Introduction
The Petaluma River is a 13-mile tidal waterway connecting the San Francisco Bay with the city of Petaluma. For over 100 years, the river was a major commercial artery shipping agricultural products and building materials to San Francisco Bay Area markets and beyond.

Today, the Petaluma River primarily serves as a recreational waterway—the city's longest and largest park. More and more people of all ages are drawn to the river, whether to enjoy the migrating waterfowl, lush grasses, tidal marshes, and scenic vistas along its banks or to get out on the water and participate in recreational boating activities.

The Opportunity
Unlike many waterfront cities such as Redding and Sacramento that have effectively used their rivers as a focal point for recreation and commercial development, Petaluma has, until recently, lacked the civic commitment and vision to maximize access to our river. The Petaluma River is an extraordinary natural resource, yet by any measure, it is an underutilized community asset.

Sadly, high costs and complicated regulatory requirements have hampered the development of new facilities offering recreational access to the river, while aging docks and deteriorating marine infrastructure limit our current boating opportunities. In addition, the lack of regular dredging remains an issue affecting future river access.

A Plan of Action and The Floathouse
In 2011, hundreds of people attended a community meeting to discuss a set of 34 potential river-access related projects, collectively called the “Petaluma Water Ways.” Among them was a proposal by the Petaluma Small Craft Center (PSCC) to create The Floathouse Small Craft Rental Center, a unique, dock-based facility in Petaluma’s Turning Basin, which has been designated as a site along the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. Today, The Floathouse is the only project that is shovel-ready, fully permitted, and approved.

With 170 feet of easily accessible dock, The Floathouse will provide a wonderful new launching and landing facility for people-powered watercraft, including kayaks and canoes, pedal boats, rowboats, standup paddle boards and sailboats, as well as electric boats and a potential water taxi. While a variety of boats will be available for rent, anyone may use The Floathouse docks to launch their own boat or to tie-up while exploring Petaluma's historic waterfront shops and restaurants.

The Floathouse office, with its iconic cupola, will be a “beacon of boating” and a launching point for adventure on the river. The small building will house the rental office, work and storage space for oars and paddles, life jackets, sailboat masts and other equipment. Serving the community as a center for information, the staff will greet and assist local guests and visitors from out of town. Comfortable benches will accommodate those who simply want to observe the ebb and flow of river life, or wait for the next water taxi.
Located in the northwest corner of the Turning Basin, steps from Petaluma’s historic downtown, the facility will be close to parking and the nearby SMART station and regional transportation center. Nearby, at Cavanagh Landing Park, PSCC will build a new public restroom with a shower, as well as make ADA improvements to the park, ramp and gangway, providing the boating public and the entire community with much needed amenities.

The Floathouse facility is the first step in realizing a broader vision that will include a Community Boathouse to be located approximately a mile and a quarter downstream. Linked to the boat rental and public access features of The Floathouse, the Community Boathouse will serve as the home for Petaluma’s boating clubs and their outrigger canoes, rowing shells, and racing kayaks, plus private boat storage too. Anchoring the river between the Turning Basin and the Marina, the two facilities will support river access for everyone, year round.

**The Petaluma Small Craft Center**
The Petaluma Small Craft Center (PSCC) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization, founded over a decade ago by boating enthusiasts from local clubs and businesses, river advocates and conservationists, with a commitment to building community through boating.

With over a decade of programming experience, including summer camps that have put hundreds of kids on the river in all manner of boats, often serving as a conduit to further involvement in local rowing and paddling clubs, PSCC is poised to lead the development and management of The Floathouse. PSCC provides camp scholarships through Mentor Me, the Boys & Girls Club, and COTS, and partners with local businesses such as Clavey Paddlesports, Petaluma Stand Up Paddle, Wind Toys and the Guideboat Company.

PSCC also hosts the annual “Day on the River” event in June, during which we invite the community to try out a cornucopia of people-powered small craft in a daylong celebration. Our volunteers put hundreds of people on the water in a single day, in anticipation of The Floathouse, which will soon make every day a “day on the river.”

PSCC proudly represents the diversity of river interests in our city: North Bay Rowing Club, River Town Racers, and the He’e Nalu Outrigger Canoe Club are among our boating supporters. Friends of the Petaluma River, the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance and other allies join us in anticipating the completion of The Floathouse project. It is through representation of this broad coalition that PSCC has successfully maneuvered through the many city, state and federal requirements to bring this project to fruition.

Through our leadership, in 2015 the Petaluma City Council approved The Floathouse CEQA environmental report that enabled PSCC to obtain a $180,000 construction grant from ABAG and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. The final environmental regulatory permits have been certified, the building permit submitted and the encroachment permit filed and approved for the pile driving work in September of 2018.

The Floathouse is scheduled to open in 2019 if fundraising goes to plan.

**Costs and Phasing**
The cost to construct the docks, The Floathouse office, and the restroom facilities, as well as to purchase the initial rental fleet is $800,000. An additional $150,000 will be set aside to help
with operating expenses during the startup as The Floathouse grows to become a sustainable enterprise. Our *pro forma* operating plan calls for full financial sustainability for The Floathouse by 2021. Another $50,000 will be invested in the preliminary design, engineering and development costs of the Community Boathouse.

To open the Floathouse to the public, the first phase of the project will include the dock facility and the rental fleet. In addition, an interim office will be built: a durable, high quality, lightweight tent structure, which will withstand the predicted groundings due to the river’s ongoing siltation issues. The second phase will involve the construction of the public restroom at Cavanagh Landing Park. The third phase of the project, after the river is dredged, will replace the interim office with the iconic Floathouse office building.

**The Campaign to Create the Floathouse**
Currently a capital campaign—“*Launching a River Legacy*”—is underway. Over $250,000, or one quarter of the campaign goal of **$1,000,000**, has already been committed by individuals, businesses, foundations or other public agencies. Our intent is to complete the campaign by the end of 2019, through a combination of tax-deductible donations, grants, and in-kind contributions of materials and labor from local contractors and businesses.

A committee of community leaders has been formed to lead the campaign. Naming opportunities, which will include donor recognition on the docks, office facility and other elements of The Floathouse, as well as an option to dedicate the entire complex, are available.

**Your River, Your Legacy**
The Floathouse will be a vital hub in an emerging network of hiking, biking and water trails linking neighborhood landings and parks, such as Shollenberger along the Petaluma River corridor. As growing numbers of south county residents embrace a healthy lifestyle, The Floathouse will be a go-to site for outdoor wellness activities with programs and events for people of all ages—launching more river fun for everyone.

So, what’s a “River Town” without a friendly place to rent all kinds of boats, and just get out on the water? PSCC’s **Floathouse Small Craft Rental Center** in Petaluma’s downtown Turning Basin will become just that, with your help. Your tax deductible donation will be a signal, loud and clear, that this river town community is willing to invest in access infrastructure, including new docks and facilities, a wide variety of small craft, a public restroom, and ADA improvements.