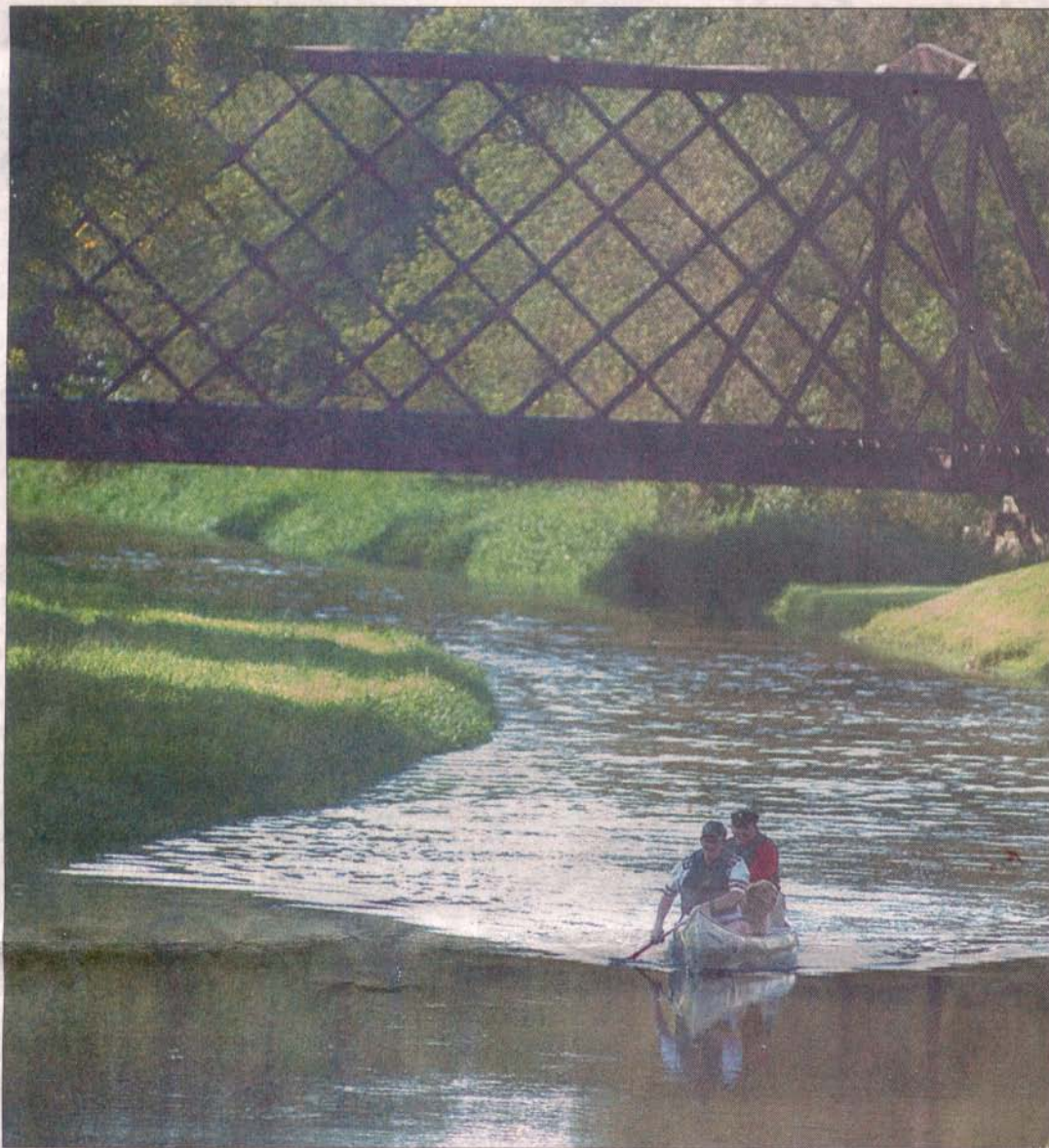


RIVERWALK DREAMS

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DAILY NEWS FILE PHOTO

NEW RECREATIONAL opportunities on the North Fork are being touted as an economic and lifestyle tool to develop tourism with a proposed riverwalk through Norfolk.

How we got here

■ More than 18 months ago, supporters of a riverwalk in Norfolk began meeting to try and gain momentum for the idea. In the 1970s, a riverwalk proposal was put forth but didn't occur when it was given a low priority and little funding and investment.

■ Norfolk will be trying to raise about \$300,000 for a study by HDR of Omaha that would include such things as visioning, discussions, urban design and enhanced value development studies and implementation. Plans call for a combination public-private partnership similar to what has worked in other communities.

■ A kickoff to raise the \$300,000 necessary for the study is expected to be held next month.

Committee tells residents to let riverwalk ideas flow

By **JERRY GUENTHER**
regional@norfolkdailynews.com

Go ahead, Norfolk. Dream a little.
Get excited.

Maybe even dream a lot.

Imagine the North Fork of the Elkhorn River, which now lazily flows through town, being used to generate new cultural, recreational and economic opportunities.

Imagine designers taking advantage of local residents' ideas and using their own expertise and experience from other cities to harness the river's natural beauty and power.

Think about how new recreational offerings could mix with restaurants, retail shops, clubs, offices and living places to attract young professionals to Norfolk.

Share your ideas and enthusiasm for the project with others. Let them bounce their hopes and ideas off you.

And don't worry about those people who are skeptical. Other cities and towns — even smaller than Norfolk — had people scoff when they developed

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their own riverwalks.

That was the message presented Tuesday evening during a meeting organized by the NorthFork Riverwalk Development project held at Grace Community Church in downtown Norfolk.

In some ways, it was a fitting location for the meeting because it showed how a former retail business has been converted to a church, complete with modern design and state-of-the-art technology for slides and other presentations.

The church's location was also just a few blocks away from the North Fork, the source for Norfolk's new optimism.

Doug Bisson of HDR of Omaha was

among those who gave presentations to a crowd estimated at about 125 people, most of whom appeared to support the idea.

HDR is an architectural, engineering and planning firm with 165 offices nationwide. It has extensive experience with other riverwalk projects, as well as several redevelopment projects, including including the Aksarben Village and new baseball stadium in north Omaha.

Bisson, who is the project manager for the Norfolk riverwalk, said many communities across the nation are doing "great things."

"Unless you're doing great projects, you're at the status quo," Bisson said.

Bisson said that when attracting young people or retirees, it's important for communities to address quality-of-life issues, such as entertainment and recreational offerings. In order to grow, communities need to do things that set themselves apart, he said.

Jim Miller, chairman of a riverwalk

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Riverwalk

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board of directors that has been assembled, said there is widespread support for the concept.

Already, 10 standing committees representing more than 100 members have been formed, Miller said.

Miller also announced an impressive list of people and agencies who support the proposal, ranging from the Norfolk Public Schools to Gov. Dave Heineman.

Dan Mauk, president of the Norfolk Area Chamber of Commerce, said Norfolk and the nation are in the middle of a transition.

With new technologies, people can work just about anywhere they want, he said. As a result, Mauk said, communities need to get outside of traditional thinking to provide amenities that will attract residents, he said.

Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk said the riverwalk fits in well with many other exciting opportunities currently happening, including the hospital expansion and fundraising for a new nursing college.

There were those who thought the new nursing college would not occur, but already about \$7 million of the \$15 million necessary has been raised, he said.

Flood said that in Norfolk, like other communities, there are "two kinds of people." There are those who have "50 reasons" why a project like this won't work and those who have "50 reasons" why a project like this will work.



DAILY NEWS FILE PHOTO

TOURISTS, adventure-seekers, retirees and nature-lovers are among those expected to be attracted to a proposed riverwalk in Norfolk.

J. Paul McIntosh of Norfolk, a community leader, said he is old enough to remember the town's naysayers on other projects, including merging and relocating the Norfolk Junior College into Northeast Community College.

Once these projects are successful, people tend to forget their opposition or pessimism, he said.

Now it's up to the current visionaries to make this project happen, McIntosh said.