

Walk & Talk Self-Guided Tours

Water Works at Mill Ruins Park

Difficulty: Easy half mile meander with some steps and paved slopes

The Mississippi River's only natural waterfall — *Owamni* in Dakota, *St. Anthony Falls* in English — is the dynamic backdrop to the city's newest gathering place, Water Works at Mill Ruins Park. This 3-acre park traverses a complex site with multiple levels, trail connections, and programmed features, all layered with historical, contemporary, and natural elements that are designed to help us tell our shared stories, old and new.

★ **Start** – Mill Ruins Park parking lot covers the old gatehouse that controlled the flow of the Mississippi to the area's 19th century mills, portions of which will be re-exposed and preserved in a future park development. Proceed up the combined bike/walking path and cross W River Parkway using the new pedestrian crossing.



A. General Mills Plaza – The main gathering and meeting place at Water Works, this welcoming plaza offers visitors places to eat in fair weather or warm themselves at the fire pits in cooler seasons.

- One of the two heritage Cottonwood trees preserved during park construction, shades the plaza. Cottonwoods are essential for certain species of native bees.
- Fire pits were designed as circles based on input from Indigenous community members and are covered with artwork designed by an Indigenous artist.
- The Pavilion entrance archway sits between the Bassett Sawmill to the left and the Columbia Flour Mill on the right. The Columbia was once five stories, and this visible remnant wall was preserved as part of the site reconstruction.

B. South plaza – This tree-sheltered sloping plaza serves as a passageway between the hustle and hardscape of Downtown to the splendor of St. Anthony Falls and the Stone Arch Bridge.

The Water Works Park Pavilion on your right opened in the summer 2021 and is home to the highly acclaimed restaurant *Owamni* by *The Sioux Chef*.

C. Bank of America City Steps – Designed for contemplation and programming, its terraced walkway and wood-topped benches invite visitors to stay awhile.

- The City Steps are embedded within the former Occidental Mill — walls from which can be seen at the back of the steps adjacent to the 1st St sidewalk.
- Interpretive engravings on the wood bench tops feature dots representing gallons of water diverted through the site's rainwater reuse program and Dakota language about the human relationship with water.

D. Mezzanine lawn – A gathering space for lounging, playing, and programming, this lawn also sits above a rainwater reuse system. The first of its kind in Minneapolis, 68,000-gal. capacity tank stores rainwater that fell on adjacent rooftops. Once filtered and treated, it provides up to 36% of the water used for the site's irrigation and grey water.

E. Wooded slope – This variegated slope sits below the busy city streets and provides shade for the **Nature Play Lab**, a playground nestled next to a children's garden. All told, hundreds of mostly native plants — many with edible, medicinal, or sensory qualities — were rooted at Water Works, interspersed in four spots with mill relics recovered during construction.

F. Woonerf – A Dutch word for a multi-modal plaza, the woonerf provides pedestrian and bike access to and from 2nd St and, during evenings and weekends, additional public parking. Above, a cantilevered footbridge was added on 1st St to improve walkability from the Water Works site to 3rd Ave.



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