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Stories from the region worthy of our praise

Trashed parcel could become park

A parcel of land in Lawrence could be transformed from an unsightly dumping ground into a beautiful riverside park.

The 2.7-acre Brook Street parcel owned by the former Fleet Bank, was burdened with \$800,000 in back taxes when a city collection effort uncovered the neglected plot last year. The bill was paid, but buried pollution and unfinished financing still impede a three-year effort to turn the garbage-strewn parcel into a verdant park along the Spicket River in the heart of one of the city's most overlooked neighborhoods.

Andre Leroux, associate director of Groundwork Lawrence, a nonprofit community rehabilitation group that's been pushing the reclamation for the past three years, told our reporter the site is a problem for illegal dumping because it is hidden from view. That stretch of the Spicket River is difficult to take care of. But a park on Brook Street could become a rare place that gives the waterway to the public.

Fleet had worked to settle the back taxes owed the city. And it was also working with Groundwork Lawrence, and sister organization Lawrence Community Works, to turn the property over to the city. Then Fleet was acquired by Bank of America recently and officials involved aren't sure where the new owners stand on the park project. A Bank of America spokesman recently said the company would honor any commitments Fleet had made.

That could include a promise of \$200,000 toward a park project. Along with \$250,000 from the state's Urban Self Help grant program, that could go a long way toward the \$800,000 cost of constructing a park.

Kudos are due to the corporate and city officials, residents, and advocates who are working to make this idea of a park a reality.