Hampton Park: Design with Culture
James L. Ward, Registered Landscape Architect & Assistant Professor at the College of Charleston – Historic Preservation and Community Planning

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;
Hampton Park
Charleston, SC

- 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
1769 - The Grove

1791 - Washington Race Course

1864-1865 - 257 Union POWs are buried on the site.

1901-1902 - South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition

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**
Hampton Park
“Design with Culture”
Reconnecting Hampton Park to the River

In an attempt to revitalize the park, a major renovation took place in the 1980s that included the reconstruction of the lagoon and the barriers. 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.

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 at 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.

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.

### Hampton Park

- **Historic Significance:**
  - Hampton Park is one of the oldest public parks in the United States, established in the early 19th century.
  - It was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed Central Park in New York City.

- **Recent Renovation:**
  - In the 1980s, a major renovation was completed, including the reconstruction of the lagoon and barriers.
  - The park is now properly maintained and contains the legacy of two once-great city institutions, the Washington Racecourse and the West Indian Exposition.

- **River Connection:**
  - A new pathway is proposed to connect Hampton Park to Brittlebank Park, offering new recreational opportunities.

- **Future Development:**
  - A complete Peninsula River Walk is envisioned, which would connect Hampton Park to other significant locations along the Ashley River.

- **Signage and Landscaping:**
  - Appropriate signage and landscaping would be required to develop a distinguishable route along the River Walk.

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**FIGURE 7**

- **Author:** Nathan Attard
- **Supervisors:** Tipton Fowlkes, Erika Smith, Nicole Papas
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**HPCP 290**

AutoCAD/Photoshop
Professor Ward
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