

# Tourism Bureau to Unveil Piasa Park Plans Tuesday in Alton

by Submitted by Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau  
March 24 2023 3:50 PM



*Byway Discovery Center and Piasa Park redevelopment part of \$10 Million Illinois Capital Grant Development Project*

**ALTON** - Plans for the redevelopment of Alton's Piasa Park including the addition of a new Byway Discovery Center will be presented at the Alton Riverfront Advisory Commission meeting on Tuesday, March 28 from 2 to 3 p.m. in the Alton City Hall council chambers. The meeting is open to the public and comments are welcome.

The much-anticipated project calls for the redesign and redevelopment of Piasa Park – home to the painting of the Piasa Bird on the limestone bluff walls -- and a new state-of-the-art Byway Discovery Center. The project is funded by a Capital Bill Grant received by the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau to create and enhance product development along the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway in Alton and Hartford. The Bureau also manages the 33-mile scenic byway which runs from Hartford to Pere Marquette State Park.

“This project will enhance the livability of Alton and the Metro North region while revealing our commitment to activate the byway corridor with key products, programs, and projects that steward key natural and cultural assets, promote active living, and build a vibrant livability destination for leisure travelers, our residences and businesses, relocators, and investors,” Cory Jobe, President/CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau said. “We must thank former State Sen. Rachelle Aud Crowe, Illinois Senate President Don Harmon and Gov. J.B. Pritzker for supporting this revitalization effort along the Great River Road.”

The redesign of the park includes new hardscape at the park including landscaping, water retention ponds, parking with access for motor coach buses, outdoor gathering areas, interpretive panels and kiosks, and a new Piasa Bird observation deck. In addition, there will be state-of-the-art security and lighting at the park.

Plans also call for construction of a 4,500-square-foot state-of-the-art Byway Discovery Center which will become the new Alton Visitor Center. The Center will include exhibit space, a gift shop and lecture facilities, and public rest rooms. It will be open seven days a week and will be managed and staffed by the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau along with a corps of dedicated volunteers.

“The design elements of the Discovery Center will include a nod to the Clark Bridge with a sweeping entryway roof, stone façade matching the limestone bluffs of the nearby Byway, and the building will be set back in to the contours of the surrounding land,” Mr. Jobe said. “There will also be expansive glass windows and solar panels on the roof. The building is designed with purposeful creativity and responsible advocacy. Its bold climate and clean technology elements will also reveal our commitment to livability and sustainable community building.”

Design and engineering firms working on the Piasa Park and Byway Discovery Center include: SMS Engineers of Alton; Henderson Associates Architects of Edwardsville; Kennedy Hutson Associates Architects of Monticello; and the Hitchcock Design Group of Naperville.

The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau is managing all aspects of the project from design to implementation to contract management and is working in conjunction with the City of Alton.

“We have moved thoughtfully and deliberately to ensure this project aligns well with regional and local efforts to reinvest in downstate Illinois and reveal elements of a new green economy that takes advantage of the unique natural assets and landscapes we have at our doorstep,” Mr. Jobe said. “We are committed to moving this project forward without delay and have it serve as a key milestone in our overall byway activation timeline. This is just the beginning.”

The Bureau is in the process of finalizing cost estimates for the park redevelopment and building construction with a goal to let the project for public bids in the summer of 2023. The project is anticipated to be completed by Spring of 2025.

“Product development was always a feature of the Byway Corridor Master Plan created in 2007,” Mr. Jobe said. “We are fulfilling the plan set forth by regional leaders over 15 years ago.”

