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April 26, 2023

Revée Needham
Assistant City Planner
City of Northfield
801 Washington Street
Northfield, MN 55057

Re: Bridge Square Design Review

Dear Ms. Needham:

The City of Northfield has contracted with landscape architects Damon Farber to develop designs for the Phase I of the Bridge Square-Riverside Park Improvement Project (Project). The Project involves the rehabilitation of Bridge Square, which is a contributing property to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-listed Northfield Commercial Historic District (District).¹ In order to comply with the Minnesota Historic Sites Act and Minnesota Field Archaeology Act, the current project design needs to meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (SOI Standards)* to avoid adversely affecting the District. Rehabilitation is defined as “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions and features of the property which were significant to its historical, cultural or architectural values.”²

The District is listed in the NRHP for its significance under Criterion A, in the areas of Settlement, Industry, and Commerce, and under Criterion C, in the area of Architecture. The period of significance for the District is 1855-1945. Bridge Square (RC-NFC-400) is a contributing property within the District and is immediately adjacent to other contributing buildings and structures within the District. Bridge Square includes four individual resources: Bridge Square (a contributing site); Riverside Park (a contributing site); the Civil War Monument (a contributing structure); and the sculpture (a non-contributing structure).³ Although not explicitly defined in existing inventory forms or reports, character

¹ Carole Zellie, *Northfield Commercial Historic District (NRIS 79003125) Boundary Decrease and Additional Documentation*, prepared by Landscape Research, LLC, October 2020, Certified March 2021.

² National Park Service, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017), 2.

³ Ibid.

defining features of Bridge Square may be understood to include the contributing sites and structure identified above. Additionally, the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has identified the extant Water Street corridor between Bridge Square and Riverside Park to be a character defining feature.⁴ Water Street historically defined the spatial relationships of the two sites and surrounding properties in the twentieth century and helped shape the “asymmetrical triangular perimeter” of Bridge Square found in 1916 concept plans developed by Minneapolis landscape architect Phelps Wyman.⁵ Prior to the implementation of Wyman’s design, Bridge Square was an open dirt area with a central horse fountain (non-extant).⁶ The two large concrete planters, existing treescapes and vegetation, and topography and viewsheds are also important features to consider.

Based on information provided by the City of Northfield and Damon Farber in April 2023, updated design components include:⁷

- A “Sweep” design that retains the existing Water Street corridor as a stone-paved pedestrian walkway with the mountable curbs and safety bollards
- Retention of the “asymmetrical triangular perimeter” of Bridge Square and the conversion of Riverside Park into a “Gathering Space”
- A sunken amphitheater with precast concrete bench seating capped by a semi-circular pergola in the Gathering Space
- A “Living Street” design that transforms the south block of Bridge Square Street into a one-way roadway and bike path
- Retention of some existing trees and the planting of new trees and landscape planting
- Replacement of existing railing along the Canon River retaining wall with louvered railing; the installation of steel planters at the east entry to Bridge Square; and the installation of metal bike racks at the northwest entrance to the park, at the Water Street Bridge.

⁴ Kelly Gragg-Johnson, Environmental Review Program Specialist, SHPO to David Bennet, Public Works Director/City Engineer, City of Northfield, May 6, 2022.

⁵ Carole Zellie, *Northfield Commercial Historic District (NRIS 79003125) Boundary Decrease and Additional Documentation*, prepared by Landscape Research, LLC, October 2020, Certified March 2021; “Plan for the Improvement of Mill Square,” *Northfield News*, April 7, 1916, 1.

⁶ Zellie, 2020.

⁷ Damon Farber, “Northfield Bridge Square: Design Development/Design Meet 2 Power Point Presentation.” Provided by the City of Northfield.

A summary of the design review for Bridge Square, a contributing property to the NRHP-listed District, is provided below. This work was completed by an architectural historian who meets the *Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualifications Standards*.

The *SOI Standards for Rehabilitation* state that “The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property should be avoided.”⁸ The current design retains the Water Street corridor between Riverside Park and Bridge Square, thus retaining the spatial relationships between the two sites and surrounding properties. The retention of the Water Street corridor also retains the “asymmetrical triangular perimeter” first established in the early twentieth century. The extant asphalt paving and concrete curbs are not distinctive features of the street and the proposed stone pavers will create enough visual contrast between surrounding materials to clearly maintain the visual street corridor. The proposed paver color also references the dirt square that existed prior to the park’s early twentieth century development during the early part of the District’s period of significance. Moreover, Bridge Square will continue to be used as a park and gathering space, thus maintaining its historic function, and all contributing resources will be preserved. Therefore, the “Sweep” design that retains the Water Street corridor and the “Living Street” design that retains the north and south Bridge Square Streets, retains the spatial relationships and historic perimeters of Bridge Square and meets the *SOI Standards for Rehabilitation*.

The *SOI Standards for Rehabilitation* state that “New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.”⁹ The conversion of Riverside Park into a “Gathering Space” with a sunken amphitheater, concrete seating, and pergola will slightly alter the topography of Riverside Park, although this area historically sloped more steeply toward the river during the District’s period of significance. As proposed, the pergola will slightly diminish Bridge Square’s integrity of setting and the integrity of setting of the District, and has the potential to alter

⁸ National Park Service, 2017:76.

⁹ Ibid., 76.

viewsheds to and from adjacent historic properties. If incorporated into the final design, we recommend the pergola be as low and as unobtrusive as possible in order to diminish any potential effect on the integrity of setting. If constructed to maintain viewsheds to and from adjacent District properties, the construction of the pergola will not adversely affect Bridge Square or the District, as both will retain enough integrity to convey their significance. Landscape planting is not a character defining feature of the historic property, so the planting of new landscaping, in addition to the trees retained, will supplement existing vegetation and not alter the property or surrounding viewsheds. Likewise, the extant railings along the Cannon River are relatively new and are not character defining features of Bridge Square. The replacement of these railings as well as the installation of steel planters and bike racks will not alter Bridge Square's setting enough to adversely affect its ability to convey significance as a contributing property to the District. Additionally, if removed, these elements would not permanently alter the essential form or integrity of the historic property as the spatial relationship and contributing resources will remain intact. Therefore, these design elements meet the *SOI Standards for Rehabilitation*.

Continuing the ongoing consultation process with SHPO and the Northfield Heritage Preservation Commission as well as following the *SOI Standards for Rehabilitation*, will ensure that proposed work meets applicable requirements and avoids and adverse effects to Bridge Square or the District.

Sincerely,

THE 106 GROUP LTD.

Chris Hommerding
Sr. Architectural Historian



Tisha Allen
Project Manager

