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Iconic Walkway Proposed Over Mississippi River at St. Anthony Falls

The promenade uses obsolete structure to allow unprecedented access to the river.

MINNEAPOLIS (01.14.20) – Design concepts for an iconic walkway over the Mississippi River at St. Anthony Falls in downtown Minneapolis were unveiled today during the Hennepin County Board’s Public Works meeting. The walkway takes advantage of obsolete structure remaining in the river since the closing of the lock and dam to create an inclusive promenade over the storied Mississippi River’s only waterfall, St. Anthony Falls. Designed by RSP, the proposed project is moving into the feasibility stage and seeking public input.



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Further study will be needed to answer critical “next step” questions regarding buildability, historic and environmental impact, economic opportunity, etc. Initial studies of the existing structure, river and site suggest the walkway is possible. Extensive public engagement to gather feedback, answer questions, and gauge interest will also be required.

“We’ve spent the past two years exploring this concept,” said David Norback, AIA, President of RSP Architects. “We’ve had initial discussions with an array of individuals and organizations to gather input, learn more about the site and get a sense if this is possible. So far, the design has received a positive response as a strong placemaking gesture that improves the downtown experience.”

Norback lists three key reasons why the opportunity for this project exists now:

1. Industry, which used the river as a source of power and transportation, has moved away.
2. The riverfront’s growing popularity and booming residential population.
3. The closing of the lock and dam.

The site is rich with history. First as a home and spiritual place for Native Americans and then as the center of the industry – first lumber, then flour and more recently, hydro-electric power. Today, the area is increasingly popular with downtown residents and tourists alike. Millions walk, run and bike over the Stone Arch Bridge annually. As proposed, the ¾-mile walkway brings the public close, creating an intimate connection to the river – a place to walk, run, bike, or rest alongside the majestic power and beauty of the Mississippi.

The recent closing of the lock and dam presents the opportunity for the project. The large mooring cells that used to guide boats into the lock and dam are re-purposed as structural supports for the walkway, while the lock provides support for a grand staircase and elevator. As proposed, more than 80 percent of the walkway is supported by existing elements.



Accessible from both sides of the river, the hope for the landscaped walkway is that it would be free to the public, open year-round and feature a range of programming possibilities.

“The proposed walkway intends to be a light touch with simplicity in all new construction,” explained Norback. “We call it Wishbone in reference to its shape. Visitors will be able to walk alongside the Horseshoe Falls and stand within feet of St. Anthony Falls. In providing unprecedented access to the river, the Wishbone aligns with the City’s 2025 Downtown Plan to create a river destination that is thriving, connected, exciting and welcoming.”

Leaders from Minnesota’s Native American tribes are involved to help guide the project and are collaborating with the team, discussing options and ideas. RSP has also collaborated with Damon Farber Landscape Architects, Meyer Borgman Johnson, and Mortenson on the initial concepts.



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RSP Architects was founded in Minneapolis 42 years ago in 1978. Since then, the firm has grown to over 400+ employees in six U.S. locations and a subsidiary overseas. Headquarters remain in Minneapolis with other offices in Rochester, Minnesota; Phoenix, Arizona; Fort Worth, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; and Miami, Florida. The 100% ESOP firm consistently ranks as one of the largest in the country with annual revenue over \$75M.

RSP maintains a diverse practice with architectural expertise in corporate, government, healthcare, higher education, hospitality, manufacturing and distribution, and retail projects throughout the U.S. and internationally. In addition, RSP i_SPACE is a proprietary consultancy service that specializes in facility information, while RSP Dreambox offers experience design and environmental communications.