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Background and Client Goals

North St. Paul is a small city located just north of the Minneapolis-St. Paul area in Minnesota. The people of North St. Paul identify themselves as members of a small, tight-knit community based on the tradition of the city, which was founded in 1887. As a whole, the community maintains a set of values to promote well-being amongst the residents, which includes citizen value, integrity, leadership, collaborative, excellence, and valued employees.

Southwood Nature Preserve is a roughly 42 acre piece of land nestled away just south of downtown North St. Paul. Before this area was a preserve it was a farm and then after being donated to the city, it was used by residents as a dump. Because it is a nature preserve and not a park, there is no playground or sport field and the main purpose is to preserve and enjoy nature rather than to foster intense recreational activities. A community task force, a group called the Master Naturalists, has been formed in order to keep the preserve in shape and have begun their efforts with identifying and removing invasive species.

The city of North St. Paul along with the Master Naturalists are looking for a way to draw in more residents to the preserve as well as improve its user experience. Their goals are as follows:

1. Remove invasive species
2. Increase UX
3. Maintain landscaping
4. Preserve wildlife
5. Promote the preserve
6. Increase Attendance
We spent five weeks researching North St. Paul, residents of North St. Paul and the Southwood Preserve to determine (1) our target user and (2) how to appeal to this user and increase their user experience at Southwood.

While many Nort St. Paul residents have been there for a lifetime and are heading toward retirement, there is indication of urban sprawl and new families settling down in the community. It is this group’s intent to appeal to these new families in order to begin a new tradition within the community of caring for the preserve and promoting North St. Paul as a cultured, wholesome place to raise a family.

Our target users are families; primarily parents, 28-45 years old who have younger children in the house ages 3-12. These parents are always looking for activities to occupy their children- and a bonus if the whole family can get involved. In today’s culture of technology permeating every experience, these parents are highly appreciative of any endeavor that gets their kids outside, educates them AND keeps them engaged without a screen. They want their kids to grow up to be well-rounded and considerate citizens with knowledge gained from hands-on experience rather than just through a computer.
After much brainstorming, ideation, more research through focus groups (specifically through a method known as “Speed Dating”, critique and review we narrowed our recommendations down to four prototypes.

These prototypes fall into two categories: promotional (outside of the preserve) and informational (within the preserve). We believe these four prototypes are worth investing in for three primary reasons. First of all, each is rather simple, or could easily be integrated into existing infrastructure. Secondly, all four ideas would be relatively inexpensive for the City of North St. Paul to try out or implement. Finally, every one of these ideas fits into the lifestyle of a typical younger, North St. Paul family and wouldn’t ask them to change their behavior drastically other than to make the decision to visit Southwood Nature Preserve.
EVENT BANNER - The first thing a banner hung outside of Southwood would do is call attention to the preserve itself as a destination. People notice things that are out of the ordinary. If a citizen drives past Southwood every day they’re accustomed to the greenery of the preserve but a flash of a slick contrasting banner would easily draw their gaze just as a billboard does along the highway (but would be much less invasive and permanent than a billboard).

The other advantage of using a banner as a promotional tool is that it can alert or remind community members of an event that’s going to occur there. It prompts people to think either “Oh, this is where that event is going to be on Saturday,” or “I didn’t realize this was a public space. I wonder what this event is going to be like.”
SCHOOL NEWSLETTER EMAIL - Today, most people, and most young parents specifically, receive information online or through email. However, many existing community or school newsletters are printed. We suggest encouraging the local North St. Paul schools to begin or extend an email newsletter. In this newsletter a section would always be available for updates or opportunities regarding Southwood Nature Preserve.

The advantage of using a school emailed newsletter is that the message would be coming from a trusted source - the local school district and could easily be added to a parent’s online calendar or marked down on their physical one. Furthermore, if Southwood has a recurring spot in these newsletters it could help it to become a better known landmark of the community and encourage feelings of loyalty to the preserve.
MAP AND FLYER BOARD - A large, updated map would greatly improve the existing information board structure present at the entrance of the preserve. This would clearly define the boundaries of the preserve, as well as the walking trails that run throughout it. Including this at the entrance would create a positive atmosphere and leave users feeling more confident in their knowledge of Southwood.

Surrounding the map and on the reverse side of the board, we suggest using a more organized system for displaying community flyers and notices. Plastic sign holders should be attached in a grid, allowing for weatherproof postings and easy changing of content. This will allow the information board to remain up to date and visually appealing, encouraging guests to rely on it to find out about community events and ongoings.
EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE - Inside of the preserve, a simple signage update would greatly increase engagement and interest in the natural surroundings. Implemented signs would be letter size and would feature a plastic sign holder to allow for changing of content throughout different seasons. These signs would include images and conversational text that would explain different foliage and animal species within the preserve, giving users context to their surroundings. The content of these signs would be child-friendly to engage families and encourage them to become a new user group of Southwood.
IN CONCLUSION

Implementation of any these designs will benefit Southwood Nature Preserve as well as the city of North St. Paul. The result of these designs would have a long lasting effect that would bring more users into the space.

These designs are worth investing in for the following reasons:
- They can be easily incorporated into Southwood’s existing infrastructure.
- They are relatively inexpensive to accommodate a budget.
- They don’t require the user to drastically alter their behavior in the space.

NEXT STEPS

The city of North St. Paul should implement prototypes as they see fit and measure increase in event or general attendance. Furthermore they could conduct surveys six months and one year after implementation to measure community awareness and use of Southwood Nature Preserve.