

**ROCKFORD CULTURAL CORRIDOR/
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT
TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Mayor Doug Scott appointed this task force approximately ten months ago to review the C.H. Johnson study in conjunction with the numerous proposals and plans for areas of downtown that stretch through the Cultural Corridor. When he discussed this task force, he urged us to take a fresh look at all of the various proposals. He suggested we focus on those with the greatest impact both downtown and for the community not only in terms of functionality but also in the aesthetic presence of the Cultural Corridor.

The Mayor credited and we must acknowledge the energy and work of the River District Framework Plan, the On the Waterfront plans for Davis Park and the Riverfront Museum Campus plan. He pointed to three project areas in downtown Rockford: 1) Riverfront Museum Park; 2) the Metro Centre; and 3) Davis Park that he felt needed examination and a coordinated plan for action. The Mayor as well as the community has acknowledged these three entities to be major destination attractions in their own right. With that said, a cohesive plan for providing for expansion of all three of these areas is needed so that each does not compete with the other for funds and community effort. The Mayor recommended and sought from this Task Force a complementary process to provide for all of their needs.

We must begin by analyzing the projects for the Riverfront Museum Park campus. The recent addition to Burpee is an excellent beginning for a new focus in the museum area. Currently, there are clear plans for the expansion of the Burpee Museum of Natural History to house "Jane" as well as plans to expand the Riverfront Museum Park for the Discovery Center. There are very few opportunities and locations to create a truly signature building on our riverfront. With dwindling river frontage available this opportunity to make a spectacular

statement about our community must be seized. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that either the Rockford Art Museum in conjunction with the Rockford Park District construct a new signature art museum on the banks of the Rock River or the proposed addition to the Riverfront Museum by the Discovery Center be greatly enhanced to create a stunning presence on the river. This building or addition should provide the community with accesses and uses beyond anything envisioned at the current site. The opportunity is now to capture the growing community support for the "Jane" addition for Burpee and the significant enthusiasm for riverfront improvements. Finally, there must be an analysis of the museum tax and consideration of an increase in that levy to support the expanded operations.

This change in focus and development should accompany a final completion of the Riverfront walkway on the west side of the Rock River from the Museum Park at least to Davis Park . The Park District should develop a plan for the Riverfront walkway that includes the acquisition of the Armory Building and uses for that building. The City's support should address any additional parking needs that may arise in the immediate area.

The City must also address the beautification of North Main Street, and transportation needs (i.e. a two-way street and potential boulevard). In addition, on a community-wide basis, but specifically in this area, the City must immediately address the signage issues, which are currently woefully inadequate. Finally, in this commercial/residential transitional area it is important that the city continue to be a force in encouraging the renovation of existing housing and improving the neighborhood.

In the immediate downtown area there has been growing community support for removal current mall on North and South Main Streets. This dramatic shift in the downtown area must be accompanied by the alternative outdoor gathering places recommended by the task force. A narrow two-lane street should be constructed with wide sidewalks to allow for expanding the

current open-air restaurants. The road texture and other amenities must be designed to be pedestrian friendly and obviously, no parking should be permitted on these streets.

The Johnson study points to the need for significant improvements to the Metrocentre and the immediate surrounding area and the Task Force strongly agrees with those conclusions. Clearly, downtown Rockford needs the arena and its events to draw people and add excitement to the center city. The skyboxes, reconfiguration, ingress and egress changes and greatly enhanced vending and food services will enhance revenue and increase the number of potential events. With the mall opened, South Main Street is no longer appropriate for the staging and truck related functions of the MetroCentre. A final decision should be made to demolish the Stewart's Parking Deck with an intention to move the staging area after the completion of a traffic study including the potential closing of Elm Street. The final determination should be subject to the project's land planning.

The greatest immediate impact and environmental change downtown evolves from the Davis Park plans. South Main Street has become the gateway to the center city. A dramatic and exciting entry is needed to bring a complete change for that location. The City should immediately acquire and demolish the Amerock and Tapco Buildings, expanding significantly Davis Park. The City should also remove the Lorden Building and relocate Warshawsky's to complete the transformation of this area. This massive reuse of land should result in a spectacular permanent modification of the appearance of downtown while greatly expanding Davis Park creating a vista of the Rock River. The expansion of Davis Park must include the permanent outdoor amphitheater, concessions and bathroom facilities as recommended by the Johnson study. All of those plans are necessary for the Park to be successful but must consider the needs of both the On The Waterfront Festival as well as smaller festivals. The plans must consider a second smaller music venue and method to facilitate affordable usage of the park for

smaller events. The property must also be developed in a fashion to facilitate additional park usage as well as being developed in conjunction with the construction of the new Federal Courthouse and Justice Mall. On the Waterfront should be viewed as a preferred tenant for this site, and their input during the design process will be critical to creation of a highly functional park and festival grounds. They should be actively encouraged to provide input. However, it should be recognized one of the primary objectives of redevelopment is to provide a setting for consistent (and hopefully year-round) use. Given this objective, bold vision is a necessity and preferred tenants will be required to adopt a broader view of the uses for the park.

As part of the reshaping of the southern portion of downtown the City must continue to reconstruct the area south of Davis Park including Barber Coleman Village and South Main Street. The Park District must be encouraged to renew the beauty of its building while completing the transfer of its offices to its downtown building.

Any plans addressing changing downtown must include new attractive housing. We recommend the City facilitate development of “for sale” row housing along the south side of Cedar Street and seek possible modification of some buildings for loft style development. It is essential for the long-term viability of downtown that there be a significant influx of people living and owning homes downtown. As such, city subsidies for construction should be dramatic. As this area of the city develops the city must address the need in this area of additional parking.

It is obvious to the Task Force that there are significant management issues with the Riverfront Museum Park, Davis Park, Coronado Theater and the Metro Centre. The City and the Park District must force accountability for all venues and create a management and governance structure to meet the ongoing needs of all facilities. The City and the Park District must

carefully consider whether outside management is needed for specific venues and then must relinquish control and contractual decisions to one independent overseer. The MetroAuthority should be the umbrella organization for performance venues contracting with venue specific professional management. The Metro Authority should then report annually to the city and the community as to the success and costs of activities of each venue with specific performance standards. In addition, clear performance standards must be incorporated in the management agreement, including more effective planning for maintenance and capital needs and annual public reporting that reinforces the economic role of these facilities in the public eye. The Authority should also be encouraged to operate in a public fashion, so as to reinforce its position as a public body.

This investment in our community is significant and will take strong leadership both public and private. The city can begin measuring the community's commitment by including in its annual capital improvements referendum the public improvements for the cultural corridor. This public process will give the citizens an opportunity to express their support for downtown and their commitment to these dramatic changes. However, we recognize that the investment must be sequenced in a manner that ensures that each project leverages additional resources, either from economic impacts or private investment.

Currently the city funds the police and fire protection for the On the Waterfront Festival, the Fourth of July Festival and all other similar activities from the Redevelopment Fund. The City should create an entertainment tax on the purchase of tickets for all types of entertainment creating new revenue of \$250,000 annually and use those funds in conjunction with other revenue to provide the police and fire protection. That would then make available approximately \$500,000 annually from the Redevelopment fund to be used in conjunction with possible other funds from the Downtown TIF, hotel/motel tax increase to leverage bonds to pay for the a

portion of the cost of these projects. The City then could leverage that annual amount and raise approximately \$12 to 15 million dollars for the Davis Park improvements. The City and the Park District must seek significant funds from the State of Illinois for the improvements to the Metrocentre, the Riverfront Walkway and improvements to Davis Park.

It is time to ask the private sector, both individuals and corporations, to do their part. The \$8 to 10 million dollars to build the signature building to house the art museum must be raised privately. Although the Mayor has indicated his willing to assist in raising these funds, it must become a community commitment and it must begin immediately

The dramatic changes recommended herein will not come without some sacrifice and more importantly some compromises but now is the time to act. With the energy currently being created by the proposed of new Federal Courthouse and County Jail with their combined construction costs of nearly \$150 million the time has come to transform downtown Rockford. The following represents possible funding sources for the proposed projects but the community must consider all possible resources.

Davis Park Improvements --\$12-15 million		Redevelopment Fund Bond Issue
Downtown Mall and streetChanges-\$5-7 million		Citywide CIP
MetroCentre	\$16-22 million	Federal, State_of Illinois_and TIF_Bond
Art Museum	\$8-10 million	Private, State of Illinois, Park District and Federal

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