

COALITION MOVES FORWARD WITH BOLD DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

Members of the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan Coalition have asked global architectural design firm Populous and the rest of the design team to bring back a bold design for the community to see at its next public meeting, **5:30 to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, January 14, 2020, at Newman University Dugan-Gorges Conference Center, 3100 McCormick St., Wichita.**

The coalition made the recommendation at its December meeting, after four and a half months of engaging with the community, facilitating technical input, reviewing previous studies, and sharing opportunities and challenges related to the 55+ acre site along the Arkansas River, from Douglas to Kellogg and to Main on the east.

"We can't be hesitant or timid about what comes out of this process," said Shelly Prichard, President and CEO of the Wichita Community Foundation, one of the eight organizations that make up of the Coalition. "The ability of our community to attract and retain talent and to build a thriving community is too important."

Relating it to the master plan of development for Downtown Wichita, Jason Gregory – Executive Vice President of Downtown Wichita, said, "That master plan has spurred nearly $1 billion in investments during the past 10 years to the downtown area – that is the value of having an intentional master plan that challenges us to achieve more." Downtown Wichita is also a member of the coalition.

Members of the coalition took into consideration the community engagement input, which identified green space and activation of the river as critical components for any design. More than 5,000 comments were collected from online questionnaires, public open houses, presentations and social media from the July 31 kickoff of the planning process through the middle of December.

In addition, the coalition reviewed the market analysis, which showed that the master plan site can support a mix of uses, including shops, restaurants, a grocery store, non-convention hotel and commercial and residential properties.

The group also reviewed findings from previous studies that showed that Century II, the 50-year-old building at the north side of the riverfront master plan site, is no longer fit for its original purposes of housing performing arts and conventions. Based on the review by RCLCO, the real estate advisory firm that is part of the design team, Century II – because of its size and deferred maintenance costs – would not likely be able to draw developer interest to use the building for mixed use or other purposes.

In addition, economic impacts are estimated to double over a 10-year period with new facilities, from $360 million with minimal renovations of Century II, compared with a yield of $915 to $921 million in economic impact over a 10-year period with new facilities.

According to coalition leaders, the decision came down to balance what the community says it wants – activation of new parks and green space and the river, while also building a performing arts center and convention center. "It needs to be fiscally responsible, and contribute to the economic vitality of our community," said Gary Plummer, President and CEO of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The studies that provided the most opportunity included those found in what are called Scenarios 1A and 1B, with some elements of the grand open green space of Scenario 2 that connected the north and south ends of the space. These two designs provided a maximized amount of mixed-use development, which could support the public spaces of the design. The scenarios can be seen at riverfrontlegacywichita.org/design-scenarios.



“The work that has been done to engage the community, as well as the way the design team has taken that input and brought us concepts that reflect the bold vision and plan is just what we needed for this once-in-a-generation opportunity,” said Jon Rolph, President and CEO of Thrive Restaurant Group and co-chair of the Greater Wichita Partnership, also a member of the coalition. Rolph co-chaired this week’s coalition meeting.

“Now we turn our attention to the detailed designs, perspectives and financial information that will be reviewed at the meeting in January.”

Organizations in the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan coalition are the City of Wichita, Downtown Wichita, Greater Wichita Partnership, Sedgwick County, Visit Wichita, Wichita Community Foundation and Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce/W – a community of young professionals/Wichita Educational Foundation, working together through the regional vision and action plan Project Wichita.