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## DETROIT PARK PROPOSAL EVALATIONS

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**To:** HCMA COMMISSION  
**From:** HEALTH/MEDICAL/SENIORS INTEREST GROUP  
**Subject:** PROS AND CONS OF EACH PROPOSAL  
**Date:** JANUARY 6, 2004

### Executive Summary

The purpose of this memo is to outline the potential benefits and drawbacks of each of the proposed park sites as interpreted by the Detroit Medical Center, Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, AARP, and Family Elder Network. Although project feasibility, economic impact, and environmental effects are considered, our analysis is primarily focused on each park site's impact on health, medical, and senior citizen issues.

### Riverside Park/West Riverfront Proposal

#### **Pros**

The Riverside Park proposal promises economic development and increased investment in the area. A park along the river would connect the downtown area with the residential districts in the west and increase traffic into the downtown district. The proposed park would also increase pedestrian traffic and make the city more accessible. Economic development is also likely to result from the park. A developed riverfront would encourage new businesses to locate to the downtown Detroit area. The improved retail activity increases the tax base for the city and may also bring housing opportunities for young professional and middle-class citizens. This outcome is particularly important for the area's hospitals and other health care providers that rely on "paying" patients to help subsidize the cost of lower income patients that are often unable to pay their medical bills.

A riverside park that connects different residential and commercial areas and makes the city safer for pedestrians may improve public health. A path along the river encourages walking, jogging, and bicycling. It is important for Americans to incorporate these types of physical activities into their daily routine in order to reduce obesity and diseases. Finally, the proposal would also cleanup many contaminated sites which would lead to improved air and water quality along the river.

#### **Cons**

One weakness of the proposal is that the site is small and has limited recreational facilities. There is also the concern that the neighborhood is unsafe, thus discouraging area residents from taking advantage of the park. The elderly population may be particularly wary of using a park in a dangerous neighborhood. Most importantly, the development of the proposed park would require a large amount of initial investment and may be more efficiently used for commercial purposes.

## Belle Isle Proposal

### **Pros**

Belle Isle's principal assets are its existing land and programming opportunities. The site already contains a variety of facilities including sports fields, an aquarium, and a senior center, as well as many scenic places to picnic or sit. These options are especially important because they encourage physical fitness activities. The island's large natural forest also provides a unique opportunity for educational nature trails for joggers and walkers. The police mini-station increases a feeling of safety, which is important to seniors.

Accessibility is also an important asset of Belle Isle, as it is located off the corridor of many major highways. People will not need to drive through any confusing residential or downtown areas in order to reach Belle Isle. Seniors and educational groups will be much more receptive to a park that is easy to find and reach. Finally, area residents, especially seniors, have a sense of nostalgia about Belle Isle since many of them visited the park as children and young adults.

### **Cons**

The fact that Belle Isle is already a park is a major concern. Money may be better spent on the development of a new park. Belle Isle is currently open to the public for no fee. The introduction of an access fee, as proposed by the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA), would likely reduce patronage by nearby neighborhood residents. In addition, the park's distant location from areas heavily populated by senior citizens makes it a less desirable location for these citizens to visit and utilize.

## Fort Wayne Proposal

### **Pros**

Fort Wayne has many attributes that appeal to the interests of health, medical and senior citizen groups. The site offers several activities specific to improving the overall health of Detroit citizens. It's important to note that many of these activities are senior citizen accessible. The park's 210 acres offer many diverse opportunities for healthy outdoor activities, including biking, running, and rollerblading. These activities are important tools for increasing the overall health of the community.

Another benefit of the Fort Wayne site is its close proximity to the Family Elder Network (FEN), which is also located in the Empowerment Zone. By attracting senior citizens to this area with activities such as fishing and museums, senior citizens will develop a sense of community within the Fort Wayne area. In addition, there are several vacant buildings on the site that could be developed for community use, such as a senior center or community development non-profits.

The Fort Wayne site offers many positive attributes beyond its impact on the health of the community. A HCMA park designation would place a spotlight on the long-neglected surrounding neighborhoods, which has the potential of augmenting the safety of the

surrounding community. In addition, the Fort Wayne site may be more economically viable because of its potential for additional federal funding. A potential secondary benefit of the site is the development of a public transportation system that reaches this forgotten neighborhood. The location of Fort Wayne, within walking distance of several neighborhoods including Corktown and Mexicantown, makes the site viable and attractive to community development.

### **Cons**

Despite its many selling points, Fort Wayne does offer several drawbacks. First and foremost, the surrounding neighborhood is perceived by many to be unsafe. This perception could cause many possible park attendees, especially the elderly, to avoid use of this facility. In addition, the site is currently not accessible by public transportation. This problem is amplified when one considers the park's isolated location from highways and main roads. This has the effect of discouraging potential park users that would normally drive. Ultimately, the park's location may be too far away to encourage its use by senior citizens and people below the poverty line, which would greatly reduce its potential for meaningful economic and community change.

### State Fairgrounds Proposal

#### **Pros**

This proposal is particularly attractive because of its proximity to the elderly middle class living in the inner-ring suburbs and the impoverished African Americans living to the south and east of the Fairgrounds. The site also provides many educational opportunities including a Community Arts Center and facilities for environmental awareness.

The area west is perceived as a stable and established neighborhood relative to those surrounding the other proposals. This perception may help convince constituents, specifically senior citizens, to support the Fairgrounds Metropark. The site's central location and proximity to major highways makes it easily accessible to all areas of greater Detroit.

Furthermore, the Fairgrounds site is well known and historically significant due to its long tradition of hosting the Michigan State Fair. The Fairgrounds have generally been used only one month a year for the State Fair, thus freeing the balance of the calendar for Metropark activities.

#### **Cons**

Some critics would say that the proposed site lies in an affluent neighborhood that already has access to recreational facilities, such as Palmer Park. Thus, there is a significant equity concern vis-à-vis the low-income communities in Southwest Detroit. Additionally, there is a concern that the proposed site does not lie on a body of water, unlike the other Metropark proposals, thereby limiting the recreational activities available to visitors. The limited area of the Fairgrounds, relative to Belle Island and Fort Wayne, places further limits on recreational activities. Finally, the site offers few physical fitness opportunities and is therefore unlikely to benefit the health outcomes of nearby residents.