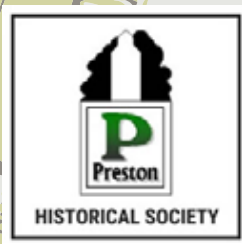




Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan

**Telling the Story of the River,
Agriculture, and the Railroad**

*Preston Historical Society (PHS) &
Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan Committee
October, 2023*





PURPOSE

thoughtful planning

The South Branch Root River and the natural Karst geology that was formed by it are one of the many reasons people live and visit the Preston area. This study was conducted so the history of the river, agriculture, and railroad can be remembered and celebrated. Activating the riverfront not only preserves access to the river for pedestrians but also brings more visits from residents and tourists alike.

To accomplish a successful masterplan design in the end, this study had to go through multiple phases which you will see outlined below. The project started with a full inventory analysis of the nearly 3-mile stretch along the Root River. The existing conditions of the site were photographed, and a full inventory of the site was conducted and analyzed. This was a necessary step to complete a design that met the needs of the community and would tie the Historic Campus and Riverfront together.

In October 2022, an online survey was distributed followed by two community engagement events to gather input from residents. After reviewing the data and collected comments, the design masterplan that represents the community, natural integrity of the site, and history was put together.

Completion and execution of the masterplan will give the Preston Historical Society a permanent home for its meetings, its collection activities, and educational exhibits. It will enhance the year-round use of the riverfront by residents and visitors alike to the economic benefit of the community.

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"The overall goals of the project are to showcase the cultural, historical, and ecological aspects of Preston's precious river front in order to draw residents and visitors to the river, community, and each other."

-Barb Mielke, Preston Area Community Foundation (PACF) and Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan Committee

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Preface

The Preston Historical Society (PHS) received a grant from Southeast MN. Initiative Foundation (SMIF) in fall 2021. PHS had been working on the Milwaukee Elevator and railroad display at the Preston DNR Trailhead and realized the need for a permanent home for its collection and activities.

The open houses at the “historic campus” – the caboose and the elevator - had attracted visitors to Preston and the Root River Trail. A theme emerged for a masterplan: Telling the Story of the River, Agriculture, and the Railroad.

As stated in the SMIF grant application: “The execution of a master plan will provide year round opportunities for Preston and Fillmore County residents but also for the surrounding cities and counties in southeast Minnesota. And this project will expand utilization of the State Trail and attract multi-day visits from greater Minnesota and nearby states.”

Community participation was critical to the success of the effort. A “Masterplan” committee was formed representing local organizations, city boards and commissions, and business leaders. F&M Community Bank offered use of their Community Room, and the committee started its monthly meetings on December 6, 2021.

Preston Area Community Foundation provided funding for a video to share the goals of the project and create public interest and support:
<https://www.prestonmnchamber.com/preston-historical-society/>

In spring 2022 the WiDSETH planning and engineering office in Rochester was chosen to lead the “conceptual planning” for the campus and the riverfront. A POET grant added resources for the planning work and public outreach.

Preliminary plans were shared at a Community Engagement meeting at the Preston United Methodist Church on October 26, 2022, with over 50 attendees. Based on public input, WiDSETH previewed a conceptual plan at a second meeting on April 25, 2023.

The Masterplan Committee continued to work with consultants to finalize the plan and will share the plan with the City and others in fall 2023 – two years from the SMIF grant.

We thank everyone for their donations, input, and encouragement for this two year effort and welcome your continued interest and involvement. ALL ABOARD!!

identified needs



Step 1

The very first step of the project was collecting the identified needs from a broad range and demographic of residents in Preston. This list gave some starting direction as to what should be looked at throughout the entirety of the project.



GAZEBO, ACCESS TO RIVER FOR FISHING

HANDICAPPED FISHING RIVER ACCESS

MULTIPLE AREAS FOR PICNICS, GRILLS, AND GATHERINGS

GATEWAY WHEN COMING INTO TOWN WITH SIGNAGE

DNR BEAUTIFY TRAILS

AREA IS A MAGNET

MN. TROUT UNLIMITED GRANT FOR THE REMAINING RIVERFRONT NOT YET STABILIZED.

REALISTIC THAT IT WILL HAVE TO BE PHASED

MORE SEATING ALONG THE RIVERFRONT

POSSIBLE AQUISITIONS OF MISSING PROPERTIES ALONG THE RIVERFRONT

NATIVE RESTORATION

HISTORIC RAILROAD AND BUSINESS SIGNAGE WITH A FOCUS ON THE MILL STREET PARK AREA



RIVER ROAD PROPERTY AT “OXBOW” ON RIVER – EXPANDING PUBLIC RIVERFRONT ACCESS.

DOG PARK

RECONSTRUCTED “DEPOT” – PHS HOME, MUSEUM, AND WELCOME CENTER.

ACCESSIBLE UPDATED AND LARGER PLAYGROUND

ENTERTAINMENT/ GROUP GATHERING VENUE

community engagement

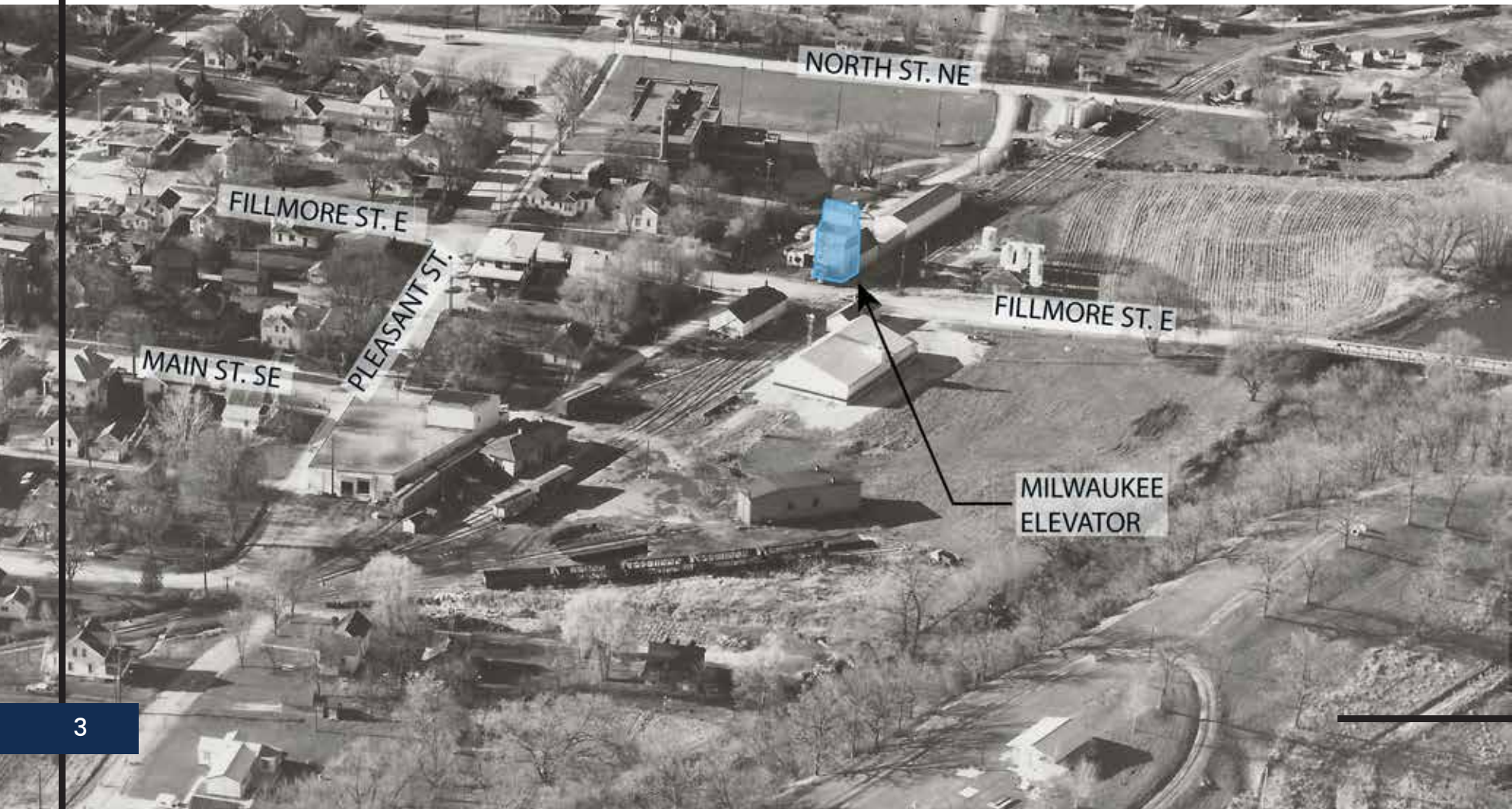
Inventory & Analysis

Inventory

Preston is the county seat of Fillmore County. With its proximity to the Root River Trail, fishing streams, and larger neighboring towns, any enhancement to the proposed site will benefit all area residents and Minnesota as a whole for many years to come.

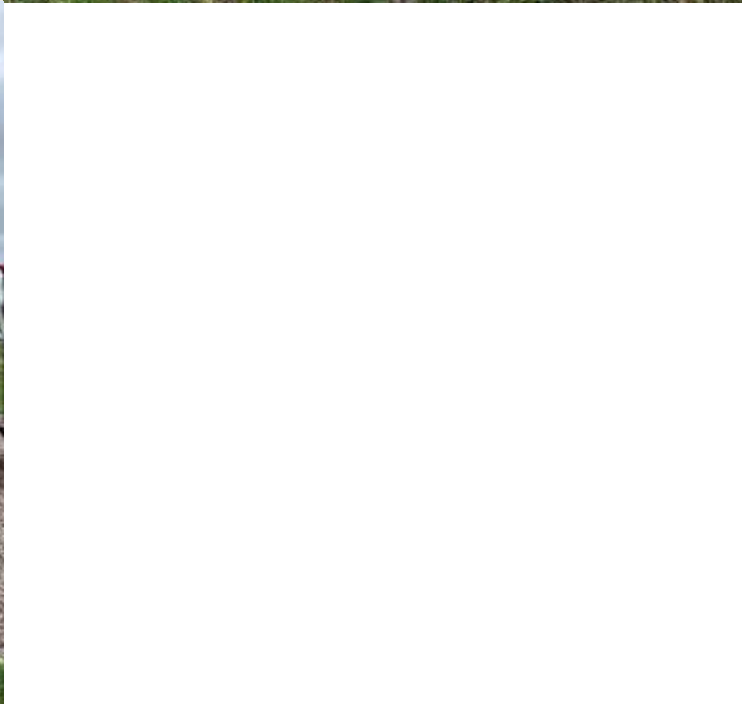
It was determined early on that for the benefit of the community and success of this masterplan, the expanse of the 3-mile riverfront must tie in seamlessly with the Historic Campus expansion.

Walking the entirety of the riverfront gives a sense of what already exists and what could be added to activate the Trailhead Park area. What areas are people wanting to visit the most? Where should new parking be provided? What natural views should be highlighted and preserved? At what points along the riverfront are visitors cutoff from accessing the river? Where is ADA access missing? These are just a few of the questions looked at during the study.





**existing
conditions**



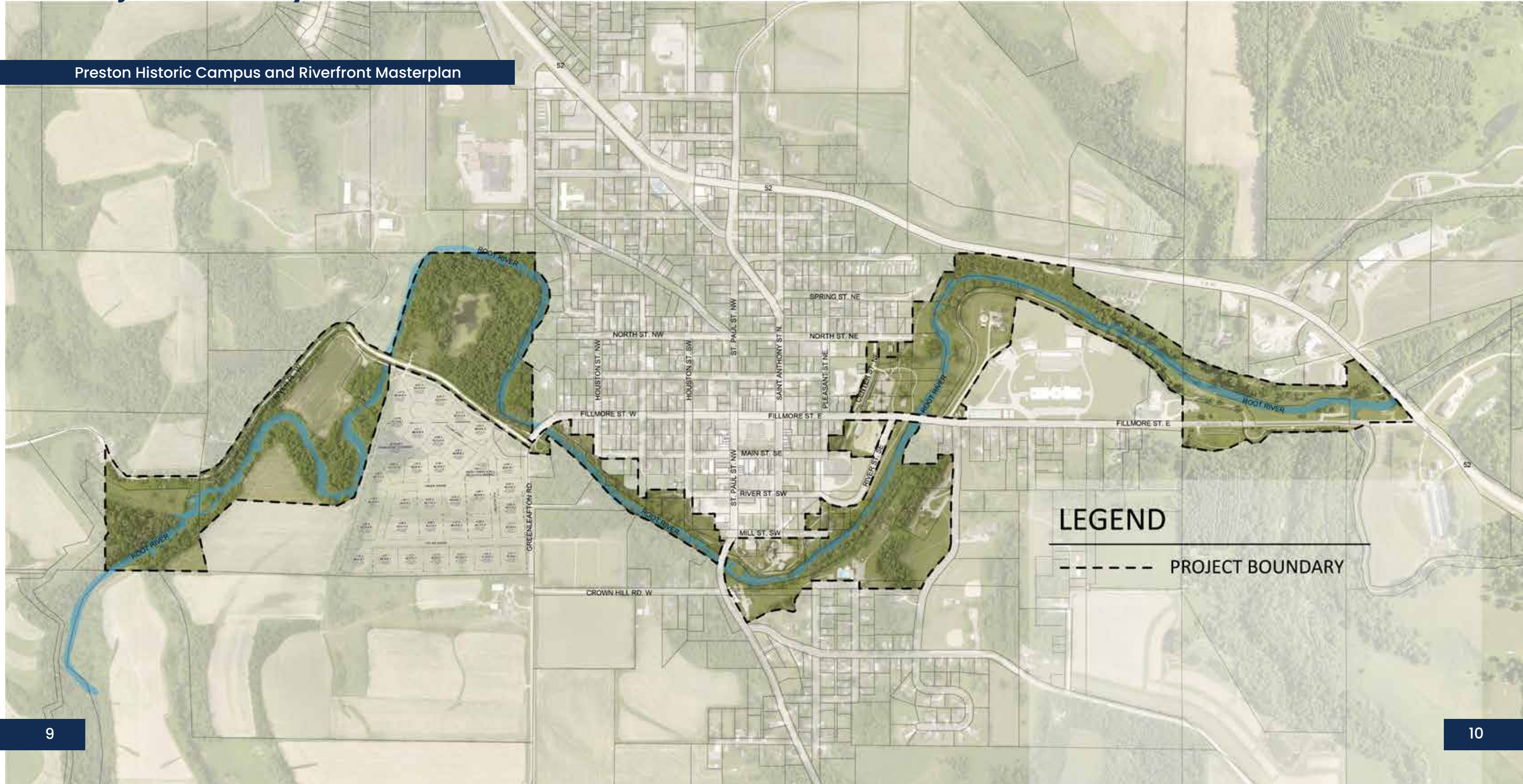


**existing
conditions**



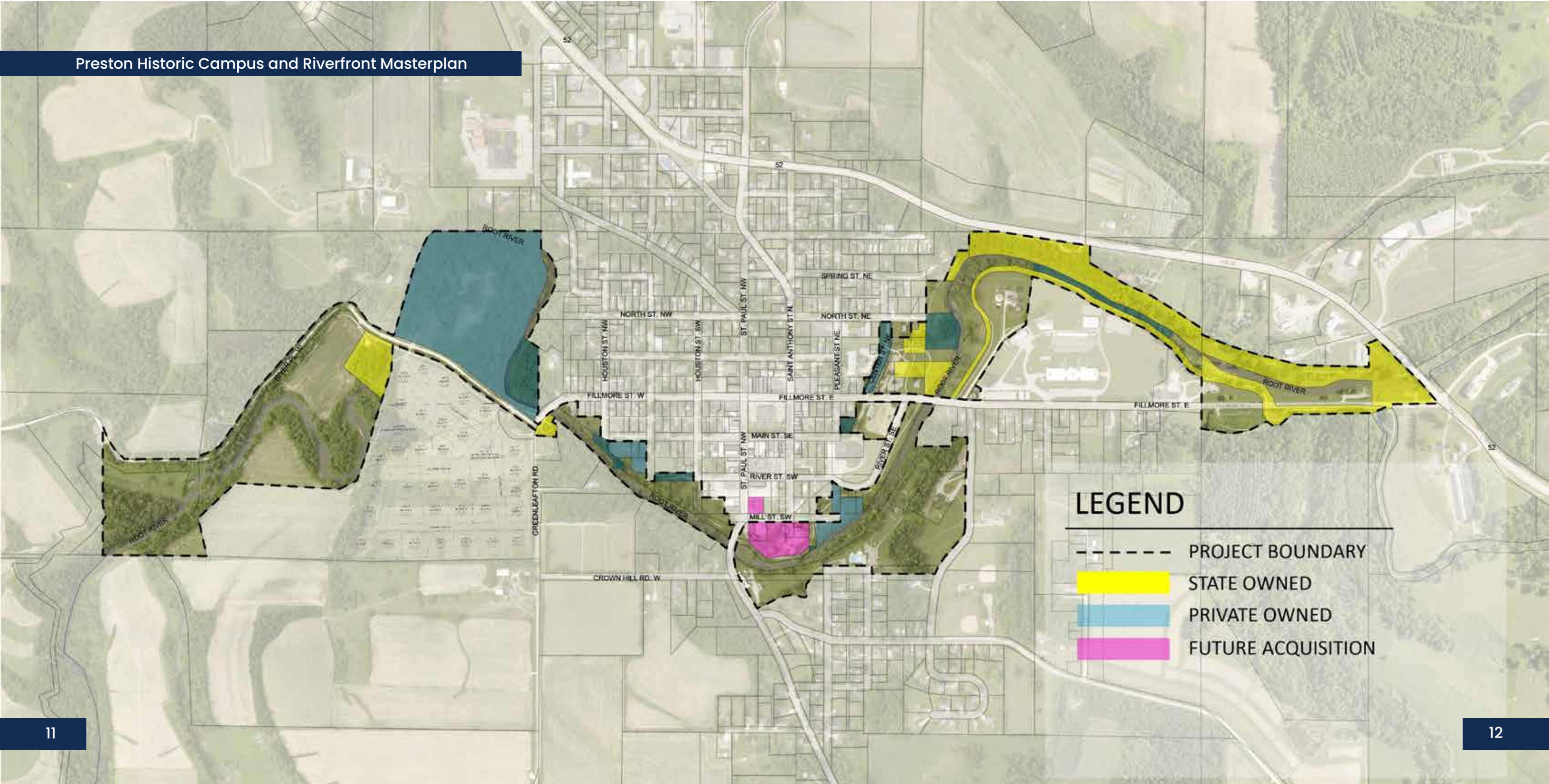
Project Boundary

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan



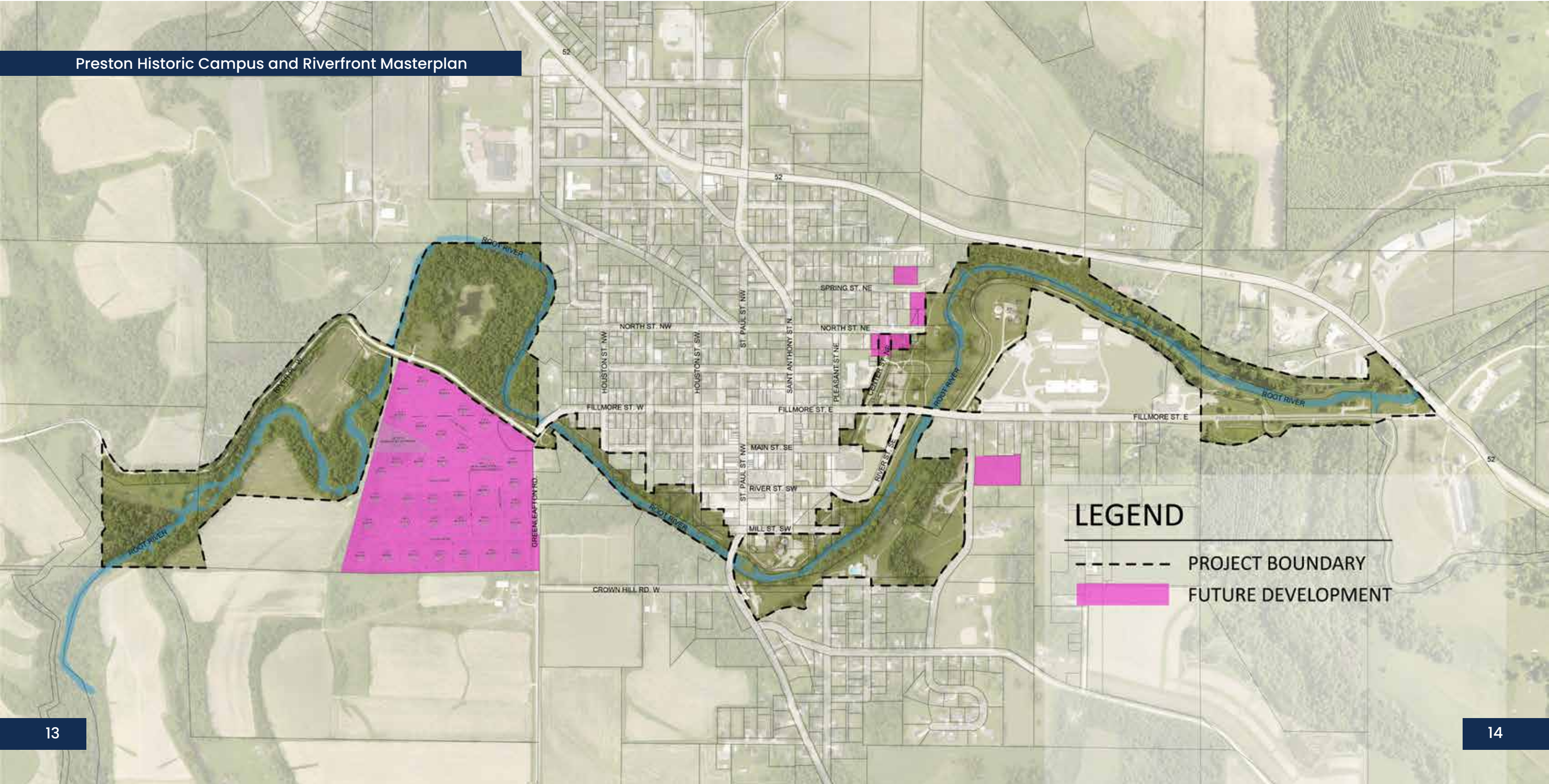
Parcel Ownership

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan



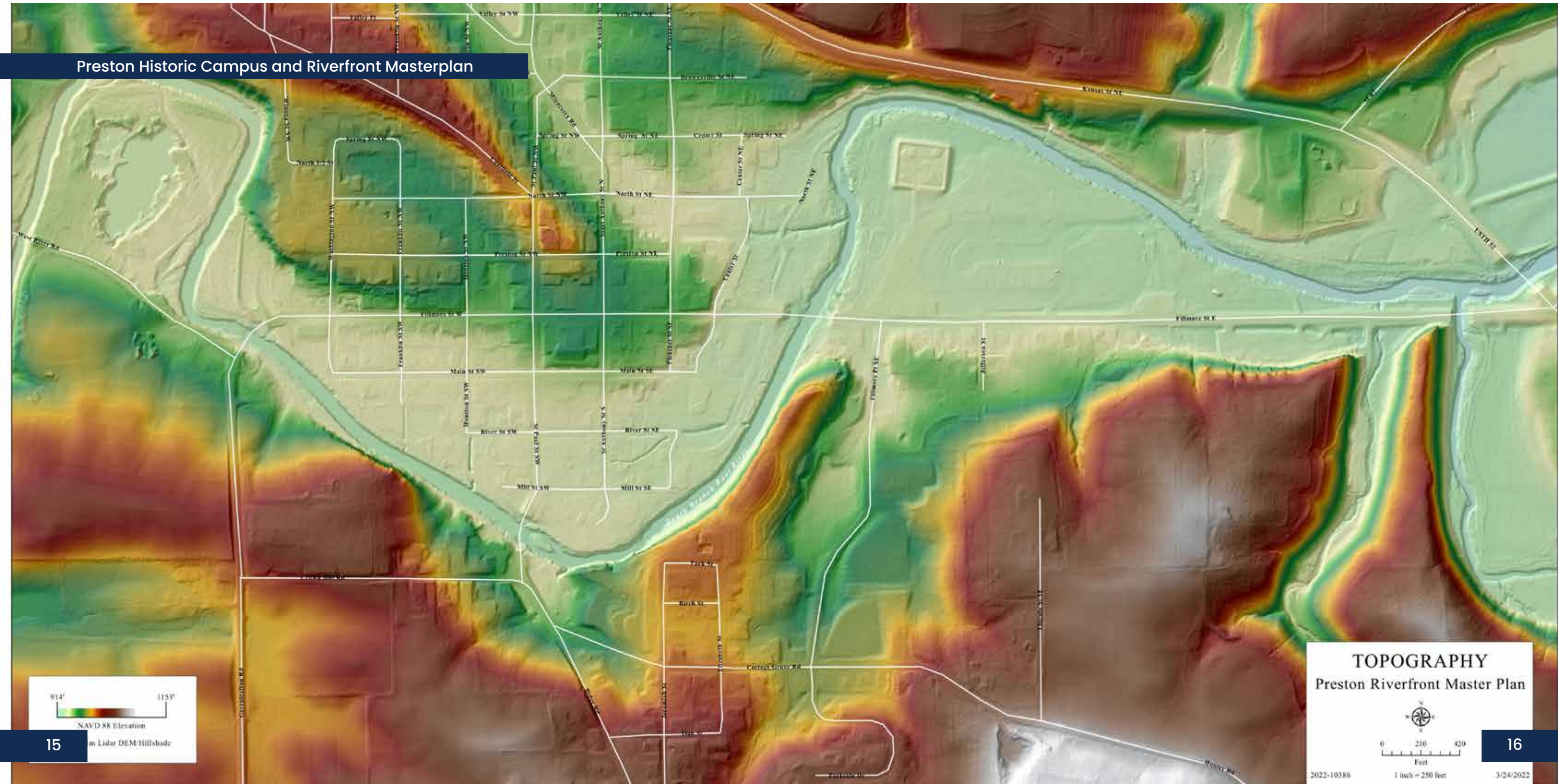
Future Development

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan



Topography

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan



Floodplain & Floodway

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan

The map displays the Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan area, showing the Root River and surrounding floodplains. The project boundary is outlined in black. The floodway is highlighted in dark blue, the 100 Year Flood Plain is highlighted in medium blue, and the 500 Year Flood Plain is highlighted in light blue. The map includes a legend for Project Boundary, Floodway, 100 Year Flood Plain, and 500 Year Flood Plain. The map shows the Root River flowing through the area, with floodplains and floodways highlighted in blue. The project boundary is outlined in black.

LEGEND

- PROJECT BOUNDARY
- FLOODWAY
- 100 YEAR FLOOD PLAIN
- 500 YEAR FLOOD PLAIN

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan

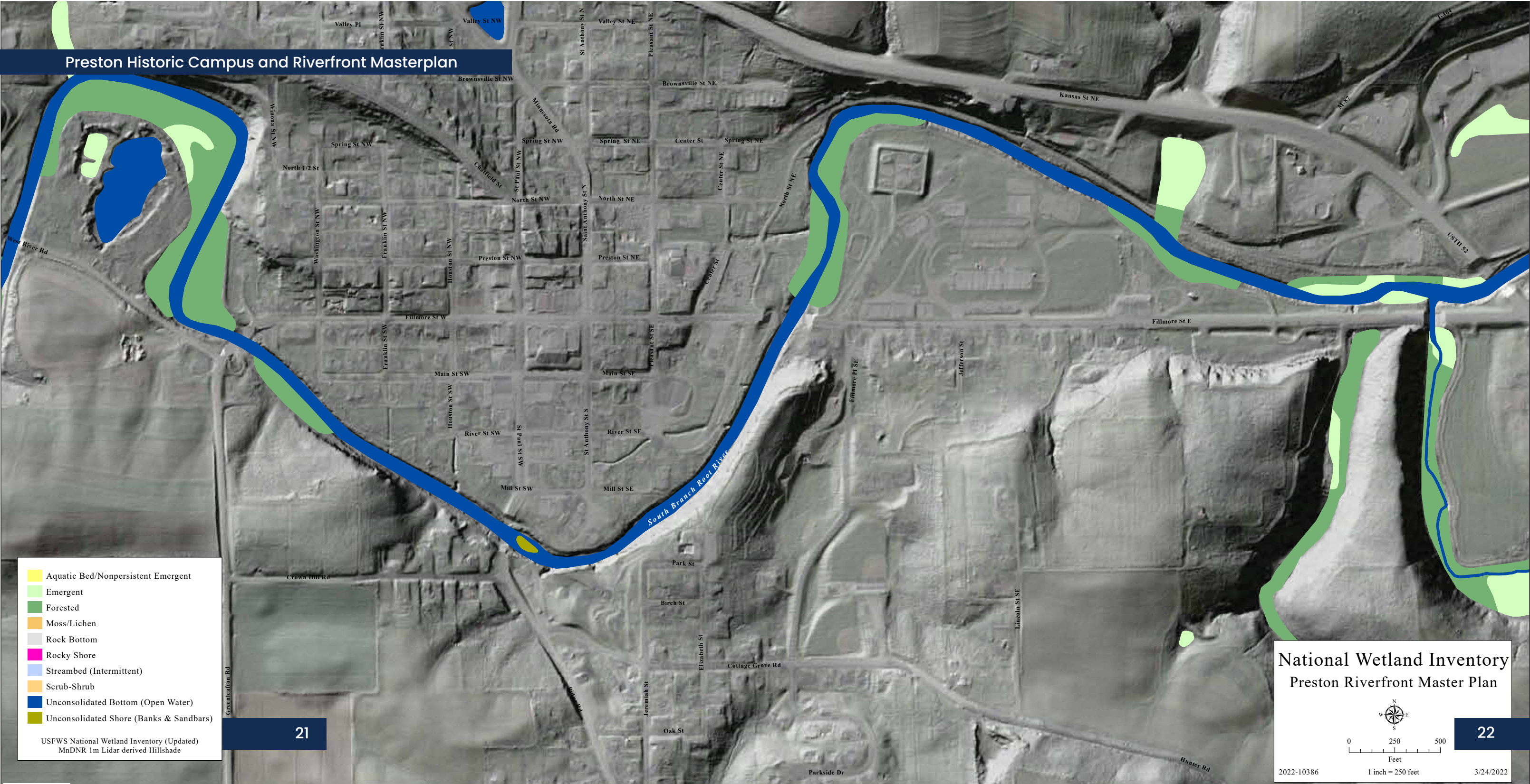


300' River Setback

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan



Wetland Inventory



case study

Analysis

In our analysis, all the maps created in the inventory/ existing conditions phase were studied closely. This analysis is where improvement discussions began. We studied what was missing on the site that the community would benefit from having. What other communities of similar sizes and geology were doing. We found many of the amenities on the existing site were elements that people travel to come see or pass through, but not stay for any longer periods of time. All those items were researched while analyzing how to bring out the uniqueness of the Preston riverfront.

We want to make sure people not only come to visit Preston and the park but give them enough things to do and reasons to stay. We know this not only makes for a livelier vibrant park, but a safer park as well. Although all aspects of the site were looked at, three areas took on a main focus.

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS SEPARATION

Trailhead Park and the depot site location are separated by busy Fillmore Street which is an unsafe intersection to cross and does not feel like one site/ park. Enhanced safety measures are needed for crossing Fillmore Street.

LARGE FIELDS OF TURF GRASS

The riverfront currently houses large fields of turf grass which is not native or beneficial to the area. Certain areas were determined to remain as turf grass for recreational uses, but other areas that are less utilized or are between destinations along the Root River could be re-naturalized. Re-naturalizing the riverfront not only celebrates its natural history but also reduces maintenance and restores habitat.

ADA ACCESS

Improving accessibility throughout the campus and riverfront areas was determined to be an important part of the plan. New direct ADA access points to the river for fishing and recreational activities are needed. The design of the historic campus elements including elevator, rail display, and reconstructed depot will also need to incorporate full ADA access.



DEPOT MUSEUM & HISTORIC CAMPUS

RIVERFRONT AMENITIES & PARKS

RIVER STABILIZATION, ENHANCEMENT, AND PUBLIC/ ADA ACCESS

Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan

FUTURE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

RIVER WEST

- Trails, fishing areas, lake/nature preservation, parking
- West Bridge - Pines - "Trout Unlimited" - Phase III
- Landscape, paved parking, launch, lighting, restrooms
- Address drainage issues/add missing riverfront segment- River Road/ "Oxbow site"
- Native plant areas - trees, floral, grasses
- Direct ADA river access

TOWN RIVERFRONT

- Bridges, parking areas, walkways, cliffsides
- Handicapped & other viewing/fishing access points
- Signage - all types - historic, access, natural features
- Native plant areas - trees, floral, grasses
- Rest stops, bike racks & seating along riverfront
- St. Paul St. - West Bridge - "Trout Unlimited" - Phase II
- Upgrade West Bridge kayak launch - restrooms, etc.
- Possible Dog Park
- Direct ADA river access

HISTORY CAMPUS/
RAILYARD

- Milwaukee Elevator preservation and enhancement
- Reconstructed "depot" for meetings, museum, welcome center
- Parking, pedestrian/handicap access, landscaping
- Historic businesses/rail structures/natural features/ signage
- Wayfinding to downtown and riverfront amenities
- Rest stops, bike racks & seating along riverfront
- Public music/performance stage
- Bridges, parking areas, walkways, cliffsides
- Enhanced playground - all age groups
- Disk Golf & other outdoor recreation areas
- Sheltered gathering spots - riverbend, etc.
- Highlighting natural features - wildlife, cliffs, etc.
- Designated for open markets & events.
- Completion of Milwaukee Elevator restoration
- "Story-Book" trail with Preston Public Library
- Direct ADA access to river
- Enhanced safety crosswalk for Fillmore Street
- Covered patio/ performance stage at Depot.
- Fishing/ viewing/ gathering park at Riverbend/ Mill St. Site
- Direct ADA river access

RIVER EAST

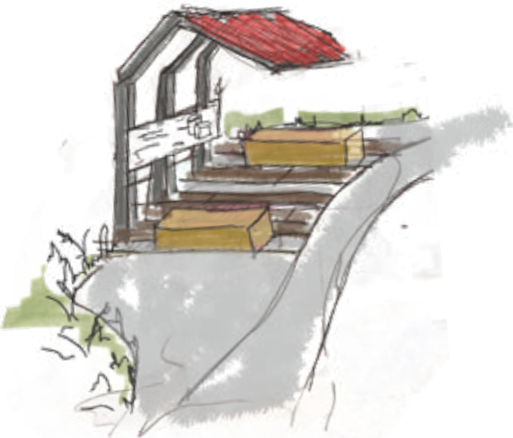
- Restroom, landscape, paved parking, signage, lighting
- Handicapped and other pedestrian access points
- Signage - all types - historic, directional, natural features
- Bluebird/Other bird houses
- Native plant areas - trees, floral, grasses
- Rest stops, bike racks & seating along riverfront
- Upgrade Pooler Park - ADA access, restrooms, signage, seating, etc.
- Direct ADA river access

Historic Campus Masterplan

The historic campus begins at Trailhead Park and continues along the Root River trail Southwest towards the proposed Mill Street Park. It was important that no matter what one might be coming to the site to see, the trails would be enough of a reason to stay parked and walk or bike between both ends or through downtown.

Parking was added so visitors can go to either end of the Historic Campus and easily walk along the naturalistic paths connecting Mill Street Park to the historic campus. Along this section of the trail, accessible benches were added as well as rail industrial inspired kiosks highlighting the different legacy sites that once played key roles in the rail industry here. Some of these kiosks would be educational signs, while others could be interactive to engage younger ages in learning about the history of Preston.

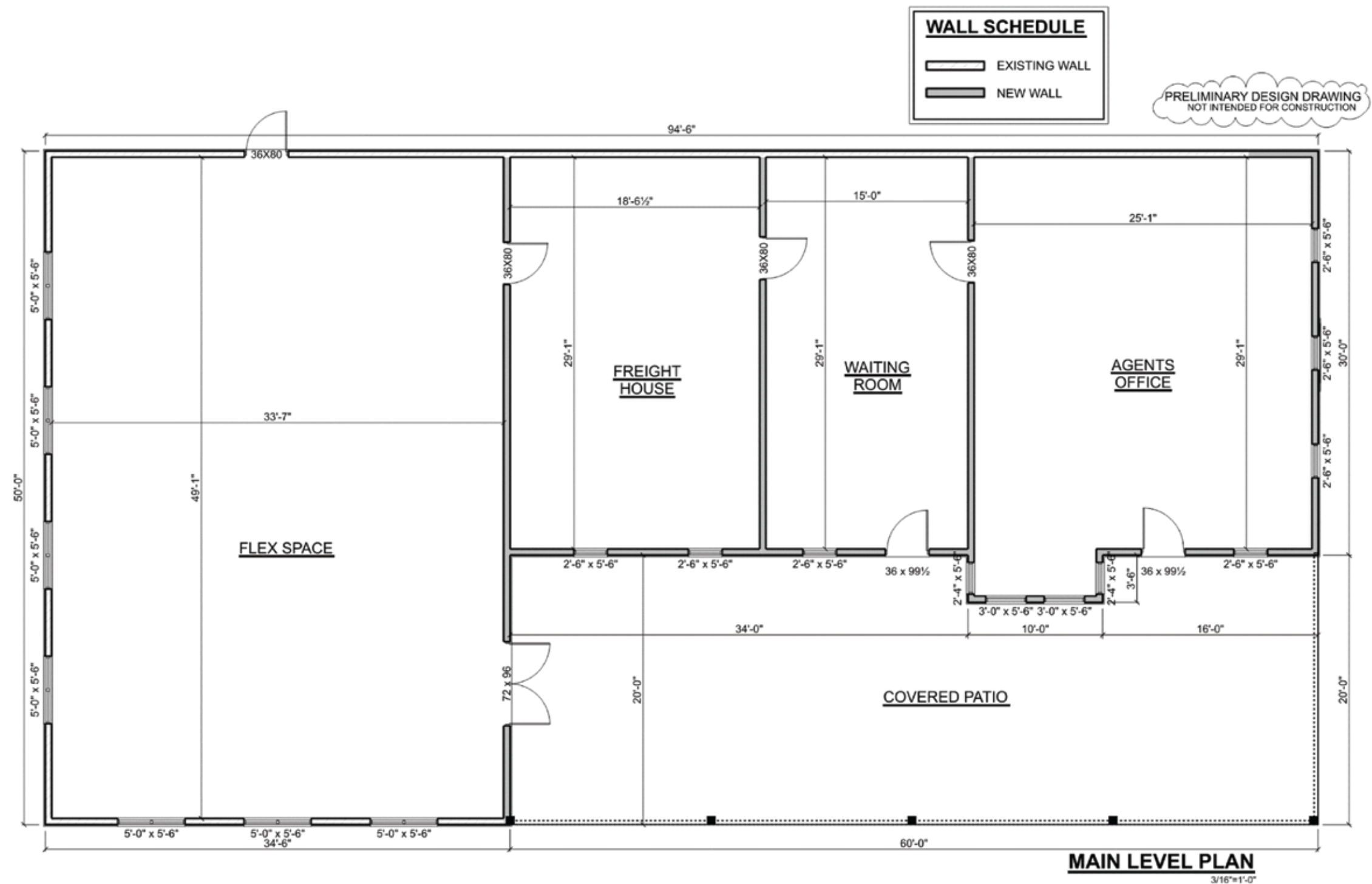
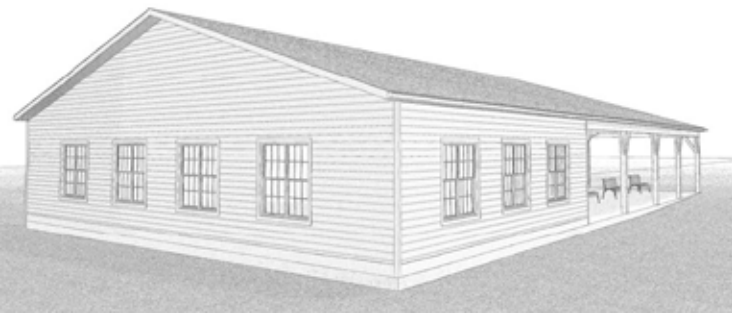
Vegetation would frame the pathway along a riverfront creating a naturalistic park setting. The proposed Mill Street Park will serve as a great location for future events and family activities, capitalizing on the views of the existing bluffs as a backdrop.



rail legacy site kiosk



Depot Schematic
Plans





Trailhead Park/ Depot Site Plan

The Historic Campus through this design becomes the recreational and historical hub of Preston, Minnesota. This space needs to be one that the Preston Historical Society could use for generations to come for meetings, cataloguing and displaying historic artifacts, hosting events, and much more. Providing a space that is exciting to work in and be in drives participation for current members as well as future members. History is not just what happened in the pre- 20th century, but what is happening now as well. It is recognized that the space needs to be one the Preston Historical Society can use, but also needs to be one the general community can enjoy and use as well.

The new depot replicates elements of the old depot that once stood a block South and in the same orientation to the historic railyard tracks. The depot would face the river with views of the cliff sides and large open plaza space. The covered patio and plaza serves as an event space. People can bring chairs or stand in the plaza while the mound behind the plaza creates a natural seating berm (site of the two previously demolished buildings).

With the depot on the South side of Fillmore Street and the Milwaukee elevator, playground, and recreational area on the North, safe crossing becomes vital to connecting these two areas, so it feels like one park. Different methods are proposed in this design from large decorative signage on both ends getting vehicles attention as well as flashers and digital crossing signs. Markings in the pavement help to connect the two plazas so it can begin to feel like one park ignoring the feeling of a large road in-between.

The playground currently is slightly undersized for being a destination playground, so it is proposed that a large fully accessible natural playground be added, blending into the surrounding landscape.

With families visiting the playground, people coming to enjoy the world-renowned fishing at the new access points, visitors interacting with the preserved history of Preston, and reconnecting with nature, the Preston Historic Campus becomes a one-of-a-kind destination for tourists and residents alike.



Preston Historic Campus and Riverfront Masterplan

Acknowledgement

special thanks to all:

Historic Campus & Riverfront Masterplan Committee:

Sheila Craig	President, Preston Historical Society (PHS) & Committee Chair
Charles Aug	F&M Community Bank
Daniel M. Christianson	F&M Community Bank
Jon B. DeVries	PHS Facilities Committee & Preston EDA
Ilene Edwards	Preston Area Chamber of Commerce
Steve Hall	PHS & Preston City Council
Gabby Kinneberg	Preston EDA & Preston Tourism Board
Lindsey Reding	Presont EDA & Preston Tourism Board
Barb Mielke	Preston Area Community Foundation
Dean Schumacher	Preston Planning & Zoning Committee
Kerry Soiney	PHS Facilities Committee
Charles Sparks	PHS & Preston City Council

Funding Sources and Donors

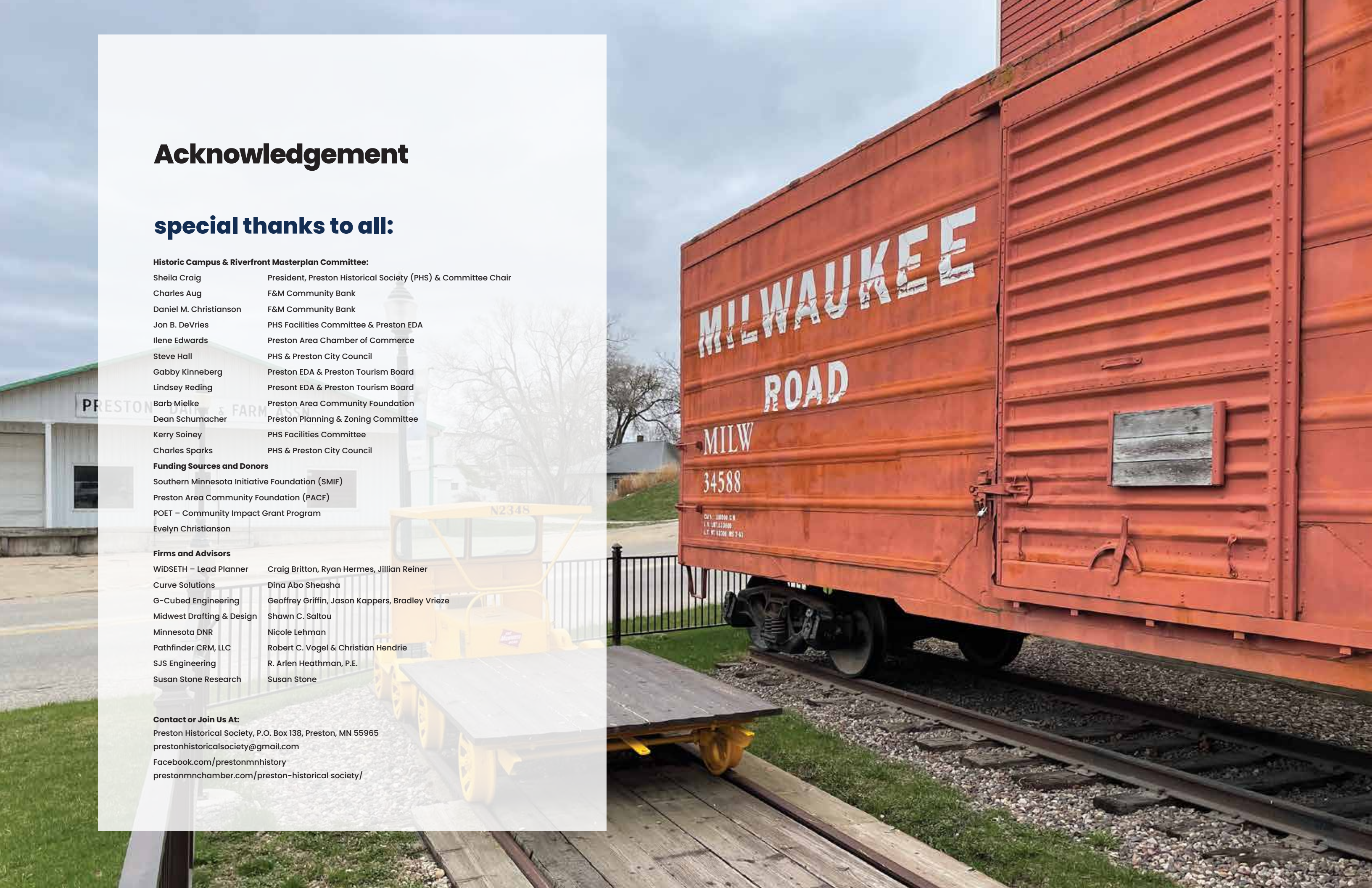
- Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF)
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