



B-LINE TRAIL PROPOSAL February 2024

Organization Information and Background

Since 1992, Riverworks Development Corporation (RDC) has spearheaded the revival of the Harambee and Riverwest neighborhoods, attracting millions of dollars of local and national corporate and philanthropic investment, and some of the top technical expertise in the country. Riverworks has been instrumental in redeveloping the "Beerline Trail", currently maintains the trail, and is devoted to reimagining the role of this public space.

Led by Executive Director Darryl Johnson, RDC has a long history of managing large-scale development projects, public investments (municipal, state, and federal), and local and national philanthropic funds. Riverworks has completed \$12.5M in redevelopment, including two commercial projects, 36 units of affordable housing, and the Connector Building which houses a coffee shop and community room within the B-Line Park. Riverworks was responsible for the formation of the East Capitol BID and Harambee NID. Through the NID, 60 homeowners have received over \$800,000 for critical home repairs. The Riverworks Financial Clinic and Business Development HUB continue to expand and serve the community adjacent to the trail. Annually, the Financial Clinic prepares over 1200 tax returns for individuals. In 2024, RDC will launch a city-wide Financial Empowerment Center with the City of Milwaukee making financial literacy a free public service.

Riverworks serves as the fiscal agent and coordinating agency for this project. The organization is backed by a robust board of directors which includes residents, businesses, and nonprofit leaders. Riverworks Cleans is RDC's successful social enterprise and workforce development program which will manage B-Line Park maintenance.

Project/Program Description

Abstract: The B-Line Park, a world-class, one-mile linear park, will unite the economically divergent Harambee and Riverwest neighborhoods, connect eight neighborhoods along the 3.7-mile Beerline Trail, and offer regional access through the Oak Leaf and Hank Aaron Trails to 35 neighborhoods. Located on Milwaukee's historic rail line, the B-Line Park will transform this long-disinvested area, open economic opportunities, improve the quality of life for residents, and serve as a regional destination for visitors across southeast Wisconsin. Spurred by resident action, the B-Line Park has attracted local, regional, and national partnerships with a common vision to improve the lives of Milwaukee residents. As such, the project positions Milwaukee as a national model for transformative urban green space and

is well-positioned to achieve Rotarian objectives of impact, engagement, and sustainability. The project offers connectivity between historical Rotary projects like the Rotary Centennial Arboretum, Johnsons Park, Live at the Lakefront and even the MKE Urban Stables. The B-Line Park is a labor of love by residents and community leaders spanning over two decades. Now, at this critical junction, Rotarians can provide the vital leadership and recognition needed to help us bring this world-class linear park to fruition.

Project Background: Of significant historical interest, the Beerline Trail is located on the Milwaukee Road line where trains once carried raw materials and labor to the many industries along its path. At one time, the Milwaukee Road had more than 10,000 miles of track throughout sixteen states and its busiest branch was the “Beer Line.” As the breweries that once made Milwaukee the “Beer Capital of the World” closed, transportation modes changed. A special report in 2004 by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, “Hit by a Global Train” detailed how “no major urban center in America has suffered as much as Milwaukee’s from the economic upheaval of a globalizing economy.” The community was not prepared for the historic shift away from manufacturing jobs, resulting in “a depression in the region’s urban core far more severe than the Great Depression of the 1930’s.”

The tracks stood largely forgotten until the early 2000’s when community members approached the City of Milwaukee and realized the closed line could be an opportunity to unite, enhance, and strengthen the two neighborhoods that bordered it. Concerned by the impact of blight, dedicated volunteers started to remove railroad tracks, clean up debris, and make the area more accessible.

In 2014, cultural and community leaders created the Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project with a shared vision that a revitalized trail could drive broader economic and cultural benefits for the community. The group attracted nearly \$3M in investments from the City of Milwaukee, Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Bader Philanthropies, the Kresge Foundation, ArtPlace America, and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. With this support, the first miles of the trail - from North Bremen Street running diagonally to West Capitol Drive - were paved. Improvements also included land acquisition and trail construction, community improvement projects, planning, engagement and programming, and environmental remediation.

Reinforcing what residents already knew, multiple expert reports pointed to the need for the B-Line Park project. The Route of the Badger Assessment showed a lack of access to trail infrastructure. Urban Institute, commissioned by Art Place America, found valuable potential for increased safety and increased community and economic development. A Kresge Foundation assessment found significant potential for improving community health and wellness, as well as safety and economic development.

The Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project team pushed forward. In 2019, nationally recognized urban landscape architect Walter Hood, founder of Hood Design Studio in Oakland, CA, completed “The Lifeways Plan”, a detailed design for the B-Line Park infrastructure and integration. GRAEF architects and planners also completed “The Beerline Trail Equitable Implementation Plan” to ensure equitable benefits for neighbors, workers, and business owners. The plan received an American Planning Association – Wisconsin Chapter 2020 Planning Excellence award. In 2023, the Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC) and Riverworks Development Corporation launched the *B-Line Park on the Beerline Trail “Connecting Communities” Capital Campaign* to raise \$8M and fulfill the vision sparked by residents twenty years prior.

The B-Line Park Project Description: The B-Line Park is a catalyst for creativity and culture, equity and inclusion, health and wellness, economic development, and proof that a small group of persistent people can make a big difference. The B-Line Park is a world-class, one-mile linear park stretching from East Keefe Avenue to West Capital Drive, with comprehensive amenities for all ages. *The mission of the B-Line Park is to sustain and enrich the lives of people in Harambee and Riverwest by promoting health, well-being and prosperity through increased circulation of resources, voices, ideas, labor, and creativity.*

The B-Line Park Vision:

- 1. A World-Class Linear Park and Community Green Space** envisioned through community conversations and engagement events shaping the Lifeways Plan design for the Beerline Trail by Walter Hood, Hood Design Studio (2019 MacArthur Fellow & Gish Prize Awardee).
- 2. Regional Connectivity to the Wider Bike & Pedestrian Network** coordinated by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy through the Route of the Badger project.
- 3. Community-Centered Development Projects** including commercial and residential development are designed to provide equitable benefits to residents.
- 4. Community Leadership and Programming** with resident-led planning group, Guiding Lens, Riverworks Development Corporation, and community partners along the trail.

B-Line Park Project Features and Goals:

- Develop a one-of-a-kind, linear park that unifies arts, culture and civic engagement, and serves as a catalyst for local economic and business development
- Create a community greenhouse, play structures, work-out equipment, a bike shed with repair shop, activity pavilions, and green space to increase resident and community-wide involvement
- Build a large performance stage to showcase community talent and amplify resident voices
- Construct The Connector Building and Kuumba Juice and Coffee to revitalize the Keefe Avenue Corridor including a community space for programs and gatherings.
- Install lighting, wayfinding and new connection points along the trail to increase safety and mobility to the wider bike and pedestrian network
- Develop leadership and programming along the trail and in the surrounding neighborhoods to foster stewardship and civic engagement
- Fund ongoing maintenance of the park and trail
- Facilitate creative placemaking and cultural representations on the trail, including murals, sculptures, and landscaping

Regional connectivity to the wider bike and pedestrian network is a top priority, and the B-Line Park will play a key role in connecting over 35 neighborhoods – including Harambee and Riverwest – to a continuous trail system called the Route of the Badger coordinated by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Thanks to the Wisconsin DOT, these neighborhoods, formerly divided by Interstate 43, will now be connected by a tunnel located under the newly rebuilt expressway. Milwaukee County and the cities of Milwaukee and Glendale are working together to secure federal funding for extending the trail

connection from the B-Line Park to the future 30th St Corridor Trail. These trail additions will be complete within the next 3-5 years. Ultimately, the Route of the Badger will create an amazing 17-mile loop around the city of Milwaukee.

As the Beeline trail connects to more of Milwaukee County's trail infrastructure, it becomes a way for people to get to school, jobs, other neighborhoods, and essential services. To facilitate connectivity, a partnership with Bublr Bikes' Access Pass program will allow anyone living in Milwaukee County who received state or federal benefits to get a free Bublr Pass. The Access Pass includes access to the Bublr ebikes at no extra charge, offering quick and affordable transit.

Cost: The B-Line Park project cost is \$8 million, which includes \$345,000 for two years of maintenance and programming. The Connector Building (\$825,000) and trail continuity access points (\$700,000) have been expended. The remaining cost for the amenities listed above is \$6,130,000.

Timeline: The construction timeline for the B-Line Park began in 2022 and is targeted to end in 2026. The Connector Building construction was completed in September 2023. A local architect and contractor for the design and construction of the rest of the B-Line Park will be selected by June 2024. Construction of the Bike Shed begins in August and Vienna Street Accessways into the linear park will begin in September 2024. All other amenities will be under construction between April to November 2025 – with anticipated completion of the B-Line Park by the end of 2026.

Impact: Disinvested communities in Milwaukee traditionally have significantly less public green space than other parts of the community. Urban green space initiatives have proven to be a powerful solution to disinvestment, a means of improving quality of life, and a tool for community engagement. From lowering rates of gun violence to ending food deserts, and improving the health and safety of residents, urban green space is an effective long-term investment that brings stakeholders, including residents, together to solve community problems. Actively programmed green spaces in distressed communities strengthen neighborhood networks, create safer and healthier neighborhoods, provide youth employment and engagement, and positively impact the social deterrents of health.

The B-Line Park will provide access to jobs, recreation, schools, exercise, health and wellness, and a wider trail network connecting to many regional amenities. It will also improve safety, real and perceived, benefiting the area businesses and residents. There is an expected economic development impact as it becomes a city and regional destination.

The B-Line Park plays an important part in bridging race, class, and culture. The B-Line Park unites the 31,000 residents of Harambee (population 19,355) and Riverwest (11,427), crossing at Holton Street, a commercial corridor that also acts as the border between the neighborhoods. About 50% of residents living in the Harambee neighborhood live at or below the poverty line, compared to less than 25% in Riverwest. About 85% of Harambee residents identify as African-American, compared to around 20% in Riverwest. Property values in Harambee are far below property values in Riverwest.

Evaluation

The City of Milwaukee is working with the Beerline Trail Leadership Committee to study the various economic benefits of the Trail. The Plan analyzes the following metrics:

- Private and public investment including commercial real estate and housing – city collaboration
- Transportation investments – dollars invested

- Resident engagement and participation – tracked annually by RDC
- Trail usage – tracked through a trail counter
- Business development and job creation – city collaboration
- Increased health and equity measures – publicly available health and safety data

This project is projected to spur a wide range of development in the area, based on research from the Equitable Implementation Plan. **The development is anticipated to create: \$20 million in affordable housing construction and rehabilitation; \$15 million in commercial, industry, and community space development; and \$400,000 in safety and public art projects.**

Funding Considerations

A campaign cabinet made up of 40 public and private sector community leaders has been formed to fundraise \$8 million for the B-Line Park project. The Co-Chairs of this campaign cabinet are Michael Morgan, Rick Schmidt, and Julia Taylor. Honorary Co-Chairs are Mayor Cavalier Johnson, County Executive David Crowley, Wisconsin DOT Secretary Craig Thompson, Kevin Shafer from MMSD, and Tim Sullivan, Carroll University Dean of the School of Business.

To date, we have raised \$2.6 million toward our goal. Currently, we have 154 qualified, active prospective donors that will be approached for support. Collectively, we are leveraging cabinet member relationships for public sector support as well as funding from foundations, corporations, and individuals. In addition, we will be stewarding campaign donors for annual B-Line Park support after its completion to ensure operational/sustainability funding.

We extend our sincere thanks to Bader Philanthropies, City of Milwaukee Community Development Grants Administration, Johnson Financial Group, U.S. Bank, and We Energies Foundation who were our generous top five funders to the B-Line Park project last year.

Rotarian Engagement: This project is ideal for Rotarian involvement at multiple levels. James Davies and Corey Zetts are the Rotarian co-chairs for this proposal. Tim Hunter, Ian Abston, Keith Stachowiak, Jeremy Jannene, and Angela Sprau are the other Rotarians on the Committee. Current Beerline Trail volunteer opportunities for Rotarians include participation in the annual Beerline Shuffle; Done-in-a-Day opportunities for trail clean-up, plantings, and equipment maintenance. Raising public awareness of the project is a critical role Rotarians can play in the overall success of the B-Line Park. Rotarians Mary McCormick, Ian Abston and others currently serve on the Campaign Cabinet and other Rotarians are encouraged to join. The B-Line Park is an ideal location for networking events through the Coffee Connector and Art Connector groups. Once the B-Line Park is built, Rotarians can join committees that will help select local artists for the park's murals and become involved in Friends of the Beerline Trail to plan future activities and events. There are many naming opportunities (Bike Shed, Stage, Playground, etc.) to demonstrate the Rotarian investment and commitment to the project long-term.

We are so grateful for the interest that Milwaukee Rotary has in the B-Line Park project and the opportunity to apply for funding through the Beyond Project. We hope you will be part of our transformational journey and consider a gift to the B-Line Park campaign.