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## Developers offer to donate land for park

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News-Leader*

Hundreds of acres of flood plain land along the east edge of the proposed 60/65 business development could soon become a public park.

Developers of the major retail, residential and hotel project are offering to donate the land to the Springfield-Greene County Park Board.

"We've already pledged a 200-foot conservation corridor next to the river to the Ozark Greenway Land Trust," said Geoff Butler, a partner in the 60/65 project.

"Whatever flood plain property is left -- it's hundreds of acres -- we want to let the Park Board work on developing it."

Donating the flood plain land would provide some tax benefits to the 60/65 project, Butler said. He added that specifics about the benefits wouldn't be available until additional study is complete.

It also would open up a public recreational area that would connect with existing park land and facilities at Lake Springfield.

"It's still an environmentally sensitive area," Butler said. "The question now is how can the Park Board make use of it to benefit the most people?"

Jodie Adams, Springfield-Greene County Parks Director, said the park board recently voted to pursue the land donation offer.

"We have not met with them, but it really opens up the discussion so we can talk through plans with them," Adams said.

If the details of a land donation can be worked out, Adams said a key element likely would be a public access point on the James River.

"It's an opportunity to have a water entry point on the river -- like a trail head for hikers or bicyclists -- where you can put in a canoe or boat and follow the river all the way to Lake Springfield," she said.

The park department also has been interested in developing a public archery center.

Butler said the 60/65 project includes some land that's out of the flood plain that could be given to the park system for some kind of structure development.

"They're willing to donate acreage in a buildable area where that could work," Adams said.

"We've talked with U.S. Archery about having a facility that would introduce archery to the public," Adams said.

Springfield already has several U.S. Olympic Committee training programs in place, and archery could be the next.

Any park projects in the donated land area would cost money, and Adams said there currently are no funds available to make those improvements.

If the park board does obtain the land, some of the proposed improvements could be added to the next quarter-cent countywide park sales tax initiative.

The current quarter-cent park sales tax ends June 30, 2012.

If the park board proposes another renewal, it likely would go to voters some time in 2011.

The flood plain land along the river is excellent wildlife habitat, and Adams said it's possible a bird-watching trail could be part of future improvements.

"It is a beautiful area, and most importantly it would provide protection for that green space and valley," she said. "A big key is that it also helps protect the quality of the river and helps keep the water clean."

City Utilities owns a large chunk of undeveloped forested land just east of the James River near the south end of the 60/65 development.

Adams said she has not approached the utility to see if the land might also fit as park property.

CU spokesman Joel Alexander said no one had approached the utility about possible use of the land as a park.

More than a year ago, CU leased a large portion of its Lake Springfield property to the Park Board.

The Lake Springfield park now features trails, a boathouse and marina and canoe/kayak rentals.

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