



Currently

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY



Building New Connections to the River

Designing the River Balcony



Dear Great River Passage Conservancy Supporter,

Since our founding, the power of convening has been a constant theme in the Conservancy’s work. Our recent convenings this fall have been an inspiring reminder of that power, with events including our River Balcony community celebration, virtual CEO convening, and conversation with the High Line Network’s Asima Jansveld about transforming our relationship to the river.

The River Balcony event celebrated the project’s final schematic design, and came quickly on the heels of the Mississippi River Learning Center’s own final design celebration. We’re excited to see both projects transition into the next phase as we move ever closer to implementation!

Meanwhile, our commitment to equitable engagement, planning, and design has reached a key milestone: this month our board approved the Conservancy’s finalized equity plan. Two years in the making, this effort was the product of deep collaboration, first as part of the High Line Network’s Equitable Impacts Framework, then through our partnership with Culture Brokers to finalize the plan.

To sustain this momentum, we encourage you to make a year-end gift supporting the Conservancy. Your support fuels our vision as we flow into the new year.

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

FUNDING PARTNER PROFILE Knight Foundation



When we recently caught up with Jai Winston, Knight Foundation’s program director for Saint Paul, it was no surprise that much of the conversation centered around the idea of transformation.

Knight Foundation believes “great public spaces have the power to transform cities.” When Jai and Knight first connected with Executive Director Mary deLaittre and the Conservancy, Jai says Knight was moved to support our work because, like many older industrial cities, Saint Paul “had not oriented itself toward the river. For us to have more river frontage than any other city in America, we were [missing] opportunities to use the river to its fullest potential.

“That’s what’s exciting about the work the Conservancy is leading: trying to resocialize and transform the way we think about an asset like the river in our community.”

Drawing on Knight’s partnership with likeminded organizations and projects around the country, Jai and his colleagues “saw an opportunity to apply those insights to the work that was unfolding [through the Conservancy’s projects].” Knight Foundation awarded two grants - one to support our River Balcony project and one to fund additional equity planning and Dakota engagement.

Jai says the River Balcony was a natural fit for Knight, given the foundation’s commitment to revitalization and transformation efforts in downtown Saint Paul.

The Balcony’s proposed 1.5-mile promenade presents a unique chance for the Conservancy to partner across sectors to create a thriving downtown area that is linked to the river and its natural spaces. Like the Conservancy, Knight values the power of convening, and sees the Balcony as a site where public, private, and other cross-sector collaboration are critical.

“One funder alone is not going to take the project across the line,” says Jai. “We need to be strategic with resources and fundraising. For Knight, we have the convening power to bring together stakeholders that are important to the project.”

The spirit of convening and collaboration is also tied to equitable planning and design, another area of great interest for the Foundation. “When we think about public spaces, we want to make sure they’re spaces where everyone in the community is included, feels values, feels seen,” shares Jai. To that end, Jai and Knight saw another opening to connect the deLaittre and the Conservancy with likeminded thinkers, paving the path to our joining the High Line Network.

High Line members creating similar river-centered public spaces across the country provided actionable examples and best practices for “grappling with tough issues,” Jai says. “How to design projects that account for equity every step of the way...how to be intentional with input from the community.”

“Another thing that’s really exciting about this project and about Mary’s leadership [was their commitment] to community engagement and engaging Indigenous relationships with nature and the river,” reflects Jai. “We were delighted to see the Conservancy’s engagement plan wanted to start with the Indigenous community and their relationship with the river long before the land was settled and how they can shape the vision of how projects can be designed to bring community together.”



Creating a Vision for the River Balcony

Last month, we completed schematic design for the second of our three key projects, the River Balcony, a proposed 1.5-mile promenade along downtown Saint Paul's river bluff.

Like the recently-designed Mississippi River Learning Center, the Balcony's design journey was shaped by community voice. Led by partners such as 106 Group and Full Circle Indigenous Planning + Design and informed by community workshops and surveys, our community engagement identified several priorities, notably the need to connect people to the river by creating welcoming outdoor public spaces at the river's edge and by linking development to the river.

As the designs on the following pages reflect, our team focused on these goals and concepts as they finalized the design:

ACCESS: Increase, enhance, and strengthen access to the river.

ACTIVATION: Activate the downtown and riverfront.

ARMATURE: Connect civic landmarks, public spaces, trails, and development.

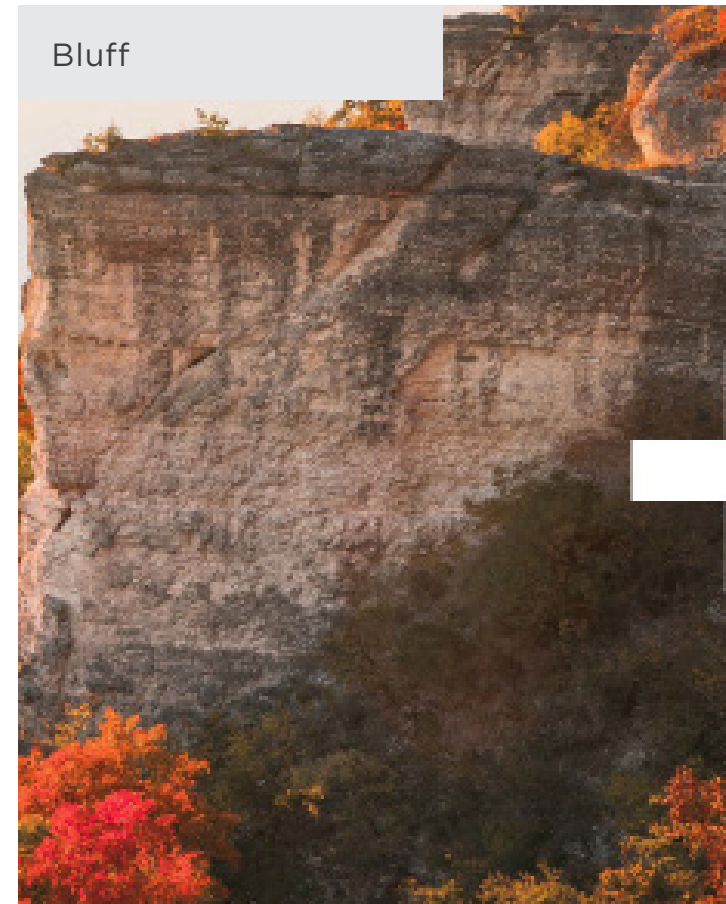
IDENTITY & RIVER LORE: Tell stories that develop and expand Saint Paul's narrative around the river to bring the river to the center of public life. This includes critical place-keeping efforts through deep engagement with Indigenous communities.

Through features like the Big Woods Walk, Observation Tower, and the Bluff Walk, the River Balcony will transform our relationship to the Mississippi, creating new connections to the river and sparking economic development along the riverfront.

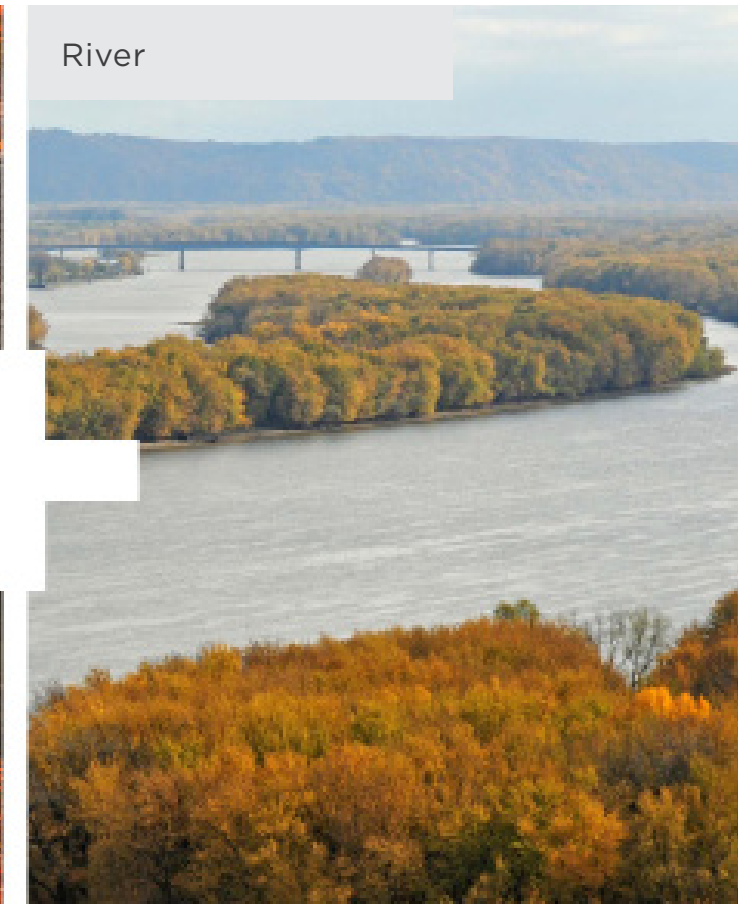
A LAYERED SITE



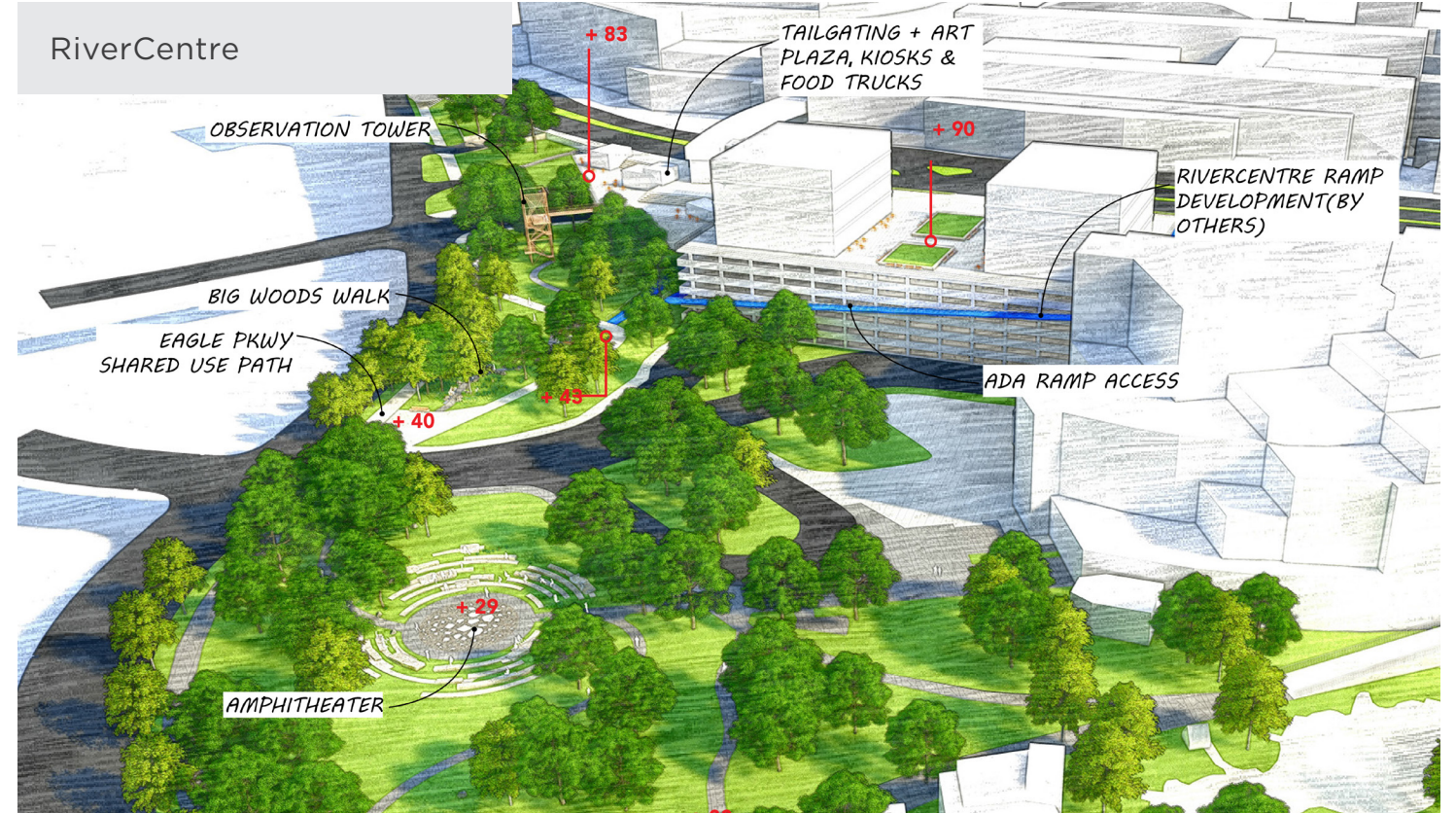
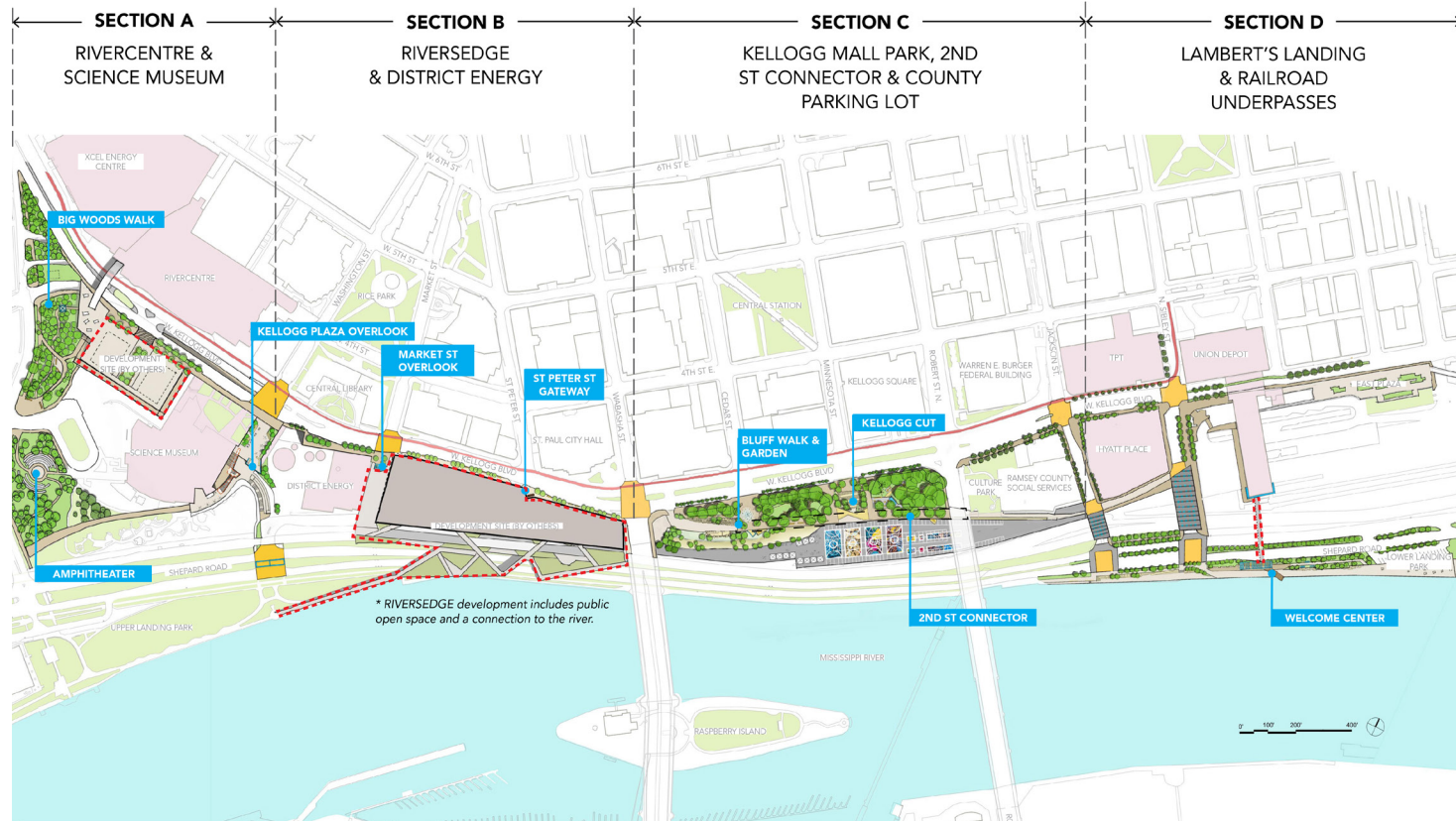
Bluff



River



THE RIVER BALCONY IN SECTIONS



Site Plan: RiverCentre



THE RIVER BALCONY IN SECTIONS

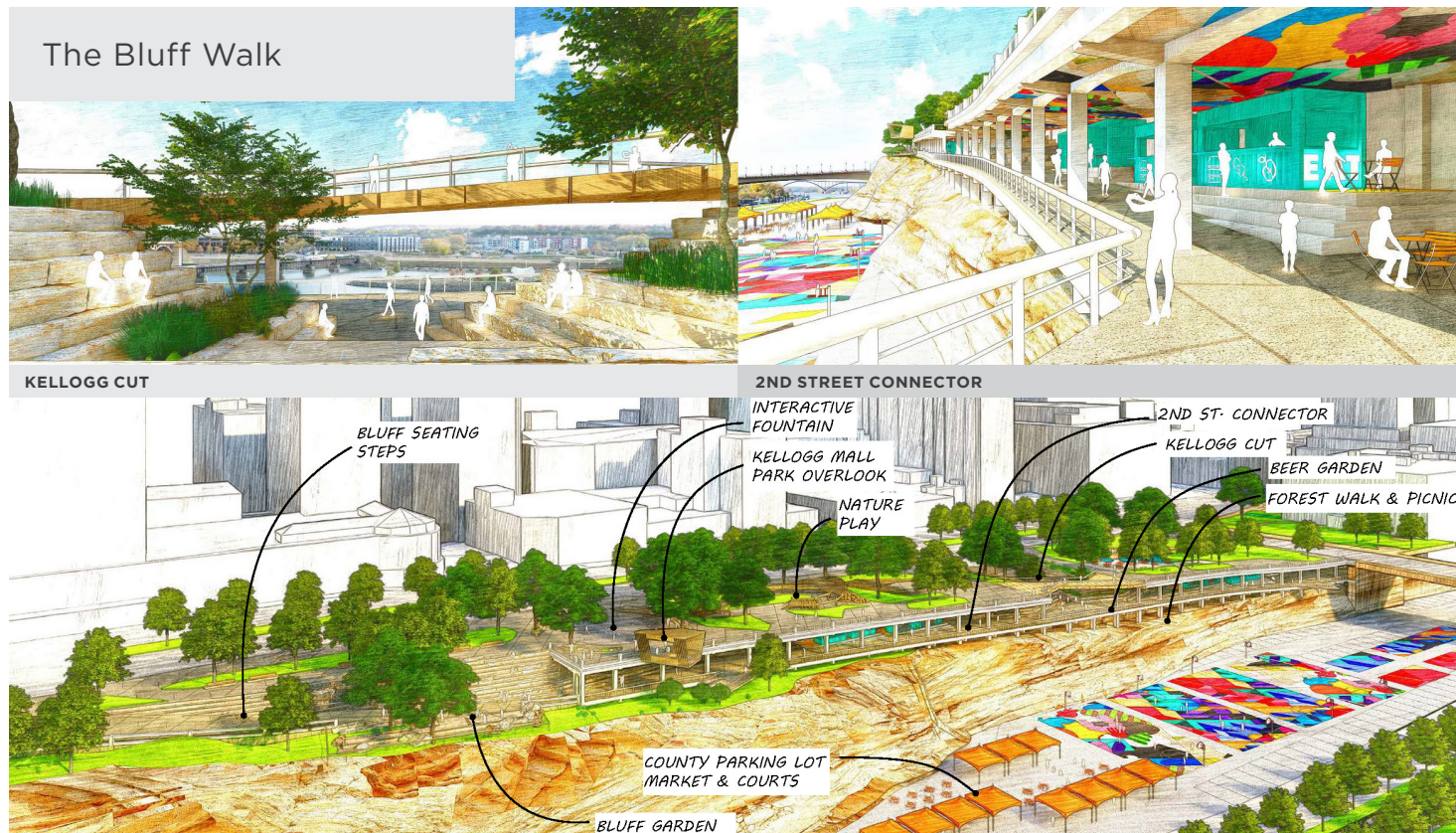
Site Plan: Kellogg Mall Park (Park Upper Level)



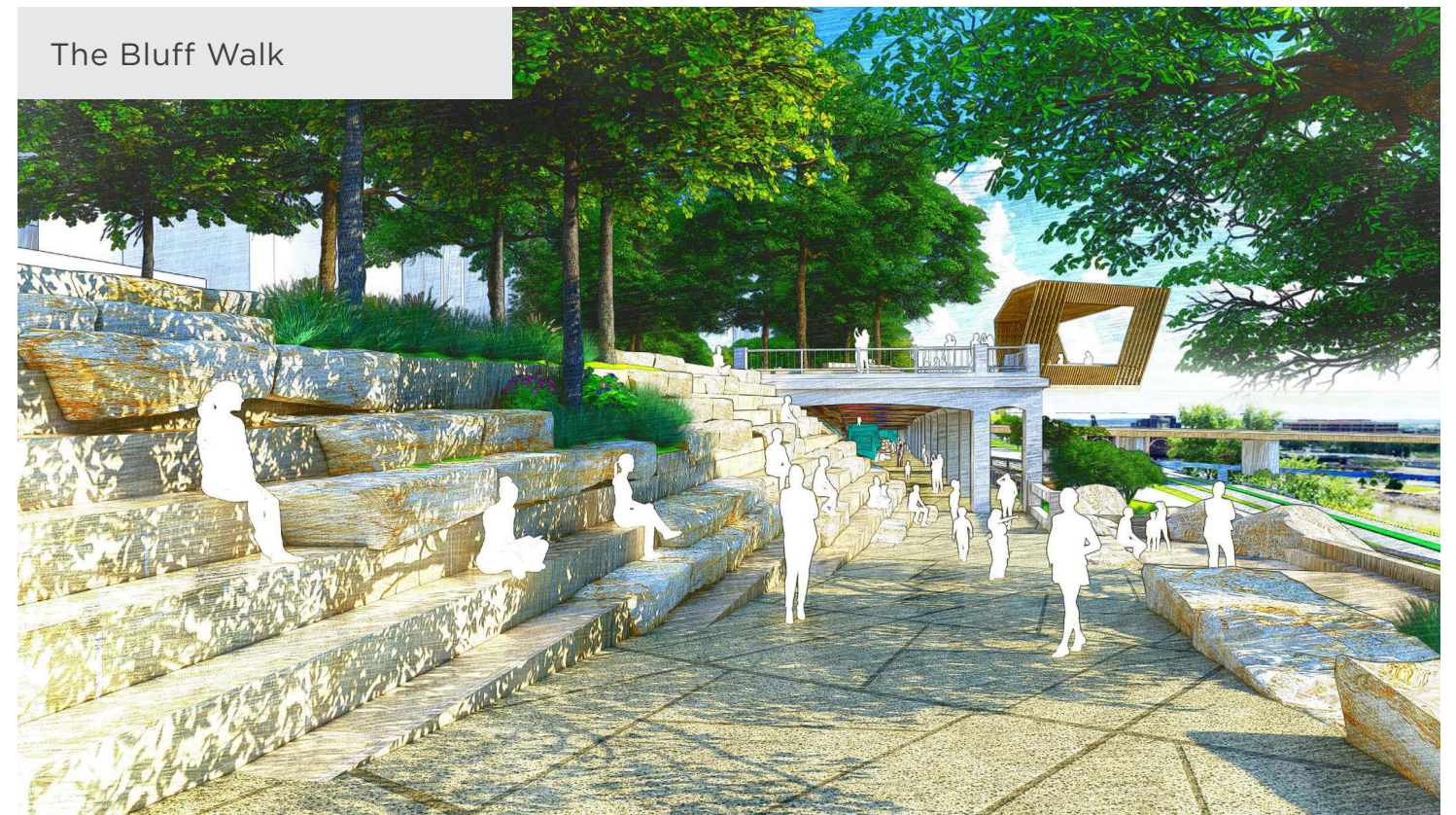
Site Plan: 2nd Street Connector & Country Parking Lot (Park Lower Level)



The Bluff Walk

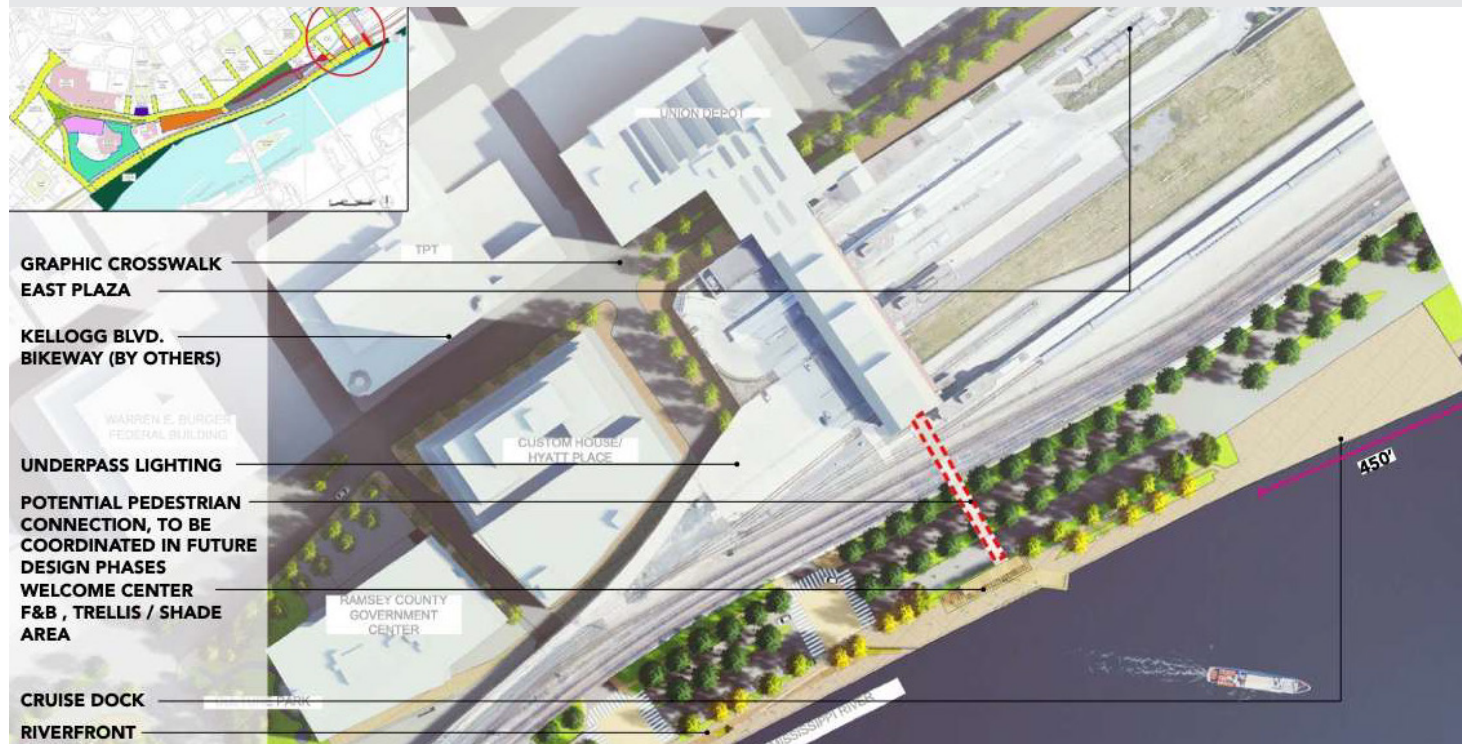


The Bluff Walk



THE RIVER BALCONY IN SECTIONS

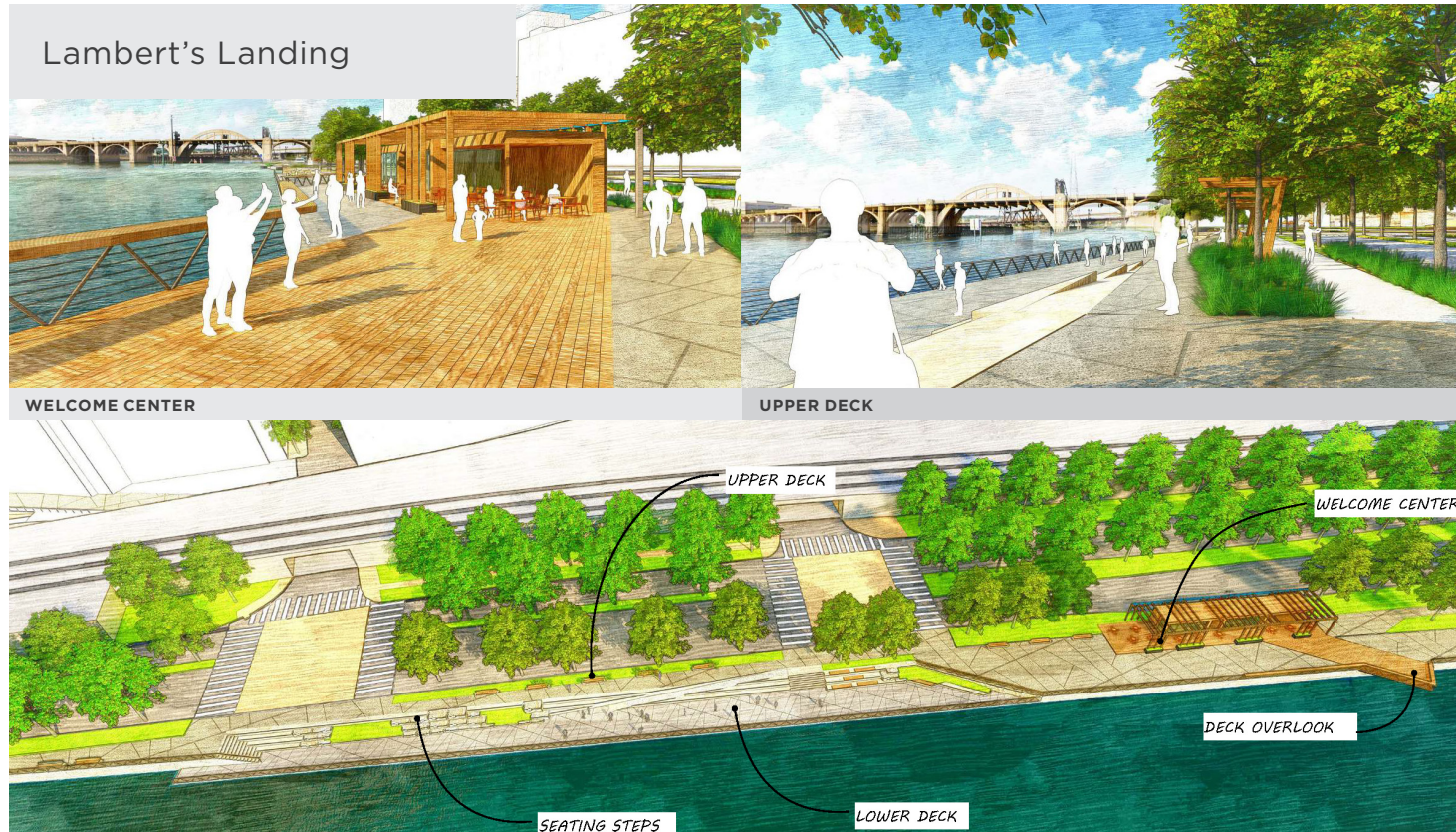
Site Plan: Lambert's Landing & Railroad



Lambert's Landing



Lambert's Landing



FUNDERS

The Conservancy's fundraising for the River Balcony benefits from a 50/50 mix of public and private partnerships.

- City of Saint Paul
- Ramsey County
- Metropolitan Council
- Ecolab
- Xcel Energy
- District Energy St. Paul
- RiverCentre
- Visit Saint Paul
- Knight Foundation
- Securian Financial
- Ruth and John Huss
- Capitol Region Watershed District




NEXT STEPS: SIX MONTH TRANSITION PERIOD

With schematic design complete, we are now focused on these critical steps to bring the project's vision to fruition:

- Create governance structure
- Define partner roles and responsibilities
- Develop finance strategy
- Evaluate phasing timeline



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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.

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