



Currently

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY



Dear Great River Passage Supporters,

When we debuted this *Currently* newsletter a year ago, the Great River Passage Conservancy's work was moving fast—but much of it still felt on the cusp: full of promise not yet realized.

As we share in our “Holding the Center” piece in this edition, we are proud to celebrate two major promises fulfilled. In September, we launched schematic design for the River Balcony, naming James Corner Field Operations our design partner for the nine-month process.

Meanwhile, the River Learning Center is not far behind, with the schematic design journey officially set to kick off in January. As the East Side River District also gains momentum, we feel our three major projects are all keeping pace with the transformative hope we have for them.

While these projects anchor our vision for Saint Paul as the River Capital where we bring the river back from the edges to the center of our community, we also recognize our responsibility—alongside our many partners—to be positive ambassadors for the river at a time when the pandemic persists and the threat of climate change is never far from our minds.

As nature photographer Chris Jordan puts it, ‘If the aim is a healthy balance and inspired stewardship, then I think an important part of facing the reality of our world is acknowledging immense beauty that surrounds us in every moment.’

We hope this newsletter—in both its beautiful natural imagery and stories about inspiring river ambassadors and partners—has been a bright voice for that “healthy balance” as you read it.



Eric J. Jolly, Ph.D.

Board Chair
Great River Passage Conservancy
President and CEO,
Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation



Mary E. deLaittre

Founding Executive Director
Great River Passage Conservancy



James Corner Field Operations Announced as River Balcony Designer

In September, we made it official: the Great River Passage Conservancy and the City of Saint Paul **selected James Corner Field Operations to design the River Balcony, a 1.5-mile promenade on downtown Saint Paul’s river bluff.**

The announcement marks a key milestone in the project’s development, with the River Balcony becoming the first of our three capital projects to be matched with a designer. We are especially excited to team up with Field Operations, the New York-based firm known for its work on the High Line in Manhattan, among other signature urban design projects.

Chosen from a group of 12 highly-competitive applicants from around the country, Field Operations will partner with several local firms to ensure the project design is faithful to our vision of bringing the river back to the center of public life in

Saint Paul. Our design team will engage the wider public throughout the process, while also working with Saint Paul’s four Dakota tribes and local native communities to ensure their voice and goals are reflected in the final design.

“We are passionate about the potential of this site, with its great legacy and impressive scale, and its capacity for transformation as a **powerful connector between parks, civic landmarks, private development, people, and the river,**” said Lisa Switkin, senior principal at Field Operations. “We can’t wait to get to work with the Saint Paul community.”

Engagement and schematic design kicked off in late September, with the final design, cost estimates, phasing, and partner roles and responsibilities determined and delivered by June 2022.

Holding the Center

At the Conservancy, we often talk about **“recentering” the river** for people across Saint Paul. As the movement to reorient our community around the Mississippi continues to grow, we see the Conservancy’s responsibility to **hold the center** also gaining urgency.

This role becomes ever clearer as we see our three ambitious capital projects all reach new milestones. While each project is essential on its own, we will not truly realize our River Capital vision unless all three come to fruition—a goal that requires the Conservancy to play the central, cohesive role in keeping them moving forward. We’re excited to share that all three are doing just that:

- As we shared at length earlier in this newsletter, the **River Balcony** is gaining especially strong momentum, with our recent announcement that the Conservancy has selected **James Corner Field Operations** as the Balcony’s designer, officially moving the project into schematic design phase.
- **The River Learning Center** is on track to launch schematic design Requests for Proposals by late 2021. While all our projects prioritize environmental stewardship, that spirit will take center stage through this project. By hosting year-round environmental, cultural, and historical education and recreation opportunities that are integrated into the region’s routines, traditions, and collective identity, the River Learning Center will lead the way in developing Saint Paul’s next generation of river stewards. Also contributing to the momentum, the University of Minnesota College of Design is planning on hosting a semester-long design course focused on the River Learning Center starting in October 2021.
- Meanwhile, we have secured \$200,000 in recent funding pledges for the **East Side River District**, including an exciting new partnership with REI (see our “partner profile” on page 7).



Welcoming Monica Bryand to Our Board of Directors

The Conservancy is proud to introduce our newest board member, Monica Bryand, who brings to the organization a longtime commitment to social justice and the natural world. After more than 25 years in philanthropy (including 16 at Headwaters Foundation for Justice), Monica is now the co-executive director at Voices for Racial Justice while also leading and supporting the Urban Bird Collective that provides safe and welcoming spaces for BIPOC and the LGBT community to bird in the Twin Cities.



She also finds time to volunteer with her local District Council, the West Side Community Organization, Audubon St. Paul's Conservation Committee, and serves on the board of Hawk Ridge, based in Duluth. Bringing expertise in philanthropy together with a passion for equity and a commitment to wildlife and natural spaces, Monica's interests and vision are a perfect fit for the Conservancy. We are honored to welcome her to the board.





City of Saint Paul

New REI Partnership Advances East Side River District

As we remind ourselves often, bringing the river back to the center of public life requires a **comprehensive, integrated, and collaborative approach.**

While much of our collaborative focus centers on prioritizing the perspectives of existing partners and community members, it also involves forging new relationships. To that end, we are proud to share a new partnership with REI Co-op's new Cooperative Action Fund, which recently announced **a grant to support the Conservancy's East Side River District project.**

Launched this fall, the Action Fund is a "community-supported public charity directly supporting organizations promoting justice, equity, and belonging in the outdoors to strengthen the health and well-being of people and communities."

Part of REI's effort to "rewild our cities," the Cooperative Action Fund's \$50,000 investment in the East Side River District reflects the Fund's belief that **"time outside and our connection to nature is fundamental to the social, cultural and**

rei
cooperative
action
fund

physical health and well-being of all people." As one of their "Creating Space Outside" grantees, the Conservancy's work on the ESRD aligns with REI's focus on "prioritizing community-led and natural climate solutions that bring nature's individual and environmental benefits closer to home for marginalized communities."

The 1,000-acre East Side River District is an area of incredible convergence: of industry, regional parks space, superfund sites, sacred and significant Dakota sites, 40% of the area's migrating birds—all in a dynamic riparian landscape. But it has long been disconnected from the surrounding community. Collaborating with REI and other partners, we aim to integrate the ESRD into the everyday experience of people across Saint Paul, reclaiming the landscape to create accessible community spaces for all.



GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY

P.O. Box 4974, Saint Paul, MN 55101
612-398-5989 | greatriverpassage.org

 @greatriverpassage

 @grpassage

Great River Passage Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent of the law.

About the Great River Passage Conservancy

The **Great River Passage Conservancy** was founded in late 2018 to rally philanthropic support for the Great River Passage Initiative's river-focused projects designed to build economic vitality along Saint Paul's stretch of the Mississippi River. All on Dakota homeland, these three projects—the River Learning Center and National Park Service Headquarters, River Balcony, and East Side River District—respond to the enduring qualities of the Mississippi River that link it to Saint Paul and the wider region's historical, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being.

With Saint Paul's 17 miles of river, 26 miles of river edge, and 3,500 acres of publicly owned land, we have a unique opportunity to become the River Capital and unite our region's two greatest assets: its people and one of the three great rivers of the world, the Mississippi. By advancing major projects along the Mississippi River that allow all people to experience the river in new and equitable ways, the Great River Passage Conservancy fosters environmental stewardship, community health, and economic development.

Board Members

Eric J. Jolly, Ph.D. (Chair)
Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

Tanya Bell
Grand Real Estate Advisors

Cameron Boyd
Metropolitan Airports Commission

Monica Bryand
Voices for Racial Justice

Shelley Buck
Prairie Island Indian Community

John I. Marshall
Xcel Energy

Peter Myers
Myers Communications Group

Joe Nayquonabe Jr.
Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures

Jake Reint
Flint Hills Resources

Mike Hahm (Ex Officio)
City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation

Russ Stark (Ex Officio)
City of Saint Paul