

Master Plan for Schuylkill River Park

PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA

Prepared for
Friends of Schuylkill River Park

August 2006

SALT DESIGN STUDIO
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE · PLANNING · URBAN DESIGN

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178 SUMMIT LANE SUITE B BALA CYNWYD PENNSYLVANIA 19004
T: 610.667.5048 F: 610.667.5049 WWW.SALTDDESIGNS.COM

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to the Board of Friends of Schuylkill River Park, the Markward-Taney Playground Fund, the Master Planning Task Force, The Philadelphia School and numerous members of the community who generously gave of their time, their intellect and their creativity towards the masterplanning process.

FSRP BOARD MEMBERS

Sylvia Beck - President

Linda Berger

Sharon Blumberg

Camille Focarino – *Co-Chair, Playground Committee*

Janet Harrington

Lisa Heller

Lynne Hopper

Henry Jaffe

Deborah Leibel

Diane Luckman

Jane Ahn Park

Judith Parker

Randy Robinson

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Kate Welch

Lauren Wylonis – *Co-Chair, Playground Committee*

COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

Lisa Armstrong

Eric Berg

Elizabeth Block

Lisa Christopher

Judy Crossan – *Markward Recreation Center*

Jonathan Fingerut

Wendy Gosfield

Corey Hilliard

Robin Kohles

Emily Marston – *Principal, The Philadelphia School*

Nicole Melichiorre

Sean O'Rourke

Al Rodin

Ellen Siegel – *Taney Baseball*

Joe Symick – *Schuylkill River Development Corporation*

Helen Whatnell

Introduction

Schuylkill River Park was designed and built in 1976. This public green space plays a vital role in Center City as a recreational venue for people of all ages and abilities in the surrounding neighborhood and for nearby community institutions as well. As with many successful and well-loved urban parks, Schuylkill River Park is heavily used on a daily basis and now, after decades of use, is in need of renovation and repair.

The impetus for conducting a planning process and designing a master plan initially grew from efforts to renovate the playground, known as Markward-Taney Playground. In 2005, members of the community had voiced concerns about proceeding with a playground renovation in absence of a long-term plan for the entire park. As a result, Friends of Schuylkill River Park (FSRP) embarked on a master planning process to address broader planning issues, including the renovation of Markward-Taney Playground, pedestrian circulation, lighting, safety, landscape management and park maintenance.

The Friends hosted two community charettes, facilitated by SALT Design Studio, to provide a forum for neighborhood residents and community organizations to express their concerns and interests regarding overall improvements to the park as well as renovations to Markward-Taney Playground. The charette participants included a broad range of user groups and organizations, representatives of The Friends of Schuylkill River Park and Markward-Taney Playground Fund. Many organizations in the neighborhood were invited, such as Taney Baseball, Hockey Players, Center City Resident's Association, Beacon Center for Children, Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel Preschool, Trinity Playgroup, The Philadelphia School, The School Association of Greenfield Elementary School, and Markward Recreation Center Staff, though not all were able to attend the charettes.

In addition, a separate Task Force (composed of representatives from the neighborhood, various recreational groups, The Philadelphia School and Schuylkill River Development Corporation) was created to provide feedback throughout the planning process.

[NOTE: Complete summaries from the two charrettes are included at the end of this master plan report.]





Top: Community Charrette held at The Philadelphia School
Bottom: Entrance to Park from 25th & Spruce Streets, paths in Park, Plaza at entrance to Park on Taney & Pine Street

Previous Page: Primary park green, known as The Bowl



Master Plan Description

The intent of the Schuylkill River Park Master Plan is to preserve the overall park structure as it was designed many years ago, yet augment the park with a few select improvements in key locations.

The improvements shown in this plan respond to new uses, new user groups and overall increased use of the park. Through charrettes and feedback sessions with the Board and Task Force, the planning team listened to members of the community speak about their love for the Park. Many taught their young children how to ride bikes on the asphalt courts, others now come to play hockey or bike polo in the evenings, and still more use the playground on a daily basis with their families.

Many expressed concern that the Park lacked both a connection to the Schuylkill River and a defining gateway from the adjacent neighborhoods. Though the two primary entrances -- Taney & Pine Streets and 25th & Spruce Streets -- are apparent to pedestrians, they are neither visually exciting nor specifically related to the neighborhood or the physiographic context of the Schuylkill River and its floodplain. Consequently, two key projects for the master plan became renovation and redesign of these important entrances to identify them as unique Park gateways.

Shad Fountain & Plaza (Gateway at Taney & Pine Streets)

Inspired by the shad fish which once swam in the Schuylkill River each Spring, this redesign of the entry Plaza near the Recreation Center employs water as a key feature. A fountain of leaping shad crafted from brushed metal is proposed to enliven the space. On the ground plane, bright mosaics of crushed glass echo the curves of the river, repeating the pattern in the new playground surfacing. Additional canopy trees and movable seating will offer increased shade and picnic or rest spots for park users.

Gateway Plaza (at 25th & Spruce Streets)

Many commented that this entrance called out for a more architectural and formal definition. Intended to be visible from a distance, this gateway features new brick seating walls and brick piers, topped with metal sculptures and connected by a metal arch announcing the Park. The twisting, organic forms of the metalwork allude to the park's natural setting, while the walls, piers and archway form a physical portal to the Park.

Taney Playground

During the planning process, the community learned of the City's intent to expand the existing Markward Recreation Center. As part of the Recreation Center building project, funding was included to assist with renovation of the playground. Expansion of the Recreation Center was slated to begin in Spring 2006. In addition, the Friends received a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) for new playground equipment. As a result, the need to develop a plan for the playground renovation became a priority component of the planning process.

Consensus was reached that the playground should remain in its present location, and expand towards the river. The resultant playground design captured additional space west of the playground to accommodate new swings and new equipment in both toddler and junior lots. The new safety surface design clearly contextualizes the playground with an abstraction of the river, the city and the tracks, the confluence of which most agreed make the Schuylkill River Park unique as an urban destination. The playground renovation was completed in August 2006.

River Promenade & Bridge Over Tracks

The City of Philadelphia and CSX Railroad have been discussing a potential bridge over the railroad tracks to allow users park access when trains are stopped in that area. Though it may be several years before such an idea begins to take shape, it was critical for the Friends to identify in this masterplan where such a bridge could be located and consider how it would impact the rest of the park. It was determined that the under-utilized space between the Dog Run and the recreational courts would be an acceptable location. Concession stands, storage space for recreational groups, a trellised entry and shaded seating areas are proposed to be incorporated into this future bridge structure.

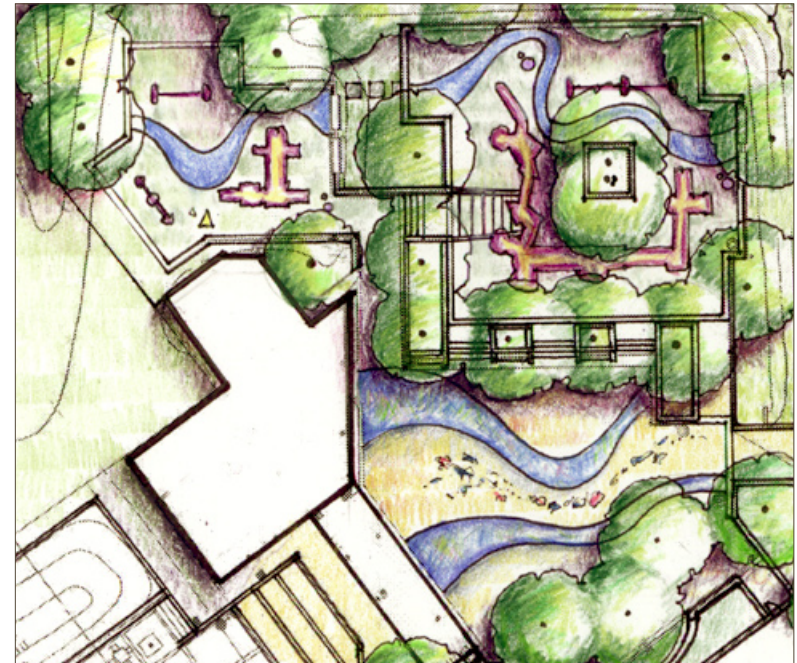
The Bowl

Even to the untrained eye, the landscape in the primary lawn area, also known as “The Bowl” at the Park, appears to be suffering. Many of the trees are distressed, perhaps due to compacted soil, inadequate drainage or inappropriate habitat (such as the Pine trees). Priorities for “The Bowl” are renovation and aeration of existing soil, removal of dead and unhealthy trees, and replanting new trees that are ecologically and culturally more appropriate for this riverfront space. It is strongly recommended that soil testing is conducted prior to selecting and planting new trees. A list of recommended plants appears at the end of this report.

Park Lighting

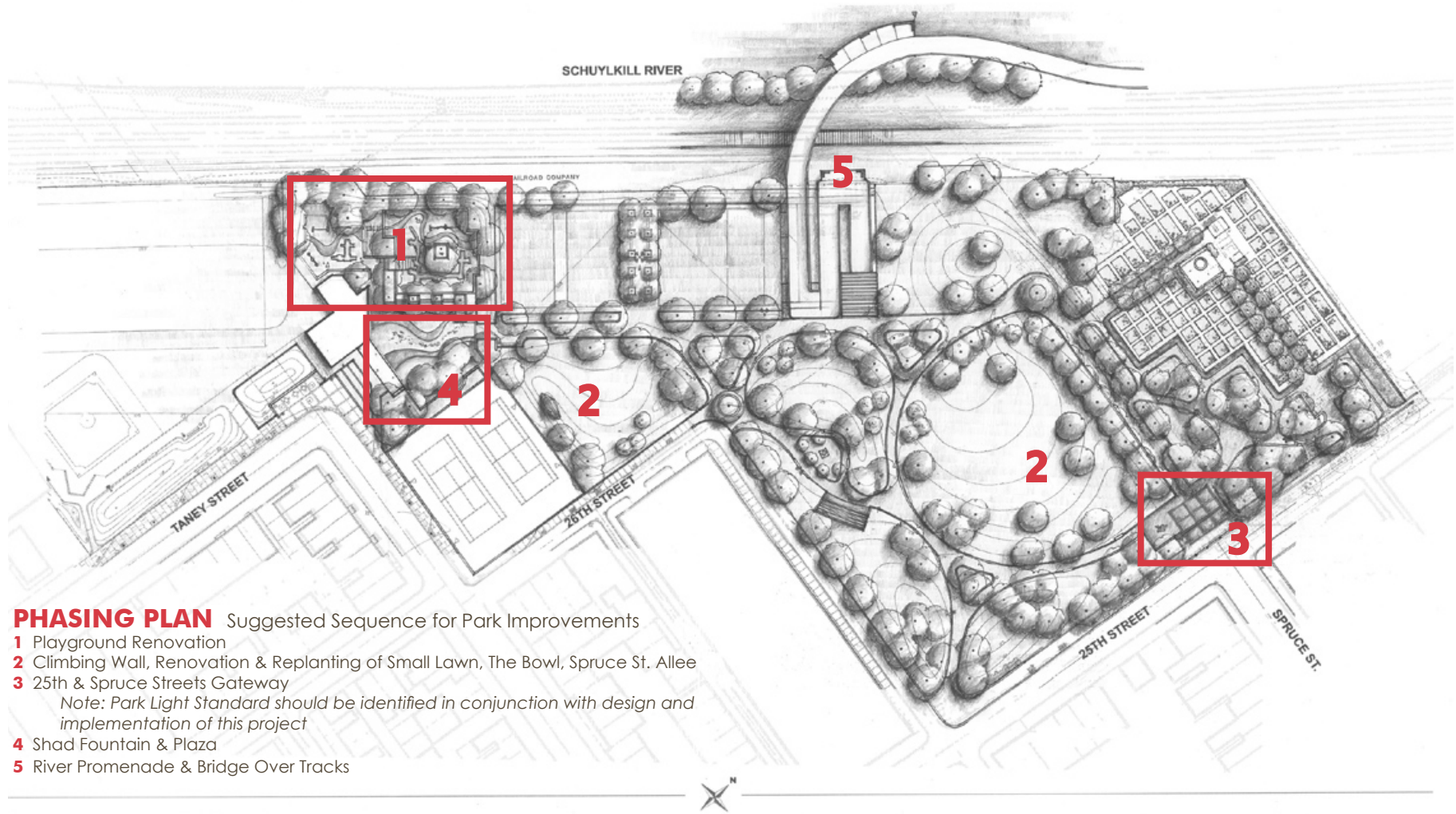
Lighting is a critical component to the success of any urban park, particularly one that is heavily used in evening hours. The type and quality of light affects the way people experience a place. Good lighting design can make a park feel safe, yet still intimate. At present, lighting throughout the Park is inconsistent in both type and quality. Some areas, such as the recreational courts, tend to be overlit and harsh on the eyes, creating dark

spots immediately adjacent, while other areas, such as the playground and some tertiary paths, suffer from inadequate light altogether. To help unify the park, it is recommended that one style of a pedestrian scale light fixture be selected and installed throughout the park, eventually replacing all other existing fixtures. The park should be evenly lit throughout, creating a more consistent and uniform “glow” along all pathways, greens and play spaces.



Plan of proposed Shad Fountain & Plaza at Taney & Pine Streets entrance





- PHASING PLAN** Suggested Sequence for Park Improvements
- 1 Playground Renovation
 - 2 Climbing Wall, Renovation & Replanting of Small Lawn, The Bowl, Spruce St. Allee
 - 3 25th & Spruce Streets Gateway
Note: Park Light Standard should be identified in conjunction with design and implementation of this project
 - 4 Shad Fountain & Plaza
 - 5 River Promenade & Bridge Over Tracks





Site Language

RECOMMENDED PLANTS

Canopy Trees

<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Red Maple
<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	Black Gum
<i>Quercus bicolor</i>	Swamp White Oak
<i>Quercus palustris</i>	Pin Oak
<i>Quercus phellos</i>	Willow Oak
<i>Betula nigra</i> 'Heritage'	River Birch

Understory Trees

<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	Ironwood
<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Eastern Redbud
<i>Cornus florida</i>	Flowering Dogwood
<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>	Sweetbay Magnolia

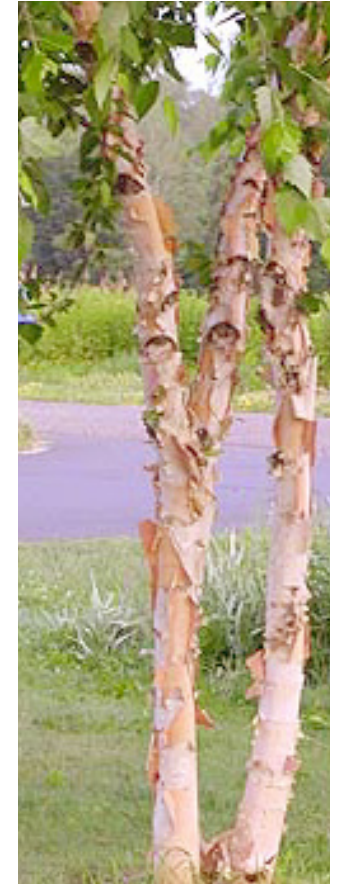
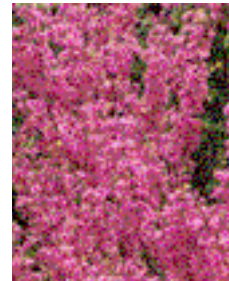
Shrubs

<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>	Summersweet Pepper Bush
<i>Itea virginica</i>	Virginia sweetspire
<i>Ilex glabra</i>	Inkberry

Perennials & Groundcovers

<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Bugleweed
<i>Carex flacca</i>	Glaucous Sedge
<i>Carex pennsylvanica</i>	Pennsylvania Sedge
<i>Hosta</i> sp.	Plantain Lily

NOTE: The plants listed above are native to floodplain or lowland areas, and are tolerant of stressful, urban conditions. It is recommended that the Friends consult with a local landscape architect prior to selecting and installing new plant material in the Park.



Top: Bugleweed, Sweetbay Magnolia, River Birch
Middle: Sedge, Black Gum
Bottom: Redbud, Virginia Sweetspire

Neighborhood Design Charrette: 22 October 2005
for
Schuylkill River Park
Markward Recreation Center, Philadelphia PA

S U M M A R Y

Background

Markward Taney Playground was designed as part of Schuylkill River Park in the 1970s and is a well loved urban resource, for both the immediate surrounding neighborhood and community institutions, as well as for the city at large. Recently, there has been an effort to renovate the playground since the present play equipment has outlived its useful life and poses numerous safety hazards. The Markward Taney Playground Fund was founded in 2004 to raise funding for renovation purposes.

Introduction

The Friends of Schuylkill River Park hosted two community charettes to provide a forum for neighborhood residents and community organizations to express their concerns and interests regarding the future renovation of Markward Taney Playground. The charettes were organized by the Markward Taney Playground Fund and facilitated by two local landscape architects, Sara Pevaroff Schuh and Tyrone Hofmann.

The charette participants (listed at the end of this summary) included a broad range of user groups and organizations, as well as representatives of The Friends of Schuylkill River Park and the Markward Taney Playground Fund. Many organizations in the neighborhood were contacted, such as Taney Baseball, Hockey Players, Center City Resident's Association, Beacon Center for Children, BZBI Preschool, Trinity Preschool Board, The Philadelphia School, Home, School Association of Greenfield Elementary School, and Recreation Center Staff, though not all were able to attend the charettes. *Additional comments or feedback is encouraged through the Markward Taney Playground Fund website at <http://www.taneyplay.org>*

The Facilitators posed several key questions to the groups to foster discussion and ensure that all major issues surrounding the renovation effort were addressed.

Roundtable Discussion: WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THE PARK?

- Close relationship to city
- Diversity of user groups, both in activity and demographics

- Park design easily serves a multi-age and multi-use population
- Open, free flowing aspect of the spaces
- Accommodates large groups
- Proximity to green areas, dog park, garden area and play areas
- Near trains, planes and developed areas
- Design of park encourages interaction on multiple levels

Roundtable Discussion:

WHAT ACTIVITIES/SPACES ARE DESIRED IN THE PLAYGROUND?

- Area for babies to play in tot lot
- Promote creative play, including discovery of nature
- Provide flexible space for "pick-up" or spontaneous games
- Large, flat hardscaped area for learning to bike ride, roller blade, throw a ball,
- Asphalt or hardscape area for hockey, bike-polo, basketball and other group recreational games
- High-quality play equipment, swings for toddlers and older children
- Socializing for parents, including more parent friendly seating
- Encourage night activities to increase evening park safety
- Different types of fun equipment that meets needs of various ages groups
- Contiguous play areas to promote parental access
- Capitalize on unique aspects of park and context to create meaningful spaces
- High-quality products and equipment, clean play areas

KEY ISSUES FOR RENOVATION OF PLAYGROUND

- Equipment in the 5-12 year-old area needs to be replaced in present location
- Present toddler area viewed as both sheltered and secluded
- Recreation Center addition (slated for January 2006) will necessitate redesign of Toddler lot
- Toddler area should be separate from 5-12 year-old area, but nearby
- Existing tree canopy is important, but if play areas could be expanded

into the landscape, trees could be removed and new ones replanted (several of the trees adjacent to playground are in poor health)

- Swings are desired but new codes require larger physical layout
- Locating swings close to dog run not desirable because of distance from playground, too disconnected from children's activities
- Locating swings adjacent to playground could be considered if basketball courts were shifted toward playground, creating an equivalent hardscaped area near dog park (as suggested by hockey players)
- Desire to create aura of safety by confining the play spaces
- Create containment through designated areas, grade changes or plant materials rather than fencing.

Roundtable Discussion:

GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT PLAYGROUND & QUALITY OF SPACE

- Baseball field area is not available as an expansion space for playground
- Markward entry Plaza is underutilized – could some activities shift to this area?
- Reconsider how entry Plaza and fountain area might better address community uses/activities
- Repair the fountain totem in the center of Markward Plaza for summer activities.
- Playground needs well-designed, visible signage with playground rules and a community notice board/kiosk
- Hardscape areas presently define user groups
- Maintain stroller and handicapped access to playground
- Narrow the pedestrian opening at 26th and Pine street – would aid in security
- Maintain grass and greenery in general – landscaping is important to quality of space
- Maintenance of playground is critical, long-term fund should be established to assist with maintenance

- Natural setting with shade trees important to quality of space
- Need to maintain restroom access

Next Steps

1. *Community in agreement that present play equipment is unsafe and requires immediate replacement.* Prepare draft proposal for replacement of 5-12 year old play equipment only – to be presented to public on November 8 for comments and feedback
2. Identify areas of playground/park for master planning study in 2006

Charette Participants

Lisa Armstrong
 Sylvia Beck, President of Friends of Schuylkill River Park
 Tyrone Hofmann, Facilitator, SALT Design Studio
 Fred Kaulbach
 Tim Kerner
 Robin Kohles
 Josh Levy
 Emily Marston, Co-Principal of The Philadelphia School
 Sara Pevaroff Schuh, Facilitator, SALT Design Studio
 Rick Summers
 Brett Weber
 Kate Welch, Co-Chair of Markward Taney Playground Fund
 Lauren Wylonis, Co-Chair of Markward Taney Playground Fund

Neighborhood Design Charrette: 22 January 2006

for

Schuykill River Park

Markward Recreation Center, Philadelphia PA

S U M M A R Y

Introduction

In October of 2005, The Friends of Schuykill River Park (FSRP) hosted a community charrette to specifically discuss issues involving the renovation of Markward-Taney Playground. At that time, the community voiced concerns about proceeding with a playground renovation in absence of a long-term plan for the entire park. As a result, FSRP has embarked on a master planning process to address broader planning issues, including the renovation of Markward-Taney Playground, pedestrian circulation, lighting, safety, landscape management and park maintenance. The Board of FSRP was significantly enlarged in December 2005 to include a broader representation of the Park population and surrounding neighborhood. In addition, a separate Task Force composed of Park constituents (not members of FSRP) was created to advise FSRP and its consultants throughout the planning process. The Task Force includes representatives from the neighborhood and various recreational groups, The Philadelphia School and Schuykill River Development Corporation (SRDC).

A second design charrette was held on 22 January 2006 at The Philadelphia School to engage the surrounding community in creating a master plan for the park.

Goals & Warm-Up

The charrette began with an introduction about the purpose of a master plan, reviewed existing park conditions and goals for the charrette. Charrette participants also took part in a warm-up drawing exercise to stimulate imaginations about possibilities for the park.

- **Primary goals for charrette:** reach consensus on what are the major activities desired in the park and identify the best locations for these activities.

Small Group Exercise

Charrette participants were divided into two smaller groups for more focused discussions about existing activities, proposed activities, and potential programmatic and spatial ideas for the park. Each small group was asked to write and draw their ideas on a park map for presentation to the entire group later in the charrette. The results of that exercise are summarized below.

1. What Happens in the Park Now?

- Dogwalking, Train watching, Sunbathing
- Basketball, Kickball, Hockey, Tennis, Playing in Playground, Bike Polo, Organized Recreation, Day Camp, Afterschool Programs, Football, Frisbee
- Gardening, Lollygagging, Picnics, Scootering, Socializing

2. What New Activities/Uses are Desired in the Future?

- Outdoor concerts & movies
- Water Play at fountain
- Visual Connection to River & Trains
- River Activities
- Nature Observation
- Seasonal Festivals
- Safe Trail Connection between Park & Playground
- Winter Activity
- Expanded/improved social area with tables & chairs
- Vendors/concession stands
- Expanded Garden Plots
- Swings for Juniors & Tots (retain existing or add new)

3. Desired Improvements

- General park beautification, including more shade (trees or shelter), greater variety in planting, increase in landscape richness
- Repair/protection of Bowl area from dog abuse
- Gateways at Park entrances (many participants mentioned that the archway temporarily installed at 25th & Spruce Streets for a movie set was a wonderful way to mark the "front door" of the Park)
- Donor/Sponsor opportunities for Park improvements
- Lighting – Upgrade quality and quantity
- Seating – Upgrade quality, relocate to more appropriate areas and redesign for socializing, lunching, relaxing, etc.
- Repair and activate existing spray fountain
- Provide water in the park – for drinking, watering plants and clean-up

- (will require repair of existing water lines)
- Expansion of Community Garden plots

4. Analysis: Existing Uses, Incompatible Uses

- Dog walking/running generally seen as incompatible with most active recreational activities in the park, particularly those involving children
- The "Bowl" not suitable for dog running because it degrades quality of space – need better policing by park users and dog owners (leashes, clean-up)
- Tot Lot – presently semi-enclosed space. Enclosure is desirable for safety reasons though ease of mobility between play areas for different-aged children is equally important. Enclosure can be achieved through various methods, including plant materials, grade changes and fences or gates.
- Transitional spaces between play areas and other recreational areas throughout park are desired.

Roundtable Discussion – Proposed Spatial Program for the Park

Both groups presented drawings of existing uses and discussed ideas for future uses and activities at the park. Facilitators from SALT Design Studio worked with the whole group to clarify ideas and build consensus about future key components desired in the park. The group reached consensus about the following:

- general location of proposed activities in the park
- playground area could be expanded towards the river
- space between dog run and asphalt courts is under utilized and should be considered for future activities
- park needs a defining gateway at the 25th and Spruce Streets entrance

Next Steps

Based on group consensus reached during the charrette, SALT Design Studio will prepare an overall master plan framework for the park outlining proposed activity zones (including areas for proposed expansion or new development) for review by the Board at their February meeting. The group further agreed that the playground renovation would be the

first priority project to be implemented as part of the master plan. Accordingly, SALT Design Studio will develop several schematic playground designs investigating expansion of the playground towards the river.

Charrette Participants

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Sylvia Beck - President
 Linda Berger
 Sharon Blumberg
 Camille Focarino – *Co-Chair, Playground Committee*
 Lisa Heller
 Deborah Leibel
 Josh Levy
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 Ellen Siegel – *Taney Baseball*
 Joe Synchron – *SRDC*
 Helen Whatnell

PLAYGROUND COMMITTEE

Janet Harrington

SALT Design Studio

Sara Pevaroff Schuh
 Tyrone Hofmann