Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)

Urban Waterfront Action Group (UWAG) Meeting

Tuesday, September 17, 2013

Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation

Philadelphia Navy Yard

Broad Street—Quay Wall Repairs and Improvements

Participants:

Monica Trudeau: Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation
Carmen Zappile: Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation
Angelo Water: Urban Engineers, Inc.
Michael Wagner: Urban Engineers, Inc.
Stephen Walsh: Delaware River Basin Commission
Randy Brown: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Coastal Zone Management
Jim Boyer: Army Corps of Engineers, Regulatory
Jiting Deng: Temple University

Meeting Summary:

The Philadelphia Navy Yard is a 1,200 acre site that was sold by the U.S. Navy to the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) in 2000. The PIDC is a non-profit real estate developer. The Navy Yard has about 10,000 employees and receives about $1 million annually from the City of Philadelphia for capital projects. That amount doesn't meet the great need for infrastructure improvements for the site. The Navy Yard recently completed a $60 million Army Corps of Engineers project to repair a seawall with an adjacent greenway.

This project is to repair a failing quay wall to the west of Broad Street adjacent to a reserve basin historically used to dock ships. The Navy owns the reserve basin up to the line of the quay wall. Because of the deteriorating condition of the wall, the south bound right lane of Broad Street and adjacent sidewalk were closed in 2004. PIDC has been able to fund the design of the project, although there are not dedicated funds at this point to pay for the needed repairs.

The quay wall is about 720 feet in length. There are sinkholes in the sidewalk that have been progressing due to the loss of fill. The stone wall at the edge of the basin may have historical significance. The structure of the existing pier is composed of timber piles, timber caps, and timber decking. There is then a full height concrete seawall with a stone barrier on top.

The proposed repairs and improvements involve a steel sheet pile on the exterior that would be backfilled and capped with concrete. There would be a need to demolish much of the existing structure and remove the existing soil. The proposal is to maintain the existing line of the wall and not extend into the basin.

A Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) screening has been conducted. A habitat screening revealed the site provides habitat for the threatened osprey and red-bellied turtle, as well as the endangered plant species Walter's Barnyard Grass.

The Philadelphia Naval Shipyard Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which includes a number of individually designated buildings and structures. The reserve basin is a designated structure, and the quay wall is identified as a defining character of the basin. That would seem to indicate a need to maintain the historic character or structure of the stone wall. However, a Programmatic Agreement signed in 1997 by the Philadelphia Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), PIDC, and the Navy Yard offered an exemption to historic protections for in-kind replacements. The proposed improvements, however, would not necessarily be defined as in-kind since a timber pier structure would be replaced by a sheet wall and fill structure. The Programmatic Agreement would need to be reviewed to see how it may or may not impact the Army Corps of Engineers Section 106 review.

There is an existing large stormwater outfall that would be replaced as part of the project. The location and size would not be changed, although a tide gate would be added. This upgrade and repair should not have an impact on the permitting.

PADEP suggested that a pile-supported high deck might be a preferred alternative that would have fewer aquatic impacts, although would be higher maintenance in the long run. PIDC is concerned with having low maintenance improvements due to the uncertain and highly constrained nature of funding for capital projects. The PADEP imposes an impact fee, which increases with greater impacts.

For the Army Corps of Engineers permit, the high tide line and mean high water line need to be identified. The applicant will also need to identify how the impacts will be addressed and minimized.

One alternative to reduce impacts could be to have the sidewalk on a deck structure, and just the roadway on fill. That would have a smaller impact, would be less expensive, and would offer a better argument to enable a General Permit.