

Dayton preps to continue urban riverfront development

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The city of Dayton is eyeing more riverfront growth. A new park initiative aims to bridge the barrier between the east and west sides, while spurring economic growth as part of an ongoing effort.

The Dayton Riverfront Plan was created to draw visitors and residents to areas surrounding the Stillwater River, Wolf Creek, Mad River and Great Miami River for outdoor and recreational activities and events. Development around the rivers is intended to increase foot traffic and provide economic boosts in nearby areas and neighborhoods.

2022 marks the starting point for a three-piece park project to connect the currently divided east and west sections of Dayton by the Great Miami River.

As such, the renovated Sunrise MetroPark will sit on the west side of the river while the Sunset Park will rest on the east.



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Dayton is ready to begin the long road to development for this connective waterfront project in the downtown area.

Currently, both Sunrise and Sunset parks are underdeveloped and will see significant changes in appearance over the next 20 years. Connecting the two parks is the Union Bridge, a pedestrian and cyclist platform, which will act as a hangout spot and its own park experience on a bridge structure.

“Historically, we’re still a very segregated community. This river on the west side of Dayton has kind of been the symbolic divide between east and west, black and white. The idea is that these two parks are connected by a (third) park over the river, and they become, not the place that divides the community, but the place where the community comes together,” said Carrie Scarff, chief of planning and projects at Five Rivers MetroParks.

The development is chasing the success of its waterfront park predecessor, RiverScape MetroPark, which Scarff said brought significant economic investment to the surrounding area around Monument Avenue.

Scarff said in the 20 years since RiverScape MetroPark was built, \$37 million in public funds were invested. Additionally, private investment in the two-block area surrounding the park tallied \$407 million. This marked a more than ten-fold investment increase between public and private investment.

This is not uncommon on a national level. Scarff said national urban waterfront developments are a significant asset for economic development because they provide open public space for healthy lifestyle opportunities by introducing nature into the urban environment.

She said the city hopes to see the areas surrounding Sunrise MetroPark, Sunset Park and Unity Bridge follow in the footsteps of RiverScape MetroPark, as the development is completed in phases.

The expected economic development would bring nearby neighborhoods up along with it. She specified it's not to gentrify the area but spur redevelopment and grassroots entrepreneurs to come, invest and create new jobs.

The Dayton Riverfront Plan is set on a timeline of 25 to 30 years. Scarff said ambition around the Sunrise, Sunset and Unity Bridge

portion of the project are high, but the process will require building in phases alongside other aspects of the plan.

“RiverScape MetroPark took almost 20 years to build out all the phases and this will be very similar,” Scarff said. “It will take a while, but we’ll do it.”

The amount set to be invested into the Dayton Riverfront Plan or phases of the Sunrise, Sunset and Union Bridge developments were not disclosed.

Here are some of the amenities that will be added to the development over time:

Centennial Overlook – an overlooked plaza including interpretive signage and in-pavement quotes about the river in nature such as bird species information and history. This portion of the project will be done by the Garden Club of Dayton at the corner of E Monument Avenue and Riverside Drive to be completed fall 2022.

Bikeways – a bikeway on the South end of the river will be completed in 2023 with on at the North end in 2025. Once the bikeway is completed, RiverScape, River’s Edge, Sunrise and Sunset Parks will connect to make the downtown loop, a continuous trail with a series of experiences to attract walkers and host activities.

The Gardens of Remembrance and Celebration – on the north portion of the park from First Street toward the Art Institute with braided pathways. The path overlooks a series of landscape art pieces to commemorate art history and remember local heroes such as those who suffered through local natural disasters and crises.

Circular stairway to the river – this stairway down to the riverfront connects to the Centennial Overlook Plaza and will have a mural on it.

A gallery experience – a similar experience to RiverScape MetroPark with connecting areas down to the riverfront for bikers and pedestrians to travel through a series of experiences.

General park amenities – shelters, seating areas, children’s play area

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