



STATEMENT FOR LAKE GENEVA PLAN COMMISSION 9/16/2017

On proposed White River Holdings LLC amendments to Comprehensive Plan

The Geneva Lake Conservancy would like to suggest alternatives to the proposed land uses requested by WHITE RIVER HOLDINGS to amend the land uses of the Hillmoor property.

First, we believe that their proposal to change the majority of the property to Planned Mixed Use will create too much density along Highway 50, where traffic is already a problem and believe this area should instead be designated Neighborhood Mixed Use, which would permit less density.

Second, the GLC is requesting that 60 acres of floodplain the developer has requested be retained as Private Recreation land use, be amended instead to PUBLIC PARK AND OPEN SPACE. This supports the land use designated for this 60 acres in the Lake Geneva Park and Open Space Plan 2015-2020, which on page 50 says:

**“Lake Geneva residents expressed a desire for natural recreation areas in 2007 and again in 2014. The city obtained a WisDNR grant to obtain 60 acres of wetland White River property located north of White River city lands. It is recommended that the city continue to actively pursue acquisition and development of that property (the 60 acres of Hillmoor floodplain) as an accessible natural area.”**

The PRIVATE RECREATION land use that the developer is requesting does not require public access. Yet, the city itself has planned that these 60 acres along the White River be opened to the public for canoeing, kayaking, fishing and other recreational activities.

A PUBLIC PARK AND OPEN SPACE land use designation allows for biking and hiking trails, parks, public kayak and canoe launches, and public natural or conservancy preservation areas. It would allow the Conservancy to ensure that the conservation values of this floodplain are enhanced, not diminished.

The Conservancy is requesting this alternative land use designation for these reasons:

- **THIS 60 ACRES IS PART OF A PRIMARY ENVIRONMENTAL CORRIDOR.** This environmental corridor is essential to the environmental health of the entire Lake Geneva area and its wildlife. This land should be restored to environmental health by removing invasive species, stabilizing river banks and creating stream buffer zones to prevent polluted runoff into the River.
- **A HILLMOOR PUBLIC PARK WOULD TAKE PRESSURE OFF LAKE GENEVA’S LAKEFRONT PARKS AND SHORE PATH by providing alternative hiking trails and park uses.** In addition, while the city provides kayak launches into Geneva Lake it has no kayak access to the White River. The Lake Geneva Park and Open Space Plan 2015-2020 states: “Given the popular demand for lake and river-based kayaking facilities reported in the survey, river launch sites should be considered for the proposed White River city lands.” Lake Geneva’s city parks are small and this 60 acre site could accommodate a host of new recreational activities. The land is also **well positioned for**

**new biking and hiking trails that would link with existing city and county biking and walking areas.**

- **THIS WHITE RIVER SEGMENT CONTAINS THREATENED SPECIES** -- According to the City's Comprehensive Plan (page 28) the entire length of the White River within the Hillmoor property is classified as an aquatic area of county and regional significance. "The portion of the river from the outlet at Geneva Lake extending 1.7 miles downstream is a critical stream reach, containing the Longear Sunfish, a threatened species, and the Least Darter, a species of special concern," according to the Comprehensive Plan. Excessive fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals used by a private developer could destroy these species' habitat. Public protection of these species habitat would be afforded by a Public Parks and Open Space designation.
- **THESE WETLANDS NEED UPGRADING FOR BETTER FLOOD CONTROL** -- This 60 acres of Hillmoor contains some of the 6 percent of city land classified as wetlands, essential for flood control for surrounding neighborhoods and help maintain groundwater and surface water quality. The current private recreation land use designation provides no assurance that they will be properly managed for flood control and filtering of surface water. White River Holdings says they will restore these areas and establish a biking trail, but the real estate LLC may turn around once the property is rezoned and sell it to another developer who will have no interest in managing this environmental corridor for the public benefit. Commercial developers often turn their backs on wetlands once they have developed the upland property.
- **THE LAKE GENEVA PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PLAN 2015-2020 CALLS FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE EFFORTS TO CREATE PARKS. Designating this 60 acres as Public Park and Open Space would allow the Geneva Lakes Conservancy and city to partner to buy it and open it for public access.** The City and Conservancy would be eligible for thousands of dollars of federal, state and local grants that a for-profit company like White River Holdings cannot receive. These include grants for removing invasive species, restoring streambanks, planting native species and building hiking and biking trails.

The Plan Commission should make its land use decisions based on recommendations of consultants and city officials who developed the Lake Geneva Parks and Open Space plan for 2015-2020, not the needs of a developer. The Parks and Open Space plan recommendations were clear about Hillmoor. They were developed based on surveys and public meetings with city residents who favored that at least 60 acres of the Hillmoor parcel be developed for public use.

The Conservancy would also support an amendment that would designate the entire Hillmoor property as PUBLIC PARKS AND OPEN SPACE. However, we recognize that to buy this property from its current owner would require the city and its residents to raise at least \$4 to \$5 million. Blaine Osborn, city administrator, says there are no public grants of this size to fund this proposal. The GLC has checked with its private donors and there is currently little interest. This means that a county referendum would be needed to raise taxes for this purchase.

While we would support this effort, we believe currently the BEST solution is to work with the city and the developer to protect one third of this property as publicly accessible open space.

The Conservancy has been very successful in forming partnerships like this. We are currently working with the Village of Williams Bay's Kishwauketoe group to develop the Helen Rohner Children's Fish Park on land we recently purchased, we expect to complete a conservation easement

protecting part of a Lake Delavan estate as a wildlife preserve by year end and to close on a contract opening 77 acres along Sugar Creek for public access in the fourth quarter. WE NEED MORE PUBLIC RECREATIONAL LANDS IN WALWORTH COUNTY. We would like to add the Hillmoor Conservancy to our list of projects. It would benefit the city, residents and visitors, water and wildlife conservation and the developer by adding value to his planned residential and commercial buildings.

The Geneva Lake Conservancy hopes that the plan commission will agree with these alternatives to the developer's requested amendments. Thank you.

Approved by the Geneva Lake Conservancy Board of Directors 10/14/17