

### BASIC SITE INFORMATION

---

<b>Site Name(s):</b>	Manhattan Square Park	<b>Location Description:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	353 Court St	Park site bounded by Court Street to the north, Chestnut St to the west, and
<b>Coordinates:</b>	UTM: (Datum: WGS-84) Zone: <b>18T E/N:288431,4781197</b>	Manhattan Square Drive on the south and east.
<b>Tax ID:</b>	121.320-0002-003.000	
<b>Existing Zoning:</b>	CCD (City Center District)	

### PARK INFORMATION

---

<b>Park Type:</b>	Modernist Landscape
<b>Size:</b>	4.40 Acres
<b>Dimensions:</b>	+/- 415' x 480'
<b>Topographic Description:</b>	Varied (rolling areas, flat, sunken plaza)
<b>Date of Construction:</b>	Completed in 1974
<b>Landscape Architect(s)/Designer(s):</b>	Lawrence Halprin (original design, 1972)
<b>Current landmark designation status:</b>	None

### CULTURAL / HISTORIC INFORMATION

---

The following history is adapted from the nomination of Manhattan Square Park to the Cultural Landscape Foundation's "Marvels of Modernism" program, submitted by The Landmark Society in 2008.

Lawrence Halprin Associates designed Manhattan Square Park in 1972. It was built as designed and opened to the public in 1974. The park, 5 acres in area, located in the southeast corner of downtown, was designed to serve people of all ages. It included a children's play area with a wading pool, a regulation-size hockey rink/tennis and basketball courts, a football field-sized meadow for active play, a berm garden, a promenade, a park drive (Manhattan Square Drive), and a skylit pedestrian underpass below Chestnut St. The focal point of the site was a plaza and amphitheater with a restaurant, a waterfall fountain and an overhead space frame with an observation tower. The design is a complex multi-level structure, defined by strong landforms, concrete steps and walls, and angular patterns.

Manhattan Square Park was built in the first and only phase of development of a 60-acre urban renewal plan, the Southeast Loop Plan, for this area of downtown. It included 15 high and mid-rise apartment buildings, commercial and community facilities intended to serve 7500 new residents. The park was intended as a centerpiece of this development, to be viewed from above, and as an outdoor living room for a high intensity of use. Like many ambitious and failed urban renewal plans in this period, the Southeast Loop Plan left the area surrounding the park largely cleared and underutilized. The park has been used most successfully for organized high intensity activities, including concerts, special events and ice skating. It has been less successful in attracting informal use day-to-day, related to (as both a cause and effect of) reduced operations, including the closing of the restaurant, the observation tower and the fountain.

Recent projects have included a redesign of the children's play area in the 1990s and the redesign of the skating rink in the past few years. Both kept the function of the original design intact.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

---

### **Setting and Neighborhood Context:**

Manhattan Square Park is located in a highly urbanized downtown setting, with various office, institutional, and residential uses surrounding the park block. High density residential housing towers are located directly east of the park. To the south is the considerably large Strong Museum of Play. New office-use redevelopment is currently being constructed on a site southwest of the park, across Chestnut Street. HSBC plaza and office tower is located adjacent to the park site on the north.

### **Natural Systems and Features:**

No significant natural features are present on the park site.

### **Spatial Organization:**

The park area is spatially divided into six different components. The northwestern corner of the park features a large concrete sunken plaza space, with an iconic structural matrix of steel beams and platforms overhead. The sunken plaza features a highly irregular series of steps and terraces on the north end, once a functioning water feature.

Directly south of the sunken plaza is a wooded grove area with diagonal crossing pathways. The space features a considerable amount of shaded canopy, with walkways and wooden slat benches. The grassy wooded spaces formed by the crossing paths have been mounded and bermed, to create an intimate and enclosed area.

To the west of the wooded grove is a playground that is not original to the park's design. The playground features brightly colored rubberized/soft-impact surfaces with a variety of standard and custom play equipment, including slides, balance beams, echo chambers, interactive play/sound pieces, stainless steel benches, and a large rubberized climbing hill.

North of the park's playground is a wide promenade, linking the main sunken plaza space to the park's southeastern boundary and street frontage. The promenade runs diagonal across half of the park block, and has a formalized shade tree planting scheme, with trees lining the promenade edges. Benches and light fixtures are also placed at promenade edges, between planted shade trees. Shrubs rows sit atop large berms beyond the promenade's edge, essentially setting the promenade to appear below surrounding grade.

North of the promenade is a recently redeveloped ice skating facility, which is located along the western boundary of the park. The area features an ice rink with curvilinear edges, which also doubles as a reflecting pool during the summer months, and an associated building at the rink's south end. Seating and lighting surround the ice rink.

Between the ice rink area and the sunken main plaza space is a large open grass lawn area, measuring approximately 130' x 250', which functions as a passive recreational space.

**Buildings and Structures:**

Various buildings and other structures are located on the park site. The main sunken plaza area features a large steel scaffold-type structure built over the plaza space. The structure features an access stairway and viewing platforms. Built into the western wall of the sunken plaza is a tenant space, formerly occupied by a restaurant, which is now secured with plywood.

The playground area includes a significant tower structure within the play equipment, made of steel and various other materials.

A small contemporary building associated with the seasonal ice skating use is located at the south end of the rink.

**Water Features:**

Manhattan Square Park features a noteworthy water feature within the sunken plaza area. The water feature includes various sizes of wading pools, waterfalls, platforms, water chutes and other geometric spaces. The water feature no longer appears to be functioning.

**Materials / Paving materials:**

Paving throughout a majority of the site is concrete. Most pathways, plaza areas, walls, and water feature elements are concrete. The playground area features a soft-impact rubberized surface treatment, as well as a small portion of concrete pavers within the playground sitting area. The newly renovated ice rink is generally surrounded by poured concrete walkways and contains a band of square asphalt pavers near the rink edge.

**Vegetation:**

Vegetation varies across the site, which includes various shade trees, ornamental trees, and planting beds. No vegetation exists within the sunken plaza space, though a concrete planter with juniper is located at street level. Shade trees line major walkways, and a grove of trees is located at the site's southwestern corner. Hedgerows are present along the top of berming along the main axial promenade. The playground area features a vegetative climbing-wall system, with narrow gauge steel cable strung between fixtures along a concrete wall. Vines have been trained to climb the cable and screen the concrete wall. The ice rink reconstruction includes planters with concrete curbing at the periphery. These planters contain various ornamental grasses, shrubs, and perennials/annuals.

**Furnishings/Monuments:**

Description of existing site furnishings, including benches, trash receptacles, lighting, flag poles, sculptures, monuments or other visual focal points – Include description of materials and condition. The ice rink area includes a considerable amount of new steel benches, one-piece chairs/table combination

units embedded into the concrete, and matching trash receptacles. Lighting near the ice rink is a contemporary cut-off style fixture. Benches throughout the original portions of the park site are wood slat construction on steel supports, with many featuring back to back double-benches. Lighting fixtures are different in some areas, and include new contemporary fixtures, colonial style Rochester-standard fixtures, and various flood-style and cobra-head style fixtures near the sunken plaza space – many of which appear to be event-related. The playground area includes two additional lighting fixture styles, a contemporary spot-light style fixture, lighting up the play area, and contemporary wall-sconces that have been placed along concrete walls. A few small dedication monuments are located at the base of some trees within the open lawn area.

**Circulation:**

Circulation across the site is generally formed by the main axial promenade, linking the northwest and southeast corners of the block. The sunken plaza area lies at the northwest terminus of the short promenade and the playground, open lawn area, wooded grove, and ice skating rink can be accessed from pathways perpendicular to the promenade. The open lawn area and ice skating rink is separated by a significant elevation change, limiting cross-access. The perimeter of the park is also surrounded by typical streetscape and sidewalk circulation, wherein various portions of the park can be accessed.

**INTEGRITY**

---

**Setting and Neighborhood Context:**

The park does retain much of the contextual neighborhood fabric that existed during the park's period of significance. The central urban site and surrounding office, residential, and other uses are typical of the urban context. However, the original intent of the park design was to compliment an area redevelopment plan that included several more residential towers and a higher intensity of surrounding land use.

**Natural Systems and Features:**

No significant natural features are present on the park site.

**Spatial Organization:**

The overall spatial organization of the park retains the integrity of the original park design, with various designed sub-spaces retaining important form, connections, and alignments. Additions to the park since the original design was completed include playground and ice rink redevelopments.

**Buildings and Structures:**

Many of the important features that contribute to the park's functionality, such as the water feature, tenant space, and scaffold structure, are not currently used or operable, but remain within the park.

**Water Features:**

The water feature within the sunken plaza space remains intact and all the elements of the design are visible. However, the water feature has not been operated in several years and continues to deteriorate without regular maintenance.

**Materials / Paving materials:**

Paving materials appear to generally be intact. Some concrete areas near the southwestern grove and plaza space appear to have been maintained with asphalt patching.

**Vegetation:**

Vegetation across the park site appears to retain integrity to the original park design. Several trees appear to need maintenance or replacement due to severe leaning or other odd growth characteristics. Photographs show moveable exposed aggregate planters dispersed around the sunken plaza and are no longer visible within the space.

**Furnishings/Monuments:**

Furnishings from the original park design remain intact in most places, but may need replacement due to significant wear. New lighting has been introduced with the redesign of the playground and ice rink areas, and does not reflect the style that exists within the older portions of the park. It is unknown if lighting fixtures within the original portions of the park are original to the design.

**Circulation:**

Circulation throughout the park retains significant integrity with the original design. Connections to various sub-spaces within the park remain true to the park's original characteristics.

---

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE & ELIGIBILITY EVALUATION**

---

Manhattan Square Park appears to meet the criteria for National Register listing when it reaches 50 years of age, and may qualify for listing sooner than that based upon the "exceptional significance" exception.

Manhattan Square Park is significant according to Criterion A, for its association with dramatic, partially realized urban renewal plans that transformed downtown Rochester, and Criterion C, as the work of renowned Modernist landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and a good example of 1960s/70s urban landscape architecture. Assuming it does not lose integrity in the meantime, it appears that it will qualify for the National Register when it is 50 years old, the usual threshold for Register eligibility.

Properties that are not yet 50 years old, as is the case with Manhattan Square Park, can qualify for the National Register if they are of **exceptional significance**, in accordance with guidelines established in the National Register Bulletin, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years."

To determine whether it meets the test for exceptional significance, Manhattan Square Park should be evaluated within the context of both Lawrence Halprin's work and urban renewal plans for the

southeast quadrant of Rochester. This may be possible, but a sufficiently thorough evaluation would require research beyond the scope of the present project.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

---

Kowsky, Francis R., and Martin Wachadlo. *Cultural Resource Survey of Recent Past Buildings and Designed Landscapes within the Inner Loop Area of Rochester, New York, 1940-1975*. 2009.

The Landmark Society of Western New York. "Manhattan Square Park," nomination to Marvels of Modernism (Cultural Landscape Foundation), 2008.

Lawrence Halprin Associates. *Southeast Loop Park*. N.d. (c. 1972).

*Lawrence Halprin: Changing Places* (exhibit guide). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1986.

Macaluso, Tim L. "City is restoring downtown's hidden park." *City*, 5 June 2007. Print.

Sherfy, Marcella, and W. Ray Luce. *Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years*. National Register Bulletin 22. U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979; revised 1990, 1996, 1998.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS, PLANS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS

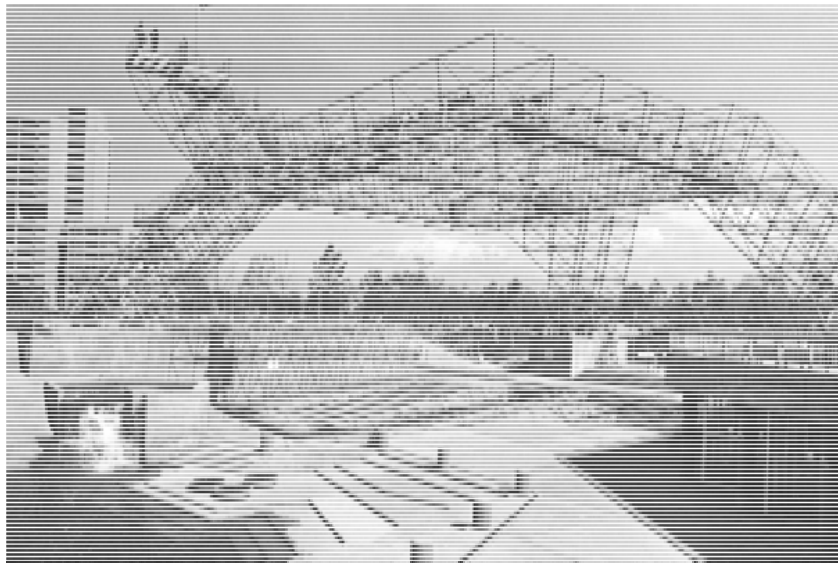
---



*Manhattan Square Park, aerial photo. (Google / NYS GIS Clearinghouse)*



1935 plat map showing future site of Manhattan Square Park (southeast corner of Chestnut and Court streets) and vicinity, pre-urban renewal.



Manhattan Square Park, 1977. Photo by City Photographer; Landmark Society photo files



*Manhattan Square Park, 1975. Landmark Society photo files.*





c0000647.jpg Rochester City Hall Photo Lab

*Manhattan Square Park in 1983.*



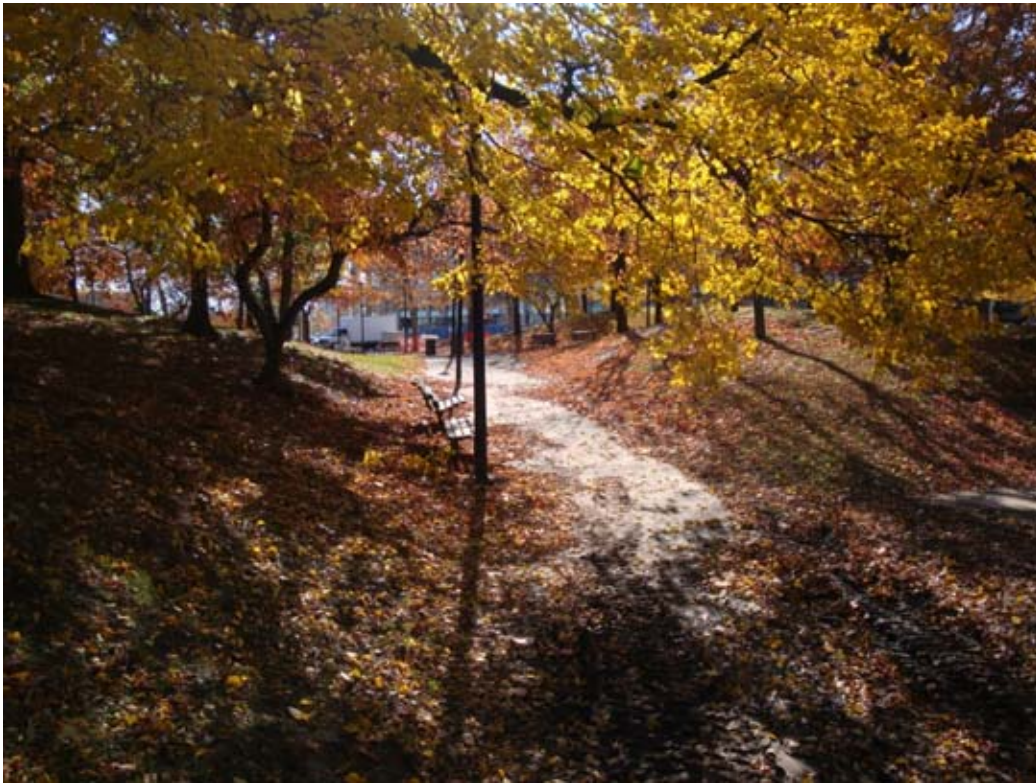
*Manhattan Square Park, looking northwest into sunken plaza space former water feature, 2009.*



*Manhattan Square Park, scaffold-type structure with platforms above plaza, 2009.*



*Manhattan Square Park, looking southwest down pedestrian promenade, 2009.*



*Manhattan Square Park, southwestern corner/wooded grove area, 2009.*



*Manhattan Square Park, redeveloped playground area, 2009.*



*Manhattan Square Park, redeveloped ice rink area, 2009.*



*Manhattan Square Park, seating area near Court Street, 2009.*