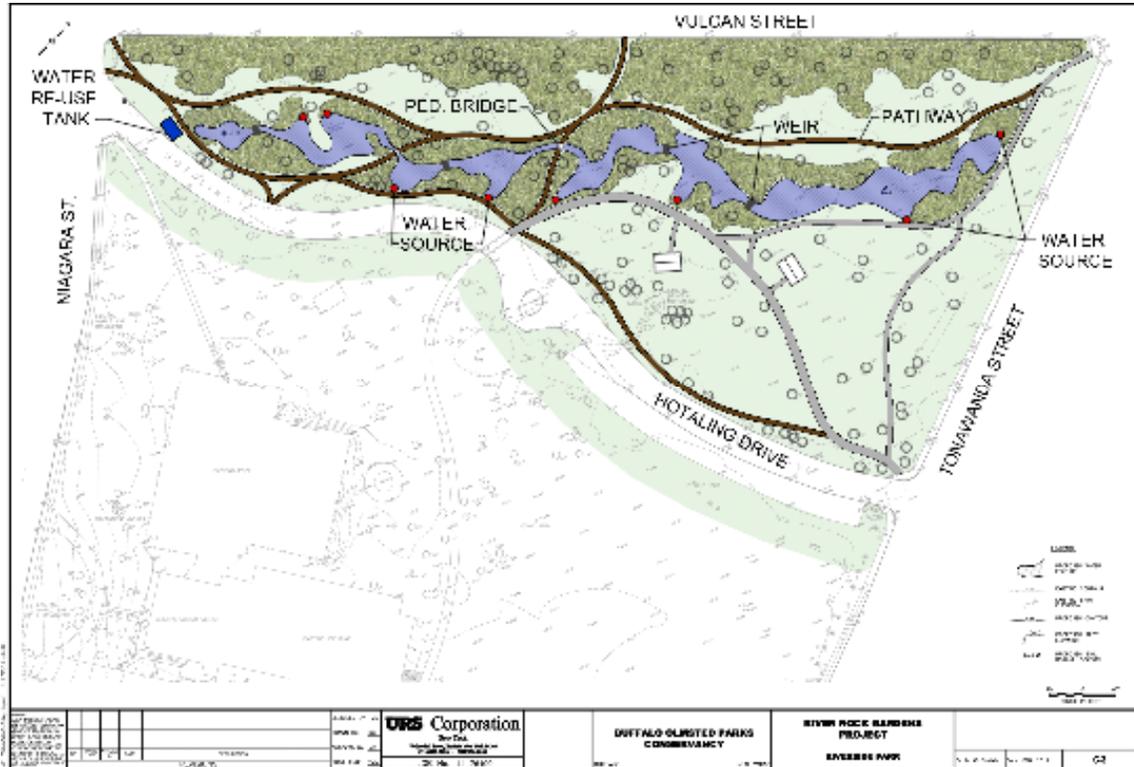


# Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy

## Riverside Park – River Rock Gardens Rehabilitation Project



### Project Narrative

1. The project proposed by the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is the restoration of the River Rock Gardens formerly known as the Minnow Pools in the historic, Olmsted Firm designed Riverside Park. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC) began the design process for this project in 2007, when the Conservancy received an initial \$100,000 grant from the office of State Assembly member Sam Hoyt. In 2008 the BOPC submitted a proposal to the Niagara River Greenway Commission, who determined the project to be consistent with the Niagara River Greenway Plan, and Erie County Standing Committee and was awarded \$305,000, fifty percent of the remaining funds in the initial project budget. At the

time of the proposal, the BOPC committed to obtaining matching funds for the completion of the project. Since then, the BOPC has secured an additional \$200,000 for the project through the Dormitory Authority State of New York (DASNY) and \$125,000 through the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation as allocated by State Senator Antoine Thompson.

The original proposal the BOPC made to the Erie County Standing Committee in 2008 identified the project as a Reinterpretation of the historic Minnow Pools feature under the Department of Interior Standards for Historic Preservation. The project description referenced construction of rain gardens and native plantings in the area originally designed by the Olmsted Firm as open water. However, as the BOPC completed the intensive historic research phase of design development and began communication with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) we had discovered an extensive amount of additional detailed design records. The BOPC uncovered detailed design correspondence from the Olmsted Firm as well as meticulous historic planting plans and plant lists of the original Olmsted Firm design. On the basis of having significant information as to the original design, the SHPO called for BOPC to alter the design to a Rehabilitation of the historic landscape. The project scope alteration entailed shifting away from the character of a constructed rain garden of native plant material to utilize the historic planting plan as the basis for rehabilitating the landscape as per the historic plans for a flowing water feature. This project scope expansion necessitated a delay in construction as the Conservancy identified additional resources and undertook much more complicated and technical design development.

As a result of the SHPO mandate, the BOPC put out an RFP for an engineering consultant and received six proposals, hiring national firm URS to assist in the design of the rehabilitated water feature to ensure proper construction and function of the water feature. URS is in close consultation with the Buffalo Sewer Authority and Water Department as well as providing the BOPC with specifications on construction materials and mechanicals.

The rehabilitation of the River Rock Gardens Project will be composed of a serpentine shallow flowing water feature based on the Olmsted Firms original drawings. The feature will be heavily planted on either side with drifts of ornamental trees and shrubs identified on the Olmsted Firms original planting plan. The entire landscape will be circum-navigated with a system of 1850 feet of winding pathways highlighted by a picturesque stone pedestrian bridge near the middle of the feature. The project will also include a complete system of wayfinding, interpretive and regulatory signage in accordance with the Conservancy's signage system master plan.

The design process for rehabilitating the River Rock Gardens is already well underway, the BOPC is refining the landscape plan drawings as well as working with consultant URS on the water feature construction drawing. Throughout this entire process we have remained engaged with the Black Rock Riverside Good Neighbor Planning Alliance making presentations at meeting on 7/10/08, 11/5/09, 3/24/10, and ReDiscover Riverside on 4/21/10 and 1/12/11 as well as with District Councilman Joe Golombek on 3/17/10 and 12/20/10 and Deputy Parks Commissioner on 2/17/10 and 12/20/10.

## 2. Principles of Niagara River Greenway Commission

- Excellence – every project undertaken by the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is done with excellence. Within the scope of the project would be securing a professional project team and utilizing only the best in construction materials and methods in completing construction.
- Sustainability / Ecological Integrity – the project is being designed to as sustainable as possible from a maintenance perspective, and also to provide educational interpretation to educate the community.
- Accessibility / Connectivity – Riverside Park is a gateway landscape into the city of Buffalo along the Niagara River Greenway. This project builds upon the existing infrastructure of the adjacent Riverwalk within the city of Buffalo and its direct connection with this riverside parkland. River Rock Gardens will be a dynamic node along the Greenway serving a diverse group of users on the Greenway as well as enriching the Greenway experience within the City of Buffalo.
- Public Well-Being – The River Rock Gardens Project will help tell the story of the rich Olmstedian history of the City of Buffalo.
- Restoration – this principle represents the cornerstone of *The Buffalo Olmsted Parks System: Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, as one of the 7 Guiding Principles, and is in the forefront of everything done by the Conservancy.
- Authenticity / Celebration – The Minnow Pools Project will clearly demonstrate authenticity to Olmsted’s vision as a part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Plan and will celebrate that vision through the physical reestablishment of the landscape feature.
- Partnerships/ Community based – Partnerships have already been created through the interpretive workshop on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and

was vetted with the community at the time of the initial presentation with Sam Hoyt at a Riverside Park Neighborhood Association Meeting.

As stated in the examination of the guiding principles of this project in relationship to those of the Greenway Commission, there is clear consistency in all aspects of the project.

3. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy's vision for the Greenway has been incorporated into the development of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks System Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century looks to place the Parks System within the green infrastructure of the city, restoring and building off of the assets brought to the region by Joseph Ellicott, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Niagara River as Buffalo's reason for being. The Minnow Pools Project was incorporated into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Plan as a part of the public process of the plan. This process included 21 meetings of the BOPC Advisory Council, comprised of representatives of a broad-based group of over 50 community organizations and park users whose main purpose is to encourage and facilitate public participation in the planning process. During this same 5 year period, 6 public meetings were held throughout the city as well as 15 meeting of the BOPC Long Range Planning Committee of the Board of Trustees, who approved the plan in October, 2008. As a part of the ongoing Minnow Pools project there will be an additional series of public vetting.
4. The environmental setting of the Riverside Park Minnow Pools area is that of little integrity at present time. Within the area remain a handful of mature trees of the 10,000 trees and 122,000 shrubs planted in Riverside Park between 1900-1901. Many of the trees declined over years and for a number of reasons and were not replaced. The Minnow Pools laid out by

the Olmsted Firm were filled in the 1930's, however the area has remained perpetually wet and has always been a maintenance issue, especially in the spring and fall. Shelters in the nearby landscape are the main use of the area, as the area is often too wet for regular utilization. There are two benches in the area, and one path along the southern edge. Riverside Park as a whole is a very active park with baseball diamonds, tennis courts, basketball courts and a football field. There is an extensive amount of active recreation, however little throughout the whole park to support any passive park use and there is little variety in the landscape.

The Minnow Pools Project will comply with any and all SEQR regulations relevant to the project and while there are no sensitive environments within the project area, the project will greatly increase the biodiversity in the flora and fauna in the park. Full environmental study will be a part of the initial technical site analysis of the project.