

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Rich in history, Pope Park reflects the thoughts of those who broke boundaries and presented society with new and generous ideas. Colonel Albert Pope provided a large green space for those who worked in his bicycle factories, while the founding father of landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, developed a vision for a natural, pastoral space for the physical and mental health of its visitors. Both these ideas were forward thinking for the times in which they were conceived. Today, park spaces are again understood to be important contributing factors to a healthy environment, particularly in dense, urban areas such as Hartford.

Pope Park was built in 1903 by Olmsted's sons' firm Olmsted Brothers. A review of existing conditions shows that the integrity of the Olmsted plan is still evident today, in spite of the impacts of the relocation of the Park River and the construction of an interstate highway through the park. The edges of the park are buffered from the surrounding streets by mature tree plantings. The major open space contained by the trees still exists, in spite of being developed into various programmed recreational venues. The wooded hillsides offer a contrast to the wide open central space. High Mall still provides panoramic views westward across Parkville and east into the park, looking down to Hollowmead Pond.

However, the original pathway system so integral to the Olmsted design has disappeared. Only a few remnants remain, offering glimpses of former connections. The formal flower garden and pergola at the high point of the park no longer exist. The sole indication of their former existence is the semicircular row of oak and maple trees. In updating the park to include modern facilities and uses, a number of alterations and additions have violated some of the basic design elements, such as the construction of the Recreation Center with its associated swimming pool and field sports located in the central open space of the park. Intrusions by roads and increased volume of vehicular traffic have also scarred the park and reduced the park acreage by 17% to its current size of 71.27 acres. A lack of formal parking spaces has led to cars parking all over the lawn areas during events, thereby degrading the health of the lawn.

The Hartford Parks Master Plan, prepared in 1992 by the City of Hartford, addressed the need "for wise stewardship of all parks" and made recommendations for improvements in thirty-two city parks. In 2000, Friends of Pope Park, a group of concerned citizens, started working with Pope Hartford Designated Fund/Knox Park Foundation to realize the recommendations made in the Hartford Parks Master Plan. The Friends recognized the need and value of a Pope Park Master Plan which would provide a vision from which to orient all restoration and enhancement efforts.

The Master Plan is the result of work by the Master Plan Committee, a sub-committee of Friends of Pope Park, public meetings, user surveys and historic research. The Master Plan and Report reflect the thorough examination of the existing conditions and the historic elements. Current uses and desired uses are described, and potential park improvement areas are noted. The Master Plan Report describes the costs of the plan, the potential funding sources and the ability to construct the project over a 3 or 10 year time period.

MAJOR POPE PARK MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide safe road crossings and entries into park from surrounding residential areas for children and families
- Redesign the intersection at Sigourney Street and Russ Street to regain lost park land and provide safe pedestrian connections to Pope Park North
- Create safe connections to Pope Park from Dominick F. Burns School
- Recreate historic gardens and formal spaces on High Mall
- Develop historic path system to provide visitors with access to all areas of park and connections with adjoining neighborhoods
- Provide an amphitheater as a location for outdoor performances
- Create interpretive play spaces and flush spray fountains for seasonal use and for both children and toddlers
- Provide new vehicular entry and expanded parking for Recreation Center and Park
- Incorporate a wet meadow as a natural filtration system for stormwater
- Close and remove Pope Park Drive to remove non-park vehicular traffic and to restore the integrity of the Park's open space
- Make a serious commitment to the maintenance of the restored park

The Pope Park Master Plan proposes to reconnect the park to the surrounding neighborhoods with safe travelways for the pedestrian, defined entrances for the visitor and clear activity zones for the park user. The park will no longer be a space of transition, but one of destination with programmed activities and a community focus. The ideas of Colonel Pope and Frederick Law Olmsted are upheld in Pope Park Master Plan design.