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Riverfront Legacy Master Plan group outlines proposed process and date for first public meeting

With a goal to make the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan one that reflects the vision of the community, organizers are in the process of identifying what will be needed for a successful comprehensive planning process, including ideas for four public gatherings designed to open up the conversation about the future.

The proposed timeline includes a July 31 date for the first public meeting.

A team from Populous, the international architecture and urban design group expected to lead the effort based on previous work in the riverfront area, will offer a brief presentation. An open house format with members of the Riverfront Legacy Master Plan Coalition, as well as the plan's advisors, attending is anticipated, with time for questions and answers and interactions designed to stimulate conversations about the future of the site.

The goal of the plan itself is to create a comprehensive vision and master plan for future development on the east bank of the Arkansas River, with a focus on the area south of Douglas Avenue to US-54/Kellogg and east to Main Street. The 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.

"This is the first step of what will be a dynamic vision not just for the heart of our city, but for the entire economic region," said Michael Monteferrante, Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce Board chair and member of the privately-led coalition.

Lead organizations in the coalition are Downtown Wichita, Greater Wichita Partnership, Visit Wichita, Wichita Community Foundation and Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, 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.

For the past six weeks, members of the coalition have drafted the scope of the work, including how this plan will build on previous studies related to the site, and negotiated details of a possible contract with Populous and its sub-contractors. RCLCO Real Estate Advisors will conduct an analysis to provide a market-driven plan, and Olin Studio, a worldwide leader in landscape architecture and urban design, will provide scenario designs based on input from previous studies and the public.

"The decision to work with Populous was based on its expertise with large scale urban design projects, its ability to hit the ground running because of previous studies and work related to Century II and a performing arts complex in Wichita," said Susie Santo, president and CEO of Visit Wichita. "In addition, they have the ability to pull together a team that specializes in market-driven analysis and how we can maximize our connections to the developments on the west bank of the Arkansas."

In addition to the Populous contract, the coalition is planning to work with local firm Bothner and Bradley Inc. to coordinate community engagement.

The total budget for the plan is about $700,000. The private sector has secured more than 70 percent of the total needed for the plan so far, with the City of Wichita and Sedgwick County expected to discuss funding at upcoming regular meetings.

"This is a complex plan with many pieces that need to be coordinated, while at the same time ensuring we have the



mechanics set up to be able to engage the public and cast an aspirational vision that guides our region for the next generation," said Jon Rolph, co-chair of the Greater Wichita Partnership. "In this case, we are working to ensure we have the technical expertise to make this the best plan possible."

Rolph and other members of the coalition have committed to ensuring this is a long-term plan that puts the community first, and have said they will not be afraid to address tough decisions as a community – no matter where the plan leads.

As part of its commitment to transparency, the coalition plans to meet monthly and keep those meetings open to the public to attend as visitors. "It is critical we have a platform where we can conduct the business of keeping this process on time and budget, while also providing the public a chance to observe how – and why – decisions are being made," Rolph explained.

The public will have several opportunities to offer input, including public meetings initially set for September and November this year and January 2020. As an example, the proposal calls for a series of "walkshops" held in September, offering anyone who wants the opportunity to tour the east bank site, including the buildings and other structures included in the area. Plans are in the works to also take design workshops out into the community, where the public can offer input.

The presentations of the final plan are expected in early 2020.

As plans progress, organizers will also have a website, where the public can learn about upcoming meetings, as well as offer input. There also will be a social media presence. People are encouraged to attend meetings, provide comments online and ask questions if something doesn't make sense.

"This is an exciting time for our community, and this planning process promises to build on the momentum of multiple initiatives working together to change perceptions, and attract talent and industry to the Wichita region," said Shelly Prichard, President and CEO of the Wichita Community Foundation. "This is a chance for everyone to participate in defining the vision for the riverfront where these initiatives can come together and thrive."

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