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Assignment #2

After review of the four possible area for the development of a Detroit metropark—the Riverside, Belle Island, Fort Wayne, and the State Fairgrounds—the environmental coalition recommends that HCMA choose the Riverside site. This recommendation comes with the endorsement of the Sierra Club, 1000 Friends of Detroit and the Michigan Farm Bureau in hopes of creating an ecozone in the heart of an industrial area of Detroit.

This recommendation comes after the assessment of each of the four sites based on issues surrounding urban sprawl and the environmental. The decision to endorse the Riverside site was primarily based on the following criteria: net environmental impact of development, existing infrastructure, quality of life, transportation, pollution abatement and the development of green space, and environmental education opportunities. The group also factored in secondary considerations of potential for economic viability, transportation access, historical significance and the potential for integration into the existing and future development programs.

Historic Fort Wayne

Developing Fort Wayne into a metro park is our second option. Its historic importance as both a military base and the Native American burial ground creates a diverse set of educational activities that would attract a large number of visitors. The surrounding neighborhood could greatly improve as the result of a metro park. Its other benefits include:

- Proximity to waterfront
- Environmental education
- Brownfield rehabilitation
- Opportunities for real estate development
- Regional attractiveness
- Year-round activities.

Historic Fort Wayne has an existing infrastructure though the cost to rebuild and maintain the site would be prohibitive. Fort Wayne is also relatively far from downtown Detroit and not easily accessible by public transportation making it difficult for the majority of Detroit residents to visit.

Belle Isle – “The Jewel of Detroit”

Belle Isle is the largest of the proposed sites and has the largest green area. It is also one of the sites that has an existing infrastructure and is already a popular spot for the greater Detroit area. As an environmental/agricultural interest group, we feel this site offers the best opportunity for environmental education. The benefits of Belle Isle include activities such as waterslides, golf course, yacht club, and an aquarium. Plans include:

- Re-opening of the Belle Isle Zoo

- Building a Native Forest Nature Preserve
- Improving the existing beach area.

The restoration of Belle Isle would aesthetically improve the city of Detroit, but we are unclear whether it will have a positive economic impact on the neighboring areas. As an island Belle Isle is detached from the adjacent community. Our groups have an interest in not only improving green space but preventing urban sprawl. We do not feel this site would promote real estate development and commercial investment.

Another issue is that HCMA may not be able to acquire the land from the city government. Being the “jewel of Detroit”, the mayor’s office will be hesitant to release authority to HCMA. In addition, the park has always been free and the charging an admission fee will cause opposition from Detroit residents.

The State Fairgrounds

The Fairgrounds are located at the corner of Woodward and 8th Mile road. Currently, they are used two weeks out of the year for the Michigan State fair and possess other indoor and outdoor exhibition facilities with limited recreational areas. However, despite the popularity and use of the grounds, it has fallen into financial trouble, and is under consideration as a possible site for the development of a metropark.

The advantages of the State Fair site are:

- Public Transportation for both Detroit and Suburban residents.
- An infrastructure already in place (i.e. amphitheatre, concert hall, livestock area).
- Located near both affluent and poor neighborhoods, with homes of nearest proximity housed by families, making it an ideal site for the intermingling of bedroom communities.

The disadvantages to the State Fair site are:

- Least amount of open land for green development (40 acres)
- Closer to the suburban and rural areas than to downtown Detroit.
- Environmental impact low compared to other sites.

It is the view of the environmental coalition that the disadvantages to the State Fair site outweigh the net advantages compared to the other sites, especially in terms of environmental impact and effects on urban sprawl.

The Riverside Park

The proposed site for the Riverside Park (a.k.a. West Riverfront) is in the heart of abandoned and existing industrial facilities in southwest Detroit. Despite its industrial background, the Riverside Park has a great deal of potential for development and is the favored sites among the four potential areas.

- Has the most potential for environmental impact due to the clean up of brownfields and creation of green spaces.
- A positive spillover effect on the neighboring communities which would increase the quality of life in the area. This could then lead to a higher demand for and further development of downtown residential spaces.
- Use this park as an opportunity to build upon the concurrent development of the East Riverfront and the existing benefits of Belle Isle to create a synergy between the activities of the three riverfront areas.
- Create a regional attraction for business owners to move downtown especially with the promotion of light commercial industry such as restaurants and shops, similar to Houston, Seattle and Baltimore.
- The revitalized West River Front creates the opportunity for environmental education through comparison between the newly reconditioned parklands and still polluted areas.
- West Riverside is an aesthetically pleasing location for riverfront activities. Its proximity to downtown Detroit also makes this location valuable real estate. Despite limitations to access, creative planning such as mass transit can be used to make the site even more accessible.

One risk is that the environmental function of the metropark might be secondary to its potential to spur economic development and curb urban sprawl. However, the environmental renewal of the Riverside area is the catalyst for revitalization of the area. The park will help to attract and create incentives for private investment and public-private partnerships in the surrounding areas that are currently underused. Although there are not guarantees that the park will spur economic development, the park presents a unique opportunity with the redevelopment of the East Riverside in conjunction with the upcoming Superbowl in 2006. This focusing event will not only bring national attention to the Lions, but also highlight the redevelopment of the Riverside.

The environmental coalition gives their endorsement with the acceptance of the following conditions. First, an agreement with the city of Detroit to create a downtown development district on the west river front area. HCMA's role will be to clean up and develop this urban sanctuary, setting the tone for future redevelopment and the coexistence of green settings and concrete and steel.

In addition, the city should establish a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) that will help manage the properties and development in concert with the environmental goals of the park. The establishment of the DDA will allow for the extension of public sector influence by allowing the use of private means of buying and selling land. Similarly, the Brownfield authority should initiate the use of brownfield incentives to redevelop old industrial sites and contaminated land using tax-increment financing. But the use of these mechanisms allows for the public to directly define the future of these areas. The use of the redevelopment authority and use of brownfield clean up projects incorporates environmentally sustainable infrastructure and energy sources. These additional recommendations to the proposal will not only win the support of the environmental coalition, but it also is the first step in the creation of a city where

environmental objectives can coincide within an urban settings, working to achieve a the vision of a neo-bohemian living space—where man and nature work together.