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DATE: May 23, 2012  
TO: Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission  
FROM: Jody Martinez, Design and Construction Manager; Don Ganje, Great River Passage Project Manager; Ellen Stewart, Landscape Architect  
RE: **Great River Passage: Response to February 29, 2012 Public Hearing Testimony**

## Introduction

This memo summarizes the main issues raised during the February 29 - March 5 public comment period for the Great River Passage Master Plan. Attached is a comment matrix addressing each comment (Attachment A), a list of recommended changes to the Master Plan document (Attachment B), and a list of Great River Passage Master Plan sections suitable for adoption as part of Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan (Attachment C). Suggested responses to the comments and changes to the Master Plan resulted from discussions with the Leadership and Steering committees, and consultations with Wenk Associates and other City staff.

## Background

The Great River Passage Master Plan, over two years in the making, was developed by a consulting team of professionals led by Wenk Associates, a national planning and design firm based in Denver, Colorado; a City staff working group made up of individuals from Planning and Economic Development, Public Works, and Department of Safety and Inspections; and a 56 member task force/technical advisory group including representatives from District Councils, City Council offices, National Park Service, MN Department of Natural Resources, Ramsey County, Friends of Ramsey County Parks and Trails, Friends of the Mississippi River, City of Saint Paul Departments of Public Works and Planning and Economic Development, and the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation. Input was received at 29 public input sessions, including focus groups, community task force meetings, and open houses.

## What is Proposed

The Great River Passage Master Plan will transform Saint Paul in profound ways. Developed with hundreds of hours of citizen input, the Great River Passage vision is based on three principles for riverfront development - to be **more natural, more urban, and more connected**. This plan lays the framework to unify the entire length of Saint Paul's riverfront into one grand and comprehensive vision to be realized over the next several decades. This visionary parks plan is not without precedent ... Central Park in New York City, the Emerald Necklace system of parks in Boston, and, here in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Landscape Architect Horace William



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Shaffer Cleveland's 19<sup>th</sup> century plan for development of both cities' park systems were all "visionary" park plans, not without controversy. Were it not for the 1870 era adoption of H.W.S. Cleveland's plans for the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Park systems, we would not have the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Parks, the Grand Round (in both cities), Como Regional Park, Phalen Regional Park, Mississippi River Boulevard, and the other parkways and boulevards connecting these parks within each city. An example of the controversy surrounding these plans is illustrated from a July 1873 article in the Saint Paul Dispatch reporting on the discussions in the City Council to purchase land for Como Park, as recommended in the HWS Cleveland Plan. The article stated the City's argument to purchase lands while real estate value was low, is "a farce; the city has more pressing needs for sewers, streets, and public buildings, as well as other outstanding bond issues to be paid and must therefore be fiscally conservative." Fortunately, wiser sentiment prevailed or we would not have the premier park in Como Park we have today.

Moving forward in the years to come, the Great River Passage Master Plan will set the stage for sustainable parks and open spaces; ecological restoration and economic development; and connection of the city, its neighborhoods, and people to Saint Paul's unique Mississippi River resources.

### **Key Points to Remember**

- The Great River Passage Master Plan builds upon several previous planning efforts that have been adopted by the Mayor and City Council. These include the Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework (1997), the Mississippi River Corridor Plan (2001- also adopted as part of the Comp Plan), the Great River Park chapter of the Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework (2007), and various District Council plans.
- A central goal of the master plan is to strike a balance between the protection and enhancement of the river corridor's natural qualities, and urban development.
- This plan has been developed and recommendations were made in the context of viewing the river corridor as an interconnected system of parks and trails.
- The Plan is a 30- to 50-year vision, yet also includes specific recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term implementation to provide guidance for policy makers, City departments, and budgeting processes.
- The Great River Passage Master Plan will not become part of the Comprehensive Plan in its entirety. PED staff will make recommendations to the Planning Committee as to which portions of the plan are appropriate as part of the Comprehensive Plan. For example, Chapter 7, Implementation, will not become part of the Comprehensive Plan, but it will be adopted by the City Council to guide implementation of the Master Plan. Attachment C includes an outline of sections suitable for adoption for the City's Comprehensive Plan.

### **Public Hearing Testimony**

The Master Plan was released for public review and comment on January 12, 2012. On February 29, 2012, after a nearly seven-week public review period, the Parks and Recreation Commission held the first of three scheduled public hearing opportunities. The Commission also received additional written comments until March 5, 2012 at 4:30 p.m. A summary of the public hearing testimony, as well as the written testimony submitted, was posted to the Parks and Recreation Commission web site and the Great River Passage web site in March. They can be found at [www.stpaul.gov/parkscommission](http://www.stpaul.gov/parkscommission) and [www.greatriverpassage.org](http://www.greatriverpassage.org).

### **Major Issues**

The major issues raised have been grouped into seven categories for clarity and to minimize duplication of responses. These categories are:

1. Process
2. Management and Funding

3. Proposed Park Development
4. Transportation/Connection
5. Environmental Impact
6. Economic Development
7. Mapping/Graphic

Under each category, similar comments were grouped where possible, and a recommended response to each issue has been prepared.

## 1. PROCESS

**Issue 1-a. *Concern about how the process moves forward; concern that the Great River Passage Master Plan will supersede or negate other planning documents, discussions, or input from community groups; relationship of this plan to other approved City plans; concern that approval of conceptual parts of the plan will count as approval of the more specific recommendations of the plan; and concern about ability to alter the plan in the future.***

- **Response:** The Great River Passage Master Plan will be used as a basis for understanding specific design/development goals and objectives for individual parks and other areas within the greater system of St. Paul’s riverfront lands. The Great River Passage process included a review of all existing district plans, small area plans and other relevant plans, including Comprehensive Plan chapters. Information from these various plans was included as a base layer that the Great River Passage Master Plan built upon to envision the future.

The charge of the project team was to look beyond today’s thinking and envision a new world where our City preserves and enhances its natural areas, considers and moves forward key development opportunities to take advantage of a river address, and creates better connections between the river and our neighborhoods. This plan is a community-based vision which will be **used as a starting point and guide for future design development and more detailed planning** of specific projects, a process that will continue to involve community input as funding is secured and budgets established.

- **Plan changes:** Chapters 1, 6 and 7 will include more information on the plan process moving forward. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 2, 4, 7, 137, 292, 300*

**Issue 1-b. *Concern that the plan does not specify a public process to determine project priorities.***

- **Response:** Development of a master plan for the Great River Passage sets a vision for enhancement of all 17 miles of Saint Paul’s Mississippi River Corridor. This Plan will help us leverage funding and partnerships throughout the Great River Passage as opportunities for various projects develop. Determining priorities out of the many potential initiatives and projects outlined in the Plan was not part of the scope of this planning effort. However, having the ability to be adaptable and flexible to respond quickly as projects come forward is critical. For example, a developer for the West Publishing site is unknown today, but tomorrow, someone could come forward with a proposal and things could change immediately. The Plan will be ready to address those situations. Although we have not determined specific project priorities, established City procedures for determining and allocating project budgets through Saint Paul City Council action will be adhered to. In addition, the following list of criteria will be used to evaluate which projects the City will pursue:
  - broad community consensus

- City owned/controlled land or willing developer
  - catalyst for further development
  - leverages partnerships
  - funding options and availability
- **Plan changes:** The above project evaluation criteria have been included in Chapter 6. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 136*

**Issue 1-c. Concern that the citizen input process was non-inclusive and that review process was not long enough.**

- **Response:** From August 2010 (Community Event at Harriet Island kicks off community planning process) to June 2011 there were 29 public input opportunities.
  - 12 Community Task Force/Technical Advisory Group meetings, including representatives from District Councils, City Council offices, National Park Service, MN Department of Natural Resources, Ramsey County, Friends of Ramsey County Parks and Trails, City of Saint Paul Departments of Public Works and Planning and Economic Development, Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation.
  - 11 meetings inviting public comment.
  - 6 Focus Group meetings with experts and agencies on the topics of: Natural Resources, Water Resources, Recreation, Transportation, River and Industry, and Public Art.

A 56-member Task Force, including representatives from all seventeen District Council, was invited to participate in the process with the assumption that they would communicate with their respective boards on Great River Passage conclusions and draft recommendations. Other Task Force members were selected from the following organizations: Audubon MN, Minnesota Boat Club, St. Paul Yacht Club, Friends of the Mississippi River, Friends of Ramsey County Parks and Trails, River's Edge Academy, Lower Phalen Creek Project, Mississippi River Fund, Padelford Packet Boat Co., Northwest Canoe Co., District Energy, Upper River Services, Aggregate Industries, St. Paul Bicycle Coalition, The Trust For Public Land, Friends of Lilydale, Xcel Energy, U of MN River Life Partnership Institute on the Environment, and Urban Boat Builders.

In addition, a Technical Advisory Group was chosen with representatives from the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation, the DNR Div. of Waters, Ramsey Washington Metro Watershed District, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation, Metropolitan Airports Commission, Saint Paul Planning and Economic Development, Public Art St. Paul, Capitol Region Watershed District, St. Paul District Corps of Engineers, National Park Service, Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority and St. Paul Port Authority.

In January, 2012, the Master Plan was released for a 60-day public comment period before the Parks Commission public hearing (2/29). From January 2012 to February 2012, there were presentations of the Master Plan to 10 District Councils. Plan support and comments were requested. City staff prepared an errata list as a means to track plan errors and omissions. An initial list of errors/omission was compiled and posted to the GRP web site. Comments were received until Monday, March 5, 2012 at 4:30 p.m. for this first public hearing period providing over eight weeks for the public to review and submit comments.

- **Plan change:** None

## 2. MANAGEMENT

**Issue 2-a:** *Concern expressed regarding Chapter 7 - Implementation. Comments include concern the task force did not get a chance to review the chapter or provide input, increased annual expense and impact on limited City resources, and creation of a new Parks Department Division to manage the Great River Passage.*

- **Response:** Chapter 7 was not reviewed by the community task force and was never intended to be adopted as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The information presented in Chapter 7 was requested by the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department to help department leadership begin to develop a roadmap to shepherd the plan through the many decades it will take to complete, including multiple budget cycles, administrations, and changes in leadership. The strategies presented in Chapter 7 respond to the significance of the vision for the Great River Passage and will serve to elevate the Passage to the same level of stature that Saint Paul's premier park, Como Regional Park, now enjoys. It is no coincidence that the organizational structure proposed by the consultants for the Great River Passage is based upon the highly successful public/private organizational structure that has guided the restoration and on-going operation of Como Regional Park for over 30 years.
- **Plan Changes :** Chapter 7 will be renamed "Delivering the Vision" to better reflect the intent of this chapter as a guide for the leadership of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation to create the organizational structure required to implement the grand vision that is the Great River Passage. Also, information will be added to both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 outlining opportunities for continued public involvement in the development of detailed designs for individual areas of the Passage as funding is secured. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 2, 4, 7, 292*

## 3. PROPOSED PARK DEVELOPMENT

**Issue 3-a:** *Several comments regarding text as well as mapping inconsistencies in Chapter 3 - regarding the map and information included on River Parks.*

- **Response:** We agree with the comments and believe the intent of this section was to define the term "Nature-Based Recreation" as well as to indicate where opportunities for this type of activity exist within distinct park areas along the river corridor. We have instructed the consultants to revise this section and change the title from "River Parks" to "Active Nature-Based Recreation."
- **Plan Changes:** Titles on both the text page and the map have been changed to "Active Nature-Based Recreation." Much of the text in the section formerly called "River Parks" will change to reflect the intent of providing information on Active Nature-Based Recreation including the definition of it as well as the selection of locations mapped on the opposite page. Active Nature-Based Recreation will be clearly defined in the text and identified on the map. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 27-32*

**Issue 3-b:** *Concern was expressed that with the Plan's promotion of greater recreational use of the river, there was no corresponding mention about an increase in safety concerns this additional recreational use will bring.*

- **Response:** We agree that, as greater recreational use of the river occurs, the potential conflict between barge traffic and recreational boaters will increase. Specifics on boating safety are beyond the scope of this plan; however, the plan is not silent on the issue, and it

has been emphasized in the introduction to Chapter 4-More Urban.

- **Plan Change:** Add language to Chapter 4 that addresses the importance of safety in a river that has shared uses. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 63*

**Issue 3-c:** *Comments were expressed regarding the inclusion of mountain biking trails within Hidden Falls Park and Island Station, due to concerns regarding potential environmental damage as well as a perception that there is not enough space to allow the trails to be of much value to potential riders.*

- **Response:** The areas in the Plan designated for mountain biking were selected by our environmental consultants due to their avoidance of ecologically sensitive areas as well as the fact that they are areas where frequent flooding occurs, which they believe will tend to “heal” any further ecological degradation caused by the mountain biking activity. Staff met with representatives of the MN Off-Road Cyclists, who enthusiastically support the idea and expressed interest in being involved in future design of the trails.
- **Plan Change:** Language has been added in Chapter 6 in the table, which recommends partnering with the M.O.R.C., as well as the need to promote best practices in design of the trails. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 157*

**Issue 3-d:** *Concerns have been expressed about locating an environmental learning center at the Watergate Marina site.*

- **Response:** : The environmental learning center, to be located in the general area of the existing Watergate facility, will be part of a multi-use facility that includes privately-operated concessions supporting river-oriented recreation, as well as environmental education. The site for the environmental education center was located here for the following reasons;
  - The success of the City's environmental education program requires close proximity to natural areas, such as those which are already available in the adjacent Crosby Farm Regional Park.
  - The existing facilities and structures at Watergate Marina require upgrading and/or replacement to better serve the needs of boaters. This provides the opportunity to construct new facilities which would serve to further support the mission and activities of the City's environmental education program, while enhancing the quality of the current facilities for the recreational boater community.
  - The current Watergate Marina facility, although in public ownership, allows river access to very few members of the public. As an environmental education and recreational access point, the river would become much more publicly accessible.
- **Plan Change:** None

**Issue 3-e:** *There are comments and some concerns expressed regarding the idea of locating a destination commercial sports activity center on land behind the levee adjacent to Harriet Island Park and near the intersection of Wabasha Street and Fillmore Avenue.*

- **Response:** The Harriet Island/District del Sol Final Concept Plan, adopted by the City Council in 2003, designates this site as a “regional commercial recreation attraction.” Although City staff continue to support this, and consider it an amenity for proposed adjacent residential development on the Westside Flats, this idea would only become feasible over time and as land use changes.

- **Plan Change:** None

#### 4. TRANSPORTATION/CONNECTION

**Issue 4-a:** *Several comments were received requesting that a pedestrian bridge be shown over Shepard Road at Walnut Street, between Irvine Park and the Samuel H. Morgan Regional Trail.*

- **Response:** The Walnut Street Connection is included in the District 9 Area Plan Summary (2010). It is not recommended as part of the GRP Plan due to the existing at grade connection at Eagle Parkway and Shepard Road.
- **Plan Change:** The crossing will be removed from the maps where it is shown and the Plan will show no bridge or overpass connection between Irvine Park and Upper Landing Park. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 105*

**Issue 4-b:** *Comments were received requesting the existing rail line, which runs through the Victoria Park Urban Village and terminates at the abandoned Ford Plant, be shown in the Master Plan as a proposed bike/pedestrian trail.*

- **Response:** Canadian Pacific Rail owns the rail line that runs to the Ford site and has indicated that its future use is tied to reuse of the Ford property. The City will evaluate reuse options for the rail line in the event that Canadian Pacific ceases to use it for rail service. The Ford Site “Phase I Summary Report: 5 Major Development Scenarios” (2007) shows the rail line used in a different way in each scenario, as a road, a transitway, a trail, and vacated. The impacts and benefits of these alternatives will be tested through the planned Alternative Urban Area-wide Review and Traffic Impact studies to be conducted on the scenarios in 2012-13. It is premature to depict the railway as a trail in the GRP Plan since land use/redevelopment decisions have yet to be made.
- **Plan Change:** None

**Issue 4-c:** *Comments were received regarding concern over the Plan’s recommendation to lower the speed on Shepard Road to 35 MPH, along with the proposal that it be redesigned as a “parkway-like” road. Concern has been expressed that this will result in greater traffic moving to West Seventh Street.*

- **Response:** The intent of the Plan is to transform the character of Shepard Road to enhance redevelopment potential along the river, and to more strongly connect adjacent neighborhoods to the river. A more detailed study of the corridor will be necessary to determine final design. Our traffic consultant has indicated that the reason West 7th has so much traffic, is because of the many destinations located along it. Shepard Road has few by comparison. The City’s goal is to balance traffic volumes between parallel routes - lowering those on West 7th while increasing volumes on Shepard - and to do so while keeping speeds compatible with surrounding land uses in both corridors. W. 7th is not capable of realizing a 25% increase in traffic volumes, regardless of speeds on Shepard Road. It can have more *person capacity* if transit use is revisited within the corridor, but room for increased auto capacity on W. 7th is limited.
- **Plan Change:** We have asked the consultant to add language to the section on Shepard Road to clarify that the intent of the changes to Shepard Road are to foster better

connectivity between the Great River Passage and adjacent neighborhoods rather than reduce Average Daily Traffic (ADT) and divert traffic. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 161*

## 5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

**Issue 5-a:** *Plan lacks delineated process for following environmental policies and regulations. Specific comments mentioned the identification and accommodation of threatened and endangered species, development in the floodplain, and the adoption of the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) to address environmental issues.*

- **Response:** As the City pursues enhancements within the Great River Passage, the usual protocol will be followed in order to obtain the most accurate and relevant information to inform the design, including but not limited to: FEMA floodplain determinations, information on endangered and protected species; and soil information for structural and contamination purposes. The multiple Federal, State, regional, and local agencies and requirements are delineated in the Appendix Section A.3 Regulatory Requirements. However, the method and process required to demonstrate adherence to applicable law, policy and regulation are not included in this visioning document. Specific SITES criteria relevant to the Great River Passage have been included in the recommended Sustainable Strategies.
- **Plan Changes:** Added current 100-Year Flood line to Water Resources Management Plan map. The former Section 3.4-Sustainable Strategies has been moved to Chapter 7-Delivering the Vision, and additional information on SITES as a tool rather than a prescribed approach to design and development has been added, as well as additional information on Floodplain and Rare and Endangered Species. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 49-53*

**Issue 5-b:** *Concern about recommended river shoreline revetment solution through the Passage.*

- **Response:** Specific engineering solutions for the shoreline will be determined at the time that we have funding for design and construction. The intent is to provide shoreline stabilization as well as a natural look to the river's edge in the more natural areas of the park. The method recommended in the Plan provides sub-aquatic habitat in addition to a natural aesthetic achieved by live staking.
- **Plan Changes:** Provided graphics for recommended engineering solution along with the text in Chapter 3 the Water Resources Plan section under River Shoreline Restoration. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 33, 41, 47*

**Issue 5-c:** *Concern about the impact of Watergate Marina.*

- **Response:** Watergate Marina exists in an area which has endured much environmental disturbance from construction of the current structures and ongoing use of the adjacent area surrounding the structures. The intent for the Watergate Marina site is to provide a new sustainably designed public facility that draws people to the river, including an environmental learning center, café and marina. Use of sustainable design principles, such as the incorporation of eco-friendly materials and state-of-the-art energy practices into the design, will be a model for good design practices throughout our park system and our community. Native plant communities will be re-established in areas that have been

disturbed, creating enhanced habitat and a more natural transition into adjacent Crosby Regional Park.

- **Plan Changes:** Added language to Chapter 6 Watergate Marina Vision Plan to include the potential for environmental improvements at the site. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 175, 179*

**Issue 5-d: Concern regarding proposed acquisition of potentially contaminated Ford riverside parcel.**

- **Response:** Saint Paul is concerned about any pollution and contamination threats posed to the Mississippi River, its park system and the public. The City works on an on-going basis to make sure that any such threats are addressed. Former dumping and contamination at the Ford properties is being documented, investigated and monitored as required, with oversight from the MN Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The City continues to discuss site remediation issues on the Ford site with the MPCA, including the Ford river parcel, respecting the MPCA's charge of ensuring that public and environmental health concerns are addressed.
- **Plan Changes:** Language has been added regarding contamination issues in Chapter 6, under the heading "Explore Acquisition of Part of the Ford Property." *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 156*

## 6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Issue 6-a: Concern that the Plan indicates industrial activity along the river is in decline, and that the Plan recommends phasing out industrial uses along the river.**

- **Response:** We understand there continues to be demand for use of river-related industrial sites along the river's edge within Saint Paul. This plan will continue to support river-related industry.
- **Plan Changes:** Language and graphics have been changed in Chapters 1, 4 and 6 to reflect the City's intent to balance uses along the river and maintain river-related industry. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 8, 9, 76, 77, 80, 250, 252, 253-257, 263*

**Issue 6-b: Concern that the Plan discourages on-going industrial activities and proposes to limit industrial uses on the river.**

- **Response:** It is not the intent of the Plan to discourage industrial or manufacturing uses. Saint Paul is interested in retaining a strong industrial job base. In fact, City staff have prepared draft Zoning Code amendments to do just that (currently being reviewed by the Planning Commission). The Great River Passage strives for a diversified land use mix in the high-amenity river corridor while preserving a sensitive natural environment.
- **Plan Changes:** None

**Issue 6-c: Concern that all current barge fleeting areas have not been shown on the Plan maps, and that the significance of the Saint Paul harbor is not clearly emphasized.**

- **Response:** We understand the concerns regarding the significance of the Saint Paul

harbor, as well as the need to maintain existing barge fleeting capacity. We have reviewed Plan language and changed potentially sensitive language to reflect the intent of the City to balance uses along the river and retain river-related industry.

- **Plan Changes:** Maps were changed and updated to reflect all existing barge fleeting locations. Language was added to Chapter 4 to reflect the importance of the Saint Paul harbor. *For specific changes to the plan, refer to Attachment B: Line item(s) 82, 85, 251, 252, 255-257, 263*

**Issue 6-d:** *Concern that exact setbacks from the riverfront are not described in the Plan, and that buildings are recommended to be close to the river, especially on the Westside.*

- **Response:** It is not appropriate for the GRP Plan to recommend specific setback requirements. The intent of the conceptual images for the West Side Flats is to encourage private development that relates to the public edge (especially on the ground floor), and to encourage physical and visual interaction between the two.
- **Plan Changes:** None

## 7. MAPPING/GRAPHIC

**Issue 7-a.** *Concern about confusing and incorrect items noted on various maps and graphics, including inconsistent labeling, map key descriptions, definitions and other miscellaneous items.*

- **Response:** All maps and associated text have been reviewed and revised to more accurately describe intent.
- **Plan changes:** See Attachment B for a complete listing of all Plan changes.

### **Staff Recommendation and Park and Recreation Commission Request**

Staff requests that the Parks and Recreation Commission:

- Approve the changes to the Plan as recommended in Attachment B;
- Forward the Great River Passage Master Plan to the Planning Commission and City Council for final approval;
- Request that the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council adoption of appropriate sections of the Great River Passage Master Plan as part of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan as per Attachment C; and
- Request that the City Council adopt the entire Great River Passage Master Plan as official City policy to guide public and private investment within the Great River Passage, plan implementation, and administration of the program.