Western New York Land Conservancy Unveils ‘The Riverline’: The New Name for Buffalo's Former DL&W Corridor

On Tuesday, November 19, at a press conference held at Tewksbury Lodge, the Western New York Land Conservancy unveiled “The Riverline,” the new name for the DL&W Corridor project.

The one-and-a-half-mile former rail corridor running from Canalside to the Buffalo River across from the new Tesla solar panel manufacturing facility at Riverbend is slated to become a new nature-centered public space. The Land Conservancy is transforming this corridor into an iconic, innovative, and inspiring nature trail and greenway as it crosses through the Old First Ward, Perry, and Valley neighborhoods.

During the past year, the Land Conservancy worked with Block Club, a local branding, strategy, and content agency, to develop the name, identity, and website for the project based on almost two years of feedback and input received throughout a community vision and design ideas process.

The Riverline name reflects elements of the project that community members identified as important to them: the connections this new nature trail and greenway will make through the neighborhoods it crosses and the influence the adjacent waterways have had on the land surrounding the project for centuries.

Sections of the trail will have names that also reflect the heritage of the corridor and the natural elements that are reclaiming it after decades of human neglect. “The Del” is a nod to the elevated berms that run the corridor through Perry and the Old First Ward; “The Junctures” is where the trail navigates other existing and legacy rail infrastructure; and “The Basswoods” designates re-naturalized areas along the trail where native Basswood trees previously flourished and will soon rise again.
Land Conservancy Executive Director Nancy Smith said, “We are thrilled to share this new name, identity, and website with our community. Block Club was a smart, strategic, and creative partner for us throughout this process. The team at Block Club carefully considered the community vision, the neighborhoods surrounding The Riverline, the design ideas process, and the history of the region. We couldn’t be happier with their collaborative process and work. When it is completed, The Riverline will be a corridor of connections, connecting people to each other and to nature. It promises to attract new investments, strengthening our economic vibrancy and quality of life.”

Echoing this sentiment, Congressman Brian Higgins added, “Water is one of Western New York’s most defining and vital resources, and an important source of the revitalization now taking place in Buffalo and in our region. As a ribbon of green, from the Buffalo River to Canalside, The Riverline will provide new public access and tangible benefits made possible by decades of efforts to increase the health of our fresh waters. It is an important next step in reclaiming our waterfront.”

“The Riverline will create new transportation options, giving Buffalonians the opportunity to walk or bike on what was once a railroad,” said Senator Tim Kennedy, Chair of the New York State Senate Transportation Committee. “Through this project, we will join other major American cities that have found creative ways to integrate their former rails into the fabric of their civic life.”

The Land Conservancy also released a short video, produced by Paget Films, that captures the essence and magic of The Riverline. It can be viewed and shared at the project’s website, designed by Block Club in association with the Land Conservancy: theriverline.com.

The next phase of The Riverline will be the concept and schematic design phase, which is funded in part through a grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). This work will take place over the next year beginning in late 2019 and will include many opportunities for community engagement. The final trail design will build on all of the design proposals, not just the design winners (previously announced in June), and will be developed in partnership with the community and other partners.

“By providing an inspiring place for residents to get outdoors and explore, The Riverline will have a positive impact on all Western New Yorkers. With future connections to Buffalo Harbor State Park and the Empire State Trail, The Riverline promises to be a much-loved addition to the unfolding puzzle of unique Buffalo destinations. I am very pleased that Governor Cuomo and OPRHP are able to support the next phase of this endeavor,” said NYS Parks, Western District Director Mark V. Mistretta.

Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes agreed, adding: “The Riverline will have a profound impact on the health and wellness of the city’s residents, as it inspires our children and families to spend time in nature right in their own community.”
The Land Conservancy also received a grant from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Funds administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo to create an equitable development plan for this project, which will help ensure that it benefits the communities around The Riverline. These communities have engaged in this project from the start.

In recent months, the Land Conservancy also worked with partners to offer a calendar of community events and outdoor programs for residents living near the corridor, sponsored by BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York Blue Fund.

Sara Heidinger, the Old First Ward Community Association Board President and a businesswoman in the neighborhood, has been very active in recent Blue Fund events. For her, The Riverline “provides the chance to showcase the vibrant art and cultural heritage in the community as well as a way of responding to challenges.” A recent mobile food market by Urban Roots and Veggies made it possible for residents to access fresh local food, for example.

Perry Tenant Council President John Williams said that he “appreciates and has witnessed firsthand improvements to the Perry Community Garden and activities for community members to engage in art and habitat projects at Perry.”

Valley Community Association Executive Director Peg Overdorf has long been a determined and effective champion of her community. Overdorf looks forward to “ever expanding ways to connect our community programs with the river and a vibrant natural space.”

The Riverline project—including an International Design Ideas Competition executed earlier this year—was made possible through generous support from M&T Bank, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Funds administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York Blue Fund, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy through the Doppelt Family Trail Development Fund, numerous individual Land Conservancy members and donors, and the New York State Department of Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) and New York’s Environmental Protection Fund. The NYSCPP is administered by the Land Trust Alliance, in coordination with the state Department of Environmental Conservation. The total funding raised for the project to date is close to $1 million.

The Land Conservancy needs to raise another $200,000 by the end of the year to continue the next phase of the project. You can contribute by making an online donation at wnylc.org or by sending a check to P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052.

If you are interested in learning more about this project or the Land Conservancy, please visit the new website for The Riverline, developed by Block Club: theriverline.com. You can also reach out to the Land Conservancy at (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org.

The Western New York Land Conservancy is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for current and future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open
spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1000+ land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State. Land trusts have protected 56 million acres of land. For more information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of the Land Conservancy, please call (716) 687-1225 or visit wnylc.org.

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