THE MALL

LOCATION AND HISTORY

The Mall encompasses five blocks of grass median and roadway stretching from Hennepin Avenue to Lake of the Isles. In 1911, the water channel that linked Lake of the Isles and Bde Maka Ska was first opened (now known as the lagoon). Shortly thereafter, the Park Board received a petition from The Lake District Protective Association to construct a new parkway to the lagoon, as well as petitions from others in the neighborhood who opposed a parkway. The true motivation of the Lake District Protective Association may have been to obtain the land south of the railroad tracks before industrial developments acquired it. To many people, industrial use of that land would have been incompatible with the symbols of progress and refinement that stood at either end of the boulevard - the lagoon and the new Walker Library. When the community could not agree on whether to create the parkway or not, they deferred the decision to the Park Board which almost immediately acquired the land to create a park. At the time of its acquisition in 1912 the area was called 29th Street Boulevard. Later that year, the name The Mall was selected after the unusual action by the Park Board of requesting public input in choosing a name. Park Board records indicate that the Lake Calhoun Improvement Association submitted recommendations and shortly after, the name “The Mall” was chosen.

Seven houses were sold and removed from the land before construction could begin. The double roadway that was built is noteworthy in park history because it was used to test a new method of pavement: a two-course pavement of concrete and an asphalt-concrete mix. Wirth, having hired two paving experts from Winnipeg and Chicago, deemed the pavement results such a success that the method was used on other parkways. Within the next few years however Wirth changed his mind, determining that the concrete mix was too expensive and not durable enough. It was already becoming apparent that The Mall pavement would have to be repaired.

The Mall was also the pilot site of a park engineering project in 1923 when the Minneapolis General Electric Company installed test lighting consisting of 12-foot ornamental standards with 400 candle-power incandescent lights placed 100 feet apart. Overall, Wirth determined from this pilot project that the overall operations and maintenance cost for the lights would be too costly for system-wide use.

In Wirth’s reminiscences of his first twenty-five years as park superintendent, published in the 1930 annual report, he included before and after photos of The Mall. The Mall largely disappeared from public and Park Board attention until in 1962 when the City Council requested an easement along The Mall for street and parking purposes. The Park Board approved the easement until an outcry of protest from the neighborhood forced them to rescind their action before the City Council had time to formally accept it. There have been very few changes made to The Mall since it was constructed aside from the closing of the intersection with Hennepin Avenue when the old Walker Library was replaced with a new underground library at Hennepin and Lagoon in 1981. The Library Board inquired with the Park
Board about buying a piece of The Mall for the new library, but the Park Board refused. It cited its land policy, which was developed in the 1960s at a time when roads and freeways were encroaching on park property and rejected the sale of any useful park land for any reason. The Park Board repaved the roadways and replaced the lighting in 1989. In 2016 the East Isles Residents Association helped improve the park with additional landscaping, and in 2018 funding was allocated in partnership with Hennepin County to enhance the connection between The Mall and the Midtown Greenway.

Excerpted from history written by David C. Smith

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND CHARACTER

This linear park is made up of a central grass median split into 4 sections with one-way park roads bordering it to the north and south. The Midtown Greenway runs parallel to The Mall just to the north of it. James, Irving, and Humboldt Avenues cut north-south through the park at three signed intersections. A sidewalk runs down the middle of the full length of the median. Before each intersection this sidewalk splits to create a small triangle, each one planted with a volunteer-maintained ornamental garden. An alley of mature trees runs along each side of this central sidewalk, which makes for a lovely shaded stroll. Benches along the way provide a place to sit and enjoy the park. At the east end where the park meets the Walker Library and Hennepin Ave Transit station there is a rectangular open grass area with a path, park sign, and garden. At the west end the park terminates at E Bde Maka Ska Parkway with no crosswalk to shepherd pedestrians to the regional park across the road.

Compared to the constant activity on Hennepin Avenue and the Uptown area in general, the park can feel quiet and tucked away. A few times a year, large events such as the Uptown Art Fair draw large crowds. During spring, summer, and fall, the East Isles Farmers Market utilizes the space. Large multi-unit rental buildings occupy the blocks south of The Mall, while to the north is a neighborhood of primarily single-family homes and duplexes.

While it’s possible to drive a full loop through the park, it’s more common to see the park road used for on-street parking and as a means to avoid traffic along neighboring Hennepin and Lagoon Avenues during peak hours. Additionally, the Walker Library, located in the southeast corner of the park, relies on the park road as the one-way exit from their underground parking and for access to a book drop off.

THE PROPOSED DESIGN

The Mall will retain its distinctive linear character while also responding to community environmental concerns and desires for additional open green space. There will be a gradient of active to more passive uses from east to west, reflecting the urban vibrancy of Uptown at one end and the tranquil beauty of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park at the other. The most significant improvements will occur at each end of The Mall. The east end next to Hennepin Ave will include a gathering space with a formal central lawn framed by sitting steps, trees, plantings, and walkways. It will be bordered by a fountain, plazas with tables and chairs, and public art. A new multi-use trail connection at this eastern end will provide bicycle and pedestrian access from Hennepin Avenue to the Midtown Greenway. A balcony with benches, an informal play area, and a new railing overlooks the Greenway next to the busy transit station. Much of the design ideas for the east end come from an Uptown Mall Study completed in 2011 by Close Landscape Architecture and VJAA for Hennepin County and MPRB.

The existing portion of one-way park roads between Hennepin and Humboldt Avenues will be converted to a shared use woonerf/flexible market street. This could include permeable pavement and mountable curbs that can accommodate vehicles but are guided by urban design principles focused on pedestrians. This reconfiguration of the road enhances stormwater capture in this flood-prone area, and more seamlessly flows into the activated park space next to busy Hennepin Avenue, especially during large events. Flexible seating is added to the central median space. Existing gardens at intersections will be retained and enhanced.

Between Humboldt and Irving Avenues the park roads, gardens, and median with updated center walkway will remain much as they are today. Sidewalk will be installed where it is missing between Irving Avenue and the alleyway to the east. Community gardens or other urban agriculture between Humboldt and James Avenues will enhance the center section of The Mall. North-south through streets will not be altered by this design.

At the western end of The Mall between Irving Ave and Bde Maka Ska Boulevard the median’s central walkway will be shifted to the edge of the park south of existing boulevard trees. This allows for additional open green space in the median and an enhanced pedestrian crosswalk at the Bde Maka Ska Parkway.
To enhance the greening of this space and emphasize the gradient of more passive uses at the west end, the west-bound park road will be removed from these two blocks and replaced with forested and open green space. The east-bound park road will be removed between the alleyways so that one-way alley egress without parking can be maintained. The goal of this reconfiguration of the west end is support for a more continuous, uninterrupted green and forested space, with removal of impervious surfacing as one moves down The Mall closer to the lagoon waterway. This green space could include naturalized stormwater management best practices including native plantings under tree driplines to protect root areas, raingardens, and community gardens.

Overall, this design increases the amount of green space leading to the lakes, strives to protect tree canopy whenever possible, and enhances the pedestrian experience throughout, while supporting more active uses at the east end.

**CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARKS**

The Mall serves as a unique green connection between the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park and the Grand Rounds to the busy Uptown Area. Both Bde Maka Ska and Lake of the Isles are easily accessed from The Mall, as is the Midtown Greenway. Levin Triangle is a half-mile away, Mueller Park is a mile north, while Bryant Square and Painter Parks are just over a mile to the southeast.

**KNOWN LAND USE AND COORDINATION ISSUES**

Coordination with Hennepin County Libraries, the City of Minneapolis, Metro Transit, and the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority will be necessary for improvements to the east end, road reconfiguration, and cultivation of urban agriculture areas. Temporary road closures of the woonerf at the east end should be coordinated with the Library’s building and parking hours. Ongoing coordination with large events such as the Uptown Art Fair and EIRA farmers market will be necessary to design the woonerf and the addition of green space at the west end. Residential multi-unit housing adjacent to The Mall currently uses free parking on the one-way park roads, some of which will be removed. The SW Parks Plan Community Advisory Committee recommends searching for a parking solution in collaboration with the City. Continued collaboration between the Park Board and volunteer garden stewards is important to the success of gardens at The Mall’s cross street intersections.
**THE MALL PARK- PROPOSED PLAN**

1. **INFORMAL PLAY AREA** (with option for small play spots to be incorporated along The Mall)
2. **PLAZA WITH PLANTINGS** (design based on proposed Hennepin County and MPRB plan)
3. **SHARED USE WOONERF/FLEXIBLE MARKET STREET** (potential temp. road closures, permeable surface, vehicles and parking accommodated but guided by urban design features focused on pedestrians)
4. **MIDTOWN GREENWAY MULTI-USE TRAIL CONNECTION AND UPDATED WALKWAY**
5. **ENHANCED NATURALIZED AREAS AND PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS** (stewardship gardens near north-south and east-west crossings)
6. **COMMUNITY GARDEN/URBAN AGRICULTURE** (work with Hennepin County to explore opportunity to engage with Midtown Greenway)
7. **NATIVE PLANTINGS AND/OR RAINGARDENS** (in collaboration with Hennepin County)
8. **ENHANCED PEDESTRIAN CROSSING TO MINNEAPOLIS CHAIN OF LAKES REGIONAL PARK**
9. **FORESTED AND OPEN GREEN SPACE**
10. **RELOCATED PATH**
11. **THROUGH-ALLEYS** (one-way through-alleys without parking)

**EXISTING FEATURES**

A. ONE-WAY ROAD CONFIGURATION WITH ON-STREET PARKING
Looking East

This section depicts a shared-use woonerf and flexible market street. This proposed concept would be located between Humboldt Avenue and the plaza adjacent to Hennepin Avenue. See The Mall park proposed plan for more information.

THE MALL PARK - SECTION VIEW
PROPOSED DESIGN FEATURES

1. INFORMAL PLAY AREA (with option for small play spots to be incorporated along The Mall)

2. PLAZA WITH PLANTINGS AND CENTRAL LAWN (design based on proposed Hennepin County and MPRB plan)

3. SHARED USE WOONERF/FLEXIBLE MARKET STREET (potential temp. road closures, permeable surface, vehicles and parking accommodated but guided by urban design features focused on pedestrians)

4. MIDTOWN GREENWAY MULTI-USE TRAIL CONNECTION AND UPDATED WALKWAY

EXISTING FEATURES

A. FLEXIBLE OPEN PLAY/MARKET AREA AND TREES
B. BOULEVARD/TREES
C. SIDEWALK

NOTE

This design originated from the Uptown Mall Study by Close / Landscape Architecture and VJAA for Hennepin County and MPRB, 2011.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1: General Input</th>
<th>2: Initial Concepts</th>
<th>3: Preferred Concept</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring-Winter 2018</td>
<td>Winter-Spring 2019</td>
<td>Now</td>
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<tr>
<td>Input themes prior to initial concepts</td>
<td>Input themes on initial concepts</td>
<td>Key elements of the concept</td>
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### aqaurics

- No comments

### play

- Interest in nature play
- Need more activities near library

- Support for adding play areas or features

- No comments

### athletics

- No comments

### courts

- Nothing here to engage people

- Divided interest in sand volleyball

- Divided interest in field space here

- No comments

### winter

- No comments

### landscape

- Like trees and shade
- Like flowering gardens
- Interest in pollinator habitat
- Interest in community gardens
- Consider no-mow grass
- Like quiet green space here
- Needs open plaza space

- Keep tree canopy
- Support for existing gardens
- Support for native plantings
- Support for urban agriculture

- Preserve and protect tree canopy
- Enhanced stewardship gardens included
- Native plantings/raingardens included
- Vegetated buffer added to protect pedestrians from street traffic
- Move pathway to one side to create forested green space
- Flexible market street including permeable surface and plaza added

### other

- Bikes on sidewalks are a concern
- Great farmers market space – expand it
- Good space for events- need more!
- Speeding traffic
- Need better pedestrian crossings

- Like connection to Greenway, separation of bikes from cars and peds
- Like space for farmers market, events
- Some concern woonerf is confusing
- Support flexible street–cars, bikes, peds
- Support enhanced pedestrian crossings
- Concern about loss of parking
- Concern for north-south & alley access
- Support for plaza at eastern end

- Trail connection to Midtown Greenway
- Shared use woonerf for market and events (accommodates vehicles and parking but focused on pedestrians)
- Enhanced pedestrian crossings included
- Direction to explore with City resident parking options nearby
- North-south through streets remain open
- Preserve through-alleys on west end
- Plaza with amenities included near Hennepin
- Keep walking path, adjust route at west end of park
- Green space added to west end, plaza to east end
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Name</th>
<th>Asset Type</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>2020 Estimated Cost/Project</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Mall Park</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Traditional Play in New Container</td>
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<td>The Mall Park</td>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>Community Garden/Urban Agriculture</td>
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<td>Urban Agriculture Areas will be implemented in partnership with specific programs or community members. Estimate includes water service</td>
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<td>Naturalized Areas: includes native plantings and/or raingardens, plantings, and stewardship gardens</td>
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<td>The Mall Park</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>Shared Use Woonerf/Flexible Market Street</td>
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<td>Renovate paths: includes relocated walking path and multi-use trail</td>
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<td>Misc. signs, trees, furniture</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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