



02

THE ARETHA

OVERVIEW

ABOUT

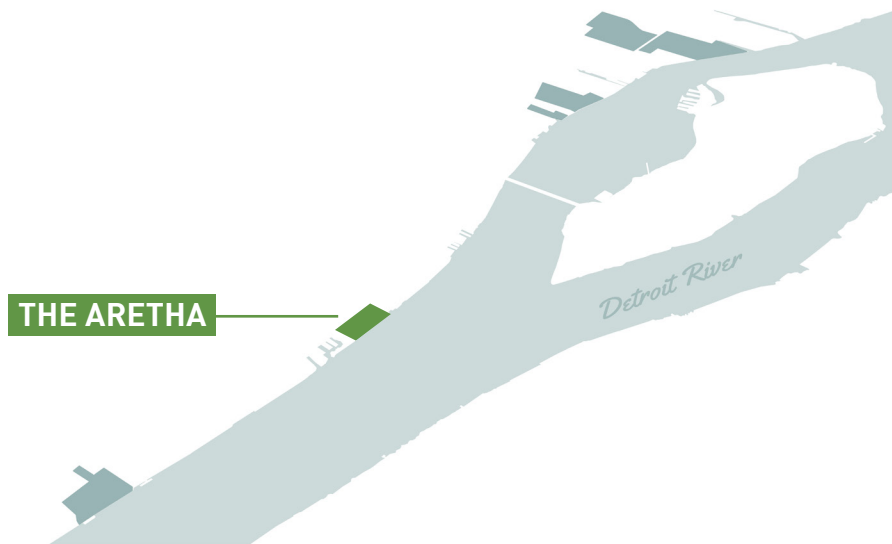
The Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre (formerly known as Chene Park) is located approximately 1.5 miles east of Downtown Detroit and sits adjacent to Milliken State Park and Harbor to the west and Valade Park to the east. The amphitheater has a capacity of 6,000 which includes 5,000 fixed seats under a tensile tent structure and lawn seating for 1,000 people. The venue provides a unique setting with the Detroit River as the backdrop to the stage offering expansive views of the river for event attendees. Renowned talent such as Smokey Robinson, B-52's, Manhattan Transfer, Anne Murray, Robin Thicke, Miles David, Aretha Franklin, and the comedian Sinbad have performed at the amphitheater.

ASSETS

- Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre

DISTRICT STATS

Total Site Area	+/- 9 acres
Linear Feet of Shoreline	+/- 820 feet
Amphitheater Capacity	6,000
Zoning Designation	Parks and Recreation (PR)
Local Historic Designation	Aretha Franklin Amphitheater/Chene Park



EXISTING AERIAL OF SITE & SURROUNDINGS

NOT TO SCALE 

HISTORY

The Riverfront Music Theatre at Chene Park opened in 1984. Designed by the architecture firm Schervish, Vogel and Merz, the amphitheater was constructed for \$2.2 million, had an original capacity of 2,000, and was designed without permanent structures. The park was steadily upgraded into the form we know it as today with permanent seats under a distinctive canopied roof. The park was originally named for Charles Chene, a French immigrant who owned a strip of land along the shores of the Detroit River. In 2018, the venue's name was changed to The Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre, which is commonly referred to as "The Aretha" in honor of Detroit native and famous singer Aretha Franklin. In 2019, new digital signage was added along Atwater Street to memorialize the venue's new name.

Jazz has played the pronounced role of musical concerts since opening in 1984. Classical music was also an important musical component and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra played in Chene Park after Ford Auditorium closed. Other musical programs have included folk, blues, bluegrass, and a variety of other world music and dancing.

Before the amphitheater, the site was home to Native American tribes until the 1600s, followed by French settlers and farmers in the 1700s and early 1880s until industrialization took hold in the later part of the nineteenth century. By the late 1800s, the Detroit riverfront proved an ideal link for shipping Michigan's abundant natural resources (iron, copper, lumber) to America's eastern shore, and the site associated with the amphitheater was filled with holding and staging areas for the lumber industry. Maps from 1885 to the 1920s reveal a shift in the riverfront industries from lumberyards to ship and railroad car building companies and various industries associated with iron, steel, and coal products.



Construction on Chene Park, 1984



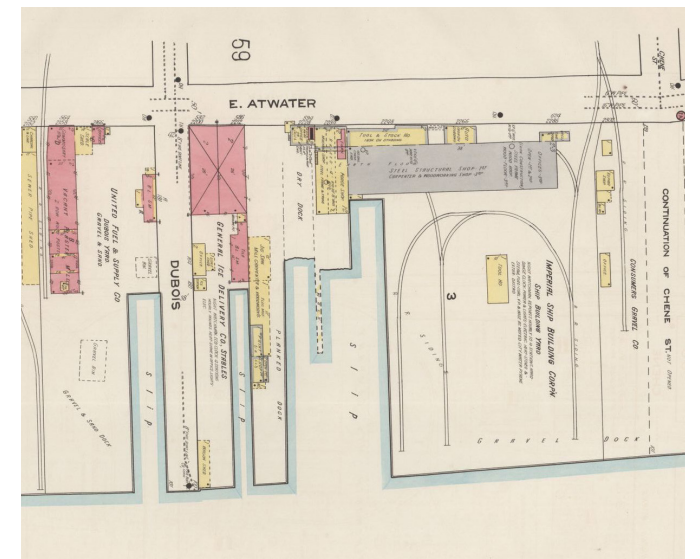
Chene Park along the Detroit River, 1986



Concert goes on the lawn, July 1990



The Goebel Brewing Co. Plant No. 3 was located at the corner of Atwater and Dubois Streets



The 1922 Sanborn map shows a dry dock, gravel and sand yards, a ship building yard, steel and woodworking shops, and an ice delivery company

TODAY

Today the site contains approximately 750 lineal feet of river shoreline, an L-shaped pond, a short segment of the Detroit Riverwalk connecting to Milliken State Park and Harbor to the west and Valade Park to the east, a Detroit Water & Sewerage Department building, and four buildings associated with the amphitheater.

The amphitheater is a well-sized venue for today's outdoor entertainment market with a capacity of 6,000 which includes 5,000 fixed seats under a tensile tent structure and lawn seating for 1,000 people. A separate multi-level pavilion sits approximately 40-feet above the stage and contains concession stands, restrooms, dressing rooms, private event space, and mechanical operations.

The Aretha hosted approximately 25 concerts in 2019 as well as graduations, community activities, and special events. Before the 2019 COVID pandemic, the Aretha had an annual attendance of 150,000 people each year.

In June 2021, a master plan was completed for the Milliken State Park and Harbor west of The Aretha. The 31-acre parkland is operated by the State of Michigan and offers a naturalized landscape with plantings and habitat that reflect the park's native environment. Future improvements to the park seek to connect to the larger riverfront system including The Aretha.



Boats anchored on the river near the amphitheater during a concert



Concert goes



Ray Charles performed at the Concert of Colors concert in 2002



View from within the amphitheater looking toward the river



Festival Plaza and the 1984 artwork *Carnival* by John Piet

OBSERVATIONS

The planning team performed an extensive analysis of the structural, civil, electrical, mechanical, and management and operations components of the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre site. Participants in community meetings and surveys also provided valuable insight about the site’s existing conditions from a users’ perspective. The following summarizes key observations made during the planning process.

ITEM	DESCRIPTION
Access	There is a desire to continue the Riverwalk along the site and improve the pedestrian experience of the Atwater Street portion of the site.
Parking	There is a desire for more parking and shuttle availability from off-site locations for events.
Back-of-House	Suggested improvements include locker rooms, the stage floor and canopy, and winterizing the bathrooms.
Front-of-House	Suggested improvements include updating the box office, adding LED screens, better seats, more concessions, and enhanced security.
Daily & Seasonal Activities	Public meeting participants voiced a desire for more daily public access to the site and for winter activities such as ice skating on the lagoon and a sledding hill.
Stewardship	Public meeting participants suggested forming a “Friends of The Aretha” group of volunteers.



Amphitheater and pond as seen from Atwater St.



Pavilion



Amphitheater tensile roof over fixed seating



Current ticket booth along Atwater Street



Administrative Office building



Detroit Water & Sewerage Department building



Erosion above the existing riprap shoreline



The Mall, connecting Atwater Street to the riverfront



Staff parking along the riverfront

REFERENCE

The **Comprehensive Condition Assessment** provides a detail evaluation for the structural, civil, electrical, and mechanical components of the parks and plazas. See **Appendix A** for the full report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As part of the planning process for The Aretha Franklin Amphitheater, the City of Detroit and the planning team hosted a series of public engagement events that allowed residents, park users, and community leaders to review the opportunities and challenges of the sites and collectively propose ideas and recommendations to improve them in the future.

The following list summarizes key takeaways identified during the community engagements

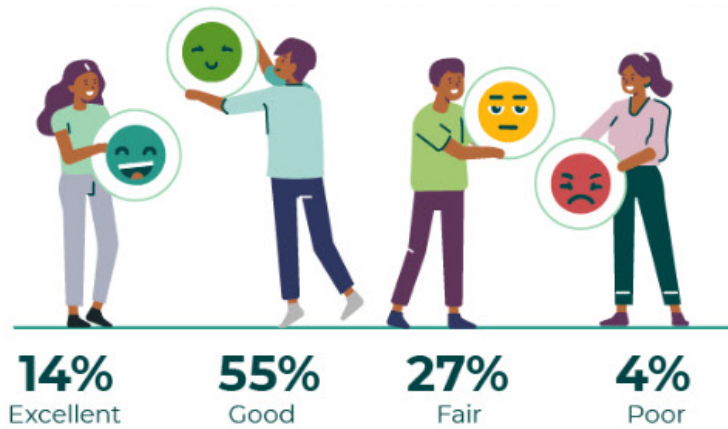
Accessing the site:

- Free access to the site and Riverwalk when events are not going on
- Parking is an issue, as is access via transit
- Improve accessibility throughout the site.
- Ensure all areas meet ADA standards at minimum

Site Maintenance and Amenity Upgrades:

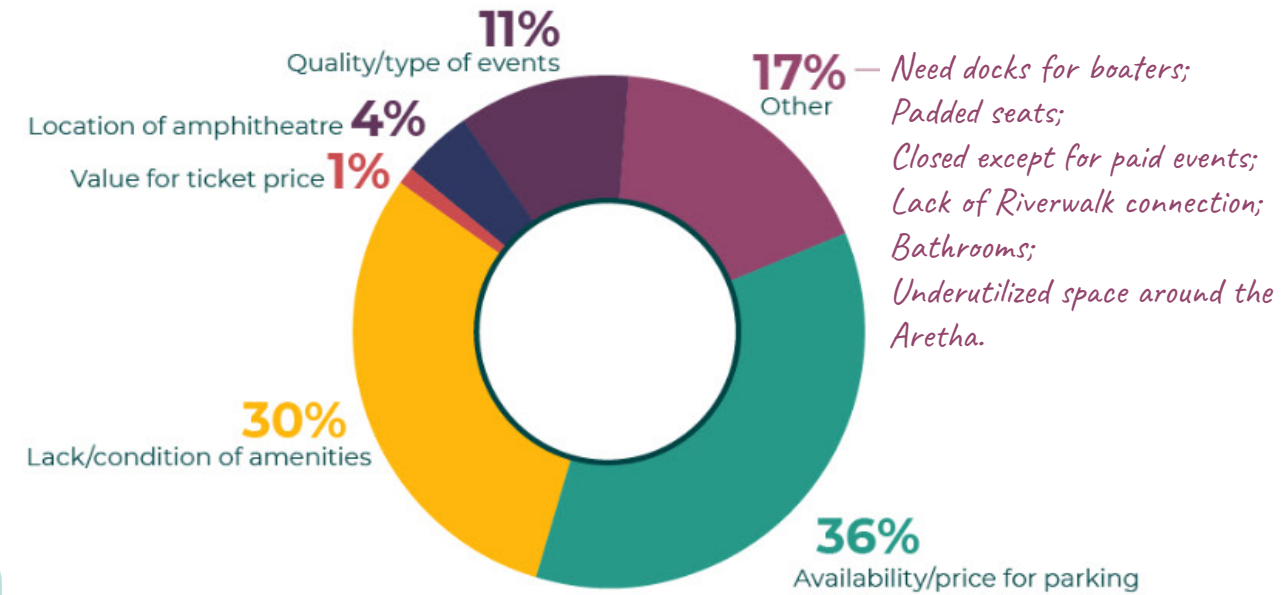
- Updated bathrooms, better food options, and a digitized ticketing system
- The maintenance of the ponds, add winter activities

WHAT IS YOUR GENERAL OPINION?



THE GROUNDS SHOULD BE IMPROVED TO BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO VISITORS AND EVERY DAY USERS WHEN THERE IS NOT AN EVENT GOING ON.

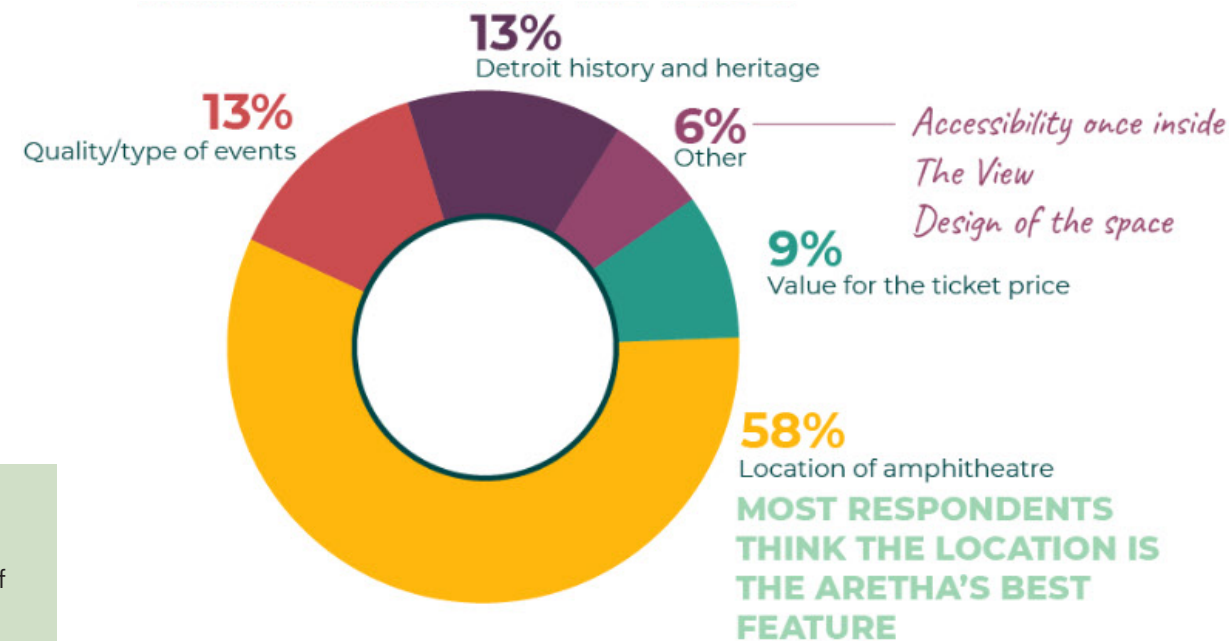
WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE?



IF YOU HAVE NOT VISITED THE AMPHITHEATRE, WHY NOT?



WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE FEATURE?



IT'S A BEAUTIFUL VENUE. MAKE SURE YOU KEEP UP WITH UPDATES AND MAINTENANCE OF THE PROPERTY.

REFERENCE

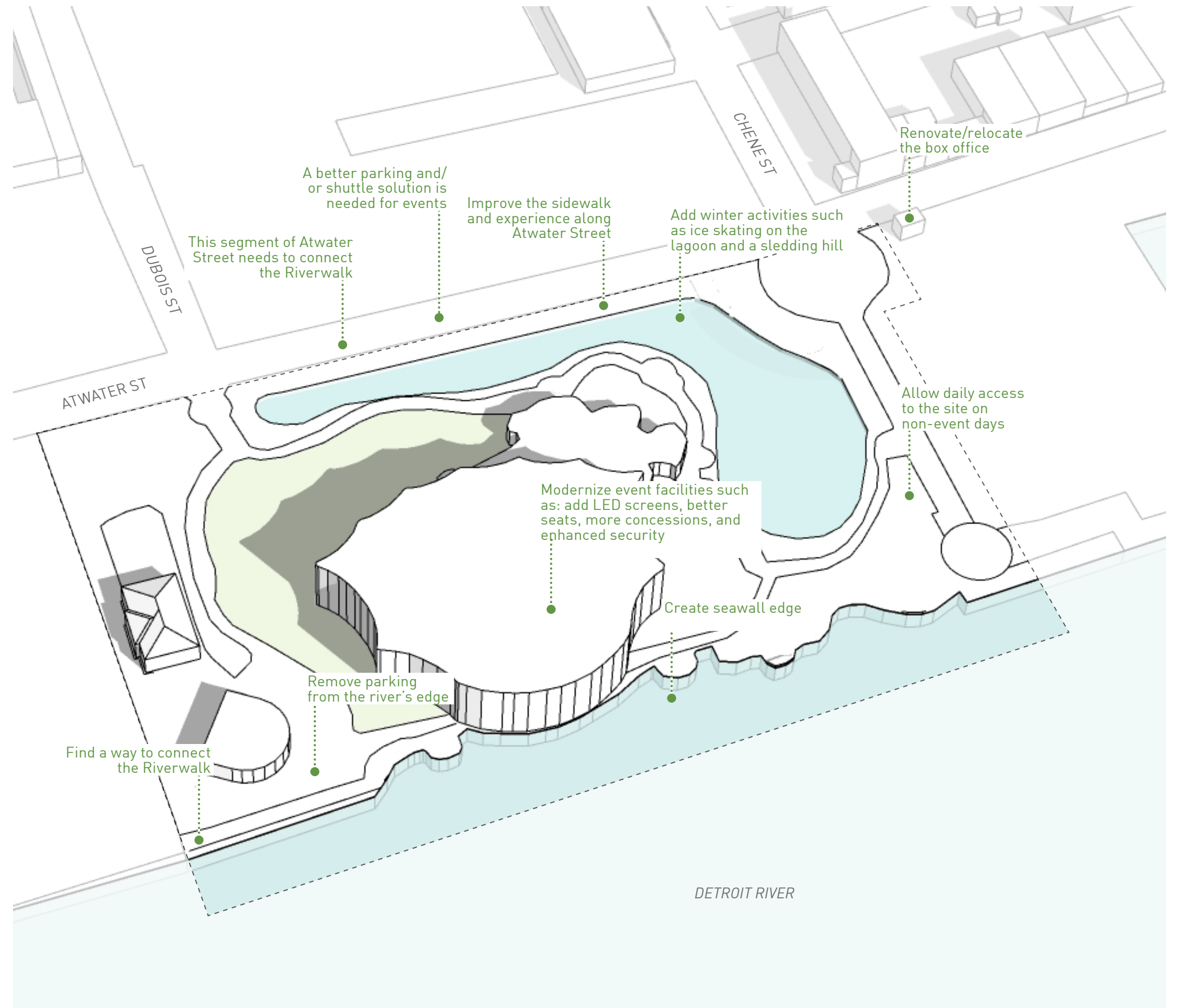
Participants at community meetings and in surveys provided feedback and about the plaza, parks and event facilities. See **Appendix B** for a summary of each **Community Engagement**.

DESIGN APPROACH

Throughout the planning process, the planning team and participants in community meetings and surveys exchanged ideas and recommendations for The Aretha's future. The following list summarizes opportunities for improvement.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Maintain the quality of events, and explore additional programming,** such as the potential to activate the site during fall and winter, public access to the site on non-event days, and more variety in the types of concerts and events offered.
- **Improve transportation, circulation, and parking strategies,** such as enhancing neighborhood communications, partnering with local parking lot owners, and making streetscape improvements.
- **Upgrade systems and maintain the facility,** including modernizing event facilities, introducing cashless payments, improving ADA accessibility, and making general updates and maintenance to the grounds, pond, and amphitheater.
- **Connect the Riverwalk** by enhancing the Atwater Street streetscape and/or by creating a connection behind the amphitheater along the river.
- Find a way to **celebrate Aretha Franklin** on the site.








OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT





VISION

The diagram illustrates a proposed program key circulation routes for The Aretha Franklin Amphitheater. The conceptual vision provides a future framework for planning, design, and implementation. By securing venue doors and relocating internal gates, some pathways within the facility could be accessed by the everyday public. A potential boardwalk/seawall edge should be considered to allow the Detroit Riverwalk to continue behind the Amphitheater structure (requires further study).

PROGRAM

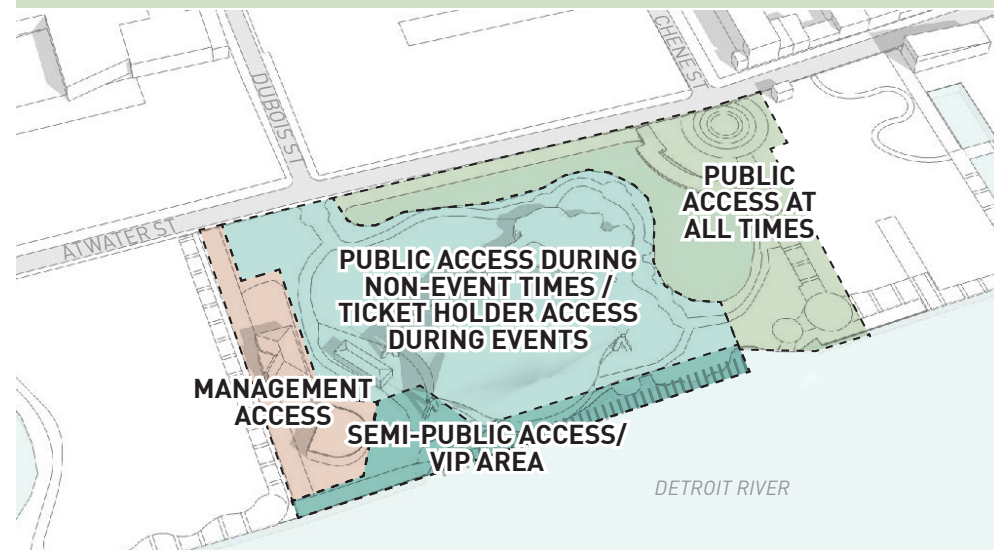
-  PASSIVE LANDSCAPE
-  WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES
-  EXISTING BUILDINGS
-  NEW BUILDINGS
-  PARKING
-  POSSIBLE/FUTURE BOARDWALK
-  SECURED FENCE
-  EXISTING GATE
-  PROPOSED GATE

CIRCULATION

-  VEHICULAR/MULTI-MODAL STREETS
-  PEDESTRIAN PATHS
-  MAIN ENTRANCES
-  POSSIBLE/FUTURE DAYTIME PATH

REFERENCE

For detailed site diagrams that informed the urban design approach - see Appendix C for Site Analysis Diagrams for full information.



ACCESS ZONES



PROPOSED PROGRAM DISTRIBUTION & CIRCULATION

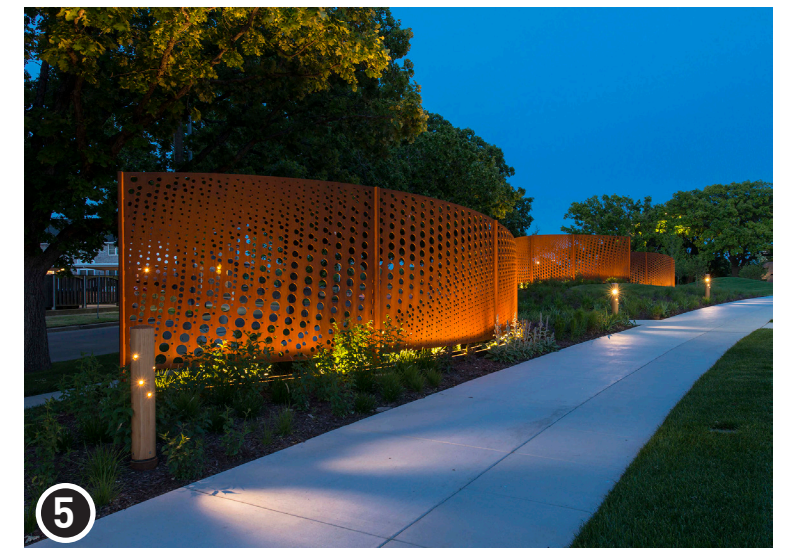
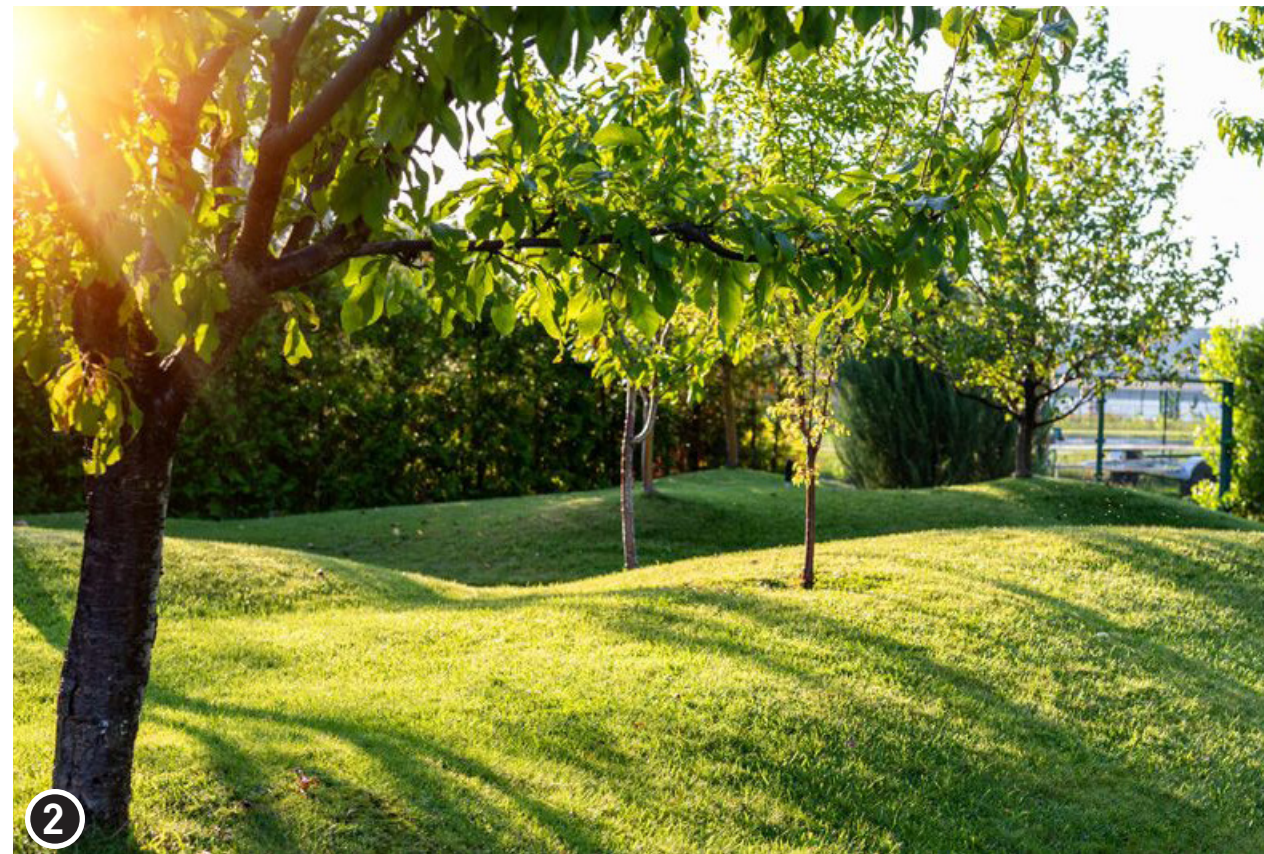
RECOMMENDATIONS

PASSIVE LANDSCAPES

Passive landscape areas on The Aretha Franklin Amphitheater site are envisioned to be places of grassy lawns, plantings and shade trees, walking paths, nature habitat, seating and picnic areas with views of the river and the amphitheater stage.

The images illustrate the following passive landscape environments:

1. West Plaza park entrance
2. Existing landscape berm
3. Event lawn/hill (event days only)
4. Amphitheater gardens
5. Landscape or artistic screening of back-of-house facilities (limited public access - event days only)



PASSIVE LANDSCAPE ZONES

PRECEDENT IMAGERY

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTIVE LANDSCAPES

Active landscape areas on The Aretha site are essentially extensions and connectors of the Detroit Riverwalk, providing wide pathways for walking, jogging, and bicycling. Currently the Riverwalk does not extend along the water's edge on The Aretha site so it is important to enhance the connection on Atwater Street to fill the gap along the highly popular 3.5 mile Riverwalk greenway.

The images illustrate the following active landscape environments:

1. Riverwalk connection to Atwater Street (on Milliken State Park area)
2. Riverwalk extension into the site, create connection to the site's walkways, and provide potential VIP area during events
3. East Plaza as the main park entrance with bike parking, wayfinding, and space for gathering
4. Existing Riverwalk
5. Future riverfront edge/boardwalk



ACTIVE LANDSCAPE ZONES



PRECEDENT IMAGERY



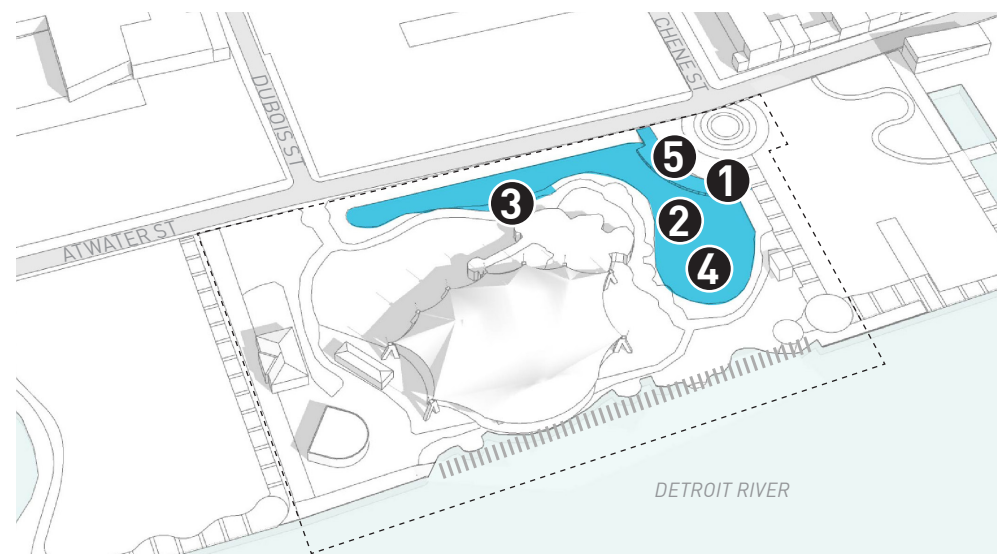
RECOMMENDATIONS

WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES

Water-based activities at The Aretha are envisioned to take place on and around the pond. Activities like model sailboats, wildlife watching in the warm months, ice skating in the cold months and walkways with overlook points along the pond's edge.

The images illustrate the following potential water-based activity environments:

1. Warm months pond activity such as model sailboats
2. Cold months pond activity such as ice skating and ice bumper cars
3. Walkways and overlook points along the pond
4. Pond fountain and seating along the edges
5. Pond overlook with informational signage



WATER-BASED ACTIVITY ZONES



1



2



3



4



5

PRECEDENT IMAGERY

RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES

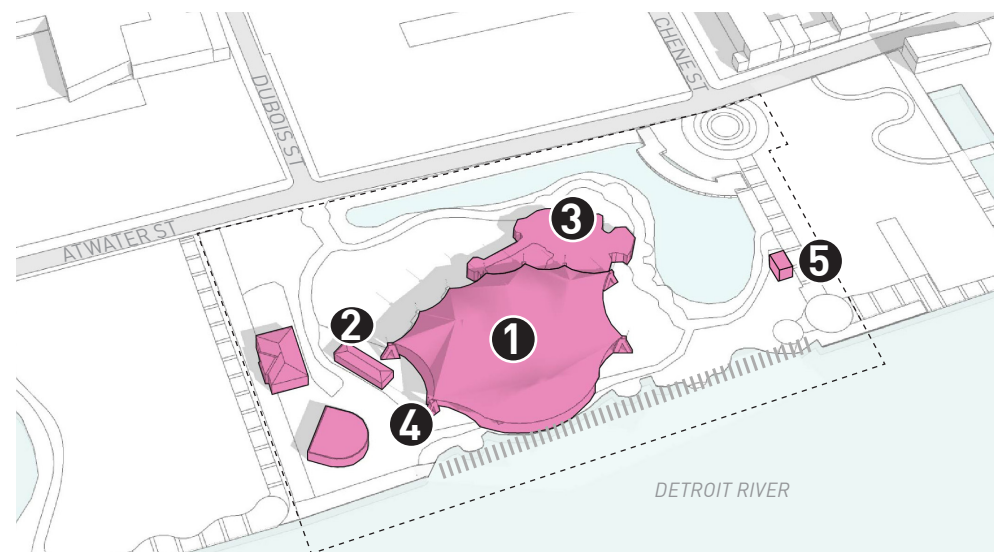
Buildings and structures on The Aretha site are needed to support event goers, park users, and venue and event management with restrooms, shade and shelter, ticket booth, and recreational amenities.

This plan envisions upgrades to existing buildings including the office/green rooms building, the amphitheater and amenity building.

Potential new structures might include a restrooms building and a ticket office.

The images illustrate the following buildings and structures:

1. Renovated amphitheater seating
2. Restrooms building
3. Renovated pavilion/amenity building
4. Renovated Office/Green Rooms building with lighting and landscaping where adjacent to public paths
5. Ticket booth



BUILDING & STRUCTURE ZONES



PRECEDENT IMAGERY



RECOMMENDATIONS

EVENT LOADING, PARKING AND STAGING

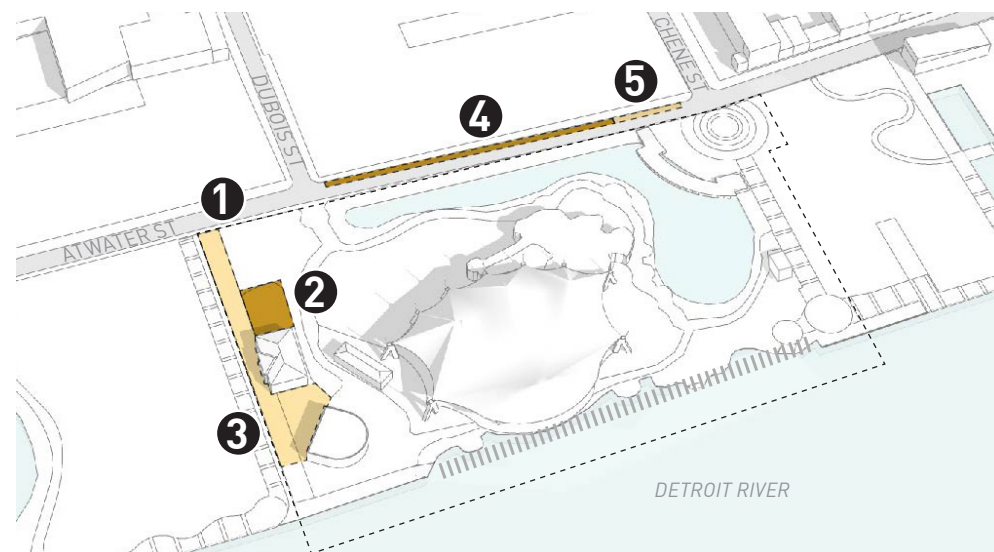
Well-located parking areas provide important infrastructure for allowing pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles to get to and from their destinations safely, efficiently, and conveniently. During events at the amphitheater, the importance of parking, loading, and staging is magnified.

While public parking is not provided on site, a reconfiguration of Atwater Street through a streetscape improvement project could provide some on-street parking on one side of the street, primarily for users visiting the site during non-event times. On event days, a portion of this new parking lane could alternatively be used as a designated drop-off and pick-up zone.

Consider permeable pavers on site to aid stormwater management and improve the aesthetics of back-of-house areas.

The images illustrate the following parking and circulation environments:

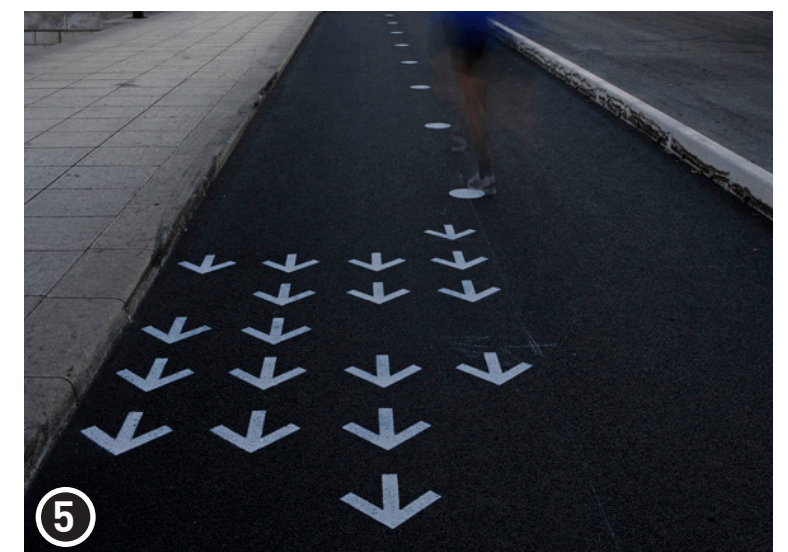
1. Renovated driveway to the site with pedestrian-friendly design and signage at Atwater Street
2. Parking for GLWA building users
3. Parking/loading for Office/Green Room building users
4. On-street parking along Atwater Street
5. Designated event drop-off/pick-up zone along Atwater Street



PARKING & STAGING ZONES



PRECEDENT IMAGERY



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS ATWATER STREET CHALLENGES

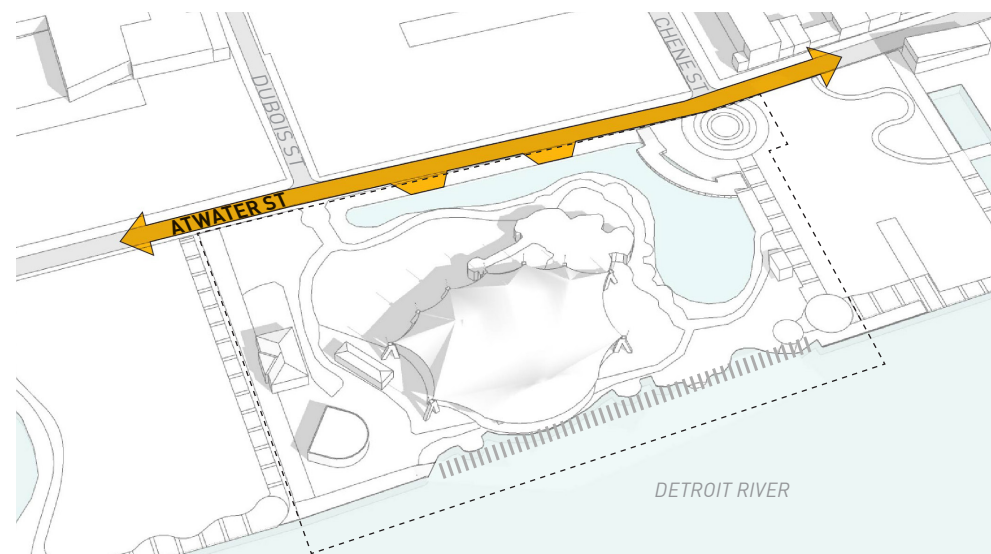
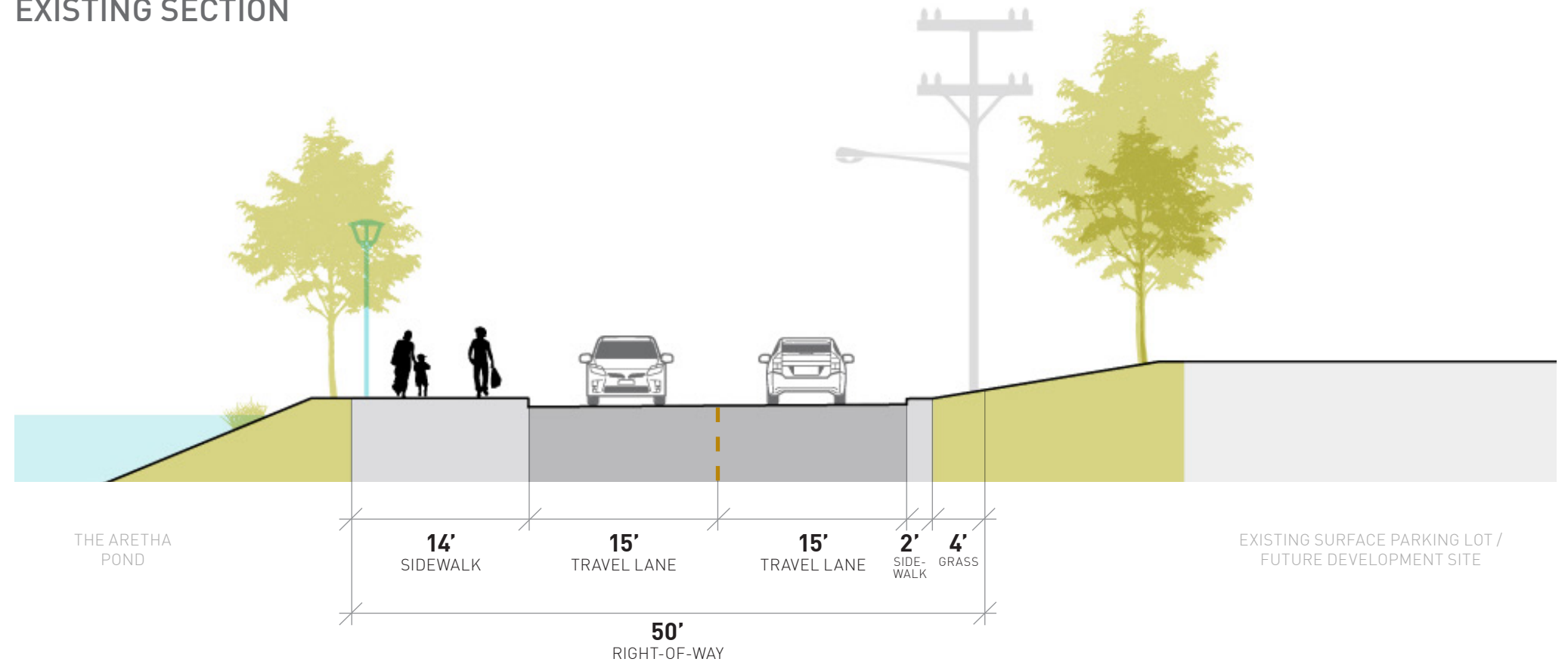
The images illustrate existing conditions along Atwater Street along the length of the Aretha Amphitheater site. Current challenges for the pedestrians, cyclists, event goers, and service vehicles include:

- Excessively wide travel lanes
- Excessively narrow or no sidewalk on north side of street
- Lack of bicycle infrastructure, considering that this portion of Atwater Street serves as part of the Riverwalk in order to stitch adjacent Riverwalk segments together
- Lack of on-street parking
- Lack of event drop-off/pick-up areas
- Vehicular speeding issues, particularly in the evenings and night

EXISTING STREET VIEW



EXISTING SECTION



SEGMENT OF ATWATER STREET ADJACENT TO THE ARETHA SITE

VISION ATWATER STREET

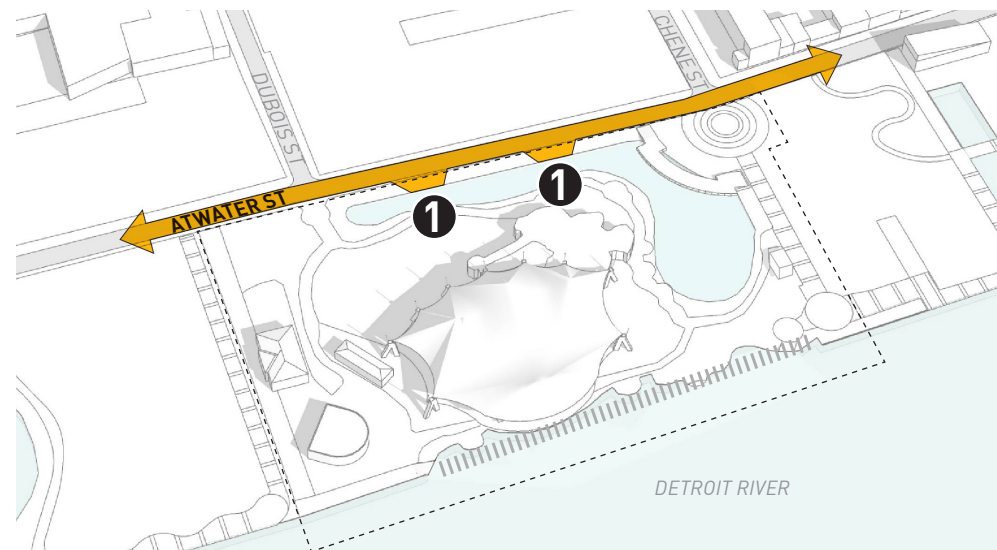
Atwater Street is and will continue to be a critical east-west spine of the East Riverfront district. Currently, the Atwater Street right-of-way changes in width five times along its entire 1.25-mile stretch between the GM/Renaissance Center and Joseph Campau Street. Sidewalk widths, presence of bike lanes, presence of on-street parking, and streetscape furnishings also vary.

The following pages illustrate existing conditions and proposed improvements for the 700-foot (0.1 miles) segment of Atwater Street adjacent to The Aretha and to serve the public as a connector to the Riverwalk. Coordination among the City of Detroit, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, and adjacent property owners will be necessary to successfully plan for and design a cohesive, multi-modal Atwater Street experience, both adjacent to The Aretha and along its 1.25-mile entirety.

Another opportunity to improve the Atwater streetscape is to look outside the right-of-way. The diagram below illustrates a few moments where the sidewalk could expand into the site, providing a place for people to stop off and meet and a place for venue signage.

The images illustrate the following streetscape improvements for Atwater Street:

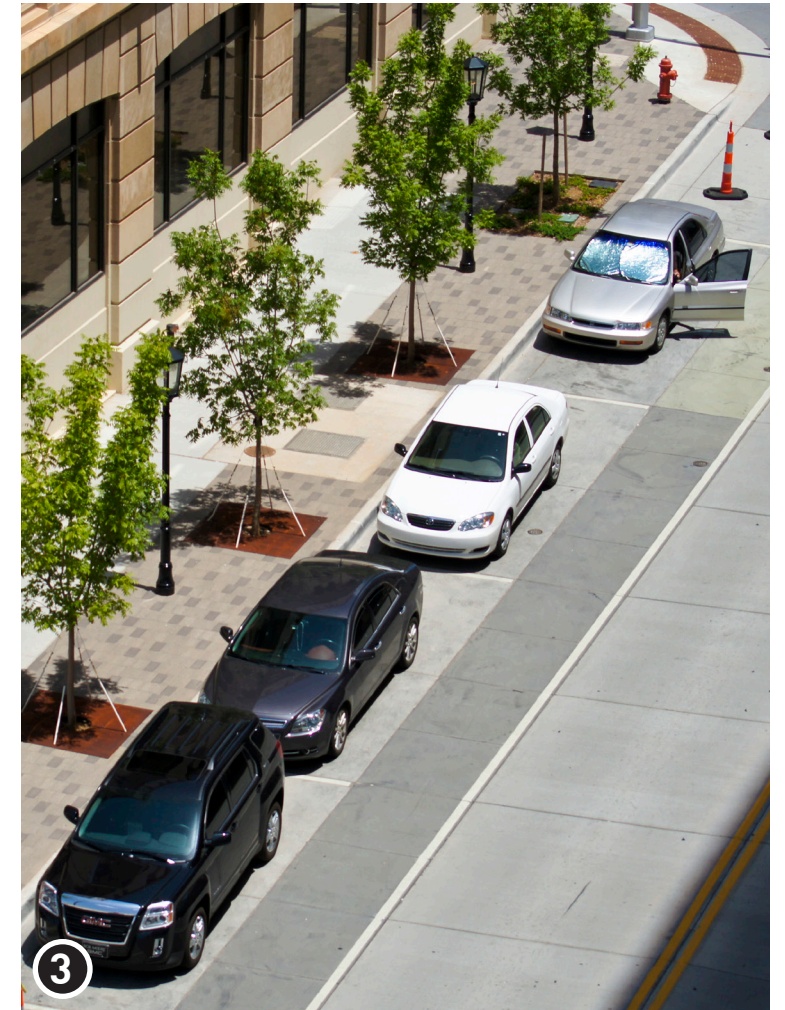
1. Sidewalk expansions with signage, seating, and landscaping
2. Unique paving with potential interpretive signage to celebrate Aretha Franklin or Detroit's riverfront history
3. On-street parking
4. Streetscape furnishings such as bike racks and waste receptacles



SEGMENT OF ATWATER STREET ADJACENT TO THE ARETHA SITE



1



3



2



4

PRECEDENT IMAGERY

RECOMMENDATIONS ATWATER STREET

The two proposed options illustrate the opportunity to provide on-street parking and designated drop-off/pick-up areas for events as well as to formalize shared travel lanes (“sharrows”) to enhance bicycle safety in the roadway — all while working within the existing right-of-way and existing curb-to-curb dimensions. In both options, on-street parking would be available during non-event times. During events, a portion of this lane could be designated for buses, shuttles, and accessible drop-off/pick-up locations to facilitate event traffic.

Any design improvements will need to be coordinated with the Department of Public Works and other property owners in the area.

PROPOSED SECTION, OPTION 1:

This option positions the on-street parking/drop-off/pick-up lane on the south side of the street. Advantages of this option include its proximity to the amphitheater site (closer and no need to cross the street), and the wider sidewalk which provides ample queuing and disembarking space for patrons using the loading zone. Disadvantages include the potential that sidewalks along the amphitheater site get cluttered and congested by people queuing and disembarking from buses, shuttles, and other vehicles.

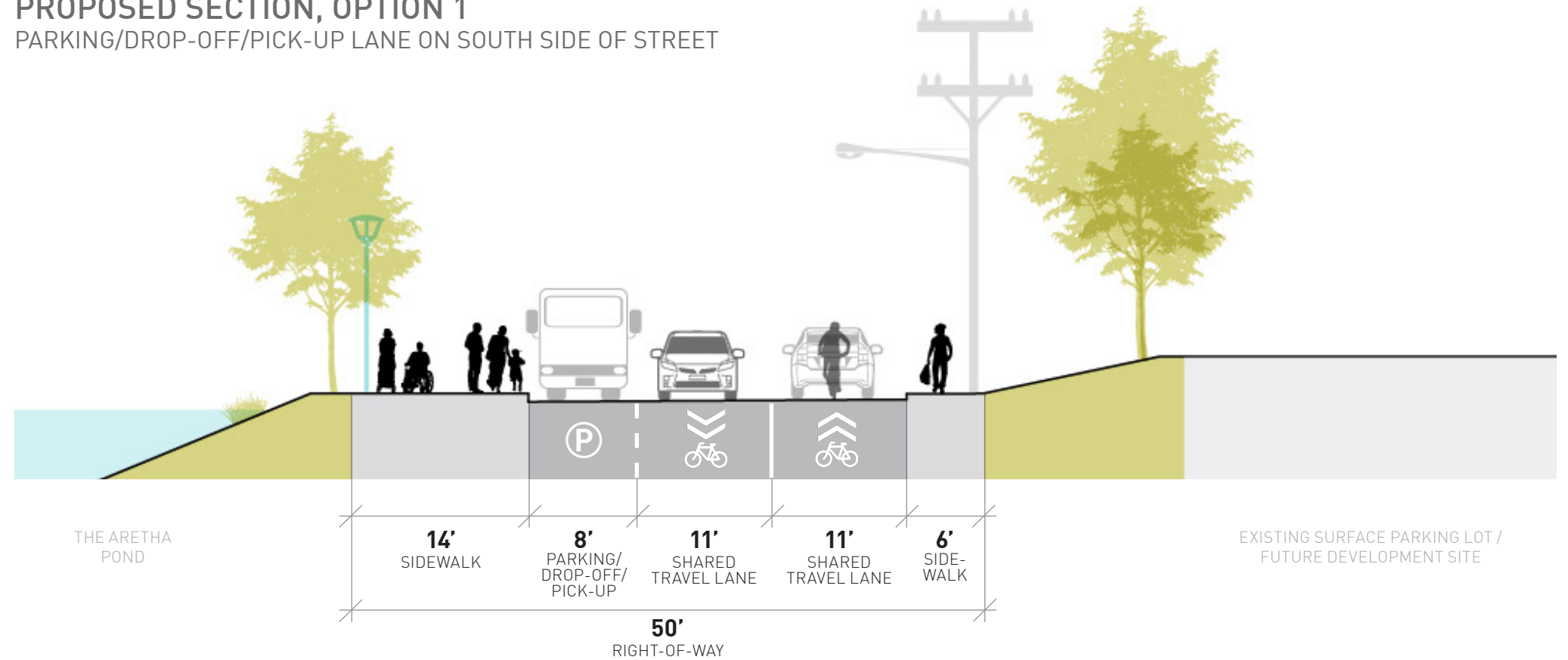
PROPOSED SECTION, OPTION 2:

This option positions the on-street parking/drop-off/pick-up on the north side of the street. Advantages of this option include keeping the sidewalk on the south side of the street uncrowded, the potential for consistency with segments of Atwater Street further west if more streetscape improvements take place in the future, and the benefit of having on-street parking adjacent to future retail if it were provided on the future development site. Disadvantages include the need to cross the street (less ideal for handicap persons and crowds) and the relatively narrow sidewalk which may result in sidewalk congestion while people queue and disembark from buses, shuttles, and other vehicles.

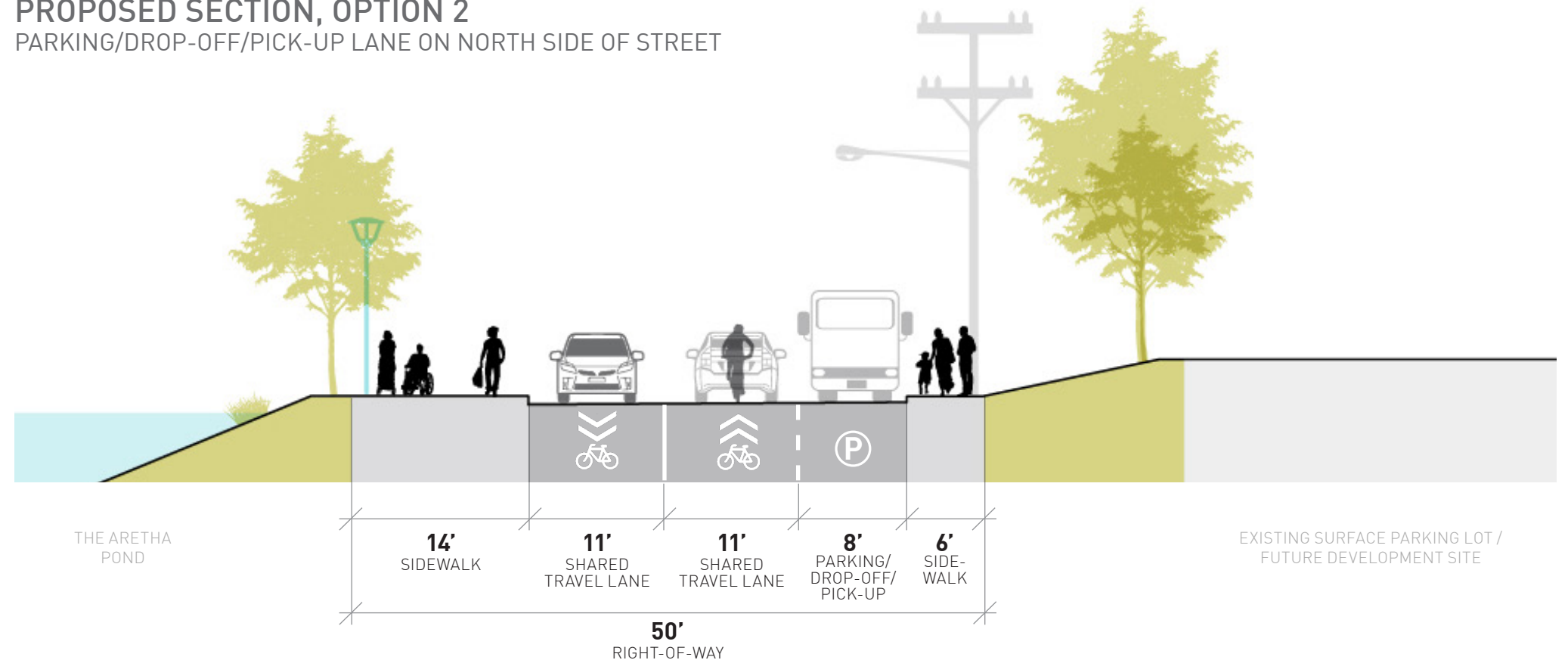
FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS:

- Coordinate streetscape work with future development site on the north side of Atwater Street to re-grade the sidewalk.
- Bury utility lines to reduce overhead poles and sidewalk clutter.
- Consider pedestrian-scale lighting on the north side of the street.
- Coordinate streetscape improvements with other segments of Atwater Street east and west of The Aretha site to maximize consistency across streetscape elements including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, on-street parking, and site furnishings.

PROPOSED SECTION, OPTION 1 PARKING/DROP-OFF/PICK-UP LANE ON SOUTH SIDE OF STREET



PROPOSED SECTION, OPTION 2 PARKING/DROP-OFF/PICK-UP LANE ON NORTH SIDE OF STREET



IMPLEMENTATION

THE ARETHA

Recommended implementable projects include capital projects and maintenance, operations and management considerations for The Aretha Amphitheater. The following summarizes the overall implementation strategy, which is meant to guide future planning, engagement and design.

The Aretha serves as a great music and performance venue for Detroit residents. A challenge for the Aretha is to ensure that employees, visitors and concert goers are able to safely park and walk to the venue. While on street parking is abundant, users cited safety concerns as a key factor for preferring surface or garage parking. As adjacent development occurs it is recommended, that the City and The Aretha managing operator work with future developers to improve overall circulation, pedestrian experience and parking availability.

As improvements to the Aretha grounds are considered, it is recommended a further detail analysis into providing public access to the grounds. This could be accomplished through relocating existing gates (maintaining the venue itself gated) and/or considering a major capital improvement that connects the riverfront.

Key considerations include:

- Coordinate between stakeholders, developers and City departments to improve Atwater Street for improved circulation and parking availability.
- Work with The Aretha management operator to find ways to provide pedestrian access to The Aretha (particularly on non-event days).
- Ensure that amphitheater infrastructure and amenities are in keeping with national entertainment standards.

Phasing and Capital Project Priority:

Projects identified in the study range from critical improvements, repairs, maintenance and major capital projects. Project phasing is sequenced and prioritized based on:

1. Health and Safety Improvements
2. Stabilization and Critical Repairs
3. Replacement / Re-design (based on component life cycle)
4. Transformational Impact

Project Cost Estimates and Funding:

Estimated costs for improvements and capital projects reflected in this implementation strategy are rough orders of magnitude, developed from current unit costs and early concepts. Funding sources for each project will depend on the project type, priority and funding availability.

SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TO LONG TERM	
<p>IMMEDIATE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seawall Repairs - <i>completed</i> • Bathroom Renovations - <i>completed</i> • Back of House Renovations - <i>completed</i> • Pond Repairs - <i>completed</i> 	<p>MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New restrooms building • Landscape upgrades and gate relocations • Concessions and kitchen equipment upgrades • Facilities renovations (skate pavilion, green rooms) • Seat Replacement • New modern and relocated ticket booth • Riverfront connection* <p><i>* Pending further feasibility studies</i></p>	<p>OPERATIONS, MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual tensile roof inspections and repairs as needed • Annual seawall inspections • Cashless ticketing and concessions • Improve concession offerings

IMPLEMENTATION

MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

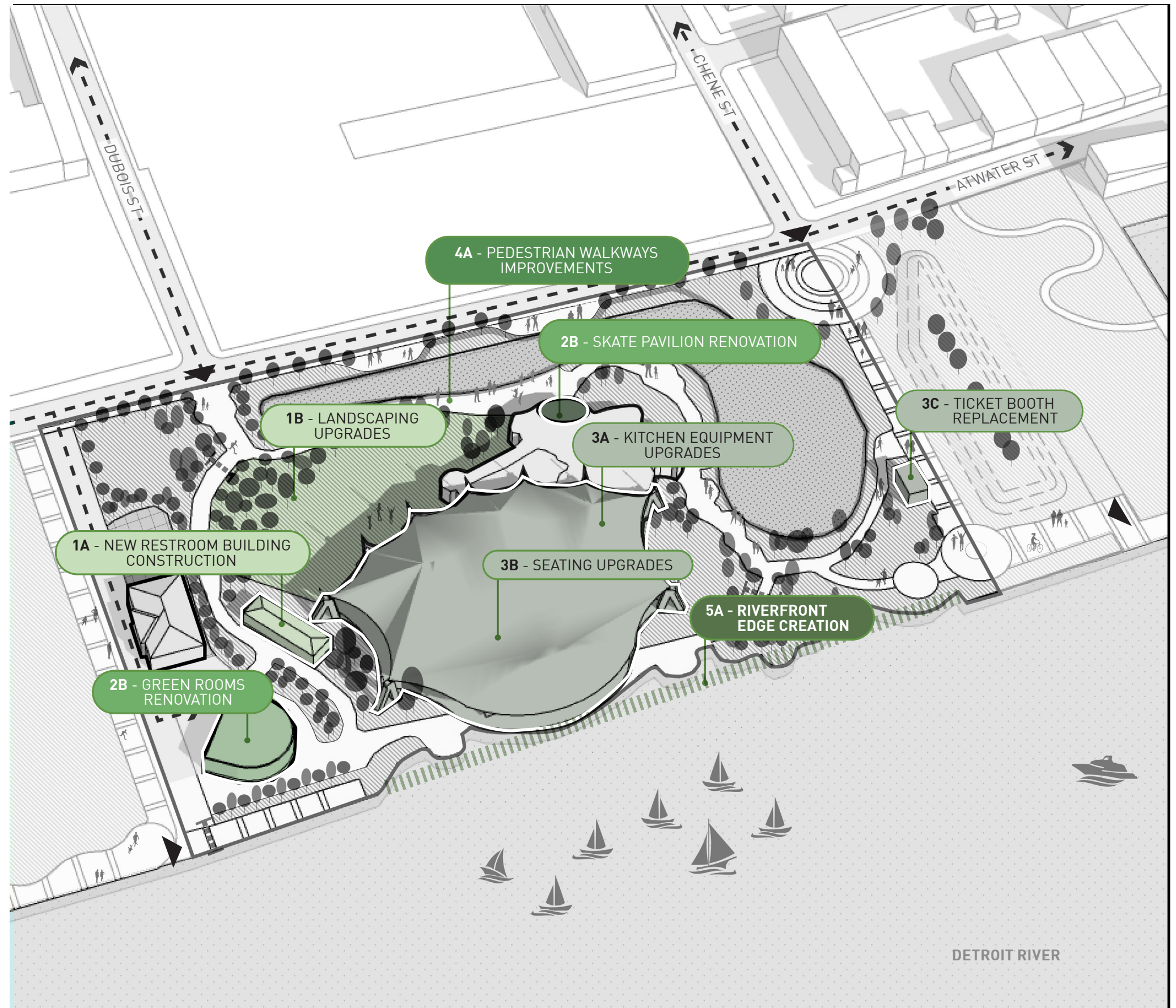
In addition to major capital improvements, The Aretha requires consistent maintenance, repairs and planned upgrades to meet the needs of performers. An operations and maintenance plan is recommended to accompany the major projects capital plan.

PHASE	MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS ¹	COSTS ⁴
PHASE 1	1A New restroom building	\$\$\$\$
	1B Landscaping improvements	\$\$
PHASE 2	2A Landscape upgrades and gates relocation	\$\$\$
	2B Facility renovations (Green Rooms, Skate Pavilion)	\$\$\$
PHASE 3	3A Kitchen equipment upgrades	\$\$\$
	3B Seating upgrades	\$\$
	3C Ticket booth replacement	\$\$\$
PHASE 4	4A Pedestrian walkways improvements	\$\$\$
PHASE 5	5A Riverfront Edge Creation ³	-

NOTES:

1. Plan and coordinate capital projects across City departments including: HDAB, PDD, and DPW.
2. See Condition Assessment And Seawall Report for the full list of repairs by priorities.
3. Further investigation and feasibility studies required.
4. Costs are estimates are rough orders of magnitude (ROM).

- Costs Key:
- \$: under \$10K
 - \$\$: \$10K - \$100K
 - \$\$\$: \$100K - \$1M
 - \$\$\$\$: \$1M-\$10M
 - \$\$\$\$: above \$10M



IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS