meets monthly and plays an important role in helping to guide riverfront policy and decision making through cooperative communication. The RDAC role is further advanced and formalized by the Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan.

While the RDAC has provided a valuable forum for discussion, dissemination of information, and ad-hoc problem solving, it has no vested authority to set official public policy that would guide riverfront development. This has highlighted the need for adopting and implementing a comprehensive plan which addresses the key issues underlying current redevelopment practices. Unlike past planning efforts, the tools necessary to implement the vision outlined in the plan should be established.

City Council Resolution

Recognizing the wealth of potential for the Riverfront, its value to the city, and the lack of strong planning tools to address the current development pressure, the City Council passed resolution (R-03-281) in May 2003 directing the City Planning Commission to:

"Pursue a vision and implementation strategy for the New Orleans riverfront, continue to serve as the coordinating and managing entity for riverfront development, and to conduct this public process to produce a Riverfront Vision 2005."

With this charge, the City Planning Commission has worked with the general public, riverfront neighborhoods, local leaders, public agencies and other stakeholders to develop the Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan.

Riverfront Charrette

After conducting research into previous planning efforts and studying riverfront development in other cities (Memphis, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Portland), the City Planning Commission collaborated with the American Institute of Architects and the Port of New Orleans to begin outlining the vision for the riverfront by holding the Riverfront Charrette. The Charrette was an intense work effort over the course of two weekends in January 2004. The participants involved architects, planners, business interests, representatives of public and private agencies and leaders of riverfront neighborhoods. While the Charrette was not open to the general public, it captured the broad spectrum of interests and ideas. The Charrette focused on the riverfront segment from Jackson Avenue to Jackson Barracks because of the nearly three dozen developing and potential projects in the area. The outcomes of the Charrette were summarized in a document which is presented as a companion document to this Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan. Future charrettes focusing on the West Bank and Uptown segments will be integrated as an addendum to this document.

Public Workshops

While the Riverfront Charrette relied on stakeholders and professionals to begin the visioning process, it was important to involve the general public as well. In May 2004, the City Planning Commission invited the public to participate in a similar visioning exercise. Three workshops used the Riverfront Charrette's findings as a starting point for community planning. The discussions started with a review of overall riverfront issues and was followed by discussions of the opportunities and challenges facing distinct neighborhoods along the riverfront as described in this Plan. General topics included desired (and undesired) land uses, transportation, access issues, and urban design characteristics. The meetings gathered nearly 250 citizens. In addition, a riverfront survey was distributed to gain additional public comments. The results were integrated in the Plan and a detailed account is presented in the appendix.

Public Agencies and Stakeholders

City Planning Commission staff also met with key agencies and stakeholders in the development of the Plan, such as the Port of New Orleans, Army Corps of Engineers, Coast Guard, Orleans Levee Board, Tulane University, the Trust for Public Land, and the Regional Planning Commission in order to assess their various issues and needs. See the appendix for a complete list of meetings and agencies.

The Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan presents analysis of the issues and opportunities and makes a number of general and specific recommendations. It builds upon information coming from the above specified sources and reflects the community's vision and desires for the future of the riverfront

Organization of the Plan

The Plan consists of four chapters. Following the Introduction, Part II of the Riverfront Vision 2005 Plan frames the major issues and opportunities within the context of the overall riverfront. In Part III of the Plan, the distinct segments of the riverfront are closely examined, with concerns addressed and opportunities identified for these segments and their sub-areas. Part IV presents a summary of recommendations of the Plan and an implementation action plan. The Action Plan suggests the immediate implementation steps and planning tools necessary to achieve the vision and implement goals and recommendations of the Plan. In the Appendix, an overview of key development parcels is presented, addressing site-specific concerns through the lens of the larger vision and goals that are articulated in this plan.