



GARFIELD PARK CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT

Chapter VI: Park Use & User Survey

A. INTRODUCTION TO PARK USE

The Heritage Landscapes field review of Garfield Park took place on fall weekdays in 2003 when relatively few people were using the park. Even at these lower use times we observed walkers of various ages, joggers, dog walkers, Conservatory visitors, Burrello Center users and staff, police in cruisers, and male drivers parking in several lots and sitting in cars. FGOP members and Indy Parks staff have informed us of the high levels of summer season use. Everyday uses in good weather bring a constant flow of people to the park. Peak periods of use on the weekdays were early morning exercise and end of workday park strolling. Weekend use is predictably heavier with families at the Burrello water play area, visitors to the Conservatory and Sunken Gardens, MacAllister amphitheater performance attendance, baseball games and other sports events, and individual exercise and recreation. With specific event uses, especially when more than one large event is taking place, the park landscape is crowded and sometimes beyond the capacity of the park drives and parking lots.

B. TYPES OF PARK USE

In twenty years of projects addressing historic public parks Heritage Landscapes has observed four general types of recreational use, all of which occur in Garfield Park today. It is useful to articulate the range of park uses that are possible and potential in this planning report. The four broad categories of recreation observed in historic parks are:

- *Active or exertive recreation*- this type of recreation is aerobic exercise, which can be equipment, field or court-based games, and related to specific facilities; or running, walking, or biking on paths or trails.
- *Passive recreation*- encompasses a wide range of casual and informal uses of parks and open spaces and is usually about spending time in the landscape. The motivation is often simply to be in a green, scenic environment. Passive activities include walking, sitting, reading, walking a dog, picnicking, enjoying being outdoors, and enjoying the scenery.
- *Social or gregarious recreation*- joining with friends, family or groups in park and open space settings for a celebration, picnic, performance, dance, fair, or festival, and as spectators viewing sports and enjoying the company of others in that context.
- *Interpretive or educational recreation*- casual or structured learning about local history, ecology, geology, horticulture, garden design, art, or other subjects which can be addressed in part by providing guided or self-guided tours, informational signs, programs, lectures, exhibits, interactive education on computers, or informal classes.

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As the user survey was developed for this Garfield Park Cultural Landscape Report each of these types of recreation was considered in formulating the questions.

C. USER SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Based on several previous user surveys for similar historic parks Heritage Landscapes developed the Garfield Park User Survey. The questions included were customized to address Garfield Park. A sample survey is included in Appendix B. The survey was reviewed and refined with the Friends of Garfield Park (FOGP). Survey forms were distributed at the first community meeting and were placed by FOGP at the Shelby Branch Library, Burrello Center and Conservatory. Completed surveys were sent to Heritage Landscapes for tabulation of results. Distribution of surveys at park facilities in the fall season, when the park is not in peak use, will skew the results to neighborhood residents who frequent the distribution facilities. Summer distribution as an in-park intercept survey, would also skew results toward summer users and possibly toward infrequent ones or those from beyond the neighborhood. The user survey respondent population is a valid sample in either case. The nature of the sample simply needs to be kept in mind in the consideration of the results.

The survey included four categories of questions. The first group of questions requested demographic information including respondent age, gender, education, children, frequency of visits, accompaniment, distance from and method for getting to the park. The second group of questions inquired about current types of park use including aspects of each of the four types of recreation discussed above. Opinion on the condition of the park landscape, features, and facilities was the topic of the third group of questions. The final set of questions required the respondent to fill in responses and included a query about best and least liked park elements, perception of safety, and desired improvements. The summary charts of survey responses are included with the actual survey in Appendix B.

D. USER SURVEY RESULTS

During the fall of 2003 the Friends of Garfield Park and the reception staff at the park facilities distributed surveys to park users. This overview of the results from the seventy-four respondents summarizes the responses and the most-frequent comments.

D1. Demographics of Park User Survey Respondents

To put this section of the survey in context, the 1989 Master Plan summarized the demographics of the Garfield Park neighborhood as generally white, middle class, with housing at a higher median value than the rest of Center Township but modest in comparison with the County. The area surrounding the park was described as an attractive residential neighborhood with a median age of the population older than that of the County as a whole.

The 2003 park user survey recorded demographic profiles of the respondents including age, gender, education, children, and ethnicity as the first category of survey results. Age range

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tabulation revealed 46 to 64 year-olds as the largest group of users at 45.9%, comprising nearly half of those completing the survey. The next largest group is 65 or older at 25.7%, followed by the 36 to 45 age group at 16.2%. Ages 25 to 35 and 17 to 24 are both 6.8%. There were no respondents in the 10 to 16 year age group. The gender count was 62.2% female and 37.8% male. 75.5% do not have children under the age of 18, while 20.3% do. 4.2% report bringing grandchildren. The children are almost equally divided between male and female, and their ages range from less than a year old to age 16.

The responding park users are well educated overall with 29.7% having post-college/graduate school education, 23% with college degrees, 32.4% have some college education, and 13.5% are high school graduates or equivalent. There were no respondents in the primary or middle-school group, due in part to the lack of young park users represented in the survey sample. 91.9% of the respondents were white, 4.1% of the respondents were black, and 4% did not answer the question. There were no respondents of other ethnic backgrounds. It appears that there has been little change from the 1989 demographics.

D2. Park Visit Frequency, Duration, & Transportation

This group of questions gained information about frequency of use, use in each of the four seasons, length of visits to the park, distance from the park that park users live, and method for getting to the park. For the frequency of park use, almost 7% reported visiting daily, 28.4% visit more than once a week, 29.7%, visit a few times a month, and 33.8% visit the park a few times a year.

In responding to the seasonal use question park users were encouraged to check all that apply, and as a result the percentages exceed 100%. As anticipated the summer season registers the highest use with a 98.6% response. Those reporting spring and fall visits number 75.7% equally. The number reporting winter use is 54.1%, well over half the survey group. These results indicate a steady level of year-round use among the survey sample.

The average length of park visit for a 63.5% majority of users is a one to three hour length. 32.4% visit for one hour or less, and 6.8% visit for more than three hours.

On the question of whether people come to the park alone or with others, many people reported visits in more than one category, again exceeding 100%. The findings show that 59.5% visit regularly with a family member, 52.7% visit alone, 45.9% come with a friend, and 28.4% visit with a group.

The park is reached by more than one form of transportation with the private car as the dominant mode. 86.5% come to the park in a car, 35.1% walk to the park and 13.5% ride bicycles. No one reported using public transportation.

In responding about distance lived from the park users indicated that 17.6% live next to the park, 12.2% live less than a five-minute walk away, and 6.8% live at a distance of five to fifteen minutes. These groups total 36.6%, which is roughly equal to those reporting that they walk to the park in the previous question. The largest number of respondents at 59.5% lives further than

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a fifteen-minute walk from park. Some of the visitors living within the fifteen-minute range use cars to get to the park some of the time.

D3. Current Range of Park Uses

Survey respondents checked off their activities on a listing of thirty-three different park uses, in the four types of use categories. Their responses can be organized in different ways to understand the types of use. Passive uses appear to rank highest with “Visit the Sunken Gardens” at an 86.5% response and “Enjoy Nature” at 63.5%. The third-ranked passive use is leisure walking with a 48.6% response. These top-ranked uses align with the results from park use surveys in Chicago, Boston, Fort Wayne, Brooklyn, and others, that indicate a solid majority of park users come to parks for passive uses, basically to enjoy being in a green landscape and to walk. Additional passive use rankings for Garfield Park are 37.8 % who come to relax in the park, 20.3% to walk their dogs, and only one person who marked sunbathing as a park use.

Social and educational use categories overlap to a degree. Starting with events as both social and educational the respondents ranked attending Amphitheater events, at 58.1%, slightly above the 56.8% response for Sunken Gardens and Conservatory events. Responses for Burrello Family Center events were 13.5% and Art Center events at 10.8%. Event spectating in general was highly ranked at 45.9%, which is, however, somewhat below the counts for the events listed specifically by facility. About one-quarter of the respondents listed social park uses, with picnicking at 29.7%, people-watching at 27.7%, socializing at 25.7%, and meeting friends at 21.6%.

In terms of active uses the highest ranked was jogging or exercise walking at 31.1%. This response highlights the importance of the pedestrian paths in the park. Active use numbers following this response were, in order of percentages: playing at the playground 24.3%, bicycling and swimming 16.2%, tennis 14.9%, sledding 10.8%, and playing basketball 6.8%. Trailing on the active sports list were playing catch, baseball, softball, little league softball, co/ed softball, frisbee, football and pick-up ball games, with one to two respondents each. Interestingly 12.2% of survey respondents noted that they watched sports. Of the active recreational items listed on the survey all had some users except for skateboarding and small fry/pee-wee football.

While there is a wide variety of positive uses of Garfield Park, negative uses are also in evidence. There is a daytime cruising behavior along park drives and in parking lots that we witnessed and that a few park survey respondents addressed in their comments. In 1989 segments of the internal drives were closed to eliminate youth cruising on the drive loops, and in 1995 the drive and walk reconfiguration around the Conservatory formalized the new system making the Conservatory to Sunken Gardens a pedestrian-only area.

In response to the question “Do you feel safe in Garfield Park?” nearly 68% of the park users surveyed indicated that they did while 9.5% said that they did not and a further 12.2% indicated that they felt safe only in the daytime.

In general, Heritage Landscapes has observed an array of negative, anti-social and illegal uses in all the historic parks we have studied. These activities occur in areas and at times of day when

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positive use and activity are lacking. In implementing renewal plans for historic parks we have noted that as circulation systems, features, and destinations have been improved and positive uses increase, negative uses decrease, moving elsewhere in the park or in the city.

D4. Park Feature & Facility Condition Ratings

The condition ratings chart, included in Appendix B, shows the ratings in order of highest to lowest. Overall there is a median 13% rating as excellent and a 40% rating as good conditions, with about 20% as average, and 6% and 3% as fair and poor respectively. The largest rating percentages occurred in the category of good for most of the areas, with percentages ranging from 65% for the condition of the trees and 62 % for cleanliness and litter pick-up down to 20% for the football field and 18% for baseball fields. General appearance of the park was ranked as good by 55% and excellent by 11%. These condition rankings by park users indicate a relatively high opinion, overall, of the condition of the park and its features.

Top ranked park elements by condition include the Sunken Gardens with 42% excellent and 50% good, park walks with 41% excellent and 46% good, and park trees with 36% excellent and 65% good. Park cleanliness and litter pick-up are also ranked high with 20% excellent, 46% good and 11% average. The condition of the creeks/banks, bridges, baseball fields, football field, parking areas, and benches received their largest percentages in the category of average, ranging from 39.2% for the parking areas to 21.6% for the baseball fields. The summary chart is useful for more in-depth assessments of the areas across the range of their individual ratings as well as against the other areas.

D5. What Do You Like Best?

This question required a write-in response and the largest number of comments mentioned the Conservatory and the Sunken Gardens. Detailed preferences specified the Conservatory in winter, its flowers, and the park birds. For the Sunken Gardens the floral displays and the lighted fountains were mentioned most often. The Burrello Family Center and staff was mentioned nine times. Park programs were noted eight times emphasizing the diversity of activities, and in a few cases noting particularly the summer concerts in the Amphitheater. The beauty, size, open space, and naturalness of the park, the variety of terrain and fresh air, the number and variety of mature trees, and the sense of serenity and relaxation were frequent comments. The multi-use park trails were seen as an asset. Specific park facilities were also noted like tennis courts and playgrounds. Creeks and bridges were mentioned. The monuments and historic buildings were mentioned and the Pagoda singled out as a special historic park structure. One enthusiast noted the great value of the park to the neighborhood and the community as a historical and cultural resource.

D6. What Do You Like Least?

This question also required a written response and the most frequently noted item was concern about homosexual cruising on foot and from cars in parking lot. Also mentioned were drug dealing, unleashed dogs and their feces, traffic both around and within the park, the poor condition of the roads, trash and graffiti, users who play loud music, and a degraded natural environment. On this topic the poor condition of the creeks and banks were mentioned most

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often. Also noted was the perception that there is too much asphalt and too many parking areas. Not being able to circle around within the park without going onto adjacent streets was another criticism. Some respondents commented on a lack of knowledge of upcoming events as a least-liked aspect and noted their preference for increased event advertising.

D7. Suggested Improvements

These written responses identified and grouped some specific desires and needs for many of the park users. More, readily accessible restrooms that are well distributed throughout the park were a top response. An increase in park rangers or police patrols was requested to discourage undesirable behavior. Better publicity of upcoming events both in the media and in the park was requested. Several respondents also mentioned pedestrian circulation allowing a complete circuit of the park without going out on the streets, more parking for the Conservatory and Sunken Gardens, fewer large parking lots, improved roads and walks, more benches for the elderly, and the re-establishment of the bridge from the Sunken Gardens to the west bank of Bean Creek. In other areas, requests were made for the gardens to be open later in the evening, lighting at the tennis courts and the Raymond Street trail underpass, cleaning and brush-cutting of the creeks and banks, planting more native plants and more trees of greater variety, creating more native plants and bird habitat, establishing more benches and places to sit, and mowing more often.

Additional activities requested also turned up groupings of comments. The top request was the desire for more concerts in the Sunken Gardens as well as the Amphitheater. Shakespeare in the park was requested. More individual and league sport programs and venues were listed including softball and baseball leagues, tennis tournaments, lap swimming and foot races. A junior park ranger program was requested. Also listed were art classes, an art fair, nature walks, farmer's market, Christian programs, wine tasting events, and an annual festival.

E. USER SURVEY CONCLUSION

The park use survey responses are revealing of current activities and attitudes. The responses are somewhat swayed toward age biases with the respondent group all over 17 and predominantly over 36 years of age. It is likely that a younger group would have responded to park activities differently. Overall, the survey responses affirm that people come to Garfield Park because it is a green landscape, a place of horticulture and nature, and that the predominant activities are those involving enjoyment of this open space.