

2017-2022

HIGHLAND PARK CONSERVANCY STRATEGIC PLAN



Adopted by the Board of Directors

September 28, 2017

*Advocating for the
preservation, restoration and
enhancement of Highland
Park's world class arboretum
and historic Olmsted design.*

HIGHLAND PARK CONSERVANCY, INC.

2017–2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

I. Introduction

The Highland Park Conservancy, Inc. (Conservancy) continues its journey. We have a great past with many accomplishments. And, we have many exciting challenges and hopes for the future. This 2017-2022 Strategic Plan (Plan) is the roadmap that is guiding us in creating, charting and moving toward our future.

We recognize from where we came. The “high park,” given to the people of Rochester by horticulturalists George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry in 1888 and the Children’s Pavilion (Pavilion) dedicated in 1890 are the foundations upon which the Conservancy now builds. The Highland Park legacy, started over 125 years ago, calls us to commit ourselves to its continued preservation, renewal and restoration. We are the keeper of Highland Park’s story; its beauty, promise and nurturing of community, and of its health, wonder, scenic panoramic vistas and commanding elevations.

The Highland Park legacy also calls us to engage the community and its leaders in restoring the Pavilion. Indeed, even with all its natural beauty, Highland Park will not truly be complete, its legacy not completely fulfilled, without returning the Pavilion’s crowning glory, at the apex of the Park, in honor of and dedicated to our children.

II. Background

Rochester New York’s Highland Park was designed in 1889 by Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted was a visionary whose influence on public landscape is unmatched and is as relevant today as ever. He sought to plan, develop and construct visually exciting and accessible green spaces that would restore and nurture all people regardless of their economic circumstances. Olmsted believed that public parks should foster a deep sense of community as well as “re-creation” for all.

Highland Park was Rochester’s first park and beautifully reflects Olmsted’s vision. Famous as an arboretum, it is also a masterpiece of American art. Its drives and paths lead into the park from all sides, curving with the rolling terrain through an unfolding sequence of world-class plant collections, including its nationally renowned lilacs and converging at the Overlook, where the former Pavilion offered an exhilarating 360-degree view of the region’s distant landscapes.

Highland Park reflects a time when Rochester was a national center of the seed and nursery industry. It sits on a glacial moraine high above the Genesee River valley and

the Lake Ontario plain. For generations, Highland Park has been and will continue to be a place of unique natural beauty visited by people from throughout the world.

The Conservancy is the official not-for-profit volunteer organization formed to help preserve Highland Park's unique heritage and to promote its vast horticultural, educational and recreational resources. It supports sound planning, management and restoration. Conservancy volunteers conduct tours and offer educational events that are free and open to all. A major focus of the Conservancy is the construction and restoration of the 1890 Pavilion to its original form, scale and style, with adaptations for universal access. A key feature of Frederick Law Olmsted's park designed by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge Architects, the Pavilion served as a popular community landmark and gathering place for seventy-three years. It was demolished in 1963 due to significant deterioration.

III. Planning Process

To accomplish its work, the Conservancy Board's Planning Committee (see attached list of members) divided its work into four phases:

1. The Environmental Scan – Understanding the environment or context in which an organization operates is critically important to stay relevant, set priorities and track success. Over a four month period the Committee reviewed the work and structure of similar park organizations throughout the country. It spoke to neighborhood representatives near Highland Park to obtain input, ideas and support. Within the last several years, Conservancy representatives met with City of Rochester and Monroe County staff and elected officials to secure support. Agreements relating to Highland Park between the City (park owner) and the County (park operator) were reviewed. These efforts resulted in gaining a better perspective on the environment within which the Conservancy operates.
2. Vision and Mission Statements – Nothing sets direction and context more for an organization than its vision and mission statements. Understanding this, the committee spent considerable time identifying what it believes the Conservancy should become, why it should exist, what services it should provide and whom it should serve. The priorities emerging from this process informed and guided the creation of the Conservancy's vision, mission and branding statements.
3. Goals - These briefly describe the means by which we implement our Mission. They are the "How." A subset of a goal is the strategy that outlines the action steps needed to complete the goal. Strategies include timeframes for completion and those responsible for getting the strategy completed.
4. Strategic Plan Adoption – In order to ensure that all Conservancy Board members and community supporters were fully informed, engaged and prepared to act on the proposed Plan, the Committee held briefing meetings with a variety of people and groups, including the County Parks Director, the City

Commissioner of Environmental Services, the City Director of Buildings and Parks, the City Forester and the City of Rochester Neighbors Building Neighborhoods Sector 6 neighborhood organization. Feedback from all these sessions were considered as the final draft was prepared.

IV. Planning Principles

Six planning principles were identified to guide the nature, content and scope of the Plan.

1. Strategic – The Plan must be intentional, creative and bold, yet realistic.
2. Renewable and Flexible – The Plan must have a built-in update process and accommodate future modifications and change, if needed.
3. Accountable – The Plan must include ways by which we can determine our success.
4. Sustainable – The Plan must be responsibly affordable given our fiscal, physical and people resources.
5. The Larger Context – The Plan must reflect the larger external environments within which we operate.
6. Collaborative – The Plan must promote and encourage the development of partnership with key individuals and community groups.

V. Environmental Scan

An important part of any strategic planning process is reviewing the present “world” in which an organization operates. Taking stock of what is helps us plan for what may yet come. This helps us to determine and control the future. The exercise is termed an “environmental scan.”

As part of this process, the Committee reviewed the present state of the Conservancy in light of recent trends in similar organizations throughout the country. The Committee also reviewed the Conservancy’s present and future relationships with the County and City as well as with other community groups. A brief summary of our findings follows:

- Trends in Park Advocacy Groups – As part of understanding the context for the Conservancy, the Committee researched other similar groups throughout the country. Successful grassroots advocacy groups including the Central Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park Alliance in New York City, the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy have restored their historic parks while enhancing civic identification and pride. There is no more dramatic example of the potential of urban parks to

draw people and fuel reinvestment than the High Line in New York City, established by the Friends of the High Line.

Of the four cities with Olmsted-designed park systems, three (Boston, Buffalo and Louisville) have long-standing park conservancies that raise significant public and private funds for capital investment as well as for staff to manage, maintain and care for the respective park.

- Relationship with the County – The January 14, 2014 Agreement between the Conservancy and the County outlines the relationship between the two entities. The three-year Agreement, which can be renewed for two additional three-year periods, holds the Conservancy to providing public tours, other free events and weeding/mulching by volunteers. Further, the Conservancy will work as a partner with the County to develop a “restored Children’s Pavilion.” The Agreement provides no other role for the Conservancy (e.g., no involvement with, nor responsibility, for the Lamberton Conservatory and the Lilac Festival). Finally, a representative appointed by the County serves as a non-voting member on the Conservancy Board.
- Relationship with the City – Although it is the owner of Highland Park, the City remains a silent partner with the Conservancy. The City’s long-term maintenance and care agreement with the County makes the County the primary governmental partner with the Conservancy. In 1963, City Council Resolution 63-45 granted permission to the County (at the County’s request) to demolish the original Pavilion due to its “deteriorated condition”. The resolution states that such permission is given conditioned on, among other items, the County “will cause to be erected at its own expense a suitable new structure to fulfill the same purpose as the present Pavilion.” On July 28, 2015, Mayor Lovely Warren signed a letter of support for the Conservancy.
- Relationship with Neighborhood and Community Organizations – The South East Area Coalition (SEAC), the Landmark Society of Western New York (LSWNY), through its former Historic Landscape Committee, and Monroe County People for Parks were instrumental in founding the Conservancy. LSWNY assisted in securing funding for a consultant to set up the organization and acted as an umbrella for financial purposes. The Conservancy remains affiliated with LSWNY as a member of its Olmsted Parks Subcommittee. The Conservancy also coordinates tours and events with a variety of community organizations including the Rochester Garden Club, the Poet’s Garden Master Gardeners, the Genesee Valley Ornithological Society, the New York Upstate Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects and others. In addition, the Conservancy has mutually supportive relationships with nearby neighborhood associations, including the Highland Park Neighborhood Association, the Lilac and Azalea Neighbors and the South Wedge neighborhood, which alert their members of Conservancy tours and events. Through overlapping

memberships, the Conservancy monitors issues of concern to our various community and neighborhood partners while offering support, as needed.

VI. Framing the Vision / Mission / Goal Discussion

As we move into this section of the Plan, it is important to set the Conservancy's historic context:

The Conservancy was founded in 1994 by a group of citizens interested in promoting the public understanding of, and appreciation for, the value of Highland Park and to ensure the preservation of the Olmsted-designed park landscape. In 2001 the South East Area Coalition Committee to Rebuild the Children's Pavilion (CRCP) commissioned Bero Associates to complete the Highland Park Children's Pavilion Feasibility Study, including preliminary plans and cost estimates. In 2003 the CRCP merged with the Conservancy to create the 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation known as Highland Park Conservancy, Inc. In so doing, its scope of activities expanded from educational tours, events and communications to include planning and fundraising to rebuild the Pavilion. In 2012 the Conservancy received a memorial donation of \$500,000 toward the capital cost of the Pavilion. In January 2014 the County Department of Parks executed an agreement with the Conservancy as its official not-for-profit partner for the purpose of providing public tours, programs and events, and sponsoring of the Children's Pavilion Project.

As we move toward the future, these key questions need to be addressed: Who are we now and who do we want to become? Is a primary mission to see the reconstruction of the Pavilion? Is it to be the premier keeper and advocate of the legacy and future of Highland Park? Is it to be the provider of unique educational opportunities for the community in Highland Park? Is it a combination of these or possibly something much different?

These are the questions that will drive us into and through a creative re-imagining of the Conservancy's life over the next five years and the defining of our new reality.

VII. Vision, Mission and Branding Statements

A strategic plan guides an organization for a period of time through changing circumstances. It helps guide future leaders as well as current ones. In challenging or confusing times, it can illuminate and remind. It frames activities and gives them context and meaning. The following key elements are incorporated into the Plan.

- Vision – The inspirational idea toward which we strive and continually work toward. It is the “Why” behind what we do. Ideally, it will not change over time.

- Mission – The way we move toward the Vision. It is the organizing approach behind our actions. It is the “What.”
- Goals – The means by which we will implement our Mission. They are the “How.” Because of the long-term nature of the Mission, goals may span the life of the Plan. While some goals may evolve and change, they will be consistent enough to provide direction over the life of the Plan.
- Strategies – The shorter term actions by which we execute our goals. Strategies may take one to three years (or more), but they are specific and drive our actions. Strategies include timeframes for completion and those responsible for completing them.

These Plan elements will all be aligned. Strategies will focus on achieving goals. Goals will help us advance the Mission which then fulfills the Vision.

VISION

We share the authentic story of Highland Park to inspire and ensure its preservation as a signature public space for the enjoyment of all.

MISSION

We advocate for and participate in the preservation, restoration and enhancement of the entire Highland Park with its world class arboretum, its historic Olmsted design and other amenities by increasing the public’s appreciation for and active engagement with its absolute uniqueness.

VIII. GOALS and STRATEGIES

Based upon the findings of the environmental scan, our Vision and Mission , the following four goals for 2017-2022, along with their respective strategies, are proposed:

Goal 1: Advocate for a vibrant and sustainable Highland Park.

Strategy 1.1: Renew a three year 2017-2020 Agreement with the County.

Strategy 1.2: Advocate for, plan, monitor and evaluate sound activities that will impact positively on the character, fabric and viability of the Park.

Strategy 1.3: Partner with the County to create a ten year capital plan and budget for the Park.

Strategy 1.4: Submit an application to the National Park Service to be designated as an individual historic site on the National Register of Historic Places.

Strategy 1.5: In cooperation with the County, create a workforce development program to assist in the maintenance and beautification of the Park.

Goal 2: Engage the public with Highland Park.

Strategy 2.1: Enhance interpretive materials about Highland Park and its Olmsted design and horticultural collection.

Strategy 2.2: Increase the Highland Park visitor experience by offering creative tour opportunities and unique park activities for all generations, with a focus on children and families.

Strategy 2.3: Hold regular public special events to share the past and future Highland Park story.

Strategy 2.4: Produce a video that focuses on Highland Park's history, its horticultural specimens and its contribution to the past and future livability of the City.

Goal 3: Ensure the reconstruction of the Pavilion by 2022.

Strategy 3.1: Develop and implement a capital campaign.

Strategy 3.2: Develop and implement a comprehensive public outreach and engagement effort.

Strategy 3.3: With the County, develop and sign a Children's Pavilion Reconstruction Agreement.

Strategy 3.4: In cooperation with the County, develop and implement a variety of programs and events for the Pavilion.

Goal 4: Enhance the Conservancy's organizational capacity.

Strategy 4.1: Develop our fundraising capacity and success.

Strategy 4.2: Implement a Board development process while recruiting additional members with knowledge, abilities and networks to help successfully implement the Conservancy's Plan.

Strategy 4.3: Increase the Conservancy's membership and volunteers.

Strategy 4.4: Enhance the Conservancy's image and organizational capacity.

IX. Conclusion

The Conservancy is on the threshold of an exciting and “breakout” future. So much depends on our success: the future viability of Highland Park; the public’s enjoyment of and engagement with its vast horticultural collection; the community’s appreciation of its historic legacy and exciting future; the reconstruction of the Pavilion. We will accomplish all these over the next five years.

Our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan is the Conservancy’s roadmap to fulfilling its vision and its mission on behalf of the thousands of visitors and residents who so wonderfully engage with and enjoy our priceless Highland Park. This then, is our calling: to preserve and enhance Highland Park as a historic public space while ensuring its bright future for the enjoyment of all.

Planning Committee

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