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The Land Conservancy Receives Two Major Grants to Support the Concept and Schematic Design Phase of The Riverline

The Western New York Land Conservancy has announced two major grants to support the Concept and Schematic Design phase of The Riverline, part of the Land Conservancy's efforts to transform the former DL&W rail corridor running from Canalside to the Buffalo River into an iconic, innovative, and inspiring nature trail and greenway. The First Niagara Foundation in partnership with KeyBank awarded \$40,000 (in addition to a \$20,000 grant earlier in 2020), and Moog Inc. awarded \$75,000 to be distributed over three years.

This Concept and Schematic Design phase of work follows a community visioning process, an international design ideas competition announced in 2019, and an equitable development framework completed in 2020. Early this year, the Land Conservancy and the design teams will virtually exhibit early stages of the design to solicit public feedback. This feedback will assist the design teams in developing their final concept designs, which will be unveiled in the summer. The Land Conservancy recently solicited photographs from the community; these photographs will assist the design teams in their work.

The DL&W corridor is owned by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA). It runs from downtown Buffalo at the DL&W terminal to the Buffalo River across from Riverbend, and travels through the Old First Ward, The Valley, and Perry neighborhoods. The Riverline will accommodate walking, bicycling, and winter activities like snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. It will connect to parks and paddleboat launches along the Buffalo River, and it will connect to trails that go to Canalside and the Outer Harbor. By transforming the unused railroad corridor into The Riverline, the project will provide a model for how to connect people to nature right in the middle of a city.

"The green space enhancement The Riverline will create will provide health benefits across our Western New York population by encouraging physical activity with a walkable, bikeable regional trail, and by connecting people with nature," said Elizabeth Gurney, Executive Director of the KeyBank and First Niagara Foundations. "The improvements planned for this part of our City will inspire recreation and exploration, transform and engage neighborhoods, and strengthen our community."

John Scannell, Chairman and CEO of Moog Inc. in East Aurora, agreed. “We are committed to The Riverline’s vision as a downtown nature trail and greenway where Western New Yorkers and visitors can enjoy a welcoming space that shows off the beauty and nature of our historic waterfront.”

“We are thrilled to receive such incredible support from two pillars of the local community,” said Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Land Conservancy. “Once completed, The Riverline will benefit all Western New Yorkers, but it will take many partners here in Buffalo and beyond, working together, to make this dream a reality.”

The design for The Riverline will be created in collaboration with neighborhood groups, many project partners, and ongoing community feedback. Once completed, The Riverline will be a vibrant, safe, and welcoming space for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to connect with each other, with nature, and with the waterfront. The Riverline will be an inspiring community gathering place alive with the history and voice of the surrounding Old First Ward, Perry, and Valley neighborhoods.

Funding for this phase of work comes in part through an Environmental Protection Fund grant (EPF #180842) administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Additional funding is provided by BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York Blue Fund, Nancy and Tom Smith, Peggy and Jay Elliott, Kathy Lasher and Scott Bieler, and other individual community donors. The Land Conservancy continues to seek additional funding for The Riverline.

If you are interested in learning more about this project, or donating to create The Riverline, please visit the new website for The Riverline: theriverline.com. You can also reach out to the Land Conservancy at (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org.

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for current and future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1000+ land trusts nationwide, including 87 in New York State. Land trusts have protected over 56 million acres of land. To learn more about the Land Conservancy, visit wnylc.org.

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