

August 15, 2015

To: Transient Guest Tax Committee, City of Topeka

From: Beth Fager, Chairperson
Topeka-Shawnee County Riverfront Authority

Subject: Application for Continued Transient Guest Tax Allocation
Oregon Trail Riverfront Park

At the invitation of the TGT Committee and in response to a resolution of the Topeka-Shawnee County Riverfront Authority adopted July 22, 2015, we respectfully submit the following responses to the list of questions provided to us by City staff on July 21, 2015. Please consider these answers and support documentation as our request for continued funding via the Transient Guest Tax extension currently under consideration.

1. Describe the Project.

The Oregon Trail Riverfront Park project will develop the land on the north of the river into an Oregon Trail-themed park. The public commitment by the Topeka City Council to develop this park project has been ongoing since its inception in 2002. The planned park extends from the Great Overland Station south to the levee and contains approximately 80% of the land area between the Quincy and Topeka Avenue bridges.

Phase One

In phase one of park development, based on City Resolution # 7253 approved August 16, 2002, the City utilized Transient Guest Tax Dollars for the following purposes: (selected highlights from the resolution)

- Acquisition of land for park purposes
- Demolition or relocation of some existing buildings
- Cleaning and clearing the land for development
- Supporting costs for professional design services and project administration

The original Transient Guest Tax funding totaled \$1,325,000. The current remaining fund total of \$818,000 is being held by the City of Topeka and will be utilized to complete the various components stated in this resolution. By spring 2016, the City expects to have completed their initial task for phase one.

Phase Two

The Transient Guest Tax funding requested will be used for phase two park development. The conceptual master plan, which was commissioned, funded and completed in 2006, calls for the park to highlight artistic and historic features depicting and interpreting the national historic significance of the 2,200 mile Oregon Trail, which connected trappers, explorers, and pioneers travelling from Missouri to the Oregon Valley. (See attached renderings.) Additionally the park is located along the Kansas River which was designated by the United States Department of the Interior as a National Water Trail in 2012.

This site – which encompasses Pappan’s Ferry and Pappan’s Landing - has been designated as a significant Oregon Trail site by the National Parks Service. Their recent involvement has been to offer services and resources from the National Historic Trails program. Developments include:

- May 12, 2015, a meeting took place with Lee Kreutzer, representative of the National Park Service to discuss the park development plans
- May 22, 2015, communications was established with Steve Burns Chavez, Landscape Architect, National Parks Service, National Trails Intermountain Region for the purpose of establishing a day and time in spring 2016 for hosting a project design charrette and preparation for and determination of the actual park development and budget
- August 19, 2015, Steve Burns Chavez and Kristin Van Fleet, landscape architects with the National Trails Intermountain Region, NPS, will visit Topeka for initial planning purposes.

2. What is the total budget for this project?

Phase one: \$1,325,000 (TGT funding 2003 – 2015)

Phase two: \$3,675,000

Total: \$5,000,000

3. What are the funding sources other than TGT dollars for the project?

- National Park Service – Historic Trails Program
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Shawnee County Parks and Recreation
- Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Private donations and sponsorships

4. How much TGT Funding is requested?

- \$2,300,000 (TGT)
- \$1,375,000 (from other sources listed in #3)

5. What will TGT Funds be used for?

- Planning and design
- Architectural / engineering services
- Construction
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Parking, sidewalks, and pathways
- ADA compliance
- Access
- Interpretive signage and activities
- Boat ramp

6. What are the economic development and tourism benefits to the City?

- Oregon Trail Riverfront Park capitalizes on Topeka's unique and pivotal role in the westward expansion of the United States, drawing strong interest from the fast-growing cultural and heritage sector of the domestic tourism industry.
- The park efficiently leverages local investment in the hip, emerging urban arts district known as NOTO, as well as the Great Overland Station – itself a prime factor in western settlement and industrialization. The park and the importance of the Oregon Trail in the nation's history, works in concert with other important heritage attractions to create a critical mass of cultural attractions, allowing the entire collection to compete effectively for tourism.
- The recently restored State Capitol, Brown v Board museum, Jayhawk Theater, Constitution Hall and other landmark facilities all complement the Oregon Trail park, with the entire cultural and heritage collection generating a "must see" public perception for Greater Topeka.
- The park serves as an anchor attraction in the renaissance of Topeka's riverfront. Riverfront trail planning creates an opportunity to connect the historic Oregon Trail to Shawnee County's robust and expanding network of pedestrian and bicycle trails.

- An urban river whitewater feature is part of a weir safety re-engineering project, funded via the City's approved five-year capital improvement plan. Recreational boaters coming downriver from that feature will likely choose to make a landing at a new boat ramp to spend time in the Oregon Trail Park, visit NOTO Arts District restaurants and shops, and tour the Great Overland Station.
- Oregon Trail Riverfront Park is an ideal venue to attract school tours, leading to re-visits during the summer vacation period. The adjacent Topeka Rescue Mission is working to create related cultural programming for their resident children, via the Children's Palace now under construction.

7. What is the projected return on investment for the City (direct and indirect)?

Direct

- The vast majority of the city's transient guest tax is collected from non-residents, allowing the community to create lasting facilities and attractions at a reduced cost to local taxpayers.
- Economic development consultants suggest that most cities benefit from tourism-generating investment of transient guest tax dollars at a ratio of \$5.00 in benefits realized for every \$1.00 invested.
- According to the Position Paper on Cultural and Heritage Tourism developed by the U.S. Department of Commerce, roughly 81% of U.S. adult tourist travel incorporates a strong interest in cultural and heritage attractions. These tourists spend an average \$623 per person. They were also found to use hotels, and bed & breakfasts, on an average of 5.2 nights annually.
- Timely completion of Oregon Trail park allows other cultural and heritage attractions to become more competitive in the national tourism marketplace.

Indirect

- Increased usage of parks and trails, which is shown to be a high priority among Topeka citizens.
- By providing these outdoor spaces for activities we enhance the attractiveness of the community for current and potential residents.

- NOTO Arts District and Downtown are two huge economic development tools. The Oregon Trail Riverfront Park will connect the two to enhance the dynamic core of the city on both sides of the river. This will further stimulate growth in downtown and NOTO businesses.
- Retail development at Branson Landing in Branson MO is centered on their waterfront. Similar development could eventually happen here on either side of the river.

8. What is the timeline for the project?

Estimated completion: December 2018- Spring 2019 (*assuming TGT funding is bonded*)

9. How many visitors will come to your project?

Projection: 100,000 annual visitors

Visitors will come to the Oregon Trail Riverfront Park for a variety of reasons:

- Great Overland Station Museum visitors – 20,000 with potential to grow.
- All Veterans Memorial and Corridor of Flags – many visitors but no figures available
- Existing and new events and festivals at the park – 20,000 +
- NOTO Arts District visitors – 25,000 annually (First Fridays alone)
- Oregon Trail tourists – now 26,000 annually; the National Park Service projects visits will rise 300%, based on new developments underway
- Recreational boaters on the Kansas National Water Trail, with new boat ramp at the Oregon Trail Riverfront Park. Currently the Kaw River State Park (less than five (5) miles upstream from the Oregon Trail Park) attracts more than 30,000 visitors annually, and is projected to increase as the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism completes boat ramps.
- A whitewater “play space” being created at the water treatment weir will attract even more boaters who may make the Oregon Trail Riverfront Park a stop on their journey, as the play space is less than two (2) miles upstream from the park.
- Cultural and heritage tourists: 35.3 million adults say that a specific arts, cultural, or heritage event or activity strongly influence their choice of destination

10. How will your project create overnight stays at hotels?

- Oregon Trail Riverfront Park is projected to attract interest from area residents as well as participants in cultural and heritage tourism.
- The whitewater “play space” to be constructed less than two miles upstream from the park is expected to draw boaters from a radius of up to 600 miles, according to the leading national canoe-kayak organization, with each visitor spending an average of \$623 per day.
- A similar whitewater venue in Ann Arbor, MI attracts as many as 1,500 daily visitors, in season, 35% of whom are from out-of-state. Assuming a total of thirty (30) in-season weekends in Topeka, the Kansas River whitewater run can be expected to generate over 15,000 annual visits requiring an overnight stay of one or more nights. At an occupancy of 2.2 such visitors per room, a conservative estimate would be just under 8,000 room-nights generated per year.
- The park project creates a vital feature for visitor attraction and retention, when taken in concert with other, ongoing riverfront development projects.

11. Is there additional information and/or materials, including pictures, other details, etc., that would be helpful to the committee?

Attachments:

- A. Riverfront Authority background information
- B. Riverfront Authority resolution to request Transient Guest Tax funding
- C. Letter of support from the Topeka Rescue Mission
- D. Conceptual master plan of the Oregon Trail Park 2006 – to be revised
- E. American Alliance of Museums “Museum Facts”
- F. Position Paper on Cultural and Heritage Tourism, U.S. Department of Commerce

Attachment A.

The **Topeka-Shawnee County Riverfront Authority** (Authority) is a joint administrative extension of the City of Topeka (City) and Shawnee County (SNCO), created by an Act (Chapter 12, Article 56) of the Kansas State Legislature, adopted in 2009. The Authority is empowered to oversee the planning and development of beneficial improvements to the Kansas River Corridor, as it passes through Greater Topeka and Shawnee County.

Three (3) members of the Authority are appointed by mayor and city council of City, and three (3) are appointed by the board of county commissioners of SNCO. All meetings are conducted in accordance with the Kansas Open Meetings Act. The official repository of Authority records is 515 S. Kansas Avenue, Topeka, Kansas 66603. Ms. Beth Fager chairs the Authority, Mr. Robin Jennison is vice chair, Mr. Vince Frye serves as secretary, and Mr. Pat Downes serves as director of development, under a consultant services agreement.

Additionally, an **Oregon Trail Riverfront Park Advisory Task Group** has been formed, to provide project guidance, identify and explore external funding opportunities and enhance project cooperation and communication. Current task group membership includes:

Topeka-Shawnee County Riverfront Authority: Beth Fager, Pat Downes

City of Topeka: Doug Whitacre, Bill Fiander, Dan Warner

Shawnee County Parks and Recreation: John Knight, Terry Bertels

Heartland Visioning: John Hunter

Great Overland Station Museum: Bette Allen

Topeka Rescue Mission: Mike Foster, Great Overland Station Museum,

NOTO Arts District: Darrell Six

Downtown Topeka Inc.: Vince Frye

There are ongoing conversations between the City of Topeka and Shawnee County regarding park development and ongoing operations and programming