

POSITION PAPER

DETROIT COMMISSIONERS:

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As Detroit continues its evolution as a new city for the new millennium, it has undertaken one of the greatest revitalization efforts in American history. In achieving its goals, Detroit has centered its development priorities around increasing jobs, improving housing, and providing Detroiters with better opportunities for recreation. Because improving the quality of life for all Detroiters is one of our chief concerns, we have followed with interest the proposal of the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA) to place a Metropark within our city limits. After careful consideration of the HCMA's four possible plans for a Metropark, we conclude that the Fort Wayne site best lends itself to the creation of a new park that would both maximize the resources of the HCMA and provide the greatest benefits for Detroiters.

As many Michiganders are aware, the HCMA has built and maintained numerous beautiful Metroparks throughout the Huron-Clinton metropolitan area. After only cursory consideration, then, the idea of a new park within the city of Detroit has appeal: It is easy to conclude that the city would benefit from a new green space and new recreational opportunities for its citizens. The issue is less simple than it appears, however, and the city of Detroit has carefully analyzed each proposal from a variety of perspectives. We are less sanguine than are other stakeholders that a Metropark would bring significant economic development to Detroit, and we remain committed to maintaining direct responsibility for city property. In addition, we are proud of the many parks which already grace our city and confident in our ability to maintain them. Nevertheless, we are eager to take advantage of a possible partnership with the HCMA.

Because Fort Wayne is a historic site with regional and even national appeal, we believe it offers the best location for a new Metropark. While the city owns Fort Wayne, it has long allowed the Detroit Historical Museum to operate the facility, and we believe that other entities, including non-profits, Native American Indian groups, and schools would be interested in joining in the administration of a new park. The site would also allow for a park that would be in line with both the mission of the HCMA and the goals of the city. To begin with, the site has characteristics that would make it an ideal multi-

use facility with wide appeal. Its historic buildings would attract school groups, history buffs, and park users less inclined to engage in outdoor pursuits. Its fairly large open lots would make excellent locations for athletic fields, and its extensive waterfront could easily be converted to fishing and boating docks. In addition, the site's close proximity to Del Ray, Corktown, and Mexicantown ensures that any economic growth that does result from a new park would benefit communities that need it most. Thus, while the city remains somewhat reluctant to sacrifice direct control of such an important historic site, we are willing to explore the possibility of partnering with the HCMA to turn Fort Wayne into a new Metropark.

The Detroit Commissioners rank the Michigan State Fairgrounds ("the Fairgrounds") as a second choice for the impending HCMA Detroit Metropark. While the Fairgrounds site plan has several positive attributes, overall the Commissioners' in depth site analysis demonstrates that it is not as viable as the Fort Wayne proposal, although still preferable to the other two options.

Specifically, the City is unconvinced that a new park at the Fairgrounds will add to its established development plans. While none of the proposals will have any clear economic development benefits for the citizens of Detroit, the Fairgrounds location near non-City municipalities further lessens its appeal for many Detroit residents. The location is also inaccessible from the Central Business District in the downtown waterfront area and thus will not even compliment the ongoing riverfront redevelopment plans.

In addition, the Fairgrounds' large, up-front cost, non-waterfront location, and lack of clear partnerships also puts the proposal at a disadvantage when compared to the diverse options of the Fort Wayne plan. The fact that the Fairgrounds is not City-owned does mean that the proposal will not need City approval, *per se*, and will thus potentially incite less political opposition from Detroit officials than the Riverfront or Belle Isle proposals. The Fairgrounds also does not interrupt ongoing Greenway development that the City has underway, unlike the Riverfront proposals.

The east riverfront site raises even more problems. Unlike park construction on the Fort Wayne site, which would generally be free of legal and environmental problems, development on the east riverfront would require millions for site clean-up, pull the city

into a long legal battle, and raise concerns over homeland security. Among the most important problems to consider is that development on the east riverfront would require a massive investment in environmental decontamination projects. Years of use as a major industrial center has made the east riverfront among the most contaminated of all four possible Metropark sites. Chemicals and metals, determined to cause birth defects and cancer, would cost millions to clean-up, adding to an already hefty price for park development. In addition to environmental clean-up costs, construction on the east riverfront would have to include costs for the destruction of the Ford Auditorium and four cement silos. Both projects would cost millions.

Another concern is that plans for park development will push the city into lengthy legal battles. Past plans to develop areas along the east riverfront were met with stiff resistance from private landowners. Mayor Dennis Archer's attempts to place casinos, restaurants, and shops on the land cost the city millions in legal fees. It is reasonable to assume that a Metropark plan would cause similar problems. Construction of a new bridge to Canada will complicate the legal issues surrounding the east riverfront. Private landowners, eager to capitalize on industrial economic opportunities created by the new bridge, will resist any attempts at development. Also, the bridge will cause logistical problems for the park, interfering with much of the planned construction.

In addition to legal and environmental concerns, development on the east riverfront creates problems for homeland security. Officials will be reluctant to have public recreational facilities, including boat rentals, so close to the Ambassador Bridge. Finally, the size of the east riverfront park makes it less than ideal for a Metropark. Compared to the Fort Wayne site, which has ample land for all types of activities, the small size of the east riverfront would limit recreational opportunities.

Finally, we regard the Belle Isle site as the least favorable of the four proposed locations. Belle Isle is clearly an important historic and architectural landmark for the city of Detroit, and the park is loved by generations of Detroiters. The city has traditionally done an excellent job maintaining Belle Isle, and has recently improved the park's facilities. Consequently, we see little need for an external organization such as the HCMA to take over administration of the park. Detroiters are unwilling to surrender authority of a park that has long been theirs, and few citizens would agree to pay

admission to an attraction that has for years been available for use with no charge. The park is currently being utilized to its fullest capacity. With more than 8 million visitors annually, the island has already reached its physical capacity and is slowly sinking due to extensive traffic and use. A Metropark would only exacerbate this problem, and a Metropark would not be financially soluble given the constraint on the number of visitors the park can hold.

To conclude, we welcome any partnership with the HCMA at the Fort Wayne site. With the interest of all Detroiters in mind, we would like to make sure that necessary precautions are in place to ensure that Detroiters will continue to enjoy the many beautiful parks throughout our wonderful city. We are confident that we can work alongside the HCMA to turn Fort Wayne into an attraction for both Detroiters and all Michiganders.