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FINAL REPORT

Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee

Report and Recommendations to the Grand River Restoration Stakeholder Group

May, 2013

Rick Baker, Rick Chapla, John Green, Joe Jones, Birgit Klohs, Kris Larson, and Mike Stevens, Co-Chairs

"We will succeed in making our most important natural feature – the Grand River increasingly visible and usable by converting older riverfront industrial sites to parks and new development that welcome people to the river's edge. We will recreate the rapids in the river as a reminder of our heritage."

Green Grand Rapids (2012)

INTRODUCTION

Grand Rapids has awakened to the fact that the Grand River is one of its most important natural, economic, and community resources. As Grand Rapids' most significant natural asset, the Grand River can and should play an increasingly important role in enhancing the city's quality of life. Grand Rapids Whitewater (GRWW), a nonprofit organization, was formed to focus on one aspect of the *Green Grand Rapids* vision: restoring the City's namesake rapids.

Last year, GRWW retained a national river restoration engineering firm, RiverRestoration, and a local engineering firm, Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber, Inc., to collaborate in a preliminary review of the opportunities and constraints associated with rapids restoration, which was completed in August 2012. The opportunities identified include:

- Install water quality and habitat enhancements
- Connect historic sturgeon spawning habitat
- Improve access and recreational opportunities for residents
- Enhance natural aesthetics and riparian function of the riverfront
- Attract tourism, businesses, and employment opportunities
- Create access to natural areas for under-represented community members
- Invigorate the cultural significance of the rapids
- Implement a comprehensive plan for watershed and green infrastructure issues
- Generate a stewardship ethic for the River through education and outreach.



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This preliminary analysis also identified important constraints on any rapids restoration project, including:

- Sea lamprey barrier and control
- Obtaining necessary easements from adjacent landowners
- Flood conveyance
- Project costs

GRWW representatives also began meeting last year with user groups, community leaders, and governmental officials to refine its understanding of the opportunities and constraints and to assess the likelihood of public interest and philanthropic support. For example, in these informal meetings, important issues were identified that are associated with maintaining and enhancing river flows and levels for rowers and property owners upstream and downstream; maintaining and enhancing sport fishing opportunities and access; and enhancing opportunities for river access for disabled individuals and the general public and the associated public safety concerns.

Beginning in June 2012, GRWW determined community outreach was necessary. GRWW asked the Michigan League of Conservation Voters Education Fund to design and implement a short-term, time-limited stakeholder process to reach out to potentially affected interests. MLCV Education Fund convened a series of stakeholder meetings to elaborate on the preliminary opportunities and constraints by identifying additional issues, concerns, opportunities, information, and interested groups. This stakeholder process is depicted in Attachment A. To date, there have been two large-group meetings, including the December 2012 meeting at which three subgroups of stakeholders were identified to focus specifically on (1) river quality and use; (2) economic development; and (3) community benefits. These subgroups met monthly in February, March, and April 2013, with the results of their deliberations to be presented to the full stakeholder group in May 2013. These results also will be forwarded to GRWW and will be publicly available.

GRWW will use the opportunities, issues, concerns, and information from this preliminary stakeholder process in undertaking an initial feasibility analysis of potential designs for restoring the namesake rapids in downtown Grand Rapids and the associated costs and benefits. This analysis will support a determination as to which, if any, project designs warrant moving forward to secure project funding and to prepare and submit detailed applications to the various local, state and federal government agencies involved. The relevant results will be publicly available and subject to public involvement if and as the project moves forward to the permit application phase.

As the figure in Attachment A indicates, it is anticipated (and hoped) that this initial stakeholder process will also identify additional potential projects associated with enhancing the Grand River as a community resource for Grand Rapids. To the extent that restoring the namesake rapids can serve as an inspiration and catalyst for these projects, GRWW is eager to coordinate and collaborate with other nonprofit groups, government agencies, and community leaders interested in pursuing these projects to realize a more comprehensive view of Grand River restoration.



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Economic Development and Community Benefits Participation:

The Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee is the amalgam of what was originally two separate subcommittees. Participation in the Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee was by interest and voluntary. Meeting on a monthly basis, the Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee was open to all interested individuals throughout the process. The subcommittee was led by Co-chairs Rick Baker, Rick Chapla, John Green, Joe Jones, Birgit Klohs, Kris Larson, and Mike Stevens.

Meeting Frequency and Procedures

The Economic Development Subcommittee and Community Benefits Subcommittee convened (separately) for the first time in December 2012. The Co-chairs subsequently decided to combine the two subcommittees into one, and the combined subcommittee met once monthly during February, March, and April of 2013. A subset of subcommittee participants met once in mid-April to discuss ways in which the public might be engaged in future public processes, apart from this one, which will wrap up in May 2013. The meetings were guided by an agenda, but also provided an opportunity also to field questions, address concerns, and report progress and information. Meeting notes are available upon request.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is presented by the Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee to the larger Stakeholder Group, and reflects the work done by the subcommittee to identify issues and interest groups potentially related to or affected by river restoration. Our subcommittees were originally charged with providing input on maximizing the economic development benefits of the proposed project, and maximizing the community development and quality of life benefits of the proposed project, respectively.

This report contains recommendations for the Grand Rapids Whitewater Board, including issues to prioritize and local groups and individuals to engage. Below please find a list of issues and interest groups which should be considered. Given the combined nature of this subcommittee, a comprehensive list of community benefits was not generated. However, the importance of community benefits was strongly expressed by many participants.



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I. Economic Development and Economic Impact Assessment

Grand Rapids Whitewater should commission an Economic Impact Assessment (EIA) This EIA could include consideration of acquiring land to be preserved for the continued use of the public, developing trail networks and other park facilities, and the connectivity of trails.

The EIA should be informed by existing studies, including Green Grand Rapids, the River Edge Trail plan, and the experiences of other cities with significant river frontage. Participants' suggestions included seeking a "planning" grant to envision flood wall removal, and coordinating with the City of Grand Rapids to complete the River Edge Trail project.

Participants also urge further study of non-monetary benefits, with an eye toward making the project "uniquely Grand Rapids," including community revitalization, educational outreach, and the river serving as a bridge that brings the community of Grand Rapids together, instead of as a dividing line between neighborhoods.

Grand Rapids Whitewater should clearly identify the pieces of this process on which they will take the lead.

II. Public Process

- Ultimate Goal: build community ownership; information exchange helps drive the work and project
 - Think about how to specifically engage those who may underrepresented or opposed to the project
- Critical Ouestions:
 - How does project (river restoration) work with process (city corridor plan)?
 - What are the boundaries of river plan?
 - Likely Ann to Fulton Street, but decision needs to be made early on
 - o How to establish a clear point of leadership, and leadership accountability
 - What is the window for community engagement?
 - Harnessing community energy to use for great outcome, and maintaining momentum
- Scope: Regional



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• Getting the Word Out

 Communicate to existing community organizations, neighborhoods, civic institutions, schools, parks, festivals, etc., to discuss what would they like to see happen at and build legacy for the Grand River

Feedback

- Most important: periodically check in throughout process to make sure engagement and project are on the right track; affirming; open to readjusting
- Surveys could play a very big role
 - Using inexpensive online surveys and distributing to places could effectively gather information from the community, build more excitement, and gather more stakeholders
 - Municipal, surveys, video talk to pastors and they can show video at church service, and provide survey after service and video
 - What questions would be asked in the survey? Scope of questions?
- Going directly to communities and certain groups to seek input, utilizing modes
 of communication that those specific communities use. Must do this to get input
 from underrepresented
- Deliverable: A document to be used for implementation: to describe phasing and funding, maps, figures, etc.
- Participants offered the following suggestions about future public engagement
 - Start public process early with a single point of contact; do not wait for EIA to be complete
 - Identify local organizations that may like to link to the project, virtually or through their own activities and projects (Disability Advocates, Neighborhood Associations)
 - Family-oriented events along the river, talk about its history, impacts on river, family visions for the future – get their input
 - o Specifically engage young professionals, college students
 - o Persons of color sharing their stories and experiences of river
 - Incorporate year-round recreation programs to bring residents closer to the river;
 some cold-weather suggestions include an ice-skating rink or a snowman contest
 - Government Processes
 - Get an understanding of the criteria (at federal and state levels)
 - Lay the groundwork to satisfy the federal focus on community revitalization, youth engagement (especially youth of color), and economic benefits



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- o Consider geographic layout: parking lot, restrooms, accessibility
 - Ensure that there is some access to the river that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act
- o Incorporate opportunities for public art and education
- o Consider the impacts to communities upstream and downstream
- Consider the experience of other cities with notable riverfronts (Detroit, Cincinnati, Chattanooga)

• Other Considerations

- Likely will need to seek permission of adjacent landowners on the River if this is true, we really need to have a comprehensive plan with a strong vision
- Need to have a clearer understanding of the permitting timeline
- Recommendations about who is leading what ability to identify leadership with accountability integrating work into organizational strategic plans (for DDA, Friends of GR parks, etc.,)
- *Downtown Plan:* City of Grand Rapids designing a 12-month process for larger river corridor area downtown
 - o River corridor planning group working in tandem with river restoration project
 - o Must get to point where decision making is more of a public process
 - Improvements in communications and transparency
 - o River restoration as a PROJECT; engagement is a PROCESS
 - Community engagement is expensive
 - Who are we engaging? And how do we want to engage them? What is engagement goal for considered dollar amount?
 - How do people understand where we are in the project process? What is the public perception, and is it accurate?
 - Is public participation appropriate right now?
 - Mini-grants to a group, which will then engage its constituents extends our reach from what we would otherwise be capable of doing on our own
 - o Important to have clear, structured process
 - o Funding dollars come with expectations
 - Set aside resources for maintenance, who will manage and maintain, and other critical questions
- What are the options other than GRWW's initial conceptual design?



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III. Branding/Communications

Consider creating a "river alliance" of individuals and businesses that have concerns about access to river, amount of public space, and preservation of corridors to river

- Consider organizing symbolic projects that will energize the community, e.g., temporary art installations or river restoration-focused events
- Consider benefits of highlighting history of the river, region, and the Native American population

Project Benefits to Community:

- Importance of park setting in generating attraction to river for all, especially young people
- Benefit of opportunity for education
- Sense of place
- Youth involvement, young professionals
- Retaining young adults in Grand Rapids
- Community building
- Engage urban schools, place-based education
- Public art component can assist in educating communities
 - o Opportunity for re-dedication to public art and to connect individuals to the river
 - o Consider example of Seattle: public art, rain garden, water resources
- Attraction and retention of youth to the city

Involve these People and Organizations in Future Public Processes:

- Federal
 - Federal Emergency Management Service (FEMA)
 - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
 - US Army Corps of Engineers
 - US Department of Agriculture
 - o US Fish and Wildlife Service
 - USDA Forest Service
- State
 - Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- Municipal and Local Governments
 - City of Grand Rapids



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- Downtown Development Authority
- Grand Rapids City Commission
- o Grand Rapids Fire Department
- Grand Rapids Police Department
- Kent County Commission
- Kent County Parks Department
- Monroe North Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA)
- Ottawa County
- Plainfield Township
- Robinson Township
- Rockford
- Walker
- Wyoming

User Groups

- Grand Rapids Rowing Association
- Grand Rapids Whitewater
- Grand River Future Vision
- o J&D Mobile Sport Shop
- o Michigan Steelhead & Salmon Fishermen's Association
- Michigan Steelheaders Grand Rapids Chapter
- Organizations of Fishermen and women
- o Rowers
- Schrems West Michigan Trout Unlimited
- Spectators

• Environmental Organizations

- o Groundswell
- Kent Conservation District
- Michigan United Conservation Club
- o Rogue River Watershed Council
- Timberland Resource Conservation & Development Council
- West Michigan Environmental Action Council

• Business Leaders from:

- Amway
- Dickinson Wright PLLC
- Experience Grand Rapids
- Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber, Inc.
- Founders Bank & Trust
- Founders Brewing Co.



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- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce
- Huntington Bank
- Local First
- o Ordway Law Firm, PLLC
- Rockford Construction
- Schellenberg & Evers PC
- Streamworks LLC
- o Varnum LLP
- West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum
- Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations
 - Dyer-Ives Foundation
 - Frey Foundation
 - Friends of Grand Rapids Parks
 - Grand Action
 - Grand Rapids Community Foundation
 - Grand Rapids Urban Forest Project
 - Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition
 - Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
 - Inner City Christian Federation
 - The Meijer Foundation
 - The Right Place
 - Steelcase Foundation
 - Urban League
 - The Wege Foundation
 - West Michigan Sports Commission
- Academic Institutions
 - Calvin College
 - City High might be moving into old Creston engage children
 - Davenport University
 - o Ferris State University
 - Grand Rapids Community College
 - Grand Rapids Public Schools
 - Grand Valley State University
 - Groundswell group
 - Kendall College of Art and Design
 - Michigan State University
 - Sea Grant Michigan, Southwest District Extension
- Riverside Institutions



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- Charlie's Crab
- DeVos Place & Van Andel Arena
- Ford Museum
- Grand Rapids Public Museum
- o JW Marriott
- River Residents
- Native American groups
 - o Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians
 - Little Odawa Band
- Neighborhood Groups
 - o Staff of neighborhood associations that surround river

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS AND RESOURCES

(NOTE: inclusion does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by the subcommittee)

Attachments

- Grand River Restoration Stakeholder Process Flow Chart (Attachment A)
- Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee Participants (Attachment B)

Resources

- Bronx River Alliance
- Department of Environmental Quality website: www.michigan.gov/deq/
- Department of Natural Resources Dam Management Page: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364 52259 27415---,00.html
- Downtown Development Authority Framework Plan:
 http://www.graity.ug/design.ond.douglo-propt.graity.ug/design.graity.ug/design.ond.douglo-propt.graity.ug/design.graity.
 - http://www.grcity.us/design-and-development-services/Downtown-Development-Authority/Documents/GRDDA%20Framework%20Final%2006.15.11.pdf
- Green Grand Rapids Report:
 - http://grcity.us/design-and-development-services/Planning-
 - Department/Documents/Green Grand Rapids Report LowRez 2011 10 04.pdf
- Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development website:
 - http://www.michigan.gov/mdard
- Neighborhood Pattern workbook
- Similar restoration initiatives (Detroit, Chattanooga Cincinnati)
- Urban Waters Federal Partnership website (overarching federal partnerships for river restoration projects)
 - www.urbanwaters.gov



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CONCLUSION

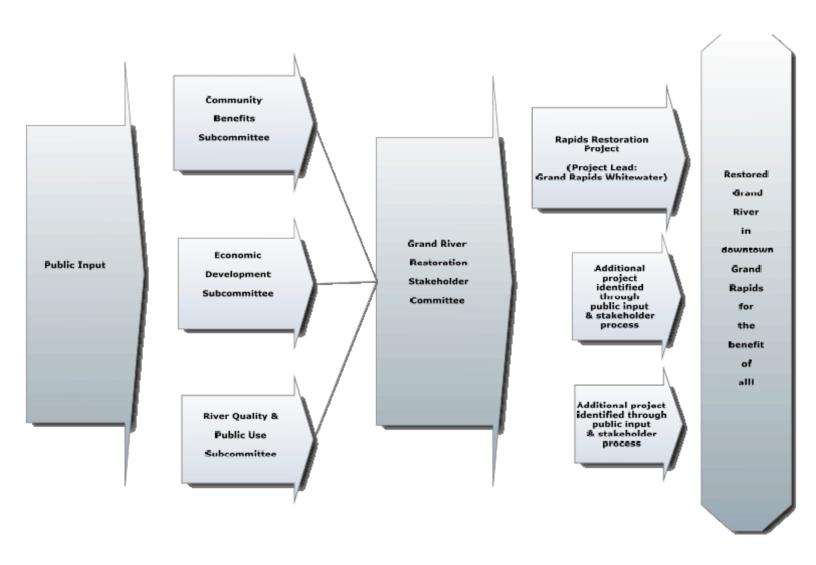
It has been an honor and a privilege to convene and participate in this vibrant and energetic community process. Proposals to restore the namesake rapids to downtown Grand Rapids have been a catalyst for an initial vibrant community conversation about the long-term future of the Grand River in downtown. The ideas and concerns identified through this preliminary stakeholder process provide important input into the early stages of identifying and studying specific proposals for river restoration. We sincerely hope this report is a useful starting point for officials, advocates, and users of the Grand River as the community embarks on the next phase of considering restoration possibilities for the Grand River.

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ATTACHMENT A

Grand River Restoration Initial Stakeholder Process Flow Chart



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ATTACHMENT B

Economic Development and Community Benefits Subcommittee Participants

<u>DISCLAIMER: Please note that organizational affiliation is shown for identification</u> purposes only. It does not reflect organizations' opinions of this report or outcomes.

Tommy Allen: Arts Columnist, Rapid Growth Media

Jim Bachmeier: Vice President for Finance and Administration, Grand Valley State University

Tony Baker: Board Member, Grand Rapids Public Schools

Rick Baker: President & CEO, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce

Beth Banta: Director of Advancement, Grand Rapids Catholic Central High School

Tom Bantle: Director of Exhibits and Facilities, Grand Rapids Public Museum

Laurie Beard: President & CEO, Founders Bank & Trust

Patty Birkholz: West Michigan Director, Michigan League of Conservation Voters Education

Fund

Rosalynn Bliss: Second Ward Commissioner, Grand Rapids City Commission

Colleen Bourque: Groundswell Hub Coordinator, Groundswell

Jonathan Bradford: CEO, Inner City Christian Federation

John Byl: Partner, Warner Norcross & Judd LLP

Rick Chapla: Vice President- Business Development, The Right Place

Norman Christopher: Executive Director, Sustainable Community Development Initiative at

Grand Valley State University

Jeff Cranson: Director of Communications, Michigan Department of Transportation

Robert Eleveld: Attorney, McGarry Bair PC

Steve Ender: President, Grand Rapids Community College



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Steve Faber: Executive Director, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

Wendy Falb: President of the Board, Grand Rapids Public Schools Board of Education

Bill Farr: Retired, Farr, Oosterhouse & Krissoff

Greg Gilmore: Founder, The Gilmore Collection

Bruce Goodman: Partner, Varnum Law, LLP

John Green: Co-founder & Partner, Locus Development

Mike Guswiler: Executive Director, West Michigan Sports Commission

Bryan Harrison: Corporate Government Affairs, Amway

Steve Heacock: Senior Vice President of Community Relations, Spectrum Health Systems

Peter Homeyer: Principal, Pure Science Consulting

Kristine Huizen: Program Officer, Frey Foundation

Joe Jones: Interim President & CEO, Urban League

Birgit Klohs: President & CEO, The Right Place

Chris Knape: Senior Account Executive, Seyferth PR

Kris Larson: Executive Director, Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority

Elizabeth Welch Lykins: Attorney, Welch Law

Tim Marcus: Senior Project Manager, Rockford Construction

Terri McCarthy: Vice President of Programs, Wege Foundation

Peter Mitchell: Vice President of Operations and Innovation, Rockford Construction

Lou Moran: Managing Partner, West Michigan Deloitte

Jon Nunn: Executive Director, Grand Action



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Nick Occhipinti: Director of Policy and Community Activism, West Michigan Environmental Action Council

Wendy Ogilvie: Senior Environmental Specialist, Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber, Inc

Dan O'Keefe: Michigan Sea Grant, Michigan State University Extension

Joseph Platte: Senior Engineer, Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber, Inc

Therese Poland: Research Entomologist, US Department of Agriculture

Michael Posthumus: Assistant Director at Center for Educational Partnerships, GVSU

Connie Redding: District Administrator, Kent Conservation District

Roger Sabine: Parks Director, Kent County

Suzanne Schulz: Planning Director, City of Grand Rapids

Jay Steffen: Assistant Planning Director, City of Grand Rapids

Mike Stevens: Senior Project Leader, Michigan Department of Treasury

Rodney Stokes: Director, Department of Natural Resources

Jim Talen: Kent County Commissioner

Julian Turley: College Student

Mark Van Putten: Consultant, The Wege Foundation

Dan & Katie VandenAkker: Riverhouse Association Board

Mike VanGessel: Founding Partner, Rockford Construction

Jason Zylstra: Senior Program Office, Foundation Administration at RDV Corporation & DeVos Family Foundations

