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The Grand Strategy: Protect, Rethink and Include – A Plan to Build Resilience Along the River

KENT COUNTY, MI - Kent County, Grand Rapids and a number of other communities are in the running for millions in federal dollars to aid in protecting life and property, while promoting economic vitality through job creation, job protection, while boosting and protecting property values for low- to moderate-income families. This comprehensive, region-wide proposal came through our joint Kent County/Grand Rapids Emergency Manager; the idea is to place regions and communities in a position that they eliminate the need to call FEMA again. The proposal, called "The Grand Strategy," could do just that.

After Superstorm Sandy, Congress appropriated \$1 billion as part of a national program to create resilient communities – to help them bounce-back quicker from unpredictable, natural events like tornadoes, floods, or drought. Municipalities along the Grand River qualified to participate in the competition through a submission by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, as a result of the 2013 Flood that caused significant damage in Kent County, Lowell, Ada, Cascade, Plainfield Township, the Cities of Grand Rapids, Walker and Grandville.

"This is yet another collaborative effort of Kent County and the region - an inclusive effort," said Wayman Britt, Kent County Assistant County Administrator. "'The Grand Strategy' emphasizes restoring and working with nature to more effectively manage future flood events throughout the county and to protect vulnerable populations in both urban and suburban communities. This is not about sustaining the old; it is about improving the present and setting the stage for an exceptional future."

67 communities entered the competition; the Kent County region was one of 40 selected to advance to round two of the competition. Awards range from \$1 million to \$500 Million. "The City of Grand Rapids is very enthused by the quality of the partnership we've had in preparation of this Grand Strategy," said Eric Delong, Grand Rapids Deputy City Manager. "Our ability to work this rapidly on such a major regional endeavor is because we all planned ahead together. The application so much reflects all of the work we've done, along with community planning efforts such as Green Grand Rapids and GRForward, to get ahead on resiliency, sustainability, and flood control mitigation. It's amazing how all of that work accelerated this application. The quality of our planning is excellent and we are in a great position to create a resilient river city."



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The team leading “The Grand Strategy” grant proposal have identified about \$444 million in strong projects – existing projects that had been previously discussed and evaluated but were outside the current financial ability of the various jurisdictions to complete alone. With community partners identifying close to \$200 million in support, these projects to protect the communities may now be fiscally viable in today’s environment of tight budgets. Our proposal asks HUD for close to \$244 million.

“Implementing the Grand Strategy to restore the Grand River and build up our region’s resilience to extreme flooding will not only help stave off expensive and debilitating disaster,” said Andy Guy, Chief Outcomes Officer at Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. “The initiative will significantly improve West Michigan’s quality of life, leverage substantial private investment in community building, and catalyze the region’s next generation of growth and success. For these reasons the National Disaster Resilience Competition presents a timely and potentially game-changing opportunity for our region.”

Together, the numerous participating municipalities have developed a Three Fold Strategy that includes:

- Establishing an equitable and inclusive river corridor that attracts, welcomes and serves a diversity of people;
- Restoring and repurposing land to achieve economic, environmental and social resiliency;
- Protecting critical infrastructure to safeguard public health and to sustain the economy.

The collaborative strategy includes a portfolio of 65 coordinated countywide projects and initiatives that would provide:

- Resilient Flood Protection along Grand River from Lowell to Grandville;
- Economic opportunities;
- Enhanced access and recreational opportunities;
- Improved habitat, connectivity and water quality.

Some projects include improvements to lift stations, better protection of clean water and waste water facilities, drain improvements, and improved river response for rescues or evacuations. “The Grand Strategy” team sent our regional strategy to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation this week and will work with MEDC on finalizing a HUD submittal in October. The decision on funding should occur in the first quarter of 2016.

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