



Roll Call Number

Agenda Item Number

47

Date January 7, 2008

Motion to receive and file attached letter from the Park and Recreation Board regarding initiation of a multi-jurisdictional planning process for the development of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers Greenway.

Moved by _____ to receive and file the attached letter and refer to the City Manager.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Ann DiDonato

Ann DiDonato
Assistant City Attorney

COUNCIL ACTION	YEAS	NAYS	PASS	ABSENT
COWNIE				
COLEMAN				
HENSLEY				
KIERNAN				
MAHAFFEY				
MEYER				
VLASSIS				
TOTAL				
MOTION CARRIED			APPROVED	

CERTIFICATE

I, DIANE RAUH, City Clerk of said City hereby certify that at a meeting of the City Council of said City of Des Moines, held on the above date, among other proceedings the above was adopted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and year first above written.

Mayor

City Clerk

December 12, 2007

Honorable Mayor
And
Members of the Des Moines City Council

RE: Regional Greenway Planning

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

Greater Des Moines has a natural resource that has had a significant impact on the quality of life in Des Moines. As part of our history, this resource shaped commerce and the development of our cities. On the whole, we have shown great respect for this resource by protecting its access by the public. But as Des Moines continues to urbanize, we see regular threats to the quality of this resource by encroachment, pollution and the pressure to exploit it through privatization. This natural resource is our Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers Greenway.

When we talk about the great resources of this region we typically refer to elements of the greenway (Gray's Lake, Water Works Park, Principal Riverwalk, Neal Smith Greenbelt, James W. Cownie Soccer Complex, Walnut Woods Park, Raccoon River Park, Brown's Woods, Birdland Marina, Union Park, etc.) but it does not readily occur to us to think about it as a singularly significant resource. Therefore, the planning and management of these facilities tends to be done independently.

What is a Greenway?

A good definition was provided by the *Central Iowa Greenways Framework Plan* as “. . . a corridor of protected open space managed for conservation or recreation. Greenways follow natural land or water features. They link natural areas, parks, cultural sites and historical sites with populated areas.”



PARK AND RECREATION BOARD
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ALL-AMERICA CITY 1949, 1976, 1981

What is the Purpose of a Greenway?

- To protect natural environments including plant and animal life
- To improve air and water quality
- To ensure that urbanites have access to the countryside with the consequential educational and recreational opportunities
- To allow for off-road connections of people to people, people to their environment and people to business
- To protect precious historical and cultural resources
- To improve surrounding and regional land values

Are greenways essential to world peace? The greenway concept has even spread to remote rural areas such as those in East Africa. Women's rights and environmental activist Wangari Maathai launched the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya in 1977 as a grassroots tree-planting program to address the challenges of deforestation, soil erosion and lack of water in her home country. To date, her organization has overseen the planting of 40 million trees across Africa. In 2004, Maathai was the first environmentalist to be awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. Why peace? "There can be no peace without equitable development and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space," said Maathai in her Nobel acceptance speech.

Interestingly, Africa is a pioneer in the Peace Park Concept, which refers to parks that spread across governmental boundaries, such as international borders. One of the most famous peace parks in North America is the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, formed by the aggregation of American and Canadian national parks. In central Iowa, multiple governments are connected by our greenways.

What About Greenways in Greater Des Moines?

We know that approximately 92% of the shorelines of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers within the city of Des Moines are in public ownership today. We do not have data on ownership outside of the city but it would appear that a similar trend of public control stretches to West Des Moines and Polk County. As noted in the second paragraph, significant public resources exist in the greenways managed by the city of Des Moines, Des Moines Water Works, State of Iowa, city of West Des Moines, Polk County and the Army Corps of Engineers. The planning and management has traditionally been separate, although the groups do occasionally come together for special efforts (i.e. trail and Des Moines River Greenbelt planning). **The Greater Des Moines Two Rivers Greenway has the potential to be the most significant amenity and resource of our region.** We can set the standard on how to plan and manage such a facility, resulting in people visiting or moving to Des Moines because of this resource (Denver - Rocky Mountains, Southern California - Pacific Ocean, Seattle - Mt. Rainier, Miami-Dade County - Miami Beach). The Upper Midwest

is gaining on the rest of the country on the desirability index in areas such as education, clean environment, and water access. Greater Des Moines can distinguish itself through the careful planning and future management of this most precious resource or we can watch it become abused and used up.

What Can We Do About This?

The Park and Recreation Board of Des Moines proposes to lead a multi-jurisdictional public planning process for the **Greater Des Moines Two Rivers Greenway**, in coordination with the Des Moines City Manager and City Council.

What is the End Product?

A plan would be developed to show how best to protect our greenway. It would have elements of site planning, public policy recommendations, funding ideas and management alternatives. The St. Louis area initiated the "Confluence Greenway" concept in the 1990s. In November of 2000, voters in the city of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and St. Charles County passed a one-tenth of one-cent sales tax to form the Metropolitan Park and Recreation District (MPRD). The MPRD later changed its name to the Great Rivers Greenway and began collaborating with the Metro East Park District in Madison and St. Clair Counties in Illinois to implement the \$141 million, ten-year Confluence Master Plan. The planning resulted in many initiatives - trails, water taxis, new parks, historic sites - in all impacting more than 10,000 acres of public green space around the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. In Polk County there are approximately 3800 acres of publicly owned land along the Raccoon River, 1400 acres of which are in Water Works Park alone.

If enough governmental entities participate in the plan, the overall greenway package could be used to promote Greater Des Moines as having one of the largest urban parks in the United States. This could be an excellent magnet for tourism and recruitment of business and people. And, it is easier to get grants - both public and private - when government entities band together. This could also encourage more inter-governmental cooperation in other areas. But, most importantly, this will help guarantee the continued existence of our most precious natural resource against unplanned, piecemeal destruction.

As with all successful planning efforts, the process of developing this plan will be at least as meaningful and fruitful as the final plan document.

The Des Moines Park and Recreation Board appreciates the excellent contribution of Don Tripp in the drafting of this letter.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Galloway
Joseph Galloway
Parks and Recreation Board Chair

Marian Rigg Kell
Marian Gelb
Parks and Recreation Board Vice-Chair

Loyd Ogle
Loyd Ogle

Susan Noland
Susan Noland

Susan Koenig-VandeHaar
Susan Koenig-VandeHaar

Suzette Jensen
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