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China Garden project taking shape

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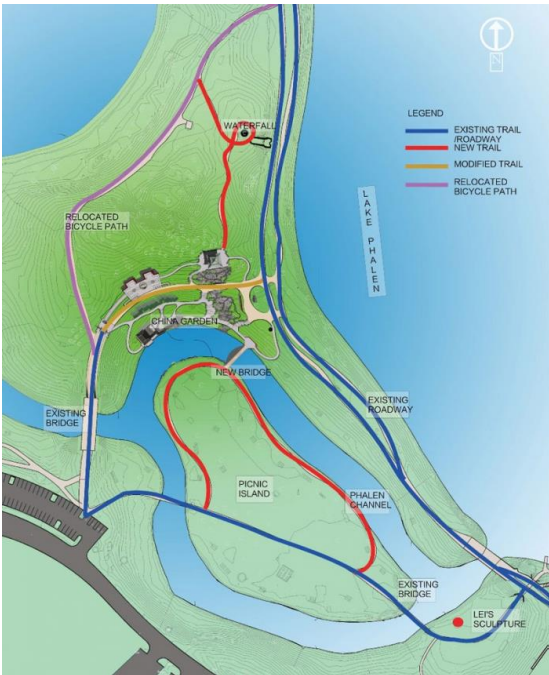
The St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department released an architects' rendering of the future China Garden at Phalen Regional Park. This pavilion is designed to look like the Aiwan Pavilion in Changsha, China. (submitted illustration)



The rendering shows where various features will be placed to form the Changsha-style garden. (submitted illustration)



This general map of Phalen Park shows the area where the garden will be built. (submitted illustration)



Architects drew the garden design and placement of various features in a master plan. (submitted illustration)



An important element within the garden is the Hmong Cultural Plaza to emphasize Changsha as the ancestral home to many Hmong in Ramsey County. (submitted illustration)

Conceptual plans released for Phalen Park amenity

After months of discussions, the proposed China Garden at Phalen Regional Park has begun to take shape, even if it's still in the blueprint stage.

St. Paul Parks and Recreation and The Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society recently released conceptual plans for the China Garden. According to their press release, the garden will be built in phases, with a goal of starting Phase 1 in 2016.

The plans were put together by Changsha architects Jennifer Junfang Fan and Jon Youhua Wen, as well as Alice Messer, senior landscape architect at the Parks and Recreation department.

These preliminary plans give some of the first visualizations of how the garden will look. The St. Paul District 5 Planning Council and the China Garden Society will be seeking public input in March.

Design features include an open-air pavilion and stone garden, a Hmong Cultural Plaza, a lakeside pavilion with a waterside patio and veranda, an entrance arch, and an arched bridge. The main pavilion will be in a Changsha-style architecture and modeled after the famous Aiwan pavilion in Changsha. A stone garden will lead from this pavilion to the water channel and use Minnesota stone.

The Hmong Cultural Plaza is an important element in the China Garden because Minnesota Hmong claim Changsha as their ancestral home, and a large Hmong community lives in the Phalen Park area of St. Paul and Maplewood. Hmong cultural symbols and historical information will be included in the Plaza.

The project has been in the works for many years. The Chinese Garden is a part of Phalen Park's 2011 master plan, which was created by St. Paul Parks and Recreation and Ramsey County Parks and Recreation. The garden received \$50,000 in funding at the end of the 2015's special session of the Legislature, but is seeking further donations. Early estimates put the price of construction at about \$1 million.

In October 2015, four members of the China Garden Society traveled to Changsha with St. Paul mayor Chris Coleman's eight-member delegation to conduct research on Changsha garden architecture, tour several famous gardens, meet with Changsha architects, and learn more about Hmong culture in Changsha. A sister-city park agreement was signed between Phalen Regional Park and Yanghu Wetlands Park in Changsha at that time.

In November 2015, architects Fan and Wen visited the Twin Cities and Phalen Park to come up with design concepts for the garden.

The China Garden will be built at a site north of the Phalen Park picnic pavilion and water channel and east of the Stone Arch Bridge along Lake Phalen.

It will complement Public Art St. Paul's "Minnesota Rocks!" symposium sculpture "Meditation," already at Phalen Park, which was created by internationally known Changsha sculptor Master Lei Yixin, who introduced the two architects to the China Garden Society. Master Lei was the sculptor of the Martin Luther King Jr. Stone of Hope Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The sister-city project between St. Paul and Changsha in Hunan Province is a relationship that began in 1988 and will be the first Changsha-style garden in the U.S.

For more information, go to mnchinagarden.org.

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