

Hampton Park: Design with Culture

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This project has been a joint effort by the City of Charleston Department of Parks and James L. Ward (JW), consulting landscape architect and professor at the Historic Preservation and Planning Program at the College of Charleston. JW coordinated these efforts with undergraduate students in a studio class, portions of interns' work, and individual research projects. Hampton Park is important to the immediate growth plans of the City, and central to an expanding residential area, dating largely from the 1930's and 1940's, just outside the official historic district. A recent aerial photo shows the development of the new Cooper River Bridge with projected development, graphically emphasizing the importance of the mature plantings and significant open spaces to the character of its residential neighborhood (Figure 1).

These combined efforts occurred mostly over the 2006-2007 academic year. The process started as a more narrowly focused consultation dealing with the pond area trying to develop a viable plan for necessary long term tree replacement of the large specimens that are so much a part of the image of this park (Figure 2). Planning and implementation are required now because this process would take generations, at least 50 years. In so doing, however, larger strategic and programmatic concerns became immediately evident. Cultural and entertainment programs such as the Spoleto Festival have also utilized this space. Given the need to expand the space required for an uneven age tree management system, the park must shift some of these activities to some other location. From there, the plan for the entire park needed some rethinking. In order to reconsider comprehensively this larger scope and let the cultural landscape itself inform our efforts, we began with the history of the site.

The time line (Figure 3) shows the historically significant periods in the park's life so far.

- The Grove Plantation, (1769) - a memory of the losses of the existing Ashley River Historic District and the source for the existing trees;
- Washington Race Course (1791) - an expression of early Charleston Restoration English culture;

- Confederate States of America prison for Union soldiers (1864-65) - a troubling and all too real chapter of national history;
- South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition (1901-02) - the site of Charleston's economic reemergence after Reconstruction;
- John Charles Olmsted, Jr.'s planning for a new park (1905) - the attempt to provide a "rural" urban park for the people;
- The division of park lands to incorporate the Citadel (1918) - the park is separated from its natural setting;
- Hampton Park Zoo (1932) - the struggle to find purpose within the truncated place;
- Major Renovations (1981) - the development focuses on the exposition as the inspiration for new development.

As this timeline suggests, the park is a much-contested and constantly changing landscape that reflects its cultural context. Within the larger Charleston historical district, establishing this chronology and considering future planning's effects on the park's narrative are a fundamental, if not always a determining, consideration. The layering of this place's story thus becomes a planning guide to help us find new ways to consider the future of the park.

The fundamental approach is to treat this locally important site sensitively and to enable it to function as an important center for the city. The site is outside the historic district, but has been deeply involved in Charleston's long history. In some respects, because there is not a specific restored design or just one period of significance, there has been a tendency to place monuments honoring important local characters (such as the one planned for Denmark Vesey, leader of the slave revolt of 1822) here even though there is no connection with this place. While this provides an opportunity to make improvements in the selected area of the park, it complicates the historical narrative and mission of the park. Our effort, therefore, is to build a future design that is grounded in this history and avoid the casual expression of contested and significant history as if place does not matter.

The theme – "Design with Culture" – attempts to emphasize the relevant connections, guided by the following consensus vision:

- Authenticity - Trying to avoid pastiche, we need to consider what is the "real" Hampton Park;

- Carrying Capacity – Given the considerable history of a “rural” urban park, we need to determine appropriate uses and avoid overuse;
- Community Involvement – By identifying current and prospective users, we need to establish and focus their participation; and
- Stewardship – As we approach a much more urban future, we need to promote research into these urban natural areas and look for meaningful interpretive opportunities to educate the public and continue to find inspiration in the past.

The final form of a park design, therefore, is a matter of balancing these more general management and interpretive goals with the development of future designs. The approach must of necessity be incremental and observational.

In order to plan effectively for ongoing management operations or updating the master plan effort, an inventory of the trees needed to be updated - the last one having been completed just after Hurricane Hugo some 20 years ago. For this, JW surveyed a traverse line around the 40 acre park to establish field control. Teams of students then triangulated tree locations from these fixed points, measured each tree, and wrote up a brief condition assessment. This document allows for a clearer understanding of the need for tree replacement and preventive efforts and is useful to establish the essential structure of the park and those places that might be available for new uses in planning. The scaled tree location plan, photos of all the trees, and summary charts of condition assessment were provided to the city by the students (Figure 4). As areas were identified in the strategic planning, more elaborate surveys have been undertaken to confirm the locations more precisely, but as a planning document, this kind of focused study is an essential first step.

The more comprehensive design starts with these horticultural concerns but overlays historical, urban, and cultural components. It is an attempt to think broadly about the issues the park faces without too much emphasis on a design response until further consensus is achieved. To do this requires a programmatic reaction to these issues and a set of broad recommendations. These more design-related ideas include the following:

- Planning for future tree replacement now;
- Providing more spaces for community activity including both larger and smaller spaces that fit naturally into the park configuration;
- Developing more entrances and connections to the park from the immediate neighborhood both in cars and on foot; and

- Designing coherent and acceptable spaces for cultural and social events that also honor the site's history.

The Conceptual Master Plan (Figure 5) elaborates on these objectives and checks on adequacy of the space requirements. It also serves to promote discussion among all the concerned parties. The process is currently underway to solicit feedback and find support to promote and implement a future vision, less than a specific plan.

As an example for this planning and management effort and to react in a timely manner to continued demands of this space, these recommendations were further developed in priority area design studies. These studies include several new concepts:

- Designing a garden for the current and long time major, Joseph P. Riley;
- Developing an opportunity for art in the park in the "Secret Garden;"
- Exploring efforts to educate users in the relationships between broader natural environments and urban ecology;
- Exploring methods to calm traffic and control parking; and
- Looking at the entrance and roadside character needs.

As with all such efforts, keeping the planning abstract is useful to explore the implications of these changes. The process allowed students to listen to community input, program these spaces accordingly with regard to issues of space and character, and develop a design concept. Some of these were the basis for further professional design elaboration (Figure 6).

As an important addition to this public process, a student researcher has been pursuing his inspiration to reconnect this park to the Ashley River as it was originally intended by Olmsted, Jr. This effort quickly grew to encompass tying the trail system to the larger peninsula trail system (Figure 7). This kind of thinking and follow up enhances planning efforts, helps to build community partnerships with neighbors like the Citadel, and can become an important component of the larger recreation master planning for the City. Bringing new ideas into the planning process based on the historical model helps to keep the thinking fresh and adaptive, and forms an important part of maintaining the sense of purpose for this park in the future of a dynamic and growing city.

Further work on this project will include additional review by the City staff and departments, budget and grant efforts, public response and volunteer building efforts. The City of Charleston is fortunate to have the recent establishment of a Charleston Parks Conservancy whose aim is to promote the vision of these parks. As such, this work speaks directly into those efforts as a model for historic parks – a model that depends on partnerships and a focus on larger vision. Additional and compatible efforts to plan for a more sustainable future have seen it as a broader landscape for bringing the natural world into urban life, thereby enhancing both. These efforts, therefore, emphasize strategic thinking about preservation issues, partnerships with University training and local community involvement, and the continuing importance of designing for a future functionality. Our effort is not oriented to a single “historical” vision of the park but is tempered by an ongoing commitment to the long term viability of this place.

Hampton Park

“Design with Culture”



Landscape Studies
Planting for the next 50 years
Done for the City of Charleston Parks Department
by Placemakers - Landscape Architects



FIGURE 1

Hampton Park Timeline

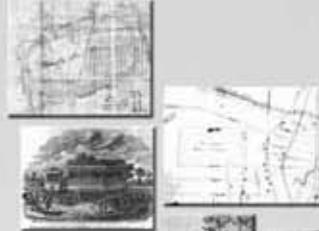
1769

The Grove



1791

Washington Race Course



1864-

257 Union POWs are buried on the site.



1865



1901-

South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition

1902



1905

John Charles Olmsted creates a new plan for the park.



1918

Part of the park is given to The Citadel for a new campus.



1932

The Hampton Park Zoo opens.



1981

The park as it appeared before its last major renovation.



FIGURE 3



LEGEND

- HANDICAP ACCESS
- NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS
- PROPOSED SMALL TREES
- PROPOSED LARGE TREES
- PALMS
- VISUAL TERMINUS
- PROPOSED GARDEN SPACES
- TEMPORARY ROADSIDE PARKING
- SPECIAL EVENT PARKING
- POTENTIAL TENT LOCATIONS
- PROPOSED NEW TRAILS
- EDUCATIONAL EXHIBITS
- VEHICULAR CONTROL FEATURES

Vision Issues

- Maintain Authenticity*
What is the "Real" Hampton Park?
Avoid Pastiche
- Work With Carrying Capacity*
Determine Appropriate Use for a "Small" City park
Avoid Overuse and Inappropriate Use
- Maintain Community Involvement*
Identify current and potential users
Make them a part of the Process
- Develop a Holistic Stewardship Ethic*
Promote Research
Educate through Interpretation

- Design Recommendations**
- 1) Planting for focus, tree replacement and to reinforce the design
 - 2) Proposed plantings to great area as much as possible
 - 3) Proposed steps with areas 1 & 4 - clear walk and place area around parking lot
 - 4) Additional better plantings all around immediately on North end of building
 - 5) Provide small garden spaces for smaller groups
 - 6) Major's garden or pond
 - 7) Small garden at local service area
 - 8) Even best zone of 20 trees each
 - 9) Develop path connector to within to next destination path
 - 10) Develop entrance and connections to neighborhood and larger community
 - 11) Trail through to lobby and Birchwood Park
 - 12) Small scale neighborhood walking accessible entrance points around throughout
 - 13) Additional parking for large scale events both at the park and in cooperation with the Church, possibly opening up canopy in field area
 - 14) Emphasize handicap accessibility and safety services during special events
 - 15) Develop entrance and accessible space for cultural/social events and to reflect and honor such history, culture, processes, and events
 - 16) Memorial to Civil War History
 - 17) Historical building and interpretive solution for Colonial Exhibition at Major's Garden
 - 18) Provide venue for art and public social and cultural events
 - 19) Provide opportunities for access to the urban natural environment

CONCEPT MASTER PLAN

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Hampton Park

"Design with Culture"

FIGURE 5



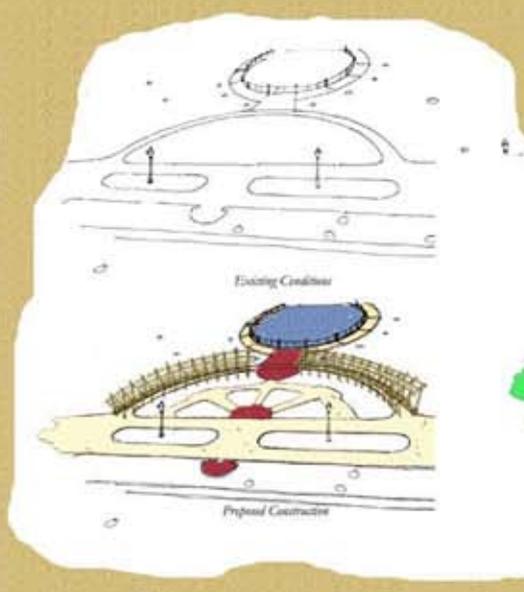
Site Perspectives



Plan



Arthur
As-Built Detail



Existing Conditions

Proposed Construction



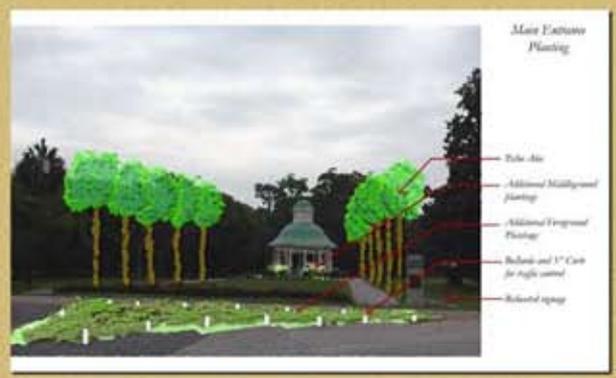
Proposed Composite
with Planting

Mayor's Garden
Study 1

7/2007
J. West

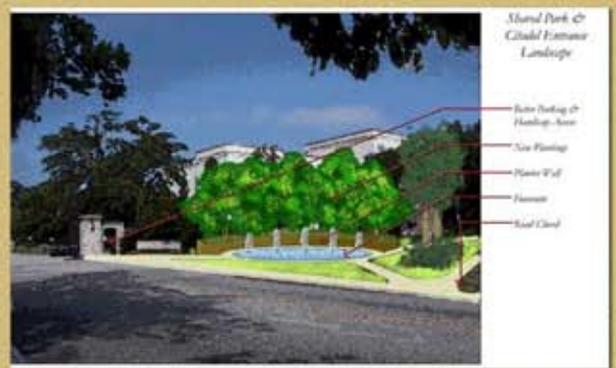


Ballast Existing Driveway Entrance



Main Entrance
Planting

- Tall tree
- Additional Midheight planting
- Additional Upright planting
- Ballast and 1" Curb for angle control
- Retained signage



Shared Park &
Child Entrance
Landscape

- Extra Parking @ Handicap Area
- New Planting
- Flower Wall
- Terrace
- Leaf Cloud

Changing Landscapes



Reconnecting Hampton Park to the River

Park History... Hampton Park currently exists as a shadow of its original vision. It has, however, great potential based on its history and its proximity to the Ashley River. Maximizing the site of the existing park and the adjacent Citadel Campus could create a civic space comparable to that of some of the great urban spaces of America.

The site of the park was owned by the Gibbes family throughout the 18th century. In 1836, the park land was purchased by the South Carolina Jockey Club and was used as the Washington Racecourse until the Civil War, when it was used as a prison for Union soldiers. After the war, the Jockey Club would not regain its antebellum popularity, and its lands were given to the Charleston Library Society, who sold them at auction. They would be used as the site of the Interstate and West Indian Exposition from December 1, 1901 until May 31, 1902. The event was grand, but its structures were temporary, and upon its conclusion its site was purchased by the city, which acquired 120 acres to create a park. In 1903, the city would name the park after Wade Hampton, the Civil War General, governor and US Senator from South Carolina. It was recommended as the most appropriate site for a monument to General Hampton, though that monument would eventually be placed in Marion Square. In 1905, John Charles Olmsted, the stepson of Frederick Law Olmsted visited Charleston and created a plan for Hampton Park. The primary component of the Olmsted design was the Ashley River Drive, which created access to the river for park goers beginning in 1908. In 1918, however, the river access was lost when this part of the park was given to the State of South Carolina for the construction of a new campus for the Citadel. Despite the lost land, Hampton Park remained a popular place to visit and enjoy until after the Second World War.



Plan of new park entrance

In an attempt to revitalize the park, a major renovation took place in the 1980's that included the reconstruction of the lagoon and the bandstand. Today, Hampton Park remains properly maintained and contains the legacy of two once-great city institutions, the Washington Racecourse and the West Indian Exposition.

River Reconnection... The creation of a connection to the Ashley River could help Hampton Park regain its former popularity. The connection would encourage more foot traffic to the site, while restoring a historic aspect of the park that existed in the Olmsted plan. The proposed pathway would connect to Hampton Park on its southwest corner, run through the Citadel campus, include a boardwalk over the Ashley River's marsh, and connect back to the city-owned Brittlebank Park. At the southwest corner of Hampton Park, the connection path would include a pedestrian-friendly traffic circle at the intersection of Moultrie Street and Elmwood Avenue, in front of the Citadel's Lesesne Gate.



New Traffic Circle

Through the Citadel, the pathway would run along the Avenue of Remembrance and proceed down Jenkins Avenue. This route would pass by some of the military college's main points of interest, including the Library, the Chapel, and the Summerall Field parade grounds. Tree planting and plaque placement would distinguish a clear foot path through the Citadel. Walkers would turn off of Jenkins Avenue, down Hammond Avenue, and continue on to the Ashley River connection just beyond the Washington Light Infantry Field. The pathway would proceed on a newly constructed boardwalk over the marsh, maximizing the river view. One section of the boardwalk would offer a widened portion with benches for resting and viewing. The new pathway would end with a land connection in the Brittlebank Park area.



Pathway through Citadel Campus

Future Implications... A new walkway connecting Hampton Park to the Ashley River could be a small part of something larger. The future development of a complete Peninsula River Walk would create recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike. This walk would begin at the Aquarium Wharf and follow the edge of the peninsula all the way to Hampton Park, utilizing its new connection to the Ashley River. Along the way, pedestrians could appreciate the river views, as well as several points of interest. Brochures could give information about each of these sites. Appropriate signage and landscaping would be required to develop a distinguishable route.



HPCP 290
Autodad/Photoshop
Professor Ward
31 May 2007

Nathan Attard
Tipton Fowlkes
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Section of New Boardwalk over Marsh

FIGURE 7