



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
Christopher B. Coleman, Mayor

25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Telephone: 651-266-6700
Facsimile: 651-266-6549

DATE: June 8, 2017

TO: Mayor Chris Coleman
Members of the Saint Paul City Council

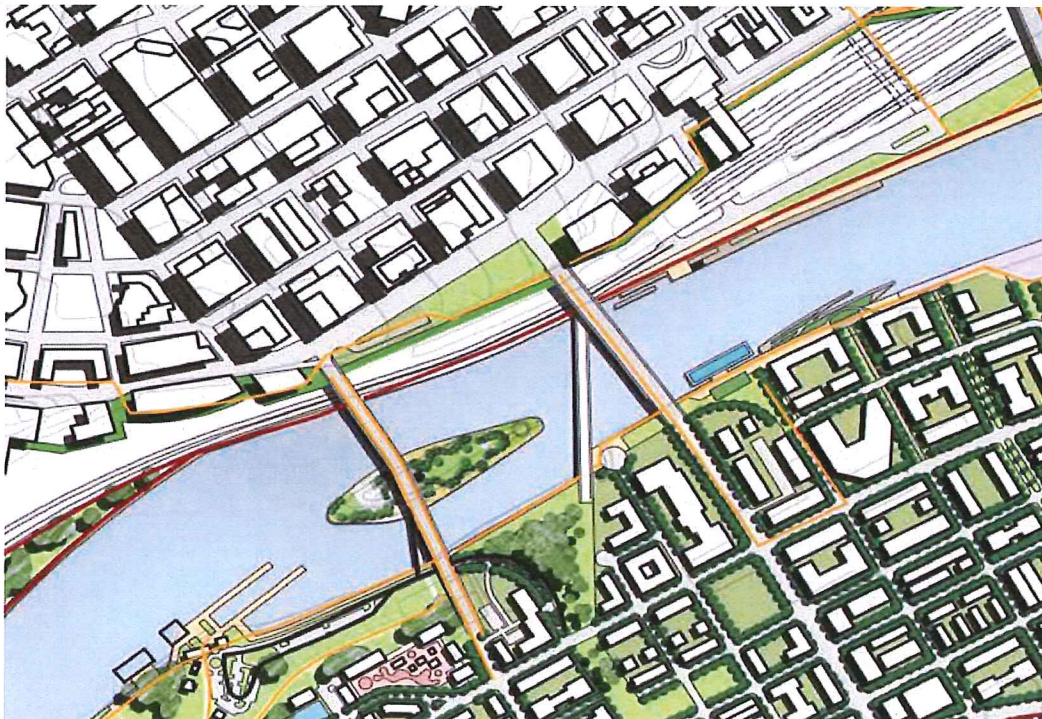
FROM: Elizabeth C. Reveal, Chair, Saint Paul Planning Commission

SUBJECT: *River Balcony Master Plan*

BACKGROUND

Reconnecting to the Mississippi River has been a City of Saint Paul and community priority since completion of the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework* in 1997. Over the past 20 years, the City and its partners have worked tirelessly to embrace the river and recognize it as a natural, historic, cultural, recreational and ecological amenity.

The *Great River Passage Master Plan*, adopted by the City Council in April 2013 as an addendum to the *Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan*, calls for the creation of a River Balcony along the downtown river bluff (green/yellow line on the image below). The River Balcony was one of the most widely-supported ideas to come out of the *Great River Passage Master Plan*.



The design rendering in the *Great River Passage Master Plan* shows an active, vibrant public ledge overlooking the river:



From 2015-2016, City staff from Planning & Economic Development, Parks & Recreation and Public Works worked with a design team of staff from the Minnesota Design Center at the University of Minnesota, BKV Group and Landscape Research to prepare a master plan and Phase 1 schematic design for the River Balcony. A Project Review Team of adjacent property owners, CapitolRiver Council (District 17) representatives and other key stakeholders advised the consultant team and City staff throughout the process. In addition to nearly a dozen Project Review Team meetings, the City hosted three focus topic roundtables, four design team workshops, a public open house in September 2015 and a public meeting in April 2016. The community meetings were well-attended, and support has been high for the River Balcony.

THE SAINT PAUL RIVER BALCONY MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan lays out the following vision for the River Balcony:

The River Balcony is envisioned as a publicly-accessible pathway connecting public spaces and bluff-side redevelopment sites from the Science Museum to Union Depot. It will be designed to accommodate walking, outdoor seating, gathering and related public activities; and to be a catalyst for economic development.

A set of core goals establishes the role of the River Balcony in not only activating the public realm along the river bluff, but also in catalyzing high-quality private development on key sites along Kellogg Boulevard. The River Balcony will:

1. **reconnect downtown** to the river visually and physically;
2. provide a **public linear path** along the downtown river bluff with occasional vertical connections to the river's edge;
3. **activate private development** on the Ramsey County West/Adult Detention Center, Ramsey County East and Custom House sites; and
4. **connect public spaces and private development** sites along the river's edge in downtown.

The *River Balcony Master Plan* contains design guidelines based on the following general design principles:

1. The River Balcony is a public space, accessible to all, at all times of the day and during all seasons.
2. The main purpose of the River Balcony is to provide visual and physical connections between downtown and the Mississippi River.
3. The River Balcony is an integral part of a larger public realm network comprising the Capital City Bikeway, City and regional parks and trails, streets, plazas and skyways.
4. The River Balcony is both a horizontal (linear) and vertical (from upper bluff to river's edge) system of movement. The River Balcony will be a fundamental feature of new development on private property along the bluff, including Custom House and the Ramsey County riverfront properties.
5. The River Balcony will be designed to add value to adjacent private development.
6. The River Balcony will be built with high-quality, durable materials.
7. The River Balcony will be designed as a coherent series of public spaces, with overall continuity of design, but allowing for site- or district-specific expressions of place.
8. The River Balcony will be designed to be a "light touch" on the bluff landscape.
9. The River Balcony will incorporate natural features as much as possible, recognizing that some areas will be more predominantly hard-surfaced.

The Master Plan also contains sections on land use history and cultural resources; project precedents from around the country and world that inspired our vision; and design guidelines for 1) the River Balcony as a whole; 2) each component of the River Balcony; and 3) adjacent private development sites.

The guidelines for the River Balcony as a whole address:

- Identity
- Connected pedestrian amenities
- Balcony structure
- Materials
- Landscaping
- District (utility) systems
- Furnishings
- Retaining walls
- Paving
- Railings
- Wayfinding signage
- Lighting
- Vertical circulation towers
- Historic resources
- Public art

The guidelines for adjacent private development sites address how the following elements on privately-owned sites interface with and activate the River Balcony:

- Site development
- Building form and façade
- Landscaping
- Historic preservation
- Sustainability and district systems
- Furnishings

WHAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION HEARD AT ITS PUBLIC HEARING

The Planning Commission released the *River Balcony Master Plan* on April 7, 2017 and held a public hearing on May 19, 2017. The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission adopted a resolution in support on April 13, 2017.

In general, public testimony was very positive and recommended adoption of the *River Balcony Master Plan*. Statements in support included the following points:

- The River Balcony is an important opportunity to capitalize on Saint Paul's key asset, the Mississippi River, and to bring together all the assets along Kellogg Boulevard into an engaging experience that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- The River Balcony is Saint Paul's "signature element" that will raise its prominence beyond its borders.
- The Balcony will enhance views of downtown from across and on the Mississippi River, provide essential physical and visual connections to the river, and greatly enhance the visitor experience and use of the river.
- The River Balcony will be an "iconic park."
- The Balcony will be a great "sales item" for attracting events to Saint Paul.
- The River Balcony will enhance access to the river while creating investment – both economic (creating places where people want to live, work and recreate) and personal/emotional – in it.
- The River Balcony will help people of all ages interact with the Mississippi River in new ways and become our future stewards of the river.
- The River Balcony can be a vibrant "canvas" for arts activities and programming.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission adopted the attached resolution #17-31 on June 2, 2017, which recommends adoption of the *River Balcony Master Plan* as an amendment to the *Great River Passage Master Plan* with minor changes that respond to public testimony.

Attachments:

- Draft River Balcony Master Plan
- Planning Commission Resolution #17-32
- Parks & Recreation Commission Resolution #17-07