

THE COMMONS

A Welcoming Civic Space Celebrating the Spectacle of the City

/ Location /

Minneapolis, MN

/ Category /

General Design

/ Abstract /

The Commons is a 4.2 acre welcoming civic landscape that replaced a neglected portion of the city with surface parking lots and scattered low density buildings left over from the 1960's approach to urban renewal. Today this urban park unites the downtown Minneapolis with the Downtown East Neighborhood. Investment in this open space triggered a vast amount of private investment and neighborhood renewal. The park is an example of how prudent urban planning coupled with thoughtful park design can spur private development and revitalize depressed neighborhoods. The Commons has quickly become a valued destination for workers, residents and visitors.

/ Narrative /

Role of the Landscape Architect

The Landscape Architect led a multi-disciplinary team of Architects, Engineers and specialty Consultants to plan, design, and administer the construction of this \$10 million plus park project.

An extensive public and stakeholder engagement process was led by the Landscape Architect. And they had to navigate many complexities that go along with an urban site including; abatement and demolition of an existing building and parking lot, existing subsurface electrical vaults, the adjacent light rail transit safety standards, and public works requirements for the streetscape edges of the park.

The Landscape Architect traveled throughout the region to source and select all 200 trees and selected and specified all materials, site furnishings, plantings, site lighting, and other equipment for the park.

Project Design

This project was an opportunity to create a large new prominent public open space in an underutilized area. Sited between the business district and an iconic new stadium, the park had the potential to provide the large open space that was missing in the downtown fabric.

A myriad of objectives confronted the design team, not least of which was to ensure this investment in public green space would be a catalyst for the surrounding neighborhood renewal. The Commons required a fast-track process to efficiently coordinate extensive public and stakeholder engagement, design, documentation, and construction to open on an established date. Public outreach drew large crowds of stakeholders with a vested interest in learning about project updates, reviewing design concepts and offering feedback. Design team members engaged the stakeholders to facilitate conversation

and gather comments which influenced the project's trajectory.

The park is bisected by Portland Avenue which ensures emergency access. The avenue and was reduced in width and transformed into a complete street with raised bicycle paths vertically separated from vehicular traffic. The narrower street, coordinated lighting and park geometry connect the two blocks safely and aesthetically.

The design for each side of the park form a complementary system that interacts to form a dynamic park greater than the assembled parts. The east half is dominated by the wide open oval shaped Great Lawn, intended to host large-scale events. The west half has a more intimate scale and irregular form that flows to meet the needs of everyday visitors. The park provides a variety of opportunities for family use including a splash pad and play area. These amenities have been widely embraced by the residents of the city's

largest public housing development, home to more than 300 children. Perimeter streets are defined by tree lined promenades to provide continuity to the streetscape which visually connects the two halves. Strong urban connections are emphasized in all directions, reaching out to the city and to the Mississippi River.

Garden Rooms are located parallel to 4th Street providing shady spaces filled with outdoor furniture and defined by perennial gardens. Daily, food trucks line this street and establish an impromptu food market. A continuous seat-wall along the streetscape provides a flexible space to support the market.

The Commons project incorporated several significant sustainable strategies. It transformed a parking lots into a public open space, dramatically increasing site permeability. The Great Lawn composed of a high-traffic turfgrass mix offers the park tremendous flexibility to host events.

Underneath the lawn and invisible to users lies a deep layer of imported sandy soil that acts as a giant sponge to infiltrate and manage stormwater. Water from the splash pad is captured in cisterns and reused as irrigation. Porous paving in the garden rooms and permeable tree trenches further assist in managing stormwater through infiltration. Dozens of native plants comprise the park's plant palette, and almost 200 new trees further contribute to stormwater management and reduction of the urban heat island effect, significantly augmenting the urban tree canopy in downtown Minneapolis. Located adjacent to the city's light rail transit system, the park is easily accessed from a nearby stop. Equally important to these initiatives is how this park supports sustainable lifestyles by allowing people to comfortably live, work, and recreate in an urban environments.

The Landscape Architects accomplished a design that balances everyday use with accommodations for large-scale special

events. The designers planned a park that caters to neighborhood residents, the workday lunch crowd, as well as large events.

This significant project in Minneapolis is worthy of recognition for its ability to both stimulate comprehensive neighborhood renewal and skillfully balance daily neighborhood use with large events including concerts, festivals, and programming associated with the adjacent stadium.



THE COMMONS

CONNECT TO TARGET FIELD

HENNEPIN AVE

GATEWAY PARK

WATER WORKS PARK (planned)

FATHER HENNEPIN BLUFFS PARK

MILL RUINS PARK

RIVERFRONT

MILL CITY FARMERS MARKET

GOLD MEDAL PARK

NICOLLET MALL

FEDERAL COURTHOUSE PLAZA

S WASHINGTON AVE

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT PLAZA

COMMONS

WEST BANK ATHLETIC FIELDS UMN

BOHEMIAN FLATS PARK

SKYWAY

1/4 MILE

1/2 MILE

NEW STADIUM PLAZA

ELLIOT PARK

WEST BANK CAMPUS UMN

METRO TRANSIT

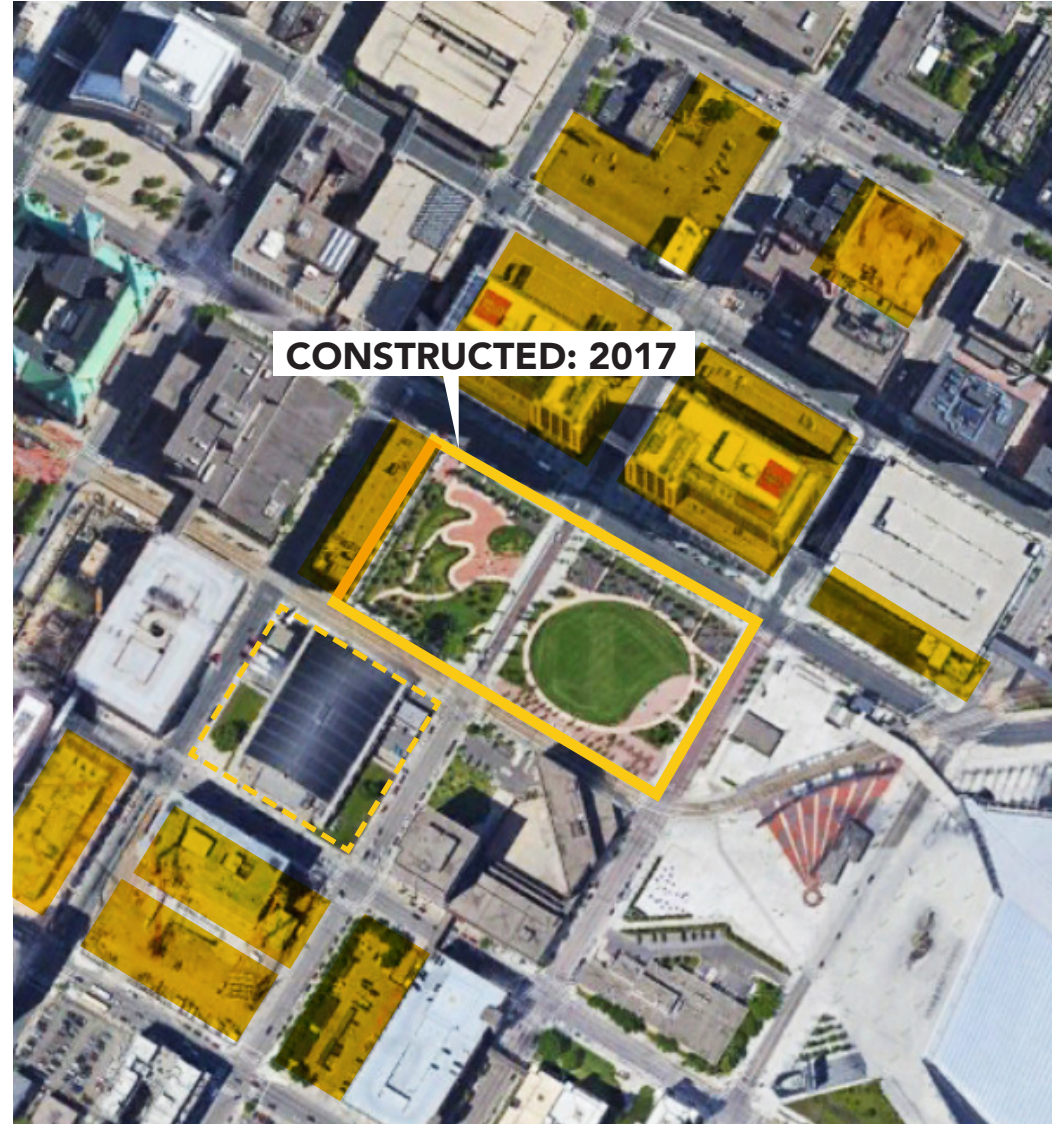
CURRIE PARK

CEDAR RIVERSIDE

2012



2020



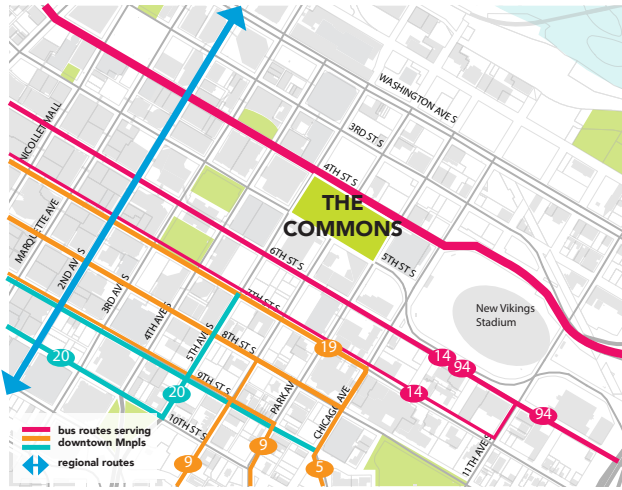
TRANSFORMING THE CITY

The Commons is a green oasis that grew from what was once surface parking lots. Investment in this open space triggered a vast amount of private investment and neighborhood development. Prudent urban planning coupled with thoughtful park design transformed this neglected space into a cherished destination and public amenity.

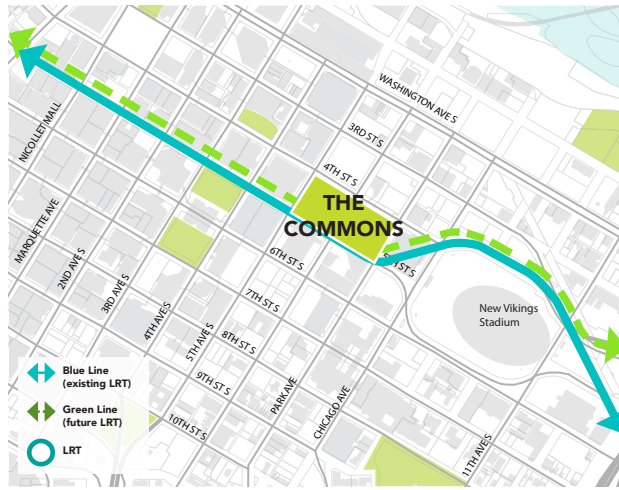


SPURRING DEVELOPMENT

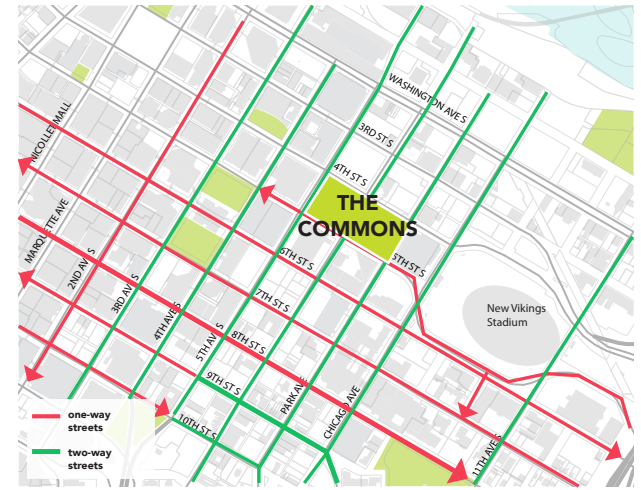
The Commons has made downtown Minneapolis more vibrant and livable, inspiring the development of hundreds of new housing units nearby. The open space provides an amenity for downtown workers, attracting companies large and small to the neighborhood, and provides space for large civic events attracting thousands of visitors regionally.



BUS CIRCULATION



LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT



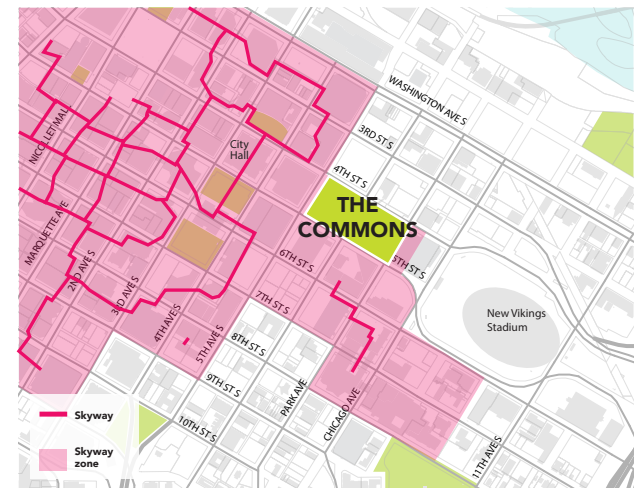
VEHICULAR CIRCULATION



BIKE CIRCULATION



PEDESTRIAN CORRIDORS



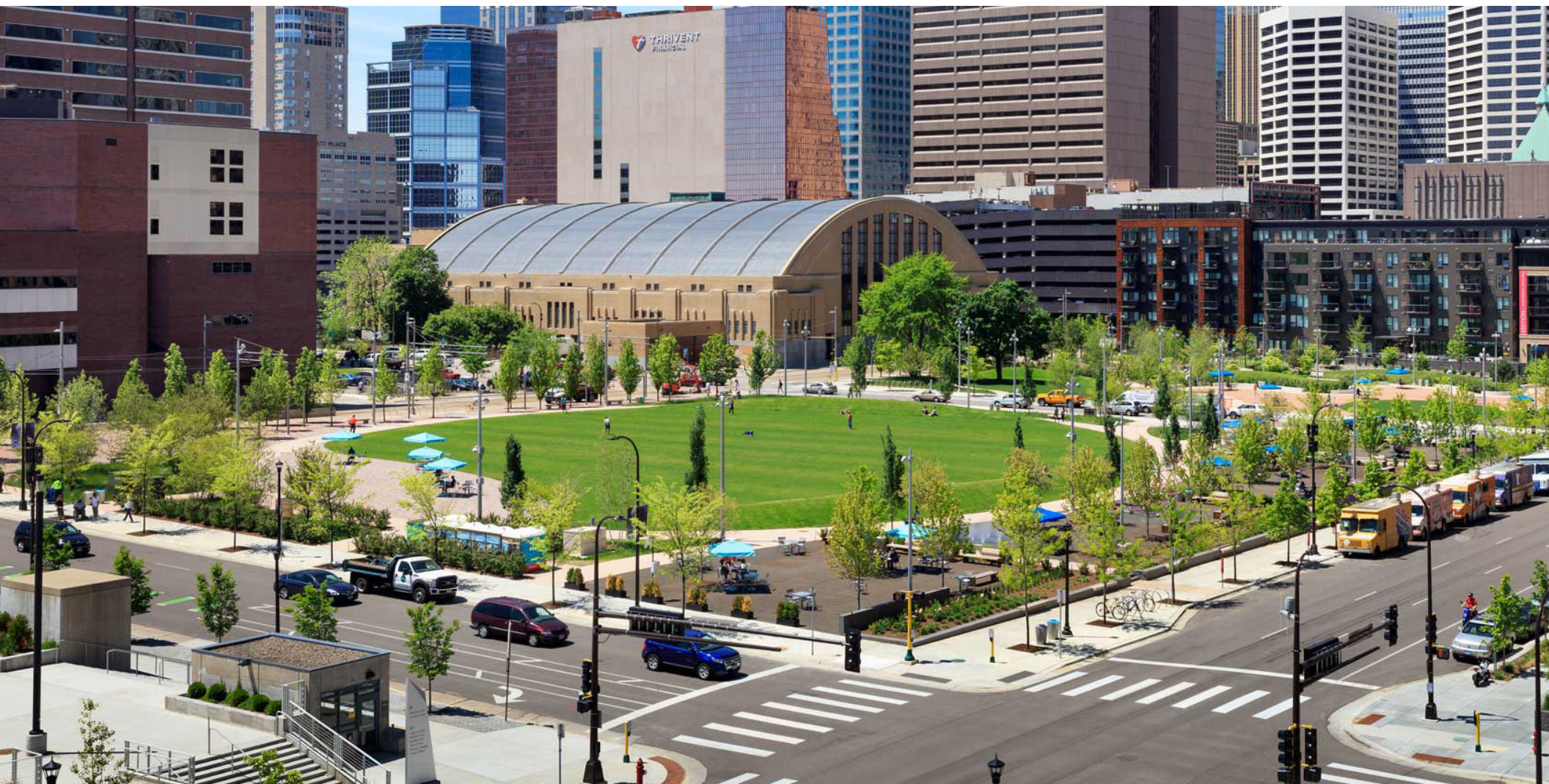
SKYWAY CONNECTIONS

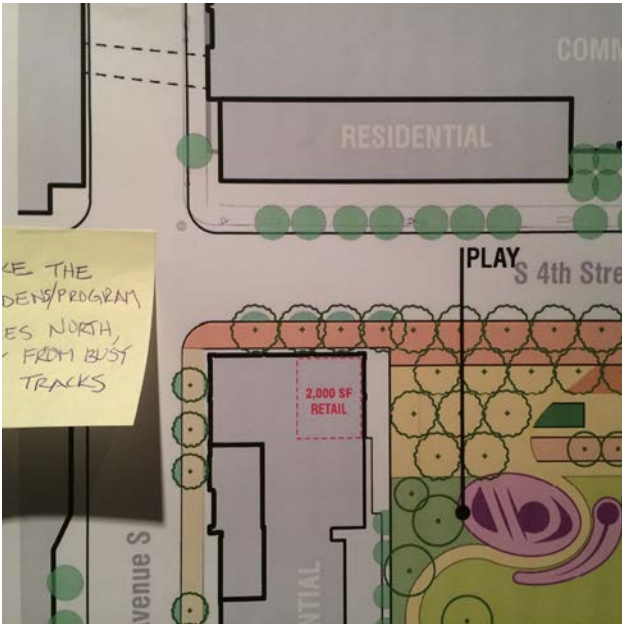
URBAN SYSTEMS

Strong urban connections are emphasized in all directions, reaching out to the City and to the Mississippi River. The design team gave great consideration to how this park connects to various modes of movement throughout the city.

GREEN IN THE CITY

The Commons contains a great lawn and good lawn; program and garden zones; native Minnesota prairie/woodlands; a natural landscape that encourages children to explore and play; an iconic water plaza and pavilion; a park support building; and vibrant, treed promenades. These features offer greening in the middle of the city.

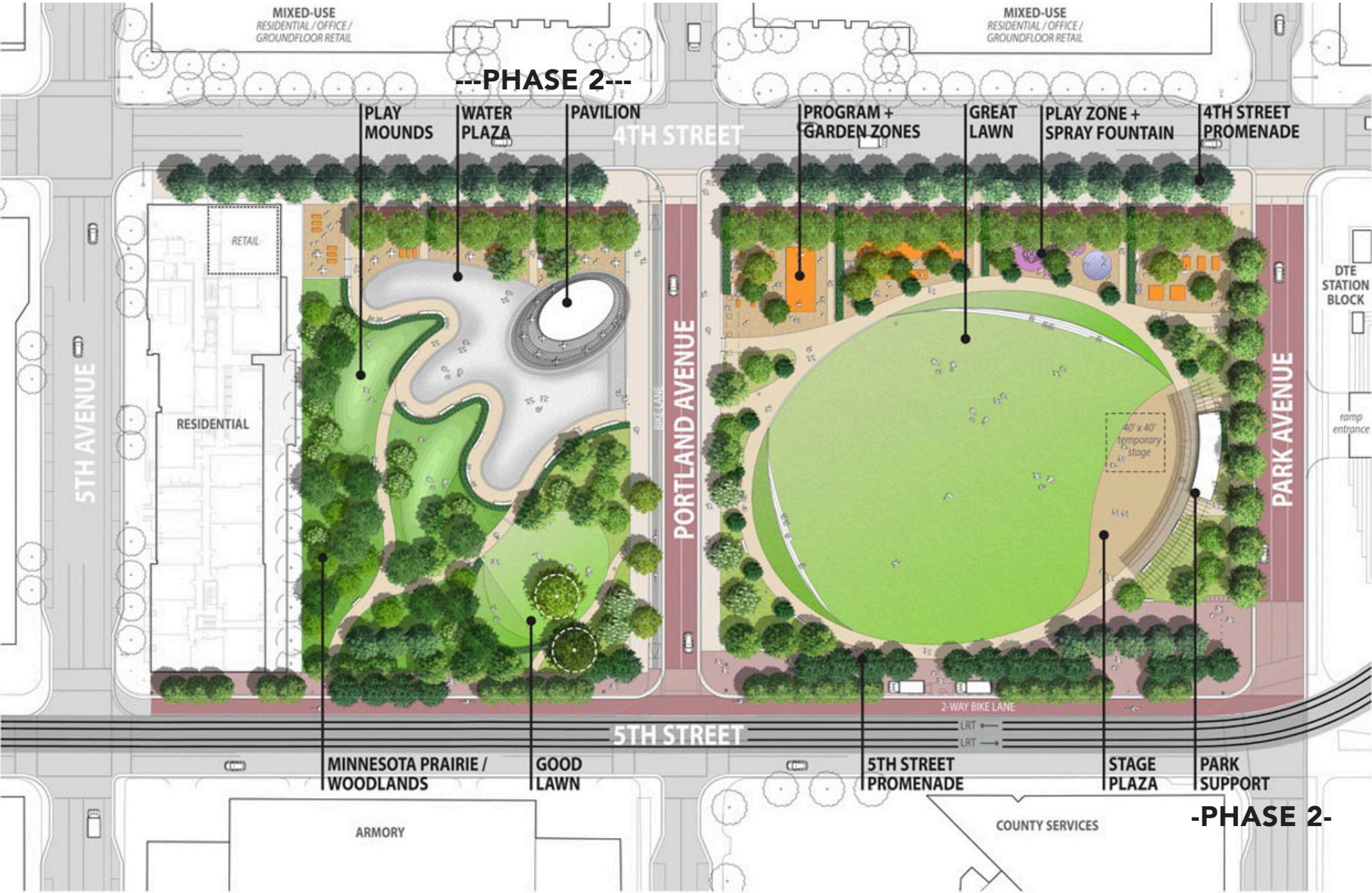




COMMUNITY LED

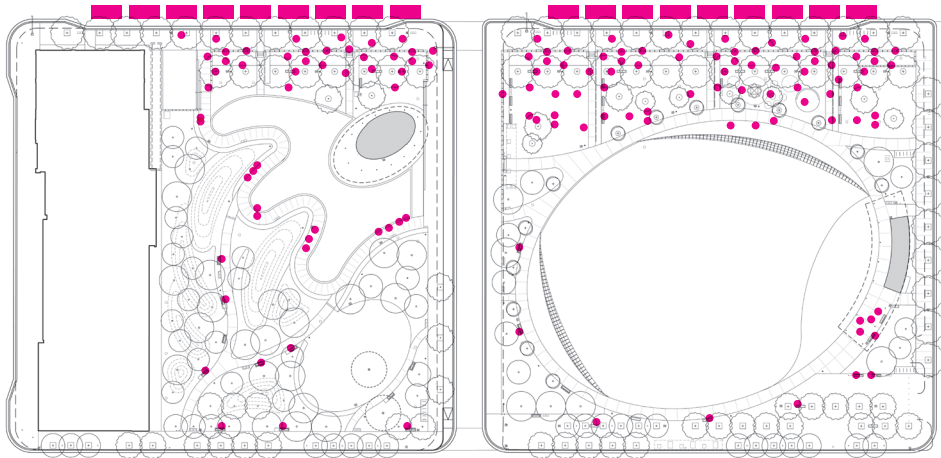
Public outreach drew large crowds of stakeholders with a vested interest in hearing project updates, seeing design concepts and offering opinions and ideas. Design team disbursed amongst the stakeholders to facilitate conversation and gather comments which led the project's trajectory.

SITE PLAN

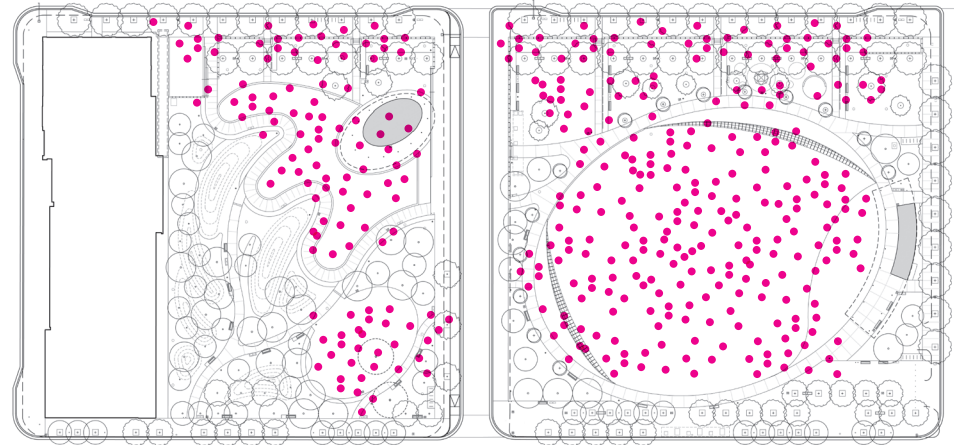


A PARK FOR THE EVERYDAY AND EVERY OCCASION

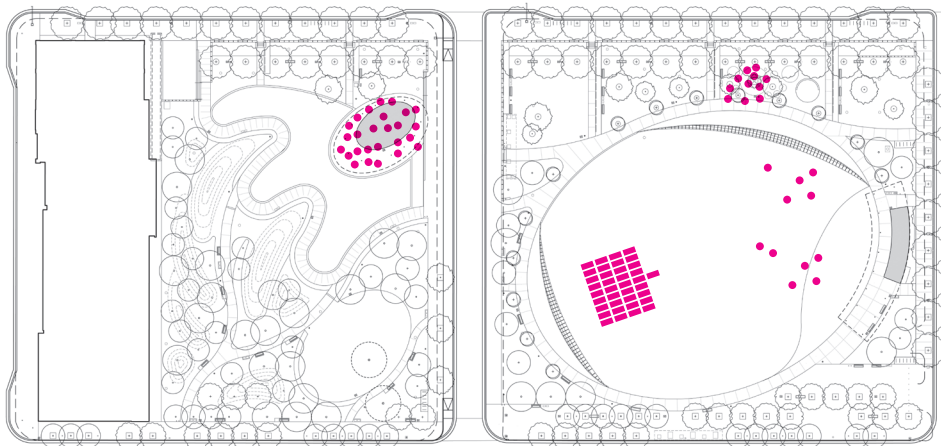
small gathering + food trucks



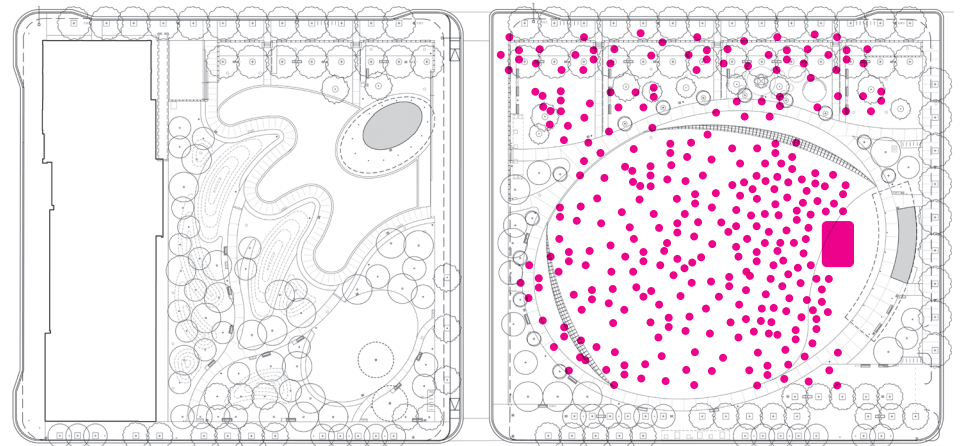
game day



play and flexible use



concert



MAJOR CIVIC EVENTS

The Landscape Architects understood the need for and accomplished a design that - balanced everyday use with accommodations for large-scale special events.



ACTIVE EVERYDAY

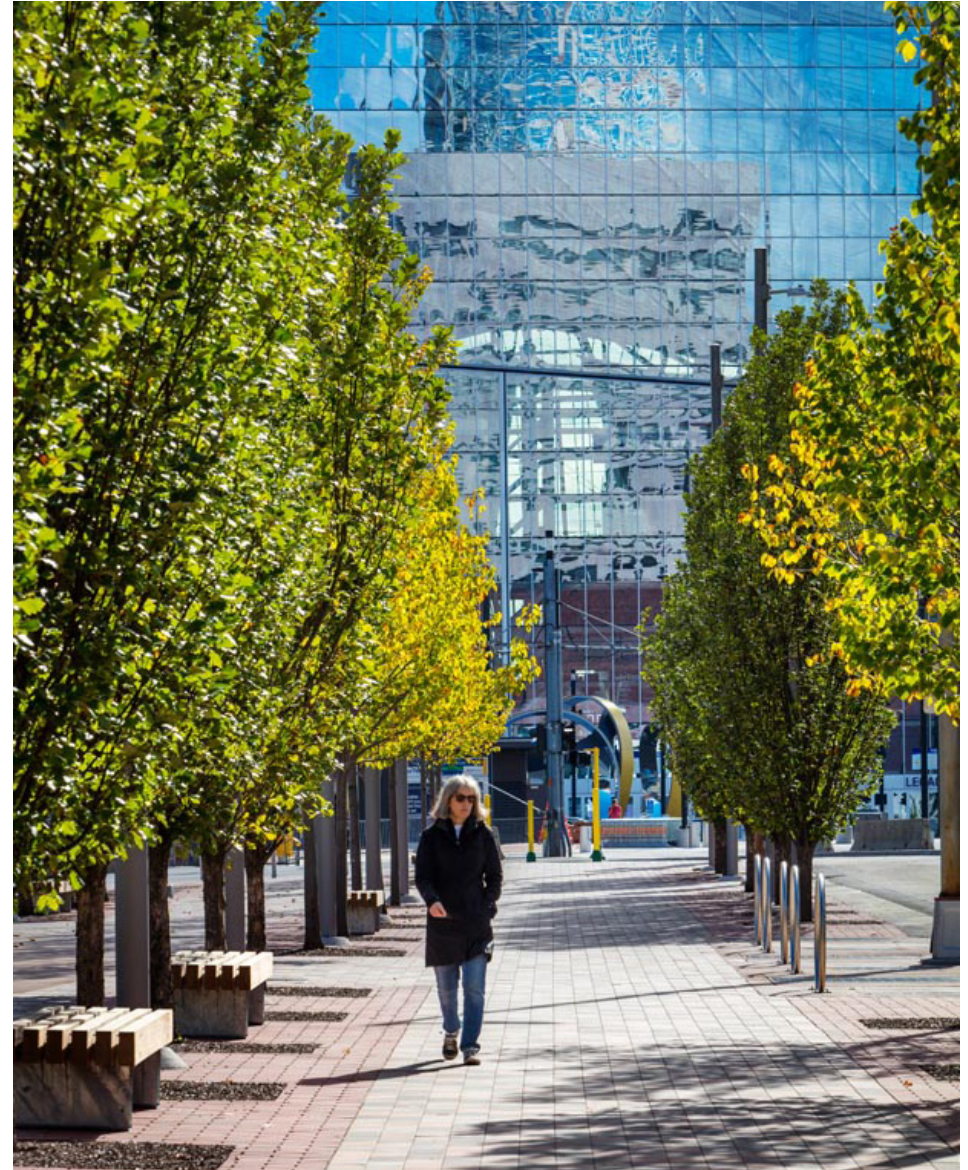


The Landscape Architects understood the need for and accomplished a design that balanced everyday use with accommodations for large-scale special events. This required an understanding of future park programming – knowledge gained through collaboration with the city and park operator.



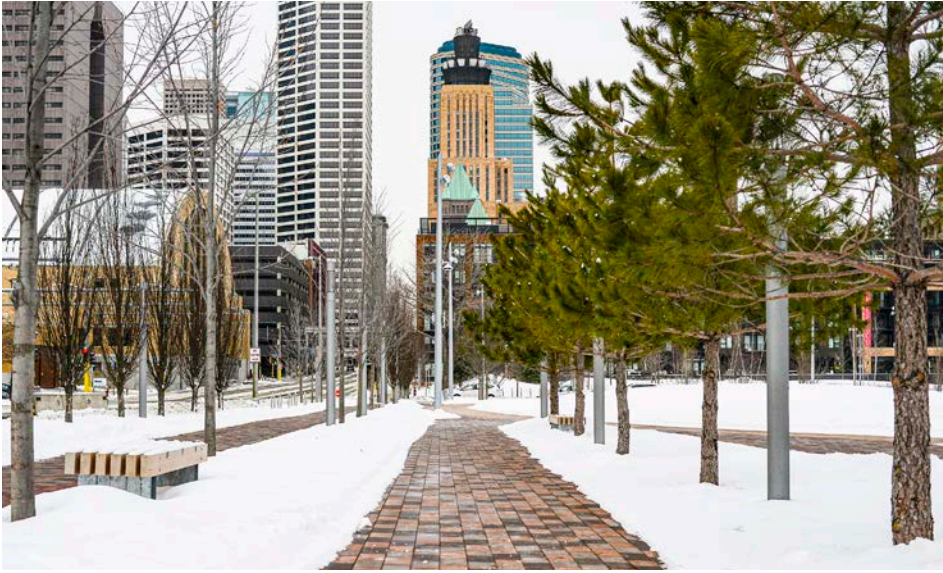
VARIETY OF USES

Combined with a study of the park's context, the designers planned a park that caters to the workday lunch crowd, weekend yoga class, casual lawn use, and kids programming to support growing residential and business amenity needs.



RESPIRE IN THE CITY

In addition to being a highly programmed and active park, The Commons is a green oasis in the city, with garden rooms, lush native plantings and opportunities for strolling and peaceful moments as well.



ALL SEASON USE

The Commons is a park that is utilized year-round for events small and large. The park accommodates daily and programmed use through all seasons and is planted with native evergreens and tallgrasses for visual interest through the year.

SUSTAINABILITY FAST FACTS

THE COMMONS MPLS



PREVIOUSLY AN IMPERVIOUS PARKING LOT, NOW A LUSH GREEN PARK SPACE



OVER 200 TREES PROVIDE SHADE, SOAK UP STORMWATER & REDUCE THE URBAN HEAT ISLAND



POLLINATOR HABITAT



THE GREAT LAWN SITS OVER 2' OF SPECIAL SOIL THAT ABSORBS STORMWATER LIKE A SPONGE, REDUCING RUNOFF ON SITE



ALL LIGHT FIXTURES ARE HIGH EFFICIENCY LED

THE WATER USED AT THE WATER FEATURE IS COLLECTED IN UNDERGROUND TANKS AND RE-USED FOR LANDSCAPE IRRIGATION



THE COMMONS

A Welcoming Civic Space Celebrating the Spectacle of the City

The Commons is a welcoming and inclusive civic landscape, balancing active programming and events with opportunities for respite. Sustainable strategies and innovative programming are incorporated throughout the design, offering a vision for an enduring open space that provides the city with a dynamic, inclusive, all-season destination.

