Moving through the Park

**Pedestrian**

The improved park will increase experiential complexity for pedestrians by quadrupling the number of paths and connecting topography. A variety of new and secondary connections will be added, giving paths multiple directions and providing convenient access to park programs. A graceful new pedestrian and bike bridge over I-25, which connects Rattlesnake Valley and Memorial Park neighborhoods, will be integrated into the park landscape to create a strong sense of welcome on arrival.

Improved access to the park will facilitate travel by bike, bus, car, or on foot. Upon arrival, the new circulation system will make exploring the park convenient and fun for all types of park users. Roads, pathways, boardwalks, and a pedestrian bridge will be well-lit and closely integrated with new topography and plantings to make it easy to navigate the space. A new bus stop for Route 25 at the Porter Avenue entrance will make it easier to arrive by transit.

**Athletic Loop (3.1 miles/5K)**

Park circulation can provide a fun framework for a rigorous workout. The athletic loop will highlight a designated route for runners and walkers, establishing a benchmark distance that covers a range of terrain. This feature will support daily use of the park in a variety of weather conditions, allowing easy access to the athletic loop can also be used by cross-country skiers.

**Cycling**

The design greatly expands bike circulation in the park, adding more than two-and-a-half miles of bike paths. The major connector cycle paths through the park will follow routes where there is enough path width to safely accommodate two directions of bike travel as well as pedestrians. The improved park will provide an exciting regional destination along the 12-mile Shoreline Trail, which is the western terminus of both the Erie Canalway Trail (48 miles long when complete) and the Haynie-Page Trail (250 miles long when complete).

**Vehicular**

Vehicles enter the park from Porter Avenue onto D.A.R. Drive, which will be redesigned as a welcoming park boulevard lined with trees. This boulevard will provide convenient access to park programs and amenities, connecting to the waterfront in key locations and having a significant role as a turn-around. Cars can also enter the park along Amherst Drive, which is a one-way road running between the athletic waterfront and the grounds of The Pumping Station, eventually feeding into D.A.R. Drive. Although the number of parking spaces will remain constant in the new design, the existing large concentrated parking lots will be replaced by smaller dispersed parking areas that allow visitors greater flexibility in their use of the park. Maintenance vehicles will use the roadway and park pathways to service the park as needed.
Activating the Park

The new civic framework of the park will include an improved circulation system with stronger neighborhood connections, new topography and plantings, and a much more engaging relationship with the water’s edge. There are four major elements that will help realize the notion of activating the civic spaces of the park.

The Great Lawn will provide a place for everyday enjoyment of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park, as well as a place to host seasonal events such as outdoor movie nights, or even bigger annual events and performances.

A second major new feature of the park is the recreational program, which will be thoroughly upgraded, including renovating fields to provide optimal solar orientation, improving drainage and turf systems, and replacing outdated facilities such as comfort stations.

Another major new element is a destination Play Garden that will expand the child-focused program in Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park by encouraging active and imaginative play, as well as promoting a strong sense of connection with Buffalo and its dynamic natural environment.

The fourth major improvement is a restructured water’s edge that will add experiential connectivity, ecological values, and water access to the park. These elements work together to expand the opportunities to gather, to play, and to feel connection with the city and its natural environment. With the addition of the Play Garden and new programming, these new features will ensure that the park has something special to offer everyone.

Play Garden

Water’s Edge
Strolling Along the Water’s Edge

The design team has worked closely with the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper organization to ensure that the water’s edge provides the greatest possible environmental and experiential value. The transition from park to lake will be varied and active, forming a stronger connection between city and waterfront and improving the shelf stability. The new water’s edge will encourage activities such as boating, fishing, and bird watching, while also providing access to seasonal activities like ice skating and boating.

The complex interplay between land and water is explored in different ways along the new edge. The Outcrop is a landscape feature that will extend beyond the bulkhead line, effectively bringing the park out to the water. Here, visitors can experience the thrill of safely launching kayaks directly into the water. The Lagoon is a naturalistic environment that will feature wetland plants and attract migratory birds, bringing the richness of Great Lakes ecology into the park.

Park circulation will engage the new water’s edge, supporting children who want to travel through the water on a kayak, launch a kayak, or simply play and enjoy the view. New social programming along the water’s edge such as picnic areas, the Lake Erie Promenade, and Waterfront Steps will invite Buffalonians to connect with each other and to their waterfront. Along Amboy Drive, new activities including seed milking, seine, handball, piloting, and rappel training will add fun and excitement to outdoor activities.
Accommodating a Variety of Events

The park will continue to host beloved community events and performances. The spatial layout of the Great Lawn has been tailored to support a broad range of events, gatherings, and performances of different size and duration, such as the Rick James Park Festival and the performances that follow the Puerto Rican and Hispanic Day Parade of WNY. Key factors are being considered to meet community needs as this process unfolds—primary options are a review of future capital maintenance and/or replacement needs and the adoption of a modern landscape strategy in order to enhance the area's multi-use potential. There is also potential for temporary event staging that could be easily deployed for the event organizers. All parks must a design that cares topography and show to the water in a way that create amazing experiences for all visitors, year-round, regardless of why they are there.
The recreational uses of the park will be greatly expanded. Some popular uses that already exist, such as Centennial Pool and the splash pad and skate park, will be preserved in the same location while others, such as the off-leash dog playground known as the Barkyard, will be relocated and improved. The popular program of sports fields and courts within the park will be expanded, reconfigured, reoriented and upgraded to increase both safety and fun. Bike trails and pedestrian paths will be lengthened and made more interesting, creating more ways to explore and enjoy the park.

Flexible-use landscape elements, such as the Great Lawn, can support many types of year-round park activities, depending on the season and weather. More active facilities will be added throughout the park, in close proximity to the play garden and game courts, such as bocce and sand volleyball.

The park will also include one-of-a-kind features that will highlight the uniqueness of Buffalo. These will include the Play Garden, which will celebrate the natural and cultural history of the city, as well as the Lake and the history, which will both emphasize the city's relationship with Lake Erie. Park users will now also be able to explore the interior of the Colored Ward Pump Station, to marvel at its monumental architecture and engineering in addition to enjoying its exterior as a dramatic backdrop to park activities.
Exploring the Play Garden

Harbor

Seaplane

Discovery

Nature

Industry

Water

Rolling, jumping, diving, climbing, learning, sliding, ziplining, swinging, tailing, sliding and having fun will all be encouraged in the Play Garden. This extensive new play space will draw inspiration from the history of the Great Lakes city. Some new play structures will reference the industrial history of the city—including shipping, storage silos, factories, and seaplanes—while others will celebrate the rich ecology of the Great Lakes. In the spirit of play, these narrative elements will appear sometime in child-sized versions and other times as larger-than-life landmarks. A framework of trees and plants will contribute to the sense of enchantment. The Play Garden will be designed to appeal to all ages and comfort toward different age groups and abilities. The Play Garden will be designed for children's enjoyment and caregivers' comfort, but it will include elements that will delight visitors of all ages.
Celebrating Seasonality in Planting

Different communities of trees, shrubs, and ground covers support a variety of uses and experiences across the park. In some areas, such as B.A.R. (Blue Ash Ridge), a formal planting arrangement will enhance the sense of welcome and help communicate the importance of this site within the park. The varying openness of the Great Lawn is defined by a varied edge that features a striking plant palette and will provide shade and visual protection as well as seasonal interest. This edge will frame epic views to Lake Erie.

At the southern tip of the park, in the Lagoon area, the plantings will mimic local habitats and restore ecological functions. The native wetland species will attract migratory birds and will provide resources where visitors can feed and enjoy these species. The focus is on wetland creation and maintenance at B.A.R. (Blue Ash Ridge), in Centennial Park, trees and plantings will be selected for characteristics that can brighten the enjoyment of each season, such as leaf color and size, flowers, bark color and texture, and winter form.

The Great Lawn
Sports Fields
Pine Bluffs
Lagoon
Play Garden/Barkyard
Woodlands
Rain Gardens
Flowering Orchard
North Entry Allée
East Entry Allée

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