

# AGENDA & MINUTES

## GRAND RIVER GREENWAY Advisory Committee

December 7, 2022

9:00 AM

29 Pearl Street NW (Downtown Grand Rapids Inc Offices)

### 1. Call to Order & Welcome

Present: Kate Berens, Matt Chapman, Rob Hunter, Ryan Kilpatrick, Salvador Lopez, Sam Moore, Wendy Ogilvie, Stephanie Ogren, Kara Wood, Jim Meeks (virtual)

Absent: Tim Kelly, Mark Rambo, Julius Suchy

Others Present: Andy Guy, Josh Spencer, Natalie Youakim, David Sernick, Mark Miller, Marion Bonneaux

### 2. Introductions

Members briefly introduced themselves as some members were not present at the October kickoff meeting.

### 3. Agenda Review

Andy Guy briefly reviewed the agenda and asked if Committee members had any questions or additional discussion topics. Members offered no comments and agreed to move ahead with the agenda as presented.

### 4. Approve October 26, 2022 Committee Meeting Minutes

Guy stated the October meeting notes were included in the agenda packet. He asked if Members had any corrections or questions. Members offered no comments and agreed the notes adequately captured the October 26, 2022 discussion.

### 5. American Rescue Plan Act Overview

Natalie Youakim and David Sernick presented an overview of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), eligible costs/projects and the timeframe for spending ARPA funds.

Guy presented the *Growing the Grand River Greenway* pitch deck overviewing how greenway projects align with the intent of the ARPA funds and opportunity.

The slides for both presentations are included as an attachment to these notes.

Wendy Ogilvie asked for confirmation on the federal deadlines for ARPA spending and inquired how those federal deadlines might translate to local deadlines for reporting, spending, etc.

Staff confirmed that federal guidelines call for Obligating all project funds by December 31, 2024 and Expending those funds by December 31, 2026. Staff also stated State Department of Natural Resources has not yet determined how their deadlines might differ – this will be defined thru the grant agreement – but staff expects the State will outline tighter deadlines than the Federal government.

6. Greenway Project Status / Readiness

Josh Spencer provided an overview of the status and readiness of the various Greenway projects organized by what projects could potentially be completed by years 2023, 2024 and 2026.

The slides for this presentation are included as an attachment to these notes.

Recognizing that most projects are bringing together a mix of funding, Jim Meeks asked for further explanation of any flexibility with the various funding sources, ie what dollars can be used where and within what time frame? He encouraged staff to add a column to the spreadsheet detailing other funding sources and related requirements.

Sam Moore asked if staff anticipates project costs might escalate.

Guy stated many of these costs estimates were developed pre-Covid. He also stated several projects could be put out for bid this spring/summer, and that responses to those bids would help update our understanding of how costs might fluctuate based on the current environment ie inflation, supply chain, etc. He also stated its reasonable to anticipate material, labor and other costs will increase.

Moore stated increasing costs should be one factor encouraging an accelerated process and a focus on *what projects can we get done in the foreseeable future* to help avoid increasing project costs.

7. Prioritization Criteria

Spencer presented a summary of Potential Project Prioritization Criteria identified during the Committees October meeting. The list of criteria was segmented by tactical considerations and value-based considerations.

**Tactical**

**Sustainability & Maintenance.** Spencer asked members if this a priority consideration and, if so, what more might they want to see/understand to help inform a project prioritization discussion? ie is it enough to know the community has a dedicated parks/trails millage, for example.

Ryan Kilpatrick asked if there are projects on the Greenway list that raise concerns about the community's ability to provide long-term maintenance?

Spencer stated that project sponsors such as City of Grand Rapids, Ada Township, Plainfield Township, Cannon Township, Grand Rapids Public Museum all have millages. But the capacity of individual community/organizations to maintain new amenity is perhaps a project-by-project / community-by-community consideration.

Moore stated local communities typically have and follow maintenance plans and agreements, and presumably new amenity would fall under those existing approaches.

Kate Berens stated that 'sustainability and maintenance' is more of a design criteria. Not necessarily a project prioritization criteria.

**Complete Critical / Difficult Trail Gaps.** Spencer stated this is a question we've heard from the philanthropic community .. ie might the ARPA funds be utilized to tackle more difficult projects, or big gaps in the trail system, and utilize philanthropy/private funding to complete smaller/easier projects.

Stephanie Ogren stated a map visual would help members see the "gaps" in the system and better consider this particular criteria.

Wendy Ogilvie stated some of the neighborhood connections to the Greenway could be quite difficult, and those are important connections to make.

**Greenway Backbone Trail.** Spencer stated another project potential organizing criteria is focusing primarily on building the "backbone" trail that enables other communities / neighborhoods to connect into the larger trail network.

Ogren stated that idea makes good sense.

Moore agreed. He stated several of the individual opportunity sites along the river are complex, require considerable funding and longer implementation timeframes. Focusing specifically on the backbone enables us to prioritize making connections across the community and showing the broader vision. Completing the backbone perhaps also helps catalyzes efforts on more complicated individual sites.

Berens agreed building "the main highway" is a good focused goal.

Rob Hunter agreed and stated that, with completion of a backbone trail, the remaining projects – difficult or other – could then become a subset list of projects, with greater potential to identify/attract other potential public/private funding sources because they're also aspiring to plug in to the main backbone.

**Potential To Attract Other Funds.** Spencer asked members if it is important to consider a projects ability to raise additional funding, or simply rely on ARPA for full funding.

Wood questioned whether the proposed criteria is relevant, as most of the projects on the list have secured or will pursue additional funding sources.

Ogilvie asked if there was any match funding required under ARPA or other guidelines. Spencer stated no, but the Committee could impose it.

**Catalysts for other Projects.** Spencer inquired if investing in projects with potential to further compel investment in housing or other important development is an important consideration.

Ogilvie stated it would be helpful to understand the extent to which an individual greenway investment might spur other good things to happen.

Ogren agreed.

**Timeline for Completion.** David Sernick inquired about the feasibility – technical, logistical, political, etc – of executing the backbone trail within the required timeline.

Spencer stated its complicated, especially where the railroad companies are involved, but many of the project pieces seem to be coming into alignment.

Guy stated local interest in developing the Greenway has never been stronger, and there's seemingly good political will to act. Technically feasible? That's a site-by-site, project-by-project consideration but simply blazing the trail seems doable.

Kilpatrick stated that, if we were to rank these criteria, completing the backbone for him emerges as a top priority, and embedded in that is key values such as increasing public safety and connecting to underserved communities. He stated the overarching theme/goal that's emerging in his mind is *Can you get from A-to-B safely, and can everyone get from A-to-B?*

### Values

**Public Safety.** Wood inquired which of the proposed projects would significantly improve safety where there are currently challenges/concerns?

Spencer highlighted the Knapp Street pedestrian bridge as a significant safety improvement.

Guy inquired to confirm all the projects on the list, with the exception of perhaps a couple/few on-street connections, are separated, off-street, nonmotorized trail sections, which would provide a high degree of safety and protection for users. Spencer confirmed this is true for the majority of greenway trail projects on the list.

Kilpatrick inquired if its correct to assume that safety is largely "baked in" to the projects.

Wood agreed all the projects are likely designed to provide/improve safety. But when it comes to prioritizing projects, some may deliver a bigger safety value than others. She cited the proposed Leonard-to-Ann trail connection which currently doesn't exist but would provide a significant safety benefit by taking current trail users off a busy section of Monroe Ave. She asked: Should we prioritize projects that resolve existing safety issues.

Moore observed there seems to be good agreement emerging among members about what's important, and that many of the prospective projects have been in the works for years. He encouraged staff to develop a proposed list of recommended projects for the next meeting, in the interest of expediting process.

Berens supported that recommendation. She also stated that she finds the Tactical considerations more useful than the Value considerations, because all the projects on the prospect list have largely been designed based on extensive community input and all the prospective projects meet all the listed values. She encouraged prioritizing the tactical considerations.

Members generally agreed.

Spencer asked if there were additional information or considerations that are missing?

Matt Chapman asked if its possible to compile more detail on the timeline for project completion ie property acquisitions, easements to secure, permits, relocating existing uses on project properties, etc. He encouraged the effort to be realistic about time required to pursue any needed approvals/requirements/other actions.

Moore encouraged staff to bring a working draft list of recommended projects to the next meeting. He also stated its important to make decisions efficiently and provide clear direction sooner than later to help support additional fundraising efforts of individual projects. Construction season also will soon be upon us, he said.

Salvador Lopez encouraged the development of visual tools, that link projects and values to more clearly demonstrate how prospective projects connect communities, expand access to the recreation system, etc.

Spencer asked if members agreed that they would prefer to see potential recommendations at the next meeting. Moore said yes and members generally agreed.

Guy reminded members about the Committee's dual charge: the short-term need to prioritize projects for ARPA fundings and the other need to develop the longer-term Plan of Action for building out the Greenway across Kent County.

Ogren expressed support for this two-pronged approach. She stated the ARPA-funded projects will happen in the next three years. But she emphasized the importance of defining the Greenway vision and plan that shows how everything ties together over the next 10-15 years. She emphasized the importance of identifying and addressing important project opportunities that have necessarily been part of the public dialogue to date, such as the Grand River Burial Mounds.

Guy mentioned the Plaster Creek Greenway is another important longer-term project consideration.

8. Updates

Guy shared the next meeting dates/times:

- o Wednesday, January 11, 3:00 – 4:30 PM
- o Monday, January 30, 12:00 – 1:30 PM

He thanked the members for doing the doodles to help identify meeting times and making the time available to pursue an accelerated process schedule in the near term.

9. Committee Member Discussion

Kilpatrick reiterated his support for and confidence in staff developing a proposed list of project recommendations, and providing content for Committee members to react to. He stated that would be welcome and valuable for the process.

10. Adjournment

Guy adjourned the meeting at 10:37 AM.