



Image Courtesy of Al Whitaker

Excelsior Commons – Master Plan

Public Presentation
September 20, 2017

Background - Formation of Community for The Commons

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- Established in 2015 by local residents who wanted to support the park
- Community for The Commons is 501(c)(3) “conservancy” – a nonprofit with the purpose of raising funds for a public park
- Identified the need for a Master Park Plan
- A Committee was appointed by the city to create "the people's plan"



COMMUNITY
FOR
THE COMMONS

Background - Master Planning Work Mission & Members

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The Excelsior City Council established a “Commons Master Planning Workgroup” in early 2016. Objectives for the Commons Master Planning process:

- Provide a coherent, long-term vision for the park, that is consistent with:
 - primary user types
 - community’s desired types and scale of use
 - local history
 - community’s capacity for investment & upkeep
- The master planning process has been:
 - managed by local residents
 - driven by input and sentiment from South Lake residents and businesses

Members of the Planning Workgroup:

- **Jennifer Caron**, City Council
- **Mark Macpherson**, Heritage Preservation Commission
- **Tom Wolfe**, Parks & Recreation Commission
- **Kristi Luger**, City Manager
- **Dan Johnson**, Community for The Commons
- **Erik Paulsen**, Member At-Large
- **Eric Snyder**, Community for The Commons

The Workgroup began its work by understanding the park’s history, finances, use and operations.

In addition, three separate studies were commissioned to inform the final master plan

Background - Parenteau-Graves Public Opinion Study

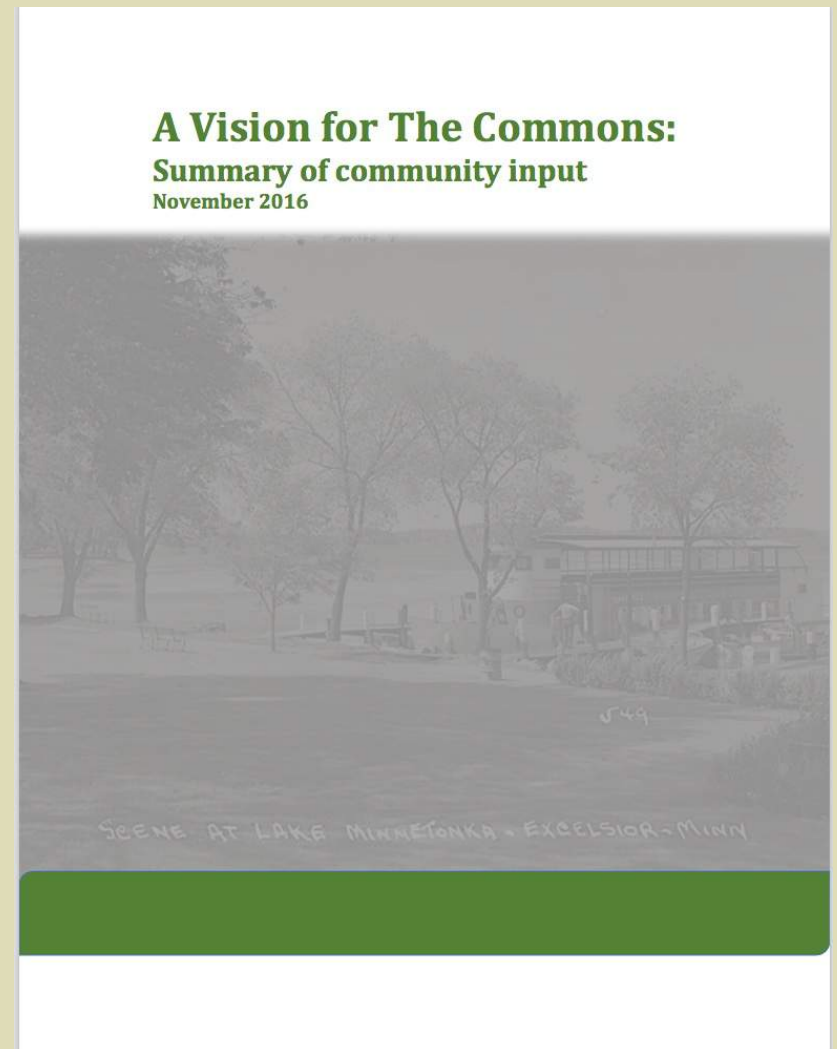
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Purpose:

- Better understand residents' and local businesses' vision, priorities, preferences and concerns for The Commons

Key Findings:

1. The Commons is a “community park” – for the primary benefit of South Lake residents & businesses
2. Most popular uses of The Commons are quiet and/or passive
3. Widespread agreement that The Commons needs “significant attention and revitalization”
4. Strong public sentiment for incremental, rather than radical changes to the park
5. Priority areas include:
 - improved “walkability” of the park
 - beach area & facilities
 - shoreline restoration
 - redesign of the “Port” area
 - revamp of the band shell



Background - SRF Condition Study

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Purpose:

- Engage a landscape architecture & engineering firm to conduct an inventory of the The Commons and catalogue necessary improvements

Key Findings:

- lack of ADA access throughout the park
- current walkways too narrow / no formal walkway along shoreline
- band shell, concessions and bath house structures in need of significant revitalization or replacement
- lack of defined picnic areas
- erosion on steep hillsides
- lack of vegetative barrier along shoreline
- need to replace lighting along the street edge, at the courts and in the ball park
- need a plan to maintain and replace trees and other vegetation in the park



Memorandum

SRF No. 9344 016

To: Excelsior Commons Planning Committee
From: Ken Grieshaber, PLA, ASLA
Date: August 31, 2016
Subject: The Commons - Existing Conditions Park Site Assessment

Introduction

The following evaluation was completed of The Commons park property and its surrounding site context to identify issues and opportunities for improving user group experiences and programming, updating amenities and accommodations to better serve events and activities, and for reducing operations and maintenance costs to the City.

The intent of this evaluation is to begin to establish a design framework for implementing site and building improvements to be made in the park over time and identify priorities for implementation which can be made when funding sources are identified. The Commons has been categorized in to eight separate park use or transition areas to organize evaluation observations.

Port Entry Area

While the Port Entry is a destination in itself for many visitors to the City's lakefront, it is also an integral part of transitioning a public open space connection to the Commons from the downtown along Water Street to the park. The following issues should be considered to provide a better sense of entry to The Commons:

- Address poor sight lines and lack of way finding to the park from Port entry, Water Street, and Commercial District
- Identify opportunities for improving pedestrian walk connection from Port entry along Lake Street

Dock Access Area

The dock access area between the Port Entry and the park property provides the opportunity to create a more prominent pedestrian entrance to the Commons which becomes more hidden with a steeper grade embankment between the street and the park property. Some observations made within this transition area include:

- Steep lawn embankments are difficult to maintain and subjected to erosion during large storm events
- Lack of adequate vegetation buffer along lake edge
- No defined gateway or sense of arrival to the park

Public Street Edge

Lake Street serves as the primary vehicular access and parking area for the park and offers opportunities for improving the parks function and appearance from the street. The following observations were made for this area:

- Steep slope gradients create barriers for pedestrian access and connections to existing park walk circulation
- Existing pedestrian entries are undefined and not visible from the street
- Poor sight lines and visibility from street increase security/safety concerns
- Parking space identification numbers need to be more visible and improved with more attractive signage

Background – PVN Historic Preservation Study

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Purpose:

- To define the “period of significance” and “character-defining features” for The Commons

Key Findings:

- Suggested period of significance is 1937
- Character-defining features (to be preserved) include:
 - Overall Continuity of Spatial Organization and Land Patterns
 - Commons Property Boundary (landmass)
 - Use Pattern of “Active” and “Passive” Spaces
 - Topographical:
 - the slope along Lake Street
 - the Knolls
 - Shoreline
 - the Lawn
 - Vegetation
 - tree cover on the Knolls
 - manicured grass on the Lawn
 - Circulation
 - path parallel to Lake Street
 - two sets of stairs at Lake Street Slope
 - boat circulation at Port area
 - Water features
 - active use of Lake Minnetonka
 - rock retaining wall at Shoreline
 - Structural
 - ball field location
 - ball field seating



PVN
PRESERVATION
DESIGN WORKS, LLC

Site Inventory and Period of Significance Study

Excelsior Commons
Excelsior, Minnesota

Working Draft: July 11, 2017



For questions or comments:
Meghan Elliott
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(612) 843-4140

Background - Design Process

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In early 2017, the Workgroup released a request for proposal (RFP) to identify a design team to assist in the development of the final master plan and supporting documents.

Key Deliverables of the Design Process:

1. creation of a “conceptual guide plan” to
 - illustrate circulation, architectural/structural concepts, lighting, landscape concepts, civil and topography
 - establish the “architectural language” for future structures in the park
2. concept elevations/illustrations
3. identify infrastructure priorities; and
4. provide budget pricing narrative to assist in estimating the cost of the plan

Design Team Search:

- The Workgroup invited 9 firms to respond to the RFP
- Seven responses were ultimately received and four finalists interviewed
- The contract was awarded to the team of MSR (structural architecture) and Damon-Farber (landscape architecture)

MSR

Architecture
Interiors and
Urban Design

DF/ DAMON FARBER

Background – Design Process Timeline

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Summer 2017

Review Background & Solicit Public Input

- ✓ historical research, review existing documentation
- ✓ conduct walk-through
- ✓ site inventory
- ✓ identify constraints/opportunities
- ✓ identify current and future programming needs
- ✓ gather feedback re: design influences & aesthetics
- ✓ initial concepts presented
- ✓ initial public feedback solicited

Public Meeting #1
July 19, 2017

Summer/Fall 2017

Draft and Refine Guide Plan

- refined guide plan options presented
- conceptual design illustrations presented
- infrastructure improvements identified
- project prioritization recommendations
- final public input solicited

Public Meeting #2
Sept 20, 2017

Fall 2017

Final Guide Plan & Presentation

- refine & finalize conceptual guide plan
- refine & finalize illustrations
- refine & finalize infrastructure priorities
- Budget pricing narrative
- Present final documents to Excelsior City Council

**Final Presentation to
City Council**
Oct-Nov, 2017

Background - Results from Public Meeting #1

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The team presented a number of draft design concepts to the public on July 19, 2017

CONCEPT A - EXCELSIOR COMMONS



CONCEPT B - EXCELSIOR COMMONS



The Workgroup received a significant amount of public feedback:

- walking loop and boardwalk concepts highly popular
- support for a new, two-sided band shell in the existing location
- support for reclaiming the “knoll” near the beaches for picnic space and for relocating a bathroom and concession facility closer to the children’s beach
- little support for using existing parkland for additional parking
- desire for 3 sets of bathrooms – beach, ballpark and Port
- strong preferences to preserve open green space
- new band shell and concession structures should remain in the same location as the current buildings
- strong interest in identifying winter amenities to promote year-round use
- many requests for bicycle-related amenities

Feedback from the July 19th meeting has been incorporated into the Sept 20th concept plan

Objective for Tonight's Meeting

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- Design team's role:
 - present the latest concept plan (overall and by zone)
 - the presentation will review:
 - design issues to be addressed
 - current state; and
 - design proposals & options

- Public participants' role:
 - view the presentation
 - provide immediate feedback during the "poster" session from 7:00 to 8:00 pm
 - provide email feedback until 5:00 pm Friday, Sept 29th
 - feedback should be directed to elsnyder@excelsiorbaygroup.com