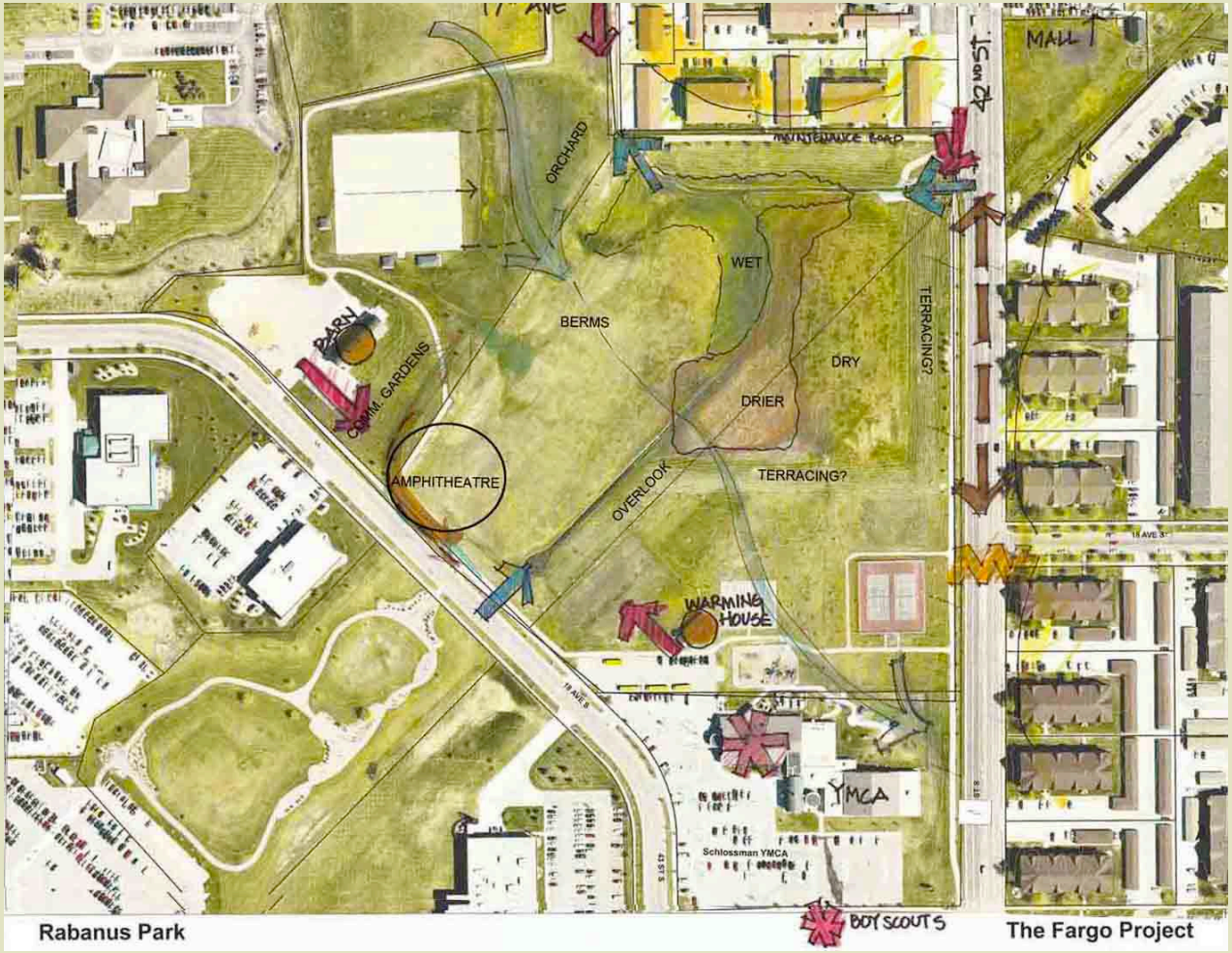
THE FARGO PROJECT

people ~ restore ~ water ~ gather

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**Background**

Over the last several decades the City of Fargo built over 20 large neighborhood basins to offer protection from catastrophic spring and summertime storms. The basins were built to address water quantity, but not water quality. Because social and aesthetic impacts were not considered in the selection and construction of these basins, these barren sites cut off neighborhoods and disrupt connectivity. In addition, many of the basins are in underserved neighborhoods with low or moderate-income residents, including Fargo's Native American community and New American population, refugees and immigrants from 20 different nations such as Bhutan, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Iraq, and Bosnia.

The Fargo Project in Fargo, ND is a pilot project to demonstrate how *holistic ecological restoration*, *socially engaged ecological art*, and *active community process* can synergize to transform functioning *stormwater infrastructure* into vibrant and innovative green spaces for our urban community. The 18-acre urban stormwater detention basin at Rabanus Park, one of Fargo's largest and most visible basins, will become a multifunctional commons with restored native prairie stream, walking trails, and outdoor spaces for natural play, gathering and celebration.

The project's long term goal is to transform many of Fargo's stormwater detention basins into neighborhood amenities and to do this through a fully participatory community process. Water quality, flood control, biodiversity, cultural diversity, and human health and well being become the beneficiaries of recognizing and celebrating stormwater as a valuable resource.

**Project team**

The project launched in 2011 when the City of Fargo received an inaugural $100,000 Our Town Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to support the research, outreach and design phases of the pilot. It is co-led by Fargo planner/ landscape architect Nicole Crutchfield and ecological artist, Jackie Brookner. The city began working with Brookner in March, 2010 when she was invited to Fargo to help investigate solutions. Respected internationally for her socially engaged, ecologically functional art, Brookner's practice unites natural systems approaches to storm water filtration with intensive community process. In order to build local capacity for socially engaged ecological art, the team includes five local artists, made possible by the "Our Town" grant.

**Building a Community of Interest**

While this is a city initiated project, part of its purpose is to create a methodology and processes that embed it deeply and broadly within Fargo's diverse communities—from concept through design, implementation, use and care of the spaces.

Our primary efforts during the project's first year were to create relationships with city residents of all ages and backgrounds to understand what kind of commons people want and the research opportunities the site presents. Over several months our ecological artist team and other volunteers engaged over 400 people of all ages and backgrounds in the initial visioning outreach. The project team visited nearby residences and businesses, went into churches, had participatory events in the park, with the secondary schools, and in the high school, met individually and in small groups with New Americans from many cultures, with representatives from the Native American Community, and engaged with students and faculty from Fargo/ Moorhead academic institutions, including North Dakota State University, Minnesota State University Moorhead, and Concordia College.

We felt it was particularly important to learn from the long experiences of Native Americans in this region and to ground the project in the place where Native American values and ecological values intersect. Our first major public event was a site visit and well attended lecture with Lakota ecologist and ethnobotanist Linda Different Cloud.

**WeDesign Workshop**

In late spring 2012 over 200 people participated in the celebration inaugurating the basin with Native American dancing and drumming and at the WeDesign workshop that followed.

For the three days after the workshop many other people came to contribute their ideas and to see the models and drawings from the workshop at the open design space at the warming hut next to the basin. A schematic plan was then developed based on the community ideas.

## Schematic plan based on community visioning and workshop

17 acres of native prairie, wet meadow, and culturally significant plants

Colorful wildflowers for bird and pollinator habitat and beauty

A meandering prairie stream that allows infiltration replaces the concrete low flow channel

Orchard with fruit and nut trees

Walking trails throughout

Natural play areas with local logs and boulders

Trees for shade, sound, and wind shelter

A 1/2 acre community garden and Farmer's market

An overlook and gathering area

An earthen amphitheater

Opportunities for winter play

**Partners**

Regional native plant restoration consultants will oversee and manage the initial planting, and train City Public Works staff and The Parks District in planting and ecological management practices. Concurrently, the project team will continue working with community partners to build programming for the community garden and for sustaining the project through skills training in prairie restoration practices, monitoring and maintenance for underserved populations, as well as stewardship partnerships with nearby schools.

Primary Partners include:
River Keepers
The Parks District
The Plains Art Museum
Fargo Native American Commission
Lutheran Social Services
Growing Together
Soil Conservation District
The Fargo Project Advisory group includes: NDSU Dept. of Plant Sciences, Landscape Architecture, Fine Arts, Natural Resources, Zoology; The Arts Partnership; K-12 teachers; and other community leaders.
We are working closely with City engineers on all phases of the project.

**First phase of construction, testing, fall 2012**

Due to the environmental history of the region, the geological context and soils in this area are unique, unlike even similar climates in the Midwest. Establishing native plant material and wet meadow in the context of the native soils, groundwater system and a functioning stormwater basin is new in this area before. Therefore before full build out of the site, construction initiated with full-scale tests. The outcome of these experiments will be realized Summer 2013.

**Construction/Installation Timeline**

June 2013 – August 2013: Finalize engineering and restoration construction plans
September 2013: Finalize Adaptive Management Plan, capacity building activities
October 2013: Finalize hydrological model
January – April 2014: Set up baseline monitoring program
April – June 2014: Set up installation workshops, begin channel removal, earthwork
October 2014: Seeding and plant installation