
RiverEdge Park construction begins

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As ground was broken Friday afternoon on RiverEdge Park in Aurora, talk among the facility's planners and supporters painted the park as a central gathering place, regional entertainment site and job creation engine.

With an excavator and a crane on-site and the Fox River as the backdrop, Mayor Tom Weisner said the 30-acre park will become a centerpiece to draw people downtown.

"This project will bring to this city a wonderful riverfront gathering place," Weisner said. "This park will add immeasurably to the vibrancy and the vitality of our community."

Funding for the park, which comes from the city and four groups that provided grants, is an example of

cooperation during difficult economic conditions, Weisner said.

Including some city money already spent on site preparation, the park's total cost has been estimated at \$17.4 million, with \$15 million in grants from groups including the Dunham Fund, the Fox Valley Park District and the Kane County Forest Preserve District. An \$8 million state grant from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity is the largest chunk.

The department "invested in the project because we think it will not only improve the quality of life for Aurora and the areas around Aurora, but also because we think it puts an asset in your hands that is going to produce jobs for years to come," said Dan Seals, assistant director for the department of commerce and economic opportunity.

Construction is expected to create 150 jobs, and once it's up and running, RiverEdge Park is expected to support between 450 and 600 non-retail jobs in the private sector.

Aurora will use the park to host annual concerts such as Blues on the Fox and the Downtown Alive! festival series. And while professional artists often will headline the park's Music Garden, designed to hold up to 9,500 people, Weisner said young musicians in middle and high school bands also will get the chance to perform.

Alderman Abby Schuler, whose ward includes the park, spoke representing city council members, most of whom have supported the park and many of whom attended Friday's groundbreaking.

RiverEdge Park's Music Garden is expected to be complete in Oct. 2012.