

The Redevelopment of Emerson Park

Park Master Plan

DRAFT

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Executive Summary

The Redevelopment of Emerson Park is an opportunity for Cayuga County to create a “Community Jewel” that is both unique and a source of community pride for generations to come. The following report outlines the process that was followed, the concept designed, the economic feasibility of the plan and finally the methodology to implement the concept plan to make the Redevelopment of Emerson Park a reality.

The Redevelopment of Emerson Park is an important and emotional topic to those who grew up in Cayuga County. It is their nostalgic memory combined with the vision of the Parks Department and the County Legislature that has created an atmosphere where something spectacular can be accomplished. The following goals were established early in the process:

- The design team was charged with creating a signature project.
- Public outreach and participation is a significant component of this project.
- The design theme of “Victorian elegance, natural beauty” will be used for each program element
- The park will be a year round facility offering evening as well as daytime uses.
- Wherever possible, the plan elements should reflect the values of the community.
- Every program element should be economically feasible so that the burden on taxpayers is minimized.

These goals were incorporated into the design concept that can be seen in the appendix section of this report. The program elements include:

- Existing Pavilion Upgrades
- Merry-Go-Round Theater
- Concession
- Year-round Picnic Pavilions w/ Restrooms
- Open Space for Events

- Conservatory/New Pavilion
- Ice Skating Trail
- Boat Launch Area
- Deauville Island Bridge
- Swimming Pool
- Beach Areas
- Boat Tie Up
- Seawall Improvements
- Lake Shore Promenade
- Trail Network
- Playground
- Hotel/Conference Center
- Sports Fields, Basketball
- Nature Center / trails
- Highway Improvements/Streetscaping
- Trolley
- Information/Medical/Security
- Sheriff's Boathouse
- Museum

In order to gain a sense of the economic viability of the planned improvements, an economic study was conducted for some of the more controversial, capital intense program elements. The four Program Elements for Emerson Park that received this further consideration include the following:

- Hotel/conference center
- Full-service restaurant
- Water park/water play area
- Ice skating trail

Each of these elements were studied and their economic viability was established. The recommendations for each were positive and they will each benefit the Park, The County and the Region through economic development and tourism stimulation.

Although the financial feasibility of the program is important, this project has also undergone a large amount of public outreach. These efforts have resulted in some excellent comments that have been incorporated into the plan and although there were some negative criticisms to the plan, it is the general feeling that the public supports the Concept Plan.

Introduction

Victorian elegance, natural beauty; Emerson Park is truly one of the jewels of the Finger Lakes. Many Cayuga County natives fondly remember their youth spent at Emerson Park. Dances, rides, amusements, and swimming in Owasco Lake are all recollections that are recounted time and time again when the topic of “what to do with Emerson Park” is discussed. Emerson Park is a nostalgic location that evokes a great deal of emotion from those close to it. One thing is for certain, Emerson Park is a jewel in the rough. With these thoughts in mind, the Cayuga County Department of Parks and Trails began to assemble a team to plan the future of Emerson Park. Victorian elegance, natural beauty - the vision that became and remains our guiding principle.

The question of what to do with Emerson Park has been addressed numerous times over the last twenty years. The most recent study was orchestrated in 1997. This undertaking was conducted by a generous group of private citizens and is the basis for the work currently underway and summarized in this report. There have been bright spots in the recent history of the park. The Merry-Go-Round Theater was created from the shell that housed one of two carousels that once resided on the site. This facility has enjoyed great success and the increase in patronage has fueled expansion plans that are scheduled to be completed in May of 2002.

Another recent success was the design and construction of the seawall along the Owasco River. Cayuga County was able to secure funding to reconstruct the wall and perform dredging operations to increase the pleasure boat traffic and enhance the usage of Emerson Park. This project is fully underway at this time and completion is scheduled for September 2001. Still in the planning stages, the County is also engaged in the rehabilitation and stabilization of the shoreline of the Owasco River. This project will be out for bid shortly and is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2002. Further improvements to the property include the recent construction of a

modern maintenance facility in the northeast corner of the property along with extensive electrical upgrades to various areas within the Park.

Given the body of work that has already been completed on behalf of the Park, the Parks Department set about gaining the political support to fund a process where a clear, concise and feasible master plan could be developed for Emerson Park. The Parks Department felt that this plan should be prepared with the following thoughts in mind:

- The park should contain something for everyone, barrier free and age appropriate
- The planning process should include significant public participation and outreach
- The Park should be a year-round facility
- The proposed improvements should be sensitive to the Victorian elegance and natural beauty that already exists

The following document outlines the approach, process and recommendations that are a result of this project. The appendices contain backup documentation and graphics.

Study Goals

The Redevelopment of Emerson Park is an important and emotional topic to those who grew up in Cayuga County. It is their nostalgic memory combined with the vision of the Parks Department and the County Legislature that has created an atmosphere where something spectacular can be accomplished. The following goals were established early in the process:

- The design team was charged with creating a signature project. A park that will serve as the centerpiece for recreation and economic development in Cayuga County and the Finger Lakes region.
- “Since this park is for the residents of Cayuga County, it should be what they want” was a quote taken from a member of the County Legislature. Public outreach and participation is a significant component of this project.
- The design theme of “Victorian elegance, natural beauty” is the test of the design team’s success. In order to produce a Concept Plan that enhances the park and the enjoyment of it’s patrons, every element of the Emerson Park plan was tested against this measure. Does a project element contain the elegance that was prevalent during the Victorian era and does that element enhance the natural beauty of its surroundings? If a program element did not meet these goals, it was either modified until it did or was eliminated.
- The plan should provide a variety of activities, both daytime and evening, which provide interest year round.
- Wherever possible, the plan elements should reflect the values of the community.

- One should always begin with the end in mind. Since the goal of any Concept Plan is to see the plan proceed into construction, the design team decided that every program element should be economically feasible so the burden on taxpayers is minimized.

Park Program

The following program elements can be seen depicted in graphic format on the “Revised Concept Site Plan” dated April 2001 located in the Appendix.

Pavilion Upgrades – the existing park pavilion is an historic structure located in a part of the park that is controlled by deed covenants. These covenants mandate SHPO coordination for any architectural changes made to the building. As a result, the scope and extent of the improvements to the pavilion are limited to restoring the structure for it’s current use. These improvements include upgrades to the electrical and mechanical systems, structural repairs to the front porch, window improvements, painting, and landscaping. Other improvements to this facility include reconfiguring the driveway that leads up to the building. The proposed site plan reflects a circular driveway with a formal drop-off area to allow bridal parties and handicapped patrons to be dropped off closer to the entrance. This structure is extensively utilized and is currently booked two years in advance.

Merry-Go-Round Theater – the Theater is currently under redesign and funding has been approved to construct an addition to the east side of the building. This expansion, scheduled to be completed in May 2002, will expand and enhance the theater’s ability to generate traffic in the park and increase revenues due to increased patronage.



Figure 1 - Merry-Go-Round Theater

Concession Stand - the concession stand will remain in its current position next to the Theater and the new traffic circle will pass directly adjacent to the structure. The concession stand is envisioned to receive aesthetic modifications but will remain essentially unchanged. A restroom will be constructed east of to the Concession Stand. Modifications planned for the Merry-Go-Round Theater do not include provisions for restrooms.

Year-round Restaurant - a year round restaurant is planned alongside the Owasco River (the Outlet) just west of the existing Pavilion. This facility will be an all season, casually appointed establishment that will cater to park patrons as well as those seeking a dining experience on the water. Provisions for outdoor dining are shown on the concept plan and boat docks along the new seawall are nearby. This facility is intended to be privately operated (i.e. no chain operations) although the configuration of the leasing arrangement has not yet been fully explored.

Picnic Pavilions w/ Restrooms - new Picnic Pavilions are stationed strategically throughout the park. Many of these structures will be equipped with restroom facilities. The Structures are located near planned areas of activity such as near the boat launch, beach, and ice-skating trail.

Open Space for Events - as a formal design element, a large green space near the main entrance of the park is very desirable. This large open green space also serves as a flexible large-event space that can support a variety of functions such as the Tomato Fest, car shows, craft shows, flea markets or even the return of the circus to Emerson Park.

Conservatory/New Pavilion – located on the eastern portion of the park property, the conservatory is a multiple-function program element. This facility will have provisions for large public gatherings and will function in a manner similar to that of the existing Park Pavilion. In addition to public gatherings, the Conservatory will also house a greenhouse facility that will provide a summer climate during the winter. This facility can be designed for anything from an arid desert-like condition to a sub tropical rain forest.

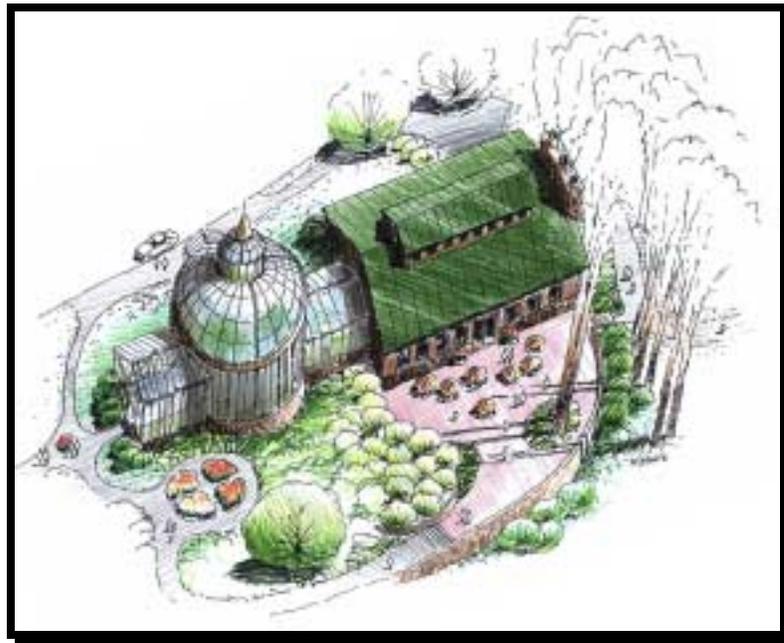


Figure 2 - Artist's Rendering of the Pavilion/Conservatory

Ice Skating Trail – this facility is considered a non-traditional ice skating experience. Located on the eastern portion of the park property, the Ice Trail consists of a 10-20 foot wide ribbon of concrete that extends $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile through the trees in a loop

configuration. The facility will be refrigerated to maintain good quality ice even when air temperatures rise above freezing. The trail will be lighted to allow park patrons enjoyment of the facility during evening hours. Located directly adjacent to the trail is a modified picnic pavilion structure that will serve as a warming and concession area during ice skating operations. This facility will also house bathrooms as well as the mechanical systems and equipment that are required to maintain the ice.



Figure 3 - Artist's Rendering of the Skating Trail

Boat Launch Area – provisions for launching boats will be enhanced but will generally remain in its current location. The current plan calls for two boat ramps and enhanced trailer parking in the vicinity. Provisions to provide overflow boat trailer parking is also provided.

Deauville Island Bridge – the existing structure is substandard and there are plans in place to replace it to both increase capacity and enhance the aesthetics of the structure. The current plans call for a steel stringer bridge with cast stone appliances mounted to the fascia that will result in a structure that is better fitted to its surroundings. The current plans also provide for increasing the freeboard of the structure so larger boats can gain access to the river.

Swimming Pool - due to the difficulties surrounding lake water quality during certain times of the year, a swimming facility was determined to be a valuable asset to the park. The proposed pool is intended to be an organic shape with a large amount of deck space and lake views. This facility will be designed to handle young, non-swimmers as well as adults. Although it is not envisioned that swimming teams will use this facility, provisions for the health-minded lap swimmer can also be made. As an interesting addition to the pool, a water playground is also proposed for the pool area. State health code requires a bathhouse be provided directly adjacent to the pool. This facility will be located to allow pool users and beach swimmers access to changing, showers, restrooms and concessions.



Figure 4 - SCS Water Play Structures

Beach Areas - the two existing beach areas will remain unchanged from their current configuration. The water quality at this end of the lake is still problematic and these facilities will likely continue to close at intervals during the summer.

Boat Tie Up - provisions for boats to tie up and dock will be enhanced as a part of the proposed project. The existing dockage around Deauville Island will remain and be enhanced slightly with the addition of the Sheriff's boathouse. Additional dockage will be examined once the seawall reconstruction project is completed in the fall of

2001. The concept plan also shows floating dockage at the south end of the seawall near the water pumping station. All of these facilities are meant to enhance or attract additional water borne commerce targeting the recreational boater.

Seawall Improvements - the seawall improvements are currently under construction and scheduled for completion in late fall of 2001. The seawall will have provisions for boat dockage, fishing access, and seating along the river.

Lake Shore Promenade – south of the existing pavilion, the plan shows a reconstruction of a formal promenade. This element existed as late as the early 1900's and will be reconstructed in keeping with the Victorian theme of the historic parcel of the Park property. This element will be designed to enhance the water front area but not prevent the use of the current beach. The Promenade will be linked with the rest of the park trail system.

Trail Network – the spine upon which the park is built relies heavily on the trail network that is planned. The trail network will link important segments of the park to unify the park and promote both active and passive pedestrian use. The trails will be an improved surface, probably paved, that will be accessible to the handicapped as well as bicycles and in-line skates. The plan calls for eventual trail links to the proposed City of Auburn Trail along the Owasco River as well as the Town of Fleming Bike Trail.

Playground – to pay tribute to the amusements that once existed on Deauville Island, the concept plan shows a playground area directly adjacent to the Swimming Pool. These play structures will be designed to be age appropriate and barrier free. They will also be designed with modern, long lasting materials and with the latest safety provisions.



Figure 5- Playground

Hotel/Conference Center – located on the westernmost portion of the property, a Hotel/Conference center is planned for Emerson Park. This facility will be in the range of 40 – 80 rooms and will be privately owned and managed. The architecture of this facility must be compatible with the nature of the park.

Sports Fields, Basketball Courts – provisions for the casual or pick up game of softball, basketball or other pastimes requiring large open space will be provided on the portion of the property closest to the High School. These fields, although well designed, will not be suitable for regular league play. These facilities are intended to be available for park patrons such as family reunions, company picnics, etc.

Nature Center / trails – many designers see wetlands as a project constraint. In this case, the wetlands that exist on the northern parcel of the park are seen as an opportunity. The concept plan calls for the construction of a nature center and trail system that can be used by hikers, students, or anyone interested in a quiet stroll through a unique ecosystem.

Highway Improvements/Streetscaping – due to the increase in traffic that is expected as a result of the redevelopment of Emerson Park (combined with various safety concerns), traffic calming measures have been proposed for the state highways passing through the Park. These improvements include providing a hardscaped median between opposing lanes of traffic as well as roadside streetscaping that will include

trees and plants along the shoulders of the roads. The NYSDOT is currently in the early design stages for the replacement of the Rt. 437 Bridge over the Owasco Outlet. This structure will be designed to be aesthetically compatible with the park and will accommodate a future trail link to downtown Auburn beneath the structure. The DOT is also planning on increasing the freeboard of the structure to allow passage of larger vessels. Recent discussions with the DOT have led to the consideration of accomplishing some or all of the proposed traffic calming measures as a part of the bridge replacement project. Negotiations on this matter continue.



Figure 6 - Artist's Rendering of the Rt. 38A Pedestrian Crossing

Trolley – due to the sprawling nature of Emerson Park along with the widely dispersed attractions, provisions have been made within the concept design to provide a continuously circulating trolley. This provision is intended to encourage parking in remote locations so that parking on prime central real estate can be minimized. As a related element, the plan calls for the reintroduction of the miniature railroad around Deauville Island. Although not really a transportation element, this nostalgic detail can be linked in theme to the full size trolley that is envisioned for the Park.

Information/Medical/Security Center – as an element of thoughtful design, identifying a security/emergency center near the center of the park property can help to reduce response times and enhance the smooth operations of the facility. The concept plan

shows this facility near the site of the existing park entrance building and will be used to house communications equipment and first aid supplies. This modest facility will be a year round operation to provide support for the anticipated four-season use of the Park.

Sheriff's Boathouse – In order to improve the Sheriff Department's response time to water borne emergencies, the Plan makes provisions for a boathouse located north of Deauville Island. This facility will house the Department's boat, watercraft, equipment, and supplies needed to conduct water operations. This facility will also provide a small office space.

Museum – The existing museum will remain in its current location, as will the log house. Additional parking will be provided.

team sees this as an opportunity rather than a constraint. SHPO's intent is consistent with the design theme of Victorian elegance combined with natural beauty; all improvements to this area of the Park will remain consistent with this goal.

Owasco Lake

Owasco Lake is one of the lesser known but more beautiful of the Finger Lakes. It enjoys a modest amount of boat traffic during the peak season and the fishing is very good. By enhancing access to the lake for boaters, Emerson Park should enjoy a small migration of pleasure craft users from the more crowded lakes located to the east and to the west.

Wetlands

Wetlands are also considered a constraint in this project. However the wetlands located on the northern parcel will be used as a nature center. We see these wetlands as a significant resource for recreation and education and as a result, can also be considered an opportunity.

Community Character

The residents of Cayuga County are a unique group of civic-minded individuals that have a collective "character" that generates an atmosphere of success for the project. The enthusiasm and vision of the community is overwhelming.

Undeveloped Property

It is uncommon to have such a large contiguous tract of undeveloped lakefront property. The site is flat, largely unforrested and well suited to development.

Constraints

Wetlands

A preliminary wetland delineation has been performed that indicates the presence of wetlands on the northern parcel of the Park. Since regulations severely limit the amount and type of disturbance of these areas, little or no development can be planned for this area.

Flood Plains

Deauville Island is located within the 100-year floodplain. Although this will not prevent construction on the site, this construction will be somewhat more expensive due to the insurance requirements governing construction in a flood area.

SHPO

Cayuga County has accepted federal funding for various capital improvement projects within the park. Specifically, the parcel that contains the Merry-Go-Round Theater and the Pavilion is restricted with a deed covenant. This grants SHPO complete review and approval authority over any improvements that are planned on this parcel. Improvements that effect the viewshed of this parcel are also subject to SHPO review. Although SHPO is listed as an opportunity as well, the need for SHPO review will add cost and time to the implementation of planned improvements.

A Phase IA Archeological Assessment has been performed for the entire site. This study (see appendix) has determined that the area has a high archeological sensitivity due to the past history of the site. This will require future development to be preceded by a more intense archeological investigation that will include Phase IB surveys in planned areas of disturbance.

State Highways

Two state highways, Rt. 38A and Rt. 437 traverse the park. These highways see significant traffic and alterations to these corridors will require concurrence from NYSDOT. Due to the safety requirements of modern day state highways, improvements in or near the State right-of-way will be restricted. The speed limit on the stretch of Rt. 38A nearest the park entrance is somewhat high for pedestrian traffic.

Viewsheds

Due to the existence of Historic-Register eligible buildings and landscapes in the park, retention of existing viewsheds must be enforced. The viewshed map in Figure 7 shows four main viewsheds where new construction must be kept to a minimum. This will limit the height of structures as well as other architectural aspects of the proposed improvements.

Market Assessment

In order to gain a sense of the economic viability of the planned improvements, an economic study was conducted for some of the more capital intense program elements. Four program elements were assessed for their feasibility:

- Hotel/conference center
- Full-service restaurant
- Water park/water play area
- Ice skating trail

These potential uses are treated individually to determine the market potential of each. The examination of these potential uses is supported by information on the wider market context and, where available, relevant examples of similar uses that have been successfully implemented in other markets. It is not assumed that these uses are mutually exclusive; in fact, a combination of any two or more of these uses at Emerson Park may provide a market opportunity in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The complete Economic Analysis can be reviewed in the Appendix.

Hotel / Conference Center – A use under consideration for Emerson Park is a new hotel and conference center development. A hotel would not be a new concept for the park – in the early 1900s, a hotel was located on Deauville Island and served as a weekend and vacation retreat for urban dwellers. The setting and current infrastructure at Emerson Park makes this location a potentially attractive one for both leisure overnight travelers and business interests seeking conference, retreat and event facilities. Emerson Park offers opportunities for water- and landside recreation as well as entertainment at the highly regarded Merry-go-round Theater. The Finger Lakes region is an established visitor destination, and Auburn’s proximity to larger urban

areas such as Syracuse and Rochester makes the site accessible to firms seeking conference or retreat facilities.

The configuration of a proposed hotel/conference center is as yet undetermined. Because the hotel marketplace is so varied, a potential hotel/conference center development could be configured in a number of ways. Variables include the type of visitor the development wishes to attract, price relative to the market rates for competitive properties, the extent of visitor amenities and services, and project scale, among other issues.

Based on the market and competitive context of hotel/conference center facilities in the region, as well as the spatial requirements necessary for such a development at Emerson Park, the following conclusions and recommendations are set forth:

- The viability of a hotel development at Emerson Park depends heavily on a waterfront location on Owasco Lake. A hotel development away from the water (e.g., on the north side of Rt. 38A) greatly reduces its viability and appeal.
- The scale and type of park utilization is generally supportive of a hotel development. There are a number of events annually at Emerson Park that could create demand for overnight accommodations. These include in particular evening events such as the Merry-go-round Theater. However, it should be noted that most of these events occur in the summertime, when hotel utilization by leisure visitors is likely to be at its peak. It is assumed that the hotel will be a year-round operation, and the hotel must be sustainable during periods of lower utilization.
- A conference center/retreat facility (without overnight accommodations) is not recommended. Generally, these specialized facilities are located on expansive, private property with few distractions. A public park setting without controlled access is generally not conducive to the goals of retreat participants.

- Any lodgings development be appropriate to its market potential and its surroundings in terms of size, available services and amenities, its integration with adjacent and nearby uses, parking requirements and design. A hotel development of 40 to 80, but less than 100 rooms – with 2 to 4 conference rooms – might be appropriate, depending on the responses to a request of proposals. The interior should have modern amenities, though the exterior design should be sympathetic with the other park uses in terms of scale and design. This will help integrate the new development within the existing built environment of the park. A primary market for the conference part of the Inn is the Syracuse corporate market. Currently, there are no hotels or conference/convention facilities in the Syracuse area (Onondaga Lake or Oneida Lake) that are on the waterfront, presenting an appealing market opportunity at Emerson Park.
- An accommodation facility may be of the scale to affect the physical attributes of and use patterns within the park. It is in the County’s best interest to have a partner that is committed not only to the well being of his or her own site but also to long term well being of the Park.

Restaurant - Currently there is no food service facility at Emerson Park (except seasonal concession stands) and park users must go off-site in order to purchase food and refreshments. The proposed restaurant site is located to the west of the historic pavilion along the River that separates Deauville Island from the eastern half of the park. There is parking nearby, as well as more remote parking available adjacent to the Merry-go-round Theater. Depending on the orientation of the building the main dining room and a patio could provide exceptional views of Owasco Lake. The lakefront, the graceful pavilion, and the general ambiance of Emerson Park make this a very attractive location for a restaurant.

Restaurants and food service facilities of this scale are successful in many places. Food service near public attractions such as waterfront parks and visitor destinations such as the Merry-go-round Theater have a “built-in” market base to build from. The

outdoor seating would allow the operator to serve peak period demand at a relatively low capital investment. The following summary and recommendations support the notion of a restaurant at Emerson Park.

- Assuming few or no restrictions and a building size of approximately 3,500 to 4,500 SF, a restaurant along the waterfront at Emerson Park could be quite viable.
- A waterfront location would be very appealing to visitors, though the closer the restaurant is to the water, the less visible it may be from the road. Appropriate roadside signage is recommended.
- Though the restaurant seeks to be open year-round, any potential owner/operator should be aware that business would vary greatly with the seasons. Summer will be busiest, considering the combination of theater, boating, annual events (summer festivals held at the park), and higher general levels of park usage. Wintertime business will come mostly from local residents and will be lower than summertime business.
- The success of a year-round restaurant at Emerson Park depends heavily on the type of product offered and the differentiation of the product from other restaurants in the area. Though it might seem obvious, a chain restaurant should be discouraged. A high-end restaurant might appeal to many theatergoers, though it might be out of reach of many local residents, who will support the restaurant in the off-season. A best bet is a casual but well-appointed restaurant with quality food items that appeal to a number of tastes. Its décor and menu should be more contemporary than the “family restaurants” in the local area.

Water Park / Water Play Area - There may very well be a market for a waterpark/water play area at Emerson Park, however most waterpark developers would look for a large site with better transportation infrastructure than currently exists as. On a busy day, there could be upwards of 2,000 attendees, with the

consequent traffic and parking requirements. This could be taxing to the infrastructure of Emerson Park and could greatly detract from the quality of other programs and uses at the park.

Given the site and competitive market context, a large swimming pool /water play area is much more desirable than a full-scale waterpark. Emerson Park will not have to compete directly with existing and new waterpark developments in Canandaigua and Fulton, near Syracuse. Additionally, the use of land resources will be much less intensive, and will not alter the physical characteristics of Emerson Park to such an extent. Furthermore, a smaller development will serve the local population more exclusively, bringing an additional benefit to County and area residents.

Ice Skating Trail - An ice skating trail is a novel potential use at Emerson Park that has an excellent upside from a market perspective. Unlike an ice skating rink or oval, an ice skating trail is more analogous to a speed skating oval that features a narrow connected track the center of which is not used for skating. An interesting feature of an ice skating trail is that it can potentially wind at irregular intervals, and it can be incorporated into wooded areas to give the user the sense that they are in fact on a trail.

Not surprisingly, few of these ice skating trails exist. The closest such trail to Auburn is the trail at Gage Park in downtown Brampton, Ontario, outside of Toronto. It claims to be the first such trail of its kind in North America. For the purposes of this study, the Gage Park trail is the model on which a similar trail at Emerson Park is based. Following is a summary of physical, market and operational characteristics at Gage Park. These characteristics help inform the potential of a similar development at Emerson Park.

- Because of its uniqueness in the region, an ice skating trail appears to be a creative and potentially successful, while low-impact, use at Emerson Park. In addition,

- The ice skating trail will be the anchor attraction at Emerson Park for wintertime activities. It will make Emerson Park a truly four-season park, satisfying one of the goals for the park.
- Based on the conceptual plan for Emerson Park, the proposed ice trail is an excellent way to integrate a currently underutilized park parcel into the greater whole of the park.
- The proposed ice trail would be a unique asset in the region of natural curiosity to area residents and would likely perform well, especially in its first year of operation.
- The ice skating trail would be an admission venue. An admission fee would help to cover operating costs, including utilities, personnel and ice making equipment. Other revenue sources could be from locker rental, skate rental, concessions at the warming hut, and facility rental for private functions.

Public Outreach

One of the most important goals of the project is to seek public input and gain public support. In support of this goal, the process included a number of internal and external meetings to develop and refine a concept plan into its current status. The process that was used is as follows:

Advisory Committee Formation

The Parks Advisory Committee is a diverse group of people that were assembled to progress the project in an orderly manner prior to the selection of the Design Consultant. These people were chosen for their interest in the project as well as their representation as a cross section of citizens in the community.

Initial Brainstorming - Consultants and Advisory Committee attending

This session was the initial meeting with all members of the team. Members of the Consultant team as well as Advisory Committee members met in an open meeting to discuss in very general terms, the goals, process, and expectations for the project. In this meeting, the group discussed, in broad terms, the program elements, project schedule, and other background information. This session was intended to kickoff future workshops where a more structured approach would be followed.

Wish List Creation – Consultants and Advisory Committee attending

With the project team fully introduced to one another and a level of comfort beginning to build, the first in a series of sessions intended to combine individual visions into a cohesive plan began. In this session, the group was encouraged to discuss any idea that they felt was in any way appropriate for inclusion into the park. At this stage of study there is no “bad ideas”, so the rapport of the group began to build as the ideas

began to flow. At the end of this session, a “Wish List” was created that included all the items the group wished to see as a program element.

Figure #1



Design Charette – Consultant and Advisory Committee attending

With the brainstorming complete, it was time to ask the hard questions and prioritize the “wish list” items into a concise list of program elements that would meet the following series of criteria:

Victorian Elegance

Natural Beauty

Something for Everyone (all ages)

Family Oriented

Year Around

Unique

After carefully considering the program elements, the group processed the priorities and surprisingly, very few elements were eliminated from consideration. The prioritized list is the program that was progressed to concept design. The group then discussed each of the program elements in detail so that the design team could understand the group's vision surrounding each item.

Figure 2



The design team took the program list back to the office and began working on a preliminary plan that interpreted the group's intent. A large scale drawing of the park was made over the base map survey of the parcel so the concept could be communicated graphically.

Upon review of the Concept Drawing, the Advisory Committee made comments and determined that it was time to test the program with the Public. In order to allow for a full public involvement process, a series of meeting dates and times were scheduled.

To further enhance the effectiveness of the public involvement process, the Advisory Committee assisted the Designers with assembling a collection of stakeholder groups. Business Owners, Community Leaders, Government Leaders and the General Public were organized into groups and assigned appropriate meeting times so that their questions, comments, and concerns could be voiced among their peers.

Stakeholders Meetings – Design Team and the Public attending

Two rounds of Stakeholder Meetings were held in the Park Pavilion where comments were heard regarding the concept plans. The first round of stakeholder meetings was well attended and the comments received were recorded, considered, and in many cases reflected on later revised plans. The second round of meetings was similarly well attended and the comments received were likewise processed and reflected in the revised plan. In general the public participation process was well received and the ultimate goal of consensus seems to be very close at hand. Although the public meetings were not without dissension, the overall feel from the public was that of support. The major concern that was heard surrounds the implementation of the plan, since so many plans had come before with little to show for the effort.

Parks Committee Briefing – Design Team, Advisory Committee, Parks Committee

At the conclusion of the public participation program, a briefing meeting was conducted for the benefit of the Parks Committee. During that meeting, the Design Team described the process that has been underway to progress the project to this point. The current version of the concept plan was discussed at length and additional comment was sought for incorporation into the final concept plan.

Proposed Park Development / Implementation Strategy

The development of Emerson Park is a large-scale undertaking that will take at least five to seven years to fully implement. This is possible, in part to the great momentum that has been gained with the project successes to date. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, The Merry-Go-Round Theater expansion, The seawall improvements, improvements to White Bridge Road are all under way and at various stages of completion. These projects will help to fuel the other program elements and it is the purpose of this report to set the blueprint to make this happen.

Several Program elements that are critical to the success of the project are ripe for development. Most notable of these are the planned highway improvements for the state highways that pass through the park. As a result of the current NYSDOT Project that will replace the Rt. 437 Bridge over the Owasco Outlet, the Design Team has met with the NYSDOT Design Team to discuss the possibility of additional streetscaping and traffic calming measures. These upgrades from the normal DOT protocol will both enhance the park and increase the safety in the area. Although negotiations are still under way at this time as to the type and extent of the improvements, NYSDOT's new motto of "contact sensitive" design appears to be a reality when they consider this project and how their designs will effect the park. DOT officials appear to be very interested in cooperating with Cayuga County in this matter and it is recommended that the dialogue between these two entities remains open as their design progresses.

The Hotel Conference Center has been discussed at length as a result of this study. This program element is important not only to Emerson Park but to the Region as well. The economic analysis included elsewhere in this report discussed the financial viability of such a project and the impacts to the region, as both a boost to tourism as well as an economic development is quite clear. The best part of this portion of the project is that it can be progressed with little or no public funding. The Hotel Conference is seen as a private venture that will be operated with little or no public

involvement. Although the exact details of how this deal would take place have yet to be finalized with the Legislature and its legal council, the likely scenario would include the preparation and distribution of a Request for Proposals. This document would be distributed to a select group of developers, or other interested parties for consideration and response. The County could lease the property to a potential developer and would have complete control over the type of operation, architecture, configuration or any other aspect of the project that could be structured into the lease document. Revenue from this lease could be used to offset other park costs that currently do not have a dedicated funding stream. It is the recommendation of the team that this portion of the project progress as soon as the Legislature recognizes the Concept Plan as complete.

Swimming at Emerson Park is a tradition that is rooted in many generations of Cayuga County Residents. The unfortunate fact is that the water quality in the north end of Owasco Lake drops to a point where the County Health Departments closes the beaches to prevent human contact with water that tests positive for fecal coliforms, a potentially dangerous pathogen. Due to the seriousness of the water quality issue, the construction of the swimming pool / water playground is a very good candidate for a high priority on the implementation plan. The pool is a relatively expensive program element that will have significant recurring costs in the form of energy and maintenance. This program element is also a good candidate for sponsorship. Community pools have long enjoyed public support and avenues for private funding should be available for such a venture. These types of projects are also likely candidates for member item grants or possibly other types of funding to provide a safe place for residents to swim in the summer. It is recommended that a pool steering committee be formed so that the effort can begin to obtain the necessary funding for the project. This type of focus group will enjoy the benefit of concerning itself with only one objective and will help to ensure the focus does not get shifted towards other, sometimes competing, park elements.

One of the primary goals of the project is to provide for the year round use of the facility. This goal will be best accomplished through the development of the Ice Skating Trail on the eastern park parcel. This facility will enjoy a uniqueness that cannot be found for hundreds of miles in any direction and will serve as a community focal point throughout the winter months. Due to the uniqueness of this part of the project, combined with the anticipated success of such a venture, the ice skating trail should receive a high priority in the implementation plan. This type of project should enjoy a great deal of corporate interest in sponsorship. It has been the recent experience that the business community is very generous when it comes to high profile project sponsorship and an ice skating trail will truly be the “jewel” of the park. A project of this magnitude may justify the services of a professional firm that specializes in packaging this type of project and presenting it to decision-makers within industry. It is recommended that this portion of the program be implemented as soon as the legislature decides it is appropriate to advance the plans for the park. In addition to the creation of a focus group, it is recommended that the Legislature set aside a budget to retain the services of a marketing firm to assist in the development of a sponsorship package.

With all of the above-mentioned attractions being added to the park, the one missing element to the recipe is food. A year round, full service restaurant is needed within the park property to serve patrons visiting one of the other attractions at the park. This operation would be set up in a manner similar to the Hotel Conference Center where the operations would be bid out to a professional restaurant operator. Although the actual configuration of the leasing / bidding arrangement needs to be approved by both the Legislature and the County Attorney, the likely operation would consist of a contract operated facility run out of a county owner building. The building could be provided either with or without equipment and control can be maintained through carefully crafting of the agreement with the operator. It is recommended that this project element be developed on a timeline that coincides with the increase in park attendance. If the opportunity were to present itself sooner, the facility can surely capitalize on the beautiful surroundings, in particular, its location on the waterfront.

The existing pavilion space at the park is currently the greatest revenue-generating venue available at this time. This facility is currently rented two years in advance and it is thought that this pace will only grow as the park is developed. A new pavilion is therefore an immediate need and would enjoy a backlog of reservations even while it was under design and construction. An important part of this new facility is the addition of a conservatory. This unique space, similar to a greenhouse, will only add to the popularity of a new pavilion and would justify increased rental fees due to its aesthetic value. Although a detailed economic analysis of the viability of this facility has not been completed, the demand for reception space should place this element high on the priority list. To better understand the feasibility of this project, the services of an Architect should be secured to progress the conceptual design of this facility to a point where County Officials can better determine the ability to bond and pay for such a structure. To ease the funding burden of the Conservatory, this element can be treated separately from the Pavilion portion of the project and private donation can be sought. Perhaps one or more of the local service clubs could take ownership of the fundraising required to build the conservatory portion of the project.

Other portions of the project, that are no less important, remain tied to the development of the above project elements. The trail system for example, will be developed independently in some areas of the park but in other areas, will depend on the final configuration of the adjacent program element. Parking lots and internal roads will also be developed in a similar manner. This work can more than likely be accomplished with County forces and will therefore result in material costs only. Another benefit of doing this type of work with County forces is when local shares are required for grants.

Emerson Park Conceptual Estimate

Project Element	Total Required Funding	Anticipated/ Actual Source of Funding
Skating Trail	\$2,000,000- \$2,500,000	Corporate Sponsor
Warming Pavilion	\$400,000 - \$600,000	County / Corporate Sponsor
Water Playground	\$200,000 - \$400,000	Corporate Sponsor
Swimming Pool	\$2,000,000 - \$3,000,000	County / Corporate Sponsor/Grants
Play Structures	\$100,000 - \$200,000	Corporate Sponsor
Hotel / Conference Center	\$6,000,000	Private Developer
Island Bath House	\$500,000 - \$1,000,000	County / Corporate Sponsor/Grants
Year Round Restaurant	\$500,000 - \$1,000,000	County
Concession Stand	\$10,000	County
New Pavilion / Conservatory	\$1,000,000- \$2,000,000	County/Private Donation
Docking	\$100,000 - \$200,000	County / Grants
Nature Center	\$100,000 - \$200,000	Private Donation
Athletic / Ball Fields	\$200,000 - \$400,000	County/Private Donation
Trails / Site / Civil Improvements	\$1,000,000	County/Public Service
Boat House	\$100,000 - \$200,000	County / Grants
Picnic Pavilion	\$300,000 - \$400,000	County/Private Donation
Existing Pavilion Improvements	\$225,000	County / Grants
Pavement Repair / Replacement	\$1,000,000 - \$1,500,000	County

Island Bridges / Replacement	\$700,000 - \$1,000,000	County / Grants
Rt. 437 / 38A Improvements	\$1,500,000 - \$2,000,000	NYSDOT / County
PROJECT TOTAL	\$17,935,000 - \$21,835,000	

Projects Funded and Currently Under Way

Seawall Construction	\$6,165,000	Grants / County
Owasco Outlet Shoreline Reconstruction	\$1,000,00	Grants / County
Rt. 437 Whitebridge Replacement	\$2,000,000	NYSDOT
Merry Go Round Theater	\$1,900,000	Private Donation/Grants/County
Maint. Facility / Merry Go Round	\$325,000	Private Donation/County
Project Total	\$11,390,000	

The above cost estimates were derived from a gross square foot analysis based on the scaled dimensions from the concept plan, as such these figures are **CONCEPTUAL** in nature. These figures are intended to provide the reader with an order of magnitude estimate of the costs that can be expected while developing the park concept. Actual construction costs could differ significantly based on the final configuration of each individual program element. Soft costs such as permitting, design and inspection were not included in this analysis. As the park development progresses, it is recommended that the cost estimate be revisited on a frequent basis so that the overall impact to the community can be assessed.

Appendices