

THE WATERFRONT WE HAVE VS THE WATERFRONT WE WANT IDENTIFYING CHANGING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS THAT WILL RE-SHAPE THE CURRENT DURBAN WATERFRONT

MRIDULEKHA ALLOPI · BERNARDUS VAN HEERDAN



Figure 1: Avenida Afonso Pena.
The main Avenue of Belo Horizonte is a diagonal that cuts the city grid pattern, bordered by public buildings.
Credit: Cecilia Delgado, 2015

»This article concerns itself with that portion of the Durban Harbor commonly known as the Victoria Embankment Waterfront; the Bay Waterfront; or the Durban Yacht Basin. It is an area whose role and function has been evolving for decades. Today the Waterfront includes limited public spaces; private spaces, a Yacht Basin and a ship/boat repair facility. We propose to review the waterfront's role in the context of "the city we have vs the city we need," and to look at the changing conditions and needs of the city that will re-shape the Durban Waterfront as a must see attraction. «





Figure 1: Durban Waterfront decades ago

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Durban has one of the great natural harbors in the world. Today, the harbor is one of the busiest container ports in Africa and it also serves as a base for cruise ships. As a result, almost all of the shoreline is developed for port use. The exception to this extensive port development is an approximately mile-long section which fronts Durban's downtown, referred to as the Victoria Embankment Waterfront. The principle use along this area is a marina, which caters to sail boat. It is this portion of the harbor which is the focus of this article.

The potential of the Victoria Embankment Waterfront has long been recognized. During the 1980's the City of Durban undertook to integrate the Victoria Embankment Waterfront with plans for the Inner City. It also identified the need to upgrade the area in general and to consider limited public access into certain areas. A few years later, the City endorsed its intention to upgrade the Inner City; this time identifying the Victoria Embankment as part of a Corridor of Excellence. At the same time it received the endorsement of the National Ports Authority to consider a wider range of land uses for this area, such as commercial, recreational and tourism opportunities.

In 1998, another document prepared by the City, called "Towards an Inner City Development Framework Plan for Durban", identified the "Bay Waterfront" as a key project. In essence this plan proposed nodes of development which included entertainment, leisure, tourism, commercial

and office use together with low impact port, naval operations and facilities. Arising out of this work, an Outline Development Plan for the Victoria Embankment Waterfront was prepared and approved by the City Council in 1996/1997, however "delays persist in the actual redevelopment of this strategic area."

Later in 200,2 the City Council approved an Urban Design Framework for the Yacht Basin, which was one of the nodes/precincts that was identified in the Outline Development Plan for the Victoria Embankment Waterfront. Today, all of the years of limited interventions have failed to produce success. However the opportunity for this catalytic project to force a change in this area still exists.

CURRENT PLANNING PHILOSOPHY

The Durban Planning Scheme was written some 60 years ago and identified all land within the Waterfront as "harbour." This plan promoted the mentality of limiting land uses to those associated with port operations and endorsed the need to keep the public out of this dedicated marine terminal area. Since then, and despite the various intentions of the City, the Planning Department has never been directed to review this Planning Scheme. Thus, allowed land uses remained static and the character of the waterfront remained largely unchanged.

Coupled with this lack of pro-active planning, the Waterfront remained a water facing piece of infrastructure, without any relationship to the urban land uses of Durban downtown. Further, the existence of a railway line and a high volume freeway along the edge of the site isolate it and complicate matters further.

In 2015/2016 the City announce another intention to regenerate the Inner City. This Inner City Regeneration Plan seeks to create an overall Master Plan; to identify seven key precincts for more detailed planning work; and lastly, to provide for a Management Plan to operate the day-to-day activities within the Area. The Victoria Embankment area of the Waterfront will fall under the Master Plan, but the Waterfront has not been identified as one of the seven precincts for more detailed planning work.

The Master Plan has identified that the real estate fronting the Waterfront has a new role to



Figure 2 (top): The Urban Design Framework for the Yacht Basin proposed the development of a limited commercial and specialized residential development and the upgrade of the public realm. Limited interventions have occurred to date

Figure 3: With this close proximity to the Durban Central Business District it is believed that the Waterfront Development could be a major catalyst for the regeneration of the Inner City



Figure 4: The Yacht Basin has been the venue for international regattas

play and that its revitalization will transform the area. The domino effect is that this Master Plan will, in turn, force the development of a Plan for the Waterfront. The resulting waterfront Planning Scheme, will be a component of the Inner City Regeneration Plan, and will be used as the tool to direct and manage the development of the Waterfront into the future.

The Planning Scheme will have to ensure that it remains responsive and robust and is able to promote and facilitate development within this area.

CHANGING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS THAT WILL RE-SHAPE THE DURBAN WATERFRONT

There appear to be two economic forces which might drive the waterfront development. Globally there has been an increase in people travelling on cruise vessels. In fact, two cruise lines already use facilities in the Durban harbor. To attract this type of growth, Durban must provide an exciting location with the ability to dock at a world class, safe and exciting place. Across the world cities are constantly re-invent their public waterfront spaces to offer a competitive edge and in this re-

gard the Durban Waterfront is no different.

The second economic driver could be International yacht racing. Again, waterfronts across the world have grown and expanded their mandates to also attract and retain the global phenomenon of yacht racing. Durban should be able to attract this growth industry as it continues to grow.

Therefore, a vibrant mixed use development is the recipe for a successful Durban Waterfront. The plan should also respect the environment and its delicate and fragile ecosystems.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Perhaps then the process to shape the Waterfront of the future should begin with an examination of the Environmental Impact Assessment together with the Draft Estuarine Management Plan (2015). Without undermining past studies, the Draft Estuarine Management Plan is more likely to have the latest key indicators for the



re-development of this area. Without a doubt, there will be areas marked as “no go areas” (conservation areas) but the identification of areas for heightened development must also be identified. It is this balance that will make this Waterfront a sustainable waterfront into the future.

The resulting analysis of development opportunity and conservation areas should cause a new Framework Plan to be prepared to direct the urban fabric, the movement patterns, and the infrastructure for the area. Such a plan will also cause existing property values to increase in the area. These properties include the areas on the Waterfront itself, but also on the existing properties that sit on the edge of the existing facility.

The Management Plan will seek to improve recreation and boating by identifying key areas for such activities. The Management Plan should highlight the loss of commercial and public spaces due to the widening of the Port mouth and relocate them to other spaces within the Port, perhaps including the Victoria Embankment site. Such a plan should also talk about the need to enhance public access, reminding of the conflict between port operations

Figure 5: The Urban Design Framework for the Yacht Basin proposed the development of a public promenade along the water's edge

and the movement of people, and lastly, put in place a plan of action for the next 5 years.

The Plan will look to direct the enhanced development of the existing Yacht Basin that is currently home to some 400 sailing vessels and its ability to increase this capacity. Clearly, support services to this Maritime Sector must be located within close proximity to the marina, but not necessarily within the Waterfront.

Existing bulk infrastructure such as waste water disposal into the Waterfront will also have to be considered. The impacts of such disposal will have to be understood and if significant will have to be relocated then such relocation initiated.

In preparing this Framework Plan it must be noted that the Waterfront currently has dual ownership, with some tracts of land owned by the City of Durban and others by the Port Authority. This dual ownership has, to a large extent, compromised the development of the Waterfront. While the City of Durban acts in the interest of



Figure 6: The Yacht Basin is primarily occupied by various water sport organizations and is an important recreation node within the Port of Durban

the general public; the Ports Authority, by virtue of its business, restricts and manages public access in these areas. Current institutional arrangements require review so that all parties, while still effecting their responsibilities, work towards the common good of the City, its Port and its people.

At this point the changing conditions and needs that will re-shape this Waterfront include:

- The enhanced role of the Waterfront as it relates to the global travel and the land uses that promote that adventure/experience. To this end a Development Framework Plan, together with a responsive and robust Planning Scheme incorporating urban design

directives, will deliver a world class facility. Implicit in this will be the infrastructural and other specialist studies that will ensure that the Waterfront is sustainable;

- Secondly, the need to grow and enhance the role of the Waterfront in global yacht racing across the world. In developing the Framework Plan, consultation must be undertaken in capture this economic sector.
- Thirdly, to responsibly balance development with the environmental issues. Emerging climate change trends must be fed into the Development Plan.
- And lastly to review existing Institutional mechanism in the best interest of the City and its people and the Port Authority.

CONCLUSION

The Durban Waterfront is a landmark within the City and the need to grow its potential within the City is paramount. Looking back over our shoulders, we can see the Waterfront of the past; looking into our crystal ball, we can see a different Waterfront in the next decade. This new Victoria Embankment Waterfront will be dynamic and vibrant, colorful and people drive; a place that is abuzz and where there is symbiosis amongst all its users. The opportunity exists now to change the Waterfront we have and to evolve it into a Waterfront of the future - a Waterfront that we want and the one to which we can invite the world to enjoy this special place.

Acknowledgement:The photos in this article are by Prakash Bikha and Derek White.

WHAT'S CHANGING?

At the very outset all issues need to be understood and categorized; this includes everything from who stakeholders, the legislative requirements, the infrastructure capacities and funding streams; and the institutional arrangements.

Having understood the above; it is important to understand possible compromises and to understand what exactly they are; thereafter to draft a discussion document in order to start an engagement with all stakeholders. Once the conversation is complete, then to reach out to the world to prepare a Development Framework Plan. ♦