



Title: 325 Blake Road Update

Prepared by: Name: Gabriel Sherman and Michael Hayman
Phone: (952) 641-4510 / (952) 471-8226
Email: gsherman@minnehahacreek.org / mhayman@minnehahacreek.org

Purpose:

At the March 16, 2022 meeting of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), staff will present and lead a discussion around the latest designs and next steps to advance the 325 Blake Road Restoration and Redevelopment capital project. Since the CAC last provided input on the project at its August 18, 2021 meeting, the project has entered its second phase of design work and 60% designs were approved by the MCWD Board of Managers on February 24, 2022. With the major project components laid out, staff is now considering how best to incorporate wayfinding and interpretive installations to integrate the site with the surrounding neighborhood and the Alatus development. In addition to any general feedback the CAC has on the design, staff will especially be seeking feedback and fresh ideas from the CAC on interpretation and wayfinding for the site.

Background:

MCWD's capital project located at 325 Blake Road in Hopkins is intended to stitch together the Minnehaha Creek Greenway between the Minnehaha Creek Preserve and Cottageville Park through riparian restoration and the addition of trails, and provide regional treatment of stormwater runoff from approximately 270 acres surrounding the site. These improvements will occur on approximately 5 acres of the nearly 17-acre site, with the remaining acreage intended to be redeveloped into a mixed-use transit-oriented development that meets the City's needs and takes advantage of the site's location adjacent to the future Blake Road LRT station.

Design Process

Phase I design included significant foundational technical work as well as broad stakeholder engagement, both of which built off prior work undertaken to characterize the site's water resource and societal potential. Listening sessions, surveys, and open houses in early 2021 helped re-establish and refine the specific goals the community, MCWD, and the City held for the site. In July 2021, a design charrette was held in conjunction with MCWD's and the City's selected developer, Alatus, LLC. Findings from the stakeholder engagement process and preliminary stormwater engineering studies were used to sketch MCWD's stormwater and greenway project and demonstrate how Alatus' transit-oriented development could be merged with that design. Representatives from regional agencies with an interest in the project were invited to provide real time input on the emerging designs.

The first Phase II deliverable is 60% design, which incorporates feedback received on the schematic design from the Board, CAC and staff, as well as preferences gathered through several community engagement events. MCWD participated in a neighborhood meeting hosted by Alatus in November 2021 to collect ideas on the schematic design and hosted a 60% design virtual community meeting in January 2022. Both events included preference surveys, which were also made available online in English and Somali after the meetings. Two informational sessions and preference surveys were also conducted with students at Hopkins West Junior High to bring youth perspective to the site, a demographic that was under-represented during other community events. The designs have continued to respect the direction set at the July 2021 charrette to allow for seamless integration with the Alatus development, while independently achieving the project goals established by the Board and community.

60% Design

Baseline and Alatus Alternatives

Two alternatives were produced as part of the schematic design: 1) a Baseline Alternative which built out MCWD's stormwater and greenway project and reserved a portion of the site for a future transit-oriented development (TOD), and 2) an Alatus Alternative which merged MCWD's stormwater and greenway project with Alatus' proposed TOD. Throughout late 2021, Alatus rapidly advanced the design of its development to secure land use entitlements by the end of 2021, which allowed MCWD's 60% design to proceed along the Alatus Alternative while maintaining the ability to easily shift to the baseline alternative if necessary.

Project Components

The major components of the project are broken out below to demonstrate that portions of the project could be prioritized or constructed in phases if necessary. Designs for the stormwater pond and associated infrastructure have currently been fast-tracked to meet critical grant deadlines, while the Nature Play Area and Gateway Plaza are proceeding at a more measured pace to allow for future collaboration with Alatus and Hopkins.

Stormwater

At the heart of MCWD's capital project is the regionalization and treatment of 270 acres of stormwater that currently empties untreated into Minnehaha Creek. This stormwater is brought to the site through two diversion pipes (already constructed) and treated in a stormwater pond in the eastern portion of the site. The pond is designed to be functional yet aesthetically pleasing for users of the Minnehaha Creek Greenway trail extension and future residents of the private development. The pond is currently designed to tie into the Alatus development through a pump and cascade system, which offsets the volume of the pond reduced by the development footprint and provides added water quality benefits.

Greenway and Trails

Another core element of the project is the extension of the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, providing a connection through the site between the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail and Cottageville Park. The design includes a ten-foot bituminous trail running from the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail, along Minnehaha Creek and the stormwater pond, across Minnehaha Creek via a pedestrian bridge, and finally to Lake Street to connect to Cottageville Park. The Greenway will be bookended with the Trailhead at the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail intersection and the Gateway at the Lake Street and Blake Road intersection to welcome and orient users.

Greenway Activity Nodes

In addition to the Gateway and Trailhead, the design includes two distinct activity nodes along the Greenway trail to provide users with connections to the creek and places to gather, while protecting the integrity of the riparian corridor. The Landing is located adjacent to Minnehaha Creek on the 325 Blake Road parcel and will accommodate non-motorized watercraft users, as well as provide picnic areas and more contemplative spaces. The Nature Play Area will be located on the Cottageville parcel immediately downstream of the Lake Street bridge and will be connected to the main 325 Blake Road parcel by a pedestrian bridge across Minnehaha Creek.

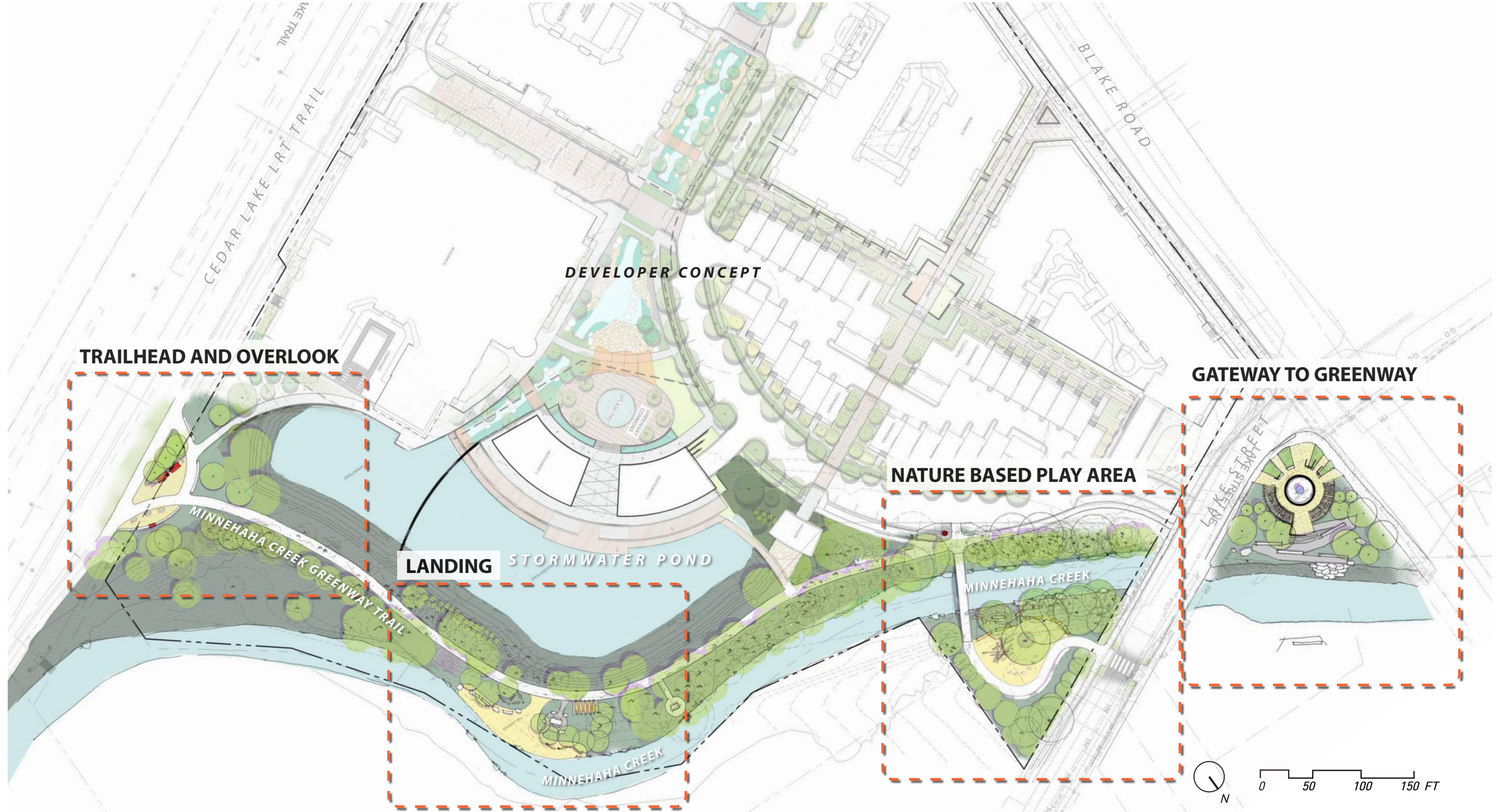
CAC meeting focus and next steps:

At the March 16, 2022 CAC meeting, staff will provide a project update, including the 60% designs, and seek ideas around interpretive themes and wayfinding. A purchase and sales agreement with Alatus is nearing completion and is currently scheduled for Board consideration in March. The purchase and sales agreement will provide the framework for determining if MCWD's project (or a portion of it) could be jointly bid with the larger development to achieve cost efficiencies. In preparation for either jointly or independently bidding MCWD's project, final designs for the main 325 Blake Road parcel are scheduled to be completed in Summer 2022. Interpretive and artistic elements may advance on an extended timeline to allow for maximum coordination with project partners.

Attachments:

- 60% site plans and renderings

Overall Site Plan



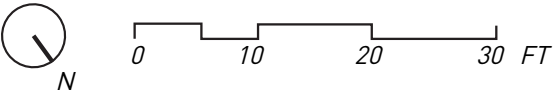
Trailhead and Overlook



key

- 1 RAISED PLANTING
- 2 BLOCK SEATING
- 3 TRAILHEAD KIOSK
- 4 PERMEABLE PAVERS
- 5 BLOCK BENCH
- 6 SEATWALL
- 7 CREEK INTERPRETATION (PUBLIC ART)
- 8 PRESERVE EXISTING TREES

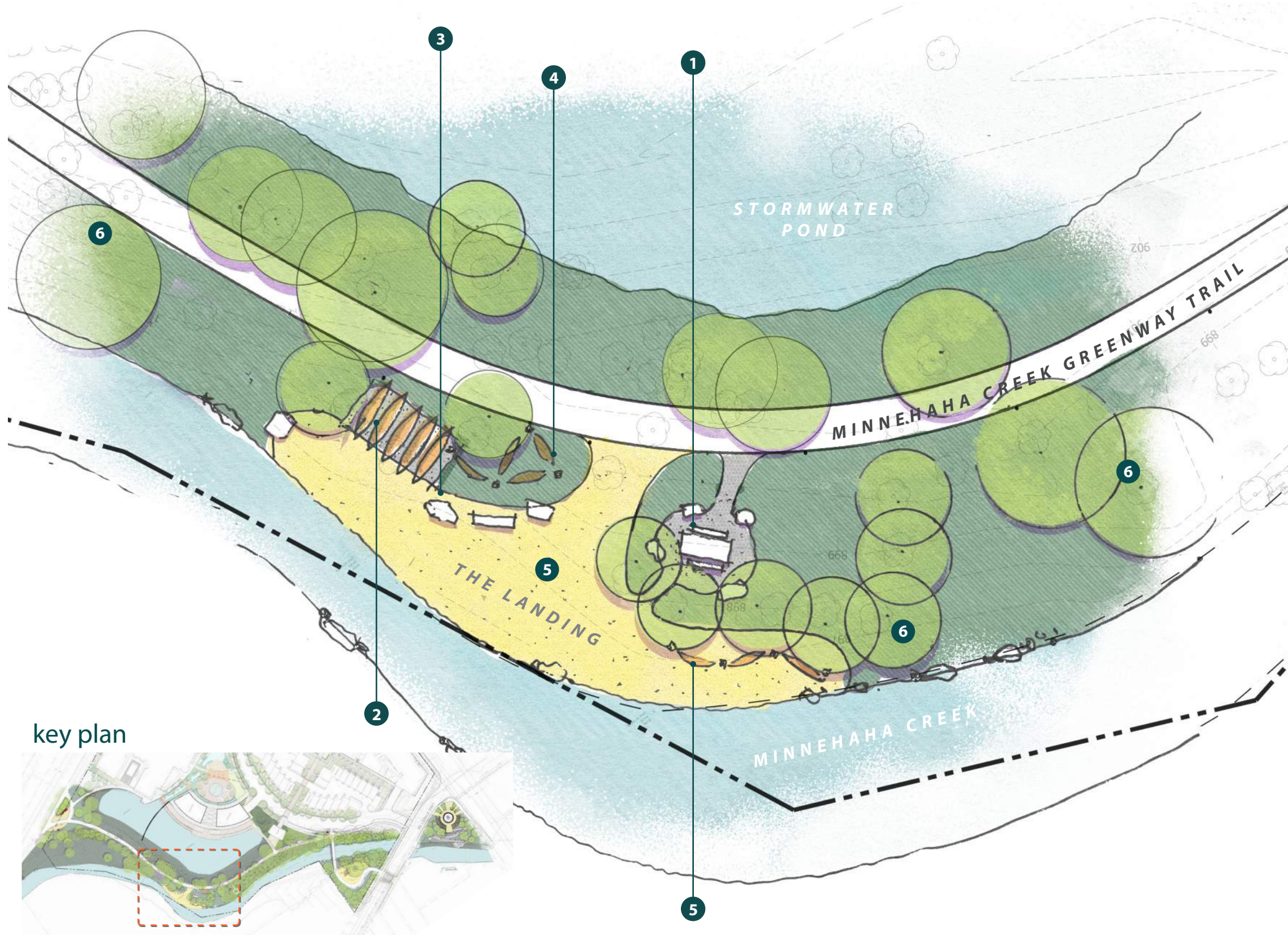
key plan



Trailhead and Overlook



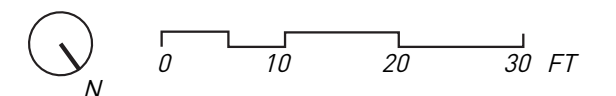
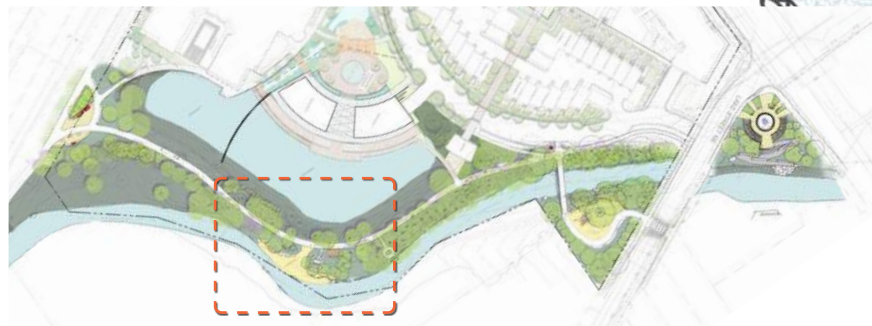
The Landing



key

- 1 PICNIC AREA
- 2 SHORT TERM CANOE STORAGE
- 3 INFORMAL SEATING
- 4 HAMMOCK POLES
- 5 CREEK ACCESS
- 6 PRESERVE EXISTING TREES

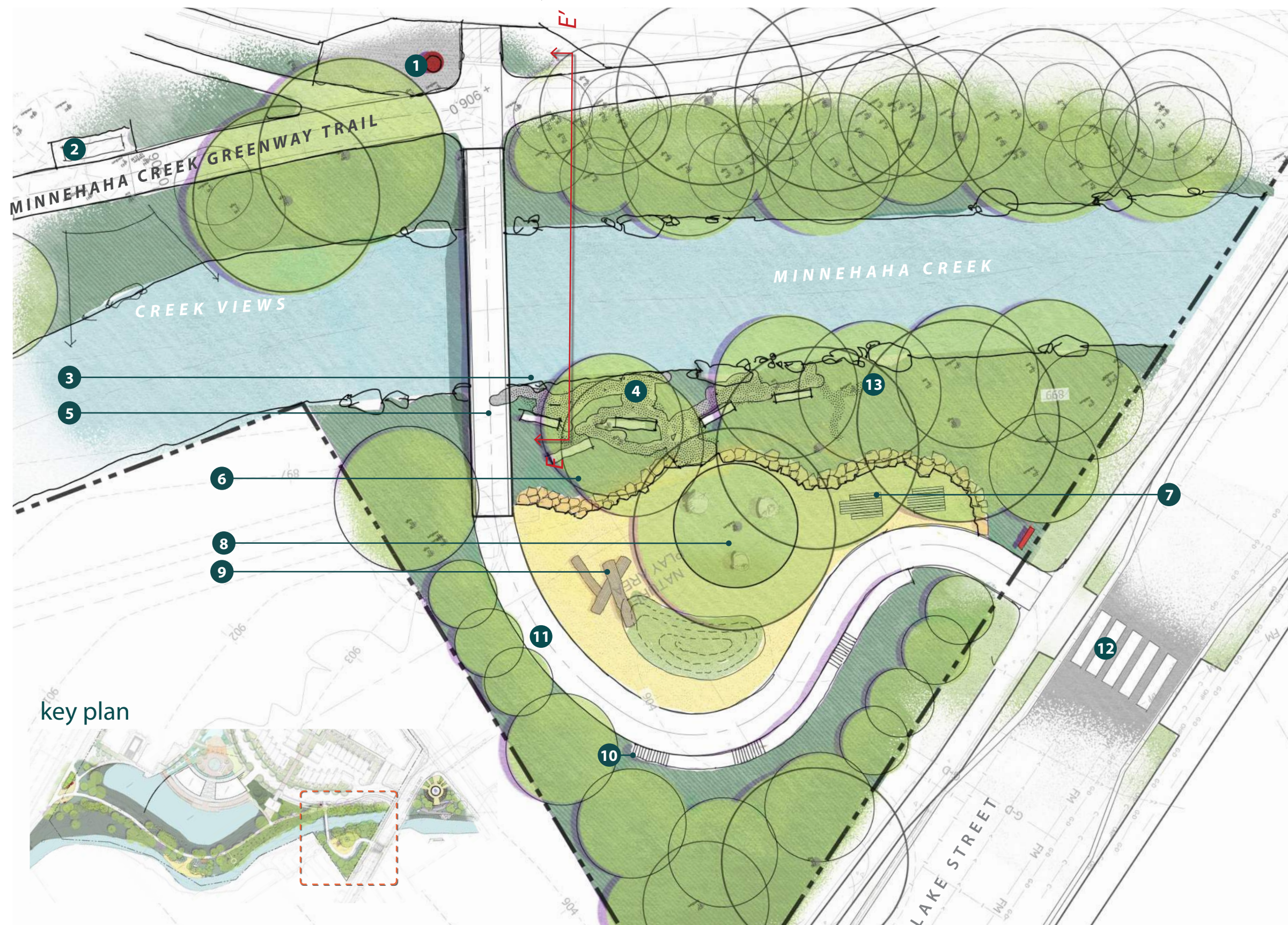
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The Landing

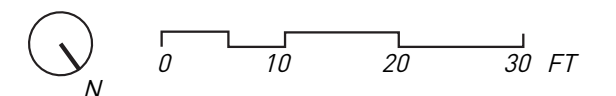


Nature-based Play Area



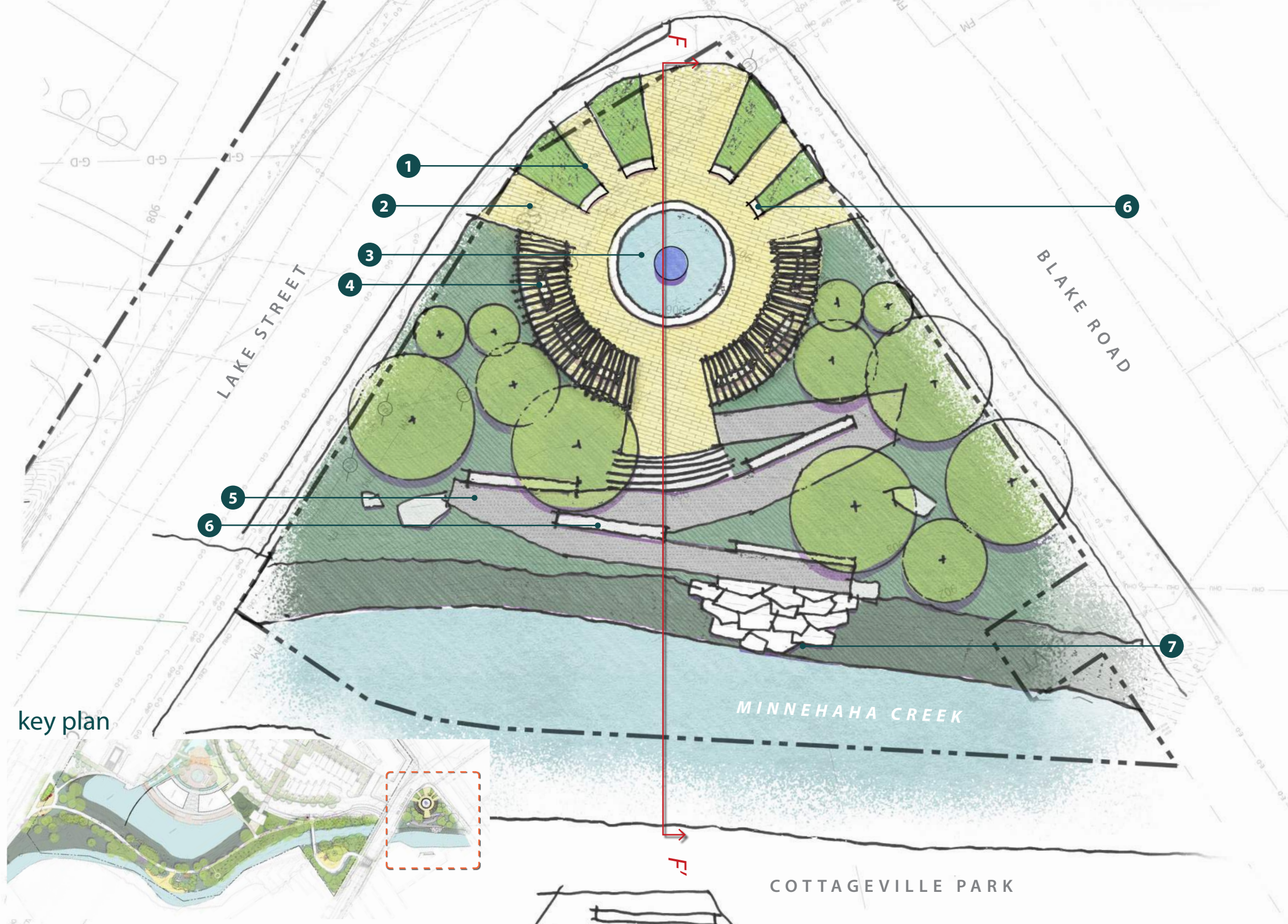
key

- 1 TRAILHEAD KIOSK
- 2 BENCH/PULL OFF
- 3 CREEK ACCESS
- 4 AGGREGATE PATH
- 5 ADA ACCESSIBLE BRIDGE
- 6 LIMESTONE SEATING
- 7 GATHERING SPACE
- 8 TURF WITH ACORN FEATURES
- 9 NATURE-BASED PLAY
- 10 CIP WALL WITH BENCHES
- 11 ADA WALK
- 12 CROSSWALK
- 13 PRESERVE EXISTING TREES





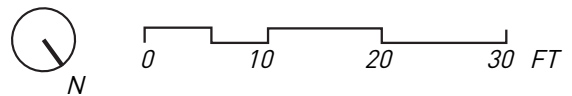
Gateway to Minnehaha Creek Greenway



key

- 1 PLANTER
- 2 PERMEABLE PAVERS
- 3 WATER AS PUBLIC ART
- 4 PERGOLA W/ SWING BENCH
- 5 AGGREGATE PATH
- 6 CIP WALLS W/ BENCHES
- 7 CREEK ACCESS

key plan



Option 2: Center Fountain

