

RIDGEDALE COMMONS

Planning A Green Catalyst For Suburban Transformation

/ Location /

Minnetonka, MN
Ridgedale Area Planning

/ Category /

Planning

/ Abstract /

Ridgedale Commons is the nation's first signature park within active mall property. We've seen that parks can revitalize urban areas, but can they transform a mall parking lot into a rich and diverse community? The City of Minnetonka aims to find out with this bold urban planning effort.

City leaders and planners in Minnetonka, Minnesota understood this and began to reimagine their town's sprawling suburban mall's future. This landscape architect-led team of designers and planners strategized with the city a multi-phased plan to bring life back to a part of the city which was rapidly declining.

/ Narrative /

Ridgedale Mall is a sprawling complex of retail, restaurant, and entertainment space, surrounded by a sea of asphalt parking. Cherished for decades as a popular destination for residents and visitors, today the mall has a formidable adversary: the internet. The original vision for shopping malls set forth by Victor Gruen was a concept of mixed use community gathering areas, not the car-centric destinations they became. This planning effort starting with a public park is a pivot point towards accomplishing that original vision.

City Planners engaged a team of consultants to discuss the impacts to the city and to reimagine the future of this part of their community. Planning efforts resulted in tangible moves the city could make to reinvest tax dollars and set the stage for a long-term, multi-phased transformation.

The main circulator road which wraps around the east and south sides of the mall has been converted into a parkway style road with landscaped medians and boulevards, sidewalks to improve walkability, trails that connect to a regional system, and branded public realm amenities for a cohesive aesthetic. This initial investment has set the stage for further public and private developments.

The planning identified a piece of land situated between the mall and the county library as an ideal location for a new 2-acre urban park.. The city agreed and negotiated with multiple entities to re-plat and purchase that part of the mall's property. The park is intended to become the nucleus of a future neighborhood expected to grow up around it. Catalyst public projects require innovation and creativity to attract private development.

Initial planning, compelling graphics, and public outreach have proven effective at attracting high quality, high density housing adjacent to the project site even before the park's construction. Further planning imagines infill of additional mixed-use buildings on the sprawling mall parking lot.

As more density is constructed around the mall a vibrant community will be realized, self-supporting, and desirable. To envision this the landscape architecture team lead a public outreach and engagement effort. Over the course of a few intense months the team surveyed the community, held a pop-up engagement event at a rock concert, connected with library patrons and staff, hosted an open house and installed project displays at the Mall. The process revealed the desires of the community and informed the park planning and design..

Early studies explored how the park design could support the program that stemmed from the engagement process. The landscape architects balanced the need for the park to host large community events and feel comfortable for daily use. A gestural vision began to emerge with circular forms and linked program spaces. Through scaled diagrams the team conveyed programming which accommodated a variety of uses including concerts, movies on the lawn, skating on the plaza, and seasonal markets. Activating the park with these events will be crucial to the establishing it as a cherished place within the community.

The design creates a series of spaces over the 2-acre site and balances the hard and softscape to create a comfortable urban park setting. Anchored by a circular lawn on the west and plaza on the east, both will play key roles in the event programming. An interactive fountain, pollinator garden room,

forest lounge and park building provide further amenities and destinations for visitors.

The water feature provides an embossed map of two iconic regional water bodies: Lake Minnetonka and Minnehaha Creek. The programmed fountain will fill a carved granite plaza representing the lake and flow down the figurative Minnehaha Creek before being captured in an underground tank to be reused for irrigation.. The interpretive water feature will educate visitors about their watersheds, water quality, and celebrate our most precious resource. The design invites children to interact in multiple ways and accommodates accessible interaction on the plaza level.

Sustainable design strategies emanate throughout the design including a cistern to capture rainfall and fountain water for reuse as irrigation. A native plant palette, local indigenous stone paving, a significant increase

in site permeability, and a bee lawn for pollinators round out other approaches.

The planning and design for Ridgedale Commons are worthy of recognition for the transformative impact the landscape architects have contributed to this community as it seeks to pivot towards a better and more meaningful future for these important community assets. The underlying design concept, space programming, stunning illustrations, technical aptitude, and sustainable practices can be a precedent for other malls to transform into more welcoming a public destinations for the entire.



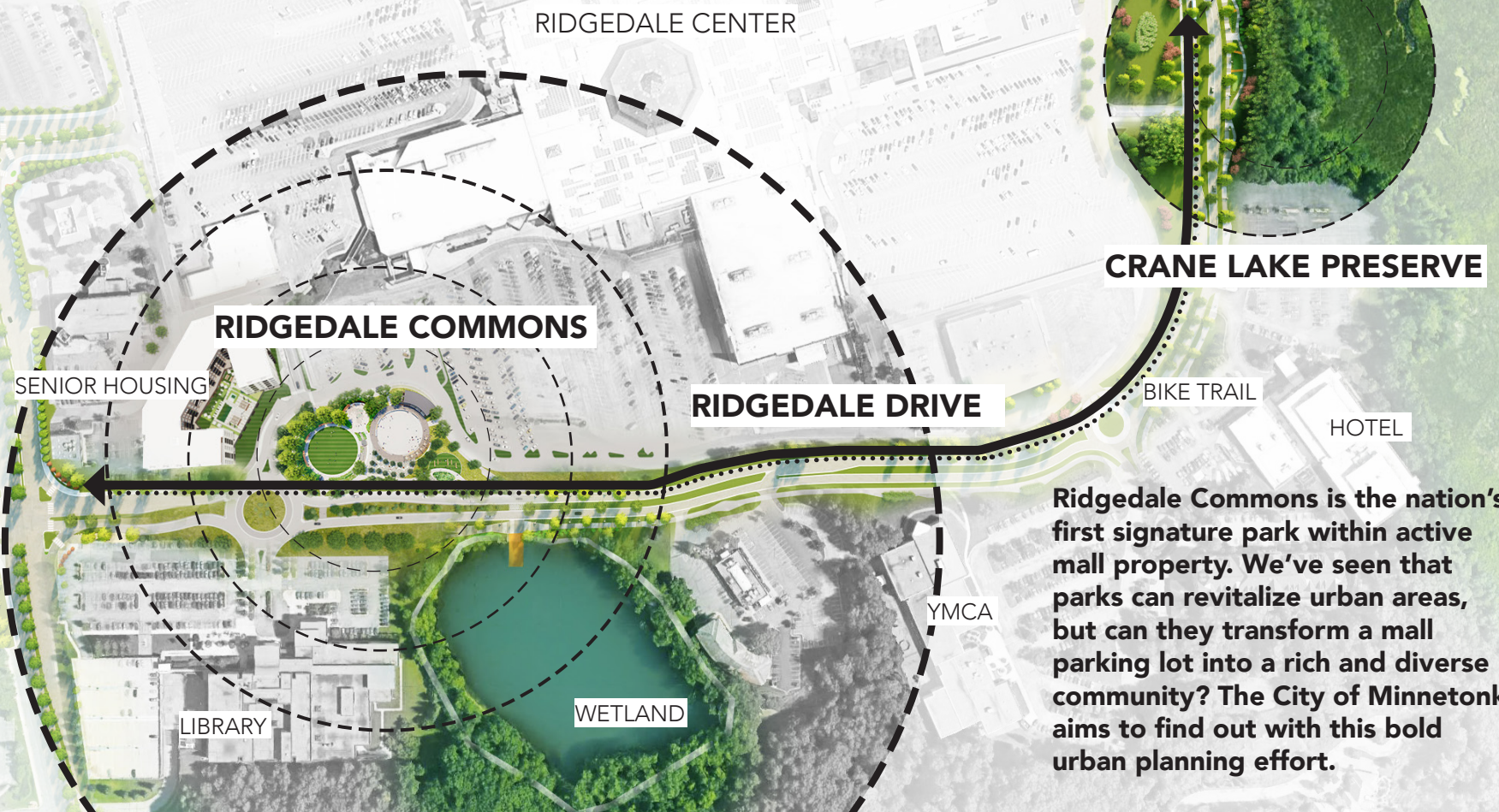
RIDGEDALE COMMONS

“ We spent fifty years building and living in these suburban landscapes, and we must spend the next fifty retrofitting them... ”

— June Williamson
Author of “Retrofitting Suburbia”

WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF THE SUBURBAN MALL?

A GREEN CATALYST FOR SUBURBAN TRANSFORMATION



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GREEN CATALYST

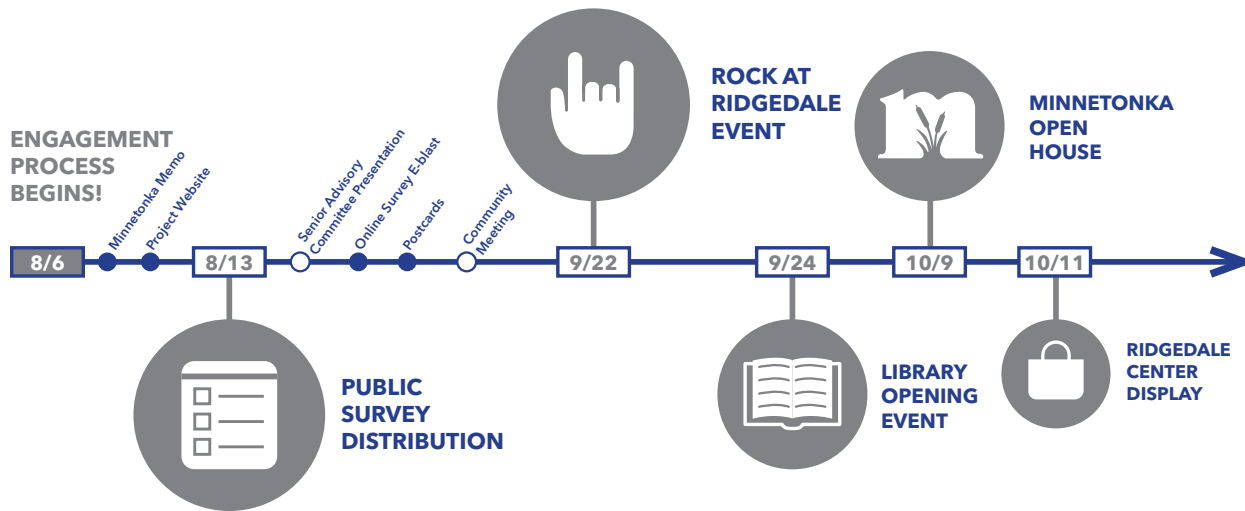


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ENGAGE



ROCK AT RIDGEDALE EVENT



Partnering with the City, we developed a robust and truly engaging process that elicited high community participation in a “Rock at Ridgedale” event. The park was mapped out on site and visitors were asked for in-depth feedback which was used to establish the direction of park planning, design, and programming.

NEW PARK AT RIDGEDALE

a community-level urban park

2 ACRE NEW PARK

- create identity for mixed-use community
- vibrant and welcoming gathering space
- a place to see and be seen

Currently focusing on community outreach & engagement to inform concept designs- share your input!

New Park survey & project updates available at eminnetonka.com/newpark

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE OR DO IN A NEW PARK AT RIDGEDALE?

POST-IT HERE!

NEW PARK AT RIDGEDALE

a community-level urban park

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO IN YOUR PARK?
Place dots by your top 5 favorite things

ON THE GO

RESTITE & RELAXATION

NEW PARK AT RIDGEDALE

a community-level urban park

THE RIGHT VIBE

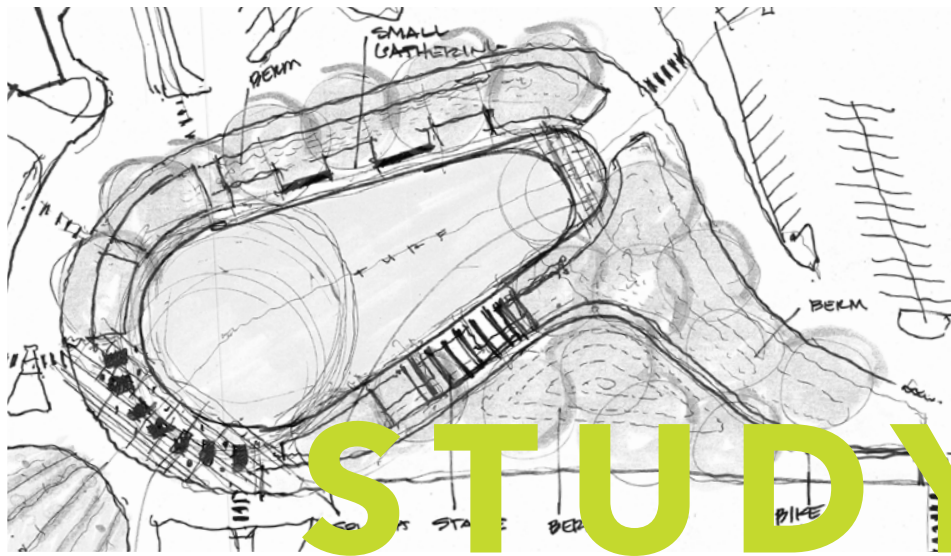
Which of the parks below are closest to what you'd like to see for the New Park at Ridgedale?



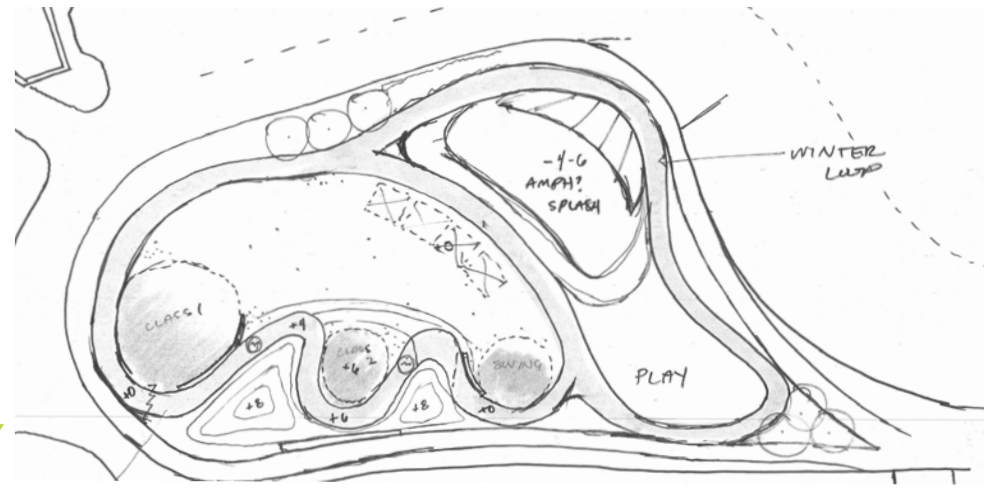
Over the course of a few intense months – the team surveyed the community, did pop-up engagement at a rock concert, connected with stakeholders, hosted an open house and set up displays. Afterwards, we measured feedback and represented what was heard and how this feedback would be used.

LISTEN

LARGE OPEN LAWN SURROUNDED BY GREEN ROOMS

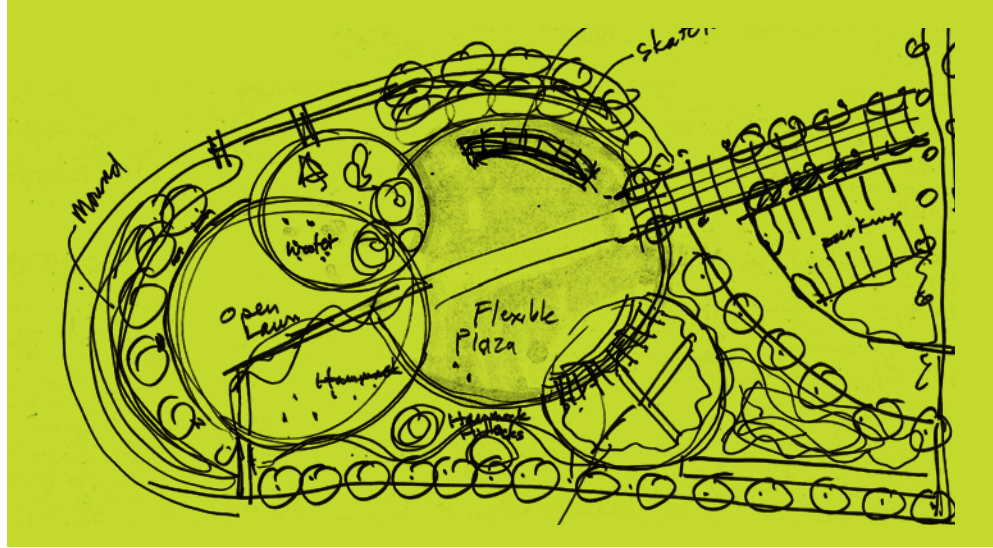


ICE RIBBON PARK WITH AMPHITHEATER



STUDY

ABSTRACT, PLAYFUL PARK WITH FLEXIBLE EVENT SPACES



CIRCLE GEOMETRY WITH INTERSECTING GRID AND PARKING



The engagement process revealed the desires of the community and informed the park planning and design going forward. Early studies from team charrettes explored how the form and development of the park design could support the program that stemmed from the engagement process.

VISION

The park is planned as a series of spaces over a 2-acre site, many circular in form, that strike a balance between spaces equipped for large civic gatherings, and moments for respite. A series of unique "rooms" create a variety of experiences that each recall the character of Minnetonka.



AVIDOR BUILDING

RIDGEDALE MALL

LAKE EFFECT

PAVILION

MALL PARKING / FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

LAWN

PLAZA

THE RIVULET

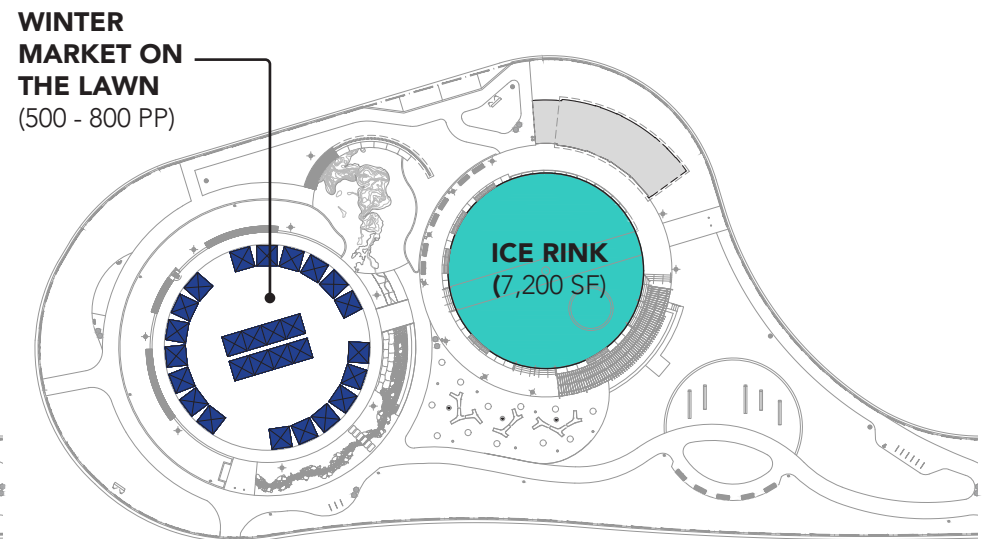
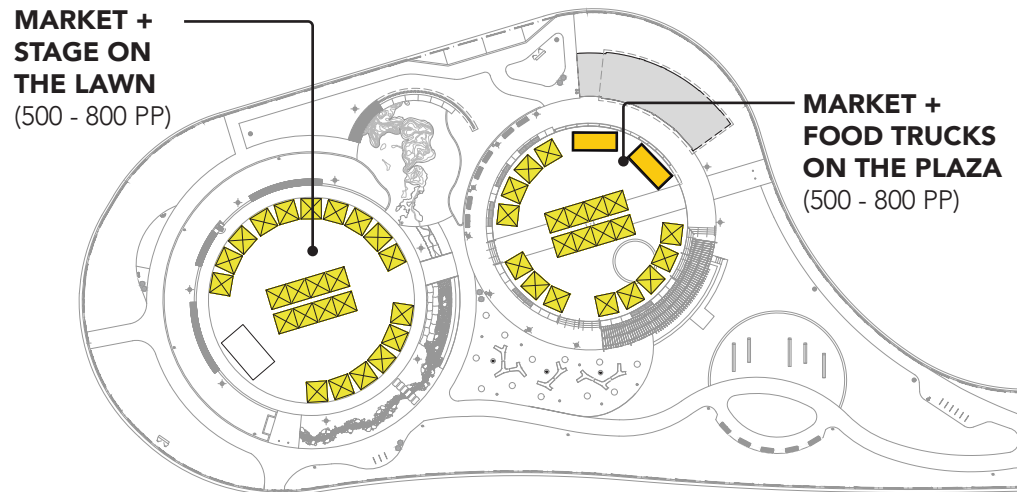
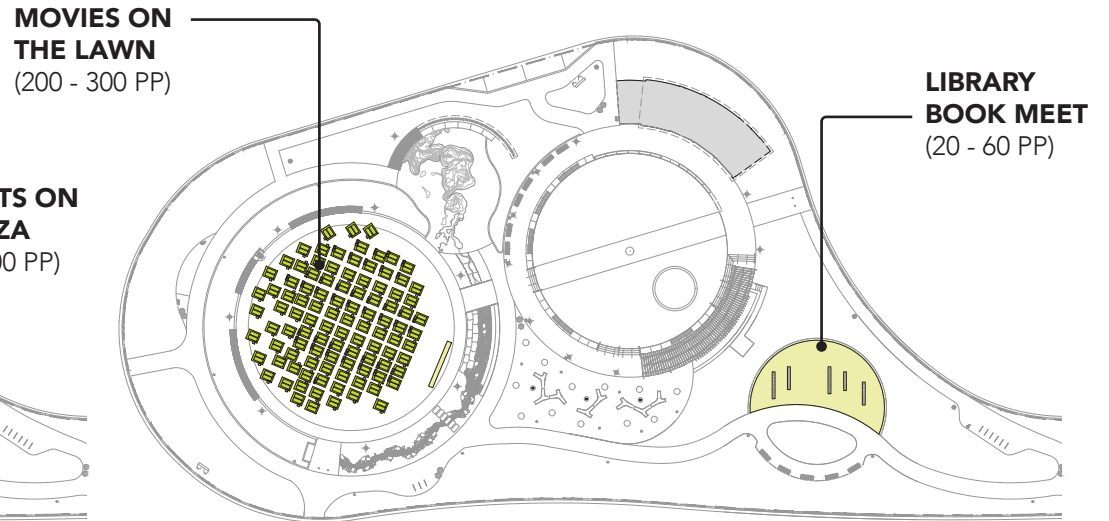
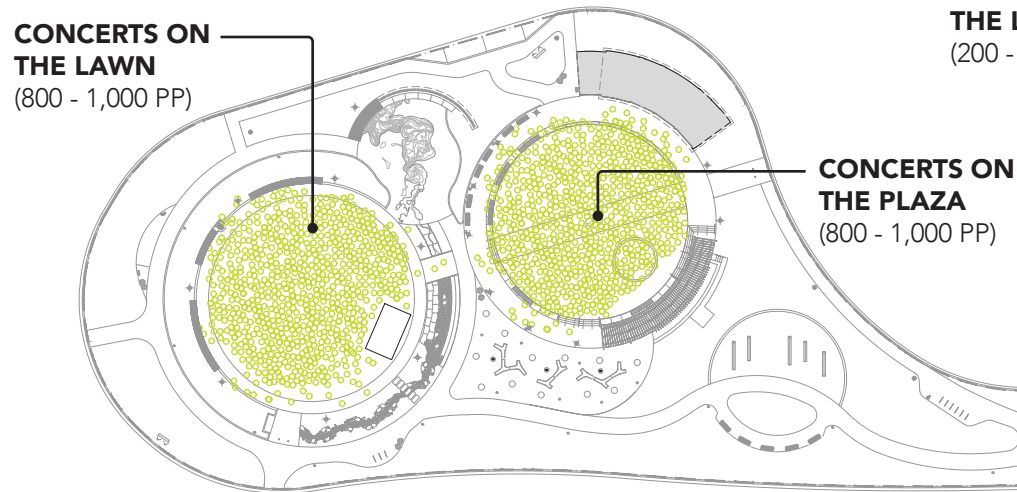
FOREST LOUNGE

RIDGEDALE DRIVE

GARDEN ROOM

RIDGEDALE DRIVE

ACTIVATE



Our team balanced the park's need to host larger community events – and yet feel comfortable on an average day void of events. Through scaled diagrams – the team conveyed the design's potential to activate the park with a variety of events that meet the needs of various user groups.



OPEN LAWN



PLAZA



The plaza and the lawn are flexible spaces planned to host a variety of events, from concerts, movies and seasonal markets, to ice-skating and yoga on the lawn. Activating the park with these events will be crucial to the park's acceptance and establishing it as a new cherished place within the community.

"LAKE EFFECT" FOUNTAIN
INTERPRETIVE MAP

UNDERGROUND WATER
STORAGE COLLECTS
ALL SITE WATER, REUSED
TO IRRIGATE SITE AND
RIDGEDALE DRIVE

FOUNTAIN

WATER
STORAGE

BIOSWALE

BIOSWALE

COMMUNITY
HABITAT
WATER
ECOSYSTEMS

CONNECTION TO FUTURE
DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY ROOM &
WARMING HOUSE

POLLINATOR GARDENS + BEE LAWN
WITH INTERPRETIVE LUMBER FEATURE

DIVERSE AND NATIVE TREE
+ PLANT SPECIES

FOREST LOUNGE WITH MATURE
NATIVE TREES

CONNECTION TO TRAIL SYSTEM

COLLECT AND FILTER
RAIN WATER



pedestrian-focused
public realm



place-making



bike-friendly



water reuse and
biofiltration



ecological biodiversity



soil health



interpretation
historical icons



support for
development density



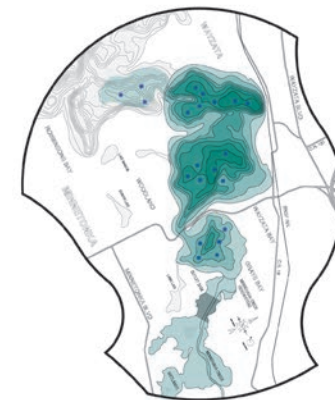
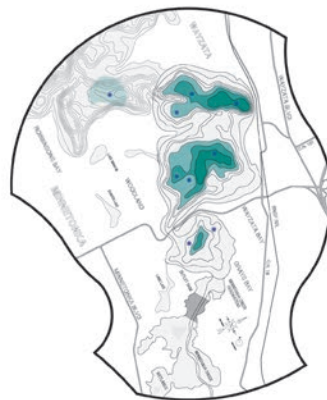
local & regional
scale connections

SUSTAIN

Ridgedale Commons is an oasis in what is currently an underutilized parking lot, and will provide ecosystem services including shading, reduction of the urban heat island, carbon sequestration, stormwater filtration and creation of pollinator habitat. The ground fountain feature will capture and re-use potable water for landscape irrigation.



FILL STAGE



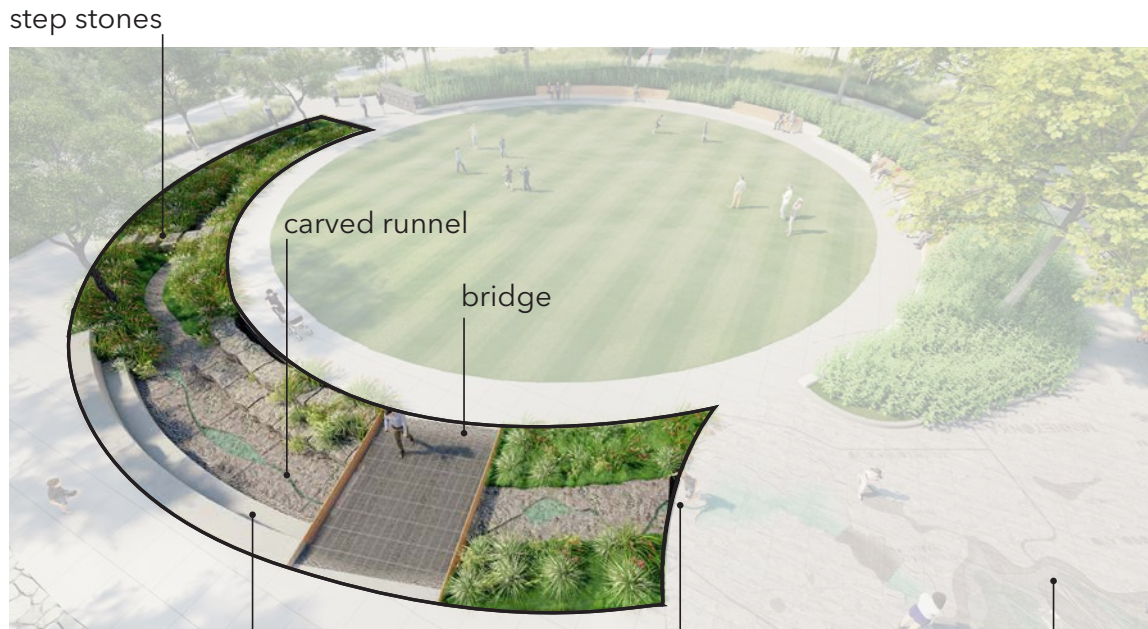
DRAIN STAGE

The "Lake Effect" is an artistic water element that interprets the unique geology, history and natural resources represented at the headwaters of Minnehaha Creek. Children will be able to see the underwater topography and be able to touch and engage with the water and learn while playing.

The rivulet is a small stream of water that overflows from the “Lake Effect” fountain. This stream represents Minnehaha Creek and offers visitors a variety of opportunities to engage in playful ways with running water while also creating a space that divides the park into two distinct spaces.



The rivulet receives overflow water from the fountain which flows under a bridge and pours into a carved stone channel. Terraced seating brings people to the edge of this feature and step stones create a playful crossing for children. Kids can modify the stream with the use of stones and pebbles.

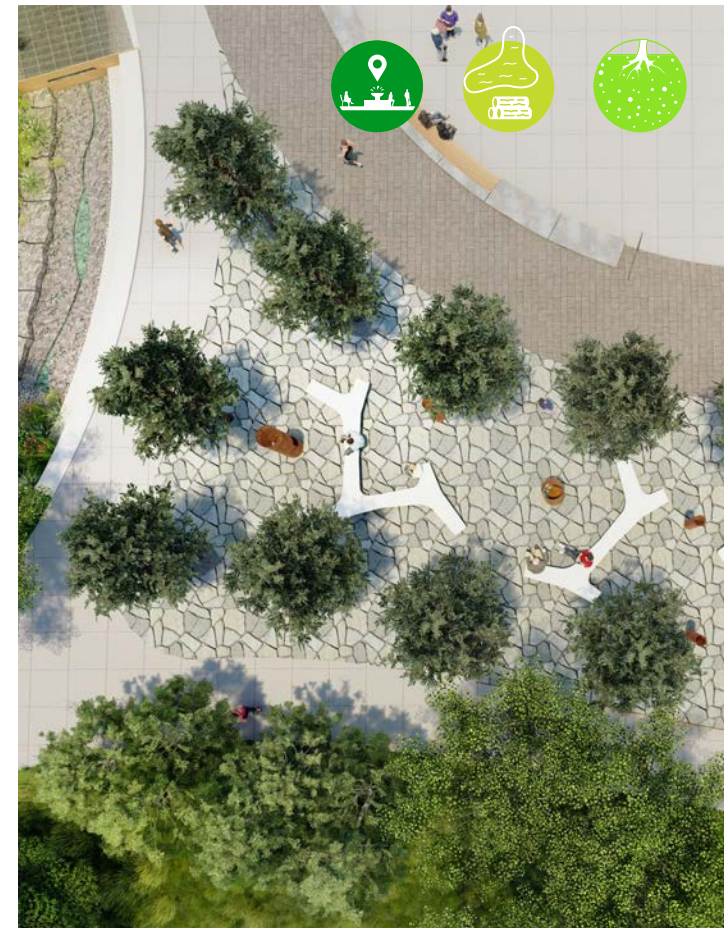


terraced seating

overflow channel

contoured water feature





The Garden Room is a pollinator garden that also interprets Minnetonka lumber history with the use of planked timber benches. The Forest Lounge is a whimsical area with native pines and artistic fire features to create a Minnesota-in-the-woods experience. Both spaces interpret context while creating memorable spaces.

THE FUTURE OF THE SUBURBS

As our profession plans future projects in suburbia, it is critical to consider human-scale, large-reaching, artful and ecological solutions. Ridgedale Commons is a model for the type of holistic thinking that can be applied to suburban areas across the nation. The future of our suburbs is green.

