

# Portage Riverwalk Plan

CITY OF THREE RIVERS

| Summer 2016 |

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to lay out a plan for the development of a riverfront trail in the heart of Three Rivers. The initial segment of this trail will be located on a property enclosed by Hoffman St., Water St., Fifth Ave., and the Portage River. It will feature dirt walking trails and serve a larger purpose of increasing recreational opportunity and district connectivity within the city. We look forward to the opening of this park which is set to take place in the first week of August!

This document shall be available to all parties involved in the planning and implementation of strategies for the opening of the Portage Riverwalk.

## Planning Process

The city has owned these parcels for a few years. In May of 2016, Kayla Turner (planning intern) and Jaymes MacDonald (County Parks and Rec Director) set out to walk the property and evaluate the potential for walking trails and limited infrastructure. They found that trails were already in existence behind Black Cat Alley (Water St.). These had been created and maintained by residents along Portage Ave. for numerous years. The city began working on a plan to open these as public trails and connect the property to comprehensive trail plans that had been created for Three Rivers in the past.

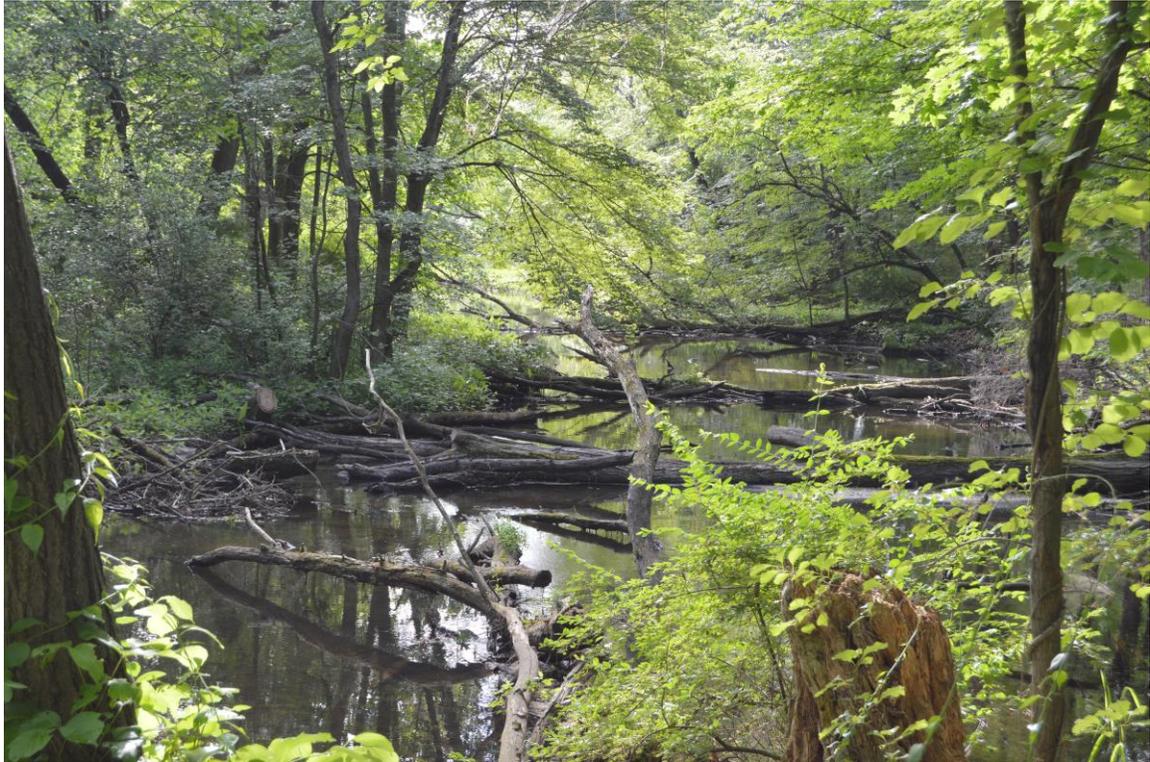
On June 16, 2016, a report on the potential Portage Riverwalk was presented to the River County Recreational Authority. The report outlined property details as well as strengths and potential issues. The report was accompanied by a map showing a trail connection from downtown, through the 'Portage' property, and north towards the Hidden Marsh Preserve and future sports complex. Estimates of the initial opening costs were also provided. The Recreation Authority provided valuable feedback and support.

The city held a meeting with residents directly adjacent to the potential Portage Riverwalk on June 29<sup>th</sup>. This was an opportunity for those immediately impacted by the opening of the park to voice concerns and give input on design and function. Comments from the meeting produced beneficial information that will help the city to plan for this property in a way that benefits the entire community without imposing an unjust burden on nearby residents.

Another meeting is set to take place on July 21st.

This document outlines important points from the process so far. It will provide context, inventory and analysis, needs and desires, vision, planning and implementation, partnerships, and creative solutions – guidelines identified by the Three Rivers Area Non-Motorized Trail Study (2007).

## Introduction: City-Owned Land along Portage River



*Image 1: View of the Portage River from existing trail on 'Portage' property*

The property now designated as the Portage Riverwalk describes a piece of land located on Black Cat Alley and along the Portage River; it stretches from Hoffman St to Fifth Ave. This area has been desired by the community for years and was included in many trail maps and visioning processes prior to 2016.

Residents have been the primary users of the land. Trails have provided paths for hiking, biking, dog-walking, and sledding. Jon Rice (resident) cleared and maintains the majority of the trails, which have been suited for these purposes.

This parcel offers amazing views of the Portage River while also providing the opportunity to link several city districts and amenities. The main trail within the wooded segment of the property is 0.5 miles long, but other spider trails offer an opportunity for expansion. Water St is accessible from Fifth Ave and Hoffman, as well as from the backyards of those located along Portage Ave. The natural character of the property and its location in the heart of Three Rivers deem it an asset worth investing in.

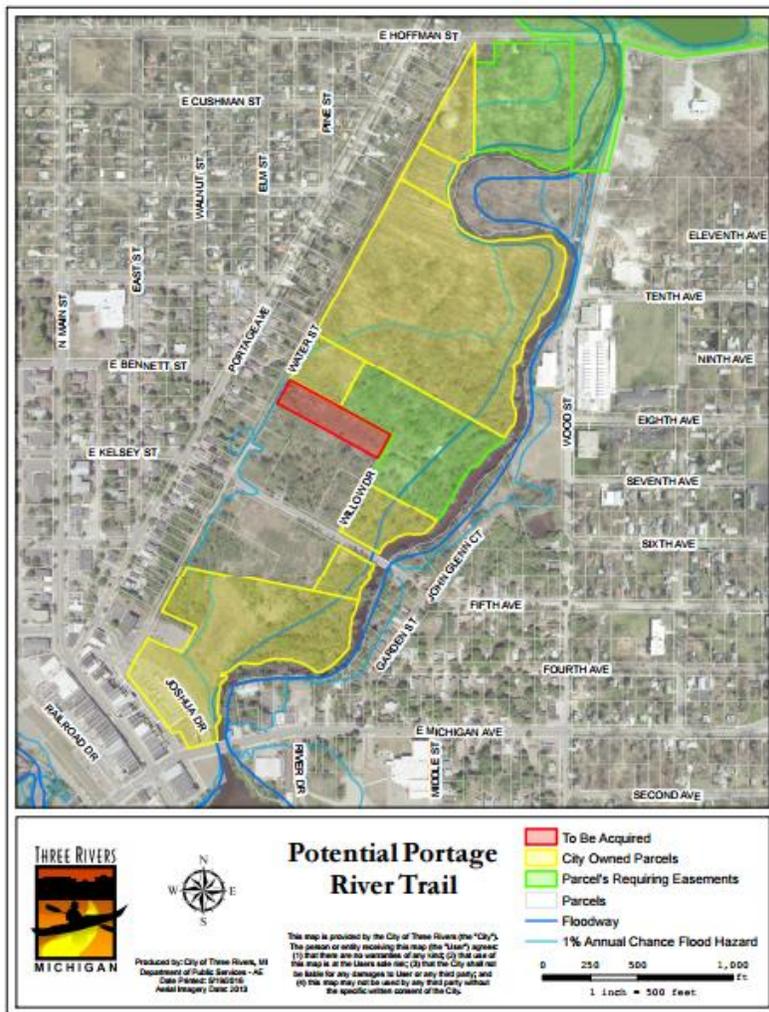
### CONTEXT

In 2007, the Three Rivers Area Community Foundation sponsored the 'Three Rivers Area Non-Motorized Trail Study'. The study was brought forth from the understanding that Three Rivers' waterways have served a vital function to the community and all that it aspires to be. The long-

term goal of the study and future projects inspired by the study is to use these assets to their full potential now, while also protecting them for future generations.

Since that study, several plans have been developed for separate pieces of a proposed trail network for the city. Even as we work to open the Portage Riverwalk, committees are meeting and discussing the implementation of a plan connecting the Three Rivers Health to Meyer-Broadway Park through non-motorized trail. This project should not take a sideline to the Portage Riverwalk, nor should any others. Rather, it is our hope that these different trail segments would be developed in unison to one day connect the four districts of our city in a walkable, functional, and interesting way.

The parcels intended to make up the Portage Riverwalk are stationed between the historic downtown district and the future sports complex. The following entities are located within a 15 minute walking radius of the Riverwalk entrance: Hoppin Elementary School, Three Rivers Middle School and High School, Riverside Cemetery, Scidmore Park, former Kellogg Rock Gardens (O'Malley's Law Offices), Bowman Memorial Park, the Carnegie Center, and many other important Three Rivers landmarks.



Map 1: Proposed Portage Riverwalk showing parcel ownership

## Assessment of Existing Conditions

*Zoning:* The land being assessed is zoned R-3, high-density residential. This zoning permits the development of parks, especially when said parks will serve surrounding residents.

*Surroundings:* The property is primarily encompassed by residential development. Houses along Portage St share backyards along Water St. Other homes are located to the east of the river as well as northeast of the city water storage tank (northwest quadrant).

*Access:* All trails are found off of the unpaved portion of Water St. This route is not currently open to vehicular traffic, except as pertaining to utility companies. A locked gate discourages others from using the street.

*Natural Resources:* Portage Riverwalk is wooded with changing topography. Access is available from Water St. The trail overlooks the river from an elevated bluff. Wildlife is known to be numerous in the area. Residents express having seen deer and beavers.

*Recreation:* Trails currently consist of approximately 3 feet wide dirt paths. Brush has overgrown these paths in a few areas. In total, there is approximately 1 mile of walkable trails on the property. Not all of these are connected.



Image 2: Looking down Water St on proposed property

## EXISTING STRENGTHS

The property provides access to the Portage River; for the most part this is from high elevations, but there are some low touch points.

Trails have already been established and maintained.

Residents use the land frequently.

This land is located within close proximity of city amenities.

The 'Portage' property has already been included in several city-wide trail plans.

## EXISTING WEAKNESSES

Dead trees have fallen along parts of Water St. and will need to be removed.

Minimal litter and traces of past activity, including a blue tarp shelter, exist and should be cleared.

Some residential fencing along Water St is non-existent or consists solely of cattle wire.

Seasonal conditions (e.g. flooding) are unknown.

## OPPORTUNITIES

This property presents an opportunity to increase inventory of recreational land and spaces available for community gatherings.

It offers a chance for Three Rivers to preserve some of its wildlife and natural resources.

By taking an active role in the clean-up and regulation of this land, the City may improve overall safety and security of residential neighborhoods along Fifth Ave and Portage Ave.

This is an opportunity to re-energize and commit the community to a vision of Three Rivers as a city connected by non-motorized trails.

The project may fuel creative long-term projects nearby (such as the Kellogg Rock Gardens).

## THREATS

Zoning of the city-owned land immediately south of Fifth Ave. is currently for the Central Business District, meaning that development could soon infringe on the city's ability to expand the park.

Residents express fears over safety and security as outsiders are welcomed onto land that has traditionally been utilized by households living on Portage Ave. If the city does not take measures to alleviate these fears, it will lose out on needed support and alter neighborhood character.

## Why this park matters: meeting the needs of the community

This project is an answer to needs and desires long-expressed by residents in the Three Rivers Area.

### Charrette Feedback

A design charrette for the city was conducted in 2006. As a part of this, a comprehensive public engagement process was conducted by Three Rivers in partnership with AIA Southwest Michigan. Detailed feedback expressed residents' wishes for the following:

- Promotion of hidden assets (e.g. rivers)
- Effort to link distinct community neighborhoods
- Improvement in appearance and design of major roadways
- Increases in recreational opportunities, particularly for the teenage population
- A focus on pedestrian-oriented development
- Design and planning that promotes socialization among residents.

### Master Plan and Trail Study

The 2009 Three Rivers Master Plan update called for a greater inventory of public land available for community events. The Portage Riverwalk provides an opportunity for the city to host exploration days, picnics, walks, and other events that show off our rivers and the spirit of our small town.

The 2007 Three Rivers Area Non-Motorized Trail Study proposed a long-term goal to:

- “Provide bicycle and pedestrian access to all destinations normally served by motorized transportation”.

When the full potential of this property (along with adjacent trail projects) comes into effect, residents will be able to walk from their homes, to their jobs, to area parks and beyond. The trails will offer an interesting alternative to routes currently accessed primarily by motorized vehicles.



*Image 3: Trail along bluff overlooking Portage River*



Map 2: Property and outlined trails (existing and future)

## Goals, Objectives, and Implementation

1. Create a park space that capitalizes on the Portage River, attracting both residents and visitors alike.
  - 1:1 Develop infrastructure and implement wayfinding that accommodates visitors.
    - 1:1-1 Discuss possibility of using the back parking lot of Horizon Bank for Riverwalk parking on the south end.
    - 1:1-2 Explore the possibility of angled parking on the north end of the property. This is the paved portion just north of the city water storage unit.
    - 1:1-3 Post park entrance signs at the intersection of E Hoffman and Water St., and at the intersection of Fifth Ave and Water St. Signs should be 3-4 feet high, identifying the Portage Riverwalk as well as listing hours and available parking.
    - 1:1-4 Small post signs will be planted at each significant trail head, labeling that trail and the distance from start to finish.
    - 1:1-5 Trail maps will be designed and placed at entrances and parking lots for the Riverwalk when funding becomes available.
  - 1:2 Strategically plan events on the property to raise awareness of the park among residents and promote city rivers and public spaces.
    - 1:2-1 Host an opening day event which will be advertised throughout the city. It will include a property walk-through ending at the clearing overlooking the river and water storage tank. The event may include food, raffles, and other interactive games.
    - 1:2-2 Organize clean-up events at least twice a year, focusing on litter on the trails and in the river. Use this as a time to encourage residents to care for area natural resources and protect wildlife.
    - 1:2-3 Consider a partnership with Third 90 Network to further the above goals.
  - 1:3 Design the park trails to take full advantage of pristine setting.
    - 1:3-1 Ensure that trails are wide and clear so that visitors can experience the riverfront views.
    - 1:3-2 Place furniture at key viewing points along the elevated bluff segment of the trail. These shall be carved in wood from trees that the city has had to cut down either on-site or off. The city may hire someone to create these pieces (benches, tables, etc.), or they may actively seek out volunteers, perhaps holding a contest.
    - 1:3-3 The city shall not infringe upon the natural setting of the park. Infrastructure will be kept to a minimum. No land will be clear cut, and any

paving, introduction of playground material, or general habitat destruction will be prohibited.

2. Provide for the safety and security of neighboring residents, ensuring that their needs are met.

2:1 Immediately address any safety hazards that become apparent before or after the opening of the park.

2:1-1 Remove dead and fallen trees along Water St. which pose a threat of injury (these removed trees could then be used for park furniture).

2:1-2 Ensure that there is no motorized vehicle access along Water St. except where necessary by utility trucks or by properties that have been grandfathered in with gates connecting to the ends of the alley. Gates similar in structure to that already present on Water St. should be constructed on either end of the alley where pavement ends.

2:1-3 The city will inspect the property both on and off trail to remove any materials, litter, or other substances which do not belong. Poison ivy will also be removed in any areas where it may hinder users experiences.

2:2 Work along with residents to provide a safe environment where community recreation coexists with residential expectations.

2:2-1 Ensure that trails are clean and used frequently. Discourage “sneaking into the woods” mentality by increasing foot traffic and awareness on the property.

2:2-2 Look into possibility of installing lighting along Water St. especially near residential properties lacking a formal fence. This is a preventative measure to keep park users from trespassing on private property. Lighting should be bright enough that activity is clearly visible, but should not be so bright as to disturb sleep of adjacent residents. It has been suggested that solar lights are strung on back fences.

2:2-3 Implement a fee waiver for affected residents wanting to obtain a permit to construct or replace fencing. The waiver should be in effect for a maximum of 1 year after park opening. This will reduce financial impact of installing privacy fences.

2:2-4 The city shall plant trees for anyone who would prefer a natural barrier over fencing alterations. Three Rivers can obtain these trees free from the Conservancy. Any plantings should be reviewed by the American Electric Power Company.

2:2-5 Implement park trail hours from dawn to dusk. Permit residents to use Water St. at a later hour, but prohibit all traffic on wooded trails.

2:2-6 Organize periodic check-ins and walk-throughs by police and/or fire departments or by neighborhood residents. These reviews will serve both to check

on the conditions of the park and to discourage undesired activities by engineering the feeling that the area is constantly under surveillance.

3. Let this property be the successful first step in implementing a larger trail network throughout the city.
  - 3.1 Do not lose sight of this property in the context of the community.
    - 3.1-1 Refer back to previous maps and visions for this property throughout the entire planning process and during implementation.
    - 3.1-2 Check-in with the community frequently to ensure that the Riverwalk is used to its fullest potential to meet the needs and desires of Three Rivers residents. Information may be gathered through surveys, informal interviews, or through events held in the park area.
  - 3.2 Work diligently to plan for future park and trail projects which would connect to the Portage Riverwalk.
    - 3.2-1 Explore options for trail heads along Buckhorn Rd. Keep working to implement a full pedestrian-oriented trail from downtown Three Rivers to the location of the future sports complex. Further develop plans for a boardwalk from downtown to the Hoffman Mill Pond, creating a longer loop for the Riverwalk.
    - 3.2-2 Organize a committee to restore the Kellogg Rock Gardens behind O'Malley Law Offices. Seek an easement for this property that would allow the public to walk from the Portage Riverwalk to trails through the restored gardens.
    - 3.2-3 Research options for the Hoffman Mill Pond Building. A city-wide design contest could be held with a light cash reward. This would provide a vision for which the city can move forward on an adaptive reuse for the building. The city must obtain the building from the current owner. It offers great potential for waterfront views and the preservation of Three Rivers' historic past.
    - 3.2-4 Extend efforts to the downtown area. Marked paths should lead visitors down both sides of Main St, through malls, to the Sue Silliman House, and to the Portage Riverwalk and any other amenities.
4. Protect natural resources in the area both for the sake of today's residents and for the residents of future generations.
  - 4.1 Infrastructure will be kept to a minimum. Extra care will be taken not to disturb wildlife habitat.
    - 4.1-1 Any lighting implemented will be solar-powered and low-intensity, so as not to disturb life cycles of organisms (human or otherwise).

4.1-2 Rather than purchasing furniture for the Riverwalk, the city will seek out opportunities for locally sourced labor to carve out benches and tables from city-removed trees. This serves multiple purposes: (1) prevents the introduction of plastics, metals, and other non-native materials into the environment, (2) provides a use for removed trees which would otherwise not serve a purpose, and (3) ensures that furniture is too heavy to be moved and is low-cost in the case of vandalism.

4.2 Clean-up days and wildlife watches will be organized at least twice a year.

4.2-1 The city may look for help from local environmental agencies to organize and conduct these services. Suggested partners include: the River County Recreational Authority, the Women's Club, Third 90 Network, Land Conservancy of West Michigan, St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission, TRHS National Honor Society, and other community groups.

4.3 Thought will be given to the long-term use, ownership, and zoning of the property to ensure that it is in the best hands for future enjoyment and environmental stewardship.

4.3-1 The planning commission should consider a rezoning of the land designated for the Portage Riverwalk as well as the land immediately south of it. These areas are currently zoned as R-3 High Density Residential and B-3 Central Business District respectively. These should be down-zoned in the next few years to ensure that the land is not developed in a way that is non-conforming with the vision that Three Rivers has for these properties and trails.

4.3-2 The city may eventually look at long-term options for protecting this patch of natural land along the Portage River. The property could be given to the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy with the agreement that trails would still be accessible by the public. This is the best way of ensuring that the land is available for generations to come.

5. Generate public feedback that will guide and inspire future city planning initiatives regarding parks and recreation.

5.1 The City of Three Rivers will recognize that the success of this project will largely determine the amount of support for similar projects in the future.

5.2 Citizen input will guide the decision-making process, providing for a successful project that incorporates many diverse ideas and stakeholders.

5.2-1 Multiple public meetings will be advertised and held to spread information about the city's plans. Each of these meetings will include a platform for citizen engagement.

5.2-2 Contact information regarding the Portage Riverwalk plan and materials will be readily available to citizens, so that no group feels that they have not had the chance to contribute to the discussion.

5.2-3 After the opening of the park, data will be collected for at least 1 year to examine who is using the Riverwalk, how often it is being used, strengths of the property, and weaknesses of the property. The results from this will then be used to better inform future parks and recreation projects.

5.3 Plans regarding this property will be communicated among city leaders. The final plan should be approved by every relative department.

5.3-1 Copies of this document will be passed to the following parties:

*Thomas J. Lowry (Mayor)*

*Joseph A. Bippus (City Manager)*

*J. Patrick O'Malley (City Attorney)*

*Melissa J. Bliss (City Clerk)*

*Chief Tom Bringman (Police Department)*

*Chief Carl Holcomb (Fire Department)*

*Director Amy Roth (Department of Public Services)*

*Director David Vago (TR Downtown Development Authority)*

*Alex Ebenstein (GIS Technician)*

*Jim Stuck (President of Three Rivers Area Community Foundation)*

*Jaymes MacDonald (Director St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation)*

*Jean Logan (Superintendent Three Rivers Community Schools)*

*Christy Trammell (President Three Rivers Area Chamber of Commerce)*

*Rebecca Shank (Sue Silliman House)*

*Rob Vander Giessen-Reitsma (Culture Is Not Optional)*

*Jeff Gatton (Horizon Bank)*

*American Electric Power (services Water St)*

*Other community organizations where deemed necessary*

The key to success for this project and for our community as a whole is communication and consensus-building among these parties which all play their own critical role in shaping the City of Three Rivers, MI.

## Implementing the Portage Riverwalk: Phase 1

The main goal of Phase 1 is to get Water St and the 0.5 mile trail open to the public, advertising it as the Portage Riverwalk. This phase balances the ‘Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper’ approach with the understanding that some expenditures must take place to ensure that the park is safe and enjoyable for residents and visitors.

| Task   | Estimated Cost | Planned Revenue Source                        | Parties Involved   |
|--|----------------|---|--|
| Host meetings to discuss potential for Riverwalk and provide plan input.                                 | -              | -   | City of Three Rivers, Residents, Interested Organizations            |
| Secure parking lot for Portage Riverwalk, focus on back parking lot owned by Horizon Bank.               | Unknown        | Unknown                                       | City of Three Rivers, Horizon Bank                                   |
| Clear out litter and push back brush along Water St and trails.  | -              | City of Three Rivers                          | City of Three Rivers, DPS, volunteers                                |
| Carve furniture from trees removed on property (or from other locations if necessary)                    | Unknown        | Grants, DPS, City of Three Rivers, volunteers | City of Three Rivers, volunteers, DPS                                |
| Construct and place 3 wayfinding signs with name, hours, and available parking info.                     | \$3,000        | Grants  | City of Three Rivers, Community Organizations                        |
| Place 2 pet waste stations (at each trailhead on the side closest to park entrances).                    | \$1,300        | Grants  | City of Three Rivers, Community Organizations                        |
| Place 2 trail marker posts with name of trail and distance (at each trailhead).                          | \$600          | River County Recreational Authority           | City of Three Rivers, River County Recreational Authority            |
| Purchase solar-powered lights to be hung on back fences of residents along Water St. Residents maintain. | \$600          | River County Recreational Authority           | City of Three Rivers, River County Recreational Authority, Residents |
| Plant trees as natural fences for those residents desiring.  | -              | Conservancy, w/ help from Jaymes MacDonald    | City of Three Rivers, Conservancy, Jaymes MacDonald, volunteers      |
| Waive fee for Water St. residents applying for permit to construct privacy fence as result of Riverwalk. | Unknown        | City of Three Rivers                          | City of Three Rivers, Zoning Inspector and DPS                       |
| Advertise the Portage Riverwalk to the community.  | \$200          | Grants, River County Recreational Authority   | City of Three Rivers, DDA, Commercial News                           |
| Host opening day event for the Riverwalk.  | \$200          | City of Three Rivers                          | City of Three Rivers, volunteers                                     |

**Total expected cost Phase I (\$500 est for each unknown): \$7,400**

## TASK DETAILS:

**Public Meetings:** One meeting was held on the property itself. Residents immediately surrounding the parcels comprising the Portage Riverwalk were contacted via a flyer placed at each residence. Those who attended were informed of the tentative plans of the city. Questions were asked and problems and solutions were explored with residents' help. Information on the Riverwalk has twice been posted in the Three Rivers Commercial Newspaper.

Similar meetings should be held before the park opens in August. One should take place in the commission room at city hall. It will be advertised over Facebook, city webpages, and by word of mouth. A presentation will be given before the floor is opened for questions. If time permits, the city should plan on hosting another meeting on premise, after more has been finalized. This will be a last opportunity for comments and concerns, and will also seek volunteers and contributions.

**Parking:** The question of parking was raised by residents at the first meeting. While there is a possibility of providing angled parking on the paved portion of Water St closest to E Hoffman, the city has sought out other opportunities. Several large parking lots within close distance to the Portage Riverwalk are currently underutilized, and could be put to good use for this project.

The lot behind Horizon Bank, directly off of Water St, would provide an excellent spot for parking for this current phase as well as later expansions. The city will need to have discussions with Horizon Bank looking into this parking lot. A further benefit of encouraging parking there is that it will discourage motorized vehicles behind residences on Portage Ave (Water St), and will ensure that access to the city water storage tank remains open.

**Trail Clean-up and Maintenance:** Before opening the park to the public, the city in conjunction with the Department of Public Services should perform a sweep through of the property. This will include collecting litter and cutting back brush to further open Water St and the trails. Residents have asked that a blue tarp on the wooded property be removed along with a few dead and fallen trees across Water St. Costs of this task are currently unknown.

The River County Recreational Authority expressed interest in helping to cover some of the labor, and the city could look into equipment lending or rental. DPS needs to be included in this process as they manage the water storage tank and can provide needed information on safety and tree removal. Before the Portage Riverwalk is opened, a walkthrough should be conducted with city staff and the police and fire departments.

**Riverwalk Furniture:** The city desires a few spaces along the trail where visitors can rest and take in views of the river. These spaces do not need to be elaborate constructions, but should be kept minimal and incorporate the natural surroundings. Many examples of furniture carved from fallen trees have captured the interest of the city. These can be used to enhance our own Riverwalk while providing for a more sustainable construction.

The cost of carving out these pieces is unknown. The City of Three Rivers has several individuals in mind to contact regarding the project. Furniture will take the form of benches and tables. Tables will be located in an elevated clearing between the river and water storage tank. Opportunities for a hammocking cove have also been explored. This

area would have a view of the river and allow visitors to pitch their own hammocks. Underbrush would be trimmed down, leaving mature trees.

*Park Entrance and Wayfinding:* Wayfinding signs will be placed at three locations in this first phase. There will be a sign at each park entrance (intersections of Water St with Fifth Ave and E Hoffman). There will also be one sign at the available parking lot (presumed to be behind Horizon). Each sign will be no taller than 4ft. They will incorporate a design similar to those already in existence throughout the city to keep an air of uniformity. Park entrance signs will include: 'Portage Riverwalk', with hours and parking information. The sign at the parking lot will include the name of the trail as well as the trail hours and distance to the entrance.

The estimated cost of these three signs is \$3,000. This funding is expected to come from money that has been set aside by community organizations specifically for trails. The city will also look into available grant money to help cover the costs of this signage. City staff will be involved in the design and placement of these signs.

*Pet Waste Stations:* Many residents currently use this property for dog-walking. We would like for the Portage Riverwalk to remain a viable environment for this activity. To do so, two pet waste stations will be placed on-site. Each of these will have a waste bucket as well as a roll of waste bags that park visitors can access to clean up after pets that defecate on the trail. It is important that pet waste be managed in order to keep the trail clean for other walkers but also to prevent nutrient run-off into the Portage River.

Kirby Built offers recycled plastic pet waste stations (Item APW1225). Each of these costs \$615.85, for a total estimate of approximately \$1,300. Again, the city seeks to win these funds from community organizations and grants. The city and DPS will be responsible for the upkeep of these waste stations. A station will be placed at each of the two major trailheads. They will be located at both trailheads on the side closest to the nearest park entrance. This ensures that visitors walk by the bags before entering and after exiting the trails.



Image 4: APW1225 Pet Waste Station (Kirby Built)

**Trail Markers:** Trail markers will be placed prominently at each trail head. It will mark the name of the trail as well as the distance of that trail. The current proposed name of the main trail within the Portage Riverwalk property is “Ye Same Ole Trail”, taken from a proposal made at the first on premise meeting. This symbolizes the fact that this beautiful property has always existed within Three Rivers, but it also reminds residents of the area that the city’s plans for the property do not involve significant change. In many aspects, the land will remain the same.

These markers will be constructed from wood in a shade of brown that matches the pet waste station. The exact price of these is unknown, but \$600 has been budgeted for the two signs. In an effort to save money, the city could explore the possibility of making the signs by hand. Local carvers and artists as well as hardware stores could be enlisted to help. Funding for these signs is expected to come from the River County Recreational Authority.

**Lighting:** Many residents at the first meeting indicated that they would feel safer about the prospect of the park opening if they knew that lighting was available during the night. This would discourage unwanted guests from trespassing onto private property. Although there was consensus on the desire for lighting, the form that it should take was debated. If the light is too intense, it will disturb sleep for residents and alter the life cycles of surrounding plants and animals. Instead of street lights, the city proposes solar-powered lights hung from the back of residents’ fences. This would give a charming feeling along Water St as well as provide a preventative safety measure.

Solar-powered outdoor ‘holiday’ lights have been identified as a possible solution. 16ft strings of these lights are available from the Outdoor Solar Store for \$26.00 each. Cost increases with length. Each set includes a solar panel, and lights automatically turn on at dusk and off at dawn. The City would pay for the first round of these lights, but residents would be responsible for upkeep. If the lighting solution works well, the city may look at finding a way to fund these yearly. \$600 is budgeted for these lights. The River County Recreational Authority serves as a possible provider of those funds.

**Tree Plantings:** For those residents wanting to increase privacy without making alterations to their fencing, the city has proposed planting lines of trees along the back section of yards adjacent to Water St. This work should be conducted with American Electric Power to ensure that growing trees do not interfere with power lines or servicing. Native trees will be selected for any plantings so as to avoid the introduction of foreign or invasive plant species into the area. As these trees grow, they will serve to block the view of homes from Water St. and further contribute to the natural setting.

Jaymes MacDonald informed the city at the River County Recreational Authority meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup> that trees could be obtained from the Conservancy free of charge. Labor needs will be fulfilled by volunteers and residents. The cost of this solution should be zero.

**Fee Waiver:** 30-15 of the City Code regulates fencing: “No fence subject to the provisions of this Chapter shall be constructed or erected without first making an application for and securing a fence permit”. For residents wishing to construct a privacy fence due to the public opening of the trail, the cost of obtaining a permit is added onto the cost of fence building materials. The city has proposed a waiver of this fee for no more than one year following the opening of the Portage Riverwalk. This provides ample opportunity for residents to consider whether they desire the fence

and subsequently apply for the permit to construct. If the Riverwalk is opened sometime in August, the deadline for applying for a permit with the fee waived would be the following August. This waiver will only apply to residents whose yards directly border the portion of Water St. from Fifth Ave to E Hoffman.

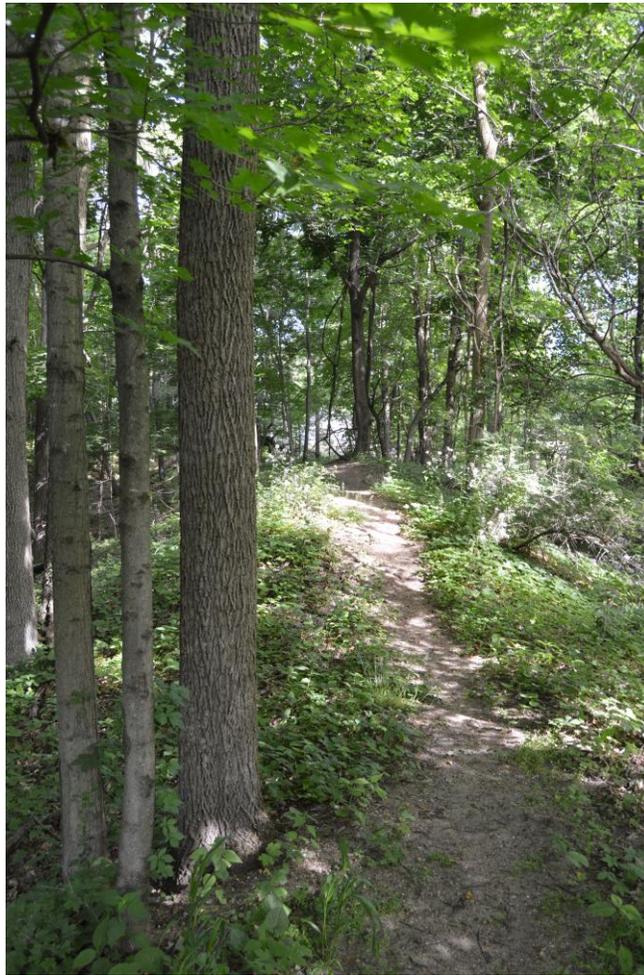
Fencing permits are currently \$67.00. The amount of money budgeted for this waiver is \$500. It is not expected that every resident along Water St. will choose to use the city's waiver. Some have already expressed a preference for a natural tree line rather than a privacy fence. This will be worked out between the City of Three Rivers and the zoning inspector. The city will pay the costs for the waivers.

*Advertisement:* It is very important that this trail is made known to the general public, even those not residing directly within city proper. The city should advertise the trail opening through social media and newspaper ads. Opening day activities should particularly be organized and publicized to encourage family involvement and use of the property. Facebook and the City of Three Rivers website could both serve as alternate avenues for reaching those not receiving the Three Rivers Commercial News.

\$200 is budgeted for advertising. This will largely be used towards newspaper ads with a small amount set aside for the creation and printing of flyers or posters for opening day.

*Opening Day:* It is the hope of the City that hosting an event at the property on opening day will encourage residents to stop by and explore the Riverwalk. Tents could be set up on the end of Water St. closest to E Hoffman, and other stations may be placed along the trail particularly in the clearing between the storage tank and river. The event could begin with a ribbon cutting and walking of the trail, while other activities geared towards families are conducted in the hours following.

Funding will be needed to cover food, raffle prizes, face paint, sidewalk chalk, and other items that the city chooses to include on that day. An estimated \$200 is set aside for this. This funding is expected to come from the city and volunteered contributions.



*Image 5: State of existing trails through Portage Riverwalk property*



*Image 6: Parking lot being considered for trail, behind Horizon Bank (Google Maps)*



*Image 7: Furniture example - Twin Mills Campground in Howe, IN*



*Image 8: Trail sign example – South Table Mountain, Colorado (Wikimedia)*



*Image 9: Wire fence on backyard adjacent to Water St*



*Image 10: Example of a privacy tree line (Low Cost Tree Farm)*

## OTHER PARK DETAILS

The Portage Riverwalk will be open year round. The trail will be subjected to the hours of dawn to dusk, while Water St will remain open (as desired by residents who need to walk their dogs after work). Motorized vehicles will be prohibited on the property, except where permitted by the city for the purpose of service needs (American Electric Power, etc.). Residents located on the ends of Water St. who currently use this corridor to access trailer storage in their backyards will be permitted to do so. Hiking, dog-walking, snowshoeing, and sledding (in designated areas) will be encouraged activities.

## Long-Term Commitment

### TWO YEARS OUT

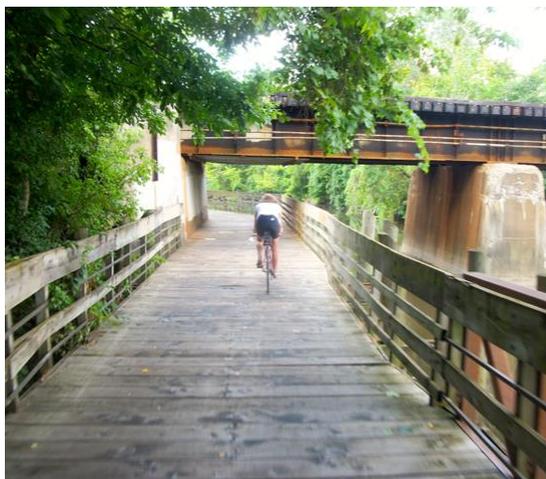
In the next two years, small enhancements should be made to the Portage Riverwalk and properties immediately surrounding it. If the property sees a lot of use, the city may look at the construction of an on premise bathroom or outhouse. Gates to prevent non-permitted motorized vehicles from accessing Water St. should be installed where the pavement ends on either end of the street. Trails within the wooded section of the property should be connected back to one another to provide a continuous walking experience.



*Image 11: Existing gate in the center of Water St, adjacent to trails*

In this time, the city should also move forward with its planned boardwalk, which would stretch from parking downtown along the river and to the Hoffman Mill Pond. This would create even more water access for residents of Three Rivers, and by looping around to Water St., would enhance and lengthen the Portage Riverwalk. The boardwalk should be wide and relatively flat, allowing users of all mobility levels to access and enjoy the trail. Jaymes MacDonald, the county parks and recreation director already has STAMP plans in place for projects of this nature.

Trail maps should be developed for the property and subsequent projects and connections.



Images 12 and 13: (Left) Map showing first phase of boardwalk which would connect downtown to city-owned property along Portage River. (Right) Example of boardwalk construction – Lansing River Trail (Blog Spot)

### FIVE YEARS OUT

Within the next five years, the city should begin to complete other projects related to the Portage Riverwalk. This would include rehabilitation of the Hoffman Mill Pond Building, restoration of the Kellogg Rock Gardens, and completion of the sidewalk down Buckhorn Rd. so as to connect the trails with the Hidden Marsh Preserve and future sports complex. As these are completed, they will serve as nodes for a larger trail network along the Portage River and eventually throughout the entire city.



Image 14: Former vision for the Hoffman Mill Pond Building (2006 Charrette)

In addition, work to the Portage Riverwalk should be paired with downtown development strategies. Wayfinding and trail maps should be introduced to pedestrian-oriented Main St. The boardwalk should be expanded to reach the Sue Silliman House, providing another destination point on the path. Design elements should be added to sidewalks and other trails so that visitors have a marked path to follow as they walk.



*Image 15:* The Sue Silliman House offers great potential to utilize downtown riverfront space and connect to Three Rivers' heritage

In addition to the projects outlined above, the city should seek to partner with Three Rivers Community Schools and the Carnegie Center to start a public art program. This program would serve to provide unique and interesting pieces of art for placement along trails downtown and along the river. These pieces would attract people to downtown and the trail system branching from it as well as serve to promote conversation and socialization among visitors. Plainwell, MI has experienced much success with a similar program, and the city may choose to look to them as a model.



Image 16: Project completed for Plainwell's Public Art Procurement Program

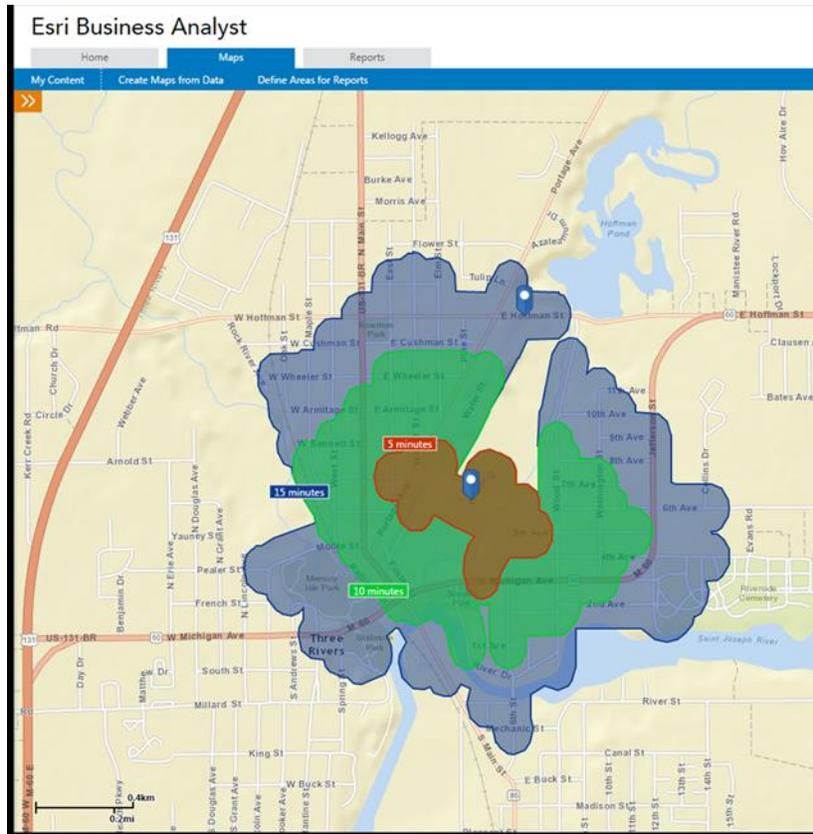


Image 17: Walking distance rings from existing Portage Riverwalk property (Esri Business Analyst)

## Conclusion

Three Rivers is blessed with water and beautiful woods in abundance. The Portage Riverwalk serves to connect residents to these sights and promote healthy lifestyles through physical activity and socialization. Phase I of implementing this trail network focuses solely on city-owned property between the Portage River and Water St., enclosed by Fifth Ave. and E Hoffman. This portion of the project is low-risk with the potential for great reward. It will open up pre-existing trails for public access and inspire further projects in nearby areas. \$7,400 is being requested to implement the plans for Phase I as described above.

In the long run, this first phase plays out into a larger effort on behalf of the city to promote its waterways, downtown, and heritage. The Portage Riverwalk, upon completion of Phase I and further projects outlined earlier in the document, will connect several historic landmarks within the City of Three Rivers. These will include the Kellogg Rock Gardens, the Hoffman Mill Pond Building, and the Sue Silliman House. Additionally, it will provide pedestrian-oriented corridors for those wishing to travel to functional destinations such as community schools, downtown shops, jobs, and the sports complex.

This property is important both to Three Rivers' past and its future. The work begins today. With proper planning and implementation, the Portage Riverwalk will become a symbol of Three Rivers' identity and assets. *Connecting work, home, and play.*



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