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Riverfront Legacy Master Plan to create comprehensive vision and plan and connect projects for both banks of Arkansas River

In response to recent recommendations from Project Wichita and the Century II Citizens Advisory Committee, community organizations and their leadership are stepping forward to take the next step to create a comprehensive master plan and vision that connects projects and both banks of the Arkansas River.

Calling it the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan, leaders of the community organizations said the plan will build on previous studies for the east side of the Arkansas River as well as new developments such as the ballpark on the west side.

Leaders affirmed that the vision and plan will consider all elements together, including a performing arts center, convention center, Century II, the former library, pedestrian bridge and open riverfront gathering space, as well as connecting elements from Kellogg to Douglas, west bank development, downtown and area neighborhoods.

"We have a once in every 100-year opportunity as a region," said Greater Wichita Partnership Board Co-Chair Jon Rolph. "The most important next step is to ensure all projects and decisions are carefully considered together to maximize our opportunities and community use for each element of this important area. Community interaction with our river is especially important."

The master planning process would begin by using information generated by previous studies that analyzed different elements as a starting point and then add information related to new projects including developments on the west side of the river.

"Previous studies have provided us solid, market-based information on which to start this comprehensive plan," said Wichita Regional Chamber Board Chair Michael Monteferrante. "That information will serve as our foundational building blocks. Unless we need additional or new analysis because of market changes, we plan to move quickly to create a new collective vision and holistic plan based on need, benefit to our community and public input."

Lead organizations are Downtown Wichita, Greater Wichita Partnership, Wichita Community Foundation, Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce and Visit Wichita, working together through the regional vision and action plan Project Wichita. These private-sector organizations will work closely with public partners City of Wichita and Sedgwick County, other community organizations and area neighborhoods.

"It's important that the public and community are at the center of this process," said Wichita Community Foundation Board Chair Wayne Chambers. "We achieve great results when private and public sector work together with strong community input. Each of our organizations is led by community leaders who volunteer and dedicate time to create the best future of our community, and we're excited to stand with our elected officials to engage the community, maximize transparency and provide a viewpoint from which to make generational decisions."

The group will focus new community engagement on vision and connection of elements, on top of previous community engagement findings, including from Project Wichita, the regional vision process, and the Century II Citizens Advisory Committee analysis of a performing arts center.

"This is one of the most catalytic sites in our city, region and state," said Downtown Wichita Board Chair Don Sherman. "As a community we must be dedicated to building upon the legacy of innovation, arts support and regional attraction from past

generations to make the best decision for this generation and future ones. That's why it's important to consider all elements together to maximize community use and benefit for the next 50 years."

There has been significant community interest in the riverfront in addition to the studies over the past six years.

"During the discussion surrounding our region's 10-year vision and action plan, we heard from thousands of people - literally - about the significance of the river in our city and the role it plays as we move forward" said Aaron Bastian, Project Wichita Advancement Team Member. "This led to what I believe is a key part of our quality of place action plan. Retaining and attracting talent to our region is a priority, and it's clear that the riverfront is important to a diverse group of people."

In addition, the Century II Citizens Advisory Committee recommended a new performing arts center be constructed and requested an RFP for site selection and concept development within 60 days.

"This is a powerful next step and having community leadership stepping forward to work with the City and the County on this is exactly what our committee hoped would happen," said Mary Beth Jarvis, Chair of the Century II Citizens Advisory Committee. "As we listened to the thoughts and hopes of thousands of our neighbors, we heard loud and clear that people care a great deal about getting this right. They want collaborative, big-picture thinking, followed by real movement on a pride-worthy actionable path forward."

The City of Wichita and Sedgwick County leadership said they welcome the community organizations involvement in development of a holistic master plan.

Wichita Mayor Jeff Longwell said, "We have great momentum and the community is looking forward to enjoying all that the riverfront area will offer. We appreciate the private sector leadership's involvement in looking at how everything works together because our opportunities on the river's east side are important. The City looks forward to working together for the benefit of our community."

Sedgwick County Chairman David Dennis said, "Sedgwick County is glad to partner with these organizations, the City and especially the community on this important step to plan our collective future success. Every time we've worked together with community and public partners, we all move smarter and faster."

According to the lead organizations the next step is to develop a scope, including specific components, which will affect the cost of creating a master plan. It is expected that the lead organizations will fund a significant portion of developing a comprehensive master plan along with some anticipated public funding from the City of Wichita and Sedgwick County.

"We expect to move quickly and strategically with a months-long, not years-long, master plan process," said Visit Wichita Board Chair Jim Korroch. "The CSL study confirms that there is significant economic impact to be gained by attracting more meetings and conventions to Wichita with a convention center that meets industry-standards. Doing nothing is not an option, and deferring a decision simply delays our ability to start delivering those economic benefits. Developing a master plan and vision now will provide a roadmap for implementing these very important community decisions."

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