

# Rock Island Armory Demolition Makes Way for Riverfront Park

## Planning & Redevelopment Division

4/9/08

### Rock Island Armory Demolition Makes Way for Riverfront Park

Rock Island Armory demolition started April 9, 2009 with a public ceremony officiated by Mayor Mark Schwiebert. Williams / Valley Construction Management LLC are the construction managers of the park project. Valley Construction, the sub-contractor for the Armory demolition, swung the first wrecking ball. The demolition will prepare the way for a new riverfront park in Downtown Rock Island that will offer spectacular views of the Mississippi River, and will include a performance stage, small pavilion, playgrounds, gardens, and other amenities. The \$10 million park is expected to be completed in 2010.

[Five hundred souvenir postcards were distributed at the event](#), and will be available to the public while supplies last. Contact the City's Planning & Redevelopment Division at 309.732.2900 or visit their office on the second floor of City Hall, 1528 Third Avenue.

#### Armory History

The construction of the Rock Island Armory began with a ground breaking by Governor Henry Horner on March 8, 1936. The building was designed by Benj. A. Horn, a prominent Rock Island architect. The general contractor for the Armory was Coath & Goss of Chicago. It was built at a cost of \$400,000, made possible through the national building program and the Public Works Administration (PWA). The Armory was to be the headquarters of two National Guard units and the Rock Island Naval Reserve.

The monolithic steel reinforced concrete structure is 232 feet long, 148 feet wide, and 65 feet high with a total area of approximately 80,000 square feet and is three stories tall. The free-span barrel vaulted roof is supported by eight steel girders weighing 18 tons each and maintains a clear height of 45 feet.

The Armory was dedicated by Illinois Governor Horner on Armistice Day, November 11, 1937. The dedication was attended by more than 3,000 persons, and was preceded by a parade through the downtown district.

A unique feature of the Armory is that the structure itself is part of the massive seawall that protects Rock Island from the Mississippi River flooding. Originally, the flood wall was made of stone riprap. Following the flood of 1965, a reinforced concrete flood wall was incorporated into the building's structure, in conjunction with the construction of an overall flood protection system for the city.

In 1996, the National Guard vacated the Armory for a new facility, and requested proposals for purchase of the building and property. The City of Rock Island submitted the only proposal, with a purchase price of \$90,000. The offer was accepted with approval by Governor James Edgar in January 1997.

After much public debate, the City of Rock Island determined the highest and best use of the riverfront site was to demolish the Armory. Illinois Historic Preservation Agency approved release of the covenant (allowing the partial or complete demolition to proceed) on May 10, 2007.

#### RiverVision Project

The Cities of Rock Island and Davenport, together with corporate and community groups, completed a bi-state public planning process in 2003 that resulted in the [RiverVision plan](#) being unanimously

adopted by both cities in 2004. This bi-state plan, the only one of its kind in the nation, was the basis for the U.S. Conference of Mayors awarding First Place honors to Davenport and Rock Island in the 2007 City Livability Awards, calling RiverVision “a far-reaching and broadly participatory waterfront plan that provides a coordinated framework for channeling development and configuring urban public open space to improve the quality of living in Davenport and Rock Island.”

RiverVision is built on five strategic goals:

- Connect Rock Island and Davenport.
- Capitalize on the unique qualities of Rock Island and Davenport.
- Create new urban parks appropriate for each city.
- Identify catalysts for spurring economic development.
- Phase project implementation to demonstrate early success.

### **Riverfront Park**

An important element of the RiverVision Plan in Rock Island is development of [Armory Park](#), approximately one-fifth mile of river frontage adjacent to downtown. Much of the area was formerly used to support a riverboat gaming operation, which has now relocated to the City’s southwest area, at the interchange of IL-92 and I-280. A key element in moving forward with the Armory Park development project has been to remove the obsolete and deteriorated former National Guard Armory building.

The City started working with Schreiber /Anderson Associates Inc. to design concepts for the riverfront park in 2004. Sub-contractors for the design include: Stanley Consultants for structural engineering and permitting, Gere ~ Dimer Architects as architects, KJWW Engineering Consultants as electrical engineer, and WESCO Fountain, Inc. for fountain mechanicals.

The park has several project goals:

1. Maximize use and flexibility of the green.
2. Iconic space on river.
3. Aesthetically pleasing, creative design.
4. Water access - physical & visual.
5. Public boat docks.
6. Retain flood control.
7. Capture river views.
8. Meet park programming needs.
9. Linkage to downtown and The District.
10. Enhance downtown and riverfront redevelopment opportunity.

After reviewing many options, holding a series of meetings to gain public comment in 2005-06, and refining the plans, City Council selected a preferred concept to move forward with design and development in February 2008. [The preferred concept is the Armory Silhouette concept.](#)

The Armory Silhouette concept includes a main stage area and great lawn that mimics the Armory’s footprint. The park will also include a water feature, an observation shelter, riverfront promenade, rain garden, playground equipment, urban beach, restrooms, parking, and flood protection. The plan includes an area for a dock, which could be added in the future. The park will include green space, plants, and trees, along with some hard surfaces.

The City’s Armory Park, once built, will establish a beautiful riverfront area for public use that provides a year-round venue for arts and entertainment, recreational programming and a transient dock facility. It is the City’s goal to use the proximity of the riverfront to complement development activity in the downtown and create a legacy and point of pride for future generations.

## **Flood Protection**

The north façade of the Armory forms part of the City's flood protection system. Due to the Armory's demolition, the City has designed and will construct a demountable flood protection wall to replace the existing structure. This new demountable wall will only be installed when directed to do so by the Corps of Engineers, providing an unencumbered view of the Mississippi River and downtown Davenport for the majority of the year.

## **Construction of Armory Park**

This project has been broken into several construction phases.

Williams / Valley Construction Management LLC was hired in June 2008 to assist the City in the overall construction management of Armory Park. They will handle all the bids and manage all the sub-contractors on the project.

An environmental evaluation for asbestos and lead-based paint was completed in November 2008 by EnviroNET at a cost of \$5,110 in 2008.

An environmental Abatement was completed by Advance Environmental Testing and Abatement, Inc. in January 2009 at a cost of \$61,818.

Temporary flood protection barriers were purchased in January 2009 from Centennial Contractors of the Quad Cities at a cost of \$52,000.

Bid Release 1: Williams / Valley Construction Management LLC, the construction managers for the project awarded the bids in January 2009. The work is now underway. The total cost of Bid Release 1 is \$2,137,302, which is 24% below estimates.

- Demolition bid (Armory demolition and site clearance) was awarded to Valley Construction at a cost of \$414,620.
- Interceptor sewer bid (part of the City's \$60+ million Long Term Control Plan) was awarded to Foley Construction, Inc. at a cost of \$1,068,525.
- Fencing bid (site security) was awarded to Lovewell Fencing at a cost of \$75,370.
- Sheet piling bid (Provides underground support for permanent flood protection) was awarded to General Constructors, Inc. at a cost of \$324,750.
- Construction Management (overall management of park construction) was awarded to Williams / Valley Construction Management LLC at a cost of \$254,037.

Bid Release 2: Williams / Valley Construction Management LLC opened the bids on April 7, 2009. Bids are currently being evaluated. It is anticipated that City Council will award the bids on April 20, 2009. Work will include a performance stage, small pavilion, two playgrounds, benches, fountain, landscaping, restrooms, and other amenities.

The project is being paid for from the Downtown Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District funds, a source that can only be spent in the Downtown area. Bonds have been issued totaling \$11.1 million, plus TIF revenues of \$1.25 million totaling \$12.35 million. TIF funds will be used to retire the bonds.

## **Completion**

The park is anticipated to be completed in 2010. Work is underway now to plan events and activities for once the park opens, along with planning for the maintenance of the park.

Creating this riverfront park is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reconnect residents to our number one tourist attraction, the Mississippi River. The park also honors the Armory that served as a sentinel on the riverfront for more than 70 years and provided space for numerous events such as ice skating performances, concerts, and the circus.