

A PARK BUILT BY DETROIT

Fifteen years ago, a bold vision for Detroit's waterfront began to take shape. It began with new investment by General Motors, an unprecedented philanthropic commitment of \$50 million by the Kresge Foundation, and a partnership with the City of Detroit.

The vision was inspired by the simple belief that all Detroiters should have safe, clean, and welcoming place to gather on the river.

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy has transformed this vision into a plan - shaped by community input — to create a five-and-a-half mile public space of parks connected with a greenway along the Detroit River.

Today, we welcome more than three million visitors annually.

As we work toward achieving our vision, we have turned our attention to a 22-acre riverfront parcel just west of Downtown Detroit that was formerly the site of a newspaper printing facility. It's a beautiful site located at the intersection Mexicantown, Corktown, and Southwest Detroit. It is a site brimming with potential. It will change the way our community interacts with the river. It will become a regional destination for recreation. And it will have a profound impact on the lives of area residents.

The opportunity to build a waterfront park on this scale comes up once in a generation.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO PARK DESIGN

Historically, the vast majority of public spaces have been designed by elites. A patron hires an architect. A little work is done with input from community leaders. And often a drawing will hit the front page of the newspaper before anyone in the community knows about the project.

We set out to something different in Detroit. We set out to build the best park in the country for Detroit by building the best park in the country for *Detroiters*.

To accomplish this goal, we resolved to build this park not from the ground up, but from people up.

THE COMMUNITY ADVISORY TEAM

Before we asked Detroiters to dream about our park with us, we wanted to help them learn from other cities that have created significant public spaces.

So we decided to take a group of of Detroiters to visit great public spaces around the country and bring what they learned back to our city.

We intentionally sought out the "un-usual suspects" -- people who are deeply in touch with their communities but are are rarely heard in city planning meetings.

We wanted to find the high school kid that everyone looks up to. We wanted to find the grandmother who watches out for everyone on her block. We wanted to find the retired pastor who knows the name of everyone in his neighborhood.

We built an amazing cohort of Detroiters. And we have learned a great deal from their input.

This "Community Advisory Team" has become the heart and soul of this project.

THE INVITATION

We started by reaching out to our volunteers with a simple invitation:

"We are building a team of Detroit residents to help us dream about the future of West Riverfront Park.

Over the course of the summer, we are sponsoring a group of Detroiters to fly across the United States and explore some of the country's leading parks.

We are looking for incredible people with a heart for Detroit and a strong desire to serve as ambassadors for their respective communities.

Do you know anyone who would be great? We are looking for the *un*-usual suspects...just great people. Seniors and kids are encouraged."

The Community Advisory Team we assembled surpassed our expectations and reflects the diversity of Detroit:

62 percent women;

48 percent African-American;

29 percent Latinx;

30 percent under age 18 or over 60;

20 percent individuals with school-aged children.

We packed this group into airplanes and took them all over the country to visit great parks in cities that many had never before visited.

They played in the fountain at Millennium Park.

They sat in the swings at Spruce Street Harbor.

They watched kids roller skate at Brooklyn Bridge Park.

The advisors who joined us on these trips returned informed about what other cities have prioritized in building landmark parks and with new perspectives on the potential our site holds.

We all learned a great deal from these trips. And this learning will be applied to our work in Detroit.

WHAT WE LEARNED

This report contains a snapshot of what we saw and what we learned during our benchmarking field trips. This work and our ongoing community engagement work will guide our design team and make us a stronger community.

We are deeply grateful to the staff and trustees of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation for their support of this project and for reminding us every step of the way that Detroiters deserve nothing less than world class. One of the teens who attended the trips with us pulled me aside on the High Line and whispered – out of earshot of the tour guide – "I think we can do better than this."

His comment made me chuckle. Little did he know of other visitors' breathless praise or the columninches of critical acclaim devoted to the park. Or, for that matter, that he High Line is one of my favorite places in the world. Still, his comment made me smile. To that Detroiter, the High Line isn't the best park for Detroit because it isn't the best park for Detroiters.

As we work hand-in-hand with the community to shape the future of West Riverfront Park, we should be confident. We should be ambitious. And Detroit should unapologetically aspire to build the best park in the country... for Detroiters.

We hope that you will be inspired by this process, and by the ideas contained here that have been gathered by our community members.

Mark C. Wallace
President and CEO







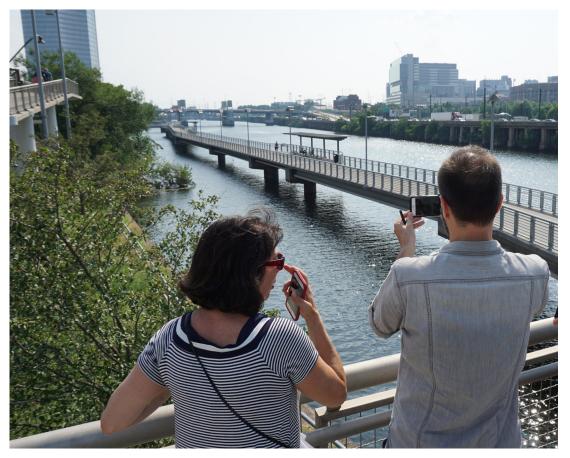






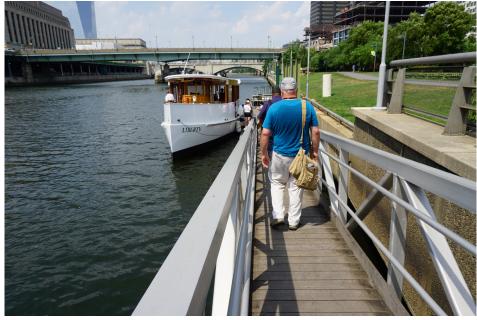


BARTRAM'S GARDEN PHILADELPHIA



SCHUYLKILL RIVER TOUR PHILADELPHIA





DIRECT PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE WATER

AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE!























MAGGIE DALEY PARK **CHICAGO**

BACK TO THE PARK, AGAIN AND AGAIN



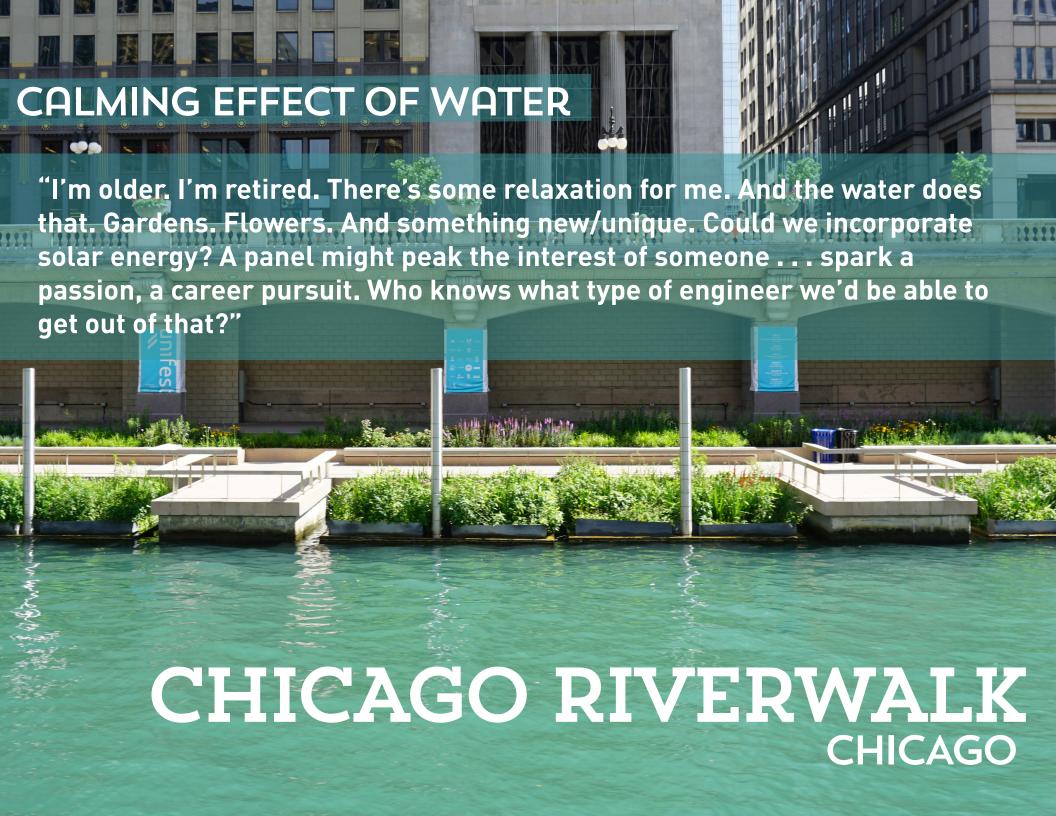








*Lurie Garden designed by Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, competition finalist









PROVIDE FREE SPACE TO ORGANIZATIONS WHO PROVIDE FREE PROGRAMMING





BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK

NEW YORK

PLAN PARKS FOR COMMUNITY FIRST

TOURISTS WANT TO BE PART OF AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

*designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc, competition finalist







AND FOSTER SUSTAINABILITY!



THE HIGH LINE **NEW YORK**

PLAN AHEAD FOR GROWTH & CHANGE

LONG TERM VISION!

*designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and James Corner Field Operations, competition finalists

GANTRY PLAZA STATE PARK

NEW YORK







COMBINATION OF HISTORY, FUN, LEARNING

KNIT INTO NEARBY NEIGHBORHOOD







BATTERY

PARK

NEW YORK

GOVERNOR'S ISLAND

NEW YORK

SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGIES

INTERACTIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT









FIELDNOTES + FEEDBACK OUR IDEAS MOVING FORWARD

MOST FREQUENT COMMENTS:



MOST FREQUENT COMMENT:

"INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING"

WE HEARD THIS COMMENT DIRECTLY & INDIRECTLY. SAMPLE STATEMENTS FROM FIELDNOTES:

Community plays a role in programming through an advisory council

Neighborhood involvement is key to sustainability

Public helps define the parks activity

Look around the community and see what activities need space

Cultivate local partnerships

And more



PHILADELPHIA TOP TAKEAWAYS

- Direct public access to water, as close as possible!
- Experimentation with temporary spaces & programs
- Economic and social inclusiveness through spaces, programs and public involvement
- Universal appeal to all people: age, culture, gender, etc.
- Value of unique elements: hammocks, nets over water, seating options, landscape and shade

"DETROIT IS BETTER ALREADY.

THE RIVER. THE OPENESS. THE DIVERSITY.

OUR RIVER IS BEAUTIFUL."



CHICAGO TOP TAKEAWAYS

"I LIKE THE CONCEPT OF:

FREE. OPEN. DEMOCRATIC."

- Unique attractions that bring people back to the park again and again
- Continuous flow and movement, with activities for all ages
- Include basics: access to picnic tables, benches, shade, water and bathrooms
- A welcoming space for all, with access from streets, neighborhoods & parking
- Topography is desirable, but it results in some less functional areas



- Provide free space to organizations who provide free programming
- A park for all the people let the voices be heard and reflected in programming & design - youth and adults
- Importance of catering to a wide variety of recreational needs
- Ecologically resiliant design, connecting the past to the future
- Plan ahead for growth and change, and have a long-term focus











