Report on a site for
a Park at Newark

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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
1867

110 Broadway New York
October 5th, 1867

To the Board of Commissioners of the Newark Park:

GENTLEMEN:

We were yesterday shown certain lands in the vicinity of Newark, and upon such superficial examination of them as we have since made, we have now, at the request of your Executive Committee, to express an estimate of their fitness to be taken up for a Park.

The tract to which our attention was more especially directed is indicated in a printed diagram published in the Newark Daily Advertiser, but we were also desired to look at the land lying west of this, on which the "Boiling Spring" is situated. Both these tracts are included between the Morris & Essex and Bloomfield Railroads on one side, and the Bloomfield turnpike on the other.

As the term "Park" in its simplest usage means merely an enclosure, and as it is applied to enclosures of widely different character, it is necessary to exemplify the type of Park which is had in view in this case before the matter in hand can be debated with advantage. Our understanding of the character of the Park which is merited is one that, to the people of Newark, shall answer the more important purposes which are found to be met in the Central Park of New York; Druid's Hill in Baltimore; Hyde, Regents, Victoria and Battersea in London; Birkenhead Park, and the series known as Princes, Stanley, Sheil, Newsham, Wavertree and Sefton parks at Liverpool; the Phoenix in Dublin; the Bois de Boulogne, and the Bois de Vincennes in Paris, and the Prater in Vienna. These and others of the same class all offer certain advantages for the recreation and the conservation of health of the people of the towns which respectively possess them that are not found in some other enclosures, also called Parks, that have been set apart for public use in several of the same cities.

Parks of the former class are all of considerable size; the largest containing over three thousand acres, and the smallest three hundred, while the average extent is probably about eight hundred acres. It is to be borne in mind, however, that within the enclosure of each of the above mentioned pleasure grounds,
as it now exists, considerable space is occupied by accommodations of a special character not common to all of the designs, and obviously not necessary to the accomplishment of the main purposes which a public park is intended to serve. In some, for instance, private residences are included, with extensive grounds attached, to which the general public are not admitted; in others there are museums and scientific collections, buildings and grounds for colleges and other institutions, palaces, parade grounds, theatres, restaurants, barracks, arsenals, waterworks and various other things which, it is evident, are not essential features of this class of Parks, and which need not, therefore, enter into our consideration of the adaptability of the land now in question for the formation of the Park required. Accommodations for some of the purposes referred to or for others of similar character may perhaps be advantageously connected with the design for the Newark Park, but they must all be regarded as unimportant in a first study of the site.

Our understanding of the character of the Park which is merited is one that, to the people of Newark, shall answer the more important purposes which are found to be met in the Central Park of New York...

The influences most desirable to be exerted on the mind are the reverse of those from which the much confined, stimulated, and overworked inhabitants of large towns are habitually suffering, and from the wearing and disorganizing effects of which they most need to find conditions favorable to recreation. In our preliminary report upon the plan of the Brooklyn Park we indicated the character of scenery best fitted to this end as follows:

Turf or repeating their beauty by reflection upon the calm surface of pools, and the predominant associations are in the highest degree tranquilizing and grateful, as expressed by the Hebrew poet: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters." We know of no other landscape effects that can be commanded within the limitations fixed by the conditions of the site which experience shows to be more desirable in a town Park than these.

The first thing we ask for, then, in considering the fitness of any tract of ground for the purposes of a Park, is opportunity for economically establishing upon it scenery of this character, and for so arranging this scenery that it may be brought under the eye of a large number of observers, continuously, for a considerable period of time, during which they are able, by moderate and agreeable exercise, to enjoy in succession a series of views and thus have their interest constantly stimulated by a pleasant variety.

It is desirable that this opportunity should occur in a part of the land proposed to be used for a Park, from connection with which, in the landscape to be produced, other objects inconsistent in character with it, may be readily disassociated.

Such an opportunity is found in a portion of the land which we yesterday examined, the centre of which is not far northwest of the Boiling Spring.
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This ground is at present water-soaked and unproductive, and its appearance is unattractive; but our cursory examination seems to indicate that with a less outlay per acre than was required for the improvement of any part of the site of the New York or Brooklyn Parks a considerable portion of this territory may be transformed into pleasure ground of the character required.

The scope within which it would be desirable to operate in the formation of pastoral landscapes of a refined and complete character, the central parts of which would be near the point indicated, would extend nearly to the Railroad on the South, the Turnpike on the North, a little beyond Bathgate’s lane on the East and to the further slope of the rising ground west of the road which leads from the turnpike to the neighborhood of the German Catholic Cemetery, on the West.

The tract thus bounded is somewhat more nearly level than is desirable, but it has controlling advantages, especially regarding the probable cost of construction, over any other part of the region to which our attention was called, and over any other which we observed in a rapid drive of about ten miles through the Southern, Western and Northern suburbs of your city.

We have indicated to your committee the more important of these advantages, and they need not be recapitulated in the present report.

We should deem it practicable, after due preparation, within one year from undertaking the work, to form in this situation a larger stretch of that character of ground, which is the most valuable constituent of a great park, than is yet included within any park in this country, while in all probability the cost per acre of the necessary operations would be much less than has been required to secure the same character of ground in other localities that have come under our notice.

A proper site for the central and most important Element of a park having been found, the question next in order is how and by what way shall the site be made accessible to those for whose benefit the park is to be designed?

In this case it is practicable to open a way from the very center of your city to what we have proposed should be the central feature of your park, which would be very convenient, while it would also be highly novel and interesting in character.

The central idea of a large public park is manifestly that of a work of art...

The route for this purpose would follow up the ravine which is now crossed by a bridge at the north end of the principal street of the city, the sides of which – together with the abandoned quarries which adjoin it – are susceptible of picturesque treatment; after passing the quarries it would continue around the pond above the reservoirs, the west border of which is already agreeably overhung by trees, and then be extended by a graceful approach to the ground already designated.

A strip of land on this route, from two to five hundred feet wide, might be so treated as to furnish scenery of a rural and appropriate character, to be enjoyed throughout its whole extent; and all that portion of the traffic of the town that must be expected hereafter to pass through this neighborhood, and which would be inharmonious with the purpose of recreation, might be provided for so as not to cause inconvenience.
The character of the arrangements which might be used for this purpose have been indicated to your committee, and we need only say here that the advantages of the route proposed are of a character to add much to the feasibility and economy with which the general project of a park in this quarter of the city may be carried out. We believe there is no large town in the world in which an unobstructed route, itself rural in character, giving access to a great park, is brought so conveniently near the doors of all its inhabitants, as with this arrangement you would enjoy. The advantage is all the greater from the fact that Broad Street is so fine an avenue — so spacious, level and arterial in its relations to the other important parts of the city and its suburbs. Neither in London, Paris, Vienna, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia or Brooklyn is it possible to reach the great parks from the central or opposite quarters of the town without long and difficult encounters with conflicting currents of commerce, crowded and sometimes packed immovably in streets of insufficient capacity for the service required of them.

A proper site for the central and most important Element of a park having been found, the question next in order is how and by what way shall the site be made accessible to those for whose benefit the park is to be designed?

That which strikes us as most desirable is a series of ways suitable for pleasure driving, riding, or walking, with bordering plantations, which shall connect with those of the very beautiful grounds about to be improved for the public use by your State Agricultural Society. Another similar series to connect with Llewellyn Park is suggested, and a third leading northwardly through the charming landscapes which lie in the direction of Woodside, Belleville, and the valleys of the Second river and the Passaic.

With reference to the latter route, we glanced at the land lying on the north side of the turnpike, opposite that which we have advised should be selected as the center of your Park, and were struck by its beauty and the advantages which it would present as an adjunct of the Park. It would be necessary that you should control an outlet for your drainage in this direction, and this consideration, together with the beauty of the natural scenery in the vicinity of the mill pond which lies a short distance away, led us to consider whether a sufficient area of land here might be connected by pleasure roads with the park without interfering with the turnpike, the route of which, we were advised by your committee, should not be considered as open to change. We observed two points which would be suitable for this purpose, and we would suggest that after acquiring the land which we have already indicated, a further extension of the boundaries of the Park would be desirable, to

Unfavorable upon the prosperity of the whole city. They thus cause a distortion of the plan of the city, which, in connection with the arrangement for a park, might, we should think, be remedied, with a clear profit at no distant day to the city treasury.

Next in order of importance to the principal approach from the city to the park are other approaches and connections with the points of interest, which may with advantage be thus associated with the Park itself.
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include the grist mill on the old Bloomfield road, the mill pond, the ridge between the latter and the turnpike gate, the swampy land to the westward of the same, and a sufficient extent of firm land beyond the swamp and pond for a road.

The greater part of this land is worthless for agricultural or building purposes, but could at small cost, be made to add much to the attractiveness of your Park.

A sufficient portion of the high land between the old quarries and the line of 6th avenue (as laid down upon Holbrook’s map of the City) would be desirable to be associated with the Park from the opportunity it offers, in connection with the improvements already suggested, of retaining perpetually for the public enjoyment the very fine views which would be commanded from it.

There could be here placed to great advantage a pavilion and other provisions for the salutation and entertainment of guests of the city. (The ground required for this purpose is included in the diagram, to which reference will presently be made, in plot B).

Some of the flat ground between the old quarry and the park property, adjoining the route of approach beyond the Canal, would be very suitable for a parade and ball ground, and if secured in season, it would enable you to save, for the more important general purposes of a Park, lands which otherwise would have to be thus appropriated, although naturally susceptible of a more refined and artistic treatment.

The ground lying between the turnpike and Sixth avenue is the least desirable of all that we examined to be included in the Park. If, however, the Park should be formed upon the land we have advised to be taken, and a general plan should be adopted for its construction, embodying the few large features which have been vaguely suggested in this report, it would be quite necessary that the plan of the city in this section should be thoroughly revised without reference to the existing structures upon it, which generally seem to be of small value.

We should advise, therefore, that this land be also included in the tract to be purchased for the Park, but that it be left with those to be charged with the duty of supervising its construction, after their plans shall have been matured, to recommend the disposal for other purposes of such portions of it as can be left out of the Park proper with advantage.

We recapitulate our conclusions, referring to the accompanying diagram:

1st – Within the tract designated A, a small park could be formed which would include an unusual extent of scenery of a very desirable character.

2nd – The addition of plot B would provide for an admirable approach to plot A from the central parts of the city; would allow the general plan of the city to be much improved, and would secure the advantages of a fine prospect over the city.

The larger the area of the park the longer will be its boundary, and the longer its boundary the greater will be the amount of land which will be directly advanced in value...
and the Park and of a distant outlook over a considerable stretch of country.

3rd – Plot C offers an addition to the Park of much value. Its improvement, in connection with plot A, would greatly add to the healthfulness and to the availability as a place of residence of the region of country lying back of it and between it and the city, as well as of that on its immediate border. It would also render the improvement of plot A cheaper, and its advantages greater.

4th – Plat D contains land, portions of which, in the elaboration of a plan, it would probably be found desirable to include within the Park, and all of which might be improved in connection with the Park with very great advantage, even though parts of it might afterwards be appropriated to purposes not essential to be fulfilled by a Park.
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5th - It would be desirable for your city, at the same time that it acquires a park, to secure possession of strips of land of from two to four hundred feet in width, reaching from the park site in different directions and running through pleasant neighborhoods where land is cheap; these strips being secured with reference to the future construction thereon of pleasure drives and walks. By this arrangement the advantages of the park as a place of general recreation could be greatly extended while a large number of tax payers would be invited to the attractive places of residence which could be thus made directly accessible from, and associated with the park.

We are the more impelled to make this suggestion from having observed that a demand for such approaches and connections has of late invariably followed the construction of a park, and that the necessary expense of meeting this demand has been many fold advanced by the neglect to procure the necessary land for the purpose at the same time with that taken for the park itself. This has been the case not only in New York and Brooklyn but in London, Liverpool and Paris.

For the same reason we urge that the boundaries of the park should not at the outset be rigidly fixed, but that a reasonable latitude should be allowed in the regulation of the borders of the park, for this will probably result not only in a more satisfactory artistic arrangement, but in great benefit to the city treasury.

In conclusion we would observe that, as only a few hours were allowed us for our examination, it is quite probable that a more deliberate study of the site would lead to some modification of the lines of the diagram, and possibly would reveal important advantages which have been overlooked.

It will be observed that the sequence of the letters A, B, C, D, indicates the relative value with reference to the park, of the different pieces of land thus designated, and that this order of valuation is the reverse of that which would be adopted in estimating their value for most other purposes, or their actual market value at this time. Thus, if the purchase of the whole tract covered by the diagram should be deemed too great an undertaking, we should advise that the size of the park be cut down by throwing off so much of the more expensive class of lands as may be found necessary to bring the cost of the whole within the proper limit. It should be considered, however, that the larger the area of the park the longer will be its boundary, and the longer its boundary the greater will be the amount of land, which will be directly advanced in value by reason of its construction, and, consequently, the lighter will be
the rate of taxation per acre of park, which will fall upon the citizens generally.

Newark is so situated with reference to the harbor of New York and to the great mining and manufacturing region growing up West of it, that a park of ample dimensions, which shall compare favorably with other notable parks, cannot fail to establish in a few years a great number of tax-paying residents upon its border.

According to all precedent the mere increase in the value of land, to say nothing of the increased demand upon its merchants and mechanics which would thus occur, would much more than defray all the expenses of the undertaking.

It should not therefore escape consideration that the larger the area of the park, the greater will be the number of lots which will face upon it, the greater the number of streets which will open upon it, the greater the amount of land, the saleability of a residence upon which will be affected by it, and the more favorable will be the comparison which Newark will present with other cities and consequently the stronger its hold upon its own capitalists and its attraction upon others.

Respectfully,

Olmsted, Vaux & Co.,
Landscape Architects

The foregoing is a transcription of a manuscript in the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. The final, published version of the report has been republished, with maps and annotation, in volume 6 of the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, “The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865 - 1874,” edited by Jane Turner Censer and David Schuyler et al (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992)