

As the Oakland County Commissioners, we have carefully reviewed the four proposed plans for a Metropark in Detroit, visited the sites, and met with experts in a variety of fields to aid our decision-making process. After considerable deliberation, we have come the following conclusions about each of the proposed sites.

Historic Fort Wayne

Oakland County does not support the Historic Fort Wayne Metropark proposal for several reasons. The main concern with this proposed site is its location and accessibility to Metro area residents. The site is located relatively far from Oakland and other area counties, and its location would deter these residents from traveling to the Metropark and utilizing its amenities. Furthermore, the 146-acre Fort Wayne site, with its run-down buildings and facilities, does not fit into the direction and vision of the Metropark system, which primarily provides opportunities for outdoor recreation in large, scenic areas (most current Metroparks are 1,000 acres or more).

While the proposed Fort Wayne plan offers rich educational opportunities for school groups and individuals with an interest in military history, these aspects will not necessarily attract a broad base of residents from the areas surrounding Detroit looking for outdoor recreation. For broad usage, the site would have to offer innovative recreational opportunities not available in current Metroparks in the region. The Fort Wayne proposal lacks such elements. Therefore, it is also questionable whether turning Fort Wayne into a Metropark would be an effective impetus for economic revitalization in the surrounding areas if businesses do not anticipate large inflows of visitors from different social and economic backgrounds.

Considering the many concerns with the proposed site and how it would fit into the current Metropark system, HCMA involvement at Fort Wayne would not be prudent at this time. Preserving this historic landmark is important; however the City of Detroit should facilitate this preservation and reconstruction with support from private sponsors and historical foundations.

State Fairgrounds

The State Fairgrounds proposed Metropark site is the closest geographically to Oakland County. From this perspective it might serve the recreational demands of the southern parts of the county or act as an economic stimulus for businesses near the Oakland County border.

For the most part, however, the State Fairgrounds has very little to offer Oakland County as a Metropark. In fact, developing the State Fairgrounds as a Metropark might harm Oakland County's interests. Creating an environmental education center could detract from the HCMA investment in our own Indian Springs Metropark environmental education center. Additionally, the State Fairgrounds site, located far from Detroit's central business district, would not spark the economic revitalization Detroit badly needs. Our residents already take advantage of the State Fairgrounds in its current capacity.

during the two weeks of the summer when it is transformed into a lively, bustling fair. During the rest of the year, Oakland's own ample parkland and wealth of recreational opportunities provide a much greater draw than the proposed project would, especially since the plan does little to erase the stigma that Detroit has. Very few Oakland residents would want to travel to a park they have to pay to enter in a city they consider unsafe and undesirable. Despite its proximity, the proposed State Fairgrounds park would not enhance the recreational opportunities available to our residents in any meaningful way.

Most certainly, our constituents would vote against a millage increase that would serve to create a Metropark at the site of the State Fairgrounds. Therefore, as commissioners we cannot cast our vote in favor of the State Fairgrounds.

Riverside Park/West Riverfront Proposal

Admittedly, this proposal might provide the most benefit for the immediate surrounding environment of Detroit. However, it is the most parochial in nature. At 22 acres, the upgrades and expansions planned for this area seem, at best, organized for the communities immediately surrounding the facility. This park plan provides little to no primary benefits for the residents of Oakland County. Among the many problems with this plan are: issues of location, size, and amenities, concerns about the impact and usage by the residents of Oakland County, and issues of security.

At 22 acres, Riverside Park is the smallest of the possible sites that are being considered. Even with the addition of the a West Riverfront walkway, this proposal provides little space for day-trippers. Rather, the size and structure of the park encourages individuals in the immediately surrounding neighborhoods to utilize the park, and for those who work in the area, or in the nearby downtown, to use the park only in passing.

The size of park, along with its decided lack of parking facilities (or plans to enlarge what is currently available), creates a disincentive for residents of Oakland County to come and enjoy the facilities. Rather, this park proposal is the most parochial in nature, appealing only to the residents of the area. It is difficult to expect Oakland County to support a park that it will gain no tangible recreational benefit from. And while some might postulate that such a park would help revitalize the business community of Detroit, which in turn would provide a rising tide of economic revitalization for the entire region, Oakland County with its booming business development is not in need of such revitalization. Oakland County has yet to see compelling evidence that such secondary benefits would actually occur, and worries that job creation in the Detroit area is merely a zero sum game for Southeast Michigan, with Oakland County paying the price.

A third problem with the park proposal is its attempt to cross paths with the Ambassador Bridge. The West Riverfront RiverWalk (which would connect with the East Riverfront RiverWalk) would be dangerously close to the foundation of the Ambassador Bridge, and security concerns in the wake of September 11th might make this plan unfeasible.

The balance of these concerns means that Oakland County cannot support the Riverfront proposal.

Belle Isle

We on the Commission representing Oakland County feel that the Belle Isle Metropark Proposal is the plan that will best serve the residents of Southeast Michigan. Belle Isle is already established as a popular location with over 8 million visitors a year.

Unfortunately budget shortcomings have eroded the existing infrastructure on the island. This is where the HCMA can play an important role. By upgrading the existing infrastructure and developing new additions to the physical plant Belle Isle will become the world class park that it was meant to be.

The Belle Isle Park is a natural addition to the HCMA system. The HCMA is committed to providing the public with access to parks containing large natural habitats. Its position on the waterfront is another factor that matches with the HCMA's effort to provide areas for recreation, education, and conservation near Michigan's lakes and streams.

New construction proposed in the Belle Isle plan will increase the island's usage and provide valuable resources to metro area citizens. HCMA development of new athletic fields will provide a way for metro area residents to get exercise while participating in community sporting events. The new culture center will provide an area for community artists to do their work and area children to participate in community theater. Renovation of the existing entrance, conservatory, greenhouse, gardens and museums will make Belle Isle a more attractive destination, bringing prestige and much needed economic stimulus to the surrounding areas.

Concerns about access to Belle Isle are unfounded. Belle Isle provides the best access from public transportation of any of the proposed sites. Additionally Belle Isle provides ample parking for those visiting from the areas surrounding Detroit, an important source of revenue for any Metropark.

Some in Detroit are concerned that the HCMA's entry fees will cause a reduction in the number of Detroit residents visiting the island. Nothing could be further from the truth. Residents of Detroit who take public transportation or walk to the Island will be charged no fee. Those who drive in will only be charged a modest fee for parking. This is a small price to pay in order to enjoy the world class facilities which will be provided through the HCMA system.

In conclusion, Belle Isle is the only viable option as a Metropark from the perspective of the Oakland County Commissioners.