



Friends of the Mississippi River

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Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities Area.

Minneapolis Historic Preservation Commission
210 City Hall
350 S Fifth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415

August 7, 2006

Dear Commissioners

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a local non-profit citizen-based organization that works to protect and enhance the natural and cultural assets of the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. We have 1,400 active members, including over 600 that are Minneapolis residents, and 3,500 volunteers who care deeply about the river's unique resources.

We are writing in regard to DeLaSalle High School's application to the HPC for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the athletic facility they propose for Nicollet Island. Friends of the Mississippi River respectfully requests that you deny this request. The proposed football stadium will irrevocably harm the historic and scenic character of Nicollet Island and transfer priceless riverfront open space to a private entity. Many alternatives exist, and therefore the HPC should not allow this degradation of the highly-valued scenic resources within the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. Our specific concerns are outlined below.

Athletic facility proposal conflicts with Nicollet Island Park Vision

As far back as 1866, local citizens were clamoring to dedicate Nicollet Island as a natural area and park, an idea that resurfaced throughout the 20th century. Over one hundred years after the idea was conceived, Minneapolis took several steps to ensure this historic area would be preserved and celebrated. MPRB purchased most of the island in 1974 and the community began planning for the island and surrounding proposed historic district. A Master Plan was developed for Nicollet Island in the 1990s, which outlined several Objectives (p 3) and Design and Planning Principles (pp 10-11) that conflict with the current proposal. Some of the most notable are as follows:

- *Preserve and enhance the island's natural landscape character*
- *Design recreation facilities which will not conflict with the residential character of the island.*
- *Preserve the integrity of the original (1866) street plan of the island.*

In 1988 the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) was designated by Congress in order to protect the unique natural, cultural, scenic and economic uses of the river corridor in the Twin Cities. The stadium proposal is also in direct conflict with the MNRRA Comprehensive Plan because of the potential impacts to nationally significant historic resources, scenic views of and from the river, and the existing natural river landscape.

Athletic facility would impair a unique and significant historic river landscape

Nicollet Island is the only remaining true island of several islands that once existed around St. Anthony Falls, and therefore a significant part of the natural heritage of the Mississippi River and the City of Minneapolis. The small hill on the island provides topographical relief to a relatively flat area, and would be obliterated by

a football stadium that is over-sized for such a small island. This rise in the landscape is so significant to the character of the island, that the Nicollet Island Master Plan begins the section on the area's past (p 4) with the following two sentences.

The 40-acre landform rises 15 feet at its center. In 1853, one observer noted that its slope was "rounded as if by the hand of art..." [quote is by Harriet Bishop for whom Harriet Island was named]

Protecting views of and from this historic Mississippi River landscape is critical to maintaining the integrity of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District.

In addition, Nicollet Island provides open space in a historic setting that is surrounded by rapid residential development. It is all that remains of the natural river in downtown Minneapolis and provides an essential component to the historic character of the St. Anthony Falls District. St. Anthony Falls and Nicollet Island are highly significant cultural resources that ground the community's sense of place. A football stadium would dramatically impair a treasured place that helps city residents remain connected to our Mississippi River heritage and history.

Closing Grove Street would conflict with City's goals to maintain historic street grid

Maintaining and re-establishing the historic street grid features prominently in every plan the City has along the Mississippi River, including the Minneapolis Critical Area Plan and the Nicollet Island Master Plan. Grove Street is the only street that crosses the middle of the island, and it provides an important visual and physical connection to the river for park-users and residents. In north and northeast Minneapolis, citizens are working diligently to try and re-establish the street connections to the Mississippi River, many of which were vacated for industrial development. Vacation of streets that connect to the river cuts off public access and blocks public views of the river; it should simply never happen, especially in an historic district.

Loss of public resource to a private organization

Friends of the Mississippi River is also opposed to this proposal because it turns public open space over to a private institution. This is a step backwards for Nicollet Island and the surrounding riverfront regional park. We should be doing all we can to preserve open space along the river. Giving away a natural and cultural resource that is owned and enjoyed by the public is an insult to the hard work and millions of dollars spent by Minneapolis taxpayers establishing this park and historic district.

Viable alternatives exist and must be considered

Before such a proposal should even be considered for a Certificate of Appropriateness, viable alternatives must be explored and exhausted. Numerous alternative sites have been suggested for this athletic facility, some of which would give DeLaSalle greater flexibility for other sports such as soccer and for potential expansion in the future. They have been unwilling to give serious consideration to these alternatives, and prefer instead to push through their current proposal which has the greatest impact on scenic and cultural public resources. Denial of this Certificate of Appropriateness is the only way to ensure alternatives will be properly considered.

To summarize, the proposed sports facility would materially impair the setting and feeling of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. In place of bucolic river landscape, natural open space, 32 trees, and a 140-year old street would be a nine-foot retaining wall, fencing, bleachers, 70-foot light towers, and paved parking to the river's edge. The historic aesthetic ambiance would be forever and dramatically altered. Please do not allow this to happen on your watch.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these comments. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely yours,

Irene Jones
Outreach Director
Friends of the Mississippi River