



EXCELSIOR COMMONS CONCEPTUAL GUIDE PLAN

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The Work Group would like to acknowledge all of the local residents and business owners who participated in the master planning process over the past 24 months. Thanks to your active and thoughtful involvement, the plan that follows is a true reflection of the community's vision and priorities for The Commons.

PREFACE/CONTEXT PURPOSE

The purpose of the Concept Master Plan is to establish a comprehensive and consensus-driven vision to guide future programming and investment in The Commons. The plan establishes direction on the fundamental design principles for The Commons, while leaving room for some discretion and interpretation in the implementation of the proposed improvements.

PREFACE/CONTEXT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The foundational principles of the plan were identified and validated through two years of research and public engagement. The Commons Master Plan Work Group convened 10 public meetings and collected feedback from hundreds of local residents and businesses. Independent historic and condition studies were also completed. These efforts informed the creation of the conceptual design. The plan is comprehensive in nature, and is intended to serve as a binding framework for future development and renovation projects in The Commons. The consensus-driven, guiding principles for The Commons are as follows:

1. The Commons is cherished as a community park primarily for the benefit of South Lake Minnetonka residents and businesses. There is community consensus that The Commons functions as a neighborhood park for Excelsior residents, and as a community park for South Lake Minnetonka residents. It does not function as a regional park intended to draw large audience from outside the community. Scale and mass of future proposed projects should reflect this intended audience.
2. South Lake Minnetonka residents and businesses support incremental improvement to, rather than radical redesign of, The Commons. The objective of future capital projects should be to improve upon what already exists, rather than attempt to create wholly new concepts and amenities.
3. The community's preferred uses of the park are passive and unstructured (ie: walking, casual sporting activities, lake viewing, etc.) as opposed to new large-scale, organized events. As such, future proposals for new elements and programming in the park should be consistent with these types of uses.
4. Proposed changes and improvements must preserve The Commons' historic elements as identified in the PVN report.
5. The architectural language for improvements to The Commons should be inspired by a "summer" or "lake" aesthetic, and reflective of Excelsior's legacy of simple, unembellished wooden structures and natural materials. Future structures should be buildings of today, influenced by history without creating historical replicas.
6. Capital improvement projects must balance design aesthetics with the need for sustainable upkeep and maintenance. Proposed renovation or development projects should include costs of ongoing maintenance in their budgets.

Prioritization and Implementation of Future Projects

The changes contemplated in the Concept Master Plan are too significant to be undertaken all at once. Rather, the work group recommends that a process be developed to allow South Lake Minnetonka residents and businesses, the City, Community for The Commons and other stakeholders to prioritize and pursue discrete improvement projects as interest and funding levels permit.

Review and Approval of Future Projects

While the Concept Master Plan provides a binding framework for future stewardship of The Commons, it stops short of prescribing specific design details. Instead, each significant park improvement project will go through a detailed design process, allowing the public, Community for The Commons, regulatory agencies, relevant commissions and the City Council to participate in and shape the final, detailed plans.

PREFACE/CONTEXT FOUNDATIONAL QUESTIONS FOR STEWARDSHIP OF THE COMMONS

Prior to creating the conceptual design for The Commons Master Plan, the Work Group wanted to establish a consensus - driven set of principles upon which this work could be based. The Work Group approached this task by asking – and through a series of three studies answering – several simple questions:

- Who is the primary audience of The Commons?
- What are the primary, intended uses of The Commons?
- What aspects of The Commons require attention, renovation or replacement?
- What elements of The Commons are historic and deserving of preservation?

The summaries below detail the three studies that were conducted and the lessons learned from each.

PREVIOUS STUDIES: PARENTEAU/GRAVES - PUBLIC OPINION STUDY

Purpose:

- The purpose of the study was to better understand residents' and local businesses' vision, priorities, preferences and concerns for The Commons.

Methodology:

- The study solicited public opinion through a combination of 10 focus groups meetings with 155 Excelsior resident and business group participants. An electronically administered survey was also used to capture public opinion and feedback from 221 Excelsior residents and 114 broader South Lake Minnetonka residents. A copy of the study is attached as Exhibit A.

Lessons Learned:

Key findings gleaned from the study included:

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

PREVIOUS STUDIES: SRF - CONDITIONS STUDY OF THE COMMONS

Purpose:

- The purpose of this study was to engage a landscape architecture & engineering firm to conduct an objective inventory of The Commons and catalog necessary improvements.

Methodology:

- SRF staff conducted a day-long, walk-through survey of the park to note and document existing conditions in The Commons. Their report describes these conditions by use zone and recommends improvements for each zone.
- A copy of the SRF study is attached as Exhibit B.

Lessons Learned:

The SRF study identified the following deficiencies in The Commons:

- 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

PREVIOUS STUDIES: PVN - HISTORIC ATTRIBUTES STUDY

Purpose:

- The purpose of the study was to define the “period of significance” and “character-defining features” for The Commons to inform any necessary historic preservation considerations in the Concept Master Plan.

Methodology:

- PVC staff researched historical archives, reviewed narrative history on the site, and compared current conditions to historical imagery.
- A copy of the PVN study is attached as Exhibit C.

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
 - ballfield location
 - ballfield seating