

To: Riverwalk Confluence Development Team
From: River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group
Date: 12.21.2022

The River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group appreciates the opportunity to review and provide input on the Riverwalk Confluence site approximately located between Lake and Franklin Streets as presented on November 1, 2022. The presentation provided Task Force members with an overview of the proposed changes including connections to the existing Riverwalk and the street above, new landscape design, and back of house improvements in compliance with the Chicago [River Design Guidelines](#).

Following the development team's presentation, Task Force members had the opportunity to ask questions and provide general feedback. Task Force members then discussed thoughts and reactions amongst themselves after the development team was excused from the meeting. The comments in this letter summarize the group's written and verbal input.

Context of the proposed development

The development team presented conceptual plans and renderings of the 'final piece' of the Main Branch Riverwalk. The proposal includes a ramped pedestrian connection to Wacker Drive, terraced and open planting, multiple seating types and locations, a continuous walkway, and back of house facilities for parking, storage, utilities, and office space to replace existing facilities located under Wacker Drive. The site is a focal point along the river for people accessing the Riverwalk as well as for views from the surrounding streets and existing and proposed office and residential buildings. An important consideration for this site is the possibility for connection with future southern expansion of the Riverwalk.

Development review working group recommendations:

The Task Force would like to commend the development team for their compliance with the River Design Guidelines. This proposal could serve as a case study for constrained river edge design for future developments along the river and is an exciting improvement to the current termination of the Riverwalk. We understand that this project does not yet have a concrete timeline and is currently conceptual while the team works through funding, outreach, and compliance. We also understand that this project is not seeking regulatory approval and will simply be the final completion of the Riverwalk as proposed previously. This is an important project as a model for future expansion and should be approved and completed as soon as is feasible. With an eye toward potential southern expansion the Task Force provides the following site improvement recommendations to the project team and the Department of Planning and Development.

- **Considerations for non-motorized recreational boater safety at the River Confluence**

The river confluence adjacent to this site is a potentially dangerous transition point for non-motorized recreational boaters. While high wake and construction difficulties may not allow for a river access point or traditional boat launch, additional consideration should be given to the small slip located at the western edge of the site. Installations to increase boater safety could include a relief ledge, additional wake protection, and emergency safety equipment such as ladders or life rings.

The development team has noted compliance with signage and wayfinding for pedestrians along the Riverwalk, but this project could create a precedent for recreational boater wayfinding signage as well. If the slip on this site serves as a resting point for non-motorized boaters, signage could be installed with information about safe navigating practices, distance to next access point, river quality, etc. Coordination would likely be needed with other agencies such as the Chicago Dept. of Transportation, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Harbor Safety Committee.

- **Review the planting plan to maximize native species, protect birds, and balance shading/screening with high-value natural habitat**

New landscaping at this site along with existing and proposed landscaping across the river at Wolf Point will likely attract more birds to the area and create a focal point for migratory landbirds navigating along the river. The site is located in the central business district and is surrounded by large buildings

with highly reflective and mirrored glass surfaces which are a documented hazard to migratory landbirds. DPD and city officials should consider requirements for retrofitting of existing buildings along bird migration corridors, especially where additional landscaping is installed.

The City should consult with experts to determine which buildings contribute most to bird strikes and implement a monitoring system to determine where and to what extent retrofits are needed. Tenants and building owners will benefit from the positive externalities of being located near an improved riverwalk, so the negative externalities of those buildings on natural habitats and wildlife should also be understood and reduced wherever possible.

- **Additional feedback regarding minor site improvements**

Task Force members expressed a preference for the Corten Steel version of the ramp, because it fits with the industrial and natural material feel of the rest of the riverwalk branding. Additional tree improvements in the streetscape along Upper Wacker Drive should also be included or clarified as it is unclear if that would fall within the scope of this project, as shown in the renderings along with additional tree plans for river level.

Thank you for taking the time to present to the River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback in the design process and look forward to the ongoing coordination as the project moves on to future phases. We hope that implementing the above recommendations can be mutually beneficial for the development team, community residents, and the river itself. The Task Force is excited about the improvements to this portion of the Riverwalk in order to bring it in line with the existing eastern sections and as a gateway to future southern expansion. We welcome the opportunity for feedback, offer our services in the future, and look forward to your responses and collaboration.

Sincerely,

River Ecology Governance Task Force
Development Review Working Group