

CENTRAL VILLAGE PARK

A park in need of help in the Summit-University community a division of Ward 1



by:

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Dear Future Community Partner,

We are a growing group of neighbors concerned about the equities across our city's great park system with a concentrated focus on the green space at Central Village Park, located on Central Avenue West between Dale Street and Western Avenue. We are experiencing a significant number of changes to our section of the Summit University community, a part of Ward 1; especially with the addition of the Green Line, the rebuilding of Western Avenue and the recently approved plan to expand and revitalize Dale Street (rebuilding of the Dale Street bridge over Interstate-94, and related infrastructure to improve pedestrian access and walkability in our area).

With all these community improvements surrounding us, it would be heartbreaking not to consider the needs of Central Village Park. We believe that it is time to step up, work as a group, maintain the park, and straighten out some longstanding concerns regarding equity and equal access at Central Village Park for all people living and visiting our great community.

Overall goals as a community:

Short Term 2015-2016

1. Get visible park signs for Central Village Park.
 - a. At the current time, there are no visible signs to identify the park from Central Avenue; which is the main street that people use to access the park.
 - b. There is no signage along the walking trails or any "way finding" signs along University, Western, or Dale that point to the park.
 - c. The only sign with the park's name is located on the south corner of Aurora Avenue, behind Midas facing a parking lot. This sign is located in front of townhomes and is outside the designated main park area.
 - d. Our neighborhood schools (Capitol Hill & Benjamin E Mays) call the park "Spider Park" due to missing designation signs. Their explanation for the assumed name is because the playground structure looks like a spider web.
 - e. Vehicles have been found driving on the trails coming from behind Uni-Dale Mall and driving onto the park path because there is no clear signage or barrier blocking them.
2. Replace or repair the walking/biking trails throughout the park.
 - a. The paths are deteriorated and people with disabilities have difficulty using them and risk falling or getting stuck.
 - b. There are no curb cuts on the path where it crosses or connects to the street on Central, Fuller, and Aurora for people with mobility-powered wheelchairs and young children in strollers. Therefore accessing the park is limited or burdensome. We are also missing mid-block crosswalks and safety signage.

3. Relocate the single grill (behind 509 Central Avenue West).
 - a. The grill is currently used to burn trash, paper, plastic, and sticks. Its smoke is blown into residential yards; especially at 509 Central Avenue West.
4. Add 2 handicap accessible picnic tables and grill spaces.
 - a. People with wheelchairs or strollers must ride or push their way through the grass to get to the picnic bench with the single grill.
 - b. The bench does not have enough flat surface to accommodate a wheelchair or stroller.
5. Replace the “pedestrian only” signs around the park and along the bike/walk paths.
 - a. The signs are broken and so badly deteriorated that they cannot stand on their own.
 - b. To prevent injury to people walking on the path, the signs have been picked up and are stored away at the Central Village Park Block Club.
6. Replace the broken and missing benches along the walking trail.
 - a. Elderly residents walk the parks paths and frequently use the benches to rest; yet there are many areas where the benches have broken and have never been replaced.
 - b. With only one grill, people have resorted to using the remaining benches as an extension of the picnic tables.
 - c. Residents walk and carry bags of groceries and various goods through the park and the benches were a peaceful and relaxing place to stop before continuing their journey.
7. Add additional trash and recycling containers to the entrances of all the walking trails. Including more located in the park.
 - a. This will help reduce the amount of litter in the park and on the trails.
8. Stripe the soccer field.
 - a. The field is regularly used by residents, community programs, churches, and schools for sports related activities.
 - b. Neighborhood schools, churches, and the Ober Community Center would be allowed an alternate field to practice or use.
9. Add “NO PARKING” signs to the bike/walk trail entrances along Aurora Avenue, St. Anthony, and Central Avenue West.
 - a. This will keep the park entrances open and accessible.
 - b. The signs are a visible re-enforcement on the importance of not parking and blocking the path.

Long Term 2017-2019

1. Build a community shelter or group structure.
 - a. This is to provide and allow more community gatherings to take place at the park. It will also encourage and promote large parties.
 - i. There is currently no group structure or public power/electrical access.
 1. We recently celebrated National Night Out 2015 and it would have been awesome to have a group structure to

cook and gather to enjoy the event. Power access would help in community forums and meetings at the park.

2. Build a restroom facility.
 - a. Observation on not having a restroom facility or porto-potty.
 - i. Visitors and guest to the park & during National Night Out 2015 did not have access to porto-potty and had to leave early.
 - ii. Residents attending National Night Out 2015 had to go back home.
 - iii. We have Urban Tennis at our park over the summer and a porto-potty was not provided this year. As a result, kids ended up urinating on the trees or not participating in tennis.
3. Replace the sand in the playground.
 - a. The current sand is full of glass, debris, and weeds.
 - b. The ropes on the climbing structure are starting to show their age and may need replacement soon.
4. Replace, upgrade, and add lighting to the walking trails.
 - a. The current lights are not bright and only light up a small area of the path.
 - b. We recommend adding additional lighting to the tennis court, playground, and picnic areas because those areas are highly used.
 - c. We recommend adding lights to the soccer field to allow for evening sports to be played.

Our Voice on Central Village Park

Central Village Park was originally created to be cared for through a common interest community with “Central Village Association” as the overseer. In time, this vision was not followed through and lost because Central Village Association did not expand. Without any updates or follow-up discussion on how to handle the park going forward, the participating agencies continued to maintain the park and continued to overlook the varied green space and bike/walk trails; again based on the community’s original setup. It was not until recently [2015] that concerned residents started asking questions about the degraded condition of the park and sought out information and ways to revive it.

“The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.”

Theodore Roosevelt

On paper, Central Village Association is defined as the inclusion of all townhome associations between Central Avenue to Aurora Avenue and Dale Street to Western Avenue. Therefore, if applied correctly, Central Village Association is suppose to have the ability to be responsible for all maintenance and repairs with regards to the bike/walk trails and shared green space surrounding Central Village Park. However, the truth and a closer look into the path’s use and ownership presents a conflict because it is a mixture of individual private owners with a few townhome

associates remaining along with city owned bike/walk trails; this individual mix of different ownerships resulted in the lack of maintenance and repairs to the green space, trails, and park. This significant unforeseen situation caused a setback to the original intent of the area and created confusion with the maintenance responsibilities to the park and its paths; especially now that the trails are cracked and worn out. These trails are covered in trash from the increased daily use from the public's walking, biking, running, and enjoyment; especially now that the Green Line is up and running.

Starting July 2015, communication between Public Works and St. Paul Parks and Rec. helped pilot an update and acknowledgement on identifying which agencies are responsible for the maintenance to Central Village Park's walking trails and park space along with a strong community volunteer effort to keep things clean and trimmed.

"The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven and support well-located parks that can thus give back grace and delight to their neighborhoods instead of vacuity."

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Back in June 2015, our community reached out to St. Paul Parks and Rec. and Public Works about the need for maintenance at Central Village Park. In response, we received an open and proactive approach; including all trees in the park being trimmed, dead trees removed, and new trees are scheduled to be replanted in 2019. St. Paul Parks and Rec. and Public Works even worked together to clean up the eastern trails, leading to a very positive impact on the safety of the trails. The Parks Department and Public Works demonstrated actions that went above and beyond our expectations and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts. However, as a park that hasn't been a priority, we believe that more work needs to be done before it is up to an equitable level compared to its many sister parks.

A way we are striving for equal attention is through a request for repaired or replaced signs, more grills, portable or permanent toilets, upgraded playground equipment, new sand, building of a picnic shelter for large groups, and chalking of the field for sports, and improved lighting along with improvements for equitable access for people with disabilities. With outdated information on the books, we recognized that we are faced with confusion on the nature of the park and who is responsible for its infrastructure; which leads us to another issue...its name.

At the current moment, we have inquired about information on how to change the parks name through the Parks and Rec. Department but information has not yet been provided. We strongly feel our area and park would benefit from a new name. We believe the park should be named "The Hollow" in memory of the local Rondo

community park destroyed during the construction of I-94 which devastated our community.

Unknown to us, adding the Green Line increased the use of Central Village Park. From our observation, more people are using the park and associated trails as a path in how they get to and from work and use connecting transportation options like public transit. Although, the communication with Parks and Rec. and Public Works has been positive and is a stepping stone towards improving Central Village Park, they have both acknowledged the need for improvements in a sense playing catch up; which is an additional unexpected expense, not only for Parks and Rec., but for other responsible agencies as well.

We were made aware of the funding shortage required to bring Central Village Park up to a level that would be equitable, when funds were not allocated to it, a result of no community voice at the local parks CIB request lottery that takes place every 5 years and just closed this June 2015. As a result, we are trying to apply for some grants and, with fingers crossed, hope to be granted some funds that will help spark hope in building the park to be what not only the community, but what the City of St. Paul needs, especially in our area which has seen years of devastation, first with Rondo being destroyed and recently with the predatory lending practices related to the sub-prime mortgage dilemma causing many residents homes to go into foreclosure. Couple this with our extremely high poverty rate and it becomes apparent that people were, more likely focused on survival rather than the park and corresponding green space.

Although we have applied for grants; we are also aware that those grants may not be awarded and we would like to come up with a plan B. This plan includes asking Parks and Rec. and Public Works use our Right of Way (ROW) maintenance monies collected over the years to make needed repairs and upgrades to the park. You may not be aware, but almost all the houses that surround the park do not have sidewalks. The sidewalk a city lot would typically have in front of the house is in fact the park's bike/walk trails, since the backs of all our houses face these trails given the cul-de-sac signature of the development. Normally regular maintenance is done to sidewalks to mitigate the expense of costly repairs do to no maintenance being performed, yet in some ways that is what has happened at Central Village Park. We realize this may not be a possibility, but its one outside the box idea we wish to ask about. The other is to reach out and ask for donations from companies, and other private entities and we ask you to also request that the City of St. Paul, Metropolitan Council, and state legacy funds, provide resources to make this happen.

"We take too much of our heritage for granted. Harriman State Park is not Mt. Vernon. Nor is it Yosemite. But heritage cannot be measured on a scale..."

Mary E. Reed, Harriman: From Railroad Ranch to State Park

Overall, we would like Central Village Park treated equally while providing equitable access to the community. The park and bike/walk trails are a center piece for any community; and being the park is a gathering place for families, children, schools, sporting events, and people in need of a compassionate response, it should be an amazing green space to visit so that it fosters an environment that inspires hope, creativity, and positive feelings towards the future for all of those who stop by. These feelings will go a long way towards building our children into the future city leaders we so desperately need.

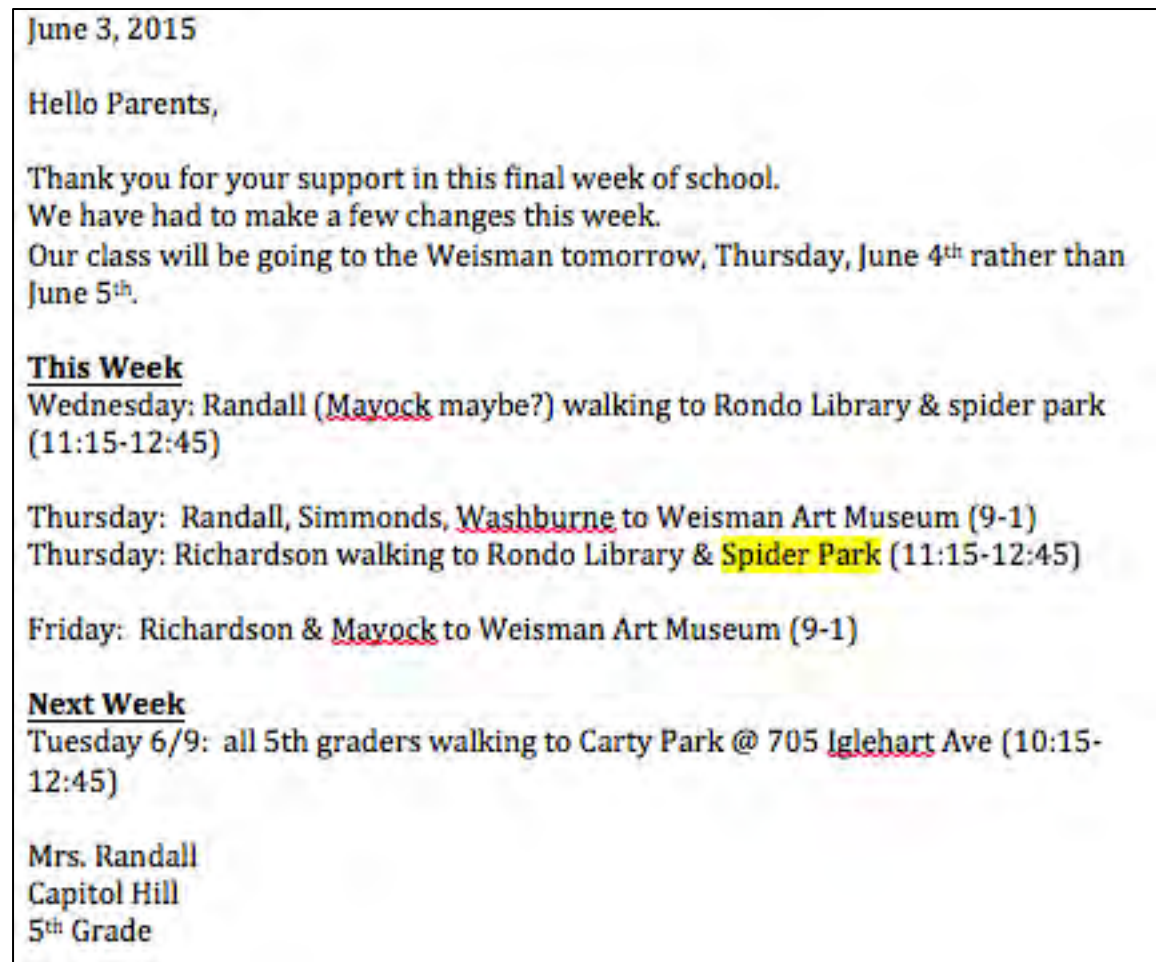
"I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong."

George Washington, letter to Francis Van der Kamp, May 28, 1788

We are reaching out to you or your organization to discuss the park, trails, and the opportunities to improve equity and equal access for Central Village Park. We present you pictures and facts related to the parks current condition and welcome an open dialogue and hope for a partnership, letter of support, and/or donations to move forward and maintain, fix, and improve the park for all our GREAT city's residents and visitors.

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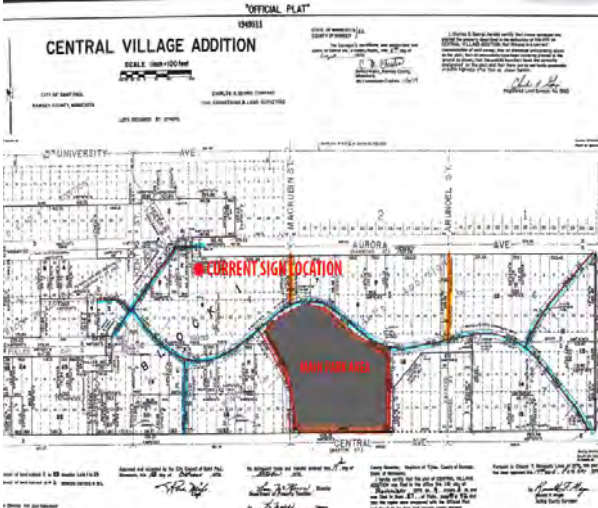
This is an image of a permission slip sent home on June 3, 2015 from Capitol Hill School referencing Central Village Park as "Spider Park". It is very hard for kids to return to a park or for a school to make recommendations on repairs about a park when there is no visible park sign in the actual park with the parks name.



Here are 3 pictures. The first is of the existing sign, second is its current location outside the main parks area of responsibility, and third of Central Avenue West where the park sign should be located [note: you can see the old cement footings from an original sign that deteriorated and was never replaced or repaired].



The current park sign is located outside the parks area of responsibility; this sign was placed behind Midas looking into an empty parking lot facing University Avenue.



The current parks area of responsibility showing the primary parks green space. NOTE: the red dot is the existing park sign.



This shows the North side of Central Ave West where a park sign once stood but deteriorated in the past and is currently missing. A park identification sign is important in case someone needs emergency services; this helps people tell first responders where they are, in essence to help locate the park.

Here are some pictures related to the condition of the sidewalks and walking trails regarding access for people with disabilities. Note there are no curb cuts making access via bike, wheelchair, mobility scooter/chair, or other means difficult and in some cases not possible.



A St. Paul resident cannot cross Central Avenue West towards the Dale Street pedestrian bridge during our 2015 National Night Out due to missing curb cuts. Installing curb cuts on all the park trails would go a long way towards improving equitable access for all people visiting Central Village Park



Missing asphalt along the Central Village Park walking and biking trails make safe navigation difficult.



Broken and uneven sidewalks make traveling along Central Avenue West difficult. As you can see here multiple attempts to patch the cement have taken place over the years.

Here you will find images of Central Village Parks only grill, both picnic tables, and our aging chess table.



The current grill and picnic table combo is not adequately accessible for disabled residents in wheelchairs.



There is one other picnic table, but there is no grill accessibility.



We do have 2 chess tables but they are currently in tough condition and primarily used for drinking games by people in need of a compassionate response.

Here is one vision showing what could be built to help accommodate accessibility for disabled residents in wheelchairs.



CENTAL AVENUE WEST

Addressing the accessibility needs of disabled residents is paramount in achieving equitable park access for all of our residents. If a shelter or group structure could be built this would also improve community conditions allowing shelter from the rain, and hopefully allow access to a restroom facility.

Here are pictures one of the deteriorated pedestrian signs. Some are missing, others are in tough shape, and yet others blocked by fence lines that encroach on park and city easements and are against covenants on file with Ramsey County.



Our pedestrian only signs are all nearly gone. Most deteriorated over the years and were never repaired or replaced.



Some were fenced in. With fence lines being placed into the easement setup to provide equitable green space reducing the Eastern walking paths to a narrowed cement path again this is against longstanding covenants



On the Western edge of the park the walking path/trail opens into the Uni-Dale mall loading docks, which make the trail look like a roadway. Vehicles often mistake this path for a road; only realizing it's a park path when they drive into the park and honk at children to move.

Here are some pictures of the missing trash bins, benches, and walkway conditions.



Here we can see the trail has heaved from the trees growth. This has happened over many, many years and shows that maintenance has been deferred.



Here we have another missing park bench with missing trash and recycling bins on the Western half of the trail.



and another missing park bench with missing trash and recycling bins again on the Western half of the trail towards Dale Street.



Here the walking path leads to Aurora. Notice the fences encroaching the walking path. No trash bins or park bench's are located here. Many people stop and sit on Xcel energy's junctions box located half way down on the left. Also, notice the car parked blocking the path exit.

Here are more pictures of vehicles blocking the walking path exits. Since there are no curb cuts, crosswalks, and there are not any “No Parking” signs. Vehicles often block these exits. This makes traveling by foot, bike, mobility scoter, or wheelchair difficult and in many cases impossible.



Here the trail empties onto Aurora. Because there are not any “No Parking” signs cars block the trails making crossing the road difficult. Many times kids are almost hit because they are coming out between the cars.



Here is a zoomed version of the above picture. Notice the street sign is also blocking the trail exit. Without the “No Parking” signs cars often block these walkway exits



Here is a zoomed version of from the previous page. This resident has a cane and if he needed to sit down his only option is to sit on the ground or on Xcel energy’s junction box. Again, the parked car is blocking the trail exit.

We are aware that like many public spaces, people will utilize them in whichever way they see fit. Overall the crime rate for the Summit University is low, yet at Central Village Park it is highly likely you will encounter people using drugs, drinking, and in some cases sleeping on playground equipment, this can also be typical of any city park, but with the Green Line so close we have noticed an increase in these activities. We also have a large percentage of people in need of a compassionate response who typically come to the park during the evening from the Dale and Western street stations and we implore our community to unite and help Central Village Park become an amazing green space for all our city residents.



Here is a mattress and blankets someone was using to live on the toddler play structure.



One of the various drug bags that litter the grass at Central Village Park.



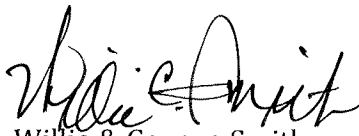
One of the various types of alcohol containers that litter Central Village Park.

Thank you for being a part of our community. We thank you for taking the time to read through our proposal/report. We hope to gather support to make some real changes to Central Village Park and leave you with a quote from former president John Adams that we hope inspires you to take action on our community's behalf.

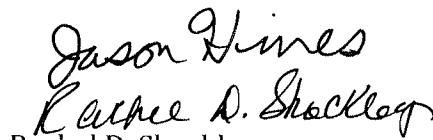
"Government is instituted for the common good; for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men; therefore, the people alone have an incontestable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to institute government; and to reform, alter, or totally change the same, when their protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness require it."

John Adams, Thoughts on Government, 1776

Thank you,



Willie & Geneva Smith
509 Central Ave West

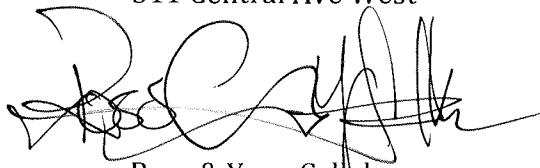
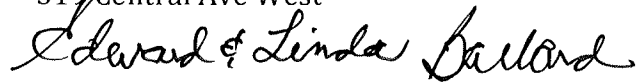


Rachel D. Shockley
517 Central Ave West



Curtis Finney & Angela Burns
511 Central Ave West

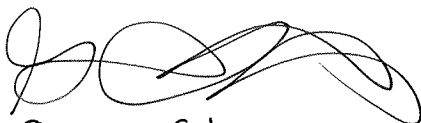
Edward & Linda Ballard
519 Central Ave West



Ross & Yeng Callahan
515 Central Ave West

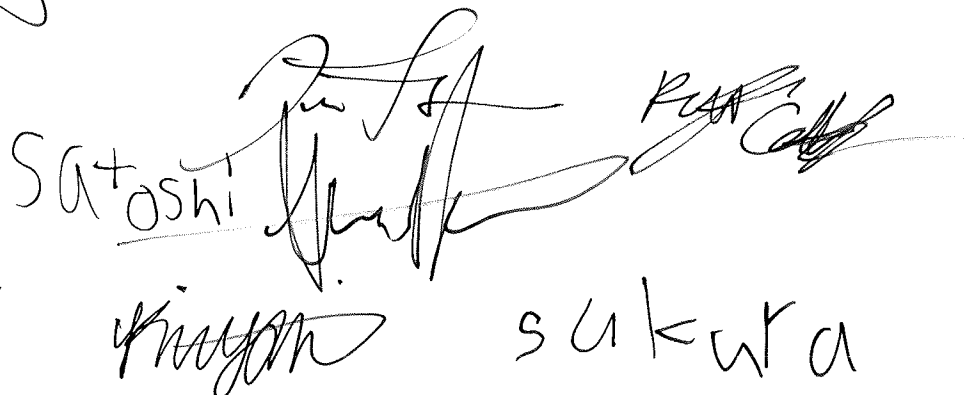


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16 Central Village Park



Satoshi Sakuta