



**Meeting of the Heritage Preservation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Thursday, September 11, 2025**

Members Present: Commissioner Linda Campbell, Commissioner Gavin Tuckey, Commissioner Zachary Griffiths, Commissioner Lance Lindberg, Councilmember J. Brian Calva

Members Absent: Commissioner Jayne Dietz (attending PreserveMN Conference)

Council Liaison: Councilmember J. Brian Calva

Staff Present: Community Development Director Zack Carlton

Others Present: Sandy Muelners-Comstock and Olivia Halsne, Mend Collaborative

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. CONSIDER AGENDA

Moved by Commissioner Griffiths and seconded by Commissioner Campbell to approve the agenda. Motion carried 5-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

Moved by Commissioner Campbell and seconded by Commissioner Tuckey to approve the following consent items as outlined in their respective staff reports. Motion carried 5-0.

4.1 July 17, 2025, Meeting Minutes

5. GENERAL BUSINESS

5.1 Elk River Water Tower Historic Site

Sandy Meulners-Comstock, Mend Collective, provided an overview of the two versions of the Elk River Water Tower Historic Site plan - Journey and Community. Information for the concepts was gathered from residents during two Farmer's Markets events, hosting a booth at Elk RiverFest, and online community surveys.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed the Vision Statement and Goals.

Vision Statement

“The water tower historic site is a welcoming community space that celebrates the iconic water tower, local heritage, and everyday gathering. Designed for all ages, it supports connection, play, events, and ecological systems while reflecting the spirit of the community.”

Goals

- The history of Elk River is celebrated through storytelling, art, and interpretive design.
- The site is a symbolic place for the community of Elk River.
- The site is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all ages and abilities to experience and enjoy.
- The site is a key stop along a future Elk River historic walk that connects various historic sites throughout the city.

Community feedback revealed that people want to see a water feature, swinging benches, live programs and events, interpretive signage and panels, public art and sculpture, a wide variety of plants, and pathways.

Councilmember Calva stated he thought the stairs gave a sense of importance. The Commission discussed issues of accessibility such as making sure the paths were usable for walkers or strollers and that ramps were available.

Ms. Muelners-Comstock reviewed the plan for including a variety of plants in warm colors to play with the idea of fire and smoke. One of the plans showed a restored prairie planting while the other was more curated.

Olivia Halsne, Mend Collaborative, described the two plans in detail.

Ms. Muelners-Comstock stated the public seemed more receptive to the Journeys concept, citing the fact that people could find their own space within it. However, people liked the boardwalk and sloped lawn in the Community concept. Ms. Meulners-Comstock stated that there was a lot of mixing and matching of the two concepts.

Mr. Carlton stated that feedback mentioned the existing water feature at Woodland Trails park and discussed a pumping feature at the water tower site instead of continuously running water. Resident feedback mentioned concerns about the budget for the project. Once residents heard the goal of the project was to tell the history of Elk River, rather than be a new park, they were more receptive to the idea.

During the latest farmers market event, former Elk River Mayor Jim Tralle asked if there could be a plaque talking about the six mayors of Elk River. Ms. Meulners-Comstock also mentioned she had received feedback about including veteran memorials in the historic site.

Commissioner Campbell stated that, if a historic walk was going to be developed, different historic sites could address different aspects such as a government building including the history of mayors or a veterans memorial located on the corner of Main St and Highway 10. She added that the signage at the water tower site could include QR codes that gave more information.

Commissioner Lindberg mentioned that people are reluctant to walk across Highway 10. Mr. Carlton

stated that there is a possibility of working with MnDOT for a delay in the lights to allow safer pedestrian crossing across Highway 10. The Commission discussed options to improve crossing Highway 10 as a pedestrian.

Councilmember Calva questioned who would decide what history to put on the signage at the site. Mr. Carlton stated the Commission would be part of the process.

Commissioner Campbell added that history of the fire could be incorporated, perhaps including modern fire prevention tips using a QR code. She also added that the history of the water tower should be included. She asked what time frame should be included and if space should be left for future additions.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed that, once a plan was determined, Mend Collaborative could look at cost estimates and consider funding sources.

Councilmember Calva stated he liked the Journey concept. He was attracted to the sloped lawn in the Community concept but wondered if people would actually go there to lie in the grass. He commented on the green space in the downtown parking lot and that few people use the picnic tables located there. Commissioner Lindberg agreed.

Commissioner Campbell discussed real grass versus artificial turf. She felt the Community concept appeared more restrictive and the stairs seemed unnecessary. There seemed to be more places to sit in the Journey concept plan.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock agreed that the Journey concept had more opportunity to scale if there was a gap or increase in funding. Commissioner Griffiths added that there was ongoing discussion about acquiring a nearby parcel on an adjacent lot and going with the Journey concept may be easier to connect.

Commissioner Griffiths stated he liked the Journey concept with incorporating ideas from the Community concept such as the boardwalk. He liked the official look of stairs, as Councilmember Calva had stated, but agreed that they presented issues with materials and accessibility. He asked if, instead of the water feature going through the map, it could go through the timeline stones along the arc.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock stated the Journey concept could be revised to explore the options of a boardwalk and channeling water to go toward the timeline area.

The Commissioners discussed what is currently located under the water tower. They also discussed locations for stairs and added that a platform could be a good place for a photo opportunity of the water tower.

Ms. Meulner-Comstock discussed planting design. The Commission agreed that multi-stemmed trees could be closer to Jackson Ave to provide some privacy. Trees species should not grow too tall to block views of the water tower but include ornamental trees. Commissioner Griffiths commented on trees to provide shade and add autumn interest. Mr. Carlton stated his favorite tree was the Autumn Brilliance Serviceberry. Councilmember Calva added that evergreens should be part of the plan for winter interest.

Commissioner Campbell pointed out that the current plan included covers over the swinging benches.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock brought up the consideration of maintenance of the plantings. The Commissioner discussed having prairie plantings. Commissioner Campbell asked about a reasonable level of effort the city could provide to maintain appearance. Ms. Meulners-Comstock stated that limiting the varieties of plants would make it easier to identify weeds. Councilmember Calva asked if volunteers could be found to maintain the area.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed some ideas for funding including adopting a bench or swing or buying pavers with a name on them. Commissioner Calva stated he thought pavers were a great idea and could see people purchasing them for loved ones. Mr. Carlton stated that some of the larger items, such as benches or picnic tables, may be sponsored by local businesses. Ms. Meulners-Comstock added that the information panels could also be sponsored. In addition, grant opportunities may be present.

Commissioner Tuckey asked if the information panels would be similar to the one found near Rivers Edge Commons where the information can be switched out over time. Mr. Carlton stated the information panels would have a similar design theme and would allow for changeable content.

Commissioner Campbell recommended contacting local companies to donate building or landscaping materials and plants. She also wondered if any of the components would qualify for energy-wise grants such as solar lighting.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock reviewed that the Commission was in favor of the Journey theme, incorporating a boardwalk, exploring the inclusion of steps, thinking about water interacting with the timeline, more detailed discussion of tree and plant species, and discussing cost estimations and funding opportunities.

Commissioner Campbell asked if there would be future discussion of items such as art or a drinking fountain. They agreed that the water tower should not be part of the landscape.

Councilmember Calva asked if there could be a way to have the water coming from two different directions and joining to become one to symbolize the Elk River and Mississippi river as well as the unity theme. Ms. Meulners-Comstock suggested pumps on both sides. Commissioner Griffiths commented, if the water is coming from the other side, there would be more reason for a boardwalk crossing it.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock brought up the issue of city Public Works staff maintaining a water feature. The water would need to be pumped in.

Commissioner Campbell asked about drinking fountains and garbage cans. Mr. Carlton stated a drinking fountain would not be an expectation in such a small park but garbage cans would be included.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock brought up the question of lighting and if solar power should be explored. Mr. Carlton felt that electrical lighting should be used, perhaps to include bollards to point the light downward or upward lighting into the trees.

Ms. Meulners-Comstock commented that the interpretive panels should not be of a height to allow someone to hide behind them or could include perforations or legs for increased safety. The old hitching posts could be used as bike racks.

Mr. Carlton asked the Commission about having a Special meeting in October to review a final draft of the plan with a proposed presentation to the City Council at their November 3, 2025 city council meeting.

Commissioner Tuckey asked if there was a list of sites to include in a historic walking tour. Mr. Carlton stated there is currently a walking tour listed on the city website. A more complete list could be a project for the Heritage Preservation Commission in 2026 in addition to fundraising and finding grant opportunities to finance the water tower historic site.

6. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Campbell and seconded by Commissioner Tuckey to adjourn the meeting of City Council. Motion carried 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Katie Porath.

Lance Lindberg, Chair

Tina Allard, City Clerk