

Hermann Park

Envisioning the next 20 years

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc.

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LAKE PLAZA AT MCGOVERN LAKE

HERMANN PARK MASTER PLAN ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Prepared for
HERMANN PARK CONSERVANCY
 Doreen Stoller
 President

Ethan Beeson
 Project Manager

Jane Anderson Curtis
 Director of Horticulture

Julia McGowen
 Marketing and Communications Manager

Meghan Miller
 Director of Development

CITY OF HOUSTON
 The Honorable Sylvester Turner
 Mayor

Steve Wright
 Director, Houston Parks and Recreation Department

Rick Dewees
 Assistant Director Park Administration, Houston Parks and Recreation Department

Lisa Johnson
 Division Manager – Parks Capital Program, General Services Department

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Cyndy Garza-Roberts	Terry Smith
Glen Gondo	Y. Ping Sun
Gregg Hollenberg	Marvin Taylor
Linda C. Hunsaker	Troy Thacker
Linda Kelly	Keith Watson Wade
Ann Kennedy	

Prepared by
MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH ASSOCIATES INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
 Michael Van Valkenburgh
 Matthew Urbanski
 Chris Matthews
 Jesse Nicholson
 Richard Conte

IN COLLABORATION WITH
 Michael Hardy, Author

Nelson\Nygaard, Mobility Consultants
 Jason Schrieber
 Alyson Fletcher

Sherwood Design Engineers, Civil Engineer
 Tom Bacus
 Steven Albert



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HERMANN PARK DEDICATION, 1914

A PARK FOR ALL HOUSTONIANS

On June 7, 1914, businessman George Hermann stepped to the microphone at the old City Auditorium in downtown Houston and formally announced the donation of his property in South Houston for the creation of a new city park “for the benefit of the poor and the rich.”

Today, Hermann Park is visited by millions of Houstonians each year from every walk of life. They come to relax, play golf, run, fish, visit the zoo, ride the miniature train, or catch a show at Miller Outdoor Theatre. The verdant, 445-acre Park sits at the heart of Houston’s cultural district — bordering Rice University, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and the Children’s Museum — and is just across the street from the Texas Medical Center.

Although much progress has been made, George Hermann’s dream of a park for all Houstonians remains unfulfilled. Great public spaces like Hermann Park are never “finished”— they must continually improve to meet the needs of new generations of users. To meet that challenge and look forward to the next 20 years, Hermann Park Conservancy, in partnership with Houston’s Parks and Recreation Department, commissioned a new master plan in 2015 from the world-renowned landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc. (MVVA), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Building on the work undertaken by the recent Centennial Campaign and a succession of historic plans, the new master plan envisions a more welcoming, dynamic, and diverse Park — one that better serves its current users and attracts a generation of new users.

MVVA’s plan proposes making improvements to 233 acres of the Park— more than half its total size. The plan reclaims 21 acres of land at the Park’s center— twice the size of Discovery Green—by replacing the current surface lots with a hilly play landscape concealing an at-grade parking center. It adds 2,000 new trees and 20 miles of new and improved trails, and reintegrates and naturalizes the 70 acres of land along Brays Bayou, including adding shade trees for bicyclists and joggers.

The master plan is guided by the goals of access, play, and nature. To achieve George Hermann’s dream of a democratic public space, the Park must invite people in, not keep them away. It must provide an integrated experience rather than a fragmented one. It must provide more opportunities for both children and adults to play. And it must remain an oasis of nature in the heart of a growing city. With your help, we can ensure that Hermann Park remains a place for all Houstonians—now, and in the future.

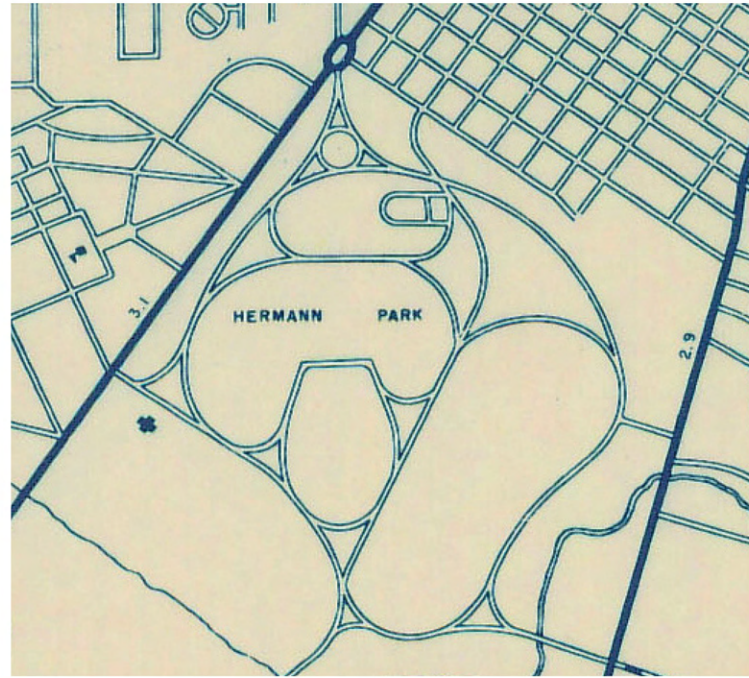
Sylvester Turner
Mayor
City of Houston

Steve Wright
Director
Houston Parks and Recreation Department

Phoebe Tudor
Chair
Hermann Park Conservancy

Doreen Stoller
President
Hermann Park Conservancy

HERMANN PARK MILESTONES



1915 KESSLER PLAN

The City of Houston appointed celebrated St. Louis landscape architect and planner George Kessler as Hermann Park's first consulting landscape architect. His plan included the "grand basin," now McGovern Lake, and a landscaped elliptical island with a Sunken Garden, now the Mecom Fountain. Kessler had a talent for blending formal entrances with large swaths of unordered planting to create natural landscapes in an urban setting. He was able to balance open lawn areas for recreation with wooded areas that felt natural to Houston's ecology.



1923 HARE & HARE PLAN

The Kansas City landscape architecture firm Hare & Hare added the zoo and golf course in their master plan, while incorporating the vision of Kessler's earlier plans for Park entry and a grand basin. The zoo opened in 1924, with the original Houston Museum of Natural Science located within the zoo grounds. The Hare & Hare plan called for a wide oval drive circumscribing the zoo area, establishing a clear organization for the center of the Park.



1943 COHESIVE ELEGANCE

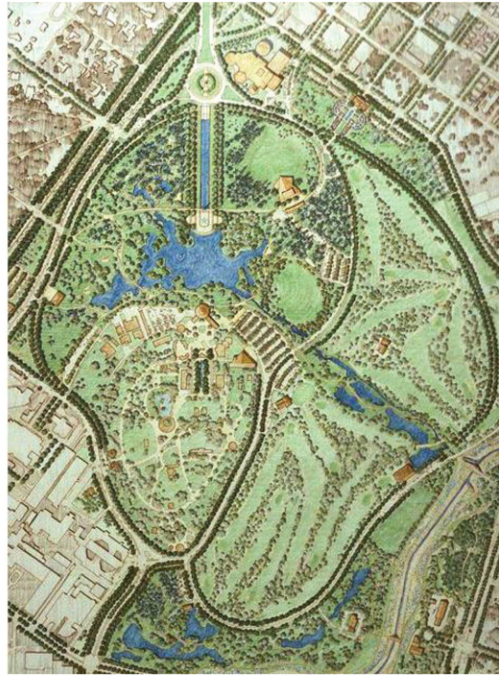
The Park matured around a system of gently curving carriage trails flanked by oak allees, making it easy and pleasurable to move around. The curving trails both organized the Park and defined the landscape experience for those promenading or driving along them. The overall effect was a cohesive experience created by an elegant form. The zoo continued to develop within a simple oval form with the lake, Reflection Pool, and Grand Gateway united by the series of curving frames.



DETERIORATION AND COMMUNITY ACTION

The second half of the twentieth century was a period of stagnation for the Park. A large section of the Park containing ballfields was transferred to the Texas Medical Center for development. Other than Miller Outdoor Theatre, which opened in 1968, few major improvements were made, and underinvestment by the City of Houston allowed the Park to deteriorate. After decades of decline, the first organized group of Houstonians to take an active interest in Hermann Park was incorporated in 1987 as the Hermann Park Joggers, Runners, and Walkers. Soon afterwards the Friends of Hermann Park, known today as Hermann Park Conservancy, was formed with a goal to preserve, restore, and enhance Hermann Park. The group's first charge was leading "The Heart of the Park," a 1992 national design competition to restore, enhance, and strengthen the Park's center.

HERMANN PARK MILESTONES



1993-2015 HANNA OLIN PLAN

To address the needs of the entire 445-acre Park, in 1993 the Conservancy commissioned a new master plan from renowned Philadelphia-based landscape architect Laurie Olin. Olin's plan imagined a Park that was "greener and bluer," an "urban sanctuary, alive with wonder and mystery," and a physical realization of "equity and justice, beauty, and the delight in each other's company." The plan called for restoring the Park's historic coherence and bringing life back to underutilized areas to ensure that the "civic role of Hermann Park would be celebrated." Olin's plan also called for enhanced vehicular access and increased stewardship.



HERMANN PARK CONSERVANCY

Since the Olin plan was adopted by City Council in 1997, Hermann Park Conservancy has raised more than \$122 million in Park improvements in partnership with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD). Over the last 25 years the Conservancy's responsibilities have grown to include stewardship initiatives such as reforestation and the operation and maintenance of the McGovern Centennial Gardens. In addition, the Conservancy has created programs to attract volunteers, who now contribute over 20,000 hours of maintenance support each year. The Conservancy also operates the Hermann Park Railroad, pedal boats, food services, and facility rentals to gain crucial earned income to assist HPARD in maintaining the Park.



MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS

The Conservancy has undertaken key restoration projects including the Jones Reflection Pool and McGovern Lake. In 2009 it built Lake Plaza—which includes the Kinder Station, a cafe, and the Tiffany & Co. Foundation Bridge — to provide a vibrant new public space. In 2011 it restored the Marvin Taylor Trail and built the Bill Coats Bridge to provide additional opportunities for active recreation. And in 2012, to improve access to the 70-acre natural area along Brays Bayou, it built a pedestrian underpass under MacGregor Way connecting visitors to the main body of the Park to Bayou Parkland.



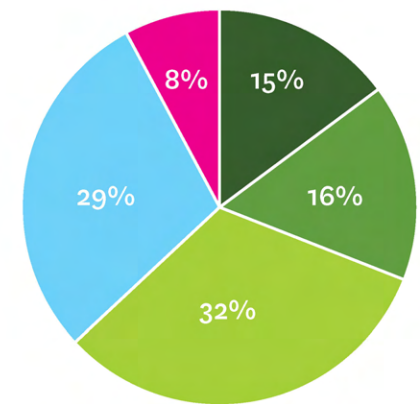
CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

To mark Hermann Park's centennial in 2014, the Conservancy launched a major capital campaign to fund a series of improvements, including the \$31 million McGovern Centennial Gardens, the \$5 million restoration of the Park's historic main entrance, known as the Grand Gateway, and the renovation of the Park's Japanese Garden and historic clubhouse. While the completion of these projects will effectively complete the project list identified in the Olin plan, there is still much to be done to complete the historic vision for the Park and respond to the evolving needs of the City.

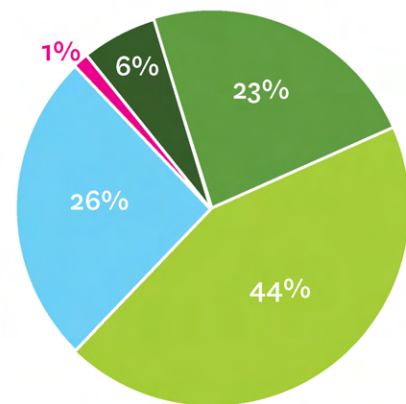
HERMANN PARK USERS

Hermann Park is one of Houston's most vital public parks, drawing a diverse array of visitors from every Houston zip code and from across the socioeconomic spectrum. Visitor demographics closely match Houston's overall demographics, making the Park a microcosm of the larger city. The Park also provides a geographical connection between neighborhoods as different as the Museum District, the Texas Medical Center, and the Third Ward.

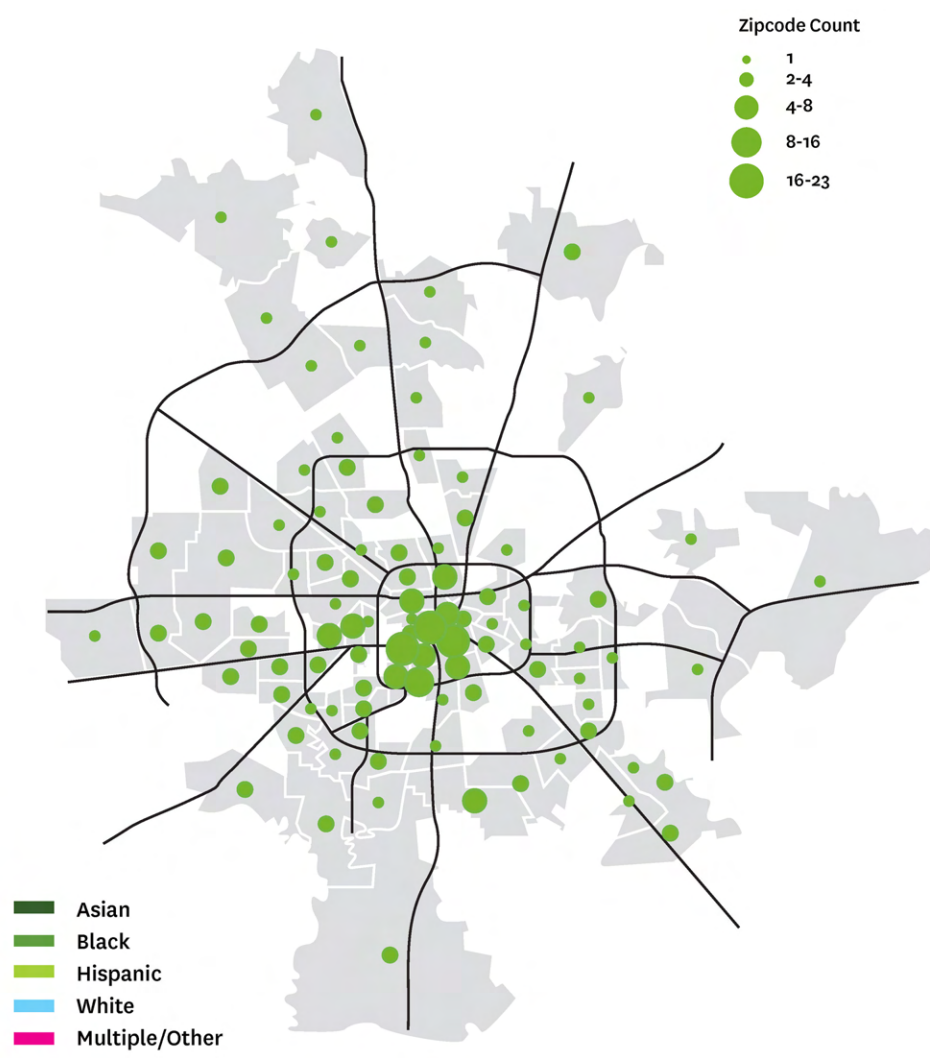
A 2016 study by Rice University, commissioned by the Conservancy, studied Park patrons and usership and found virtually no difference in usage patterns between ethnic groups ("Understanding Usership in Hermann Park," Rice University, 2016), supporting the idea of the Park as a shared experience.



WHO USES THE PARK
The diagram shows the racial demographics of Hermann Park (Understanding Usership in Hermann Park, Rice University, 2016)



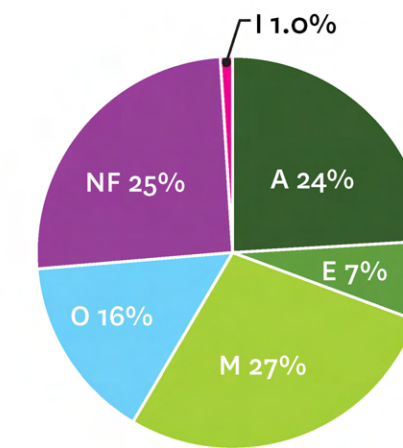
CITY OF HOUSTON DEMOGRAPHICS
The diagram shows the racial demographics of Houston, Texas (2015 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau)



REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF PARK USERS
The diagram shows the number of park users per zip code (Understanding Usership in Hermann Park, Rice University, 2016)

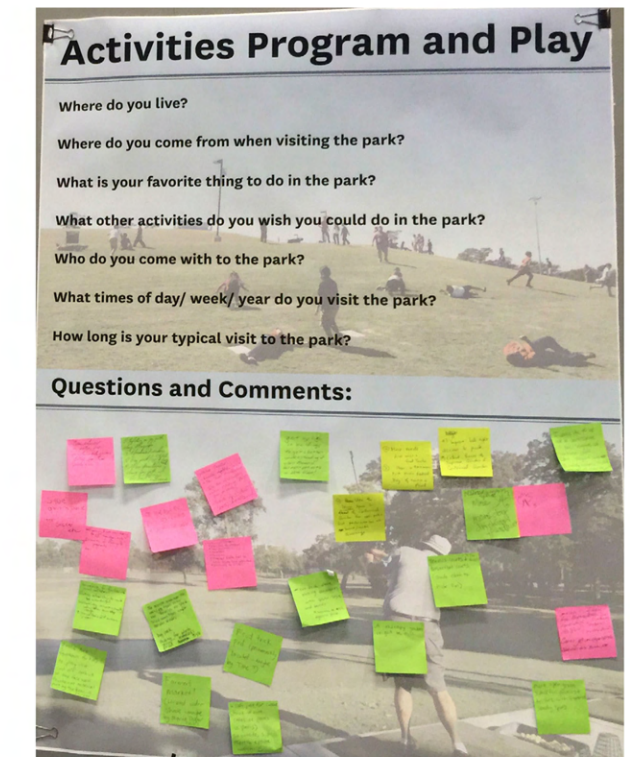
THE MASTER PLAN ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

To better understand how Houstonians use the Park, and what improvements they would like to see, the Conservancy undertook a two-year-long public engagement process that included consultations with numerous stakeholders and a series of well-attended public meetings. The Conservancy also gathered online comments from the Houston community through digital platforms.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

(A) Activities & Programs	(E) Environment	(M) Mobility
Concessions	Wilderness/Wildlife	Accessibility
More Events	Trees/Plants	Parking
Playground	Water Re-Use/Drainage	Traffic
		Biking
(O) Operations	(NF) New Feature	(I) Infrastructure
Homeless/Security	Dog Park	Power Lines
McGovern Centennial Gardens	Walking/Running Trails	Sewer Smell
Extended Hours	Water Fountains	



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Based on community feedback, the Conservancy settled on three broadly defined priorities for the new Hermann Park master plan.

1 EXPAND THE SPECTRUM OF PLAY

The Park needs a greater variety of play areas—for children, adults, and even pets.

2 INVIGORATE THE PRESENCE OF NATURE

The Park needs to preserve and add to its existing biodiversity, as well as adding more shade trees.

3 IMPROVE ACCESS & VITAL INTERNAL CONNECTIONS

The Park needs to be more accessible to the public, whether they come by car, light rail, bus, bicycle, or on foot. Within the Park itself, better connections are needed between various sections to encourage visitors to explore.

The new plan proposes a number of specific projects, all designed to fulfill George Hermann's dream of a Park for all Houstonians.



WHAT WE HEARD



More events, specifically nature related

Safer crossing into Park

Distribute the water fountains better throughout the Park and on the running trails

Provide information on things like park activities and pedal boat rental hours

More food trucks and options for places to buy small items like coffee and tea

More activities such as Zumba, Kayaking, Ice Skating, etc.

Better parking strategy

Hammock rentals

More play spaces

Improved playgrounds

More trails

More food venues

Add a dog park

More drainage

Cleaner lake and cleaner water

More events that are friendly for children

Circulation needs to be reconsidered to better accommodate places to drop-off heavy picnicking supplies

More places to sit on the weekend

PLAY

Play is fundamental to childhood development and has been proven vital for physical, emotional and social growth. Because Hermann Park is so widely used by Houston families, it is essential to offer expanded and updated recreational opportunities throughout. The master plan envisions a new, state-of-the-art playscape built atop the central parking center that will become Houston's premier public playground. It also calls for a reimagined Playground for All Children with improved and expanded water play area.

The master plan calls for enhanced picnic areas and party pavilions on the west side of the Park, as well as an improved drop-off area to accommodate food trucks. Two new dog parks will also be added, expanding the opportunities of play for both humans and their pets.



BUDDY CARRUTH PLAYGROUND FOR ALL CHILDREN



PARK FOR HUMANS AND DOGS, HOUSTON, TX



MAGGIE DALEY PARK, CHICAGO, IL, MVVA

“Houston has very few destination playgrounds. The Conservancy should go all out on a large, new, cohesive playground with themed equipment, maybe even providing shade structures above the whole thing.”

NATURE

Ever since Frederick Law Olmsted designed New York's Central Park in the 19th century, public parks have been valued as antidotes to the hustle and bustle of city life, a respite from the concrete jungle. Hermann Park comprises 445 acres of natural landscape, providing Houstonians an irreplaceable oasis in the middle of an increasingly built-up urban environment.

Over the 20th century, however, the Park's natural resources have slowly been whittled away by new roadways, drainage projects, and land sales. To ensure the Park remains one of Houston's premier public spaces, we must conserve and increase its biodiversity, especially in the 70-acre Bayou Parkland area.

While the lower channel of Brays Bayou is lined with concrete for flood control, the mown grass of the upper channel can be enriched with wildflowers and native grasses. Ecological diversity can also be added to the paths from the bayou to the Park Center, and on the margins of McGovern Lake.

Finally, Hermann Park has a diverse and largely healthy tree canopy, which provides much-needed shade in the summer. The master plan calls for planting the next generation of tree canopy, concentrating on providing shade along roads and paths where it is most needed.



POST OAKS NEAR BRAYS BAYOU



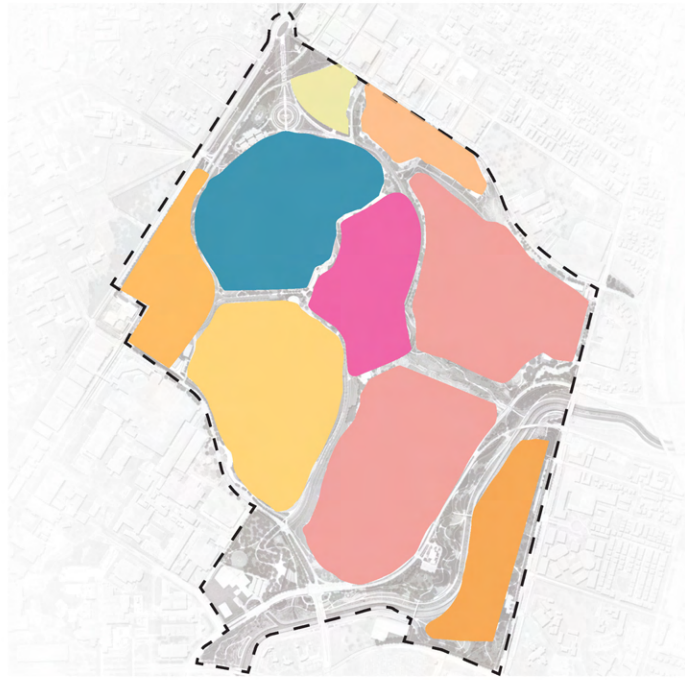
EXISTING CONNECTION FROM GOLF COURSE TO BRAYS BAYOU



“Would like to see as much natural growth as possible, which is welcoming to wildlife.”

BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK, BROOKLYN, NY, MVVA

ACCESS AND CONNECTIONS



A FRAGMENTED LANDSCAPE

Despite all the improvements undertaken by the Conservancy, Hermann Park remains a work in progress. Inefficient parking lots continue to dominate the Park Center, cutting off circulation to various parts of the Park. The Bayou Parkland area remains cut off from the rest of the Park by MacGregor Way. Roads with high traffic volumes form the perimeter of the Park on all sides, creating barriers to pedestrian and bicycle access and decreasing the sense of welcome. The master plan will create new crossing points and will narrow intersections where possible. New pedestrian signals and improved crosswalks will draw more people into the Park.



STITCHING THE PARK BACK TOGETHER

This vision of Hermann Park will emphasize continuity and diversity, areas for families, areas for large events and gatherings, quiet areas for contemplation and areas where nature takes center stage, all tied together with a stronger network of pathways, bike paths and shaded driveways. Putting the Park back together with the city that surrounds it will emphasize safe and welcoming street crossings, and clear connections between the internal pedestrian and bicycle networks and those surrounding the Park.



“Hermann Park is very cut up and segmented into unusable and isolated pods, especially at the perimeter.”

MOBILITY AND PARKING

Visitors come to Hermann Park from all over the Greater Houston region, arriving primarily by car. Current problems with traffic and parking dramatically affect the visitor experience, and are at the top of the list of visitor concerns. Arriving at the Park can be uncomfortable, inconvenient, and even unsafe. Lines of traffic waiting to enter the central parking lots can stretch around the Park's perimeter on a busy day. Cambridge Street is often blocked by cars waiting to enter the Park, impeding emergency traffic to the Texas Medical Center.

Arriving at the Park on foot or by bicycle can also be a challenge. Over time Hermann Park has become ringed by roadways that are difficult to cross on foot, with most carrying tens of thousands of cars every day. The Mecom Fountain traffic circle has some of the worst crash statistics in Houston. Comprehensive mobility improvements to all modes are needed to transform the visitor experience of the Park.



PEAK WEEKEND
PARKING INEFFICIENCIES



CLOSED DOWN CAROLINE STREET



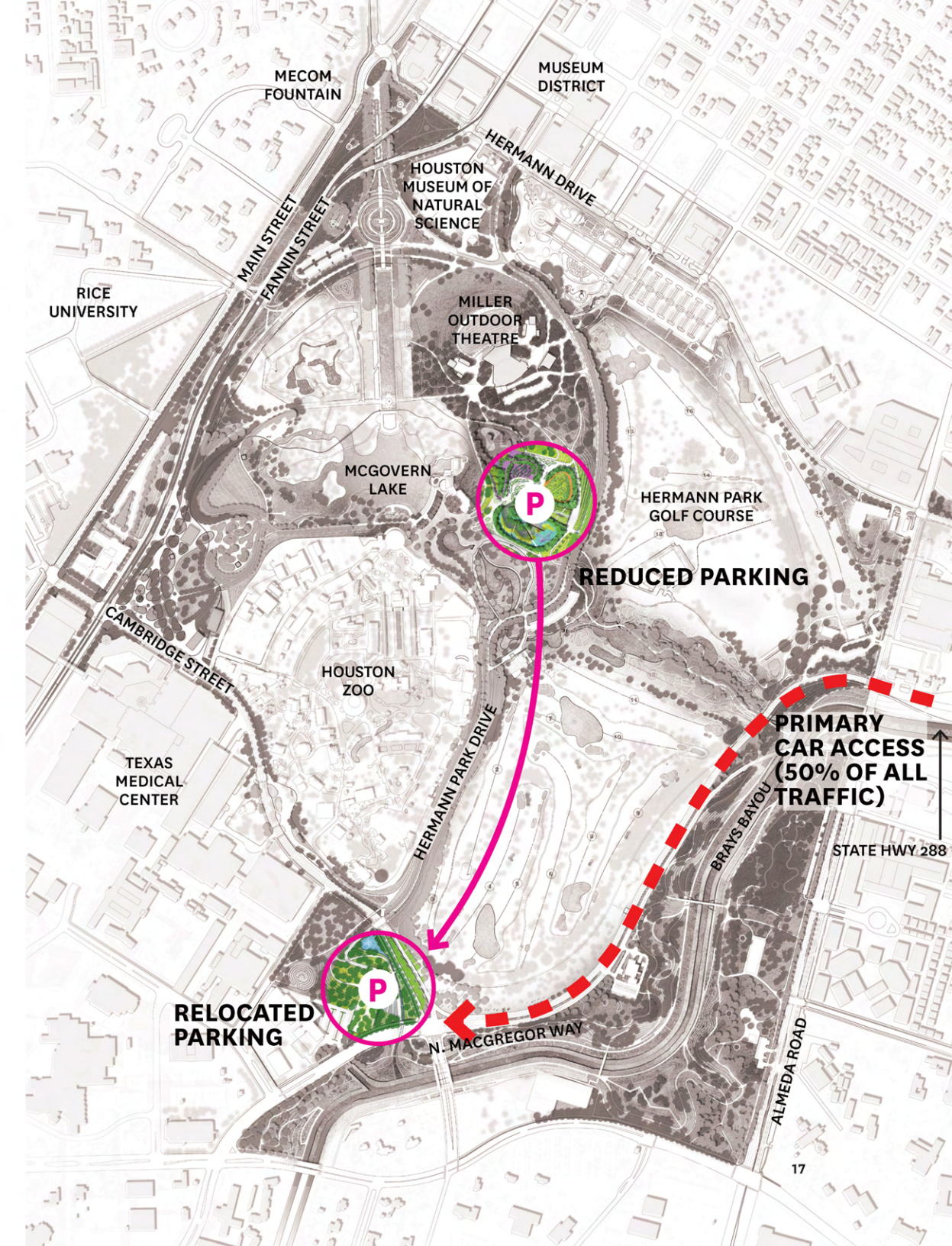
CONGESTION AT THE PARK CENTER

PARKING REDISTRIBUTION

A 2016 study by mobility consultants Nelson\Nygaard found that the Park's 2,300 parking spaces are more than enough to accommodate visitor needs on all but the busiest days, due to major inefficiencies in the central parking lots cause cars to back up on Hermann Park Drive and around the Park perimeter. The Houston Police Department (HPD) regularly enforces a one-way-only route through the Park from Caroline Street to Cambridge Street, further restricting Park access. The master plan calls for building a new, smaller, high-efficiency at-grade parking garage at the Park Center.



PARKING AT GRADE UNDER A HILLY
PLAY LANDSCAPE



PARK IMPROVEMENTS



233 ACRES OF PARK IMPROVEMENTS



20 MILES OF NEW & IMPROVED TRAILS



26 NEW & IMPROVED ACCESS POINTS



NEW ACCESSIBLE PLAYGARDENS



2 NEW DOG PARKS



NEW PARK WIDE BICYCLE NETWORK



21 ACRES OF NEW LANDSCAPE



55 ACRES OF NEW & IMPROVED HABITAT



2,000 NEW TREES



IMPROVED PARKING & MOBILITY



NEW & IMPROVED FOOD AND PICNIC AREAS



IMPROVED HYDROLOGIC SYSTEMS

2017 MASTER PLAN

MASTER PLAN LEGEND

- 1 Play Hills
- 2 Central Arrival Landscape
- 3 Miller Outdoor Theatre
- 4 Picnic Grove
- 5 Historic Clubhouse
- 6 Central Bayou Connection
- 7 Hermann Park Family Commons
- 8 Playground for All Children
- 9 McGovern Lake Lawn
- 10 Bayou Parkland West
- 11 South Bayou Portal
- 12 North Bayou Portal
- 13 Dog Park and Exercise Field
- 14 Nature Play Area
- 15 Nature Pavilion
- 16 Tupelo Wetland Habitat
- 17 Grand Gateway
- 18 Caroline Street Arrival Landscape
- 19 Main Street Promenade
- 20 Hermann Drive Improvements
- 21 Dog Park



4 PROJECT AREAS

MASTER PLAN LEGEND

- Park Center
- Hermann Park Family Commons
- Bayou Parkland
- Park Perimeter

MASTER PLAN LEGEND

- BW Bayou Parkland West
- PC Park Center
- CS Caroline Street Arrival Landscape
- BC Central Bayou Connection and North Portal
- GG Grand Gateway

- FC Hermann Park Family Commons
- MS Main Street Promenade
- AT Allee Trail Improvements
- EB Eastern Bayou Enhancements
- WB Western Bayou Enhancements
- HD Hermann Drive Improvements
- MT Miller Outdoor Theatre



PARK CENTER

PC - PARK CENTER

The Park Center will be transformed from a series of large surface parking lots into a new play landscape built over and concealing a single-story, at-grade parking garage. The project also creates new arrival landscapes for the Park, the zoo, and Miller Outdoor Theatre.

BC - CENTRAL BAYOU CONNECTION

This project will enhance the existing pedestrian connection through the center of the golf course by providing pedestrian and bicycle trails between Brays Bayou and the Park Center. A pedestrian bridge over Hermann Park Drive will allow grade-separated access to the new play hills at the Park Center. The new North Bayou Portal, in combination with the existing South Bayou Portal, will create pedestrian and bicycle circulation loops between the bayou and the center of the Park.



ZOO ARRIVAL LANDSCAPE



MAGGIE DALEY PARK, CHICAGO, IL, MVVA



“We love Hermann Park! We live a block away, have a 4-year-old and are at Hermann Park almost every day of the year and the continued improvements are awesome.”



HERMANN PARK FAMILY COMMONS

FC - HERMANN PARK FAMILY COMMONS

This currently neglected Park corner at the intersection of Fannin and Cambridge Streets will be transformed into a welcoming civic area, drawing in visitors from the Texas Medical Center and Rice University. Food service and shaded benches will provide a graceful new entrance into the Park. From the corner, visitors will be guided down a series of curving pathways planted with flowering tree allees and sloped picnic lawns.

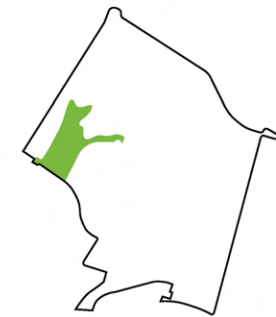
The drop-off on Fannin Street at the historic pavilion will be improved to provide access for families to a series of new party pavilions and the restored historic pavilion, which will be available to rent for parties and small events. The Playground for All Children will be updated with new water play and landscape features. An elevated, sloped lawn will create views across McGovern Lake to the Park Center's new play hills. A lawn will provide a venue for events that are too small or informal for the Miller Outdoor Theatre.



A GATHERING PLACE, TULSA, OK, MVVA



CIVIC PLAZA AT ALAMEDA CENTRAL, MEXICO CITY



“Hermann Park should employ a huge nature-themed playground. Completely reconstructed and fenced-in playgrounds, surrounded by fresh and new picnic and restroom pavilions, would vastly improve the northern park zone.”

A GATHERING PLACE, TULSA, OK, MVVA

BAYOU PARKLAND

This project will improve connections between Brays Bayou and the center of Hermann Park, improve trails along both sides of the bayou, and improve the habitat value of the bayou.

BW - BAYOU PARKLAND WEST

A 600-car parking garage at MacGregor Way and Cambridge Street will accommodate relocated cars from the Park Center. The garage will be integrated into the landscape with a green roof terrace and screening landforms. Trails below MacGregor Way and over Cambridge Street will provide seamless and safe connections.

WB - WESTERN BAYOU ENHANCEMENTS

A braided network of pedestrian and bicycle trails will provide improved connections along the bayou through improved habitat. An exercise field and dog park with a small parking lot will increase activity between MacGregor Way and the bayou.

EB - EASTERN BAYOU ENHANCEMENTS

A similar braided trail system will connect a number of new landscape elements, including a new wetland habitat at Alameda Road and Holcombe Boulevard, a nature pavilion reusing the Park maintenance shed, and a nature play area in the existing oak grove.



SOUTH BAYOU PORTAL AND BAYOU PARKLAND WEST



NEW AND IMPROVED TRAILS ALONG BRAYS BAYOU



“This portion (South Bayou Portal and Bayou Parkland West) is so picturesque and cute but there is no safe way to access it because of the high speed traffic cutting it off.”

PROPOSED BAYOU PARKLAND WEST



PARK PERIMETER

This project will enhance pedestrian and bicycle crossings around the Park perimeter and improve traffic flow at the Grand Gateway, Caroline Street, and Cambridge Street.

MS - MAIN STREET PROMENADE

A new Main Street crossing will be added, the existing church parking lot between Fannin and Main Streets will be expanded, and new shade trees will be planted along Fannin Street.

HD- HERMANN DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS

Pedestrian and bicycle access across Hermann Drive will be enhanced and new street trees planted. A new dog park will be created at the corner of Hermann Drive and Almeda Road.

GG - GRAND GATEWAY

Traffic safety and flow patterns will be improved at the Park's historic entrance while strengthening pedestrian connections to the Museum District and Mecom Fountain.

CS - CAROLINE STREET ARRIVAL LANDSCAPE

A more welcoming entrance to the Park will be created with improved traffic flow, and pedestrian and bike safety.



IMPROVED ACCESS TO HERMANN PARK FAMILY COMMONS



CYCLE TRACK AND ENLARGED SIDEWALK ALONG HERMANN PARK DRIVE



“This stretch of the trail (along Cambridge between Fannin and Hermann Park Drive) is totally bottle necked and hazardous, and completely inaccessible to disabled and overgrown with bamboo from the zoo. Could be a much wider sidewalk with a feature or graphic walls with murals depicting the zoo or zen views into the zoo.”



CONCLUSION

Over a century since George Hermann made his big announcement at City Auditorium, Hermann Park that bears his name has grown into Houston's premier public space, one that attracts six million visitors a year from every zip code and walk of life. Successful as the Park is, much remains to be done to fulfill Hermann's dream of a place for all Houstonians. The master plan created by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc. lays out a bold vision for a greener, more accessible, and more cohesive Hermann Park, a Park that will serve the needs of all Houstonians well into the future.

It's in our power to bring that vision to life. Please consider joining the thousands of Houstonians who have donated their time and money to support the Conservancy as it works to implement the new master plan. With your help, Hermann Park will continue to thrive for the next hundred years.

