

MEMO

Date: December 16, 2011

To: Members of the Public Works Committee

From: Menomonee Valley Partners, Inc.

Re: Fulfilling the Master Plan for the Milwaukee Road site: the Redevelopment and Restoration of Airline Yards

Thank you to the City of Milwaukee and the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee for your partnership and leadership for the past 11 years in the transformation of the Menomonee Valley. In just over a decade, our joint efforts have led to 29 companies moving to the Valley, bringing 4700 jobs, building one million square feet of sustainably-designed buildings, and creating new amenities for the region with development of the Hank Aaron State Trail and 45 acres of new green space. While the national economic recovery is slow, the Valley is regarded as a bright spot for Milwaukee and for the State of Wisconsin because of the continued private investment and job growth here. The Menomonee Valley story is known beyond Wisconsin's borders, as several cities nationally are now using the Menomonee Valley as a guide for their redevelopment efforts. Because of the shared vision and leadership shown in the Valley, our collective efforts have made the Valley *the* benchmark for successful sustainable redevelopment.

As a partner, Menomonee Valley Partners, Inc. (MVP) wants to keep that momentum moving forward. The plan before you is not the beginning of a new phase in the Valley; it is the culmination of years of planning by RACM, the City of Milwaukee, MVP, and many other partners. This plan not only remedies problematic site conditions on RACM's land, but also addresses community needs for access to jobs and recreation while bringing together additional partners to share in the costs and long-term care of the site. MVP has worked to bring Federal and State funding as well as more than \$6 million of private sector funding to this project to complement the investments RACM has made to date.

There is a compelling case to act on this file now. This highly-vetted design is ready to go to construction in March. All real estate transactions and governmental approvals are required **by the end of this year** in order to maintain the construction schedule designed for the project. If we do not meet this schedule, some of the funding tied to this construction project is in jeopardy. In addition, Urban Ecology Center (UEC) has already broken ground on its new Valley branch in anticipation of this project moving forward and the site being available for youth and needs the restoration to occur to have a viable launch and ensure the success of its youth and community programs in 2013.

We ask that you support this proposal today in order to continue the economic development and community building momentum in the Menomonee Valley.

Background

Airline Yards was acquired in 2002 by RACM as part of the 140-acre former Milwaukee Road Shops site. While most of the Milwaukee Road site has been dedicated to new job producing development, Airline Yards was unsuitable for economic development purposes. Stretching 24 acres and nearly a mile long, the site is far too narrow to provide vehicle access and development areas, and was slated for development as a park. MVP was contracted by RACM to develop a specific proposal for this site. As a result, a DOT consultant team, with assistance from DOT, DNR, RACM, DPW, MVP and UEC staffs, has completed the design and is prepared to advance to construction pending gaining the necessary City approvals. Please consider the following:

The project turns a liability into an asset.

Site conditions currently need to be addressed in order to stabilize the riverbank and comply with the site's Remedial Action Plan. Through this project, significant improvements will be made to site and environmental conditions that could not be achieved with RACM resources alone. This vacant 24-acre site will become a park and a segment of the Hank Aaron State Trail. However, this will be more than a park. A robust landscape restoration plan, funded largely by the private sector, will be implemented to increase biodiversity and ecological function. Two new bridges will connect this parcel to nearby communities, providing residents with walkable access to Valley jobs. UEC will establish a new branch in the Menomonee Valley and will utilize Airline Yards as an outdoor science classroom. UEC's presence here will deter the criminal activity present in the area as well maximize use of the site and the impact of the redevelopment on the surrounding community.

The project will benefit employees and job seekers, Milwaukee children, and the community as a whole.

Airline Yards is one piece of an integrated, comprehensive plan that addresses economic development, transportation, quality of life, environmental remediation and community development. The Menomonee Valley Industrial Center, the Valley Passage, the 5.5 mile Hank Aaron State Trail extension, the new UEC branch and the Airline Yards redevelopment work in concert with one another to protect investments made to date and also to stimulate further investment. The continued successful redevelopment of the Menomonee Valley impacts the more than 415,000 people live within a 15-minute bike ride of the Valley, 100,000 of which are 18 or younger.

The neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the site, including Clarke Square and Silver City, will benefit the most from this redevelopment. The project provides connections to Valley jobs; it eliminates 24-acres of vacant brownfield, seen as a blighting force on these neighborhoods; and it connects the Valley's economic resurgence to the neighborhoods to promote neighborhood stabilization, housing and commercial development.

Furthermore, expanding UEC will bring activity to Airline Yards 365 days a year and meet community needs for recreation and education. Area schools have expressed strong interest in enhancing their science curriculum through UEC partnership, and neighborhood organizations have been clamoring for a UEC branch as part of their community

revitalization efforts. Imagine kids snow shoeing, high school students testing water quality, and volunteers of all ages planting native plants here. Because this effort so aligns with the Quality of Life Plans developed by stakeholders from the Clarke Square and Layton Boulevard Zilber Neighborhood Initiative communities, the Zilber Family Foundation has invested \$500,000 in this effort.

The partnership structure shares responsibilities.

RACM, the City, and DNR are all playing a role in the long-term operation and maintenance of this public space. In addition to the role played by the public sector, MVP and UEC are participating in the stewardship of the site as well.

In 2013, after the DOT-led construction is complete, MVP and UEC will use privately-raised funds to significantly enhance the site with native vegetation and other amenities, while raising an endowment for its long-term stewardship. In fact, a private donor just provided MVP and UEC with a \$500,000 gift last week, directed to the native landscape installation on the site. In addition, UEC will hire a full-time land steward to assist with the restoration of the site. Together, DNR, MVP, and UEC are committing to help maintain this site as an asset for the Milwaukee community.

The plan before you is the result of significant engagement of industry experts and the Milwaukee community. It has been designed to not only remediate problematic site conditions on RACM's land, but to bring the greatest benefit for the Milwaukee region and its residents. The information contained in this memo should provide a compelling case that the project before you today goes much further than City resources could alone. The plan not only addresses brownfield site conditions, but provides significant benefits to the greater Milwaukee community in terms of physical access to employment opportunities as well as educational and recreational opportunities for residents, especially children in the surrounding community. On behalf of all of those who have invested time, expertise, and funding into this vision, we request your support of this project today.