

HELP US IMAGINE THE FUTURE RIVER LEARNING CENTER!



SAINT PAUL
MINNESOTA

<https://greatriverpassage.org/projects/river-learning-center/>

June 22, 2022
Organizational Committee Meeting

W Architecture and Landscape Architecture
with 4RMULA + 106 Group + Solution Blue + ETM + CPML

Key Partners

**City of Saint
Paul**

*Land Manager +
Project
Manager*

**Great River
Passage
Conservancy**

*Private
Fundraising +
Strategic Project
Development*

**National Park
Service**

*Tenant +
Programming*

**Mississippi Park
Connection**

*Programming
+ Fundraising*

**Wilderness
Inquiry**

*Fundraising +
Programming +
Operations
Center*

Your Boat Club

Marina tenant

**Tribal Historic
Preservation
Officers
(THPOS)**

*Indigenous
leadership*

Community

Three capital projects will transform Saint Paul's riverfront into centers of river-oriented activity that provide diverse, authentic landscapes and experiences.



GATEWAY

Mississippi River Learning Center

The gateway to the Mississippi River, welcoming residents and visitors to this national feature with four-season programming that honors, promotes stewardship of, and teaches the culture, history and ecology of the river.



PROMENADE

River Balcony

A 1.5-mile promenade that extends along Downtown Saint Paul's signature Mississippi River Bluff and down to the river. The Balcony transforms urban infrastructure into public space that connects parks, civic landmarks and private development the length of Kellogg Boulevard.



LANDSCAPE

East Side River District

A dynamic urban landscape where historically incompatible uses can comfortably coexist and:



This forward thinking, mixed-use, river-focused center will combine National Park Service Headquarters with year-round environmental, cultural, and historical learning plus outdoor recreation experiences along Saint Paul's stretch of the Mississippi River.

Located at the Watergate Marina site at Crosby Farm Regional Park, the Mississippi River Learning Center will transform this area into an easy-to-reach hub that strengthens the community's connection to an incredible natural resource and foster generations of park users and river stewards. The Mississippi River Learning Center builds on a 40-year legacy of reorienting Saint Paul to the Mississippi. By connecting our city's two greatest assets—its people and the river—we can bring the river back from the edge to the center of public life and community identity.



Creating A Center

The Mississippi River Learning Center will be perfectly situated at a strategic, 25-acre city-owned site, sitting at the convergence of key cultural, historical, ecological, recreational, and developmental sites, with MSP Airport, Mall of America, and Ft. Snelling nearby.

With 17 miles of river, 26 miles of river edge, and 3,500 acres of publicly owned land, Saint Paul's economy, ecology, and cultural identity are defined by the river. As it flows through us, the Mississippi is the lifblood of the River Capital. As such, our history, culture, health, and wellbeing are inextricably linked to the Mississippi. In other words, we are the river, and we are committed to making the Mississippi River Learning Center a beautiful, safe, welcoming, and accessible place for all.



Designing A Gateway

The Twin Cities stretch of the Mississippi is a national park, but today has few spots to safely access the river. With its two sheltered bays opening up the river in new ways to thousands of local and national visitors, the Mississippi River Learning Center will be the gateway to the Mississippi River. It is the contemporary meeting point of:

- Forward-thinking design that is small in scale, light on the land, and responds to the interplay of the site's dynamic river conditions and sensitive riparian ecology
- Restorative landscape design
- Equity-focused design and engagement
- A true public-private partnership in ownership, funding, programming, and management



Developing Generations of River Stewards

The Mississippi River Learning Center will host year-round environmental, cultural, and historical education and recreation opportunities that are integrated into the region's routines, traditions, and collective identity. We will build a river-centered community that values the Mississippi and will care for it in the future.

With key partners like the National Park Service, Mississippi Park Connection, and Wilderness Inquiry hosting programming at the site, Mississippi River Learning Center visitors will:

- Be moved by the river, whether literally (in a kayak) or by connecting with the natural beauty and wildlife of the River Capital.

Preliminary Building Program

- Wilderness Inquiry facility – 14,700
- Your Boat Club admin – 7,600
- Your Boat Club workspace – 6,400
- National Park Service admin + storage space – 12,700
- River Learning Center – 8,000 sf
- Mississippi Park Connection admin + storage space – included above
- St Paul Parks admin – 400 offices
- Great River Passage Conservancy admin space – 400 sf.
- Boat house
- Remote Storage
- + Parking

River Learning Center is

**...An important
Dakota Landscape**

Bdoté

This is not a “park.”

This is shared community place. No one owns it.

This is not a single location, but part of a connected system of natural and cultural areas. Everything is related. Restore lost connections.

Minimize footprint of anything built here. Listen to the water. Listen to the land. Listen to the sun. Listen to the plants and animals. Let ecology drive the design.

Any buildings created should not look like colonist structures, recalling farm structures or Fort Snelling.

Go beyond sustainability, be regenerative and restorative.

Portray the authentic history of the area, good and bad.

Provide areas where private ceremonies and storytelling can happen for Indigenous People.

Make sure Native people share in opportunities created by this project: cultural, economic, and access.

Plan and design for our grandchildren and theirs, generations to come.

River Learning Center is

**...A part of the Hidden Falls
Crosby Farms Regional
Park**

Regional Park Access



LEGEND

Existing Bus Route

Proposed 2030 Bus Route

Existing Bus Stop

Key GRP Bus Stops

Vehicular Access Point

Multimodal Access Point

Multimodal Access Route

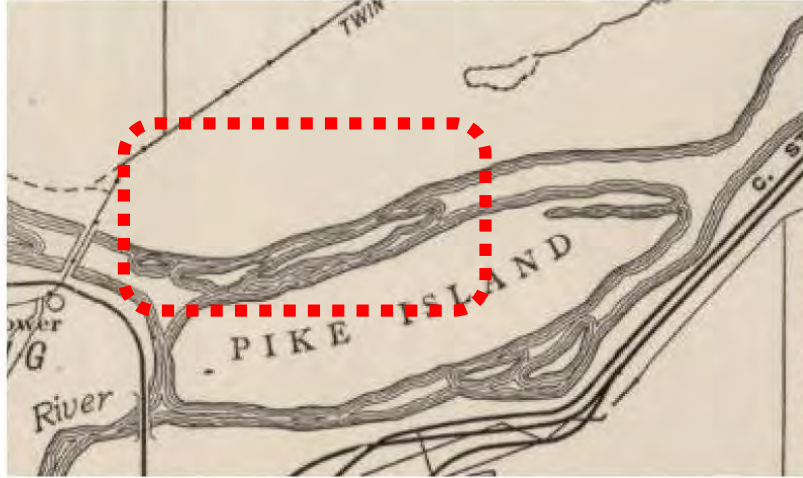
Paved Trail

Dirt Trail

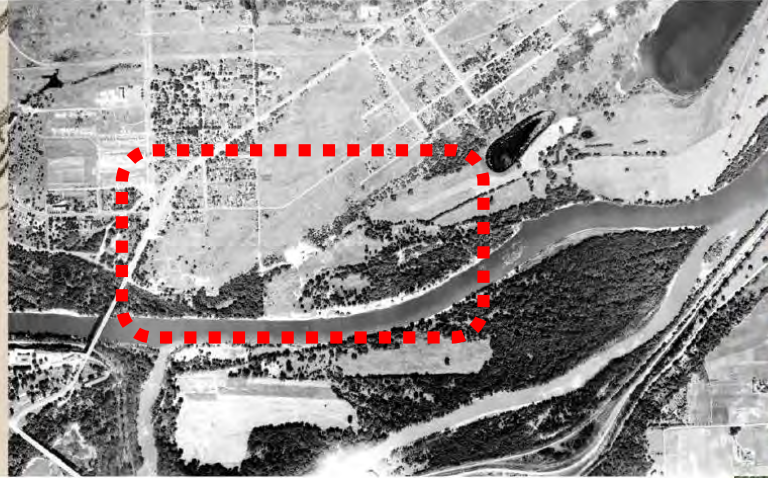
Boat Launch

River Learning Center is
...An Urban Wilderness

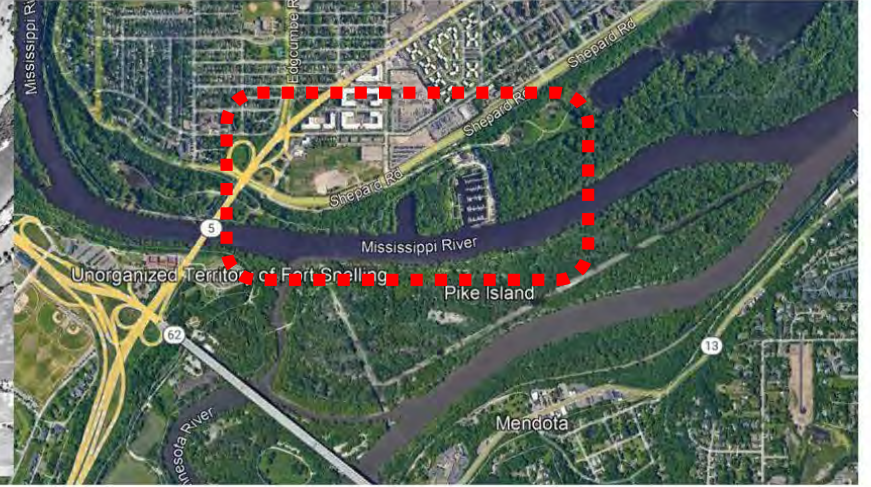
Floodplain forest- Dynamic River Edge



1924



1950



2021



**The Public feels the River
Learning Center is...**

Community responses – in your words





1. Lookout Bridge – 303 (59.18%)



2. Touch the Water – 358 (69.92%)



3 Beach



4. Cultural Events – 282 (55.08%)



5. Canoeing/Kayaking – 346 (67.58%)



6. Educational/Rec – 330 (64.45%)



7 Ice Fishing



8 Boat Launch & Storage



9 Pontoon Boating

Visual Survey:

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO AT THE RIVER?



1 Welcome Plaza



2. By the Water – 321 (62.57%)



3 Outdoor Amphitheater



4. Tree Grove Plaza – 327 (63.74%)



5 Picnic Area



6 Outdoor Classroom



7 Shade Pavilion



8 Indoor Gathering Space



9 Festivals

Visual Survey:

HOW DO YOU WANT TO GATHER HERE?



1. Walking/Strolling – 473 (91.67%)



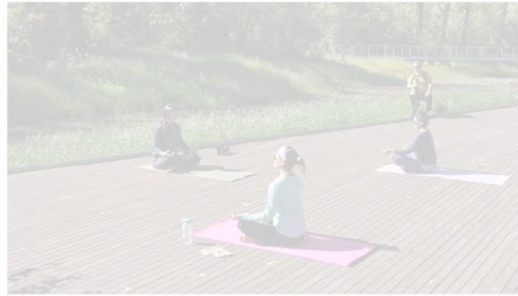
2. Biking – 299 (57.95%)



3. Forest Canopy Walk – 332 (64.34%)



4. Fat Tire Biking



5. Outdoor Exercise



6. Snowshoeing



7. Edu/Rec Programs - 316 (61.24%)



8. Nature Play



9. Exploration – 367 (71.12%)

Visual Survey:

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO IN THE LANDSCAPE?



1. Picnicking – 286 (55.64%)



2. Meadow Field – 308 (59.92%)



3. Boardwalk – 338 (65.76%)



4 Art Installation



5 Fire Pit/Ring



6. Overlook – 289 (56.23%)



7. Wetland/River Access – 376 (73.15%)



8. Bird Watching – 320 (62.26%)



9 Community Garden

Visual Survey:

WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO IN THE LANDSCAPE?



1. Bike Racks – 357 (69.46%)



2. Picnic Pavilion – 265 (51.56%)



3. Restroom – 441 (85.80%)



4 Prayer/Meditation Space



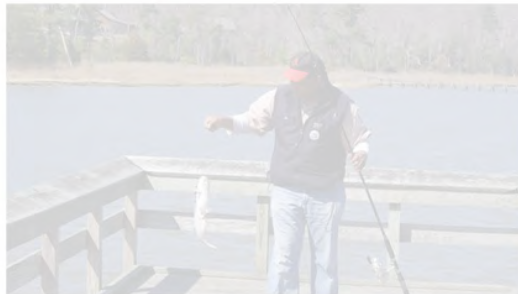
5 Cafe



6 Solar WiFi



7 Fire Pit



8 Fishing Pier



9 Kayak Launch / Boat Storage

Visual Survey:

WHAT AMENITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?



1. Dakota Landscape – 431 (83.85%)



2. The Caves – 384 (74.71%)



3. The Bluffs – 350 (68.09%)



4. The Forest – 368 (71.60%)



5. The Rivers – 430 (83.66%)



6. Past Histories – 397 (77.24%)



7. Programs



8. Habitats / Ecology – 413 (80.35%)



9. Mississippi Flyway – 368 (71.60%)

Visual Survey:

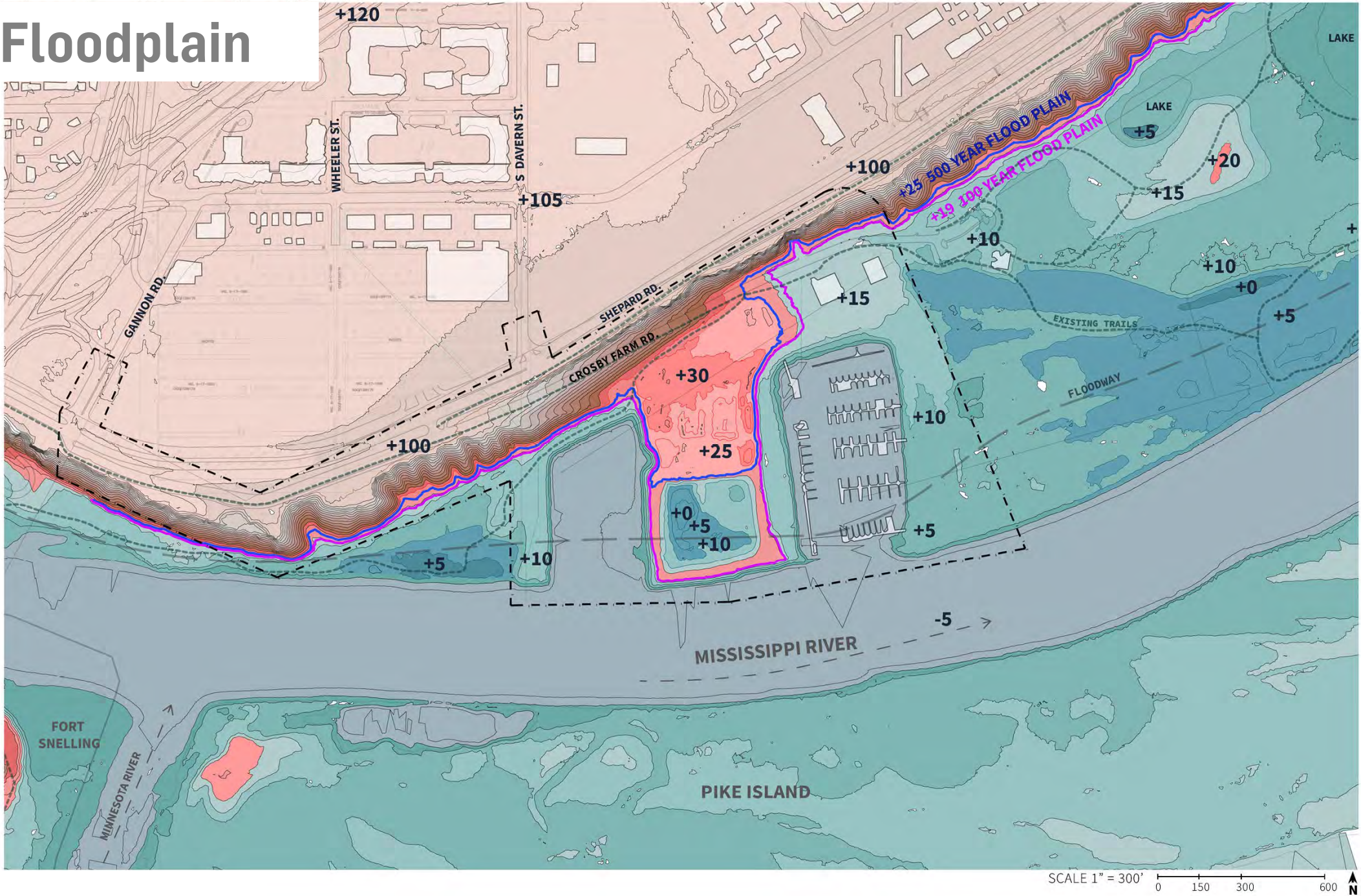
WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT THE SITE?

WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM THE RIVER?

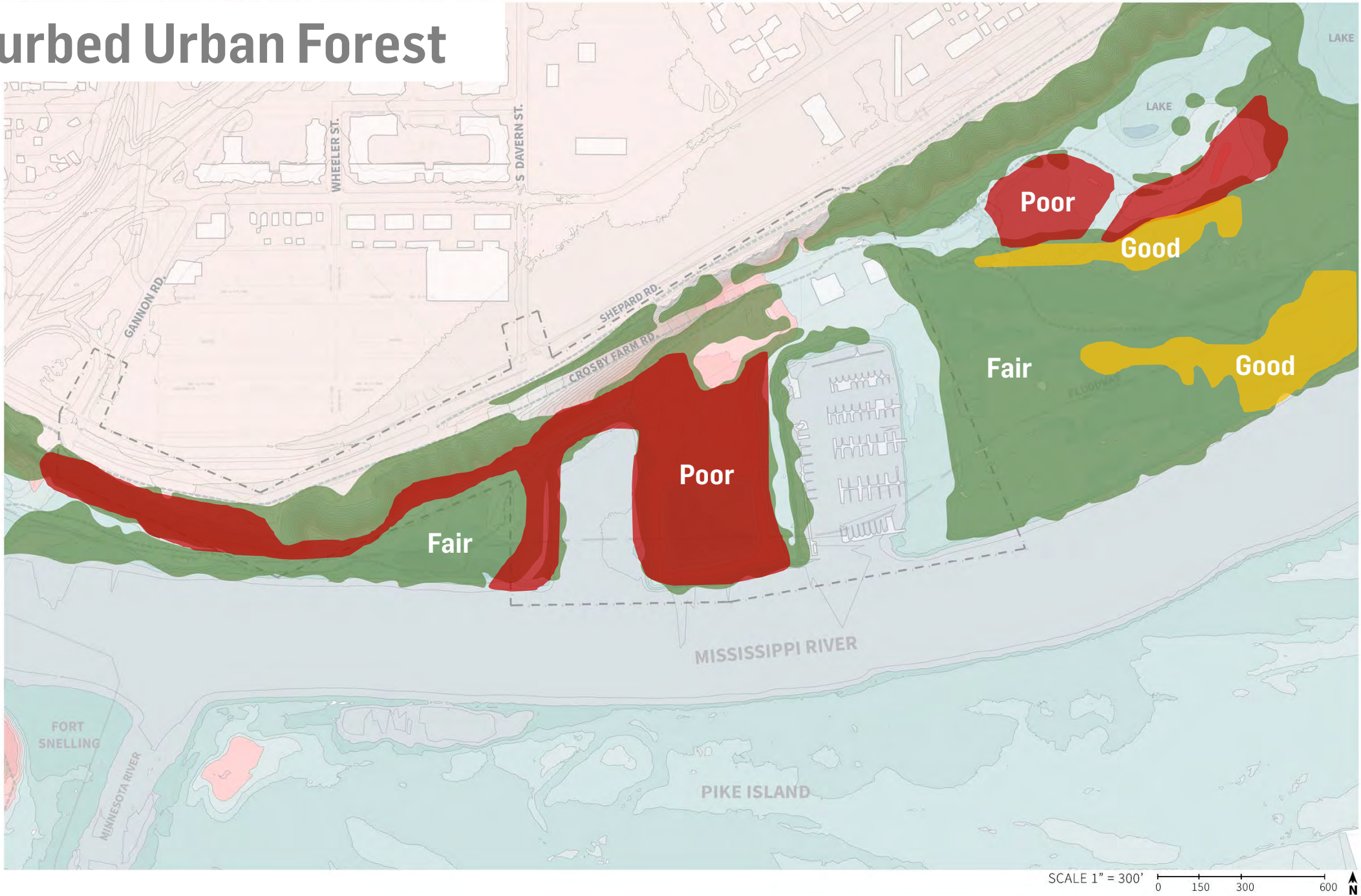
1. **Nothing**
2. **Lack of access** to the park (by water, by foot, by bike, disability, roads are too busy to cross)
3. **Distance**
4. **Crime**
5. Feeling **unsafe or unwelcome** as woman/LGBTQ/BIPOC
6. **Lack of access to water**/water activities
7. Lack of personal **time** to visit
8. **Poor parking** options
9. **Lack of amenities**
10. **Poor park maintenance** (disrepair, trash, water pollution, poor trails)

Site opportunities and constraints...

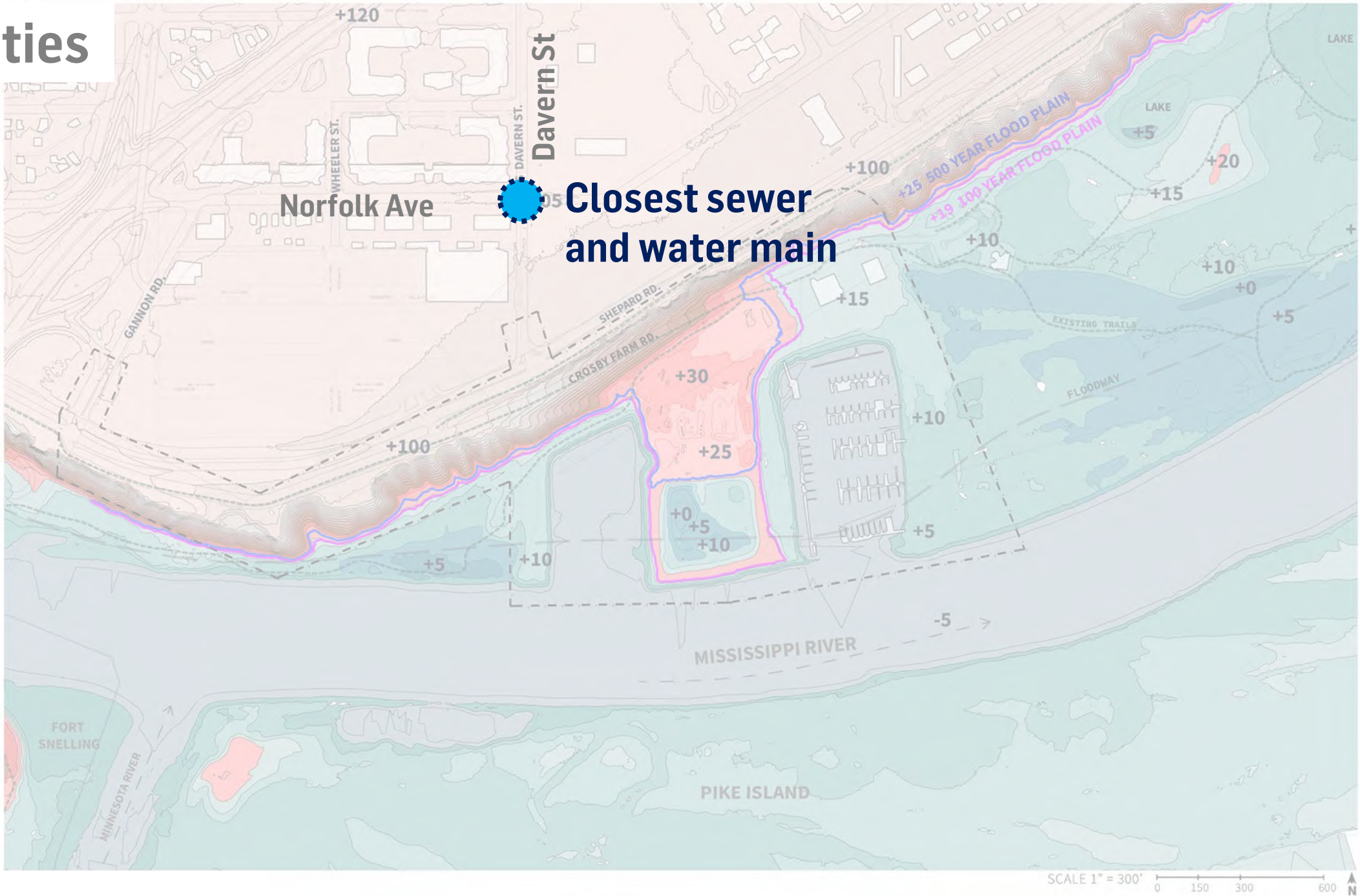
The Floodplain



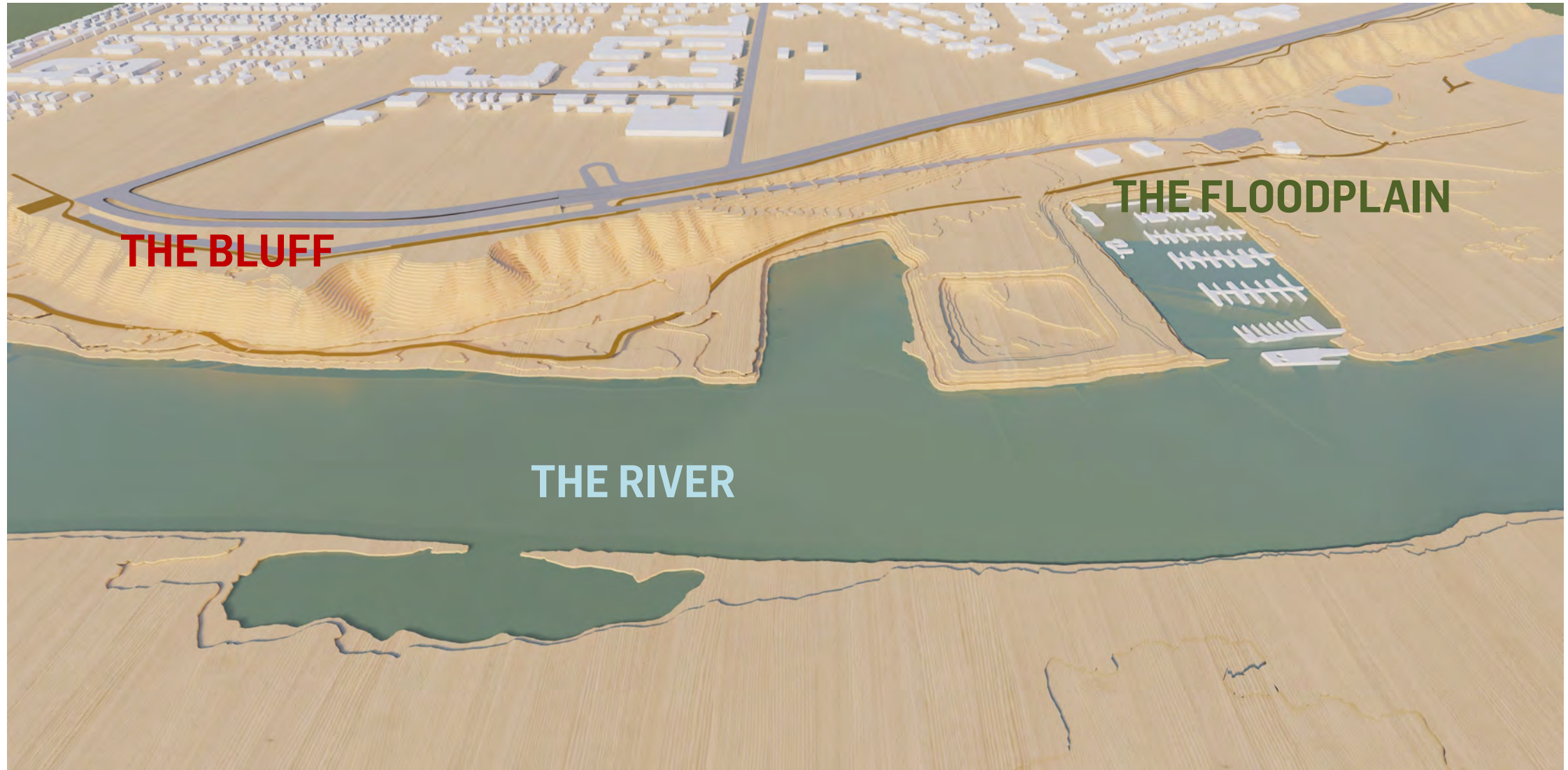
Disturbed Urban Forest



Utilities



Existing Site: How to connect the parts to create a Unique River Experience?



River Learning Center is...

- **A visible national gateway to the Mississippi**
- **A place to experience land, water and culture**
- **Small-scale, light on the land, and forward thinking**
- **Beautiful, safe, welcoming and accessible to all**
- **Regenerative and restorative: planned for future generations**

3 Alternative Schemes

Alt #1: The Bridge



Alt #2: The Path



Alt #3: The Destination



- All schemes make the site more **visible** with a welcoming entrance
- All schemes create **universal access** from the bluff to the floodplain
- All schemes locate major buildings **out of the floodplain**
- All schemes place major new elements (islands, buildings) on disturbed land and **improve the ecology**

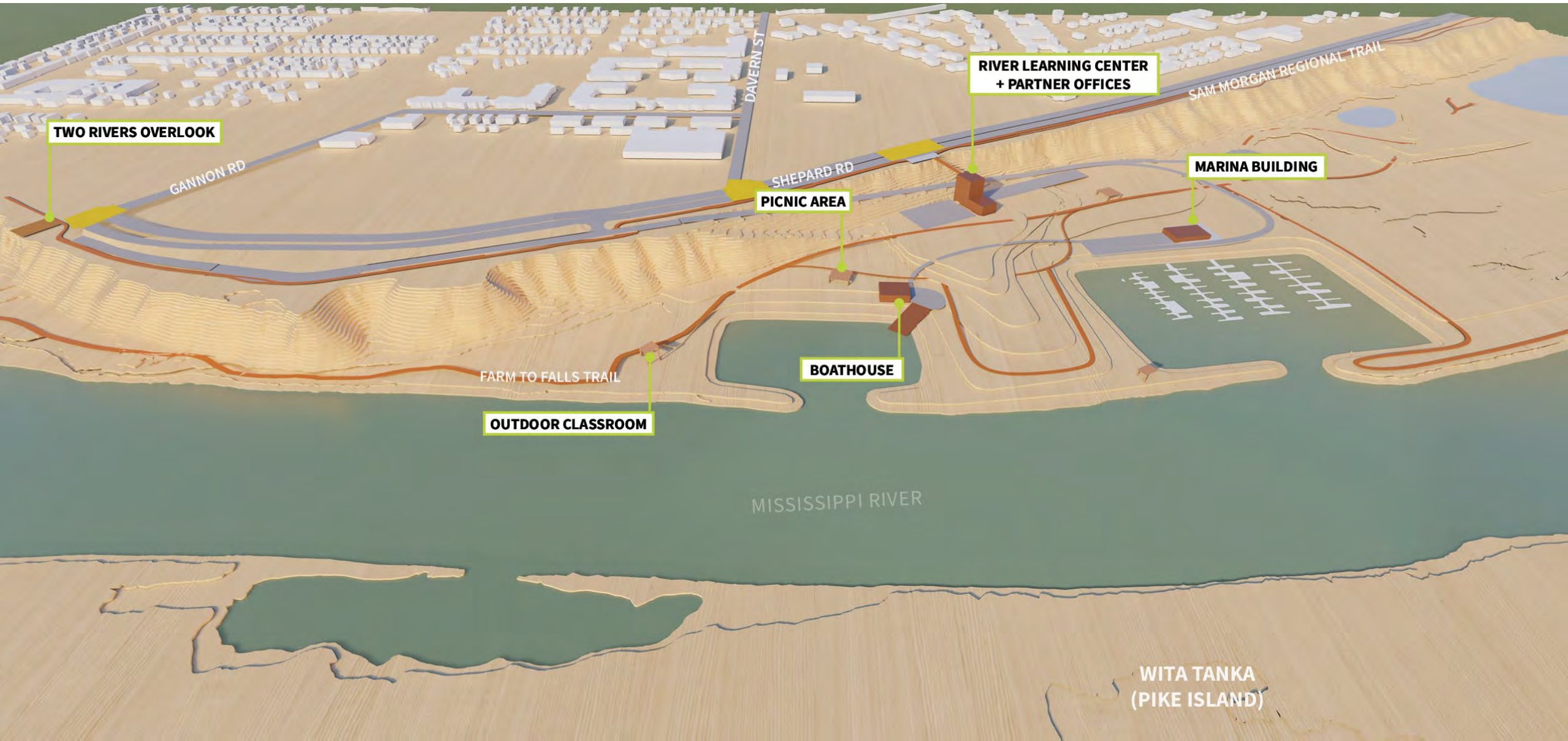
Alternative #1
River Learning Center as a
Bridge

Alt #1: The Bridge



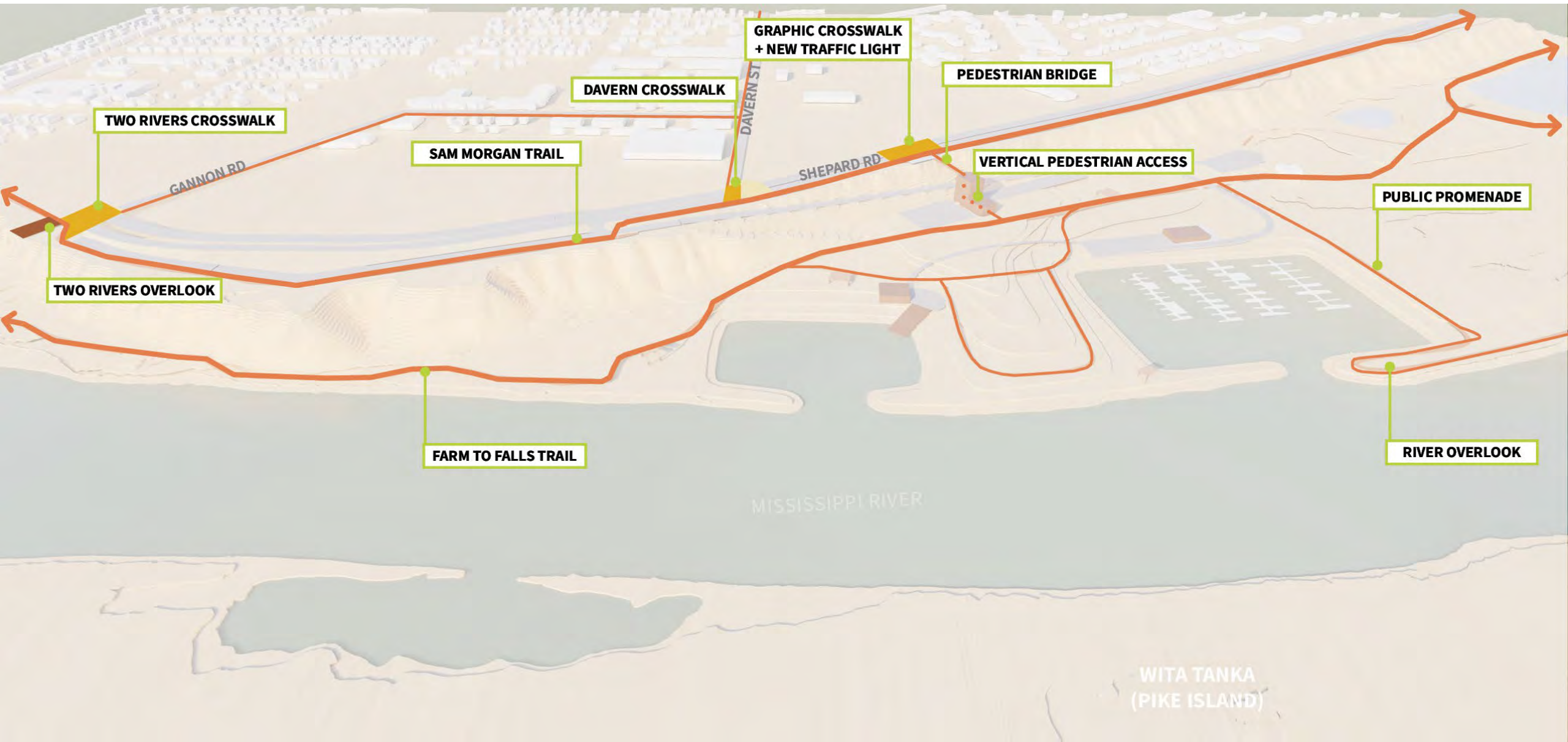
Alt #1: The Bridge

Building provides pedestrian access down to river



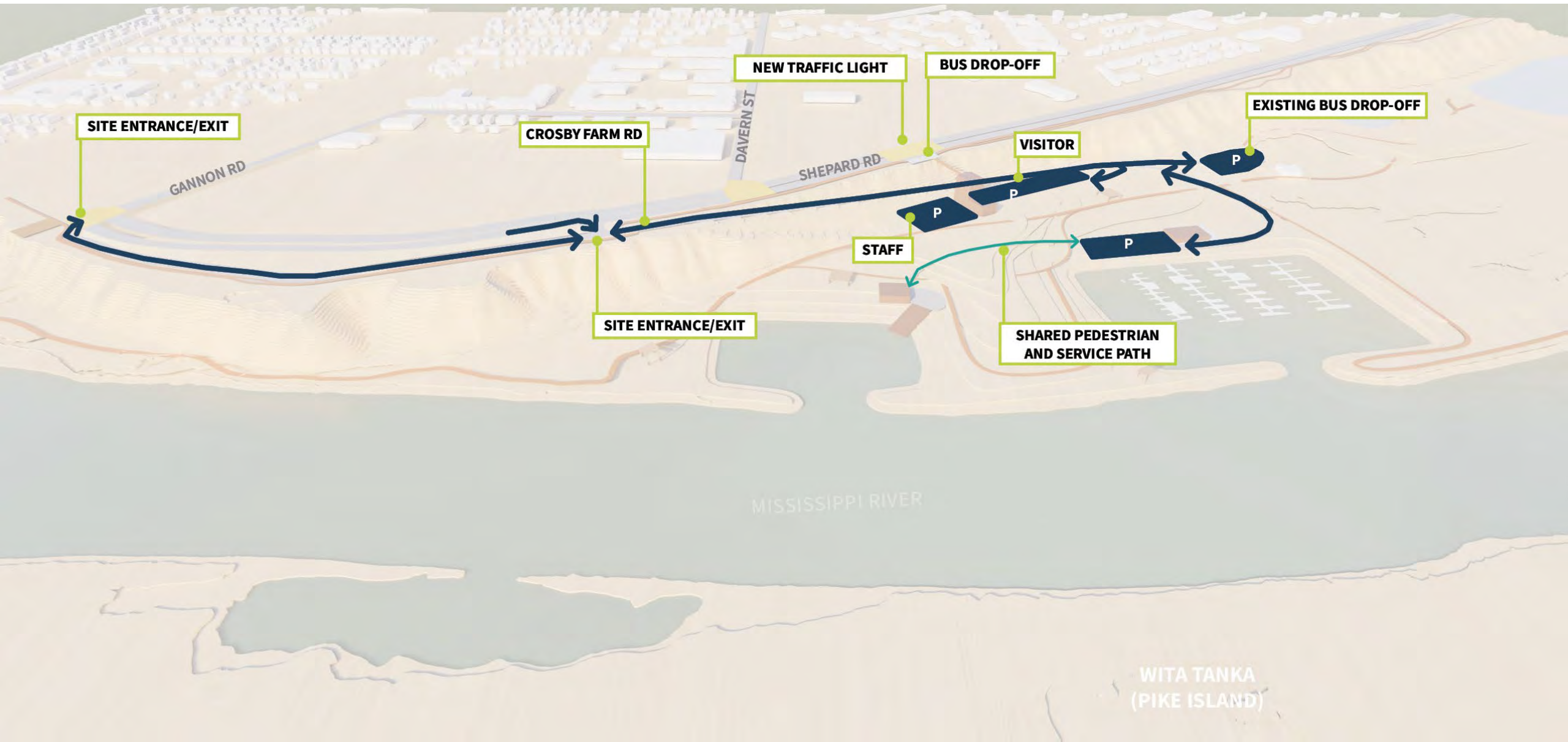
Alt #1: The Bridge

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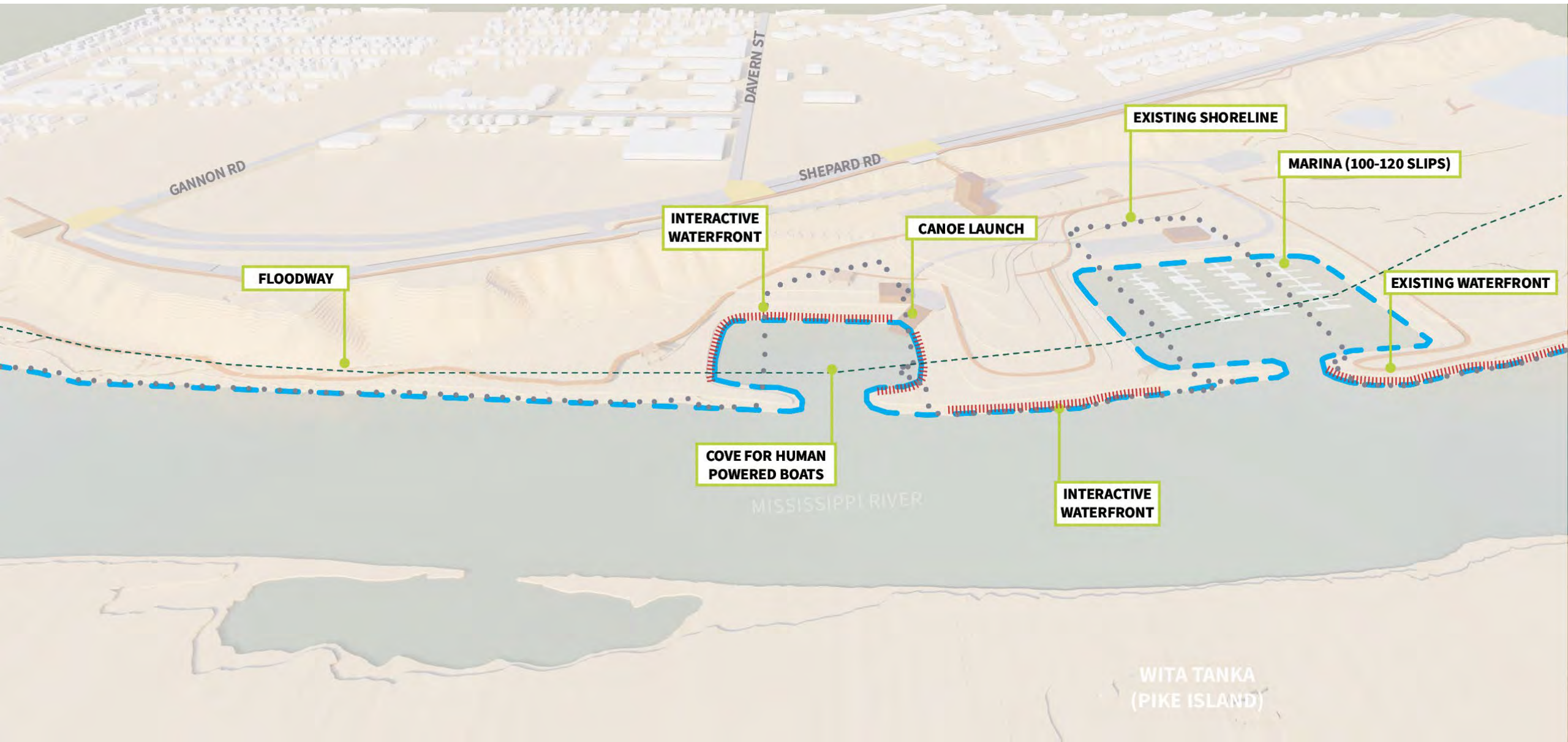
Alt #1: The Bridge

Existing road connects to expanded parking



Alt #1: The Bridge

Inlets are oriented to provide more area around building



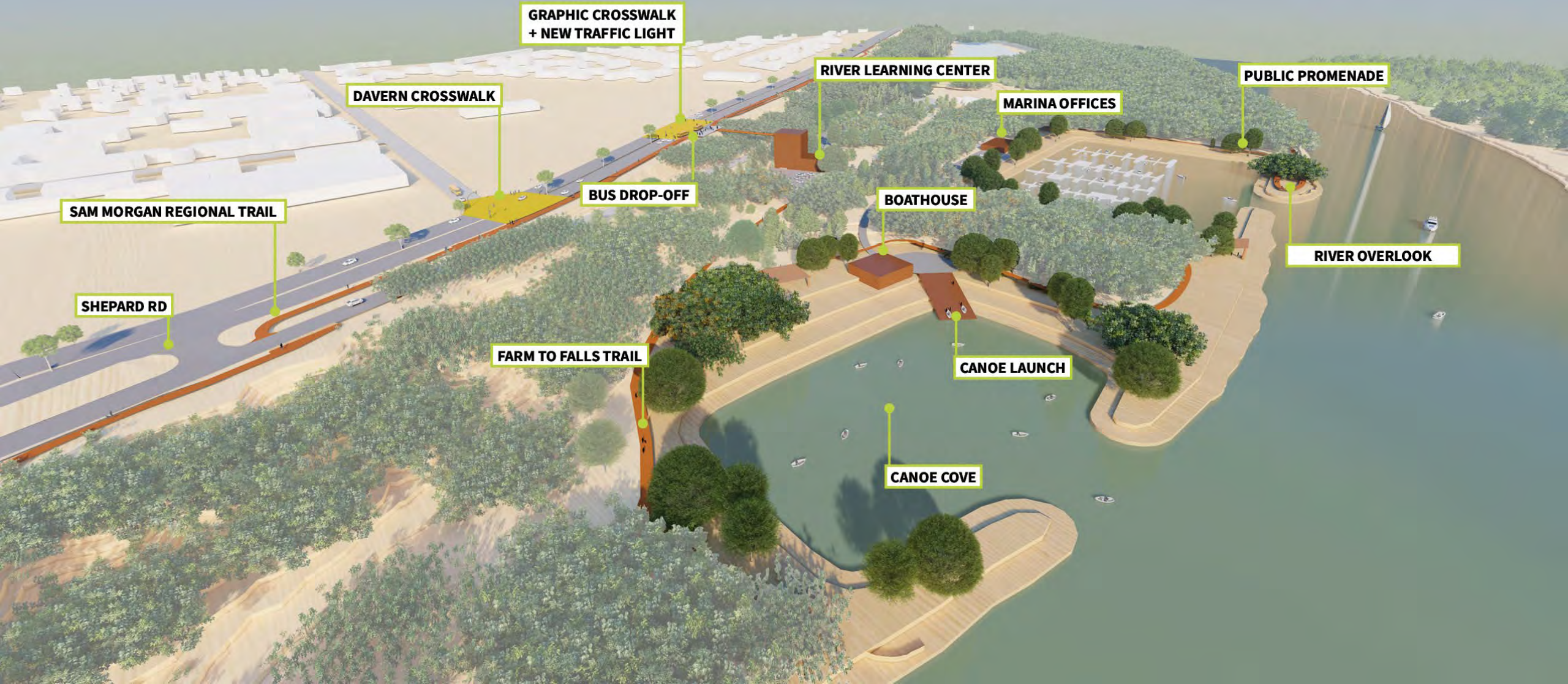
Alt #1: The Bridge



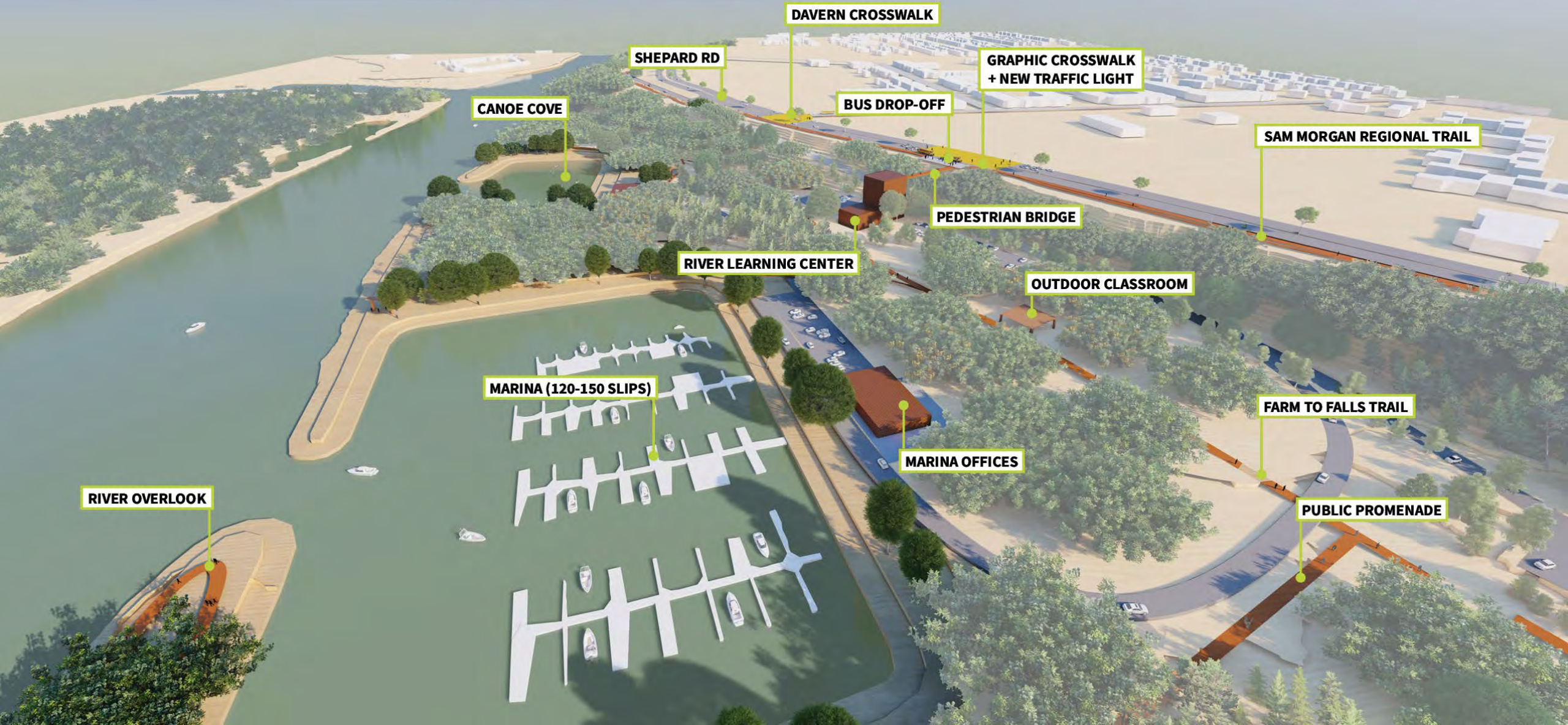
Alt #1: The Bridge



Alt #1: The Bridge



Alt #1: The Bridge



Alt #1: The Bridge



Alt #1: The Bridge



Summary:

- Most **direct interior connection** down to the River (elevator, stairs)
- Offers **views onto the River & Pike Island**
- All bus drop off and parking at river level
- Reconfigured marina to create **more outdoor space** between river & bluff

Alternative #2
River Learning Center as a
choreographed path
connecting Bluff to Floodplain

Alt #2: The Path – Bluff to Floodplain



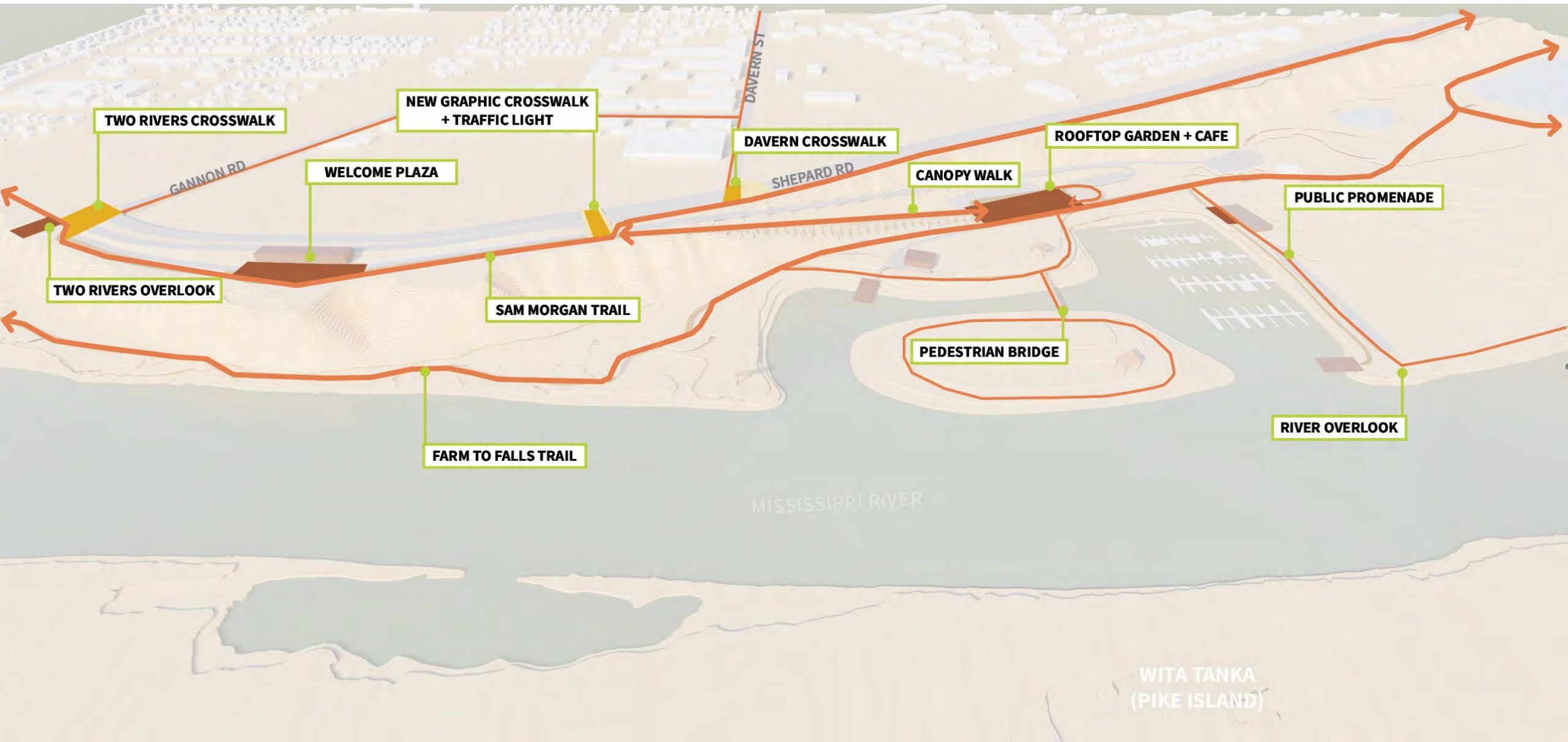
Alt #2: The Path

Building is split into two parts



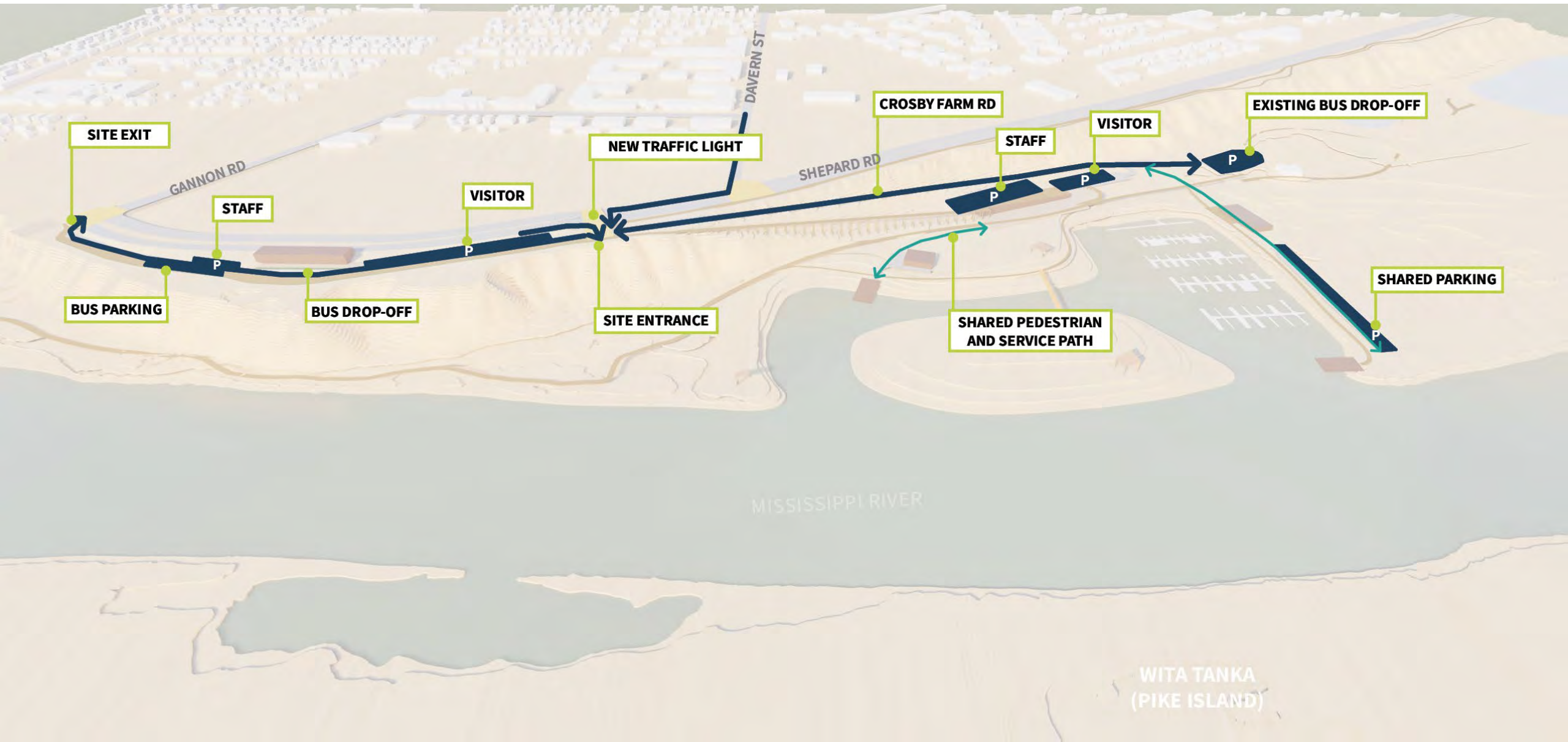
Alt #2: The Path

Universal access from Sam Morgan trail to river



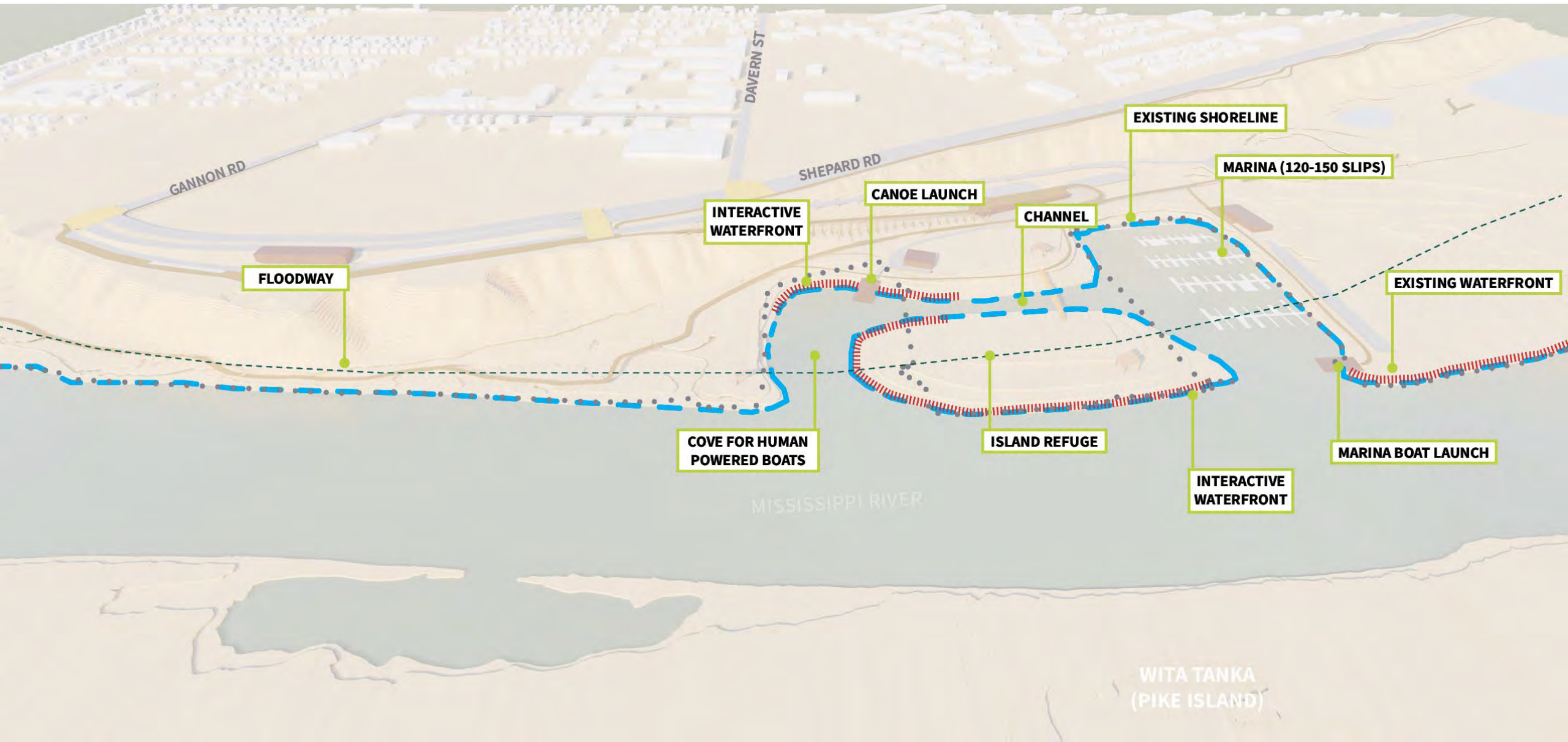
Alt #2: The Path

New light at Site entrance-One-way loop to service NPS and visitor buses and cars

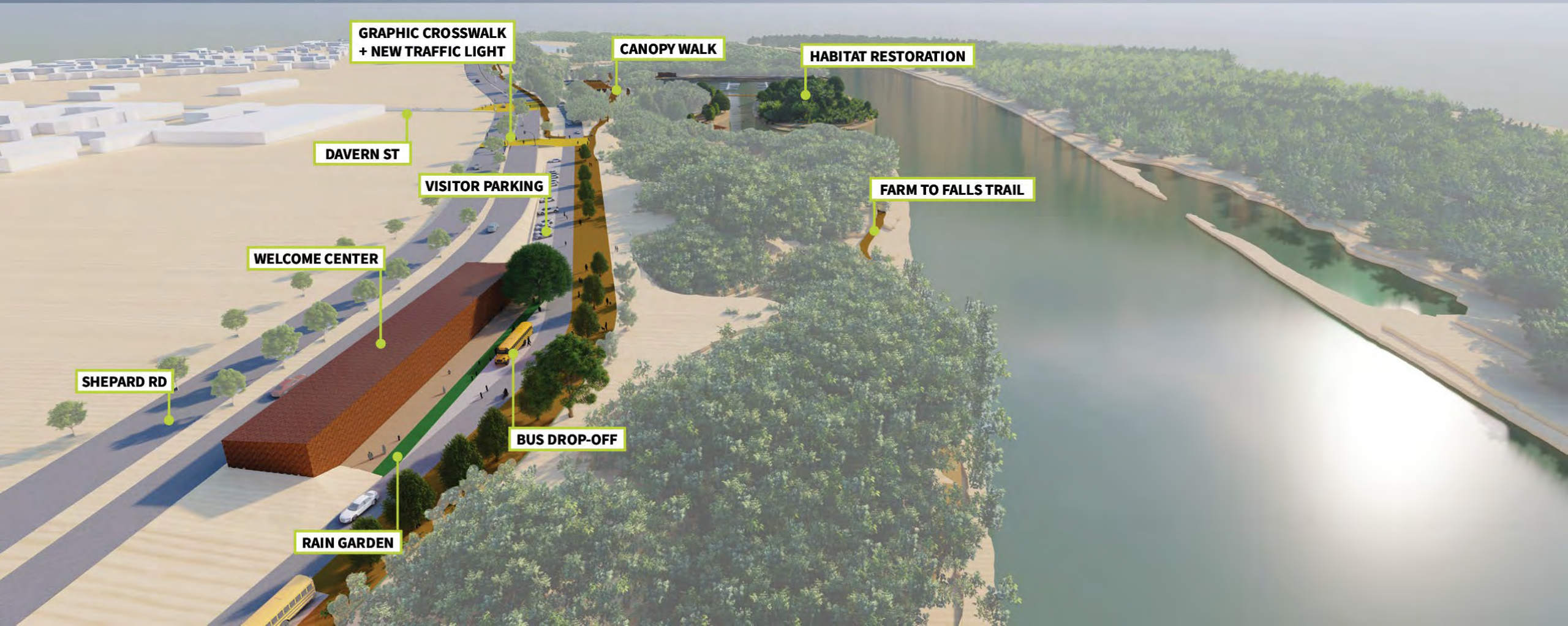


Alt #2: The Path

New channel creates an island



Alt #2: The Path



Alt #2: The Path



Alt #2: The Path



Alt #2: The Path



Alt #2: The Path | Bluff Building



Alt #2: The Path | River Building



Alt #2: The Path – Bluff to Floodplain



Summary:

- A welcome center at the top of the bluff with NPS offices, parking and bus drop off
- Universal access down to the River Learning Center (elevated walk) with rooftop public space
- Minimized impact at the river level
- Island for contemplation or exploration
- Marina remains at current size

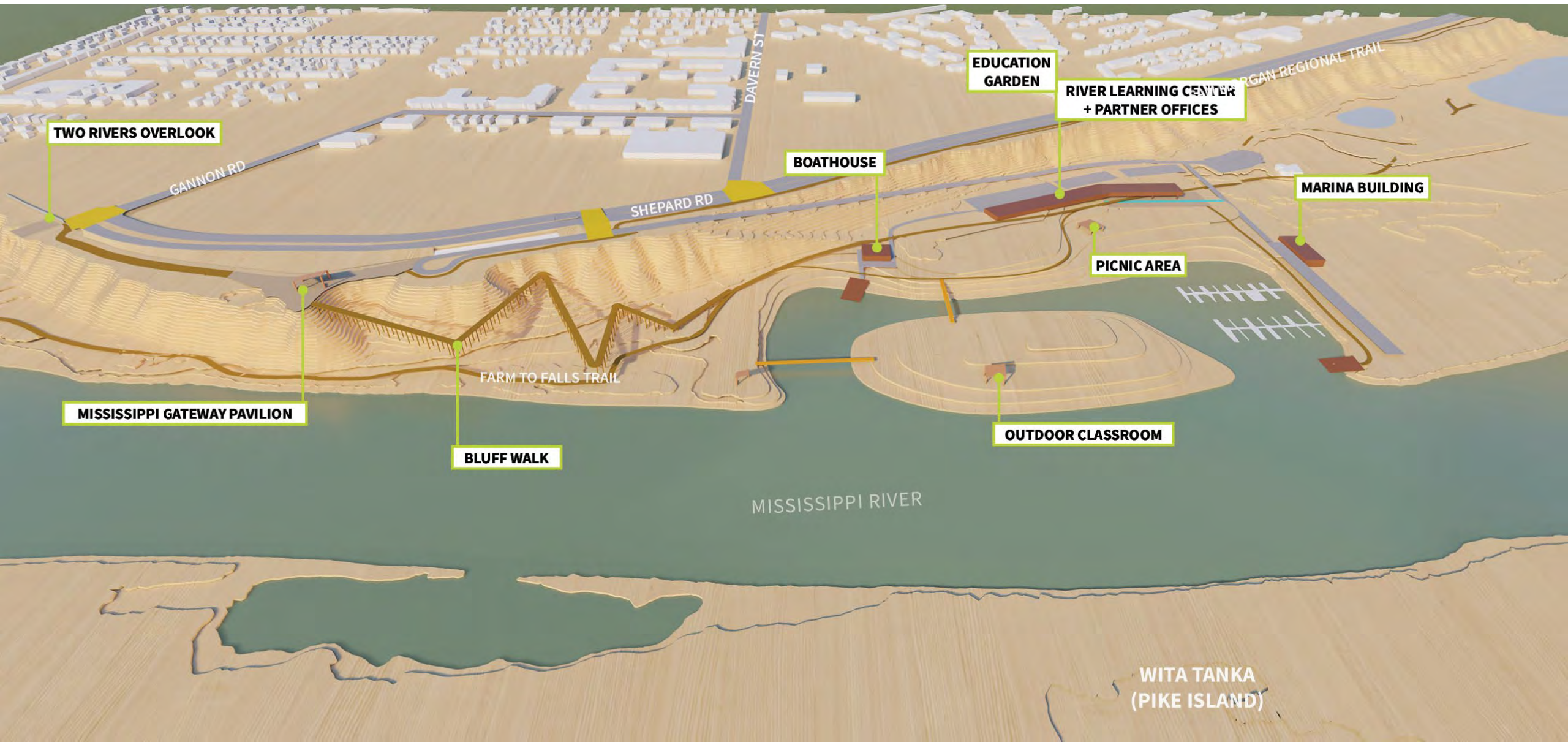
Alternative #3
River Learning Center as a
Destination by the River

Alt #3: The Destination



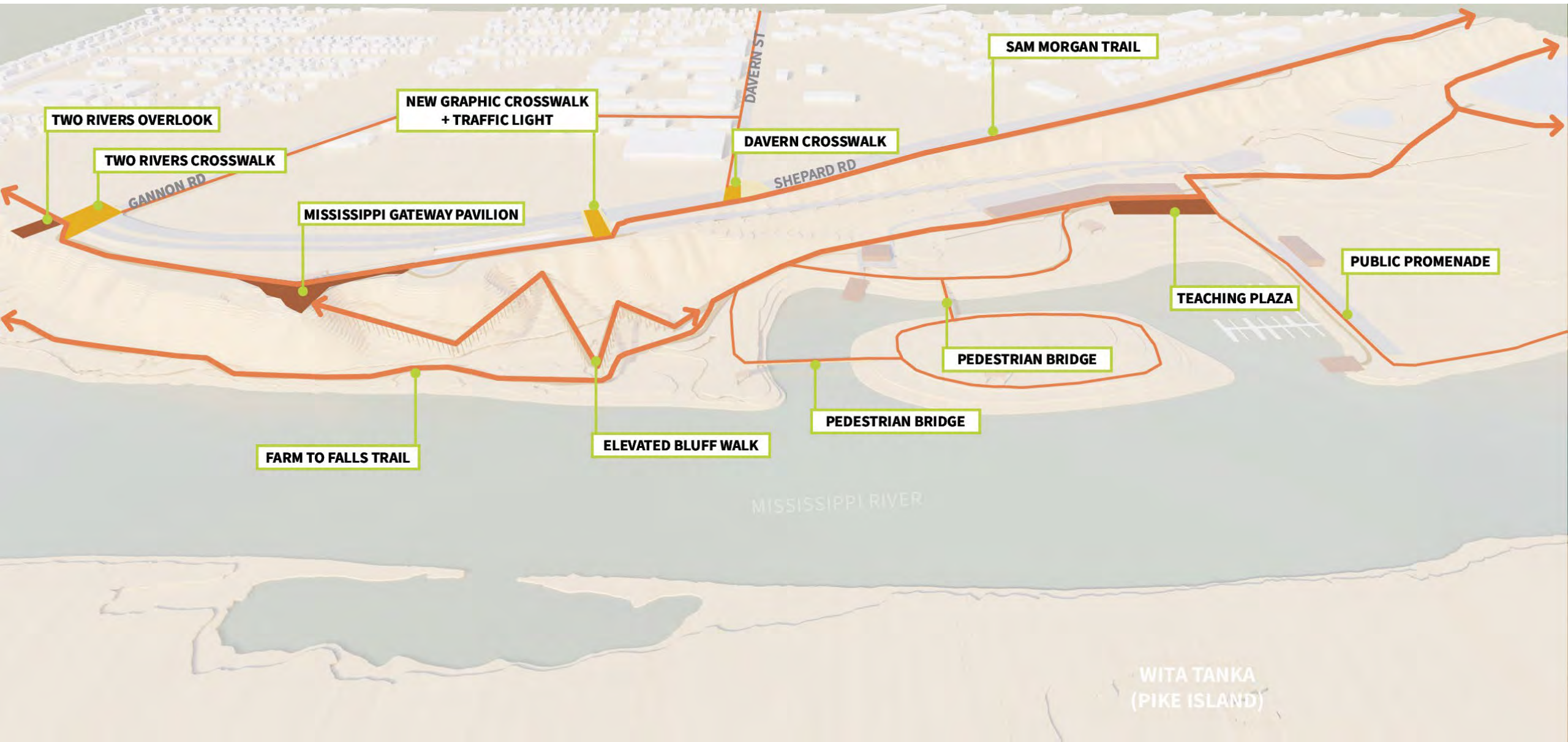
Alt #3: The Destination

Single building by the river



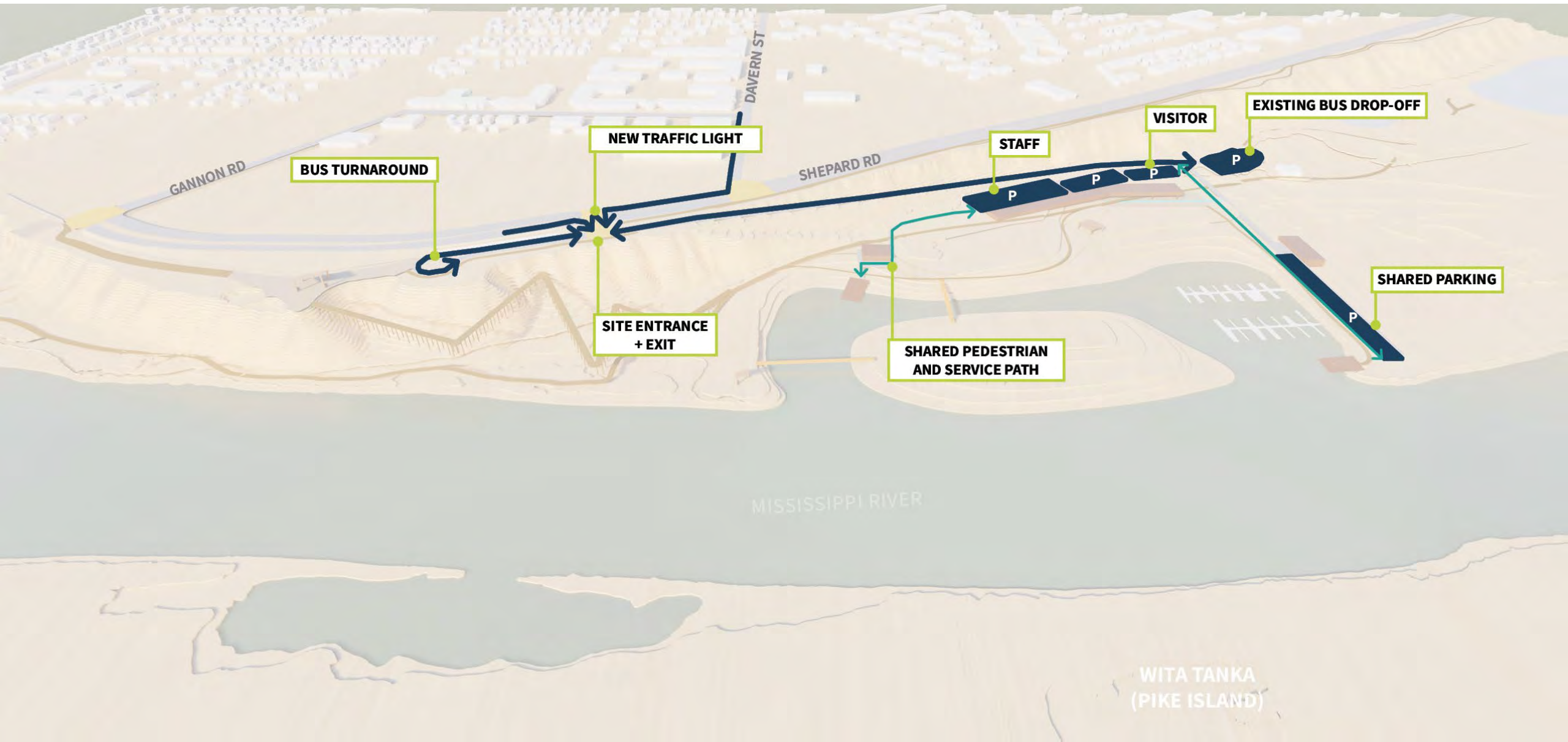
Alt #3: The Destination

Canopy Walk connects Bluff gateway to River



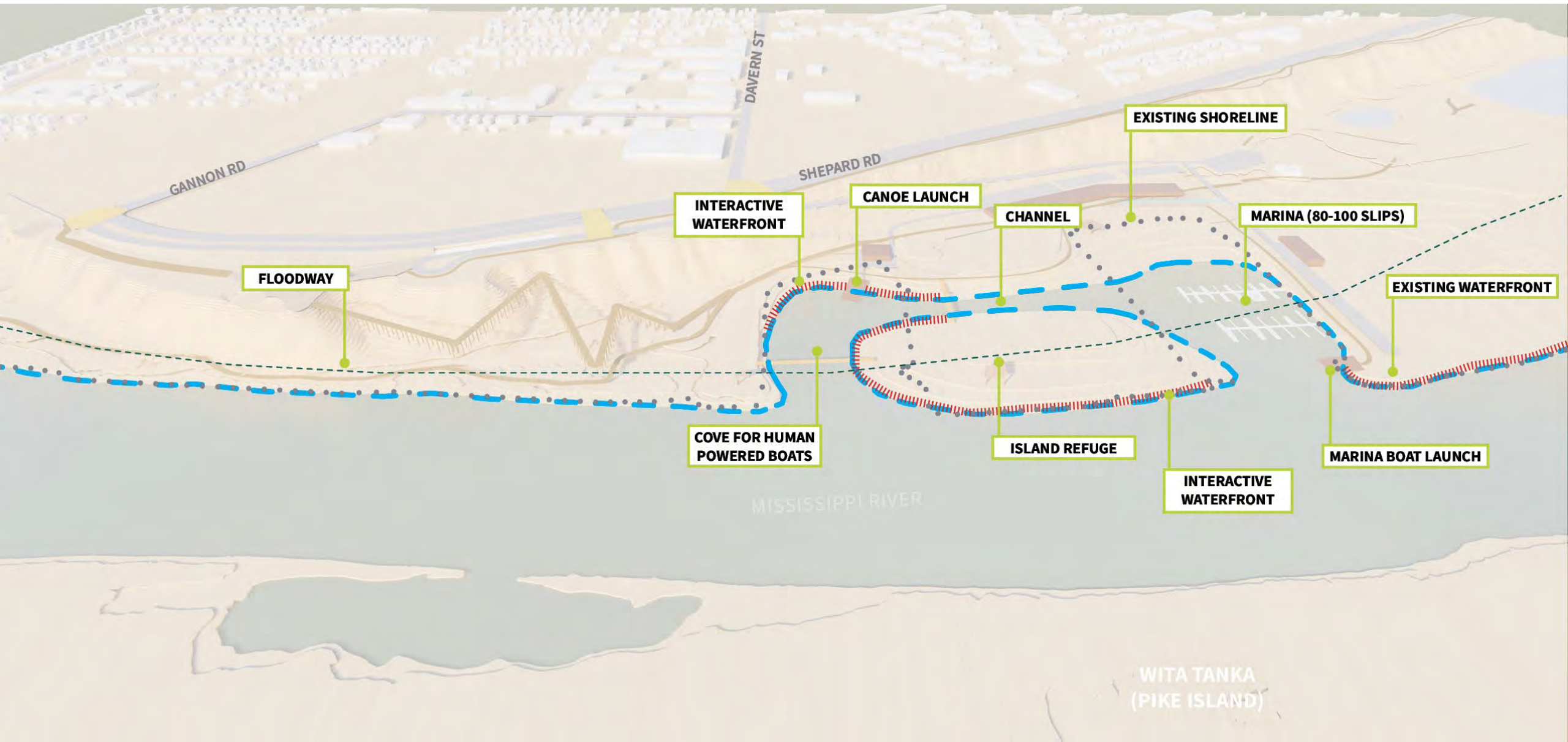
Alt #3: The Destination

Parking and Option for bus turnaround at bluff, rest at river



Alt #3: The Destination

Smaller Marina for larger public space by the River Learning Center



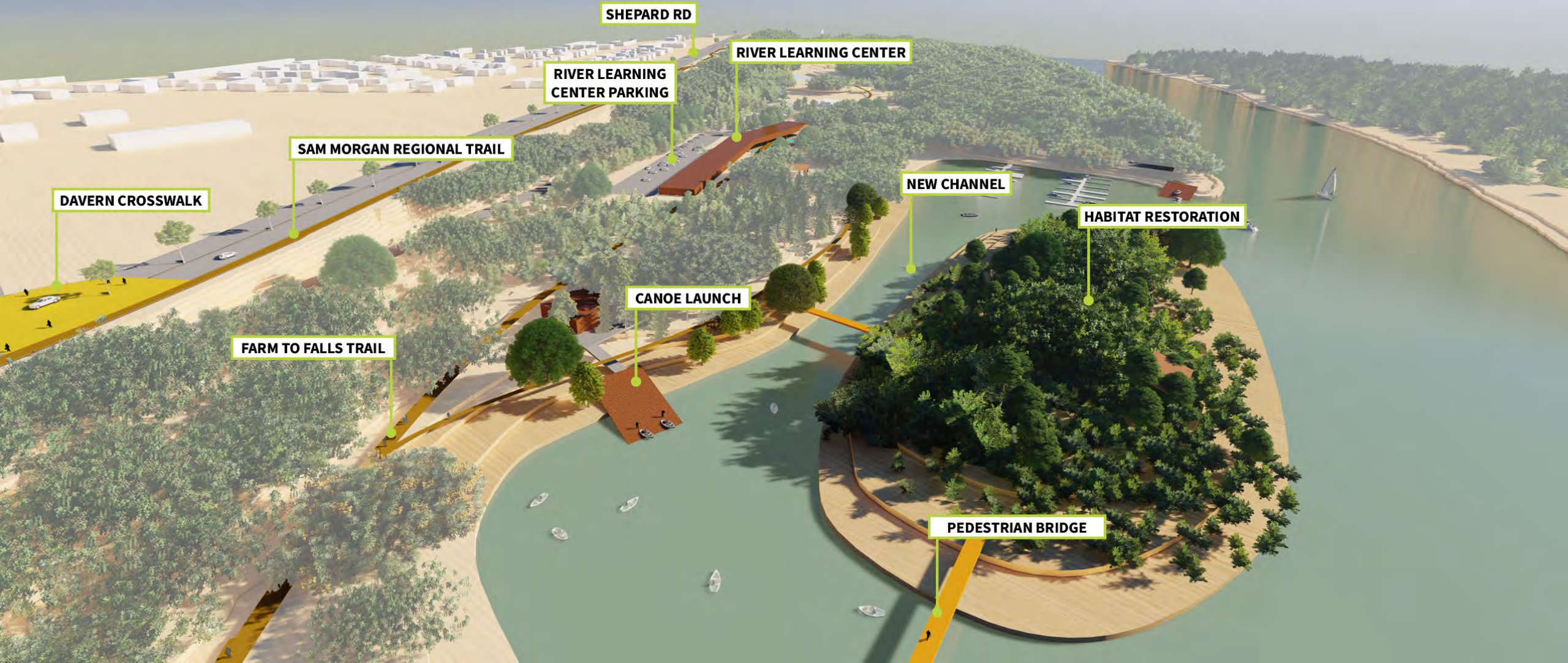
Alt #3: The Destination



Alt #3: The Destination



Alt #3: The Destination



Alt #3: The Destination



Alt #3: The Destination

River Learning Center and support offices (NPS and WI)



Alt #3: The Destination

Elevated walk connects bluff to river



Alt #3: The Destination



Summary:

- Landscape experience knits the site together – **unfolding the landscape**
- Sharable spaces all in one building – **collaborative environment** at the river
- All bus drop off and parking at river level
- **Island** for contemplation or exploration
- **Smaller marina**

3 Alternative Schemes

Alt #1: The Bridge



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Alt #2: The Path



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River Learning Center?

**What will make it a unique and
attractive place?**

What is its identity?

How will everyone feel welcome?

Next Steps

- 
- ➔ ● **Now:** Open House Discussions at Stations
 - **7/21** Community Meeting #3: Preferred Scheme
 - **Date TBD** (Fall 2022) Community Meeting #4: Schematic Design Completion & Celebration!

Questions or comments, please contact Project Manager: Anne Gardner- Anne.Gardner@ci.stpaul.mn.us