

Snelling Green Space Preliminary Report for the Snelling Common Space Workshop

Introduction

The data results presented here are part of the Friendly Streets Initiative's (FSI) "Better Bridges for Stronger Communities" project, with a focus on the Snelling Avenue bridge over Interstate 94. Extensive community input over the past few years, and most recently by the District Councils Collaborative (DCC) and Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation (SPRC), has resulted in an improved rebuild of the Snelling bridge over I-94.

When conceiving the Better Bridges project in mid 2014, the DCC requested that Snelling and Dale bridges be included. FSI's role for improving these bridges is to provide support for DCC's (and their partners) existing community organizing. Since the Snelling bridge was rebuilt this past year (2015), the focus of our efforts was directed to the green space located at the intersection of St. Anthony and Snelling, on the northwest corner of the I-94/Snelling 'intersection'. We refer to this space as the "Snelling Green Space." The aim is to improve the space so as to offer a better experience for those utilizing that space currently, for those who live nearby, and for passersby walking north toward the Green Line or south toward Selby Avenue businesses (as well as residences north and south of the Interstate).

The Snelling Green Space is located in the Union Park District of Saint Paul, and is near Hamline-Midway. It is owned by the State of Minnesota, and is under the jurisdiction of the Minnesota Department of Transportation. It's proximity to I-94 and Snelling Avenue (state highway 51) makes it both a problematic space (due to noise and pollution) and a potentially wonderful space that can offer respite for users and passersby.

Data Results

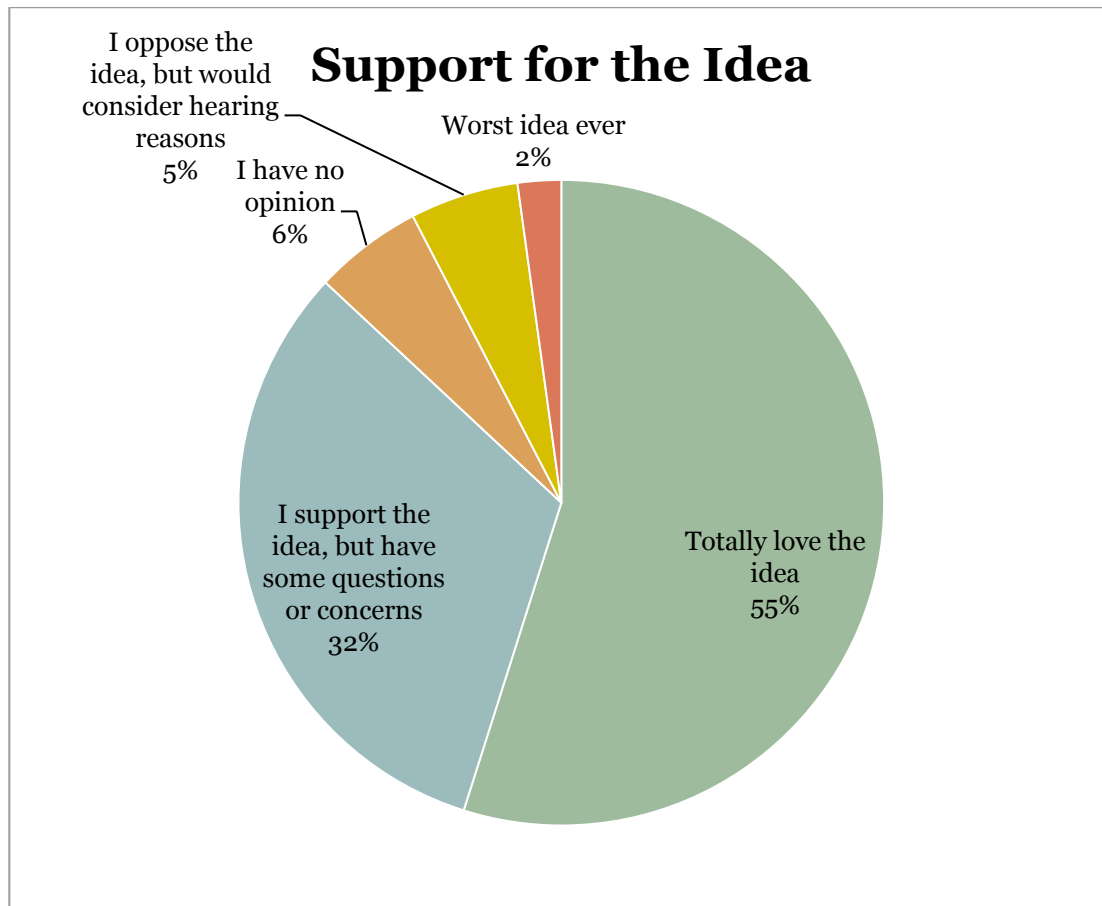
FSI deployed three forms of data collection regarding community opinions regarding the Snelling Green Space: A survey, opinions expressed on a gallery of images, and field notes from conversations on site and nearby. A total of 198 surveys were completed (at the time of this writing, the survey remains open and people continue to give input). People provided hundreds of opinions on the gallery of images (in person and online), and themes of conversations on site have been noted.

The Snelling Green Space is of great interest to different groups of folks. That is the key theme of this project, both its greatest challenge and opportunity.

Where surveys were taken

Celebrate Snelling event, August 20	n=11
Midway Murals event, August 29	n=34
Peanut Butter and Jam event, September 19	n=10
Online	n=152
TOTAL	N=207

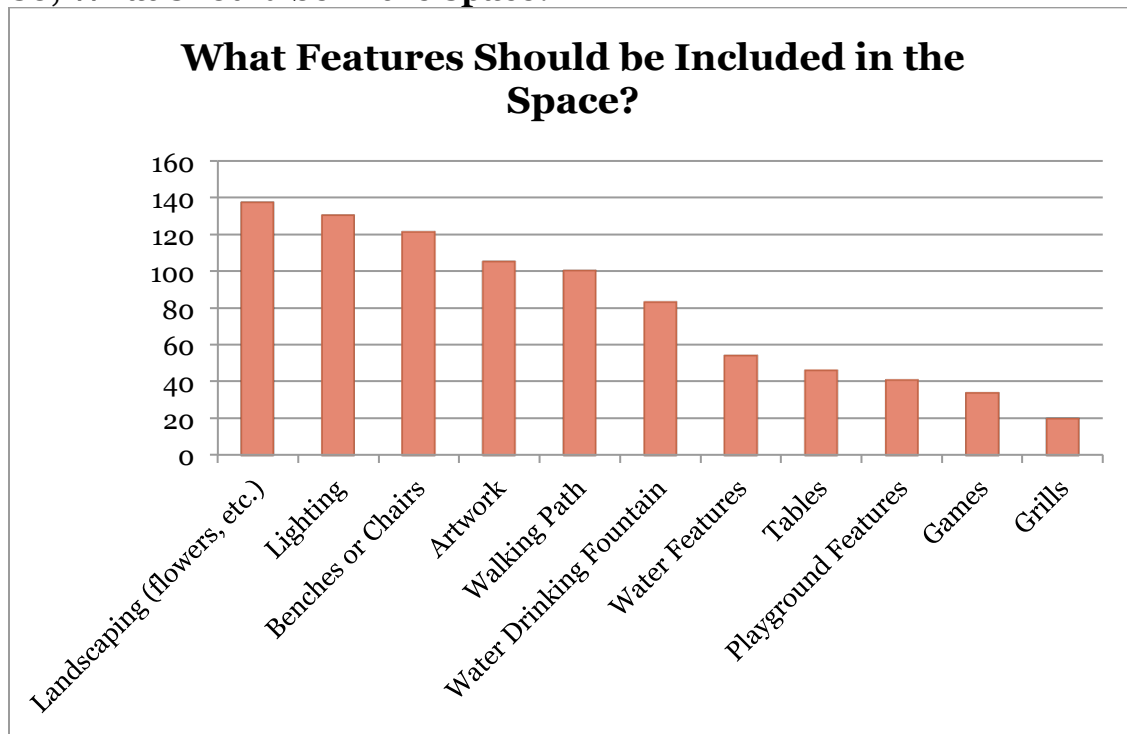
Is There Support for the Project?



n of responses for survey question= **184** (meaning 23 survey respondents gave no opinion on this question)

There is overwhelming support for redesigning the Snelling Green Space Project area, with a combined total of **87%** of question respondents supporting the idea (from the top categories of “totally love the idea” and “I support the idea, but have some questions or concerns”).

So, What Should be in the Space?



n of responses for survey question= **172** (35 survey respondents gave no opinion)

A trend from these results is that those features that have a *higher potential for **social interaction*** surrounding them (including playground features, games, and grills) have received the *least amount of support* while those features that could offer ***aesthetic improvements*** (such as landscaping, lighting, and artwork) have garnered the *most amount of support* from survey respondents.

This finding relates to a ratio that FSI often utilizes as a means of analysis of space. This ratio is:

stopping/exchange : movement

One way to evaluate a space is in terms of how it encourages stopping and experiencing a place in some depth, or how it encourages persons to continue movement through the space. This ratio is taken from David Engwicht (1993, *Reclaiming our Cities and Towns*). By exchange he means the opportunity for persons to interact, to exchange information, goods, ideas, etc.. It can also mean exchange of the person with their surroundings, their environment, in all of its qualities.

The results above indicate a desired ratio of stopping and movement to be weighted to the latter. In other words, respondents indicate a preference for the Snelling Green Space to be improved with qualities that make a pleasant moving experience with stopping supported by primarily by artwork and seating, but not so much stopping as to place people for longer periods of time (associated with grilling, for example).

What other ideas did survey respondents give for the space?

We also asked what other ideas people have for the space. This is an important question because people are offering these ideas after considering nearly a dozen others. Their willingness to offer other ideas indicates the importance of the idea to the respondent. This is also a good source of creativity not already present in the given options. What is presented below are selected notable answers:

- *A map of the area showing nearby destinations and transit routes.*
- *Bathrooms*
- *Bike racks, some way to incorporate permanent recycling bins as an integral part of the space, so people could be encouraged to recycle.*
- *Sustainability from neighbors*
- *Dog water fountain*
- *A wall dedicated to the community to get rid of negative connotations of graffiti, make art to express themselves: paint and spray painting, etc. Black lives matter art need to be incorporated in the new park*
- *Ways to keep safety at night- for bus riders*
- *Murals!*
- *Just something that reflects the community*
- *Natural landscaping- large boulders, stones, tree-stump seating*
- *Rainwater filtration and pollinator habitat*
- *bicycle facilities (path, fixit station, bike parking)*
- *Bird feeder dispensers, I would love to see these in parks where you can put in .25 or .50 & get a handful of bird seed*
- *Get rid of the trees. Plant flowers in a labyrinth using native flowers/plants and maybe set-up placards to identify the plants as an educational as well as peaceful experience for people*
- *A map of the area showing nearby destinations and transit routes.*
- *something interactive and thought-provoking; one idea -- a microscope (what creatures do you share this space with?) and a telescope or world map (what is our place in the universe?) other idea -- a connection with a small park in some of the SP sister cities*
- *An emergency call box*
- *It is a busy intersection there with car traffic -- which means it will be noisy. design the park as a waypoint for light rail foot traffic , not as a destination playground or the like*
- *If there is any history to the area that could be displayed and described on both sides of a placard on a post or somewhere.*

Overall Most Favored Ideas from Gallery of Images

Based on post-it data on the gallery of images, and based on survey questions asking respondents to identify the top three ideas among the gallery, the following ideas emerged as most desirable.

Pocket Parks

Pocket Park #1 (Top Idea)



Reasons:

Cool aesthetic, modern, elegant, structure, seating, greenspace, color

Quotes:

“I like all of the greenery and intergration [sic] of forms submerging in the park, makes it more distinct”

“Inviting and a place I would like to be in. Being "sunk" makes it seem more private and calm.”

Pocket Park #5



Reasons:

Light, safety, aesthetics

Quotes:

“light in a city park is important for security and usability”

“again, sense of separate place, away from commotion of snelling.”

Pocket Park #6



Reasons:

Accessible, sociable, shows sidewalk-green space relation, similarly to current site

Quotes:

“... I liked the open-feel of the landscaping and that the path went through the landscaping.”

“Nice mix of green space and built features”

Placemaking

Water Fountain (Second Top Idea)



Reasons:
Hydration

Quotes:
“necessary”
“always good for everyone to have access to water”
“Hydration is important to people and pets”

Artistic Bench



Reasons:
Seating, artwork

Quotes:
We need a place to sit.
What an excellent combination of function and beauty.

Design

Curved Sidewalk



Reasons:
Breaks monotony, communicates meandering pace

Quotes:
“I think curved sidewalks are much more inviting and appear more organic and natural than straight paths; the surrounding area is already very angular (straight roads, buildings with gars angles, etc), so some curves would be nice to see

The opportunities and challenge of the project

It is a guiding principle of FSI that every project needs to address equity aims. Such is the case with the Snelling Green Space. The Snelling Green Space is a major opportunity given attention and changes occurring on Snelling already, and in relation to the proposed stadium site.

The major issue that communities will have to address these two questions: Whose space is this? What are considered legitimate uses of this space?

The people who are in the space currently are caretakers who lack secure housing, among other needs. There are neighborhood residents immediately proximate and nearby. There are churchgoers, neighborhood businesses workers and owners, and passersby. FSI sees all as having valid claims to the Snelling Green Space. But there is not agreement among survey respondents, or in our conversations on site, about this. Consider the following comments from several survey respondents:

- *Please do not put any kind of outdoor furniture in this area. All you will do is create an "outdoor room" which is another name for a homeless hangout. This space will be taken over by the panhandlers who shake down motorists for cash at the intersections of I-94 and Snelling.*
- *You have a significant safety concern with the transient presence that will inevitably keep everyone else out. I would be very interested in how you are going to combat that...*
- *whatever works for the apartments and church*
- *Does it need improved? What do the immediate neighbors want? They should carry the most weight. What is the current perceived problem that "improvement" seeks to solve.*
- *small vendor area for artisans*

When we asked what concerns respondents have about the Snelling Green Space, three major themes emerged (in order of emphasis):

- The occupation of the space by unhoused caretakers (“vagrants, panhandlers, dealers”)
- Safety
- Health of the area: noise, pollutants

FSI’s recommendation is to have a totally inclusive working group or steering committee to come to consensus about these concerns and issues related to whom the space is designed for, and what is considered legitimate use.

Appendix A: Gallery of Images

Pocket Park #1



Pocket Park #2



Pocket Park #3



Pocket Park #4



Pocket Park #5



Pocket Park #6



Curved Sidewalk



Giant Chess



Peace Poll



Artistic Bench



Water Fountain

