
1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

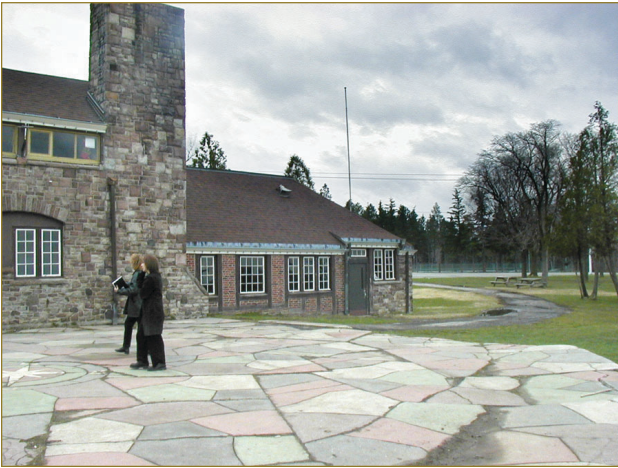
Erie County owns and operates a parks system containing nearly 11,000 acres of land on 38 sites throughout the county. These sites include eleven large multi-purpose parks, five undeveloped parks, thirteen forestry lots, seven small special-purpose parks and two multi-use recreational trails. The County park system was established in 1925, and initially was comprised of four sites and 2,280 acres of land. Periodic land acquisition, over the years, has expanded the original holdings to the system's current size, and future expansion is always under consideration.

Previous County park system master plans were prepared in 1961, 1976, and most recently in 1988. Since the last plan much has changed within the park system and throughout the County. The County therefore initiated an update of its Park System Plan in 2002. This current Parks System Master Plan is intended to establish a framework for preservation, restoration and enhancement of the parks over the next 15–20 years. This plan is the first component of a full update of the Erie County Comprehensive Plan. Subsequent components will address County-wide land use, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, farmland protection and similar regional planning issues.

1.2 STUDY PROCESS

1.2.1 PROJECT TEAM

From the start of this project, the master plan process has included input and collaboration from a large, comprehensive project team including County staff, steering committee (*Leadership Team*), private consultants, various park user groups, and individuals from all over Erie County. To complete the Master Plan update, the County retained the services of two separate teams of consultants to complete the various component parts:



Chestnut Ridge Casino - Rear Terrace



Cayuga Creek - Como Lake Park

The following team is preparing the Master Plan Update, which includes: recommendations for the overall park system, individual park master plans, a strategy for the waterfront parks, management/consolidation opportunities, and a marketing and financial strategy.



PARSONS

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37 Franklin Street, Suite 300
Buffalo, New York 14202*



ENVISION - THE HOUGH GROUP

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PARADIGM CONSULTING

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Amherst, New York 14068*

The following firm is preparing the Inventory and Assessment portion of the project, as well as the Recreational Trails element:

ERIE COUNTY PROJECT TEAM

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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ANTOINETTE "TONI" DRZEWIECKI

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Sample Home Page for the Project Website



WENDEL DUCHSCHERER Architects & Engineers

Architects, Engineers & Landscape Architects

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Amherst, New York 14228

The team worked closely throughout the course of the study, sharing information, and jointly conducting the public outreach. The final Master Plan document is a collaborative effort, with technical background reports documenting the detailed inventory and assessment work.

I.2.2 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Given the extent of the parks system, it was not possible to hold specific meetings for each individual park. However the public consultation approach included outreach to as many interested groups and individuals as possible throughout the course of the project. Outreach was achieved through the following methods:

WEBSITE:

A Website dedicated to the Parks Master Plan was the primary source for ongoing information updates and public input. The site was upgraded periodically as project materials became available, Opportunities were provided for the public to share concerns and ideas for improving the park system.

PARKS USER SURVEY:

A survey was posted on the Web Site and directly distributed to an extensive list of park user groups, environmental interest groups, and municipal government organizations. Over 300 surveys were completed and sent in, with good representation from all corners of the County. *A summary of survey results is provided in the Appendix.*

TRAVELING EXHIBITS:

Graphic displays highlighting park plans and key Master Plan recommendations were set up at various sites and at key events



Traveling exhibits at Galleria Mall



Traveling exhibits at Galleria Mall

throughout the County. Exhibits were placed at the Erie County Fair, Walden Galleria Mall, downtown Rath Building and at other notable locations with heavy pedestrian traffic opportunities. Additional “park-specific” displays were distributed to the various town halls and/or libraries near the individual park sites. Displays were also posted at AutumnFest at Sprague Brook Park.

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES:

Two public open houses were held in separate areas of the County, attended by over 200 people. The open houses were conducted as drop-in events that allowed ample review of presentation boards and information pertaining to the Master Plan, as well as one-on-one discussion with members of the project team and County staff and elected officials. This format was selected over a formal public hearing, as providing for maximum input from individuals who prefer a more low-key setting for discussing their concerns or sharing their opportunities for enhancement of the parks system. *A copy of the “posters” (graphic displays) can be found in the Appendix.*

MEETINGS AND WORK SESSIONS:

In addition to sending out surveys, the project team met with a number of park user groups and individuals that requested a separate meeting on specialized or park specific issues. *For a list of the larger meetings, refer to the side-bar.*

LIST OF MEETINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Meeting Focus / Organization</u>
April 3	Monthly Review
April 10	EC Development Comm. Board
May 1	Monthly Review
May 21	County Visioning Session
May 29	Monthly Review
June 25	Park Summit, Chestnut Ridge Park
July 3	Monthly Review
July 18	Hunters Creek User Groups
July 19	EC Parks Superintendents
August 1	Hunters Creek Neighbors Meeting
August 6	Hunters Creek Workshop
August 14	Monthly Review
August 21	In-house Workshop
September 4	Monthly Review
September 18	EC Development Comm. Board
September 24	Central Park / Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy
September 26	Legislature, Community Enrichment Committee
October 3	Blue Collar Union Representatives
October 9	Monthly Review
October 17	Erie County Environmental Management Council
October 22	Energy Mtg / Cornell University Rep.
October 28	Open House #1, East Aurora MS
October 29	Trout Unlimited
November 1	Kenneglen / WNY Land Conservancy (Representative - Betty Cheteney)
November 1	Legislator Ranzenhoffer
November 6	Monthly Review
November 6	EC Fisheries
November 7	Elma Meadows
November 13	Open House #2, Amherst Central HS
November 18	Kiwanas Club- Wales
November 19	Delaware North Park Service Div.
November 20	Hunters Creek Trail Expert Mtg
November 26	In-house Review with L. Rubin
December 4	Monthly Review
December 18	Delaware North Park Service Div.
January 15	Monthly Review
January 21	In-house Workshop
January 22	EC Development Comm. Board
February 5	Monthly Review



Trail within naturalized meadow setting - Ontario

1.3 MASTER PLAN COMPONENTS

The resulting Master Plan is comprised of the following five elements:

A. INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING FACILITIES AND CONDITIONS

This includes a detailed inventory of all structures, furnishings, athletic facilities, play equipment and other appurtenances within the County's developed parks. A database of inventory information was created to give the County a management tool for future maintenance and funding decisions.

B. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF EXISTING PARK PLANS

All parks in the system were looked at for specific upgrades and enhancement recommendations and Master plan updates were prepared for each of the developed parks in the County system. Recommendations are made that take into account long-term environmental sustainability, current and future recreational opportunities, maintenance requirements and fiscal responsibility. For the oldest parks in the system, with heritage significance, an emphasis has been placed on preservation and restoration of original park features. For all parks, the focus is on preserving natural resources and key scenic features, while developing a better system of interpretation and awareness within these beautiful properties.

In addition, new, conceptual master plans were created for five designated parks within the overall system. These are:

- HUNTERS CREEK PARK,
- WENDT BEACH PARK,
- BENNETT BEACH PARK,
- COMO LAKE PARK - EXPANSION AREA;
- AKRON FALLS PARK - EXPANSION AREA.



Trail in Hunters Creek Park

C. RECREATIONAL TRAILS ELEMENT

The trail plan is focused on two primary goals. The first is to better connect the parks to their surrounding communities and other area attractions. This would establish smaller area trail loops that will provide opportunities for linking the specific parks to other area destinations, business districts and neighborhood centers, and cultural attractions. The second goal is to look at broader “park to park” connections throughout the County, expanding upon the regional Bicycle Route Guide recently published by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional transportation Council. Recommendations are made for specific improvements and enhancements to the existing County trails, including the Riverwalk system along the Niagara River and the Two Mile Creek Greenway.

D. WATERFRONT STRATEGY

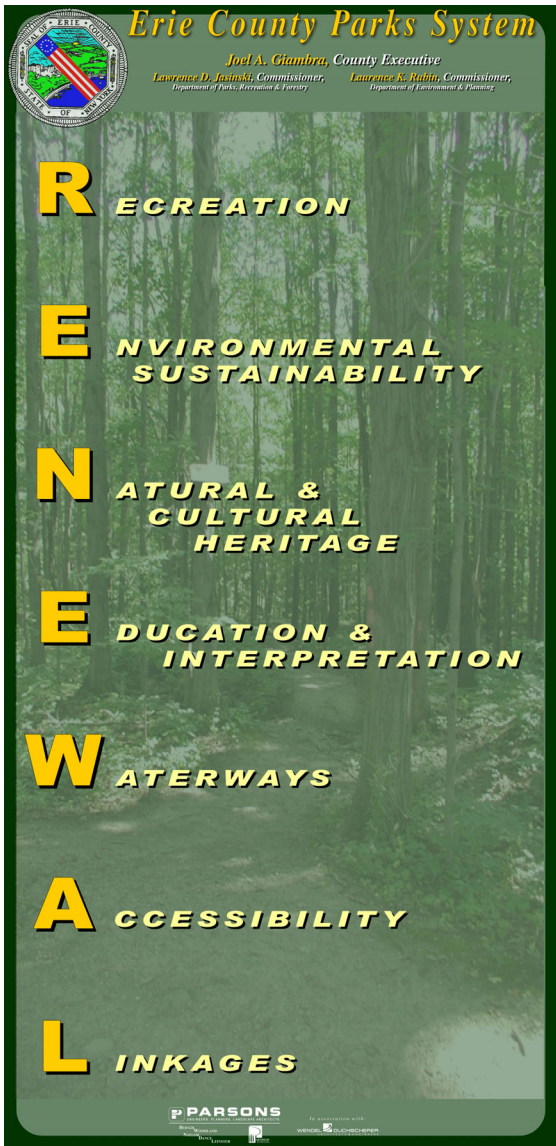
This component of work provides a specific focus on the recreational opportunities along Erie County’s 90 miles of waterfront, including strategies for gaining public access to the water and for promoting tourism potential within Erie County. The recommendations build upon previous waterfront planning efforts, including that undertaken by the County (Horizons Waterfront Action Plan) in 1992, and recognizes external initiatives proposed or underway by the state and local municipalities.

E. ASSESSMENT OF CONSOLIDATION AND MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM

Although an in-depth departmental operational review was not a component of this study, this effort begins to examine opportunities for consolidation within the County Parks Department and to look at creative management approaches to parks maintenance and funding. In addition, opportunities for establishing partnerships with local municipalities, agencies and local community-based groups were explored.



*View of Historic Grain Elevators from Ohio Street Park
(Buffalo River Parks)*



"Theme" of Project - Traveling Road Show Poster

The completed Erie County Parks System Master Plan is comprised of four documents, as follows:

VOL. 1 PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

VOL. 2 PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS

VOL. 3 RECREATIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM

VOL. 4 PARKS INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT



Wendt Beach



Scoby Dam Park