CENTER SPRINGS PARK MASTER PLAN

2018

Our Parks
TAKE ME TO THE PARK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Center Springs Park is a picturesque, 57-acre park in the core of Manchester, bounded by major transportation corridors, residential neighborhoods and commercial districts. During its first decades in existence, the park was an active gathering place, hosting thousands of visitors for annual winter sporting and other events. In recent years, many Manchester residents have rediscovered the park and its potential as a vibrant gathering place. However, this centrally located park is currently faced with several challenges limiting its potential—primarily a lack of visibility, poor physical connectivity to adjacent districts, and a lack of internal park amenities and programming. This Center Springs Park master plan is intended to address these challenges and provide Town policy makers and staff a blueprint for implementing various enhancements over the near, medium, and long-term.

In terms of infrastructure, this plan recommends three primary strategies for revitalizing the park: enhancing gateways to improve the park's visibility from adjacent districts; improving the park's physical accessibility to encourage a wider range of visitors; and introducing new internal amenities to make visiting the park more enjoyable. In addition to physical infrastructure improvements, continuing to activate the park through events and programming in order to attract regular visitors is also essential. The combination of these physical design and programmatic enhancements will make Center Springs Park a premier place of enjoyment for residents and visitors.

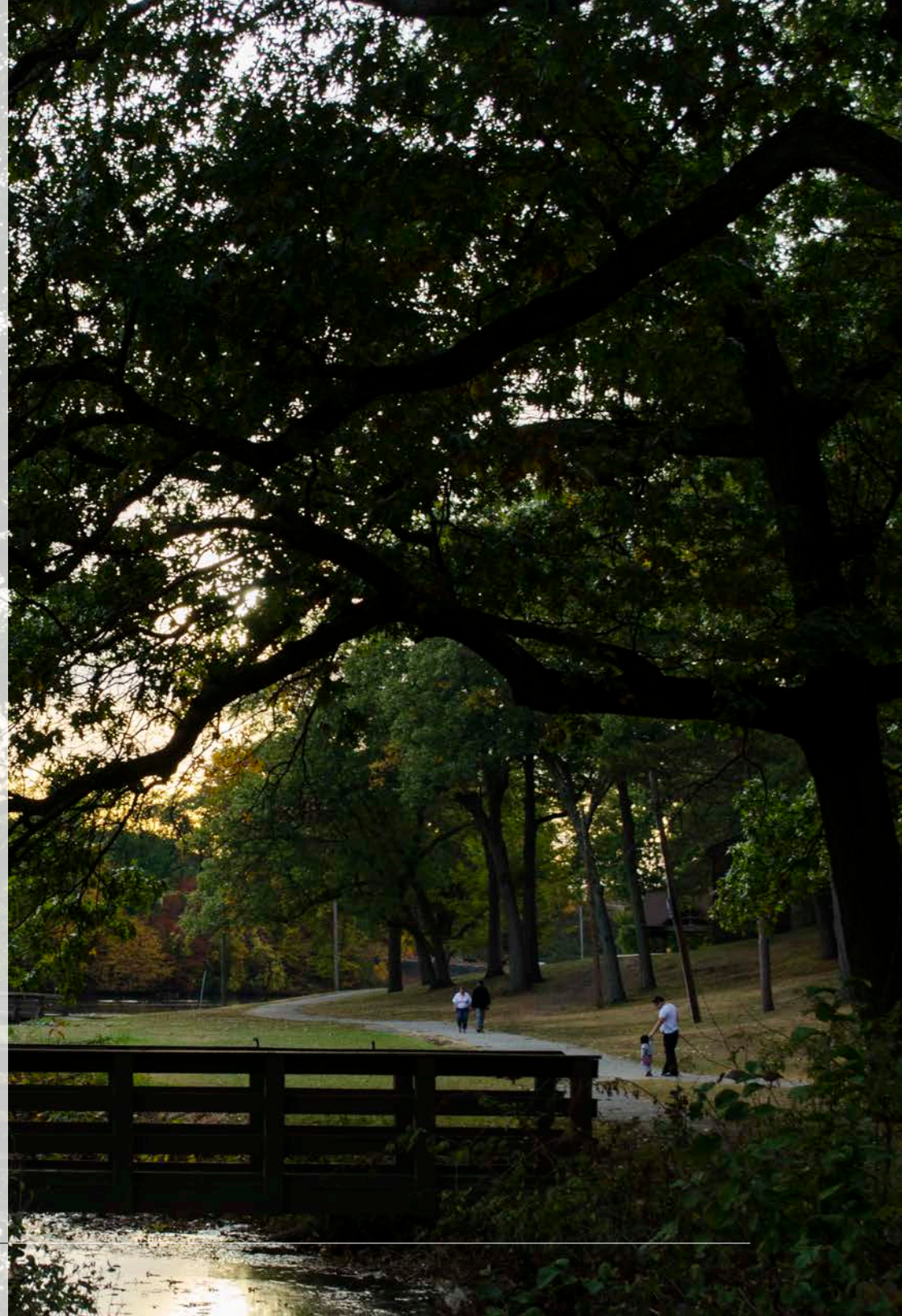
The implementation timeline recommends near, medium, and long-term strategies and improvements. Near-term includes tasks which can be reasonably completed within 1-3 years of this plan's adoption. Medium-term includes a range of tasks likely to be undertaken in some form within the next 3-5 years. Long-term items include both on-going activities and potentially more complicated concepts which could be undertaken with sufficient funding and public support. Where appropriate, rough cost estimates and proposed sequencing of work are detailed to assist with prioritization.

Center Springs remains an important and valued piece of Manchester, representing not only a unique landscape but reflecting the Town's commitment to maintaining its unique natural and historic assets. This master plan outlines a blueprint for significant enhancements to Center Springs Park in an efficient, equitable and cost-effective manner so that it may continue its legacy as an important Town asset and destination. Town departments and staff will work closely with elected and appointed policymakers, volunteer groups, and Manchester residents to ensure investments recommended in this plan strengthen not only Center Springs Park but surrounding neighborhoods and Manchester as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Center Springs Park is currently a beautiful park with unrealized potential as a great destination. Located in the center of Manchester, the 57-acre park provides a scenic and bucolic setting directly adjacent to several important Town districts and corridors. Bisected by Bigelow Brook, the park's visually striking topography and dense tree canopy create a picturesque, unique New England environment. Center Springs sits within a half mile of the Broad Street Redevelopment Area to the west, the Center Street corridor and Downtown central business district to the south, the Main Street corridor to the east, and the Manchester Memorial Hospital district to the north. The scale of the park itself and its proximity to these areas make Center Springs Park a critical node in connecting these areas. A thriving and vital Center Springs Park is an important element of any revitalization efforts for central Manchester.

While the park's location is prime, its geography has at times stifled its potential. The park's seclusion in a natural valley makes accessibility and visibility challenging. This master plan attempts to address these challenges by identifying both proposed physical enhancements to improve park connectivity and visibility and enhanced core programming intended to attract users to the Park. This plan then summarizes previous and ongoing Park improvement projects and provides a blueprint to guide near and long-term capital investments and programming.



PARK HISTORY

Center Springs Park was established in 1917, when the Cheney family donated the largely undevelopable forty acres from Main Street west to the Town of Manchester. In 1921, the Hilliard family donated an additional seven acres, where later that same year a dam was built to create the six-acre pond on the western portion of the park. During the 1920s and 30s, thousands of annual visitors from the region, including nationally known speed and figure skaters, would travel to the park to participate in ice skating and other winter activities. Accounts at the time reported approximately 6,000 visitors in 1931 alone *(Manchester Evening Herald, March 1931)*.

While subsequent decades would see attendance at such events gradually dwindle, as the ice no longer froze to the previous thickness (up to 20 inches during the 1930s), the park remained a popular gathering place well into the 1950s and 60s. A former Town parks superintendent noted, "In its time, it was one of the great social centers in Manchester" *(Journal Inquirer, July 1993)*. With the advent of more indoor recreational opportunities, the park's status as a central gathering hub also faded over time. By the 1980s, the park was in relative disrepair, prompting Town leaders in the late 80s and early 90s to initiate several improvement projects. These included the construction of the lodge building to house the Town Recreation Department in 1989 and various pond restoration projects in the 1990s, including dredging of the pond and construction of a sedimentation forebay on its eastern edge. Other improvements included the installation of a fishing pier, and construction of bituminous walking trails, picnic pavilions, a small baseball field, and a new playground off Lodge Street.

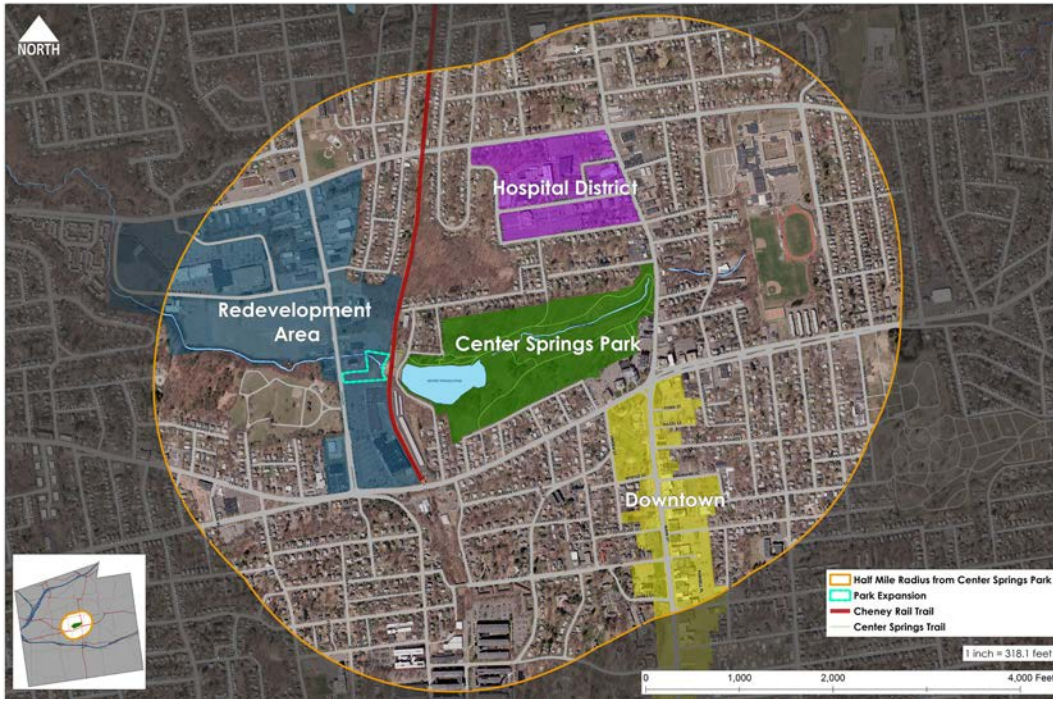


Figure 1: *Center Springs Park is adjacent to several important Town districts, including the Broad Street Redevelopment Area, Manchester Memorial Hospital and affiliated offices, and the Downtown Central Business District. Manchester High School and hundreds of converted mill apartments within the Cheney Mill district are also within a half-mile radius.*

"MANCHESTER IS PARTICULARLY FORTUNATE IN HAVING SUCH A TRACT OF LAND AS THE 58 ACRES KNOWN AS "CENTER SPRINGS PARK."

Thomas H. Desmond & Associates
"Report on Center Springs Park at Manchester Connecticut," 1929

PARK HISTORY (CONT'D)

While these projects were significant internal improvements, the Park's lack of visibility and connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods have remained significant hurdles, limiting park usage and, at times, contributing to a negative perception of its desirability as a recreation destination. Many long-time Manchester residents at public workshops conducted for this masterplan found accessing the park confusing or were unaware of the park's existence entirely.

In 2009, the Board of Directors charged the newly expanded Redevelopment Agency (RDA) with creating a redevelopment plan for the 148-acre Broad Street area. In crafting this plan, the RDA recognized the park's proximity to the redevelopment area as an asset to encourage and complement prospective redevelopment. The resulting Broad Street Redevelopment Plan specifically called for extending the park west to Broad Street in order to create a new prominent entrance for visitors and connect it directly to the district. Soon after adoption of the plan, the necessary replacement of the Edgerton Street culvert at the western edge of the park created the opportunity to construct such a connection. An opening was created through the embankment of the former Cheney rail line, and a pedestrian bridge installed over the span. After purchasing the adjoining property on Broad Street, a park entrance was constructed and officially completed in the fall of 2017.

Figure 2: *This map from a 1929 master plan for the park shows Center Springs Park largely as it exists today.*

Figure 3: *An estimated 6,000 people attended the 1931 Winter Carnival in the park.*

PARK HISTORY (CONT'D)

Figure 4: *Nationally known figure skaters of the era would perform at winter festivities in the park.*

A FINE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION BETWEEN TOWN OFFICIALS, PARK BOARD MEMBERS AND THE INTERESTED PUBLIC HAS RESULTED IN THE CREATION OF BEAUTIFUL PARK AND POND FOR THE USE OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS GROWING COMMUNITY. FEW, IF ANY, TOWNS OF THIS SIZE POSSESS SUCH AN ALL-YEAR PLAYGROUND AS CENTER SPRINGS PARK AND THE VALUE OF THE NATURAL PARK WILL INCREASE AS THE YEARS PASS.

Manchester Evening Herald, March 1931

PARK HISTORY (CONT'D)

Other recent projects have included selective brush and tree clearing to improve sightlines into and out of the park, improving the sense of security for visitors. The construction of a paved walking loop along the upper embankment of the pond and most recently, sidewalk along Edgerton Street completes the first contiguous loop around the perimeter of the park, providing contiguous pedestrian access to all of Center Springs. A nine-hole disc golf course was installed in 2015 and has proven to be a minimal footprint, low-cost amenity consistently drawing enthusiasts of the game much of the year and adding additional park activity.

In 2015 the Friends of Center Springs Park was established to reintroduce Center Springs Park to Manchester residents and energize revitalization efforts. The Friends have worked to raise the park's profile in the community through targeted improvement projects and as community ambassadors for the park itself. The volunteer group has over twenty active core committee members and has benefitted from the efforts of over 100 additional volunteers. Accomplishments to date include three "Celebrate Center Springs!" music events, six park cleanup events, and two Daffodil Planting Days resulting in 3,000 daffodil bulbs being planted in the park. As of this writing the Friends plan to plant another 2,000 bulbs and host a 5k road race during the upcoming 2018 season.

Center Springs Park has always benefitted from the collaborative efforts of engaged citizens and Town staff. While specific uses and amenities within the park have evolved over the years, the park's size and central location ensure it will continue to be an important Manchester asset. This master plan is intended to identify and prioritize efforts to make Center Springs an even better community asset. Given the recent attention and energy surrounding the park, this plan will assist Town stakeholders in prioritizing and coordinating efforts to make Center Springs an even better place for recreation, gatherings, and socializing than it is today.

Figure 5: *The installation of a disc golf course in 2015 has been highly successful in consistently attracting enthusiasts of the game into the park.*

Figure 6: *When the Edgerton Street culvert was replaced, the embankment below the Cheney Rail line was opened and a north-south pedestrian bridge installed over the former rail line.*

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY

Three public workshops were organized with the intent of soliciting a wide range of perspectives on Center Springs Park and ideas for improvements. The first workshop in early September 2017 included the Government Academy class, a multi-week Town outreach and educational program designed to introduce Manchester residents to all aspects of municipal government. The second took place in early October 2017 and included the Manchester Youth Commission, a diverse group of twenty-four high school students charged by the Board of Directors to involve youth in municipal government decision making. The third event, a "Walk in the Park," was held on October 5th and open to the general public.

All three workshops revolved around an interactive walking tour of the park, where staff discussed recent and ongoing projects and possible enhancements to various park entrances. After each walking tour, attendees gathered in a breakout session where they discussed what they liked most about the park, what they did not like, and what they would change to make Center Springs more inviting and accessible. While most of the Youth Commission and Walk in the Park attendees were either occasional or regular visitors to the park, the majority of the Government Academy attendees had not been to Center Springs Park previously, despite many being long-time Manchester residents.

Several consistent themes emerged from the three workshops. Visibility was identified as the most prominent issue. Most agreed Center Springs Park is difficult to locate and lacks visual indicators identifying it as a public park. Attendees suggested more prominent signage and gateways to the park would make it more inviting and noticed. Youth Commission and Walk in the Park attendees identified the eastern entrance at the corner of Main and Bigelow Streets as the most in need of enhancement.

Figure 7: *Participants from the Walk in the Park workshop.*

SUMMARY (CONT'D)

Balancing the park's current appeal as a passive place of recreation with the desire for more active uses was a point of discussion. Attendees liked the natural features of the park, particularly the brook and waterfall near the eastern edge. Improved utilization of and access to these natural features was a common point of emphasis. However, attendees also noted the park's relative lack of active uses compared to other Town parks and suggested more events and programming could help increase usage.

In terms of amenities, most attendees cited a lack of seating, trash receptacles and lighting as the most common park deficiencies. The location of the playground on Lodge Drive was cited as lacking by several participants who noted it feels separated from the rest of the park. Relocating the playground to a more visible, accessible area integrated within the park was suggested. The location of other amenities in relation to parking was another repeated comment. Generally, participants felt more amenities located closer to existing parking at the edges of the park would draw a wider range of potential visitors.

A synopsis of the comments at each workshop is included below:

MEETING	GOVERNMENT ACADEMY CLASS *September 7th, 2017*	YOUTH COMMISSION *October 3rd, 2017*	WALK IN THE PARK GENERAL PUBLIC WORKSHOP *October 5th, 2017*
What Do You Like?	• Natural beauty • Walking path/trail • Water	• Ravine area • Trees/natural areas	• Waterfall/ravine area
What Do You Not Like?	• Nowhere to sit • Lack of signage • Not accessible/visible • Lack of lighting	• Lack of seating/tables • Entrances uninviting • Poor signage	• Not enough signage • Not enough lighting • Poor accessibility
What Would You Change?	• Better signage • Amenities closer to parking • More active uses for youth • Lighting	• More lighting along trails • More trash cans • Enhance entryways into park	• More lighting along trails • More trash cans • Enhance entryways into park
Comments/Suggestions	• Add events like a "haunted walk," disc golf tournament and bird watching • Relocate the playground so it feels like it's inside the park • Add events like summer camp, summer baseball, basketball, and music concert • Create a link between Center Springs and Center Memorial	• Make the ravine easier to access • Christmas light show walk through along the path or a Halloween haunted path • Plant flowers to draw people	• Light the bridge • Visible entrance points • The hill adjacent to Lincoln Center entrance could accommodate an amphitheater (has the natural topography)

Table A: *A sample of responses from the three public workshop.*

SITE ANALYSIS

SITE ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Center Springs Park has two major site challenges – a lack of visibility from adjacent neighborhoods, and limited accessibility to a wide range of potential users. While much work has been done recently to improve connectivity and amenities within the park, these site challenges mean Center Springs Park remains relatively underutilized and has not yet reached its potential as a recreation destination. These site challenges stem primarily from the park's steep, bowl-like topography (described below). While the topography presents some accessibility and visibility challenges, it also creates scenic landscapes not often found in urban parks.

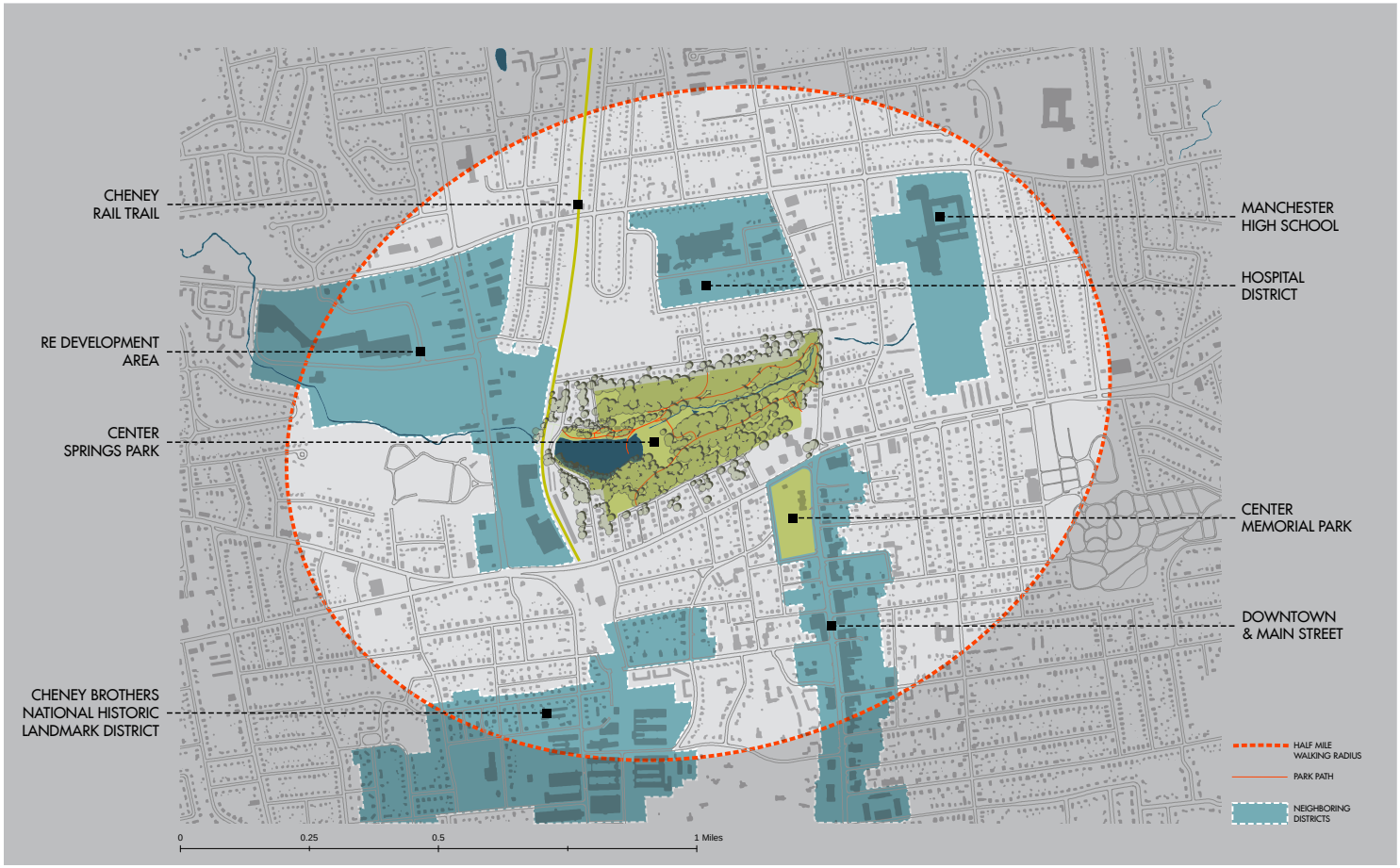


Figure 8: *Center Springs Park is adjacent to several important Town districts, including the Broad Street Redevelopment Area, Manchester Memorial Hospital and affiliated offices, and the Downtown Central Business District. Manchester High School and hundreds of converted mill apartments within the Cheney Mill district are also within a half-mile radius.*

TOPOGRAPHY

The topography of Center Springs Park provides much of its scenic beauty, yet also presents challenges for accessibility. The Park is shaped like a bowl, with much of the outer perimeter nearly 100 feet higher in elevation than Bigelow Brook at the bottom, which bisects the park. The elevation forms a ravine on the eastern section before emptying into the 6-acre pond at the western edge. This elevation change offers many potentially scenic vistas into the park, particularly from Main Street to the east and Valley Street to the south. The slope has also traditionally provided a popular winter sledding hill for residents. However, the slopes can be difficult to traverse for some potential users, limiting physical accessibility.

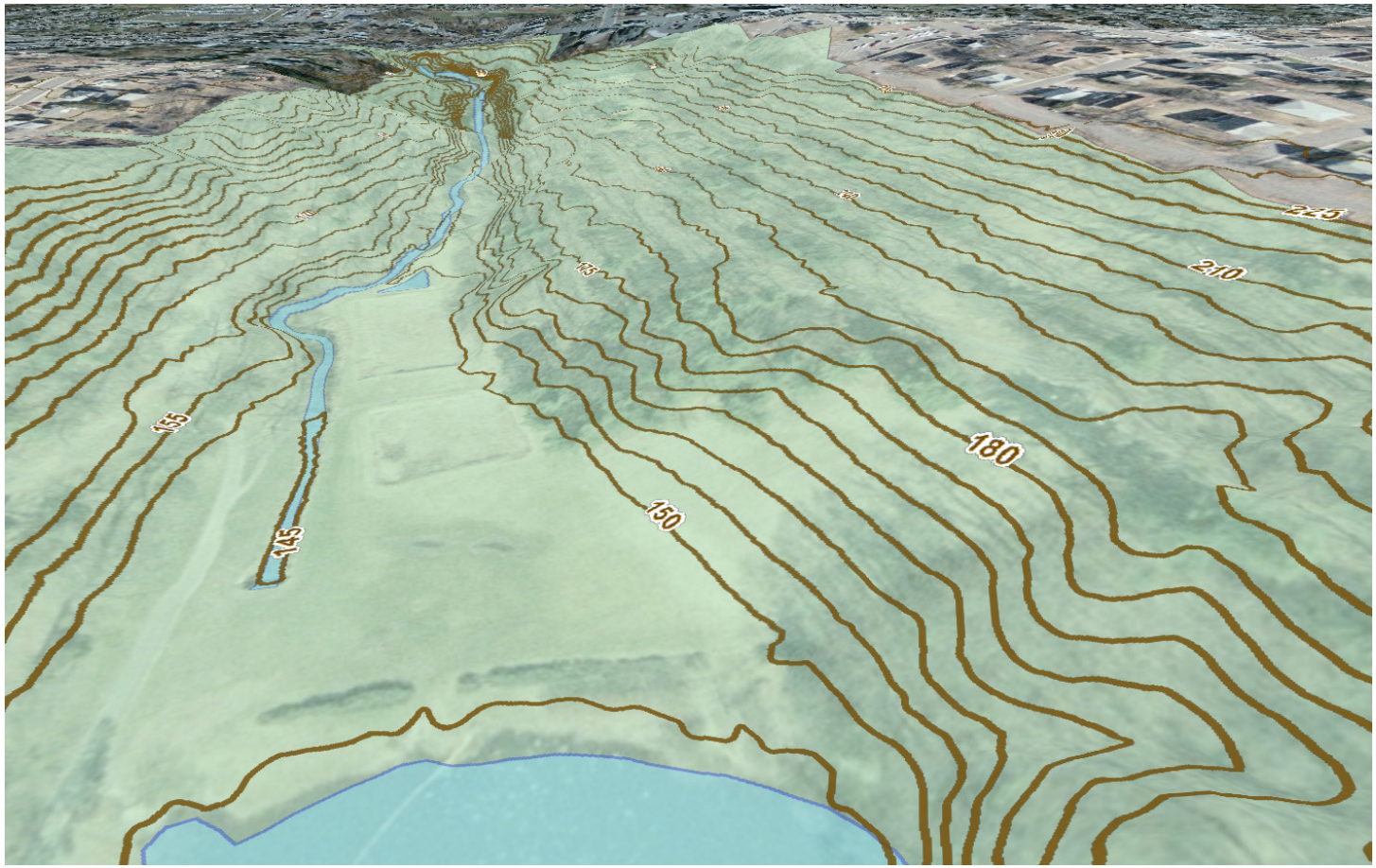


Figure 9: *A 3D elevation model shows a vantage point looking east from Center Springs Pond toward Main Street. The elevation descends nearly 100 feet forming a bowl-like topography.*

HYDROLOGY / STORMWATER / POND

As stated above, the Bigelow Brook runs westerly through the center of the park. The brook receives runoff from a 1.5 square mile drainage area. Throughout its course, the brook is tightly constricted and is conveyed through developed areas via pipes and culverts. Within the park the brook emerges from a 96" culvert under Main Street and cascades to the south before turning east toward the pond.

The riparian corridor along Bigelow Brook within the park consists of a regulated floodway and associated floodplain. Due to the amount of impervious surface within much of the watershed, the brook is frequently inundated with stormwater runoff and overflows its narrow banks, often leaving the flat area at the base of the sledding hill saturated and littered with debris. Federal, state and local floodplain and wetland regulations limit the building of permanent structures, excavation or filling in such areas dictating the best use of this section of the park is as a natural area for passive recreation.

The brook channel consists of a mix of bedrock, man-made retaining walls and earthen embankments. Where the brook has been allowed to flow freely it naturally meanders. The dynamic and changing nature of the watercourse should be considered in development plans for the riparian corridor, primarily limiting the development of permanent structures in these sensitive areas.

Center Springs Pond is an approximately 6.1 acre pond at the west end of the park. The pond receives runoff from a 1.5 square mile urban drainage, bringing with it a range of contaminants including sediment, nutrients, and a variety of trash items. Average daily flows are low at about 1.1 cubic feet per second (cfs), but storm flows can exceed 100 cfs, causing flooding in the park.

The current water level of the pond was set in the 1920s with the erection of an outlet structure, but the accumulation of both coarse and fine materials over the years has been substantial. It is acknowledged that the water quality problems will be an ongoing problem in light of watershed features. The pond was dredged in 1995 and a sediment trapping forebay was constructed at the point of entry of Bigelow Brook to Center Springs Pond, and has trapped course solids very well for almost 20 years; it is cleaned every few years as warranted. The pond will again be dredged in the summer of 2018 with a goal of improving water quality. A promenade exists on top of the berm that separates the sedimentation forebay from the pond that provides handicapped access and facilitates fishing. A related issue has remained the unaesthetic appearance of the pond during summer. Algae, floating plants, and rooted submerged plants have created unsightly and malodorous conditions at times, and interfere with fishing.

VEGETATION & NATURAL AREAS

The park is generally characterized by dense forested areas and maintained open grass fields. Oak trees dominate the mature canopy in most areas of the park. Individual white and red pine, hickory, beech and maple trees can be found throughout.

The south side of the pond is heavily wooded and steep. Hemlock trees were once prolific in this area but have been almost completely eliminated by the Hemlock Wooly Adelgid blight. Many dead trees still remain, presenting potential safety hazards and a generally unappealing condition. As trees fall and root balls rot, the steep embankment is compromised in areas. A general removal, clean-up and subsequent replanting plan to stabilize the embankment on the south side of the pond should be considered.

The riparian corridor along Bigelow Brook is also heavily vegetated. Public Works field staff have recently undertaken extensive brush clearing and tree removal within the park, significantly improving sightlines and allowing more sun into previously fully shaded areas. Preventing excessive erosion of the area surrounding the brook is a concern, as any clearing of tree and underbrush must be balanced with the consequences of the resulting erosion.

Three shallow, man-made ponding areas exist on the south side of the brook in the area adjacent the wooden pedestrian bridge. The three depressions consume an area just short of an acre in size and were once deliberately flooded during the winter months to provide a popular ice-skating feature. This use has been discontinued for some time now. However, the depressions are periodically saturated naturally, providing flood storage capacity and a wildlife habitat that mimics a wetland meadow unique to the park. Development of this area to enhance its scenic and habitat value could also provide stormwater pollutant mitigation and educational opportunities to the public.

Figure 10: *One of three depressions adjacent to Bigelow Brook formerly used as ice skating rinks, now overgrown with wet meadow grasses and shrubs, providing wildlife habitat and flood storage.*

WILDLIFE HABITAT

The diversity of physical characteristics at Center Springs Park offers a potentially rich wildlife habitat despite its developed residential surroundings. While the brook is mostly impassable for migratory fish species due to the dams and culverts typical of urban stormwater infrastructure, the pond is stocked with fish annually by the State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). A pond stocked with fish has proven to be attractive to water-loving bird species such as the Great Blue Heron and the Belted Kingfisher, while Bald Eagles and Osprey have also been spotted. With appropriate seed or seedling establishment, the manmade retention ponds could make a wet meadow or cattail dominant habitat attractive to the Redwing Blackbird, nesting snapping turtles and a variety of dragonflies and butterflies.

The oak canopy is a favorite stopover of migrating songbirds such as the Baltimore Oriole and the understory of shrubs such as Mountain Laurel, dogwoods, and viburnum make a secure foraging habitat for Eastern Towhee and the rarely seen American Woodcock. Deer are rare in the park; however the sandy soil and sloping topography make for easy burrowing of dens for ground hogs and red fox.

Figure 11: *Ducks swimming in Center Springs Pond.*

SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

Because its topography keeps it hidden from plain view, wayfinding is needed to direct visitors to Center Springs. The recently constructed parking lot at the Broad Street entrance and the main Lodge Drive entrance feature the only prominent park entrance signs. Additional wayfinding signage would particularly enhance the park's prominence on the eastern side along Main Street. Currently, a small sign at the corner of Main and Bigelow Streets directs people down Bigelow Street but provides minimal information regarding access or amenities. Other existing similar signs include one in the Lincoln Center parking lot and another at the pedestrian entrance on Liberty Street.

There is currently no wayfinding signage within the park, offering visitors no opportunity to learn more about park features or information about distances to other attractions. Some limited additional signage would improve navigation to and within the park, and better connect it to its surroundings.

Figure 12: *A small, nondescript sign at the corner of Main and Bigelow offers little wayfinding utility for prospective visitors.*

PARKING

Overall, parking is adequate given existing use patterns of the park. Approximately sixty parking spaces are located adjacent to the Recreation Lodge building and along Lodge Drive. There are no formal on-street parking spaces, although Lodge Drive could potentially accommodate a small amount of overflow parking if necessary. Ten additional spaces are located at the newly created Broad Street entrance and a relatively new overflow parking area by the baseball field off Valley Street can accommodate an additional fifteen to twenty vehicles. Typically this lot is only utilized when the field is being used.

The Lincoln Center lot contains forty-one parking stalls, most of which is in use during the day but largely empty during the evenings. Valley Street has the capability to host on-street parking, which is currently rarely necessary. With nearly 130 total parking spaces available in addition to relatively plentiful on-street parking nearby, the park does not currently have a pressing need for additional off-street parking. Should future parking demand increase, the Proposed Enhancements section includes suggested areas for potential additional parking.

AMENITIES

The park contains a handful of active recreational amenities, but most are isolated from parking and other park features, leaving them underutilized. The playground along Lodge Drive on the western portion of the park, the baseball field and half basketball court along Valley Street, the pavilion at the top of the sledding hill and the unfinished bituminous pad along the pedestrian trail on the southern side of the park receive primarily drop-in use from neighboring residents, in comparison with similar facilities at other Town parks with more formalized programming and events.

The installation of a nine-hole disc golf course in 2015 has been highly successful in consistently attracting enthusiasts into the park for a weekly tournament open to the public as well as drop-in use. The park makes an optimal venue for disc golf, taking advantage of elevation changes and the combination of long, open fields and dense tree stands for obstacles. The landscape provides a challenging course layout for variety of player skill levels. Industry standard tee-pads and baskets, including a practice area for putting are installed throughout. The addition of disc golf offers an example of how appropriate amenities can help stimulate activity with minimal negative impact on the natural feel of the park.

Figure 13: *Existing park program and amenities.*

CIRCULATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Bituminous pathways provide pedestrian circulation through most of the park. A newly completed segment along the southwestern part of the park above the pond connects to a new sidewalk along Edgerton Street, creating for the first time a continuous pedestrian loop around the park.

While the park now includes a full internal pedestrian loop, connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods could be significantly improved. The opening and expansion of the western edge of the park to Broad Street is a significant milestone for improving the park's connectivity. However, connections along the northern, eastern and southern portions of the park remain deficient. Improving the visibility of entrances at these locations will allow easier accessibility for a wider range of potential users.

Figure 14: *Existing paths within Center Springs Park.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS

A. Entrance from Broad Street
B. Entrance from Hospital District
C. Entrance from north Main
D. Entrance off Main Street
E. Entrance from Lincoln Center
F. Entrance from Trotter Street
G. Entrance off Valley Street

Figure 15: *Major gateways into Center Springs Park. A - Broad Street entrance; B - Northern pedestrian entrance from Liberty Street; C - Pedestrian entrance at corner of Main and Bigelow streets; D - Staircase off Main Street; E - Lincoln Center entrance; F –Entrance at intersection of Trotter and Valley Streets; G – Southwest entrance at Valley Street and Rosemary Place.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS (CONT'D)

Northern – Entrance at Liberty Street (B)

Located at the southern end of Liberty Street, this pedestrian-only northern entrance primarily serves the immediate neighborhood and is not particularly welcoming. The proximity to Manchester Memorial Hospital offers an opportunity to connect to an important economic and activity hub, particularly as the importance of physical activity and the benefits of natural spaces to health are becoming more widely recognized. The installation of sidewalks along the western side of Liberty Street in 2018 and the addition of prominent wayfinding signage could potentially make this entrance more appealing and used.

Figure 16: *The pedestrian only entrance at the park's northern edge.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS (CONT'D)

Eastern – Corner of Main and Bigelow Streets (C)

Potentially the most prominent eastern gateway to the park, the area at the corner of Main and Bigelow Streets, is not currently a formal park entrance. It currently consists of an informally trailblazed footpath leading into the park. A steel guide rail along the Main Street frontage creates more of a highway, rather than a park-like environment. The small wayfinding sign is easily overlooked by vehicular traffic and offers minimal guidance for potential visitors, or wayfinding information. A series of small boulders acts as a natural set of bollards preventing vehicular entry.

Figure 17: *The corner of Main and Bigelow Streets currently serves as an informal park entrance.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS (CONT'D)

Eastern – Staircase Off Main Street (D)

An underutilized staircase currently serves as an additional park entrance on Main Street between Wadsworth and Lilley Streets. The staircase is relatively steep with rusted metal railings and surrounded by overgrown vegetation. The entrance is disconnected from parking and park amenities, and sits between the Bigelow Street and Lincoln Center entrances. As such, it is not an ideal location for a primary gateway.

Figure 18: *The staircase entrance off of Main Street.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS (CONT'D)

Eastern – Lincoln Center Parking Lot (E)

The southeastern park entrance is located adjacent to the Town's municipal Lincoln Center parking lot. Located off Main Street at the southeast edge of Center Springs, parking in the 41-stall lot is often limited during weekday hours but is typically widely available after work hours and on weekends. The elevation change from the parking lot into the park can be challenging to traverse, limiting this entrance's accessibility for many potential users. Few park amenities are near this entrance, and the topography limits park visibility from this location. The large open field at the bottom of the staircase receives a significant amount of sunlight and offers a potentially interesting opportunity for passive recreation, gardening, unique landscaping features or seating. Moving the nearest disc golf tee to the platform at the top of the stairs, adjacent to the parking lot, would add to the gateway's visibility and better tie the park to the parking lot.

Figure 19: *The entrance from the Lincoln Center parking lot.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS (CONT'D)

Southern – Intersection of Trotter and Valley Streets (F)

Located on the southern edge of the park, the intersection of Trotter and Valley Streets offers a potentially scenic gateway vista. Currently, an informal footpath, with remnants of decades-old stone steps, meanders into the park from Valley Street. Proximity to the Town municipal campus, Center Memorial Park, the Mary Cheney Library and the Downtown central business district make this location an important connection between the Park and Center Street. The nearby parking makes this area relatively accessible. However, the lack of a direct sightline here keeps the park hidden from this highly visible area.

Figure 20: *Deteriorating stone steps and a trailblazed footpath lead into the park from the Trotter Street entrance.*

PARK ENTRANCES AND GATEWAYS (CONT'D)

Southwestern – Valley and Liberty Street (G)

Prior to the construction of the Broad Street gateway, the entrance at Valley and Rosemary Place was the primary way to enter and exit the park from the west. A Little League baseball field and half-court basketball court are noteworthy amenities in the area. The completion of the upper walking loop above the pond to Edgerton Street will be most directly accessed through this entrance and parking lot.

Figure 21: *Paved vehicular entrance from Valley Street just west of the baseball field.*

SECTION II
STRATEGIES AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

OVERVIEW

Proposed park improvements center on three major themes identified during public workshops and site analysis:

1) Improving Center Springs Park's visibility and physical connectivity to adjacent districts,
2) Enhancing internal park amenities for a more enjoyable visitor experience,
3) Activating the park through events and programming designed to consistently attract users.

The proposed enhancements range in scale from low-cost projects which can be performed by Town staff and volunteer groups to more significant capital projects requiring additional support and funding. This section details the specifics of each proposed project, while Section III outlines the potential prioritization and sequencing of work.

GATEWAYS AND CONNECTIVITY

The following proposed enhancements are intended to improve visibility into the park and make it more prominent from all directions. These proposed enhancements are also intended to make the park more physically accessible and convenient to people of all ages, backgrounds and mobility levels.

Figure 22: *Existing pedestrian entry points or "gateways" into Center Springs Park.*

BROAD STREET ENTRANCE

With the fall 2017 official opening of the expansion to Broad Street, the western gateway to Center Springs Park is complete. Minor landscaping improvements may be appropriate in the medium-term, but in the short-term Town staff will allow the newly planted landscape features to mature and stabilize while monitoring their health. As the number of parking spaces was scaled down from initial concept plans – monitoring the use of the lot is appropriate. If the lot is consistently at capacity, the existing park entrance layout could accommodate additional spots in the future.

A medium-term project could include lighting the pedestrian bridge to make it visible at night from Broad Street. This concept was initially included in preliminary designs for the park entrance, but was postponed to reduce project costs. If the Broad Street park entrance becomes well-used, lighting the pedestrian bridge would be a relatively low-cost enhancement to further improve the park's visibility.

Figure 23: *A view to the Cheney Trail bridge, looking east from Broad Street.*

NORTHERN ENTRANCE LIBERTY STREET

The northern entrance to the park from Liberty Street is not particularly well-used, as it is primarily a pedestrian path linking the park with the small neighborhood immediately north of the park and with Manchester Memorial Hospital. The proximity of the hospital to this entrance offers an opportunity to connect Center Springs with one of the Town's largest employers and a destination use that sees hundreds of daily visitors. The planned installation of sidewalks on the western side of Liberty Street in 2018 will provide a better pedestrian connection from the hospital to the park. Other minor enhancements to this gateway include selective tree and brush clearing to improve sightlines into the park from Liberty Street and upgrading the existing signage at the entrance. Additional wayfinding signage could also be added on Haynes or Russell Streets directing hospital employees and visitors to the park entrance.

South of the entrance, adding a bituminous path connection forking east would better accommodate pedestrians and formalize what is now an informal trailblazed path. The area in the middle of the fork could be dedicated to decorative landscaping with native species to increase visual interest along the walking loop.

Figure 24: *The northern entrance of the park currently features a relatively narrow bituminous path forking west. An additional fork to the east would improve functionality and create a new landscaped planting area.*

NORTHERN ENTRANCE LIBERTY STREET (CONT'D)

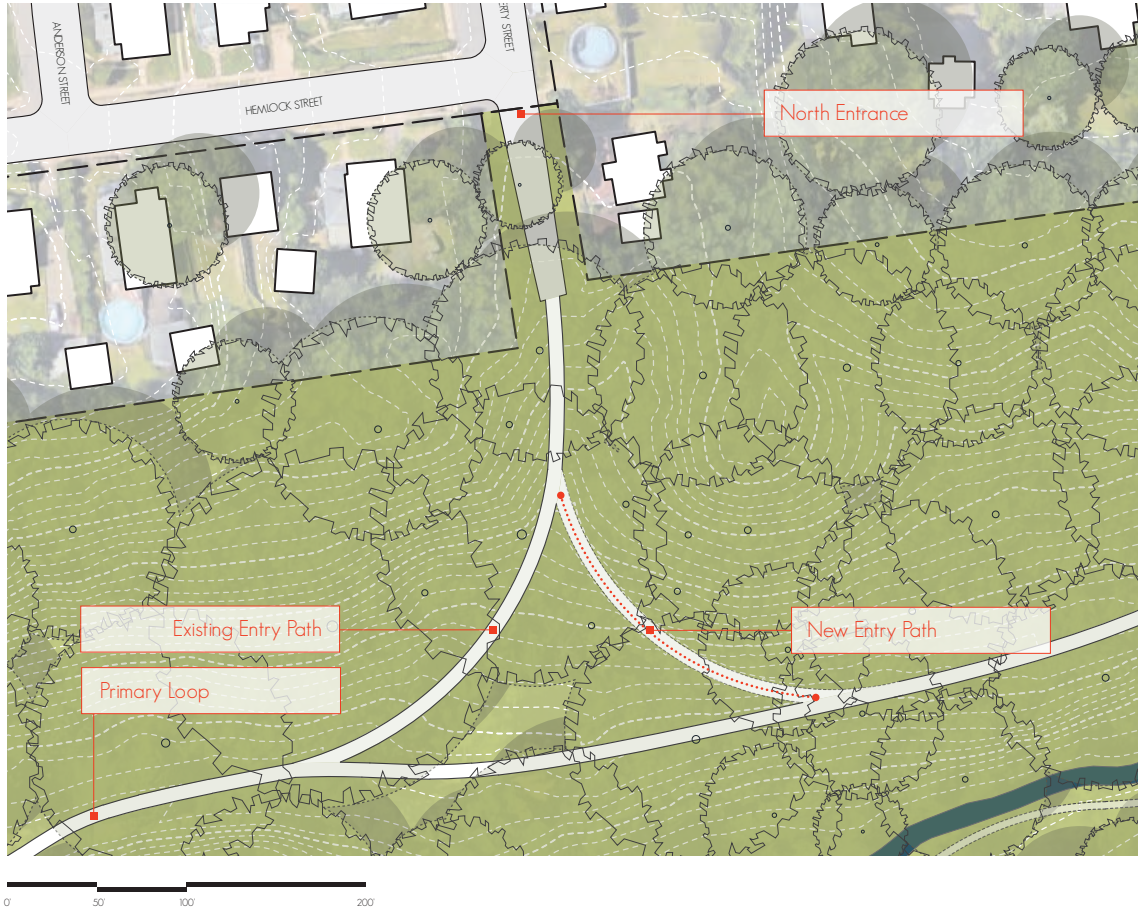


Figure 25: *Creating an additional fork off the existing bituminous footpath will improve accessibility and create a defined area for ornamental landscaping.*

EASTERN ENTRANCE MAIN AND BIGELOW STREETS

The corner of Main and Bigelow Streets offers the best opportunity to create a highly visible and accessible pedestrian gateway entrance on the park's eastern edge. The high traffic volumes along Main Street, significant pedestrian activity along Main Street, and CT Transit bus stop at this corner ensure any enhancements will be immediately noticeable. Two concepts for this eastern gateway are detailed below. In both concepts the corner is enhanced with landscaping, signage and the construction of formal pathways. The concepts differ in how the Main Street frontage and park walking loop are treated.

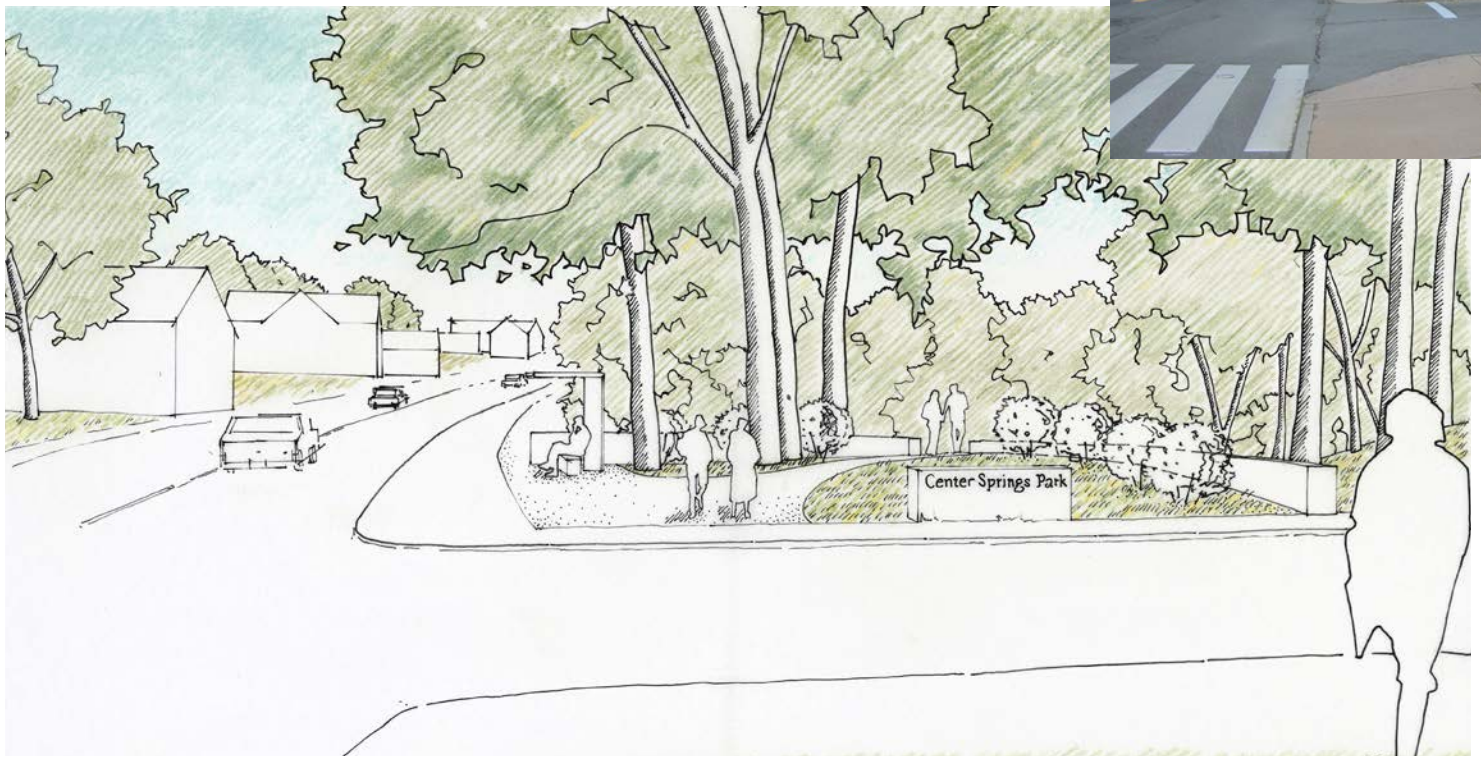


Figure 26: *Both design options include enhancing the park entrance at the corner of Main and Bigelow Streets, creating a more visible formal entrance.*

EASTERN ENTRANCE MAIN AND BIGELOW STREETS (CONT'D)

Option 1

Option #1 features significant regrading of the slope along the park's Main Street frontage in order to provide a widened sidewalk and tree belt. The park walking loop would be slightly elevated behind a new retaining wall, running parallel to the improved sidewalk. These improvements would enhance and create a more park-like atmosphere along the Main Street frontage while the tree belt would serve as a way to slow down the heavy traffic in this area. An observation deck is also envisioned along the realigned internal park footpath, creating a scenic vantage point looking westward down Bigelow Brook towards Center Springs Pond.

Figure 27: *Option #1 would include an enhanced corner to serve as a formal entrance, a regraded slope to realign the walking loop, an observation deck looking west down Bigelow Brook and a belt of street trees along the park's Main Street frontage.*

Figure 28: *Regrading the slope on the eastern edge of the park would allow for a belt of street trees and create a more park-like environment along the Main Street corridor.*

EASTERN ENTRANCE MAIN AND BIGELOW STREETS (CONT'D)

Option 2 – Bridge

Option #2 involves installing a pedestrian bridge spanning Bigelow Brook just west of the Main Street culvert opening. The bridge would serve as both a new segment of the walking loop as well as an observation point looking into the park. The existing trail section at the northeastern-most portion of the park, currently tightly constrained by the slope, would be removed entirely in this option. The bridge would also serve as a visual identifier similar to the Broad Street entrance at the opposite end of the park and functionally serve as the observation deck. The option to introduce a belt of street trees as mentioned in the previous option would remain.

Both options are relatively similar in projected cost and complexity. Both are conceptual at this point and would require further discussion among stakeholders regarding desired design outcomes, engineering and sources of funding. The treatment of the corner at Main and Bigelow would remain the same in both options, with enhanced signage, landscaping and the addition of limited hardscape amenities intended to define the corner as a prominent park entrance.

Figure 29: *A pedestrian bridge would serve as both an observation deck and as part of the park trail network, connecting the major north and south trails.*

Figure 30: *Conceptual rendering for bridge option.*

LINCOLN CENTER ENTRANCE

As noted, the Lincoln Center entrance functions more as a municipal parking lot than a park entrance. The steep grade to Center Springs is traversed via a staircase from a platform in the parking lot. The grade provides a barrier to those with limited mobility. Additionally, while parking for this entrance is readily accessible, few amenities currently exist in this portion of the park. Moving the nearest frisbee golf tee to the top of the platform would better connect the parking to the park. Landscaping and planting treatments on the park side of this entrance should be explored as well.

Figure 31: *Satellite image of Center Springs Park entrance at Lincoln Center.*

SOUTHERN ENTRANCE TROTTER STREET

Primary goals for the proposed Trotter Street gateway are to improve the Park's visibility and accessibility from Center Street and to connect the Park to the Downtown area. One element consistent in all conceptual options is connecting Center Springs Park to Center Memorial Park via a green, park-like corridor. The presence of the public parking improves the likelihood of this entrance becoming a well-used gateway. While the location of the Fire Station and existing municipal vehicle parking area create restraints, realigning the rear portion of the parking lot and current entrance would provide for both a park entrance and improved circulation.

Options A and B are functionally similar, varying primarily in how the exit lane from the Town Hall parking is realigned. Option A features more regrading and the installation of a retaining wall, a tighter curve in the reconfiguration of the exit lane, and maintains the amount of parking for Town vehicles. Option B features a gentler bend in the reconfigured exit lane and less drastic regrading, but reduces overall parking by approximately twenty spaces. In either option, the currently vacant lot on the western site of Trotter Street could accommodate additional parking.

The greenbelt linking Center Springs and Center Memorial can be treated in a variety of ways. Treatment options range from a simple meandering path along a corridor of trees (option A) to a hardscape, plaza-like option (Option B). The unifying idea in any treatment of the corridor is to create a more welcoming gateway connection.

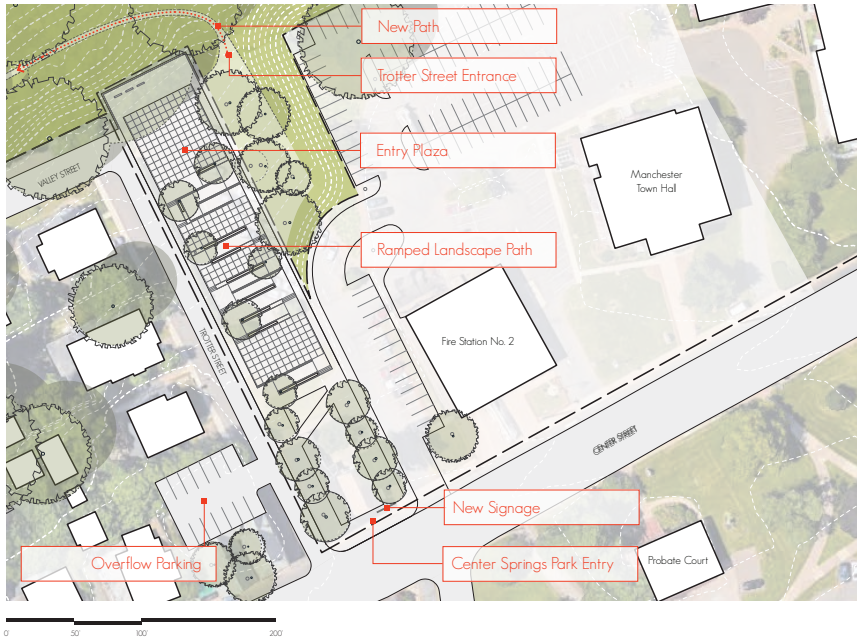


Figure 32: *Trotter Street entrance, Option A.*

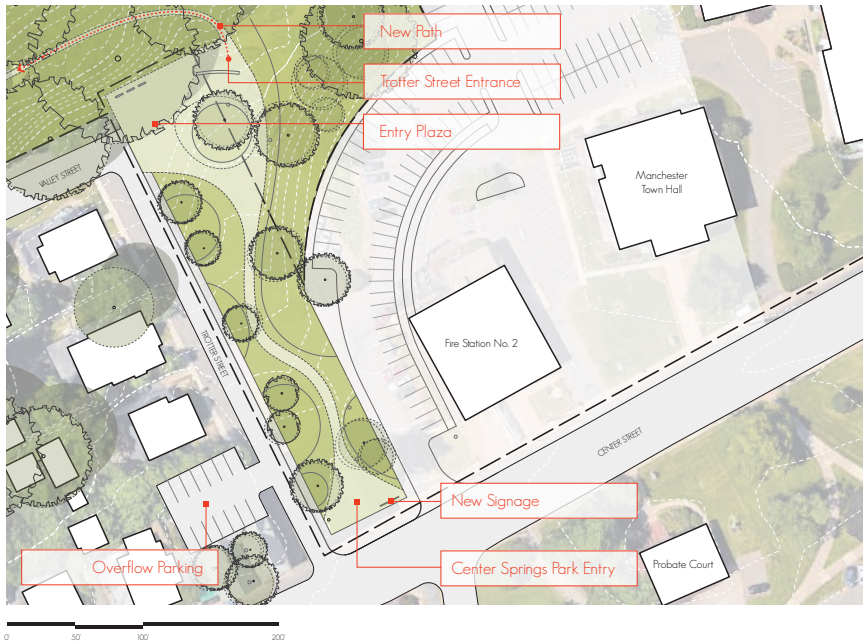


Figure 33: *Trotter entrance, Option B.*

SOUTHERN ENTRANCE TROTTER STREET (CONT'D)

Options A and B are functionally similar, varying primarily in how the exit lane from the Town Hall parking is realigned. Option A features more regrading and the installation of a retaining wall, a tighter curve in the reconfiguration of the exit lane, and maintains the amount of parking for Town vehicles. Option B features a gentler bend in the reconfigured exit lane and less drastic regrading, but reduces overall parking by approximately twenty spaces. In either option, the currently vacant lot on the western site of Trotter Street could accommodate additional parking.

The greenbelt linking Center Springs and Center Memorial can be treated in a variety of ways. Treatment options range from a simple meandering path along a corridor of trees (option A) to a hardscape, plaza-like option (Option B). The unifying idea in any treatment of the corridor is to create a more welcoming gateway connection.

Figure 34: *Aeirial image of the existing condition at the southern entrance to Center Springs Park.*

Figure 35: *Option A - The Trotter street gateway would improve the visibility of the park from Center Street, connect it to Center Memorial Park, and improve the functionality of the Town Hall parking lot.*

SOUTHERN ENTRANCE TROTTER STREET (CONT'D)

Another consistent element of the Trotter Street entrance concepts is the creation of a bituminous walking path from Valley Street, tying into the existing path network. Currently, deteriorating stone stairs and trailblazed footpaths are the only paths leading into the park at this point – formalizing these with paved trails would provide the necessary functional accessibility if this entrance is to become a primary park gateway.

Figure 36: *The deteriorating staircase at the potential Trotter Street entrance could be rehabilitated and repaired to improve access.*

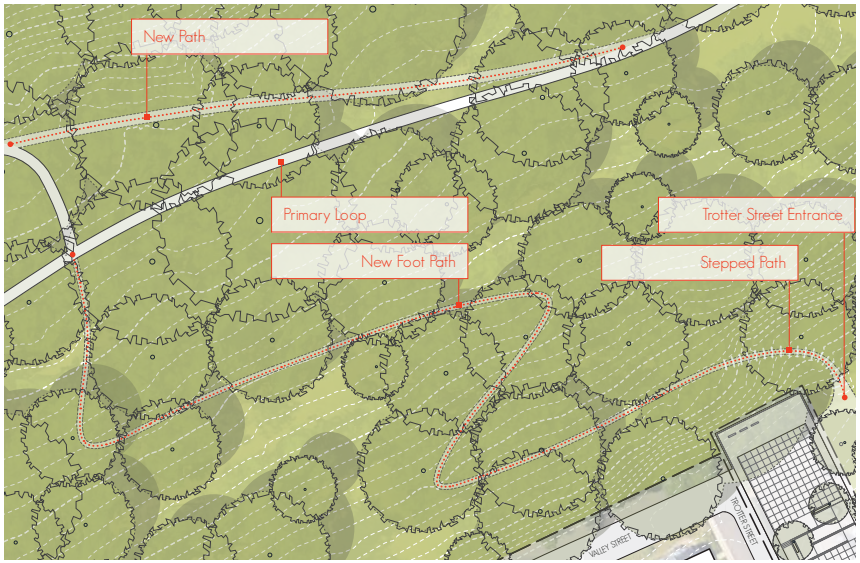


Figure 37: *Once a formal entrance is established at Trotter Street, enhancing the footpaths into the park from this area will improve accessibility.*

SOUTHERN ENTRANCE TROTTER STREET (CONT'D)

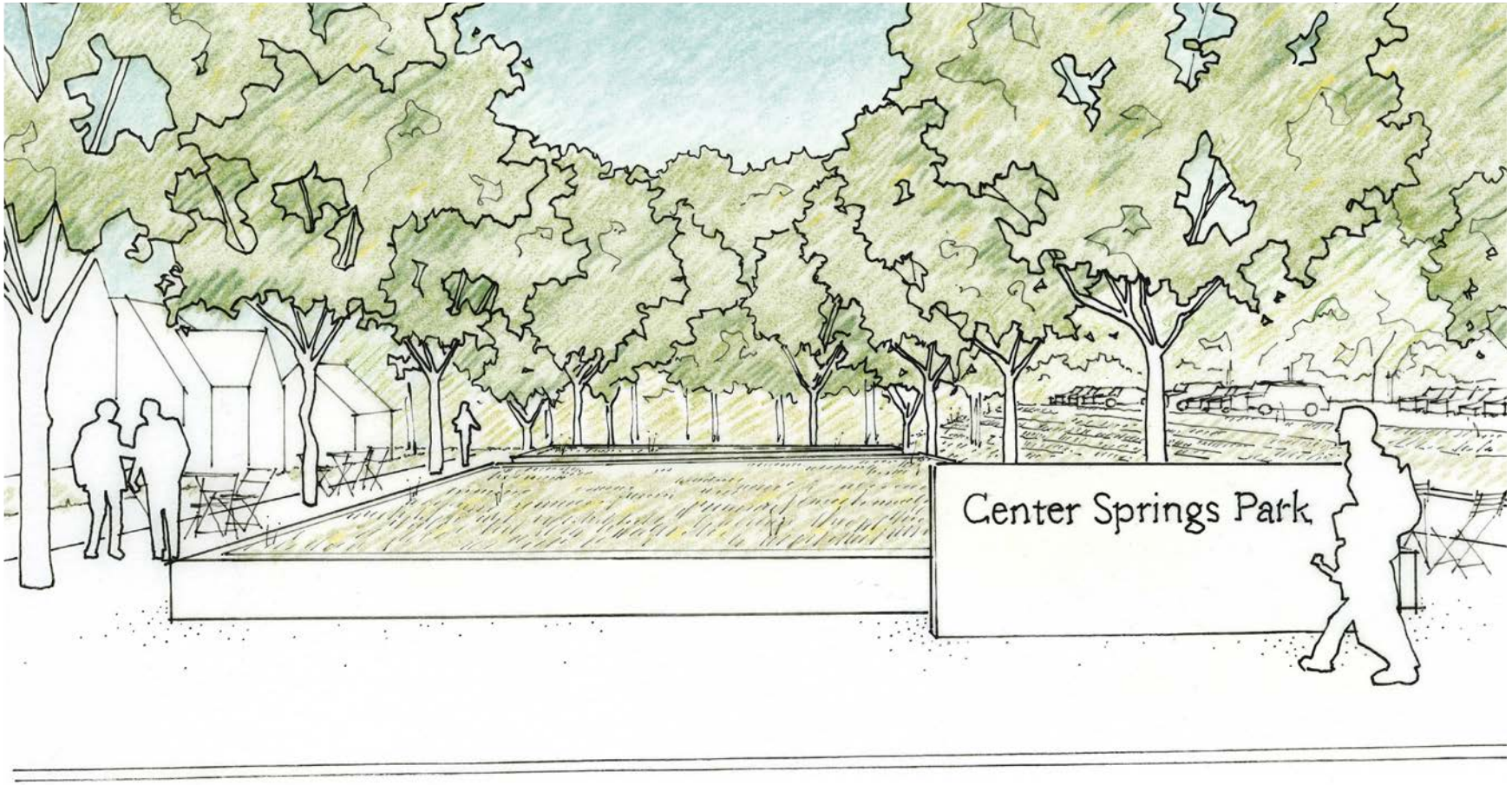


Figure 38: *Conceptual rendering of green corridor looking north into the park from Center Street.*

INTERNAL AMENITIES

While gateways and entrances to the park are critical to its visibility and use, park amenities will determine if people will stay and come to consider the park a destination for recreation and socializing. Several consistent themes emerged from the public workshops regarding desirable park amenities. Participants expressed a desire to take full advantage of the park's natural beauty through enhanced viewing areas and pedestrian routes, to add or relocate existing active facilities, and to address the need for more seating and tables. The following proposed enhancements are recommended to address those needs:

Balance Passive and Active Uses

Attendees at all three public workshops were essentially split on preferring active versus passive uses for the park in the future. Many enjoyed the park's passive, natural oasis-type quality as a relaxing environment. Others expressed interest in more active uses within the park as a means to draw more visitors. Balancing the desire for more active uses while maintaining the park's natural features is important when considering future programming.

The park's topography offers guidance when considering passive vs active uses. The base of the park (highlighted red area in Figure 26) is prone to flooding after storm events and flood regulations prohibit construction of permanent structures in this area. Any additional amenities should be located at higher elevations along the walking loop and/or close to parking.

Figure 39: *The Park's topography limits most active uses and the construction of permanent structures to areas not prone to flood events. The highlighted red area of the park is most appropriate to maintain as primarily passive space.*

INTERNAL AMENITIES (CONT'D)

Some of the attendees at each of the three workshops expressed a desire to light the park at night. Some advocated for lighting to improve safety and the perception of safety, while others thought lighting would detract from the natural environment which makes the park appealing. This plan does not call for including additional lighting within the park, which is consistent with Town-wide park policy stating parks officially close at sunset. Within the natural setting of Center Springs Park, lighting could also potentially negatively impact nocturnal wildlife. The cost of lighting even a portion of the park would likely require significant additional infrastructure and related costs, which could be used to accomplish other goals.

Establish Scenic Viewpoints to Take Advantage of the Park's Natural Beauty: While the park's unique bowl-like topography presents accessibility challenges, it also creates impressive scenic vistas. Incorporating formal scenic viewpoints at selected points throughout the park would highlight some of the park's impressive aesthetic qualities and create additional points of interest for visitors. The above map identifies locations with the potential for particularly noteworthy views. Selective vegetative clearing and the placement of seating at some of these locations would create a unique amenity at minimal cost and impact.

Ornamental Planting Sections Along Walking Loop: Certain areas along the pedestrian loop could be dedicated to unique planting and landscaping features to improve aesthetics and biodiversity within the park. As with the recent daffodil planting initiative led by the Friends of Center Springs, volunteer groups and Town staff could identify appropriate areas, species and treatments to establish perennial planting beds.

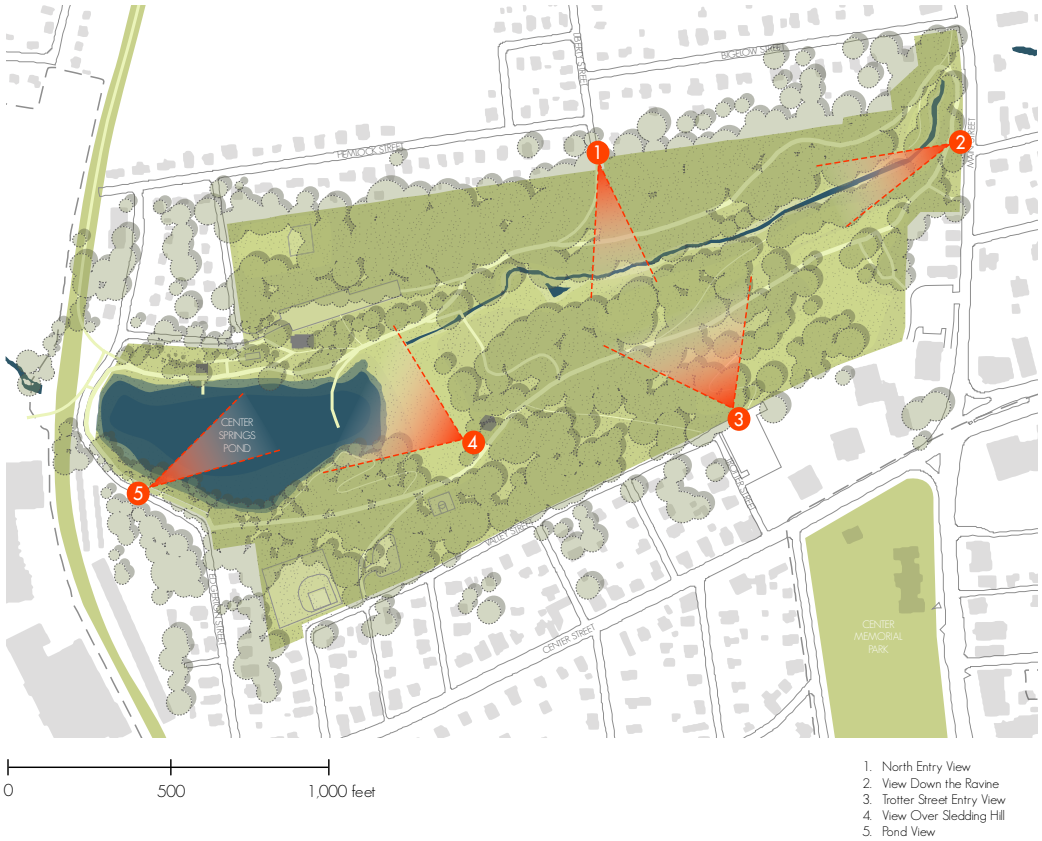


Figure 40: The slopes around the park create numerous opportunities for scenic vistas. While the Town has strategically cleared vegetation in several locations, others remain overgrown with excessive vegetation and unhealthy or dead trees. Selective and judicious removal of such vegetation would open up these view sheds and create an even more inviting environment for potential users.

INTERNAL AMENITIES (CONT'D)

Proposed Active Uses

Relocation of existing playground: Currently located off Lodge Drive, the existing playground is isolated from the rest of Center Springs. The forested slope between the Lodge and playground prevents a visual connection between the playground and the rest of the park. Relocating the playground to the end of the Recreation Building parking lot (Figure 32) within the park would draw families with children into the park center and increase both general activity and exposure to the rest of the park's amenities. Any lost parking spaces could be replaced at the current playground location.

Install fitness apparatuses along the walking loop: The contiguous walking loop within Center Springs is likely to attract more pedestrians and those using the park for physical fitness. Installing fitness apparatus like chin-up stations, parallel bars, and core training equipment would offer additional fitness-related activity at relatively low cost. Staff will monitor the use of similar equipment to be installed at Union Pond Park in 2018.

Accessible Paths: A new path located in-between the relocated playground and the existing loop along the existing topography would provide greater accessibility for those with limited mobility by incorporating a gentle 5% grade.

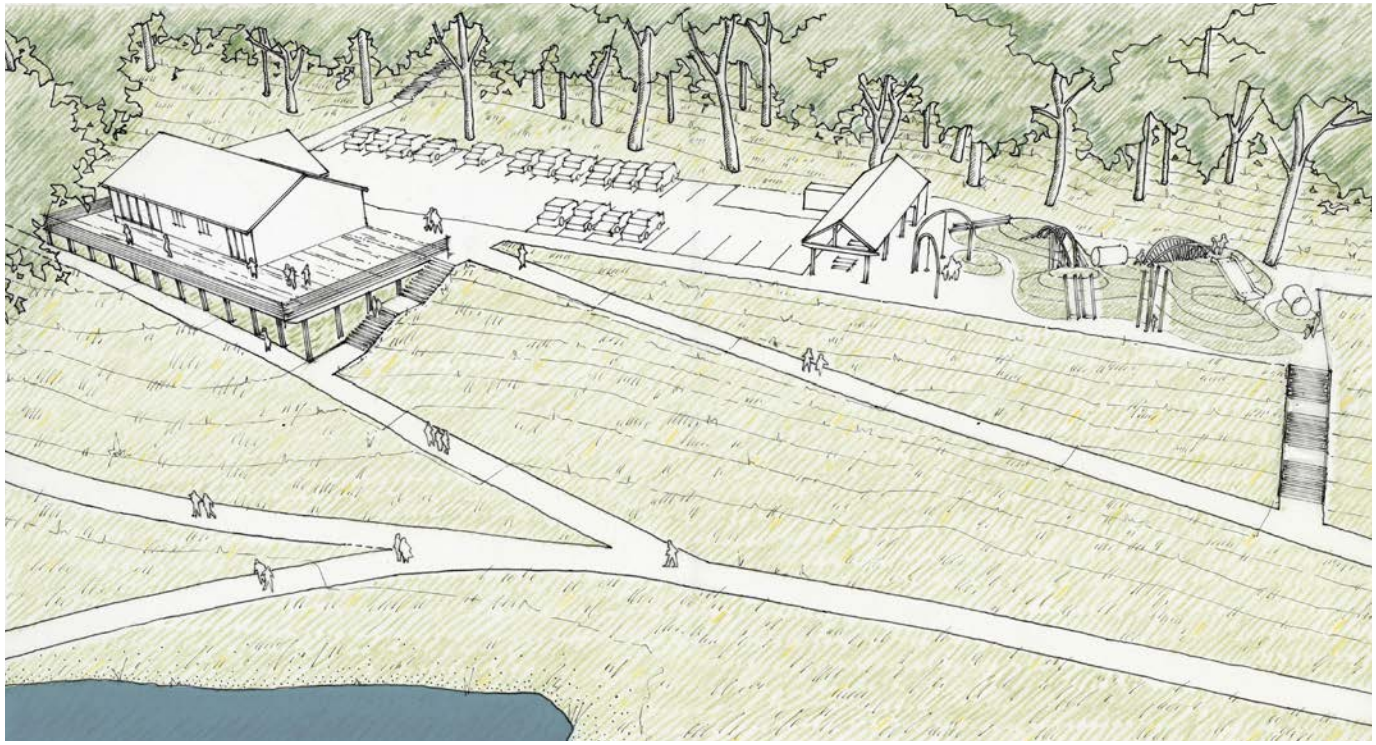


Figure 41: *Relocating the playground area inside the park would offer families a more prominent, convenient amenity and allow family members of different ages to use the park simultaneously.*

INTERNAL AMENITIES (CONT'D)

Proposed Active Uses

Potential Repurposing of the Baseball Field:
While the existing Little League field at the southwest entrance is used by the local little league, future programming demand and changes in recreation trends may dictate the need for a different use in the future. As part of a long-term strategy for the park, this area could transition to another use or uses, given demand from residents, requests for events or desires of the immediate neighborhood. A unique recreational use unavailable elsewhere in Manchester, such as a learn-to-bike-playground, could be a good fit for this location.

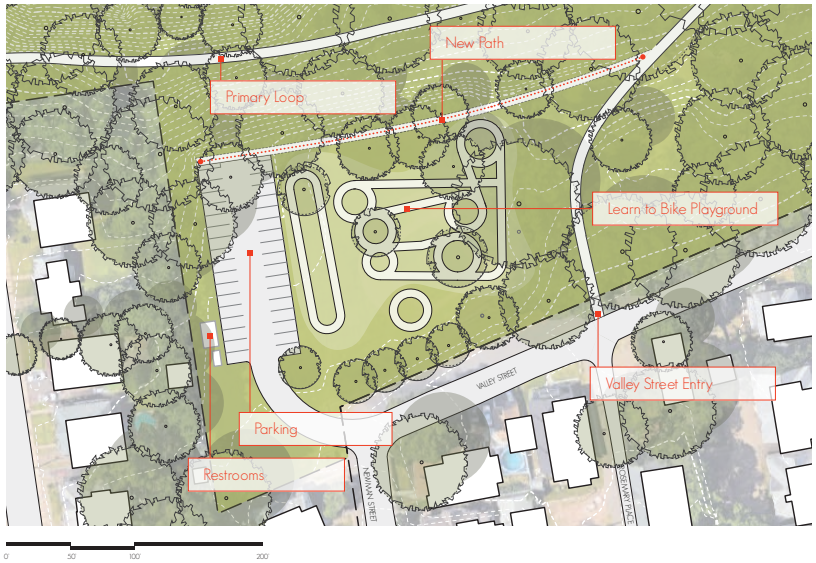


Figure 42: *Depending on future programming demands, the baseball field at the southwest portion of the park could be adapted to other uses such as a Learn-to-Bike playground.*

Figure 43: *Conceptual rendering - 'Learn to Bike' playground.*

INTERNAL AMENITIES (CONT'D)

Proposed Active Uses

Lodge Terrace and Amphitheater: The area surrounding the park's primary Lodge Drive Entrance, including the Recreation Lodge and Center Springs Pond offer opportunities for additional park improvements over the longer-term. Amphitheater-style seating could be built into the hillside next to the existing pavilion, providing opportunities to hold larger events and gatherings in a particularly scenic section of the park. A wrap-around terrace on the upper section of the Recreation Lodge would provide an additional observation deck overlooking Center Springs Pond, and potentially make the lodge more appealing for holding evening and weekend events.

Enhance the Pond: Improving the pond as a more attractive, useful amenity was encouraged at the public workshops. Improvement of the fishery habitat, installation of a fountain or light feature and the provision of a simple manpowered watercraft for navigating the pond were some ideas shared. The planned dredging of the pond in 2018 should improve water quality, while a restocking of fish will again make it a more attractive fishing location. Town staff is exploring the possibility of improving access to the southern side of the pond for improved fishing access and nature walks.

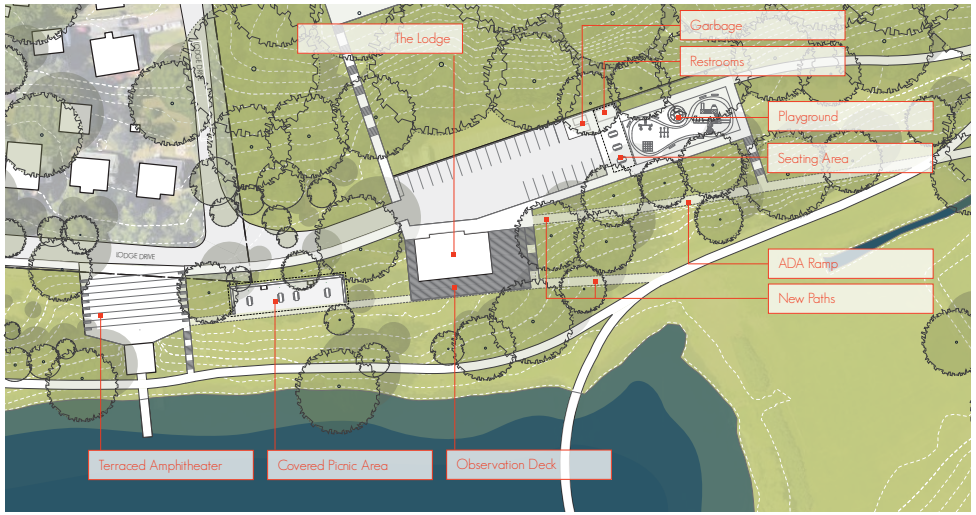


Figure 44: *The primary park entrance at Lodge Street could be enhanced with a relocated playground, a natural amphitheater along the hill, and a wrap-around terrace along the Recreation Department building.*

Figure 45: *Building amphitheater-style seating into the hillside next to the existing pavilion would provide additional opportunities for seasonal events and gatherings.*

INTERNAL AMENITIES (CONT'D)

Proposed Active Uses

New Path to Ravine Section: The ravine section at the eastern edge of the park is one of Center Springs Park's most scenic natural assets, yet the area is currently hidden and inaccessible. Establishing a footpath branching off from the main pedestrian loop to a seating area in this section would allow more visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of one of the park's most unique geologic features.

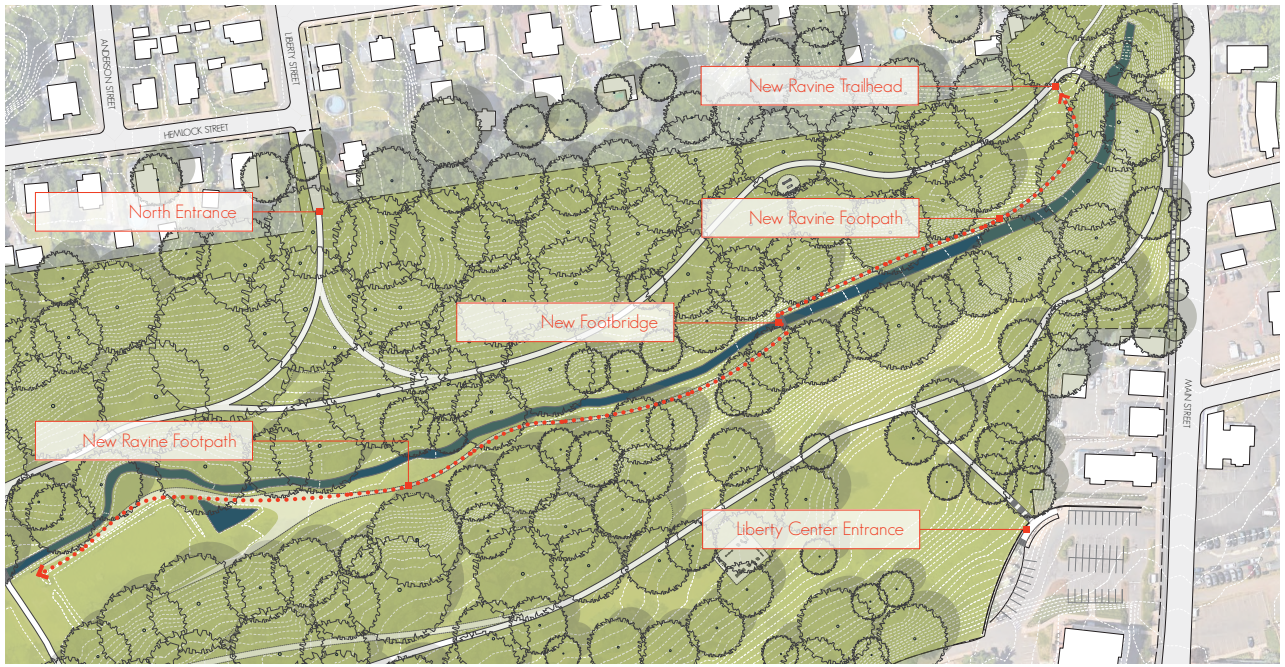


Figure 46: *A new footpath could run paralell to Bigelow Brook on its north and south banks. A new footbridge would connect both sides of the brook at its midpoint.*

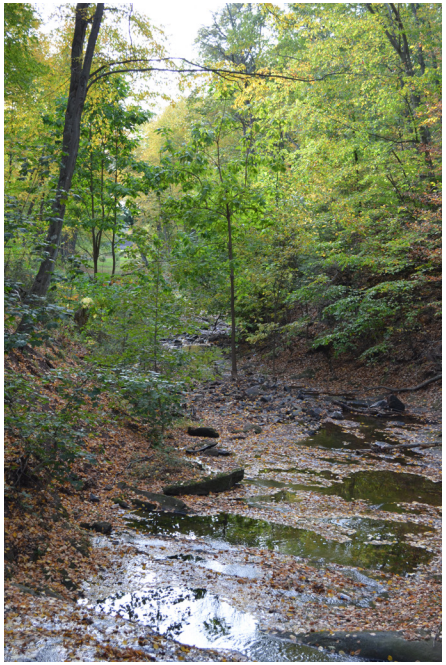


Figure 47: *The ravine section at the eastern edge of the park is scenic, yet inaccessible.*

ACTIVATION EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING

Proposed Active Uses

While its natural setting and passive recreation options provide much of the Center Springs' appeal, its central location offers opportunities to generate additional activity. Regularly programmed events attracting visitors would increase activity within the park and could have beneficial spillover effects on local businesses This section aims to identify potential events, vendors and sponsors offering the best opportunity to establish a strong presence of consistent activity in and around the park.

While increased activity is desirable and necessary for the park to reach its potential, it is important to recognize 'overprogramming' the park with formal events may not be the most appropriate approach given the park's focus on natural features and passive recreation. The challenge to activating the park is recognizing these inherent physical limitations, while looking for opportunities to improve the park's status as a gathering place for formal and informal events.

Given limited Town resources for staffing and funding events, it is critical to leverage existing events and relationships with other groups to generate additional activity. To that end, Town recreation staff have actively encouraged event sponsors and organizations to hold events in Center Springs Park when appropriate. Such events have included fitness classes, musical performances, walking and running events, a fishing derby, disc golf leagues and tournaments, and arts and cultural events. Continuing to intentionally encourage organizers to hold events in Center Springs will activate the park without requiring additional Town resources.

In addition to the recent events mentioned above, the park could also host additional planting days, high school running sport practices, concerts, small boating events, wellness classes and other seasonal events. The Town's Leisure, Family and Recreation staff will continue to work with volunteer groups and encourage event leaders to consider Center Springs when planning events.

SECTION III
IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTATION

This plan recommends implementing phased recommendations for park improvements. While some low-cost, low-impact enhancements can be undertaken by Town staff in the near future, other proposals require further public discussion and additional resources. This section organizes the proposed enhancements by estimated cost, prioritization, expected time-frame, and recommended sequencing.

Implementation of these recommendations depends on a number of factors, including cost, stakeholder consensus, whether Town staff or outside contractors will be required to complete the work and most importantly, the tangible impact the enhancement will have on revitalizing the Park. Projected cost estimates shown are included as ranges due to the conceptual nature of the designs to date. Each proposal is identified using the following criteria:

TIMEFRAME	PROJECT	COST	NOTES
1-3 years	Liberty Street Entrance	$	Sidewalk installation 2018; brush-clearing, signage, bollard installation; bituminous path extension
	Establish Scenic Viewpoints	$	Select 3-4 locations - selective brush-clearing, install benches and/or tables; possible repurposing of hilltop pavilion rooftop for scenic vista area; new disc golf tee locations.
	Ornamental Planting Sections	$	Identify 2-3 locations along loop for appropriate ornamental plantings
3-5 years	Main & Bigelow	$$$	Street frontage (tree belt, observation deck, regrading); Bridge option (pedestrian bridge); repair drainage system as feasible
	Playground Relocation	$$$	New playground equipment, parking lot redesign, pathways
	Fitness Apparatus	$$	~10 fitness stations
	Stem Path to Ravine section	$	Minimal trail treatment leading to stone bench/log and some clearing along the ravine section
	Trotter entrance	$$$	Greenbelt, parking lot redesign
5-7 years	Southwest Entrance	$$	Learn to bike/natural playground
7+ years	Lodge Terrace	$$$	Wrap-around terrace on upper floor of lodge
	Amphitheater hill seating	$$	Hillside seating around existing pond-side pavilion to create additional event space.

Projected Cost:

• $ (Less than $25,000): Projects at this level either do not require a formal public bidding process or can be entirely completed by Town staff.

• $$: ($25,000-$99,000): Projects of this scale require a public bidding process and most likely would be entirely performed by outside contractors.

• $$$: ($100,000-$250,000): Projects require a public bidding process, outside contractors perform most of the required work and additional stakeholder engagement would be required for projects at this cost level.

Timeframe:

• 1-3 years: Projects in this category are both low-cost and have high levels of consensus among stakeholders.

• 3-5 years: Projects with a medium-term timeframe require additional public discussion before settling on specific concept design. Identifying specific funding sources for projects with moderate to high costs is also necessary.

• 7+ years: Projects categorized as long-term improvements include moderate to high projected costs, uncertainty regarding the specific conceptual designs or funding sources, and do not immediately improve the Park's connectivity or visibility.

IMPLIMENTATION (CONT'D)

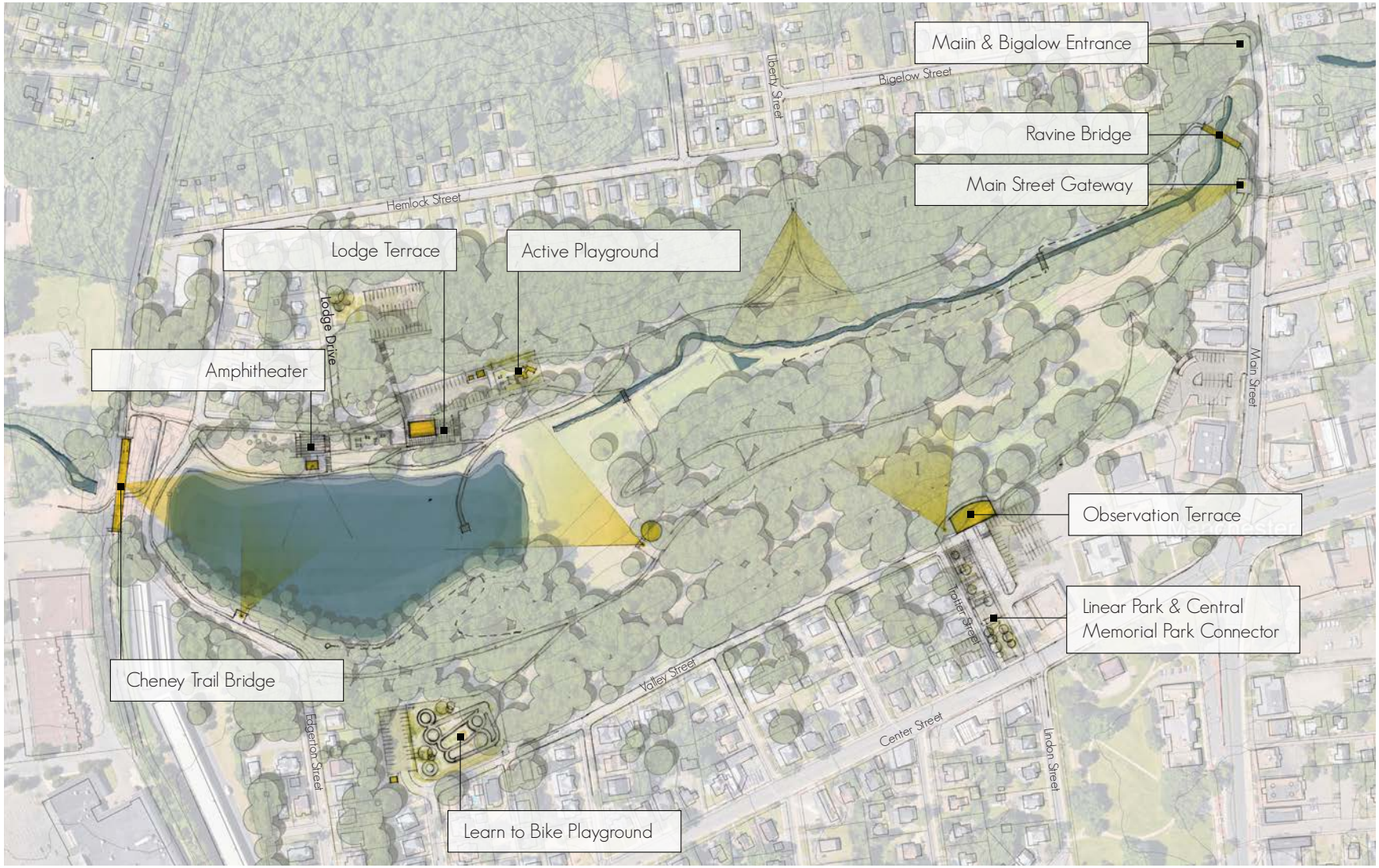


Figure 48: *Conceptual mater plan sketch illustrating strategies and proposed improvements.*

Our Parks

TAKE ME TO THE PARK