

August 31, 2021

Ms Bisola Taiwo, Assistant Director
City of Newark Department of Economic and Housing Development
920 Broad Street Suite 218
Newark, NJ 07102

Assistant Director Taiwo,

Thank you for attending our July meeting. As a group, we are grateful and admiring supporters of you and all civil servants who continue to implement the long-held vision of Newark residents to get to and enjoy their riverfront.

Friends of Riverfront Park is a volunteer organization started by Newark residents in partnership with the City of Newark and County of Essex in 2012 in coordination with the County's completion of Phase 1 from Terrell Homes to Oxford Street. We hold open monthly meetings, and have hosted Mayor Baraka & County Parks Director Salvante among others. Along with residents from East and other wards, attendees usually include a representative from Ironbound Community Corporation, Marcy DePina from Newark Riverfront Revival and Newark City Parks Foundation, and Scott Dvorak from the Trust for Public Land. We support riverfront programming by providing resident feedback and guidance, acting as eyes and ears on the park, and volunteering at events like Newark Riverfront House with DJ Omar Abdallah.

At our July meeting, we were excited to hear about progress towards completing "Phase C" of the park between Penn Station and FBI building. We understand this will allow work to advance on "Phase A" between Congress and Madison Streets, which is the other subject we'd like to raise with this letter. *We write to respectfully share and reiterate our guidance as community advocates and stewards that design changes should be made to "Phase A" before it is constructed.*

As you know, James Corner Field Operations completed a schematic design for Phases A, B, C, D and E in one swoop over a few months in 2017, and design work was completed between the departure of Deputy Mayor Ladd's predecessor in 2017 and her arrival in 2019. At the time, our group took advantage of the few opportunities provided to clearly communicate our feedback. Realizing that there has been a full turnover in City and Invest Newark staff supervising this project, please find our summarized feedback attached in hopes that it will be helpful as you deliver this amazing new public place for us and our fellow Newarkers.

In contrast to the public deliberations that fueled the design for the first three segments of Riverfront Park, constructed by the County and City, the process for Phases A, B, C, D and E depended on internet multiple choice polling rather than robust interactive public discussions between residents and the design team. For example, clear drawings for public review, rather than graphic renderings, have never been released, and we know of no instances when the design was adjusted in response to comments from our group or other residents, which is far from a best practice in public space design for multiple users.

As lovers of Newark, parks, and our river, we deeply believe that inspiring and durable public space design depends on lots of talking to people, including elders, young people, parents, athletes, artists, and more. We truly hope that it is not too late to make important alterations to make this the best possible project for Newarkers.

Sincerely,

Nancy Zak, on behalf of Friends of Riverfront Park

Comments on Riverfront Park “Phase A” Design



MAINTAINABILITY

- Foremost among our feedback is that based on our experience with the first 3 phases of riverfront park, we believe that that maintenance requirements for a “sand beach” to be safe, clean, and enjoyable will far exceed the regular maintenance resources available. We anticipate issues with sharp objects like broken glass and health concerns such as dog feces. We advocate for this area to be an alternative surface material, ideally decking as seen in Segment Three directly to the east.
- The design appears to have major horticultural requirements for plant upkeep and maintenance that far exceed the requirements for existing park segments. We recommend examining the plant selection and layout in collaboration with the private maintenance contractors who have worked at existing park segments in order to test maintenance requirements against available resources, potentially editing the plant list and creating more continuous areas of planting rather than the current “mosaic” layout.

CIRCULATION

- From the available rendering, it appears that the layout does not create easy perpendicular access from Raymond Blvd to the water’s edge. We recommend redesigning elements including the “Riparian Ramble” to ease access, especially for elders and disabled people, rather than the “jumble” of paths at this key corner that provide no direct path to the water.
- The current “mosaic” layout appears to make it difficult to cross this large space since the paths are often turning or twisting. This especially creates issues with sight lines and safety. We recommend “opening up” sight lines and circulation by removing some of the natural and hardscape barriers.
- From the available rendering, it is not clear if the parallel waterfront walkway is continuous with the waterfront walking in Segment 3 directly to the east. We recommend that this be a clear and direct connection, not a buffer of shrubs as it is depicted.

FLEXIBILITY OF USE

- Overall, the proposed “mosaic” layout creates many side-by-side single-function spaces, which diminishes the flexibility of use for park visitors over different times of day and different times of year. These small single function pieces also make the park more difficult to maintain. We recommend creating more multi-functional overlapping spaces.
- For example, we wonder if the three volleyball courts could be more connected (without trees in between) to host a wider variety of athletic activities enjoyed by Newarkers, specifically basketball and tennis. We do not think it is justifiable to only offer volleyball facilities.
- Another example: we don’t agree that the best location for a “picnic platform” is right next to Raymond Boulevard, yet this is the only group seating visible in the available rendering.
- As Essex County has not been successful in keeping an active concession in Park Segment 1, we would like to understand the plans for using the proposed Phase A “concession kiosk.”

