Executive Summary

Charette Overview

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC) is currently directing the preparation of a 20-Year Management and Restoration Plan for the city's Olmsted-designed parks system. The BOPC has engaged a design team headed by The Urban Design Project at the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo to prepare the draft Plan for Conservancy and public review. As part of this work, The Urban Design Project led two sets of Design Charettes, held on April 11-13, 2005 and May 11-13, 2005.

A charette is an intensive and interactive design workshop often used in the early stages of planning and design projects to reveal issues and opportunities and to envision alternative potential solutions to complex issues. 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.

The charettes served to focus and facilitate the ongoing dialog regarding the future of the park system to assist and inform the decision-making process. The focus areas group BOPC investments in the park system in a coordinated and cost effective manner. The methodology facilitates comparisons of the various disparate projects among and within individual parks by providing a standard set of images that presents each park and each project in a like manner. The project recommendations developed through the charette process are preliminary. Ongoing work by the design team includes preparation of technical documentation and analysis for use by the Conservancy as it moves forward and further refines and evaluates alternative recommendations.

Preliminary Findings

Each of the six major destination parks in the Buffalo Olmsted Parks system—Delaware, Front, South, Cazenovia, Martin Luther King Jr., and Riverside Park—serves a unique purpose and offers distinctive features which both sets it apart from other parks as well as defines its role in the overall system. The grouping of individual projects into major initiatives and suggested areas of investment was based on a number of factors, including compatibility with BOPC's Guiding Principles and the

Figure i – The historic park drives enhanced the experience of Delaware Park users

Figure ii – The Scajaquada Expressway now cuts through Delaware Park

project priority matrix established by the Olmsted Advisory Council. As a result, a common goal structure underlies recurring areas of focus for many of the parks. These include: restoring the natural environment; bringing back key lost features which were central to original concepts for the parks; buffering the parks and improving gateways; rationalizing park facilities and promoting equitable use; returning "wholeness" to each park; improving the pedestrian nature of the parks.

Where a recommended project would have the effect of displacing an existing recreational use or community facility, implementation is considered to be contingent on developing a mitigation strategy that adequately addresses the removal of the facility to the satisfaction of the user groups.

Results by Park

Delaware Park

With nearly 350 acres, Delaware Park is by far the largest and most complex of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks. Originally known simply as "The Park," Delaware Park plays a central role in the Olmsted Park System and in the city itself. The park is heavily utilized, has been carved up by highway infrastructure, and has lost many of its historic features. Areas of focus to address these issues include:

- Reunite the fragments of the park by reconstructing the Scajaquada Expressway as a landscaped, boulevard-like parkway and restoring historic park circulation systems.
- Restore the Meadow, one of the three central environments envisioned for the park by Olmsted, the Meadow is integral to historic park concept and function.

- Restore the water's edge. Remove obstructions and enhance lake and creek water quality and access.
- Restore the Casino area. The park's heavily utilized central area needs rehabilitation and enhancement.
- Enhance the Lodge area. This includes restoring the lodge itself, removing incompatible structures, and recreating/interpreting the Quarry Garden.

(See Figures i-ii)

Front Park

Front Park, perched on a scenic bluff overlooking the Niagara River and Lake Erie, is on a site chosen by Olmsted for its outstanding views of Lake Erie and the Niagara River. Designed as a public ceremonial space and once adjacent to the former Fort Porter, Front Park has largely lost its water-related, scenic, and historic context as a result of highway and bridge construction. The overarching issues to be addressed include reconnecting the park with the water (visually and logistically) and attracting people back to the park. Specific preliminary areas of focus include:

- Buffer the park and its visitors from the effects of the highway, bridge and thruway edge through landscape treatments and reinstating lost park land.
- Recreate a Grand Terrace, restoring the central focus and active use area of the park including its gardens, trees, and structures.
- Enhance connections. Improve pedestrian and bike links between the park and the neighborhood, other nearby parks, and the waterfront.

Figure iii – The peaceful conditions of Front Park adjacent to the Erie Canal

Figure iv – The noise of the Thruway severely impairs the usability of Front Park

Figure v – Historic signature plaza overlooking the Erie Canal and Lake Erie at Front Park

Figure vi – The character of the plaza has been lost

- Rationalize park facilities in a way that better serves visitors, is compatible with the original design of the park, and interprets lost features including Fort Porter and the Bank.

(See Figures iii-vii)

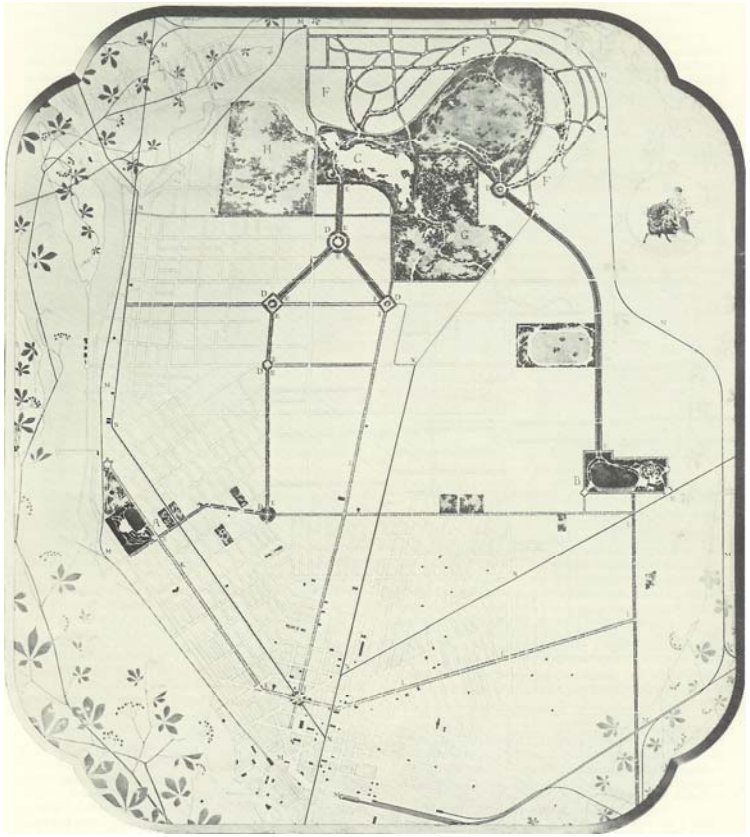

Figure vii – 1874 design for the connecting Parkways between Delaware Park, Front Park, and MLK, Jr. Park

South Park
South Park is remarkably intact in terms of its historic integrity—few elements of the original design have been lost and few new features have been added. The recommendations focus largely on enhancing accessibility and user amenities and promoting equitable use. Major initiatives include:

- Restore the Meadow and the Arboretum, including the historic trail system, and reestablish general park use of this area.
- Enhance the botanical collection and environment, including the trees and the gardens, and develop a world-class horticultural attraction, while preserving the ecology of the lake and its shoreline.
- Improve circulation systems and connections with the South Buffalo community, downtown Lackawanna, and nearby attractions such as Our Lady of Victory Basilica.
- Rationalize park facilities by taking the NFTA bus loop off the park, better utilizing existing structures, and installing site furnishings.

(See Figures viii-ix)

Riverside Park
Riverside Park is two parks in one—the historic north section designed by the Olmsted firm which included woodlands, the formal central gardens called the Concourse, and a meadow-like playfield. In the early 20th century, a southern section was added to provide more active recreation facilities. The Olmsted-designed section has lost many of its defining features. Riverside Park offers scenic views of the Niagara River. To reach the river, pedestrians use the Irene Gardner Bridge to cross the New York State Thruway, which

Figure viii – Historic pathways separated uses and encouraged walking in South Park

Figure ix – Much of South Park's pathway system has been lost or altered

Figure x – Cazenovia Park entrances are at busy intersections that are hard to navigate

Figure xi – Erosion is a problem along Cazenovia Creek

separates the park from the river. Focus areas include:

- Re-establish the Central Concourse to its historic form and prominence as a focal point.
- Re-establish the historic plantings/improve edges.
- Re-establish river to park connection by redesigning the pedestrian bridge and creating a Niagara River pier.
- Calm traffic on Hotaling Drive and the Crowley Street parking lot.
- Sustain active recreation facilities that are compatible with proposed park designs.

Cazenovia Park

With its location on the banks of Cazenovia Creek and its scenic pathways and pastoral views largely intact, Cazenovia Park has great charm. The park is at the center of the surrounding South Buffalo neighborhood and its setting remains very much as it was when it opened. The park has lost a number of defining elements of the original park design, most prominently the historic lake bays and lagoons. Suggested focus areas include:

- Redevelop the Center/Casino area—the civic "heart" of the park, by restoring and reinterpreting the Cazenovia lake.
- Enhance pedestrian conditions/calm traffic along the roadways and walkways throughout the park.
- Practice ecologically sustainable techniques for creek edge management, water and flood control management, and general park maintenance.

(See Figures x-xi)

Martin Luther King, Jr. Park

The Humboldt Basin, the Fountain and the Water Plant Basin, all no longer operational, were the defining and unique

Olmstedian features of MLK, Jr. Park. The central spine of water features and the procession/parade gave the park a strong geometry. The park, originally called the Parade, was located at a central point on the northern Olmsted Parkway system, and the southern terminus of the former Humboldt Parkway. The charette team assumed that the Science Museum and the Science Magnet School would stay in the current location, but recommended that these facilities stay within their existing building footprint.

- Restore the central water features in the Parade including the Humboldt Basin, the Water Plant Basin, and the Fountain.
- Restore historic paths and landscape features including plantings throughout the park.
- Integrate Science Museum and School area into the park by redesigning the landscape.
- Restore the Greenhouse and lawn area on the east side of Fillmore Avenue.
- Improve circulation and calm traffic making the roadways more pedestrian friendly, and creating visual links across the roads.
- Harmonize the southeast corner of the park, including restoring the Greenhouse and the Shelter House, enhancing the setting of the MLK, Jr. Memorial, bringing back the floral gardens, and improving the service and maintenance areas.

(See Figures xii-xiii)

Figure xii – MLK, Jr. Park was once known for its Formal Gardens and Greenhouse

Figure xiii – Only remnants of the Formal Gardens exist today with great promise for restoration

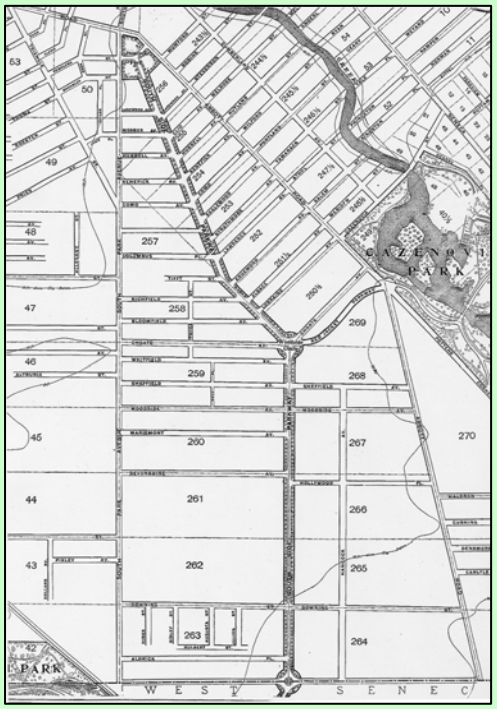

Figure xiv – The 1902 connecting Parkways between South Park and Cazenovia Park

The System of Parkways, Avenues, Circles and Small Spaces

In addition to the six large parks within the City of Buffalo, the Olmsted firms designed a system of parkways, avenues, circles and small green spaces including neighborhood and pocket parks. Some of these features have been lost, but those that remain help define the City of Buffalo.

The system of Olmsted and parkways, avenues, circles and small spaces and non-Olmsted connectors should enable citizens to access the parks from locations throughout the City and to travel among destination parks, downtown and the waterfront via beautiful parkway or avenue routes. Toward this end, goals for the system connections include:

- Continue to protect, preserve, rehabilitate, and maintain the original Olmsted system that remains in place today.
- To the extent possible, restore or reconstruct lost components of the Olmsted system as originally built.
- For lost components for which full restoration is not possible, re-interpret the lost elements in a way that is consistent with the original Olmstedian vision and intent.
- Construct or re-interpret linkages planned by the Olmsted firm but never fully realized.
- Develop new parkway, circle, and similar linkages to fill in remaining gaps in the overall system. Maintain the historic integrity of the original Olmsted system by differentiating new connections from the historic ones. The new elements should connect the six major parks through parkways,

avenues, and a system of great streets based in part on the Joseph Ellicott radial plan for Buffalo. The connections should link neighborhoods and parks, downtown, and the Buffalo River, Lake Erie, the Niagara River, and other greenway corridors.

- Interpret the lost or separated small spaces of the system with streetscape and landscape linkages to related existing or proposed system elements.

(See Figures xiv-xvi)

Figure xv – Humboldt Parkway from the steps of the Museum of Science

Figure xvi – Construction of the Kensington Expressway destroyed the Humboldt Parkway

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.

Figure1 – 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 charette 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 charette 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 charettes 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 charette 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 charettes 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.

II. Results for Each Park

Recognizing Each Park's Unique Role

Each of the six major destination parks in the Buffalo Olmsted Parks system—Delaware, Front, South, Cazenovia, Riverside and Martin Luther King Jr. - serves a unique purpose and offers distinctive features which both set each park apart from the other parks as well as defines its role in the overall system.

Focusing Efforts and Setting Priorities

The prioritizing of the major initiatives and the ranking of individual projects were based on a number of factors, including compatibility with BOPC's Guiding Principles, summarized in the following chart. Other factors considered by the group included a priority matrix established by the Olmsted Advisory Council. These factors included project sequencing, importance to community, visibility of the project area within the park, and others.

Buffalo Olmsted Park Conservancy Guiding Principles

- Preservation and Protection.
- Promotes User Satisfaction and Comfort.
- Consistent with the Broader Vision and Sound Planning.
- Consistent with Historic Olmstedian Intent.
- Community Involvement in the Process.
- Promotes Safe, Diverse, and Equitable Use.
- Enhances aesthetic beauty and ecological diversity.

Projects within each park were listed and grouped by location. This process, in combination with consideration of identified BOPC guiding principles, resulted in the

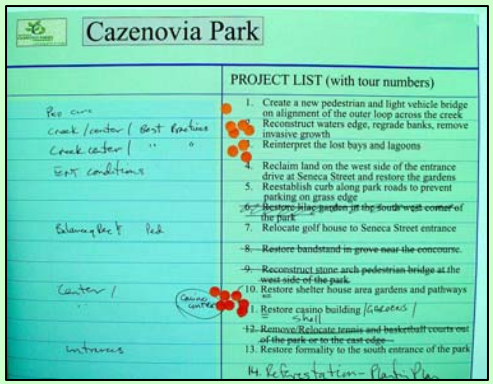

Figure 11 - Priority principles and projects were discussed

Figure 12 - Historic, current, and proposed maps were used to formulate design ideas

Figure 13 - Sketching ideas for the Minnow Pools at Riverside Park

identification of suggested focus areas by park (See Figures 11-13).

Assessing and Confirming the Results

The project recommendations are preliminary. The focus areas are suggested as a way of grouping BOPC investments in the park system in a coordinated and cost effective manner. The planning methodology and alternate park schemes suggested by the charette findings are intended to provide a methodology that facilitates comparisons of the various disparate projects among and within individual parks.

The 20-Year Plan will serve as a dynamic tool for the restoration and management of the Park and Parkway System. Each specific project will be contingent on a number of additional actions. These actions could include work by others outside the control of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, by testing of alternative means to resolve a specific issue such as balancing active and passive uses in the parks, the guidelines of the State Historic Preservation Office, and the ability to raise the funding for the proposed improvements.

The 20-Year Plan is also subject to environmental assessment and local, SEQR, state, and federal agency review. Individual projects may also require additional feasibility assessment and design development prior to implementation. The community will continue to have input throughout the Plan implementation for each project which will require policy and design review by the Olmsted Advisory Council and the BOPC Board of Directors.