

Minutes:

Historic Falls of the James State Scenic River Advisory Committee

Meeting: February 16, 2017 – James River Park Headquarters

Greg Velzy – Chair presiding

Called to order: 12:09 pm

Attendance:

Falls Members: Justin Doyle, Anne Wright, John Heerwald, John Thompson, Greg Velzy, Ralph White, Ralph Hambrick, Jim Hill, Tricia Pearsall, Leighton Powell and Nathan Burrell – Manager, James River Park.

Falls Members Not Present: John Moser, Alex Dahm, Jane Myers

Minutes: January 19, 2017 minutes approved.

Current Issues:

Riverfront Development Plan Update:

- **T. Potterfield Bridge Updates** – Nathan reported that the City was going through the punch-list in regard to finalizing the project.
 - Post + cable system going up at the overlook and along the shoulder which was carved to form the accessible ramp to the east.
 - Interpretive signage still has to be put in place.
 - There was much discussion regarding placement of a foliage barrier and signage where the trail seems to open up onto the Norfolk & Southern Railyard. This has created a sort of defacto Missing Link Trail along the railroad tracks, which is dangerous.
- **Downriver Updates:**
 - It was reported that the Planning Department had submitted a budget request for the site plan
 - Greg Velzy suggested that a Water Taxi System along the Canal from 14th Street Dock to Chapel Island be created as docks are (more or less) in place, and this could relieve parking at Great Shiplock Park. It was suggested that this idea be proposed to Capitol Trees and Venture Richmond.
 - It was also noted that there has been no follow up from City Planning as to suggestions submitted in January 2017 by Falls Committee regarding the Downriver Plan.
- **Next Phase - Missing Link** - As stated in last month's minutes, Anne Wright and Ralph Hambrick made a proposal that the current Missing Link trail be only slightly modified and left alone as a wilderness scramble. Ralph White and others stated that this connection is a priority and a trail should be investigated. He suggested that we solicit inquiry as to the feasibility of a cantilevered path connector from bridge experts. Justin Doyle reported that a Grant Application to the Doppelt Family Trail Development Fund has been made by SportsBackers for funds for a feasibility study. Pending the outcome of that grant, the Committee will remain neutral.

EnRichmond: Leighton Powell (is meeting with John Sydnor tomorrow and will bring up the following points)

- **Status of Passages' Contract with JRP** – Passages Summer Camp has a huge impact on the JRP and has used the park for 20 years. To date, the JRP has seen no monetary income (to offset that impact) from the contract negotiated and renegotiated over the past 20 years, though it is said that approximately \$300,000 has

been paid to EnRichmond. If correct, the Committee found that to be extremely problematic, as it seems that the vendor payment is going to support the staff of EnRichmond and not the JRP.

- **Vauxhall Island** – Status Update on when the island will be given to the City as promised. When that transfer is made, a large cleanup effort will be undertaken to find suitable housing for the tenants and clean up the debris.

JRA – General Assembly Update – Justin Doyle

- **Senate Bill #1398** designed to protect Virginia's Rivers from the harmful impact of coal ash deposits passed the Senate "29-11 on Feb. 7, SB 1398 said Dominion would have to complete the environmental assessment on a coal ash pond before getting a permit to close the facility. The director of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality "shall issue no draft permit to provide for the closure of any CCR unit until he has reviewed and evaluated the complete assessments and all comments received relating to that CCR unit," but the language was dropped in the version of the bill that the House passed 96-1 on Friday. Under the House-approved version, the Department of Environmental Quality would not have to consider the environmental studies when granting permits to close coal ash ponds. The DEQ director "shall not suspend, delay, or defer the issuance of any permit" pending the completion of the environmental assessment, the House version said. "In deciding whether to issue any such permit, the Director need not include or rely upon his review of any such assessment."
- **James River Scenic River Designation** - Extends the scenic river designation of a portion of the James River located in Botetourt and Rockbridge Counties from 14 miles to 59 miles – passed by Senate and House. That portion of the James River in Botetourt and Rockbridge Counties, including the Towns of Buchanan and Glasgow, from its origination at the confluence of the Jackson and Cowpasture Rivers running approximately 59 miles to Rockbridge-Amherst-Bedford County line is hereby designated a component of the Virginia Scenic Rivers System.

Falls Committee Meeting with Levar Stoney: Tricia reported that two weeks after last month's meeting, she wrote to Brandon Cox and then to Parker Agelasto to try to schedule a meeting date with the Mayor. So far, no replies. Leighton stated that we shouldn't attempt a meeting until the time was right. Greg relayed our conversation at last month's meeting regarding the need for 3-4 members to meet with the Mayor to establish our James River identity for review of ANY projects concerning the stretch of the James River through Richmond. As discussed in January:

1. The Committee needs to make certain that the Mayor understands our history as a State appointed committee and understands how we are different from JRA and other river groups.
2. The Falls Committee be consulted on all proposed plans along both shores of the River BEFORE the development/comment phase.
3. The Falls Committee would like for the Mayor to appoint a liaison or a Falls Committee member from his office to insure connectivity

Members who should attend: Greg Velzy, Jim Hill, John Heerwald (he brings a State and City perspective) and Leighton Powell)

Capital Region Land Conservancy:

- Currently conducting Conservation Easement Surveys of the James River Park
- Continuing working to deed the islands in the James and other portions under Conservation Easement

James River Park Economic Development Study: Drafting of document in process by VCU and Friends of the JRP. Volunteers are in process of surveying businesses. That data is being 'worked' and a document should be out by March 1, 2017. Hope to dovetail this with a Visitation Plan based on the numbers of visitors in the JRP.

Master Plan Funding and Preparation: VHB (who is also working on the Invasive Species Project) has made headway with a proposal. Costs look to be in the \$170,000.00 ballpark. A proposal should be in shortly from Hargreaves and Associates. When these two are in, Nathan will submit to the Falls Committee for review. FOJRP is leading the funding and fundraising for this effort.

New Business:

GRTC Bus Routes: After much discussion regarding existing and proposed bus routes, it was decided that the Committee should write a letter in support of having a GRTC stop by the Park both on Second Street (Downtown) and along Southside. It was proposed and seconded that the Committee send a letter to Council and GRTC supporting bus access to the River and to elaborate that all persons need access, particularly the underserved. Leighton will draft the letter and consult with Nathan.

Park Litter Issue: Ralph suggested that JRP needs to request more personnel to completely take over a river trash plan.

Reports:

James River Park:

- Nathan Burrell stated that he has a meeting tomorrow - internal department meeting – to change the fees for ALL vendors in the JRP such that anyone using the JRP grounds for programs must pay a fee per person. This would include runners, workout groups, SUP classes, rafts, everyone. This would help pay for the JRP educational programs.
- Nathan has requested 6 full time and 8 seasonal personnel as well as a hefty capitol improvement budget.
- Nathan reported that he dredged the ramp access at Ancarrows – by himself (with help from heavy equipment)
- Also he is working with a VCU student to devise a Master Plan for the Pumphouse.

JRAC: Stewards of the River Nominations due by March 3, 2017

JROC: Weekend project to extend the boardwalks in the Wetlands and create bump-outs for passing – walkers and bikes.

FOJRP: See above

Open discussion:

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 1:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Tricia Pearsall

Next months meeting will be held Thursday, March 16, 2017 at 5th Floor Conference Room – City Hall