



RIVERFRONT PARK

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES

Winner: 2021 ULI Americas Awards for Excellence, Urban Open Space Category



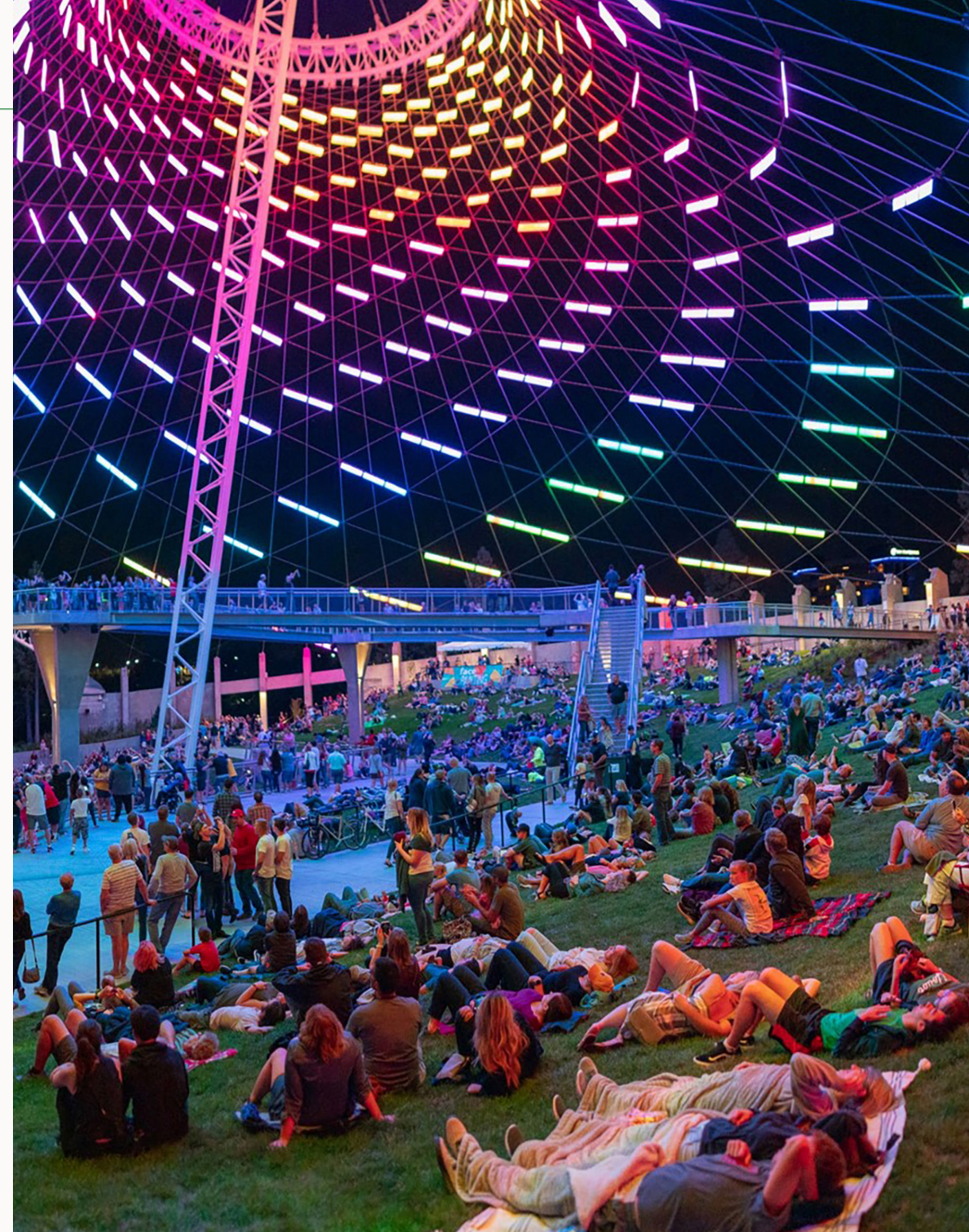
Riverfront Park in Spokane, Washington, was designed to reconnect people to the Spokane River, restore ecology, reengage with the heritage of the Spokane Tribe, and serve as a venue for community events. Designated as parkland after its use as the site of the 1974 World's Fair—the first fair to focus on the environment—the park now boasts a redesign that is accessible and environmentally sustainable and pays homage to the history of the site.

Owner/developer: City of Spokane Parks and Recreation

Designers: Berger Partnership, NAC Architecture, Jacobs, Dark Light Design, Land Expressions, Garco Construction, Hill International, Walker Construction, DH, GuildWorks LLC, Stantec Engineers, Bernardo Wills, SPVV

Size: 100 acres (40.5 ha)

Cover Image: (Kelly Beck)



The Riverfront Park Pavilion was designed to easily transform into a venue to welcome civic events and performances for up to 5,000 attendees. (Miles Bergsma)

Park Overview

Sitting along the banks of the Spokane River, Riverfront Park has become a jewel for downtown Spokane. The 100-acre (40.5 ha) site was once the fishing grounds of the Spokane Tribe and, subsequently, was used by the railroad industry due to the strength of nearby waterfalls.

The site was used for the 1974 World's Fair and it has remained public park space ever since. Forty years after the fair, Spokane's residents overwhelmingly approved a \$64 million bond for park improvements, which led to the reimagined Riverfront Park that exists today.

The waterfalls and three river channels surrounding Riverfront Park create three distinct park zones: the South Bank, the Islands, and the North Bank. These zones are linked by the new Howard Street Promenade, a pedestrian path stretching from downtown to the arena, which provides a long-missing link in the Centennial Trail, a 63-mile (101 km) shared-use trail corridor that extends from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to west of downtown Spokane.

Today, Riverfront Park welcomes 3 million visitors annually and supports a healthy, active community through improved accessibility to open space for people of all abilities and plentiful free or low-cost programming. Park improvements include increased green space, safer pathways with lighting, an accessible playground, an interactive fountain, a café, a gondola over the falls, a recreational facility, fitness classes in partnership with local businesses, storytelling with members of the Spokane Tribe, markets and food trucks, a concert series, and community festivals.

Social Equity and Community Engagement

A robust community engagement strategy, starting with building initial support for a \$64 million bond that was passed by voters in 2014, included outreach to the general public and targeted stakeholder groups, such as the disabled and arts communities and the Spokane Tribe. Advisory groups, including a Citizens Advisory Committee, Design Steering Committee, Public Art Committee, Park Board, and Accessibility Workgroup, helped launch the project and ensured that a broad range of voices were incorporated. The Accessibility Workgroup in particular profoundly shaped the park's design. In response to the workgroup's feedback, a differentiated-color/textured border was added to pathways to help those with sight impairments distinguish the edge more clearly.

The heritage of the Spokane Tribe also helped shape the park. In particular, the Islands park zone, which includes two islands formed by the channels of the Spokane River, celebrates the tribe. Snxw Mene? (*sin-hoo-men-huh*, which translates to "salmon people") Island was renamed by the Spokane Tribe in 2017 and is now a place that tells the story of the tribe's evolving culture. Also, Riverfront Park is home to the Gathering at the Falls Pow Wow, an annual celebration of Native American arts and culture.

Throughout the community engagement process, celebrations included participatory art projects for the park. Engagement included over 300 community gatherings and survey opportunities that collected information from thousands of people.



The Howard Street Promenade crosses three bridges and two islands, including the tribally renamed Snxw Mene? (*sin-hoo-men-huh*, Salmon People Island) to unify the park from the South Bank to the park's new North Bank. (*Built Work Photography*)

The community has embraced the reinvented Riverfront Park, observable through engagement on social media and conversations with people using the park. And a new Community Engagement department within the city government includes dedicated staff members who program the park with free and low-cost activities. To ensure equitable access, three signature park experiences—the Looff Carousel, the Numerica Skate Ribbon, and the Numerica SkyRide gondola—offer free admission on select days.

Resilience and Sustainability

Environmental resilience strategies informed the park's design in large part due to the site's industrial past. The river, falls, and parkland had suffered environmental damage and contamination. The site is now protected in perpetuity as public open space.

The project's underlying geology and its industrial history profoundly influenced design strategies, soil management, and stormwater treatment, with all surfaces now draining to lined stormwater gardens, restoring the health of the riverfront. Furthermore, the revitalized park celebrates its eastern Washington setting with native plantings and restored shoreline ecology replacing once-hardened edges. New viewpoints and water access for visitors connect them physically and mentally to the river. The beauty of the region's native landscape has been restored for a new generation of park visitors.

Funding

The cost to redesign Riverfront Park totaled \$73 million. The primary funding was the aforementioned \$64 million bond passed by voters in 2014, with additional funding obtained through earned interest, corporate and family giving, naming rights, and grants from the Washington Department of Ecology and the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office.

The restoration of the site and the enhanced connectivity between Riverfront Park and the surrounding areas have spurred more than \$200 million of new investment adjacent to the park, including private commercial and residential projects and a \$65 million public sportsplex. An ongoing capital campaign—the Fund for Riverfront Spokane—was created to fund improvements beyond those covered by the original bond issue, and the Friends of Riverfront volunteer group has additional fundraising roles. These additional funding channels help ensure that the park's features and facilities continue to evolve to meet the community's needs.