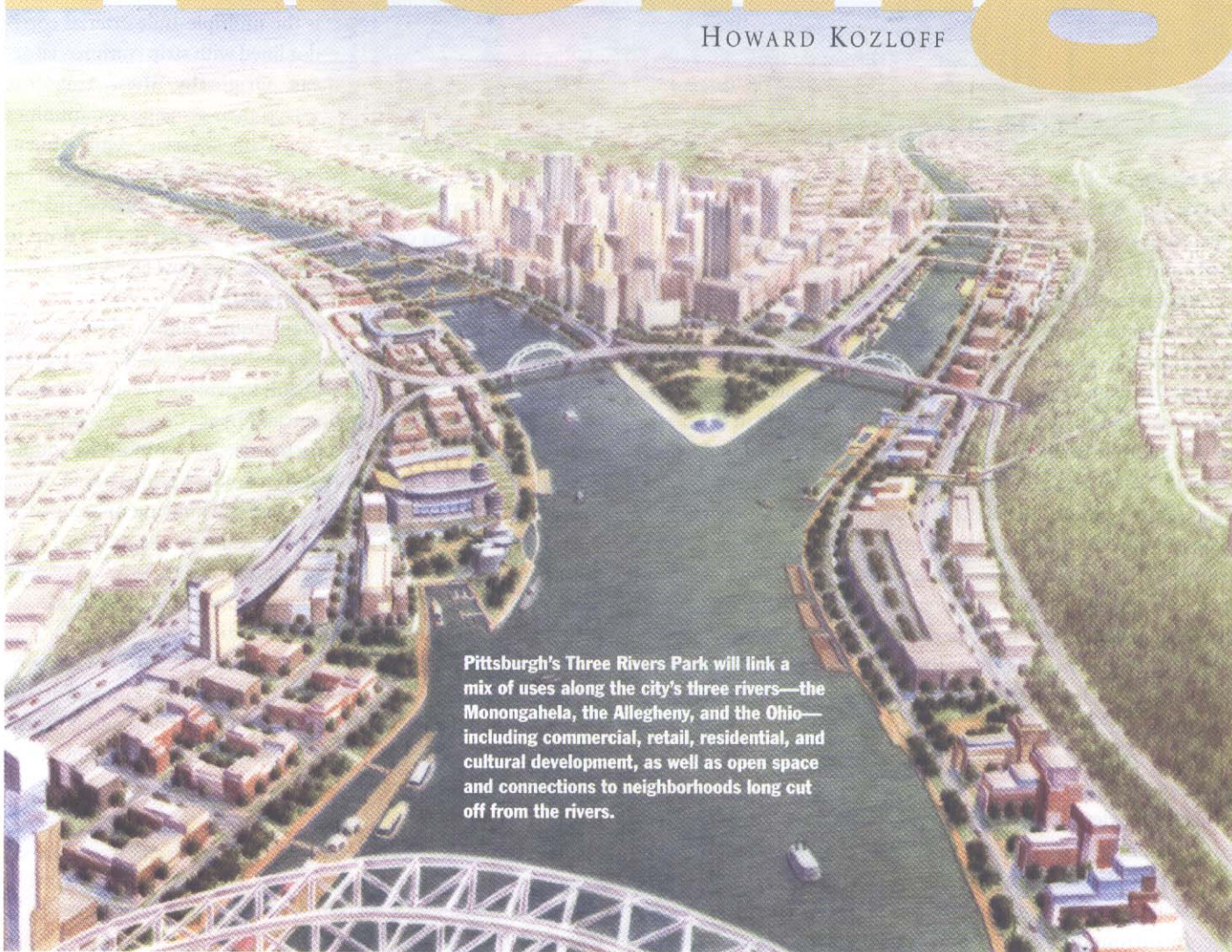


Three Rivers Rising

HOWARD KOZLOFF



Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Park will link a mix of uses along the city's three rivers—the Monongahela, the Allegheny, and the Ohio—including commercial, retail, residential, and cultural development, as well as open space and connections to neighborhoods long cut off from the rivers.

CHAN WRIEGER & ASSOCIATES

Once flowing with steel, Pittsburgh's waterways could again define the city's image.

Urban waterfronts were, for most of history, sources of wealth for the cities built upon their banks. Industry of all sorts lined the rivers that provided transportation, power, and, in many cases, disposal sites. When industry fled waterfront sites, disinvestment and disinterest along the waterways usually resulted. Slowly cities began to realize the lost opportunities waterfronts afforded and used the forgotten amenity to revitalize their downtown cores. Cities such as Baltimore and Memphis used their waterfronts as a means to spur economic development. Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Park envisions the same result by linking a mix of uses along the city's three rivers—the Monongahela, the Allegheny, and the Ohio. Despite its name, Three Rivers Park includes commercial, retail, residential, and cultural development, as well as open space.

While many cities are graced with a river, few, if any, are graced with three, such as those flanking downtown Pittsburgh. The city's fortunes—and misfortunes—have long been tied to them. The rivers once were lined with the riches of steel, only to deteriorate as the industry fled and, with it, population and pride. Today, however, Pittsburgh is embarking on a task that will return the three rivers to the community centerpiece they once were. In a plan commissioned by the Riverlife Task Force, the banks of the Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio will be transformed into Three Rivers Park, with parks, civic and cultural amenities, and connections to neighborhoods long cut off from the rivers.

The task force, a 501(c)3 private nonprofit organization funded primarily by Pittsburgh foundations such as the Howard Heinz Endowment and R.K. Mellon Foundation, is the entity charged with envisioning and implementing the plan for Three Rivers Park. Appointed by Mayor Tom Murphy in May 1999, it comprises 46 community leaders representing a broad range of interests and expertise from both the public and private sectors, among them the landowners of property within the study area, including four private landowners, the city, Allegheny County, and the Sports and Exhibition Authority. Members of the task force include Teresa Heinz, chair of the Howard Heinz Endowment; Paul O'Neill, former chairman and CEO of Alcoa, Inc., and now Secretary of the Treasury; Kevin McClatchy, owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates; Art Rooney, vice president and general counsel to the Pittsburgh Steelers; Martin McGuinn, chairman and CEO of Mellon Bank; and Albert B. Ratner, cochairman of the board of Forest City Enterprises.

From the early days of the task force's establishment and the initial planning stages, the public was actively involved. According to Elisabeth Schroeder, managing director of the Riverlife Task Force, because of considerable controversy surrounding the redevelopment

of a downtown retail district, people were "in a mood to be involved in a planning process." Local historian David McCullough encouraged the task force to seize this opportunity: "As you think of the Pittsburgh waterfront, build on its heroic past, the confluence of hills and rivers, the port, the steel town that at full throttle was 'hell with the lid off'; and build as well on its new spirit and vitality. Do nothing but the best, nothing short term, and nothing insipid. Instead, make this a place where you want to bring the people you love." The task force responded with the following mission statement: "To create, in the heart of Pittsburgh, a great urban river park."

Chosen to create the master plan after an initial request for qualifications (RFQ) was Chan Krieger & Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, an urban design and architecture firm. Through a series of 120 public meetings over 18 months, Riverlife and Chan Krieger set out, according to Schroeder, "to establish a new paradigm" involving professional organizations, community groups, and others in the planning process. Three citywide open forums also were held to solicit ideas from community members and to educate them. One such educational forum included a panel made up of such experts as Alex Krieger, principal of Chan Krieger and chair of the urban planning and design department at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design; Robert Yaro, president of New York's Regional Plan Association; Nicolas Retsinas, director of the Joint Center for Housing Studies; and Richard Florida, the H. John Heinz III Professor of Regional Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management. In the end, Riverlife and Chan Krieger compiled the feedback and set forth a conceptual plan to ensure that the communities' voices had been heard.

With the Riverlife Task Force, Chan Krieger released "A Vision Plan for Pittsburgh Riverfronts," in which the mission was expanded and guiding principles were set forth to direct the creation of Three Rivers Park. Building on the basic premise of creating a world-class river park, Riverlife expanded its mission to include core visions. The first is to "galvanize the region around the best possible use of the city's three signature rivers." To capitalize on the opportunity, there would need to be regional support so that the region's center would thrive by converting "those rivers into a powerful new symbol of Pittsburgh's indomitable spirit," the second broad vision. Third, the task force set out to establish "a vision that will aspire to greatness and accept no mediocre successes, yet will exist on a human scale." Finally, reflecting the myriad individuals and groups involved as well as uncertainty of the future, Riverlife and Chan Krieger called for a plan "flexible enough to allow for the unexpected and to meet the needs of property owners, individuals who use the rivers

and waterfront for recreation and commerce, and the community as a whole.”

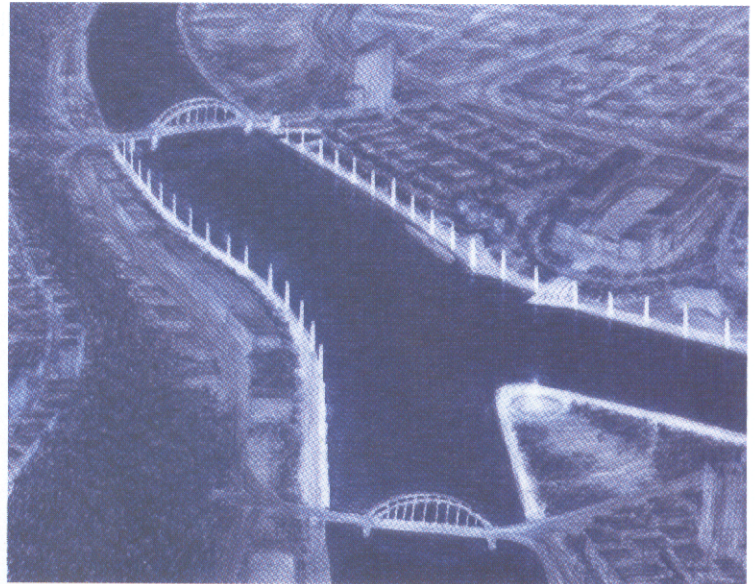
To complement the expanded vision, Chan Krieger’s guiding principles include all aspects of urban life in Three Rivers Park:

- Organize riverfront investment in relationship to the shared vision of the confluence (of the rivers) as Pittsburgh’s premier public domain.
- Reinforce the power of place by revealing and seeking inspiration in history.
- Enhance the shoreline experience and the range of uses encouraged to locate along the riverbanks.
- Increase connections to the rivers, especially from the neighborhoods, and endeavor to create new neighborhoods near the rivers.
- Activate the water sheet itself by incorporating diverse uses while recognizing potential conflicts among them.
- Celebrate the “City of Bridges” through lighting and pedestrian amenities and by incorporating them into the river trail system.
- Improve regional connections and the continuity of public green space along the rivers’ edges.
- Consolidate transportation and minimize industrial impediments at the rivers’ edges.
- Incorporate urban ecology and sustainability into the plan.

The mission, vision, and guiding principles together create a continuous path of activity along and across Pittsburgh’s rivers. The result is the linking of various nodes of activity, using new facilities, redesigned landmarks, and a broad vision of what the combined riverfronts can do for Pittsburgh’s vitality. Chan Krieger identified specific nodes that will anchor Three Rivers Park, and broader ideas for creating a cohesive whole.

Point State Park, located where the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers converge to become the Ohio River, was identified as a major landmark and the physical centerpiece of Three Rivers Park. A long-term maintenance and management plan was recommended after renovating portions of the park. Furthermore, improved connections will be created between the park and downtown, which now are separated by the Fort Pitt and Fort Duquesne bridges and the expressway that connects them. Finally, Point State Park is to be expanded “from a single pendant to a multijeweled necklace,” stretching along the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers to Mon Wharf and the Strip District, respectively.

On the south edge of downtown Pittsburgh (the north shore of the Monongahela River), Mon Wharf currently exists as a parking lot and right-of-way for the I-376 expressway, despite the fact that it is “the front porch of the city”—hardly a desirable use for a city trying to reclaim its waterfront. The Mon Wharf will be reconnected to the city both physically and visually, using a series of stairs to

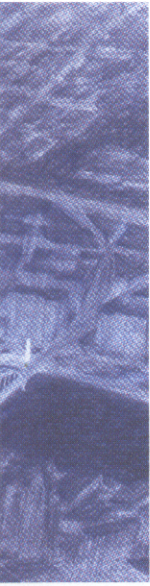


bring people down to the water and riverfront markers that will be visible from downtown’s streets. Further, water usage will be restored through marinas, restaurants, and waterfront promenades connecting to Point State Park.

The Allegheny Riverfront Park also will connect to Point State Park, but will extend eastward along the Allegheny River to an expanded and improved Strip District. The Strip District will include housing, office, retail, and light-industrial uses along an internal street pattern, including a right-of-way for a possible future light-rail extension. Also anchoring the Allegheny Riverfront Park will be a newly constructed Rafael Viñoly–designed David L. Lawrence Convention Center. A 50-foot-wide easement and an eight-foot-wide multipurpose trail will traverse the park, ensuring public access to the waterfront. In addition, a series of boat landings, ramps, and marinas will allow waterborne transport connections across and along the river.

With PNC Park, home of the Pirates, and Heinz Field, home of the Steelers, already in place and oriented toward the rivers, the North Shore Riverfront Park is poised to realize its full potential. Like Allegheny Riverfront Park, the north shore of the Allegheny and Ohio rivers, extending to the West End Bridge, will be a mixed-use destination anchored by institutional nodes. Mixed-use infill development will occur between the stadiums and, further to the west, an expansion of the Carnegie Science Center, including an adjacent outdoor Discovery Park exhibition area, is planned to help improve that facility’s accessibility and value. Housing will be created between the Science Center and the West End Bridge, with all elements potentially tied together with a new light-rail system that would extend all the way to the airport.

The Monongahela River’s south shore will be rejuvenated through Forest City Enterprises’ planned development of an entertainment destination at Station Square. More than 90,000 square feet of retail space, restaurants, and entertainment, together with a renovated and expanded Sheraton Hotel, will return Station Square to prominence as a gathering spot. Direct access to downtown may be achieved



CHAN KRIEGER & ASSOCIATES

Part of the plan for the Three Rivers Park is a celebration of the "City of Bridges" with lighting and a river trail system.

through a Wabash Bridge connection, which is not currently funded. Other direct connections include potential water taxi service and a waterfront pedestrian promenade to the Duquesne Incline.

The West End Circle, where the West End Bridge touches down on the south shore of the Ohio River, will be improved with waterfront parks, river access, and better pedestrian access. Similarly, the Duquesne Incline, which rises from the Ohio River to the neighborhoods on the bluffs, potentially could be transformed into a proposed River Center that would include boat landings and water taxi service, recreational opportunities, a viewing platform, and a visitor's center. The idea of connecting to the neighborhoods, which all aspects of the plan endeavor to do, is considered critical to the plan's success. It is "especially important that you have connections across rivers because, like many cities, [Pittsburgh] let the state's department of transportation put roads and railroads on our riverfronts," points out Anne Swager, executive director of AIA Pittsburgh and a member of the Riverlife Task Force. "Those connections across become even more important. Connections back thorough to the neighborhoods give those neighborhoods more green space of their own if they can connect right back through to the rivers."

In addition, both bridge lighting schemes and a water taxi system could embrace and celebrate the rivers upon which the city was founded and Three Rivers Park is envisioned. Pittsburgh has more bridges than any other city in the world besides Venice, and the lighting on the city's 13 bridges will visually frame Three Rivers Park. Duquesne Light, a private corporation, contributed a grant and Pittsburgh History and Landmarks is providing project management.

The perpendicular connections provided by the bridges are "a critical element of character and access," notes Schroeder. The first bridge lighting project will be the Roberto Clemente Bridge, which, with its continuous flow of pedestrians to and from the ballpark, often takes on a festival atmosphere on game days, she points out. Schroeder maintains that the biggest challenge is to design the vertical connection systems up and down all of the bridges to accommodate pedestrians, bicycles, and wheelchairs, adding that they afford an opportunity to create powerful images of identity and urbanity that can be design icons unique to Pittsburgh.

Also envisioned is a water shuttle system connecting all of the aforementioned parks, stadiums, and mixed-use projects, and traveling beyond to suburban areas to the east and west. With the creation of a seasonal downtown loop and a regional commuter system, it is anticipated that daily traffic can be eased, as well as traffic on special event days, such as baseball games or conventions. While

the focus now is on programming and transportation to animate the rivers, Schroeder notes that Riverlife is working to promote water taxi or bus or water commuter service, especially since waterborne commuter service, because of a lock-and-dam system, is difficult and may not offer much in the way of time savings.

Implementation is planned in three scales, according to Alex Krieger, principal of Chan Krieger & Associates. The long-range scale, which is generational, is realization of the fact that there is increasingly "less need for industrial uses and more need for improving the quality of life in Pittsburgh." The short-range scale concerns individual projects: as each particular project, like the two stadiums, advances, it should contribute to the larger vision. The intermediate scale, he says, consists of taking "this very magical part of Pittsburgh, where the three rivers come together and between the three bridges that define that confluence, and try to convert that into a continuous promenade or public park." Krieger contends that the intermediate scale is "the most interesting and most difficult" as he speaks of "bringing the confluence alive."

There are two unique possibilities for implementation, according to Krieger. The first would be to designate Three Rivers Park as an urban park to try to raise money to undertake a substantial part of it. By taking advantage of the city's connections to the federal government through both O'Neill and Tom Ridge, director of the Office of Homeland Security and former governor of Pennsylvania, the project could be advanced as one of statewide or nationwide significance. The other option would be to approach the landowners, of which there are only a few, and get them to commit to leading the way by improving their territory "as a demonstration project to advance the larger vision," he adds.

Pittsburgh has long suffered through periods of disinvestment; however, Three Rivers Park, by building on already strong foundations in housing, universities, and health care, seems poised to spur a new era of growth in Pittsburgh. The Riverlife Task Force, together with the city and county, is using public investment to bring about positive change. As Schroeder puts it, "Part of the spirit of renewal is that the city is ready to propel itself into a new era." By linking private investment and encouraging public investment that will make the private investment more valuable, Schroeder says she hopes to "seize catalytic opportunities to create the pieces one, two, or three at a time," until the grand vision of Three Rivers Park is realized. ■

HOWARD KOZLOFF IS PROJECT MANAGER AT BRV CORP., AN URBAN REDEVELOPMENT CONSULTING FIRM BASED IN NEW YORK CITY.

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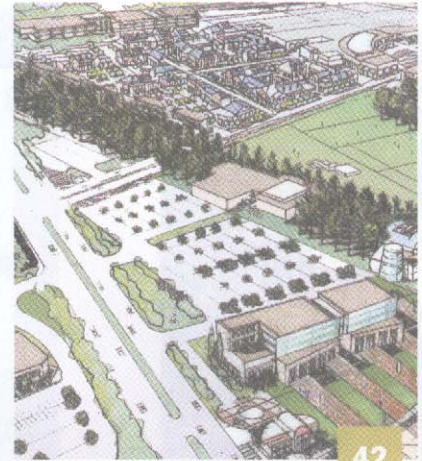
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ON THE COVER: Lawn chairs on grass in autumn.

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