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Officials kick off riverside corridor master planning

Planning has officially started on a project that will guide the gradual transformation of a six-mile stretch of land along the Spokane River from Independence Point in downtown Coeur d'Alene west to Huetter Road.

During a kickoff meeting on Monday, a diverse group of land use planners, engineers, architects and city officials met to discuss a wide range of possibilities for the corridor.

A master plan being developed by Welch Comer Engineers of Coeur d'Alene could involve a recreational, commercial and private development uses, as well as numerous opportunities to secure public access to the Spokane River, including the development of trails and parks along the water and expansion of Riverstone Park.

The land is divided into two sections: The east end—known as the Four Corners—runs from Independence Point to the Riverstone Development. The two-mile stretch involves about 40 acres, 29 of which are owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The city is working with the BLM on development of the master plan.

If the BLM accepts the plan—which would generally require that any development provide for public uses—it could lease the property to the city at little or no cost.

The second tract starts at Riverstone and goes west to Huetter. The city is in the process purchasing 20 lineal acres of right-of-way through along the Spokane River for \$2.5 million. The four-mile stretch is currently owned the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad.

Phil Boyd, Welch Comer president, emphasized that the master planning process will include numerous opportunities for public involvement and input, through “small group” meetings, public workshops and informational forums.

The entire stretch of property has high “emotional importance” to dozens of user groups and stakeholders, all of whom will have an opportunity to meet with the master plan architects and express their desires.

The small groups include North Idaho College, the Fort Grounds Homeowners Association, Museum of North Idaho, the Human Rights Education Institute, the city's bike/pedestrian committee, skateboard activists and many other "singular issue" groups.

Land use architect Dell Hatch of Welch Comer said officials will focus on the "highest and best use" along the entire length of the master plan area. "And the highest and best use is not necessarily always going to be for recreational purposes," he said.

Adoption of the master plan is anticipated in February 2015.

The Four Corners/BLM Steering Committee is comprised of Boyd, Hatch, Dave Patzer, a member of the city's Parks and Recreation Committee who is also a board member for the Lake City Development Corporation (LCDC), Acting Coeur d'Alene Parks Director Bill Greenwood, Coeur d'Alene Mayor Steve Widmyer, Scott Cranston, Chairman of the city's Parks and Recreation Commission, Tony Berns, executive director of the LCDC, Coeur d'Alene City Councilmember Amy Evans, and architect Dick Stauffer.