



# Central Park – 421 4<sup>th</sup> St. E.

Designating a Local Heritage Preservation Site

City Council – April 2, 2025

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# Agenda



- What is a local heritage site designation?
- What is the process?
- History of Central Park
- Legal Status
- Comprehensive Plan
- Recap
- Questions

# Local Heritage Preservation Sites



- “...certain places... are of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, landscaping, and culture and those locations should be subject to additional review as it relates to this LDC.”
- “The city council declares as a matter of public policy that the *preservation, protection, perpetuation* and use of areas, places, buildings, structures, and other objects having special historical interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of the health, safety, welfare and prosperity of the people.”

# Timeline & Process

## Type 4 Review



HPC votes to apply for local designation – Nov. 2024

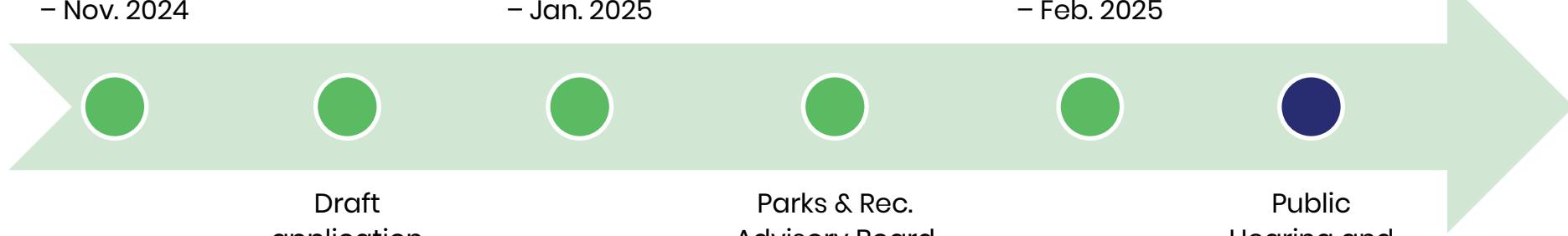
HPC recommend local designation – Jan. 2025

PC does not recommend local designation – Feb. 2025

Draft application sent to SHPO; SHPO letter of support received – Dec. 2024

Parks & Rec. Advisory Board recommends local designation – Jan. 2025

Public Hearing and City Council action on ordinance – April 2025



# Is Central Park Historic?



- General rule: 50-years-old; and
- 6 approval criteria shall be considered
  - Old vs. Historic
  - Affirmative for 4 of the 6
- Mirrors national designation criteria, adding #1 and #6
- Designation is made by ordinance, and findings must be adopted in support of the designation

# Local vs. National

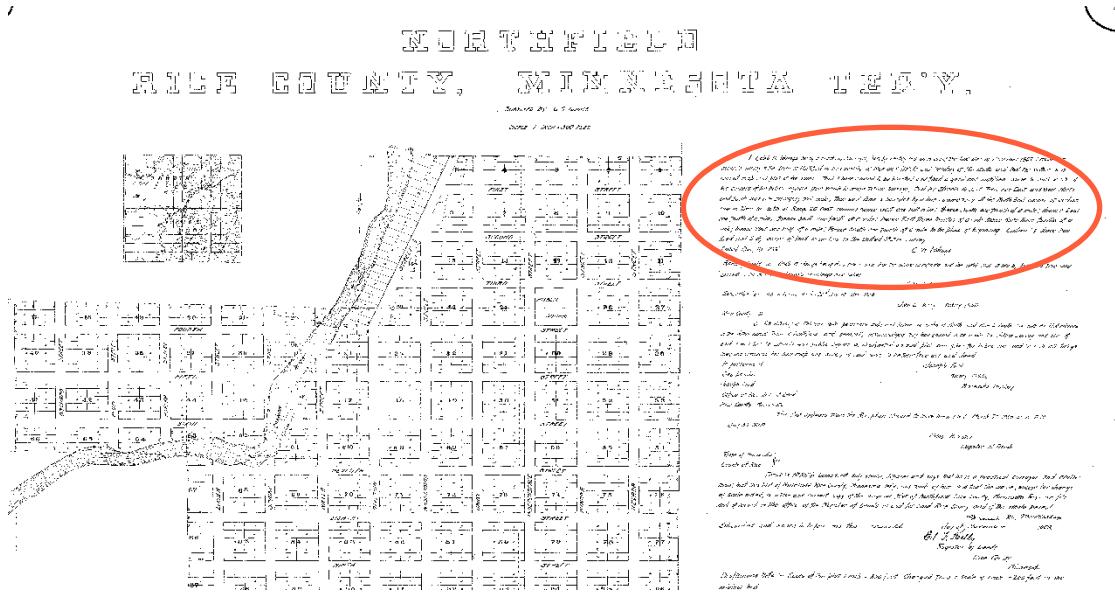


- Local designations protect historic resources – impose locally administered constraints
- National nominations honor historic resources – qualify for financial incentives

# History of Central Park



# Original Plat



# Caleb Iddings – Surveyor

- “...I have caused to be planted and fixed a good and sufficient stone to mark each of the corners of the public square from which to make future surveys...”

# Character - Defining Features

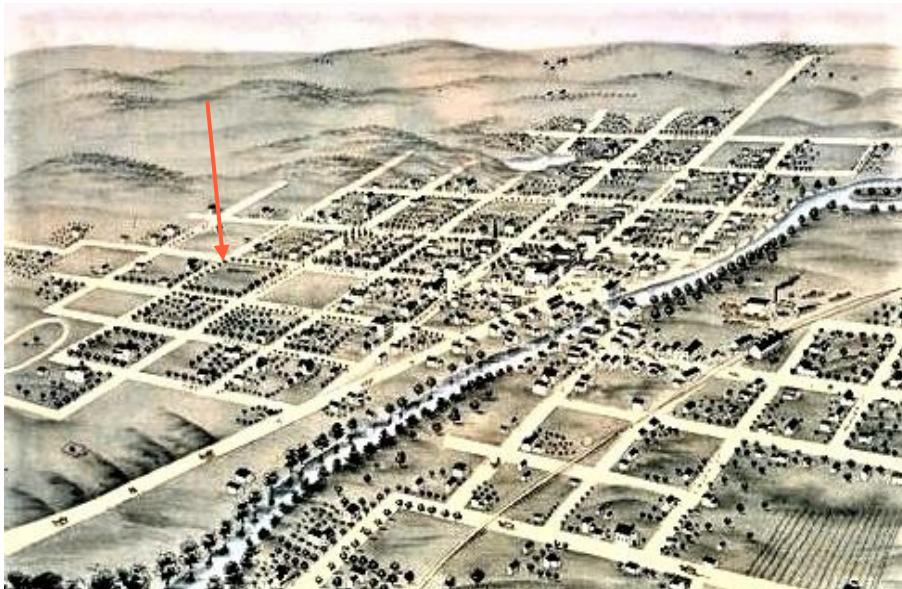
- Rows of trees along the perimeter
- Two diagonal crosswalks meeting in center
- Central circular plaza and seat wall



# History of Central Park- Trees



Rows of Trees – Circa 1869



Looking west on 4<sup>th</sup> – 1910



EAST FOURTH STREET SHOWING CITY PARK - NORTHLAND, MINN.

# History of Central Park- Trees



Seventh Day Adventist Camp 1912



# History of Central Park – Center Circle Feature



**Circular fountain – circa 1915**



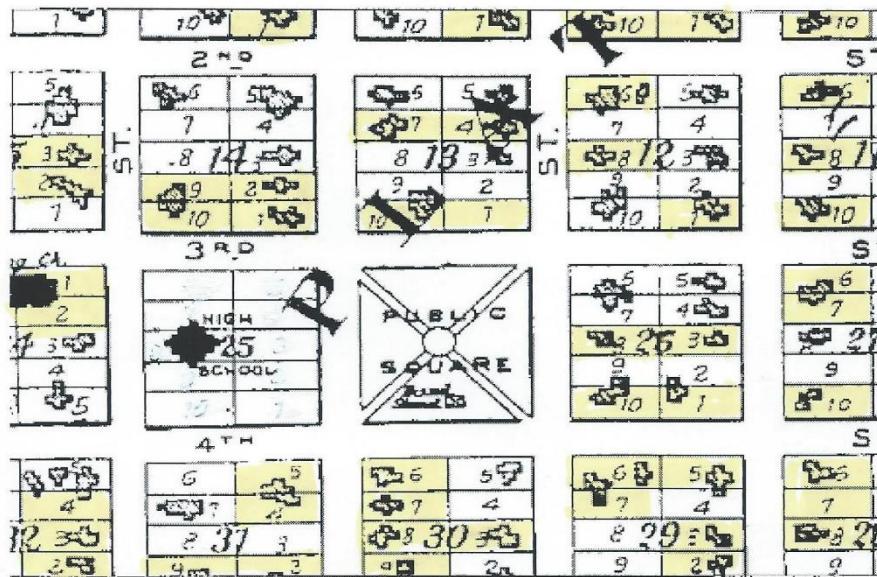
**Circular wall and plaza – circa 2017**



# History of Central Park – Diagonal Walks



Diagonal walks – Circa 1900 map



Current aerial



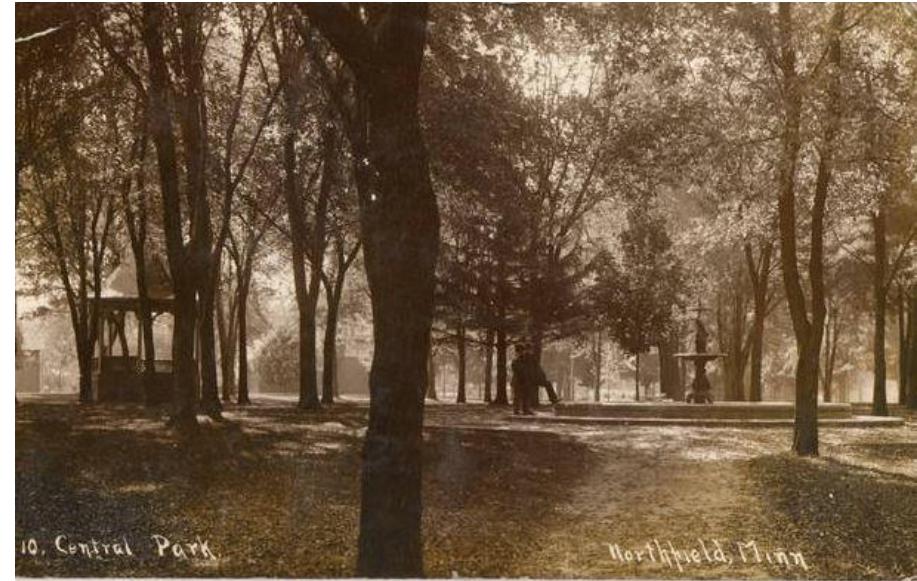
# History of Central Park– Diagonal Walks



Diagonal walks– Circa 1900 map



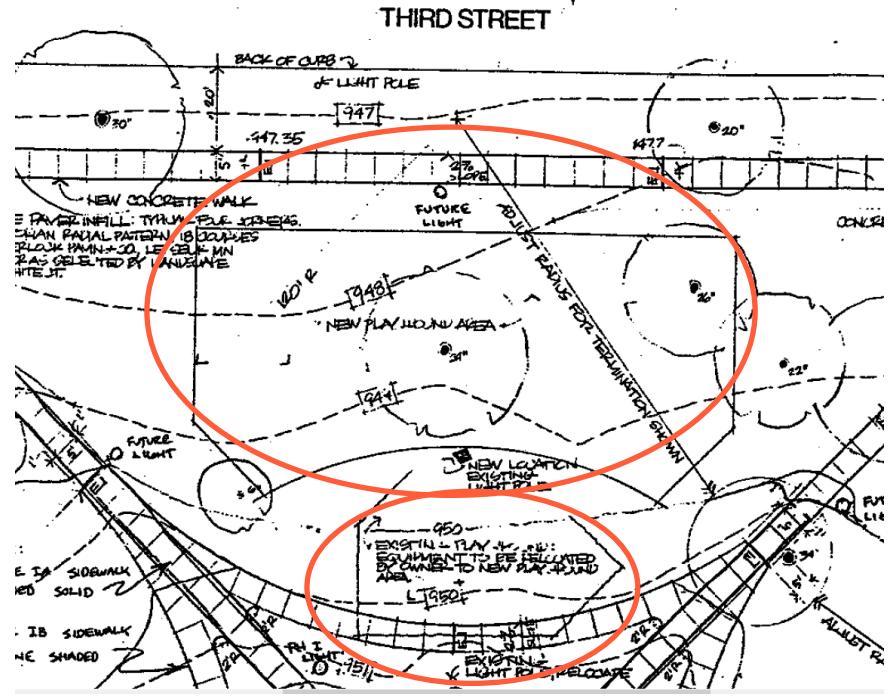
1910 – diagonal walks & fountain



# History of Central Park - Playground



- View to South from 3<sup>rd</sup> St. E
- Google Streetview 2023



# Approval Criteria #1 - Affirmative



- (1) That the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, landscaping, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; or
  - Central Park possesses integrity of design, setting, feeling, and association, and is significant to local culture as a characteristic feature of Northfield from the time of its founding and the earliest neighborhood.

# Approval Criteria # 2 - Affirmative



- (2) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
  - Central Park has made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Northfield's history. The site was included in the original 1855 town plat and designated as a Public Square for purposes of free passage or of ornamentation and improvement as grounds of pleasure, amusement, recreation, or health. The original surveyor, Caleb W. Iddings, also placed a stone at each corner of the Public Square to make future measurements from, and to establish the original street grid. The status of the park has been central to several court cases, including a Minnesota Supreme Court case that reaffirmed the status of the park as held in trust by the City and aided in preserving its historic configuration.

# Approval Criteria #3 – Affirmative



- (3) That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
  - The park was included in the original plat of the city as established by John North, at the founding of Northfield. In addition to founding Northfield, Mr. North was involved in the framing of the state of Minnesota's constitution and the founding of the University of Minnesota.

# Approval Criteria #4, #5



- (4) That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
  - Not Applicable
- (5) That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history; or
  - Not Applicable

# Approval Criteria



- (6) That have a unique location or singular physical characteristics representing established and familiar aspects of a view, vista, site, area or district in the city; and
  - Central Park's location is unique and exclusive to the public square established in the original plat and has continued in that use, uninterrupted, through to the present day. It is surrounded by some of the earliest houses built in Northfield, and located two blocks east of the historic business district. The park retains many of its character-defining features including two diagonal walks that cross in the center of the park, a central, circular area at the center, rows of shade trees along the streets, and the park-like landscaping of mowed turf combined with ornamental plantings, and shade trees. The park predates most of the homes in the neighborhood and is therefore a defining feature of the earliest neighborhood in the City.

# MN Supreme Court Case



## **Headly vs. City of Northfield 1948-49**

- The city sought to turn the park over to the school district for use as athletic fields.
- MN Supreme Court blocks move
- Dedication as a public square was incompatible with the proposed athletic facilities for the school.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Lawsuit – 1949-50**

- City attempts to condemn the park to take possession
- District court blocks the attempt

# Legal Status



- “Public Square” is a specific dedication
  - Uses are limited
- “The ordinary and usual signification of a public square dedicated by a private person, as here, for public use is an open tract of land for use for purposes of free passage or of ornamentation and improvement as grounds of pleasure, amusement, recreation or health.”

# 2008 Comp Plan



- Parks & Recreation Objective 2 – Provide residents with parks and natural areas for recreational uses, protection of the natural environment, and visual/physical buffering of land development as a means to maintain the sense of place, ambiance, appearance, and history of the community.

# Recap



- **Central Park is historic**
  - Dedicated at Town Founding
  - Basis for surveys
  - High level of integrity
  - Central feature of original neighborhood
- **Legally a Public Square**
- **Designation supported by 2008 Comp Plan**
- **Period of significance 1856-1954**
- **Character-Defining Features**
  - Perimeter of shade trees
  - Diagonal walks
  - Central circular feature
- **Staff, HPC, PRAB, SHPO recommend designation**
- **PC did not recommend designation**



# Questions?