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News Release

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For Immediate Release

Grand Rapids Whitewater Releases Preliminary Plan for River Restoration Project:

Community engagement process to begin after New Year

- What if 80 acres of sturgeon habitat could be restored?
- What if the Sixth Street dam were removed?
- What if Grand Rapids became an international destination for rowing?
- What if everyone could splash in one of the highest quality urban rivers in the country...here, in our own backyard?
- What if the namesake rapids were restored to downtown Grand Rapids?

Grand Rapids, MI - Grand Rapids Whitewater (GRWW), a local non-profit group, released today a [Preliminary Plan](#) to restore the rapids to the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids. The Plan is based on two years of scientific studies that evaluated the river bottom, sediment, water flows, wildlife, and other factors to understand the river. "We wanted to learn everything that we could about the river to know what was feasible," said Chris Muller, one of the founding members of GRWW. "What we found was incredibly exciting."

GRWW discovered an impressively-large underwater bedrock shelf located between Leonard and Ann Streets; believed to be the historic spawning grounds for sturgeon. “Re-exposing this rare bedrock for lake sturgeon and increasing flow diversity and habitats is an exceptional opportunity to do something uniquely beneficial for sturgeon” said Marty Holtgren, Senior Fisheries Biologist with the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians.

Additionally, they found that there was no contaminated sediment behind the Sixth Street Dam. Several snuffbox mussels, an endangered species, were located and the Preliminary Plan would improve their habitat. In fact, the mussels are an indicator of how clean the Grand River is; good news for people who want to play in the water. Various opportunities for public access, rowing, fishing, kayaking, and other activities were also evaluated.

[The Preliminary Plan](#) illustrates the opportunities for recreation and restoration within the Grand River from Ann Street (N) to Fulton Street (S). The limits of the project were determined by how the river bottom drops 18 feet in elevation between these two points. That drop allows experts to maintain an active current that will increase oxygen for fish, provide current for kayakers, and create a one-of-a-kind centerpiece for downtown.

Chip Richards, also a founding member of GRWW, said: “Our next step is to reach out to the community to dream about what restoring the rapids will look like. We will begin after the New Year to engage the community in a process to talk about what we’ve learned about the Grand River, to answer questions and listen to concerns, and then create a shared vision.” Part of this work involves the creation of a Coordinating Committee – a diverse group of community leaders that will assure effective coordination of this project with other related initiatives, such as the City’s Downtown Plan, River Corridor Plan and the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. The group will start meeting in January.

Mayor George Heartwell will also appoint interested citizens to the River Corridor Plan Steering Committee by the end of the year to formally recognize a community engagement process that will assist the Mayor and Commissioners in decision-making. “Restoring the rapids to the Grand River will be an important catalyst for the continued revitalization of the region’s downtown,” said Mayor Heartwell. “The City is pleased to be a partner in this historic effort.” The public engagement effort will be facilitated by city staff, in conjunction with Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. as part of an effort to update the Downtown Master Plan. Consultant resources and public input opportunities will overlap to insure an efficient and cost-effective process.

Funding for the research and development of the Preliminary Plan has been generously provided by the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, Frey Foundation, Wege Foundation, Dyer-Ives Foundation, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Grand Valley Metro Council, the North Monroe Tax Increment Finance Authority, and Founders Brewing Company.

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