



Riverfront Revitalization Task 1 Final Report

Prepared for
The City of Minneapolis
and
Riverfront Revitalization
Core Group
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Executive Summary

The City of Minneapolis has a long history of commitment to the revitalization of the Mississippi River. Many coordinated efforts have resulted in major achievements. Nevertheless, questions have surfaced as to whether it is desirable and feasible to establish a separate organization or make other organizational changes that would strengthen cooperative efforts and financial support of revitalization efforts.

With the help of a grant from the McKnight Foundation, the City hired Bacon & Associates to help the City examine how Minneapolis can enhance its organizational capacity so riverfront revitalization efforts can be completed more effectively.

The first stage of this process (Task 1) is a high-level assessment to understand the roles of organizations involved in riverfront initiatives, what seems to be working well, and what are the challenges of the current arrangement. In addition, organizational models in other communities actively pursuing waterfront revitalization were researched.

Methodology

Bacon and Associates used a combination of action research methods. These included individual interviews, organizational questionnaires, review of documents, and web research.

Core Group

Carolyn Bacon and Cathy Tilsen of Bacon & Associates worked in collaboration with a small group of representatives primarily from the Riverfront Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), called the Core Group. The Core Group consists of: Ann Calvert, Carrie Flack, Pam Miner and Barbara Sporlein, Community Planning and Economic Development, City of Minneapolis; John Crippen, St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board/Mills City Museum; Rachel Ramadhyani, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; David Kelliher, Minnesota Historical Society; Larry Blackstad, Hennepin County; and Chuck Sullivan and Matt Massman, Above the Falls Citizen Advisory Committee.

Findings

These common themes emerged from the organizational questionnaires, individual interviews, and document review:

Current Gaps, Challenges, and Opportunities

1. Unclear common vision
2. Lack of clear, defined leadership
3. Constraints on funding
4. Lack of consistent coordination among agencies
5. Role of the Park Board
6. Influence of neighborhood groups
7. Lack of effective marketing
8. Limited awareness and support in the community
9. Poor planning

What is Working Well?

For those involved in riverfront revitalization efforts, there is a great deal of energy and passion. People care about what happens on the river. When asked what has worked well, these themes emerged:

1. Much has been accomplished
2. Staff support is strong
3. Above the Falls Citizens Advisory Committee is highly committed
4. Partners at the table: experiences of cooperation and collaboration

Summary of Research From Other Communities

Bacon & Associates researched the following five communities:

- Riverfront Corporation (St. Paul)
- River Action (Quad Cities region)
- RiverCity Company (Chattanooga)
- City of Vancouver (British Columbia)
- Fraser River Estuary Management Authority (British Columbia)

(In addition, research is underway into the Minneapolis Riverfront Development Coordinating Board, RDCB, which existed from 1977 to 1981.)

Findings from the research

- Each organizational structure reflected the uniqueness of that region's people, culture, history, patterns, and hopes for the future. There was no one-size-fits-all model or approach.
- It took a champion and other strong civic leaders to make a nonprofit organization a reality.
- Each region developed a compelling vision for revitalization that incorporated design principles, which were often linked to a long-term Master Plan.
- Each community had gone through some kind of extensive community engagement process.
- There was an understanding that these kinds of major revitalization efforts require long-term and ongoing political, financial, and community support.
- All models emphasized ongoing collaboration among governmental agencies, developers, businesses, and community groups.
- Policy-setting and decision-making were transparent.
- In St. Paul, the Quad Cities, and Chattanooga, the organizations were set-up to jump-start major redevelopment efforts *before* much revitalization had been undertaken.

Consultant Team's Overall Observations

- The sheer number of groups and individuals that have a hand in riverfront activities in Minneapolis is both remarkable and overwhelming. The potential richness of all of these organizations working together is tremendous; but one can also see the potential for competing goals, communication challenges, and unnecessary gaps and/or redundancies.

- The issues around the lack of a common vision are complicated. It is the most constant theme heard and for some, the most troubling concern. However, it's possible that the lack of a shared vision is a *symptom* that points to the fact that there is no organizational body that unifies all of the riverfront stakeholders.
- With no one agency or organization in charge of riverfront revitalization initiatives, it is more difficult to move initiatives forward.
- Minneapolis's unique governance structure—it's weak mayor/strong city council system, array of departments, and the independent park board—makes coordinated decision-making more difficult.
- No clear consensus emerged about the ideal organization design; but there was strong agreement that there is a need for change.
- The absence of a clear champion with authority, power, and influence is sorely missing.
- There is an attitude of mistrust of government and its ability to make things happen. Thus, real concern exists that if a governmental agency is put in charge of riverfront activities, little will get done.
- There is a strong sentiment that it is time to focus significant attention and funding on the redevelopment of the river on the north side of the city. There is also strong sentiment to take a more regional approach to the river, both within Minneapolis itself, and in connections to St. Paul and its riverfront work.

Recommendations

We recommend proceeding with the study into Task 2:

- Do small group facilitated sessions with Minneapolis elected officials to share the themes from the Riverfront Revitalization Task 1 report, attain their reactions and insights, and further explore their level of interest in riverfront revitalization.
- Do the same with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board commissioners and superintendent.
- Staff will aid in developing questions for the sessions; however, they will not be in attendance at the facilitated sessions.
- Simultaneously, conduct interviews with additional key stakeholders (civic leaders, developers, etc.) to further assess riverfront revitalization as a priority and willingness to provide input on organizational options.
- Assuming enough interest exists to continue the study process, convene Task 3 Workshops in early 2006. At this time, the research on various design options in other communities will be used to develop organization design scenarios. Invitees to these workshop/s will include representatives from neighborhood groups, the public sector, elected officials, the business sector, the non-profit sector, foundations, and key civic leaders.

Introduction

Background

The City of Minneapolis has a long history of commitment to the revitalization of the Mississippi River. Many coordinated efforts among public, private, and nonprofit organizations and partners have resulted in major achievements. Nevertheless questions continue to surface among various stakeholder groups as to whether it is desirable and feasible to establish a separate organization or make other organizational changes that would strengthen cooperative efforts and financial support of ongoing and future revitalization efforts.

With the help of a grant from the McKnight Foundation, the City of Minneapolis hired Bacon & Associates to develop and guide a process for the City to explore if and how Minneapolis, as a community, can enhance its organizational capacity so that future riverfront revitalization efforts can be completed more effectively and efficiently.

The first stage of this work, Task 1, involved a high-level assessment to understand the roles of organizations involved in riverfront initiatives, what seems to be working well, and what are the challenges of the current arrangement. In addition, organizational models in other communities actively pursuing riverfront or waterfront revitalization were researched.

This report is a summary of the findings from this assessment and research. It also includes observations and recommendations from Bacon & Associates.

Methodology

Bacon and Associates used a combination of action research methods. These included individual interviews, organizational questionnaires, review of documents, and web research. For a list of organizations surveyed, individuals interviewed, and cities researched, please see the appendix.

Core Group

Carolyn Bacon and Cathy Tilsen of Bacon and Associates worked in collaboration with a small group of representatives primarily from the Riverfront Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), called the Core Group. TAC is an interagency group, representing a variety of organizations—public, nonprofit and citizens groups—that are involved in riverfront revitalization efforts. The Core Group consists of: Ann Calvert, Carrie Flack, Pam Miner and Barbara Sporlein, Community Planning and Economic Development, City of Minneapolis; John Crippen, St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board/Mills City Museum; Rachel Ramadhyani, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; David Kelliher, Minnesota Historical Society; Larry Blackstad, Hennepin County; and Chuck Sullivan and Matt Massman, Above the Falls Citizen Advisory Committee.

Findings

Common themes emerged from the organizational questionnaires, individual interviews and document review. These include frequently raised concerns, issues, ideas, and suggestions. The findings are organized into three sections: summary of current gaps, challenges, and opportunities; what's working well; and thoughts on a new organization.

Note: the following themes are perceptions of the respondents. These perceptions may or may not reflect the actual facts. However, all of these perceptions deserve our attention as they represent commonly shared opinions held by many of those that participated in this aspect of the assessment.

Current Gaps, Challenges, and Opportunities

1. Unclear common vision

A vision is an organization or community's picture of its preferred future. It is a beacon of light that excites those involved in striving for this future, as well as those directly affected by it. A compelling shared vision guides decisions and becomes a rallying point for all involved. A vision is usually a statement that is succinct and is spoken about frequently, rather than a set of comprehensive plans.

However, perception is strong that there is a lack of vision for the river, or if there is a vision, it's not well understood or embraced. More importantly, the perception exists that there is a lack of vision for the City of Minneapolis, and that any vision for the river should be an aspect of the larger vision for the City as a whole. Others expressed the need for a regional vision of river redevelopment efforts. Many people noted that there are many visions for the river; however, they are not well-coordinated or connected. "If everybody has a vision, then nobody really makes it happen."

2. Lack of clear, defined leadership

Closely aligned with the perception of the lack of an overarching vision for riverfront revitalization, is the view that there isn't a clear champion for the riverfront. Furthermore, there isn't one group or agency that oversees and coordinates riverfront initiatives; many expressed frustration with the variety of agencies and bureaucracies they had to deal with to get anything done. Not only do respondents want a clear, shared vision, they want a designated group to monitor and measure progress on the attainment of that vision.

3. Constraints on funding

Both the limitations of current funding streams and the barriers that exist in raising funds from nongovernmental sources were frequently cited as serious problems. Some people have a hope that potential non-governmental investors and funders would get better informed and involved, but there isn't a process to explore these ideas that would also garner action. Many seemed to think that just having more funds was the answer to the perceived difficulties— and it's hard to argue that this isn't a core and critical barrier.

4. Lack of consistent coordination among agencies

There are pockets where agencies work well together, and the existence of the staff-level Riverfront Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board have resulted in creative and thoughtful solutions. However, the overriding view is that turf issues, lack of trust, competing goals and priorities, and the need to slog through the many layers of bureaucracy impede sound, consistent coordination among all the different entities. Several people noted that the staff of the different agencies worked well together, but that the decision makers were rarely seen in a similar vein.

5. The role of the Park Board as a key player

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is an important player, and there is recognition of both the importance of working well with them and the value of the Park Board's riverfront accomplishments to date (see [supplemental list](#) (pdf)). However, many talked about difficult experiences in working in a collaborative manner with the Park Board leadership, especially during the past few years. People talked specifically about leadership issues, while speaking well of the staff. For the Park Board itself, it appears that a key struggle is around the need for adequate funding—particularly for operations expenses.

6. Influence of neighborhood groups

Neighborhood groups are viewed as both a strength and a weakness. On one hand, they reflect the grassroots nature of Minneapolis, and provide an important avenue for citizen engagement. On the other hand, there is not a level playing field for all constituents. In addition, it is the nature of neighborhood groups to take a small picture view of the city, rather than consider the big picture needs of the city as a whole. Some people pointed out that it takes a convener or lead organization to help communities look across jurisdictional boundaries. Others talked about the need to focus efforts on the North side. Most agencies welcome public input—but want processes that are less cumbersome and less reactionary in nature.

7. Lack of effective marketing

Clearly, much has been accomplished along the riverfront—and respondents recognized that. By a large majority, we heard that a major gap has been in the promotion of all that has been achieved. There is a perception that the broader public has limited awareness of all that the riverfront has to offer—despite efforts of a number of groups to do some promotional and marketing work. In the absence of funds and a clear body to take responsibility for marketing, the efforts are disjointed and have limited success.

8. Limited awareness and support in the community

In an era of intense competition for public attention and resources, the perception is that the riverfront is not on the radar screen for the general public. Elected officials and others spoke of other key priorities such as public safety, education, transportation, and affordable housing. However, many believe that this lack of awareness may be a reflection of issues mentioned earlier (lack of both vision and appropriate marketing), and that there is still a need to continue to invest in the beauty and recreational opportunities offered by the river flowing through our community.

9. **Poor planning**

Again, the issue of planning has a strong relationship to issues already mentioned. Respondents who spoke of this as a concern talked about the need for a set of design principles that have been developed with broad input from all interested parties. Part of the criticism was that revitalization efforts don't appear coordinated, but rather look like a "hodge-podge of efforts." However, in the absence of a unified vision, and a group to coordinate all riverfront initiatives—it would be difficult to develop and manage the design principles.

What is Working Well?

For those involved in riverfront revitalization efforts, there is a great deal of energy and passion. People, whether private individuals, public sectors employees or elected officials, care about what happens on the river, even if there are conflicting views, ideas, and suggestions. Without that passion and energy, much of what has been achieved could not have happened. When asked what has worked well, these themes emerged:

1. Much has been accomplished

Many made the observation that even without a shared vision and guiding design principles to coordinate efforts, much has been accomplished along the river. Some point to the Stone Arch Bridge, Mill Ruins Park, Mill City Museum, the new Guthrie building, and all the housing developments along the riverfront. Small projects add up and make a difference.

2. Staff support is strong

While interviewees may have identified overall concerns about agencies and leadership, there is a strong and consistent theme of respecting and appreciating the efforts of the staff from multiple agencies. Many point to the commitment, dedication, intelligence, and creativity of key staff. In fact, there is the opinion that without the staff, riverfront revitalization would not be as successful as it is today.

3. Above the Falls Citizens Advisory Committee is committed

AFCAC's commitment and energy has caused many things to happen.

4. Partners at the table: experiences of cooperation and collaboration

Although there are some clear challenges to having so many stakeholder groups working on riverfront issues, there is also real value. "It usually takes all of the multiple contributions to get anything done." When divergent groups come together, people experience greater focus on the big picture and common goals; separate agendas seem less important. There is usually a "can do attitude."

One example of this was with the rebuilding of the Stone Arch Bridge. Under the guidance of a legislative Cooperative Agreement among MNDOT, Minnesota Historical Society (SAFHB), the City, the Park Board, and the County, "cooperation [eventually] became the watch word."

Another example of cooperation is with the TAC; several people mentioned that TAC has helped to reduce agency territoriality and improve coordination (but only up to a point).

As one respondent said, “[When we partner] we learn more about each other and sub-liaisons, and other unexpected partnerships occur.” Having partners at the table is also seen as way to widen possible resources.

Thoughts on a New Organization

While the overwhelming majority of those that participated in this assessment agree that there are serious and significant gaps in the coordination of riverfront efforts, respondents were all over the map about how to remedy the problems. When asked about solutions to the problems identified, several themes emerged:

1. Any new organization must be lean and strategic—and it must avoid bureaucracy.
2. Any organization will need the buy-in of all elected officials (including the Park Board), businesses, and the staff of all of the implementing agencies.
3. Strong civic support and participation will be essential in any design.
4. Strong, charismatic, focused and consistent leadership will be required to both spur and sustain interest in riverfront revitalization.
5. Some thought a new organization should be directly modeled after the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation. However, many thought the St. Paul model won't work in Minneapolis for a variety of reasons, primarily the difference between the strong mayor/weak council and weak mayor/strong council structures.
6. Others thought that a separate nonprofit organization was the only way to proceed, since it would be the sole steward of the goals and vision for riverfront revitalization.
7. Some spoke of tweaking what exists today.
8. Some fear that a new organization won't be accountable to the public. Any new organization must fully support and respect both public and private interests, including historical, cultural, environmental, and economic concerns.
9. Finally, some thought that any discussion of organizational design is premature, and that community engagement and a unified vision must come first.

Summary of Research From Other Communities

The Core Group wanted to learn about the organizational structures and governance approaches of other riverfront/waterfront revitalization projects.

After brainstorming and prioritizing, the Core Group instructed Bacon & Associates to review the organizational processes for riverfront or waterfront redevelopment in: St. Paul, Minnesota; Quad Cities; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Anacostia, Maryland; and Vancouver, British Columbia. Representatives from Milwaukee and Anacostia did not return phone calls. Therefore, the Core Group decided to add Chattanooga, Tennessee. In addition, one of Vancouver's senior city planners suggested reviewing the Fraser River Estuary Management Authority, which brings together multiple jurisdictions and private sector interests. The Core Group agreed to look into this as well.

Together with the Core Group, Bacon & Associates developed questions to guide the research into these five organizations:

- Riverfront Corporation (St. Paul)
- River Action (Quad Cities region)
- RiverCity Company (Chattanooga)
- City of Vancouver (British Columbia)
- Fraser River Estuary Management Authority (British Columbia)

(In addition, research is underway into the Minneapolis Riverfront Development Coordinating Board, RDCB, which existed from 1977 to 1981.)

Bacon & Associates reviewed documents and websites, and for, most sites, interviewed leaders of these organizations or those closely involved in the process.

Findings from the research

- Each organizational structure, including the private, nonprofit organizations, reflected the uniqueness of that region's people, culture, history, patterns, and hopes for the future. There was no one-size-fits-all model or approach. They all seemed to be created from the ground up.
- In each situation in which a private, nonprofit organization was established, it took a champion and other strong civic leaders to make things happen. Leading involved educating and advocacy, inspiring not only initial financial investment, but also political and civic involvement, and ongoing community-wide engagement.
- Each region developed a compelling vision of revitalization initiatives for their area that incorporated design principles. The vision was often linked to a long-term Master Plan or other long-term redevelopment goals, and had been developed with input from divergent stakeholder groups.
- Each community had gone through some kind of extensive community engagement process. This created more buy-in for the vision of redevelopment. It also created more support for the governance structure that already existed, as with River Action and the City of Vancouver, or resulted in the recommendation to establish a separate organization, as in Chattanooga. Both the vision and the community engagement process helped create a commitment to the greater common good.
- There was an understanding that these kinds of major revitalization efforts require long-term and ongoing political, financial, and community support for success, not just for the redevelopment plans but for the organizational structure. As one executive director observed, "This kind of work takes a long time. Organizations need to have long-term support to stay the course, to implement the vision and goals."
- All models emphasized ongoing collaboration among stakeholders, specifically among governmental agencies, developers, businesses, and community groups. Several of those interviewed expressed their opinion that no matter what governance structure is employed, the only way to be successful in the long run is through inclusive collaborative efforts.

- Whatever governance structure was employed, policy-setting and decision-making were transparent.
- In St. Paul, the Quad Cities region, and Chattanooga, the nonprofit organizations were set up to either jump-start or initiate major revitalization along their riverfronts. Little, if any, redevelopment had taken place prior to the organizations' active existence.

Consultant Team's Overall Observations

- The sheer number of the groups and individuals that have a hand in riverfront activities in Minneapolis is both remarkable and overwhelming. In the organizational questionnaires, we asked respondents to identify their role with the riverfront. Following is the result:

Regulatory role:	8 organizations
Implementer/taking action role:	15 organizations
Funder role:	8 organizations
Input role:	14 organizations
Advocacy role:	7 organizations
Other (programming, maintenance, management, etc.):	12 organizations

Note: some organizations play multiple roles, and the questionnaire process did not include all of the organizations involved in riverfront activities.

Additionally, we asked respondents to identify the *intensity* of their focus on the river. Following is the result:

Our only focus:	4 organizations (including AFCAC)
One of our top 3-5 focus areas:	2 organizations
One of many focus areas:	14 organizations

The TAC works to coordinate the effort of all of these groups. However, it's clear that, with no one organization in authority, and no commonly shared vision, each group will interpret and act upon their own individual goals in an effort to maximize the outcome *they* believe is most critical. Also, for the majority of the organizations, the riverfront is one of many priorities.

The potential richness of all of these organizations working together is tremendous; but one can also see the potential for competing goals, tremendous communication challenges, and perhaps unnecessary gaps and/or redundancies.

- Issues around the lack of vision are a bit complicated. It is the most constant theme heard throughout the interviews and for some, the most troubling concern. However, it's possible that the lack of a shared vision is a *symptom* that points to the fact that there is no organizational body that unifies all of the riverfront stakeholders. There is vision out there—lots of it. Each entity maximizes their efforts to achieve *their* version of the vision.

- The fact that there is no one agency or organization in charge of riverfront revitalization initiatives makes it more difficult to move initiatives forward, primarily because of the perceived layers a project must go through to get support and approval. It may not be feasible, but many long for a one-stop shop.
- The uniqueness of Minneapolis's governance structure, with its weak mayor/strong city council system, its array of departments, and the separate and independent park board, make any decision about establishing an organization dedicated to riverfront revitalizations efforts more cumbersome and difficult – but it should not be viewed as an insurmountable problem. Strong, charismatic, focused, and consistent leadership (along with a clear vision) can overcome this potential obstacle.
- While most see a need for change, no clear consensus emerged about the ideal organizational design. Some people clearly support a private nonprofit entity; others want to see CPED granted extended authority; still others suggest a return to a more quasi-governmental organization like MCDA; and some prefer to leave things just as they are.
- The absence of a clear champion with authority, power, and influence to garner enthusiasm and support for a particular organizational and governance model is sorely missing. A champion would consistently speak of and engender excitement for a compelling vision and direction, and help bring together the multiple jurisdictions and interests that have a stake in the riverfront. Additionally, if that champion is a recognized civic leader (working alongside key electeds), the potential to build support among non-governmental funders might be realized.
- As in many communities across the nation, the early stages of this kind of work reveals that there is mistrust of government—and its ability to make things happen. There is real concern that if a governmental agency is put fully in charge of riverfront activities, little will get done. Interestingly, people *in* government expressed this feeling as well as those outside of governmental departments and entities. Experiences and perceptions of mistrust include: 1) the turf issues among departments and entities; 2) the multiple and often conflicting agendas of city council members to the city; 3) that the city is anti-business; 4) the quality of community engagement processes, especially with the more disenfranchised neighborhoods close to the river.
- There is a strong sentiment that it is time to focus significant attention and funding on the redevelopment of the river on the north side of the city. There is an equally strong sentiment that a more regional approach to the river is needed, both within Minneapolis itself and in connection with St. Paul. This could be an opportunity to create and deepen those connections with St. Paul and its riverfront work.

Recommendations

Many of those interviewed, and a number of the respondents to the questionnaires, suggested that any discussion about organization design is premature. Some called for this study to focus its efforts on a deep and broad engagement process with the community, and that such an effort should result in a shared vision for the future of the riverfront in Minneapolis. Once that vision is established, determine the organizational entity that will best assure the attainment of that vision.

While the consultant team recognizes the wisdom of the above suggestions, we also see some significant barriers to such a broad effort at this point in time. Given all of the entities that currently play a role in riverfront activities, who would lead such an effort? Would taking that leadership role inadvertently set that entity up as the future lead agency? How would we develop the interest to fund such a study? It is our opinion, that if there is enough support to develop a new organization (or designate a current organization as the lead), one of the first items of business will be to spearhead the deeper community engagement and build a unified, shared vision. It is the role of a passionate leader to inspire the hearts of Minneapolitans around the concept that the river is the *center* of our community. As stated by one interviewee – “We aren’t just the City of Lakes – we’re the City of Water.” Bold leadership won’t wait for a public outcry to do more with the river – they will inspire and lead people to that conclusion.

At this point, we recommend proceeding with Task 2 and continue exploring organizational options. (Task 2 involves assessing civic and political readiness to support organizational options):

- Do small group facilitated sessions with Minneapolis elected officials to share the themes from the Riverfront Revitalization Task 1 report. Attain their reactions and insights to the findings, and further explore their level of interest in riverfront revitalization and organizational capacity issues.
- Do the same with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Commissioners and Superintendent.
- Staff will aid in developing questions for the sessions; however, they will not be in attendance. To encourage candid responses, anonymity will be assured through any write-up or communication of the results of the sessions. If possible, sessions will be scheduled and held before the end of the calendar year.
- Simultaneously, conduct interviews with additional key stakeholders (civic leaders, developers, etc.) to further assess riverfront revitalization as a priority.
- Assuming enough interest exists to continue the study process, convene Task 3 workshops in early 2006. At that time, the research of other communities will be used to develop organization design scenarios. Invitees to the workshop/s will include representatives from neighborhood groups, the public sector, the business sector, elected officials, the non-profit sector, foundations, and key civic leaders.

Bacon and Associates would like to thank the many individuals that gave of their time and wisdom throughout the first stages of the Riverfront Revitalization study process.