

The

RIVER

Districts: A Regional Collaboration

Lane Livability Consortium Catalytic Project Report

Riverfront
District

Courthouse
District

Riverfront
Research
Park

Downtown
Eugene

University
District

Walnut
Station

Laurel
Hill

Glenwood

Downtown
Springfield

To
Goshen and
LCC

February 4, 2014

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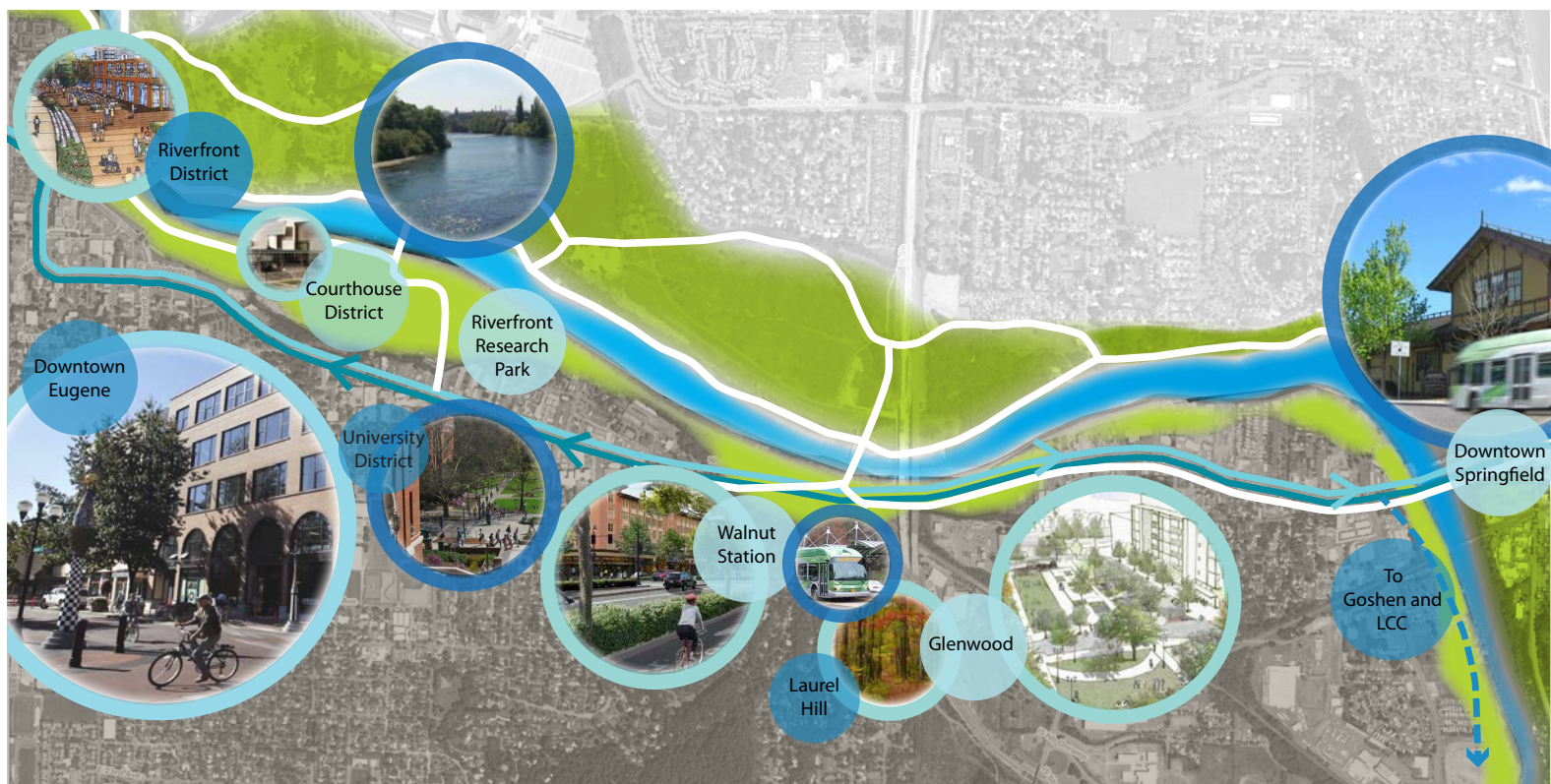
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Introduction

Purpose and Background

As part of the Lane Livability Consortium work plan, the “catalytic project” task brought regional partners together to collaborate on a tangible project with shared goals and broad community benefits. A project team was assembled with staff representatives from the City of Eugene, the City of Springfield, Lane County, the University of Oregon, and the Lane Transit District. The team set out to define a regionally-significant project related to the Regional Prosperity Economic Development Plan and to highlight important steps towards making the project a reality. The Franklin Boulevard corridor, which runs through multiple jurisdictions and generally follows the course of the Willamette River, was selected as the subject of this task in part due to the strong foundation of planning and investments which has already been laid. The focus area within the corridor generally includes the following districts, from west to east:

1. Eugene Downtown Riverfront District and Federal Courthouse District
2. The University of Oregon, Riverfront Research Park and the Walnut Station District
3. Springfield’s Glenwood Riverfront District

Additionally, the project included important connections from these districts south to future development areas along McVey Highway in Glenwood

as well as Franklin Boulevard south to Lane Community College, Goshen, and the Buford Park recreation area.

With this broad concept and geographic area in mind, the team focused on identifying common goals, strengthening cooperative roles in accomplishing those goals, and proposing next steps. From this effort, the “River Districts” concept emerged.

Project Rationale

The Eugene-Springfield metropolitan region is rich with authentic qualities and potential that support an outstanding quality of life and make the region an attractive place to live and do business. Working together enables partners to build on these strengths and provide many benefits to residents of the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan region that may otherwise go unrealized. Acting as a strong, unified team will help us compete successfully with other cities and regions around the state and US, grow local companies and bring in new businesses providing living wage jobs in a sustainable way, and create opportunities for the best and brightest to stay in the community. Working together will help us stay focused on efforts that have the greatest impact across political and organizational boundaries, and succeed in winning the resources to support those efforts.



Ruth Bascom Riverbank Trail System



Willamette Plaza in Downtown Eugene



Springfield Historic Train Depot and EmX Bus Rapid Transit

Introduction

In the absence of cooperation, the prosperity of our community remains at risk. The pace, scale and location of economic growth is a competitive process at the mercy of prevailing conditions. As the Eugene-Springfield region faces a new era of growth and change, it is urgent that we seize opportunities when they arise, such as realizing the enormous potential of the River Districts. Only through initiative and bold steps will we gather the will and resources needed to take real action and make tangible investments that can start growing.

If we don't, other communities will reap the rewards and we will continue to struggle with the legacy of past economic upheavals.

Partnership, commitment, and focus are tools to help us, as a community, gain more control over our future.

Project Outcomes

The aim of the “catalytic project”, as part of the Lane Livability Consortium work, is to grow our regional partnership by learning to build our community together. Joining forces to tell a compelling story and inspire community leaders about the River Districts creates a new model for cooperation that can be used again in the future. The bridges we build between agencies, one person at a time, help “catalyze” individual and divided opportunities into larger, more unified efforts that provides greater benefits to the region. The work described herein is only the beginning; one important outcome is that we continue working together to make these ideas a reality.



1

Vision





Section 1

Vision

1.1 Vision Statement

Create “The River Districts,” a set of vibrant and connected urban neighborhoods planned, designed and built to celebrate and share the beauty of the Willamette River Greenway while sustainably capturing and driving regional economic growth.

1.2 Vision Narrative

The River Districts are a popular hub and major economic engine for people living and working in the Eugene-Springfield region. Comprised of a series of distinctive, walkable districts, closely connected along the Willamette River Greenway and Franklin Boulevard by bus rapid transit and shared use paths, the River Districts have become a destination for job growth, urban living, learning and recreation. Formerly seen as a place to pass through, investments for high-wage businesses, education, entrepreneurship and quality mixed income housing – along with great access to the beauty of the Willamette River – have enhanced each district as a unique part of a whole.

1.3 Big Ideas

Celebrate the River

Connect the river to commercial areas and neighborhoods.

- Enhance walking and biking access to riverbank paths and parks and the river itself from adjacent commercial and residential areas.

Create more places for people.

- Create more people places near the river.

These can include well designed plazas, paths and commercial areas that front pedestrian zones and traffic calmed streets.

Complete the Riverbank Path.

- Construct all planned Riverbank Path improvements between Springfield and Eugene on both sides of the Willamette River. Add lighting and other amenities.

Improve safety and comfort.

- Create a continuous experience along the riverfront that is safe and comfortable in, around and between the River Districts, for example by providing abundant lighting, good visibility, active uses, wayfinding, and public safety programs.

Transform Franklin Boulevard

Convert Franklin Boulevard from an auto-oriented thoroughfare to an attractive, multimodal street.

- Redesign Franklin Boulevard as a street that is safe and comfortable to walk and bike both along and across.
- Use design tools such as multiway boulevard sections, roundabouts, cycle tracks and wider sidewalks with street trees.

Reinforce Franklin Boulevard as the spine of the regional EmX system.

- Provide continuous bi-directional travel for EmX buses along the corridor with high-quality, well-integrated stations.

Strengthen connections between the districts.

- Create a seamless experience along Franklin Boulevard to maximize mobility for all travel modes, for example through wide, well-appointed pedestrian realm, high-visibility crosswalks, and consistency of design elements.
- Consider solutions that address the auto-dominant gap between the I-5 on-ramp and Glenwood.

Vision continued

Create Healthy, Walkable, Mixed Use Neighborhoods

Capture growth in mixed-use neighborhoods where people can work, live and play.

- Update plans and regulations to support development of higher density mixed-use housing and employment opportunities within the River Districts. Seek out opportunities to partner with private parties to make the most of investments while providing jobs, housing, shopping and services, and recreation opportunities within the districts.

Close the market gap for the construction of mixed use development as well as housing affordable to people with a wide range of incomes.

- Identify specific income ranges for job types within the River Districts and direct existing and future programs, including incentives, regulations, and other investments, to promote a mix of housing opportunities.

Invest in an Economic Engine

Prepare an investment pipeline.

- Complete intra- and inter-jurisdictional work to attract development pioneers, for example through alignment and streamlining of policies and regulations, preparing investment tools, adopting agreements, and preparing funding sources.

Build a business hub.

- Create synergy in the River Districts between targeted enterprises, for example by providing space and support for startups, meeting special infrastructure and site needs, and fostering a sense of place attractive to early and mid-career workers.

Leverage investments in the University of Oregon.

- Locate support services, supply sources, housing for faculty and non-faculty staff, and other university-related investments within the River Districts, for example through incentives, purchasing criteria, and other opportunities that may appear through examining current practices.

- Utilize the high potential of the River Districts for university-related workforce housing.

Educate a River Districts workforce.

- Create links between university education, internships, certificate programs and other tools with a focus on characteristics and qualifications important to targeted enterprises.

Create activity centers.

- Build on existing themes within the River Districts, for example outdoors and athletics, to boost retail and leisure visitors from outside the districts, for example around a public space or group of related retail and service businesses. Activity centers should enhance the attractiveness of the district as well as the quality of life for future residents in the region.

Launch a collaborative marketing program.

- Through a consortium of agencies and private partners, identify and cultivate an identity for the River Districts as a whole, as well as each district within it, for use in actively promoting targeted investments and job growth.

Forge a Long-Term Partnership

Align leadership and organizational missions to focus on regional benefits.

- Partner agencies endorse the River Districts concept as a regional, cooperative effort and work together to realize the vision. Adjust policies as opportunities arise to support this approach.

Cooperatively plan and prioritize investments.

- Partner agencies review and adjust respective project planning, where appropriate and as opportunities arise, to support the River Districts vision with a focus on sharing and leveraging resources.
- Establish contributing roles that play to the strengths and assets of each agency.
- Balance investments through in-kind and complementary contributions to maintain a climate of cooperation, shared purpose, and equity between partner agencies. For example, if a partner is unable to participate in a

particular effort, another type of contribution may be offered towards realizing overall goals.

1.4 Best Outcomes

By successfully realizing the River Districts vision, partner agencies aim to achieve the following best outcomes:

The Eugene-Springfield region is known as a hub of thriving economic growth driven by new development and innovative businesses in the River Districts.

The River Districts are a destination for creative professionals and entrepreneurs from around the country, and provide an attractive option to keep talented, local high school and college graduates living in the region.

New mixed use development in the River Districts has successfully transformed under-developed land, is efficiently served and supported, and is delivering substantial savings and financial benefits to the community.

Diverse housing and job opportunities in the River District, connected by convenient, low-cost transportation choices, has improved equity in the community and integrated well over time with nearby development and uses.

Residents of the region enjoy new, accessible, interconnected riverfront destinations for many different activities and lifestyles that is a source of pride and quality of life.

Development and infrastructure in the River Districts showcases sustainable best practices and improves the long-term health of the community and natural systems. The River Districts have leveraged public investments and hundreds of millions of dollars in private investment to create a robust and self-sustaining infrastructure that will help the region thrive for decades to come.



Eugene Riverfront Redevelopment Concept



University of Oregon - Lewis Integrative Science Building



Walnut Station Redevelopment Concept with Multi-Way Boulevard



Glenwood Riverfront Redevelopment Concept

The River Districts: A R

Celebrate the River

- Connect the river to commercial areas and neighborhoods.
- Create more places for people.
- Complete the Riverbank Path.
- Improve safety and comfort.

Riverfront District

Courthouse District

Riverfront Research Park

Downtown Eugene

University District

Create Healthy, Walkable, Mixed Use Neighborhoods

- Capture growth in mixed-use neighborhoods where people can work, live and play.
- Close the market gap for the commercial mixed use development as well as affordable to people with a wide range of incomes.

Transform Franklin Boulevard

- Convert Franklin Boulevard from an auto-oriented thoroughfare to an attractive, multimodal street.
- Reinforce Franklin Boulevard as the spine of the regional EmX system.
- Strengthen connections between the districts.

Walnut Station

Laurel Hill

Regional Collaboration

Invest in an Economic Engine

- Prepare an investment pipeline.
- Build a business hub.
- Leverage investments in the University of Oregon.
- Educate a River Districts workforce.
- Create activity centers.
- Launch a collaborative marketing program.

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Ruth Bascom Riverbank Trail System
Willamette River

Franklin Blvd.

Downtown
Springfield

Glenwood

To
Goshen and
LCC

Forge a Long-Term Partnership

- Align leadership and organizational missions to focus on regional benefits.
- Cooperatively plan and prioritize investments.
- Establish contributing roles that play to the strengths and assets of each agency.



Abstract white wavy lines on a green background, resembling a stylized ribbon or smoke, flowing from the left side towards the bottom right.

2

Analysis



Emerald Express (EmX) Bus Rapid Transit

Section 3

Analysis

2.1 Overview of Current Conditions

Franklin Boulevard is a vital and central link between downtown Springfield and downtown Eugene that also serves as a gateway to both communities. Franklin Boulevard, as well as the surrounding corridor of neighborhoods and development, stands apart from other regional thoroughfares by its proximity to the beautiful Willamette River Greenway and its world-class riverfront park and bicycle path system. Many other important regional assets are located along the corridor, including the University of Oregon, the Matthew Knight arena, numerous institutions, employers, and retail businesses, and direct links to Interstate 5. Franklin Boulevard serves most of the corridor, is already a vital link between downtown Springfield and downtown Eugene, is a gateway to each city, and is home to Lane Transit District's (LTD) flagship EmX bus rapid transit (BRT) line that has been recognized as one of the most innovative BRT systems in the nation. The area is highly visible to local residents, visitors to the University of Oregon,

as well as travelers along Interstate 5. Finally, a great deal of local planning has been done in recent years to prepare for change in many of the districts connected by the Franklin corridor. Other destinations connected to this corridor include Lane Community College, Goshen, and the Buford Park recreation area

Yet, the land within the Franklin Boulevard corridor and nearby districts is vastly underutilized and far from realizing its full potential. In both Eugene and Springfield, Franklin Boulevard is dominated by low-density, auto-oriented land uses that are cut off from the Willamette River. The design of Franklin Boulevard itself favors cars over other modes of travel, and the western parts of the corridor (the Eugene Riverfront and Courthouse districts) are not served by the EmX bus rapid transit system. The western portion of the Franklin Boulevard corridor provides many rental housing units but few are affordable to very-low and low-income families, while the housing stock east of Interstate 5 is affordable but in poor condition. In some corridor segments, existing development has

Analysis continued

remained virtually unchanged for decades. In other segments, however, such as the Walnut Station district, significant recent investment in major University of Oregon facilities, of the EmX bus rapid transit service, is beginning to transform the area.

2.2 Big Opportunities

The special blend of high potential, unique characteristics, recent investments, and under-utilized land found within the Franklin Corridor represents one of the greatest opportunities in the region. Specific opportunities include:

Community Identity

- The unique arrangement of developments and connections along the Franklin Boulevard corridor and Willamette River are well-suited to work as a whole, with a marketable identity or brand that supports the common interests of all local jurisdictions
- The River Districts have the power to be a strong expression of shared community values and the quality of life in the region.
- The corridor offers great potential to improve livability for area residents by creating new and attractive recreation, business and living opportunities.
- The River Districts offer high potential as a unique and attractive front door to the University of Oregon, Springfield, and Eugene.

Economic Development

- An abundance of under-developed land already zoned for high-density, mixed use development creates potential for significant private investment under the right conditions
- The River Districts are a prime location for “edu/tech” companies – a growing regional business cluster – due to the location *near population centers, urban amenities, major medical centers, and the University of Oregon.*
- Over 300 acres of underutilized industrial land in the community of Goshen connects directly to the corridor from the south and has the potential to provide a significant, large-lot, rail-served industrial land inventory for the region.
- The development potential and high purchasing power of the University of Oregon’s students, faculty and staff could help transform the River Districts, including

locating support services, workforce housing, and landmark buildings and institutions.

Growth Management

- A significant share of regional growth, in terms of jobs and housing, could be accommodated on existing land within the corridor, reducing sprawl and its associated high costs.
- Growth captured in the River Districts makes the most of recent investments in the EmX bus rapid transit system and taps into the University of Oregon’s large pool of employees.
- Strengthening the relationship between underdeveloped land and the Willamette River could support the higher rent and lease rates needed to spur new redevelopment
- With planned investments that will drastically improve walkability, and a location near recreation, shopping and services, the River Districts are well-suited for a diversity of housing types, including workforce and affordable housing.
- Plans and regulations are already in place that support walkability, mixed-use development, and other characteristics of the River Districts vision.

Access and Equity

- Creating both market-rate and affordable housing opportunities in the River Districts improves equity for the region by increasing housing choices to people across different income levels.
- The River Districts have the potential to provide much-improved access to the Willamette River for people walking, biking and driving.
- The River Districts are very diverse and provide the opportunity to showcase and celebrate diversity, inspiring positive interactions among neighbors.
- Creating new affordable housing and spurring economic development in the River Districts has the potential to create new job opportunities for people with lower incomes located closer to their home.

Climate and Energy

- Capturing a significant portion of regional growth in the River Districts will help the region meet statewide goals for reducing car travel and greenhouse gas emissions
- Large redevelopment sites within the River Districts may provide opportunities to experiment with district energy systems or other green development practices

2.3 Big Challenges

The scale and complexity of the corridor presents a variety of challenges to achieving the River Districts vision. Some challenges include:

Resources and Economics

- The need for parcel assembly is a major challenge for redevelopment.
- Some segments (e.g. Glenwood) lack urban levels of transportation systems and infrastructure.
- Existing development and development entitlements in some segments deter developer interest.
- Current economic conditions do not support higher-density, mixed-use redevelopment; a significant “market feasibility” gap remains
- There are significant gaps in the region’s “investment pipeline” (i.e. ability to attract and leverage private-sector investment) that will impede or slow desired changes
- Limited tools are available to incentivize private sector development
- Limited outside funding is available for incentivizing development, supporting affordable housing, and developing infrastructure
- There is currently no shared strategy for prioritizing investments in the region; competing interests for limited funds could limit the potential for transforming the area

Identity

- Some districts along the corridor have no defined role or vision
- There is no clearly identifiable connection to the river throughout most of the corridor, including from the University of Oregon, Glenwood, and the Laurel Hill Valley
- Riverfront areas do not feel safe for all users at all times, especially the area between Eugene and Glenwood
- The current mix of businesses along the corridor is limited mostly to motels, restaurants, and University of Oregon buildings in Eugene, and auto-oriented industrial and commercial uses in Glenwood
- The University of Oregon does not present a good, welcoming “front door” on Franklin Boulevard, although it has been improving over the last several years



Wayne L. Morse United States Courthouse



Rafters on the Willamette River in Downtown Eugene



Oregon Research Institute - University of Oregon Riverfront Research Park

Analysis continued

Transportation

- Franklin Boulevard between Eugene and Springfield is a highway and feels like one
- The current design of Franklin Boulevard is not conducive to walking, biking, or pedestrian-oriented retail and siting of housing.
- Franklin Boulevard and the EmX are not directly connected to the western parts of the corridor

Access and Equity

- Redevelopment for market-rate housing is typically expensive and could displace lower-cost housing in some areas of the corridor, or limit opportunities for lower-income households
- There is a lack of affordable housing in the area except for fragmented neighborhoods in Glenwood

2.4 Existing Planning Framework

Over the past decade, partner agencies have already put a number of well-crafted plans in place that directly and indirectly support the River Districts vision. These plans cover topics ranging from transportation systems, parks, and community-wide plans and policies to “area plans” for individual districts along the Franklin corridor. Relevant examples include:

Regional

- Regional Prosperity Plan (job creation)
- Consolidated Plan (fair housing)
- Metropolitan Area General Plan (land use policy)
- Regional Transportation Plan
- Willamette River Open Space Vision and Action Plan
- Lane Transit District Long Range Transit Plan

Citywide

- Springfield 2030 Plan
- Envision Eugene
- Springfield and Eugene Transportation System Plans
- Eugene Climate and Energy Action Plan

District Level

- Glenwood Refinement Plan
- Walnut Station Specific Area Plan
- Eugene Downtown Riverfront Master Plan
- Eugene Courthouse District Concept Plan
- University of Oregon Campus Plan
- Riverfront Research Park Master Plan (adopted master plan – the enabling conditional use permit expired in 2012; a new plan and permit is needed needs to be adopted before additional development can take place)
- The GREAT (Goshen Region Employment and Transition) Plan

Although the River Districts concept unites these plans under a higher-level, cooperative vision that is greater than the sum of the parts, a few of the “big moves” are already set forth in existing plans. In general, plans call for walkable, higher density, mixed use redevelopment of the River Districts with stronger connections to the river and parks. Specific ideas are set forth for including new public spaces, transitions between development areas and nearby neighborhoods, and special treatment of Franklin Boulevard to serve the EmX system, vehicles, and people walking and biking equally. Partner agencies have made significant investments in recent years towards these goals, and plans call for further investments in coming years.

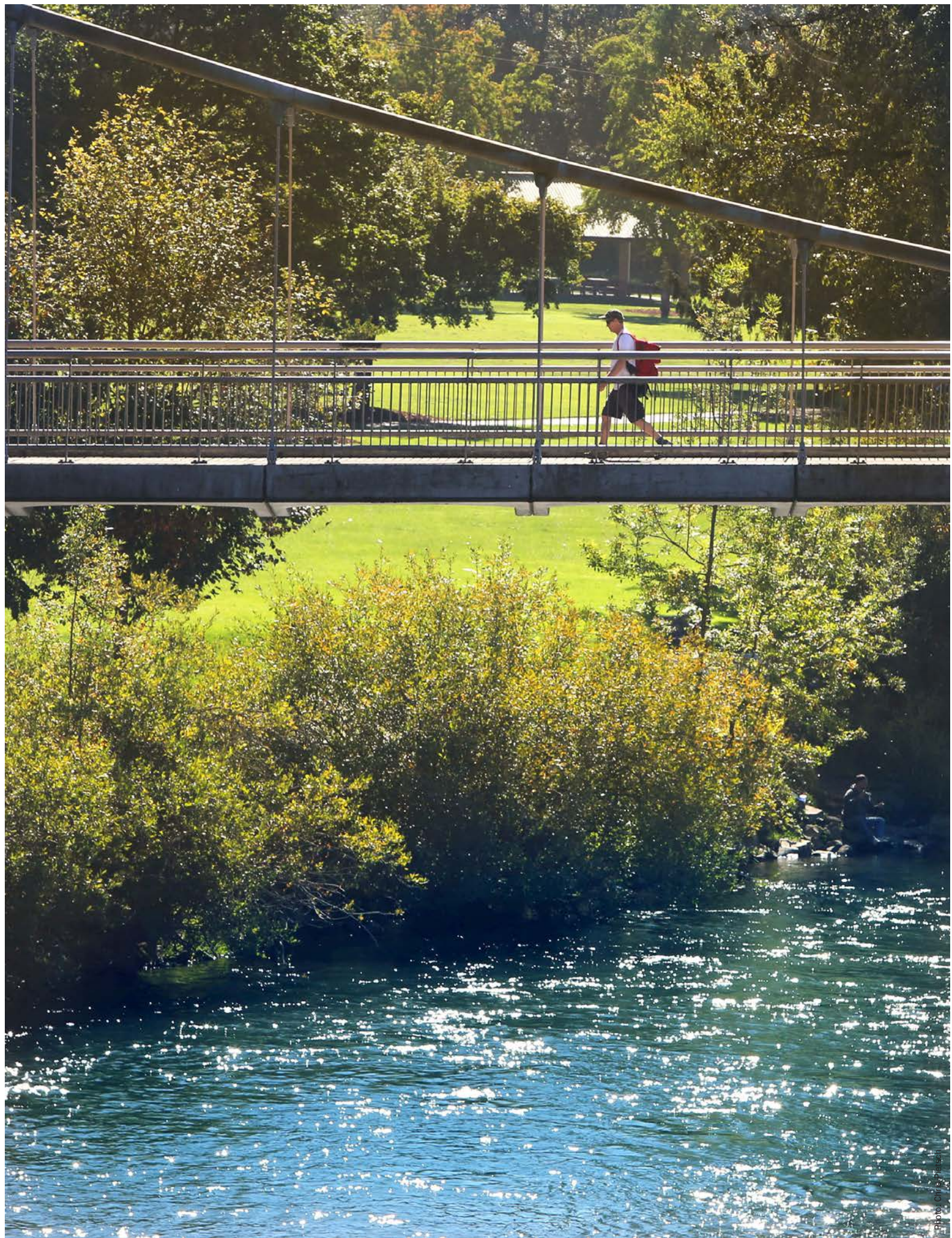
In addition to these “big moves,” both Eugene and Springfield are in the process of adopting growth strategies that depend on major commercial and residential redevelopment in core areas, including the River Districts. To speed things along, local discussions are also underway to find ways to close the “financial feasibility gap” through programs such as urban renewal and tax exemptions.

Given this solid foundation, the River Districts concept is poised for success because it helps accelerate progress in the right direction. Greater focus and cooperation are likely to strengthen agreed-upon efforts that are already underway, uncover new ways to make the most of limited resources, and create a positive feedback loop between the districts and agency goals.



3

Implementation



Section 3

Implementation

3.1 Working Strategy

The key to making the River Districts vision a reality will be to maintain cooperation between agencies as each agency pursues respective goals, and, more importantly, to work together to prioritize and secure funding for efforts that unify the Districts – both physically and conceptually. To accomplish this, agencies will need to extend cooperation beyond the scope of the Lane Livability Consortium by making time for meaningful coordination at leadership and staff levels. These “good habits” of collaboration will need to be a part of each agency’s work plan, including funding, and should transcend individual staff and administrations to be durable over the long term. Below are two key milestones to aim for in accomplishing this goal:

Milestone 1: Within six months following completion of the Lane Livability Consortium work plan, agencies have met at least once at both the leadership and staff levels with the specific intent of implementing the River Districts concept.

Milestone 2: Within 12 months, partner agencies have authorized one or more priority actions towards achieving the cooperative vision.

3.2 Logistical Hurdles to Implementation

Partner agencies face several important hurdles that must be recognized and overcome in order for the project to succeed. A few of these hurdles, as well as possible solutions, are listed below.

- Each agency must be responsive to a different constituency with differing values and priorities. These priorities may sometimes be at odds with cooperative goals and cause significant delays or road blocks to making progress.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION: Find common ground within the mission and goals of each agency upon which to build the project.

- Following the economic crisis of 2008, funding for public services has fallen dramatically. Agencies are struggling to meet basic needs and are forced to make tough budgetary choices. Identifying funding for

cooperation on efforts beyond immediate needs and services presents a serious challenge.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION: Focus on the long-term value of investments as essential in helping the region recover, prosper, and be more resilient during future economic down turns. Also, reach out to the philanthropic community.

- Making and keeping commitments to partners can create a sense of lost autonomy for individual agencies. This creates a risk of backlash – especially during critical decisions – that can set efforts back.

POSSIBLE SOLUTION: Frame decisions in terms of a greater responsibility to, and benefit for, the region as a whole. Focus on benefits that overlap boundaries and seek ways to leverage them between agencies.

3.3 Next Steps

The task team identified several next steps that could be taken over the next 12 months that will move the region towards implementing the River Districts vision.

- **Recognize a formal partnership** to implement the River Districts; identify and authorize staff to work together on a trial or limited-duration basis
- **Engage key stakeholders** in a convening (i.e. interagency consultation) that focuses on agencies and organizations with a regional perspective
- **Develop an action plan** steps that identifies priorities/phasing, lead agency, cooperative roles, and future collaboration needs
- **Develop high-level cost estimates** and list potential funding sources for capital, development and planning-related projects
- **Identify priorities** for infrastructure funding projects within and across jurisdictions
- **Identify contributing efforts** or investments planned to occur over the next 2 years for each agency
- **Refine project goals** using tangible metrics and benchmarks from other products of the Lane Livability Consortium, including the results and recommendations of the Economic Opportunities Analysis.
- **Recruit an outside topic expert** or consultant to advise on potential catalytic investments