



MEMORANDUM

Date: February 17, 2022
To: Members of the Heritage Preservation Commission
CC: Mitzi Baker, Community Development Director; David Bennett, Public Works Director & City Engineer; Ben Martig, City Administrator
From: Mikayla Schmidt, City Planner; Reeve Needham, Assistant City Planner
RE: Heritage Preservation Commission Input on Proposed Changes to Bridge Square

This memo is to provide additional information regarding proposed changes to Bridge Square as part of the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan. This item was included in the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) meeting packet for February 10, 2022, but was missing background information and project context. Staff who have been more closely involved with the project were not available when the packet was being prepared and have since been consulted.

Background:

In 2014, the City created a Vision Plan for Bridge Square. As part of that vision plan, four alternatives were created for Bridge Square. Since the plan completion, no improvements have been made to Bridge Square.

Fast forward to 2018, as part of the City Strategic plan, the City created a Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan that was adopted in December, 2020. In June 2021, the City Council approved priority sequencing for park improvements, which can be viewed [here](https://www.ci.northfield.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/12109/Riverfront-Motion-to-Council---passed), or at: <https://www.ci.northfield.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/12109/Riverfront-Motion-to-Council---passed>. One of the early initiatives in the plan is related to Enhancing and Activating Riverfront Parks. Bridge Square is an early initiative, so the City needs to review those four alternatives, understand what we have learned/changed recently for Bridge Square and come up with a final concept, cost, and implementation plan.

The City has been working with consultants Bruce Jacobson, Bob Close, and Julie Aldrich to assist in this process. Their team has reviewed the 2014 Bridge Square Alternative along with the input/comments within the plan, met with City staff and developed a draft concept pulling features from the different alternative and incorporating the context of the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan.

City Council gave initial feedback on a modified concept at the October 12, 2021 work session, then preparations were made for engaging stakeholders.

The updated concept was presented to ten stakeholder groups. The HPC was included, and discussed the concept plans, layout, placement of features and offered feedback at the December 14, 2021 meeting. The comments from these stakeholder meetings are attached to this memo and accessible on the updated webpage. Minutes from the December 14, 2021 meeting are attached and the video can be [watched online](#).

The proposed concept and stakeholder comments were reviewed by Council at their December 20, 2021 meeting. This provided opportunity for Council direction and synthesis of the public comments received. The consultant then prepared a final concept for Bridge Square based on the Council consideration and public input.

Currently:

The proposed final concept plan is ready for additional public feedback. The webpage has been updated, a [press release](#) announced the plan on February 14, 2022. Additionally, [a video](#) was created to help provide information to the public and stakeholders and to assist in seeking feedback. In addition, four city boards/commissions are being asked to provide input on the final concept plan. Those include the Heritage Preservation Commission, Planning Commission, Park and Recreation Advisory Board, and Arts and Culture Commission. The proposed final concept plan and feedback survey have also been sent to the following stakeholder groups: Defeat of Jessie James Committee, Riverwalk Market Fair Board/Director, Chamber of Commerce Board/Director, Convention and Visitors Bureau Board/Director, Downtown Development Commission Board, Northfield Historical Society, Vets Memorial, and the Vintage Band Festival. Beyond these formal commissions the public are also encouraged to provide feedback on the proposed final concept plan by responding to the survey.

Participation and feedback from the HPC is valued and appreciated and will be shared with the City Council. The proposed final concept plan can be viewed at: <https://ci.northfield.mn.us/901/2021-Bridge-Square-Draft-Improvement-Pla>. Responses to the following survey questions, from the lens of the HPC, will be especially important as this project moves forward.

1. Please share a few items you like about the plan:
2. Are there any item you feel are missing from the plan?
3. Any additional comments you would like the City to Consider?

HPC Subcommittee to Review:

At the February 10, 2022 HPC meeting, the HPC formed a subcommittee (Barb Evans, Alice Thomas, and Jesse Steed) to review the plan and draft initial comments for the HPC to consider. The subcommittee will be meeting on Tuesday, February 22, 2022. All HPC members are asked to review the plan and individually submit comments to [Reeve Needham via email](#) by 8:00 AM on Tuesday, February 22, 2022. The comments will be shared with the subcommittee, who will review the comments and plans and draft a comment letter on behalf of the HPC. Then, the HPC can formally act on the comment letter, or make amendments, at the HPC meeting on Thursday, March 10, 2022. The HPC comments will then be shared with the project team and the City Council.

HPC Input:

The HPC serves as a resource and in an advisory capacity to the City Council and is being requested to provide input on the historical objects components of the Bridge Square project. The HPC's advisory role is outlined in the Land Development Code (LDC), section 7.5.4 (B), which provides in part as follows: *“Following designation of a heritage preservation commission site by city council, the heritage preservation commission shall act as a resource and in an advisory capacity to the owner of the property regarding preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation activities. Heritage preservation commission activity in this regard shall include participation in the planning and implementation of activities within the downtown historic district and other sites that have been designated as heritage preservation sites.”*

This Council request to the HPC for input on the historical objects of the project is important since as a City government function, activity, service and project on City-owned property, the same is not subject to City permitting and is exempt from the Certificate of Appropriateness procedures pursuant to LDC, sections 7.8.3 and 8.5.8. As a result, the City Council determines whether the project proceeds and in what form, but the HPC's advisory input is important for City Council consideration of the historical objects components of the project in Council's review of the final concept plan.

All feedback collected will be shared with and reviewed by City Council. The tentative schedule for concept plan approval by Council is in April 2022. Council will review and approve each stage along the way. Additional updates on the progress of this project will be provided as information becomes available.

Tentative Timelines:

- ✓ August 8, 2017 Council adoption of Strategic Plan Summary (2018-2020)
- ✓ October 9, 2018 and November 13, 2018 Council approved Resolution Establishing Riverfront Enhancement Committee and Mayoral Appointments
- ✓ December 1, 2020 – Council resolution approving Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan
- ✓ June 15, 2021 – Council approved Strategic Plan (2021-2024)
- ✓ June 15, 2021 – Council approved motion to support park priorities within the Riverfront Action Plan to include Years 1 through 5.
- ✓ October 12, 2021 – Council Update/Input on Draft Bridge Plan
- ✓ October 12 – Dec 9 – Public Input on Bridge Square Plan
- ✓ December 9 – HPC review and comment on draft concept plan
- ✓ December, 14 – City Council – Review and Discussion on Bridge Square Plan
- ✓ February 14, 2022 – Press Release announcing the Concept Plan, soliciting public feedback
- February-March 2022 – Board/Commissions asked to review proposed Plan and offer comments
 - Planning Commission
 - Heritage Preservation Commission
 - Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
 - Arts and Culture Commission
- March 13, 2022 – Survey closes
- April 2022 – Council reviews input and adopts Phase 1 plan