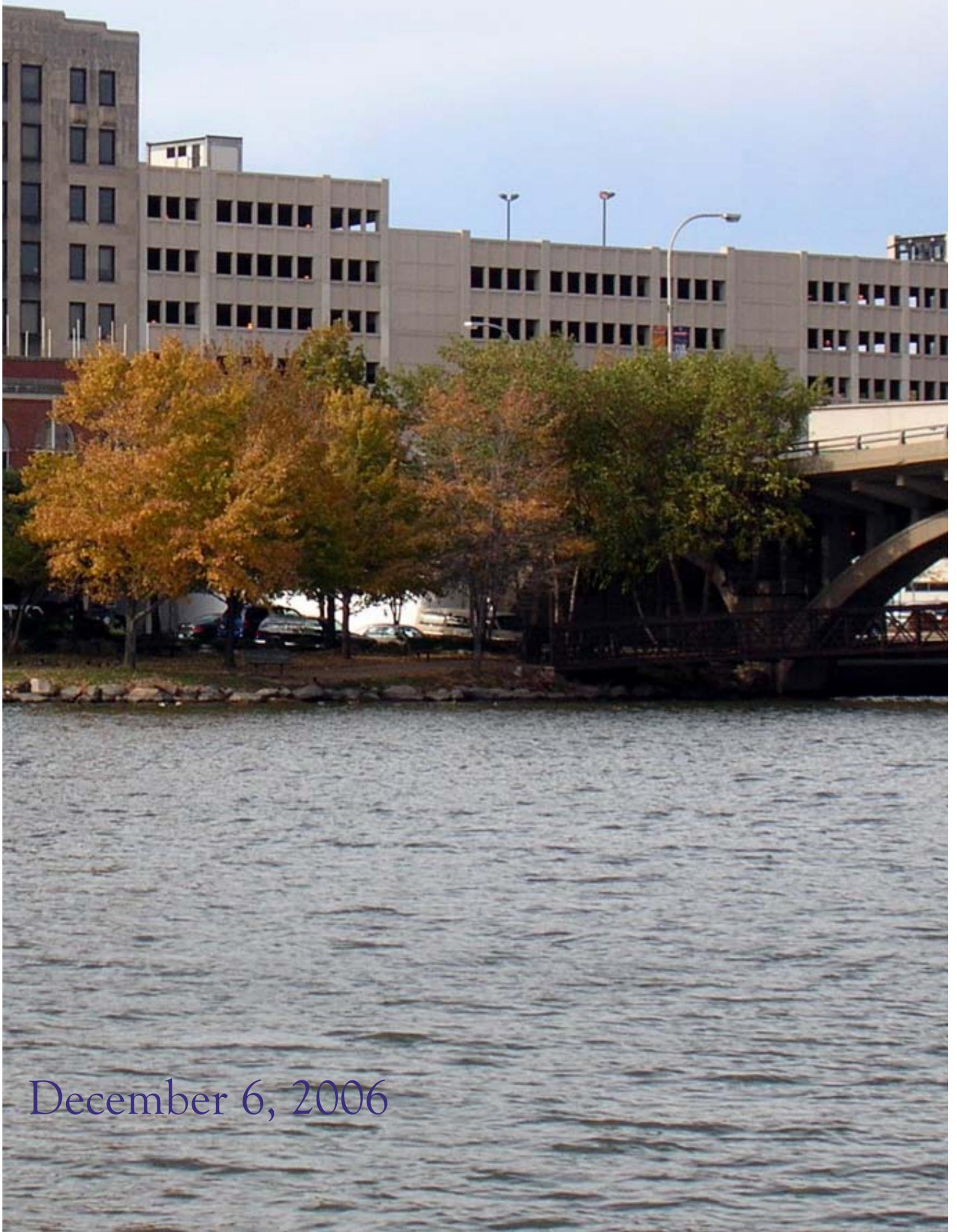


Rockford Riverwalk Vision Plan

A Vision for Our Downtown Riverfront



December 6, 2006

Riverfront Steering Committee

City Officials

Larry Morrissey, Mayor
Victory Bell, Alderman
Doug Mark, Alderman
Jim Ryan, City Administrator
Bill Bittner, Director of Public Works
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Scott Christiansen, Winnebago County Board Chairman
Laura Williamson, Rockford Park District
Jennifer Giltrop, Rockford Public Library
Linda Dennis, Rockford Art Museum
Sarah Wolf, Discovery Center Museum
Lew Crampton, Burpee Museum of Natural History
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Prepared by

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Executive Summary

In early 2006, Mayor Morrissey, in his State of the City address, stated, “Our river will unite us, not divide us.” For the city of Rockford, an unbroken, continuous pathway along the banks of the Rock River has been the goal of many initiatives and master plans in the past. The reasons for this desire are obvious: improved access to a major regional amenity, a stronger local economy, and improved community identity. This Vision Plan is focused on showing how a continuous pathway along both banks of the River can become a reality. It identifies important issues and opportunities but stops short of laying out a plan for development; this will be done in the public arena at the project development stages for each increment of the Riverwalk. Its goal is to raise popular support for improving connections along the River rather than define a particular design.

This plan considers existing land uses, land forms, property ownership, and historic features to portray a complete path system. The proposed path links the existing trail heads at the Whitman Street bridge to the north and the Davis Park bridge to the south with a variety of approaches. These include on-street improvements to Madison Street, cantilevered structures around the Register Star building, renovations to the existing riverwalk sections between Beatie Park and Davis Park, and possibly a new bridge and pier structure around Indian Terrace. The Riverwalk should be designed to be more than a utilitarian structure; it should create a “WOW” factor that becomes a source of community pride and a testament to the fact that “Rockford is Rising.”

However, this Vision Plan is more than a blueprint or collection of ideas for change. It is also a call to action. In order for this plan to become a reality, it is imperative that the City commit to two important objectives. First, this Plan must be presented to the public to enlist popular support and an understanding of the goals. Secondly, systematic investment in the component pieces of the riverwalk, as well as other aspects of the Downtown, must be made. This will stake the City to a position of leadership in redeveloping the River into the focal point and economic engine that are the pride of the City. As the Riverwalk described in this Vision Plan moves from dream to reality, the River will truly become a source of unity rather than division.

Introduction

At the October 6, 2005, Rockford Riverfront visioning workshop, participants were asked to share their ideas for creating a vibrant and vital riverfront. Among the many thoughtful responses was this entreaty: **“Let’s not copy the old thing. Let’s create the new thing.”** This sentiment neatly sums up the overarching goal of this initial visioning process: to not merely create a plan that improves the aesthetics of the riverfront but to implement a vision that puts Rockford back on the map of public perception and recognition. In short, this plan and any projects spawned by it must raise the standard for the Rockford community and create a “WOW!” factor marked by high quality design and attractions that stand the test of time.

Rockford has struggled for years with creating a compelling riverfront plan and, more importantly, implementing the recommendations of any plan. Attention and investment of public and private dollars have been focused on other areas of the City, leaving the river and those properties fronting along it to slowly recede into the backwater of public consciousness. In the meantime, other regional riverfront cities and towns have invested heavily into their riverfronts to create a heart for their communities and an engine for their economies. In an age where “quality of life” is what largely separates one community from another, Rockford has wisely recognized that it must reverse its past course; it has recommitted itself to reinvigorating its downtown and the river that runs through it so that Rockford regains its stature in the regional economy. This commitment stems from the desire to transform the downtown from its industrial past into a 24/7 mixed-use environment replete with residences, restaurants, retail businesses, institutions, and civic spaces.

As it moves through Rockford, the Rock River is an undeniable visual feature or focal point. As such, it is an attraction for scores of people, whether they are pedestrians, bicyclists, boaters, or fishermen. The public value of this resource has been recognized and provisions made, where possible, to accommodate access down to the water’s edge. Unfortunately, this access is interrupted in several places making a somewhat disjointed and fragmented circulation system. In many places, people using the path are required to leave the river’s edge and go around obstructions, whether they be private properties or other obstacles such as the dam.

In a regional sense, path continuity and connectivity are important because the missing sections of a clear public path along the River through downtown represent a missing link in the Grand Illinois Trail. The trail is already in place from Whitman Street to the north, and plans are in progress to extend the trail from Davis Park west to the City limits. Winnebago County intends to further extend the trail west from the City limits to Freeport. It is important to realize that one major criterion for this plan’s success will be the degree to which it affords completion of an unbroken path along both the east and west banks of the River. Once this connectivity is achieved, the River will be perceived as a truly public amenity and an important regional trail system will be substantially improved.

The purpose of this Rockford Riverfront study was to identify and evaluate alternatives for focusing the City’s urban design on the Rock River. Hitchcock Design Group was asked by the City to develop a vision for their riverfront that is unique, innovative and environmentally sensitive; one that will contribute to the quality of life for the City’s residents and act as an economic catalyst for investment in the downtown. The consultant was directed to facilitate a process that would achieve a consensus among the stakeholders who participated in the planning process. In addition, Hitchcock Design Group developed a vision that could be used as a tool to guide budgeting for the next phase of riverfront planning and development. This Vision Plan is not intended to be a list of projects that are required to complete the riverwalk but, rather, it is a framework against which future projects can be compared to ensure a consistent implementation of the plan.

What makes this plan different from those that preceded it? In short, there are two answers: political will-power and funding. The City government, from the Mayor on down, has made it clear that implementing the changes presented in this plan are a high priority and that achieving it is critical to ensuring Rockford’s longterm prosperity. To assist in the funding of a first phase of improvements, the City applied for, and was successful in receiving, a grant from the Illinois Department of Transportation’s Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) for improvements related to completing a public access trail along the River. This report provides details regarding the opportunities that exist for improving the interface between the City of Rockford and the Rock River. It also prioritizes those opportunities and gives input regarding potential costs of improvements, possible funding sources, and critical steps to ensuring that this plan becomes a reality and that Rockford truly can “Create the new thing.”

Approach

Background information on the Rockford riverfront was collected using a variety of methods. First, a site inventory and analysis was conducted using base information provided by the City to understand constraints and opportunities. The site inventory included a one-day site visit during which a photographic inventory was compiled along a one-mile stretch of the river. Adjacent land uses, conditions and character were also documented in photographs.

A review of existing plans and studies related to the project area was conducted to better understand existing and anticipated future land uses, proposed and pending improvements, as well as previous and current visions for the project area prepared for the community. City tax maps identifying current land ownership within the project area were reviewed to better understand potential acquisition and easement needs.

A Visioning Workshop was held on October 6, 2005, to gather input from community stakeholders and elected officials regarding the goals and objectives of the Riverfront plan. During this meeting, participants viewed photographs of other communities where similar issues exist and the ways in which they were addressed.

After reviewing the background information, preliminary plans identifying recommended land uses, acquisitions, easements and improvements were prepared. The preliminary plans were also presented to stakeholder groups to obtain their input and receive additional direction. After reviewing this feedback, this report was prepared for City review and to build support for the initiatives described within.

Opportunity Analysis

Geographic Limits, Ownership

The Riverwalk Master Plan focuses on the downtown section of the Rock River. The intent is to create an integrated pedestrian and bicycle network along both sides of the river from the Whitman Street Bridge on the north, to the Chestnut Street Bridge/Davis Park on the south. In many cases the riverwalk is anticipated to follow directly along the edge of the river, although in some areas private properties extend directly to the river's edge, and the riverwalk may need to be routed inland.

The City of Rockford retains ownership of a number of properties immediately adjacent to the river including the Public Library and adjacent Riverwalk, the vacant Ingersoll building, the Armory building and a number of street rights-of-way leading directly to the river. The Rockford Park District owns a significant amount of property along the riverfront including Beattie Park, Davis Park, Millennium Park and the Riverview Ice House. Additionally, the museum campus has frontage directly on the river. Combined, a significant amount of the project area is publicly controlled.

In some locations, private commercial properties, social/recreational clubs, and residential properties are directly adjacent to the river and must be respected as the Riverwalk is developed.

Jurisdictional Agencies and Permitting

Since The City of Rockford and the Rockford Park District own a significant amount of property in the study area, it is anticipated that each would plan an active role in the review, approval and permitting process in order to construct the Riverwalk improvements. Plans would be subject to City and Park District planning and engineering standards, submitted, reviewed and permitted following the same procedures required for private development proposals.

Any improvements directly adjacent to the River will be subject to the City of Rockford stormwater management requirements along with county, state, and federal requirements, depending on the impact to the floodplain and floodway. For improvements that do impact the floodplain and floodway, a joint permit of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the United States Fish and Wildlife (USFW) would likely be necessary. For environmentally degraded sites, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may need to be involved.

A number of utilities exist along the riverfront, both publicly and privately owned. As construction projects are advanced, further study of existing utilities will be required.

Other Studies

In January 2003 the River District Association published the River District Framework Plan outlining a series of recommendations to revitalize the downtown area adjacent to the river. One of the core revitalization principles identified is to "Capitalize on the River" and a number of the recommendations include public access along the riverfront. The Rockford Riverwalk Vision Plan builds on the ideas as identified in the River District Framework Plan, focusing specifically on development of the Riverwalk.

The City of Rockford is currently considering the creation of a Whitewater Park on the ComEd and Ingersoll properties at the southeast section of the project area. The intent is to connect the Riverwalk to Whitewater Park creating continuous public access.

Financial Resources

It is anticipated that the Riverwalk improvements will be funded using a variety of sources including City capital improvement funds, local, state and federal grants, private funds as part of development projects, and private donations through fund raising efforts. Financial resources specific to the proposed improvements are discussed in more detail in the Implementation section of this report.

Existing Physical Conditions

River edge conditions

A variety of conditions exist along the river's edge throughout the project area. A number of areas are stabilized with vegetation with little evidence of significant erosion. In other areas, large granite boulders effectively prevent erosion. A few areas such as Davis Park, Beattie Park, and the National City Bank Property have a vertical concrete and sheet pile wall at the river's edge, all in relatively good condition. The Register Star Building is constructed directly at the river's edge with little or no access along the water.

Topography

The majority of the area directly adjacent to the river is relatively flat, with a 5 foot to 10 foot grade change down to the normal water level directly at the river's edge. The exception is the Museum Campus area which is significantly higher than the water surface (30 feet or more), with steep side slopes.

Environmental and Water quality

Like many Midwestern towns, Rockford has a history of industrial uses being located along the riverfront, which suggests that environmental issues could be encountered during redevelopment. Although no specific issues are known that affect the areas represented in this report, additional environmental studies may be necessary as implementation advances. Similarly, the water quality of the Rock River has improved in recent years as industrial uses have become less common. Additional improvements to the river itself are anticipated as part of any riverfront developments.

Existing Public Walkways and Bike Paths

A significant network of multi-use trails exist (or are in the planning stages) to the north and south of the project area. The parks within the project area have walkways along the river and a riverwalk extends north from Davis Park along the State office building, connecting to the National City Bank plaza. A City owned Riverwalk extends from State Street north to Beattie Park, where it continues until reaching the adjacent private properties. Altogether, these improvements represent a fairly significant linear footage of access; however a number of these areas are underutilized because they lack connectivity.

The images on the following pages illustrate a number of the existing conditions as described in the opportunity analysis.

Opportunity Analysis



Library riverwalk looking south



View north toward the Ice House from the Jefferson Street bridge.



Commercial district looking west



Register Star building looking north



Looking south from the State Street bridge.



Davis Park looking north



West shoreline from the marina



Looking north from Jefferson Street



Whitman Street bridge looking west



Private property looking south



Looking north toward Beatie Park from the Jefferson Street pedestrian bridge.



Looking north from Beatie Park

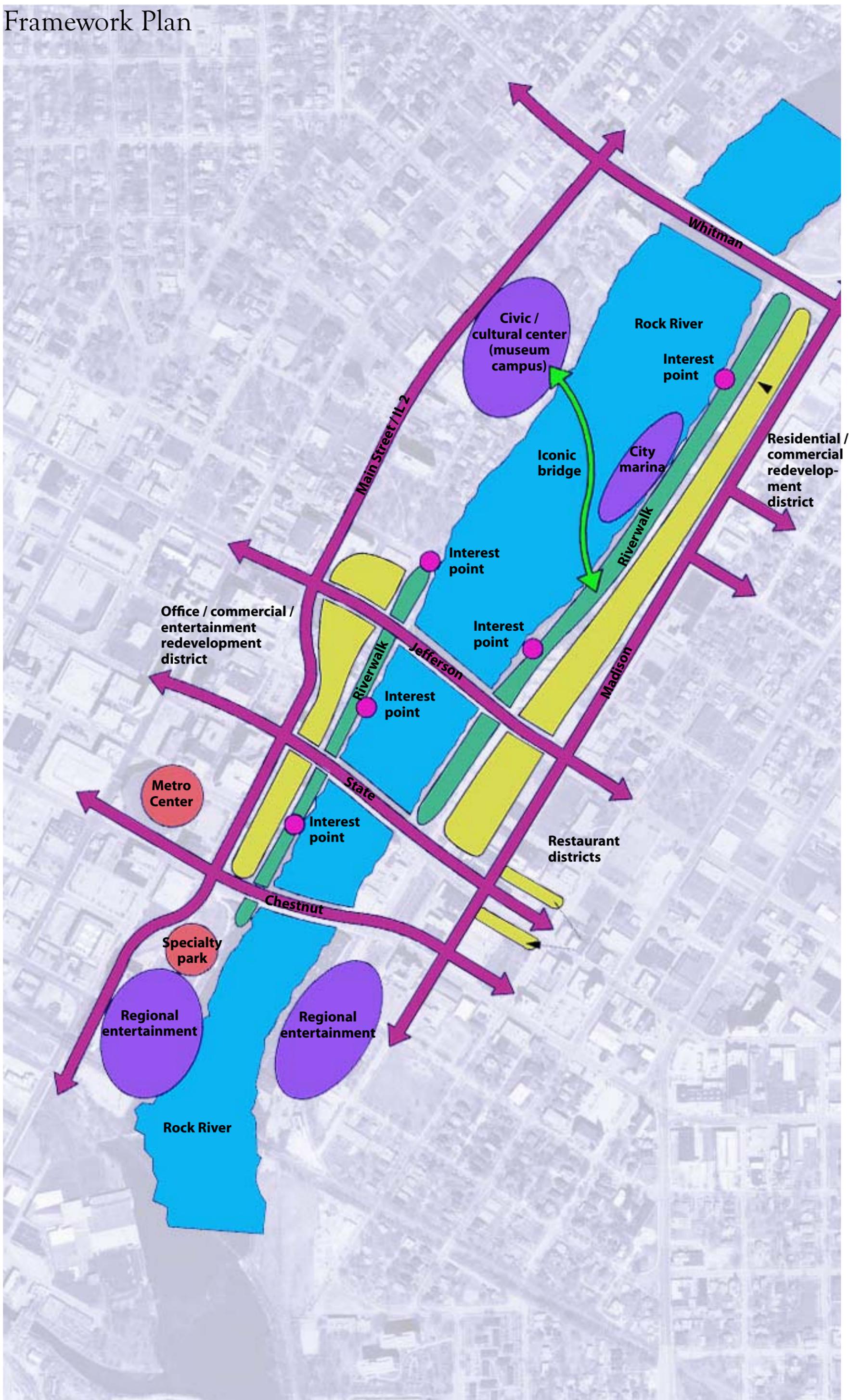
Framework Plan

The Framework Plan outlines a number of key destinations, points of interest, development opportunities and circulation objectives related to the development of the Riverwalk.

Generally, the idea is to create significant destinations at all four corners of the downtown waterfront, connected by attractive public improvements with many points of interest along the way. The waterfront improvements will relate to the adjacent commercial and residential land uses, including connections to the Grand Illinois Trail (north and south) and the existing neighborhoods (east and west). The Riverwalk will be comfortably “walkable” with the creation of a series of compact circulation loops, utilizing the existing street grid for east-west access across the river. The exception is the area between Jefferson and Whitman Streets. This section is longer than the average person may be willing to walk, so a pedestrian bridge is recommended crossing from the Museum Campus to the east side of the river.

This Framework Plan forms the basis for development of the detailed Riverwalk Vision Plan on the following pages.

Framework Plan

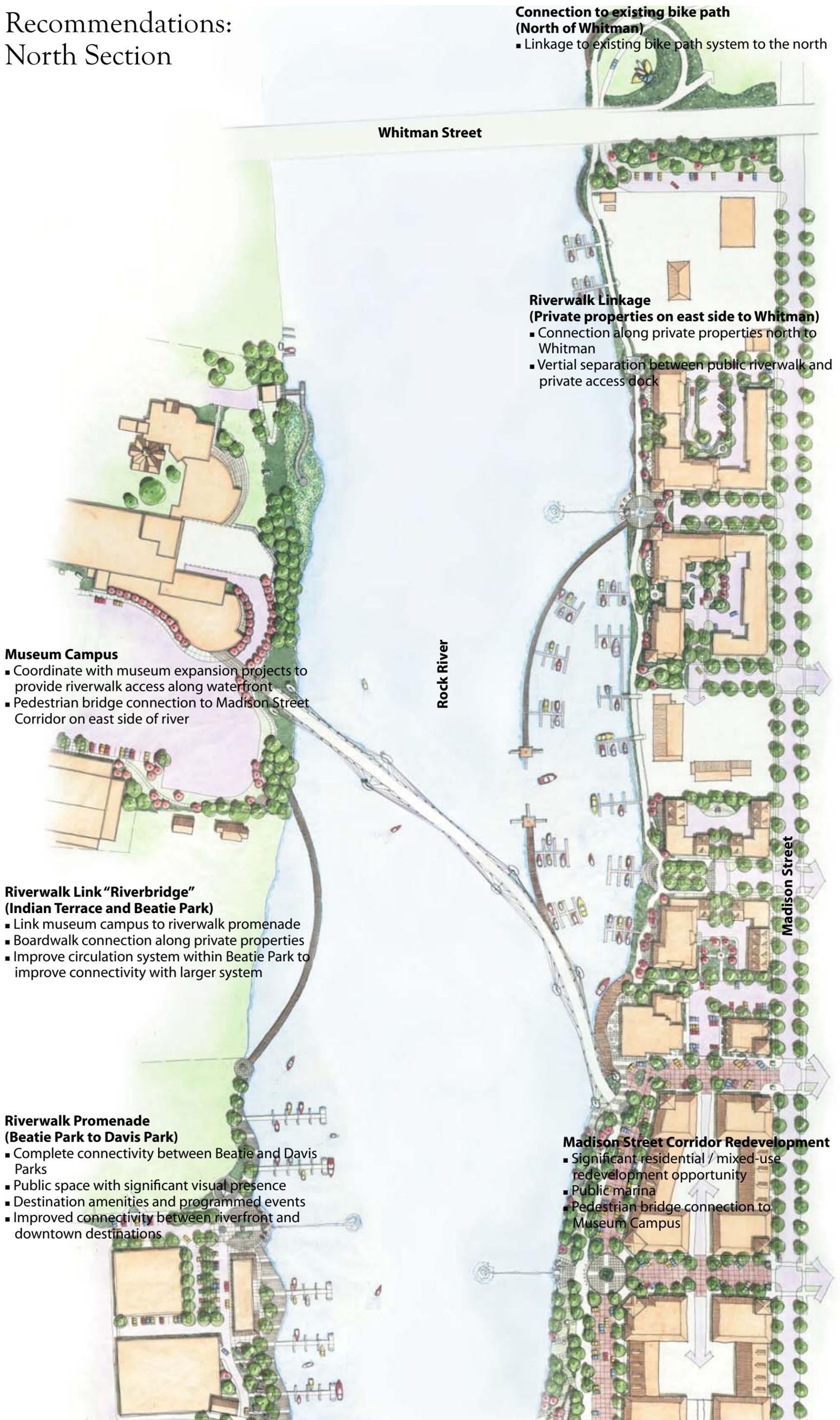


Our long-term vision is to make Rockford's riverfront a unique, exciting and attractive community resource that links City residents to our history, geography, economy and culture in mutually sustainable ways.

Vision Plan:



Recommendations: North Section



Connection to existing bike path (North of Whitman)
 ■ Linkage to existing bike path system to the north

Whitman Street

Riverwalk Linkage (Private properties on east side to Whitman)
 ■ Connection along private properties north to Whitman
 ■ Vertical separation between public riverwalk and private access dock

Rock River

Museum Campus
 ■ Coordinate with museum expansion projects to provide riverwalk access along waterfront
 ■ Pedestrian bridge connection to Madison Street Corridor on east side of river

Madison Street

Riverwalk Link "Riverbridge" (Indian Terrace and Beatie Park)
 ■ Link museum campus to riverwalk promenade
 ■ Boardwalk connection along private properties
 ■ Improve circulation system within Beatie Park to improve connectivity with larger system

Riverwalk Promenade (Beatie Park to Davis Park)
 ■ Complete connectivity between Beatie and Davis Parks
 ■ Public space with significant visual presence
 ■ Destination amenities and programmed events
 ■ Improved connectivity between riverfront and downtown destinations

Madison Street Corridor Redevelopment
 ■ Significant residential / mixed-use redevelopment opportunity
 ■ Public marina
 ■ Pedestrian bridge connection to Museum Campus

Recommendations: South Section



Riverwalk Promenade (Beatie Park to Davis Park)

- Complete connectivity between Beatie and Davis Parks
- Public space with significant visual presence
- Destination amenities and programmed events
- Improved connectivity between riverfront and downtown destinations

Water Street Riverwalk (State to Jefferson Streets)

- Completes continuous east side path from the south to Jefferson
- Improves amenities and river access

Riverwalk Connection (Register Star Building)

- Cantilevered or pier / floating dock connection between Chestnut and State Streets
- Potential restaurant location

Ingersoll Property Redevelopment

- Residences with waterfront access
- Potential adaptive re-use of Ingersoll Building

Davis Park

- Major Downtown events venue
- Connected to Federal Courthouse
- Destination plaza / park space at intersection with Chestnut Street
- Architecturally-significant amphitheater

Whitewater Park

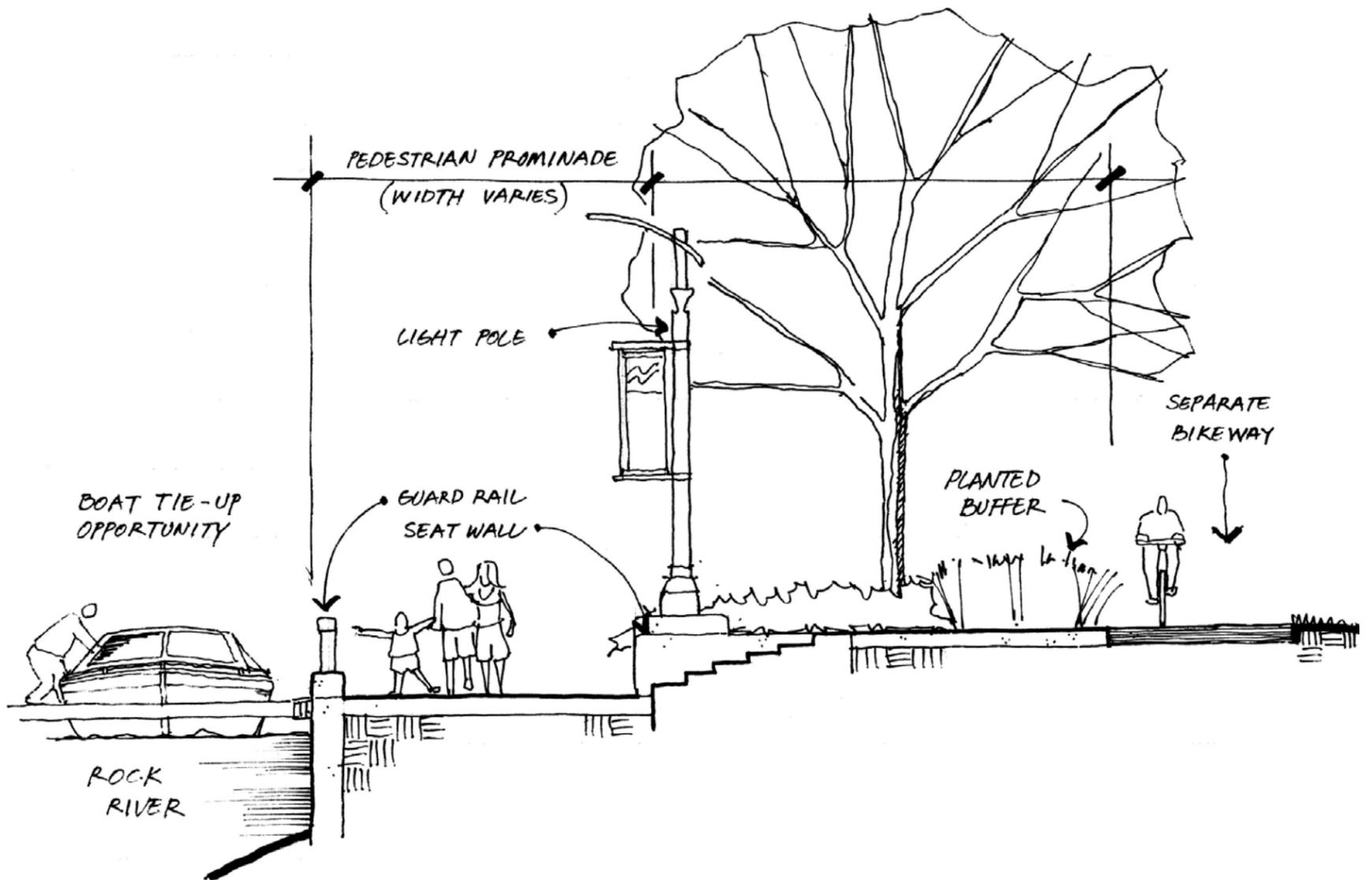
- State-of-the-art rapids course
- Regional attraction

Recommendations: Connectivity Plan

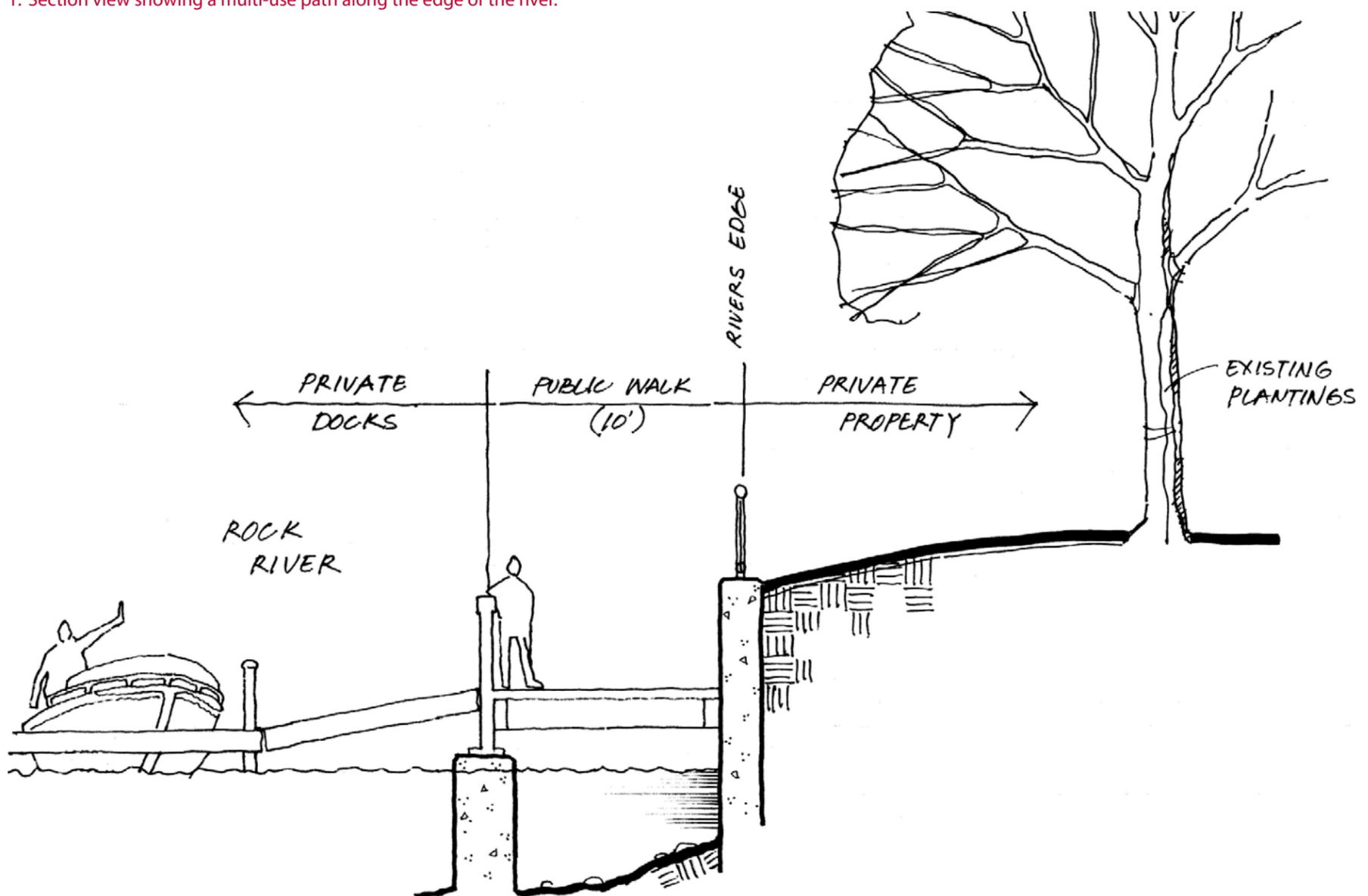
While the Framework Plan outlines a series of big picture ideas related to the overall development of the Riverwalk, the Connectivity Plan identifies the specific existing circulation routes along the riverfront and potential methods to fill the gaps. A series of cross-sections illustrates how connectivity could occur related to the specific conditions of the riverfront.



Recommendations: Riverwalk connections

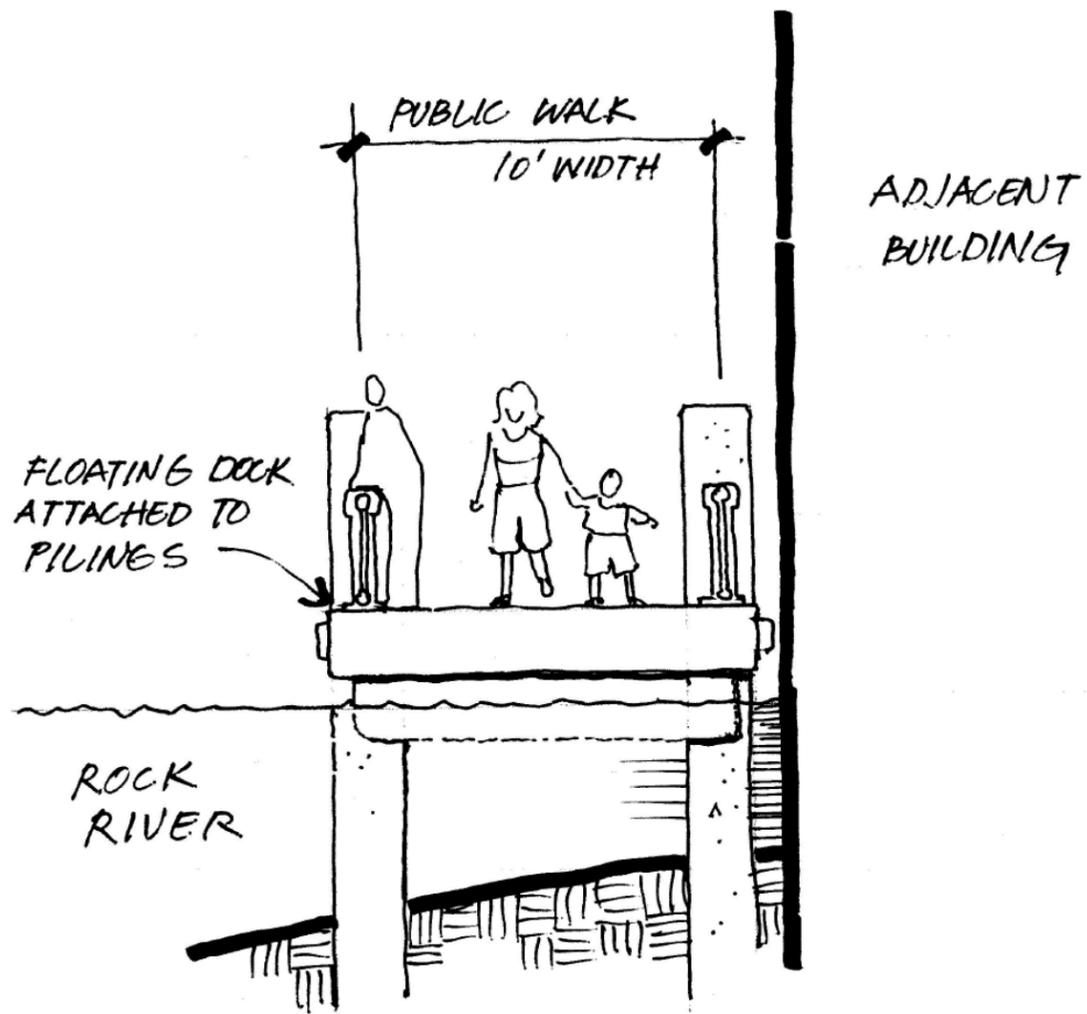


1. Section view showing a multi-use path along the edge of the river.

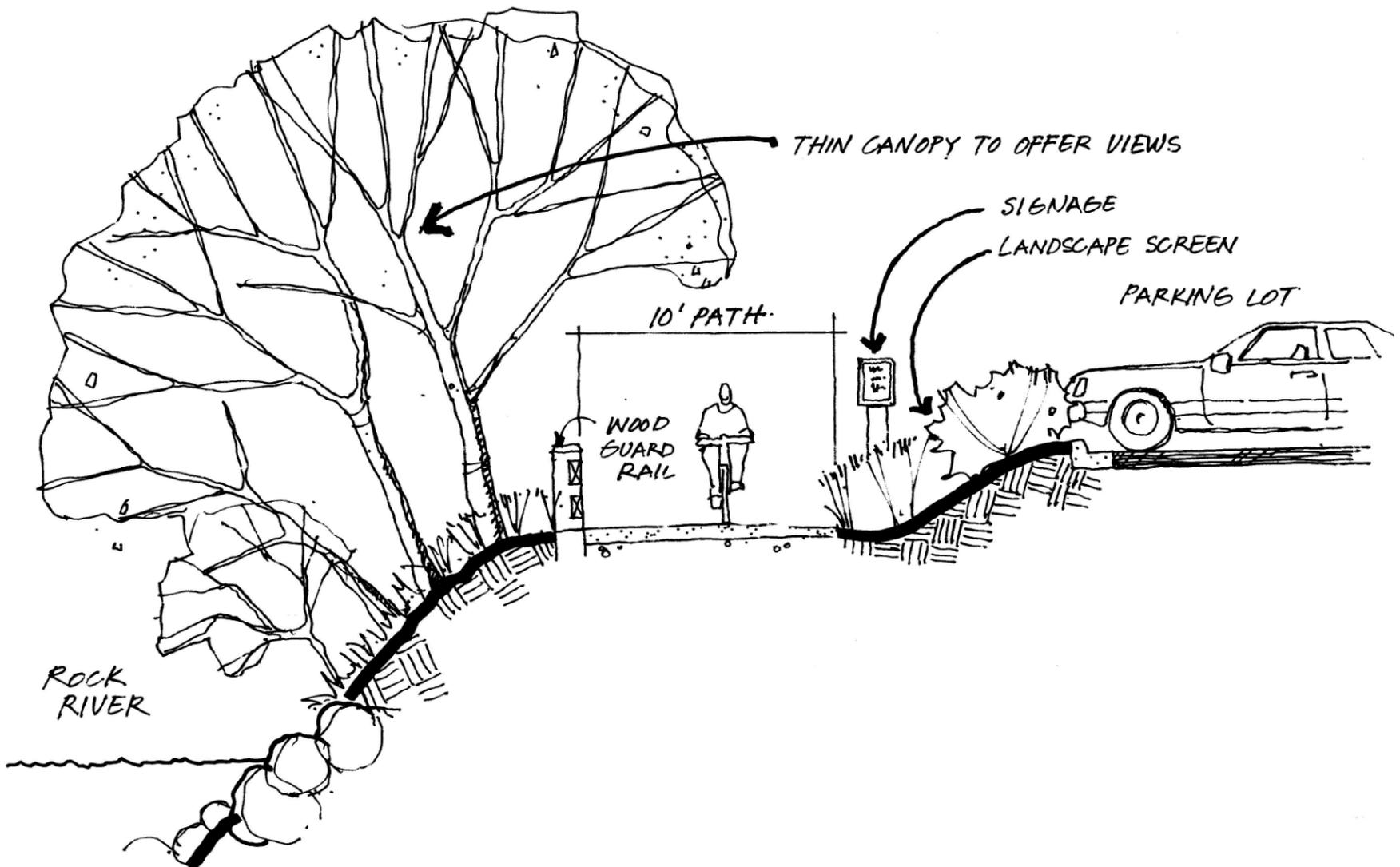


2. Section view showing a pedestrian path that is located and constructed in such a way so as to minimize disruption and disturbance to the adjacent property.

Recommendations: Riverwalk connections

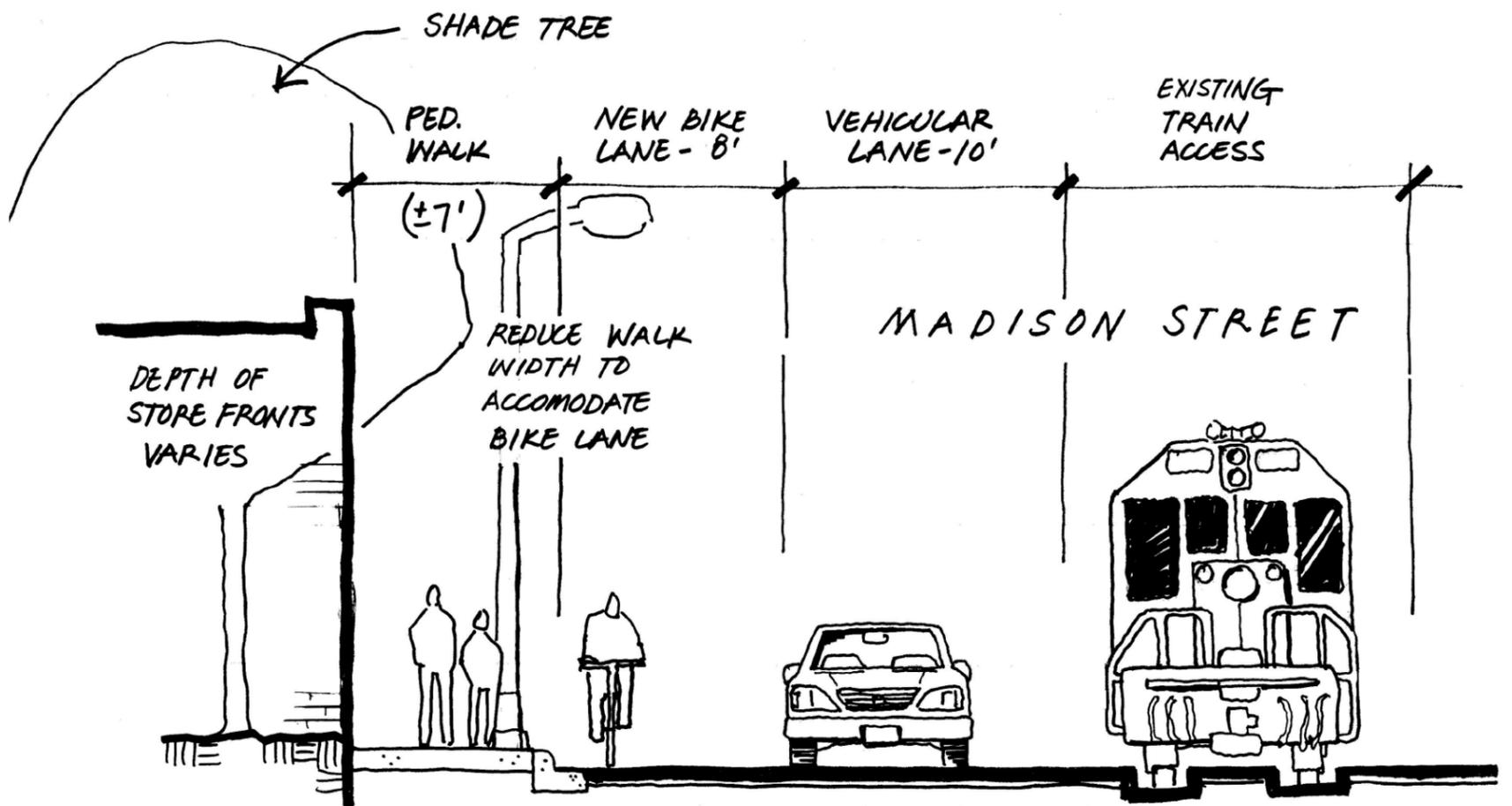


3. Section showing a floating pedestrian path for use where existing buildings are built at the water's edge.

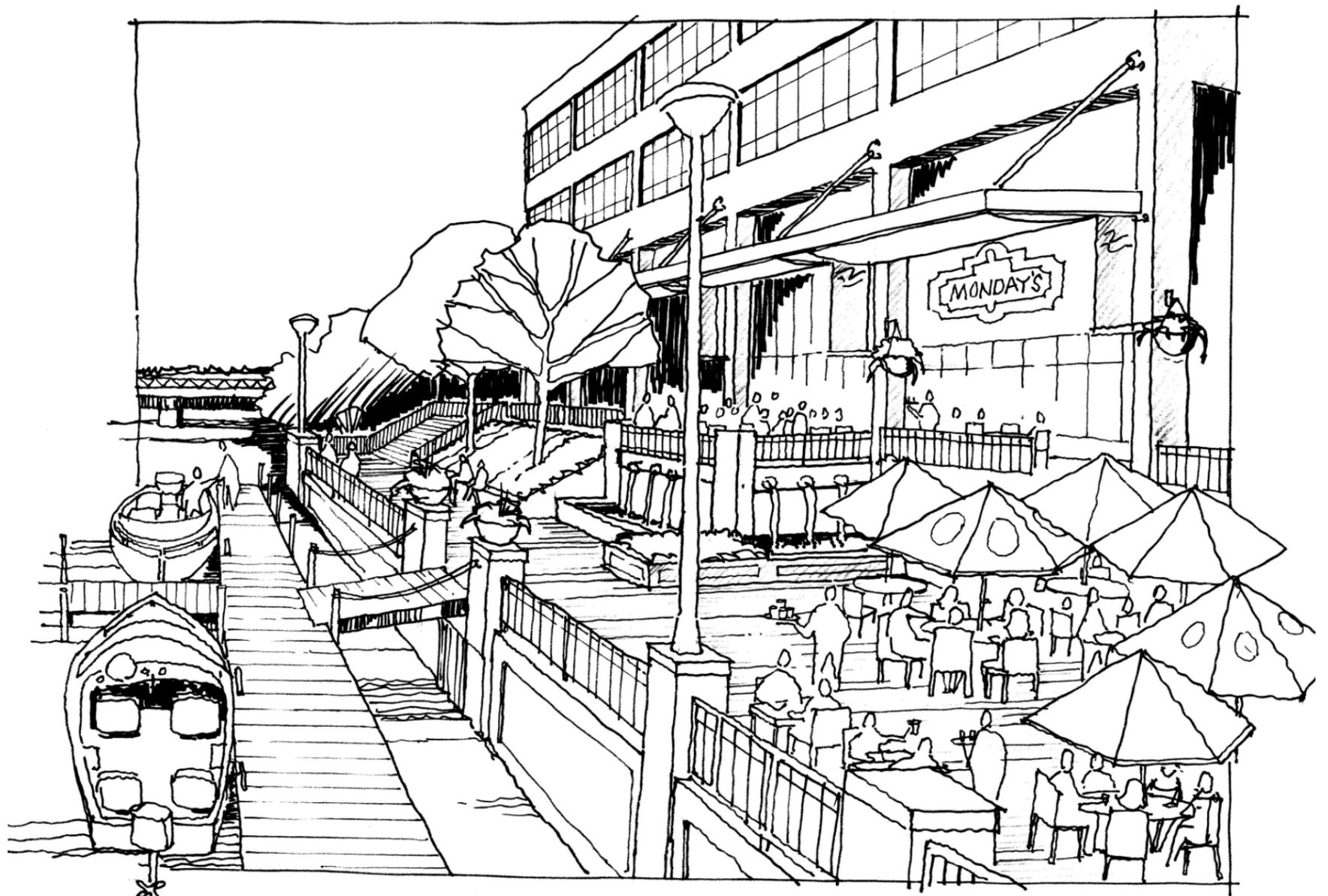


4. Section view showing a bicycle path built to minimize the impact on adjacent land uses and the river embankment.

Recommendations: Riverwalk connections



5. Section view showing how a bicycle path could be integrated into a typical street.

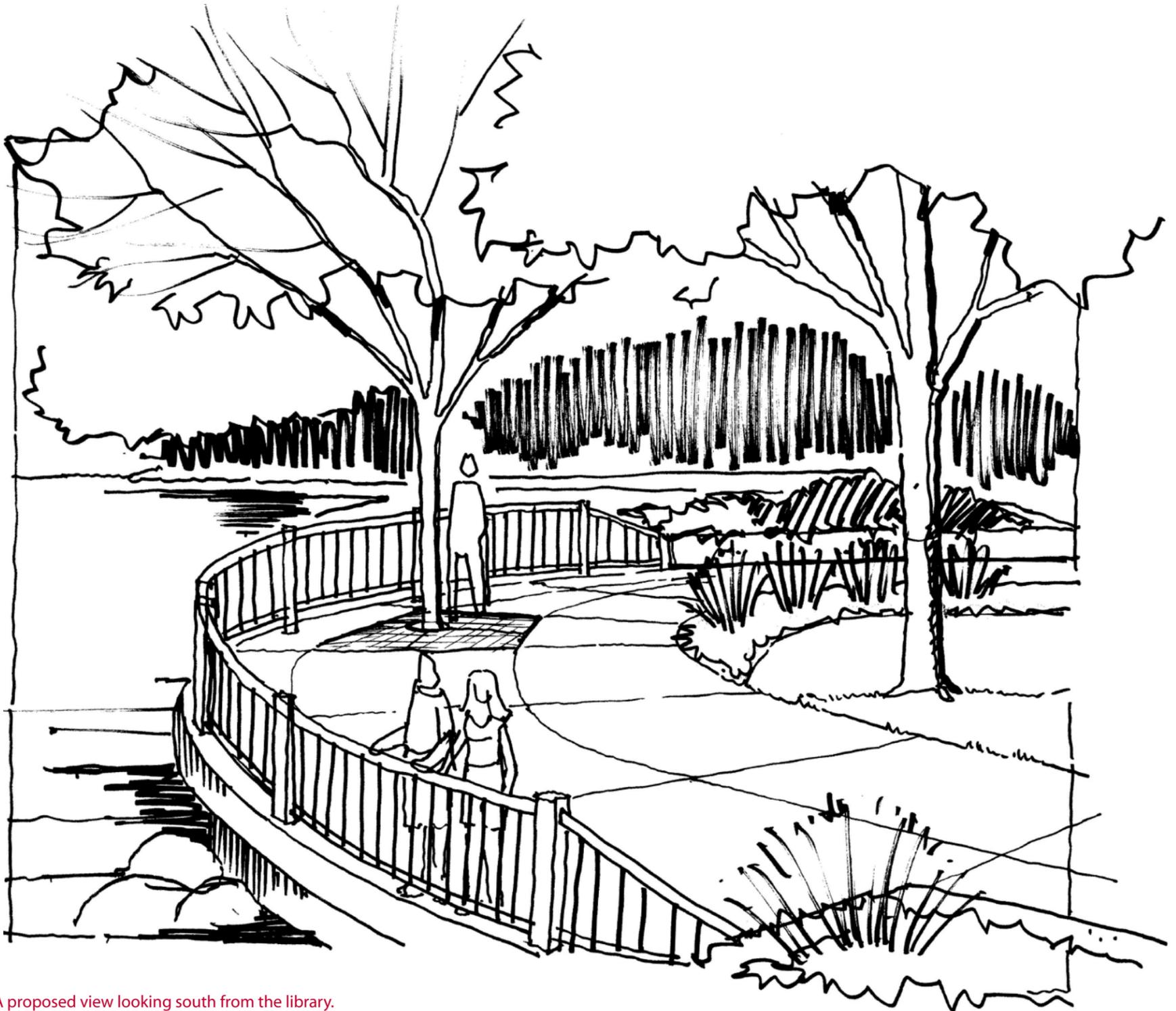


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Recommendations: Riverwalk connections

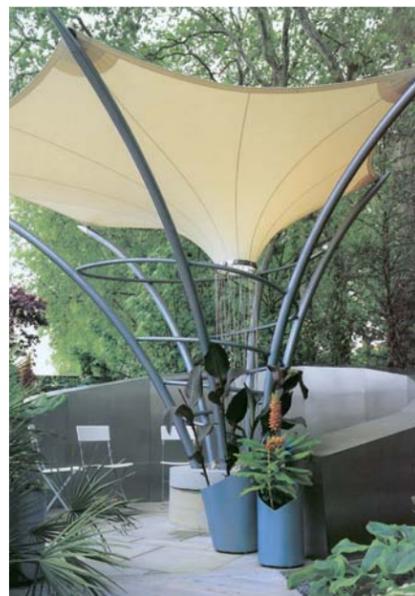
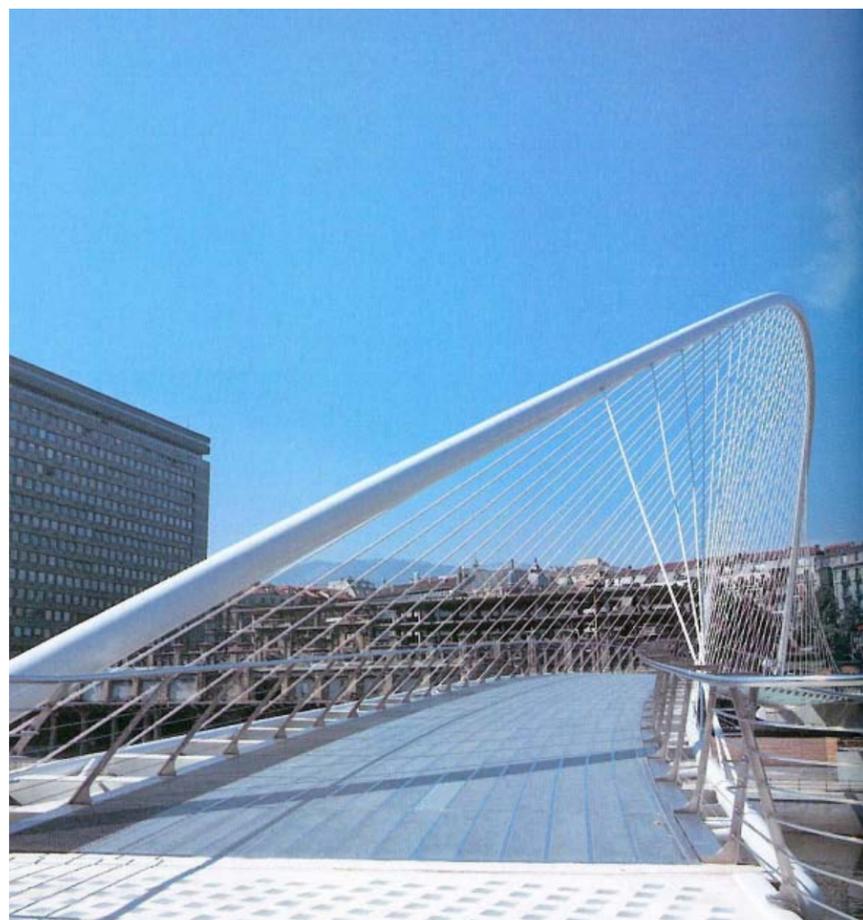
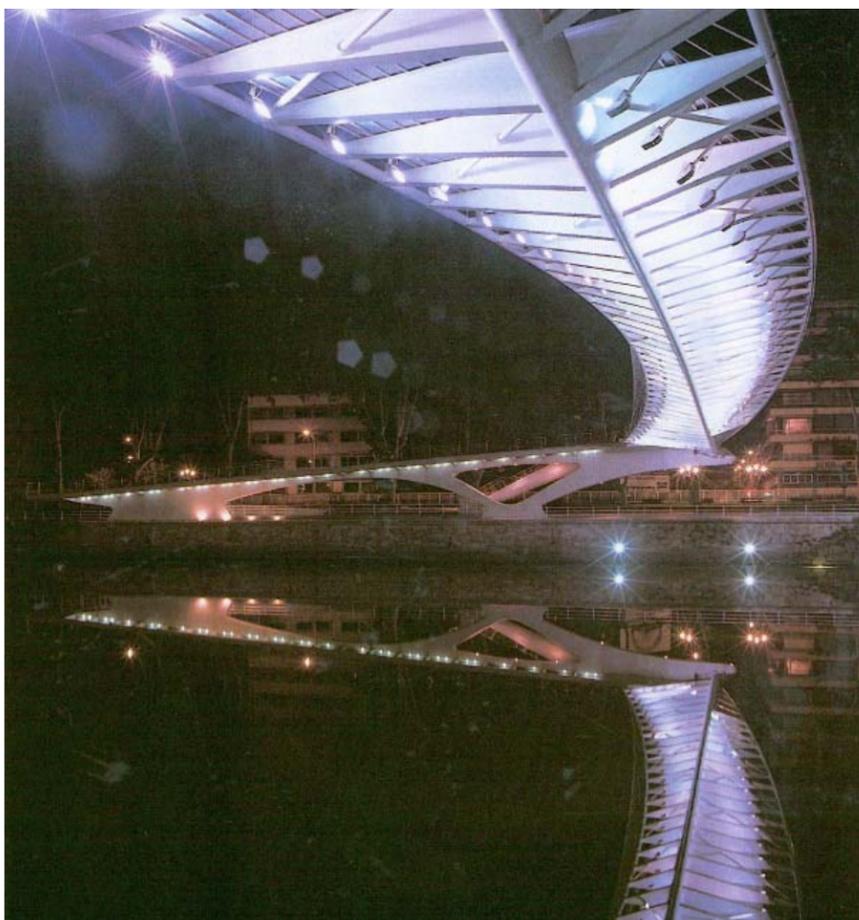


A proposed view of Davis Park looking north along the river.



A proposed view looking south from the library.

Recommendations: Design prototypes



Ideas for bridges, boardwalks, fountains, sculpture, plazas, lighting, places to sit, places to read, places to eat, places to see and be seen.

Short-term Opportunities

Short-Term Opportunities

Some of the ideas represented in the Vision Plan are big picture items meant to guide future policy decisions. Other ideas represent more short-term opportunities that can be implemented sooner rather than later. It is anticipated that these short-term opportunities will build momentum for more complex, long-lead time endeavors.

One of several factors should characterize a river edge project for it to qualify as a short-term opportunity. These are:

1. Infrastructure: Public-sector capital improvement projects, such as expansion to or repair of bridges, bulkheads, embankments, etc. should be expanded in scope to include the incremental continuation of the riveredge pedestrian trail system.
2. Redevelopment: Private-sector development or redevelopment projects should be approved only if they include provisions for constructing a link in the riverwalk.
3. Grants: Obviously, the procurement of sufficient funding from public or private sources is cause for a project to be moved to the top of the list of short-term projects. In fact, the city has received an Illinois Transportation Enhancement Project (ITEP) grant in the amount of \$1.76 M to be used for riverwalk improvements

Given their inclusion of one or more of the factors above, the following areas of the Vision Plan have been identified as short-term opportunities:

Madison Street Corridor

Although redevelopment of the Madison Street Corridor may take some time to gain momentum, the City and Park District should focus attention on this area sooner rather than later in order to establish a policy regarding redevelopment. Discussions with private land owners and potential developers should take place to lay the groundwork for what will likely be a multi-phase project.

Davis Park

The Park District has identified Davis Park as a major downtown gathering space including the addition of an architecturally significant band shell. In addition, the master plan recommends construction of an active urban attraction in the northwest corner of the park, potentially with an environmental education theme, which would be a major downtown destination. The City and Park District should work together to determine how these improvements can be implemented in conjunction with the other downtown improvements.

Federal Courthouse Plaza

It is our understanding that the construction of the new federal courthouse includes a commitment to construct a significant urban plaza linking the courthouse to the riverfront. The City should consider the long range vision represented in the Riverwalk Master Plan as construction of the Federal Courthouse Plaza is implemented.

Riverwalk Promenade – Beattie Park to Davis Park

Construction of the Riverwalk from Beattie Park to Davis Park seems like the most logical place to begin for a variety of reasons. First, the majority of the property is publicly owned which simplifies the implementation process. In addition, transformation of the passive existing walkway to a more dynamic urban environment would act as a demonstration project and set precedence for future Riverwalk improvements. This section would also provide connectivity to existing and future redevelopment sites within the most visible section of the downtown.

Depending on the amount of funding available, this section of the Riverwalk could be constructed in a series of logical phases; Beattie Park to Jefferson Street; Jefferson Street to State Street (Library frontage); State Street to Elm Street (National City Bank frontage); Elm Street to Chestnut Street (State of Illinois Building frontage).

Museum Campus, Riverwalk linkage to Downtown

It is our understanding that the Burpee Museum and the Discovery Center Museum both intend to construct significant additions in the near future along with other master planned improvements throughout the Museum Campus. The City and Museum representatives should coordinate their efforts to construct Riverwalk improvements through the Museum Campus with the goal of creating continuous connectivity to the downtown area.

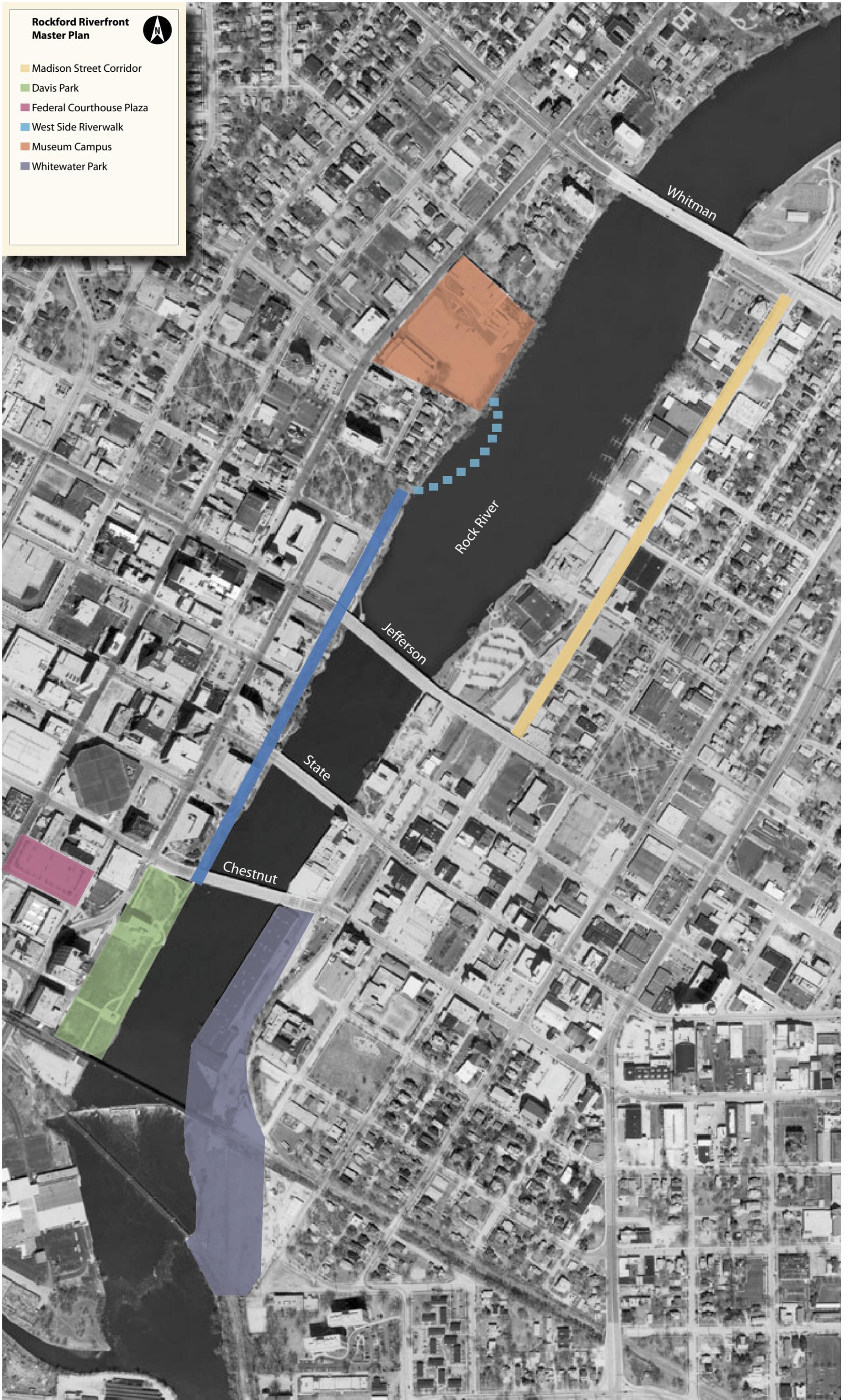
Whitewater Park

The City of Rockford is developing plans for a water sport complex built on the site of the abandoned ComEd facility on the east side of the river. Preliminary concepts include an Olympic-quality whitewater kayaking venue as well as recreational and instructional facilities.

**Rockford Riverfront
Master Plan**



- Madison Street Corridor
- Davis Park
- Federal Courthouse Plaza
- West Side Riverwalk
- Museum Campus
- Whitewater Park

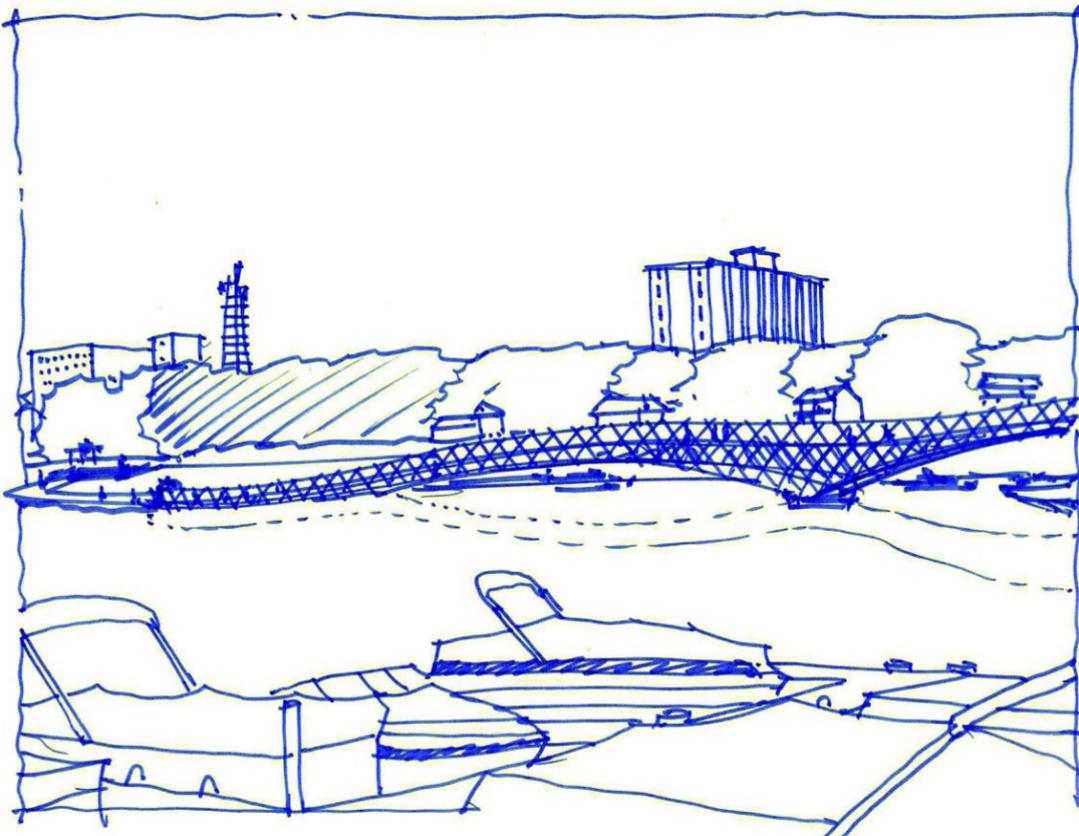


Phase One

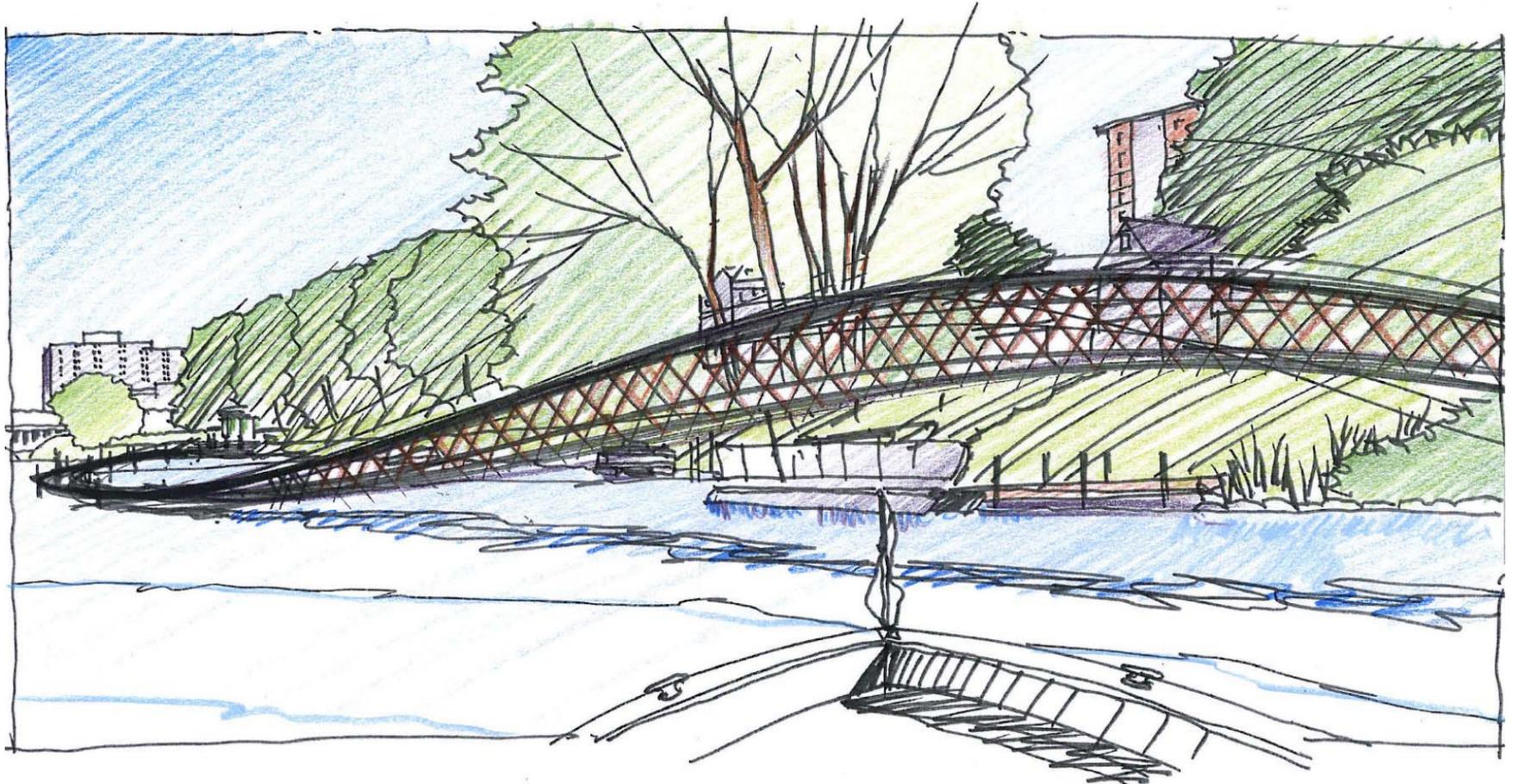
Museum Campus, Riverwalk linkage to Downtown

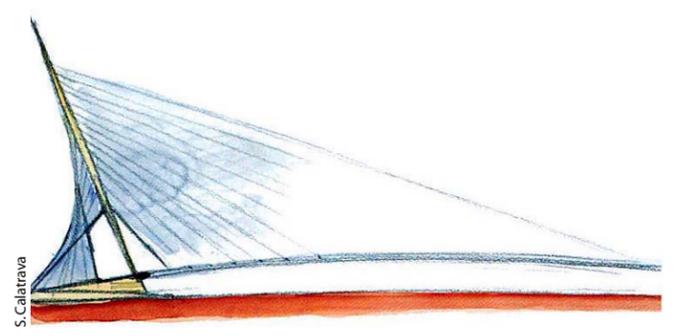
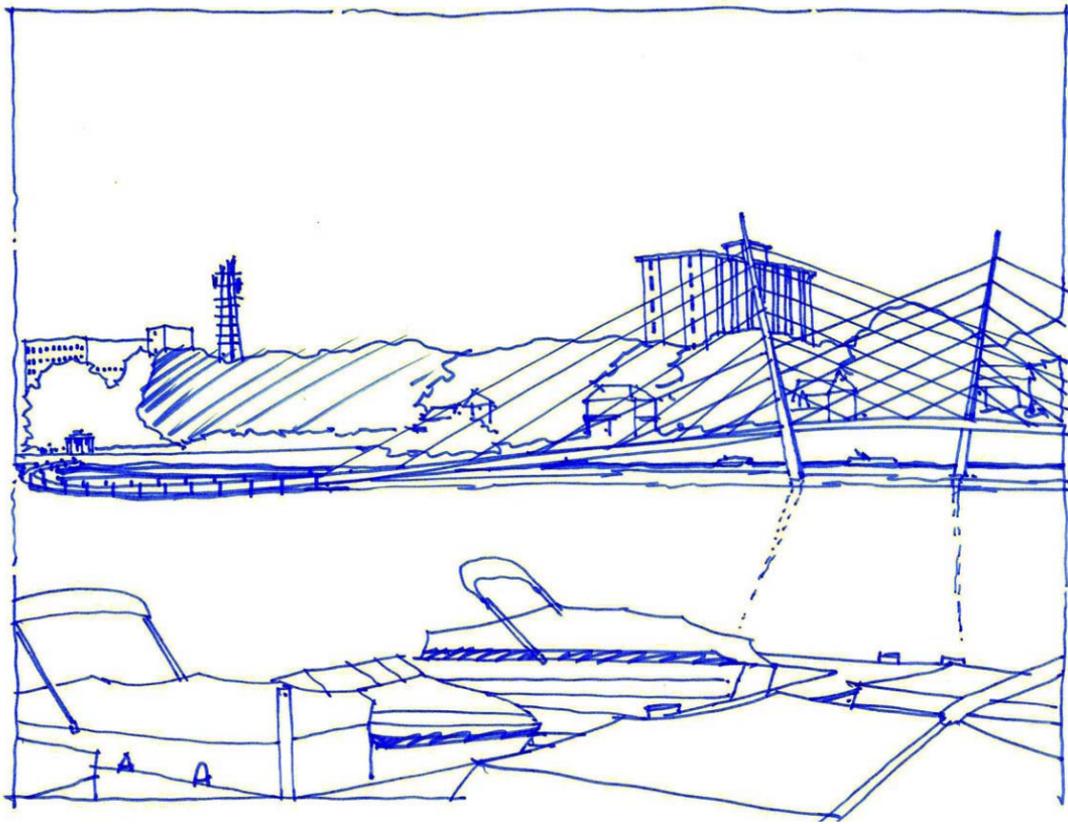
As noted in the preceding section, the Burpee Museum of Natural History and the Discovery Center Museum both intend to construct significant additions in the near future along with other master planned improvements throughout the Museum Campus. For its part, the City has recently released a Request for Proposals to develop plans for improving the river edge, possibly by using bridge and boardwalk sections, to connect the Campus with Beattie Park. This work will be undertaken to fulfill the ITEP grant and will include establishing alternatives as well as Phase I, II, and III engineering services.

The solution to this challenge may well include a pedestrian bridge and boardwalk that extends outward from the Museum Campus bluff and runs south to the existing pavilion in Beattie Park. The design will need to allow boat access from the private residences and boat docks in Indian Terrace to the open river. The sculptural possibilities for this structure are quite striking. One possible design direction is to construct a pylon / suspension bridge, similar to those made famous by the architect Santiago Calatrava. A second possibility is to create a structure that recalls the form of a dinosaur's tail as it descends from the bluff and wraps to the park. Given the popularity and cachet of the Jane dinosaur exhibit at the Museum of Natural History, this sort of iconic symbol will act as a unique, place-specific sign announcing the museum campus, as well as serving a very functional purpose.

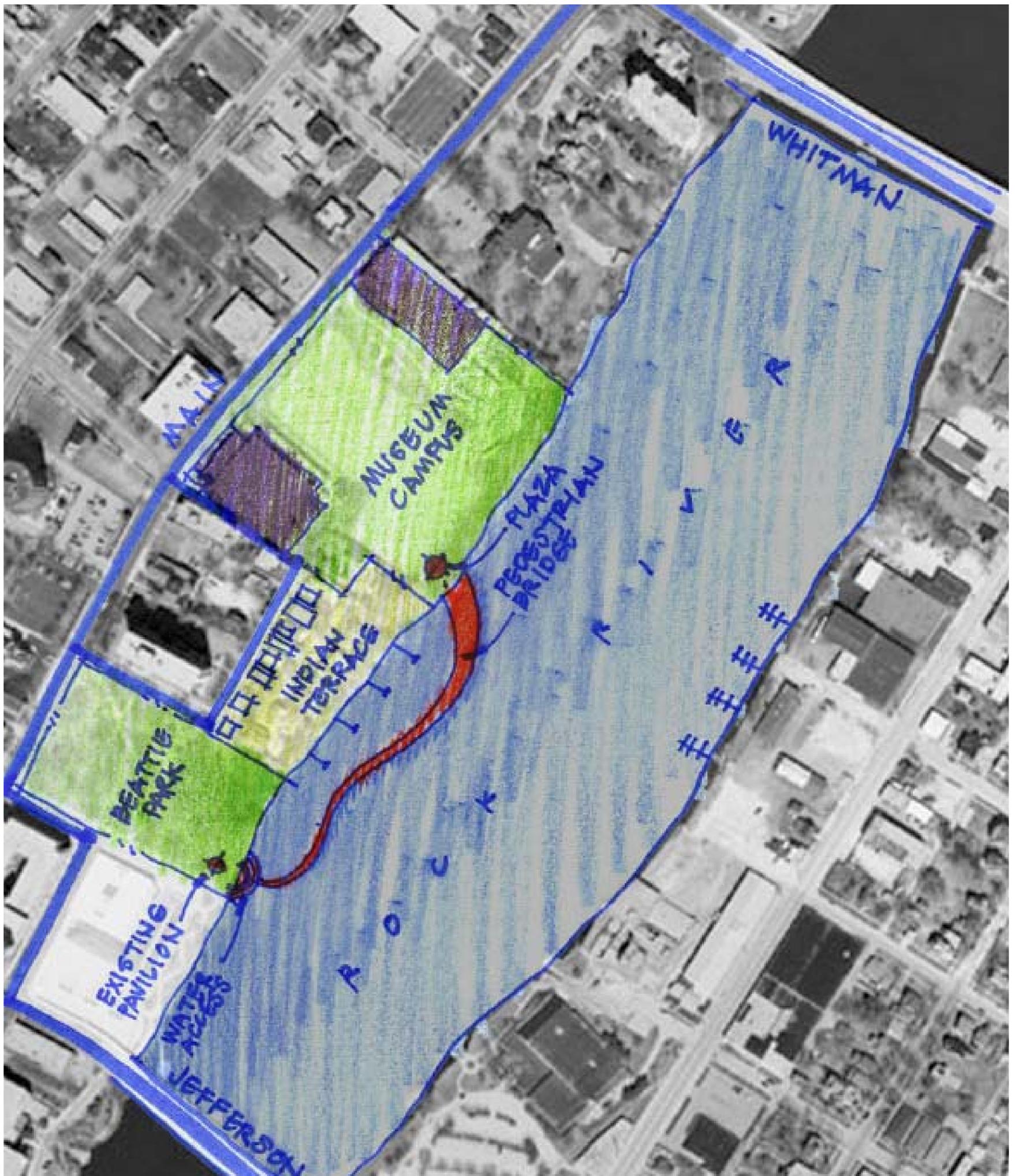


A bridge recalling the form of a dinosaur's tail would be a memorable way to complete the path connection on the west side of the river.





A pylon / suspension "Calatrava" bridge would add a significant element to the Rockford skyline.



Implementation

The Rockford Riverwalk Vision Plan illustrates an exciting long range vision for the downtown riverfront. The plan represents the current thinking regarding a number of opportunities, building on the vision as outlined in the River District Framework Plan.

Although the plan may seem overwhelming at first, in reality, it is likely that implementation will occur in phases over a number of years due to the scale, complexity and potential costs of construction. It is expected that the Vision Plan will need to be updated on a regular basis as different areas become priorities and various phases are completed.

The following action items are recommended in order to systematically implement the improvements over time.

Support the Vision Plan

In order for the Vision Plan to act as a guide for future redevelopment it is important that it be supported by the City, Park District and River District Association. Supporting the Master Plan will send an important message that the community is serious about implementation of the riverfront improvements and will help justify allocation of important community resources.

Encourage Public / Private Partnerships

The City and Park District own a significant amount of property along the downtown riverfront, however adjacent private development is critical to the success of the Riverwalk. Public / private partnerships are encouraged in order to leverage resources in order to provide connectivity and construct the Riverwalk improvements as part of private redevelopment projects.

The City should also clearly define the review, approval and entitlement process in order to encourage private developments.

Identify Funding Opportunities

It is anticipated that the Riverwalk improvements will be constructed utilizing a variety of funding sources including City and Park District capital improvement funds, grant funding from various agencies, and private sector investment.

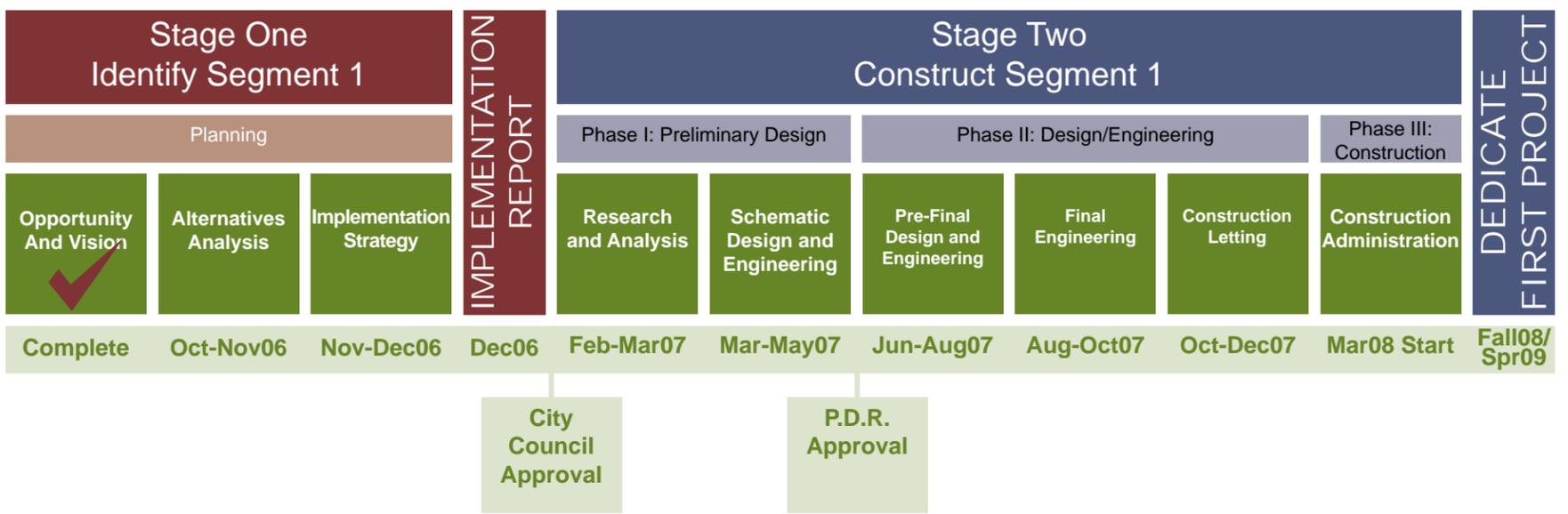
As a matter of policy, the City and Park District should systematically allocate capital funds every year towards construction of the Riverwalk improvements. When combined with other sources of funding, individual projects can be phased based on the total amount of funding available.

The Riverwalk improvements should be included and evaluated as part of the City's overall downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) strategy. TIF increment as a result of continued downtown redevelopment has the potential of contributing significantly to the development of the Riverwalk.

There are a number of grant programs available that could contribute to the construction of the Riverwalk improvements. However, grant funding will vary from year to year, depending on the political climate and amount of funding available to the various programs. Also state and federal legislative grants are a possibility if facilitated by Rockford's local representatives. It is important to remember that certain eligibility and administrative procedures will be required as a condition of receiving grant money. These requirements may complicate matters, which may or may not be favorable to the development of the Riverwalk and should be considered carefully prior to accepting outside funding.

An Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) grant application was awarded in June, 2006 for the Riverwalk with eligibility based on providing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity along both sides of the river. The City will need to coordinate with IDOT to determine specifically what items will be eligible based on the amount of funds received.

It is anticipated that a number of the Riverwalk improvements will be constructed as part of private developments, utilizing private sector funding. Additionally, private sector contributions acquired through fund raising campaigns could also contribute significantly to construction of the Riverwalk improvements.



Design, Engineering and Permitting Process

Once the first phase projects are confirmed and financed, the next step is to finalize the design and engineering required for permitting and construction. Under normal circumstances the design, permitting, and documentation process can take six months or more depending on the complexity of the project. The jurisdictional permitting will vary depending on the impact of the improvements within the floodplain and floodway. Agencies that have jurisdiction include, the City of Rockford, Rockford Park District, Winnebago County, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA), Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, among others.

For ITEP funded projects, design and engineering will need to follow IDOT requirements which could prolong the process. However, design and engineering fees are eligible for reimbursement under the ITEP funding. Once construction begins on the first project, design, engineering, and permitting for the next project(s) should begin in order to maintain momentum for continuous improvements.

Conclusion

This Vision Plan is the first step in what will be a long and challenging process for the City of Rockford. But, in many ways, it is also a necessary step in refocusing the city’s attention on the river and the incredible opportunities it represents for improving the welfare and enjoyment of Rockford’s citizens.

Appendix:

Visioning Workshop Summary

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: October 6, 2005
Time: 11:30 am – 1:30 pm
Location: City of Rockford – Council Chambers
Attendees: Mayor's Steering Committee (see attached sign-in sheet)
Hitchcock Design Group (HDG)
RE: **Rockford Riverwalk Master Plan**
Project No.: **03-0675-002-01-03**

Purpose of meeting: **Visioning Workshop**

Items discussed:

A. Welcome and Introduction

1. The group was introduced and the City described that attendees were selected by the Mayor based on their interests and involvements along the riverfront and downtown.
2. The Mayor described the general goals of the Riverwalk Master Plan as:
 - a. Improve the riverfront in order to maximize community value
 - b. Provide complete, connected and continuous improvements along the river
 - c. Leverage both public and private investment (sum of the whole greater than individual parts)
3. The master plan was generally described as:
 - a. Inventory and data gathering
 - b. Visioning workshop and interviews
 - c. Schematic design
 - d. Public meeting / open house
 - e. Refinement
 - f. Council presentation
 - g. City adopt the plan as policy

B. Presentation of Existing Conditions and Comparables

1. HDG gave a PowerPoint Presentation with a brief overview of the study area including photographs of existing conditions. HDG also described the ITEP grant application that was submitted for the riverfront. Finally, HDG presented a series of images from other projects to give attendees an example of what is possible.

C. Individual Brainstorming

1. Individuals were first asked to brainstorm ideas based on a series of questions. Individuals were then divided into sub-groups where they discussed the issues in detail. Attendees were asked to turn in their individual ideas. A summary of individual responses are as follows.

Round 1 Question

What is your vision of the Rockford Riverfront Park in fifteen years? This can be a single word or phrase that summarizes what kind of place the Riverfront should be in fifteen years.

- Keep the river as natural as possible, as little concrete as possible
- You can't have a riverfront park without a river, we must maintain water levels
- Improved quality of life
- Stimulus to economic development
- A central location for events, festivals, and celebrations
- Vibrant (active and attractive, magnet-people)
- Accessible/open to all
- Represents Rockford (ownership of, for, by people of Rockford)
- Safety – more people you attract, more safety measures
- Vibrant
- 24 hours
- Collaborative
- Festive, engaging, alive
- Accessible to community
- Complementing historic structures and attributes
- Wow
- A destination (whether its for a family, couple or singles)
- Art, music
- An accessible, beautiful and visible gathering place for all
- Knoxville, Chattanooga
- Evansville
- Art and culture
- Recreation and business
- Boating
- Retail, residential, commercial development will follow
- Destination
- Year round ice skating
- 24 hours a day
- Connected
- Center of region
- Linking the City
- Activity
- Accessible
- Scenic, beautiful
- Clean, safe
- Restaurants and outdoor eating
- Children's area
- Family oriented
- Complete the loop so both banks are accessible to all
- Scenic
- Food available in several gathering places
- Umbrella tables
- Fountains in center in the river or on the banks
- Children's areas adjacent to Discovery Center and behind library
- Mixed-use riverfront neighborhood with an emphasis on retail and tourism

- Develop the river for local residents, but also make the area attractive to tourists
- The riverfront tourism
- Year round
- Often, when you ask Rockfordian what makes this city great, they hesitate, usually and say the parks and golf. How about “The river?”
- Interconnect public spaces with direct access to river
- Areas for people (families, singles) to come to year round; lively area with lighting and water features
- Gathering places along river for those either living in area (mixed-use development) or visiting destinations.
- Get locals to buy into the area
- Take advantage of the natural resources and economic development opportunities with the intent of creating a higher quality of life for Rockfordians and our visitors
- I would like to see the riverfront park as a destination for not only people from Rockford, but also for visitors. A fun place to go.
- A place the community recognizes as outstanding
- A central hub of our city with prosperity emanating from it
- A safe, fun place with almost 24/7 activities
- A defining place to identify Rockford for its citizens and visitors
- A place to relax, enjoy, congregate
- A place of high quality development that interacts with its natural assets
- Direct connection between downtown business district and South Main business district
- Family-friendly
- Diversity development
- Distinctive, set apart, above other Midwestern river cities
- Engages all ages, walks of life
- Balanced mix of retail, entertainment, residential, business, government, etc.
- Water feature inside
- Excellence for everyone, everyday
- Year round
- Lighting
- Residential/tourism
- Gateway to culture
- Premium riverfront
- Like San Antonio – restaurants, nature shops, boat rides/tours, festival atmosphere
- Public transportation - trolley, boat, car, pedestrian (Amtrak station here)
- Gathering place (for fireworks display, recreation/park, museum)
- Site to see (like “space needle” w/o restaurant)
- Architectural place
- A place for all walks of community life
- Quality of “river” life in Rockford
- A happening on the river
- Active and alive – bustling with activity year round
- Land use and activities that appeal to all ages
- Beautiful – wow factor

Round 2 Question

What are the critical issues facing the development of the Riverfront Park?

- Do not create something at the expense of existing ownership. Respect the property and business of neighbors.
- Attractive design and marketing to community and fit into a “master” plan for future
- Communication of the impact on future development and quality of life for whole community
- Buy in of existing stakeholders and property owners along river and development of private/public partnerships
- Attitude is everything – who, where, how
- City staff – support – negative attitude
- Overall economic growth in City to support more downtown activity. Need more jobs for young professionals.
- Collaborative attitude for private developers
- Perception of safety
- Comprehensive, cohesive planning and standards
- Parking
- Ability to accommodate all uses and activities
- Cohesion
- Dollar source of improvements – public/private – TIF, sales tax, grant, public ownership
- Property laws
- Fear of “west side” as downtown
- Void after 5 p.m.
- Crappy building stock that exists
- Ease of use – parking, access via roads
- Community and political will
- Access points to river
- Crossing of river to provide connections north-south
- One focal point implementation
- Safety
- Property owners can support getting started
- Parking
- Master plan
- Buy in
- New opportunities for a manufacturing based community
- Why Evansville is slow to take off
- Master plan and timeline for implementation
- Funding
- Decision-making – City, park district- who is responsible?
- Common vision by those who can make it happen
- Timeline for progress if it needs to be phased
- There is agreement on where to start, always looking at the final blueprint and how pieces fit together
- Balancing the needs of multiple, private owners against the desire for public access along the river
- Past history of inaction
- Getting the public sector land owners to work with private developers to develop shared amenities along the riverfront
- I don’t think the general populace (i.e. residents east of Alpine) think that it’s safe to go downtown unless it’s July 4th
- More entertainment opportunities – sort of chicken and egg scenario
- Too much “government services” downtown – more residential
- Lack of public control of land – if not available – develop memorandums of understanding with property owners
- Lots of plans – now need action plan to implement – get something done, need small success to keep momentum
- Getting the citizens excited and believing it will get accomplished
- We must believe that we can do this venture and commit to assigning the resources
- We must sell the quality of life and economic benefit
- We must support the vision by all participating, not just leaving it up to the Mayor
- Getting property owners to agree and be open to change

- Having the community as a whole support and back the changes needed
- Getting started
- Community buy-in
- Ownership buy-in
- Funding
- Moving quickly
- Agreement on space design needs
- Alternatives for homeless people
- Creating agreement on economic leverage of riverfront asset
- Quality of development
- Leadership
- Can do attitude!!
- Need a master plan that ties development together
- Needs good signage
- Citizens, businessmen need input on plan
- Lack of bold movement in past has led to skeptical public
- Need to focus on what can be done – get a win, then another, then more- otherwise you risk nothing being done
- Private sector must be part of solution – public investment should not be sole source
- Transportation/parking (i.e. access) – pedestrian, rail, boat, car
- Funding and drawing restaurants, retail – tax base needed
- Safety – making sure that people are safe getting to sit and spending time at site, night or day
- Community support
- Affordability
- On-going support
- Environmental
- Development standards
- Design continuity and creativity
- Sustainability
- Must generate revenues (EAV) in part to sustain in the long term
- Lack of access
- Property owner acceptance
- Affordability
- Environmental issues/regulation
- Parking

Round 3 Question

What are some of the critical design components needed to create a Riverfront Park?

- In some areas, there are existing operations right on the river (30' or less), some have boat docks. The integrity of these establishments must be retained.
- Access to water's edge – with appropriate gathering and celebration spaces and “safety issues”
- Incorporation of sculptures and artistic scenes with attention to night lighting and displays
- Useability on a year round basis with access to “event” type parking and viewing spaces
- Function/variety/creativity – multi-use by different organizations to different audiences at different seasons of year
- Important that quality of work represents function/purpose and design as well-should scream “a wise investment” – that unifies community by flowing well from venue to venue along riverfront
- Natural to Rockford – landscape design that represents Rockford
- Parking/access
- Public gathering areas
- Integration/access of river and adjacent properties
- Establish and enforce property standards to achieve desired environment that attracts residents, businesses, tourists
- Lighting – imaginative, exciting
- Imaginative landscaping, water features
- Ease of use – connection to parking, dining, getting there
- Intense landscaping with irrigation systems
- Public art (artistic value)
- Visibility from adjacent streets
- Visually appealing – distinctive
- Active
- Diverse
- Year round
- Art
- Pathways
- Health and fitness
- Draws you in
- Programming
- Boating
- Access
- The path or walk needs to have a common or consistent look, but some parts of it can be more landscaped than others
- Flowers and other green areas – ambiance along the walk should be high priority
- Signage, lighting can add the branding or consistency
- Decision on is it only pedestrian or is it for bikes, too? Lots of bikes? Dogs, etc.? How will this be allowed in the future?
- Continuity of the path
- Urban (active) as opposed to rural (passive) design
- We must have private development right along the river path (like San Antonio, TX)
- “Branding”/marketing
- The right riverwalk infrastructure and (?)
- Game tables, lighting, bike racks, benches, boat docks
- Light is most critical – for safety reasons as well as aesthetic
- Separate bike/walk paths or well delineated, or more bike space on surface streets
- In general pedestrian lanes, there aren't any on east side surface streets, right?
- Year round opportunities to gather in area
- Areas to get direct access to river (plazas and walking paths)
- Lighting
- Don't overdo signage – even interpretive
- Lots of vegetation (urban design along with more free flowing)
- Captivate the interest
- Sculpture and art (murals, beautify the bridges, railroad overpass South Main)
- Inclusive – things for all people, young and old
- Vendor-friendly
- Year round activities (i.e. water in the summer, ice skating in the winter)
- Family and safety features
- Retail, shops, restaurants
- Artistic value, fountains, sculptures, banners

- Residential development
- Good continuity of hardscape
- Ability to assure public access and privacy for owners
- Low maintenance
- Performance area
- Affordable for event planners
- Useful year round
- Mixture of experiences and places
- Passive park
- High energy spaces
- Cafes and special events
- Cater to boaters
- Natural and hardscape spaces
- Interaction of buildings and river amenities
- Require signature style buildings on our riverfront – a higher standard of design
- Youth-friendly
- Role senior citizens can play (walk/benches)
- Safety
- Highest commitment to quality
- Public art, passive and active/interactive
- Music – groups and individuals
- Activities and spaces for activities on and off the water
- Services for visitors to waterfront – bathrooms, food stands, parking
- “Green” space, filled with color/flowers (park spaces)
- Year round (4-season) hard/softscapes and activities/spaces
- Continuity
- Bike racks, boat docks, game tables
- Functional – liked the gathering places, the amphitheater, the shops, sidewalk café
- Need access from downtown and parking for docks, marinas
- Need a place like an Omni-Max theatre, space needle or something for tourism interest
- Preserve some unique architecture of area and can combine that with modern
- Family-oriented
- ADA support and approval
- Parking availability
- Multi-seasonal use – biking, skating, walking, cross-country skiing
- Retail, stop, shop, sit
- Group functions/events
- Codes, covenants, and restrictions, governing plans are critical
- Design needs to be urban – we have enough passive river settings
- Design needs to encourage pedestrian and river activities

Round 4 Question

What ideas do you have to help achieve the plan? These could be policies, actions, innovations, or fund raising ideas.

- Work directly with the property owners to find the best way to realize the objective. This will give us a riverfront park and enhance the business.
- Form strong private/public partnerships in support
- Integrate City/County/Park District and regional planning
- Have City of Rockford provide major leadership role
- Partnering throughout individual functions/fundraisers throughout year to promote “what can be”
- Get the City staff clear direction to find ways (not obstacles) to get things done
- Identify two to three clear distinct projects (short-term) that the Mayor can challenge the development community to come together and execute
- Bring back the housing (market rate) apartment, rehab, subsidy
- Need people to support the overall effort
- 24 hour downtown
- Innovation – “waltzing waters”
- On the Waterfront, Inc. researched and proposed a water, light and sound show installation in 2003. Patterned after an existing installation in Pittsburgh and other cities. It is in continual operation May-November 1 with 18 shows a day. We have a prospectus, video, etc. and still would like to pursue funding, installation, and operation.
- Fire in the Water – Rhode Island, Providence
- Zoning and building code changes that encourage private investment
- Local public source of money – earmark \$1 million per year of the hotel/motel tax for 20 years. Issue bonds and use the \$1M year as debt service.
- Assign one entity to gain land control – purchase, lease, easement. Fund it and use private sources to build it. (e.g. RPD Foundation) and hold this entity accountable for action
- Strategic support, multifaceted approach to the top ideals
- Shepherd the process. Keep the successes (even the small ones) usable. Celebrate the completion of phases.
- Let one or two ideas fully develop
- A shotgun approach will fail. Mixed messages; lack of focus; confusion.
- Art and culture is a great focus. Chattanooga is a great model
- Several in the room today participated in a Chamber of Commerce trip to Chattanooga to understand why that was such a successful riverfront
- As property owners along the path or walk sign on to this project, commitments needs to be made for funding – i.e. an owner may believe in the concept but not commit to funding
- Grants – someone needs to take leadership
- Partnerships forged
- Community awareness – keep it in citizens’ minds
- Phased
- Consistent zoning and design standards
- Make the public expenditure of funding the riverwalk part of our annual capital planning for the City, County and park district
- Seek private donations of right of way for riverwalk development
- Use TIF districts and encourage private retail, residential and hotel development and help fund the public infrastructure
- New amenities: (skateboard park, rapids course, kiosks?)
- Solar powered kiosks for history, social event info
- Skateboard park
- Boater’s destination
- Continue strong leadership by Mayor
- Get a project started to build momentum and excitement
- Require new downtown development standards
- Development friendly ordinances
- Preserve riverfront land for future development
- Look for input from the community
- Find a best practice and sell the concept
- Look for private dollars and give incentives, i.e. naming rights
- Start a community awareness program with a fund raising campaign
- Show people designs and graphic demos of a finished product

- Start with a small section asap
- Referendum for bonding through voters
- Public/private partnership like Coronado
- Corporate sponsorships
- Can do attitude by governmental staff
- Streamline and define the process
- Identify key projects
- Demand quality
- Inclusion of all ethnic groups
- Neighborhood Groups
- Diversity
- Meet in private settings – small groups
- Involve public – average Joe and Jane – in the process (not the decision process) of details, but in funding, celebrating the riverfront redevelopment
- SSA taxes
- Private sector incentives for developers and for small businesses
- Fund raising is difficult here lately (lots of need)
- Grants, tax incentives, to build or locate there
- Help to minimize risk for businesses
- Partnerships/sponsorships and co-ownership with businesses
- Leadership commitment, i.e. full time manager
- Phase in design with celebration
- Retail development
- Housing development
- Parking availability
- State of the art
- Historical past/present/future
- Expansionable
- Establishment of TIF District and Business Redevelopment District
- What are national trends on entertainment/river activity? Let's not copy the old thing. Let's create the new thing.
- Zoning overlay district
- Develop whitewater park now!

D. Sub-Group Discussion / Prioritizing

1. After individually brainstorming, attendees were divided into sub-groups to discuss the issues. Each of the groups was then asked to summarize their ideas and report out to the group. The following are the group summaries.

Round 1 Question

What is your vision of the Rockford Riverfront Park in fifteen years? This can be a single word or phrase that summarizes what kind of place the Riverfront should be in fifteen years.

Team 1

- “Wow” factor
- Connectivity
- Universal appeal attraction

Team 2

- Take advantage of natural resources to improve quality of life
- River as a venue
- Vibrant
- Improve quality of life
- Attractive
- 24 hours
- Central event space
- Stimulus for economic development
- Mix of uses
- Stimulating urban environment
- Navigate river
- Defining place

Team 3

- Your full service destination
- It's all here on the river
- The premier neighborhood and tourism destination
- Excellence for everyone everyday

Team 4

- Year round
- Completed loop connection
- Family oriented
- Beautiful
- Food and gathering places

Round 2 Question

What are the critical issues facing the development of the Riverfront Park?

Team 1

- Resources
- Sustainability – maintenance, environment, safety
- Property owner and public acceptance

Team 2

- Balance private and public interests
- Funding availability
- Follow thru leadership
- City staff
- Attitude
- We have to believe
- Can-do attitude
- Stakeholder buy-in
- Able to attract from the region
- Quality of development
- Zoning restriction

Team 3

- Safety and image
- Diversity of uses
- Model shift – manufacturing to art and culture
- Learning how to commercialize the river
- Need action plan: credibility
- Land acquisition
- Land banking
- Balancing private needs with public access

Team 4

- Funding
- One implementing responsibility
- Holding that entity accountable
- Timeline and single vision
- Get started

Round 3 Question

What are some of the critical design components needed to create a Riverfront Park?

Team 1

- Integrated use
- Multi-season
- Views
- Wayfinding
- Unique
- Quality
- Streetscape

Team 2

- Mixture of experiences and places
- Need core constituency that demands excellence
- Need people to demand service and safety
- Invest emotionally

Team 3

- Continuity of path
- Year round
- Private development along river (i.e. San Antonio, TX)
- Urban/active as opposed to rural/passive design
- Quality and excellence in design

Team 4

- Keep the elements that are unique
- Artistic elements, creative, unique
- Common, consistent design element that unifies (i.e. lights, banners)
- Visibility

Round 4 Question

What ideas do you have to help achieve the plan? These could be policies, actions, innovations, or fund raising ideas.

Team 1

- Phased in design
- Implementation momentum
- Living and innovative design
- Changes
- Grows
- Community Involvement and input

Team 2

- Accountability
- City should provide the leadership role in this development
- Can do attitude by staff
- Incentives
- Market – rate housing
- Public/private partnerships
- Relationships of downtown groups, organizations
- Identify once clear key project to do and make happen

Team 3

- Developing riverfront standards (zoning and design)
- Responsible party to coordinate
- Risk capital
- Annual public expenditures from City, County, Park District

Team 4

- Funding mechanism
- Partnership
- Keep all of community aware
- Buy in from all owners along the path
- Zoning and building changes to encourage development
- Redirect some City current funds

E. Reflecting

1. After the sub-groups reported out, the whole group reflected on what they heard. The following are some broad ideas that were highlighted as part of the reflecting discussion.
 - In order to be successful, the Riverfront must be unique – not just another generic historic theme.
 - This project must raise the bar and become an example for future projects.
 - Programming is critical – the riverwalk will need to be programmed in order to be successful.
 - Action is critical – people are tired of planning and want to see things get constructed.
 - Priority should be given to projects that will spur private economic development.
 - City must be pro-active in encouraging owner occupied residential downtown. If people don't live downtown, private commercial, retail, restaurant will not reinvest downtown.

- City must be a partner in redevelopment – clearly define requirements, be flexible in order to make deals work, provide incentives when necessary.
- City should consider forming TIF district or other funding mechanisms. City should reallocate capital improvement dollars towards the riverwalk if it is really a priority.

2. The group was then asked to identify priority project areas. The following areas were identified as possibilities:

- Museum Campus
- Area between Whitman and Chestnut
- Madison Street area
- Areas where private enterprise will benefit (National City Bank, redevelopment sites)
- Publicly owned sites (implement easy areas as soon as possible to get them in place)

F. Conclusion

1. HDG will take the information gathered during the Visioning Workshop and use it to develop schematic design options. The schematic design options and potential catalyst projects will be discussed at the next Steering Committee meeting to be scheduled in November.

cc: Attendees
Urban Design Team, Hitchcock Design Group