

CATEGORY

PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN

PROJECT

FALLS PARK CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

ABSTRACT

Falls Park Conceptual Master Plan is a graphic guide for redevelopment emphasizing connectivity, recreation, programming, environmental and economic sustainability, and economic development opportunities. The Landscape Architect led a process that created a comprehensive vision for the entirety of Falls Park. The vision addressed current demands, as well as future uses. The successful design fully integrates the diverse features of the existing park into a unified site plan and program that maximizes the potential of this special place and utilizes adjacent property to enhance and expand the address of the park while connecting it to the community.

NARRATIVE

Falls Park is a large, 120-acre, municipal park located in downtown Sioux Falls, SD. Falls Park is named after the raging waters of the Big Sioux River that tumbles over the exposed quartzite bedrock located within the park. This natural wonder makes the park a destination point for area residents and tourists year-round.

Prior to 1990, Falls Park and the adjacent downtown areas were largely neglected and dangerous. This led to an overrun of invasive vegetation and dilapidated infrastructure throughout the area. In the early 2000s, the City of Sioux Falls began a series of significant investments to revitalize its downtown and clean-up of Falls Park. This entailed demolition and remediation of unused industrial sites, street and utility projects throughout the central business district, and improvements to the city's downtown river greenway, and multiple streetscape improvements within the City's downtown core.

A resounding theme emerged during our engagement with the Sioux Falls community— "Please DON'T significantly change the heart of the park but improve the overall experience and improve connectivity with the surrounding area."

Four key themes were part of the planning process:

Provide engaging multi-functional spaces within the falls park that can operate through all seasons; provide equitable access to falls park, the river and its facilities from adjacent neighborhoods and the diverse Sioux Falls community; listen to the community; and introduce diverse revenue streams to support the park improvements and operations.

BIG IDEAS GROUNDED IN REALITY

The Landscape Architect led design addressed programmatic considerations and created an inclusive framework by generating big ideas to meet the growing needs of the region and the community and respond to the diverse recreational, ecological, and built history of the site. The project considered multiple scales, from broad systems to individual sites and thought about long-term development and flexible solutions that can change and mature over time. The design examined multiple types of movement to safely navigate to and through the park, considering connections to all places within the park, the Big Sioux River, Downtown and the surrounding underserved neighborhoods.

The master plan investigates landscapes that are accessible and respond to the changing seasons with a focus on more year-round programming, while exploring new and compelling experiences to support a wide range of social and physical activities. The design builds upon the existing features and spaces of the park and surrounding community while incorporating new and innovative amenities while providing opportunities for economic sustainability. The master plan establishes strong connections to adjacent undeserved and land locked neighborhoods isolated by railyards and the river to provide safe and effective connections to the park and the regional trail.

Prioritizing Access and Connectivity to the site led to the transformation of existing entry experiences, and site circulation including both vehicular and pedestrian. These new entry experiences create new viewsheds and reduce pedestrian and vehicle conflicts, providing more direct connections to the local neighborhoods. These connections will eliminate unsafe intersections, provide safe railway crossings, and improve pedestrian and bike access. Redevelopment of the park edges through a land swap will help fund major infrastructure changes and activate the park.

The Landscape Architect also unified park land by roadway realignment, land bridges and consolidated parking, prioritizing pedestrian movement over vehicular traffic creating a safer more connected park system. Areas that were previously blocked off from the park due to the existing adjacent railyard were unified with pedestrian bridges spanning the rail yard and river connecting residents to the heart of the park and adjacent developments. These larger planning and development moves push the boundaries of the park and provide opportunities not only for private public development but equity in access as a walkable community.

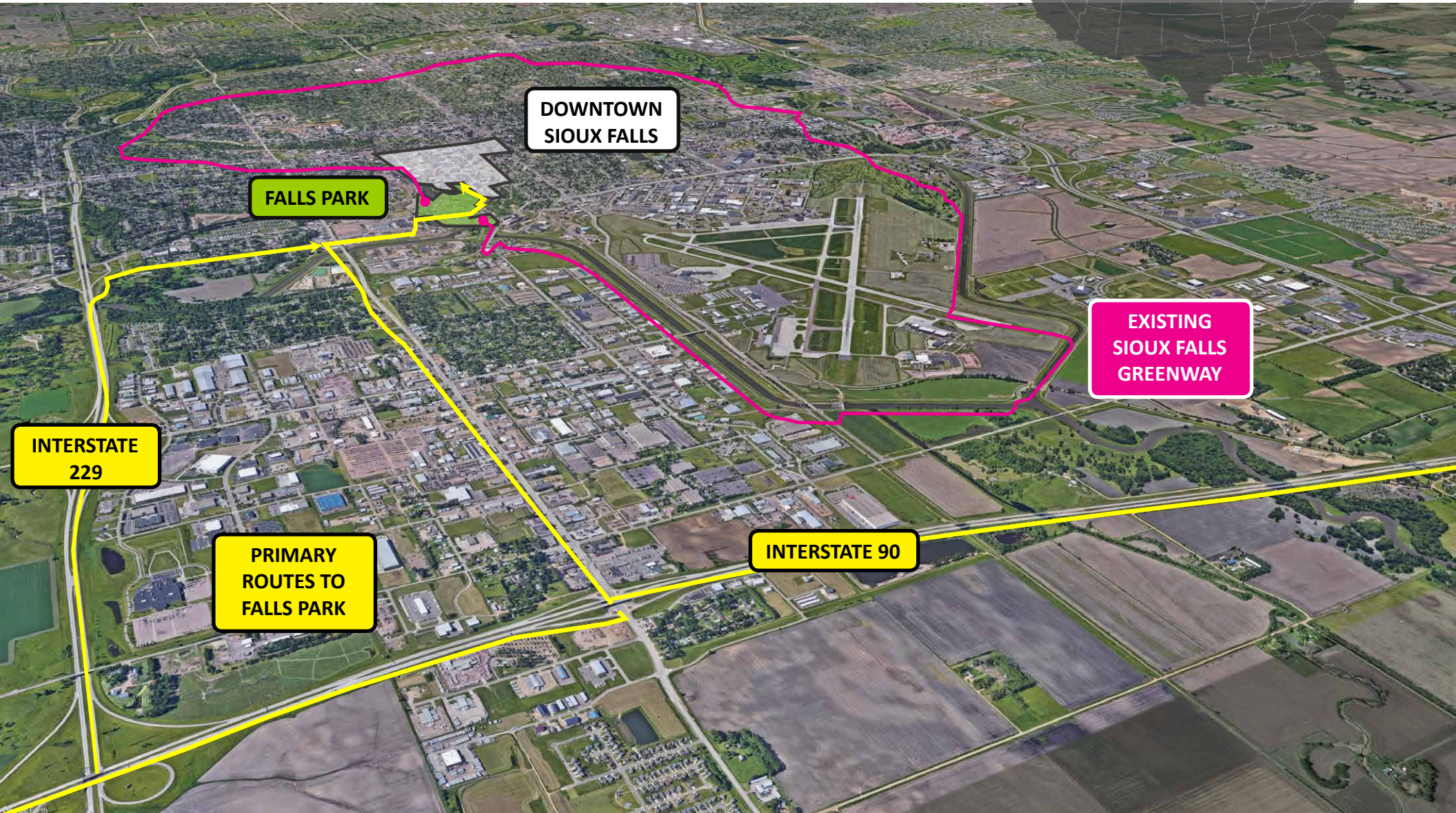
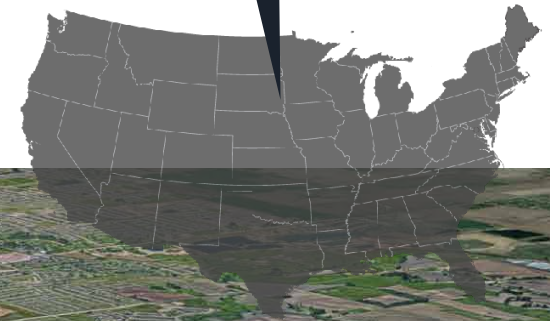
Improving interaction and access to the Falls and the Big Sioux River as a major amenity is a key factor to the design approach. The river will once again become central to life in Sioux Falls, as it was for the early settlers. The design activates the river by adding pathways, places to stop and relax, places of restored nature, places to play interact with the water, places to gather and perform, places to celebrate, and places to see and be seen.

"Falls Park is the city's namesake, the flagship park, and anchors the north end of the city's booming downtown," said Mayor Paul TenHaken. "Creating a comprehensive vision will allow us to dream big on how we will continue to make Sioux Falls an even more attractive place to live, work and play."

FALLS PARK CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

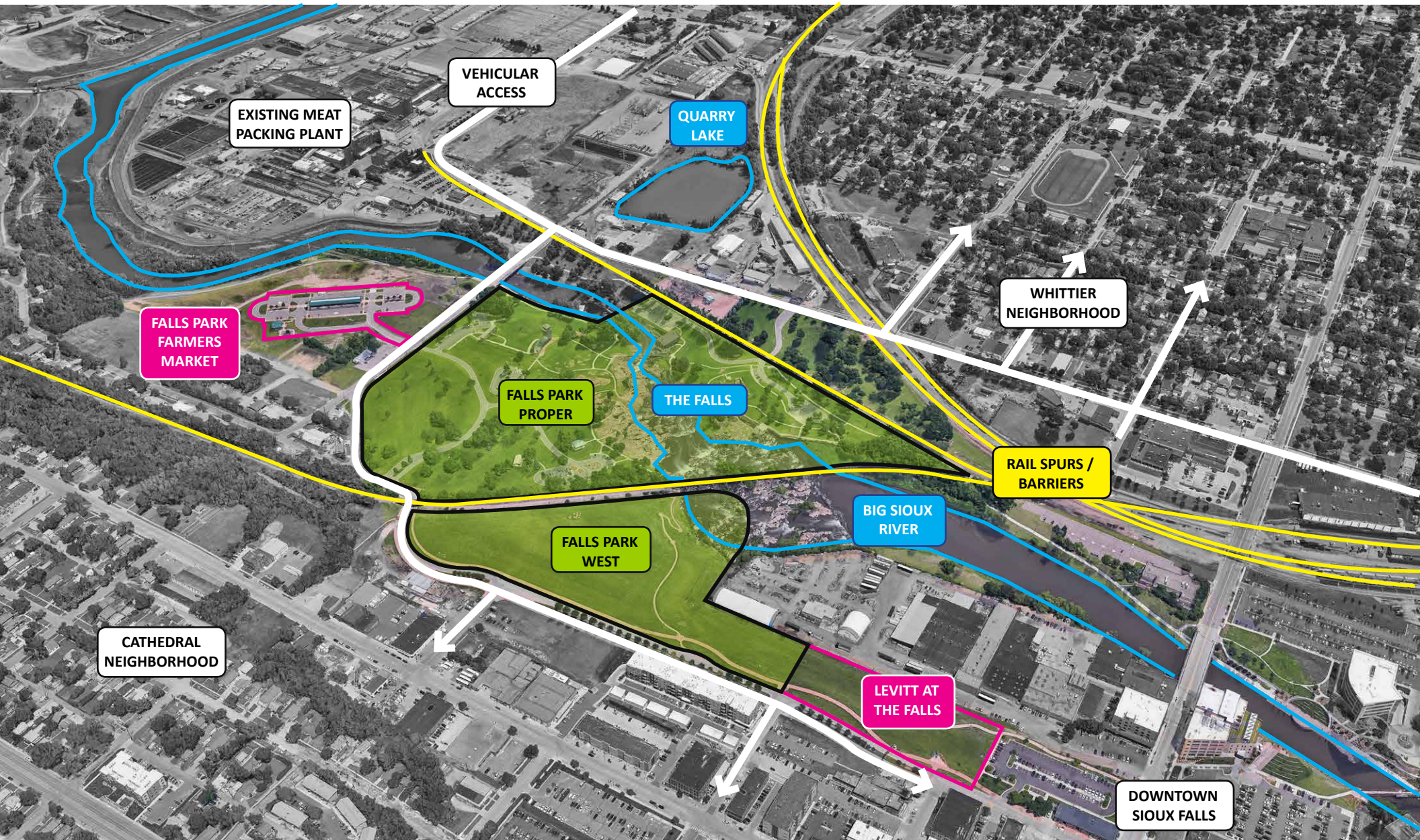
FALLS PARK WAS DISCOVERED IN 1856 AND REMAINS THE HEART OF SIOUX FALLS - SERVING AS A PRIMARY TOURIST DESTINATION SITUATED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF DOWNTOWN.

SIOUX FALLS, SD



FALLS PARK TODAY

FALLS PARK SERVES AS A PRIMARY GATEWAY INTO DOWNTOWN SIOUX FALLS. NUMEROUS RAIL SPURS AND VEHICULAR CONFLICTS LIMIT THE CURRENT ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS - THEY REMAIN UNDERSERVED AND LACK MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS INTO FALLS PARK.



FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS


THIS CONCEPTUAL STUDY AIMS TO LEVERAGE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS TO PROMOTE A COLLECTIVE VISION GROUNDED IN REALITY AND BUILD MOMENTUM AND EXCITEMENT THAT WILL SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF FALLS PARK. THOROUGH DISCUSSIONS WITH KEY LEADERS AND STAKEHOLDERS HELPED INFORM THE PROCESS.

Our research has shown these neighborhoods are among the highest rates of households in Sioux Falls that receive SNAP benefits and access food from Feeding South Dakota. Additionally, these households are less likely to drive themselves, and are more likely to get rides, walk, bike, or take public transportation.


The LBA neighborhood is heavily populated by foreign-born households – 15% of these families do not have a vehicle and at least 15 different languages are spoken.

Traffic on Cliff Avenue and Rice Street is a hazard for kids walking or riding bikes. Even if they could – the truck traffic around Smithfield is unsafe. Knowing many of the parents, they will not let their precious children venture into that crazy world.


“As an adjacent landowner, we appreciate being involved in these discussions, and we are excited to see the City’s continued commitment to improving the Downtown and Falls Park areas. We look forward to working with all stakeholders in developing a master plan that creates opportunities for the general public and private business.”




Paige Pearson Meyer
President, Stockyards Ag
Experience Board of Directors




Nancy Halverson
Executive Director,
Levitt at the Falls




Ivy Oland Dandar
Sanford Health Head of
Environmental Design &
Downtown Resident




Justin Howe
President of Howe Plumbing /
Heating & Falls Park Neighbor




Jennifer Kirby
Kirby Dog Park Donor, Levitt at
the Falls Board of Directors,
Downtown Resident




Joe Kirby
Kirby Dog Park Donor &
Downtown Resident




Dan Statera
SR VP of First Dakota
National Bank / Former
Director of DTSF




Andy Patterson
President / CEO,
Sioux Falls Area
Community Foundation



Lance Dunlap
Owner of Quality Welding
& Falls Park Neighbor




Teri Ellis Schmidt
Executive Director,
Experience Sioux Falls




Chris Thorkelson
President / CEO,
Lloyd Companies / Steel
District Developer

I’ve learned that transportation and accessibility are critical issues for local families, and I think they are barriers to Falls Park and other adjacent amenities.


“Our company has been next to Falls Park for over 30 years and we have enjoyed seeing it’s success. We are invested in it’s next steps for growth and hope to be an integral part of the new plan.”




Joe Batcheller
President,
Downtown Sioux Falls



Paul Schiller
Arc of Dreams Board &
Downtown Advocate



Michelle Erpenbach
President,
Sioux Falls Thrive



Mike Hart
Owner, Fresh Produce &
Downtown Advocate

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



PROVIDE ENGAGING MULTI-FUNCTIONAL SPACES WITHIN FALLS PARK THAT CAN OPERATE THROUGH ALL SEASONS.

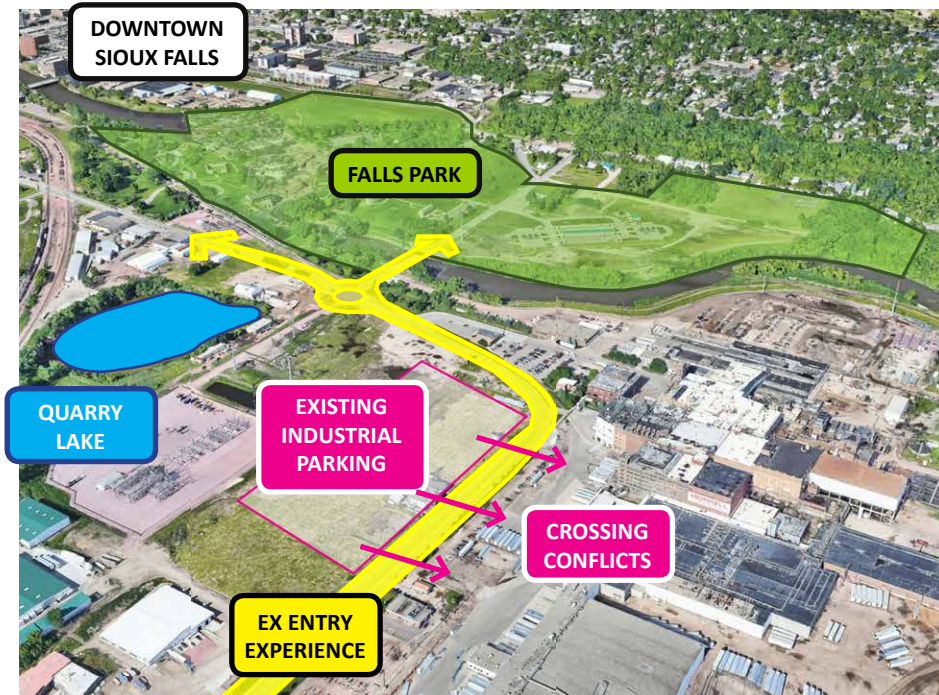
EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FALLS PARK AND ITS FACILITIES FROM ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS AND THE DIVERSE SIOUX FALLS COMMUNITY.

ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC DURING THE PLANNING OF A NEW FUTURE VISION FOR FALLS PARK AND THE SURROUNDING AREA.

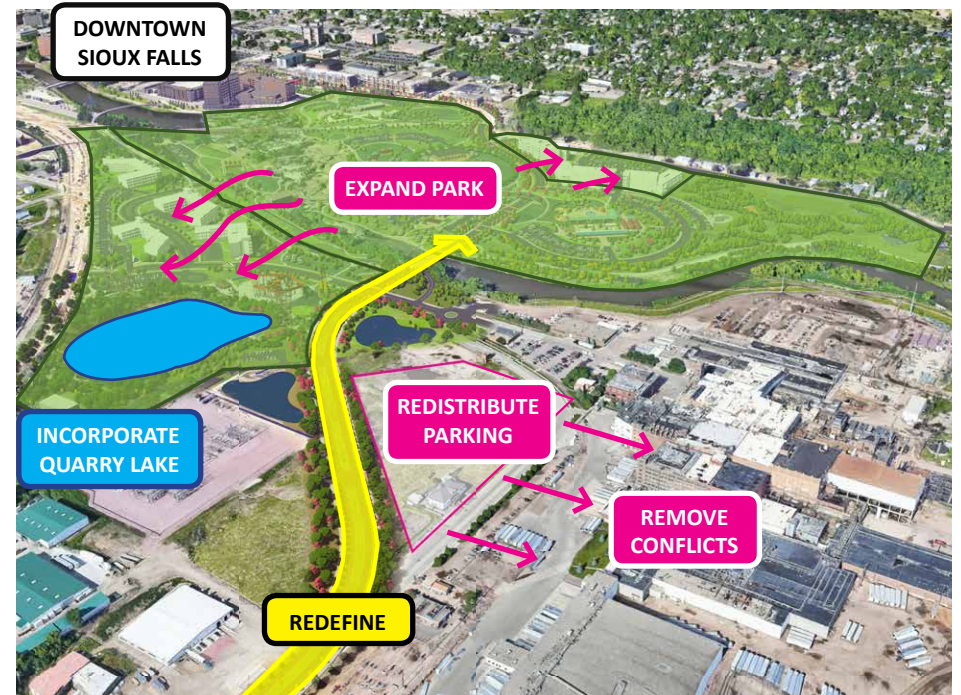
INTRODUCE DIVERSE REVENUE STREAMS TO SUPPORT PARK IMPROVEMENTS + OPERATIONS. A SIGNATURE PARK DOESN'T LOOK LIKE OTHER PARKS, SO IT CAN'T BE MANAGED OR FUNDED LIKE OTHER CITY PARKS.

BIG MOVES = BIG IMPACT

FALLS PARK SERVES AS A GATEWAY INTO DOWNTOWN SIOUX FALLS. THE VISION AIMS TO PRIORITIZE THE ENTRY EXPERIENCE AND LEVERAGE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS TO EXPAND THE PHYSICAL EXTENTS OF THE PARK TO PROVIDE BETTER ACCESS TO THE ADJACENT UNDERSERVED NEIGHBORHOODS.



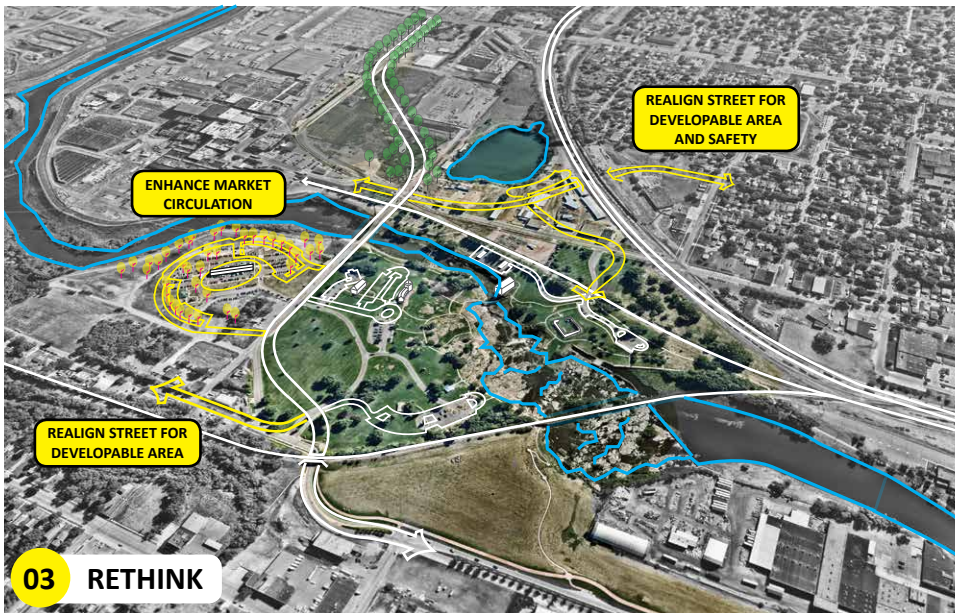
FALLS PARK TODAY



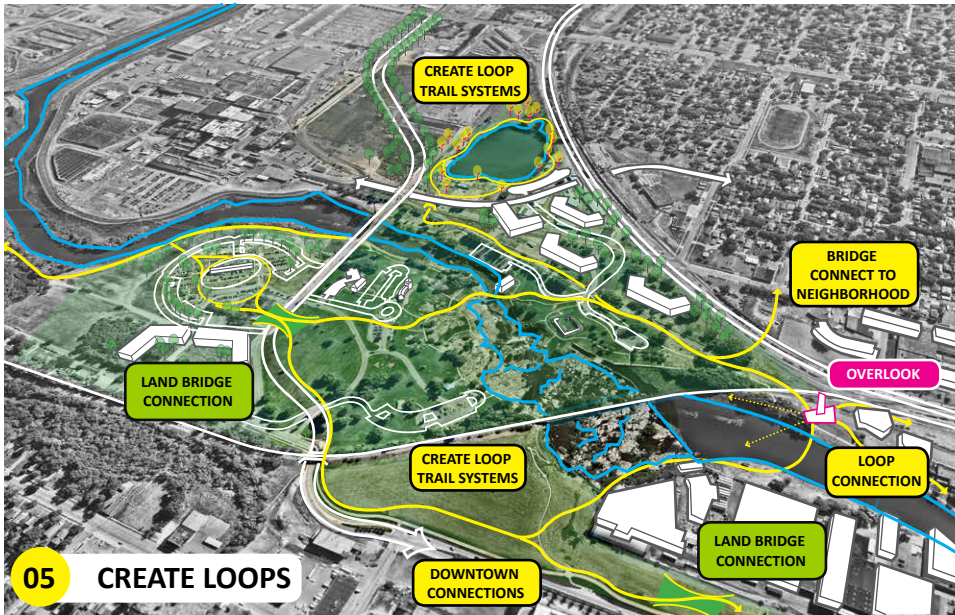
- + REDEFINE AND PRIORITIZE ENTRY EXPERIENCE
- + INCORPORATE UNDERUTILIZED ASSETS
- + PROVIDE SAFER PEDESTRIAN / VEHICULAR INTERACTIONS
- + EXPAND PERCEPTION OF PARK EXTENTS
- + LEVERAGE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS TO EXPAND PARK

DESIGN PROCESS

GRAPHICALLY CONVEYING THE DESIGN PROCESS WAS CRITICAL IN UNDERSTANDING THE DESIGN IMPACTS THAT WILL BENEFIT THE FUTURE OF FALLS PARK, THE ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS, AND DOWNTOWN.

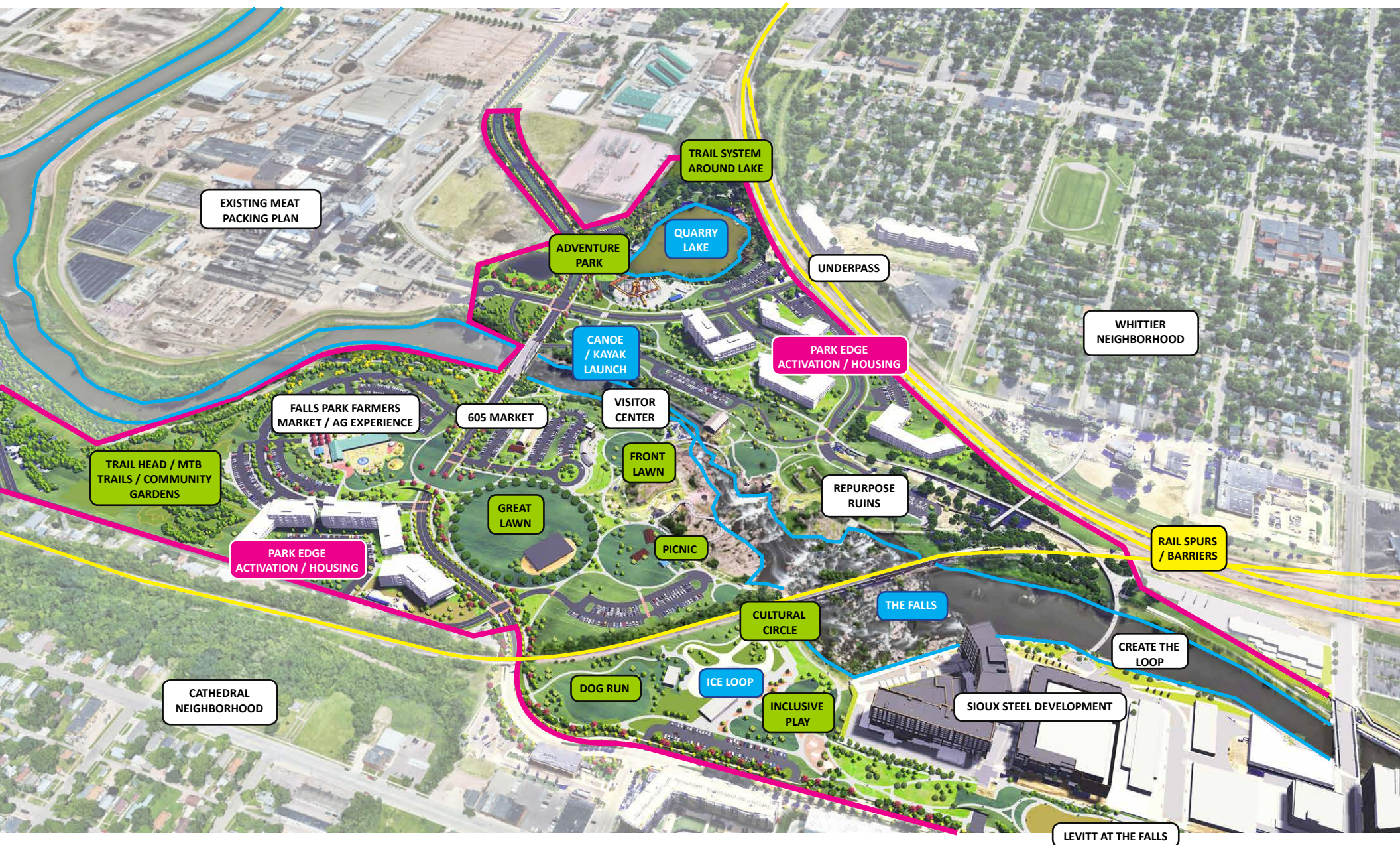


DESIGN PROCESS



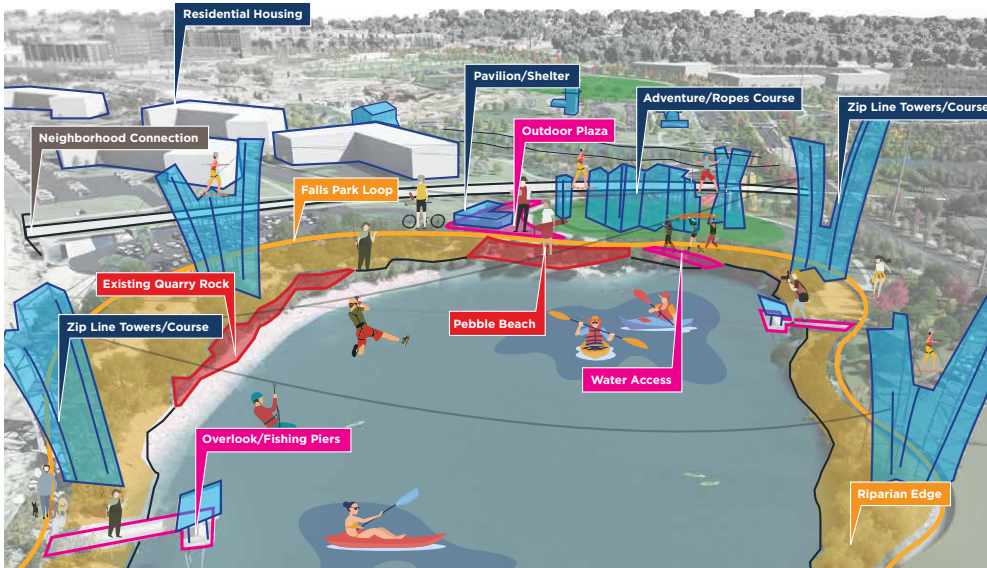
FALLS PARK TOMORROW

AN EXPANDED VISION FOR FALLS PARK PROVIDES BETTER SERVES THE NEIGHBORHOOD NEEDS, PRIORITIZES PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY AND CIRCULATION, AND CREATES MORE ACTIVATION WITHIN THE PARK THROUGH PROGRAMMING AND CRITICAL MASS.

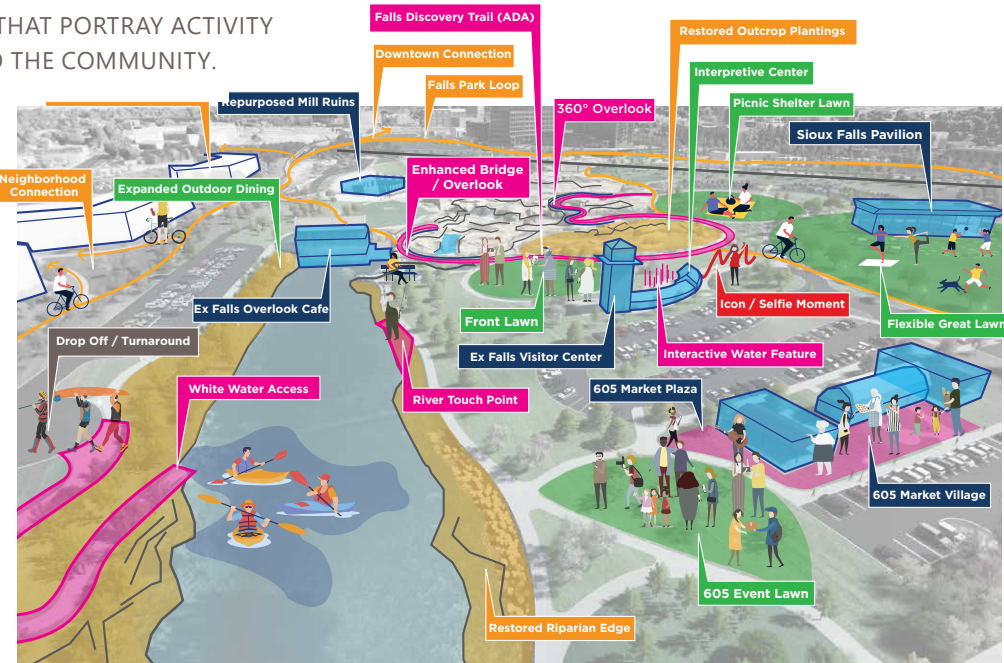


PROGRAMMATIC VIGNETTES

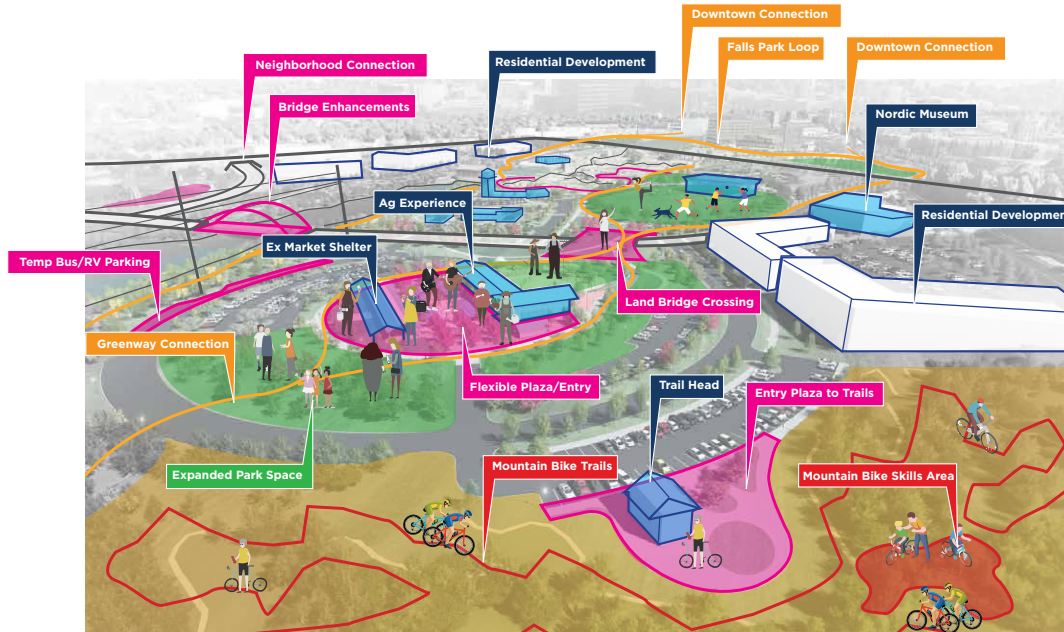
COMMUNICATING WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC THROUGH GRAPHICS THAT PORTRAY ACTIVITY AND EASY UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE VARIOUS PARK ELEMENTS WILL APPEAL TO THE COMMUNITY.



QUARRY LAKE



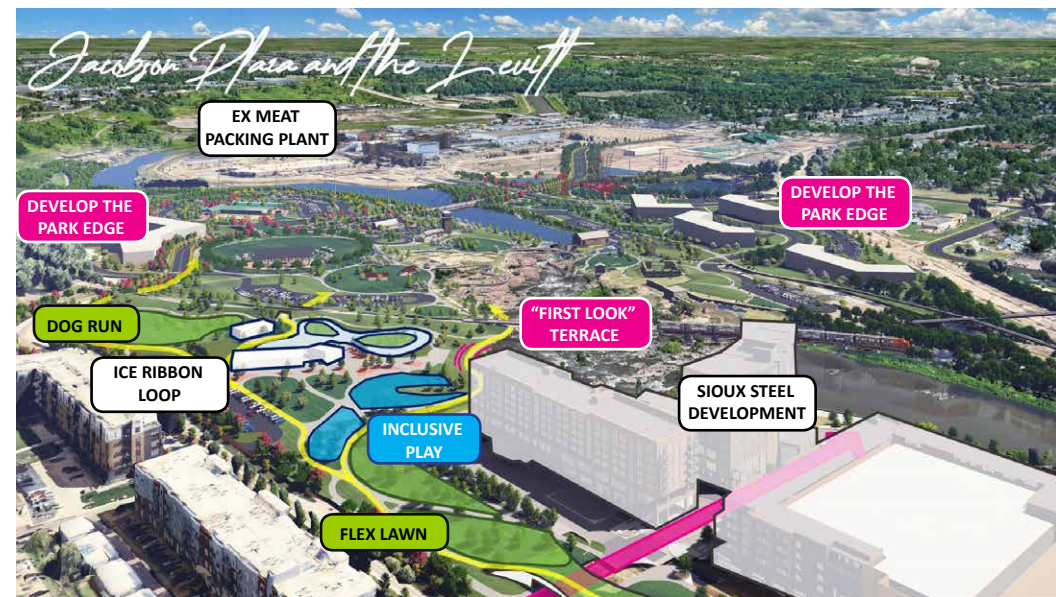
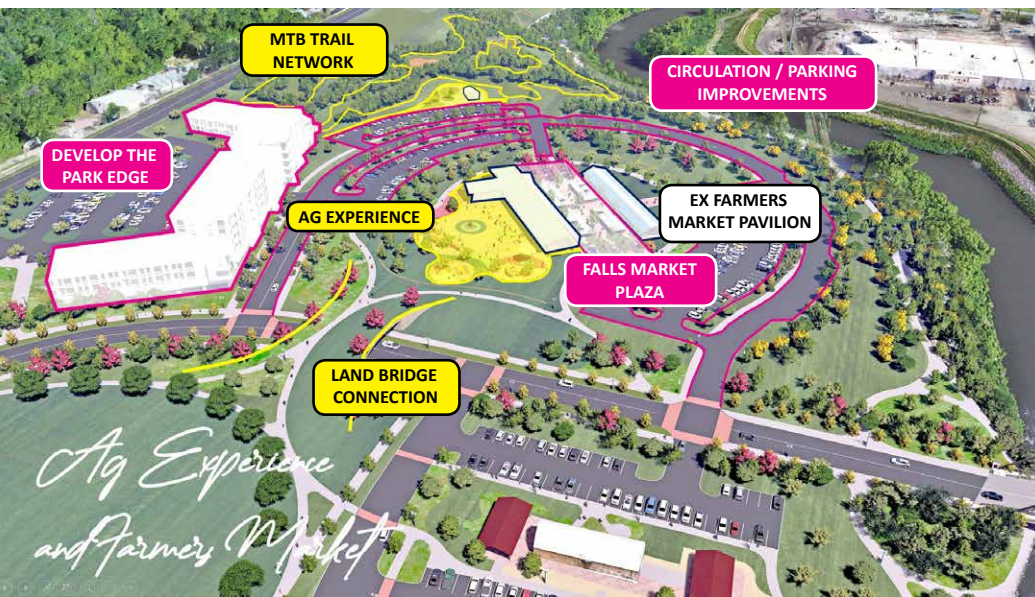
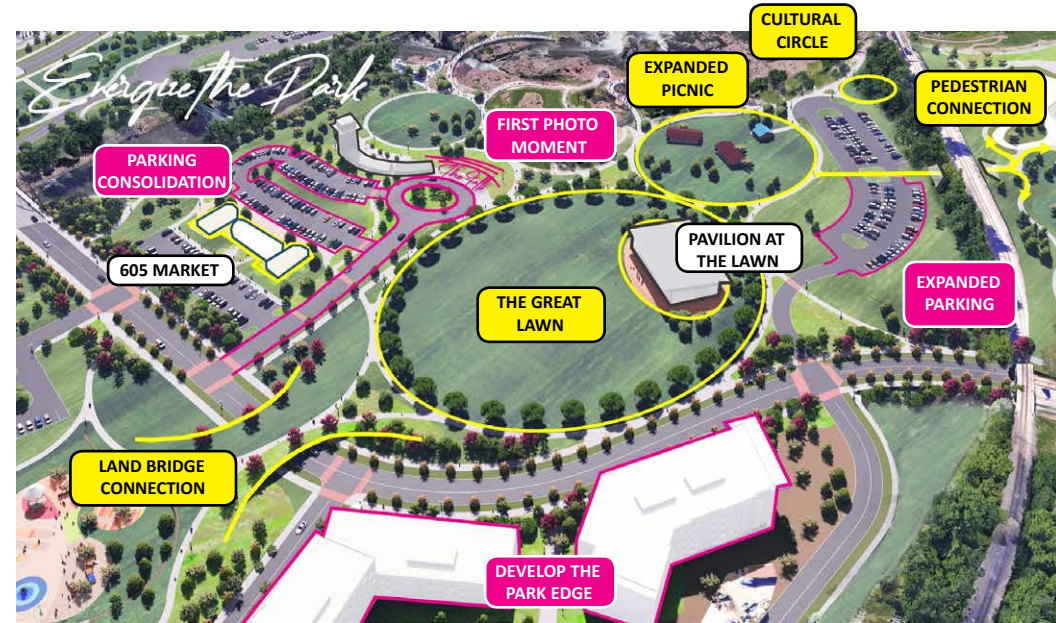
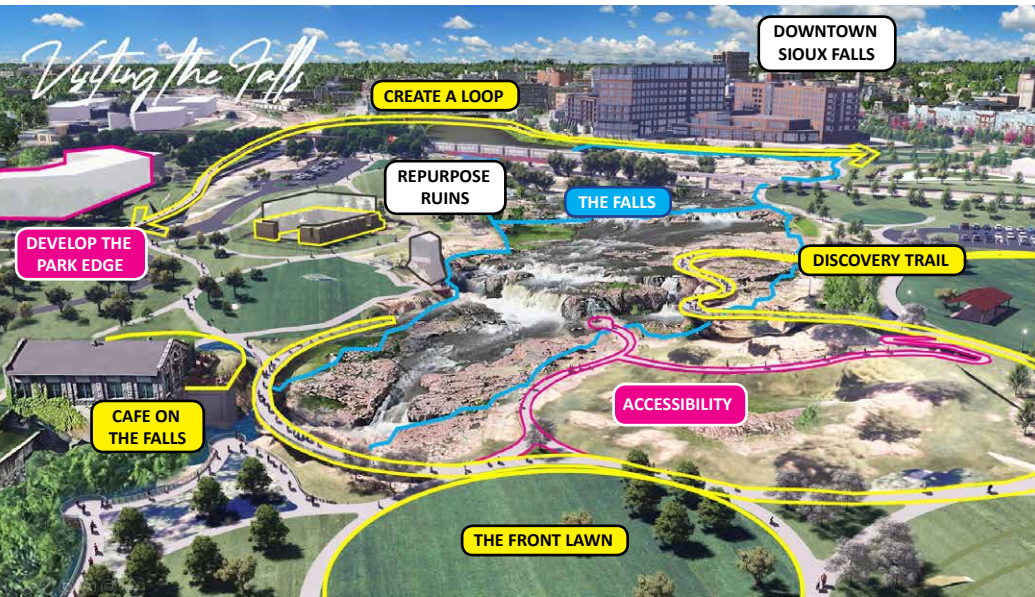
FALLS PARK PROPER



NORTH FALLS / FARMERS MARKET AREA

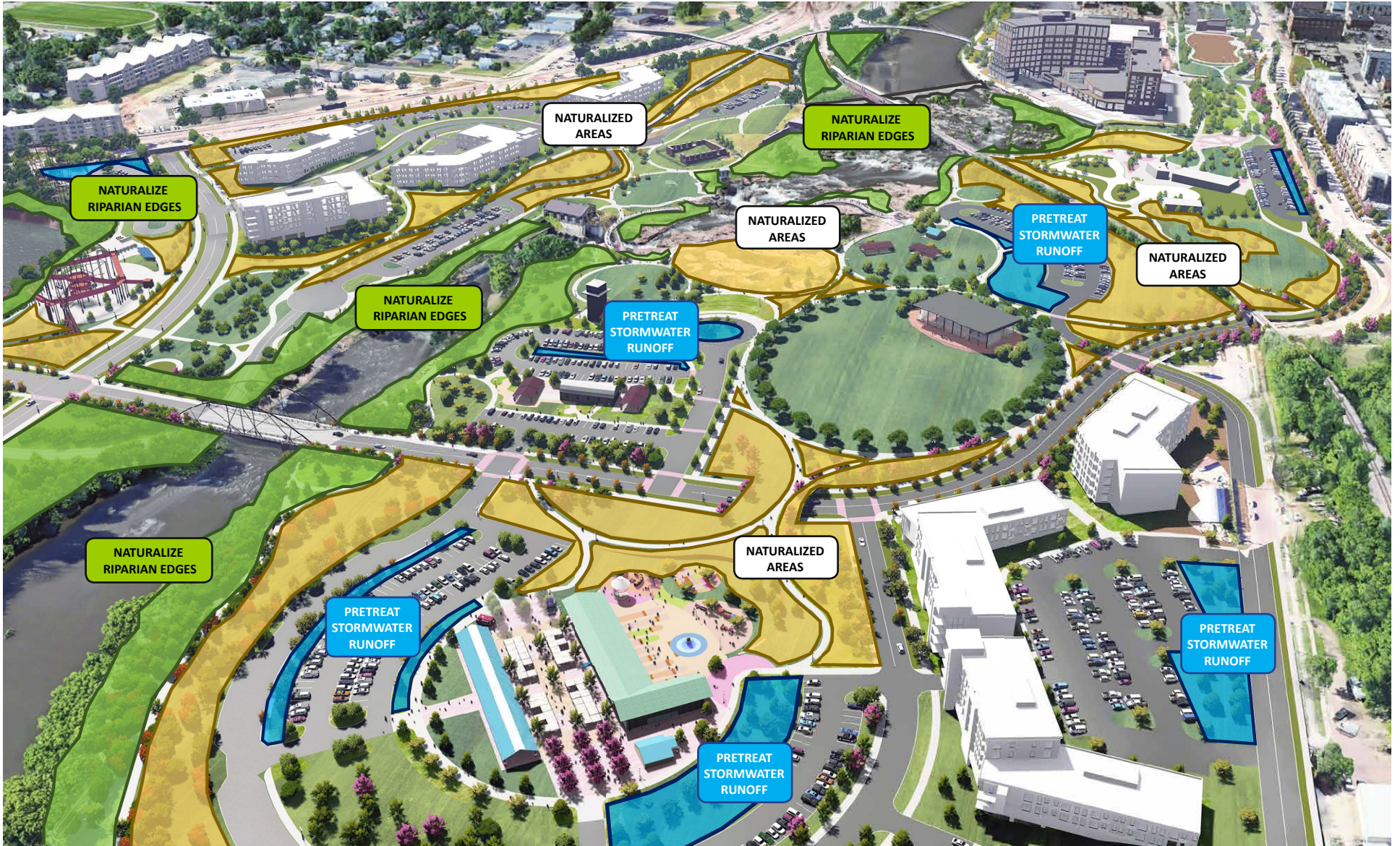
FALLS PARK CONCEPTUAL PLAN PROGRAM

GRAPHICS HELP CLARIFY THE VISION AND HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE KEY ELEMENTS, MOMENTS, AND FUTURE EXPERIENCES THAT FALLS PARK WILL OFFER.



BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT DEVELOPED OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED RIVER ACCESS BY FIRST IDENTIFYING ACTIONS TO ENHANCE WATER QUALITY UPSTREAM AND IN THE PARK THROUGH AERATION, INTRODUCTION OF A ROCK DAM, EXPOSING WATER TO SOLAR UV RADIATION, SHORELINE NATURALIZATION, IN PARK STORMWATER TREATMENT, AND PROVIDING SAFE TOUCHPOINTS ALONG THE RIVER'S EDGE.



DAY IN THE LIFE AT FALLS PARK

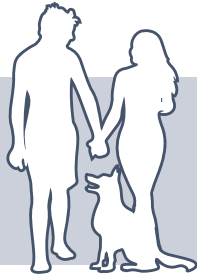
FALLS PARK WILL BECOME A PLACE THAT SERVES THE NEIGHBORHOOD, VISITORS, AND TOURISTS MORE EFFECTIVELY THROUGH A DIVERSITY OF ACTIVITIES AND USES.

A DAY AT FALLS PARK

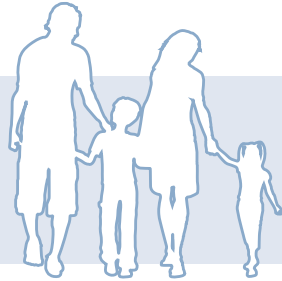
MORNING

AFTERNOON

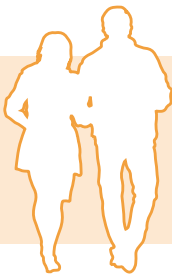
NIGHT



FALLS PARK NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENT



VISITOR TO FALLS PARK

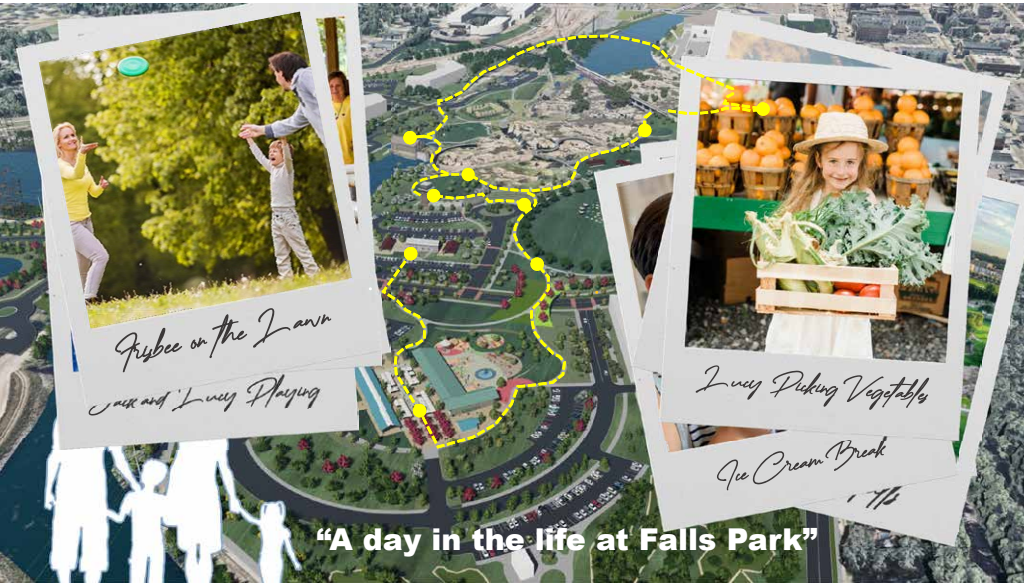


TYPICAL SIOUX FALLS RESIDENT



DAY IN THE LIFE AT FALLS PARK

INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, VISITORS GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE IN A VARIETY OF DAILY AND SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE FUTURE FALLS PARK.



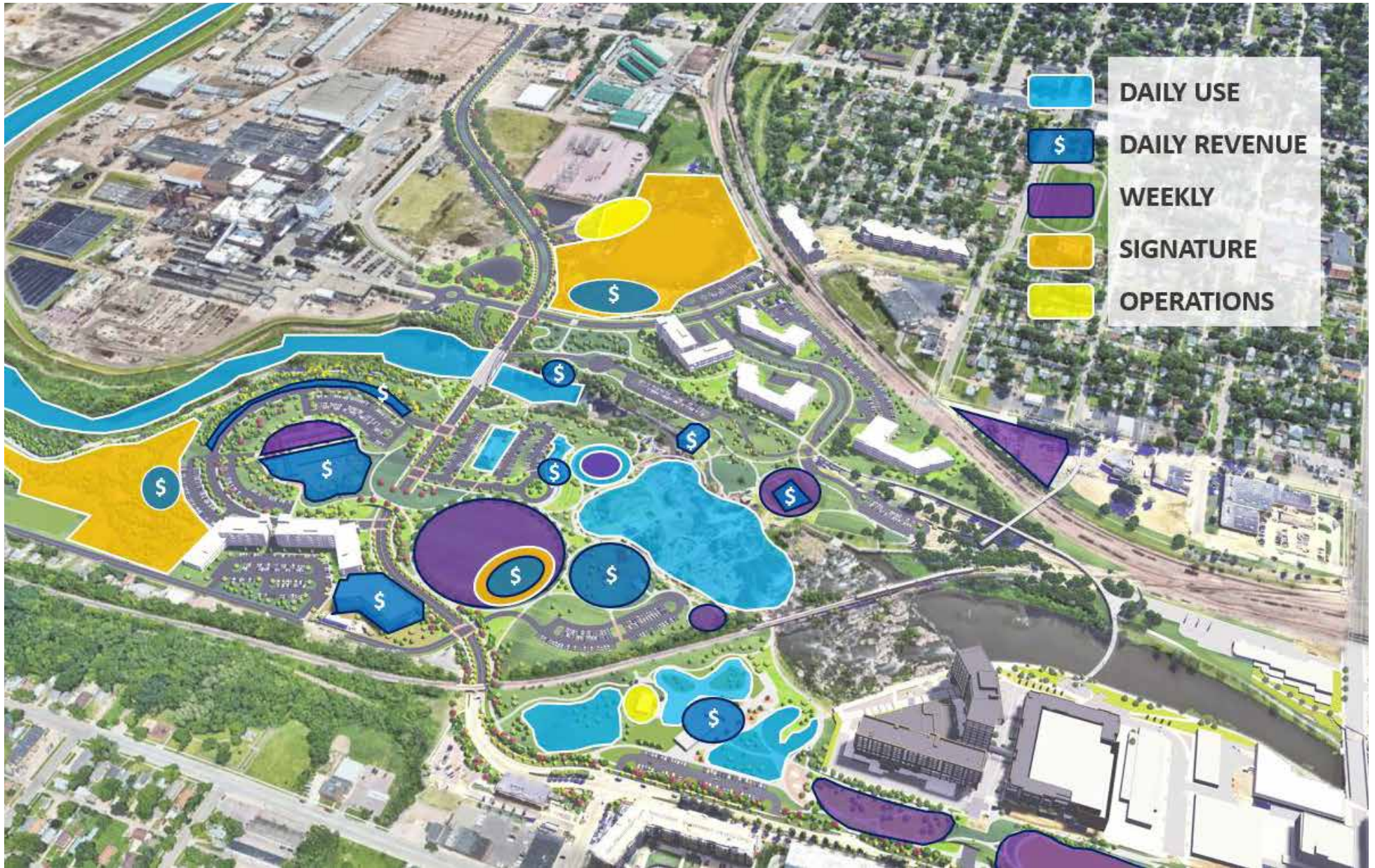
WINTER USE AND ACTIVATION

YEAR ROUND ACTIVATION AND PROVIDING LOCAL DAILY ACTIVITIES ARE CRITICAL TO MAKING FALLS PARK A LOCAL AND REGIONAL DESTINATION.



ACTIVITY FOR ALL

PROGRAMMING WAS DEVELOPED TO ACTIVATE THE PARK YEAR-ROUND FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES AND DAILY FOR THE COMMUNITY WITH A FOCUS ON FLEXIBILITY. GOVERNANCE, MAINTENANCE, AND OPERATIONS ALONG WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE SOURCES OF REVENUE AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY WERE ALSO IDENTIFIED.



NAMESAKE OF THE CITY

"FALLS PARK IS THE CITY'S NAMESAKE, THE FLAGSHIP PARK, AND ANCHORS THE NORTH END OF THE CITY'S BOOMING DOWNTOWN," SAID MAYOR PAUL TENHAKEN. "CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE VISION WILL ALLOW US TO DREAM BIG ON HOW WE WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE SIOUX FALLS AN EVEN MORE ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY."

