

V. Best Practices of Riverfront Planning

The following online principles of “waterfront” planning were shared with The Steering Committee to inspire them toward actionable goals and objectives.

*How to Transform a Waterfront*¹

1. Make public goals the primary objective
2. Create a shared community vision for the waterfront
3. Create multiple destinations: The Power of Ten (destinations)
4. Connect the destinations
5. Optimize public access
6. Ensure that new development fits within the community’s vision

*10 Qualities of a Great Waterfront Destination*²

1. Surrounding Buildings Enhance Public Space
2. Limits are Placed on Residential Development
3. Activities go on Round-the-Clock and Throughout the Year
4. Flexible Design Fosters Adaptability
5. Creative Amenities Boost Everyone’s Enjoyment
6. Access Made Easy by Boat, Bike and Foot
7. Local Identity is Showcased
8. The Water Itself Draws Attention
9. Iconic Buildings Serve a Variety of Functions
10. Good Management Maintains Community Vision

*9 Steps to Creating a Great Waterfront*³

1. Look First at the Public Space
2. Make Sure Public Goals are the Primary Objective
3. Build on Existing Assets & Context
4. Create a Shared Community Vision
5. Create Multiple-use Destinations by Tapping the Power of 10
6. Connect Destinations Along the Waterfront
7. Maximize Opportunities for Public Access
8. Balance Environmental Benefits with Human Needs
9. Start Small to Make Big Changes

Sources

¹ <http://www.pps.org/reference/turnwaterfrontaround/>

² <http://www.pps.org/reference/stepstocreatingagreatwaterfront/>

³ http://www.pps.org/reference/10_qualities_of_a_great_waterfront/



Memorandum

To: Kent Baird, Carter van Dyke Associates
From: Todd J. Poole *TP*
CC: Carter van Dyke
Date: May 2, 2016
Re: Whitemarsh-Conshohocken Township Riverfront Plan

This memorandum serves as 4ward Planning's recommendations report, pursuant to the Whitemarsh-Conshohocken Riverfront Plan.

Background

4ward Planning, working in support of Carter van Dyke Associates (CVDA) the lead planning consultant working on the Whitemarsh-Conshohocken Riverfront Plan, was provided with background materials, inclusive of aerial photographs, planning diagrams and draft segments of the riverfront planning report, as completed.

4ward Planning's charge is to provide high level guidance on the steps the township (Whitemarsh) and borough (Conshohocken) should jointly consider, as the final elements of the riverfront plan come into place. Specifically, and based on its experience working on a number germane public space projects, nationally, 4ward Planning identified the key questions the township and borough will need to address, moving forward, if the riverfront plan is to be sustainable well into the future.

These key questions are centered on operational structure and annual funding – issues common to most public space projects and their sponsors. These questions are summarized, below:

1. What value does the new investment along the riverfront have for the local area?
2. How will the project sponsors pay for its annual and long-term capital costs?
3. What entity or entities will manage the riverfront?
4. Should the project sponsors partner with outside organization or go it alone?

While the above are not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions to be answered, they are the most critical questions that need to be addressed, well in advance of the project moving into financing and construction phases.

Accordingly, 4ward Planning offers up the below recommendations which address the above key questions.

Recommendations for the Whitemarsh-Conshohocken Riverfront Plan

Recommendations

ESTIMATING THE “PROXIMITY” VALUE CREATED BY THE IMPROVEMENTS

What value do the waterfront improvements impart on adjacent and nearby real estate?

It is well documented that public realm improvements and, particularly, those that involve public space along a waterfront, contribute to real estate values on adjacent and nearby properties. Indeed, the “proximity” effect of such improvements can contribute as much as 40 percent of property’s market value, depending on the scale and aesthetic value of the waterfront improvements, and proximity to the subject real estate parcel.

The proposed improvements for the Riverfront Plan, once implemented, will create such value for existing and prospective development and will, ultimately, be captured through real property tax assessments, based on rental and real estate property sales transactions.

Consequently, it is recommended that Whitemarsh Township engage the services of a consultant to provide a preliminary estimate of the “proximity” values that the proposed Riverfront Plan improvements will likely create. The type of analysis which needs to be performed involves identifying the likely land-uses, locations, scale and prospective price points (sales prices and rental values), and then, using an appropriate algorithm, estimating the incremental value increases based on the foregoing variables.

The resultant benefit of performing such an analysis is to understand the Riverfront Plan’s contribution to local economic investment and the tax base.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR FUNDING MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

How will you pay for the riverfront’s long-term maintenance and operating expenses?

Raising the needed upfront capital required to construct the riverfront improvements is one thing; coming up with the annual funding to underwrite the costs associated with operating and maintaining (O&M) the riverfront is an entirely different issue, altogether.

Where many organizations (public and non-profit) get into trouble is not planning in advance for identifying the source(s) of funding required for annual O&M and then realizing, after its been built, that local tax dollars are likely insufficient to underwrite the costs. Advance planning for annual O&M should begin in advance of finalizing the Riverfront Plan, in order to ensure that funding sources and methods are realistic, based on likely annual need.

It is recommended that Whitemarsh Township, with the help of an outside consultant, identify the likely annual O&M expenses, and the degree to which these expenses could vary, based on such variables as weather, vandalism, general use, and other factors. This exercise will be particularly useful when performing “what-if” analyses, in a later step.

Recommendations for the Whitemarsh-Conshohocken Riverfront Plan

Once estimated annual O&M expenses are identified (including the likely variance on these expense), the township and its consultant will begin to identify a range of revenue sources beyond local tax dollars, including programming, tax increment financing (TIF), and sponsorships. A pro forma will be developed during this step to allow for sensitivity (“what if”) analysis. In this way, the township will be in position to determine if the proposed capital improvement program can be adequately supported through various financial means, beyond general fund dollars.

IDENTIFY A MANAGEMENT ENTITY AND DEVELOP A MANAGEMENT PLAN

What entity shall be responsible for carrying out O&M for the riverfront?

This particular issue is of vital importance, not least of which because the Riverfront spans across two municipalities – Whitemarsh Township and Conshohocken Borough. It should also be recognized that the success of the riverfront, after improvements have been completed, can not be predicated on what each municipality contributes in isolation; to the contrary, the long-term success of the riverfront, particularly after improvements are made, will be as a result of the seamless management of it (that is, in the eye of the public, there is not section managed and maintained by the township or the borough).

It is also critical that the responsible entity have sufficient authority and the means to carry out its mission of operating and maintaining the riverfront area – this means that municipal boundaries will not impede the organization in the carrying out of its responsibilities and that both municipalities will recognize the designated entity as having the requisite authority to act on behalf of both municipalities, where the operation and maintenance of the riverfront is concerned.

It is recommended that, subsequent to developing a funding strategy for the riverfront (an exercise which should identify funds for administration activities), Whitemarsh Township, in collaboration with Conshohocken Borough, explore various types of management entities for the Riverfront (e.g., existing municipal department; newly created municipal department; creation of a non-profit; farming out the responsibility to a private entity (non-profit or for profit); etc. Having settled on a particular management entity, the next step the municipalities will want to take is to develop an initial management plan (recognizing that it will likely morph, once an entity assumes O&M responsibilities).