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ARTICLE

THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY:

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP STRIVING TO RECLAIM THE DETROIT RIVER

BETSY HEMMING*

INTRODUCTION

A bold vision is in place for the Detroit Riverfront in Detroit, Michigan. The transformation of the Detroit Riverfront is still a work in progress, but already the lessons are many. This paper will detail the vision for a transformed Detroit Riverfront, the efforts to realize the vision, and lessons learned to date. Specifically, the article will focus on the creation of the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc. (DRFC), a non-profit organization that is charged with facilitating the transformation through a strong public-private partnership. Section I will provide the background on the Detroit River, important demographics regarding the riverfront and early work on the vision. Section II and III will highlight the work of the DRFC and the project details. Finally, Section IV covers key success factors and challenges, focusing on important elements for future progress.

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I. DETROIT AND ITS RIVER

The city of Detroit was founded just over 300 years ago, along a wonderful river.¹ A rich life emerged along the riverfront, from the French ribbon farms to the underground railway, to rum smuggling and the many recreational pursuits still thriving today.² From fur-trading in the 1700s to lumber and farming in the 1800s to significant commerce on the river in the 1900s, Detroit became one of the busiest ports in the world, even described in 1908 as “the Greatest Commercial Artery on Earth.”³

The thriving riverfront was lined with wharfs and piers, mills, shipyards and smokestacks.⁴ In more recent times, the region’s economy crumbled.⁵ Unfortunately, over time, vacant buildings and abandoned sites littered the shoreline of the Detroit River.⁶ Ultimately, these abandoned sites limited access to the river and caused environmental problems along the river.⁷ The future is growing brighter for the riverfront, as the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy and its many partners join together to transform the riverfront and renew public access to the Detroit River.⁸

The Detroit River is an American Heritage River, a federal program that helps river communities seek resources to address river-related challenges.⁹ It is the only international heritage river system and international wildlife refuge in North America.¹⁰

The river is about 32 miles long and runs from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie, with the City of Detroit lining the river for

¹ Jenny Nolan, *How the Detroit River Shaped Lives and History*, Detroit News, available at www.detroitnews.com (Aug. 7, 2003).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., Grant Application, *Introduction* (Apr. 30, 2004).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ EPA, *American Heritage Rivers*, available at <http://www.epa.gov/rivers> (Last updated on Monday, February 14th, 2005).

¹⁰ John Hartig, *Detroit River Int’l Wildlife Refuge, Detroit River Activities and Notoriety* (Aug. 7, 2003).

about 13 miles.¹¹ More than five million people live in the river's watershed.¹² The Detroit River remains one of the busiest ports on the Great Lakes, moving about 80 million tons of cargo every year.¹³ The Ambassador Bridge crosses the river and links Detroit with Canada, while the Detroit-Windsor tunnel remains one of the largest underwater international automobile tunnels in the world.¹⁴

The Detroit metropolitan area is a sprawling region in southeastern Michigan, with approximately 5.5 million residents, the eighth most populous metropolitan area in the United States.¹⁵ Just fewer than one million people live in the City of Detroit proper.¹⁶

The incredible diversity of people in the Detroit region and the riverfront district has great impact on any riverfront redesign plan.¹⁷ The plan must comprehend the wants and needs of a wide constituency base. The planners must address the needs of neighborhood, city, region, county and state inhabitants, which are people from very different ethnic and economic backgrounds. There is also a wide array of stakeholder categories, such as residents along the river, Detroit workers, residents in the broader metropolitan area and visitors to Detroit, who also represent very diverse interests.¹⁸ In fact, past visions for a transformed riverfront may have failed because of a lack of comprehension of the importance of honoring this diversity and assuring that the wants and needs of all constituents were adequately reflected in the envisioning process.¹⁹

The current vision for a transformed Detroit riverfront solidified in December 2002, when Detroit Mayor Kwame M. Kilpatrick unveiled the results of a 90-day study by a diverse

¹¹ Student Resources, Metropolitan Regional Communities, *River Facts* (Aug. 2, 2002).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Wikipedia, *Detroit, Michigan*, available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detroit%2C_Michigan (Last modified 17:42, 11 Dec 2004).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., Grant Application, *Introduction* (Apr. 30, 2004)

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

team of Riverfront stakeholders.²⁰ The stakeholders created a vision of the rejuvenated Riverfront:

The historic Detroit River is a gathering place for Detroiters, their families, friends and visitors – a place where people want to live, work and play. The riverfront illustrates our ability to provide stewardship of our environment, confirms our ability to connect and care for our people and channels sustainable economic development for the benefit of all. Our riverfront is transformed and we are recognized as an outstanding global community.²¹

Mayor Kilpatrick authorized the formation of the East Riverfront Study Group and asked its 34 members to spend an intensive 90 days developing a revitalization strategy for Detroit's east riverfront.²² Co-chairing the Study Group were Derrick Miller, the Chief Administrative Officer for the City, and Matthew Cullen, General Manager of Economic Development and Enterprise Services for General Motors, who would go on to become the co-chairs of the new Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Board of Directors.²³ The Study Group unveiled a multifaceted redevelopment plan for Detroit's East riverfront featuring commitments for more than \$500 million in public, private and foundation funds over the next five years.²⁴ Critical stakeholders, including City, County, State and Federal government agencies, public organizations, corporations, foundations and community groups, participated in the study to assure an appropriate focus on development in this region, spending significant amounts of time together creating a robust vision of the riverfront.²⁵

The Kresge Foundation simultaneously announced a series of challenge grants over five years totaling up to \$50 million.²⁶ In its 2002 Annual Report, Kresge President and CEO John Marshall III stated: "There were many shoulders at the wheel,

²⁰ Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Inc., *Detroit's Riverfront Vision*, available at www.detroitriverfront.org (2002).

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *East River Study Group Unveils for Revitalized Riverfront*, Press Release (December 12, 2002).

but The Kresge Foundation's expressed interest in making an extraordinary grant provided encouragement and endorsement that gave this project and its stakeholders momentum. . . . This is our largest commitment ever. It will succeed if others see the opportunity."²⁷ When aggregated, the series of grants will represent the largest single gift in the Foundation's history. Kresge also awarded its first grant, \$5.5 million, to the DFRC.²⁸

As part of the study, an agreement was created and signed by all the stakeholders. The agreement set forth a promise and a philosophy that every participant would do everything within their power to bring this vision to a reality.²⁹

"When we started this process, we identified non-negotiables to getting the job done: The vision to make it happen; the money to make it happen; the will to make it happen, and the people to make it happen. We now have all of those in place," Matthew Cullen, co-chair of the DFRC, said in a December media briefing on DFRC progress. "Detroit's Riverfront will make an unparalleled contribution to the image of Detroit as a destination, as our home, and as host to global-reaching events like Super Bowl XL, NBA Final Four and Major League Baseball's All Star Game."³⁰

"All of this is intended to be part of setting the stage for economic development," Derrick Miller, another co-chair of DFRC, said, "We want to send a clear signal to potential investors that our overall vision of a busy urban waterfront is really going to happen."³¹

II. THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY

The diverse private-public partnership, a critical element in the creation of the Riverfront, was exemplified with the creation of the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc. (DRFC) in

²⁷ The Kresge Foundation, *The Kresge Foundation 2002 Annual Report*, available at www.Kresge.org (2002).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *East River Study Group Unveils for Revitalized Riverfront*, Press Release available at www.detroitriverfront.org (December 12, 2002).

³⁰ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *Detroit RiverFront Conservancy Makes Huge Progress in First Year*, Press Release available at www.detroitriverfront.org (December 16, 2003).

³¹ *Id.*

early 2003.³² The DFRC was charged with undertaking the establishment, improvement, operation, maintenance, security and programming of the Detroit Riverfront. This vision included the creation of the RiverWalk as the centerpiece for the transformation of the riverfront.³³

The Board of Directors of the DFRC is a constituency-based board, consisting of 44 members (31 ex-officio and 14 at-large members), bringing to the table many of the important public and private stakeholders.³⁴ The DFRC's by-laws instruct the board members to ensure representation of all types of organizations in the planning process.³⁵ This diverse representation and involvement are considered critical to the success of the redevelopment.³⁶ The commitment of the Board members to this project is demonstrated in their active participation in policy meetings, advisory groups, community outreach and fundraising.³⁷ The members of the Board are diverse in terms of their positions in the community and are representative of the community as a whole.³⁸ Of the 44-members, 33 percent are racial/ethnic minorities and 33 percent are women.³⁹ Some of the organizations represented on the board include the State of Michigan, Wayne County, City of Detroit, Wayne State University, large riverfront property owners, riverfront residents, community representatives and many organizations that have a connection to the riverfront, such as the tourism and economic development organizations.⁴⁰

Eight committees manage the work of the DFRC. Committees are comprised of board members, as well as more than 60 non-board member volunteers.⁴¹ These committees are the Executive Committee, Audit Committee, Advance and Member-

³² Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://www.detroitriverfront.org/index.asp?item=493&name=Frequently+Asked+Questions&site=5org> (last visited on February 15, 2005).

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., Grant Application, *Organizational Description* (Oct. 2004).

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://www.detroitriverfront.org/index.asp?item=493&name=Frequently+Asked+Questions&site=5org> (last visited on February 15, 2005).

ship Committee (which has five subcommittees), Community Outreach and Communications Committee (which has two subcommittees), Finance and Investment Committee, Governance and Nominating Committee, Operations and Programming Committee, and Planning Design and Development Committee.⁴² In addition to the co-chairs, the DFRC board has a vice chairman, David Page, who is the vice chairman of The Kresge Foundation and a senior partner in the Detroit law firm of Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn LLP.⁴³ The board selected Faye Alexander Nelson as president and CEO in late 2003.⁴⁴ In total, more than 100 constituents are actively engaged in the DFRC by attending board and committee meetings, working on specific DRFC initiatives and speaking on DFRC progress.⁴⁵ This participation points out the importance of diversity that these voices bring to the table.⁴⁶ The group is engaged, active and willing to debate amongst one another to assure the best possible outcome for the community.⁴⁷

III. RIVERWALK - THE PROJECT DETAILS

A. THE EAST RIVERFRONT

A key element of the riverfront transformation is the plan for a RiverWalk, ultimately extending from the Ambassador Bridge to the MacArthur Bridge at Belle Isle and beyond, a distance of about five miles.⁴⁸ The RiverWalk is envisioned to be an average of 62 feet wide where permitted.⁴⁹ The pathway will include a pedestrian section, a bike path and landscaping, including open space canopy trees, ornamental trees, deciduous shrubs, ornamental grasses and significant perennials.⁵⁰ The RiverWalk design will take into consideration the actual

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ See Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *Detroit River Front from Vision to Reality*, available at http://www.detroitriverfront.org/img_content/drc/pdf/From_Vision_to_Reality.pdf (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

shoreline; in some places, a soft shore approach will allow a closer connection with the river and in others, the walk may be slightly farther away with steps leading to the river.⁵¹ The Riverfront will be a magnet for walking to jogging, biking or rollerblading, to fishing, recreation, art and music.⁵² The RiverWalk and surrounding green spaces will be designed to support activities such as outdoor dining, children's playgrounds, art fairs, and areas for relaxing enjoyment.⁵³ Concessions will be located along the pathway, and restrooms will be located at four pavilions along the RiverWalk.⁵⁴ Detroit's history dating back to the early 1700s will be shared in a series of interpretive plazas, focusing on the many rich historical aspects of the city, the river and the people.⁵⁵ The RiverWalk has been designed for the possibility of water taxis to shuttle people by boat between popular stops, making the riverfront more accessible to all ages.⁵⁶

The SmithGroup, a national architecture, engineering and planning firm headquartered in downtown Detroit, was selected in May 2003 to serve as lead architect for the RiverWalk.⁵⁷ SmithGroup leads a diverse design team that includes Somat Engineering, Wade-Trim, Inc., Tucker, Young, Jackson, Tull, Inc., Greenburg Consultants, Madison & Madison, Hines, L.S. Brinker, NTH, Giffels Webster and Multi-Solutions to round out the team.⁵⁸ The DFRC hired the best of the best. The group represents a convergence of experienced international experts and the best and brightest local talent.⁵⁹

The planning team continued early efforts to assure that all voices were heard in the design process.⁶⁰ After gaining benchmarking of other riverfronts nationally and

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *One Step Closer to the River: Detroit RiverFront Conservancy Announces Kresge Funding, Architect*, Press Release (December 16, 2003).

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., Grant Application, *Introduction*, Apr. 30, 2004.

internationally, the team held a series of workshops and public meetings to gain as much feedback on design concepts as possible.⁶¹ The detailed design was rolled out to community leaders and the media in December 2003, followed by a community workshop where more than 600 members of the community came to see the design first-hand.⁶² Their input was again incorporated into the design concept, which was followed by design development and creation of construction documents.⁶³ These DRFC-sponsored community meetings were critical in assuring that the voices of interested community members were heard with regard to the design of the RiverWalk.⁶⁴ Perhaps even more importantly, community members' concerns were also heard.⁶⁵ Their top concerns pertained to solving transportation and access problems, retaining the historical heritage of Detroit, ensuring safety and cleanliness, and involving the local community.⁶⁶ Addressing these concerns remains a top priority for the DFRC.⁶⁷ Half of the RiverWalk is scheduled to open by December 2005 and the entire pathway will open by December 2006.⁶⁸

Other elements of the transformation include the creation of Michigan's first urban state park, the Tri-Centennial State Park & Harbor, along the Detroit River.⁶⁹ The first phase of the park opened May 20, 2004 with Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm and Detroit Mayor Kilpatrick cutting the ceremonial nautical flags to the newly-renovated harbor.⁷⁰ The harbor now is officially open for public use on a first-come, first-serve basis.⁷¹ The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, along

⁶¹ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://www.detroitriverfront.org/index.asp?item=493&name=Frequently+Asked+Questions&site=5org> (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Detroit River Front from Vision to Reality*, available at http://www.detroitriverfront.org/img_content/drc/pdf/From_Vision_to_Reality.pdf (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁷⁰ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://www.detroitriverfront.org/index.asp?item=493&name=Frequently+Asked+Questions&site=5org> (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁷¹ *Id.*

with the DRFC and other stakeholders, are creating the master plan for the state park itself, which will be constructed in a series of phases and will include educational programming.⁷² The DFRC's role with regard to the State Park will be to assure good connections of the RiverWalk through the State Park, as well as to coordinate infrastructure such as security, communications and programming.⁷³

A ground-breaking ceremony for a new Port Authority terminal and dock took place in June 2004, signaling yet more progress that this vision will become reality.⁷⁴ The new dock, scheduled to be complete by mid-2005, will allow the docking of large passenger vessels for the first time in many years.⁷⁵ In December 2004, General Motors opened a \$25 million plaza and promenade behind its Renaissance Center, which represents the completion of another portion of the RiverWalk.⁷⁶

Harbortown, a residential marina community, announced a significant expansion this year.⁷⁷ GM also issued a request for proposal for developing an adjacent parcel of land owned by the automaker on the river, which will be called River East. And a developer has been identified for the old Uniroyal site along the river, which bodes well for future economic development.⁷⁸ Individually, these important accomplishments signal progress toward accomplishing the vision, and collectively, they are all important elements of a transformed riverfront.⁷⁹

B. THE WEST RIVERFRONT

At the urging of the west riverfront community stakeholders, the DFRC incorporated the west riverfront into its

⁷² Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Detroit River Front from Vision to Reality*, available at http://www.detroitriverfront.org/img_content/drc/pdf/From_Vision_to_Reality.pdf (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Detroit River Front from Vision to Reality*, available at http://www.detroitriverfront.org/img_content/drc/pdf/From_Vision_to_Reality.pdf (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁷⁹ *Id.*

mission in June 2003.⁸⁰ Specifically, lawmakers and west Detroit residents sought to expand the original vision of a transformed riverfront to the west riverfront, stretching from the Civic Center to the Ambassador Bridge.⁸¹ The west riverfront has its own set of issues, including the security issues related to the Ambassador Bridge's Detroit entryway. The bridge literally separates a large neighborhood literally from the river.⁸²

In November 2003, the DRFC announced the selection of Chan Krieger & Associates, Inc. from Cambridge, Massachusetts as the primary architectural/planning firm to support the vision study.⁸³ The other firms that are involved in the architectural team are the Detroit-based firms of Yamasaki Associates, Inc., Mark English Associates and Tucker, Young, Jackson, Tull, Inc.⁸⁴

The vision will include the expansion of the RiverWalk for approximately one and a half miles, development of the green spaces along the river, seawall improvements, accompanying view corridors and green connections to the residential areas.⁸⁵ A visioning team was put into place in late 2003 comprised of west riverfront stakeholders.⁸⁶ The visioning process was completed and announced at a public event on March 9, 2004.⁸⁷ The visioning stage for the west riverfront is fully funded, but any subsequent phases of redevelopment will require additional fundraising.⁸⁸

Economic development is a critical component of the riverfront vision, specifically a major initiative to encourage development of a mixed-use neighborhood in the 365-acre west riverfront district.⁸⁹ In the plans developed by Cooper Robertson &

⁸⁰ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *DRFC West Riverfront Presentation, "The Road to the West Riverfront"* (2004).

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Detroit River Front from Vision to Reality*, available at http://www.detroitriverfront.org/img_content/drc/pdf/From_Vision_to_Reality.pdf (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *DRFC West Riverfront Presentation, "The Road to the West Riverfront"* (2004).

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *DRFC West Riverfront Presentation, "The Road to the West Riverfront"* (2004).

⁸⁹ *Id.*

Partners and Hamilton Anderson Associates, an effort spearheaded by the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), there are millions of square feet of new commercial, residential, retail and cultural use, all of which represent the potential for billions of dollars of investment in Detroit.⁹⁰ The vision is for upwards of 5,000 new residents in multi-generational neighborhoods, shopping where people live and work, and a variety of options for elegant and casual dining. General Motors has issued a Request for Proposals for the development of River East (25 acres of riverfront land just east of the Renaissance Center) and the City of Detroit recently selected Betters/Bettis to develop 2,000 units of housing on the former Uniroyal site.⁹¹ A committee consisting of DFRC and DEGC members is closely monitoring coordination between the master planning and the RiverWalk design through regular meetings.⁹² The key elements described here will serve as a springboard for upwards of \$2 billion of economic development, enough to make a tangible difference in Detroit.⁹³

IV. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY

While it will be some years before the entire vision of a transformed riverfront becomes a reality, already several key success factors have already emerged that account for progress to date, and are important drivers of future progress.

First, the importance of having a detailed vision as well as solid buy-in to that vision by the grassroots, government and business communities cannot be overstated. A diverse team of stakeholders spent 90 days creating the vision, a visual representation of what a transformed riverfront might look like.⁹⁴ This work clearly jump-started the detailed design process, providing an early roadmap for the designers and planners to utilize in creating the design schematic and construction documents. The vision comprehended both the

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Inc., *Detroit's Riverfront Vision*, available at www.detroitriverfront.org (2002).

creation of the RiverWalk and other important planned developments along the riverfront, even though responsibility for those initiatives was not held with a single entity. This visionary thinking – including the creation of a DFRC that would facilitate implementation of the vision – has been a critical factor in the early progress made. The challenge going forward is assuring a continued focus on realizing the vision as stakeholders move from design to construction, and from planning to implementation. For example, simultaneously managing the greening of the riverfront while assuring the right economic development strategy requires a strong shared vision and commitment to wearing both hats, a required dual role at DFRC board and committee meetings. Working with property owners to gain perpetual land control agreements to the property rights along the riverfront for the creation of the RiverWalk requires that they too share the vision for the transformation of the riverfront. Team and consensus building remain important enablers to progress.

Another important success factor has been the engagement of all of the river's stakeholders in the process.⁹⁵ Stakeholders have been continuously involved in every stage of the effort from visioning to participating in the DFRC to providing feedback.⁹⁶

Since November 2002, the DFRC has presented its vision to over 4,000 attendees at nearly 100 meetings of people with a vested interest in the development of the riverfront – area residents, political figures, business owners, people working in the area, and religious, cultural and educational leaders.⁹⁷ Attendees were asked for comments at these forums.⁹⁸ The greatest concerns of respondents included solving transportation/access problems, retaining the historical heritage of Detroit, ensuring

⁹⁵ See Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *Detroit River Front from Vision to Reality*, available at http://www.detroitriverfront.org/img_content/drc/pdf/From_Vision_to_Reality.pdf (last visited on February 15, 2005).

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., *DFRC Outreach Database*, (2005).

⁹⁸ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., Grant Application, *Appendix F, Summary of Community Meetings*, Apr. 30, 2004.

safety and cleanliness and involving the local community.⁹⁹ These concerns remain high priorities for the DFRC.¹⁰⁰

Another initiative to assure involvement of key stakeholders will be the engagement of volunteers to assist with many different aspects of the Riverfront. Volunteers will help coordinate events, plant flowers and trees and assist with programming along the riverfront.¹⁰¹ Already, volunteers have signed up via the DFRC website and are very interested in having identified opportunities to participate.¹⁰² A volunteer strategy is currently being developed.¹⁰³

Finally, adequate economic support is always an important success factor. The catalyst for funding this project was launched by The Kresge Foundation, which advanced an unprecedented series of challenge grants up to \$50 million.¹⁰⁴ This extraordinary level of support, the largest in aggregate to a single project in Kresge's history, is illustrative of the public-private partnership that is making possible the redevelopment of the East Riverfront.¹⁰⁵ Given the progress made in 2003 in meeting organizational, project and fund-raising benchmarks, Kresge has awarded \$20.5 million to the DRFC thus far.¹⁰⁶ Subsequent to the Kresge grant, the DRFC has raised additional monies totaling \$30 million from the federal government (facilitated by the City of Detroit); State of Michigan; Detroit corporations including General Motors and other major companies affiliated with the Detroit Renaissance organization; foundations, including Skillman Foundation, Knight Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Kaufman Foundation, Detroit Renaissance Companies, Community Foundation, McGregor Fund, and Hudson-Webber, along with individual contributions and pro-bono services from a number of companies and individuals.¹⁰⁷ While this support is significant, the total cost for the

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, Inc., Grant Application, *Summary of Community Meetings*, (Apr. 30, 2004).

¹⁰¹ Detroit RiverFront Conservancy, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://www.detroitriverfront.org/index.asp?item=493&name=Frequently+Asked+Questions&site=5org> (last visited on February 15, 2005).

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ *Id.*

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ *Id.*

¹⁰⁷ *Id.*

first phase of the DRFC project, the east RiverWalk, is \$110 million, which includes \$80 million to build and operate it for the next five years and \$30 million to create an endowment to assist with ongoing operating costs.¹⁰⁸ The DFRC will continue to seek matching funds from the public and private sectors and will institute a membership program to solicit funds and volunteerism from individuals.¹⁰⁹

Challenges remain, however. Land control agreements must be secured from all private property owners on the east riverfront before construction can begin and the natural tension that exist between economic development and the greening of the riverfront must never be ignored. This is a healthy tension, but requires the stakeholders on both fronts collaborate and support the larger vision that comprehends both of these critical aspects of the transformation

V. DRFC LESSONS FOR OTHER CITIES

Some may see it unwise to write about the lessons learned when in the midst of a transformational initiative such as the Detroit Riverfront. Contrary to such concerns, significant progress has been made and important lessons have been learned in two short years. The rest of the story remains to be told in years to come. The DFRC must uphold the vision, continue to build ownership with the many diverse stakeholders of the riverfront, and to continue identifying funding to ensure that the vision becomes reality in every sense of the word.

“We’re definitely in the midst of changing the conversation about Detroit and the Detroit Riverfront is a significant component of this change,” Ms. Nelson said. “Certainly we have challenges, given the scope of the project, the numerous stakeholders who want to assure their input is incorporated in the process, the need for balance of economic development and the greening of the riverfront, and the ever-present need for funding. We are pleased with progress to date but we know that we are a long way from the finish line. I suspect we will

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

all be richer with knowledge on how to achieve an enormous transformation such as this going forward.”¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Interview with Faye Alexander Nelson, President and CEO of DRFC, in Detroit, Mich. (Dec. 2004).