

Walk & Talk Self-Guided Tours

North Commons Park

Difficulty: Easy – 1 mile walk on paved park trails

This park has served more than five generations of Northside families with big celebrations and ball games, art classes and after-school homework help, computer labs and youth coaching. Today's North Commons Park is getting ready for a major transformation—a \$35 million renovation plan that will be the largest investment ever made in a neighborhood Minneapolis park.

★ **The Creation of North Commons Park** – At the turn of the century, North Minneapolis was home to a diverse array of racial and ethnic communities. The rise of restrictive real estate covenants during World War I forced many to find more affordable housing in this neighborhood, where they established business, churches, and social organizations.

With so many young families in this area, Parks Superintendent Theodore Wirth anticipated serious community demand for North Commons Park. Land was purchased in 1907, a skating rink and playground were installed a year later, and by 1908 North Commons was one of the first parks in the city to acquire “goals” for a popular new game called basketball.

A. North Commons Recreation Center – North Commons Park was one of the first Minneapolis parks with its own field house and soon had a wading pool, tennis courts, and a bandstand. By 1928, participation at North Commons Park was double that of every other park in the system. The Parks board made major improvements in the mid-1950s that tripled attendance and participation at North Commons Park, which welcomed what had become Minneapolis's largest Black community.

In the 1970s, the old field house was demolished to make way for this community center, which includes a gym, warming house, multipurpose rooms, kitchen areas, a computer lab, and an arts room. One of the most highly-used features here is the Teen Room, which is a home away from home for thousands of youth every year.

B. North Commons and North High School – One of the park's strengths is its proximity to this innovative high school, and one of the goals of the Transforming North Commons Park project is to build even more connections to allow Northside youth to play, learn, discover new career paths, and take on their role as leaders of this community.



C. Keeping North Commons Green – The century-old oak grove here at North Commons is one of the park's most distinctive features, providing beautiful shade and helping to curb the urban heat island effect. Protecting this canopy will be an important part of the North Commons Park renovation which will also include green design and sustainable water capture to protect the Mississippi River.

D. Community Connections and Support – Another strength of North Commons Park is the support of the Northside's businesses and nonprofits, including the YMCA, the West Broadway Business & Area Coalition, and the Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON). This fall, NEON began construction on a commercial kitchen and food business incubator, a project that's going to launch a new generation of food entrepreneurs while helping to address the food desert that exists in the neighborhood.

E. Diving In – Swimming facilities have always been a big part of the North Commons story, starting with the addition of a wading pool in 1912, an outdoor swimming pool in 1974, and a water park—with gadgets, geysers, slides, and funbrellas—that opened in 1998. North Commons Park is the first and only Minneapolis park with both a gym and a swimming pool.

F. Transforming North Commons Park will be the largest private fundraising campaign ever undertaken for a Minneapolis neighborhood park—the latest investment in a long history of community support. We look forward to welcoming more individuals, corporations, and foundations that are inspired by the community vision behind North Commons, as we expand the circle of support for one of the city's most vibrant neighborhood parks.



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