RiverEdge Park Aurora, Illinois
Music Garden

**RIVEREDGE PARK**
RiverEdge Park is the centerpiece in a 10-year master plan for the City of Aurora. This 30 acre regional festival park is a centerpiece because of its location along the Fox River in the heart of Aurora but, it is also the foremost economic stimulus concept pursuant to the Seize the Future (STF) Master Plan for Downtown, approved by City Council in 2006. Aurora’s downtown, the park and the properties along the Fox River are part of one of the Illinois River Edge Redevelopment Zone communities.

**LOCATION OF THE PARK**
RiverEdge Park is located just north of Downtown Aurora along the Fox River with New York Street to the south and Illinois Avenue to the north. This is a significant location, situated on the 170-mile long Fox River watershed, in the second largest city in Illinois, at the western edge of the Chicago Metro Region. It is a historically significant location once being the home of some of Aurora’s first settlers and the famed Potowatomi Chief Wau-bonsie.

The park site is bisected by the Fox River and surrounded on three sides by major north-south and east-west traffic corridors. These roadways connect through the downtown area to all sections of the city and nearby communities. The site is conveniently located adjacent to the City’s historic downtown, the Metra station at the Aurora Transportation Center, the Roundhouse restaurant, the Hollywood Casino and the Paramount Theatre.

www.RiverEdgeParkAurora.org
GOALS OF THE PARK
Why is this park important - four words – Community, Recreation, Innovation, and Economics.

Community. The park is intended to be a true centerpiece of our community. In an effort to affect change, public and private groups joined together to promote the creation of a plan for a new Central Park that would become a regional destination and project a sophisticated energetic image for the community. RiverEdge Park will bring the Aurora community together - and be a source of community pride. The plan promotes redevelopment, recreation, and resource restoration, using innovative design to address community needs, while celebrating the Fox River. This regional park, located in the heart of the city, will connect neighborhoods on both sides of the river and act as a catalyst to unify Aurora in a dynamic public gathering place. RiverEdge Park will serve as a neighborhood park for those historically more compact neighborhoods close to the downtown.

Recreation. The park has been designed to encourage both passive and active recreation. The designing of the park has strived to enhance public access and recreational uses of existing and planned open space along the Fox River. The park strives to optimize signature views of the river for travelers, whether motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, or paddlers.

Innovation. The Fox River will be elevated to its rightful prominence in our community by allowing, our greatest natural asset to be directly experienced within this urban setting. The park will connect the built environment to the river’s natural environment, while revitalizing and restoring the health of the river. The park will be a model of cutting edge and innovative sustainable environmental practices including products, programs and technology.
Economics. RiverEdge Park has the potential to dramatically transform the heart of Aurora. As a result of the success of the park, revitalization efforts will bring private sector investment to our Downtown, generating substantial increases in annual property taxes and sales taxes. The positive economic impact of parks and open space is well-documented as consistently fostering higher values for surrounding properties. People value the recreational opportunities they provide, and many are willing to pay a premium to live near a park. The economic impact of RiverEdge Park can be seen in other ways as well. The park can help make downtown Aurora a tourist destination. This increased tourism can result in a more vibrant downtown with higher retail spending and sales tax revenues. Urban parks can make an area a more attractive place to live, especially for people who seek pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. By providing amenities, RiverEdge Park can spark the development of new residential units. This can, in turn, improve the retail environment, with the increased number of households and higher spending potential. Properties located close to parks typically reflect values that can be up to 20 percent higher than other parcels. This impact is commonly seen for properties within 500 feet of a park, but can be observed for distances up to 2,000 feet for large, amenity-rich parks. The positive property value impacts of RiverEdge Park could potentially extend to cover much of central Aurora, including nearly 1,000 acres of private property.

For these reasons the Fox River was identified by many business and resident groups as being the most important amenity in Aurora and that if that amenity could be maximized it would be the key to the redevelopment of the central corridor of Aurora.
HISTORY OF THE PARK
To understand the importance of the park it is good to know the origins of it. Two downtown/riverfront revitalization plans were approved by the City Council contemplated opening up public access to the river. The Riverfront Vision Plan which identified the Fox River as “THE” economic engine of downtown redevelopment; and the Seize the Future Master Plan for Downtown Aurora which depicted a large “central park” style park on the cover as a significant component of downtown revitalization.

A design competition was held and from that competition the Aurora Park Collaborative was chosen by the public/private RiverEdge Park Committee to design the park. The design professionals included a representation of some of the best in their fields including a number of consultants that worked with the City of Chicago in designing the hugely successful Millennium Park along Lake Michigan, and World Festival Productions, Inc. which runs the Summerfest grounds in Milwaukee.

Throughout the master planning and design process, numerous meetings and charrettes provided for public input into the design of the park to ensure that not only is the park an economic development tool, but a community gathering place, to serve the needs of the whole Aurora Community.

THE AURORA PARK COLLABORATIVE
Christopher B. Burke Engineering Ltd. Civil /Structural Design
Muller&Muller Ltd., Architects
Terry Guen Associates, Inc, Landscape Architecture
Wills, Burke, Kelsey Associates, Wetland Design and Management
Virgilio and Associates, Ltd Associates, Structural Engineers
IDC Green Solutions, LLC, Building Systems Engineers
Talaske Sound Thinking, Sound Engineering
Schuler and Shook, Lighting And Theater Design
Edward K. Uhlir, Park Design and Management Consulting
World Festival Productions, Inc.
DESCRIPTION OF THE PARK
The RiverEdge Park Master Plan includes six distinctive park spaces on both the east and west sides of the Fox River, these spaces are “Parks within a Park”. These areas include the extension and connection to the FoxWalk river walk from the heart of downtown, Wilder Park on the west bank of the river and just to the north of that McCullough Park, Veterans Island just south of Illinois Avenue, the historic Indian Creek watershed area along the east bank, and the Music Garden across from the roundhouse and Metra station.

The RiverEdge Park Master Plan builds on the existing river front open space corridor with several proposed park infrastructure construction projects. These projects include: the Indian Creek wetland restoration and environmental center; the Wilder Park upgrade and expansion; the Iconic bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the Fox River; the restoration of Blues Island and the Music Garden festival pavilion.

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The Indian Creek wetland restoration and environmental center is located at the north end of the site where the Indian Creek flows into the Fox River. A new wetland will be created at the mouth of the stream, restoring it to its more natural form. This wetland will serve as compensatory storage for rainwater, allowing other park elements to the constructed in flood zones and providing an urban wildlife area and environmental education center.

Wilder Park was occupied by the old City of Aurora police station building. Demolition of the existing building opened up new parkland, allowing for dramatic vistas down to the river and provides a connection for west side neighborhoods to the park and river. Upgrades to utilities and lighting in this area will be designed and installed for picnicking, gatherings, weekend markets and special events.

The Iconic Bridge will be the central focus of the RiverEdge Park. This pedestrian bridge will embrace the river and allow for uninterrupted views of the Fox River and the Aurora skyline. It will gracefully connect the Music Garden and Wilder Park and join the neighborhoods on the east and west sides of the Fox River and provide a needed bicycle/pedestrian connection to the Transportation Center.

Blues Island has been restored to a near natural state. Invasive plant species have been removed and replaced with new native plants. The Island will serve as a mid-town nature sanctuary. From the pedestrian bridge you will be able to view the flora and fauna on the restored island without disturbing it. The restored Island will become a catalyst to restore the health of the Fox River.
The Music Garden with its garden market, outdoor performance venue and seating lawn will be the most active portion of the park. Both urban and natural form, the Music Garden acts as a transition from the city to the naturalism of the park. The outdoor performance venue is the major functional element of the park. It acts as a platform from which visitors can experience cultural events, within the natural setting of the river and the vibrancy of downtown Aurora. The flexible seating and lawn area will serve as a venue for large concerts, small performances and picnics. The Downtown Alive! events which are currently held on the streets of downtown Aurora will be relocated to this more efficient and permanent location.

The Music Garden portion of the RiverEdge Park is the first of these construction projects to be undertaken.

THE MUSIC GARDEN - DESIGN
As with the Master Plan, the initial design work included a public input and programming effort to ensure that the design and engineering of the site would meet the needs and desires of the community.

The public outreach included informational booths at public events including the Downtown Alive! Festivals; and City Expos. There were also a number of task forces formed with a combination of representatives from Aurora residents, Aurora business owners; and other government agencies. These task forces were critical in the design decisions made throughout the development of the Music Garden.

As part of the design process a number of technical reports and studies were produced to help guide the task forces and the consultants in the design of the park including a traffic and a parking report, both which found that by locating the music venue adjacent to the Aurora Transportation Center the
infrastructure for this phase of the park is already in place. The Music Garden’s demand on the traffic and parking in the area would be during the “off hours” of the train station.

A sound study was produced to ensure that the sound does not negatively impact the adjacent residential neighborhoods as well as ensure that the sound within the venue is designed to keep the Route 25 traffic noise out and to maximize the quality of the venues’ acoustics.

The work done by the consultants also included the development of all applicable regulatory applications including to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The outdoor performance venue is one of the most sophisticated elements in the RiverEdge Park. The venue will be a regional attraction and will act as a catalyst for economic growth by bringing many residents and visitors to downtown Aurora. For this reason a great deal of research and design work was put into every detail of the design. The pavilion design team visited a number of similar venues in the area to learn from the successes and failures of those venues. Many iterations of the venue and site layout were explored to ensure that the final design will meet all the visitors needs, create a performance venue that all Aurorans can be proud of and that performers love to perform at again and again.

Many considerations were taken into account when designing the site including the flexibility of the seating area; the site lines for the audience; ease of loading and docking of performer’s trucks and tour buses; accommodations for permanent and temporary vendors; crowd control during and after events; restroom facilities both permanent and port-a-potty locations; performer accommodations; storage; lighting; sound; digital video screens; security; availability for private parties; and opportunities for revenue generation throughout the park. The list goes on....
The final result is a stage and guest services building which will meet all of these needs. The aesthetic of the exterior of the stage and the guest services building will be “natural with a modern edge”, incorporating materials such as wood, natural stone, steel, and glass. The site will include plaza areas for vendors, people gathering and queuing as well as paved pathways for people to move throughout the park. The grass seating area is strategically located for stage viewing, event activities, or park picnicking. Aesthetic site lighting along the pathways is incorporated, as well as a speaker system for background music, or sound amplification of a stage show. Permeable pavement will be used wherever possible.

The park will be open to the public on a daily basis all year round and available for outside reservations and programming when not in use by the City. The goal is to have the park programmed from sun up to 11pm all year round.

In order to fully program the park it will require partnerships with many local entities, neighborhood groups and organizations. In the summer of 2012 the City entered into an agreement with the Aurora Civic Center Authority which runs the Paramount Theatre for the programing and operations of the park starting in 2013. A base calendar of events was established that fully anticipates additional programing opportunities with other outside agencies including the Fox Valley Park District, community organization, school districts, and many others.
The overall seating capacity of the venue is 4,500 and 9,500. The seating will consist of a modular seating area at the front of the stage extending approximately 200’ south, a lawn area extending approximately 220’ beyond that and a roof top viewing area above the guest services building.

This capacity includes:

a) modular seating 3,200 to 5,000 being flexible for seats, benches or picnic tables which can seat approximately 2,000 people in bench seating plus an additional 1,200 to 1,800 in chairs/picnic tables (or a total of 4,400 to 5,000 standing room only),

b) roof top viewing area 200 above Building One which is a partially covered 2,100 square foot area (approximately 2,380 square feet total above a first floor bathroom/ vending space which can accommodate hospitality needs) with 2 bathrooms (1m/1w) to serve the capacity of the elevated space, which can be set up with round tables or for standing room only.
The first level of the guest services building will include permanent restroom facilities to serve a crowd of approximately 3,600 people (9m/14w). This building will also house the second floor rooftop viewing area mentioned previously and includes the required toilet fixtures to serve the rooftop capacity. There are permanent restroom facilities to accommodate seated events and larger rooftop events. This building also houses one permanent food vending area and one a separate beverage vending area. A small box office/office space will also be located in the building. The park grounds surrounding the venue will include temporary port-a-potty pads and temporary vendor set-ups to serve larger capacity crowds to a comfortable maximum of up to 9,500 people.

The stage building includes a dock area, manager’s office, bathrooms, green room, dressing rooms, and storage room. A two story spot/sound mix tower located 100 feet in front of the house, and at the direct center of the stage. The stage structure is capable of hanging or stacking sound speakers, as well as a two video screens for the best patron experience. Additional video locations may be placed on the back of spot/sound mix tower, on the south elevation of the Guest Services building and at the back of the lawn seating area to extend the viewing experience to those in the rear of the
venue. There are locations throughout the park which can be set up with temporary secondary stages for multiple acts. A sound wall was designed and installed between the stage and this building to shield the venue from traffic noise along Route 25 and to enhance the acoustics of the venue. A ramp has been established along this sound wall to provide access to the rooftop deck without the need or cost of an elevator in this
THE MUSIC GARDEN - FINANCING
RiverEdge Park is a Public-Private partnership. This means that the project will be funded by leveraging public dollars with grants, donations and partnerships.

The consultants have developed a Donor Program with levels of giving and donor recognition from being listed as a contributor on the website to naming rights on the pavilion or the park itself. This was modeled after the greatly successful Millennium Park funding program, which has been tailored to our master plan.

We have already received donations and financial commitments to the park. In 2011 the City received a grant from the State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for $8 million dollars. The Fox Valley Park District has contributed riverfront land to the park as well as a $3 million dollar financial contribution. The Kane County Forest Preserve has committed $2 million dollars to the design, engineering and construction of the bridge.

Additionally, we received a $2 million dollar donation from the John C. Dunham Fund for naming rights of the pavilion and we are pursuing other funding sources such as foundations, federal, state and local grants.
MILLENIUM PARK MODEL
Leveraging public dollars with grants, donations and partnerships