



PICTURE





PARK

LONG FORGOTTEN DICKERMAN PARK BECOMES PICTURE PERFECT

— BY MASON RIDDLE

Digital renderings courtesy of Coen + Partners

When is a nearly 100-year-old city park not really a park? When no one realizes it's there. Such is the plight of St. Paul's Dickerman Park, a narrow 2.6-acre, quarter-mile-long slice of land shouldering the north side of University Avenue between Fairview Avenue and Aldine Street. Currently, the only clues to its existence are brown signs reading "Dickerman Park" and "Park Hours: Sunrise to 10:00 P.M.," posted in what appears to be the front yard of several commercial buildings. But the park's anonymity will soon be a thing of the past. Thanks to a sleek, sophisticated redesign by landscape architects Coen + Partners featuring mural-size photographs of neighborhood residents by artist Wing Young Huie, Dickerman Park will command the attention of not only neighbors and passersby but also urban designers and public artists nationwide.

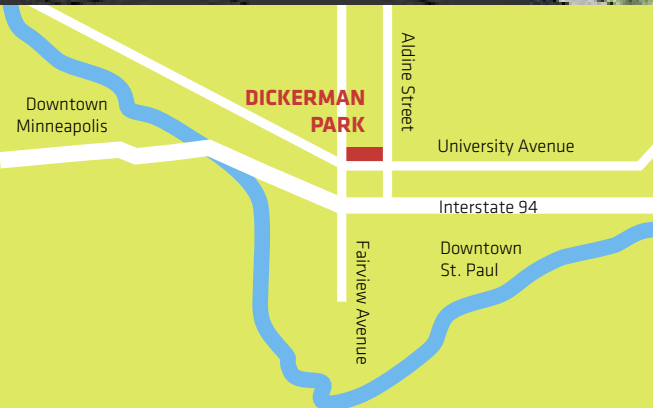


**“WE BELIEVE WE’VE CREATED A NEW MODEL FOR A NEIGHBORHOOD PARK,
ONE THAT CELEBRATES ALL WHO LIVE AROUND IT.”**

— Shane Coen, Landscape Architect

The recently unveiled design transforms the sliver of land, donated to the city in 1909 by brothers Charles and Gilbert Dickerman of the Dickerman Investment Company, into a true strolling park that captures both the residential and industrial character of the neighborhood. Its main elements include a café plaza featuring a café/art gallery, concrete loungers, and Huie’s photographic wall panels (see sidebar on page 53); a promenade marking the main east-west pedestrian axis; textured gardens of vividly colored plants beneath the park’s century-old oak trees; a grove of honey locust providing dappled light, fall color, and a visual contrast to the oaks; a children’s plaza with illuminated water-jet pools; and an entry plaza at the west (Fairview) end of the park. A 12-foot-wide paved walkway running flush to the adjacent buildings creates a flexible band that could accommodate future retail and dining.

“The design has the potential to reach across social boundaries,” says Shane Coen, referring in part to the diversity on display in the wall panels. “We believe we’ve created a new model for a neighborhood park, one that celebrates all who live around it.” The taut, reductive scheme is bold yet accessible



PEOPLE WATCHING

Wing Young Huie's celebrated photography is the perfect match for the redesigned Dickerman Park in St. Paul. The Duluth native, who began his career as a freelance writer and photographer, has been documenting the diversity of Twin Cities neighborhoods since the early 1990s, seeking to reveal "not only what is hidden, but also what is plainly visible and seldom noticed." His images of Frogtown residents in their homes and backyards appeared in a groundbreaking outdoor installation on a vacant Frogtown lot in 1995, and in 2000 his "Lake Street USA" images—675 of them—adorned storefront windows, bus shelters, and the sides of vacant buildings along a six-mile stretch of that Minneapolis thoroughfare. More recently, Huie traveled across the United States photographing Asian Americans; his journey produced "9 Months in America: An Ethnocentric Tour," a 2004 exhibition at the Minnesota Museum of American Art.



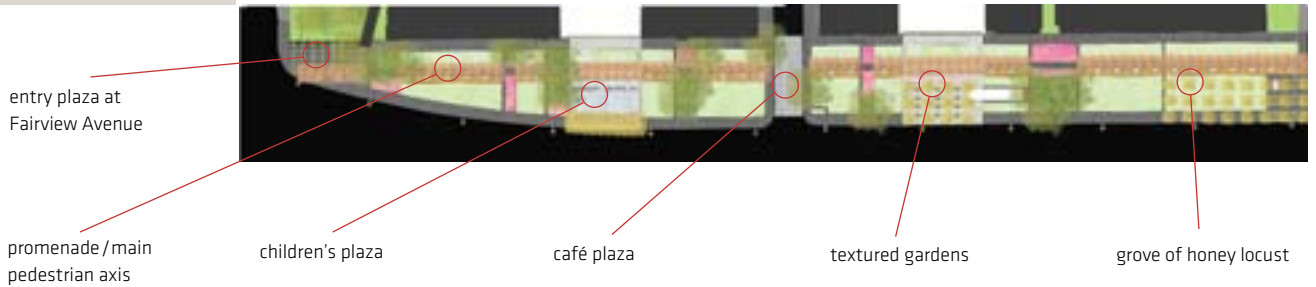
For the Dickerman Park project, Huie photographed, mostly in color, dozens of Hamline-Midway residents in neighborhood shops and cafés and in their homes. Four of the images are now installed at the Fairview and Wheeler bus shelters along University Avenue to test their impact and durability. "This is a culmination of everything I've done to date," says Huie. "It's a way to make my photographs permanent in the neighborhood where they were taken. It will be interesting to see how the images fare as the neighborhood changes over time." While his process of walking around and getting to know individuals before photographing them is essentially the same, "the images feel different to me, knowing that they will be up for five to ten years."

Dickerman Park is Huie's first collaborative project, and both the artist and landscape architect found the process stimulating. "From the beginning, we developed the design in anticipation of incorporating Wing's images," explains Shane Coen. "The idea was to create a dynamic outdoor gallery that gets motorists or LRT passengers to say, 'That's cool. I want to stop and go there.' We think the strong repetition of the trees and Wing's images will do exactly that." Huie asserts that the images of people living and working in the vicinity also mark a step forward for public art. "Our lives revolve around an advertising reality," he says. "But the Dickerman images present a grounded, everyday, here-and-now reality."

Urban photographer Wing Young Huie's photographs of Hamline-Midway residents (above) will be displayed on large wall panels (opposite) in the café plaza.

Dickerman Park enjoys a gateway location between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul (left).

**DICKERMAN PARK
PLAN**



entry plaza at
Fairview Avenue

promenade/main
pedestrian axis

children's plaza

café plaza

textured gardens

grove of honey locust

and fluid like a permeable membrane: residents and visitors can filter in and out. Visual and material shifts—for example, between the variously colored pavers and lush lawn, the mass of trees and sprays of water, and the faces in the photographs and the abstract, glassy gallery—run the length of the park, creating one experience for motorists driving past the park and another for leisurely pedestrians.

A Fresh Start

Interest in revitalizing Dickerman Park sparked in 2002 when the Friends of the Parks and Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County initiated a series of meetings with local residents and community groups on the future of the languishing urban space. The following summer, University UNITED, a coalition of Midway-area residents and businesses, assembled a task force of community leaders and a technical advisory group that includes Tim Griffin, AIA, director of the Saint Paul on the Mississippi Design Center, and Christine Podas-Larson, executive director of Public Art Saint Paul. Descendants of the Dickerman brothers, delighted by the renewed interest in the park, raised \$45,000 to fund a professional planning study.

“It all goes back to the principle that parks lie at the heart of a community, and how effective this idea has been for St. Paul,” explains Griffin. “Shane’s design begins to identify the neighborhood in a very important way while bringing green to a very urban corridor.” The design also constitutes a signature statement for the rejuvenation of University Avenue, which 19th-century city planners envisioned as a great thoroughfare in the tradition of the Champs Elysées in Paris. “This project has the potential to become one of the great urban spaces in the country,” says University UNITED executive director Brian McMahon, who chaired the task force. “It’s not only the design but also the process that sets it apart. Huie went into the community to photograph and put a human face on our larger planning efforts.”

No completion date has been set, because the \$5 million price tag must still be addressed, but the project’s stakeholders are confident of success. Four million will be raised privately, with state and federal funds accounting for the balance. “Everyone is excited and wants something to happen,” says Coen + Partners designer Stephanie Grotta. “Everyone wants to celebrate the neighborhood.”

AMN

www.coenpartners.com
www.wingyounghuie.com

*Shane Coen and
Wing Young Huie (above)
stand beneath a century-
old oak tree at the site.
The Coen + Partners'
design (below) transforms
what is now only a front
lawn for commercial
buildings into a true urban
strolling park.*

Photo courtesy of Brian McMahon

