

A Brief History of the Loring Greenway Association



The heavily used Minneapolis pedestrian walkway between the southern end of Nicollet Mall and the residential neighborhoods that surround Loring Park in Minneapolis is named the Loring Greenway. A product of Minneapolis's urban renewal that began in the late 1950s and continued into the 1970s, it was constructed in an area of Minneapolis in desperate need of renovation at the time. The Loring Greenway attracted a variety of residential and commercial developments and reflects important post-World War II community planning and development trends.

Together with Peavey Plaza, the Loring Greenway is an effort to connect the system of parks and boulevards known as the Grand Rounds. The Loring Greenway is an example of the modern style of urban plaza design that represented a new urban park aesthetic. Noted landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg designed both the Loring Greenway and Peavey Plaza, the defining features of which include the use of concrete to create hard space, water features, and multiple levels with green plantings.

But nothing lasts forever. By the turn of the millennia, many aspects of the Loring Greenway were showing their age. Walkway tiles were cracked or patched with unsightly asphalt, many plantings had died and were not replaced, and its architectural and artistic effects were looking run down. Something had to be done or the Loring Greenway would soon become a liability to both the city and its neighborhood.

For many years residents worked on Loring Greenway improvements as a committee of the Citizens for a Loring Park Community (CLPC) neighborhood organization. Using a Neighborhood Revitalization Program Phase I grant of \$60,000, a new playground was constructed and lighting was improved to make the Loring Greenway safer at night.



Residents also sought to repair its crumbling walkways and to renew its plantings and fountains. Much of this was accomplished during the summers of 2007 and 2008, at a cost to the city of more than \$2.8 million. But clearly, much more effort and money would be required to enhance and maintain the Loring Greenway over the coming years.

Meanwhile, the city of Minneapolis began to experience severe financial problems and continues to do so today. While the city was able to pay for the basic upkeep of the Loring Greenway, there were important questions that needed to be answered. Who would buy and plant the hundreds of flowering plants that have made the Loring Greenway so attractive? Who would see to the weeding of its plantings? Who would push for its enhancement through better lighting and art works? And who would coordinate the neighborhood events envisioned for the Loring Greenway, such as music performances and Oktoberfest celebrations?

To answer these questions, a citizens group led by Ray Harris, Merry Keefe and Doug Wallace, with the help of City Council member Lisa Goodman, started the Loring Greenway Association (LGA), a partnership with the city with a goal of making the Loring Greenway one of the premier pedestrian walkways in the nation. The LGA consists of a board of directors who represent residents and the major commercial and residential properties in the area, plus an active group of volunteers. City officials regularly work with the LGA to formulate and achieve various goals.

Initially, the Loring Greenway Association's finances were managed under the auspices of the CLPC, but in 2009 LGA earned independent status as a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.

As the result of its fundraising activities and its volunteers' time, the LGA annually plants more than 1,800 flowering plants. It saved the Loring Greenway's many ash trees from the

Emerald Ash Borer beetle through an inoculation program. A sampling of other LGA-sponsored activities and achievements in the years since its founding include the following:

- development of a strategic plan
- a dog parade on National Night Out
- Oktoberfest celebrations, featuring food, music and games
- informal evenings of croquet
- seasonal placement of more than 70 moveable French bistro chairs and 25 tables
- purchase of three hand trucks for transporting furniture for special events
- installation of three iron benches around the children's playground
- weekly summer Music on the Greenway concerts by student musicians
- a tree donation program and the related planting of more than a dozen trees
- hundreds of new shrubs and flowering perennials
- boulder fields, rock catch basins and garden edgings
- tree and shrub fertilization
- professional pruning of shrubs
- establishment of a Little Free Library
- planting of a native shade garden
- herb boxes for summer use by area residents
- installation of hoop fencing to protect sensitive garden areas
- root beer social and happy hour gatherings
- purchase of a gardening shed for storing the association's tools
- ...and plans for many more enhancements in the coming years!