

# Emerson Park Master Plan

## Summary of Public Input through June 2014

A second public participation meeting was held at the Emerson Pavilion on Wednesday, June 11, 2014.

Staff from the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development presented a list of ideas to be included in the plan and led breakout focus groups to discuss some of the specific ideas in more detail.

Following the public participation meeting, the planning department received additional comments by phone, email, and the web. Below is a compilation of all comments received at the June 11 public participation meeting and afterward through the end of June 2014.

## Access & Parking

### **Create a more inviting entrance.**

- Needs to be something more memorable, maybe like Falcon Park.
- The pavement needs to be wider. All lanes are too narrow now.
- An arched entrance that says “welcome.”
- Include a more attractive sign. Hire a design team to do.
- Remove some of the chain link fence or replace the fencing with something more ornate, so that it doesn't look so restrictive.
- Historically there was an arch at the entrance but it was very large, maybe a smaller take-off of that. Need a larger architectural element of some sort, not as big as the historic one, but similar.
- Maybe some columns with flowers and landscaping instead of an arch.
- Entrance way should incorporate and preserve the parks history, e.g. with old photographs, old map and new map.
- Signs or design features identifying the entrance to the park should be at across from Green Shutters, adjacent to High School, etc. to emphasize that East Lake Road, White Bridge Road, etc. are *in* the park.

### **Improve existing vehicle entrance and parking on west side of Park.**

- The entrance needs to be paved instead of just gravel.
- People aren't aware that it is an entrance now; it doesn't look like one.

### **Improve access to the park via the lake. / Create an area where boats can tie up temporarily for free.**

- Utilize the existing tie outs/gates and ladders along the seawall on the inside of the channel and allow boats to tie up diagonally to them and use the existing walkway on the seawall to access the park. Add tie ups along the outside on the west side of the seawall for additional diagonal boat docking. **All as temporary access.**
- Install seasonal docks like at Skaneateles.
- Need an area that is not too shallow.
- Boat tie-ups must be sheltered but would be better closer (than existing boat launch) to attractions, e.g. to pavilion, lakeshore.
- Convert existing yearly rental slips to “parking meters” for temporary boat tie up.
- Add slips near the boat launch.
- Provide boat access directly to a restaurant.
- Create floating wood dock at the seawall, and convert nearby shelter to restaurant that could piggy-back on the pavilion's liquor license.
- A breakwater could protect the beach from erosion and provide protected space for boats.

- Boat launch fee is high compared to other Finger Lakes, which have more attractions than Owasco Lake. Seneca and Skaneateles Lakes do not charge a fee.

**Improve parking areas and access roads in the park.**

- The county should take the road millings from other road projects (the leftover “garbage”) and put it down as a binder, then after 2 years top coat it. This way the county can reuse “throw away” materials to be more “green” and to increase cost savings.
- Need better configuration of parking at the boat launch.
- No one who pays to get into the park should be ticketed unless they are blocking traffic. No parking tickets for cars unless there is a sign that says NO PARKING.

## Passive Recreation

**Establish a more comprehensive system of paths for pedestrians, bicycles, and rollerblades.**

- Separate paths for wheels and feet (pedestrians and bikes/roller blades), but a path for pedestrians is the higher priority.
- Include paved trails that could be used by parents with strollers, roller blade users, and bicyclists.
- Make sure that trails are easy to maintain and are actually maintained.
- There is a need for fitness trails for biking / walking / running.
- Create a “river walk” from Auburn to the park.

**Incorporate a lakeshore “promenade.” Site various landscape plantings, sculptures, opportunities for activity, entertainment, seating/eating and other points of interest along the walkway.**

- Should be around the back of Deauville Island and around the back of the old channel on the north shore of the island as close to the shore as practical.

**Improve existing and establish new nature trails in the area north of White Bridge Road.**

- There is a lot of nature and wildlife in this area, e.g. deer, blue birds. Worried about losing that to hotel. Worried about dogs or a dog park disturbing wildlife in that area.
- Connect with the City trail or mirror what is being submitted right now by the City as their greenway trail.
- Like to encourage bird watching, but should prohibit feeding the birds.

## Food and Concessions

**Arrange and/or allow leases with food truck operators.**

- Should be allowed 7 days a week if there are no other established restaurants.
- Should allow a larger number of trucks on the weekends, but a limited number during special events.
- They should be simple and offer things like hot dogs during the day, but should be more upscale for evening/theater events.
- A food truck over by the canoe launch would be good especially if they served something quick and cheap.
- Whatever food providers are permitted in the park should be mobile only for now. No established eating/restaurants except for the pavilion.
- Vendor permits are already available for \$100 a season. This needs to be promoted more to potential vendors, including advertising availability and soliciting for vendors.

- Provide moveable sheds for vendors to use.
- Create an area for Food Trucks to access and use; investigate Food Truck Rodeos.

**Provide more options for year round food and dining from casual to upscale.**

- The pavilion should be the focus for anything other than food trucks.
- Lunch should be served in the pavilion like it used to be, would be well attended.
- The pavilion should be used as a food venue for more than just weddings and large private events. Should be regularly open to the public.
- Food could be one of the biggest draws to the park.

**Locate boat-accessible casual dining options near the lakeshore or on Deauville Island.**

- Provide boat access directly (or nearby enough) to a restaurant.
- Create floating wood dock at the seawall, and convert nearby shelter to restaurant that could piggy-back on the pavilion’s liquor license.
- We have a beautiful lake and sadly only one restaurant accessible from the water. Of all the Finger Lakes, Owasco Lake lacks an attraction to our lake.

## Ideas to Improve Swimming

**Explore ways to improve the existing swimming area on Deauville Island.**

- Add more seating, shelters, tables and grills all around this section of the park.
- Upgrade Island bathrooms and shelters. Update the façade, construction, materials. Maintenance needs to be improved. The shelters on the Island are out-of-date. Make the Island shelters more like the Conservation Shelter (the one with the fireplace).
- Bring back the sand beach. The current beach is rocky, has bricks (that floated in?), has a “dirty” feel. Beach should have “pristine” feel.
- Improving the beach would cost money but would be family-oriented.

**Provide better access to the water for swimming.**

- The existing swimming area is too small; it needs to be expanded.
- The season for the swimming area needs to be expanded as well; it’s too short. The season currently runs after Memorial Day and closes before Labor Day.
- The swimming area is not deep enough close enough to the shore.
- Explore installing liability signage which states that there is no life guard on duty past the current season, in order to extend the season.
- Why is there no swimming over by the pavilion? Was there a reason for moving over to Deauville Island other than wanting to keep the restrooms at the pavilion private?
- Dredging may be necessary to create a deeper swimming area, but past experience has shown that the dredging needs to happen every year, which gets expensive.
- A breakwater could protect the beach from erosion and may require less dredging over time.

## Ideas for Entertainment

**Host concerts within the Park.**

- The county should reach out and get bigger name bands.
- More frequent smaller events would be better than fewer, larger events.
- Should consider having an “Old Timer Days” with and old fashioned dance.
- Can there be concerts on the back porch of the pavilion?
- The planning and layout of Dallas Smith concert on June 7 was excellent. Neighbors reported that the noise was the loudest event yet, but not a problem because it ended by 11 pm.

- Some large, loud events would be appropriate but there needs to be limits on how frequent the events are and how late they last into the evening.
- Need a variety of music, such as symphony music, kid-friendly music, music for dancing, etc.

**Promote and develop facilities for concerts, dances and other fun entertainment;  
Construct an amphitheater or band shelter.**

- The county needs to hire a full time Event Coordinator who will be responsible for promotion of events and booking talent/bands. Bands which are in Syracuse can come down here and play on their off night, i.e. play Syracuse on Friday but play Emerson Park on Thursday.
- The existing facilities on the island are inadequate; there are no overhead lights or a facility to string them up. The space doesn't work after dark.
- Need a stage with good lighting.
- There needs to be a strategic plan for an amphitheater which includes access, lighting, seating, etc. You can put lights on the top of the wall of a half dome amphitheater and have lighted paths.
- Entertainment events don't need permanent facilities. The Park could have evening events with movies on a blow-up screen, powered by a generator and provided by a private company; like summer events at Hoopes Park.
- An amphitheater could be designed to minimize the sound that escapes to outside the park and toward the lake.
- A dog park as a temporary use over in the nature trail area on the other side of White Bridge Road which can be the site of the amphitheater later.

**Allow/encourage/solicit boat rides. / Allow/encourage/solicit dinner boat cruises.**

- Need a pier
- Need good food
- Need buzz and interested people

## Ideas about Park Site Amenities

**Install tables, benches and shade shelter near the swimming area. / Create an enhanced picnic area near the boat launch.**

- Need more tables—both large and small, as well as shelters and grills.
- Add more gazebos with the swings for seniors.
- Upgrade Island bathrooms and shelters. Update the façade, construction, materials. Maintenance needs to be improved. The shelters on the Island are out-of-date. Make the Island shelters more like the Conservation Shelter (the one with the fireplace).
- Picnic areas should have good tree canopy. Allows picnickers to enjoy the sunshine without baking in the heat. Smaller tables that are easier to move, in addition to the current large picnic tables, would be a plus.
- Provide grill stations at picnic areas and make sure they are cleaned and maintained regularly. Grill stations tend to get gritty fast.
- Create places for people to barbeque, play music, have friends over: all the things that people would do in their backyard or lakefront property if they had a backyard or lakefront property.

**Update the playground and provide areas for adults to sit.**

- Add miniature golf instead of Frisbee golf in a historical theme for adults and kids.
- Surface material under playground structure could be better/safer.
- Make sure there is a slide in at the park.
- Needs to be seating and shade-shelter for adults/guardians near the playground.

- Provide a picnic area near the playground including shelter for stormy weather. This would be friendly for families.
- Add a climbing/bouldering wall at the playground.

**Provide playground areas and equipment for seniors as well as handicapped persons; Consider including spray features.**

- Add fitness equipment/stations along the nature trails and walking paths for seniors, like what was done over at the community college.
- Spray park can be used as an ice skating rink in the winter.
- Add more gazebos with the swings for seniors.

**Permit creation of a dog park, although not necessarily as a permanent feature.**

- There is a lot of nature and wildlife in the area north of White Bridge Road, e.g. deer, blue birds. Worried about dogs or a dog park disturbing wildlife in that area.
- Dog owners need to pick up after their pets. Any dog park facilities must have bag stations and trash cans to make sure that dog owners clean up dog droppings.
- A dog park as a temporary use over in the nature trail area on the other side of White Bridge Road which can be the site of the amphitheater later.

## Ideas about Limited Camping

**Explore ideas for limited camping**

- Appropriate to put it behind the 4H building?
- A winter camping program could be developed with outside partners, such as a joint venture with Bass Pro.

## Hotel/Lodging

**Promote the private development of hotel/conference center.**

- There is a lot of nature and wildlife in the area north of White Bridge Road, e.g. deer, blue birds. Worried about losing that to hotel.
- Move Auburn High School to old West High campus; use lands of Auburn School District for hotel adjacent to the Park.
- There needs to be development at the park, but it needs to be balanced with protecting the natural setting and the lakefront. The best place for a hotel that balances these needs is north of White Bridge Road.
- An ideal place for a smaller motel/restaurant combination is the sailboat launch across from Deauville Island. Not a huge place like Geneva on The Lake, but a few stories high as not to obstruct the beauty of the lake from the Traffic circle. Could offer lodging for weddings or events at the pavilion. Merry-Go-Round Theatre could also offer overnight events with a show.

## Ideas about Park Operations

**Improve maintenance and upkeep of existing and new facilities.**

- Anything we do needs to be maintained.
- Maintenance of the bathrooms and shelters on Deauville Island needs to be improved. The façade, construction, materials are out-of-date. Make the Island shelters more like the Conservation Shelter (the one with the fireplace).
- Make sure that pathways in any trail system are easy to maintain and are actually maintained.

- Bricks are already dropping off the pier/seawall. Restore and/or improve maintenance as needed to limit this happening.

### **Improve and expand outreach and promotion of the Park.**

- The county needs to hire a full time Event Coordinator who will be responsible for promotion of events and booking talent/bands.
- There is not enough communication now about what activities are allowed where and when in the Park, how to rent shelters, etc. More strategic promotion of the park would help.
- Need to provide a paper map and brochure of the park. Existing tri-fold map of the county park system is good, but a more informative brochure specific to Emerson Park is also needed. Directory signs in the Park and online presence are also helpful, but a paper map and brochure is also necessary.
- Provide literature and park brochure to rental agents / rental operators to leave at rental properties on the lake.
- Provide a large sign directory near the entrance of the park.
- To get people to the Park, it needs to be promoted. Whatever we do, it has to be greatly promoted.
- Vendor permits are already available for \$100 a season. This needs to be promoted more to potential vendors, including advertising availability and soliciting for vendors. You should check into the concept of “Food Truck Rodeos”.
- Disc golf, soccer field [lacrosse field], etc. should be promoted to younger generations.
- Start small with promotion and build from success.
- Marketing needs to be different, distinguished from Skaneateles.

### **Parking policy ideas.**

- For events, roll the cost of parking into the ticket/admission price of the event. Keep the revenue but make it look like free parking.

## **New Ideas**

### **Develop a permanent “farmers market” shelter.**

- Think about adding a farmers market with a permanent shelter. Could be on west side of park near canoe launch. Would provide a venue for events, music, food vendors.
- Reach out to existing Auburn Farmers Market to explore moving or expanding to Emerson Park.
- If a Farmers Market Shelter were developed, it should allow multi-function, seasonal programming.

## **General Ideas about a Vision for the Park**

- Emerson Park is lakefront for everyone. Think about what people who have lakefront property do in their yards: they barbeque, play music, have friends over. This is what the Park should be for.
- What visitors think: “Emerson Park is so beautiful, but where are all the people?” We need to attract the people.
- The Park can have a destination/tourist-oriented area, but it also needs community-oriented activities and areas.