

# 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 + CPMI

# 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 lifeblood 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.**

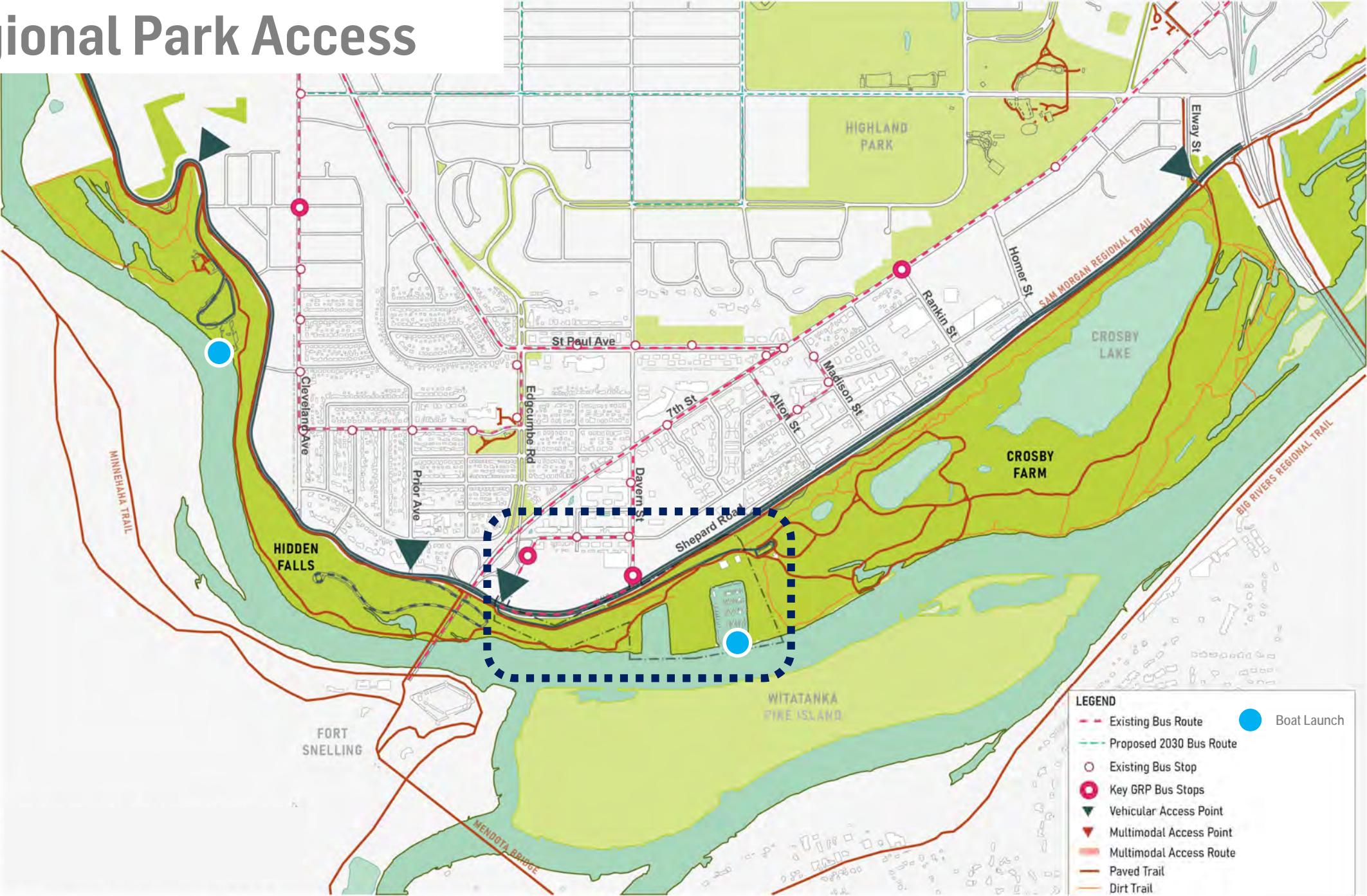
**Plan and design for our grandchildren and theirs, generations to come.**

**River Learning Center is**

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



# Regional Park Access



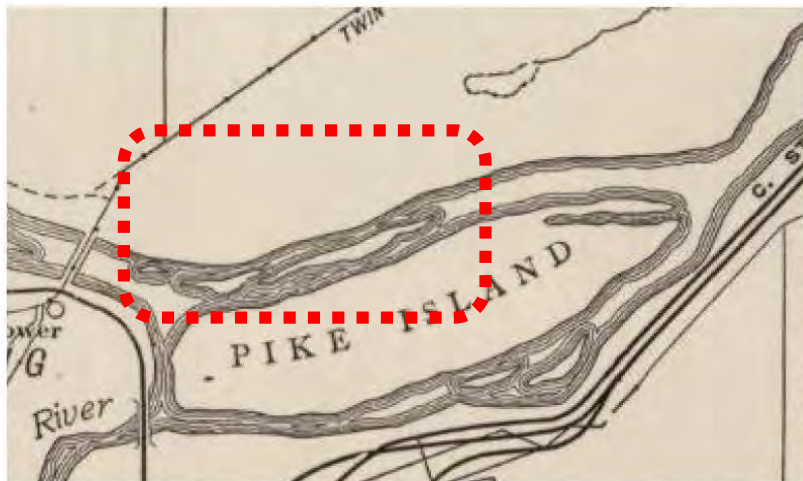
**LEGEND**

- - - 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

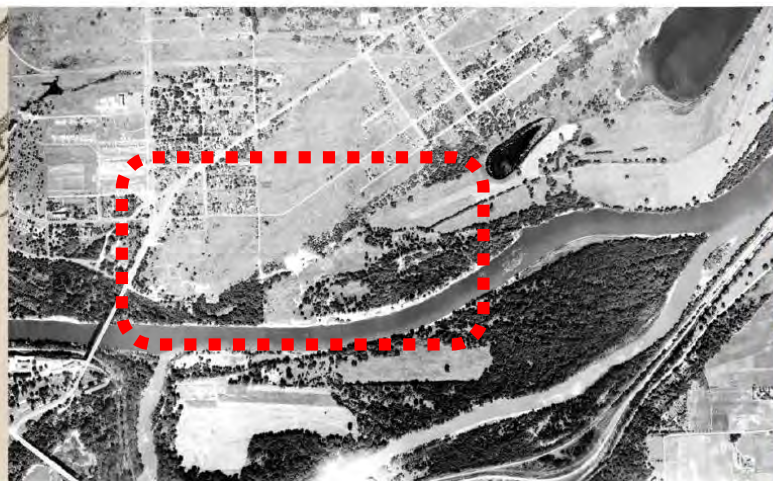
**River Learning Center is**

**...An Urban Wilderness**

# Floodplain forest- Dynamic River Edge



1924



1950



2021



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





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%)



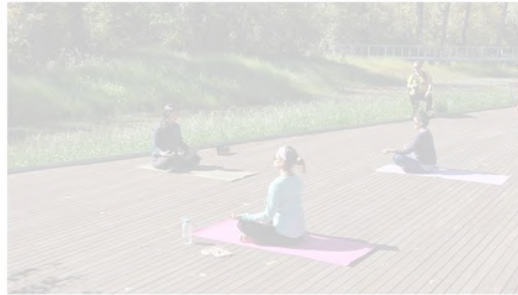
2. Biking – 299 (57.95%)



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



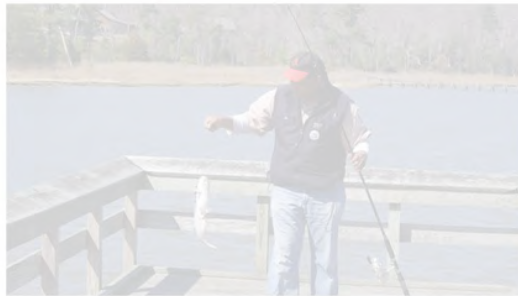
5 Cafe



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:

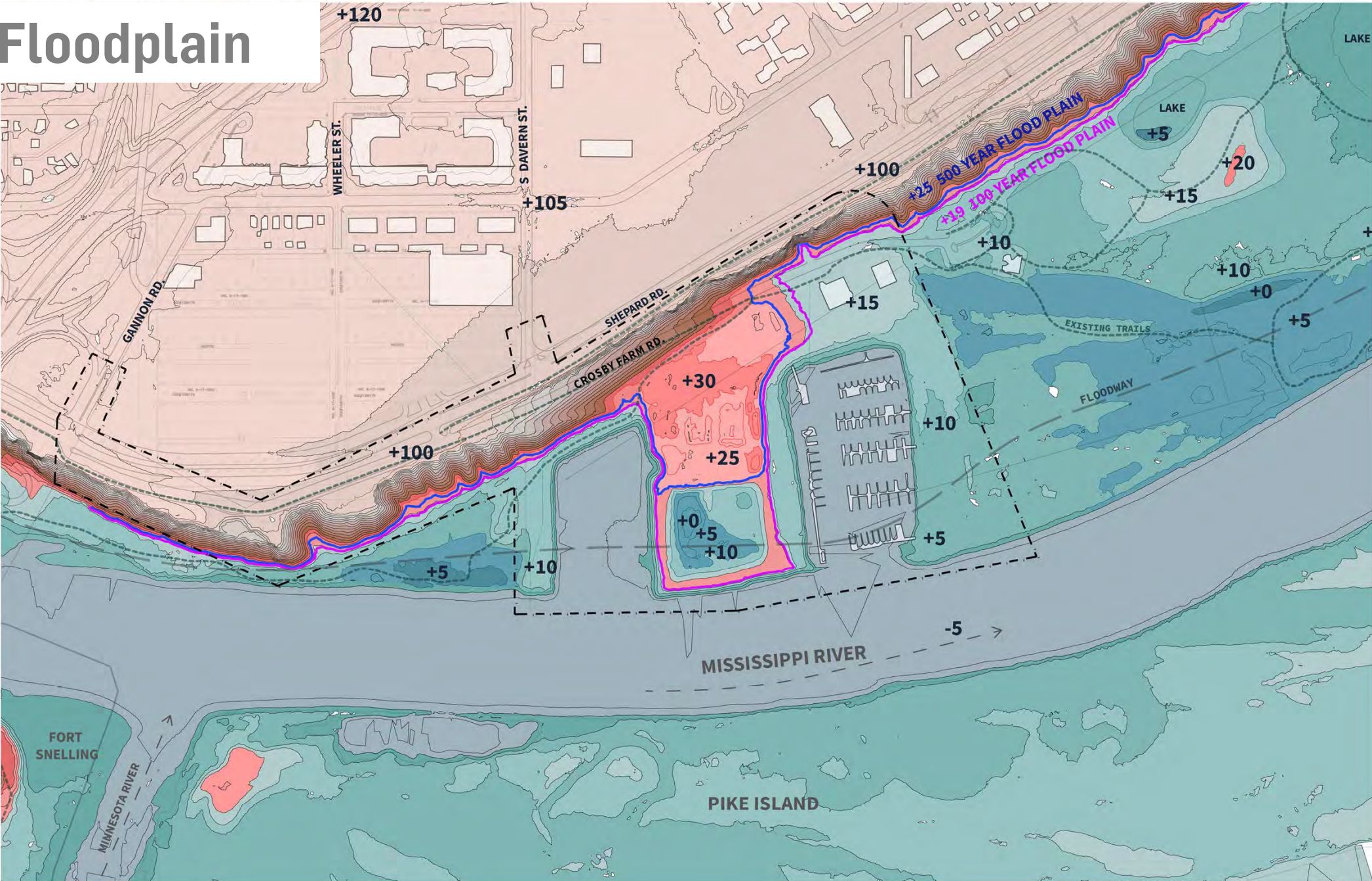
**WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT THE SITE?**

# 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)

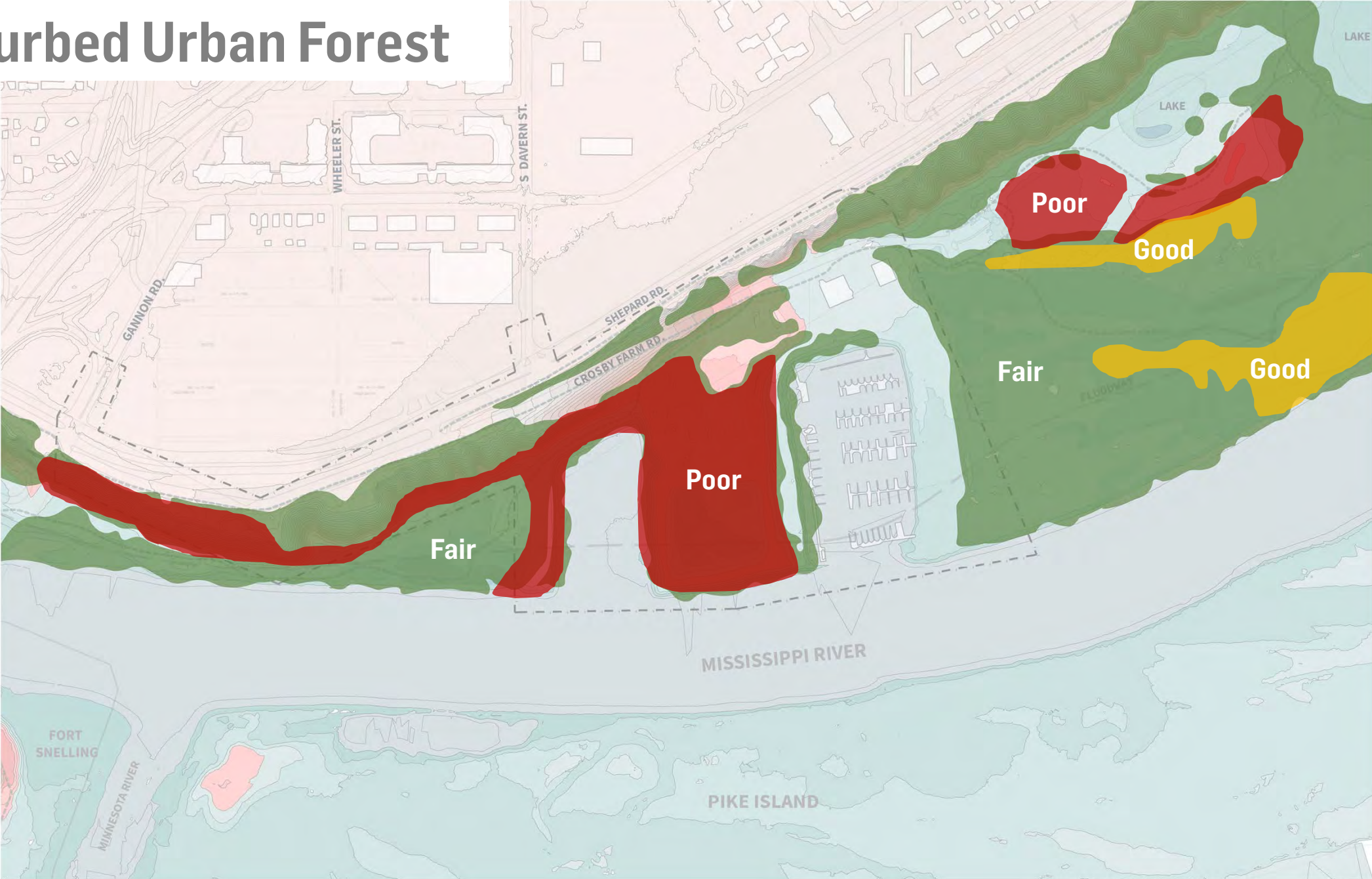
# Site opportunities and constraints...

# The Floodplain



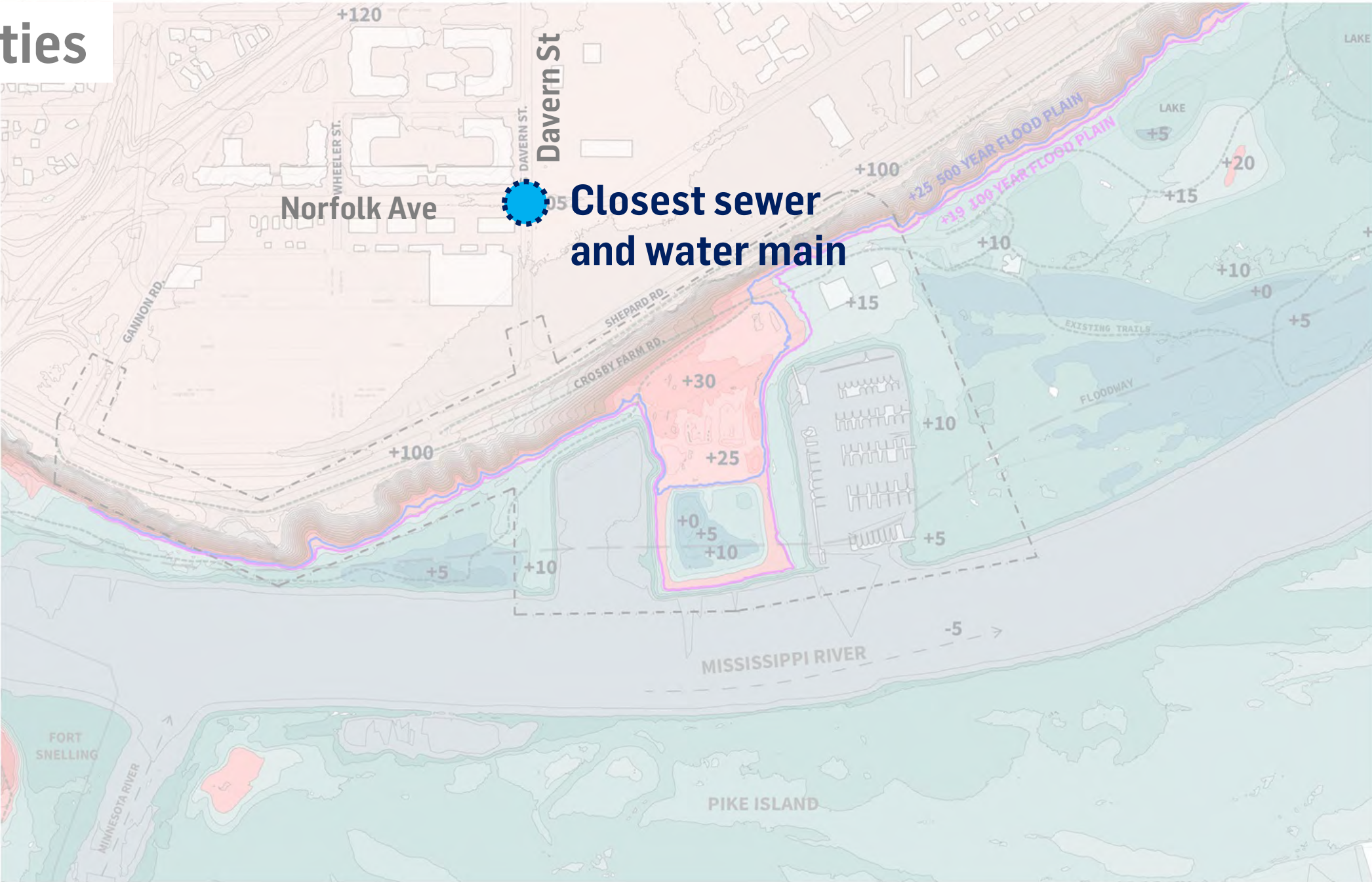
SCALE 1" = 300' 0 150 300 600 N

# Disturbed Urban Forest



SCALE 1" = 300' 0 150 300 600 N

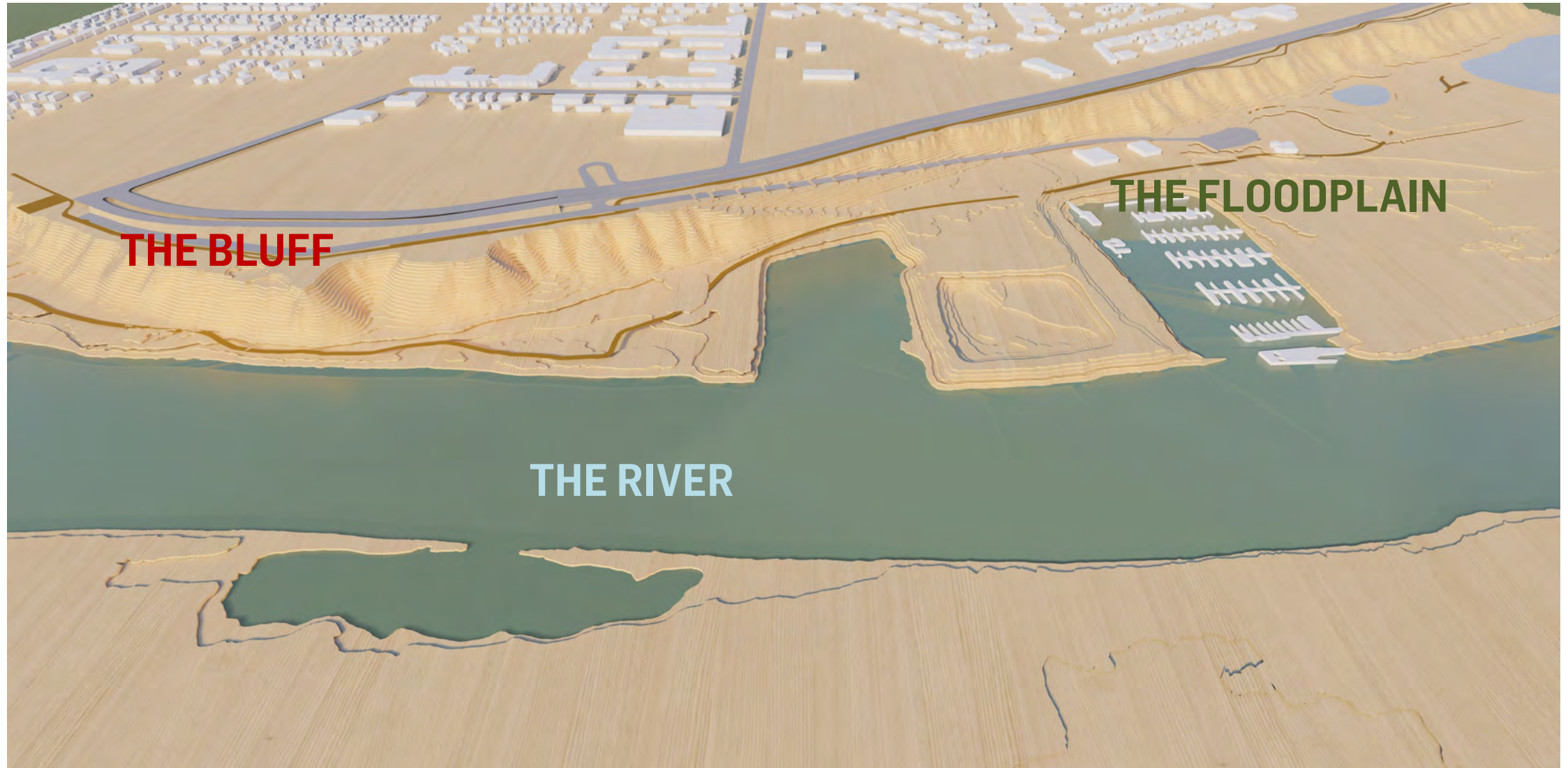
# Utilities



**Closest sewer  
and water main**



## 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**

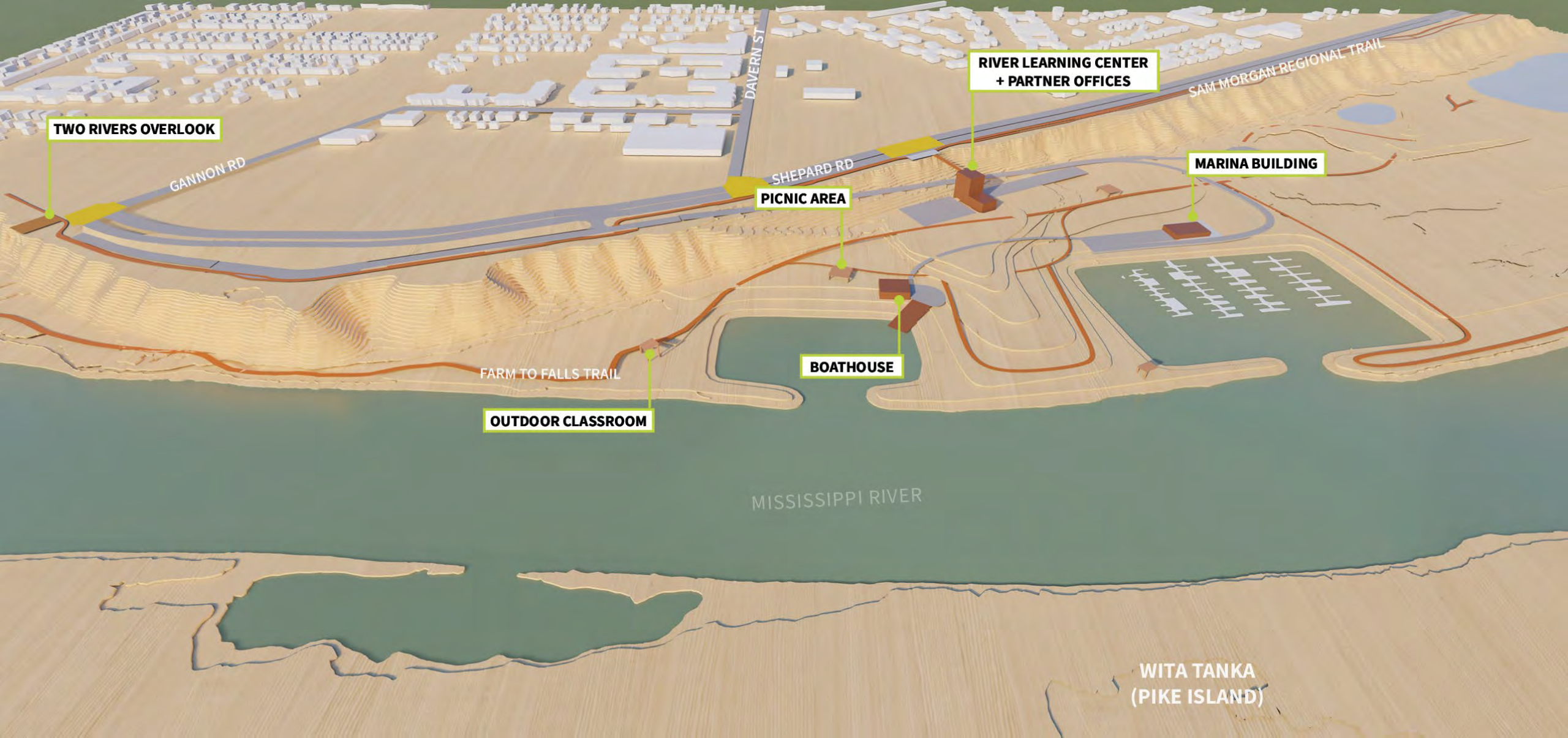
**Alternative #1**  
**River Learning Center as a**  
**Bridge**

# Alt #1: The Bridge



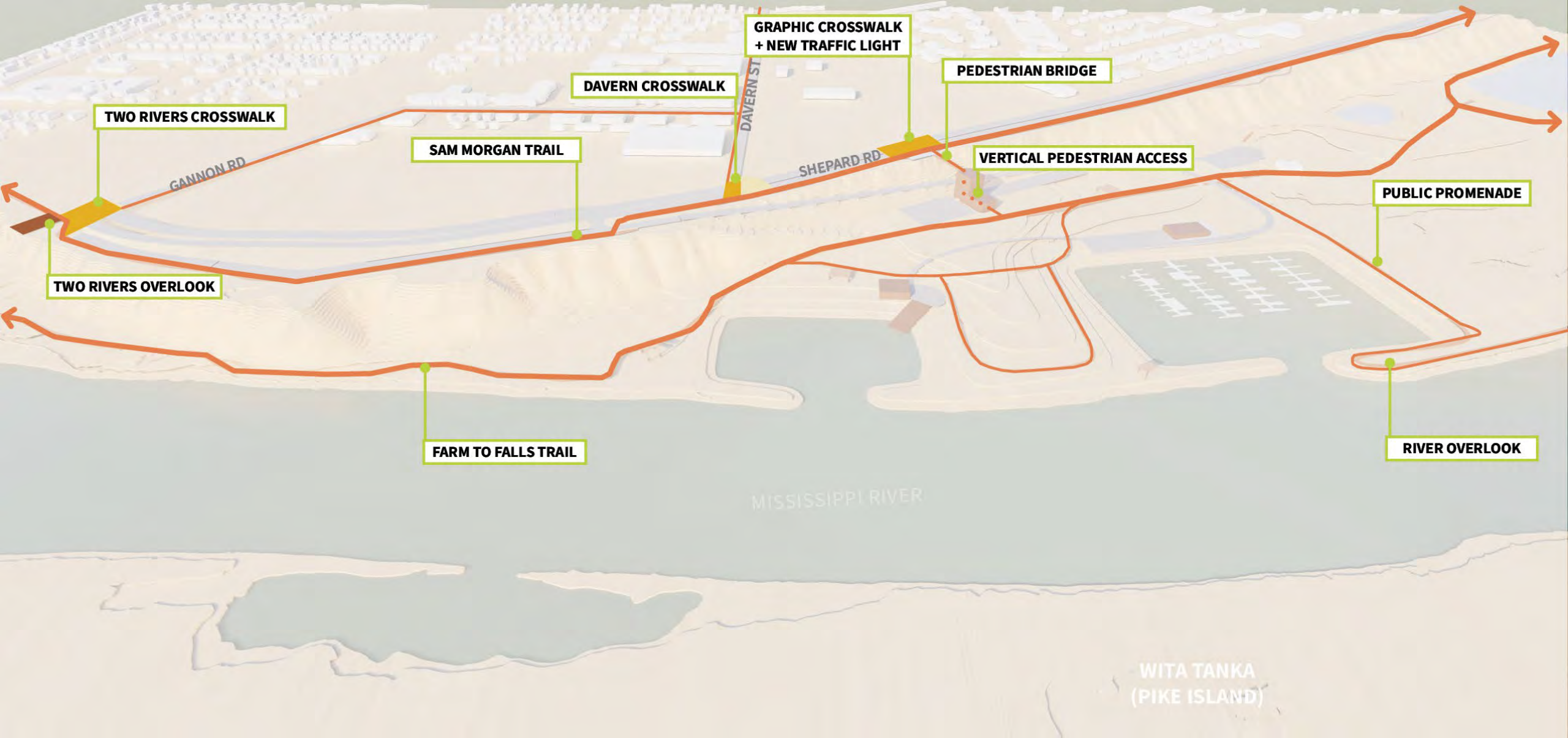
# Alt #1: The Bridge

Building provides pedestrian access down to river



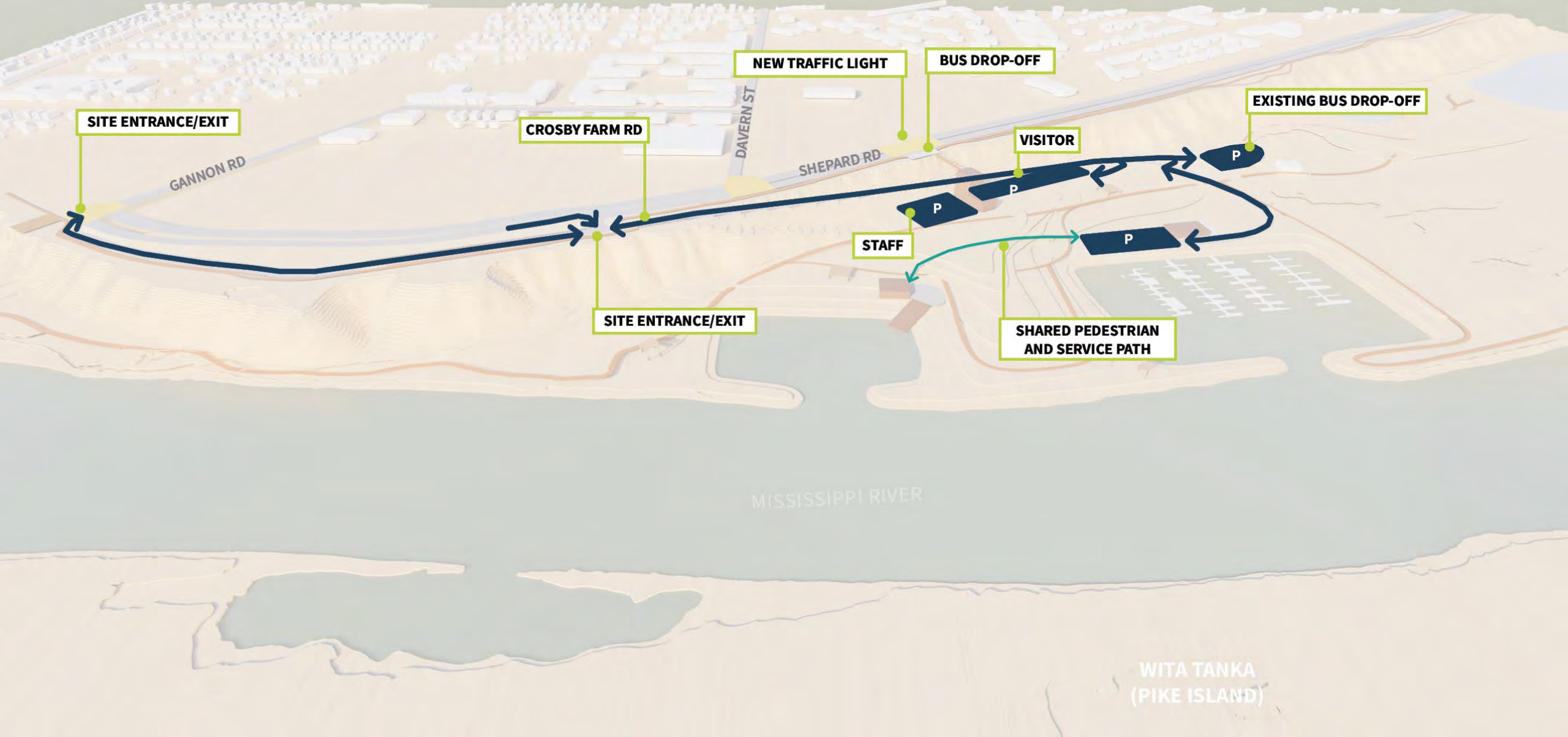
# Alt #1: The Bridge

Building provides pedestrian access down to river



# Alt #1: The Bridge

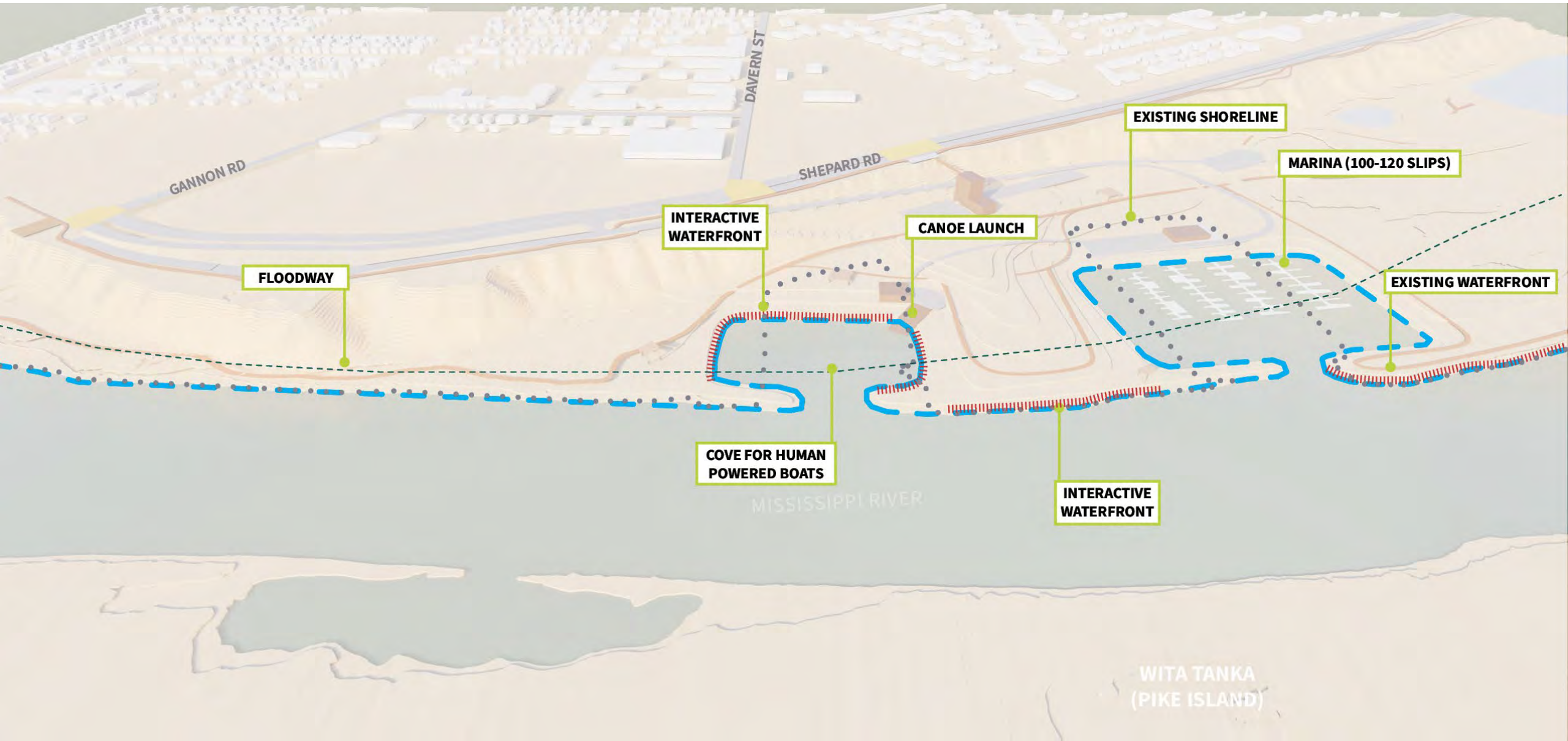
Existing road connects to expanded parking





# Alt #1: The Bridge

Inlets are oriented to provide more area around building



# Alt #1: The Bridge



GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

RIVER OVERLOOK

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

DAVERN ST

DAVERN CROSSWALK

CANOE LAUNCH

CANOE COVE

CROSBY FARM RD

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

SHEPARD RD

SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL

# Alt #1: The Bridge



SHEPARD RD

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

BUS DROP-OFF

GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

DAVERN CROSSWALK

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

RIVER OVERLOOK

BOATHOUSE

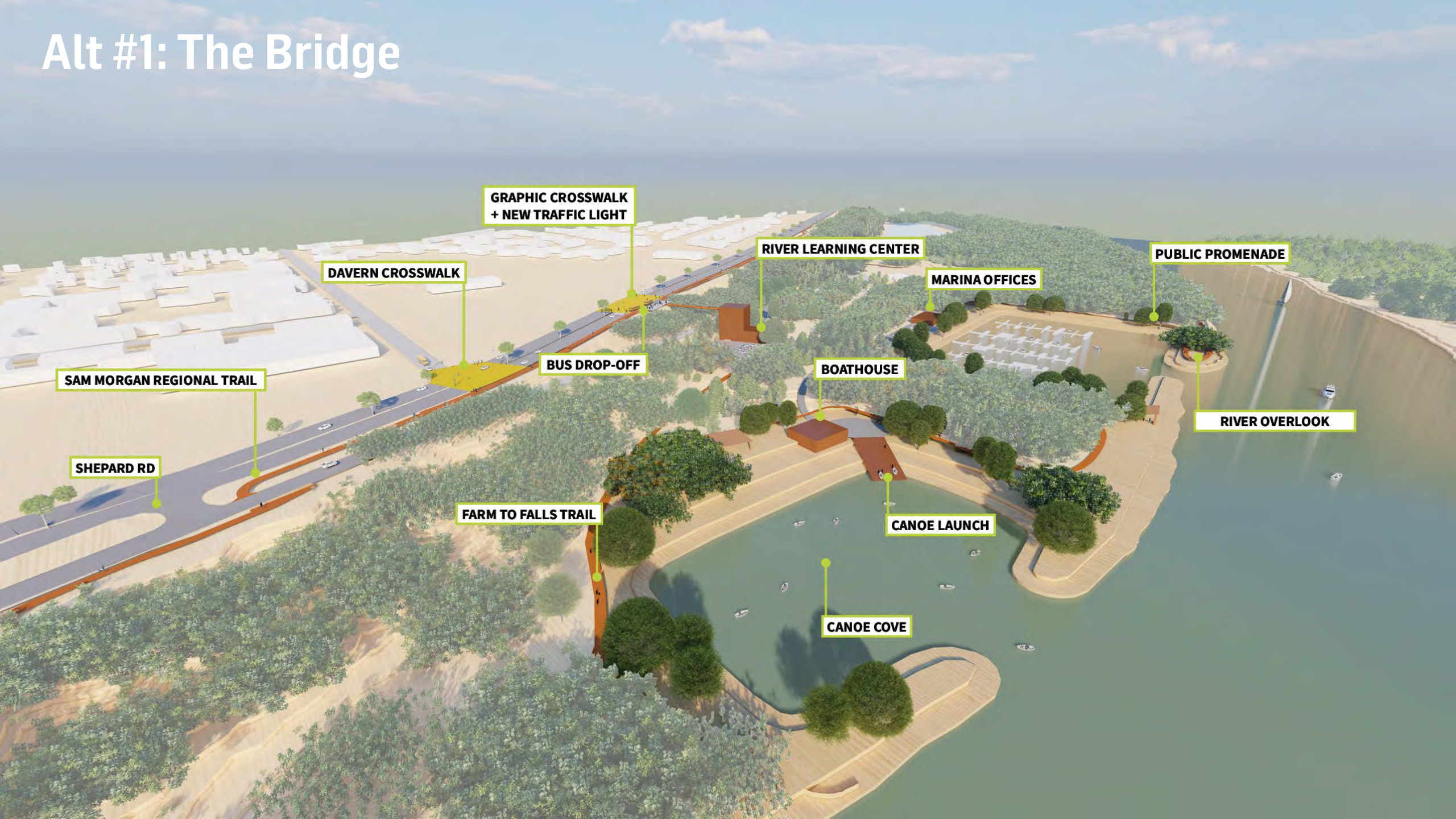
CANOE LAUNCH

CANOE COVE

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL

# Alt #1: The Bridge



GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

DAVERN CROSSWALK

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

PUBLIC PROMENADE

MARINA OFFICES

SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL

BUS DROP-OFF

BOATHOUSE

RIVER OVERLOOK

SHEPARD RD

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

CANOE LAUNCH

CANOE COVE

# Alt #1: The Bridge



DAVERN CROSSWALK

SHEPARD RD

GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

CANOE COVE

BUS DROP-OFF

SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

MARINA (120-150 SLIPS)

MARINA OFFICES

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

RIVER OVERLOOK

PUBLIC PROMENADE

# 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



TWO RIVERS OVERLOOK

PUBLIC RESTROOMS  
+ PARTNER OFFICES

CANOPY WALK

RIVER LEARNING CENTER  
+ OFFICE SPACES

ROOFTOP GARDEN + CAFE

MARINA BUILDING

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

BOATHOUSE

PICNIC AREA

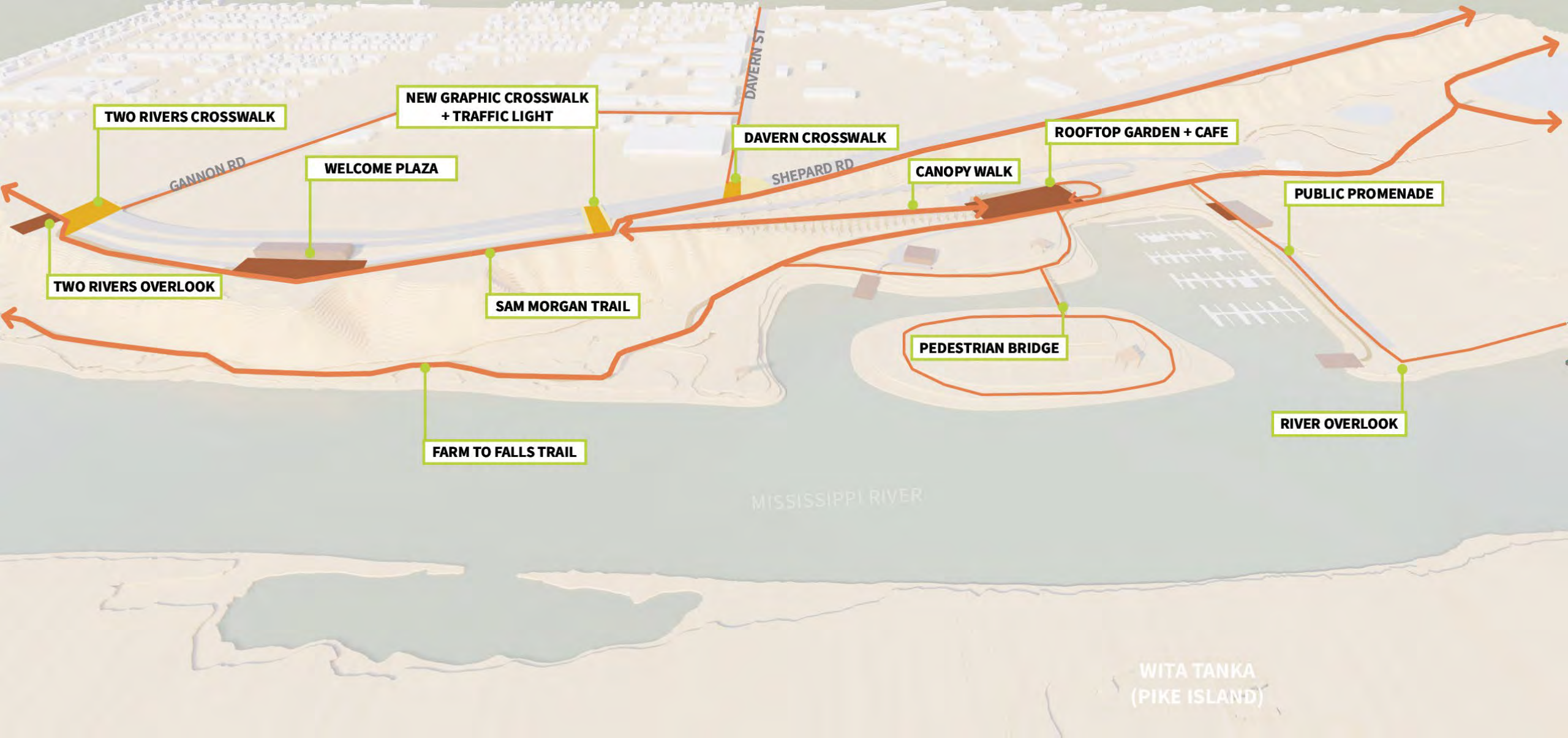
BOAT LAUNCH

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

WITA TANKA  
(PIKE ISLAND)

# Alt #2: The Path

Universal access from Sam Morgan trail to river



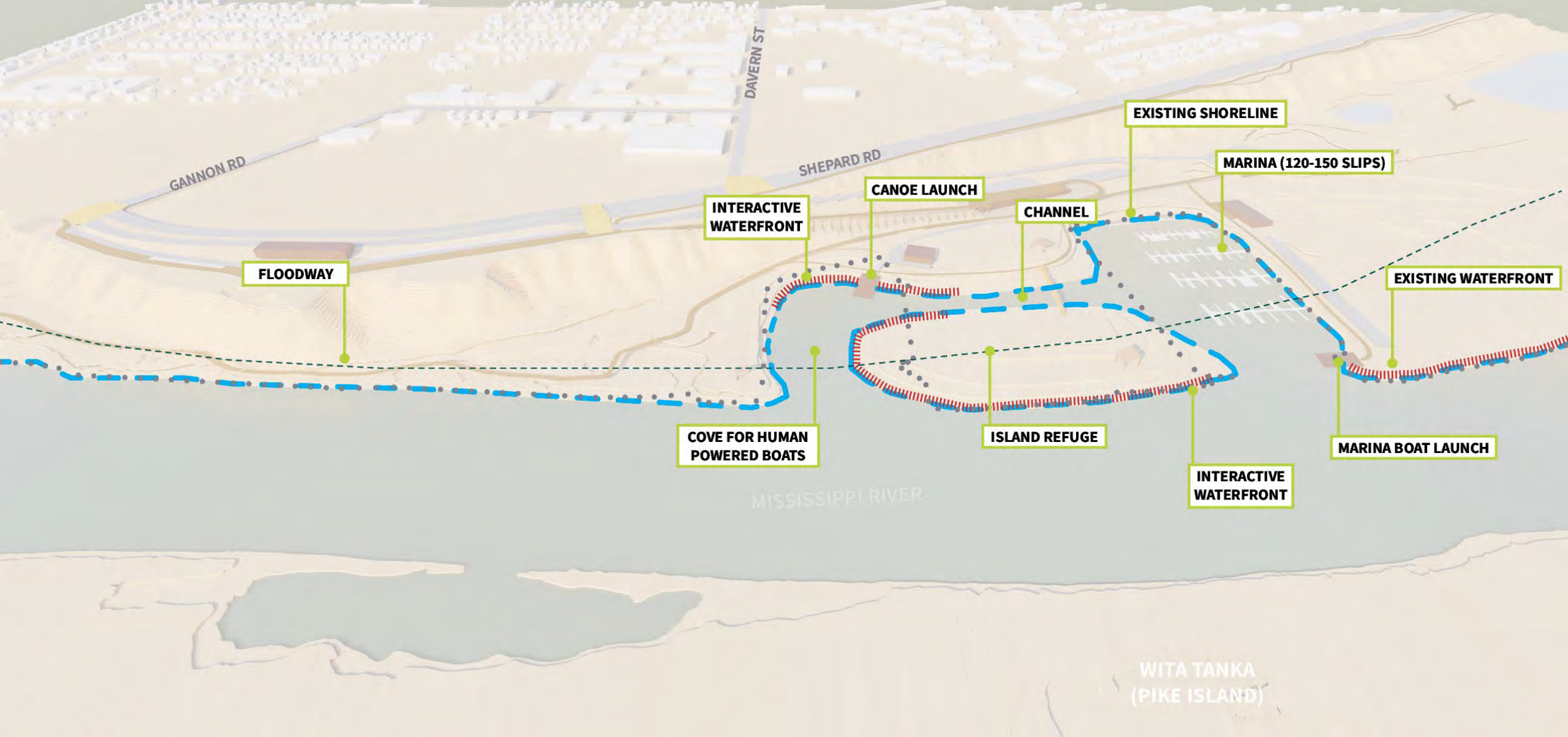
# Alt #2: The Path

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



GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

CANOPY WALK

HABITAT RESTORATION

DAVERN ST

VISITOR PARKING

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

WELCOME CENTER

SHEPARD RD

BUS DROP-OFF

RAIN GARDEN

# Alt #2: The Path



GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

SHEPARD RD

DAVERN ST

DAVERN CROSSWALK

CANOPY WALK

SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

PUBLIC PROMENADE

BOAT LAUNCH

CANOE LAUNCH

FARM TO FALLS REGIONAL TRAIL

HABITAT RESTORATION

# Alt #2: The Path



WELCOME CENTER

GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

CANOPY WALK

HABITAT RESTORATION

CANOE LAUNCH

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

SHEPARD RD

PUBLIC ROOF TERRACE

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

MARINA (120-150 SLIPS)



# Alt #2: The Path



HABITAT RESTORATION

NEW CHANNEL

CANOPY WALK

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

PUBLIC ROOF TERRACE

SHEPARD RD

VISITOR PARKING

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

PUBLIC PROMENADE

MARINA OFFICES

MARINA (120-150 SLIPS)

BOAT LAUNCH

RIVER OVERLOOK

# 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

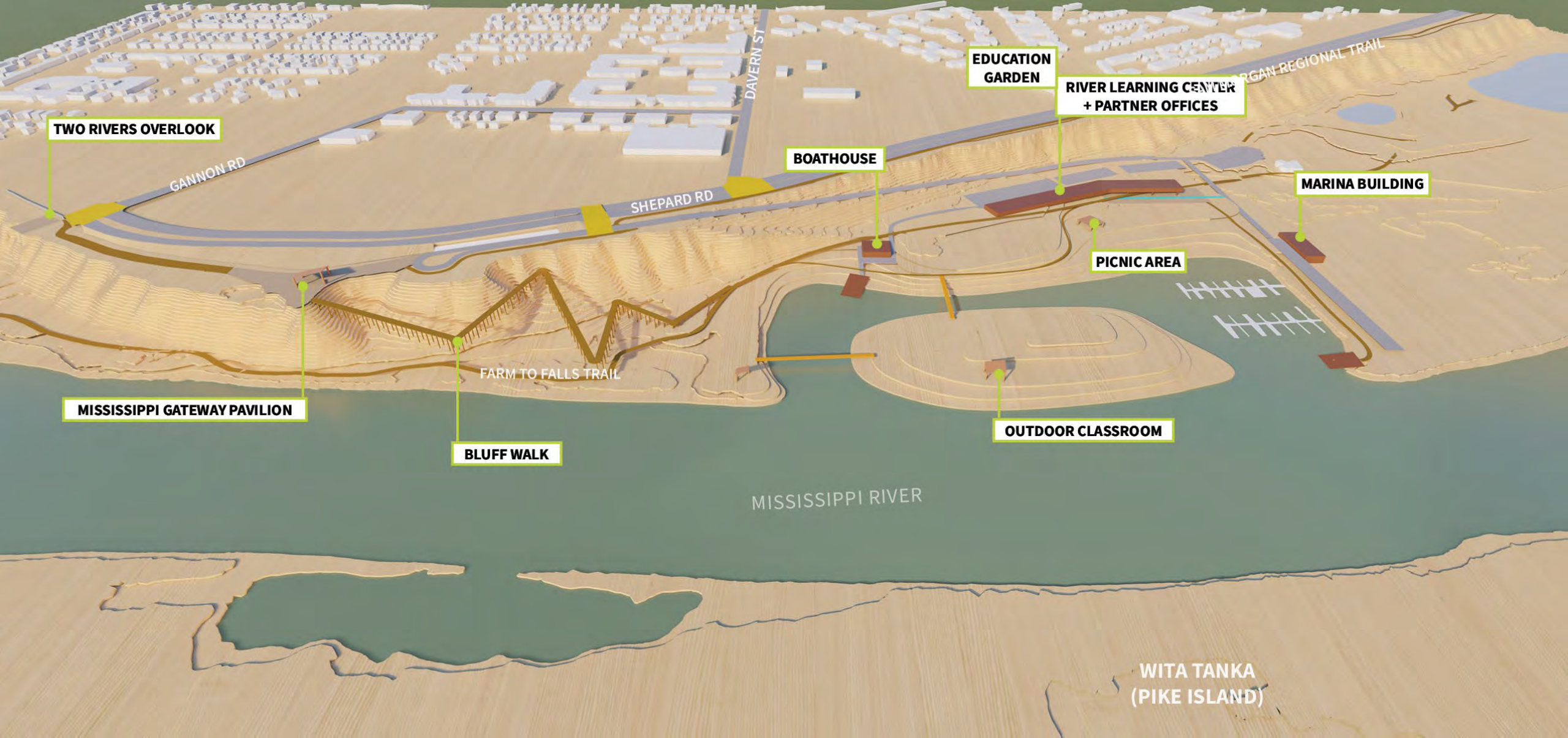
**Alternative #3**  
**River Learning Center as a**  
**Destination by the River**

# Alt #3: The Destination



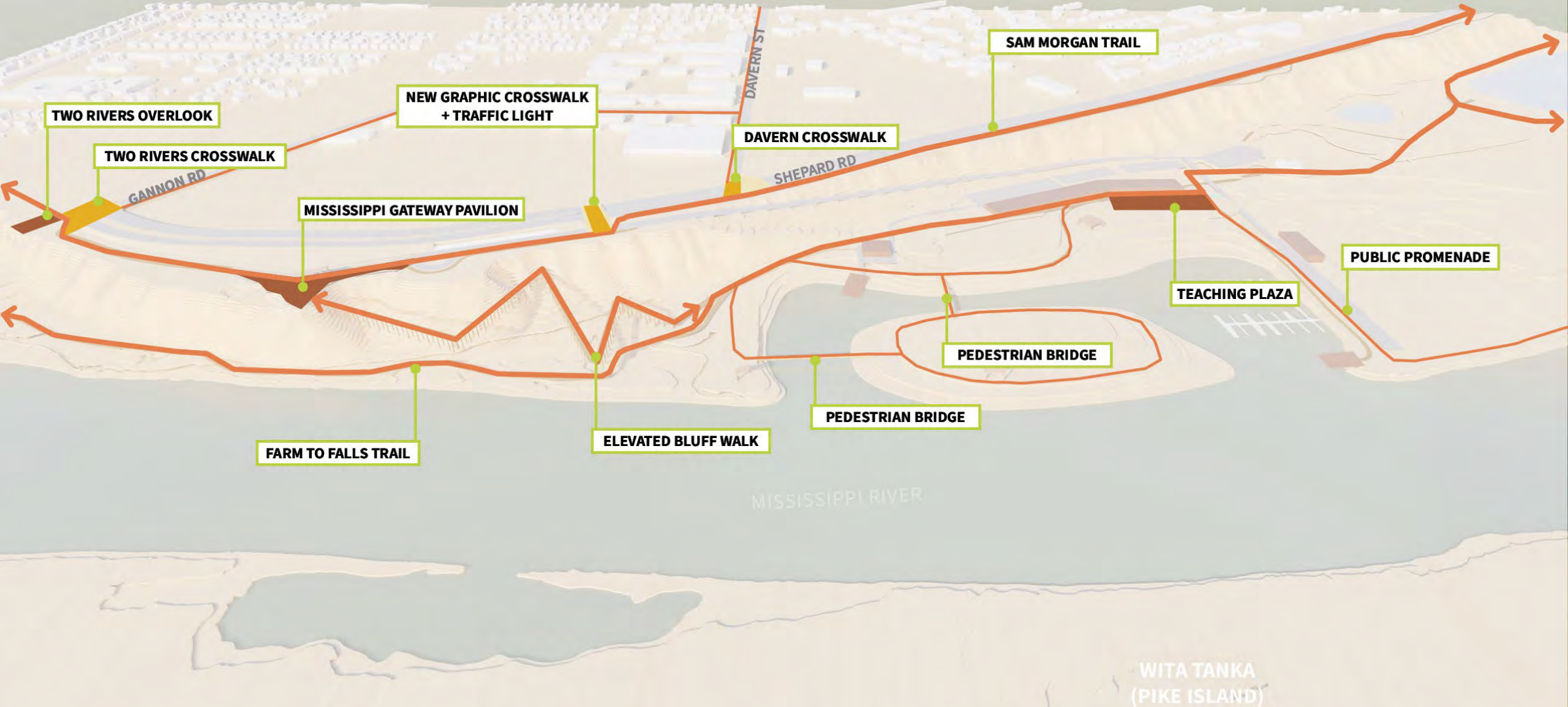
# Alt #3: The Destination

Single building by the river



# Alt #3: The Destination

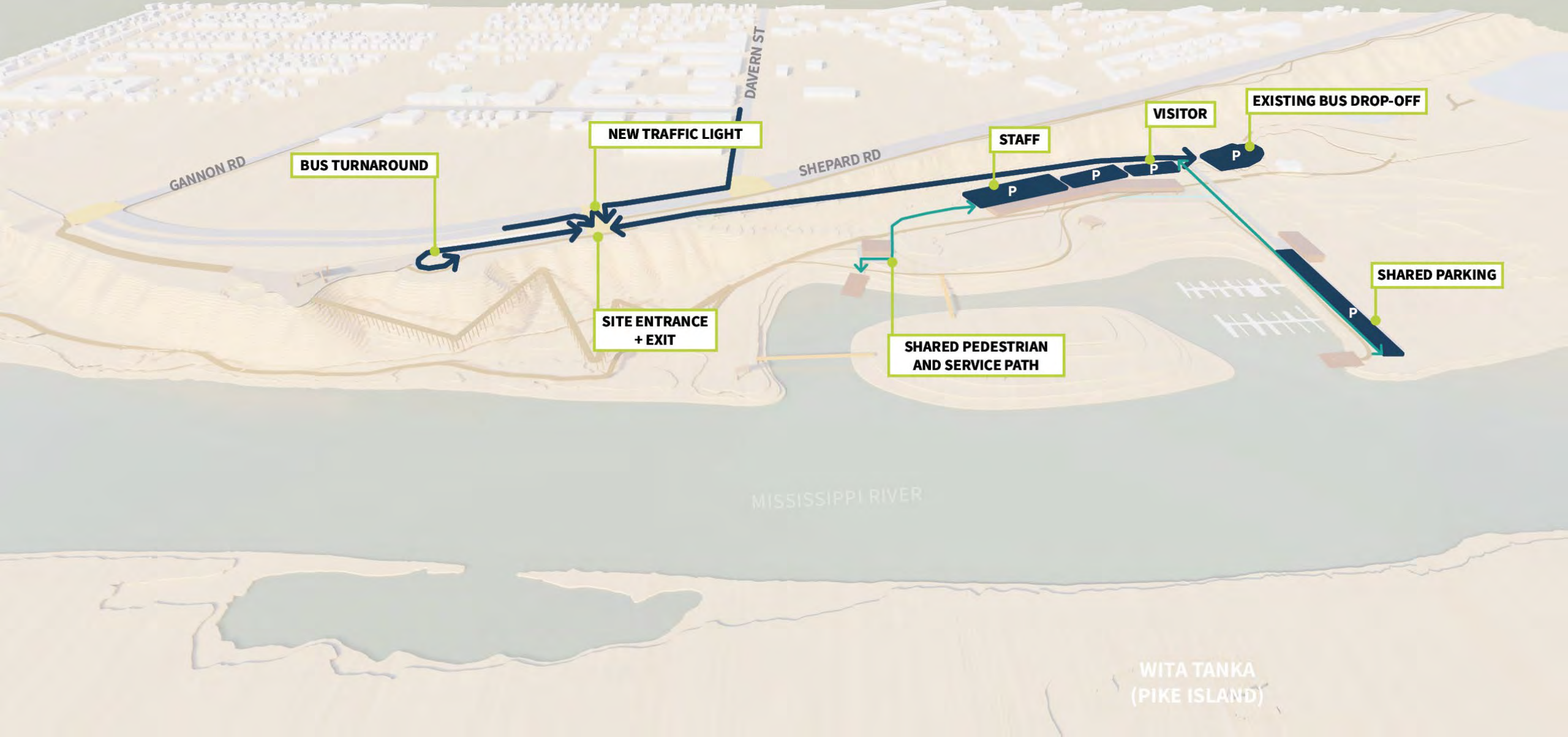
Canopy Walk connects Bluff gateway to River





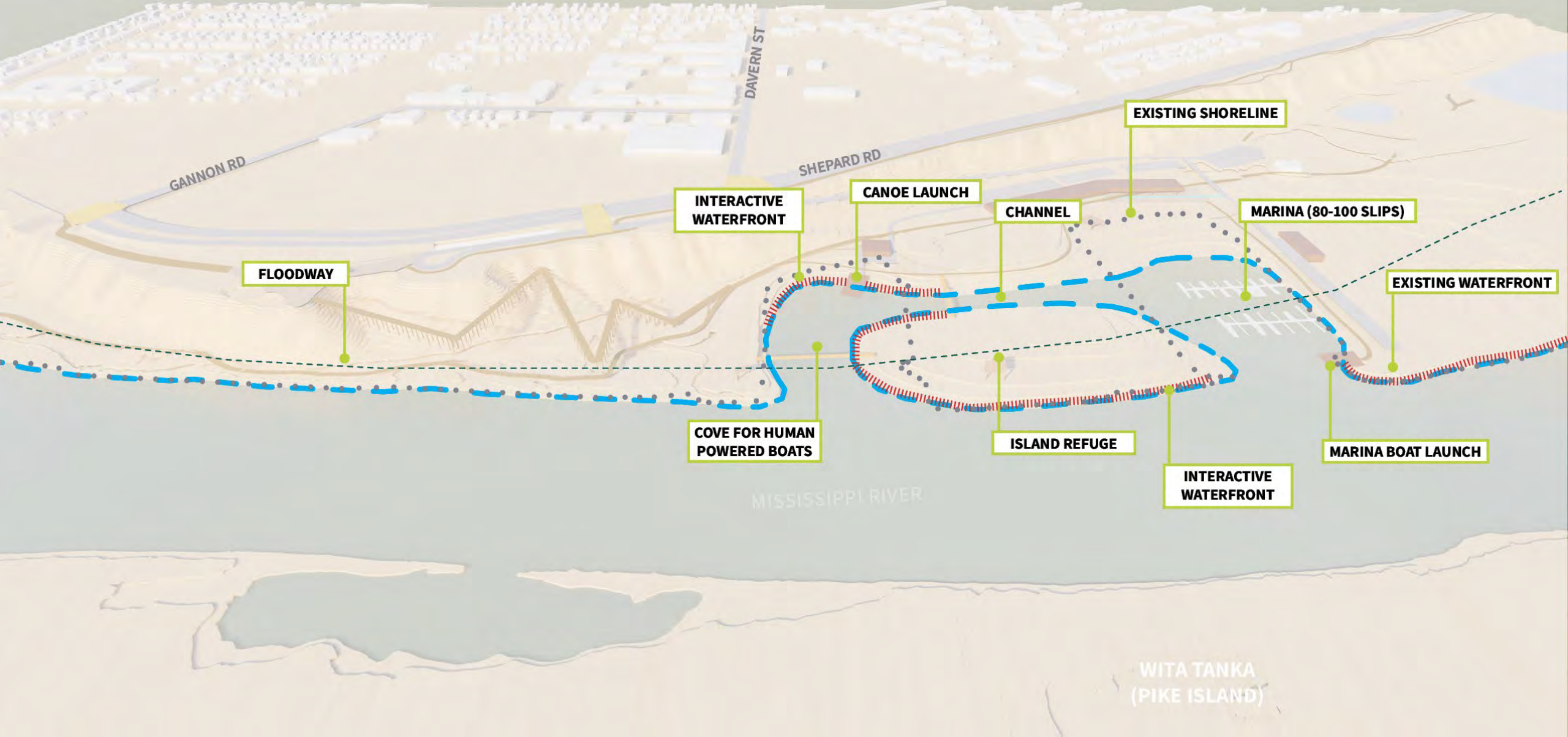
# Alt #3: The Destination

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



**GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT**

**RIVER LEARNING CENTER**

**BLUFF WALK**

**DAVERN ST**

**BUS DROP-OFF**

**SHEPARD RD**

**MISSISSIPPI GATEWAY PAVILION**

**SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL**

# Alt #3: The Destination



MISSISSIPPI GATEWAY PAVILION

SHEPARD RD

GRAPHIC CROSSWALK  
+ NEW TRAFFIC LIGHT

BLUFF WALK

SAM MORGAN REGIONAL TRAIL

DAVERN CROSSWALK

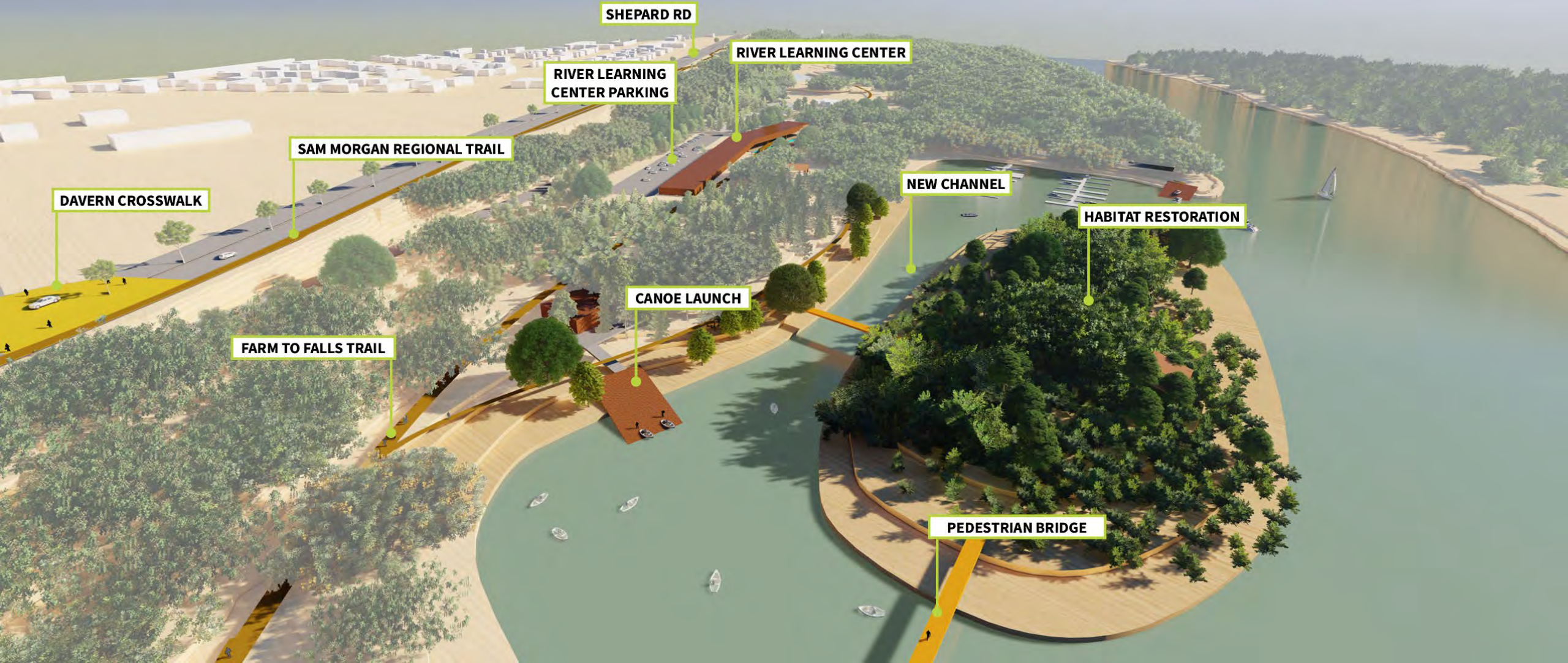
OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

CROSBY FARM ROAD

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

FARM TO FALLS TRAIL

# Alt #3: The Destination



# Alt #3: The Destination



RIVER OVERLOOK

BOAT LAUNCH

MARINA PROMENADE

MARINA (80-100 SLIPS)

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

RIVER LEARNING CENTER

TEACHING PLAZA

RAIN GARDEN

SHEPARD RD

VISITOR PARKING

# 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



- 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 marina & bluff

## Alt #2: The Path



- A welcome center at the top with NPS offices, parking and bus drop off
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- Marina remains at current size

## Alt #3: The Destination



- 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

**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](mailto:Anne.Gardner@ci.stpaul.mn.us)