

I had a bit of an epiphany as I'm finishing Galen Crazz's book "The Politics of Park Design. A History of Urban Parks in America." The new design for Howard Park (on the next page) seems to be a series of vignettes dedicated as an homage to various eras of United States park history.

### **SOUTH LAWN** (*Mid 1800's*)

Let's start at the open space in the south end of the park. It's highly unstructured space, designed for almost any activity – flying a kite, having a picnic, playing catch, or otherwise. The earliest "parks" in the United States were known as "pleasure grounds" and this space is precisely what they were. Fairly un-programmed and simple in design, these spaces were created for the public to enjoy in whatever ways they so desired. These spaces were less formal than a traditional garden or city plaza and were specifically created to encourage recreation. The term "pleasure ground" may sound funny today, however, it was the exact term Councilman Timothy Howard used in 1878 when he suggested that the area no longer be used as a dumping ground, but to be remediated and converted into a "public pleasure ground for the use of the citizens of South Bend." Let's continue our tour of the new Howard Park clockwise toward the river.

### **RIVERWALK** (*Turn of the Century*)

When likes of Frederick Law Olmsted and George Kessler came on to the scene in the late 1800's/early 1900's, the idea of the shapeless pleasure ground morphed into a more deliberately designed place. They introduced trees and plantings, winding paths, and benches with the notion that these places would serve as places of respite from the busy city life. This trail and heavy native landscaping is the exact treatment that we see along the proposed riverwalk in the new Howard Park designs. These early parks were, as Olmsted said, "a class of opposite conditions, a visual antithesis to gridded streets and rectangular houses." Preserving the WPA-era work in Howard Park additionally reinforces this era of our country's urban park history.

### **EVENT LAWN** (*Early 1900's*)

As parks began to become more familiar and integrated into city life, music, plays, and festivals became an important part of experiencing a park. The proposed event lawn area reserves a high-profile space for this very type of entertainment. Nearby is the arts grove, a tribute to this same period when artists began to put their mark on public parks with creative landscaping, sculptures and monuments. Continuing clockwise still, we get to one of the signature areas of Howard Park.

### **ICE/WATER FEATURE & PLAYGROUND** (*1920's – 1950's*)

Throughout "The Reform Period" in American Park history we see the advent of the playground. This period that starts in the 1920's and lasts approximately 30 years, also sees the formalization of recreational activities. Park designers and city officials noticed the trend that residents were starting to expect more than just open space and landscaped trails. Outside of programmed events, the parks started to become havens for illicit activity. City parks needed to do something to attract families and to encourage consistent vibrancy. In addition to playgrounds, this is when amenities like baseball diamonds, tennis courts, swimming pools, and ice skating rinks gain popularity. Ice skating has long been a tradition at Howard Park and the new skating trail will be among the most unique of its kind in the country. It'll also include an interactive water feature in the summer months. The entire area will be flanked by a signature series of playground elements designed for universal access, intergenerational play, and discovery.

### **COMMUNITY CENTER** (1940's – 1980's)

Recreation Centers became an integral part of the suite of services offered by parks systems starting in the 1940's, increasing in popularity and necessity through the 1980's. Recreation Centers served as places to deliver services and opportunities to neighborhood families, senior citizens, veterans, and general park users. Concurrent with the advent of recreation centers was the expansion of the definition of recreation. Recreation was no longer just team athletics or play, it could be leisure activities or physical fitness activities. These centers soon became neighborhood anchors and some of the most widely accessible, and used, civic institutions. The new Howard Park Center will feature flexible spaces designed to encourage varied programming and partnerships.

### **URBAN CORE** (1990's – Current)

Cranz's text was written in 1989, and he doesn't offer much in terms of the "future of parks." Nonetheless, here is where I think Howard Park will offer a glimpse into another important era in the history of American cities and parks. After the crisis of urban renewal and the plight to the suburbs in the 70's and 80's, the dawn of the new millennium brought a renewed interest in restoring our urban fabric. Carefully complimenting the burgeoning retail corridor along Jefferson Boulevard, the new mixed-use Community Center and connected café will be located with right at corner of Jefferson and St. Louis. It will feature standard setbacks, quality streetscaping, on-street parking, and a generous plaza space around the building will create places for outdoor dining, reading, relaxing, and encountering. The café will serve as an amenity to users of the park, and the park will serve as an amenity to users of the café. It's an urban design that would make the likes of Jane Jacobs smile.

### **RELEVANCE** (Emerging)

Like museums and libraries, parks today exist as public spaces that struggle to maintain relevance. I hypothesize that the "park of the future" is informed by the eras above, true to a given community's identity, dynamic and multifaceted. Or course, not every park will need to be as heartily designed and programmed as Howard. A well-rounded city will have a broad range of parks, from neighborhood playgrounds to more quiet and contemplative spaces. A park like Howard, however, will only be complete with some progressive amenities – just like it's always contained. Illustrating our commitment to sustainability, the Community Center will be LEED v4 certified, perhaps the first in the state to claim this designation. Architectural lighting will artistically adorn areas of the park to complement the South Bend River Lights, the park will be Wi-Fi enabled, and modern, yet modest sound systems will be enjoyed in select recreational areas. Whether arriving by bicycle, car, foot, or wheelchair, conveniences throughout the park will ensure that it's relevant and comfortable for families, young professionals, seniors, and even dogs. The new designs also feature a unique space specifically created for adjacent street festivals and food trucks. Despite all that, perhaps Howard Park's best feature is its amphibious ability to adapt to various active and passive uses.

The new Howard Park is truly a design for the ages, inspired by the ages. We are very fortunate to have this asset. I'm thankful for the wisdom of our city's early leaders who had the foresight to reclaim this space and those who have worked to protect and program it through the years. I'm thankful for those partners and colleagues who are working together to make this revitalization possible. And I'm thankful to the South Bend community who continue to support, respect, and enjoy our parks. When John M. Studebaker spoke at the dedication of Howard Park in 1906, he said he was "surprised and delighted" at the community's reception. I look forward to introducing the residents of South Bend to the "surprise and delight" that will exist in our city's first public park when it re-opens in 2019.

