

# Lake project makes waves of interest

## 800 gather to hear consultants' ideas

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DECATUR — Advocates of Decatur's Lakefront Enhancement Project shared a long list of ideas at Thursday's Community Leaders Breakfast they hope can generate excitement about Decatur's future and calm skepticism from those who doubt its possibilities.

Members of the project's design and planning firm, AECOM, presented more than 20 elements that could be a part of a redesigned Nelson Park.

The ideas ranged from a pedestrian bridge that could reach across the lake, different types of gardens from botanical to healing, and



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retail space that could attract tourism to the lake and support the community's economy.

"It's about what you think is right for Decatur," said Greg Weykamp, AECOM design and planning principal.

AECOM is based in Chicago, but for the next six months, Decatur's project designers will spend a few days a month in town, working with the community to develop a lakefront plan.

"You really have a tremendous amount of public waterfront here on an absolutely beautiful lake," Weykamp said. "And I can't tell you how many communities would kill for that."

He called Thursday's breakfast a chance to "prime the pump" for development ideas and explain to the community how AECOM will move forward with the planning process. With more than 800 attending the breakfast, it was also a sort of call to arms for community members to submit their ideas and concerns about the transformation of the Nelson Park Basin.

"Are cars the right thing to put in the middle of a park?" Weykamp said. "I don't know; you tell me. This is your park."

His question was in reference to South Lake Shore Drive and the possibility of removing the road to expand the lakeshore.

Cindy Deadrick, park district board president, said the concept of relocating the road farther from the lake is an

option that could create great possibilities for the lakefront.

"With the amount of property we have around there, we can find a way to make the shorefront a larger area," she said.

Decatur City Manager Ryan McCrady said the lakefront is an important piece of the city's development that will help tie all of its assets into one synergistic community.

"We have the puzzle; we're just missing a couple pieces, and the lakefront is one of them," he said.

Developing the Nelson Park Basin as a year-round tourist spot also could create more economic activity throughout the city.

"We need to have so many things to do in Decatur you can't get them done in one day," McCrady said.

Randy Prince, Greater Decatur Chamber of Commerce president, said he has no concerns that more activity near the lake would draw attention away from other parts of the city, such as downtown Decatur.

"Those are two of our big assets, and you want to play up all your assets so they work in conjunction together," Prince said.

State Sen. Kyle McCarter, R-Lebanon, said he knows the project advocates are counting on state and federal grants to help pay the bills, but he cautioned not to put too much faith in the state dollars because of its financial situation.

"From the state's perspective, it's going to be really difficult for us to do much to help right now," McCarter



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AECOM's financial analyst Chris Brewer and architect Greg Weykamp deliver their insights on showcasing Lake Decatur and the Nelson Park area at the Community Leaders Breakfast.

said. "I think capital projects like these are going to be hard to fund, at least in the next two to three years."

Part of AECOM's job is to develop elements for the lakefront that can support themselves economically through fees, tax dollars and property values. AECOM economist Chris Brewer will work with Weykamp to develop plans that should work economically for Decatur.

Rich Hunter, president of the Nelson Park Neighborhood Watch group, said he sees the positives that could come out of developing the lakefront, but his neighborhood still has concerns about changes in Nelson Park, and

they plan to meet with the park district to discuss them.

Mainly, Hunter said, they don't want to see land that currently is owned by the park district turned into residential space.

"There will probably be some protest in regards to that," he said. "But I think if they do it correctly and make it walking paths and nature trails ... and places where people can enjoy a parklike atmosphere, then that'll be terrific."

The first community brainstorming session is scheduled for 6 p.m. March 1 at the Scovill Park Banquet Facility. At the meeting, the firm will plaster the walls with photos

of different elements possible for the Nelson project, and the public will be invited to leave notes next to each idea.

In the meantime, any community groups interested in discussing the plan can contact the park district at 422-5911.

Community participation was one message made repeatedly by project designers and community leaders.

"If you're for it, come out. If you're against it, come out. At least come out and say something, because the hardest thing in government is to sit around and guess what people want you to do," McCrady said.

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