

The Triumph of the Commons

"The city is the site where people of all sorts and classes mingle, however reluctantly and agonistically, to produce a common if perpetually changing and transitory life."

Raj Patel defines the commons in his book *The Value of Nothing*:

"A resource, most often land, [that] refers both to the territory and to the ways people allocate the goods that come from that land. The commons has traditionally provided food, fuel, water, and medicinal plants for those who used it - it was the poorest people's life-support system."

Today, the commons is under attack from all sides. Whether it is the fencing off and cultivation of wild lands into mono-culture crops, the use and degradation of vital resources such as water or the erosion of shared knowledge through the privatization of ideas and intellectual property, the commons has become a scarce and ever shrinking territory.

Vandana Shiva summarizes this crisis well in her essay *The Enclosure of the Commons*:

"The 'enclosure' of biodiversity and knowledge is the final step in a series of enclosures that began with the rise of colonialism. Land and forests were the first resources to be 'enclosed' and converted from commons to commodities. Later on, water resources were 'enclosed' through dams, groundwater mining, and privatization schemes. Now it is the turn of biodiversity and knowledge to be 'enclosed' through intellectual property rights."

Proposal:

This design proposal seeks to re-establish the commons in Minneapolis through the creation of a truly public space. The commons draws upon the natural biodiversity of Minnesota through the creation of distinct ecological regions or subsections, each of which serves to supply an essential component of communal well-being.

The commons fosters the essential quality of stewardship through the creation of a community improvement district funded by a city-wide levy. The CID will work in partnership with the Minneapolis public school system to create a maintenance and education program that teaches students and adults the importance of environmental stewardship and the value of biodiversity and shared public knowledge.

The best monument to the common man is that which enriches his life and connects him with his community and with nature. The commons is envisioned as a space in which people of all classes, races and cultures can mix to share in the beauty of nature and the fostering of community and environmental health and well-being.



Vandana Shiva

Elements of the Commons



Community



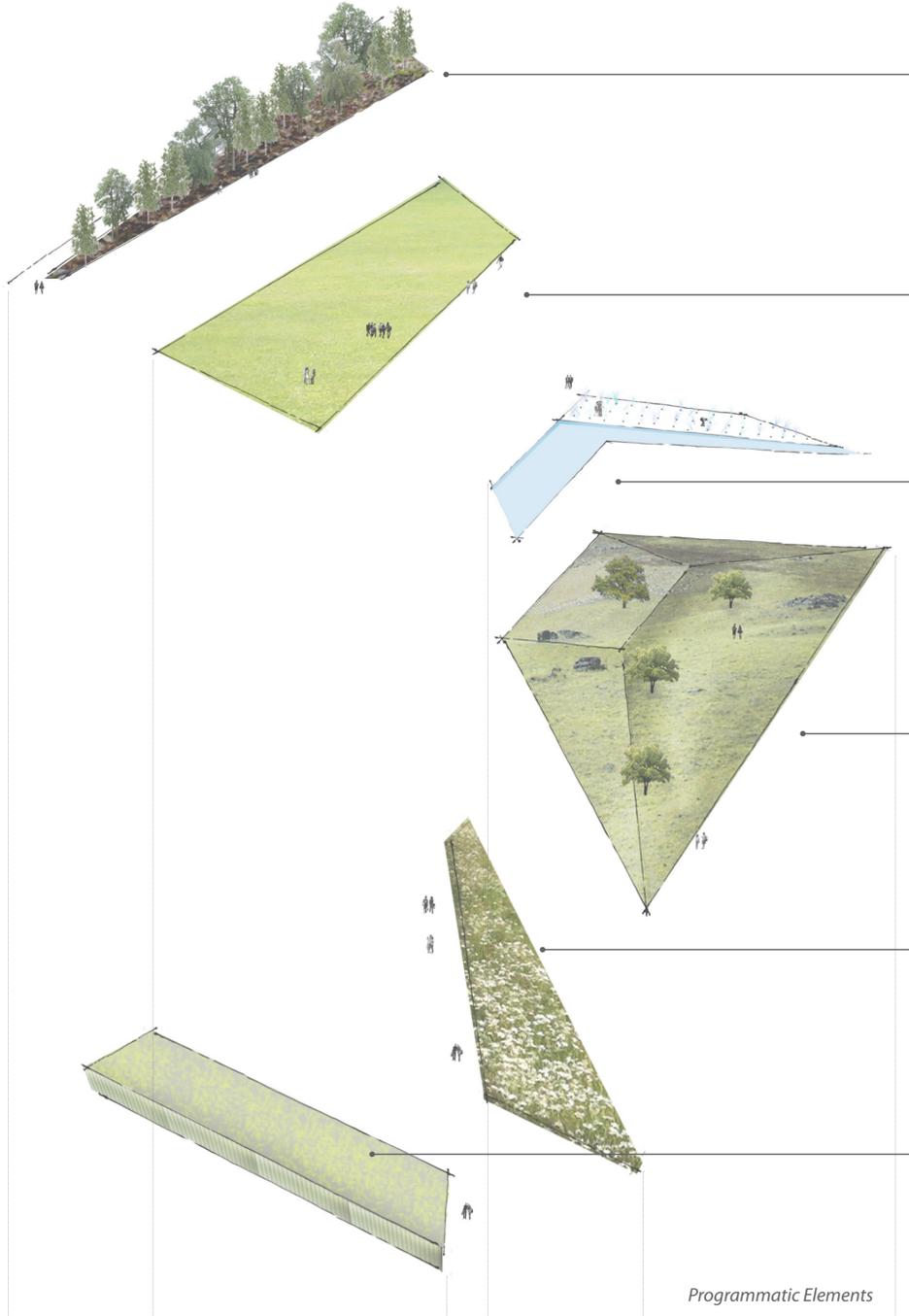
Shared Resources



Environmental Stewardship



Shared Knowledge



The Big Woods

The Big Woods represents a large block of deciduous forest present at the time of Euro-American settlement. In the Commons, the Big Woods provides tranquility, quietude, and relaxed contemplation - an escape from the outside world.

The Pasture

In pre-capitalist market economies, the pastureland was the heart of the commons and was shared amongst the community. Anyone could come to bring their livestock to graze and in the meantime share news and information about important community affairs as well as engage in recreational activities. The pasture accommodates formal and informal large gatherings, games and group demonstrations.

The Marsh

The marsh is traditionally dominated by herbaceous rather than woody plants forms a transition between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. It also serves the important function of cleaning the groundwater of toxins and pollutants before re-entering the ecosystem.

The Oak Savannah

Formerly one of the most common eco-regions in the Minnesota the Oak Savannah is frequently an "ecotone" or border between two larger biomes like the big woods and the plains. Here it acts as an ecotone between the urban environment and the natural park setting. The savannah is maintained and renewed through fire and teaches us the value of rebirth and renewal.

The Prairie

The prairie is dominated by native flowering grasses and wildflowers, essential plants for the health of the pollinator population, including honeybees. Pollinator communities have recently been facing devastation due to the overuse of neonicotinoid insecticides and mono-culture crop farming. Pollinators are critical to the success of our agriculture system and to the perpetuation of native plant communities.

The Education Center

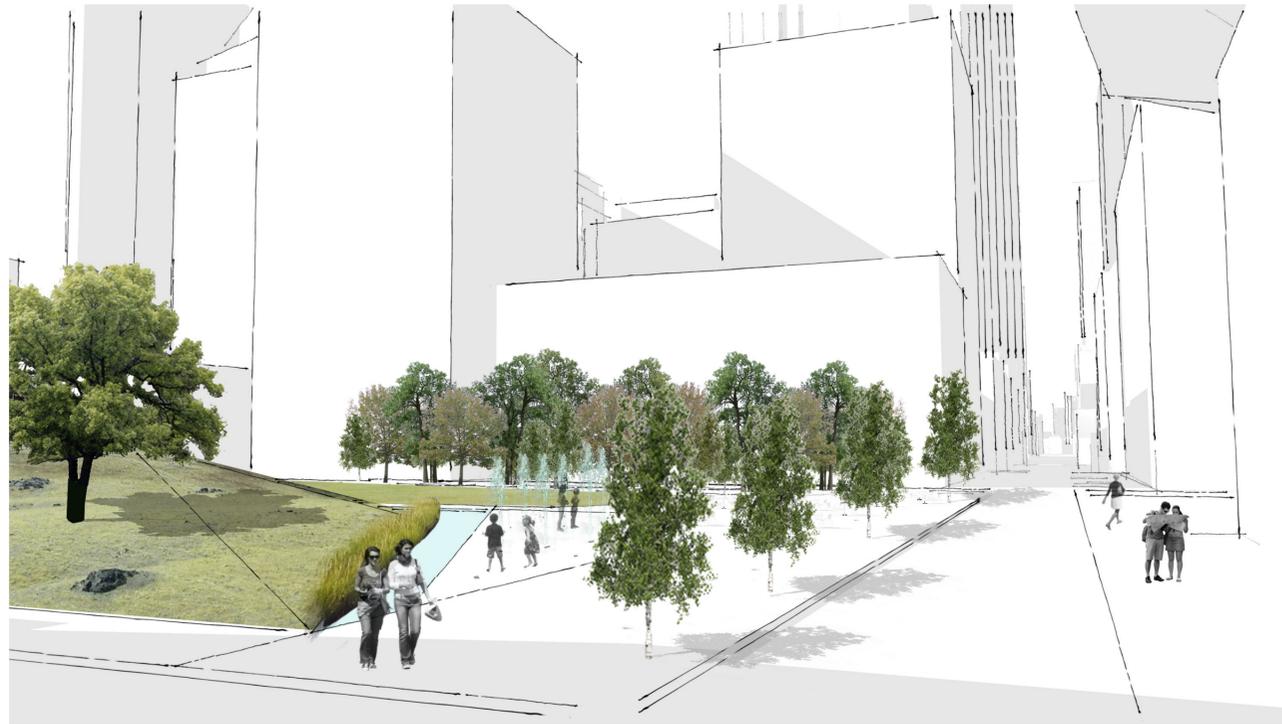
Classroom space for the dissemination of shared community knowledge is provided through the education center. The space is imagined as a community gathering space for public meetings, lectures and more formal classroom instruction.



Axonometric Diagram



Site Context



Community Improvement Districts

Local governments face increasing challenges to fund the construction and maintenance of community infrastructure and public realm improvements. Increasingly, many communities are looking to innovative taxation models that seek to collect funds for project-specific work and to drive community and economic development.

The Commons proposes the creation of a new Community Improvement District funded by a new city-wide levy for the establishment of and maintenance of inclusive and active public space in the city of Minneapolis. The levy would be a progressive tax in order to help Minneapolis reach its goals of creating an equitable city.

The Commons would be the first of many spaces created in partnership with the Minneapolis Public Schools System and the Minneapolis Park Board. While maintaining many of the characteristics of traditional park system spaces, these new parks would be focused on the creation and dissemination of shared knowledge particularly around issues of biodiversity and sustainability.

The Downtown Central Library is the perfect site for the first of these spaces as it encapsulates the largest public collection of shared knowledge in the Hennepin County Library system.



Experiential Perspective