



## **MRA Project Summary**

March 13, 2023

**Urban Renewal District:** URD II

**City Council Ward:** 1 & 3

**Neighborhood:** Riverfront & Westside

**Name of Project:** Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project

**Project Location:** Clark Fork River and Riverbanks between the Bitterroot RR Trestle and the California Street Bridge.

**TIF Investment:** \$ 300,000

**Project Description:** A group of partners consisting of City Departments (Parks, Public Works & Mobility, Missoula Redevelopment Agency), MT Fish Wildlife & Parks and Trout Unlimited are working jointly on the Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project which consists of improvement of instream conditions, riverbank restoration and protection, improved access to and recreational use of the river, completion of missing sections of Ron's River Trail and improved public safety, all accomplished in a sustainable and holistic way. The requested TIF contribution will fund the initial planning phase of the project which will provide the partners with the information that they need to begin final engineering, permitting and to successfully pursue Federal, State, local and private funding for implementation.

**Cost Breakdown of TIF/CCP/CRLP Funds:**

TIF Funds - \$300,000 from URD II

**Unique Public Purpose or Benefit:** The City and its partners will develop a plan to address issues and opportunities on the Clark Fork River between the Bitterroot Trestle and the California Street Bridge through improved access to the river for all members of the community, much needed bank stabilization, improvements to the river bed, enhanced river recreational opportunities, removal of the diversion ditch and improvement of safety in and around the river.

**Tax Increment Investment:** MRA will partner with the departments and agencies referenced above to accomplish the second highest priority project in the URD II 9 Year Strategic Exit Plan as adopted by the MRA Board in 2022.

**District Sunset Date:** 2031



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** MRA Board of Commissioners

**FROM:** Ellen Buchanan, Director *EB*

**DATE:** March 11, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project

The MRA Board adopted The URD II 9 Year Strategic Exit Plan at the March 17, 2022 Board meeting. The two highest priority projects in that plan are the Bitterroot RR Pedestrian Bridge and the River and Riverbank Improvements & Trail Connections projects. In October 2022, the Board approved a request from the staff to enter into a professional services agreement with HDR Engineering to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of using the trestle both as a rail facility, if needed, as well as becoming part of the Bitterroot Trail. A structural evaluation of the trestle is complete, with no adverse findings, and concept development is underway in cooperation with Montana Rail Link, City Parks and MRA.

MRA staff has been working with City Parks and Public Works & Mobility (PWM) for several years in an attempt to address both bank stabilization and riverbed improvements between the trestle and the California Street Bridge. In early 2022, the City, with assistance from FWP and the Clark Fork Coalition, was able to purchase the Flynn-Lowney Ditch for approximately \$900K. The MRA Board approved just over \$57K in September 2021 to help fund some of the technical work needed to facilitate that purchase. With the acquisition of the Ditch, new opportunities are available and new partnerships have been formed. Currently, multiple City departments, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and Trout Unlimited are working to define the project, identify how best to proceed and what funding sources may be available for implementation of what will be the largest, most comprehensive Clark Fork River project in Downtown Missoula since the construction of the levee system in the 1960s.

This working group consisting of Parks, MRA, PWM, FWP and Trout Unlimited established the Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project Goals in May 2022 (a copy is attached to this memo). This is the guiding document which is and will be incorporated in all agreements between the City and partners on this project. The primary objectives range from improvement of instream conditions to riverbank restoration and protection; enhanced access to recreational uses of the river; and public safety, all accomplished in a sustainable and holistic way. It is evident from this document how ambitious this project is and how many of MRA's stated goals will be addressed in a comprehensive way rather than project by project. These include riverbank stabilization where our investments in Ron's River Trail are threatened, completing the missing trail segments on the north bank, increasing recreational opportunities in the river such as an

additional play wave, protection of the MRA investment in the West Broadway Island, and improvement of the access to and from the Silver Park Boat Ramp, all of which are included in the URD II Exit Strategy.

We are now at the point where we need to issue a Request for Proposals to hire a professional team to create the plan. Engineering, permitting and implementation of the envisioned comprehensive plan will take years and millions of dollars. This first step in the process will include data collection and analysis, hydraulic modeling, recreation and landscape planning, concept development, preliminary engineering and design of alternatives, project administration and reporting. During this initial step project partners will facilitate a public process to inform and raise support for a comprehensive vision for this stretch of the Clark Fork River. The end product will be a publicly supported vision for this section of the River, with initial designs, construction cost estimates and a plan for implementation. The goal is that this product will provide project partners with the information that they need to begin final engineering, permitting and to pursue Federal, State, local and private funding for implementation. Trout Unlimited has experience developing and implementing large scale ecological restoration projects in Western Montana, working with local governments to execute such projects and securing grants and other funding to support these projects. Consequently, Trout Unlimited will act as project manager for this project. The estimated cost to hire a consulting team is between \$250K and \$300K. That said, pricing is so unpredictable today, that we will not have certainty about the cost until we have selected and negotiated a scope of services with a professional design team. Staff would like to reserve the right to come back to the MRA Board for additional funding if the amount requested is inadequate.

The URD II 9 Year Strategic Exit Plan earmarked \$5.4M for the River & Riverbank Improvements and Riverfront Trail Connections priority. Knowing that this would not be an inexpensive undertaking, it is the largest allocation in the Plan. URD II currently has just over \$3M in unencumbered funds in the FY23 contingency; consequently, there is adequate capacity available to fund this initial step in addressing the issues and opportunities in this stretch of the Clark Fork River. This is the first step in being able to accomplish our number 2 priority in the adopted Exit Plan.

#### **City of Missoula Strategic Plan**

Undertaking the Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project will help the City meet the goals of the City of Missoula Strategic Plan as follows:

- Safety and Wellness – Invest in transportation projects and create complete multi-modal networks that are comfortable, safe and accessible for people of all ages and all abilities.
- Environmental Quality – Partner with area organizations to plan and implement the Clark Fork River Restoration and Access and reforestation Open Space Bond Projects.

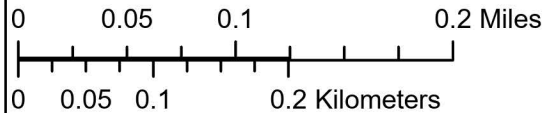
**Recommendation: Staff recommends that the MRA Board approve up to \$300,000 to fund the professional planning work required to allow project partners to begin final engineering, permitting and funding to implement for the Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project, with the understanding that this estimate may not be adequate and additional funds may be needed to complete this initial phase causing staff to come back to the Board with a request for additional funding, and authorize the Director to enter into and sign any internal agreements with other City Departments.**





**Public Trails**

- Gravel
- Paved
- Canal/Ditch



# FLYNN LOWNEY DITCH PROJECT

## Issues and Opportunities Map



## **Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project Goals**

May 2022

In September 2021, through a collaboration with the Clark Fork Coalition, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and Trout Unlimited, the City of Missoula purchased the Flynn-Lowney Ditch on the Clark Fork River. Reasons for purchasing the Flynn-Lowney Ditch included: reduction of road construction costs in the S<sup>w</sup>tpqyen Master plan area, transfer of 10-20 CFS of irrigation surface water to groundwater wells, elimination of continual disturbance and maintenance needs in the diversion head gate area and adjacent river reach, and a potential return of 20-30 CFS of irrigation surface water to instream flows. In addition to these primary purposes for acquisition, City ownership of the Flynn-Lowney ditch provides a multitude of ancillary benefits and opportunities.

The City of Missoula is developing a comprehensive project to improve conditions in the Clark Fork River and Flynn Lowney ditch area. This document outlines the overall project goals which will be included in a Memorandum(s) of Understanding (MOU) to be executed by the City, and project partners. The goals listed below are not in priority order.

**Project Planning Area:** The Flynn-Lowney Ditch Restoration Project generally includes the Clark Fork River, riverbanks and riparian areas from McCormick Park downstream to the California St. pedestrian bridge. This project is located in a dense urban area and planning for this project must include consideration of adjacent public lands, adjacent development and explore connections between these lands/developments and the Clark Fork River. The design of the Flynn-Lowney Ditch Project may require adaptation of current adopted City plans for the Parks and Trail systems within the project planning area.

### **Project Goals:**

- *Develop and Implement a Sustainable and Holistic Project*
- Recognize that this project has a number of environmental, recreational, and social equity benefits. Implementing a holistic vision for this section of the Clark Fork River will make the project stronger and more successful.
- Foster collaboration between public and private entities to design, fundraise and implement the project to fully realize potential benefits and opportunities.
- Invest in the quality of life and economic prosperity of Missoulians by improvements within this Project Planning Area.
- Consider funding availability and opportunity costs in developing the scope of the project and specific design elements to maximize the benefits and timeliness of the project.
- Consider long-term maintenance responsibility and costs of any infrastructure or improvements built, or even left in current condition, within the project planning area during all aspects of the project.

- *Improve Instream River Conditions*

- Remove the irrigation diversion, irrigation debris and all irrigation infrastructure in the Project Planning Area.
- Cease operation of the Flynn-Lowney Ditch and return 20-30 cfs of irrigation water to the Clark Fork River.
- Rehabilitate the affected river bank and riparian corridor in restoring river's natural form and function through the project reach (also noted below). Improve floater passage and safety within the project area.
- Limit soil erosion into the Clark Fork River by directing use to appropriate river access locations.

- *Augment Floodplain and Riparian Habitat*

- Remove waste concrete, construction debris and metal junk used to armor riverbanks in the project area and restore those banks with natural materials.
- Utilize native riparian species planted at high densities to ensure quick revegetation across the site.
- Improve riparian floodplain habitat on West Broadway Island by increasing seasonal side channels across the island.
- Develop additional ways to mitigate current and future human-caused impacts on the natural environment.
- Maintain existing native vegetation and promote establishment of desirable woody vegetation in riparian corridor .

- *Enhance Access to Recreation*

- Connect Downtown Lions Park to the adjacent riparian area by filling in portions of the irrigation ditch.
- Protect the existing bridges and gravel trail built on West Broadway Island.
- Evaluate opportunities to increase river access to individuals with mobility issues.
- Evaluate opportunities to connect the riverfront trail system along the north river bank.
- Develop and evaluate new concepts to expand public recreation opportunities and river access within the project reach, including the possible addition of river access points and/or instream wave features that balance the public's desire to recreate in the river while also improving the natural form and function of the river.

- *Improve Public Safety*

- Mitigate bank erosion along the south side of the river around Civic Stadium and the existing trail network.
- Increase the level of activity and visibility by utilizing Crime Prevention through Environmental Design concepts to improve public safety in West Broadway Island, Downtown Lions, Silver and McCormick Parks.

- Modify river hydraulics at the Silver Park boat ramp to improve access and boater safety.
- Consider floodway protection and capacity in all aspects of project design.