

#012 Downtown Riverfront Development

June 2011

Opportunity: Capitalize on Northeast Indiana's waterways by developing downtown Fort Wayne's riverfront, which would serve as a catalyst for future development throughout the region, expand the area's tourism and cultural footprint, and weave together multiple aspects of quality of life: recreation and trails, arts and culture, large scale attractions and urban living. In concert with all of the plans that are in place, including those that address water quality and downtown revitalization, now is the time to launch riverfront development in Fort Wayne and beyond.

Background: Northeast Indiana's numerous water resources make the region unique and should be used to give it a competitive advantage that would attract young professionals, families and empty nesters. A riverfront development in downtown Fort Wayne would foster a quality of life that can support economic growth, neighborhood development, and expanded business and retail diversity.

Working in concert with transportation planning efforts, riverfront development could serve as a central hub for an integrated system aimed at connecting the region through walking and biking trails, public transit and various waterways themselves, spurring additional riverfront developments throughout the region. Additionally, these could also act as an educational tool to teach residents about Northeast Indiana's vast water resources and enhance efforts to preserve its water quality.

This community has the opportunity to create a truly unique riverfront development by drawing upon the values and ideas that were put forward in the city's first plan by landscape architect George Kessler in 1912, and which have been continually referenced in the planning work done by the Board of Park Commissioners and the Headwaters Park Commission. These community led organizations hired internationally recognized landscape architects and planners such as Arthur Schurcliff, Adolphe Jaenicke, and local architect Eric Kuhne. By emphasizing this unique heritage, nature and recreation, and acknowledging their importance to the human psyche and economic development, the riverfront will be an attraction in and of itself. The development should be designed in such a way that it has a positive impact on water quality and can be used as an educational tool to teach people about our natural resources.

All great regions have a strong metropolitan center. We need a quality "heavy hitter" attraction such as a riverfront development, which could complement current amenities, such as Parkview Field. When Chattanooga began working on its Vision, one of the major findings was that it had turned its back on a major asset, the Tennessee River. As seen in Chattanooga and other communities that have capitalized on their riverfronts, this type of development expands well beyond the central project. Riverfront development could lead to a rejuvenation of Northeast Indiana.

Update – September, 2011:

The Quality of Life Action Team completed its recommendations for the next steps to be taken towards advancing downtown riverfront development. Immediate issues facing downtown riverfront development include but are not limited to: public perception about the quality and possible uses of the rivers, lack of access points on the rivers, and lack of funding for development. Long-term issues include but are not limited to: water quality and flood mitigation (looking at both urban and rural implications), and lack of long-term strategic planning, funding and development focused specifically on downtown riverfront development within Fort Wayne, as well as other regional communities with downtown riverfronts. Vision 2020 staff has begun conversations with key members from Friends of the Rivers about developing a partnership to help with the facilitation of further downtown riverfront development planning efforts. Additionally, the Legacy Fort Wayne taskforce announced on Tuesday, August 30, 2011, that it is focusing the funding recommendations for the \$75 million from the Light Lease Settlement Funds on three categories, one of which is downtown improvements and riverfront development.

Citizens Advisory Panel Feedback – September 28, 2011

Impact

- There will be a rise in tourism – events on the water, festivals, restaurants, shopping
- Could bring the region together - Lakes for leisure, rivers for active lifestyle

Difficulty

- Need a comprehensive, cohesive plan of retail, restaurants, etc. - Long term stability/sustainability
- Find a balance between development and conservation.
Watch for flooding – ACOE really must know what the flow is

Possible Opportunity Strategies:

- Through public-private partnerships, work to identify areas of Fort Wayne's rivers that are conducive for the development of businesses and recreational amenities.
- Pursue attractions that would be compatible with riverfront development and would draw people to the area for dining, shopping, entertainment and recreation.
- Identify obstacles from the past that have prevented riverfront development and pursue ways to minimize or eliminate them.
- Develop riverfront properties within downtown Fort Wayne.

Options

- A. Pursue opportunity
- B. Obtain further information
- C. Realign/Refocus the opportunity
- D. Put aside for future consideration