



For Immediate Release:
Monday, July 19, 2021

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The Land Conservancy and its Design Partners to Present Concept Designs for The Riverline

The Western New York Land Conservancy and its award-winning design partners W Architecture, Hood Design Studio, and Green Shield Ecology will present their concept designs for The Riverline at a press conference at the Tewksbury Lodge Pavilion on July 19th at 11:00 a.m. These concept designs are the result of four years of public engagement, as well as community feedback from February's initial concept designs and April's first drafts.

The Riverline is the Land Conservancy's proposed nature trail and greenway that stretches along an unused railroad corridor from Canalside at the DL&W Terminal in downtown Buffalo to the Buffalo River across from Riverbend and Tesla.

These concepts are built around a common theme: The Riverline as a place of Refuge.

The Riverline will provide a place for residents to find refuge, in whatever ways they define it: a place of security, a place of shelter; a place of safety; a place for small social gatherings; a place of sanctuary. The Riverline is a place of coming together and a place of personal growth: a place where we can find ourselves amongst a living history and heritage along our shared waterfront.

Along the one-and-a-half-mile stretch, which runs through the Old First Ward, Perry, and Valley neighborhoods, the design team has also identified locations to introduce gardens and nature-based recreation to reflect the community's vision for this important green connector.

These concept designs envision a string of vibrant and engaging experiences in nature that everyone can enjoy—right in the city, only minutes from downtown. A variety of place types along the trail have been designed to be appropriate to their surroundings: The Del – where tight-knit neighborhoods come right up to the trail itself; The Junctures – where the legacy of the railroad becomes a place of connection; and The Basswoods – where nature takes center stage. Entrances have also been designed to respect the character of the communities.

Gateways provide high profile public access points while neighborhood connectors provide more subtle approaches for those who live along The Riverline.

Nancy Smith, the Executive Director of the Land Conservancy, said, “With these concept designs we’ve reached a significant milestone in the development of The Riverline. The input of community members and partners has been central to this accomplishment. We look forward with great enthusiasm to working with the community and bringing to life this design, centered on the idea of nature as a refuge.”

The DL&W corridor is owned by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), which has been a key partner in supporting project planning and design work. About this partnership, Nancy Smith said, “We have been so pleased to coordinate how best to realize our joint visions for Buffalo: a thriving community where residents can access open space and the service they need.”

The Riverline will include walking, bicycling, and winter activities like snowshoeing and sledding. It will connect to parks and kayak launches along the Buffalo River, and it will connect to trails that go to Canalside and the Outer Harbor, as well as the Larkin District and beyond. 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 heart of the city.

The design for The Riverline was developed in collaboration with neighborhood groups, many project partners, and ongoing community feedback. Once it is built, 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 the Concept and Schematic Design phase 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 Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York Blue Fund; KeyBank in partnership with the First Niagara Foundation; Moog Inc.; the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor's IMPACT! Grant Program; the East Hill Foundation; Kathy Lasher and Scott Bieler; Peggy and Jay Elliott; Nancy and Tom Smith; 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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Quotes:

"The Riverline is a transformational project that will lead our city's resurgence and create a symbol of the new Buffalo," **said Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul.**

"The Riverline plans to utilize our industrial past to protect and save the environment, restore public access to our waterways, and offer Western New Yorkers a prime location to appreciate our unique waterfront."

"This is an exciting phase in The Riverline project where we move from a collaborative effort to imagine the possibilities to a plan that brings to life the opportunity to better connect people and neighborhoods to the Buffalo River corridor," **said Congressman Brian Higgins.** "The Riverline will be a destination like none other enjoyed by residents and visitors alike that embraces the region's unique history and environment. We congratulate the Western New York Land Conservancy for their vision and steadfast commitment to continuing to move this project forward."

"For years, the Western New York Land Conservancy has worked alongside our greater community to gather ideas and feedback on what The Riverline could become, and now we're seeing that thoughtful dialogue channeled into the finalized designs that will carry us forward," **said New York Senator Tim Kennedy.** "This project enhances and restores highly coveted greenspace, while preserving the character and history of our city and the Old First Ward, Valley, and Perry neighborhoods. I look forward to seeing this vision take shape and become yet another connective, interactive opportunity for people to explore the Queen City."

New York State Senator Sean Ryan said, "The Riverline design process has been a shining example of urban planning done right. The final design – the culmination of years of public engagement – will highlight Buffalo's natural beauty and bring a new vibrancy to some of our city's most historic neighborhoods. My thanks to all the people who devoted a significant amount of time and energy to bring this project to life."

"The forthcoming transformation of a once unused railroad corridor into The Riverline, at Buffalo's Waterfront, is just one example of how the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and The Western New York Land Conservancy are making targeted investments in order to revitalize our region," **said NYS Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes.** "By developing a new, vibrant, and welcoming space for people from all backgrounds and communities to connect with each other while enjoying Buffalo's waterfront, we are attracting tourists and promoting recreational and physical activity, while adding vitality to the Western New York region."

“The beauty of nature is irreplaceable and to be able to appreciate it in the heart of the city is a tremendous benefit,” **said County Executive Mark Poloncarz**. “The Riverline gives us that opportunity and is an excellent reuse of an old rail corridor, providing access to natural spaces and acting as a connector between communities along the way. Residents will be able to enjoy outdoor recreational activities year-round along the Riverline as well as ‘get back to nature’ just minutes from downtown. I thank the partners and community members involved for designing this community asset.”

New York State Assemblyman Pat Burke said, “After years of planning and seeking input from the Old First Ward, Valley, and Perry residents, it is exciting to see the final design for The Riverline in Buffalo. What is now an overgrown rail corridor will finally become a vibrant community asset that will connect people with the nature, art, and history these neighborhoods have to offer.”

“Over the past year, we have all witnessed the healing power of nature and it is so important that we continue to add greenspace in our community—especially in the City. The designs presented all are looking to achieve that same goal, while enhancing connections between communities and creating connections to nature. It is exciting to be watching the project move forward.”—**Mark Mistretta, Director, Western District, New York State Offices of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation**

“The Riverline project stands to transform the way we think about urban exploration in Buffalo. It will become a refuge to experience Western New York's unique environmental landscape in a whole new way. I am excited to see this project run through the Fillmore District and become a thread that connects the neighborhood, the great outdoors, and visitors to our region. Thank you to the project stakeholders for developing this concept with input from the residents who live near the project's footprint,” **said Council Member Mitch Nowakowski**.