

Bridge Square Comments from the HPC

(Originally drafted by the subcommittee of Barb Evans, Jesse Steed, and Alice Thomas; Adopted by the entire Heritage Preservation Commission on March 10, 2022)

All documents and presentations should state that Bridge Square and Riverside Park are local, state and nationally designated Historic Preservation Sites.

Proposed Renovations:

The following are comments on Bridge Square based on the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and the *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. Overall, it is difficult to respond fully to this plan since the details are not stated in a written document or a more detailed map. It is difficult to know, for example, whether the current mailbox will continue to be in Bridge Square or whether this plan provides parking for the Post Office, among other issues. A larger, drawn-to-scale, picture would be helpful for not only the HPC but also the public to comment on the plan. Additionally, the video, drawing, and text on the City's website make no mention of the fact that Bridge Square is within the Historic District, including its contributing and noncontributing features.

The Historic District Nomination Form includes the site description: "Bridge Square is a contributing property within the Northfield Commercial Historic District. It is associated with the historic contexts "Designed Historic Landscape, 1855-1945," and "Commerce, 1955- 1945." Although it has been significantly redesigned since its formal construction in the 1920s, it retains fair historic integrity and the retention of the Civil War Monument especially adds to its significance." According to the Registration Form, Bridge Square contains one contributing structure (monument), one non-contributing structure (sculpture), and two contributing sites (square and park).

Note: The following comments focus on Phase 1 of the Bridge Square project with overviews of Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Phase 1:

1. The Plaza: Civil War Memorial

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan: The HPC likes that the Civil War Memorial is remaining in its original location, given that the feature is designated as a "contributing structure" **in the Historical Site**. The HPC would be abdicating our responsibility if we were to ignore the Secretary of Interior Standards which note that "removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided". The memorial holds a position of prominence in the center of the plaza, and the HPC likes that it will remain in place and be surrounded by open space as its historical context.
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan:
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider:

2. The Green: Fountain/Sculpture

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan: The HPC likes that the fountain will remain in the same location.
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: This item is not a contributing feature; however, it is only eight years away from being eligible to be a contributing feature. The HPC does not want the fountain moved or modified. It is difficult to decipher how the fountain would be changed with a possible splash pad and new seating.
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: Most important in consideration of the fountain is that, the modification would involve redesigning the fountain art piece. Local artists have noted “*Changing the sculpture on the square dismisses the idea and the artistry*,” and another that “*Jake was always concerned about the “surround” [the wall proposed to be removed] for his sculptures*.”

Other factors in opposing a proposed modification for a splash pad include the following: would be used only a few months a year; it is not necessary (there will be a splash pad elsewhere in the city); children already splash with their hands in the current fountain; and it would eliminate the heavily used year-around seating on the surround wall.

Leaving the sculpture/fountain as is could provide an opportunity of adding a storyboard or sign to explain sculpture and to note that originally in the center of the square was a different type of water feature, a water pump and trough for horses.

3. The Green: Grass (closing of Water Street)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan: While the removal of the street adversely affects the historical landscape, it does provide an important additional uses in the Square.
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: The Secretary of Interior Standards suggest that an original feature should not be entirely erased and noted that “*Designing and installing compatible new circulation features when required by the new use should assure the preservation of historic character of the landscape*”. In this case, if the area of the current street were elevated to be level with the rest of the square (as proposed) AND the original “shadow” of the street were covered in pavers vs. grass, it would acknowledge the historical street and visually separate the two portions of Bridge Square – into the Square and the Park, as it was during the period of significance.
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: If pavers were used on the area of the street it would also 1) provide some hard surface between the two grassy areas that would be more vehicle friendly for food trucks, stages, etc., 2) make the space more flexible than in the current plan, and 3) would reduce the total area of grass which would reduce time, effort and money to maintain. The Green is attractive on paper, but does not seem practical. Is the City ready to provide the appropriate

maintenance needed for the area that is projected to include heavy vehicles during special occasions?

4. The Terrace

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan: It is good that this will be a space for a portable stage and not a permanent stage.
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: The size of the proposed Terrace, most, but not all, of which is in the Historic District area, affects the character of the historical landscape. If it were smaller and if it were linked to the above proposed pavers in the area of Water St., the historical character would be less affected. Reducing the size of the current hard surface terrace and providing some grass in the area would also provide more flexibility of the space, and be more similar to the historical context. It is difficult to tell from the plans and the images what the green horizontal stripes in the plan in that area indicate.
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: It might be better to have pavers instead of concrete – it is difficult to tell what type of ground material there will be. This should not be so stark as to be inconsistent with the open historical features of Bridge Square. The location and number of trees in the square but particularly in the terrace could obscure the view of the river and falls (see below)

5. Adding Trees

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: The Secretary of Interior Standards note that “New additions are not recommended that detract from or alter the historic topography, e.g., a new feature that would obscure an historic shoreline.” The location and number of additional trees needs to be revised to prevent the historical view of the river (a significant feature of the square) from being obscured from the square. While trees provide shade and have environmental benefits, the loss of the view of the river is a significant factor in maintaining the integrity of the square.
- Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: How big will the trees be at a mature age? Would they obscure the view of the river and falls?

6. The Riverwalk - north portion (is within Historical District)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan:
 - Details are missing about the width allocated to the “pedestrian walk”, “biking trail”, and “fishing area” between the river and the benches and circular planter. Is there enough room for all these users that seem to be sharing the same space?

- Details are missing about the planned bike lane connectivity at both the south and north ends. Does the “bike trail” violate any City regulations about riding on sidewalks downtown?
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: The bikers could be directed to share the paved area of the current street and the new proposed paver area in the closed street area to travel between 4th St. and Water across Bridge Square

Phase 2:

7. The Riverwalk – south portion (not in Historical District, but affecting Historical District)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: The planned removal of almost all parking in that area will affect the use of the Bridge Square as a shopping area, and will definitely require additional parking elsewhere which could possibly push parking into historical areas.
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: The proposed new design and lack of easy access to the Historic Post Office might also affect the future viability of the Historic Post Office – a serious, negative outcome. If the Post Office loses too many customers, Northfield could lose it in this location. Narrowing the area could also make it more difficult for the mail trucks to deliver to the Post Office. This area needs much more thought but there is time given that it is the 2nd phase.

Was the Milltown Bike Trail incorporated or consulted?

8. The Landing (not in the Historical District – won’t affect the Historical District)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: “The Landing” as described in the drawing and the video does not mention any areas in the Historic District or alterations to the dam. If any alterations to the dam are included in Phase 2 (or at any time), that will involve the HPC (the dam is a Historic Site), SHPO, and other agencies.
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider:

Phase 3:

(Note: Only general comments could be made due to lack of detailed information)

9. The Bridge (In the Historical District)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: The Bridge is a contributing feature in the Historic District. It is difficult to judge the extent to which the new design will affect the historical character since it is not clear about the details of the plan. While it is a good idea to improve pedestrian safety on the bridge, any change in details should retain the historical character. A clarification is also needed of the possible effect on access for the heavy 4th St. commercial delivery traffic (reported by the commerce interests) will/could be re-routed if 4th St. is significantly changed.
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider:

10. The Frame (in Historical District)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan:
- c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider:

11. Woonerf (in Historical District)

- a. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
- b. Are there any items you feel are missing from the plan: Details about the plans for making the street level with the sidewalks and Bridge Square area are missing. These plans would provide important additional space for some events in the square but could adversely affect the historic character of the landscape, depending on implementation.

If the street level is raised, details are missing about the specific options some of which would affect the historic character of the landscape, and others that could be compatible:

Adversely affecting historic character.

- Removing parking. The square has always been a commercial area and some type of parking and vehicular movement around the square have been available to the customers. Removing parking would affect both the historical character and affect the future viability of the businesses including the Post Office.
- Closing the street and adding grass on the former street area. Adding grass to the elevated area would change the historic character of Bridge Square

Possible options that could retain integrity.

- Use pavers to replace the concrete street that has been elevated (in a similar manner proposed for Water Street). The standards suggest that an original feature should not be entirely erased noting that “Designing and installing compatible new circulation features when required by the new use should assure the preservation of historic character of the landscape.”
- Keep the paver street open to traffic and retain parking; close street only for special occasions, as has been the practice in recent years. In this case, if the area of the current street were elevated to be level with the rest of the square and the original “shadow” of the street were covered in pavers vs. grass, it would acknowledge the historical street while retaining the “land use pattern” for traffic and parking used historically.
- As with the closed Water St. area, it would provide additional hard surface for occasionally use of food trucks, stages, etc.

In summary, if the street is modified by raising, the historic integrity could be retained by 1) using pavers to show a “shadow” of where the street was and 2) maintaining the “land use pattern” of the street serving parking, and heavy traffic and movement around the square, and closing only for special events.

c. Any additional comments you would like the City to consider: Have the businesses along Water Street been consulted about the changes that impact their parking? If parking is reduced here, it could impact parking for historical buildings or if a new parking location is constructed elsewhere in the district. Overall, losing parking is a concern.

Attachment:

- Review of Literature of Secretary of interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

Review of the Literature of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties¹

- I. **Historic District Designation.** Within the area of The Bridge Square Draft Improvement Plan, the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form identifies three contributing sites (4th St. Bridge, Bridge Square and Riverside Park), and one contributing structure (Civil War monument)². It also notes one structure (the fountain) that is non-contributing because it is eight years short of the 50 yr. minimum.
- Monument. Based on the Secretary of Interior standards, the “contributing” monument was dedicated in 1921 and should remain in its historical context/placement to retain its integrity and contributing status (for definition of “integrity” and other terms, see IV)
 - Fountain. Based on the standards, the 1980 fountain, if moved, would be eligible for contributing status in eight years. If it remains in place, its integrity would be in its location in a highly public, trafficked location; and is associated with a local artist, a nationally known local business (donor), and the sounds and vision of water that are connected to the near-by river and falls. Location, design, setting, and association are all aspects of integrity.³
 - 4th St. Bridge. The survey document indicates that the 1914 bridge was updated in 1986. “The original concrete balustrade, set between concrete piers, and historic lighting have been replaced with compatible steel railings and lighting. Despite the loss of the historic concrete balustrade and other features, the structure continues to retain enough historic integrity to be contributing to the district.”⁴ Details of the Phase 3 proposed changes in the bridge features are unclear.
 - Park. Little information was found in the 2016 Zellie survey and the related nomination document about the historical features of the park area next to the river as designed by Wyman in 1916. The National Register noted that “Both the square and small park both retain perimeter features from the 1916 plan by Minneapolis landscape architect Phelps Wyman as well as features from the mid-1970s and 1999 plans that introduced hardscape and additional plantings.”² More research is needed.

II. Treatment [bold added below for emphasis]

a. Of the four Sec. of Interior treatments of historic properties, the treatment for the Bridge Square site would be Rehabilitation (vs. Preservation, Restoration, or Reconstruction).

“Rehabilitation standards acknowledge the need to alter or add to a cultural landscape to meet continuing or new uses **while retaining the landscape’s historic character**”⁵

b. The Guidelines for rehabilitating cultural landscapes “begins with recommendations to identify those landscape features and materials important to the landscape’s historic character and which must be retained. **Therefore, guidance on identifying retaining and preserving character defining features is always given first**”.⁶ That first step of rehabilitation, as identified by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, was not included in the current planning process.

c. Some of the additional standards for “rehabilitation” include the following:

- i. “requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships”⁷
- ii. “removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided”⁷
- iii. “Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved”⁷

- iv. “The new work will 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”⁷
- v. New additions. . . or related new construction will not destroy historic features, materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property”⁷

III. “Alterations/Additions for the New Use. When alternations to a cultural landscape are needed to assure its continued use, it is most important that such alterations do not radically change, obscure, or destroy character-defining spatial organization and land patterns or features and materials. . . Such work may also include the selective removal of features that detract from the overall historic character.”⁶

- a. New additions should be avoided, if possible, and considered only after it is determined that those needs cannot be met by altering secondary, i.e., non-character-defining, spatial organization and land patterns or features.”⁶
- b. New additions are not recommended that detracts from or alters the historic topography, e.g., a new feature that would obscure an historic shoreline.”⁸
- c. Designing and installing compatible new circulation features when required by the new use should assure the preservation of historic character of the landscape, e.g., controlling and limiting new curb cuts, driveways, and intersections along a historic road.”⁹

IV. Definitions:

“**Historic character** – the sum of all visual aspects, features, materials, and spaces associated with a cultural landscape’s history, i.e., the original configuration together with losses and later changes.”³

“**Character-defining feature** – a prominent or distinctive aspect, quality, or characteristic of a cultural landscape that contributes significantly to its physical character. Land use patterns, vegetation, furnishings, decorative details and materials may be such features.”³

“**Integrity** – The seven qualities of integrity as defined by the National Register Program are location, setting, feeling, association, design, workmanship, and materials.”³

“**Significance** – the meaning or value ascribed to a cultural landscape based on the Register criteria for evaluation. It normally stems from a combination of association and integrity.”³

Footnotes:

¹ This research was conducted by A. Thomas who is responsible for any errors or misconceptions.

² *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Northfield Commercial Historic District*, National Park Service, United States Department of Interior. Section 7, p. 11-12

³ *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes: Defining Landscape Terminology*, Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, <https://www.nps.gov/Tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/terminology.htm>

⁴ Zellie, C. and Lucas, A, August 2016, *Northfield Commercial Historic District Survey Revision Project*, p. 9.

⁵ *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/index.htm>

⁶ *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes: The Approach*, Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties,
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/rehab/approach.htm>

⁷ *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes: Standards for Rehabilitation*, Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties,
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/rehab/index.htm>

⁸ *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes: Topography*, Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties,
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/rehab/topography.htm>

⁹ *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes: The Approach: Circulation*, Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties,
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/rehab/circulation.htm>