

The Falls Initiative

Community Conversation 1 - February 15

Response to Public Questions

Question: How is this project related to the Upper Harbor Terminal project?

Answer: The Upper Harbor Terminal is a separate project. However, it is related in that the Upper Lock was originally built to allow boats to navigate over the Falls and bring commerce to Upper Harbor Terminal. The two sites may now be connected by both blue and green trails.

Question: What are blue and green trails?

Answer: Blue trails refer to the “trails” that are on water (moving by boat or kayak) and green trails refer to those on land (walking and biking).

Question: What historical materials are available for the classroom?

Answer: Teaching Indigenous languages continues to be a powerful tool to teach students about Indigenous culture and history. We also recommend the following resources:

- Indian Land Tenure Foundation: <https://iltf.org/>;
<https://www.lessonsofourland.org/>
- Bdot Memory Map: <https://bdotmemorymap.org/>
- University of Minnesota Open Rivers:
<https://editions.lib.umn.edu/openrivers/>
- Minnesota Humanities Center:
<http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=&CatID=107&SearchText=&SortBy=1&mediatype=&lurl=1>

Question: Is there any plan to restore/rebuild Spirit Island for visiting?

Answer: The purpose of the Community Conversation series and ongoing meetings of the Native Partnership Council is to invite input on what the Native community and general public envision for this place. At this stage, no design decisions have been made and all options are being considered.

Question: Are there any water ceremonies coming up?

Answer: The [Owamni Falling Water Festival](#), [Nibi Walks led by Sharon Day](#), and events held by [Mni Ki Wakan](#) are opportunities to participate in water ceremonies. We will share information about future events and ceremonies specific to The Falls Initiative on [TheFalls.org](#) and @TheFallsMpls Facebook and Twitter accounts. Many Native individuals also host personal water ceremonies at the River.

Question: Are there any signs in place today that acknowledge that the Falls have been a Dakota and Native site for 20,000 years? If not, why not?

What about signage on the Stone Arch Bridge?

Answer: There is minimal interpretive signage currently in place in this area of the Central Riverfront. There is no prominent signage or acknowledgment that the place is within Dakota homeland or that identifies the former location of Spirit Island.

In 1990, Hock E Aye Vi (Hachivi) [Edgar Heap of Birds](#) created a temporary public art installation on the Central Riverfront called “Building Minnesota” recognizing the Dakota men who were hung by the United States Government at the end of the US-Dakota War of 1862.

There are current discussions about adding or improving signage as part of the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Trail, neighboring park improvements, and our own The Falls Initiative.



Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, “Building Minnesota” (1990) (photo courtesy of the artist)

Image Source:

<https://hyperallergic.com/385682/in-minnesota-listening-to-native-perspectives-on-memorializing-the-dakota-war/>

Question: Are the only land areas with Native American-centered development federally owned? Is it possible to do the same thing with local (state, county, city, Park Board) land - such as the whole riverfront?

Answer: The land available for The Falls Initiative, adjacent to the Upper Lock, is federally owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Friends of the Falls is currently negotiating with the Corps of Engineers to transfer this land to local ownership, and it will continue to center the engagement process on Native voices. This process is possible through the support of elected officials at every level of government, including Tribal Nations; unique partnerships; and a commitment to relationship building.

Question: Is there involvement from the University of Minnesota in this project?

Answer: Karen Diver, Senior Advisor to the President for Native American Affairs at the University of Minnesota, addressed this question during the panel discussion: The University works to acknowledge its role as a campus on the River and a contemporary user of this land, while honoring the historical nature of this place. As part of its strategic plan, the University is investing significantly in Native communities and supporting Indigenous people.

The University community also contributes meaningfully to this work through its online journal [Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community](#), the Weisman Art Museum's [Big River Continuum](#), and other initiatives.

In addition to Ms. Diver's participation in the Community Conversation, University of Minnesota staff are members of the [Friends of the Falls board of directors](#).

Question: How can the sacredness of the site be restored and maintained?

Answer: We hope to continue the discussion about how the sacredness of the site can be restored and maintained during future Community Conversations and ongoing meetings of the Native Partnership Council.

Question: Can guests save messages in the chat from the February 15 Zoom meeting?

Answer: A transcript of the February 15 Zoom meeting chat has been provided at [TheFalls.org](#).