

## A Community Priority Three Decades in the Making

Confluence River Park is a citizen-driven project that has been part of community conversations for more than 30 years. A series of municipal planning documents spanning decades have consistently identified the need for a public park that directly connects downtown Montpelier residents and visitors to the natural features of the two rivers. Here's a sampling of just some of the city plans that have prioritized construction of a park at the confluence of the North Branch and Winooski Rivers:

- **City State Commission Master Plan for the Capitol District (1998):** "Create a Riverside Park" (along with numerous notes regarding "River Conservation Issues")
- **Winooski River Vegetation Management Plan (2002):** "Goals ... 4) taking advantage of small pockets of open space (along the river) to be used for public enjoyment" and "(sites) #4 -6 are areas where a "Confluence Park" can create a place to enjoy the river at the so-called Carr Lot."
- **Capital District Master Plan (2002):** Proposal of a "Winooski River Greenway" with specific identification of a "Park at the Confluence of the North Branch"
- **Montpelier Master Plan (2015):** The location at Confluence of the North Branch and Winooski Rivers is marked as a "planned park" in the 2015 Master Plan.
- **Montpelier Master Plan (2017/2018):** "... The city should continue to pursue opportunities to develop recreational space in the urban core whenever possible."
- **Montpelier Strategic Plan (2019):** Included in Strategic Outcome: Environmental Stewardship, with an action to build Confluence Park.
- **Montpelier Downtown Core Master Plan (2020):** Notes the lack of open space in Montpelier's urban core and calls for prioritizing urban parks, specifically noting Confluence Park as an example and listing the park as a key opportunity.
- **Montpelier Strategic Plan (2020/2021):** Strategic Goal 1: Community Prosperity
  - Initiative 1.2: Economic Development Through Outdoor Recreation
  - Action 1.2.1: Work with VRC and Friends of the Winooski to establish Confluence Park, remove dams where possible, and improve on-water recreation experiences.

### Partial List of Community Engagement and Design Influence

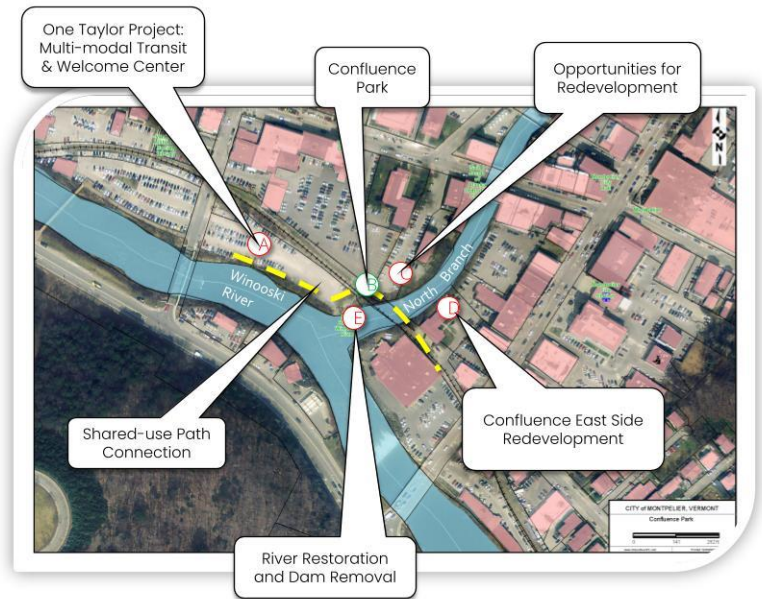
- Conservation Commission – November 8, 2018, March 14, 2019
- Parks Commission – November 13, 2018
- Public Meeting at the Senior Center – December 4, 2018
- City Council – January 9, 2019
- Montpelier Planning and Zoning – February 6, 2019
- Montpelier Parks – March 7, 2019
- Montpelier Public Works – March 14, 2019 and April 25, 2019
- VTrans Rail – March 19, 2019
- Public Canvassing at City Hall – May 4, 2019
- Montpelier Police and Fire – May 7, 2019
- Vermont DEC Rivers – May 8, 2019
- Montpelier City Manager – May 22, 2019
- Public Meeting at Senior Center – July 22, 2019
- City Council – Sept. 24, 2019
- Vermont Adaptive – March 31, 2022
- Focus groups – March-May 2022
- City Council – April 27, 2022
- Staff Review – Dec. 21, 2022
- City Council – Feb. 8, 2023
- Confluence River Park Advisors – monthly 2019–spring 2023

Consistent with this long-time prioritization, Confluence River Park is included in **Montpelier's 2022-2023 Strategic Plan** under **Goal 1: Improve Community Prosperity, Strategy 1.1: Actively Support Economic Development and Promote Outdoor Economic Development**. This current strategic plan underscores Confluence River Park as an asset that is central to supporting a thriving community of residents, businesses, and visitors. The City Council has voted to reaffirm its support on multiple occasions in the past 3-years (most recently in February 2023), and voters resoundingly passed a bond in both 2022 and 2023 that will allocate \$600,000 towards this project.

## The Vision

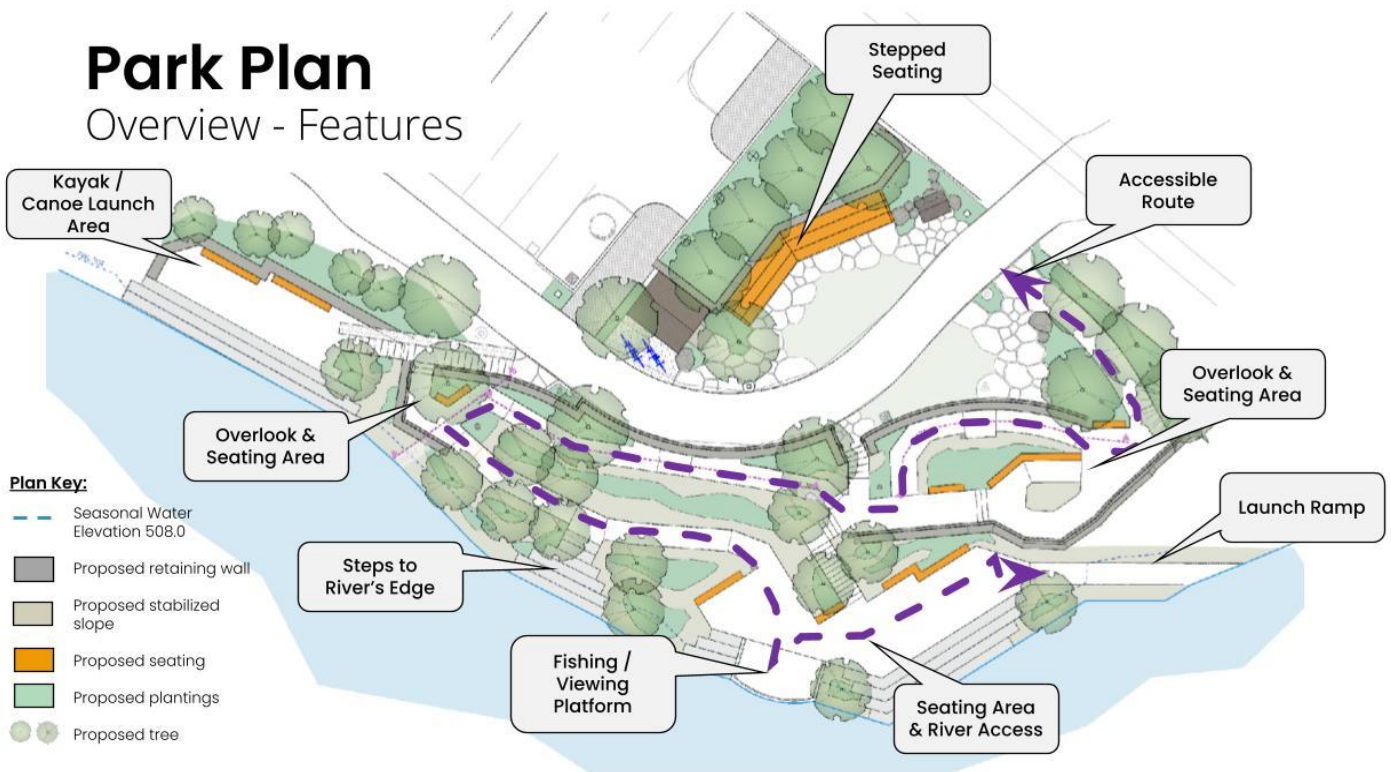
In an effort to simultaneously make progress for two longtime city-wide priorities – housing *and* parks – One Taylor Street and Confluence River Park were designed in tandem. Together, the two projects were intended to transform the vacant Carr parking lot into a downtown asset – a two-part vision for Montpelier’s riverfront. One Taylor Street was completed in 2019 and Confluence River Park would complete the full community commitment to that space.

Informed by dozens of public meetings, focus group conversations, and citizen advisors, designs reflect community-driven desires and feedback. The park will offer accessible access to the river, a fishing platform, boat launch, and multiple benches and seating areas. This is designed as an inclusive space where people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds can gather by the river with friends, family, and community members.



## Park Plan

### Overview - Features



## The Design

Centered around the goal of supporting a vibrant, accessible downtown for both residents and visitors, design objectives include:

- Provide direct pedestrian access to the shorelines of the North Branch and Winooski Rivers.
- Provide the space and opportunity for downtown outdoor performances, educational events, health and wellness activities, and any other public functions that would benefit from the river access and open space in the downtown area.
- Meet ADA accessibility goals and standards with all constructed elements of the Park.
- Create new recreational opportunities for river related activities in the heart of Montpelier’s urban core including picnicking, nature viewing (otters, waterfowl, riparian habitat), fishing, canoeing and kayaking (with connections to upstream and downstream access areas, whitewater paddling, and scenic enjoyment of the rivers.
- Create a “node” on the newly established Siboinebi Path (bike/pedestrian path) to encourage path users to rest and recreate.
- Provide critical outdoor space (a “backyard”) for the newly developed affordable housing facilities at the One Taylor Street Transit Center and the French Block on Main Street – both facilities within a two-minute walk of the Park.
- Ensure resilient infrastructure is designed and built to withstand floods like Montpelier experienced this summer.

To meet these objectives, design elements include:

- Multiple gathering and seating areas with constructed natural stone and wood benches.
- A hard surfaced river access path accessible for able bodied users as well as those with assistance from a walker, cane, wheelchair, or person, so that all people can access the river for relaxing, fishing, and boating.
- Native trees and shrubs appropriate to a rivershore environment, and resilient during floods.
- A canoe/ kayak “slide” to facilitate transport of canoes, kayaks, or tubes to the urban boat launch.
- A fishing platform that provides people of all abilities the opportunity to cast a line into the confluence waters.



The Park will be accessed directly from Montpelier’s downtown business district, via the newly constructed Siboinebi Path, and by parking spaces at the eastern end of the One Taylor Street Transit Center parking area.

## Accessibility

Access to the river’s edge has been one of the fundamental objectives of the Confluence River Park design. The project team has established a close relationship with Vermont AARP and area seniors to inform accessibility details and provide a voice for the senior and mobility challenged residents of the City of Montpelier. During the numerous public outreach events held in the preparation of the Confluence River Park design, a consistent and strong desire for full accessibility was explicitly expressed. Specific accessibility components include:

- An inclusive walking path designed to provide a high level of access to the waterfront for users of all ages and abilities. To the extent feasible given the steep conditions and limited space, the plan minimizes steep slopes and provides regular landings, scenic overlooks, handrails, and seating along the path down to the river's edge.
- A variety of seating options will be built to provide individual and small gathering places.
- Lighting designed and located to focus illumination of pathway elements, seating areas and, in general, to create a welcoming and safe experience for all users of the Park throughout the year.



## Flood Resilience

Built atop an historic floodplain at the confluence of two major rivers, the City of Montpelier is subject to devastating flooding, as witnessed this July. Here in Vermont, all climate models indicate that Vermont will see increasingly frequent floods. Knowing this particular park site will flood, the site design is engineered for flood resilience, including:

- Replacing the site's current "industrial rubble" with tiered structural walls that stabilize the slope, add protected pockets of native vegetation, and manage runoff.
- Uses flood-resilient construction materials and methods to harden and stabilize the structures and surfaces.
- Incorporates levels of public access that can be closed off during normal seasonal and moderate to large flooding events.
- Site features like benches using durable materials that will stay in place during floods.

Overall, the engineering and landscape architecture anticipates future flooding at the site – both fluctuating annual water levels and complete inundation – to ensure the park endures over time.

## People Experiencing Homelessness

Across dozens of community conversations and focus groups – young families and seniors, businesses and recreators – it's no surprise that a top question is how the park will account for the site's current primary users – people experiencing housing challenges.

Location: The park was designed in tandem with One Taylor Street and is nearly adjacent to the French Block, two of the city's biggest housing investments. Research repeatedly indicates that parks and open space significantly contribute to residents' quality of life, and are especially important in proximity to low income populations who have less access to the outdoors than other populations.

Confluence Park's location helps to fill this "nature gap" – a concept that identifies the intersection between lack of access to the parks and socioeconomic challenges, and seeks more equitable access to the outdoors by locating accessible parks and recreation amenities in proximity to low income and marginalized communities. This concept echoes the findings in Montpelier's 2020 Downtown Master Plan and Montpelier's 2017/2018 Master Plan (as well as previous city plans), which identify the overall lack of parks and recreation in the city's urban core.

Design: Antiquated park philosophies implemented in the second half of the 20th century incorporated park design elements to actively deter use by the unhoused, incorporating design elements such as spikes on benches or garish lighting. The message was: the unhoused population is not welcome here.

In contrast, contemporary design philosophies embrace a more equitable concept that parks are for *all* people. Following this approach, Confluence River Park design elements acknowledge that it's likely that the current park users will continue to use the park *and* to ensure additional park users feel safe and welcome to use the space. Proactive design elements include:

- Open sight lines so people can easily see across the site from throughout the park.
- Multiple points of entry and exit from the paths so that people can choose various routes into and out of the park.
- Multiple gathering areas to accommodate multiple people and user groups using the space at the same time.

These efforts seek to ensure that the park is a safe and welcoming place for *all* people, ultimately converting the current confluence space from an avoided corner dominated by a single user group, to a vibrant place enjoyed by broad users across the community.

### Community Value

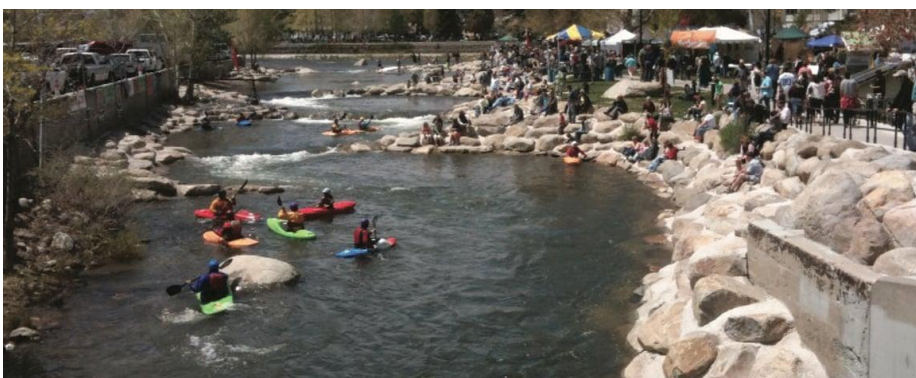
In keeping with one of the core tenets of Montpelier’s latest economic development goals, Confluence River Park leverages the community’s rivers as an economic asset – providing outdoor amenities for people of all abilities, attracting new residents to establish roots in their communities, and drawing visitors (and dollars) to the downtown. Putting this goal into reality, cities across the country – from Denver, CO to Missoula, MT and from Burlington, VT to Franklin, NH – have successfully capitalized on their waterfront location by constructing downtown parks and greenways along their waterfront, ultimately leveraging their waterfront location for economic growth. Similarly, Confluence River Park is an opportunity for Vermont’s capital city to improve quality of life for residents, attract visitors to the heart of downtown, and gain its rightful place among nationally recognized river cities.

Working towards more equitable access to the outdoors, the park is just a two-minute walk from affordable housing projects (French Block, One Taylor Street), providing open space for these residents.

The park would also serve the growing set of new Montpelier residents who are, or will be, choosing Montpelier as a place to live, in part, because of forward-thinking planning for urban recreational opportunities. Being able to eat lunch at the river edge, launch a kayak or tube, splash with young kids, or cast into the river will be new opportunities for Montpelier residents.

Engineering studies are just beginning that will determine the feasibility of removing four dams in and upstream of Montpelier: the Bailey and Trestle Dams at the confluence, Pioneer Street Dam, and Hidden Dam immediately below U-32. Dam removal is anticipated to reduce flood risk in downtown Montpelier, while also opening new in-water recreation opportunities including tubing, stand up paddle boarding, kayaking, canoeing, and swimming – with Confluence River Park and Montpelier businesses as a central economic opportunity.

**Communities leveraging their urban waterfront for economic vitality**  
*below: Missoula, MT, Denver, CO, Burlington, VT*  
*bottom left: Franklin, NH*



**The Economic Value of Burlington’s Downtown Lakefront Recreation**

- 26,000-35,500 users on weekends and 40,000-67,000 on weekdays
- 50% of lakefront recreators are out-of-town visitors
- Total visitor spending per day = \$10,000 weekdays - \$45,000 weekends

*Source: Headwaters Economics, 2010*

## Project Financials

| Timing                                           | Amount           | Purpose                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project Investment to Date</b><br>2018 - 2023 | \$111,000        | City Grant Investment (2021-2023): Contractors include SLR engineering, Regina Leonard landscape architect, Flywheel infrastructure design, Weston and Sampson archaeology, VRC community engagement and project management (see fund source details below) |
|                                                  | \$60,000         | Vermont River Conservancy investment (2018-2023): individual contributions, private foundation grants, and business contributions. Funds have supported staff time, community outreach, and early designs.                                                  |
|                                                  | <b>\$171,000</b> | <b>Total Public and Private Investment to Date</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Remaining Investment to Finalize Design</b>   | \$15,700         | The project is currently at 80% design. This amount would bring the plans to 95% design, and the plans would be ready to implement as soon as funding is assembled.                                                                                         |
|                                                  | \$0              | Archaeology projected at \$7,000. Currently on hold, and no need to move forward until permitting and implementation.                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                  | \$0              | Permitting projected at \$16,600, which includes getting to 100% design. Currently on hold, and no need to move forward until funds are assembled for implementation.                                                                                       |
|                                                  | <b>\$15,700</b>  | <b>Total Investment to Achieve Shovel-Ready Design</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

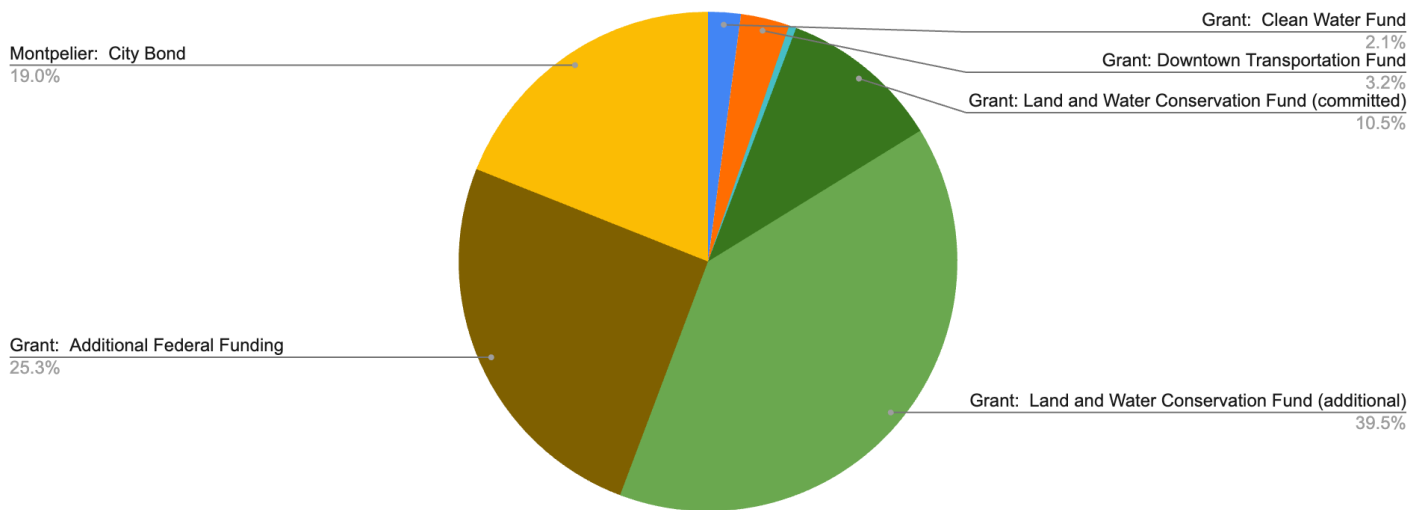
**Source of City Grant Investment Funds:** The City of Montpelier has received a \$331,000 grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund that supports planning and implementation of the park. This is a reimbursed grant – the city pays expenses at the outset, and then is reimbursed when deliverables are completed. If the city moves forward with implementation, then the design costs would be reimbursed by this grant. If the city does not complete design and does not move forward with implementation, these expenses would not be reimbursed.

### **Implementation Costs**

Project implementation is projected to cost \$3 million. The breakdown of these expenses is approximately one-third brownfields mitigation, one-third bank stabilization and flood resilience, and one-third park amenities. The cost to the City of Montpelier, via the committed bond, stands at \$600,000.

## Funds Raised

A total of \$1.13 million has been raised. This includes commitments from the Clean Water Fund, Downtown Transportation Fund, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the pledged City Bond. Potential additional federal funding includes brownfields mitigation funding and additional support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (which will typically fund up to 50% of a project). The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars are generated as a result of off-shore oil and gas revenue, which is then Congressionally mandated to invest in projects like open space and parks nationwide.









# Park Plan

## Overview - Features

Kayak /  
Canoe Launch  
Area

Stepped  
Seating

Accessible  
Route

Overlook &  
Seating Area

Overlook &  
Seating Area







Launch Ramp

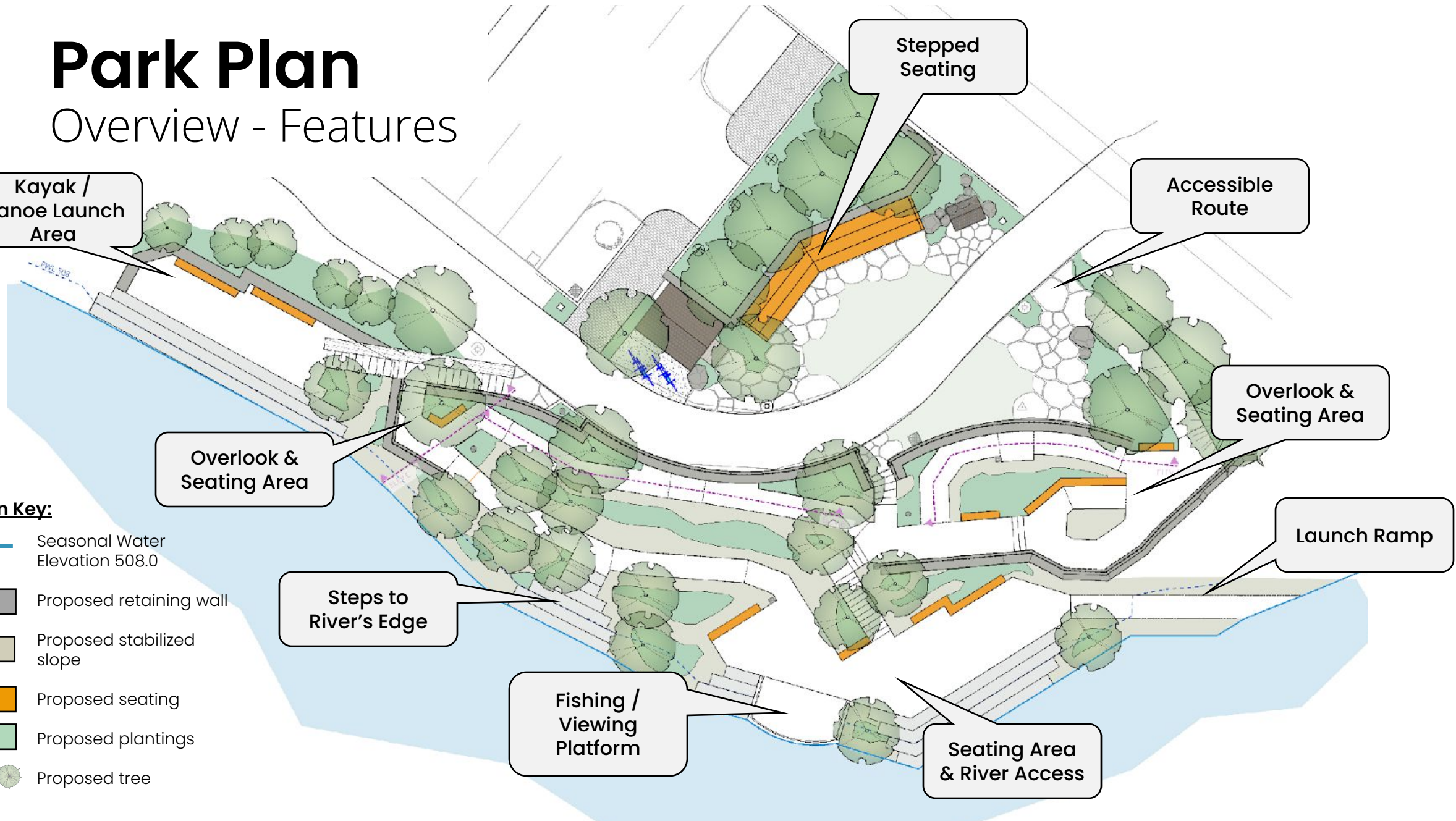
Steps to  
River's Edge

Fishing /  
Viewing  
Platform

Seating Area  
& River Access

### Plan Key:

-  Seasonal Water  
Elevation 508.0
-  Proposed retaining wall
-  Proposed stabilized  
slope
-  Proposed seating
-  Proposed plantings
-  Proposed tree































CONFLUENCE PARK









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