

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

Event/Gathering Area

The large event lawn area within the park serves a wide variety of uses and offers opportunities for improvement to better serve the needs of user groups. The following issues have been identified to be studied in this area of the park:

- Lack of shade provisions within lawn areas
- Lawn quality impacted by heavy event use and drought conditions
- Limited pedestrian sidewalk accommodations and circulation
- Lack of ADA access for wheel chair users to band shell viewing area and programmed event space
- Limited stage area, access, and amenities for larger group performance events
- Poor relationship with restroom/concession building entries and perimeter walk circulation

Overlook Area

The park's lakefront edge provides some of the best public open space views of Lake Minnetonka and is a popular place for visitors to relax and congregate together. Some of the issues identified to be addressed in this area include:

- Lack of ADA accessible walk to lake front
- Lawn quality compromised by geese congregation and lack of native vegetation buffer on lake edge
- Invasive buckthorn stands obscure views to lake
- Placement of site furnishings (picnic tables, benches, and trash receptacles) creates additional challenges for maintaining lawn areas
- Lack of defined pedestrian walk system which connects park amenities and use areas along the lakefront

Athletic Field/Court Area

The ballfield and adjacent tennis and basketball court area are also popular amenities at the park but are also in need of upgrades to improve the user group experience. Observations include:

- Right and left field sidelines impacted by steeper side slope embankments
- Inefficient ball field lighting and spill over light outside park property boundary
- Lack of accessible walks to ballfield viewing area
- Lack of shade provisions within ball field amphitheater seating area
- Concession/restroom building in need of upgrades and improving perimeter pedestrian circulation and seating areas
- Tennis court fencing, lighting, and retaining wall in poor condition along Lake Street sidewalk edge
- Some degradation of basketball and tennis court bituminous (cracking) and color coat surfacing

Picnic Area

The park currently offers a generous amount of general purpose open lawn space for picnicking and informal recreation. Issues identified to be studied to improve user group accommodations in this area of the park include:

- Lack of shelter space and defined picnic areas which can be used for both small and large group picnicking activities
- Lack of accessible walk connections to picnic tables, grills, and trash receptacles
- Lack of convenient and accessible walk connections to restroom building from picnic areas
- Lack of drinking fountains, jug fillers, and electrical plug ins for picnic user groups
- Lack of other recreational amenities (sand volleyball, horse shoe courts, shuffleboard, etc.) to supplement picnic activities

Beach/Play Area

The two separate beach areas and adjacent play area are located in an ideal setting within the park but have been subjected to a lot of use over the years and are in need of site and building upgrades. Some initial observations include:

- Lack of defined separation between beach and lawn areas creates maintenance and erosion challenges on steeper slope areas
- Remote swing play containers are difficult to access and disconnected from main play area and offer better opportunities for expanded picnic facilities
- Lack of accessible play events and transfer stations on the current play structure
- Lack of diversity in playground equipment serving older and younger children
- Wood chip trail circulation difficult to maintain and does not meet ADA accessibility guidelines
- Restroom/changing room building does not serve current park user groups and is in need of replacement

Four Season Use and Programming

The Commons currently hosts a wide variety of events and activities during the summer months from May through August but does not offer winter recreation amenities or programming. Opportunities should be explored for identifying new activities and programming which can make The Commons a more active and year round destination for residents and visitors.



PARK USE AREAS

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| ① Port Entry Area | ⑤ Overlook Area |
| ② Dock Access Area | ⑥ Athletic Field/Courts Area |
| ③ Public Street Edge | ⑦ Picnic Area |
| ④ Event/Gathering Area | ⑧ Beach/Play Area |





LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

MEDIUM ①
25-50K

LOW ②
<25K



① Provide wayfinding signage and visual cues to park entrance from Water Street, commercial district, and Port of Excelsior entrance.

② Widen street edge sidewalk to accommodate pedestrian traffic and provide better sense of entry to park along Lake Street.



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

①

MEDIUM
25-50K

②

LOW
<25K

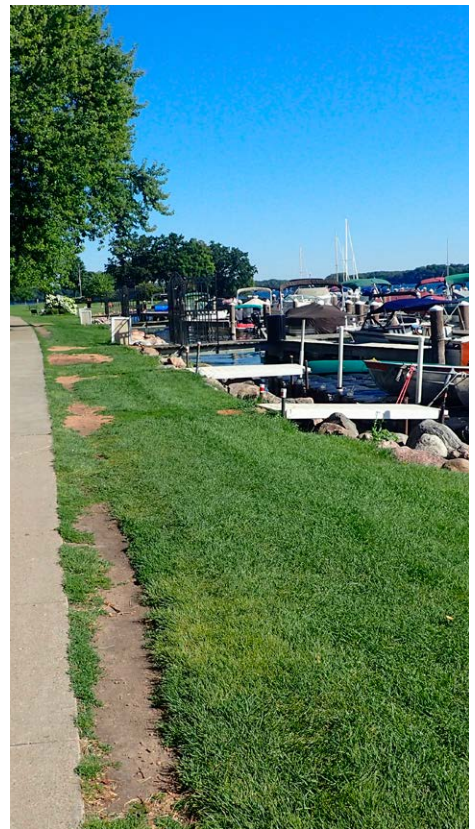
③



② Widen sidewalk to better accommodate pedestrian traffic.



① Identify opportunities for replacing steep lawn embankment with alternative landscape treatment and monument sign as entry feature to park.



③ Install native vegetation buffer along shoreline edge.



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

③

MEDIUM
25-50K

①

LOW
<25K

②



② Improve parking space identification signage



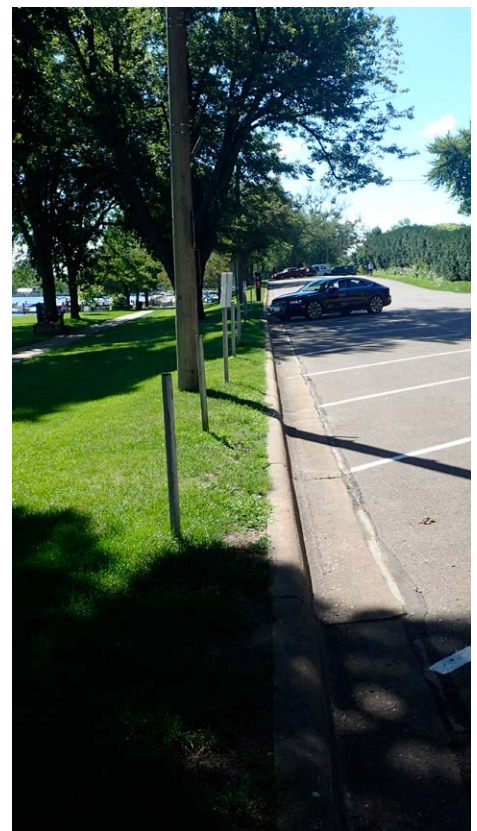
①.1 Identify opportunities for creating more prominent and accessible entries to park along Lake Street by adding bump outs, widened walk entries, and landscape features.



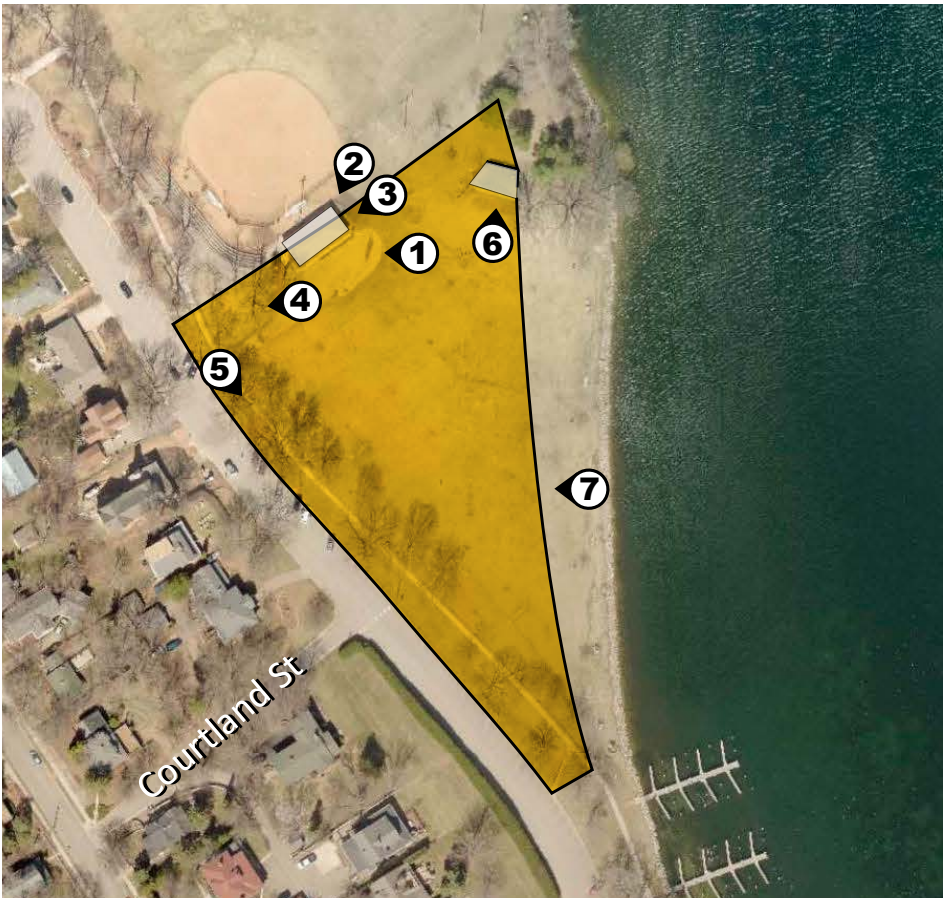
①.2



①.3



③ Improve pedestrian scale lighting along Lake Street park edge



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

③ ⑥

MEDIUM
25-50K

① ②

LOW
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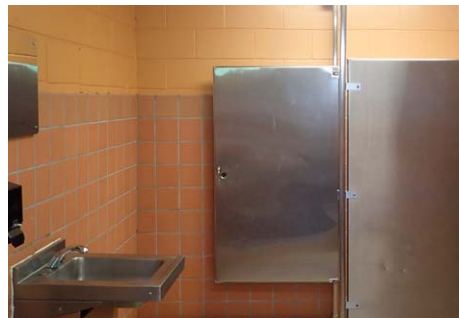
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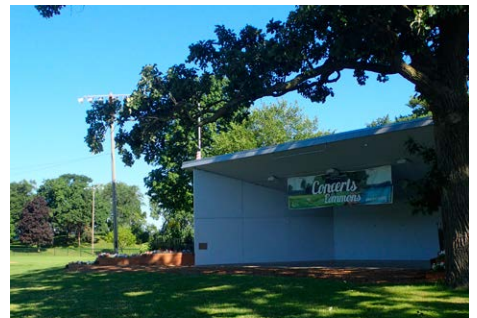
⑤ Assess preservation or removal of ash trees for treatment or replacement.



① Identify opportunities for reconfiguring park service access drive and walk circulation to improve drainage and accommodations for park event programming.



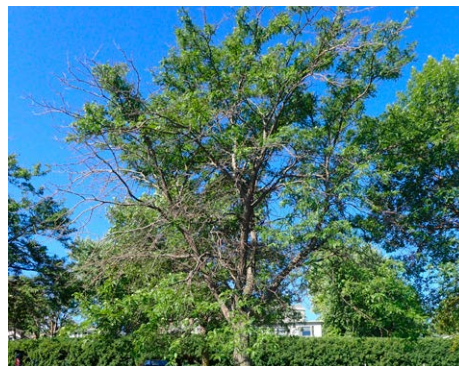
③ Consider interior and/or exterior upgrades to existing restroom/concession building or replace to better serve the needs of park programming and events.



⑥ Consider upgrades for existing concrete band shell structure or replace to accommodate a wider variety of stage performances.



② Expand patio seating and shade provisions on east side of concession/restroom building.



④ Assess existing damaged/diseased trees for removal and replacement.



⑦ Provide more groupings of trees in select open lawn area to provide more shade during events.



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①

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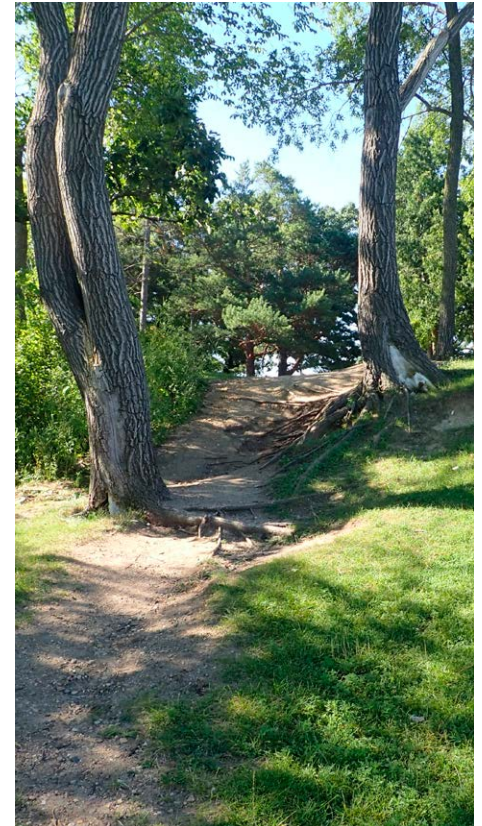
①

Install native vegetation buffer along shoreline to discourage geese loitering and improve lawn quality.



③

Identify opportunities for realigning and improving appearance of storm water outlet at lake edge.



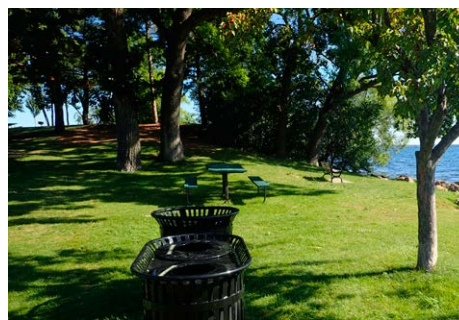
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Repair eroded trail embankments.



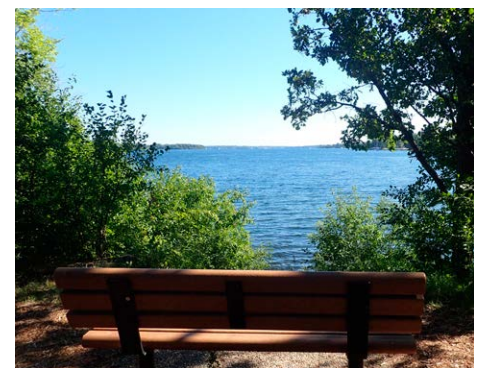
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Identify opportunities for integrating accessibility and trail circulation near lakefront and consider establishing looped trail system around perimeter of park property.



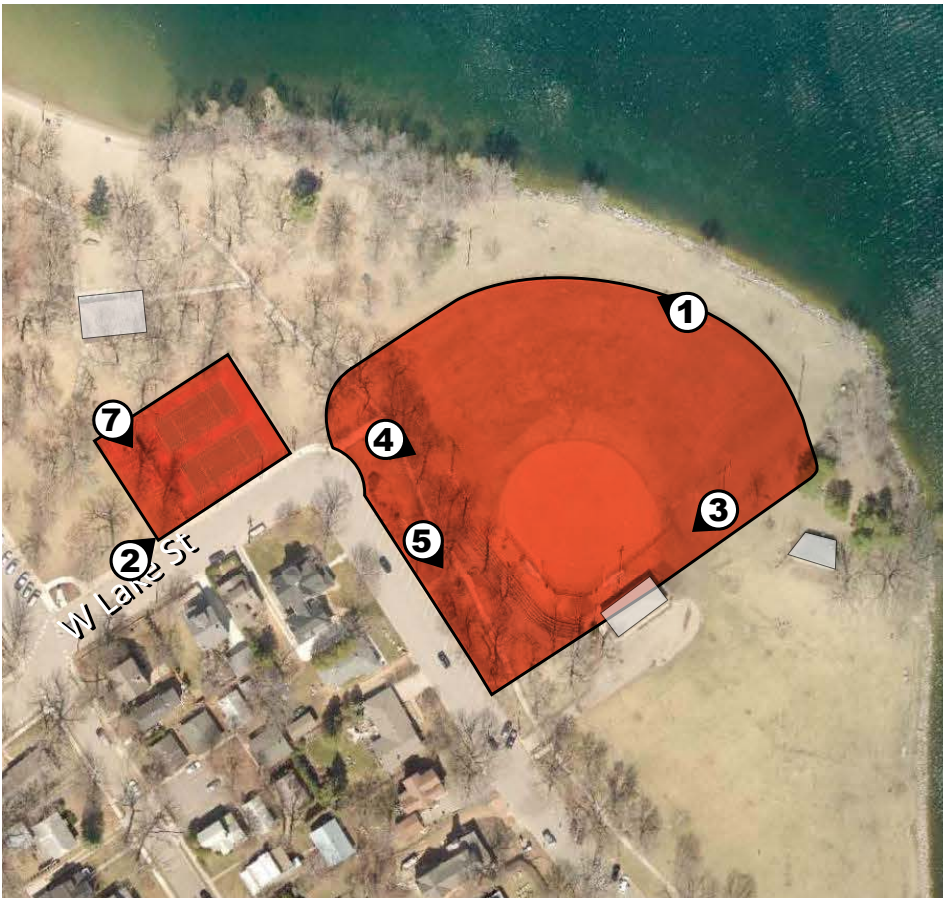
④

Reassess placement and provide concrete pads under trash receptacles, picnic tables, and benches to improve lawn mowing efficiencies.



⑤

Remove invasive buckthorn undergrowth to open up lakefront views.



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MEDIUM
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②

③

⑥

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⑤





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①

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③



② Consider adding covered shelter(s) to picnic areas to accommodate small group gatherings.



① Provide ADA accessible picnic tables, grills, and walk connections to accommodate wheel chair user groups.



③ Remove isolated swing containers to expand picnic area opportunities.



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

③ ⑤

MEDIUM
25-50K

② ④

LOW
<25K

①



④ Remove play equipment and sand adjacent to beach and restroom building and reestablish as expanded lawn and picnic area.



① Repair eroded slope transition edges between lawn, beach, and sidewalk edges.



⑤ Replace existing playground equipment to improve ADA access and provide a wider variety of play experiences for older and younger children.



② Better define and organize pedestrian circulation between beach, play areas, and restroom building.



③ Consider interior and/or exterior upgrades to existing restroom/changing room building or replace to improve accessibility and better serve the needs of beach and playground user groups.

