

What is, what can be ...  
a fresh look at the Memphis Riverfront

**Placemaking**  
with  
  
**PPS**  
on the  
Memphis  
riverfront.

Presented by:  
Friends for Our Riverfront  
Memphis Heritage  
Mid-South Planning  
& Zoning Institute  
Rhodes College

With support from:  
Crawford-Howard Fdn.  
Jack Robinson Gallery  
Simmons Graphics



*Presented by:*  
Friends for Our Riverfront,  
Memphis Heritage,  
Rhodes College Urban Studies  
Program,  
University of Memphis Planning  
and Zoning Institute.

*Sponsored by:*  
Crawford-Howard Foundation  
with support from  
Jack Robinson Gallery,  
Simmons Graphics,  
Gaskill Strategies.

On March 31, 2007 Project for Public Spaces (PPS) brought their expertise to Memphis for a fresh look at ways to enliven and enhance the public space along the riverfront.

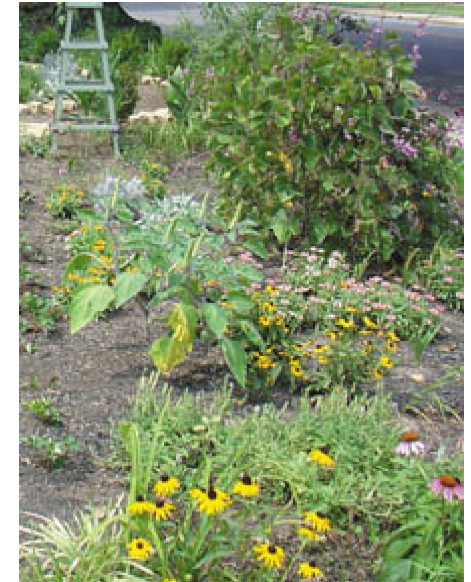


*The values of a community, its history, uniqueness, geography, and culture are all involved in a waterfront's renaissance. ...A waterfront project for a town resembles a blank canvas for an artist. Anything is possible, including a masterpiece.*

Project for Public Spaces

# Table of Contents

Introduction _____	2 - 3
Citizens Rate the Sites _____	4
Citizens See Ten Key Elements to Create an Inviting Riverfront _____	5 - 13
PPS Comments and Suggestions _____	14 -21
Partners for Cooperation _____	22





Presented by:  
Friends for Our Riverfront  
Memphis Heritage  
Mid-South Planning  
& Zoning Institute  
Rhodes College

With support from:  
Crawford-Howard Fdn.  
Jack Robinson Gallery  
Simmons Graphics

On March 31, 2007, several local groups and organizations united to bring Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to Memphis to assist our community in taking a fresh look at the Riverfront.

More than 100 Memphians participated in the “Placemaking” workshop to move forward in the exciting process of experimentation and celebration of our public spaces. The focus was on how to enhance and enliven the riverfront and stimulate economically sustainable redevelopment downtown. The workshop was an opportunity to learn more about what makes good public spaces and to move forward in re-creating spaces that we as a community will love and use.

PPS has worked with cities, governmental departments, and organizations world-wide to create dynamic public spaces that reflect and energize cities. Their track record is unbeatable and includes the Rockefeller Center and Bryant Park in New York City, Campus Martius Park in Detroit, and the French Market in New Orleans.







Fred Kent,  
Pres. & founder of PPS

Seven public spaces on the Memphis riverfront were analyzed (see map on page 2):

- (1) TN Visitors' Center, Parking Lots and Garage (Front St. between Jefferson and Adams)
- (2) Jefferson Davis Park
- (3) Cobblestone Landing
- (4) Fire Station & Parking Garage (Front St. between Union and Monroe)
- (5) Cossitt Library and US Post Office/future home of U of M law school, (Front St. between Union and Monroe)
- (6) Confederate Park
- (7) Court Square

Participants were divided into small groups. Each group went to one site, interviewed people there, evaluated the site's current status, and suggested improvements from short term goals of picking up trash, to longer term goals of removing parking garages. Many of the suggestions apply broadly to the riverfront as a whole, as well as directly to each public space, identifying the entire riverfront as a destination with several smaller destinations within it. The input has been grouped into ten categories of suggestions, Ten Key Ideas to Create a Unified Riverfront that can be enjoyed as our city's greatest public space.

PPS reviewed the public comments, made comparisons with successful public spaces, and formulated site specific suggestions for the Memphis riverfront.

The following report is based on a compilation of over 1,150 comments contributed by the participants regarding the future of our public spaces along the Memphis riverfront.



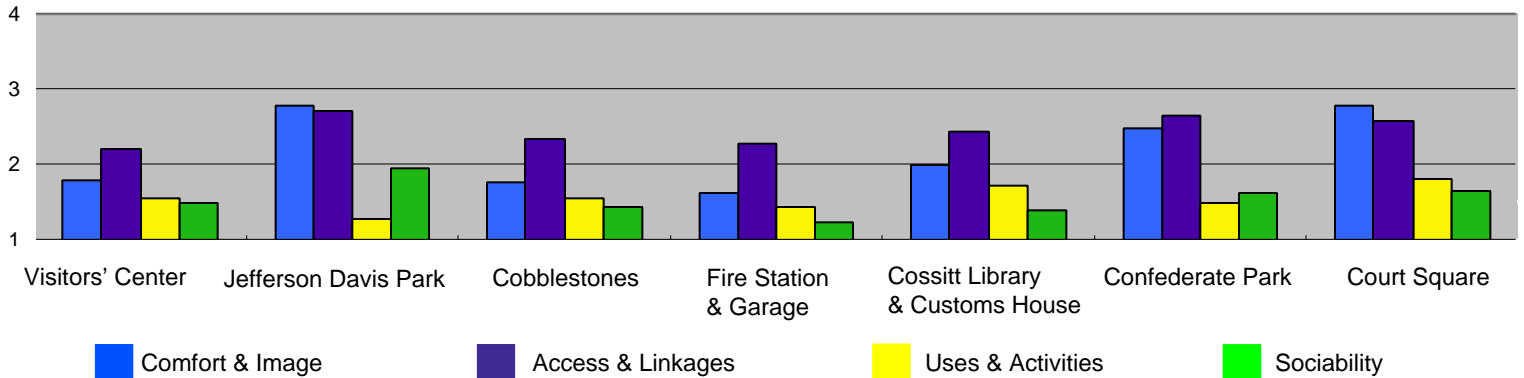
**During the workshop, participants looked at the seven Memphis sites, interviewed those there, and evaluated each based on its current level of**

- a) Comfort & Image: overall attractiveness, feeling of safety, cleanliness/quality of maintenance, comfort of seating
- b) Access & Links: visibility from a distance, ease in walking to the place, transit access, clarity of information/signs
- c) Uses & Activities: mix of stores/services, frequency of events/activities, overall busy-ness, economic vitality
- d) Sociability: number of people in groups, evidence of volunteerism, sense of pride and ownership, presence of children and seniors

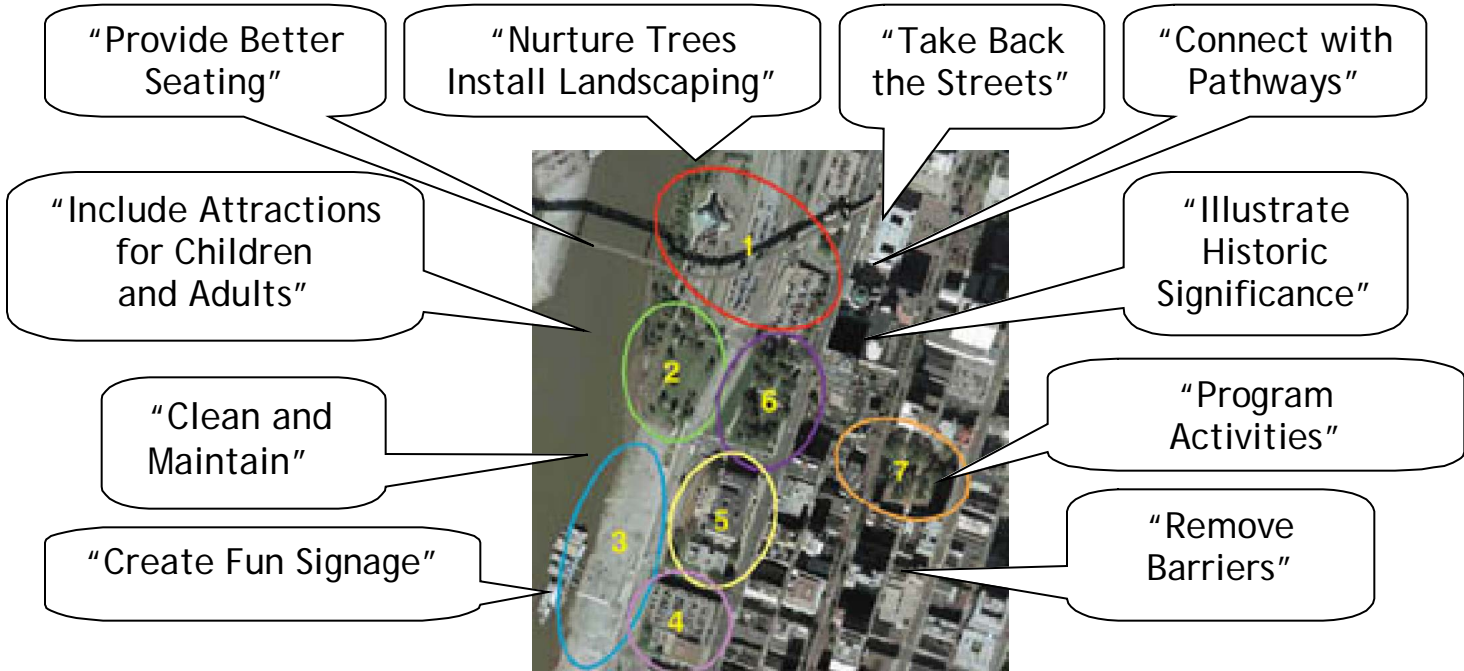
**Here's what they found:**



**Site Ratings on a scale of 1 - 4. 1 = Poor 4 = Good**



At the workshop, participants repeatedly voiced **10 Suggestions** in reference to all seven sites. They saw these 10 Ideas as keys to make the Memphis riverfront a comfortable and exciting destination.



*Downtown Memphis - Union to Adams along Wolf River Harbor*

## #1: “Create Fun Signage”

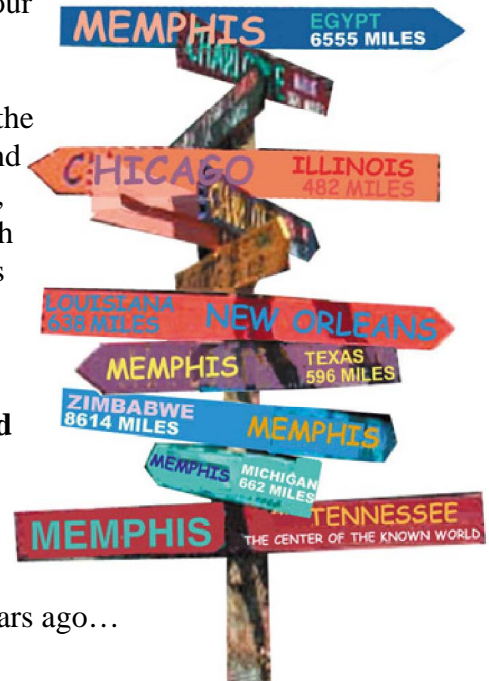
### Create a riverfront-wide, site-sensitive, illustrative system of fun facts and information...

...to inform and remind us, to educate and entertain our children, and to enlighten our city’s visitors. Visits to each of the seven selected sites brought back repeated requests for better signage. Plaques, signs, banners, impressions in the sidewalks, small info-kiosks, wooden stakes, tombstones...anything!

There is a great example at our main library. The sidewalk there shares ideas and information creatively with the pedestrian. It is engaging and intriguing. On the riverfront, signs could tell us about such things as the species of birds that visit the river’s edge or fish in the river.

### Give us a creative and

**connected system of signage that tells us who, what, when, where, why, and answers the question “so, what?”** Use the signage to give us event information and directions to nearby attractions. Tell us about the architecture and the landscape around us. A sculptural sign at the zero mile marker or along the railroad track could connect us to other parts of the city and to the world. Illustrate to us what we would see if we stood on this very spot 100 years ago... 200 years ago.





**#2: “Clean and Maintain”**

An even simpler improvement mentioned with unbelievable frequency, **“Clean and Maintain.” Make it a place we want to be.** To quote one answer, “Whoever is responsible for clean up needs to do it.” At the very front of our city are the cobblestones, which got the highest number of comments regarding a need to clean it up! “Clean the weeds and trash from the Cobblestones.” Stop the erosion, and repair the cobblestones. It’s really the least we can do for such a rare site. Keep the fountain in front of the library clean and maintain it so it works all year. The same for the fountain in Court Square. Clean up around the library. Strategically place well designed garbage cans so we can clean up after ourselves. Another place needing special attention is along the railroad tracks. Even Jefferson Davis Park, the cleanest of the sites according to the comments, received one criticism: clean up along the harbor. One suggestion was for a water garden that would clean stormwater run-off before it enters the harbor and create a sculptural educational place for people to play -- a way to make our riverfront not only respect the past but also be on the cutting-edge of environmental thought, education, and action.



*Living Water Garden, Chengdu, China*

**#3: “Include Attractions for Children (and Adults, too)”**

**PLAY. PLAY. PLAY.** The comments remind us that children like to play and adults like to breathe easy while their children are playing. There is not one single entity among all of these sites that is inviting to children. A very popular comment: “We want something for our children to do.” Put in play spaces, games, wading fountains, play equipment, kite rentals, sculptures, and a giant sprinkler in Jefferson Davis or Confederate Park. **ADD CHILDREN’S FEATURES.** Hang a big swing from one of the trees in one of our parks for adults and children. It is strongly suggested to incorporate education whenever possible, as long as you don’t take the fun out of it.

#### **#4: “Provide Better Seating”**

**Give us a place to sit, view, and visit.** “Add seating.” “Seating.” “Provide better seating.” “Improve seating for groups.” There is a great demand for **better**, perhaps sculptural, **seating!** Create some awesome seating to view our awesome river. The main access to the Cobblestones is one small, broken concrete stairway at the beginning of Monroe Street. It’s the only place near the Cobblestones to sit and watch the boats and the harbor at sunset.

Along the riverfront, participants point out, there are no places provided for us to gather and visit as a group. Even at the Visitors’ Center, where nice tables exist, access to the existing seating is blocked by a long concrete wall. We need creative solutions! Our main library, again, has an example in the children’s courtyard where a brightly colored S-shape bench features animal and plant tiles. It’s wonderful and simple. Allow landscaping elements to make interesting seating. Use earth terraces, large rocks, a bench made from driftwood. Please install conversational seating...provide portable seating...seating for groups or families... and a place to sit alone and read a book or just rest. Make it flexible.



### **#5: “Nurture Trees / Install Landscaping”**

**We love our trees, and visitors do, too.** Visitors to our city are overwhelmed by the beauty of our trees. They are a treasured element along this riverfront – especially when we are searching for shade. Comments show that we want



more trees, **native trees**, and we are concerned that the existing trees are not being properly cared for. Pruning, removing dead trees, tending to the old-growth trees of Confederate Park are all mentioned. There are requests for information about these trees...like a small identifying plaque on the ground in the shade, telling us about the native vegetation. Native flower and plant gardens are high on the list for near the Visitors’ Center and for anywhere that a path could be softened like along the trolley tracks. Line sidewalks and bike paths with trees. Place trees in the middle of Riverside Drive to slow the traffic down to make it a more comfortable pedestrian zone.

One person commented that Court Square was a green oasis in the center of the city. Several people pointed out how crazy it is that Court Square

doesn’t connect to Confederate Park as strongly as it should in order to make one greenspace lead them into another greenspace. One suggestion was to connect the two with a row of trees or an ornamental fence on which artists could display and sell their work. Put in some **colorful native plants** that tell us about our region. **Keep the natural, but enhance its beauty.** Weed around the library and keep the grass cut and area clean of debris. Our plants make our places much more comfortable and friendly, more inviting and interesting. Memphis could be known as **a city within a garden.**





### #6: “Take back the streets”

Share them with cars, but **make our streets and the riverfront a pedestrian friendly zone.** Memphis is like many cities where the car dominates the design of public spaces and leaves the pedestrian in a situation that is far less than ideal. Being unable to get to a place comfortably on foot detaches that place from everything that surrounds it and leads to a spiraling descent in quality, enjoyability, and value. **Don’t let our public spaces become car places; make them people places.** Right now cars and buses make both Front Street and Riverside Drive difficult to cross and hard to enjoy.

Encourage trolley ridership. Consider making Front Street and Riverside Drive two-lanes. We’re on the right track with a median in Riverside Drive, but more could be done. Make lighting pedestrian in scale. Use **friendlier lighting**, special fun

lighting for different seasons, a light feature to attract us when the sun has set. Improve landscaping. **Encourage vendors and shops and restaurants to put displays and tables outside.** On special occasions, temporarily close streets to cars and turn the space over for community activities.



### # 7: “Connect with Pathways”

**CONNECT THESE SITES!! Make it feel like one place!** We’ve mentioned the importance of the pedestrian. Now, let’s talk about the pedestrian’s path. Getting to the Visitors’ Center is the worst example, but several of the sites feel disconnected and going from one to another is discouraging. Please allow us to move freely. Make the car wait for us. **Create paths that take us on a tour of all of these sites and make them wide enough to bike, walk and push a stroller.** Build bridges across the streets to connect the blocks of the Public Promenade. Help us get from the bluff to the lower level along Riverside Drive, to the Cobblestones, Tom Lee and Jefferson Davis parks. We can see a lot from the bluff; we need to see how we get from there to the water, and then back into the city. Show us how to get to Court Square; make the path clear. Create a strong direct path from the Visitors’ Center to the Mud Island monorail. Open the monorail walkway year round to connect us to Mud Island and Greenbelt Park. Consider a pedestrian drawbridge or boat taxi as a link to Mud Island. Make downtown bicycle friendly; add bike racks and paths. Slow the traffic down to 25 mph. Use inviting, textured pavement. Paths are what will connect these sites to one another, and paths are what will take us to Beale Street, South Main, the Redbirds, the Civil Rights Museum, Cannon Center, FedEx Forum, Peabody, and sites and neighborhoods county-wide.



Savannah, Ga. <http://www.terrageria.com>  
photo by QT Luong/terrageria.com, all rights reserved.





### **#8: “Illustrate Historic Significance”**

Share our **history**. When asked “What do you like best about this place?”, historic importance and significance is repeated and repeated and repeated for each of the sites. Short term and inexpensive ideas to improve these places included historic signage for walking tours, historic markers, displays and viewfinders with historic information. For the long term, we repeatedly requested the dedication of this area for its historic significance to our city. Make it a walk through time. Tell us about all the people and cultures who have lived, travelled, and traded here. Tell us the significance of the bluff and our relationship to the river. Tell us how lumber cut here and farther north travelled through Memphis to build houses around the world. **Tell us what makes Memphis unique, and nourish our sense of place.**



### **#9: “Program Activities”**

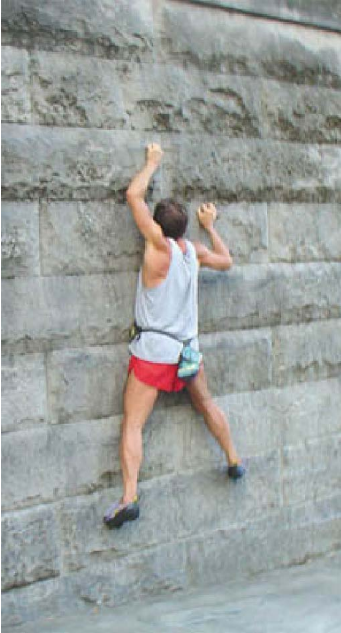
Get active and **organize a program!** Bring in vendors; bring in activity. Set up wi-fi all along the riverfront. Shuttle us over to Mud Island on a little boat. Bring in music. Allow different groups to use the riverfront for their seasonal celebrations, cyclists to have monthly rides, garden clubs to have fund-raising plant sales and seasonal plantings, the canoe club to have monthly harbor races as a fund raiser, artists to sell their work or compete for an art piece to win a place in this public area. Let the boy scouts have rock-skipping contests on the cobblestones. Encourage family picnics. Fill up the buildings along the perimeters of these spaces with businesses. Show outdoor movies during the summer.



## **#10: “Remove Barriers”**

**Make us feel welcome.** We’ve listed so many things to be added, this last one is a request for the removal of barriers. We do not feel welcome on our riverfront; we don’t feel invited. The ideas we’ve previously mentioned are only going to be effective if people feel welcomed to use these spaces and are involved in the process of creating them. The riverfront is the most important part of our city. It illustrates our origin, and it indicates our future.

Please remove the barriers that make it so difficult for us to enjoy our city’s edge. Remove the ‘no loitering’ sign outside of the Customs House. Remove the unfriendly “can’t do” sign in Confederate Park. Remove the parking lot behind the Customs House and the garages that occupy our promenade. Support the riverboat companies. Listen to the canoers and boaters and runners and bikers and yes, the skateboarders and rock climbers and rappers and street preachers. This should be a people friendly place where citizens are encouraged to be involved as dreamers, users and volunteers, a friendly place that unites our entire community.



## Project for Public Spaces Comments and Suggestions

Based on their experience, PPS has identified some key qualities that define great waterfront destinations. With these as a foundation, they have taken a look at Memphis, reviewed participant comments, and made some short and long-term suggestions for Memphians to consider.

### Qualities of Great Waterfront Destinations

- Access & Linkage
- Edge Uses
- Attractions & Destinations
- Identity & Image
- Amenities
- Water Uses
- Flexibility in Design
- Seasonal Strategy
- Place Management
- Diverse Funding Sources
- Reach out like an octopus



*“Creating a great waterfront is not about buildings. It’s about people.”*





**Site # 1 - TN Visitors' Center, Parking Lots, and Parking Garage on Front Street between Jefferson and Adams**

The Visitors' Center is poorly located and poorly designed as a public amenity or as a gateway to Memphis. Roads, fencing, and surface and garage parking divide and disconnect the area creating an uneasy, unfriendly place for people. General access issues, including the Visitors' Center's connection to downtown and Confederate Park, moving across the parking lot, moving from the parking lot to the waterfront, and then moving into Jefferson Davis Park and to the Cobblestones, need to be addressed. The Visitors' Center itself might best be reconceived as a restaurant spilling out into Jefferson Davis Park.

Demolition of the city owned garages on Front Street here and at site #4 would instantly improve the visual and physical appearance of the area and allow a much needed pedestrian connection between the Visitors' Center, monorail station to Mud Island River Park, Public Promenade, and downtown. A better location for parking garages might be under the interstate ramps with a new garage functioning as an intermodal connector to the monorail and trolley. In the shorter-term, plant the garage-top green and add tables and umbrellas, remove the chain-link fences, and add bike rentals to the car maintenance lower level.

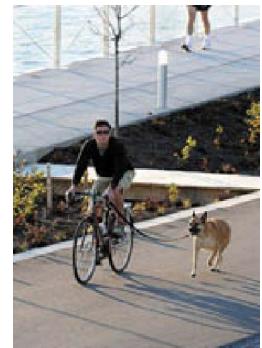
*Historic streets sloping down to the waterfront have been made into dynamic public spaces in Montreal.*



## **Site #2: Jefferson Davis Park**

The only river-level park in central downtown, the trees, naturalness, and connection to the river and Cobblestone Landing make this space a surprising find. Unfortunately today it is separated from other riverfront sites and downtown by streets and parking, making it feel more like a highway rest stop than a downtown park. Unlike a rest stop though, there is not a place to get something to eat or drink. A short-term lease to a vendor of the tables outside the Visitors' Center could

provide this amenity. The current challenge is to get people down here on a regular basis so uses like a dog run, playground, and sports area might be appropriate in the short-term. In the long-term other uses like historical, environmental, geologic, and interactive educational features or public art would work well here.



*Sections of parks are fenced off as playgrounds and off-leash dog parks in NYC.*



### **Site # 3: Cobblestone Landing**

This unique open area offers a terrific opportunity to create a destination with minimal investment and infrastructure. The historic significance of this wharf area - how, when, and why it was used - provides a foundation for why the city exists. Preventing further erosion of the cobblestones should be a top priority, and boat use should be encouraged. Adding temporary seating, food vendors, some public art that children can play on, and a temporary water feature could start to develop some momentum here and give further clues about what else would work and how the area could best be used in the future. In the longer term, with inexpensive wood platforms and walkways, shade structures (umbrellas, tents, trellises, etc.), water features, and planters this area will evolve into the destination where the city meets the river. The proposed Beale Street Landing will not achieve the desired outcome unless the design is allowed to be more flexible and evolve with a strong plan to emphasize management and programming of the space. Design for both the Cobblestones and foot of Beale Street should come out of a community generated use plan, and the design should be more temporary and inexpensive to support a

range of changing uses.

As this area becomes more successful, it may be that more money should be spent on design, but, at that point, it will be clearer what the design should actually support. The current direction is likely to lead to a product in which few residents feel ownership and, still worse, few residents use.



*Each August Paris turns its riverfront into a temporary beach.*



#### Site # 4: Fire Station & Parking Garage, on Front Street between Union and Monroe

This block should be the center of Memphis' presence on the riverfront and should perhaps be more active than the public spaces to the north. The space and the streets leading to it and down to the Cobblestone Landing need to become the face of Memphis to the world. Everything from postcards to television sportscasts should be able to focus on this area showcasing the soul and character of a great downtown and a city of great communities.

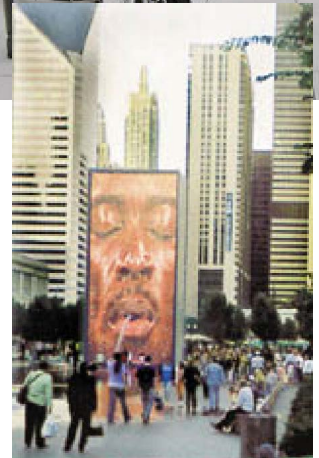
Unfortunately today, the space is occupied by a fire station and parking garage. A short term improvement phase might include removal of the **Fire Station's** rear parking lot and chain link fence and alternative uses for the building itself. It could possibly function as an event rental space, a farmer's market, an art market, or a showcase cooperative venue for southern film and culture. Eventually the building should be adapted or torn down for more functional public uses.



The city-owned **parking garage** is obviously not the best use of this public space and should be removed as soon as possible.

The east side of **Front Street** here can and should be Memphis's best pedestrian scale residential and retail street. Street level shops and restaurants should be encouraged. Slowing traffic down and making crossing Front Street easier is crucial to creating a downtown environment that people drive to rather than through.

*Face of Chicago - Millenium Park*



## Site #5 - Cossitt Library & Post Office (future home of U of M law school), Front between Union and Monroe

In the short term, the plaza areas at both front and rear entrances of these buildings can be made into comfortable gathering areas.

If the **Cossitt Library** were able to put out every day some book/magazine racks, some seating, a coffee cart (perhaps leased to a vendor) and thought about other amenities like art, fixing or adding to the water feature, and small cosmetic improvements, this could go from being the most embarrassing corner in downtown to the most active and beneficial. Library hours should be geared to downtown workers, the meeting room open for groups at night, and perhaps the focus should be on art and film with a series of Memphis movies offered on a seasonal basis. Longer-term the historic part of the library building could be adapted to be used as a modern library,

perhaps focusing on art, film, music, and/or history with a restaurant added to support the library and park.

The area on the river side of the **Post Office/Law School** has the position and prominence to become a great public balcony. With landscaping and publicly accessible food concessions, it could be a great asset

for the city and for the law school. Likewise, the Front Street entrance should be a place where both the law school spills out into the city and which the city is invited to use. Bike racks should be provided, and parking and the driveway removed.

*Ourdoor reading room - Bryant Park  
Seating in Luxembourg Gardens*





## Site #6: Confederate Park

This is a special park that plays an important role in downtown as an historic park with quieter and more passive uses.



It needs to be protected as such, but also needs to be allowed to evolve slightly to perform at a higher level. More importantly, its multi-directional connection to the downtown fabric needs to be improved. Easier crossing at Front St. and to the river's edge is critical for it to be an active and integrated space for people. Better visual and pedestrian connections to Court Square, along Front Street, towards the Cobblestones, and down to Jefferson Davis Park will help. Steps could be a major amenity and provide an attractive place to sit as well.

Additional uses like a playground and very small restaurant kiosk should be considered. Allowing some vending may also be a possibility. A good temporary location for an informal

truck farmers' market would be on Court Street between Confederate Park and the new law school location. The carousel from the fairgrounds was mentioned as a possibility and would be a great addition to downtown. Special creative lighting of the park and area, as well as seasonal flexibility of the space, should be considered.



*Summertime dining area in Chicago's Millenium Park, becomes wintertime ice skating rink.  
Carousel in NYC's Bryant Park.*

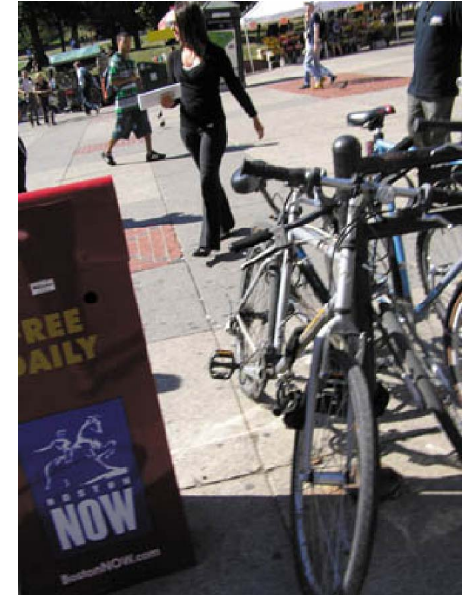


## Site #7: Court Square

Court Square has a special relationship with the Memphis riverfront because it is not on the city's edge but rather connects to it. Its location within the city gives it a strong opportunity to reach out to areas throughout downtown and makes it a critical link of access for the riverfront. Its historic identity is strong, and it is a source of local civic pride. Water features like the fountain in Court Square are



great energizers of public spaces, but people must feel free to interact for them to be effective. The historic feeling of the park shouldn't overwhelm the playful attitude that is important for such a centralized location. Small vendors could add to the enthusiasm and complement the permanent shops and businesses along the square's perimeter. Street parking on the north and south sides interrupts pedestrian movement. Even more disturbing is the obstructed connection to Confederate Park, all but detaching Court Square from the Promenade and riverfront. If this connection was celebrated it would become an exciting space on its own and attract attention for both parks. The current challenge is to get people to the public spaces on a regular basis and to make the spaces safe and friendly. Program management with a regular event schedule could cause this park to thrive in its role as the central link to the public spaces downtown.



*Well-loved and used, historic Boston Common (left & right)*



“Public participation and cooperation are fundamental in creating great public spaces.”

**In closing, PPS asked, “What local partnerships and talent can you identify in Memphis that could help implement some of your proposed improvements?” Here are the responses:**

AIA Regional Design Center	Film, Tape, and Music Commission	National Ornamental Metal Museum & metal workers
AutoZone	Fire Department	Nearby Businesses
Banks, both local and regional	Friends for Our Riverfront	Neighborhood Associations
Bookstores (Cobblestone history)	Garbage Collectors	Neighbors
Boy Scout Troops (clean-up crews)	Garden Clubs	Outdoors Inc.
Boys and Girls Club	Henry Turley and the Henry Turley Fdn.	Paddlewheel Company
Bryan ( to provide umbrellas, hot dog stands, etc.)	Historic Society of Tennessee, etc.	Park-related Organizations and Volunteers
Businesses along Front Street	Landmarks Commission	Police
Businesses in the Falls and Morgan Keegan Bldg.s	Landscape Architects and Designers	Private Businesses
Cannon Center for Performing Arts	Landscape & Nursery Companies	Private Vendors / Cafe Owners
Center City Commission	Local Advertising Agencies (Archer Malmo)	PSA’s Inc.
Center for Southern Folklore	Local Artists ( banners, program schedule)	Regional Design Center
Chamber of Commerce	Local Design Consultants	REVIVE the Memphis Park Commission
City Council Members - current and past	Local Historians (compile information)	Riverboat Companies
City of Memphis	Local Student Design Studio	Riverfront Development Corp. (water recreation)
City of Memphis Parks Division	MAMA	Seating Company
Coast Guard	Memphis Botanic Garden (planting materials)	Signage Company
Coca-Cola (to provide sodas, pavilions, etc.)	Memphis City Beautiful	Sleep Inn
Comcast wi-fi	Memphis College of Art (faculty and students)	Small Surrounding Businesses
Community Garden Organizations	Memphis Cook Convention Center	Social Workers
Construction Companies	Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau	St. Jude
Cotton Museum	Memphis Heritage	Univ. of Memphis
Cruise Lines	Memphis Literacy Council	Univ. of Memphis Architecture and Planning Depts.
Department of Transportation	Memphis Police Dept. (slow down traffic)	Univ. of Memphis Food Vendor/Provider
Downtown Garden Club	Memphis Public Library	Univ. of Memphis Law School & Alumni
Downtown Neighborhood Asso. (grant/ bike racks)	Memphis Queen Line	Urban Arts Commission
Downtown Residents	Memphis River Boats	Veterans (to maintain displays)
Event Planners	Mississippi River Corridor	Visitors’ Center
Farmers’ Market	Morgan Keegan	Volunteer Memphis (clean-up)
Film and Recording Industry	Mud Island River Park	Yacht Club