



Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park Public Information Session

January 27th, 2021 | Zoom

On January 27th, 2021, about 175 people attended a public information session and panel discussion on Zoom and Facebook Live. The meeting began with a brief introduction recapping the Imagine LaSalle engagement process from the meeting's facilitator, UB School of Architecture and Planning Dean Bob Shibley. Afterward, Paul Seck from the design firm leading the park's redesign, MVVA, shared progress updates on the park's design, including the 100% design detail drawing of the park and information about hydrology studies and the park's playground. Then Dean Shibley introduced the session's four panelists: Mayor Byron W. Brown, David Egner from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Marnetta Malcolm from the Imagine LaSalle Focus Group, and Mark Wallace from the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. Each panelist was given the opportunity to share their insights on the formation of the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy and why it makes sense as a management strategy for this park. Throughout the meeting, attendees on Zoom and Facebook were encouraged to share their comments and questions in the chat. Attendee comments and questions are summarized below, along with the project team's responses.

[Click here to watch a recording of the session](#) [Spanish and English captions available]

Where do attendees live?

ZIP Code	Attendees
14202	33
14201	22
14222	16
14213	10
14203	9
14216	8
14214	6
14209	4
14217	4
14052	3
14223	3
14051	2
14204	2
14215	2
14220	2
14221	2
14226	2
14228	2
Other ZIP Codes w/1 attendee	23

Comments and Questions from the Audience

Safety

Question/Comment: A viewer mentioned their concern about safety near the water, given how dangerous the Niagara River can be. They emphasized that the park's design and management should consider how people, especially youth, might interact with the water's edge in a safe way.

Response: All interactions near the water's edge should be done in accordance with City of Buffalo approved launches. Water safety has been an important consideration in the design, and the kayak launch is intentionally oriented to the north to steer water access toward the Black Rock Canal and away from the lake. Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper has been an active member of the overall project team and will continue to be a resource to ensure public access to the water is accompanied by safety and education. More broadly, as a region with so many incredible waterfront spaces, water safety is a community-wide concern that must be addressed beyond the scope of this single project. Shoreline design is currently undergoing ongoing permitting and regulatory processes.

Question/Comment: A viewer was concerned about park safety in regards to ATVs being used in the park, and wondered what was being done to prevent these types of vehicles from being used in the park.

Response: The project team is working together with the City of Buffalo to include movable bollards at all pedestrian and bicycle entrances to the park. Additional safety measures will be explored with the City of Buffalo as details of the park management continue to develop. Recently, the City of Buffalo Common Council passed a new ordinance with stricter penalties aimed at people illegally operating all-terrain vehicles on Buffalo streets and in city parks.

Question/Comment: One comment asked about how the park's design reflects considerations for public health in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Response: The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how valuable outdoor public spaces are to our community health. The design elements proposed for Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park will provide for even more safe outdoor spaces that will serve the community. As an example, pathways in the park are designed with a hierarchy in mind for different types of space, but very few paths are narrower than 10 feet. The waterfront promenade is 20 feet wide, shared-use paths are 16 feet wide, and playground paths are 10 feet wide. A small number of pedestrian paths are 6 feet wide, to provide more intimate, quieter spaces within the park. The transformed park will also have

considerably more pathways compared to today, so park visitors will likely be spread out across a larger area.

Environment

Question/Comment: A commenter on Facebook mentioned that they love the incorporation of the Least Bittern into the playground, even if this bird isn't usually found at the park.

Response: While the Least Bittern is not typically spotted in Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park, this bird species is native to the low-lying marshes and wetlands around the Great Lakes and in the Niagara River Corridor. Playground designers aim to incorporate local ecology and history into their design, and found the unique shape of the Least Bittern offers interesting, fun playground elements that are also educational.

Health

Question/Comment: A viewer on Facebook asked if the park's design is aimed at promoting healthy choices.

Response: One of the park's design elements is aimed at encouraging exercise and other forms of active and passive outdoor recreation. The amount of walking, running, and biking paths throughout the park is significantly increased from the current park. Stronger connections between the park, surrounding neighborhoods, and regional trails, including the new pedestrian bridge over the I-190, will encourage more people to experience the park by foot or bike. A new kayak launch also encourages a new healthy recreational activity at the park. These elements are also complimented by a range of athletic facilities that will encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to engage in healthy activities.

Community

Question/Comment: One commenter on Facebook was concerned about the possibility of nearby residents being displaced by the long-term impacts of such a large investment in a predominantly working-class neighborhood. They asked to know what actions are being taken to ensure that current neighborhood residents will be able to enjoy the benefits of living close to the newly designed park for many years to come. Another commenter reflected on these comments and replied that they felt that the planning process has been inclusive of the diverse community members and park users, and that the park will remain an accessible neighborhood amenity for all, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Response: As the park transformation takes place, the City of Buffalo, the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy, and project partners will continue to work together to ensure that neighborhood residents benefit from this new community asset, which will remain a City park. Just as the park redesign process has been guided by goals of equitable access and serving the needs of the nearby community, the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy and

City of Buffalo will ensure public access and that the community is involved in how the park is programmed and managed.

Accessibility

Question/Comment: A commenter asked about progress updates on the bridge, and wondered if there is additional planning taking place to better connect Niagara Street and the surrounding neighborhoods to the “new” park entrance on 4th Street.

Response: At the moment, park design is limited to the boundaries of the current park including the 4th Street landing for the pedestrian bridge. Throughout the community engagement process, the public has shared ideas about a stronger connection to Niagara Street. Though the initial park transformation is limited to the park boundaries, there may be opportunities in the future for the City of Buffalo, and the community to work together to explore these ideas further. The City continues to improve connectivity to recreational spaces through implementation of its [Bike Master Plan](#) and Complete Streets initiatives.

Management

Question/Comment: A viewer asked to whom the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy will report after it is created.

Response: Management of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park will be a continued partnership between the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy and the City of Buffalo. Roles and responsibilities of these two entities will be clearly delineated and the City of Buffalo will maintain ownership of the park. The park conservancy will have an independent Board of Directors. As in other conservancy partnerships in the City of Buffalo, the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy will include the community in planning processes to ensure park sustainability and accountability to the community for generations to come.

Sports

Question/Comment: A commenter asked about softball and baseball use at the field, and wondered if the project team has considered how tournaments might be organized in the park in the future.

Response: The park has been home to numerous sports leagues and organizations through the years, including West Side Boys Baseball League, West Side Girls Ponytail Softball League, West Side Seahawks (football), West Side International Soccer, and others. In addition, Buffalo Public Schools has used the fields and athletic facilities for practices and competitions. The intent of the re-imagined Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park is for these leagues and organizations who have called the park home to continue to flourish with enhanced facilities and not be displaced. The City of Buffalo will continue

to manage permitting of park activities, and existing protocols will continue into the future.

Resiliency

Question/Comment: A commenter asked whether wave modeling shown during the design update has taken in account seiches.

Response: The hydrology modeling process accounted for: (1) projected normal conditions; (2) for 20 year events (the US Army Corps of Engineers standard); and (3) for 100 year storm events. The modeling shown in the presentation was representative of four-foot waves during storm conditions, not the current lake level plus four feet. Hydrological modeling also accounted for years in which water levels might be below normal, to ensure the design still allows water to flow through the proposed inlet. This modeling accounts for water level increases consistent with seiche events. The park transformation comprises three distinct projects: the pedestrian bridge, the core park, and the shoreline. Though the visioning and conceptual design process has guided these projects, the implementation of each one has unique regulatory and permitting requirements. Design principles include shoreline resilience and flood protection.

Question/Comment: A commenter asked how the design, and particularly, the inlet feature at the southern edge of the park, will impact homes nearby, and in particular residences of Harbour Pointe.

Response: All park designs are currently being developed and reviewed to ensure they will not adversely affect neighboring properties. It is important to note, the park project and shoreline project end at the park property line. The Harbour Pointe seawall is not part of the park property.