

Earl Ellen's Park and Riverside Center Development

Project: The communities in the region of northern Pine and southern Carlton counties are enthusiastically working together on the renovation and redevelopment of Earl Ellen's Park and Riverside Center. This area is a hidden gem for the region. Its proximity to the lake, river, bike and snowmobile trails in addition to its on-site recreation potential is an asset to the entire area and a very worthwhile development project. This is an opportunity to diversify and maximize the use of the park and building and help provide recreational opportunity for all ages. It connects our full breadth of generations with their natural surroundings and provides a year round gathering spot.

There is currently more support and excitement than has existed in many decades and folks are willing to donate time, money, labor and materials to make this a rewarding and affordable project. This regional community center, park and recreational complex is a shining example of how cooperation among individuals, businesses, foundations and government can result in an environmentally and economically sustainable park.

History: The original Riverside Arena was built 25 years ago with active city and community cooperation involving many volunteers combined with private and business contributions. A 4400-square-foot addition and ice plant were added in 1995, again with immense community and volunteer effort along with a state grant. The arena remains a great community asset. The current winter programs serve over 150 youth, ages pre-school through high school. They provide skating for physical education classes for the regional school districts, after-school AmeriCorps opportunities, broomball for regional teams, adult and senior hockey, figure skating and community public skating. In the summer the arena is used for car sales and shows, concerts, a weekly farmers' market, and a skate park area for youth. All of these uses enhance the community, bring in new visitors and increase the region's economic base. Park improvement will allow expanded year-round use of the facilities. This is truly an area-wide park meeting area-wide needs.

Phase I, which started in the fall of 2010, is making the existing Riverside Center and Park more energy efficient and economically sustainable by reducing energy costs and utilizing community resources more efficiently. This will allow the facility to increase year-round use and provide an environmentally safer and healthier recreational center for all ages.

The improvements are being funded with widespread, diverse community and regional support incorporating in-kind labor and materials and private and business contributions along with foundation and grant support. Key contributors have been the Northland Foundation, which solicited input from 12 community groups and the general public through community forums to help develop the park design and architectural plans, and the Northern Minnesota Sustainable Development Project (NMSDP), which has assisted the city, school and recreational non-profit organizations in developing a sustainable business model for the park. The local and regional governmental units, through resolutions of support, include the park and recreation board, city council, county board of commissioners, and local and area schools. Other support has come from the Moose Lake Area Hockey Association through fundraising

and in-kind work, the regional business community through sponsorships and financial support, and the State of Minnesota through an Office of Energy Security grant.

The Earl Ellen's Park and Riverside Center Development Committee are now seeking funds for Phase II and III. Design will occur in the fall of 2011, with site work during the summer of 2012. Building expansion is planned for fall of 2012, with completion and grand opening in the spring of 2013.

Phase II will include rough grading and landscaping of the parking lot with a bituminous area for summer use of the recreational and picnic areas; burying the power line; and completing a Riverside Center addition of 5000 square feet. The addition will include public restrooms, a concessions area, park and trailhead office, lobby area/community room along with girls and boys changing rooms. It will also include accessible walkways connecting the center entrance with other areas of the park.

Phase III park development will be completion of the connecting trail along the river, the final grading and finishing of the parking areas around Riverside Center and the park, as well as the picnic area, canoe landing and primitive campsite. These cooperative projects with the DNR will include in-kind labor through Conservation Corp of Minnesota. This phase will also include the expansion and completion of the skate park area, with donated equipment, in-kind labor and new bituminous surface.

This entire project, located in a low socioeconomic and under-served area of southern Carlton and northern Pine counties, will connect a Minnesota "Fit City" to the region through the convergence of multiple trails, waterways and indoor recreational facilities, providing all ages a gathering spot for exercise, education and socialization.

This is a great opportunity to work together to make Earl Ellen's Park and Riverside Center a fitting welcome for visitors to our region as well as a recreation center for our teens, a gathering place for our seniors and a place of commerce for small businesses, such as the farmers' market.

Your support of this project is greatly appreciated.

Earl Ellen's Park and Riverside Center Development Committee

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