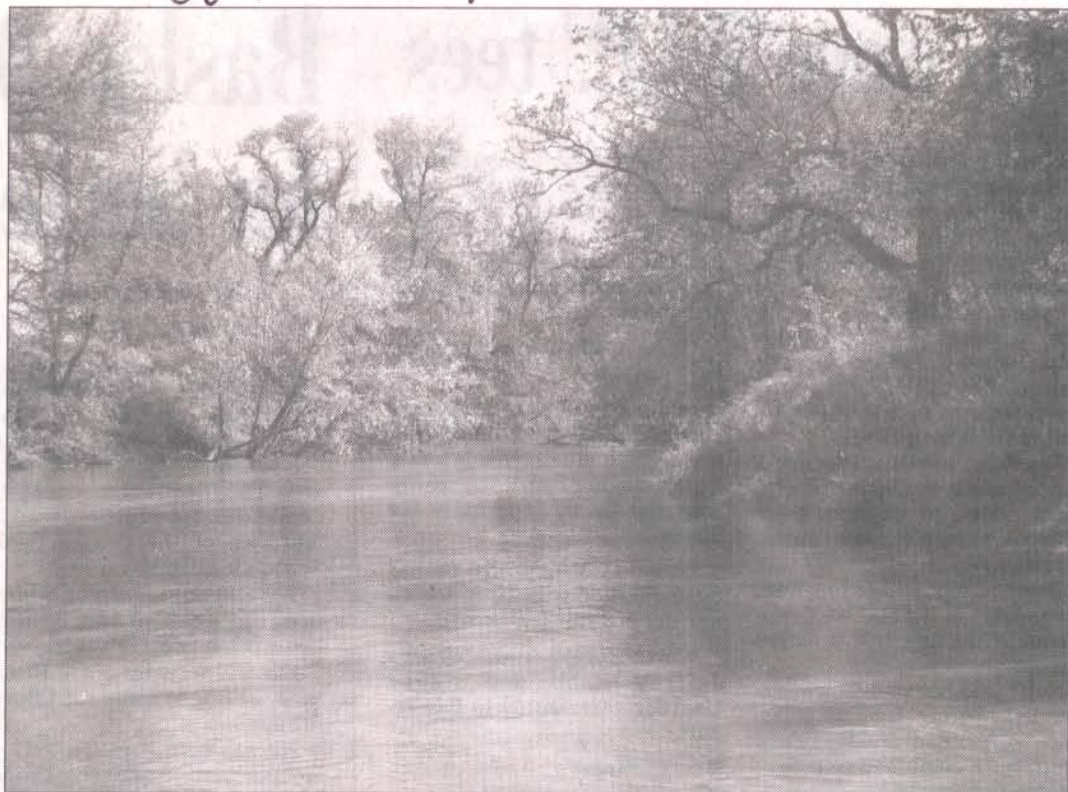


OWH 08/30/08



THE NORFOLK DAILY NEWS

A riverwalk along the North Fork of the Elkhorn River through Norfolk, Neb., would draw tourists and retirees to the city, proponents say.

OWH 08/30/08

North Fork riverwalk proposal gets positive reaction in Norfolk

By JERRY GUENTHER

THE NORFOLK DAILY NEWS

NORFOLK, Neb. — 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 — faced skepticism when they developed their own riverwalks.

That was the message presented this week during a meeting organized by the North Fork Riverwalk Development project 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 is also just a few blocks 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.

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 questions, 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 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 a 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 beyond traditional thinking to provide amenities that will attract residents.

Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk said the riverwalk would fit well with other current developments, 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.