

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development**

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**MEMORANDUM**

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DATE: April 16, 2013

TO: Heritage Preservation Commission

FROM: Brian Schaffer, Principal City Planner 612.673.2670

SUBJECT: Informational Item, Washburn Fair Oaks Park Master Plan

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The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is presenting a draft of the Master Plan for the Washburn Fair Oaks Park in the Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District. The Applicant is looking for general comments on the appropriateness of the Master Plan within the context of the Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District.

The Applicant is seeking this feedback in advance of bringing the Master Plan forward for approval by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. The Master Plan outlines the goals and proposed design of the park. It also includes a variation that includes the China Friendship Garden concept. The China Friendship Garden concept was reviewed and discussed by the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in January 2012 (see attachment C for the previous report). The Applicant has provided a brief narrative of the process to develop the plan and a slide show that provides more detail on the process to develop the plan and includes the proposed master plan (see attachments A and B)

**RECENT BACKGROUND**

In January 2012 the HPC reviewed a concept for construction of a Northern-Style Minneapolis-Harbin China Friendship Garden Pavilion and Grounds in the southeast quadrant of Washburn Fair Oaks Park. The proposal includes a new pavilion, a small viewing pavilion, an entrance structure, and a bridge over a proposed water feature. The HPC gave the Applicant some direction:

- The overall concept was found to be compatible with the Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District, but the details needed to be more developed and reviewed with the HPC.
- The concept should be considered as part of an entire master plan for the park to ensure that all elements work together.
- The master plan for the park would be reviewed as an informational item with the HPC.
- A Certificate of Appropriateness would be needed before construction or implementation of the plan elements.

**HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

**Fair Oaks Park**

The park was originally the site of Senator William D. Washburn's home "Fair Oaks", which was designed by architect E. Townsend Mix in 1883. (Mix also designed the Metropolitan Building.)

In 1911 the estate was given to the Minneapolis Park Board, by Washburn, with the stipulation that he and his family live there until the time of their death. Theodore Wirth developed a plan for the park in 1913. Several other grand plans were developed for the site and were never realized. The mansion was demolished in 1924.

According to written descriptions, photographs, and plat maps the grounds of Fair Oaks included hills, two water features, and bridge over the water features and a series of trails that connect the site. Buildings included the mansion, stables, and in later years a green house and out building (Sanborn 1912).

### **History of William D. Washburn**

In 1857 William D. Washburn came to Minneapolis and opened a law office. Soon after his arrival he accepted the appointment as secretary and agent of the Minneapolis Mill Company, which controlled the west-side power of the Falls of St Anthony. While serving with Mill Company Washburn acquired both lumber and flour interests for the company. In 1889, when the Minneapolis Mill Company and St. Anthony Falls Water Power Company of the east-side and the most prominent of the flour mills were consolidated under a new company, Washburn remained as a director.

In 1861 President Abraham Lincoln appointed Washburn Surveyor General of Minnesota, and while serving in this post Washburn began to build up private interests in lumber and flour. However, in 1889 the lumber business was closed and the flour milling interests were transferred to a new company, Pillsbury Washburn Flour Mills Company. William Washburn, along with his cousin, Dorilus Morrison, was involved in the building of the Northern Pacific's first section of railway. He also acted as president of the Soo Line Railroad from the time it was built until he became senator.

William D. Washburn was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 1870 and the U.S. House in 1879 in which he served six consecutive years. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1889, he held this office for a six year term.

### **Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District**

The Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District contains a significant concentration of residences built at the turn of the century by prominent developers of Minneapolis. These residences exemplify the fashionable stylistic modes of architecture during this period and were designed by important local architects, including William Channing Whitney and Ernest Kennedy. The designated area is defined by East Franklin Avenue on the north, Interstate 35-W on the east, East 26<sup>th</sup> Street on the south and the alley between Nicollet Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South on the west, but reaches over to include the former Christian Scientist Church at the corner of Nicollet Avenue and East 24<sup>th</sup> Street. Washburn Fair Oaks Park, originally the site of Senator William D. Washburn's home "Fair Oaks," gives the area its name and serves as an aesthetic core. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (2400 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.), designed by McKim, Mead and White in 1912, operates as the area's major landmark and activity center.

In the early years of Minneapolis' history the most desirable and prestigious residential areas were located close to the hub of activity, the city's central business district. As the population grew, however, prominent families began to move away from the once choice areas of town and build their large homes along the outer edges of the city. The pockets of fine residential structures along the 1866 city limits of Minneapolis testify to this trend which began as early as the 1870s. With its many large and elegant homes, the Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District is a prime example of this outward movement.

Although incorporated into the city in 1867, intensive settlement of the Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District did not begin until the early 1870s. Improved transportation resulted in the progressed development of the area. In addition to elegant homes, single and two-family houses and large apartments began to fill the vacant land. By 1930, settlement of the area had begun to cease.

The Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District provides a varied platter of popular architectural styles that existed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many of the structures have retained their original design although their functions have changed. The Luther Farrington House (2100 Stevens Ave.) and both of the Crosby Houses (2104 Stevens Ave. and 2105 1<sup>st</sup> Ave.) represent examples of the Georgian Revival style. The two Pillsbury Houses (100 and 116 E. 22<sup>nd</sup> St.) reflect characteristics of the Medieval Revival, while the Edward Gale House (2115 Stevens Ave.) is Renaissance Revival in conception. The E.A. Merrill Residence (2116 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave.) represents the fanciful complexities of the late Victorian brownstone era.

The District's period of significance is 1858-1926.

### **DRAFT MASTER PLAN ELEMENTS**

The draft master plan covers three major elements: stewardship elements, adding a new element, and the optional addition of the North China Garden.

The stewardship elements include:

- Rebuilding pathways - widening interior pathways to eight feet.
- Replacing lighting – LED lighting on interior pathways and standard city boulevard lighting along perimeter streets.
- Renovating furnishings - relocating and adding new benches.
- Adding drainage – so that the 'bowl' in the southeast quadrant has drainage.
- Ongoing tree management - see plan for details.
- Enhancing programming

Introducing new elements:

- Entry plaza on 24<sup>th</sup> Street - semi circle paved area with trees lining it. Located on 24<sup>th</sup> Street across from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

North China Garden Option:

- Pavilion.

- Narrow paths.
- Ornamental bridge.
- Sculptural stones.
- Plantings at pavilion.

### **COMPATIBILITY OF THE MASTER PLAN WITH THE WASHBURN FAIR OAKS HISTORIC DISTRICT**

During the Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District's period of significance the structures on the subject site were demolished and the site used as a park. The designation study for the historic district does not discuss the specific elements for the park, it does however, address the setting of the mansions surrounding the park.

The Applicant's proposal falls under the rehabilitation treatment of cultural landscapes as defined by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes. The guidelines for rehabilitation recommend identifying, retaining, and preserving historic features. The topography appears to be a feature of the site that remains intact. The Applicant's proposal is to utilize the existing topography, which appears to be in-keeping with this guideline.

The guidelines recommend the following regarding replacing missing features: "Designing and installing new structures, furnishings and objects when the historic features are missing. It may be an accurate restoration using historical, pictorial and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the landscape. For example, replacing a picnic shelter with one of a new compatible design."

The guidelines further recommend the following for new additions: "Designing and installing a new structure, furnishing or object when required by the new use, which is compatible with the preservation of the historic character of the landscape. For example, constructing a new farm outbuilding utilizing traditional building materials or installing appropriately scaled and detailed signage."

Conversely the following are not recommended for new additions under the guidelines for rehabilitation: "Placing a new structure, furnishing, or object where it may cause damage, or is incompatible with the historic character of the landscape. For example, constructing a new maintenance facility in a primary space; " "Locating any new structure, furnishing or object in such a way that it detracts from or alters the historic character of the landscape. For example, installing a "period" gazebo that was never present in the cultural landscape" or "Introducing a new structure, furnishing or object in an appropriate location, but making it visually incompatible in mass, scale, form, features, materials, texture or color. For example, constructing a visitors' center that is incompatible with the historic character of the cultural landscape."

The Applicant's proposal introduces new additions to the site that are inspired by unrealized plans developed during the period of significance (24<sup>th</sup> street entry plaza) and the historic existence of a former bridge, gardens and out-buildings, with designs that are inspired by Northern-Style China gardens and not by designs of the adjacent former architecture.

The Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District Design Guidelines provide direction for new buildings. They do this by offering guidance on scale, dimension, materials and roof form. Due to the variation in the district the guidelines do not offer specific requirements and state that these elements should be consistent and compatible with existing elements.

The historic district guidelines also state that proposed new buildings shall not “materially impair the architectural or historic value of buildings on adjacent sites or in the immediate vicinity within the preservation district.”

In the discussion with the HPC in January 2012 the overall elements that were proposed as part of the North China Garden were discussed as needing to have some connection with materials to the district, but should be true to their own design.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Memo from Andrew Caddock, MPRB dated April 16, 2013
- B. Slide show on Master Plan
- C. CPED Memo to the HPC from January 12, 2012.