

Genesee Valley Park West Master Plan

City of Rochester, Project #20042, NYSDOS #C006965

Advisory Meeting #3 - Minutes

Date: November 13, 2013, 2:00-5:00 PM

Location: Genesee Waterways Center, 149 Elmwood Ave, Rochester NY 14611

A. ATTENDANCE

Name	Representing	Contact / Email
Sheila Bazil	19 th Ward, Community	sheila-bazil@yahoo.com
John Curran	PLEX, Community	jecurran@rochester.rr.com
Caitlin Meives	Landmark Society WNY	cmeives@landmarksociety.org
Jeff Mroczek	City of Rochester, DES	mroczekj@cityofrochester.gov
John Picone	City of Rochester, DRYS	piconej@cityofrochester.gov
Peter Siegrist	City of Rochester, City Planning	peter.siegrist@cityofrochester.gov
John DeMott	Sector 4 CDC	jnj_demott@juno.com
Mark Bayer	Bayer Landscape Architecture (BLA)	mhb@bayerla.com
Zakery Steele	Bayer Landscape Architecture (BLA)	zds@bayerla.com

B. MEETING CONTENTS

1) INTRODUCTION AND UPDATE:

Jeff Mroczek gave a brief introduction to the group. Bayer Landscape Architecture (BLA) followed up with detail on the work accomplished since the group last convened, including:

- a. Completion of the Cultural Landscape Report for the park; now included in the complete Inventory & Analysis document
- b. Completion of hydro-geological assessment of the river edge and docking facilities; now included in the complete Inventory & Analysis document
- c. Completion of the Inventory & Analysis report; currently being reviewed by the City and being made electronically available to committee members
- d. Development of recommended Preliminary Park Treatments and historic rehabilitation areas
- e. Development of recommended "Site Character Zones" – the proposed organization of the park's future development.
- f. Development of "Park Character Concept" alternatives, including 3 alternate proposals delineating areas for park facilities, levels of infrastructure and community connectivity.
- g. Recommendations of appropriate architectural styles for the park, for a new boat house or other future facilities
- h. Development of alternative schematic development sketches for each Character Concept

2) DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND / CONTEXT:

BLA reviewed background information regarding the historic and recreational context, outlining the basis for specific treatments, broad rehabilitation proposals, and proposed park character concepts. These included the long term desire to reclaim the visual intent of Frederick law Olmsted's "river plain" and reduce visual disruptions along the river while providing both traditional and water-based formal recreation opportunities.

3) PRELIMINARY PARK TREATMENTS (see meeting handout, page 1):

BLA reviewed and discussed broad treatment goals of the preliminary master plan for specific sites with the Committee, which are proposed to be incorporated into forthcoming alternative concepts designs. These include:

- a) **Training Facility:** Enhanced and more naturalized buffering treatments and alternate trail alignments along the Public Safety Training Facility periphery (short term). Relocation of training facilities out of park as long term goal.
- b) **Preserve South Woodland / Enhance Ecology:** South woodland areas (south of I-390) to remain wooded, but include trail enhancements and vegetation management / development of views to the river.
- c) **Chili Parcels to Buffer Park:** Proposed addition of Chili parcels along Scottsville Road to contiguous parkland to preserve visual buffering (from adjacent airport and industrial uses, or future industrial development) and enhance ecological health (through green infrastructure, designed stormwater treatment) of the river-edge and woodlands south of the Barge Canal.
- d) **Mitigate I-390 Impacts:** Landscape, artistic, or other aesthetic treatment of land underneath I-390 overpass.
- e) **Restore Pedestrian Bridges:** Full restoration of the Olmsted pedestrian bridges over the Barge canal (including bridges on the east side of river). Also stabilize and enhance historic PennNY rail bridge for future Genesee Valley Greenway ped/bike use. The rail bridge would also allow ADA access across the canal, while the proposed restored Olmsted bridge would not meet ADA slope requirements.
- f) **Relocate Dredging Equipment:** Dredging equipment from canal operations should no longer be parked at river overlook on northwest side of canal-river intersection. The intersection is an icon of the region's park system and special view preservation and enhancements should be implemented.
- g) **Integrate Community Facilities into the Neighborhood:** Facilities and structures most-used by the community should be clustered at the periphery of the park – near Elmwood and Genesee at the parks most important and genuine connection to the neighborhood. The most heavily-used facilities should be located where they can be integrated into the community and become part of the neighborhood fabric rather than civic recreation facility “islands” set away from the neighborhood along the river.
- h) **Preserve Significant Trees:** Significant trees should be preserved, particularly on the wooded knoll and high point of the park.
- i) **Rehabilitate the River Plain:** The viewsheds across the river plain – from the east to west sides of the river (particularly south of the Elmwood bridge) – should be rehabilitated to the original Frederick Law Olmsted design intent. The intent being to screen and/or remove as many man-made structures and high-visibility infrastructure as possible, thereby reestablishing a place along the river (and from within the river itself, via boat) where the community can experience the natural pastoral beauty of the winding river within the heart of the city.
- j) **New Park Entry:** The main park entry from Elmwood Avenue should be redesigned to enhance the safety and visual quality of the park's “street frontage” and entry. The traffic pattern is currently inadequate and requires dangerous turning movements for all vehicles entering the south side of the park. It should be noted that the existing signal light cannot accommodate a complete intersection alignment (two-way in and out) without modifications to the swimming pool and or sports complex building entry area. The building is too close to the intersection. Possible new entries should be explored, including elsewhere along Elmwood Avenue, or the long-term relocation of facilities.
- k) **Brooks Landing Phase II:** Consideration should be given to the reality that the Brooks Landing Phase II project is underway and in the construction documents phase, which includes park improvements north of Elmwood Avenue.

The pending improvements in the Brooks Landing Ph II project limit the ability to fully rehabilitate the park to Olmsted's original design intent and relationship to the City (all structures north of Elmwood), at least in the short term.

- l) **Screen Brooks Landing Developments:** Landscape and buffering treatment should be established at the north end of the park to screen the view of new developments at Brooks Landing, including the existing hotel and the proposed residential tower. This proposed treatment is aligned with the park's historic design intent – to screen out man-made structures from view while in the park.

4) **CONCEPT CONSTRAINTS (see meeting handout page 1):**

Advisory committee and BLA reviewed the park's significant constraints, that BLA believes will ultimately drive important concept design decisions. These include:

- a) **Preservation of Trees:** The significant trees are an important experiential, aesthetic and ecological component of the park. To reconnect the two sides of the park from a circulation standpoint it may be necessary to remove some trees. It may also be beneficial from a historic and visual enhancement standpoint to remove limited vegetation and trees to open up views. However, the most significant historic trees, trees on the wooded knoll, and trees that are actively buffering adjacent residential uses should be preserved where possible. Tree preservation will influence long-term circulation decisions.
- b) **Genesee Street as One-Way:** Genesee Street is currently one way and includes park vehicular access (to the tennis court parking area) but requires one-way out through residential streets and un-signalized left turns onto Scottsville Road. Future park circulation will need to address this, possibly by taking better advantage of the Elmwood Avenue frontage and reducing or altering traffic flows off Genesee Street.
- c) **Existing Pool and Ice Rink Building – Entry Realignment:** The current proximity of the existing pool and recreation building to the existing intersection at Elmwood Avenue prohibits future realignment of the intersection. Realignment is highly desirable for safety and circulation reasons.
- d) **Brooks Landing Phase II Nearing Construction Phase:** A complete long-term park rehabilitation might include locating the park's major infrastructure closer to the City core and closer to existing developments at Brooks Landing and the University of Rochester River Campus facilities. This was Frederick law Olmsted's original design intent as well – that the more intensive recreation infrastructure would be located in the "ante-room" or park "approach" north of Elmwood Avenue. The project investment in Brooks Landing Phase II, which is nearing the bidding phase and was designed prior to the park's master plan, makes this master alternate plan approach more challenging, at least in the short term.
- e) **100-Year Flood Plain:** A significant portion of park land located north of Elmwood Avenue is situated within the FEMA 100-year flood plain. Any structures or land form modifications would require additional review and permitting, including requiring possible designed-allowance for flooding elsewhere. Recent soil percolation tests have shown that the ground water is not as high as expected in most areas but percolation is slow in selected locations. Beyond poor soil conditions, the existing drainage issues in the ball fields can at least partially be attributed to existing grading or the failure of a nearly 100-year old system of clay drain tile installed during the barge canal construction era.
- f) **Sanitary Force Main – Utilities:** The former railroad right of way now includes a large diameter sanitary force main and utility easement through the length of the park. No new buildings should be proposed for this corridor, however this does not prohibit parking or other recreational or circulation features from crossing the utilities.

5) RECOMMENDED CHARACTER ZONES (see meeting handout, page 2):

Advisory committee and BLA reviewed and discussed the proposed organization of the park's future development, represented by "site character zones" which establish recommended areas of preservation, buffering, opportunities for facilities to incorporate into the neighborhood fabric, and areas where the Olmsted-design integrity is proposed to be reestablished.

6) PARK CHARACTER CONCEPTS (see meeting handout, page 3):

Advisory committee and BLA reviewed and discussed (3) alternate master plan approaches to locating facilities and infrastructure. The concepts delineated areas for various levels and intensities of park infrastructure, which adhere, in varying degrees, to the recommended park character zones. The three alternatives included: (A) Structures North of Elmwood, (B) Retrofitting Existing Structures, and (C) Structures Into the Neighborhood Fabric. BLA proposed that, given the current site constraints, and the benefit and importance of integrating future recreational facilities into the neighborhood, Character Concept "C" was the most appropriate and beneficial.

7) ARCHITECTURE STYLES (see meeting handout, page 4):

Advisory committee and BLA reviewed and discussed examples of architecture styles that are recommended as appropriate to the park's historic Period of Significance. Due to the extensive redevelopment of the park through time and the importance of various periods, it was determined that the park's Period of Significance is uniquely stretched from 1890 to 1940 (WWII). This included both the park's pastoral Olmsted origins, the period of recreational advancement, the park restoration during barge canal construction and the significant Works Progress Administration-era facilities. It was noted that, except for significant trees, some historic land forms, and the Olmsted-era pedestrian bridge (designed in 1910-12, constructed 1917-1920), no features or buildings exist from any historic period in GVPW.

Considering the park's history and future use, the recommended architecture styles fell into 4 categories: (1) A contemporary / modern take on WPA-era architecture; using materials of the period with more refined and simple forms of contemporary design. Examples shown included Tahoe Transit Center by WRNS Studio. (2) Works-Progress Rustic; a traditional architecture styling that resembles 1930s-1940s regional park improvements. Examples included the Buffalo Zoo Entry Court, Forest Park Boat House in St. Louis, and the Refectory that formerly existing within GVPW. (3) Historic Styles within the Park; which varied widely in style and period (1892 to 1930s), and included the gambel roofed athletic club, the octagon-shaped public athletic building, the Durand Boat House. (4) Contemporary Low-Profile Buildings; which although foreign to the park's period of significance, have been considered compatible with significant Olmsted parks in other cities (Lakeside Skating Center in Prospect Park) if done well. The architectural design would focus on integrating itself into the natural surroundings and letting the park's landscape dictate the forms, materials, and relationship to natural features, take advantage of designed views, and may emphasize sustainable elements such as green roofs, or other energy conservation features.

8) GENERAL DISCUSSION NOTES:

- a) **I390 Overpass:** The I-390 overpass was a concern area, noting that sometimes metal from accidents (or snowplows pushing debris over the guardrail) falls to the trail area below.
- b) **Canal Corp Dredging / Parking:** The Canal Corp does not park their dredging equipment at the park in the winter. Discussion needs to be had with Canal Corp on where this goes during the off-season, where it can be moved in the future so as to not impact the park during the rest of the year, and the need for access of the park areas used (for parking by canal employees).

- c) **Boat House Location:** It was proposed that location selection for the boat house include the non-park parcels in Chili (along the south side of the canal) or the river edge park land just south of the Olmsted bridge. All agreed it was an intriguing place for the boat house as it removed the infrastructure from the river plain, reinforcing Olmsted's original concept. There are many benefits and constraints to various boat house locations. Need to establish consensus from rowing community on where they would prefer the boat house.
- d) **Boat Recreation History:** It was noted that the park has always supported boating as a recreational amenity, even in the Olmsted-era, but the required infrastructure has changed in visual and use intensity. If the boathouse can be pulled back from the river edge and additional boat-specific improvements can be made (larger boat staging area), then perhaps it can still be located along the river in the heart of the park. The detailed site design will be important.
- e) **Increase in Boating Facilities – Need for Plan:** It was noted that rowing has increased significantly in popularity and 3 boat houses have popped up along the park river front in the past 15 years alone (Genesee Waterways Center, Genesee Rowing Club, new boat house in basement of forthcoming residential tower at Brooks Landing). Concern was expressed over development of historic park riverfront into a "boathouse row." A plan should be put in place noting where appropriate areas are for these uses.
- f) **Recreation Demand and Best Use of GVPW Land:** A discussion was held about recreation demand and specific facilities needed. According to recreation guidelines based solely on population (which are, admittedly by the guideline authors, not always appropriate metrics), the city has a surplus of most facilities except for tennis courts. It was discussed that, based on the historic nature of the park, the river as the unique and significant feature, and the limited available land area, the most appropriate level and mixture of recreation facilities for GVPW is one that promotes a smaller collection of superior quality facilities. Rather than combine every possible recreation field and feature into a topographically complex and historic landscape that cannot support it, let the demand exist for use of the best and most unique facilities in the City. It was noted that the riverfront landscape of GVPW is not the same as open flat farmland in Victor or Henrietta, and perhaps the park's master plan should recognize this and design within these constraints.
- g) **Water Recreation as the Focus:** The park's most significant asset is the river – and, from a recreation standpoint, offers the only (and most unique, with both river and canal access) small-craft opportunity in the City in terms of public access to boating and water sports within a traditional dense urban neighborhood. Therefore, the recreation component of the park should potentially focus on taking advantage of this resource in a visually and historically appropriate way.
- h) **Preferred Character Concepts (A and C):** The Committee felt that Character Concepts A and C were intriguing concepts, though with uncertainties about levels of traffic, architecture styles or other current unknowns.
- i) **Not Significant Advantage to Concept B:** It was generally felt that there was no significant long-term advantage to "Character Concept B" (Retrofit Existing Structures). It was described as the "status quo". The main advantage would be cost, however it had no obvious long term benefit to the historic park or the neighborhood.
- j) **Link to Existing Development:** Moving the significant infrastructure and facilities north of Elmwood Avenue (Character concept "A") made sense in terms of linking it to the urban development happening at Brooks Landing and existing infrastructure and buildings across the river at the U of R. It also most closely reflects Olmsted's original plan for the park.
- k) **Fixing Drainage Problems:** Character Concept "A" (structures north of Elmwood) would fix the drainage problems through the redevelopment efforts.

- l) **Connect North and South Park Lands Across Elmwood:** It was proposed that the park lands north and south of Elmwood be better connected through a pedestrian bridge or other circulation mechanism to tie the park areas together from a user standpoint. BLA noted that the Elmwood Avenue bridge has been rebuilt 3 times in the last century and that changes could be made during the next bridge reconstruction to expand the land before the abutment met the bridge deck, allowing a significantly wider park area (rather than just a trail skirting the abutment) to be developed under the bridge. This would give broad visual and circulation access from either side of the park providing a safer and more pleasing connection between the north and south sides.
- m) **Unknowns Regarding Buffering and Infrastructure Near Neighborhood:** There was both interest and concern was expressed over the relocation of recreational buildings to the corner of Elmwood and Genesee Street (Character Concept "C"). The benefit of having the most heavily used facilities integrated into the neighborhood was discussed, but there are worries about the buffering from adjacent residential uses, what the buildings would look like and how they would be accessed.
- n) **Importance of Calming Traffic on Elmwood:** Discussion on the value of placing community buildings at the Elmwood-Genesee St-Scottsville Rd intersection because it's so noisy and the traffic is very intense. The importance of proposing a traffic calming solution along with option "C" was discussed. It was felt that by making the corner into a neighborhood recreational building that is used every day – additional pedestrian improvements would be very beneficial to slow traffic and make it easy to cross the intersection. Comment was noted that while the Elmwood frontage of the park is pleasant from a vehicular standpoint that it is too noisy for general park use. Pushing the intensive uses to this area may group like uses (active with noise) and help block/buffer noise to the more passive internal use of the park.
- o) **Determine I-390 Impacts on Elmwood Traffic:** It was determined that the traffic along Elmwood Avenue and the Scottsville/Genesee St/Elmwood intersection should be addressed in the master plan. The traffic is too intense, too fast, and disconnects the park from the neighborhood at the precisely the one location where the park actually has the potential of deeply connecting to a neighborhood. The I-390 ("Access 390") improvements along the freeway on the other side of the river (Kendrick Rd) may have a significant positive impact on the traffic along Elmwood – by reducing commuter traffic from the University and Medical Center using Elmwood Avenue to get to the Scottsville Rd 390 on-ramp. It will be important to see if there are traffic forecasts for Elmwood post-Access390 construction, which may allow us to propose more innovative and important treatments to Elmwood Avenue itself.
- p) **Parking:** Discussion was held on reducing parking in the park by providing on-street parking on Elmwood and Genesee St, or incorporating a park boulevard around the perimeter of the park that would allow street parking. The challenge of placing parking on streets along Elmwood is the relatively high traffic volume and limited street frontage against the park. Genesee St is also one-way. A park boulevard around the perimeter would likely impact the beneficial tree buffering that has established over the years. All agreed that breaking up parking into smaller pods, working with the topography, and blending them into the landscape was an appropriate approach. Once again, considering the long-term forecast for traffic on Elmwood Avenue, uniquely positive changes could be made to the streetscape allowing parking, bike boulevards or other neighborhood friendly street features.

9) NEXT STEPS:

Bayer Landscape Architecture will address comments and carry forward two schematic alternative plans representing the proposed treatments, and addressing comments and concerns.

END of MINUTES - Please notify Bayer Landscape Architecture of any errors or omissions in these meeting minutes.

Zakery D. Steele, ASLA

Project Manager, Bayer Landscape Architecture, PLLC

zds@bayerla.com