

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF PARK PLANNING

Written expressly for Park Practice GUIDELINE by Walter A. Coldwell, State Park Planner, Florida.

Mr. Coldwell received his degree in Landscape Design from the University of Florida and has spent much of his life in park design and planning. He was one of the three original employees of the Florida Park Board in the early 30's. In addition to his design work, he has served variously as Superintendent of Parks, City of Fort Lauderdale, six years as State Park Superintendent and District Supervisor and as the Director of Florida State Parks. Mr. Coldwell also served for several years as Landscape Consultant in Cuba.

"If I were to plan a park, what would I do?"

This question to many of us seems extraordinarily easy to answer, yet the truth is that others connected with parks do not appear to understand the fundamental approach, the thought behind, nor the information required in the planning of a park. Only recently I was approached by a competent engineer whose humble question was "How do you go about preparing a master plan for a park?" His sincerity startled me because it was then I realized that although I have found theory and dogma, I have failed to find written material that would satisfactorily answer this simple question.

When the opportunity to prepare an article on the Fundamental Concepts of Park Planning was offered to me I was at first hesitant for I am no 'literary cove', having spent most of my time with a pen drawing straight lines and curves. In this short article I cannot hope to present a complete manual that would answer all those matters involved in the engineer's question, and there is no doubt that the young and inexperienced park planners could use a 'troubleshooting' manual to help them solve their day-to-day problems. I submit this, not so much as a thought-provoking treatise, but as an informative narrative; not of authority but as the result of much experience.

GENERAL

There are no intricate manipulations in the evolution of a park Plan of Development. The procedure follows a certain prescribed direction, going from the less complex to the more complex. Those who will participate in the design of a public park are entrusted with an obligation of great importance. The Plan of Development is an indication of immediate and future possibilities as based upon current trends and it is the starting point upon which trades and professions will be directly or indirectly dependant during the park's development. The full merit of the design will not be measured by the acclamations for a pretty tinted drawing with sweeping curves. It will be praised or condemned by those persons in whose hands the operation and maintenance of the park is placed. These people will generally be families or groups of young people, and the park best filling the needs and requirements of families has proven to be the more successful.

THE PLANNER

The technical and academic requisites for a park planner as set forth by private enterprise and governments are parallel. Essentially, the planner should be skilled in basic designing and delineation; should have a basic knowledge of civil engineering; should have a sympathetic feeling of lands, not only for the contents of these lands but for the character of them. He should have an aesthetic ability to ably portray, reflect and preserve the natural or man-made landscape.

Not all park planners would ever make successful park superintendants, nor will all park superintendants make successful park planners. However, even in this age of "hurry up and specialize" I am so bold as to observe that the park planner would be more apt to become successful if he were willing, at the threshold of his career, to enlist his services in the operation and maintenance of a park. Here he would learn how and why a park really works. Most certainly he would learn about people and how they look upon a park. He would learn that rose beds poorly placed are difficult to spray, and that inferior planning might make it more difficult to collect and dispose of refuse, than to park automobiles.

To the impatient, the word apprentice might be offensive but to me it is difficult to conceive how a park planner can give his best unless he is, first, last and always, a park man. The successful farmer has spaded the earth. The successful hospital administrator may not have served a medical doctor's internship, but the medical doctor serving in that same hospital began his career as an interne. So, why should not the park planner be willing to learn his profession by experiencing the fundamentals early in his career?

Few of the millions of park visitors ever give a thought as to who designed the park they are enjoying—they take the design for granted. In like manner, the personnel of the operating park are seldom sought out to be paid hard-earned compliments concerning their scrupulous upkeep, and the task of these persons can be made less difficult when the planner does his utmost toward this end. I well remember an all night chore of repairing sudden washouts along some three miles of park road. The reward the following day was the satisfaction of seeing park traffic flowing as usual. I also recall the compliment of a lady visitor regarding the replacement of black toilet seats with white ones. The replacement had been made the previous summer!

The park planner should not envision his design as being a monument to his skill. Should he adopt this attitude he is in danger of repetition which might not prove quite as satisfactory in the next park to be designed. There is a reward far more enduring than faded citations—it is that inner pleasure derived from observing, smugly if you wish, the happiness of people who come to use the park and its wide variety of facilities. Another reward is that satisfaction of seeing a job well done—wherein the facilities, roads, etc., blend into the landscape and do not give the appearance of man-made competition.

THE PLAN

I prefer the following out of many existing definitions of a Plan of General Development: "The Plan of General Development, sometimes referred to as the Master Plan, is the first comprehensive statement of the aspirations and goals for the development of the park. It would

become the official guide to the orderly development of the park."

Certain textbooks are only fleeting, and true design of the outdoor area will identify the spirit of the people. No park is identical to any other, each having its own atmosphere, character and surroundings. These identities must be reflected in the plan by dint of the planner's determination and comprehension. To achieve this, the planner must studiously interpret the area, and although he may have his own ideals, they will only be ideals and the plan will merely approximate these images.

A tall pine exists only because it is capable of weathering the storm; likewise, the plan should not be regarded as being an inflexible organ even though it is the official guide. It must have durability and quality which will enable it to conform to changing or new situations. Indeed, he was unusually perceptive who could forecast, some two decades ago, the present day popularity of overnight tent camping as we are today experiencing it. The plan may have to be revised periodically to provide for the new changes and facilities, and to do away with the obsolete or inadequate. Changes in type of public use, changes in physiographic or hydrographic features, acquisition, etc., all play a part in the necessity for a revision in a Plan of Development. In planning the revision, the planner should take full advantage of the experience and observations of the personnel who have been responsible for the park's management.

In spite of future and inevitable revisions, the Plan of Development should be complete and properly prepared; without it, the development of the park will proceed according to whim, opinion and pressure, and results might then prove experimental, costly and unsatisfactory.

Facts about the earliest parks in the United States should not be too difficult to trace. It would appear that local communities led in this development, and later we read of the National Parks. The next significant park activity occurred during the 1930's when the Federal government joined with local governments in cooperative programs of park development. Regardless of size, these new parks were of importance to their communities.

From whence did the park planners spring to suddenly meet the urgent demand of the 30's? Many were landscape architects who had been engaged in the planning of estates, subdivisions, or in the more fastidious and exacting planning of large cemeteries. To swell these ranks, young graduating landscape architects were called upon. This organization of land planners was coordinated through the efforts of the practicing planners in the National Park Service and other established park departments. In spite of certain diversified previous activities in land planning, all were in agreement regarding one fundamental principle—PREPARATION.

PLAN PREPARATION

The plan will be only as successful as the preparation involved prior to the design. Richard L. Bury^{1/} aptly makes the statement "The best solution can be reached only if well grounded information is available. As Franklin put it, 'An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.'"

1/ TRENDS in Parks and Recreation, July 1964

Let us assume that the lands are now park property, that very little information regarding the area is available, and that the planner has been authorized to proceed with the Plan:

(1) A map of the park should be secured. It might be a map which has already been prepared during the acquisition period, or it may be an aerial photograph, or a map as prepared by the United States Geological Survey. In any event, this map should be brought to a scale large enough to enable intelligent interpretation of the park and its physical features.

(a) The establishment of the park boundaries is first priority, and if they have not been legally surveyed this should be done immediately. Topographic information of an adequate contour interval should be available so as to provide general data. If sufficient topographic information is not at hand, a survey crew with transit may readily provide the topographic facts required for a small area. For an extremely large acreage it might be less costly and quicker if aerial photogrammetrical methods are utilized to provide the desired data.

(b) The boundaries and necessary topography should be laid out on the map of general information, which should also contain pertinent data relative to the neighborhood, surrounding countryside, highways, waterways, variation in tides, climatic extremes, and any other vital information peculiar to the area.

(2) With this information at hand, the planner is now prepared to make an area inspection. This inspection may cover all of the area, or at least it should cover the more salient features of the park. In the consideration of immense areas, it is presumed that a great deal of previous exploration has been accomplished and has provided information covering localities within the park.

It is obvious that the smaller park might not involve the time and effort as would be spent in the inspection of a much larger park, but the planner should not make the mistake of assuming that the planning of these little crown jewels require less thought and effort than much larger parks. Frequently, these smaller parks present more difficult problems than their larger brothers. They often present diverse complications such as the proximity of residential and business districts, the access streets, drainage problems, etc., the concentration of use and the people who may be expected to use them most.

The use of aircraft for aerial inspection is commonplace, and the planner should avail himself of this type of inspection at the outset. Repeated flights will save much time, more especially during the course of the design when the inevitable additional questions will arise.

During this initial exploration the planner may not be too concerned about less important details, but his notes should be comprehensive regarding his observations. These notes should refer to general facts for the purpose and use in mind regarding the park or locality, and should apply to such references as forest cover, soils, wildlife and fishery, geological and archaeological and historical elements, etc. The worth of the notes will be in their completeness to suit the planner's initial purpose as frequently, upon his return to the drawing board, he has forgotten details of some importance.

The preliminary inspection will not provide sufficient time nor information whereby the planner will become an authority concerning the park, but he should have assimilated enough of the park into his thinking that he becomes fully aware of its characteristics and influences.

Few parks are completely alike, be they all dry or all humid, high or low, large or small, north or south. Somehow, each has one or more particular identities. In this absorption, the planner will note that the constant reflection of these influences will favorably affect his design.

(3) The area has been selected as a park because it contains certain factors which might be put to use for human enjoyment, recreation, education, and conservation or preservation. The park may be a small neighborhood type, or a shady commons, or an old fort, a waterfront, a cleft in the earth, or mountains or prairies, or marshes or forests. The planner should more thoroughly seek out these particular factors, as the case may be, from specialists or scholars. In like manner, the advice of the professionals interested in wildlife and other natural resources is invaluable in the planning of certain parks. Destruction of breeding grounds, historical or archaeological sites, etc., may be avoided as a result of these consultations. The purpose of the design is not to destroy or impair the natural environment. It is a scheme to take advantage of the environment wherein any man-made facility will contribute to the appreciation of the landscape and that which it contains. So also does the planner remain aware of the relationship of the design to the well-being of people.

In this age of computers, forecasts, statistics, studies and zoning, the planner should encounter no difficulty in accumulating whatever information he deems necessary to assist him in the formulation of a plan which will be cognizant of population trends, transportation proposals, etc.

(4) With the passing of each year, the subject of economics becomes more familiar to the planner. The argument of whether any income, little income or more income should be derived from parks is generally not the planner's decision. However, in looking into the past and peering into the future, there is little doubt that increased income from certain parks will be required. Recognizing this fact, the planner should (or will have to) take into account the income potentialities of his park design. Of just as great importance is the fiscal economy during construction or development, and the operation and maintenance of a park. No matter how tasteful the design may appear, if considerable thought is not given to various costs involved in development and operation, the result might be incomplete development and poor maintenance. With this in mind, and acknowledging that the planner has no control over present or future finances, he must give his most practical planning consideration to this matter.

(5) A park does not occur by accident; it is the outcome of deliberation and work on the part of an individual or a group. Some properties are purchased, others are donated, and so on; but regardless of how the lands become a park—the planner can be sure that the neighborhood or locality is profoundly interested in its outcome. The persons who devoted their time and efforts in the creating of this park should be consulted, and from such relationships many ideas will be revealed. These suggestions will have been mature long before the planner was called in, and as often as not he will uncover many worthwhile ideas and much valuable information during these consultations.

THE PRELIMINARY STUDY OF PLAN OF GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

When furnished with all the information necessary, the planner should proceed with his preliminary study. Few are born to genius in creative activity, and the design will be the result of effort. This task will mean that schemes will be scrapped, time and time again, until the picture develops a semblance of pleasing continuity. Roads will merge along proper routes, use areas will appear to be in their proper place, and all will seem well!

Now that the planner is satisfied with his preliminary study, he should analyze it minutely by composing a narrative or summary describing what he accomplished in his plan. This summarization generally reveals discrepancies in the design which should be corrected accordingly.

Often the planner is fortunate enough to be answerable to a reviewing committee to whom he will then make a presentation of his preliminary plan. Here he should hopefully anticipate critical observations and questions, and he will then find himself reviewing his plan through the eyes of others.

THE PLAN OF GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

The final plan will be the result of changing and modifying the preliminary plan. The design will be quite similar to the preliminary plan, however, the refinements will give emphasis to a finished product. Again, a summary is prepared to accompany the plan, but this time it is an article of reasoning to support the design. Complete detailed explanations should cover the proposed facilities, roads and use areas. Any interpretive, educational or conservation circumstance should be made clear. Frequently, the planner is required to provide an estimated total cost of the park's development as per his design, in which case this is presented as a total overall cost according to the sum total of all items. It may be necessary to present total costs in suggested succeeding phases of development. Sometimes the planner is also required to include with his plan an estimate of annual costs of operation and maintenance. This should be prepared in conjunction with the development phase or otherwise, and in accordance with anticipated progressive visitation.

SITE PLANS

If it be required that the planner submit site plans, then more exacting studies will be necessary. These site plans may be expected to accompany the plan of development, or at a later date. In any event, more precise topographic surveys must be prepared for each site or use area, and personal inspections of a most thorough nature are essential. Consultations should be held with the architects, highway engineers and other professions involved, in order to discuss the requirements and problems of the particular sites. Upon the satisfactory completion of these discussions, the individual site plans are then prepared to a scale compatible with the site; existing and proposed topographic contours are indicated, as are the roads, parking areas, structures, utilities and all other proposed facilities.

I may be getting somewhat far afield from the subject under discussion, but while on the subject of site planning I am of the opinion that the structure should be built conforming to the park, and that the park should not be built around the structure. I agree with Mr. Grady Clay^{2/} who in turn disagrees with a theory that the building architect "must retain the basic control of the design, not only for the individual buildings but . . . of the total man-made environment." It is also noted that Mr. William J. Hart^{3/} also disagrees with this theory and he has written "it should be clear that architectural style cannot substitute for landscape and design principles which control the location of buildings within the park." I might add that it has been my privilege to be associated with some architects who seemed to agree in principle with Messrs. Clay and Hart, and the outcome of this type of association has been most satisfactory from the viewpoint of public use and aesthetic effects.

THE PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT FOR A PROPOSED PARK

In this type of planning, we enter into the field of more presumption and less preparation, as, for obvious reasons, the employer is reluctant to expend funds on a proposal which is still in a fluid state. Here the planner is called upon to present a design that appears feasible, and although his preparation might be held to a minimum, the planner must have access to some information, such as maps, aerial photographs, and the opportunity to personally make inspections of the proposed park. By dint of experience, imagination and written explanation, the proposed plan will usually be resolved into a reasonable arrangement.

THE HYPOTHETICAL PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

This type of plan is designed upon a hypothetical locality within an existing vicinity. Here the planner is called upon to create a design which is intended to sell an idea. The preparation for this more unusual type of plan is simple. All the planner need do is to become completely familiar with the vicinity in which it is hoped that sometime a park will be located; he must also be fully aware of the kind of park he intends to portray.

In closing this article and to illustrate that this abstract plan has its rewards, I offer a gratifying experience:

A few years ago it became obvious that the protection and conservation of a large coral reef was an immediate necessity. Coral dealers were stripping this reef thereby robbing it of its aquatic beauty and destroying fishery breeding grounds. In order to patrol the reef and to have a point from which sightseeing boats might depart for the reef, a headquarters site on the Florida Keys was sorely needed.

It befell my lot to try to uncover property of generous acreage which might be purchased for a state park headquarters site. Weeks of searching only revealed buyers, but no sellers. To satisfy a curiosity

2/ Grady Clay; TRENDS in Parks and Recreation, January 1965

3/ William J. Hart; TRENDS in Parks and Recreation, April 1965

aroused by the enthusiasm and prodding of Mr. John Pennekamp, I finally prepared a hypothetical design of the type of base site we had in mind. The plan as completed not only indicated its initial purpose, a headquarters site, but the progression of the plan unveiled boating marinas, bathing beaches, overnight camping areas, day use facilities and an interpretive museum. A narrative was written to substantiate the plan, and also included was an estimate of development costs and progressive annual visitation.

Mr. Pennekamp, a man who has devoted most of his life to conservation and parks in Florida, and who also played an active part in the establishment of the Everglades National Park, took possession of the plan and its narrative. The story is his from thereon; the result being an anonymous gift to the State of Florida of a large and desirable tract appraised in the millions. Later, upon commencement of the construction on the land given, the same donor deeded to the State an adjacent, larger and more valuable tract. This complex of the underwater park and the Key lands are now known as the John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park.

Maybe there is a moral to such an encouraging finish and it might be:

A Park Plan of Development depends upon those who have the determination and inspiration to make it become a reality.

