



Currently

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY



Looking Back
at 2021



Dear Great River Passage Supporters,

Our first Currently of 2022 brings exciting news, including updates on the schematic design process currently underway for the River Balcony and River Learning Center. Informed by extensive partner and community engagement, these plans will help set the stage for the transformative work that lies ahead.

In past editions, we have stressed the importance of re-centering the city and the people of Saint Paul around the 17 miles of Mississippi River that runs through what we call the River Capital. To truly define ourselves as that kind of capital, someone must also center the work it takes to get us there.

During a very busy 2021 and already busy 2022, the Conservancy has embraced that role. Throughout this edition, which doubles as our 2021 Annual Report, we cover the ways our organization, in close partnership with the City of Saint Paul, is holding the center when it comes to building community engagement, securing funding, knitting together programs and partners, and more.

Unifying across the city and along the river, we can reconnect with our greatest natural asset—the Mississippi River—to elevate Saint Paul's economy, cultural identity, environmental health, and more.

With the river,



Peter Myers

Board Chair
Great River Passage Conservancy
Owner, Myers Communication Group



Mary E. deLaitre

Founding Executive Director
Great River Passage Conservancy

WHY THE RIVER?

A river is at once both new and old, tied to both our past and future. As it flows through Saint Paul, the Mississippi is ever-changing, while also carrying the deep history of our city's people, culture, nature, and more.

But along Saint Paul's stretch of river—in the areas where the Conservancy's three key projects are situated—we have become less connected to both its past and future. Today, the Mississippi River is often seen as a marker, something we cross when moving between the Twin Cities. Our work aims to create new spaces where people can live with the river, not just by it.

As we work to re-orient to the river, it is worth reminding ourselves how Saint Paul is inextricably linked to the Mississippi. With 3,500 acres of riverside, 17 parks, six major trails, and five historic and preserved sites, the Mississippi River has a centuries-long legacy tied to our community identity. From the Dakota who made their home along the river before Saint Paul was even a city to the construction of the Capital building, the river has always flowed through us. We rely on rivers for transport, trade, to water our farms, and to supply our drinking water. **Saint Paul is not Saint Paul without the river.**



UPPER MISS. RIVER -- ST. PAUL HARBOR
E.H.A. - CONT. NO. 2.1.1. - WED. ENG. 16
REMARKS: AREA ADJACENT TO
LANDING BELOW ROBERT STREET BRIDGE
U. S. Engineer Office, St. Paul, Minn.
August 21, 1904.



WHY THE GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY?

Alongside our lead partner, the City of Saint Paul, the Conservancy has identified three major projects that give us the opportunity to reimagine our city's 17 miles of river for Saint Paul residents, businesses, and visitors. The Mississippi River Learning Center, River Balcony, and East Side River District will all reorient Saint Paul as the River Capital that strengthens:



Economic Development

The river is an essential economic engine in Saint Paul. Each year, 5 million tons of commodities pass through, and Saint Paul Port Authority terminals are home to 30 businesses and nearly 750 jobs.



Community Health and Wellbeing

Today, more than 4 million people (including 30,000 children) visit parks along the river annually to take part in recreation, education, and environmental experiences.

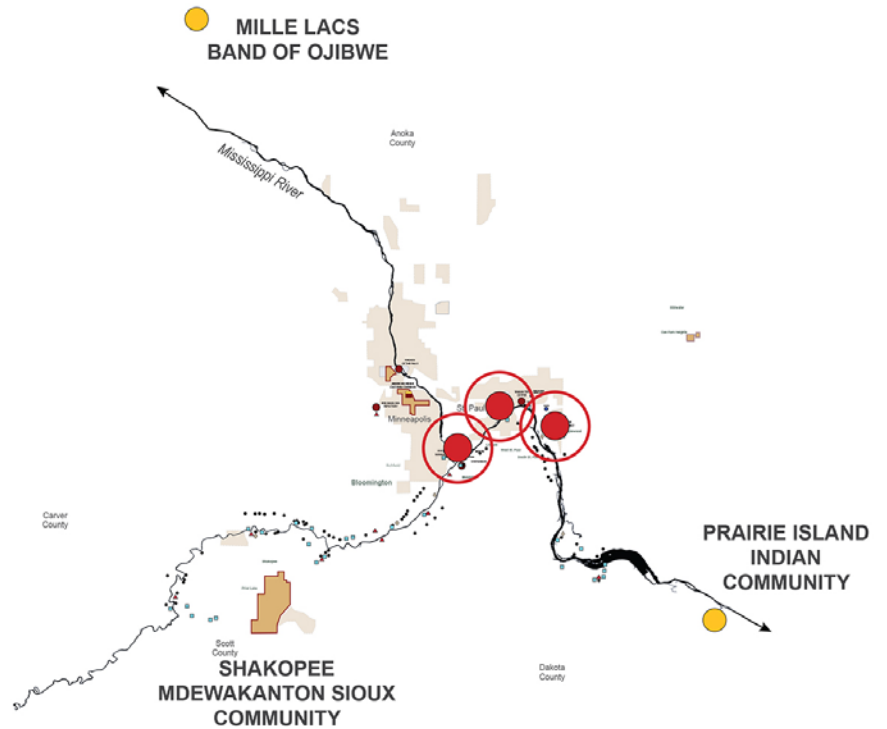
WHITE EARTH NATION

LEECH LAKE NATION

ST. CROIX

Shared Culture and History

Saint Paul's river flows through Dakota homeland, but too often, tribal communities have been involved in river-based projects too late—or not at all. The Conservancy is moving each project forward with an eye to historical and cultural context, determined to rewrite that narrative by ensuring Indigenous leaders play an active role in every step of the design process, shaping a shared vision for our work along the river that preserves and honors Indigenous culture and heritage.



UPPER SIOUX
LOWER SIOUX

REGIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITIES



Environmental Stewardship

The climate crisis is real, and it is taking a toll on natural treasures nationwide—the Mississippi River among them. The largest, most complex flood plain river ecosystem in the northern hemisphere and fourth biggest watershed in the world, the Mississippi serves as an important migration and flyway route for birds and as a habitat for more than 300 species of animals. Saint Paul is a capital of river advocates focused on protecting our river and the wildlife that calls it home. Our projects will be successful only if they repair and revitalize our damaged natural spaces.

Just as the Conservancy's design philosophy emphasizes a comprehensive, collaborative, and integrated approach, we know that all the pieces above are linked. When we spark economic development, lift up our shared culture and history, and inspire environmental stewardship, we will see a Saint Paul whose people and river thrive, hand in hand.

A LOOK BACK AT 2021

Holding the Center: Bringing River Supporters Together

In a complex landscape filled with so many organizations, businesses, and community members invested in the river, **the Conservancy continued to play the role of connector and hub in 2021.**

Linking Partners

We hosted our virtual **River Programming convening in December**, with partners like Wilderness Inquiry, Mississippi Park Connection, and National Park Service on hand to spread the word about their programs designed to get more people along, on, and in the river. As you will read in our project updates, the Conservancy has also been busy connecting people to place to project at community meetings like our East Side River District convening.

Connecting People to Place

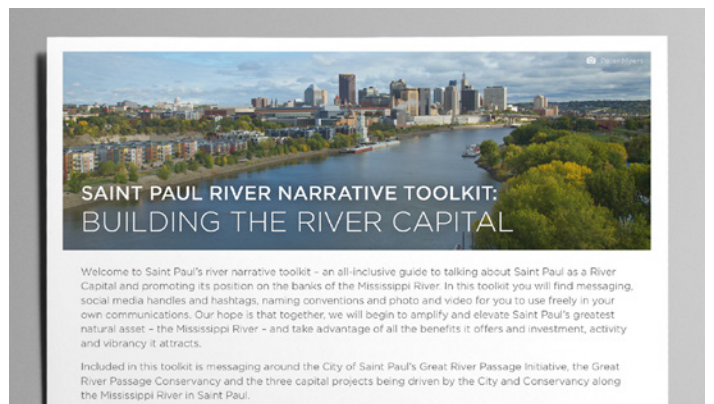
The Conservancy believes the best way to envision projects in a vast setting like the Mississippi River is to **get out into that space**. Over the last year we hosted more than 35 walking tours of our three project sites, with tour-goers including donor prospects, funders, and tribal leaders.

Telling a Shared River Story

In December, we published the River Narrative Toolkit, a comprehensive guide for partners and stakeholders to use as we collectively elevate and amplify Saint Paul as the River Capital.

Leveraging Partnership with the City

The importance of connecting extends to funding as well. While the City of Saint Paul provides extensive project management expertise, accomplishing projects of this scale requires equally extensive funding partnerships. Thus far, we have leveraged our strong alignment with the City to inspire giving from a range of private funders, including REI and the Knight Foundation.



Project Momentum

Knitting together public and private contributors

extends our capacity to bring in more than just funding—it also adds levels of implementation savvy, design expertise, and vision that we couldn't achieve through the public sector alone.

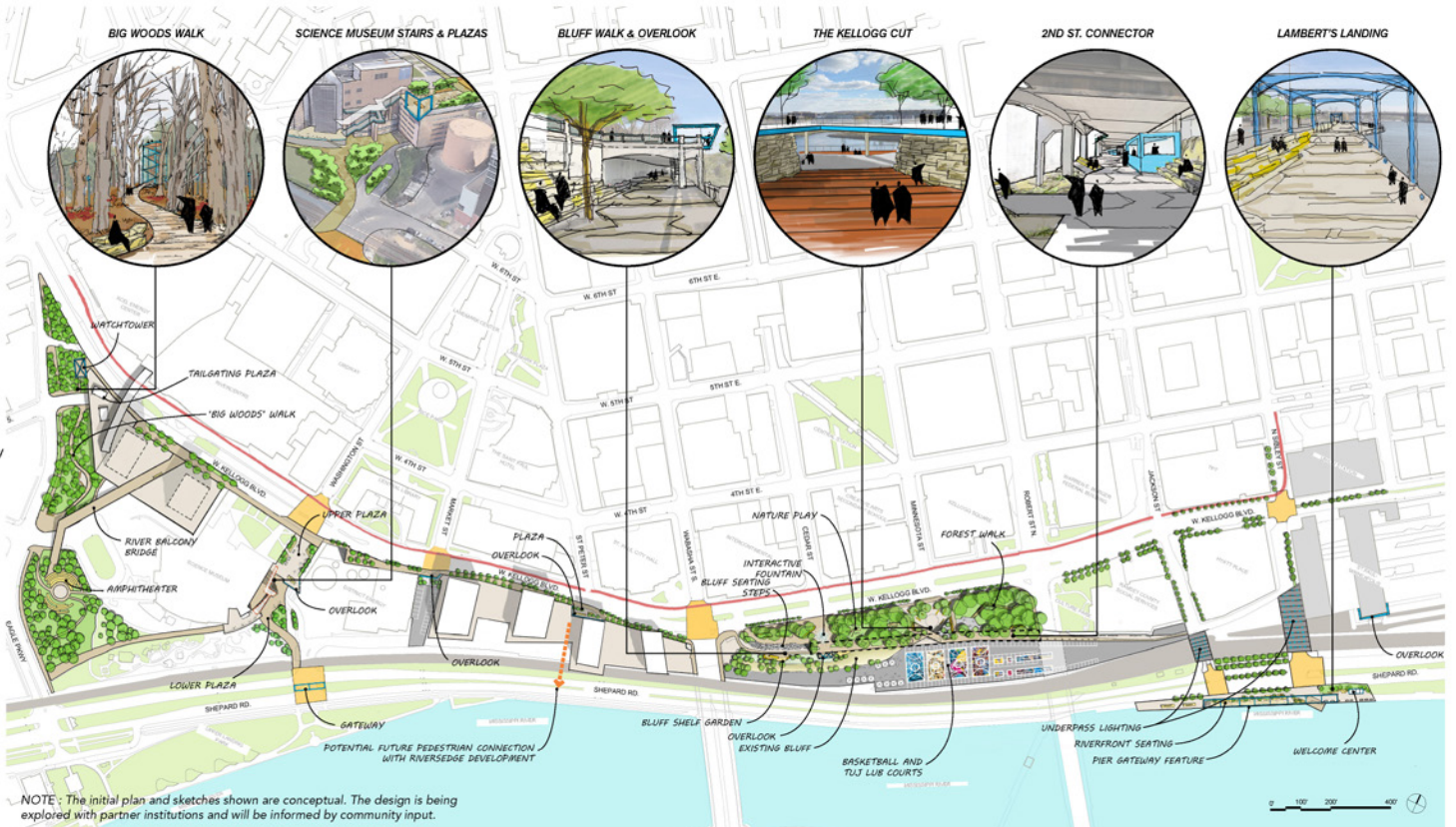
On the strength of these public-private partnerships, our key projects all made tangible strides in 2021. At this time last year, our three capital projects—the Mississippi River Learning Center, River Balcony, and East Side River District—were all building momentum, but none had reached the milestone phase of schematic design.

That changed in 2021, with both the Learning Center and River Balcony **selecting design teams and launching the design process, putting these projects just months away from answering key questions, including:**

- What do we estimate different pieces of the project will cost?
- Which elements should be done first?
- What roles will each partner play, and what are their responsibilities?

Along with those essential considerations, **schematic design is also a time to lift up community voice.** Our design teams on all our projects will be asking for input from people who care about the river. In that spirit, we have already hosted a virtual **Community Workshop for the River Balcony**, with others planned in the future.

This model of engagement will be mirrored in River Learning Center and ESRD design phases, and will rely on the equitable engagement recommendations that have come out of our participation in the High Line Network's Equitable Impacts Framework (EIF) cohort over the last year. Among other recommendations, the EIF collaboration has given our project teams **a clear roadmap for building stronger relationships with the Dakota.**



© James Corner Field Operations

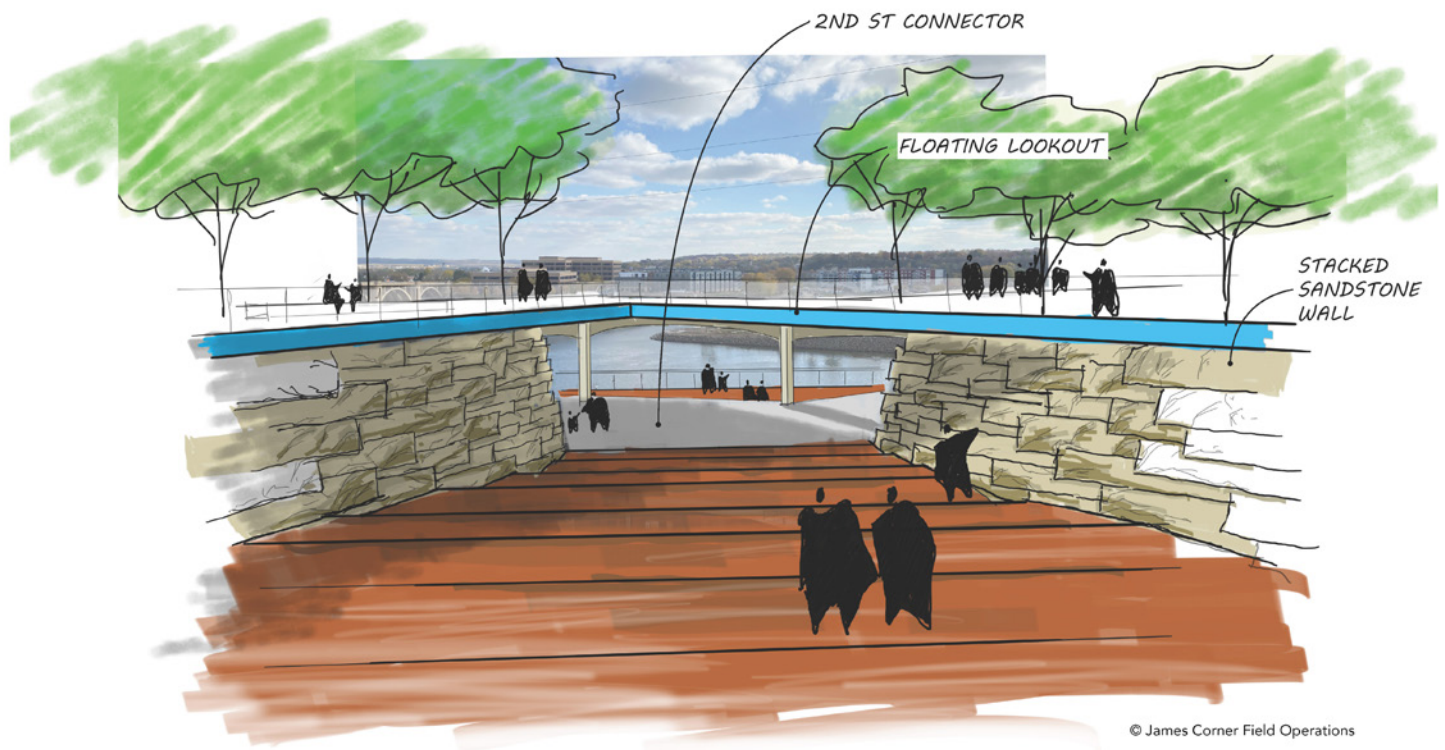
River Balcony

In September, after a successful fundraising effort, the River Balcony became our first project to enter design phase when we selected James Corner Field Operations to lead the Balcony's schematic design. Known for their innovative work on the High Line in Manhattan, Field Operations is one of the foremost waterfront designers in North America. Reflecting the community's enthusiasm for the project and their desire to share their hopes for the River Balcony, **250 people registered for our community engagement event in February.**

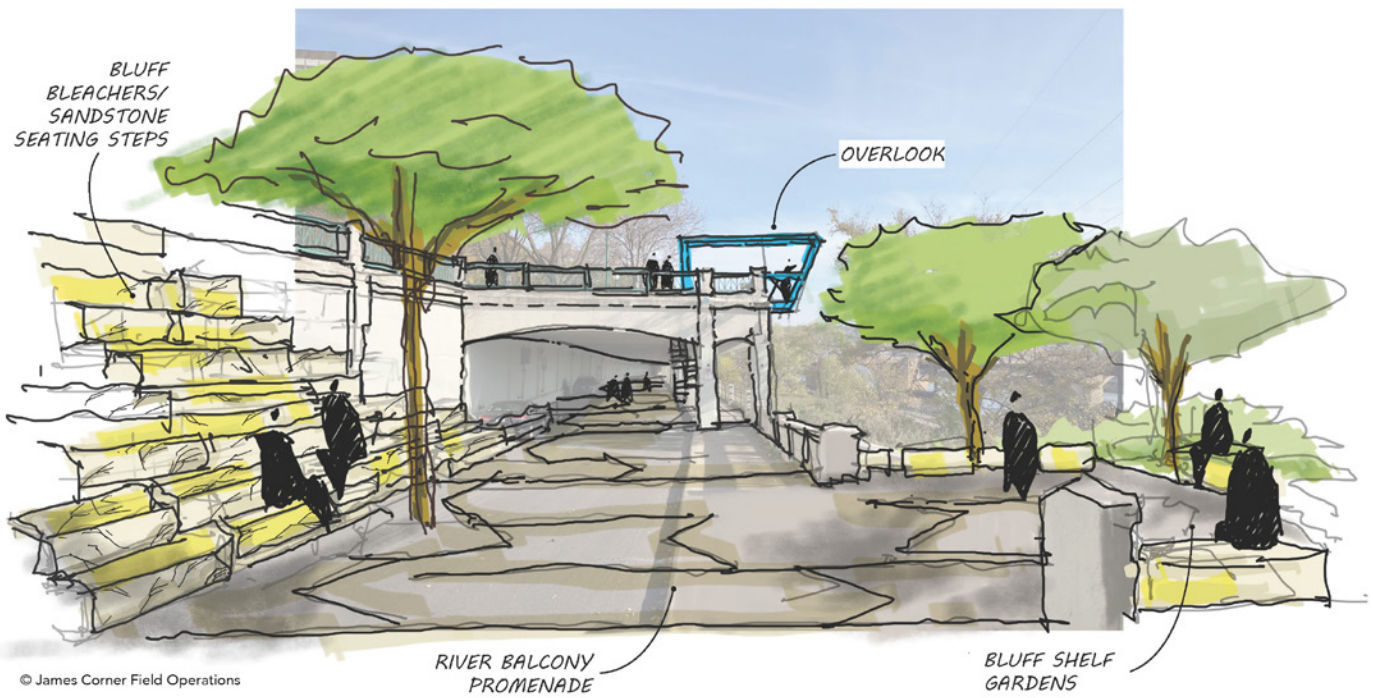
What's Next: Our design team will continue to engage the public throughout the process, while also **working with Saint Paul's four Dakota tribes and other local Native communities** to ensure their voice and goals are reflected in the schematic design, which is slated to be complete by September 2022.

Note: The initial plan and sketches shown are conceptual. The design is being explored with partner institutions and will be informed by community input.

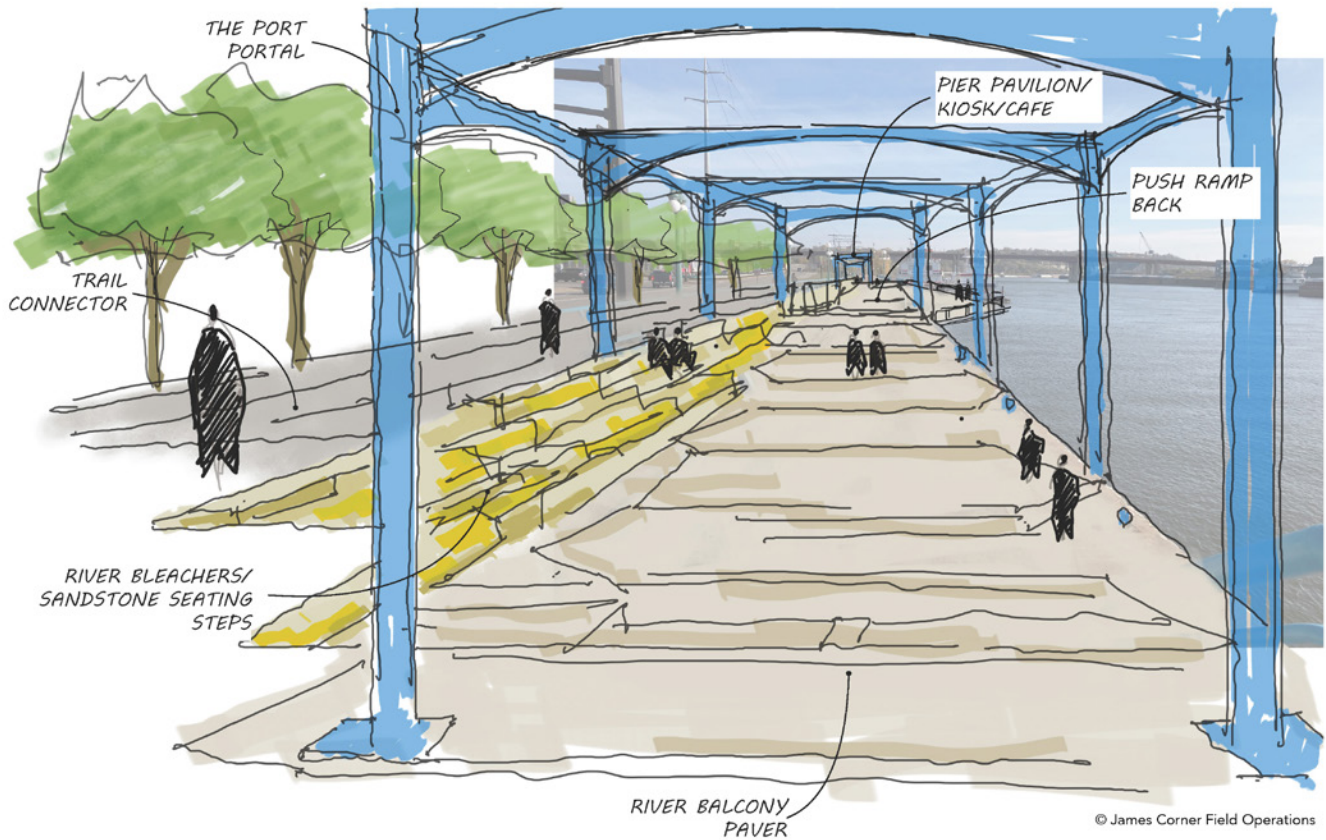
PROPOSED - KELLOGG CUT

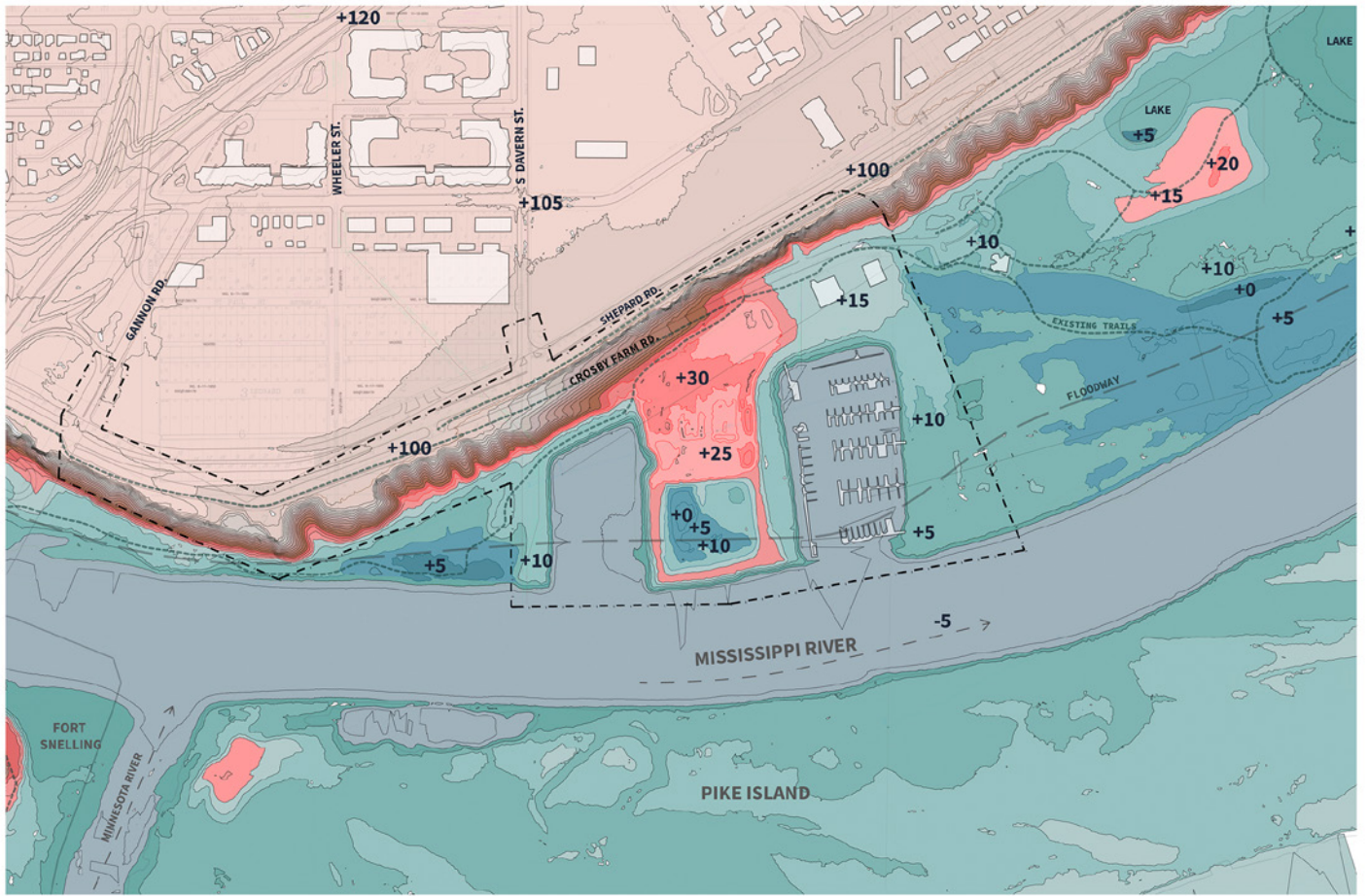


PROPOSED - BLUFF WALK & OVERLOOK



PROPOSED - THE LANDING





Mississippi River Learning Center

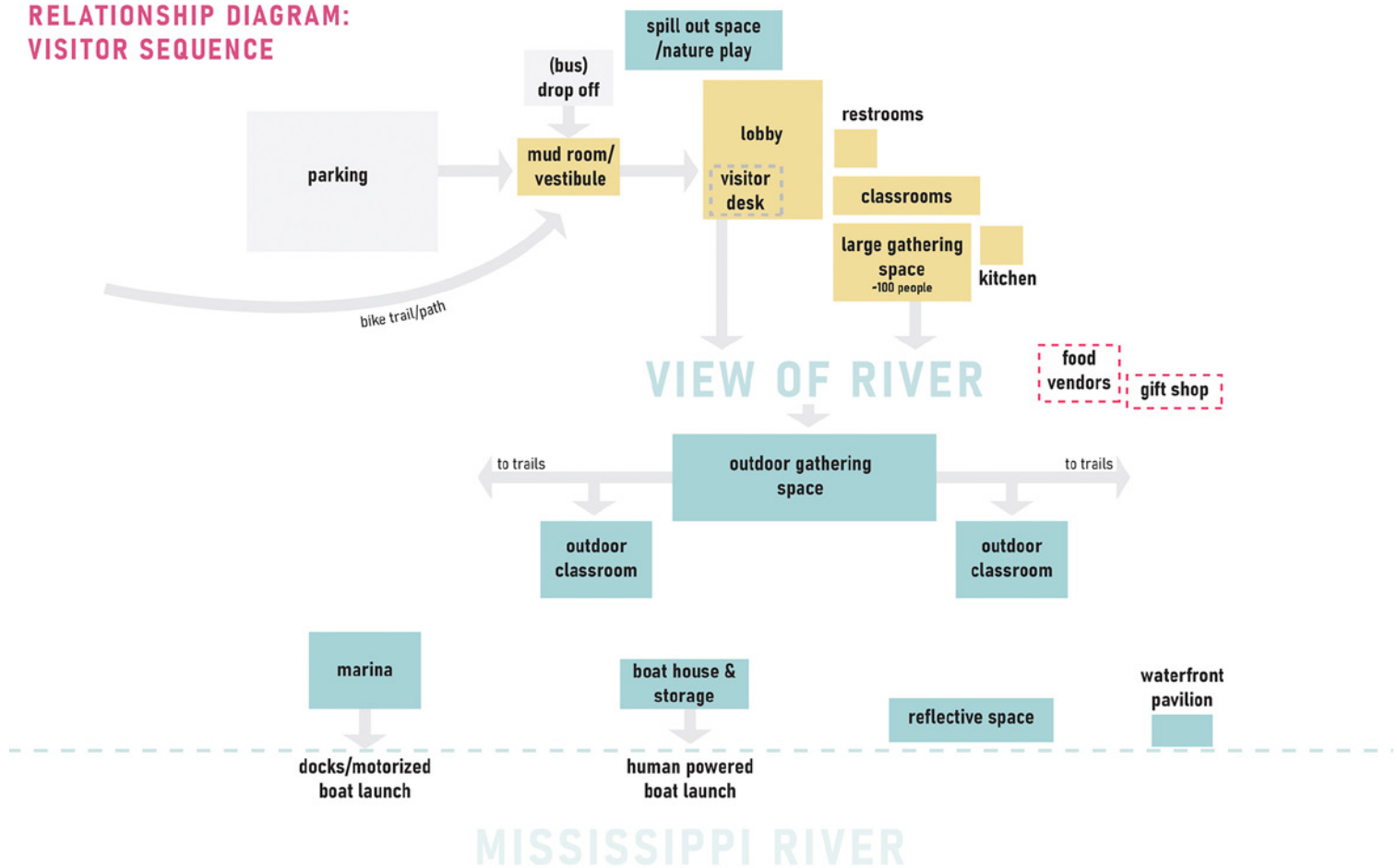
This winter, the Great River Passage Conservancy and City of Saint Paul selected New York-based W Architecture & Landscape Architecture to lead the River Learning Center's schematic design process.

Engagement and schematic design began in February 2022, and we are excited to have W's architecture and landscape architecture expertise driving this design.



What's Next: We will engage the community throughout the year as our design team works to integrate community voice into their plans. Final design, cost estimates, phasing, and partner roles and responsibilities will be determined and delivered by October 2022.

RELATIONSHIP DIAGRAM: VISITOR SEQUENCE



East Side River District

In October, the Conservancy co-hosted an **East Side River District (ESRD) convening with nine key partners sharing presentations on their dynamic projects.** All told, there are 23 projects planned or underway in the District with \$490 million of planned investment flowing into the area as we all continue to come together and reveal, heal, connect, and protect the river and land of the ESRD.

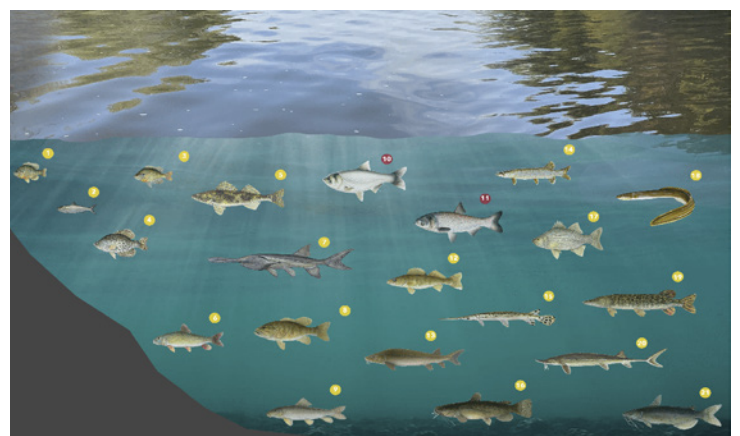
What's Next: The next step for this collaboration is to raise \$600,000 in public and private funds for the schematic design process in 2022.

Further, there are now bills in front of the House and Senate to create a task force that will **lead the clean-up and restoration of the two hazardous Superfund sites on the ESRD stretch of the river.** This reflects renewed political will to secure the considerable state and federal funding needed to clean up this long-polluted area.

On this preservation front, we have also engaged a Macalester College student to conduct a comprehensive flora and fauna survey of the ESRD region.



EAST SIDE RIVER DISTRICT SITE HISTORY
by Full Circle Indigenous Planning and Design





Top: Peter Myers; bottom: City of Saint Paul

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Knight Foundation Fund

Mississippi Parks Connection*

Wilderness Inquiry*

*for Mississippi River Learning Center

2021 FINANCIAL REPORT*

Statement of Activity

	Without Donor Restriction	With Donor Restriction	Total
Total Income	\$208,413	\$336,907	\$545,320
Total Expenses	\$251,346	-	\$251,346
Beginning Net Assets	\$195,664	\$237,816	\$433,480
Changes in Net Assets	-\$42,933	\$336,907	\$293,974
Ending Net Assets	\$152,731	\$574,723	\$727,454

Statement of Liabilities & Assets

Total Current Assets	\$751,551
Total Current Liabilities	\$24,096

Net Assets

Without Donor Restriction	\$152,731
With Donor Restriction	\$574,723
Total Net Assets	\$727,454
Total Liabilities and Equity	\$751,550

* Preliminary, unaudited financial report

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY

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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.

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