

Columbus Park Framework Plan

Prepared By:
Department of Planning and Development
Chicago Park District



Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Contributors | Page 2 |
| Location | Page 3 |
| Aerial Maps | Page 3 |
| Rendering | Page 5 |
| History | Page 6 |
| Statistics | Page 8 |
| Process | Page 9 |
| Concept Plan Goals | Page 11 |
| Key Challenges | Page 12 |
| Major Recommendations | Page 13 |

Contributors

Chicago Park District Staff

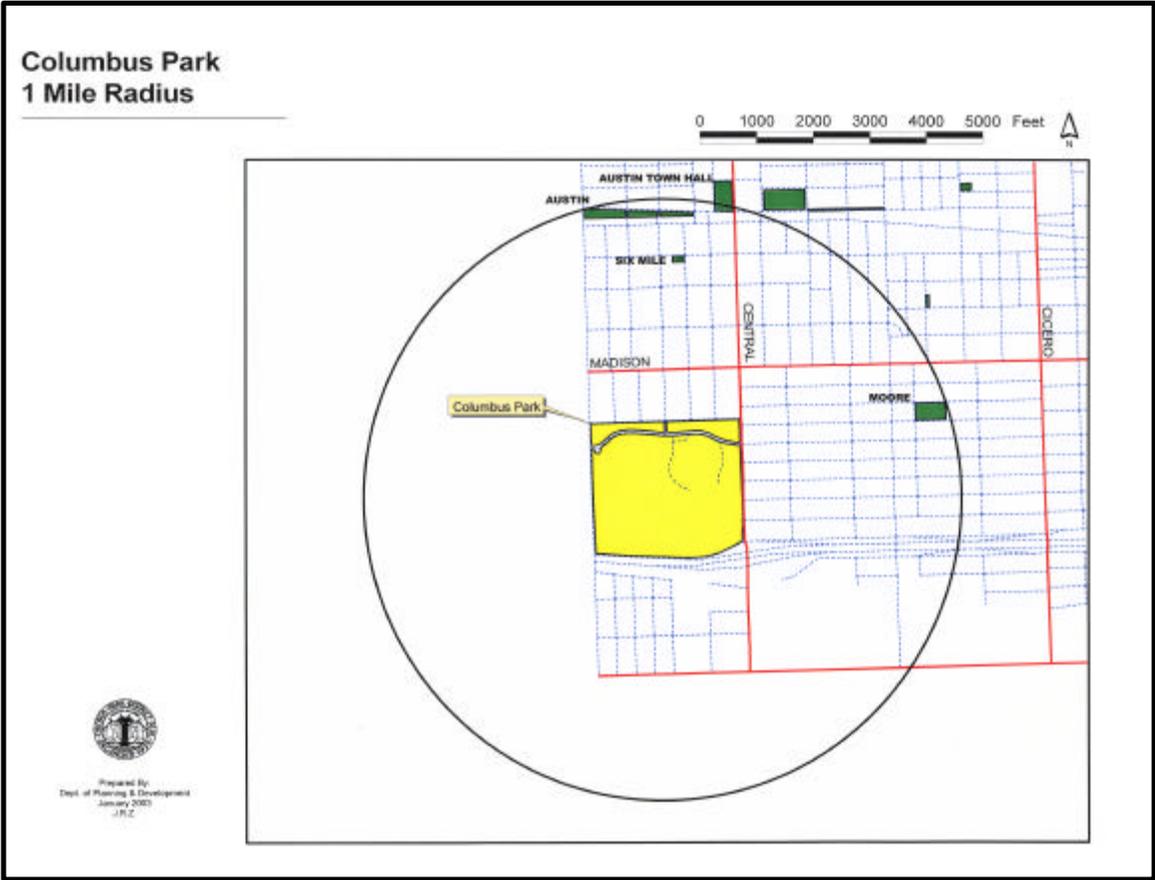
- Daniel M. Purciarello (Deputy Director of Planning and Development)
- Anne Miller (Project Manager)

Location: Aerial Maps



Columbus Park Aerial View

Aerial Maps (continued)



Columbus Park One Mile Radius

Location: History

Columbus Park is considered the masterpiece of Jens Jensen, now known as dean of Prairie-style landscape architecture. The project, Jensen's only opportunity to create an entirely new large park in Chicago, represents the culmination of years of his conservation efforts and design experimentation.

Appointed as West Park Commission General Superintendent and Chief Landscape Architect in 1905, Jensen re-designed Humboldt, Garfield, and Douglas Parks and began creating small parks such as Eckhart and Dvorak. After losing political support in 1910, he shifted his role to consulting landscape architect. Two years later, the commissioners acquired 144 acres of farmland at the western boundary of Chicago. They named the new park for Christopher Columbus (c. 1451-1506), the famous Italian explorer who "discovered" America while in the service of Spain.

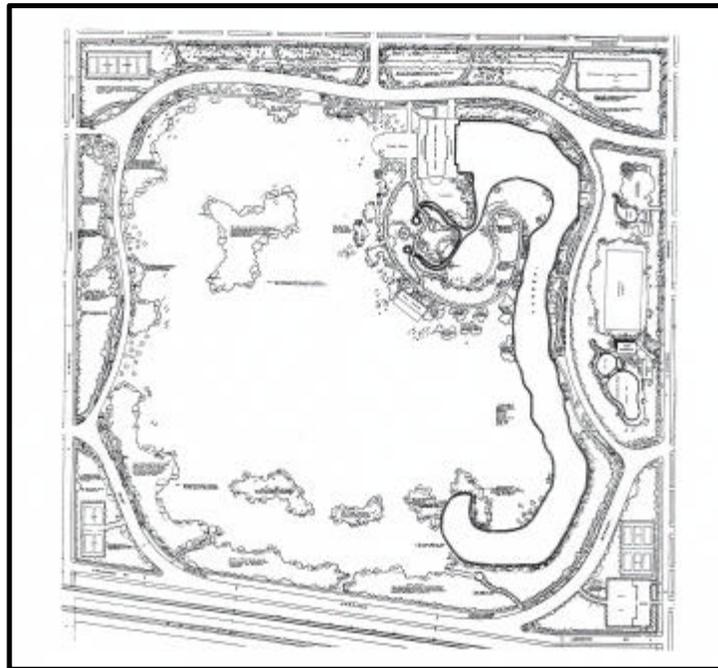
Jensen's vision for Columbus Park was inspired by the unimproved site's natural history and topography. Convinced that it was an ancient beach, Jensen designed a series of berms, like glacial ridges, encircling the flat interior part of the park. In the center area, following the traces of sand dune, he created a "prairie river" flowing from two brooks. Two natural-looking waterfalls, with ledges of stratified stonework, represent the source of the river. Throughout the park, Jensen included native plants.

Jensen also included programming elements emulating nature. Broad prairie-like meadows provide a golf course and ball fields. He designed an outdoor theatre, known as the "player's green," for

History (continued)

plays and other performances. In the children's playground area, Jensen included his favorite feature, the council ring, a circular stone bench for storytelling and campfires. In 1953, the nine acres at the park's southern boundary were destroyed to make way for the Eisenhower Expressway. Despite the loss of some land and other changes to the park at that time, Columbus Park still conveys Jensen's genius.

*Historical Profile prepared by Julia Bachrach, Historian for the Chicago Park District, available on-line at chicagoparkdistrict.com



Columbus Park Original Plan

Location: Statistics

Acres: 134.92

Region: Central
Ward: 29
Community Area: Austin (25)

Select Outdoor Facilities:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1 Swimming Pool | 4 Baseball Fields |
| 2 Softball Fields | 2 Combination Football & Soccer Fields |
| 2 Basketball Courts | 1 Volleyball Court |
| 6 Tennis Courts | 2 Playgrounds |
| 1 Nature Area | 1 Nine-Hole Golf Course |

Indoor Facilities

| |
|---|
| 1 Fieldhouse with 2 Gymnasia and Fitness Center |
| 1 Refectory Building |

Process

CPD Internal Planning Committee Meeting

Two meetings were held on February 22nd and March 22nd, 2002.

Jens Jensen Exhibit Tour/Discussion of Columbus Park

The Columbus Park Advisory Council and the Chicago Park District visited a Jens Jensen exhibit at the Chicago Cultural Center on April 18, 2002. The visit included a historic slide presentation and discussion of vision/goals for future improvements to Columbus Park. *A list of representatives present at this discussion can be found on page 10.*

Public Meeting

A public meeting was held on May 14, 2002. The public meeting was publicized in the local newspaper and included representation from the Columbus Park Advisory Council and other community members. Small group input was solicited in the following areas: fieldhouse area, athletic field area, southwest corner, northern edge, and the golf course/concession area. *A list of representatives present at this meeting can be found on page 10.*

**Jen Jensen Exhibit Tour/
Discussion of Columbus Park**

Participants

Julia Bachrach
Margaret Berry
Elizabeth Brown
Bernard Clay
William Dale
Mitch Glass
Alberta Johnson
Camille Lilly
Shannon Mahoney
Michael Mark
Anne Miller
Caroline O'Boyle
Dan Purciarello
Art Richardson
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Ollie Turner
Alfreda White
Beulah White
Presley White
J. Jones Willis
Barb Wood

**Columbus Park
Framework Planning Meeting**

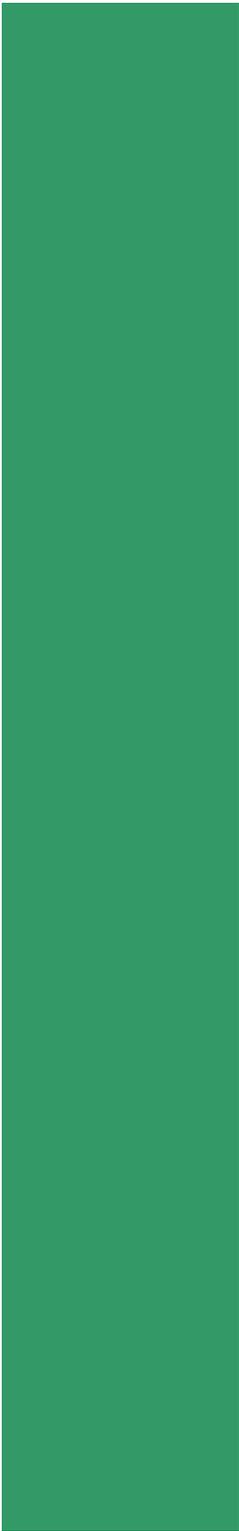
Participants

Julia Bachrach
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Willie Dickson
Annie Farrel
Katherine B. Feuz
Robert Hawkins
Barbara Hoy
Katherine Hurus
Alberta Johnson
James Johnson
Charlie Matthews
Eliza Matthews
Dorothy McGee
Christine Miller
Joyce Paris
Sylvester Stylas
Dwayne Touss
Presley White
Inez Wilson

Concept Plan Goals

Through the different meetings held, the following concept plan goals were developed:

- Balance a desire to renovate/restore certain historical characteristics of the park with current programming needs such as active recreation and picnicking
- Reintroduce historical layers of Jensen's plantings where possible
- Tie separate areas of the park together with paths and plants so that the park feels whole
- Reconnect the north portion of Columbus Park to the south, across Jackson
- Address perceived or real safety concerns in the park
- Reactivate the southwest corner and integrate the space into the park
- Address immediate and future capital issues such as drainage, erosion, parking, furnishings, lighting and paving
- Enhance programming opportunities throughout the park
- Develop a comprehensive park management and maintenance plan



Key Challenges

After the goals were established, key challenges were identified from the list, they include:

- Balance of historic restoration goals with current program and community needs/desires
- Funding

Major Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to achieve the concept plan goals:

- Restore council ring, wading pool and shelter historic features
- Create new signature playground along Central Avenue and integrate into historic children's playground landscape
- Remove playground along northern perimeter
- Restore nature path to northern perimeter
- Improve golf building area, including parking and circulation
- Add new golf concession building and remove non-conforming structures
- Improve traffic circulation by golf course/refectory area by adding a traffic light on Jackson, and reconfiguring parking lot
- Extend prairie river/lagoon to original form
- Create bridge over prairie river by fieldhouse
- Reconfigure athletic field
- Reintroduce historical layers of Jensen's plantings when appropriate
- Re-activate southwest corner of park by: opening an office/restroom in existing building; creating a small parking lot; and adding a soccer field