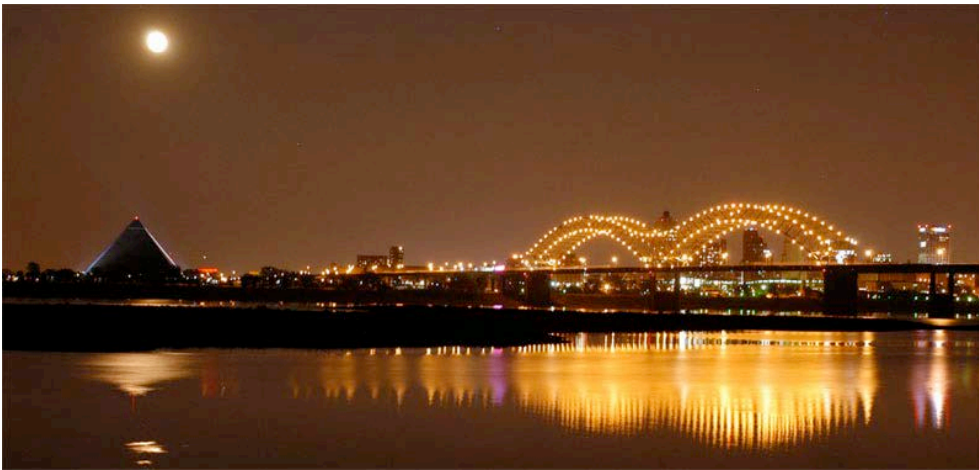


MEMPHIS RIVERFRONT ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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**JEFF SPECK
AICP, CNU-A, LEED-AP, HON. ASLA
SPECK & ASSOCIATES LLC**

**IN CONSULTATION WITH:
NELSON/NYGAARD – TRANSPORTATION PLANNERS
TONI L. GRIFFIN – URBAN DESIGN**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The downtown Memphis riverfront does not suffer from a lack of planning. Over the last quarter-century, a good dozen documents that could rightly be called plans have been completed for the area between the A.W. Willis Bridge and the French Fort. But very few built improvements have arisen from these efforts.

The reasons behind this history are complex, but it is fair to say that planning in Memphis has outpaced politics. Exemplified by a 2002 riverfront vision that turned out to be as imaginary as it was imaginative, plans for the edge of the Mississippi have tended to exhibit a greater appetite for transformation than the City's population and leadership were prepared to embrace.

Now, for the first time in many decades, the City finds itself in the opposite position. As other American cities have successfully acted upon bold plans to enliven their waterfronts, the citizens and leaders of Memphis have come to recognize that their river's edge is not all that it could be. There exists a strong sense that change is welcome, but no single past plan offers a clear path for this change. . . and the last thing the City needs is another plan.

For this reason, this document attempts to be the furthest thing from a new master plan. Instead of starting over, it sorts through three decades of designs, considers several important efforts currently under construction, and makes specific proposals for what immediate actions can exert the most profound positive impact on the downtown riverfront over the next few years. It does not avoid identifying some longer-term proposals, but these are presented mostly as a framework for understanding where the short-term efforts are potentially headed. Also, creating a complete long-term wish list proved very helpful in figuring out which of the items on that list would be the easiest and the most beneficial to accomplish soon.

Organized geographically, this report begins by explaining the underlying and sometimes hidden structure of the riverfront. It then marches north to south, starting in the Pinch District and working its way to the French Fort, considering eighteen distinct locations where physical change is either underway, contemplated, or simply needed. It discusses these locations in the context of previous plans and proposals, nineteen of which are further described in the report's Appendix. It then identifies the six sites where a coordinated short-term investment of limited cost is expected to have the most transformative impact on the riverfront and, in turn, on downtown Memphis.

Briefly, the key findings are as follows:

- Riverside Drive, which is annually narrowed and closed with little negative impact on the downtown, should be converted from a four-lane speedway to a two-lane "complete street," including parallel parking and a protected bicycle track along the Mississippi River. This change can be accomplished through a

mere restriping, with no curbs reconstructed. Canopy trees should be added where they are lacking and can be planted at limited cost.

- Similarly, Poplar Avenue and Fulton Street, currently being re-engineered as Bass Pro Drive, should be reconfigured to welcome drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists equitably, which will support redevelopment along it.
- The site between the State Visitors' Center and the I-40 ramps, cleared of its concrete plant, should be sold or leased for development as mixed-use moderate-density housing. Revenue from this transfer should be used to support the other initiatives listed here.
- As the northern bookend to the Cobblestones, Jefferson Davis Park should be remade as an active waterfront park, including dramatic water features and a stair/elevator connection to the Mud Island monorail bridge.
- The Riverwalk, currently interrupted by confusing gaps where Riverside meets Jefferson and between Monroe and Union, should be completed and provided with improved wayfinding.
- Both Tom Lee Park and Beale Street Landing, receiving dozens of new parking stalls within a reconfigured Riverside Drive, should remove their surface parking lots. Working with Memphis in May International Festival, the City should redesign Tom Lee Park as a series of grassy "rooms" separated by trees and shrubs.

Again, these six recommendations are all intended for the nearest term. They were chosen over all the others for their collective visibility, economy, and connectedness to each other and the downtown. Many bolder long-term visions are included in this report, and many of those should also be started now. Specifically, eight additional second-order efforts are recommended in this report's Conclusions. But pursuing those projects should not distract us from a single-minded focus on the six initiatives above.

In the absence of a larger discussion, the above proposal may seem a bit arbitrary or even rash. For this reason, we encourage the reading of this report in its entirety.

Memphis sits at the broadest point of America's most celebrated river. It is hoped that the steps outlined in this document present an imminently achievable vision of how the city can itself begin to celebrate that river properly and, in so doing, bring new life to its downtown.

I. CONCEPTUALIZING THE MEMPHIS WATERFRONT

If the riverfront were only the water's edge, there would be no great river cities. What matters is how people are brought to the water, and therefore how urbanism reaches to the water. The proper measure of the riverfront is from the edge of the water—however much it fluctuates—to where the people are, which, by and large, is across Riverside Drive and well up the bluff. It is an artificial and inappropriate narrowing of our gaze to consider it anything less. For that reason, this study contemplates the full stretch from the west bank of Mud Island to the east side of Main Street, the downtown's principal walkable spine.

From north to south, the limits set by the Memphis Riverfront Study of 1982 still seem the best measure of the riverfront's downtown boundaries: the A.W. Willis Bridge, and the Chickasaw Heritage Park. To the north, the area beyond the Pinch is too sparsely developed to feel like "downtown." To the south lays an Exxon/Mobil tank farm and the beginning of a large industrial sector.

1. Zones

The downtown riverfront is not a single place, physically, socially, or conceptually. It is best understood as comprising the following six distinct zones, each with its unique circumstances and character:



The five zones of the riverfront.

A. The Pinch/Pyramid

Here a slow-to-revitalize urban area with "good bones" is separated from its waterfront by a massive, faceless building and its parking lots. The Pinch therefore has potential for revitalization, but not as a waterfront neighborhood. The Pyramid will receive new life

as Bass Pro—and will have its own water access—but the aspects of that building’s program that integrated it into the Pinch have been lost, replaced by outparcels that must be developed independently.

B. The Northern Blind Spot

Between I-40 and the State Visitors’ Center, the waterfront against the Wolf River Harbor is cut off from downtown by the ramps to and from the highway. Half this area was occupied by the concrete plant, now removed. Its Street, called both Poplar and Fulton, is being remade as Bass Pro Drive, but the area between this drive and the harbor, about 200 by 1000 feet, awaits a new use. A similar area, slightly smaller—about 200 by 750 feet—also sits underutilized on Mud Island.

C. The Heart – Mud Island Park –The Promenade

This is the area where the downtown truly meets the waterfront, connecting its grid to Riverside Drive, from Adams Avenue and Jefferson Davis Park to Beale Street and Beale Street Landing. (Of course, meeting the waterfront and engaging the waterfront are two different things.) Most of this area runs along the historic Cobblestone Landing, currently under restoration. Across the Wolf River Harbor, this is the location of Mud Island Park, which is still vital despite needing a face lift, but which is hard to get to and closes at 5 PM. In its current condition, it does not function like a part of the downtown. In the other direction is the center of the Promenade zone, the four blocks between Riverside Drive and Front Street from Adams to Union, which hold a variety of uses including Confederate Park, the Law School, the library, a firehouse, and, most awkwardly, two parking garages. The Promenade does not function as a promenade, but the new bridge connecting the two sides of Court Street suggests how a continuous pedestrian edge could be established.

D. The Parkway Park – The Bluff – Arkansas

At Beale Street, the bluff begins to rise beneath the urban edge, and Tom Lee Park runs for half a mile along a Riverside Drive which is here a true drive, with a median and no intersections all the way up the hill to Georgia Avenue. Used for giant events like Memphis in May, the Park is little more than grass with a few concrete paths and a parking lot for about 120 cars. Another parking lot, brand new, sits at its northern end against Beale Street landing. Riverside Drive is notably half-closed for two weeks out of the year, and fully closed for the other two, all during Memphis in May. The bluff, for much of its length, contains the Riverwalk, which tucks into the South Bluff neighborhood before reemerging on a footbridge to cross Riverside Drive into Ashburn-Coppock Park. This one stretch of the riverfront, south of Mud Island, looks straight across the Mississippi to the flood plains of West Memphis, which here is better called Arkansas, since it looks less like a sister city than an uncharted frontier.

E. The Southern Blind Spot

Ashburn-Coppock Park overlooks Tom Lee Park to its north, and then continues the Riverwalk south for another quarter mile before ending in a disappointing cul-de-sac just north of the Church of the River—for this reason also referred to as the Church of None-

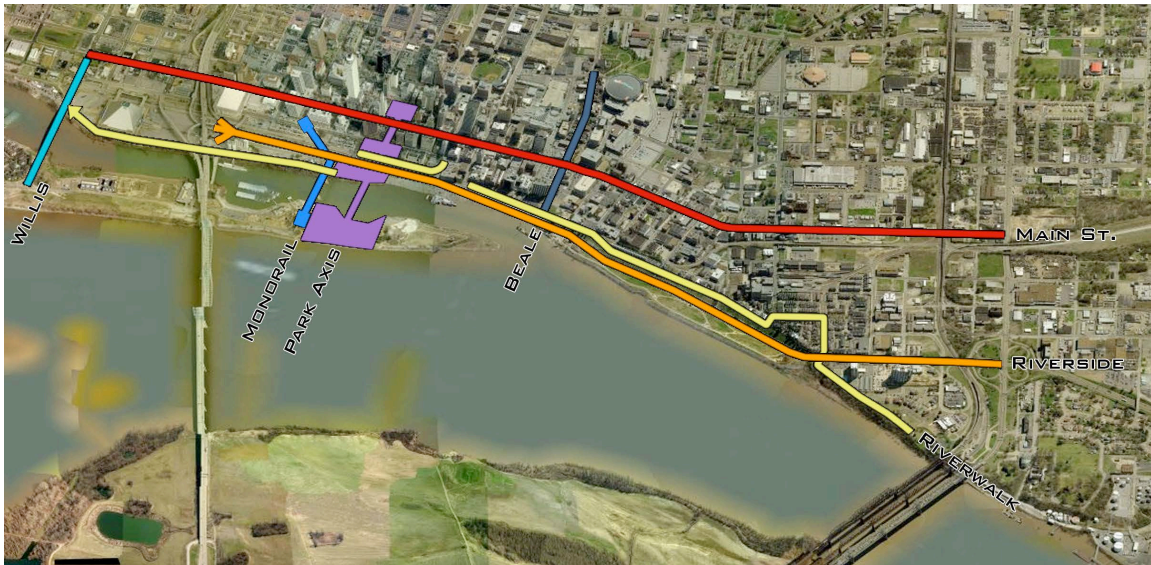
Shall-Pass. Just beyond the Church is the Harahan Bridge, soon to receive its Main-to-Main boardwalk. This tucked-away section of the riverfront receives little use, since it connects nothing to nothing.

F. The French Fort

The downtown Memphis riverfront effectively ends in this neighborhood, which is bounded to its south by dozens of fuel tanks. This is a good place for an ending, with its lovely Chickasaw Heritage Park, its cultural assets of the Ornamental Metal Museum and historical Marine Hospital building, and its high views over a dramatic bend in the Mississippi. The reconstruction underway to turn the Crump Boulevard cloverleaf into a roundabout will only improve access to this neighborhood, which contains several underutilized sites. A major landowner has drawn up plans for this sector, and is requesting City assistance in making them real.

2. Axes

The organization of the downtown can also be better understood if we delineate its seven principal linear spines:



The seven main axes of the riverfront.

A. Main Street

While it is not truly on the riverfront, we cannot ignore Main Street, because it is the central spine of the downtown. Not only is it the only continuous street from bridge to bridge, as well as its transit spine, but it is the best axis for walking, for the entire length of the downtown. It also has been given new meaning—and funding—by the Main-to-Main project, which allows it to connect all the way to Arkansas.

B. Riverside Drive

Riverside Drive is the highway that was famously killed to become a parkway, but now functions too much like a highway, speeding cars in a seam between the city and its riverfront. Its principally vehicular characteristics are key to the quality of the city/river interface along most of the downtown.

C. The Riverwalk

Drawing the “axis” of the Riverwalk is a challenge, because it is so imperfect. This path is used principally for recreational walking, but it would be better used—and might become an asset for tourists—if it were completed as a continuous circuit. Flaws include its interrupted segments downtown and the fact that it has to leave the riverfront in order to return to it at Ashburn-Coppock Park.

D. Beale Street

Beale Street is already established as a pedestrian corridor, beginning four blocks from the riverfront. Now, with the establishment of Beale Street Landing, there exists an anchor that could begin to generate east-west activity to the river and back. The problem is the missing teeth along that path, and the fact that the investment in Beale Street Landing will not fully flower until that axis is better established. There is also a timing issue associated with Beale Street being most active at night, while Beale Street Landing will be most active during the day. Worth noting is how this axis, extended only slightly east, also reaches the tip of Mud Island.

E. The Auction Street (A.W. Willis) Bridge

The only downtown vehicular connection to Mud Island, this bridge serves that purpose all too well, inviting high speeds across its span. Barring some other at-grade connection, this axis will also be the prime pedestrian and cycle connection to Mud Island, a role it could play more explicitly by better connections at its eastern base.

F. The Monorail/Walking Bridge

This axis connects downtown to Mud Island, but in a way that bypasses the Riverfront, and also needlessly doubles the length—and triples the frustration—of getting to Mud Island from the riverfront or Riverwalk.

G. The Park Spine

Court Square, Confederate Park, Jefferson Davis Park, and the heart of Mud Island Park all align on an east-west axis that is essentially the heart of the downtown. This subtle axis also aligns with the northern edge of where downtown connects properly to the water, since the I-40 ramps create a fissure from this point north. This axis, then, is essentially an opposite bookend to Beale Street, and implies a potential new strategy for integration with Mud Island.

II. SITE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS, ORGANIZED GEOGRAPHICALLY

In the pages that follow, the entirety of the downtown Memphis Waterfront is considered from north to south. Recommendations are organized not in terms of their priority or significance, but simply based upon their location on the map. A more instrumental discussion of the most important and promising recommendations are collected in the subsequent Priorities section (III).

1. A.W. Willis Bridge

While it does not serve many pedestrians or cyclists, this bridge is their principal path from Mud Island to the mainland and needs to accommodate them comfortably. The protected paths on both sides of the streets seem adequate for both of these travel modes, since the volume of each is so small. However, upon landing, cyclists lack dedicated facilities for traveling any further.

As discussed ahead, Willis Avenue seems a good candidate for a road diet that would include the introduction of bike lanes heading east. As the best pedestrian axis to downtown, Main Street would be the obvious choice for north-south travel were it not for the presence of its trolley tracks, which pose a hazard for cyclists. For this reason, it probably makes sense to locate a southbound cycle facility on Front Street, from where it could also turn into the Bass Pro property to connect with the bike path proposed alongside Bass Pro drive, to be discussed ahead.

The location of this cycling facility south from the A.W. Willis Bridge warrants immediate attention. If it is to be placed within the Bass Pro property, it must be added to parking lot plans that are well into design development. If it is to be located in Front Street, it must be done as part of a redesign that makes that corridor feel truly safe for biking.

2. The Pinch District

In both its past and planned incarnations, the Pyramid has and will effectively separate the Pinch District from the Wolf River Harbor. This fact is not a crisis, but points to the value in having the neighborhood interface comfortably with the Pyramid itself, which will “spin off” energy into the Pinch only to the degree that it provides a pleasant and pedestrian-scaled connection eastward. While earlier plans for the Bass Pro Pyramid included shopfronts facing Front Street, these have been replaced in the most recent design by outparcels to be developed by others. The quality and speed with which these outparcels are developed will have a profound impact on the spinoff energy provided by the reuse of the Pyramid.



This illustration from the 2011 “Experience the River” Plan shows both Overton Avenue and the front of the Pyramid lined by new storefronts.



The most recent plan for Bass Pro places outparcels against Front Street, which is a good solution presuming that their development is expedited.

The Pinch District itself contains a nice collection of unique shops, restaurants, bars, and other businesses, but these are scattered among a larger collection of empty buildings and empty lots. Plans proposed for the revitalization of this area, first in 2001 and again in 2011, are remarkable both for the quality of the urbanism they propose and for the tremendous degree that this proposal differs from reality. (See Appendix, items 4 and 16.)

That great distinction suggests that, rather than planning and coding every street for the optimal outcome, the City should use an Urban Triage approach. Urban Triage acknowledges that most healthy, “walkable” urban areas actually contain many streets that are not very walkable, but these streets support a framework of other streets that are truly excellent. Accepting this typical pattern, and acknowledging how many “missing

teeth” the Pinch needs to fill, would lead to a plan that identifies the key corridors to be improved first while others are left for later. Two such corridors, one north-south and one east-west, should be adequate. More are possible, but should be approached with caution so as to not rob vitality from the two which are most promising.



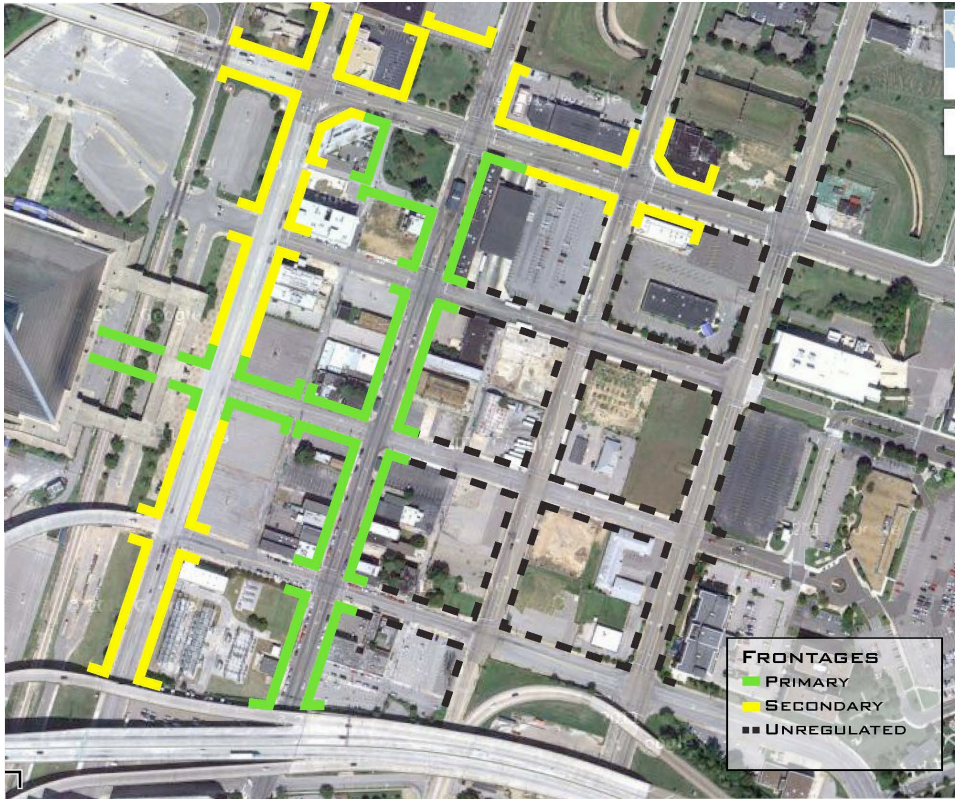
This recent plan for the revitalization of the Pinch imagines excellent urban frontages against all street edges, a far cry from the current condition.

The designation of the proper north-south axis (or axes) depends on whether shops can be brought back to the west side of Front Street in front of the pyramid. If they can, then that street should be made excellent on both sides. However, whatever that outcome, the only street that has any promise of providing a comfortable pedestrian connection under I-40 to downtown is Main Street, which is already the best street in the District. That street certainly needs to be held to the highest urban design standard and prioritized in terms of redevelopment.

An obvious choice for the prime east-west street would be Overton, which aims smack-dab at the center of the Pyramid. If a powerful pedestrian connection to the Pyramid can be resuscitated along this axis, then it makes sense to bring that axis east as well. However, Overton dead-ends only four blocks away at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, so it is also worth considering A.W. Willis Avenue, which handles a much greater volume of traffic and thus would be better able to attract retail tenants. If Willis could receive a lane reduction (road diet) in favor of bicycle facilities, it could become the most attractive east-west axis in the Pinch.

This discussion suggests an Urban Triage diagram for the Pinch which focuses development first on Main Street and its connection to the Pyramid, and secondarily on the remaining sections of Front Street and Overton, and eventually A.W. Willis. These two areas should be coded for the highest quality development and prioritized in first and second order, as indicated in the attached diagram. The remaining street frontages in the

Pinch (Shadyac, Jackson, 2nd, and 3rd) should be allowed to develop in whatever way best supports the completion of the walkable frontage, for example, as parking lots serving that frontage.



This Urban Triage diagram for the Pinch district allows many of the streets to remain less walkable so that those with the most promise may become walkable.

3. Main Street

The greatest impediment to connecting the Pinch District to downtown is the I-40 overpass. This is a prime place for a dress-up investment, especially as it improves the experience of walking between the Pinch and the convention center. Conventioneers are shoppers and diners, and not every walk will take them south if there is a meaningful gateway to the north.

The Main Street passageway under I-40 is only slightly less than 100 feet long. A proper installation of vertical features and creative lighting could be very impactful in attracting pedestrians to along this path.



The underside of the Netherlands Center for Architecture (Rotterdam) suggests a possible decorative approach for Main Street beneath I-40.

4. The Northern Blind Spot



If Bass Pro Drive is properly developed with parallel parking, the entire area between the State Visitor's Center and the I-40 ramps could be developed into urban blocks.

This area, formerly home to a concrete plant and parking, will be given new value by the beautification of Bass Pro Drive, and seems an ideal location to open up for development. While certain parties feel otherwise, the evidence suggests that Memphis currently has more waterfront open space than it can commit to properly amenitizing and maintaining. It seems logical that, before any new parkland is created, limited city resources should be used instead to amenitize existing parks such that they attract and benefit users. One way

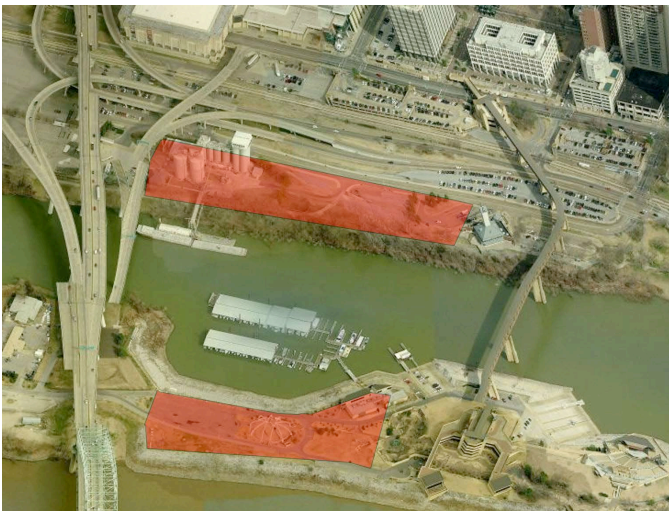
to help fund this effort is through the sale or lease of City land to be developed in a manner that brings more residents and activity to the riverfront.

Allowing parallel parking along Bass Drive—discussed ahead—will make the State Visitors’ Center bus parking lot unnecessary. Therefore, the entire stretch from the Visitors’ Center to the I-40 off-ramps, approximately 4 acres, could be developed as medium density housing (with some mixed use) to take advantage of its prime location. This housing would be best shaped as two to three urban blocks with a central parking alley running north south, buildings facing east to Bass Pro Drive and west to a Riverwalk, and cross streets/paths connecting the Riverwalk to Bass Pro Drive. A plan of this nature should be prepared and pre-approved by the City prior to the sale or lease of the land, to ensure a good outcome.

While not necessary, it might be wise for the City to let a single master developer take responsibility for this site in conjunction with the remaking of Jefferson Davis Park, to be discussed ahead (see Item II.9).

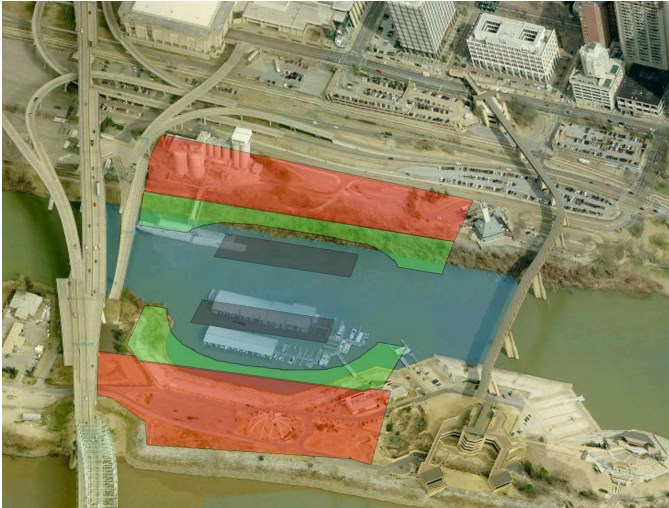
5. The Mud Island Blind Spot

One suggestion to arise prominently from the recent Mud Island River Park Land Use Study was the redevelopment of the area directly across the Wolf River Harbor from the site discussed above. As with on the mainland, this part of Mud Island feels cut off and is vastly underutilized. It includes the full width of the high ground from the I-40 overpass to the entry to the River Park, which could also be reconfigured to allow for a better interface by eliminating the empty restaurant against the Marina. (See Appendix, item 14.)



Across the Wolf River Harbor from the Northern Blind Spot lies an area of almost equal size that awaits redevelopment.

The Land Use Study recommends reconfiguring the Marina in order to broaden the buildable area to the east with new high ground, and some degree of landfill will be needed to establish a proper block width. This design—in addition to needing to provide parking for its own new uses—would require significant on-street parking to help mitigate the approximately 110 parking lot spaces it would eliminate. As proposed in the Land Use Study, it would be accessed by a southward extension of the Mississippi River Greenbelt Park along Island Drive. The proximity and similarity of this site and the Northern Blind Spot across the Wolf River Harbor suggest that these two sites might be developed at once in concert with a coordinated and reciprocal approach to designing the harbor between them as a shared amenity.

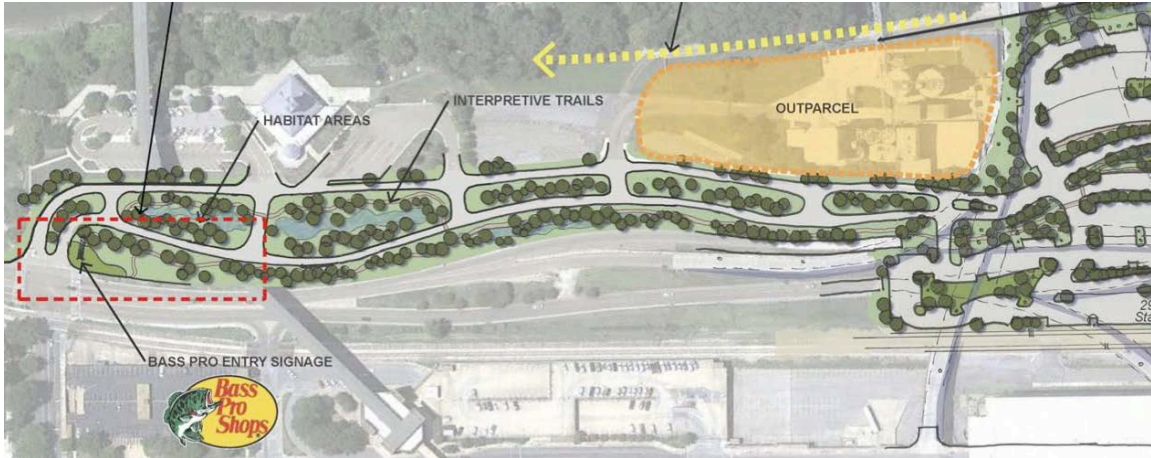


Expanding this buildable area slightly eastward (with a harbor reconfiguration) would make it more valuable, as would the reciprocal amenitizing of both riverfronts.

6. Bass Pro Drive

While not particularly urban, the changes underway at Bass Pro Drive (formerly Fulton Street) seem to be an overall plus for downtown. An unappealing highway of a street is being turned into a picturesque parkway, and an unsightly surface parking lot is being eliminated (at the corner of Jefferson and Riverside). However, closer examination of the proposal shows some missed opportunities.

The current proposal for Bass Pro Drive shows a broad boulevard consisting of two roadways, each containing 24 feet of pavement made up of two 12-foot driving lanes. Those lanes flank a central median that varies in width and contains occasional water features and a meandering path, as well as a path between the roadway and the I-40 ramps. The median path crosses the western roadway to join the other path about 2/5 of the way along its length.

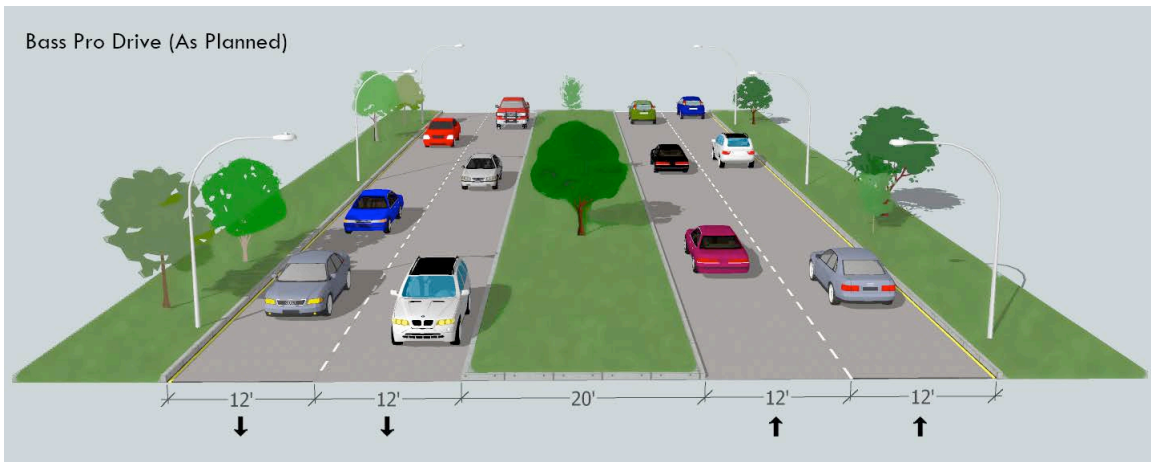


The latest proposal for the remaking of Poplar Avenue / Fulton Street as Bass Pro Drive.

This design would be appropriate for a rural byway that has no opportunity to attract street life or enfront real estate. But the large site between the Bass Pro parking lot and the State Visitors’ Center is probably best redeveloped to hold medium-density housing—as already discussed—and that housing requires a fronting street that is designed to welcome front doors.

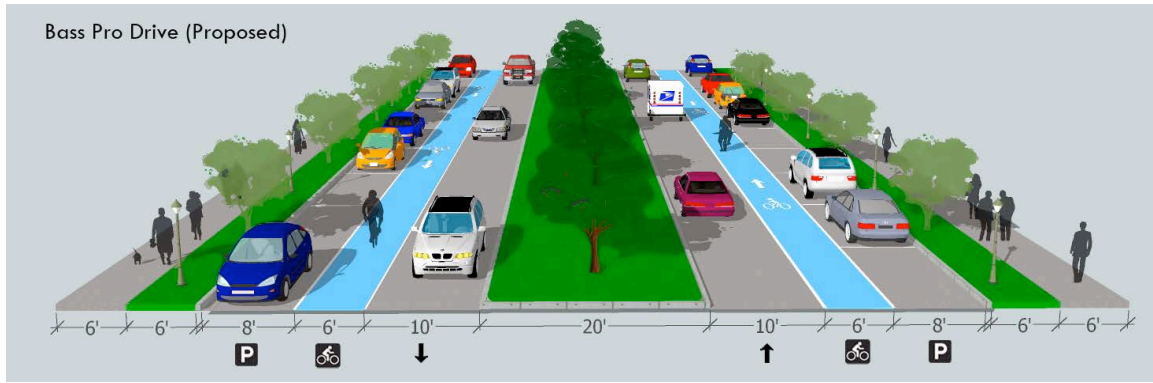
Such a street is not a rural byway but an urban boulevard, which includes parallel parking and continuous sidewalks, as well as regular rows of consistently-spaced street trees, rather than the rural clumps of trees in the current plan. Bicycle facilities would be a nice addition to this street as well.

Happily, discussions with transportation planners suggest that two driving lanes in each direction are not needed to handle the traffic flows from the Bass Pro parking lot, which will allow much of the roadway to be put to better use. Further, the proper lane width for a walkable thoroughfare is 10 feet rather than 12 feet, which is the 70-mph highway standard.



The currently proposed cross section of Bass Pro Drive.

Therefore, each 24-foot roadbed within the proposed boulevard, instead of containing two 12-foot travel lanes, can hold one 10-foot travel lane, one 6-foot bike lane, and one 8-foot parking lane. This means that the current proposal can be changed, without any roadbed redesign, to alternative shown here.



This alternative proposal for Bass Pro Drive is a simple restriping of the current plan, with no changes to curb locations.

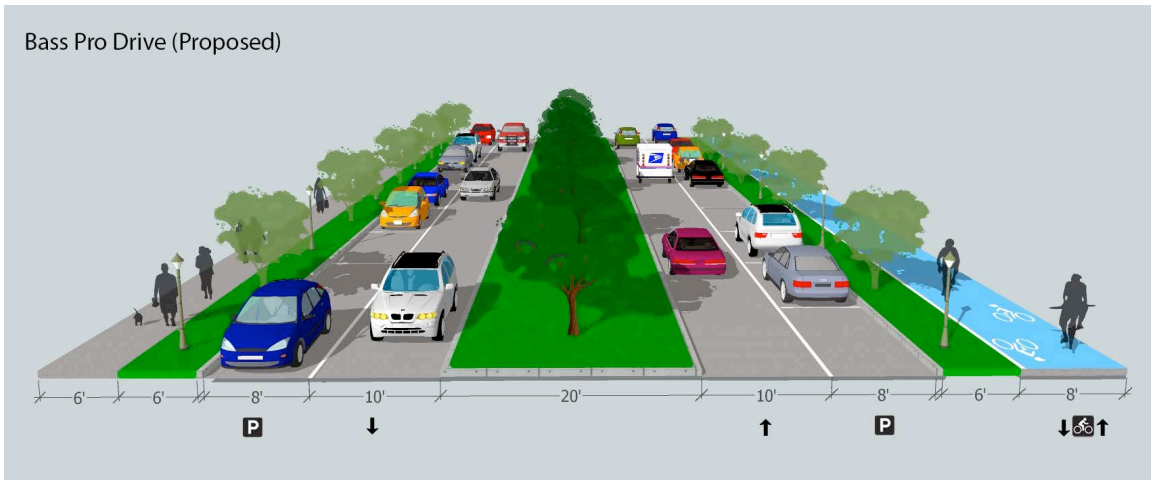
This drawing also shows the insertion of regularly-spaced trees along all curbs and in the median, as befits a proper boulevard. Note that its east-flank sidewalk could be eliminated, since there is no reason to walk on that side of the street, up against the ramps to I-40.

Were the construction contract for the boulevard already out to bid, the above changes would still be easy to accomplish. However, since there is still time to alter the plans more significantly, there is another recommended change. The area east of the State Visitors' Center –including its bus parking lot, which becomes unnecessary when parking is provided along the roadway— would benefit from being somewhat deeper. To the degree that the roadway can be pulled slightly eastward, this will increase the development value of that site. The drawing that follows shows a revised trajectory that still gives Bass Pro its dramatic entrance while maintaining a nicely-sized development site to its west. As discussed, this site would ideally hold buildings facing both Bass Pro Drive and the RiverWalk, with a north-south parking alley between them.



An eastward shift in Bass Pro Drive would add value to the developable parcel to its west.

If it is possible to move the location of the roadways as shown here, then it is also possible to replace the current two-24'-drive solution with a more optimal one. The ideal solution would take the bike facilities out of the street and put them where an east-side sidewalk would go. This approach would replace the two 24-foot roadbeds with two 18-foot roadbeds, and place an 8'-foot-wide 2-way bike path just eastward of its eastern tree row. It is shown here.

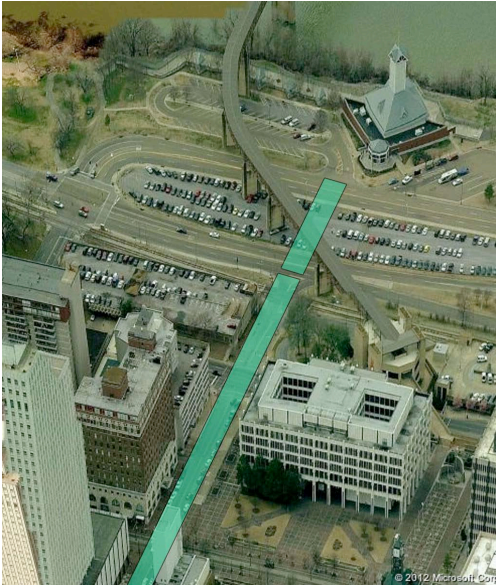


The ideal cross section for Bass Pro Drive places the bike facility where an east-side sidewalk would otherwise go.

Some final technical notes should be shared with the project’s engineers:

- The boulevard should be designed with a median break in line with Adams Street, and with a connection to an extended Adams street to its east, to make a more porous street network that serves both pedestrians and vehicles better.

- Large (at maturity) street trees should be planted along both curbs and in the median, roughly 40-feet-on-center, for the full length of the boulevard.
- Curbs should be upright without gutter pans.
- The intersection at Riverside Drive should include 3 lanes out (left-turn, straight, and right-turn) and only one lane in. The parallel parking should not begin until the street rounds the curve.



The continuation of Adams street to Bass Pro drive will improve both circulation and safety in this area.

7. The Mud Island Connection

Aside from the design of Riverside Drive—to be discussed—the greatest missed opportunity along the Memphis riverfront is the interface with and use of the Mud Island Park. Few Memphians visit the Park on a regular basis, because it is hard to get to, poorly amenitized, and open only from 10 to 5 for only half the year. Fixing any one of these three problems makes the greatest sense in the context of fixing all of them, and doing so seems the best approach. With better access and better amenities, Mud Island Park could be expected to attract the larger populations that would make the investment in them justified.

The construction of Beal Street Landing, less than 400 feet away from Mud Island suggests the further creation of an access point to the south. This access could take the form of a raise-able (or swinging) pedestrian bridge or a water taxi. Several types of movable bridges have been discussed with the most intriguing perhaps being made of a construction crane. The cost of such a connection, however, has yet to be conclusively determined.

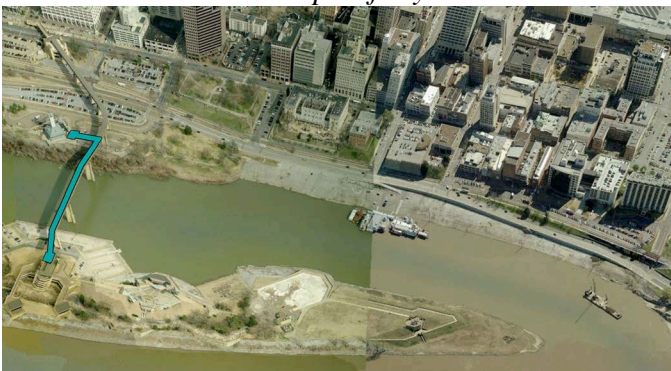
A water taxi would require considerably less investment, although the changing water level would require long docks on both flanks. Most important to a water taxi is the requirement that it take a direct route. Taxis are currently imagined as traipsing up and down the Wolf River Harbor, but the only water taxi that is likely to be effective at attracting people to Mud Island will be one that functions like a bridge, free of charge, zipping back and forth across the channel, always in sight, and never more than a few minutes away.

At the heart of Mud Island, where the monorail currently arrives, a different solution is needed, one that short-circuits the current circumstance where people at the State Visitors' Center need to walk about 700 feet uphill to then double back along the monorail bridge. This circuitous route essentially triples the distance from Jefferson Davis Park to Mud Island.

Several solutions are possible. The easiest and least expensive, which should not be delayed, would be an elevator and stairway from the Riverwalk, directly west of the parking lot. Rising perhaps 60 feet, this structure would allow visitors to reach Mud Island by walking a distance barely further than it takes to reach the monorail.



The current pedestrian route from the Visitors' Center to Mud Island is painfully circuitous.



A stair and elevator tower at the State Visitors' Center would greatly simplify this pedestrian connection.



Combined with a water taxi or other crossing at Beale Street Landing, such a new crossing would help create an appealing pedestrian loop through Mud Island.

Such a tower was recommended in the Mud Island Land Use Study. (See Appendix, item 14.) Also suggested for the long term was a full vehicular connection, a bit further north, at Poplar Avenue. While not necessarily a bad idea, this idea seems prohibitively expensive to be considered currently. A compromise solution would be a lightweight raise-able pedestrian bridge, but even that proposal is estimated to cost about \$10 million—no small fee.

An alternative idea, not yet considered, would be to hang a non-raise-able pedestrian bridge from the current monorail structure. The viability of such a structure would depend on whether the limitations regarding wheelchair accessibility allow this bridge enough of an arch to maintain an adequate clearance for ships on the Wolf River.

Finally, one idea raised in the Mud Island Study was for a Zip Line along the trajectory of the monorail bridge. If created in conjunction with a new stair tower at the Visitors' Center, such an amenity could bring new energy to this portion of the riverfront.

8. Mud Island Itself

The plan for Mud Island is a good one, and the principal dissatisfaction around it stems from the momentum lost since the plan's completion in 2010. This Study is probably the greatest reason that Memphis has been said to be experiencing "planning fatigue," as significant public involvement has led to no outcomes.

As noted, a determination to improve access to Mud Island brings with it a commitment to open the park up for longer hours, if not around the clock—with adequate security presence—and to add amenities that will attract more visitors. These amenities include, first, a retrofit of the amphitheater that allows it to hold more events each year. There is some question as to how much of its limited use derives from its need for reconstruction

rather than its need for more aggressive management. Once that question is answered, it is likely that a remodeling of limited cost is in order, if such a remodeling brings with it some certainty of its vastly increased use.

Second, whatever the quality of its exhibits, the physical surroundings of the Mississippi River Museum seem down at the heels. Arriving on the monorail and walking past its abandoned and barely-furnished exterior spaces give the impression of a derelict facility. This immediate area surrounding the monorail needs reinvestment. Next, while the Riverwalk itself is still quite impressive, the “Gulf of Mexico” basin at its terminus needs significant work to regain its appeal.



The entrance to Mud Island from the Monorail feels less than welcoming.

Finally, there is currently little reason to visit the flag pavilion at the southern end of Mud Island. Creating a direct connection to Beale Street Landing from that location will both increase its importance and demand that the walk from the point to the park be made more appealing. At the very least, an allee of trees should protect visitors from the sun, but it is likely that a greater investment must be made in the overall landscape. This effort might be enhanced by a continuation of the water feature along this axis.



The lower stretch of Mud Island would benefit from an allee of trees and water feature to draw visitors south.

It is possible that some of these improvements to Mud Island Park could be funded by allowing mixed use development to its north, as already discussed. Conversations with the real estate community could help determine the likelihood of such a transaction generating revenue for the City. It seems just as likely that this development would fund little more than the suggested reshaping of the land under it and its parking provision.

For this reason, the transformation of Mud Island into a truly welcoming around-the-clock destination is probably an expensive proposition. Investments here will have less impact on the vitality of the riverfront than investments made on the east side of the Wolf River Harbor, which is why the RKG Report (see Appendix, item 17) considers Mud Island a lower priority. There is no doubt that an optimal Memphis riverfront contains the improvements discussed above, but they should be funded subsequent to the improvements suggested ahead along Riverside Drive.

9. Jefferson Davis Park

Just as Beal Street Landing serves as a southern bookend to the portion of the riverfront that engages the downtown, Jefferson Davis Park is poised to play the same role to the north. Its presence on the east-west park axis and its potential connection to Mud Island make it the proper location for the City's next major investment in a waterfront park. Its prime location and small size make it a place where a reasonable investment could have a transformative effect in short order.



Well located between the State Visitors' Center and the Cobblestones, Jefferson Davis Park receives little use.

A number of site features add promise to this proposal. The presence of the State Visitors' Center provides a physical anchor and an opportunity to amenitize the park with food and drink. Its parking lot, oversized for the Visitors' Center itself, could also serve the park. The planned addition of parallel parking along Bass Pro Drive and Riverside drive (discussed ahead) would provide yet more parking. The development of the Blind Spot parcel immediately north of the park would create an audience of residents within walking distance. Indeed, an improved Jefferson Davis Park would add to the value of this proposed new housing.



Jefferson Davis Park drops about one story in elevation from the State Visitors' Center parking lot.

Finally, the park's one-story north-to-south drop in elevation, just south of the Visitors' Center parking, would allow for a multi-level waterfall feature of the sort that brings life to other successful new parks, like Washington DC's popular Yards Park.



Yards park in Washington DC shows how a grade change can be put to good use.

10. Riverside Drive

The potentially easiest win on the Memphis riverfront is the reconfiguration of Riverside Drive. While a vast improvement over the interstate highway that was once planned for this corridor, it still functions much like a highway, moving four to five lanes of traffic speedily through downtown, creating a high-speed barrier that discourages pedestrian activity and river access. Landscape improvements along Tom Lee Park have already

made it more attractive, but have not changed its non-pedestrian nature. Does Riverside Drive need to take such a strictly automotive form?

The answer to this question can be found each May, when one-half of the street is closed for two weeks and the entire street is closed for three weeks. While presenting some temporary inconvenience as people adjust their paths, it is clear that the City's grid of alternative north-south streets contains more than adequate capacity to absorb the trips typically handled by Riverside Drive. Such an experience has been mirrored in American Cities from coast to coast, where highway removals have repeatedly failed to cause traffic crises. From New York's West Side Highway to San Francisco's Embarcadero Freeway, removed road capacity has not had a negative impact on travel times.



For a month each year, Memphis in May reduces the width of Riverside Drive, first by two lanes, then entirely.

For this reason, and as further studied by transportation engineers at Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, we have the luxury of asking ourselves what kind of street Riverside Drive wants to be. Surely it can still hold cars, but the downtown would benefit tremendously if it were to hold cars moving a bit less speedily, alongside pedestrians and cyclists. Additionally, the inclusion of parallel parking would both provide protection to its sidewalks while eliminating the need for parking lots within Tom Lee Park and at Beale Street Landing.

These changes, happily, can be achieved without any reconstruction to the street or its drainage facilities; a new topcoat and restriping will be enough. This report's proposal is as follows:

- Keep the two center travel lanes, as well as turn lanes at intersections, although these turn lanes should be shortened to the length of the typical queue;
- Replace the easternmost lane with parallel parking, clearly marked, and priced to encourage proper occupancy—approaching 80% around the clock. (During many times of day, that price will be \$0.)

- Replace the westernmost lane with an ample two-way bike lane, separated by a painted buffer. This buffer should receive inexpensive breakaway metal posts at its center, each about 3 feet high, spaced about 20' apart.

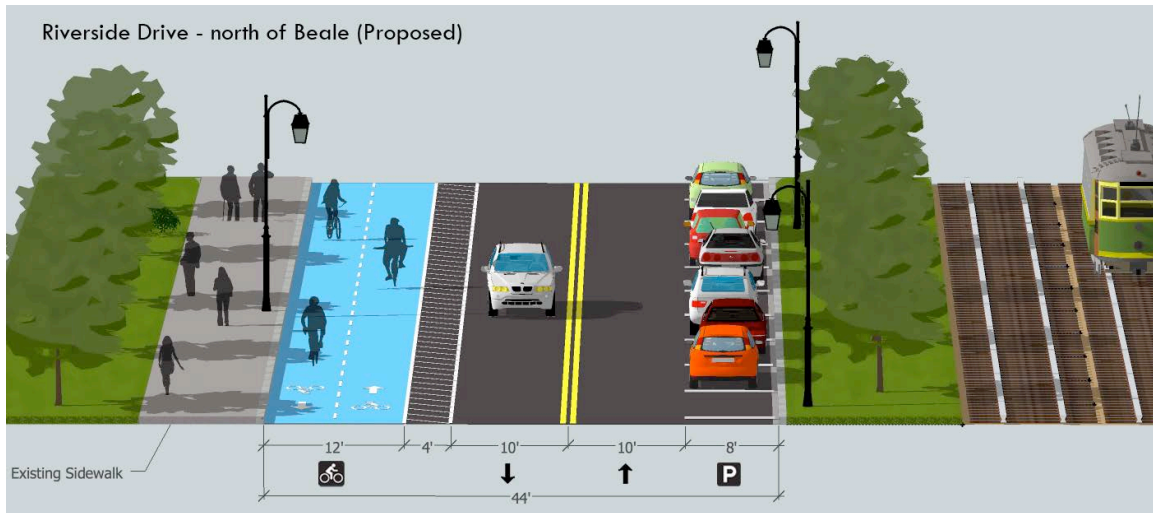
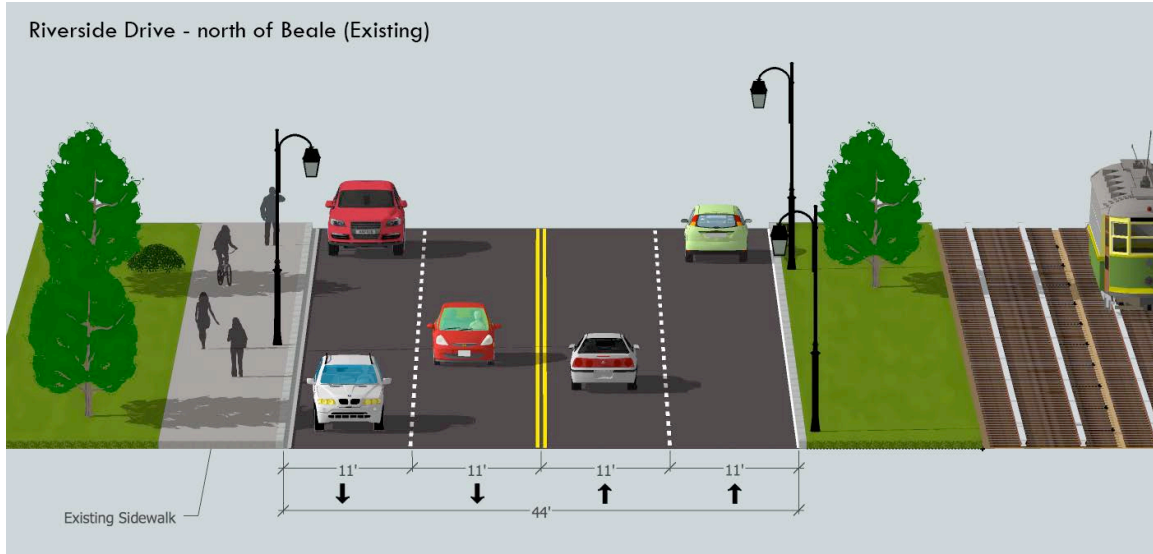
This proposal is recommended for the entire stretch of Riverside Drive between Bass Pro Drive and Georgia Avenue. An alternative, compromise solution would not place parallel parking any further south than Tom Lee Park, but that solution would require a two-lane-to-one-lane northbound merge in this location. This transition is better handled at Georgia Avenue, where the right-hand lane can become a right-turn lane onto Georgia.

Before and After plans by the engineers at Nelson/Nygaard are provided on the next three pages for three different locations along Riverside Drive. Since the street varies in width along this stretch, and we wish to limit expense by not moving any curbs, the plans necessarily vary along their length. In all locations, however, two travel lanes are removed and replaced by a lane of parking to the east and a protected bike lane to the west.

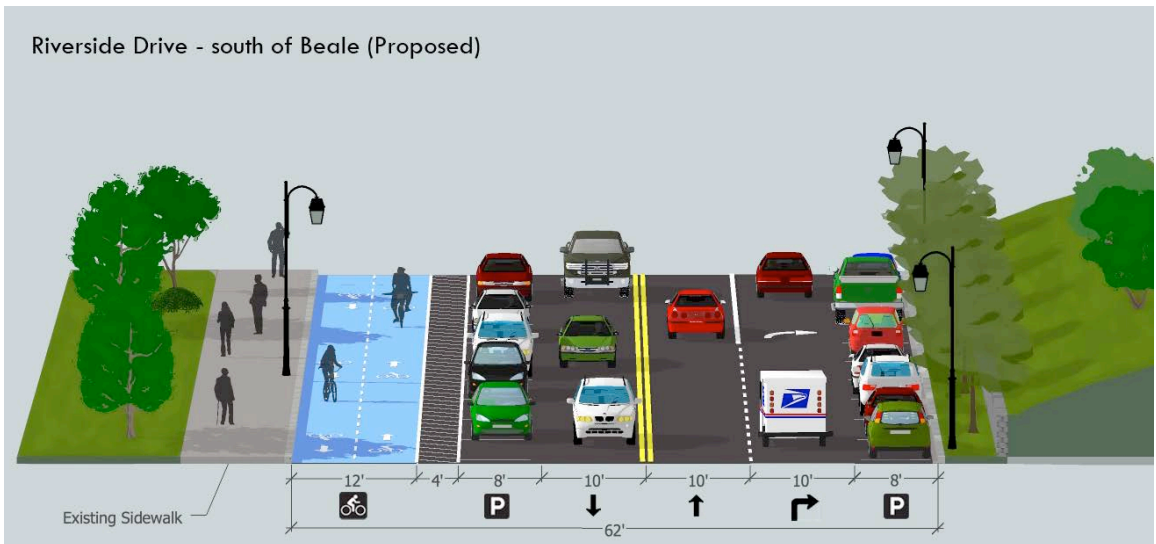
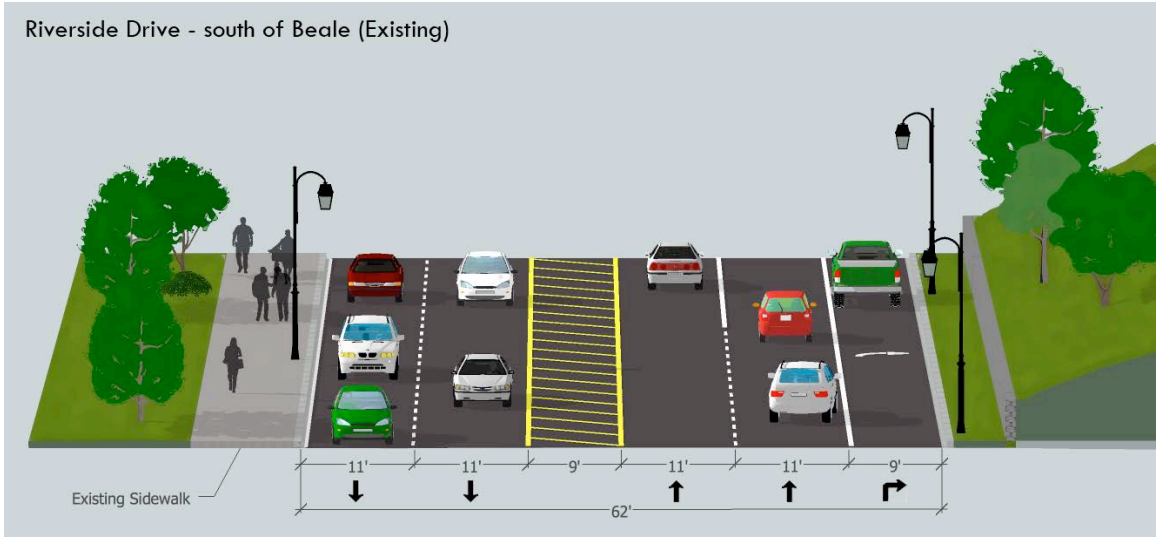
The parking lane receives its own buffer zone in some locations, so that the travel lanes maintain a proper width. The bike facility is located on the western flank because that edge is uninterrupted by intersections for its entire length, close to two miles. Such an uninterrupted path will be especially attractive to bikers, but it is essential that this route is clearly and safely connected to the larger regional biking system.

Also in need of attention is the tree canopy over the Drive. While prettified in front of Tom Lee Park, it is still more decorative than sheltering. True urban boulevards are planted continuously with a single tall and broad species on both flanks and in the center. At maturity, the top branches of the trees touch, forming a dramatic ceiling. Memphis' North Parkway, just west of I-240, shows what this configuration is like, and how effectively it contributes to the beauty and comfort of a space. Riverside Drive deserves no less.

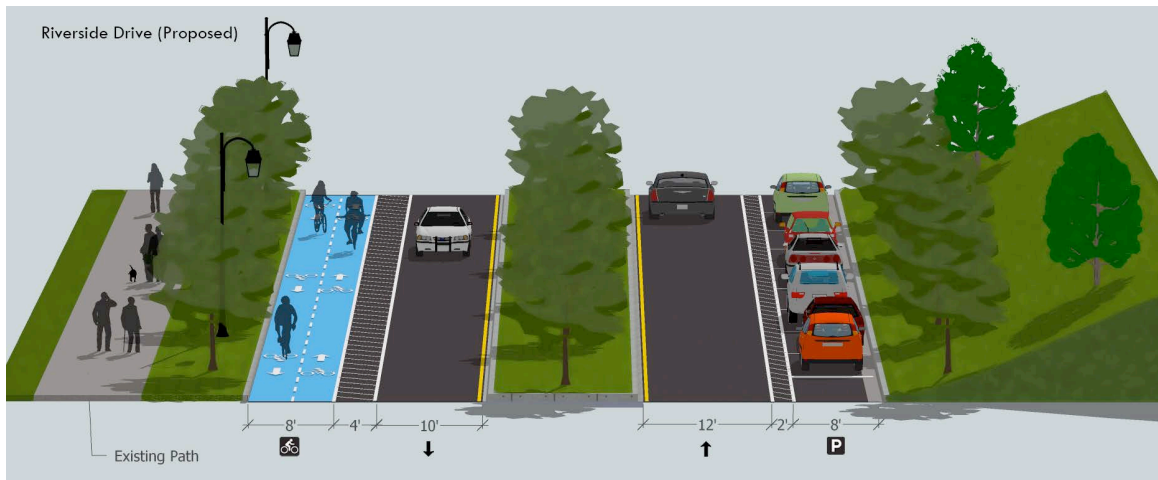
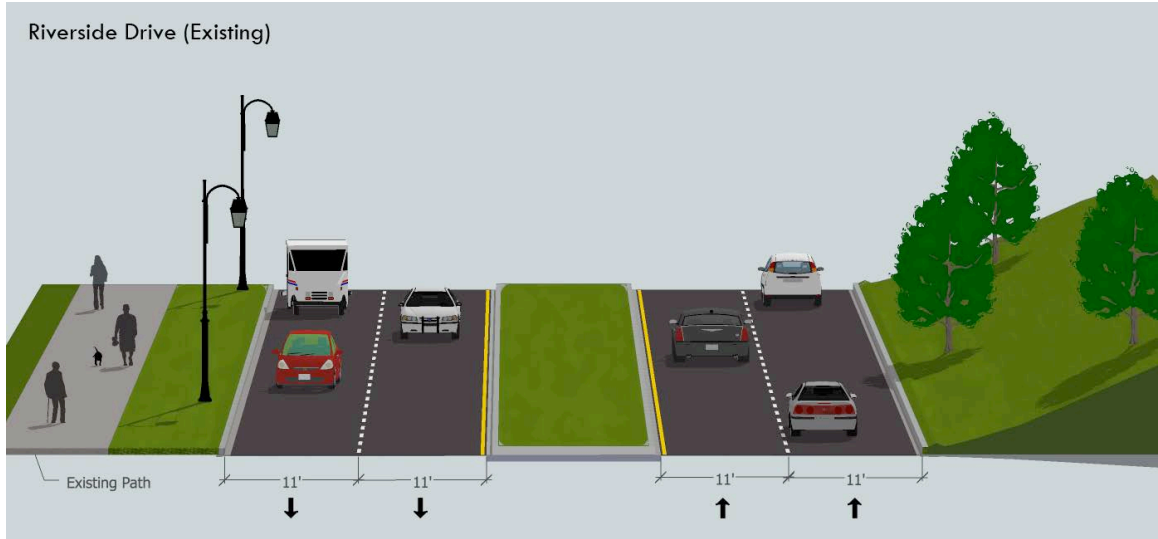
North of Beale Street, we face a different challenge, which is a paucity of both trees and places to put them. But opportunities do exist, and a tree plan needs to be completed for this stretch, with the objective of creating as complete a canopy as possible, given the limitations.



Along its narrowest stretches, Riverside Drive includes a generously sized cycle track against a street sized for urban travel speeds.



In the wider section south of Beale Street, but north of where it has a median, Riverside drive is here shown maintaining its right-hand turn lane onto Beale, since there is room for it.

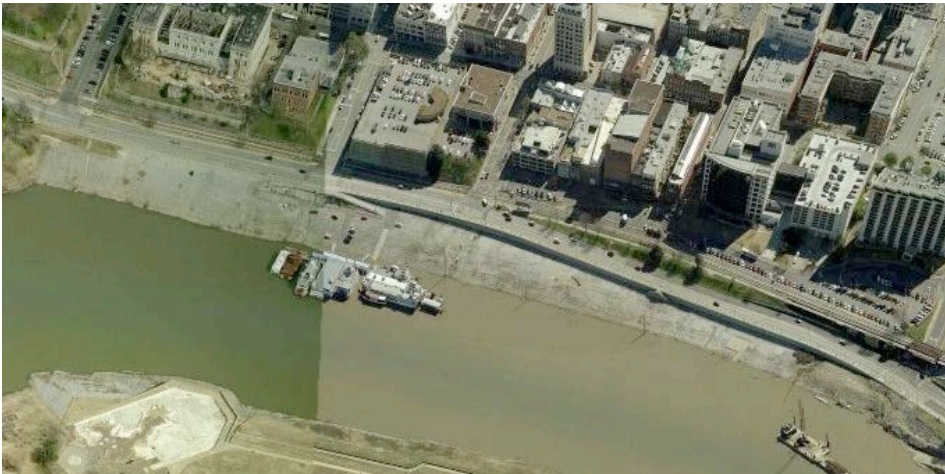


Where it includes a median, each 22-foot roadbed is simply re-apportioned with paint.

11. The Cobblestones

The old Cobblestone Landing forms the centerpiece of the downtown Memphis riverfront. (See Appendix, item 12.) The downtown street grid only intersects Riverside Drive in six places, from Adams to Beale, and two thirds of this half-mile stretch meets the river at the Cobblestones. For good reasons, all prior plans for the riverfront included some form of activation of this space, from a restaurant row to a recreational boating hub. While some of these solutions seemed unrealistic, it is easy to find wisdom in the many voices who suggest that, despite the challenge poised by changing water levels, the Cobblestones have a better use than the one currently anticipated.

Due principally to the limitations poised by valid historic preservation mandates, the current renovation effort results in a Cobblestone Landing that is neither activated by much daily use nor easy to get to. However, that is not the end of the story. Once complete, the renovated Cobblestones will be ready to be reconceptualized as a *tabula rasa* upon which unpredictable and temporary things should be allowed to happen. These temporary, or temporary-seeming, things should be allowed to include the gentle draping of stairs and ramps that add accessibility to it and to the water. These items were limited in the reconstruction due to an attempt at historical accuracy, but once the landing is rebuilt properly and “permanently,” it should be permissible to add clearly modern adornment that makes the Cobblestones both more interesting and more usable.



The historic Cobblestone Landing stretches for almost the entire area in which the downtown grid engages the riverfront.

Like the metal and wood walkways that allow tourists access to Roman ruins—certainly no less historic than the Cobblestones—an armature of stairs, ramps, and platforms could be laid atop the many empty acres of stone. In addition to broadening the Riverside drive sidewalk as an overlook, this installation would ease access to the water and allow for future programming for a broad range of activities, from temporary sculpture displays to ad hoc craft fairs.

What should be allowed to happen on the cobblestones? Better to ask what shouldn't be allowed to happen. Short of a shantytown, the City should allow and encourage all sorts of "tactical urbanism" atop this neutral palette.

12. The Promenade

It is with great trepidation that we take on the subject of the Promenade, the topic that, more than any other, has caused great division among those who care about the future of the Memphis riverfront. All parties that put forth proposals for its future share the same goal, which is a beautiful, lively western city edge, one that causes the city to benefit to the greatest extent possible from its adjacency to the amenity called the Mississippi. However, these proposals diverge dramatically when it comes to their vision of how such an outcome is achieved.

One group, whom we could call the Originalists, support the vision of the city put forth by the Overton Heirs when they gifted the four bluff blocks of the Promenade (and other property) to the City of Memphis in 1828. These blocks, stretching from Adams to Union Avenues between Riverside Drive and Front Street, were contributed for strictly public use, which we can assume meant both as open space and to house institutions of a civic nature. Over the years, this definition was interpreted somewhat loosely to allow the construction of two privately run City-owned parking garages that, while perhaps in keeping with the letter of the law, certainly violated its intent.



The Overton Heirs conception of the Memphis riverfront embraced the City Beautiful motif of a civic park (with civic buildings) between the river and the downtown.

This vision of the Riverfront is a compelling one, and not one unique to Memphis. Many waterfront cities, like Chicago and St. Louis, historically placed civic space in between the center of the downtown and its water's edge, to great benefit. In this conception, the amenity of the waterfront is seen as beginning not near the waters edge, but at the edge of the park space along it, an approach that makes particular sense in which the downtown

sits at some height above the waterway with opportunity for distant views. (See Appendix, Item 8.)

Many parks of this type were created during the City Beautiful period, when rivers were considered not amenities but principally transportation ways, power sources and, too often, trash disposals. There was tremendous logic in creating a public overlook at some distance from the hustle, sound, and smells of the waterway. While these same conditions do not apply today, it is certainly compelling to imagine the Riverfront of the downtown being located at the appropriately-named Front Street, with a four-block Promenade park along its edge.

This vision did not die with the Overton Heirs and has been shared by many thoughtful people since, including the world famous design firm of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, who endorsed it in their Center City Development Plan of 1987. (See Appendix, item 1.) It is currently championed by the Friends for Our Riverfront, who contributed mightily to the defeat of the 2004 Memphis Promenade Public Realm Plan, which envisioned a far different outcome. (See Appendix, Item 7.) Among the circumstances giving strength to the Originalist approach to the Memphis waterfront is the fact that it is the law; until a court rules otherwise, the stipulations of the original land donation remain in force, and the Promenade must remain public.

Those on the opposing side of this discussion, whom we can call the Progressives, understand the stipulations of the original Overton Heirs donation, but question whether their vision remains ideal in the changed context of how the river is now used. The fact that, rather than a place of dock-work and other commerce, the Memphis riverfront is now an (admittedly limited) tourist attraction and a place to board pleasure cruises, suggests that the downtown might benefit more by engaging it directly rather than holding it at arms length.

This outlook lies behind the creation of Beale Street Landing, and also behind the failed Promenade Public Realm Plan. It was endorsed most recently by the 2011 Assessment of Downtown and Riverfront Projects by RKG, which states:

“It is the consultant’s opinion that redevelopment of the Promenade properties with combined public and commercial uses and establishments would be most beneficial for creating a more active waterfront environment. . . [The] value of redeveloping the Promenade properties should be measured on how well they are able to improve integration of the waterfront with the downtown. . .”

It is this desire for integration of the riverfront from the downtown, rather than the separation envisioned by the Overton heirs, that characterizes the Progressive approach to the Promenade. This approach was most aggressively demonstrated in the 2004 Promenade Public Realm plan, by the highly-regarded firm of Cooper Robertson & Partners. This plan created a continuous public park edge around the perimeter of the

four bluff blocks, framing a large amount of new mixed-use development within. It also connected the southern three blocks into a continuous north-south promenade by means of two bridges, one of which has since been built.



The Promenade Public Realm Plan grew from objective of bringing urbanization closer to the river's edge.

In addition to activating the west side of Front Street—in opposition to the Overton Heirs intention—this plan aimed to bring life to Riverside Drive by placing commercial uses underneath the promenade, facing west. In many ways, this concept is the most promising aspect of the plan, as it would contribute activity and people to the river's edge—where the two parking decks now blight that street—and make the use of the Cobblestones and Jefferson Davis Park much more likely.

What was wrong with this defeated plan? Most importantly, it violated the letter of the original land dedication, which is the main reason that it could be stopped. Second, it placed buildings against Front Street that were considerably taller than the three to six stories across the street from them. Even though Front Street holds some buildings more than twenty stories tall—for example, facing Confederate Park—more respect could have been paid to immediate neighbors. Additionally, the plan imagined the wholesale removal of the Public Library—not only its unpopular modernist front, but its historic Romanesque rear annex—the sort of demolition that rarely receives public support these days, and for good reason.

Otherwise, from a best practices approach, this plan is superior in most ways to the current degraded condition, and no less proper a response to the site than the Originalist all-park scenario. Its key planning advantage to an all-park solution is that it brings activity to its Riverside Drive frontage, and gives people more reason to walk down the bluff to the Cobblestones and Jefferson Davis Park. If—and it's a big if—the general

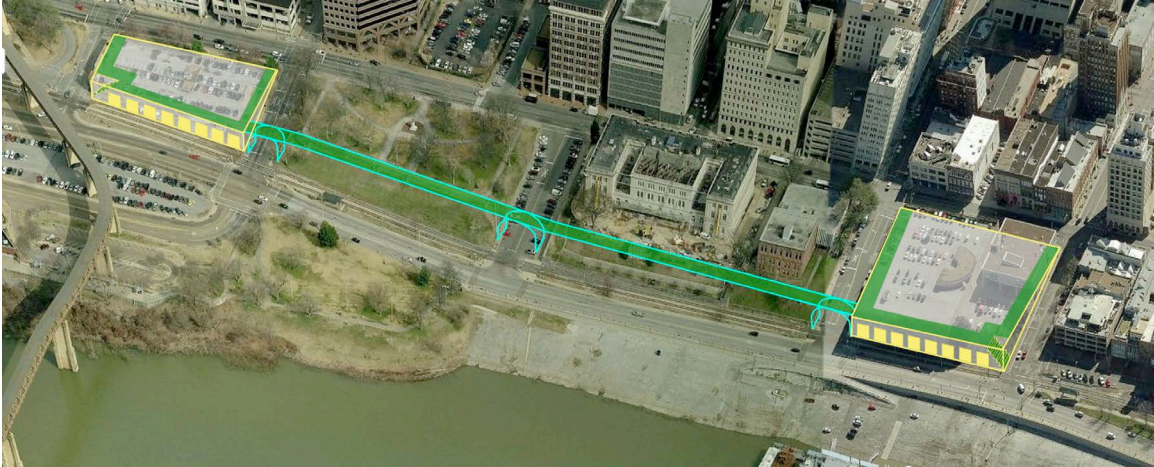
strategy is to understand this lower area as the true riverfront, and not Front Street, then this is the better solution.

The other advantage of the Progressive solution is that it potentially pays for itself. If robustly developed for commercial mixed-use, the interiors of the Promenade blocks could generate income to support the creation of the new public spaces that surround them. Advocates for this approach are quick to point out how the city has trouble maintaining the large amount of riverfront public space it already oversees, and that building an all-parks solution would only add to that burden. Supporters of the Originalist approach counter that the failure of the mixed-use One Beale development to get off the ground suggests that there is little demand for more commercially-developed space in this location.

Before continuing in this dispute, it is important to note that, for all intents and purposes, we are talking about two blocks, not four. One block, Confederate Park, already achieves the green vision. A second, to its south, holds the University of Memphis Law School and the Public Library, which, although it may be transformed in use, is unlikely to be replaced by anything dramatically different, for the reasons already stated. The exciting Memphis Art Park proposal makes a new use of the site without changing its civic nature. (See Appendix, item 16.) Creating the Art Park on this block would be a great benefit to the riverfront and the downtown, and deserves City support.

This leaves two blocks, one to the north and one to the south. Both hold large, unattractive parking structures, and the southern block also holds the firehouse. Most people—though not all—agree that the parking structures are a blight. These buildings cut Front Street (and the downtown) off from the river, and provide unpleasant, deadening faces against all surrounding streets. While the parking spaces are much valued, it would seem that underutilized parking garages nearby could absorb much of their capacity. Also, given the multi-story grade change between Riverside Drive and Front Street, these two blocks could be rebuilt with smaller parking structures sitting somewhat invisibly within the bluff, with either parkland or some other, more intensive use atop them.

Many outside consultants have advised the city on this heavily contested site, and it is neither our right nor our proper role to determine the outcome. What we can do, however, is delineate the characteristics that both good outcomes share, and note that, until the question is resolved, the current unfortunate condition will not change. By defining the dispute to its true limits, we can then both establish a shared—albeit limited—vision that is potentially enact-able as an official plan, while also limiting the scope of a legal dispute that needs to be resolved as quickly as possible to allow change of any sort in the near future.



While there is little overlap between the two alternative visions for the Promenade, the area of disagreement is principally the two sites shown here in grey.

The shared vision is as follows:

- Replacement of the two parking structures with smaller parking structures whose top-floor ceilings sit roughly at the elevation of Front Street. Each of these structures would be accessed from each of its flanks, with only one entry allowed per face. These structures would be required to provide a habitable edge at least 20 feet deep facing Riverside Drive to a height of at least 20 feet. This space may have either public or private uses (pending resolution of the dispute), but it must face its front doors to Riverside Drive and be principally glazed. (In all fairness, it must be noted that certain parties would prefer that these bases not be inhabited at all.)
- A continuous promenade at Front Street elevation, of minimum 20 feet width, along all four sides of each block, connected by continuous bridges over Monroe Avenue and perhaps over Jefferson Avenue.
- Atop the roof of the parking structure, 20 feet from each block perimeter, a Contested Zone holding either only open space, mixed-use development, or something in between. That “something in between” could be limited to civic uses like museums and academic buildings without violating the letter of the original dedication. (If both funding and an audience existed for such facilities, this outcome would seem ideal.)
- A determination that, whatever the legal outcome, development upon the Contested Zone shall correspond to a design code (to be further defined) that includes a 60-foot height limit against Front Street, to a depth of 60 feet, but no height limit for the remainder of the site.

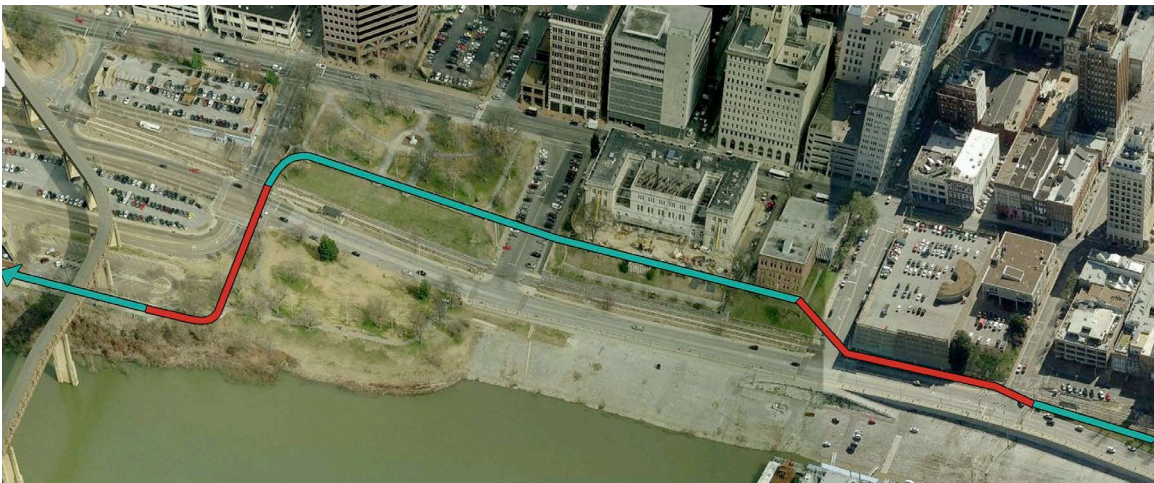
Again, these rules are designed to restrict development to a proper envelope if and when it comes, with an understanding that a court of law may determine that no “non-

public” buildings are actually allowed. We should not let the possibility of a ban on development stop us from defining the proper shape of development.

Ideally, some version of the above rules in their entirety would be established as the City moves forward to resolve the disputed issues as quickly as possible. The circumstances may not currently exist for any of the imagined scenarios to be accomplished anytime soon, but it would be wise to have the proper requirements in place now, so that no further delays meet those who wish to make change when the opportunity comes.

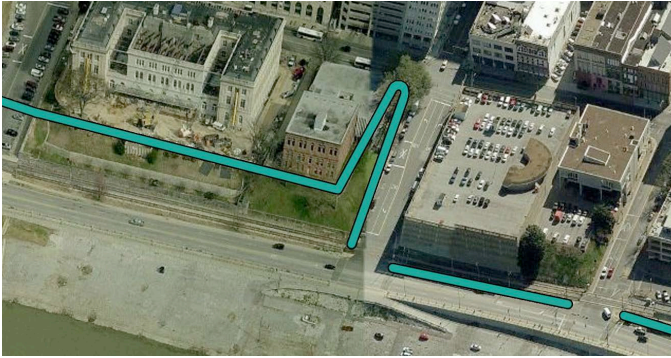
13. The Riverwalk—Central Section

Memphis’ Riverwalk, which is also a bluff walk, would attract many more users if it were continuous, stretching all the way from Bass Pro to the French Fort. Creating this condition at the central downtown riverfront requires the following corrections and additions:



The central section of the Riverwalk is complete but for the two segments shown in red. Like a train track, its value depends on its continuity.

- The Jefferson Davis Park connection: At the northwest corner of Confederate Park (at Jefferson) a prominent crossing of Riverside Drive, with speed table, should be created to encourage an easy transition from the northern Riverwalk to the bluff;
- The current dogleg behind the Public Library requires bluff-edge walkers to head east to Front Street and then west on Monroe to Riverside Drive. This dogleg and doubling-back must be supplemented by a staircase southward to Monroe at Riverside. The appropriate investment in this stairway—wood metal, or stone?—depends on how long the parking structure is likely to remain in its current location, rather than being replaced by a new block with its own promenade atop it, connected by bridge across Monroe. (See the earlier discussion of the Promenade)



Heading south behind the library leads to a dogleg path.

- Along the blank front of the parking deck, pedestrians are currently required to walk a block south on a dangerously thin sidewalk between the street and the train tracks. In the short term, the area between the train tracks and the Parking Deck could be inexpensively turned into an 8-foot-wide boardwalk, constructed of teak or similar. This boardwalk would turn into a raised speed table across Monroe Avenue, meeting the stairway up the bluff to the corner of the Public Library.



A sign blocking the sidewalk does not a Riverwalk make.

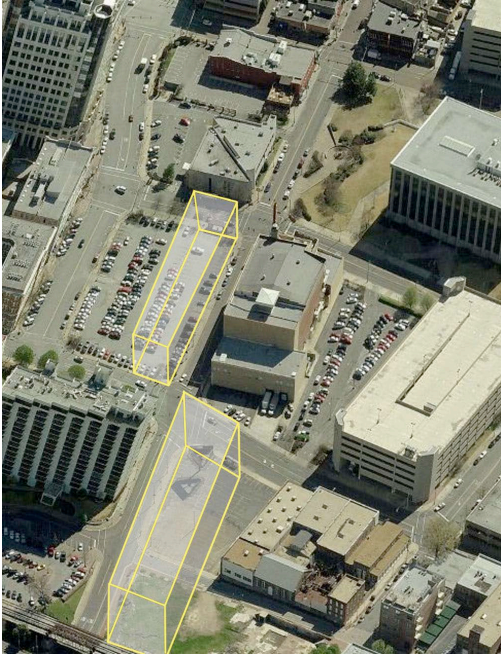


An 8-foot boardwalk in this location on the other side of the tracks would offer a preferred path.

14. Beale Street

Great effort and resources have gone into the creation of Beale Street Landing without an accompanying effort to improve its pedestrian connection to the downtown. Currently, the walk from the active parts of Beale Street to the Landing is undermined by the suburban-style lawn of the MLGW headquarters, the long blank wall of the Orpheum Theatre, and the gigantic parking lot that sits across the street, between Front and Main. An essential first step in connecting Beale Street pedestrians to the riverfront is the redevelopment of this parking lot as a building (or buildings) with doors and windows facing Beale. It is not necessary to develop the whole site, just the southern edge against Beale, where a standard-depth collection of buildings would occupy only one third of the block.

With the completion of One Beale—whose delay merits further investigation—the development of this key edge is likely to contribute mightily to pedestrian flow from Memphis’ entertainment hub to its new waterfront. The principal remaining challenge will be related to time of day: increasing daytime use of Beale Street and nighttime use of Beale Street Landing. In the longer term, completing the east-west axis with a bridge or water-taxi connection to a 24-hour Mud Island will help considerably in this regard.



In addition to the completion of One Beale, another building is needed along the street edge across from the Orpheum Theatre.

15. Tom Lee Park

Most people feel that Tom Lee Park is a missed opportunity, a place that could offer visitors much more than it already does. The key impediments to achieving this goal are described as “funding” and “Memphis in May.” Presuming the former to be potentially surmountable, it is worth delving into the latter.

A number of plans have been made for beautifying Tom Lee Park, with the main strategy of using copses of trees and shrubs to divide the 4000-foot-long park into a series of “rooms.” People complain that all of these plans have been rejected by Memphis in May as conflicting with its needs, specifically the demands of its large concerts and barbecue cook-off. Conversations with Memphis in May suggest that such a reconfiguration of the park is not at all in conflict with its needs, but that prior design efforts have not included the organization as an active participant, which kept these from meeting the festival’s needs. Based on these discussions, there is good reason to expect that a new design effort that acknowledged Memphis in May as a key client could produce a satisfactory “outdoor-rooms” proposal.

As a side note, some voices have suggested that one solution to this apparent conflict is to move Memphis in May from the riverfront to the Fairgrounds, where it has been located on occasion. For a city that wants to better celebrate its relationship to its river, such an

outcome would be extremely counterproductive. Having Memphis in May on the riverfront gives the festival an unmatched setting, gives a boost to downtown businesses and hotels, and is also a great convenience to festival visitors, many of whom are liberated from the risk of drinking and driving by the festival’s current location.

As a redesign moves forward, it is worth noting is that, having been constructed of fill, Tom Lee Park has soil that needs amendment and or replacement to properly support plant life. Any plans to add trees to the park must include a soil plan, and also a temporary fencing plan to protect landscape from trampling—and human “watering”—during Memphis in May.



A conservative approach to improving Tom Lee Park would use areas of trees and shrubs (in amended soil) to shape “outdoor rooms” of grass.

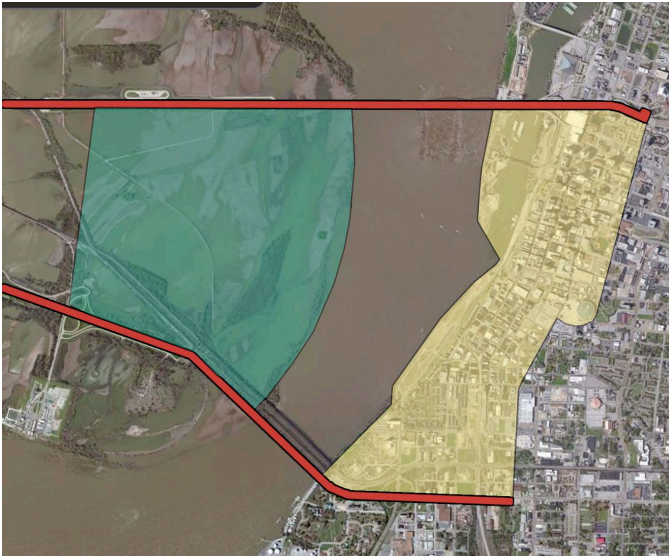
A more elaborate plan is not recommended, for several reasons. First, Memphis in May still requires that most of the land remain grass, which is not out of keeping with an “outdoor-rooms” scheme. Second, Tom Lee Park is so very large that any commitment to change it dramatically will necessarily be very expensive. Third, while the park is a missed opportunity, it isn’t broken. It still presents an attractive edge to the Mississippi, and it serves many users in its current state. Finally, Tom Lee Park sits below the bluff, away from the area where downtown Memphis reaches toward the riverfront. There are no cross streets approaching it from the east, unlike north of Beale Street. For all of the above reasons, Jefferson Davis Park is seen as a much better place to invest in the interest of attracting waterfront activity.

Still, while not being the highest priority, Tom Lee Park warrants a limited investment in beautification in conjunction with the reconfiguration of Riverside Drive, which will attract more potential users to its edge. The creation of a continuous parking lane on Riverside will create more parking spaces than the 120 spots located within the park.

This parking lot, which even Memphis in May doesn't like, should be removed, as no truly urban American park includes a parking lot. Also slated for removal should be the parking lot serving Beale Street Landing, which—added during the value engineering phase—betrays that project's design conception of a grass field rising to become a roof.

16. Arkansas

The heart of downtown Memphis is framed between the I-40 bridges and the three bridges along I-55 to its south. Across the Mississippi in this location is a low-lying piece of Arkansas that happily remains undeveloped due to its regular flooding. Few Memphians consider how fortunate it is that this area cannot be built upon except at great expense, since it is the view from much of downtown. Its wilderness quality, more than simply adding to the value of west-facing real estate, creates the impression of Memphis as a city ideally situated in nature.



The low-lying area across from downtown could be more emphatically understood as an asset.

Plans are already underway for the enhancement of this area as a visitable park, assisted by the pending investment in the Main-to-Main project connecting Memphis to West Memphis. At the risk of dampening enthusiasm for that nascent corridor, it must be said that East Broadway, its ostensible urban destination in West Memphis, likely presents less of an attraction to potential Main-to-Main strollers, joggers, and bikers, than would be provided by an appealing trail through this natural area.

Right now, it is a fair guess that many Main-to-Main users will cross the river and come right back. A well-appointed park loop within this coastal zone would provide a nearby destination to encourage greater use of the new bridge boardwalk. Beyond the provision of such an amenity, it is worth investigating how this natural area, so important to the

impression of downtown Memphis, can be permanently protected from unsightly development, and further taken advantage of for what it is, a vast downtown park.

17. The Riverwalk—Southern Section

As already discussed, half the value of the Riverwalk is its continuity. The other half is its relationship to the river. As it climbs the bluff heading south, the Riverwalk provides an exceptional experience until it is forced to take a dogleg into the South Bluffs neighborhood. Here it continues as a very nice walk, but certainly not a Riverwalk. While its gate into South Bluff shouldn't be closed, a new path should be created down the bluff to the southwest, where it can easily cross a narrowed Riverside Drive and enter Tom Lee Park. It is likely that a speed table should be provided at this crossing.



Once Riverside Drive is narrowed and its traffic correspondingly calmed, it will make sense to create a direct connection to Tom Lee Park from the Riverwalk.

As it dead-ends just north of the Church of the River, a trajectory should be established between the Church and Channel 3, allowing it to pass south of the Church parking lot and reach the railroad tracks as they mount the Harahan Bridge. Here the Riverwalk can both mount the Main-to-Main crossing, and also step down the hill alongside the Bridge, in order to allow a further connection south underneath the three bridges in this location.

Finally, hugging the side of the bluff, the Riverwalk can run along the west side of Crump Park, bridge across Illinois Avenue, and finally cross Metal Museum Drive at the northwest corner of the Chickasaw Heritage Park, where it can terminate in an appropriately civic structure like a bandstand. This solution, part of the Riverwalk's original conception, requires the cooperation of the Ornamental Metal Museum, which stands to benefit greatly from the Riverwalk tourists this extension would bring to its front door.



The Riverwalk is currently planned to connect to the Main-to-Main bridge via this frustrating dogleg.



The proper solution brings the Riverwalk between the Church of the River and Channel 3.



In keeping with its original conception, the Riverwalk should eventually reach all the way to Chickasaw Heritage Park.

Once completed, the Riverwalk would run continuously and dramatically from Bass Pro to Chickasaw Heritage Park, a length of almost three full miles. Thus established, the Riverwalk could then be improved over the years by the eventual replacement of

signage, lighting, and other furniture. But more important than its amenities is the continuity that it is today sorely lacking.



A completed Riverwalk would be close to three miles long.

18. The French Fort

The plan for the redevelopment of the blighted French Fort neighborhood, with some limited modifications, would create a worthy southern bookend to the downtown riverfront. The project appropriately continues the Riverwalk under the three bridges to terminate at Chickasaw Heritage Park. It properly makes new use of the historic Marine Hospital, and places new buildings along currently vacant street edges.



This plan for the French Fort makes good use of historic properties.

A few aspects of the design seem capable of improvement, as follows:

- The extension of Alston Ave westward into Crump Park has no curbside parking, yet runs along a parking lot with double head-in parking. This redundant and pedestrian-unfriendly configuration should be replaced by an outcome in which the parking lot becomes a street with double-head-in parking along a tree-lined sidewalk.
- Walkable streets are lined by buildings on both sides, without the “missing teeth” of surface parking lots. The current plan for the eastern stretch of Alston Ave is lined partly by buildings and partly by parking lots (between the buildings designated P and G). Ideally, the boundary of a walkable precinct would be delineated, and no parking lots allowed along sidewalks within it. This could be accomplished at a minimum by moving building G next to building P.
- Delaware Street is shown in the plan as containing a treed median that is cut back at corners to provide left-hand turn lanes. Given the limited traffic counts on these streets, these turn lanes are unnecessary and detract from the walkability of the streetscape. The medians should continue from corner to corner.
- For some odd reason, Delaware Street was never connected through to Riverside Boulevard. As a result, the park looks at the unsightly rear-ends of houses, whose privacy is also undermined by having a public park in their back yard. The proper urban solution would be for Delaware be brought south as a narrow street, and for houses to face it from the east with front doors. This outcome is not desired by the residents and therefore it is not proposed by the developer. But the current condition is not worthy of a civic park, which should be enfronted by public streets and house fronts, not rear fences.

Re-conceptualizing the Memphis Riverfront

No activity is currently more needed than identifying a limited number of relatively inexpensive urban interventions for the short-term transformation of the riverfront; that is the goal of the section that follows this one. However, all efforts must point towards a longer term outcome that allows this tremendously important part of the city to reach its full potential. Such a potential could be characterized as a riverfront that is integrated both to the downtown it serves and to the potentially powerful amenity of Mud Island.

Accomplishing this integration requires paying special attention to a number of initiatives already mentioned, as follows:

1. The Beal Street Axis needs to be reinforced as a walkable corridor from 2nd Street to the Beale Street Landing.

2. Jefferson Davis Park needs to be remade as a destination, and its connections eastward enhanced.
3. Both Jefferson Davis Park and Beale Street Landing need to establish direct, quick, connections to Mud Island, likely in the form of a stair/elevator tower for the former and a two-point water taxi for the latter.
4. Mud Island needs to be remade along the lines envisioned by its recent Land Use study, and not only beautified from its tip to beyond the monorail landing, but enlivened with amenities that keep it active from dawn to after dark.
5. Finally, the Cobblestones need to receive an armature of additional “temporary” construction that allows it to be used in a more active way than is currently contemplated.



A reconceptualized riverfront has two coasts and reaches into downtown where it connects to a revitalized Mud Island.

There are additional long-term interventions that will also have a profound positive impact, such as the replacement of the two City parking garages with bluff structures that line Riverside drive with active building fronts. But the diagram above emphasizes the key aspect of the riverfront’s reconceptualization, which is as a two-coast loop that reaches into downtown at its two river crossings.

This drawing is intentionally a diagram and not a plan, because it could be accomplished in a wide variety of ways. But the best plans are reflective of simple underlying diagrams that show what a site “wants to be.” In this case, the location of Mud Island a short distance from the very heart of downtown, and the presence of Beale Street Landing and Jefferson-Davis Park as bookends to the underutilized Cobblestones, all suggest the integration of these features into a continuous circuit that will allow the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts.

III. PRIORITIES

The remaking of Mud Island and the activation of the Cobblestones are the sort of long-term transformations that will allow the Memphis riverfront to reach its full potential. However, by focusing short-term efforts on those few centrally-located places where immediate change is possible, we can fundamentally alter the riverfront in a way that achieves dramatic outcomes at limited cost.

These interventions should be selected from the long list already presented based on the combined criteria of visibility, affordability, and connectedness:

- The goal of *visibility* acknowledges that the most impactful investments are those that can be seen and visited the most easily by the greatest number of people. This goal suggests that areas along Riverside Drive have more immediate potential than areas elsewhere.
- The goal of *affordability* acknowledges that high cost/acre investments should be focused in relatively small areas (like Jefferson Davis Park), while low cost/acre investments can be spread over larger areas (like Tom Lee Park). It also acknowledges that it is cheaper to ask for modifications to other people's investments (like Bass Pro) than to fund new investments.
- The goal of *connectedness* acknowledges that investments are much more likely to achieve critical mass if located adjacent to one another, and also that those investments *which connect other things together* are likely to have disproportionately large impacts.

Based on these criteria, it is strongly recommended that the City of Memphis immediately move forward on simultaneously accomplishing the following six interrelated initiatives:

1. Making Riverside Drive a complete street;
2. Making Bass Pro Drive a complete street;
3. Encouraging development along Bass Pro Drive;
4. Remaking Jefferson Davis Park;
5. Completing the central Riverwalk; and
6. Improving Tom Lee Park.

Each of these initiatives is described briefly below, while also referencing the larger discussion that has already occurred in the body of this report.

1. Making Riverside Drive a Complete Street (See Section II.10 above)

Nothing separates downtown Memphis from its riverfront as powerfully as the current pedestrian-unfriendly condition of Riverside Drive. The experience of Memphis in May demonstrates that the city can function properly with this road reduced from four lanes to two. Effecting this narrowing without rebuilding any of the street's curbs makes room for the addition of a protected bicycling facility and a full flank of parallel parking, which would protect sidewalk edges while also allowing for the removal of unattractive parking lots in Tom Lee Park and at Beale Street Landing. This dramatic change could be accomplished for little more than the cost of a new top coat, although we encourage a concurrent investment in shade trees where they are missing along the street's length. Thus transformed from a highway to an urban boulevard, Riverside Drive would bring the city back in touch with its river.

2. Making Bass Pro Drive a Complete Street (See Section II.6 above)

Bass Pro, with some help from the City, is about to make a major investment turning Poplar Avenue / Fulton Street into a road that, unfortunately, will not encourage walking or biking along it, nor enhance the value of its adjacent real estate. Unnecessarily sized at four lanes, this road will encourage speeding, and lacks parallel parking protecting the sidewalk to its west. This sidewalk enfronts the State Visitors' Center as well as a prime developable parcel that would benefit from a safer and more comfortable eastern edge. Properly resized to two lanes to include ample sidewalks and cycle facilities, and ideally shifted slightly east within its current right of way, this street can both provide an appealing route to the Bass Pro Pyramid and contribute to the size and value of abutting property. Indeed, by including parallel parking, this street can allow for the removal of the bus parking lot at the State Visitor's Center, further enlarging the area available for redevelopment.

3. Encouraging Development along Bass Pro Drive (See Section II.4 above)

As just discussed, the removal of the concrete plant has resulted in a large city-owned property being made available for redevelopment alongside Bass Pro Drive. Bounded to the west by the Riverwalk (against the Wolf River Harbor), this site is well located and amenitized to receive a significant quantity of medium-density housing with a limited mixed-use component. If it is properly planned prior to its sale, the City can both control its quality and raise funds for the transformation of Jefferson Davis Park, which could potentially be redeveloped as part of a developer RFP for the two parcels together. In fact, the City may want to consider creating a master plan for this area that also includes the State Visitors' Center and its parking lots.

4. Remaking Jefferson Davis Park (See Section II.9 above)

Because it is not large, Jefferson Davis Park can be remade dramatically for a relatively small cost. Doing so is not essential, but makes sense in the context of its role as the northern bookend to the Cobblestones, opposite Beale Street Landing, and its location along an east-west park axis that connects Court Square through Confederate Park to Mud Island. This Mud Island connection should be enhanced by a stair/elevator tower that allows Riverwalk users to access the monorail bridge without first doubling back uphill to Front Street (See Section II.7). As suggested just above, the improvement of this park would further amenitize the City-owned parcel just north of the Visitors' Center, and should perhaps be redeveloped in conjunction with that site.

5. Completing the Central Riverwalk (See Section II.13 above)

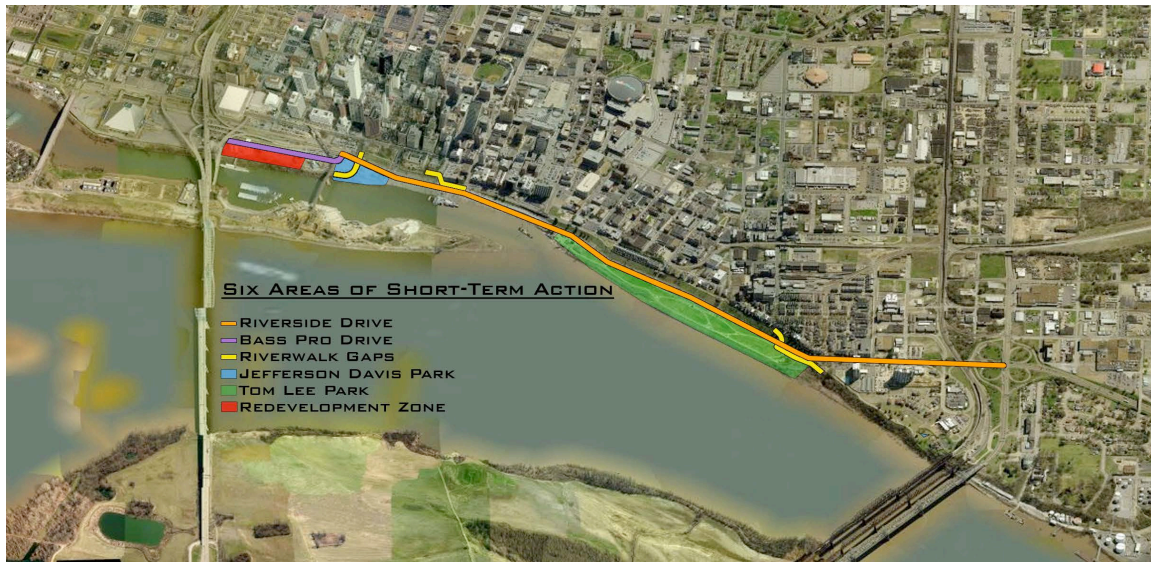
Memphis downtown now includes a nice Bluff Walk south of Union, a short Promenade Walk from Monroe to Jefferson, and a Riverwalk growing north from the State Visitors Center. These three brief experiences can be combined into a single worthy stroll for the slight cost of one staircase (at Union), two speed tables (crossing Union at Riverside and Riverside at Jefferson) one block of boardwalk (from Union to Monroe), and a very limited amount of additional walkway and wayfinding. Thus connected to itself, the Memphis Riverwalk will provide a delightful multi-mile meander from Ashburn-Coppock Park to the Bass Pro Pyramid. This effort can be supplemented, in conjunction with the calming of Riverside Drive, with a path down the hillside that allows bluff walkers to directly access Tom Lee Park rather than all being diverted into the South Bluffs neighborhood. (See Section II.17.) Given its small price tag and great connective potential, there is every reason to make this proposal a high priority.

6. Improving Tom Lee Park (See Section II.15 Above)

If there is a single initiative among these six that can be delayed, it is this one, the improvement of Tom Lee Park to include “outdoor living rooms” of grass separated by copses of trees and shrubs in a manner that supports the activities of Memphis in May. However, this proposal makes the A-List for a number of reasons, including its tremendous visibility from Riverside Drive and beyond; its adjacency to the almost-complete Beale Street Landing; and the fact that adding parallel parking along Riverside Drive will allow both Beale Street Landing and Tom Lee Park to eliminate their unattractive parking lots. Tom Lee Park covers half of the downtown Memphis riverfront. Making it beautiful at limited cost seems a promising path towards transforming the city’s relationship to the Mississippi.

The above six initiatives have been put forward for immediate action because they all seem affordable, quickly achievable, and mutually supporting. That does not mean that none of the dozen other proposals above merit short-term attention. Indeed, some of these are only considered long-term because, even if initiated right away, they will not be achieved for years. There is no reason to delay any of them, with the possible caveat that certain tasks, such as the redevelopment of Mud Island, will be easier to achieve once the higher-priority items have been accomplished. That said, we must always be wary of casting our gaze too wide, lest we lose our focus and distract attention from the easy wins that we can chalk up first.

For that reason, it is recommended that the six items discussed above be specifically identified for short-term promotion. Some must be begun immediately—such as the modification of Bass Pro Drive—while those that require additional study should be consolidated into a single planning effort to be undertaken this Spring.



This diagram indicates the six priority sites for remaking the Memphis riverfront.

Once those six projects are decisively begun, the City should not delay in pursuing the following eight second-order objectives, also described in more detail in Section II:

1. Create a bicycle facility that heads north, south, and east from the base of A.W. Willis Bridge, with the southern facility reaching to Bass Pro Drive and the eastern facility contributing to a road-diet along Willis Avenue. (See Section II.1)
2. Revise current plans for the Pinch District to be based upon an Urban Triage Diagram similar to the one provided here under Section II.2, focusing on the connection of the Bass Pro Pyramid east to Main Street.
3. Begin efforts to create an artistic armature improving the passage along Main Street under the I-40 ramps. (See Section II.3)

4. Begin discussions with the development community around the remaking of the “blind spot” on Mud Island along the lines envisioned by its Land Use Study. (See Section II.5)
5. Begin investigations into the possibility of installing temporary ramps and platforms along the Cobblestone Landing once it is complete, and consider commissioning a plan for such an installation. (See Section II.11)
6. Initiate the legal proceedings necessary to determine the real costs associated with replacing the parking garages and firehouse along the Promenade with a greater variety of uses. (See Section II.12)
7. Initiate an effort to institutionalize and develop the parkland across the Mississippi as an actual visitable park. (See Section II.16)
8. Create a preliminary plan and cost estimate for continuing the Riverwalk to its proper termination in the French Fort neighborhood. (See Section II.17)

Finally, unmentioned in the above two lists are Mud Island Park and the French Fort neighborhood (Section II items 5, 7, and 18). As already communicated, these areas, while important, are currently less visible and less accessible from downtown than the other sites considered. However, once Jefferson Davis Park is remade with a direct connection to Mud Island, and once the I-55 roundabout is constructed and the Riverwalk brought south to Chickasaw Heritage Park, these two locations will be better positioned to benefit from our more concerted attention.

APPENDIX

**REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR REPORTS
AND PROPOSALS, ORGANIZED
CHRONOLOGICALLY**

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APPENDIX: REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR REPORTS AND PROPOSALS, ORGANIZED CHRONOLOGICALLY

More than twenty prior reports and proposals were considered as a part of this effort. Those deemed relevant to current challenges are briefly discussed on the pages that follow. Far from a comprehensive review, this discussion is rather a synopsis of progress made and lessons learned.

1. CENTER CITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE RIVERFRONT SUB-AREA (1987)

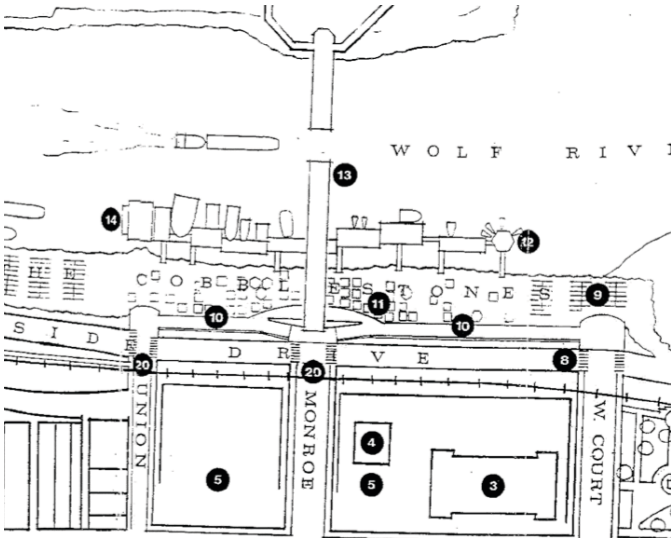
This plan, by the highly-regarded firm of Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown, included a pedestrian bridge to Mud Island, a Mud Island Aquarium, and a collection of kiosks on the Cobblestones. Given the recent controversy, its pronouncements on the Promenade are noteworthy:

“Long term guidelines are predicated on the aspiration that it could once more become the civic treasure envisaged by the founders when they established the Promenade. . .

“In the long term the west side of Front Street should revert to a Promenade consisting of wide expanses of park-like open space with unencumbered river views. Of the present structures, only those possessing a civic character should be preserved. These include the Post Office and perhaps the surviving fragment of the original Cossitt Library. All others including the parking garages, fire station and modern addition to the Cossitt Library should be demolished as they become obsolete or begin to need major repairs.

“After demolition these sites should be replaced as parks. following the precedent of Confederate Park. At the bluff edge handsome stone parapets should be constructed. Walkways should make frequent connections to Front Street to encourage pedestrians to meander away from the street to experience the river views and breezes.”

These recommendations are much in keeping with the subsequent stated goals of the Friends for Our Riverfront, but in opposition to position of a number of other reports (such as that of the Urban Land Institute), as will be described ahead.



The 1987 Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown plan, which called for a pedestrian bridge to Mud Island (13) and a collection of kiosks on the Cobblestones (11).

2. RIVERFRONT BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM AND RIVERSIDE DRIVE BEAUTIFICATION MASTER PLAN (1992)

This report established the plan for the RiverWalk. While much of this plan has been built, several key segments have not, specifically between Court and Union Streets, and from Martyrs Park to Chickasaw Heritage Park. At the time of the report, the first stretch was priced at \$50,000 and the second at \$380,000.



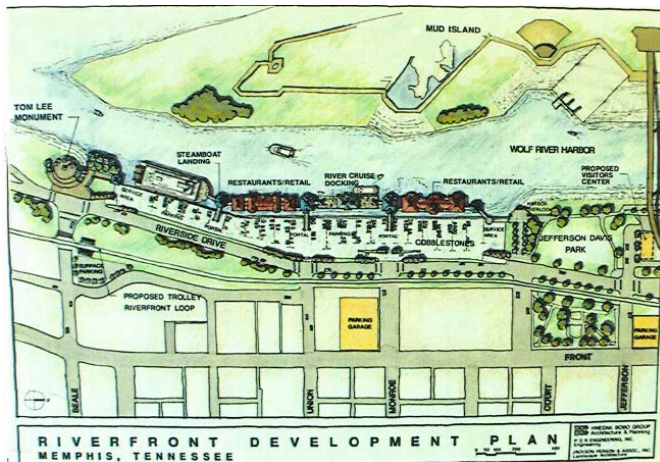
The 1992 plan for the Riverwalk included this segment connecting south to the French Fort.

3. MEMPHIS RIVERFRONT PROPOSAL (1996)

This effort was completed by the Riverfront Redevelopment Task Force of the Downtown Redevelopment Planning Committee. Its recommendations included turning the Wolf River Harbor into a recreational basin with boat rentals for crew, canoeing, sculling, and kayaking. It also proposed a casino on Mud Island.

Perhaps most notable was the proposed creation of a waterside restaurant row below the cobblestones. A more current understanding of how waterfront entertainment districts operate suggests that an isolated collection of shops and restaurants—like Miami’s Bayside or Toledo’s Portside—is less likely to thrive than one better integrated into either existing urban fabric or a broader collection of civic and residential uses—like Boston’s Faneuil Hall Marketplace or Baltimore’s HarborPlace.

This report also recommended the creation of a Memphis Riverfront Redevelopment Commission—what instead was created as the Riverfront Development Corporation.



The 1999 Riverfront Proposal shows a collection of floating restaurants and shops along the Cobblestones.

4. UPTOWN COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE FOR THE PINCH DISTRICT & WOLF RIVER HARBOR (2001)

This plan is top notch in terms of its urban design, but seems overambitious in terms of the amount of redevelopment it imagines. More significantly, by proposing the healthy redevelopment of almost every street edge, it does not prioritize certain street edges over others, and threatens to create an outcome in which every street is improved slightly, but none changed significantly.



This 2001 plan for the Pinch presumes universal walkability, which may impede the completion of several key walkable corridors, a more achievable outcome.

5. MEMPHIS RIVERFRONT (2002)

Completed by the highly esteemed city planners at Cooper Robertson on behalf of the Riverfront Development Corporation, the Memphis Riverfront plan is perhaps the most skillful and ambitious American design effort of the past decade. Unfortunately, it is this ambition, more akin to plans produced a century ago, that doomed the design to failure.

Well before the real estate bubble burst, this plan bumped head-first into the realities of building new urban districts in the 21st century. These included public opposition—as faces any plan of magnitude—but were mostly centered around how difficult it is in these times for any city to change itself in such a dramatic way.

By creating a neighborhood-size land bridge south of I-40 connecting Mud Island to the mainland, and making a lake out of the Wolf River Harbor, this plan would have allowed the city to truly embrace its waterfront, fundamentally changing its relationship to the Mississippi and its likely visual appeal. However, calling for more than ten million square feet of new construction—at a time when “build it and they will come” only seems to apply to highway congestion—was simply unrealistic.

That said, some of the intelligence contained in this effort bears repeating. It wisely notes that Paris, Portland, and Pittsburgh all deal with fluctuating height levels just fine. In discussing the Overton Heirs blocks, it observes that:

“There are very few sites, if any, adjacent to the waterfront seemingly able to be developed to activate the riverfront and provide a critical mass of people and activity. . . Ironically, the blocks which were set aside for public purposes have become a barrier to the largest public purpose of all, connecting downtown to the Mississippi.”

While others would dispute this statement, it is fair to say that the opinion it represents has become the dominant train of thought in most reports issued since the Friends for Our Riverfront endorsed the opposing view elucidated in the 1987 Venturi Rauch plan.

Discussing traffic patterns, the Riverfront plan noted, correctly, that Riverside Drive is another barrier between the downtown and the river, and that a proper redistribution of traffic throughout the downtown grid would take pressure off this street and allow it to flourish.



The 2001 Riverfront Plan proposed a land bridge to Mud island, with the goal of turning Memphis Harbor into a “world-class destination.”

6. URBAN LAND INSTITUTE REPORT ON MEMPHIS RIVERFRONT (2003)

This report, by the leading real estate think tank, was completed just after the Cooper Robertson plan, which it generally supported. Its relevant recommendations included:

- Support for the land bridge, albeit on a deferred timeline, and perhaps smaller.
- Connecting Beale Street Landing better with Beale Street.
- Clearing the bluff of (visible) parking structures. Recreating it as the Grand Esplanade.
- Developing the west side of Front St. with mixed-use buildings, rather than as open space.
- Restoring cars to Main Street, providing parking where possible.
- Adding a water taxi connection to Mud Island.

- Considering 2-way traffic on 2nd and 3rd Streets.
- Creating a comprehensive downtown parking plan.

The document also includes much interesting but outdated info on the market potential, and much still-relevant data on implementation strategies and models.

7. MEMPHIS PROMENADE PUBLIC REALM PLAN (2004)

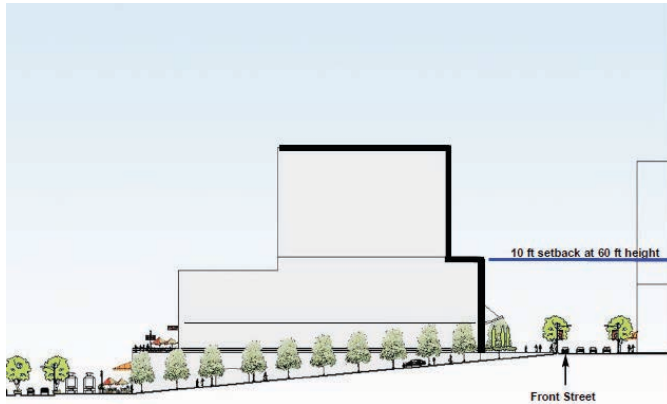
Also by Cooper Robertson, this plan very skillfully develops the four bluff blocks of the promenade in a way that enhances the public realm and the connection of Memphis to the Mississippi while also providing a strong economic incentive to do so. It also violates the stipulations of the Overton Heirs’ donation of these block to the City, abolishing their vision of the waterfront bluff as a continuous public park.



The Promenade Plan (2004) allows considerable construction on the west side of front street, while maintaining a continuous public promenade around the edge of each block. Of all existing structures, only the Law School is preserved.

Were a plan of this nature to ultimately be pursued, it could present a less massive presence along Front Street by locating the taller part of its construction to the west, rather than to the east as currently proposed. This solution would be more in keeping with what finds in most waterfront cities (and along Central Park in New York City),

where buildings interface with their neighbors at moderate height while rising dramatically against the edge of the visual amenity.



Shown in cross-section, the plan locates its tallest buildings against Front Street, rather than against the river, in contrast to historical practice. Note how the “10 ft setback” is (misleadingly) shown as closer to 20 feet.

8. FRIENDS FOR OUR RIVERFRONT (WEBSITE POST, 2004)

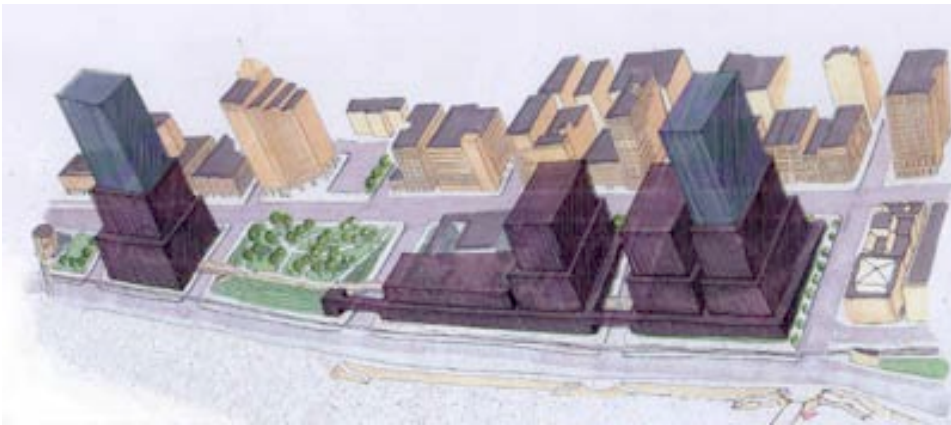
Friends for Our Riverfront is a group that includes prominent descendants of the Overton Heirs which was formed largely in opposition to the 2002 and 2004 plans for the Riverfront and Promenade. Its position on these developments is well documented on its website, and includes the following:

Replacing the 2-3 story parking garages now on the Bluff with high-rises will only compound past mistakes and further separate the River from downtown. . . If you walked down the street next to skyscrapers, you know how empty, dark, and dreary it can feel. . . Building a new downtown on the land bridge, Mud Island, and the Promenade would only cannibalize the city’s rebirth.

This opinion is in keeping with the orientation of the 1987 Venturi Rauch plan and, while historically conservative, represents another bold vision for the city, in which the entirety of the bluff becomes a continuous public park, albeit one that preserves the historic structures of the Law School and Library Annex.



This *Friends of the Riverfront* illustration of current conditions shows in grey the two parking structures, newer library, and firehouse that would be replaced by park.



This second image interprets the proposal of the Promenade Plan, albeit with some of its proposed public spaces shrunk or missing.



This third image shows the Friends' ideal outcome, in agreement with the Overton Heirs' vision for a continuous bluff park.

9. A FRESH LOOK AT THE MEMPHIS RIVERFRONT (2007)

Sponsored by the Friends for Our Riverfront, this report was completed by the highly-regarded nonprofit Project for Public Spaces. In keeping with this organization's work, the recommendations are mostly fairly general, but include:

- Consider reducing both Riverside Drive and Front Street to two lanes of traffic.
- Connect the individual bluffs with bridges.
- Demolish the bluff parking garages.
- Demolish or reuse the bluff fire station.

10. BEALE STREET LANDING (2002 – PRESENT)

Almost complete, this dramatic design for a park, docking facility, and restaurant will create a powerful connection to the Mississippi at the foot of Beale Street. It is strategically located where the historic Cobblestone Landing meets Tom Lee Park, directly across the Wolf River Harbor from the tip of Mud Island.

Its design was selected through an international competition entered by 170 architects from twenty countries and 28 U.S. states. The winning scheme, by RTN Architects of Buenos Aires, has been executed with some compromises. The design concept was simple: the green expanse of Tom Lee park was to sweep upward to form the roof of the facility. Now that roof contains an elevator tower, and the sweep is further interrupted by a surface parking lot that was originally intended to be underground.

While the architects are likely putting on their best faces in regard to these changes, they are a clear example of the sort of “value engineering” that so completely undermines the original design intent of a project as to eliminate its artistic integrity. That said, the outcome is still likely to be appealing. Its greatest challenge will probably be keeping its restaurant open, which will only happen if the restaurant is one that would attract a clientele independent of its location, which unfortunately remains fairly isolated from the more walkable section of downtown.



While somewhat compromised from its initial vision, Beale Street landing will provide a dramatic southern bookend to the Cobblestones.

11. ONE BEALE (2005 – Present)

This roughly 30-story building would bring much-needed activity to the key corner of Beale Street and Riverside Drive. Originally designed to contain condominiums, office space, and a hotel, this plan has gone through several iterations and is currently in limbo with its developer in no hurry to build.

If the plan moves forward and evolves as is hoped, its capacity to have a positive impact on its neighborhood will largely be a function of how it treats its adjoining sidewalks. If it is to play any role in the development, the City must insist on a solution that provides ample doors and windows facing both Riverside Drive and Beale Street. Additionally, a solution that includes a building volume reaching eastward along Beale Street will help to frame that axis and further connect Beale Street Landing to downtown.



Two different designs for One Beale. Note how only the former provides a continuous street-edge east along Beale Street.

12. THE COBBLESTONE LANDING (2008 – Present)

Because it is currently about to begin construction, the plan for the Cobblestones is the one activity on the Memphis riverfront for which criticism is perhaps the least useful. That said, it is worth considering the process that created to its current design, in order to begin a discussion of how its layout may evolve over time.

The challenge of the Cobblestones is a daunting one, in which the twin objectives of preserving the past and enlivening the present seem to be in opposition. In this case, the central and largest feature of the downtown Memphis Waterfront happens to be a rocky slope that is too steep to meet current safety and handicap codes, and too historic to allow for the sort of reconstruction that would render it more usable. Coupled with the fact that it floods regularly, these limitations make it difficult to imagine any reconstruction of the

Cobblestones that does much more than preserve it as an empty tableau against which to store river vessels.

For this reason, a reconstruction of the Cobblestones is underway which is unlikely to make it considerably more inviting or active than currently. However, once that effort is complete, it will be possible to start a new design effort around temporary installations that will render it more usable. As long as they are understood as temporary attachments to a restored site, such installations should not find themselves as restricted by historic preservation mandates as the reconstruction was.



The historic Cobblestones will be restored to a condition that reflects their historical nature.

13. CENTRAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT STREETScape MASTER PLAN (2009)

This document is fine as far as it goes, but is worth noting for what it does not do. While important, streetscape—the construction and furnishing of the area between the curb and adjoining building—is only one factor in people’s decision to inhabit the public realm as pedestrians. Of equal or greater importance is the disposition and performance of moving vehicles, which determine whether pedestrians feel safe. These are impacted by a wide range of factors including the number, direction, and width of travel lanes, the presence of curbside parking and street trees, the inclusion of bicycle facilities, and the avoidance of drive-throughs and other curb-cuts.

As this plan is implemented, we must remember that streetscape improvements will have little impact on sidewalk activity unless coupled with improvements to the real and perceived safety of pedestrians. Additionally, the Plan’s somewhat tepid endorsement of trees does not seem to reflect a current best-practices understanding of their value to walkability, urban sustainability, and real estate value.



(Trim) *This image from the 2009 CBID Streetscape Plan shows a well appointed sidewalk against a curb that is not protected by parallel parking.*

14. MUD ISLAND RIVER PARK LAND USE STUDY (2010)

Completed by the nationally renowned Memphis firm of LRK, this land use study was executed with substantial public involvement, and included an urban design effort that went well beyond mere land use. It considered a full range of outcomes, from minimal change to a complete replacement of the River Park with mixed-use development. The ultimate outcome was a proposal that restores and improves the current Park, Museum, and Amphitheater while introducing a sector of mixed-use development between the park and I-40. Other relevant features include:

- Vertical stair/elevator towers in Jefferson Davis Park and east of the current museum, dramatically shortening the distance of the walk from downtown to Mud Island.
- A water taxi connecting many locations along the Wolf River.
- A pedestrian bridge connecting Beale Street Landing to the tip of Mud Island.
- The potential of a vehicular bridge connecting to Mud Island along Poplar Avenue.
- The reshaping of the marina to allow expansion of the developable property to its west.
- The southward extension of Island Drive and its adjacent Greenbelt Park well into the new mixed-use area south of I-40.
- Improvement to the existing park made possible in part by revenues associated with the development of this mixed-use property.

The only disappointment that people voice about the Mud Island Study is that nothing has happened in the several years since its completion. Indeed, it is due to this lack of progress that some people speak of “planning fatigue” in Memphis, a public wariness towards supporting or getting involved in subsequent planning efforts of any kind.



The Land-Use Study for Mud Island creates a mixed-use area of development just north of the River Park.



A shallower marina in this area expands the land area made available for redevelopment.

15. THE FRENCH FORT (2011 – Present)

This plan for the redevelopment of the blighted French Fort neighborhood was prepared for a major landowner in consultation with the community by the Memphis Regional Design Center. This neighborhood is properly understood as the southern terminus of the downtown Memphis riverfront. Appropriately, it was also intended to be the southern terminus of the Memphis Riverwalk, and its lovely Chickasaw Heritage Park is an appropriate anchor for that trajectory. This part of downtown, now quite cut off, will be given greater accessibility by the roundabout that is planned to replace the I-55 cloverleaf.

This proposal lines the neighborhood streets with new buildings, and places an Inn and conference center within Crump Park, with its parking wisely located down the bluff, in the flood plain. It makes good use of existing buildings, including the beautiful old Marine Hospital, and takes great pains to avoid inconveniencing existing neighbors. Like

many good plans in Memphis, it awaits the investment that will start it down the path to becoming reality.



This plan for the French Fort neighborhood was completed by the Memphis Regional Design Center in consultation with neighbors and a major landowner.

16. “EXPERIENCE THE RIVER,” AN INVENTORY OF CURRENT RIVERFRONT PROPOSALS (2011)

This document is not intended to be a plan but is rather a collection of all the design proposals currently on the boards relating to the Memphis Riverfront. As such, it is a useful summary that calls attention to some additional ideas not yet discussed. These include the following:

A. Lighting up the Substation:

Adding colorful lights to the electrical substation in the Pinch District would be an inexpensive way to improve the appeal of its immediate area at night, and also suggests the sort of approach that might add some character to Main Street as it passes under I-40.

B. I-40 Ramp Redesign:

This proposed reconfiguration of the ramps exiting I-40 would allow westbound drivers to enter the Pinch directly on Jackson Avenue, rather than all being diverted south on 2nd Street. While there is certainly no harm in this proposal, it is estimated to cost \$18 million, a large sum that could be much more effectively spend on a beautified Pinch Streetscape or other non-automotive infrastructure. Additionally, it should be noted that the greater opportunity for the Pinch lies in not attracting cars off of the highway but in attracting pedestrians north from the Convention Center and beyond.



Adding a branch to the current westbound ramp would allow drivers better access to the Pinch, but at a high cost.

C. Bass Pro at the Pyramid



This earlier iteration of Bass Pro places continuous shopfronts along Front street, providing a powerful connection between the Pyramid and its neighborhood.

Having a new tenant for the empty Pyramid is blessing that should not be sneezed at, but it is important to be realistic about that tenant's likely impact on the Pinch District. As developed in 2011, the plans for the new facility, in addition to filling the Pyramid interior, placed a three-block-long row of shopfronts on the west side of Front Street. Between two of these blocks was a corridor leading into the facility, welcoming Bass Pro visitors into the Pinch District and vice versa. The most recent iteration of this scheme maintains the corridor, but has replaced the Front-street shops with outparcels, to be developed separately.

D. Pinch District Revitalization

The design first made in the Pinch District Proposal of 2001 is elaborated upon here, with a similar commitment to placing pedestrian-friendly building fronts along all streets, as shown in yellow in the previous diagram. Once again, while ideal from a design perspective, this proposal seems unrealistic in face of the neighborhoods recent history and current market conditions.

E. Front Door Memphis

This proposed park runs beneath I-40 in order to improve the connection between the Pinch and the Convention Center. While certainly a lovely design, this proposal seems misconstrued in several ways. First, the best way to improve the connection under the highway is to focus not on the axis of the highway but on the axis that must be followed by pedestrians, which is likely to be Main Street. Improving Main Street as it passes under I-40 requires only about 150 feet of improvements, a much smaller investment.

Secondly, it is hard enough to attract visitors to a public park that is lined by attractive buildings and other amenities. To think that anyone but the homeless would want to occupy a park against an elevated highway seems overly optimistic in the extreme.



Front Door Memphis, while appealing, is likely to have trouble attracting visitors.

F. Memphis Art Park

John Kirkscey’s vision for a Memphis Arts Park has excited a lot of interest. Many within the City government are supportive of his proposal, as are several local foundations. Several different iterations of the Arts Park proposal exist, each requiring a different amount of City land. The original proposal makes use only of the bluff containing the Law School and Public Library, working around those buildings. A more ambitious proposal also takes over the site of the firehouse and parking garage, requiring their removal. An intermediate proposal keeps these structures but places more ArtPark programming atop a green parking garage roof.

The failure of many overambitious arts schemes in recent years, and the challenges of removing or changing the parking garage and firehouse in the near term, suggest that the more conservative one-bluff proposal has the most promise.

17. ASSESSMENT OF DOWNTOWN AND RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS (2011)

This report by the firm RKG is focused not on design but on the realities of real estate economics. Its purpose is “to examine the array of planned and ongoing development projects along the city’s waterfront in order to help establish priorities for public sector action and funding.”

Its recommendations include:

- Capture Bass Pro spinoff energy by focusing on mixed-use development in the Pinch and having the proper development code in place. This recommendation is sound, but one has to wonder what sort of spinoff energy is anticipated from the Bass Pro, which is currently oriented towards its southern parking lot and no longer contains the eastern shopfronts along Front Street as originally contemplated.
- Focus on the Beale Street corridor between Beale St. Landing and the night life to its east, paying special attention to the City-owned parking lot between Front and Main Streets, and improving the façade of the Orpheum Theater.
- Resolve the legal issues surrounding the Promenade now, so that the community can move forward with some understanding of its development potential.
- Enlarge convention center from its current 350,000 square foot size to 1,000,000 square feet.
- Examine the possibility of making Riverside Drive more pedestrian friendly, including street tree planting, parking, and lane reductions.

- Plan for Mud Island, but don't make it a high priority, as it is not seen as a strong tourist attraction.
- Find a way to allow more active use of the Cobblestones, delaying the current stabilization effort. (This horse has now left the barn.)

Given its recent completion and the pointed nature of its advice, some of the recommendations of the RKG report bear repeating here.

Regarding the Promenade:

“It is the consultant’s opinion that redevelopment of the Promenade properties with combined public and commercial uses and establishments would be most beneficial for creating a more active waterfront environment. However, if this is not possible, creation of a more signature facility, such as a major museum or entertainment facility, would be better than simply adding more passive recreation space. . . Obviously, construction of several high-rise buildings would create more direct financial return than smaller retail or entertainment venues. However, the value of redeveloping the Promenade properties should be measured on how well they are able to improve integration of the waterfront with the downtown, and not simply on the construction and operational returns generated by each site individually.”

Regarding the Cobblestones:

“The city is poised to spend in excess of \$6 million for a project that will create more passive recreation space along a riverfront that is already quite accessible. The space that will be created. . . will not offer any significant opportunities for public use other than walking or viewing the river. Furthermore, the elimination from the plan of the grand esplanade walkway at street level will remove an improvement that would have significantly improved the Riverside Drive environment for pedestrians. . . We suggest that the city consider its options fully before proceeding with this construction project to insure that all options have been eliminated for creating more active, and possibly, developable space within the Cobblestones footprint while still preserving the integrity of the stone surface. For example, could a wharf be constructed at street level that would only require pilings be placed at a few places within the Cobblestone field? Or, could the sidewalk be effectively cantilevered out over the Cobblestones for some distance to facilitate creation of the original esplanade and possibly allow for other active uses?”

And then:

“If the city elects to go forward with the current rehabilitation plan then, in the consultant’s opinion, reuse of the Promenade properties for more mixed use activities will become all the more imperative since they will offer one of the few remaining opportunities for integrating the riverfront with the downtown in a direct and meaningful manner.”

Regarding Mud Island:

“Mud Island could become a very vital and engaging recreation and entertainment venue for the city. However, if it is not activated with continuous commercial facilities offering dining, drinking, and entertainment it will limit its potential appeal to a broader spectrum of users. As such, it would most likely remain a community park that is most attractive to local residents with less appeal for tourists, convention guests, or area employees.”

In sum, this report turns our attention away from Mud Island to the Cobblestones and the Promenade, and recommends that an active mix of uses be brought to at least one, if not both, of those locations.

18. UPTOWN WEST (2012)



This partial view of the Uptown West plan shows its use of a normative urbanism of high-quality street edges.

The Uptown West plan was recently completed by LRK for the Riverfront Development Corporation, Memphis/Shelby County Community Redevelopment Agency, Memphis Housing Authority and Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development, and Lauderdale Greenlaw LLC. Because it begins north of the Pinch, it covers an area that is not considered a true part of the downtown waterfront. All the same, it should have a

best-practices-based plan that allows it to develop properly as of right, and this document certainly qualifies.

19. HARAHAN BRIDGE (2012 – Present)

Recently funded by the Memphis / West Memphis Main-to-Main project, this design by O.T. Marshall Architects adds a 4932-foot-long pedestrian and bicycle bridge to the north flank of the 1916 rail bridge. Key to the success of this effort will be its connection both to Main Street and to the Riverwalk. The trail is currently connected to the Riverwalk in an indirect manner that needs improvement, as already discussed in this report.

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