



## **Metropark Position Paper: Statewide and Southeast Michigan HCMA Commissioners**

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### **Introduction**

The Statewide and Southeast Michigan HCMA Commissioners welcome the opportunity to enhance Michigan’s urban core through the creation of a Metropark within the City of Detroit. To achieve the goal of economic revitalization in Detroit we support a project that finds a regional solution to foster economic growth. The creation of an HCMA park within Detroit will help the city attract more businesses and local investment, encourage tourism, preserve and enhance the natural environment of the area, create income in an area that desperately needs it, and help make Detroit a “cool city” able to retain and attract the young, creative class. Using these criteria, all four park proposals have potential; however, the statewide and SE Michigan commissioners are currently inclined to support the Historic Fort Wayne and West Riverfront sites.

### **Historic Fort Wayne**

There are several reasons that we endorse the establishment of a Metropark at the Fort Wayne site. It is understood that the Fort Wayne area is a very impoverished section of Detroit, but the HCMA is looking at a plan that will improve the quality of life in the Detroit and the surrounding area not only for the next 5 years, but for the next 100. Out of the 4 Metropark candidates the HCMA views Fort Wayne as a candidate that matches our goals of attracting tourists, preserving the environment and revitalizing the area.

Built between 1843 and 1849, Fort Wayne is the last remaining fort on the Detroit River. The fort played a role during the American Civil War, World War I and World War II. This history can be used as a conduit to increase tourism to the area. Centers can be established on the grounds to educate visitors about the history of the fort. These centers can also be used to educate visitors on the role played by Native Americans showcasing the Indian burial mound on site. The variety of educational opportunities available to the public can be used as a major draw for all.

The area is located on the edge of the West Riverfront and the park can generate income through all the water related activities that can be provided on the river. A pedestrian boardwalk can be erected for strolling alongside the river, participating in entertainment-related activities, and enjoy and learn about the Indian Burial Mounds. Through a Metropark, the dream of community members and tourists promenading along the river can become a reality and a huge attraction.

Added tourism and more greenery will spur economic revitalization in an area that desperately needs it. Green space will increase property values and more people coming to the park will create the need for more businesses. This income generation is very important for the

community and to truly revitalize Detroit we need to begin with the poorest sections and not ignore their problems.

The HCMA understands that the endorsement of Fort Wayne will be a risky option. We know the park lies in an economically depressed area and it will be expensive to renovate the site. However, we feel that the benefits outweigh the costs. Our goal is to use parks as a method of revitalization, and there is not a place in Detroit that will benefit more from this decision.

### **West Riverfront/ Riverside Park**

There are numerous benefits to the proposal to develop a Metropark on the West Riverfront. This park development project would achieve most of the goals that the HCMA state commissioners have for a Metropark in Detroit. Of the four proposed Metroparks, the West Riverfront holds the greatest appeal to the three interests that the Governor has identified as most critical to the urban revitalization of Detroit: the business community and developers, the tourism industry, and environmentalists.

First, this project serves our economic development goals. It will further encourage the development of restaurants and other businesses in the thriving, adjacent area of Corktown, generating jobs and increasing the area's tax base. The project also would stimulate innovative public/private partnerships on neighboring sites along the riverfront.

Second, a West Riverfront Metropark would boost the state's tourism industry by making Detroit a more attractive destination. Tourists would take advantage of the park's central location, and the park would facilitate appealing city festivals with artists and street performers. It would connect with the East Riverfront redevelopment, creating a five-mile walking and biking path from the West Riverfront to Belle Isle. Furthermore, this project will help make Detroit a "cool" city that would attract and retain the young adult population that is so critical to the city's economic future.

Lastly, the West Riverfront proposal would serve environmental interests, as it would involve the decontamination of brownfield sites and beautify a contaminated site.

The West Riverfront proposal also achieves most of the HCMA's internal goals. It has water access and is politically feasible. It also has the potential for a large impact, especially if it is part of a future, larger revitalization project along the entire Riverfront.

Drawbacks of the West Riverfront project include the minimal short-term return on investment for the HCMA. The project does involve risk; however, the long-term returns are likely to be substantial. An additional, smaller concern is the relative safety and security of the area.

### **Belle Isle**

Investing in Belle Isle offers a multitude of advantages. It is already a well-known park and matches the profile of other parks that HCMA has invested in. It is nearly ten times the size of all the other proposals and for the same cost is capable of protecting more green space, offering more diverse facilities, and creating a recreational area in Detroit without consuming valuable space that could be used for business development. In addition, it already has well-developed infrastructure to accommodate traffic flow and public transit.

The HCMA specializes in the management of parks such as Belle Isle. Given its size and established infrastructure, the Belle Isle proposal promises to deliver the highest returns on investment at the lowest risks. Due to its proximity to downtown Detroit, it will undoubtedly

help to further the “cool city” image. Since it is already well known among Michigan residents and tourists, investment in marketing and image building will be minimal. The Belle Isle project has the potential to develop into one of the finest parks in the country and can be a source of significant tourist interest.

However, there are considerable political constraints that may make the Belle Isle proposal infeasible. Belle Isle is known as the Jewel of Detroit and is a key community resource. It is therefore unlikely that the City of Detroit would relinquish its control over the park management to HCMA. Also, the proposal is unlikely to make a significant contribution to the economic development of the surrounding areas.

## **State Fairgrounds**

There are several reasons for considering the Michigan State Fairgrounds as a location for a Detroit Metropark. Developing a Metropark in this neighborhood has the potential to bridge the gap between groups of people who normally do not interact due to the various economic, racial, cultural, and spatial issues that exist within the community. It will facilitate this interaction because the Fairgrounds are within or border three of the five park region counties. In addition to its proximity to major highways, urban and suburban public transit makes it accessible to multiple communities.

In terms of the vision for HCMA Metroparks, the fairgrounds also have several deterrents. The State Fairgrounds site is not located near water, eliminating the possibility of certain types of water recreation. It also has the least amount of greenspace. The fairgrounds also do not mesh as well with the economic development efforts of the city. There is limited potential for further development around the site, which is mostly residential. Furthermore, the site is located near one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Detroit as well as prosperous suburbs. Therefore, the site less likely to impact economic development in the poorer communities of Detroit’s inner city. For these reasons in addition the lack of water and greenspace, the Michigan State Fairgrounds proposal is not the best option for a Detroit Metropark.

## **Conclusion**

Michigan is the eighth most populous state in the nation, and the eleventh largest. It offers richly diverse geographic, cultural, and historic resources. Detroit, Michigan’s largest city, serves as the principal American port for trade with Canada. Michigan’s economy supports farming, industry, education, and high-tech enterprise. The state possesses unparalleled recreation and park facilities, which drive economic development, tourism, and environmental improvement. Michigan’s parks also play a key role in creating “cool” cities that attract and retain young, creative people, revitalize local communities, and anchor urban and suburban growth and renewal. The Huron-Clinton Metroparks Southeast Michigan and Statewide Commissioners support the Fort Wayne and Riverside Park proposals. Parks such as these are the magnet that unites local, regional, and statewide communities; reduces harmful urban sprawl; and revitalizes our urban centers. It will foster regional investment, raise property values, and provide a common space for all residents to enjoy recreational activities. In turn, this urban investment will bring resources, jobs, and workers to the entire state, positioning Michigan as an international leader in the twenty-first century.