

Phase I: Baraboo River Corridor Plan Summary

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CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 states the plan's purpose which is to "Protect, restore and enhance the natural environment within the Baraboo River Corridor and focus on opportunities that will spur recreation, tourism and development to establish the region as *THE* premiere water recreation destination in south central Wisconsin."

This Phase I plan includes recommendations for North Freedom, West Baraboo, City of Baraboo and Sauk County to begin to accomplish this vision and suggests funding options to help communities carry-out the recommendations. Next steps after the Phase I plan include applying for grant funding, building partnerships for future planning and operation/maintenance of the corridor, then beginning to implement recommended park and recreation projects from this plan. These steps will lead the communities towards growing the corridor and making it a community and regional destination.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter two gives general information on the communities and region, demographic data and discusses land use within the study area. The study area has and will continue to experience population growth due to its unique characteristics - including opportunities for recreation and tourism, high quality school districts and quality of life offered by the communities. According to projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Sauk County's population is expected to grow by 25.6% between 2010 and 2040, surpassing the State's growth rate within the same time frame (14.1%).

Land use was an important topic in both focus group meetings and at the public meeting. Stakeholder interviews revealed concerns with the adjacency of farmland to the River, especially when farm animals are allowed to roam into the River. This has a negative impact on water quality and creates a potential risk for paddlers. Stakeholders are also concerned about development adjacent to the River being well-thought out so as not to disturb the River's flow.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 is an inventory and analysis of the natural resources, cultural and historic resources, infrastructure resources and recreational resources within the study area.

Of note in this section is that the River is a unique amenity, due to a series of dam removals that have allowed the River to return to its natural state. Although it has a lot of recreational potential, there are some existing issues with water quality due to nonpoint source pollution. The communities have been and will continue to work to improve water quality.

The River is also a unique habitat and is home to a variety of rare plant and animal species including birds, butterflies, dragonflies, fish, mayflies, mussels, snakes, mammals and a turtle, lizard and snail. The River is currently a fishing and birding destination and the communities hope it will become a more well-known location in the future. The river is also used frequently for paddling and offers opportunities for beginners all the way through more experienced paddlers.

The River Corridor also has many archaeological and historical sites including Native American effigy mounds which are shaped to resemble animals and humans. The Native Americans were the first people to use the River and since then, the River has played an integral part in the development of nearby communities.

Existing amenities along the River include the Ice Age Trail, the Riverwalk in Baraboo and a long list of parks that are adjacent or near the River.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 summarizes existing plans related to the study and efforts to engage with the community and identify strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats. MSA Professional Services conducted two focus group discussions and a public forum to gather critical knowledge and discuss improvements to the Baraboo River Corridor. A summary of key takeaways from these meetings is summarized in the topics below:

STRENGTHS

Natural Resources and Recreational Opportunities

- Free-flowing river/dam removals have increased opportunities for recreation on the River (e.g. kayaking, canoeing, fishing).
- Riverwalk in Baraboo connects people to the River and offers opportunities for walking, biking and enjoyment of nature.

- Public access allows residents and visitors to recreate on and near the River.
- Transect of River allows users to have a variety of experiences (River runs through developed areas and very rural areas).
- Scenic views along River make it a desirable place to visit.
- Paddling opportunities for all skill levels along River offer something for everyone.
- ~50 foot drop in elevation at Baraboo Rapids section of River make it a desirable paddling location.

Established, multi-jurisdictional partnership

- Partnerships between and within communities make planning and funding improvements more feasible.

WEAKNESSES

Waterway

- Water quality is poor due to phosphorus and suspended solids.
- Log jams in River create difficulties when paddling.

Recreational Limitations

- Existing canoe/kayak launches are difficult to use due to mud and steep slopes.
- River access points are not widely known/ well-publicized.
- There is a lack of public restrooms along corridor.
- Not all canoe/kayak launches are ADA accessible.
- Fluctuation of water level causes mud issues which make accessing the River difficult.

OPPORTUNITIES

Access, Active Use and Healthy Living

- If River conditions continue improving, the River could become a fishing destination.
- Riverwalk trail extension could be extended to other communities.
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation wayside along STH 33 could become a canoe/kayak launch.
- Improve canoe/kayak launch at Giese Park.
- New canoe/kayak launch to the east of Circus World.
- New canoe/kayak launch along Water Street.

Development/Redevelopment

- Riverfront redevelopment could make the area more attractive for residents and visitors to enjoy.
- Tourism could bring additional spending into the communities.

- Restaurants/retail along the River could make the area more widely used by residents and visitors.
- Hold events that focus on River to bring awareness to the resource as a local and regional destination.
- New paddle sports store and/or rental location for those who come to the area to canoe/kayak or for those who are interested in trying those activities.
- Water Works Building could be reused for a business related to River recreation.

Education and Stewardship

- Additional partnerships within communities (ex: University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County) could bring others on board to help with planning and implementation efforts and engage the wider community.
- Organized river cleanups will improve the River's appearance and help improve water quality.
- Marketing/advertising will help to bring in more local and regional visitors to use the River as a recreational amenity

Beautification

- More natural landscaping adjacent to River will make the River more scenic.
- Beautification of the corridor will help it become a place that people enjoy visiting.

THREATS

Human Activity

- User conflicts on River can be potentially dangerous and should be minimized (e.g. between fishermen and those kayaking on the River).
- There is some uncertainty about designated vs. undesignated hunting areas (e.g. water fowl hunting near Gander Mountain)

Maintenance

- Obstructions in and along the River can make paddling difficult and/or dangerous.

Health and Safety

- Increasingly degraded water quality can be a health hazard for those tubing, swimming, canoeing or kayaking in the River and those eating fish from the River.
- Agricultural land uses increase phosphorus levels in the River which lead to degraded water quality.

Recommendations

5

- 5.1 Goals
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 Overall Corridor Implementation
- 5.4 Specific Capital Improvements by Municipality

Chapter 5 presents a vision for the future of the Baraboo River Corridor and describes the goals and recommendations necessary to achieve this vision. Additional details will be identified in the next phase of the project. **Please note: the municipalities within the Baraboo River Corridor are under no obligation to complete the recommendations listed in this Chapter if they adopt this plan.**

5.1 CORRIDOR GOALS

1. Make the Baraboo River Corridor an attractive, accessible and safe destination to increase its use by residents and visitors for recreation.
2. Improve the water quality of the Baraboo River.
3. Build partnerships to develop, implement and champion improvements throughout the Baraboo River Corridor.
4. Create a system of access points throughout the Baraboo River Corridor and associated Tributaries for kayakers, canoers and fishers.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

BY 2025, THE BARABOO RIVER CORRIDOR:

1. Will be known regionally as a paddling destination with designated whitewater course(s).
2. Will provide a host of support facilities and amenities to expand tourism within communities it resides.
3. Will put into place measures to protect, enhance, restore and control the corridor's natural setting, improve water quality and biodiversity and educate visitors and residents on the unique cultural and historical significance of the Corridor.

VISION

“Protect, restore and enhance the natural environment within the Baraboo River Corridor and focus on opportunities that will spur recreation, tourism and development to establish the region as *THE* premiere water recreation destination in south central Wisconsin.”

5.3 OVERALL CORRIDOR IMPLEMENTATION

PUBLIC POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

To ensure that improvements and policies are made which continue to advance the BRCP and build upon the Phase I Plan, it is recommended that a River Partnership be created to include all municipalities adjacent to the River. Once the partnership has been established, the general goals contained within this section (5.3) should be delegated to specific entities to carry-out. A coordinator should also be designated so there is one person ensuring the project stays on track and continues moving forward.

Baraboo River Corridor

- Adopt and maintain the Baraboo River Corridor Plan.
- Review existing codes and processes, modify these documents to align with the goals, objectives and strategy. Evaluate impediments to implementing this and future phases of the plan.
- Conduct Phase II of the Baraboo River Corridor Plan which should include a parallel NRCS watershed study.

Conduct additional studies

- Conduct a study of stream and aquatic resources, vegetation, prairie and wetlands in order to identify issues and opportunities for ecological protection and restoration. As part of the study, create a maintenance plan for consistent river clean up.
- Conduct fishery surveys of the Baraboo River to identify current fish populations and strategize as to how to improve the abundance of desirable fish in the River and determine where fish habitats could be built.
- Conduct feasibility study to expand Riverwalk and/or trail throughout the corridor.
- Create a recreational master plan to guide the implementation of proposed amenities.
- Create, adopt and enforce planning and design guidelines for corridor improvements.
- Complete a more detailed analysis of cultural/historical resources for storytelling and educational opportunities within the corridor.

Developer toolkit

- Determine approach and available resources to provide developer assistance. Confirm developer assistance criteria and toolkit.
- Property owner outreach. Contact property owners to discuss the goals, objectives and recommendations of the BRCP (determine support, future plans, business objectives, potential development, etc.). Align policies and actions.

OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Marketing

- Engage in branding, collateral, public relations, business development and outreach.
 - » Create a brand strategy and communication system.
 - » Develop promotional material (including logo/mark, slogan, imagery and pattern language all municipalities can use throughout the Baraboo River Corridor.)
 - » Develop a design standards package and plans for identification, wayfinding, map and educational signage throughout the corridor.
- Create a website and app for the corridor. Include a real-time map of river levels, input/takeout points, trip suggestions, etc.
- Work with local tourism agencies to advertise existing local attractions and new attractions as they are developed.

Public/Private Partnerships

- Build a River Partnership to include all municipalities adjacent to the Baraboo River.
- Consider creating an intergovernmental organization or 501 (c)(3) agency to oversee Implementation of the Baraboo River Corridor Plan(s).
- Consider establishing a Friends of the Baraboo River Corridor group (or another volunteer group) that oversees stewardship and events in the corridor.
- Coordinate between the municipal River Partnership group, the 501 (c)(3) and the Friends group for planning, implementation and volunteer efforts in the Corridor.
- Designate a “coordinator” between all of the partners involved in the effort who will commit to organizing meetings, marketing and ensuring the project maintains focus.
- Hold community-wide events that focus on the River.
- Engage local County law enforcement to identify protocol on policing within the corridor.
- Work with WDNR to determine the feasibility of increasing rapids in certain places along the River to enhance kayaker experience.
- Investigate opportunities for educational and exploratory programming to expand curriculum that focuses on the diversity of the area and the potential to create outdoor classrooms and monitoring stations within the corridor. (Local schools, University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County and other local higher education institutions)
- Work with property owners and businesses to address property conditions, unsightly views and improper uses along the corridor.
- Reach out to potential developers and

operators:

- » Contact a whitewater course developer.
- » Contact paddle sport businesses.
- » Contact food cart vendors.
- » Contact shuttle service providers.

Funding

- Investigate funding opportunities for planning, design and construction of future improvements.
- Establish corporate and individual donation program.
- Prepare an annual Capital Improvement Project Plan that aligns with partners and all sources of revenue.
- Identify local businesses for support, sponsorship and volunteer efforts.

Project Management

- Consider recruiting and hiring a project manager who can dedicate efforts to the revitalization and development of the river as a premiere recreation destination.
- Hire or identify staff responsible for regularly inspecting and reporting deficiencies, obstructions and debris within the riverway.
- Organize river cleanup days and clear log jams.

Park and Public Space

- Identify capital improvement budgets and priority action items.
- Prepare maintenance plan for current and future capital improvement projects.
- Develop a plan for revenue generation and enhancement through fees, events and sponsorship.
- Consider a Historic Review Board for oversight on protection and restoration of historic sites and structures.

LAND AND DEVELOPMENT IMPROVEMENTS

- Develop paddle up restaurant(s) along the corridor.
- Each municipality should pay attention to properties that will further the goals and objectives of this plan by obtaining land either through purchase or easement for recreational and capital improvements.
- Municipalities should carefully review development proposals including opportunities for:
 - » A paddle sports store and/or rental locations near the river.
 - » Designated camp ground facilities.
 - » Redeveloping riverfront parcels into mixed- use development that allows for retail, restaurant and other businesses that are desirable to those

recreating on the River.

- Each municipality should carefully evaluate developer proposals and provide gap funding opportunities and assistance for property acquisition and clean up.

Current initiatives

- Continue to encourage redevelopment by supporting current grant opportunities for property owners.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Parks, Trails and Riverwalk

- Plan and design an extension of the Riverwalk and connecting Trails to and along the River Corridor towards North Freedom and the Glenville access point.
- Integrate public art, historical markers and interpretive signage into the corridor along designated routes that celebrates the rich history of the river.
- Identify and install designated fishing areas along the River.
- Connect to existing trails to provide multi-modal opportunities to, from and within the corridor.
- Improve existing launches and create new canoe/kayak launches that are easy to use, provide additional parking options and are ADA accessible.

Transit, Street and Streetscapes

- Install a unified, comprehensive wayfinding system throughout the corridor following the development of the branding effort.
- Inventory existing boat launch sites, associated parking, identify specific improvements needed and develop an implementation plan.
- Identify strategic locations for additional parking along the river.

Best Management Practices

- Communities should implement additional stormwater management techniques to improve non-point runoff.
- Increase native vegetation along the River to improve water quality and decrease erosion.
- Use best management practices to filter stormwater before it reaches the River.
- Communicate the importance to landowners of keeping farm animals out of river.

5.4 SPECIFIC CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS BY MUNICIPALITY

Please note: the municipalities within the Baraboo River Corridor are under no obligation to complete the recommendations listed in this Chapter if they adopt this plan.

City of Baraboo

- Evaluate the feasibility of installing a pedestrian bridge just east of the Broadway bridge, upstream of proposed whitewater course.
- Evaluate the feasibility for and apply for a Stewardship Grant for the pedestrian bridge east of Circus World.
- Identify, mark, and provide support amenities for portage opportunities at the two peninsulas (Attridge Park Area and Spirit Point).
- Acquire additional property for river access points.
- Evaluate the feasibility of moving the snow storage at Circus World's parking lot to somewhere outside the river corridor.
- Work with businesses along the river to establish potential variable access points.
- Work with the Village of West Baraboo to create a whitewater course from Haskin's Park to the south end of Attridge Park. Identify, mark, and provide support amenities for portage opportunities.
- Create additional opportunities for picnicking and unpaved recreation at Spirit Point.
- Work with the County to create an off road trail connection from Spirit Point to The Ice Age Trail.
- Identify, mark, and provide support amenities for portage opportunities.
- Create a short whitewater course from the west side to the east side Spirit Point with two potential variable access points. Identify, mark, and provide support amenities for portage opportunities.
- Identify opportunities for historic storytelling, especially focused on the River.
- Continue to move forward with redevelopment opportunities that support the goals of this plan.
- Continue to renovate the pump house into a picnic shelter with restrooms and historic storytelling plaques.

Village of North Freedom

- Apply for SFR and RBF Grants in 2016 for the boat launch improvements in North Freedom Park
- Apply for DNR Stewardship Grant for redevelopment of North Freedom Park
- Designate safe pedestrian routes to/from North

Freedom Park and local destinations (Village Hall, local restaurants etc.)

- Work with adjacent land owners to develop additional variable access points to the river.
- Evaluate the feasibility of extending the riverway trail to Seely Creek and Lake.
- Work with adjacent land owners to clean up over-vegetation and log jams from North Freedom to Giese Park.
- Identify opportunities for historic storytelling, especially focused on the River.
- Continue to move forward with redevelopment opportunities that support the goals of this plan.

Village of West Baraboo

- Conduct feasibility study and extend the Riverwalk to Haskin's Park.
- Install a kayak/canoe launch along 2nd Street.
- Apply for DNR Stewardship Grant in 2016 for Phase II of the park redevelopment.
- Consider applying for RTA or Stewardship Grant in 2018 for trail extension.
- Partner with Gander Mountain to add a variable access point on the river. Obtain an access/usage easement from Gander Mountain.
- Create a designated route on W. Oak Street that connects to Haskins Park and meets the Baraboo Riverwalk and loops back to Hill Park and The Village Hall Square.
- Work with the City of Baraboo to create a whitewater course from Haskin's Park to the south end of Attridge Park.
- Identify opportunities for historic storytelling, especially focused on the River.
- Continue to move forward with redevelopment opportunities that support the goals of this plan.

Sauk County

- Coordinate with WDNR and the Town of Baraboo to address existing erosion and sediment issues at both Giese and Glenville launches.
- Work with landowners to develop additional variable access points to the river.
- Consider development of a park/shelter and improved boat landing facilities at the Glenville Access Point and on land owned by Sauk County west of State Road 113 based on perceived increased demand. Coordinate development efforts with the WDNR.
- Coordinate with the Town of Baraboo to improve the Giese Park Access point/boat launch.
- Work with participating communities/friends groups to identify opportunities for historic storytelling, especially focused on the River.

5.5 TOOLS & MECHANISMS TO FUND IMPLEMENTATION

Maintenance and operational expenses of the Corridor's Parks and Open Space is generally funded through property taxes and user fees. As the park systems within the corridor grow, the need to increase funding to meet the basic maintenance and operational costs also grows. Often there are insufficient funds to undertake major capital improvement projects. There are a wide variety of potential funding sources to assist with up-front capital costs, including acquisition of land and the development of new recreational facilities.

GRANT PROGRAMS

An important source of funding is grant programs offered by state and federal agencies, especially the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Table 5.1 provides a summary of common state and federal park and recreation grant programs. The table is not an exhaustive list of grant programs, rather those that are typically used by municipalities. Other grant programs may exist and information regarding funding details shown in Table 5.1 should be verified with grant providers prior to seeking grant funding.

COMMUNITY FUND-RAISING & VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Community groups and civic organizations are sometimes willing to organize fund-raising efforts to assist with these costs, and they may also be able to marshal volunteer labor to assist with small development projects such as trail creation or playground installations. Local business and corporate support should also be sought. Both non-profit and for-profit organizations can be rewarded for their support with acknowledgement on a plaque or sign at the site.

501(C)3 FOUNDATION

The City can set up an endowment fund as an additional means of providing continual financial support for park acquisition and development. An endowment fund works like a permanent savings account. The amount individuals give, which is the principal, is never spent. Only the interest income is spent, thereby providing a continual source of monies. A park endowment fund can provide a means for residents to either bequeath money or provide ongoing donations to the City's park system, with the certainty that the money donated will only be used for the advancement of recreation in the community. Gifts to an endowment fund are typically tax deductible under federal and state law.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)

As part of a broader plan to redevelop an area, the City can use tax increment financing to assist with parkland acquisition and development. There are some limitations to what revenues from a TIF district can be used to pay for, generally the costs of constructing public buildings can not be funded with TIF.

The City currently has two active TIF Districts, TID #4 and TID #6. The TID's were created for the purpose stimulating redevelopment and new public and private investments.

Under state statute 66.1105 a municipality can use tax increment to complete public improvements within a 0.5-mile radius of the TID, so long as the use of the funds supports and benefits the TID.

Table 5.1 In the full report identifies funding opportunities to assist municipalities to move forward with selected improvements.