

City, community ready to start planning for future park on West 7th

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SAINT PAUL – With signatures from ExxonMobil, Saint Paul officials and community members said they are ready to start planning for the future park that will go where oil tanks once stood on West 7th Street.

The Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) and ExxonMobil signed off on an agreement that will transfer 36 acres in the Victoria Park neighborhood for \$1, with ExxonMobil also providing \$5 million for clean-up and redevelopment of the former industrial land into park land. ExxonMobil and the city came to the agreement in October, ending years of discussion over the future of the land.

“This property along West Seventh has been vacant for too long. Finally, we can develop this land into a community asset and continue the redevelopment that is creating new opportunities for residents and businesses in a key commercial corridor,” Mayor Chris Coleman said.

“Working collaboratively, ExxonMobil and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of the City of Saint Paul have developed a plan that will benefit both the environment and the citizens of Saint Paul,” said Kim Moore, regional program coordinator, ExxonMobil Environmental Services. “This agreement provides both the land and substantial funds to the HRA to complete the current site restoration efforts and eventually give the community a beautiful park - an excellent outcome for all parties with benefits extending well into the future.”

The property bordered by West 7th Street, Otto Avenue, Shepard Road and Montreal Way is part of the 65-acre Victoria Park development. All the 65 acres once housed oil tanks, with the other 29 acres operated by Koch Refinery Co. Both Koch and ExxonMobil shut down the operations in 1995, opening the development opportunities.

“Many years ago, the West Seventh Street neighborhood came together to develop a plan to redevelop a polluted industrial site in our midst. Now the end is in sight and Exxon's willingness to settle our case will give our neighborhood more park and recreation space that will increase the viability of the planned housing development with a park on the bluffs of the Mississippi River,” said Councilmember Dave Thune, whose ward includes the Victoria Park land.

Already, the Koch portion of the land has attracted new developments, including townhomes, a senior housing complex operated by Sholom Community Alliance, and a new Mississippi Market Natural Foods Co-op. Community members say adding an active park to the residential and commercial space will continue the neighborhood's transformation from it's industrial past.

“This is a real opportunity to create an asset that benefits all of Saint Paul,” said David Bredemus, president of the Fort Road Federation. “This will give us the space to do some great things with trails and other recreational uses the community comes up with. This is going to be a real spectacular spot.”

Mike Hahm, director of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department, said work with the community will begin after the first of the year to determine a design for the park that will benefit the neighborhood and complement the city's park system.