

DRAFT

Northfield Town Common Design Memorandum

October 10, 2024

Introduction

The following memorandum is intended to supplement the Final Concept Plan for the Northfield Town Common Redesign. This memorandum exists to provide further insight into the initial project goals, the development of the Final Concept, and design details, as well as recommendations for, funding, phasing, and coordination.

Project Goals

- To create a concept design for the Northfield, VT Town Common that is informed by the desires and needs of the Northfield Community.
- To create a concept design that increases accessibility of the Town Common.

Project Process & Community Engagement

For this public space, public engagement was a key element of the design process. The following is a summary of this process.

1. Creation of a project steering committee. This steering committee comprised residents and community leaders, whose knowledge of the town and the Common itself was instrumental in guiding this process. These members were:
 - a. Sally Davidson
 - b. Gail Hall
 - c. Mary Kay Shernock- Select Board Member
 - d. John Stevens Sr.- Select Board Member
 - e. Richard Wobby

The project steering committee met regularly with the Dubois & King consultant team and Town Manager Jeff Schultz throughout the entire project process.

2. In addition to the input from the Steering Committee, several public events were held to garner public feedback on the wants and needs of the community regarding the Town Common. These events included:
 - a. Community Conversation Event - Northfield Library Community Room, May 2, 2024. Approximately 40 participants.
 - b. Public Survey - Online, April 22- May 17, 2024. Approximately 200 respondents.

- c. Business Owners Outreach - Via emails, June 2024. 5 commercial respondents.
- d. Visual Preference Survey - Northfield Farmers Market, May 28 and June 3, 2024.
- e. Community Design Workshop - The United Church of Northfield, June 20, 2024. Approximately 50 participants.
- f. Student Design Workshop - Northfield Elementary School, June, 2024. Approximately 25 student participants.
- g. Alternatives Concept Review - Labor Day Celebration, August 31- September 1, 2024, Online August 31- September 9, 2024, and at the Brown Public Library, September 2- 6, 2024. Approximately 300 respondents total.
- h. Final Design Concept Presentation to the Select Board - Scheduled for October 22, 2024

For a full summary of each event, please refer to the Appendix.

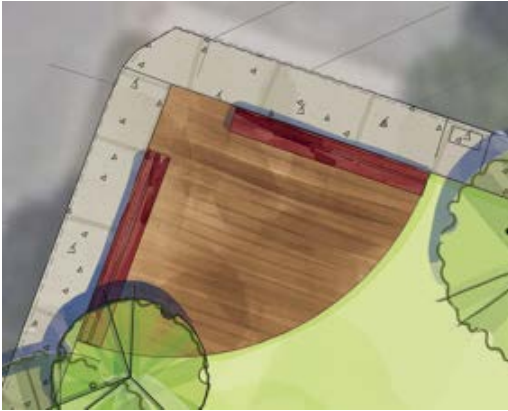
- 3. Dubois & King also conducted several independent analyses of the project site, including:
 - a. Professional site survey.
 - b. Interview with a member of the Northfield Historical Society.
 - c. Desktop analysis of environmental factors and traffic patterns.
 - d. Multiple site visits, including on February 12, April 9, May 23, June 18, and September 19, 2024.

- 4. Key takeaways from public engagement and site analysis:
 - a. Accessibility. In the current Town Common configuration, there is a need for an improvement to the hardscaping to make the Common more physically accessible. Some suggestions provided by the public were increasing the width of walkways within the Common, eliminating threshold bumps between surfaces, such as the wood perimeter of the brick patio, and improving the circulation options around the Common during public events, where things such as extension cords and uneven ground can be obstacles for some members of the community.
 - b. Improving the existing fountain. In the Visual Preference Survey, many respondents indicated they did not like the existing fountain. During other events, there was vocal support for improving the existing fountain, which has become a safety hazard and needs repair.
 - c. Respecting the historical nature of the Common. Many community members stated they wanted to respect the history of the Common, particularly by preserving the brick pavers surrounding the fountain. These bricks were paid for by community donations, and many have the names of community members or their loved ones.
 - d. The Common as a place for community gathering, both formal and informal. To facilitate gatherings, members of the community voiced support for more and better seating options, a formal performance space, and enough room for kids and teenagers to recreate.

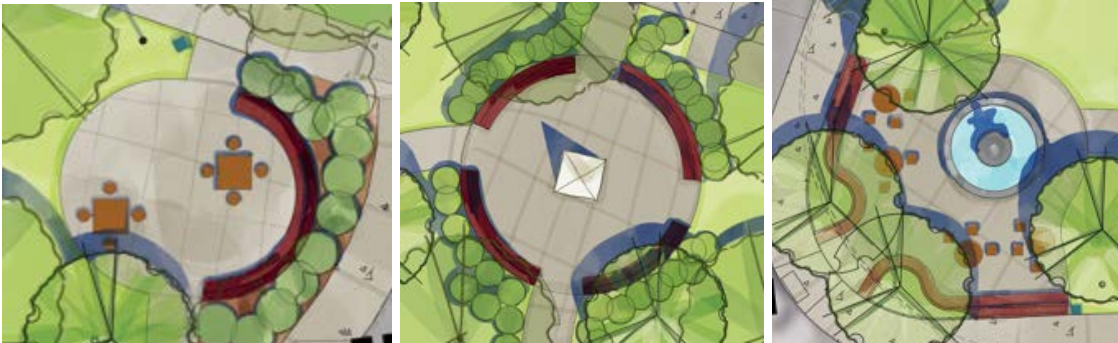
Final Design Concept

The following are descriptions of the Final Concept Plan Elements, which are called out of the Design Planset.

- A. **Performance Space.** This space can be utilized for live performances on the Town Common. It should be at grade for ease of use.



- B. **Paved Seating Areas.** There are three official seating areas. They have a variety of seating options available, and should be made of a smooth, stable material such as pavers or brushed concrete for accessibility.

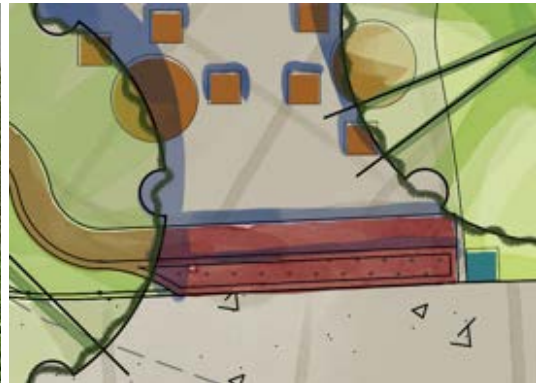


- C. **Refurbished Fountain.** This design maintains the existing fountain, but with several changes. In this design, the fountain is refurbished, so that it is elevated and stands upright, with a steady stream of water. The refurbished fountain will have a recirculating water system, to reduce the amount of water it utilizes. The part of the fountain where the water comes from, referred to as the 'bowl', is raised up, to give it greater visual prominence. The bottom of the fountain, referred to as its 'basin' is smaller in diameter in this design, to be in better proportion with the fountain. Around the whole fountain is an 18 inch wall, containing 12 inches of water. This arrangement should result in fewer falls into the fountain's basin compared to its current configuration, where the basin and

water level are nearly at grade with the surrounding pavers.



- D. **Brick Seatings Wall with Planters.** These seating walls are located on the west side of the Common. In addition to providing new seating opportunities, this design recommends utilizing the existing bricks, currently located around the fountain as pavers, within the walls. This configuration continues the display of the history of the Common and allows viewing year-round without being covered by snow, dirt, or leaves. These benches should all be designed with the intent to increase use and accessibility by all visitors. Along the back of the seat walls there is a built-in planter for added visual interest.



- E. **Brick Seating Wall without Planter.** These seating walls are located around the Monument and on the east side of the common and should be similar in style and materials to the above seat walls, but without the planters.

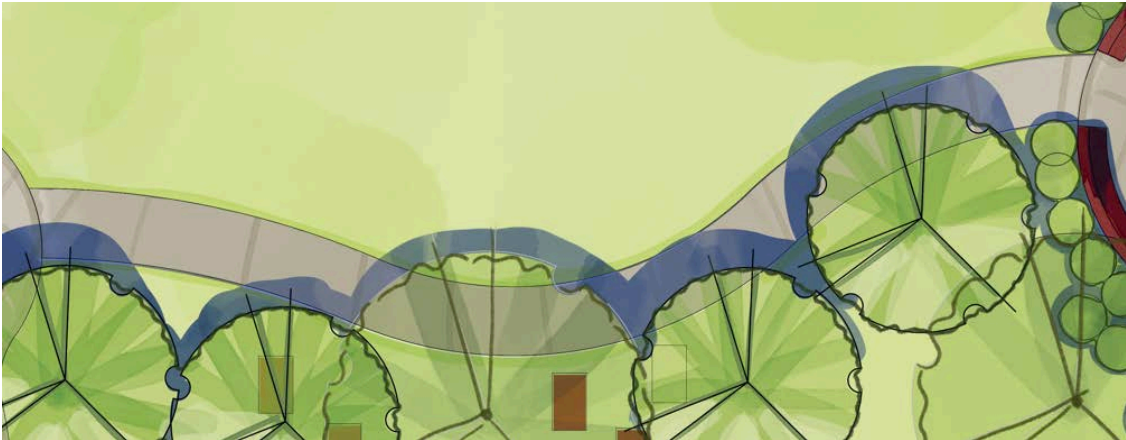


- F. **Tree Planting Area with Groundcover and Silva Cells.** For added shade in the southwestern seating area around the Fountain, two smaller trees are added behind the

seating walls. These trees should be underplanted with a groundcover, and installed using Silva Cells underneath the adjacent paved walkways to increase space for root growth and minimize compaction. There will also be a low ornamental fence along the edge of the adjacent sidewalk. For tree and ground cover recommendations, see the section 'Recommended Plants and Design Details'.



- G. **6 Foot Paved ADA Walkway.** A walkway is added to allow for an accessible route through the western half of the common from the Monument to the Fountain. This walkway can also be utilized for events on the Common, with vendors having the option to place booths along it. This walkway should be made of a firm, stable surface that is visually cohesive with the paved seating areas (B) and the sidewalk (L).



- H. **Existing Lamp Post in New Location.** To make room for new design elements, 4 of the existing lampposts on the Town Common have been moved.
- I. **Existing Lamp Post in Current Location.** The remaining 6 lamp posts that have not been moved.

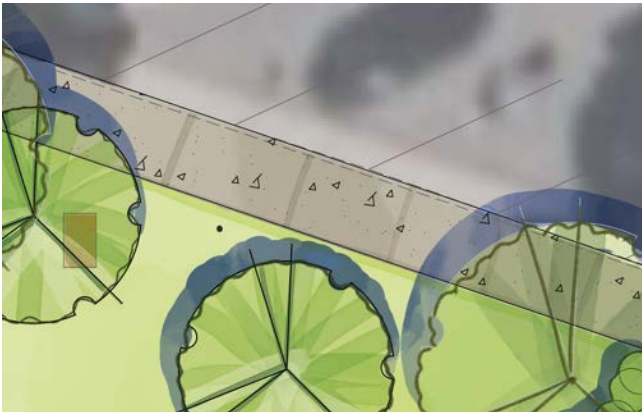
- J. **Drinking Fountain on Paved Footprint.** Two drinking fountains for public use.



- K. **Paved Bike Rack Footprint.** A new footprint for the existing bike rack.



- L. **New/ Expanded 7 Foot Sidewalk.** The design proposed a new and/or expanded concrete sidewalk that extends around the entire perimeter of the Common. Existing sidewalk should be expanded to 7' in width. The sidewalk should be made of a firm, stable surface that is visually cohesive with the paved seating areas (B) and the 6' paved walkway (G).



- M. **Approximate Curb-Cut Locations.** Six curb cuts should be added to the perimeter sidewalk (L) to allow for increased accessible access to the Common. The exact locations of these curb cuts should be determined based on specific site measurements

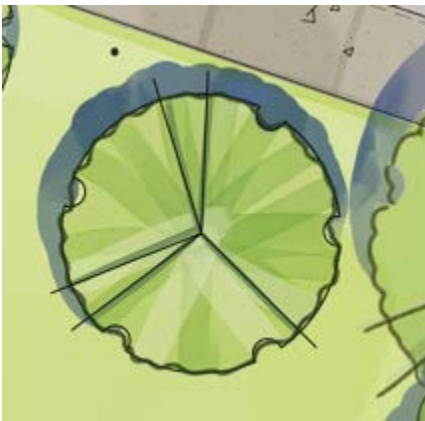
during the construction details phase of this project.



- N. **Concrete Pad for Seasonal Displays.** Northfield currently uses the Town Common for seasonal celebrations and displays, such as the Christmas Tree and Maypole. This concrete pad can be used to place these displays close to Main Street, where they will be visible to more of the public.



- O. **New Shade Trees.** To make the seating areas and walkways more comfortable in the high heat of the summer, shade trees have been added in strategic locations, typically south and/ or west of these seating areas, to provide mid-day or afternoon shade, when the sun is at its hottest. Placing trees near paved areas will also help keep the paving cooler, working to offset the urban heat island effect. As existing trees begin to age, new trees will grow to take their place. For species recommendations, refer to the section 'Recommended Plants and Design Details'.

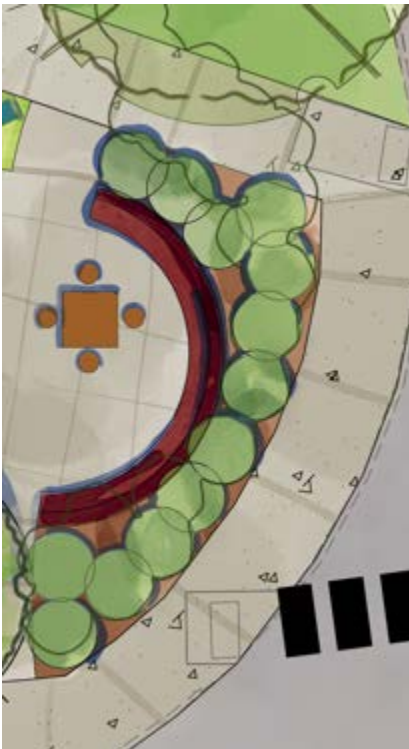


- P. **Existing Trees.** These are the trees to be kept on the Town Common. Some of these trees may need to be replaced in the future, owing to their declining health. In this case, new trees are proposed to be planted near them for intentional succession. This design

recommends one tree to be removed with the redesign.

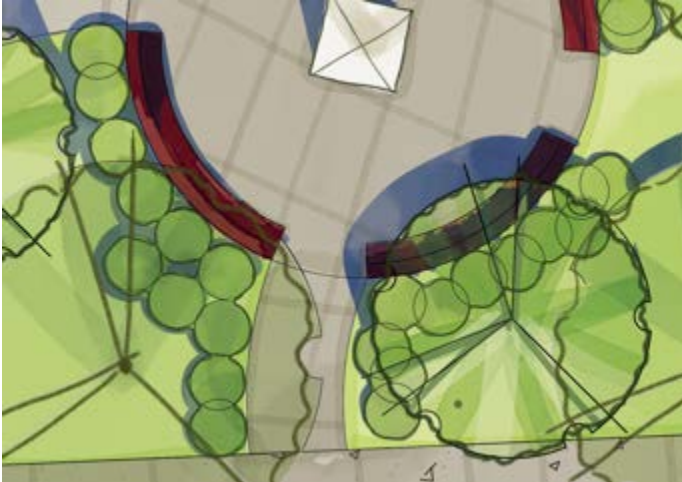


- Q. **Medium-Height Shrub Border.** This shrub border is between the east end of the Common and Main Street to provide a physical and visual barrier, better defining the space. They should also help block dust and debris from the road, and help to dampen noise. These shrubs should be planted in a staggered configuration, rather than in a line, to avoid the appearance of a hedge row. For species recommendations, refer to the section 'Recommended Plants and Design Details'.

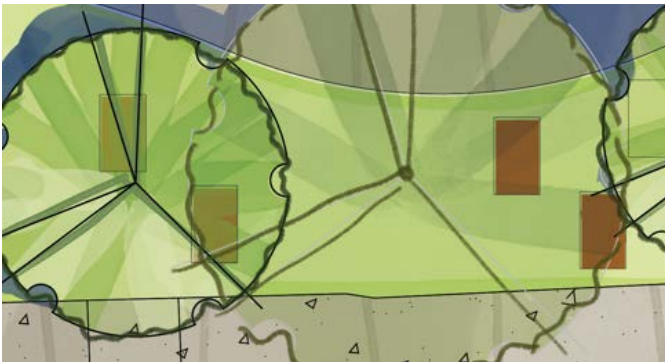


- R. **Low-Height Shrub Border.** This shrub area should be planted with shorter shrub species to help define the seating area around the monument without dominating the space or blocking sight lines. These shrubs should be planted in a staggered configuration, rather than in a line, to avoid the appearance of a hedge row. For species

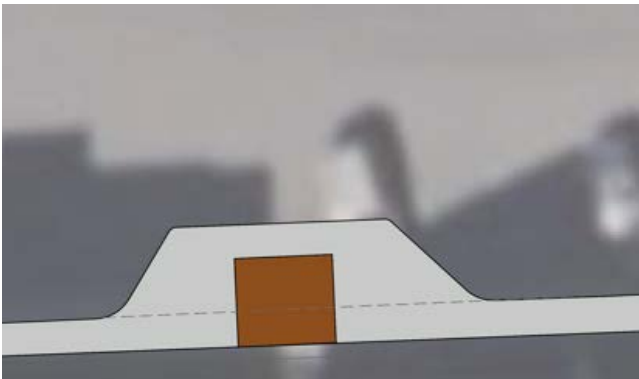
recommendations, refer to the section 'Recommended Plants and Design Details'.



- S. **Shaded Grass Seating Areas with Multiple Seating Options.** Underneath the shade trees are seating areas in the grass. These seating areas should contain different seat options such as benches, picnic tables, or adirondack chairs.



- T. **Old Bus Kiosk with New Bump-Out.** In discussions with the Town of Northfield and Green Mountain Transit, the location between the Norwich Armory and the Mayo Insurance Building was determined to be an appropriate location for a bus stop and kiosk. The bus kiosk that was formerly located next to the Northfield Town Common is currently behind the Northfield Police Station on Wall Street. This proposed location would bring this exciting bus kiosk back to the area by the Town Common.



*Not Shown: 2 Water Spigots; 6-8 Electric Outlets: Exact locations to be determined based off site measurements during the construction details phase of the project.

Recommended Plants and Design Details

SHRUBS: To add privacy, noise screening, and visual interest, borders of shrubs are a key part of this design. Shrubs can create valuable ecological habitats and add an element of beauty and comfort enjoyed by humans, while being much easier to care for than annual or perennial herbaceous plants.

The following is a list of recommended shrub species. They have been separated into shorter and medium-growth shrubs to facilitate a specific design intention and simplify pruning maintenance. A combination of shrub species should be used, rather than a hedge of one species.

Where applicable, species native to VT should be chosen, as they will be better suited to Vermont's climate. A preference could also be given to species for whom Northfield's USDA hardiness zone (5a) is the northern-to-mid edge of their growing range (in other words, plants for whom 5a conditions are on the colder end of what they tolerate.) This will increase the likelihood of the long-term survival of the plants, as the climate continues to warm.

MEDIUM-HEIGHT

- Sweetfern; *Comptonia peregrina* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 2-5 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, tolerates drought, slow-growing.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 2a-6b



- Mountain Laurel; *Kalmia latifolia* 'Olympic Fire' (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 4-5 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Partial shade, slow-growing.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3a-10b



- Northern Bush Honeysuckle; *Diervilla lonicera** (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 4-5 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, drought tolerant.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3b-7b
 - *There are several non-native or invasive species that go by the common name 'honeysuckle'. Be sure to verify the Latin name of the chosen plant(s) first.



- Dwarf Fothergilla; *Fothergilla 'Mount Airy'* (North America Native)
 - Height: 5 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, prefers wet soils.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 4a- 9a



- Flame Azalea; *Rhododendron calendulaceum* (North America Native)
 - 4-8 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Partial shade to shade.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 5a-7b



LOW-HEIGHT

- Fragrant Sumac 'Gro-Low'; *Rhus aromatica* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 1.5-2 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, tolerates dry and wet soils
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3a-9b



- Shrubby St. Johnswort; *Hypericum prolificum* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 1-4 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to part shade, tolerates drought, slow-growing.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3a-8b



- Dwarf Inkberry; *Ilex glabra* (Northeast Native)
 - Height: 2-4 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, tolerates wet soils and salt. Easily pruned to 2 feet.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 4a-11b



- Lowbush Blueberry; *Vaccinium angustifolium* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 2 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, tolerates dry and moist soils.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 2a-8b



- Scottish Heather; *Calluna vulgaris*
 - Height: 2 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, tolerates wet soils and salt.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 4a-6b



- Dwarf Mountain Laurel; *Kalmia latifolia* (Cultivars 'Elf', 'Tinkerbelle' and/or 'Minuet') (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 3 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Partial shade
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 4a-9b



TREES: There are several established trees currently on the Town Common. Some of these individuals are in better condition than others. This plan aimed to preserve as many of the trees as possible. For the trees in poorer condition, this plan suggests successional planting; planting new trees near these declining individuals. This allows for these new trees to establish and mature, so when it is time to remove the old trees, there are new individuals ready to take their place.

The following is a list of tree species fitting for the Town Common. They have been chosen for their ability to provide shade, resistance to salt and compaction, and suitability to Vermont's climate and ecology.

Where applicable, species native to VT should be chosen, as they will be better suited to Vermont's climate. A preference could also be given to species for whom Northfield's USDA hardiness zone (5a) is the northern-to-mid edge of their growing range (in other words, plants for whom 5a conditions are on the colder end of what they tolerate.) This will increase the likelihood of the long-term survival of the plants, as the climate continues to warm.

- Pin Oak; *Quercus palustris* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 60-80 feet
 - Spread: 25-40 feet
 - Growing Habitat: Full to medium sun, moderately wet to soils, salt and compaction tolerant.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 4a-8a



- Ruby Red Horsechestnut; *Aesculus x carnea 'Briotii'*
 - Height: 40 feet
 - Spread: 40 feet
 - Growing Habitat: Full to medium sun, moderately salt and compaction tolerant.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 4a-9b



In the southwest corner of the Common, this design proposes two trees be planted along the seating walls. As these trees will have limited room for growth, it is recommended that two of the same species be chosen, that this be a species well-suited for the small planting area, and that the trees be planted in Silva Cells. This memorandum proposes the following species.

- Autumn Brilliance Serviceberry; *Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Autumn Brilliance'; **single-stemmed variety** (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 20-25 feet
 - Spread: 15 feet
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, prefers well-drained soils, salt and compaction tolerant.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3b-9b



GROUND COVERS: There will be open space underneath the two trees proposed in the southwestern corner of the project side. A spreading, mat-like groundcover is an appropriate planting option for this location. This location will likely receive shade throughout the day, but also receive late afternoon sun. It will also be immediately adjacent to the heat and winter salt of the road. Both of these factors should be considered when selecting a species. There is also an area underneath an existing tree to the northeast of the project site where the

The following is a list of plant options suitable for this location. A single species should be selected, to cover the entirety of this area, and be allowed to form a mat.

Where applicable, species native to VT should be chosen, as they will be better suited to Vermont's climate. A preference could also be given to species for whom Northfield's USDA hardiness zone (5a) is the northern-to-mid edge of their growing range (in other words, plants for whom 5a conditions are on the colder end of what they tolerate.) This will increase the likelihood of the long-term survival of the plants, should the climate continue to warm.

- Lowbush Blueberry; *Vaccinium angustifolium* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 2 ft
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, tolerates dry and moist soils. Salt tolerant, but leaf burn may occur.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 2a-8b



- Barren Strawberry; *Waldsteinia fragarioides* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 2-3 inches
 - Growing Habitat: Medium sun to shade. Salt tolerant.

- USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3b-9b



- Pennsylvania Sedge; *Carex pensylvanica* (Vermont Native)
 - Height: 6-10 inches
 - Growing Habitat: Full sun to shade, drought tolerant, moderately salt tolerant.
 - USDA Plant Hardiness Range: 3a-8b



PLANTERS: Several of the seating walls have been proposed to have built-in planters. These planters vary in length, but should be approximately 1 foot in width. Because of the variety of lighting conditions, and the future decision of how much maintenance will be available for the Town Common, the specific species for these planters should be determined during the construction documentation phase of this project. However, the following is a brief list of the categories of plants that could be added to such a space, with estimations of the amount of maintenance they would need.

- Flowering or Fruiting Annuals
 - Description: Flowering or fruiting herbaceous plants with a single year or single season life cycle.
 - Maintenance Estimation: High. These would need to be re-planted every year, and most likely every season (i.e. spring, summer, fall, and winter) to be kept looking their best. While annuals tend to be less expensive

than perennials, the cost of adding new plants regularly will add up quickly.

- Visual Impact: High. The constant blooms and fresh plants each season will keep the seating benches looking fresh and lively.
 - Important Note: The number of annuals whose season of interest expands into multiple seasons is slim. Additionally, many annuals may begin to look spent or ragged by the end of their season of interest. Therefore, to keep these planters looking fresh, it is recommended that they be refreshed each season.
 - Example Species: Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*); Zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*); Ornamental Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*)
- Flowering Herbaceous Perennials
 - Description: Herbaceous perennial plants grown for their attractive blooms.
 - Maintenance: Moderate to high. As the perennial plants will re-grow year after year, there is less of a need to replant each year. However, the perennials would require the same care as they would if planted in the ground; this includes cutting back spent foliage, deadheading, or pinching, depending on the specific species. Maintenance from experienced gardeners will provide the best results. Additionally, the planters being above grade means the perennials will be exposed to greater temperature fluctuations in the winter, due to the loss of the ground's insulation. This may negatively impact the longevity of some species.
 - Visual Impact: High. Much like the existing perennial gardens near the Common, the regular and rotating blooms would create a beautiful garden atmosphere.
 - Important Notes: For maximum visual impact make sure to include at least a few species with visual interest in every season.
 - Example Species: Dutch Crocus (*Crocus vernus*); Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*); New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*)
- Low or Moderately Flowering Herbaceous Perennials
 - Description: Herbaceous perennials grown for their attractive foliage, rather than their blooms.
 - Maintenance: Moderate to Low. Perennials grown for foliage, rather than flowers, generally require less maintenance. These species will typically need to be cut back once or twice a year, depending on species. As they grow back each year, the need to replace plants regularly is much less. However, the planters being above grade means the perennials will be exposed to greater temperature fluctuations in the winter, due to the loss of the ground's insulation. This may negatively impact the longevity of some species.

- Visual Impact: Moderate. While not as showy as other species, foliage plants can provide an array of attractive textures and colors.
- Important Notes: For maximum visual impact make sure to include at least a few species with visual interest in every season.
- Example Species: Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*); Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*); Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*); Blue Wood Sedge (*Carex flaccosperma*)

Site Furnishings

Below are some potential options for site furnishings within the Common.



Drinking Fountain



ADA Accessible Picnic Table



Moveable Tables and Chairs



Adirondack Chairs



Benches



Bike Repair Station



Trash Receptacle



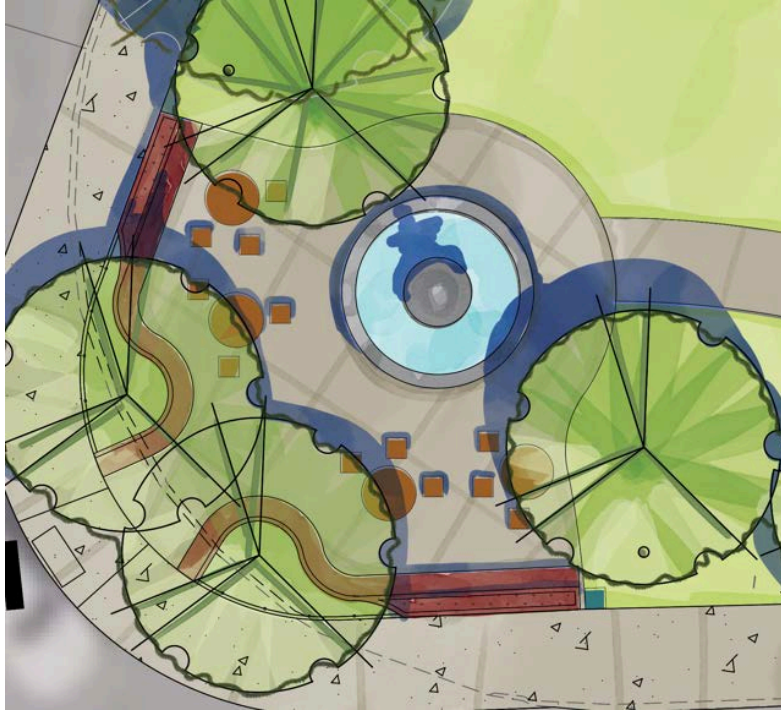
Decorative Metal Fencing

Fountain

Our public outreach indicated that there was both a strong dislike of the existing fountain yet a similarly strong desire to preserve it. This design concept takes the existing fountain and renovates it to elevate the bowl and decrease the size of the basin while adding a low wall around the exterior of the basin and adding a recycling water feature. It also relocates the fountain to provide better use of the space in the Common. Delta Fountains, based in Jacksonville, FL, provided the recommendations and conceptual construction costs.



Existing Fountain



Graphic of relocated fountain



Inspiration images