



# City of Fernandina Beach

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Fernandina Beach City Commission  
Amelia River Waterfront CRA Board  
Waterfront Advisory Group

**FROM:** Kelly N. Gibson, Senior Planner

**DATE:** February 7, 2014

**RE:** Amelia River Waterfront CRA Advisory Board + Waterfront Advisory Group Meeting Update

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Following a November 2013 presentation by the newly formed Partnership for Amelia River Park, the City Commission requested input and comments from two City initiated groups — the Amelia River Waterfront CRA Advisory Board (CRAAB) and Waterfront Advisory Group (WAG) concerning the newly formed partnership's design proposal and funding strategy. It was directed that a meeting be convened between the groups to gather feedback and determine consensus on the proposal. The purpose of this memo is to provide the Commission with the feedback of these two groups. Before getting into the meeting itself, it may be helpful to have an understanding that each of these groups were formed for different reasons and each with an independent focus.

### *Amelia River Waterfront CRA Advisory Board*

The Amelia River Waterfront CRA Advisory Board was formed as an ad hoc committee in the summer of 2011. This board is charged with the task of advising the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) on issues including implementation of the CRA Plan by providing recommendations and assistance in identifying and prioritizing projects to be undertaken as consistent with the CRA Plan. The focus of this group is economic development of properties in the City's established CRA, and the adjoining Central Business District, with specific consideration on attracting and retaining businesses.

### *Waterfront Advisory Group*

The Waterfront Advisory Group was formed in late 2011. Under direction of the City Manager, this group was created as fact-finding technical advisory group to work with staff and the City's engineering consultant. Their focus was to review the approved conceptual park plan and address identified issues and changes that were needed following engineering activities and decisions not to relocate the current boat ramp in the 2009 adopted plan. More specifically, they used the previously approved conceptual park plan as a base and addressed the following needs:

- Balance parking with park areas;
- Retain the existing boat ramp;
- Provide for boat trailer parking;
- Retain working marina;
- Accommodate existing businesses;
- Encourage use of the ENTIRE park.

The group met several times between December 2011 and March 2012. Their task was completed following an approval of the revised conceptual park plan. This revised plan has served as the basis for schematic and construction level engineering that has been completed and approved by the St. Johns Water Management District for purposes of issuing a stormwater permit.

On January 23, 2014, the Amelia River Waterfront CRA Advisory Board and the Waterfront Advisory group held a joint special meeting to discuss the Partnership for Amelia River Park's proposed design and funding strategy for improvements in the waterfront park area. This area is identified or commonly known as parking lots A+B (publicly owned waterfront lots). At the meeting, City Planning staff provided an overview of the various efforts towards establishing and planning for a waterfront park over the past 20+ years. Staff then turned the meeting over to the Partnership for Amelia River Park to introduce and explain their rationale behind a new design strategy and funding approach. The meeting lasted just over two hours. **The general consensus of both groups is that they would really like to see something happen and progress towards a waterfront park . They were supportive of the identified funding strategy, but neither group is interested in getting into the park design planning process again.**

Despite their consensus for progress, **the groups offered divergent opinions on the park's revised design strategy.**

- The Waterfront Advisory Group supports use of the currently approved 2012 plan because it includes the representation and input of so many stakeholders over 20+ years of planning. Further, the City has already completed a number of steps in engineering the park to achieve the design set forth in the approved conceptual plan.
- The Amelia River Waterfront CRA Advisory Board supports the proposal of the newly formed Partnership in the interest of getting something done soon.

The following is a listing of the discussion and thoughts from each of the boards for your consideration.

General thoughts from both groups:

- Do we want a park at the waterfront or parking? (If park is built, we will move parking elsewhere.)
- Adjust parking arrangement in C+D to create more parking
- Opportunity to make needed infrastructure improvements (vs. focus on parking)
  - If stormwater improvement is neutral or positive, great!
- Front Street needs infrastructure improvements- want to make sure that this proposal doesn't preclude needed improvements
- Consider the timing of grants and ability to stay on schedule
- Stormwater questions should be negligible to limited based on Water Management District input
- Is it possible to compare the cost of the originally approved plan in this section (lots A+B) vs. the new proposal cost?

WAG:

- Prior planning was no net loss of parking within the plan because that was always a priority at the Commission level; this proposal seems like reinventing the wheel and could be hard to sell parking proposals
- Go with the original plan- It can be phased and use public/private partnerships to fund
- Lot B is different than the original plan's Lot B
- Why not just build original park plan and complete only one section?
- This approach may discourage completion of the rest of the park? OR Maybe it will encourage it? Either way this should be considered.
- This approach involves a lot of moving parts and NO ONE wants to be here for five more years.
- Question the idea that the park design is being driven by need to generate revenue
- Be careful about going back in time with any changes! Does this approach eliminate the engineering work that has already been completed? Think about what will actually get approved and what will get the biggest bang for the buck.
- Concern that if this is built then the rest will never get done.



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CRAAB:

- Group consensus is the same as two weeks ago to generally support the proposal and funding strategy
- Be realistic about getting the grants awarded
- Concept is good for private funding
- If parking ok and downtown and merchants are ok, then no issue with proposal
- Let's just do something- take a positive step forward- not concerned about park details as long as it doesn't impact long term infrastructure. More pros here than cons
- A parking garage may be needed to address parking later on
- Include more shade trees in the plan and complete the proposal in phases
- This is a good way to start.
- Can the original plan and new proposal be merged?
- Need macro level mindset for planning
- If function of this area captures overall functions of the bigger park but on a smaller scale (in this case, it is). Do we get a bigger bang for park with new proposal? The proposal could allow the City to see how the park is used, then evaluate expansion.

CC: City Manager's Office, City Attorney's Office, City Clerk's Office, CDD Director

Attachments: Waterfront Park Planning Efforts Timeline, Partnership for Amelia River Park Slideshow and Memo: