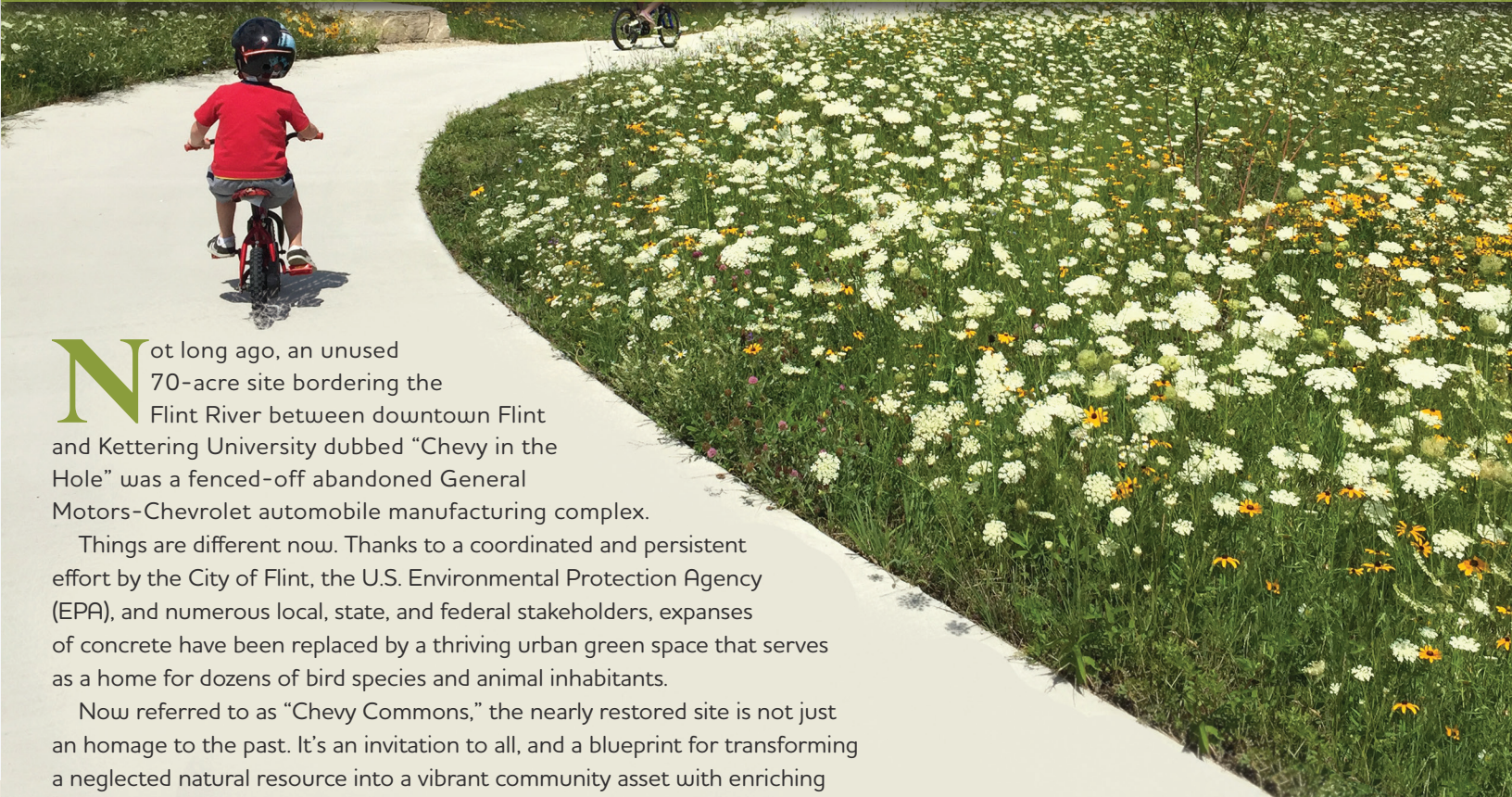


CHEVY COMMONS

ENRICHING FLINT THROUGH GREEN SPACES

By Faith Finholm, Scot Lautzenheiser, Adam Moore, and Janet Van De Winkle



Not long ago, an unused 70-acre site bordering the Flint River between downtown Flint and Kettering University dubbed “Chevy in the Hole” was a fenced-off abandoned General Motors-Chevrolet automobile manufacturing complex.

Things are different now. Thanks to a coordinated and persistent effort by the City of Flint, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and numerous local, state, and federal stakeholders, expanses of concrete have been replaced by a thriving urban green space that serves as a home for dozens of bird species and animal inhabitants.

Now referred to as “Chevy Commons,” the nearly restored site is not just an homage to the past. It’s an invitation to all, and a blueprint for transforming a neglected natural resource into a vibrant community asset with enriching and lasting impacts for generations to come.

Flint Riverfront Restoration

To understand what Chevy Commons brings to the community, the project must be put into context. The land itself has a long and storied past. A General Motors manufacturing center with 8,000 workers at its peak in the early 1900s, the site made national history during the labor movement when the Flint Sit Down Strike of 1937 transformed the United Auto Workers (UAW) into a major nationwide labor union.

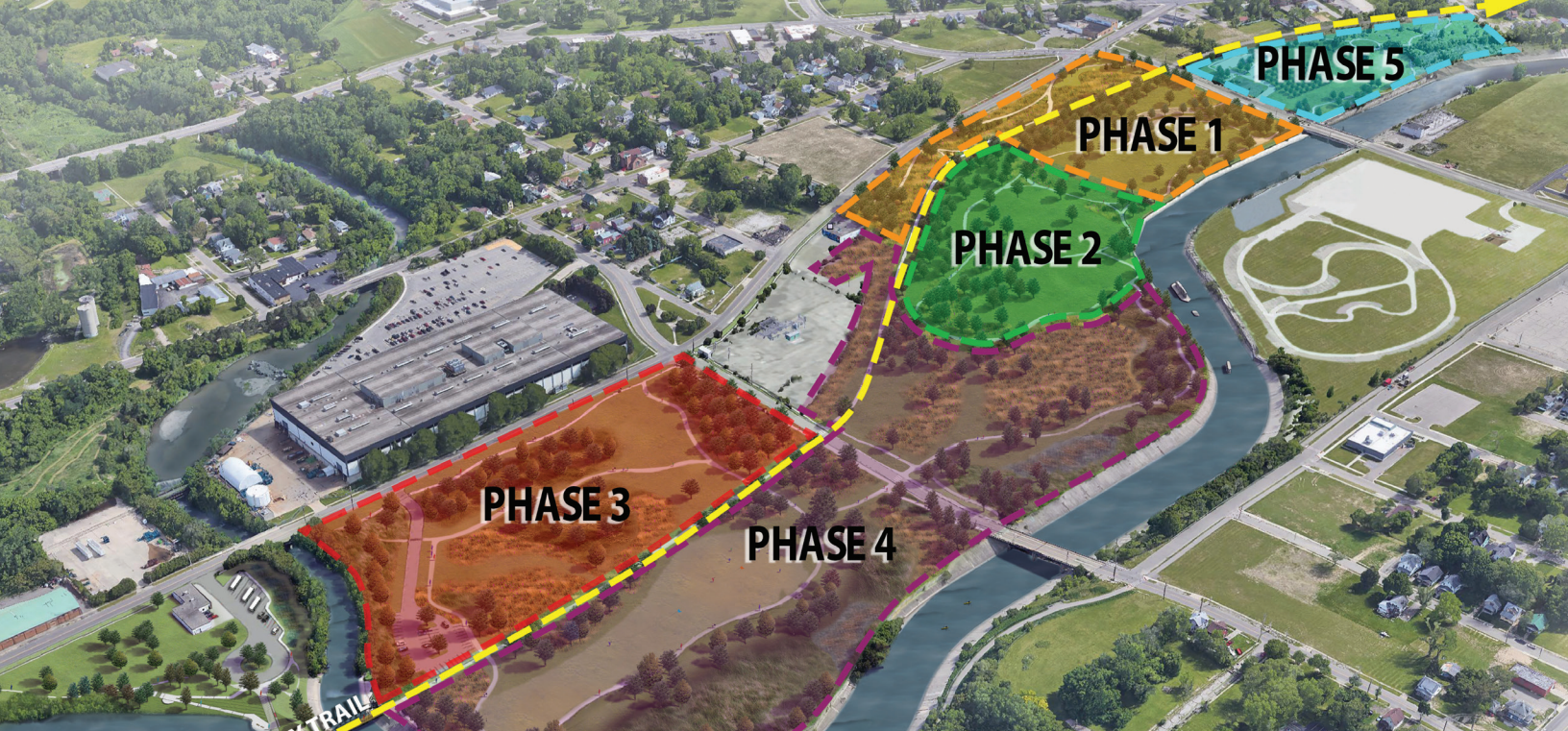
Transformation of the area from a former industrial site to green space is the first major land use change at the site in almost a century, reflecting changing times in Flint. The greening of Chevy Commons showcases the focus on improving quality of life for Flint residents, and the importance of cleaning up post-industrial sites so they can be repurposed as assets for the community.

Chevy Commons is one of three major pieces of the larger project known as the Flint Riverfront Restoration Plan, which is focusing on creating connected green spaces along a two-mile stretch of a rehabilitated Flint River. The plan was written in 2010, vetted by more than 5,000 stakeholders, and included in 2013 as part of “Imagine Flint: Master Plan for a Sustainable Flint”—the city’s first comprehensive master plan in 50 years. The concept of the Riverfront Restoration plan calls for rejuvenation of the area along the Flint River by focusing on creating better, safer access to the river using water-based recreation, storm water and flood control, ecological restoration, and public space improvements.



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To date, the Flint Riverfront Restoration progress has included five phases of Chevy Commons development that combines an extensive trail network with native landscapes. Construction of Phases 1 and 2 began in 2015, with 30 acres fully rehabilitated and turned over for public use. An additional nine acres for Phase 3 was completed in July. Phase 4, which got underway in May

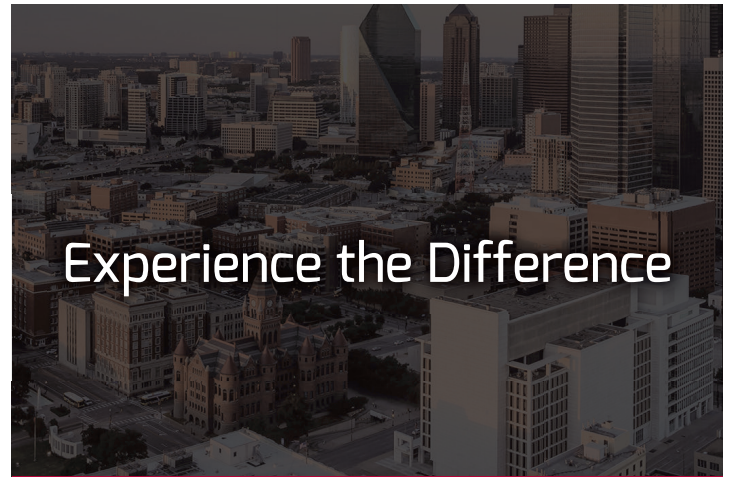
thanks to a \$3.3 million appropriation from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Strategic Water Quality Initiatives Fund, addresses 22 acres and should be fully rehabilitated and ready for public use before the end of the year. The fifth and final phase of the area's remaining nine acres is under design and anticipated to be completed in 2019.



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From BROWN to GREEN

After General Motors vacated the land, it sat unutilized for years, slowly becoming an eyesore in the community with contaminated soils and groundwater. Redevelopment required an innovative approach to naturalize the riverfront. Extensive environmental assessment funded by EPA was completed to determine contamination levels on the site and analyze potential methods for addressing the contamination issues. Ultimately, studies recommended a method of isolating contaminated soils with a soil cap that would support a matrix of native plant communities. Implementation of the design was planned to ensure that the residual industrial contamination does not pose a threat to the community or site visitors. In addition, old vaults and inactive drains and sewers were filled to contain and limit movement of the site's subsurface water and contaminated soils into groundwater and surface water sources.

Cleanup activities were kickstarted by a \$1.975 million cleanup action funded by EPA's Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund

Vision for Community Revitalization


Chevy Commons' distinct and undulating topography, mixed landscape typologies, and maximized viewpoints to the river and naturalized landscape are inviting. The site has quickly become a magnet for community events and gatherings, creating a sense of place in the community and attracting visitors from across Genesee County. A free gathering aptly named "Cycling Circles" has met annually at Chevy Commons since the first two phases were opened to the public in 2016, encouraging visitors to participate in various cycling-themed activities and ride the trail that provides varied terrain for walking, biking and hiking. The Corridor Alliance Chapter of the Flint River Watershed Coalition organizes the family-friendly event, which also offers contests for kids, giveaways, and snacks.

The impressive progress at the site is entirely reflective of the intergovernmental partnerships, the public-private partnerships, and community input throughout. Many of these partnerships are unique to Flint and Genesee County. It has taken an incredible



in 2010. In 2012, the Genesee County Treasurer provided a \$1.6 million EPA Revolving Loan Cleanup Sub-Grant to address environmental concerns and construct the initial phases of the landscaped cap.

With generous funding from multiple local, state, and federal stakeholders, the City of Flint, Genesee County Land Bank Authority, and Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission are currently working together to continue the original planned redevelopment of the area into a park-like space that features open grasslands, storm water marshes, reforested woodlands, an event lawn, and wetlands interlaced with trails that will ultimately link to surrounding institutions, neighborhoods, and regional trails. The greening comprises habitat restoration, storm water management, and improved connectivity. Once all the trails are complete, this site will connect the University Avenue Corridor, Mott Park, and the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood with Downtown Flint. It will also complete the connection between the regional Genesee Valley Trail and the Flint River and Iron Belle Trails.

amount of communication and teamwork, but the collaboration has resulted in the best possible design and outcome for the City of Flint and its residents. It is truly something of which the entire community can be proud. 

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