

Deseret News

Plan for Jordan River rehabilitation moves forward

Amy Joi O'Donoghue
The Deseret News
Apr 29, 2010

Copyright (C) 2010 Deseret News Publishing Co.

SALT LAKE CITY -- The Salt Lake County Council became the first government entity to sign off on an ambitious plan to rehabilitate the Jordan River, preserve and acquire neighboring open space and develop a "lake-to-lake" trail along its 50-mile corridor.

Under the Blueprint Jordan River Vision, 15 cities and three counties would chip in dollars to fund a governing commission that would then seek ways to pay for the project.

With its yes vote this week, the council agreed to consider an annual allocation of \$40,000.

Proponents of the plan are making the rounds to prospective member cities and counties, with another proposal made Tuesday before the Utah County Commission.

Alan Matheson, executive director of Envision Utah, told Utah County officials that the proposed commission would be modeled after the Utah Lake Commission, which grew out of a study committee and was formally organized in 2007.

With the Jordan River, the plans call for a nature preserve, regional and neighborhood "river centers" and expansive rehabilitation of the river banks to make it a navigable waterway. Other environmental protections include restoration of wetland habit and the preservation of 7,300 acres for open space.

Once an industrial thoroughfare for the valley, the Jordan River has long been the target of cleanup efforts that in some instances have shown success and in others stumbled to a halt.

In 2004, it was named one of the country's top 10 polluted waterways after more than a century of abuse imperiled its water quality.

An interlocal agreement includes a proposed contribution by member entities, with Salt Lake County paying \$40,000 and cities generally chipping in a few thousand dollars.

Such a proposal may seem like a hard sell in such tight fiscal times for government, but Envision Utah's Gabe Epperson said that has not been the case.

"The amounts are so small relative to their given budgets, they have not really blinked at the amount of money," he said. "I think it is an investment they see as having a good return."

Epperson, the project manager, said presentations have been made to the elected bodies of eight prospective city and county members, and one-on-one meetings have been held with representatives of several other cities, including Lehi and Salt Lake City.

"Overall, the response has been positive. Everyone has felt the objectives are worthy, and they are supportive."

Epperson and others from Envision Utah will make follow-up visits to the government entities and request that the interlocal agreement be put on the agenda as an action item for adoption.

Ideally, member cities will adopt the agreement in time to handle the proposed contribution in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Those membership fees would pay for half of the commission's proposed \$220,000 budget, while state agencies and water districts would pay the other half.

Once in place, the commission could then pursue funding options to put the "blueprint" in action, such as bonding, securing state and federal grants or using sales tax revenue, such as a Zoo, Arts and Parks tax.

Contributing: Sara Lenz

e-mail: amyjoi@desnews.com