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Contractor selected to design public spaces for Canalside

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A New York City-based company that specializes in designing and managing public spaces was chosen Wednesday to be the public space consultant for Canalside.

Biederman Redevelopment Ventures has created or revitalized urban parks and plazas, business improvement districts and streetscape programs, and turned public space into profit centers for mixed-use developments.

“I am pleased that Biederman Redevelopment Ventures, an internationally recognized leader for its innovative work in public spaces, will partner with [the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.] to transform the [Memorial Auditorium] block and surrounding area into a vibrant public space,” said Sam Hoyt, interim chairman of the waterfront agency.

The company, founded by Daniel Biederman in 1998, will be paid \$253,455 by the development agency “to expand the Canalside vision and activation plan from the Central Wharf area to the former Memorial Auditorium block.”

Among Biederman’s public projects are New York’s Bryant Park, the Boston Common and, more recently, parks or plazas in Pittsburgh, Miami, Newark, Baltimore and Dallas.

Biederman said he’s long been a fan of the Erie Canal, recalling memories of singing “Erie Canal (A Mule Named Sal)” in school.

“When people have asked me what the five or 10 things are that I always wanted to work on, the Erie Canal has always been one,” he said.

Biederman said he was “impressed” by the waterfront agency’s management team. “We’re feeling we have a sophisticated client here, and that makes us up our game.”

They have “a lot to learn,” he said, and expect to start conversations as soon as Friday, with a visit by the end of the month.

“We don’t know enough to tell you what we’re going to do, and would be arrogant to do so without observing, doing lots of interviews, and synthesizing that in a programming charette, which we’ll undoubtedly have this summer to help blend the many voices into one,” Biederman said.

The consultant’s requirements include leading a public workshop; identifying “key issues, opportunities, partners, audiences and technical items”; developing “principles and themes” that describe each environment and the connection between the Aud block and Erie Canal Harbor; and programming for the Aud block after the planned May 20, 2013, opening of replica canals now under construction.

The development agency also authorized a sand sustainability study for Gallagher Beach on the outer harbor.

Sand will be tested in three locations to see if it becomes “compromised” by currents, water level fluctuations and weather activity.

The cost of implementing the field test—necessary to determine the beach’s feasibility —is about \$300,000 and will be paid from proceeds from the New York Power Authority Relicensing Settlement Agreement.