

# ROCHESTER MN RIVERFRONT SMALL AREA PLAN

Rochester, Minnesota

July 7, 2022



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUBMITTED TO: City of Rochester  
Destination Medical Center

DATE: July 7, 2022

## COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

This Riverfront Small Area Plan is intended to be a living document that will evolve over time with the changing needs of the City of Rochester. In that spirit, the document invites comments and perspectives that will inform the City of Rochester as it implements and updates this work.

Jaymi Wilson  
Project Manager

Comments on this document may be made to:  
Ryan Yetzer  
RYetzer@rochestermn.gov

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

### STEERING COMMITTEE

Joshua Johnsen  
Catherine Malmberg  
Holly Masek  
Karli McElroy  
Mathew Miller  
Mike Nigbur  
Geno Palazzari  
Molly Patterson-Lundgren  
Jamie Rothe  
Patrick Seeb  
Cynthia Steinhauser  
Jaymi Wilson  
Ryan Yetzer

### CITY OF ROCHESTER

Kim Norton, *Mayor*  
Brooke Carlson, *Council President*  
Patrick Keane, *City Council Member, 1st Ward*  
Mark Bransford, *City Council Member, 2nd Ward*  
Nick Campion, *City Council Member, 3rd Ward*  
Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick, *City Council Member, 4th Ward*  
Shaun C. Palmer, *City Council Member, 5th Ward*  
Molly Dennis, *City Council Member, 6th Ward*  
Alison Zelms, *City Administrator*  
Aaron Parrish, *Deputy City Administrator*  
Cynthia Steinhauser, *Deputy City Administrator*

### CO-DESIGNERS

Tiffany Alexandria  
Lida Casper  
Cathy Clermont  
Edward Cohen

Shawn Fagan  
Will Forsman  
Lexis Tello  
Jennifer Winter



SUBMITTED BY:

Gamble Associates, Boston MA

Urban Design + Planning

SWA Group, Laguna Beach CA

Landscape Architecture

NEOO Partners, St. Paul MN

Economic Development + Community Engagement

OMLOOP, Boston MA

Signage + Wayfinding

## LETTER FROM THE CITY/DMC

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The late 19th and early 20th century architect and urban planner Daniel Burnham once famously stated, “Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably will not themselves be realized. Make big plans...!” Indeed, this Small Area Plan is small in title only. The initiative –which will transform two underutilized and largely car-dominated sites into remarkable riverfront destinations– is much needed as downtown Rochester continues to be an attractive destination for people from the region, state and around the world. The open space connections will grow our downtown’s trail network, link to existing public spaces and leverage their proximity to the historic commercial core. The five-and-a-half acres sites will add much needed housing and ground floor retail venues that engage the river in contemporary, productive ways.

Patrick Seeb,  
*Executive Director at  
Destination Medical Center (DMC)*

Alison Zelms,  
*City Administrator*

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Seek balance of: open space + development, new construction + historic preservation, public + private space, flood protection + river access, East + West development

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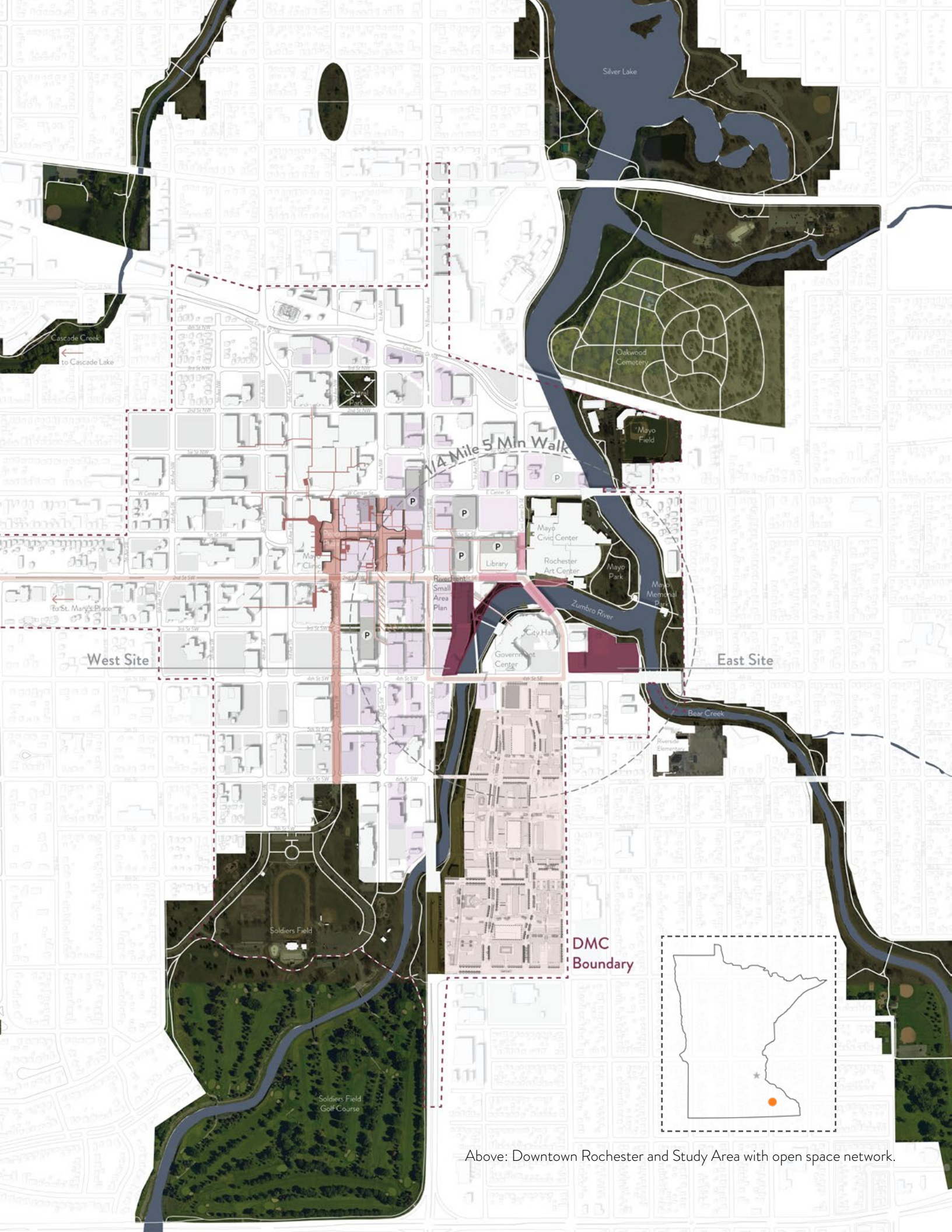
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# **THE SMALL AREA PLAN + PROCESS**

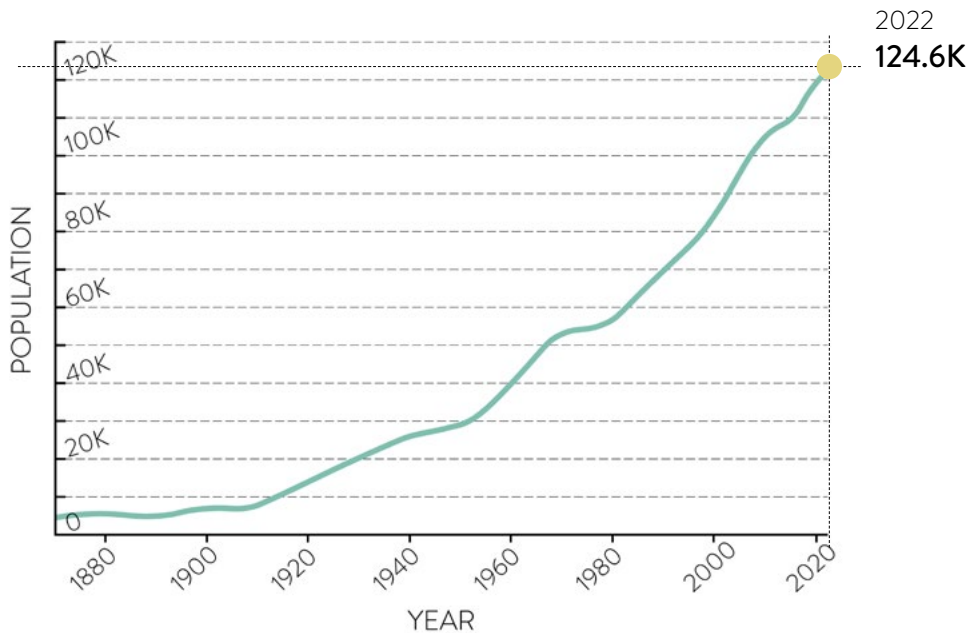


Above: Downtown Rochester and Study Area with open space network.

# THE SMALL AREA PLAN + PROCESS

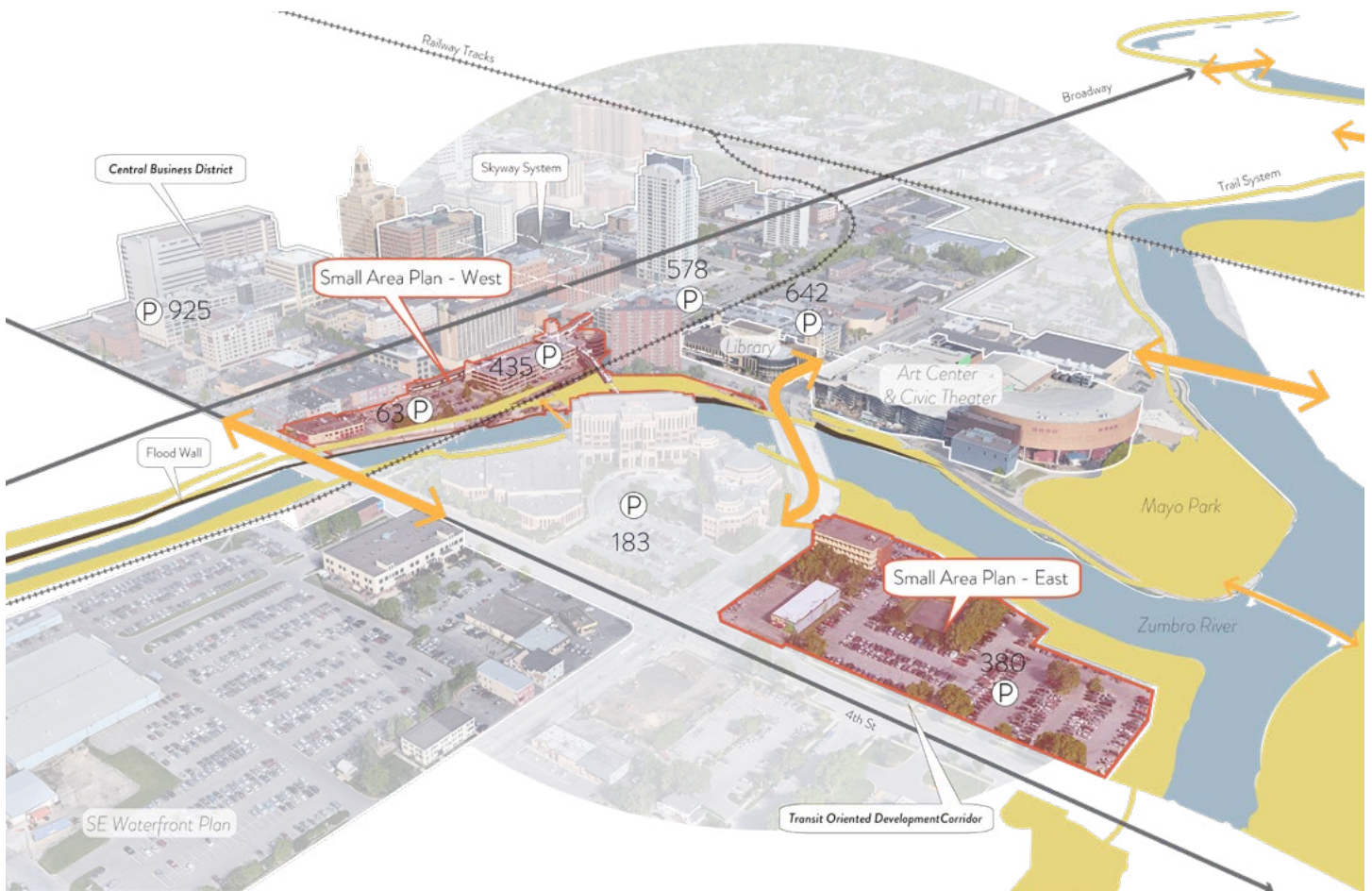
## THE PLAN

Along a waterfront the aura of a city resides, and Rochester deserves to have a riverfront as remarkable as its people and institutions. Across the country, urbanized areas are witnessing robust pockets of economic activity not seen in generations, and Rochester has had a vast amount of new development in the last decade alone. As the city and region grow, the need for safe, equitable and superlative public spaces increases as well. The unprecedented impact of the pandemic since March 2020 has amplified the need for healthy and well-programmed public spaces, enhanced connections to outdoors and greater access to trails. Focusing on this Small Area Plan, which enhances Rochester’s relationship with its downtown riverfront in compelling and economically-viable ways, is both timely and essential.



**Population Growth**  
1880 - 2022

Credits: Rochester, MN population, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/rochester-mn-population>



Above: Collage of project sites and analysis.

The Plan comprises two riverfront sites. Together, the sites equal approximately 5.5 acres along the Zumbro River. The western property is located between Second Street and Fourth Streets and between Broadway and the river. This 2.5 acre property is city-owned and contains two currently vacant buildings built in the 1930s along Fourth Street (Red Owl Grocery and Time Theater), a surface parking area (63 spaces) and a five level, city-owned parking garage which is in disrepair (435 spaces). The East site is approximately three acres in size and has just a couple lower-scale buildings. The majority of the property is used for surface parking by employees of the City County building. Both sites reside within the geography of the [Destination Medical Center \(DMC\)](#) which has witnessed millions of square feet of new development in the last decade. The city is poised for much more.

It is the city's goal with this plan to develop a community-driven process for a market-supported vision for two central waterfront properties. Their redevelopment links together several civic, cultural and governmental assets to the heart of downtown and the Mayo Clinic. Both sites are city-owned, face the river and can function as gateways in the future. Located at the intersection of the Rochester Arts and Culture District and the Main Street Mixed-Use District as outlined in the [Downtown Master Plan](#), they are also located within the Destination Medical Center (DMC) district, a public-private economic development initiative that funds selected public infrastructure within the district.

The City envisions these sites as part of a historic cultural triangle that encompasses the Library, Mayo Civic Center, Government Center and the historic shops at Third Street and Broadway. A future [Bus Rapid Transit corridor](#), currently under design, will run along Second Street and along Fourth Street adjacent to the sites. A low-volume rail line segments a portion of the site. The areas are zoned Central Development Core (CDC) and are in the Downtown Waterfront DMC sub-district.

This 5.5-acre Small Area Plan (SAP) should not be confused with the 2021 60-acre [Downtown Waterfront SE SAP](#). However, the two initiatives share similar ambitions to better connect the city with its riverfront, provide people-centric places that leverage the natural and cultural resources of downtown and support multi-modal connectivity. As stated in the City's [Comprehensive Plan](#), Rochester is committed to creating a sustainable and resilient future focused on a three-pronged strategy for environmental, economic and social equity. The Plan advances affordable living by identifying sites that can accommodate a variety of housing types, ensures economic vibrancy and growth management by directing resources to under-served areas downtown that need them and directs quality services and living to two sites whose primary role currently serves cars and not people.

The Preferred Plan articulated in this document physically and socially connects the community to the Zumbro River. It enables year-round use with easy riverfront access defined by vibrant public spaces and state-of-the-art green infrastructure. The plan removes impervious surfaces and integrates nature. The

transformation of these two sites represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity to acknowledge Rochester's past, catalyze new development and be a welcoming place to all with diverse community appeal.

Riverfronts are more than thin lines. Despite the existing trail connections along the river, for much of its length as it passes through downtown the Zumbro is barely visible. Better linkages and enhanced view corridors need to enhance the land to water interface. In addition to new public spaces that compliment and build on other recent public realm enhancements like Heart of the City and Discovery Square, new private development is needed to support, activate and better connect them to their surroundings.

The transformation of these areas represents a once in a generation opportunity for downtown to reorient itself. Despite the underwhelming character of the properties today, the western site actually resides at the city's "origin point" - the Mill Reservation. Although there is little evidence of this today, the site provided the initial economic engine for Rochester with its mills. The city has turned itself away from the riverfront, but now the site has the potential to once again be a point of entry and orientation for residents, employees and international visitors who travel great distances to Rochester for medical care, health and wellness.

A grand vision that is not tied to economic realities is destined to disappoint by remaining just a vision. Equally ineffective is a lack-luster plan that seeks to appeal to everyone and, in so doing, acquiesces to the lowest-common denominator and fails to inspire. With this in mind, this Small Area Plan has been crafted over the last eight months through a wide variety of engagement techniques. It is community-based, and brings world-class ideas and best practices to the effort. The principles that guide the site's transformation are grounded in those community conversations. The plan creates an innovative riverfront for Rochester, while acknowledging the contemporary tensions that exist about what should take place here, and for whom it is designed.

## *RIVERFRONTS ARE MORE THAN THIN LINES.*

## WEST SITE



Above: Proposed West site development.

Despite the divergent viewpoints that naturally emerged in the process, the following objectives received strong endorsement and form the basis of the plan:

- Consider both sites together as a “campus”, with greater development on the eastern site. The East site is farther from the historic downtown core and has rip-rap in lieu of a concrete seawall separating the land from the river.
- Create private sector development opportunities that can assist with offsetting the cost of a highly improved public realm and the adaptive reuse of the historic Red Owl and Time Theater buildings.
- Modify the concrete river channel wall by stepping it back to create a gradual transition of terraced public spaces from the street elevation to the river’s



Left: Aerial image of West site, courtesy of Fagan Studios.



Above: Proposed East site development.

edge and increasing the flood capacity at the bend of the river.

- Physically and visually extend Third Street into the western site as a space for small-scale commercial activity, activating the ground plane and creating an entry point into the site. Similarly, on the East site, extend 4th Avenue SE visually into the property to create an open space corridor that connects the community to the river.
- Ensure that the trail networks along the river are linked and connected into downtown for people of all abilities and that the project's transformation better leverage the presence of the Skyway and remove barriers.
- Increase housing opportunities with new development that assists with the city's goal of more affordable housing and a wider range of housing types.



Right: Aerial image of East site, courtesy of Fagan Studios.

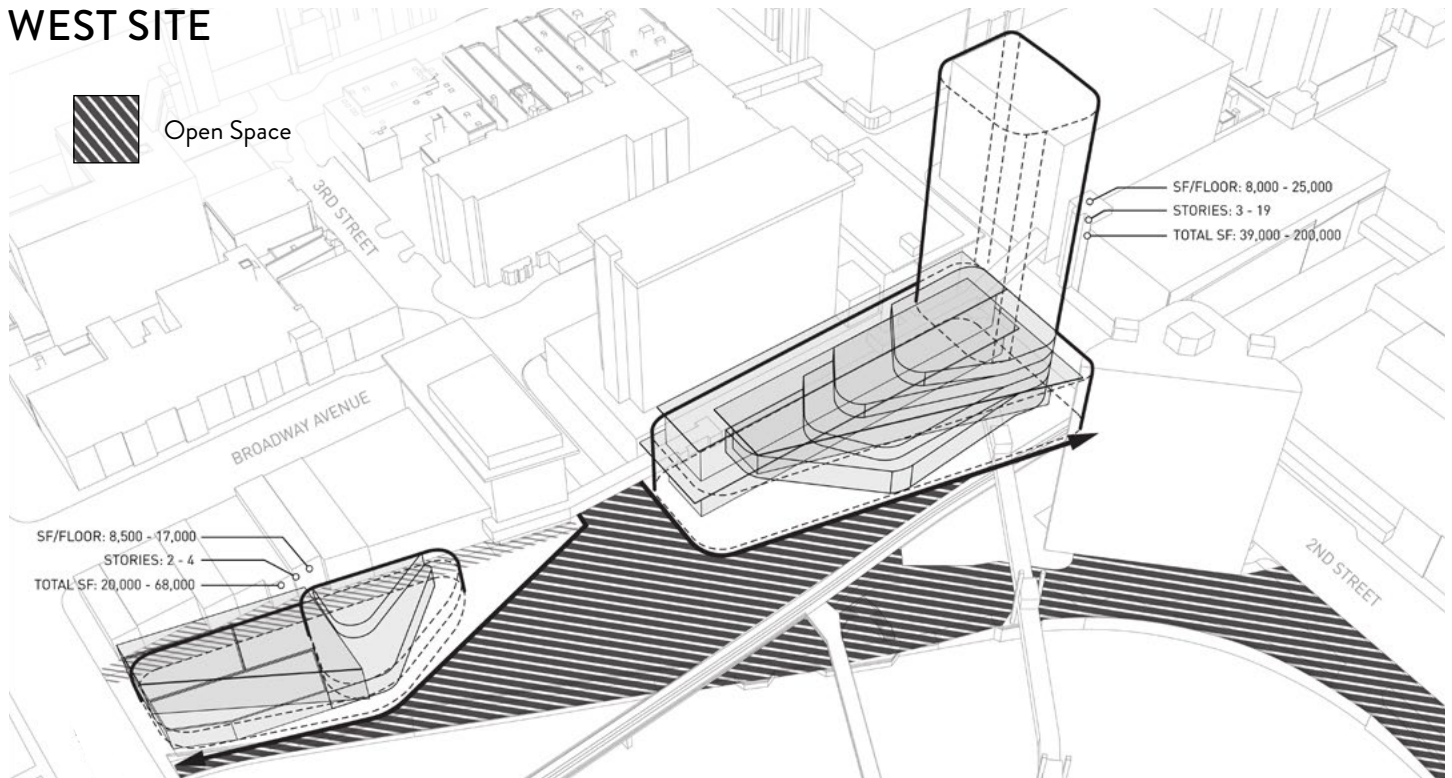
## *ROCHESTER DESERVES TO HAVE A RIVERFRONT AS REMARKABLE AS ITS PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS.*

Rochester's [Comprehensive Plan](#) provides a solid foundation for this Small Area Plan. Adopted in 2018, it serves as a holistic vision for the city's future and establishes broad goals and objectives across municipal departments. In this way, when planning for smaller geographies such as these two riverfront sites takes place, there is already a policy framework to guide development decisions. This Small Area Plan relates directly to the Comprehensive Plan in that it incorporates the Core Principles articulated in that document:

- Integrating land use and transportation.
- Emphasizing fiscal sustainability.
- Expanding housing diversity.
- Enhancing the integrity of existing neighborhoods.
- Improving community connectivity.
- Championing social equity and environmental justice.
- Maintaining a commitment to health, wellness and the environment.

A Small Area Plan develops strategies for preserving or improving a specific part of the city and addresses land use, zoning, transportation, economic development, housing and aesthetics. It does not acquire private property. This endeavor should not be confused with the [Downtown Waterfront SE Small Area Plan](#), which looked at the redevelopment of over 60 acres of land directly to the south of this site (also known as the AMPI Site) and adjacent to the Sunnyside and Slattery Park neighborhoods (Perkins&Will, 2021).

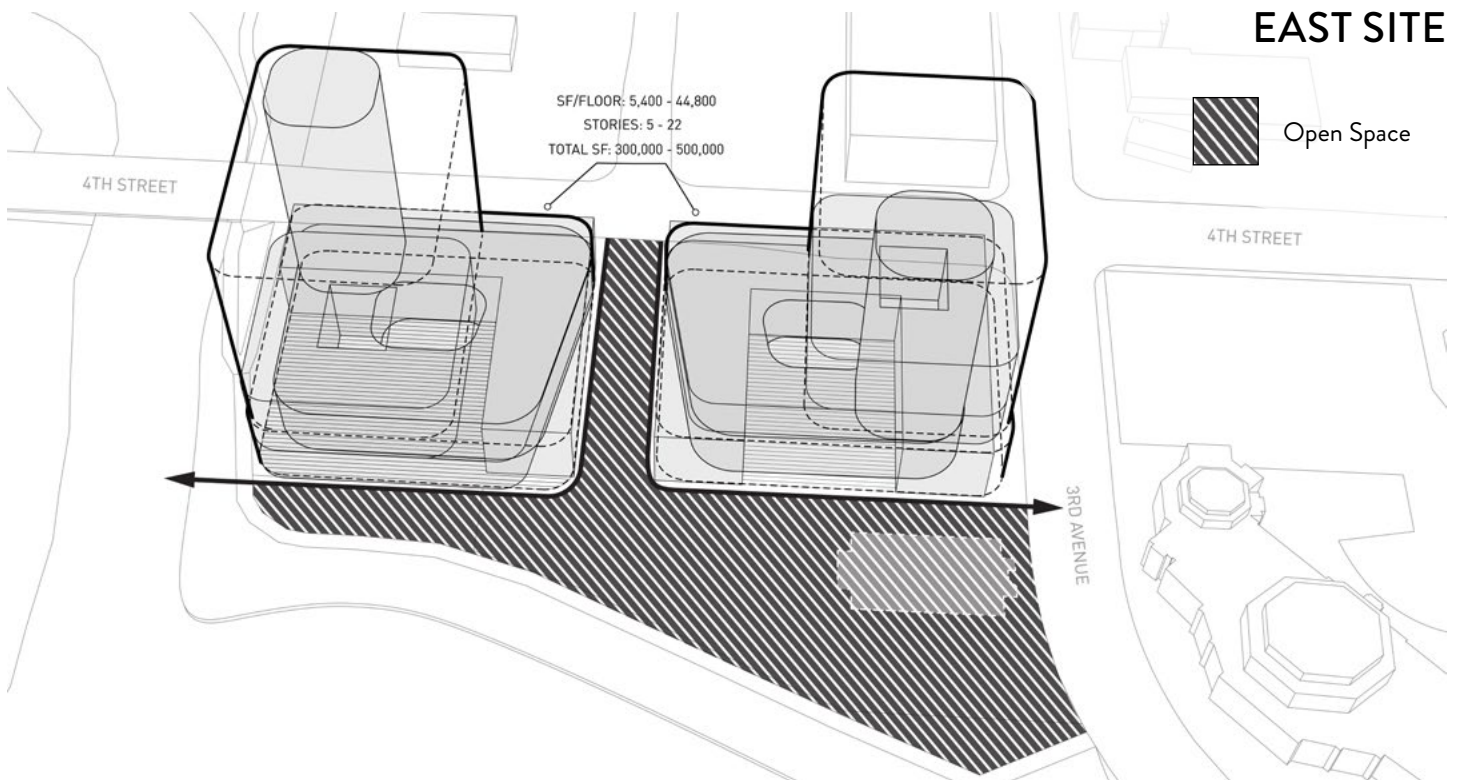
## WEST SITE



Above: Diagram showing development ranges and open space on West site.

## THE PREFERRED PLAN AT A GLANCE

- Enhanced River Trail connections.
- 2.5 acres new passive and active open space.
- 500,000-700,000 sf of new mixed-use development on multiple sites.
- Ground floor, small-scale, commercial space for local, entrepreneurial activities and market space.
- Enhanced relationship to historic Broadway buildings.
- Increased tree canopy and native plantings.
- Direct connection into the future district power grid.

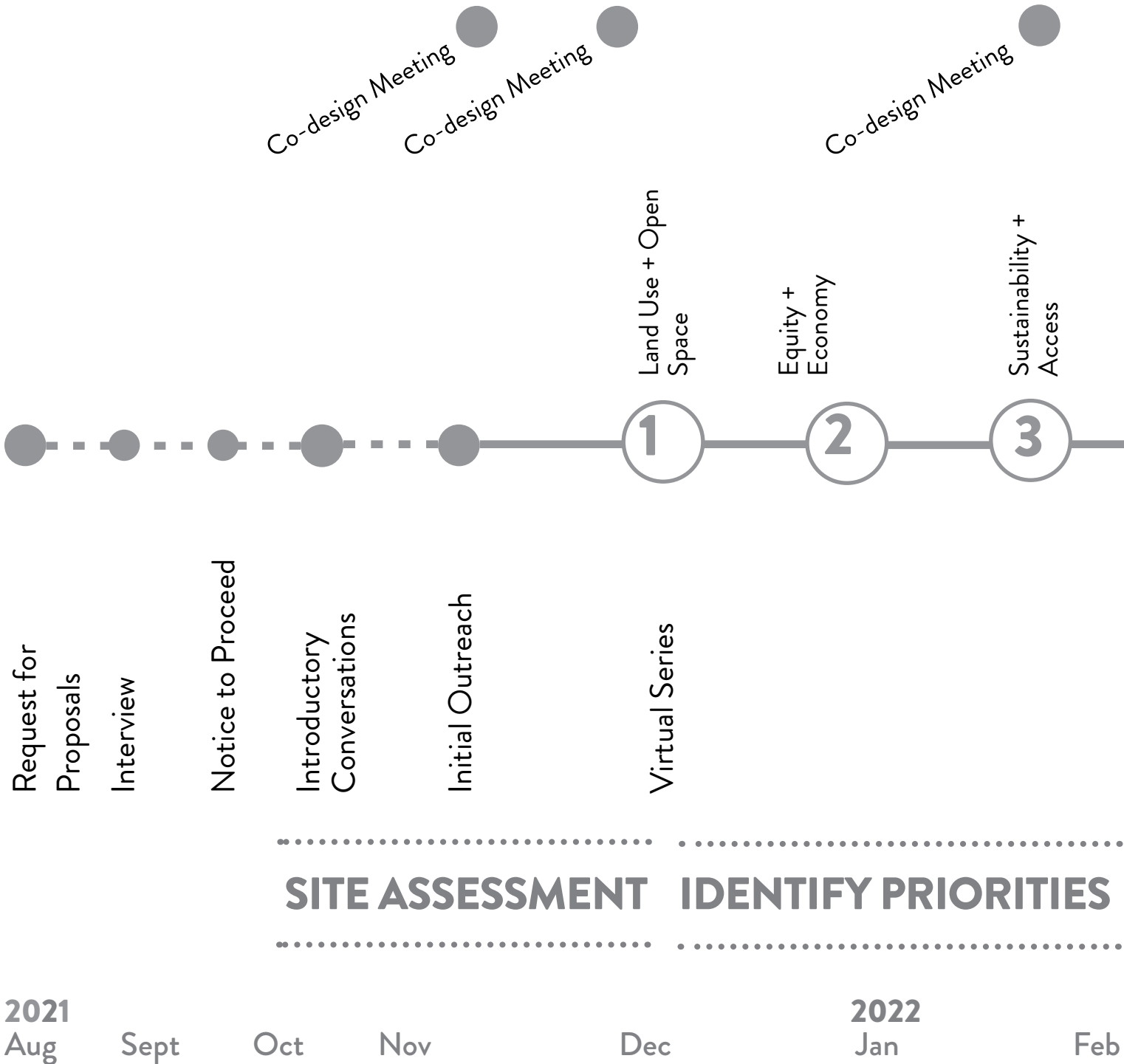


Above: Diagram showing development ranges and open space on East site.

The Preferred Plan establishes a new “front door” for the city. It reduces impervious pavement by one third, increases tree canopy five-fold and reflects the diverse flora and fauna of the watershed and region. The public spaces that are created through the plan build on the diversity of the city and create new opportunities for partnerships to emerge. What are currently back doors become new entry points for existing buildings, overlooking the river in a variety of hard and soft spaces and providing greater opportunities for active recreation.

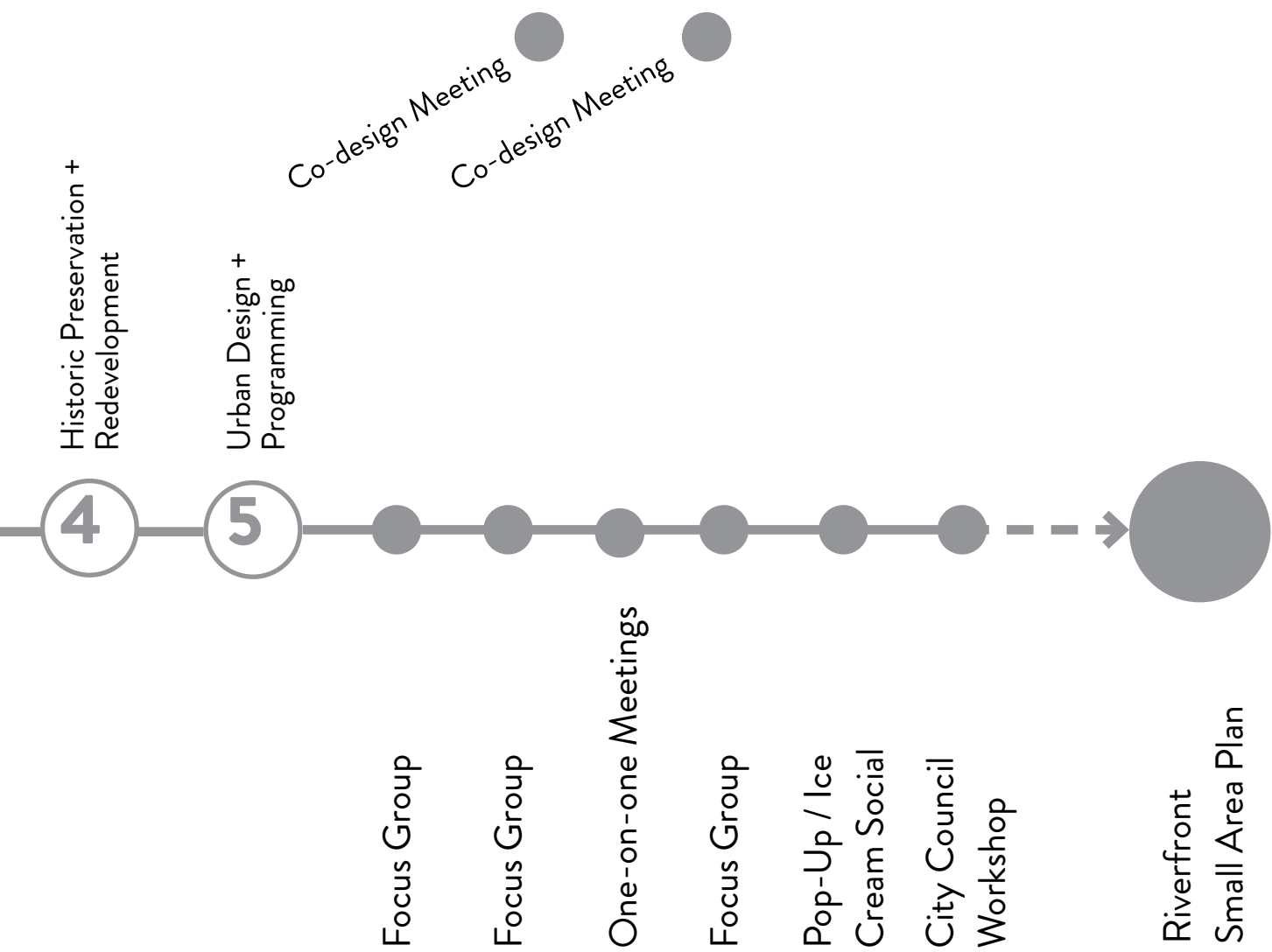
This Vision will take time to emerge; it will not emerge in a year, or even three. Both sites have constraints which will require greater study, evaluation and assessment. Nevertheless, interim site activation can and will take place that shifts people’s perceptions about what is possible here, what the significance of these sites mean in the city’s evolution and how new activities alter Rochester’s relationship with the Zumbro River for all people.

# PROJECT SCHEDULE



.....  
**SITE ASSESSMENT IDENTIFY PRIORITIES**  
 .....

2021 Aug Sept Oct Nov Dec 2022 Jan Feb



**+ DESIGN MENU OF OPTIONS ENVISION TOGETHER**

Mar

Apr

May

Jun



Left: Walking Tour of West Site with neighbors and stakeholders, November 2021.



Left: Focus group with residents of Fontaine Towers (neighboring the West Site), March 2022.



Left: Riverfront Biking Tour with RDA, December 2021.



Left: Meeting with teachers at Riverside Elementary, March 2022.

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## PROCESS + ENGAGEMENT

The City of Rochester has been undergoing tremendous growth. The new development is naturally championed by many as it brings jobs, housing and economic activity to the city and region. At the same time, the rapid growth has periodically been a source of concern for those who feel the city is changing too quickly. Navigating the tension around change is not unusual, and there have been many planning efforts working towards consensus and establishing a vision for the future. The new development has not occurred in a vacuum. On the contrary, the City's [Comprehensive Plan](#), the [DMC Development Plan](#) and [Design Guidelines](#), the [Parks and Recreation System Plan](#) and many Area Plans and Market Studies have laid the ground work for the city's evolution. This Small Area Plan is a by-product of those efforts. The prior plans and initiatives have shaped the city's form and channeled its priorities. In short, planning matters!

However, against this backdrop - where so many things are happening and there are multiple conversations taking place simultaneously - one must guard against planning fatigue. There is only so much time and so many resources. People's time is limited and there are amplified political and cultural debates taking place nationally that have, unfortunately, polarized views. Therefore, community engagement efforts must maximize the time that people do have and channel it towards productive ends. Effective engagement today means going where people are versus simply assuming they can come to you. With this in mind, the team utilized a wide variety of engagement techniques to elicit feedback and provide a safe and supportive environment for public participation.

EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT TODAY MEANS GOING WHERE PEOPLE ARE VERSUS SIMPLY ASSUMING THEY CAN COME TO YOU.

**400+**  
PARTICIPANTS

**12** FOCUS  
GROUPS

**7** LISTENING  
SESSIONS

**20+**  
PRESENTATIONS

ICE CREAM  
**SOCIAL**

**345+**  
COMMENTS

**5** PUBLIC  
MEETINGS

INTERACTIVE  
**WEBSITE**

SIGNAGE IN  
ENGLISH,  
SPANISH,  
SOMALI,  
**ARABIC**

**2** MEDIA  
INTERVIEWS

**50+**  
COORDINATION  
MEETINGS

**4** SITE  
WALK-THROUGHS

**5** SITE  
VISITS

Above: Community Engagement Data, November 2021 to June 2022.



Above: Downtown walking tour with RDA and community stakeholders, November 2021.

## SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

The project's reconnaissance phase began in November 2021 with a canvassing of prior efforts and many in-person meetings. The meetings took place in coffee shops, downtown business offices, City Hall and along the riverfront itself. From these initial conversations, a number of competing tensions could be observed:

- What is the appropriate ratio of development to open space?
- In what ways can new development and programming reflect the increasing diversity of the city and region?
- How can one safeguard downtown from flooding while also enhancing the visual and physical connections to the Zumbro River?
- How can new riverfront spaces complement other public realm investments like Heart of the City, Discovery Walk and Mayo Park?
- Is it possible to both preserve (or uncover) some aspect of the city's history while re-imagining the sites in new, contemporary ways?
- Can new and old harmoniously coexist?

سلسلة  
المشاركات  
المجتمعية  
الإفتراسية



استخدمهم الأراضي + المساحات المصنوعة  
2023، فبراير 8-6 مساءً

الإضاف + الإضاف  
تاريخ: فبراير 17، 6 مساءً

الإستدعاء + المصادق  
التاريخ: مارس 1، 6 مساءً

الحفظ التاريخي + إعادة التطوير  
التاريخ: مارس 10، 6 مساءً

التصميم الحضري + الترميم  
التاريخ: مارس 24، 6 مساءً

مناقشة 480 دقيقة من الساعة 6 مساءً إلى 7:30 مساءً  
7880son@rochester.gov

جدول منطقة ريفرفرونت العسيرة في روجستر

محدثات  
ريفرفرونت

2/8  
2/17  
3/1  
3/10  
3/24

روجرست DMCC  
مركز مدينة روجستر

**Temas de conversación:**

- ¿Cómo se puede mejorar la conectividad de esta área con otros servicios en downtown Rochester?
- ¿Cómo determinar un equilibrio adecuado de desarrollo urbano y espacio público.
- ¿Qué actividades te gustaría que ocurrieran aquí?

CONÉCTATE: 8 FEB, 6PM

2/17 - SESSION 2

# EQUITY + ECONOMY

Downtown Rochester is rapidly changing, with a good deal of new development that includes multifamily housing, institutional expansion and increased investment in public space. New development should leverage what is already occurring and not siphon away activity from other locations. This session looks at the market dynamics and probes how new growth downtown and along the river advances a just, fair and equitable city.

**Rochester's Downtown Riverfront is poised for transformation.**

Come share your thoughts and ideas!

LINK: [riverfrontsap.com](http://riverfrontsap.com)

MUUQAALKA  
TAXANAHA  
KA QAYBGELINTA  
BULSHADA



Website URL:  
riverfrontsap.com

Bartamaha Magaalada Rochester ee\*  
Riverfront\* waxay diyaar u tahay isbeddel.  
Kooxda ka socotay magaalada ee\* Bartamaha Magaalada  
looga faa'iidaynta hantida gaarka ah ee Bartamaha Magaalada  
si loo kordhiyo xidhiidhka gaarka ah ee qaybta ee\* oo loo  
yeesho Webiga "2nd Street".

Laga bilaabo Febraayo 8, 2023 saacadu markay tahay  
6pm. Isbeddelka taxanaha ee\* ayaa muhiim u ah  
la isbeddelka.

Taxanaha magaalada ee\* ayaa muhiim u ah  
dhaqanka dawladda hore oo ku saabsan horumarinta bar-tamada  
magaalada Rochester ee\* dhaqanka gaarka ah ee Webiga Doodaha  
waxay si gaar ah diiradda u saariyaan dagaal u dhexeeya Waddada  
"Broadway Avenue" iyo "2nd Street" iyo "4th Street".

QORSHADA AAGGA YAR EE WEBIGA HORTIISA EE ROCHESTER

# WEBIGA HORTIISA

## DOODAHA

2/8 Isticmaalka dhulka + meel bannaan  
Talaado, Febraayo 8, 6pm

2/17 Siinaanta + Dhaqaalaha  
Khamiis, Febraayo 11, 6pm

3/1 Joogtaynta + Heitaanka  
Talaado, Maarso 1, 6pm

3/10 Isaalinta Taariikhiga ah + Dib-u-kobacinta  
Khamiis, Maarso 10, 6pm

3/24 Maqshadynta Magaaloyinka +  
Barooyinka  
Khamiis, Maarso 24, 6pm

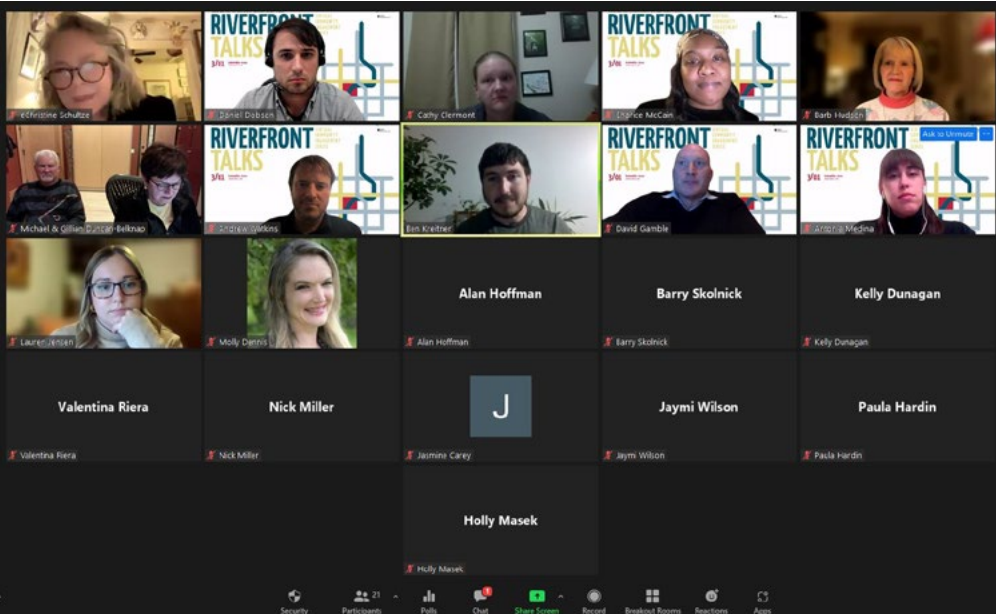
8:00pm - 7:30pm  
Magalooyinka ee\* [www.rochester.gov](http://www.rochester.gov)

ROCHESTER DMCC  
MAGALOOWADA ROCHESTER

Above: Posters and media advertising the Riverfront Talks in four languages: Arabic, Spanish, Somali, and English (clockwise from the top) for printing and social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram).

# RIVERFRONT TALKS SERIES

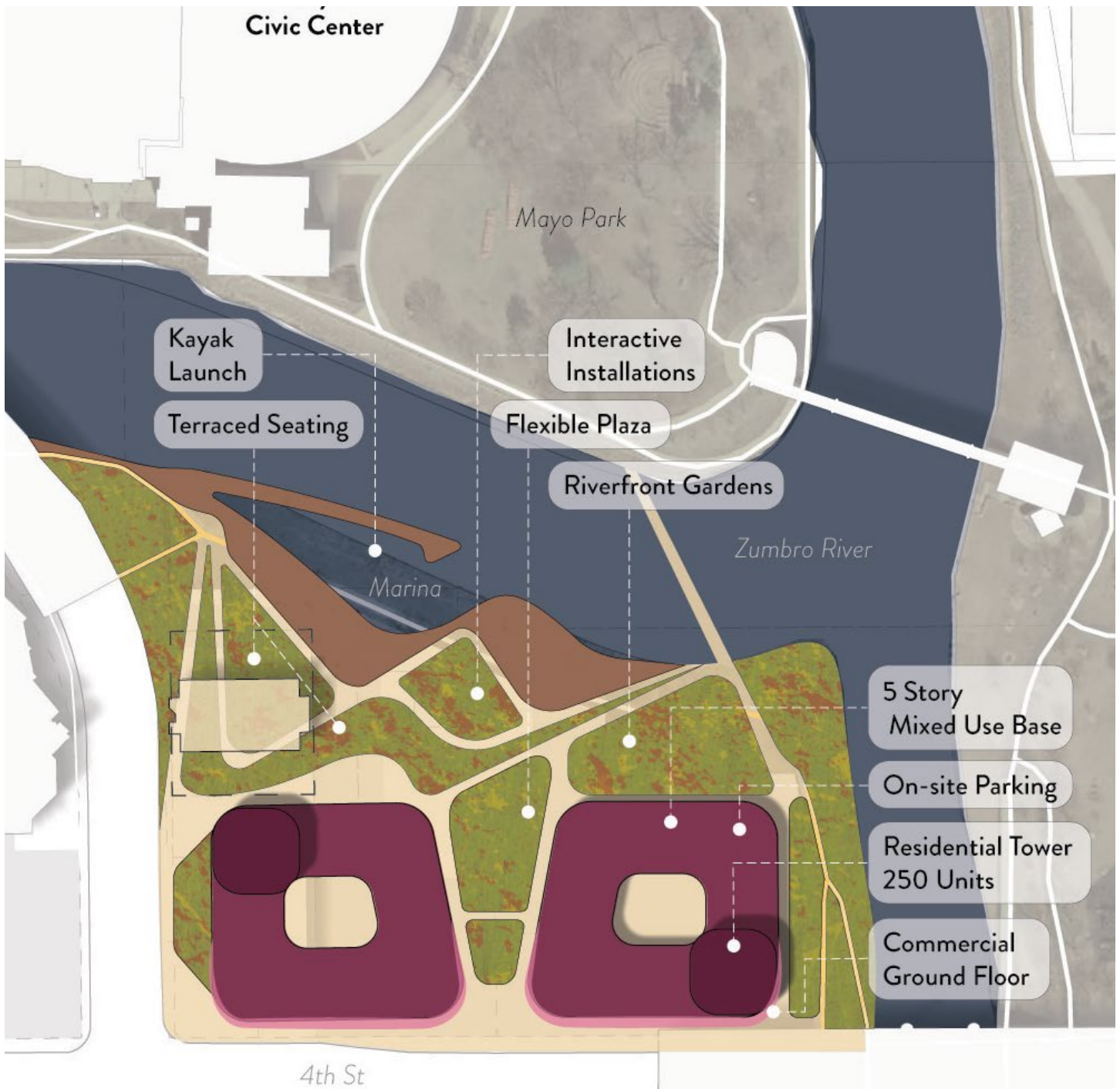
In light of these tensions, the team cultivated a series of community conversations. The five-part series was thematically-based in order to focus the conversations around specific topics. The events were held virtually, in part, because of the rapid increase of COVID-19 variant infections that limited the possibility for in-person gathering. Dubbed “[Riverfront Talks](#)”, the virtual conversations took place in February and March 2022. The two-hour sessions were held in rapid succession to build momentum over the two-month period and establish planning principles for the two sites. Conversations were comprised of a brief overview of the topic, survey questions for participants, a short, thematic presentation, interactive breakout rooms and report-backs by participants. Riverfront Talk posters were printed in four languages and distributed around downtown harnessing the networks of the Rochester Downtown Alliance, the City and Destination Medical Center.



Above: Screenshot of Virtual Riverfront Talks Session.

# PREFERRED PLAN





Towards the end of the Riverfront Talk series (as the viability to convene in person became more possible), the virtual series transitioned to an in-person event. Held at the Chateau Theater downtown, participants were presented with the planning principles established over the course of the series and shown a range of options for the East and West sites based on those principles. From that meeting a Preferred Plan emerged.

In addition to this virtual series, the team utilized many other modes of engagement, including:



**Project Website:** The project website for the Rochester SAP served as a landing page for virtual session and event registration the duration of the project. Event fliers, Power Point presentations, zoom recordings and event photos were shared in order to maintain project transparency, address learning and accessibility needs and support the overall community vision for the project site. Interaction on the project website served as a broadly recognized place to receive up-to-date information on the Small Area Plan. More information about the project can be found at [www.riverfrontsap.com](http://www.riverfrontsap.com).

**Facebook Page/Emails List Serve:** Distributed to over 200 participants and contacts maintained through the course of the effort. The team maintained the listserv regularly, updated events and provided other opportunities to engage throughout the process.

**Event Postcards:** Distribution through traditional mail sent to residents in a one mile radius of the site, approximately 1,100 addresses. Rochester businesses received print promotional materials as well as Riverside Elementary School, Fontaine Towers, Rochester Public Library, 125 Live, Rochester Public Transit and other community organizations. They were the major contributors in distribution of materials.

**Neighborhood Canvassing:** Targeted engagement with residents Downtown and in Eastside and Slatterly neighborhoods. The team connected with local residents at bus stops, visited local businesses, including BIPOC owned businesses and other local destinations.

**Ice Cream Social and Walking Tour:** The Walking Tour and Ice Cream Social site activation goals included familiarizing stakeholders to the project site and urban design principles, collecting feedback and input on the preferred concept,

collecting feedback and input on strategies for interim activation and identifying potential contacts for future engagement and planning processes. The goals were achieved through a successful event that hosted community members and stakeholders that participated in this project from the start. The on-site activation included an interactive session of visual art with NEOO Artist-in-residence Tyler Jackson, chalk art, coffee and food truck provided by local vendors, on both the East and West sites.

It can be difficult to summarize community feedback with so many different opportunities for engagement and so many different perspectives. Nevertheless, the following themes did emerge:

- Incorporate community art and color to the riverfront
- Provide accessibility for seniors and differently-abled community members
- Create an environment that brings residents and visitors of Rochester back again and again

As a result of the Riverfront Talks, smaller participant meetings, walking site tours and community input on the website, the following design and planning principles were formulated:

1. Creating Connections
2. Supporting Local Businesses
3. Ensuring Universal Access
4. Achieving Visionary Transformation
5. Expanding Economic Development

These community-based principles formed the basis for the Small Area Plan and are the structure by which the remainder of this document is organized.

Right: Artist Tyler Jackson at Ice Cream Social event, May 2022. Courtesy of NEOO Partners.



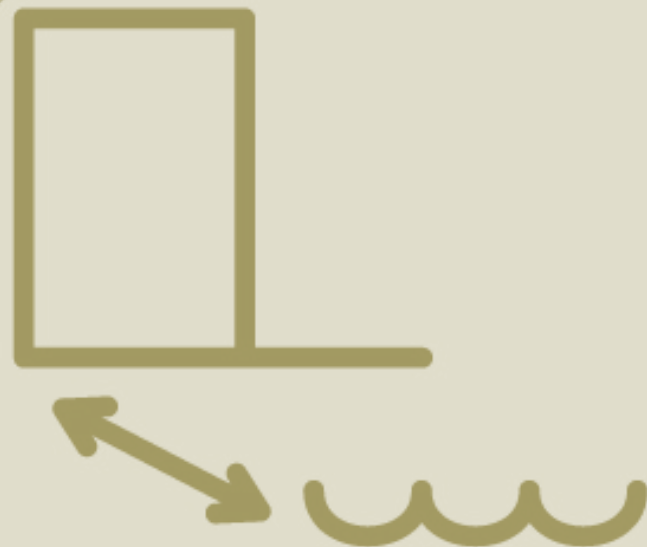


# 1

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## PRINCIPLE 1: CREATING CONNECTIONS

Leverage the riverfront as a destination and natural corridor that better connects the trail system to downtown



## PRINCIPLE 1: CREATING CONNECTIONS

**Leverage the riverfront as a destination and natural corridor that better connects the trail system to downtown**

### THE VISION

The West Site of the Small Area Plan resides at Rochester's "origin point." The Mill Reservation - located between Broadway, Second Street, Fourth Street and the Zumbro River - is where the city began. Growth emanated outward from this strategic location along the banks of the river. While historically the site was one of active production and exchange, today the two-and-a-half-acre site is used for parking. The same is true of the three-acre East Site which is covered in asphalt and gravel. Combined, the two sites are over 90% impervious surfaces.

However, Rochester is blessed with recreational trails along the river and adjacent to the Study Areas. While the foundations of the system are there, the overall network lacks connectivity.

*IMAGINE AN ACCESSIBLE WATER'S EDGE.*



Gamble Associates.



Fort Wayne Riverfront, HOCH Associates.

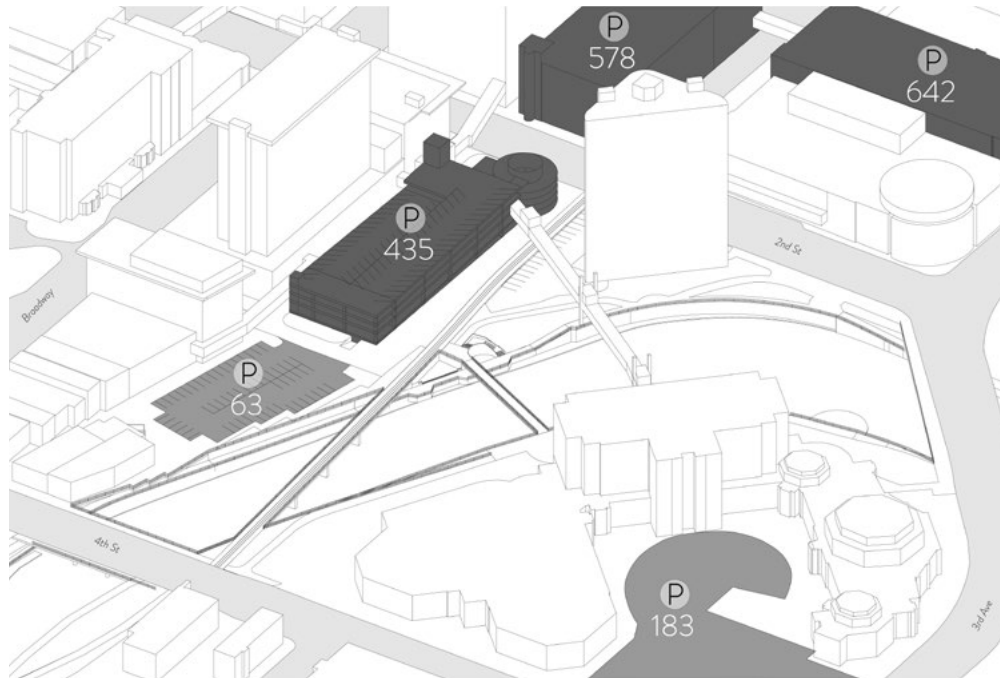


Above: Perspective on West site showing accessible pathways with public art that expand the trail network.

This Small Area Plan improves physical health and wellness by connecting pedestrian and bike networks together and augmenting these with new pathways into the downtown. The circulation system for the two sites facilitate new forms of mobility for people of all abilities and reconnects the downtown to the river and the regional open space system.

A goal of reinvesting along the river is to establish seamless transitions between trail amenities and the private properties adjoining them. With new investment in the public realm, redevelopment sites adjacent to them will emerge. Recreation is a catalyst for economic development and these two sites leverage their relationships along the river to bring people into the grid of the city.

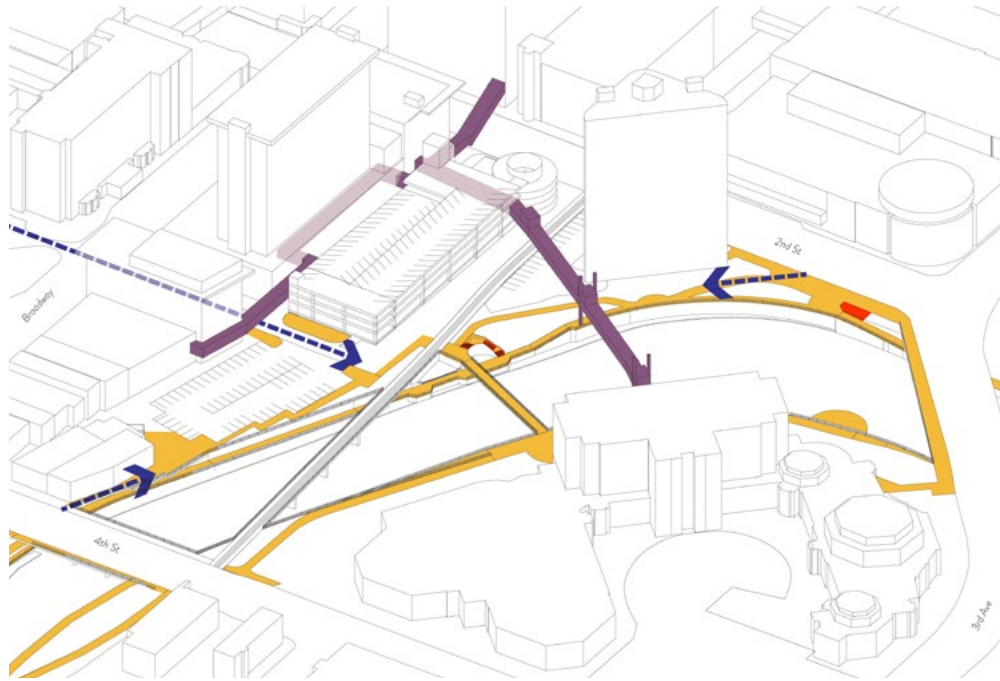
The [Rochester Area Bicycle Master Plan's](#) vision is to “support the gradual transformation of the City of Rochester into a community where citizens can easily integrate cycling into their daily lives and all bicyclists enjoy a welcoming environment; riding safely, efficiently and conveniently within the City of Rochester year-round.” The East and West sites of this Small Area Plan offer



Above: Parking count of the site and surrounding areas on the West Site.

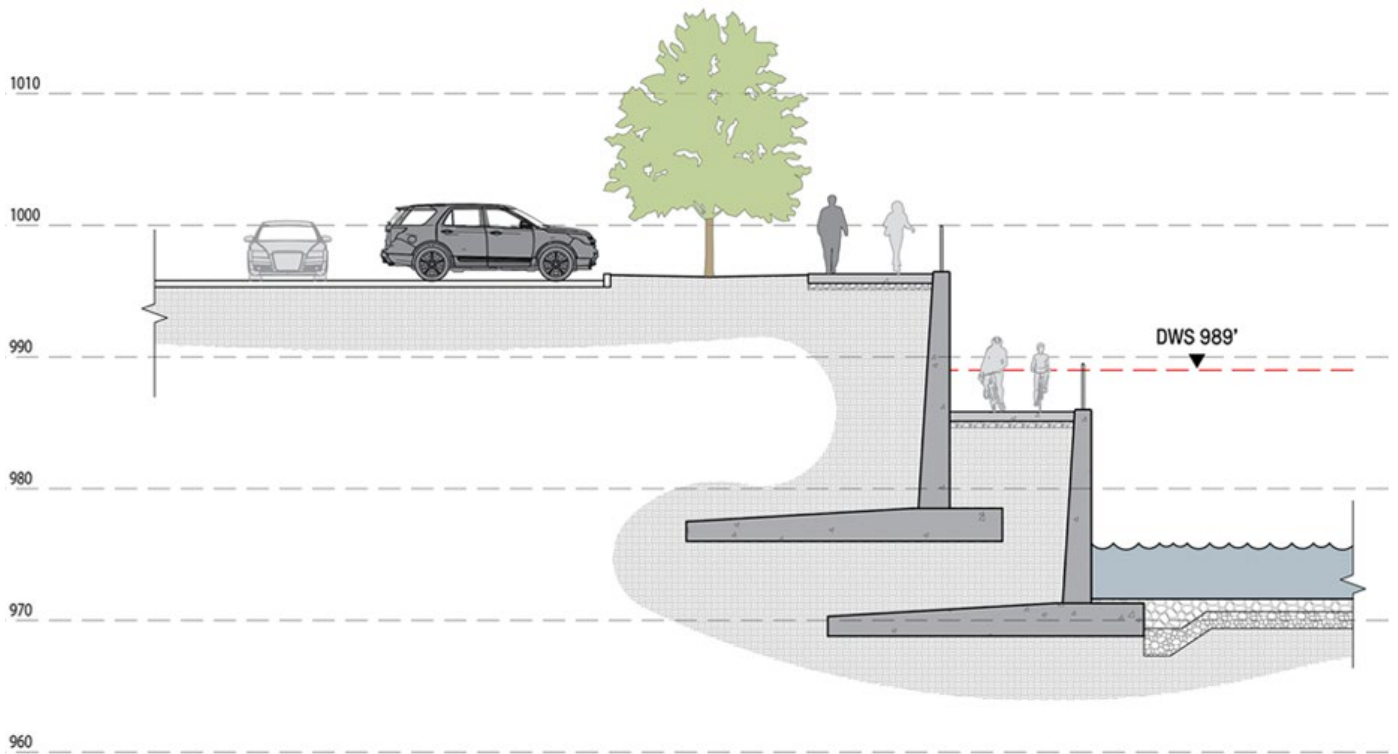
exciting opportunities to better connect the trail network. With modifications to the river channel wall on the west, and gentle terracing of the rip-rap on the east, the sloping trail links the waterfront with the streets that border the Zumbro River. These pathways augment other modes of connectivity with terraced seating and river overlooks that provide enhanced access. Parks and trails encourage healthy, happy, active lifestyles by providing a venue for physical activity ([Rochester Parks and Recreation System Plan](#)).

Another goal of this Small Area Plan is to add connections where none currently exist and to bolster the paths and corridors that are there now. For example, while the Skyway connects the City County Building to the parking garage and across Second Street the pathway is compromised. One must traverse a series of steps along the route or take an elevator one half level down. The Skyway Bridge across Second Street then to the Rochester Public Library has a slope that is difficult to traverse for those with a disability. Another example of a



Above: Pathways at a variety of levels exist on the sites but many are not ADA compliant and they do not connect into a network.

compromised access point is adjacent to the Time Theater building where the deck is narrow and uninviting. The proposed plan anticipates a future Bus Rapid transit station along Second Street (near Fontaine Towers), an extension of Third Street into the site from the west and a more gracious entry point from the south on Fourth Street. (Improved connections are shown in blue dashed lines in the graphic above). The River Channel wall itself, while providing protection, itself is a barrier to connectivity.

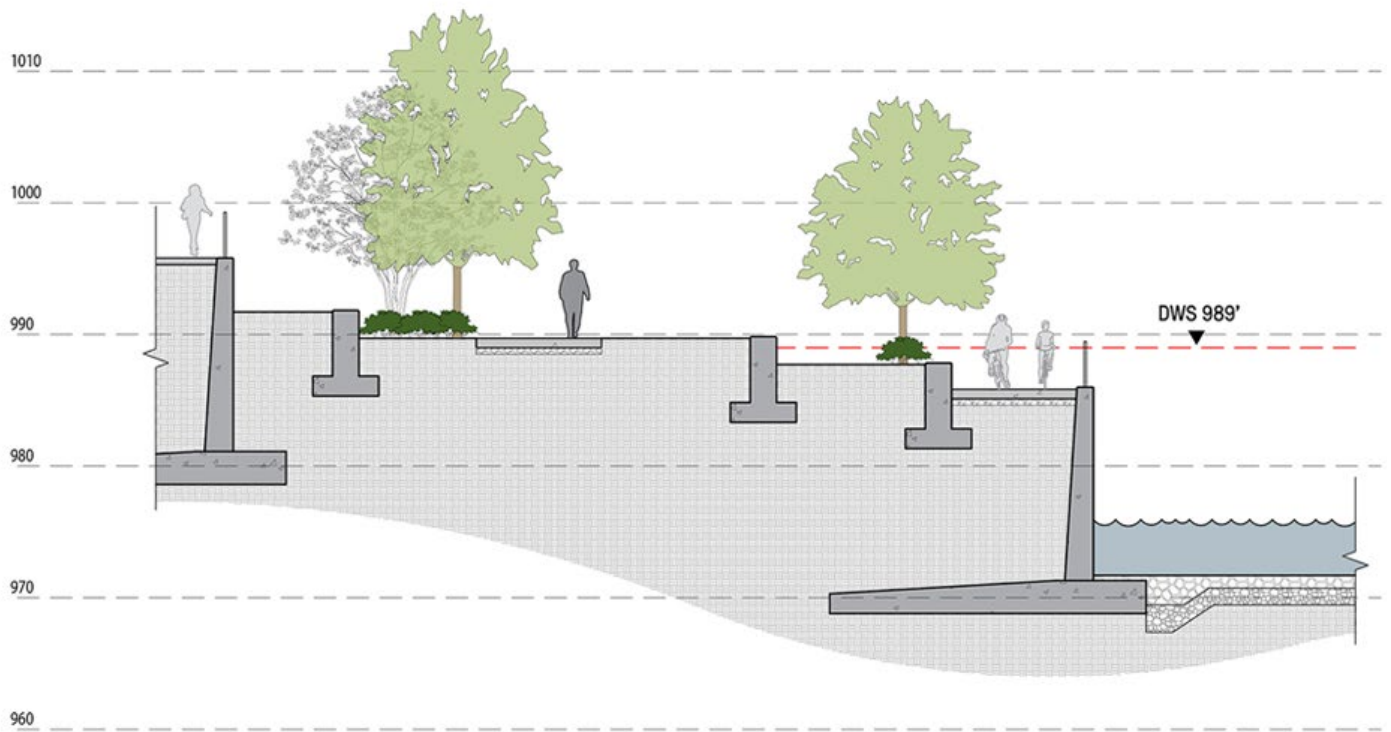


Above: Existing condition of river channel retaining wall.

## EXISTING CONDITION

The broader the overlap between land and water the more successfully a city will capture the benefits of its riverfront assets. Currently, the two sites have very different interfaces with the Zumbro River. One East site, rip rap defines the water's edge while the West site has a harder engineered condition. The current channel wall system on the West is composed of an upper and lower concrete wall with a trail path at the back of each wall. For a significant portion of the path the lower trail is immediately adjacent to the upper wall. Moments of respite along the lower trail are provided at the Anne Scott Plummer mural and the waterfall feature that is an outlet for the Mayo Clinic Franklin Heating Station. The upper wall transitions to a reinforced grassy slope to the north.

***FLOOD PROTECTION AND INCREASED  
WATER ACCESS NEED NOT ALWAYS BE AT  
ODDS WITH ONE ANOTHER.***



Above: Proposed stepping back of river channel retaining wall and expanded flood retention area.

## PROPOSAL

Flood protection and increased water access need not always be at odds with one another. Based on initial discussions with the US Army Corp of Engineers, the re-envisioning of the walls is a possibility, provided the original goals of the 1994 flood control project are still achieved and navigation of the Zumbro River is not impeded. This plan proposes the removal/relocation of the upper wall and, in its place, the construction of a series of reinforced terraces that lead down from the street level to the lower wall. This modification to the channel creates programmable areas at the riverfront, allows for improved visibility of the river and better connects the riverfront trail to downtown circulation network. In addition, in the event of a flood, this configuration allows for a greater volume of water to be accommodated on site when compared to the current condition. The flood wall mural will be relocated to another vertical surface along the riverfront.

Improved connectivity is one of the primary goals in Rochester’s 2018 [Comprehensive Plan](#) and the Downtown Waterfront - as one of the DMC Area Sub-Districts in the [DMC Development Plan](#) - envisioned the creation of a “year-round destination for residents and visitors alike.” Linking these sites to the other neighborhood sub-districts is essential in fostering a pedestrian-oriented sequence of public spaces and forming a downtown network. With improved connections along the city streets in the form of enhanced tree canopy, pedestrian amenities and streetscape enhancements, the public spaces envisioned as part of the East and West site’s transformations will complement other recently improved public spaces like Heart of the City and Discovery Square. With increased emphasis on “micro-mobility” with bike share programs and scooters, this Small Area Plan with its sinuous pathways and gentle sloping ramps will be better connected with the 60-acre [Downtown Waterfront SE Small Area Plan](#) nearby which was advanced and adopted in 2021.

## NEXT STEPS

- Evaluate opportunities to create a new Second Street Skyway bridge that is ADA compliant and better links the Indigo Hotel, Associated Bank, Library and City Hall/Government Center.
- Collaborate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate options to relocate the existing concrete river channel wall with a series of stepped terraces.
- Study methods to extend Skyway to open space on West site and better connect across Second Street.
- Evaluate viability for relocating, or recreating, the Anne Scott Plummer mural with its elastomeric mold.

## BEST PRACTICES - PRECEDENTS



### BUFFALO BAYOU

Houston, TX

Buffalo Bayou Park reveals the story of how a derelict drainage basin hidden beneath a tangle of highway infrastructure was transformed into a treasured parkland in the heart of Houston, Texas. Now, this thoroughly renovated, 160-acre public space deploys a vigorous agenda of urban ecological services and improved pedestrian accessibility, with four new bridges connecting surrounding neighborhoods. It stands as a model of resilience, having been tested severely by Hurricane Harvey and emerging unscathed.

The design utilizes channel stabilization techniques, enhancing the bayou's natural meanders and offering increased resiliency against floodwaters while preserving the beauty of this culturally significant waterway. The planting strategy reduced mowed turf by half, replacing it with riparian woodlands and naturalized meadows featuring native species. This further stabilizes the landscape, provides habitat and uses Texan species to return a sense of place to the city. All lighting, plantings and walkways are designed to withstand the natural, periodic flooding of the bayou. The project provides continuous pedestrian and bike trails, public art and special maintenance and safety provisions to address flooding.

Landscape Architect: SWA Group

Above: Photo courtesy of Tom Fox, SWA.



# DOWNTOWN

Rochester, Minnesota

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# 2

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## PRINCIPLE 2: SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Support local, diverse businesses and programming that grow entrepreneurial endeavors



Opposite page: Band playing in downtown alley.  
Corrie Strommen, courtesy of Rochester Downtown  
Alliance.

## PRINCIPLE 2: SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

**Support local, diverse businesses and programming that grow entrepreneurial endeavors**

### THE VISION

The Mayo Clinic is an international health care destination for people from across the globe. As the largest economic engine in the state, the aura of the institution is immense. In downtown Rochester, the clinic constitutes the majority of high-density development pressure. It continues to stimulate new investment as health care, research, education and entrepreneurial activities expand within the framework of the Destination Medical Center. What if the transformation of these two riverfront sites capitalized on institutional growth while also providing sustainable economic development opportunities that were hyper-local and leveraged the city's increasing diversity? The success of the Rochester Night Market demonstrates that there is demand for small-scale economic development as a complement to the large-scale transformations taking place elsewhere downtown.

*IMAGINE GROUND FLOOR MARKET SPACES FACING THE RIVERFRONT.*



Gamble Associates.



Alpha Digital, courtesy of Rochester Downtown Alliance.



Above: Ground level perspective of commercial spaces with vendor stands, a food hall and connection to skyway system.

## EXISTING CONDITION

There are numerous local businesses on the ground floor of buildings along Broadway, Third and Fourth Streets. However, the inside edges of the West site, and nearly all of the East, lack commercial activity along the river. The Zumbro Riverfront offers compelling opportunities for economic activities tied to a market concept. Conversations around a Market Hall have ensued for many years. This Small Area Plan supports these ambitions and identifies a variety of locations on the West Site where such a use can take hold. A market concept might take place either in the ground floor of a new, mixed-use building or, more likely, through the adaptive reuse of existing buildings bordered by outdoor courtyards, terraces and gardens. The open spaces provide a signature destination for families, children and the elderly to benefit from the commercial activity and partake in special community events alongside the Zumbro.



Above: The Night Market outside the Rochester Art Center. Courtesy of CHOOCHOO-ca-CHEW.

Equity and inclusion are central frameworks to achieve the city’s mission to build a vibrant community. The Small Area Plan provides an environment where diversity is celebrated and where community members from all backgrounds feel safe, welcomed and valued. Supporting local businesses to create an economic environment that eliminates barriers and expands opportunities for low-income people and communities of color is a priority. If equity gives people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives then equality aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to achieve those full and healthy lives. The best riverfronts are public destinations and are recognized as strong economic attractions that support local businesses and a community’s overall livability ([Festival Area Feasibility and Conceptual Design](#)). Ground level commercial uses will activate the public spaces that define them and grow the capacity of small-scale entrepreneurial and artistic endeavors.

The public realm is most successful when it has active edges. A key takeaway from the [Downtown Retail Survey](#) was that the identity/brand of downtown can build from solid existing strengths in the restaurant, event, gift and service sectors that are “mostly unique businesses that add to the character.” With this in mind, Principle 2 builds on these assets and recognizes the need for accommodating space for local entrepreneurs, makers and business that are an essential component of the 21st century knowledge-based economy.

As identified in the [Downtown Rochester Residential Consumer Research Project](#), the demographics of downtown residents varies widely in income, age and occupation. In addition, Rochester has many temporary residents with students, researchers, business travelers and even patients to Mayo Clinic. Nevertheless, demographic and profile research suggest that Rochester’s new downtown residents are increasingly social, diverse, active, technologically savvy and well-traveled. They “like the urban experience.” Ensuring commercial space for local artisans and entrepreneurs creates an environment that is continually renewed and engaging. This Small Area Plan, as voiced by many participants over the course of this public engagement effort, advocates for community-oriented spaces that are affordable for local, small shops. Dedicating spaces that are more viable for small businesses will diversify the tenant mix and foster spaces that are constantly renewed.

## PROPOSAL

The Preferred Plan envisions space for such community-based uses ideally located in the adaptively reused Red Owl and/or Time Theater Buildings. The Depression era buildings, dated 1935 and 1937 respectively, have “cultural and social significance” beyond their architectural integrity ([Rochester Heritage Preservation Commission](#)). These buildings are in close proximity to the oldest remaining block of 19th and early 20th century buildings along Broadway. The blonde brick and block façade of the Art-Deco style Red Owl Store was unique for Rochester at that time and Time Movie Theater was created by the Mayo Properties Association as an entertainment venue ([Rochester Landmark Nomination Application](#)). In this way, the building’s reuse for local, market-based uses is consistent with their historical role. While not currently included

## *EQUITY AND INCLUSION ARE CENTRAL FRAMEWORKS TO ACHIEVE THE CITY'S MISSION TO BUILD A VIBRANT COMMUNITY.*

in the proposed Downtown Commercial Historic District, key aspects of the buildings can be preserved to enable reinvention and continuity with the past (Refer to Section 4: Achieving Visionary Transformation).

Investments in public infrastructure attract privately-motivated development. As seen recently with compelling and high quality public realm improvements such as the Heart of the City and Discovery Walk, downtown public spaces are transforming into more active destinations. With a robust event calendar and seasonal, interim activation, these spaces are attracting residents to the downtown core and keeping them there longer. In conversations with the Co-designers and in many community settings, participants were looking for a riverfront project that reflects the implicit values of the local community as a complement to the international draw and global impact of the Mayo Clinic. Supporting local businesses means providing space for entrepreneurial activities on these sites which express, not just reflect, the increasing diversity of the city.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Advance community conversations that bring together local entrepreneurs and partners to advance conversations about a market hall space and plaza for local tenants.
- Work with the Rochester Downtown Alliance, DMC and other partners, curate and calendar of events for interim site activation.

# BEST PRACTICES - PRECEDENTS



## MONET AVENUE 2.0 AT VICTORIA GARDENS Rancho Cucamonga, CA

Monet Avenue is a streetscape and plaza along a primary retail street. The focus of the three-block long project is on the next generation of users, with a shopping environment that highlights the social landscape and blurs the lines between retail and recreation. The design scope included landscape, paving, fountains, site furnishings and art interventions, with the use of drought-sensitive planting, high-efficiency irrigation and innovative storm water treatment.

This 147-acre downtown combines the best traditions of Western American town centers with the social and planning demands of the early 21st century. Retail, office, residential, civic and cultural uses are placed within a landscaped urban experience of a traditional Main Street environment. The landscape framework for Victoria Gardens is a grid of local streets and sidewalks with a town square, plazas, paseos and parks distributed throughout the downtown district. The streetscape trees are planted in beds of native shrubs and groundcovers to further enhance the garden heritage of the project.

Landscape Architect: SWA Group

Above: Photo by Jonnu Singleton.



EXIT  
↑ Myra Clinic & Subway     ↓ Center & Marriott Plaza ↑  
↑ West Park Pharmacy     ↓ Calverton  
↑ Morgan Stanley Center     ↓ Calverton Street Parking  
↓ Embassy Gardens

# 3

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## PRINCIPLE 3: ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Ensure universal access to streetscapes, Skyways, Subways, buildings and the River Trail



Opposite page: People walking in Skyway System, Second Street Bridge. May 2022. Gamble Associates.

## PRINCIPLE 3: ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS

### Ensure universal access to streetscapes, Skyways, Subways, buildings and the River Trail

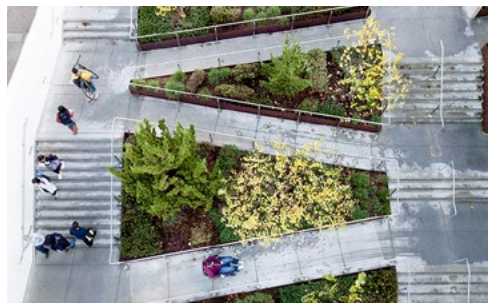
#### THE VISION

Rochester is unique among American cities. It has not one “Main Street” but three. The interconnected network of second floor bridges forms a climate-controlled experience in the Skyway that links many buildings downtown. Within the Mayo Clinic, the below-grade Subway creates the basis for the visitor experience and building servicing for most of the campus. There is surprising good natural light that filters in from above and the wayfinding is effective. However, at the street level - where the ground floor entrances of buildings reside - the quality of the streetscape is underwhelming. The vision for these sites is to overcome barriers to access and forge an interconnected network.

*IMAGINE DOWNTOWN STREETS AND ALLEYS THAT ARE ACTIVE, MEANINGFUL INTERCONNECTED PLACES.*



Gamble Associates.



UC Berkeley, Noah Berger.



Above: Ground level perspective of an activated alleyway space between back of Red Owl/Time Theater building and Broadway buildings.

## EXISTING CONDITION

Streets can be a city's greatest democratic space, but the proximity of destinations in downtown Rochester to one another seem farther away than they really are. There is an absence of continuous tree canopy, gaps in ground floor retail and decades of transportation engineering decisions geared more towards efficiently moving vehicles rather than people. Like many American cities, these have incrementally eroded the quality of Rochester's public realm. Efforts are already underway to improve this condition with the Downtown Sidewalk and North Broadway projects.

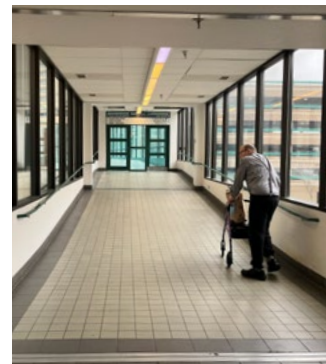
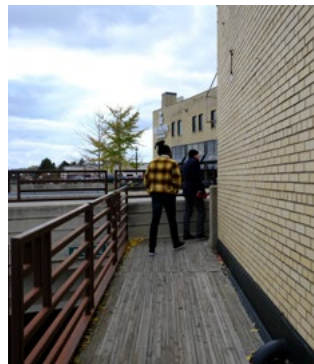
Within the geography of this Small Area Plan, changes in topography limit accessibility. Universal design is needed that acknowledges the necessity for

safe, efficient, clean and well-maintained pathways for people of all mobilities and abilities. The canal wall along the river, while protecting downtown Rochester from flooding, severely limits access to the Zumbro. It is well known that rivers and trails offer wonderful opportunities for active recreation. However, the current condition of the canal wall requires a design solution that balances flood protection with access to and promotion of the trails.

## PROPOSAL

As mentioned previously, strategic modifications to the canal wall push the flood elevation back, enabling a terracing effect that enhances views and creates new public spaces. The design and composition of a physical environment that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by people - regardless of their age, size, ability or disability - is a foundational principle of this Small Area Plan. Spaces are designed so that they are useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. The seating and informal play areas accommodate a range of individual preferences and abilities, while advancing a consistent design aesthetic. Seating, walkways and stairs allow use of the spaces that are easy to navigate, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level. "Universal Design" communicates information effectively regardless of the user's sensory abilities, allows its use with a minimum of fatigue and is appropriately-scaled. Creating walkable centers and corridors is an ambition of the Transportation Framework of the [Comprehensive Plan](#).

Below: Existing images of compromised access to the site with many stairs, narrow passages and non-ADA compliant slopes.



The plan envisions a seamless set of spaces and programs that navigates multiple levels, provides equal access to amenities, welcomes visitors, and grounds the community in understanding the historical and cultural significance of the Zumbro and the site's location as Rochester's origin point. The design integrates new connections which serve to link the ground plane both down to the river's edge and up to the Skyway. Additional public connections through ramps, stairs and elevators will provide users of all types and abilities to have better access. Building upon the city's innovations in medical technology and devices, the site can serve as a hub to test, practice and develop these advances in a safe, inviting and beautiful outdoor setting.

The following outdoor uses, as part of this Small Area Plan, are being recommended to enliven Rochester's public realm throughout the year;

- A winter garden could allow users of the skyway to access an indoor oasis, even in the depths of winter—or a kayak launch would provide a way to experience being on one of Rochester's greatest assets, the Zumbro River, directly from downtown.
- An urban green space will complement the larger open spaces at Rochester's edges and more intimate urban plazas at Rochester's core with an open space that ties these two together, firmly connecting the downtown fabric to the regional open space system.
- Flexible market hall and cafe seating.
- Interactive installations and public art.
- Lawn games and places of active recreation.
- Riverfront native garden.
- Outdoor movies with terraced seating.

Additionally, there is a story to be told about this site, both in its future position as Rochester's connection to the Zumbro, but also as a historical narrative that uncovers the many uses and forms that previously existed on the site. Much as the existing mural tells a story of Rochester's success—additional art, wayfinding and signage will bring the site to life in experiences that can be shared by all of our senses. Sight, touch, sound, smell and even taste can ground the experience of the site to Rochester for a variety of users through educational signage, artistic interventions, playful environments and moments of respite.

## NEXT STEPS

- Create site survey for East and West properties with key spot elevations.
- Advance the Schematic Design of the primary public-rights-of-way, identifying primary and secondary pathways and linkages to the Skyway system as well as the building interface for new development.

## BEST PRACTICES - PRECEDENTS



### LOCK NINE PARK

Piqua, OH

North of Dayton, the distance between Piqua, Ohio's downtown and its riverfront is less than it appears; the two are very close. Stronger connections were needed that enabled the life and vitality of the Great Miami River Trail to connect to downtown's commercial district. The downtown is currently blocked from view of the river by a high levee wall.

Lock Nine Park is a new three-acre open space at the bend of the Great Miami River that provides a central gathering spot for the city. Modifications to the existing levee wall, in the form of a stepped terrace, enable a direct connection to be forged that connects the lower bike trail to the higher elevation of the downtown. A continuous ramp in the location of the former Miami and Erie Canal's 19th century limestone walls brings the recreational trail into Main and Water Streets. A terraced fountain recalls the historical alignment of the former spillway. The infrastructure improvements are catalyzing largely vacant, former industrial buildings into coffee shops, artist studios and maker spaces. Project currently under construction.

Master Planner: Gamble Associates

Landscape Architect: Booker Design Collaborative

Engineering: Choice One

Above: Photo by Gamble Associates.



FARM SERVICE STORES INC.

RED OWL  
FREE  
PARKING

# 4

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## PRINCIPLE 4: ACHIEVING VISIONARY TRANSFORMATION

Strive for balance; polarizing issues are not helpful. Seek a balance of:

- Open space + development
- New construction + historic preservation
- Public + private space
- Flood protection + river access
- East + West development



Opposite page: Open area driveway adjacent to Red Owl Grocery store and before construction of the Time Theater, circa 1935. Courtesy of Olmsted County History Center.

## PRINCIPLE 4: ACHIEVING VISIONARY TRANSFORMATION

**Strive for balance; polarizing issues are not helpful**

### THE VISION

Through efforts of the Rochester Downtown Alliance, Destination Medical Center and others, there are an increasing number of programs that are bringing more and more people downtown. The seasonal events provide residents and visitors with a new way to see Rochester, and spaces created through this Small Area Plan are part of an emerging network of public spaces. They build on recent investments in Peace Plaza, Heart of the City, Discovery Walk, Mayo Park and the Civic Center Plaza, among others. When the open spaces along these two waterfront sites are lined with new, private sector development immense opportunities emerge. Rochester can grow towards the Zumbro River as opposed to being defensive against it.

*IMAGINE ROCHESTER GROWING  
TOWARDS THE ZUMBRO RIVER.*



Google Street View.



Optimist Hall, Keith Isaacs.



Above: Ground level perspective view of the sunken terrace/winter garden and adaptive reuse of Red Owl/Time Theater into community space and market.

Negotiating a wide variety of perspectives doesn't mean acquiescing to the lowest common denominator. On the contrary, between the East and West sites there are five and a half acres of development potential. Taken together, the two sites provide a multitude of open spaces and development typologies that complement other downtown investments.

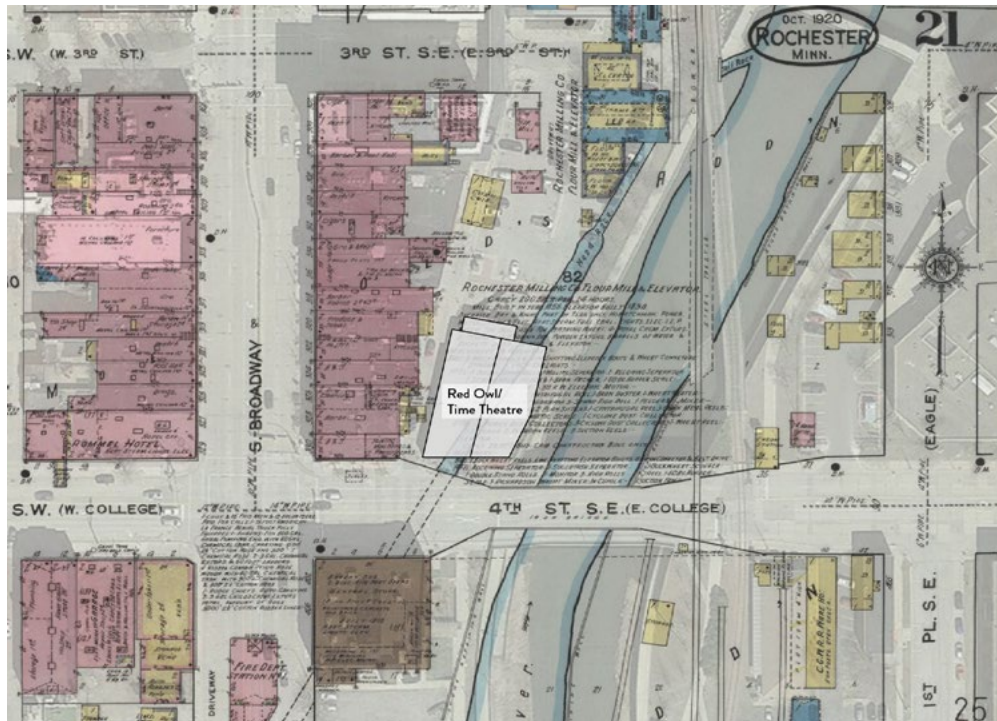
Rochester's [Destination Medical Center District Design Guidelines](#) increase physical and visual connections to the natural landscape by encouraging walking and enhancing the public realm. Every new and renovation project downtown should develop and strengthen the "green system" – urban forest, storm water management and generation of clean energy. In this way, new development and open space are complementary ambitions. Neither all open space (without active uses that activate them) nor all development (where the public realm is marginalized or sacrificed) are the appropriate response along a city's waterfront.

It is possible to balance development capacity on the two sites as they each have intrinsic characteristics that make them distinctive. In addition, flood protection and river access can harmoniously co-exist, as can the preservation of existing buildings together with contemporary development. Indeed, some of the most interesting places in a city are where the past meets the present and point towards the future.

## EXISTING CONDITION

The Mill Reservation was located between Broadway and the river. It existed from the earliest days of the city's history and represents the origin point for Rochester where the first residents settled. Historic overlays of late 19th and early 20th century Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of this location highlight how

*SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING PLACES IN A CITY ARE WHERE THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT AND POINT TOWARDS THE FUTURE.*



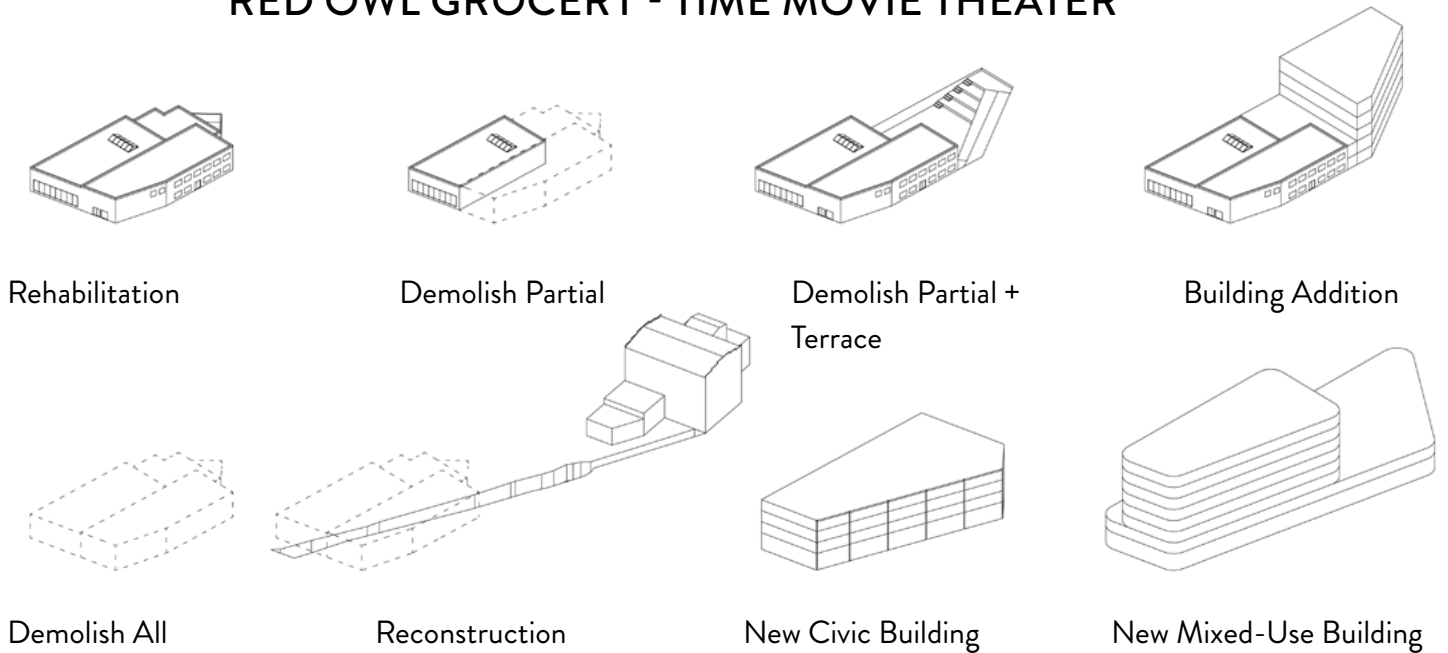
Above: Overlay of millraceway on Red Owl/Time Theater plan.

the trajectory of the Zumbro River was manipulated over the course of time to facilitate power generation and transportation with a mill race. The mill race powered a number of grist and flour mills in the location of the current surface parking lot on the West site. When the Red Owl and Time Theater buildings were constructed in the 1930's, they were actually built over the former mill race (as shown on the image to the left) which had been covered over in 1929. The Olds Mill (also known as the General Mills and Rochester Milling Co.) was eventually demolished in 1953 (Rochester Post Bulletin September 22, 1953).

Buildings have many lives. For some people in Rochester, these two buildings are referred to as Legends Sports Bar, or “Legends”, which was a bar and grill in the latest incarnation. The Time Theater also had a history of showing “adult” films in the 1960's and 1970's and was known as Zumbro Market, a restaurant and retail complex in the mid-1980s and a Mexican Restaurant. In 2001, the AFL-CIO Labor Temple association purchased the former Red Owl for offices, and also had life as Gold Bond Stamp Store. The two structures were not considered to be “historic” under the terms defined by the city's ordinance. In addition, they were not included in a 2017 draft Historic Downtown Commercial District. Nevertheless, they do carry cultural and social significance. The Time Theater was built by Mayo Properties Association which eventually became the Mayo Foundation with the ambition to provide entertainment during the Great Depression and the Red Owl Grocery was a successful downtown market.

This Small Area Plan places emphasis on the 2.5 acres of new public open space that connects the river trail to downtown. Ninety-five percent of the development potential for the plan resides on the East site and northern portion of the West site. While the plan's success does not rest on what happens to these two buildings, there has been a good deal of community debate surrounding their fate. On the one hand, there are carrying costs for maintaining the buildings while an appropriate development partner is identified. There is a need for a clear path forward with finding the best tenant mix, evaluating the structural stability of the two buildings (there is evidence of floor buckling and some water damage from roof leaks) and identifying funding for the building's renovation, fit-out, operations and maintenance. All of these issues need to be worked out. On the other hand, demolishing them removes an aspect of the city's history that is worthy of celebrating.

## REDEVELOPMENT SPECTRUM: RED OWL GROCERY - TIME MOVIE THEATER



At the outset, the team evaluated a wide spectrum of options for this portion of the plan. Options included total preservation to total demolition, including the excavation of the former mill race (whose condition is unknown) and the reconstitution of the former Mill complex. The southern portion of the West site is small, and any new construction in the place of the two buildings (if they were to be demolished) would be expensive. The site has spatial constraints between the river and the rear alleyway of the historic Broadway buildings. Should a new mixed-use building be constructed in the location of the Red Owl/Time Theater, the cost of construction would render the viability of small-scale, entrepreneurial uses much more difficult to financially support. New development will require higher rents for tenants, unless subsidies are made available.

As described in the *Supporting Local Businesses* section of this report, there was strong preference for the inclusion of space for local entrepreneurs, artisans and makers in this plan. Therefore, the initial eight scenarios were narrowed down to three which were more likely to provide that type of affordable, ground floor space the community desires.

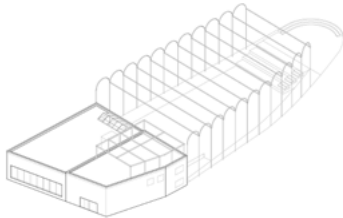
# PROPOSAL

Scenario 1, “Adaptive Reuse” preserves the majority of the Red Owl/Time Theater Building. The removal of the northern, concrete block addition is replaced with a sloping indoor/outdoor garden. The four-season, nearly 21,000sf space provides a place of respite for visitors to the Mayo Clinic and offers a unique riverfront setting for public events.

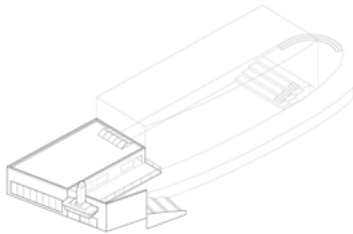
Scenario 2, “Partial Reuse” preserves the majority of the Red Owl, the primary elevation of the Time Theater along Fourth Street and a segment of the wall parallel to the river. Similar to Scenario 1, the northside of the Red Owl building is replaced with an indoor/outdoor event space. Portions of the Time Theater are removed in order to provide better access to the site. The primary gateway along Fourth Street is therefore through the entry portal of the former Time Theater elevation. The historic “Time” marquee is brought back as an overhead gateway entry to the riverfront park where outdoor movies can be shown.

Scenario 3, “Total Demolition” removes both buildings to provide greatest access on the West site and river trail. The Skyway, which currently dead-ends at a nearby office building, gets extended as a gentle sloping ramp that overlooks the river. The walkway has multiple levels and defines an amphitheater space at the elevation of the river trail.

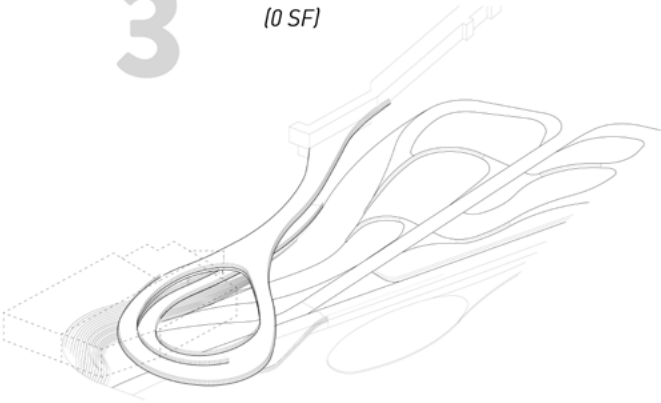
**1** Adaptive Reuse  
(20,900 SF)



**2** Partial Reuse  
(15,500 SF)



**3** Total Demolition  
(0 SF)

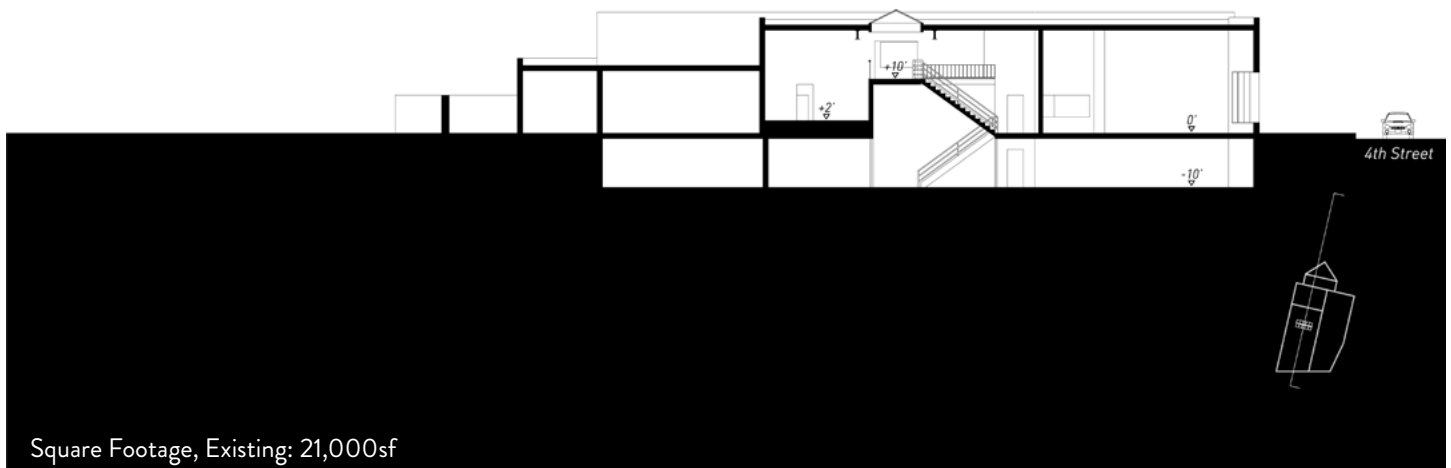


## *THE PREFERRED PLAN ADVANCES THE ADAPTIVE REUSE OF THE RED OWL BUILDING AND TIME THEATER FAÇADE.*

The Preferred Plan advances the adaptive reuse of the Red Owl Building and Time Theater façade – Scenario 2. As mentioned in the Ensuring Universal Access portion of this report, there is limited access to the site due to the narrow walkway along the east Legends elevation. The plan envisions the demolition of the interior of the Time Theater building but recalls the theatrical component as part of an indoor/outdoor performance space. In this way, the uses of the two buildings as market space and entertainment venue are reinterpreted for contemporary needs. The primary façade of the Time Theater is retained, as well as the recreation of the historic marquee sign. The entry portal to the building now becomes the gate through which the river trail is accessed.

### EXISTING - SECTION

Longitudinal Building Section Through Red Owl



Above: Section cutting through middle of existing Red Owl portion of building.

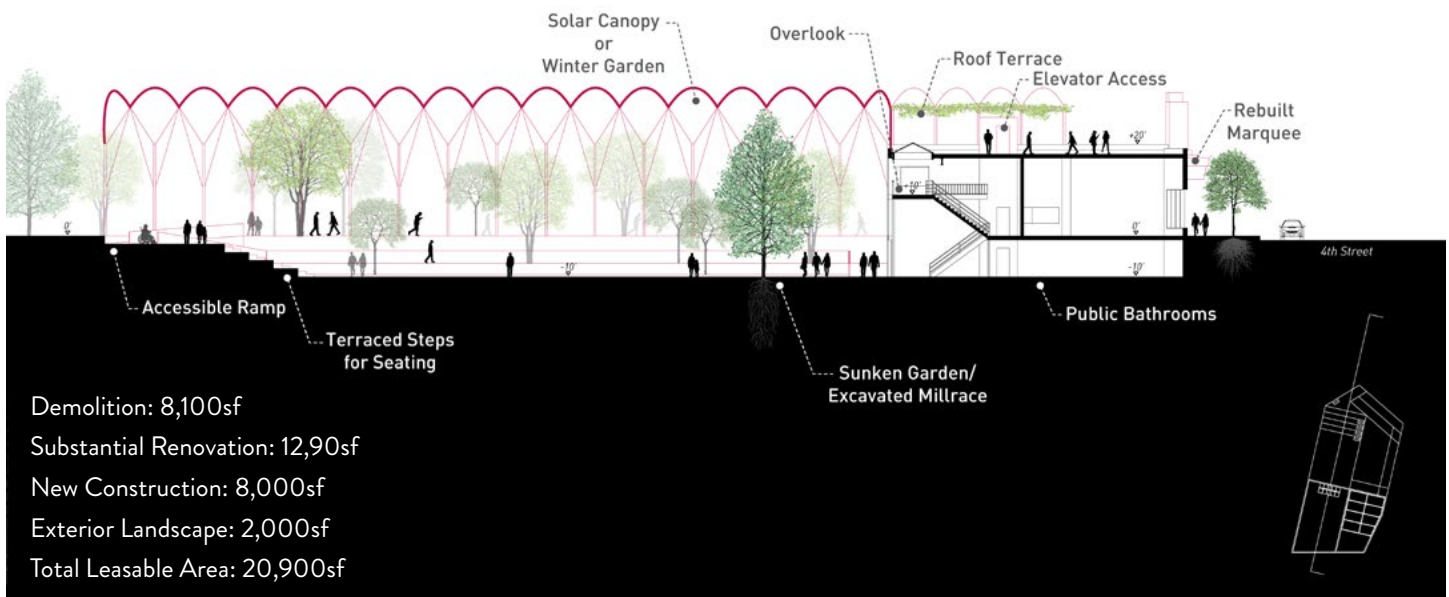


Above: The south portion of the West site provides an opportunity for a unique, contemporary four-season event and community space connected to the historical Art Deco buildings and the Skyway system.

Above Left: Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. Above Right: PRS Architects.

## PROPOSED - SECTION

### Adaptive Reuse with Sunken Garden



Above: Section of proposed condition for an adaptive reuse scheme of the Red Owl with a sunken garden, Scenario 1/Scenario 2.

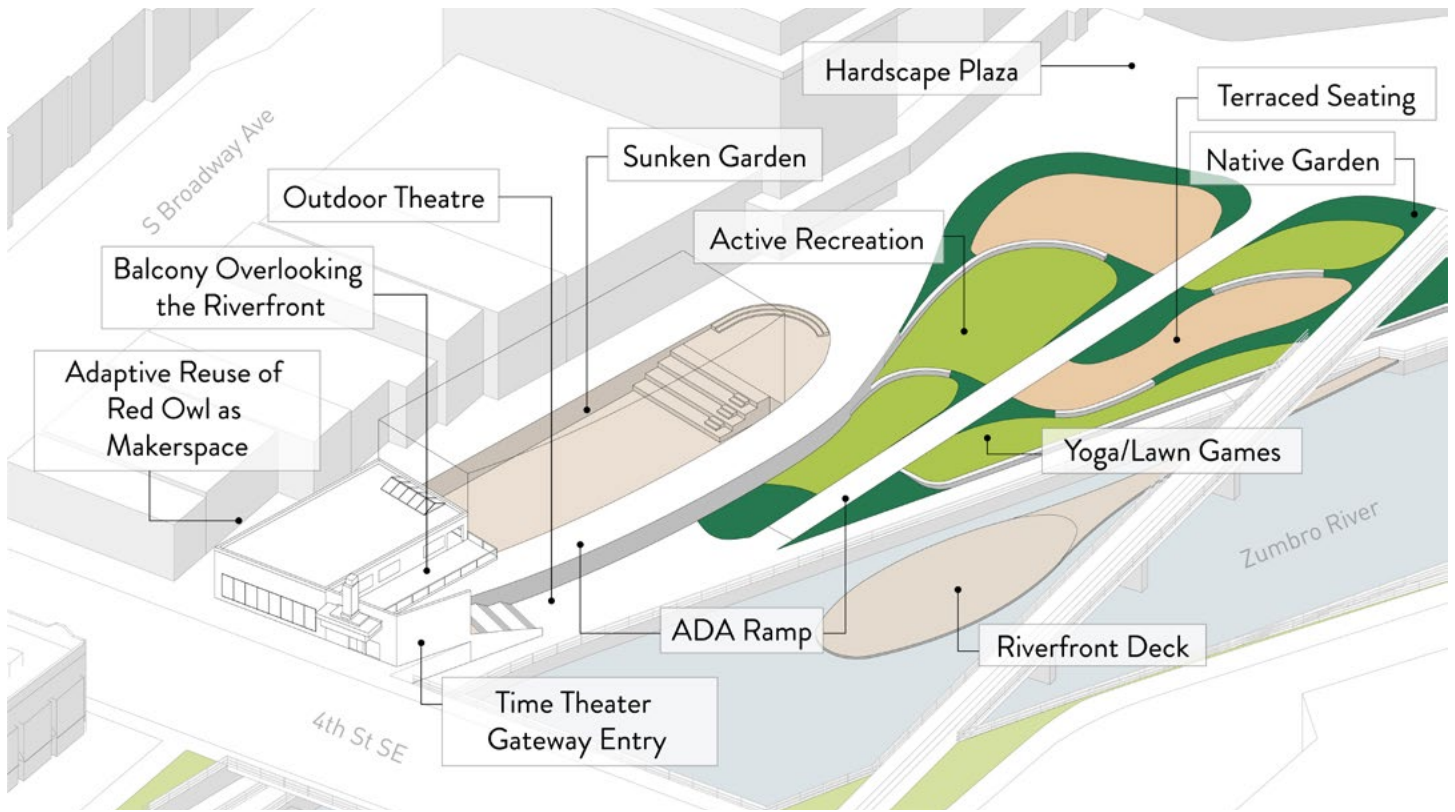
“Achieving visionary transformation” means arriving at equilibrium. There is a good deal of development potential on the two sites; density is a good thing in an urban setting! It fosters connectivity and enlivens the public realm. Modifications to the river channel wall on the West and the terracing of the rip rap on the East provide compelling opportunities for a new, world-class riverfront landscape to emerge in tandem with the new development. Resisting the urge to demolish the currently vacant Red Owl and Time Theater buildings demonstrates restraint and a willingness to foster sustainable economic development that are more likely to attract small-scale entrepreneurial and entertainment activities. These uses harken back to their original reason for being. There is a significant amount of embodied energy in the existing structures, and preserving the most important elements of the Red Owl and Time Theater will define the alley they share with the Broadway buildings, activate Fourth Street and open the door to retrofitting the Depression-era buildings into vibrant, 21st century energy efficient structures. Their adaptive reuse constitutes a competitive advantage in the marketplace and a unique, year-round destination.



Left: View of North facade of Red Owl + Time Theater building from parking garage, existing conditions in December 2021.



Left: Historic West Main Street elevation preservation, Louisville, KY. Courtesy of Patrick Seeb.

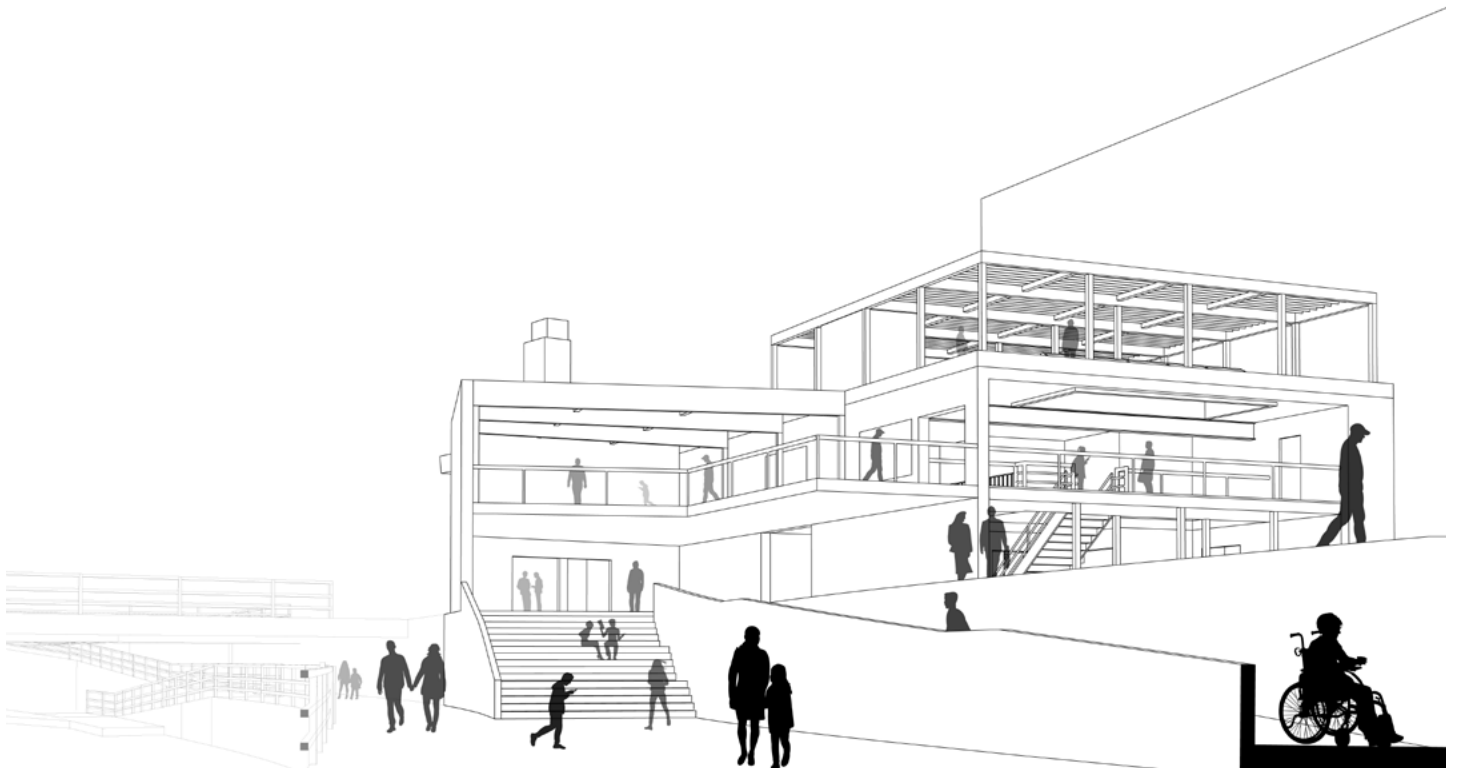


Above: Preferred scenario diagram in context.

More analysis is needed to evaluate the adaptive reuse potential of the Red Owl and Time Theater. However, their reactivation will enable community-based market uses to connect to the open space network and preserve a portion of Rochester's Art Deco period.



Above: 1937 Time Theater facade and marquee. Courtesy of Olmsted County Historical Center.



Above: Perspective of Preferred Plan's partial reuse scheme from the riverfront bike trail.

## NEXT STEPS

- Evaluate the structural integrity of the Red Owl and Time Theater Buildings.
- Perform environmental testing as to the condition of the soils below and adjacent to the historic structures.
- Advance design of the removal of the northern portion of the buildings (1985 addition) and a lower, sunken garden concept.

# BEST PRACTICES - PRECEDENTS



## RICHARDSON OLMSTED CAMPUS MASTER PLAN Buffalo, NY

“Sustainable” is one of the most widely used, but ambiguous, terms in design vocabulary. It is used here to describe projects that are connected with the environment in which they reside. A development that is sustainable utilizes alternative and renewable energy sources for energy generation and retention. Sustainable buildings use less energy through the use of higher quality building envelopes, green and/or solar roofs, natural daylighting, energy responsive facades, sun-shading devices, recycled content and low embodied energy materials. New development in this Small Area Plan must incorporate environmental responsibility as an integral part of the design, and ensure that negative impacts associated with the development are minimized.

Since new building construction accounts for 50% of all greenhouse gas emissions, the most sustainable approach is often to reuse existing buildings. Uses change, but a building’s form can endure. The removal of an inadequate 1950’s addition to the former Buffalo Psychiatric Center provided an opportunity to reorient the historic structure. The contemporary glass addition forms a new handicapped-accessible entry lobby for a boutique hotel and conference center.

Master Planner: Gamble Associates (2009/2015)  
Design Architect: Deborah Burke Associates

Above: Photo by Christopher Payne/ESTO.

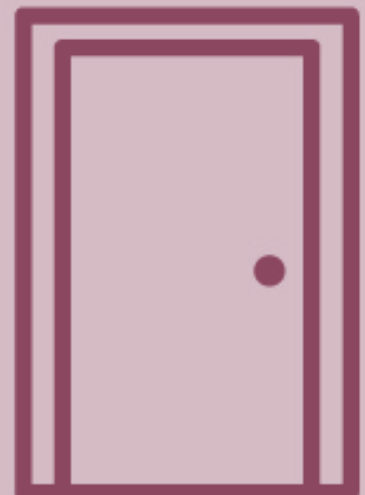


# 5

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## PRINCIPLE 5: EXPANDING ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Forge a new identity for the riverfront that expands economic development opportunities and activates the public realm



## PRINCIPLE 5: EXPANDING ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

**Forge a new identity for the riverfront that expands economic development opportunities and activates the public realm**

### THE VISION

Towns and cities of all sizes are investing in their downtowns and along their riverfronts. They do so today not for industrial purposes, as in eras past, but to enhance the quality of life for residents, keep existing businesses and attract new ones. Along a waterfront the aura of a city resides, and Rochester is fortunate to have been born along the Zumbro River. This initiative capitalizes on the city's historical legacy by making the past more visible in the design of the public spaces and reinforces its identity as a river city.

From Native American people to the “frontier architecture” and modern technology of the Mayo Clinic, there are many attributes to highlight in the culture of the city. Unfortunately, evidence of much of this history is hidden

*IMAGINE ROCHESTER HAVING A  
NEW “FRONT DOOR.”*



Gamble Associates.



Via Verde, David Sundberg.



Above: Ground level perspective facing south from Mayo Park, showing the East site terraced landscape towards the Zumbro River and the site’s recommended mix of housing, including affordable units.

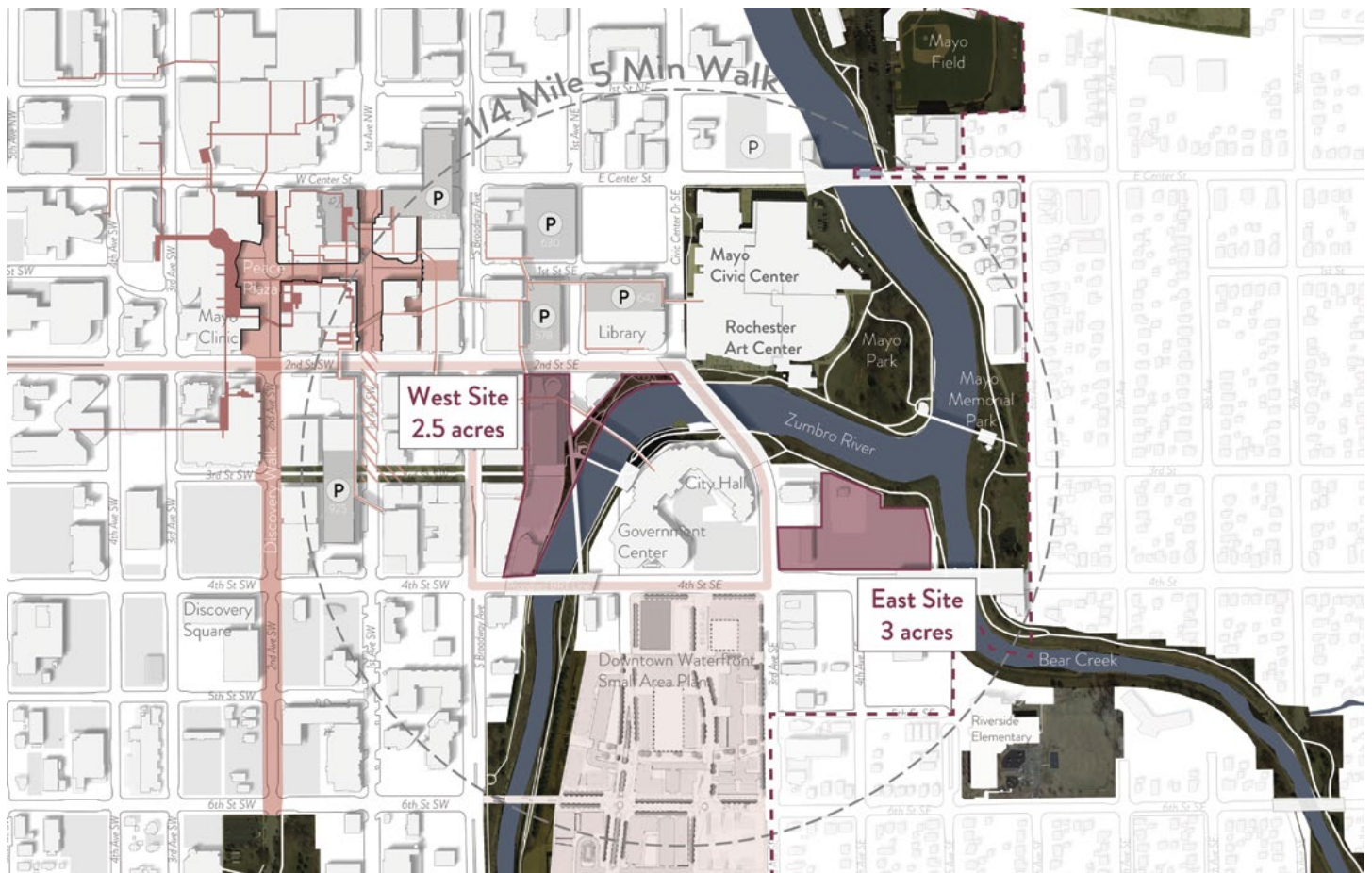
from view. Remnants of the former Mill Race that ran through the West Site can be excavated or reinterpreted as an interactive art water feature as part of a revitalized open space. A series of terraced steps with integrated handicapped-accessible ramps will provide viewing platforms at the bend of the river.

New development on the East and West sites will serve as connecting points along the river. The synergies between the two sites have not been fully optimized. Together, they can accommodate between 500,000–750,000 gsf of new development while still providing celebratory public spaces for gathering of community festivals and events. Rochester’s geographic position along the regional trail system is a significant, underappreciated asset and a more superlative public realm adjacent to new development is needed.

The first guiding principle of the [Destination Medical Center Development Plan](#) is to create a compelling vision that harnesses the energy and creativity of the entire community. The Downtown Waterfront, as one of the six Sub-districts identified in the Plan, has the potential to drastically alter downtown Rochester's image. Transforming the two sites as part of this Small Area Plan will improve connectivity, enhance placemaking, increase health and wellness, diversify the housing stock and provide for greater transit options all at once. Rochester and Olmsted County are growing rapidly, with more than two-thirds of all downtown market rate apartments constructed in the last ten years ([Downtown Rochester Residential Consumer Research Project](#)). As this infill development occurs, more affordable housing and additional open spaces are needed to forge a superlative public realm which adds value to the adjacent properties.

***THE MAJORITY OF THE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT RESIDES ON THE EAST SITE AND THE NORTHERN PORTION OF THE WEST SITE.***

Below: Network map diagram.



## ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

The City of Rochester retained NEOO Partners as part of the Gamble Associates team to discuss, discern and ultimately quantify the economic trade-offs of multiple scenarios for the Zumbro Riverfront Small Area Plan. The NEOO, SWA and Gamble Associates (“consultant team”) team worked collaboratively to develop the following analysis.

### SUMMARY

The consultant team created over a dozen different development scenarios for the East and West Sites of the Zumbro Riverfront Small Area Plan. Each development plan offered unique characteristics and trade-offs, and through public engagement three development scenarios emerged as the strongest reflection of the community’s vision. While the majority of the development will reside on the larger three-acre East site, there is a good deal of development potential on the north side of the West site, which is the current location of the city-owned parking structure. It was the rather small southern end of the West Site - the location of the Legends Building (formerly known as the Red Owl and Time Theater) - that elicited the most attention and debate. In the consultant team’s analysis, there is no significant financial barrier to any development scenario.

Adaptive Reuse: Scenario one (1) proposed keeping the majority of the two Great Depression-era existing buildings with only minor demolition to remove non-historic, concrete block building additions. This plan adaptively reuses the buildings as an entrepreneurship market and plaza (“EMP”) with a sunken landscape garden. The EMP described in Exhibit A allowed the overall Small Area Plan to achieve all five of the planning principles articulated in this report.

Partial Reuse: Scenario two (2) contemplated preserving only one building, the Red Owl Grocery store, which allows for a more open experience between the southern sites, Fourth Street and the lower River Trail. Currently, there is limited

access to the site from Fourth Street with a narrow, non-ADA compliant deck. The partial removal of the Time Theater (which was initially built separately from the Red Owl Grocery) enables greater access to the river. It is possible under this scenario to retain the front elevation of the Time Theater as an entry gate to the property.

Total Demolition: Scenario three (3) proposed removing both structures completely. Under this plan the southern end of the West site provides the greatest access to the riverfront and adjoining open space. The removal of the two buildings enables the excavation of an earlier historic artifact of the Mill Race whose trajectory runs diagonally under the structures. The absence of the buildings also facilitates an extension of the upper-level Skyway to connect to the ground in this location with a generous public ramp and elevator tower.

## METHODOLOGY

In preparation for the economic analysis, the consultant team did a data pull from CoStar | LoopNet for housing, retail, commercial properties in the City of Rochester Market Area as determined by CoStar. Data from the reports are available as Exhibit B in the Appendix. Additional data was collected from publically available data sources, articles and recent project data available from online sources.

In the calculation of the economic analysis, the following assumptions were made to keep as many variables constant across the project.

- \$240,000 per unit in Construction Cost
- \$300 per square foot in Commercial Core and Shell Construction Cost
- \$50 per square foot in Landlord provided Tenant Improvement Allowances for Buildout
- \$35,000 per Parking Stall in Construction Cost
- \$185 per square foot Substantial Interior Renovation for existing building
- Land Sales price of \$12,500 per unit for Market Rate, and \$7,500 per unit for Affordable

By utilizing the existing programming detail created for the three scenarios the consultant team was able to develop an estimate of probable cost for the infrastructure, demolition and new construction. The estimate then allowed us to develop a construction contingency, as well as the cost for professional services or any miscellaneous costs that were shared with us by the City. The resulting amount for each scenario and for each development site is labeled as total project uses.

Subsequently, standard practice is to develop a rough estimate of project sources or funds that will be used to help pay for development projects. The majority of project financing for all viable commercial real estate projects is the construction/senior “note” debt that is taken out on a project. This source of capital can range from 4% to 7% interest, and up to 80% of the total project cost. Given the conservative underwriting nature of this work, the consultant team estimated between 55% to 65% of the total project costs could be paid for by the senior note.

In all market rate transactions, the pairing of debt with what is called equity is how projects are financed. The total equity is a result of what remains to be purchased or developed up to a point of financial failure or inability to repay the equity. The consultant team used best practices to estimate the amount of equity each project could support. The difference between the debt and equity is what is referred to as the project “gap.”

The gap is what we estimate would need to be paid by other sources of capital. Philanthropy, municipal grants, mezzanine debt, tax increment financing, or tax credits, are all examples of the public and private financing solutions to cover the gap. The consultant team did not try to fill the gap, but simply stated the gap in context so that the City’s leadership team can view the gap, and while understanding various available funding sources could agree that in principle the funding gap is something worth pursuing further. The only exception to this is the placement of tax credits on the East site for affordable housing. This is a more well-known financing source with clear funding benchmarks in order to create an estimate.

Lastly, to show the funding gap in a context of a well-known public financing solution we calculated a general tax increment amount for the project and used the following assumptions to estimate what is known as a Pay-Go Note. Generally, the consultant team used Olmsted County, MN property tax value lookups for recently completed projects, queried likely estimates using the Olmsted County Tax Estimator, and market data from the CoStar report for non-housing projects.

For a standardization of tax value estimates we concluded that the Olmsted County Tax Estimator was sufficient to estimate the likely property tax information. Assumptions included:

- Using 2022 dollars
- \$16,717.18 in Annual Property Taxes per \$1M in Market Value for Apartment and Mixed-Use Buildings
- Total Tax Increment Financing would be on a 20 year collection of increment
- TIF Note would be based on a 10 year term
- The note would mature at 7% interest to be collected biannually in alignment with Property Tax payment schedule
- The note would only recapture 60% of the increment generated
- Tax Value based on
- Olmsted County, MN
- City of Rochester
- ISD 535 Rochester
- Any special assessments, or overlays were *not included* in the calculation

## FINDINGS

The comparative data tables are available as Exhibit C of the Appendix. The results of the financial analysis resulted in three project scenarios with the following total project development costs and (sources).

- Scenario 1 - \$344M (\$309M)
- Scenario 2 - \$345M (\$308M)
- Scenario 3 - \$353M (\$300M)

As stated previously, the majority of the potential development resides on the East site and the northern portion of the West Site. Given that the overall development programming changed very little across the three scenarios, the small variations in the project financing totals is consistent with industry standards.

It is worth noting that Scenario 3, the total demolition of both the Red Owl and Time Theater buildings, departs the most from the core development program. This variation reduces the total building potential square feet for the two sites by a little, and the core entrepreneurial market and plaza are traded for an expansion of a world-class riverfront park. The cost increases relatively and there is a reduction in taxable value, and elimination of senior debt creates a total funding gap of \$53M across the three phases within Scenario 3.

As a note, and reminder - the Scenario funding Gap IS NOT a true funding gap, it is simply the difference between equity, debt and the total cost of the project. There are known funding sources which can fill and help to reduce the funding gap dramatically.

One such source of funding is Tax Increment Financing. The following TIF available v. (note) for each scenario is based on the above assumptions:

- Scenario 1 - \$69M (\$40M)
- Scenario 2 - \$69M (\$41M)
- Scenario 3 - \$65M (\$38M)

In the context of the Gap described above, the Tax Increment Financing available at 60% collection is greater than the Gap in all scenarios. Again, this is to show the gap in context and not a formal recommendation to fill the gap with TIF.

Lastly, the consultant team reviewed the development scenario of required minimum development amounts to afford the Scenario 3 world-class park by reducing the scale of development of the East site to get to a break-even point between the Gap and potential TIF available. The end result is that the project can transform from a 550-unit development to a 300-unit development and

still be able to pay for the park as contemplated with only using TIF as a source of funds.

## CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The economic analysis demonstrates that the Small Area Plan as currently designed is feasible.

This observation is based on the known requirements for additional funding and the strength of the public financing in the form of TIF. The Small Area Plan and all scenarios described in this analysis are subject to values based decision-making, and leadership/civic priorities, and not based upon financial handicaps regarding limited budgets.

The development scenarios contemplate adjusting the southern site of the West site of the riverfront only. In comparison, the East site and northern portion of the West site account for 95% of the economic value of this Small Area Plan. The southern edge of the West site accounts for the remaining 5%. It is in that same thread that we concluded the impact of the southern site on the overall development is value-driven or aesthetic, but has little financial impact to the overall project.

## PHASING

In review of the proposed development pattern, the team recommends the following phasing for the overall development of the Zumbro Riverfront where the East and West sites are viewed as a “campus.”

Phase I - Continued discussions with the County on the parking requirements of their surface lot and the commencement of development on the East site as a major priority to support the connectivity and financing of the public park improvements on the West sites. Riverfront connections between the West site

and East site should be reinforced in this Phase.

Phase II - the demolition of the existing parking structure and commencement of development on the northern portion of the West site. The demolition of the existing parking structure requires negotiations with the Fontaine Tower which leases approximately 60 spaces as well as Indigo Hotel tenant spaces. There are substantial construction staging challenges, as well as modifications to the Skyway bridge that will enable an ADA-compliant route. It may be in the best interest of park improvements and public right-of-way to complete this phase before finishing the southern site.

Phase III - the demolition of or the renovation of the existing and any planned increases to the public park space with the existing buildings of the Red Owl and Time Theater or the completion of the world-class riverfront park.

Under this phasing scenario, the recommendation is to coordinate the development of the Small Area Plan through a collaborative, public financing agreement with one or more development partners. The key anchoring component is the public financing agreement which would provide guidance and flexibility for any public financing to be shared across the development sites as needed. The East site is a major contributor to the project's feasibility and represents a key driver to the economic success of the campus redevelopment. Prioritizing its early success will be vital for future development negotiations.

## NEXT STEPS

- Prepare RFQ for development proposals.
- Develop partnerships for public benefit programs including the market and winter garden.
- Initiate TIF process to create funding mechanism for public benefits.

## BEST PRACTICES - PRECEDENTS



### CULVER STEPS AND MAIN PLAZA Culver City, CA

As cities consider the future of their streets in light of pandemic-inspired innovations and federal infrastructure investment, placemaking solutions can help communities achieve more value from the public realm.

The Steps are framed on one side by Culver Studios (where productions like “Gone with the Wind” and “Arrested Development” were filmed). The design of sculpted, stepped terraces for a new private development creates a memorable place for views, shade, respite and interaction for the public. This distinctive ambience is extended into the public realm with an adjoining plaza at street level, resulting in a continuous, central open space that unifies the surrounding buildings for a unique and programmed civic setting.

This spectacular project gives new meaning to Harry Culver’s renowned axiom, “All roads lead to Culver City.” The forging of this new outdoor commons revitalizes the Culver City’s “maker tradition”: rather than merely celebrating the past, the plaza provides a vital setting for today’s transit, culture and award-winning restaurants within a public-private partnership.

Landscape Architect: SWA Group

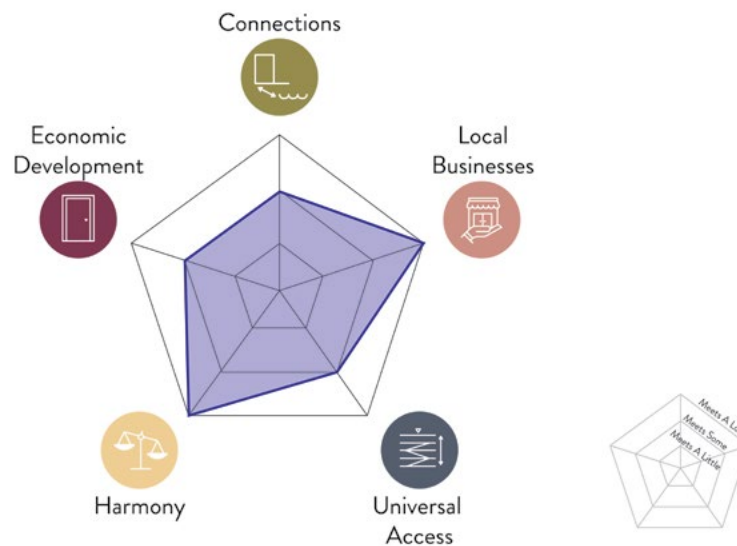
Above: Photo by Jonnu Singeton.

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# **IMMEDIATE ACTION ITEMS**

## IMMEDIATE ACTION ITEMS

As stated in the beginning of this document, this Small Area Plan will not occur overnight. There are many decisions that need to be made, partnerships to be formed or strengthened and funding to be allocated. However, the planning principles developed with the team's Co-Designers and vetted through the planning process suggest a high degree of community buy-in.



Above: Spider diagram weighing out the Preferred Plan against the principles.

In order to build on the momentum generated, the following next steps are recommended to move the plan towards implementation.

### Interim Site Activation:

- Working with the Rochester Downtown Alliance, DMC and other partners, curate an annual calendar of events (beginning Summer and Fall 2022) for interim site activation that builds on initial engagement and outreach.

### **Architecture/Urban Design:**

- Advance architectural design for the adaptive reuse of the Red Owl Grocery Store for community-based market uses and the selective reuse of the Time Theater to provide enhanced access to the site from Fourth Street and concept design for the Botanical Garden.
- Evaluate the Skyway circulation linking the City/County Building to the existing Parking Garage and connection to the Public Library / Indigo Hotel and advance massing scenarios for the site of the Parking Garage such that new development connects to the Skyway network in a seamless manner.

### **Landscape Architecture:**

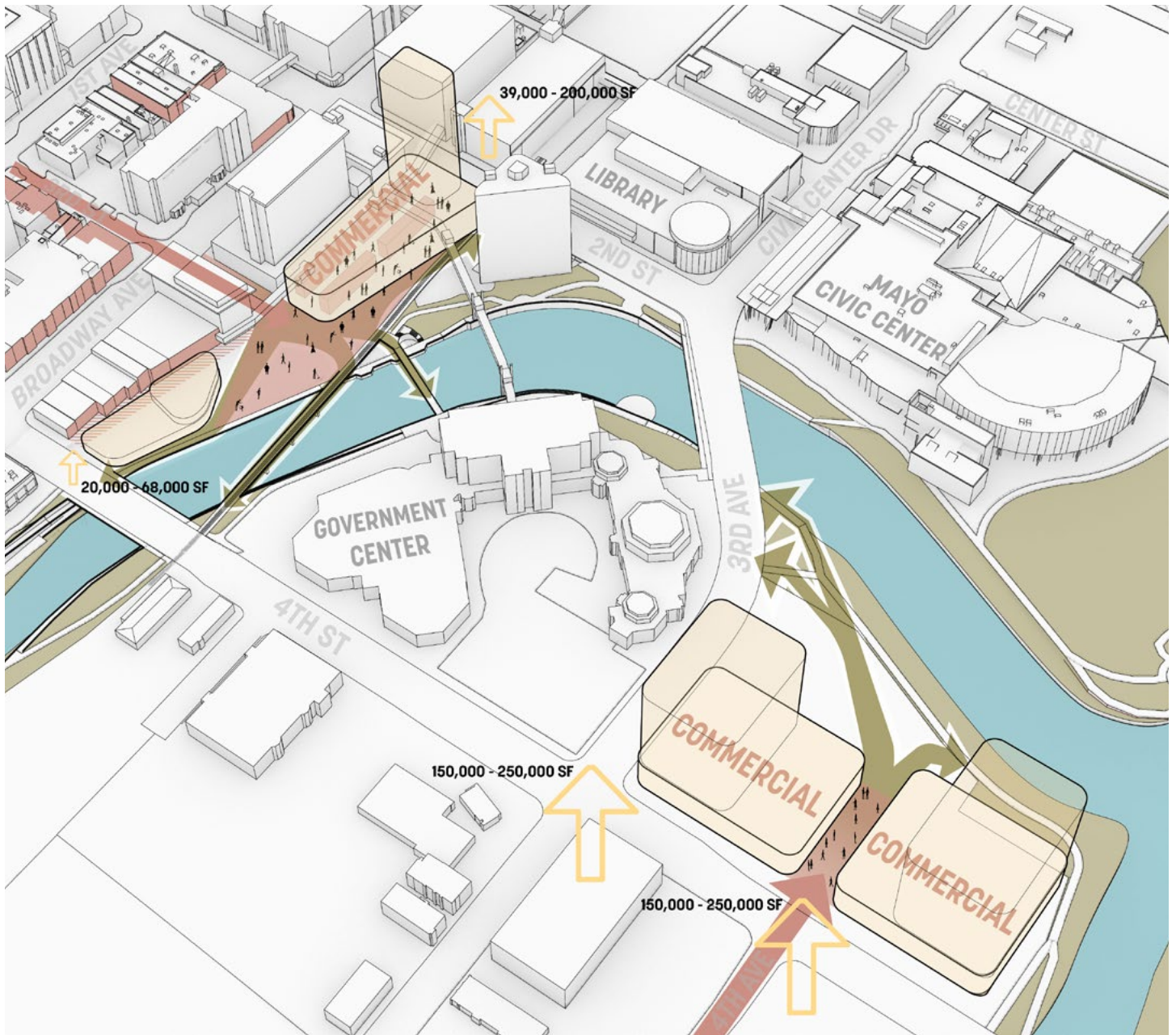
- Advance Schematic Design for the public realm for the East and West sites, exploring: Programming; Low impact design/resiliency strategies; Hard vs. soft spaces; Site furnishings; Material palette; Plant palette; Conceptual lighting; Public art concept; Signage and wayfinding concept; Trail connections; Skyway connections and site accessibility; Amenity buildings; Waterfront activation; Building interface for private development.
- Engage stakeholders and the community in the design process.
- Provide budget estimates and opinions of probable cost.
- Continue discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to vet the Schematic Design concept.
- Coordinate with architecture on the concept design for the sunken garden.

### **Development:**

- Draft Request for Qualifications / Request for Proposals for Development Partners for the Small Area Plan.
- Identify partners for the reuse of the Red Owl Grocery Store and operation of the Botanical Garden.

### **Civil/Environmental Engineering:**

- Complete site survey.
- Work with the US Army Corps of Engineers, Federal Emergency Administration/Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Flood Control program for Rochester on necessary modifications to the River Channel wall, costs, timing and infrastructure implications for the floodway.
- Investigate ways in which these sites can connect to the proposed District Energy network.



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# APPENDIX

Economic Impact Data and Research

Site Activation Summary