

The City of Charles City is Leveraging its Biggest Natural Resource to Help Develop its Future

The city of Charles City is in the process of redeveloping an existing park along the Cedar River in the heart of the community. The \$1.2 million redevelopment includes a kayak rodeo, refiguring of the low head dam, new recreation trails, a new picnic gazebo, a storm water fountain, and imaginative play areas for both kids and adults. In February 2008 Governor Culver signed a memorandum of understanding with the city naming the Riverfront Development an Iowa Great Place.

The project called “The Riverfront Park” covers 26 acres of ground and 11 acres of water. The park is situated along the Cedar River in the heart of the community. The existing park consists of land given to the city for recreational use by FEMA after the floods of 1993 and 1999 ravaged a river side neighborhood. The current park has 2 ball fields and a paved bike trail which are being incorporated in the new design.

The concept for the redevelopment was hatched in part by an Iowa State Landscape Design class in 2006. The class was given the dimensions, layout and description of the existing park and told to come back with a design. As the Charles City Park Board reviewed the proposals they began to realize what an important and underutilized asset the city had in the existing park.

The portion of the park design that has received the most attention has been the creation of a whitewater kayak rodeo course. Modifications to the low head dam will improve the safety of the area and also provide a unique recreational opportunity in Iowa. In addition to the recreational benefits, the kayak rodeo is expected to be an economic benefit to the community. Our research has shown that on average each visiting kayaker will spend \$262 in our community over a weekend stay.

The city of Charles City has contracted with Recreation Engineering and Planning (REP), the leader in developing whitewater parks in the United States, to design the kayak rodeo. In March REP was on site surveying the Cedar River and developing a design plan that was delivered to the city in late April. The project is being partially funding by the City’s hotel/motel tax funds. Grants are being sought from various state agencies, foundations and corporations and individual contributions are being solicited to provide the balance of the funding.

The architect for the park redevelopment is Larry Kurtz of AHTS Architects of Waterloo, IA. Larry has many years of experience in park development including the riverside park in Waverly, IA. Construction on the park is expected to begin in March of 2009 with park completion scheduled for the fall of 2010.