

Verdigris Valley Riverside Park

Hwy 266 and Verdigris River

Executive Summary

Residents First

Tourism as a Revenue Stream

Place Making



Submitted by: Richard Honey - Printed: Monday, April 11, 2022

Objective.

To outline and summarize the opportunities for use of an existing 10.5 acres owned by the Town of Verdigris, at the intersection of Hwy 266 and the Verdigris River, and explore additional options when extending that same piece of land to the east with land currently for sale. One hundred percent (100%) of the currently owned land, and the majority of the available land is currently flood plain and lends itself to no other use except recreational use and flood proof construction.

Mitigating Town Challenges.

The Town is facing some growth challenges.

1. Two of these challenges could be mitigated by using land and grants currently available:

a) Creating Business-Driven Revenue

Available land purchases for commercial ventures, and therefore opportunities for tax / license driven income is diminished by the low number of available parcels and the distributed nature of available parcels lessen the opportunities for development of a “downtown” area.

Effective and managed use of the land currently owned by the Town provides an opportunity for income driven by licensing / renting certain resources - and tourism within the region. Town residents would have access to normal park facilities.

The high visibility from the Port Road and easy access from Catoosa, Tulsa and connecting regions make this a highly desirable and easily accessible location.

b) Amenities for, and retention of, residents

Currently there is no community recreational space which increases the chances of residents leaving when their children have passed through high school.

Often heard “...there is no reason to stay in Verdigris when the kids graduate from high school”

The fact that this land is all in one location further enhances the likelihood of creating a one-stop regional recreation location for entertainment, community recreation, sports events and perhaps some associated retail.

Regional use is further enhanced, if designed accordingly, by the hotel and leisure business located around Catoosa and Hard Rock facilities.

“Who wouldn’t extend their stay in the area to participate in river activities and the weekend festival?”

Effective use of this location – removed 4-5 miles from the perceived center of Verdigris, also mitigates some residents concern about losing our “small town feel”

Current Access Restrictions

Land currently belonging to the Town has NO right of way permitting any use of the 10.5 acres.

Options

1. Use existing ownership and purchase / build right of way from ODOT – using valuable land space from the 10.5 acres and dollars that could be put into the additional land purchases.
2. Extend the Town ownership another 4-6 acres to include a fishing pond and an existing right of way – but still face challenges with potentially unsafe deceleration lanes and traffic access on the existing 50ft+ access drive.
3. Extend the Town ownership east along Hwy 266 up to the “Ward Building” building and provide safer access and approx. ½ to 1 acre additional land above flood plain for building restrooms, retail and possibly a food service outlet.

Land Use Options

Due to flood plain considerations recreational use is the lower cost option for making good use of this land and making it available to residents.

Let’s assume a 3-5 year development plan of which 3-4 years would involve planned development with the 2026 Route 66 Celebration – which coincides with the 250th anniversary of the United States, in mind. Certain additional grant monies also being available from the Route66 Alliance funding.

Proposed Facilities

Using the full extent of the land available (owned and for sale) the following consists of equipment and activities on which this regional recreation area would be developed.

1. Regional Sports Leagues
2. Mile long walking / biking trail
3. Low intensity exercise stations along the trail
4. Casual boating and featured boating events with access to boat ramps upstream and egress on the Verdigris site.
5. Disc (frisbee) Golf course – relatively low cost and portable
6. Softball / Little League field
7. Amphitheater for performing arts, music events and private functions
8. Fishing Pond – pre-existing
9. Outdoor Fitness Gym – a single area for focused classes and high intensity workouts
10. Separately fenced Playground Area for ages 3-12 (near Fitness Gym for parental oversight)
11. Sports Courts – Tennis & Basketball
12. General year-round community events and food festivals
13. City Maintenance Building
14. Potential for 4H building with school district support

15. Restaurant / Gift Shop / Restrooms above the floodplain – saving additional flood mitigation costs

Possible Events

Planned and managed events would provide a source of income for the Town through tax revenue, licensing and rental opportunities and possibly access fees or ticketed events. Examples include:

1. Jazz Festival
2. Film Festival (using the Amphitheater)
3. Founders Trading Days (mirroring Verdigris history from the 1700's)
4. Chuck Wagon Festival
5. American Folk Festival
6. Cherokee Nation Days
7. Arts and Crafts Festival
8. Farm & Ranch Festival
9. Verdigris Riviera Weekend (managed boating activities and races)
10. Performing Arts presentations from the schools and private groups
11. Spring / Summer / Fall Band series (weekly music presentations for the community)

Funds & Grants Available

The following funding sources are available for further investigation. Nonetheless, many funding sources require sponsorship and commitment from the governing authority before paperwork can even be submitted. Some grant monies are “reimbursable” - grants based on expenses accrued during the project.

These are the sources known to-date:

1. Existing ARPA Relief funds provided for community health and well-being purposes.
2. Recreational Trails Program (RTP – Oklahoma)
3. Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB) – Water Resources and Flood Plain Management
4. FEMA Grants for Flood Plain protection & management
5. Route 66 Alliance (general Town of Verdigris / local development grants for Route 66 celebrations)
6. National Fitness Company (subsidized cost of Outdoor Fitness Gym)
7. Cherokee Nation (Infrastructure grants – following meeting with Keith Austin of the Council)

Estimated costs – based on a preliminary investigation.

1. Having engaged in discussions with the current landowner, costs for additional land have been quoted as being \$20,000 / acre for flood plain and an increased rate for non-floodplain portions. This would put the cost of an additional 8-9 acres – to include the fishing pond, at \$160,000
2. Total cost for all acreage on the east end of the Town's current property – to include safe access driveway and land above the floodplain has been estimated to be approx. \$450,000
3. Phase 1: Approx. \$120,000-\$150,000 (not including land costs)
 - a. Fencing 4939ft – up to the elevated acreage – including 16ft vehicle access gate

- b. 8' x 1 mile ¾ inch crusher – prepared & compacted walking trail
- c. Exercise Stations
- d. 20 vehicle parking lot
- e. Trail head construction (trash cans, wooden entrance etc...)

Projected Revenue

Without a firm commitment to land use, and knowing the available land, it is challenging to project revenue. What we can assume is that without suitable access and sufficient space for parking a large number of vehicles we will not achieve the levels of revenue we would like to see. Additional land purchases are recommended.

Direct Revenue

1. Boat Rental
2. Guided River Trips
3. Ticketed Amphitheater Events
4. Annual Festival Ticketing
5. River Guide Fees
6. Sports League Hosting
7. Outdoor Gym Club licensing / rental
8. Field Rental (Camping, Special Community Events) / Corporate Rental
9. Food / Gift Sales

Indirect Revenue

1. Sales Tax from increased local businesses
2. Business Development Opportunities (licensing river guides, developing community theater - for example)

Marketing and Branding

Verdigris, with its river assets and rich French Trader and “Verdigris Switch” railway history is not a “branding nightmare by any means. Yet this town with huge potential – not just for residential growth, could easily match towns of equal size that are giants in the tourist trade. Pawhuska OK, Winslow AZ, Carmel CA, Wallace, ID are all examples of small towns who focused on a piece of history or a famous person and created a tourist destination. Verdigris does not yet appear on the TravelOK.com (Oklahoma’s tourist guide) website – we can change this!

Long Term Outlook

Possibilities grow in proportion to action.

Having established a presence on the river the possibility of land acquisitions along the river bank north would allow for new hiking trails for avid hikers and historic walking trips searching for additional signs of our trading

history in the riverbank areas. The possibilities are endless and the co-operation of landowners to partner in bringing increased prosperity to Verdigris Valley will be evident.

In Summary

The Town of Verdigris has an opportunity to create a regional outdoor attraction with a variety of revenue opportunities for the Town – which will only grow with time and ongoing development. Putting the residents first (Phase 1) we can create a growing space that will expose Verdigris to the upcoming 2026 celebrations and the influx of visitors. Without a bold approach to planning and development of this location we are simply a Route 66 drive-by “bump in the road” when it comes to the expected influx of visitors for the 2026 celebration – and, we will have missed a wonderful opportunity to bring focus to the “Valley” with its rich heritage of French Trader and Railway history - both of which can be key components in this type of project.

Purchasing all the remaining prime 266 frontage at the location discussed would provide an asset to Verdigris and its ongoing development. To ignore the opportunity may lead to complications in using the existing ownership and loss of opportunity in the long term.