



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

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Park Design Process – What to Expect

The project has been given the green-light for implementation. A design and construction budget has been established during an initial scoping phase to set the scope of work and determine a preliminary estimate for funding. A task force will be selected that will represent community groups, “friends of” groups, user groups, stakeholders, and regulators to advise the Parks and Recreation department during design. City landscape architects (with the addition of consultant engineers, architects, and/or other needed experts as the project requires) will now begin the ‘Design Process’ which will determine the new design of the park/facility.

For those of you not familiar with the Design Process, the following summary illustrates the various steps required in the process. This is a well established and very typical approach used by design professionals everywhere in the process of designing a building, park or amenity. The design process helps the landscape architect arrive at a finished site design that collectively utilizes all the design elements to meet the requirements of the project in the most efficient, cost effective, and aesthetically pleasing manner possible.¹

Remember that while the information and decisions made in one of these phases / stages forms the basis of the subsequent stages, design is seldom a linear process. Instead, one typically moves back and forth between the phases, allowing ideas from more detailed designs to influence and modify the overall design direction previously established. In practice these phases often blend into one another.

Design Process:

1. Project kick-off, programming and site analysis:

- a. **Project Kick-off:** The design process starts with a site history research (previous projects, plans, environmental information, etc) and base plan preparation. A kick-off meeting, which may include a site tour, brainstorming session, and general process guidelines will help to inform and set the program for the site.
- b. **Goals and Objectives:** What do we want the project to accomplish? Ideas stem out of the kick-off session and include input from task force and city staff. These are very important and at the end of the process we verify that the solution meets the established goals and objectives originally set forth.
- c. **Program:** Programming is the activity of determining the "program", or set of needs that a building/park/site needs to fulfill. The program includes specifics

¹ Booth, Norman K. *Basic Elements of Landscape Architectural Design*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1990.



such as how many picnic tables, what type of amenity, what kind and how many features. The program may be loosely set during the initial scoping phase.

- d. **Site Inventory and Analysis:** An inventory and analysis of all existing site influences includes consideration of views, traffic, site features, tree identification, circulation, smells, utility locations, context, neighborhood impacts, historic context, and regional concerns...., everything that may influence the design of the facility.
2. **Preliminary and Concept Design:** After site analysis and establishment of the program for a project, the focus in the design process shifts from what the problems are to how to solve those problems to meet the needs/wants set during the program. During preliminary/concept design, the focus is on the overall big picture (high-level) design. Here, minor details should be ignored and the focus is to create a coherent solution that encompasses the project as a whole.
 - a. **Functional Diagrams:** Program elements as simple bubbles arranged to establish ideal relationships among the functions and spaces.
 - b. **Concept Design:** Direct elaboration of the functional diagram that takes into account site conditions and becomes more detailed in content and graphic representation. The concept plan breaks down the larger bubbles into more specific uses and areas. The concept plan also notes major grade changes.
 - c. **Charrette or Open House:**
 - i. Charrette is an intensive brainstorming session where the public can participate with the consultants and staff team to develop project ideas and concepts. The design concepts are based upon the approved goals and objectives, site conditions, program, and budget. The goal is to develop several (3 to 5) very general concepts built upon all that has been reviewed and established. These concepts are displayed and everyone will have a chance for input by placing dots/notes (“dotmocracy”) by those concepts or elements they most like or dislike. This is not a scientific or strict method but simply a good means to obtain broad community input, dialog and discussion. It has worked very well for other community projects.
 - ii. Open House: Concept design has been done through the design team and task force. The public is invited to come and hear a presentation and offer input on what is presented via the same “dotmocracy” format discussed above.
 - iii. The consulting and staff team review and analyze all comments, concerns and questions heard from the community and use that feedback to inform the **Master Plan drawing** which will be reviewed, presented and ultimately endorsed by city staff and the task force.
 3. **Master Plan:** All design elements are considered and interrelated components of a total environment.
 - a. General material of all elements and forms
 - b. Plant materials as masses drawn to approximate size
 - c. Three dimensional qualities and effects of the design
 - d. Preliminary grading plan
 4. **Design Development:** studying specific areas of a project at detailed scale to refine the visual quality of the design by determining specific detail appearance and integration of materials.
 5. **Construction Documents**
 6. **Construction**