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June 12, 2013

City of Rochester Hills
1000 Rochester Hills Drive
Rochester Hills, Michigan 48309

Attn: Planning Commission

Re: Riverbend Park – Project Development

HRC Job No. 20120638

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Hubbell, Roth & Clark, (HRC) and our project partners Landscape Architects and Planners (LAP) and Niswander Environmental (NEI), have been engaged by the City to prepare the Development Plan of Riverbend Park. Working with the Mayor, staff, and donor, we are pleased to present our findings and the current vision of the development of the park.

The design team performed multiple site visits to collect habitat data, field conditions, and gain an understanding of the site. Riverbend Park is listed as the largest of three undeveloped parks in Rochester Hills at 70 acres (Page 4, Paragraph 1 of the Rochester Hills Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2011-2015 [herein referred to as “the Master Plan”]). This has afforded it the ability to maintain large swaths of wetland and upland ecosystems that are still intact today. After reviewing the existing habitats and their conditions, it was determined that Riverbend’s 70 acres contains many high-quality habitats, several wetland habitats, one of which is rare for this part of Michigan.

Collaborative analysis between HRC, LAP, and NEI resulted in a unified agreement that there are important ecological features on site that should be maintained, protected, or rehabilitated. Much discussion was given to the best place to build a new body of water within the park. Additional deliberation was given to a general trail alignment based on educational opportunities and conservation possibilities.

The overall vision for this park is consistent with the 2011-2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan’s focus (See Page 1, Paragraph 4 of the Master Plan). The overall goals of the Master Plan are all satisfied by the vision of Riverbend Park (Page 72, Paragraph 4 of the Master Plan).

The Vision of Riverbend Park (also called Riverbend Health Park)

Riverbend Park is Rochester Hill’s first “ecopark,” characterized by its intentional focus on the health benefits of the land, people, and community. The statements of “environmental stewardship, education and awareness, and healthy living” summarizes the vision of this park: to provide an ecologically sustainable and functioning environment in which plants, animals, and humans can all interact in natural, healthy, and beneficial ways.

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The ideal result would be that of a pristine ecosystem comprised of a variety of habitats, large and small, resulting in clean water, clean air, healthy animals, and healthy, educated people. Visitors ought to walk away from this park with a greater appreciation for the natural beauty that surrounds us as well as an understanding of the amazing services that nature provides us (not to mention a desire to visit again).

Target Audience

The general program for Riverbend Park is to provide passive recreation through trails as well as passive and programmed educational opportunities. This lines up well with the projected needs of the recreation target audiences through the year 2035 (Page 6, paragraph 1 of the Master Plan).

Potential Interest Groups

Riverbend Park will provide recreation opportunities that overlap the interests of the following groups: Parks and Forestry Department, Rochester-Avon Recreation Authority, Older Persons Commission, Green Space Advisory Board, Rochester Community Schools, Avondale School District, Clinton River Trail Alliance, Clinton River Watershed Council, and the Friends of the Clinton River Trail (FCRT) (Page 11 and 12 of the Master Plan). In addition to these, the City of Rochester Hills Citizens Pathway Review Committee may also be an interested party (Page 13, Paragraph 5). These groups should be involved in one way or another during the continuing planning process.

Funding in Addition to Donor Sponsored Improvements

Potential funding sources from within the City include the General Fund and the Pathway Millage (Page 13 of the Master Plan). These sources could be utilized for various aspects of the parks. There are opportunities to expand the regional trail and develop portions of the undeveloped park.

Funding from outside the City may include private donations and fundraisers, state parks and recreation grants, federal grants, and grants offered through interested organizations (ducks unlimited, wildlife federation, etc.). While funding from private sources is likely to be available immediately, additional and continued funding will be explored in the next steps of the planning process.

Resident Opinions

Riverbend Park's vision meets five of the top six criteria that are listed as important to a resident's quality of life (Page 66 of the Master Plan).

Of the responses given by residents on which park facilities should receive more, less, or the same amount of funding currently spent on parks, the four categories "preserve open space", "biking/walking trails", "jogging and exercise trails", and "nature areas" were given an overwhelming amount of support to either maintain or increase spending on those park facilities (Page 68 of the Master Plan). These four facilities were among the top five in terms of numbers of residents who support funding these activities. These four facilities fall directly in line with the vision of Riverbend Park, further justifying this park's imminent development.

Preliminary public comment has been received and continues to support the above comments.

Geographic Reach

Four subdivisions border the park to the west, north, and east. All four of these neighborhoods are within a half hour walk, a ten minute bike ride, or a five minute car ride. Additional neighborhoods continue to spread to the north and north-east as well as a limited distance to the south-west. Additional neighborhoods lie to the south-east, though they are separated from Riverbend Park by an industrial park. All of these neighborhoods have access to the extensive trail network that runs directly adjacent to Riverbend Park including the Clinton River Trail.

Oakland University lies to the north-west of Riverbend Park roughly 4 miles away. Biking and walking from the University to the Park is possible and a car drive makes it only ten minutes away. This opens up a wide variety of opportunities to attract users to the park, enhance educational opportunities, and form partnerships to broaden the impact of the park. The City should establish partnerships with the University to promote educational awareness, research within the park, community involvement through volunteerism, and other opportunities that may arise.

Development Potential

After reviewing SEMCOG traffic data, we've found there is the opportunity to reach out to 58,840 combined trips per day (on average) at the intersections of Hamlin and Adams and Hamlin and Crooks (this excludes those already traveling between Adams and Crooks on Hamlin). There is also an opportunity to reach those 9,470 trips traveling between Adams and Crooks on Hamlin each day. This number of trips represents a high number of potential users.

Creating entry ways at Crooks and Hamlin and Adams and Hamlin, as well as continued reinforcement of the location halfway down Hamlin would reach out to the thousands of drivers each day. This area could become the "Riverbend Parkway," or something similar. There is great development potential in this, especially if the future businesses along Hamlin can enhance and play off of the health, wellness, education, and ecosystem themes of the park itself. Education and healthcare will be the fastest growing job market in Rochester between 2010 and 2040, making this a prime development opportunity. See also, (<http://www.semcog.org/Data/Apps/comprof/economy.cfm?cpid=2010>)

Landscape Management

Riverbend Park contains a variety of habitat types of varying quality. Many of the areas are dominated by invasive species and need significant restoration. In addition, there are areas of very high quality wetland and woodland that are being degraded by invasive species. One area of fen (a unique wetland area) is almost gone due to the encroachment of buckthorn. NEI has developed a preliminary habitat map and invasive species maps. NEI has recommended a variety of treatment strategies based on habitat type, quality of the habitat type, restoration cost, and invasive species present.

Implementation of this plan in 2013 is recommended and will help prepare the site for the first Phase of Park construction. Delaying treatment will only result in an increase in invasive species quantity and density and further threaten the high quality areas. Several treatment strategies will be used for control of invasive species

Concept Designs

Based on the above, the design team then produced a set of concept drawings that detailed preliminary design ideas based on the preliminary programmatic elements as discussed by the City. These drawings were reviewed by City Administration, staff, and MDEQ. Then the plan was shared with the Donor. Attached for your review is the current Park concept plan.

Phasing

Invasive species management is slated to begin immediately. Additional site investigation is planned for this month. Final plans and permit applications will be developed over the summer for fall construction.

Summary

Overall, we find that the development of this park can be accomplished to meet the City's goals and objectives. It is exciting to consider the regional attraction it will become showcasing environmental stewardship and healthy environments and people. As discussed, we think the story of the development of the park will be as important as the final developed product and look forward to be part of this story.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, please contact the undersigned.

Very truly yours,

HUBBELL, ROTH & CLARK, INC.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James F. Burton".

James Burton, P.E.
Associate

pc: Rochester Hills; Mayor Barnett, Mike Hartner, James Breuckman, Roger Moore
LAP, B. Ford, M. Hull
NEI; S. Niswander
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