

LINCOLN PARK MASTER PLAN

ALBANY, NEW YORK

Fall 2019

STIMSON

CITY OF ALBANY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

LINCOLN PARK MASTER PLAN

STIMSON STEPHEN STIMSON ASSOCIATES LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, INC.



Mayor Kathy Sheehan
City of Albany Department of Planning and Development

Fall 2019

contents

Message From Mayor Kathy Sheehan	iv
Introduction	1
The Site	3
Lincoln Park History	7
Lincoln Park Today	15
The Master Plan Process	23
The Master Plan	29
Envisioning Lincoln Park	47



Dear Neighbors:

Lincoln Park is a beloved South End landmark. First designed in 1914, this nearly 70 acre public park is home to a variety of cultural, recreational, and educational spaces and events that are part of the fabric of the adjoining neighborhoods, our entire City, and the Capital Region.

The Lincoln Park Master Plan project provided an opportunity for our community to discuss ideas for preserving and improving Lincoln Park, and to learn more about the master planning process. The plan you are about to read is the culmination of four community meetings and the evaluation of hundreds of suggestions and recommendations by residents, community leaders, sporting groups and other stakeholders.

I sincerely thank all who played a part in developing this visionary document. This plan will be used to shape Lincoln Park's future and help to prioritize investments and initiatives within the Park for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Kathy Sheehan". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "K" and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kathy Sheehan
Mayor, City of Albany

Introduction

Covering 68 acres in downtown Albany, New York, Lincoln Park is a significant historic landscape. First master-planned by landscape architect Charles Downing Lay in 1914, Lincoln Park has served for a century as the primary outdoor recreation resource for the City of Albany.

Built on a comprehensive public engagement process, this Master Plan weaves together the ecology of the site with the social and cultural life of the surrounding neighborhoods. New nature playgrounds provide important opportunities for children of all ages to engage with the outdoors. Stone structures and furnishings evoke native bedrock ledges in the ravine at the park's northwest edge, while a swath of stormwater gardens recalls the historic trace of Beaver Creek. Plantings of native trees and meadow species enhance ecological vitality and seasonal beauty, and a curving allee of magnolias honors the planting scheme from Lay's 1914 master plan. Interpretive historic signage links the many chapters of the park's history to its importance in contemporary Albany.

Lincoln Park is already a vibrant hub of active recreation, hosting a busy schedule of sports, fitness, and play programs. The Master Plan expands the park's capacity for year-round active recreation, while enhancing its cultural vibrancy and foregrounding the site's natural history to craft a unique design language and celebration of place.

STIMSON and the City of Albany Department of Planning and Development prioritized the public engagement process, and accordingly, the plan reflects the specific needs, goals, and preferences of Albany residents. The result is a community-driven vision for Lincoln Park, that will preserve, connect, celebrate, and activate this cherished cultural landscape for decades to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The City of Albany would like to thank the dedicated residents and City Staff who participated in the development of this plan.



The Site

Given its size, Lincoln Park is remarkably central to downtown Albany. Abutting the New York State Museum and Archives, it serves as the major neighborhood park for Albany's South End. Lincoln Park is part of a network of large green spaces in the city, including Washington Park a few blocks to the north, and the Corning Riverfront Park on the Hudson. The Lincoln Park Master Plan looks toward strengthening connections between these public green spaces, as well as between Lincoln Park and its diverse surrounding neighborhoods.





LINCOLN PARK IN CONTEXT



DOWNTOWN ALBANY PARKS



Lincoln Park History

The evolution of this site reflects the urban development of Albany since its founding. The Beaver Creek ravine historically formed a southern boundary to the city, and the creek was crucial to economic development during the 19th century, powering several mills in what is now the park. Clay beds along the creek supplied material for Albany's renowned brickyards. In the late 19th century, Martinville—an informal settlement of mostly Irish immigrants—occupied the south side of the park. Martinville was displaced by the construction of the park, following Lay's 1914 master plan which claimed the south slope for walking paths, rolling lawn, and picturesque groves.

Lay's design advanced a comprehensive vision for the park's program and aesthetic, proposing sports and play facilities, several civic buildings, and a mix of formal and naturalistic plantings. Some of Lay's ideas were implemented, while others can serve now as inspiration for new design. The 2019 Master Plan revives Lay's focus on the site's unique geology and topography, and proposes contemporary civic spaces that support the interests of today's local communities. The plan also seeks to reestablish urban connections that were lost with the construction of the Empire State Plaza, and to strengthen existing connections to nearby parks, schools, and cultural institutions.

Albany from the Hudson River with the site of Lincoln Park overlaid



Clay mines and the Martinville settlement along southeast edge of present-day Lincoln Park



1758

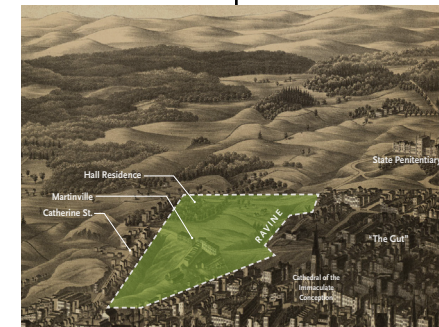
1850

1879

1892

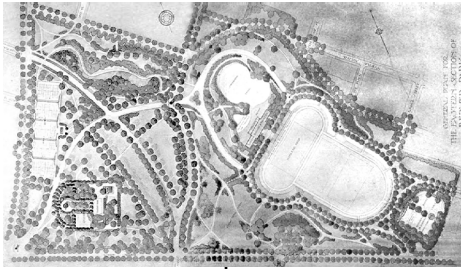


Map of the City of Albany, with approximate footprint of present-day Lincoln Park



Beaver Kill Ravine (future site of Lincoln Park)

Beaver Park Master Plan by Charles Downing Lay



Public School 24, later renamed Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (T.O.A.S.T.)



Dr King Memorial and renaming of road as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard



1897

1914

1931

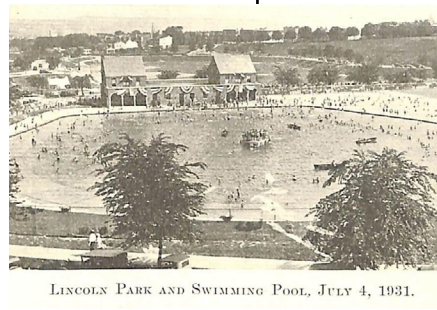
1954

1976

1993



A gathering in what is now Lincoln Park, with views of downtown Albany to the north



Opening of the Lincoln Park pool

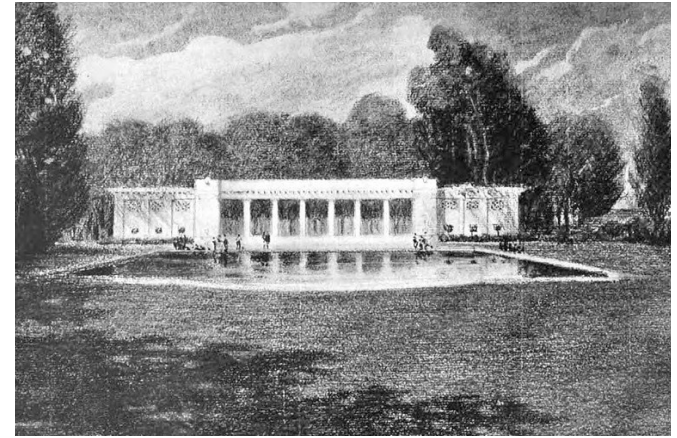
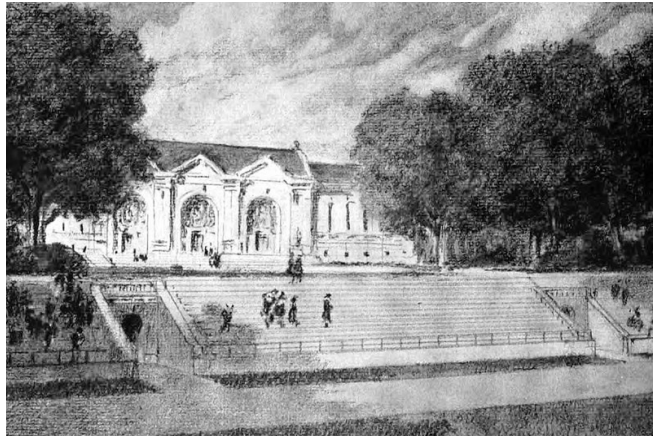


Empire State Plaza, completed 1976

1914 MASTER PLAN



Beaver Park Master Plan, by Charles Downing Lay.



Proposed park buildings.

1

2

3



Built park landscapes, early 20th c.

4



5

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The construction of the Empire State Plaza had a major impact on Lincoln Park and its relationship to downtown Albany. With the removal of the adjoining neighborhood, the north slope of the park became neglected and overgrown, and is now a significant barrier to visual and physical access.



Downtown Albany, 1948.



Looking north across the Bowl, 1930s.



Demolition and construction of the Empire State Plaza in progress, late 1960s-early 1970s.

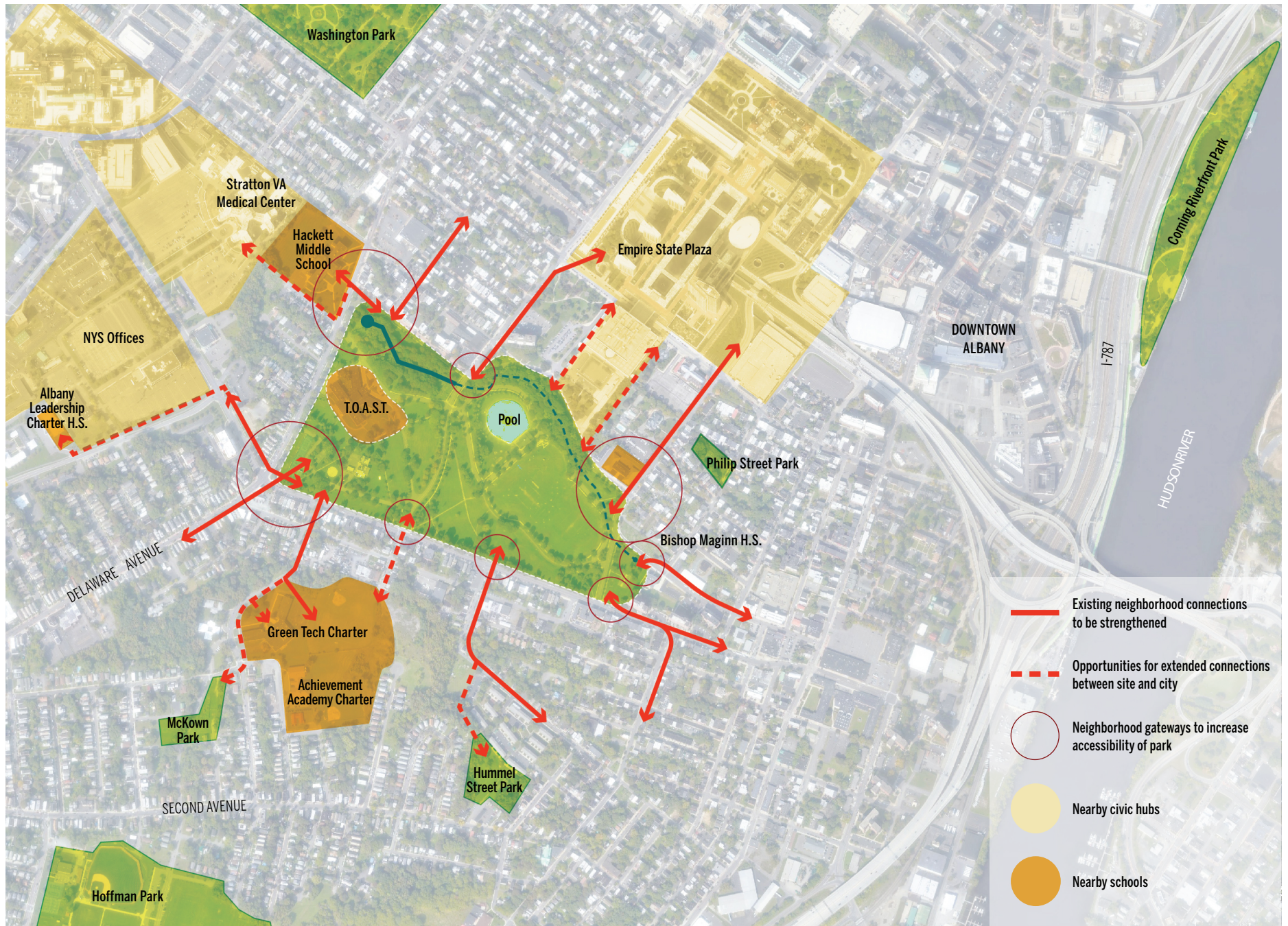


Completed plaza complex with Lincoln Park in background, late 1970s.



The north slope of Lincoln Park today.

CIVIC CONNECTIONS



Lincoln Park Today

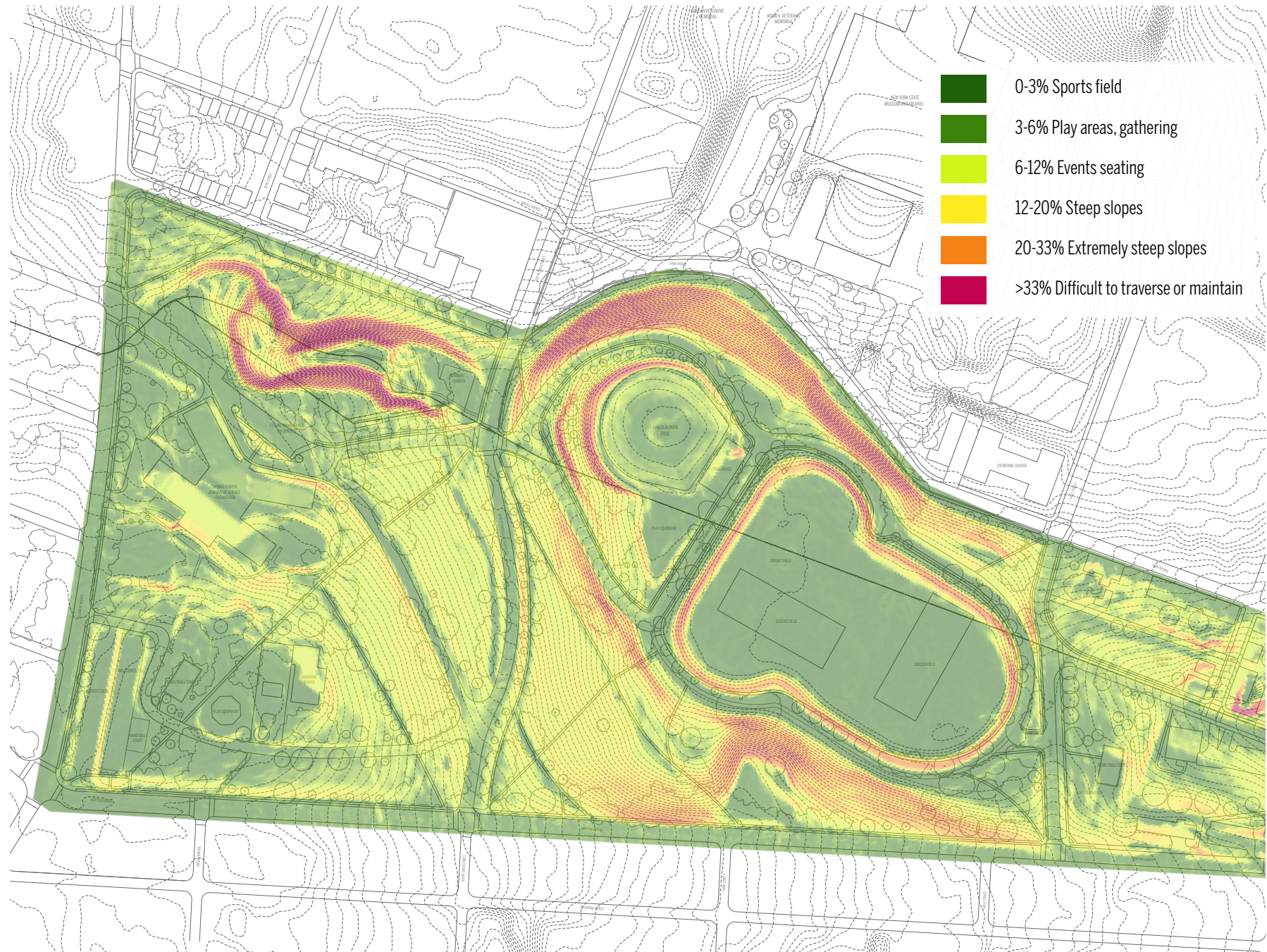
Lincoln Park is distinguished by its topography. The park's hilltop location allows dramatic views of the city, while its 'bowl' form provides long views within the park and supports a range of recreation activities. Some slopes within the park are steep enough to make their use and maintenance a serious challenge. The Master Plan integrates these spaces more fully into the park through a range of strategies for planting and access.

Lincoln Park is a lively venue for sports, play, and cultural events. It is also cherished for its extensive open space and opportunities for walking, rest, and informal gatherings. The Master Plan celebrates these current uses and is guided by community input as it proposes to fulfill the park's potential and enhance its year-round appeal and accessibility.





SLOPE



Extremely steep slopes

Flat or moderate slope access areas

CURRENT USE



Mississippi Day 2018 photo: Yasmine Robinson



Schoolyard garden at T.O.A.S.T. Photo: Glen Valentine



Flag football in the Bowl. Photo: Paul Buckowski, Times Union



15 Love tennis program. Photo: Grace Nadel, Times Union



Cricket team. Photo: Robert Downen, Times Union



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr memorial. Photo: Rick Karlin, Times Union

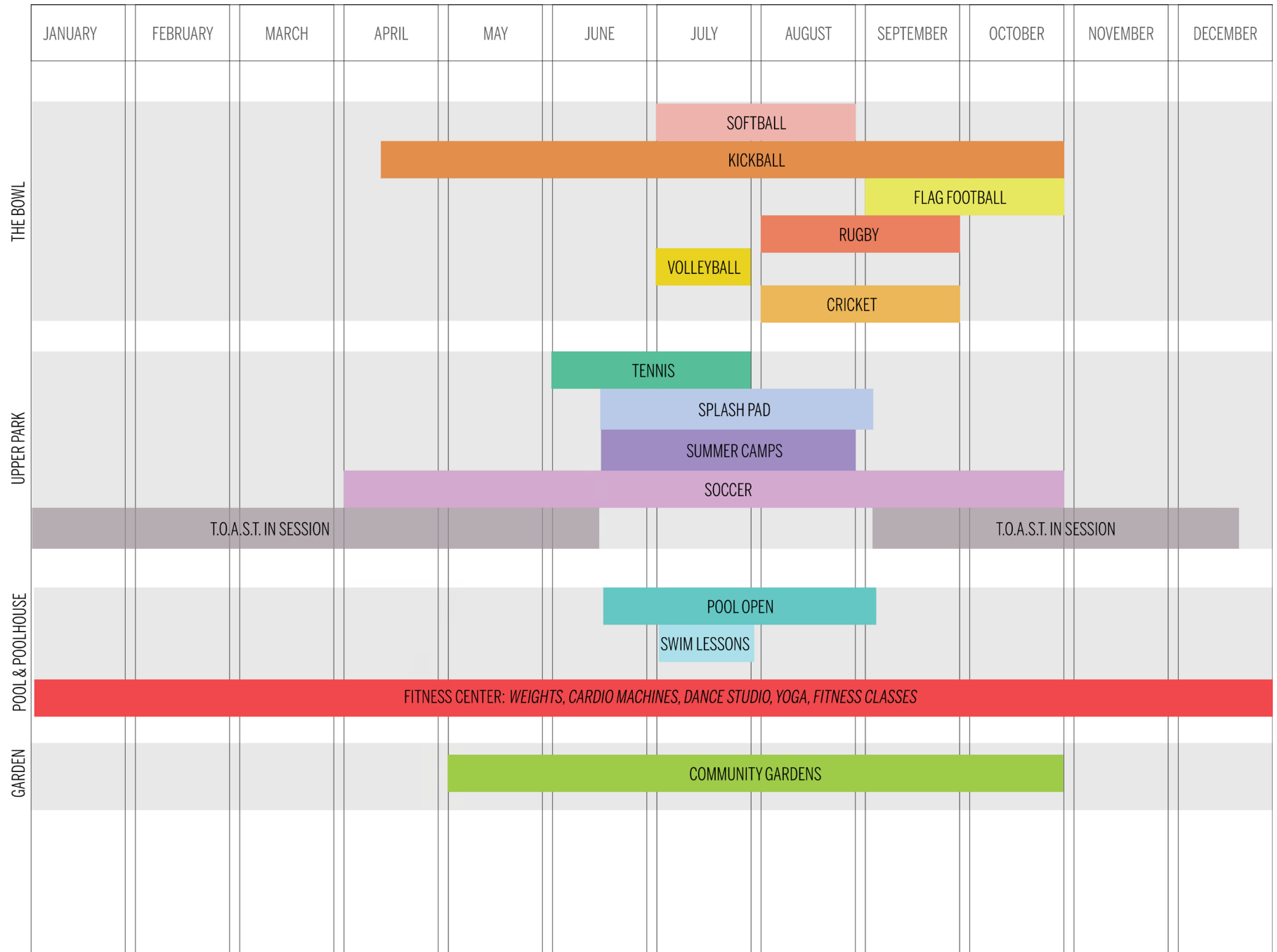


Splash pad, summer 2018. Photo: Stephen Stimson



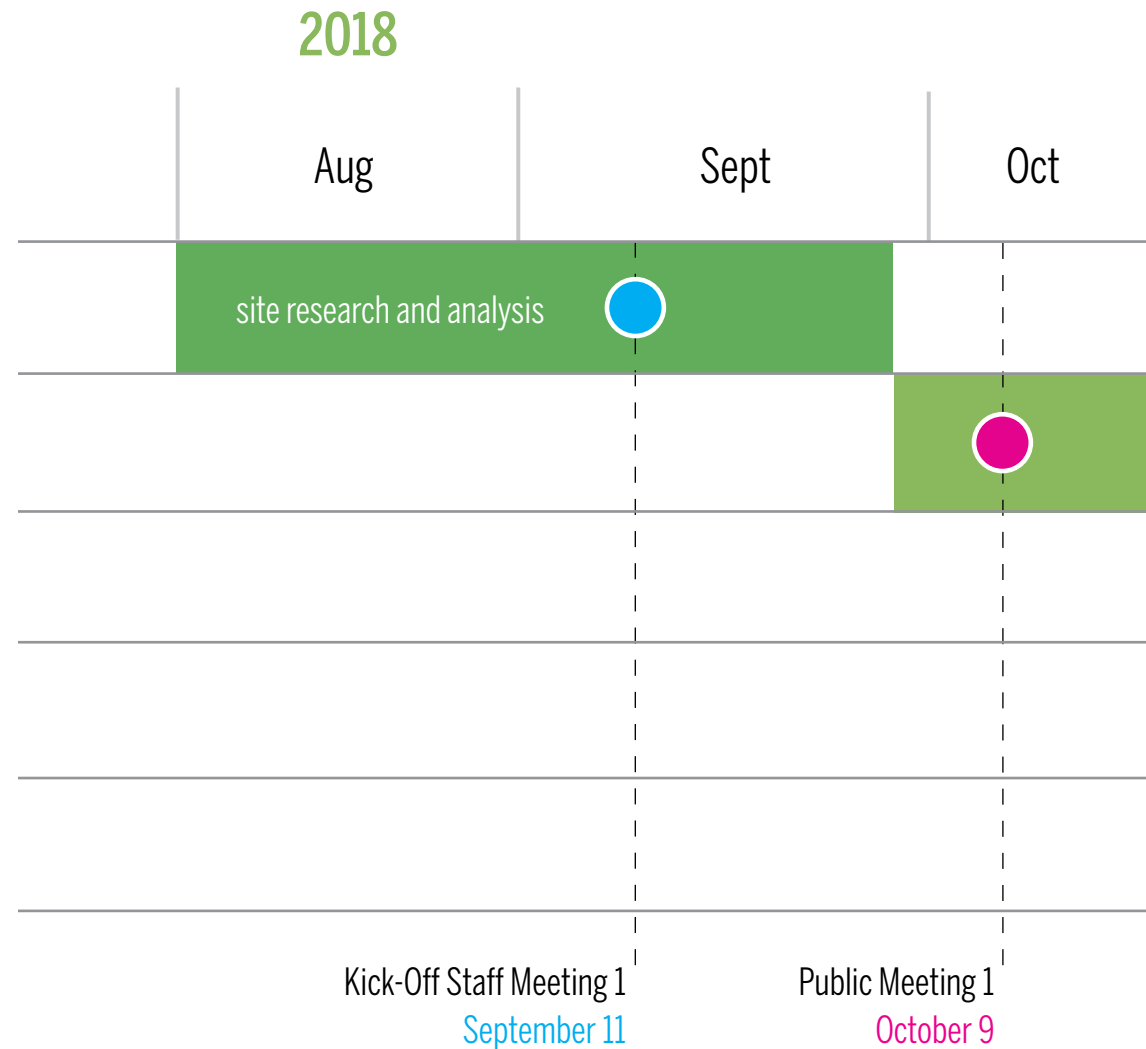
Relay race at Allympics 2015. Photo: Michael P. Farrell, Times Union

RECREATION SCHEDULE

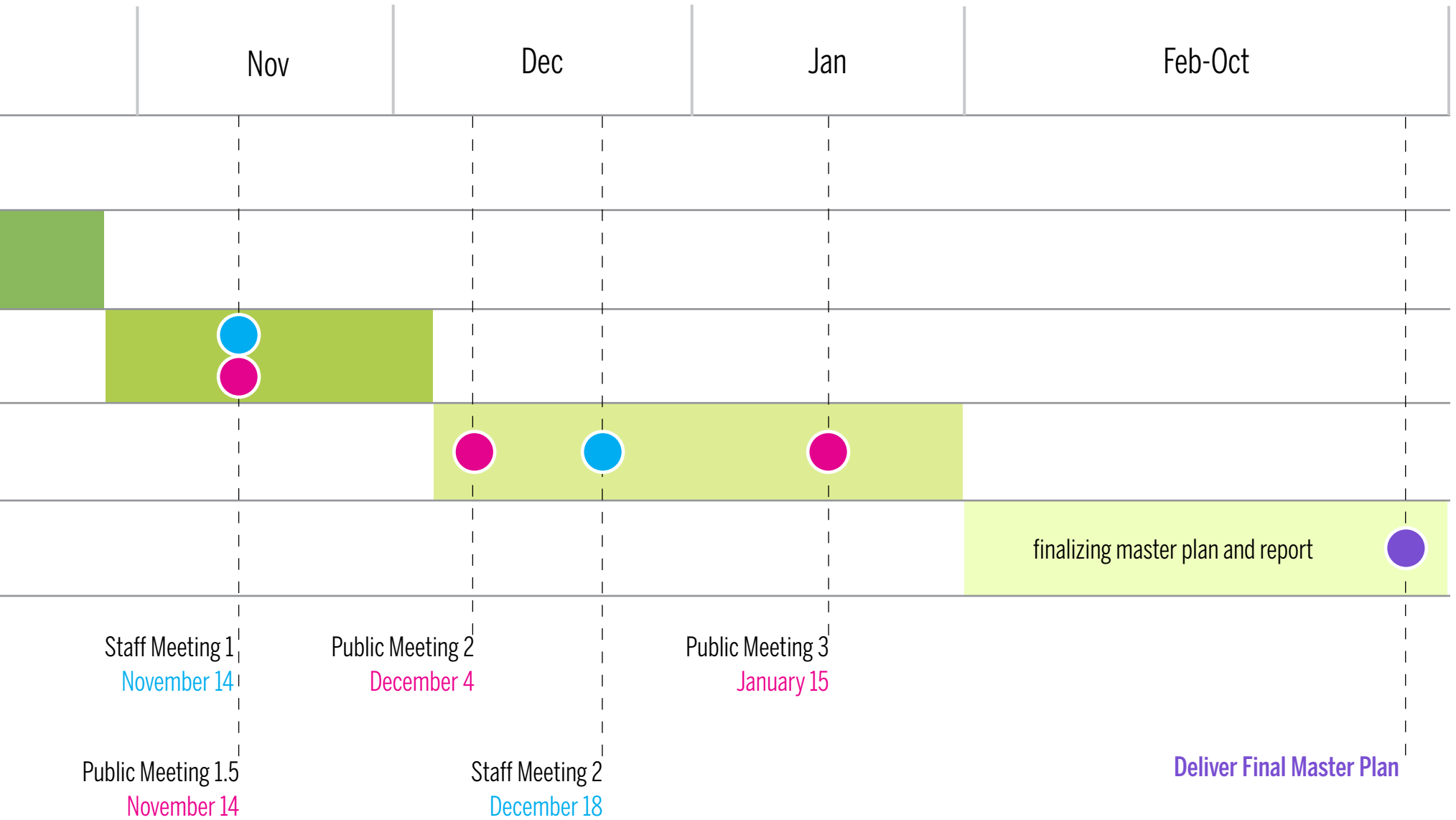


The Master Plan Process

Community participation is at the heart of this Master Plan. Mayor Sheehan, STIMSON, and the Department of Planning and Development convened a series of community meetings throughout the fall and winter of 2018-2019 to gather information and feedback from park users. Lincoln Park is a beloved historic landscape, and guidance from the community was crucial to the creation of a relevant, effective, and exciting plan. Meeting attendees conversed, wrote, drew, and voted to record preferences and hopes for the park. The final plan and principles for long term design represent a synthesis of this community input.



2019



PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings at Hackett Middle School, T.O.A.S.T., and the Albany Housing Authority on October 9, November 14, December 4, 2018, and January 15, 2019.





COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS FOR LINCOLN PARK



PRINCIPLES FOR LONG-TERM DESIGN

1

Preserve

Preserve historic form and function of the park; protect pool and recreation fields, open pastoral hillside with views of the city and Hudson Valley, historic structures and Dr. King Memorial.

2

Connect

Enhance visibility and access around the park's perimeter; create inviting views, gateways, and community spaces along the edge of the park.

3

Activate

Enliven the center of the park with new circulation, program, and plantings; draw the community into the heart of Lincoln Park throughout the year.

4

Celebrate

Establish unique moments for special events and community gatherings; celebrate the natural and cultural histories of Lincoln Park.

The Master Plan

The Lincoln Park Master Plan exemplifies the guiding principles—Preserve, Connect, Activate, Celebrate—to enliven and strengthen the park’s cultural role in the city. While it is an extensive and highly programmed landscape, these principles help to summarize the larger design intentions that underlie the master plan.

The central recreation areas of the park are preserved, as is the park’s distinctive landscape character of grassy slopes and broad views. Woodland on the north slope is preserved but also activated via new connections to the Empire State Plaza, New York State Museum and adjacent neighborhoods.

Around the perimeter, new gateways and gathering areas invite entry into the park, and proclaim its presence and identity along the street front. The southwest corner becomes a primary community gateway, building on Lay’s original circulation concept. A new entry at Museum Road and Park Avenue connects the park to the museum grounds and gives it visibility from the north side. Traffic-calming structures at key intersections and ADA-accessible walking trails facilitate park use by people of many ages and degrees of mobility.

Circulation, planting, and key new features enliven currently underused areas of the park. An open-air community theater activates the upper park hillside, and a swath of stormwater gardens wraps the south side of the bowl, providing seasonal beauty as well as green infrastructure performance. Native plantings enrich the park’s ecological vitality and sensory appeal; an arboretum corridor, an informal flowering orchard, and drifts of pollinator-friendly perennials give new life to the upper hillside. Expanded basketball, tennis, and play facilities at the east and west ends of the park support already-thriving local sports programs and local families.

The Master Plan is a celebration of Lincoln Park’s rich history, and its great potential. Enacting the Master Plan will be a celebration of the City’s investment in its public landscapes, green infrastructure, and cultural resources.



Elements of the Master Plan: An Introduction

The Lincoln Park Master Plan provides design strategies to accomplish three major goals:

1. Activate the park's perimeter by making Lincoln Park more visible, accessible, and inviting.
2. Fulfill the potential of its historic center: revitalizing active recreation spaces and adding site-specific features to make this landscape as vibrant and welcoming as possible.
3. Reintroduce elements of the site's natural ecology and hydrology, strengthening both the identity and sustainability of this cultural landscape.

Through the enactment of these goals, the Master Plan reconfigures circulation in and around the park, and strengthens connections between Lincoln Park and its surroundings.

A “walk through the park,” narrative allows the introduction of key plan elements:

At the corner of Morton and Delaware Avenues, the **Park Gateway and Community Green** acts to open the southwest corner of the park, a major historic entry point which is currently blocked and obscured by sports courts and a gazebo. The Master Plan proposes a prominent and distinctive park entry here, with space for gatherings, events, and play, including a large pavilion and a new splash pad. Sports courts will be moved north to accommodate the new entry spaces. The bus shelter is relocated to Morton Avenue, just east of its current location. The driveway connecting Delaware Avenue to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is removed.

Next, new **Family Gardens** around the Sunshine School and James Hall Office provide space for strolling and gathering. Flowering shrubs frame the space and offer ideal backdrops for photos. The area along Morton Avenue that is now frequently used for grilling and picnics is maintained as a community lawn and picnic space.

The slope northeast of the new Family Gardens boasts the most dramatic views to be found in the park. This is the location for an open-air **Community Theater**, whose amphitheater seating also offers informal space for lunch breaks, dates, and play. An **orchard of flowering trees** enlivens the hillside around the theater, and swaths of native wildflowers provide seasonal beauty and a **pollinator habitat**. Winding trails through the hillside plantings are ADA-accessible, and a new parking area at the Sunshine School provides access to the theater. A double row of flowering magnolias along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard evokes the planting design from C.D. Lay's 1914 master plan.



Just north of the theater hillside, and acting as a verdant boundary between the main park and the school grounds of T.O.A.S.T., an **Arboretum Corridor** of native tree species marks the route of a historic park road. In addition to the shade, shelter, and beauty they bring, these trees will also serve an educational purpose for the students of T.O.A.S.T. and other visitors interested in native trees of the Capital Region.

The Ravine at the northwest edge of the park will be transformed by the Beaver Creek Clean River Project, which has proposed a series of educational landscape spaces and ecological restoration efforts in this area. The master plan advocates for woodland restoration on the north slope of the ravine, with new spaces for gathering and recreation along the western blocks of Park Avenue.

Forest restoration on the north slope by the Lincoln Park Pool will focus on removing invasive species and replacing them with native trees and shrubs. This intervention will enhance the health of the ecosystem, and make the area safer for visitors by improving sight lines through the woodland. A second major **Park Gateway at Museum Road** and Park Avenue connects Lincoln Park to the Empire State Plaza and the New York State Museum.

South of the pool, a **Nature Playground** offers opportunities for creative play. This space features a naturalistic splash pad and **giant slides** set into the hillside. Whereas the existing playground is enclosed by the pool fence, and thus only open when the pool is open, this play space has a separate fence, and can be accessed year-round and outside of pool hours.

Lincoln Park's iconic "Bowl" is refurbished with regraded **athletic fields** and a **green infrastructure** drainage system. Water from the fields will now drain into an extensive system of **Stormwater Gardens** along the south and east sides of the Bowl. The stormwater gardens trace the historic path of Beaver Creek across Lincoln Park, and greatly enhance the ecological vibrancy and seasonal interest of the landscape.

At the east end of the park, existing play and **Basketball Facilities** are improved and expanded. Additional parking, a pavilion, and restrooms allow for tournaments and large gatherings in this area.

Some of the Master Plan interventions are distributed throughout the park. All **walking trails** are improved, and the trail network is enhanced by a series of **outdoor fitness stations**. At all intersections around the park's perimeter, prominent crosswalks are proposed to facilitate pedestrian access. Traffic-calming roundabouts at Eagle Street and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard are intended to slow vehicles in the park and prioritize pedestrian safety.

Park Vision

The Lincoln Park Master Plan is an extensive and long-term vision for the park, but it can be broadly understood in terms of a few key areas of intervention.

Recommendations for **park programming** seek to enhance existing active recreation facilities, and to activate the park with new cultural spaces.

Circulation proposals are intended to prioritize pedestrian safety and experience within the park, while providing inclusive access to new program areas.

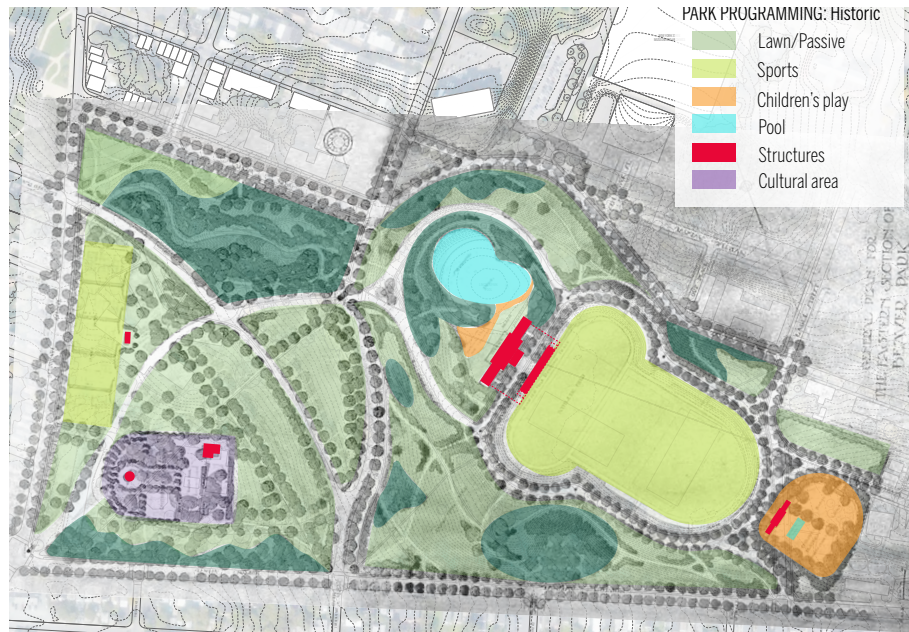
Reintroducing the site's natural history and ecology as part of Lincoln Park's identity is a critical part of this plan. Recommendations for **planting** design and ecological restoration, along with new **green water infrastructure** and **stone** features help to ground this park in its larger context and provide both didactic and aesthetic benefits.

Finally, the plan suggests sites for interpretive signage to commemorate the park's **cultural and social history**.

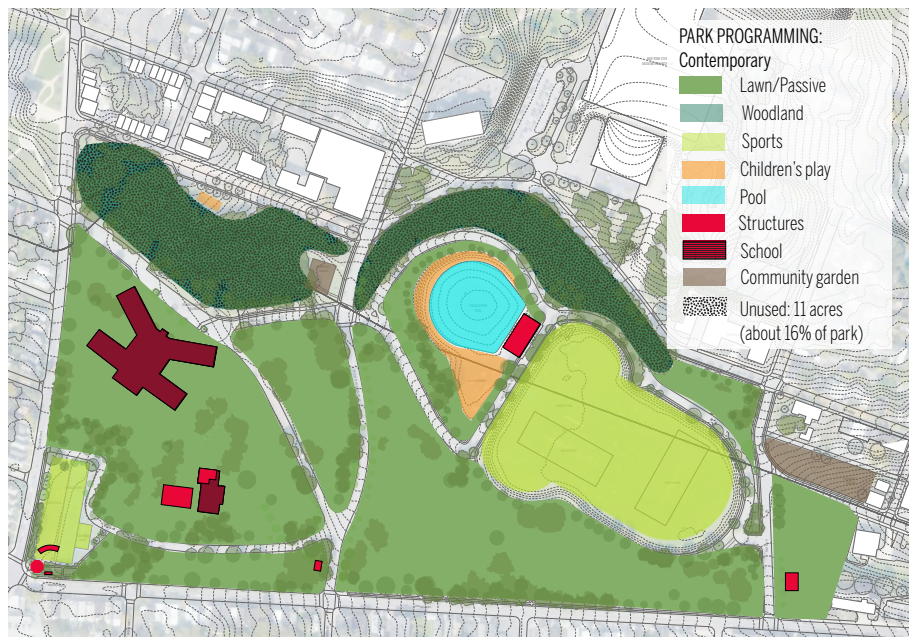




PARK PROGRAMMING



Historic program.



Current program.

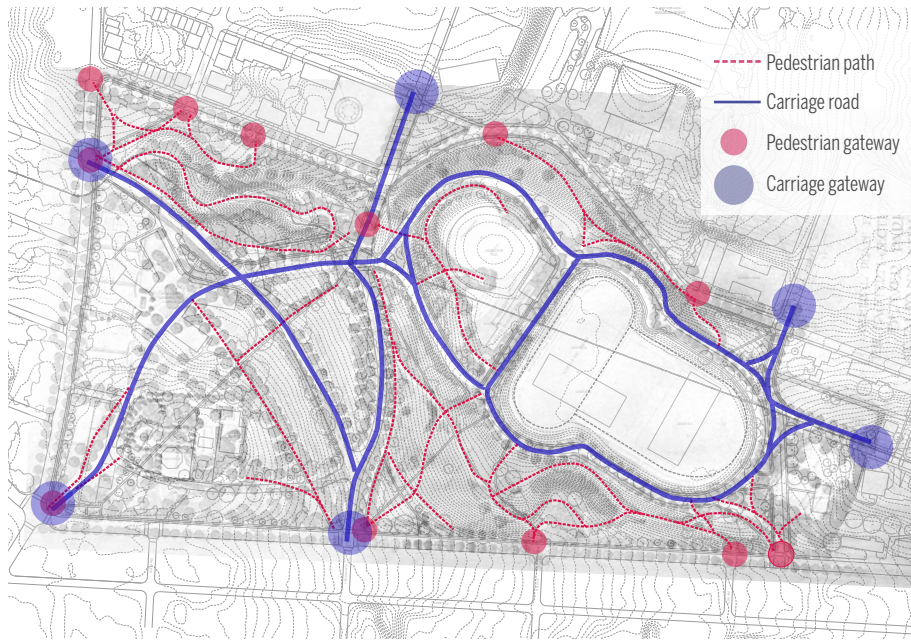
Lincoln Park is downtown Albany's historic active recreation park, but it is also distinguished by its wide-open spaces and dramatic topography. The Master Plan's proposal for park programming enhances **active recreation and play facilities**, protects and revitalizes landscapes for passive recreation, and adds spaces for gatherings and events.

The introduction of **native plantings and pollinator habitat**, along with green stormwater infrastructure and woodland restoration, enhances the park's ecological vibrancy and seasonal beauty. Major new programmatic elements include the southwest and northern gateways, the hillside theater, the nature playground, and the stormwater gardens in the Bowl. These features respectively activate the park's perimeter and its historic core, inviting all kinds of visitors to access and enjoy this landscape.

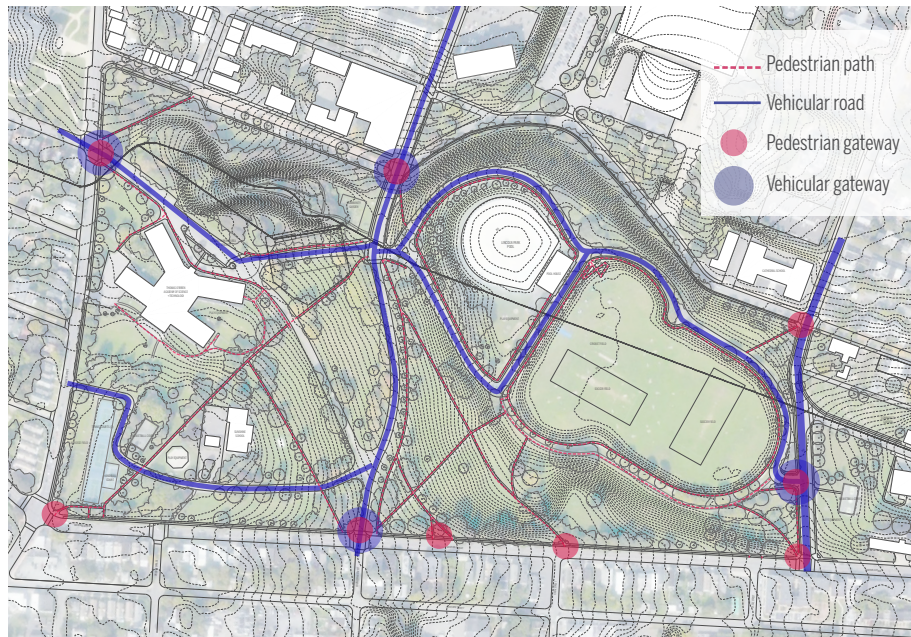


Proposed program

CIRCULATION

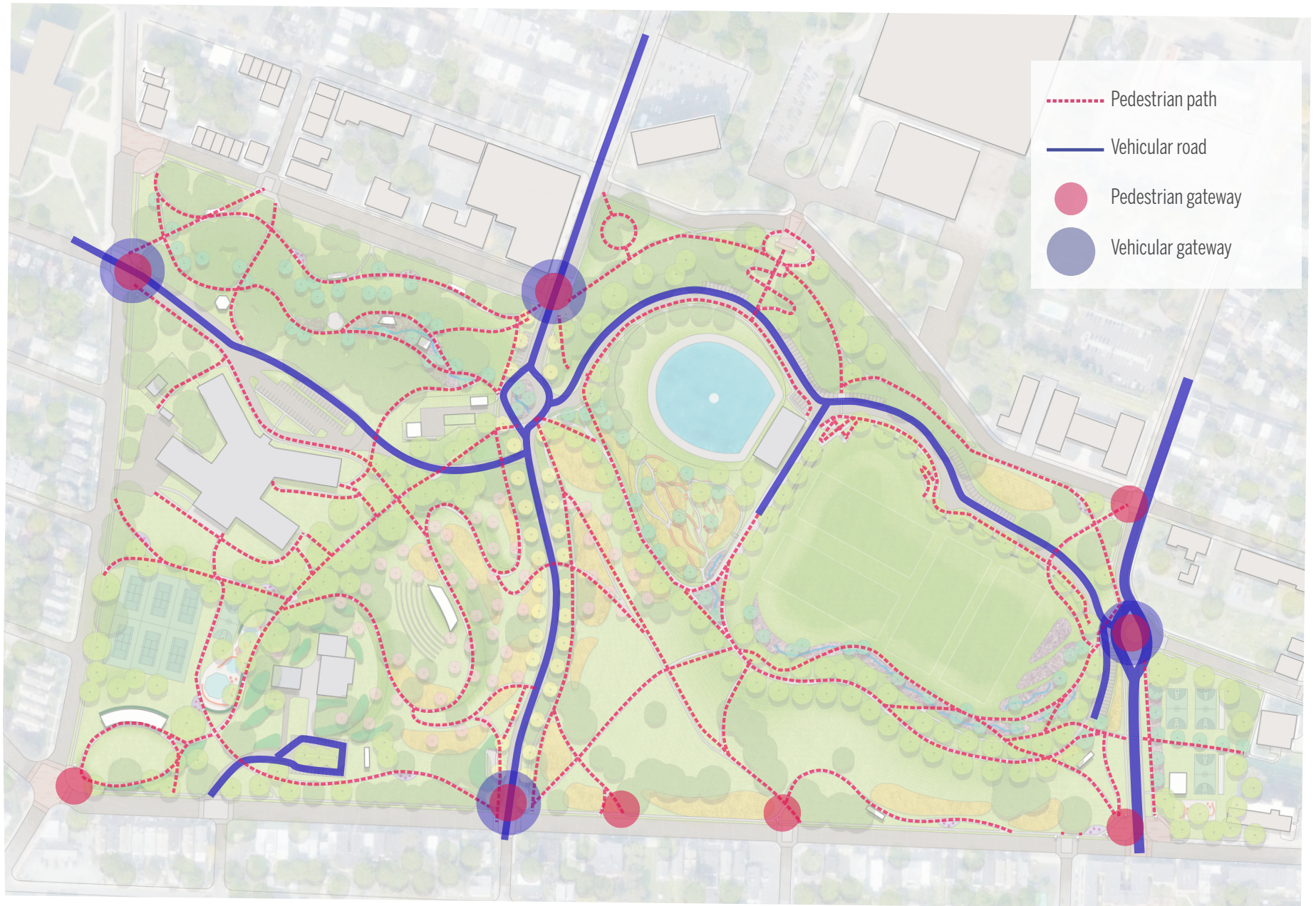


Historic circulation.



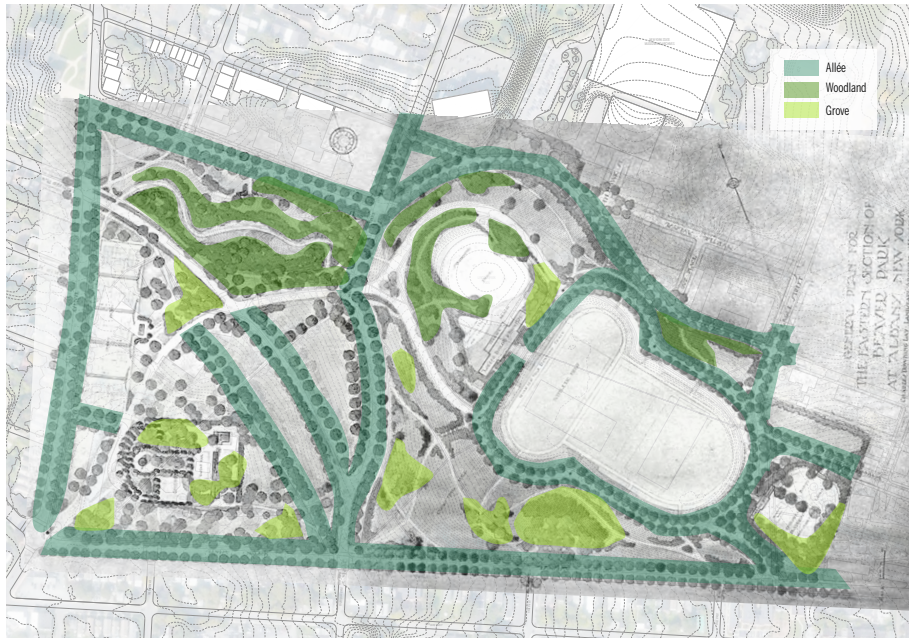
Current circulation.

The park's original circulation system has been severely disrupted over the past century, and this Master Plan proposes some significant changes for all modes of park circulation. A network of pedestrian trails, including improved existing pathways, provides safe, accessible pedestrian circulation throughout the park. Vehicle access is reduced, and traffic calming measures are implemented to slow through-traffic and prioritize pedestrian safety. The driveway that currently connects Delaware Avenue to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is removed, and a new driveway and parking lot are installed near the Sunshine School and maintenance building to serve the Community Theater. The roadway south of the Pool becomes a pedestrian path, although vehicle access is maintained along the west end of the bowl to serve the fields, bathhouse, and pool.



Proposed circulation

PLANTING



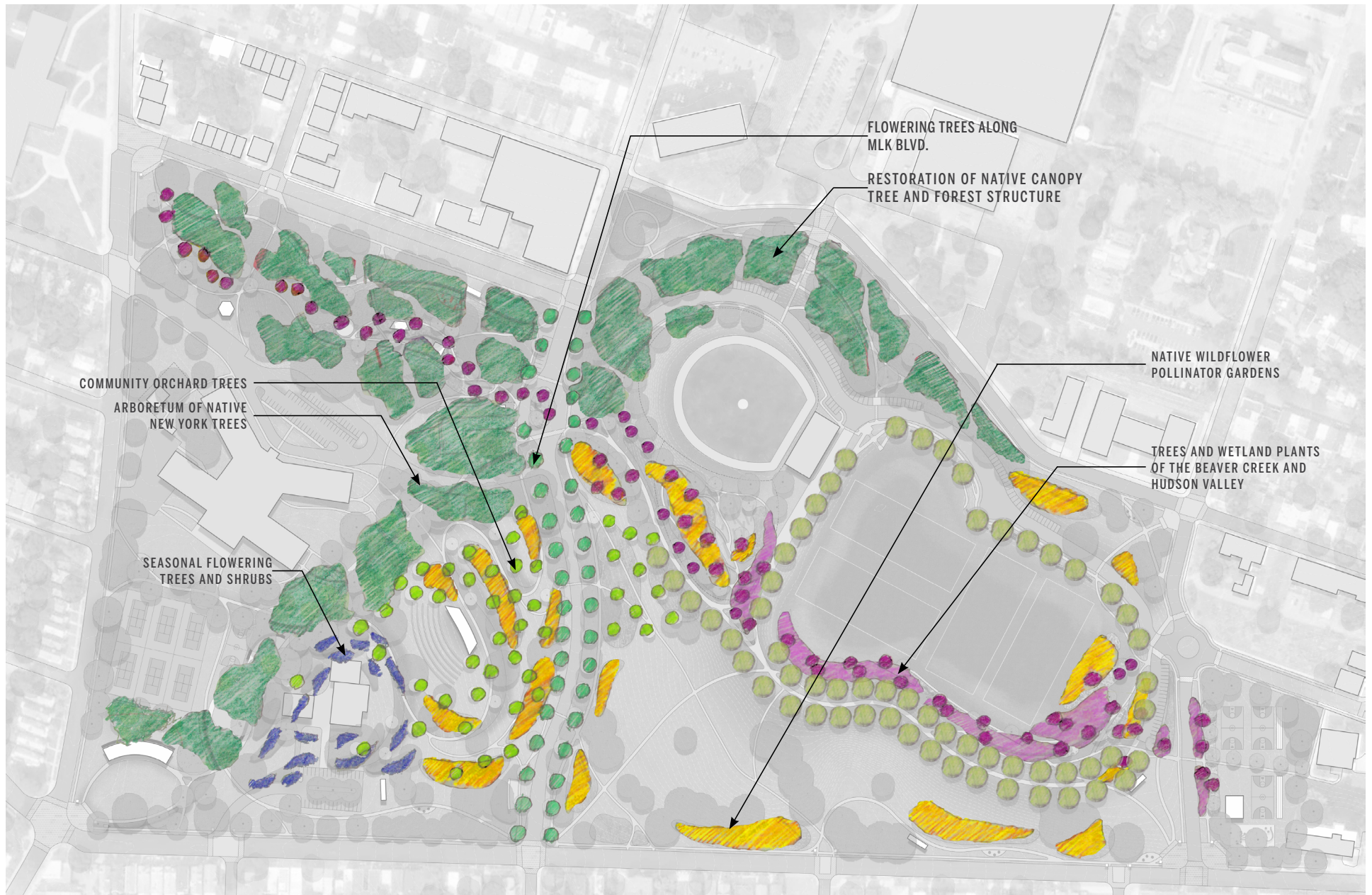
Historic planting.



Current planting.

Planting in the park today does not reflect much of Lay's original concept. More importantly though, there are a wealth of opportunities to add beauty and ecological activity to the park through new plantings. Woodland restoration along the park's north side will improve sight lines and safety for visitors to this area and support native ecosystems. Drifts of native wildflowers offer pollinator habitat and sensory richness on the upper hillside and south slopes. The stormwater gardens along the south side of the Bowl catch and filter runoff from the fields, but also provide wildlife habitat and spaces for nature immersion.

More formal plantings are located at the Family Gardens around the Sunshine School, and along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, where a double row of flowering magnolias evokes Lay's design. A flowering orchard frames the open-air theater and offers shade for visitors walking or enjoying the hilltop views.



Proposed planting

WATER SYSTEM



Abraham Wendell and his mills on the Beavercreek, c. 1737.

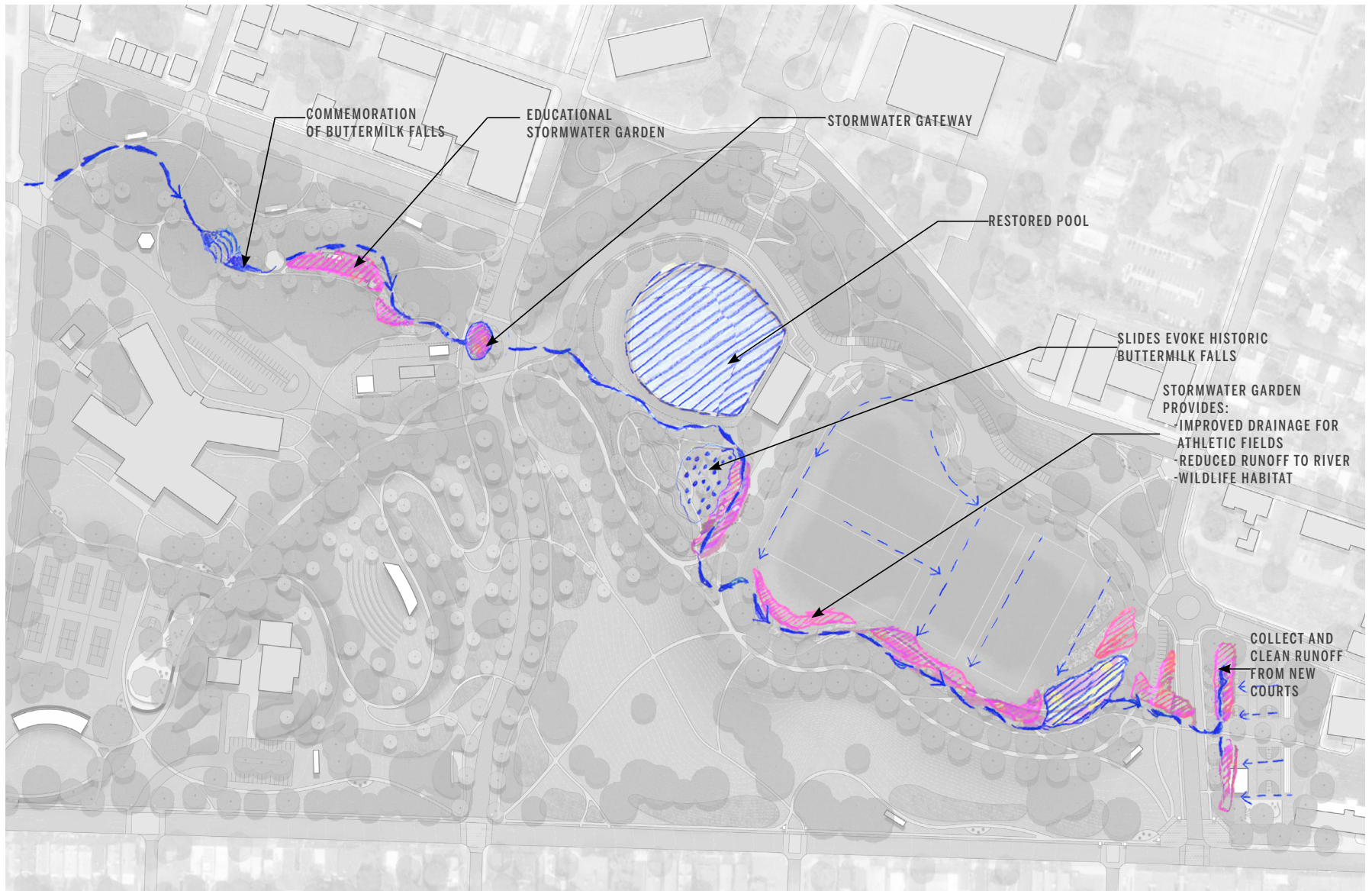


Bathers in the original 'Rocky Ledge' swimming pool, mid 1920s.

Beaver Creek once ran through this site, providing power for mills and clay from its banks for Albany's brickworks. In the 1920s, the creek was dammed to create the first swimming pool on this site. The Master Plan evokes Beaver Creek with a swath of stormwater gardens from the ravine through the Bowl. The stormwater gardens in the Bowl catch runoff from the athletic fields, improving playing conditions and relieving pressure on city storm sewers.



Today the creek is completely buried.



Proposed water system design

GEOLOGY

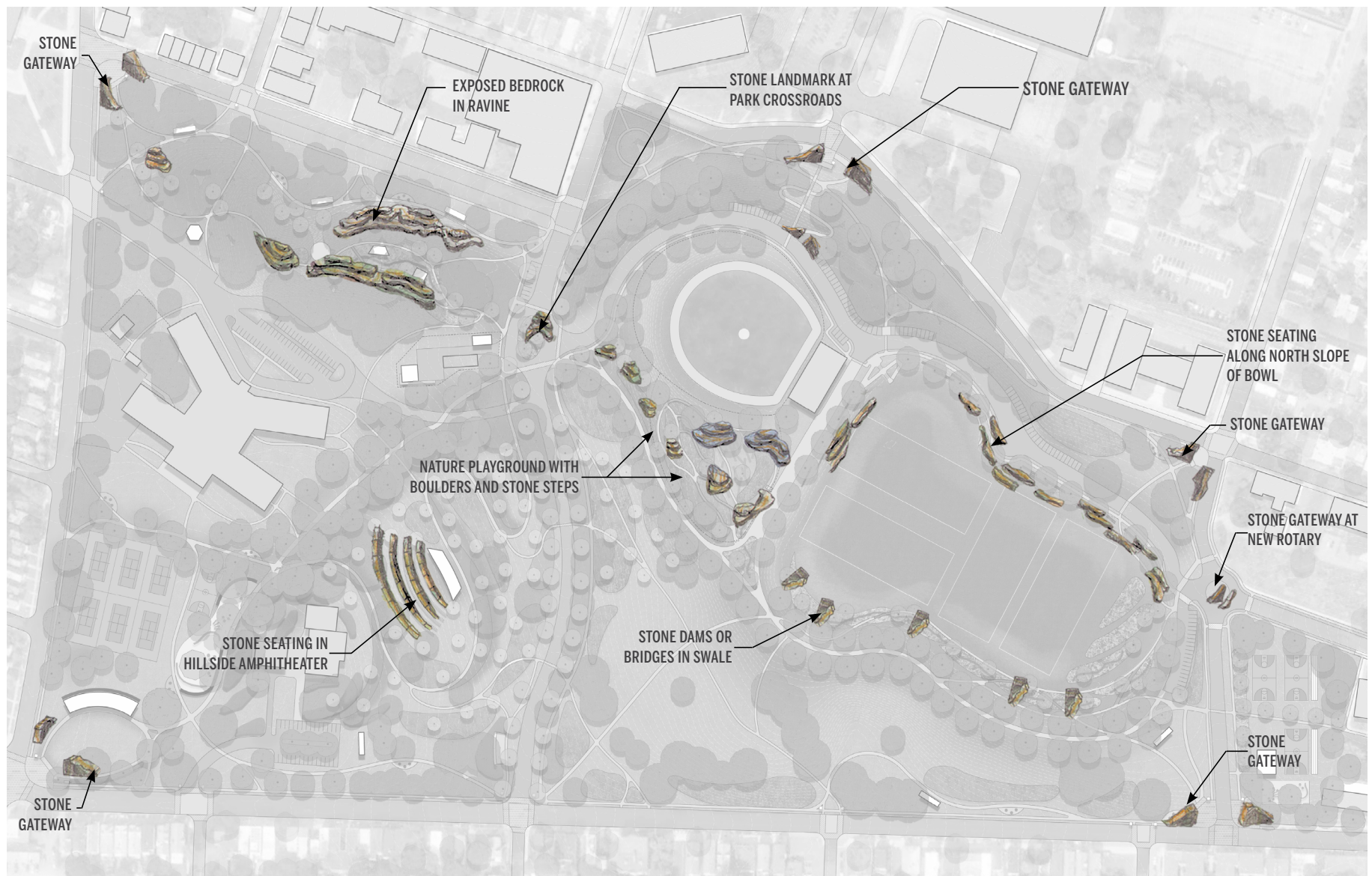


Historic design highlighting native geology.



Current condition of outcrop ravine.

Lay's Master Plan took advantage of the remarkable geological assets of the ravine, with a path winding between dramatic rock outcrops. This Master Plan seeks to bring back the geology of the site as a prominent feature, building on the work of the Beaver Creek Clean River Project in the ravine. Stone is used for distinctive entry signage, and for furnishings in the park, such as seating in the theater and the Bowl. The same stone can be used as components of the Nature Playground, and for small dams and bridges in the stormwater gardens, giving the park a unified aesthetic.



Proposed design with geologic features

SOCIAL HISTORY



Gathering in Beaver Park prior to Lay Master Plan, ca. 1897.



Climate justice rally in the Bowl, 2016. Photo: The Daily Gazette.

The land that is now Lincoln Park has been instrumental to the development of the City of Albany. It is an important and complex cultural landscape, and the Master Plan includes suggestions for interpretive signage and historic markers to enrich visitors' experience of the park.

From a 17th century battle in the ravine, to Martinville, to the decades of sports and events in the Bowl, this is a park with many important stories to tell.



Proposed interpretative signage

Envisioning Lincoln Park

These before and after renderings offer a vision for several key locations in the park.

1. Southwest Gateway and Community Green
2. Hillside Theater, Flowering Orchard, Pollinator Gardens
3. Slides and Nature Playground
4. Museum Road Gateway
5. Stormwater Gardens and Improved Athletic Fields



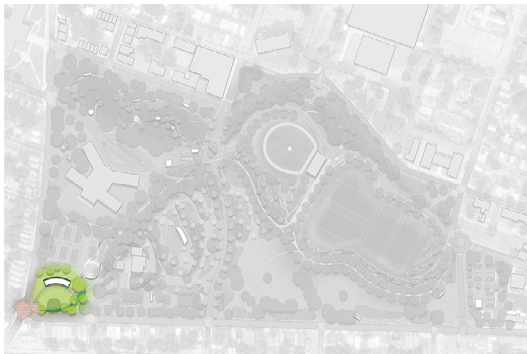


4. MUSEUM ROAD GATEWAY AND PATH, WITH NATIVE FOREST RESTORATION

2. COMMUNITY THEATER,
FLOWERING ORCHARD, AND
POLLINATOR GARDENS

5. STORMWATER GARDENS AND
IMPROVED ATHLETIC FIELDS

1. INTERSECTION OF MORTON AVE. AND DELAWARE AVE. BEFORE



- Lack of park visibility at important historic gateway.
- Busy streets can impact ease of crossing.

AFTER



- New park gateway.
- Renovated crosswalk + signal.
- Community green.
- Events pavilion.
- Renovated splash pad play area.

2. UPPER HILLSIDE, BY SUNSHINE SCHOOL BEFORE

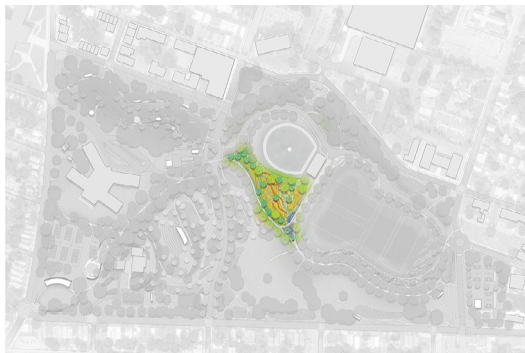


- Spectacular views of city and Hudson Valley.
- Abundant space on gentle slope without existing program.
- Location already used for temporary summer stage.



- Covered performance stage.
- Hillside seating for 500 people.
- Spectacular views to the east.
- Orchard and meadow plantings.
- ADA-accessible walking path.

3. POOL AREA PLAY SPACE BEFORE



- Small, outdated playground that is only open when pool is open.
- Slope could support hillside slides.



- ADA-accessible hillside slides play area.
- Nature play with splash pad.
- Natural materials evoke local landscape.
- Year-round access.

4. MUSEUM RD. AT PARK AVE. BEFORE

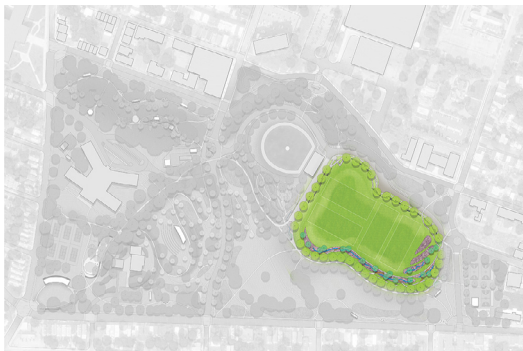


- Overgrown north slope of park blocks views and access.
- Potential for cultural connection between Empire State Plaza/New York State Museum and Lincoln Park.
- Opportunity to revive historical link between downtown and the park.



- New park gateway.
- Views into park and pool.
- ADA-accessible pedestrian entryway.
- Renovated crosswalk and sidewalks.
- Restored open woodland on slope.

4. MUSEUM RD. AT PARK AVE. BEFORE



- Drainage problems on Bowl fields.
- Under-utilized slopes could be revitalized for additional passive and active use.
- Opportunities for native plantings and ecological infrastructure.

AFTER



- Improved field drainage, soils.
- Stormwater garden with native species.
- Multiple points of access to fields.
- ADA-accessible trails and boardwalks.

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