



The Falls Initiative

The First Season | Summary & Next Steps

Restoring A Story Disrupted

The site of *The Falls Initiative* is a powerful place. Owámniyomni, meaning “turbulent waters” in the Dakota language and known in English as Saint Anthony Falls, is considered to be a significant part of ancestral Dakota homelands.

Two years ago, Friends of the Falls and the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) came together as partners with the mission of authentically centering Native voices in creating a shared vision for the future of the Upper Saint Anthony Falls Lock, which today sits at the heart of Owámniyomni.

At the center of this work is the Native Partnership Council, a group of leading voices from the Mni Sota Dakota Tribal Nations, as well as local Dakota and Lakota communities, who were convened to guide *The Falls Initiative* by sharing stories and considering the project site from an Indigenous perspective. Over the course of a year, the Council came together in circle and found consensus around four engagement and design principles to ground the work in Indigenous worldviews and values:

- A Place to Restore a Story Disrupted
- A Place of Power
- A Place of Connection / Mitakuye Owas’in (All Our Relations)
- The River is a Spirit / Mní Wičóni (Water is Life)

These central themes became the basis of our public engagement, which has included a series of five Community Conversations, numerous on-the-ground engagement events, an online immersive exhibit, and two public surveys.

The Native Partnership Council continued to guide the Engagement Team as we wove what was heard from community voices into this work. In doing so, we began to build a shared vision for the future of this sacred place along the Mississippi River, a Dakota name for which is Haha Wakpa, meaning “the river of the falls.”

Creating A Place of Healing

The Native Partnership Council’s guidance and direction for *The Falls Initiative* culminated in a statement authored to encompass and communicate their vision for the site:

VISION STATEMENT

“The vision of the Native Partnership Council is to create a place of healing at Owámniyomni that restores connections to Haha Wakpa, Dakota culture, and language; teaches us to honor and care for all our relatives, including the land and water; and addresses the parallel trauma of colonization by recognizing the transformative power of this place.”

Created through more than a year of Council meetings, this statement is reflected in a range of early design ideas: depictions of how this evolving vision might come to life at the site of the Upper Lock. These visualizations are not a design proposal for this site, but rather first interpretations of the Council’s guidance created by the Design Team through thoughtful listening and reflection. As we move forward, these ideas and illustrations will continue to grow and evolve.



Early design ideas by GGN and VJAA begin to visualize how the Native Partnership Council’s vision might come to life at the site of the Upper Lock.

The First Season

We’ve come to see the evolution of *The Falls Initiative* not in traditional development phases, but rather in seasons of transformation. This first season of work, lasting from September 2021 to December 2022, might be considered “winter”, a time for connection, storytelling, and preparation for what’s to come.

To document our first season of work, we are pleased to share this First Season Report. Part 1 details the process to convene the Native Partnership Council, the stories they shared, and their direction for the work. Part 2 describes the public events, online engagement tools, and outreach to key stakeholders that was facilitated

by the Engagement Team to weave broader community voices into the Council’s vision. Part 3 outlines the work of the Design Team to listen to the Council’s guidance and develop early design ideas for the site. Finally, Part 4 considers programs and partnerships to activate this place.

Next Steps

As we enter our next season of work, our team remains committed to growing relationships with Tribal Nations and Native communities to create a shared vision for the future of Owámniyomni. We will consider how the site’s design, program, ownership, and management can be structured to honor Owámniyomni and Native connections to this place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tribal Nations

Thank you to the leadership of the four Dakota Tribal Nations of Mni Sota for engaging with *The Falls Initiative*.



We invite all Tribal Nations and diasporas to join the conversation.

Non-Tribal Partners

Thank you to our local, state, and federal government partners:

