THE CROSSING

In its simplest forms, a crossing is a place where lines, streets, tracks, etc., cross each other—or a place at which a road, railroad track, river, etc., may be crossed. It also describes the act of a thing that crosses. More complexly, crossing can refer to hybridization or crossbreeding. It can even take on a slightly nefarious character when describing the act of opposing or thwarting, as if deliberately thwarting straight passage.

Historically in Washington, small boats and rafts, then ferries provided vital links across the city's rivers, including along the Anacostia River. In the not so recent past, ferries shuttled workers living in the Anacostia neighborhood across the river to their jobs in the Navy Yard. These ferry crossings became as much places of congregation and assembly, places of social exchange, as much as they were places of passage.

Our proposal for the 11th Street Bridge Park puts in place a new crossing, one that establishes new connections across and to the Anacostia River and to the burgeoning and socially / culturally rich neighborhoods along its banks. THE CROSSING, then, is a new place of convergence, of congregation, of cross-breeding. It is an incubator for social and community and civic life, and a model for building healthy bodies, healthy neighborhoods, and a healthy river environment.

The design of THE CROSSING is organized around eight key ideas:

A bridge for people
A river park, a city park
A regional destination, an everyday meeting place
A distributed approach to activity + play
A flexible strategy that can adapt over time
A food incubator for people + birds + fish
A catalyst for community + culture
A design for strategic investment + financing

THE CROSSING is also an active strategy for engaging people in defining the future for the community. It is a place to gather and participate in future development, enabling ideas for the multitude of public, agency and private uses across the project. And it combines both high and low technological elements.
overview looking north from the south bank
The design strategy is straightforward and strategic:

- **Connect** across the river with a single wide structure
  - Merging multiple parallel pathways that can accommodate different types and speeds of movement.
  - The pathway network extends outward from the river, creating windows to the river and additional lateral dimensions.

- **Multiply** the single surface of the bridge, making multiple parallel pathways that can accommodate different types and speeds of movement.
  - Enabling a diverse range of activities and experiences.

- **Expand** the pathways network outward toward the river, creating windows to the river in between, and additional lateral dimensions without additional cost.
  - Enhancing the integration with the natural environment.

- **Unfold** the ends of the bridge to establish direct access to the river, and to the riverfronts to the southwest and northeast.
  - Creating opportunities for activity and multiple experiences of the river.

- **Accumulate** program and activity in the gaps, thus activating the bridge park and its surrounding riverfront.

The diagram illustrates the various components of the design strategy:

- **Connect**: A wide structure spanning the river.
- **Multiply**: Multiple parallel pathways on the bridge.
- **Expand**: Extension of pathways outward from the river.
- **Unfold**: Ends of the bridge leading to river access.
- **Accumulate**: Activities and programs integrated into the gaps.
A KIT OF PARTS
bringing people into the conversation

WALKING SURFACES

+ ACTIVITY INFILL

+ GREEN SURFACES

+ CLIP ONS

MULTIPLE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

The project is made from a combination of walking surfaces, activity infills, green surfaces, and clip-on elements. The proposed designs array a combination of these elements across the bridge and down to the river in a way to activate a series of places between and along the river banks, creating energy and synergies among adjacent elements. As stakeholders and the parts can be re-arranged as additional community projects, stakeholder conversations, and agency reviews ensue. Thus, we can create a project in the long-run that holds true to the design principles and physical strategies we have outlined—but importantly can be adjusted to the many conversations we will have with people.

View from slope atop cafe, looking toward environmental education center, large amphitheater, and Anacostia river
Available space and historic developments in parts of the city other than Anacostia lead to locating program elements all across the bridge, highlighting its southern side and investment. Many of the spaces are designed to accommodate multiple activities, which can be used in different ways according to budgets and community desires. For example, the river plaza is designed with embedded foundations and utilities to host a water fountain, farmer’s markets, art fairs, and other events at different times. The café and environmental education structures can be used for various purposes, or separate spaces, and could potentially include food incubator spaces, maker spaces, art studios, community organization spaces, and even a new National Park Service headquarters or public service buildings—adding to the basic requirements of café and environmental education program requested. Over time, the project could also catalyze adjacent development, to the southwest on the south bank and to the northeast on the north bank.

View of the river plaza, overlook and small amphitheater, with lawn slope cafe and the navy yard beyond.
One goal of the project is to make activity and play part of neighbors’ and visitors’ everyday lives—making it normal to be out there, running or biking or fishing or dancing or skateboarding or climbing or whatever, while others are enjoying the view, having a tortilla, or learning about the environment. To do this, we’ve distributed play and sport and recreational features (a climbing wall, interactive rubber bouncing surfaces, swings for adults and kids, steps for running, docks for boating, piers for fishing, and trails for bicycling) all across the bridge and the riverbanks, and among the plazas, cafes, gathering spaces, and hanging gardens. This allows for people to move and exercise as part of their normal movement across the bridge, or while attending a festival—encouraging people to be active, to be healthy, and to be social.
Other goals for the project include making people aware of opportunities to grow and eat fresh food, to learn about healthy eating, to help improve water quality in the river, and to advance the environmental health of the entire river ecosystem. For us, these are inter-related, and they all point to creating great environments for food and for feeding—whether we’re talking about people, about birds, or about fish. If we can create places that migrating fish can stop and feed, and that resident fish can use to increase their population, we can start to build a stronger ecosystem. As we do that, we can create new wetlands that allow more migrating fish to feed. We can also capture stormwater from the bridge, clean and filter it, and funnel it to the wetlands, and have it contribute to improved water quality in the wetlands and the river. And we can integrate orchards, meadows, and gardens with foods that birds, animals, and humans can—green beans, chestnuts, hazelnut, figs, apples—as both learning demonstrations and food sources. Environmental education here is active and everywhere, and it has real impact on the river, on the environment, and on the general health and well-being of people.