



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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JOINT MEETING ON JACKSONVILLE VETERANS MEMORIAL WALL

Minutes

August 4, 2025
4:30 p.m.

Location: Henry Cook Room

In attendance: Council Vice President Howland, Council Members Lahnen and Miller

Meeting Convened: 4:30 p.m.

Introduction

CVP Howland convened the meeting and called for introductions.

CVP Howland stated that, amid other Downtown development, the location of the Veterans Memorial Wall still needs to be determined. He noted that a few questions need to be answered: (1) how is the optimal location defined, (2) will the optimal location defined remain optimal in the future, and (3) can the wall be moved if a more optimal location is discovered? He also said they need to determine the cost of the wall and of any relocation if necessary.

He stated that they are holding the meeting now because of the upcoming budget process, during which the Council will set the majority of its legislative priorities. He said it was important to establish a consensus now.

CM Lahnen provided background information and noted two key priorities: the shade structure, for which he and CM Miller contributed funds from their strategic initiative, and a veterans and military members and family resource center. He indicated that CM Miller intends to introduce legislation to establish a fund for the resource center. He also said he will follow up with legislation to reallocate funds from another project in his district that came in under budget. He said that regardless of location, he wanted the wall to be located somewhere that respected the veterans and family members who may be on the wall. He also emphasized that it should be accessible with parking available for visitors and a shade structure.

He also wanted to be mindful of cost, noting that the price is \$6 million, with the Mayor proposing \$2 million from her budget. He wondered how much of the gap could be covered with private donors.

CM Miller affirmed CM Lahnen's statements and added that he is not tied to any particular course of action. He said all on the Council want to honor those on the wall and ensure they can visit it to pay their respects. He said that if it is to be permanent, then they should invest in a structure that will last for a long time. He said he was aware of a push to relocate the wall and was open to it if it could be done in a way that makes sense and doesn't cause damage. He also said they should be mindful of siting the wall in the sports and entertainment section of downtown, noting the need to balance high visibility with solemnity.

Current Plan for Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Wall—Harrison Conyers

Harrison Conyers, Director of Military and Veteran Affairs, provided a PowerPoint presentation, beginning with an overview of the wall, which is the nation's second-largest veterans memorial wall and the only one to honor veterans from all seven service branches.

He said a shield structure was proposed to symbolize protection, strength, and selfless service, honoring the profound sacrifice of our nation's veterans, supported by seven columns representing the seven service branches of the United States. He said the structure was designed to protect against both sun and rain. He added that it will have built-in fans and audio systems to support events. The shield will have a perforated star pattern that provides dappled light and shade. He continued, showing aerial views of potential lighting options: a programmable mesh lighting option or a spot-lighted option. He then offered structural designs from multiple angles.

CM Miller asked Mr. Conyers to provide the pros and cons of the different location options. Mr. Conyers outlined the benefits of moving the wall. He said they could move the location from what is essentially a parking lot. He said they could also recreate the wall plaza if relocated, and noted that they will need to make repairs and improvements if the wall remains in its current location. He said moving would also enable more commercial development in the area while creating a space dedicated solely to the wall.

He then discussed the negative aspects of relocation. He named the potential for damage during the relocation process. He said other components will need to be moved or rebuilt, in addition to the wall, such as the plaza and the seating arena. He said there was also a gas line in the wall donated by TECO. He said there is an emotional attachment to the current location because the wall has been there for 30 years.

He then provided a potential timeline of the project. He said engineering studies would need to be conducted on the current site, which could delay any improvements. He said they could also consider other waterfront sites, but noted it could be challenging. He also noted that parking is a consideration, as they typically have 1,500 to 3,000 attendees at the annual Memorial Day Celebration. He added that attendees are normally older and disabled, which should also be considered. He also mentioned that the Purple Heart Trail was intended to extend from the wall to the stadium and would need to be adjusted to reflect the new location if they ultimately relocated. He said the current location also attracts people who might not otherwise visit the wall. He said the wall site will be transformed regardless of the additional programming options available to them.

Future Plan for Downtown Entertainment District—Guy Parola

Guy Parola, Director of Operations for DIA, provided an overview of plans for the Downtown Entertainment District. CVP Howland noted that stadium construction may limit what they can plan for that area. CVP Howland asked Mr. Parola to trace the proposed riverwalk for the area. CVP Howland stated that many have suggested relocating the wall near the USS Orleck, but he believes the parcel between the new MOSH location and the Iguana Option parcel is potentially ideal for the wall. He said he finds the parcel optimal.

CM Lahnen asked if they would share parking with MOSH. CVP Howland stated that MOSH was currently debating parking options and noted that Lot J is nearby and that there is a River Taxi and NAVI stop nearby. He also said that, depending on how the area is developed, parking may improve in the future.

CM Amaro said he sees CVP Howland's vision but found it expensive. CVP Howland agreed and noted that additional work would be done on the land to prepare it for the wall. He indicated he would propose downsizing some parts of Shipyards West or the Riverwalk to address costs.

Future Plan for Riverfront/Downtown Parks

Daryl Joseph began his presentation on plans for the riverfront parks. He detailed parks spanning from the Riverside Arts Market to Metropolitan Park. He stated that the Artist Walk in Riverside has been successful with daily usage. He provided an overview of the Music Heritage Park design, which will highlight Jacksonville's contributions to the music industry. He stated that this project will be completed by the beginning of next year. He stated that phase one of the Riverfront Plaza, which included the great lawn, café building, and splash pad in the western portion of the park, would be completed at the beginning of 2026. CVP Howland asked if there had been talks to move the wall to Riverfront Plaza; Mr. Joseph said there had not been.

He said they were in the design phase for Shipyards West and were working to secure a contractor to begin construction. He added that they were not encouraging kayaking in this area, but they intend to allow paddleboats in the park's floating wetlands. He said they were working on a museum space on the Flex Lawn, with additional private development occurring in the CRA Scope area.

Mr. Joseph said Metropolitan Park's design is focused on accommodating both large- and small-scale events. CVP Howland asked whether there had been discussions to locate the wall at this park; Mr. Joseph said there had not been.

Responding to an earlier question about visitation to the Riverwalk, Mr. Joseph said that, within one year of re-opening Friendship Fountain, there were roughly 600,000 visitors. He then compared visitation to other cities' riverwalks, highlighting the positive impact of activating the riverfront.

CM Lahnen requested the anticipated cost for relocation and land preparation for the wall. Mr. Joseph said that preparing the land would cost approximately \$15-20 million. CM Lahnen asked if the CIP dollars budgeted for Shipyards West had already been contracted. Mr. Joseph said there is a funding plan in place and that the design is underway. He also said they were ready to hire a contractor to begin work at Shipyards West.

CM Lahnen stated that there are plans underway to bring the USS Jacksonville from Seattle to Jacksonville, just to put it on people's radar. CVP Howland asked for the total amount approved for all riverfront parks. Mr. Joseph estimated around \$150 million. CVP Howland then asked how much had been spent. Mr. Joseph said about half that amount was spent. CVP Howland said there could be wiggle room to relocate the wall if they de-scope other parts of the riverfront parks. CM Miller asked for an update on the timeline for Riverfront Plaza and Metropolitan Park. Mr. Joseph said that each is on schedule to be completed by the end of 2028. He added that construction has begun on Riverfront Plaza, with work on Shipyards West scheduled to start next year and on Metropolitan Park after that.

CVP Howland provided a brief history of the parcel containing MOSH and the vacant parcel outlined in red on the handout. He said this area was the old St. Johns Shipyard, which, in 1941, the Department of Defense asked Jacksonville to use to produce 82 Liberty ships for WWII. He said they have the opportunity to move the wall to this hallowed location.

Public Comment

William Harrell handed the panel copies of documents containing park designs he had prepared in October 2022. He said the concept contained the Orleck on the west side of the bulkhead of pier four. The design also included space for the USS Jacksonville and an idea for the Veterans Memorial Wall. He said he was a veteran and a Gold Star family member, and suggested placing the Orleck and the Veterans Memorial Wall at Shipyards West to reduce costs.

Daniel Bean said that if he were to start over, he would not have the wall located in a parking lot and noted that no other NFL teams have such a structure near their stadiums. He favored moving it to a more serene location. He said they should factor in the cost to move the Fire Museum. He noted that the Purple Heart Trail could also be relocated, as there was no significant connection to the stadium. He said that they could use Mr. Conyer's design for the shade structure in other locations. He said that an ideal location would be somewhere along the water.

Robert Hernandez asked whether the empty land next to MOSH had been EPA-certified. He suggested adding more memorials to the Veterans Memorial Wall rather than relocating it. He also expressed concern about the impact of saltwater if the Wall were moved to a waterfront site. He also expressed concern about the cost of maintaining the wall.

Pat Mulvihill expressed concern about relocating, noting the many moving parts and high costs involved in moving the Wall. He had no objection to the Wall remaining in a parking lot. He also explained the need for parking for various memorial ceremonies throughout the year.

Rich Possert expressed concern over potential damage to the wall by relocation. He noted that approvals can take time and was concerned about potential costs. He explained that if they could articulate a benefit to the sports and entertainment business, they might be open to providing financing. He also said that there could be increased visibility by keeping it in the parking lot.

Recommendation/Next Steps

CVP Howland noted that major obstacles were potential damage to the wall and limited parking options. He said he was not concerned about price because some of the funds allocated to riverfront parks have not been spent, creating an opportunity to de-scope other projects to accommodate any action on the Wall.

CVP Howland committed to obtaining three quotes to assess the likelihood of wall damage. He stated that he had one that assured him that relocation of the Wall was possible. He said that only leaves money, maintenance, and parking as issues to solve.

CM Miller said he wanted to meet with Parks and Public Works to discuss additional details regarding riverfront activation.

CVP Howland thanked those in attendance and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 5:41 p.m.

Minutes: Brandon Russell, Council Research
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