PUBLIC UPDATE MEETING I

A STORY OF THE PARK: PEOPLE IN NATURE & INITIAL DESIGN CONCEPTS

The Eldorado Ballroom
September 17, 2014
6–8 pm
We are here
Memorial Park Conservancy
Uptown TIRZ
Houston Parks and Recreation Department

Berg Oliver (Ecology)
John Jacob (Soils)
Hunt Design (Wayfinding)
Sherwood Design Engineers (Civil Engineering)
Susan Turner Associates (History)
The Lighting Practice (Lighting)
ETM Associates (O & M)
Ecotech Panel

Public Input

Guiding Principles

Research

Client Input
Lord Public Priorities:

1. Enhancement of Existing Character, Amenities and Usage (Magnify)
2. Long-term Sustainability (Tend)
3. Balance (Optimize)
4. Safety and Security (Optimize/Reconnect)
5. Communication (Reconnect/Magnify)
6. Access (Reconnect)
7. Individual and Community Enhancement (Reveal)
DESIGN ANALYSIS: DEVELOPMENT, HISTORY, AND CULTURE
DIVIDED PARK

Memorial Park’s history since its establishment has been one of increasing fragmentation. Provisions for access have divided the park into many disjointed pieces, resulting in 1500 acres effectively divided into many small separated pieces.
Pre-1900: Undivided Land

- West of Houston’s developed extents, yet to be touched by infrastructure or the thought of a park.
- 1834: Reinerman Tract claimed (image right)
1915: Land Bisected by Rail

- The land goes largely unused between Reinerman ownership and Camp Logan.
- 1914 Eureka Cutoff railroad bisects this land west of Houston's urban extents
- Washington St. to the north created
- Post Oak Rd. to the west created
1922: 2 Halves and Camp Logan

- 4 years after WWI and Camp Logan & 3 years from being conveyed to the city
- Bisected by the elevated rail line
- Left with the traces of Camp Logan’s small at-grade access roads.
- Post Oak Rd. to the west created
1930: Park Established, 4 Parts

- Memorial Park is officially established in 1925.
- The first east-west transect emerges. At grade, it functions more as an access through the park than a divider of it.
- Road & drainage remnants of Camp Logan remain, but there are no structures.
1945: 14 Parts

- NW corner gained for polo and Weiss tract gained as park land in 1942.
- Golf course constructed.
- Memorial Loop & Woodway/Memorial Dr. loosely adopted from Hare & Hare Plan. The park is divided, but roads are narrow scenic routes designed for the slower speeds of pleasure driving and viewing.
1953: 16 Parts

- Post Oak Drive is created along the western boundary, splitting two more pieces from the park
- Reliant Energy (now CenterPoint) easements added along northern half of railroad ROW
- Bayou Club Polo fields occupy the NW corner of the park
1967: 23 Parts and Highways

- Loop 610 Freeway and Katy Freeway remove park land and isolate the park from adjacent neighborhoods.
- Memorial Dr. widens to 6 lanes and is straightened. The Woodway Dr. split is established and its former curve to the S becomes a secondary access for ball fields. The picnic loop is extended, closing the loop.
- Reliant Energy (now CenterPoint) easements added
- 1958: Houston Parks takes on Hogg Bird Sanctuary
1978: 24 Parts

- Loop 610 Freeway is completed.
- Park maintenance center & access road are added.
- Houston Arboretum and Nature center access road is added
2010: 25 Parts

- The Living Bridge is constructed.
- Picnic loop is connected to Memorial Drive at a second point further east, creating another fragment.

Legend

1 Bridle Trails
2 Golf Course
3 Arboretum & Nature Ctr.
4 Ravine & Woods
5 Median
6 Artillery/Infantry Woods
7 Green
8 Baseball
9 Playgrounds
10 Median
11 Median
12 Median
13 Picnic Loop
14 Rugby, green, trails
15 Weiss Park
16 Green
17 Median
18 Median
19 Median
20 Median
21 Median
22 Green / Median
23 Reynolds Woods

New roads
Site rails & roads
Adjacent roads
Buffalo Bayou

SCALE: 1"=2000'

Image: 2010 Aerial Photograph; Data: aerial photograph, Berg Oliver Associates, Susan Turner Associates
2014: Divided Park

Legend

- Site rails & roads
- Adjacent roads
- Buffalo Bayou

source: 2013 (RAM) RODS Aerial Mapping aerial photograph

SCALE: 1"=2000'
VISION: RECONNECTED PARK

- Stitch fragments together with contiguous spaces that feel like a cohesive park
- Limit visual and pedestrian boundaries within the park
- Maintain existing programmatic elements of the park

Legend
- Site rails & roads
- Adjacent roads
- Buffalo Bayou

Source: 2014 Lee Lupher aerial photograph

SCALE: 1”=2000’
HISTORIC SITE IMPACT

Memorial Park has been manipulated by humans for as long as historic records of the site exist. These diagrams chart the course of human impacts on the site over recorded time.
PRE-1917: RANCH LAND

- Land used for timber harvesting & cattle grazing during the Reinerman ownership (track shown in image to right)
- The site was not a pristine woodland before Camp Logan
1914-1918: RAIL & CAMP LOGAN

- Camp Logan covers most of the eastern half of today’s Memorial Park.
- A subway is purported to exist under the rail line north of the 370th Regiment quarters
- A road and the rail cross the Bayou

Image: 1915 USFS Topographic map; Locations are estimated based on Moore Archeological Consulting findings, accounts of the site, and a map by Corporal Paul B. Hendrickson, 1918
1919-1922: POST CAMP LOGAN

- The site is largely unimproved since Camp Logan. Nearly all remnants of roads remain while most structures are not evident.
- Four wetland areas are evident in a USGS survey.
- Two development areas.
1923-1930: VARNER REALTY & PARK CONVEYANCE

- Park established in 1924
- Memorial Dr. construction
- Cattle grazing is likely in the NW corner of the park
- 55% of the site is moderately to heavily forested, likely predominated by pine trees.
1931-1944: **GOLF COURSE & SPORTS FIELDS**

- Memorial Park Golf Course is graded and constructed
- Significant areas around Memorial Park Loop at Washington St. are disturbed for new road construction and possibly initial Hare & Hare entry
- Memorial Dr. is rerouted and new roadways including the Picnic Loop are created
- Sports fields are constructed including the polo fields, rugby pitch, and NE baseball diamonds
- A large clearing is made in the SE corner of the park with either unimproved trails or small roads
24

1945-1953: BAYOU, PICNIC & HIGHWAYS

- Addicks and Barker Reservoirs are created to regulate and control water flows of Buffalo Bayou
- The picnic loop is cleared and the swimming pool area is graded and constructed
- The northern and southwestern boundaries of the site are cleared and graded, likely for the construction of Katy and 610 Highways
- Construction of drainage ditches is extensive along Memorial Drive and to the east of the railroad
- 70% of the site is heavily forested
1954-1967: MEMORIAL DR. & PARK AMENITIES

- Significant changes to Memorial Dr break up the park into many fragments and impose a large footprint of disturbance on adjacent land
- 1958: Houston Parks assumes management/ownership of Hogg Bird Sanctuary
- The picnic loop is extended; and maintenance facilities, outer loop trail, and Arboretum access road are constructed;
- Significant clearing has taken place north of the golf course and for a new rugby pitch
- 85% of the site is heavily forested
1967-1995: RECREATION & ARBORETUM

- Houston Arboretum and Nature center creates a clearing for a pond and buildings, trail construction becomes apparent in Arboretum
- Loop 610 + I-10 Freeways are completed.
- A secondary roadway from the picnic loop is added north to Memorial Dr. and other areas are cleared for recreation
- Golf course and driving range altered; pond between fairways 16 & 17 extended to the south
- 90% of the site is heavily wooded with mostly pines and significant areas that are either wetlands or hardwood trees
1995-2010: FOREST COVER TYPE & PATHS

- The Living Bridge is constructed in 2009 and areas around it are cleared; the outer loop is constructed
- Two clearings, one in the Arboretum and one east of the railroad in the Bayou tract have been made
- The pond between fairway 6 & 7 was extended southward in around 1995 and some of the course’s fairways were reconfigured
- Heavily-wooded with mostly pines and significant areas of wetlands or hardwoods; 2008: likely suffered impact by Hurricane Ike
2014: FOREST COVER

- The 2012 drought leads to the death of many of park’s pine trees
2014: CONCENTRATED CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

- 100 years of intensive grading, varied uses, and alteration: a rich cultural landscape
- Most intensive site work has taken place in the NE quadrant of the site. Within this quadrant, some areas are of cultural and historical sensitivity that are location-specific and other areas of importance that are not location-specific.
- The NW, SW, and Southern sections of the park are areas with very limited site work
2014: SENSITIVE HISTORICAL RESOURCES

- Archaeological sites from Camp Logan present an opportunity for selected interpretation.
- Majority of features found are foundations from latrines and camps, drainage, pipes and traces of roads and trenches.
- Roger Moore’s study indicates that while some sites contain few or no surface historic features penetrating radar analysis should take place before any site development in groups 1, 2, and 3.
2014: SENSITIVE CULTURAL RESOURCES

- There are many cultural resources throughout the park
- The golf course and Arboretum have been identified as the two largest and culturally valuable to the park
- Because of their size and existing infrastructure, their locations should remain fixed
VISION: LIMIT AREAS OF FUTURE IMPACT

- Areas in red indicate places that have been heavily impacted by previous development excluding areas that are culturally or historically sensitive
- Goal: limit future development to areas that have already been altered by past development

Legend

- Areas for future impact
- Historical & Cultural Resources
- Land impacted by foot traffic only

Image: 2014 Google Aerial Photograph; Data: HRA Gray & Pape “Intensive Archaeological Survey of a 1.3-mile segment of Buffalo Bayou in Harris County, Texas” with Roger Moore Archaeological Consulting; Susan Turner Associates; and Berg Oliver

SCALE: 1:24,000
Slope

Legend

- <5%
- 5-8.3%
- 8.3-12%
- 12-25%
- 25-33%
- >33%
Barrancos
Soil Units

Legend

- Loamy Claypan Soils
- Sandy Claypan Soils
- Buffalo Breaks/Barrancos
- Not Studied

 SCALE: 1" = 2000'

source: Jacob and Associates 2014
VEGETATION
AND ECOLOGY
Vegetation: Preliminary Assessment

source: Berg Oliver 2014

Legend
- Unaffected Areas
- Affected Areas

SCALE: 1"=2000'
Vegetation: Existing Complexes

Legend
- Green: Forest
- Light Green: Savannah
- Medium Green: Savannah/Forest
- Greenish-Grey: Savannah/Prairie
- Light Grey: Prairie

Scale: 1" = 2000'

Source: Berg Oliver 2014
Pine Hardwood Mix Complex

Typical along ravine
Savannah Complex, South of South Ballfields

Savannah complex North of Living Bridge
Savannah/Prairie Area near Maintenance Yard
Memorial Park in 1938-typical woodland

Proposed forest type with open understory

Image Courtesy Matt Buckingham  https://www.flickr.com/photos/mabuckingham/
Prairie
Savannah

Image Courtesy Matt Buckingham  https://www.flickr.com/photos/mabuckingham/
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles for the project were formulated by the NBW team to incorporate and summarize input from the public engagement process and from the design team’s technical experts. These principles will guide the design team as they move forward with design.
TEND

Memorial Park needs our care. Let’s be good stewards.

1. Build a resilient park framework for future generations with adaptive systems that will withstand time, increased use, variable weather patterns, and will allow Houstonians to maintain its character into the future.

2. Adopt and sustain management practices that complement the ecological position and features of iconic indigenous species.

3. Design a park that has a positive impact on the neighborhoods and the city by collecting, storing, and re-using storm water, improving water quality, and using alternative energy.

4. Maintain a record of biotic and abiotic ecological factors to track available quantifiable data to support and influence management practices.
MAGNIFY

Memorial Park has a lot going for it. Let’s make those things more visible.

1. Strengthen and build upon the cultural, historical, and ecological assets of Memorial Park that differentiate it from Houston’s other parks.

2. Maintain and enhance existing programmatic uses in the park. Memorial Park has four major use types:
   - Arboretum and Nature Center
   - Urban active: Ball fields, tennis, soccer, cycling, running, swimming, golf
   - Urban wilds: Trails and bayou-based recreation in an urban wilds context (bird watching, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, paddling, horseback riding).

3. Construct and improve existing amenities that fit the character, use, and scale of the site. Follow the regional vision of Houston Parks and Recreation.
OPTIMIZE

Memorial Park’s parts are out of balance with each other. Let’s arrange them so the park can function optimally.

1. **Group** similar program uses in the park together to enhance the experience of different aspects of the park and to reduce user conflict.

2. **Orchestrate circulation** in the park to improve safety for all types of users. **Make the park inviting** by creating gateways and marking paths and amenities to facilitate self-guiding and understanding of the place.

3. See the park’s current state as an opportunity. The drought and hurricane of recent years have cleared the site of vulnerable vegetation. Design landscape types for the site’s climate, soils, and the maintenance capabilities of the park administration by using *intrinsic ecologies to ensure future resilience*.

4. **Maximize social opportunities** that allow Houstonians to engage with each other in meaningful ways.
RECONNECT

Memorial Park is divided in many ways. Let’s make it whole and plug it into life in Houston.

1. Enable external access to the park. New connections will allow for increased park use, and improve safety in getting to the park on foot, wheelchair, bike, bus, or car.

2. Bridge the park’s internal divisions to expand usable park space and enhance its existing character.

3. Provide opportunities for consolidation of habitat areas.

4. Link water systems, allowing them to function holistically as a complete system.
REVEAL

Memorial Park holds stories relevant to all Houstonians. Let’s tell them to the world.

1. *Preserve* and *interpret* elements of the cultural and natural history. In so doing, empower future generations in the continued management of urban landscapes.

2. Make space for users to discover, learn about, appreciate and enjoy the *flora, fauna and water systems* of Memorial Park and the region.

3. Interpret and engage *multiple cultural narratives* that are relevant to Houston area’s diverse population.
VISION: RECONNECTED PARK

- Stitch fragments together with contiguous spaces that feel like a cohesive park
- Limit visual and pedestrian boundaries within the park
- Maintain existing programmatic elements of the park
VISION: LIMIT AREAS OF FUTURE IMPACT

- Areas in red indicate places that have been heavily impacted by previous development excluding areas that are culturally or historically sensitive.
- Goal: limit future development to areas that have already been altered by past development.

Legend:
- ❄️ Areas for future impact
- 🏥 Historical & Cultural Resources
- 🍃 Land impacted by foot traffic only
2014: EXISTING SITE ORGANIZATION

- The park is currently experienced as a series of smaller and discontiguous uses and typologies
GOAL: CONNECT ACTIVE RECREATION AREAS

- Relocate active recreation such as baseball, rugby, and soccer that require more infrastructure and amenities such as parking and bathrooms
- Combine areas of similar program, use and ecological, cultural, and historical experience
- Share recreation amenities for minimal impact on park and ease of maintenance
GOAL: LOCATE PICNIC AREAS THROUGHOUT PARK

- Picnic areas become moments to experience different parts of the park
- Accessible by car, bike, foot, or wheelchair
GOAL: CONNECT LAND MASSES

- Create trail areas that connect large swaths of the site, allowing for longer and more rich park experiences and greater ecological connectivity
- Bridge currently divided parts of the park with green spaces trails that are appropriate to ecologically and historically sensitive sites
VISION: COHESIVE PARK PROGRAMS & EXPERIENCES

Envisioning a park that:

- Preserves and interprets Camp Logan’s richest and most productive archaeological areas
- Embraces the signature existing cultural and ecological resources
- Creates expansive, connected, and complimentary program areas that provide a cohesive experience of this 1500 acre park