



MEMORANDUM

7(b)3 – HPC Recommendation Regarding The

Re: Commons Concession Building and Stairs

Date: February 22, 2022

Kevin Staunton, Assistant City Manager/City

From: Attorney

To: City Council

BACKGROUND

Attached is the Review and Recommendations Report on The Commons Concession Building Proposal, pursuant to Excelsior Code 20-10(b).

RECOMMENDED ACTION

No action required.

Attachments:

Review and Recommendations Report on The Commons Concession Building Proposal

HPC Review and Recommendations on The Commons Concession Building Proposal

Per Excelsior Code § 20-10(b)

Introduction

The following comments and recommendations are provided pursuant to the Heritage Preservation Commission's ("HPC's") obligation pursuant to Excelsior Code § 20-10(b) to "review and make recommendations to the city council concerning city activity that could change the nature or appearance of a landmark or a site located within a historic district." In this case, the "city activity" being proposed is the replacement of the existing concession building adjacent to the ballpark in The Commons. Since The Commons is a landmark property, and the replacement of existing concession building with a new structure "could change the nature or appearance of" The Commons, this Review and Recommendation is appropriate.

Guiding Principles

The HPC is guided in its review by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation and the City's Preservation Design Manual. In this case, page 54 of the Design Manual (attached) provides specific applicable guidance for a review and any recommendations regarding the proposed new concession building. There are five Commons Guidelines listed in the Design Manual:

- C.1 The uninterrupted scenic viewscapes to Lake Minnetonka from the downtown should be preserved.
- C.2 Existing mature trees should be preserved.
- C.4 Any new retaining walls should be constructed of traditional masonry materials or timbers.
- C.5 The WPA-era bleachers should be preserved and maintained.
- C.6 Any structures, features or objects in the Commons that are 50 years old or older should be professionally evaluated for their significance before they are modified and/or demolished

In addition, the city's Master Park Plan (adopted in 2018), included a November 3, 2017, study of the historic attributes of The Commons by Preservation Design Works, LLC (the "PVN Study"). The PVN Study includes an evaluation of the Period of Significance for The Commons and a survey of the "extant historical material and character defining features of The Commons." It determined that the Period of Significance for The Commons extended from 1854-1937 and, accordingly, did not include the existing concession building (which was constructed in 1987) as a character defining feature of The Commons. Consistent with Page 54 of the Design Manual, the PVN Report identifies the topography, trees, and ballfield seating as character defining features of The Commons.

Review of the Proposed Concession Building and New Stairs to the WPA-era Ballfield Bleachers

- *Demolition of the proposed concession building does no harm to character defining features of The Commons.* As the PVN Report concluded (see page 22), the existing structure is not a character defining feature of The Commons. It was built less than 50 years ago and does not exhibit exceptional architectural design.
- *The design of the new concession building does not interrupt the scenic views to Lake Minnetonka.* The new building will be located in the same area as the existing building. In addition, although the canopy of the new structure will extend further than the footprint of the existing building, its design increases the available viewscape by limiting the footprint of the building and extending the canopy with the use of randomly placed columns instead of walls to maximize the transparency of the views. In addition, the green roof on the building helps it blend into the surroundings.
- *The new concession building does not remove any mature trees.* The HPC will evaluate a future proposal for the stairways to the WPA-era bleachers and will provide their recommendation regarding the impact on mature trees at that time.
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- *Any proposed retaining walls will be considered by the HPC during their review of a future proposal for the stairways to the WPA-era bleachers. The HPC will provide their recommendation regarding retaining walls at that time.*
- *The stairway adjacent to the WPA-era bleachers is a feature that, per Guideline C.6, should be professionally evaluated for its significance before it can be modified and/or demolished. An expert in WPA-era structures and masonry work must be hired to evaluate the stairway and provide a recommendation on its historic significance. Upon review of this evaluation, the HPC will provide their recommendation on any future proposal for the stairway.*

Recommendations

Our **recommendations** are that:

1. Professional forensic work be conducted by an outside team with expertise in WPA-era structures as soon as possible to identify any character-defining features relative to the stairs and the WPA-era bleacher seating.
2. The HPC will consider proposals to alter the stairways to the WPA-era bleachers and provide recommendation separately from their review of the concession building.
3. The HPC recommends that the concession building be given a different name, as no food will be sold from the building. The HPC proposes to lead a process to select that name.
4. The City Council should look holistically at every aspect of the concession building project that might obstruct any sightlines to the lake. The HPC understands that the highest point of the existing concession building is higher than that of the proposed building.

Two votes were taken at the HPC Meeting on 2/15/22:

1. The HPC believes the proposed concession building design is reasonably consistent with the City's Preservation Design Manual Guidelines. Yes: Brattland, Caron, Noll, Tyler; No: Bolles, Hartwich
2. The HPC adopts this Review and Recommendations Report and directs staff to forward it to City Council. Yes: Brattland, Caron, Noll, Tyler; No: Bolles, Hartwich