

# The Heights Outdoor Spaces Workgroup Recommendations

## Learning from The Hub

The Hub is the Saint Paul Port Authority's (SPPA) first Privately Owned Public Space (POPS). There are multiple POPS opportunities at The Heights and the committee provided the following recommendations:

- Continue with strategies that were effective at The Heights
  - Hire local artists for public art installations
  - Reuse onsite materials, specifically wood
- Incorporate new strategies to create a better experience
  - Be sure the purpose for any POPS is clearly communicated onsite
  - Work with the community to put an activation plan in place
  - Make the area more accessible
  - Make better choices to deter vandalism and other safety/security concerns

## Public Art

The workgroup agrees that public art is important and would like to see family-friendly, interactive installations at The Heights. As such, SPPA should share the workgroup's recommendations, listed below, with the Public Art Workgroup:

- Look at art from a child's perspective. If it's going to entice children to touch or climb, be sure it's safe.
- Ensure public art strategies discourage vandalism. Graffiti artists tend to stay away from other people's art so adding color and art to everyday items like utility boxes and benches can serve as a layer of protection.

## Nature Play

The workgroup feels strongly about the addition of natural play options at The Heights. Their recommendation is to provide simple structures for kids to safely crawl, climb, and explore. Repurposed wood could be used for this purpose. This concept could also be paired with a sensory garden that incorporates opportunities see, feel, hear, smell, and taste things in nature.

## Peaceful Seating

The workgroup was in support of a variety of outdoor seating options.

- Solar powered bench stations for people to charge their phones
- Swinging benches
- Artistic benches
- Friendship benches (program that supports mental health)

## Multigenerational Spaces

The workgroup sees value in multigeneration spaces that are welcoming for children, seniors, and everyone in-between. Concepts include multigenerational swings and exercise equipment. A sensory garden could also be incorporated into such a space.

## Accessible Spaces

The workgroup pointed out that there are no accessibility parks in Saint Paul. If accessible playground equipment is not part of the City's park plan, it would be a valuable addition to a POPS.

## Dog Park

The workgroup agrees that dog parks are an important neighborhood amenity. To enhance the neighborhood experience, the group would like to see a dog park tucked into a more remote area of The Heights with lights and cameras to promote safety and security.

## Food Choices

The workgroup provided two recommendations for growing food at The Heights. The first was affirmation of the community garden concept. The second was to find space for a possible food forest where fruit trees and berries could grow. SPPA should reach out to Urban Roots to see if there are any partnership opportunities.

## Gateway Signs

When making selections for gateway signs, the workgroup recommends a design that fits the neighborhood while letting people know they are in The Heights development. Vertical structures could further illustrate the concept of height.

## Trails

The trail system is very important to the workgroup. Members want SPPA to ensure that trails are designed with child safety in mind. The group also supports the boardwalk concept included in the rendering and would like to see the walking path extend over the wetlands (providing a dry space).

After reviewing trail amenities, the workgroup prioritized benches, lights, and bike racks over water fountains and bike repair stations. The thought process is that people can bring their own water and the service equipment could be challenging to maintain.

## Restaurants with Outdoor Seating

The Workgroup understands that the master housing developer would ultimately be responsible for renting space to a restaurant owner based on marketability. The following information should be shared with the master housing developer:

- Outdoor eating options, including restaurants or food trucks, are highly desirable
- Removeable outdoor seating and life-size lawn games (e.g., chess) would enhance the neighborhood experience

## Amenities for High-Density Housing Units

The workgroup understands that the master housing developer will ultimately be responsible for tenant amenities and will make decisions based on marketability. At the same time, SPPA should inform the developer that the community would like to see outdoor gas grills and playground equipment at these sites.

## Ownership

Regardless of what is selected, the workgroup agrees that ownership and activation of public spaces is critical to the success of any outdoor space. The perception of ownership reduces the likelihood of vandalism. Anything of value should be placed in a high traffic area. Well maintained landscaping and high-quality amenities will also build a sense of ownership, which in turn will minimize safety and security concerns. SPPA should work with community groups in advance to ensure new spaces are created with an activation plan in place. This may need to be revisited on an annual basis as community groups are always changing and evolving.

## Ecology

From an ecological standpoint, the workgroup supports the use of native plants and a biodiversity that will lead to a more resilient site. There was also agreement that carbon reduction strategies should be considered when building out

the site. Recommendations include building to last, leveraging energy-efficient electricity, and using locally-resourced and/or recycled materials.