



*Working to protect the Mississippi River
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.*

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May 17, 2017

Saint Paul Planning Commission
Betsy Reveal, Chair
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

RE: River Balcony Master Plan draft

Chair Reveal:

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a local non-profit community-based organization that works to protect and enhance the natural and cultural assets of the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. We have 1,800 active members, and more than 3,000 volunteers who care deeply about the river's unique resources. FMR has been an active and ongoing participant in planning for the future of the Saint Paul riverfront.

We are writing today with our comments on the River Balcony Master Plan draft.

Overall, we are pleased with this plan. We are glad Saint Paul is investing in the riverfront downtown. This plan contains many excellent features including several that we outline below.

- Increasing and improving public space downtown, for example:
 - moveable furniture to accommodate a variety of groups
 - providing an option for the eastbound lanes of Kellogg Boulevard to easily transition to a pedestrian space for large events
 - emphasizing the use of native plants for landscaping
 - including a green roof on the civic building
- Improving the views of the river valley and downtown, for example:
 - ensuring protections are in place for preserving views and viewsheds
 - ensuring portions of the bluff are visible and including subtle bluff lighting that highlights the natural features of the area
- Improving access between the Mississippi River and downtown, for example:
 - building vertical connections early on in Phase 2
 - providing expansive visual access from the Balcony to the river
- Improving connectivity with existing pedestrian routes and area amenities, for example:

- connections to the Sam Morgan Regional Trail, Science Museum of MN, Light Rail Transit, etc.
- Ensuring development guidelines are in place for adjacent private development sites

We also have a few suggested clarifications and changes that we've organized by topic.

Bird-friendly

This park is part of an internationally significant migratory corridor that millions of birds and other wildlife use throughout the year. Therefore, we encourage specifying bird friendly features as priorities in the plan. The plan indicates that tempered glass will be used as a design feature for railings, stair and elevator shafts at the bridgeheads, and walls of the civic building near the Robert Street bridgehead. The tempered glass references should be updated to include bird-safe glass. Additionally, the inclusion of dark-sky friendly lighting in the plan will help prevent birds from becoming disorientated. However, page 69 also indicates that the vertical circulation towers' "lighting should provide a striking night-time image." We would support the striking image if it could be accomplished in a bird-friendly way. We also encourage the landscaping sections of the plan to specify that "pollinator-friendly native plants" will be used.

Technology & green energy & going green

The plan does feature some innovative ideas like using District Energy Heat to melt snow and provide comfortable outdoor spaces. We'd like to see the plan go further so the park becomes a model park in the Twin Cities for green and technological features, especially with its proximity to downtown. We encourage further discussions to ensure this is a leading model park and we would be happy to assist in exploring these and other questions.

- Why not specify that the planned kiosks will be interactive with state-of-the-art technology powered by solar energy?
- Why not encourage the employees and students to come out to the river balcony with their electronics that can be recharged at no cost in the park with solar or wind energy?
- Why not specify that the park will be Zero Waste, like so many other surrounding park systems have already done, and list compost as an option on page 62 and 63?

Wood decking

We appreciate the desire to bring natural elements into the park design, but it may be wise to avoid wood decking on trails. Wood decking is a rare feature in parks today as it has largely been replaced with more durable and safe materials like composite decking or plastic lumber made from recycled materials. We've been involved in conversations regarding the wood planking in the Mill City portion of West River Parkway in Minneapolis. Frequent trail users complain of noise when wheeled recreational vehicles (e.g. bikes, inline skates, skateboards, etc.) go over the planks, slipperiness when wet, and safety concerns due to the natural warping of the boards (e.g. tripping, inline skates getting caught, dangerous in high heels, etc.). The Minneapolis Park Board staff have also

mentioned the high cost of constantly replacing these boards as they warp. We hope whatever material is chosen will be long lasting, safe to use year-round in all weather and safe to use on inclined portions of the project.

Other small tweaks

On page 39, we'd like to see "take in the scenic river valley" added to the last paragraph that lists what the River Balcony should provide. The bottom of this page also needs a period. On page 49, label Pad 10A and Pad 10B. On page 67, "orientation" is spelled incorrectly.

Thank you for your work on this visionary plan. With a few small changes, we look forward to being able to fully endorse this plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Whitney L. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "W".

Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director