MN China Friendship Garden Society furthers plans for the St. Paul-Changsha China Garden at Phalen Park

By Linda Mealey-Lohmann

The group visited many Changsha Gardens to view the architectural style and landscape designs, including a visit to the famous Aiwan Pavilion at Yuelu Mountain. A highlight of the trip was the signing of a Sister Friendship Park Agreement between Phalen Park and Yanghu Wetlands Park, located in Changsha. The Sister Friendship Park Agreement opens the way for future cultural exchanges.

The China Garden Society group also traveled to Feng Huang Phoenix Ancient Village and smaller villages to conduct research on Hmong (Miao) culture, one of the main ethnic groups in the Changsha area. The Hmong in Minnesota claim the Changsha area as their ancestral home.

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Because of this connection and the large number of Hmong living near Phalen Park, the China Garden design is expected to include Hmong cultural symbols and information about the connection between the Hmong communities in Minnesota and Changsha.

In November, Mealey-Lohmann, Zajicek and Sowiak hosted two architects from Changsha to travel to Minnesota. The husband and wife architect team, Jennifer Junfang Fan and Jon Youhua Wen, made several site visits to Phalen Park and met with architects from St. Paul Parks & Recreation to further work on a conceptual design, expected to be completed by mid-January 2016. Money for the design work came from a bill for the Minnesota's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, sponsored by Representative Tim Mahoney and Senator Foung Hawj that passed in the spring.

For more information, contact MN.China.Garden@comcast.net.

(L to R): Mealey-Lohmann (MN China Friendship Garden Society), Changsha architect Wen, Sen.Hawj, Changsha architect Fan, Zajicek (advisor, MN China Friendship Garden Society at the Hmong Village Shopping Center in St. Paul

Group at Aiwan Pavilion

Changsha architects at Phalen Park “Meditation” sculpture

Miao cultural ceremony in Changsha

(Back row, L to R): Mealey-Lohmann, Joe Spencer (Director of Arts and Culture, St. Paul), Todd Hurley (Director of Finance, City of Saint Paul), Mayor Coleman, Vice Mayor He Jihua, Liu Ji Xiong (Board chair, Changsha Pilot Investment Holdings Co), Lei Yixin, Wang Juan (director, Changsha Foreign Affairs Office) (Front row, far left and right): Alice Messer (architect, St Paul Parks & Rec) and Miao Bingding (executive director, Yanghu Park)