

Currently

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY



Summer
on the River



Dear Great River Passage Supporters,

In previous *Currently* editions, you have probably come across the words “schematic design” several times. While an essential step in the journey of the Conservancy’s three key capital projects, the concept can seem a little theoretical—until now.

At our recent Mississippi River Learning Center workshop, the Learning Center’s design team gave the community its first glimpse of three site strategies. With this milestone, coming at the halfway point of schematic design, the project is coming to life. We invite you to browse the beautiful images of what could be on our website (greatriverpassage.org).

The design scenarios were informed by feedback from a community meeting and survey conducted in April. While pleased with the turnout (more than 100 people joined both meetings thus far, with more than 200 joining remotely), we must do more to ensure true inclusion in the design process. Among others, Full Circle Indigenous Planning + Design is consulting with the Conservancy and our design team to ensure Dakota perspectives are voiced and turned into action. Learn more about Full Circle’s philosophy in founder Sam Olbekson’s guest article on page 3.

Meanwhile, the River Balcony project is right on the heels of the River Learning Center, with schematic design flowing forward and a second community workshop held on June 25. It’s been a busy summer for us! Stay tuned for further updates on these two projects, as well as the East Side River District, in the months ahead.

With the river,



Peter Myers

Board Chair
Great River Passage Conservancy
Owner, Myers Communication Group



Mary E. deLaittre

Founding Executive Director
Great River Passage Conservancy

Founder and Principal Sam Olbekson shares the philosophy and strategies guiding Full Circle Indigenous Design

With the Mississippi flowing through Dakota land, the Great River Passage Conservancy's three key projects are of vital importance to me personally, and to Native Americans whose voices have too often gone unheard in projects along the river. Social equity, environmental justice, community-building, and cultural resiliency are at the root of the projects we put our hearts into at Full Circle Indigenous Design. Since the development of the original Great River Passage Plan, we have seen a commitment to those values and to Native leaders playing an active role in all three projects, shaping a shared vision that preserves and honors Indigenous culture and heritage.

Working closely together, we believe the future of these projects can take into account design, health, equity, culture, community, and economic opportunity, all of which are inextricably linked. In this way, the Conservancy's work can further Full Circle's mission: to (re)connect people to culture and nature through innovative, impactful, and beautiful design, while expanding access to these natural spaces for underserved communities.



Full Circle Indigenous
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MEET THE BOARD



Andy Rodriguez

When it comes to building the River Capital, new board member Andy Rodriguez has a passion for the Great River Passage Conservancy's mission

that dates back to childhood. As Andy puts it, "The City of Saint Paul and its parks system raised me, both personally and professionally."

Growing up in Saint Paul, he took part in countless City Parks and Recreation programs, relying on recreation centers, park spaces, programs, and program staff for support and guidance. Keeping it local, Andy graduated from Saint Paul Central High School, then earned a degree in Metro Urban Studies from Augsburg University.

From there, Andy stuck close to his roots, securing work with Saint Paul's Parks and Recreation Department and serving in a range of roles including community recreation leader and environmental volunteer coordinator, overseeing more than 2,000 volunteers annually. Seventeen years later he's still with the department, and in June 2022 Andy became the department's director, providing strategic leadership and management for the entire Parks and Rec system.



Jay Haapala

Like many Great River Passage Conservancy board members, Jay Haapala brings to the role a lifelong passion for natural spaces. As a child his family lived a block away from the river in

Little Falls, and today he "hauls the boat to a public launch" whenever he can. "I love all our natural and recreational resources, and the Mississippi River holds a special place."

Jay's education and volunteer background deepened his commitment to equitable access to nature. He studied Recreation, Parks and Leisure Services at MSU Mankato, then went on to hold an AmeriCorps position for the Department of Natural Resources. He has also served on the boards of the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, SHIFT, and Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly. Jay's current role as Associate State Director of Community Engagement for AARP positions him well to offer leadership in the Conservancy's ongoing effort to engage a wide range of voices and participants in our project planning.

In fact, his words about his AARP team could just as easily sum up the Conservancy's approach to engagement: "We start by listening and engaging with our members and the public to identify issues, and we provide opportunities for people to get involved as volunteers and advocates. From there, we work with decision-makers to improve our communities, public policies and the social environment."

Jay also highlights one of AARP's founding mottos: "what we do, we do for all." "That guiding principle can be applied in many ways," says Jay, "and one of them is certainly about inclusion and equity. The same applies to my passion for conservation and access with resources like the Mississippi River, which is why I hope to join you in achieving the GRPC vision."

PROJECT UPDATE

MISSISSIPPI

RIVER

LEARNING

CENTER

This spring and early summer saw the Mississippi River Learning Center project achieve important milestones, including our first and second Community Workshops. Building on feedback from the community during our first meeting in April, on June 9 W. Architecture & Landscape Architecture shared how our collective voices have led to three different design strategies for the Learning Center site.

The three design approaches—which focused on landscape restoration and configuration, building scale and location, and site circulation—respond to a range of guiding themes:

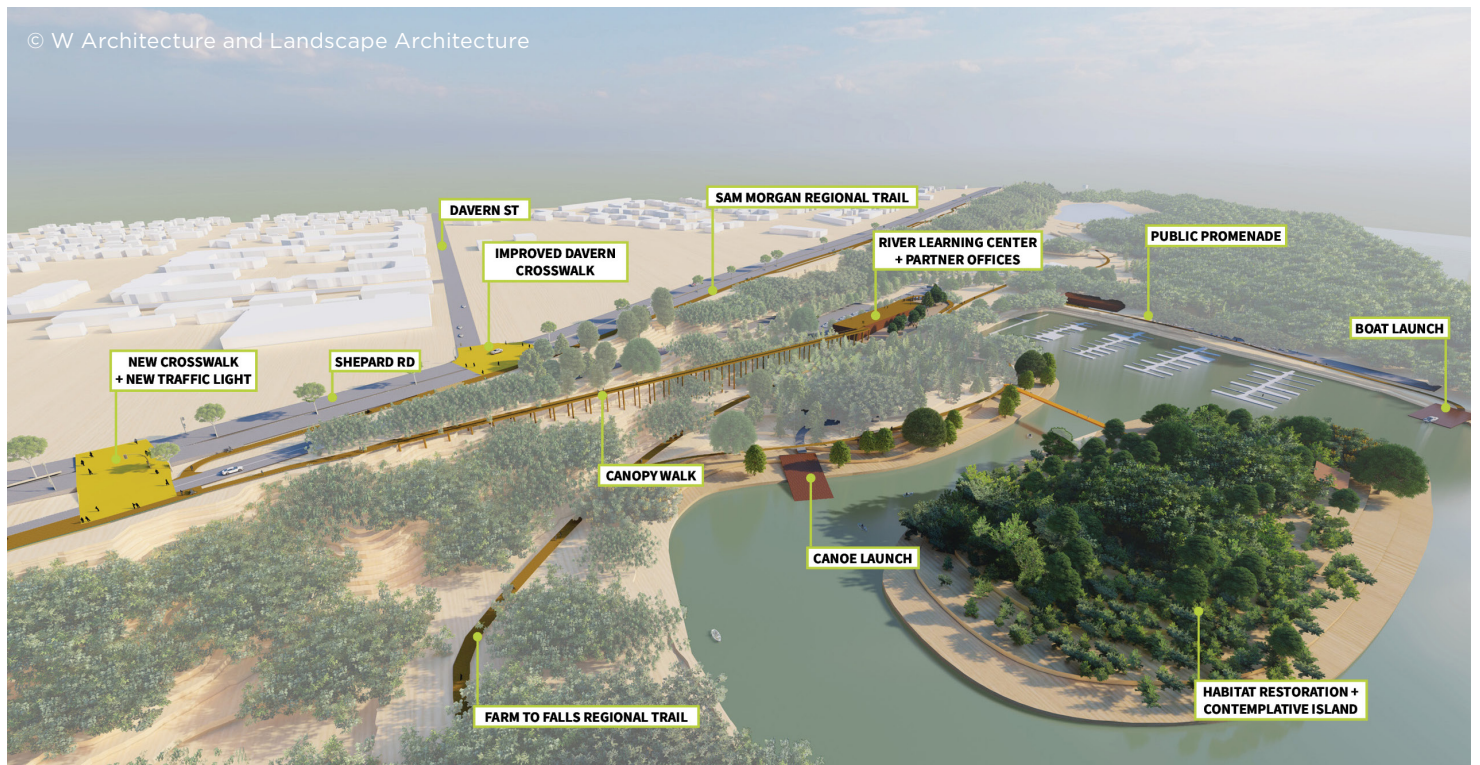
- The site is on Dakota homeland, and has great spiritual importance to the Dakota people.
- The area must be more visible, with a welcoming entrance.
- Universal access from the bluff to the floodplain is a must.
- All buildings will be out of the floodplain, and any new elements must improve the site's ecology.

As schematic design moves forward, we will continue to prioritize community voice—through future workshops and surveys—in collaborating on a final design that is beautiful, safe, and accessible to all.

More than 100 community members joined us for the Community Workshop and had the chance to share their thoughts on the design scenarios



© Laura Bray





The “Big Woods Walk” is envisioned as a new nature trail for art, education, recreation and gathering, with a focus on native planting and family-oriented activities that strengthens the connection between downtown and Upper Landing Park at the river.

PROJECT UPDATE

RIVER BALCONY

The River Balcony seeks to reorient and reconnect Saint Paul to the Mississippi River, expanding Saint Paul’s narrative around the river and bringing the river to the center of public life. The most recent design iteration, revealed to the community in late June, builds on what is already here, creating a series of distinctive elements that activate the bluff and riverfront and cultivate connections to this special place. Three primary open spaces – the Big Woods Walk, the Bluff Walk and the Landing – strengthen the relationship between the bluff and the river. The team is now adding finishing touches to cost estimates, finance and governance strategy, all in preparation for a fall final design reveal.

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The “Bluff Walk” includes a new connection from Kellogg Mall Park to E. 2nd Street with seating steps, overlooks and gardens.



The “Kellogg Cut” is a dramatic new scenic overlook at the terminus of Minnesota Street with panoramic views of the river and a physical connection to the newly pedestrianized E. 2nd St. Connector, providing light and air to the space below.

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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