

Minutes:

Historic Falls of the James Scenic River Advisory Committee
5th Floor Conference Room
Richmond City Hall

Meeting:

Greg Velzy, Chair – Presiding

Call to Order: 12:01 PM

Attending Committee Members: Greg Velzy, Jim Hill, Tricia Pearsall, Ralph Hambrick, Justin Doyle, John Heerwald, Shawna Shade Nathan Burrell, Parker Agelasto, Will Isenberg, Alex Dahm, Leighton Powell, Lynn Crump. Attending Community Guests: Marianne Pitts (Deputy Director, Dept. of Planning & Development Review, City Of Richmond) Giles Garrison (Superintendent, James River Park), Josh Stutz (Director, Friends of the James River Park).

Minutes: Minutes of February 15, 2024: Motion to approve, Ralph Hambrick, Seconded, Leighton Powell: Approved

Introductions:

Current Issues:

- **Riverfront Development Updates:** Marianne Pitts, Deputy Director, Dept. of Planning & Development Review, City Of Richmond. Rezoning of the property near Rocketts for 12-story building will not seriously impact the viewshed from Libby Hill or the view that named Richmond. Marianne will look more closely into map and potential viewshed district suggested by former Director, Mark Olinger and see why the program was dropped. Lynn Crump reminded the Committee that this viewshed has been listed with critical review to the Virginia Viewshed Register.
- **CRLC Updates:** Parker Agelasto, Executive Director
 - Brander Street Properties: The properties owned by Norfolk-Southern have not at this moment been transferred to the City of Richmond and JRPS, but they have been put in escrow and are waiting on completion of the transfer by the closing agent. An announcement should be forthcoming soon. It's a complicated transfer.
 - Draft of the Conservation Easement for Mayo Island is in draft form. Some areas of Mayo are flood tolerant. The City has secured almost one million (if in budget) to assist with helping to pay down the purchase price. CRLC has also succeeded in securing other grants and are advancing donor interests and promoting preservation work as well. As part of that effort, CRLC will celebrate Clean the Bay Day with a huge cleanup of Mayo Island on June 1, 2024.
 - A Lidar mapping overview of the entire James River in Richmond has been completed as a survey for the City Assessor's Office to identify all of the islands in the James and their ownership. If no ownership is found, then the City will take ownership and incorporate into the Conservation Easement adding it to the former Rogers property, Vauxhall, Brander Street, Williams Island, etc. This could add an extra 200 acres to the JRPS. This effort should be completed by the end of 2024. Monies will have to be allotted by City Council to make this happen. Currently DCR is working on the Easement draft as they are the other easement holder.
 - There may be an opportunity to acquire the parking lot at the north end of Mayo Bridge (where Riverside Outfitters is located) and incorporate that into JRPS.
 - Also inroads have been made to acquire the ¼ acre remaining on Mayo Island, but current asking price is ridiculously high.
 - Ellen Robertson has introduced a non-binding resolution to City Council: No. 2024-R008 "to express support for the City's acquisition, designation, and establishment of a portion of the property located at 405 West 6th Street and commonly known as Manchester Green as an official City park" in keeping with the 2017 adopted Richmond Riverfront Plan. Parker suggested that we might write a letter of support as it's to be voted on March 25, 2024. (Tricia wrote and sent letter and Ellen Robertson replied with thanks for the support)
- **Brown's Island Improvement Plan:** Alex Dahm: Operations Manager, Venture Richmond, Inc.
 - In accordance with the 2012 – 2017 Richmond Riverfront Development Plan, Venture Richmond engaged 3North to develop plans to create an improved back stage area to open it up, etc. The results were sort of a sculpturesque shipping container structure to contain equipment, provide restrooms and open up the river view. Then VDOT said that

nothing could be built under the Manchester Bridge. They are now looking at more strategic approach involving the green space, terraces close to the river (a revised overlook) and Alex hopes to have a rough rendering next meeting.

- Dominion Energy hopes to be finished with the retaining wall and fence by 2025, The building will measure roughly 30' x 30' x 60' and construction of that will begin October 2024.
- Alex added that they have been fighting invasive species to re-open the view and keep the pipeline trail more active. There was discussion involving the decommissioning of the pipeline and CSX shutting down the trail. This is a no win situation which 'doing nothing' may be the best approach. As Josh Stutz said, "There's no way to keep people off the pipeline".
- The Bay-Scape Garden is no more. DPW in an effort to remove silt at the canal intake just mowed it down. It would take \$60,000 to replace it, so DPW has agreed to build it back and they're in the process of suggesting buffer plants and berries.

- **Virginia Scenic Rivers:** Samantha Wangsgard was not present. No DCR report.
 - Lynn Crump reported that she reached out to Kevin Collins who is working towards Scenic River designation for a segment of the North Anna River. He has started to build community and has put together a PowerPoint presentation. We will reach out to him and see if there's any way the Falls Committee can assist. Some work had also been done in the area of the North Anna Battlefield.
 - Justin Doyle said he had been working with a gentleman on the Hardware River and he would get him in touch with Lynn'

- **Scenic Virginia:** Leighton Powell, Executive Director deferred to Viewshed Project Manager, Lynn Crump. She is co-working with FOLAR to identify viewsheds along the Appomattox River. (See the Program Information concerning the Virginia Viewshed Program: <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/document/vop/2019-VA-Scenic-Landscape-Assessment-Project-ScenicVA.pdf>) Lynn will be doing viewshed presentations.

- **JRA Update:** Justin Doyle, JRA Director of Community Conversation
 - Justin updated the Buzzard Education site visit opportunities. We can go Friday March 22 around 3:00PM or perhaps April 3, 2024. The Committee opted to go on Friday March 22, 2024. (We did go at 1:00pm on the hardhat tour. Amazing space and opportunities. Well attended). Justin said that the green roof was going on today, but that Johnson Grass was a real problem and must be eradicated before the grounds to the east can be planted. They are also working with the National Park Service on transportation issues in the area – with the Volpe National Transportation Center. The fences are coming down and programs should begin in the late summer and fall.
 - Dredging is another expensive issue being considered at the docking site in view of the boating activity which will be carried out by the Education Center.

- **James River Park:** Giles Garrison, Superintendent, James River Park. See February 2024 JRP Report attached to this email.
 - Giles added that dredging (at around \$500,000) was beyond the Park's budget. This is also the last year of the 5-year permit which must be renewed. A lengthy discussion ensued about avenues for making more substantial dredging possible including additional City funding. It will all be taken into consideration. Ancarrow's Landing was dredged this year thanks to Lewis Evans, and DPU staff.
 - The Natural Resource Management Plan will begin after 3 public engagement sessions in early spring. Biohabitats, a Baltimore based firm, will be hired to develop the natural resource management plan within the park boundary. The project is grant- funded through Friends of James River Park.
 - JRP will have an archaeologist conduct a survey of Belle Isle as a result of feedback concerning the design improvements on Belle Isle. They are working with DHR. Through a grant, JRP will also conduct an assessment and the implement the guidelines of the National Park Service concerning how to honor reflective spaces like the POW Camp on Belle Isle.
 - JRP is also beginning to construct an ADA ramp at the Pumphouse which will begin at the road. They will be cutting some tress and must plant others during the summer months, as they have to be planted by August (not the best time) but this is in keeping with the deadlines of the grant.
 - They are working on an interim plan at the Dock Street with the help of Marvel Design. The Dock Street area is due to open up with the change in the Capital Trail path by June. They will engage the following community groups in the planning – Plant experts, recreational users and residents of the 7th District. Dates not established as yet.
 - Lynn Crump and Giles are coordinating site visits to Mayo Island and Dock Street using the Scenic Viewshed criteria for evaluation and to better inform the committee members about how to apply that tool to the park system. The Falls

Committee is invited to visit Mayo Island first, given that the conceptual plan is in development and input in that plan would be timely: April 23, 2024 2:00-4:00. Park on Mayo Island in parking lot

- Working on starting the Belle Isle Bridge improvement. It has to be resurfaced before any projects can begin on Belle Isle
- Community Engagement for Belle Isle: There was much discussion as to when/how/what community to engage in the planning process for Belle Isle improvements and how much to cement the Marvel Design ideas. Giles and Josh want to do more targeted engagement, but Nathan Burrell and other Committee members felt a broader engagement was fair, needed and necessary.

- **Friends of James River Park Report:** Josh Stutz, Director

- Josh reported that the James River levels will be part of the weather forecast on Channel 8. FOJRP has paid for this service for another season.
- A litter survey is planned for Belle Isle to determine where trash and graffiti are most prevalent – April 21, 2024 at 9:00am (Earth Day)
- Combatting graffiti – FPJRP is hiring someone to stay on top of this. Get rid of it as soon as possible.
- Don't forget to participate in the Invasives Survey online

- **Mayo Bridge Update:** It is rumored that 90% of the plans for the Mayo Bridge have been developed and are not honoring the old bridge at all. Tricia will call Marianne Pitts and ask what she knows.

- **New Business:**

- Meeting on the James River Branch Trail will be held on Monday 25, 2024 at the Southside Community Center
- Shawna added that in making JRP plans and all other considerations, the safety of park visitors must be prioritized.

- **Reports:**

JROC: Gear Swap will be at Forest Hills Park, April 20, 2024 – 11:00 – 3:00

Open discussion: None

Adjourn: 1:50 pm

Next Public Meeting: April 18, 2024

Meetings begin at 12:00 noon in the Conference Room on the 5th floor of Richmond City Hall and/or conducted via Zoom. Meetings are scheduled for the THIRD Thursday of each month. All meetings are open to the public. If you are not now receiving e-mail meeting notices and wish to receive them, please provide your name and e-mail address to velzyg@verizon.net. If you would like to be removed from the list, so indicate at the above e-mail address.

Tricia Pearsall – Secretary