



**For Immediate Release**

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**The Land Conservancy and The Riverline Launch Community Art Program to Inspire Future Designs and Programs**

**NOTE:** If you would like to be involved in this project, please reach out Jeff Lebsack, The Riverline director, at [jlebsack@wnylc.org](mailto:jlebsack@wnylc.org)

The Western New York Land Conservancy and The Riverline are launching a community art program with The Riverline communities for an exhibit that will debut at several locations—and virtually—in the summer of 2022. Building on strategies identified in The Riverline Equitable Development Framework, the exhibit will celebrate the rich history and cultural diversity of the Valley, Old First Ward, and Perry neighborhoods through the voices and stories of neighborhood residents. Residents and local artists will provide the materials for the exhibit to elevate resident voices and promote community pride. The materials will inspire future design details of The Riverline, including interpretive signage, art installations, and programming.

The Riverline, the Land Conservancy's planned nature trail and greenway near downtown Buffalo, will hold a press conference at Waterfront Memories and More (41 Hamburg Street) at 1:00 p.m. on Monday, January 3 to announce the program.

The Riverline is being designed around a common theme. It will be a place for people to find refuge, in ways they define: a place of security, a place of shelter; a place of safety; a place for small social gatherings; a place of sanctuary. The Riverline will be 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. Generations of local residents have lived through many changes to these communities, and for many, the neighborhoods and natural areas have served as a refuge in all of these forms.

Jeff Lebsack, the newly appointed Director of The Riverline, said of the community art program: "One of my goals for 2022 is to find meaningful ways to continue our engagement with The Riverline communities, and to gather fresh input and ideas. This initiative will

promote and celebrate the heritage and stories of the neighborhoods and the people who live there—as told through their own voices.”

“From its earliest conceptual phase, The Riverline was envisioned as a way to better connect people and neighborhoods to the Buffalo River corridor,” said Congressman Brian Higgins, a longtime champion of the project who will speak at the January 3 press event. “The Riverline embraces the region’s unique history and environment, but it also boldly imagines a future in which people from all walks of life can enjoy a revitalized Buffalo River. Throughout the planning process, the Land Conservancy has involved the community every step of the way. As a native Buffalonian and former history teacher, I look forward to seeing the results of this program.”

“The Riverline is going to be more than a trail, it is going to help tell the story of diverse communities that are tied together by their shared history,” said Senator Tim Kennedy. “This community art program will provide residents and those with roots here the chance to help paint the picture of how the DL&W corridor, The Del, helped to form this unique, close-knit community. I applaud the WNY Land Conservancy for continuing to ensure this is a grassroots-led project that gives voice to and empowers residents to tell their own story in their own way. I encourage everyone who has something to contribute to play a part in bringing this project to fruition.”

“I grew up in the Old First Ward,” said Dean S. Seneca, CEO of Seneca Scientific Solutions+, Adjunct Professor at the University of Buffalo. “I love it here! There is no better place in the world. I have great respect for the cultural heritage of this community. And I’m also here to raise awareness as a Seneca Indian to the history of what came before the OFW, the grain mills, the train trusses, and the city. I am thrilled and it warms my heart to see the people of the OFW acknowledge and celebrate that our neighborhood stands on land once occupied by the Haudenosaunee people. To further acknowledge that this land once was occupied by the Seneca people. Throughout the development of The Riverline, the Land Conservancy has gone above and beyond to consult with our communities—Native and non-Native alike—to bring us together, so we could collectively develop something here that would benefit all our people; something we all could be proud of. That honors the past and seeks a bright future, together. I encourage all of our people, Native and non-Native, to share their voices and their stories of this place. Nya:weh!”

Community feedback has always been important to Nancy Smith, the Land Conservancy’s Executive Director and President of The Riverline, LLC. She said: “We are so pleased with the partners who have stepped forward to craft The Riverline thus far; partners like The Buffalo Center for Arts & Technology, Just Buffalo Literary Society, and the arts programs at the Valley Community Association and the Old First Ward. The Community Arts Program that we launch today will allow us to expand to include additional partners as we recognize the transformative power of the Arts to inform and inspire The Riverline.”

Once completed, 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 corridor, owned by the Niagara Frontier Transit Authority (NFTA), 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. 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. Lebsack believes that, "The Riverline's Community Art Program is the next link in the chain that will bring The Riverline to life."

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](http://theriverline.com). You can also reach out to the Land Conservancy at (716) 687-1225 or [info@wnylc.org](mailto: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](http://wnylc.org).

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