

Preserving the Character of Nicollet Island

Executive Summary

Four non-profit organizations—the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, the Sierra Club’s Northstar Chapter, Friends of the Mississippi River and Friends of the Riverfront—share a broad set of significant concerns regarding the potential construction of the DeLaSalle Athletic Facility on Grove Street on Nicollet Island. These organizations collectively represent thousands of Minnesotans, and each of their memberships brings a relevant perspective to the proposal.

All of these organizations are opposed to construction of the stadium on Nicollet Island and ask that the Certificate of Appropriateness be denied by the HPC. Enclosed in this package are individual letters detailing objections to the athletic facility. This executive summary serves as a brief overview of those objections, which are delineated more thoroughly in the following documents. Immediately following the executive summary, we have included a set of Suggested Alternative Findings to be considered for HPC adoption.

Preservation

- The athletic facility would negatively impact the St. Anthony Falls Historic District because it is not compatible with the scale of its surroundings. It impairs the setting and feeling that defines the district’s historic integrity.
- Interrupting the historic east-west circulation pattern would inhibit the comprehension of the island’s connection to the Mississippi River.
- There is a high likelihood the site holds archaeological potential, according to a report from Two Pines Resource Group. The athletic facility would destroy or disrupt these resources.
- The proposed use and corresponding infill design are incompatible with the district’s period of significance, which was for residential and industrial use. The size of the field, bleachers and concession areas are out of character of Nicollet Island’s environment.

Impact on Site’s Character

- The athletic facility would materially impair the historic district because it does not meet criteria established by the National Register of Historic Places for integrity of district design, setting, feeling and association.
- The proposal will impact the historic and scenic views of and from the Mississippi River.
- The athletic facility proposal conflicts with the Nicollet Park vision. A 1990s master plan calls for preserving and enhancing the island’s natural character, preserving and integrity of the original 1866 street plan and ensuring recreational facilities be in harmony with the island’s residential environment.
- The athletic facility would impair a unique and significant historic landscape. Construction would wipe out a small hill, which provides topographical relief on a flat island. The master plan includes historic references to the scenic value of the hill and states that grades should be preserved. The island also provides open space for a quickly urbanizing area of the Mississippi Riverfront. Geographical context should be considered when dealing with preservation of cultural landscapes
- Closing Grove Street conflicts with the city’s own goal of maintaining the historic street grid. Every plan Minneapolis has formulated calls for re-establishing the city’s original street grid. Grove is the only cross street on the island’s middle section. Vacating streets that connect to the river should not occur.

- The Central Riverfront Park draws over a million visitors a year and many of them visit Nicollet Island. The athletic facility and closing of Grove Street will restrict circulation and detract from the experience of visiting Nicollet Island.
- Frequent intrusion of loudspeaker noise will damage the historic district's character and feeling. From mid-August to November, the loudspeakers would be in use five times a week on average.

Environment

- The athletic proposal would destroy a prairie grass meadow containing 30 trees planted to commemorate the founding of the University of Minnesota. If more of the parkland like this parcel could be restored, Nicollet Island would continue to flourish in its role as a conservation and recreational jewel in a densely populated area.
- The lighting would intrude on the view of the downtown skyline, noise and lighting would be problematic to neighboring property owners.
- There is a potentially harmful impact on migratory birds – the island sits in the path of 60 percent of all North American bird species and 40 percent of North American waterfowl. Bright lights and loud speakers will deter birds from landing on the island during spring and fall migration.
- The proposal does not address adequately the potential water run-off, nor does it address pollution prevention measures. Current run-off goes directly into the Mississippi River. Nearby homeowners fear further problems with run-off from the site.
- The proposal violates the Mississippi River and Recreation Area (National Park Service) Comprehensive Plan for the river corridor in the Twin Cities – because of its negative impacts to a cultural and natural resource of national significance.

Alternative Locations

- There are numerous viable alternatives that have not been considered. Destruction of an historic property requires a finding of no alternatives.
- The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) did not examine alternatives in a manner that can satisfy HPC review. HPC has no basis for determining if there are no reasonable alternatives, because there has not been a full and fair public discussion of alternative sites for the facility. No historic preservationists were included on the CAC.
- The school has not thoroughly investigated other sites for the stadium or suggested collaborations with other schools in their conference, a common practice among schools in urban areas and even in the suburbs. Many schools in even more densely populated areas than Nicollet Island do not have facilities on campus – and some don't even have a playing field. For example, research shows in DeLaSalle's conference that several schools did not play on their own grounds. In fact, of the urban-based schools Blake plays at Hopkins' high school field, St. Agnes plays at Midway and Minnehaha Academy plays at a stadium on its lower campus. Suburban Mounds Park Academy turns out to play at Saint Paul Academy in a sharing arrangement.
- Loss of public resource to a private organization is unacceptable. DeLaSalle, a private religious institution, is asking for development rights on public parkland in a national historic district. This is a dangerous precedent, especially when possible alternatives have not been explored and exhausted.

Contributing Partners

Preservation Alliance of Minnesota (PAM) is the only statewide, private, non-profit organization advocating the preservation of Minnesota's historic resources. The formal mission of the Alliance is "to preserve, protect, and promote Minnesota's historic resources." The Alliance is a growing organization that positions itself at the center of a statewide network of other individuals and organizations.

The Alliance was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1981 by Minnesota citizens concerned about the future of the state's architectural and cultural landmarks. Now celebrating its 25th anniversary, the Alliance has grown into a membership network of over 600 dues-paying individuals, businesses and groups throughout Minnesota, with 80 percent of our members in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Beyond our membership, we collaborate and partner with other organizations and agencies from the national to the local level. In 2005, through all our programs, publications, and networking, we reached an estimated 2,000,000 Minnesotans.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a leading citizen-based organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. Through education, outreach and advocacy, we protect water quality, conserve vital land along the river and its tributaries, and foster a sense of place that is rooted in the unique cultural, historical and recreational assets of the Mississippi.

FMR was established as a non-profit organization in 1993 and has grown to include approximately 1,500 members, more than 600 of whom live in the City of Minneapolis. In our work to protect the river's resources, FMR engages over 3,500 volunteers annually. We partner with citizens, elected officials, local governments, MNRRA and other organizations throughout the river corridor to advocate for development that is sensitive to the natural and cultural assets of the Mississippi River.

The Sierra Club is the oldest and largest environmental advocacy organization in the United States. The North Star Chapter has over 23,000 members statewide, more than one third of whom live in the metro area and over 5,000 who are Minneapolis residents. Our membership's goal: "To explore, enjoy, and protect the planet."

Minnesota Sierra Club members have worked on Twin Cities environmental protection issues since the Chapter's inception in 1968. Our Land Use and Transportation Committee was first established in the early 1970s and reinvigorated in 1995. Today, the committee consists of more than 20 volunteer leaders with expert knowledge in areas of land use planning, ecology, transportation, communications, land use law, and more. The committee has established a track record of effectively educating and empowering citizens in the issues that most impact their own communities, where they live, work and recreate.

Friends of the Riverfront (FOR), a group of concerned citizens and park users, is working to conserve, protect, and enhance the historic, cultural and natural resources of the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park. The park is located along the Minneapolis downtown riverfront from the Plymouth Avenue bridge to just below the Stone Arch bridge and is part of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Within its boundaries is the St. Anthony Falls National Historic District. FOR was founded in 2004 and has more 1,000 supporters from the Twin Cities and across the state and country who value the park's natural and historic significance.