

I. Charette Overview

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC) hosted a series of two Design Charettes, held on April 11-13, 2005 and May 11-13, 2005, completing an important early task in preparation of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks System 20 Year Management and Restoration Plan. The design charette—an intensive professional and management team workshop—is a tool intended to focus and facilitate the dialog concerning the future of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks. The team built upon the body of planning work conducted to date and the evaluations of the historical and existing conditions of the parks and the overall Olmsted park system (See Figures 1-6).

The Charette Process

A charette may be defined as an 'inquiry by design'

workshop—that is, an intensive workshop in which participants are brought together to suggest ideas for potential solutions to a set of complex issues—in this case, those that need to be addressed in the 20-Year Management and Restoration Plan. The process considers factors such as planning, the environment, user demand, and economic and social aspects as well as historic design and sustainability factors. Charettes identify short-term and long-term concerns and issues as well as opportunities and needs. The charettes, combined with ongoing BOPC and public review and input, are intended to assist and inform the decision-making process. The charette process is a cost effective means of envisioning alternative potential outcomes at an early stage.



Figure 1 – Delaware Park 2004 BOPC Draft Plan



Figure 2 – Front Park 2004 BOPC Draft Plan



Figure 3 – South Park 2004 BOPC Draft Plan



Figure 4 – Riverside Park 2004 BOPC Draft Plan



Figure 5 – Cazenovia Park 2004 BOPC Draft Plan



Figure 6 – MLK, Jr. 2004 BOPC Draft Plan

The charrette process was also utilized to bring forward a complete record of the planning and design ideas generated based on the history, existing conditions, user surveys, and existing planning documentation for the Buffalo Olmsted Park and Parkway system developed over the past 20 years. The charrette process was intended to initiate and create a dialog around this record, clarify BOPC planning and policy values, and to actively promote additional feedback.

The preliminary findings and sketches that were generated in the charrettes will be analyzed by BOPC Board and staff and the planning and design team in the context of community input with the benefit of the results of the comprehensive inventory and critical technical analysis of the park and parkway system now underway.

Purpose

The interdisciplinary team used the charrette process, literature and image review, discussion, and park tours to produce schematic site plans and a narrative describing the unique attributes, key missing or lost elements, crucial analytic assumptions, and suggested areas of focus for each park and the parkway system. Proposed projects from previous master plans were critically assessed within the context of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC) Guiding Principles and Olmsted Advisory Council findings. This generated a set of preliminary recommendations and sketch drawings intended to foster further BOPC and public comment. This process serves to place each park and parkway in the context of the overall system and to assess all components in a comparable analytic framework. The charrettes and their preliminary

findings build on the sizable base of existing work. The preliminary charette results will be revised and augmented, then integrated with BOPC and public feedback into the interim and long term vision plans ultimately to be included in the final 20-Year Management and Restoration Plan.

Participants

The participants in both charettes included professionals in the fields of urban design, urban and park planning, landscape architecture, architecture, transportation and pedestrian system planning, park management and operations, concession management, public outreach and facilitation, history, computer systems, and graphics design.

The team included individuals with a wealth of combined knowledge and experience with the Buffalo Olmsted Park System

from the BOPC; the Urban Design Project, the Center for Computational Research (CCR), and the Department of History at the University at Buffalo; Trowbridge and Wolf, landscape architecture firm based in Ithaca; the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), the regional metropolitan planning organization; Wendel Duchscherer, landscape architecture and engineering firm, and the Delaware North Companies (See Figures 7-8).

Parks

The parks addressed in the April 2005 charette included Delaware Park, Front Park, and South Park; the May 2005 charette included Riverside Park, Cazenovia Park, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The second charette also addressed the overall Olmsted Park System, including parkways, circles and smaller spaces.



Figure 7 - Charette participants



Figure 8 - The CCR team



Figure 9 - Charette participants on the Delaware Park tour



Figure 10 - Three dimensional models of each park were projected

Structure:

Pre-Charette Preparation

The Urban Design Project prepared and distributed booklets which included written and graphic material on the history, original plans, and subsequent plans, contextual studies, and designs to inform participants.

Site Evaluation

The charette participants toured each of the six destination parks in the system. In addition, the tour followed Olmsted parkways which connect the parks, as well as potential routes of future parkways and connectors to complete the linkages between the parks (See Figure 9).

Charette Workshops

As described above, charette workshops are collaborative sessions which involve intensive discussion, brainstorming, and testing of potential solutions and

ideas by the participants. In both charettes, the team utilized the visualization resources of the University at Buffalo’s Center for Computational Research (CCR). The technology enabled the workshop participants to toggle seamlessly between historic, existing, and proposed planned conditions in each park (See Figure 10).

Based on the group discussion and observations from the park site evaluations, the charette participants were divided into sub-groups and asked to develop design schemes for specific focus areas in each park. At the end of the breakout sessions, team members of each sub-group presented their design concepts and drawings to the entire group for additional dialogue and refinement.