



Legislation Text

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City Council Meeting Date: December 1, 2020

To: Mayor and City Council
City Administrator

From: Mitzi A Baker, Community Development Director

Resolution to approve the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan.

Action Requested:

The Northfield City Council is requested to consider a Resolution to approve the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan.

Summary Report:

The Riverfront Enhancement Advisory Committee (REAC) considered a draft Action Plan in September 2020. Following a public comment period, the draft Action Plan documents were refined to reflect feedback from the Committee and public. REAC met on November 12, 2020 to consider the refined documents and made a unanimous recommendation to forward the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan to the City Council for approval. The City Council received a presentation on the Plan on November 17, 2020.

Background:

The City Council adopted resolution 2018-115 in November 2018 to create the Riverfront Enhancement Advisory Committee to further the City's strategic priorities, including:

- "riverfront enhancement";
- "enhanced tourism"; and
- "expanded downtown"

All of which contribute to "Economic Development: A Community That's Economically Thriving".

The Council adopted the resolution establishing an expectation that the Committees work would include preparation of a Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan that includes the following:

- ☐ Prioritization to align with the strategic plan; and
- ☐ Concept plans for strategic park improvements; and
- ☐ Identified short term and long term projects and funding sources; and
- ☐ Preservation and conservation of the riverfront; and
- ☐ Identification of stormwater management project priorities; and
- ☐ Strategies for increased active use of the riverfront; and
- ☐ Opportunities for business expansion on the corridor.

Over the last 18+ months, the REAC had the benefit of significant support from the National Park Service through a Technical Assistance Grant. Among many things, the NPS staff catalogued existing City plans and policies, both formal and informal, and facilitated a process to sift through a myriad of ideas to translate into actions. They facilitated identifying characteristics of the River to identify “Districts”. NPS also helped the City engage experts to inform the Committee about river ecology and the potential impacts of modifying the Ames Mill dam in ways that would facilitate a passage and re-connecting river systems.

The Committee actively participated in scanning nearly 200 documented potential improvements that informed direction to this project. Ideas were further illuminated through active participation in workshop sessions with the Park Board and resulted in bubble diagrams documenting ideas for improvements. Consultants joined this project to augment the effort, infuse their expertise and create Action Plan documents. They held listening sessions, helped organize the Action Plan, and developed visually engaging concepts that inspire. Their contributions developed the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan into a series of brief documents that could guide efforts to enhance the riverfront area.

This is not a “doorstop” plan, but a series of brief documents that quickly convey the grand opportunity Northfield has to enhance its riverfront and establish a Regional Park destination. The images inspire building off great assets - to complete connections, provide new opportunities and stimulate excitement and energy that draws residents and visitors alike. Full implementation will take time, but meaningful improvements can be realized in the early years while simultaneous efforts position the City for larger project implementation.

Alternative Options:

The City Council is asked to consider final action on the proposed Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan and approve the attached Resolution.

Alternatively, the Council could delay action to another date, could provide direction on alterations or could reject the Plan.

Financial Impacts:

Implementing this project will require dedicated staff time and financial resource. Not all of those resources are anticipated to come from the City, as many elements have potential to leverage funding from State and Federal sources, philanthropy and through partnerships and existing programs. Resource documents prepared as part of this plan include an index of potential grant and funding sources that will be an important tool for the City going forward.

Tentative Timelines: (see text below)

GUIDING IMPLEMENTATION AND FUTURE DESIGN WORK

The Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan is a framework to guide improvements along the River and future design of park spaces. It is intended to create enthusiasm and identify actions necessary to further enhance Northfield’s riverfront parks into an exciting regional experience. While some actions can be implemented in the next few years, many will be longer term and may require incremental steps to complete.

Engaging with property owners and key users before advancing major improvements is important to facilitate successful implementation, and will be part of future actions. There will be opportunities to further explore

how to implement the vision and to expand more year-round activity. The Action Plan is not a construction plan document and not a final design approval for park improvements.

EARLY YEARS (1-5+)

The Action Plan identifies steps necessary to move toward the greater vision of a regional park destination. In the early years of implementation, those steps will likely include (not intended to be an all-inclusive list):

Parks: Ames Park and Bridge Square emerge as early priorities for park improvements. While Ames Park will require additional design, coordination with the adjacent property owners and identifying alternate design options to accommodate the DJJD carnival event or secure a desirable alternate location, Bridge Square improvements to expand pedestrian spaces could advance to implementation more quickly.

Regional Designation and Technical Studies: Additional early effort will be necessary to pursue a regional park designation, identify and pursue potential funding streams, develop partnerships, evaluate flood related issues and study potential alternate designs for the dam.

Aesthetics: Improving how structures relate to the river and aesthetics along and adjacent to the River will be incremental and can start early. This might include cleaning up the riverbank, addressing aesthetics and considering artwork and lighting.

Connections: Steps may include enhancing connections to the River by improving public spaces that connect to the commercial district, eliminating gaps in sidewalks and trails, and pursuing design solutions to create a series of pedestrian loops that extend to both sides of the River and connect to the urban historic core of the community.

Way Finding: Developing a way finding plan and design approach for signs and kiosks, securing funding and implementing.