

Cooper Robertson to lead development of Middletown riverfront master plan

July 22, 2022 - Connecticut



Middletown, CT The architecture and urban design firm Cooper Robertson has been selected by the city to lead development of a master plan for a key portion of the city’s riverfront. The initiative, which includes project partners Karp Strategies and Langan, aims to reimagine a 200-acre stretch of land along the Connecticut River as an accessible new city district with major open spaces and a mix of uses.

Long separated from the surrounding community by a major state highway, the riverfront master plan area lies less than a mile from Wesleyan University and just south of Middletown’s existing Harbor Park. According to Cooper Robertson, a firm known for planning and designing creative waterfront districts including New York’s Battery Park City and Candlestick Point in San Francisco, Middletown’s decision to move forward with the master planning process reflects an important commitment to real and actionable transformation of its riverfront assets—and sets an example for how similar cities can prioritize the creation of new regional recreational, economic, and environmental opportunities, while preserving their historic legacy.

“Cooper Robertson is honored to be a part of this transformational project, and we are excited to support the Middletown community in developing a forward-looking and inclusive vision for the city’s riverfront,” said Mike Aziz, AIA, LEED AP, a Cooper Robertson partner and the firm’s director of urban design. “Reconnecting to the Connecticut River with a diverse array of uses will help Middletown chart a course for a future that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. It’s a chance for the city and its residents to thrive in new and exciting ways while setting a powerful precedent for smart growth in southern New England.”

"I am thrilled to be getting the riverfront master plan underway, and so excited for the work this community is going to do together with Cooper Robertson and team," said mayor Ben Florsheim.

"The level of talent, vision, and experience that they bring to the table matches the extraordinary potential and opportunity that exists on our riverfront, and their strong focus on community engagement will ensure that this will be a people-driven process leading to the outcome we all want: a riverfront that has something for everyone."

The riverfront master plan team was selected following a competitive proposal process overseen by mayor Florsheim, local and regional planning and business leaders, and community advocates. In order to develop a comprehensive and equitable vision for the riverfront's future, Cooper Robertson and its project partners will foreground a planning process of broad community inclusion and thorough stakeholder engagement led by Karp Strategies, a firm known for its dedication to community-driven economic development. These phases of listening and discussion will bring together a diverse array of community interest groups to help set priorities and identify opportunities for public open space along with new restaurants, retail, housing, potential mixed-use commercial space, and the preservation and adaptive reuse of existing structures.

"This is an important project that presents the opportunity to reimagine the Middletown riverfront in a way that meets the needs of local communities and the regional economy. Realizing an equitable and inclusive vision for this site depends on engagement with a diverse group of stakeholders from start to finish. We look forward to working in collaboration with Middletown residents to bring a dynamic, mixed-use vision to fruition that both stimulates regional economic development and serves a model for a community-driven process," said Ali Sutherland-Brown, principal at Karp Strategies.

Recognizing the core challenges facing post-industrial urban waterfronts nationwide, the master plan will also explore critical issues around resilience, flood risk, and environmental conditions through the involvement of Langan, a leading engineering and environmental services firm with offices in New Haven and deep familiarity with the area. According to Middletown leaders, state and federal grant-funded environmental remediation and assessment is already underway at the former industrial parcels in the master plan area.

"Revitalizing a large stretch of the Connecticut River creates an opportunity to reinvest in the community while implementing resilient and sustainable design solutions throughout the region," said Chris Cardany, PE, LEED AP, principal at Langan. "We are excited to work on such a transformative project and look forward to working with the project team to set a new precedent for waterfront redevelopment."

Work on the riverfront master plan begins this summer, as the city of Middletown announces the start of public engagement initiatives introducing the riverfront master planning team to the community at large, establishing a timeframe and budget, and starting the process of creating an actionable plan for the riverfront's future.