

NORTHFIELD'S CANNON RIVER REGIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

THE PROCESS

The City Council adopted a resolution in November 2018 to create the Riverfront Enhancement Advisory Committee to further the City's strategic priorities, including:

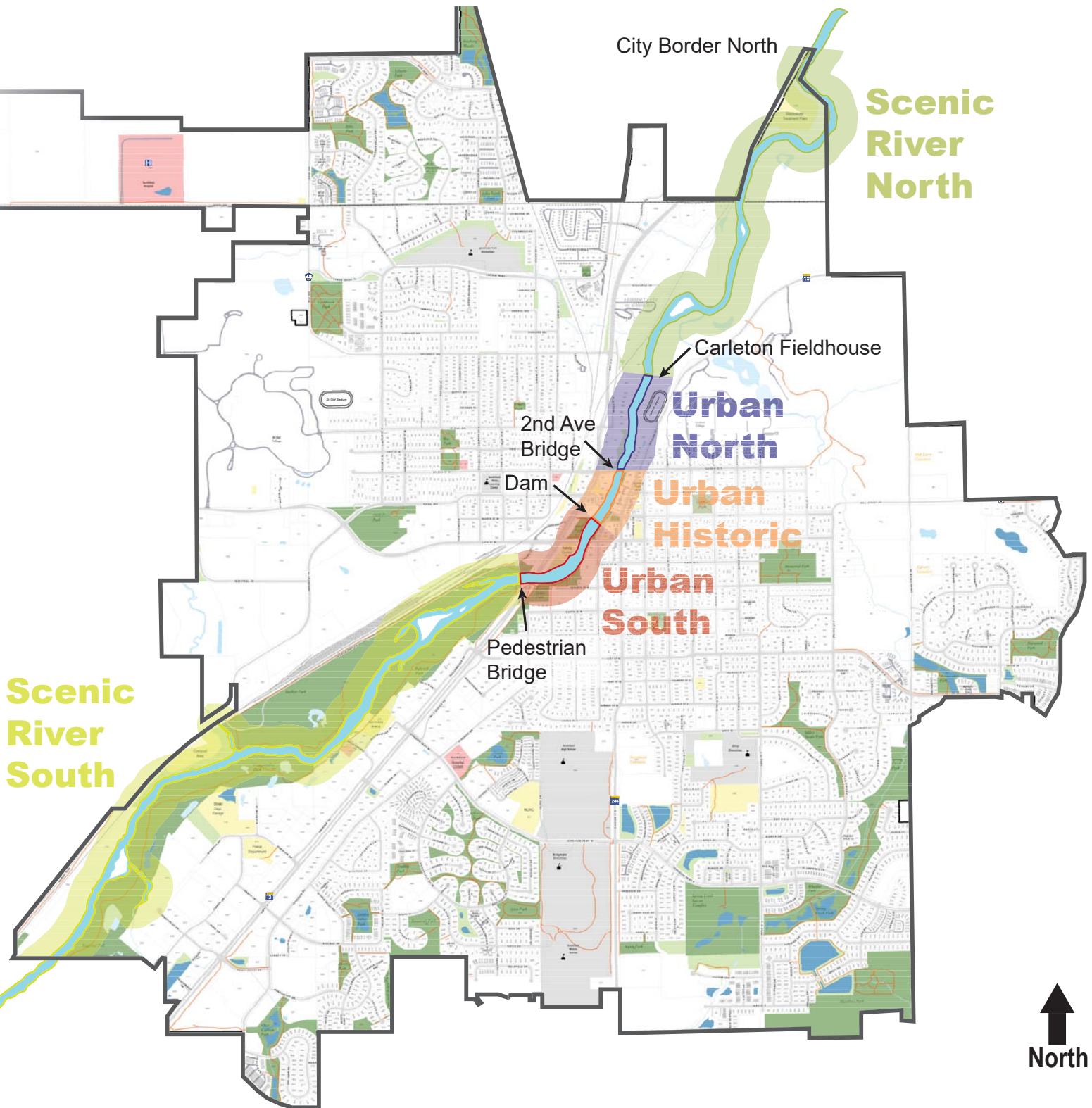
- 1) riverfront enhancement
- 2) enhanced tourism
- 3) expanded downtown

– all of which contribute to their Strategic Plan objective: "Economic Development: A Community That's Economically Thriving".

The Northfield Riverfront Enhancement Advisory Committee (REAC or "committee") was formed at the direction of the Northfield City Council by resolution 2018-115 in November 2018 to assist the City with the preparation of a Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan that includes the following:

- » Prioritization to align with the strategic plan.
- » Concept plans for strategic park improvements.
- » Identified short-term and long-term projects and funding resources.
- » Preservation and conservation of the riverfront.
- » Identification of stormwater management project priorities.
- » Strategies for increased active use of the riverfront.
- » Opportunities for business expansion on the corridor.

The City received a Technical Assistance Grant from the National Park Service (NPS). NPS Staff was retained in March, 2019 to facilitate an extensive effort to review past plans and documents, identify initiatives and improvements and help REAC through a series of ranking exercises. The committee partnered with the NPS to map out and discuss several river districts plans, ultimately deciding on a plan of five river districts organized as Scenic River North, Urban North, Urban Historic, Urban South, and Scenic River South. These river districts were created to help the committee create actionable steps and goals focused on the REAC charter from the City Council to "Enhance the assets of the Cannon River."



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NPS facilitated meetings with REAC to explore park design program ideas.

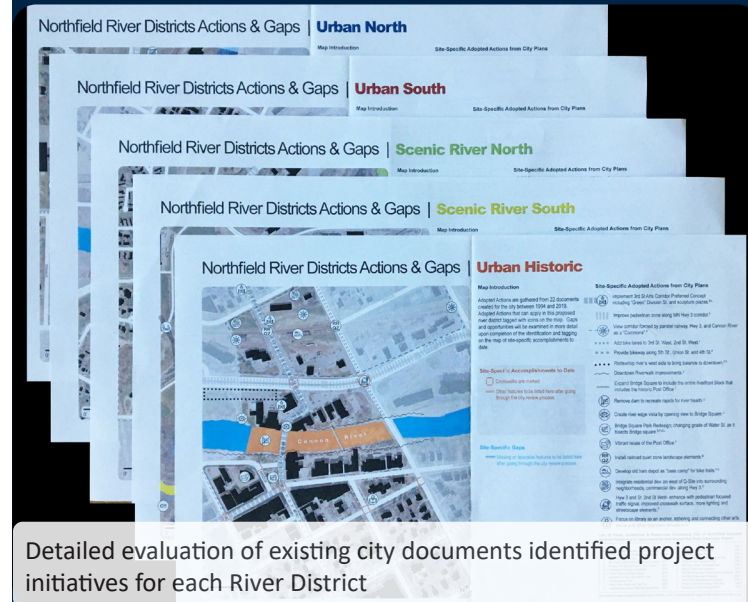
The NPS team led an extensive process that began with a comprehensive review of previous proposals, documents and plans dating back 30 years. Improvement ideas were listed and mapped. The Committee then brainstormed additional specific ideas to augment those listed from earlier studies. This process was closely tied to the goals of the City's 2008 Comprehensive Plan.

A list of 182 unique action items were identified and reviewed for feasibility by City staff. With NPS input, a new list was developed that focused on the four city-owned riverfront parks. The action items list was then winnowed to 123 ideas that were eventually categorized with high, medium, or low scores. The REAC committee has worked towards identifying which action items should be prioritized for implementation in the next three to five years.

In December, 2019, a park planning workshop involving REAC members and Northfield Park Board members was facilitated by NPS staff. The outcome was a series of 4 programmatic concept diagrams for each of the four parks, which were presented back to the REAC Committee; an NPS facilitated discussion led to preferred programs for each park. These were developed into more refined concepts by the consultant team retained by the City. More detail about each of the park concepts is addressed in the individual project pamphlets.



Facilitated workshops produced preferred park program diagrams



Detailed evaluation of existing city documents identified project initiatives for each River District

In 1973 the Minnesota legislature established the State Wild & Scenic Rivers Program to protect rivers with outstanding natural, scenic, geographic, historic, cultural and recreational values. Rivers are categorized as Wild, Scenic and Recreational. One of six such rivers in the state, the Cannon River was designated in 1980 from Faribault to Cannon Falls (including Northfield) as a Recreational River, the least restrictive category. From Cannon Falls to the confluence with the Mississippi, it is a Scenic River.

While the Recreational River categorization imposes some restrictions on how the river may be developed, such as building setbacks, vegetation removal and bridge crossings, the Wild and Scenic River Rules do not prevent the committee's ideas from being executed. Pedestrian bridges, for example, are not specifically addressed in the rules, although how they are located could be impacted. It is recommended by the NPS staff that the City of Northfield should work within the bounds of the regulations when carrying out the recommended action items.

CATEGORY AND PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

NPS Staff recommendations are based on the document, "1st Round Prioritization of Ideas/Action Items," which was reviewed by REAC to help define Action Plan priorities. NPS used this input to further refine their list of suggested phase-one implementation projects that include the categories and representative projects outlined below:

Trails Improvements

- Wayfinding
- Ames—Sechler Park

Connection

- Arboretum Connection
- Riverfront Trail Access
- Mill Towns Trail
- Ames--North Connection
- Bridge Bike Lanes
- North River Access

River Access:

- Fishing Dock/River Overlook
- Informal Fishing Spot
- Canoe/Kayak Access
- Canoe/Kayak Take Out
- Colleges

Promotions/Marketing

- Walking/Biking Loops
- Business River Sides

Arts

- Crosswalks
- Murals
- Art Walk

Park Improvements

- Ames Park
- Babcock Park
- Bridge Square

Conservation

- Ames Mill Dam Feasibility Study
- Management Plan
- Native Plantings

Programming/Events

- Water Fest
- Existing Events
- Bridge Fest
- Park Events

Policy Changes

- Trail Easement

Riverfront Enhancement Advisory Committee (REAC)

- » Tracy Heisler, Co-Chair
- » Norman Oberto, Co-Chair
- » Joe Gasior
- » Daniel Hollerrung
- » Peder Jothen
- » Rachel Leatham
- » Suzie Nakasian
- » Kristi Pursell
- » Robert Stai
- » Erica Zweifel
- » Greg Siems (ex-officio)
- » Glenn Switzer or appointee (ex-officio)
- » Peter Hark (Past)
- » Jenny Roney (Past)

Planning and Design

- » Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service
- » Holly Larson, Barrett Steenrod and Jeremy Edwards

Consultants

- » Bruce Jacobson, Bob Close and Julie Aldrich

Northfield City Staff

- » Ben Martig, City Administrator
- » Mitzi Alex Baker, Community Development Director
- » David Bennett, Public Works/Engineering Director, City Engineer
- » Mikayla Schmidt, City Planner
- » Kari Bondi, Administrative Associate

For a complete list of REAC + NPS Recommendations and other more detailed information, refer to the Project Description Pamphlets and these links and websites: