



The Chattahoochee River Restoration Project

ready **2012** raft

Submission for the
2010 Georgia Planning Association
Chapter Awards

Outstanding Initiative

Uptown Columbus, Inc. and the
Business Improvement District (BID)

GPA Fall 2010 Conference

Project Overview

The Chattahoochee River has always been an economic engine for Columbus, Georgia and Phenix City, Alabama. The river has provided power to operate our mills, transportation and recreational opportunities for our communities. Over the last 20 years the economic impact of the river has been diminished in part by the closing of our historic mills. Consequently, over the past ten years we have been developing a plan that would reestablish the River as the economic engine it was in years past.

On April 26, 2010, local government and business leaders announced the Chattahoochee River Restoration Project. This project will be completed on a section of the Chattahoochee River in Uptown Columbus, Georgia, and will transform 2.5 miles of the river to its original splendor. When the project is completed, it will provide environmental benefits for the fish and vegetative habitats along this stretch of the river and provide world class white water for rafting and kayaking. This stretch of the river will have the distinction of being the longest urban whitewater venue in the world!



Unveiling of the Ready2raft Campaign
April, 2010

The Whitewater project is a two-year endeavor that will prove to be another successful public-private partnership that consists on a multi-stakeholder effort, driven by both sides of the Chattahoochee River. The committee is formed by John Turner, Steve Butler, Mat Swift, Carmen Cavezza, Ed Burdeshaw, David Arrington, Mike Gaymon, and Richard Bishop. Billy Turner works as the Project Manager for this project.

The Whitewater project will have a tremendous economic impact in the Columbus region and anticipates having the first person going down the river in 2012. The project is expected to generate a total economic impact of \$42M. More than \$2M of that will be from new sales and hotel/motel tax revenue and more than 700 new jobs will be generated. In addition, it is estimated that this project will draw visitors from a 5-hour driving radius, attracting 188,000 sports participants to the venue annually; 144,000 are expected to be from out of town.

Beyond this quantifiable data, this project not only leverages the region's natural resources but also enhances the assets already invested on both sides of the Chattahoochee (e.g., the streetscapes, the river walks, the 14th Street Bridge) to create something more spectacular and beneficial to the region. The project is expected to assist in recruiting students and talented employees for the corporations that are the economic lifeblood for the region. It will undoubtedly draw attention to the Valley region by creating the world's largest urban whitewater rafting course that can be used for multiple recreational activities such as kayaking, fishing and other water sports.

Moreover, the project will likely serve as a catalyst for the restoration of properties within this National Historic Landmark District. This restoration will allow the river to regain its historic, environmental, educational, recreational and economic function to these communities. Restoring this 2.5-mile stretch of river channel will reveal magnificent shoals and river rapids and will restore the fall line habitat for rare and endangered species like the shoal bass, mussels and shoal spider lilies.

Award Criteria

Uptown Columbus, Inc. and the Business Improvement District nominates the River Restoration Project for the 2010 Georgia Planning Association Chapter Awards under the Outstanding Initiative (A. Large Community.) We strongly believe that this project has increased the interest of the local community as well as the entire region. The project is a true public and private partnership that has stakeholders from two cities, two states, State and Federal agencies and environmental groups and community members. In addition, this project will demonstrate the importance of a broad base partnership in getting the project completed.

Past experiences show that projects are successful when they combine creative ideas and public/private partnerships. Having known that, we realized that we needed not only a clear vision and a unique approach, but we needed great partners to help us drive the project toward fruition. These days it may seem impossible for government, business and environmental groups to agree on anything, but that's precisely what's happening on the Chattahoochee River Restoration Project.



Columbus Riverwalk

The public and private partnership process started when the idea took place in the minds of local business owners and then grabbed the attention of city leaders in both Columbus and Phenix City in the mid-1990s. This has truly been a joint effort supported by two cities, two counties, two states, our federal government, environmental groups, historic groups, recreation groups, economic development groups, and tourism groups. This effort has also been joined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who also helped fund the River Restoration Plan as the "Chattahoochee Fall Line Ecosystem Restoration Project" and approved the project during the early stages. Other organizations such as Georgia Power and Columbus Water Works have also joined our efforts since the very beginning.

Collecting funds is normally one of the biggest challenges faced by any project, but in this case project leaders made it easier by creatively thinking in advance and raising public and private money to purchase two obsolete mill dams in the 90's. Those dams were then transferred under the control of Uptown Columbus, Inc., a non-profit organization chartered to encourage and support quality development and redevelopment in Uptown Columbus. Private donations, city funds and federal grants will soon be combined to pay for breaching the dams and restoring the river flow. More than half of the necessary funds have already been collected and it is estimated that around \$4 to \$5 million still needs to be raised. This all happened due to partnerships and the stakeholder group created.



Conceptual View of the Chattahoochee River that Incorporates the Whitewater Project, the Riverwalk Extension, and the Rails-to-Trails Project

The whitewater project was built around two main ideas: environmentally enhancing this stretch of the river and making it one of the greatest attractions in our region and perhaps in the world. Our master plan was designed with that purpose in mind. We wanted to take advantage of the river which in recent years has not been fully utilized, then make it more attractive by combining several other projects that have already been completed or are close to being completed, such as the Riverwalk, the Rails-to-Trails Project and the 14th Street bridge and plaza project. This restoration effort will also allow the river to regain its historic, environmental, educational, recreational and economic

function to these communities.

Understanding the river was one of our first priorities, so for the past 10+ years we have used the most sophisticated technology to probe it, sonared it, computer-modeled it, photographed it, biologically sampled it, historic-resource surveyed it, and master planned it. The benefit of all that work is that we now know the river very well and fully appreciate the dramatic impact that restoring it will have on this community. According to a study completed by Columbus State University, the River Restoration Project will have a tremendous economic impact in the Columbus region since it is expected to generate a total economic impact of \$4.2M. More than \$2M of that will be from new sales and hotel/motel tax revenue and more than 700 new jobs will be generated. In addition, it is estimated that this project will draw visitors from a 5-hour driving radius, attracting 188,000 sports participants to the venue annually; 144,000 are expected to be from out of town.

The project will divert the river's flow into an engineered whitewater course that will begin south of the North Highlands dam, around 35th Street, and end near 11th Street. Over its 2.5 mile course, there will be an overall drop in elevation of about 40 feet. As part of the project, the Eagle & Phenix dam below 13th Street and the City Mills dam by 18th Street will be taken apart. Once the dams are breached, the river will regain its free-flowing state for the first time since 1828. Project leaders also envision a "standing wave" that appears under certain conditions near the end of the Eagle and Phenix rapids-one that could be used for everything from kayaking to surfing competitions. W.C. Bradley is also evaluating the possibility of turning some of the river's abandoned mill buildings into mixed-use developments, with property values along the river poised to increase by as much as 60 percent as a result of the whitewater attraction.

This project will not only bring thousands of visitors, but will bring more students and young professionals to the area who are looking for a vibrant city to live and work. Current employers will also be able to retain their employees and will reduce recruitment and retention costs. This phenomenon could also be seen in colleges and universities. Other communities could offer similar attractions and benefits, but not that many places have the opportunity to offer it all like we do.

A successful plan could only be accomplished with a detailed time table that describes every step of the process. As illustrated in the graphic, this project plan (see attachment) starts with the Ready2Raft campaign launched this past April and will end with the grand opening in 2012. Hundreds of people attended the press conference held in April including city officials from both sides of the river, business leaders, local media, and residents of the area. As part of our public outreach efforts, we have created a page on facebook to keep people updated on the process. The page has now 1,760 fans. Several magazines and local newspapers have featured the project in their written materials and websites. Attached you'll find articles from the Columbus and the Valley Magazine and Spectrum Magazine.



Facebook Page

In the Media

WTVM 9 COVERAGE YOU CAN COUNT ON

Whitewater rafting to bring 700 new jobs

By Taylor Barnhill - [email] Twitter

COLUMBUS, Ga (WTVM) - Hundreds of jobs, millions of dollars and lots of fun are making their way to the valley in the form of white water rafting.

It's a project 22 years in the making and now it's official, white water rafting is coming to the area. The new campaign "Ready 2 Raft 2012" is a joint effort between Columbus and Macon city and organizers tell us it's a long awaited announcement.

Sally Turner, a member of the River Restoration Committee, told News Channel 9, "It's like my children and Christmas all rolled into one. This has been a long time coming. It never even occurred to us when we started planning in 1989 that it would take this long but it's worth it."

The project will create 700 new jobs and is estimated to bring in \$42 million annually from tourists and tourists.

"We need people and people bring retail and restaurant development and hotel development and that's exactly what we expect to happen," said John Turner.

Sally Turner, the 8i-Scate Project Manager added, "188,000 visitors will come to the river on an annual basis and \$44,000 a five out of town. That's a \$45 million economic impact, new hotel rooms and \$1.7 million in new state tax."

The project is a partnership between both Columbus and Macon. City will invest more than 1700 community members. Although it is a plan twelve years in the making, organizers plan to announce startline building process in mid-July.

Sally Turner said, "We hope to have someone, the first person, rafting down the Chattahoochee in 2012 and we will be waiting towards that every day and then."

<http://www.wtvm.com/Global/story.asp?S=12378721>

NBC AUGUSTA.com August 26, 2010 10:48 AM EDT

Augusta's Only News at 7pm

Columbus, GA to construct whitewater course

COLUMBUS, Ga (AP) - Government and business leaders in Columbus say the city will have a whitewater course on the Chattahoochee River starting by 2012.

Officials announced the project on Monday and estimate the project cost at \$23 million. They say the stimulus economy impact could be up to \$42 million.

John Turner of the W.C. Bradley Co. says construction should start in May 2011.

Upper Columbus President Richard Blings said the finished course is expected to create 700 jobs and draw 180,000 visitors annually.

The plan is to divert the river's flow and to the apart the Eagle & Phenix turn cover 130 feet and the City Mill turn near 18th Street. They would all construct an engineered whitewater course that fits the river's more rapids flow.

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<http://www.nbcaugusta.com/news/local/92185314.html>

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"Whitewater" Coming To Columbus

By Taja Bengels

ATLANTA — Columbus officials say a multi-million dollar whitewater course will transform its portion of the Chattahoochee River, creating jobs, economic investment and thousands of outdoor enthusiasts.

More than a decade in planning, the go-ahead has been given to construct a whitewater course in the river. The project will involve bringing in the river down to help reconfigure the river to the sport.

Columbus and business leaders have been up on the economic impact of the development since the work is done.

John Turner with the River Development Planning Committee says for many years he has been hearing about the idea of whitewater rafting in the area.

And Turner says a big change to history for people viewing along the Chattahoochee's banks, given the river's industrial past.

"If the project is completed, it will be a major step in making the river the way we want to see it, a fun and exciting place to spend our leisure time along the river because it's going to become a great place to visit."

Turner estimates a jump of 60 percent in the number of projects with the river of the whitewater course being open.

As for how Columbus will benefit, Turner says a big part of it will be the jobs that will be created.

"We have the benefit of stable flow of water and water the southernmost good whitewater in the eastern United States. The water temperatures are cooler and then all of that is working in our favor, in addition to being usable."

<http://www.gpb.org/news/2010/04/27/whitewater-coming-to-columbus>

ledger-enquirer.com

Update: Proponents say Columbus' \$23 million Chattahoochee River whitewater project's ready to launch, could be finished by 2012

Construction could start in May 2011

By TIM CHITWOOD - tchitwood@ledger-enquirer.com

In an announcement full of wind and waves of applause, proponents Monday proclaimed Columbus will have a 2.5-mile downtown river whitewater course by 2012.

The project's price tag is estimated at \$23 million, its economic impact at \$42 million.

The announcement by local government and business leaders came during a program on the 14th Street Bridge, where gusty winds nearly unveiled the project logo "Ready2Raft" before presenters were prepared to show it off.

Proponents of the whitewater plan expect the work can be finished over two summers, while the Chattahoochee River's running low. John Turner of the W.C. Bradley Co. said the project should begin next May but not.

<http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/2010/04/26/1101404/update-proponents-say-columbus.html>