

NEWS RELEASE | June 29, 2017

Water Works design concept adopted by Minneapolis Park Board

Minneapolis Parks Foundation and Park Board preparing for 2018 construction start on phase 1 of the transformative park project overlooking St. Anthony Falls on the Mississippi River

Minneapolis, Minn. – On Wednesday, June 28, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) voted to adopt the Water Works design concept. Water Works is a transformative park development project overlooking St. Anthony Falls and the Stone Arch Bridge that will bring significant new historic, cultural, and recreational amenities to one of the most important sites along the Mississippi River and the most iconic location in Minnesota. The Minneapolis Parks Foundation, an independent non-profit, is co-leading the Water Works project with the MPRB.

In May, the Parks Foundation, together with the MPRB, brought forward a dramatic — and now definitive — design concept for the Water Works project that will embed a new, indoor park pavilion into the historic remnants of the Bassett and Columbia mills. It will also expand naturalized gathering spaces with direct access to public amenities. Collectively, these new spaces will provide the community with unique places to come together and share experiences — an ancient and very human act that the design team began to intentionally conceive of as storytelling. Now, with the adoption of the new concept, the Parks Foundation and MPRB are preparing for construction start on the first three-acre “Mezzanine Phase” of the six-acre project, slated for 2018 with an expected grand opening in late 2019.

“Creating places for people, and peoples, to tell their stories is one of the most powerful ways that parks transform human life,” says Tom Evers, Executive Director of the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, which aligns community vision and philanthropic investment to bring parks to life and communities together. “The community is embracing the idea of revealing and re-inhabiting the mill remnants as emblematic of how stories of old can imbue our surroundings even as we come together to tell our stories today, just as St. Anthony Falls has been a place for gathering and communing for millennia.”

A complex urban site and natural venue for storytelling

In 2016, the Parks Foundation and Minneapolis Park Board retained a 13-member design team led by Damon Farber Landscape Architects, HGA Architects & Engineers, and the 106 Group, to refine an earlier Water Works concept and take the project through schematic design to construction. The site is complex and layered – topographically; in terms of dynamic intersections of bikes, cars and pedestrians; and perhaps most critically, as the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park, a historic area and current destination for 2.5 million visits annually.

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St. Anthony Falls a spiritual place and a travelway, important to the Dakota and other indigenous communities, as well as the birthplace of the city's milling history. In addition to St. Anthony Falls, the Water Works site contains an important convergence of multiple riverfront destinations and physical features, including the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, Stone Arch Bridge, West River Parkway and Trail, Mill Ruins Park, St. Anthony Falls Visitor Center and Lock and Dam, historic industrial ruins, Mill City Museum, and Guthrie Theater.

The storytelling theme emerged through cultural resources assessment, interpretive planning, and engagement with diverse communities. Visitors to the future park will be immersed in stories – past and present – through features that include the mill-embedded pavilion, three-sheltered city steps, a naturalized playspace, and the potential for revealed mill remnants and artifacts. The stories and programs planned for Water Works will allow people to tell their stories.

“Like the city itself, the Water Works site has adapted to meet the changing needs of the people living in it from navigation, to industrial, to recreation and residential,” says Jayne Miller, Superintendent of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. “Water Works will be an exciting, iconic destination that builds on the Central Riverfront’s rebirth as a place where a full range of diverse communities from across Minnesota can gather and engage with the Mississippi River and experience the power of St. Anthony Falls.”

Schematic design and preconstruction

With the adoption of the final Water Works concept, the Minneapolis Park Board and Parks Foundation will launch schematic design and begin preconstruction activities on site ahead of the 2018 construction start. In 2017, activity will include preliminary archeological digging to determine the condition of remnant mill walls. In addition, the selective deconstruction of an existing building – the former Fuji-Ya restaurant – will also begin. More information about these activities will be communicated in the coming weeks and people may visit <https://mplsparksfoundation.org/projects/water-works> and https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/water_works for project updates.

Through the Parks Foundation, the majority of Mezzanine Phase funding will be provided by philanthropic investment. In 2015, the Parks Foundation launched the RiverFirst Capital Campaign, which has to-date raised \$12.3M in philanthropic gifts and commitments.

About the Minneapolis Parks Foundation

The Minneapolis Parks Foundation transforms human lives through parks and public spaces by aligning philanthropic investment and community vision. The Parks Foundation co-leads the RiverFirst Initiative with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and is responsible for private fundraising and implementation of the Water Works and Great Northern Greenway River Link projects. The Parks Foundation also supports innovative Minneapolis parks projects through equity funding and champions world-class design through its Next Generation of Parks™ Event Series. Learn more at MplsParksFoundation.org.

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About the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is an independent, semi-autonomous body responsible for the Minneapolis park system. With 179 park properties totaling 6,804 acres of land and water, the Park Board provides places and recreation opportunities for all people to gather and engage in activities that promote health, well-being, community and the environment. Its Grand Rounds Scenic Byway, neighborhood parks, recreation centers and diversified programming have made the park system an important component of what makes Minneapolis a great place to live, play and work. More than 22 million annual visits are made to the nationally acclaimed park system, which was named the number one park system in the nation in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 by The Trust for Public Land's ParkScore® Index.

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Editor's note: Renderings available by request