
Macomb County position paper – Assignment III

Macomb County commissioners group

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Projects not considered

Fort Wayne and Belle Isle are currently not considered viable Metropark options for the Macomb County Commissioners. We believe that the West Riverfront and the State Fairground proposals are more politically and economically feasible and provide greater potential for revitalizing the City of Detroit.

Fort Wayne

Fort Wayne could provide educational and tourist opportunities in Detroit. The project has the potential for improving blighted areas, and serving many low-income citizens in Detroit. This effort, combined with other revitalization efforts in the downtown area could result in significant positive change for the city. However, the project has many disadvantages:

- Fort Wayne is isolated from other neighborhoods and from the central downtown area. No public transit options and poor road access will deter people from visiting the park.
- The project requires huge initial investments. Most of the buildings are in serious disrepair and the area immediately surrounding the park is an industrial ghost town.
- The historic fort will be the main attraction of the park. This promotes the park as a “one time visit” site and not as a recreational facility where people visit frequently.

Overall, the project could possibly benefit the area where the park will be located but would not benefit the area as much as the other projects.

Belle Isle

This City Park is considered the jewel of Detroit and is a popular entertainment destination for Detroit. Moreover, the park is well connected to residential and businesses areas and is the largest facility considered in the four proposals. Nevertheless, the project has some disadvantages, which make it unsuitable as a potential HCMA park location:

- Belle Isle is isolated from the city center and does not hold the same potential as the other proposals to contribute to the overall revitalization of the Detroit area.
- The project presents strong political opposition due to its status as a city park. The park is currently functioning well as a city park, and public officials in Detroit are not willing to relinquish control of this facility to HCMA. Further opposition will most likely be encountered from Detroit residents if a fee was charged (a standard HCMA practice) as they have always had free access to the Isle.

Projects under consideration

The West Riverfront and State Fairground proposals are the two proposals that are possible options for the Macomb County HCMA Commissioners. Both projects provide good opportunities for the City of Detroit and its surrounding areas. Our position states that the West Riverfront proposal is the one which generates the most positive effects for the downtown Detroit area, but is the least politically and financially feasible. On the other hand, the State Fairgrounds proposal does not hold as much potential for the surrounding community, but is more politically and financially feasible.

West Riverfront benefits

The West Riverfront is located close to the same communities that would be served by the Belle Isle and Fort Wayne proposals. In conjunction with the current East Riverfront development project that is underway, the West Riverfront proposal offers the greatest opportunity for the revitalizing the downtown Detroit and some of its surrounding communities.

The beautification of the waterfront in conjunction with the ongoing economic activities in the area will generate further economic development, attracting new entrepreneurs to locate in the area. Increased economic activity and improved quality of life might also attract new residents to live in Detroit.

The proposal will make the Detroit River more accessible for residents and will further promote the area as a tourist destination. The increase in interest could also serve as a catalyst for revitalizing nearby projects such as Fort Wayne.

West Riverfront concerns

Due to current efforts in the Riverfront, private, city, or state development of the West Riverfront might occur in the future without using scarce HCMA resources. This would allow the City of Detroit more flexibility in development choices (i.e. mixed park, residential, and retail options that have been proven to be the most successful in similar locations) than a Metropark provides. Also the riverside park presents a potential problem for raising revenues for the park. HCMA depends on parking fees and other user fees from the Metroparks to cover approximately half of their budget. The West Riverfront Park's open access and "city park" feel with a majority of foot traffic in and out of the park, will greatly reduce the parking revenues HCMA relies upon.

Its small size (22 acres) means that there would not be as much space for recreational activities as the other parks. Furthermore, it is not very accessible for the suburban counties in the metro Detroit region leading to potential political opposition.

In order to make the Riverside park financially feasible, huge amounts of federal and tax dollars would need to be invested to address brownfield remediation, access to the site via improved mass transit and road improvement, and private and investment to the surrounding community in terms of housing and businesses. HCMA cannot afford to redevelop the surrounding the surrounding areas, which would ultimately be a huge part of the success of such a park. Furthermore, some type of financial sharing agreement would need to be

worked out in order for the HCMA to recuperate some of the financial losses that would occur with the expected decrease in car traffic and consequently parking fees.

State Fairgrounds benefits

The State Fairgrounds is centrally located for both the residents of Detroit and the residents of Macomb and Oakland Counties. Furthermore, it is accessible to both those with and without transportation since mass transit and several roads run through the area. Consequently, the services provided at this site would be accessible for both those in the city of Detroit and those in the surrounding areas.

The park—located in a low and middle class residential area—will provide recreation facilities to a diverse population. The economic benefits that would arise from a park at this location would also benefit a larger number of people in the surrounding areas.

Some of the park's current infrastructure can be utilized by the HCMA reducing the financial cost of building an entirely new park. The existing facilities would allow HCMA to provide a number of different recreational activities, like a Joe Dumars basketball camp, an ice hockey rink, and an activities pool, that the other proposed sites cannot provide. would do not have the current capacity for.

The State Fairgrounds proposal is most similar to resembles the existing HCMA parks, addressing issues of equity between the parks and programming, administration, and maintenance efficiency for the HCMA.

State Fairground concerns

The State Fairgrounds does not provide access to a natural resource, such as a body of water or river, which is uncharacteristic of all the other HCMA parks.

An HCMA park at the Fairgrounds might not promote large-scale economic development around the metro park, a key point in using a Metropark as a tool for redevelopment. As a result, lack of redevelopment potential might not retain and attract people to the city as hoped, which decreases the chances of strengthening Detroit and reducing sprawl in the surrounding counties.

Conclusion

Macomb county commissioners are aiming to improve the quality of life in Southeast Michigan. We believe that revitalizing the City of Detroit is a necessary goal, and developing a new Metropark can act as a catalyst for revitalization.

In order to select among the different proposals we are looking at the project feasibility as well as other factors such as job creation in the area, economic development opportunities, and quality of life improvements. We are aiming to consider the project that brings the most positive effects within the HCMA's capacity.