



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

EXISTING CONDITIONS WHAT WE HEARD



07.15.2017

DESIGN PRIORITIES

- ① WALKABLE
- ② BEACH
- ③ SHORELINE
- ④ PORT
- ⑤ BANDSHELL
- ⑥ RESTROOM/CONCESSION
- ⑦ PLAYGROUND

EXISTING CONDITIONS

WHAT WE HEARD

1. Walkable

The Commons today has one sidewalk that parallels Lake Street, connecting the Port to the ballfield to the beach area. New walks could be introduced to create walking loops and allow for better ADA access to the shoreline.

2. Beach

The two beaches are beloved spaces within The Commons but are too often closed because of high levels of E coli. The plan has an opportunity to improve water quality by minimizing road runoff impact on water adjacent to the beaches as well as reducing runoff from lawns used by geese.

3. Shoreline

Erosion of the shoreline is evident in many areas of The Commons. Opportunity exists to fortify the existing rip-rap edges and introduce shoreline vegetation that is more resilient to the heavy wave action along the edges of The Commons.

4. Port

The Port represents an important connection to the historic downtown on Water Street. The functional requirements of servicing charter boats has driven much of the layout today and an opportunity exists to reorganize the Port to accommodate the functional needs but provide much needed community gathering space and public restrooms.

5. Bandshell

The existing bandshell has fallen into disrepair and does not take advantage of its relationship to the knoll behind it. The bandshell could be re-envisioned to accommodate more intimate events on the knoll and also large community events on the main lawn.

6. Restroom/Concession

The existing building does not meet current code and ADA, and is seldom used. It too could become more multi-functional to accommodate events on the main lawn as well as at the ballfield.

7. Playground

The existing playground is beginning to show signs of age and a refresh of some of the equipment would enhance accessibility as well as the overall aesthetics of the equipment.

8. Winter

The Commons is underutilized and its design could be enhanced to better accommodate winter activity.

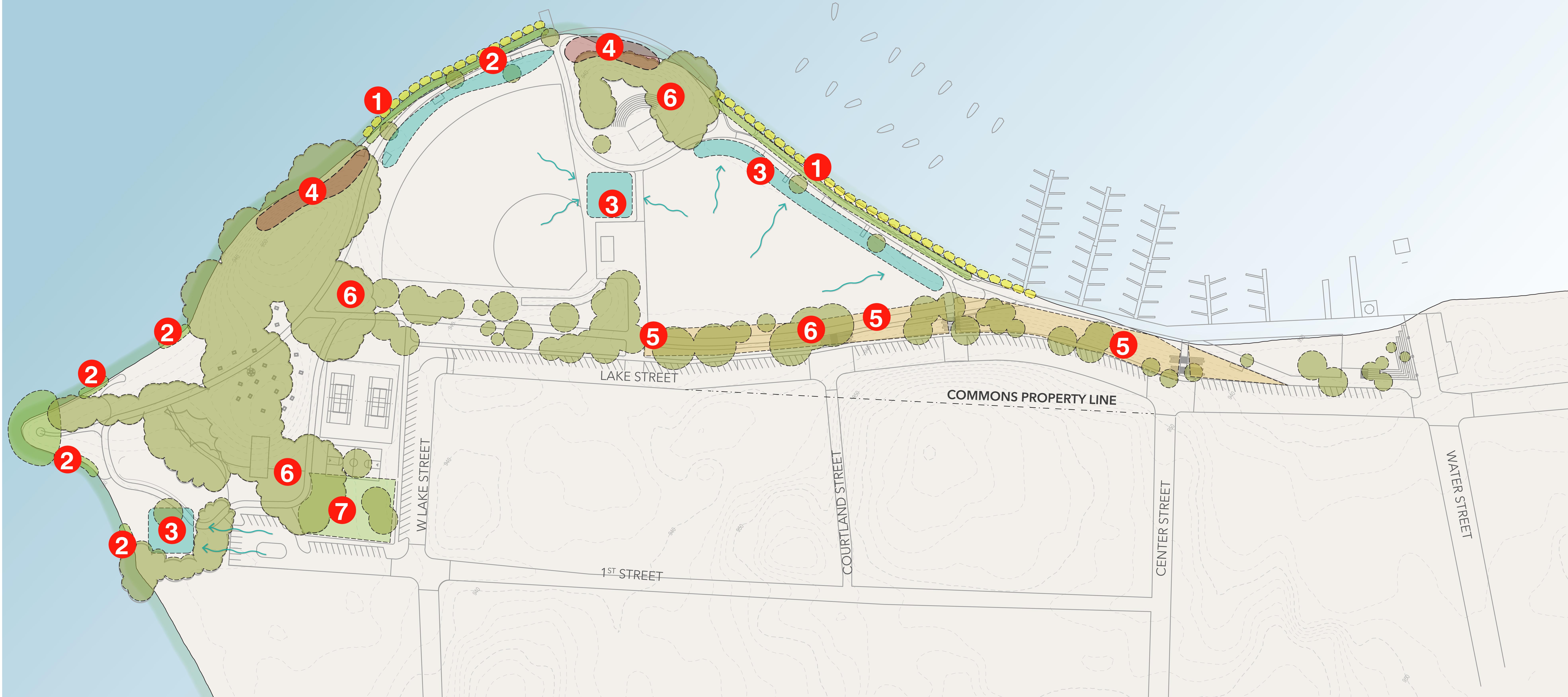
9. Gathering

The Commons accommodates a large variety of gatherings from large legacy events to smaller events like weddings. An opportunity exists to expand the flexibility of The Commons to reflect community consensus for unstructured use, picnics and smaller events.

10. Bike Friendly

The Commons does not currently have amenities that promote bicycle use and the City has seen significant expansion as a destination for cyclists. The Commons could add parking, and other bicycle friendly amenities to attract these users.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES ECOLOGY



① STABILIZATION

② RESTORATION

③ INFILTRATION

④ INVASIVES REMOVAL

⑤ REDUCED TURF

⑥ TREE PRESERVATION

⑦ SUCCESSIONAL PLANTING

DESIGN PRINCIPLES ECOLOGY

Members of the design team and City met with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District to review The Commons and discuss improvements that would enhance the overall ecology of The Commons but also reduce runoff impact to improve the overall water quality of the Lake. The diagram on the previous page illustrates a menu of improvements that could be pursued to improve the ecological function of The Commons.

1. Stabilization

The existing rip rap has eroded in some areas allowing for a significant amount of erosion into the Lake. Augmenting the existing rip rap edge will help to reduce erosion by minimizing impacts from the wave action seen in the bay.

2. Restoration

Once the shoreline has been stabilized, the reintroduction of resilient shoreline vegetation will improve the effectiveness of the buffer. Existing edges of the beach could also be enhanced to minimize erosion into the lake and improve water quality around the beaches.

3. Infiltration

Improved infiltration within the park will intercept runoff from road and grass areas used by geese. These infiltration areas provide important treatment of storm water prior to discharging into the Lake but also provide important habitat for pollinators and improved aesthetics for park users.

4. Invasive Species Removal

The preserved wooded hillsides on the knoll areas have become overrun with invasive species. The removal of these invasive species like buckthorn will improve views to the lake but, most importantly restore lost ecosystems that enhance the overall ecology of the Lake.

5. Reduced Turf

Many steep slopes and underutilized areas of the park are mowed today. Replacing turf with native vegetation will reduce long term maintenance, restore ecological function and enhance aesthetics.

6. Tree Preservation

The Commons is home to a significant number of mature trees that are defining features of the park. The recommendations previously provided to the city in the Bartlett Tree Study should be followed to ensure continued health and enhancement of The Common's tree canopy.

7. Successional Planting

Many of the trees within The Commons are fully mature with no young trees to eventually take their place. An overall strategy should be developed to ensure the tree canopy within The Commons is maintained for future generations.

ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE



Loosely Based On Historical Structures:

- Simple Wood “Lake Front” Structures
- Relationship of Buildings to Shore and Water
- Summer/Lake Culture

ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE



DOCK/BOARDWALK



PAVILION



BUILDING

ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE



CONCESSION / BATHROOMS
PORT BATHROOM / REFUSE STORAGE



PAVILION / WARMING HOUSE



BANDSHELL

MASTERPLAN EXCELSIOR COMMONS

0 60' 120' 240'



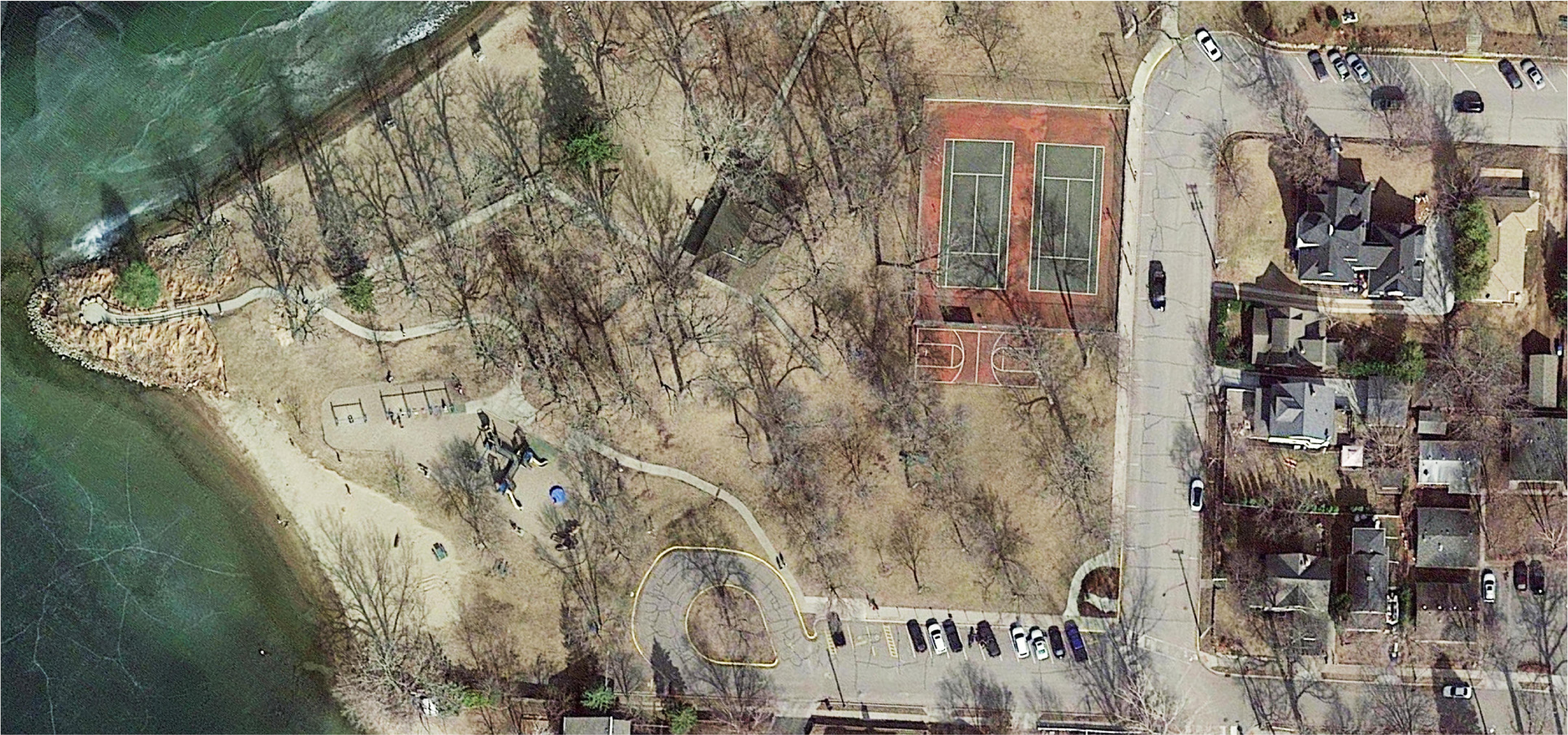
MASTERPLAN EXCELSIOR COMMONS

0 60' 120' 240'



MASTERPLAN EXCELSIOR COMMONS

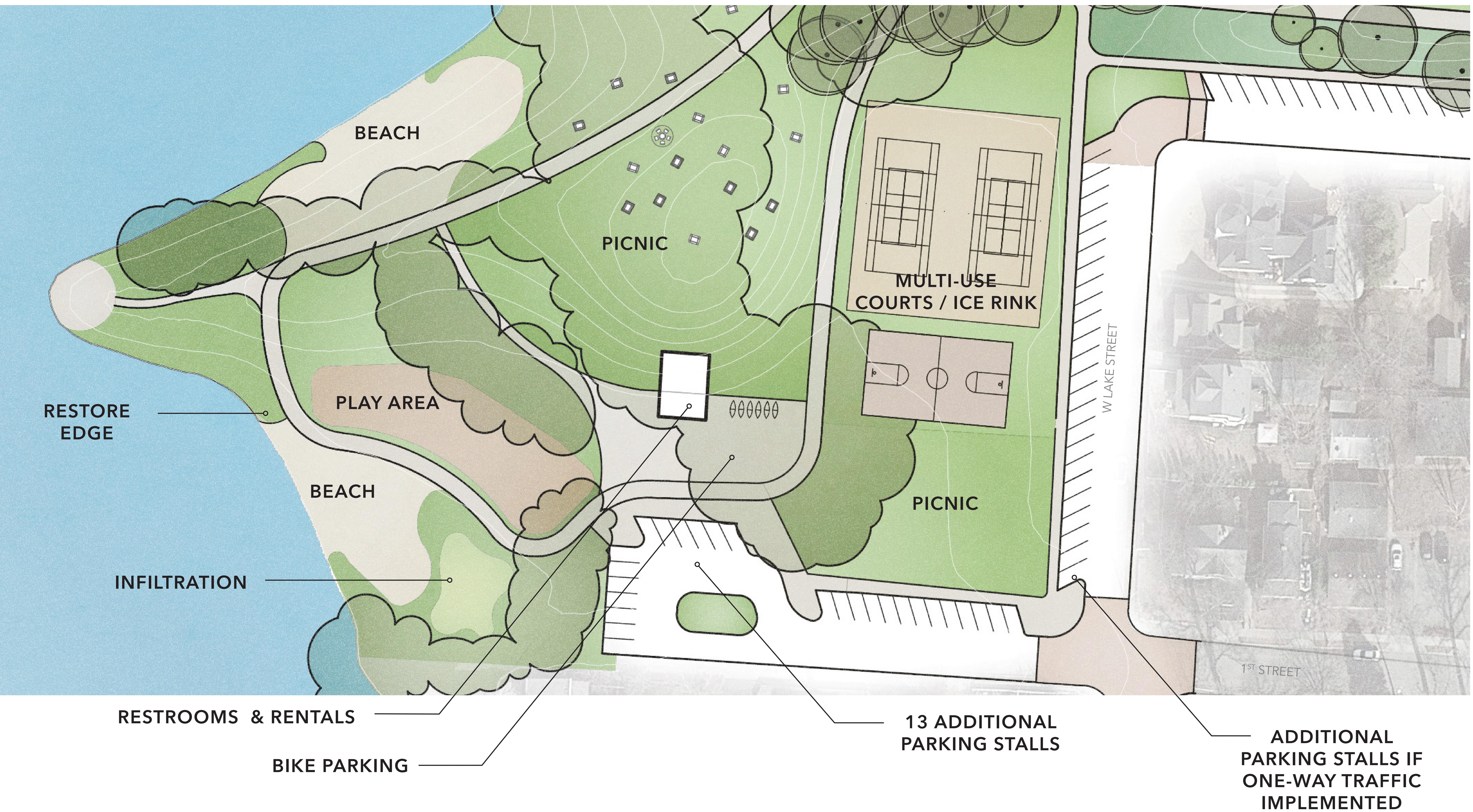
The following pages focus on the three main areas of The Commons 1) The Beach & Picnic Area, 2) The Lawn and Ballfield Area, and 3) The Port. Analysis of the existing conditions, recommendations for improvement and before and after renderings illustrate the opportunities that exist and articulate a vision for the future. As this plan moves towards implementation, each phase will require additional due diligence, design, identification of funding support, and community engagement.



BEACH AND PICNIC AREA EXISTING CONDITIONS

The beach and picnic area sit on a significant knoll within The Commons. This area is an important neighborhood and community destination. The tennis courts, play area, beach, picnic area and restroom/changing building are all showing signs of age. The following issues were identified as areas for improvement:

- Current run-off contributes to frequent beach closings
- Significant erosion on knoll under the existing tree canopy
- Invasive species on knoll hillside along lake edge
- Limited winter recreation opportunities
- Courts are striped for single sport
- More parking is needed
- Restroom building is run down, not ADA accessible and unwelcoming



BEACH AND PICNIC AREA IMPROVEMENTS

DESIGN PRINCIPLES BEACH AND PICNIC AREA

IMPROVEMENTS:

The beach and picnic area offer an important amenity for residents and the master plan envisions a series of improvements that will maintain the natural character of this zone of the park, while better addressing ecological and recreational opportunities. Proposed enhancements include:

- New stalls on West Lake Street and at playground drop-off area add parking capacity with minimal impact on green space.
- A restroom building with space for rental of equipment (i.e. paddle boards, kayaks, skates/skies) and space for a winter warming house. The building would be accessed from roundabout and provide a central hub for activity. A new picnic pavilion for family gatherings would be located at the top of the hill grade.
- Upgrade existing play equipment to address universal accessibility and modern play.
- Provide pretreatment infiltration of road runoff to improve water quality at the beach.
- Enhanced picnic facilities on top of knoll.
- Bike parking.
- Shoreline improvements to minimize erosion into lake.
- Elimination of invasive species on knoll.
- Move courts away from Lake Street to provide improved green buffer and re-purpose for multi-use activity, such as an ice rink.



BEACH AND PICNIC AREA EXISTING

This view taken from the top of the existing knoll illustrates how the existing beach has extended almost to the top of the knoll and created erosion issues, the limited amount of picnic tables, the unwelcoming restroom building and the invasive species along the knoll hillsides adjacent to the Lake.



BEACH AND PICNIC AREA IMPROVEMENTS

A SUMMER RESPITE

The proposed illustration reflects a Minnesota fall day with enhanced picnic opportunities, restoration of vegetation between the beach and the top of the knoll and removal of invasive species along the lake edge.



BEACH AND PICNIC AREA EXISTING

This view is taken from the existing roundabout illustrating the difficult access to the existing restroom/changing building, erosion on the hillside and the one dimensional use of the existing court area.



BEACH AND PICNIC AREA IMPROVEMENTS

A WINTER DESTINATION

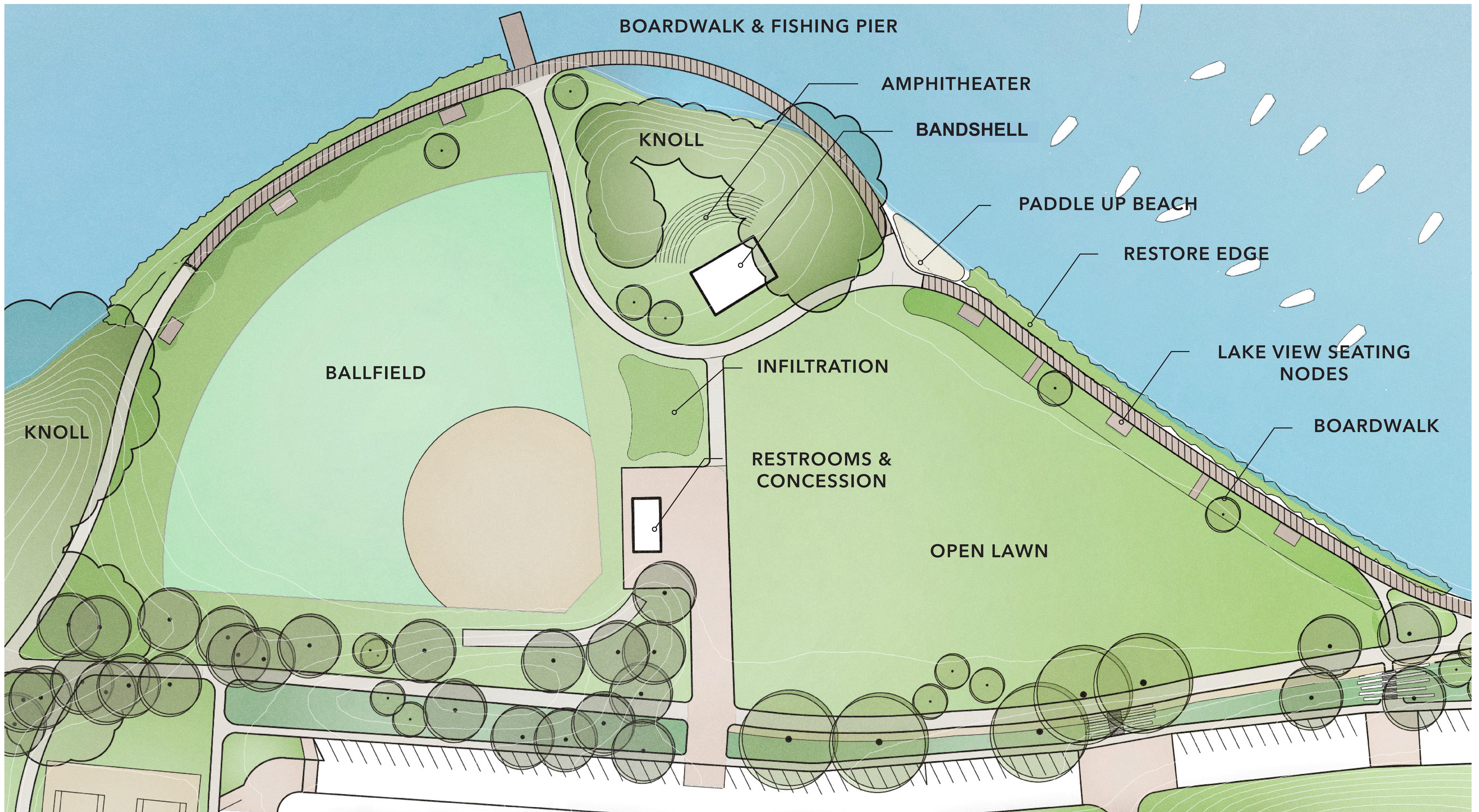
This illustration reflects a transformation of this area into a community winter destination with improved access to the restroom/warming house, outdoor fire pit, direct access to a winter skating area on the courts and the family picnic pavilion on top of the restroom building.



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA EXISTING CONDITIONS

The historic ballfield and Lawn area provide significant recreational benefits and flexibility for community gathering in The Commons. Two significant knolls on either side of the ballfield frame views of the Lake. The existing shoreline offers picturesque views of the Lake. The band shell and concession/restroom structure are in disrepair and is in need of updating. The following additional issues were identified as areas for improvement:

- Ballfield requires grading and drainage improvements
- Challenging access to the lake edge
- Shoreline erosion
- Bandshell could be replaced for multi-purpose use
- Challenging access from neighborhood to park
- Concession stand and restroom facility is obsolete
- Tree canopy on knolls require maintenance
- Unmanaged run-off into the lake



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA IMPROVEMENTS

DESIGN PRINCIPLES LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA

IMPROVEMENTS:

Recommendations – The master plan recommends maintaining the current uses of this area but improving the overall supporting infrastructure to facilitate that use. Ecological, circulation and facility improvements in this area will enhance use while maintaining the current character. Proposed improvements include:

- Shoreline fortification and restoration
- Perimeter loop trail and boardwalk
- Multi-functional, bidirectional, bandshell with seating on the knoll
- Infiltration basins to filter runoff prior to discharge into the Lake
- New concession and restroom building that serves events on ballfield and open lawn area
- Enhanced neighborhood entries across Lake Street
- Refurbish ballfield
- Invasive species removal on knolls
- Preservation of existing tree canopy
- Fishing pier
- Enhanced lighting, minimizing light pollution and glare



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA EXISTING

The knoll provides picturesque views of Lake Minnetonka, but views are obstructed due to the presence of invasive species.



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA IMPROVEMENTS

The creation of a loop boardwalk on the backside of the existing knoll allows for a continuous perimeter walk within The Commons and claims area that is currently not used. The boardwalk also connects to a fishing pier (seen in the distance) that provides new recreational opportunities. Invasive species have been removed on the knoll to open up views to the Lake and the boardwalk.



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA EXISTING

The current lake edge has seen significant erosion, does not filter runoff water and is not ADA accessible.



SHORELINE RESTORATION

BOARDWALK

WET MEADOW

LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA IMPROVEMENTS

The master plan recommends the development of a boardwalk system along the lake edge with gathering areas that promote interaction and conversation. New fortification of the lake edge and the introduction of a buffer infiltration area on both sides of the walk will create an immersive experience that promotes improved ecological function of The Commons.



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA EXISTING

The current bandshell and concessions buildings are obsolete and do not take advantage of the 360 degree nature of their settings. An opportunity exists to re-envision these structures to better serve the evolving needs of park users.



LAWN AND BALLFIELD AREA IMPROVEMENTS

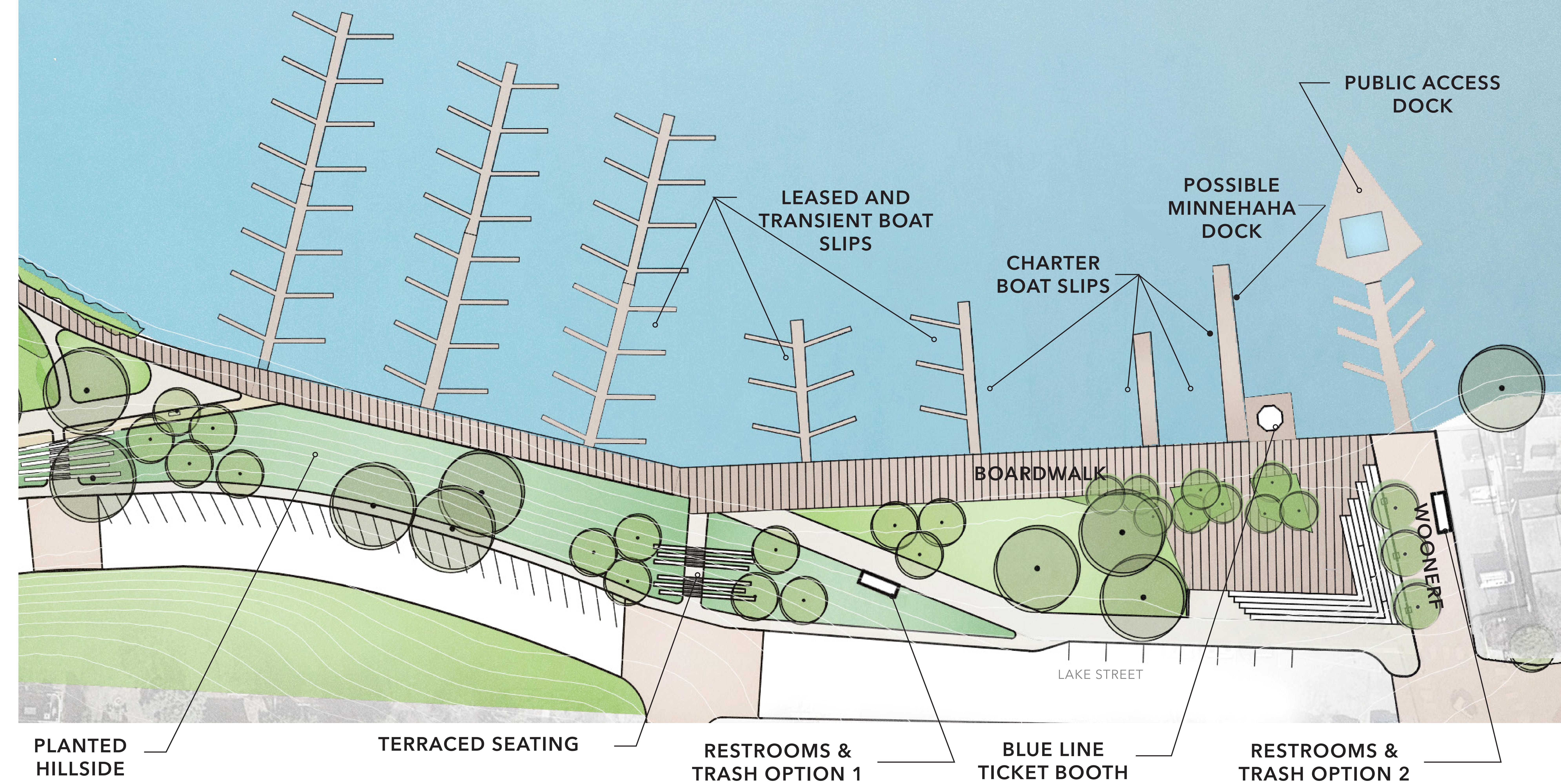
This illustration depicts a new two sided bandshell with tiered seating on the knoll for more intimate events and a large stage facing the open lawn for large community events. The asphalt driveway has been replaced with a permeable paver plaza that allows for vehicles but feels more pedestrian in nature. The concession stand and bathroom building has been replaced with more modern amenities and access on both sides to serve events on the open lawn and ballfield. A picnic shade structure extends from the concession stand towards the Lake to accommodate picnicking. New infiltration areas filter storm water and invasive species on the knoll have been removed to open new views of the Lake.



PORT AREA EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Port Area is the first impression of The Commons for many people. The flow of people to and from downtown on Water Street creates important synergy between the park and downtown. The Port Area serves the needs of charter and private boat users. The old Blue Line ticket booth provides a visual connection to the historic lake-front and nearby concessions provides an important amenity for people gathering in the Port. The following issues were identified as areas for improvement within the Port:

- Connection between the Downtown District and The Commons
- The Blue Line ticket booth is in an inopportune location
- Lack of community gathering opportunities
- Port does not accommodate summer dockage of the Minnehaha Steamboat
- Shoreline erosion and water quality issues
- Unsightly garbage storage and lack of restroom
- Bottleneck exists between the Port and the rest of The Commons



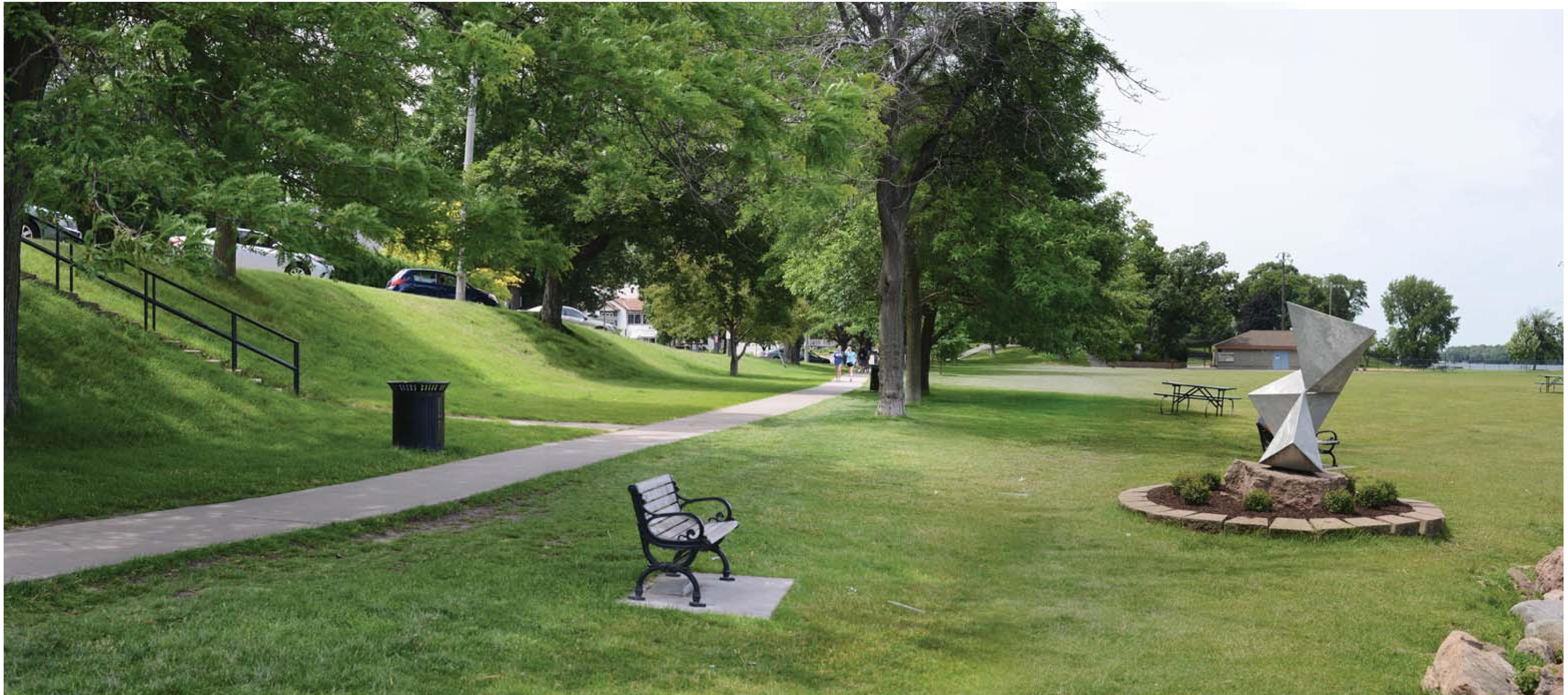
PORT AREA IMPROVEMENTS

DESIGN PRINCIPLES PORT AREA

IMPROVEMENTS:

The Master Plan envisions a reconfiguration of the Port area that places an emphasis on community gathering space. A central boardwalk provides flexible space for a wide variety of Community activities and extends the Port into the water, mitigating a bottleneck. The Blue Line Ticket Booth is located adjacent to a dock that could accommodate summer dockage of the Minnehaha. The Water Street extension is transformed from a bituminous road into a pedestrian friendly woonerf while still accommodating vehicular traffic. Other proposed improvements include:

- New refuse/restroom building location options
- New boardwalk adjacent to the Lake to better connect the docks and restore historic Port experience
- Terraced seating along Lake and Water Streets provides seating for Port activities and community events
- Open green space for passive activities
- Steps that realign key neighborhood access points
- Consideration of converting Lake Street to one way traffic (subject to public input and a traffic study) would allow a sidewalk to be constructed at the top of the slope that improves access for residents and users parking on Lake Street.



PORT AREA EXISTING

Currently, residents accessing The Commons must navigate steep slopes, inconvenient stair locations, and challenging street crossings. The steep slope is a hazard for parks maintenance staff and is prone to erosion.



PLANTED SLOPE

PARK PROMENADE

BOARDWALK

PORT AREA IMPROVEMENTS

CONNECTING TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Terraced seating is integrated into the hillside with expanded steps creating a more dynamic and welcoming entry into The Commons. Wider sidewalks with seating and public art help make the park entry experience more cohesive. The mowed hillside is converted to native plantings helping to reduce maintenance and improve the overall aesthetics of the park.



PORT AREA EXISTING

Water Street appears as a typical roadway that spills directly into Lake Minnetonka. The Port lacks a central gathering area or town square. Service trucks have access to the heart of the Port area creating conflicts with pedestrians and boat users. Erosion along the shoreline is evident. Kayak and paddle-board rental is sandwiched between the charter boats and resident and transient docks, generating safety concerns.



PORT AREA IMPROVEMENTS

TRANSFORMING THE PORT: SUMMER

The central feature of the Port is the development of a new boardwalk. Large areas of green space begin to break down the scale of this area while framing different use zones within the space. Water Street has been transformed into a quality first impression from downtown to the Lake. New sidewalk along Lake Street allows for continuous movement and access from the perimeter of the park. The Blue Line Ticket Booth and Minnehaha dock are important focal points of the plaza and also important links to the heritage of Excelsior. In this rendering, the restroom and refuse storage facility is illustrated on the hillside near the Lawn.



PORT AREA IMPROVEMENTS

TRANSFORMING THE PORT: WINTER

The Port area has the opportunity to become a winter destination for community events. This illustration depicts a winter market concept that could invigorate this space during cold winter months. The existing vehicle access to Lake Minnetonka is maintained. In this rendering, the restroom and refuse storage facility is illustrated on or near the Woonerf.

PRELIMINARY BUILDING PROGRAM

Excelsior Commons Guide Plan: Preliminary Building Program

This preliminary programming outline was developed with the Work Group and the design team. It is a first iteration of the basic needs as perceived at this time. In the future, at the start of each project, a more detailed programming and budgeting process will need to be done. It will respond to community needs at that time and it must reconcile the scope of work with the available funding

ALL BUILDINGS:

- Structure: poured concrete foundations; wood framed generally, board formed concrete columns and walls in high durability areas
- Exterior: acetylated lumber or pressure treated wood siding (environmentally responsible, durable wood product); aluminum clad windows; membrane flat roof or standing seam metal sloped roof
- Interior: 5/8" flush wood birch panel finishes generally in public areas; ceramic tile in toilet and wet areas; polished concrete floors; code required finishes in concession food areas
- HVAC: ventilation and electric resistance heaters in toilet rooms in toilets; beach warming house building has gas furnace with air conditioning
- Electric: general architectural LED lighting of building interiors and exterior

PRELIMINARY BUILDING PROGRAM

PORT BUILDING: (Public toilets and refuse storage)

- 2 accessible unisex toilet rooms:
toilet, sink, diaper changing counter, small skylight in each, durable finishes.
 - 1 general storage and janitor closet:
sink and storage shelves, durable finishes
 - Garbage storage:
Size and configuration will depend on lease arrangements with the tour boats at the time and garbage collection methods.
 - Site work: sidewalk, plantings, lighting, utilities,
- Allow 150 SF
- 300 SF
50SF each = 100 SF
50 SF

BALLFIELD AND LAWN CONCESSIONS

- 4 individual accessible toilet rooms: toilet, sink, (diaper changing counter in 1) small skylight in each, durable finishes
 - 1 general storage and janitor closet:
 - Drinking fountain
 - Storage room also functions as command center for event (window to exterior)
 - Concession area: sinks, refrigerator, freezer, counters, power for basic warming and simple prep equipment, ventilation, finishes and equipment to meet code
 - Plus covered pergola seating area: of 500SF
- 1000SF
200SF
200 SF
150SF
450SF

BANDSHELL

- Open on two sides:
 - Larger opening to the “lawn”,
 - Smaller opening to the hillside with tiered seating for 100
 - Drop down screen on small side as backdrop for larger performance.
 - Power for amps, instruments, lighting provided by bands
 - Basic performance lighting
 - Band bus parking adjacent with power hook up to function as Green Room
 - Band bus parking adjacent with power hook up to function as Green Room
 - Also functions as Park Pavilion
- 1250SF

PRELIMINARY BUILDING PROGRAM

BEACH AREA CONCESSION lower level	1550SF
• 4 individual accessible toilet/changing rooms: toilet, sink, wall of small lockers (diaper changing counter in 1), small skylight in each, durable finishes	60SF each 240SF
• 1 general storage and janitor closet:	300SF
• Drinking fountain	130SF
• Life guard room with storage shelves, window	130SF
• Office/sales counter: roll down closure over counter	130SF
• Storage for sales items, seasonal items	300SF
• Lobby; one glass wall, functions as small warming area in winter	400SF
• Mechanical room	50SF
• Plus exterior patio area with fire pit and radiant heaters	
• Nearby kayak storage	
BEACH AREA CONCESSION upper level	1550SF
• Functions as open air covered pavilion	
• Power and lighting	
• Plus patio to the north among the trees 500SF	

FUTURE STUDY POLICIES FOR SUCCESSFUL STEWARDSHIP OF THE COMMONS

The Commons Master Planning Work Group also recommends that the City of Excelsior adopt policies to ensure successful stewardship of The Commons. Among the areas where policy direction is needed include:

1. A **Use Policy** that guides programming, evaluating and selecting event uses, and permit pricing for applications in The Commons.
2. A **Maintenance Policy** that outlines the desired condition of The Commons, significant types of maintenance to be conducted, required funding and sources and responsible parties.
3. A **Master Plan Change Policy** that outlines how future deviations to the plan are considered, approved, or denied.
4. A **Memorial Policy** that provides guidance to the City relating to the modification, removal, or addition of memorials.
5. A **Gift and Naming Policy** to document the intent and use of significant gifts, and provide guidelines and terms when individuals or institutions request naming rights as part of their gift in The Commons.
6. A **Project Selection and Implementation Policy** for future improvements that details the process for prioritizing, designing, and implementing future projects.
7. A **Tree Preservation, Maintenance and Replanting Policy** that ensures trees are preserved, maintained, and insured against disease or natural disaster.

A Vision for The Commons: Summary of community input

November 2016



A Vision for The Commons: Summary of community input

City of Excelsior, The Commons Master Planning Work Group

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Project Overview

Methodology

The City of Excelsior's Commons Master Planning Working Group (CMPWG) retained Parenteau Graves in June 2016 to guide a process to define a shared community vision for The Commons, the 13-acre municipal park located in the heart of Excelsior. Working with the CMPWG, Parenteau Graves designed informational materials and a process to gain widespread community input through surveys and focus groups. This community feedback was gathered August–October 2016. The process focused primarily on the key stakeholders for the Commons, defined as the residents and business owners whose local property taxes fund 65% of the park's annual budget.

Survey

The online survey was available August 25–October 27, 2016, with a paper version available at City Hall. The City sent a postcard with the survey link to every Excelsior resident and business owner and promoted the survey on its website and Facebook page. Community members also posted the survey link on the Excelsior-area NextDoor website, and CMPWG members distributed it via their networks.

The goal was to obtain a minimum of 200 responses. In total, 335 people responded; 221 were residents of Excelsior (defined as where they pay their water and sewer bill), and 114 were non-residents who live in the area and are users of the Commons. (*See Addendum A.*)

Informational Materials

Parenteau Graves and the CMPWG developed an information packet that was made available on the City's website and was emailed to all who registered for focus groups. The packet provided a history of the Commons; details on current zones, infrastructure, permitting fees, and usage statistics; overview and link to a recent independent condition study of the park; background on how the park is funded; and information about possible new funding streams. (*See Addendum B.*)

Focus Groups

Focus groups, facilitated by Parenteau Graves, were held in five private homes in diverse locations in Excelsior, plus two in public locations (Excelsior Library and Golden Rule). Parenteau Graves also met with the Downtown Retailers and two Excelsior Rotary groups.

Approximately 80 people attended the focus groups, with another 75 people participating through the Downtown Retailers and Rotary groups. The focus groups allowed Parenteau Graves to explore in depth the community's vision, priorities, and concerns for the Commons. All groups discussed a common set of questions. (*See Addendum C.*)

Executive Summary

Research Overview

The City of Excelsior's Commons Master Planning Working Group (CMPWG) retained Parenteau Graves in June 2016 to guide a process to define a shared community vision for The Commons, the 13-acre municipal park located in the heart of Excelsior. Through a widely distributed survey and numerous focus groups, the community expressed its vision and priorities for the Commons.

Major Findings

Part 1: Maintenance & Use

- Maintenance is a critical issue that the City must address prior to any new, major investment in The Commons.
- The City needs a use policy to guide fees for and type of events in the park.
- Individual user fees are not recommended as a way to fund the park.

Part 2: Design Needs

- The community deeply values the Commons and recognizes that the park needs significant attention and revitalization.
- The design of the Commons should first and foremost reflect the preferences of South Lake Minnetonka residents and businesses.
- While there are many competing needs for revitalization throughout the park, several co-equal priorities emerged from the research:
 - Improve walkability and accessibility.
 - Enhance the beach area and facilities.
 - Address shoreline erosion.
 - Re-design the port to create a welcoming, safe entry to the park.
 - Revamp the bandshell and better design the open space around it.
- Additional priorities cited as very important include adding winter amenities; improving gathering spaces; investigating ways to increase usage of the baseball field plus reimagining the adjacent concessions and bathroom facility; and developing a plan to remove and improve playground equipment.

Guiding Principles

- Physical improvements to the park should reflect the community's desired scale of use.
- Any new building structures should be designed in keeping with the historic character of Excelsior.
- Any capital improvements to the park should incorporate ongoing cost of maintenance into their project budget.

Major Findings

Part 1: Maintenance & Usage

#1 Maintenance is a critical issue that the City must address prior to any new, major investment in The Commons.

The topic of maintenance was at the forefront of every focus group. In the words of one participant, “The first order of business should be to clean up the Commons so we can really see what needs to be done.” Issues cited included messy garbage, dirty facilities (especially the bathrooms), unkempt beaches, random and aging playground equipment, untended trees, and infrequently shoveled steps in the winter.

There is widespread concern about making any improvements until a sustainable maintenance plan can be put in place. In addition, there is concern that the City doesn’t currently have the expertise on staff to tend to some of the more complex maintenance issues.

#2 The City needs a use policy to guide fees for and type of events in the park.

Walking and quiet uses of the park were ranked most important in terms of usage, followed by swimming and concerts. While the survey showed that the two-thirds of respondents believe usage of the park is “about right” in the busy summer months, many focus group participants expressed concerns about large-scale events that detract from the enjoyment of the Commons. A use policy should reflect and reinforce these preferences and concerns.

The City currently does not have a use policy or screening criteria by which to approve or deny permit requests to host events in the Commons. Applications are decided on a first come, first-served basis and are usually approved. In addition, residents want the City to re-examine permit fees to improve revenues to help park maintenance.

#3 Individual user fees are not recommended as a way to fund the park.

Focus group participants were not particularly receptive to the idea of individual user fees for the park. The majority believe they would be hard to police, require fences, would be unfriendly or discriminatory, or may not even be legal by the park’s public domain status. Most people felt the City could make more revenue through improving the permitting fees/use policy, by investing in attracting people to smaller scale permitted events, and through pricing and continued enforcement of the newly installed electronic parking meters.

A small percentage of people felt a user fee may be something to consider given the financial needs of the park, and that it could be limited to amenities such as the beach.

Part 2: Design Needs

#4 The community deeply values the Commons and recognizes that the park needs significant attention and revitalization.

Excelsior residents and business owners are deeply invested in their community, holding in high esteem the charming and historic character of the town; its small-town feel and close-knit community; its walkability and range of amenities for the size of the town; and—at the top of many people's list—the Commons, the extraordinary 13-acre green space that is central to the City of Excelsior's identity. The Commons is most valued for:

- Offering a multiplicity of uses: beaches, courts, baseball field, kayaks & paddleboards, picnicking, concerts, and more.
- Serving as the community's lakeshore, with direct public access to Lake Minnetonka.
- Providing a central gathering place for the town.
- Offering wide open green space that is in short supply around the lake.

The community recognizes, however, that the Commons needs significant attention and revitalization in all zones. **No aspect of the park—lawns, beach, shoreline, courts and playgrounds, buildings—achieved an “excellent” or “good” rating.** Buildings received the lowest ranking (below average). A recently conducted independent condition study of the park concurs with the community's perceptions.

#5 The design of the Commons should first and foremost consider the preferences of South Lake Minnetonka residents and businesses.

Focus group participants clearly expressed a preference for a *remodel* and *revitalization* of the park rather than *radical redesign*.

To inform design, participants were asked if the Commons should best be thought of as a:

- Neighborhood park, primarily for the benefit of Excelsior residents & businesses
- Community park, for the benefit of South Lake Minnetonka residents & businesses
- Regional park, for the benefit of Twin Cities metro residents and businesses

Both survey respondents (62% of residents and 76% of non-residents) and focus group participants chose “community park,” with most saying that the Commons already serves the wider South Lake community but could not handle the traffic of a regional-scale park.

#6 While there are many competing needs for revitalization throughout the park, several clear co-equal priorities emerged from the research.

High priority: Improve walkability and accessibility.

Widening and thickening (to handle maintenance equipment) the walkways is a top priority, cited in every focus group and reinforced by survey results, which rated enhanced trails and

sidewalks as the top desired new feature/enhancement. Adding “relief” areas in the sidewalk—where people can stop, rest and talk—also is highly recommended. Many people would like to see a loop added that better connects park zones and that follows the shoreline. And importantly, lack of ADA access is a growing concern that should be addressed.

High priority: Enhance the beach area and facilities.

The beach ranks third highest in terms of usage and second highest in terms of interest in new features/enhancements. Of all structures, the bathhouse/beach bathrooms received the highest percentage (85%) of votes to remove, replace or remodel. In addition, several people noted that the design of the changing room is not relevant to today’s usage.

Focus group participants recommended improving the beaches by: 1) Creating clear boundaries between grass, concrete, sand and woodchip paths to deal with erosion and dirty sand conditions; 2) Removing the old playground equipment in the sandy area by the bathroom; 3) Adding beach amenities such as a splash pad or swimming/diving docks.

Focus group participants were divided in interest in adding a seasonal beach café, with some citing the possibility of a private-public partnership to sustainably improve design, maintenance and food options. Survey respondents rated a café as their third highest priority for new enhancements.

High priority: Address shoreline erosion.

The shoreline and related erosion is a major and growing concern. There is strong support for addressing the shoreline through natural buffers that could help with both geese overpopulation and erosion.

High priority: Re-design the port to create a welcoming, safe entry to the park.

“Disorganized, unsafe, unimpressive, junky, and underwhelming” were the words often used to describe the port area. As the major entrance to the park, many participants noted its lack of welcome and wayfinding, which contribute to a confusing traffic flow of cars and pedestrians, as well as a lack of connection to the downtown district. Many participants also want the paddleboards moved to the beach area because of safety concerns with boats.

High priority: Revamp the bandshell and better design the open space around it.

Nearly 80% of survey respondents believe the bandshell needs attention, but there is strong agreement that should it be replaced, the new structure should be more multi-use focused and small in scale. Focus group input ranged from giving the structure a new coat of paint to replacing it with something less dense and more true to the character of Excelsior.

While people greatly value the open green space in front of the bandshell, some noted the need for better design to improve usage. However, there is strong opposition to anything that would block view of the lake.

#6 Several other additional priorities were cited as very important for the improvement of the Commons.

Add winter amenities to increase usage of the Commons in winter.

Many people would like to add winter amenities to the Commons. An ice rink ranks fairly high in preferences for new amenities, but many focus group participants expressed concerns about cost and maintenance and cited the need for more research. Additional ideas to increase winter usage included snowshoe and ski rentals and a winter festival.

Improve gathering spaces.

The Commons lacks any covered pavilions or spaces where more than a few people can hold an event (baseball team celebration, family reunion, e.g.). Adding well-designed, easily maintained structures is supported, especially if the City could cover the expense by requiring a small fee. Aging grills should be removed, and the picnic area needs redesign and configuration. There was consensus that this area has the best view of the lake but that it's generally unused because of access, poor equipment, and bad layout.

Investigate possible strategies to increase usage of baseball field and reimagine the adjacent concessions and bathroom facility.

There is widespread nostalgia for the ballfield, and people love the view. But the field, in its current status, with problematic drainage and poor lighting, is underutilized. Further data from Little League leaders or other community baseball resources could help bring greater clarity to what is possible and needed before major funds are invested in improvements. In addition, the aging concessions and bathroom facility is considered underutilized, dirty, and unattractive, and 77% of survey respondents said it should be removed, replaced, or remodeled.

Develop a plan to remove and improve playground equipment.

Many focus group participants recommend removing the random and old playground equipment scattered throughout the park (such as at the top of the hill in the picnic area and in the sandy area by the bathroom), and 51% of survey respondents recommend replacement and remodeling. Beyond that, the main playground is now more than 20 years old so a plan to update the equipment should be put in place. In the immediate future, gravel in the playground area should be replaced with a safer material.

Additional ideas that merit consideration:

- Eco-friendly lighting, bike racks, and improved locations to fish received mentions.
- Off leash dogs are considered an issue by many so pop-up dog parks may offer a solution.

Guiding Principles for Design

- Physical improvements to the park should reflect the community's desired scale of use.
- Any new building structures should be designed in keeping with the historic character of Excelsior.
- Any capital improvements to the park should incorporate the ongoing cost of maintenance into their project budget.

Next Steps

- Master Planning Work Group presents findings to the Excelsior City Council and appropriate City Commissions (*December 2016*)
- City staff develops a maintenance plan and use policy for The Commons (*December 2016–January 2017*)
- Commons Master Planning Work Group considers competencies required for initial planning efforts (landscape design, civil engineering, architectural, etc.) (*December 2016*)
- Master Planning Work Group expands to include more stakeholders (*January 2017*)
- Master Planning Work Group engages design team via RFP process (*January–February 2017*)
- Commons Master Planning process commences with opportunities for public input (*February 2017*)
- Commons Master Plan is completed and accepted by the Excelsior City Council (*date TBD*)

Addendum A: Survey Findings

Are you a resident of Excelsior (pay your water/sewer bill to the City of Excelsior)?		
Yes		221
No		114

How long have you lived in Excelsior?		
Less than 5 years	60	27%
5–10 years	38	17%
11–20 years	49	22%
More than 20 years	72	33%
No response	2	1%

To which age group do you belong?		
14 and younger	4	1%
15-20	1	0%
21-30	27	8%
31-40	55	16%
41-50	95	28%
51-60	80	24%
61-70	44	13%
71+	25	7%
No Responses	4	1%

Which best describes how often you visit the Commons?		
Several times per week	143	43%
Several times per month	119	36%
Several times per year	71	21%
No Responses	2	1%

How often do you use the Commons from October–April?		
Several times per week	39	12%
Several times per month	204	61%
Several times per year	92	27%
No Responses	0	0%

(scale = 1–7, with 1 being least used)

Rank the following zones of the park in terms of your usage	All	Resident	Non resident
Grassy open field/bandshell	5.17	5.27	4.97
Port/Excelsior Docks	4.61	4.66	4.50
Beach	4.36	4.40	4.29
Scenic overlook hillside areas	4.19	4.18	4.21
Playground	3.80	3.82	3.77
Picnic and BBQ areas	3.04	2.85	3.42
Athletic courts and fields	2.88	2.89	2.85

(scale = 1–9, with 1 being least important)

Rank the following in terms of importance at the Commons	All	Resident	Non resident
Walking	7.08	7.44	6.71
Quiet uses	6.26	6.42	5.93
Swimming	5.46	5.25	5.68
Concerts	5.38	5.54	5.21
Playground	5.21	5.32	5.11
Picnics	4.97	4.78	5.16
Sports	4.17	4.15	4.19
Third-party sponsored events	4.15	3.74	4.57
Fishing	2.47	2.49	2.44

If funds were available, should the bath house/beach bathrooms be:	All	Resident	Non resident
Removed and not replaced	2%	3%	1%
Replaced/redesigned	35%	35%	35%
Remodeled	47%	46%	49%
Left alone	14%	15%	12%
No Responses	2%	2%	3%

If funds were available, should the bandshell be:	All	Resident	Non resident
Removed and not replaced	3%	2%	4%
Replaced/redesigned	39%	44%	28%
Remodeled	36%	30%	47%
Left alone	21%	23%	18%
No Responses	1%	0%	3%

If funds were available, should the concessions/bathroom by the ballfield be:	All	Resident	Non resident
Removed and not replaced	2%	2%	2%
Replaced/redesigned	30%	32%	25%
Remodeled	44%	40%	51%
Left alone	22%	25%	18%
No Responses	2%	1%	4%

If funds were available, should the children's playground by the children's beach be:	All	Resident	Non resident
Removed and not replaced	0%	0%	0%
Replaced/redesigned	20%	18%	21%
Remodeled	31%	31%	33%
Left alone	48%	50%	42%
No Responses	2%	0%	4%

(scale: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = average; 1 = poor)

How would you rate the condition of each of the following in The Commons?	All	Resident	Non resident
Lawns/gardens/trees	2.87	2.76	3.10
Beach	2.74	2.66	2.90
Shoreline	2.70	2.64	2.81
Facilities (courts & playgrounds)	2.54	2.56	2.50
Facilities (buildings)	1.90	1.86	1.98

Rank your interest in the following possible new features and enhancements for the Commons:	All
Enhanced trails/sidewalks	5.94
Beach and water amenities	5.35
Seasonal beach café	5.27
Ice skating/hockey rink	4.86
Picnic shelter	4.68
Fishing pier	3.84
Dog park	3.24
Other/additional concessions	2.88

In your opinion, is the Commons best thought of as:	All	Residents	Non-residents
Neighborhood park	20%	26%	7%
Community park	67%	62%	76%
Regional park	12%	11%	14%
No Responses	2%	1%	3%

How would you describe usage in summer months?	All
Too busy	15%
About right	69%
Not busy enough	11%
Other/No response	5%

How would you describe usage during the off-season (October–April)?	All
Too busy	0%
About right	37%
Not busy enough	59%
Other/No response	4%

Excelsior Commons Master Planning Project



FOCUS GROUP BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SEPTEMBER 2016

The Commons – Today

2

- The Commons is a 13-acre municipal park located in the heart of Excelsior.
- The park is composed of several distinct “use areas” including:
 1. The “Port”
 2. The docks
 3. Street edge/paved walkway
 4. Event/gathering lawn and band shell
 5. Scenic overlook areas
 6. Athletic courts/fields
 7. Picnic areas
 8. Beach/playground areas



History of The Commons

3

- The establishment of The Commons dates to the inception of Excelsior, appearing on the original plats in 1854 and 1855 as "Public Ground," with no other indication of its intended use.
- Since the 1870s, the Village/City Council and Park Board have leased portions of The Commons for various uses: bath houses, dance pavilion, casino/entertainment pavilion, boat works, commercial and resident docks, and restaurants.



Photos courtesy of Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society

History of The Commons

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- In addition to formal leases, The Commons has informally been used for camping, picnics, baseball, and pageants, swimming, and concerts, among other uses.
- The physical landscape of The Commons has changed dramatically since its inception through extensive grading and filling of wetlands to create more useable land. A pedestrian wood boardwalk along the lake once connected the Port/Excelsior Docks with the beach area.



Photos courtesy of Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society

The Commons - Infrastructure

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The physical infrastructure of The Commons includes:

- Bandshell
- Concession stand with restrooms
- Bathhouse with restrooms
- Three playground areas
- Softball diamond (lighted)
- Two tennis courts (lighted)
- Basketball court
- Two beaches
- Benches, picnic tables and grills

The Commons has 110 adjacent, metered parking stalls.

Because Excelsior does not have a Parks & Recreation department, The Commons is maintained by the City's Public Works Department.



The Commons – Use & Permitting

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- The Commons draws tens of thousands of visitors annually and often hosts large, regional events such as the 4th of July and Art on the Lake.
- Current City policy requires that certain activities obtain a permit, including events that amplify sound, require street closures, assemble more than 10 people on City property, or impact neighboring properties.
- Permit fees range from \$60 for organized use of athletic fields, to \$150 for "minimal impact" events of less than 100 participants, to \$1,000 for "major impact" events. (Event organizers may pay more than \$1,000 if they serve alcohol, reserve parking meters or sell tickets)
- The City does not currently have a use policy or screening criteria/process by which to approve/deny permit requests. Applications are decided on a first come, first-served basis and are usually approved.



Data Sources

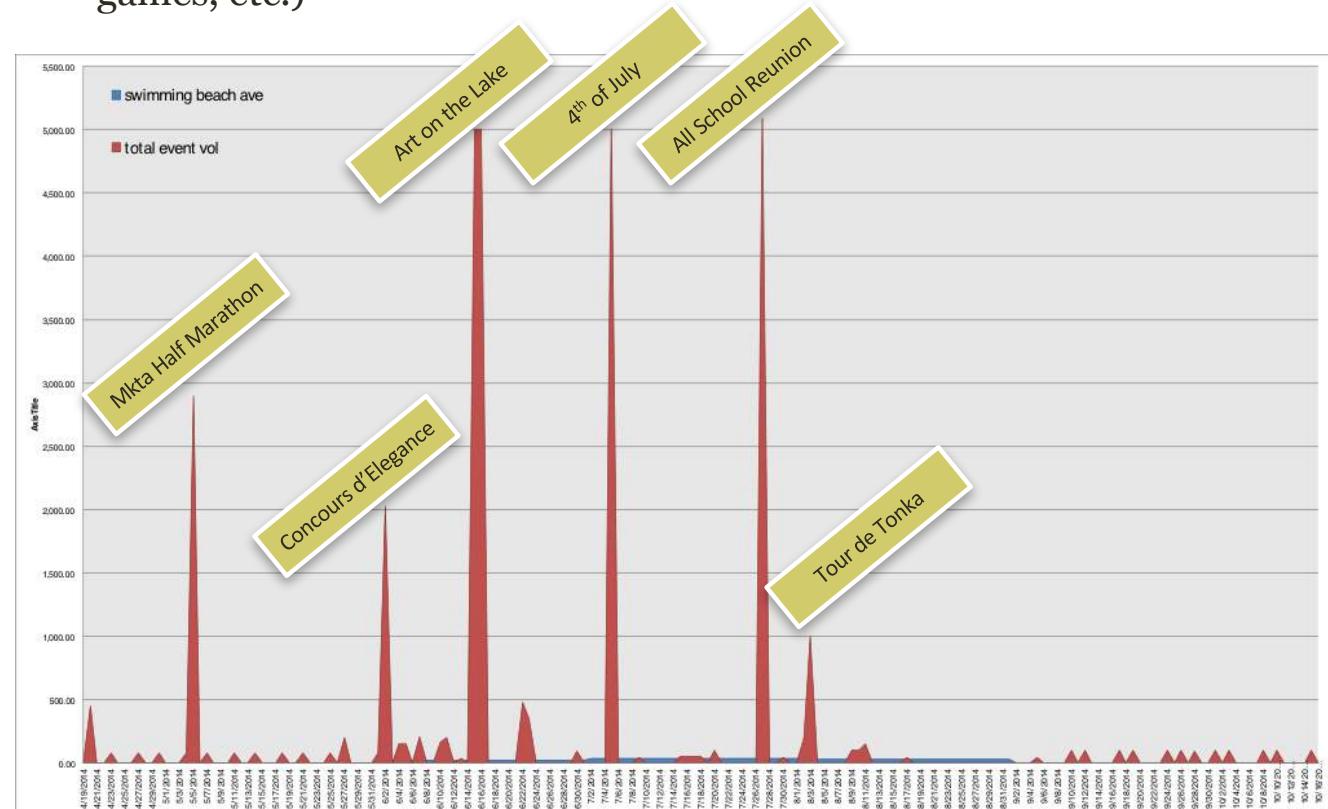
Use data for The Commons is officially collected in two ways:

1. Permit application data
2. Monthly lifeguard reports of beach usage

Using these data sources, it is possible to graph the levels and seasonality of permitted traffic in The Commons.

Observations (2014 data)

- Use is highly concentrated during summer months.
- No permits were requested between November and April.
- Six events were responsible for the vast majority of permitted traffic.
- Almost all the other 48 permitted events had attendance under 100, with a couple closer to 500.
- In addition to specific events, there are generally scheduled activities in The Commons every day June–August (tennis lessons, softball games, etc.)



The Commons - Condition

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An **independent study of the condition of The Commons** was conducted in summer 2016 by SRF Consulting Group. The study identified issues and opportunities to:

- Improve user experiences
- Update amenities and accommodations
- Reduce operations and maintenance costs for the City of Excelsior

Report is available at:

<http://www.ci.excelsior.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/918>

The Commons – Budget Picture

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2016 Figures

- **Excelsior's General Fund annual revenue = \$2M**
 - \$1.3M of the \$2M (65%) comes from local property tax
 - Of the \$1.3M, 66% comes from residents and 34% from commercial property
- **The Parks & Rec allotment is \$208K, or approximately 10% of the City's budget.** The Commons comprises 95% of this budget.
- **Revenue generated in the park (from concerts, equipment rental, docks, etc.) is *not* specifically dedicated to The Commons.**

The Commons – New Potential Sources of Revenue

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City Funds

- In summer 2016, the City Council committed to increasing the Park Improvement Fund from \$25K to \$100K per year (contingent on approval of proposed residential dock extension).
- Excelsior's new electronic parking meters are expected to generate significantly more revenue for the City, some of which could be allocated to initiatives in The Commons.
- Park dedication funds, collected when property in Excelsior is subdivided.

Private Funds

- A nonprofit park conservancy, Community for The Commons, was recently formed to solicit private funds for City-approved projects in The Commons.



New revenue sources will ensure that the Master Plan vision becomes reality.

Addendum C: Focus Group Questions & Locations

City of Excelsior • Community input on the Commons

Focus group questions

15 minutes

- Introductions / Social time

15 minutes

- Brief review of leveling doc
- What characteristics set Excelsior apart from other towns? What attributes do you value the most?

10 minutes

Successful design identifies the key customer and desired scale of use. Who is the primary “customer” of The Commons from your perspective? What is our desired scale of use? With that in mind, do you think the Commons is best thought of as a:

- Neighborhood park – primarily for the benefit of Excelsior residents & businesses
- Community park – for the benefit of South Lake Minnetonka residents & businesses
- Regional park for the benefit of Twin Cities residents and businesses

15 minutes

- How does The Commons contribute to your enjoyment of Excelsior?
- Do any activities/usage detract from your enjoyment of Excelsior?

20 minutes

- Over time, the layout of The Commons has evolved in eight distinct use zones: 1. Port, 2. Docks, 3. Street edge walkway, 4. Event lawn/band shell, 5. Scenic overlook area, 6. Athletic courts/fields, 7. Picnic area, 8. Beach/playground. (Have poster of use areas as reference)
- Do you think space in the park is allocated appropriately? If not, what changes would you make to the use zones?
- Is there anything missing from the park?
- Which items do you think should be the highest priority to address?

5 minutes

- It has come up from time to time that we charge a user fee for some uses, say the beach. Would you welcome this, and do you think it's viable?

10 minutes

- Is there anything else you want to share with the Master Planning Work Group?

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

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 parks 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

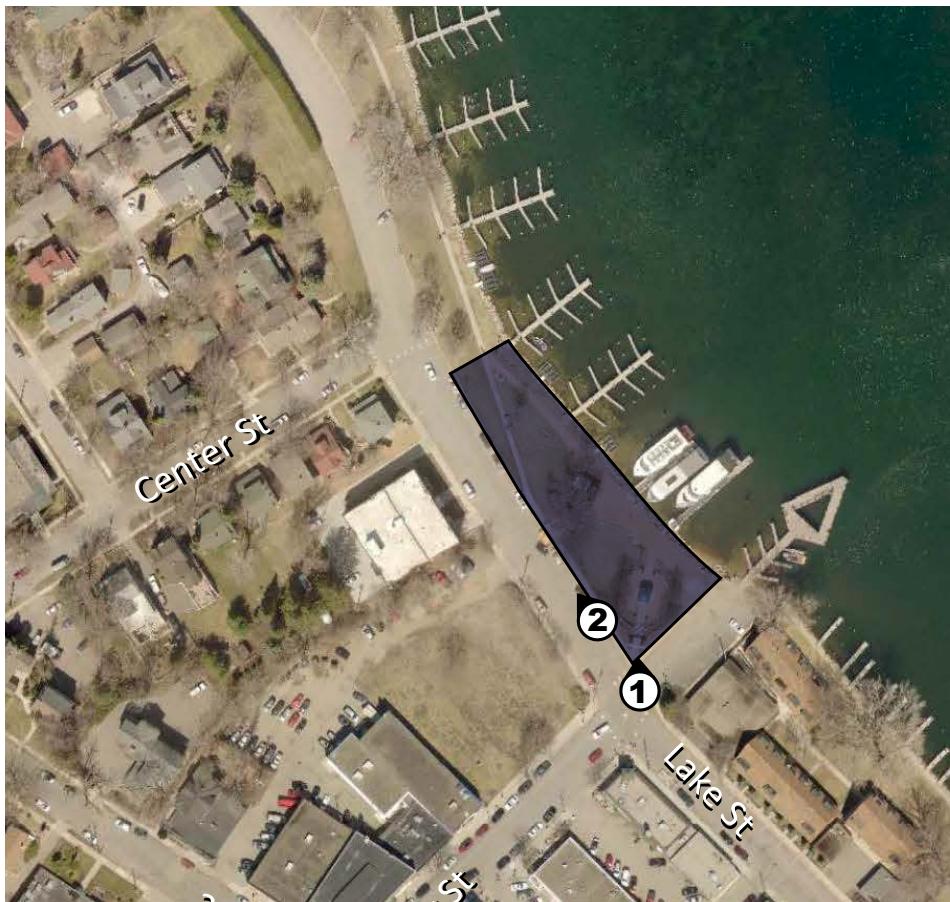
The Commons currently hosts a wide variety of events and activities during the summer months from May through August but does not offer winter recreation amenities or programming. Opportunities should be explored for identifying new activities and programming which can make The Commons a more active 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
25-50K

①

LOW
<25K

②



- 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

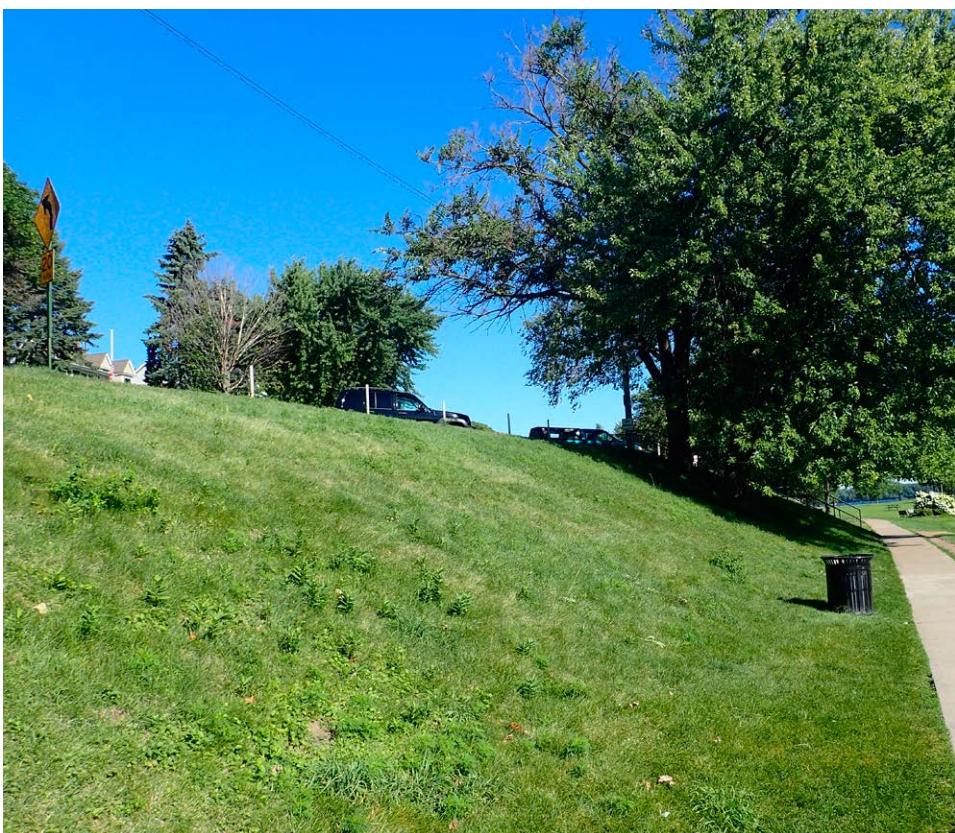
HIGH
+50K ①

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.



3 Improve pedestrian scale lighting along Lake Street park edge





LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

③ ⑥

MEDIUM
25-50K

① ②

LOW
<25K

④ ⑤ ⑦



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/recreation 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.



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH

+50K

②

MEDIUM

25-50K

①

③

⑥

LOW

<25K

④

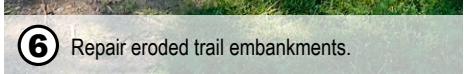
⑤



① Install native vegetation buffer along shoreline to discourage geese loitering and improve lawn quality.



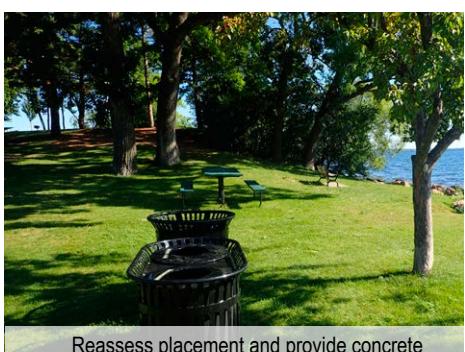
③ Identify opportunities for realigning and improving appearance of storm water outlet at lake edge.



⑥ Repair eroded trail embankments.



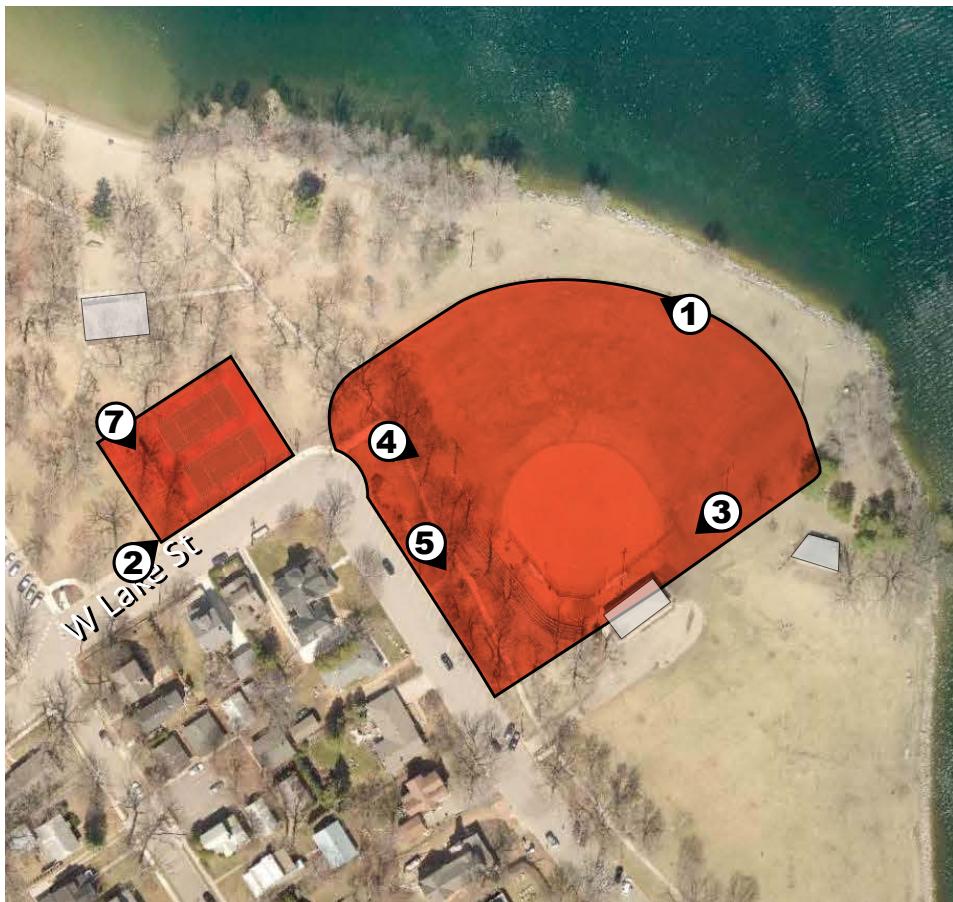
② Identify opportunities for integrating accessibility and trail circulation near lakefront and consider establishing looped trail system around perimeter of park property.



④ Reassess placement and provide concrete pads under trash receptacles, picnic tables, and benches to improve lawn mowing efficiencies.



⑤ Remove invasive buckthorn understory to open up lakefront views.



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

HIGH
+50K

①

MEDIUM
25-50K

②

③

⑥

⑦

LOW
<25K

④

⑤



① Replace ball field light standards with new high efficiency, glare cut off lighting.



③ Re-grade right field line embankment to improve field of play.



⑥ Replace tennis court fence and retaining wall.



② Replace tennis court lights with high efficiency, glare cut off lighting.



④ Improve accessible walk circulation to ball field complex.



⑦ Repair bituminous cracking and install new color coat on basketball and tennis courts.

SRH ATHLETIC FIELD/COURT AREA

Consulting Group, Inc
160817

The Commons - Excelsior, Minnesota



LEVEL OF INVESTMENT

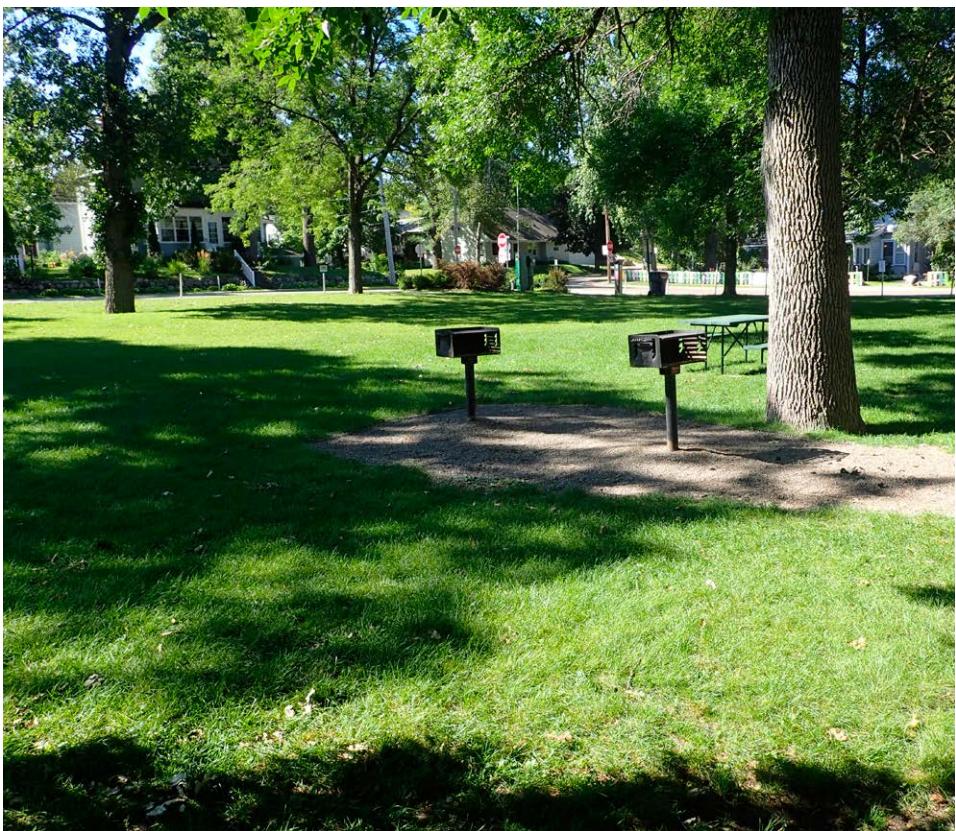
HIGH
+50K ②

MEDIUM
25-50K ①

LOW
<25K ③



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



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.



SRI BEACH/PLAY AREA

Consulting Group, Inc.
160817

The Commons - Excelsior, Minnesota



PVN
PRESERVATION
DESIGN WORKS, LLC

Site Inventory and Period of Significance Study

Excelsior Commons and Port of Excelsior
Excelsior, Minnesota

November 3, 2017



For questions or comments:
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Site Inventory and Period of Significance Study
EXCELSIOR COMMONS and PORT OF EXCELSIOR
Excelsior, Minnesota

November 3, 2017

Prepared for:

City of Excelsior

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Executive Summary

In 2017, the City of Excelsior retained PVN (Preservation Design Works, LLC) to determine a Period of Significance for the Excelsior Commons (“The Commons”) and to complete a survey of extant historical material and character defining features of The Commons and also The Port of Excelsior (“The Port”).¹ This work will supplement and inform the City’s current master planning project for The Commons and The Port.



Excelsior Commons and The Port of Excelsior, 2017. Background image via Mapquest.

¹ Abbreviating Excelsior Commons to “The Commons” and the Port of Excelsior to “The Port” with both words capitalized is standard practice in the City of Excelsior; this report follows that convention. The Port refers to Lot 204, Auditor’s Subdivision 120.

Excelsior Commons is a local historical landmark for the City of Excelsior and The Port of Excelsior is a contributing property to the locally-designated Excelsior Downtown Historic District. Both also function as city-operated public park land. Alterations to The Commons and The Port of Excelsior are reviewed by the Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission, the Excelsior Parks and Recreation Board, and the Excelsior City Council.

At the time of local designation, a formal designation study for The Commons was not undertaken. Thus, The Commons does not have an agreed upon Period of Significance or set of Character Defining Features. In 2002, historic consultants Hess, Roise and Company completed a designation study for the Excelsior Downtown Historic District.² The designation study concludes that the period of significance for the Excelsior Historic District “extends from the 1870s, the date of the earliest surviving buildings in the district...to about 1955.”³

Excelsior Commons has existed as long as the City of Excelsior. The Commons was platted as “public ground” on the City’s original 1854 and 1855 plat maps, and has existed as public property ever since.⁴ Similarly, The Port of Excelsior saw its first dock installed in 1854.⁵ Presently and historically, The Commons and The Port have functioned as a continuum of public space where park and port uses have existed on both pieces of land.⁶ The park and port have been popular destinations for the local community throughout their history – playing host to public events and private enterprises ranging from picnics, baseball games, camping and bathing, to a boat works, casino, concessions stands, and pleasure boat cruises.

Through archival research at the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society, review of existing narrative historical documentation of the site (particularly *On Excelsior’s Waterfront*, by Scott McGinnis), and a comparison of the park today and the park as seen in images, aerial photographs, site maps, and other visual material from the past 100 years, PVN worked to determine a Period of Significance for The Commons and set of Character Defining Features for The Commons and The Port.⁷ The assessment was informed by the National Park Service’s “Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes.”⁸ Cultural Landscapes are generally defined by the National Park Service as “a geographic area (including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein) associated with a historic event, activity, or person, or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic

² Marjorie Pearson (Hess, Roise and Company), *Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study*, Excelsior, Minnesota, Prepared for The City of Excelsior, 2002. Thomas R. Zahn, *City of Excelsior Preservation Design Manual*, Prepared for The City of Excelsior, 2016.

³ *Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study*, 8.

⁴ Scott McGinnis, *Excelsior’s Waterfront: A History of the Excelsior Commons and Excelsior Docks*. Self-Published. 2008. 3-4.

⁵ Ibid. 23.

⁶ Appendix E shows the boundary of the Excelsior Downtown Historic District, as provided by the City of Excelsior; City of Excelsior, “Designation of Heritage Preservation Sites,” <http://www.ci.excelsior.mn.us/index.aspx?NID=186>

⁷ With thanks to the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society for their research suggestions and assistance in accessing visual materials in their collection and to the City of Excelsior staff for providing access to city files and past reports related to the property.

⁸ National Park Service. “Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes.” <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/>

values.”⁹ The Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study does not identify specific character defining features of the Port.

Research and evaluation outcomes include the following:

Period of Significance

The suggested Period of Significance for Excelsior Commons is 1854-1937.

The Period of Significance for the Port of Excelsior as established in the 2002 designation study for the Excelsior Downtown Historic District is 1870s-1955.

Character Defining Features

The suggested Character Defining Features for Excelsior Commons and The Port of Excelsior are listed below, organized according to broad categories as recommended by the National Park Service:

- Overall Continuity of Spatial Organization and Land Patterns
 - The Commons and Port of Excelsior Property Boundary (landmass)
 - Use Pattern of “Active” and “Passive” Spaces
- Topography
 - Change in Grade Along Lake Street
 - The Knolls
 - The Lawn
- Vegetation
 - Tree Cover on Knolls
 - Manicured Grass on Lawn
 - Lawn West of Lake Street
- Circulation
 - Circulation Parallel to Lake Street
 - Vertical Circulation at Lake Street Slope
 - Circulation at the Water Street Terminus
- Water Features
 - Active Use of Lake Minnetonka – Bathing Beach Location, Children’s Beach Location and The Port of Excelsior Location
 - Shoreline
- Structures
 - Ball Field Location
 - Ball Field Seating
 - Blue Line Ticket Booth/Blue Line Launch Livery (As part of Downtown Historic District)
- Site Furnishings
 - The Commons and The Port of Excelsior do not retain any Character Defining Site Furnishings
- Objects
 - The Commons and The Port of Excelsior do not retain any Character Defining Objects

⁹ Ibid.

Period of Significance Recommendation and Justification – Excelsior Commons

The purpose of a **Period of Significance** (POS) with respect to an historic property is to codify the period of time when a property attained the characteristics that qualify it for historic designation. A property's POS should have a symbiotic relationship with the property's historic integrity – meaning that the property needs to retain historic integrity dating to the POS.

The suggested POS for Excelsior Commons is 1854-1937. 1854 marks the platting and founding of The Commons, while 1937 marks a major work effort by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which saw The Commons settle into the overall site boundary and topography that it retains to this day.

Prior to 1937, The Commons saw frequent construction and demolition of structures located on the property and alterations to the shoreline as portions of the bay were dredged and infilled. Despite these changes, the overall Spatial Organization, Land Use Patterns, Vegetation, Circulation Patterns, and Water Features that contribute to The Common's integrity remained relatively consistent between the park's founding and 1937.

No major changes to The Common's Topography have taken place since 1937. Newer Structures, Objects and Site Furnishings in the Commons have not yet achieved 50 years of age, and are generally “reversible” alterations. With the exception of the community-funded Bicentennial Band Shell (1973, not 50 years old), none of the newer structures, objects, or site furnishings located within The Commons exhibit notable design features, or are related to important events or activities within the history of Excelsior Commons or the city in general, thus there is no more recent date than 1937 that makes a logical end for the POS.



Figure 2. Excelsior Commons and Port of Excelsior in 1937 and 2017. Additional and more detailed aerial images available in Appendix C of this document.

Site Inventory, Character Defining Features, and Integrity – Excelsior Commons and Port of Excelsior

On site inventory was completed on June 5, 2017 by Michael Bjornberg, FAIA, Historical Architect and Laurel Fritz, Architectural Historian, both of PVN. The site inventory area includes The Commons and The Port. The area is bounded by Lake Minnetonka to the north and east, and 1st Street, West Lake Street, and Water Street to the south and west. Between Courtland Street and Center Street, a portion of The Commons extends west of Lake Street. The site inventory area is graphically depicted below. Purpose of the site inventory is to identify elements of The Commons and The Port dating to the period of significance, and determine which of these elements retain historic integrity and are character defining features.



Excelsior Commons and Port of Excelsior, 2017. Background image via Mapquest.

Integrity of a property refers to the property's ability to convey its historic significance through its physical features.¹⁰ The National Park Service identifies seven aspects of integrity:

- Location
- Design
- Setting
- Materials
- Workmanship
- Feeling
- Association

These aspects of integrity can also be used to evaluate Character Defining Features. It is not necessary for a property or individual feature to possess all seven aspects of integrity in order to retain overall integrity. However, it is necessary to possess several, usually the majority, of the seven aspects.¹¹

Character Defining Features are those features of an historic property that provide a physical representation of important elements of the property during its Period of Significance. The suggested Character Defining Features for Excelsior Commons have been evaluated and organized according to broad categories as recommended by the National Park Service's "Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes."

All extant features of The Commons and The Port – both character defining and non-character defining are documented and evaluated in the site inventory, which begins on the following page of this document.¹²

¹⁰ Patrick W. Andrus and the Staff of the National Register of Historic Places, *National Register Bulletin 115: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. 2002. <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² All images included in the site inventory by PVN, 2017, except for aerial image used to illustrate "Overall Continuity of Spatial Organization and Land Patterns" via MapQuest.

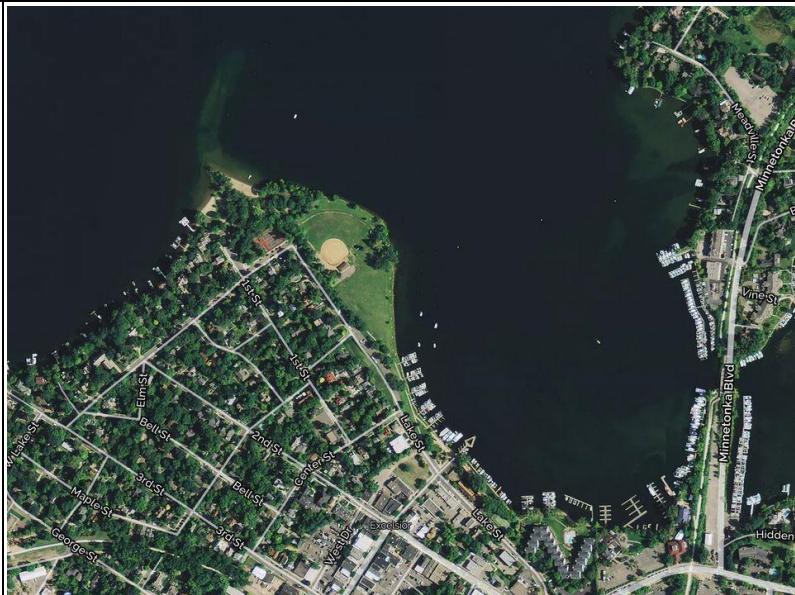
Excelsior Commons Site Inventory – June 2017

Overall Continuity of Spatial Organization and Land Patterns

Commons and Port Property Boundary

The Commons and The Port have had the same general property boundary since they were gifted to the people of Excelsior in the 1850s. The boundary of the Commons includes the “wedge” of land west of Lake Street between Courtland and Center Streets.

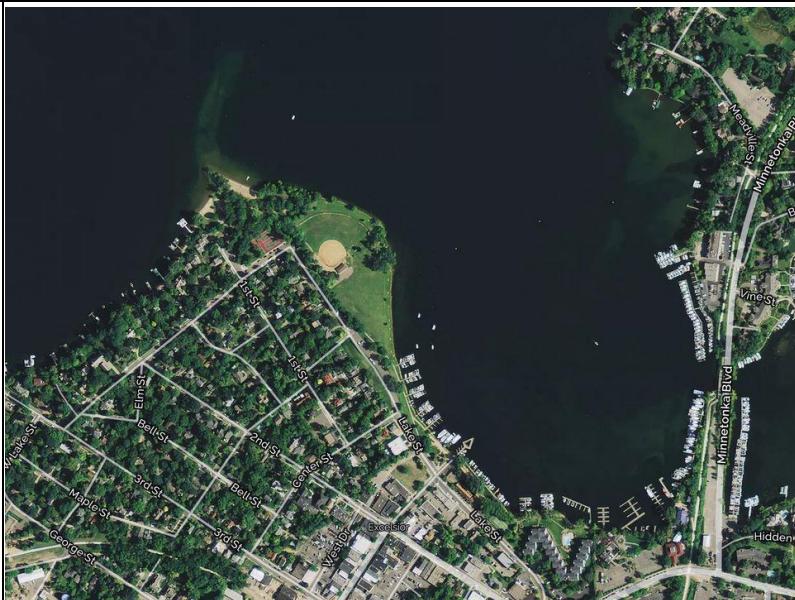
The overall Commons and Port landmass **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons and the Port of Excelsior.



Use Pattern of “Active” and “Passive” Spaces

The Commons and The Port have retained their general pattern of spatial organization since their early use – with The Port and some public/private commerce located to the south, the open lawn and ball field at the center, heavily wooded areas at the Knolls, and other “active” uses such as the swimming beach and playground to the north.

The overall spatial organization of the Commons and the Port **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons and the Port of Excelsior.



Topography

Change in Grade Along Lake Street

The change in grade down from Lake Street to the rest of the Commons is present in photographs and aerial images of the park throughout its history.

This change in grade along Lake Street **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



The Knolls

The Commons features four Knolls – two located to the northeast of the band shell, one located north of the ball field, and one in the northwest portion of the park where the bathhouse is currently located. The knolls are present in photographs and aerial images of the park throughout its history.

The knolls **ARE** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.



The Lawn

The expansive, relatively level lawn located to the north of the Port is present in historic photographs, aerial images and written descriptions of the park from throughout the Commons' history.

The Lawn **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



Vegetation	
<p>Tree Cover on the Knolls</p> <p>The existence of relatively dense tree cover on the Knolls is visible in historic photographs, aerial images, and written descriptions of the park from throughout the Commons' history.</p> <p>The quality of the tree cover on the Knolls IS a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p> <p><i>Determining the age and variety individual trees was beyond the scope of this study. The Knolls may include individual heritage trees, but none have been identified at this time.</i></p>	
<p>Manicured Lawn</p> <p>The expansive, grass covered lawn located to the north of the Port is present in historic photographs, aerial images and written descriptions of the park from throughout the Commons' history.</p> <p>The manicured nature of the lawn IS a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	

<h3>Restored Shoreline Planting</h3> <p>The restored shoreline planting near the bathing beach was installed in 2009.</p> <p>The restored shoreline planting does not meet the 50 year rule and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	
<h3>Composed Plantings</h3> <p>Composed planting beds are located throughout the Commons. In particular, beds are located near the Port entrance and ticket booth, the band shell, and in boxes next to some electrical equipment housings.</p> <p>These composed plantings do not meet the 50 year rule and ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	

Hedge and Lawn West of Lake Street

An evergreen hedge is present at the “wedge” of Commons land west of Lake Street. The hedge extends from Courtland Street to a little over half way to Center Street. The remainder of the “wedge” property is a grassy lawn.

Historic aerial photos of the Commons suggest that the “wedge” has generally been lawn. Trees are present in some images. The hedge is not present in historic aerial images. The hedge **IS NOT** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons. Historic aerial images suggest that this area has always been lawn, it is likely that the presence of a lawn at this area **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



Circulation

Path Parallel to Lake Street

A paved concrete walking path extends along the bottom of the Lake Street Slope generally parallel to Lake Street. Historic images and aerial photographs of the Commons suggest that a path has existed in this location since at least 1937.

The location of the path **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons. The specific materials used to construct the path **ARE NOT** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



Vertical Connections At Lake Street Slope

Two sets of stairs provide vertical circulation along the Lake Street Slope. The stairs are concrete with metal hand rails. The date of installation of these stairs is unknown.

Historic images and aerial photographs of The Commons suggest that some type of vertical connections have existed at the Lake Street slope since the Period of Significance.

The two extant sets of stairs **ARE NOT** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons. The existence of vertical connections at the Lake Street slope **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



Paths Through the Northwest Portion of Park

Multiple gravel and concrete paths exist in the northwest portion of the park connecting the bathing beach, playground, bathhouse and northern knolls. Historic images and aerial photographs of the Commons do not provide any evidence that these paths follows historic circulation patterns.

The paths through the northwestern portion of the park **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.



Diagonal Path at the Corner of Water Street and Lake Street

A pedestrian entry path to The Port currently extends north from the corner of Lake Street and Water Street providing a circulation route to the lake front and charter boat services.

Aerial images dating to the period of significance for The Port show the presence of sidewalks along Water Street and Lake Street, however a path extending north from the corner of Water and Lake Streets is not legible.

The diagonal path **IS NOT** a Character Defining Feature of the Port of Excelsior.



Water Street Terminus

Evidence of access to Lake Minnetonka and The Port at Water Street is visible in historic aerial images dating back to 1937 (within the period of significance for the Excelsior Downtown Historic District). Aerial images also show that docks in various configurations were present at the terminus during the period of significance.

Circulation at the Water Street Terminus, including Lake and Port access and the existence of public docks **IS** a Character Defining Feature of the Port of Excelsior.

The terminus's existing docks and their configuration **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of the Port of Excelsior.



Water Features

Active Use of Lake Minnetonka

Throughout its history, Excelsior Commons has benefitted from active use of Lake Minnetonka. Historic images, aerial photographs, and written documentation show that the Commons has utilized this water feature through existence of a bathing beach located at the northwest shoreline of the park, additional beach front at the west shoreline of the park, public and semi-private dock located at the Port area. While the specific materials, arrangement of docks, and structures serving the beach and dock uses have changed over time, the location of these functions and general relationship to the lake have not.

A bathing beach located at the northwest portion of the park **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons. Specific extant features of the beach, including the life guard stands (2006, 2008) and light fixtures **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.

Additional beach located at the western edge of the park, adjacent to the playground (see page 24) currently functions as a children's beach. Historic aerial images of The Commons suggest that beachfront was



<p>present in this location during the period of significance for the park. It is unknown at this time if this area of beachfront has a specific use during the period of significance.</p> <p>The area currently known as the Children's Beach IS a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p> <p>Docks located at The Port ARE a Character Defining Feature of the park. The specific arrangement of and materials used to construct the extant docks ARE NOT Character Defining Features of The Port of Excelsior.</p>	
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<p>Shoreline</p> <p>The current shoreline configuration was completed as part of the 1937 WPA work in The Commons (Appendix D). Riprap was installed along portions of the shoreline at this time.</p> <p>The overall alignment of the shoreline IS a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons. Individual components of the riprap ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.</p> <p><i>Addressing the long-term environmental impacts of the existing shoreline treatment throughout the park is outside the scope of this report.</i></p>	
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Structures	
<p>Docks and Gates</p> <p>Historic images, and aerial photographs show that while docks have existed in this general location throughout the Commons' history, these specific docks post-date a 1976 site map (Appendix C) which shows that at that time The Commons and The Port had 10 dock structures whose locations do not align with the current 5 dock structures.</p> <p>The existing docks and their gates do not meet the 50 year rule and ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons or The Port of Excelsior.</p>	
<p>Port of Excelsior Entry Plaza</p> <p>The entry plaza at the Port (including arch, stairs, paved plaza, plantings, and dedicated benches) was installed between 1996 and 1998.</p> <p>The entry plaza in general does not meet the 50 year rule, and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of the Port of Excelsior.</p>	

Blue Line Ticket Booth/Launch Livery

The original construction date of the Blue Line Ticket Booth is unknown – the structure is visible on Sanborn maps from 1911, though it may be older. Circa 1945, the ticket booth was removed from its original location in The Port of Excelsior and installed at the Excelsior Amusement Park. The ticket booth remained at the Amusement Park until 1973, and then was moved to a local resident's yard and later a storage facility before being reinstalled at The Port in 1997 (Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study). In 1997, the ticket booth was replaced in a different location than the one it occupied during the Period of Significance for the Downtown Historic District.

The Ticket Booth retains its historic footprint, roofline, metal roof, and stucco exterior.

The Ticket Booth **was deemed a Contributing Structure to the District by the Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study**, and is the only extant feature of The Port that was present during the



Period of Significance for the District. However, the Ticket Booth is currently located in a different position than the one it occupied during the District's Period of Significance. If in the future the Ticket Booth is moved to yet another location within The Port, the move would not further damage the Ticket Booth's historic integrity.

<p>Concession Cart</p> <p>For-profit concessions located in the Port area have been a part of the Port and Commons throughout the park's history.</p> <p>The current concession stand is mobile and can be removed from the park. The current concession stand does not meet the 50 year rule and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	
<p>Garbage Enclosure</p> <p>A wood garbage enclosure serving the concession stand and the rental boat launches is located between the concession stand and the lake.</p> <p>The garbage enclosure does not meet the 50 year rule and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	

<p>Band Shell</p> <p>The band shell was constructed in 1973 as part of the City of Excelsior's celebration of the United States' Bicentennial. The structure is concrete with a flat membrane roof.</p> <p>The band shell does not meet the 50 year rule and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p> <p>The band shell may achieve historic significance as part of Excelsior Commons or as an individual structure and is recommended for re-evaluation when it reaches 50 years of age.</p>	
<p>Concession Stand Building</p> <p>The concession stand building was constructed in 1987. (Today, the building is commonly known as the concession stand building – at the time of its design and construction, the building was referred to as the maintenance building.) The building has concrete walls and a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. The building is utilitarian in nature and does not exhibit exceptional architectural design.</p> <p>The building does not meet the 50 year rule, and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	

<p>Bathhouse</p> <p>The current bathhouse was constructed in 1968, replacing multiple earlier iterations of bathhouses located within the park. The building has concrete walls and a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. The building is utilitarian in nature and does not exhibit exceptional architectural design.</p> <p>The building does not meet the 50 year rule, and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	
<p>Swing Set</p> <p>The remnants of a swing set are located between the western knoll and the bathhouse. Historic images and site maps show that the swing set dates to at least 1976.</p> <p>The swing set does not retain historic integrity and does not meet the 50 year rule. The swing set IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	

Playground Equipment

Playground equipment is located at the northern edge of the park and adjacent to the bathhouse. City records indicated that existing playground equipment was originally installed in 1994, with components upgraded over time as use and safety regulations require.

The playground equipment does not meet the 50 year rule, and **IS NOT** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



Baseball Field

Historic photographs, aerial images, and written documentation confirm that a ball field has been located in the same general location within the Commons since the 1920s.

The general location of the baseball field **IS** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.

The specific materials used to construct the current baseball field - i.e. sand, grass, metal fencing – **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.



<p>Baseball Field Seating</p> <p>The baseball field seating was installed in 1937 by the WPA – the seating retains its original location, shape (design), and setting. Additionally, the seating continues to feel like WPA-era construction, and to be easily identifiable as seating for the baseball field (association). Modern finish materials have been installed over or replaced the original stone construction.</p> <p>The baseball field seating retains integrity, and IS a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	
<p>Tennis and Basketball Courts</p> <p>Historic documentation places the construction of the tennis and basketball courts between 1962 and 1971.</p> <p>The tennis and basketball courts was not present in 1937 and may not meet the 50 year rule. The tennis and basketball courts ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.</p>	

Site Furnishings

Benches

37 benches are located throughout the Commons. According to city records, the majority of the benches were installed between 1987 and 2013, with three benches relocated from downtown Excelsior at an unknown date.

The benches are generally constructed of metal and wood. Some exhibit dedication plaques.

The benches do not meet the 50 year rule and **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.



Grills

5 grills are located throughout the Commons. According to city records, the grills date to 2012.

The grills located throughout the park are not permanent structures, do not meet the 50 year rule, and **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.



<h3>Light Fixtures</h3> <p>Light fixtures located throughout the park appear to be modern installations and do not exhibit a standard design language.</p> <p>Light Fixtures located throughout the park likely do not meet the 50 year rule. Light fixtures located within the park ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	
<h3>Picnic Tables</h3> <p>According to city records, the park's 29 picnic tables were installed between 1987 and 2008. The picnic tables are generally constructed of metal and painted wood.</p> <p>The picnic tables located throughout the park are not permanent structures, do not meet the 50 year rule, and ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	

<p>Garbage/Recycling Receptacles</p> <p>According to city records, the park's 25 single-opening garbage receptacles were installed in 2011 and the 4 double-opening garbage/recycling receptacles were installed in 2015.</p> <p>The garbage/recycling receptacles found throughout the park are not permanent structures, do not meet the 50 year rule, and ARE NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	
<p>Signage</p> <p>The typical modern city-provided signage is located throughout the park.</p> <p>Signage does not meet the 50 year rule and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	

<p>Baseball Field Score Board</p> <p>An electric score board is located next to the baseball field. The score board was installed in 2017.</p> <p>The baseball field score board does not meet the 50 year rule and IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	
<p>Water Fountain</p> <p>A single water fountain is located within the park near the tennis and basketball courts. The installation date of the water fountain is not known.</p> <p>The water fountain IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.</p>	

Fencing

Metal and wood fencing is located throughout the park – surrounding the tennis and basketball courts, baseball field, and restored prairie among other locations.

The various fences found throughout the park **ARE NOT** Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.



<p>Bike Rack</p> <p>A single metal bike rack is located between the bath house and play ground. Historic photographs and site maps confirm that the bike rack has existed since at least 1976.</p> <p>The bike rack IS NOT Character Defining Features of Excelsior Commons.</p>	
<p>Electrical Equipment</p> <p>Electrical equipment (boxes, transformers, panels, etc.) is located throughout the park. These housings are utilitarian in nature, and were not specially designed to integrate with the park environment. It is unlikely that they meet the 50 year rule.</p> <p>The electrical equipment found throughout the park IS NOT a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons or the Port of Excelsior.</p>	 

Objects

"Sails"

The Sails sculpture, created by local artist Katherine Nash, was installed in the Commons in 1980.

Sails does not meet the 50 year rule and **IS NOT** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.

Recommendation to re-evaluate in future.



"Debbie's Bench"

Mosaic bench/sculpture designed by local artist David Cooley, and installed in 2014.

This bench/sculpture does not meet the 50 year rule and **IS NOT** a Character Defining Feature of Excelsior Commons.



Geological Marker

A geological marker is present to the west of the Port of Excelsior Entry Plaza and adjacent to the public sidewalk along Lake Street.

The geological marker originally dates from 1953, and was first located at the MNDOT right of way along Highway 7. In 1998, the marker was relocated to its current location by Excelsior residents and business owners. The marker is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

The marker does not meet the 50 year rule and **IS NOT** a Character Defining Feature of the Port of Excelsior.

Following their review of a draft of this report, the Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission has requested it be noted that while the marker does not meet the criteria to be a Character Defining Feature of The Port, the marker does contain important and relevant historical information and should be retained in the Port area.



Appendices

- A. APPENDIX A: Research Process and Works Consulted
- B. APPENDIX B: Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties
- C. APPENDIX C: Historic Images
- D. APPENDIX D: *Minnetonka Record* Articles, 1937
- E. APPENDIX E: Map Showing Excelsior Downtown Historic District Boundary (via City of Excelsior)

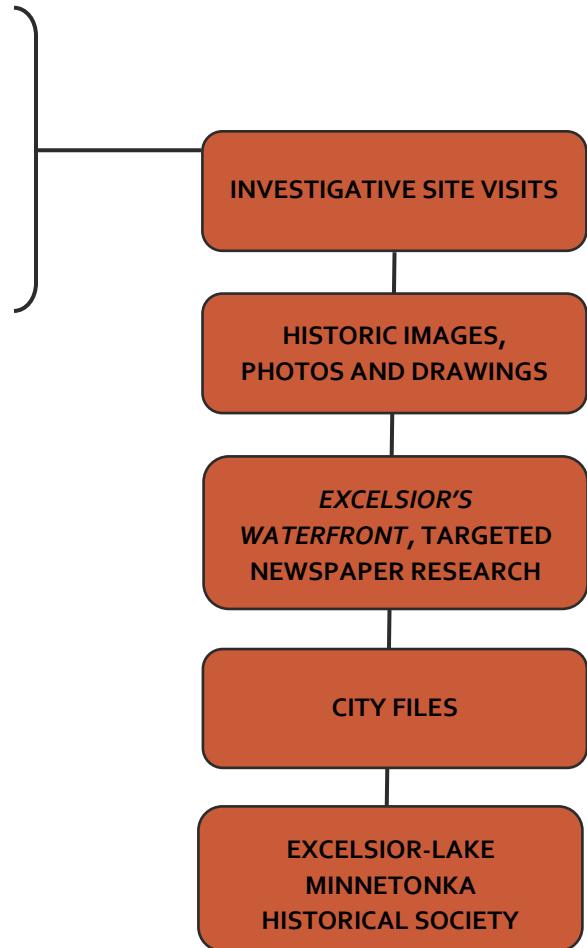
APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PROCESS AND WORKS CONSULTED

Research Process

The purpose of our research is to identify preservation concerns that will impact the cost, duration, or design of the project. In order to develop a timeline of the building's recent history, and to identify preservation design issues that arose during past rehabilitation proposals, PVN completed research utilizing the following sources:

Resources used specific to this project:

- Investigative site visits
- City of Excelsior files – including older site plans, architectural drawings for bandshell, previous planning reports
- Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study, Hess, Roise and Company 2002
- *Excelsior's Waterfront* by Scott McGinnis
- Targeted historic newspaper research – *Minnetonka Record* (Excelsior)
- Sanborn Fire Insurance maps
- Archival research at the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society – historic photographs, newspaper articles, and previous planning documents
- Photo Research at the Minnesota Historical Society
- Aerial Photo research through University of Minnesota Historical Aerial Photographs Online (www.lib.umn.edu/apps/mhapo)



APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PROCESS AND WORKS CONSULTED

Works Consulted

Andrus, Patrick W. and the Staff of the National Register of Historic Places, *National Register Bulletin 115: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. 2002.
<https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>

City of Excelsior. Planning Department Files – Excelsior Commons.

“HPC Review of Changes at The Commons and The Port.” Memo - Patrick Smith, Planning Director to Excelsior HPC and Park and Rec Commission. October 25, 2016.

“Park Equipment List 2017.” Memo – Tim Amundsen, Public Works Superintendent. January 24, 2017.

“Criteria for Designation of a Landmark or Inclusion to a Historic District – Port of Excelsior Blue Line Ticket Booth” and associated historic images. Commissioner Bob Bolles to HPC. July 28, 2017.

“Commons Park Improvements.” Drawing. McCombs-Knutson Associates, Inc. June 15, 1976.

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections

Excelsior Commons Subject File.

Excelsior Commons Photo File.

McGinnis, Scott. *Excelsior's Waterfront: The History of the Excelsior Commons and Excelsior Docks*. Self-Published, 2008.

Minnetonka Record, (Excelsior, MN)

“Park Improvement Project is Going Well,” October 29, 1937.

“Park Improvement Project Starts Soon,” August 20, 1937.

National Park Service. “Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes.”

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/>

Pearson, Marjorie (Hess, Roise and Company). *Excelsior Downtown Historic District Designation Study, Excelsior, Minnesota*. Prepared for the City of Excelsior. 2002.

Ratzloff, Tom. “Excelsior breaks ground for new Commons building.” *Excelsior-Shorewood Sailor*. (Excelsior, MN), October 6, 1986.

Thomas R. Zahn and Associates LLC. *City of Excelsior Preservation Design Manual*. Prepared for the City of Excelsior. 2016.

University of Minnesota Historic Aerial images Online. <https://www.lib.umn.edu/apps/mhapo/>
Image WM-17-1469, 1937.
Image A-11-032, 1945.
Image HHJ-581, 1956.
Image AA-19-45, 1962.
Image CLK-1-131, 1971.

APPENDIX B: SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

For further information and interpretation of the guidelines:

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/index.htm>

Preservation Brief 36 - Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes
<https://www.nps.gov/TPS/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm>

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1897.

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Ca. 1920s.

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1937

University of Minnesota Historic Aerial Images Online (MHAPO), Image WM-17-1469, 1937.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Post 1937.

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Ca. 1940

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Ca. 1944

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Date Unknown – Pre 1945.

Image Via Excelsior HPC.

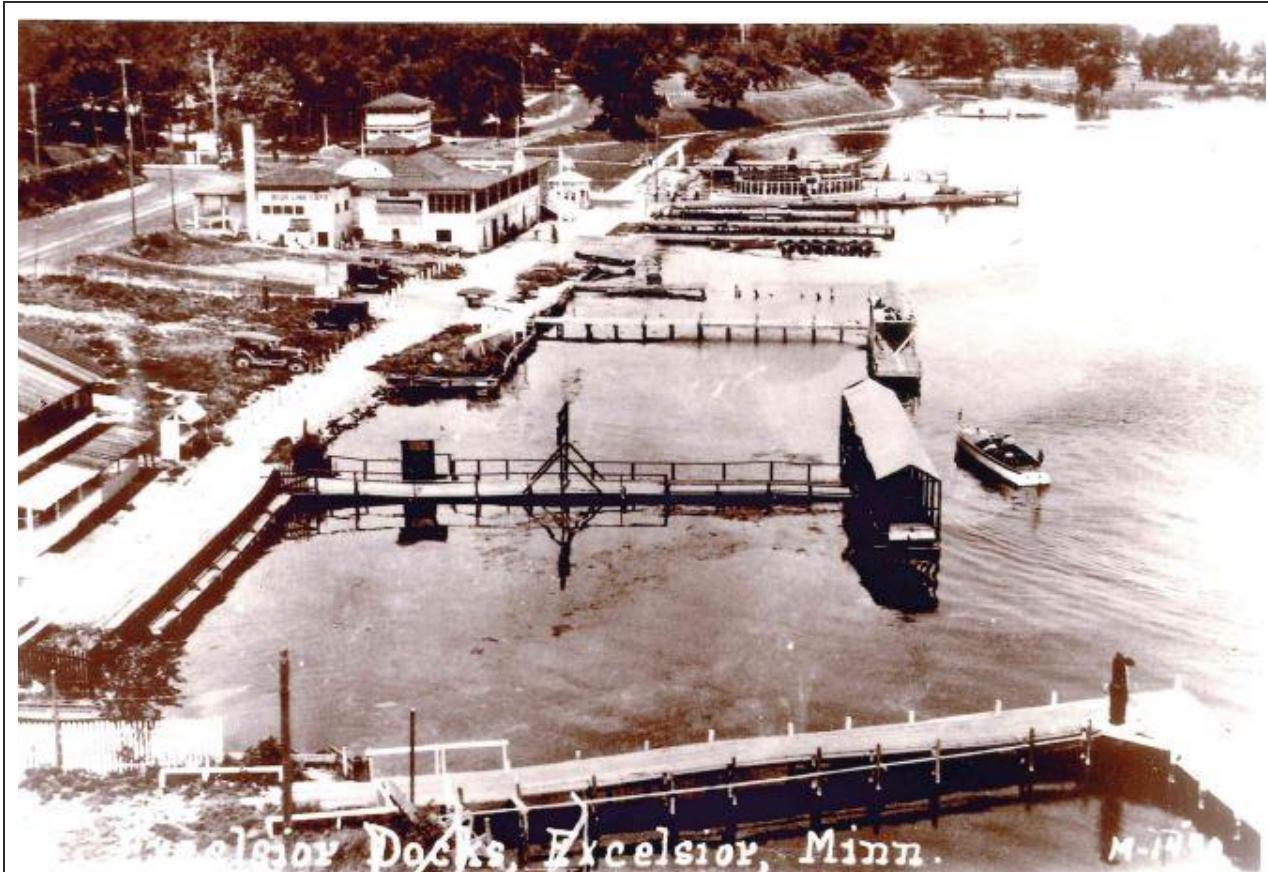
APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Date Unknown – Pre 1945.

Image Via Excelsior HPC.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



Date Unknown – Pre 1945.

Image Via Excelsior HPC.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1945

University of Minnesota Historic Aerial Images Online (MHAPO), Image A-11-032, 1945.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1956

University of Minnesota Historic Aerial Images Online (MHAPO), Image HHJ-581, 1956.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1962

University of Minnesota Historic Aerial Images Online (MHAPO), Image AA-19-45, 1962.

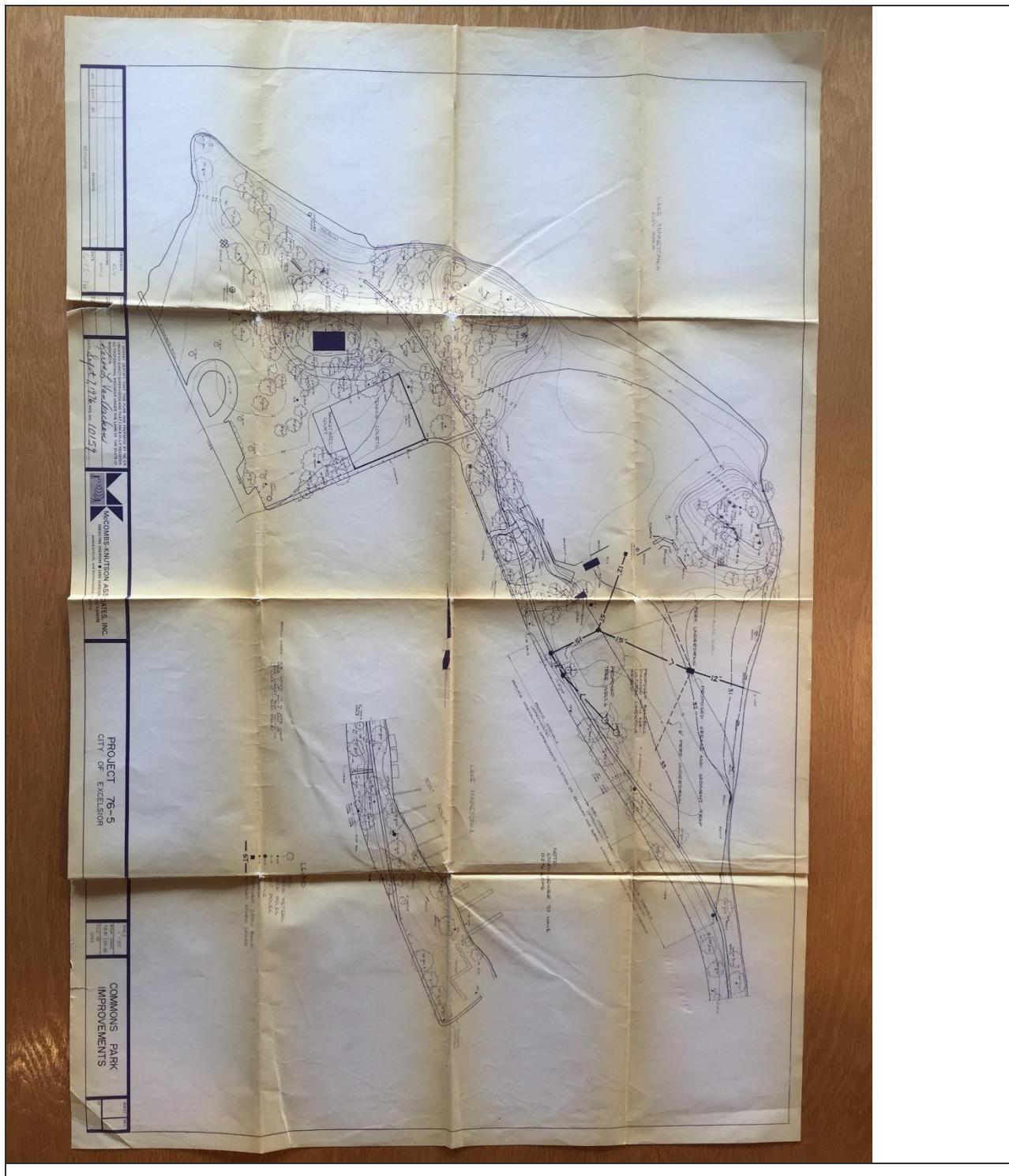
APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1971

University of Minnesota Historic Aerial Images Online (MHAPO), Image CLK-1-131, 1971.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1976. City of Excelsior.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1985.

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

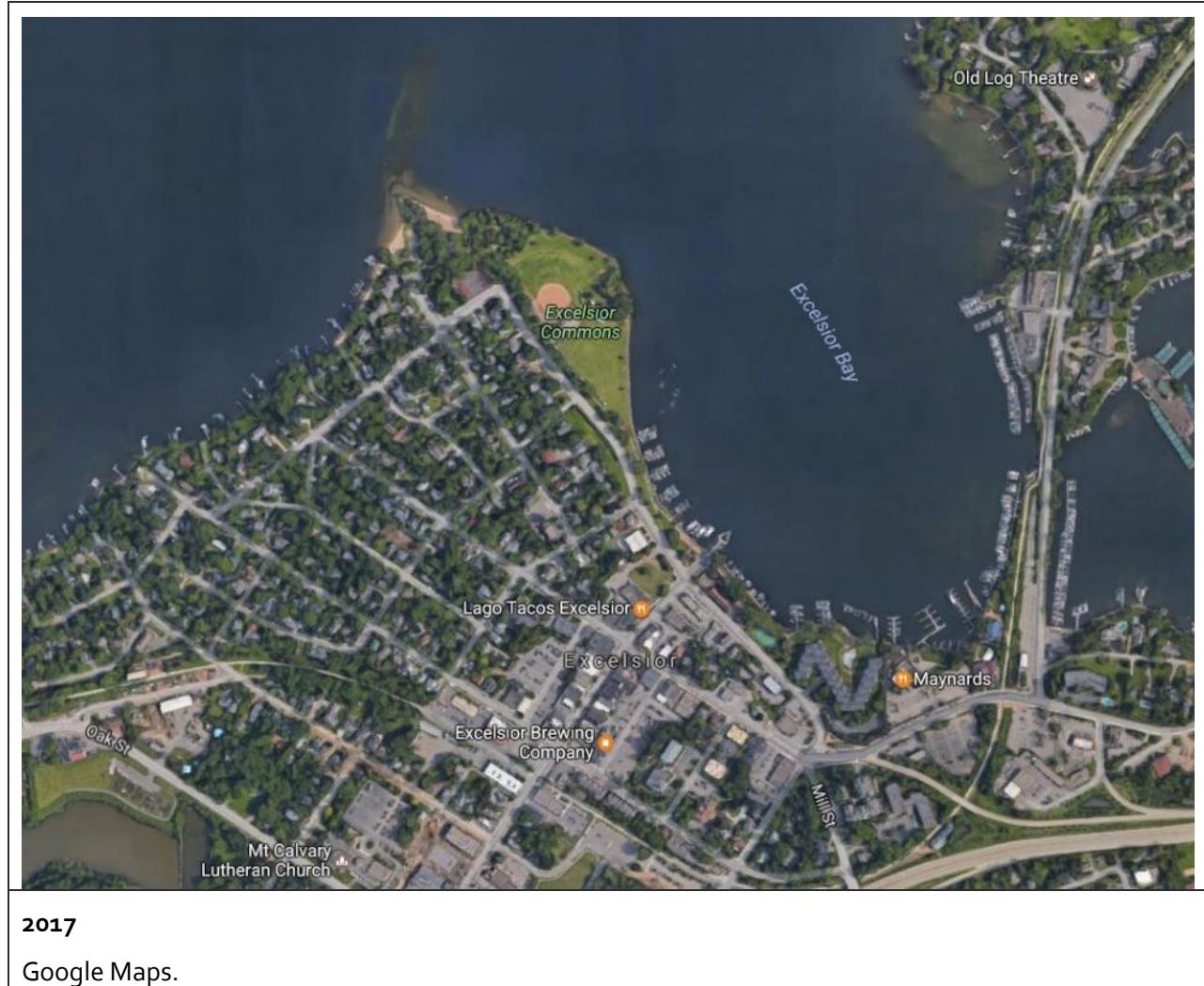
APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



1985.

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Collections.

APPENDIX C: HISTORIC IMAGES



APPENDIX D: *MINNETONKA RECORD* ARTICLES, 1937

Transcriptions of articles from the *Minnetonka Record*, 1937. Original available on microfilm at the Minnesota Historical Society Gale Family Library.

Park Improvement Project Starts Soon (Vol. 37, N. 3, August 20, 1937)

Next Thursday, August 26, work is scheduled to begin on an important improvement project at Excelsior Commons. A crew of 23 men will start a job that will continue to late this fall. The project calls for the work of 23 men for 180 days. The total cost of the project as approved is \$9,772, 90 per cent of which is Federal funds and 10 per cent funds of the local sponsors.

The technical language describing the project is, 'Rehabilitation of Excelsior Park, including grading, seeding, tree planting, riprapping, and playground construction.' This is a general description and changes may be made as the work progresses. The more essential improvements will be taken first and other in the order of their importance in order to derive the greatest benefit possible from the money available.

The entire grounds will be gone over, smoothed and re-seeded where trees removed and others trimmed. Some improvement is contemplated on the baseball diamond. Gravel and tar walks will be laid where desirable. In short a general park improvement project is contemplated.

Richard Turnham of Long Lake is the WPA engineer in charge of the project.

The project has been advanced to its present state by the efforts of the Excelsior park board with the co-operation of the village council.

Park Improvement Project is Going Well (Vol. 37, N. 13, October 29, 1937)

Citizens who have not visited Excelsior commons recently have quite a gratifying surprise awaiting them upon their next visit.

The rehabilitation project is coming along well. One would say that the work is fully half done.

The shore line from the band stand west has been evenly filled in and seeded. The new land that was made in connection with the filling of the old lagoon has been levelled off, drained, enriched with black dirt and seeded.

The old gates to the parking space have been moved further east and have been hung on sturdy rock cairns three feet square and 1 feet [sic] high.

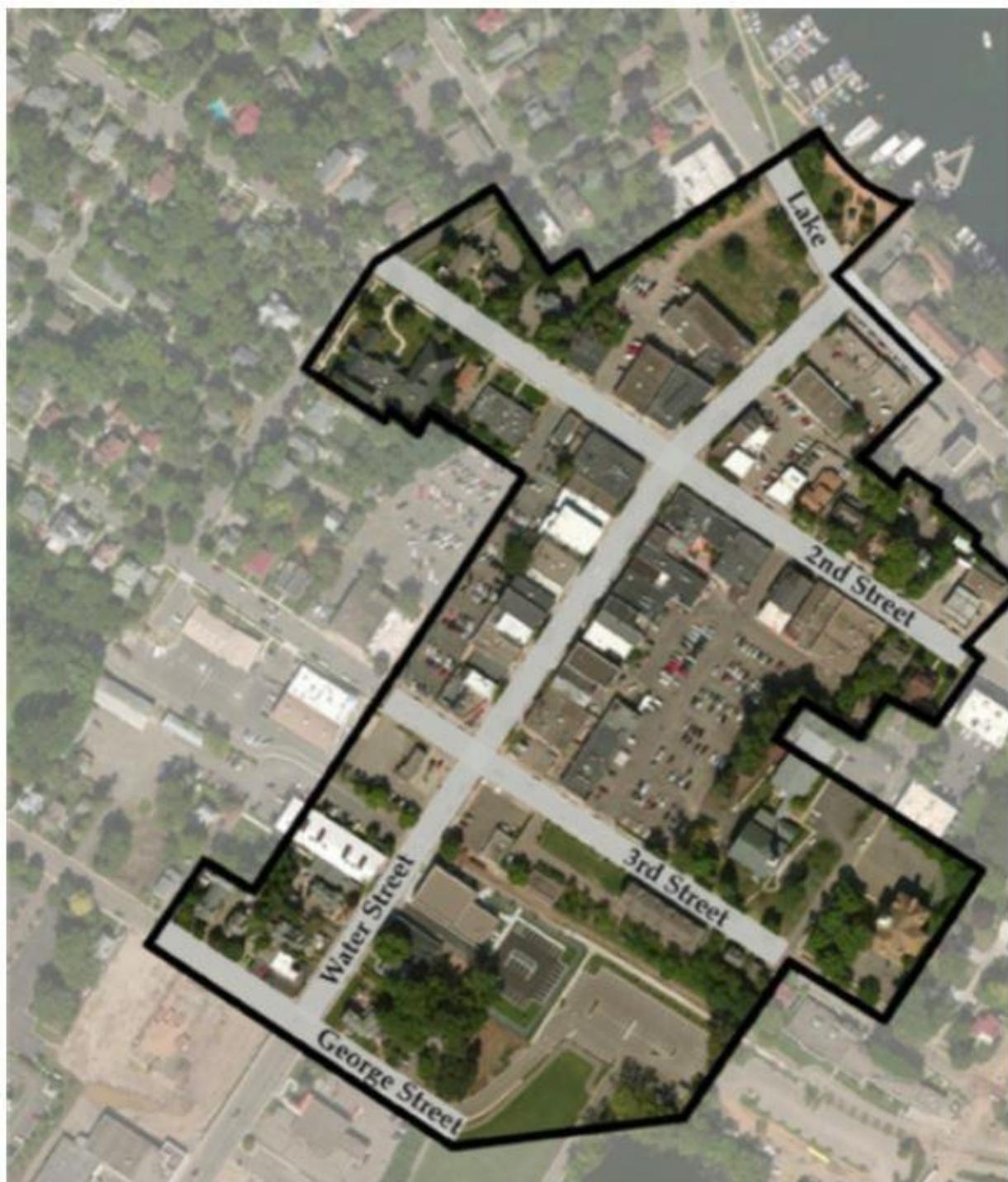
The most revolutionary work performed thus far is the new system of seats for baseball spectators. The hillsides have been cut into suitable terraces and series of stone seats and risers have been built. The new seating will accommodate about 500 persons.

In the park proper much grading and seeding have been done. Stumps have been removed and some undesirable or dying trees have been taken out.

The work of lowering the crest of the bluff and eliminating its dangers to picknickers [sic] will be left until the last. It consists mostly of what is termed deep excavation and can be carried on late in the fall.

Mr. E.D. Dawson, president of the park board, has spent most of his spare time keeping in touch with the work. He predicts a beautiful park when plans, immediate and tentative are carried out.

APPENDIX E: EXCELSIOR DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT BOUNDARY MAP



Excelsior Downtown Historic District Boundary Map, via City of Excelsior,
<http://www.ci.excelsior.mn.us/index.aspx?NID=186>