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'Wild Mile' Proposed for North Branch Canal

A plan to improve the North Branch Canal with a public boardwalk, natural landscaping and educational resources would move forward through a funding proposal introduced to City Council today by Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

"This initiative will improve the North Branch Canal as a truly unique waterfront for the entire city, where visitors will be able to engage and appreciate the city's ecosystem through unprecedented public access," said Mayor Emanuel.

To be financed by \$250,000 in Open Space Impact Fees, the plan would create a framework for the development of a "wild mile" along the canal that includes habitat improvements, pedestrian walkways, fishing stations, vegetative islands, viewing platforms, canoe launches and other amenities that cater to the public and wildlife. The plan would also include cost estimates and best practices for implementation, including cooperation with private property owners and developers.

The plan would focus on the east side of the canal between Division Street and North Avenue and be completed by the end of the year.

The enhancements are identified among the strategic goals of the "North Branch Framework Plan," adopted by City Council in May 2017 to revitalize the North Branch Industrial Corridor with a variety of land use, open space and transportation improvements.

An additional \$250,000 in Open Space Impact Fees would be used to construct a public pier or platform along the shoreline at Eastman Street, which would serve as a prototype for other access improvements along the canal's length. The project would be designed to include educational resources for area students and children.

Open Space Impact Fees are generated by new residential development projects to improve and expand public open spaces within the City's 77 community areas.

The development of the canal plan and construction of the pier would be completed by the end of the year.

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