

## Administration

**To:** Plan Commission, CC: Mayor McFarland

**From:** Mason Becker, RDA Executive Director

**Date:** October 28, 2024

**Subject:** Rock River District Vision Preliminary Presentation

## Background

Since at least the early 1980s, the concept of redevelopment of the City of Watertown's downtown riverfront has been a topic of conversation. From a project conducted by Steve Groth in 1982 (see Sept. 8, 2024 Watertown Daily Times article), to analysis done by Vandewalle & Associates in the 2000's, as well as Redevelopment Resources' 2014 "Watertown Riverfront/Downtown Redevelopment Initiative" report (see attachment), the idea has continued to percolate in the community. The City's 2019 Comprehensive Plan also calls for the completion of the downtown riverwalk and further focus on adjacent area redevelopment opportunities.

Following the successful opening of the Bentzin Family Town Square in May 2023, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Watertown (RDA) decided to take up the concept as its next area of focus, dubbed the "Downtown River Corridor Opportunity Analysis and Strategic Development Plan." More than just renewing plans for a riverwalk, the RDA also wanted to evaluate sites that could be promoted for targeted redevelopment in this section of the City.

A request for proposal (RFP) was released January 26, 2024 (see attachment). A total of eight proposals were received from qualified firms. Following review and scoring, the proposal from RINKA and Kapur was selected by the RDA.

Over the past few months, teams from RINKA and Kapur have worked with the RDA to develop the plan. Gathering of public feedback and data has included two well-advertised Community Open House events, held at the Watertown Public Library, where ideas and feedback were gathered. Part of this process also included online polling. Further, RINKA and Kapur facilitated a series of "steering committee meetings" with RDA board members and key City staff to further refine concepts.

We are excited to be at the point where this preliminary presentation for what is now dubbed the "Rock River District Vision" can now take place. We believe this plan represents an opportunity to significantly enhance the City's downtown riverfront area, lead to a re-embracing

of the Rock River as a community asset, and further activate catalytic sites for redevelopment, leading to numerous gains for the entire community.

## Budget Goal

- Proactively maintains and improves our parks and infrastructure in an effort to ensure quality, safety, and compliance
- Promotes and fosters innovative approaches for community development and growth

## Financial Impact

RINKA and Kapur are currently working on completing financial estimates for this plan, as well as a funding matrix. It is expected that funding sources will include a mix of public investment, private donations, and grants.

## Recommendation

The Plan Commission does not need to take formal action at this time. The intent of this preliminary presentation is to gather feedback from members, which will be used to further refine and finalize the Rock River District Vision document.