

City Hall Park FAQs- September 2017

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Park Design Features

Why are we planning a redesign of the park?

Today the Park has two identities: the bustling, much-loved center of the City during weekend festivals and events, and the somewhat isolated and sparingly-used space during weekdays and evenings. The current park infrastructure is not adequate to serve users of the space during either of those times. The plan for redesigning City Hall Park prioritizes a healthy, functioning urban park, accessibility for all users in all seasons, and the enhancement of this historic space to meet the modern needs of the community.

Additionally, some of the park's infrastructure is failing; there is extensive soil compaction which contributes to inadequate management of stormwater runoff, and the fountain's mechanical and water equipment need to be replaced. The level of work and cost associated with remediating these issues is significant, even without the other contemplated enhancements to the park.

What is included in the current park design?

Since 2012, concept plans for the park have continued to evolve as a result of stakeholder and public input. In August 2017, an updated plan for the park was shared, which includes the following features. See the plan online at www.greatstreetsbtv.com.

- The healthiest trees are maintained, and some in declining health are intended to be rejuvenated during construction. Soil conditions are repaired to support new and existing trees, and two rain gardens mitigate stormwater runoff and soil erosion.
- Pathways maintain the historic connectivity across the park to each of the corners and edges, intersecting near a central water feature. Paths have been realigned slightly from their current location so that the grades are less steep, in locations which limit impacts on some of the healthiest trees, and to serve the modern maintenance needs of the park.
- The flexible spaces organized along these pathways accommodate a variety of activities such as small performances, a wide range of seating types, the artist market, and a central gathering area with an interactive fountain. This allows for infrastructure which supports these activities to be condensed and incorporated into hardscape areas, retaining maximum un-programmed space and limiting future soil compaction from these activities encroaching on the lawn.
- The Park continues to serve as the home of the Burlington Farmer's Market. However, booths are relocated to the streets and sidewalks on the edges of the park so that the central lawn may be used for seating and other uses on market days, and to avoid damaging the lawn again in the future.
- Areas have been identified for the addition of a vending kiosk and a standalone restroom facility in the future so that these amenities can be tested before being installed permanently.
- Rather than an ornamental fountain element with a basin, an interactive fountain is incorporated into the central gathering space. In addition to creating an active space for play, this fountain can provide visual interest and white noise, as well as incorporate lights for ambiance and art in ways the current fountain doesn't allow.
- Terraced areas along the buildings in the northeast corner of the park connect the historic buildings to the park space, activate an otherwise shaded and unused part of the park, and create flexible space for seating and other temporary activities.

- The southern edge of the park features a seat wall, which frames the park and helps manage the complex stormwater management challenges along Main Street.

Why isn't the park designed to be more of an "oasis" with meandering paths and small, quiet spaces enclosed by a diversity of vegetation?

While the park's shape, size, layout and features have changed over time, for over 150 years the park has been more of a public open space and square than a pastoral park. Changing the park's design to emulate Central Park is fundamentally in conflict with its historic character and its role within the City-wide park system.

For a small public park in the center of downtown, the concept plan has carefully considered the historic characteristics of the park, as well as the desired uses of the park in the future. The concept plan creates a balance between un-programmed open areas of lawn and other landscaping, and the hardscape that accommodates the range of activities that take place in the park. This balance is something many Burlingtonians have said is important.

Park Ecology

What is the current state of the trees in City Hall Park?

According to the Arborist's assessment, more than half of the trees currently in City Hall Park are in poor condition or are struggling as a result of crowding, compacted soils, disease, and other factors. Several are inappropriate species within the park, dropping fruit which lead to slippery conditions. While not immediately obvious, a closer look reveals many trees that are already dead in their highest branches, and others that are being choked by their own root systems which cannot spread out in the compacted soils. A diagram of tree health in City Hall Park is available on www.greatstreetsbtv.com.

Why are trees proposed to be removed and replaced?

Trees in poor condition and some in struggling condition are likely to be removed. Those in struggling condition will be evaluated to determine if they are able to be rejuvenated to improve their long-term health. Replacement tree species are still to be determined, but emphasis will be on those that are long-lasting and tolerant of urban conditions. As designs continue to be refined, more details will be available regarding the exact number of trees to be retained or removed.

A priority of this plan is to remediate the park's soil conditions in order to support both existing and new trees. To do so, significant work will need to be done to address the compacted soils in the park, and to incorporate the appropriate infrastructure to support the park's activities, including the relocation of the Farmer's Market tents to the streets and sidewalks on the edges of the Park, rather than on the paths in its center.

How much of the park is currently green space, and how much of the park will be green space under the concept plan?

Our team has looked closely at the balance of green and impervious spaces for both stormwater and aesthetic purposes. While aesthetics and programming are important, the ecological functions for supporting healthy trees and handling stormwater are of high importance in this design process. It is evident from the condition of the park today that the park's current use is not supported by the infrastructure within it.

When considering stormwater capture, it is important to note that pavement is not always impervious and green spaces are not always permeable. Despite the fact that 25% of the park is formally paved today, 43% of the park is impervious due to the extent of the compaction and erosion of areas that used to be green (see diagram on www.greatstreetsbtv.com). Erosion and compaction can be expected to continue if the park is not rebuilt with appropriately-sized and located paved areas that will also protect open spaces. The current plan includes about 40% paved areas, including both impervious surfaces and permeable paving.

Why doesn't the plan include even more trees and landscaping than exist today?

Within Burlington, city and regional parkland add up to 23.5 acres per resident—almost double the national standard for cities of our size! These formal and informal parks include a range of amenities and are designed according to their role within the parks system.

While City Hall Park makes up less than 2 acres of this system, it has a big role within our community. As a public space within an urban environment, our community uses—and wants to use—this space for many purposes. The concept plan builds on the historic landscape design and supports what our community says is important for the future.

The plan strikes a balance between active and passive uses of the park, plans for the needs of healthy trees and stormwater management, and includes infrastructure that can be maintained within an urban environment. A heavily landscaped plan is neither historically appropriate, nor does it meet the current uses of the park—including the park's use as a space for impromptu demonstrations, vigils and other expressions of art and culture in our community.

Accessibility & Inclusivity

How does the plan improve mobility within and access to the park?

Today, there are many cracked, broken, and uneven sidewalk surfaces. There is a 23-foot change in elevation across the park, which means some of the paths exceed ADA accessible grades. And finally, some of the paths in the park are not wide enough for park users to pass one other without walking into the grass—especially if one person has a stroller or is in a wheelchair.

The plan maintains the historic connections across the park—to each of its edges and corners—and ensures that the new pathway locations reduce steep grades and are slightly wider to accommodate the current use and maintenance of the park. Additional benches are included in the plan to provide a range of seating options within the park.

It seems that the park is being designed to displace the homeless and expand Church Street's commercial activity into the park.

Some residents have shared that they feel unsafe or unwelcome in the park due to observed behaviors, poor lighting, or lack of amenities to attract people to the park. It is important to note that the park is not being designed to remove any group of users; in fact, the behaviors many people observe within the park cannot be addressed through design. Many of the behavioral challenges that have been observed in the park will require the ongoing support of agencies who work to address issues of homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health in the community.

Instead, the plan calls for a space that encourages more people to use the park on more regular basis, for a range of activities that create a welcoming and inclusive environment. The park is designed to be flexible, with ready-to-use infrastructure to support a wide variety of activities in the park. And while

working to create an inclusive space, our designers have also been careful not to create dark or isolated corners that can become a place for illicit activity to occur.

Are there public restrooms in the plan?

Public restrooms are a critical element of inclusive and accessible public spaces, and must be well-maintained in order to be safe and successful. City Hall Park is a small park, and a permanent restroom facility would require the use of a significant amount of space currently dedicated to open space and other park activities. Instead, the plan calls for a small, kiosk-style restroom, such as the Portland Loo, that can be placed along one of the park's edges. The current plan includes a placeholder for one potential location for this restroom; it is anticipated that the facility will be installed as part of a future phase.

Modern Uses

Why does the plan replace the historic fountain in the park?

The fountain's infrastructure is failing and needs to be replaced, and trash and other debris frequently accumulates in the basin of the fountain. Additionally, the fountain is not original to the park; it is a combination of elements pieced together from other locations in the City. In working with historic preservation professionals in Vermont, it was determined that while a water feature is one of the character-defining elements of the park, the current fountain is not considered to be essential to its historic integrity. So while retaining a water feature in the center of the park is essential, the fountain itself can be of a modern design. In fact, it was advised that the current fountain would be out of context in the redesigned park; however, it should continue to be located in a public place in Burlington.

The new splash fountain was introduced into the design as an interactive element to provide more activity in the park. In addition to providing white noise and ambiance in the park, this type of fountain can be used for play and can be programmed with light as an art installation. These systems can also include equipment to recycle and sterilize water to improve the sanitation of public fountains.

Is a splash fountain appropriate in our climate?

A study of pop-jet fountains has found them in use in plazas and parks throughout the U.S. and Canada, including other northerly states and communities with cold climates: Chicago, Detroit, upstate New York, Washington, and Wisconsin to name a few. Even when not being actively used for play, these fountains can create white noise and visual interest, becoming a sort of public art that activates a space.

Why is there a café proposed within the park?

The small kiosk, and seating areas that can be utilized for temporary food carts, are intended to provide a range of activities within the park on a more regular basis. Along with more frequent, small performances and more seating the park, these can help draw people into the park for day-to-day activities.

Is there a private patio for RiRa in the park?

No, there is not a private space for any establishment within the park. One of the features of the park plan is to create a series of terrace areas along the backs of the historic buildings adjacent to the park, to help activate this space. These areas are designed to be flexible for seating or other public purposes. If any of these spaces are used or occupied for events or by establishments for any period of time in the future, the use of the space must be requested through existing City permitting, licensing, and/or RFP processes as applicable.

Why is the park being designed for the Farmer's Market? Isn't there somewhere else it could go?

In recent years, the Farmer's and Artist's Markets have become central features of the park, recognized by many Burlingtonians as something they love about the park today. The popularity of this event is among the uses of the park contributing to some of the challenges with the park's infrastructure. That said, the park is not being designed *for* the market.

One of the fundamental changes in the plan is that the market vendors will be organized around the park's four edges, on hardscaped areas which can support this use, rather than on the pathways in the center of the park. This arrangement will allow for more utilization of the park's open spaces for seating and passive uses on market days, and reduce future impacts to the grass and soil conditions due to foot traffic in the park. Additionally, there are fewer vendors accommodated in this plan than the market currently features today.

What about the Market's impacts on businesses?

In the 2012 *Imagine City Hall Park* survey, the Farmer's/Artist's Market was the top feature that respondents said they loved about City Hall Park. And of 30 retail businesses that responded to a Church Street Marketplace survey in 2017, 80% reported that the market had a positive impact on business. However, we have heard from some concerned restaurant owners around the park that the market negatively impacts business on Saturday mornings. While the Farmer's Market has been an active participant in discussions about how to be a good neighbor and responsible user of the park, this plan considers where vendors should be located and how many vendors are appropriate in this size park. The type of products sold at the market is decided by the market board and is outside the scope of this project.

How is public art included in the plan?

One of the elements in the concept plan for City Hall Park is to include spaces for rotating and/or permanent public art pieces within the park. It is anticipated that public art will be designed/installed in future phases after the park has been constructed. Infrastructure, such as pads suitable for mounting art pieces, will be constructed in anticipation of these installations.

How are bulletin boards included in the plan?

We have heard a lot about the importance of bulletin boards within the City's arts and cultural landscape. Current concept plans for the park and adjacent Main Street include placeholder locations for public bulletin boards in/around the park and throughout the corridor. Specific locations for and design of these elements will be determined as plans are refined, and a few prototypes are likely to be tested. To-date there has not been a discussion about how each board will be used, but there are likely to be a combination of curated and non-curated boards throughout the Great Streets project area.

Historic Preservation

What are the historic elements of the park?

With the exception of two stone monuments, which have historic significance as individual elements, all other features in the park have been changed and replaced throughout the park's history in order to meet the evolving needs of our community. The park's historic significance is defined by the layout of its features, rather than by any one of the individual elements. In working with historic preservation professionals in Vermont, it was determined that the historic characteristics of the park are:

- The park has been an open space within downtown, and has remained so despite changing layouts and uses of the park by the community.
- There has been a gathering space near the center of the park containing a water feature with paths that radiate from the that space to all of the corners and edges of the park.
- There is an element within the park that creates a focal point visible from outside the park. In the past this element has included a flagpole and a fountain.

How does the plan address the historic characteristics of the park?

Refinements have been made to the plan that retain the historic characteristics of the park, while presenting them in a contemporary way. These refinements are the result of the project team's collaboration with the State Historic Preservation Office, Preservation Trust of Vermont, and Preservation Burlington.

In particular, the gathering space near the center of the park continues to contain a water feature, but the upright fountain and trough base are replaced with an interactive fountain. A focal point has been added—a piece of sculpture/art in the park. The east-west and north-south pathways are retained in their historic locations. Additionally, paths continue to connect from the central gathering space to the northwest, northeast, and southwest corners of the park; the primary diagonal pathway has been changed to a slight arch, rather than a straight, to improve ADA accessibility and avoid impacts on the healthiest trees in the park. The two monuments and flag pole will remain in their current locations.

What about the historic fountain?

The fountain that exists in the park today is not original to the park—it has had its home in various locations throughout the City since it was originally gifted to Burlington. In working with Vermont historic preservation professionals, it was determined that the current fountain would be out of context in a redesigned park; however, it should continue to be located in a public place in Burlington. In responding to the historic characteristics of the park, those professionals advised that a water feature in the center of the park is essential, but that the form of the fountain itself can be of a modern design.