

To: Waste Management Development Team

From: River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group

Date: 10.06.21

The River Ecology and Governance Task Force development review working group appreciates the opportunity to review and provide input on the Waste Management Hooker Street development as presented on September 7, 2021. The presentation provided Task Force members with an overview of the proposed site including updates along the river edge and the intent to hold future coordination meetings with community stakeholders. The development team expressed ongoing efforts to meet [The Chicago River Design Guidelines](#) menu of improvements criteria, and their support for the [Wild Mile](#) along the adjacent portion of the Chicago River.

Following the development team's presentation there was a 'Q & A' session that allowed Task Force members to highlight specific areas of the plan, ask clarifying questions, and provide general feedback. The following comments are representative of the group's feedback and include written responses and verbal input from meeting participants.

Waste Management and River Edge Development on the North Branch

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD), Friends of the Chicago River, Urban Rivers, and other groups have already conducted preliminary reviews on the proposed development. The Task Force acknowledges that Waste Management's redevelopment use and scale are currently authorized in the PMD, and that no new zoning approvals are needed. The Development Review Working Group supports the development team voluntarily and proactively meeting with DPD and other city agencies to maintain transparency and ensure that any changes align with the cities broader plans and goals.

The development team plans to begin construction by 2022 and expects river edge site work to be completed in multiple phases depending on approval processes. The Waste Management site is a prominent feature on Goose Island and has been included in several plans including the North Branch Plan, Our Great Rivers, and the [Wild Mile](#). Currently, the site includes most of the remaining natural (non-seawall) shoreline along this branch of the Chicago River, although this shoreline is generally considered low quality due to high proportions of invasive species and limited natural habitat. This site represents an opportunity to make bold statements about how existing industrial users and robust riverine habitats can coexist along the North Branch of the Chicago River.

The task force acknowledges that the September 7 presentation's primary purpose was to serve as an introduction to the overall river edge site improvement strategy. It does not include specific design decisions regarding the River Design Guidelines menu of improvements or subarea site/landscaping plans. Following is a *non-exhaustive* list of broad items for the development team to consider and incorporate as they continue to move through their design and planning for the site. We encourage them to refer to the River Edge Design Guidelines for direction and continue to interact, present and receive feedback from the Task Force's development review group, and other stakeholders, as they move forward with the project.

- ***Think Creatively about Habitat Creation***

The development team should think creatively about new habitat creation. The proposal's use of lunkers, planting pockets, immersed mussel habitats, as well as controlling invasive species are all important steps, but the nature of the natural shoreline provides several novel opportunities for habitat creation. Additional strategies should include creating microhabitats throughout the site, such as dense clusters of multi-layered vegetation, incorporating trees of a variety of species, and creating terraces and shelves along vertical sea-walls. Other opportunities include moving away from engineered lunkers

in favor of more natural emergent plants or large woody debris structures. The latter of which are shown effective at promoting diversity, while there is little evidence for the efficacy of constructed, man-made structures. Natural habitat can be beneficial beyond just fish or mussels by feeding additional food webs and aquatic species.

This is also a valuable opportunity to develop habitats that support birds at a key point along the river. Chicago is one of the nation's largest cities that is used by migratory birds and priority habitats are located along the lakefront and rivers. This site should incorporate effective migratory land bird habitat into its riverfront designs as well as protect overwintering waterfowl that are often found in the nearby turning basin.

- ***Utilize the Site's Unique Assets to Implement Ecologically Focused Site Improvements***

As mentioned above, this site has been included in a number of plans in the past and is especially prominent in the proposed Wild Mile plan along the North Branch of the Chicago River. Renderings for the large building facade along the river in the development team's presentation and the Wild Mile plan show a large mural, and Waste Management has been working with the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) on a formal mural design and award process. The Task Force recommends incorporating engrained habitat systems in the vertical wall in addition to, and complimentary with the proposed mural or large scale art piece. Potential habitat creation strategies on a vertical surface could include planting pockets or embedded shelves and boxes. The ecologically focused goals of the Wild Mile should not be overlooked in the interest of beautification and this development is a unique opportunity for the two to work in concert with one another.

The development team mentioned potentially using compost from on-site waste recycling to provide additional nutrients to new native vegetation. This idea is exciting and intriguing, but special care should be taken to follow stormwater management best practices, limit runoff into the river, and avoid increasing the river's nutrient load beyond acceptable levels.

- ***Continue to Hone Conceptual Ideas and Take Advantage of Stakeholder Expertise***

The development should continue working with the Wild Mile team to incorporate additional aspects of habitat into this project, like floating wetland elements. The Task Force membership includes experts on these topics who are willing to collaborate further with the development team.

Again, thank you for taking the time to present to the River Ecology and Governance Task Force Development Review Working Group. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback early in the conceptual design process and look forward to the ongoing coordination as the project moves on to future phases. We hope that implementing the above recommendations can be mutually beneficial for the development team, community residents, and the river itself. We welcome the opportunity for feedback, offer our services in the future, and look forward to your responses and collaboration.

Thank you,

River Ecology Governance Task Force
Development Review Group