RLRC COMMUNITIES

ST. HILAIRE
AREA CHARACTER
COMMUNITY ANALYSIS & OPPORTUNITIES
ISLAND PARK DESIGN
DESIGN DETAILS
ST. HILAIRE
AREA CHARACTER

St. Hilaire, a community of 300, is located at the beginning of the Glacial Lake Agassiz beach ridge landscape. It was platted in 1882 and founded in 1883 on the banks of the Red Lake River at an elevation of 1,089 feet above sea level at a spot where the Red Lake River starts to drop through a series of ridges created by wave action of the ancient lake. Small rapids begin appearing in the river, and the river’s current increases. The community of St. Hilaire and its mill on the river were founded to take advantage of this drop. At one time St. Hilaire was one of the largest towns in northwest Minnesota. In 1897 the Shelvin-Carpenter Lumber Mill was the largest and most advanced sawmill in the world. In less than ten years all the trees were logged off, and the lumber mill was moved to Bemidji. The cooperative movement has played an important role in the development of Northwestern Minnesota, and St. Hilaire reflects that heritage. The community has several cooperatives. The Northwest Grain Company, formerly St. Hilaire Elevator, is one of the largest grain co-operatives in northern Minnesota. The Cooperative Creamery Association and the Cooperative Livestock Shipping Association are also both in the town.

Today the community’s small commercial strip along Main Street has a gas station, convenience store, liquor store, laundry, and a seed-processing company; small family farms are being replaced by large grain operations; and St. Hilaire is the terminus of a railroad spur from Thief River Falls. The All-Nations Cultural Festival, a popular community event that celebrates its multi-cultural heritage, is held each summer in Island Park. The landscape is less diverse; agriculture practices have reduced native plant communities and animal species. While area drainage ditches reduce flooding locally, they contribute to downstream flooding and water quality problems.

St. Saint Hilaire’s recreational resources are located on the Red Lake River. Island Park is forty-five acre park and municipal service facility on a peninsula surrounded by the Red Lake River. It was once a man-made island; the lumber mill made a sluice and diverted water through it. Remnants of the mill’s dam, foundation, and pond are still visible.

DESCRIPTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

DOWNTOWN STREETSCAPE: St. Saint Hilaire’s existing streetscape is best described as an industrial landscape with little attention to the human scale concerns of residents and visitors.

ISLAND PARK PICNIC AREA: A large green lawn near the entry drive of Island Park has picnic shelters and a children’s play area.

ISLAND PARK HORSESHOE PITS: This recreational element at Island Park is housed within a unique alley of trees which provide a guided vista to the south from the park.

ERODED RIVER BANKS: The erosion along the river seen in St. Hilaire characterizes this river section.

ISLAND PARK CARRY-IN: The existing canoe carry-in at Island park is typical of the primitive launches and landings found along the Red Lake River.

ISLAND PARK CAMPGROUND: Island Park has both rustic and modern campsites.
ST. HILAIRE
COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES & ANALYSIS

St. Hilaire, a community of the Red Lake River with its many bends flows close to the center of this compact town. Although the much land immediately adjacent to the river lies in the hundred-year flood plain, there are opportunities to enhance the town’s amenities through the redesign of the public spaces along the river.

MAKING CONNECTIONS: The close proximity between St Hilaire’s Main Street and Island Park offers opportunities for strengthening the connection between the city, the park, and the Red Lake River. A greenway could provide better access to the park and the trail from Main Street for both residents and visitors. Residents could more easily walk to the park, visitors coming by car could find the park more easily, and boaters could more easily walk to get food and supplies on Main Street.

DOWNTOWN GREENWAY: Street trees and plantings slow traffic, define downtown, and create a pedestrian-friendly environment.

ENHANCING MAIN STREET: Currently Main Street is more State Highway 32 than a pedestrian-friendly center of town activity. There is an opportunity to improve the pedestrian environment and create welcoming gateways into town.

CREATING ACTIVITY ZONES IN ISLAND PARK: Currently there are many diverse uses within Island Park. The park’s uses could be better accommodated if compatible uses were grouped together in five areas. The five areas could be: An intensive use area located closest to the town center with two areas, one for day use by local residents and the other for overnight use by campers in recreational vehicles; an interpretive area at the mill site; a cultural area at the performance space for festivals, concerts and other social gatherings; a primitive area at the peninsula’s tip with hiking and cross-country trails through the woods; and an ecological area that explains the water treatment processes at the lagoons, and provides habitat for birds and animals.

POTENTIAL CARRY-IN & BOAT LAUNCH: Siting a small-boat launch at the bridge right-of-way just north of town facilitates short float trips or fishing excursions downstream to Island Park. A canoe/boat launch with parking facilities in the park would improve boat access to the river.

DRAINAGE SWALE (WATER QUALITY): Originating in the farm fields behind town, a drainage ditch winds its way through the town and empties into the Red Lake River just downstream from Island Park. Reconfiguring the water course to transport the same amount of water in a shallower cross section and revegetating the edges of this ditch with native plants and trees will improve the quality of the storm water runoff, reduce downstream flooding, and create wildlife habitat.

ISLAND PARK: Currently the park has two picnic shelters, two ball fields, a children’s playground, horseshoe pits, a concert stage, a recreational vehicle campground with full hook-ups, two municipal sewage treatment lagoons, and a maintenance equipment storage shed. Hiking trails and a canoe carry-in have been informally created through repeated use in the wooded areas along the river’s edge. Fishing is popular along the riverbank by the millpond and from the remains of the dam. Bald eagles nest in the trees along the river. Watching birds from the park areas by the sewage lagoons is becoming popular.
COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES & ANALYSIS

- Potential Water Quality Improvements
- Railroad
- Red Lake River
- 100 Year Floodplain
- POTENTIAL CARRY-IN & BOAT LAUNCH
- Maintenance Shed
- Ballfield
- Sewage Lagoons
- Potential Reforestation
- Playground and Picnic Shelter
- Mill Ruins
- Downtown Greenway
- Interprettive Use (Activity Zone)
- Primitive Use (Activity Zone)
- Cultural Use (Activity Zone)
- Intensive Use (Activity Zone)
- ISLAND PARK
- DRAINAGE SWALE
  (Potential Water Quality Improvements)
- City Hall / Post Office
- Town Gateway (north)
- Town Gateway (south)
- Boat Launch
- Hiking Trails
- RV Hookups
- Ecological Use (Activity Zone)
ST. HILAIRE
ISLAND PARK DESIGN

PARK ENTRY / PARK ROAD: The realigned and enhanced entrance road continues the greenway into the park. Its alignment focuses the view on the mill ruins. Rows of trees planted along the road give it definition and act as a windbreak.

PICNIC & PLAY AREA: The area closest to the town’s center is designed for group use and easy access for town residents. It has a new park building, playground, picnic sites, and parking lot.

RECREATIONAL VEHICLE CAMPGROUND: A grove of trees separates the campground from the road and the more active park area. Individual recreational vehicle campsites are set within the trees to create privacy. A new restroom with showers serves the campground.

TRAIL & INTERPRETIVE OVERLOOK: A trail connects the downtown greenway to Island Park. Within the park the trail connects the five areas of use. In the narrow area adjacent to the millpond a handicapped accessible interpretive overlook provides views of the millpond, mill ruins, wing dam, bird watching area, and the Red Lake River. Panels along the trail provide historical and ecological interpretation.

BOAT LAUNCH: A boat launch with parking for cars and trailers is sited on the millpond and the remnants of the dam are reinforced to make a fishing pier.

CONCERT / FESTIVAL / BALLFIELD SPACES: A view of the river provides the backdrop for the stage. A circular planting pattern of trees encloses the audience and provides a perimeter path that can be used by food vendors or others. The ballpark is next to the parking lot. Parallel tree plantings organize the 175 parking places. The maintenance shed has been relocated to the edge of the parking lot.

SEWAGE LAGOONS: Plantings of native prairie grasses surround the sewage lagoons to separate the bird-watching public from the lagoons and provide nesting habitat for birds. Bird observation platforms are sited along the trail for park users.

REFORESTED AREAS: Reforested areas require less maintenance than areas of grass, separate different uses within the park, provide wildlife habitat, and protect the park edges that are subject to flooding.

TRAILS & CAMPSITES: Hiking and cross-country ski trails parallel the river's edge. Ten backcountry canoe-in or carry-in campsites are located on level ground above the 100-year floodplain. Restrooms are nearby.

FISHING PIER: The remnants of the historic dam are reinforced to make a fishing pier.

VEGETATED SWALE: The drainage ditch is reconfigured to make a rainwater garden vegetated swale. The existing ditch is thirty feet wide with seven and one-half-foot shoulders. Its narrow channel conveys storm water runoff efficiently and swiftly which contributes to downstream flooding, erosion, and degraded water quality. Its lack of vegetation provides little wildlife habitat. The proposed reengineered swale is also thirty feet wide. It has a fourteen-foot channel and three foot shoulders. Its series of connected vegetated shallow ponds slows and stores runoff reducing downstream flooding and preventing erosion. Its native plants filter sediments and contaminants and create wildlife habitat with food, water and shelter.
ST. HILAIRE
ILLUSTRATIVE VIEWS

MAIN STREET GREENWAY: Currently Main Street is characterized by an open landscape of small commercial buildings, a large agricultural buildings, a sidewalk for pedestrians, dominance of truck traffic, and a storm water system of curbs and gutters. Proposed changes to Main Street include: Enhancing the sidewalk with shade trees, benches, and plantings that separate pedestrians from the cars, calm traffic, treat storm water, and create a pedestrian environment.

ISLAND PARK ENTRY: A new stone and timber entrance marks and welcomes visitors to Island Park. Trees on each side of the entrance road frame and focus the view to the mill ruins.
ILLUSTRATIVE VIEWS

DOWNTOWN GREENWAY

ISLAND PARK ENTRY
ST. HILAIRE
DESIGN DETAILS

DAM FISHING PIER: The remnants of the old dam are transformed into a fishing pier. The addition of four feet of rock rubble raises it above the ordinary high water mark. Foundations for the fishing pier reinforce the rock fill and protect it from ice damage. The type of rock used for the fill must not break or crush during hauling and placing and must resist disintegration under freeze/thaw and wetting/drying conditions. Most unweathered igneous and metamorphic rock will work. Rock from 24” -36” in size should be used. Enough fines should be present to fill the voids.

CANOE/CARRY-IN CAMPSITE: The campsites are sited for privacy on level ground above the 100-year floodplain and are a short walk to potable water and restrooms. The 7-foot wide access paths are firm, well-compacted class-five gravel. Each campsite includes a picnic table, a fire ring with a grill, a trash receptacle, and a canoe landing. The fire ring is downwind from the tent, table, and trees. Campsites are free of poisonous plants, thorns, and low branches.
DESIGN DETAILS

DAM FISHING PIER

BOAT LAUNCH SECTIONAL VIEW

CARRY-IN CAMPSITE SECTIONAL VIEW