

## Memo

To: Programs, Projects and Operations Subcommittee

Subject: Florence Futures Visitor Center

Date: August 1, 2006

From: Gerry Bowen

On April 13, 2006, the Board voted not to contribute to a feasibility study for the development of a Visitor Center to be located south of I-680 and east of 30<sup>th</sup> Street in the Florence area of Omaha. A request was also denied for the NRD to appoint a member to the Florence Futures Board of Directors. The visitor center and park were intended to celebrate the historical influences of early settlers in the area. It would have included a trail connection to the Riverfront Trail and other Back-to-the-River activities.

Recently, City of Omaha Councilman Jim Suttle has requested a reconsideration of the District's April 13, 2006 action (see attached). In addition, Mr. Suttle has made two changes to the proposal. First, the project will now include a trailhead for the Missouri River Trail system and the Visitor Center would stress the NRD projects in the area, such as Boyer Chute and Nathan's Lake. Secondly, the Florence Futures group has been certified as a "501 c3" corporation making them eligible to receive tax deductible contributions.

The study is still anticipated to cost \$110,000, and Mr. Suttle is again requesting \$25,000 from the District, and the appointment of a District representative to the Florence Futures Board of Directors.

The Florence Futures Group has demonstrated that they have raised the \$75,000 of the remaining \$85,000 for the study. If approved, the funds could be assigned from the Missouri River Trail Construction account (#07 08 4410) in the FY 2007 Budget.

**Management recommends that the Subcommittee recommend to the Board that the request from the Florence Futures Development Group for a contribution of \$25,000 to a feasibility study be approved, that the District appoint a member to serve on the Florence Futures Board of Directors, and that the needed \$25,000 be assigned to the project from the Missouri River Trail Construction account (#07 08 4410) in the FY 07 Budget.**



## OMAHA CITY COUNCIL

OMAHA/DOUGLAS CIVIC CENTER

OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68183

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July 6, 2006

Mr. Richard Jansen, Chairman  
Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District  
8901 South 154<sup>th</sup> Street  
Omaha, NE 68138

RE: Florence Master Plans

Dear Richard:

On behalf of Florence Futures, the 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation, I am resubmitting a request to the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Attached is the most recent summary. We are within \$75,000 of our total goal of \$220,000 to fund the two master plans for Florence:

- East-West Gateway Master Plan to site a high tech Visitor Welcome Center and other amenities to enhance the history and the natural environmental aspects of the Missouri River/Ponca Hills area.
- North-South Master Plan to revitalize the business district in Florence along North 30<sup>th</sup> Street to augment the Visitor Welcome Center.

The purpose of resubmitting this request is to enhance the existing investments of the NRD. The Visitor Welcome Center is a much needed "trail head" to support the Missouri River trail system. It would serve as a resting station or a beginning station for bike riders and other users of this marvelous trail system. Likewise, you need increased visitation of your investment at Boyer Chute. The Visitor Welcome Center is designed to help organize the itinerary of out of town tourist and regional residents, by redirecting them through the use of "circle tours" to any and all regional facilities.

I request your assistance financially to help us close this remaining gap in fund raising in order to start these master plans and get them completed. My request is for \$25,000 plus a representative from your staff or board to serve on the Florence Futures Board of Directors.

Representatives of Florence Futures would be most anxious to appear before your appropriate committee and the full Board to discuss this request.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Councilmember Jim Suttle  
Omaha City Council

JS/wl

Attachments

c: Marlin Petermann-Acting General Manager, NRD  
Linda Meigs-Chair, Florence Futures  
Lowen Kruse-Vice-Chair, Florence Futures

## **STATUS REPORT ON FLORENCE REVITALIZATION**

- Florence Futures
  - 501(c)3 Non-Profit Corp.
  - Mailing address: Florence Futures, P.O. Box 12121, Omaha, NE, 68112
- Florence Futures Development Fund
  - Goal: \$220,000.00
  - Banked: 88,067.75
  - Pledged: 87,500.00
  - Total Raised: \$175,567.75
- Master Plans
  - E-W Gateway Master Plan to site Visitor/Welcome Center at I-680/30<sup>th</sup> Street
  - N-S Master Plan to redevelop Downtown Florence (Young to Fillmore)
- Hotel/Motel/Restaurant/Family Plex for Downtown Florence
  - Hilton – 4 visits
  - Marriott – 3 visits
  - Settle Inn – 1 visit
  - AmericInn – 2 visits
  - Eight hotel chains contacted
- Hy-Vee Drug Store
  - Approved by Planning Board Agenda March 1, 2006
  - Approval by City Council scheduled for June 20, 2006
  - Investment of \$7 million to open Fall of 2007
- North 30<sup>th</sup> Streetscape Project
  - Proposal into 2007 CIP Process for a \$10 million, five-year project
  - Potential Funding Sources
    - \* Future Street Bonds
    - \* Future New CDBG Dollars
    - \* Economic Development Administration Dollars
    - \* State STP Dollars
    - \* MAPA STP Dollars
  - Truck O&D Study by Schemmer & Associates
    - June 1 – Notice to Proceed
    - Sept. 19 – Final Report Due
    - Sept – City & State meeting to review results

- Mormon Church
  - February 28, 2006 proposal was reviewed in Salt Lake
  - May 10-11, 2006 discussions with Salt Lake Church officials in Florence
  - Late June follow-up
  - Potential visit by Church to Florence in August
  
- Tourism Concepts within Florence
  - High Tech Visitor/Welcome Center at I-680/30<sup>th</sup> Street Interchange
  - Mormon Winter Quarters
    - \* Mormon Trail Center (70,000 – 90,000/year visitors)
    - \* Mormon Cemetery
    - \* Mormon Temple (25,000/year visitors)
  - Florence Mill
  - Railroad Depot
  - Historic Bank of Florence
  - Circle Tours radiating out and back from Florence (proposed)
  - Amphitheater (proposed)
  - Recreated Winter Quarters (proposed)
  - Missouri River Water Taxi Landing (proposed)
  - Stores, shops, restaurants in Florence and on Riverfront (proposed)
  - Musical Compositions on the Six Historical Eras (proposed)
  - Florentine Players
  - Neale Woods
  - Dodge Park
    - \* Youth Sports Tournaments (proposed)
    - \* Marina
  - Hummel Park
  - Trail System
    - \* Missouri River Trail
      - North to Boyer Chute
      - South to Plattsmouth
    - \* Route 36 – West to Lake Cunningham (proposed)
    - \* Trail Head at Florence Visitor/Welcome Center (proposed)
  - Riverboat Landing at State Street and Missouri River (proposed)
  - North Mormon Ferry (by Mormon Bridge)
  - The “Hi-Tree”
  - Chip Davis Recording Studios/”Mannheim Steamroller”
  - Horseback Riding/Stables (proposed)
  - Bodmer Art Collection and Video Presentation (proposed venue with collection owner Joslyn Art Museum)
  - Sisters of Notre Dame
  - Florence Quilt Show (@ Mormon Trail Center)
  - Florence Gingerbread Displays (@ Mormon Trail Center)

Develop and Market Circle Tours from Florence Visitor/Welcome Center to These Existing or Proposed Sites to Maximize and Expand Tourism Visits:

### **Nebraska Sites**

Lewis & Clark Scenic Byway  
(US 75 North to South Sioux City)  
Fort Atkinson  
Fort Omaha/General Crook House  
and Victorian Garden  
Omaha, Ponca and Otoe Indian Sites  
Manuel Lisa and Pierre Cabanne Fur Trader Posts  
Mormon, California and Oregon Trails  
Holland Performing Arts Center  
Durham Western Heritage Museum  
Old Market Historic District  
Qwest Center  
Lake Cunningham  
Carter Lake  
Boyer Chute  
DeSoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge  
"The Bertrand" – recovered 1860's Riverboat  
Lauritzen Gardens/Kenefick Railroad Park  
Fontenelle Forest  
Omaha Black Museum  
Preston Love Jazz Museum  
Strategic Air & Space Museum  
Joslyn Art Museum  
El Museo Latino (Latino Art/History Museum)

Boys Town

Freedom Park/US Naval Museum  
Omaha Children's Museum

Henry Doorly Zoo  
Zoo Fari  
Cutler's Park Site  
Joslyn Castle  
Various Mormon Pioneer Settlement Sites  
Missouri River Pedestrian Scenic Bridge (proposed)  
Bus Tour Vendors (proposed)  
Nebraska Wine Country  
Horse Trails/Riding  
Rosenblatt Stadium  
- Omaha Royals Baseball  
- College Baseball World Series  
Various Nebraska State Parks  
Notre Dame  
President Ford's Birth Site  
First National Bank Pioneer Wagon Sculptures  
(10<sup>th</sup> and Capital)

... and a whole lot more!

### **Iowa Sites**

Lewis & Clark Trail  
Lewis & Clark Monument  
Hitchcock Nature Center  
General Dodge House  
Pottawattamie, Ottawa and Chippewa Indian Sites  
Kanesville Tabernacle  
Western Historic Trails Center  
Rails West RR/Model RR Museum  
Union Pacific Railroad Museum  
Lake Manawa  
Carter Lake  
Council Bluffs Casinos  
Squirrel Cage Jail  
Air Force Museum  
Various Mormon Pioneer Settlement Sites  
Shenandoah Music Hall of Fame/Everly  
Brothers Museum  
Wabash Trace Nature Trail  
Missouri River Pedestrian Scenic Bridge (proposed)  
Bus Tour Vendors (proposed)  
Iowa Wine Country  
Horse Trails/Riding  
Various Iowa State Parks  
Lewis, IA (Mormon Trail/Handcart  
Trails/Underground Slave RR)  
Madison County (Bridges of Winterset, John  
Wayne's Birthplace)  
Elk Horn, IA Danish Windmill/Museum  
Fairview (Pioneer Graves) Cemetery, Council  
Bluffs

... and a whole lot more!



# EAST-WEST GATEWAY MASTER PLAN

Study Area and Visitor/Welcome Center



0 1000 Feet



# NORTH-SOUTH 30th STREET MASTER PLAN

Study Area



0 500 Feet





## GATEWAY E – W MASTER PLAN

### I-680 at 30<sup>th</sup> Street Interchange, Florence

The people of Florence identified a Visitors Center/Welcome Center as a number 1 priority for the revitalization of Florence.

They further said that the location of this Center should be in proximity to the historic Florence Mill and that it should be easily seen as an identifiable center at the I-680/30<sup>th</sup> Street Interchange.

In response to this priority, it is proposed that a master plan be initiated for the land area immediately south of I-680 from proximity of the interchange at 30<sup>th</sup> Street eastward across Dick Collins Drive to the Missouri River.

The end product of the master plan would be a document and related drawings that would site the proposed Visitors Center/Welcome Center and clearly identify its purposes for attracting out of state tourist or other individuals. It is envisioned that this Center would be the key starting point for tourists and other individuals to plan their visitation schedule to the historic activities in Florence. Also available would be the identification of multiple "circle tours" which would route tourists to area historical locations or facilities, wherein the starting point and the ending point would be the Florence Visitor Center/Welcome Center.

The remainder of the master plan would identify the icons and other historical facilities (such as replicas of the Mormon winter corridor buildings) that would create a walking experience between 30<sup>th</sup> Street and the Missouri River.

On the river we could likewise see the possibilities for a small amphitheater, a riverboat show venue, a restaurant and historical re-enactment areas portraying the Lewis & Clark Expedition, the Mormon Ferry and the early-day fur-trappers trading post. The riverfront area could also be the site for Metro-wide festivals and outdoor concerts throughout the late spring, summer and fall months.

It is estimated that the Gateway E – W Master Plan would cost \$110,000.



## **30<sup>TH</sup> STREET N – S MASTER PLAN**

30<sup>th</sup> Street from I-680 South to Young Street in Florence

The people of Florence have identified the need for a motel/restaurant/family plex to be located in or within proximity of Downtown Florence.

When tourists stop at the Mormon Trail Center, they frequently ask “where can we stay? Where can we eat? Where can we let the children unwind?”

When residents of Florence have out of town visitors these same questions are asked.

The Mormon Trail Center has been generating, depending upon the year, between 65,000 to 90,000 annual visitors. This is an awesome number!

Within the metropolitan area there are 800,000 people. These residents are within 20 minutes of Florence via I-680. For shopping, Florence residents travel west to Maple Street or Center or West Dodge. Some even travel east to Council Bluffs.

So the question for the North 30<sup>th</sup> Master Plan is how to assemble the types of businesses that would serve the out-of-state tourists, the metropolitan area visitors, and the local resident shoppers. The hotel/restaurant/family plex could certainly serve as an anchor for the revitalized Florence Business District.

The estimated cost of this master plan is \$110,000.

## **DESTINATION FLORENCE**

### **1. FLORENCE SAYS "WE NEED TO GET THE TRUCKS OFF 30<sup>TH</sup> STREET"**

- Long Term – Gateway Bridge and Expressway (16<sup>th</sup> Street from Storz to I-680)
- Short Term – shift U.S. Hwy. 75 to 72<sup>nd</sup>/Sorensen Parkway
- MAPA Truck Study to be completed in September 2006

### **2. FLORENCE SAYS "WE WANT TO REVITALIZE OUR DOWNTOWN"**

- Master Plan – fundraising half completed for \$110,000 study
- Florence Futures to serve as 501(c)(3) non-profit sponsor of study
- Must generate a pedestrian friendly environment
- Must generate on-street parking

### **3. FLORENCE SAYS "WE WANT A HOTEL/MOTEL/RESTAURANT IN DOWNTOWN FLORENCE"**

- Have two developers potentially interested
- Need to assemble properties at preferred sites

### **4. FLORENCE SAYS "WE WANT A VISITOR/WELCOME CENTER AT I-680 AND 30<sup>TH</sup> STREET INTERCHANGE"**

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### **5. FLORENCE SAYS "WE SHOULD SLOW DOWN THE SPEED OF 30<sup>TH</sup> STREET TRAFFIC"**

- Long Term – consider a streetscape project to reduce four lanes to three lanes
- Short Term – program three Downtown signals to alternate red/green phases
- Reduce speed limit on North 30<sup>th</sup> Street to 25 mph
- Relocate U.S. Hwy. 75

### **6. FLORENCE SAYS "WE WANT THE PROPOSED NEW HY-VEE DRUGSTORE AT 30<sup>TH</sup> AND STATE STREET"**

- A Suburban Plan approved
- Needs Statements #1 and #5 Improvements



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These questions must be addressed in the Plan and Economic Analysis Reports:

- A. How does the Florence Gateway Visitor/Welcome Center become a tourist attraction itself? Become the first place for tourists to stop?
- B. How does a high-tech visitor/welcome center conceptually function to best create circle tours for each day for each individual tourist facility?
- C. How do we develop the land area south of I-680 from North 30<sup>th</sup> Street to the Missouri River into a pedestrian friendly tourist experience?
- D. How do we develop the Center into a "trail head" for users (bicyclists, joggers, etc.) of the Missouri River Trail System?
- E. Is a water taxi system a feasible idea on the Missouri River?
- F. How do we best incorporate Dodge and Hummel Parks into the tourist experience? Camping? Field sports? Boating?
- G. How can we best use the COE complex for tourism? A river restaurant park? Where does the COE relocate?
- H. Can we project an east-west trail out McKinley (SR 36) from the Missouri River to Lake Cunningham?
- I. Is an outdoor musical stage production pageant feasible? Where? What size seating?
- J. How do we develop each of the six major histories of Florence?
- K. How can we best cashflow and structure a non-profit corporation to manage the Florence Gateway Visitor/Welcome Center?



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# Mormon Bridge Visitor Center Proposal For Action 2006

The proposal is for a tourist information center which would focus on historical sites within about 30 miles radius of the Mormon Bridge on I-680. We imagine the visitor entering a six-sided building and facing three large walls of historical displays: one on Lewis and Clark, one on the scene of the 1850s as local people are trying to develop a city across from Kaneshville/the Bluffs area, and one on the Mormon story. Interactive TVs would fill in the story and would direct persons to historical sites in the area.

The formal proposal is by a 401(c)3 corporation named "Florence Futures." The assumption is that land could be obtained free or leased from the Nebraska Department of Roads, south of I-680 and next to the old mill. The group proposes two professional studies to determine the feasibility of the project, to show to those who might help to fund it, and to coordinate plans of various groups. The total cost is estimated to be \$220,000. To date we have received \$145,000 in cash and pledges. Our hope is for three more \$25,000 gifts.

One study will focus on the Visitor Center and land to the east, into Iowa, and to the west for about 1 mile. The Center will have a very strong history theme, with interactive screens to assist tourists in choosing driving loops in all directions from the Center: to Fort Atkinson, Hummel Park (first meeting of Lewis and Clark with Indians), Fort Lisa Trading Post and Engineer Cantonment (north on the River), Kaneshville Tabernacle and Dodge House (Iowa), Chief Standing Bear Trial Site (Fort Omaha), Mormon Trails Center and Cemetery (about 80,000 current visitors per year), the Mormon Mill, a living history Mormon village proposed to be built near the Mill, the oldest bank building in Nebraska, the old depot, and other historic points within 30 miles.

The second study will propose changes in the business district on 30th St. south from the Center, with a family-centered hotel, a change to a more residential-style street, and the creation of a historic village appearance. Again, we have 80,000 visitors traveling through here now, each year, and we are not slowing them down for anything except the Mormon Trail Center. This is a major tourism opportunity for all of us in the region as well as the larger purpose of helping our people understand the importance of the past in understanding and living the present.