

N. Main plan has parks, open space

By JANET COHEN
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The emerging plan for North Main Street calls for public parks and open space along Argo Pond and private development to the southeast of Argo Dam.

It also calls for a multi-million dollar road through Bandemer Park that was rejected by citizens who attended a series of public meetings earlier this month.

The so-called "consensus plan" was selected by members of the North Main Task Force at a sometimes-chaotic meeting earlier this week. The group was appointed by Ann Arbor City Council last fall to oversee the development of an improvement plan for the area stretching along the Huron River from the M14 overpass to the Maiden Lane bridge.

The task force hired consultant Howard Deardorff, who prepared three alternatives for the area pro-

posing various degrees and types of development.

The consensus reflects a blend of the most popular elements of those three alternatives, task force members said.

These include:
 ■ A riverfront oriented to passive recreation north of Argo Dam, with the exception of a River Sports Center on property now owned by Harry Hawkins. The parcel is directly south of Bandemer Park.
 ■ Private development on land now occupied by the Detroit Edison Co., and on about half of the parcel owned by the Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. The other half would be used for a public skating rink and events pavilion.
 ■ A boulevard along North Main Street from University Park at the north to the McKinley property (formerly P. Lansky & Sons scra-

See NORTH MAIN, A4

NORTH MAIN CONTINUED FROM A1

pyard) at the south.

■ Landscaping, beautification and uniform facade treatments for existing businesses along North Main Street.

■ Bikeways and pedestrian paths along the entire study area, with links to downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

■ A pedestrian/bike bridge crossing the river near Argo Dam.

■ A 20-acre park on bluffs on west side of North Main Street

With the exception of the extension of Huron River Drive through Bandemer Park — the most controversial element of the consensus plan — most task force members expressed delight with the process and the outcome.

"I have been tremendously impressed with the amount of public input," said Andy Crawford, a task force member who owns property along North Main. Crawford said he was initially worried that he and other existing land owners would be forced off their property by major development interests, but he noted that Deardorff and the task force responded to public sentiment against such a change at this time.

But at least one citizen who attended the meeting this week was outraged with the task force decision.

"Basically what they've done is they've commanded Howard (Deardorff) to come up with a plan that is very much unlike what the public wanted," said John Russell, a long-time Ann Arbor resident who lives near Argo Pond.

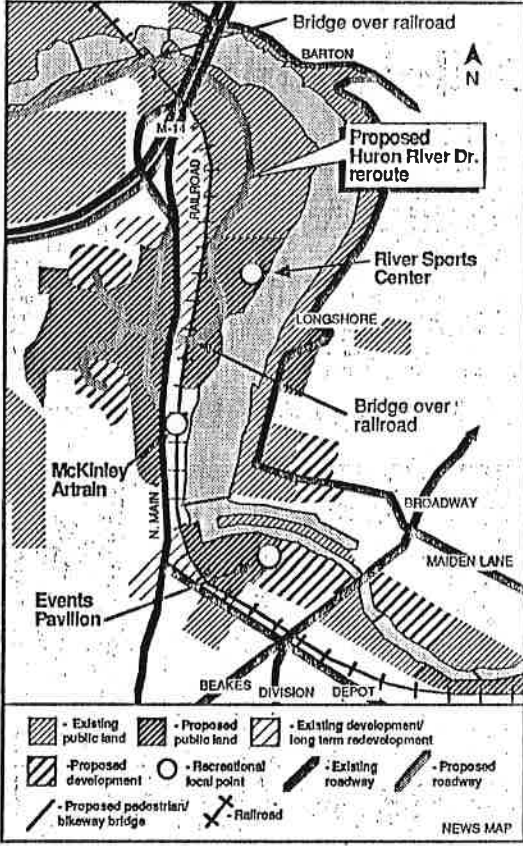
Russell said that development interests "commandeered" the task force, pushing their own interests at the expense of public opinion.

"I don't think we got (the parks) in the plan they adopted because of public opinion. I think we got them because of logistics," Russell said, explaining that both the Hawkins property and the western bluffs are unsuitable for development.

Russell, who led some of the small group discussions at public meetings earlier this month, added that citizens clearly did not want to see a busy road running through Bandemer Park, a 28.5-acre natural area identified for passive recreation under the consensus plan.

Six of eight small discussion groups at the public meetings rejected the idea of the road, Deardorff said. One group like the Idea

PROPOSED NORTH MAIN ST. DEVELOPMENT



and the other was divided about it.

Ruth Kraut, a task force member who works for the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, said she was "85 percent satisfied" with the consensus plan. But she added:

"I think we should have taken stronger cues from the public. I don't buy that you go through the public process and then make decisions based on what you want."

Other task force members, including Mayor Jerry Jernigan, said they weighed several factors in addition to input from citizens who attended the public meetings.

Task force member Dan Jacobs, an Ann Arbor architect, said he favored the road because it solved many problems that now exist in

the North Main Street area. While not ideal, a road through Bandemer would minimize traffic and safety problems at the intersection of North Main and Huron River Drive, he said. Jacobs added that the road would provide access to the proposed river sports center.

Deardorff has estimated that the road, with its two bridges over the Consolidated Railroad Tracks, would cost more than \$4 million. For comparison, the boulevard along North Main is estimated at about \$1 million.

Maps and descriptions of the consensus plan will be on display at the Ann Arbor Area 2000 conference taking place tomorrow from 9 a.m. to noon at Washtenaw Community College.

Consultant to unveil North Main plans this week

By JANET COHEN
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

A land use consultant studying Ann Arbor's North Main Street corridor plans later this week to unveil three approaches to improving the area.

Howard Deardorff, president of Deardorff Design Resources Inc., will present his "first draft" ideas for the alternatives when the North Main Task Force meets 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 14, in Council Chambers at Ann Arbor City Hall.

Deardorff has scheduled a follow-up public meeting at the Ann Arbor Inn for 7:30, Wednesday, Jan. 27, at which time he will present a refined set of alter-

natives.
The alternatives will focus on three directions, according to a summary Deardorff prepared for task force members:

■ A scheme that emphasizes an all park land approach with an emphasis on creating long-term private development opportunities on the west bluffs and inviting pedestrian and vehicular routes to downtown.

■ A scheme that minimizes public acquisition but maintains open space and walkways and sidewalks through the area, thus encouraging development or the status quo of existing businesses and industries, or both.

the city last fall to study the hodgepodge industrial corridor that borders Argo Pond. The study area also includes the slope on the west side of North Main Street, the city-owned Bandemer Park, and parcels southeast of Argo Dam that are now owned and occupied by the Detroit Edison and Michigan Consolidated Gas companies.

The goal is to seek consensus around an achievable, short and long-term scheme to enlighten what many consider to be under-used, riverfront property.

The alternatives Deardorff will present represent the second stage in a four-part process. At a public

■ A scheme that creates a public private partnership and attempts to balance public access and park amenities with private development.

Those directions are based on a two-month information gathering process, in which team members learned that significant physical constraints restrict the type and location of development, that the community won't accept high-density development north of Argo Dam, that low-density development along the Huron River isn't economically feasible, and that all alternatives must include riverfront park linkages such as bike and walking paths that extend the length of the corridor.

Deardorff's company won a \$50,000 contract from

See PLANS, A7

PLANS

CONTINUED FROM A3

meeting last month, team members presented results of the first, information-gathering phase. The third and fourth phases involve developing consensus and final plans.

While some citizens have expressed concern about the direction they perceive Deardorff to be taking, most of those who attended the presentation last month are taking a wait-and-see approach.

"We want to see all three of the alternatives looked at seriously," said Peter Long, who represents the Ann Arbor Area Chamber of Commerce on the task force.

Long said members of the business community could have been more widely represented in the information gathering stage, and added that he perceived a slant toward the conclusion that the area should remain natural. But he commended the Deardorff team's professional analysis of a complex situation.

Property owners along North Main said they were pleased with Deardorff's analysis of the area, which called for beautification and landscaping but little change in actual use of the stretch squeezed between North Main and the Consolidated Railroad tracks.

The sharpest criticism came from Dan Jacobs, co-convenor of the Ann Arbor Area 2000 committee interested in North Main Street and the Huron River. In a letter to the city task force, Jacobs asked that Deardorff place more emphasis on possibilities for public-private partnerships.

Jacobs said this week that he has since discussed his concerns with Deardorff, and will reserve judgment until he sees the alternatives.

While Deardorff continues his work, the new owners of Lansky's salvage yard are proceeding with plans to convert the scrap yard into a permanent home for the Michigan Artrain and a center for non-profit arts and community service organizations. The Artrain is a touring art museum in railroad cars.

McKinley Foundation president Ronald Welser said Friday that the group intends to present a site plan to the city by the end of February. Hobbs and Black Associates Inc. is preparing the design and has donated staff time to the project.

Dan O'Leary, executive director of the Michigan Artrain, said he hopes to bring the train to its new home in August, following its 1988 tour.

Designing Ann Arbor

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NORTH MAIN

CONTINUED FROM A3

demer Park on property now owned by Harry Hawkins, a local businessman.

- Expand Riverside Park onto land now occupied by the Detroit Edison Co. The existing building could house a community theater and/or bicycle livery and part of the current service yard could be converted to a ball diamond.

- The Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. property would instead house a surface parking lot and an open-air ice rink, with a surrounding tent to extend the skating season from fall until spring. The facility could be used as an amphitheater in the summer.

- The re-routing of Huron River Drive provides opportunities for major, long-term economic development at the north end of North Main Street by allowing for access and parking in the future.

Alternative 2:

Minimum Public Acquisition

- This "status-quo" alternative calls for public space along the river to be obtained through easements from private developers. The Michigan Consolidated Gas and Detroit Edison parcels, which would be used for medium-density office or residential development, would require 60-foot easements and 100-foot building setbacks from the river. A 75-foot easement would be requested for the Hawkins property, which would likely remain in its current light industrial use.

- A water sports center would be located at the north end of Bandemer Park.

- A ferry would shuttle visitors across Argo Pond.

- The alignment of major roads does not change, but esthetic improvement of the North Main corridor could be achieved through landscaping and beautification of existing buildings.

Alternative 3:

Public-Private Partnerships

- Sell the north end of Bandemer Park for low-density development such as office or motel space, and use the money to buy the nearby Hawkins property, which could house a parking lot, water sports center and ice skating rink. The Bandemer development would require a 150-foot setback from the river.

- Develop access to the Bandemer and Hawkins properties by extending the old Main Street from

Whitmore Lake Road. This new road would connect to North Main Street at Lakeshore Drive.

- Convert the entire length of North Main Street into a boulevard, which would mean demolishing six private homes and two businesses now located on the west slope of North Main.

- Develop the Michigan Consolidated Gas and Detroit Edison parcels for office or residential use, with buildings no higher than eight to ten stories. The buildings closest to the river would be no more than five or six stories.

- As in the second alternative, public space along the river would be obtained through easements.

Deardorff said he will use the time before a public hearing to refine maps that show the three proposals. The steering committee of the North Main Task Force must also decide how it wants to collect ideas from local people on which alternative they prefer.

"What we're looking at is land use, present and proposed, circulation of vehicles, present and proposed, and circulation of pedestrians, present and proposed," Deardorff said. "When you combine all that, over three alternatives, it's a lot to take in."

The steering committee will reschedule the public forum this week, he said.

Public forum to weigh 3 North Main strategies

By JANET COHEN
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Ann Arbor residents soon will be presented with three possible alternatives for the redevelopment of unsightly North Main Street, one of the major corridors into and out of the city.

Consultant Howard Deardorff has designed plans intended to improve North Main's appearance, provide public access to the Huron River and stimulate economic development in that part of Ann Arbor.

A public meeting to discuss the plans had been scheduled for this week, but it has been postponed to give members of the city's North Main Task Force more time to review the proposed alternatives.

Deardorff, president of Deardorff Design Resources, Inc., presented three general proposals for the North Main area when the task force met Jan. 14.

Highlights of those alternatives are outlined below.

Alternative 1: Maximum Public Acquisition

- Use all riverfront parcels for public park space. This would create more than 80 acres of continuous parkland between the Malden Lane Bridge and the M-14 overpass. (Gallup Park is 83 acres, by comparison). In addition, these parcels would be directly linked by bicycle and pedestrian pathways to about 500 acres of existing parks, including Barton, Bird Hills, Hunt and Wheeler.

- Extend Huron River Drive east from its current route, abolishing the intersection with North Main Street near M-14. Instead, the road would curve along the river, under the M-14 overpass, through Bandemer Park and intersect with North Main Street where Lakeshore Drive now does.

- Make North Main Street a boulevard for about 800 feet between the former Lansky junkyard and the freeway ramp by moving the inbound traffic lanes to the west.

- Build a river sports center and parking lot south of Ban-

See NORTH MAIN, A9

2/24/92

OPINION

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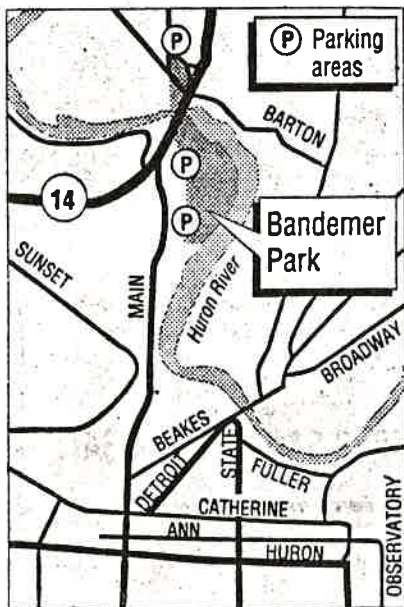
EDITORIALS

PARK PLANS

Bandemer is great nature area that will dress up North Main

The development of Bandemer Park, 28 acres along the Huron River, not only has potential as one of Ann Arbor's best natural recreation areas but also is a keystone in the beautification of the city's entryway along North Main Street.

Thus, it is with relief that the Ann Arbor Parks Advisory Commission has finally approved Phase I of the development plan. Because of resistance from some members of the Bandemer citizens task force, the plans have been moving slowly, and we have been worried that the construction season might come and go and the state grants lapse before a decision was reached.



We believe strongly that Bandemer should be developed as a nature park, with its vegetation and wildlife preserved as much as possible. We also believe that it should be built to serve the entire community, which means including paved trails accessible to the handicapped, river overlooks, adequate parking, sheltered picnic areas and paths for walking, biking and running.

We don't think it should become a

heavy-access park with slides and swings, but some task force members have been overly zealous in their efforts to limit access, trails, disturbance of the "natural" weeds and tangled underbrush. Some even went so far as to question the need for removing debris, which includes broken concrete, old tires, box springs, etc. Their concern was that by removing the debris some of the natural vegetation might be disturbed. The trade-off might have been someone stumping over rubble near a nature trail and breaking a leg.

We are pleased with the plan for Phase I in final form and believe that it answers the major concern of naturalists without sacrificing the goal of building a park for all members of the community to enjoy.

Phase I calls for development of the northern third of the park, which abuts M14 and has a half mile of frontage on Huron River. It would include a parking lot for a maximum of 40 cars and sets a goal of having no structures visible from the river by persons in canoes. It calls for only one river access point/canoe landing, which will enable the parks staff to evaluate the need for more access points in future phases.

Disturbance to existing vegetation and wildlife will be minimized under Phase I, but the final plan does not prevent the use of large-sized equipment to remove debris, as some had proposed. The restored wetlands under the M-14 bridge will be preserved.

As part of the compromise, task force members will still be involved in overseeing construction to ensure that the backhoe drivers are careful. That is reasonable, especially if the continuation of the committee enables more public input.

The Phase I development plan will be financed with \$430,000 from the Mary Couper Bandemer estate and a \$380,000 grant from the state's Quality of Life Renovation Bond. The dream of Bandemer Park has been in the making for over 10 years. When it goes to City Council next month, we hope it wins speedy approval. Bandemer Park will enhance the North Main area and offer a place of tranquility for Ann Arbor residents.