

Customer Information

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Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay District (SPROD)

Purpose: Overlay districts provide an opportunity to create new development projects which are more compatible with their neighbors, are designed to be pedestrian friendly in both design and scale, and will encourage creativity, variety and excellence in design and layout.

The City of Milwaukee has placed a great emphasis on the full utilization and appreciation of the Milwaukee River. A continuous system of riverwalks on both sides of the Milwaukee River will be a tremendous asset and amenity for all citizens of Milwaukee. The overlay district is for the middle and upper portions of the Milwaukee River extending from the Harbor northward to East Pleasant Street. The City Plan Commission must approve all projects located within 50 feet landward of the existing dock wall.

Following are the guidelines that have been approved by the City of Milwaukee Common Council:

1. Buildings areas facing the Milwaukee River should contain architectural features such as doors and windows which improve their appearance and provide a pleasant pedestrian environment.

2. Site features which detract from the use and redevelopment of the river's edge will be discouraged. Features such as blank walls; chain link fencing, barb razor or concertina wire; utility doors and staircases; service drives; loading docks; parking areas; outdoor storage; electrical or mechanical equipment; trash containers or other building maintenance facilities or equipment; ventilator exhausts; and concrete road barriers and guard rails, if required by necessity shall be screened from river areas.

3. Where a soft river edge still exists along the middle river, preserve natural river banks and historic elements of the built environment.

4. Where historic buildings exist along the river, preserve those historic elements of the built environment.

5. Riverwalk landscaping should include native species of trees, plants and shrubs with trees planted, in order of preference, in the ground, in box-outs with protective guards and grates, or in planters.

6. Riverwalk landscaping should emphasize plant species which provide year-round interest.

7. Riverwalks should be on the land side of the river where feasible. To provide space for amenities such as benches, planters, light poles, trash containers, trees and railings, riverwalks should typically be 12 feet wide at a 0 to 5 percent slope with a minimum 8 ft. unobstructed corridor and be open to the general public 24 hours a day at no charge.

8. If land side riverwalks are not feasible, walkways that float on or extend over the water may be considered if they do not obstruct navigation, and do not have permanent roofs, and match the high quality of permanent riverwalks.

9. Special amenity/activity areas are encouraged but shall be limited to a maximum of 3,200 square feet, must be open to the public; shall not block pedestrian movements on the riverwalk and shall not encroach into navigable waters.

10. Riverwalks must be passable year round and be handicapped accessible.

11. Walkways, seating areas and other high traffic areas should complement adjacent buildings and neighborhoods, be aesthetically pleasing and pedestrian-friendly and should be paved with brick, tile, stone, decorative concrete or other attractive hard material; avoiding large expanses of slab concrete or asphalt.

12. Lighting units shall be the Milwaukee Harp fixtures providing illumination in accordance

with standards recommended by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IES) and approved by the Commissioner of Public Works.

13. All segments of the riverwalk shall be designed to connect to other portions of the riverwalk system or to connect to adjacent portions of the riverwalk system if they already exist.

14. Structures built within 50 feet of bridges must not obstruct bridge maintenance.

15. Floating riverwalks will be permitted under bridges if there is a minimum 7 ft. clearance and if the connection will not obstruct navigation or bridge operations.

16. Finger piers will only be permitted where they will not obstruct navigation or extend more than 40 ft. from the dockline.

17. Temporary moorings (less than 4 hours) for water taxis and tour boats will be permitted riverward of any amenity/activity area subject to navigation restrictions.

18. Parking adjacent to the river is strongly discouraged. Parking areas, service drives, loading docks and outdoor storage areas shall provide an appropriate buffer and/or adequate landscaped setbacks from the river/riverwalk. Parking areas shall devote at least 3.33 percent of their area to interior landscaping.

Submittal checklist

The following items must be submitted to the City Plan Commission as part of an application for approval of a project within the established Site Plan Review Overlay District for the Riverwalk:

1. Current condition site survey.
2. Site Plan/s with the following information:
 - a. Dashed line indicating the location of the riverwalk overlay. This area is 50 feet landward of the existing dock wall.
 - b. Location and lot coverage of all new structures and structures to be altered.
 - c. Location, type and size of all proposed landscaping.
 - d. Location, design and amount of any proposed off-street parking
 - e. Location and size of all proposed curb cuts.
 - f. Location and design of all proposed loading or unloading facilities.
 - g. Location and size of any proposed exterior signs.
 - h. Proposed topography at 2-foot intervals if different than the existing topography.
 - i. Location of all proposed refuse stations and receptacles and types of screening.
 - j. Proposed drainage provisions, retaining walls, planting, anti-erosion devices or other protective devices to be constructed in connection with the project.
3. Riverwalk site plan. This plan should be at a larger scale to clearly depict materials and control joints/scores in surface material, location of lighting, railing and other riverwalk amenities.
4. Elevations of each side of the exterior of any existing or proposed building and/or structure located within the overlay district indicating materials.
5. Pictures of the site and surrounding context. This can be submitted as photographs, printed scanned images or in a digital format but cannot exceed 8.5" x 11".

8 sets of plans- 11" x 17", 1 set of plans- 24" x 36" in size, electronic copy (.pdf) of submittal, and application must be submitted to Planning Administration at least 2 weeks and 1 day prior to the scheduled City Plan Commission meeting.