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City streams ahead on riverfront plans

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By **Kathy Jessup**

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Kalamazoo officials are in talks with a Novi development company that could build the cornerstone of the city's planned rebirth of its riverfront.

After the city sent information to 140 regional developers and fielded initial interest from four, Terra Land Group is the only firm that responded to the city's request for qualifications to develop what the city is calling River West, on the former KTS Industries site on the west bank of the Kalamazoo River at Harrison and Gull streets.

Concern over getting just a single response turned to optimism after a local committee visited several Terra-developed "live/work" urban projects in southeastern Michigan designed to combine street-level retail or office space with residential space on upper floors, said Jerome Kisscorni, the city's economic-development chief.

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What Terra Land Group might do with the 4.5 acres of developable riverfront here isn't known.

It won't be detailed until after the city and the developer reach sale terms for the city-owned land, including any requirements the city attaches to the project

and incentives it and the state can offer for redeveloping the former industrial property. Kisscorni said Terra will present its credentials and development vision to the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority Board and other city officials July 20.

If the initial phases go smoothly, groundbreaking on a River West project could come as soon as next spring, Kisscorni said.

The scope could eventually expand. The city has assembled additional parcels in the riverfront area that are in varying degrees of readiness for redevelopment.

River West is considered "a signature site that will set the standard for the next stage of revitalization in the riverfront area," according to a city description of the proposed land use. Officials say they hope to use the attraction of the river to upgrade land uses that traditionally have been light- to heavy-industrial, with a mix of commercial and single-family residential.


Planners say the "live/work" development concept is increasing in popularity across the United States as more people seek urban housing. New zoning approved for Kalamazoo's riverfront area won't force current property owners to change land uses, but as some existing industrial uses are phased out, new owners will have to follow the mixed-use plan.

City officials say Precision Heat Treating, a heavy-manufacturing company along the river near Gull and Harrison, will remain in the project area. However, the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority wants to work with that company and the eventual riverfront developer on "improvements to the site to make the parcels complementary."

Kalamazoo's review committee visited a Terra live/work condominium developments in Walled Lake and Ferndale and a 64-acre neighborhood project in Howell that includes apartments, townhouses, single-family homes, senior-citizen housing, retail space and public parks. If the firm gets the nod for Kalamazoo's mixed-use riverfront development, it will be its first major project in West Michigan.

"We will incorporate design principles that will honor the historic past of the site while designing and building a market-driven product," Terra Land Group said in a written explanation of its development approach. "Terra will use this project as a catalyst for future projects around the River West project."

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