



# **St. Charles Active River Park**

## **Project Summary June 16, 2017**

### **Purpose and Scope**

In 2015 the City of St. Charles, the St. Charles Park District and the River Corridor Foundation of St. Charles jointly updated the Fox River Corridor Master Plan intending to provide a strategic framework to enhance the Fox River as a resource for the community from environmental, recreational and economic development perspectives. The Master Plan provides guidance for public and private investment, projects along the Fox River in St. Charles and the Plan recognizes the importance of connectivity of the river and adjacent land uses.

The City has engaged WBK to investigate alternatives to accomplish the objectives of the Master Plan with a focus on the section of the Fox River between Main Street and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) trestle. This section of the Fox River is approximately 1100 feet long and includes the St. Charles – Fox River dam. The St. Charles dam is 300 feet long with a crest elevation of approximately 684. Mean daily flows can be approximated at 1200 cubic feet/second (cfs). Normal pool elevation is approximately elevation 686. Based on the best available records, the dam is owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

The purpose of this study is determine qualitatively if dam modification appears feasible and to develop a set of concept alternatives that accomplish the objectives of the River Corridor Foundation of St. Charles Master Plan without significant adverse impact to existing recreational uses of the river. This concept study phase will conclude by identifying significant challenges and opportunities created by proposed concept alternatives as scoping items for future evaluation and engineering.

### **Existing River / Dam Conditions**

Two significant existing challenges exist within the study area of the Fox River: public safety and ecological impacts of the existing St. Charles dam. Public safety concerns with low head dams are well known and documented including an evaluation of the St. Charles dam in the 2007 Run-of-the –River studies by the Illinois Capital Development Board. Uses of the river are restricted adjacent to the St. Charles dam. Flooding of IL 31 upstream of the St. Charles dam occurs when water levels in the Fox River rise and has traffic impacts. Approximately 820 feet of IL 31 adjacent to the project limits and upstream of the St. Charles dam lies within the 100 year floodplain of the Fox River. Additionally, the dam is a recognized impediment to fish passage and other species who make their home in and around the Fox River. The lack of fish biodiversity in certain segments of the Fox River as a result of dams is well documented and resulted in the advocacy for dam removal or modification to facilitate the restoration of riparian ecosystems. The development of alternatives consider these challenges and seek to improve safety and the Fox River ecosystem.

## **Opportunities**

### **Water Recreation**

Public activity on the water of the Fox River between Main Street and Pottawatomie Park is less than the activity occurring both north and south of the project limits. Direct access to the water is limited within the study area and the study area can be considered underutilized from a recreational perspective. Opportunities involve improved connectivity on the water and access to the water from trails and adjacent land uses. The Fox River serves as a recreational water resource and also as an attraction and backdrop to many land activities including walking, running, bicycling, and many other Park District activities. Potential enhancement of water recreation includes improved kayaking, canoeing, and fishing with potential for competitive kayaking and recreational surfing among other water based activities. The project provides an opportunity to better connect Pottawatomie Park and the many existing water activities to downtown St. Charles businesses and customers. The Hotel Baker and Municipal Building are historic and significant land uses adjacent to the river with existing river access. We believe opportunities to provide enhanced access to the River and river trail amenities will appeal to a broader segment of business patrons including potential for boat dock facilities within the pool at or north of the project limits.

### **Land Based**

If a project such as this is implemented, we believe significant land use opportunities exist adjacent to the Fox River within the study limits. Opportunities include the relocation of the Police Station on the east side of the river and potential reduction in floodplain limits west of IL 31. Although the extent of floodplain reduction west of IL 31 is uncertain at this concept phase, any reduction together with the proximity to a significant recreational destination is expected to enhance intrinsic land value and encourage evaluation of current land uses. We expect the rekindling of commercial interest to synergize with the river improvements to enhance the downtown business climate for all businesses along and near the Fox River, including Salerno's, Hotel Baker, Century Corners, Third Street, and Main Street businesses.

Walking trails – Perhaps the most significant improvement opportunity to enhance recreation and the St. Charles' downtown business district lies with land connections via trails and pathways adjacent to the Fox River. Although an existing Riverwalk exists along the east bank of the river, it is not continuous across Main Street and ends at the Municipal Building creating a less than desirable interface for cyclists and pedestrians. Although access from the study area to Pottawatomie Park is provided, access is not obvious nor very wide. An opportunity exists to improve this condition and perhaps provide a visible gateway from downtown St. Charles to Pottawatomie Park. Although the project limits end at Main Street, the project has potential to safely and easily facilitate pedestrians and bicyclists along the Fox River and to a future riverwalk extension under Main Street. There is also potential to directly connect Main Street to the west bank Riverwalk at First Street further strengthening the commercial recreational connection. Finally, a west bank Riverwalk has potential to extend north of the UPRR trestle to Boy Scout Island. If accomplished, this connection would link Boy Scout Island to Pottawatomie Park and to the proposed improvements within the study limits.

## Ecological / Cultural

The ability of the project to improve the biodiversity of plants and animals within the study area and adjacent segments of the Fox River is a noteworthy opportunity for the community. We expect fish passage to be significantly improved as a result of the project. We propose to introduce native plants within the study area and adjacent areas to create habitat for fish and other riparian species such as turtles, mussels and birds. Public education of the river ecology can be accomplished through signage and collaboration with Park District and School District activities.

The St. Charles community is proud of its heritage and through historic preservation sustains the memories and stories of past civic leaders and community efforts. Although this project seeks to create a new beginning for this segment of the Fox River, respecting the adjacent historic architecture, incorporating existing art elements, and preserving the story of the dam itself can all be incorporated into the project. In addition, an opportunity to expand an understanding of the pre-settlement community and culture can be incorporated into recreational, landscape, and other elements of the project.

## Alternative River Park Concepts

The project team initiated development of alternatives by starting with the concept sketches in the Fox River Corridor Master Plan. We considered a wide range of variations including modifying the existing dam, relocation of the dam, discussion on the extent of the study limits, and consideration of multi-channel alternatives. We evaluated project elements against project goals, existing challenges, and potential opportunities. We have developed three alternatives which we believe significantly improve public safety, enhance fish passage, and provide recreational and economic development opportunities. While evaluating alternatives we sought to strike a balance between various interests to minimize impacts while providing benefit in accordance with project objectives.

Two concepts were developed from our evaluation, primarily as a result of the physical slope of the river across the study area. A single channel configuration achieves water connectivity and creates additional riverbank area for walking trails and riverbank amenities. The dual channel configurations expand the single channel concept to create a variety of paddling and water experiences by varying the slope of each channel. The island area is necessary to facilitate varying channel slopes and also creates a point of interest and facilitates enhanced access to the water. From these concepts we developed a total of three feasible alternatives, one single channel and two dual channel configurations. The alternatives are best depicted on three exhibits attached to this summary. A narrative overview of the alternative is provided hereafter:

- All concepts maintain the pool north of the UPRR trestle and have no adverse impact on 100 year flood elevations and will not result in sediment accumulation adjacent to Pottawatomie Park.
- All concepts remove the dam in its entirety due to the proximity to Main Street and the adjacent walls of the Municipal Center and Hotel Baker.

- All concepts change the river profile from a single six foot drop at the existing dam to a series of three cascade drop structures across the length of the project. This serves to improve public safety and facilitate fish passage through this section of the river.
- All concepts include an upstream gated control structure with potential to reduce upstream flood elevations, to facilitate sediment transport and to support the existing recreational purposes. The type of gate and configuration is beyond the scope of this study however the Fox River has several gated structure types between the Chain O Lakes and Dayton.
- All concepts narrow the width of the river from the existing pool condition to create additional riverbank to enhance access and use of the river and improve safety.
- The dual channel configurations have a primary channel depicted along the west bank of the area and an active channel depicted along the east bank of the area. This arrangement is reflective of the private land ownership along the west bank seeking to create activity on publicly owned land along the east bank. It also facilitates the confluence of State Street Creek at the west Bank of the river.
- The active channel in both dual channel alternatives have, in the terminology of paddle sports, a flatwater segment and a steep whitewater segment. The primary difference between the dual channel alternatives is the location of the steeper segment being either closer to Pottawatomie Park or closer to Main Street.

Based on information gathered in accordance with the scope of this study, we find these three alternatives feasible. It is noted that further study is necessary to define these preliminary concepts and to fully and better understand impacts, costs, and schedule. In addition, other alternatives or variations of these alternatives may provide additional benefits or ability to mitigate impacts and may be developed or selected in the subsequent preliminary design phase of the project.

### Other Similar / Recent Projects

It is useful to compare the project concepts developed to previously constructed projects providing similar functions. Accordingly, a comparison of the St. Charles Active River Park study area was made to the Glen Palmer Dam modification and Marge Cline Whitewater Park, both on the Fox River in Yorkville, IL. This comparison validates the feasibility of a river park concept in St. Charles. The projects are similar from several aspects including: both projects are on the Fox River, the length and elevation differentials are similar at each dam locations, the Glen Palmer Dam project was recently completed (2011, and the Glen Palmer Dam project resulted in agreements between the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and Yorkville for maintenance of the whitewater park. This comparison is made solely to validate the feasibility of a River Park in St. Charles through the similarities in river segments. However, there is no

comparison relative to the adjacent land uses including Pottawatomie Park, Hotel Baker, Main Street and adjacent commercial districts.

## **Regulation**

Construction of a project in the Fox River involves a complex regulatory framework that involves public agencies and will also involve private landowner rights. The scope of this study was limited to review and engagement with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Office of Water Resources Northeastern Illinois Regulatory Section. Although a majority of the public regulation is under the authority of IDNR, the following list of regulatory compliance is recognized for consideration in the preliminary design phase of the project.

- The following regulation is under the authority of IDNR:
  - Public Body of water regulated under IAC 3704 rules
  - Dam Safety including construction, removal and operation under IAC 3702 rules
  - Floodway Construction NE IL under IAC 3708 rules
  
- The following regulation is under the authority of the United States Army Corps of Engineers Chicago District Regulatory Branch:
  - Federal jurisdiction is through the Section 10 Public Waters – River & Harbors Act.
  - Wetland fringe United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) jurisdiction under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act
  
- Regulation under the authority of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA):
  - In river work may be subject to either IEPA Section 401 Water Quality Certification and/or the more stringent IEPA Bureau of Water Anti-degradation rules.

The project team introduced the three alternatives presented herein to IDNR for review and preliminary comment. No regulatory issue or fatal flaw was identified that would impact the feasibility of the project. In general, IDNR felt the project was feasible from their regulatory perspective. There are regulatory conditions and constraints that will require compliance, however, there is no regulatory conditions identified that we can find at this time to render the project not feasible.

The following regulatory issues need to be resolved or clarified:

- Riparian rights of private land parcels immediately adjacent to the Fox River. These owners have the rights of use and access. Public access at these 3 parcels requires legal review separate from the IDNR process.

- Creation of land within the limits of the river by means of fill will need to be publically owned. This may also give rise to a license to use and operate.
- IDNR is not likely to take ownership of new structures within the river (i.e. upstream control structure and gates) so a public entity willing to commit to ownership and maintenance will be required. We are assuming at this point that the City of St. Charles or the St. Charles Park District would need to fill that role.
- Signage and setback requirements at upstream control structure / gates.
- In-river work restrictions to protect threatened and endangered species. Of primary concern in this area of the Fox River is protecting the breeding habitat and season for the Greater River Red Horse.

It was clear based on our meeting that the type and scope of this project is not typical for IDNR to process. Coordination between sections and workgroups is necessary to coordinate all of IDNR authority and concerns. Although the IDNR-OWR (Office of Water Resources) Northeastern Illinois Regulatory Section identified themselves as the coordinating section for IDNR, a well-defined process and schedule could not be provided. Identify a permitting process & schedule with all regulatory agencies and a legal review of riparian rights is warranted in the preliminary design phase of the project.

## **Construction**

The following outline is intended to demonstrate the feasibility of construction and generate an understanding of challenges and timeframes for construction of the project. It is based on a dual channel alternative. We envision the project to span at least two construction seasons and consist of multiple phases. One scenario includes the following major elements and phases:

### Year 1

1. Establish and set a temporary water control structure upstream just south of the UPRR trestle. This structure will serve to maintain the recreational pool north of the project location throughout construction.
2. Remove the existing dam to the elevation of the river bed. Dam abutments may remain pending structural evaluation of adjacent properties and structures.
3. Construct the south portion of the west (primary) channel and two intermediate cascade drop structures. A temporary A-frame structure can be erected parallel to the river to dewater the work area. Construct the south half of a concrete cutoff wall separating the two channels. The exact length of the cutoff wall is uncertain and the term "half" is used as an approximation. It is

anticipated this would be located in the core of the island and facilitate construction of the two intermediate cascade drop structures. This phase would not include State Street creek and will route the Creek north and around the A-frame elements.

4. Construct the north portion of the west (primary) channel and the upstream control structure. Provide A-frame cofferdams from the cutoff wall to the temporary water control structure at the upstream end of the project. Re-route State Street Creek through the recently completed phase. Modify the temporary water control structure as necessary to accommodate the new phase. Complete the north half of the cutoff wall from the prior phase to the north end of the project. Construct the permanent upstream control structure. Install control gates, mechanical and electrical elements including temporary controls.

#### Year 2

1. Construct the east (active) channel. Modify the temporary water control structure as necessary to accommodate the new phase and perhaps remove the west half. Provide A-frame cofferdams from the cutoff wall to the temporary water control structure at the upstream end of the project. Construct the active channel head control structure and active channel features.
2. Complete the pedestrian connection to the UPRR pedestrian bridge and east bank walk and bikeway improvements. Modify the temporary water control structure to accommodate this phase.
3. Perform final filling, shaping and tuning of river elements.
4. Install bridges and hardscape elements on the island.
5. Install final gate controls and island electrical elements.
6. Construct ancillary plan items and support features.
7. Perform restoration of all disturbed areas including final plantings and landscaping.

### Process and Schedule

The process to design and engineer a dam modification or removal project typically includes two phases: preliminary design and preparation of final construction documents. Based on our findings and the need for further refinement, resolution, and definition, we believe this standard approach to be appropriate. The preliminary and final construction design phases would include:

- Preliminary Design
  - Design development of two concepts (~20% design)



- Field Investigations
    - Sediment depth and constituents
    - Bathymetric survey
    - Rock coring/testing
  - Meetings with all regulatory agencies
  - Refine cost estimates and schedule
  - Identify required field investigations
  - Identify and affirm funding sources
  - Legal evaluation of project
  - Public participation
  - Preliminary Design Report
- Go/No Go Milestone
    - Select preferred alternative
    - Confirm funding sources
    - Continue communication with regulatory agencies & regulatory changes
  - Final Construction Documents
    - Final design development of preferred alternative
    - Final construction plans, specifications, and contract documents
    - Final construction estimate and schedule and sequencing
    - Permitting and regulatory submittals
    - Legal requirements
      - Intergovernmental agreements
      - Easements and land rights
  - Bidding including major equipment procurement & construction services procurement
  - Construction Services

The project schedule for completion of preliminary and final design should be anticipated to be three years from authorization to proceed. This schedule could vary depending on project scope, sponsor agency alternative selection, and regulatory requirements or changes. As noted previously, the project schedule for construction is anticipated to be two years. Procurement of significant mechanical elements (i.e. gates) could be initiated prior to completion of final design to allow for manufacturing lead time if necessary.

## **Costs**

Concept level costs for the project have been developed based on the dual channel alternative and the construction phasing and sequencing noted herein. The goal of this task is to provide order of magnitude funding requirements. The feasibility of achieving the funding level required may be judged based on other projects the City of St. Charles has funded. These include Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements, Red Gate Bridge, and the First Street Redevelopment. No two projects of this magnitude are alike or have similar funding sources. Construction costs, without contingencies and soft costs, are estimated in the range of \$15 to \$16 million. With contingencies and soft costs, the total project costs range from \$20 to \$22 million.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the team's understanding of existing conditions, the scope of proposed alternatives, regulatory requirements, and stakeholder interests, we believe the development of a successful River Park improvement project in St. Charles between Main Street and Pottawatomie Park is feasible and will accomplish the objectives of the Fox River Corridor Master Plan. If public agencies desire to pursue these concepts, the next logical step is to develop a detailed preliminary design scope of services and to verify funding availability for preliminary engineering. This step would include public participation, regulatory agency coordination, and legal review of project requirements.