

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

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FILE NAME: 4901 Minnehaha Avenue Minnehaha Park (BZH 25653)

CATEGORY/DISTRICT: Minnehaha Historic District

CLASSIFICATION: Certificate of Appropriateness

APPLICANT: Mike Wyatt, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Program Coordinator

DATE OF APPLICATION: November 11, 2008

PUBLICATION DATE: December 11, 2008

DATE OF HEARING: December 16, 2008

APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION : December 26, 2008

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Aaron Hanauer (612) 673-2494

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**A. SITE DESCRIPTION**

Minnehaha Park is locally designated (Minnehaha Historic District) and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The park boundary coincides with the Minnehaha Historic District boundaries. The park's historic sites illustrate commercial, transportation, pioneering, and architectural themes and is itself an expression of inspired foresight into urban planning (Appendix D). Minnehaha Park's contributing features are both natural and manmade. The natural elements include the Falls and Glen. The four contributing manmade structures include the following: Godfrey Mill (1853/1854) the Minnehaha Station (1870s), the John H. Stevens House (built in 1849 moved to the park in 1896) and the Longfellow House (1906).

Serving as the central region that distinguishes the district, Minnehaha Park shows inspired foresight in urban planning. Noted American landscape architect Horace W.S. Cleveland sketched the master plan in 1883, as part of the Grand Rounds system of parks and parkways. The plan emphasized the natural beauty of the riverbanks and lakes, and proposed a linked series of open spaces, woods, vistas and recreation areas along the waterways. Cleveland's plan included the Minnehaha Falls area although it was beyond city limits at that time.

**B. APPLICATION BACKGROUND**

The focus of this Certificate of Appropriateness application is to review the proposed materials for the bluff boardwalk (and railings), the walkway, and retaining wall.

At the December 16 Heritage Preservation Commission meeting, the Commission adopted the staff recommendation unanimously (7-0) and approved the Certificate of Appropriateness with conditions to allow for the Minnehaha Falls and Glen restoration project. The conditions of approval were:

1. CPED-Planning review and approve final site plan, floor plans, and elevations.
2. The applicant repairs the W.P.A. retaining walls per the Secretary of Interior Standards and the following SHPO comments:
  - All new mortar used in the project should match the historic mortar in terms of color, texture, composition, hardness, and joint profile. Samples of the historic mortar should be

tested as a basis for the specification of the new mortar. The results of the testing and the new specifications should be submitted to our office for review and concurrence.

- If any [archaeological] sites are identified, we [SHPO] should be consulted with regard to evaluation and treatments. Please ensure that there are adequate provisions in the construction contract to accommodate adequate time for this construction, should it be necessary.
3. The construction of the new pathway with elevated boardwalk built into the bluff is not approved.
  4. The construction of a six-foot plastic timber walkway nearest the creek between the second and third pedestrian bridges is not approved.
  5. The construction of a new eight-foot high retaining wall between the second and third pedestrian bridges is not approved.

On December 23, The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District appealed conditions 3-5 to the Zoning and Planning Committee meeting. The Zoning and Planning Commission at their January 15 meeting granted the appeal and added the following three conditions of approval:

8a) The material for the new walkway above the southern bluff shall be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission;

8b) The materials for the proposed six-foot walkway nearest the creek between the two lower creek bridges shall be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission; and

9) That the final design for a new eight-foot retaining wall between the second and third creek bridges shall be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission.

### **C. PROPOSED WORK:**

#### ***C1. Bluff Boardwalk Materials***

The applicant proposes to construct an upper trail boardwalk made of reinforced plastic decking (specified as Fiber Force) and iron guardrails (see Attachment B3-B4, B10, and C4)). The applicant states the decking material is designed to have the same color and appearance as wood decking material, but with a much longer lifespan and durability (a sample of this material will be provided at the public hearing). The proposed boardwalk will have an attached 42-inch high guardrail to meet code and discourage deviation from the designated trail by park users. The guardrail is an iron railing consistent with use throughout the park and key viewing areas.

#### ***C2. Walkway Material***

The applicant has revised their plans and is now proposing to repair the walkway by adding additional crushed limestone (see Attachment B8 and B9). This walkway would be bordered by a six-inch wide limestone strip nearest the creek. The limestone strip is proposed to help delineate the edge of the path.

#### ***C3. Retaining Wall Design***

The southern edge of the walkway near the creek is bordered by a 1960s crib wall that stretches from the 2<sup>nd</sup> pedestrian bridge to the third pedestrian bridge for a distance of approximately 450 linear feet (see Attachment C3)

The applicant proposes to construct a 75 linear foot retaining wall in front of the 1960s crib wall (see Attachment B8). As part of this construction the applicant is proposing to vegetate the crib wall.

Additional details of the proposed retaining wall:

- *Location:* Located approximately 20 feet to the east of the stairwell near the pedestrian bridge and stretches 75 feet to the east (see Attachment C1-C5);
- *Materials:* 2' x2' x3' limestone blocks;
- *Design (from west to east):* Begins at approximately three feet in height and raises to eight feet in height at the middle, and then tapers to three feet in height where it ends (see Attachment B8).

## **D. ANALYSIS**

Staff reviewed the proposal in its compliance with the Secretary of Interior Guidelines for Setting:

### **D1. Bluff Boardwalk Materials**

The proposed iron material for the boardwalk railing meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Repair:

*Repairing features of the building and landscape by reinforcing the historic materials.*

Iron is consistent with the material used for other stair and boardwalk railings and will not detract from the historic materials of the Minnehaha Historic District.

The plastic fiber forced material does not meet the Secretary of Interior Guidelines for Setting: Repair. The following guideline highlights a course of action that is not recommended:

*Using a substitute material for the replacement part that does not convey the visual appearance of the surviving parts of the building or landscape, or that is physically, chemically, or ecologically incompatible.*

Plastic fiber forced lumber often contains polystyrene (Styrofoam) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) (see Attachment D1). These materials are not ecologically compatible with the natural setting of the Glen and Falls. In addition, staff has concerns about the appearance and durability of this material over a period of years. There is a section of plastic timber further down in the Glenn that has not held up well over the years (see Attachment CCC). Plastic timber has likely improved in the last ten years. However, the use of natural wood will help ensure that the replacement will take place in a timely manner. In addition, even if fiber force lumber has a longer use expectancy, it is unlikely that plastic fiber is able to be recycled (see Attachment D).

### **D2. Walkways**

The proposed used of crushed limestone for walkway meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Repair:

*Repairing features of the building and landscape by reinforcing the historic materials.*

Limestone is consistent with the existing walkway and will detract from the historic materials of the Minnehaha Historic District (see Attachment B9).

### **D3. Retaining Wall Design and Material**

The proposed limestone material of the retaining wall meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Repair:

*Repairing features of the building and landscape by reinforcing the historic materials.*

Limestone is consistent with the material used in retaining walls throughout the district. The use of limestone at this location will not detract from the historic materials of the Minnehaha Historic District.

The proposed retaining wall design does not meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Alternations

*Designing and constructing new additions to historic buildings when required by the new use. New work should be compatible with the historic character of the setting in terms of size, scale design, material, color, and texture.*

The addition of the new retaining wall introduces a third retaining wall design along the southern bluff and is not consistent with the historic character of the setting or existing adjacent retaining walls. The retaining wall to the west of the proposed retaining wall is constructed of limestone blocks of varying shapes (see Attachment E5). The new retaining wall is proposed to be primarily 2'x2'x3' limestone blocks for 75 linear feet (see Attachment B4, B7, and B8) Beyond this point, to the east, the existing 1960s crib wall design would stretch approximately 350 feet to the third pedestrian bridge.

In addition to the concern about the variety of a third retaining wall design, CPED-staff has concerns that the larger blocks (2'x2'x3') will attract graffiti.

### **E. FINDINGS**

1. Minnehaha Park is locally designated (Minnehaha Historic District) and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
2. The proposed iron material for the boardwalk railing meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Repair:
3. The plastic fiber forced material does not meet the Secretary of Interior Guidelines for Setting: Repair. Plastic fiber forced lumber often contains polystyrene (Styrofoam) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and these materials are not ecologically compatible with the natural setting of the Glen and Falls.
4. The proposed used of crushed limestone for walkway meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Repair:
5. The proposed limestone material of the retaining wall meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Repair:
6. The proposed retaining wall design does not meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for Setting: Alternations. The addition of the new retaining wall introduces a third retaining wall design along the southern bluff and is not consistent with the historic character of the setting or existing adjacent retaining walls.

### **F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the HPC adopt staff findings and **approve** a Certificate of Appropriateness for the Minnehaha Falls and Glen Restoration project with the following conditions:

1. The bluff boardwalk planks are constructed with true timber that compliments the historic district.
2. The walkway shall be constructed as shown in the reconstructed path detail.
3. The retaining wall shall continue the design of the existing retaining wall to the west with varying limestone sizes.
4. Precautionary measures are taken to ensure that graffiti applied on the retaining wall is easy to remove.
5. All workmanship is conducted in accordance with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation
6. Proposed work is subject to a successful completion of the 106 process of SHPO if required.

**G. APPENDIX:**

Appendix A: Minnehaha Park Map

Appendix B: Application

Appendix C: Aerials, Site Plan, and Images

Appendix D: How Green Is It? Composite Lumber for Consumer and Residential Applications