City Council eyes Riverfront Park plan

MORE: Read more news from Fredericksburg

A side-view rendering of the proposed Riverfront Park shows various features, including the mast structure along the Rappahannock as well as shade and water elements. / RHODESIDE & HARWELL

BY PAMELA GOULD / THE FREE LANCE-STAR
The Fredericksburg City Council will get its first official look at the conceptual design for Riverfront Park on Tuesday.

During a work session on the park, council members also likely will begin discussing the fate of a building on the site that is not incorporated into the plans but that the Architectural Review Board wants preserved.

The city bought Prince Hall Masonic Lodge No. 61 in 2011 with the understanding that the building, which had served an African–American membership since 1972, would be demolished to make way for the park, Senior Planner Erik Nelson has said.

The city hired Alexandria-based Rhodeside & Harwell in December to create a conceptual design for the park that is to be located on 3.6 acres along Sophia Street and overlooking the Rappahannock River.

The park’s design includes 22 elements, the most dramatic of which is a tall mast that leans toward the river. The design includes multiple walkways, some leading directly to the water.

There are two entry points along Sophia Street, as well as a tree-lined promenade, a history wall and history walk.

The design also includes an aquatic play area with water that bubbles up from the ground and a children’s play area with an interactive sculpture, boulders for climbing, shade trees and areas for seating.

The lodge building is located at 609 Sophia St. in the proposed play area.

The two-story structure was built in 1921 by local builder E.G. “Peck” Heflin. It originally served as a residence and later as a site for child care.

The fraternal organization bought the building in March 1972 and months later added brick to the exterior, presumably in response to Hurricane Agnes in June 1972.

After evaluating the options for the former Masonic lodge building, the design was created with the expectation that it would be removed.

The design firm worked with the city’s Riverfront Park Task Force in making that decision. The firm also gathered community input along the way, including a series of focus group meetings and two open houses where design options were presented.

Nelson has said the lodge does not fit any of the city’s guidelines for preservation.

The ARB’s decision to keep the building came in a 4–3 vote. The city has appealed the decision to the council.

Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw said she looks forward to Tuesday’s presentation and sees the river as a key piece of the city’s economic future.

“I can’t think of any city in the country that hasn’t benefited from a well-crafted riverfront park,” she said.

Greenlaw cited the River Walk in San Antonio and Falls Park in Greenville, S.C., as two prime examples.

No estimate has been provided as yet for the cost of the park and no timetable has been set for construction.

The council is not scheduled to take any action on Tuesday but Greenlaw said the decision of how to highlight the natural resource that played a critical role in the city’s history is an important one.

“It’s definitely an asset that we need to use well and I look forward to developing the park,” she said.

Pamela Gould: 540/735-1972
WANT TO GO?

The Fredericksburg City Council will hold a work session on the Riverfront Park at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday in a second-floor conference room of City Hall, 715 Princess Anne St. The work session and the subsequent meeting at 7:30 p.m. in Council Chambers are open to the public. Public comment is not allowed during work sessions.

Post tags: Fredericksburg | riverfront park

Comments guidelines

1. Be respectful. No personal attacks.
2. Please avoid offensive, vulgar, abusive, hateful or defamatory language.
3. Read and follow THE RULES.
4. Please notify us by flagging posts that are inappropriate.

Posts that include links, and posts from users with unverified e-mail addresses may take longer to appear.
City Council eyes Riverfront Park plan | The News Desk