



River Ecology and Governance Task Force

2022 Q2 Meeting | 6/7/2022 | 3 pm to 4:30 pm

Meeting Minutes:

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting kicked off at 3 pm with participants saying hi in the chat and sharing upcoming river related events or activities that they are looking forward to this summer. Approximately 43 members of the Task Force attended the meeting.

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 would be presented at the Task Force meetings.

The Southbank project was presented as a case study. Many members of the core project team were unable to attend so additional information was provided by the Dept. of Planning and Development (DPD). The Southbank project is located on the South Branch of the Chicago River. It is a development that brings together infrastructure and natural habitat to create an amenity and backyard for neighbors on the river. 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.

Task Force members asked questions about the setback for the project, how the developer worked with DPD to meet the design guidelines, and whether a wide-open space was created due to site limitations.

Additionally, one Task Force member provided more history of the site noting that the rail station had been demolished in 1971 and that the site was vacant until this development was created.

PAS Framework Plan, USACE Programs, and Next Steps

DPD provided information on the 81 opportunity sites that are being included in the Planning Assistance to States (PAS) Restoration Framework Plan via a StoryMap. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) noted that they are close to releasing a report that identifies the sites. These sites were identified with the support of Task Force members in 2021 and range from sites with initial ideas to those that are further along in the planning process.

USACE then presented potential next steps that could occur based on their process. There could be a comprehensive feasibility study to identify restoration opportunities across the Chicago Area Waterways system. This would require congressional authorization and appropriation. A request was made for the FY 2023 budget, but it is unclear if it will be authorized. Another next step would be to plan and construct individual projects under the Continuing Authorities Program (CAP), specifically sections 206 and 1135. A letter of intent is needed from either a government entity or a nonprofit organization to initiate a project budget request.

USACE received a number of follow-up questions from Task Force members. USACE noted the following:

- A feasibility study would include all 81 sites and could also include more. There's an ability to take a more comprehensive review of the system and identify new sites as well that are not currently identified as an opportunity site.
- Both public and privately owned sites can be included as part of the evaluation but landowners need to sign off on restoration related work.
- Recreation can be considered as part of the enhancements, but is generally limited to 10% of project costs and restoration is the driving component for the feasibility studies and CAP.
- Comprehensive feasibility studies typically take three years from initiation of the cost-sharing agreement to having recommendations before congress. This can be delayed by the federal appropriation process as well as agreement execution.
- CAPs typically take three to four years from funding to construction. Delays can occur in waiting for funding to be approved.

Planning and Project Updates

Updates on projects being led by government members of the Task Force were presented providing the status of the CDOT Access Studies, Industrial Corridor Modernization Planning, We Will Chicago, and the Sustainable Development Policy. The North River Commission also provided information about an opportunity to engage in a visioning session for the former DePaul Prep site in July. A Task Force member had multiple questions about the Industrial Corridor Modernization planning for the Southeast. It was decided to have a deeper conversation about the topic after the formal meeting adjourned.

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. DPD noted that a project along the Calumet River is slated for the June 14 development review meeting.

The meeting concluded at 4:33 pm.