

# Wabasha County Herald

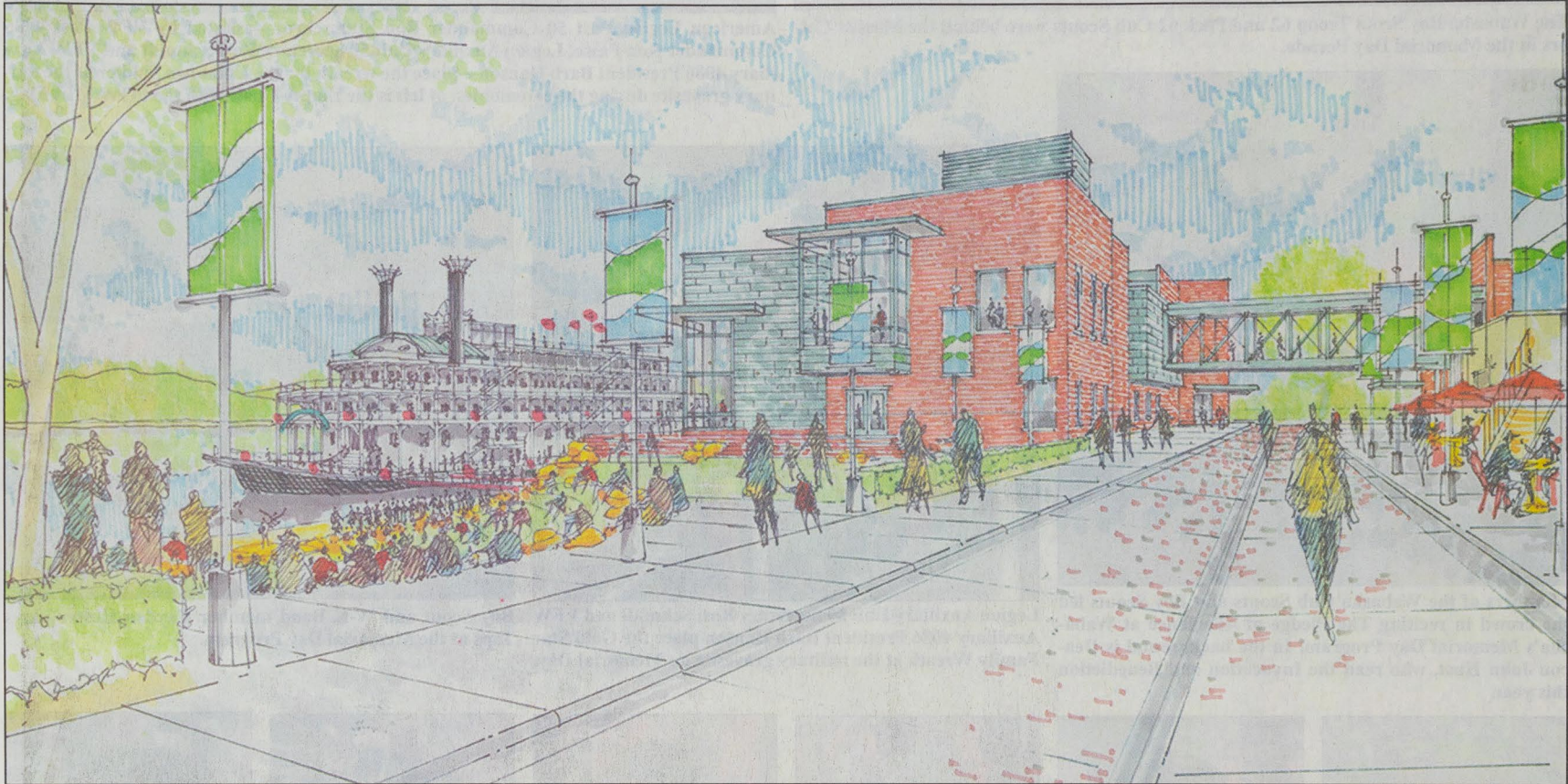
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## \$8 million for Wabasha!



An Artist's Concept of what the Big Jo Alley area between the river and West Main Street would look like after the riverfront development project and Eagle Center expansion would be completed, with the National Eagle Center in the center background and a riverboat tied up at the new City Dock at left. A skyway would connect the NEC to its exhibit spaces on Main Street, and to the rest of the downtown area. All of this can be possible with the signing of the State bonding bill which will bring \$8.1 million to Wabasha.

### Bonding bill signing means Eagle Center, riverfront projects can proceed

by Michael Smith  
Herald Editor

The City of Wabasha and the National Eagle Center will receive \$8.1 million in funding under the bonding proposal signed last Wednesday by Governor Mark Dayton.

"This is a great opportunity for the City of Wabasha," City Administrator Chad Springer commented. "This was a lot of work to get us to this point, but it will not get any easier. This was a great team effort. While this is an investment in riverfront improvements for the City of Wabasha and the NEC ex-

pansion, if we do this right it will be a win for all of Wabasha and Southeast Minnesota."

Bonding funds will support a major expansion of the National Eagle Center to provide additional space for live eagles and accommodate demand for its hallmark educational programs, as well as the riverfront and Big Jo Alley improvements.

"This is HUGE affirmation of the confidence the State has in Wabasha. It's VERY exciting!" National Eagle Center Executive Director Rolf Thompson added.

The bonding provision also in-

cludes funding for the development of museum exhibit space for the world's most comprehensive collection of eagle related art, historical and cultural artifacts and ephemera from the 18th century to the present day. The collection, amassed over 40 years by private collector Preston Cook, consists of more than 20,000 museum quality items representing the symbolism and significance of

eagles in American culture. The collection was gifted to the National Eagle Center in 2016.

"We appreciate that the Governor and Legislature recognized the uniqueness of Wabasha and the economic opportunity and value an expanded National Eagle Center represents for the entire state," said Thompson.

This State of Minnesota bonding provision is a portion of a \$16.2 mil-

lion National Eagle Center expansion project. A capital campaign is underway to raise the remaining \$8 million through private philanthropy.

"We've already raised over \$2 million from Wabasha sources," Thompson explained. "We'll be reaching out...far beyond Wabasha, taking our capital campaign on a much broader, national scale. We'll be contacting a wide variety of foundations and corporations as we seek to raise this \$8 million."

**'...if we do this right it will be a win for all of Wabasha and Southeast Minnesota.'**  
—City Administrator Chad Springer



# Bonding Bill

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Mayor Rollin Hall said it was important for everyone from Wabasha to note that no portion of this \$8.1 million will be raised through local property taxes. "This fund raising effort will NOT affect your property taxes," he said. "This \$8.1 million will be raised through a capital campaign with contributions from many sources."

Thompson added, "The Eagle Center has engaged a consulting firm to assist them and the City in this fund raising effort."

According to Hall, there has been a lot of what's known as "soft planning" on the project to this point—such as concept drawings (such as shown on Page 1) and riverfront needs assessments, but actual architectural and design plans will be the next step.

"We will begin to work on that phase of the project immediately," Thompson noted, adding that that part of this effort couldn't be done until funding was secured, due to the obvious cost. "If all goes well, we would love to break ground on the project by the summer of 2019. But that will all depend on the fundraising progress and other factors."

Regarding the inclusion of Wabasha in the state bonding bill, which was a major step in this effort in the first place, Hall and Thompson noted that Wabasha has had experience getting state bonding, doing so the first time around, prior to the awarding of \$1 million by the State for the construction of the Eagle Center, which opened in 2007. "That

money was half bonding money and half general appropriation funding," Hall stated.

"Knowing the State already had an investment in the Eagle Center and the fact that we've provided a good return on that investment over the years, helped us immensely in being included this year," Thompson believes. "Obviously, when Rep. (Barb) Haley and Sen. (Mike) Goggin came on board and really took it on and championed our cause, it helped, as well."

"Representative Haley and Senator Goggin have indeed been our champions and we are grateful to them," Hall added.

Hall credited Thompson for getting involved with the Rochester Chamber of Commerce and Rep. Dave Senjem of that city, who is the Chair of the Senate Capital Investment Committee, which oversees the state bonding bills.

"Rolf made numerous trips to Rochester to stay connected and seek support for this effort, explaining how Wabasha's gain would also be Rochester's. It paid off, I feel. Just being there...and getting known, made a difference. He never let up."

"Showing up all this while in Rochester meant a lot. People took notice, including Mr. Senjem."

Thompson also made numerous trips to the State Capitol in recent years to seek support from state legislators, including the Speaker of the House and Senate Majority Leader. Both men be-

lieve his efforts ultimately paid off. "It put Wabasha and the National Eagle Center firmly in their minds."

"This whole project will secure Wabasha's vitality, I feel, for many years," Thompson added. "The National Eagle Center provides not just local benefits, but regional and state benefits, as well, in terms of the dollars it generates and the recognition and affirmation of Wabasha and the Eagle Center as something that enhances the state. "Our goal has always been for this to be a catalyst for downtown development, including the expansion of our exhibit space onto Main Street. It's a \$16 million investment in the community."

"It will be the culmination of the vision that we all had when we began this effort that started when the Con Agra (nee: International Multifoods, Big Jo) flour mill closed."

The National Eagle Center is a world-class interpretive center located on the banks of the Mississippi River in Wabasha, Minnesota. The center has a reputation as the most comprehensive resource on bald and golden eagles in the world, has five live eagles in their care, and provides its visitors with a very rare learning experience. It is in the top 6% of museums in Minnesota and last year drew over 83,000 visitors from 50 states and 110 countries.

(**Ed Hahn** of the National Eagle Center contributed this article.)

A related committee photo can be found elsewhere in this issue.)