

BRIDGE SQUARE INPUT SESSIONS

Mayor and City Council Meeting 10/12/2021

Following the presentation, the floor was opened to Councilmembers for Q and A. Several comments are noted below:

- Concern about how bikes will move through the square was expressed; we think there are several options and will study this as we move forward. The consultants should become more familiar with the City-wide bike plan.
- The Civil War memorial is not without controversy, as it celebrates an era when racism was prevalent. Relocating it – or possibly removing it – are possibilities but there needs to be a better understanding of the memorial’s history in Northfield.
- The fountain is popular; some interactive water feature should be in new plan. It doesn’t necessarily have to be the Sheldahl Fountain, although it should remain somewhere in the community. Moving it to the east end of the square has some appeal.
- The popcorn cart is popular.
- There was discussion about using the Water Street bridge for events (either closing it temporarily or adding wider walkways). This should be explored.
- Performance venues for small and large audiences are important.
- Flexibility of the park is important.
- The parking issue is important. If parking is removed from Water Street, how will it be accommodated? There is a previous district parking study that should be studied.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board 10/21/21

- more green! Could we eliminate concrete walks?
- We need the concrete walks; people in wheelchairs; baby strollers, winter use, issue with dirt trails and mud
- Question about whether new plans make sense if the dam goes away
- Yay for public restrooms!
- Parking on Water St.: worry about impact on Ames Park. Water St. is closest parking to Ames
- Parking is a problem throughout downtown
- Post Office and Muni: what is the status of these buildings?
- Ames Park: will it become a concert space per enhancement plan? Current it is not well-used. Don’t want to duplicate performance space at both Ames and Bridge Square.
- Maybe not so many “features” in Bridge Square. Keep it simple. Don’t load with “stuff”
- Used to be called Mill Square.
- Close Water St. through the park.
- Keep exploring kayak run in place of dam. Needs water retention structure.
- Like fountain, memorial, crosswalks, “balance” of hardscape and softscape.
- Kids LOVE this fountain; currently in a safe location.
- Like large green space in center

- Yes, remove Water St.
- Reduce remainder of Water St. to a one-way with one lane.
- Pergola is one too many “things”
- Don’t want improvements to negate already successful events that take place here
- more greenspace adds versus hardscape especially the arch through area replacing the water street.
- Appreciated the comment on the surrounding buildings and context. He thinks the future of post office and liquor store site are relevant to the area.
- Accommodate for fishers, bikers and walkers along there. they will use that space and need to make sure they have usage.
- Was in favor of closing Water Street.
- Other projects near area like the dam replacement should be considered
- Public restrooms: president historical society likes restrooms.
- Ames Park – concern on public parking eliminated.
- Parking is an issue downtown.
- Cannon river watershed—it’s not a pretty river so can we make it look nicer.
- The amphitheater isn’t as critical and maybe
- Less about activity and more about community meeting space
- Would be interested to go back to mills square name
- Public restrooms: would love to see it on #9 or somewhere else
- #11—in favor of closing water through park. Make it a one-way street through there.
- Push back parking on east side of Water St and eliminate parking on west side.
- Nathan Knutson: Feels memorial and Fountain are important. Like greenspace and connection to river like that., crosswalks, hardscape/softscape balance. Thinks arbor and amphitheater too much going on buildings are a nice backdrop.
- Better park with Water St. closed.
- Less about activity and more about community meeting space

Public Comments @ PRAB

- closing access to post office not good; needs to be accessible for folks who drive; could close in summer
- need the civil war memorial in the park; turning the eagle head is a long-standing ritual for this college town
- showmobile portable stage is “as good as they can do” Flexible and gone when not needed.
- Fountain should stay where it is
- Work with what you have now and just improve on it
- Fishing takes place on the waterfront promenade; need to be sure it would for others as well as fisher-people
- leave water street open, keep the war memorial, no value in the amphitheater, replace the dam not just remove it, felt differently about Bridge Square in the summer vs. winter

Arts and Cultural Committee 11/08/21

- Pergola: shade is important
- Could also have removable fabric shades on tall poles
- Like idea of expanding green space along river; all that parking is short-sighted
- Be sure to have power feed to park and expanded green space for performances
- Paved paths are important
- This is a town square; not a town park!
- I walk diagonally across the square to Post Office; probably can't accommodate that
- Interactive water feature would be nice
- Maybe there's a "bigger plan;" e.g. maybe the performance space should be elsewhere. In Europe, a square is simple and minimal. Comment is seconded: Analogy to European Square – that's the ticket!
- Does Bridge Square serve a purpose that is not served elsewhere?
- Current activities must be preserved and enhanced in Bridge Square; they are an economic driver for the community.
- Love idea of projection on Post Building
- Like idea of some flexible and some fixed seating
- More green space along the riverfront

Chamber of Commerce, CVB, Riverwalk Market, Northfield Historical Society 11/19/21

- How will this plan impact historic designation? Would altering it affect that?
- Very concerned about parking; for businesses to thrive we need it close in; should be dealt with hand-in-hand with Bridge Square plan
- Really concerned about parking – would severely limit how many could come here.
- If fountain has a splash pad, it's too close to the street. People sit around the fountain in its current location; they love it!
- See issues for how vendors get set up – access for vehicles, the stage, etc.
- Amphitheater not a wise use of the area
- Feedback should have been much earlier!
- I've heard this presentation 3 times now; many different opinions with little overlap
- Hadn't thought about historic designation; important! Are we working with the HPC?
- Concern with how sound moved in the space, especially with performance near the dam.
- Vendors need to pull in, set up tents. East of doing this is important.
- Amphitheater area would limit vendors there; slope is already a challenge.
- Public bathrooms very important!
- What will the cost be for taxpayers?
- Restroom issue should be solved first.
- Parking issue: hard to even park for lunch sometimes.
- Likes fountain nearer Division but not good for kids and a splash pad.
- Amphitheater would only be used occasionally. A designated use like this could be very limiting.

- Concern about noise at amphitheater – noise from the dam
- Layout looks lovely
- Agree with other about historic district and this park's role
- Parking has to be solved.
- Good access for vendors very important.
- How about convertible streets? Close off for specific events.
- Fountain needs to remain in the center – it is an icon, a focal point
- Splash pad is nonsense – this is not a play park
- Amphitheater and noise issue from the dam; he was a theater designer and likes flexibility, e.g. the portable stage
- War memorial – has VFW been invited to react? It is part of the Northfield history and historic district – and there's the eagle on top that college kids can turn
- Like more trees but be aware of how vendors use the space to set up
- Should not be an “everything” park; keep it simple
- Consider Post Office and drobox location
- Could keep Water St. in the park but make it convertible
- HPC has not seen this plan
- This area is part of the historic district and IS subject to State regs.
- Pergola and amphitheater compromise flexibility of the space
- Was historically a place to park and water horses; later cars parked there
- Top issue! Need permanent and quality restrooms close by...not porta potties!
- Trees yes. Can also preserve Water St.
- No to performance space. Noise.
- This plan becomes too formal. Part of its success today is its informality.
- Carleton has said no to bike trails on its property.
- Screening the electric transformer also important. (by popcorn cart)
- Parking is an issue, but riverfront is prime real estate! WE need a comprehensive parking strategy.
- Restrooms very important. Need a strategy for that too.
- Santa House is important winter feature on popcorn wagon site.
- HPC: very important to get their input
- No to amphitheater here but need one someplace
- Better to move fountain back...a little too close to the street
- Really concerned about parking
- Splash pad
- Amphitheater: not right use for the space. Looks nice
- I agree with what was said on behalf of RMF. My other thought...how is the sound going to be by the river/dam. Also, we need flat space for vendor set up and especially if we limit street space for vehicles
- How does sound move
- If we need to close the street
- Bathrooms: could benefit from those
- Parking is an issue its really important

- we can always close the street but may not always serve to close the street. Rather than permanently close it
- Fountain: thinks the fountain should be in the center of the park.
- Amphitheater: don't need it.
- War Memorial: historic district, has VFW been invite for input.
- If have to move it shift it closer to the fountain.
- Likes the added trees.
- Space for vendors on market fair.
- 1st yes its pretty, but at what cost to the tax payers?
- 2nd and really #1 public restroom should be resolved first!
- 3rd I think the fountain move is too close to the road and will impact the walking traffic.
- 4th parking, needs to be LEFT as is. if people can't park, they can't shop! Its already an issue.

- 5th Historical issues? The Veterans statue must remain.
- 6th Amphitheatre....Just don't feel it will be used enough to justify it.
- Bathroom facilities are really important
- Preserve trees
- Flexibility
- Noise of dam itself is a good point.
- Blocks view of review: amphitheater counterproductive. Makes it more formal. Part of the charm is the informality.
- Move the transformer

- I like the expansion of green space between 4th and 5th (yes, at the cost to parking in that space)-- # 11.
- This is prime real estate...would love to see it more green than parking we'd need to find an alternative place.
- Restroom: big issue.
- Amphitheater not in this space
- Added trees and greenspace
- Visually looks nice
- Could fountain move further back (being used all the time and even though not intended to be a swimming area it's a little close to the street).
- Lovely plan with some tweaks could make the downtown even more special than it is.

Vintage Band Festival 12/1/21

- Always a focus at Bridge Square – most events there; a natural center of activity
- Supports economic activity downtown
- Have had success with the portable stage
- Love the idea of a stage more toward the center of the square. The fountain and memorial do compromise thee flexibility

- Portable stage can be too small sometimes, ex. a performance by 50 musicians
- Take a look at Hastings and LaCrosse WI for great riverfront stages; see right through them to the river.
- Love the fountain and memorial; favors moving fountain east and memorial to Vets park
- Another use could supplant the Post Office; this is not a sacred site for the Post office.
- Think of the entire downtown, esp. Division St. as a place to celebrate music of the past – venues throughout downtown (strolling down Division, etc.
- We bring music to the neighborhoods
- Do want to engage with the river better
- Permanent stage would need a lot of ongoing maintenance
- Used to be a permanent stage at Central Park; maybe make a stronger relationship between Bridge Square and Central Park
- Could imagine Ames as an alternative site
- Like the idea of portability – can order the right size of stage
- Every 3 years the festival is for four days; other years just one day
- Please come to the festival! It's the best way to see how spaces are used
- Parking not so much of a problem. Many people walk in.
- 15,000 people attend over four days
- Full square is 800 people +/-
- On a full day, 2000 people in Bridge Square
- Alternative venues should be considered "in addition to" Bridge Square; not "instead of"
- Small groups of musicians strolling down Division and playing
- Central Park has a role with the Northfield Arts Guild
- Most important: don't remove from downtown!
- Use Odd Fellows Park Pavilion a lot (over by St. Olaf campus)
- 4 hours to set up and take down the Showmobile for a one hour performance
- For the four-day event they rent an even larger stage

The #1 priority for Vintage Band Festival is to have a dedicated performance venue on the South/west side of Bridge Square that will not only accommodate the Showmobile, but that is large enough for a stage bigger than the Showmobile. It would be ideal if that stage were a permanent structure in the square, but if not, the area should be level and strong enough to allow for a rental stage. As a side note, it's our observation that the Showmobile is aging and at some point in the near future will need to be replaced.

If this isn't possible, Vintage Band Festival would continue to place its stage in the street in front of the Post Office as has been done since 2006.

There are two recent and nearby examples of the type of structure that would work well for band concerts in Bridge Square. Both the cities of Hastings, MN and La Crosse, WI have constructed riverfront performance venues in the past five years. Follow the links for pictures and descriptions. The Hastings performance structure was funded by the Rotary Club.

Other Northfield organizations that regularly present musical performances in Bridge Square are the Northfield Community Band, the Defeat of Jesse James Days, the Northfield Arts Guild, Riverwalk Market Fair, the NDDC, the Chamber of Commerce and the Northfield Public Library.

In addition to the above priority, Vintage Band Festival supports the following concepts:

- moving the Sheldahl fountain as far east in the Square as possible.
- moving the Soldiers and Sailors monument away from the center of the square. It's fine with us if the monument is moved to another location in the community such as Veterans Park.
- permanently closing off the Water Street segment in Bridge Square.
- making the center of the Square open from the far east side to the Riverwalk.
- minimizing the amount of green grass in the Square. The increasing amount of event activity in the Square makes it impossible to maintain the lawn's aesthetic appearance. For most of the summer, the grass is trampled and fading from green to brown.
- keeping the tree canopy on the north, south and west perimeters of the square.
- making Bridge Square changes in a collaborative way so that they benefit all organizations that currently use the square.

Concerns regarding some of the proposed options presented to the City Council fall 2021: The proposed amphitheater on the western edge of the square is problematic. The noise from the dam will drown out any performing group beyond about ten feet from the performers. Adding tiered seating facing the river will adversely affect our audience. If our performing area is east of the tiered seating, our stage will hide the ensembles. If our stage is in the street in front of the Post Office, the tiered seating is facing the wrong direction.

The concept showing additional green space in Water Street south of Bridge Square will severely restrict our use of the area as a loading and unloading zone for our musicians and technicians. In fact, we would like the City to consider the permanent closure of "No Name Street" on the south side of Bridge Square to vehicular traffic and making the Water Street parking area a parking lot, not a through street. This would mean relocating the Post Office drop box somewhere else downtown, but it could be done. This would greatly enhance public safety in Bridge Square. It would also present additional design possibilities as the plaza would actually become more of an actual geometric rectangle and not an oval as it currently is.

Defeat of Jesse James Days 12/2/21

- Currently have tie downs in Water St. for the big tents
- Porta-potties: 20 at Water St. (existing ones go away temporarily); 6-8 at 4th St. bridge; up to 28 around Bridge Square alone
- Garbage and recycling throughout downtown; well maintained and emptied often
- Beer tent area is referred to as the "Entertainment Center"
- Info booth at historic bank – SE corner of the park
- 22 vendors +/- at Bridge Square; many locate on closed Water St. (need to support the weight of the food trucks as well)

- 4th St. and 4th St. bridge are closed
- 5th St. between Water and Division – closed for handicapped parking
- Shuttle service offered on Saturdays only, their busiest day
- All venues are within walking distance
- Income from the carnival is high; have had to move it when there was flooding
- War memorial and fountain do not hinder their activities
- Pergolas shown on plan would be a problem for food vendors; current street there works great for their large trucks
- Small stage located at Entertainment Center
- There is electrical power to Bridge Square for vendors and others; 3 electrical transformer boxes on the square
- Safety is a priority; want good surfaces to walk on. The event is very hard on spaces/surfaces
- Incredible cleanup; the Monday after DJJD is done, everything is totally back to normal
- Have drone footage of the event (since shared with us)

Veterans Park Memorial Board 11/29/21

- If Civil War Memorial is relocated, find a location elsewhere in the community that isn't near the Veterans Memorial.

Heritage Preservation Commission 12/9/21

- Civil War Memorial is a historic contributing asset to the historic district, moving it would diminish its contribution to the square
- General concern with moving or relocating the monument without damaging it
- Memorial should stay in a position of prominence
- Open to closing water street, but support vendors and other events, make Water Street more like a European plaza
- Fountain and Civil War memorial are preferred for seating areas
- The noise for the dam and an amphitheater that close won't work well with sound.
- Greening the space with grass had its practical limit due to the number of people that gather at the square
- Don't add a pergola or other structure, takes away from the flexibility of the space
- Restrooms are important, but could be located off the square within a block
- Projection of movie or other would work better on the south side of Ames Mill from Ames Park
- Like the idea of expanding the green space along water street south of Bridge Square, but parking spaces are heavily used.
-