



# River Ecology and Governance Task Force

09/13/22 | 3 pm to 4:30 pm

Meeting Minutes:

## Welcome and Introductions

The meeting kicked off at 3 pm with participants introducing themselves in the chat and sharing upcoming river related events or activities that they are looking forward to this summer. Approximately 40 members of the Task Force attended the meeting plus Department of Planning and Development (DPD) staff.

## Task Force Goals and Membership Expectations

The group started off the meeting with a refresher on the Task Force objectives and short term goals for 2021 - 2022. As a reminder, the Task Force is focused on transforming the waterway system into a thriving and ecologically integrated natural asset through coordinated planning, investment and management. Ultimately, the goal is to have an inviting, productive, and living waterway system that contributes to the city's resiliency.

## Case Study Presentation

Last year, many members noted that they were interested in having a better understanding of planning and zoning regulations, processes and permits, community engagement, and funding for riverfront projects. To build shared knowledge and understanding about these different practices, a series of development case studies are being presented at the quarterly Task Force meetings.

The Cogle Foods project was presented as a case study at this meeting. In order to summarize the project, key members of the project team, including the Owner's representative and the Architect, were interviewed, and articles and additional correspondence from that time period were reviewed. Additional information was provided by DPD. The Cogle Foods project is located on a 2.86 acre site on Bubbly Creek bordered on the west by Ashland Avenue abutting Canal Origins Park located near the Bridgeport, McKinley Park, and Lower West Side community areas. The land was rezoned as a Waterways Planned Development given its location adjacent to Bubbly Creek. Basic project information was presented along with major project milestones, goals, successes, and challenges. The slide presentation also focused on summarizing the three areas of planning and zoning and community engagement, As well as project highlights, successes, and challenges.

Task Force members asked questions about the setback for the project, and provided additional details about the community meeting that occurred at Eleanor Boathouse. Additionally, one Task Force member noted this development happened prior to a formal review process being structured as part of the River Ecology and Governance Task Force. Since that time, the development review working group was created, and there is now a clearer structure and defined stakeholder process for reviewing and providing feedback on projects.

### **Reflections on Case Studies, and Development Reviews**

The Task Force has learned about case studies at quarterly meetings and has reviewed development projects together monthly, as part of the charge of the Development Review Working Group. Throughout that process, three key topics have come up, *Interpretation and Application of Design Guidelines*, *Community Engagement and Incorporation of Input*, and *River Edge Transitions*, as points for additional discussion and exploration. Meeting participants self selected into facilitated breakout groups to discuss each key topic in additional detail. Overall takeaways from each breakout group are listed below.

### **Interpretation and Application of Design Guidelines**

Discussion Questions: *Do these projects strike the right balance of Nature, Recreation and Connectivity? Is one emphasized over the other? What are the results and are there ways to improve this? Are there limitations to the guidelines regarding long-term operations and programming? Are there regulations that stifle innovative use of the river edge?*

- Most developers understand that sites need to have connectivity to adjacent sites in some way, but this aspect is always very site specific.
- Developers tend to do what they are best at, or what can potentially create additional revenue. Connectivity is very concrete and expectations are clear, recreation can be amenitized, nature aspect tends to be less understood and overlooked.
- Timing/timeline for review and feedback is very important. Task Force review should happen simultaneously with community review to avoid conflicts and provide a technical backstop to community meetings.
- Feedback from the Task Force is often similar or repeated across projects, are there ways to pre-empt this? Possible solution is providing an advisory document much earlier in the process (as a more feasible solution than formally revising the guidelines).
- Some additional clarity in language is need to ensure developments are meeting the spirit of the guidelines, e.g. river dependent use, variance process

### **Community Engagement and Incorporation of Input**

Discussion Questions: *Are there ways that the community input process could be more robust in the Planned Development process? How can the Task Force ensure it has a better understanding of the community input that has been received prior to the review? Should the Task Force review comments emphasize the need for broader community input?*

- Appropriate parameters are often not put around the community engagement process and how input will be incorporated. Explicitly saying what community

input is being used for and how/if it can impact the project is important so that residents do not feel like they are being ignored or their time is being wasted.

- It's important for development review working group members to know how residents have been engaged in the process and what their comments have been prior to the working group's review. Ideally, the community review should happen before the Task Force review as part of the overall process and Task Force members should receive a report of the feedback prior to their review meeting.
- The community input process should be more robust with clear City leadership and accountability at community meetings. It should also be an iterative process with more than one meeting and criteria around what constitutes a successful meeting. Perhaps an internal community engagement checklist could be integrated into the overall process that would be reviewed by the DPD project manager, similar to the Design Guidelines checklist.

### **River Edge Transitions**

Discussion Questions: *Should there be different requirements and application of the guidelines based on land use? Do the Design Guideline character zones allow for this differentiation or does there need to be a more nuanced approach? When/Where should public access be required in river edge setbacks? How should different land uses (especially industrial) consider future river edge setback public access?*

- Existing options for **river-dependent uses** to not include public access within the setback should be reviewed and clarified. What components should be located in areas that are excluded from the setback/public access requirements?
- Many CBOs/EJ organizations don't want to encourage public access in areas that are actively used for industry. How can this be balanced with planning for future river edge land use changes/transitions? How can the opportunity for future access be protected, whether or not it is feasible today?
- Currently there are two sets of guidelines with different requirements and different character zones: The Chicago River Design Guidelines (with several character zones) and Calumet Corridor Guidelines. These should be analyzed to see if the character zones align with the vision for the future of the river edges in these areas. How can these requirements be used to promote incremental improvements to the river edge? Are the character zones fine-tuned enough to address the local differences in uses along the river?
- An evaluation of the river setback is needed - how much access was created since the setback requirement in the 1990s? How much has been added since new River Edge Design Guidelines passed in 2019? The Active Transportation Alliance's plan related to the river trail has some information on this, but it needs to be updated.

### **Working Group Updates**

Updates on working groups were provided by Task Force members.

Development Review Working Group:

- Working group now has a website for materials and summaries. [River Ecology and Governance Task Force / Development Review Working Group](#)

Systems Plans Working Group:

- Planning for community events and site visits for the two focus areas selected by the working group during the summer. In-person events will be hosted for the South Branch/Bubbly Creek opportunity sites and a virtual convening will be hosted for the Calumet area.
- A link to the event pages for these activities is [here](#) and [here](#).

### **Planning & Project Meeting Updates**

Brief updates were provided by DPD staff and attendees for ongoing planning and projects related to the Task Force.

- Industrial Corridor Modernization Plan: Urban Land Institute conducting a technical assistance panel
- We Will Chicago: Draft Framework released mid-July, Planning Task Force beginning in October
- Sustainable Development Policy: Focus groups occurred in June/July, upcoming meeting in early November to review
- PAS Restoration Framework Plan: US Army Corps of Engineers completing final edits, anticipated completion December 2022/January 2023
- CDOT Access Studies underway for South Branch Parks, and River Access

### **Upcoming Meeting Dates and Adjourn**

The remaining dates for the 2022 Task Force meetings were provided to members as well as upcoming meetings for the System Plans Working Group and the Development Review Working Group.

The meeting concluded at 4:32 pm.