

WASHTENAW COUNTY PARKS COMMISSIONER POSITION PAPER ON
CURRENT METROPARK PROPOSALS

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In analyzing the four Metropark proposals, the Washtenaw County Parks Commissioner sought the proposal most likely to spur economic development and urban revitalization to the City of Detroit. Washtenaw County has carefully considered each proposal through a closed-session hearing and has come to the following conclusions:

Analysis of Metropark Sites:

Fort Wayne:

Strengths:

- Fort Wayne's close proximity to the Detroit waterfront offers the opportunity to connect the site to other waterfront developments.
- The residential area surrounding Fort Wayne consists of vacant lots, and abandoned or rundown houses and buildings. This lack of development presents opportunities for new development in the area.
- Fort Wayne has historical relevance for visitors due to its Indian Burial Ground, military barracks, and garrisons. These characteristics may attract tourists interested in military and Native American history.

Weaknesses:

- Though Fort Wayne is close to the riverfront, it will be highly difficult to link Historic Fort Wayne to other riverfront development projects without prior development of the Westside Riverfront;
- Given the area's extreme dilapidation and its geographic distance from other developing areas, drawing support for new development does not appear to be immediately feasible.
- Since there is no commercial development within and surrounding the site, tourists who visit Fort Wayne will most likely leave without utilizing the rest of the city.

Belle Isle:

Strengths:

- Belle Isle's current infrastructure and ample green space allow it to be developed with the typical attractions of current metroparks. This feature provides a familiar use of HCMA funding that should be easily accepted by regional residents.

- Belle Isle's current status as a park allows its development to be completed with minimal and focused renovations. This allows the proposal provides the most immediate access to the public.
- Belle Isle has a historic visitor draw. These high established visitation rates suggest a secure environment for investment.

Weaknesses:

- Belle Isle's physical isolation from downtown Detroit is a negative aspect of HCMA development. This isolation results in limited access to the park and interaction within downtown areas by park visitors.
- Belle Isle's historic free-entrance fees and city jurisdiction potentially may cause political tension given HCMA's required parking fees and regional composition.
- Belle Isle's development has minimal potential for spurring growth and expansion beyond the boundaries of the island.

State Fairgrounds:

Strengths:

- The Big Stove is a statewide tourist attraction;
- Due to the State Fairgrounds' location, it is the most accessible of the current proposals to the HCMA membership;
- There is a strong regional interest in assisting in the long-term viability of the State Fair;
- Due to its untraditional landscape and potential as a recreational facility, the State Fairgrounds proposal is the most unique of those under current consideration;
- The State Fairgrounds have the greatest potential for educational opportunities due to its current facilities and connections to educational programs already established at the State Fair;

Weaknesses:

- The State Fairgrounds do not have the natural resources that usually distinguish other HCMA metroparks;
- The State Fairgrounds are located near several other existing parks;
- The current proposal for the State Fairgrounds is unlikely to appeal to the young adult (25-35) demographic.

West Riverfront Park:

Strengths:

- West Riverfront Park provides the opportunity to stimulate development and revitalization in two emergent communities (Corktown, and Mexicantown).
- This plan supports the larger strategy for riverfront development in downtown Detroit.

- West Riverfront Park provides the opportunity to improve environmental and community health in Metro Detroit.

Weakness:

- Limited opportunities for educational benefits
- West Riverfront park is a limited draw for individuals living outside of the Metro Detroit area
- Limited support from individual businesses because of long time needed for park completion

Support for the West Riverfront Proposal:

After reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the four proposals, the Washtenaw County HCMA Commissioner endorses the West Riverfront Proposal. This proposal best meets the criteria outlined in our January 6th press release in the following ways:

- It is the most viable alternative for long-term economic revitalization in Metro-Detroit
- Brownfield redevelopment supports our goals to preserve green space and revitalize the metro area in an environmentally-responsible manner
- The ability to attract new residents to the Detroit area will help curb sprawl in Washtenaw County
- A thriving combination of commercial, residential, and public on the waterfront will provide an area for visiting Washtenaw County residents to enjoy

We look forward to regional support for the West Riverfront proposal so that together, we can revitalize and strengthen the Metro-Detroit area.