



**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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## RIVERWALK NORTH COMMUNITY MEETING #1

Minutes | Meeting #1 | Augusta 20, 2025

Agenda:	Purpose:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Welcome</b><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Team Introduction</li><li>Welcome and Statement of Project Goals for Meeting</li><li>Project History and Where We Are</li></ol></li><li><b>Introduction to Brownfields Program &amp; Funding (Credere)</b><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What does Brownfields mean?</li><li>Why did this Project get funded?</li></ol></li><li><b>Review of the Project (Acorn)</b><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Current Alignment</li><li>Design Elements</li><li>Privacy + Other Neighborhood Considerations</li></ol></li><li><b>Neighborhood Feedback</b></li><li><b>Next Steps</b><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Larger Neighborhood Meeting (Sept/Oct)</li><li>Planning Board Public Hearing (Oct/Nov)</li><li>Follow-up Cohort Meetings (as needed/TBD)</li></ol></li></ol>	<p>The City of Westbrook hosted a community meeting to introduce and discuss the Riverwalk North project, a public access trail proposed along the northern side of the Presumpscot River. The team shared historical and environmental background, conceptual design elements, and solicited feedback from residents—particularly those directly abutting the site. Concerns centered around privacy, flooding, wildlife impacts, permitting, and overall project scope and vision.</p> <p>A follow up meeting, with a larger audience from around the neighborhood, will occur sometime in Sept/Oct.</p>
Attendance:	
<b>City of Westbrook</b> David Morse (Mayor) Robyn Saunders (Project Manager) Monique Cornett (Deputy Director of Economic Development) Chance Gagne (Administrative Assistant) Barry Dodd (Creative Services Administrator) Erin Gundersen (Assistant Project Manager) Jennie Franceschi (Director of Planning, Assessing, and Code Enforcement) Amy Faulkingham (City Councilor) Michael Shaughnessy (City Councilor) Missy Esty (WPD Recovery Liaison)	<b>Project Team</b> <b><u>Credere</u></b> Rip Patten, PE, LSP, LEED-AP Allison Drouin, PG, LG <b><u>Acorn Engineering</u></b> Alexis Del Vecchio, RLA Craig Burgess, PE

## 1. Welcome

- Robyn Saunders, City Project Manager, welcomed all + introduced the project team.
  - Clarified the meeting was specifically for abutters but open to public
  - Inquired about those that participated in Saccarappa Park Design Charrette (2 attendees) and Water Talks (0 attendees).
  - Indicated the project was funded by EPA Brownfields Grant.
- Robyn Saunders also reviewed the following project goals:
  - Environmental Cleanup + Brownfields Revitalization
  - Public Access + Connectivity (Closing the loop)
  - Funding Strategy + Fiscal Sustainability
  - Downtown Revitalization + Economic Vitality
  - Community Engagement + Inclusive Planning
  - Safe, Accessible + Environmentally Friendly Amenities

## 2. Project Background and Environmental History

- Rip Patten from Credere Associates presented a historical overview of the Riverwalk North site, showing land use evolution from the 1800s to today.
  - The site was previously part of an industrial corridor used for hydroelectric transmission from a now-removed dam.
  - The land was acquired by the City from Sappi after dam removal rendered the corridor obsolete for energy transmission.
  - The site qualifies for EPA Brownfields funding due to its industrial legacy.
- Environmental testing revealed:
  - Some metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) sporadically in soil.
  - Low levels of vinyl chloride previously detected in groundwater near the western end of the corridor.
  - General contamination levels like other urban areas.
- The project has been a long-term vision for the riverwalk as it was included in the 2000 Riverfront Master Plan, 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan, 2015 preliminary design, and then in 2023 City acquired the property making the project possible.

## 3. Funding and Brownfields Program Overview

- The project received \$4 million in EPA Brownfields funding in 2024.
- Funding is being used to support both environmental cleanup and design of the Riverwalk North trail.
- The Brownfields program helps enable redevelopment in downtown or formerly industrial areas by addressing contamination-related concerns. Brownfields program is being used on several projects throughout the City (three projects: Saccarappa Park, Riverwalk North, Mill Lane/Riverwalk West/Dana Street redevelopment).

## 4. Conceptual Design Presentation

- Acorn Engineering shared early conceptual ideas for the trail alignment and indicated the design builds upon the preliminary 2015 design.

- Proposed 10-foot-wide trail stretching from Bridge Street pedestrian bridge to Mentor Street.
- Combination of on-grade paths and raised boardwalks to minimize environmental impact to wetlands and floodway.
- One defined “pocket park” area and two river access points (e.g. for canoes).
- Focus on minimizing tree clearing and reducing intrusion into wetland and floodway zones.
- Vegetation plans include:
  - Removal of invasive species (knotweed, bittersweet) using targeted methods.
  - Replacement with native shrubs and ground covers.
- Final thought: it’s important to think of the Riverwalk North as part of the larger holistic park system in Westbrook to include Saccarappa Park, Riverbank Park, the existing riverwalk + boardwalk across the river, and future potential parks.

## 5. Permitting and Site Constraints

- Regulatory constraints include:
  - Maine DEP 25/75-foot shoreland zoning setbacks.
  - FEMA floodplain and floodway designations.
  - Natural Resource Protection Act (NRPA) review will be required due to proximity to river.
- Project design must balance access with preserving steep slopes, avoiding excessive clearing, and maintaining riparian habitat.
- Project will avoid triggering additional stormwater requirements by limiting impervious surfaces to less than 1 acre.

## 6. Public Concerns and Feedback

- **Privacy and Noise:**
  - Several residents, especially those on Water Street, raised concerns about trail proximity to homes and loss of privacy.
  - Suggestions included:
    - rerouting the trail to the front of affected homes and installing privacy fencing or buffers.
    - Using Garfield Street as the outlet instead of Water Street.
- **Flooding and Vegetation:**
  - Residents noted prior flooding events and expressed concern that vegetation removal could exacerbate water intrusion.
- **Wildlife and Environmental Impact:**
  - Concerns about habitat loss and riparian ecosystem degradation were raised.
  - Some attendees questioned whether:
    - the trail was necessary given ecological impacts.
    - The site can be a nature preserve.
- **Crime, Trash, and Safety:**
  - Residents raised concerns about trespassing, vandalism, and theft, noting the trail runs through backyards. They also questioned police and emergency access.
  - Concerns raised about inviting disruptive activity closer to homes and potential for unhoused population sleeping in tents.
  - Lighting, cameras, and privacy measures were requested.

- **Access and Design:**
  - Participants asked about trail termination points, potential connections to the Black Bridge or Cumberland Street; and expressed concern with current Black Bridge access point through parking lot and suggested a more “public” main access be added.
  - Safety for children and people with disabilities was a concern, especially with river proximity on Riverwalk North compared to the existing south side riverwalk.
  - There is a current issue with fishing and trespassing. Residents requested access improvements to accommodate frequent fishing be considered.
- **Community Vision:**
  - Multiple residents expressed a desire for a broader plan that includes sidewalk improvements (particularly along Brown Street), traffic calming, plan for complete connection of the Riverwalk across the river (i.e., a complete loop) and city-wide pedestrian infrastructure. (Note: City clarified the limitation of extending the project to streetscapes was due to limitation on the EPA Brownfields funding and where and how it could be used.)
  - Others supported the project’s goals, seeing it as a tool for economic revitalization and neighborhood enhancement.
  - Residents asked for examples of successful projects in other towns, such as Back Cove trail as an example, which was largely unpopular at its inception but is now hugely popular and part of the area’s desirability.
  - Residents expressed excitement that pedestrian improvements like the Riverwalk could return the downtown to the bustling City center it once was.
- **Other**
  - Some questioned the stability of the EPA funding to ensure it will still be available once the project is ready for construction. The City indicated the Brownfields Program is supported by both political parties and has not been subject to any discussions regarding reduction of funding.
  - Questions were raised about:
    - compliance with Shoreland Zoning laws (permit is required or advisable?).
    - cost for maintenance and upkeep.

## 7. Next Steps

- The project team will:
  - Review and integrate community input.
  - Reevaluate trail alignment, privacy strategies, and flood mitigation.
  - Conduct further site assessments, including geotechnical analysis.
- The City plans to:
  - Hold a second, larger community meeting in late September or early October.
  - Submit the project for Planning Board review in late 2025, then begin permitting and design revisions.
- Anticipated construction starts: Late 2026 with completion extending into late 2027.
- Residents were asked to sign in and note if they wanted one-on-one property meetings.

## 8. Public Concerns and Feedback

- Explore rerouting trails around Water Street homes to protect privacy.
- Investigate additional privacy features, such as fencing and dense vegetation buffers.

- City to analyze stormwater and flooding concerns near River and Water Streets.
- DEP permitting process to be initiated for trail segments within 25-foot setback.
- Bring back comparable project examples from other cities (before/after photos, outcomes).
- Schedule second public meeting for September/October with wider community invite.
- Follow up with residents requesting private property meetings (via sign-in sheet).
- Explore lighting, safety, and surveillance strategies for the trail, especially near residential zones.
- Evaluate long-term sidewalk and traffic calming improvements (though not part of this project's funding). Consider the "bigger picture" as part of the conceptual design.