

Large Project Announcement

The Large Project Review Committee is pleased to unanimously recommend that the Rotary Club of Milwaukee invest in the Connecting Communities Campaign and adopt the B-Line Park on the B-Line Trail as it meets the criteria established for our review.

What is the B-Line Park? The B-Line Park, a world-class, one-mile linear park, that runs from Richards to Keefe. 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.

So let me tell you a bit more why it meets the four criteria we looked for in a project.

–7.Engage.Rotarians.in.a.community.project.or.initiative.that.will.improve.the.lives.of.the.people.of.Milwaukee.

Impact. The adjacent Harambee and Riverwest neighborhoods, home to 30,000 residents, have struggled over the past few decades. 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 Harambee and Riverwest communities were 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.”

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.

Connectivity beyond the local community. And it more than a community space, 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 a \$4 million investment by the Wisconsin DOT, these neighborhoods, formerly divided by Interstate 43, will now be connected by a tunnel located under the newly rebuilt expressway.

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#2 Have broad or high appeal to club members. Projects could be enhanced by proposing multi-faceted opportunities to engage Rotarians in different ways, i.e., cash donation, hands on volunteering.

Making Milwaukee great. This project will appeal to those members who are called to improve the lives of Milwaukee residents who are not in their backyard, the people that they do not see every day. Rotarians who recognize that for Milwaukee to reach its full potential, we need to improve all corners of the city.

Volunteering. There will be multiple opportunities for hands on volunteering including participation in the annual Beerline Shuffle; Done-in-a-Day opportunities for trail clean-up, plantings, and supporting bike maintenance. Raising public awareness of the project is a critical role Rotarians can play in the overall success of the B-Line Park. Rotarians will also be invited to play a role in the campaign cabinet.

#3 Have a sustainable financial model for continued success. Have been well vetted by the community and other funding partners so there is a high likelihood that the project will be completed as proposed. Partnerships, collaborations and alliances with businesses and community organizations are encouraged.

Strong Leadership. Strong, well know community leaders are at the helm of this project. The campaign is led by Julia Taylor the retired CEO of the Greater Milwaukee Committee, Rick Schmidt, CEO of C.G. Schmidt, a Milwaukee institution with deep connections to Rotary and the esteemed Michael Morgan who recently joined Rotary. The project will be managed by Riverworks.

Led by Darryl Johnson, Riverworks Development Corporation has a solid track record for managing large-scale development projects, public investments (municipal, state, and federal), and local and national philanthropic funds. Riverworks has been instrumental in redeveloping the "Beerline Trail", currently maintains the trail, and is devoted to reimagining the role of this public space.

#4 Leverage Rotary's ability to elevate a project and bring other partners to the table. Offer Rotary an opportunity for a leadership role in the project development and community recognition for Rotary's effort.

Rotary has a track record of elevating the projects in which invest. We believe that our commitment and participation can lead to a similar outcome for the B-Line Park.

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What's next ? There is much more to tell you about this project than I can do in my five minutes today. As with previous large projects, we will look to you our Fellow Rotarians to make personal contributions with a collective goal of \$250,000 payable over three years. More about that this fall.

Before I close, I want to thank all the Rotarians who brought forth project ideas—each was compelling in its own way. And I want to members of the selection committee Jackie Herd Barber, Joanne Grunau, Karen Hung, Margaret Krei, Mary McCormick, Jim Milner and Alex Zamora. And, of course, the champions for the B-Line, James Davies and Corey Zetts.