



City of Omaha
Jean Stothert, Mayor

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January 4, 2019

(Omaha, NE) A contract with Metropolitan Entertainment & Convention Authority (MECA) to manage the construction, operation, maintenance and activation of the new riverfront parks will be presented to the Omaha City Council and the MECA Board of Directors for approval this month.

Under the agreement between the City of Omaha, MECA and the Downtown Riverfront Trust (DRT), MECA will manage the development of the Gene Leahy Mall, Heartland of America Park and Lewis and Clark Landing, and future operations and activation. Activation includes creating, scheduling and managing events at the park. Gene Leahy Mall will be the first park completed. Construction will begin in March 2019 and is expected to be completed in 2021.

The City and the DRT will each contribute \$3 million annually for ten years to a fund managed by MECA for the operation, maintenance and activation costs. The money in the fund will accumulate over the ten-year period for future park expenses. The fund will be separate from MECA's CHI Health Center and TD Ameritrade Park Omaha budgets. The contract also requires that \$500,000 from this fund will be set aside in a capital reserve fund each year for future capital expenses.

"MECA has an established history of working with the City of Omaha and philanthropic leaders on major construction projects," said Mayor Jean Stothert. "This agreement provides management of the park during construction and the important long-term activation to provide the entertainment and leisure activities that will make these parks a destination for Omaha residents and visitors."

"We have experience tackling projects like this," said Roger Dixon, MECA President & CEO. "Our past collaborations with the City on major downtown construction projects have benefited the community, and we welcome the opportunity to do it again."

MECA successfully supervised the construction of CHI Health Center and TD Ameritrade Park Omaha within budget and manages both facilities.

"We plan to employ the same practices that have been proven to be operationally advantageous," Dixon said. "We're eager to get started and look forward to working closely with the City and Downtown Riverfront Trust."

The Downtown Riverfront Trust is a private non-profit created to collect funds for construction and activation of the parks. Similar non-profits were created to raise money for the construction of the CHI Health Center and TD Ameritrade Park Omaha. The Trust will contribute approximately \$210 million in private donations for construction of the parks.

The City of Omaha will contribute \$50 million for construction in each of the next three years; \$15 million in 2019, \$15 million in 2020 and \$20 million in 2021, allocated in the Capital Improvement Plan. The City will use Lease-Purchase bonds to cover the costs. The bonds will not require a tax increase.

The MECA Board of Directors will vote on the contract at its meeting on Tuesday, January 8. First reading by the Omaha City Council is scheduled for January 15, the public hearing is January 29, the vote is expected February 5.

Following approvals, pre-construction work is expected to begin at the Gene Leahy Mall in March.

Highlights of the riverfront redevelopment plan, announced in June 2018 include:

- Parts of the Gene Leahy Mall will be raised to street level, with a great lawn and pavilion for performances and events. Plans also include a dog park, sculpture garden, children's playground and space for a restaurant.
- The popular slides will remain, a third may be added
- A space for popular summer events including the Taste of Omaha and the Summer Arts Festival
- Features planned at Heartland of America Park include an amphitheater, botanical gardens, a rollerblading and ice skating ribbon and a park building for event rentals, offices and security
- Lewis and Clark landing includes a two-acre playground, sports courts for volleyball, basketball and pickleball, urban beach, marina, a dedicated space for the annual Bridge Beats summer concert series, and a future discovery pavilion
- An elevated promenade at the edge of the Missouri River is planned from Heartland of America Park to the Breakers, providing a safe space for biking, walking and jogging and a connection to the riverfront trail system

Project plans, photos and videos are available at <http://riverfrontrevitalization.com>.