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Baton Rouge Riverfront Analysis

Harrison Price Company

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May 20, 1990

TO: Allen Eskew, Eskew & Filson Architects

FROM: Nick Winslow, Harrison Price Company

RE: Baton Rouge Riverfront Analysis

Dear Allen:

Pursuant to your request, HPC is pleased to offer the following summary notes concerning the Baton Rouge Riverfront Development project based on the workshop of April 24 and 25, 1990. HPC's report, scheduled for completion within two weeks, will provide the background for the summary findings discussed herein.

The specific components recommended for development within the Riverfront district included Attractions, Commercial Projects, and Amenities. Each of these is discussed in the following paragraphs.

ATTRactions

The Riverfront site currently has a number of resident and visitor attractions including the Louisiana Art and Science Center Riverside, the USS Kidd, Mississippi River Observation Deck, Riverside Centroplex, Catfish Town and the Old State Capitol, among others. The intent of the workshop program was to build on the existing attraction base to increase interest in visiting the Riverfront by residents and visitors alike. Components recommended for development include:

1. **Black-box/Flexible Theater**- This small theater (250 to 350 seats) would feature flexible staging and seating suitable for new works, experimental works, local productions and children's theater. A potential site is the atrium area of the LASC Riverside building. Capital cost, excluding shell is estimated at \$2-3 million.

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2. **Levee Theater**-This open air amphitheater with a capacity of 4,000 to 5,000 people would host major civic events and celebrations. A site near the USS Kidd which would tie into the Levee Walk and the Riverside Gardens is desirable.
3. **Old State Capitol**-It is understood that much of the Old State Capitol building is to be used for the proposed Political Museum. The project team proposes that other areas such as the Rotunda, Senate Chamber and the gardens be set aside as public event space for residents and Centroplex meeting users.
4. **Riverside Discovery Center**-It was suggested that the LASC Riverside building be reconfigured and reformatted to better utilize its spaces and accommodate some new functions. Interpretive areas would include the Fine Arts Gallery and the Children's Discovery Center. As noted above, the "black-box" theater would be built in the atrium. The auditorium would continue to be used for travel films, etc. The area above the auditorium would be expanded and developed into a commercial project--The Landing Cafe and Bar (see below).

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS

The workshop identified a number of commercial projects which appear to be economically feasible and would inject some commercial vitality into the Riverfront District. These projects are summarized below:

1. **Convention Hotel**-The Centroplex needs a quality headquarters hotel to compete for regional meeting, convention and trade show business. Absence of a good downtown hotel is viewed as a significant void. The workshop recommended 350- to 450-room hotel with a quality similar to a Ramada Renaissance or Holiday Inn Crown. The hotel would be built next to Centroplex and utilize its meeting facilities. Joint management and booking should be investigated. Cost is estimated to be approximately \$110,000 per room, or \$38.5 million to \$49.5 million.

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2. **Pilot House Sports Bar**-Modeled after similar projects in Pittsburgh and Baltimore, this facility would occupy vacant space in the Pilot House in Catfish Town. The bar would celebrate all of Louisiana's sports heroes and legends. Estimated size is 12,000 square feet requiring a capital improvement investment of \$720,000 to \$900,000.
3. **Landing Cafe and Bar**-This eating and drinking establishment, developed on the upper floor of the LASC Riverside building with an excellent view of both the River and the Centroplex. A cafe with 150 restaurant seats and 100 bar seats will require approximately 5,250 square feet of space and an improvement budget of approximately \$140 per square foot, or \$735,000.
4. **Catfish Town**-The unoccupied space in the existing Catfish Town commercial area should be infilled with supporting food & beverage outlets as the complex becomes increasingly occupied with commercial office tenants. The strip between Catfish Town and the levee should be studied for potential development of townhouse retail and professional office use.
5. **Original Capitol House**-This historic structure should be adaptively reused for downtown housing if technically feasible. The rooftop ballroom could be used as a residential amenity. In addition to the development of residential units in the main building, the townhouse units could be constructed over the parking area. Additional townhouse residential development could occur on the unused portion of the Water Tower block.
6. **"New" Capitol House site**-Workshop participants were unanimous in the the opinion that the Capitol House annex was not worth preserving and should be demolished. The site should be held until such time as there is demand for additional office and retail space.
7. **Class A Commercial Office**-The River Road/Florida Boulevard site should be used for development of a Class A commercial office tower.

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PUBLIC SPACES AND AMENITIES

Major public spaces and amenities which will establish the character of the Riverfront District and provide the urban linkages essential stimulating interaction between the district and the rest of downtown Baton Rouge. Specific components recommended include:

1. **Riverside Gardens**-Workshop participants agreed that the Centroplex and Old Capitol gardens should be integrated to become the Riverside Gardens, a dense urban garden oasis with strong water features. The spaces surrounding City Hall and the Centroplex buildings could become platforms for a number of "user friendly" functions such as food kiosks, seasonal carts, shade structures, ad-hoc performance venues, etc.
2. **Capitol Gardens**-Collection of historical sites.
3. **"Levee Walk"**-One of the most interesting and significant attributes of the Riverfront District is the changing character of the river and the levee. A 6,000 foot "Levee Walk" is recommended which would have at least seven thematic nodes, as follows:
 - a. Pentagon Barracks.
 - b. Ferry landing with floating store.
 - c. Shaded bandstand.
 - d. Riverboat Landing.
 - e. Levee Amphitheater.
 - f. USS Kidd.
 - g. Batcher Park.
4. **Zachary Taylor site**-It was brought to the attention of the workshop that the Zachary Taylor historic site is to be used for a new state office building. The panel recommended that the building include a commemorative plaza honoring Taylor and depicting the geographic history of Louisiana.

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5. Old Capitol Grounds Sculpture Gardens-The grounds of the Old Capitol have an extensive collection of sculptures by Ivan Miscovitch which constitutes a fine urban amenity.

Allen, I hope these comments are useful. I will begin preparing our report when I return from Michigan next week.

