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December 12, 2011

Public Works Committee
c/o Bob Bauman, Chair
200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Public Works Committee members,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Menomonee Valley Partners, Inc. (MVP), we are writing to request your support of the Airline Yards redevelopment project, an important component in the successful redevelopment of the Menomonee Valley.

MVP has been involved in the Airline Yards redevelopment effort since our formation in 1999. At that time, the Menomonee Valley Land Use Plan envisioned redevelopment of the former Milwaukee Road Shops site and MVP was created as the public-private entity to facilitate fulfillment of that vision. When the City took ownership of the 140-acre former Shops property in 2002, we helped the City hold a national design competition to determine the highest and best use of the site. The winning design, backed by the City and supported by the community at large, called for creating a 60-acre business park – today the Menomonee Valley Industrial Center, home to nearly 1300 employees – and a 60-acre public park along the Menomonee River, comprised of land that was not developable.

Following RACM's adoption of the award winning master plan for the site, MVP was contracted by RACM to develop a specific proposal for the 24-acres south of the river, slated to become part of the public park and provide access to jobs in the Menomonee Valley. MVP has been leading the development of this effort for the last nine years, and has garnered tremendous public and private sector support for the project. The DNR, DOT, City, MVP, and Urban Ecology Center have all partnered with RACM to fulfill this vision, while federal, state, and private funds have been secured to fund construction and long-term stewardship.

The park itself is a key piece of a larger puzzle, dedicated to meeting economic, environmental, educational, and public safety needs and serving as a major component of the quality of life improvements underway in the region. Through the partnerships listed above, the project has expanded in scope to include a six mile extension of the Hank Aaron State Trail; the Valley Passage, which now connects residents of the Silver City neighborhood to Valley jobs; and a branch of the Urban Ecology Center, which will provide quality science education to 10,000 city of Milwaukee kids annually when fully established. To date, more than \$6.1 million of private funds, as well as \$10.8 million of Federal, \$3.8 million of State, and \$305,000 of RACM funds have been given to the comprehensive project, leveraging the investments RACM made previously to purchase and prepare the site for economic development on the north side of the river. The Menomonee Valley has been such a great success over the last 10 years; it is important that the momentum not be derailed now.

If not developed, this parcel will almost certainly become an attractive nuisance, as was the tunnel parcel to its west, which was redeveloped last year. The RACM-owned riverbank, including asbestos containing material, will remain unstable and subject to erosion. The land will remain untended and unprogrammed and will likely become a haven for graffiti, vandals, and homeless encampments. The neighborhood immediately south will continue to have a vacant brownfield in their backyard, a depressing force on neighborhood property values.

If developed as envisioned, this 24-acre brownfield will become an asset to the surrounding community as well as the greater Milwaukee region. The additional segment of the Hank Aaron State Trail and two new bridges will create additional much-needed connections between the Menomonee Valley and surrounding neighborhoods for accessing employment and recreation opportunities. The land will serve as an outdoor learning laboratory for the Urban Ecology Center, which plans to have 10,000 kids engaging in hands-on science curriculum through their programs every year, as well as providing community-based programming that will keep the park well-tended and programmed. Having these assets in the backyard of the Clarke Square neighborhood will be attractive for potential home-owners and a positive force on property values, as has been the case in the Silver City neighborhood when earlier phases of this project were completed last year.

This project has already received a great deal of national recognition for its comprehensive and collaborative nature and garnered Milwaukee attention as a leader in successful brownfield redevelopment. I urge you to continue your support of this project, for the benefit of the greater Milwaukee region.

Sincerely,



Michael W. Hatch
President



Julie Penman
Vice President