



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

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MEMORANDUM

TO: City of Minneapolis via Councilmember Reich & Director Jenifer Hager
FROM: Friends of the Mississippi River
DATE: October 31, 2018
SUBJECT: Connections Plan proposal for North Minneapolis

Dear City of Minneapolis elected officials and staff:

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 2,700 active members, more than 3,200 volunteers and more than 2,000 advocates who care deeply about the river's unique resources. For 25 years FMR has been an active and ongoing participant in planning for the future of the Minneapolis riverfront.

The following is a proposal for a connections plan to ensure that the emerging redeveloped riverfront is not allowed to become an island and an enclave but instead will extend the benefits of new riverfront parks, trails and redevelopment to the residential neighborhoods to the west of 94, moving pedestrians and bicyclists safely between the heart of North Minneapolis and the Mississippi River.

The current situation

In the diverse neighborhoods of north Minneapolis, industry, freeways and development have cut people off from the river for decades, resulting in a lack equitable access to the benefits that come with proximity to riverfront parks – in addition to the myriad other inequities layered on this community.

The city's Above the Falls Master Plan proposes a transformation of the Northside riverfront – including riverfront parks and new urban development to convert the area to a mix of residential, commercial and civic uses.

As new parks, trails and other amenities begin to be developed, we're faced with an enormous opportunity to pursue equitable and transformative redevelopment, but we'll only be successful if we address the significant infrastructure barriers (i.e. I-94) that segregate neighborhoods from the river, limiting access. Seven streets that bridge I-94 and connect neighborhoods to the river have the potential to be transformed into attractive, pedestrian and bicycle friendly routes that encourage multi-modal circulation to and from the river by incorporating elements like protected lanes, river-branded wayfinding, pedestrian lighting, sidewalk designs, street trees and native vegetation, and safe crosswalks – infrastructure that is not present today.

We understand the very dynamic environment that we must work in to promote bike/ped improvements along the North Minneapolis routes to the river. Our years of study and outreach taught us about the many plans, jurisdictions, funding cycles, and more that must be navigated to create positive change. We realize that actualizing and implementing those many changes may not be possible without more coordination and a cohesive plan.

Project description

FMR proposes to collaborate with the city of Minneapolis and other agencies to complete a “Comprehensive Connections Plan” to serve as a road map for implementing improvements to the physical connections between North Minneapolis and the Mississippi River. The Plan will be based upon information gathered and documented during our research and local outreach about potential improvements to pedestrian and bike trails, streetscaping and wayfinding for seven streets that connect neighborhoods across I-94 to the river.

Plan summary

Using extensive input already collected from Northsiders, a 30% engineering and design plan will be created detailing planned and proposed improvements to seven connector streets including lighting, streetscaping, wayfinding and bike and pedestrian infrastructure. The plan will include cost estimates and alignment with existing capital improvement schedules. The plan will provide an essential tool to allow policymakers and community members to see how seemingly disparate and mundane public works projects spread across seven connector streets and spanning multiple government jurisdictions cohere into a transformative vision for ensuring that Northside neighbors are not left out and disconnected from planned major public and private investments along the riverfront.

More information

We have posted all of our research reports and engagement findings at fmr.org/ConnectionsPlanDocuments. Also found there is a draft scope of work document from SRF Consulting with more specific details about the proposed plan.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Whitney L. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director

