The industrial edge of the Chicago River, filled with defunct barge slips and empty lots, can be reinterpreted to encourage socially positive use of leftover urban space. Steps taken ensure that the Chicago River remains a viable asset for our future, not simply a workhorse of our history. The removal of corrugated sheet piling and the reestablishment of a riparian zone signifies transition from industrial to recreational use and provides a remediation strategy as well as development opportunities. The South Fork Turning Basin gives specific context for the exploration of this strategy.

Extensive historical and social research reveals incentives for removal of Fisk [coal-fired] generating station from use—the turning basin’s only active receiver of barge shipments. Desire to regenerate this site for recreation and social use abounds in collaboration with the Cermak Creative Industries district, the Pilsen arts district and UIC. The area becomes a cultural focal point and healthy asset instead of a dangerous liability, and serves to draw increasing densities, justifying adjacent developments of riverwalk and water’s edge communities.

The development proposal for Bubbly Creek [essentially a large industrial slip] avoids cul-de-sac filled ‘ladders’ that enhance separation between city and river [people and nature, built and unbuilt] but rather celebrates their connection by pushing the existing street grid further towards this newly graded edge, inviting both new and old users to engage a now permeable boundary.

A built solution arises when permeable land is extended through grading but desire for economic use remains; it provides incentive for investment and increased density to support social programs. Elevated modular system is viable in wet or dry conditions and at varying scales according to the specifics of the site. Boardwalk elements also provide public recreation opportunities without direct water contact during initial years of remediation as well as connection to adjacent commercial and transit hubs.