

July 10, 2026

Dr. Kristine J. Wehrkamp Herman, Superintendent
1000 W 11th Street
Hastings, MN 55033

Dear Dr. Wehrkamp Herman,

The Dakota County Historical Society is working on completing the Hastings Black Heritage Trail in partnership with Building Remembrance for Reconciliation (BR4R). The HBHT will explore the community's African American history through a series of waysides and trailheads, as well as in-ground markers.

The project has gone through a few different phases – Concept Plan and Interpretive Design. The Concept Plan was completed in 2023 and during it, conducted research and put a plan together for what a trail could look like. Our second phase took place in 2025 and that expanded the research, then took the Concept Plan and placed it into action. This created an Interpretive Design package that drafted text and locations for waysides and trailheads to be placed.

A wayside is a smaller structure that will have text and graphics related to the stop along the trail. These are very similar to what you would see put together by the National Park Service. A trailhead is a larger physical sign, often multiple panels, that is a “gathering point” for the stop along the trail. These will likely have a plaza, or space for gathering around it to read, likely on concrete. Also planned for this project are in-ground markers that will designate stops along the trail in areas that cannot have a physical sign. The first example of this will be for the former site of Brown's Chapel, an African Methodist Episcopal Church that was burned due to arson at the corner of 5th & Sibley St.

Majority of the locations for signage will take place on land owned by the City of Hastings. We have discussed the trail with city officials, and they are well-aware of the signage and intent to place stops throughout the city. We have worked with the city to let them know that DCHS will maintain the signage and will have a plan to create a restricted fund to manage the signage. This will include replacement of damaged or vandalized pieces of the signage. The only requirement by the city would be while mowing, in certain areas, that they mow around it.

The signage will be made of an “easy to clean” material that is resistant to graffiti. While graffiti can be made on the signage, it will be able to be removed due to the material it is made from and a special cleaning agent. We will do our best to monitor the signage, as well as rely on community vigilance to let us know when something has been defaced.

There will be no ongoing financial contributions toward the production of the signage or upkeep, with the only exception being that DCHS will reimburse any costs for cleaning of signage on School District property should they clean signage before we are able to do so.

The entire trail is expected to be self-guided. Each stop will include a map, showing where the trail is and allowing users to move from one stop to the next. At the same time, we will utilize a website that outlines the stops and history of each stop. This will be supplemented by printed materials, such as

a brochure with map, that can be picked up and used as a guide. There may be opportunities for guided tours of the trail, which we will coordinate with the School District to avoid specific times that may interrupt school operations.

One proposed location is the Tilden Community Center, at the corner of 4th Street W and River St. This location will be the only location that would potentially be impacted by guided tours during the school district's operating hours. A second proposed location is at McNamara Stadium / Todd Field. This would be placed in the grassy area, near the entrance. However, it would be off to the side, to avoid being intrusive. This should have minimal impact for guided tours.

To complete the project, we are applying for a Legacy Grant through the Minnesota Historical Society's Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund. If funded fully, we will have the necessary funds to complete the project. The earliest project start date for this would be January 1, 2027. With a successful grant award, the first few months would be used to finalize the design and print the panels. We would expect to install the stops along the trail in late spring or early summer of 2027. Once complete, we will have a recognition event / celebration of the completed work.

Once installed, should the trail signage lose ownership from DCHS and other partners, the trail stops would be removed by DCHS at our own expense. This will remove any burden of cost associated with the trail from the School District.

Included with this letter are:

- Page 19 – Materials and Forms to show examples of what the signage will look like in appearance and be made from
- Pages 22 – 24 – Graphic Typicals to show an example of a draft sign, including colors, design and layout for a low-profile wayside and a trailhead, as well as sidewalk marker
- Page 25 – Accessibility will show how the trail plans to incorporate accessibility into the stops
- Page 29 – Final Site Map shows the proposed stops and type of signage to be included along the entirety of the trail
- Pages 44 & 45 – Educational Achievement shows the proposed location for a trail stop at McNamara Stadium / Todd Field. This includes orange cones for where it will be placed, as well as graphic typicals (bottom of page 44) to show what it would look like when installed
- Pages 46 & 47 – Neighborhood will be placed at Tilden Community Center, which from the proposed location for the signage, can see multiple houses built (and still standing) by African American community members. The location is marked with cones and the graphic typicals outlines what it would look like when installed

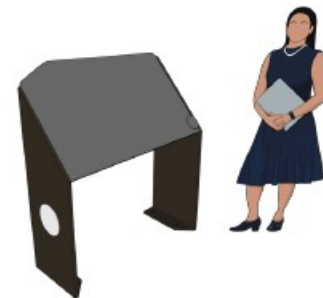
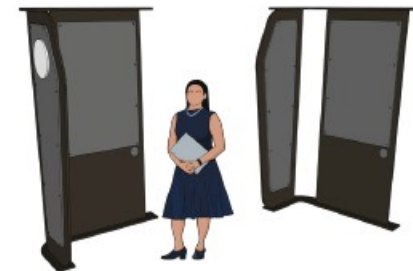
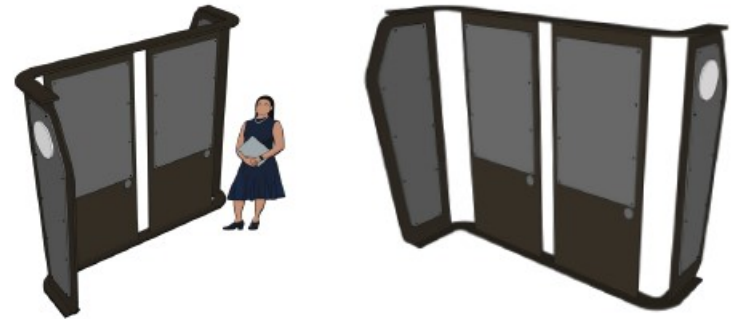
Materials and Forms

This phase evolves the design from NPS-inspired bases to structures that are more unique. The group wants the panels to stand out as unique and special, inspired by the reference images.

These bases can be made with weathering steel (coreten), which is very handsome. The downside: weathering steel weeps and gradually stains concrete footers. Instead, we are proposing a textured powdercoat that has the appearance of worn leather or weathering steel.

This recommendation also points towards panels being thick High Pressure Laminate (HPL) with a mix of hidden and exposed hardware.

Exterior-grade HPL comes with a 10 year warranty. Powdercoated bases can be similar, depending on the fabricator and final form.

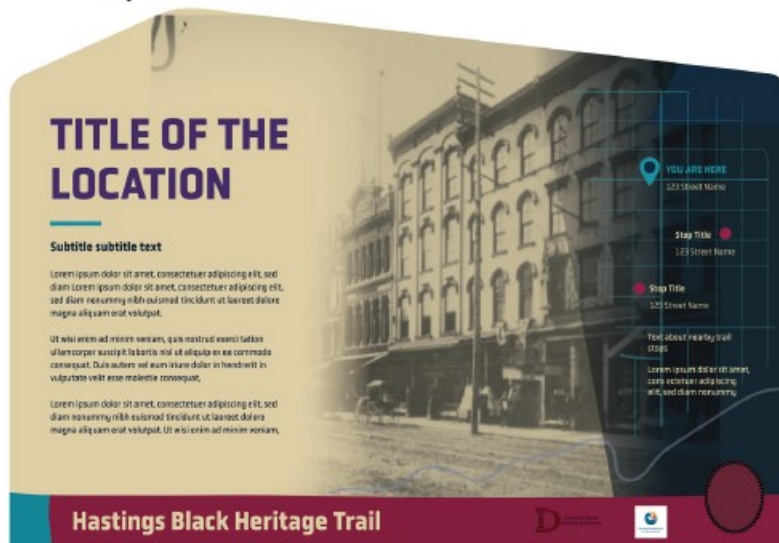


Weathering steel (from [Wikipedia](#))

Graphic Typical

The various pieces of form, material, colors, and font, driven by the design principles, combine into a coherent set of graphic typical. In the production phase, specific images and text will be applied to each panel, using these typicals as a starting point and ongoing guidepost.

Low Profile Waysides



Trailheads/Kiosks



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Text or title

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HASTINGS BLACK HERITAGE TRAIL

Subtitle subtitle text
Or some sort of statement
Or name of location

TITLE OF THE LOCATION

Subtitle subtitle text
Or some sort of statement
Or name of location

Text or title

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TITLE OF THE LOCATION

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Or some sort of statement
Or name of location

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TEXT ABOUT WAYFINDING/MAP

Text or title

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Logo/Sidewalk Markers

The logo will be a repeating element unifying all interpretive units and the sidewalk markers. It should also be used on other materials developed in the future: printed maps, marketing, the website.

The idea of a silhouette icon was selected to emphasize that this is a story of people. That said, the specific icon will change from use to use. A set of at least four silhouettes will be developed in Production: male adult, female adult, male youth, female youth. Each will be used in approximately equal quantities over the course of the Trail. For instance, each Trailhead will have four logos on the wings. Each wing will use a different silhouette.



Example of sidewalk sandblasting:
Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area in Eden Prairie, MN.

Sidewalk markers will be sandblasted into concrete (generally existing sidewalks) at defined locations. The site of Brown's Chapel is the single location identified in the current scope of work, but the next phase should be able to apply this icon to more than 20 sites identified "Known Sites" on page 28.

Accessibility

Physical

All locations were selected with an eye to physical accessibility. Worksheets note any changes (e.g. bump-outs, concrete plazas) that the City or other partners will need to make for structural and access purposes.

Audio

There are no audio features of the Trail that would limit access for deaf or hearing-impaired visitors.

Visual

Low-vision visitors are considered in the graphic design, with font sizes, reading area placement, and contrast levels at or exceeding ADA guidelines. In addition, Capption tags are called for at each unit, offering text accessibility (see box at right).

For blind visitors, Audio Description should be added separately, ideally wrapping together with all other Hastings historical waysides (NPS, city, or county-owned). The Capption tag can double as access to Audio Description for delivery. In the meantime, through screen reading Capption will provide access to the Trail's exhibit text.

Cultural

Text on panels is English only. Capption provides automatic translation in 136 languages.

About Capption

<https://Capption.com>

Capption delivers exhibit content directly to visitors' phones with a single tap. Each interpretive panel gets a small NFC tag. Visitors tap it and the panel content opens in their language, at their preferred text size, with their accessibility settings already applied.

Text accessibility

Inherits the visitor's system text size, contrast, and display settings automatically. Screen reader compatible.

Multilingual

Automatic translation in 136 languages. Content delivers in the visitor's phone or chosen language.

No app required

Works natively on iPhone via App Clip. Android visitors use the Capption app. Staff update content through a web interface. Changes go live immediately.

Audio links

Each tag can include a link to hosted audio. Narrations or audio descriptions can be added at any time.

Infrastructure-free

There is no wiring, no power requirement, and no infrastructure to maintain. Tags are weather-resistant and designed for permanent outdoor installation.

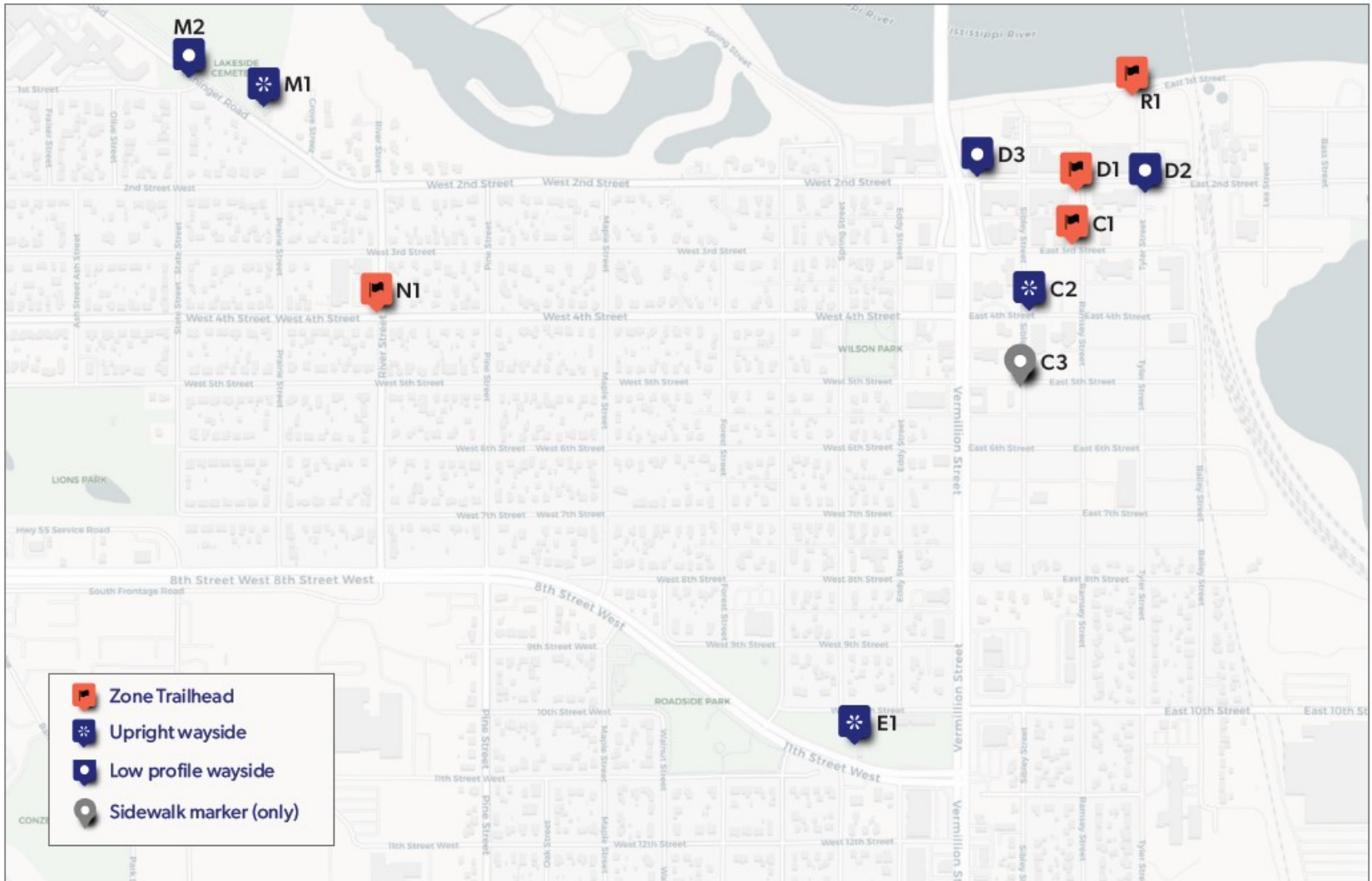
Minnesota-based

Capption is a Minnesota invention, from a Minnesota-based company. The originator has low vision and was motivated by his frustrations in a local art museum.



Final Site Map

These sites represent the starting set for the Hastings Black Heritage Trail. Additional sites may be added in the future.



Map tiles by CartoDB, under CC BY 3.0, map data © OpenStreetMap contributors under ODbL

E1 Educational Achievement

Purpose:

Found by residents, this two-panel upright honors Black youth c. 1900 as students and athletes, integrated into the life of Hastings public schools.

Zone: Education

Location: 44.7429, -92.8520

Visitor Faces:

Southerly

Conditions:

At the entrance to the current high school stadium. Site is in good condition.

Site Improvements Needed:

n/a

Accessible/Universal Design:

[Caption](#) trigger

Site Photos



Physical Format

☐ Trailhead ☐ Wayside, low ☒ Wayside, up ☐ Sidewalk Marker ☐ Other

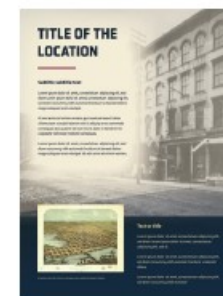
Notes:

- Coordinate with the City and the School District.
- Future: sidewalk marker at the site of the old high school.

Base



Graphic Typical(s)



Side 2: Academics and sports

- Florence Curry (Valedictorian 1906) as well as others graduating with honors and in classes.
- How we know: these photos and family memory. Other evidence is lost, so we can't know what else happened.

☒ Existing photo ☐ Historic map
☐ New Photo ☒ New map
☐ Existing art ☐ Tactile
☐ New art ☐ Audio

- Yearbook and other photos



Note from Jeremiah Ellis: "While Florence Curry's 1906 valedictorian status... is a triumph, it likely occurred despite significant social pressures. We must avoid using "integration" as a synonym for "acceptance," acknowledging the "double consciousness" required to excel in a space that would soon welcome the KKK."

N1 Neighborhood Trailhead

Purpose:

This trailhead meets residents where they live, allowing them to connect with this familiar place in a new way.

Zone: Neighborhood

Location: 44.7423, -92.8651

Visitor Faces:

Side 1 faces northerly

Conditions:

This corner is among at least 5 houses owned and built by Black residents. At the SE corner of the Tilden Community Center parking lot. Can be busy/loud, not a comfortable place to hang out. Make this very visual and text extra brief.

Site Improvements Needed:

Requires the creation of a small plaza, extending off the sidewalk. Remove or move fencing, and create a low retaining wall.

Accessible/Universal Design:

[Caption](#) trigger

Notes:

- Coordinate with the City and the School District.
- Future: sidewalk markers at each of the houses on this street, as well as all others in town that have been identified.

Site Photos



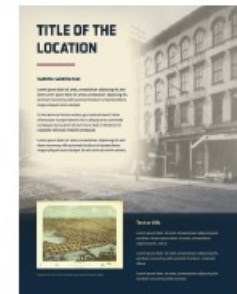
Physical Format

☒ Trailhead ☐ Wayside, low ☐ Wayside, up ☐ Sidewalk Marker ☐ Other

Base



Graphic Typical(s)



Content Structure

(previously approved with comments)

Side 1: Trail Intro (Big Idea and capsule history) with inset Trail map (wayfinding)

Side 2

- This used to be the suburbs of Hastings. Concentration of African Americans here because they gradually homesteaded, bought empty lots, and built houses as they encouraged family members and friends to move here. (Not because they were forced to live here.)
 - John and Nancy Wallace were living on this street at the time of the 1870 census with their children, James and Louanna.
 - On the 1885 census, their son James and his wife Ellen and their 6 month old daughter were living with them. In addition, Nancy's niece Ella Phoebe and her husband James Curry and their 2 daughters,, a toddler and an infant, had joined their household. Their address was 724 4th St W.
 - In May 1886 James Curry purchased a lot and built the house at 740 4th St. W., which he sold to James Wallace in November 1888. James and Ellen Wallace raised their 7 children in that house. Their children attended Hastings schools and their youngest son, played sports.
 - After selling the house to the young Wallaces, James built the house on SW corner of 4th and River Streets, referenced in the text.
 - William Douglas lived in the house between the two Wallace families at 736 4th Street West. The house he lived in has been replaced as well as the John and Nancy Wallace home, where the members of the Black community met to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1890.
- This was an integrated blue collar neighborhood. It is called Swede Hill for a reason.
- Dig Deeper: changing lines and definitions of whiteness.

Side 3:

- House across the street: James and Ella Curry bought a small farm on two lots and built that house. Added 8 more lots, built a barn, added a cow, a horse, chickens, and had a large garden. They had 10 children, 9 of whom graduated from Hastings High School, 5 were honor students, daughter Florence was Valedictorian of the 1906 class. By 1910, four of the older children had moved to Minneapolis. By 1920 all had chosen different opportunities.
- When James died in 1933, the town shut down to honor him. Ella died in 1943. Both are buried in the family plot at Lakeside Cemetery.

Wayside/Trailhead Supporting Media

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☒ Existing photo | ☐ Historic map |
| ☐ New Photo | ☒ New map |
| ☐ Existing art | ☐ Tactile |
| ☒ New art | ☐ Audio |

Sample Visual Resources

- Curry images
- Create (illustrate) a birds-eye view of the neighborhood?
- Create (illustrate) the Curry farm, viewed from here?
- Custom map



Notes: