

# Beale: Riverfront landing project delayed by historical commission

FROM PAGE 1

in this case the Cotton Row Historic District, which is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Riverfront Development Corp.**

Not-for-profit, public-private partnership

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The Tennessee Department of Transportation was listed as the applicant for the Section 106 approval because federal funding for the project would be released through it.

Beale Street Landing is expected to receive \$10 million in state and federal funding.

As a result of this setback, the RDC is organizing a meeting with TDOT, the Tennessee Historical Commission, the Memphis Regional Chamber of Commerce, both mayors' offices, Memphis Heritage, Friends

for Our Riverfront and other stakeholders to talk over project issues in late October or early November.

"We will try to come to grips with any issues that are outstanding as far as the project's effect on the surrounding historical site and come up with solutions that will make the project a much better project for everybody," RDC president Benny Lendermon says.

Patrick McIntyre Jr., executive director of the Tennessee Historical Commission, plans on attending the meeting once a date is set.

"It's a way to talk through some of the issues related to the project and it's usually a good, productive process in which all

positions can be considered," McIntyre says. "I think it's a good project, but we did find it has an adverse effect on the historic district. Maybe with some possible modifications, it would be more harmonious with the area."

The historical commission's Section 106 finding was determined by its review and compliance officer and several members of the staff, including McIntyre.

"Our role in the process is to make comments and to look out for the historical resources in the process," McIntyre says.

**A QUESTION OF IMPACT**

Memphis Heritage and Friends for Our Riverfront, both non-profit organizations, have asked questions about Beale Street Landing's impact on Tom Lee Park and the historic cobblestone area.

Virginia McLean, president of Friends for Our Riverfront, hadn't seen the historical commission's letter and declined to comment for this story.

June West, executive director of Memphis Heritage, says her group has concerns about Beale Street Landing's impact on the cobblestones.

"The Riverfront Development Corp. has had money for years and years to restore the cobblestones and they have chosen not to do it," she says. "Their answer is that they have to build this project before they can restore anything, and I have problems with that. I would like to see them put some effort into restoring the cobblestones and making them long-lasting before they start drilling into areas that will affect them."

West says Memphis Heritage believes in developing the riverfront, but has is-

sues with Beale Street Landing's design.

"We don't have to replicate old things, but this design to me is not timeless and it doesn't fit that environment at the cobblestones," she says. "I don't think it's an ageless design; I don't think it will age well."

Lendermon says Beale Street Landing doesn't infringe on the cobblestones.

"It stops right on the edge," he says. "The project actually reaches out further to the edge of the cobblestones, because we wanted to connect to them and not be separated from them."

**SPACE CONSIDERATIONS**

Another concern is Beale Street Landing's potential impact on Tom Lee Park.

As currently planned, Beale Street Landing would take up 78,000-120,000 square feet of Tom Lee Park's north end, according to Jim Holt, president and CEO of Memphis in May International Festival.

"There will be some barbecue teams lost and it's going to impact the configuration of the music festival, but we're working with the RDC to recapture some of the lost space at the southern tip of the park," Holt says.

The boards of Memphis in May and the RDC have talked about gaining some space on the park's southern tip, which hasn't been usable because of a dramatic slope in the terrain. There has been talk of leveling the ground in order to add park space.

"Pretty much all of the improvements or enhancements done to Tom Lee Park have, in some way, taken up space that we use for the stages and the festival," Holt

says. "From that perspective, there's an impact on us."

Holt, who also serves on the RDC board, supports the Beale Street Landing project.

"I think it's going to be a tremendous improvement to our waterfront, which is something that I think everyone would pretty universally agree is needed," Holt says. "The design is obviously contemporary, but if you look at the models and the diagrams, it looks pretty exciting."

Lendermon, who is on the Memphis in May board, says the RDC has worked closely with the festival to try and answer all questions.

"We think at the end of the day that Memphis in May will probably be better off at the end of this project," Lendermon says. "We think we've all figured out ways to have just as much usable space."

While construction of Beale Street Landing has been delayed, the RDC is working on the project in other ways.

It has contracted with Paradigm Productions LLC to produce for \$20,000 a 3-D virtual tour of the completed project.

"We have been thinking of doing a 'reality walk' of the whole project so people can get a better feel for it," Lendermon says. "It would be an educational piece."

The virtual tour presentations will help RDC demonstrate the full scope of the project, according to Lendermon.

"As we are negotiating with excursion boat operators and restaurant operators or talking with the East Memphis Rotary Club, we need something to describe the project in a little more detail."