RE-ENVISIONING THE SOUTHERN WATERFRONT OF EAST PROVIDENCE

Community Listening Session
July 26, 2017
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This report is a summary of comments made by participants during a listening session and does not represent the position of the organizers of the session, nor do the organizers endorse suggestions made or solutions proposed.
On July 26th residents, small business and property owners met at the Tockwotton community room to discuss the future of East Providence’s southern waterfront.

The purpose of the meeting was to give community members an opportunity to share their ideas for the redevelopment of waterfront. The meeting was a joint initiative of the major property owners: Chevron, Genesee & Wyoming and Tockwotton. A design team, engaged by Chevron facilitated the discussion.

People discussed what they like about East Providence, what they would like to see more of, and how waterfront redevelopment can help achieve this. They gave examples of the other places they like and that they believe could work in East Providence.

In general, the community is excited about the possibility of new development on the waterfront. Residents imagine a lively neighborhood with a host of community-based activities. For local businesses, redevelopment means more people, and more people means the potential of more business.

The participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss the future of the waterfront and share ideas before plans are fully developed. They desire ongoing dialog about the waterfront development and would like to receive information updates by email and plans posted on a Facebook page.

An impression of the meeting, intended to capture the highlights of the discussion, follows below. Detailed meeting notes and presentation boards are attached.
Traffic Headaches

Traffic is the number one concern expressed by the participants. The current situation is problematic with cars traveling at high speed on Veterans Memorial Parkway and I-195 bound traffic spilling onto neighborhood streets during rush hours. The participants pointed out that you cannot easily get to the waterfront. The vehicular access is confusing to drivers and there are no walkways or bike paths that connect to the waterfront. The community worries that, without solving today’s problems and making the necessary improvements, future development will only make things worse.

Takeaways

- Traffic & New Development: improve safety, reduce congestion, prevent speeding
- Waterfront Drive: improve access from Veterans Memorial Parkway to Waterfront Drive
- Veterans Memorial Parkway: take traffic calming measures and create safe intersections
- I-195 Interchange: better manage traffic from/to I-195
- Pedestrian Environment: improve pedestrian safety and create a walkable neighborhood
- Parking: meet current and future parking needs
- Public Transportation: add bus and water taxi services
3. LAND USE AND OPEN SPACE

No Shortage of Ideas

The participants envision a waterfront that offers an experience with a mix of uses, shopping and entertainment and water-related uses, linked by a boardwalk serving both the local community as well as attracting visitors. Suggested uses include restaurants, shops, hotels and a marina, but also residential, cultural and even small-scale industrial uses. Rather than just single family homes, participants suggested a more densely build-up district with apartments above shops. A stage for performances, visual arts center or museum could be one of the new destinations on the waterfront. It is important to have space for community-based activities such as farmer markets, intimate concerts, and art shows, where children, families and seniors can interact. The waterfront can also accommodate needed public facilities, for example a harbor master and emergency response facility. The existing central business district, and its connection to the water, can be enhanced through the creation of a gateway neighborhood.

One of the uses discussed is an outdoor concert venue. This August Live Nation is organizing a series of concerts at Bold Point Park. The participants are generally positive about the concerts and are not so much concerned about loud music, as they are about litter and crowd control.

In addition to solving the traffic problems, providing access and better connections, the community wants to make sure the new development will not block the views of the waterfront from the existing neighborhoods.

Takeaways

- Mixed-Use & Experience: Create waterfront district with a mix of uses and offer an experience
- Residential Uses: Offer range of housing options with a distinct neighborhood character
- Shopping & Entertainment: Create a boardwalk with restaurants, shops and local businesses
- Central Business & Gateway District: Support range of opportunities for existing owners
- Concert Venue: Integrate outdoor event space into overall design of the waterfront
- Arts & Culture: Accommodate visual and performing arts and consider art center or museum
- Community Uses: Encourage interaction between people and allow for public programming
- Industrial Uses: Include new industrial uses and small scale manufacturing
- Utilities: Plan for future utility needs and put overhead power underground
- Public Facilities: Build harbor master/emergency response facility on the waterfront
- Water Uses: Plan for a marina and fix up bridge at yacht club for public use
- Green & Open Space: Create opportunities for active recreation, walk ways and bike path
- Views: Preserve views from existing neighborhoods and from waterfront to Providence skyline
A. Meeting Notes

Below is a summary of comments made by participants and does not represent the position of the organizers of the listening session, nor do the organizers endorse suggestions made or solutions proposed.

Communication and Community Input

- Make information available to community via website, Facebook, emails
- Appreciate the opportunity to give input
- City typically does not reach out to notify residents of projects

Transit Access and Connectivity

- Traffic & New Development
- Improve safety, reduce congestion, prevent speeding
- More development = more traffic
- Create two points of access to any development

Waterfront Drive

- Improve access from Veterans Memorial Parkway (VMP) to Waterfront Drive
- Reduce congestion at intersection of Waterfront Drive and Warren Avenue
- Install signage/way-finding to direct people to the waterfront

Veterans Memorial Parkway

- Place signal before bike path at VMP and 1st St
- Solve problem of speeding along VMP
- Create second point of access on Lyon Ave

I-195 Interchange

- Improve access to I-195 in both directions
- Install stop signals on Warren Avenue and at I-195 ramps

Bicycling Environment

- Biking like in Amsterdam

Pedestrian Environment

- Improve pedestrian safety
- Create pedestrian zones (like in Bruges)
- Install pedestrian crossings at VMP and at northern end of Mauran Avenue
- Improve ADA accessibility with sidewalks on both sides of the streets near the waterfront
- Make sidewalk connections
- Build walking bridge to India Point park
- Sidewalk access along water
- Pedestrian path at waterfront
- If you can’t drive – “we are really isolated”

Parking

- Need more parking spaces today
- Make sure to create sufficient parking space for new development

Public Transportation

- Add bus service
- Consider water taxi

Uses and Open Space

Mixed-Use & Experience

- Aim for mixed use, not just condos or houses
- In favor of new development – we want more people!
- Bring in as many people as possible – good for business!
- Think about what will bring people to the waterfront - experience!
- Plan a truly commercial district – not just superficial
- Make sure new development does not negatively impact existing residents/businesses

Residential

- Plan for single family homes with distinct character, like brownstones
- Look at Chapel View for successful example of stores on bottom residential on top
- Not just blocks of stores but create a real experience with mix of uses
- Consider flexible stay hotel, could share parking and club facilities with Tockwotton

Shopping & Entertainment

- Room for more restaurants
- Favor local businesses
- Include specialty and high-end retail, such as boutique clothing
- Boardwalk - restaurants, shops, no residential
- Give local entrepreneurs first right of refusal for new restaurant opportunities, give preference to local business
- Concert Venue
- Loud music not a concern
- Connect event space to overall design of the waterfront
- Address concerns regarding litter and crowd control
- Include parking for permanent venue

Arts & Culture

- Consider arts center, visual arts and/or museum
- Accommodate performing arts, for example dance hall, theater stage productions, drama club use, outdoor performances
- Consider coffee shop/writer’s studio

Community Uses

- Consider community building, like a YMCA
- Consider a meeting house
- Encourage interaction between people, schools, children

Utilities

- Plan for utility needs
- Account for the long-range public needs
- Accommodate National Grid, Verizon/Cox etc.
- Put overhead power underground
- Remove National Grid site at Mauran Avenue which currently is vacant and fenced in and has a negative impact on surrounding area, or -if it must stay- use it to relocate major overhead lines

Public Facilities

- Build harbor master/emergency response facility on water front (water/police/fire)

Water Uses

- Room for a marina/boating facility – more is better
- Plan a marina – good example BLU On The Water, East Greenwich
- Assess the need for another boathouse
- Remainder of bridge at yacht club: use it or lose it!
- Get Coastal Resources Management Council approval to build on remainder of bridge at yacht club

Industrial Uses

- Small industrial uses are fine, like auto shop, small scale manufacturing

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Green & Open Space

Park Uses
- Future buildings to have green space
- Extend bike path along the waterfront
- Add benches and create seating areas along paths
- Keep the fishing access
- Preserve existing boat launch at Bold Point park and potentially add another
- Include a kayak launch
- Create opportunities for swimming and beach access
- Establish feasibility of a ball park as it may take up too much space
- Improve streetscape – fix sidewalks, add street lights

Views
- Protect/preserve view, do not plan a hotel west of the Portuguese club, Teofilo Braga way at VMP
- Control building heights of condos and stores, make sure views remain
- Preserve views of skyline of Providence
B. Presentation Boards

To facilitate discussion the design team created presentation boards with information about the existing conditions.

- East Providence Southern Waterfront
- Waterfront Special Development Subdistricts
- Publicly/Privately Owned Properties
- Major Property Owners
- Existing Land Use
- Topography
- Flood Levels
- Existing Recreational Activities
- Existing Community Assets
- Goals from city’s Waterfront Plan