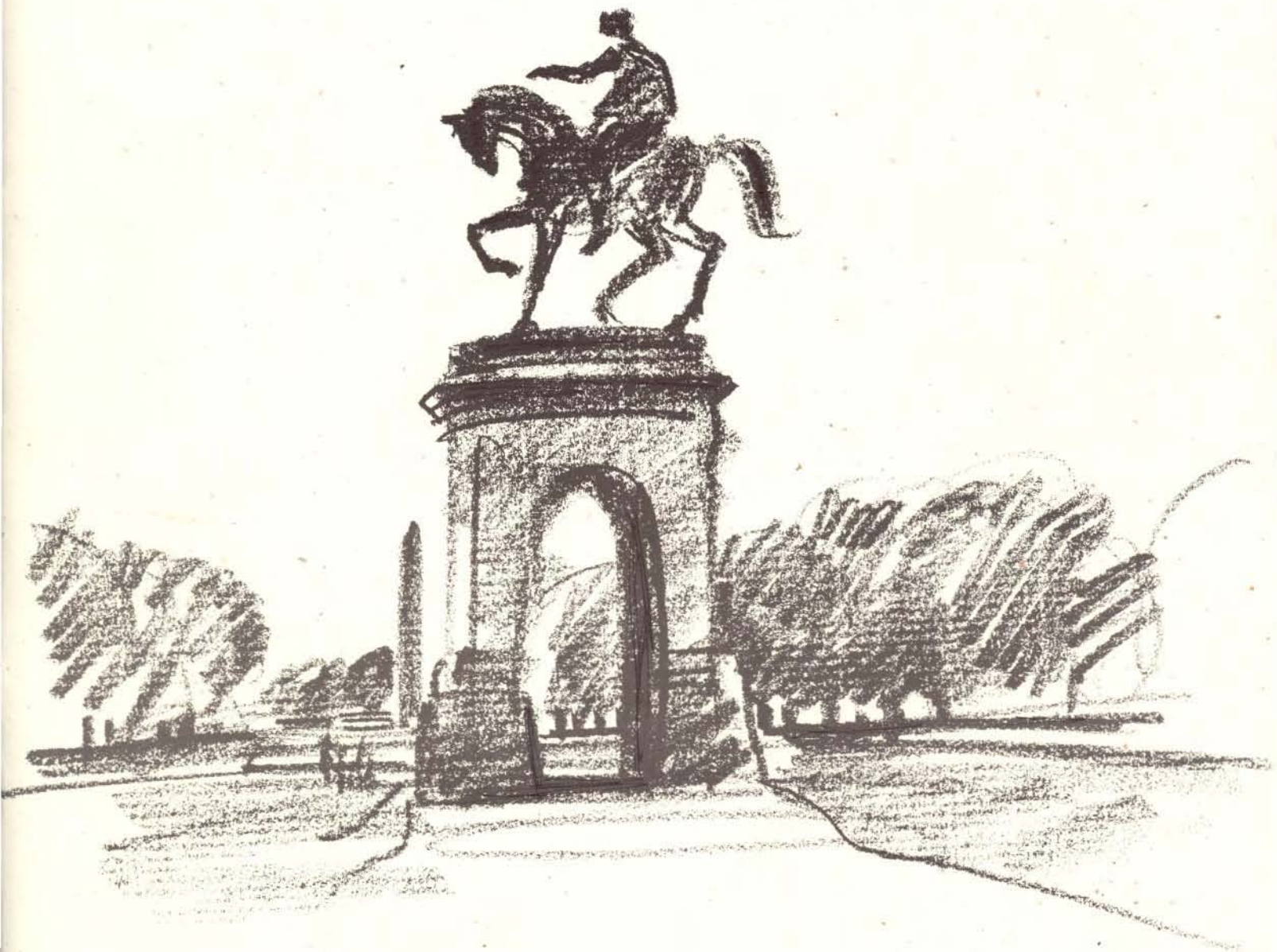


A  
Comprehensive  
Master Plan

—  
1995

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R E N E W I N G  
HERMANN PARK



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PREPARED FOR THE FRIENDS OF HERMANN PARK BY HANNA/OLIN, LTD.

# A New Leaf

Hermann Park, one of Houston's oldest and most historically significant parks, is a special place for many Houstonians and visitors to Houston. It is a cultural and recreational resource, a grand civic space, a respite for urban dwellers, and a common ground for the more than six million park users who visit the park annually. It is also a living landscape where thousands of live oaks, pines and other tree species native to Houston thrive and offer a green band that is often lacking in urban areas.

In 1993 the Friends of Hermann Park joined with the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department to commission a new master plan for the park—a plan that will enhance and preserve the best of the park, restore areas that are old or worn-out and develop under-utilized areas to provide new recreational opportunities for park visitors.

That plan is now complete. The master plan is the product not only of the Friends of Herman Park and the City but also of the many citizens who took part in the planning effort — citizens who use the park, who live near the park, who work in institutions in or near the park, who represent governmental agencies that impact the park.

The plan is far reaching yet capable of accommodating change, ambitious yet achievable. But to succeed it will need the support of all Houstonians — as supporters, as advocates for change, as users of the park and as active participants in the continued refinement of the master plan.

We have accomplished much in 18 months. We hope that the community will continue to work with us to implement the master plan so that Hermann Park can realize its full potential as one of the finest urban parks in the United States.



MAYOR BOB LANIER  
*City of Houston*



WILLIAM R. SMITH, II  
*Director, Parks and Recreation Department*



WILLIAM M. COATS  
*President, Friends of Hermann Park*



MARY ANNE PIACENTINI  
*Executive Director, Friends of Hermann Park*

---

Report prepared by Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

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Report designed by Peter Boyle/Babendure Design Group

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The master plan was funded by:

*The Brown Foundation, Inc.*  
*Exxon*  
*Ray C. Fish Foundation*  
*Houston Endowment Inc.*  
*The Samuels Foundation*  
*The Wortham Foundation*

*Travel and lodging graciously provided by*  
*Continental Airlines and the Wyndham Warwick Hotel*

*Special thanks to Gilbane Building Company for its invaluable assistance in developing the budgets for master plan projects and improvements.*

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*Acknowledgements*

This report represents the initial eight-month phase leading up to the first public presentation of the Master Plan on 17 March 1994 and additional revisions and responses which were the result of that presentation and subsequent meetings. It has been made possible by the commitment of the Friends of Hermann Park and the many supporters of the park who represent a wide spectrum of agencies and organizations, of neighbors and friends, within the community of Houston. Without their generosity and enthusiasm, this report would not have been possible. Hanna/Olin, Ltd. wishes to acknowledge and thank all who have participated in meetings and who have supplied information. A full list of all institutions and individuals consulted has been compiled and included in the appendix. However, the following have been instrumental participants and deserve special thanks:

*The Honorable and Mrs. Bob Lanier*  
*Bill Smith, Director, Houston Parks and Recreation Department*  
*The Board of Directors of the Friends of Hermann Park*  
*Mary Anne Piacentini, Executive Director, Friends of Hermann Park*

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# Master Plan for Hermann Park

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# A Vision for Hermann Park

Parks have long helped people cope with urban life. Since its inception in 1914, Hermann Park has been a green sanctuary for Houston, an enduring feature in a city characterized by rapid change. To ensure that this public arena is protected and maintained, the needs of the people who use and love the park must be considered over the pressures of development and the sub/urbanization of an ever-growing city.

The Master Plan advocates the health and future of the entire park rather than one particular piece. Its goals are to preserve, protect and nurture what is special and worthy, to mend what is broken or has begun to unravel, and to remove or relocate what has come to harm the park or impede public access. It is both a long-range and immediate action plan, coordinating current projects with those envisioned for the next decade and the coming century. The planning process has drawn on the history of Houston and the region: from the initial schemes of the 1910s and 1920s, to the needs of the modern metropolis and its diverse and growing population. The public has been consulted at length and the plan incorporates their advice and aspirations.

The vision is of a park both greener and bluer – a park you can reach with less difficulty, leave your car, and move about with ease. It depicts a sanctuary with more shade, more lawn, and more water. It will be a magical place alive with wonder and mystery – around the bend of an island in the Grand Basin, or along a shaded woodland trail – and a beautiful oasis conducive to rest and relaxation – dreaming or dozing on the Great Lawn, strolling through fragrant gardens. It will be a gathering place for families, young couples, and the elderly, where people of different circumstances feel a sense of understanding and togetherness. It can serve as a model for changing the landscape of the entire city, a place both unique and integrated.

There is unlimited potential for Hermann Park and for Houston. The philanthropy and civic pride which fostered the original gift of park land has been re-kindled with the spirit of public-private partnership embodied in this project. The agenda of the city administration has been made clear – to promote the quality of life in the city to a higher standard. The vision for Hermann Park aligns with that effort, driven by a desire for equity and justice, for beauty, and for delight both in the place and in each other's company. These should be the joys of urban life, this is the role of the urban park.

# Highlights of Master Planning Principles

## ACCESS

A reorganization of vehicular circulation and parking in Hermann Park is necessary in order to reclaim the center for public use. While cars and Houstonians are often inseparable, there remains a need for vehicular-free zones where children can play without danger, and where one can come into contact with the scents and sounds of the natural world. The intent of the Master Plan is to increase the amount of parking spaces currently available in the park by the re-distribution of new lots to the edges in order to reduce congestion caused by the concentration of parking north of the Zoo. By encouraging visitor entry from all sides and providing a comprehensive network of paths and services, the park will be populated and used more evenly .

- The Master Plan for Hermann Park promotes regional transportation improvements to encourage commuter traffic to by-pass park roads and **restores the maximum amount of park land to pedestrians** by condensing, managing, and screening the traffic which remains in the southeastern quadrant of the park.
- Visitor traffic will be encouraged to stay out of the park by **increasing opportunities to park at the edges** with smaller parking lots adjacent to the entries to park facilities. This will allow people to walk in towards a green center and explore new areas of Hermann Park.
- The **total number of parking spaces will be maintained and increased** but reorganized to provide enough to meet the average, week-day needs of the Zoo in the center of the Hermann Park. Adjacent garages and remote parking facilities, served by a shuttle connecting parking locations and park entries, will be used during weekends and for peak events.
- **A new standard for parking lot design will be set in Hermann Park**, by containing cars in tree-shaded rooms and integrating areas for parking with the fabric of the park. The total area paved for parking will be broken up, from five major lots into over thirty smaller, less obtrusive parking lots, which can be reserved as necessary for special events.



- Other types of travel in Hermann Park will be encouraged to coexist with private vehicles, by improving the number and quality of **bus shelters**, connecting roads and paths through the park to **bicycle trails**, and implementing a separate network of **bridle trails** for horseback riding which avoids areas of high pedestrian traffic.
- The **experience of walking** to and through the park will be enhanced by adding crosswalks, traffic signals, sidewalks, and gates, by maintaining a clear system of paths, to differentiate between highly-trafficked routes, secluded paths for strolling, and exploratory trails and by separating conflicting forms of transportation.

## RESTORATION

Hermann Park holds a unique place in the hearts and lives of many Houstonians. Over time, however, many elements integral to the history of the park and of Houston have been neglected or damaged. These points of contact with Houston's natural and cultural history offer a significant means for orientation, a common ground within an ever-changing city. The restoration of these historic and natural resources is crucial to safeguard the civic role of the park and to ensure continuity with the past. Each element, old or new, should be evaluated and considered in the context of the whole park, to discern which uses and requirements are of lasting value, and how they can be maintained without bowing to recent pressures and immediate constraints.

- Hermann Park will be unified by **extending the live oaks** and sidewalks of the Main Street edge to wrap and define all sides of the park. When complete, this ribbon will stretch over three miles.
- **Fenced areas in the park will be limited** to encourage easy access and community gathering, and to maintain open spaces for flexible use year-round. The amount of contiguous, usable open space in the park will increase by 94% from 90 acres to over 175 acres.
- The **civic role of Hermann Park will be celebrated** by increasing entry and activity at all edges, strengthening the connections to the immediate neighborhoods, and re-connecting the park to Brays Bayou and the regional bike trails.
- The Master Plan seeks to recapture the character of early plans for Hermann Park, where the intention was to provide the public with a green sanctuary in which to meet, play, relax, and enjoy fresh air and natural beauty. **Historic elements of these plans will be completed and rehabilitated for modern use.** These include the main entry and axis, the carriage drives, the Reflection Pool and the Grand Basin.

- The **natural processes of Hermann Park will be preserved and strengthened** for two reasons. By restoring the remaining patches of woodland which illustrate a diverse selection of canopy trees, understory plants, and wildlife, the park will represent the native diversity of the region. Secondly, by reclaiming the swale from the Grand Basin to the bayou and adding ponds through the Golf Course, the structure of the site can function to aid drainage within the park.

#### LIFE IN THE PARK

The separation of activities within a diverse landscape is a key consideration for Hermann Park to ensure that the park feels open and free to urban dwellers who seek an expanse of space and greenery. By revealing the inherent diversity of the site, with its groves of mature trees, open lawns, and woodland patches, the many individuals, families, and groups who tend to congregate near the major park institutions will be attracted to new areas in the park. Fenced enclaves will be opened up with additional entries and new facilities dispersed, thereby easing the congestion of use and services currently found in the center of the park. This expanded mantle of visitation will provide the best security patrol possible, discouraging crime with increased community activity.

- The Master Plan proposes **occupying lessor used areas of Hermann Park with new or relocated facilities**: a new Golf Clubhouse adjacent to North MacGregor, a Nature and Education Center, a woodland trail, small picnic shelters off Alameda, and a new lake across from Ben Taub with a boat rental dock and a lakeside concessions stand .
- **Existing facilities in Hermann Park are to be rehabilitated** for modern use and full access: renovating the historic picnic shelter to provide rest-rooms and concessions for the new playground, re-designing the Houston Garden Center with a building addition to meet the needs of the garden clubs, and opening the Japanese Garden with new gates and free entry.
- The restoration of Hermann Park depends on the provision of **services for all visitors**, to allow people be comfortable in the park for more than a few hours at a time. Proposals include increasing the number of concession areas from one to five, with a range of prices, settings, and menus, expanding the quantity and accessibility of public rest-rooms, and coordinating site furnishings, including lights, benches, water fountains, and picnic tables.
- **Security** in Hermann Park will be addressed by expanding the range and type of police and park rangers patrols (on foot, mountain bike, and horse-back) and by adding lights and emergency telephones throughout the park.

## STEWARDSHIP

The importance of Hermann Park's central civic role and future health can only be assured by re-considering the care of the park. The integrity of the whole park must come first in any decisions that might entail changes to its physical form. Second, a long-term and effective public-private partnership must be established to assure continued public funding and attract new institutional and commercial support. Finally, a new attitude to its day-to-day management and maintenance will be essential. This latter approach must emphasize the wise and frugal use of non-renewable resources, favor natural processes over engineered systems, and look responsibly at the off-site effects of construction in the park.

- With the adoption of the Master Plan, the first step is to create a **dedicated public-private partnership** to administer the park, which can complement the commitment of the public sector with an increase of private and institutional sponsorship. The structure of this organization could include, in addition to a full-time director, a Master Gardener to oversee Hermann Park.
- An **Advisory Board** of neighbors, institutions, and community organizations will be assembled, to consult on decisions made within Hermann Park and to defend park land from any further encroachments or development pressures.
- **Management and maintenance** in Hermann Park will be coordinated, by compiling a data-base of park information, by holding monthly staff meetings to increase the sense of pride in working in the park, and to establish a system of observation and response to immediate problems.
- The management team will be involved in the development of **maintenance standards** which will limit the extent of areas in the park which require intensive maintenance, and emphasize principles of low-maintenance design and management as appropriate.
- An important goal for the stewardship of Hermann Park is to promote **community outreach**, particularly with the education of children, and instill a sense of responsibility and awareness which extends into the next generation. Volunteer days and events in the park, as well as partnerships with the Zoo, Museum of Natural Science, and the Children's Museum, can reinforce lessons about nature, native habitat, and the history of Houston.

# Preface

## **ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY**

The Friends of Hermann Park is an amalgamation of several earlier groups of neighbors and citizens interested in the health and future of Hermann Park. Since undertaking its first project in 1990, the Friends have been governed by a thirty-five member Board of Directors who represent a diverse cross-section of Houston's population. The membership and number of donors have also grown, with over 800 'Friends' active in planning for the future of the park and the conservation of this civic arena.

Completed projects, such as the addition of lights to the jogging trail and the restoration of the Mecom Rockwell Fountain, have been of immediate benefit to many park users. In conjunction with the Rice Design Alliance and the City

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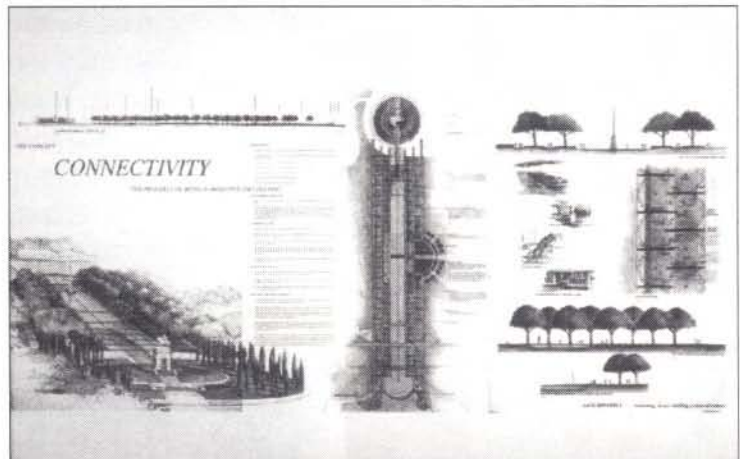
*“The Friends of Hermann Park is a non-profit citizens’ organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of one of Houston’s oldest and most historically significant public greenspaces. Its goals are to preserve the integrity of Hermann Park, enrich its heritage as a unique landmark, and transform it into one of the nation’s premier urban parks.”*

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of Houston Parks and Recreation Department, the Friends of Hermann Park sponsored a competition in 1992 which focused on the Reflection Pool and the main northern entrance to the park. The 'Heart of the Park' competition generated a tremendous response from the local community and designers nationwide.

The process of selecting a winning entry highlighted the ambitious scope of this design competition and revealed larger issues which are a problem in Hermann Park: the gradual erosion of park boundaries, the increase of traffic to and through the park, and a decline in the health of both vegetation and facilities. The need to consider the future of the whole park in a coordinated fashion became obvious. Encouraged by the success of the competition, the Friends and their supporters decided that a comprehensive master planning process would be the primary focus of their efforts.

With the March 1993 appointment of an Executive Director to lead the Friends of Hermann Park in these plans, the organization expanded its focus to the long-term, while continuing to organize events such as a day of tree-planting and to coordinate with both the Parks and Recreation Department and the Houston Parks Board on other park projects. By April, the Planning Committee had defined the scope of the Master Plan as one which would develop a vision for the park using its historic plans as a starting point and establish a set of principles to direct future development. Understanding that a successful and viable plan would result from widespread dialogue with the park's neighbors, the Friends of Hermann Park considered community consultation to be an essential component of this process from its inception.



#### Heart of the Park Design Competition

The design competition for the Heart of the Park attracted more than 100 entries from 23 states. Houston firm Melton Henry / Maurice Robison in conjunction with Peter Brown, Scott Slaney, and Steve Harding won first place. Their scheme focused on the theme of connectivity by extending the Reflection Pool to meet the Grand Basin, while doubling the rows of Live Oak flanking the pond and providing a series of parallel paths with low seating walls.

Photo courtesy Rice Design Alliance

### PROCESS OF ANALYSIS AND CONSULTATION

Guided by this directive, Hanna/Olin, Ltd. of Philadelphia was commissioned to begin work for the Friends of Hermann Park in August 1993. The process of defining a vision for Hermann Park began with information gathering and analysis. The study of site conditions was extended to include the regional context of the park, from adjacent neighborhoods to the urban structure, since many of the users and activities which enliven the park, as well as those forces which detract from the park's integrity, originate off-site. Each category for analysis was extended to the scale appropriate to develop a full range of solutions.

The Friends of Hermann Park and Hanna/Olin, Ltd., have pursued a two-faceted approach throughout the planning study. While gathering and analyz-

ing data about the park and the region - reports, maps, traffic counts, site information - an equal amount of time has been spent meeting with representatives of institutions, community organizations, municipal and county officials, and, perhaps most important, individuals who use and love Hermann Park. With the hope that the greatest advocates would be those who use the park and who would benefit directly from improvements, the goal of the master planning process has been to seek insight, consensus, and support at all stages.

The process of research, listening and learning has built a base for the master plan, and made it possible to offer proposals which reflect consultation, cooperation, and commitment from both individuals and organizations. In order for Hermann Park to be a place for all people, the citizens have been, and should continue to be consulted at all stages. The responses and comments received in the past twelve months have been incorporated to refine the conceptual scheme and to enrich the report.

The challenge of soliciting this rich, yet seemingly endless, stream of data and opinion is to order and then assign priorities to information. Certain ideas served as a lens through which to focus both the early phases of analysis and preliminary schematic development and shape the design of the conceptual plan for Hermann Park. Other strategies for systems, management, and maintenance may apply to the whole park or be useful for specific areas or details.

#### MASTER PLAN REPORT

The goals of the Master Plan are to outline ways to reconcile conflicting demands and expectations, to unify the pieces physically and socially into a coherent entity, and to facilitate maximum access and use while protecting the



Photo of Bill Smith, Director of the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and Laurie Olin, Hanna/Olin, Ltd., at the First Community Meeting in the Garden Center

*The process of public consultation began in September of 1993. The Community Advisory Committee represented institutions and community groups from Houston and the immediate neighborhood of Hermann Park. The Technical Advisory Committee comprised representatives from institutional, municipal, county, and state agencies, whose knowledge of Hermann Park and Houston was instrumental in the formulation of a vision for the park. The goals were to open the planning process at all stages, to solicit advice, and to find practical solutions to the problems which face Hermann Park.*

*Comments and responses were helpful in identifying issues of greatest concern. At the first public presentation of the Preliminary Master Plan, a questionnaire about the ideas shown in that plan was distributed to the 300 audience members. Responses formed the basis for revisions to the preliminary scheme. The process of soliciting community opinion continues as recommendations of the Master Plan are implemented and as individual projects are debated and reviewed.*

Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

fragile natural resources of the Park for the enjoyment of future generations. The phrase "master plan" bears the unfortunate implications of control and finality, whereas one might seek to describe the qualities of an ideal "master" as one who is wise yet flexible, who shows both sympathy and responsibility in leadership. This Master Plan is not intended as an immutable map of the future, but as a framework for decision-making as the park and Houston meet the challenges presented by urban growth and change. It is intended to serve as a flexible instrument of park development and a guide for those who work in Hermann Park every day.

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*Ultimately, the Master Plan must be read and reviewed as both a document and an on-going process. In essence, it is a responsive catalyst that engages the community and creates momentum to translate their aspirations for the park into physical form long after City agencies, the Friends and Park leadership, and teams of consultants have completed this planning phase.*

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The Master Plan described in this report is an overall conception for Hermann Park comprised of individual projects which can be designed and implemented independently as funding is made available. These projects are coordinated to shape the rehabilitated whole. It is a conceptual design and a set of management guidelines. It outlines strategies for phasing and implementation. In principle, each project must consider those elements which form a park-wide network of services and the common details which reappear in other places. No project, from the replacement of garbage cans to the rehabilitation of an historic structure, can be considered in isolation.

# Narrative

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*“The intense activity of city life and the increasingly artificial conditions under which its citizens live make more and more essential the introduction into daily life of recreation, – the complete change and relaxation for tired nerves afforded by play and the appeal to nature.”*

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Arthur Coleman Comey, Houston, *Tentative Plans for its Development, Report to the Houston Park Commission* (Boston, 1913), p. 8.



## THE ROLE OF HERMANN PARK IN HOUSTON

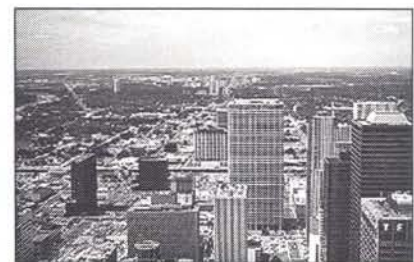
The wooded site for what is now Hermann Park was mentioned in Houston's first city planning study, published in 1913 by Arthur Coleman Comey, the landscape architect consulting to the newly-appointed Board of Park Commissioners. At the turn of the century, the region southwest of central Houston was a broad and open coastal prairie, relieved only by this tract of pines and marked by the verdant line of Brays Bayou. Comey's notion that a significant park should be an essential element for this young city was influenced by the growth of other American cities: New York, Boston, and Chicago. It was visionary, however, to project that urban development would quickly spread south and beyond the fashionable district of Main Street.<sup>1</sup> The identification of this particular site was a grand and astute gesture of this early planning document.

Today, Hermann Park is bordered by institutions and neighborhoods which are a microcosm of Houston: gracious residential enclaves and mixed city neighborhoods adjoin vibrant institutions of education and culture, and a health care center which rivals the Central Business District in size, work force, and service demands. With its diverse neighbors, accessibility from the regional transportation network, and proximity to the central business district, Hermann Park holds a unique position in Houston's system of urban parks. It is dearly loved and intensely used by citizens and visitors alike, to whom the expansive growth of Houston is still recent history, and for many of whom the green and shaded sanctuary of the park holds a special place in childhood memory.

Hermann Park embodies the character of the city's past, when private benefactors and city administrators had the foresight to conceive a grand city plan. It is also a text for the present, where pressures of development and technology have slowly eroded or overshadowed the integrity of that original conception. To meet the needs of the next century, we are called on to envision, to recall the intentions of the earliest plans for Houston, to recognize the role of this significant urban park in those plans, and to discuss the means by which public and private entities can collaborate to enhance the quality of life and civic pride in Houston.

## PARKS IN HOUSTON, PAST AND PRESENT

The story of Hermann Park is firmly rooted in that of Houston and the remarkable transformation of this city, from a rough-and-ready inland trade center of the 1830s to the metropolis it is today, the fourth largest in our nation. Downtown Houston exhibits a high density of development and fulfills a grand realization of the earliest vision of the city. Founded on 30 August 1836, the city served as capital of the Republic of Texas and the seat of Harris County. Named for the popular "Hero of San Jacinto," Houston was advertised as the location "which must ever command the trade of the largest and richest portion of (the state), making it, beyond all doubt, the greatest



Houston's Central Business District, 1993



Aerial view of Hermann Park, 1992.

Photo Courtesy LandisCor, Inc.

interior commercial emporium of Texas.”<sup>2</sup> True to this prediction, recent reports confirm that Texas now rivals New York state in population, and the diversified economy is drawing new residents every day.<sup>3</sup>

The density of building and pavement which has spread across Harris County has engendered a host of changes to the native and human environments. Within the urban fabric, isolated fragments of native woodland continue to shrink and remain threatened by development. Much of the network of bayous, home to native communities of plants and wildlife, has been paved in an effort to provide flood protection. The inevitable decline and loss of mature trees over the past century was exacerbated by Hurricane Alicia in 1983. As made evident by both public and private tree-planting initiatives, Houston

has become increasingly concerned with the transformation of its historic image – from the gracious “Bayou City” into a high-tech industrial mecca.

## Landscape of Houston

Houston is situated on a broad and flat coastal plain, the surface of a vast wedge of sediment resulting from 60 million years of erosion and deposition. The rivers which run southeasterly across Texas have carried successive loads of gravel, silt, and sand from as far away as the Rocky Mountains, and the resultant wedge is estimated to be as much as 40,000 feet thick. The rich organic matter trapped within the mud layers was the source of the oil and gas fields of east Texas, tapped and put into production at the turn of the century.

As the sediment deposition at the mouths of the rivers increased, the sea level began to rise with the decline of the Ice Age approximately 18,000 years ago. The Gulf coast shoreline has since receded as much as fifty miles, while the actions of waves and wind have sculpted the submerged, sandy shelf into the barrier islands and bays charted today. Houston is far enough inland to avoid the volatile weather patterns of the open water, and out of the range of most Gulf coast hurricanes. Because of its comparatively stable climate, the Houston Ship Channel, which extends Buffalo Bayou at a navigable depth to meet the coast, was dredged in 1914 to provide safe harbor for ocean-going vessels.

The sediment wedge on which Houston rests is subject to subsidence from several causes: the natural compaction of the silt and clay soils which slump along various fault lines city-wide, and an acceleration of subsidence due to the

depletion of the aquifer and from oil and gas extraction. The causes which have accelerated sinking have been under scrutiny since the 1960s, and Houston continues to monitor its use of these natural resources. A result of this process, which affects the environs of Hermann Park, is the increased susceptibility of subsided areas to severe flooding during brief periods of concentrated rainfall. Certain regions within the city have subsided as much as six feet and flooding in the streets is commonplace. |

Within the city, these layers of rich silts and clays can still be read on the surface in the lush, semi-tropical vegetation. Early travelers up Buffalo Bayou bound for Harrisburg, which predated the founding of Houston, were struck by

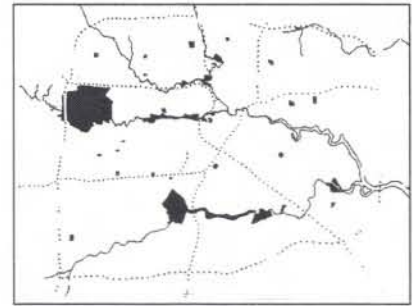


Buffalo Bayou, 1912

Photo Courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

With advancements in technology and transportation, the structure of the landscape and the systems essential to the early growth of Houston have been neglected, while artificial systems, engineered to solve the problems which accompany urban growth, have been favored in their place. For example, while the purpose of the 1950s bayou channeling was clear, the true source of flooding, an increase of paved surfaces which quickens runoff, was not challenged. The watersheds of Houston's bayous have become increasingly developed, but the concrete channels implemented in the last generation can no longer supply the degree of flood protection for which they were designed.

Given the fast pace of urban growth in Houston and its strengthening economy, it may have been difficult to anticipate the long-term effects of lost woodland within and at the edges of the city. Although Houston has adopted a series of piecemeal land-use ordinances, the recent defeat of the Planning and Zoning Commission's recommendations continues the established history: maintaining individual property rights instead of regulating growth to levels compatible with the regional landscape and engineered infrastructure. There have been few barriers, legal or physical, to hinder urban development. As the urban fab-



Parks in metropolitan Houston

an abundance of majestic trees – in particular the ever-green Southern Magnolias which flowered in late spring, Sycamores, and graceful Cypresses with knees protruding above the water's edge. The banks of the bayous were dense with mature canopy trees: oaks, birch, sweetgum, and walnut, under which grew an understory of flowering trees and shrubs.

Buffalo Bayou was the main route between Houston and the Gulf of Mexico – fifty miles east-southeast at Galveston Bay. The landscape of Houston can be described in relation to this main watercourse, which serves to demarcate a change in the soils and vegetation. The region north of Buffalo Bayou was characterized by sandier soils, and an upland forest of mixed hardwoods and evergreens, which flourished close to Gulf coast weather patterns. South of the bayou the soils were of a less permeable, clay formation, where a tall-grass prairie extended both east and south towards Mexico. In springtime, these prairies were rich with blooming wildflowers, an enduring characteristic of the Texas landscape.<sup>2</sup> The tall-grass prairie was interrupted by the wooded streambeds of Sims and Brays bay-

ous, and occasional stands of taller trees growing in areas with richer soils.

Characterized by just such a grove, Hermann Park is situated between the mixed forests north of Buffalo Bayou and the coastal plains to the south. The Houston region was transformed by logging, as timber was a valuable resource for early settlers, and sawmills dotted Houston by the end of the nineteenth century. Following the logging of the original forest, the second growth timber was primarily slash or loblolly pine. Woodland patches in Hermann Park illustrate several association groups indigenous to the Houston landscape: mature pine groves, mixed upland forests of pine and oaks, drier post oak savannas, and intermixed riparian forests along the stream corridors, characterized by elms, ash, willow and water oaks, and sweetgums.



Forest east of Rice Institute, 1912

Photo Courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

<sup>1</sup> Darwin Spearing, *Roadside Geology of Texas*, (Missoula, 1991), p. 11-68.

<sup>2</sup> Sadie Gwin Blackburn, "Evolution of the Houston Landscape," *Houston's Forgotten Heritage: Landscape, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1914*, (Houston, 1991), p. 13-25.

ric continues to expand and the city's engineered systems reach capacity or falter, it is appropriate to question further encroachment on green, open areas and to challenge the addition of pavement on park land in particular.

More immediate, however, is the knowledge that the quality of life in the city is enhanced and maintained by the availability of green sanctuaries. Urban dwellers need the opportunity to breathe fresh air, to come into contact with nature, and to re-affirm their connections with each other and their community. The preservation and restoration of Houston's greenways and the existence of urban parks of all scales is crucial to the health of both this city and her citizens.

#### THE HISTORY OF HERMANN PARK

In 1910, during his third term as Mayor, H. Baldwin Rice appointed a three-member Board of Park Commissioners to advise his administration on the acquisition and maintenance of park properties. As their first step, the Park Commission appointed a Massachusetts-based "consultant on city planning" to

### Parks in the City

Parks have long helped people to cope with urban life. In terms of their uses and elements, parks such as Hermann Park reached their current form in the mid-nineteenth century. The lakes and lawns, belts of trees, curving walks and drives, the carousels and pleasure rides, the cafes, casinos, and theaters – these were the things that constituted the urban playgrounds for populations in Berlin, London, Paris, and New York. The establishment of Hermann Park, modeled after parks in older, established cities, came at the end of the great construction boom for large urban parks in this country.

The role of these great parks was to provide an outdoor environment where different social classes could mingle peacefully, and in doing so, take in fresh air for the improvement of their health. Here citizens could step into a green environment to re-establish their connection to nature and the cycles of the earth. Parks offered a change of air and scene, a place to affirm a sense of community. They played a role in civilizing and providing a pleasant environment for people, many of them recent immigrants, who worked long and hard in unpleasant, even dangerous, environments. Put simply, parks were intended to help overcome some of the ills of urban life and its scene.

These traditional goals and uses are as valid today as they were one hundred years ago, despite the changing demands of an increasingly modern and complex society. An urban population will always need fresh air and contact with nature, to enjoy the change of seasons, however extreme.

People continue to need and desire places to meet out-of-doors and take pleasure in each other's presence. Parks can and do foster positive values and help to establish a sense of community.

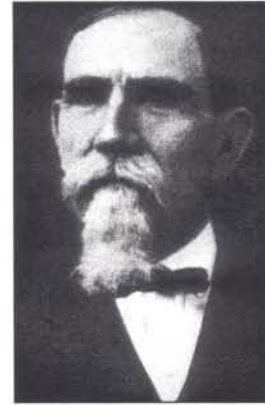
In this age of such massive suburban development, middle-class affluence, and high-speed travel, where it is possible to live out of the city, some have recently asserted that urban parks have lost their original purpose. The response to this criticism is that not every one is affluent, or lives in the suburbs and can travel at will. Even among those who are not living in poverty, there are large numbers of elderly and young for whom such travel is impossible. For them, their arena for outdoor experience and recreation is limited to the environment of their dwelling and neighborhood parks.

In a recent study conducted by Pennsylvania State University, social scientists in several cities discovered that urban parks are not exclusively the domain of the urban poor, but are heavily used by the well-to-do and middle classes as well. By some democratic alchemy, the mix in parks is still very much like that sought after and achieved in the nineteenth century. The aspects of nature and community which have given parks beauty and value for centuries are qualities which can neither be underestimated nor considered outdated.

George Hermann, donor of Hermann Park, traveled extensively in Europe in 1885 and 1886. Much impressed with the scenery of Switzerland and Germany, he also visited a number of large parks in European cities. Although his journal describes these scenic and cultural resources only

complete a study of local conditions for both park planning and civic development. For the site of a new urban park, Arthur Coleman Comey's report of 1913 favored a site along Brays Bayou, where industrialist and real estate investor George H. Hermann (one of the three Park Commissioners) owned substantial acreage.<sup>4</sup> In his will, witnessed November 1910, Hermann already had decided to bequeath to the city several hundred acres of land "to be used as a Public Park and to be known and called 'the George Hermann Park.'"<sup>5</sup> When this intention was made public in the spring of 1914, and 285 acres were transferred to the city, Houston celebrated the occasion with a public ceremony and awarded the donor with "the highest order of citizenship."

At the time of the deed transfer, the western border of Hermann Park was defined by an extension of LaBranch Street, and the main entrance to the park was located along this proposed boulevard, facing the new Rice Institute. Laid out (following a scheme by Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson) on an essentially open site at the prairie's edge, the Rice Institute was Houston's first example of "city beautiful" planning, where the buildings, landscape, and roads had been conceived in a single, coordinated vision. This campus set the stage for new

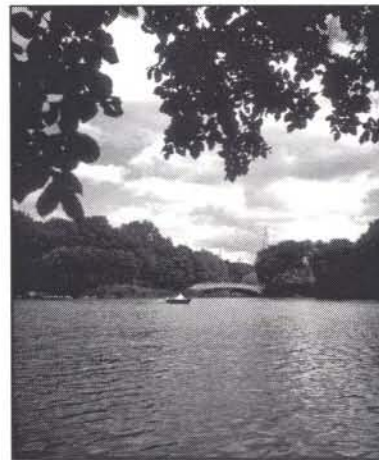


**George H. Hermann**  
Photo Courtesy of Houston Metropolitan  
Research Center, Houston Public Library



briefly, one might imagine that his exposure to these established parks inspired him to gift park land to his home city. Hermann did write more extensively of Central Park, which he visited prior to sailing for Europe.

*"(Central Park) has 848 acres of land in it. Entrance(s) all around, (one) can get in a cab for twenty-five cents by waiting a little until they get a load then drive around on the principle Ave(enu)ue...they have nice walks all round fine stone and iron bridges and cuts walled off with stone caves in the rocks...nice flowers and a variety of trees just a budding...also nice big lawns for the schoolboys to play ball & all kinds of fowls on them also 2 lakes with geese ducks cranes swans in them & boats for people to ride around the lake...one lake has 40 acres in it they have 3 big reservoirs in the Park which supplies the City with water..." (Diaries of George H. Hermann, Hermann Hospital Archives)*



**Central Park**  
Photos: Richard Newton

Hermann was obviously struck by both the variety of scenery and the activities available in Central Park in 1885. Ironically, recent studies (for example, one done by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, Park Administrator for Central Park) have

shown that most people in parks really aren't doing very much. Very few, if any, are engaged in strenuous sports. Most are just sitting, lying, or walking about, resting, reading, napping, eating, and watching other people. It is not hard to see why. Most of us spend our days in architectural interiors with limited dimensions and proportions, rectangular spaces of varying color but with fixed focal lengths to our views - all day long, all week. We relish the chance to go outdoors and see a wealth of colors and textures, leaves and trees, water moving into waves from the wind, the variety of distances great and small, and to see light and shade move about under trees and across diverse topography. These phenomena are indeed a respite and tonic for our bodies and nervous systems.



**Plat of Hermann Park, 1912**  
Photo Courtesy Houston Daily Post, June 7 1914

*"George Hermann was a benefactor for Houston in so many ways...the main park, the hospital, Hermann Square in front of City Hall, and so on...I just wish I had the wherewithal to help my city the way he did. Anyhow, I have always felt a kinship with him. We care, too."*

(Letter to Laurie Olin from Houstonian D. E., after the first community meeting at the Garden Center, 29 September, 1993)

development along south Main Street, and a 1914 map of Hermann's gift even suggested that the land between the park and Rice could be developed as residential blocks. For this ambitious vision of civic beautification, Hermann collaborated with city engineer John W. Maxcey on the first design for the park.

When George H. Hermann, bachelor and benefactor, died in October 1914, he left as his legacy public institutions which have shaped the development of Houston. Hermann Park, Hermann Square at City Hall, and Hermann Hospital (in whose trust lay the bulk of his estate dedicated for the care "of the indigent, sick, and infirm of the City of Houston") all bolstered the image of a city which was taking conscious steps towards civic planning. The vision characterized by Hermann's bequests to the public was continued by Mayor Ben Campbell, who in 1915 engineered the City of Houston's purchase of an additional 122.5 acres of park land from the Hermann Estate. This tract, which extended Hermann Park west to meet Main Street, expanded the potential scope of the park to such a degree that the Board of Park Commissioners decided to discard Maxcey's plan and to commission an outside consultant of their own.

## Early Park Development 1913-1915



**Arthur Coleman  
Comey's Park  
System for the City  
of Houston, 1912**

Comey's "skeleton plan" shows parks along the bayous, connected by parks or boulevards. He envisioned parks which would serve a variety of functions: playgrounds, recreations centers, city squares, and local parks. He identified the need for "at least one large forest park" which he referred to as 'Pines Park,' "south of the city and east of Main Street, where there is a fine stand of pine woods extending to Brays Bayou."

(Arthur Coleman Comey, *Houston, Tentative Plans for its Development*, Boston, 1913, pages 8-38)

In his report to the Houston Park Commission, landscape architect Arthur Coleman Comey addressed the need for a comprehensive park system. "Houston is far behind other progressive cities in certain respects, notably in its park system, and should act at once to remedy these conditions." He recommended one acre of park land for every 110 inhabitants, to be organized as follows: "The backbone of a park system for Houston will naturally be its bayou or creek valleys, which readily lend themselves to (become parks) and cannot advantageously be used for any other purpose. These valleys intersect the city and surrounding country in such a way as to furnish opportunity for parks of unusual value within a comparatively short distance of most of the residential areas, including those of the future as well as the present."

The citizens of Houston were deeply moved when George Hermann announced that he intended to donate 285 acres to the city for the creation of a municipal



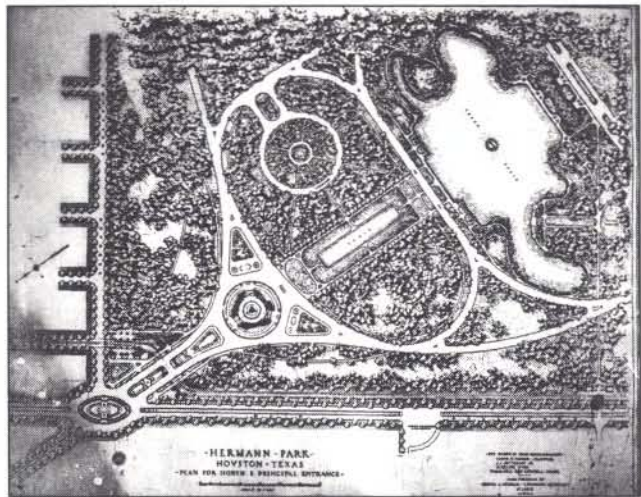
**Ceremony to Honor Hermann , 7 June 1914**  
Photo Courtesy of Houston Chronicle 6.13.14



George E. Kessler  
Photo Courtesy of Fondren  
Library, Rice University

George E. Kessler, landscape architect, had gained a reputation based on his work designing and engineering park systems in cities throughout the midwest: Kansas City, Toledo, St. Louis, Memphis, and Cincinnati. It may have been his work in nearby Dallas and Fort Worth (1907-1910) which attracted the attention of the Park Commissioners, for Kessler was

appointed as their consultant in 1915. His only surviving drawing of this scheme, dated 1916, focuses on the north and principal entrance, with an elliptical Sunken Garden to resolve the diagonal geometry between Main Boulevard and Montrose Boulevard, and a strong axis extended from the line of Montrose into the park. This Montrose axis formed the principal armature of the plan. At the north end, carriage drives diverged at a monumental circle, a reflection pool flanked by trees ran the length of the axis, and at its south end was the



Plan for North and Principle Entrance,  
Hermann Park, Houston, Texas, 1916  
George E. Kessler, Landscape Architect  
Drawing courtesy of the Metropolitan Research  
Center, Houston Public Library

park. City officials quickly organized a ceremony, attended by "several thousand citizens." Hermann, a reticent man uncomfortable with public speaking, arrived on stage with the deed to the park property in hand, and gave a brief address about his life and upbringing.

Speeches honoring Hermann reflected a city-wide sense of pride. "We have a few scattered spasmodic spots in the city, but until this good minute we have not had what we call a real park," spoke Mayor Ben Campbell. "It gives us an opportunity to develop the civic pride that has been dormant for so long. It will give us a place to go and spend the evenings or the days pleasantly."

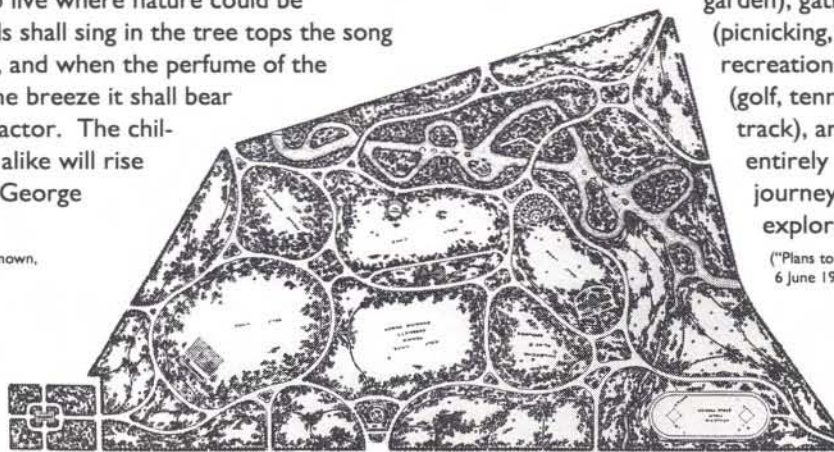
A subsequent speaker was more lyrical in his vision of the future. "It is not enough that we have a commercial city. God meant for men to live where nature could be found....When the birds shall sing in the tree tops the song shall breathe his name, and when the perfume of the flowers is wafted on the breeze it shall bear the name of this benefactor. The children and the veterans alike will rise up and say 'God bless George Hermann.'"

(The Houston Chronicle, author unknown,  
8 June 1914, page 11)

John C. Maxcey, city engineer, declared "it will be my greatest desire and pleasure to make both a useful and ornamental park...and to make it a pleasure and health resort for the rich and poor." The plan included a number of oval meadows containing both a golf course and athletic fields, and defined by a sinuous network of carriage drives. Brays Bayou was depicted as a major feature in the park, enhanced by new channels and islands crossing the original watercourse, to provide a wooded contrast to the roads and open meadows to the north.

Although this plan was never implemented, it is important to recognize the intentions of the donor, who collaborated with Maxcey on the design. The program included the following: a grand civic promenade along LaBranch, new civic institutions (conservatory, zoological garden), gathering in the meadows (picnicking, children's play), active recreation in the designated fields (golf, tennis, croquet, bowling, track), and the means to take an entirely different and mysterious journey beside or on the bayou, exploring hidden waterways.

("Plans to Beautify the Park", Houston Daily Post,  
6 June 1914, p. 14)



J.C. Maxcey Plan for  
Hermann Park, 1914

Photo Courtesy of the  
Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library

Grand Basin. The axis was terminated by a glass conservatory at the far side of the lake. In the predominantly wooded site, the plan included features such as a music pavilion tucked away from the main carriage road within groves of trees.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Main Boulevard was Houston's most fashionable residential district. A popular activity among residents of its large mansions, most of which were surrounded by ornamental gardens, was the tradition of carriage driving towards Hermann's woods and on to Brays Bayou.<sup>6</sup> The experience of driving or riding through the pines, enjoyed throughout his life by George Hermann, formed the basis for Kessler's scheme for carriage drives in the park, on roads designed primarily for the purpose of driving for pleasure and taking in the scenery. Kessler later completed a preliminary plan of a more comprehensive park system for Houston, which explores a boulevard connection from Hermann Park north towards Buffalo Bayou. At the time of this drawing, Brays Bayou was well beyond the limits of the city, and Hermann Park appears as more of a destination park at the edge of town than as a neighborhood amenity.

## Adjacent Land Use

### A Museum District and Commercial

With the Museum of Natural Science located in Hermann Park, the area to the north of the park is the center of Houston's growing Museum District, which includes the Museum of Fine Arts, the Contemporary Arts Museum, the Children's Museum, the Harris County Museum of Medical Science (under construction), the Cullen Sculpture Garden, the Glassell School of Art, and, to the west, the Menil Collection. The Museum District is framed by a zone of mixed-use, with residential streets, small office buildings, Park Plaza Hospital, and commercial buildings along Montrose and Main Street.

### B Residential Neighborhoods:

Hermann Park is bordered in several directions by residential neighborhoods, each with a distinctive character and history.

Shadyside (B-1), to the northwest, is an exclusive, deed-restricted neighborhood developed in 1916 by J.S. Cullinan, who had purchased 37 acres from the Hermann Estate. Shadyside was designed by George E. Kessler, at the same time that the landscape architect was working on Hermann Park.

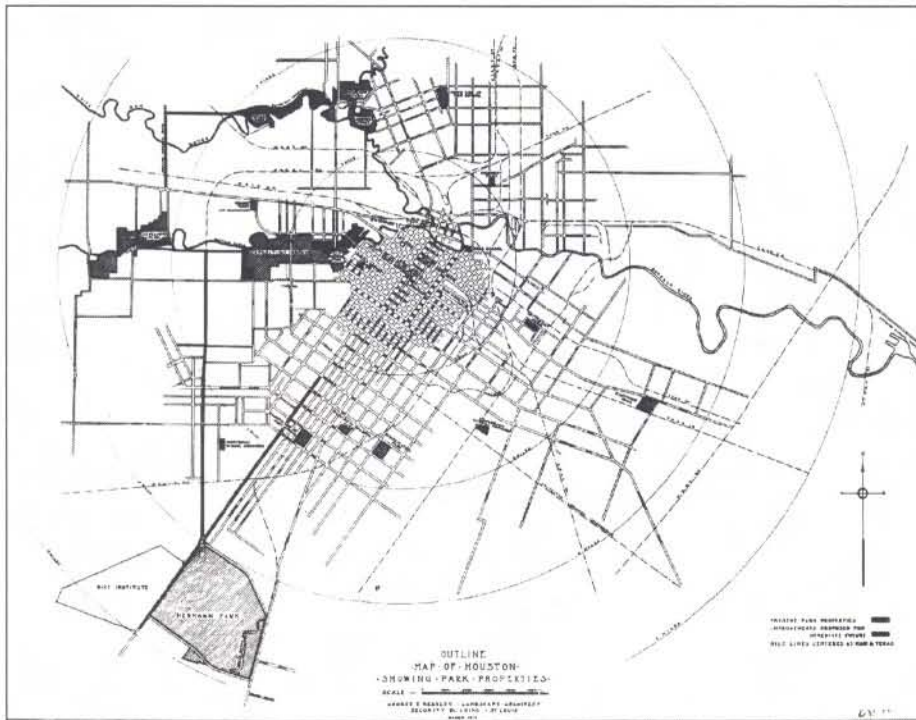
Bordering the park on Hermann Drive, and extending to the northeast of Fannin, is Southmore (B-2), a quiet, family-oriented neighborhood with a mixed population. While the Hermann Drive edge is characterized by several apartment towers, Southmore has predominantly single and multi-family dwellings and is facing gentrification.

To the south, between Brays Bayou and the Veteran's Hospital, Devonshire Place (B-3) is a small deed-restricted neighborhood, planned by Hare and Hare of Kansas City, Kessler's successor for the design of Hermann Park. Central City (B-4), to the southwest along Almeda, is surrounded and heavily effected by a light-industrial and warehouse district. Portions of Central City, particularly the area south of South MacGregor, has suffered tremendously from the addition of State Highway 288 to the east.

### C Rice University

The Rice Institute, inaugurated in 1912, was made possible in part by George Hermann's 1908 sale of 76 acres of land, which helped to shape the 280 acre campus. Laid out by Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson, this was Houston's first example of large-scale civic planning. Today home to students of the arts and sciences, Rice has grown with a series of new buildings which respect the original site plan and architectural character, and is remarkable for its fine architecture and its mature landscape, an oasis of dappled shade and greenswards.

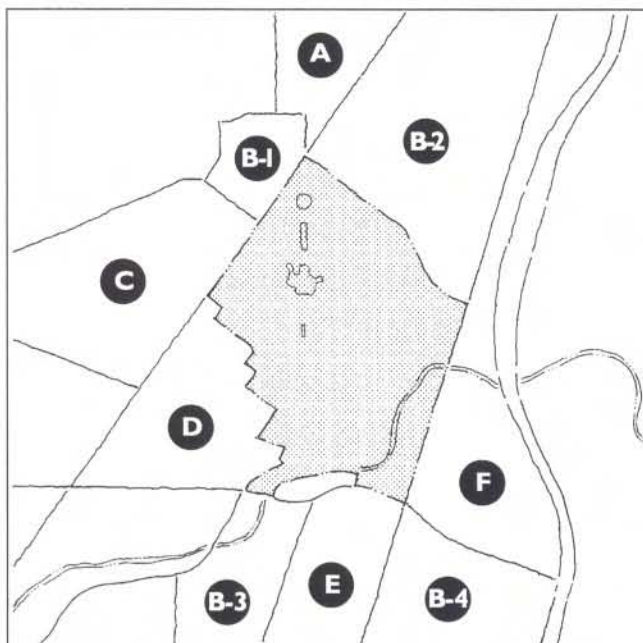




**Outline Map of Houston Showing Park Properties, George E. Kessler, 1917**

*Kessler's vision for a comprehensive park system in Houston was similar to that of his predecessor in civic planning, Arthur Coleman Comey, as well as to his own work for park systems in Kansas City and Dallas. His plan illustrates both urban connections, with boulevards and small parks as features within the developing grid, and parkway connections, with larger parks sited along the bayous. Hermann Park forms the significant anchor in this preliminary scheme, its borders defined by an irregular shift in the urban grids, and employs Montrose Boulevard as the strong northward link to the east/west series of parks proposed along Buffalo Bayou. Kessler's scheme focuses on the relationship between Hermann Park and downtown Houston, and explores the notion of Main Boulevard as a direct connection.*

Map courtesy of the Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library



**D The Texas Medical Center**

Incorporated in 1945, the Texas Medical Center is now the dominant economic force in the entire South Main region, with nearly 55,000 employees in 1993 and over three million patient visits per year. The Medical Center began on a 145-acre tract, much of which had been bought from Will

C. Hogg by the City for park land, and was sold in 1943. The TMC now occupies 670 acres in Houston, with 42 institutions housed in over 100 buildings. Originally conceived as a series of detached hospitals set within a park, the ever-growing demands of the automobile and modern health-care institutions have transformed the wooded tract into a high-density urban campus not unlike Houston's central business district.

**E Veterans Administration Hospital**

Originally the U.S. Naval Hospital, the Veterans Administration Hospital is now part of the Texas Medical Center complex, one of the largest individual hospitals south of the Park.

**F Institutions to the East along Almeda**

Across Almeda to the east of Hermann Park is a significant amount of open land, some of which is currently for sale: for example, the site of St. Anthony's Center, now vacant.

Demographic and descriptive information courtesy of South Main Area Profile, Houston, Texas, by Rice Center and the South Main Center Association, 1988.

These early phases of park planning were the result of a strong economy, for Houston was booming at the turn of the century. The growth of the three principal industries, oil, timber, and cotton, engendered an extensive transportation system to facilitate the movement of goods to market. Houston was situated to intercept the flow of raw materials from all of Texas and part of Oklahoma, and to refine, package, and ship them to national and international markets.<sup>7</sup> The development of Hermann Park coincided with this commercial growth. The early phases of its construction included layout of the carriage drives, excavation of the reflection pond, construction of the Picnic Shelter, and planting of the double row of live oaks which line Main Boulevard.<sup>8</sup>

The country's involvement in World War I shifted the attention of the city and her industrial largess. The exhaustion of the 1914 bond issue (in August of 1917) halted construction on Hermann Park and other civic projects citywide.

George E. Kessler, intensely active in both the public and private sectors during the war, changed the focus of his own work away from park systems to city planning for the modern, increasingly automotive, world.<sup>9</sup> His 1922 alliance with the landscape architectural firm of Hare and Hare of Kansas City was a timely one, for they assumed a number of Kessler's commissions after his death in 1923. Hare and Hare were retained by Houston's Board of Park Commissioners as Kessler's obvious replacement.

By 1922, the City of Houston, under the tenure of Mayor Oscar F. Holcombe, once again addressed comprehensive planning with the creation of a City Planning Commission, which in 1924 appointed Hare and Hare of Kansas City as consultants.

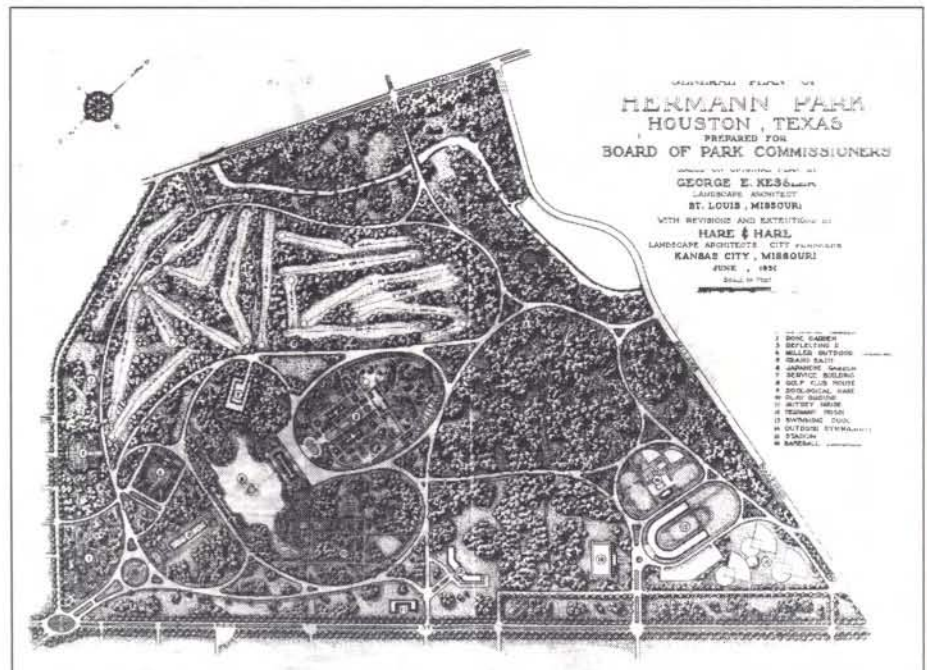


Carriage Drive (now Jogging Trail), 1993 Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

## Hermann Park in the 1930s

General Plan for Hermann Park, Houston,  
Texas, as prepared by Hare and Hare  
Landscape Architects, Kansas City

Photo Courtesy of the Metropolitan Research Center,  
Houston Public Library



Attention to Hermann Park was re-focused by the City's at-cost purchase of an additional 133.5 acres of park land from Will C. Hogg, the developer of River Oaks and a later chairman of the City Planning Commission. It was Hogg who privately financed the planting of 200 live oak trees, along the carriage drives of the park, as a memorial to Harris County soldiers who perished in the World War I, and who engineered the purchase of Camp Logan, sold to the city in 1924 to form Memorial Park. The purchase of this 133.5 tract again expanded the potential program for Hermann Park, and Hare and Hare's General Plan for Hermann Park of 1930 both reflects the Kessler scheme and accommodates an ever grander vision.

Kessler had intended the area south of the Grand Basin, along the Montrose axis and inscribed by the carriage drives, to contain athletic fields. The addition of the Hogg tract led Hare and Hare to re-position all these fields and facilities (except the city's first municipal golf course, opened in 1922) to the southwestern portion of the expanded park. The Houston Zoological Gardens was located in this area south of the Basin, and the new plan extended the Montrose axis into the Zoo, still visible today with the smaller, companion reflection pool flanked by rows of live oak. The Zoo opened in 1924, and the newly organized Museum of Natural History was built adjacent to the Zoo's reflection pool. By 1925 the excavation of Kessler's Grand Basin had finally begun.

For the next twenty-five years, Hare and Hare retained strong creative as well as editorial control over projects both completed in and proposed for Hermann Park. Although incremental in scale, most projects of this era (Sam Houston Monument, Pioneer Memorial Obelisk, designs for the Garden

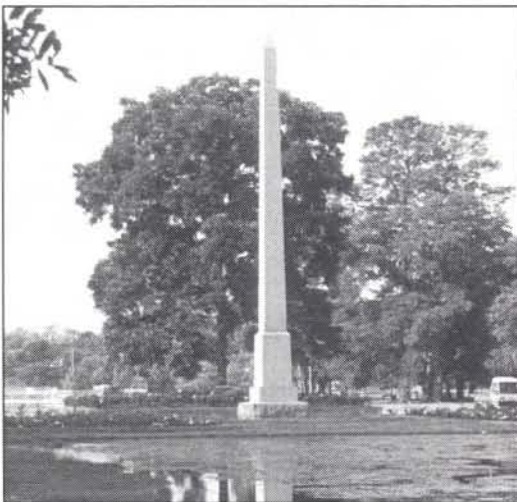


**Sam Houston Statue**

Completed in 1925 by Italian sculptor Enrico F. Cerracchio and modeled in bronze after a painting by Seymour Thomas, the equestrian statue of Sam Houston was sited in the grand entry circle of the Montrose entrance.

Houston is depicted pointing east towards the Battle of Sam Jacinto, where in 1836 he had led his troops to victory over the army of Mexico, winning independence for the Republic of Texas.

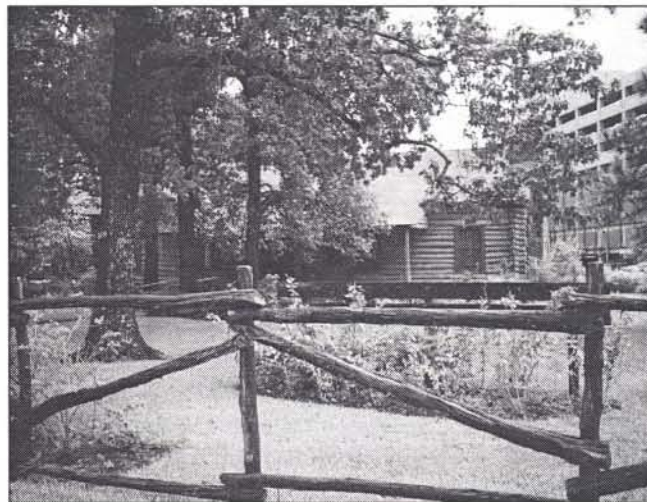
Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



**Pioneer Memorial Obelisk**

The 50-foot high granite obelisk was placed by the San Jacinto Memorial Association to commemorate the centennial of Texas independence. The monument was placed along the Montrose axis, and in line with Sunset Street to the west.

Photo courtesy Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



**Memorial Log House**

Also placed in Hermann Park in 1936 as a commemorative gesture of the centennial, the Log House was donated and is still operated by the San Jacinto Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

Photo courtesy Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

Center) reinforced the General Plan for the park. Other proposals (a conservatory of music, a second golf course, a 50-acre public school stadium) were rejected as being incompatible with the park as intended for public use. Ralph Ellifrit, formerly of Hare and Hare, was appointed director of the Department of City Planning in 1940, and collaborated with his colleagues to complete planning reports for both Houston's thoroughfare and parks systems. The latter report recommended the acquisition of additional land for Hermann Park (along Brays Bayou) for a recreational center, if one were to be added.



The Texas Medical Center, 1992: Hermann Park is to the upper right hand side.

Photo: LandisCor, Inc.

This recommendation to extend the boundaries was made in response to an ongoing proposal to remove land from Hermann Park. In 1943 the M.D. Anderson Foundation, a charitable trust, finalized its negotiations with the City of Houston and the Mayor and were allowed to purchase the 133.5 acre Hogg tract for the establishment of a new medical campus. The site was selected because of its proximity to Hermann Hospital and for the potential to expand to the south. This transaction was opposed by Ellifrit who, one might imagine, fought to preserve park land for park-related uses. His opposition was overruled by City Council. After a public referendum in which only 951 votes were cast, the land was sold and the Texas Medical Center came into being in 1945. The pace of development around Hermann Park was altered forever with the creation of what is now the largest, most active assembly of medical institutions in the nation.

## Evolution of The Texas Medical Center

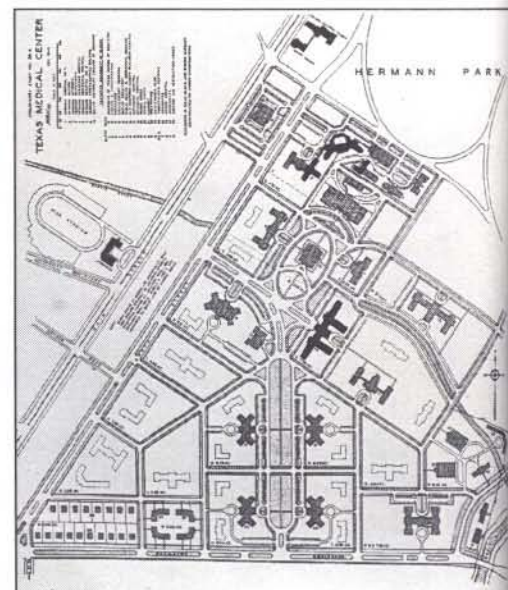


Hermann Hospital, 1925

Prior to his death, George Hermann had traveled to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore for treatment of stomach ailments. His experience with a nationally known medical institution may have been the inspiration for this second bequest to the city: this gift of ten acres adjacent to the park as the site for a charity hospital, endowed with \$100,000

and the remaining property in his estate. The first building for Hermann Hospital, now the Cullen Pavilion, was designed by Berlin & Swern and Alfred C. Finn and completed in 1925. Hermann Hospital, which now accepts a combination of charity and paying patients, continues to expand on its original ten-acre tract, having recently announced construction of a ten-story pavilion. It was the presence of this hospital that encouraged the M.D. Anderson Foundation to site eventually became the largest medical center in the nation: the Texas Medical Center.

(Gabrielle Cosgriff "A Lucky Break", *h*, the *Hermann Hospital Magazine*, Fall 1993, p. 22-25)  
Photo courtesy of Hermann Hospital Archives.



Plat of the Texas Medical Center, 1945, by H.A. Kipp, Professional Registered Engineer

Post-war construction in Hermann Park focused on new and growing institutions located within the park. Hare and Hare aided in the preparation of schematic plans for several of the City-funded projects: the expansion of the Zoo in 1948, the construction of a sloped lawn in front of Miller Theater which would increase seating capacity, and the lease of four-and-a-half acres of park land to the Museum of Natural History (which had outgrown its site within the Zoo). With the popular municipal golf course, these institutions now form the backbone of what many Houstonians and visitors perceive as Hermann Park – not the place itself, but the vibrant and ever-improving activity centers within it.

While these institutions were attracting more visitors to Hermann Park, development in the immediate region added a different set of pressures along the original park boundaries. By 1948 traffic on Main Boulevard, bound for the Texas Medical Center and beyond, had increased to such a degree that the City decided to extend Fannin Street through the park to provide a more direct connection to downtown. (The easement for Fannin had been a condition of the deed when purchased by the City in 1915.) The resultant strip of land between Fannin and Main streets, approximately 10 acres, was effectively cut off from park use.

Development around the park and at the Texas Medical Center also increased in the post-war years, altering the regional watershed pattern for Brays Bayou

Kipp's layout for the Texas Medical Center illustrates general divisions of the original 140.3 acres known as the TMC tract. All of the land is owned by the Texas Medical Center Incorporated, and has been deeded to member institutions, although restrictions strictly enforce the use and type of buildings that may be constructed. The TMC was chartered to "promote and provide for...the establishment, support and maintenance of facilities for medical, dental, and nursing education..., for hospitalization and treatment of the sick and afflicted, and for research in the field of health and science of medicine and dentistry."

Kipp, the engineer who laid out the River Oaks subdivision, organized the original institutions within an elegant system of interior roads. Continual expansion, however, has altered the order of this scheme. Although the deed restrictions maintained that all buildings need "to conform to (certain) architectural standards," development has not occurred in a conformance with any specific code, guidelines, or plan.

(Restrictions Governing the Texas Medical Center, Houston, Texas, Deed 633522, signed 23 May 1949, recorded Harris County Deed Records, 14 June 1949.)

Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

Franzheim's illustration of the Texas Medical Center was part of the package used to convince the Parks and Recreation Department and the City of Houston to sell a portion of Hermann Park. Each hospital is shown in the center of a landscaped island, not unlike a college campus, with the idea that all buildings would be exposed to light and air, and that patients and staff would walk from one institution to the next.

While the layout of the buildings was retained, the ideal of a collection of hospitals within a park has been sacrificed to the needs of access, parking and the phenomenal success of the Texas Medical Center. Woodland was razed first for surface parking lots, and later, for additional buildings and parking garages. The TMC now provides over 37,000 parking spaces for its visitors, patients, students, and staff. The pattern of land use differs significantly from Franzheim's drawing, although recent years have been met with efforts to enhance external space, with the use of coordinated graphics and street planting, as well as the development of pocket parks.

Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.



1946 Rendered Perspective of the Texas Medical Center, by Kenneth Franzheim

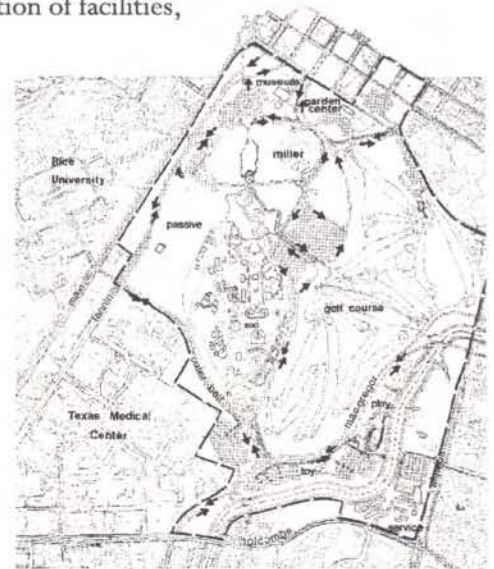


**Brays Bayou, 1956 and 1993**

Photos: Parks and Recreation Department (top) and Hanna/Olin, Ltd. (bottom)

with a higher percentage of building roofs and paved surfaces. A tremendous flood in 1949 and the resultant property damage led neighbors of the park to demand better flood control measures. The Harris County Flood Control District and the Army Corps of Engineers complied with what was at the time the standard solution to hasten water flow through the then-wooded channel. By 1959, Brays Bayou had been stripped of all vegetation, compacted, and lined with concrete.

In 1972 the City of Houston commissioned a Master Plan for Hermann Park, completed by two Houston engineering firms, Lockwood, Andrews, and Newnam, Inc. and Cummins Engineers. Their report categorized the major problems facing the park (parking, circulation, access, drainage, security, utilities, deterioration of facilities, and inefficient park use), identified areas which were subject to crowding and overuse, and suggested expanding park facilities to the south into the unused portions near the bayou. Of all the report's recommendations, many of which were well researched and thoughtful solutions to obvious problems, the only pieces implemented were those concerning parking and utilities.



**Hermann Park Master Plan, 1972, Lockwood, Andrews and Newnam, Inc. and James A. Cummins, Inc.**

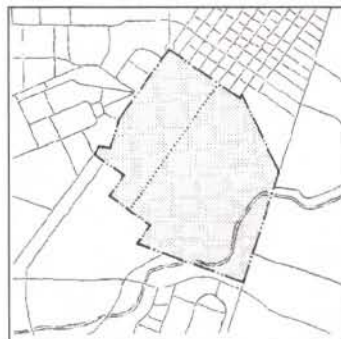
## History of Land Acquisition

Hermann's 1914 gift of park land to the City of Houston included 278.71 acres. The city added to this first gift with subsequent purchases, to eliminate out parcels within the original tract and to extend the park towards the Rice Institute to meet Main Street by 1915. With the at-cost purchase of 133.5 acres from Will C. Hogg, the city had increased the size of Hermann Park to over 550 acres by 1925. At its

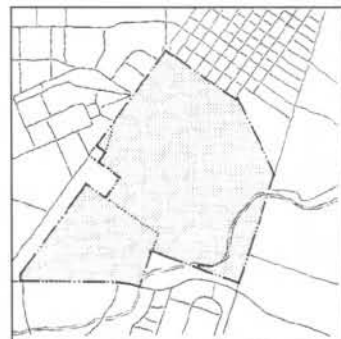
fullest, the extent of park land altered development plans for the park, prepared by Hare and Hare in 1930, in which all active recreation facilities were shifted into the newly-purchased tract.



1914



1916



1924

## HERMANN PARK TODAY



Zoo Parking Lot Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



Reflection Pool Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

As a result of the partial implementation of the 1972 Master Plan, all vehicles are concentrated in the center of the park, which routinely leads to gridlock on any warm weekend or holiday. Roughly 90% of the parking spaces available in Hermann Park for visitor use are accessible only from the same central spine: a two-lane, two-way route with three points of entry. The central parking lots (which were sized to accommodate peak traffic loads and are only one-third full on the average weekday), are vast, barren, and shadeless. A combined total of approximately 15 acres of park land is paved for parking alone.

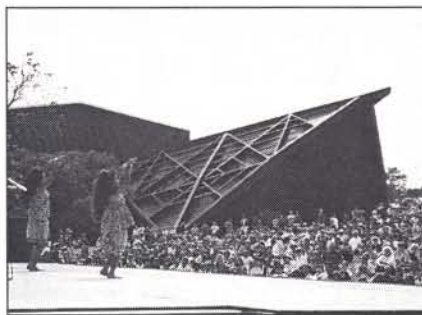
This concentration of vehicles and parking in the center leads to the intensive use of park land adjacent to the institutions directly accessible from the center, while remote areas of the park are neglected. Around the Reflection Pool, the hill at Miller Theater, and in the adjacent picnic groves, Hermann Park has been loved to death. The ground is beaten down by foot traffic, the grass struggles to stay green through the hot summers, and the trash barrels overflow. Soils rich in clay have been compacted by overuse, exacerbating the existing drainage problems. Large areas in the picnic groves, on the golf course, and around the Reflection Pool are routinely flooded and unusable, drying later to baked mud. Shallow pools of standing water provide ample habitat for Texas-sized mosquitoes.

## Hermann Park Institutions



**Front Entry**  
**The Museum of Natural Science**

The Museum of Natural Science has entered its second phase of expansion in recent years, and the new Butterfly Habitat opened in July 1994. This institution has been meticulous in developing and maintaining its grounds. The Museum is host to tens of thousands of schoolchildren and visitors every year, and its annual visitor population rivals that of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.



**Summer Festival**  
**Miller Outdoor Theater**

Miller Outdoor Theater is the only free public theater in the United States, and can attract crowds of over 20,000 patrons for its summer schedule. The Pavilion, built of Cor-ten steel, was designed in 1968 by Eugene Werlin and Associates. The columns from the older Doric proscenium were relocated to what is now the Mecom-Rockwell Fountain, at the corner of Hermann Drive and San Jacinto.

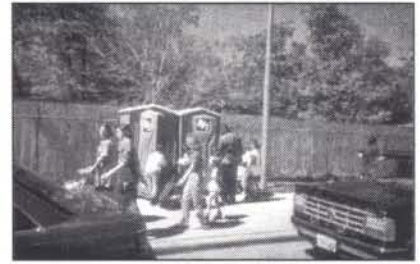


**Wortham World of Primates**  
**Houston Zoological Gardens**

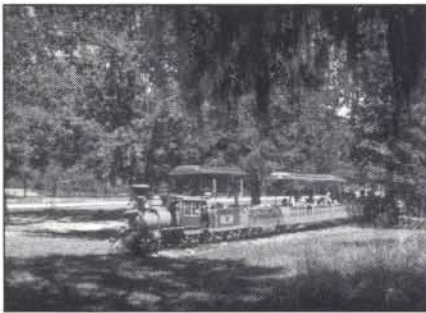
The Zoo has recently completed a new primate facility in conjunction with their Master Plan by Jones and Jones, Landscape Architects of Seattle. This already popular exhibit is a model of accessibility, visitor interaction, and habitat design. Future plans for the Zoo include the rehabilitation and improvement of both visitor facilities and animal habitats.

The basic facilities which make it possible for visitors, especially families, to stay in the park for more than a short time are concentrated between the Zoo and the Museum of Natural Science. There are public rest-rooms and concessions at Miller Theater. Other rest-rooms and concessions are within the Zoo, Museum, and the Japanese Garden, all institutions which charge admission. The children's playground has no rest-rooms. The Golf Course and Garden Center have small rest-rooms yet are not generally used by park visitors. The lack of facilities, and the concentration of inadequate facilities in the center are further deterrents to the full exploration and population of the whole park.

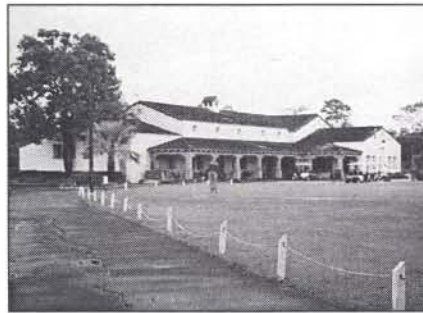
Last, security is a concern to both park visitors and Parks and Recreation staff. Park rangers have indicated that much of their time on busy days is devoted to directing traffic. Because of the congestion of vehicles and potential for conflict in reaching the Zoo and finding a parking place, police and park rangers are hard-pressed to attend to their primary duties; patrolling the park and giving visitor information. Police in patrol cars tend to congregate either behind Miller Theater in the service lot or in one of the central lots adjacent to the Zoo, close to the majority of park visitors. The less-populated edges of the park are patrolled only occasionally and therefore are less enticing to individuals or families concerned with safety.



Temporary Facilities by the Zoo, March 1994  
Photo Credit Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



**The Hermann Park Miniature Train**  
Buffalo Rides opened the Hermann Park miniature train in 1957, and it has been operating year-round ever since. The short ride on the brightly-painted cars is one of the most universal memories of the park for many people who have grown up in Houston, or have visited the park with their families.



**Hermann Park Golf Clubhouse**  
Designed by Arthur E. Nutter in 1933, the Hermann Park Golf Club is typical of Houston's Mediterranean style of building, with a deep porch overlooking the course. The Golf Course was part of Kessler's original conception for Hermann Park, and was designed in 1922 by engineer David M. Duller, and Houston golfer George V. Rotan. Of the three municipal courses in the city, it remains one of the most popular.



**Rose Gardens at the Houston Garden Center**  
Over two dozen separate garden societies hold their monthly meetings in the Houston Garden Center, which is maintained by the Horticultural Branch of the City of Houston's Parks and Recreation Department. The Rose Gardens are also home to several commemorative busts and a pavilion donated by sister city Taipei.

Photos: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.





Fences, highly trafficked roads and specific uses such as the golf course effectively remove the areas shown shaded from open use. The area left unshaded is thus the area used by the greatest majority of the park, as opposed to institutional, visitors.

Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

In an informal poll conducted by the Friends of Hermann Park in 1993-94, the majority of park users, when asked to identify the "five best things" about the park, responded by mentioning either the Zoo, Miller Theater, or the Museum of Natural Science. This reveals a common perception that the institutions within dominate the park, which itself makes a lesser impression. Beyond the limits of the major institutions, portions of Hermann Park seem to be or are cut-off and inaccessible to the general public. The Museum of Natural Science, the Zoo, the Japanese Garden, and the Golf Course, require admission fees and in places are isolated with security fences up to eight-feet high. The Garden Center, although open to the public, is completely fenced and most gates along the Hermann Drive edge are locked during the day as well as at night.

These fenced areas render parts of the park inaccessible to the majority of park visitors. Roads which carry high volumes of commuter traffic through Hermann Park create barriers hostile to pedestrians, and cut off sections of park land to both the west and south. It is discouraging to realize that one of these roads, South MacGregor, was added to the park as recently as 1980, and, when voted on by City Council, encountered no public opposition. The park land which was lost at this time was not viewed as valuable. In summary, Hermann Park as a whole suffers from a concentration of activity in limited areas, from the vibrancy of a few distinct parts, and from demands which spill over from institutions at its edges.



Path of Hurricane Alicia and the remains of Hermann Park Golf Course shelter, 1993

Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

The ravages of time and natural processes can be read in many corners of Hermann Park, those both used and neglected. The loss of canopy throughout and particularly in the golf course (due to hurricanes and a lack of adequate irrigation) has rendered the popular municipal course more open and less shaded. Heavy rains, clay soils, compaction due to overuse, and the challenge of grading what is essentially a very flat site have added to the drainage problems which plague Hermann Park. The solutions proposed in the 1972 engineering study encouraged a dependence on sub-surface drainage and an abandonment of natural swales and channels. New and existing drainage swales have been overloaded by an increase of impervious surfaces in the park, while pieces of the remaining infrastructure are crumbling.



Standing Water in Picnic Grove, 1993

Photo: Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

## SUMMARY OF HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

The history of any park is a mirror of the history and health of the city. In the case of Hermann Park, the two are inseparable. A strong economy, a progressive administration, and philanthropic citizens can make a powerful mark on their community. Conversely, recessions, wars, and budgetary shortfalls too often cause deferred maintenance which, when coupled with short-term solutions to deeper, long-term problems, has burdened many American institutions in the past three decades. Throughout both Hermann Park and the City of Houston one can notice examples of the failure of engineered systems, which neither respond to the natural structure of the land form nor respect the diversity of native species.



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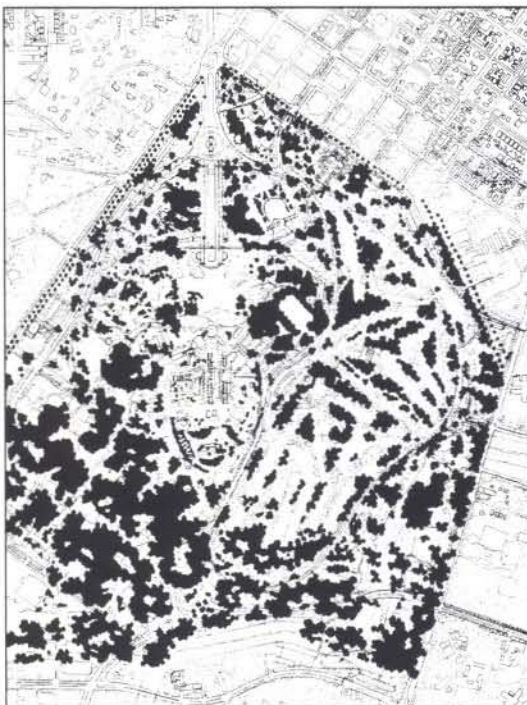
The history of any park is a mirror of the history and health of the city. In the case of Hermann Park, the two are inseparable. A strong economy, a progressive administration, and philanthropic citizens can make a powerful mark on their community. Conversely, recessions, wars, and budgetary shortfalls too often cause deferred maintenance which, when coupled with short-term solutions to deeper, long-term problems, has burdened many American institutions in the past three decades. Throughout both Hermann Park and the City of Houston one can notice examples of the failure of engineered systems, which neither respond to the natural structure of the land form nor respect the diversity of native species.

No one plan for the park should be regarded as sacred merely because of its author or historic period; each should be judged on its own merits. After study, it is apparent that many elements embodied by the early plans for Hermann Park remain valid today. The coherence of vision and the quality of life espoused therein can and should be taken seriously. Unfortunately, many of the overall strategies and principles embodied by the early plans have been sacrificed in favor of individual projects and piecemeal solutions. A comparison of Hare and Hare's General Plan for the park of 1930 with the current site conditions reveals changes on all levels, changes which began with the sale of the Hogg tract, resulting in the reduction of green, open space, and the tremendous loss of wooded canopy now apparent. Numerous additions to the park in the past 50 years, constructed without a guiding influence like that exerted by Hare and Hare from 1924 to the early 1950s, have gradually eroded the overall vision for Hermann Park as well as its utility and structure.

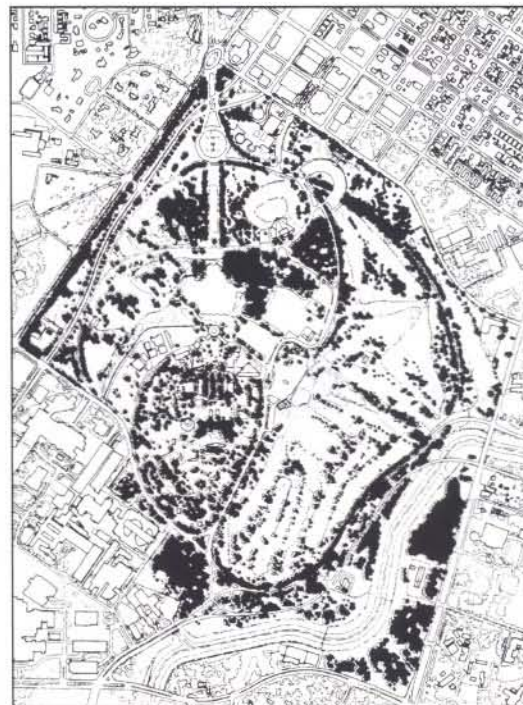
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*The existence of a 'master plan' at any scale is no guarantee that short-term solutions can be avoided or that natural systems can be restored. Its success requires vision, cooperation, flexibility, and continual commitment to examine each small detail in light of the whole.*

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Hermann Park canopy as proposed in Hare & Hare 1930 Master Plan



Hermann Park canopy as existing, 1993



**1932 Photo of  
Hermann Park  
from Warwick  
Hotel**

Photo Courtesy of the  
Metropolitan Research  
Center, Houston Public  
Library



**1995 Photo of  
Hermann Park  
from Wyndham  
Warwick Hotel**

Photo: Paul Hester/  
Lisa Carol

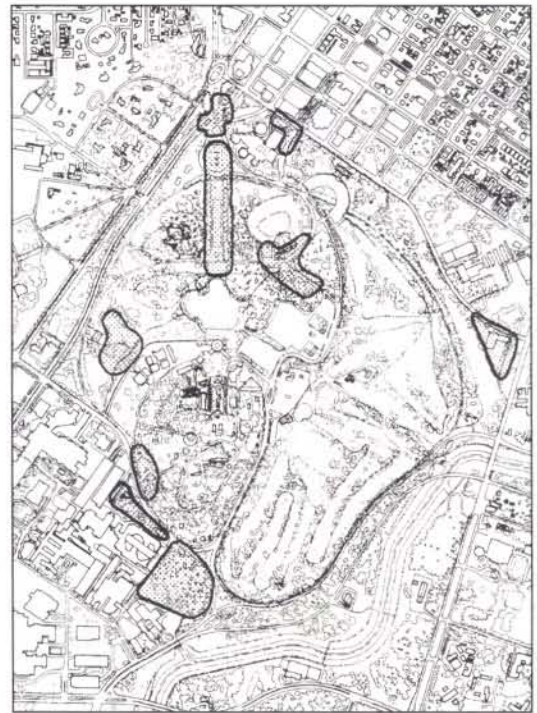
Recent years have brought a renewed interest in Houston's most urban parks: Memorial Park, Hermann Square, and Hermann Park. Not unlike the era of civic planning in which the park was established, the Office of the Mayor and private benefactors are assuming an active role in promoting the quality of life within the city and in reinforcing the character and standard of construction and maintenance in the public realm. Mayor Bob Lanier, now in his second term, has made his agenda clear: to improve the quality of life in the city to a standard commensurate with that in the suburbs. His achievements to date testify to the success of this focus and the potential to stabilize the quality and health of both city and region, for financial, social, and spiritual reasons.

There are a number of projects currently being planned in Hermann Park, all of which will impact and will offer considerable benefit to both the park and the citizens. Projects under study or proposed for Hermann Park in 1995 range in scope from the beautification of on-site utilities (Zoo fence screening, Water Department site) and the rehabilitation of significant pieces of the park ('Heart of the Park', Miller Theater plaza, Zoo west entry, playground), to projects which could potentially alter the site boundaries and the historic axis (proposals for hospital garages, Fannin/Montrose intersection).

Before any of these projects go forward, it is imperative to learn from the lessons of the past and to resist patterns of fragmentation and the short-term financial decisions which have plagued both this park and the City of Houston over the past 50 years. There is a need for comprehensive planning to reverse this trend and work towards a unified framework in which all institutions and features fit into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The study of Hermann Park's history in the context of Houston and the region makes it possible to develop a coordinated vision, one which balances competing interests and desires while looking to maximize long-term financial, social, and aesthetic benefits.

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*Comparing these two views, facing page, of the north and principal entrance to Hermann Park highlights an important point regarding vision, and the need to consider the long-term impact of immediate projects within the park. The 1932 image shows rows of live oak along both Main Street and the central axis flanking the Reflection Pool, trees which are now considered historic landmarks. Many of the earliest planning efforts for Rice University and Kessler's design for Hermann Park may have looked barren and awkward for many years, but now mature, characterize the South Main district.*



Projects both ongoing and proposed for Hermann Park

#### Footnotes

- 1 Steven Fox, *Braeswood, An Architectural History* (Houston, 1988), p. 3.
- 2 *Telegraph and Texas Register*, August 30, 1836, from David McComb *A History of Houston* (Austin, 1981), p. 9.
- 3 Mark Porok, "High-Tech Now at Home on the Range", *USA Today*, 21 April 1994.
- 4 Stephen Fox, "Big Park, Little Plans: A History of Hermann Park", *Cite*, Spring 1983, p. 18.
- 5 George H. Hermann, last will and testament, 4 November 1914, filed Harris County, Texas.
- 6 Sadie Gwin Blackburn, "Evolution of the Houston Landscape," *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* (Houston, 1991), p. 38.
- 7 McComb, p. 76-83.
- 8 Fox, p. 18.
- 9 Kurt Culbertson, "The Origins of Landscape Architecture in Ohio: The Life and Work of George Edward Kessler", *Queen City Heritage*, Spring 1993, p. 17.

# Strategies

## DESIGN STRATEGIES

The Master Plan for Hermann Park considers past successes and failures in light of projected use and future needs. We must ask how these past examples apply to the current planning effort and project a vision for the park in the 21st century. The goals of the Hermann Park Master Plan are to preserve, protect, and nurture what is special and worthy, to mend what is broken or has begun to unravel, and to remove or relocate what has come to harm the park or impede public access. Only then can new features or activities be considered. For Hermann Park to serve the citizens of Houston, as intended by the original donor and those who have given their resources, time, and efforts over the past 80 years, the needs of park users must be considered above those of the car, especially regarding traffic which is not related to park access and use. These are the primary principles of the master planning process.

Three categories of design strategies have emerged to organize and shape the physical, social, and ecological concerns, by which to achieve the restoration and rehabilitation of Hermann Park:

- Access: Re-organize park circulation to reclaim the center of the park for general public use by relocating some parking to the edges of the park and creating a network of green spaces connected by shaded and secure paths.
- Restoration: Reinforce the historic elements of Hermann Park – both natural processes and built form – to reconnect pieces which today seem inaccessible, to restore the intentions of the early plans for the park, and through reforestation, to maintain this green sanctuary for Houston and for future generations.
- Life in the Park: A dispersal of activities within a diverse landscape is essential to ease the pattern of use in Hermann Park. The distribution of new and relocated facilities to the edges of the park and the provision of the necessary services for visitors throughout will encourage people to frequent lesser used areas.

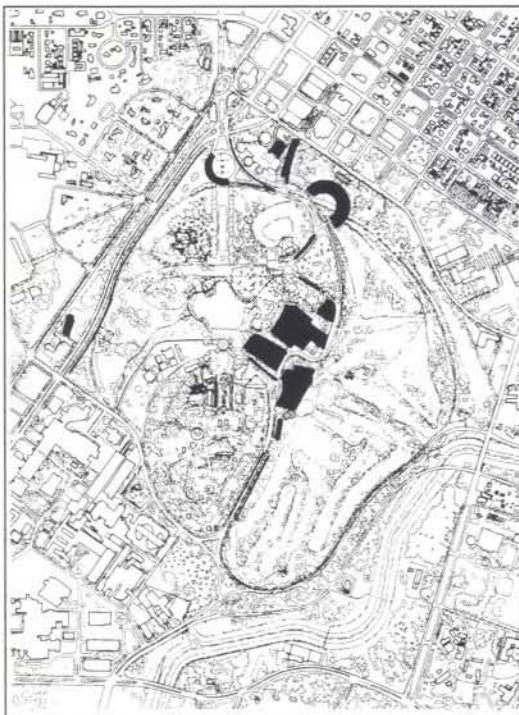
A final strategy of Stewardship, which underpins the entire planning effort, is the creation of a public-private partnership to manage Hermann Park. Through this partnership sources for funding will be increased and diversified,

to implement projects as well as insure continued maintenance. Strategies for implementation and management will be discussed more fully subsequent report chapters.

### **ACCESS: REORGANIZING PARK CIRCULATION**

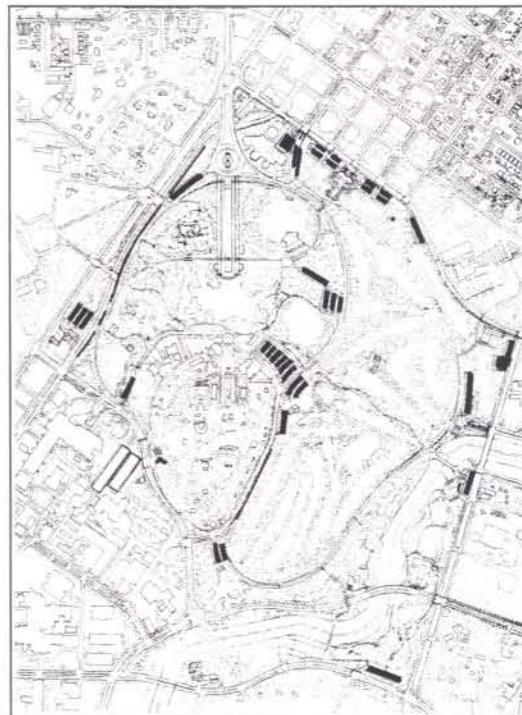
The first design strategy, the re-organization of circulation, has evolved from study that finds the present system of park roads (one) and park entries (three) ineffective and the congestion of cars at the very center of the park disruptive. For weekend and holiday visitors to the park, arrival begins with a traffic jam and the frustrating search for a parking space. The relocation and reconfiguration of parking lots in Hermann Park, from the center to diffused locations at the perimeter, is a primary goal.

The first aspect of the multi-faceted approach to disperse "gridlock" is to encourage visitors to park and enter from the edges. By removing a portion of the parking from the center of the park, traffic on the central park road, Golf Course Drive, will be reduced. All new perimeter parking lots will be located to serve specific activities (the children's playground, the Garden Center, the new education center), and will be entered from boundary roads (Hermann Drive, Fannin, Almeda). The result of this reconfiguration of parking will be dramatic: the creation of a public gathering and recreation space at the very heart of Hermann Park rivaling those of other urban parks nationwide, Houston's own Great Lawn.



Plan showing existing layout of parking.

Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



Plan showing proposed layout of parking.

Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

The proposed scheme increases the number of parking spaces currently available in Hermann Park, from approximately 2,400 to 2,600. Cars will be directed around the park, not through it, to alternate lots and garages when those at the center are full. By increasing the number of entries from 3 to 14, the existing roads will absorb the traffic and alleviate congestion. Peak weekend traffic to the Zoo will be encouraged to park in the parking garages on North MacGregor and adjacent to the Zoo's West Entry. Existing garages in the Museum District to the north will be open for evening performances at Miller Theater. The implementation of a park trolley or shuttle will make it possible for visitors at one facility to reach another part of the park without using their cars.

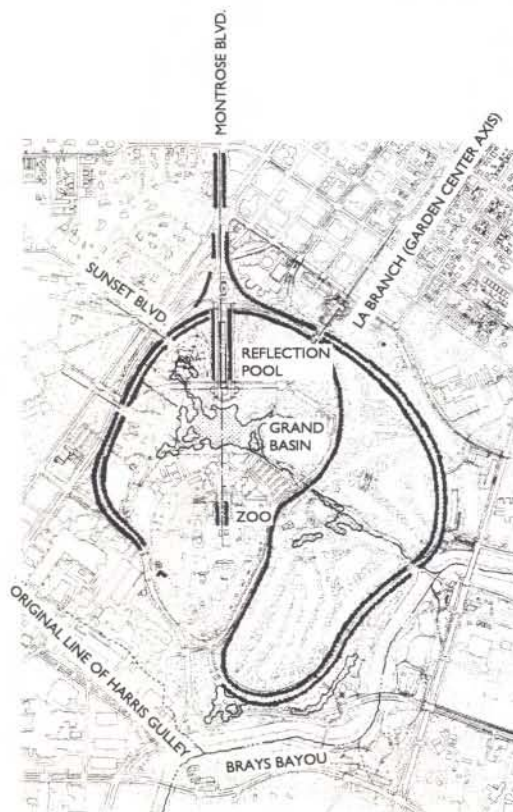
By extending trails and paths, areas which are presently little used and neglected become integrated and connected. It will be possible to enter the park, on foot, from every street corner, and to walk safely through areas that today are fenced off or seem less secure. Hermann Park will be welcoming to all travelers, whether walking, with strollers, on skates and bicycles, or on horseback. Where uses are incompatible, as with a children's play area and a bridle trail, separate trails will be established and maintained.

#### RESTORATION: SAVING THE PARK FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The second strategy is to reinforce the historic armature of Hermann Park as a means to reach out from the restored center and connect all portions of the park. The two major components include first elements of the historic plans for Hermann Park (the civic entry, the carriage drives, the lake and Reflection Pool) and second, the land form of the site, particularly the gully which extends from the Grand Basin southeast to and including Brays Bayou. The skeletal structure of both the land form and the original plans provide a powerful framework by which to integrate areas of the park which have been effectively abandoned.

The expanded system of lakes, irrigation ponds, and the natural path carved by the swale through the golf course defines a sequence in both the design and the use of Hermann Park. The fall of the land, although subtle, lends both order and sequence by separating the civic, structured elements such as the Reflection Pool from the more natural areas adjacent to the bayou, characterized by less rigid forms and native species.

Hermann Park needs a program of re-vegetation to reinforce the canopy which has suffered a decline in recent decades and to expand the palette of ground cover and understory species. Trees planted in Hermann Park 70 years ago are mature; some are already in decline. To insure the presence of mature, healthy trees for the next 50 years, one must re-plant now. Uncoordinated tree planting efforts, howev-



Historic and natural armature restored and expanded.  
Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

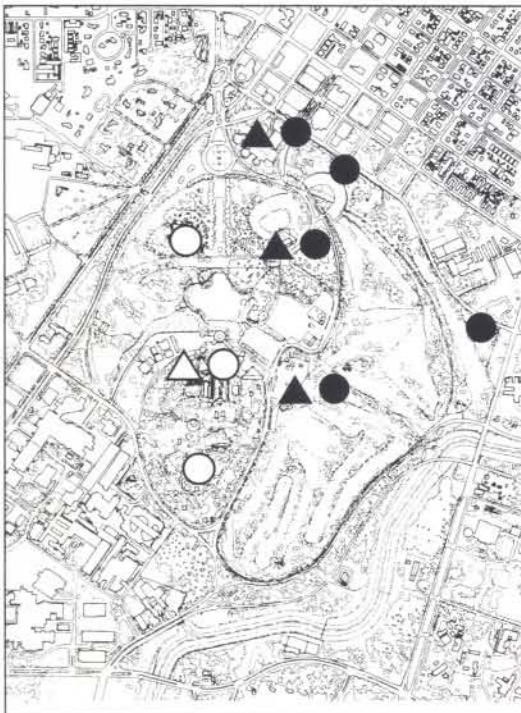


er, could result in an overly-uniform spatial character in the park. Plans for re-vegetation therefore must take into account the need for a sequence of spaces, with clearings and vistas, interiors and borders, which will reinforce the needs of people as well as wildlife.

**LIFE IN THE PARK : PLACES TO GATHER, EAT, REST, LEARN**

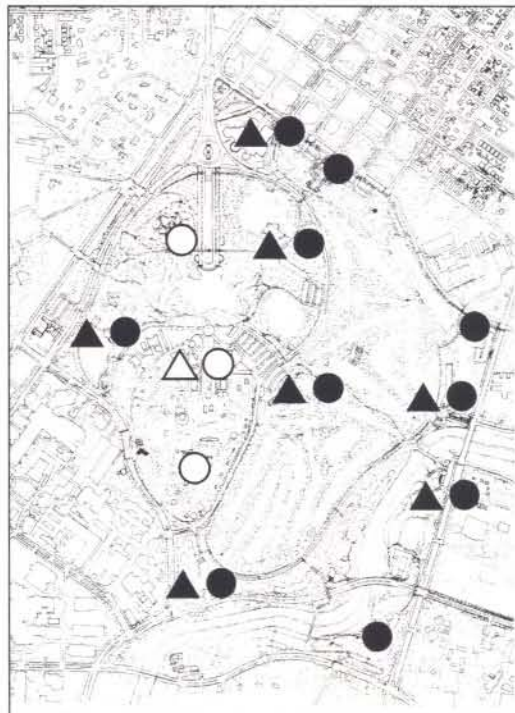
The third design strategy is to disperse the many people who use and love Hermann Park into areas which, today, are neglected or seem cut off. The goals of re-organizing circulation and parking and of reclaiming the swale through the golf course as a pedestrian path are to physically reconnect large sections of the park and return these areas to visitor use. If it is possible to park a car, rent a picnic shelter, lock up a bicycle, or get a drink of water in places other than at Miller Theater, then people will use a greater extent of park land. Careful design and thoughtful distribution of the most discreet and pedantic elements – bathrooms, lights along paths, adequate seating – will make the park a more hospitable and habitable place .

Management of vehicles and traffic goes hand in hand with the creation of a full network of paths and trails, to improve the experience of walking through the park. New sidewalks, park entries, and paths will encourage the discovery of less known features: the bayou, the woodland, an overlook point, and new ponds. The journey will be made comfortable by the addition of service facilities: rest-rooms, water fountains, benches, and food stands. A variety of paths, from broad avenues to secluded trails, will allow many different kinds of experience within Hermann Park.



Existing facilities in the park.

Hanna/Olin, Ltd.



Proposed expanded facilities within the park.

Hanna/Olin, Ltd.

# Ten Projects

The Master Plan can be summarized by the description of ten projects which characterize a unified and transformed Hermann Park. Although many projects which are modest or incremental in scale contribute to the success of the park's revitalization, the project areas described below are those which will have the most dramatic effect, and are essential to the success of the Hermann Park Master Plan. The ten projects are:

*“Heart of the Park” and rehabilitation of the Reflection Pool*

*Civic Plaza and fountain at the end of the Reflection Pool*

*Grand Basin expansion*

*Miller Outdoor Theater environs: hill extension, concessions, and plaza*

*Great Lawn as a new space for open play, picnicking, and gathering*

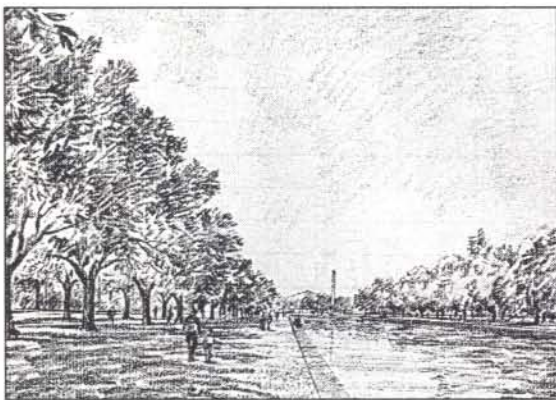
*Rose gardens reconstruction and Garden Center addition and parking*

*“Cafe on the Green” from the transformed historic Golf Clubhouse*

*Zoo West Entry, with improvements to the street edge and parking*

*Pedestrian Trail through the golf course to the Bayou*

*Restoration of park land flanking Brays Bayou in Hermann Park*

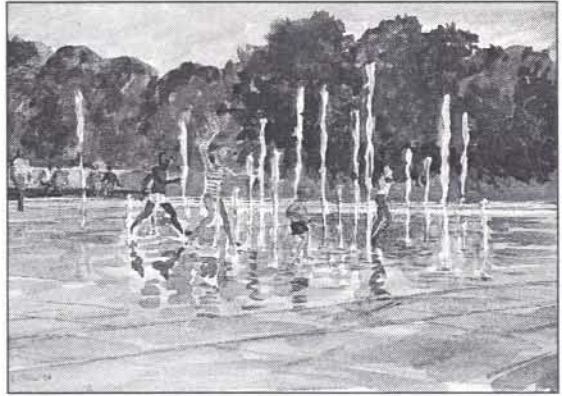


Path along the Reflection Pool

The grand, civic entry into Hermann Park forms the backbone of the scheme developed by landscape architect George Kessler in 1916. Although the rows of live oak have matured into one of the park's most familiar features, the excavation of the Reflection Pool was left incomplete and the terminus leading to the Grand Basin unresolved. The goals of the Heart of the Park competition, sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance, the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department and Friends of Hermann Park, were to unify and anchor the diverse elements of Hermann Park, enhance and strengthen the existing elements of the main axis, create a place to commemorate Houston, and make a relaxing,

welcoming environment. These goals remain fundamental, and the competition winners will now be able to develop their theme of connectivity as part of the comprehensive renewal of Hermann Park. The adjacent areas of park land to which this project connects have now been defined, allowing the final design for the Heart of the Park to commence. The Reflection Pool and the rows of live oak are an enduring element of Houston's urban plan, providing a clear example of the connection between the city and the park.

Kessler's scheme for the Grand Basin described a hard and symmetrical edge on the central axis, with a wilder, more naturalistic edge to the west and east similar to the relationship of Bethesda Terrace to the boating pond of Central Park in New York. To resolve the unfinished terminus of the Montrose axis, and to recognize the cross-axial path which connects Miller Theater to the entry of Rice University, the southern end of the Reflection Pool is conceived as a Civic Plaza. While not overly large, this terrace would be a gathering place at the end of the path along the Reflection Pool, marked by the relocated Pioneer Obelisk. The central feature of the plaza is a playful fountain for children on hot summer days with jets of water spouting from the pavement at irregular intervals. The plaza will be flanked by seating areas under the shady canopy of trees. The edge overlooking the lake will be defined by balustrades with steps down to the water, providing a sunny spot to sit as well as a boat landing.



Fountain in civic plaza

The Grand Basin, as envisioned in the Master Plan, will be extended in several directions, with a sinuous edge richly articulated with a mixture of trees and grasses. Extended arms will allow longer views across the water, which, when described by light, shadow, and reflections of the trees and grasses, will create the illusion of an even grander lake. New arms of the Grand Basin will reach out to areas of the park which at present seem disconnected. The recycled water system in the Japanese Garden will be opened partially toward the lake over a small waterfall which, as the main path crosses this apparent stream, will imply a visual and physical connection. Another extension will meet the children's playground and could be conceived as a wading pool or a shallow fishing pond. A third arm will provide a home for the paddle boat docks and its new ticket booth.



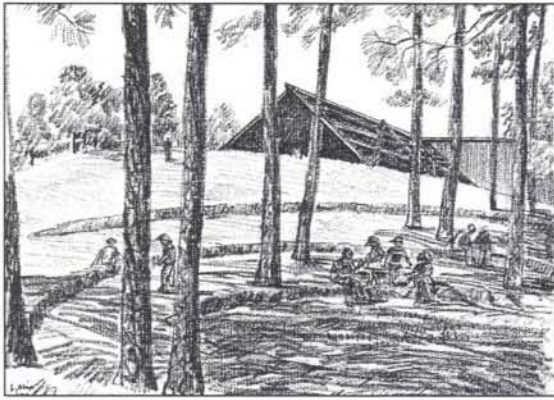
The Grand Basin

A final lake extension will reach out in segments along the old drainage swale leading toward the bayou, to define a pedestrian trail by which visitors to Hermann Park can cross the Golf Course safely, and reach the southeastern quadrant of park land. This path will be separated from the golf cart paths as it follows the stream course, and the addition of both tall trees and understory plantings will safeguard pedestrians from the range of play on the course. The excavation of additional ponds along this trail will increase the irrigation capacity for the fairways, and provide a more secluded wetland habitat for waterfowl and other birds.

The Hill at Miller Theater is one of Houston's most loved landmarks – a theater in its own right. Here children roll down, while picnics, touch football, and people-watching take place. Unfortunately, the area behind the Hill facing the Sam Houston Monument, is plagued by drainage problems and worn from



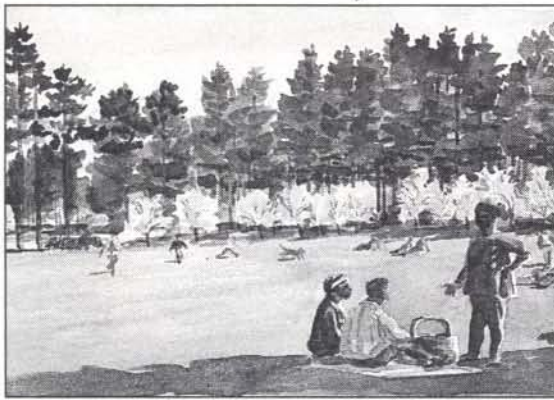
Golf course greenway



Woodland Amphitheater

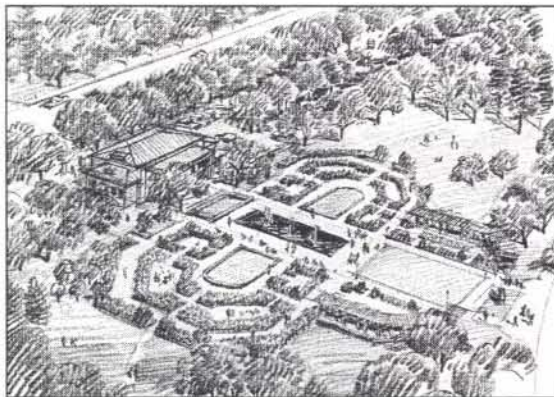
heavy use. Fill generated by the excavation of the Grand Basin will be relocated and shaped to create two new features for the Hill – a gentle and accessible ramp reaching from the Museum of Natural Science to its summit, and a smaller woodland theater space perched above the groves of oak and pine on the backside of the Hill. This shady venue, looking through the trees towards the Reflection Pool, could host intimate performances on festival days. At other times, it will serve as an impromptu stage for play-acting, classes, reading, and picnicking. The groves surrounding Miller Theater are to be planted with a variety of flowering and specimen trees, connecting the Garden Center and the Japanese

Garden with a diverse collection one would expect to find in botanical gardens and arboreta.



The Great Lawn

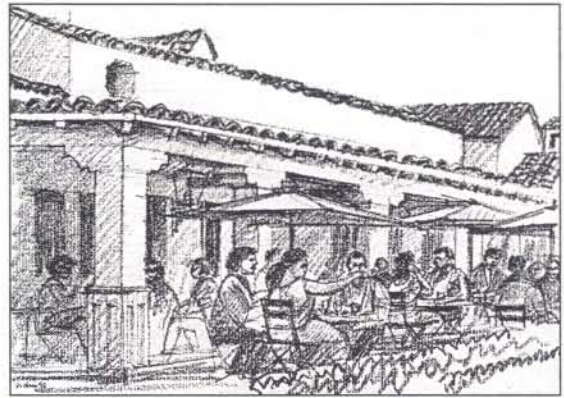
Informal games of touch football and Frisbee, hampered by crowds and the slope of the Hill, will now find as their stage a Great Lawn in the very center of the park. This is made possible by the removal of a portion of the largest asphalt parking lot. Central to the Master Plan is the restoration of the center of Hermann Park as green park land for the use and enjoyment of all Houston citizens. This great green meadow will become the focal point for gathering and open play. Sloped towards the Grand Basin and under-drained, the Lawn will provide a meeting place, a domain for children visiting the park on weekdays, and a welcome spot for sunbathing and dozing. More visitors can be accommodated for special events, such as the Fourth of July concert and fireworks display. The reconfiguration of the adjoining parking will create shady groves that surround the Great Lawn and screen the cars.



Rose Garden Renovation

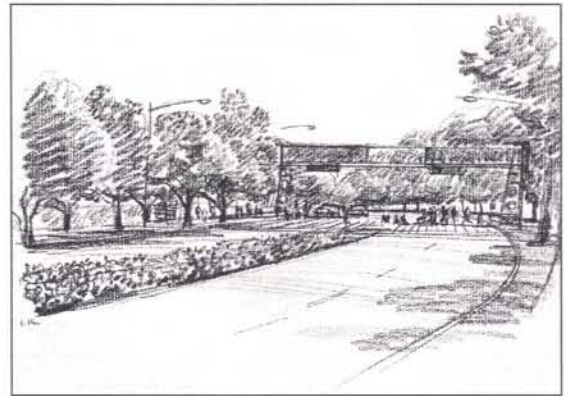
The Houston Garden Center is an area of Hermann Park which can benefit from the completion of an unrealized piece of the previous plans. The present condition of a large parking lot on the park side of the building, the Hermann Drive facade sealed shut, and the Rose Gardens relegated to the side will be entirely inverted. The building will be opened to the street with the addition of an entry porch and open gates. Parking will be shifted to the sides to provide direct access from Hermann Drive and to allow members of Houston's many garden clubs ample parking for their evening meetings. The Rose Gardens will be re-configured to the south of the Garden Center, reuniting disconnected elements and creating a green corridor into the park. The new gardens will front an extension of the Jogging Trail and lead to a crosswalk to Miller Theater.

The historic Golf Clubhouse, currently located across from the Zoo entry, provides competition for the existing parking spaces and contributes to weekend congestion. To reduce this congestion and allow for direct access by golfers and staff, a new golf clubhouse will be relocated on the reclaimed park drive, North MacGregor. This clubhouse will have its own parking lots and would be reached from Alameda. The historic structure, designed by Houston architect Alfred E. Nutter in 1933, will be restored, adjusted for a new use, and open to the public year-round. Houstonians and their guests will enjoy a Cafe overlooking the fairways and ponds, with a diverse menu and unique location.



Cafe on the Green

The new Zoo West Entry will allow visitors to get into the Zoo directly from the Texas Medical Center or from public transportation. This entry will encourage park visitors to use garages along North MacGregor, many of which are not full on the weekends, and avoid parking in the central parking lots. Improvements planned for the street will aid both drivers and pedestrians, by adding a turn-lane and a crosswalk at the new signal. By moving the sidewalk on the park side of North MacGregor in towards the fence and adding a row of shade trees, it will be both easier and more pleasant to walk between the Zoo West Entry and the new children's playground. This playground, planned by the Houston Parks Board and designed by Lauren Griffith, is envisioned as Houston's first fully accessible "Playground for All Children," and will be a welcome addition to Hermann Park. Construction is scheduled to begin in 1995.



Zoo West Entry

The Master Plan addresses the reclamation of over 100 acres of Bayou Park land, currently cut off by roads, traffic, the Zoo, the Golf Course, and in part by the bayou itself. This extensive and important part of the park lacks parking spaces and park facilities. Through the management of traffic which currently uses North and South MacGregor and the implementation of connections both to the center of the park and across the bayou, these disparate pieces will transform part of Hermann Park. An expanded series of trails and ponds will attract park users who currently gravitate toward the northern part of the park, while new bridle trails will provide a designated route for riders on their way down the bayou. This section of park land will be glorious in the spring when the banks of the channel bloom with wildflowers, providing a dramatic contrast to the rest of Hermann Park. Picnic facilities and trails will be added in this area, where there are currently no facilities of any kind for visitors.



Bayou trail through wildflower meadow

# Implementation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Any discussion of the proposals made within the Master Plan invariably raises the same questions – How much will it cost, and who will pay for it? An even more astute question focuses on management – How will the new projects be maintained, given limitations of staff and budget? There are several levels on which questions of implementation must be addressed. These are summarized here and discussed more fully in a later section, Stewardship.

## **ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS**

Hermann Park is a city-wide resource, a social good that needs the support of the full community. No one individual or agency can solve all of its problems or generate all the money needed for its myriad systems. Working together, however, several can. While the city with its staff and revenues may be able to maintain the status quo or make modest improvements, other pressing needs prevent it from undertaking, unassisted, the massive reconstruction envisioned in this plan.

In other cities, those parks and squares that have been dramatically rescued or rebuilt have one thing in common: a dedicated full-time organization whose sole purpose is the park's planning, rehabilitation, maintenance, and operation. In cases where a successful public-private partnership has been forged, each partner brings significant personnel, skills, and financial resources to the project. There are examples in New York, Los Angeles and Philadelphia, although it is a fact that not many such partnerships have developed. Nationwide, few parks can attract or galvanize a sufficient cross section of community to sustain such interest and commitment. When an opportunity arises, as it has for Hermann Park, it should be seized upon and vigorously pursued .

Every city has a different culture of public-private cooperation and each successful partnership has to be tailored to the needs of the individual community, the park, and its particular issues. An important overall aim, however, will be to maintain the momentum of this initiative and make its future secure. The evolution of this partnership will be a learning process. Decisions regarding the nature of such appointments as a Park Administrator, a deputy to oversee project implementation and maintenance, a master gardener, or a review board

to uphold the principles of the Master Plan will be the product of consensus within the community and the City Council tempered by the experience of other parks.

## FUNDING

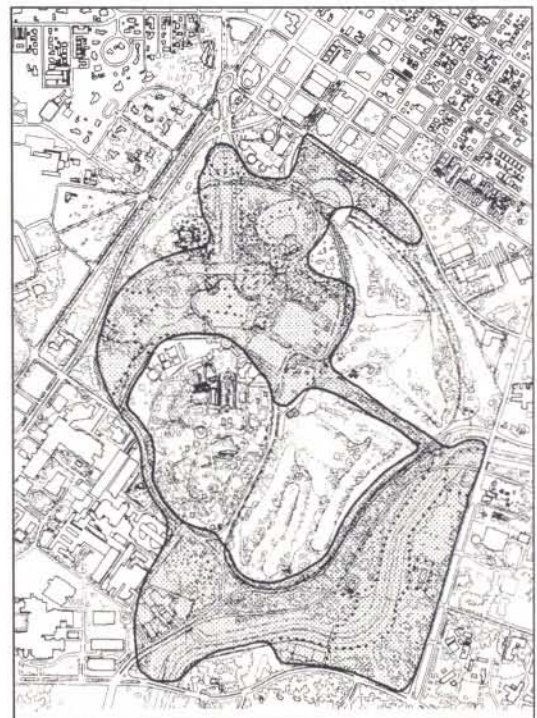
Experience has shown that a stable and effective public private-partnership is a powerful force for eliciting funding from diverse sources. As donors see that their contributions supplement public funding rather than being used as a substitute, they will witness tangible improvements resulting from their investment. Grants from foundations, charitable organizations, and individuals for planning, design, and construction will be important sources to supplement public funds. A number of projects, notably those described below as “incremental,” can be realized by the review and redirection of existing Parks and Recreation Department funds. Some of the most significant and far reaching proposals in the plan involve road realignment. It is fortunate that funding for these works, together with the rehabilitation of the adjacent park land, is matched by a considerable diversity of sources – Department of Transportation, Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, Urban Mass Transit Authority, Texas Department of Transportation, METRO in addition to the city itself.

A principle of the master planning process has been to find solutions that work on many levels - inside, adjacent to, and beyond the park. The key, therefore, to proposals that involve realigning roads has been to achieve a consensus with the park’s neighbors to solve their problems as well, and thereby access alternate sources of funding. For example, Harris County Flood Control Department funds would be a source for new bridge work and flood control measures in the park if the proposed work is shown to improve the flood protection to neighboring institutions.

## PRIORITIES

Over seventy individual projects have been identified to implement the Master Plan in its entirety. The success of the Master Plan, however, depends on the implementation of a critical mass of projects. It is crucial to address the fundamental problems of the park, or there remains a risk that the park eventually reverts to its present condition. The projects that comprise this critical mass are those described as Flagship Projects. These projects, such as the Great Lawn and the reclamation of park land in the southeast section, get to the heart of the park’s problems and together with projects that clear the way for their implementation, form the backbone of the plan.

In addition to the Flagship Projects there are four other types: Major Projects, such as the new gateways into the park and the various



'Critical mass' of Master Plan projects for Hermann Park

peripheral parking lots, improve more limited areas of the park, but address in particular the perimeter. Incremental Projects, such as replanting the park canopy and initiating a comprehensive signage program, are those which can be implemented in phases over time. This type of project takes advantage of smaller gifts and donations. On-Going Projects, such as the Children's Playground and the Miller Theater Concessions, are funded and in the process of design by other consultants. The design of each on-going project has been developed to conform to the basic principles of the Master Plan. The final category is Stewardship Projects, such as the creation of a computer data base to monitor park maintenance. These will improve the standard of care and ultimately attain the goal of a more sustainable park.

### PHASING

The rehabilitation of the park will be phased over a number of years, in view of the limitations on available funding, the importance of allowing visitors continued access to the park, and the necessity of testing strategies before extending them throughout the park. Based upon a reasonable assumption of funding availability, implementation is anticipated over a period of ten years, in three phases. Each phase includes a core of Flagship Projects.

The first phase focuses on the rehabilitation of two areas of the park: the most intensively used areas between the Grand Basin and Sam Houston's statue, and the southeast corner of the park between the bayou, Almeda and Holcombe. The goal is to increase and improve the quality of usable open space in the park. The second phase will address the reorganization of parking and traffic circulation in the central areas of the park, increasing the availability of parking while reducing the impact of the car. These projects will allow for the creation of the Great Lawn and a Cafe. With the realignment of North and South MacGregor, the third phase focuses on the reconnection of the center of the park to the bayou. The areas of the park between the Golf Course and the Bayou, presently dominated by traffic, will be returned to lush park land.



# Conclusion

From broad goals to the identification of specific projects and the most mundane details of operation and management, the aim of the Hermann Park Master Plan is to consider the health and future of the whole park above the needs of one particular piece or the desires of a specific constituency. There are obvious steps in this process: arrest the decline and assess the situation, then repair what can be mended, rebuild what is needed, and edit proposed additions in context of the whole. This report represents assessment, with proposals for future work, and it addresses broad planning principles regarding transportation, traffic, and parking, as well as detailed proposals for terraces, cafes, trails, and picnic shelters. It is both a long range and immediate action plan, coordinating projects which are on-going with those envisioned for the next century. It is a plan that grows out of the history of Houston and its setting: from the initial schemes of the 1910s and 1920s, to the needs of the modern metropolis and its large and growing population.

The plan depicts a park both greener and bluer. It is a place you can reach with less trouble and move through without your own car. It will be a sanctuary that has more shade, more lawn, and more water than it does now. It adds services where people need them: toilets, snack bars, picnic shelters, barbecue pits, signs, and shuttles. The plan restores the gardens to the Garden Center and links the heart of the park to the bayou that runs through it. This plan envisions the Zoo and Golf Course, the Museum of Natural Science and Miller Theater set in a bigger, more generous park, rather than one where the park is a threadbare, leftover space between successful, well-maintained, fenced enclaves.

All of these proposals imply change, both physical and psychological. To carry these ideas forward will require capital, organization, talent, and determination - all qualities which have characterized Houston since its inception, and which have been evident in every step since the beginning of the planning process. From the chorus of voices, each with a new concern, a remarkable consistency in public opinion has emerged: "Keep the park green, keep it open, keep it free, make it a place for all people." There is unlimited potential for Hermann Park, not just to be the civic, central park for Houston, but to rival grand urban parks nationwide. Early architects of the city embraced this

potential with their original vision for the park. The intention of the Master Plan is to restore and renovate this park for the public, in the spirit of Hermann, Kessler, and Hare and Hare, with an eye towards the future.

Our vision for Hermann Park in the next century is practical, achievable, and eminently desirable. It is driven by a desire for equity and justice, for beauty, and delight both in the place and in each other's company. In the words of cultural geographer J.B. Jackson, "every American is entitled to an environment that is biologically wholesome, socially just, and spiritually rewarding." The revitalized Hermann Park will help make Houston such a place.

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