

Planning a Community Park on the Waterfront

BY WILLIAM RICH

Fresh off of the approval of the Stage One PUD application by the Zoning Commission on September 12, a charrette planning session was held on September 14 where 33 community members from across Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6D attended to discuss plans for the waterfront park at The Wharf. The proposed park will be located at the southeastern portion of the development, which currently serves as a parking lot for the cruise boats and a traffic circle next to the Harbor Patrol. At 4.2 acres, the park is slightly smaller than the Yards Park in Near Southeast, which is about 5.5 acres. After taking into account an access road needed to serve the Harbor Patrol and 26 parking spaces split between servicing the planned Pier 4 town homes and Harbor Patrol, there will be somewhere between three to four acres available for the park. While the waterfront walkway from the park site south to the Titanic Memorial is not a part of the planned park, Hoffman-Madison Waterfront wants to work with the National Park Service (who owns the reservation where the memorial is located) to refurbish the promenade in order for it to blend in with all the new development to the north and west.

Elinor Bacon from Hoffman-Madison Waterfront convened the meeting at the request of ANC 6D, which stipulated in its support of the Stage One Planned Unit Development application that the park be built in the first phase of development and a public process was needed to help design the park. Warren Byrd from Charlottesville, Virginia-based Nel-



The line of mature trees bordering the planned waterfront park will be maintained. However, there are several trees along the waterfront promenade that will need to be replaced. Photo by William Rich

son Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects and Jeff Lee from DC-based Lee and Associates, the two landscape architect firms charged to design the park, were the facilitators. Byrd and Lee have designed several public spaces around the world and locally, including the Asia Trail at the National Zoo, the 9-11 Memorials at Shanksville,

Pennsylvania and the Pentagon, and the CityVista mixed-use project in Mount Vernon Triangle.

Bonny Lystra, HOA President of Capitol Square at the Waterfront townhomes and a real estate consultant by trade, was one of the community members invited to the charrette. Lystra was pleased, but surprised that



The waterfront park is located at the southeastern portion of The Wharf, at the parking lot for the cruise ships and traffic circle next to the Harbor Patrol. Initial concept rendering courtesy of Hoffman-Madison Waterfront

have placed their commitment to the community ahead of profits," said Lystra. "Also I am very impressed with the caliber of the landscape design team they have selected. Their credentials are top-notch."

Besides the parking spaces and access road, another element that has to be included in the park is a pavilion that will sell food and beverages. Since The Wharf development will be designed to achieve LEED-Gold for Neighborhood Development, the waterfront park will contain permeable surfaces, possibly rain gardens to collect storm water before it reaches the Washington Channel, and other environmentally friendly elements. Accessibility will also be considered to allow those with disabilities to enjoy the park.

Charrette participants were each given twelve stickers to place on certain design elements (about 28 of them) that were placed around the room so the landscape architects could get a better idea of what was important for residents who would be using the park. The design elements most important to the participants were the following: More Green than Paved; Quiet Areas - Garden Rooms; Gardens; and Tree Preservation. Other elements that were fairly popular include: Innovative Children's Play Area; Bocce; Views Toward Hains Point and the Washington Channel; Trees - Flowering, Shade, Fall Color; Walking/Strolling Paths; and Interactive Water Features.

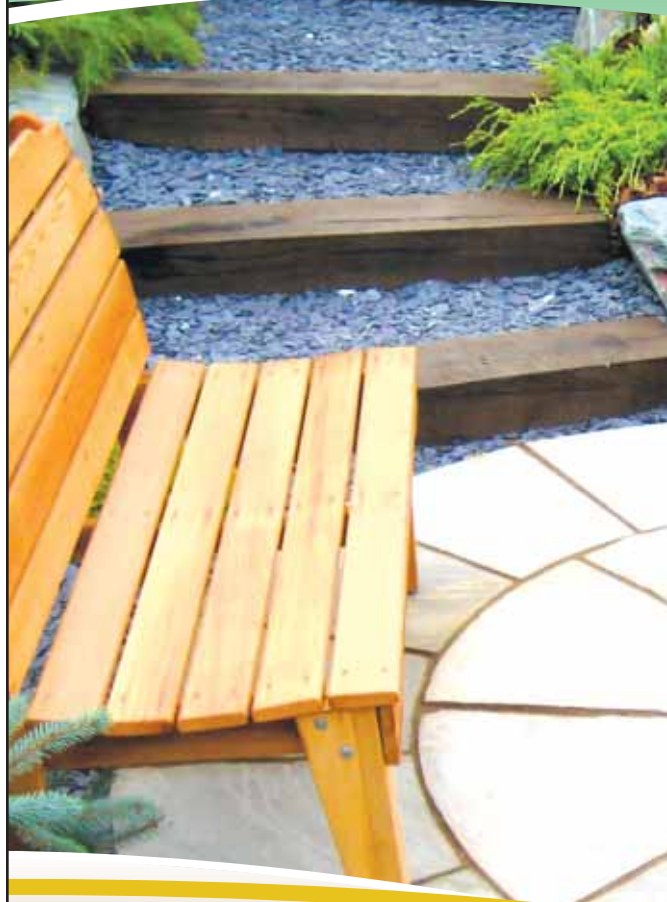
The group was then split into two in order to gather more input on design of the park. There were some striking similarities between the two groups once reconvened. Both groups

thought there should be a large grassy area that's curvilinear in shape with more intimate areas in the periphery. The view from the grassy area should be focused downriver towards the Potomac River. The grade change can be used to create an amphitheater of sorts (similar to the Georgetown Library – also designed by Lee and Associates). A minor water feature like a bubbling brook was asked for as well to create some white noise and allow for getting a little wet on a hot summer day (there will be a major water feature at neighboring M Street Landing). While dogs would be allowed to be in the park, neither group wanted to create a dog park within the park. Creating lighting was desired by both groups to make the park attractive and safe at night. There was a split among the groups whether to have a playground in the park, but child-friendly elements were desired in the park.

Hoffman-Madison Waterfront will build the park and once complete, will transfer ownership to the District. However, the developers will be responsible for maintaining the park. They will either form an association from within The Wharf development to maintain the public spaces, or they may form a larger Business Improvement District with other landowners in the area. Construction is slated to begin at The Wharf by the end of 2012, which means the new waterfront park could be complete by 2014 or 2015. Another charrette will be held in early October where the landscape architects will share concepts for the park based on the input from the first charrette and will seek feedback. Lystra has her own vision for the community park. "I envision a place where locals can picnic, read a book, lie out on the grass in the sun, or just people watch," said Lystra. "Even in a big, bustling city, we need places where one can relax, reflect and enjoy the water."

William Rich is a blogger at Southwest... The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com) ★

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