

Detroit's E. Riverfront: 2 plazas, one mile of walk set to open

RiverWalk preview: What will be open and accessible later this month

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DETROIT - Model D was fortunate to get an all-access preview tour of soon-to-open segments of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's RiverWalk, and let us just say: it is more spectacular than you or we could have ever imagined.

If you're downtown quite a bit, you have probably already wandered along the segment between Joe Louis Arena and the Renaissance Center. You may have even meandered further east, towards Rivard, and peeked through a chain link fence keeping a mini-Chene Park just out of your reach.

Finishing touches are now being put on this structure and surrounding pavilion, Rivard Plaza (pictured). The plaza contains a magical Great Lakes-themed carousel, a water jet fountain and pool, a sculpture dedicated to major donors as well as donor bricks, a map of the Detroit River system made of granite and a vertical glass map of the entire St. Lawrence Seaway, stretching from Lake St. Clair to the Atlantic Ocean.

The tensile structure that is the defining visual feature of the plaza is the largest of what will eventually be four plaza nodes along the East Riverfront portion of the RiverWalk. In addition to concessions and restroom facilities -- which each will possess -- the Rivard canopy includes a rental area from where bikes and roller blades might be procured as well as the security command center for the entire RiverWalk as well as, eventually, the West Riverfront and the Dequindre Cut.

The plaza's eastern boundary is defined by the western edge of Tricentennial State Park. The stretch of the RiverWalk that will traverse, from west to east, Tricentennial Park, the Watermark Detroit development site, Chene Park and the @water Lofts Development site, is not yet completed.

This takes us along Atwater Street to Jos. Campau, home to the Stroh River Place mixed-use campus. And here's where the RiverWalk starts up again. All the way from Jos. Campau to Mt.

Elliott Park, more than a half-mile of river frontage, will be accessible. This takes walkers and bikers in front of Stroh River Place, Omni Hotel, UAW-GM and Harbortown.

This entire stretch is landscaped, attractively paved and installed with the RiverWalk's signature benches and lighting. In many stretches, where there was a wider easement to work with, DRFC installed separate bike and pedestrian paths.

Once Mt. Elliott Park is reached, the development of the RiverWalk is cut off -- for now -- by the Uniroyal Site.

Gabriel Richard Park, just east of the Belle Isle Bridge has been improved and another pavilion constructed. This plaza is more serene than the one at Rivard; there are butterfly gardens, a meditative labyrinth, fishing platforms and a soft shoreline.

Both plazas will offer shaded outdoor seating and wireless Internet; they will also be sites at which music and other programs will be centered. The other two pavilions are being planned for Mt. Elliott Park and the vicinity of Chene Park.

Model D will be sure to post the exact date all this great stuff will actually open to the public. Meanwhile, more detail about this soon-to-open portion of the RiverWalk can be found in Model D's previous update on the project.

Also, mark your calendars for Detroit International River Days: June 22-27, the RiverWalk's grand opening celebration and festival.

Sources: Caroline Marks and Benjamin Swift, DRFC