

Size: 7 acres **Services provided:** Conceptual planning, community engagement
Project team: GGN (David Malda, Lama Hasan, Christine Chung), Landscape Architect; VJAA, Architect; EOR, Ecology & Engineering, CDA Enterprises, Facilitation; Studio Civic Duval, Project Management & Conveyance Coordination; Cassyex Consulting, Graphic Recorder; Full Circle Indigenous Planning, Native Perspective on Design & Programming; Interboro, Programming; Studio Thalo, Graphic Recorder

Project Context and Location

The Falls Initiative is working to transform the site of the decommissioned Upper Lock and surrounding land within the Mississippi River in Downtown Minneapolis. The lock was constructed at Owámniyomni, St. Anthony Falls where the industrialization of the river fueled the growth of the modern city while systematically disrupting the relationship between the Dakota and this place of great spiritual power.

Engagement process aims to center Native voices and educate the public through a Native lens: The Friends of the Falls engagement process is unique in its goal to center Native voices through a process grown from listening and relationship-building. By connecting story-telling and teaching around the deeper truths of the Falls and Indigenous knowledge, the team worked towards capturing the principles of the Native Partnership Council, formed to guide the design visioning of the site. The Falls Initiative is as much a transformational and learning process led by Dakota voices and values as it is a proposal for the future of a specific place.

Place-Based Key design challenges and approach

1. Engaging the inaccessible and dominating lock to expand the Dakota story and presence in this place: Creative occupation of the Lock structure is proposed to transform its narrative through art, events, and significant visibility of the Parallel Gallery. Spirit Island is honored through art, teaching, and reverence.
2. Centering the story and health of the currently stagnant water: Water above and below the Falls is proposed to be re-connected responsibly to enable flow and restore its ecology.
3. Restoring the land to support animal relatives: Majority of this place today is paving, gravel, or turf grass. The proposal shapes and plants the land to support diversity of plants and animal relatives. Restoration is planned as a process that continues to change through time.
4. Centering of Native voices: Multiple scales of spaces with emphasis on unique moments and experiences are shaped by relationships between land, water, Lock, and the city. Spaces are designed for gathering, celebration, teaching, and remembrance with connection to the River.
5. Restore access to the Falls as a welcoming and connecting place at the River: An accessible universal-abilities path is proposed from street level to the water below. A new Welcome Center is established for orientation, teaching, and community events.

Key design/solution/feature you choose to highlight from that approach/concept

Transforming and reclaiming the Lock for the Parallel Gallery and Genocide Memorial: The notion of “parallel trauma” (the trauma of both the victim and perpetrator) and the need to confront the truths of Native genocide at this place have been emphatically raised by the NPC. The Parallel Gallery will be an active place to amplify the voices in the Native community today.

Through engaging with Native-led art, there will be opportunities for deeper conversations, healing and education around Dakota and Native worldviews, the truth of the place, the history of genocide, and the intentional disruptions of colonization that have caused generational harm.