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# A PLACE CALLED SOUTHWOOD



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# THE SOUTHWOOD CHALLENGE

The Southwood Nature Preserve is a valuable and unique North Saint Paul resource. Initial research helped define some of the reasons for this. Southwood's unique identity of being a preserve rather than a park creates a lot of confusion. The ambiguous distinction between a **park** and **preserve** enables a situation where the preserve's unique value as a natural resource is downplayed and it becomes simply a pseudo park: a "park" without the traditionally expected recreational offerings of human built structures.

It is clear what the purpose of a park is, when prompted people easily bring to mind images where people take center stage: kids enthusiastically climbing over playgrounds, families picnicking, people playing baseball, etc. But what is the purpose of a preserve? The images that most readily come to mind are largely free of people: nature pristine and almost untouchable. With many other parks competing for the community's time and attention, this humanless vision of a "preserve" serves to discourage potential visitors and so the preserve goes underappreciated.



The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "preserve" as a verb that means to (1) to keep safe from injury, harm, or destruction (essentially to protect) (2) to keep alive, intact, or free from decay or maintain (3) to keep up and reserve for personal or special use. It is easy to see how a preserve has such a complicated identity, or lack thereof; if the purpose of a preserve is to protect the natural world from people, then how is the community supposed to "use" it? The result is that while parks are active community places, the preserve is somehow separate, or actually being protected from the community.

Definition four offers a clue "to keep up and reserve for special or personal use." Though the preserve must be protected and allowed to flourish, the natural environment offers its own special uses for the larger community and individuals. In this sense the preserve is better integrated into the community: it becomes a place for people. This is the Southwood Challenge.

# TWO EARLY COMPLEMENTARY DESIGN GOALS

In order to meet this challenge at the end of our research we formulated two interrelated design goals. These two broadly defined directions helped jump start the design process and guided our initial goal brainstorming.

## **Communication**

The branding should portray a modern image Southwood Nature Preserve while staying true to the history of North St. Paul. Southwood can be marketed as a place that sustains the environment and ecosystem. At the same time, residents can improve their health and quality of life through physical activity or spending time in nature at Southwood. These messages can be communicated more effectively by choosing the appropriate channels of communication. With the advancement of technology, having an online presence is crucial to any business or organization. North St. Paul's site should be improved to be more user-friendly. Information about Southwood and upcoming events should be easier to find on the site. Social media should also be utilized to engage users on a regular basis.

## **The Visitor Experience**

The user experience within Southwood itself has to be pleasurable in order to attract more users. The kiosks and signage at the preserve should be more attractive and easy to read. This will improve the users' navigation and ability to understand the purpose of the preserve. If users have an enjoyable experience they are more likely to come again and recommend Southwood Preserve to others. Southwood should also be more active in engaging its users. Facilitating educational nature walks or community-volunteering events lets users know that the preserve is active and encourages participation from the community.

# PROCESS: DEFINING OUR AUDIENCE AND THEIR GOALS

We defined our audience into three groups, primary, secondary, and indirect. Southwood Preserve administration, and educators and by association the students they teach.

## **Indirect Audience:** North Saint Paul Government and Southwood Administration

Though not an audience who needed to be encouraged to visit the preserve more or whose experience of the preserve needed to be improved, the administration would be affected by our designs. Are proposed designs feasible, do they prevent Southwood administration from meeting their goals?

### **Goals:**

- Increase environmental education
- Increase engagement of N.STP citizens (particularly children) with Southwood Preserve
- Restore and preserve Southwood to pre-settlement conditions
- Create a viable long term plan for preserve maintenance
- Communicate the purpose of Southwood Preserve & intended use

## **Primary:** Educators

Our primary audience was educators. Narrowly defined this meant local teachers, but others who play the role of educators were also considered, such as scout leaders, parents, and master naturalists. Any designs that primarily assist teachers should also offer some value to other educators.

### **Goals:**

- Provide fun meaningful, curriculum-appropriate activities for students that engage their interest and create memorable experiences
- Have lesson plans and activities that can be adapted with little effort and used repeatedly
- Ensure safety of students
- Feel closer to the community
- Network with other teachers
- Get parents actively engaged with parents

# FOR THE PEOPLE: DESIGN PERSONAS

Our lives are made up of many big and small stories: how can the Southwood Nature Preserve be part of those stories? Personas are design tools that enable empathetic and contextual brainstorming and design processes. Using these personas allowed us to ask questions from the perspective of visitors and potential visitors and imagine the stories our designs could enable.

## **Eva McKinnon**

SECONDARY educator - in the role of parent/involvement with school

## **Alexandria Flynn**

PRIMARY educator - teacher

## **Bernie Mason**

INDIRECT Administrator - Environmental Advisory Council

## **Jeanette Pierce**

INDIRECT Administrator/educator - Master naturalist

## **Jonathan “John” Tomkowski**

INDIRECT Administrator - Environmental Advisory Council

# FOR THE PEOPLE: DESIGN PERSONAS

## Jonathan “John” Tomkowski



**Long Term Resident**

**Occupation: North Saint Paul**

**Marital Status: Married**

**Gender: Male**

**Age: 48**



Born and raised in North Saint Paul, as a young man Jonathan moved away for a brief period of time to earn a Bachelors of Science in Business Management from Hamline University. After college he worked for 3M, and married his wife Megan. Though he enjoyed working for 3M, John wanted to do something more meaningful. With the encouragement of his wife Jon earned a Masters degree in Public Policy from the University of Minnesota. Remembering “extraordinary small town” feel of North Saint Paul Jon from his youth, Jonathan and his wife moved back to North Saint Paul to raise their children Tyler and Cindy. John enjoys cooking for his family. He has recently taken up running and wants to run the Tour de North Saint Paul 5K. John has made Southwood his midpoint during his runs, stopping to enjoy the natural surroundings. John always greets others with a warm welcoming smile.

John has been a North Saint Paul City Council member for nearly two full terms and takes his responsibilities seriously.

His work is challenging, but rewarding. He’s especially proud of the mission, vision, and core values that he helped the city administration develop. John feels that his on the Parks and Recreation Commission is particularly important. While working on the North Saint Paul Park Improvement Plan he came to understand that well maintained parks and open spaces provide value by maintaining property values, and attracting new residents and even businesses. So much work goes into maintaining the parks. The commission needs to connect with and be open to community residents, but coordinating and getting the word out can be difficult. John sees the connection between parks and natural spaces, but bridging the gap using and restoring/preserving can be difficult. With so many community parks to attend to, John often feels that the natural spaces don’t get the attention they deserve by residents or administration.

# FOR THE PEOPLE: DESIGN PERSONAS

## Jeanette Pierce



**Master Naturalist Volunteer**

**Occupation: Retired**

**Marital Status: Married**

**Gender: Female**

**Age: 58**



Jeanette is a member of the North Metro chapter of the Minnesota Master Naturalists. She is a Master Naturalist for North St Paul at Southwood Nature Reserve. She is currently retired, but took courses at a community college and worked at a local feed mill. She is athletic and not concerned overly with appearance; she carries a flip-phone. She is married and has one child who has graduated college. She is involved with the community and attends Parks & Recreation meetings to keep up to date with issues and events.

Since a young age she has been interested in gardening and maintains a plot near her home. Because part of maintaining a garden is pulling out weeds and invasive plants, she is familiar with the different varieties of weeds. She takes joy in creating a natural, beautiful space that produces fruits and vegetables well into fall, which she shares with family and friends.

She is involved with the community and attends Parks & Recreation meetings as

well as Southwood Task Force meetings to keep up to date with issues and events. Her current pet project includes working with Boy Scouts to build bat houses and making sure signage for the park is kept in good condition. She spends weekends pulling out invasive plants with volunteers, which she finds fulfilling and allows her to feel ownership over the Southwood Preserve.

# FOR THE PEOPLE: DESIGN PERSONAS

## Bernie Mason



**Existing Resident**

**Occupation: EAC**

**Marital Status: Married**

**Gender: Male**

**Age: 38**



Bernie is a current City Staff Representative for the EAC. He studied Communications and Natural Science at the Valpraiso University and got his Master in Public Relations at Hamline University. He settled down in North St. Paul with his wife after completing his degree. He became a member of the EAC a year and a half ago. He is very invested in his work and loves to share new information he finds with others. Research is a big part of his job and he has to be well informed on the topics of every meeting. Bernie is a very organized person which helps in his work on the Commission. He is married and has two girls ages 4 and 6 and makes sure he gets time to spend with his family. They enjoy going to the park and going on family vacations. They also own a little Jayco popup and enjoy being outdoors.

He is married and has two girls ages 4 and 6 and makes sure he gets time to spend with his family. They enjoy going to the park and going on family vacations. They also own a little Jayco pop up and enjoy

being outdoors. Their love of outdoors brings them to the Southwood Nature Preserve many weekends. His girls love to look at the different flowers and leaves. He noticed that it is usually very quiet and not a lot of other people fill the preserve. They have touched on the topic of Southwood once or twice in his EAC meetings, but the subject has not really been brought up too much. He hope that this will change in the future and they can find some research and ideas to expand the population in the area.

# FOR THE PEOPLE: DESIGN PERSONAS

## Alexandria Flynn



**New Resident**

**Occupation: Teacher**

**Marital Status: Single**

**Gender: Female**

**Age: 24**



Alex is a 24-year-old Science teacher taking her first job at Cowern Elementary school after student teaching at UWM. She has been in a serious relationship for two years and has a 1 and a half-year-old beagle named Stella. She loves to exercise and is a big runner. She loves to take Stella and occasionally can drag her boyfriend along. She is also training for her first half marathon. Her husband's career moved them to the North St. Paul area and they have just moved into their new ranch home. She is excited to start her new teaching job and meet her students. She is a very interactive teacher and loves finding new ways to get her students learning and involved. She heard about Southwood Nature preserve from a local resident and is excited to check it out. This could be a place for her to take her students, go for a jog, and walk Stella.

Her husband's career moved them to the North St. Paul area and they have just moved into their new ranch home. She is excited to start her new teaching job and meet her students. She is a very interac-

tive teacher and loves finding new ways to get her students learning and involved. Her previous experience has shown her that getting students to interact with the environment and learn in a hands on way can be very successful. She heard about Southwood Nature preserve from a local resident and is excited to check it out. This could be a place for her to take her students, go for a jog, and walk Stella. Hopefully it is a place where her students can roam freely and really explore the environme

# FOR THE PEOPLE: DESIGN PERSONAS

## Eva McKinnon



**Long Term Resident**  
**Occupation: Journalist**  
**Marital Status: Married**  
**Gender: Female**  
**Age: 43**



Eva is very active both physically and in terms of her children's schooling. She used to be a marathon runner, but time--and a past injury--has quickly diminished that hobby down to local 5-10k races. She tries to live green, preferring to grow her own produce versus buy it due to nutrition benefits. She takes daily speed walks through the park with their 6 year old collie. She works from home nowadays for the Tribune, but has a lot of experience with other newspapers around the country. From time to time, she writes columns for the North St. Paul news about achieving healthy lifestyles.

She is very involved in the PTA at both the elementary school and middle school, and is trying to pursue field trip plans that involve nature, and educational scavenger hunts. She does not attend city hall meetings and is not completely aware of how the city government works, but she does vote during official elections.

Eva lived in North St. Paul for the first 18

years of her life, then went to St. Thomas University to study communications and journalism in St. Paul. She graduated with honors, and had various jobs writing about conservation efforts in the areas where she worked. Among those areas were Chicago IL; Minneapolis MN; Detroit MI; Syracuse NY; and Madison WI. After 20 years, she moved back to North St. Paul because of all her positive memories from childhood and the strong community spirit involved. Thus, she prefers to work from home while working for the Tribune, and has a part time office in North St. Paul to work out of.

She spends a lot of time going to parks not only for exercise, but also spiritual well being as she found spiritual healing very effective for her mind while she went through surgery on her knee. Also, she likes to investigate good sites for potential field trips for the schools. Now that her kids have been to most of the parks in North St. Paul, Oakdale and Maplewood, she is looking to find more places to go. As of yet she has not heard of Southwood Nature Preserve.

# PROCESS: BRAINSTORMING GENERAL DESIGN DIRECTIONS

## **Southwood website**

After having difficulty searching for detailed and current information about Southwood online and finding information scattered across several locations, it was determined that a dedicated website could possibly help raise awareness and increase use.

What functions are critical to ensure the website is as useful and effective at increasing use and environmental education?

## **Rotating Southwood Task Force guest position**

From observing Parks and Recreation committee and The Southwood Task force meetings, we saw the potential for bringing new people on a temporary basis that could share responsibilities and could spark new initiatives.

Where could guests be sourced from, who would show the most interest and how can the guest position be advertised? How could the guests be supported and their events/activities promoted?

## **Redesigned kiosk/adaptive signage**

After visiting the preserve and assessing current signage it was determined that redesigned and improved signage could improve the visitor experience. A particular focus that emerged early on is how signage could be adaptive or change overtime to make Southwood more active and dynamic.

How can the main kiosk be improved to better communicate with visitors in a clear and understandable manner? What kind of smaller signs could be changed over the course of a year and how can the signs enhance the natural qualities of the park rather than distract from them? Who would be responsible for making the signs?

## **Branding and identity for the preserve**

Initial research revealed that ambiguity between a park and preserve prevents people from forming visiting and forming a meaningful relationship with the preserve. The preserve needs its own distinct identity that separates it from other places and conveys the park as an active natural part of the community which offers unique experiences.

What kind of identity best fits the preserve and would improve the visitor experience and increase traffic to the preserve? How can the identity be effectively conveyed and what are the unique qualities of the preserve that set it apart from other public places?

# PROCESS: BRAINSTORMING GENERAL DESIGN DIRECTIONS

## **Complementary currency/volunteer discount system**

Initial research helped us understand what kind of experiences volunteers were having and the logistics that the Southwood master naturalists had to plan and cope with. Master naturalist sometimes rewarded volunteers with a meal at the end of the day. Forging relationships with local businesses these rewards could be improved by offering volunteers discounts or a local currency for their efforts. Local/complementary currencies are forms of money whose value is recognized by the local community, but is not part of the larger monetary/economic system.

What businesses are the best candidates for partnership, what benefits will they receive from participating? How could master naturalists manage the rewards in an easy and straight forward way? What could be done to make the rewards a larger impact on the volunteer experience? Does rewarding volunteers equate to paying them, how might this be counterproductive to the spirit of volunteerism?

# PROCESS: EVALUATING OUR INITIAL CONCEPTS USING A WEIGHTED MATRIX

## Results:

### Southwood Website

#### Score total: 84 Strongly aligned

Website discussion sparked ideas of what the critical functional requirements of the website would include in order to meet goals. The website needed to be more than a static place for basic Southwood information, it needed to serve as a way to facilitate community involvement and usage of Southwood. Potential volunteers need to see activities are available, at what times and to quickly and easily sign up. Teachers should be able to access timely information on natural characteristics of the preserve and communicate with master naturalists to assist in creation of independent activities for students.

### Rotating Task Force Guest Position

#### Score total: 62/77 Aligned

The rotating guest position's alignment with goals is very dependent on how the position is promoted to individuals in the community as well as organisations. Guest positions would need to be guided through a process that ensures that the event or activity hosted by the guest would align with administration goals. The guest position slot can be strongly aligned with the goals of educators if strong relationships with teachers, the local Parent Teacher Association, and Scouts are cultivated. The guest position has a lot of potential but needs to be purposefully directed.

### Redesigned kiosk/Adaptive Signage

#### Score total: 92 Strongly Aligned

Signage is critical to communicating with visitors and can strongly affect the preserve experience. Discussion of signage revolved around how designs could direct visitor's attention, give the preserve a more active feel, communicate the purpose of the preserve, and more directly reach out to visitors in a meaningful way. In order to directly meet the goals of educators signage would need to be accessible to children and be entertaining. The theme of a "nature walk" emerged, where signs could help guide people to have a specific experience.

### Branding and Identity for the Preserve

#### Score total: N/A

Because of its more abstract nature, branding and identity for the preserve was determined to not be its own distinct design, but a driving purpose which all the other designs would help meet: acting as a reference point for the form and style that signage might take and visual characteristics of the preserve.

Branding identity for preserve is returned to as the need for specific guidelines to help ensure a consistent identity across time, communication channels and events was recognized.

# PROCESS: EVALUATING OUR INITIAL CONCEPTS USING A WEIGHTED MATRIX

## Results:

### Complementary Currency/Volunteer Discount System

**Score total: 71 Aligned**

The creation of a complementary currency is most strongly aligned with the goals of preserve administration as a way of encouraging and rewarding volunteers. The concept would require special adaptations to also meet the goals of educators. The success of a local currency would depend on how many businesses would be open to participating and many, requiring many fine details to be negotiated.

Though the concept was judged to have value it was determined that the time resources required to illustrate a viable system would be outside the scope of our time frame.

### Additional Ideas/Physical improvements to the preserve

**Score total: 43 Not aligned**

An open column enabled for a collection of other concepts to be discussed that did not fall into the other categories. The concepts all involved potential physical improvements to the preserve (not including signage), via new bench designs, donation boxes, bike racks, plaques and so on. Potential designs in this category were far too varied and general to be connected up to many of the specific goals. There is potential for physical improvements but pursuing them with purpose would require new goals to be formulated, any physical improvements were to be connected to already defined goals.

0-5 points

Place this into the table not a letter

Write out different options Physical Improvements

WEIGHT	GOALS	DESIGN DIRECTIONS					
		SOUTHWOOD WEBSITE	ADAPTIVE SOUTHWOOD PARKING LOT	REDESIGNED BENCH/ADAPTIVE BENCHES	TRAILS AND IDENTITY FOR THE PRESERVE	COMPLEMENTARY CURRENCY/VOLUNTEER DISCOUNT SYSTEM	ADDITIONAL IDEAS
3	INCREASE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION	4	4	5	+ native plants	1	0
3	INCREASE ENVIRONMENTAL ENGAGEMENT	4	5	5	↓	5	3
2	PROTECT AND PRESERVE SOUTHWOOD	3	2	2		5	2
1	LONG TERM PRESERVE MAINTENANCE PLAN	2	2	1		4	1
3	COMMUNICATE THE PURPOSE OF PRESERVE & RECREATION	5	4	5		1	4
3	CONDUCT AND APPROVE ADAPTIVE TRAILS AND IDENTITY FOR PRESERVE	3	1/4	4		3	2
4	INCREASE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AND AWARENESS	3	0	3		2	0
2	IMPROVE SAFETY	1	1	5		0	3
3	GET PARENTS INVOLVED	4	3	4		4	1
1	NETWORK WITH OTHER TEACHERS	3	0	0		0	0
2	TELL STORY TO THE COMMUNITY	2	4	1		3	2
2	REPAIR BENCHES	3	0/3	2		5	0
		84	62/77	92		71	43

# PROCESS MONTAGE

## Speed Dating

A wide variety of concepts were roughly prototyped including:

- Multiple website functions
- Form factors for signage
- Nature walk themes
- Nature photography in the preserve
- Customized collaboratively created maps for teachers
- Mobile low-tech interactive signs in the form of chalkboard
- A meeting area within the preserve with benches
- Website assistance to teachers to create/select lesson plans utilizing southwood
- Southwood mascots to personify the preserve
- Using stories featuring the mascots in guided nature walk signage for students
- A direct interpersonal voice for signage that would reach out and engage visitors

### SPEED DATING METHOD: 02: Website, Kiosk, & Photographs

**Need** A forum/platform to share experiences and showcase photographic skills

**Prompt** Have you ever wanted to share special moments (or photoskills) in nature with others?



Ellen takes a walk through Southwood Nature Preserve on a beautiful day, with camera in tow.

Ellen takes as many pictures as she can. After looking over them at home she decides that some of them are good enough to share with other nature lovers.

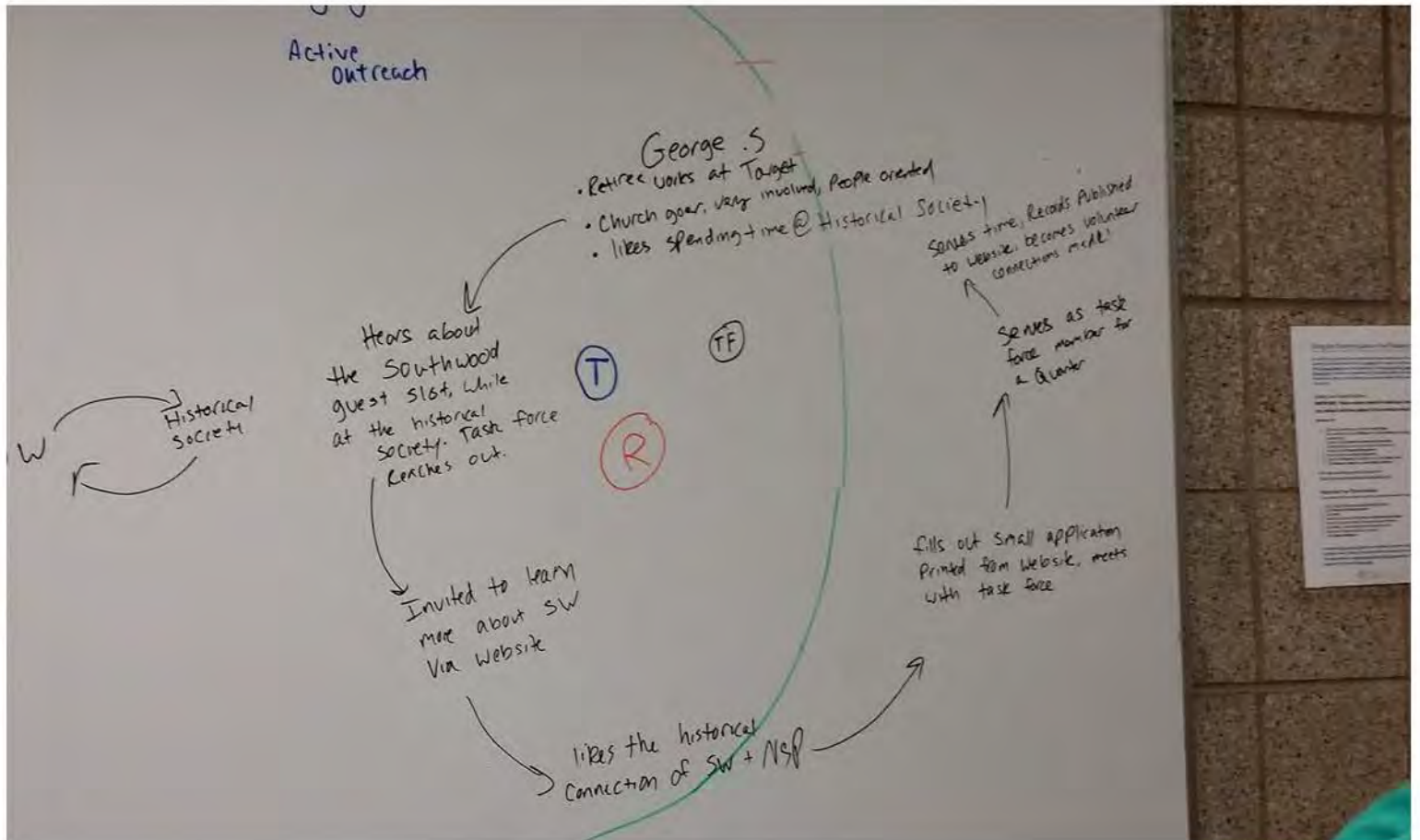
Ellen then submits her pictures to the Friends of Southwood website, to showcase her experience in the preserve and show others her photography skills. Her photo is selected as "Photo of the Month" which is then posted on a kiosk at the entrance of the preserve.

SOUTHWOOD NATURE PRESERVE

# PROCESS MONTAGE

## Interaction models

Incorporating feedback from critique session prototypes were revised and multiple systems of interaction were modeled. These systems told user stories and sought to understand the experiences that could be created.



# PROCESS MONTAGE

## **Incorporating Feedback**

The prototyping process and critique feedback helped us understand the perceived needs Southwood administration and educators. Themes emerged that helped the design team to better frame the Southwood challenge and understand the limitations to designing specific experiences.

## **Resources, sponsorship, and responsibilities**

While many ideas were greeted positively a common response was who, how, and how much? The city and the task-force is interested in facilitating community events and education, but feedback indicated limited resources to officially sponsor and directly support them. Interest was shown in designs that would facilitate others in their activities, rather than fully hosting and taking on all the risk/responsibilities. There was a strong desire for the involvement of other community groups to champion activities and events.

The city and master naturalists want to facilitate others to take ownership of the preserve and events/activities. There is a lot of interest in designs that facilitate others: nature guides via the kiosk, website for everything related to the preserve, resources that get kids and parents to the preserve to do things on their own. Designs that require more infrastructure, whether it's signage or more seating are less appealing because of the upkeep.

## **Consistency over time**

There have been programs in the past that had been started, only to unceremoniously end due to people coming and going and the lack of structure to keep the program running. Having information that changes overtime and adapts to the seasons is important to keep the preserve an active place. Regular activities and events that people can depend on to last and that last long enough to garner a following are needed. Information on the kiosks also need to change overtime and not be static.

# A GUIDING DESIGN GOAL EMERGES: PLACEMAKING

## Designing Experiences versus Designing for Experiences

In response to the feedback as the design team refined and reevaluated proposed designs, further research was conducted on how communities created and supported meaningful places in their community while coping with limited resources trying to create a sustainable consistent experience for visitors. The practice of placemaking provided insight into how these challenges have been met. Placemaking is a collaborative activity that assists in letting the needs and interests of the community arise to determine what kind of place a space can be. Placemaking is a bottom up approach, rather than top down. How can design, an often top down oriented activity, and designers facilitate rather than determine?

## Creating a Foundation



The basic elements of a place can be broken down into four facets: sociability, uses and activities, access and linkages, and comfort and image. Our final designs needed to help ensure that each of these facets were enabled and supported. The team refined our concepts and took a big picture view of how they enable the community to create a place. Creation of a guiding identity for the preserve was revisited and incorporated with other concepts such as Southwood Preserve mascots, types of nature walk signage, and website functionality. Special attention was paid to how the community could play a larger role.

# **RECOMMENDATION 1: Create a consistent identity or personality for the preserve**

Southwood needs to have its own clear and understandable identity that is memorable and distinguishes it from other parks and places. At the core this identity is playful, welcoming and informative. Southwood is a place that helps visitors enjoy the natural world by directing their attention, “speaking” directly to them, and suggesting activities. The preserve is a place for people to interact through nature. A guide for how signage, kiosk and website content will help the preserve have a consistent character. Mascots can be incorporated into nature walk signage to playfully communicate with visitors and tell stories

## **Elements**

**Mascots:** Adaptable and open ended to entice return visits. The mascot should stay as a permanent character within Southwood, but its role can be interchanging and open ended to fit the specific usage need. For example, Olly the Owl, spokesperson of Southwood may appear on signs that educate nature walkers, Felix can appear on signs that are meant to entice attention and entice return visits, and Betsy can engage users to look at the scene before them. Combining her and Olly, they might engage users to look at the scene, and then further read information on what they’re looking at.

### **Master naturalist character**

A collection of supporting characters

#### **- Owl (Olly)**

Olly is a very friendly and educated horned owl, but is not stuck up or pretentious. He loves riddles and jokes, but is not stale and corny. He is always open to share his knowledge and loves entertaining guests on both the website and at the site of Southwood.

#### **- Fox (Felix)**

Felix the Fox likes to play games. Board games, mind games, card games, you name it! He enjoys being outdoors a lot so he can run around and try to play harmless tricks on people. He is often seen on signs that engage users to use their mind and look “closer” at their surroundings. Spotting him is a treat in itself, but figuring out his tricks is where the greater fun begins!

#### **- Bat (Betsy)**

Betsy Bat is an artist at heart. She loves anything naturally beautiful, and always sees the best in everything. Every season has its own luxury, and she encourages users to embrace the landscape and not be “as blind as a bat!” Finding her is always an opportunity for a breathtaking experience, so bring your cameras! If you submit your photos to the website, maybe she will like what you’ve seen so much that she’ll make your picture “Photo of the month/week/day/something!”

Additional mascots can be created by the community.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1: Create a consistent identity or personality for the preserve**

**Interpersonal and friendly voice:** Signage (and all other communication) will more directly connect with visitors, as if a humorous friend or wry wise uncle were in the preserve with you. Communication feels as if it is coming from a friendly companion or guide, not an overbearing authority figure, yet firm when needed. Facts are accompanied by language that addresses the audience on an individual level. This gives the preserve a strong personality and will leave a lasting impression on visitors. Visitors are informed about upcoming activities and invited to return.

**Shared visual lexicon and information design:** All information whether it is on the website or the kiosk needs to have clear and understandable visual language and information design. Color scheme: Bright welcoming primary colors. Light grassy green that avoids the darker expected evergreens that are often associated with National parks. Bright lightly tinted blues that evoke beautiful picturesque skies. Bright lightly tinted red that sufficiently contrasts with surrounding colors to draw the eye. The bright engaging color palette gives the preserve a unique feel compared to other parks.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2: Redesigned kiosk and new nature walk signs**

The main kiosk and additional signage need to be redesigned to meet the needs of visitors and encourage exploration. Signs must communicate that the preserve is an active and lively place and take advantage of Southwood's natural resources to create unique experiences.

### **Nature walk signage**

Nature walk signage would be posted throughout the preserve and change with the seasons. The signs should be made from low-cost plastic laminated prints, so the cost of upkeep is kept to a minimum. Signage posted throughout the preserve pulls people through and sparks curiosity.

**Positive signage:** Eliminating phrases and words such as "do not" and "keep away from" and replacing them with invitations to interact with the scenery. "Please DO touch the tree, or even hug it!" is a possible solution, as well as phrases like "These plants do not feel well. Please let them rest peacefully to become strong and healthy!" in place for treated areas that need to be left alone.

**Rotating/Changing signs:** Just as your friends change overtime and say different things, Southwood will change overtime. Physical signs must easily accommodate new content. This makes sure that Southwood is a dynamic place and visitors are encouraged to return to see how it changes overtime. The seasons can play a large role, many people may visit the park particularly to enjoy a "perfect" summer, fall, winter, or spring day.

# **RECOMMENDATION 2: Redesigned kiosk and new nature walk signs**

## **Types of Nature Walk Signs**

Signs are broken down into four categories, coded in three different colors. The color coding lets people identify the type of sign from a distance and seek out the kind they are most interested in.

### **Suggestions for activities (blue)**

- Suggest appropriate activities throughout the preserve and communicate its purpose, as well as fostering a personal connection with the visitor.

### **Directing attention (Blue)**

- Helps visitors get into a receptive frame of mind for appreciating the natural world. Often it is easy to glaze over all the little details and nuances, these signs encourage visitors to slow down and take it all in.

### **Educational (Green)**

- When visitors leave the preserve they should leave knowing that they got something out of the visit whether the experience of observing nature, or the complementary activity of learning about the natural world. Visitors can then share this knowledge and story of visiting Southwood with others. Educational signs ask a question and require the visitor to find the answer on the back of the sign or on other signs throughout the preserve.

### **Stories (Green)**

- Telling stories that feature and take place in the natural world can be an engaging way to educate and entertain visitors. Southwood mascots can be used in Narratives that spark curiosity and give visitors something to discuss with each other.

### **Maintenance (Red)**

- Red is color coded to be synonymous with invasive species and areas of the preserve that are being restored. Red signs gently, but firmly tell people to be careful not to disturb areas and also teach visitors about the danger of invasive species.

# RECOMMENDATION 2: Redesigned kiosk and new nature walk signs

## Examples



## **RECOMMENDATION 3: Friends of Southwood Website**

The Friends of Southwood should be exactly what its title suggests: a place for the Friends of Southwood. It would consist of maps, information, and events that revolve around Southwood, but also echoes the brand and personality. The website should be "narrated" by the mascot and his friends, and the characters can even correspond to certain areas of the site where they would also be found in Southwood. Examples, Master Naturalist would be found on the informational pages, Task Force archives, Teacher connection...etc. Felix the Fox would be on the more playful pages...art gallery, events, message boards, and feedback pages. The website would serve the critical function of disseminating information by allowing people to post to social media and facilitating interactions between the park and residents.

### **Website Functions and Sections**

#### **- Seasonal calendar of events**

An up to date calendar of events broken into seasons. With the ability to sign up for a reminder email for upcoming events visitors are interested and a way to make ask questions about events or suggestions for future events.

#### **- Nature photography spotlight**

Community photo shown on frontpage.

#### **-Task force guest position page**

Information promoting the guest position opportunity, explaining it's benefits and what can be done. As more guests successfully create events their accomplishments are listed so visitors can see what has done before. People are able to fill out an interest application and can also share the opportunity with others via social media.

#### **- Advice on how to spend time at the preserve**

A seasonally aware guide on how to enjoy time spent at the preserve. Nature photography tips, bird watching resources, special sights and sounds to look for. Information on exercising in the preserve.

#### **- Detailed layered map of preserve**

Highlights specific ecologies and is organized into layers that can be turned on or off allowing people to focus on what interests them, i.g., animals, trees, vegetation, water features.

#### **- Minnesota ecology**

Information about how Southwood fits into the larger Minnesota ecology and the danger of Invasive species.

# **RECOMMENDATION 2: Redesigned kiosk and new nature walk signs**

## **Kiosk Sections**

### **Southwood story**

A short history of Southwood telling the story of how it came to be a preserve and indicating where the preserve is going in the future.

### **Events calendar and invitation to get involved**

### **Promote the Southwood website and task force guest opportunity**

### **Community nature photography spotlight**

Features a nature photograph taken by a community member with a small blurb about the persona and the photo.

### **Teacher-student section**

Teachers can write content for their students or have questions answered by master naturalists

### **Seasonal spotlight**

section explores the rhythms and changes in ecology throughout the year

### **Map**

Tactile, layered map at main entrance: emulate museum designs, where a layer of information is printed on one layer of plastic and kids/visitors can interact with what information they want to see.

### **Master naturalist community spotlight**

Describes what master naturalists are and what they do at the preserve, encourages people to ask questions and interact with them.

### **Ecology**

An educational section that is developed by local students that focuses on elements of the natural ecology. Suggests what visitors should look out for.

### **Restoring Southwood section**

Teaches about invasive species and why it's so important to control them and allow the natural ecology to flourish. Suggests what visitors should look out for.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2: Redesigned kiosk and new nature walk signs**

### **Kiosk**

The main kiosk needs to be updated to better communicate community events at Southwood and to present information in a clearer more pronounced manner. The kiosk should serve as touchpoint between multiple people in the community and the preserve. Making the kiosk an active place that provides reasons for visitors to return will ensure that the preserve is a more active and dynamic place.

**Typography and visual design:** Typography is fun and avoids looking stern or overly authoritative. Text is kept fairly large to accommodate multiple people reading the sign at a time and also people who might have difficulty reading small text. All elements on the kiosk have a shared color scheme and look like they belong together, colors are consistent the Southwood identity.

**Heading formatting and Information organization:** Information is organized into categories that reflect visitor goals. For example, sections that are intended for children/families are clearly identifiable with large bold headings and give an appropriate amount of detail. The amount of information never overwhelms people by giving too much, each piece of information is allowed sufficient space so content is not fighting for attention. Information is organized into sections whose content can be updated and changed overtime, but sections remain in the same position on the kiosk.

**Map:** Visually updated maps throughout Southwood; tactile, layered map at main entrance. The idea for the tactile map is to emulate museum designs, where a layer of information is printed on one layer of plastic and kids/visitors can interact with what information they want to see.

### **Collaboratively create with students**

Content on the kiosk can be created by students in the community. This would encourage young people to explore Southwood and combine environmental learning with community engagement. Students would research the natural ecology of Southwood and pick their own emphasis then work as a team to create content that can be updated on the kiosk. There is also much potential in combining learning and personal expression by having students create nature walk stories featuring Southwood mascots. Once the signs are in place, students can bring their friends and family to show off their creations.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3: Friends of Southwood Website**

### **- Parents/Kids activity page**

Suggestions for activities that families can do when they visit the preserve along with promotion of the seasonal nature walk.

### **- Friends of Southwood volunteer signup**

contains a complete list of volunteer opportunities with in depth descriptions of what each entails. Potential volunteers can sign up for activities on specific dates and/or indicate interest in participating when an volunteer event is scheduled. Allows for both individuals and groups to sign up.

### **- Teacher connection**

A section that facilitates discussion amongst educators and master naturalists. Teachers can ask questions about Southwood to create independent activities for their students. Teachers can also create special messages for their students for when they visit the preserve, which master naturalists and other volunteers post to the Teacher-student section of the kiosk. This section could incorporated into the community message board.

### **- Community message board**

An open forum for community members to discuss preserve issues and to explore potential events and activities.

### **- Social media integration**

Throughout the site social media tools allow site visitors to share Southwood information with others.

## **RECOMMENDATION 4: Rotating Taskforce Guest Position**

The rotating task force position is a quarterly/short term engagement, that is open to many different perspectives, interests, and intentions to promote increase usage of Southwood create memorable experiences. Throughout these different activities and events the personality of Southwood should remain the same, but signage can be tweaked to dynamically fit with the Task Force Guest representative's concept. Because there is no definite set rule for what the Task Force member facilitates, Southwood becomes an opportunity for seasonal uses, signage, and activities. Emphasis may be placed on Historical trivia and facts about the preserve for one term, and then the next could be a focus on the natural beauty/ embracing artistic intervention.

### **Promoting the Position**

To ensure that the position is a success it must be actively promoted to both individuals and groups throughout the community. The position should be promoted to schools, churches, high school interest clubs, and even retirement homes. Ensuring that a wide range of activities are possible requires there to be an open willingness to shepard projects from inception to completion. Guest members must be given clear guidelines for what isn't appropriate for the preserve.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

Southwood Nature Preserve in North Saint Paul stands as potentially a prominent place within the community as a whole. Through care given in regards to placemaking, the space and site could blossom with many wonderful events and educational outsources for both parents and children. As many presentations displayed, Southwood has a lot to offer the community in its natural sense as well as its value for creative potential. While many of the ideas incorporate a sustained event, it is important to make Southwood stand out on its own and carry its own personality against the other, more populated, parks around the area.

Through the four proposals our group has shown, we would like to help mediate the future of Southwood through the importance of turning the static site into a thriving place.

We would like to thank everyone involved for helping us get to know Southwood Nature Preserve, as well as the community of North Saint Paul.