THE POTENTIAL EFFECT OF S.P. 2735-159 ON GRAESER PARK IN ROBBINSDALE (T.H. 100)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) is proposing to reconstruct TH 100 and associated intersections adjacent to Graeser Park in Robbinsdale (S.P. 2735-159). The park was designed by landscape architect A. R. Nichols and built by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) and the highway department in 1940-41. It has been determined by the State Historic Preservation Office to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as part of the "Lilac Way Historic District" because of its historical associations and design quality.

Mn/DOT retained Gemini Research to assess whether the changes proposed by S.P. 2735-159 are likely to affect the park's eligibility for the National Register.

It is the opinion of the consultant that the park will no longer be eligible for the National Register as a result of the undertaking.

Despite its ineligibility for the National Register, however, Graeser Park will retain more than one dozen rare stone structures designed by distinguished landscape architect A. R. Nichols and built by workers hired under the W.P.A. The consultant recommends that Mn/DOT and the City of Robbinsdale take all possible measures to preserve and rehabilitate the historic and aesthetic qualities of the park. Several suggestions are made under eight sets of "Recommendations" below.

GRAESER PARK

Description

Graeser Park is a roadside park located at the intersection of TH 100 and CSAH 81 (formerly TH 52) and the intersection of TH 100 and Broadway Avenue. (See Fig. 1.) Graeser is situated west of Twin Lakes in a residential neighborhood. The park is a roughly triangular site with numerous intact stone structures that were hand-built of roughly-dressed tan limestone laid with gray-brown mortar. The extant structures include an overlook wall, ten stone picnic tables, a stone "beehive"-style fireplace, a stone refuse container, stone curbing, and a rock garden with an adjacent retaining wall. (There may be another stone refuse container hidden in the shrubs south of the rock garden.) Most of the existing stone structures are intact. Eight stone tables, one or two stone refuse containers, and three small picnic fireplaces are missing from the park.

Graeser has a parking area/entrance drive that is paved with asphalt. The park was originally planted with more than a dozen varieties of trees and shrubs that sheltered its picnic areas, shaded its grassy lawns, softened views of the highway, and helped blend its structures with the landscape. (For original plantings see Fig. 1.) About one-third of these trees and shrubs are extant. The rock garden (one of only two among Minnesota's highway wayside rests) was planted with numerous shrubs, perennials, and water plants, many of which may be extant.

The park is unusual in that it was originally designed to be nestled into the corner of a major highway cloverleaf interchange. (See Fig. 1.) It was originally intended that the park's concourse look out onto what the *Minneapolis Journal* in 1935 called "the magnificent six-lane belt line highway," just as it does today. The park's original setting -- comprised of multi-lane highways to

the northeast and southeast, Broadway Avenue and the railroad tracks to the southwest, and house to the northwest -- is very similar to its setting today.

History

Graeser Park was built in 1940-41 during the original construction of TH 100, the Twin Cities' first freeway. The *Minneapolis Journal* wrote in 1935, "The road itself is a gigantic undertaking, involving a highway of extreme width, under or overhead passes to promote speed with safety, introduction of 'clover leaf' circles to eliminate left hand turns and construction of so permanent [a] character as to make it the outstanding project of its kind in the country" (Lee 1935).

The park was one of a series of small wayside rests that were built along the new highway. Graeser and the other wayside rests were focal points of an extensive roadside landscaping scheme along TH 100 that included the planting of thousands of lilac bushes (hence the highway's nickname, "Lilac Way"). The TH 100 landscaping, including Graeser Park, was designed by prominent landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols. Like the rest of TH 100 Graeser was built by the highway department and a massive federal relief work program during the Depression. (See Gemini Research 1998.)

The design of Graeser Park was influenced by the "National Park Service Rustic Style," a style of landscape architecture that creates or enhances naturalistic landscapes, and uses native materials like local stone for manmade structures that blend with their surroundings. The natural, informal appearance of these parks often belies their careful planning. Many national parks and other parks in the U.S., including some of Minnesota's state parks, were built in the Rustic style during the early 20th century. (See Granger et al 1998.)

The original plans for Graeser Park and several photographs taken soon after the park was completed are important sources of information about the original site design. (See References below.) The stone features and trees drawn on the original planting plan (Fig. 1) represent approximate, but not exact, as-built locations.

National Register Eligibility

Graeser Park is eligible for the National Register as part of the "Lilac Way Historic District" for both historical significance and design quality. Historically, the park is an excellent example of the early work of the Minnesota Department of Highway's Roadside Development Division. The park embodies the partnership between the highway department and the WPA which produced essential infrastructure while at the same time providing badly-needed jobs for Minnesota's unemployed during the Depression. The park is part of the original construction of TH 100, the Twin Cities' first belt line freeway and a huge transportation and federal relief undertaking. Architecturally, Graeser is significant as an excellent example of the work of distinguished landscape architect A. R. Nichols, and as an example of the influence of the National Park Service Rustic Style on the design of a highway wayside rest.

Graeser Park retains the largest number of original, intact stone structures of any of the 102 historic wayside rests evaluated in a recent, 18-month Mn/DOT study. (See Granger et al 1998.) Among Graeser's structures are a "beehive" fireplace and a rock garden, two rare elements found on only one other wayside rest -- Lilac Park on T.H. 100. Graeser's overlook wall has one of the most

expansive flagstone terraces found on any of the wayside rests. After much of T.H. 100's "Lilac Way" is lost to highway reconstruction, Graeser's significance will increase as it becomes one of the last vestiges of the historic highway.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED CHANGES

Graeser Park will be affected by the reconstruction of the TH 100 roadway and the intersections of TH 100 with CSAH 81, Broadway Avenue, and the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF). CSAH 81 intersects TH 100 east of the park. Broadway Avenue and the BNSF cross TH 100 south of the park. (See Fig. 2.)

Seven of the proposed changes are detailed below. Detailed information on the proposed undertaking is available from Valerie Svensson, Mn/DOT Metro District, 1500 Co. Rd. B2, Roseville, MN 55113, telephone 651-582-1769.

The boundaries of Graeser Park -- identified by the consultant for the purpose of this analysis -- are shown on Figure 2 of this report. These boundaries were drawn based on the original plans for the park (Fig. 1). The word "viewshed" is used below to characterize land or elements that are located outside of these boundaries, but within view of the park.

1. Change: Construct temporary bypass lane

Mn/DOT proposes to construct a temporary bypass lane to link southbound CSAH 81 and southbound TH 100. (See Fig. 3.) The lane, which will exist for about one year, will be located within park boundaries. The lane will be constructed through the eastern and southern portions of the park, encroaching on both the eastern and southern table groupings. (See Fig. 1.) A stone refuse container, which is located in the northeastern spirea hedge near the eastern table group, will be disturbed and should be salvaged. One stone picnic table pad located east of the overlook wall's curved lookout bay will likely be disturbed and should also be salvaged. At the southern table group, one stone picnic table (the sole remnant of this group) will be moved farther north into the park where it will be placed on an existing pad from which an original table is missing. Original spirea and lilac hedges along the northeastern boundary and at the southern end of the park will be removed. Several young deciduous trees that postdate the original planting plan will be removed.

Effects on Park: loss of land, movement of stone features (table, refuse container, and table pad), loss of original spirea and lilac hedges from park, loss of non-original deciduous trees, addition of temporary lane and traffic motion to park.

Recommendations:

- Design the temporary lane so that it encroaches on the park as little as possible.
- Retain as many of the hedges and shrubs as possible near the northeastern and southern portions of the site.

- As planned, move the stone table to an existing stone pad to retain the original spatial organization of the park. When reassembling the table, tint and shape the mortar joints to match the original joints as closely as possible.

- Move the refuse container and the nearby flagstone pad (both near the northeastern hedges) to alternate locations within the park, placing them at locations consistent with the original design intent. (See Fig. 1.) (Contact the Mn/DOT Site Development Unit or Cultural Resources Unit for more information on Nichols-designed stone refuse containers.)

- There may be another original stone refuse container hidden within the hedges near the southern end of the park. Locate this container and either take steps to protect it from construction, or move it northward within the park, placing at a location consistent with the original design intent.

2. Change: Add lanes to TH 100

The reconstruction of TH 100 will add one additional lane to TH 100 in each direction, increasing the highway from four to six lanes. Adding the lanes will be achieved primarily by reducing the width of the median in the center, with minimal widening of the TH 100 main line at its outside edges. TH 100 will stay at approximately its current elevation past the park.

Effects on Park: addition of more traffic noise and motion to viewshed.

Recommendations:

- Replant missing trees in the park, following the original planting plan. (See Fig. 1.) Add additional trees to screen traffic, extrapolating from the original plan. Use large transplants, if possible. Select and position the trees with the advice of a landscape architect experienced with historic landscapes.

3. Change: Raise CSAH 81 over TH 100

Reconstructing the intersection of TH 100 and CSAH 81 will involve raising CSAH 81 over TH 100 on an overpass structure within the park's viewshed. The overpass will replace an existing at-grade crossing with stoplights. On top of the overpass, the new CSAH 81 driving surface will be about 25' higher than its current elevation. The upper portion of the overpass structure will be about 4'-5' deep. Northeast of the park, the CSAH 81 roadway will begin to rise as it moves toward TH 100 and the overpass.

Effects on Park: addition of overpass and rising CSAH 81 roadway to viewshed.

Note: An elevated overpass in the approximate location of the proposed overpass (all be it slightly narrower and lower) was anticipated by the park's original design intent. (See Fig. 1.)

Recommendations:

- Retain as many of the hedges and shrubs as possible near the northeastern edge of the site.

- Replant missing trees in the park, following the original planting plan. (See Fig. 1.) Add additional trees to screen traffic, extrapolating from the original plan. Use large transplants, if possible. Select and position the trees with the advice of a landscape architect experienced with historic landscapes.

4. Change: Add new ramp (southbound CSAH 81 to TH 100) and noise wall

The redesigned TH 100/CSAH 81 intersection will add a new ramp that will carry traffic from southbound CSAH 81 onto southbound TH 100. (See Fig. 2.) The ramp will be about 50' wide. It will be located outside of the park boundaries along the northern two-thirds of the park, but within park boundaries at the southern end. The land at the southern end of the park was originally part of the southern table grouping and is currently an open, grassy area. (Trees and shrubs here will be lost to the temporary bypass lane.) East of the park boundaries, the ramp will occupy an open grassy area that currently buffers the park proper from the highway interchange. In this area, about one dozen young deciduous trees will be removed. (These trees postdate the original planting plan.) In general, the ramp's elevation will decrease as traffic moves southward from CSAH 81 to TH 100, which travels under Broadway Avenue.

A noise wall will be added to the northeastern corner of the park along the new ramp. (See Fig. 2.) The 18'-20' wooden noise wall will be built along the western edge of CSAH 81, on or just outside of park boundaries, but will then enter the park northeast of the overlook wall.

An electrical high line tower located just outside of the northeastern boundary of the park will be moved to the park boundary to accommodate the new ramp. The tower will be moved about 1,000' to the southwest where it will be placed near the existing original spirea hedge. Shrubs that were not removed for the temporary lane may be removed to accommodate the tower.

A black vinyl-covered chainlink fence will be added to mark the highway right-of-way line between the park and the new ramp. (See Fig. 2.) The fencing will enter park boundaries at the southern end of park.

Effects on Park: loss of land at southern end of park, loss of original shrubs not taken by the temporary lane, addition of new ramp and traffic motion to viewshed, addition of noise wall to park, tower moving closer to park within viewshed, possible loss of hedges at tower base, addition of fencing to park and viewshed.

Note: A ramp linking CSAH 81 and TH100 was anticipated by the park's original design intent. (See Fig. 1.)

Recommendations:

- Design the new ramp so that it encroaches on the park as little as possible.

- Eliminate the "hook" at the end of the noise wall that projects into the park near the stone overlook wall.

- Retain as many of the hedges and shrubs near the park's boundaries.

- Replant missing trees in the park, following the original planting plan. (See Fig. 1.) Add additional trees to screen traffic, extrapolating from the original plan. Use large transplants, if possible. Select and position the trees with the advice of a landscape architect experienced with historic landscapes.

5. Change: Add drainage pond

Mn/DOT proposes to construct an approximately 6,000 square foot drainage pond within the eastern boundary of the park. (See Fig. 2.) (The pond will collect water from city storm sewers and street runoff.) The edge of the pond (at ordinary water level) will be about 120' from the overlook wall's curved bay and about 30' from the rock garden. The pond will be built in what was an open, grassy area on the original plan, and extend into what was the southern table grouping. A planting plan for trees and other vegetation around the pond has not yet been determined. The city has suggested building a walking path around the pond.

Effects on Park: Addition of new element to park.

Recommendations:

- Design the pond to be as small as possible. Breaking it into two pieces would improve its visual impact. Position the pond as far to the east as possible.

- Soften the appearance of the pond by planting clusters of trees at its edges, extrapolating plant placement from the design intent of the original planting plan. Select and position the trees with the advice of a landscape architect experienced with historic landscapes.

- Do not further alter the park by add a footpath around the pond which would introduce another new element, further compromising the park's historical integrity.

6. Change: Widen Broadway Avenue

A portion of Broadway Avenue adjacent to the southern half of the park will be raised in elevation about 2' and widened by several feet to a width of 60'. (See Fig. 2.) (The street will change from two 12' driving lanes and two shoulders to two 12' lanes, two 10' shoulders, and two sidewalks.) The widening will begin at about the midpoint of the park's western boundary (Sta. 71.0) and continue southward over the Broadway/TH 100 overpass. Several original, mature trees will be removed. (The construction limits along Broadway will vary in width, but may approach 100' from the centerline of Broadway in some places.)

The slope between Broadway Avenue and the park's rock garden will be recontoured from an approximately 1:6 slope to an approximately 1:4 slope.

The widening of Broadway Avenue will disturb two stone elements: the rock garden's western stairway and a small retaining wall. (See Fig. 4.) The rock garden's western stairway leads from Broadway Avenue down into the rock garden. (It is one of two matching stone stairways that access the rock garden. The other is located on the garden's northern side.) Mn/DOT proposes to reconstruct the stairway slightly to the east of its current location and at a steeper angle. The second stone element to be disturbed, the small retaining wall, is a V-shaped stone structure located just north of the stairway. (See its current placement in Fig. 4.) Plans for the retaining wall have not yet been determined.

The water line that feeds the rock garden's now-inoperable fountain currently enters the park from under TH 100. The water line will be moved so that it enters the park under Broadway Avenue, allowing possible future rehabilitation of the fountain.

The circa 1940 overpass bridge that carries Broadway over TH 100 will be replaced by a bridge that is several feet wider and about 2' higher than the existing bridge. The bridge is located just south of the park within its viewshed.

A line of shrubs that have volunteered between Broadway Avenue and the BNSF railroad tracks will be removed. These shrubs currently soften the view southward from the park and screen the park from the railroad tracks.

Effects on Park: loss of several feet of land from southwestern edge of park, loss of original trees from southwestern side of park, recontouring of slope along southwestern edge of park, reconstruction of stone stairway in new location and at new angle, repositioning of small stone retaining wall, realignment of rock garden's water feed, replacement of original 1940 bridge in viewshed, loss of screening hedges in viewshed west of park.

Recommendations:

- Take steps to protect the edges of the rock garden during all phases of construction including during removal of stairway and small retaining wall.
- Preserve as many existing trees and shrubs as possible along Broadway Avenue and near the rock garden.
- There may be an original stone refuse container hidden within the shrubs near the southern end of the park. Locate this container and either take steps to protect it from construction, or move the container northward within the park, placing at a location consistent with the original design intent.
- Reconstruct the stairway following the historical photograph that appears as Figure 4 in this report.
- Reconstruct the small stone retaining wall north of the stairway, again referring to Figure 4 in this report.
- Replant trees and shrubs along the western edge of the park and at the southern end (to screen the new bridge), following the design intent of the original planting plan. (See Fig. 1.)

Select and position the trees with the advice of a landscape architect experienced with historic landscapes.

- Replant the screening between Broadway Avenue and the BNSF railroad tracks.

7. Change: Repave Graeser's parking area

It is proposed that Graeser's parking area be repaved with a bituminous overlay. The overlay will raise the elevation of the parking area by about 2". Original limestone curbing currently runs the length of the southeastern side of the parking area (in front of the overlook wall) and encircles the triangular island.

The original height of the stone curbing was about 6". Pavement overlays through the years have reduced the height of the stone curbing to about 4". The proposed overlay would further reduce the curb depth to about 2".

Effects on Park: further bury the stone curbing leaving only about 2" of curb face exposed.

Recommendations:

- To preserve the depth of the distinctive stone curbing, substitute a mill and inlay for the pavement overlay so that there is no net increase (or a possible decrease) in the pavement thickness.

8. Change: Transfer of ownership

While not technically part of S.P. 2735-159, Mn/DOT has proposed that the park be transferred to the jurisdiction of the City of Robbinsdale.

Recommendations:

- Prepare a written historic preservation plan to help preserve the park's historic qualities by guiding its future rehabilitation and maintenance.

- Do not move the stone flagpole salvaged from Blazer Park into Graeser. This would alter the park by adding a new element, further compromising the park's historical integrity. Instead, place the flagpole in an alternate location, outside of park boundaries. If the flagpole must be placed within the park, consider placing it on the triangular island at the Broadway Avenue entrance.

- Rehabilitate the park's exceptional stone structures with the advice and supervision of an architect experienced in historic preservation.

- Explore rehabilitating the park with additional stone tables salvaged from other TH 100 parks. Position and reassemble the tables with the advice of an architect or landscape architect experienced in historic preservation.

- The park is missing about two-thirds of its original trees and more will be lost to the highway project. Replant missing trees in the park, following the original planting plan. (See Fig. 1.) Add additional trees to screen traffic, extrapolating from the original plan. Use large transplants, if possible. Select and position the trees with the advice of a landscape architect experienced with historic landscapes.

SUMMARY

The proposed reconstruction of TH 100 and its associated intersections will result in significant changes to both Graeser Park and its viewshed.

It is the opinion of Gemini Research that the park will not be eligible for the National Register after the changes. The impact of some of these changes may be lessened by implementing the recommendations of this report.

Despite the highway changes, Graeser Park will retain many important qualities including the largest collection of A. R. Nichols-designed stone structures of any roadside park in the state. It is hoped that Graeser's structures and plantings can be carefully rehabilitated to preserve the park's remaining design qualities and ensure that Graeser can be enjoyed by future generations of city residents.

REFERENCES

Original Plans

"Roadside Development Plans Trunk Highway No. 100-130. S.P. 2735-03. Final Plans Showing Materials Placed, Construction Div., W.P.A., November 30, 1941." Sheet 5 of 5. Minnesota Department of Highways. Nov. 30, 1941.

[Note: additional original site plans are probably available from Mn/DOT's plan room.]

Historic Photos

Historic photos of Graeser Park. 1940. Catalog No. MH5.9 RB r9 and p4. Minnesota Historical Society. St. Paul.

Historic photos of Graeser Park. Negative envelopes 41:85 (taken 1941) and 48:2099 (taken 1948). Mn/DOT Photo Archives. St. Paul.

Olson, Harold E., comp. *Historical Markers in Minnesota*. 4 volume photo album. Prepared by the Roadside Development Division, MHD. Ca. 1942, updated ca. 1954. Located in Mn/DOT Site Development Unit. [Contains historical photos of Graeser park on page 2.20.]

Other Information

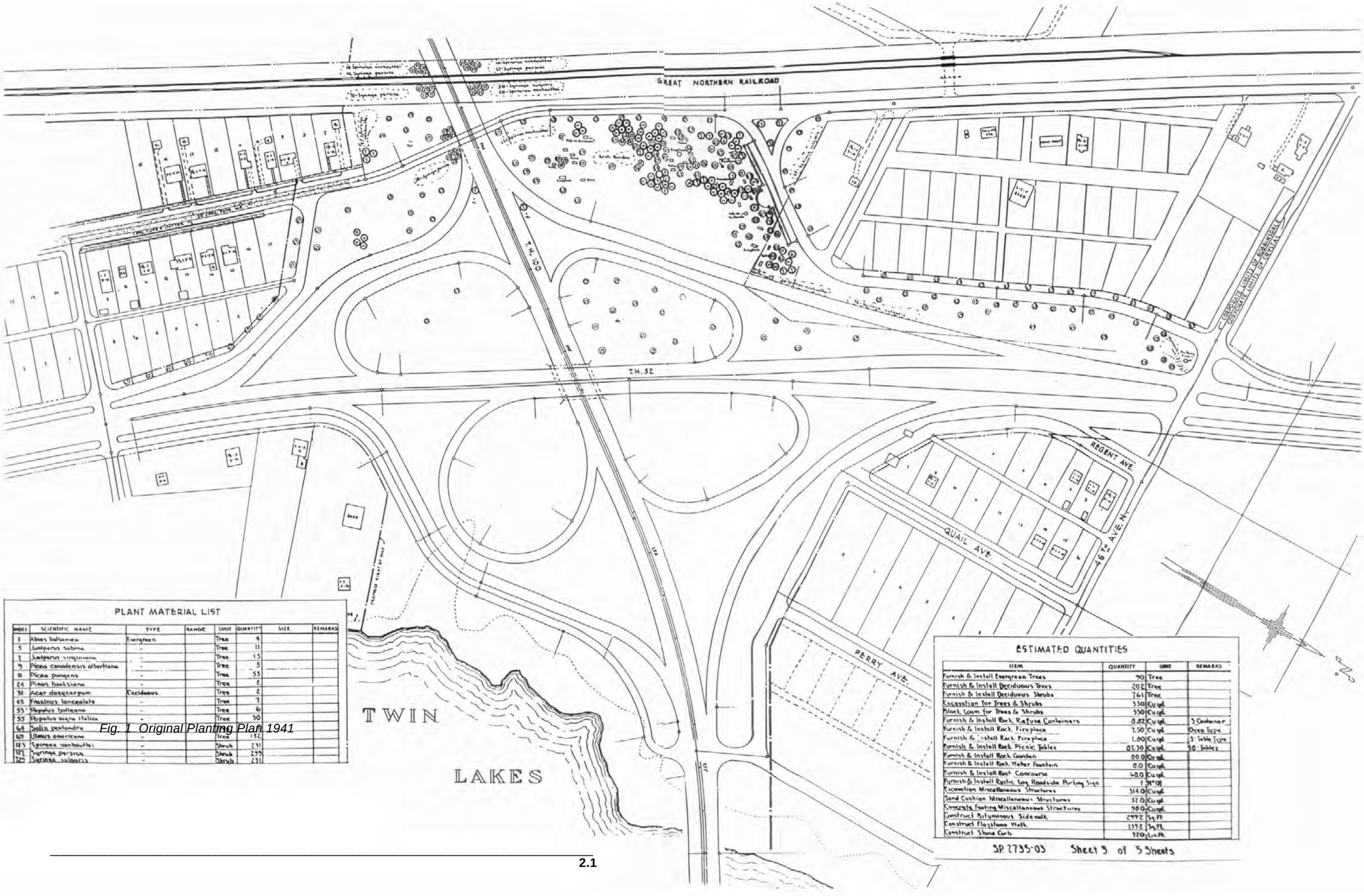
Gemini Research. "Graeser Park." MnDOT Historic Roadside Development Structures Inventory Form. Prepared for Mn/DOT. Dec. 1998.

Granger, Susan, et al. *Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways*. Prepared for Mn/DOT. Dec. 1998.

Lee, Rudolph. "Highway Department Approves 'Lilac Way' West of City." *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1935, pgs. 1 and 4.

"Lilac Way Here Soon." *Minneapolis Journal*, Jan. 30, 1938, pg. 2.

Plans for S.P. 2735-159 (T.H. 100). Minnesota Dept. of Transportation. 2001.



PLANT MATERIAL LIST

INDEX	SCIENTIFIC NAME	TYPE	RANGE	UNIT	QUANTITY	SIZE	REMARKS
1	Abies balsamea	Evergreen		Tree	4		
5	Juniperus sabina	-		Tree	11		
7	Juniperus virginiana	-		Tree	15		
9	Picea canadensis alberiana	-		Tree	5		
11	Picea pungens	-		Tree	53		
24	Pinus banksiana	-		Tree	2		
31	Acer dasycarpum	Deciduous		Tree	2		
45	Fraxinus lanceolata	-		Tree	9		
53	Populus balleana	-		Tree	6		
55	Populus nigra italica	-		Tree	30		
64	Salix pentandra	-		Tree	2		
69	Ulmus americana	-		Tree	152		
123	Spiraea vanhouttei	-		Shrub	231		
127	Syringa persica	-		Shrub	239		
129	Syringa vulgaris	-		Shrub	231		

Fig. 1 Original Planting Plan 1941

ESTIMATED QUANTITIES

ITEM	QUANTITY	UNIT	REMARKS
Furnish & Install Evergreen Trees	90	Tree	
Furnish & Install Deciduous Trees	202	Tree	
Furnish & Install Deciduous Shrubs	761	Tree	
Excavation for Trees & Shrubs	350	Cu yd.	
Black Loam for Trees & Shrubs	350	Cu yd.	
Furnish & Install Rock, Refuse Containers	0.82	Cu yd.	3 Container
Furnish & Install Rock, Fireplace	7.50	Cu yd.	Open Type
Furnish & Install Rock, Fireplace	1.00	Cu yd.	3 - Table Type
Furnish & Install Rock Picnic Tables	82.30	Cu yd.	30 - Tables
Furnish & Install Rock Garden	60.0	Cu yd.	
Furnish & Install Rock Water Fountain	8.0	Cu yd.	
Furnish & Install Rock Concourse	48.0	Cu yd.	
Furnish & Install Rustic Log Roadside Parking Sign	1	Sign	
Excavation Miscellaneous Structures	314.0	Cu yd.	
Sand Cushion Miscellaneous Structures	52.0	Cu yd.	
Concrete Footing Miscellaneous Structures	96.0	Cu yd.	
Construct Bituminous Sidewalk	2992	Sq Ft.	
Construct Flagstone Walk	1392	Sq Ft.	
Construct Stone Curb	320	Lin Ft.	

SP 2735-03 Sheet 3 of 3 Sheets

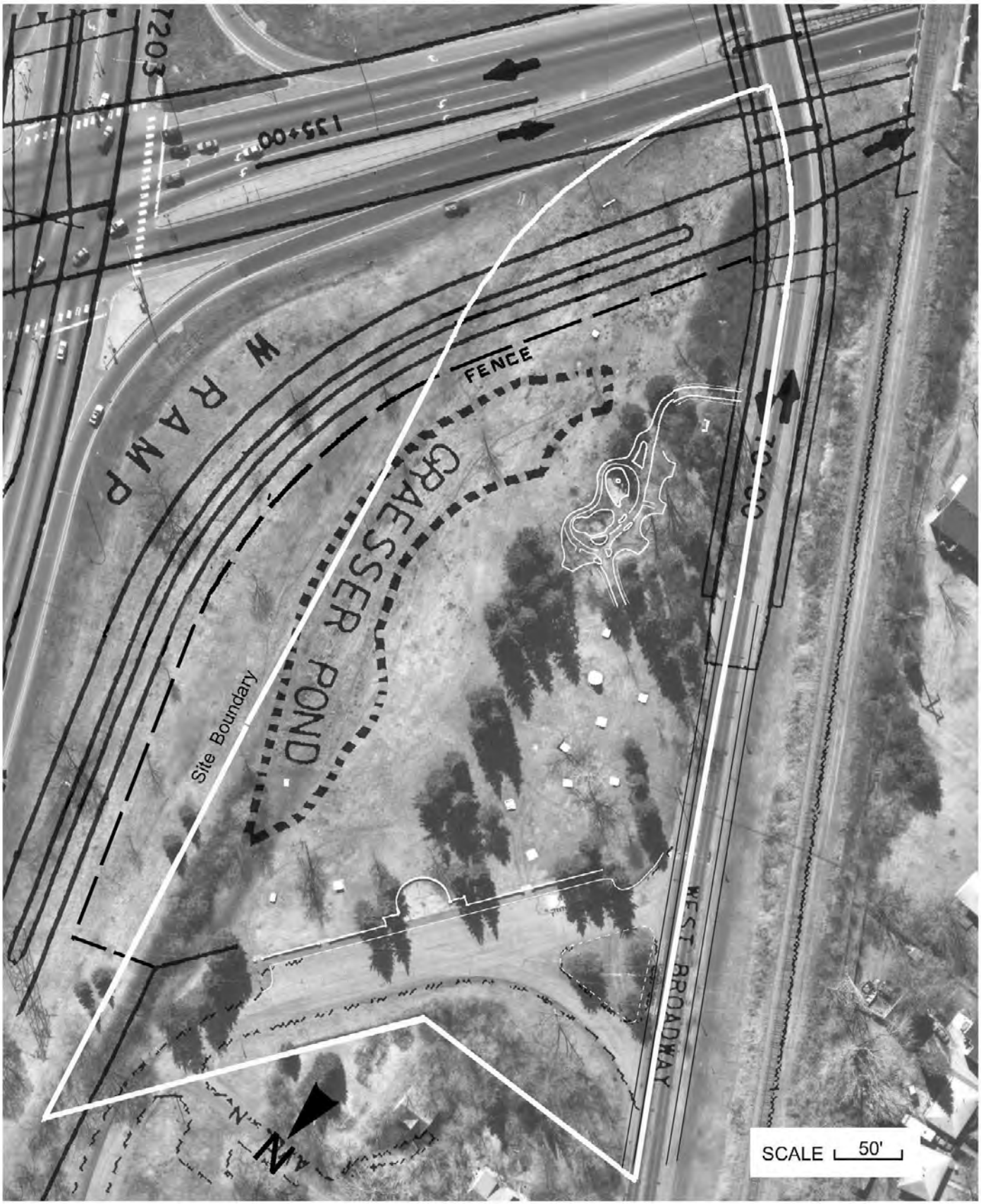


Fig. 2 Proposed Permanent Changes

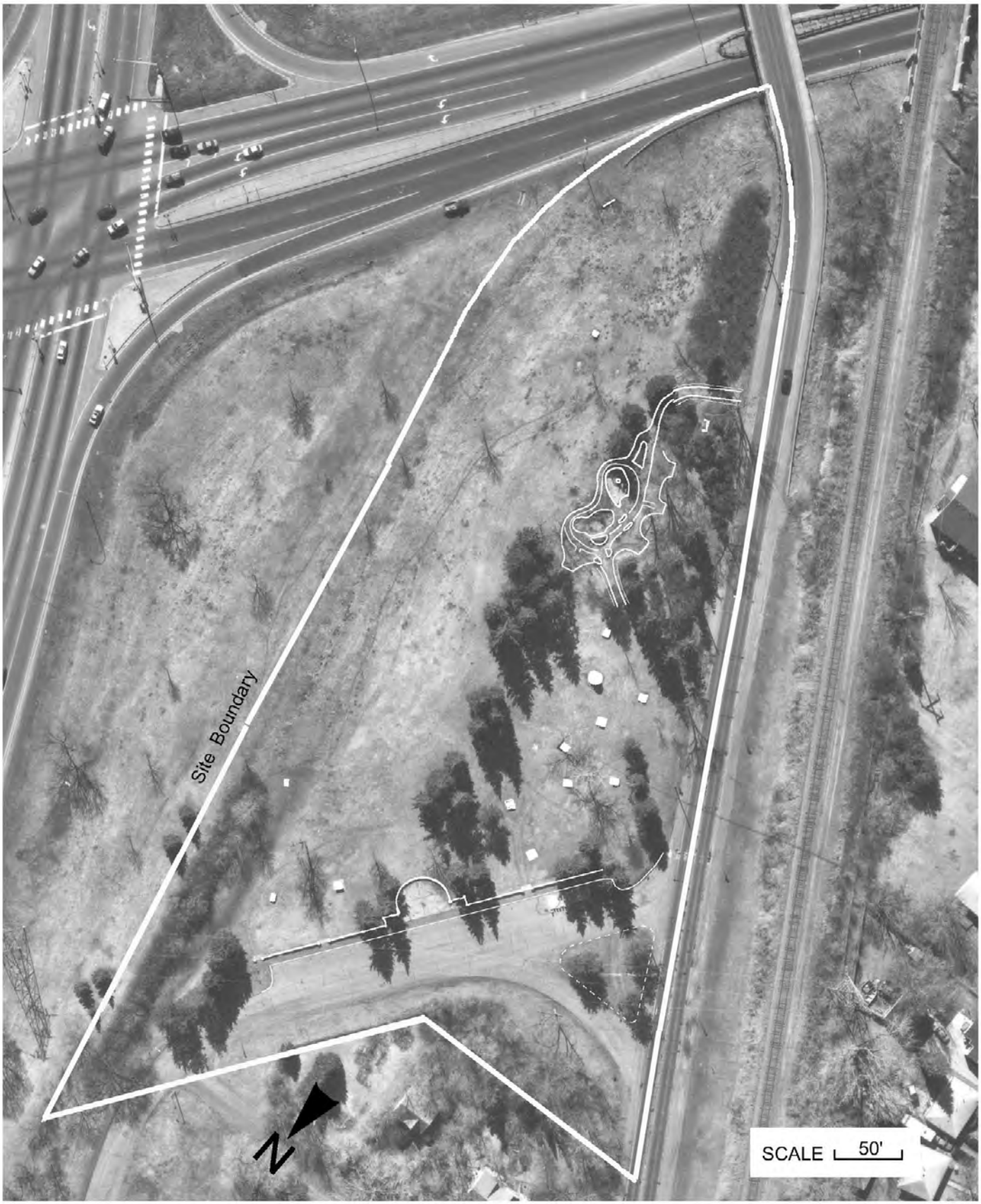


Fig. 3 Proposed Temporary Road

Fig. 4 Rock garden and western stairway, circa 1940

Fig. 5 Rock garden, July 1940

Fig. 6 Rock garden, July 1940