

Riverside Park Area Study

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Prepared For: Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee

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1.0 Area Description

The Riverside Land Use Study area is bounded by Locust Street to the north, North Avenue to the south, Oakland Avenue to the east, and the Milwaukee River to the west. The site contains active and passive parkland, Riverside High School, various densities of residential, neighborhood commercial, and a few industrial buildings.

The approximately 22-acre, high interest area of the site is west of the rail corridor/bike path, which isolates it from the rest of the study area. Linked to the east with one vehicular and one pedestrian bridge, the site contains Riverside Park, the river bluff, several industrial buildings and vacant industrial land.

2.0 Purpose

The general purpose of this study was to propose a plan that would guide the development of the Riverside lands over several decades. Several key issues formed the heart of this study:

- The study must reflect the market and community realistically
- The study must address urban design and engineering issues
- The study must contain recommendations which can be implemented

3.0 Existing Conditions

Building Conditions: Industrial & Commercial Buildings

Sixteen buildings in the high interest portion of the site (west of the rail corridor) were looked at in terms of use, area, structural soundness, and architectural merit. The findings are as follows:

- The Vetter Building (1400 E Park Place) was the only building found to be primarily vacant
- Building areas ranged from 1,600 to almost 700,000 square feet.
- All buildings were structurally sound except for Milwaukee Waste Paper, which has been condemned
- The structural soundness of Wisconsin Paperboard is not known
- The buildings which possess the most architectural significance are:
 - 1420 E Park Place – large open space and skylight
 - 1450 E Park Place – large windows, open space, and brick façade
 - 1518 E North Avenue – neo-classical façade
- Buildings recommended for possible renovation (should they remain in the development plan) include:
 - 1420 E Park Place – architectural quality, recent renovation, large skylight, flexible structure, adjacency to the park, and open space
 - 1450 E Park Place – large open space, large windows, and adjacency to the park
 - 1518 E North Avenue – location and neo-classical façade
 - Potentially “Building 6” (large building on N Newhall Street and E Bradford Avenue) – large size and visibility

Building Conditions: Residential

Overall conditions of residential buildings in the eastern half of the site were looked at in terms of deterioration and improvements. Signs of neighborhood deterioration and recent public expenditure were also noted. The findings are as follows:

- Of the approximately 260 units observed, 25% were found to be in some state of deterioration
- Individual improvements were observed in roughly 6% of all housing
- Public improvements in the area included extensive street and alley repavings, some new curbs, and newer street lighting and signage
- Between 1980 and 1985:
 - Vacancy rates increased slightly in the area
 - Owner occupied rates remained steady
 - Average home values increased (26% in tract 77, 30% in tract 80)
 - Sales of homes were higher than their assessed value
 - Only 9 new housing units were built within the study area

Environmental Concerns

The environmental study consisted of a review of historical records and a site walkthrough (mainly observational, no soil or water testing). Its purpose was to point out areas of environmental concern, which could affect future development. The general findings are as follows:

- Within and surrounding each industrial building are several potential hazards, including drains to ground, tanks, vats, leaking barrels, buried waste, etc
- Underground tanks would require removal and/or remediation. They are known to exist in three locations in the study area and expected to exist at other locations
- There is a possibility of contaminated groundwater in the entire study area

Roads and Bridges

The road system is a combination of private roads and City of Milwaukee public roads. The systems are classified as local access, indicating low volumes of traffic and low speeds. The public system is generally in fair to good condition with the exception of North Newhall and North Bartlett Avenues, which are in poor condition. Private roads are in poor condition and mainly serve as shortcuts between public roads.

There is one existing road bridge in the study area that spans the railroad right-of-way, located at East Belleview Place. The bridge was constructed in 1904 and scheduled to be replaced in 1990 by the County. Replacement was still pending at the time of the report. The bridge is in poor condition with one of its pedestrian crossings closed.

Existing infrastructure in the study area is generally in good condition and capable of supporting new development. Existing utilities west of the railroad right-of-way can support all four levels of development (industrial, commercial, residential, and recreational), between East Bradford Avenue and East North Avenue. The vacant land between East Bradford Avenue and East Park Place can only support recreational and parkland uses. Capital improvements to the water distribution system and road systems are required for higher levels of development.

4.0 Comments on Site Development and Use

The following comments and needs were recorded at various community meetings during the planning process:

- Community meetings found a need for (in order of importance):
 - Increased safety
 - Additional parkland
 - More wild/undeveloped land
 - Increased parking
 - Varied housing
 - More trees
 - Riverwalk
- Community meetings mentioned the following uses most often:
 - More recreational uses
 - Protecting parkland
 - More housing opportunities
 - Additional parkland
 - Better park/river access
 - Riverwalk
 - Park pavilion
 - Wilderness parkland
 - Nature center
 - Farmer's market
 - Amphitheater
 - Public garden plots
 - Child care center
- Developer Panel meetings gave the following development ideas:
 - Recreational uses
 - Lower end commercial
 - Elderly and affordable housing
 - Restaurant
 - Health club
 - Entertainment district
- Developer Panel meetings identified the following problems with the site:
 - Lack of reliable topographical information
 - Environmental issues
 - Presence of the Paperboard factory
- During interviews with the property owners, Wisconsin Paperboard expressed concern for additional parking and the County for new links to side streets for the bike path

5.0 Recommendations

The report makes a series of recommendations, which cover short-term to long-term changes in existing land uses. Zoning changes are called for to prevent further industrial development in the area and to permit immediate recreational and eventual residential uses of specific portions of the site. Only those properties along North Avenue, which are presently zoned commercial, would be unchanged.

Specific recommendations include the following:

Short-term Recommendations: Setting the Stage

- The County, City, and Wisconsin Paperboard should agree to a land trade and to certain other specific actions, such as roadway and alley conveyances, to create a consolidated industrial campus
- The City should rezone the entire site, except the North Avenue commercial area, to one of two residential categories. The consolidated paperboard site should be zoned for medium density. The remaining site should be zoned single family residential, which is an appropriate category for recreational uses (the existing Riverside Park, like all parkland in the City, is zoned residential)
- The existing Riverside Park, as well as a strip of land along the river, should be developed and/or preserved as a natural scenic area. Outside funding from government and private sources should be sought to assist in implementing the recommendation

Mid-Term Recommendations: Assembly and Improvement of Certain Lands

- The public sector should assemble the lands between Webster Avenue extended and Riverside Park from existing owners. It should seek a partnership with a private organization, such as the Wisconsin Soccer Association and the Milwaukee Kickers to build, maintain, and operate up to two soccer fields for these lands
- A new road should be constructed on the eastern edge of these lands to provide access to the entire site. This road would extend from North Avenue to Park Place and will require the assembly of certain properties to provide a right-of-way
- One or more pedestrian bridges should be constructed at Bradford, Belleview, or Park Place to improve pedestrian access to these lands and to enable emergency vehicles to reach the site. No vehicular bridge is recommended as part of the mid-term recommendations
- A river edge trail should be developed, extending from Riverside Park to North Avenue

Long-Term Recommendations: Housing and Neighborhood Commercial

- The existing Paperboard factory, once it is no longer viable for industrial use, should be converted to medium density residential purposes or removed and the lands made available for such residential development. Periodic market analysis will be required to test this recommendation.
- When the Paperboard factory is replaced by housing, a new bridge may be required
- Since both the issue of housing development and construction of a new bridge may remain controversial, long-term recommendations should remain the subject of on-going community dialogue. Channels that were opened during this study should remain in use