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For Further Information Contact:
Sonya Hoppes, City Administrator
City of South Beloit
s.hoppes@southbeloit.org
815-389-3023

State awards South Beloit \$600K for neighborhood park at Nature At The Confluence

SOUTH BELOIT, Illinois (February 2, 2026) – The City of South Beloit will move forward with a long-awaited neighborhood park at Nature at the Confluence after securing a \$600,000 grant through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) Program. The funding will support the development of a park that expands public access to outdoor recreation near the Rock River, increases public accessibility to existing trails that wind along Kelly Creek and Turtle Creek and strengthens connections within the neighborhood.

“This project has been a priority for our community,” South Beloit Mayor Tom Fitzgerald said. “By locating the park at Nature At The Confluence, we’re creating a welcoming gathering place that supports recreation, education and the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and visitors.”

Gov. JB Pritzker recently announced OSLAD funding for 67 projects statewide. This year’s program awarded \$36 million, including \$11.4 million reserved for economically challenged communities.

Nature at the Confluence is a nonprofit environmental education center on nearly 80 acres at the intersection of Turtle Creek and the Rock River. Once home to a significant Ho-Chunk village, the land later suffered decades of industrial dumping and ecological decline. In 2017, following a community-led initiative to restore the property, Nature At The Confluence opened as an environmental learning center and public greenspace. Partners in this initiative included the City of South Beloit, Beloit 200, Rock River Trail Group, South Beloit Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Beautify South Beloit Group, and many other community groups and organizations. Today, Nature At The Confluence is an independent nonprofit dedicated to habitat restoration, outdoor recreation, and environmental education. The City’s plans for this neighborhood park will be the critical puzzle piece to redeveloping this area to create a meaningful and transformational space for the community.

Over the last several years, the City has invested significant effort into preparing the site for the long-awaited neighborhood park. In 2022, the City worked with community groups to develop and approve an updated master concept plan for the park buildout which detailed over \$3 million of planned improvements to the entire site. In 2023, Stateline Mass Transit District (SMTD) was able to secure \$47,000 for installation of a transit hub through the Statewide Transit Rebuild Illinois (RBI) program. In 2024, the City secured \$1.46 million dollars through the US EPA Brownfields Cleanup program to remove

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six (6) underground fuel storage tanks, concrete slabs, and other related appurtenances. Also in 2024, the City utilized local funds to initiate design engineering for the initial phase of the overall master plan project. Engineering efforts focused on parking lot and access improvements along Charles Street to accommodate the SMTD Transit Hub, along with IDNR floodway permitting, to help bolster the City's commitment to improving the new park site.

Utilizing the funding awarded through the OSLAD program, the City plans to construct several amenities focused on the approximately 6 acres south of Kelly Creek including an overlook of Kelly Creek, transit shelter, picnic shelter and tables, nature-themed playground equipment, outdoor classrooms, an information kiosk, and roadway, parking, and pedestrian path improvements.

Future phases of the development will focus on improvements north of Kelly Creek, including roadway, pedestrian path, and parking improvements connecting the amenities south of Kelly Creek to the existing Nature At The Confluence educational center. Ultimately, the City intends to work with the Union Pacific railroad to close the site's access at Dickop Street to ultimately utilize the newly constructed Charles Street access points and private drive extending throughout the site for connectivity between the southern and northern limits of the project.

The City worked with [Fehr Graham](#), a local engineering and environmental firm, to prepare the OSLAD grant application. As part of the process, South Beloit held public meetings, adopted a resolution committing local matching funds and gathered letters of support from residents, local organizations, school districts, health systems and community partners.

Construction is expected to begin following final design and land acquisition, with the park anticipated to open by spring 2028.

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