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Winfield's Ambitious Riverwalk Project

*By Dan Nagel and Gary Bernard,
Winfield Riverwalk Committee members*

In January 2007 Winfield Village President Rudy Czech formed the Winfield Riverwalk Committee to evaluate if and how a riverwalk might benefit Winfield. The committee first defined itself: its vision is to make Winfield Chicagoland's most walkable town. Its mission is to serve the community at large—Winfield residents, visitors, retailers, and forest and park districts—by delivering a comprehensive plan for a unique and sustainable riverwalk project. The goal is to create an arterial sys-

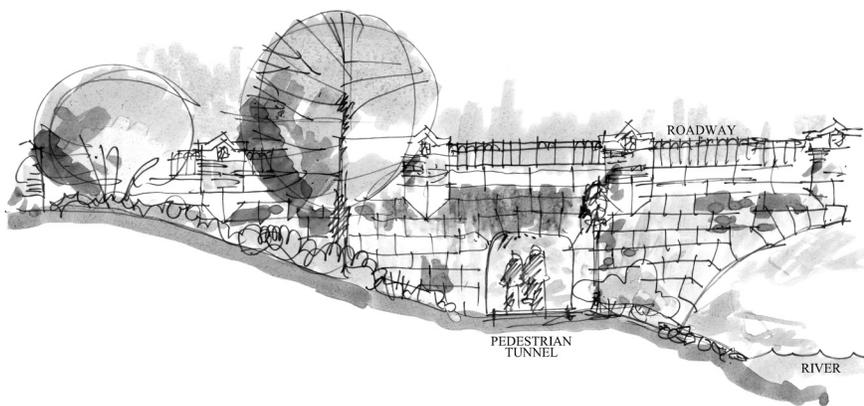
tem of pathways, surrounded by nature, intermixed with culture, education, recreation, relaxation, and community, created for the enjoyment of all and fueled via the heart of Winfield's town center.

Big plans such as these need a broad team of stakeholders, and so the committee reached out to and got support from the DuPage County Forest Preserve District, the Winfield Park District, Central DuPage Hospital, Winfield residents, and The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation (IPPC). Those of you who came to The IPPC's annual meeting in November will remember Winfield Riverwalk Board Members OnDrew

Hartigan and Steve Massie, who unveiled their exciting riverwalk plans.

Among the committee's many efforts, they worked with Landscape Architect Gary R. Weber and Associates, who developed a comprehensive conceptual design. This plan identifies eight distinct sections of proposed pathways, all linking downtown Winfield to neighboring communities. It also outlines plans for an outdoor music pavilion, a pedestrian tunnel under a historic stone bridge, a beautiful overlook by the DuPage River, a gateway monument. In February 2008, the Village of Winfield unanimously resolved to adopt this design.

Next, the committee decided to focus its efforts on Section 8, the West Branch Winfield Riverwalk. Section 8 includes the Core Riverwalk through downtown Winfield and the Forest Preserve Riverwalk, which covers the area on the east side of the DuPage River from Jewell Road to the Geneva spur of the Illinois Prairie Path. After much preparatory work, the committee, along with representatives from the DuPage County Forest Preserve District, Gary R. Weber Associates Inc.,



*Architectural drawing of pedestrian tunnel under stone bridge
as proposed for the Winfield Riverwalk*

and Central DuPage Hospital, were ready to walk through the length of Section 8 to help determine path location and potential environmental and engineering issues.

On the afternoon of November 13, the brisk temperatures, wind, and mud did not diminish the enthusiasm of the twenty-plus participants as they anticipated uncovering rarely-seen areas and envisioning how certain locations would become exciting places of adventure for future riverwalk users. On the walk-through, the planners did come across unexpected beautiful bends in the river and many spots where future visitors could breathe in the

beauty of the natural surroundings. Additionally, the experience turned out to be much more than imagined.

There is something magical about taking a long trek through thick brush relatively untouched by man. You want to share its riches with humanity. And the experience is enhanced by having that very purpose—from dreaming about it and planning its realization over the course of a couple years. Seeing the exact location, stepping on a conceptual path with a team of others, it smacks your consciousness that you are making it happen. The Winfield Riverwalk is really going to be more than a dream,

more than a plan. It's going to become a reality. On that blustery November day, many felt that amazing moment well up from inside of themselves.

They also understood the hard work ahead; parts of Section 8 will need a major, coordinated clean-up effort because of their isolation inside the forest.

Soon after, the forest preserve's and Gary Weber's teams retraced the initial Section 8 walk-through to provide a more comprehensive path plan. They presented their findings to the Winfield Riverwalk Committee in December and later to the village board. The board responded positively to plans and was enthusiastic to keep the momentum of this project moving forward. Recently, the DuPage County Forest Preserve District has initiated grant applications to fund construction of Section 8 and other sections. In the best case scenario, the Forest Preserve Riverwalk of Section 8 could be complete within four years.

The Winfield Riverwalk Committee is a registered not-for-profit organization. Donations are welcome. For additional information, please visit website:

winfieldriverwalk.org.



On the Section 8 walk-through, Andrea Hoyt and Scott Kopal are examining a plot where an orchard was planted twenty years ago.