



## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

**Project Title: Mississippi River Gorge Master Plan**

**MPRB Division: Planning**

**Project Manager: Ellen Kennedy**

As required by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Code of Ordinances, every construction or redevelopment project undertaken within the MPRB Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is to have a community engagement plan. The plan serves as a guide for the community engagement process through the multiple phases of planning and project development. The plan may be modified as circumstance warrants during project duration. Substantial modifications are to be communicated to stakeholders and the MPRB Board of Commissioners.

### **Project Description and Background:**

Defined as the natural area that runs along the Mississippi River south of the I-35 bridge to just north of Minnehaha Falls, this area is the only true gorge to occur along the Mississippi River. In 1997, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) and Longfellow Community Council co-sponsored the preparation of *A Concept Plan for the Mississippi River Gorge*. Recognizing that the west bank of the Mississippi River Gorge is owned by the MPRB and runs adjacent to the Longfellow neighborhood, the concept plan set a vision for the Gorge that balanced protection, restoration, and maintenance of this treasured natural area with recreational demands in and around the Mississippi River, which travels through the Gorge.

Fast forward twenty years and the Gorge is still at a critical point, as human use of the area has intensified, sensitive ecological areas have grown in size and scope in and around the Mississippi River, erosion impacts are ever more obvious, and the future of the river in this particular area is currently uncertain and subject to change, depending on what happens with the three locks and dams that lie nearby. Because of these conditions, a Master Plan is needed to map out management strategies befitting very different river futures. One future reflects the river as we know it today: with smooth flowing water owing to the lock and dam system that maintains the rate of flow. The other possibility, should the locks and dams ultimately be removed, is a dramatic change in the rate of flow that will restore historically known rapids to the river and change its interaction with the natural space and life in and around it. Both futures need to be addressed in considering how best to manage, protect, preserve,

and maintain the Gorge's unique natural system, while recognizing the increasing recreational demands in the area and exploring the potential to expand them, where appropriate.

The Master Plan will contain the following elements:

- An overview of Mississippi River Gorge history that tells the story of conditions that have shaped it into what it is today
- A detailed conditions assessment of the access points, trails, open spaces, shoreline, and altered areas (by either human activity or invasive plant communities) as well as a corresponding needs assessment for these areas
- Recreational programming potential that reflects both possible river futures (with and without locks and dams)
- Programming plans for different amenities within the Gorge (trails, river, beaches, open spaces, lookouts) as well as a management plan for natural spaces, including recommended improvements, phasing, and costs

The Mississippi River Gorge Master Plan will take into account existing plans pertaining to its geography and environmental sensitivity, including the South Service Area Master Plan, the Ecological System Plan, the Natural Resources Management Plan, and other local and regional comprehensive plans.

This project will unfold in four general phases:

- **Phase 1: Project Start-up.** Between August and September of 2017, MPRB Planning, Recreation, and Environmental Stewardship staff will establish the various advisory groups, begin the public engagement process, and refine the project schedule. During this time period MPRB will engage a consultant team responsible for many of the tasks outlined above.
- **Phase 2: Discovery and Assessment.** From September 2017 to the end of November 2017, staff will work closely with the project team, advisory committees, community groups, and hired consultants to research, assess, map, and begin to understand physical conditions and park and recreation needs across the Gorge.
- **Phase 3: Master Planning.** Beginning in December 2017 and stretching through April of 2018, MPRB staff will work with the advisory committees, project team, and consultants to complete master planning for the Gorge, reflecting the vastly different river conditions that may exist in the future. This phase will feature community events and will significantly engage the appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Master planning for specific parks will rely heavily on input from the general public, as well as engage significantly with established neighborhood organizations and service and outreach providers within the South Service Area that work with underserved populations.

- Phase 4: Master Plan Approval and Priority Projects.** In May 2018, MPRB staff will work with all advisory groups, consultants, and plan partners to finalize master plan recommendations and prioritize initial improvements. This will include a public comment period on the master plan.

It is expected that the Mississippi River Gorge Master Plan will come before the board in a public hearing and for approval in June 2018.

**Project Funding Sources:**

Funding for the Mississippi River Gorge Master Plan creation and implementation comes from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund in the amount of \$2,358,000.00. Of this total amount, \$250,000 has been allocated for the Master Plan, which must be complete by the end of 2018.

**Engagement Recommendation**

**Level of Engagement: Collaborate**

	Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Partner
<b>Engagement Goal:</b>	<i>To provide stakeholders with factual, balanced, and timely information to help them understand the project.</i>	<i>To obtain stakeholder feedback on project analysis, alternatives, or decisions.</i>	<i>To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that perspectives are consistently understood, considered, and reflected in project decisions.</i>	<i>To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision making in order to develop and implement collaborative project solutions.</i>

<b>MPRB Promise to the Public:</b>	<i>The MPRB will keep stakeholders informed.</i>	<i>The MPRB will keep stakeholders informed, listen to and acknowledge feedback, and work to ensure stakeholder feedback is reflected in alternatives developed.</i>	<i>The MPRB will work with stakeholders for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate recommendations to the maximum extent possible.</i>	<i>The MPRB and partner entity will be accountable to their roles as negotiated in the partnership and regularly evaluate overall success of the partnership.</i>
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An **appointed** Community Advisory Committee is recommended, based on the MPRB’s Community Engagement Policy, because the Mississippi River Gorge Master Plan will set a vision and make recommendations for design, program, operations, and maintenance in approximately 132 acres worth of parkland along the Mississippi River in a nationally recognized recreation area. The Gorge CAC will be primarily engaged in providing stakeholder feedback on Master Plan vision, goals, and objectives. This Plan will be prepared through an open, community-centered process and then brought to the CAC for review and final recommendation. Open houses, community events, engagement activities, and presentations to neighborhood organizations will be the primary engagement tools for this Plan. MPRB will collaborate with established neighborhood organizations, partner organizations whose scope and mission focus on Mississippi River management (MWMO, NPS-MNRRRA, FMR, etc) and nonprofit service providers in the area to finalize the optimal community engagement methods around park visitors and stakeholders.

The appointed CAC shall be comprised of appointments from the following, for a total of 19 CAC members:

- Park Board President Tabb (appoints chair)
- At Large Commissioners Erwin, Forney, and Young (1 appointment each)
- District Commissioners: Wielinski (District 1), Vreeland (district 3) and Musich (district 5) (2 appointments each)
- Minneapolis City Council Members: Gordon (ward 2), Warsame (ward 6), Johnson (ward 12)
- MPRB Staff (3 appointments)
- Geographic groupings of neighborhood organizations (1 appointment each):
  - Cedar-Riverside / Seward
  - Longfellow Community Council
  - University/Prospect Park

The Mississippi River Gorge CAC shall:

- Become knowledgeable about the project and its scope and advise MPRB staff and consultants throughout the planning process.
- Contribute to broad community engagement by acting as primary contact for the CAC's represented communities, and by enhancing the project's interaction with a wide range of stakeholders and stakeholder groups.
- Assist with ongoing communication of technical plan elements to the general public.
- Report back to appointers or appointing bodies, as requested, on the plan process, information presented, and possible recommendations.
- Make recommendations to the MPRB Commissioners on service area-wide vision, goals, and principles.

### **Anticipated Project Outcomes**

The primary outcome will be a master plan for the Mississippi River Gorge that addresses community and MPRB needs and provides a guiding vision and principles for operations, maintenance, programming, and capital improvements. In addition, this project will produce a list of recommended improvements to the Gorge with phasing options and cost estimates. This list will be a guide to long-range planning.

The project supports the following elements of the MPRB Comprehensive Plan:

- Theme: Urban forests, natural areas, and waters that endure and captivate
  - Goal: Residents and visitors enjoy and understand the natural environment
    - Strategy: Encourage people to experience the natural environment by providing and maintaining, where feasible, trails and access points that serve people of all ranges of ability
    - Provide or support other entities in providing programming that teaches residents to reduce their individual negative impact on the natural environment
  - Goal: People and the environment benefit from the expansion and protection of natural resources
    - Strategy: Within the park system, protect natural resources recognized as significant city, regional, or national resources due to historical, ecological, or aesthetic value
- Theme: Recreation that inspires personal growth, healthy lifestyles, and a sense of community
  - Goal: Residents, visitors, and workers enjoy opportunities to improve health and fitness
    - Strategy: Ensure recreation opportunities are available for persons with disabilities.
- Theme: Dynamic parks that shape city character and meet diverse community needs
  - Goal: Parks shape an evolving city.
  - Goal: Park facility renewal and development respects history and focuses on sustainability, accessibility, flexibility, and beauty.

- Goal: Focused land management supports current and future generations.
- Theme: A safe place to play
  - Goal: Parks are safe and welcoming by design
    - Strategy: Design parks to meet or exceed safety standards, building codes, and CPTED principles
    - Strategy: Work with communities and the city to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle routes to and within parks.
  - Goal: Communities, public and private partners, and staff cooperate to promote safety.
    - Strategy: Work with communities to identify necessary safety improvements within parks.

### **Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities**

All stakeholders are expected to work collaboratively to create and refine research and take an active role in the education of MPRB staff and community members. Stakeholders shall provide input toward final project recommendations for approval by the Board of Commissioners. Participants are expected to engage in the process in a manner that promotes respectful civil discourse and enhances mutual understanding of all stakeholder viewpoints. Any requests for public or project information should be directed to the project manager.

### **Identification of Project Stakeholders**

The Mississippi River Gorge Master Plan will touch, in some way, every person who lives, works, or visits this resource enjoyed by both Minneapolis and St. Paul. Therefore, the various groups and public outreach methods will attempt to involve, engage, and notify as many people as possible. Special attention will be paid to ensure that recent immigrant groups, those living near the poverty line, and persons of color are engaged in the project.

#### **Project Management Team**

A project management team will be established to provide decision-making and frequent oversight of the entire project. The management team will be a small group comprised of MPRB Planning, MPRB Recreation, and MPRB Environmental Stewardship.

#### **Project Advisory Team**

Staff will convene a PAC of MPRB staff and key staff from other agencies. The PAC will provide technical insight into the research, outreach, planning, and proposed vision and goals associated with the project. The PAC will assist with understanding of agency processes and capabilities as they relate to the plan, and will then assist with acceptance and institutionalization of the plan. The PAC will include members from the following departments and agencies:

- MPRB Environmental Stewardship Division (Forestry, Asset Management, Environmental Management departments)
- MPRB Community Outreach and Access
- MPRB Marketing and Communications

- MPRB Recreation Division (Athletics, Youth development and Recreation departments)

#### Technical Advisors

Staff will utilize other resources outside MPRB as needed, to provide additional review and technical insight into the process. Staff may meet with these advisors in small groups or individually, as schedules and needs warrant.

- City of Minneapolis Public Works department
- City of Minneapolis Health department
- Hennepin County Public Works department
- Minneapolis Parks Foundation staff
- Minneapolis Shade Tree Advisory Committee
- Minneapolis Bicycle Advisory Committee
- Minneapolis Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities
- Senior Citizens Advisory Committee
- Public Health Advisory Committee
- Neighborhood and Engagement Commission
- Minneapolis Arts Commission
- Youth Coordinating Board
- Minneapolis Public Schools
- NCR Neighborhood Specialist
- NCR Access and Outreach Specialist
- CPED community planner for South area
- National Park Service
- Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
- Friends of the Mississippi River
- University of Minnesota
- City of St. Paul
- Others as appropriate

#### Community Advisory Committee

As stated previously, an appointed CAC will assist with community outreach, and review and communication of the plan.

## Outreach and Research Methods

### **1. Appointed Community Advisory Committee (CAC).** This committee will:

- Contribute to broad community engagement by acting as primary contact for the CAC's represented communities, and by enhancing the project's interaction with a wide range of stakeholders.
- Assist with ongoing communication of technical plan elements to the general public.

### **2. Coordination with Neighborhood Organizations**

Meetings with representatives from the established neighborhood organizations near the Mississippi River Gorge has guided the creation of this CE Plan. This coordination will continue periodically throughout the planning process to provide the project team with additional community guidance and outreach assistance.

### **3. Community Service Organizations**

MPRB staff from Planning and Community Outreach and Access have been working together to identify community service nonprofits that work with underserved populations near the Mississippi River Gorge. These nonprofits will be continually engaged in the planning process, to the level of their desire, to assist with reaching out to the communities they serve. Organizations will include (but not necessarily be limited to):

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Additional organizations are being identified and approached and will be listed here when initial contact has been made and once the organization wishes to participate in the planning process.

### **4. Community Workshops**

Two sessions of community workshops will take place. Each session will feature two workshops in geographically diverse locations. The information presented will be the same within each of the two sessions, regardless of location, so community members may attend either of the workshops.

- The first workshop session will take place during discovery and assessment (phase 2), likely in fall 2017. The purpose of this session will be to get community reaction to consultant- and staff-driven assessment, and to add community ideas and input to the discovery and assessment process.
- The second workshop session will take place during master planning (phase 3), likely in early spring 2018. The purpose of this session will be to get community reaction to initial master plan goals, drawings, service recommendations, and other master plan elements.

If possible, the two sessions will be hosted at different duos of locations, allowing for four different sites to host workshops.



## **5. Appearances at Events**

At appropriate points in the planning process, the project management team will interact with users at neighborhood events near the master plan area. MPRB staff will rely on the CAC, community service organizations, established neighborhood organizations, and MPRB community outreach and access staff to determine which events to attend throughout the service area planning process.

## **6. Public Hearings**

Following a public comment period on the plan, a public hearing on the draft plan will take place around June of 2018.

## **7. Social/Digital Media and Website**

MPRB staff will maintain an up-to-date project website and will use news releases, the GovDelivery email subscription service, and other digital media, as appropriate, to keep stakeholders up to date on the project. Planning staff will work with Community Outreach and Communications staff to determine when/if to translate digital media (see below).

## **8. Language Translation**

MPRB Planning staff will work with the CAC and MPRB Community Outreach and Access staff to determine translation needs. Translation services may vary by geographic area. MPRB Community Outreach and Access staff, established neighborhood organizations, and community service organizations will be asked to advise on what materials should be translated and when/if to provide verbal translation services at open houses and other community events.

## **Project Schedule**

- Phase 1: Project Start-up. August-September 2017
- Phase 2: Discovery and Assessment. September-November 2017
- Phase 3: Master Planning. December 2017-April 2018
- Phase 4: Master Plan Approval: May 2018-June 2018

## **Resources**

A portion of the funding dedicated to staff time and consultant fees will be utilized for public engagement, which may include art, music, or other artistic mediums to draw interest in the project. In addition, the project budget includes costs of mailings and other notifications.

### **Evaluation Summary**

Following project completion, the project manager will analyze the effectiveness of the engagement process from both stakeholder and organization points of view and will provide a brief summary statement. The summary statement will indicate how the process advances policy goals, and will assist the Board and staff in evaluating and informing an ongoing community engagement process.

**Summary Statement:** *Statement pending plan completion.*