

MAYOR SLAY

[[Latest News](#) | [Search the Archives](#) | [RSS/Syndication](#)]

Foundation Reports Findings

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, August 29, 2007

From the Danforth Foundation:

St. Louis can create a world-class riverfront and link it to downtown, but only if portions of the grounds of the Gateway Arch are made available for active uses such as those found in Chicago's Millennium Park, a new Danforth Foundation study reports today.

"We are wasting our two most valuable assets — the Gateway Arch and our position on America's greatest river," said former Sen. John C. Danforth, chairman of the Foundation. "There is little to do at the riverfront, and the Arch — one of the world's greatest and most beautiful monuments — stands in splendid isolation.

"As a community, we can do better," Danforth said. "In fact, we have the opportunity to do something spectacular. We can transform the way the world views St. Louis and how the St. Louis region views itself by making the most of these two great assets, instead of the least. But we can do that only if we change the way portions of the Arch grounds are used."

The Danforth Foundation study was conducted at the request of St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, who called the development of the riverfront and a connector linking it to downtown "a major priority" for his Administration.

"I am deeply grateful to the Danforth Foundation for this report," the Mayor said. "After decades of riverfront studies, the Foundation has defined the problem with unprecedented clarity and detail. Now we need the community resolve to move forward."

The Mayor said he has asked three of St. Louis' leading citizens — Walter Metcalfe, Robert Archibald and Peter Raven — to give him their best advice on how to proceed with the revitalization of the riverfront and the development of the connector. Metcalfe is former chairman of Bryan Cave, the law firm; Archibald is president and CEO of the Missouri Historical Society; and Raven is director of the Missouri Botanical Garden.

As next steps, the Mayor said, he has asked them to offer recommendations on the appropriate planning process and organizational structure to provide project stewardship. In making those recommendations, he told them to recognize that the Gateway Arch and its immediate surroundings must be preserved and enhanced and that the organizational structure must be accountable to the public.

The Arch grounds and riverfront are currently separated from downtown by the six lanes of Memorial Drive and the four lanes of Interstate 70 — a physical and, to many, psychological barrier. In August 2005, Slay asked the Danforth Foundation to study how the riverfront could be revitalized and how it and the Arch grounds could be better integrated into downtown.

Since the construction of the Arch, riverfront development has been the topic of four different studies, each of which has failed to produce sustainable results. Working with Great Rivers Greenway, the Foundation was the first to employ rigorous engineering and modeling analyses recommended by the U.S. Coast Guard and Army Corps of Engineers. The Foundation also worked with many other local and national consultants.

The consultants eventually developed four options for riverfront development, all of which included proposals for distinctive restaurants, ice skating, swimming, water fountains, and other activities and features. The options were presented to the public in October 2005, shortly after a survey showed strong public support throughout the region for an active riverfront.

The most popular of the four options called for the construction of islands in the Mississippi River, which would be linked by floating and elevated walkways. Modeling studies, however, determined that the islands could not be entirely protected against barge and towboat traffic.

As a result, the Foundation considered another design that called for the construction of terraces on the levee east of Leonor K. Sullivan Boulevard. Because these facilities would be prone to flooding, however, economic consultants warned that commercial enterprises might not be viable and that parking would be problematic.

The Foundation's conclusion was that the riverfront could not be revitalized by building either islands or terraces. The only remaining option, therefore, was a portion of the 91 acres of Arch grounds, the great majority of which do not flood. Owned and managed by the National Park Service, this land, however, is maintained for passive use only. Restaurants, food kiosks, fountains, or any other uses that would activate the memorial are banned.

The Foundation's consultants also developed four options for a "lid" or connector between downtown and the Arch grounds. The most ambitious of these options called for a three-block deck that would completely cover the depressed lanes of I-70 between Walnut and Pine Streets and relocate all lanes of Memorial Drive to the east. The study concluded that the three-block

deck was not feasible, however, because it required two acres — again, owned by the National Park Service, and therefore not currently available for such uses — to house ventilation and homeland security facilities required by federal regulation.

The three other options were alike in featuring a modest one-block deck over I-70 between Market and Chestnut Streets. The Foundation concluded they would not block the noise and fumes from I-70 and would lack overall impact.

Danforth said the Foundation had therefore reached the “reluctant conclusion” that “within the current limitations, the Mayor’s vision of a distinctive world-class destination and activity center is not feasible. “But we should not accept these limitations,” he continued. “By removing them, we can profoundly alter the entire riverfront picture — and open it up to unlimited possibilities.”

A key step to a new riverfront, the Mayor said, is federal legislation. It would transfer ownership of portions of the 91 acres — the portions identified through a public planning process — to a local entity. Defining the nature of that local entity, the Mayor noted, is part of the charge he has given his three advisors.

“With some of this land set free,” the report said, “the acreage would suddenly be available to install the infrastructure needed for a grand three-block deck connecting the riverfront and the Arch to downtown. And with some of this land set free, the high, non-flooding acreage would be available to accommodate attractions that would complement the magnificence of the river, the Arch and the Old Courthouse. The result would be a distinctive, world-class central riverfront for St. Louisans and tourists alike.”

Both Danforth and Slay stressed that they would support only measures that would maintain and enhance the beauty of the Arch.

“The Arch is one of the world’s great monuments and one of this community’s chief assets,” Danforth said. “The idea is to complement this asset and our presence on America’s greatest river. We are currently missing our opportunity to make the most of these two great treasures.”