

North Arm Project Proposal



Modernizing the North Arm Public Access
on Lake Minnetonka to meet the needs of
today's recreational users



View of proposed redesign of the North Arm Public Access from Hendrickson's Channel on Lake Minnetonka

Overview

At the North Arm Public Access on Lake Minnetonka, the needs of recreational users have changed and infrastructure conditions have deteriorated over the past three decades. This project addresses repairs needed to preserve the long-term integrity and function of this popular public water access. The county’s redesign focus is on improving safety, accessibility, water quality of and connectivity to Lake Minnetonka, and complimenting the surrounding community. Key design elements are based on comments received from access users, nearby residents, and businesses.

Project benefits

- Align with the City of Orono’s vision to preserve natural beauty, quality of life and recreational assets, and especially to preserve the great resources of Lake Minnetonka for the benefit of all regional residents.¹
- Improve safety and boat launch experience – not only for motorized boaters, but also for canoers, kayakers, and paddleboarders.
- Increase access for residents with physical disabilities by constructing the first fully accessible ramp in the metro area.
- Enhance the shore fishing experience with easier access to the lake.
- Protect water quality, restore Lake Minnetonka shoreline, and improve landscaping with native plants and trees.



View of new trailer parking alignment and native pollinator planting along North Shore Drive

¹ City of Orono vision statement and 2040 Community Management Plan

Site history and use

- **1942:** The county took the title from the State of Minnesota for road purposes.
- **1960s:** This site was open water and marshland prior to twelve feet of fill being added, likely for staging space for road and bridge construction. Following completion of those projects, the site was used unofficially by the public to access Lake Minnetonka.



1957 aerial photo



1964 aerial photo



1972 shoreline photo

- **1970s:** The county established the North Arm Public Lake Minnetonka Access. The fill was graded, a steel seawall added, and an asphalt parking lot with 77 parking spaces and a boat launch were created. The site today looks much as it did when it was built.
- **1996:** In cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the county added three sediment traps for water quality improvements. Prior to that work, all stormwater was running directly into the lake. The project also added new asphalt with two center islands and made some minor changes to the shoreline fishing area. Parking was reduced to 60 parking spaces.
- **2003 to 2011:** Minor repairs were made, including maintenance to clean sediment traps, asphalt mill and overlay, and replenished shoreline riprap.
- **2012:** First aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention behavior change pilot project at a public access.
- **Today:** North Arm is the third busiest public access on Lake Minnetonka, behind Grays Bay and Maxwell Bay. Many generations of families use this access to enjoy Lake Minnetonka.



1996 aerial photo showing water quality improvements



Site improvements needed

Rather than just addressing needed infrastructure repair, the county saw an opportunity to modernize the site to better meet the needs of today's recreational users and protect the lake.

The following is a summary of the primary issues and concerns identified by access users, nearby residents, businesses, and county staff that will be addressed by this project.

Repair deteriorating infrastructure

Stormwater management maintenance



Structural deterioration of the launch



Degraded asphalt condition



Address challenging launch configuration and traffic flow

Challenging backing maneuver



Trailers park at incline in right-of-way



Parking length too short



Improve access accessibility and experience for all users

Not accessible for all boaters



Difficult launch for non-motorized boaters



Poor shore fishing experience



Project approach and goals

Project ideation began in 2021 in response to a dire need for repairs and infrastructure improvements. This involved developing concept options and conducting community engagement. In 2023, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners allocated \$3.5 million in Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funds to redesign and modernize the site. The county is also discussing a cost share agreement with the MN DNR, they have tentatively agreed to contribute up to \$850,000 towards the construction costs.

The current project design includes the following features:

Infrastructure repair to preserve the function of a public boat launch

- Redesigned parking lot that includes wider, longer stalls for the increased size of modern vehicles, boats, and trailers and integrates permeable paving while maintaining similar parking capacity (64 total stalls made up of 41 boat & trailer, 18 vehicle only, and 5 ADA² accessible vehicle & trailer and vehicle only stalls)
- New, wider boat launch

Safety improvements

- Reoriented boat launch and parking stalls to improve maneuverability and flow
- Partnership with non-profit organization, Wheelchairs & Walleyes, for ADA ramp and lift
- Increasing the number of ADA parking stalls to 5 (3 vehicle & trailers and 2 vehicle only)
- New lighting that meets dark sky standards
- Separate nonmotorized boat access for canoe, kayak, and paddleboard users
- Redesigned parking stalls along North Shore Drive to eliminate boat trailer parking on a sloped hill and encroaching on roadway

Shoreline fishing area improvements

- Additional parking for anglers, including ADA accessible spaces
- Improved access with paved sidewalks and shore fishing features such as pods with steps for better access to the lake

Water quality and natural area/wildlife habitat enhancements

- New stormwater management system that directs water into the ground and filters it through permeable paving instead of discharging it directly into the lake
- Installation of a new hot water decontamination facility to prevent the spread of AIS
- Replacement of invasive plant species, emerald ash-borer threatened ash trees, and turf grass with climate-resistant, site-appropriate tree species and native pollinator habitat
- Improved privacy screening of access for neighbors

² 'ADA' refers to the Americans with Disabilities Act. ADA accessibility in the context of this proposal primarily refers to, but is not limited to, mobility challenges.

- Protection and enhancement of natural shoreline

Variations requested

The county's proposed redesign of the site requires several variations as described below. Each of these variations are requested to maintain the site as it is used today and to better accommodate various recreational users at this public access.

1. Hardcover within 75-foot lakeyard (Sec 6.12.9110)

The current site includes hardcover within 75-feet of the lakeyard with the asphalt parking lot installed in the early 1970s. This predates the establishment of the City of Orono's current zoning rules and classifications and this property's use as a public access has been a legal nonconforming use for its residential classification (LR-1C) for the last 50 years.

For this property to act as a public access, hardcover will be required within 75-feet of the lakeyard to provide ramped access into the lake. Other site hardcover within the 75-foot setback includes the picnic area, sidewalks providing lake access to people shore fishing, the ADA accessible lift, and most of the parking spaces.

This project cannot be redesigned to avoid needing this variance.

2. Overall site hardcover exceeding 25% (Sec 6.12.9210)

The current site is ~73% hardcover. The redesign includes a slightly expanded footprint for hardcover up to ~77%. While hardcover will increase, the county is proposing to greatly reduce the amount of *impermeable* hardcover (bituminous and concrete) on-site and replace it with permeable pavement. Impermeable hardcover will only make up 43% of the reconstructed site. Permeable pavement is expected to greatly reduce rainfall runoff and pollution by intercepting and filtering the rainfall runoff before it can reach Lake Minnetonka. This provides rainfall runoff treatment well above what's provided on-site today.

Much of the hardcover expansion is to provide additional parking space along North Shore Drive so trailers are not using the hillslope to park, as is currently occurring on the grassy slope as shown above in the site improvements section. Having a solid, flat surface for both vehicles and trailers improves safety by preventing trailers from possibly extending into North Shore Drive. Foregoing the increased hardcover on the southeast side of the site would result in a reduction of trailer spaces. Addressing these challenges was the top concern with access users, residents who attended community engagement events, and law enforcement.

This project cannot be redesigned to avoid needing this variance.

3. Buildings and structures within the 75-foot lake setback (6.12.6240)

The variance request for buildings or structures within the 75-foot lake setback is for the construction and operation of an AIS decontamination shed and a small shade canopy for an AIS inspector to work with boaters to remove AIS from their boats and trailers. Additional features within the 75-foot lake setback include signs, fencing, light posts, parking bollards, and trash receptacles for people shore-fishing. Each of these features are shown in the county's application materials, including provided design plans. These features were placed where most appropriate for their use and where they would be most visible and accessible for public access users and for site flow. For example, the AIS inspector canopy is placed directly adjacent to the ramp for immediate access to boats backing into and out of the lake. The AIS decontamination shed is placed further upslope to provide more space for decontamination operations as well as for the collection system that will be installed to capture water use for decontamination operations.

Request to vacate

In the application to the Planning Commission, the county included a request to vacate the alley that bisects the site and the eastern half of Cherry Avenue with the intent of incorporating the vacated areas into the full county parcel. This was suggested as the platted but unbuilt alley and roadway section no longer served a role for future planning needs on the site and this redevelopment provided an opportunity to reflect that reality in the plat. Vacating these two easements would ensure no additional variances for the project are needed. Hennepin County still supports vacation of these easements, however vacating them is not critical for project success.

City Variance Analysis

In summary, each of these variances reflect the site as it is used today and are necessary for this site to operate as a recreational public access. The city's Variance Analysis memorandum, submitted to the Planning Commission as part of its November 17, 2025 meeting materials, states "the proposed variances are in harmony with the intent of the Ordinance supporting the improvements for the legally nonconforming use". The memorandum continues, "The improvements proposed to the site parking, lighting, and accessory structures support the site by improving safety, accessibility, and screening on the parcel."

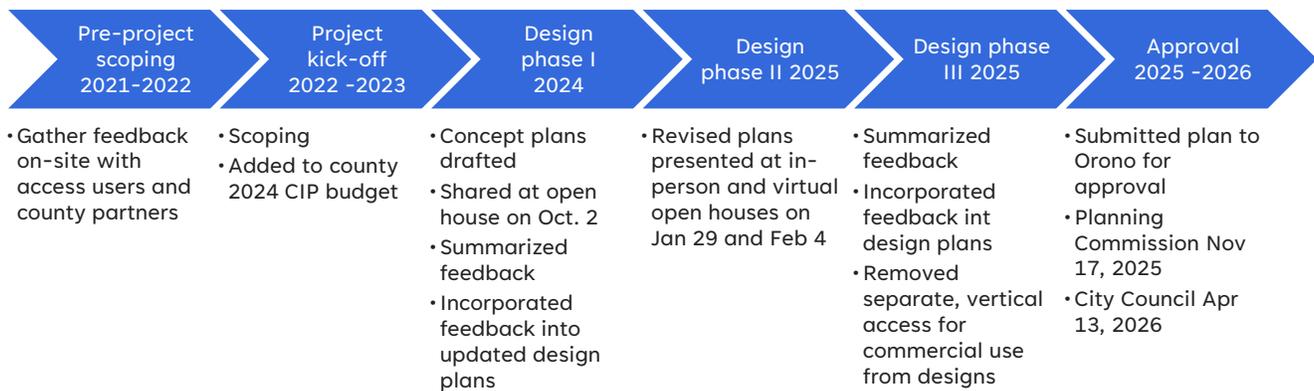
Since that memorandum was written, additional updates have been made to the designs to reduce impervious surface across the site and within the 75-foot lakeyard setback to further conform with the standard, as shown in the design renderings submitted with our permit application. These include removal of pavement adjacent to the picnic area and reduction in size and extent of the fishing pods.

Permitting approvals

Beyond approvals we need from the City of Orono, Hennepin County and the North Arm Public Access Redesign team are working with other partner agencies to ensure the project continues to proceed while meeting local, state, and federal rules. A list of the agencies we’re working with, the permits and/or approvals we’re working towards, and the status of those conversations and decisions are listed in the appendix.

Engagement and community feedback

The county has engaged with and listened to a broad group of stakeholders and adapted the design at each step of the project development process. The following is a summary of the engagement efforts. A full description of the engagement efforts is provided in the appendix.



Pre-project scoping and project kick-off

County staff began asking access users which features were most important and how the public access could be improved.

Key feedback received in this step:

- Poor pavement condition and deteriorating boat ramp
- Traffic flow bottle necks
- Boat launch requires challenging back turn maneuver
- No access docks, only a seawall with a gravel walkway
- Poor experience for shore fishing, and it was not ADA-accessible
- Difficult to launch kayaks, paddleboards, and canoes. (required dragging boats across asphalt and sharing space with trucks and large boats)
- Inadequate lighting for safety

This feedback was incorporated into the first design.

Design: Phase I

The initial design was presented at an open house at the City of Orono on October 2, 2024

After receiving feedback at this step, the county made the following changes to the design:

- Parking: Maximized the number of parking spaces available, added signage to designate location for official parking for first responders.
- Amenities: Added a small shelter for AIS inspectors
- AIS prevention tools: Added a small AIS cleaning station in addition to the more robust AIS decontamination system planned.



Design: Phase II

The revised plans were presented at a second open house in Orono in January 2025 and a virtual open house in February 2025.

After receiving feedback at this step, the county made the following changes to the design:

- Increasing accessibility: Incorporated a donation of an ADA-compliant boat lift and ramp from the Wheelchairs and Walleyes organization.
- Landscaping and stormwater management: Removed the artificial turf and included native grasses and pollinator plantings into the design.
- Waste management and litter: Made the site pack-in and pack-out and added no littering signage under the bridge.

Design: Phase III

Revised designs were shared in summer and fall 2025.

After receiving feedback at this step, the county made the following change to the design:

- Removed the separate vertical access for commercial use. Feedback from residents indicated providing a separate boat launch for commercial use gave the impression that the county was interested in increasing or expanding commercial use at the site. The county was seeking to increase safety, while reducing wear and tear on the boat launch. Recreational users and their safety are the county's primary focus for the redesign of the site.

Planning Commission feedback

Hennepin County's application materials were submitted to the City of Orono on October 28, 2025. County staff attended a pre-submittal meeting with city planning staff at Orono City Hall to discuss application needs, review design details, and discuss Planning Commission meeting logistics. Prior to the Planning Commission meeting, City staff requested and were provided additional information on the application and design details. The plan was presented November 17, 2025 at the city's Planning Commission meeting.

Based on feedback heard at the City of Orono's Planning Commission meeting in November 2025, the county has made several additional adjustments and clarifications to its approach for the redesign of the site.

Trash and litter management

What we heard from residents

Residents expressed concerns about waste management at the site, including concerns about litter, the county's maintenance schedule, and the proposed plan to replace the dumpster with trash and recycling receptacles.

Background

Illegal dumping and litter are ongoing issues at the site. The county currently provides a dumpster that is routinely overflowing with household waste clearly not generated by users of the site. The dumpster is serviced twice weekly prior to and following weekends, and the county has Sentencing to Service (STS) crews patrol for litter twice a week. These management approaches have helped but have not eliminated the issues.

Proposed solution

The county proposes removing the dumpster as part of the redesign and implementing a pack-in pack-out approach to address the illegal dumping issue. Signage at the site would make it clear that illegal dumping and littering is not permitted. Additionally, small trash and recycling receptacles will be provided along the shore fishing area to capture waste discarded by site users.

This approach, particularly the pack-in pack-out policy at the public access, aligns with management of other accesses on the lake, including Maxwell Bay in Orono.

For litter management, the county will continue to use STS crews for litter clean-up. STS crews will be at the site twice a week (typically just before and after weekends) for litter removal with the option to add additional litter patrols during high use times.

To provide additional accountability, the county will also add signage with a QR code and phone number to report illegal dumping or litter concerns. Complaints will be tracked and addressed within 2 business days. The county will continue to monitor how this solution works in practice and can further adjust to more intensive waste management solutions as needed, for example installing a camera or more frequent patrols.

Commercial access

What we heard from residents

Residents expressed concern that commercial use of the site would increase with the redesign, creating safety and parking issues for recreational users and surrounding residential streets.

Background

The North Arm Lake Minnetonka public access accommodates both recreational and commercial uses. Several companies use the site to deliver riprap, docks, and other building materials to homes on the lake. Over the years, commercial activity, specifically heavy equipment deployment, has accelerated the degradation of the boat ramp. As mentioned above, the county's initial redesign plan included a separate vertical access for commercial use to reduce wear and tear on the ramped boat launch, to improve safety by further separating commercial and recreational users, and to free up the ramped boat launch to lessen the time recreational users must wait.

After receiving feedback from the city and community members that this approach could increase commercial use at the site, the vertical access was removed.

Proposed solution

The current design now has one ramped boat launch for motorized watercraft that will be shared by recreational and commercial users, similar to how it is now. The redesign is intended to improve the site experience for recreational boaters and shore fishing; however, it will not restrict or mitigate the commercial use currently happening at the site.

Staging of materials for commercial transport at the access is not currently allowed and will remain that way. The county will post signs throughout the site restricting parking to one stall per user and limiting use of the launch to 20 minutes as part of the redesign and, as is current practice for enforcing parking regulations, will work with the city to enforce the restrictions.

While the county's priority for the site is recreational use, an internal ***legal review of state statute governing public access sites concludes the county lacks authority to prohibit commercial use.***

Under [Minn Stat 86B.205](#), the county has the ability to pass an ordinance that could potentially regulate commercial access, but it likely couldn't outright prohibit commercial use. Additionally, any ordinance passed by the county would require adoption by Carver County because a portion of Lake Minnetonka is within Carver County, or have the Minnesota DNR agree to place the ordinance into effect by implementing a parallel administrative rule. In either of those two scenarios, the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District and the Minnesota DNR would also need to authorize the ordinance. Given these requirements, passing an ordinance would be a lengthy process and would only allow the county to regulate commercial use through setting hours, time limits, and fees related to watercraft type, size, and horsepower. A county ordinance could likely not completely prohibit commercial use.

It's possible there are other regulatory avenues to explore to regulate or prohibit commercial access at other levels of government, including the City of Orono, but that would be up to those entities to determine what they legally could or couldn't do. For example, the Minnesota DNR's Gray's Bay public access is managed by the City of Minnetonka, which restricts some commercial

access through city zoning authority. If Orono were to enact any restrictions under its own authority, the county will comply with all applicable law.

Landscaping and perimeter buffers

What we heard from residents

Residents expressed concerns about the landscaping plan removing existing vegetation and privacy screening.

Background

The existing tree buffer is currently comprised of voluntary trees, many of which are invasive species or ash trees. Invasive trees onsite include Common Buckthorn and Black Locust, both of which grow aggressively and outcompete most native trees and shrubs and limit habitat value. Ash trees are native to Minnesota but are at risk from the emerald ash-borer, which is already in the Lake Minnetonka area. Hennepin County and other local foresters recommend removal of ash trees to slow the spread of the emerald ash borer. The vegetative areas found along the perimeter of the parking lot and lakeshore should be replaced and restored with native species.

Proposed solution

The project's landscape design will significantly improve the site's ecological benefits by maximizing species diversity and prioritizing habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife and by offering additional water quality protection. Tree selection prioritizes large stature trees to provide habitat for raptors and other birds as well as integration of flowering, fruiting, and nut-bearing trees for wildlife food sources. The restoration will include planting more trees than the number of trees removed. The trees planted will be native to Minnesota including shagbark hickory, bitternut hickory, basswood, white oak, bur oak, sugar maple, American elm (Dutch Elm Disease-resistant), serviceberry, blue beech, black cherry, tamarack, and white pine. The tree species selected for restoring this area will ensure the privacy buffer is quickly reestablished after the invasive species and ash trees are removed. The image on the following page shows what the buffer will look like once re-planted trees are established.

Two additional areas will be restored with native prairie plant species with an emphasis on creating pollinator habitat. The larger area will be about 1/4 of an acre running nearly the entire length of the eastern side of the site between the vehicle/trailer parking and North Shore Drive, as shown in the rendering on page 3. The second area targeted for restoration is adjacent to the natural shoreline south of the seawall. Currently, both areas are comprised of turf grass that is regularly mowed. Restoration of these areas will reduce maintenance needs while providing valuable habitat for pollinators and an attractive flowering landscape for site users and neighbors.

The county serves as the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for Hennepin County and has extensive experience restoring and maintaining natural areas across the county, including at the Lake Minnetonka access in the City of Spring Park.

The existing cattail shoreline on the western border of the site will remain untouched and the adjacent upland shoreline will be improved with a native shoreline planting.



View of tree and shrub buffer following establishment

Wetland impacts

What we heard from residents

Residents were concerned that wetland areas would be negatively impacted by the project.

Background

As described in the site history section, this site was once open water, then filled and eventually paved. Wetlands are protected because they provide tremendous stormwater management, flood prevention, groundwater recharge, and habitat value. Under the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA), it is the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's (MCWD) responsibility to review the project for wetland impacts.

As part of the initial WCA review for the project, MCWD used the word "wetlands" to describe the sedimentation basins that were added in 1996 and a portion of the bay that is outside of the project area. Residents were understandably concerned that there would be wetland impacts because of this project.

After a site visit, MCWD determined that the sedimentation basins are not wetlands protected by the Wetland Conservation Act, and the bay is outside of the project area. The bay will continue to be protected and preserved.

Proposed solution

The MCWD has since issued the project a “no loss” decision, declaring that no regulated wetlands will be impacted by this project (see appendix). Care will be taken during construction to ensure that activities do not negatively impact the cattail marsh, bay, and adjacent lake.

Site lighting

What we heard from residents

Some residents expressed concerns that the additional lighting included in the redesign will add too much light to the site.

Background

There is currently only one light at the site.

Proposed solution

The site redesign includes three short light posts that adhere to the Starry Skies North guidance to reduce light pollution. Light poles will be shorter (20 feet tall instead of 30+ feet) with light fixtures that are adjustable for brightness and hours of use. The county proposes having the lights shut off at 10 p.m. The county will continue to monitor how this solution works in practice and can further adjust the lighting approach based on feedback from neighbors, site users and the city.

User fees

What we heard from residents

Some residents have asked if the county could charge user fees to restrict certain types of access, such as commercial barges and boat rental companies.

Background

As discussed in the section on commercial access, any restrictions or regulations would require an ordinance, which would be a lengthy process to enact. The county is exploring a cost-share partnership on this project with DNR. Adding user fees for the ramp access would preclude any partnership with DNR as no state managed or co-managed accesses can charge fees.

Proposed solution

The county will continue to operate this public access without user fees.

Road access to the site

What we heard from residents

Some residents expressed safety concerns regarding the entrance/exit from North Shore Drive, reporting it was a tricky site to get in and out of.

Background

While North Shore Drive is a county-maintained roadway, improvements to the road and entrance/exit are not part of the project scope. County Transportation staff were not aware of

any concerns raised recently or in the past. There has been 1 reported segment crash near the boat launch driveway over the last 10 years.

Proposed solution

Transportation staff will continue to monitor traffic and crash data and consider changes as data is evaluated.

Nonmotorized boat launch

What we heard from residents

Residents expressed safety concerns with the siting of the nonmotorized boat launch.

Proposed solution

In response to concerns, the county has moved the nonmotorized boat launch from between the boat launch and fishing area to the other side of the boat launch, adjacent to the ADA boat lift, which should be a safer spot for launching nonmotorized watercraft away from Hendrickson’s Channel.

For more information

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Permitting approvals

The following provides a summary and status of the permits required for the project outside of those covered under the city application.

PERMITTING AGENCY	PERMIT / PERMISSION	STATUS
Lake Minnetonka Conservation District (LMCD)	Municipal Multiple Dock License	Preparing Submission. A New Municipal Dock License application will be submitted in April.
Metropolitan Council	Work over Permanent Sanitary Sewer Easement	Preliminary Approval. A permanent sanitary sewer easement crosses the site and an agreement between the agencies specifies no land use changes can be made over the easement without consultation. Metropolitan Council has reviewed preliminary plans and provided feedback that’s been incorporated into the current design. The Council has provided approval for the project to proceed.
Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD)	Shoreline and Streambank Stabilization Rule	Approval Anticipated. Designs were adjusted to address comments from MCWD in their November 13, 2025 letter and from conversations with the DNR Area Hydrologist (Ryan Toot), including reducing fishing pods’ lakeward extent along Hendrickson’s Channel and to promote additional natural shoreline. 200 feet of natural shoreline will be enhanced along the western edge of the site.
	Stormwater Management Rule	Approval Anticipated. Designs were revised in December-January to meet District-requested changes, including ensuring a minimum necessary separation between the bottom of the stormwater facilities and the groundwater surface.
	Wetland Protection and WCA Rule	Permit with Notice of Decision received on January 30, 2026. Minnesota Wetland Conversation Act No Loss Decision - determination that no regulated wetlands will be impacted by this project.
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	Public Water Permit	No Permit Anticipated. County has worked with DNR Area Hydrologist (Ryan Toot) to modify the proposed shoreline stabilization activities and shore fishing improvements to reduce infrastructure at/below the ordinary high water level (OHWL). DNR indicated in a February 4, 2026 email that these changes will result in DNR not requiring a general

PERMITTING AGENCY	PERMIT / PERMISSION	STATUS
		public water permit outside of the floodplain review MCWD is completing.
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)	Construction Permit	Preparing Submission. Construction permit will be applied for as part of construction activities in 2026-2027.
US Army Corps of Engineers	Discharge of Material	Preparing Submission. A permit application is required for requesting Department of the Army authorization to discharge fill material for the new public access. Preliminary staff discussions have occurred, and a county application is planned to be submitted in March. No issues are anticipated.

Community Engagement Summary

Pre-project scoping and project kick-off

With the deterioration of the pavement and boat launch, the county identified the need for an asset preservation project. County staff began asking access users what features were most important and how the public access could be improved.

The county began considering options for modernizing the access in 2021 and completed a stormwater analysis in 2022. The county board approved a budget of \$3.5 million for upgrades to the site in 2023. In 2024, a preliminary design was developed for community input.

Design: Phase I

This initial design was presented at an open house at the City of Orono on October 2, 2024. The county encouraged residents and partners to attend through direct mail to all North Arm Bay residents, digital message boards at the access, outreach at the access, emails to stakeholders, posts on Nextdoor, and a news release shared through community newspapers.

The October 2024 open house attendees included residents who live near the access and representatives from the Lake Minnetonka Association, Minnesota DNR, Lake Minnetonka

Conservation District, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, and the Orono City Council. Comments were also received via email following the open house.

Attendees shared feedback on topics including the access design, fishing, boating, parking, signage, and waste management. The county produced a feedback summary to answer questions, explain how the access design or management addresses the feedback, and outline how the county is incorporating suggestions. Read the [detailed summary of feedback received at the October open house \(PDF, 1MB\)](#).



Design: Phase II

Feedback was reviewed by the design team and incorporated into updated design plans. The revised plans were presented at a second open house in Orono in January 2025 and then again at a virtual open house in February 2025. The open houses were again promoted through direct mailers to neighbors, digital message board at the access, emails to stakeholders, and a news release shared through community newspapers.



North Arm Public Water Access redesign

Hennepin County is redesigning the North Arm Public Water Access to repair important infrastructure and improve access for all users.

Timeline

The design for the access is being developed now, and construction will take place fall 2025 through spring 2026. Construction will be done in phases and will prioritize maintaining public access during the busiest fishing and boating season.

Planned improvements

- Realigning the boat launch so that it doesn't require a backing turn
- Angling the parking to improve parking lot safety and navigation
- Adding lake access for canoers, kayakers, and paddleboarders
- Making improvements for shoreline anglers
- Incorporating climate and resiliency features, including redesigning the stormwater management system and adding solar

Learn about the project and provide feedback

Attend one of these sessions to learn about the project, talk with staff, ask questions, and provide feedback on the second draft design concepts.

In-person open house
 Wednesday, January 29 from 5:30 to 7 p.m.
 Orono City Hall, 2750 Kelley Pkwy, Orono

Virtual information session
 Tuesday, February 4 from 4 to 5 p.m.
 on Zoom



hennepin.us/north-arm
 612-814-1088



Postcards sent to neighbors in January 2025

Attendees of the January and February open houses included residents who live near the access and representatives from local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local government.

Attendees shared feedback on topics including the access and parking, commercial usage and vertical access point, landscaping and stormwater management, and waste management. Attendees had general questions about the project process and requested a map that better compares the current state of the access with the new concept.

The county produced a feedback summary to answer questions, explain how the access design or management addresses the feedback, outline how the county is exploring or incorporating suggestions, and explain the project process and next steps. Read the [detailed summary of the feedback received at the January and February 2025 open houses \(PDF, 1MB\)](#). A summary of the open house and the slide deck are also available at hennepin.us/north-arm.

Design: Phase III

Following these two open houses, the county incorporated community and stakeholder feedback into revised designs that were shared with partners and permitting authorities in summer and fall 2025. One of the major changes made to the initial design was the removal of a separate vertical access for commercial use. Currently, commercial and recreational users share the boat launch, which has accelerated wear and tear on the ramp. Feedback from residents indicated providing a separate boat launch for commercial use gave the impression that the county was interested in increasing or expanding commercial use at the site. The county was seeking to increase safety while reducing wear and tear on the boat launch. Recreational users and their safety are the county's primary focus for the redesign of the site.

Planning Commission

Hennepin County's application materials were submitted to the City of Orono on October 28th, 2026. County staff attended a pre-submittal meeting with city planning staff at Orono City Hall to discuss application needs, review design details, and discuss Planning Commission meeting logistics. Prior to the Planning Commission meeting, City staff requested and were provided additional information on the application and design details. The plan was presented November 17, 2025 at the city's Planning Commission meeting. This proposal includes a summary of the questions raised at the commission meeting and the county's proposed solutions.

Orono City Council

This proposal is planned to be presented at the April 13, 2026 Orono City Council meeting.