

City of Afton, Minnesota
Heritage Preservation Commission
LOCAL PROPERTY DESIGNATION

DRAFT

NAME OF PROPERTY:

Historic Name: Afton Public Square
Other Names: Town Square Park
SHPO Inventory No.: WA-AFC-
Parcel No.: 22.028.20.14. 0041

LOCATION:

Street & No.: St. Croix Trail and 34th Street
City/Town: Afton
State, County, Zip: Minnesota, Washington County, 55001

PROPERTY OWNER:

Owner Name: City of Afton
Owner Phone/Cell:
Street & No.: 3033 St. Croix Trail South
City/State/Zip: Afton, Minnesota 55001

CLASSIFICATION:

<i>Ownership of Property</i>	<i>Category of Property:</i>	<i>Number of Resources within Property</i>		
		<i>Contributing</i>	<i>Noncontributing</i>	
private	building(s)		3	buildings
X public	district	1		sites
	X site		1	structures
	structure			objects
	object			
		1	4	TOTAL

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places: 0 *Open to the Public:* Yes

FUNCTION or USE:

Historic Functions: RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation
Current Functions: RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation

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SIGNIFICANCE:

Historic significance: Associated with activities, processes, events, trends or persons of importance to the community, state or nation.

Narrative Statement:

According to the *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*, in 1881 "...in the center of the (Afton) village is a beautiful park covered with a thick growth of native oaks. In the center an auditorium has been erected, where meetings are held in the pleasant weather of summer."

Afton's town square (also known as the village park) was platted by the early pioneers who arrived from the eastern seaboard of the United States. The square, along with the village itself, was originally platted in 1855. A survey performed in May, 1855 by Civil Engineers and Surveyors Emerson and Case shows the park on lot 18 on what was then called Washington Avenue and Fifth Street. (Now St. Croix Trail and 34th Street.)

Public parks reach back in history as far as Ancient Rome. Immigrants to the New World frequently planned their towns around a common area. The early public green, town common or town square was often a shared piece of land. Many of the earliest settlers in Afton were from New England towns, where a public square served as the center of the community. Commons spaces surrounding center parcels were used for grazing, militia parades, marketplaces, and burying grounds. The schoolhouse was often located there as well. Of regular shape, (unless dictated by the topography) the grounds emerged as public parks over time.

In the Afton town square park there is a set of trees leaning to the east. Local belief is that these are "marker trees", shaped by the Indians living in the Afton area prior to white settlement. The legend is that the trees were bent to indicate the direction to the Rattlesnake Mound nearby, and/or to the St. Croix River. This story has not been substantiated.

When Civil War broke out volunteers were known to have drilled in the square preparatory to leaving for the South. (Drills also occurred directly east across Washington Street where an underground arsenal was located.) By the 1880s the park was surrounded by a "substantial fence." (Afton Courier)

In 1911 the Stillwater Messenger reported that on July 1 of that year Martin Lind found a Civil War cannon on land he had rented from Tom Cooney. The cannon had disappeared twenty-five years previously and had only been discovered due to a heavy rain. It was removed to the town square. What became of it from there is unknown.

In 1918 the Stillwater Gazette announced that nearly all the men in the village turned out to rake and clean the park; and that a new flag pole, graveled walks, seats and picnic tables were to be provided. That same year the town council voted to erect a concrete bandstand in the park. A committee was formed to solicit funds and labor. A wooden dance pavilion was erected in 1920 on the northeast corner of the park, built by the American Legion. (Afton Historical Society) It collapsed under heavy snow in 1927 and was replaced by a bandstand, which itself was torn down in September, 1973 due to structural defects. (Martens)

In the 1990s playground equipment, picnic tables, a basketball court and a gazebo were all added to the park grounds. (Robb)

Architectural significance: Possessing distinctive characteristics of a style, place, period, method or materials of construction, builder or architect.

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Architectural Classification: Recreational structures
Materials Used: Wood, concrete, asphalt roofing
Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Concrete
Roof: Asphalt shingles

Narrative Description:

The Afton Public Square was originally platted in 1855 as a place for Afton Village residents to gather and recreate. It is a square block (Block 18) in form at the center of the Village. Three uncurbed streets to the north, east and west define the Square with the St. Croix River bluff as a backdrop to the west.

The grounds display a large expanse of lawn with a few native oaks and a variety of volunteer shrubs to the back (west) of the site. The easterly portion of the block is less vegetated. A ball diamond with a chain link backstop is located in the northeast corner of the Square with home plate placed just off the intersections of St. Croix Trail South and 34th Street South. Toward the southeast corner of the Square is a chain link fenced basketball court that was added to the park in the 1990s.

Toward the center of the square is a colorful collection of modern playground equipment. In the northwesterly quadrant are a wood frame picnic pavilion that supports a hipped asphalt shingled roof that was constructed in the 1990s. South of the pavilion is a wood and concrete gazebo bandstand that was constructed circa 2000. Public restroom needs are addressed with a single vault-tank outhouse constructed in the 1970s near the southwest corner of the Square.

While the grounds and possibly the ball diamond are contributing, the three remaining structures and playground equipment are noncontributing to the historic significance of the Afton Public Square.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT: The Afton Public Square is significant for being the only public open space for the Village of Afton as platted in 1855. Although subsequently there have been structure and object additions to the landscape dating from the late 20th century into the 21st century, the parcel has retained its geographic boundaries and it remains to this day Afton’s publicly owned and utilized park space. The Square’s period of significance span from 1855 when to Square was platted to the modern era.

OTHER ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

<p><i>Related Historic Contexts:</i> Townsite Development in Washington County 1839-1955 Immigration and Ethnicity in Washington County ca. 1838-1920 Early Agriculture and River Settlement 1840-1870 Railroads and Agriculture Development 1870-1940</p>	<p><i>Significant Person(s):</i></p>
<p><i>Period of Significance:</i> 1855 to 1966</p>	<p><i>Cultural Affiliation:</i></p>
<p><i>Significant Dates:</i> 1855</p>	<p><i>Architect/Builder(s):</i></p>

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Acreege of Property: 0.208

Legal Description of Property: ENTIRE BLK 018 SUBDIVISION NAME AFTON BLOCK 18 SUBDIVISION CD 19040

Boundary Justification: Washington County tax records, Afton Village boundaries

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION:

Current Photographs:



The Afton Public Square platted in 1855 and remaining in public park use today. Camera facing west.

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The ball diamond in the northeast corner of the Square. Camera facing northeast.



The basketball court in the southeast corner of the Square. Camera facing southeast.

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The Afton Public Square playground equipment. Camera facing east across Square.



The westerly edge of the Afton Public Square displays a picnic pavilion (circa 1990) and a gazebo bandstand in the background (circa 2000). Camera facing to the south from the Upper 34th Street South right-of-way.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH(S) AND SITE MAP(S) OF THE PROPERTY:

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Aerial photograph of the Afton Public Square on the west side of St. Croix Trail between Upper 34th Street South and 34th Street South.



Parcel Map for the Afton Public Square. The Square is on Block 18 immediately south of the Afton Village School.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES:

Published

Afton Citizens Forum. Bulletin 43. Afton Historical Society.

Afton Courier. June 17 1880.

Afton Historical Museum. Various archives. Fall/Winter 2015-2016.

Blondoe, Steven. Minnesota Architecture-History Inventory Form City of Afton Flood Protection and Sanitary Sewer Improvements, Afton, Washington County, Minnesota. 2015.

Historic Afton Walking Tour. 2001.

Map. 1855. Afton Historical Society.

Neill, Edward D. *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*. North Star Publishing Company. 1881.

Robb, Edwin G. *Afton Remembered*. Afton Historical Society Press. Afton. 1996.

Stillwater Gazette. 1918. Afton Historical Museum.

Stillwater Messenger. Various years. Afton Historical Museum.

Washington County Department of Property Records and Tax Payer Services.
www.mn-washington.manatron.com.

Unpublished

Martens, Ken. Phone interviews. May 2016.

FORM PREPARED BY:

Name/Title: Thomas R. Zahn & Associates LLC
Street & No.: 807 Holly Avenue
City/Town: Saint Paul
State, County, Zip: Minnesota, Ramsey County, 55104
Telephone No.: 651-221-9765
Date Prepared: May 28, 2016

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STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER COMMENT:

Review and comment by the State Historic Preservation Officer pursuant to Minnesota Statute _____; Subd. ____.

Date Submitted to SHPO: _____ Date of SHPO Comment: _____

AFTON CITY COUNCIL REVIEW / APPROVAL:

Designation of property pursuant to: _____

Date of Action: _____