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# ***Mud Island Land Use Study: Phase I Public Input Report***

***Riverfront Development Corporation  
April 30, 2009***

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# ***Mud Island Land Use Study: Phase I Public Input Results***

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## **I. Executive Summary**

### **A. Introduction**

The public has been invited to provide ideas and guidance for a comprehensive land use study of Mud Island, with a focus on the area south of the AW Willis Bridge and past the new RiverTown residential development that includes vacant land around and beneath the I-40 bridge, a maintenance compound, parking lot, the former Belle Pavilion, and other areas of Mud Island River Park (MIRP). The input is being gathered in three different rounds, as follows.

1. Round I (March/April, 2009): Gather a very broad range of possible ideas for improving MIRP from as diverse a group of stakeholders as possible; therefore, no constraints were placed on fiscal feasibility, physical limitations, or long-term sustainability. These issues will be considered in Round II.
2. Round II (May, 2009): Gather citizen and targeted stakeholder feedback to a series of proposed elements, created based on the first round of input, that can serve as “building blocks” for a land use plan. These elements will consider fiscal constraints, physical limitations and long-term sustainability.
3. Round III (August, 2009): Gather citizen and targeted stakeholder feedback on several overall design scenarios for MIRP.

*Information on future activities can be found at the Riverfront Development Corporation’s (RDC) website: [www.memphisriverfront.com](http://www.memphisriverfront.com).*

### **B. Round I Input Process Overview**

A variety of methods were used to encourage a broad range of public input. Together, the data provide a comprehensive perspective of citizen input during the initial phases of the study.

<b>Input Method</b>	<b>Purpose and Focus</b>	<b># Participants</b>
Public Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather as many different ideas for improvements to Mud Island as possible</li></ul>	250 (est.)
On-Line Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather perceptions on what citizens think of MIRP today</li><li>• Gather preferences on what types of elements citizens want to experience at the waterfront</li><li>• Identify citizen preferences between specific photos of waterfront activities and development</li></ul>	748
Targeted Focus Groups with different stakeholder sets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify overall perceptions of MIRP</li><li>• Brainstorm possible ideas for MIRP improvements</li><li>• Identify critical elements for success</li><li>• Identify barriers to success</li></ul>	14 different types of groups with 98 individual participants

### **C. Key Findings**

1. The public meetings held Downtown at Mud Island River Park and in East Memphis at the Botanic Gardens were very well attended. There was strong participation in both of these public meetings from groups advocating specific ideas. One very enthusiastic group was SkateLife Memphis, supporting a skateboard park at Mud Island River Park.
2. While some citizens were strong advocates of one environment over another, general consensus from all input sources indicate that most citizens see value in a balanced mix of uses and amenities, so that MIRP has a broad appeal to Memphians of all ages and walks of life.
3. Input from all sources indicated that citizens are most interested in three clusters of attributes that deliver three distinctive types of environments. As previously indicated, most citizens appear to be receptive to all three environments co-existing in MIRP.
  - a. *A festive, vibrant, fair-like “streetscape” atmosphere:* Many public meeting participants expressed a strong desire for an active riverfront with people enjoying open air restaurants, markets, and programming. These findings were supported by over 700 survey respondents who said they wanted waterside cafes (66.6%), restaurants (54.1%), and live musical performances (64.9%) at the waterfront. In-depth interviews with targeted stakeholders also indicated a high level of interest in this type of atmosphere.
  - b. *Natural beauty:* Maintaining and enhancing the unique natural attributes of Mud Island were widely cited in public meetings, with attention paid to more shade trees, more places to sit to enjoy the scenery (particularly sunsets) and more landscaping. Survey responses support these findings, with 54.9% wanting picnic areas; 38.8% wanting to see natural vegetation on land; 31.2% wanting intensive landscaping; and 45.9% wanting quiet places for reflection. Although most survey respondents said they wanted restaurants and cafes, as described above, many also expressed in open-ended comments that heavy development is not desirable. Some specifically mentioned that natural views should not be obstructed and that natural areas should be preserved.
  - c. *Diverse opportunities for outdoor physical recreation:* There is a great deal of interest in a wide variety of physical recreation activities for people of all ages and physical fitness levels. Many of the activities suggested in public meetings were supported by survey results, with 46.5% wanting recreation on the river, such as boating; 43.9% wanting

hiking trails; and many survey respondents requesting a skate park, bicycle trails, and other outdoor recreation in open-ended comments.

- d. *A couple of suggestions resulted in a bit of polarization.* Many participants suggested cafes, restaurants, and shops be added to Mud Island, while others describe development as not desirable. Perhaps there is some ambiguity about the meaning of, and what constitutes, “development”. Another example is in the desire by some for attractions and rides, while others caution against introducing a Disneyesque feel to the space.
4. Input from all sources indicate a high degree of consensus on cross-cutting attributes that are relevant to each of the three types of overarching environments described above. These are:
    - a. *Access:* Improved access, both to MIRP and to the river itself, was a dominant theme from all input sources. Public meeting suggestions emphasized improved transportation to MIRP on water and land, with increased options for pedestrian access. Another aspect of access was year-round hours and longer daily hours. This was echoed by numerous open-ended comments from the survey. Survey respondents also chose a number of desired elements that relate to this topic, including 65.6% wanting easy access to the river’s edge and 68.5% wanting a pedestrian promenade along the river’s edge.

*Note: Participants from all sources indicate that many do not know that MIRP offers free daily admission.*

- b. *Connectivity:* All input sources strongly agree that improving connectivity of MIRP to the rest of the riverfront and downtown in general was extremely important. While some of the strategies suggested to improve access will also improve connectivity, the extension of Greenbelt Park was frequently noted in public meetings and particularly in targeted focus groups with downtown stakeholders. Walking trails connecting MIRP to other areas of the riverfront and downtown were also often mentioned.
- c. *Family-friendly and diverse, age-appropriate appeal:* Citizens involved in all input methods overwhelmingly wanted environments that offered “something for everyone” as well as a specific family destination. The ability to attract Memphians from across the city was cited as a critical success factor by most targeted stakeholder groups. In particular, a family-welcoming atmosphere was repeatedly emphasized in public meeting comments and open-ended survey comments.

- d. *Safety and cleanliness*: While the importance of safety and cleanliness was expressed by all input groups, it is striking that the great majority of survey respondents already believe that MIRP is clean (69.8%) and safe (75%).
- The importance of improving the perception of safety frequently emerged in public meetings and targeted stakeholder groups. In particular, the importance of dealing with the public's overall perception of the safety of the downtown area was noted.
  - Many open-ended comments from the survey indicated that future safety and security was a potential concern if MIRP was successful in attracting many more visitors.
  - The cleanliness of the river water - or lack thereof - was frequently mentioned in public meeting comments and small stakeholder groups, with some groups more tuned-in to this issue than others.
- e. *Marketing and promotion*: The importance of better marketing and promotion, particularly to local residents, was widely cited, particularly if investments are to be made in improving MIRP. Without greater investments in marketing, citizens were concerned that actual improvements to the park would not necessarily result in higher attendance.
- f. *Environmental and economic sustainability*: Though this issue did not emerge from survey results, both aspects of sustainability were frequently discussed at small group table discussions during public meetings, as well as in stakeholder focus groups. The need for operating funds for adequate maintenance surfaced in the large group meetings, and the consideration of "public vs. private" funding sources was discussed in selected stakeholder focus groups. In addition, the importance of minimal environmental impact was frequently mentioned in table discussions in public meetings.
- Note: Many of the suggestions cited (extended days/hours of operation, museum improvements, pedestrian access across the Harbor, and installation of a skateboard park) require significant capital investment. While Round I participants were encouraged to provide ideas without regard to fiscal feasibility, physical limitations, or long-term sustainability, the next round will introduce cost and feasibility issues into the public discussion.*
- g. *Authenticity/local flavor*: While a small number of participants from all input methods suggested large-scale attractions and franchise restaurants, the majority participating in public meetings and stakeholder focus groups expressed a strong desire to maintain local flavor and a sense of authentic

Memphis identity. This includes showcasing the river, local river history, as well as contemporary local music and artists. Participants frequently advised against the “disney-fication” of MIRP. While this element did not frequently emerge from survey responses, survey respondents did often attribute unique local characteristics as the element that made their favorite waterfront – whether Memphis or elsewhere – most special.

- h. *Enhance what is already there*: This theme emerged strongly from all input sources. It was frequently named as a high priority in public meetings, noted as a specific recommendation in stakeholder focus groups, and indicated in a variety of ways by survey respondents.

In open-ended comments, many survey respondents wanted more programming of the amphitheater and improvements to the museum. At the same time, 45.5% of respondents believe that the museum is interesting as it is today. The popularity of the riverwalk consistently emerged in stakeholder focus groups as well as open-ended survey responses. However, the need to beautify and update the existing architecture and other structures was frequently noted during all input methods. The “institutional feel” of MIRP’s built environment was frequently cited as something that needed change.

5. A wide range of amenity types and categories were mentioned from all input sources. However, there were frequent mentions of three specific amenities across input sources, as follows:
  - World-Class Skateboard Park: This amenity was by far the most widely mentioned in public meetings and in the on-line survey.
  - Carousel: The historic Grand Carousel (formerly at Liberty Land) was frequently suggested in public meetings, as well as in stakeholder focus groups.
  - Aquarium: Again, an aquarium was frequently mentioned in public meetings. In addition, survey respondents often mentioned it as a suggestion via open-ended comment.
6. In-depth focus groups with targeted stakeholder groups revealed a high level of consistency with all the key findings above. However, these discussions also revealed differing and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the desirability and feasibility of specific recommendations. These perspectives include:
  - The pros and cons of commercial development, including philosophical issues relating to commercial activity on public land and competition with other development downtown.

- The appropriateness of different revenue streams to support park maintenance – public vs. private.
- The pros and cons of a large skateboard park.
- Receptivity to major changes and innovations on MIRP.
- Varying degrees of interest in retaining current elements and various levels of receptivity to “outside-the-box,” innovative change at MIRP.

## **II. Public Meeting Input Summary**

### **A. Overview and Description**

Public input meetings were promoted and held in four quadrants of the city. They were advertised via multiple channels, including newspaper listings, listings in targeted e-letters (RDC, Center City Commission, Greater Memphis Chamber), and passed on via e-mail through a variety of stakeholders groups (neighborhood associations, civic organizations, Leadership Academy, etc.).

The meetings were held as follows:

Area	Date	# Participants
Downtown	March 23	125 (est.)
North Memphis	March 24	8
South Memphis	March 31	8 (including U of M students)
East Memphis	April 1	125 (est.)

The purpose was to gather as many different suggestions for improving MIRP from as diverse a range of citizens as possible. *There was no attempt to reach consensus or debate the relative merits of the suggestions. There was also no consideration given to economic feasibility, physical constraints, or long-term sustainability.*

At each meeting, participants:

1. Viewed current photos of MIRP
2. Viewed photos of riverfronts from other national and international cities
3. Shared ideas about their favorite riverfronts and possibilities for improving MIRP at their tables
4. Published their suggestions for MIRP with the entire room
5. Voted for the suggestions they felt were their individual top priority (each participant had five votes, and could use all their votes for one item or distribute among many suggestions)

### **B. Summary of Findings from Public Meetings**

Though citizen attendance at each meeting ranged from over 125 to 4, results across the four public meetings were remarkably consistent. Though citizens offered a wide and diverse range of suggestions, the overall results displayed a coherent framework that provided strong guidance about 1) the kinds of environments people wanted to experience on MIRP, 2) cross-cutting ideas relating to all different types of environments, and 3) suggestions for specific amenities and resources.

1. Experiential Environments: While some meetings were more heavily represented by groups with targeted interests than others, in general participants were relatively balanced in their desire for one or more of four clusters of environmental attributes that offer different atmospheres and experiences.

While some citizens were strong advocates of one environment over another, general consensus indicated that most citizens saw value in a balanced mix, resulting in a variety of experiences on MIRP:

- a. *Festive, vibrant fair-like “streetscape” atmosphere*: The main thrust of these suggestions was around attracting lots of people doing lots of different things, including “people watching.” Specific suggestions included:
  - Open air restaurants
  - Shops
  - Street performers and musicians
  - Public art, particularly a graffiti wall, which offers interactivity
  - Outdoor movie screens
- b. *Natural beauty*: Maintaining and enhancing the unique natural attributes of Mud Island, including the view of the Mississippi River with an emphasis on sunset views, as well as a desire for more lawn, flowers, shrubs and trees, was a top priority for many participants. Suggestions relating to enhancing this experience included:
  - More shade trees
  - Open space to recreate in a natural setting
  - More and better places to sit to enjoy views (particularly the sunset)
  - More landscaping
  - Increased access to the river

- c. *Diverse opportunities for outdoor physical recreation:* There is a significant interest in a wide variety of physical recreation activities, offering physical recreation to people of all ages and physical fitness levels. Popular suggestions included:
  - Skating, biking and wall/rock climbing
  - Boating, kayaking and parasailing
  - Fitness “exer-trails”
  - Walking and jogging trails
  - Children’s playgrounds
  
2. Cross-Cutting Priorities: Key attributes and needs for improvement were consistently identified which cut across and applied to each of the three distinct environments described above, as follows:
  - a. *Access:* Improved access to MIRP was a dominant theme among all groups. Suggestions for improving access include:
    - Water taxis
    - Foot bridges
    - Year-around access
    - Longer daily hours of operation
    - Free admission (NOTE: There is a wide spread perception among participation that there is an admission fee to MIRP.)
  
  - b. *Connectivity:* Connectivity to the rest of the riverfront, and downtown in general, was often brought up as an issue. While supported by most of the suggestions relative to “access” above, some recurring specific suggestions relating to improved connectivity include:
    - Extending Greenbelt Park into MIRP
    - Walking trails that connected through bridges to Tom Lee Park and the Riverwalk
  
  - c. *Family-friendly and diverse, age-appropriate appeal:* Citizens overwhelmingly wanted environments that offered “something for everyone” as well as a specific family destination. MIRP should be designed to allow families to come together for recreation, but also have the opportunity for different family members to “do their own thing” while there. The range of suggestions for amenities and environments mentioned throughout this summary imply a wide appeal to a variety of ages and lifestyles.
  
  - d. *Safety and cleanliness:* This is a foundation requirement for anything that happens at MIRP. While often not mentioned as a “top-of-mind”

suggestion, when questioned about the importance of this attribute citizens from all meetings were unanimous in their positive response.

- e. *Marketing and promotion*: Citizens often brought up the importance of better, more wide-spread marketing of MIRP. While MIRP is relatively regularly promoted to tourists, many participants noted that most residents seem to be unaware of what MIRP has to offer today. The point was repeatedly made that if investments are made to improve MIRP, promoting those improvements was critical to drive higher attendance.
- f. *Environmental and economic sustainability*: Maintenance of improvements, while not often offered in the “roll-up” of suggestions which were then prioritized by the entire group, this issue was noted during table discussions and on comment cards. The point was frequently made that any improvements must be allocated appropriate resources to ensure on-going maintenance. In addition, the importance of minimal environmental impact was frequently mentioned at the tables.
- g. *Authenticity/local flavor*: While a small number of participants suggested large-scale attractions and franchise restaurants, the majority expressed a strong desire to maintain local flavor and a sense of authentic Memphis identity. Participants frequently advised against a “Disney-esque” style for MIRP. A sense of local authenticity was also often mentioned as a favorite attribute of riverfronts around the world visited by meeting participants. Suggestions related to local authenticity include:
  - Highlight local performers in performance venues
  - Showcase local artists and artisans, as well as public art
  - Serve regionally inspired cuisine
  - Focus on the river experience (enhance river museum, make river paramount in MIRP design)
  - Thematic relationship to local culture and history vis-à-vis amenity design (bringing back the Huck Finn playground was often mentioned, as was the historic Grand Carousel)
- h. *Enhance what is already there*: Many participants emphasized improving existing amenities, such as the amphitheater, museum and restaurants, rather than a lot of new buildings. There were numerous suggestions in this respect, including:
  - Revitalize the museum display, with frequent changes to attract repeat visits by residents

- Improve amphitheater programming, and consider the addition of large outdoor screens
  - Reopening the restaurants with more accessible and affordable food
  - In general, updating and improving the aesthetics of the structures (not so much cement)
3. Suggestions for specific amenities: Numerous categories and specific types of amenities relating to the environments and requirements previously mentioned are listed in the detailed responses from each meeting. These include types of amenities such as bike trails, restaurants, etc., as well as very specific suggestions such as a charter school, hotel, and student dorms. In addition, several specific amenities were suggested in at least three of the four meetings:
- a. *World-Class Skateboard Park*: This amenity was by far the most widely advocated by public meeting participants. Meetings were well attended by ardent skate park advocates, who comprised an estimated 30% - 40% of the two widely attended meetings.
  - b. *Carousel*: The historic significance of the Grand Carousel and its local flavor, appeal to kids, and visibility from a distance were cited as key benefits.
  - c. *Aquarium*: The overall “wow” factor and ability to attract both tourists and residents were mentioned in conjunction with an aquarium.

### **C. Priorities from Each Meeting**

The following charts tally the number of votes received for suggestions compiled from meeting participants.

- Each participant was given five votes
- Many voted multiple times for one item
- Others distributed their votes among various options

1. Downtown Public Meeting (estimated 125 citizen participants)

Skate Board Park	54
Water Ferry	54
Open Year Round	42
Playground	26
Performing Art Venue (plus big movie screen)	24

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Grand Carousel	18
Clean and secure	18
Greenbelt Park extension	16
Shops	14
Trees	13
Public Relations / Marketing	12
Beachfront	11
Big Events	11
Name Change	10
Water Park	8
Welcoming Entrance	6
Boats	6
School	5
Family Friendly Hotel	5
Aquarium	5
Dog Park	4
Swimming	4
Youth Hostel	4
Boat Rental	2
Fitness Trail	2
Volleyball/ Baseball	0

### 2. North Memphis Public Meeting (8 citizen participants)

Authentic Memphis identity	9
Access: Water taxi, year-round access, longer hours	8
Showcase for local talent/low cost	7
Signature place at South tip	5
Refresh the River museum, use what we have	4
Restaurants	4
Open air hang out place, screened in	3
Grand Carousel	3
Public Relations / Marketing	1
Sports & recreation	1
Connectivity	1

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### 3. South Memphis Public Meeting (8 participants, including U of M students)

Diversity of activities - enough to spend all day into evening	6
Access: year-round access, later hours	6
Enhance museum and restaurants - add cafes	5
Authentic Memphis identity - mix old and new	5
Showcase for live local music and artists	3
River charter school, camp in summer	3
More water recreation - boating	2
Family friendly hotel (2 stories)	2
Expand Amphitheater - world-class acts, picnic grounds	2
Don't change name, but enhance	2
Student dorms	1
Refresh and update museum - rotating exhibits	1
Public Relations / Marketing / Promote park/signage from distance	1
Aquarium	1
Dog park	0

### 4. East Memphis Public Meeting (estimated 125 participants)

Skate park	180
Public art (graffiti wall), snake run, sculptures you can skate on	56
For kids – splash park, playground	25
Access: 24/7, year round	21
Outdoor/watersports: beach, fishing, boating	20
Nature: Trails, green space	20
Access/connectivity: Ferries, footbridges	15
Wi-Fi access	14
Boardwalk: hangout spot, shops, arcade	14
Shade	13
Enhancing existing amenities: Riverwalk, museum, picnic	12
Local snacks	11
Major attractions: Grand Carousel, Zippin Pippin	9
Swimming pool	8

Public Relations / Marketing, promotion, local art, music	7
Adventure, recreation: Roller skating, climbing wall, bungee	7
Permanent campground (grill)	6
Safety (police station)	5
Aquarium	5
Hotel, youth hostel	2
Community garden	1

### **III. On-Line Survey Findings Summary**

#### **A. Description of Respondents**

- For the Phase I public survey, 748 respondents took some portion of the survey. The completion rate was 90.9% with 680 respondents continuing through the entire survey.
- Over half the respondents were between 18 – 40 years of age and more than 30% between 41 – 60 years of age.
- The vast majority live in Memphis (nearly 70%). Respondents living in Memphis primarily live in Midtown (38.1%) and Downtown (32.5%). North Memphis (2.4%) and South Memphis (1.7%).
- The vast majority of respondents identified as Caucasians (86.7%), with 7.3% reporting as African-American.
- Many respondents (35.7%) were married with children, but the next largest category is single with no children (31.4%).
- The majority have visited MIRP within the year (14% within the month and 46.7% within the last year). Only 6.2% have never been to MIRP.
- More than 30% of respondents who have been to MIRP visit several times a year.

#### **B. Respondents Views about MIRP Today**

- The majority agree that MIRP is:
  - Safe (75%)
  - Clean (69.8%)
  - Easy to find your way around (64.2%)
  - Affordable (65.8%)
- Nearly the majority of respondents (47.6%) also think that there aren't enough events or interesting things to do at MIRP.

- Nearly the majority of respondents (47.1%) express the need for better quantity and quality of food.
- In the visual preference portion, many respondents indicate that they dislike the MIRP marina area (34.9%).
- In the open ended comments, it is frequently mentioned that there is a need to update and beautify the existing architecture.
- The MIRP River Walk Replica and the Amphitheatre are specified by many as areas to preserve and enhance, in the open ended comment fields.

### **C. Major Themes for Future Use**

- More than half of all respondents favor these specific types of activities on waterfronts:
  - Live musical performances (64.9%)
  - Restaurants (54.1%)
  - Waterside cafes (66.6%)
  - River promenades (68.5%)
  - Picnic areas (54.9%)
- Increased access to the river is desired by many respondents, as shown in open comment fields. Specifically, many mentioned increasing public boating access, boat rides, and walkways close to the river.
- Increased access to MIRP itself is desired by many as shown in the open ended comment field responses. Specifically many mentioned boat ferries, bridges, connections from other downtown parks, and better signage.
- As indicated in open ended comments, a skate park is favored by many respondents.
- Many respondents indicate strong interest in a lively park with a large number of varied activities so that lots of people are frequently using MIRP. This is evident in the visual preference responses and in open-ended comments.
- A large number of respondents chose commercial development such as restaurants (by 54.1% of respondents) and cafes (by 66.6% of respondents) among the list of possible waterfront elements, while others expressed in the open ended fields that heavy development is not desirable. Some specifically mentioned that natural views should not be obstructed and that natural areas should be preserved. Perhaps there is some ambiguity about the meaning of, and what constitutes, “commercial development”.
- Respondents were asked to indicate their preferred improvements to MIRP by choosing one photo within a set of four of other waterfronts. Preferences expressed within each set of photos reinforce the themes found in other survey responses.

- Respondents tended to favor water's edge treatments with lots of greenery and trees.
- However, when presented with a choice between photos with lots of people in them, rather than those without, respondents overwhelmingly chose photos with lots of people – **even over choices with more greenery.**
- When considering the various types of waterfront recreation, restaurants, nightlife, and a bustling street scene appear to have the greatest appeal (43%), while another large group (31%) chose walking in green space close to the river.
- When presented with photos showing four approaches to architectural development, including dense urban development in the background and a boat marina, the vast majority (43%) chose historical stone architecture, formal landscaping and lots of greenery. However, a good number (25%) preferred a scene showing people in active physical activity even though skyscrapers were in the background.
- Respondents were nearly evenly split in their preference between an open air market, an open air restaurant, and a splash park for children – indicating a broad range of interest in different types of open air activities.
- In open ended, non guided comments, many respondents indicated that the general atmosphere of MIRP should be family-friendly and safe. Many expressed specific interest in:
  - An active street scene including street vendors (food and goods), street performers, musical performances, and an open air market.
  - Bicycle and walking/running paths.
  - Major attractions such as an aquarium, amusement park, and splash/water park.

## **IV. Stakeholder Meetings**

### **A. Stakeholder Focus Group Description**

Small focus groups were held with sets of targeted MIRP stakeholders. These groups, listed below, were deemed stakeholders that warranted more in-depth conversations because of close physical proximity to MIRP and/or symbiotic relationships of organizational goals with MIRP.

- Downtown Merchants
- Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce
- Young Community Leaders (*Mpact Memphis, Leadership Academy, Leadership Memphis, Launch Memphis*)

- Skate Life Memphis
- Memphis Yacht Club
- Parents (*Maria Montessori School, Downtown Elementary, Cooper Young Parent Network*)
- Center City Commission
- Downtown Developers
- Users of the River (Wolf River Conservancy, Outdoors Inc., Sierra Club, Canoe Clubs, Mississippi River Corridor - TN)
- City of Memphis Park Services Division
- Friends for Our Riverfront
- Maria Montessori School Students
- BRIDGES Participants
- Downtown Neighborhood Associations (*Downtown Neighborhood Association, South Main Association, Island View Homeowners, Harbor Town Homeowners Association*)

### **B. Overview of Findings**

#### **1. Common Themes and Trends**

The overall themes and trends for suggested improvements at MIRP by the stakeholder groups mirrored those described in the public meetings summaries (pages 9-15). The small stakeholder group format allowed for more detailed conversation about those suggestions/issues, as well as more discussion relating to trends that could affect the success of development on MIRP. Insights and perceptions that were relatively common among the diverse groups include the following:

- A wide-variety of events should occur often at MIRP in order to engage all types of Memphians on a frequent basis.
- Likewise the activity areas on MIRP should vary in order to have something for everyone and to keep everyone interested over the long term (for example, areas for active play and areas for quiet reflection are both important).
- Opportunities to partake in local culture (from music to art to food) are important to keep MIRP authentic and unique.
- Increasing access points (such as connecting Downtown parks and improving the North entrance), access methods (water taxis, foot bridges, etc), and access time (year around operation) is critical to more frequent and effective use of MIRP.

### **2. Differentiated Findings from Stakeholder Groups**

The different perspectives of the various stakeholder groups reveal conflicts between certain groups and/or sub themes specific to certain interest areas:

- Children, youth, and parents have a great tolerance for major change of MIRP. These groups are most interested in “out-of-the box” ideas for recreation (such as non-traditional, highly-adventurous play grounds or large attractions) and entertainment (such as outdoor movies and interactive electronic outdoor gaming).
- Clean water and environmental protection was of great interest to specific groups such as the Young Community Leaders, Users of the River, and the Yacht Club.
- Economic sustainability and funding was raised as a key issue by some groups - specifically the Chamber, the Downtown Merchants, Center City Commission, and Friends for Our Riverfront. As such, striking the right blend of public and commercial use was a big topic. The Chamber is most supportive of using commercial development as a tool for sustainability. Friends for Our Riverfront was most resistant.
- While many groups expressed a desire for some commercial activity, specifically restaurants and retail, a few groups had a dissenting perspective. The Downtown Developers appear to have the least tolerance for commercial development on MIRP, citing potential competition with other existing commercial development on private land. Friends for Our Riverfront is likewise less supportive of commercial use.
- There is conflict in opinions about the desirability of a skateboard park. All groups appear to support having a skateboard park in Memphis, but some did not support the MIRP location.
- Some groups are specifically interested in retaining current elements of MIRP; the River Replica and the amphitheatre are the ones most mentioned. While other groups are less tied to the current major elements.
- The Yacht Club discussed upgrades and access to the Marina, whereas the Marina was not a topic of discussion in most other groups.

### **C. Key Findings from Each Stakeholder Group**

#### **1. Downtown Merchants:**

- Capitalize on the success of Greenbelt Park by continuing the landscaping and walkways all the way into MIRP on the North. In fact, connecting all Downtown parks would create a true green way and capture of corresponding benefits.

- Get private investors involved in any new (physical) development on the MIRP. It is important to minimize risk to the City and to have a planned exit strategy for any attraction.
  - Involve private developers to develop a highly visible thrill ride to attract out-to-town visitors and residents.
  - Capitalize on Memphis's musical talent by utilizing musicians to enliven the MIRP experience on a regular basis.
  - Develop new activities/events annually to bring people back to MIRP.
2. Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce:
- MIRP needs amenities that produce an economic engine.
  - Private development occurring on public land is appropriate; commercial development (restaurants, retail, and other businesses) is a means to enliven MIRP with people and activities.
    - This active environment would be an asset to firms employing young urban professionals; this serves the Chamber's goal of gaining and retaining more professionals and companies in Memphis.
    - Although commercial development is favored, they agree that building height should be kept low so that existing waterfront buildings' views are not affected.
    - The Skate Park is not favored; while a skate bowl would be good attraction for Memphis, it does not need to be situated by the river to be successful.
  - It is important to create an environment that is attractive to all population segments of Memphis, as well as for tourists. The primary focus heretofore has been on capturing tourists.
  - Increased access to MIRP is necessary for success. Access can be increased via several methods including water taxis, additional bridges, better parking, and a better connection to Greenbelt Park.
  - Pulling Memphis' music heritage and active music production business into MIRP would be a way to leverage our unique heritage, industry, and talent.
3. Young Community Leaders (Members and staff from Mpact Memphis, Leadership Memphis, Leadership Academy, and Launch Memphis):
- In order to utilize MIRP to attract and retain talent, there should be a wide variety of activities including recreational opportunities and active night life; however activities on MIRP must also have to be relevant to other segments of the Memphis population.

- While some commercial activity is seen as a means to enliven MIRP (for example, shops and restaurants), the group cautions to ensure there is an economic market before building and to keep unique local flavor.
- Additionally, the group favors keeping natural elements and flexible green space a priority and minimizing environmental impacts (for example, keep trees and shade and clean up the river).
- Participants agreed that MIRP should be developed in phases to limit the financial risk and to create an audience before major investments.
- Increased physical access to MIRP, including connecting MIRP to all Downtown parks, is needed in order to capture potential users, as well as opening MIRP all year around.
- The meeting facilities on MIRP must be updated and activities increased in order to attract use by leadership groups.
- RDC needs to coordinate the MIRP plan with the other major development initiatives going on in the city right now (Shelby Farms, Greater Memphis Greenline, Fairgrounds, Downtown Redevelopment). It is important to leverage, and not duplicate, amenities planned for other areas.

#### 4. Skate Life Memphis

- Skate Life Memphis continues to advocate for an 80,000 square foot skate bowl located on the South tip of MIRP.
- While others have noted limited access to MIRP as a negative factor, Skate Life sees this as positive. Controlled access is an important element in order to implement safety measures for a skate bowl.
- Skate Life favors activities/developments that build on the family-friendly atmosphere present in MIRP and that would complement the recreational nature of a skate bowl.
- Skate Life believes that a skate bowl of the proposed size could attract regional and national events that would add to the economic sustainability of the Park and Downtown as a whole.

#### 5. Memphis Yacht Club

- The group advocates upgrading the marina by adding more boat slips and covering all the slips, adding a store, and allowing boat rentals from the marina.
- It is critical to increase access to MIRP and to the public marina by eliminating barriers such as the guard gate and limited parking and increasing signage.
- Environmental stewardship and promotion is important; the river should be cleaned up and the harbor promoted as a “green area.”

- The club would like to partner with MIRP to offer water safety courses and increase river-related activities.
- Yacht Club/Marina is willing to relocate to a nearby location if necessitated by development plan.
- In general, the tone of MIRP should be family-friendly.

### 6. Parents

- A *variety* of outdoor family-friendly activities are important in order for families to visit more frequently. Some ideas include creating a festival/carnival atmosphere, showing outdoor movies, hosting children's plays, and developing a water park.
- Families also desire places to eat, relax, and shop. While heavy development is not universally favored, the group agreed that an open air market and/or small shops, restaurants would increase the length and frequency of visits to MIRP.
- Open green space for play and exercise is important. Parents favor using the natural environment to create areas for learning, relaxation, and recreation.
- Increasing the access to MIRP is essential. Ideas include a floating water bridge, drawbridge, water taxis, and connecting Downtown parks.
- Places for structured play are desired, as well, particularly a playground that offers adventurous and unique play opportunities combined with learning opportunities.
- Most participants value much of what exists on MIRP (particularly the River Replica, the amphitheater, and museum) and favor enhancing those venues.

### 7. Center City Commission

- Some revenue generation is important; however, MIRP should be seen and treated as a civic investment, one that doesn't necessarily pay for itself (for example, Shelby Farms).
- Increase diversity and amount of activities in MIRP to overcome the barrier to access and to retain a wide variety of users all day long with frequent visits.
  - Examples include concerts, other artistic performances, river-related events, holiday events, dog park, amusement park, water park elements, and recreation areas.
- Connect MIRP to the rest of Downtown through physical connections (for example, water taxis) and programmatic connections.
- Generally, MIRP must be a unique experience; a great place that's alive with people.

### 8. Downtown Developers

- MIRP should not develop as a major commercial area. It is a public facility and, as such, should have spaces that support outdoor recreation.
- MIRP should be connected to Downtown in many ways to create a seamless exercise and walking connection throughout.
- In order to increase frequency of use, MIRP would need to build a major attraction like an aquarium or a cultural center, something related to the river.
- Capitalize on what is there; enhance the museum and find good uses for the amphitheater.

### 9. Users of the River (*Sierra Club, Glenn Cox, Mississippi River Corridor - TN, Wolf River Conservancy, Chickasaw Group, Sierra Club, Outdoors Inc.*)

- The cleanliness of the water in the stretch of the Mississippi River along Memphis' waterfront needs to be addressed.
  - Without addressing the water quality, the attractiveness of the riverfront and park to water recreation enthusiasts will be limited.
  - National companies with facilities on the Memphis riverfront will pollute here when they won't in other places because, in their perception, Memphis doesn't enforce EPA-mandated regulations.
- Increased access to the park, and connectivity with the rest of the riverfront, via biking, walking, kayaking, and boating is a critical need.
  - Improving conditions for biking would be a great addition for access and connectivity to the river, and can be part of a larger riverfront effort.
- Long-range maintenance plans for the park are critical for the success of any enhancements.
- "Greening" and environmental sustainability are very important aspects to any future development.
- Improvements to the park to attract repeat users focused on enhancing the natural experience (sunsets), family friendly activities, and a variety of outdoor activities such as shaded places to sit and outdoor food and drink.

### 10. City of Memphis Park Services Division

- The distance of MIRP from Downtown is a real challenge, and both increasing accessibility and creating a "draw" for repeat visitors is very important.
- A large skate park in MIRP would not be the best use; instead, smaller skate parks located in parks around the city is a better way to motivate

resident involvement in skateboarding and is a trend seen around the country.

- The historic Grand Carousel could be a very unique and feasible amenity for MIRP.
- A commercial element is key for success of the park, but there are several caveats:
  - Dealing with a commercial element on public land is complex
  - Any commercial use must complement what is already going on downtown, and not compete with it
  - Promoting greater use of the park is desirable since public funds must be used to maintain the park whether the park has a high degree of use or not.

### **11. Friends for Our Riverfront**

- This process presents an opportunity to build on what's already at MIRP and make it sustainable.
- Accessibility in all its dimensions is very important – including better access to the island, extended hours of operation, and free admission.
- The end product of the design process should be something that reflects the unique assets and personality of Memphis rather than modeling ourselves after other cities.
- Transparency and openness to input is critical to the success of the project.
  - RDC must be open to public input and truly be willing to start with a “clean slate,” rather than only choosing input that supports a pre-determined agenda

### **12. Maria Montessori School Students (ages 7-12)**

- Create a playground that engages minds, creates learning opportunities, and also presents physical challenges. Ideas include traditional elements such as a carousel and swings, but also include mazes, climbable sculptures, and art integration throughout.
- It is important to have activities for the whole family. Therefore, some restaurants and shops are needed for adults while the children play.
- The River Replica and the paddle boat area are important elements to retain.
- The design of MIRP should allow users to do a wide variety of things from quiet reflection, to active games, to shopping, to listening to live music.

- While it is important to have an innovative playground for unorganized play, it is also important to have organized group recreational activities. For example, field games (like sack races) for kids every Friday.

### 13. BRIDGES Participants (ages 12-14)

- Create an environment where there are lots of opportunities for physical activity through a variety of outdoor activities. These activities should get adrenaline flowing and have a high level of adventure (examples include zip lines and bungee jumping to amusement park rides).
- Cater to teenager and pre-teenager visitors with youth-relevant music and outdoor movies and games specific to that generation, like wii games contests on a big outdoor screen.
- Hold joint events, where one event caters to the youth audience and one to the parent audience. This facilitates families enjoying MIRP together.
- Have a wide variety of activities to increase the interest in coming back again and again, from shopping, to eating, to playing organized sports, to relaxing, to exercising, to listen to music.

### 14. Downtown Neighborhood Associations

*(Downtown Neighborhood Association, South Main Association, Island View Homeowners, Harbor Town Homeowners Association)*

- The group was uncertain if there is a market for more retail in Downtown, but most see retail and restaurants on MIRP as a way to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of Downtown.
- Pedestrian access is a key success factor; it is critical in order for Downtown residents to increase the frequency of visits to MIRP.
- Develop MIRP in a way that makes it more attractive for young people in order to increase use by younger and more diverse generations.
- Increase the level of activities on MIRP giving Downtown residents more reasons to visit. For example, return to the days of regular public parties and more frequent use of the amphitheatre.
- Add park-like attractions like playgrounds, merry-go-rounds, and picnic areas in order to increase frequency of use by Memphians in general.