

D.C. Planner Takes Command Of Anacostia Waterfront Project

Land-Use Proposal for Stadium District Among Top Priorities

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Outgoing D.C. Planning Director Andrew Altman this week becomes the first chief executive of Anacostia Waterfront Corp., shepherding an ambitious redevelopment effort that has taken on new momentum because of plans to build a baseball stadium for the Washington Nationals.

The effort to clean the river and revitalize the neighborhoods along its banks is expected to take more than 20 years and eventually require more than \$8 billion in public and private spending.

Altman, who was confirmed for his post last month by the D.C. Council, said one of his first priorities will be designing a land-use plan for the industrial area designated as the stadium district.

The land-use plan, to be developed in conjunction with the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission, will recommend how the stadium should be oriented; how much housing, green space and commercial development should be allowed on adjacent properties; and how pedestrians and motorists should access the area.

Various aspects of the plan may need approval from local and federal oversight panels. Because the stadium is supposed to be finished by March 2008 and city and baseball officials want to select an architect by mid-February and start construction within a year, Altman said a draft of the land-use plan must be completed by April.

"It accelerates everything," Altman said of the stadium project. "It immediately becomes the highest priority of the waterfront, and you seize it and you run with it."

The corporation also will begin seeking developers to create homes, shops and offices on 40 acres of the shuttered Southeast campus of D.C. General Hospital, to complement a proposed hospital that would be built on the site as a joint venture between the city and Howard University.

Later this year, it will begin to offer land for redevelopment on the Southwest waterfront, Altman said, and look for a pilot program on the east side of the river -- perhaps creating a park or improved access to the river from existing neighborhoods.

But first, Altman and the five city planning and economic development aides he is taking with him must find office space for the corporation, probably in the redevelopment area, and hire nine additional employees, as well as consultants to aid in specific projects.

City Administrator Robert C. Bobb said the District government will redirect \$5 million from this year's operating budget to be used as start-up funds for the corporation.

"So much of the next few months is setting the foundation," said Altman, who also said that most projects will take years to complete. "You don't want people to think, now that the corporation is up, everything will start happening. There's not a miracle overnight."

Altman, 41, will be paid \$195,000 annually. He will report to a board of directors chaired by former Indianapolis mayor Stephen Goldsmith, a Republican who lives in Tenleytown, chairs the Corporation for National and Community Service and advises President Bush on faith-based initiatives. Goldsmith and six other citizen members of the board were nominated by D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D) and confirmed by the council Dec. 21.

As mayor, Goldsmith oversaw redevelopment of downtown Indianapolis, including the White River waterfront, an experience that he said will be helpful for the Anacostia effort.

"It's really important that these grand projects not start only with the biggest, grandest and glitziest, but that they're balanced," Goldsmith said, "so that neglected neighbors and neighborhoods can feel as though they're benefiting as well."

Also confirmed as a board member is Eric W. Price, a specialist in affordable housing who spurred extensive residential and downtown development during five years as Williams's deputy mayor for economic development. Price left office in the fall to join a national community development organization.

Other confirmed appointees to the panel are developer Mitchell Shear, whose firm is a partner in a large office, retail and residential project at Waterside Mall on the Southwest waterfront; Carl C. Cole, a human resources consultant and resident of the Fairlawn neighborhood who has spent time on the river since boyhood and advocated for it most of his life; Loretta Tate, who headed the Marshall Heights Community Development Organization before stepping down this fall; Capitol Hill resident Greg Farmer; and former Verizon official Marie C. Johns.

Williams must appoint a labor union representative to the panel and a representative from an environmental group.

Cole, 61, said the corporation's overriding goal must be creating greater access for city residents to the river, to amenities on its banks and, by creating new sources of tax revenue, to social and humanitarian programs.

"I look for a beautiful waterfront that's a mixture of everything," Cole said. "People, the arts, great library facilities, recreation."

Altman leaves behind a planning office that he built almost from scratch after being recruited by Williams in 1999. Toni Griffin, a deputy planning director, also will leave for the waterfront corporation, along with chief of staff David King; waterfront project manager Uwe Brandes and special assistant David Howard; and Elizabeth Price, a staff member in the city's Office of Economic Development who previously led planning efforts for the Southwest Waterfront as an employee of National Capital Revitalization Corp.

Ellen McCarthy, the District's deputy planning director for neighborhood planning and development review, has been named interim planning director.

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