

Spokane River dialogues

May 7, 2006

Read the series

Catch up with [previous installments](#).

As you walk down the hill on Riverside Avenue on the Bloomsday route today, take special note when you approach Sandifur Memorial Bridge which spans the river near the intersection of Riverside and Clarke Street. Two years from now, you might see beneath that bridge dozens of kayakers doing some water magic. The area is the designated site for a whitewater park. One hundred years ago, the Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects from the East, envisioned a greenbelt, with parks and promenades, running the length of the river gorge.

A group called Friends of the Falls is working to implement a modern version of that Olmsted vision. Recently, Rick Hastings, 46, a founding member of Friends of the Falls, and Steve Faust, 49, the group's executive director, talked with editorial board member Rebecca Nappi.

Rebecca Nappi: Tell us a little bit about yourselves.

Steve Faust: I'm an attorney. I've practiced here in Spokane for 20 or 21 years, depending on when you start counting. I was with a large law firm for 15 of those years. I've been general counsel to a technology company and then most recently I have a solo practice in business and technology law. And I've been involved in a lot of community activities, beginning with United Way, Leadership Spokane Class of '94; I served on their board for three years; the board of the Business Improvement District downtown. Most recently, Friends of the Falls. I'm also active as a volunteer for AHANA and I occasionally work with Eastern Washington University, with Bob Schwartz, who is a professor of entrepreneurship there, working with their students.

Rick Hastings: I'm working as a planner these days. I've been in Spokane 13 years. I have a master's degree in architecture, and I practiced architecture in Spokane with a couple of firms for about eight or 10 years of that duration. My master's degree is from the University of Texas at Austin. My wife is a native Texan. I've spent about half my life in Washington state.

We were in Austin finishing up my graduate degree when we decided to come back to the Northwest where my family was. Kind of got priced out of the Seattle market; things had grown so much there. I had never been to Spokane before, but we came up when I was interviewing. I was really struck by the downtown and by the river and by the opportunity. This place just seemed to have so much potential in 1993. So we moved here and I practiced architecture for most of the time I've been in town.

I discovered after awhile that the things I was doing that I was most proud of was the pro bono planning work. A friend of mine, Bill Grimes, who has a small planning practice in Spokane, Studio Cascade, had an opening and we got to talking about it. Architects have a little bit of planning background by education so it was a fairly natural transition. So I've been having a lot of fun doing that.

Q: How and when did you first fall in love with the Spokane River?

Hastings: I knew about the river. I grew up on the West side of the state and heard about Spokane and the falls. I didn't really get hooked on the river until I was at work one day and discussion came up on a bridge proposed to go over the falls. It didn't make much sense from a planning perspective or architectural perspective or anything we were hearing at the time about what Spokane wanted its downtown to be like. It didn't seem like a good fit at all. I was encouraged to look into it and see what could be done or what kinds of improvements could be done.

The Inlander had just published an editorial by Bob Herold writing about that issue. He and I got to chatting over the telephone. I was very nervous when I first called him. Here's a guy who has published, and I'm green as a gourd, and I don't know much about Spokane and I wanted to call and tell him I agreed with everything he said and gee, thank you, what can we do? He said, "How about let's set up a meeting. I know some folks." About two weeks later, we had the first

meeting of Friends of the Falls (in spring 1997).

There were about a dozen people Bob had mostly invited, but it included former state senator Dr. John Moyer. And we were talking about the bridge and how terrible it was and gee what can we do — opposition this and opposition that — and he stopped the conversation and said, "You know, what's right for the river is going to be right for Spokane. So let's focus on the river and talk about that."

Lights went on. Everyone realized what an important and profound thing that was to say to set the stage. At that point, I really began to look at the river, too, and learned about the river and visited it many, many times and stood at the base of the falls in the springtime when it's roaring and you feel the earth tremble beneath your feet and wow. And I learned about the history. And didn't realize, because I was fresh into town, that tribes had lived here for 10,000 years and this had always been a gathering place and what a magical place it was.

I ran across an ancient document, a 1907 report, by the Olmsted Brothers, given to our parks board, to Aubrey L. White, talking about something called the Gorge Park and how it needed to be the centerpiece of the community. If we were smart, we would get busy on that and capitalize on the river as a scenic asset and something that could improve the lot of everyone who lives here. I began to really become passionate about this whole thing when I learned about the river and its history.

Faust: I am a more recent comer to the party. Growing up in Montana, I was around rivers ever since I was 10 or 11 years old. My family had a spot on the Boulder River which runs into the Yellowstone River. As kids we spent hours and hours going up and down the trails that ran along both sides. We jumped into it and let it carry us downstream, sort of skidding over the tops of the rocks with our tennis shoes. So I grew up thinking rivers were great and I experienced a lot of them. In college in Missoula, we rafted the Blackfoot and Clark Fork. And also, I fished.

Even though I moved to Spokane in '84, I don't think I ever thought of Spokane as particularly having a river in it. There was Riverfront Park, and I liked that and thought it was an attractive place, but I never really understood what we had here, until Mike Edwards (former president of the Downtown Spokane Partnership) invited me to help fill up a raft, which is something that Friends of the Falls does periodically.

So I got into the raft and came down in Peaceful Valley and looked around and thought, where have I been? I was stunned by it. We went all the way down to Plese Flats, through the Bowl and Pitcher. I had done whitewater before, and that was fun, but the part that impressed me the most was going through what we now call the gorge area — the stretch from the lower falls to Hangman Creek — because the whole time we were going through, we saw an osprey and some ducks and it was quiet.

I couldn't help thinking that the city was all around me, but there was no way of knowing that. Spokane has a couple of places like that and the river is definitely one of them. It's such a valuable thing. To be able to leave downtown and in five minutes be in a refuge from the city and from urban environment is so great. At that point, I became much more interested in what Friends of the Falls was doing. As I learned more about the historic and cultural significance of it, I just was even more impressed that in this one focused geographical area there is this whole microcosm of Spokane and its whole history.

I was going through an old slide show that Rick had created and there was a slide in there that showed the concrete bridge that takes the Sunset Highway across Hangman Valley. The slide had some text that there had been a proposal in 1910 to literally fill that valley with dirt to take the road across. That would have been a nice, cheap utilitarian way to do that. It was because of efforts of people like Aubrey L. White and the (then) publisher of this newspaper, William H. Cowles. They lobbied against that. They said we really ought to try one of these new wonders of technology, these pre-stressed, concrete arch bridges would be a great way to span that.

There is a drawing in that slide of people in period costumes from the turn of the century promenading down what would be this beautiful gorge park with trails that would precede under the arches of the Sunset Bridge, would go into Vinegar Flats or Latah. It just struck me that this is a recurring theme in Spokane.

My relationship with the river was like a lot of people in this town. They sort of know it's there, but they don't really pay much attention to it. One of things we try to do as an organization is to change the way that people relate to this river. To really get them to engage with it in a positive way, with the expectation that if they engage with it, we will, as a city, have a higher degree of concern about what we do with the river.

Q: When people ask you about Friends of the Falls, how do you describe your group?

Faust: I say that we are a nonprofit membership organization that has developed a strategic master plan for the Spokane River gorge area that runs from lower falls to Hangman Creek. We've proposed a number of projects that we feel will elevate the area in the public eye, better connect people to the area and to the river and highlight the incredible history and cultural connections down there as well as the incredible potential for an outdoor recreation park. Our mission is to preserve that area and activate it for the good of the city.

Q: How many members?

Faust: We have probably 100 members. We've had 20 new members since January.

Q: How do you explain the master plan in a sound bite?

Hastings: In essence, it's intended to connect people with the river. To introduce them to the river, if they've never been introduced. There are a lot of people who have grown up here their entire lives who have never been to the lower falls. Or haven't been down to Glover Field or People's Park. Or they hear things about those places that keep them away. Or they've had an experience or been told a story when they were children that they don't respect the place or understand it.

The gorge is a microcosm of a lot of things. There are a lot of ways you can learn about the history of this area and learn about the resource itself. You can get into it on any level, once you are there. Even the Ice Age Floods are represented there. The projects that we've proposed — or rather what the community proposed through this very lengthy and progressive public participation effort with the conceptual plan and the master plan — are fairly low impact. It's not about turning the place into a theme park but about ways people can stand by the river and listen, get into the river and swim, get into the river and paddle, walk circuits around the river, do a jogging loop around the level, on whatever level people can connect to that river. We want to bring things to the table that get them to that place. By doing that, that's how you begin to turn the tide on apathy. People take it into their heart and connect with it and after that, it's sacred ground.

Faust: A point that Rick made, that I want to emphasize, is that when we talk about the master plan and the ideas in it, this isn't just Friends of the Falls coming up with these ideas and saying, hey aren't these great. There was an extensive community process. You could say that process went on for six years in different forms, and most recently, with the help of a nationally recognized planning firm. A one-year process involved 35 stakeholder groups that met five times during and interacted with that consultant and interacted with each other. In addition to the ideas developed in that process, those ideas were made available for public input for anyone who wanted to show up at meetings that were advertised and promoted. Each of the three times that was done we had at least 100 people come and want to give their input. This is really a community plan.

Hastings: One of the reasons I'm as passionate about this project as I am is that from the very beginning seated at that table were people with all different perspectives about seeing that gorge plan come to life. We had Republicans and Democrats. We had neighborhood activists. We had people from tribes who knew about the area well before we did. We had developers. We had economic development folks that were interested in promoting Spokane. We had utilities there and the parks department.

We had a wide assortment of folks who could see that we almost agreed on everything from the get-go about the respect we ought to express in the things we do down there. The opportunities seemed so promising.

Q: You said there are misconceptions. Let's hit the People's Park one right on. When I said I was at the Sandifur Bridge recently, people said, "Oh the nude beach."

Hastings: I'm not sure they are misconceptions. I've spent a lot of time there and I've seen many of the things people warned me about. But the answer is we need to get more people down there, to occupy the space, to lay claim to it, to have eyes on the place, to begin to have it used. Then those types of activities get marginalized and find other places to go.

Q: Would the nude beach have to go?

Hastings: I don't think so. We had a gentleman, a very well-educated and articulate gentleman from the gay community, we wanted to include him because he had connections with people who use the nude beach. I don't think we have to

come to the point where we say it's closed. We come to a point where the area is being used by others.

Faust: It's not an intention to exclude people who are currently there. The times I've been down there, I haven't felt any personal danger. Most of the people down there are people like anybody else. Maybe they are recreating there because it's inexpensive and comfortable for them. Clearly, there are activities that go on down there that the people who engage in them don't necessarily want to be in the public view. As you are able to attract more people to the area, those activities won't be as attractive.

West Central neighborhood folks tell me they actually had a picnic shelter on the north bank of the river a number of years ago, I want to say in the '70s. It was gradually torn apart and burned, probably at high school beer parties. That doesn't mean that all high-schoolers are evil or even that the ones engaged in that are bad people. But those are the kinds of things that can happen in an area that isn't getting enough attention, isn't getting enough love.

That's a public area. It belongs to all of us. We want to see it better taken care of it. One other area is the notion that the river is inherently dangerous. Depending on the flow and where you are, you could have a problem swimming across that river and we see that every year. But that doesn't mean you're in danger if you put your feet in the river. I get questions from people occasionally when I tell people I ride a kayak or raft through there, they say, well isn't that water just terribly polluted? Aren't you afraid you'll get a skin rash or drink some of it? I know we have issues with dissolved oxygen and phosphorous, but I don't believe the water is toxic to me as a paddler when I'm down there enjoying it.

It isn't so much a perception that the river is a dangerous place as it is that they don't really think about the river as a part of their lives. And yet, if the river were not here and did not have the particular dynamics that it has here, with the falls, it's probable that Spokane wouldn't be here. So it does have a direct impact on their lives.

Q: Talk about the Olmsted Brothers a little more. What was their vision?

Hastings: The Olmsted Brothers were the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted, considered the father of the profession of landscape architecture. Before it was sort of a gentlemen's hobby in England. But here in America it began to take on a professional veneer and Frederick Law, their father, was responsible for that. He was a giant, considered that to this day, a genius in the field. His sons took over the practice around the turn of the century and they began to further his legacy across the West.

They were invited to most of the major cities in California, Oregon and Washington, and Spokane didn't want to be left out. Frankly, I think ("Father of Spokane" James N.) Glover and a lot of folks remembered what the falls looked like when they first arrived, and the river was still largely untouched, and there was a tremendous opportunity. And Jay P. Graves, as I recall from reading history, had been sent back East to New York and had witnessed firsthand the benefits that the community was beginning to realize with Central Park and what a catalyst that was for the community. But they couldn't do everything they wanted with Central Park, because they had waited too long. Property values had appreciated far in excess of their ability to acquire new lands. So it had already begun to be hemmed in.'

So he came back to Spokane and said basically, we've got to strike now, while the iron is hot, and we can get something really grand for this community in place. I think he and White and company were instrumental in bringing the Olmsteds to Spokane and they asked what we ought to be doing.

They came up with a plan that was released to the parks board in 1907 and for land speculation reasons wasn't released to the public until 1913. I think they probably did get some lands quietly acquired based on the recommendations. So you see two different dates — 07 and 13 — but they'd been here much earlier than that 13 date would have you believe.

They laid out a master plan that by today's standards was a master plan for the whole community. They talk about boulevards. They talk about some of the great areas on the South Side. Some of the major arterials that go through the town are the legacy of the Olmsted Brothers' plan. They really described two parks — regular parks and then they talked about large parks and the large parks were the undeveloped, the wild, the scenic. I don't think their concept has ever been well-understood. I think it's been a tough thing for us to get our hands around, because we think of parks as being finite, manicured, and taken care of in certain ways. But the Olmsteds always had in mind that the gorge area would be the centerpiece, the Great Gorge Park, that would connect all of the other park areas that Spokane would acquire.

If you look at a map of what they proposed, it starts at the lower falls, Post Street, and it goes all the way down to what was then Ft. George Wright, which abuts Riverside State Park now. That was the Gorge Park, connected to another very

large swath of land that went south along Hangman Creek. That connected to a finger of land that followed Indian Canyon up to Palisades. They talked about how this would connect to something called Queen Anne Park, which now we know as the Finch Arboretum. You look at a map now at the lands they talked about acquiring and you see a real correlation with the lands we have in public hands now and what the Olmsteds talked about.

Q: Can you explain who Graves was?

Hastings: Graves was a wealthy industrialist. I think he was responsible for helping establish the trolley system in Spokane. He also donated the property for Whitworth College and Waikiki.

Q: The father of the Olmsteds, Frederick Law, he designed Central Park, right?

Hastings: Right.

Q: When you say "wild and informal" what does that mean exactly in terms of their vision?

Hastings: It's partly a response to the topography. It's steep. It's not all that accessible, but it's very scenic. We call them greenbelts today. The Olmsteds talked about having a promenade or a road or a nice paved path on the north side of the river up on the ridge and guess what? The Centennial Trail does just that. They talked about having an informal trail that circulated back on the south side through this little neighborhood called Peaceful Valley and guess what? That's one of the things we talked about in the master plan.

I was really astounded when we got into the conceptual planning process and people were saying, how about this and how about that? And I found a copy of this (Olmsted) report and transcribed it word by word and discovered all this detail that was there from the beginning. They talked about making district kinds of improvements to Peaceful Valley — street trees and benches and lighting schemes — and tie all that together so this area would have a residential identity, a wonderful margin between the wild and the civilized and the people, when they felt like they needed to get away from it all, could retreat to that place.

From the banks down, it does that. It also does that from the city side, from the falls, which are more urban and connected, we hope someday really formally connected, with Riverfront Park. It goes down through an area that has a neighborhood on one side and soon to be a neighborhood on the other side, but as it comes out and around it gets more and more wild and down to the second largest state park in Washington state. So it has a sort of transitional quality to it, going up and downstream, too.

Q: How does the Friends of the Falls master plan honor the tradition of the Olmsted Brothers?

Faust: If they have a tradition, it's good planning. And the master plan is good planning. The other thing interesting to me about the (Olmsted) story is that, as I understand it, is that part of the context of why cities in the West were bringing the Olmsted Brothers out from New York, the classic out-of-town consultant, was something called the City Beautiful Movement. The idea was that if you were a city in the West trying to attract industry and jobs to your community, what did you have to work with?

Well, you were probably on a river and you probably had a railroad or you didn't have a fighting chance. You had to have those things. But apart from that, what was going to distinguish one dusty prairie town from another? It was parks and public, civic amenities that would be used to beautify your city and that in turn would attract people who would start businesses and create jobs. And 100 years ago, that was true. And we feel strongly that's true today. This whole near nature, near perfect idea that we all talk about really holds true in an age where there are so many businesses where all you need is an airport and a broadband connection and you're in good shape.

So how does a community compete for those businesses? The way you compete is to have the kinds of natural, open spaces that Spokane has. And the kind of river that Spokane has. Those are not assets that a community that does not have them can produce. I feel strongly that we really need to care of those assets and we need to think carefully how we are using open space in this community and the environmental quality we seek to establish in this community. The people we are trying to attract are not stupid. They read the newspapers. They look at the Internet. They see what local governments are proposing. And they see how governments respond to a claim that the quality of the water is not up to standards. And if the response is let's lower the standard, then I think you've just lost a lot of people who might want to bring businesses to this community. We think the master plan plays very strongly to that idea.

Q: The whitewater park. How did the idea start?

Hastings: How did it start? Might have been Mike Edwards. He was an early proponent. He got really excited about the notion. It came up during the conceptual planning process. We had folks from the rafting community who said, how about and wouldn't it be great and this river's perfect for. We wanted to be careful about that because we were worried about cultural issues and neighborhood issues, but as the dialogue continued we discovered that there really didn't seem to be anybody who didn't feel like it couldn't be done well for all parties concerned. And again, we were looking for a way to connect the river with the community in some way, in an obvious way, in a way that would bring someone from out of town that didn't know the river at all.

As a way to activate the area, and get people down there for something, that seemed a good thing to do, and with the pedestrian bridge going across, it makes it a natural amphitheater. Most folks who enjoy whitewater kayak parks don't kayak; they watch. And they like to live in a town that's got something this cool going on. And they bring their out-of-town relatives and say, you've got to go and see these kayakers. So it made a lot of sense. And Mike Edwards was responsible for putting it at the top of the list of the things to attack first when we finished the master plan.

Q: Steve, describe the whitewater park as if it exists now.

Faust: When people think of a whitewater park, or a kayak park as they are sometimes called, they may primarily think of kayakers in colorful boats doing tricks and stunts in the river. That certainly is an activity you will see. We were down by the Sandifur Bridge last Thursday. There's no park there, but there is an awful lot of water going through that river right now. And we had our consultant, who is also a national, prominent kayaker, and before I knew it, he was in the water. He was paddling his boat right up next to one of the bridge pillars. And with the bottom of his boat facing the bridge pillar, and his head facing away from the bridge pillar, he was doing cartwheels in the water. He'd get up to a point in the wave and then he'd start cart wheeling and letting that wave carry him away from the bridge pillar.

It just happened that there was a surfing wave right at that pillar. A surfing wave is like a standing wave and if you're a beginning kayaker like me, you consider yourself very accomplished if you can just get your boat into the wave and hover there. And that's called surfing. You use your paddle to keep your boat in place and you hold there. It's very exciting because the water is moving around you and even though your goal is to stand still, you really feel like you are accomplishing something. If you're more adept, you can use the force that happens when you let your boat slip out of that surfing position to propel the boat. You can see people doing 360s, literally the boat revolving in a circle around their head. The boat goes right around like a wheel, doing flips, standing on the tip of the boat.

But the other thing we want people to understand is that a whitewater park is a community park. If you're in an inner tube or in a raft or a fisherman and you're trying to get through this facility, the intent is to design it so you can get through it. It'll be exciting. You'll go through a whitewater feature that will be like other whitewater areas in the river, but you should be able to get through that without any great degree of distress, if you are reasonably skilled at what you are doing.

The other thing they pay attention to in these designs is the edges of the water, the edges of the park, and the interaction with the shoreline. And they try to make sure there are eddies and areas of calm water, so that when you see videos of these parks in other cities, Denver is an example, you'll see people swimming or wading. You'll see little kids wading on the shore. You'll see people sitting on the sides of the banks watching. So these parks are not just a place for kayakers to play. They really are a place for everyone to interact with the river, in a somewhat more controlled fashion than you might have if you were just getting into some rapids that were naturally occurring, because there is some thought and design that's gone into creating this space.

Q: How much money do you need and how much have you raised so far?

Faust: Our estimates are that we need \$625,000 to finish the design, because what we have now is a conceptual design, something to talk with the permitting agencies about. To finish the design, to do the permitting — and we need at least four permits — and to consult with other agencies in the process, and to construct the park. The actual construction will probably take about a month. And we have a window of opportunity from mid-July to mid-August when we would want to be in the river constructing these features.

So we need \$625,000 to do those things and to create an access trail from the south bank, by the bridge, that would go under the bridge, so they don't run down the banks and create erosion. We want to be very thoughtful about that. We have a \$400,000 grant from the state of Washington. We actually raised \$40,000 which we spent on engineering and

design, including a topographical study of the river. So we have the \$400,000 grant from the state. We have pledges of \$10,000. And in our recent fund-raiser, we raised another \$10,000. We need to raise about \$210,000. Now if I could raise \$250,000, I would, because I'd know I'd have a cushion there if things came up we hadn't anticipated, which undoubtedly they will. And we'd like to raise that money in the next two months. So that we can begin the permitting process which we anticipate will take eight to 10 months. That would put us in a position to be able to begin the construction when that window of opportunity opens in 2007 and we'd be able to have that part in place by October 2007.

Q: Say a few things about "adopt a rock."

Faust: We started the adopt a rock program because we wanted to offer a way that individuals could contribute to the park and have a meaningful, tangible representation of their contribution. It's very difficult and we really racked our brains about ways to do what you typically may see, where you are putting people's names on something or bricks along the trail. The difficulty with those kinds of strategies is that we're putting things in the river. We're putting rocks in the river. So even if your name was on that rock, it might be on the bottom of the rock at the bottom of the river. So that didn't seem like a good idea.

We need a lot of rock to build this project. We figured out that it costs on average about \$250 to bring the kind of rock we need from somewhere in Spokane County. Mostly, we're looking for granite and basalt. We have an abundance in Spokane County so it shouldn't be hard to find it. The \$250 should be the cost that it takes to bring that rock to the site. So if you contribute that amount of money, you will have adopted a rock by bringing it to the site.

And what we will give you in return is a one-year membership to Friends of the Falls and we have a small rock that has our logo on it that we'll give you as a token so you will know, and other people will know, that you were one of the people that helped to adopt a rock to contribute to the park. A lot of people ask me, if you could just put people's names on something... We're still thinking about that. But until I know that I have a way to do that that's workable and acceptable to the parks department and other governmental authorities we have to deal with, I don't really want to say we'll do some specific recognition of donors.

Q: Will the whitewater park happen?

Faust: Yes.

Q: How much of the Olmsted Brothers' vision, interpreted 100 years later by the Friends of the Falls, will become reality?

Hastings: We hope all of it. They were about big visions. They were about looking at a comprehensive view of the resources a community has. If we've failed in the last 100 years, we haven't taken a comprehensive view of the river. It is not a county property. It is not a city property. It doesn't belong to a neighborhood or a developer. It doesn't know boundaries or jurisdictional lines. If we're going to do the kinds of things we need to do to make the most of this resource and, in turn, to elevate our own fortunes here, we need to look at that comprehensive view. We're talking about large and small projects in the gorge, but we want to see this play out as a model and a means to connect some of the larger things we've done well — Riverfront Park, Riverside State Park, the gorge park could connect to all of that. I'm hoping the community will look at a comprehensive way of funding all these things.

It's a resource that can benefit our entire county. Everyone who lives here. The Olmsteds were famous for having a populist approach to the outdoors, instead of being a landscape for wealthy landowners. It was something the typical American could enjoy and cherish as life in the West. The gorge can do that. It's not just economic development. It's not just respecting cultural history or geologic history, but it also has a really strong capacity just to improve the lot of people who live here today. I think people would, if given the opportunity, support a comprehensive way of paying for these kinds of improvements, to tie it all together, to police it, to maintain it, to repair it, to clean it up. So when people from out of the area come to town they don't get lost because there's a break in the trail or it looks like an area you can't occupy. It needs to be brought together with a larger vision. I think this is the beginning. I hope it's the beginning. I'll stick with it as long as I can.

Questions from videographer Colin Mulvany.

Q: If I'm in a kayak, the park's all done, take me down the river in the kayak. What will I experience?

Faust: If you are a kayaker, you will have a couple of choices. You can go down the river. Or you can drive to the

intersection of Riverside and Clarke and park your car long enough to unload your boat and then you'll move your car away from the river to a larger parking area. You'll have maybe 15 minutes of parking down there and then you'll need to move elsewhere. But you're a strong kayak and outdoor person. You don't mind walking a few hundred yards back to your boat. You'll get your boat in the river and you'll be able to play in that feature. This is the word kayakers use: play. It means surfing and doing tricks and going up and down and back into the eddy and let someone else have a shot at it in a few minutes and you'll do that for awhile, maybe a half hour or an hour. You'll be able to take your boat out, put it back in your car, and maybe drive back to work or home and do whatever you want to do. That kind of experience is the fastest growing segment in the whitewater experience. It's called park and play.

The other choice you'll have is to go to the whitewater feature and launch your boat there or be able to launch your boat from one of the other launches available eventually, if the vision in the plan is realized. One of those might be in Peaceful Valley neighborhood or it might be a little further downstream at the Clarke Street pumping station, which is some land owned by the city utility's department. You'll be able to put your boat in there. You'll be able to go through that whitewater park play feature. As you round the corner, you'll see Kendall Yards in the corner of your eye to the river right of you. You'll see the Peaceful Valley neighborhood to the left of you. Maybe they'll be some of those Peaceful Valley folks having tea on their decks, waving to you as you go by. You'll get by that whitewater feature, maybe spend some time there. Then you'll be able to go further downstream where Hangman Creek comes in.

You'll enjoy some good, riffly water through there. You may even find a surfing spot there if the flow of the river is at the right level. And from there, you're going to be a half hour to an hour to Ft. Wright. You can stop at the Meenach Bridge and take your boat out of the water. Your journey through there is going to be fairly calm water. If you want to swim, you'll be able to dump out of your kayak and sort of hang onto it and swim around with it. Or pull over to the side of the river and just enjoy the quiet and the wildlife that you'll see. You'll probably see some osprey. You may see a falcon. You certainly will see some ducks and some rainbow trout rising. You may see a big hatch of caddis flies or a big hatch of mayflies coming off the river.

You're going to have a pretty quiet experience for about a half hour to an hour until you round the bend and begin to notice the sewage treatment plant. At that point, the water will get a little more exciting again. And before you know it, you'll be in the Bowl and Pitcher. If you've picked the right level of river flow to match your skill, you'll be able to see the Devil's Toenail. Once you get through all of that, you'll have another stretch of quiet water. You'll take your boat out at Plese Flats. You'll be in the middle of Riverside State Park. Hopefully, you've got a buddy down there with a car. This is one of the reasons that park and play is popular and fast-growing. The logistics are less daunting. Or maybe you've parked your mountain bike down there ahead of time. So you use your mountain bike lock to lock your kayak to a tree, and then you drive your mountain bike back along the trail. You get in the car and go get your boat and that's a good, long day on the river.

Q: How does High Bridge Park fit into all of this?

Hastings: The master plan calls for a center at the intersection of Government Way and Sunset Highway. That would be where a lot of the parking might occur and you'd begin your gorge experience there. You'd come down A Street and perhaps through High Bridge Park to the center of Gorge Park.

Faust: At the right time of the year if you visit, maybe in June, maybe you are coming to participate in River Fest. It's an outdoor sports festival, a cultural festival. There's music happening in High Bridge Park. There are four days of events for mountain bikers and trail runners, kayakers and rafters. And there's a place for spectators, because we have the whitewater park facility there. And so when you're waiting for your mountain bike race, or your kids are there waiting for you to show up after your mountain bike race, they've got something to do. You have your food vendors there. And booths and that kind of activity that you'd have at that kind of a festival.