



Department of City Development
City Plan Commission
Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee
Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation

Lafayette L. Crump
Commissioner

Vanessa L. Koster
Deputy Commissioner

Ald. Bauman
4th Ald. District

CITY PLAN COMMISSION ZONING REPORT

File No: [240759](#)

Location: Historic Third Ward Riverwalk from the Clybourn Street Bridge south a point approximately 200 feet north of the Water Street Bridge

**Applicant/
Owner:** Business Improvement District (BID) #2 – Historic Third Ward

**Current
Zoning:** Historic Third Ward Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay Zone (SPROZ)

Proposal: BID #2 is proposing to update the lighting along a stretch of Riverwalk that is operated and maintained by the BID, within the Historic third Ward Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay Zone (SPROZ). The Riverwalk structure that is the subject of this proposal is located beyond the City’s official property line and is built over the water, within the riparian ownership of the adjacent property. Because the lighting project is within the public waterway, it is not under the City’s permitting and zoning authority. However, given that this segment of Riverwalk was designed and constructed to meet the landward property owners’ requirements under the SPROZ and consistent with past files relating to the Riverwalk that is located within the public waterway, the BID has submitted this proposal to demonstrate compliance with the SPROZ and for acknowledgement and concurrence by the City Plan Commission.

The design standards for the Riverwalk were developed in partnership with Mary Miss in 1999. Regarding lighting, the SPROZ states:

“Lighting unique to the Riverwalk should enhance surfaces and objects along the way as well as light the pedestrian path and promote security for night use. Lighting is a critical feature of the Riverwalk. Half of the time (evening hours), it is the most important element for bringing the Riverwalk to life. It is often used as a fundamental repetitive design element. Lighting that is too bright as well as too dim is to be avoided. Lighting that is too dim will discourage night use of the Riverwalk for those concerned with safety. Lighting that is too bright will destroy the intimate ambiance these guidelines are striving to encourage.”

The existing lighting along this segment of the Riverwalk is minimal, other than intermittent lighting from adjacent buildings. A new lighting scheme is proposed to improve the safety and security of the Riverwalk and provide uniform lighting consistent with the existing Third Ward street lighting. The lighting that is proposed has been carefully analyzed to ensure that light spillage will not occur on adjacent properties. The selected fixtures are Dark Sky compliant and will not narrow the width of the Riverwalk pedestrian travel path.

The project includes the installation of 30 light poles along the subject stretch of Riverwalk, and will utilize 5 different mounting techniques to address the existing structure. See the SPROZ exhibit for mounting locations and details. The Riverwalk light poles are designed to be 12' tall, which is 2/3 the height of the 17' tall Third Ward streetlight poles. The BID intends to purchase the Riverwalk lights from the same manufacturer, using the same model fixtures and head, but at the smaller scale. The Riverwalk fixtures will be powder-coated black (instead of the green used on the streetlights) to match the railings and other steel elements of the Riverwalk. The Riverwalk lights will use flat directional LED plates that cast light in a rectangular pattern, placing almost all of the light onto the Riverwalk with minimal light spillage. The light temperature will be 4,000k, matching the existing street lighting in the Third Ward. The selected lights are designed to control illumination, avoid spillage beyond the Riverwalk zone, and substantially limit the amount of illumination on adjacent buildings. The Ubicquia-branded lighting controls that the BID selected are able to be controlled via an application to regulate light levels, schedule levels based on the time of the day, and so on. The BID anticipates installing the light poles during the first half of 2025.

It should be noted that the exhibit includes potential lighting placement and mounting details for the stretch of Riverwalk on private property (105-125 N. Water Street). This section is not part of this file and may be brought to the City Plan Commission for approval in the future.

Staff has reviewed the lighting proposal and concludes that it is consistent with the overlay zone's intent.

Other Approvals and Outreach:

The BID presented this lighting proposal to both the Historic Third Ward Architectural Review Board and the BID Board of Directors in May 2024. Both bodies unanimously approved the project, and the BID Board also approved its estimated funding. Additionally, both condo associations and property owners along the corridor have been sent information about the proposed lighting plans and upgrades via email.

Adjacent Land Use:

The Milwaukee River is located to the west of the Riverwalk. Mixed-use residential and commercial buildings are to the east.

Consistency with Area Plan:

This Riverwalk segment is located in the boundary of the [Third Ward Area Plan](#), adopted by the Common Council in 2005, and amended to include [The Historic Third Ward Neighborhood Design Guidelines](#) in 2006. The Area Plan outlines the need to provide a feeling of security and safety to users of the Riverwalk with appropriate levels of lighting (p. 42). The Guidelines outline a lighting strategy that includes a combination of ambient, low glare “moon lighting” and accent lighting that highlights the walkway structure. The overall low glare lighting effect is intended to maximize experience of the cityscape’s reflection on the Milwaukee River creating a magical experience for the visitor (p. 97). The proposed lighting for the Third Ward Riverwalk are consistent with the Third Ward Area Plan and Design Guidelines’ intent.

Previous City Plan Action:

11/2000 – Approval of an amendment to create new design guidelines for the portion of the Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay District located in the Historic Third Ward. ([FN 990968](#))

Previous Common Council Action:

12/15/2000 – The Common Council approved an amendment to create new design guidelines for the portion of the Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay District located in the Historic Third Ward. ([FN 990968](#))

Recommendation:

The proposed updated lighting has been carefully analyzed and selected by BID #2, and will improve safety and security along this stretch of the Historic Third Ward Riverwalk as well as coordinate with the Third Ward’s streetlighting. The selected technology will allow the BID to control lighting levels as needed. This stretch of the Riverwalk is over public waterway, beyond the city’s general permitting authority but was designed and constructed to meet the landward property owners’ requirements under the SPROZ. DCD Planning staff believes this proposal for updated lighting is consistent with the design standards, goals, and intent of the Historic Third Ward Riverwalk SPROZ.