

[REDACTED]  
Naperville, IL 60540

October 1, 2023

Mayor Scott Wehrli  
400 S. Eagle Street  
Naperville, IL 60540

Dear Mayor Scott Wehrli:

Hello, we are currently students at North Central College pursuing our Master of Occupational Therapy degrees. This semester we have focused on mobility and ensuring areas within the community are accessible to everyone. As occupational therapists, it is our responsibility to advocate for the public to ensure equal accessibility to all individuals. With that in mind, we assessed The Naperville Riverwalk to uncover any safety and/or accessibility concerns. After further review, we would like to share our findings.

First and foremost, we would like to highlight some of the positive aspects of the riverwalk. We appreciate seeing reserved handicap spots with the appropriate amount of space surrounding it. We also observed that there are benches available for individuals to sit on and rest while they walk through the pathway. These aspects of the riverwalk contribute to the accessibility that is essential to support and provide the opportunity for all people to experience the beauty of The Naperville Riverwalk.

Along with the positives of the riverwalk, there are several opportunities of improvement. We begin at the entrance of the riverwalk. While it is greatly appreciated that a ramp is available, it is counterproductive that the ramp itself is unsafe for wheelchair and walker users. The ramp is uneven and a tripping hazard; we measured a .5" bump caused by the uneven pavement which wheelchairs and walkers can get caught on as well as cause individuals to trip while walking. We had also discovered that there is only one ramp to enter and exit the riverwalk; thus, individuals using assistive devices would have to turn around and walk the path again to exit. This would not be a major issue if the riverwalk was wider.

The 64" width of the riverwalk is too narrow for a wheelchair to travel through safely and without risk of falling into the water. There are areas of the path where it's narrower and more difficult to roll a wheelchair. The uneven pavement continues throughout the riverwalk and caused the wheelchair to get stuck on multiple occasions. Additionally, since there is only one ramp to enter and exit, the wheelchair user would have to physically turn around on the pathway to exit the riverwalk. This is completely unsafe and impossible at some points on the path due to

the short width of the walkway in addition to the lack of a railing. The railing stops shortly after the ramp, and there are no other barriers to prevent rolling into the water. We recommend increasing the width of the riverwalk to allow more room to move and adding a railing for safety. During our assessment, we encountered some locals who agree that the riverwalk is too narrow and should be wider.

Throughout the walk there are a few small patches where the width nearly doubles in size. This would be a perfect place to add benches to allow for individuals to take a break. For example, an individual with a walker may need to stop and rest. It is a safety hazard not providing an area for someone to do this.

Despite observing the riverwalk during the daytime, we had also noticed the lack of lights throughout the walkway. This would not be an issue during the day, but it is unsafe at night. A lack of lights will result in low visibility and higher risk for falling into the water. We recommend adding more lights and fixing the broken ones. This will improve visibility at night and help prevent accidents.

Farther down the river walk there are two over-head bridges. These bridges are low to the ground and would require someone to have to duck down. For an individual with low vision or the inability to judge the space, this is a big safety hazard. We recommend putting up caution signs to warn anyone passing under the bridge.

We understand that there are a lot of factors that can complicate the potential improvement of the riverwalk such as funding and community disruptions. However, we believe that making these changes to the riverwalk can provide greater, long-term benefits that will support the community. In summary, the low-stake recommendations are adding lights, warning signs, and benches throughout the path. The high-stake recommendations are widening the path itself, making it flatter and more level, and adding a railing throughout the entire walk.

Sincerely,

Jaci Doncoes, McKenna Moss, Hailey Parisek, Savanna Swanson, Risky Valera, Holly Bartz, Alexis Sandoval, Maro Simotas, Jessica Cachu, Erin Best, & Bre Kregas  
North Central College MOT Students

**From:** [Novack, William](#)  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [Pruneda, Rachel](#); [Krieger, Doug](#); [Dumler, Julie](#); [DeLarme, Rebecca](#); [Patrick Kennedy](#); [Tiffani Picco](#)  
**Subject:** Community Mobility Assessment of the Naperville Riverwalk  
**Date:** Thursday, October 5, 2023 11:50:51 AM

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Dear Hailey Parisek,

Thank you and your classmates for your e mail to Mayor Wehrli along with your mobility assessment of the Naperville Riverwalk. My name is Bill Novack and I am the Director of Transportation/Engineering/Development for the City and the City staff Riverwalk Commissioner.

Your observations are good and I want to thank you for bringing these items to our attention. Next week the City will be opening bids on a downtown brick resetting and leveling program. The east end of the Riverwalk where you observed the half inch bump has been added to that program. That location will be fixed probably in November of this year by our contractor removing and resetting the bricks adjacent to the entrance at a higher and matching elevation. A different and much larger project that we will construct in 2024 is the Eagle Street Gateway. The absence of an accessible access point at the west end was brought to our attention years ago so the commission worked to develop a solution. The Eagle Street Gateway project will provide an ADA accessible ramp to the lower Riverwalk west of Eagle Street. The addition of an ADA access point west of Eagle Street greatly enhances the Riverwalk and allows users to cross Eagle Street under the bridge as opposed to at grade.

I understand your comments about the absence of a railing between the Riverwalk and the river. When the riverwalk was initially constructed back in the 1930's there were no floodplain maps and regulations. When we went to reconstruct this area in the 2000's we had to follow the current floodplain regulations. Those regulations specifically prohibited us from installing a railing at the edge of the riverwalk due to the obstruction of the floodway, which is the moving portion of the river during a flood event. We were able to provide it on the ramp down to the riverwalk, but we were not allowed on the lower riverwalk. The great thing about the Naperville Riverwalk at this location is you have a choice between using an upper or lower pathway. There are advantages and disadvantages to both of the lower and upper walkways, but the good thing is you have a choice on how to walk near the river.

Widening the lower portions of the Riverwalk is challenging. We cannot widen out into the river due to the floodplain regulations. The lower walkway could be widened by removing and moving back the retaining walls on the back side of the walkway. This would be an expensive project. The east half of the section between the Webster Street covered bridge and Main Street is a cast in place structural retaining wall. Removal and replacement further back would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Most of the lower walkway varies between five and six feet in width, with some widened portions as you noted. A standard sidewalk in Naperville is five feet wide, so when this was designed and built in the early 2000's it was thought that five feet was sufficient. I acknowledge that in the last twenty years more emphasis has been placed on accommodating pedestrians so if it were to be designed

today it would probably be wider.

I know we did have signs on the wooden bridge warning about the low clearance. When I checked I noticed only one remaining, on the east face on the south side of the river. I will work with the Naperville Park District to get new signs posted. I will also talk with the Naperville Riverwalk Commission about adding some benches in the wider portions of the lower walkway. The retaining wall in that area acts as a seat wall, but you make an excellent point that not everyone can sit on a seat wall.

I will be sharing your letter and this response with the Naperville Riverwalk Commission at their October 11 meeting. You and your classmates are welcome to attend and provide input. The meeting will be held in the NEU conference room in the lower level of the Municipal Center located at 400 S Eagle Street and starts at 7:30 AM. Feel free to join us at that or any other future meetings of the Commission, which are held on the second Wednesday of every month.

Thank you helping us improve our community and for helping others regain their lives through the work you perform.

Sincerely,

William J. Novack, P.E.  
Director/City Engineer | Transportation, Engineering and Development Business Group  
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**From:** Hailey Parisek [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 27, 2023 8:21 PM  
**To:** Mayor <[Mayor@naperville.il.us](mailto:Mayor@naperville.il.us)>  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Subject:** Community Mobility Assessment: ADA Accessibility of the Naperville Riverwalk

**CAUTION:** This e-mail originated outside of the City of Naperville (@naperville.il.us).

**DO NOT** click links or open attachments unless you confirm the incoming address of the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mayor Wehrli, I hope this email finds you well. My name is Hailey Parisek, and I am an occupational therapy student at North Central College. My OT colleagues and I recently undertook a community mobility project, the objective of which was to evaluate the ADA accessibility of the Riverwalk in downtown Naperville. Our thorough measurements and assessments have led us to identify specific areas that could benefit from modifications to ensure a truly inclusive experience for all members of our community, especially those using wheelchairs or walkers. Attached to this email, you will find a detailed letter outlining our findings and recommendations. We have approached this project with the utmost respect and diligence, in hopes of contributing positively to our cherished community. We sincerely believe that with the proposed changes, the Riverwalk can become an even more welcoming space for everyone. We kindly request you to review our findings and take them into consideration for future planning and development initiatives. We are more than willing to meet or provide any additional information as needed. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you and remain hopeful for a progressive and inclusive future for Naperville.

Warm regards,  
Hailey Parisek  
Master of Occupational Therapy Program  
North Central College