



DATE: May 31, 2024

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee

SUBJECT: River Balcony Master Plan Proposed Addendum – Basis of Design Report

I. Executive Summary

The [River Balcony Master Plan](#) (master plan) was adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan in 2017. An addendum to the master plan is proposed to incorporate the Basis of Design Report (basis of design report), the next phase of planning for the River Balcony, into the master plan. This is proposed because there are key differences between the basis of design report and the master plan. The master plan states that “The design of each project must adhere to the master plan document as a baseline...” page 54. This memo provides background information on the master plan and identifies and assesses the key differences between the basis of design report and the master plan.

The River Balcony is a publicly accessible pathway connecting public spaces and bluff side redevelopment sites from the Science Museum to Union Depot. Its origins are in the Great River Passage Master Plan, which was adopted as part of the comprehensive plan in 2013 and called for development of an urban promenade. The River Balcony is designed for walking, outdoor seating, gathering, and related public activities and to be a catalyst for economic development.

The [Basis of Design Report](#) is the next stage in planning for the River Balcony and refines the design in the master plan. It was created by consultant James Corner Field Operations in 2021-2022. The next stages of planning are design development and construction documents. Significant fundraising and development of governance structures are needed before the River Balcony is constructed.

City staff is taking the basis of design report through the Planning Commission review process and then on to the City Council for approval as an addendum to the master plan. The Planning Commission’s Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee and its Transportation Committee reviewed the basis of design report as part of the review process as did the Parks and Recreation Commission.

The basis of design report should be approved as an addendum to the River Balcony Master Plan because

- It is generally consistent with the vision, goals, and general design principles of the master plan
- Master plan is long range and aspirational – the basis of design report represents a reasonable near-term solution to advance development for design development and ultimately construction documents
- It is a reality check on the aspirations for the River Balcony given the cost of elevated elements
- It does not preclude crossings, vertical connections, or elevated elements
- It responds to proposed changes in land use on Ramsey County property

Key differences between the master plan and the basis of design

- One less crossing of rail and road to the river
- Builds upon existing balcony and street infrastructure in lieu of elevated balcony elements
- Fewer vertical connections between top and bottom of bluff

The reasons for the differences between the master plan and basis of design report are

- To reduce costs
- Lack of support for the connections from landowners and stakeholders
- RiversEdge project anticipates a crossing of rail and road to river

The basis of design report includes additional elements that are not included in the master plan

- Kellogg Cut, which provides access from Kellogg Mall Park to 2nd Street
- 2nd Street conversion from vehicles to pedestrians
- Shepard Road safety improvements (Explore traffic calming, lane reductions)
- Lambert's Landing improvements
- Eight overlooks at various points along the River Balcony
- Bluff steps and garden
- County parking lot recreation (Interim improvements)

II. Public Hearing Testimony

On May 10, 2024, a public hearing on the master plan and basis of design report was held during the regularly-scheduled Planning Commission meeting. Notice of the public hearing was sent to the Early Notification System on April 2, 2024 and published in the Saint Paul Pioneer Press on April 30, 2024. One person spoke to ask the Planning Commission whether it had considered how unsheltered individuals and trash would be addressed. No one spoke in support or opposition. The period to submit written comment was open from March 1, 2024 through close of business on May 13, 2024, during which time no written comments were received.

III. Analysis of Testimony

The only comment received related to concerns about how unsheltered individuals and trash would be addressed in development of the river balcony. The comment did not relate to the question of whether the basis of design report should be approved as an addendum to the master plan. As a result, no change to the assessment, that the basis of design report should be approved as an addendum to the River Balcony Master Plan, is recommended based on the public hearing testimony.

IV. Background Information on the River Balcony Master Plan

The [Great River Passage Master Plan](#) was adopted as an addendum to Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan in 2013. The plan offers three guiding principles for the Great River Park - more natural, more urban, more connected. For the downtown reach of the river, the plan recommends an urban promenade – a River Balcony and a Levee Riverwalk – that will activate the riverfront and link it to the redeveloping neighborhoods in the river corridor. Below is an excerpt about the River Balcony from the plan.

Create a River Balcony along the Downtown edge

The River Balcony will contribute to the economic vitality of Downtown and extend community life to the edge of the River. It will be comprised of a series of parks, linked by continuous broad pedestrian walkways that bring the City to the top of the bluff and the edge of the River. Page 138

Downtown, the urban promenade takes the form of a continuous River Balcony that links bluffsides redevelopment sites between West 7th Street and Lowertown. Redevelopment of vacant and underutilized buildings, such as the former County Detention Center and County buildings, will allow for the creation of a dramatic public riverfront edge with Kellogg Mall Park at its center. Along the edge of Downtown, physical and visual connections to the river will be dramatically improved by incorporating overlooks, and public stairs and elevators at buildings and bridges along the bluff. With panoramic views from a series of “outdoor rooms,” the River Balcony will provide a great year-round destination for shopping, lunch or to relax with friends after a concert or sporting event. Page 139

The Saint Paul River Balcony Master Plan was adopted as an amendment to the Great River Passage Master Plan in 2017 and contains 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.

Goals for the River Balcony

- *Reconnect downtown to the Mississippi River visually and physically*
- *Provide a public linear path along the downtown river bluff with occasional vertical connections to the river’s edge;*
- *Activate private development on the Ramsey County West/Adult Detention Center, Ramsey County East and Custom House sites; and*
- *Connect public spaces and private development sites along the river’s edge in downtown.*

General Design Principles for the River Balcony

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.
5. 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.
6. The River Balcony will be designed to add value to adjacent private development.
7. The River Balcony will be built with high-quality, durable materials.
8. 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.

9. The River Balcony will be designed to be a “light touch” on the bluff landscape.
10. The River Balcony will incorporate natural features as much as possible, recognizing that some areas will be more predominantly hard-surfaced.

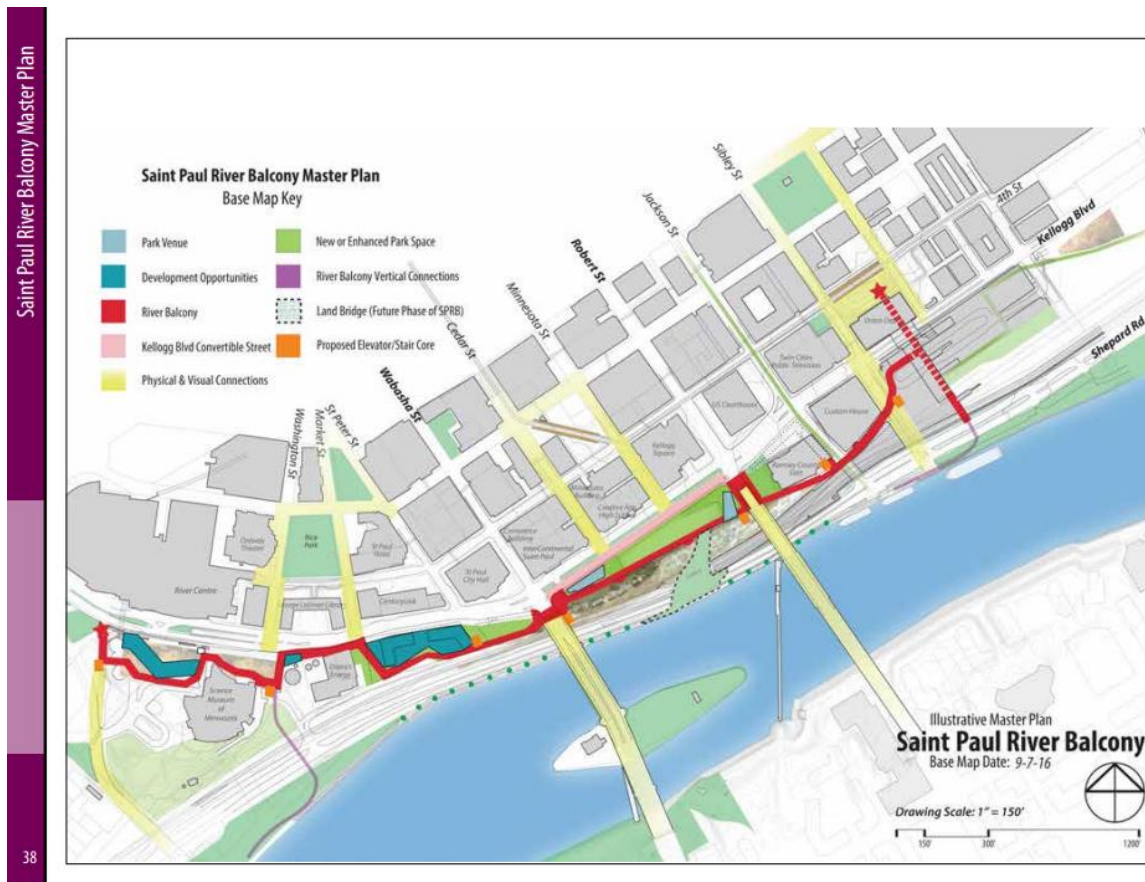
The master plan has five chapters. The first three provide information on the Great River Passage Master Plan, land use history and cultural resources in the study area, and models of waterfront places around the world to inspire and inform the design of the River Balcony. The information in these chapters remains relevant today and into the future to guide the design and development of the River Balcony and no amendments are needed. The last two chapters contain the master plan and design guidelines for the River Balcony.

In the section of the master plan that addresses priority projects and phasing is the statement that requires the master plan to be amended to incorporate the basis of design report.

“The design of each project must adhere to the master plan document as a baseline but also respond to the emerging urban environment by connecting to the street, public realm, new and proposed buildings, and the overall urban form of the city.” Page 54

Because the basis of design report departs from the master plan in key ways, an assessment of the master plan and the basis of design report is needed to determine whether the master plan should be amended/be an addendum to reflect the departures represented in the basis of design report.

The vision, goals, and general design principles noted above for the River Balcony are still relevant and continue to guide its design and development.



V. Background on the Basis of Design Report

Beginning in fall of 2021, the Great River Passage Conservancy and the City of Saint Paul worked with consultant James Corner Field Operations to develop the basis of design report for the River Balcony. The work included robust community outreach and engagement and was completed in fall of 2022. The basis of design report for the River Balcony transforms existing urban infrastructure into public space that connects parks, civic landmarks, and private development along Kellogg Boulevard. The River Balcony will include a series of centers of activity, serve as a catalyst for real estate development, and raise visitor attendance to what has historically been the edge of downtown Saint Paul and create a civic attraction that capitalizes on the views of and connections to the Mississippi River.

The basis of design report advances the design of the River Balcony in preparation for design development plans and ultimately construction documents. Much work is yet needed to get to the construction phase, including significant fundraising and the creation of a governance structure for the ownership, operations, and maintenance responsibilities for the River Balcony.

When work on the basis of design report began and a consultant was engaged, the decision had already been made, by Parks and Recreation and Great River Passage Conservancy, to pivot towards a promenade layout using existing infrastructure and less of a focus on elevated balcony elements and connections over the road and rail to the river. This was done because the future RiversEdge project may incorporate a grade separated crossing over Shepard Road and the railroad and to reduce costs. In addition, it became apparent during development of the basis of design report that some landowners and stakeholders were not supportive of some of the grade separated crossings in the master plan.

VI. Basis of Design Report: Key Differences with the River Balcony Master Plan - and Additions

The basis of design report represents a departure from the master plan in key ways. These differences are summarized here and assessed in detail below.

- One less grade separated crossing over Warner and Shepard Roads and the railroad at the Science Museum (this still assumes the RiversEdge project incorporates a grade separated crossing)
- Given the cost of elevated structures, the design builds upon existing balcony and street infrastructure in lieu of new elevated balcony infrastructure at Ramsey County East and Custom House buildings
- Not incorporating vertical connections between the top and bottom of bluff other than the enhancement of an existing vertical connection at the Science Museum.
- Moving away from a convertible street at Kellogg Mall Park

The basis of design report takes the master plan from an elevated balcony in many stretches and transforms it primarily to a promenade using existing infrastructure. The design anticipates a connection over Shepard Road and the railroad at the RiversEdge redevelopment site (formerly known as the Ramsey County Government Center West) but does not include the other connections shown in the master plan: 1) elevated boardwalk over railroad and Shepard Road in the West District; and 2) land bridge over railroad and Shepard Road from 2nd Street below Kellogg Mall Park in the Central District. Likewise, some vertical connections shown in the master plan are not included in the basis of design report: 1) vertical connection at the Wabasha Bridgehead in the Central District; and 2) vertical connection at the Ramsey County West property in the West District.

The changes incorporated into the basis of design report are designed to reduce costs and respond to the lack of support for the connections over the road and rail by various landowners and stakeholders along the River

Balcony alignment. If the RiversEdge project does not happen, the other grade separated crossings can be considered.

The basis of design report includes key additions that were not included in the master plan. These additions are summarized here and assessed in detail below.

- Adding the “Kellogg Cut” that provides access from Kellogg Mall Park to 2nd Street
- Converting 2nd Street from a vehicular to pedestrian corridor
- Explore traffic calming, lane reductions, and other measures across Shepard Road
- Proposing improvements to Lambert’s Landing at the east end of the River Balcony
- Eight overlooks at various points along the River Balcony

The basis of design report uses Kellogg Mall Park, one of the largest city-owned parcels along the project area and enhances the central core of the River Balcony by adding the “Kellogg Cut” to open views and provide access to 2nd street which is converted to a pedestrian corridor.

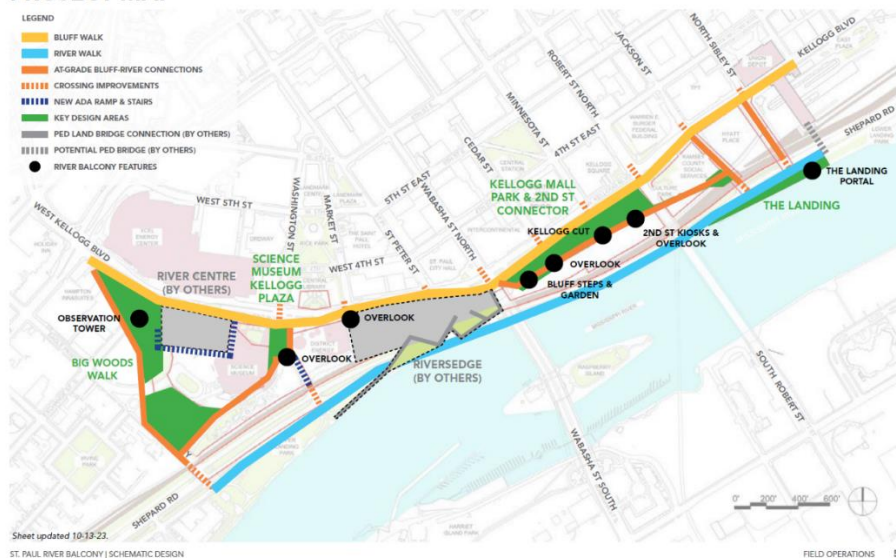
Public engagement strongly supported measures to improve at grade crossings along Shepard Road. The basis of design report proposes exploring traffic calming and lane reductions to improve the pedestrian experience, access, and connectivity.

The basis of design report embraces Lambert’s Landing as the port of entry to Saint Paul by recommending a welcome center, riverfront seating, and retail/cafe space to create a better pedestrian experience along the river.

Eight overlooks are proposed to draw people from downtown to the river bluff and to preserve historic views identified in the master plan.

Basis of Design Report

PROJECT MAP



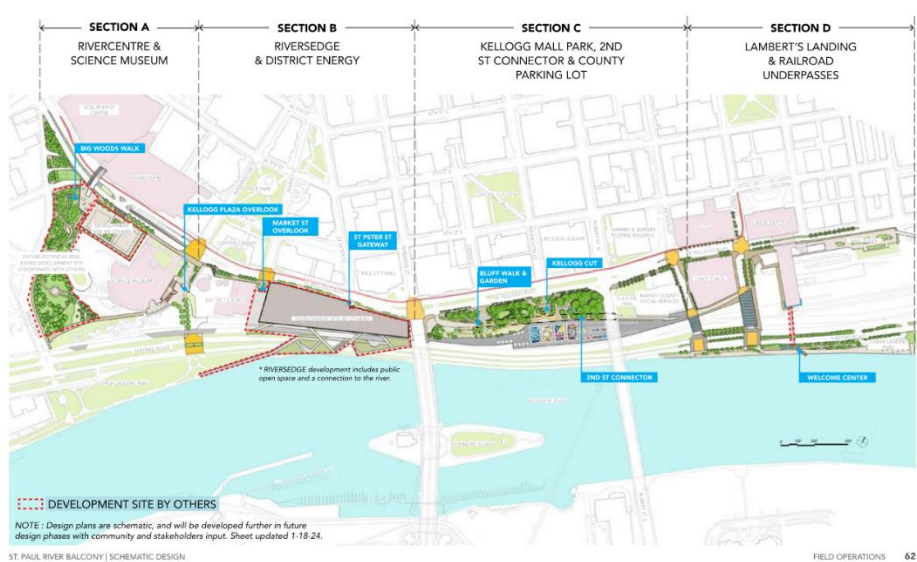
RIVER BALCONY SCHEMATIC PLAN



VII. Assessment of the Basis of Design Report and the River Balcony Master Plan

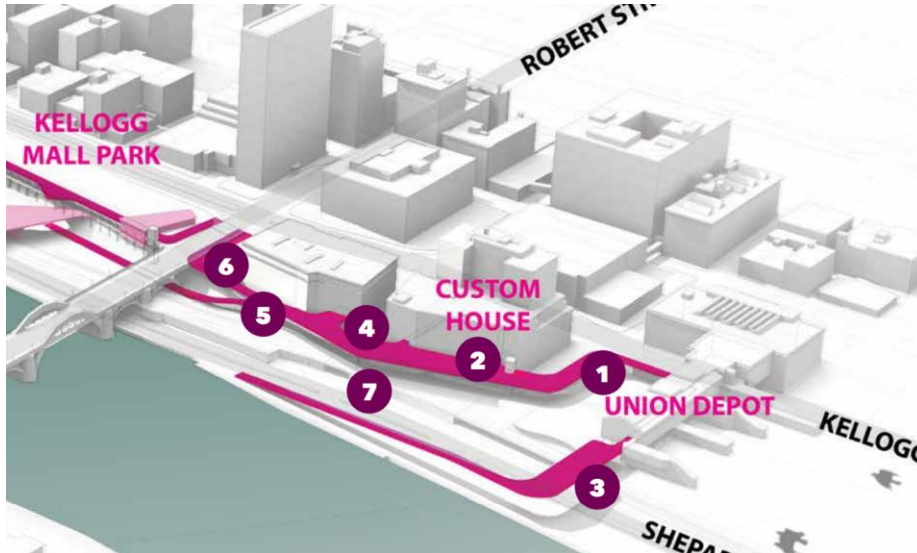
Discussion of the master plan falls into three districts – East, Central, and West. The elements of each of the districts are discussed below in items 1-22 and identify what the master plan calls for and what the basis of design report shows. Note, the basis of design report discusses the elements of the master plan according to four sections, not three districts: Section A – RiverCentre & Science Museum; Section B – RiversEdge & District Energy; Section C – Kellogg Mall Park, 2nd Street Connector & County Parking Lot (Interim improvements); and Section D - Lambert’s Landing & Railroad Underpasses. The Four Sections of the basis of design report are shown below.

OVERALL SITE PLAN



The numbered items below correspond to the locations identified in Chapter 4 of the master plan. The text for each of the elements from master plan is included along with a response as to how the basis of design report is different from the master plan.

East District – Lowertown neighborhood and historic district, pages 44-45 of the River Balcony Master Plan



1. Balcony at Union Depot: Union Depot is the east portal into the River Balcony experience. The Balcony will bring people and activity to the 25,000 square feet of available retail in Union Depot.

Basis of Design Report: The design builds upon the existing infrastructure in lieu of an elevated balcony.

2. Balcony at Custom House: As the first section of the River Balcony likely to be built, the design has the dual responsibility to establish the overall character of the Balcony going forward, as well as respond to the Mississippi River and the context of this historic part of the city. At Custom House, the design and programming of the River Balcony will play a critical role in activating commercial space on the second floor of the Custom House annex.

Basis of Design Report: The design builds upon existing infrastructure (2nd Street) in lieu of an elevated balcony. The design calls for converting 2nd street to a pedestrian corridor to continue the street level connection at Jackson Street and the Custom House.

3. The curved path over rail and Warner Road: As the eastern-most connection from the River Balcony to the river, the curving, 14-foot wide elevated boardwalk will slope at 5% from Union Depot to the river, Lower Landing Park and the Sam Morgan Trail.

Basis of Design Report: While the curved path is removed from the design because of the expanded design at Lambert's Landing and Lower Landing, the potential for a pedestrian connection, to be coordinated in the future by others, remains in the design.

4. Balcony Bridge at Sibley and Jackson Street: Where the River Balcony connects over Sibley and Jackson Streets, it is important to recognize the characteristic of "bridge" as both an historic form and a connection to the river.

Basis of Design Report: The design builds upon existing infrastructure (2nd Street) in lieu of an elevated balcony so there is no bridge proposed over Sibley or Jackson Streets. At grade crossings of Sibley and Jackson are in the basis of design report.

5. Balcony at Ramsey County East and ramp down to 2nd Street: The River Balcony already exists along this building. Adaptive reuse of the building will allow for design and programming connections between it and the River Balcony. The River Balcony can also extend to the parking lot on the north side of the building, which is an appropriate space for redevelopment once the building has a new use.

Basis of Design Report: No change.

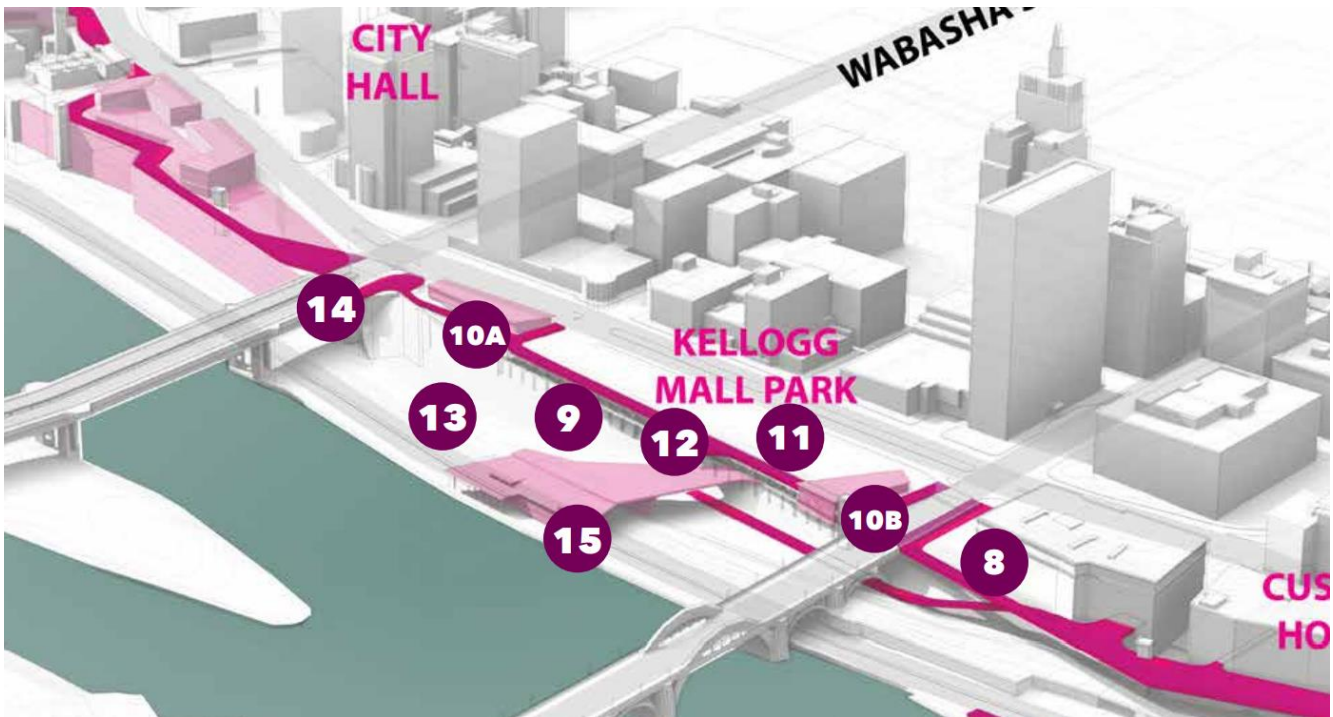
6. Balcony at Culture Park: Culture Park offers welcome respite and a unique open space along the River Balcony route. The park is a logical point to establish a vertical connection to 2nd Street and future reclaimed park space below (current Ramsey County parking lot). Pedestrian access across the Robert Street Bridge further connects the River Balcony to the West Side Flats. Reconstructing the River Balcony railing with much greater transparency provides greater continuity, and enhances visual access to the river from the park.

Basis of Design Report: The design does not include a vertical connection to 2nd Street at Culture Park and future reclaimed park space below (current Ramsey County parking lot) because Ramsey County intends to redevelop the parking lot in the future; the design includes a feature referred to as the Kellogg Cut in Kellogg Mall Park to connect to 2nd Street. The design does not specifically provide language about transparent River Balcony railing, but the design elements show transparent vertical slat railing (p. 137-157).

7. Balcony Vertical Connection: Strategic stair and elevator connections between the River Balcony, 2nd Street, future park space below Culture Park and Lower Kellogg Park will provide accessible vertical connections between levels.

Basis of Design Report: The design does not include a vertical connection to 2nd Street and future park space below Culture Park. The design includes a feature referred to as the Kellogg Cut in Kellogg Mall Park to connect to 2nd Street below Culture Park.

Central District - Kellogg Mall Park, pages 48-49 of the River Balcony Master Plan



8. Balcony at Kellogg Boulevard and Robert Street: Continuity of the River Balcony walking surface on both sides of Robert Street from the bridgehead to the crosswalk on the south side of the intersection is important for visual continuity and pedestrian safety.

Basis of Design Report: No change.

9. Balcony along south edge of Kellogg Mall Park: Kellogg Mall Park will become the central focus for city-wide events and neighborhood activities along the River Balcony. To recapture the Mississippi River as an important aspect of the overall experience of Kellogg Mall Park, the River Balcony railing will be transparent with extended platforms to allow walkers to move beyond the existing bluff and look back to the last remaining segment of natural face of the bluff.

Basis of Design Report: Kellogg Mall Park remains a central focus of the River Balcony including a feature referred to as the Kellogg Cut at the terminus of Minnesota Street. The Kellogg Cut cuts into the park to create an access down to 2nd Street. The design also includes an extended overlook at the terminus of Cedar Street to look back at the natural bluff face.

KELLOGG CUT AT MINNESOTA ST

SECTION C: KELLOGG MALL PARK, 2ND ST CONNECTOR & COUNTY PARKING LOT



ST. PAUL RIVER BALCONY | SCHEMATIC DESIGN

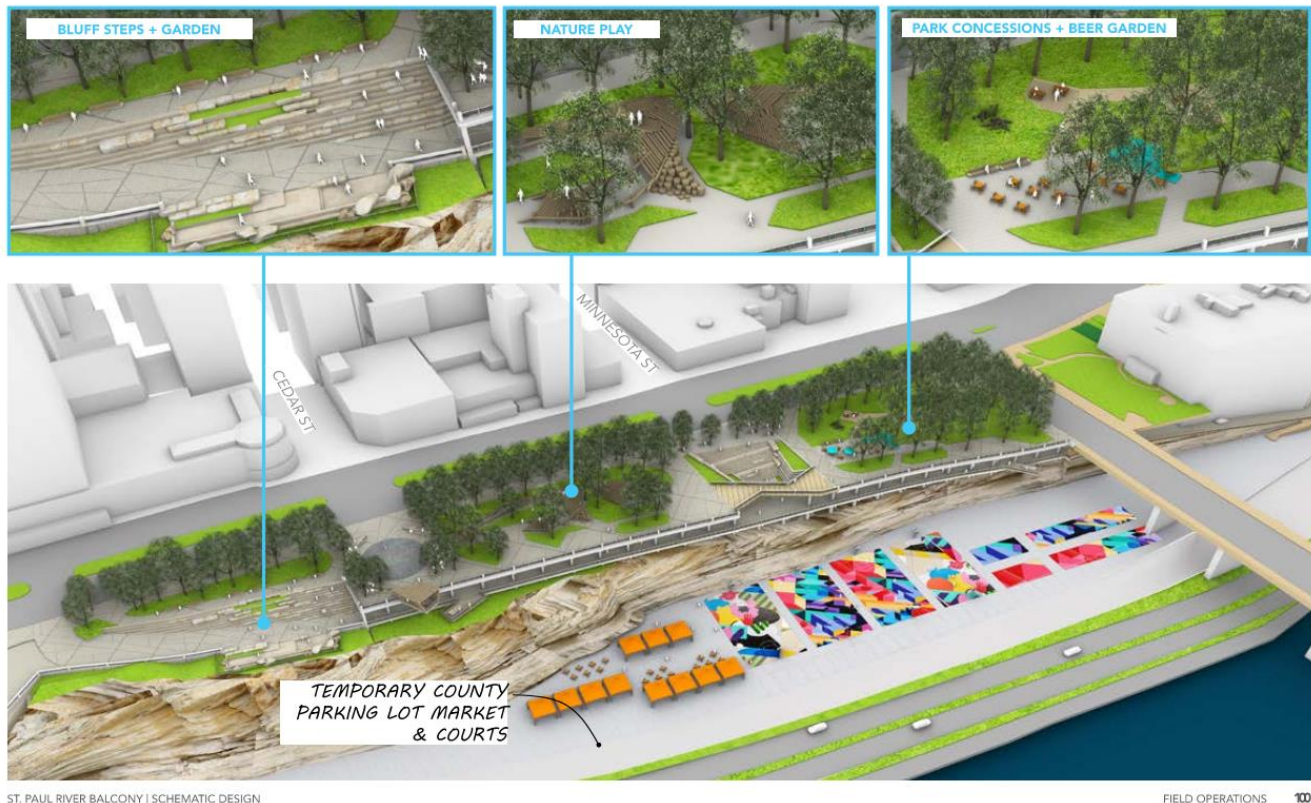
FIELD OPERATIONS 93

10. A and B Development Pads: Pad A was once the location of the Tivoli Beer Garden, destroyed by fire in 1904. A modern one-story version with an accessible green roof terrace would both activate the western end of Kellogg Park and provide revenue from the land lease to help sustain the park. In addition to the food and beverage activities at Pad A, Pad B would be located at the east end of the park, nestled into the grove of existing trees, creating a venue that could serve as meeting center, park activity center and/or river interpretive center. This would enhance the diversity of attractions, range of ages and cultural backgrounds of people using the park.

Basis of Design Report: The basis of design report retains a variety of programming to enhance the diversity of attractions, range of ages and cultural background of people using the park. The design locates a beer garden, concessions, entertainment, and a food truck area at the eastern end of the park. A food truck area increases equitable opportunities by allowing space for rotating vendors. The central and eastern areas of the park include nature play elements, art installations and seating for picnicking. The western end of the park has intimate spaces for smaller performances, contemplation garden, and art installations.

PARK FEATURES

SECTION C: KELLOGG MALL PARK, 2ND ST CONNECTOR & COUNTY PARKING LOT



11. Convertible Street at Kellogg: For larger weekend and evening events such as Saturday Market, Music in the Park and seasonal festivals, additional hard surface space will be needed for the park. The east-bound lanes of Kellogg Boulevard would be redesigned to be a “convertible” street, able to be closed for extended park/event use. The west-bound lanes would remain open for vehicular traffic moving in both directions during events.

Basis of Design Report: The basis of design report does not retain Kellogg Boulevard as a convertible street as this was not identified as a priority. A convertible street could still be possible in the future if it becomes a priority.

12. Kellogg Mall Park Upgrades: As part of the River Balcony improvements, additional upgrades would be made to Kellogg Mall Park, including permeable paving surfaces, “dark-sky” LED site lighting, wayfinding kiosks, locally-sourced or sustainably-harvested materials and furnishings, and native plant materials and low-maintenance grasses.

Basis of Design Report: No Change

13. Lower Kellogg Park: Because of its location within easy walking distance of Lowertown, the lower park area is ideal for additional community recreation space. It is also an opportunity to restore the edges of the recreation area back to a natural pre-development landscape, which could be an additional Mississippi River interpretive area along the River Balcony. Vertical connections are proposed at either end of the lower park.

Basis of Design Report: The design embraces the plans for additional community recreation space in the lower park area until Ramsey County redevelops the parking lot property. While vertical connections are not part of the design, the design does not preclude them from being added in the future if supported by stakeholders.

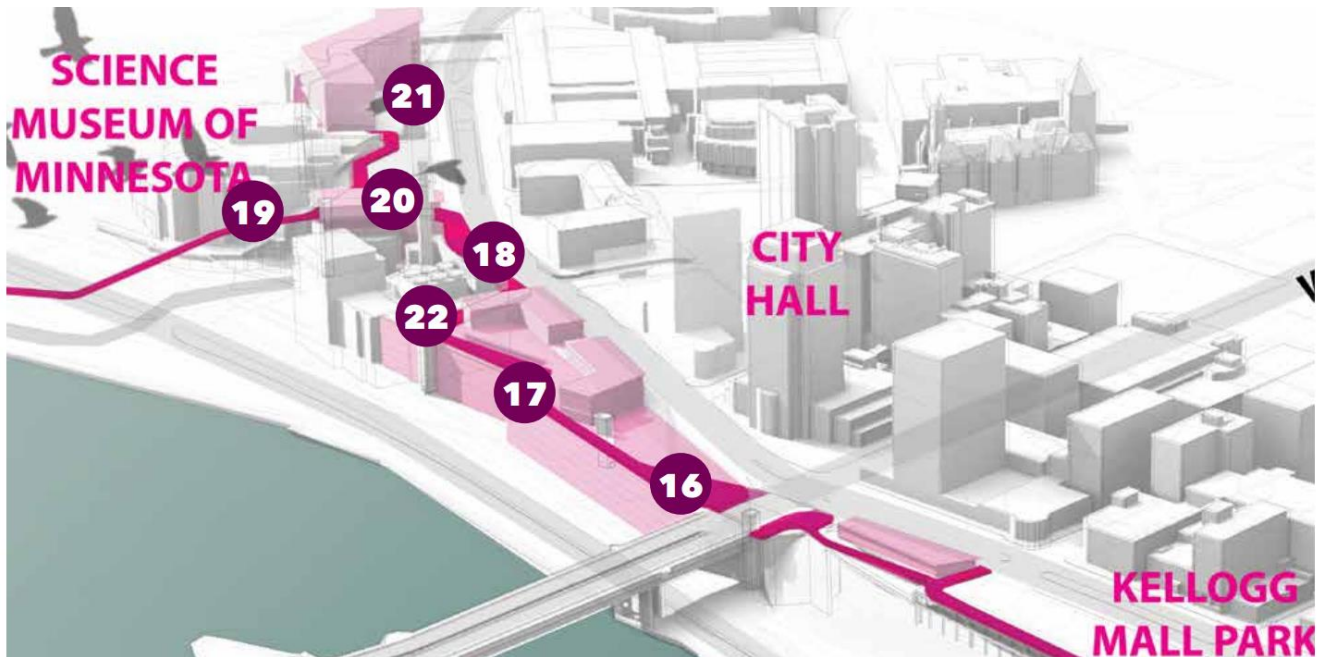
14. Wabasha Bridgehead, Vertical Connection: The Wabasha bridgehead is a key crossroads along the Balcony route, providing north-south and east-west connections as well as a proposed new vertical link to Lower Kellogg Park. The Balcony materials palette will clearly identify the intersection with a wayfinding kiosk, lighting, furnishings and landscape.

Basis of Design Report: While vertical connection is not part of the design, the design does not preclude it from being added in the future. The design does include a balcony materials palette to clearly identify the intersection with a wayfinding kiosk, lighting, furnishings and landscape.

15. Land Bridge: Connected to 2nd Street at-grade and Kellogg Mall Park by stair, the land bridge spans Lower Kellogg Park, the rail corridor and Shepard Road. Ramps at the south end of the land bridge connect the experience to the river edge. Extending the green of Kellogg Mall Park, the lid over the lower park encourages activities that face and connect directly to the river. The south end of the land bridge could accommodate event and interpretative spaces that will create a river experience unlike anything else along the 1000-mile stretch of the Mississippi River.

Basis of Design Report: The design does not include a land bridge over the road and rail in this section. Instead, the design builds upon existing infrastructure at 2nd Street, including the Kellogg Cut, in lieu of the land bridge. The future RiversEdge project may include a grade separated crossing and feature event and interpretive spaces to create a compelling river experience. Ramsey County, owner of the area referred to as Lower Kellogg Park, is not supportive of this crossing and there is minimal land available to drop a land bridge between the river and Shepard Road.

West District – pages 52-53 of the River Balcony Master Plan



16. Park at Wabasha Bridgehead: City height restrictions limit building on this parcel, so it should be used as a park at the Kellogg Boulevard elevation. The River Balcony would be designed to follow the bluff line.

Basis of Design Report: The design does not include a park in this location. The property is owned by Ramsey County and the design identifies the area from the Wabasha Bridgehead to Market Street as the RiversEdge

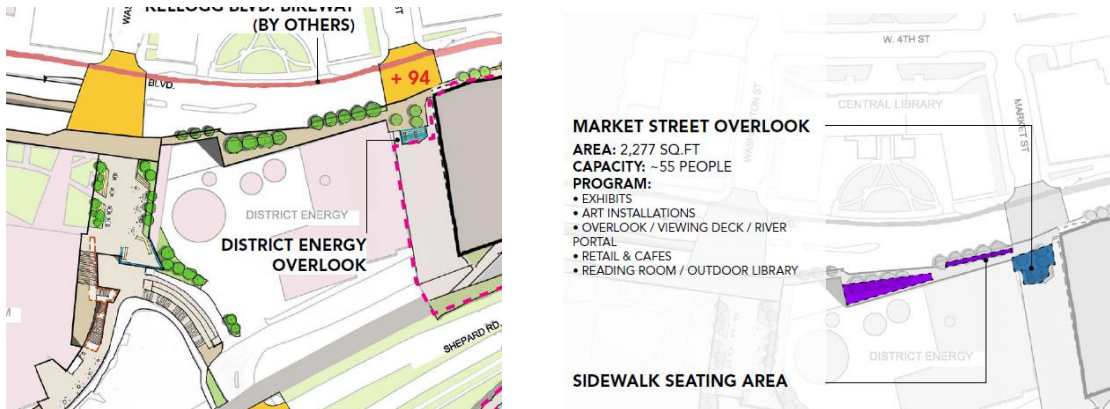
development site but is silent on details, except to note that there is a proposed pedestrian connection over the road and rail integrated with future RiversEdge development. Ramsey County is working with a private developer on a redevelopment of the site. Plans for the bridgehead have not been submitted to the city for review. The proposed plans for the bridgehead area include 9+ acres of new urban park space.

17. Balcony at Ramsey County West: This site is critical for both the development of downtown Saint Paul and the continuity of the River Balcony. The River Balcony will be incorporated into the design of new building(s) at this location, and will be located along the river side of the site. This is an important opportunity to guide the programming of the new building to activate the River Balcony and encourage uninterrupted pedestrian movement and views of the Mississippi River. Additionally, special attention should be paid to how the new building(s) address Kellogg Boulevard.

Basis of Design Report: The design is silent on this element of the River Balcony except to note that this is the RiversEdge development site and there is a proposed pedestrian connection over the road and rail integrated with future RiversEdge development. The City is aware that proposed plans for the development site are in line with the description in #17 above about the River Balcony being incorporated into the design of new buildings and being located along the river side of the site.

18. Balcony at District Energy: At this location, the River Balcony comes back to Kellogg Boulevard. It should be incorporated into the existing interpretive displays, and enhanced to inform and celebrate the innovations of the Eco-District.

Basis of Design Report: In addition to the design showing the River Balcony coming back to Kellogg Boulevard at this location, consistent with the Master Plan, the design also calls for a Market Street/District Energy Overlook.



19. The Elevated Boardwalk over Rail and Shepard Road: As the western connection from the river to the River Balcony, the curving 14-foot wide 5% slope connection will link the upper bluff of downtown to the Sam Morgan Regional Trail and Upper Landing Park at the river's edge.

Basis of Design Report: The design does not include an elevated boardwalk in this section. A pedestrian connection over the road and rail integrated with future RiversEdge development is anticipated. The design builds upon existing infrastructure in lieu of a new elevated boardwalk over rail in this section. The Science Museum is not supportive of a grade separated crossing over their leased property.

20. Balcony at the Science Museum of Minnesota: The Science Museum of Minnesota Plaza is an important part of the urban fabric and public realm of Saint Paul. As the River Balcony passes through the large plaza, it is important that materials signal the continuity of the River Balcony.

Basis of Design Report: No Change

21. Balcony at RiverCentre Ramp: Similar to the Ramsey West Site, reconstruction of RiverCentre parking ramp is an opportunity to integrate the River Balcony into new development.

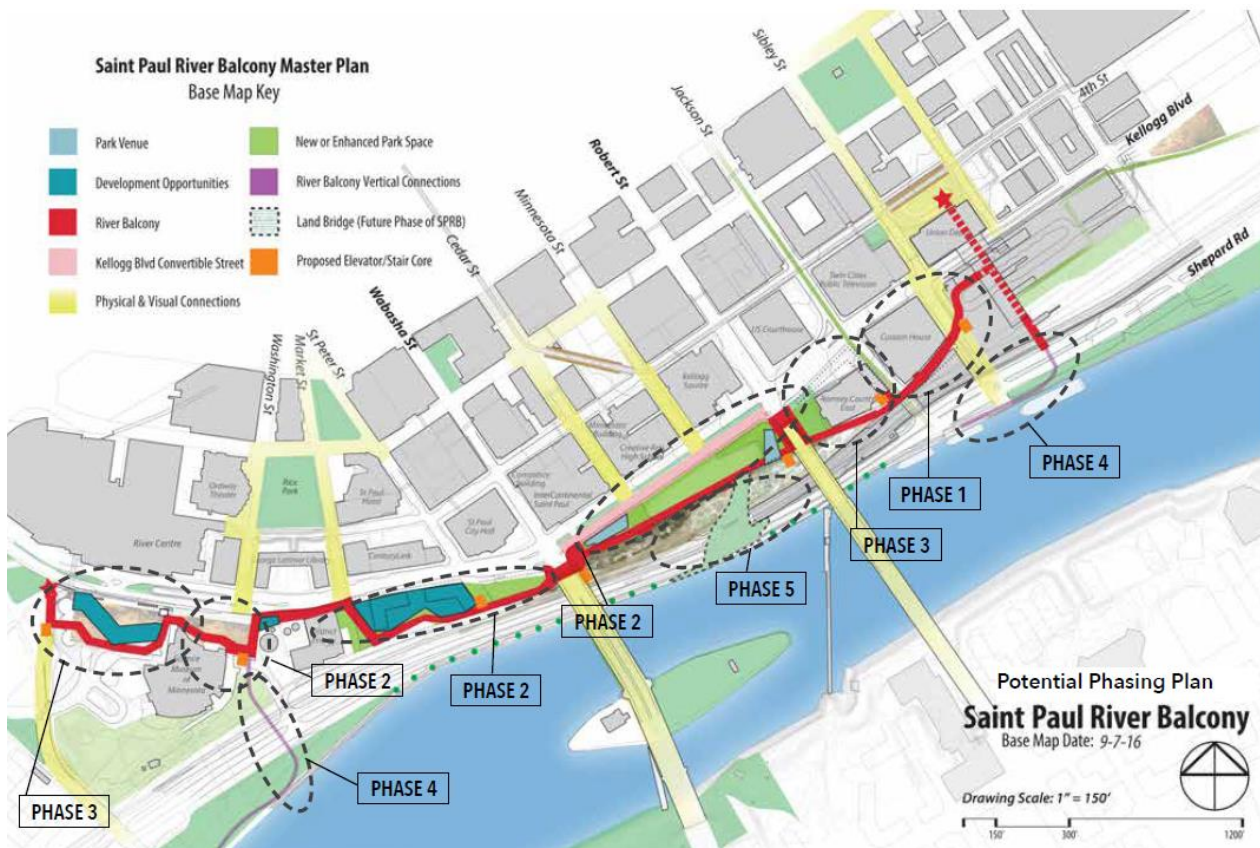
Basis of Design Report: No Change.

22. Shepard Road Vertical Connection: A transparent, enclosed stair and elevator connection provides immediate access to the Mississippi River, while the elevated walkway continues west to Upper Landing Park.

Basis of Design Report: The basis of design report anticipates a pedestrian connection over the road and rail integrated with future RiversEdge development.

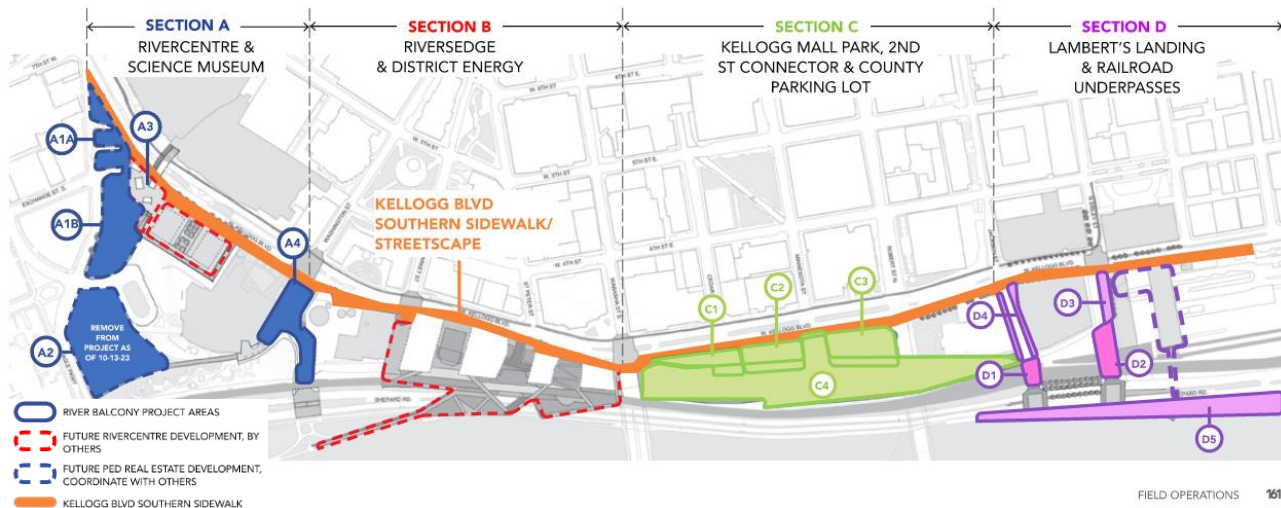
Project Priority and Phasing

The master plan identifies a potential phasing plan (page 55) for implementation. The master plan also states that the design of each project must adhere to the master plan document as a baseline but also respond to the emerging urban environment by connecting to the street, public realm, new and proposed buildings, and the overall urban form of the city.



The basis of design report also identifies a preliminary construction phasing plan but separated by the 4 sections. Phasing in the basis of design report is prioritized by section and not in a linear order because funding

is unknown. Each section is broken down further to understand priorities and coordination needs for various components of each phase (section).



River Balcony Design Guidelines – pages 57-75

In addition to the elements of the River Balcony in Chapter 4, the master plan includes design guidelines in Chapter 5 that provide direction for the design of the River Balcony and related spaces in the public realm, as well as adjacent development and infrastructure. The guidelines are presented below, followed by how the basis of design report departs from the master plan.

Identity

1. The River Balcony area should have a consistent identity with uniform design elements for paving, signage, materials, landscaping, street furniture and lighting. Specific areas or spaces along the River Balcony may still have their distinct design elements and identity but should relate to a larger whole. For example, the Science Museum Plaza in the EcoDistrict may have its own distinct design vocabulary, but the River Balcony will maintain its design elements as it passes along the edge of the Plaza.

Basis of Design Report: No Change

2. The River Balcony should consider and, where appropriate, incorporate elements from the Great River Passage identity system. These may include certain types of signage and information that relate to the river corridor as a whole.

Basis of Design Report: This was not specifically identified in the basis of design report. A signage plan will be developed during the design development phase.

Connected Pedestrian Amenities

1. On all streets in the River Balcony study area, the pedestrian zone should be expanded to accommodate higher pedestrian traffic levels and allow sufficient space for street furnishings, lighting, landscaping and outdoor dining.

Basis of Design Report: Conceptually, no change but specific language is not included in the basis of design report.

2. The River Balcony should connect to downtown’s pedestrian and open space networks. It should also interface with the Capital City Bikeway.

Basis of Design Report: Conceptually, no change but specific language is not included in the basis of design report. The basis of design report includes eight overlooks to draw people from downtown to the river bluff and to preserve historic views identified in the master plan.

3. The minimum width of the through-walking-area should be 14 feet. No slope should exceed five percent.

Basis of Design Report: Conceptually, no change but specific language is not included in the basis of design report.

Balcony Structure

While more work needs to be done to explore structural options, the Master Plan process revealed three options that should be studied during the basis of design phase:

1. a simple, more ‘form-follows-function’ design that draws inspiration from similar structural elements found along the existing Saint Paul riverfront;
2. a mast/cable stay concept suggesting a more contemporary, at times almost invisible, structural system, where the River Balcony “hangs/floats” along the bluff edge; and
3. a more sculptural or interpretive design, such as the Tree Concept, drawing inspiration from natural elements found within the river landscape.

Basis of Design Report: A formal study was not completed during the basis of design phase. The design team initiated the basis of design phase by proceeding with Option 1: form-follows-function. A simple, form-follows-function design focuses on existing infrastructure given the cost of elevated elements. This approach is more practical than the design elements articulated in the master plan, and the City remains supportive of the elevated elements in the master plan if resources to incorporate them become available in the future.

Materials

1. The River Balcony should be constructed of attractive and durable materials, able to withstand heavy use.
2. Materials for the River Balcony should be blackened steel (optional material: weathering steel), bird-safe tempered glass, concrete (precast and cast-in-place), and sustainably-grown hardwood or recycled wood (or suitable wood alternative that is long-lasting, safe to use year round in all weather, and safe for use on inclined portions of the River Balcony).
3. Lighter wood deck structures should be used for the curving, elevated walkways descending from the bluff edge. These structures should be composed of durable and low-maintenance materials, but with a “lighter” structural system.

Basis of Design Report: No change. The basis of design report shows similar durable and natural materials such as structural timber for River Balcony decks, promontories and overlooks, framing views and vistas and creating unique, friendly, and dramatic experiences.

Landscaping

1. Landscaping should play a significant role along the entire course of the River Balcony, creating a distinctive and appealing environment.
2. The plant palette should emphasize pollinator-friendly native plants (savanna and valley species) and low-maintenance, drought-tolerant species suited to the micro-climate of the bluff area.
3. The plant palette should emphasize deciduous plants (common to presettlement species) with limited evergreen trees.
4. Plants should be used in a consistent manner along the River Balcony, to help denote intersections, transitions, resting areas, overlooks, etc.
5. Plantings should be compatible with the Saint Paul Street Design Manual, and Public Works (for street trees) and Parks and Recreation standards.
6. A mix of “natural” and “architectural” landscape design should be explored, depending on the location and adjacent land uses.
7. Views of the exposed bluff from all riverfront vantage points should be protected. From the bluff and downtown St. Paul, existing views should be retained and enhanced, and new views of the river and river valley should be created where possible.
8. Existing sections of exposed bluff should be conserved. Sources of erosion and other potential threats to deterioration should be investigated. Where building demolition exposes long-covered segments, “daylighting” should be explored wherever possible. Bluff character and appearance should be considered in the design of buttresses or other stabilization efforts.
9. The bluff feature should be incorporated into proposals for public art and interpretation.

Basis of Design Report: No change. The material identity and character of the River Balcony basis of design is derived from its sandstone geology, revealing the 'nature of the bluff' – its material and botanical richness. The unique sandstone material becomes a unifying, recognizable and site-specific element – used as walls, seating and distinctive paving. Native forest and grassland communities are sources of inspiration for both the creation of immersive experiences as well as specific species selection. Natural materials such as structural timber are used for River Balcony decks, promontories and overlooks, framing views and vistas and creating unique, friendly, and dramatic experiences. The basis of design report includes eight overlooks to draw people from downtown to the river bluff and to preserve historic views identified in the master plan.

District Systems

- Energy

1. The River Balcony should showcase cutting-edge green technology features (e.g., interactive kiosks powered by solar energy).
2. District energy (or other waste heat) should be explored as a heat source for snow melting and enhancing outdoor spaces to make them more comfortable during colder weather.

3. Saint Paul District Energy and the EcoDistrict as a whole should be incorporated into the program and activities that occur along the River Balcony.

4. The Science Museum Plaza (Kellogg Plaza) and the space between the Science Museum and District Energy buildings should be used for environmental education. Additional educational facilities associated with District Energy could be placed on the eastern edge of this space.

Basis of Design Report: No Change. The basis of design report identifies educational programming between the Science Museum and District Energy buildings. Page 70 identifies the location of educational programming. The design does not preclude any previously proposed green technology or educational programming.

- Stormwater

1. The rate and quantity of untreated runoff of stormwater into the river should be reduced or eliminated.

2. Shared (district) stormwater systems should be explored to improve environmental and economic outcomes.

3. Stormwater management systems should be designed to serve multiple functions, including recreation and habitat restoration.

4. The water's edge should be naturalized where appropriate and possible.

5. Rain water should be captured and stored for irrigation and other appropriate uses.

6. Stormwater management should be incorporated into environmental education in the River Balcony area.

Basis of Design Report: No Change. The basis of design report identifies runoff collection, treatment and potential reuse to exhibit and showcase stormwater management best practices, in coordination with Capitol Region Watershed District and other stakeholders. The design also calls for Identifying 'Green Street' segments where stormwater management infrastructure can be incorporated. The design does not preclude any previously proposed stormwater systems.

- Waste and Wastewater

1. The use of innovative waste and wastewater collection systems should be explored to improve environmental and economic outcomes. Zero waste strategies should be explored.

Basis of Design Report: No change. The design does not specifically identify wastewater and does not preclude strategies identified in the master plan.

Furnishings

1. A variety of custom benches along the River Balcony should be made of sustainably-harvested hardwood on a black steel frame.

2. Moveable tables and chairs should be provided in gathering spaces.

3. Freestanding custom precast planters, ash urns, trash and recycling receptacles should be located at numerous places along the River Balcony route.

Basis of Design Report: No change. The design includes a variety of custom benches and proposes moveable tables and chairs in gathering spaces. The material identity and character of the basis of design is derived from its sandstone geology, revealing the ‘nature of the bluff’ – its material and botanical richness. The unique sandstone material becomes a unifying, recognizable and site-specific element – used as walls, seating and distinctive paving. Native forest and grassland communities are sources of inspiration for both the creation of immersive experiences as well as specific species selection. Natural materials such as structural timber are used for River Balcony decks, promontories and overlooks, framing views and vistas and creating unique, friendly, and dramatic experiences.

Retaining Walls

1. Cast-in-place concrete retaining walls with cut Kasota stone veneer should be used in more “refined” conditions, e.g., in more urban locations along the primary River Balcony route at the top of the bluff.
2. Dry-laid Kasota stone walls should be used in more “naturalized spaces,” such as the proposed landscape in Lower Kellogg Park (at the base of the bluff).

Basis of Design Report: No Change. The basis of design report proposes sandstone material to relate to the existing bluff. The unique sandstone material becomes a unifying, recognizable and site-specific element used for walls, seating and distinctive paving.

Paving

1. All paving should meet functional requirements and specific design criteria (such as ADA) to provide safe, four-season surface treatments for the entire length of the River Balcony.
2. Paving should be used to provide both continuity (recognizable identity) for the whole River Balcony, and opportunities for design expression (added variety) related to specific locations, adjacent uses, signature destinations and other unique River Balcony features.

Basis of Design Report: No change. The design calls for concrete paving, sandstone, and distinctive paving throughout the alignment to create recognizable and site-specific elements. All paving will meet functional requirements and specific design criteria (ADA) for safety.

Railings

1. Railing design should address basic functional needs related to safety, height, durability and other published criteria.
2. Railing design and materials should integrate art, both in terms of design process and constructed outcomes.
3. Key locations for way-finding and other orientation elements should be identified as part of railing design.

4. Railing materials should be used to help create a variety of experiences along the River Balcony, from see-through (almost invisible) applications to screen walls/buffers to direct views or provide attractive backdrops to special use areas.

Basis of Design Report: No change. The design proposes transparent railing (p. 137-157) to enhance the views toward the river. Railing materials are customized to help create a variety of experiences to direct views and provide attractive backdrops at the eight overlook areas. The railing design will meet the functional needs related to safety, height, and durability as identified in the master plan.

Wayfinding

1. Custom-made, lighted orientation kiosks should be located at key entrances to the River Balcony. Materials should be primarily steel and wood, compatible with other materials along the route.
2. Small (pedestrian-scale) informational blade signs should further orient the visitor at decision points and building entries.
3. Cultural information signage should be compatible with general signage strategies and located at key sites to be determined.

Basis of Design Report: No change. Wayfinding was not specifically identified in the basis of design report. A signage plan will be developed during the design development phase. The basis of design report includes eight overlooks to draw people from downtown to the river bluff and to preserve historic views identified in the master plan.

Lighting

Lighting 1. Low-level, dark-sky-friendly lighting (walkway lighting or low bollards) should be used to safely illuminate the River Balcony, while not interfering with night-time views.

2. Primary, low-level fixtures should be consistent along the River Balcony.
3. Additional lighting should be used in key locations to support activities or provide safe passage at intersections. A compatible “family” of fixtures should be selected for these uses.
4. Subtle lighting may also be used to highlight the bluff itself. Lighting of new or renovated buildings should not compete with the bluff’s natural beauty.

Basis of Design Report: No Change. Artistic low leveling lighting is proposed under bridges and underpasses to create a visual connection in the dark. A lighting plan will be developed during the design development phase that meets safety standards and accounts for dark-sky-friendly lighting as suggested in the master plan.

Vertical Circulation Towers

1. Towers with stairways and elevators should be provided at key locations to provide vertical circulation.
2. The towers should be designed to serve as a unifying design element and predictable location for moving between levels.

3. The elevator towers should be light and transparent. Lighting should provide a striking night-time image.

Basis of Design Report: The basis of design report does not include an elevator or connection at the Wabasha Bridge but anticipates a grade separated connection as part of the future Ramsey County RiversEdge project. The design includes eight overlooks to draw people from downtown to the river bluff and to preserve historic views identified in the master plan. The overlooks will be made of natural site-specific materials that will serve as a unifying design element and predictable location for moving between levels and river corridor views. The design includes an observation tower adjacent to the RiverCentre Ramp development for vertical circulation. The design does not preclude any previously proposed vertical circulation towers.

Historic Resources

1. The River Balcony and related features, including hardscape, lighting and street furnishings, should incorporate simple materials and design motifs that have a low visual impact on surrounding historic buildings and spaces.

Basis of Design Report: No Change. The design identifies guidelines for the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area on sheet 183. The design included a heritage design report that suggested no result in an adverse effect to historical properties. When more specific design details are known during Design Development, an assessment of effects analysis will be completed to determine if the proposed project will have an adverse effect on historic properties. The assessment of effects analysis will be shared with the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission for review.

Public Art

1. Public art should be incorporated into the design of the River Balcony. It can take the form of free-standing pieces or be integrated with elements of the River Balcony itself and its environs, such as railings, accent paving, furnishings and buildings.
2. Sites should be identified for permanent installations, as well as temporary/rotating installations.
3. The River Balcony should be designed to draw visitors to and enhance the Culture Garden at the Robert Street bridgehead.
4. The bluff (bluff geology and history) should be incorporated into public art, programming and interpretation opportunities.

Basis of Design Report: The basis of design report does not specifically call out enhancing the Culture Garden at the Robert Street bridgehead.

Balcony Character by Location

There are four distinct conditions that characterize the River Balcony along its course: on-grade at sidewalks and plazas; on-grade at street crossings; free-standing where the main Balcony becomes airborne; and free-standing where the elevated walkways descend from the top of the bluff to the river below.

Basis of Design Report: The design largely removes the free-freestanding balconies to reduce costs and respond to the lack of support for the connections over the road and railroad by various stakeholders along the River Balcony alignment. If the RiversEdge project does not happen, the other grade separated crossings can be considered.

Guidelines for Adjacent Private Development

The master plan provides guidelines for private development sites relative to site development, building form and façade, landscaping, historic preservation, sustainability and district systems, and furnishings.

Basis of Design Report: Discusses parameters (recommendations) related to future development projects on sheet 166. Appendix will contain Heritage Design report completed by consultant.

VIII. Analysis

The master plan vision, goals, and general design principles for the River Balcony, found on the first two pages of this memo, are the foundation of the basis of design report. The basis of design report is the next phase of design for the River Balcony, bringing it a step closer to realization. The basis of design report is also intended to be the framework for design development plans and ultimately construction documents. But the basis of design report, in some ways, departs from design elements of the master plan.

Key departures from the master plan include a pivot towards a promenade layout using existing infrastructure and less of a focus on elevated balcony elements and connections over road and rail to the river. This was done to reduce costs and in anticipation of a grade separated crossing over Shepard Road and the railroad being incorporated into the RiversEdge project. City staff also became aware of a lack of support from landowners/stakeholders for the other grade separated crossings in the master plan. City staff also became aware of proposed changes in land use on Ramsey County property. As a result, the lack of vertical circulation towers along the bluff is another key departure from the master plan, though the basis of design report does not preclude them from being included in the future.

Reasons the basis of design report should be approved as an addendum to the master plan despite departures from the master plan are discussed below.

- The basis of design report is generally consistent with the vision, goals, and general design principles of the master plan. While the basis of design report does not have as many vertical connections as the master plan contemplates, it does allow for both horizontal and vertical movement as envisioned by the master plan.
- The master plan is long range and aspirational. The basis of design report represents a reasonable near-term solution to advance development of the River Balcony. The basis of design report does not preclude elevated balconies, connections over the road and railroad, and vertical connections in the long term where opportunities arise, as these are elements of the master plan and consistent with it.
- The basis of design report is a reality check on the aspirations for the River Balcony given the cost of elevated elements of the design versus an approach that focuses on existing infrastructure.
- The basis of design report advances the design of the River Balcony in preparation for design development plans and construction documents.
- The basis of design report responds to proposed changes in land use on Ramsey County property such as the RiversEdge development and future development on the Ramsey County East property.

The basis of design report advances the River Balcony design and introduces new and refined elements that are consistent with the master plan.

- Kellogg Plaza Overlook
- Kellogg Cut
- 2nd Street Connector
- County Parking Lot Recreation (interim improvements)
- Bluff Steps and Garden
- Lambert's Landing

The Planning Commission believes strongly in the aspirations for the River Balcony, with its elevated balconies, vertical connections, and connections over road and rail. The Planning Commission also acknowledges the cost constraints that can serve as a reality check. Accordingly, the Planning Commission sees value in advancing the River Balcony elements articulated in the basis of design report, acknowledging the approach is more practical than the design elements articulated in the master plan, and remaining supportive of the elevated elements in the master plan if resources to incorporate them become available in the future and landowners are supportive. The basis of design report does not preclude elevated elements of the master plan from being incorporated in the future. To ensure that construction of the elements of the basis of design are feasible, the basis of design report is intended to be a flexible document allowing for some design refinement as projects evolve from the schematic phases to design development phases and ultimately to construction documents.

IX. Recommendation

The River Balcony Basis of Design Report represents a refined version of the master plan. The basis of design report is consistent with the master plan vision, goals, and general design principles and should be approved as an addendum to the master plan.

The Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee recommends the Planning Commission recommend the City Council approve the River Balcony Basis of Design Report as an addendum to the master plan, authorize staff to administratively advance and refine its design as projects progress through the phases of development, and request to review any design evolution diverging from the River Balcony Master Plan.