

## **Historic Central Canal and White River State Park District Working Plan**

### **Overview**

The Historic Central Canal and White River State Park Cultural district is a cultural and recreation corridor for Indiana. The district flows along the beautifully restored Central Canal and White River and features a collection of venues and attractions presented in an urban park setting. Many of the state's most visited attractions are here, including the 250 acre White River State Park featuring the historic Pumphouse, Indianapolis Zoo, White River Gardens, the planned African American Museum, the Indiana State Museum and IMAX Theatre, Celebration Plaza and the Lawn, the Eiteljorg Museum, the NCAA Hall of Champions, Military Park and Victory Field, home of the Indianapolis Indians baseball team. Starting at the canal Basin at 11<sup>th</sup> Street, the Historic Central Canal flows south through White River State Park where it cascades over a beautiful waterfall into the White River. The Historic Central Canal links the White River State Park attractions with Bethel AME Church, the Madame Walker Theatre Center and Historic Ransom Place, Crispus Attucks Museum, the Indiana History Center, Historic Landmarks of Indiana, IUPUI and the future home of the Herron School of Art Galleries and Sculpture Garden,. The Canal Walk is a popular residential environment and an urban respite for leisure activity offering extensive walking, running, biking, pedal boating and gathering opportunities, as well as a unique view of the city skyline. The Canal Walk is an artifact of the history of Indianapolis and links many historic destinations, monuments and memorials including the USS Indianapolis Memorial, and the Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial. Residents and visitors alike benefit from the easy access to recreation, education, history and entertainment all showcased along beautifully restored urban waterways.

### **Historical Background**

Soon after the decision, in May 1820, to re-locate Indiana's Capitol near the confluence of Fall Creek and White River, the state government elected to receive a donation grant of four square miles of Federal land. The land was given to Indiana by the United States, for the purpose of establishing a capitol, when Indiana became a state in 1816. Sections 1,2,11 and 12 were chosen near Fall Creek and White River in mid-state. Alexander Ralston laid out Indianapolis as a one square mile town almost in the center of the donation lands. At that time Fall Creek joined White River downstream from where it does now. The

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location was where I. U. P. U. I.'s track and field complex is now located. The area west of the mile square (West Street to Fall Creek) began almost immediately to develop as an industrial area because of the water power provided by Fall Creek.

In 1836, the Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill was passed. It provided for the Central Canal, a 296 mile canal running from Peru to Evansville. The Indianapolis division was dug from Broad Ripple to north of Waverly. It entered the mile square from the northwest just west of what was then Missouri Street. It turned south when it reached Missouri Street, consuming the street, until it left the mile square at South Street. At Market Street a side cut or offshoot was constructed to the west which was intended to provide water power. Water from the Canal would pass over mill wheels and then fall into a raceway before re-entering White River. After the Canal was watered in 1839, mills began to proliferate along the side cut; and, thereafter, the area remained mainly industrial until its decline in the 1970s through the change of the millennium. The Indianapolis Water Company stopped using water power for its pumps in 1969; and the electrical generating plant, Perry W, was raised after the White River State Park began its rapid development in 1996. The last industry, the Beveridge Paper Company, only recently left the area.

The Central Canal has now been modified and its side cut now extends through the White River State Park. The 250-acre Park lies on both sides of White River. The Cultural District continues from White River State Park into the mile square as it follows the Central Canal to its northern terminus near 11th Street.

**Boundaries (map and description)**

North = 11<sup>th</sup> Street

South = White River State Park

East = Senate

West = White River State Park

## Cultural District Initiative Goals

### Overarching

1. Strengthen Indianapolis as a unique cultural destination
2. Maximize cultural experience for visitors
3. Attract new visitors
4. Build sustainable cultural institutions, events and programs

### District Level

1. Increase local cultural participation
2. Increase sales
3. Increase overnight visitation
4. Increase artist support
5. Leverage increased resources

## Cultural District Initiative Benchmarks - General

1. Attendance at cultural destinations/attractions
2. Representative art galleries, restaurants and retail stores sales
3. Hotel rooms booked and hotel occupancy
4. Artist commissions and contracts
5. Track investments

## Benchmarks for the Canal/WRSP District

1. Track visitation for ticketed and gated attractions on a quarterly basis. (IDI)
2. Track tourism leads and conversions for the district attractions annually. (State Tourism Initiative)
3. Track event and festival attendance on an annual basis. (WRSP)
4. Track the number of retail and food service establishments on an annual basis. (IDI, City, DMD, Stakeholders)
5. Track retail and restaurant sales quarterly. (IDI, City, DMD, Stakeholders)
6. Track hotel occupancy annually. (IDI)
7. Track investments of \$100,000 or more annually. (IDI)
8. Track public art installations in the district. (Stakeholders)
9. Track residential population growth. (City,IDI)
10. Track employment growth (City,IDI)

## **District Assets / Strengths**

### **The White River State Park and Historic Central Canal District is...**

#### **Cultural Identity**

- Offers something for everyone with a mixture of culture, history, education, recreation and entertainment.
- The district provides entertainment options for families with children.
- The district is Indiana's museum and cultural attraction corridor.

#### **Attraction Assets**

- Home to an incredible collection of cultural destinations and attractions including museums and institutions:
  - Indiana State Museum
  - Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians & Western Art
  - Indianapolis Zoo
  - White River Gardens
  - IMAX Theater
  - NCAA Hall of Champions
  - Future Herron School of Art –Galleries and Sculpture Gardens at IUPUI
  - Future home of the African American Museum
  - Madame Walker Theatre Center
  - Sculpture in the Park
  - White River State Park Visitor Center
- Historic landmarks and memorials:
  - Indiana Historical Society
  - Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana
  - Historic Ransom Place Neighborhood & Museum
  - Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church
  - Buggs Temple
  - Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial
  - U.S.S Indianapolis Memorial
  - The Historic Acme-Evans Building – Home of the National Federation of State High School Associations
  - Historic Pumphouse
- And sports and recreation facilities:
  - White River State Park
  - Victory Field
  - Canal Walk
  - Bike and Pedal Boats (Wheel Fun Rentals, Ben & Co. Pedal Boats)

- The district has a growing group of African American history assets that can be packaged into a strong tour appearance.
- Numerous organized runs and walks go through the district.
- A place where large numbers of visitors visit individual institutions and major festivals and events.
- Within easy reach of 5500 hotel rooms and the Indiana Convention Center, which attracts 800,000 convention delegates per year. The district has three hotels located on or near the Canal.
- The district has many outdoor festival venues
  - Military Park
  - The Lawn
  - Celebration Plaza
  - Canal Walk
- There are many regularly scheduled events in the district that bring traffic and provide cultural programming
  - Indy Jazz Fest
  - Canal Familyfest Fourth of July Celebration
  - WENS Meijer Sky Concert
  - Indianapolis Irish Fest
  - Taste of Indiana
  - Indian Market
  - Zoobilation
  - Some like it Hot Chili Cook-Off
  - Vintage Indiana Wine & Food Festival
  - Latino Heritage Celebration
  - Irish Fest
  
- Creative and unique dining and retail establishments exist within the museums and destinations.
  
- White River State Park (WRSP) is the proposed home of the Indiana African American Museum.
  
- Numerous African American history assets exist in or near the district
  - Bethel AME
  - Historic Ransom Place
  - Madame Walker Theatre
  - Indiana Avenue
  - Crispus Attucks Museum
  - Buggs Temple

- The Indiana State Museum's "Legacy Theater: The Indiana African-American Experience" and its permanent Exhibits, "The Indiana Story."

### **Placemaking Characteristics**

- A beautiful, safe and clean urban respite with leisure walking, running, biking and gathering opportunities.
- WRSP is a 250-acre park.
- The Canal Walk is a 1.47 mile urban trail.
- Bikes and pedal boats are available here.
- The only significant waterfront in downtown, featuring the White River and the Central Canal.
- The district benefits from a connection to the Blue Line Electric Circulator
- Within easy access of other cultural districts and the Downtown attractions
- Within easy access of the State Government Center, The Indiana Convention Center, the RCA Dome, IUPUI, the Life Sciences Research Community, Crispus Attucks Museum, the National Art Museum of Sport, the Stutz Building, and many other important cultural, educational and economic drivers
- Spectacular view of the city skyline

### **Interesting, Involved People**

- The district attracts residents, students, downtown workers and vendors
- The district combines institutional draw with entertainment draw to attract a broad range of people
- Diverse cultural offerings are available because of the institutional content and the public gathering places featuring ethnic festivals and celebrations

### **History/Architecture**

- Buildings represent significant historical and new architecture
- Concentration of Indiana history in institutions, neighborhoods and waterways
- History in the making with Indiana's government center

## **Organizational Capacity**

- Established institutions and organizations with well developed marketing programs that provide structure for expanded and effective tourism and marketing partnerships.
- WRSP has successful existing hotel and visitor packages currently being marketed to areas outside Indianapolis
- Professional design services are available as an in-kind gift from the Herron School of Art.

## **District Challenges**

### **Improving Cultural Identity**

- No single district identity exists that would provide a platform for collaborative marketing
- District attractions are relatively new and have not established their own identity and positioning.

### **Improving Attraction Assets**

- Public amenities and dining options may be too limited
- Despite the significant density in the area, there is a perceived lack of demand for retail goods and services
- Large festivals attract traffic but may not support the gated attractions in the district successfully
- Some of the most interesting and unique attractions are not yet packaged well for marketing to the visitor – most notably the collection of African American historical venues and experiences
- Retail that exists within the district needs to be promoted to drive additional sales
- Strategy is needed to convert the recreational visitor to a spending visitor
- Visitors arrive unprepared to spend enough time to visit everything
- Vending on the canal level is difficult because of accessibility limitations.

### **Improving Placemaking Characteristics**

- There is a perceived lack of connectivity between destinations and institutions within the district – visitors may not understand how the Canal acts as a connector
- The Canal Walk is submerged below street level and therefore difficult to identify and navigate

- Parking is difficult to locate from the vehicular corridors that lead into the district – there are not obvious gateways into the district
- Visitors are not aware of the wealth of experiences within close distance
- Visitors need help finding their way from the street level to the canal level
- The canal needs to be activated with merchandising and interactive experiences
- Public restrooms and public facilities need to be more accessible

#### **Attracting Interesting/Involved People**

- Visits from the metro area residents and regional residents need to be expanded
- The district may not connect with IUPUI population and area residents as effectively as possible despite proximity
- A cooperative effort will be needed to reach prospective out-of-town visitors effectively with limited dollars.

#### **Enhancing History/Architecture**

- The history of the area may not be evident outside of the institutions
- The story of the African American experience in Indiana has not been packaged yet for visitors

#### **Increasing Organizational Capacity**

- Out of town visitors can be difficult to reach with the limited marketing dollars of any one institution or venue
- Maintenance and operating standards are difficult to maintain and improve with existing funding
- City, State and not-for-profit budgets are volatile



**Vision Summary**

(Imagine a day in the future)

Millions of Indianapolis residents and visitors come to the district annually to explore and enjoy Indiana's must-see museums, cultural attractions and recreational corridor. Visitors arrive, informed and excited, to experience multiple destinations in a single visit. Accessibility is top notch with visible gateways, clearly marked transportation routes, affordable and convenient parking, and ample public restrooms. People of all ages and ethnicities find this district to be a welcome host for family outings, unique events and significant city and state celebrations. Downtown workers, residents and visitors explore the beautifully restored and maintained waterways, 250 acre park and the breathtaking Indianapolis skyline. The architecture and the history of this place are inspirational, creating moments of awe and reflection. Interesting shops and restaurants complement the array of destinations, providing an appealing respite for residents and visitors and an engaging selection of memorable merchandise. Everyone leaves this place intending to return, each time discovering something new and different to enjoy about Indiana.

**Positioning Statement**

*(Conveys the unique cultural identity of the district.)*

Historic Central Canal and White River State Park is Indiana's museum and cultural attractions corridor. The 250-acre park and canal feature a world-class zoo and gardens, tremendous art, history, recreational leisure and sports, all showcased along beautiful waterways.

**Top Priorities – we are attempting to bundle all these topics into a single grant application**

1. Branding identity – unified marketing position
2. Way finding & accessibility
3. Vending program to activate the Canal

**Key Strategies**

- 1) Activate and merchandise the Historic Central Canal to serve as a connector between attractions in the district.
- 2) Unify and enhance the cultural identity and the visitor experience for the Historic Central Canal and White River State Park.
- 3) Expand existing White River State Park and Canal Stakeholders collaborative marketing frameworks to include all district participants.
- 4) Celebrate the history of the district.
- 5) Institutionalize the cultural districts planning process by creating a district representative, diverse, permanent working organization from the current Canal stakeholder participants. Provide administrative support via the White River State Park.

**Key Strategy #1**

- ❖ Activate and merchandise the Historic Central Canal to serve as a connector between attractions in the district.

**Priorities**

- Seek commitments from Canal institutions and private building owners to invest in improvements that engage the Canal
  - Extend existing retail, food, events and exhibits out onto the Canal
  - Enhance Canal level entrances to buildings
  - Locate public art installments on the Canal level
  - Showcase programming along the Canal
- Promote the dining options that exist throughout the district, expand hours as feasible and add more accessible food along the Canal
- Collect market information to guide a business recruitment strategy to be implemented by the city and IDI for under-utilized existing and new Central Canal real estate space
- Work with the City to support a well-designed collection of street merchandising vehicles to be placed in designated areas along the Canal, and that can be licensed by the City to retail vendors.
- Work with the City to locate a unique and complimentary attraction at the North End of the Canal in the Buggs Temple building

**Key Strategy #2**

- ❖ Unify and enhance the cultural identity and the visitor experience for the Historic Central Canal and White River State Park

**Priorities**

- Engage a professional identity firm to develop an identity and cooperative marketing position for the district.
- Create an artistically significant and functional way-finding program on street-level and canal-level that signals gateways to the district, clearly identifies public parking opportunities and communicates directions to district destinations through a permanent directory program.
- Participate in and support the Regional Center Plan to develop consistent and enforceable design criteria for buildings, amenities and permanent fixtures along the Canal.
- Strengthen the current collaboration between City, State and Private Resources to continually improve beautification and maintenance standards along the Canal. Investigate additional funding sources to supplement funds currently allocated to Canal beautification.

**Key Strategy #3**

- ❖ Expand existing White River State Park and Canal Stakeholders collaborative marketing frameworks to include all district participants.

**Priorities**

- Create a sub-committee of the Cultural Districts Collaborative organization to coordinate marketing initiatives in the district.
- Collect and analyze existing research to leverage knowledge and experience.
- Fund a district visitor study to identify visitor population, visitor characteristics, and reason for visit, opportunities and gaps in the visitor experience.
- Create a master calendar of programming and events for the district.
- Package tourist experiences by target group and media markets to leverage the collaborative resources.
- Collaborate to create a printed directory brochure that showcases all the district destinations for the visitor
- Collaborate to enhance visitor information within the individual institutions and attractions throughout the district – mark these locations on directories and exterior signs

**Key Strategy #4**

- ❖ Celebrate the history of the district .

**Priorities**

- Celebrate the history of the Canal by
  - Utilizing local artists, develop a public art installation that celebrates the history of the Canal for visitors with a playful and interactive experience on the Canal Walk.
  - Invite each institution to commit to opportunities to celebrate the history of the district and the Canal outside of their own facilities with special attention to enlivening their connection – back door to the Central Canal
- Create additional district programming
  - Promote new and existing tours by featuring them at destinations throughout the district.
  - Organize a marketable visitor experience that maximizes the value of the many great African American historical offerings in the district
    - Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME)
    - Historic Ransom Place Neighborhood and Museum
    - Madame Walker Theatre
    - Indiana Avenue
    - Crispus Attucks Museum
    - Buggs Temple
    - The Indiana State Museum's "Legacy Theater: The Indiana African-American Experience" and its permanent Exhibits, "The Indiana Story."

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**Key Strategy # 5**

- ❖ Institutionalize the cultural districts planning process by creating a district representative, diverse, permanent working organization from the current Canal stakeholder participants. Provide administrative support via the White River State Park.

**Priorities**

- Draft an organizational recommendation to be presented to all stakeholders.
- Attract buy-in across the district.
- Confirm the viability of WRSP acting as the formal administrative and fiscal entity.
- Secure the commitment of participants.