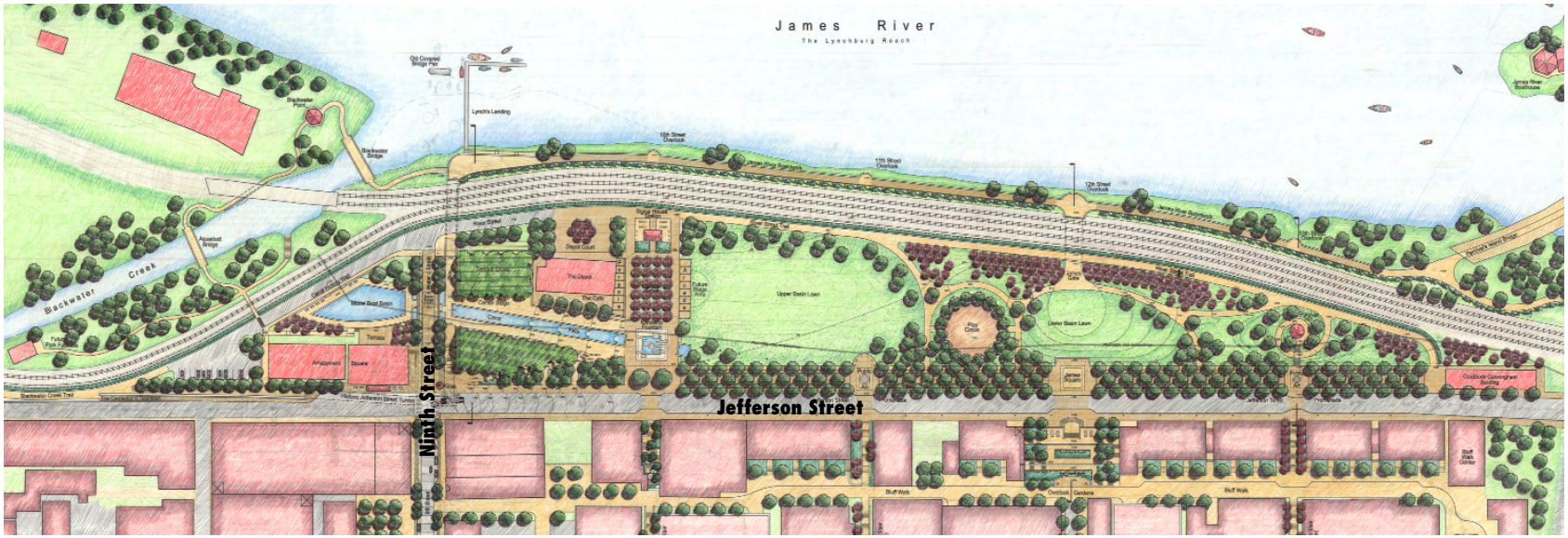
2. JAMES RIVER PARK

The James River is a unique attribute of downtown Lynchburg and should be celebrated as a natural, historic, and cultural resource for all citizens. A well-designed, high-quality civic space along the riverfront area will strengthen the downtown's image to visitors and residents alike and will provide a large civic gathering space for downtown festivals and events. As a distinct feature of Lynchburg, the history of the riverfront will be incorporated into the park elements, including the canal, the canal bridge, the train tunnel, and a landing for small boats at the foot of Ninth Street.

The riverfront area is envisioned as a park and open space that provides a significant amenity for new and renovated warehouse buildings along the length of the south side of Jefferson Street. Four historic buildings will sit within the park space to provide unique destinations, services, and activities. These include Amazement Square children's museum, the depot building as a possible restaurant, the train switching station relocated to provide rest rooms and/or bicycle rentals, and the existing office building of Craddock & Cunningham Architectural Partners and McBrattney/Sisson.

While the park will be in the 100-year floodplain, no new buildings are planned in the floodplain area. The two that will be restored (the N & W Depot and the Switching Station) will be used for commercial and not residential uses. Plantings and materials will be chosen with the floodplain in mind to ensure durability during flood events. The N.B. Handy Metal building, the Conner Produce building, the J.W. Wood Produce building, and the former Pride of Virginia Meats building may be removed, allowing the north side of Jefferson Street to be predominantly open space.



Rendered Plan of James Riverfront Park

The programming of the park space must account for use by a range of people at different times of the day and evening and at different seasons of the year, including schoolchildren visiting Amazement Square, families, the elderly, lunchtime employees, downtown neighborhood residents, and tourists. People will use the park for active recreation such as running, bicycling, and rollerblading along the trail systems, and boating and fishing along the river. A variety of large and small spaces within the park will allow people to relax, stroll, and, at times, watch informal performances. Programmed special events might include small concerts, art shows, cultural festivals, and street fairs that will draw people to the waterfront and complement nearby activities. Several Citizens have discussed the possibility of a George Stewart Memorial Park in the riverfront area.

The 13-acre riverfront area is situated on a broad terrace approximately 25 feet above the water level and is currently separated from the water's edge by three active rail lines. One of these rail lines needs to be relocated to run parallel to the other two, thereby consolidating the rail corridor and gaining more parkland. The majority of the warehouse buildings along the south side of Jefferson Street are vacant and several have been lost over the years. Within this former industrial environment, a series of programmed festivals and events have been held including:

- The James River Extreme Festival, featuring athletic competitions (triathlons, skateboarding, etc.)
- The Cultural Connection, featuring food and entertainment
- Amazement Square Cultural Festival for Kids featuring multicultural activities, music, crafts, food and performances
- Something Big, featuring food, music and children's workshops
- Hill City Music Festival, featuring food, music and children's workshops
- The Fair by the James, featuring rides, amusements, concerts, and food
- A River of Time, featuring Lynchburg history and launching of the *Bateaux*
- Blues by the James, featuring music and food
- 5Ks on Percival's Island, featuring seven monthly races from April through October
- National Trails Day, featuring education about and promotion of outdoor and environmental issues

While most of these festivals and entertainments have minimal impact on the grounds and infrastructure of the riverfront, others, such as Fair by the James, are high-impact events and may require new locations when the new Riverfront Park is built (see Section 8.14 for possible relocations).

A major sewer interceptor is located in the old canal bed. As part of the Army Corps of Engineers' study to replace combined sewer overflows along the James River (CSO/Sewer Interceptor Project), the interceptor is scheduled to be replaced by a 72-inch-diameter line in the next five to seven years. Currently, Jefferson Street is used as a truck route for local industries and for through-traffic to and from the Concord Turnpike and the regional highway system. While some of this truck traffic can be reduced in the near term, the reconnection of Commerce Street and Washington Street will be required to reroute it completely.

The distinctive areas within the park are described on the following pages. Each area is planned as a separate implementation project in order to respond to funding opportunities and the phasing of the CSO replacement.

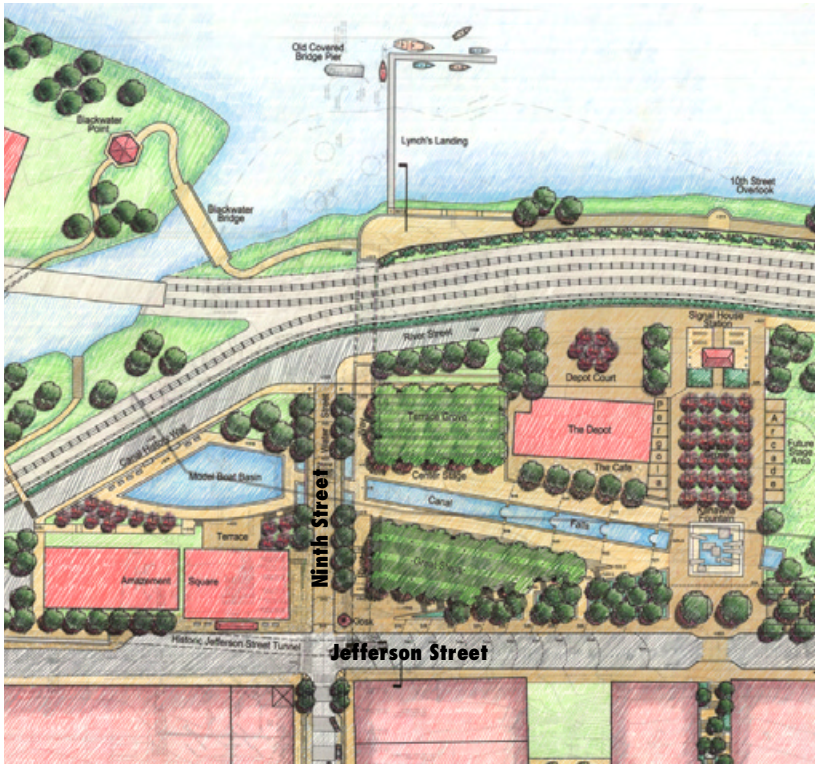
2.1 Canal Park at Amazement Square

The foot of Ninth Street will be a very active and exciting zone where the City engages the riverfront. At this location, the industrial infrastructure of the past will come together, and the urban character of the park will incorporate these historic references. The historic structures in the riverfront park also will be concentrated in this area, framing the open space and providing activity. Amazement Square will house a first-rate children's museum; the Depot building could have a destination restaurant with offices above; and the relocated Signal House is programmed for rest rooms and perhaps for bicycle rentals or other visitor services.

A portion of the canal will be restored, anchored by a fountain at one end flowing down to a Model Boat Basin near Amazement Square. At Ninth Street, the canal and pedestrian walkway will pass underneath the restored stone bridge. Along the canal, the land will rise up in a series of terraces and steps to meet the grades at the corner of Ninth and Jefferson Streets and along the railroad bed, forming a small bowl or amphitheater for informal outdoor performances. Shade trees will grace the levels of the stairs and terraces as respite from the hot summer sun.

The historic railroad tunnel extends under Jefferson Street along the length of the Amazement Square property and will daylight into the Canal Park area. With proper lighting, security and interaction with Amazement Square exhibits, this tunnel could provide a unique pedestrian and/or bicycle link from the Blackwater Creek trails directly into Canal Park.

Vehicular access will be maintained across the Kanawha Bridge to serve truck-loading functions at Amazement Square and to serve visitor drop-off and truck-loading functions at the restaurant targeted for the Depot building. The bicycle path connecting the Blackwater Creek trails to the James Riverfront will follow parallel to the railroad track along this access drive until Ninth Street, where bicyclists can choose to go to the riverfront, to Jefferson Street, or up Ninth Street to downtown. Ultimately, a wide, graceful underpass beneath the railroad tracks at the foot of Ninth Street is needed to connect the park to the water's edge.



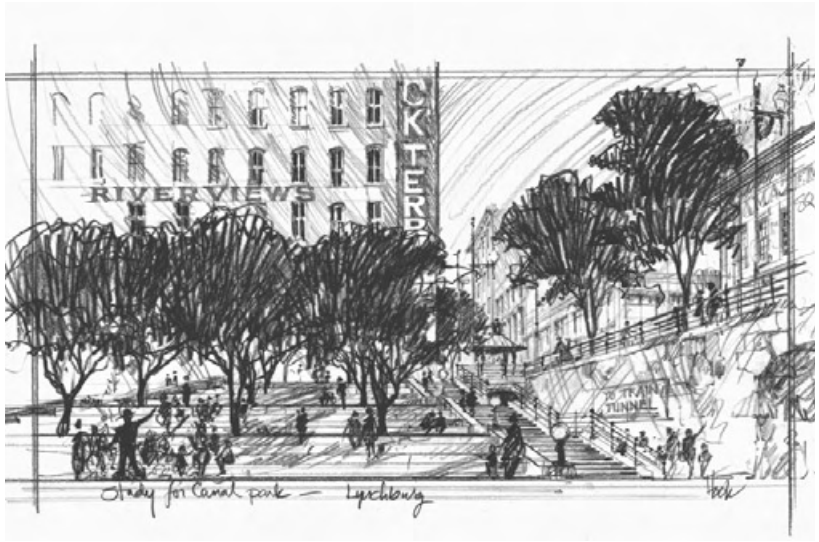
Detailed Plan of Canal Park

Sketch of Canal Terraces and Steps Looking West Toward Ninth Street Bridge

The canal terraces can be used for formal events or informal recreation.

Implementation Steps

- Coordinate with Amazement Square on the final design of the open space around the children's museum.
- Begin site preparation by negotiating with railroads and identifying funds for track relocation.
- Establish a definitive work limit line and schedule for the CSO/Sewer Interceptor project. Review those plans as they develop to maximize site preparation for the park and to ensure the feasibility of special park features, particularly the critical elevations under the Kanawha Bridge.
- Complete final design of the park as the sewer interceptor construction nears completion.



W.G. Hook

Sketch of Canal Park Looking South Toward Riverviews

2.2 Jefferson Street Promenade

The areas and activities within the James River Park will be organized along the spine of the Jefferson Street Promenade. Jefferson Street will become a narrower street serving the adjacent residential and mixed uses and accommodating on-street parking for park visitors. The street corridor will be defined by the warehouse and loft buildings on the south and a grand allée of trees along the edge of the park to the north. Under the shade of the trees a generous sidewalk with benches will allow for strolling, relaxing, and watching other park activities.

Three rows of trees will create a large area of shade and create a bold scale in keeping with the industrial scale of the loft buildings. The trees will be more successful if planted in continuous trenches. The overall promenade dimension will be 45 feet wide, with areas of ground cover planted over the tree trenches providing a soft contrast to the walking surfaces.

Along the length of the Promenade, the cross streets of the City grid (Tenth Street, Eleventh Street, etc.) will be marked with a special pavement design or a piece of public art. At the foot of Twelfth Street and the Overlook Terrace, a small plaza area will serve as a gateway into the park and could be used as an audience area for small events staged from the Overlook Terrace.

On the south side of the street, the existing warehouses and new infill loft buildings will create an edge to the park. Wherever possible, active ground floor uses, such as retail, should be encouraged. As residential buildings, the upper floors will provide the "eyes on the park" that promotes a feeling of safety for people in the park and also ensures a constituency that will advocate for the park and its maintenance over the long run.

On weekends, Jefferson Street could be closed to provide additional room for bicycling and rollerblading. The street could be closed during special events to allow gatherings or to accommodate street fairs, art shows, or other booths and venues under the trees.

Implementation Steps

- Purchase remaining land and buildings.
- Remove N.B. Handy Metal building and Pride of Virginia building.
- Complete construction documents for the streetscape, which could be implemented as an early phase of the park prior to the sewer interceptor.
- Relocate truck route off Jefferson Street as soon as feasible.

Sketch of Jefferson Street Looking West

Detail of Jefferson Street Promenade

Detail of Upper and Lower Basin Parks

This playground will complement Amazement Square as well as other park activities in the basins and along the river's edge.

At the eastern end of the James River Park, a small knoll will rise up above the height of the railroad tracks. A gazebo or other small structure at this location will allow views across the tracks to the river and to Percival's Island. The structure will also be visible from Percival's Island and other parts of the park and will serve as a point of reference and a destination for all parts of the James River Park area.

2.3 Upper/Lower Basin Lawns and Park Features

The grand lawns of the Upper and Lower Basins are named to recall the site's historic canal functions. They will provide broad open spaces that could be used for casual lawn seating, informal games, or as a seating area for music events. The Upper Basin will be a large, level space that will spill out from the Canal Park and the adjacent grove of trees. A band shell or stage at the northern end of this lawn could be either temporary or permanent, but should have the full electric service needed to host musical events.

The Lower Basin will open off the plaza at the foot of the Overlook Terrace. The gently sloping lawn and pathways will connect to an underpass under the railroad that leads directly to the river's edge at this key location.

The area between the Lower Basin and the Upper Basin is envisioned as a destination playground that will draw families to the James River Park.

Implementation Steps

- Seed area in the short term to allow for interim uses such as festivals.
- Site preparation requires negotiation with the railroads and the identification of funds for track relocation, as described under Canal Square.
- Similar to Canal Square, establish a definitive work limit line and the schedule for the CSO/Sewer Interceptor project in this area. Review those plans as they develop to maximize site preparation for the park.
- Complete final design of the park as the sewer interceptor construction nears completion.

2.4 Overlook Terrace

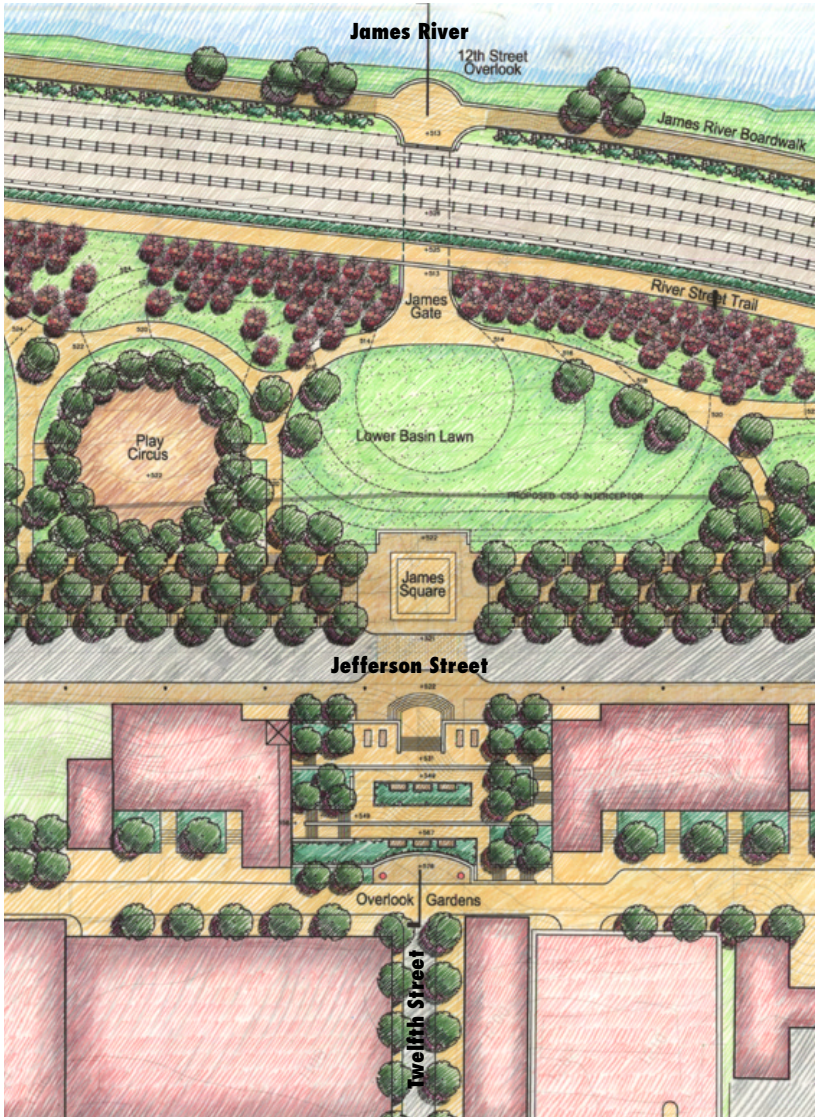
The Overlook Terrace will be built into the steep bluff overlooking the James River Park. The scale and detailing will recall the civic character of Monument Terrace, making a pair of landmarks that define Lynchburg. At the same time, the Overlook Terrace will provide the vital pedestrian connection between Twelfth Street and the riverfront, linking the upper city and the Community Market activities to the James River Park activities.

The Terrace will feature sets of stairs winding through planted landscape beds. Places to sit and rest under the shade of trees will be a key element. Public art could be integrated into the different landings, just as Monument Terrace incorporates war memorials.

New residential loft buildings will frame either side of the Overlook Terrace. A public elevator should be integrated into the massing of one of these new buildings to enhance access up and down the steep slope and to provide handicap access.

W.G. Hook

Sketch of Overlook Terrace Looking Toward Twelfth Street



Detail of Overlook Terrace Plan

2.5 James Riverwalk

The river's edge is a special zone that should be made more accessible in order to promote water's-edge activities, such as small boating and fishing. This will begin a new era in Lynchburg's riverfront—from an industrial past to a family recreation area in the future. The James Riverwalk also will become a significant link in the regional trail system that extends up Blackwater Creek and across to Percival's Island. While trail connections will be possible along the Jefferson Street Promenade and the upland portion of the James River Park, the river itself is a unique environment that can be experienced and interpreted in many ways as part of the local and regional open space system. The riverbank itself is quite steep and parallels the railroad tracks, with almost 25 feet of elevation difference between the water and the top of the bank.

Crossing the railroad tracks is the critical challenge for gaining access to the river's edge. The plan recommends two underpasses, one at the foot of Ninth Street and one at the foot of Twelfth Street. The two underpasses will need to be designed as broad, spacious areas that permit views through to the water and create a sense of light and safety for those using them. They should be perceived as bridge underpasses rather than tunnels. The two underpasses will permit emergency and service vehicles to enter into and exit from the Riverwalk.

Bridge overpass structures were explored as an option, however, they were ruled out because such structures would have to rise up approximately 25 feet above the tracks to provide adequate clearance for trains. On the water's edge they would need to descend approximately 50 feet to reach the water's edge. In order to meet handicap accessibility requirements, extensive ramping would be required (350 feet on the land side and 700 feet on the river side) or two elevators would be required. The objectives of emergency vehicular access could not be achieved with overpasses.

Large, open underpasses will lead to the riverfront.

The riverfront edge should be a magnet for different activities.

The Riverwalk will be approximately 12 feet wide with broader overlooks positioned at the point where the street grid would meet the water's edge. Benches, interpretive signs, and elements of public art could be accommodated at these points of rest along the trail. The interpretation could address the historic role of the river for transportation and industry, the history of the *bateaux* and other boats, the impact of the railroads, dramatic flood events, and the fish and wildlife found within the river environment.

Ninth Street will be a landing for small boats, recalling the original ferry landing in this location. The pier structure will extend over the gravel beach and out into deeper water and will be designed around the remnants of the bridge abutments. Interpretive material here could highlight the original ferry and the history of bridges over the river. The pier also will enhance fishing opportunities in the river.

Sketch of Riverwalk Looking West

Implementation Steps

- Compete final design of the Riverwalk and implement as funding is available. The river's edge walkway could be an early project that precedes the CSO/Sewer Interceptor project, and could also be separated from one or both of the railroad underpasses. In the latter case, the pedestrian connection from Percival's Island path would extend along the riverfront and end in a space wide enough for a turnaround at the foot of Ninth Street.
- Coordinate with the railroads and/or the US Army Corps of Engineers as necessary.

Bridges add character to the river as shown in this photograph of the original Ninth Street Bridge.

2.6 Riverfront Activities and River Crossings

Gaining pedestrian access to the Amherst County riverbank will create a sense of place in the riverfront zone, where people can enjoy activities on both sides of the river. In the short term, small boats and water taxis could provide a solution with minimal capital investment while also enlivening the waterfront. Alternatively, a longer route for pedestrians and bicyclists now exists with the new bridge between Percival's Island and the Amherst County side of the river.

Over the longer term, several other possibilities should be considered singularly or in combination to enhance these connections. The Business Route 29 Bridge has adequate space to include a pedestrian sidewalk/ bicycle route with a safety guard on the east side making the loop from Commerce Street to the access drive to the new Amherst County Park. This link will be particularly effective for bicycle access given the distances and the grades up and over the river.

Another possibility is to add a pedestrian/bicycle pathway within the bridge abutments underneath the Route 29 Expressway Bridge. This link is closer to the water and park level and will allow for access points from the south bank, the north bank, and Percival's Island. The structure of the highway bridge is in place and will require the design of the walkway system within this framework.

The third opportunity will be to construct a pedestrian bridge across the river near the foot of Ninth Street where the original covered bridge stood. This bridge will need to be designed to withstand flooding and/or to rise above the height of the 100-year floods. A bridge in this location will need to be designed to the highest standards given the visual prominence of this location at the foot of the Monument Terrace/Ninth Street corridor. Since the bridge could obstruct views of the water, an alternative location offset from the street right-of-way might be considered.