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Chester unveils long-awaited master plan for waterfront

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For more than two decades, Chester has been eager to revitalize its waterfront along the Delaware River as part of a bigger plan to help the beleaguered Delaware County community but has little to show for those efforts. Officials are now hoping that will soon change.



NBBJ

The Riverfront Alliance of Delaware County unveiled on Tuesday a master plan for roughly 100 acres surrounding Subaru Park, which is a soccer stadium for the Philadelphia Union, and the neighboring Wharf building. The area covered by the plan stretches from Highland Avenue to Norris Street.

"Many cities would kill to have this," said Tom Shoemaker, Pennsylvania president for TD Bank and chair of the Riverfront Alliance about the riverfront and park. "This plan is just the first step along the way."

The multi-phased plan sets out several goals the community wants to accomplish and seeks to tie together different areas, including the city of Chester, and uses to make it one cohesive waterfront. Not unlike Penn's Landing up the river in Philadelphia, the idea is to create a year-round destination for tourists and locals, build an economic engine for Chester and spur additional private investment.

Some of the plan's priorities include:

Improving public transit, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure along Route 291 as part of extending an East Coast Greenway through the city;
Enhancing Barry Bridge Park and the riverwalk trail and developing new public spaces along the waterfront for retail, boating and recreation;
Mitigating the impacts of climate change and rising sea levels through stormwater management and the development of natural landscapes, shading and increased plantings along streets and walkways;
Leveraging investment from both local and outside resources; and
Improving the public perception of the city.

Among the first projects that will get underway are road improvements to Route 291, Reaney and Engle streets, the design of a riverfront park and a public art program. It is hoped that once some of the public investments and improvements have been made, private investment of new office, retail and hospitality as well as sports and entertainment facilities will eventually follow.

The proposals includes a multi-sports facility, an indoor and outdoor concert venue, relocating a SEPTA rail station and leveraging Subaru Park, which was previously known as PPL Park when its opened in June 2010. It was at one point named Talen Energy Stadium.

The Riverfront Alliance was established in 1996, as the Institute for Economic Development by a consortium of private-sector corporations and nonprofit institutions to develop and implement programs and activities that could serve as the catalyst for the "physical, economic, and social development" of Delaware County waterfront communities. The group changed its name to the Riverfront Alliance of Delaware County in 2014.

Last November, the organization announced that in partnership with Union parent company Keystone Sports and Entertainment and the City of Chester it had selected a firm to oversee the master planning process. It picked NBBJ, an architecture and urban planning firm with expertise in waterfront planning. It has been involved in projects in Boston, Pittsburgh, Seattle and Vancouver, Washington.

The soccer stadium was intended to be one piece of a bigger \$500 million development for the Chester riverfront that had originally been planned and would

have included townhouses, apartments, retail space, a convention center, office space and structured parking.

With the exception of the soccer stadium, none of the other components of the plan ever materialized and the Great Recession has been blamed for the lack of progress.

"Pandemic aside, I think the stars are all aligning here for the first time," said [Jerry Miller](#), who also sits on the Riverfront Alliance board. There's a renewed collaboration among local and state government, the business sector and community to move the waterfront forward, he said.

About half of the 100 acres is owned or controlled by Keystone Sports and Entertainment, which has spent the past few years acquiring about a mile of waterfront property around its stadium.

"A year ago, I said I thought we needed a vision and I feel like we finally have that," said [Tim McDermott](#) of the Philadelphia Union. "This is just the beginning. The real work now begins."

Funding for the master plan was provided in part by a \$180,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development as well as support from the Philadelphia Union, M&T Charitable Foundation, the Chester Economic Development Authority and the Chester Redevelopment Authority.

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