Master Plan for the Central Park Rose Garden
Schenectady, New York

May, 2006
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Prepared for
the Rose Garden Restoration Committee

by

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History of the Rose Garden

Designed in late 1959, Schenectady’s Rose Garden is located at the Wright Avenue entrance to Central Park. Charles D. Brown, a member of the Schenectady Rose Society, was instrumental in its design and care program, and a plaque of appreciation now stands in the garden as a tribute to his work. The first 400 rose bushes were planted in April of 1960, with more following in the fall. The next year several hundred more hybrid teas, floribunda and grandiflora roses were added.

In the coming years, the rockery pool, triangular fountain and reflection pool were built. The rose population grew to 4,000. An adjacent garden with a Japanese lantern and an arched bridge over the creek were built in 1968. Weeping cherry bushes were planted along the stream and a small dam was added to create a reflection pool under the bridge.

The Rose Garden reached its peak in the 1970s with a rose population of 7,500, and the garden was named an All-America Rose Selection display test garden. As a result, each year the garden receives several varieties of rose bushes to be test planted in the garden, one year prior to being released for commercial sale.

During the early 1980s, as business and people moved out
Volunteers keep rose garden alive in Schenectady

By SYLVIA WOOD
Gazette Reporter

SCHENECTADY — There were 2,000 thirsty rose bushes waiting for a drink when David Gade, rose in hand, started serving among the Ladies of the Dawn.

"Roses like a lot of water," he said, after moving onto the Gardens of the World, a variety with pink blooms. "They'll take everything I can give them."

Gade delivered 600 gallons of water last Sunday to the bushes at the Central Park Rose Garden before retiring from the midday sun.

The Gypians, Mister Lincolns and 1,000 or so other roses that Gade didn't sprinkle on this turn with the water truck would have to wait until next week—or for Mother Nature.

"We're going to hope it rains tomorrow," Gade said. "It takes so long doing this. For a garden this size, we need an irrigation system."

Last summer, the garden didn't like Gade to ensure the roses got their weekly water fix.

Survival for the 4,000 or so bushes has been an uphill battle since the garden's original irrigation system broke down three summers ago and proved too costly for the city to rebuild.

Over the past several years, the garden has lost several hundred bushes to a combination of bad weather and neglect.

By last September, the war of the roses looked lost to a stifling summer, relentless weeds and persistent cuts to the city's budget that meant fewer employees to tend the plants.

Anne Hotaling recalled when her father, Joseph Formes, used to walk, all eight of his children from their Linden Street home, dressed in their Easter best, to the garden.

"We could probably make a collage of all the photos we took there," she said.

Hotaling's two younger sisters, Patricia Patterson and Mary Houlihan, had their wedding portraits taken at the rose garden during the Augusts of 1982 and 1988, respectively.

"It's just a beautiful place when it's in full bloom," Hotaling said.

Now, Gade and a group of about 50 volunteers are trying to keep the garden in bloom for future generations by raising funds for a new irrigation system and by taking over the garden's intensive upkeep.

The Rose Garden Restoration Committee, organized last year, has held a dozen work days since April to weed, mulch, fertilize and water the bushes. Over the last several weeks, volunteers have planted about 200 new rose bushes and are planning to put in 300 more by the fall.

This Thursday, the committee is holding a fund-raising party at the garden to raise some of the $15,000 needed to lay down a irrigation system to keep the roses watered.

So far, the committee has raised about more than $3,000 toward that goal with private donations and by selling memorial rose bushes in the garden to replace those that have withered.

Enhancements included a new watering system, over 4,000 new rose bushes, heavy-duty PVC edging in the beds, four cedar arbors at the entrances to the garden, concrete benches, a regular fungus preventative spraying program, and a new gardener, who was hired courtesy of a grant. A garden party has also been held each year in the rose garden as a fund raiser.

Over 440 memorial rose bushes (including in memory of, in honor of, and for victims of crime) are currently planted in the Rose Garden as a result of another fund raiser. A paved stone walkway connecting the two arbors is the latest fund raiser. The Rose Garden was placed on probation as an AARS test garden.

This situation upset many area residents, and a meeting was held in September, 1995, when the Rose Garden Restoration Committee was formed. The challenge to restore the Rose Garden began. Volunteers were solicited and many interested people signed up to help. In the next seven years, many improvements were made to the garden by its committee and volunteers. Over $125,000 was raised and over 5,700 hours of volunteer time was contributed.

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Sunday Times Union

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Walkway continues to be paved with bricks inscribed with the names of friends and supporters. By purchasing a brick, sponsors can contribute to improving and maintaining Schenectady’s historic Rose Garden.

To date, the hard work and dedication of the Rose Garden Restoration Committee and their volunteers has returned the garden to much of its glory. The roses are now routinely maintained and the garden’s status as an All American Rose Selection display test garden has been restored. In fact, the Rose Garden has held the title of an outstanding All American Rose Selection display garden since 1999.

Today the Rose Garden continues to be a favorite destination among city residents and visitors alike. It is considered a premier location for wedding ceremonies, photographs, scouting activities, and other group gatherings. Thousands of roses of all varieties and colors bloom each year from the middle of June throughout the fall.
The Restoration Continues

Though much progress has been made in restoring and improving the Rose Garden, there remains work to be done. Over the years, the visitors’ approach to the garden has changed, creating different needs for paths. Fountains that once contributed to the beauty and attraction of the garden have fallen into disrepair and now detract from it. Some portions of the garden are laid out more successfully than others. There is still no place to store tools, and there is no central location for utility controls, such as lighting and irrigation. Lighting in the Rose Garden is sparse and consequently, there have been a few instances of theft and vandalism.

The Rose Garden Restoration Committee is committed to the continual restoration and improvement of the garden and has commissioned a master plan to address its current needs.
Opportunities and Constraints

While the original Master Plan for the garden called for a strong axis running through the center of the garden and perpendicular to Central Parkway, many of today’s visitors approach the garden from Iroquois Way, where there is a formal entrance with an arbor. This is somewhat awkward, as there is currently no cross-axis through the garden, and though the central axis continues to play a strong role in the design, it no longer connects successfully with Central Parkway. There is a steep grade separation which visually and physically separates the garden from the street, as well as a low and often saturated area.

Separated by distance and elevation, the Rose Garden plays a minor role on Central Parkway.
The Fountains

Fountains have always been a draw to people, particularly in the hot summer when the sound can be so refreshing. For a long time, the fountains at Central Park were a strong asset, but two have fallen into disrepair and have remained empty for the last few years. The triangular fountain has actually become somewhat of a liability and no longer meets the standards of modern building codes. This type of fountain, with the larger concrete basins, is both expensive and labor-intensive to maintain, and may no longer be appropriate for the Rose Garden. A fountain with a smaller basin and a pump for recirculation would be a good solution.

While the two basin fountains are no longer functioning, the naturalistic fountain remains an attractive feature of the garden and is often a draw for picnickers and garden strollers. Its trickling waters can be heard throughout the northern corner of the garden.
Materials

There have been many beautiful additions and improvements to both Central Park and the Rose Garden since the garden’s inception in 1959, and these have consisted of numerous different types of materials. The entrance to Central Park is now flanked by brick pilasters, which tie into much of the brick architecture of the park. There are also new thresholds into the Rose Garden—three white arbors marking the entrances from Iroquois Way, denoting paths paved with a natural colored paver that can be engraved with the names of donors.

Stone is another material featured heavily in the garden. In the rear of the garden can be found a series of beautiful stone retaining walls and an historic set of stairs once built as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. The bridge over the pond is also made of stone.

Many other materials are found in the garden—cement fountains painted blue, a tricolored walkway, white concrete benches, wooden benches, a metal sculpture, and still others. While some of these items seem intentional and work to support the master plan, others can be distracting, and should be considered for removal.
The Master Plan

The new Master Plan seeks to build on the original master plan, while also remedying any existing problems or needs. The features mentioned below are intended to strengthen the existing infrastructure of the garden, while also enhancing the garden in a manner that is attractive, safe, and requires low maintenance.

1. Realignment of the Beds, Improvements to the Upper Pond, and the Memorial Kiosk

2. The Grand Stair and the Gatehouse

3. The Center Fountain

4. The Pergola

5. Additional Improvements

6. Restoration of the WPA Stairs and Rear Terrace Walls
Master Plan Improvements

The Rose Garden Restoration Committee Capital Campaign will commence in the Spring of 2006 and construction will begin that summer. It is anticipated that the Master Plan will be completed in six phases over the next five to six years.

1. Phase One:
   Realignment of the Beds
   2006-2007

The simple realignment of some of the rose beds is perhaps the most effective and easily attainable change proposed by the Master Plan. By relocating some of the wider beds, which are much more difficult to maintain, to locations within the garden where they can facilitate connections, the garden will become more inviting and easily accessible. Visitors will soon be able to take a direct route through the garden.

In order to complete this phase, two of the fountains will have to be demolished - the triangular fountain and the rectangular fountain. The only fountain still in use today, the “spring” fountain, will remain.
The Memorial Kiosk

The proposed kiosk will be installed as part of the first phase in order to provide visitors with information about the Master Plan and ongoing construction. The three-sided kiosk will also provide a space for the recognition of those who have contributed to the success of the Schenectady Rose Garden and those of whom gifts have been given in memory.

- Displays Map of Central Park
- Provides Useful Information about Events in the Park
- Portrays History of the Rose Garden
- Displays Information on how to Reserve the Rose Garden for Weddings or other Events
- Serves as a Commemoration Plaque for all who have been Memorialized or Honored by Donations or Rose Plantings
Phase Two: The Grand Stair
2007-2008

The Grand Stair, located on the garden’s major axis, will return the historic importance to this axis while also drawing attention to the Rose Garden from Central Parkway. The Grand Stair will be a double stair, made of slate, with brick cheek walls and planting running down the center, tying into key materials used in both the park and the Rose Garden. There will be black metal railings on either side, making the stairs safe and accessible.

- Creates a Prominent Rose Garden Facade on Central Parkway
- Provides a Walkable Entry to the Rose Garden from Central Parkway
- Provides a Drop-off Entry for the Garden
- Celebrates Historic Main Axis
- Uses Material that will Strengthen Continuity in the Garden
- Corrects Drainage Along Central Parkway Facade
- Provides Additional Photo Opportunities for Visitors
The Gatehouse

While functioning as an important storage area, the Gatehouse will be an aesthetic enhancement to the Rose Garden.

- Provides much-needed Storage for Tools and Utilities
- Places Storage in a Public Location so as to Reduce the Risk of Theft or Vandalism
- Aesthetically Enhances the Central Avenue Entry
- Relates to Existing Park Architecture
Enhancement of the Lower Pond

There is currently an underground connection between the “spring fountain” and the lower pond; however, they are not run on a circulation system and there are considerable algae problems with the lower pond. Improvements to the pond would include converting the two features to a closed system and creating an above-ground connection between the two.

- Improves Water Quality in both Water Features
- Considerably reduces Water used by Fountains
- Enhances planting around water features, providing shade and reducing algae
- More fully integrates the two water features into the Rose Garden
- Garden Stream will add to the attraction of the Rose Garden
3 Phase Three: The Center Fountain 2008-2009

The new Fountain will become the center of the garden at the junction of the two main axes, replacing the two existing, but defunct fountains currently found in the garden. This new fountain will have a much smaller basin and will require considerably less maintenance.

- Replaces Existing Fountains with a Safer Alternative that Requires Less Maintenance
- Operates on a Closed System to Conserve Water
- Serves as a Focal Point and Center for the Rose Garden
- Emphasizes the Two Main Axes
- Adds to Garden Aesthetics and Acts as a Draw for Visitors
- Adds Pleasant Sound to the Garden
- Use of Stone and Brick in Fountain will Help Unify Materials throughout Garden
Phase Four: The Pergola
2009-2010

The Pergola will provide an attractive backdrop to the garden, adding height and thereby street visibility to the space. There are many donations given to the Rose Garden in memory of lost loved ones, and the pergola is a project many donors are interested in helping to sponsor. The Pergola will be a strong attraction for the Garden.

- Provides an Elegant Backdrop to Garden
- Enhances Existing Thoroughfare through Garden
- Creates a Place for Climbing Roses
- Strengthens Existing Geometry
- Provides Additional Photo Opportunities
- Made of Black Coated Metal to Keep Pergola Visually Permeable, Safe, Vandal-Proof, and Requiring of Less Maintenance
5 Phase Five:
Additional Improvements
2010-2011

Phase Five will include the meandering walk and additional planting areas.

◆ Add to the Variety of Walking Experiences in the Garden
◆ Further Define and Embellish the Structure of the Garden

6 Phase Six:
Restoration of the WPA Stairs and Rear Terrace Walls
2011-2012

The historic stone stairs located at the rear of the garden are now in ruins and will be restored to their former elegance and purpose as a part of the master plan.

◆ Restore Historic Structure built by the Works Progress Administration and Repair Terrace Walls where Necessary
◆ Restore and Improve Access to Central Park Trails
◆ Beautify hillside behind Rose Garden / Provide Elegant Backdrop