

Introduction

Given the multiple strengths and weaknesses of each of the proposals, The Livingston County Commissioner Group feels strongly that Detroit, the surrounding metropolitan region, and the state of Michigan as a whole, would benefit greatly if Belle Isle became a HCMA Metro park.

Our evaluation of each of the proposals is as follows:

State Fairgrounds

While the Livingston County HCMA Commissioner's Office believes that we have a large interest in continuing a strong state fair, we do not believe that a substantial investment by the HCMA in this area would do the most good. We are not convinced that improving on this space would have the desired positive effects on neighboring communities that an investment in other areas might have. Although the state fairgrounds might be an appropriate place for a water-park and concert facility, and the fairground itself would benefit from improvements, we believe that investing in a different site would be more beneficial to both the City of Detroit as well as the five county metropolitan regions. Finally, the fairground site does not include green space and would end up being more of a recreational area than an actual park.

The proponents of the fairground site seem to focus on two major positive aspects to this location. First, is the financial stability of the fair itself. While we are sympathetic to this need, we believe this falls outside of the mission of the HCMA. The second aspect is just to point to the improvements in the park as a good unto themselves. We believe that making any area a Metro park would be beneficial, but that the surrounding communities as well as the HCMA organization itself would benefit more from developing one of the other sites.

We do see some positive aspects to developing this site. First and foremost, the site is located in close proximity to many of the residents in our region. Unfortunately, we are not sure the Metro park improvements would create a regional draw. Second, there is always a benefit to creating year round usage for a piece of land such as the fairgrounds. Additionally, creating more areas for amusement and recreation in Detroit has positive aspects for tourism and residents. On balance, though, we do not believe that developing the fairground is the best use of our present resources. Instead, our money would be better spent focusing on one of our area's most promising natural resources, our waterfront.

Riverside Park

The Riverside Park/West Riverfront Proposal has many advantages. Riverside Park has historically been used by Detroiters who wish to enjoy the waterfront. Riverside Park already houses boat launch sites for the Detroit Fire Department, the J.W. Westcott

Company, as well as a large public boat launch. A new seawall in the park is also popular with local fishermen.

In partnership with the HCMA, improvements to Riverside Park would include construction of a River Walk to link with the East Riverfront River Walk. When complete, the River Walk would extend from West Riverside Park all the way to the Belle Isle Bridge, providing 5 continuous miles of Detroit Riverfront for pedestrians, bikers, and skaters to enjoy. The HCMA proposal at Riverside Park also includes creation of dedicated fishing areas, installation of permanent restrooms, a climbing wall, basketball courts, a skate park and skate and bike rentals.

Livingston County supports each of the three Detroit Metro park proposals that are consistent with the HCMA mission of establishing and maintaining a park system on waterways in Southeast Michigan, including the Riverside Park/West Riverfront Proposal. However, the cost of the West Riverfront Proposal will include significant expenditures on the environmental clean-up of at least 17 contaminated sites. Furthermore, the impact of West Riverfront Park on the quality of life of the region is limited by the small size of the site, which covers only 22 acres. Thus while the Livingston County HCMA does support the Riverside Park/West Riverfront Proposal, because of its contaminated condition and its small size, it is not our first choice.

Historic Fort Wayne

This site is currently a significant tourist destination given its historical and cultural importance.

- Historic buildings
- River side property
- Great possibilities for building athletic fields and recreational facilities.

However, its reputation for being an unsafe area makes Fort Wayne unattractive for business and tourism, particularly for park users coming from the suburbs and rural areas. It is also the most expensive proposal since most of the land is abandoned and creating a park alone will not be sufficient to revitalize the site. A park project in this area ought to be accompanied by residential and commercial development, which is a more ambitious and long term project that should be considered in the future. Moreover, there is limited access to transportation given that it is an isolated area

Recommendation: Belle Isle Proposal

Given the multiple strengths and weaknesses of each of the proposals, The Livingston County Commissioner Group feels strongly that Detroit, the metropolitan region, and the state of Michigan as a whole, would benefit greatly if Belle Isle became a HCMA Metro park. These benefits include:

- Opportunity to Protect Largest Amount of Green space
- Great Access to Water and Riverfront

- Attracts Businesses and Young Professionals
- Downtown Detroit Recreational Area that Does Not Compete with space that Better Suited for Business Development
- Allows Diverse Facilities: Cultural Center and Nature Center
- Immediate, Short Term Results
- Existing Infrastructure: Easier to Improve
- Easiest Site to Lend Positive Image
- Improves Detroit's Image and Promotes Tourism

Some argue that there are several reasons that Belle Isle should not become a Metro park. These include:

- Fees for entry
- Primarily Benefits Suburbanites
- Political Opposition

However, fees are only mandatory for automobiles entering and parking inside Belle Isle; those who use public transportation or travel by foot are not required to pay a fee. While renovating Belle Isle will certainly encourage suburbanites to visit the Metro Park, it does not prevent Detroit residents from enjoying the Metro Park and its facilities. Belle Isle is located very close to Cluster 3, one of the poorer areas of Detroit. Because the infrastructure already exists, money spent on Belle Isle will go a long way to enhancing the park for all residents to enjoy. For each of the sites, there will be some degree of political opposition. Due to the fact that certain amenities on Belle Isle are slowly deteriorating and maintenance is required in order to preserve the park and its reputation, something needs to be done soon. If the City of Detroit does not have the resources to help save Belle Isle, then they should not prevent others for attempting to make a positive impact.

Becoming a HCMA Metro Park is in the best interest of Belle Isle and metropolitan Detroit in order to promote a positive image of Detroit and improve the quality of life for all of its residents.