

Silver Medal Winner
Louisville Waterfront Park
Louisville, Kentucky



This is an expert from:

Inspiring Change

The 2013 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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Waterfront Development Corporation

Overview

Submitted by: Waterfront Development Corporation (WDC)

Completed: 2013

Total Development Cost: \$95 million

Louisville Waterfront Park, an 85-acre riverfront park developed over more than two decades, reconnects the city of Louisville with the Ohio River.

Waterfront Development Corporation (WDC) transformed industrial land along the Ohio River occupied by an elevated highway, sand and gravel companies, and scrap yards into a new riverside park and gateway to the city. Planning for the park began in 1986 with the creation of the WDC, a quasi-public agency, to oversee the development of Louisville's riverfront. WDC held ten public meetings soliciting input on proposed development of the site that yielded a strong desire for green space. Subsequently, they initiated an international search for a design firm beginning with a Request for Qualifications to which 85 firms responded. Hargreaves Associates, one of four firms invited to Louisville to meet with WDC and city representatives to present their ideas, was ultimately selected to create the master plan and design for the \$95 million park.

“THE PARK HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP IN DEVELOPING A PROJECT OF THIS SCALE, PROVIDING A MODEL FOR OTHER POST-INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT CITIES.” *–2013 Section Committee*

The park provides an important green space for the city and visual and physical connections to the river. Its linear configuration stretches east to west along the Ohio’s southern shore in a series of linked spaces that include trails, landscaped areas for active and passive activities, children’s play areas, and public art. At its center, the Great Lawn and adjoining water feature draw people from downtown to the river’s edge. The lawn is tilted from the higher city elevation toward the water, opening river views from downtown under the elevated highway while still protecting the city from periodic floods. A memorial to Kentucky native (and 16th president) Abraham Lincoln includes interpretive panels that highlight his life and how his visits to Louisville influenced his opposition to slavery. Two privately-operated restaurants provide riverside dining, and a boathouse and marina offer access for rowers and motorboats.

The park was constructed in three phases. The first phase focused on the western area immediately adjacent to downtown, the second on the eastern end, and the third on the remaining center section. The Big Four Bridge is the most recent addition to the park, rehabilitating a former railroad structure into a pedestrian and bike path that spans the river and will connect Kentucky with Indiana when the northern landing is completed (projected for 2014).

Two-thirds of the park’s development was funded by the city, county, and state, with the remainder donated by corporations, foundations, and individuals. Today, the county and state continue to provide the majority of its operational funding, while WDC generates income from event rentals and business leases.

More than 120 events are held at the park every year. These include concerts, walks for charities, and sports events. Large special events like the July 3rd & 4th Waterfront Independence Festival and fireworks and the Kentucky Derby Festival’s Thunder Over Louisville draw thousands. The park is also home to the Belle of Louisville, a historic paddle wheeler operated by WDC that offers educational programming for children and adults.

Since its inception over 25 years ago, Louisville Waterfront Park has become a new town commons for the city, attracting over 1.5 million visitors a year. It has sparked an estimated \$1.3 billion investment in the Waterfront District including residential apartments and condominiums, Louisville Slugger Field, and the Yum! Center sports and concert arena. The park has garnered attention from other waterfront cities and is one of five from around the world featured in the Reclaiming the Edge: Urban Waterways and Civic Engagement exhibit at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, DC.



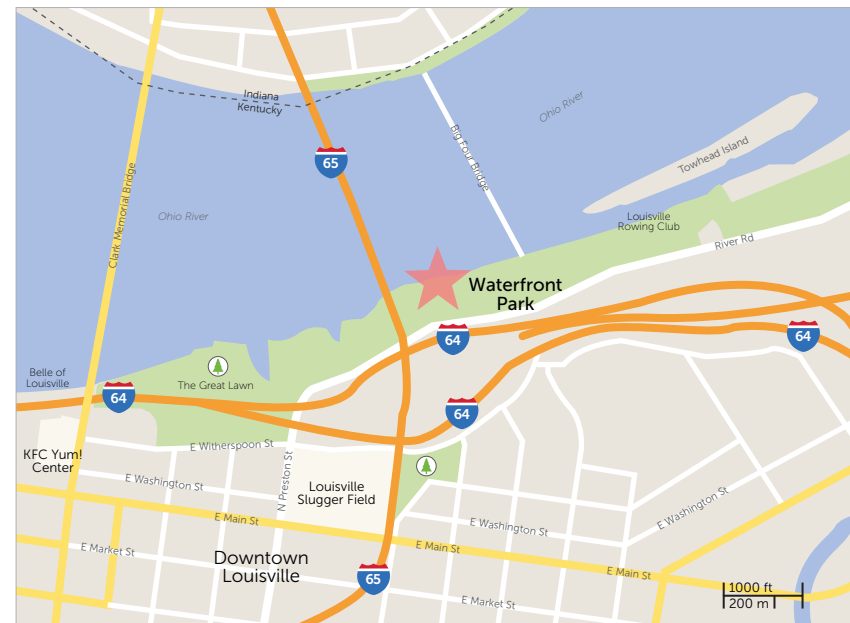
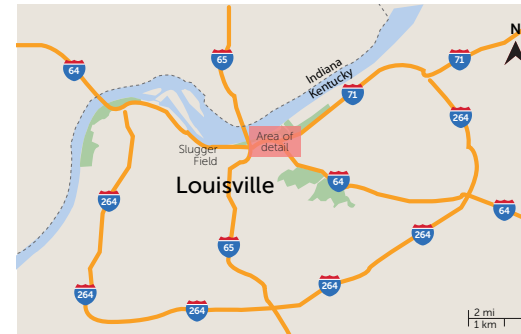
Waterfront Development Corporation





Project-at-a-Glance

- An 85-acre urban park reconnecting downtown Louisville with the Ohio River.
- Transformed an industrial wasteland into an attractive gateway to the city.
- Attracts 1.5 million visitors per year.
- Offers a wide variety of informal and organized activities, including festivals, concerts, fireworks, and special events.
- Contains a variety of landscaped areas, performance venues, two playgrounds, picnic areas, walking and running paths, and two marinas.
- Houses public art/sculpture installations that range from historical to contemporary to local folk-based.
- Was created and is operated by an organization that is also responsible for design review of projects in the surrounding area, assists with development of other river-related parks, and manages the only steam-powered paddle wheel riverboat still in operation.







Willie MacLean, Birds-Eye Foto

Project Goals

- Reconnect the city to the Ohio River, its very reason for being, providing public access and a reminder of the city's history.
- Involve the community in planning for the new park and foster a feeling of ownership.
- Make a place where all races, ages and social classes feel comfortable together.
- Clean up the industrial wasteland along the river and make a more attractive approach to the city.
- Tailor the park to unique features of Louisville – its history and sense of place.
- Overcome key challenges of the site – especially the elevated and surface roads and flood control – in an unobtrusive manner.
- Reuse the abandoned rail bridge over the Ohio River to create a pedestrian and bicycle link to Southern Indiana.
- Catalyze the revitalization of downtown areas adjacent to the waterfront.



Chronology



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Waterfront Development Corporation

Pre-1700s The site of Louisville on the Ohio River is an important location for Native American buffalo hunters due to the falls – the only obstruction along the length of the river.

1778 George Rogers Clark is credited with founding the first European settlement in the vicinity of modern-day Louisville on Corn Island.

1780 The town charter of Louisville is approved by the Virginia General Assembly. The city is named in honor of King Louis XVI of France, whose soldiers were aiding Americans in the Revolutionary War.

1803 At the Falls of the Ohio, William Rogers Clark receives a letter from Meriwether Lewis inviting him to help command an expedition to explore the Louisiana territory; they assembled their Corps of Discovery and set off down the Ohio River from the vicinity of Louisville to explore the western territories.

1800s The waterfront becomes a vibrant hub of steamboat-based commerce, with many wharf-related and industrial activities.

1900s The City declines in the early 20th Century.

1960s I-64 is constructed along the riverfront, further isolating it from the rest of the city.

1986 Louisville Waterfront Development Corporation is formed by the city, county and state as a quasi-independent entity and holds first board meeting.

1987 Funds are donated to acquire WDC's current office on the waterfront.

1988 Public forums determine community wants/needs for the waterfront – with a strong expression of desire for green space. The notion of Waterfront Park is born.

1990 Hargreaves Associates selected as master plan designer.



Waterfront Development Corporation



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1991 Master plan approved.

1992 Private fundraising campaign begins for Phase I.

1994 Ground broken on Phase I.

1995 Mass excavation completed.

1996 Wharf completed.

1997 Waterfront Park hosts its first concert series at the wharf; plans announced for Louisville Slugger Field adjacent to the park; Joe's Crab Shack opens; Linear Park and children's play area open.

1998 Great Lawn dedicated.

1999 July 4 – Phase I dedicated.

2000 Docks installed; Harbor Lawn opens; widening of River Road completed.

2004 Phase II opens.

2006 Riverview Park and RiverPark Place announced by Poe Development and WDC.

2007 Construction of Phase III begins.

2009 Lincoln Memorial complete.

2010 Big Four Lawn opens; ramp to bridge complete.

2011 University of Louisville rowing facility opens. Big Four Bridge construction begins.

2013 February – completion of Big Four Bridge pedestrian/bikeway; except for completion of landing on the Indiana side, projected for 2014, park is 100% complete.

July – construction begins on new I-65 Downtown Crossing Bridge over the river, impacting the center of the park.

Project Description

Louisville Waterfront Park is an 85-acre urban park that transformed an industrial wasteland into an attractive gateway to the city, reconnecting downtown Louisville with its historic origins on the Ohio River. The park, with its wide variety of spaces for organized and informal activities, arts, festivals and special events, is the result of 25 years of planning, community participation, and development.

CONTEXT

Louisville

The same location that attracted Native Americans also appealed to European settlers, trappers, and others as the site of the only obstruction to navigation of the Ohio River, requiring portage around a shallow falls. The city's early growth was influenced by the fact that river boats had to be unloaded and moved downriver before reaching the falls. By 1828, the population had swelled to 7,000 and Louisville became an incorporated city. The city grew rapidly in its formative years. Louisville was a major shipping port and slaves worked in a variety of associated trades. The city was often a point of escape for slaves to the north, as Indiana was a free state. Abraham Lincoln observed slaves being loaded onto a ship in the vicinity of Louisville – and wrote that he had been profoundly influenced by the experience.

Project History and Vision

Period photographs support the description that by the 1940's the "city was a sprawling eyesore." In particular, the area along the river was heavily industrial with unattractive operations including sand and gravel quarries and scrap metal yards that compressed junked cars. Historic downtown buildings that define the park's eastern edge were underutilized and in poor condition.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The park site in the 1940's

The current waterfront project was not the first time the city had imagined improving the area. Rather, Louisville “struggled for almost 85 years to implement this project.” For example, in 1931 the Bartholomew Plan envisioned the Belvedere as a precursor of Riverfront Park in bringing people back into contact with the river. There were at least eleven subsequent studies of riverfront use and development. The immediate antecedent to the creation of the park was a study prepared in 1981 by local planning authorities titled the *Riverfront Plan*. It identified as a crucial issue the fact that “the Ohio Riverfront is everyone’s front yard but no one’s responsibility” and called for an independent authority to execute the waterfront development strategy. By then a major freeway had been constructed between downtown and the river, cutting off the historical connection between the two.

In 1985, the mayor called for implementation of the waterfront strategy and, in 1986, the Waterfront Development Corporation (WDC) was created to revitalize the area. It was not initially charged with the creation of a park or any other particular use or set of uses. The notion to make the majority of the land area into a park grew out of a public input process.

The vision this time around, as described in WDC documents, revolved around a number of goals:

- **To reconnect the city to the river and provide public access.**
This had been eroding since the early 1900s with industrial development and was exacerbated in the 1960’s by the construction of the elevated highway along the river. Visual and physical connections were seen as also providing a reconnection to the city’s history.



Site prior to park construction

- **To involve the community in planning**, to foster a feeling of ownership, and to create a central gathering place for people from all parts of the community.
- **To ensure that the development is unique to Louisville** and reflects the community and its heritage (WDC had observed in visiting other waterfronts that “many of them could have been anywhere”).
- **To overcome the challenges of an elevated highway and surface road** running through the development and to incorporate flood protection that didn’t rely on a barrier such as a floodwall.

Urban Context

Louisville Metro (merged city and county) had a population of 741,096 as of the 2010 census while the greater metropolitan region (MSA) had about 1.3 million people, of whom about 75% were White, 22% Black or African-American and 3% Hispanic or Latino, of any race. Louisville considers itself to be a mixture of the South and Mid-West. Many project participants described it as being racially separated, with blacks and whites finding relatively few opportunities to interact.

Like many older American cities, Louisville began to experience a movement of people and businesses to the suburbs in the 1960's and 1970's. Middle class residents used newly-built interstate highways to commute to work in the city, moving into ever more distant, newer housing. The site of Waterfront Park is dramatically affected by these highways that separate it from the rest of the city, and there are plans to expand them, most notably a new bridge that greatly impacts a central section of the park that began construction in 2013.

Because of tax incentives, businesses found it cheaper to build new rather than renovate older buildings. Economic changes included a decline in local manufacturing. The West End and older areas of the South End, in particular, began to decline economically as many local factories closed. These factors contributed to the decline of the waterfront area, setting the stage for the founding of the WDC in the mid-1980s.

Organization History and Leadership

WDC was formed in 1986 by the City of Louisville, Jefferson County and the State of Kentucky – each of which appointed equal numbers of board members and contributed to its budget. The mayor serves ex-officio on the board. When the city and county merged into Louisville Metro Government, the new entity continued to appoint two-thirds of the board members, though it now contributes only about forty percent of the budget.

Aerial Photos: Waterfront Development Corporation



Clockwise from top: Aerial views of the site prior to park development (top and left); David Karem

When it was “spun-off” from direct government control in 2011, WDC became a quasi-independent, non-governmental entity, although its board is still appointed by governmental entities that also provide much of its budget. WDC’s degree of independence, particularly its continuity across administrations and jurisdictional boundaries, is seen as crucial to its success, allowing it to act without undue political pressure or influence. Though allowed by statute, this form of organization was unprecedented in Kentucky at the time it was created.

WDC’s executive director, David Karem, has a unique blend of experience and capabilities. His undergraduate study was in community planning, he has a degree in law, and he spent well over thirty years as an elected state representative and served as both minority and majority leader in the state senate. He provides charisma, vision, political acumen and connectivity, and appears to be an effective leader.

Twenty-five years after the first phase of construction, WDC is a mature organization, with the original leadership still intact and some younger members holding responsible positions. WDC claims that this is their succession plan, but whether these individuals can succeed David Karem’s is a matter of speculation. Future management of a successful on-going operation may not require the same skills Karem provided in getting WDC off the ground.

THE PARK AND ITS DESIGN

The 85-acre park stretches along the Ohio River for a distance of over a mile, and 500 to 800 feet from shore to its land-ward boundary. The park’s design is based on a number of guiding principles:

Provide an attractive approach to the city

The area that became the park is the first part of the city and state that is visible as people cross the river into Kentucky from Indiana. The patchwork of industrial uses along the river created visual and environmental pollution. Cleaning up the highly unattractive approach to the city was one of the major motivators for this project. Remediation of the site posed many challenges – some of which were dealt with in creative ways. There was a tremendous volume of degraded soil which would have been very costly to haul away. Instead, it was cleaned and used to create landforms that define separate areas of the park, while at the same time creating retention basins for drainage control and collecting water for irrigation.



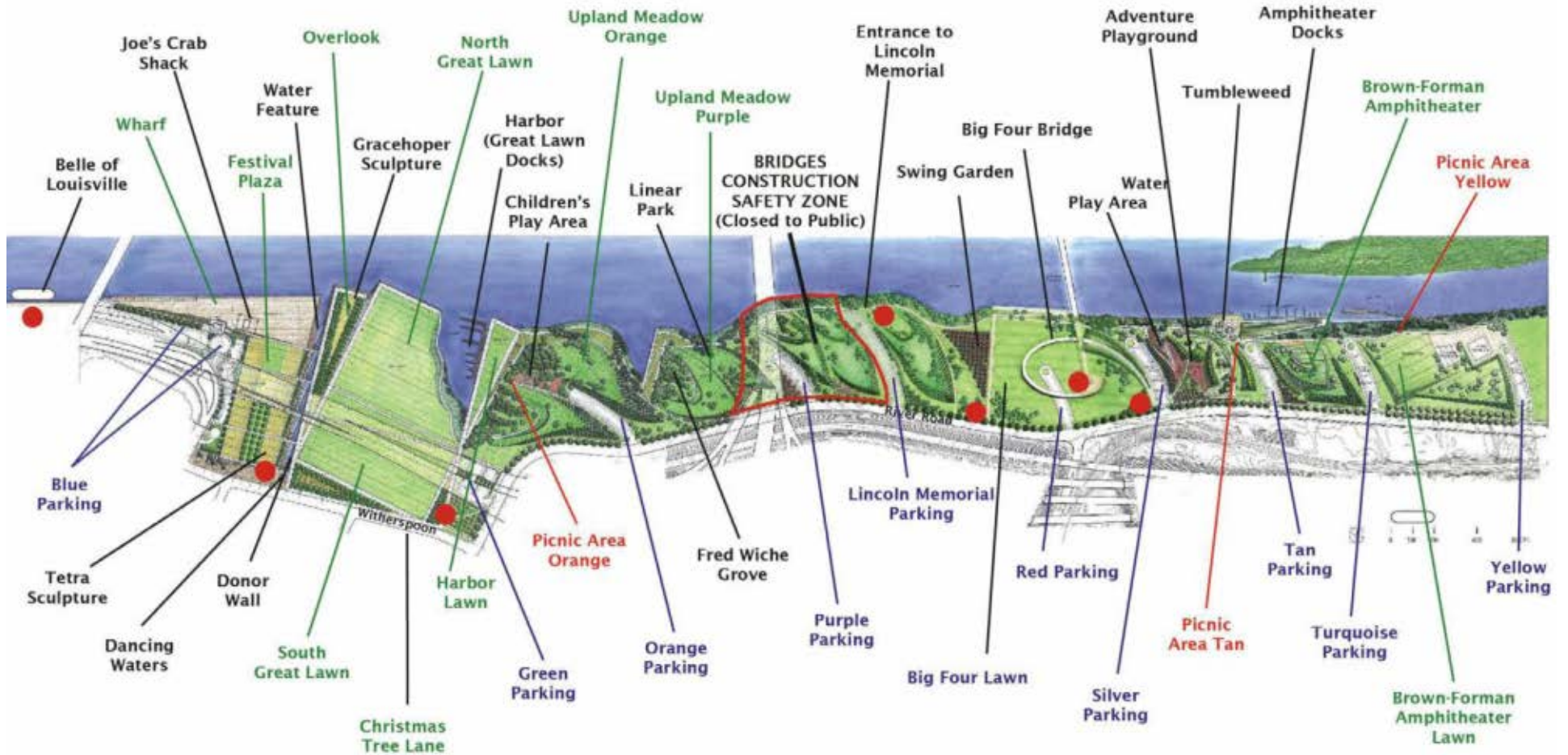
Waterfront Development Corporation, courtesy Hargreaves Associates, John Gollings

Aerial view of Great Lawn, Harbor Lawn and Meadow

Louisville Waterfront Park

(www.louisvillewaterfront.com)

- PARK FEATURES
- EVENT VENUES
- PICNIC AREAS
- PARKING



PARK HOURS:

6:00 a.m.—11:00 p.m.

Adventure Playground: 6:00 a.m.—11:00 p.m.

Waterplay Area: 11:00 a.m.—8:00 p.m.

● Accessible sign locations

The three interstate highways (“spaghetti junction”) formed a visually dominant barrier between downtown and the river. As is readily observed, the park now provides an attractive green space that sets off the view of downtown in the approach to the city from Indiana to the south or from up-river to the east.

Connect the river and the park to the city

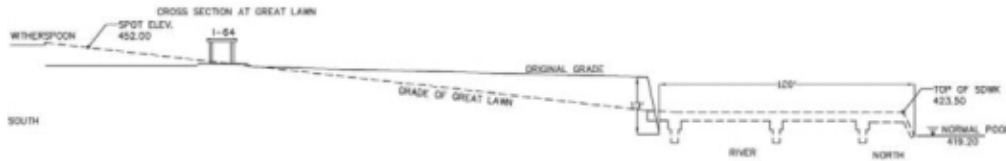
In addition to removing the industrial barriers between downtown and the river, the park also had to deal with the interstate highways. While WDC did not take on the interstate issue itself – although some in Louisville proposed removing it from the site – WDC did negotiate relocation of an on-ramp that created a major barrier toward the eastern end and blocked access at a critical location; this allowed the park to provide frontage to some of the adjacent development parcels. Once the ramp was removed, the designers found a creative way to allow the park to flow under the elevated highway: they graded the land downward toward the river, lowering it as it passed under the highway, and raising the inland edge in to open views of the river from adjacent parcels, River Road, and downtown. The design makes use of lighting and tree systems placed perpendicularly between downtown and the river to attract the eye towards the water, reducing the visual impact of the highway and extending the park up under the interstate into the city grid to provide visual and physical connections. This not only places primary activity areas out of the flood plain but provides added flood protection to downtown.

The grading provides flood protection without obtrusive flood walls or gates, in part by creating “breathing room” for the Ohio River to expand during flood stages. This was a challenging process as negotiations were required with the Army Corps of Engineers and the



Photos & map opposite: Waterfront Development Corporation

Looking towards downtown (top), landscaped mounds



This photo & map above: Waterfront Development Corporation

Coast Guard which have jurisdiction over the river and navigation. The process included rides with barge captains to assure them that the park design would not negatively affect navigation. The Ohio River is reported to be the busiest in the country and flow restrictions limited the area available for the park. Thus, in several areas the park edge is constructed so that water can flow under the landscaping, which is supported on a hidden structure.

River Road, which bisected the park along its main axis, was relocated to the inland edge to take surface traffic out of the park. Finally, the realignment of local streets connected the park to the city grid, improving access for both cars and pedestrians and opening views into the park.

Create defined areas for a variety of activities

The park is organized along its length as a series of settings for diverse activities and group sizes. These settings range from very large to intimate, with differing geometries, surfaces, plantings and supporting facilities.

Appropriately for a waterfront park, and contributing strongly to reestablishing the city's connection to the river, there are a number of water-based activity areas. The "Belle of Louisville", a working steam-powered paddle wheel riverboat is docked at the wharf on the western edge of the park. The boat is a National Historic Landmark that WDC operates on behalf of the city. The steamer is an important attraction for both tourists and locals. A harbor was created near the Great Lawn with first-come, first-served docks for over 100 power boats and two kayak launches. Further up the river, there are two boathouses, one for the Louisville Rowing Club and another for the University of

*Clockwise from top: Site section illustrating change in grading, rows of trees draw the eye towards the river, flood conditions, river level gauge
Next page clockwise from top: Water feature connecting downtown with the river, Louisville Rowing Club, natural inlet, waterside walkway and lawn, Belle of Louisville*

Louisville. At the far eastern end of the park, there is a new marina with commercially-operated docks and facilities. "Dancing Waters", an 800-foot-long water feature near the Great Lawn that recalls the Falls of the Ohio just down the river from the park, links the city to the river. An inlet suggests riparian ecologies that appear to be in a natural state. The entire park system is linked together by a continuous public riverfront walkway with many places to stop and watch the river. They provide ever-changing views of the bridges and commercial barge traffic.

In addition to water-related features, the park offers many kinds of activity venues and other amenities. One of the two park concessions, Joe's Crab Shack, is located on the wharf at the western edge of the park. Running from the water to the inland edge of the park is Festival Plaza, with the Tetra sculpture, one of the park's many pieces of public art. Between the plaza and the Great Lawn is the Dancing Waters feature and above this on the Overlook is the Gracehoper sculpture. The Great Lawn provides the setting for both informal and scheduled events. As the largest gathering space, it hosts major concerts and festivals. The approximately rectangular shape of the lawn is cut with a wedge of water for a small boat harbor.



Moving east, one comes to a series of more intimate spaces including the first children’s play area, picnic facilities, a meadow and a memorial grove. The play area, constructed in phase one, proved to be so wildly popular that it was inadequate to support the level of use. Phase two included construction of a much larger play area further east. Passing through Linear Park – a series of areas defined or enclosed with plantings, one comes to an area which was closed to the public shortly following the site visit for construction of a new highway bridge. The work temporarily interrupts the continuity of the walkway, which is rerouted along River Road. The bridge location was anticipated, so that only passive activities are supported in the area and little infrastructure was lost; however, it is a substantial intrusion into the park and undermines the connectivity between downtown and the river.

Continuing east, the next element is the Lincoln Memorial then, passing what is referred to as the “Swing Garden,” one arrives at another large lawn area dominated by the spiral ramp that leads up to the Big Four Bridge. The bridge once served as the main route across the river for four merged railways, but was abandoned a number of years ago. WDC determined that it would make an attractive pedestrian and bicycle bridge and completed the repurposing and construction of the spiral ramp in spring 2013. The ramp is elevated rather than ground-supported, as originally designed, due to geotechnical conditions. Although this results in a different appearance, it allows visitors to look under and beyond the ramp. The bridge is the last major piece of the park to be completed and appears to be very popular and well-used. Visitors suggested it was one of the only places in Louisville where one could have a truly urban experience. In this general area is the second children’s play area – much larger than the first one, with a water play section and adventure playground as well as picnic facilities.



Clockwise from top: Pedestrians on Big Four Bridge, Festival Plaza, Big Four Bridge ramp, playground, Great Lawn

The second concession, Tumbleweed restaurant, is also nearby.

At the far eastern end of the park is the Brown-Forman Amphitheater – an open theater where music and other performances are held, the boathouses, and their related docks. Capping the east end of the park is a privately developed project, including the first phase of rental housing and a marina.

Attract the entire range of citizens

WDC wanted the park to belong to everyone and be welcoming to all. The variety of settings, events and activities make the park attractive to a wide range of people. Representatives of all age groups, races, ability levels (and presumably incomes) were observed during the site visit. WDC is committed to universal access and even provides braille signage and business cards.



Waterfront Development Corporation; Photo below by Rick Bell



Clockwise from top: Water play area, Brown-Forman Amphitheater, braille signage, Swing Garden, Big Four Bridge

Spur redevelopment of adjacent land

While the park consists of 85 acres, WDC's planning and design review influences a total of 120 acres including about 35 acres of development sites in the so-called Downtown Waterfront District. The single largest parcel has been used for the Louisville Slugger field, a minor league baseball stadium that incorporates an abandoned railway station. Other major projects are residential. On the blocks that surround WDC sites, a considerable amount of development has taken place or is planned. RiverPark Place, discussed in some detail below, was not part of the park or the district. While much has been accomplished, it has taken 25 years and there are still many gaps in the fabric waiting for development.

CONCESSIONS AND DESIGN REVIEW

There are two concessions in the park – Joe's Crab Shack, part of a national chain, and Tumbleweed, a local restaurant with a southwestern menu. WDC had two purposes in granting the concessions: (1) to provide food service amenities at the waterfront to attract and serve park visitors and (2) to generate revenue to support park maintenance and other operations. Leaving the restaurants' design to their private developers – albeit with review by WDC – resulted in some compromises. Joe's was the first one built and thus the first to go through the design review process. While WDC reports that it was able to require some changes from the owners, it was clear that some members of the design review panel were not satisfied with the result, suggesting that its appearance is inconsistent with the balance of the park and their overall esthetic goals. The master plan consultant argued in favor of much more stringent design standards and controls, but concern for revenue generation and risk avoidance appear to have prevailed



Clockwise from top: Louisville Slugger Field, Joe's Crab Shack, adjacent retail development

over more thorough project review. Tumbleweed was part of phase two and is neither offensive nor particularly attractive. Both restaurants are reported to be successful and utilized by a range of park visitors.

Another example of the limits of WDC's design review is a small commercial strip development across River Road from the boathouse area of the park. Though privately developed, it was subject to WDC's review. It is not obvious from looking at its design, materials, landscaping or signage what impact design review might or might not have had since it looks like a typical strip mall found anywhere.

WDC's design review process is now highly codified (and available on their website) and applies to all development within the Waterfront Review Overlay District. When businesses in the district decide



Waterfront Development Corporation

to build new or renovate existing structures, change their signage or landscaping, or undertake any other exterior changes, those projects must gain approval. WDC provides a guide that outlines the process and lists the information and drawings that must be submitted. The actual reviews are done by WDC staff and representatives of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. It will be interesting to see how effective this process becomes as it engages new projects.

PUBLIC ART

Waterfront Park incorporates four main pieces of public art.

- The Lincoln Memorial, by local sculptor Ed Hamilton, occupies a special part of the park. Lincoln had deep roots in the area and Mary Todd was a Louisville native. The town played a special role in the evolution of his thinking about slavery. It was on Louisville's waterfront that Lincoln watched slaves being loaded on to barges and riverboats and later wrote that the sight tormented him throughout his life. Hamilton created an accessible, 12-foot high seated version of Lincoln that invites many visitors to sit on



Clockwise from top left: Lincoln Memorial, Gracehoper sculpture, Lincoln Memorial interpretive panels, Marvin Finn sculptures

his lap to be photographed. He also made four bas relief panels that illustrate Lincoln's early years in Kentucky, his leadership of a divided house, and his hatred of slavery. The panels lead up to an amphitheater with Lincoln seated on rocks in the center and famous quotations inscribed on the seat risers. The \$2.3 million Memorial was funded by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the family of Harry S. Frazier, Jr., and the Kentucky Historical Society/ Kentucky Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

- Gracehoper, by nationally famous sculptor Tony Smith, was donated to the Kentucky Center for the Arts by the Humana Corporation and is on long-term loan to Waterfront Park.
- Tetra by Charles O. Perry on the Festival Plaza at Waterfront Park was donated to the park by the children and grandchildren of Sally Brown, a long-time Waterfront Park benefactor.
- There are 32 whimsical metal sculptures by the local African-American folk artist, Marvin Finn, depicting imaginary birds installed in an area near the Great Lawn. Originally constructed of wood for a variety of owners, in 2001 WDC had them enlarged and recreated in painted steel. Children appear to enjoy interacting with them.

It is interesting to note that WDC did not choose to adapt or incorporate any of the remnants of its industrial past into the art works or park design, as some other parks in the United States – such as the contemporaneous Gassworks in Seattle or more recent Bronx River Parkway's Cement Plant Park, or European ones like Duisburg-Nord Industrial Landscape Park in Germany.



New bridge construction

THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT I-64

Although WDC planners and designers worked to mitigate the impact of the elevated highway on the park, a local movement arose in favor of eliminating the section of I-64 that runs between downtown and the river, including the area that has become the park. This group, calling itself "8664" proposes alternatives, including directing thru-traffic to a ring-road to bypass downtown. One of its founders, Tyler Allen, a businessman who has educated himself about urban design and transportation issues, expounds a well-constructed set of arguments in favor of removal of the highway. Allen cites a number of other cities – including Baltimore, Portland (Oregon), San Francisco, and others – that have successfully accomplished these goals. While there appeared

to be latent support for the idea in a number circles, it apparently did not gain real traction and came to be viewed as a political liability – a fight that would require significant resources and still be unlikely to win. Instead, the state is moving forward with the expansion of the system and started construction on the new downtown bridge adjacent to I-65 in summer 2013.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

For many reasons, planning and development of this project stretched over 25 years. These include the scale, complexity, and particularly the financing that dictated incremental construction. The protracted schedule is not necessarily a negative, however, since it allowed adjustments over time and afforded the opportunity to learn as the project evolved. In addition, by opening sections of park as they were completed, establishing popular annual events, and keeping the public well informed, WDC was able to maintain community interest and enthusiasm.

Elements of the process (paraphrased or quoted from the project application) include:

- Creating an independent entity to guide planning and development.
- Garnering public input to determine the community's wishes for what the project should be, including 10 public forums that were held over two years; covering all areas of the community.
- Developing the "wish list" into a program of components for use by the project designer.
- Fundraising for the master plan and property acquisition.
- Acquiring 85 acres of property from numerous owners.

- Rezoning the project and surrounding areas into the Waterfront District and creating a design review process.
- Conducting an international search for a master planner/park designer.
- Continuing to garner feedback and inform the public.
- Developing a park maintenance program, phased in as portions of the park opened.
- Splitting construction into manageable phases, with portions of each phase opening as they were completed.
- Scheduling public celebrations for groundbreakings and dedications to keep public support and interest high.
- Developing an event policy for park rental and managing the booking of events.

Planning Phase – 1986 to 1991

A hallmark of WDC has been its commitment to community outreach. Soon after it was established, with a mandate to improve the waterfront, WDC hosted a series of public forums to find out what the community wanted. It was the strong expression of interest in green space that led to the commitment to construct a park. Prior to the forums a park was not necessarily WDC's focus; its original mandate was broadly to improve and clean up the area. Following the initial forums, and for a number of years, WDC staff averaged more than 85 public presentations per year to keep the community updated on construction and they currently average 30 to 40 per year.

WDC representatives visited a number of other cities to study their waterfronts and learn about what worked and what didn't. As the project has evolved, they found other cities coming to them. For example, Memphis, Tennessee apparently created a development

organization for their riverfront closely modeled on WDC's corporate structure.

In 1990, once it had been determined that a park would be the focus of waterfront development, an international search was held for a designer that generated 85 responses. From this pool, four firms were short-listed and invited to come to Louisville and discuss their planning approach and concepts for the park. Based on their presentation, Hargreaves Associates – at the time a young, “up-and-coming” landscape architecture firm – was selected to develop the master plan and design for the park.

As the master plan was being developed, another series of forums was held to gather input on park design. The following goals and aspirations were expressed at the forums and informed the park plan and design, as interpreted by the designers and rendered into an almost biblical vernacular. The following is quoted directly from the Master Plan.

- Let the river be a river.
- Let the people of Louisville have a green space by the river.
- Let the Waterfront design come from the natural ecology of the river's shore, and find its way into the city.
- Let the city edge be redesigned to preserve, enhance and respect the classic grid and density established in the early years of the city as it grew out of the wilderness.
- Let the urban force on the one side meet the natural continuum of the Ohio River on the other, in a people-oriented place that attracts active participation.
- Let the evolution of Louisville meld the natural setting of the Waterfront with the development needs of a large city.

Construction Phase I – 1994 to 1999

Phase I included much of the park from the western edge up to, but not including, the Big Four Bridge. The ground breaking for Waterfront Park took place in 1994. Mass excavations were completed in 1995 and the wharf in 1996. The first concert series held there in 1997, the same year that plans were announced for Louisville Slugger Field and Joe's Crab Shack, Linear Park and the first children's play area opened. In 1998, the Great Lawn, Harbor Lawn and Harbor were dedicated and on July 4, 1999, the entire Phase I was dedicated.

Construction Phase II – 1999 to 2004

Phase II, covering 34 acres, completed the east end of the park. Key components include the second children's play area, a café, the amphitheater, a boathouse, additional parking, continuation of the riverfront walking path, and more picnic areas, meadows, and groves. In 2000, docks were installed at the eastern end of the park and River Road was widened. In June 2004, the balance of Phase II opened. However it did not include the spiral ramp up to the Big Four Bridge as originally intended; the ramp required redesign due to geotechnical and flood control issues and was postponed to Phase III.

Construction Phase III – 2005 to 2012

Phase III filled in the last important piece – the Big Four Bridge and completed the middle of the park. It also included the announcement of an agreement to develop Riverview Park and RiverPark Place by Poe Development and WDC. The Lincoln Memorial was completed in 2009. In 2010 the Big Four Lawn opened and the ramp was completed, although the bridge was not refurbished until the next year and opened in early 2013, essentially completing the main elements of the park. The landing on the Indiana side is projected to be completed in 2014.

By summer of 2013, construction began on the new highway bridge over the river. The new bridge will land squarely in the middle of the park, eliminating some portions of park green space and making it more difficult – and temporarily impossible – to walk the length of the park along the river.

While the project may be “complete” in terms of building out of the master plan, it is not really “finished” (as of the time of this publication). An architect is studying the further development of the unutilized land under the ramp up to the Big Four Bridge, and the development at Riverview Park and RiverPark Place is only partially completed, with the first phase of what may be as many as four underway as of early 2013.

ACTIVITIES, EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING

The park attracts more than 1.5 million visitors every year who engage in a wide variety of informal and scheduled activities. There are paths for walking and biking as well as tables, swings and seating areas for picnics, people- and river-watching and general relaxation. There are two playgrounds and a water play area. The park is also used as a venue for private activities such as weddings and family reunions, as well as corporate gatherings. The lawns provide space for pickup games of football or soccer.

The recently opened Big Four Bridge appears to be enticing large numbers of people to make the trek across the river. This will likely increase when it becomes possible to complete the trip to the Indiana side, pending completion of the northern bridge landing. Even before the northern landing opened, there were thousands of pedestrians

and hundreds of cyclists on the bridge each day. Usage is, of course, higher during the summer and on weekends.

Riverboat tours are offered by WDC, which operates the Belle of Louisville – the oldest, operating steam-powered paddle wheelers in the nation. The Friends of the Waterfront, a group of citizens who raise money and offer a range of volunteer services, developed curriculum guides for elementary, middle school and high school levels that are used by teachers and students to learn about the park including, Lincoln, local ecology, and history.

The park is host to a substantial number and variety of scheduled events including festivals, concerts, and fireworks shows – a total of about 120 to 150 annually. While scheduled events occur year-round, the majority take place from spring through fall. Although little or nothing happens in January, there are a surprising number of events in December as well as some in February; by March the park is quite busy. Water play activities are offered at one of the playgrounds from April through October.

The official dedication ceremony for the first 55 acres of the park took place on July 4th, 1999, and an Independence Day festival occurs every year, drawing large crowds. The largest annual event is *Thunder Over Louisville*, marking the start of the Kentucky Derby festivities, which draws up to 700,000 people and requires that surrounding streets be closed.

Other major draws include the *Waterfront Wednesday* concerts offered once a month during the summer. They were started in 2002, intended to attract young people who come to the park after work.

The local public radio station, WFPK, co-sponsors the concerts and identifies and invites a variety of bands, mostly emerging artists who agree to perform for free in return for the exposure. This event became so successful that it has been moved from Harbor Lawn to the larger Big Four Lawn.

According to events coordinator Ashley Smith, WDC consciously encourages events and works hard and flexibly to help organizations carry them out. Smith, who has been with the organization since 1998 when the first portions of the park opened, and her small staff have developed a detailed process for holding an event in the park, including an eight-page application form and a twelve-page contract which resembles a short-term lease for one or more defined portions of the park. Sponsors are required to clean up after their event in a specific period of time and must post large deposits for damage and mess, with additional punitive charges if WDC has to clean up after them, although these are rarely needed. Examples of events include the Iron-man Triathlon, sand volleyball, and a fashion week. Many not-for-profits use park for fund-raisers and pay a set fee based on expected attendance.

Some of the organizations that sponsor major events include:

- The *Forecastle Festival*, a summer music/culture/environmental festival that draws fans from across the United States (half of attendees come from outside Kentucky) – up to 25,000 of them per day for three days. Founder J.K. McKnight claims that this is one of top festivals in the country. As his festival grew, he wanted to move it to the park and now uses the Great Lawn, the Harbor Lawn, and the wharf area for as many as six performance stages. Event partners include Patagonia, Brown-Forman and others,

and the proceeds support not-for-profit ecological projects.

J.K. McKnight considers the park and river setting to be important and claims he would never leave it for another venue. The festival pays WDC \$25,000 to use park for nine days, including set up, the three day festival, and take down/clean up. McKnight praises WDC's flexibility and accommodating attitude – for example, the first time they ran the festival, WDC let them use their offices.

- The Louisville Sports Commission (LSC) has brought the Ironman Triathlon to Waterfront Park every year since 2007, and it is scheduled to continue at least through 2016. LSC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed to bring sports events to Louisville in order to attract tourists and improve the quality of life for locals who might attend or participate in an event. It also aims to contribute to defining the "brand" of the community, which does indeed seem to be very sports-oriented. While LSC utilizes a variety of venues, Waterfront Park hosts their key event – the Ironman Triathlon. This is the largest full-distance triathlon in United States. 3,000 people swim 2.4 miles downstream then transition onto the Great Lawn where there are 3,000 bikes (typically worth \$10,000 each) waiting for them. Upon completing the bike ride at the park, they run on a defined course. The park provides the essential transition spaces – from swim-to-bike and bike-to-run. The safety of swimmers in what is normally the river's shipping channel is a critical concern and LSC works with the Army Corps of Engineers to close it to traffic. There are also 100 kayaks and 15 trained boat crews in the water. When the World Triathlon organization looked at the park for the first time, they are reported to have "gone gaga". The event brings in \$5 million per year, generating 14,000 hotel-nights and other expenditures.



Event photos: Waterfront Development Corporation




Clockwise from top left: Waterfront Wednesday, Ironman Triathlon, HappyTail Hour, bicycle rentals

Local businesses have opened that relate to it, for example selling and servicing bikes. There are 500 Kentucky participants and many more local triathlons now take place. The park rental fee is paid directly by the World Triathlon organization and LSC partners with them. For three years (2006-2008), LSC also put on a beach volleyball exhibition tournament – with Olympic stars Misty May Treanor and Kerri Walsh – for which they set up a 5,000 seat temporary stadium in the park. LSC director Greg Fante indicated

that WDC wants to keep the park pristine and characterizes the organization as being “persnickety” – but indicated that they never say “no” and he praised WDC for carrying out the “complete transformation” of an industrial wasteland.

- The Kentucky Derby Festival, a civic non-profit organization independent of the race, has 75 directors and 22 full-time staff, with a total annual budget of \$10 million. The organization is 58 years old and started with a parade. It sponsors 70 events over the two weeks before the race and the two major events take place in the park. The first is *Thunder Over Louisville* and features Zambelli fireworks and an air show. It has a \$1.5 to \$2 million budget and draws up to 700,000 people to both sides of the river. The Kentucky Derby Festival is the largest event in the park, utilizing the entire area, and even involves the interstate highway and bridge. Their second event is called *Fest-a-Ville* – a family-oriented festival with multiple attractions, including a *Chow Wagon* area with adult-oriented food and alcohol. *Fest-a-Ville* takes up the Great Lawn for the 10-day event and attracts 15,000




**THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL
AT WATERFRONT PARK**

Visitor's Guide & Activities
for use in conjunction with the
Kentucky Historical Society's
*Beyond the Log Cabin:
Kentucky's Abraham Lincoln
Teacher's Guide*

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Waterfront Development Corporation

to 25,000 per day. The organizers find the park rental charge to be modest and report that WDC tries hard to accommodate every need. The festival contributed \$125,000 to initial capital campaign for the park and also installed permanent underground telephone lines.

- WFPK Public Radio partners with Waterfront Park to put on the *Waterfront Wednesdays* concert series, now in its 11th year. There are six free concerts each year on the last Wednesday of the months of April through September. They started at the Harbor Lawn triangle but outgrew it three years ago. The notion of putting on the concerts grew out of public radio's pondering what it could do to better reflect the community. Program director Stacy Owen books the bands that play for free, and schedules a local act to open each concert. The emphasis is on new music; they also have upscale food and bar. WDC provides park for free since it co-sponsors the events.

These event sponsors find the Waterfront Park facilities to be very good and meet their needs as well as and usually better than any other local options. For example, there are docks along the river that some attendees utilize if they arrive by boat. If the event uses the river – such as for the swimming leg of the triathlon or for fireworks, the Coast Guard is right there, which is very convenient for coordination and approvals. There is a wide variety of kinds and sizes of settings and venues. Access is good and there are about 1,400 parking spaces adjacent to the park. While the infrastructure is generally good, it has been suggested that more power would be useful for various events.



PARK MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY

At the time of the site visit, Gary Pepper from WDC had been responsible for park maintenance for 17 years. The maintenance program has evolved as the park developed and now has eight staff that are able to cover most trades, including mechanical. Their top priority is trash removal and keeping the park clean.

In April 2013 the park was just beginning to show its spring season growth – leaves were starting to emerge and grass was beginning to turn green. There appeared to be some potential for increased attention and maintenance. Turf had not yet filled in, some trees still showed damage from winter storms, and the “naturalized” river bank was showing signs of erosion – for example, the mesh intended to stabilize it was exposed. The natural inlet looked rather untidy at the time of the site visit, with driftwood and other flotsam collects along the banks. However, we subsequently learned that the vegetation in the inlet is cut down once a year. While George Hargreaves, the park designer, indicated that plantings continued to generally follow the original plan, he had not visited for some years and it appeared to the site visitors that the plantings and paving could have benefited from additional attention. Hargreaves did mention that WDC had, early in the process, required replacement of some natural meadow grass areas with turf grass and the reduction to a single naturalized inlet.

WDC contracts for toilet cleaning, which is done every morning, and for locking the toilets at night (toilets are open from April to November). These efforts are supplemented by the “Clean Team” – 8 to 12 young people who work in the summer and are paid with corporate sponsorships.

Clockwise from top left: Maintenance vehicle, riverbank erosion, rest rooms, planting beds, WDC offices

The only other contracted service is for supplemental security. From 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, the maintenance staff has primary responsibility. All of the staff wear shirts with a logo ID and are trained to interact with the public, providing information as well as security. Should there be an incident, they call the city police. Private security patrols the park from around 5 pm until about 11 pm, on flexible hours. City police patrol the park as well, intermittently using all-terrain vehicles, horses, bikes, and boats on the river; these alternative means are intended to be less intimidating than a squad car. The most common types of security incidents are graffiti and disruptive behavior – for example from an occasional belligerent homeless person. Park design followed CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles, employing the notion that the greatest security derives from high levels of use and good visibility.

FINANCING

Almost two-thirds of the funding for the park's development was provided by the city, county and state, with more than one-third coming from local corporations, foundations and individuals (Table 1). Today, WDC continues to receive the majority of its operational funding from Louisville Metro government and the state, while generating the balance of its income from event rentals and business leases. (All figures were provided by WDC.)

Another other way of accounting for what was spent on the park, including infrastructure that was not WDC's responsibility, breaks the costs down by phase – and adds almost \$20 million to the above figures (Table 2).

TABLE 1: SOURCES OF ORIGINAL CAPITAL FUNDING

Source	Amount
Private donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations	\$33,500,000
State funding for general construction	\$25,000,000
City funding	\$10,500,000
Federal funding	\$9,400,000
State Transportation Department funding for renovation of Big Four Bridge	\$12,000,000
State Funding for Lincoln Memorial	\$2,000,000
Federal EPA Grant for River Bank Stabilization	\$2,300,000
Total	\$94,700,000

Note – these are the amounts that paid for WDC's portion of the project; see also the next table.

TABLE 2: DEVELOPMENT COSTS BY PHASE

Development Costs By Phase <i>(including infrastructure)</i>	Amount
Waterfront Park (Infrastructure & Phase I)	\$58,000,000
Waterfront Park (Phase II)	\$15,000,000
Waterfront Park (Phase III)	\$22,000,000
Waterfront Park Big Four Bridge & Ramp	\$18,000,000
Total	\$112,870,000

The table is excerpted from WDC's "Economic Report: the impact of Louisville's Waterfront Park," Fall 2011.

WDC's annual operating budget of \$2.24 million is allocated approximately 60% to personnel and labor, 23% to maintenance and 17% for events. In terms of sources, 43% of the budget is contributed by Louisville Metro Government, which has nine seats on the WDC board of directors, and 19% from the state, which has six seats on board. Thirty-eight percent comes from park-generated revenue, which includes 3.5% of gross sales from restaurants and 4% for the marina – their rent for the land they occupy. WDC is somewhat flexible on the rents and when Tumbleweed had a rough patch gave them a temporary discount, now expired. WDC also raises revenue from events, but only enough to cover the actual costs.

WDC also raises money for specific capital expenditures. These average \$80,000 per year, but always for specific projects, not general operations. In early 2013 WDC was in the process of raising \$1.4 million for the installation of LED lighting on the Big Four Bridge.

WDC also benefits from a foundation with an \$11 million endowment funded from earned interest and lease payments. The income is exclusively dedicated to paying for major repairs and improvements, not operations. WDC draws only from the interest, spending about \$80,000 per year, or the equivalent of less than 1% of the capital, which they consider low or conservative.

IMPACT – DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENT

Since its inception over 25 years ago, Waterfront Park transformed a derelict and degraded waterfront into a new town commons for the city, attracting over 1.5 million visitors a year. The park has drawn attention from other waterfront cities and is one of five from around

the world featured in the *Reclaiming the Edge: Urban Waterways and Civic Engagement* exhibit at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, DC (on display October 15, 2012 – November 3, 2013).

The park project also catalyzed an estimated \$1.3 billion investment in the Waterfront District including its own construction, residential apartments and condominiums, Louisville Slugger Field and the 22,000 seat Yum! Center – a sports and concert arena (Table 3). While it may be worth questioning how much would have happened without WDC, some development appears to be a direct outcome of the project, while other projects are probably part of an overall synergy of progress that includes the refurbishing of the former Galleria into an entertainment complex on Fourth Street, a few blocks inland from the river.

The Yum! Center accounts for \$450 million of investment in the Waterfront District. While not directly related to the park, it probably would have been constructed elsewhere if the park had not been built. Other projects were directly sponsored by WDC. Generally, these are projects that were built on land WDC owned or controlled, like RiverPark Place, and others that the organization encouraged or facilitated. However, WDC was adamant that public money should not be spent on the developments that should be funded privately. Examples of private projects include Waterfront Park Place, a high-rise residential development facing the Great Lawn. Another adjacent development is Preston Pointe, a mixed-use residential and office building.

Key developers and related projects include:

- **Nicki Sibley, Poe Properties, RiverPark Place.** This project is being developed in cooperation with WDC, which selected Poe after a series of failed attempts to conclude a deal with other developers due, in substantial part, to unfortunate timing in the real estate and financial markets. It was important to WDC to have people living next to the park, to stimulate use and to develop a strong constituency of supporters. The project includes a commercial marina, extensions of the park and its walkways, and several phases of housing, starting with 167 units just completing construction and rent-up at the time of the site visit.

The land was contributed by WDC, which receives ground rent plus 4% of gross receipts from the marina. The developers reported that generally available tax rebates also subsidized the project, which rents the apartments at market rates. The project was designed by a local architect, assisted in master planning by Goody-Clancy and landscape design by Halvorson Design Partnership, both Boston-based firms. Later phases are planned that include high-rise condos and additional low-rise apartments. The master plan shows that the later phase of towers will block river views for some of the apartments, but the developer did not think this would be a problem.

Rents currently range from \$700 per month for a studio to \$1,900 for a two-bedroom unit. Infrastructure costs were high due to flood protection measures. The apartments are built above a garage so they are raised above the 100-year flood plain. This required an expenditure of \$2 million for excavation,

approvals, and pile foundations. The developer constructed pathways that extend the trails from the park and are owned by WDC. The developer was required to construct the marina at a cost of \$7 million, which received tax credits and grants that offset some of the costs. It includes a floating dock shop and pump out station. The developer claims to have put in about \$5 million of the total of \$12 million up-front costs. It appears that this will be a commercially successful project. Rent-up was 95% completed as of April 2013 when the last apartments were not yet finished, and was the fastest the developer had ever experienced. Renters are mainly young professionals who work downtown, medical students, and empty nesters. There are limited housing alternatives in the downtown area, and the amenities of park access and river are a plus. Not including the expensive



RiverPark Place

infrastructure, this project cost around \$60,000 per unit, which is typical for Louisville. Poe is reviewing its plans for the first condo tower and plaza, which may proceed in the near future. The developer is concerned that the condo market is saturated as some downtown projects still have unsold units that were built before the recession. The master plan calls for a 16-story tower, but they are now planning to start with eight stories in the next phase.

- **Valle Jones, Whiskey Row Lofts.** The Jones family invested in this property long before the creation of the park. Valle Jones' father was a corporate lawyer and an amateur magician who bought some buildings about two blocks from what is now the park. He built a theater for his performances and a restaurant



Waterfront Park Place

that utilized only a portion of the available space in his buildings, which occupied almost half the block. Whiskey Row Lofts, which totals about 120,000 square feet, thrived through the 1960's and 70's as a live music venue on Washington Street, but there was not much happening above the ground floor. Its popularity tapered off by 1980's and 90's, but by then plans for the park were starting to emerge.

The Jones family had a vision for the block that included 24/7 uses on the ground floor with apartments and offices above. Valle Jones worked on the project for her father while she was in business school, at which time they wanted to entice an out-of-area developer for what would have been a 500,000 square foot project. However, in 1984 the developers said "look at what's between you and the river. Until someone does something with the river you can't do the project." The creation of Waterfront Park was absolutely critical for this development to go forward. As the park emerged, the Jones family began to work on phase one of their development with a local co-developer, Bill Weyland. In April 2013, the lofts were 98% complete along with five restaurants. All 36 apartments were leased. The development includes 17 parking spaces and three special event venues including a gallery and theater. Total project cost was \$19 million and the financing was supported with \$7.3 million in tax credit equities, as well as new and historic tax credits. They received three mortgages, all from Stockyards, a local bank.

The Jones family considers this initial phase successful and they are working on phase two, which consists of new construction behind reinforced historic storefronts. Phase two will have a

different group of investors but similar financing as phase one. It will be more entertainment-oriented with double the area for restaurants and live entertainment, with some offices and apartments. Because the site slopes down toward the river, the buildings will have ground floor access on both on Washington and Main Streets. Valle Jones believes that the river and the park are important amenities and that the Yum! Center is also a great draw. She observes that there are many potential development sites downtown in the form of surface parking lots. In her opinion, current financing constraints are what limit development, not lack of demand.

- **Dave Steinbrecher, The Ice House.** Dave Steinbrecher is a contractor who owns the former ice house, which was built in the early 1900s. The property is located two blocks east of Whiskey Row, and has similar dual ground floor exposures. He bought the project in 2007, and gutted and rebuilt it as a reception hall facing Washington Street which is used for events like weddings concerts. The structure includes an onsite catering company as well as the Main Street Café facing the other street. Steinbrecher is now considering finishing out the upper floors for housing. He thought about condos but is now leaning towards rental housing. The challenge is financing. Steinbrecher bought the property before the Yum! Center was announced when he considered it to be a considerable risk. However the environment changed as the Yum! Center and Louisville Slugger Field drew a lot of people to the area. In his opinion, while Waterfront Park was very important to the improved business climate in the area, it was not enough. Rather, he felt, the downtown and waterfront improvements should be seen as whole with the park tying them together.



Main Street

The revitalization of areas surrounding the park has also resulted in a huge jump in local employment. According to a 2011 survey by WDC (*Economic Report: the Impact of Louisville's Waterfront Park, Fall 2011*), employment in the Waterfront district – the area from the river to the north side of Market Street, including Main Street and between the Clark Memorial and Kennedy Bridge – has increased from about 400 to nearly 6,700 jobs, despite the fact that many of the original businesses were displaced by the park.

Table 3 lists investments in Waterfront Park and the surrounding area (source: WDC, *Economic Report: the impact of Louisville's Waterfront Park, Fall 2011*).

Overall, it appears fair to say that Waterfront Park has contributed to making downtown Louisville a more attractive, vital and energized place.

TABLE 3: PROJECT INVESTMENTS

Project Investments <i>(as of 2011; completed unless noted otherwise)</i>	
	Amount in millions
Catalyst Corner (r)	\$0.80
Clock Tower Building (r)	\$5.70
Cressman Center	\$1.00
Cobalt 301 East Main Building (r)	\$3.00
Cobalt Marketplace (r)	\$4.00
First and Main Garage	\$8.90
First and Main Redevelopment	\$19.20
Fleur-de-Lis LLC Redevelopment	\$22.50
Haymarket Project (underway)	\$300.00
Humana Waterside Garage	\$8.50
Icehouse (underway)	\$10.00
Joe's Crab Shack	\$1.70
Louisville Ballet	\$2.30
Louisville Extreme Park	\$2.50
Louisville RiverWalk	\$3.50
Louisville Slugger Field	\$26.30
Louisville Wharf	\$1.40
Marriott Residence Inn	\$13.50
Park Place Lofts	\$5.00
Petrus Restaurant and Nightclub	\$1.00
Preston Pointe	\$11.10
River Park Place (underway)	\$200.00
Romano L. Mazzoli Belvedere Connector	\$5.30
Sea Ray of Louisville	\$0.80
The Hub Apartments (announced)	\$3.50
Mercantile Lofts	\$7.00
Tumbleweed Southwest Grill	\$2.00
U of L Rowing Center	\$2.65
Waterfront Infrastructure	\$17.43
Waterfront Park (Phase I)	\$58.00
Waterfront Park (Phase II)	\$15.00
Waterfront Park (Phase III)	\$22.00
Waterfront Park Big Four Bridge & Ramp	\$18.00
Waterfront Park Place	\$48.00
Waterside Building	\$28.00
Whiskey Row Lofts (underway)	\$20.00
YUM! Center	\$450.00
Total	\$1,384.10



PROJECT IMPACT – COMMUNITY

According to WDC, the park provides a central gathering place for people from all parts of the community and daily users include people from every ethnic and social background and from every neighborhood or community in the city. In essence, the park may be the unique place in Louisville where people from every neighborhood, race and class feel comfortable sharing space. This was an explicit intention of the park planners. Many of the board members we interviewed emphasized the importance of the park as the city's central space and that the people feel a sense of ownership in it. They believe that, in fact, it is working even better than they hoped. This assertion is consistent with site visit observations over three days where park visitors appeared to be highly diverse.

Another measure of connection to the community is the fact that the park gets substantial support from local private and corporate philanthropists, who contributed substantially to initial construction and continue to fund projects when called upon.

CURRENT PROJECTS AND FUTURE PLANS

The last portion of the master plan, the Big Four Bridge, was completed in early 2013, although the ramp and landing on the Indiana side was still under construction. At the same time, WDC is in the process of seeking funds for LED lighting of the bridge, and the redesigning the area under the main ramp, which was to have been a land-form but is instead raised on columns.

WDC appears to be a trusted advocate for open space in the city and has been asked to advise on the design of a project to refurbish River View park to the south and west – a project which is only partially complete. WDC would also like to expand Waterfront Park toward the west past 9th Street into a largely African American community. There is a gap of six to eight blocks that has a river walk but does not offer a



Big Four Bridge Indiana landing under construction

river front park. The plan would be to extend River Road to the west. WDC's role is as an advocate for the project and they would help in its design and perhaps operations if it came to fruition.

WDC also has a connection (the vice president of WDC is on the board) to the planning for a botanical garden called Botanica just east of Waterfront Park that is moving forward with feasibility studies, fundraising and site acquisition.

Another related effort is the 21st Century Parks, a legacy project of the Olmstead Parks Conservancy that is sponsored by, among others, David Jones – founder of Humana – and his son Dan Jones. Both are park enthusiasts who were strong supporters of Waterfront Park. Their current project is The Parklands of Floyds Fork, planned for eastern and southern Louisville. It will be one of the largest new urban park systems in the nation, encompassing nearly 4,000 acres of preserved land, some of which is developed for recreational activities.

Assessing Success

This section assesses Waterfront Park's degree of success in terms of meeting WDC's goals, the Selection Committee's questions and discussion, and other factors that emerged during the site visit.

- Reconnect the city to the Ohio River, its very reason for being, providing public access and a reminder of the city's history

The park succeeds in meeting this goal – it offers visual and physical connections – and functions as a magnet drawing people to the river, strengthening the urban fabric. Once there, it provides interpretive

plaques and teaching curricula explaining local and site-specific history, ecology, and other topics.

- [Involve the community in planning for the new park and foster a feeling of ownership](#)

WDC was exemplary in its outreach program and responsive to what participants expressed. In fact, the site might not have become a park without the “overwhelming” request for open space.

- [Make a place where all races, ages and social classes feel comfortable together](#)

The park draws lots of people and provides a unique venue for bringing diverse parts of the community together by offering facilities and activities that appeal to a very wide range of interests.

- [Clean up the industrial wasteland along the river and make a more attractive approach to the city](#)

Waterfront Park has transformed a derelict river front and created an attractive gateway to the city. Before the park, the approach was described as an embarrassment. Now it is considered an icon, transforming the image of the city.

- [Tailor the park to unique features of Louisville – its history and sense of place](#)

The park design responds to local needs and desires, incorporating features such as playgrounds, riverfront walkways, landscaped areas for active and passive recreation, boat launches and marinas, and plazas for events – amenities commonly found in comparable parks. It includes some references to aspects of the site’s ecological and cultural history, including a new inlet intended to resemble natural conditions, public

art – such as the Lincoln Memorial – created by local artists, and an operable National Historic Landmark Mississippi River-style steamboat. The design does not respond to the site’s more recent industrial past by incorporating elements of industrial archeology, as some similarly situated parks do, such as Gas Works Park in Seattle or Concrete Plant Park in the Bronx. Likewise, the limited presence of native plantings and materials, such as locally sourced stone or recycled building materials, does little to root the park to its setting.

- [Overcome key challenges of the site – especially elevated and surface roads and flood control – in an unobtrusive manner](#)

Given the context in which planning for the park began in the early 1990’s, including the decision to accept the existing elevated highway and design the park around it, the initial park design and implementation should be considered successful. The flood control strategy is both clever and effective – tilting the park down under the highway and constructing the river-edge portions so that water flows underneath. WDC was able to negotiate relocation of a highway on-ramp that blocked the main connection between the park and downtown. Short of removing the highway – which WDC chose not to attempt – this was, in its time, an effective approach. However, this success will be undermined by the addition of the new six-lane highway bridge running through the center of the park, significantly adding to the impact of the car on park visitors. Given changing attitudes towards the impact of urban highways – including the removal of existing highways in cities like Boston, Chattanooga, Milwaukee, Portland (Oregon), and San Francisco – it is disappointing that WDC chose not to engage in discussions that considered the impact of the new bridge and alternative approaches, especially when other voices in the community – such as the “8664” initiative – were doing so. WDC

determined that they could not succeed and chose not to risk valuable political capital.

- [Reuse the abandoned rail bridge over the Ohio River to create a pedestrian and bicycle link to Southern Indiana](#)

This is complete, except for the ramp that is Indiana's responsibility and it is under construction. The bridge is a popular destination and offers views of the park and downtown Louisville that were not previously available.

- [Be a catalyst for the revitalization of the areas of downtown adjacent to the waterfront](#)

There is no question that the transformation of downtown over the past 25 years has been remarkable – or that the park has contributed greatly to it – directly and indirectly. It has not been the sole factor, but rather a very important piece of a more general synergy.

Other Considerations:

- [Organization and leadership](#)

WDC was intelligently organized as a quasi-independent entity that included representation from all levels of government (city, county and state) and provided continuity that transcended any single administration. David Karem appears to have been a capable leader, whose political background fit well the needs of the nascent organization. Some thought has been given to succession, but it is not clear what qualifications would best move the organization and park into the next phase of evolution.

- [Quality of planning](#)

WDC had a very solid process of outreach and involvement of community. The organization sought – and received – real input to define the project's goals. For example: when the people of Louisville were asked what they wanted, they said open space, and that's what they got. Outreach continues, including presentations to and cultivation of future supporters and philanthropists.

WDC was astute in their phasing, biting off chunks they could finance, getting some areas done quickly so that people could start using the park, and celebrating each phase to keep the progress in the public's eye. The middle section was left for Phase III, when it would more or less have to be done to complete the park, with the pedestrian bridge the last element to be finished.

- [Quality of park design and maintenance](#)

WDC hired George Hargreaves, a strong-willed landscape architect with a relatively new design firm who presented ideas that they liked. In turn, he and his firm created a bold master plan that introduced a new landscape on a site that had been significantly altered and degraded by decades of industrial use. The overall approach works well, offering a variety of settings for different types and scales of activities and facilitating a phased construction process. Additionally, the design employs the brilliant gesture of tilting the plane of the great lawn down under the highway to open up views to the river and physically reconnect the city with the waterfront. The park was and continues to be an important, early example of what has now become more common in current park design – the transformation of former industrial land into parkland through the creation of a new landscape and plantings.

While the overall design is strong, its implementation was less successful in respect to some details. The large, unrelieved areas of lawn and concrete pavement – while practical and economical to install and maintain, and providing venues for large gatherings – looked barren in early spring. Light fixtures, benches and railings seem rather institutional and generic. It appears that some of the design details have been compromised for ease of maintenance. For the most part, except for the planting beds adjacent to downtown, landscaped areas appear sparse. Given the evolution of landscape architecture and urban park design over the past thirty years, the absence of attention to native plants and habitats, sustainable landscapes and maintenance practices, and detailing of fixtures and hardscapes is notable. Now that the park and WDC are well established and valued within the community, it might be appropriate to invest time and resources in changes and improvements to the park and maintenance that reflect best practices and aspirations of leading twenty-first century parks.

- [Effectiveness of design review process](#)

The design review process appears to have been compromised by a reticence to impact potential development. Some of the reviewers expressed dissatisfaction with the limits on their powers, particularly with respect to the development projects within the park – including the two restaurant concessions (especially Joe’s Crab Shack) and the new apartments at the east end. The designs range from inappropriate (Joe’s Crab Shack) to undistinguished (RiverPlace Place apartments). Perhaps WDC has been too “hungry” to get projects moving or did not build enough “teeth” into its mandate to be able to insist on better design.

- [WDC and the park as a model for other cities](#)

While unique to Louisville, a number of aspects of the project could be adapted to other cities. Many urban waterfront communities seek information about the project and express particular interest in WDC’s organizational structure and funding. Other lessons include the importance of being an informed, involved client and putting in place a public process that gains significant input from the community and keeps them involved. Design features such as the tilted planes to connect to the river (if you can’t get rid of an elevated highway) and infrastructure that allows flooding to occur “naturally” could all be applied elsewhere.

Communities that have consulted with WDC include Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Birmingham, Buffalo, Chattanooga, Cincinnati, Davenport, Detroit, Memphis, Owensboro, Paducah, Philadelphia, Richmond and Tulsa. International delegations have come from Nepal, Russia, Turkmenistan, the Yangtze River Basin, and Wakayama. Academic architecture and design programs have come from or invited them to Ball State University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Harvard University, Louisiana State University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and University of Kentucky. At the time of the visit, Louisville’s waterfront was one of five cities featured in a year-long exhibit at the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, DC.

- The park and its relationship to evolving concepts in landscape design

The master plan for the park was created over 25 years ago. While some modifications and updates were incorporated in the later phases, the original plan was followed quite closely. The design incorporates a range of formal, geometric aspects as well as more pastoral, romantic ones – in effect representing or reconciling what could be opposing trends in landscape design. While substantial ecological design concepts of the day were incorporated – such as naturalized river banks allowing for periodic flooding, landscape design practices have evolved considerably since Louisville Waterfront Park was designed. A park designed today would likely include more naturalized areas – and

less turf grass, and possibly some recognition of the Louisville’s more recent industrial past. Given the decades-long process of creating the park, it is surprising that some of these current concepts didn’t find their way into the site.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Selection Committee recognized Louisville Waterfront Park for its success in reclaiming the waterfront, and creating a new public space that brings the community together and reconnects the City of Louisville with its historic origins along the Ohio River. The Park created a new gateway to the city and a source of civic pride that has



Waterfront Wednesday

become a magnet for public life, becoming the primary place in the city that draws people of many ages and from a diversity of incomes and cultural backgrounds for activities and events. The recent opening of the Big Four Bridge significantly adds to the park's value, not only for Louisville, but also for communities on the Indiana side of the Ohio River.

The Selection Committee acknowledged the significant scope, scale and challenges addressed by the project over the 25 years of its planning, design and development. These included ecological issues in remediating and redeveloping former industrial land, tackling a complex network of transportation infrastructure, and planning for river navigation and flood control. The design cleverly solved the challenge of re-connecting downtown with the riverfront in spite of the looming presence of an elevated interstate, in the process making the river visible and accessible from downtown while providing protection from 100-year floods.

The Committee commended the park for its role as an early model for urban waterfront redevelopment. The City of Louisville not only figured out a way to reclaim its waterfront for people, but was also among the earliest to do so. Its success inspired efforts in other cities across the world, and the park continues to serve as a model strategy that makes a commitment to public space and repurposes the land without privatizing the waterfront.

Additionally, the Committee recognized the Park for its economic impact on downtown Louisville, spurring new commercial, residential and institutional development on adjacent land. They acknowledged the significance of the design overlay district and design review process

overseen by Waterfront Development Corporation as a step towards fostering better development, but questioned the overall impact on the quality of the design.

The Selection Committee did not feel that the park was as successful in meeting its expressed goal of creating a design that was unique to Louisville. In particular, they expressed disappointment at the lack of references in the park design to the industrial legacy of the site, noting that as a nation "we can't ignore it anymore; we're losing too many connections to who we were." They observed that the park design could have done more to respond to the site's unique ecological and cultural context and history, considering what was special about this river, landscape and setting. The Committee also noted that over the long period of the park's development and operation, relatively little appeared to have been modified or changed in response to experience, or changing ideas, needs and practices in landscape architecture – such as the current focus on the benefits of using native plantings as a part of sustainable design and maintenance. The Selection Committee also questioned whether the ongoing quality of the maintenance could be improved, especially given the existence of a generous endowment.

Finally, the Committee suggested that the lack of willingness to take on the issue of the new highway bridge may have been a lost opportunity, particularly in light of the increasing number of efforts in cities elsewhere in the country and the world to dismantle, relocate or bury waterfront highways.

Resources

INTERVIEWS*

Waterfront Development Corporation:

David Karem, President
Mike Kimmel, Vice President/Deputy Director
Cordell Lawrence, Finance Director
Ashley Cox, Director of Events
Gary Pepper, Park Manager
Marlene Grissom, Director of Special Projects
Margaret Walker, Information Officer
Linda Harris, CEO of the Belle of Louisville

Designers:

George Hargreaves, Hargreaves Associates
Steve Wiser, Architect, WDC design review committee
Ross Primmer, Architect, De Leon & Primmer Architecture
Nicole Walton, Brown-Forman, WDC and
Friends of the Waterfront board member

Economic Development:

Nicki Sibley, Poe Properties
Valle Jones, Whiskey Row Lofts
Dave Steinbrecher, Ice House
Ollie Barber, Barber Banaszynski & Hiatt, WDC Board Member

Events/Park Use:

J.K. McKnight, Forecastle Festival Founder
Greg Fante, Louisville Sports Commission
Matt Gibson, Kentucky Derby Festival
Stacy Owen, WFPK Public Radio

Louisville Metro Government:

Ellen Hesen, Mayor's Chief of Staff
Chris Poynter, Mayor's Director of Communication
(Mayor Greg Fischer was not available as he was attending the Final Four basketball game in Atlanta to watch Louisville win the national championship).

Others:

Ed Hamilton, artist
Rick Bell, historian
Clinton Deckard, Construction Solutions
Tyler Allen, 8664
Leadership Louisville – Class of 2013



Big Four Bridge

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