

FROM
THOMAS H. DESMOND
& ASSOCIATES, INC.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS SIMSBURY, CONN.

Report on Center Spring Park
at Manchester
Connecticut

The Manchester Historical Society
Center Springs Park Report

This report, created in 1929 by a landscape architectural firm, provides a description of and proposals for Center Springs Park in Manchester, CT, located between Main, Valley, Edgerton, and Bigelow Streets. We are making the report available to the public because it is of historic and community interest.

Today's park does contain vistas, paths, and some picnic areas, as mentioned in the report. Other ideas mentioned weren't implemented, such as an outdoor theater, rough-hewn shelters throughout the park, and a man-made island with a bandstand in the middle of the pond.

Note that the report errs in the name of the park, which is Center Springs (with an "s" at the end), not Center Spring.

A long-time member and local historian donated this booklet and the enclosed drawing to the Historical Society in 2011.

— Posted by webmaster, Susan Barlow www.manchesterhistory.org

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Manchester is particularly fortunate in having such a tract of land as the 58 acres known as "Center Spring Park."

This area can be of real service to the residents of the town in a wholesome, recreational way as long as it is maintained as a usable and beautiful country park as suggested by the plans of the landscape architects.

The natural character of the tract--rather rugged topography practically entirely wooded, with the particularly desirable feature, water, both as stream and lake,--is an excellent type on which to develop the park that is real country within the city. Plans have been prepared with the intention of maintaining and enhancing the existing natural beauty, while at the same time introducing interesting features that will be of use to all, though not so intensive as to defeat the main purpose of the park; i.e. an area designed to give city dwellers the sense of freedom that the unspoiled country gives, and an opportunity to contemplate the beauty in natural scenery.

Being as close as it is to the center of the town makes the park very accessible to all. Bounded on the east by Main Street and a small amount of private property, on the south by public and semi-public land, and Valley Street, on the west by Edgerton Street and private property which is mentioned later in this report, and on the north by property which is fairly effectively screened by existing trees it is apparent that the park is admirably located with opportunity for entrance as shown. Automobiles are allowed to enter

from Edgerton Street just north of the lake and pass by the refectory to the large parking space on the north line at the right of way. This space provides for the parking of 160 cars. A secondary space also on the north line approached from Liberty Street will take care of about 80 more cars. Beyond these points automobiles are excluded for this area is one that should be enjoyed on foot and if the automobile owner cares to enjoy the country from his car, he has a great deal of rural beauty at his command that is inaccessible to the pedestrian. In addition, grades prohibit the use of auto roads.

Circulation about the park is obtained by foot paths which enter the area as often as is necessary and lead one to points of interest, both natural and introduced. A wider path, marked 6' at intervals, will accommodate the park department cart or small truck for general maintenance and servicing. This path circles the lake about half-way between its shores and the bounds of the park and runs on either side of the brook in a like manner, thereby serving the largest area with the smallest amount of wide travelled way. In addition to the centrally located, circulatory service path there are two foot-paths that circle the park in a general way, one near the boundaries and the other close to the shores of the lake and stream. Connecting these three are paths up and down the slope which lead smoothly and naturally to the lake and stream, about which the entire design is built. While path lines on plan are shown as even sweeping curves, they only indicate the approximate location of the suggested way, for on the ground it will probably be found that paths will turn out for trees, jog back for boulders, and actually become quite zig-zag because of existing conditions. This loss of sweeping curves of line, however, is more than compensated for by the interest in the

wandering woodland path which is more in keeping with the naturalistic surroundings. All these paths need not be definitely surfaced, but through the use of pine needles or tanbark, the ground is prevented from becoming dusty or muddy. Near entrances, gravel and small pebbles are better to withstand the more intensive use.

The existing naturalistic features of the park, reached by footpaths, are probably the most important and interesting part of the development when considered from an aesthetic point of view. The lake would be increased about two acres in area by excavating the swampy ground at the upper or east end thus giving a feeling of greater depth and expanse, and creating more open area, which at present is rather lacking. The shores are to be treated naturalistically, with no use of rip-rap or artificial banking, but rather the conservative planting of native material where necessary and perhaps the introducing of some native stone. The naturalistic bridge at the head of the lake affords one of the best views in the park; either west across the lake or east up the brook. The shores of the brook will be handled in a manner similar to that used for the shores of the lake. The course of the brook would be changed for some 500 feet above the lake to accommodate a proposed meadow which will add its length to the view from the west end of the lake and provide a badly needed open area. Above the meadow is proposed a wild garden where moisture-loving native material can be planted in a naturalistic manner. While not attempting or intending to make an arboretum of this area, it can be made interesting enough through selected plant materials to be a real attraction.

It will be noticed that the plan suggests open glades and vistas cut through the existing growth. Discretion must be used in carrying out these suggestions since it is comparatively easy to remove

large trees but difficult to replace them. However, scrub growth and poor or dying specimens can be taken out for the most part and vistas cut as shown without removing good material. Pure stand grove are an added attraction that is suggested, using species of trees not commonly existing at present, as the Beech grove above the outdoor theatre, and for example, white birch in some other suitable situation. Where it is possible, as on Hemlock hill, the stand should again be kept pure and allowed to change gradually at its edges. In this way, different effects are obtained from grove to grove, comparable to the effects of the various rooms of a house.

To allow more intensive use of the park still keeping in mind that the area is essentially a bit of country, several features not incongruous with the type of design employed have been introduced. Scattered with discretion throughout the area north of the lake, fire places of a rough stone type are suggested. Here in close proximity to parking areas and the refectory, picnicking may be enjoyed. This area should be policed in those seasons when it is being much used. Also in this area, north of the bridge at the head of the lake and again easily reached from the parking spaces, an outdoor theater is proposed where the natural topography allows and invites it. Such a theatre can be designed through use of proper materials, to fit into a natural woodland and look as though it really belonged there, and can be used for pageants, out door dancing, festivals, and other type of presentation. Such projects have proved to be successful and popular wherever carried out.

For the entertainment and recreation of the children, two playgrounds are proposed. One directly below the district school is intended for smaller children and is to be equipped with standard

playground apparatus. The other, in the southwest corner of the is for older children and laid out for organized games. Space allows for boys' size baseball diamond (60' between bases) and a two hundred foot radius from home plate to the extremity of the outfield. A court for both volley ball and basketball can be placed as shown behind the baseball backstop. Across the path and to the east of the administration building is an area devoted to circle games and organized play for girls. It will be noticed that these play areas are located so as to best serve the largest city area and the differently aged children, and are kept from the more rural parts of the development. Three tennis courts are shown, behind the town hall where they may be easily reached from the center and will not be a nuisance as tennis is a restricted and quiet game.

In any park certain buildings are necessary for maintenance of the area and the comfort and convenience of its users. These buildings must be in keeping with the feeling of the park in selection of material and type of architecture.

The administration building, located near the large children's playground for obvious reasons might best be of native stone done in a park style of architecture. Here might be housed the offices of such officials as are required and all park administration could be handled from this point. The only other large building is on the north side of the lake near Edgerton Street. This structure is to combine facilities for boating and skating on the lower floor which opens out to the lake, and concessions (refectory etc.) on the upper floor which will open to the north. Also connected with the lake is the bandstand on the proposed island. People attending concerts can sit on the slopes on the mainland in the natural bays on either side of the lake and enjoy the music across the water. The stand would be of a rustic type.

Scattered through the park at vantage points are overlooks and shelters. These also should be rustic either of unpealed or rough hewn timber. They are located where good vistas exist or can be created and are numerous enough so that persons in any part of the park are fairly sure of reaching one in case of sudden storm. Finally, comfort stations are located near points that will be intensively used. With one near the concessions building and one for each play area, the park is conveniently provided. These buildings should be inconspicuous and well removed from main paths with signs plainly indicating them.

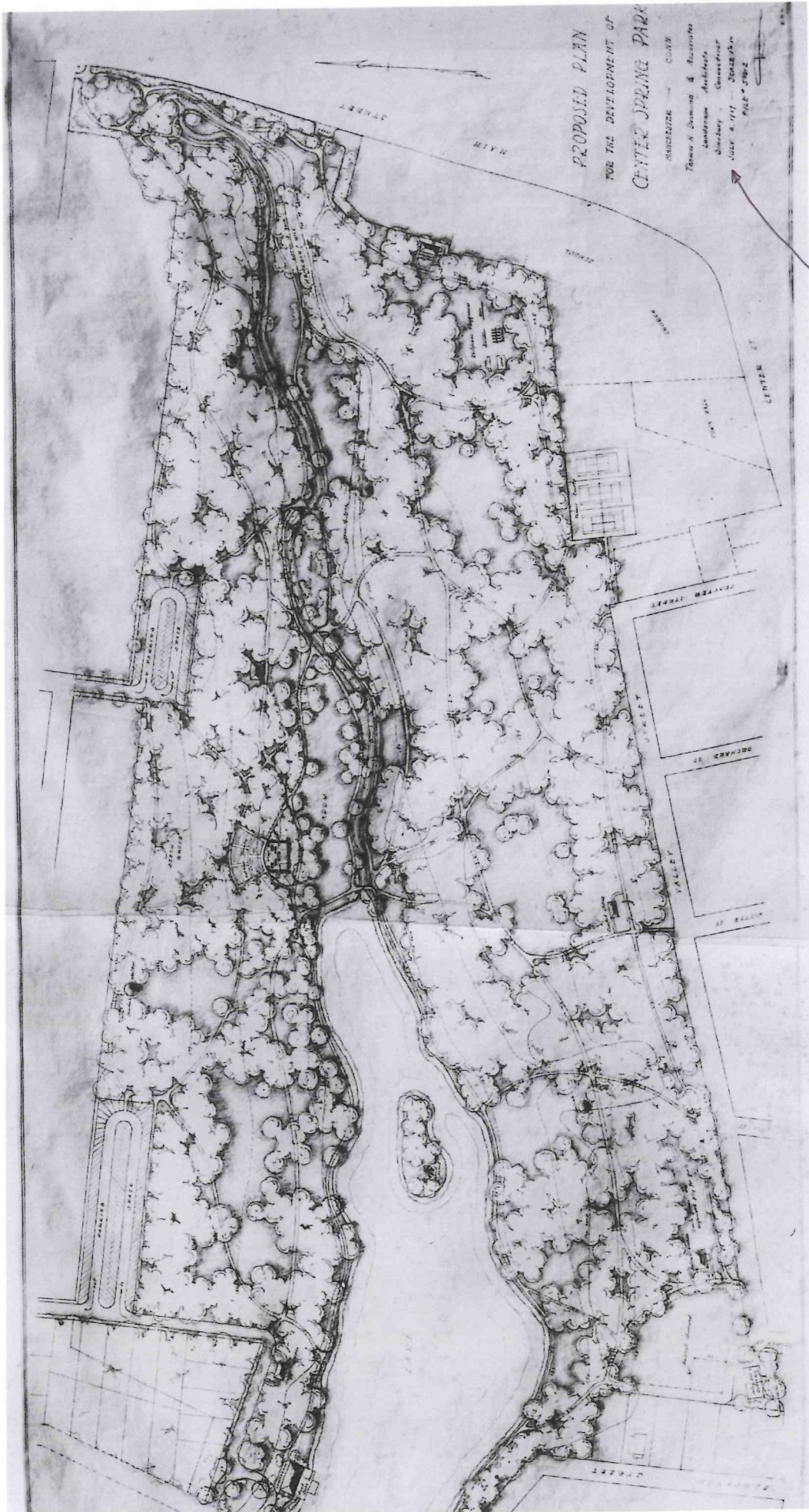
A final suggestion is the purchase of at least part of the private land at the northwest corner of the park as shown by the rider plan. The large plan is designed without acquiring this tract and the result is a sharp corner and steep grade in the road to the parking space. In addition, the owner of this land has indicated a rather low-class subdivision and of course, cheap development at this point would be very detrimental to the park. The rider shows the result of purchasing all but a strip of 150 feet deep along Edgerton Street and indicates a better class of lots. The curve of the park road now becomes very easy and the grade less steep.

The aim of the landscape architect is evident in the development of Center Spring Park. This area is to be the country style of park to be used not so intensively as to lose the rural atmosphere but with accommodations for play areas for children which are kept at the edge of the tract away from the heart of the design. The park offers the possibility of various enjoyments; seclusion or open spaces and vistas, scenery, interest in plant materials or picnicking, walking, boating, skating and the studied sequence of

landscape effects. To maintain a unity of the whole and the correct atmosphere throughout the area, however, it is advisable that the landscape architect be consulted in the designing of the playgrounds and all architectural features as stairways, shelters, bandstand, refectory etc. All construction of landscape features should be under the supervision of the landscape architect.

Although the project as put forth on the plan is a comprehensive one^{and}/probably too expensive to carry to completion immediately, it has been proposed with foresight for the future and is a plan to work on as an ultimate goal. With this guidance, Manchester will develop a park of great beauty and use of which it may well be very proud.

THOMAS H. DESMOND & ASSOCIATES
Landscape Architects



PROPOSED PLAN
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
CENTER SPRING PARK

MASSACHUSETTS
THOMAS H. SWANSON & ASSOCIATES
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
100 STATE STREET
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
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