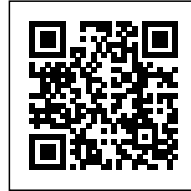




## OMAHA RIVERFRONT

*Posted on October 18, 2024 by Dima Fadel*



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**Categories:** [expanding design practices](#), [Low Density](#), [Places of Play](#), [Politics and economics](#), [Project](#), [Publication](#), [Territory and mobility](#)

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Omaha RiverFront

<https://urbannext.net/omaha-riverfront/>

The transformation of three downtown Omaha parks, collectively called The RiverFront, has redefined the city's relationship with urban green spaces. Over nearly six decades, these parks had become underused due to disconnected designs and challenging locations—one being urban and the others former brownfields.

The Omaha Riverfront Revitalization Project revitalized these 72 acres near the Missouri River, connecting them into a cohesive, amenity-filled space. By raising sunken areas to street level, the redesign improved pedestrian access and introduced expansive lawns, performance pavilions, playgrounds, and public art. A standout feature is the all-seasons skate ribbon, about the size of a football field, which has drawn thousands of visitors. An urban beach with scenic river views also adds a unique touch.

Enhanced pedestrian bridges, crosswalks, bike lanes, and sidewalks ensure safe access to these parks and surrounding areas. The RiverFront hosts a variety of events, from family activities to concerts, thanks to a dedicated programming team.

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OJB GLM Water Edge © Dan Schwalm

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OJB GLM Aerial © Jeff Durkin

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OJB GLM Aerial © Jeff Durkin

Funded through a public-private partnership, with 85% of construction costs covered by private donations, this project has sparked more than \$500 million in downtown reinvestment. It also became Nebraska's first Envision project, earning Platinum status for its focus on sustainability, community, and environmental care.

The RiverFront, comprising Gene Leahy Mall, Heartland of America Park, and Lewis & Clark Landing, has become a hub of entertainment and culture, spurring new business and residential growth. Completed on time and within budget, it demonstrates how thoughtful urban planning can rejuvenate cities. Gene Leahy Mall, originally built in the 1970s, was the first focus of the project. Its redesign elevated the sunken areas, offering seamless pedestrian access and adding spaces for performances, art, and recreation, along with interactive water features and a dog park.

Heartland of America Park, located just east of Gene Leahy Mall, connects the urban core to the

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Missouri River. It features a reconfigured lake, an event lawn, a skate ribbon, an amphitheater, and a pier overlooking the river.



OJB GLM Arches Playground © Ryan Fischer

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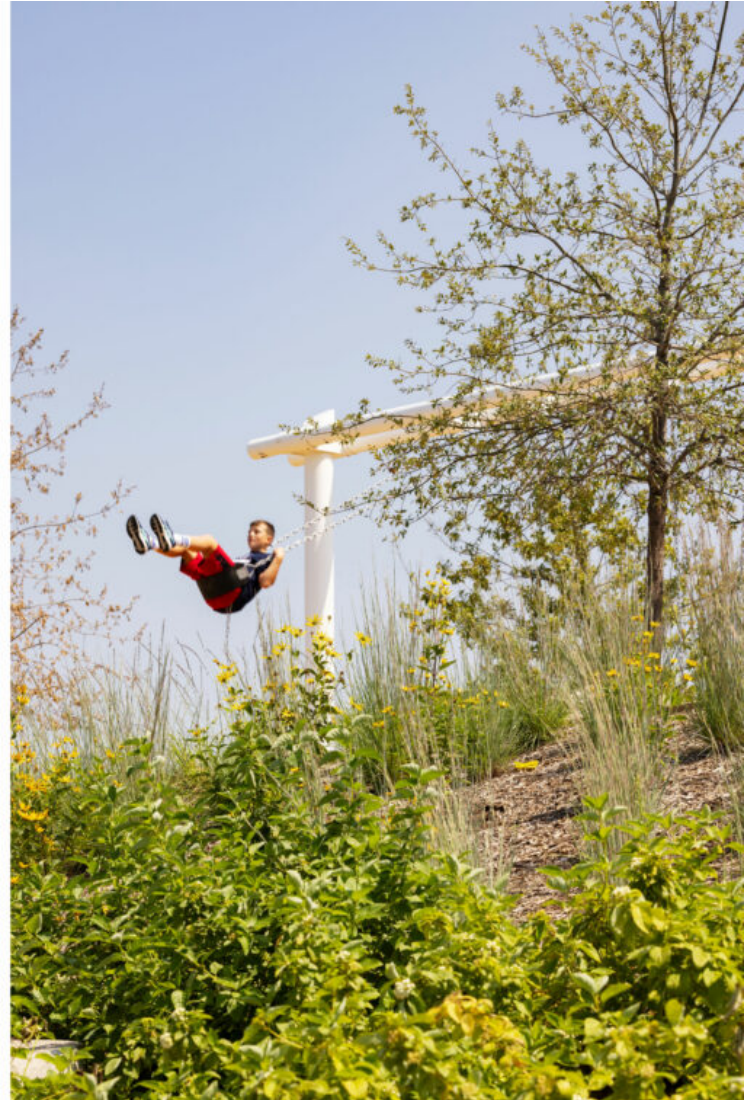
OJB GLM Under Arches © Dan Schwalm

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On the left, OJB GLM Cascades © Dan Schwalm / On the right, OJB HOA Swing © Dan Schwalm  
Finally, Lewis & Clark Landing, once a lead refinery site, has been transformed into a family-friendly space with playgrounds, sand volleyball, an urban beach, and a new children's science museum. Together, these parks reflect Omaha's vision for revitalizing its riverfront and creating vibrant, accessible urban spaces.

Established in 1854, Omaha evolved from a pioneer town into a metropolitan city. Over time, suburban sprawl and industrial scars affected its downtown. In the 1960s, a focus on downtown



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revitalization began, but it wasn't until two business leaders proposed redeveloping the riverfront parks that real change occurred. A public-private partnership raised \$342 million for the project, led by local philanthropists and the city.

After a comprehensive master plan, the parks opened to widespread acclaim, with Gene Leahy Mall debuting in 2022, followed by Heartland of America Park and Lewis & Clark Landing in 2023. Together, they have welcomed millions of visitors and breathed new life into Omaha's riverfront.



OJB LCL Play Entry © Dan Schwalm

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OJB GLM Small Slides © Dan Schwalm

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OJB HOA Skate Ribbon Winter © MECA

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