

# OVERTON PARK MASTER PLAN

A 20 Year Program of Park Improvements and Renewal



Prepared for:

City of Memphis  
Memphis Park Commission

Ritchie Smith Associates

April 1988

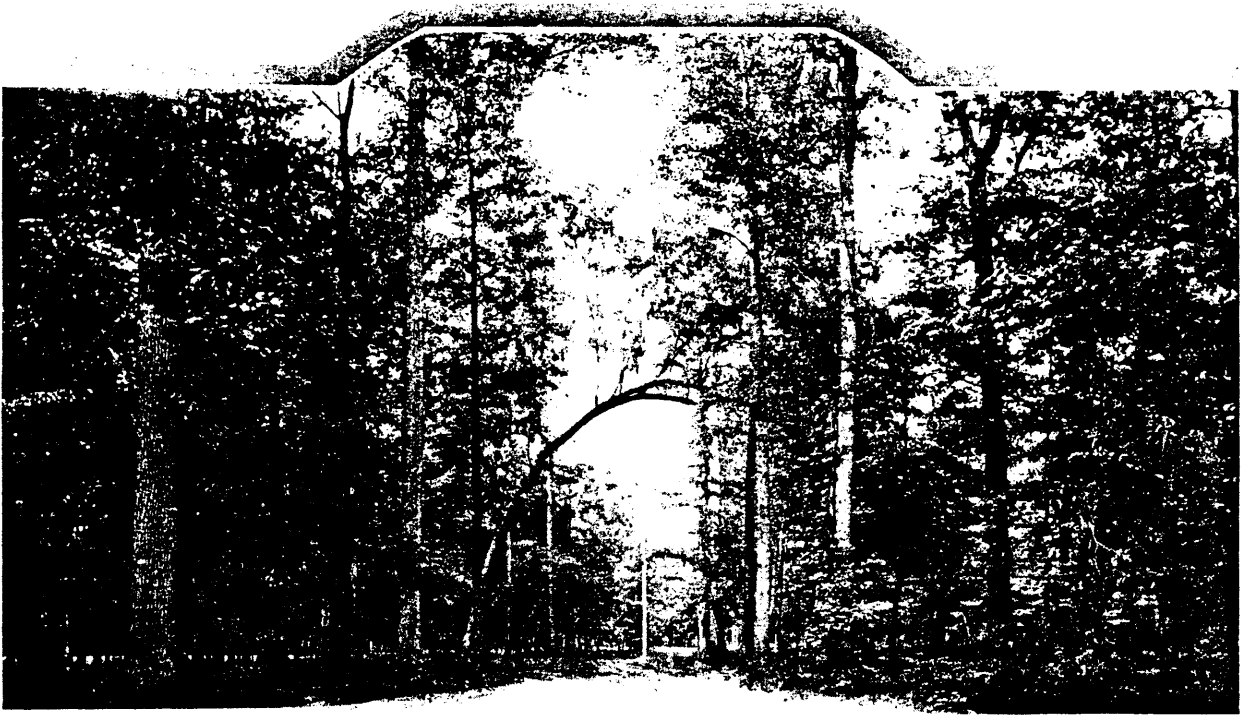


Overton Park has been referred to as the "crown jewel" of the Memphis park system. This is an appropriate reference because of the inherent natural beauty of park open spaces and forest, because of the diverse social and ethnic make-up of park users, and because Overton is home to such prominent Memphis institutions as Brooks Museum, Memphis College of Art, and Memphis Zoo and Aquarium.

The ideas in this report are the result of an 18 month open planning process. This effort has been continuously informed by a wide array of Memphians, and has been prepared by a multi-disciplinary consultant team.

This Master Plan represents the first comprehensive assessment of the park since its inception in 1901, and accordingly, the scope of proposed improvements and renewal is 20 years.





Overton Park Forest - ca. 1913

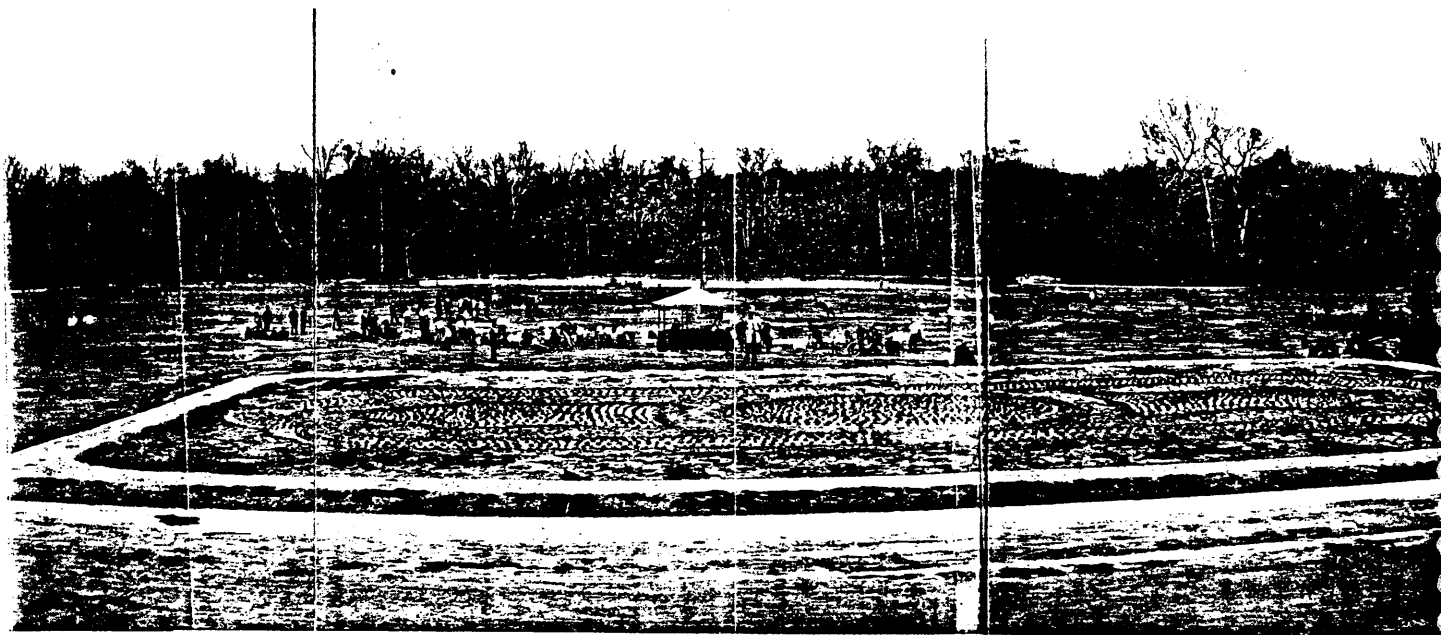


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Greensward Panorama - Looking East From Main Pavilion - 1912.



PLAY GROUNDS

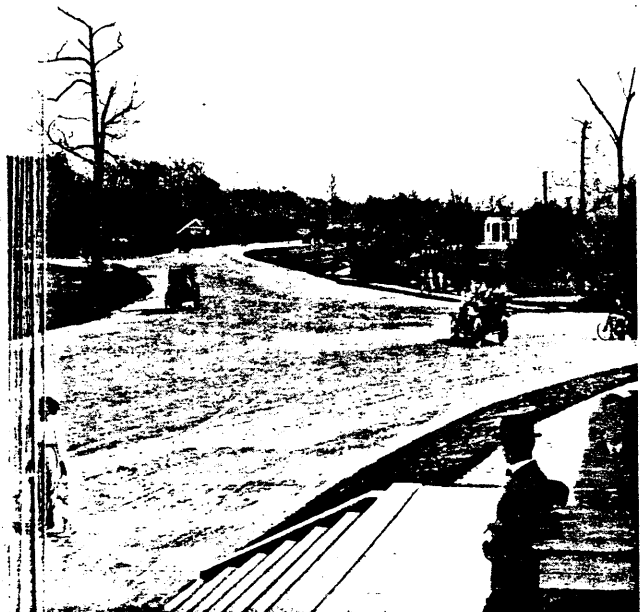
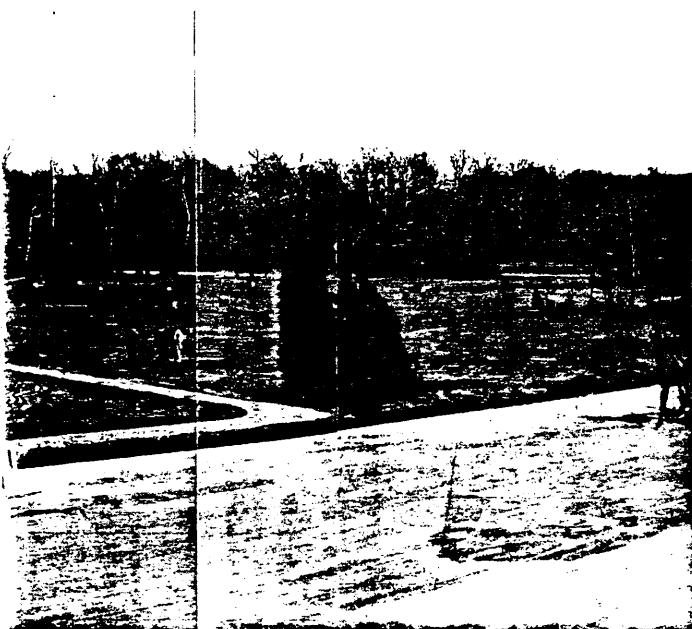


# VERTON PARK MASTER PLAN

## I. HISTORIC CONTEXT

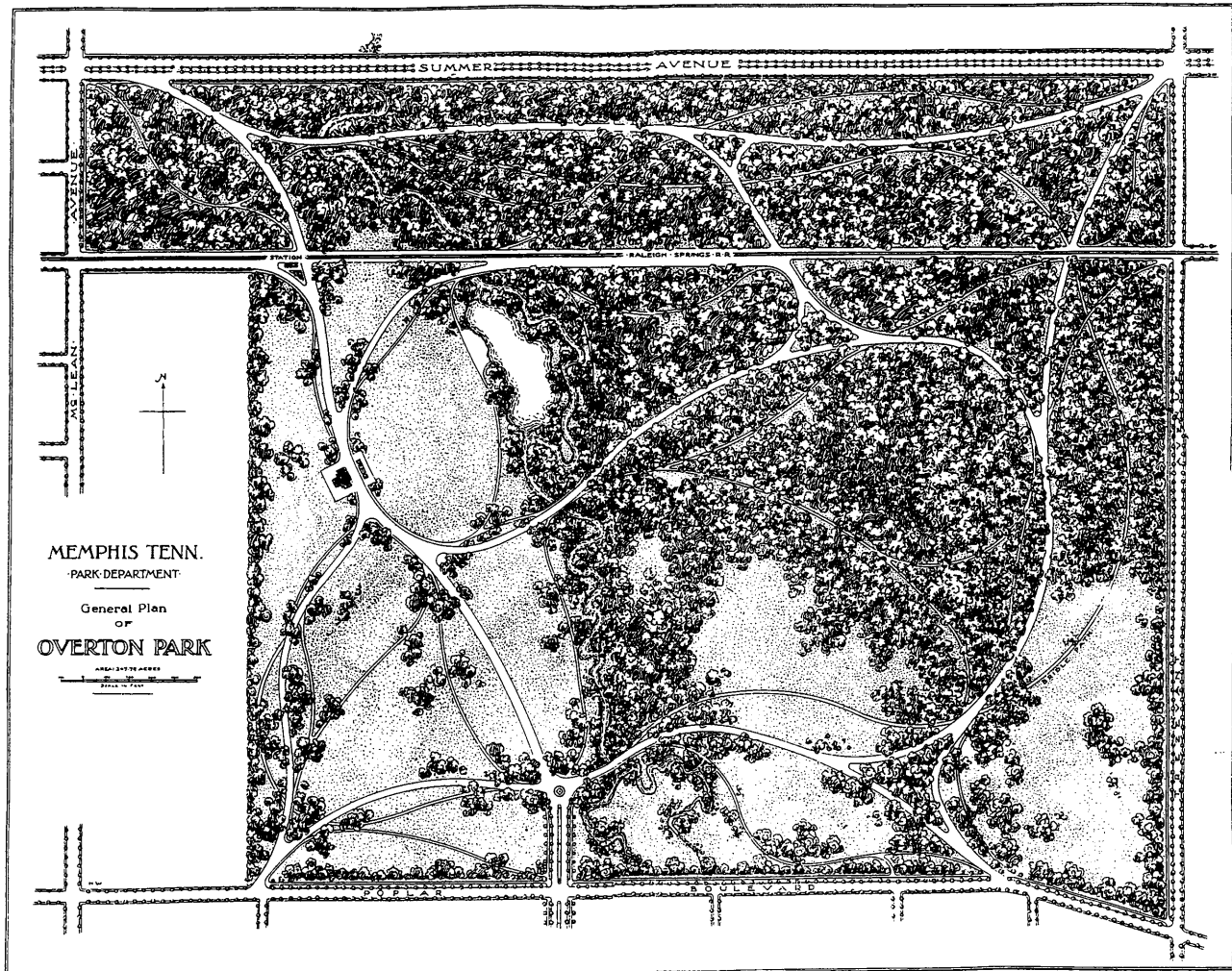
Overton Park, located in the heart of our city, is Memphis' most prominent park. The 342 acre park, along with the parkway system, was planned by Kansas City landscape architect George Kessler in 1901. Mr. Kessler was retained by the Memphis Park Commission, formed one year earlier by act of the Tennessee Legislature. The founding of the Memphis Park Commission represented a bold and innovative action, particularly among southern cities. This broad policy innovation was matched in kind by the work of Mr. Kessler, in the excellence of his overall recommendations and in the design and execution of his plans. It is noteworthy that much of Memphis' early eastward development was sparked and guided by the construction of the parkways and Overton Park.

Throughout its history, the Park has been a unique resource of natural, cultural, and recreational significance. In addition to being the first major metropolitan park in Memphis, the evolutionary growth of Overton Park has included the city's first public golf course (1904), the first zoo (1906), and the first public art museum (1916). Overton Park maintains its pre-eminent role as a focus for the arts and for passive recreation, within the context of untrammelled nature. Throughout all seasons, it serves the widest diversity of people, both locally and regionally.



VERTON





Original Park Plan by George Kessler - 1902.



## II. MASTER PLAN SUMMARY

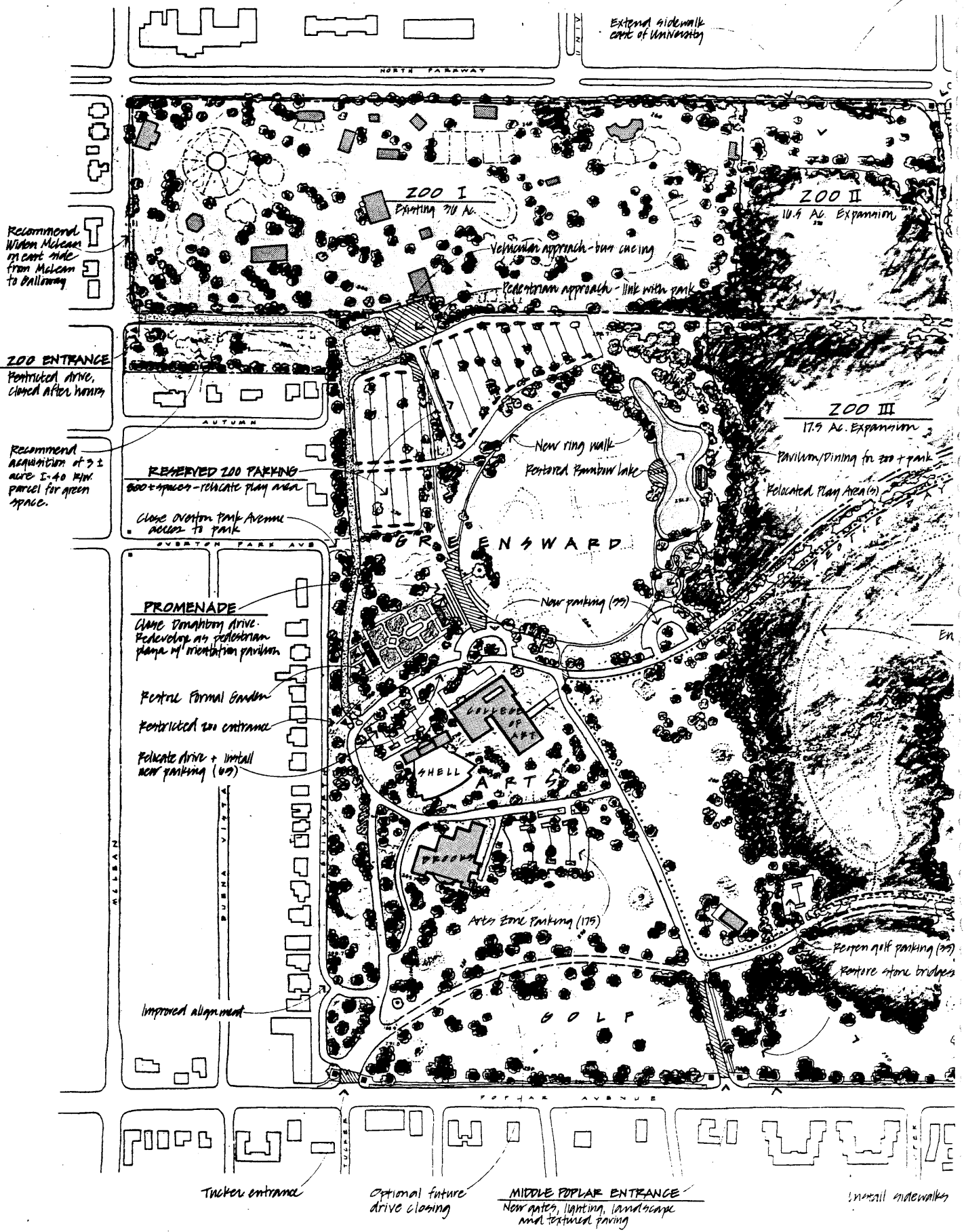
The current Master Plan effort, begun in 1986, marks the first instance since 1901 that a comprehensive study of the park has been commissioned. Like the pioneering work of Mr. Kessler, this plan is intended as an actionable document. The planning team has attempted to deliver not only a program of capital improvements but also a consensus of support for these improvements. The latter has entailed input from a wide array of Memphians who comprise the mosaic of park users and constituents. In-park surveys, a questionnaire, and numerous public meetings were conducted to review the Planning Team's ideas. This process has resulted in a base of support for the Master Plan, as well as increased awareness and appreciation for the park in general.

In essence, the Master Plan is intended to guide a sequence of park improvements and management actions for a period of 20 years. These improvements and actions can be described in three broad categories:

- 1) Resolve park-wide problems including traffic congestion and parking, visitor orientation, and perceptions of insecurity.
- 2) Ensure coordination and compatibility among all park institutions, especially those with current expansion plans: Brooks Museum, Memphis Zoo and Aquarium, and Memphis College of Art.
- 3) Improve the quality and condition of various recreational spaces within the park. Create more effective management practices, especially for the historic and forest resources.

The Master Plan suggests that the basic types of land uses and passive recreational activities within the park remain unchanged. However, the areas and spaces which support these activities should be improved. In particular, the Greensward (21ac.) and the Virgin Forest (175ac.) are recognized as the prime natural assets in the park, and prescriptions for detailed analysis, enhancement and management are included.

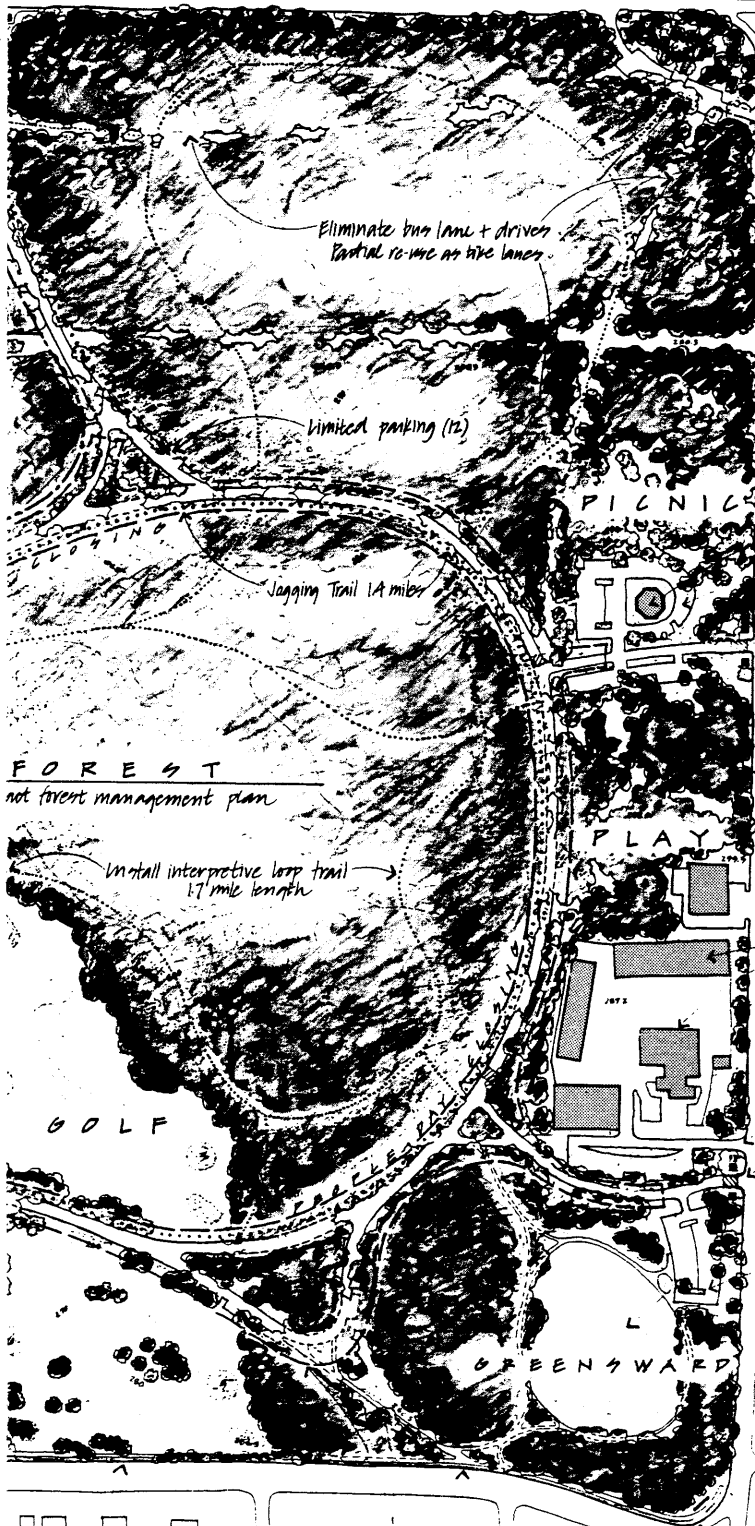






Close secondary zoo entrance + parking

Improved park entrance, signage + landscape



Eliminate bus lane + drives  
Partial re-use as bike lanes

Limited parking (12)

Jagging Trail 1.4 miles

FOREST  
not forest management plan

Install interpretive loop trail  
1.7 mile length

GOLF

PICNIC

ID

PLAY

GREENSWARD

Limited entrance + parking loop (25)

Close park entrance  
Proposed Bridge Street connector

Historic Picnic Pavilion

Redesign entrance + parking (100)

Maintenance core area to remain

Reformat maintenance entrance - 15 car lot

New public entrance

Remove ancillary maintenance building and  
paving. Establish new Greensward + ring walk.

New public parking (95)



## OVERTON PARK MASTER PLAN

City of Memphis  
Memphis Park Commission

Ritchie Smith Associates  
March 1988

Eliminate forest drives.  
Replace with limited parking (40)

Eliminate vehicular entrance  
Install pedestrian paths

Improved signage  
and identity; landscape





MIDDLE POPLAR ENTRANCE - New Gates, Signage, Lighting, Landscape, Special Road Surface.



EAST END POPLAR ENTRANCE - Closed to Vehicles. Bike and Pedestrian Only.



With many park land uses relatively fixed, the Master Plan concentrates on access and circulation. While an outright traffic ban was ruled out due to the necessity of access to key institutions, it was recognized that many of the "carriageway" drives are outmoded. To relieve the congestion and confusion in these meandering carriageways, a new and simplified circulation plan is proposed. This plan proposes that the automobile be restricted to necessary and least intrusive routes, while the pedestrian or bicyclist has the freedom to follow a variety of pathways. The Plan includes elimination of certain park drives and entrances. With improved physical identity to these entrances, and more destination oriented circulation and parking, the park will function in a more convenient and secure manner. Elimination of certain drives will enhance the quality of prime open spaces such as the Greensward, and the continued (if not expanded) "People Day" concept of restricted weekend traffic will protect both the visitor experience and the ecological integrity of the Forest.

Following are selected highlights of the Master Plan, with emphasis on improvements recommended in the next 4 years.

1. SIMPLIFY ENTRANCES and DRIVES

Reduce the length of park drives from 6 miles to 4, and park entrances from 11 to 6. Close the bus lane, Doughboy drive, and other duplicate roads reclaiming pedestrian space. Improve the visibility and signage of all park entrances. Create more destination-oriented access and parking for all park facilities.

2. IMPROVE MIDDLE POPLAR ENTRANCE

Improve the "main entrance" into the park with new gateposts, monument signage, lighting, landscape, and textured paving.

3. CLOSE EAST POPLAR ENTRANCE

Eliminate vehicular traffic at this entrance, which is hazardous though not heavily used. Retain as a pedestrian entrance with continuous sidewalks along Poplar Avenue.



4. IMPROVE NORTH PARKWAY ENTRANCE

Encourage access from the north and underused side of the park. Improve entrance with new gateposts, monument signage, lighting, landscape, and textured paving.

5. ART ZONE PARKING

New shared parking (175 cars) for Brooks Museum, which is undergoing a major \$7.0M expansion, the College of Art, and Wallenburg Shell. The complementary use patterns of these facilities will allow optimal use of this lot.

6. ZOO ACCESS and PARKING

The Master Plan for Memphis Zoo and Aquarium, prepared by Design Consortium of New Orleans, recommends a single zoo entrance and large south parking area of over 900 spaces. As these improvements are implemented, along with increased zoo visitorship, develop a restricted "zoo only" vehicular drive. This will have signed and controlled access at each end: Galloway near McLean and the park loop road northwest of the Shell.

7. GOLF COURSE PARKING

Consider rehabilitation of former parking area (35 cars) east of golf club house.

8. PARK-NEIGHBORHOOD INTERFACE

Reduce the intensity of park uses along the western park edge adjacent to the residential neighborhood. Close Overton Park Avenue entrance to traffic; maintain as pedestrian entry. As described above, zoo traffic should be isolated from other park and neighborhood traffic. It is recommended that the City acquire the 3.0 acre portion of the I-40 right-of-way, east of McLean and south of Galloway. This would extend the park westward to McLean and would create a landscape buffer for the neighborhood.



## 9. GREENSWARD IMPROVEMENTS

Maintain the Greensward as the prime open space in the park. Create a Promenade at the site of Doughboy Drive, to improve pedestrian access to the zoo and provide for a variety of uses: strolling, skating, sitting, socializing etc. Add parking (65 cars) and a ring walk encircling the Greensward.

## 10. RAINBOW LAKE RESTORATION

Restore Rainbow Lake as the eastern and historic visual terminus of the Greensward. Includes pool restoration, lakeside seating areas and landscape.

## 11. FORMAL GARDEN and PAVILION

Restore Formal Garden to an acceptable level of maintenance. Install an orientation pavilion, recalling the character of the 1902 structure, at the east edge of the Formal Garden.

## 12. FOREST MANAGEMENT

Retain forestry consultant for evaluation and long term management plan for 175 acre urban forest. Presence of "invader species" - Kudzu, honeysuckle, and privet - requires remedial action and periodic monitoring.

Following are recommendations which are deemed appropriate for Years 5 through 20.

### 1. PEDESTRIAN and BICYCLE TRAILS

Create a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails throughout the park, utilizing former drives where appropriate. Create a 1.4 mile jogging trail, with minimum intersection with other modes of traffic.

### 2. FOREST INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Create a 1.7 mile forest loop trail with interpretive signage and display relating to the forest ecology of this rare and valued resource. Install parking bollards and other protective measures as required.



3. IMPROVE EAST PARKWAY ENTRANCE

Create a single park entrance from East Parkway serving the Picnic Pavilion area. New gateway, signage, lighting, landscape, and textured paving. Revised parking layout for 100 cars.

4. IMPROVE GALLOWAY ENTRANCE

Improve the primary west entry with new gate posts, monument signage, lighting, landscape, and textured paving.

5. RELOCATE PLAY AREA

Triggered by expansion of zoo parking, relocate play area to east edge of Greensward, south of Rainbow Lake.

6. MINOR DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS

Modify south end of Kennilworth Street near The Parkview, for increased traffic safety. Modify drive at northeast corner of park to restrict Forest access. Limited parking for 35 cars.

7. NEW SOUTHEAST GREENSWARD

Remove ancillary buildings and paving at south end of Maintenance Compound. Retain core maintenance facilities. Create new Greensward in this area, as other park open spaces exceed their capacity for use. This will mark a significant enhancement of the park image at the prime intersection of Poplar and East Parkway. Create separate entrances for maintenance vehicles and public traffic, with respective parking lots of 65 and 85 cars.

8. RESTORE MONUMENTS and MEMORIALS

Implement a sustained restoration program, possibly aided by private funds. Prioritize restoration according to structural condition and historic significance. Program should include stone bridges, ditches, and swales.



9. LANDSCAPE and FURNISHINGS

Implement programs for periodic landscape planting - particularly tree replacement - and installation of site furnishings: benches, table, trash receptacles, etc.

10. FOREST MANAGEMENT

Continued implementation and revision of Forest Management Plan.



Rainbow Lake - ca. 1913.



# VERTON PARK: Capital Improvements Program - Years One through Four

YEAR 1	\$130,000	Art Zone parking (175 cars)
	210,000	Reroute drive between Shell and MCA; new parking (65)
	40,000	Park-wide signage and graphics
	80,000	Greensward parking areas (2 - 55 cars)
	8,000	Forest management program
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	\$468,000	YEAR 1 SUBTOTAL
YEAR 2	\$340,000	Improve middle Poplar entrance
	100,000	Improvements at east Poplar entrance, Overton Park Avenue entrance, and bus lane area (closure by DPW)
	8,000	Forest management program
	<hr/>	
	\$448,000	YEAR 2 SUBTOTAL
YEAR 3	\$110,000	Improve North Parkway entrance
	200,000	Restore Rainbow Lake and adjacent area
	50,000	Signage and site improvements: Poplar and East Parkway
	30,000	Restore golf parking (35 cars)
	30,000	Improve parking near North and East Parkway (35 cars)
	8,000	Forest management program
	<hr/>	
	\$428,000	YEAR 3 SUBTOTAL
YEAR 4	\$100,000	Restore Formal Garden
	220,000	Pedestrian Promenade at Doughboy Drive
	200,000	New Orientation Pavilion
	8,000	Forest management program
	<hr/>	
	\$528,000	YEAR 4 SUBTOTAL
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	\$1,872,000	FOUR YEAR SUBTOTAL
	187,200	SUGGESTED 10% CONTINGENCY
	<hr/>	
	\$2,059,200	TOTAL



# **VERTON PARK: Possible Future Improvements - Years Five through Twenty**

\$ 50,000	Park signage and graphics (complete)
200,000	New East Parkway Entrance and Picnic Pavilion parking (100)
150,000	Galloway entrance improvements
100,000	Ancillary parking areas
220,000	Relocate Play Area (Zoo parking expansion)
130,000	Greensward ring walk and site improvements
200,000	Jogging trail, bicycle trails, complete sidewalks
100,000	Forest interpretive trail and furnishings
200,000	Restore park monuments and memorials; historic plaques
200,000	Restore stone bridges and creeks
600,000	New Greensward at southeast corner; new public entrance and parking (85). Cost does not include relocation or consolidation of existing south area maintenance facilities.
300,000	General site furnishings, lighting and landscape
80,000	Ongoing forest management: 16 years @ \$5,000/year
<hr/>	
\$2,530,000	SIXTEEN YEAR SUBTOTAL
379,500	SUGGESTED 15% CONTINGENCY
<hr/>	
\$2,909,500	TOTAL

## **VERTON PARK: Additional Recommendations - By Others**

Department of Engineering	Widen McLean from Galloway to North Parkway; add one lane to east side. Improve timing of traffic signal at McLean and North Parkway.
City of Memphis	Acquire 3.0+ acre undeveloped parcel in I-40 right-of-way, east of McLean and south of Galloway.
Memphis Zoo and Aquarium	Improve south Zoo parking lot with new entry plaza and restricted zoo drive and gates.





Brooks Museum - West Entrance Facade of Original Rogers Wing - 1916.



Informal Sports Play on the Greensward - 1987.



### III. PARK ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

#### Survey of Park Users

One prime objective of the master planning process is a thorough understanding of the park and its users, both past and present, in order to make appropriate recommendations for the future. An evaluation of the types of users and activities in the park was prepared, utilizing direct observation and survey techniques.

During the weekend of August 23-24, 1986, members of the Planning Team and Park Commission staff conducted in-park surveys. Five hundred and twenty five people were interviewed at six locations: Golf Course, Brooks Museum, College of Art/Shell area, Greensward, Zoo entrance, and Picnic Pavilion/east forest area.

At the same time, a similar set of written questionnaires was mailed to 61 neighborhood leaders throughout the metropolitan area. This was one means of establishing contact with a broader spectrum of the community. These questionnaires had a 36% return rate.

In addition to these surveys, interviews were conducted with leaders of each major park institution. The annual attendance figures for these institutions, from 1986, underscore the importance of Overton as the major metropolitan park in Memphis:

Brooks Museum	50,000	verified
Memphis College of Arts	40,000	approximate
Wallenburg Shell	10,000	approximate
Memphis Zoo and Aquarium	548,000	verified
Golf Course	50,000	verified
	<hr/> 698,000	TOTAL

By conservative estimation, there are an additional 150,000 annual visits to the park, including those who come for walking, jogging, bicycling, pleasure driving picnicking, the forest, the playground and unstructured "free play" and recreation. This would bring the total number of annual park visits to 850,000.



Responses to the survey and questionnaire indicate that, as expected, the most frequent park visitors are from adjacent neighborhoods in midtown and around Rhodes College. However, there were responses from many other neighborhoods and from all 12 zip code areas between the Mississippi River, the Loosahatchie River, Germantown, and the Mississippi state line. The 525 survey respondents included visitors from other neighboring states and even two European countries. Approximately 60% of those who were surveyed visit the park primarily on weekends. 60% of all respondents visit the park on a frequency between once per year and once per month. 25% of all respondents visit the park at least once per week, with a preference for bicycling, and playground use. Survey respondents arrived by the following modes:

Automobile	89%
Walk, Jog, Bicycle	8%
Public or Charter Bus	3%

Most of the respondents en route to a particular destination such as Brooks Museum, did not visit other park institutions or amenities. Among those not visiting any institution, the preferred activities were passive in nature: golfing, bicycling, playground use, picnicking, walking and jogging. Many listed "relaxation" or "enjoying scenery" as primary reasons for being in the park.

Both the survey and written questionnaire included open-ended questions for the respondent to express personal concerns and interests. Some of these issues are noteworthy. Many are concerned about security, citing either specific incidents or a general perception of insecurity. Another dominant concern is access and travel through the park. Criticisms include: too many entrances, poor orientation and signage, too much traffic, and too little parking. There is significant interest in the physical condition of the park, which one respondent described as "shabby". Several respondents suggested upgrading or better care for park vegetation and grounds, picnic tables, drinking fountains, rest rooms, and historic memorials.

Suggestions for improvements within the park include: "better recreational



space", jogging trails, bridle paths, play areas for smaller children, more benches and picnic areas, improved parking and orientation, and a restored Rainbow Lake. Simply stated, people are concerned that the park be safe, clean, and easily accessible. In addition, Memphians care about the way it looks. For additional details, refer to Survey of Visitor Use and Traffic Patterns in Overton Park (Allen & Hoshall Inc. with Smith 1987).

### Program Recommendations

From its founding in 1901 to the present day, Overton Park has served a combination of interests. However, the primary purpose is to provide a natural environment in which Memphis' expanding urban population can find respite amidst the city's hustle and bustle and refreshment through recreation in convenient, safe and scenic surroundings.

Over the years the park has also become an important cultural focus and an ecological and educational resource. More than ever, it is a challenge to balance the demands from the varied individuals and interest groups competing for use within a limited space. User concerns and interests range from the virgin forest, an irreplaceable natural resource within our city center, to Brooks Museum and the cluster of institutions, to the most visited attraction in Memphis - the Zoo and Aquarium. It is the fact that these interests range so widely from the works of nature to the works of humankind, that makes Overton such a dynamic place.

During the 20 year development of this Master Plan, it is recommended that few wholly new activities can or should be accommodated within the park. In most cases, there is simply no space available for such development, short of "recycling" and multiple use of existing spaces. Instead, efforts should be made to repair or enhance existing facilities and activity areas within the park.

As described, virtually all of the recreational activities in the park are passive in nature. Active recreational uses, such as organized team sports or court sports which require a large expanse of paving, are deemed inappropriate.



The noise and impacts of these uses do not co-exist easily or harmoniously with the passive and tranquil activities in the park. The concentration of heavy activity in and around such uses will be damaging to the meadows and other park natural areas, especially the forest. Furthermore, areas for high intensity recreation have been historically absent from the park since its establishment in 1901.

A list of all activities in the park has been prepared from direct observation and surveys. Many of these activities have occurred since 1901, and all - in one form or another - should continue into the future.

#### PASSIVE RECREATION

Picnicking

Walking and Strolling

Visiting and Courting

Group Gatherings and Reunions

Dog Walking

Relaxing and Sunbathing

Golfing

Hiking

Bicycling

Playground Use

Jogging

Roller Skating and Skateboarding

Kite Flying

Frisbee Throwing

Viewing Scenery

Nature Study and Bird Watching

Painting, Sketching and Photography

Reading

Teaching - Area Colleges and Memphis City Schools



## ACTIVE RECREATION

Soccer and Rugby (non-organized or practice)

Pickup Softball and Touch Football

Runs and Races (organized events)

## AUTO RELATED

Pleasure Driving

Cruising (more socially interactive than above)

Car Washing and Waxing

## CULTURAL and EDUCATIONAL

Visual Arts - Brooks Museum and Memphis College of Art

Performing Arts - Wallenburg Shell

Zoological Observation - Memphis Zoo and Aquarium

Ecology Study - The Forest

Following is a list of possible new uses which might be developed in the park.

## PASSIVE RECREATION

Structured Play Area for children aged 3 - 6

Barrier-Free Play Area

Feeding Ducks or Fish (Rainbow Lake)

Interpretive Forest Trail

Interpretive History Trail

The following could be developed through private concession:

Food Vending

Carriage Rides

Paddle Boats (Rainbow Lake)





Scenic Drive Between Number 4 and 5 Golf Holes.



#### IV. SITE and TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

Overton Park can be described and experienced on many levels. To the naturalist, it is an enclave of virgin hardwood timber that once covered an entire region. To the historian, its mere existence is an important milestone in Tennessee urban history, and a walk through it is to recall the legacy of once and great Memphians. To the geographer or engineer, a place of curvilinear drives in contraposition to the strict urban grid. To the environmentalist or developer, a setting for national precedent over the routing of an interstate highway. To the student of design, a legacy in the romantic and pastoral themes of the City Beautiful Movement. To the artist, a place of profound natural beauty. All of these and doubtless other perspectives on the park are important, just as all who use the park are. In addition, all must co-exist in reasonable concert with one another.

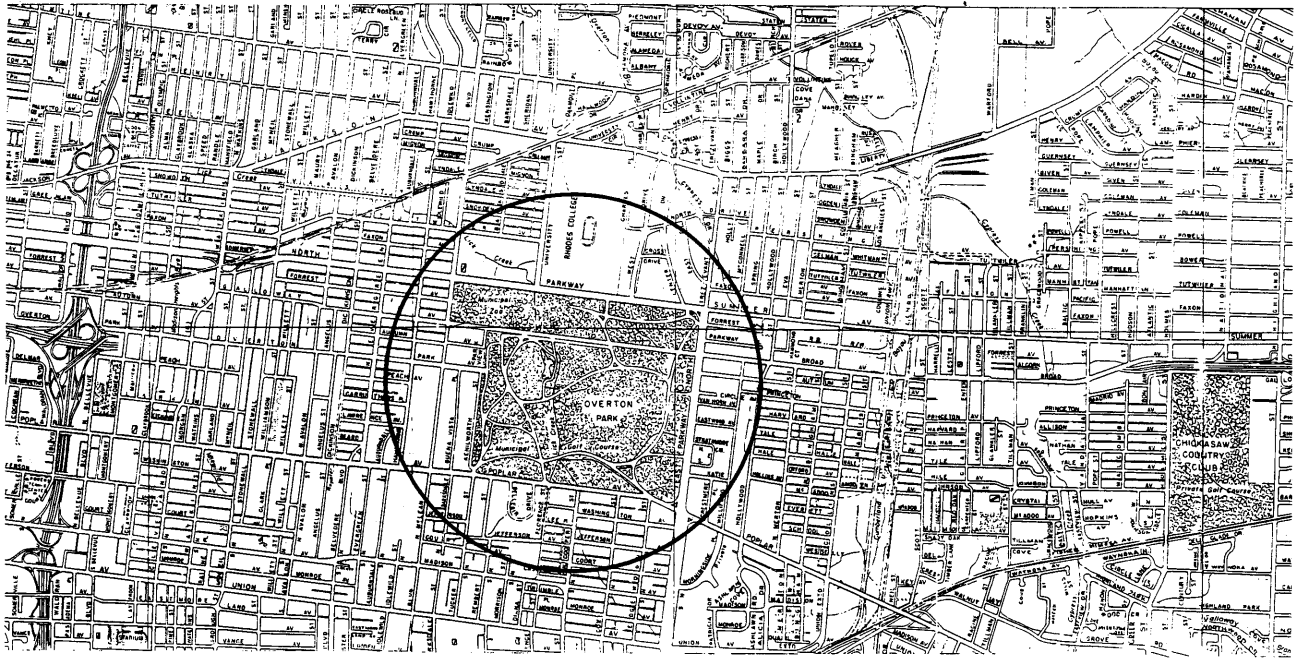
In the Master Plan process, consideration was given to six key factors affecting the park:

1. Circulation and Parking
2. Park Activities
3. Vegetation Cover
4. Historic Features
5. Aesthetic Qualities
6. Current Plans

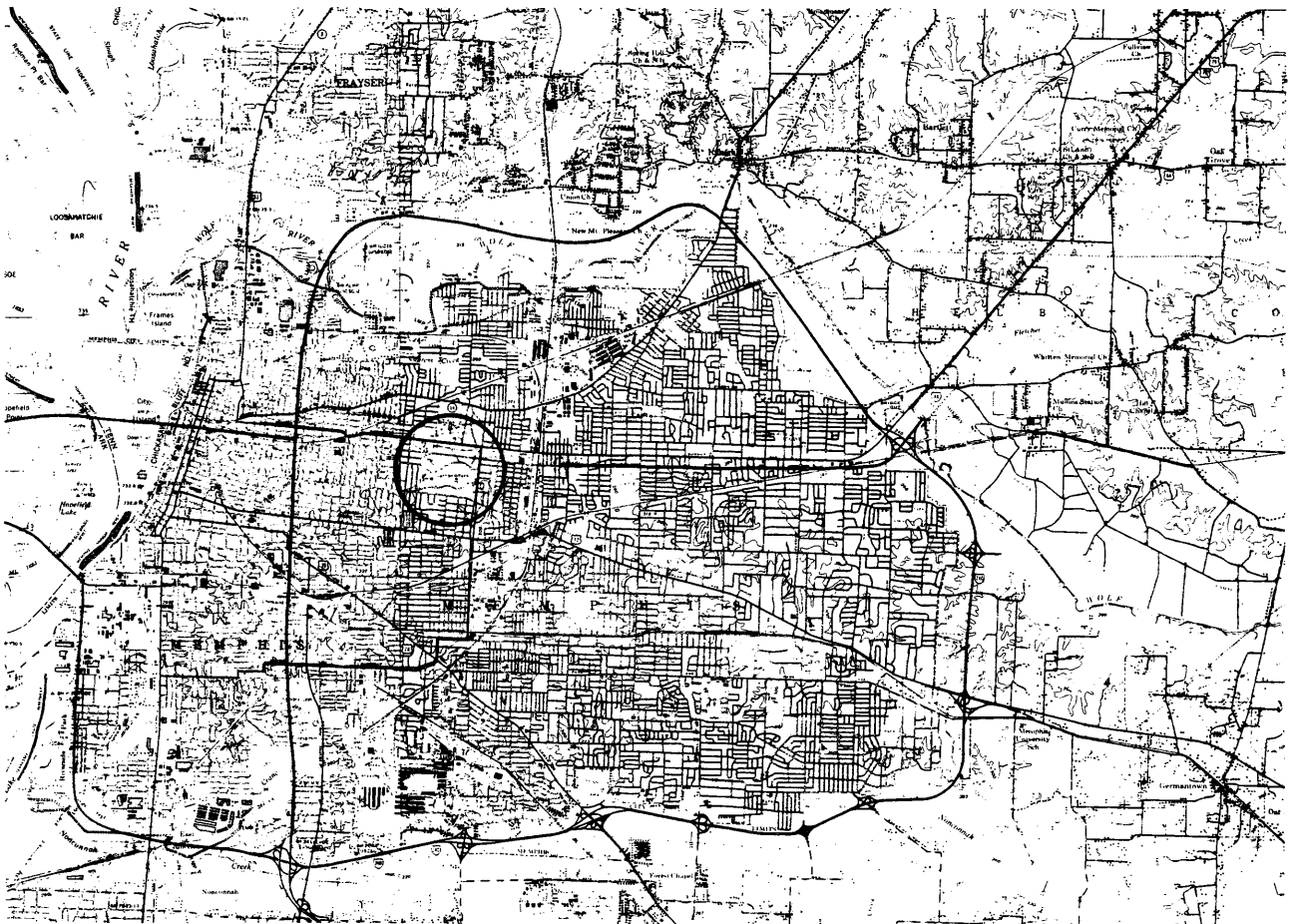
Analysis in each of these six areas can result in a more informed understanding of the park. By producing a map for each analysis, different information can be readily compared and studied. Various maps or "layers" can then be combined to form a more complete picture of the park.

To improve the content and accuracy of all analysis maps, an aerial survey was commissioned. The coverage area encompassed the 342 acre park and adjacent areas of at least 200' on all sides. The resultant survey map includes all significant park features: drives, parking areas, walkways, buildings, memorials, gardens, bridges and creeks. The survey has topographic information on a 2' contour interval, which proved especially useful.





Overton Park - Neighborhood Context.



Overton Park - City Context.



## Geographic Context

With the park base map, plus large scale maps of the surrounding area, it is possible to describe the geographic context of Overton Park. In 1901, the park occupied the eastern and growth-oriented edge of Memphis. Now it is slightly west of the metropolitan population center. Like all major parks, Overton serves on many levels. To those in the adjacent community, it is a neighborhood park. Visits are frequent and often by walking, jogging, or bicycle. To those residing in Memphis proper, it is a major city park, with beautiful meadows and forest, golf, and recreation areas, and the cultural attractions. To those in the greater Memphis region, and to visiting tourists, it is a regional park containing the city art museum, a private art college, the city zoo, an outdoor amphitheatre, and a very significant urban forest. The park is located in the central part of Memphis known as "Midtown". Developed in the early 1900's, the area is characterized by single family homes and extensive tree cover. Certain streets have an almost garden-like character. Commercial uses are generally restricted to arterial and major roads, though the immediate area around Overton park is primarily residential.

Evergreen neighborhood is located immediately west of the park, and has the closest physical relation and identity with the park. The Parkview Residence, opposite the park at Poplar and Tucker, is a significant mid-rise landmark and former hotel. In the 1980's, the rehabilitation of historic homes in Evergreen has increased with the decision not to build Interstate 40 through Midtown.

The Hein Park neighborhood and Rhodes College are situated north of the park. Snowden Elementary school and the National Cotton Council are located on North Parkway. To the east is Binghampton neighborhood, with commercial strip development on Summer Avenue, and commercial and industrial along Broad Avenue.

Across Poplar Avenue to the south are several garden apartments, one mid-rise luxury apartment, and Belleair neighborhood. Further south at Cooper and Madison is the Overton Square shopping and entertainment area.



## Circulation and Parking

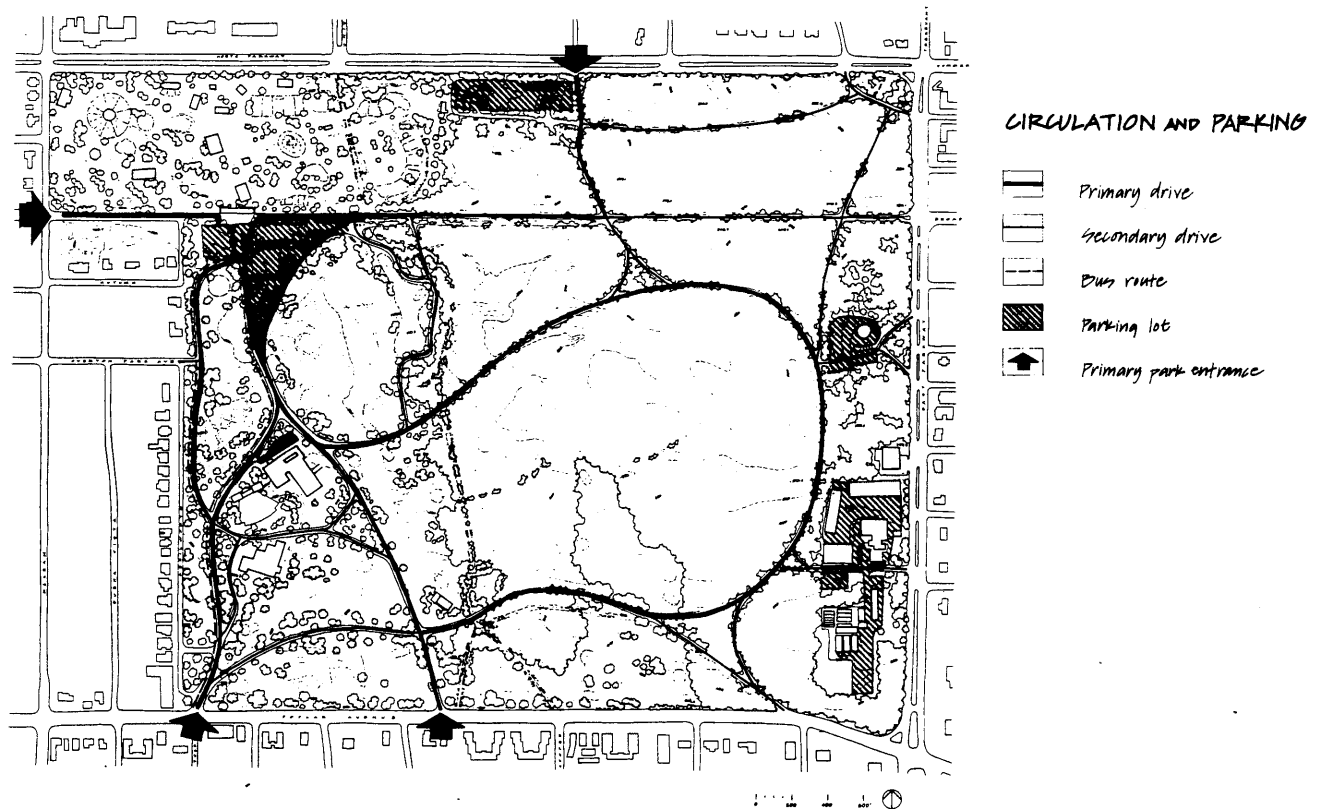
Since 1901, the role of the private automobile has changed dramatically in Overton Park, as it has in our society. In the four decades preceeding the second World War, the winding carriageways designed by George Kessler were tranquil and uncongested. Many people arrived at the park by pedestrian means or on the Raleigh Springs trolley. There was a stop near the present south zoo entrance, and the line traversed the park from west to east. When trolley travel declined, this route became the bus lane.

Since 1950, with wide availability of the automobile, the park has become more heavily congested. The growth and success of Brooks Museum, Memphis Zoo and Aquarium, and Memphis College of Art has added to the traffic demand. On spring weekends, pleasure driving and cruising exceed the capacity of many park drives, bringing traffic to a standstill and making it very difficult to enter or exit the park, or enjoy its amenities. In 1978, the Park Commission established "People Day" in the park. Approximately half of the park drives were closed on weekends, creating a large contiguous pedestrian zone in the eastern two thirds of the park. This concept, which encompasses virtually all of the forest and half of the golf course, has been effective and very popular.

Parking is another aspect of the park which is outmoded. There are only four developed lots in the park: zoo south lot (435 cars); zoo east lot (160); College of Art (20); and the east Picnic Pavilion (60). Major facilities such as Brooks Museum, Wallenburg Shell, and the Golf Course are without off-road parking. Therefore, most park visitors park in parallel fashion on existing drives. Additional destination parking lots are needed, though it is very important that these be well designed and carefully located, to protect the integrity and image of the park. The capacity of these lots should be moderate, with excess or peak period parking located on existing drives.

The orientation and signage must also be significantly improved. This is true both within and outside of the park, especially on routes leading to major attractions. Automobile routes within the park should be well marked and more direct, allowing fewer driving alternatives than at present.





Most of the traffic and transportation planning work was prepared by Allen & Hoshall, Inc. On the weekend of August 23-24, 1986, manual traffic volume counts were made at six park entrances. In addition, survey responses were collected from 525 people in the park on that weekend, as well as 22 of the 61 neighborhood leaders responding to a written questionnaire. The results indicate that approximately 80% of park visitors arrive by car, and 50% of these use only two entrances: Middle Poplar and Poplar at Tucker. These arrival patterns indicate that the park has a perceived "front" along Poplar Avenue, with East and North Parkway entrances receiving light use. Additional traffic statistics and conclusions occur in the report, Survey of Visitor Use and Traffic Patterns in Overton Park (Allen & Hoshall Inc. with Smith, 1987).

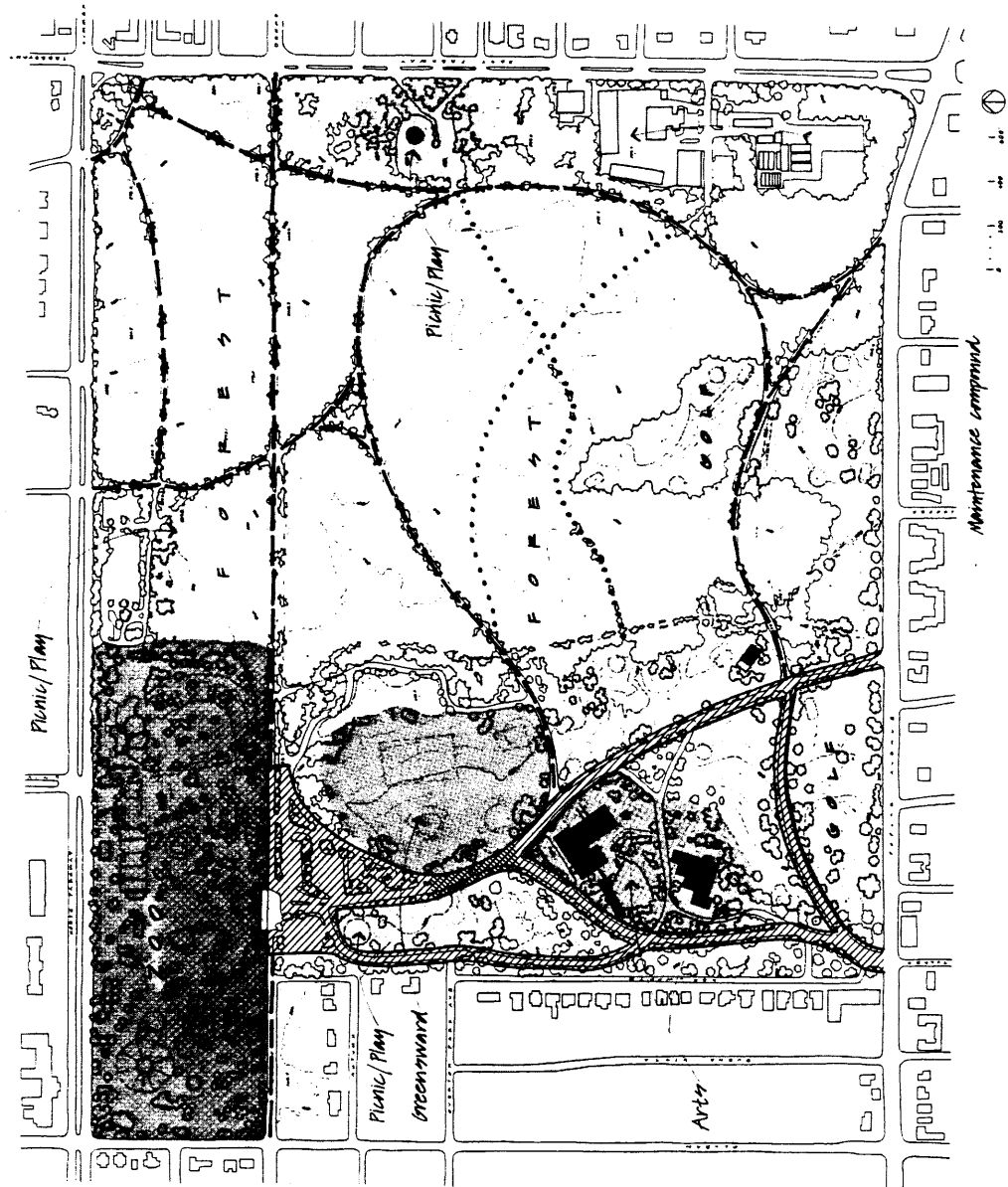


## Park Activities

Park activities have been mapped according to routes or pathways, and areas or zones of use. As expected, the more concentrated activities occur in the accessible open spaces, particularly in the western third of the park. This area includes the major institutions, the primary park entrances and drives, and the prime open space in the park - the "Greensward". During high use periods, certain activities occasionally conflict with one another. For example, heavy traffic on Doughboy drive poses hazards and impacts to concentrated pedestrian activities in this same area. Beginning in the summer of 1986, the Memphis Police Department installed temporary barriers to prohibit traffic along Doughboy drive. This solution has been well received, though its costly enforcement necessitates an evaluation of permanent design changes.

The forest, comprising 51% of the park land area, receives lower intensity use such as hiking, while the Picnic Pavilion and play area along East Parkway are moderately used. The Golf Course enjoys steady annual use. Fairways of special beauty, particularly around the forest, are used by non-golfers for strolling and even picnics. As described earlier, almost all park activities are passive in nature, regardless of their relative concentration of use. Section III lists all primary park activities.





# PARK ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY ROUTES

- Driving - heavy use
- Driving/Pedestrian - moderate use
- Hiking trails - light use
- Explanade - heavy mixed use

## ACTIVITY AREAS

- Zoo - heavy use
- Greenward - moderate use
- Arts - moderate use
- Golf - moderate use
- Picnic/Play - moderate use
- Forest - light use



## Vegetation Cover

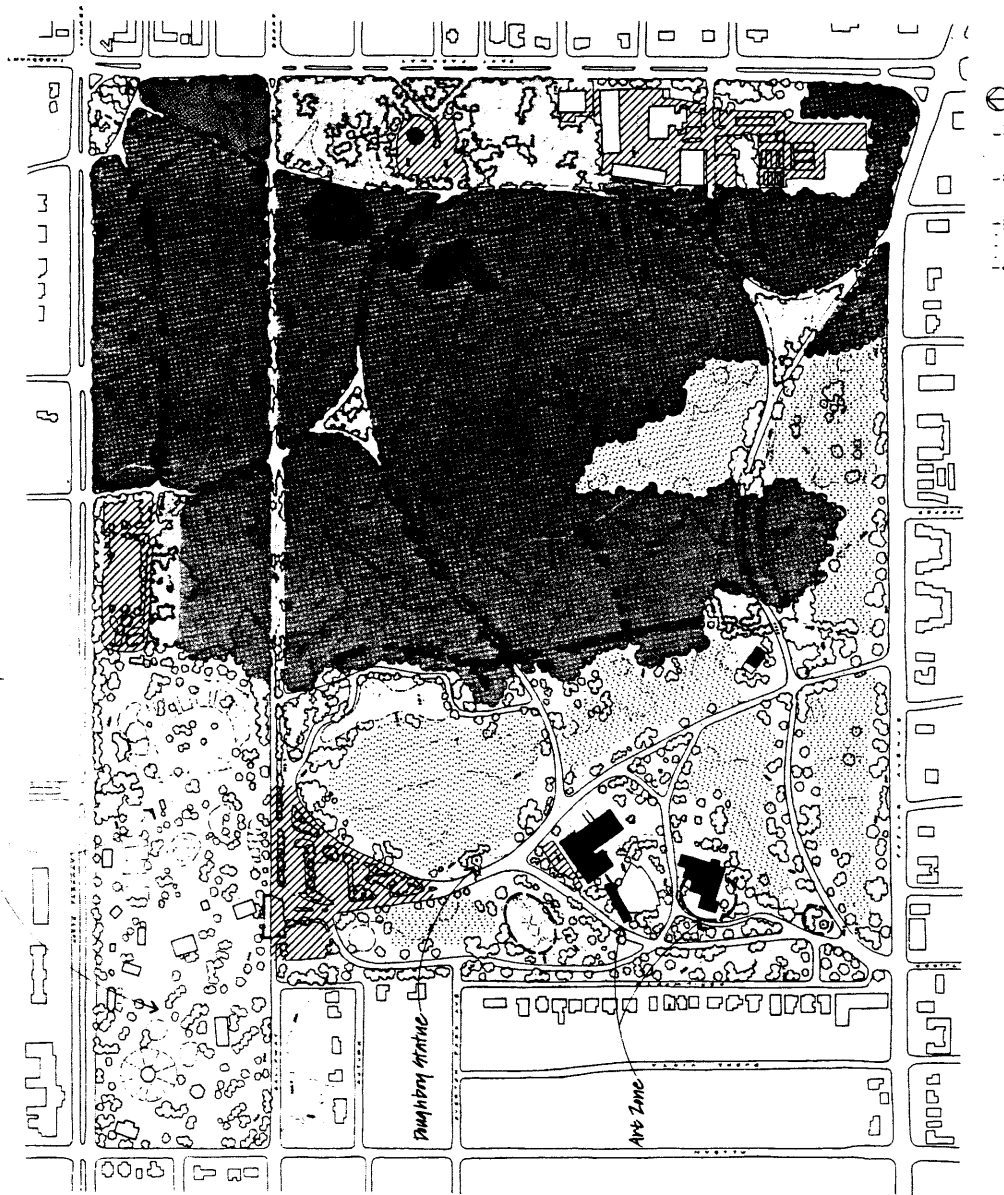
The dominant vegetation cover type in the park is the 175 acre forest, a rare and significant urban resource. This forest, largely undisturbed by human activity, is comprised of large and mature southern hardwoods: red, white and mixed oak, tulip poplar, white ash, sweetgum, hickory, cottonwood and sycamore. The forest area is as extensive now as in 1901, when "Lea Woods" was purchased by the city for park development. Certain golf fairways and the park maintenance area were located in pre-existing grazing meadows, maintained by the Lea family. Since 1901, the only forest intrusions have been the east zoo parking and picnic area, the east Picnic Pavilion and play area, the Fire station, and widening of East Parkway.

The location of the forest in an urban environment poses special challenges which must be understood in order to maintain the health and regeneration of the forest. Particular problems include air pollution and the existence of invader species such as Kudzu, honeysuckle, and privet- which cause significant competition for hardwood tree seedlings and more typical herbaceous plants. As part of this planning effort, the first comprehensive evaluation of the health and successional dynamics of the forest is underway. Species sampling has occurred in test plots comprising 10% of the forest, and a computerized data base is being prepared. Prescriptions for careful removal of invader species and other forest improvements have been made. The long life term of a forest necessitates that a management program occur over a period of years, with periodic professional monitoring and re-evaluation. The attitude of this Master Plan concerning the forest is therefore protection, conservation, and stewardship. Additional details occur in the report, Ecological Assessment and Management Recommendations for the Overton Park Forest (Guldin 1987).

Other vegetation cover types include tree groves and beautiful open lawn areas which support the predominant activities in the park. Most of the park vegetation is deciduous, as opposed to evergreen, and there has been very little new planting in decades. The Formal Garden is one of the most structured landscapes in the park, though its design and maintenance need refinement.



Zoo and Aquarium



## VEGETATION COVER

VIRGIN FOREST undisturbed intact

Forest

Disturbed area

GROVES undisturbed advent

Dense canopy over lawn

Thinned canopy over lawn

OPEN

Formal gardens

Lawn areas

Paving

NOTE: 175 Ac. virgin forest is upland hardwood type. Canopy trees include mixed oak, tulip poplar, sweetgum, white ash, shagbark hickory, sycamore and magnolia. Disturbed areas indicate forest gaps where invasive species - vines etc. - are present. Planted evergreen stands occur in the Art Zone, Daringway Plaza, and along Poplar Avenue - pine, holly etc.



## Historic Features

Overton Park includes a rich assortment of historic spaces, buildings, and memorials, and in its entirety is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Early significant features include the Greensward, Rainbow Lake, and Golf Course (1904), the Formal Gardens (1905-06), and the Pavilion (1902). The latter, known as the Dancing Pavilion, was the most important structure in the park though it was leveled by freak storm in 1936. This two story pavilion was situated directly east of the Formal Garden, and was a key orientation and gathering place.

The first institution in the park, the Memphis Zoo, developed rapidly from its modest beginning in 1906. Memphis Brooks Museum, designed by architect James Gamble Rogers in the Italian Renaissance style, was completed in 1916. The golf Club House, designed in the English Tudor Revival style, was completed in 1926. The first building for Memphis College of Art, with its prominent east facade, was completed in 1959.

Many structures from the WPA era are in need of repair, though the recent revival of Wallenburg Shell (1936) is encouraging. The condition of all park memorials, historic structures, furnishings, bridges etc. should be evaluated with the goal of phased restoration and improved care. More detailed information is listed in the report, Overton Park: The Evolution of a Park Space (Hopkins 1987).

The design of new structures, paving, lighting and site furniture should be sympathetic to the historic themes in the park. Good examples include the new addition to Brooks (1989) and the Tucker entrance gates (1955). Historic plaques should be developed for interpretation of important park features and events. A self-guided "history trail" could be established, adding a new dimension for park visitors.





Virgin Forest

## A Picnic Pavilion

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## 1 Higbee Memorial

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## Aesthetic Qualities

The analysis of aesthetic qualities is based on a visual orientation. Overton's landscape characteristics, rolling topography and patterns of meadows and forest, make it Memphis' most picturesque park. These natural qualities, combined with the stature of its architectural features, classify Overton as a significant urban park in the southeast region.

Areas of prime beauty include the 175 acre forest, with its exceptional stand of large and mature canopy trees, and the Golf Course, established in former meadow areas in sympathetic relation to the forest. The Greensward is one of the most scenic and lively areas in the park. It is encircled by trees, with the Formal Garden serving as an elevated viewing terrace on the west. Fine easterly views can be enjoyed, especially in afternoon light, across the Greensward and Rainbow Lake to the forest.

The visual impression of the park is accented by architecture and other structures, notably Brooks Museum and the Golf Clubhouse. In the western open area of the park, the doughboy Statue, the Higbee Memorial, and the Crump Statue are the most prominent memorials. Amidst the trees of the east picnic area is the large pavilion with its distinctive conical roof. Park gates at Tucker and Overton Park Avenue, as well as the elaborate stonework of single arch bridges and creek channels are also important.

Unsightly areas in need of improved screening include the large maintenance compound in the southeast corner, visible from Poplar and East Parkway. Many of the forest invader species - particularly kudzu - are visible from major streets and active park spaces. These disturbed areas should be carefully restored.





## AESTHETIC QUALITIES

### AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT BEAUTY

- A GREENWARD**  
Largest, most beautiful open space.  
Extends from Pinnal Garden to  
Rainbow Lake + forest. Very active.
- B GOLF COURSE**  
Meadow-like fairways enclosed  
by forest. Beautiful views from  
Poplar Avenue.
- C VIRGIN FOREST**  
Old age forest, trees up to 9'  
caliper, 15' height, 100-75 years  
old. Exceptional urban resource.

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- Sculpture or Memorials
- Significant Architecture
- Views and Vistas
- Poor visibility into park
- ▨ Unsightly view



## Current Plans

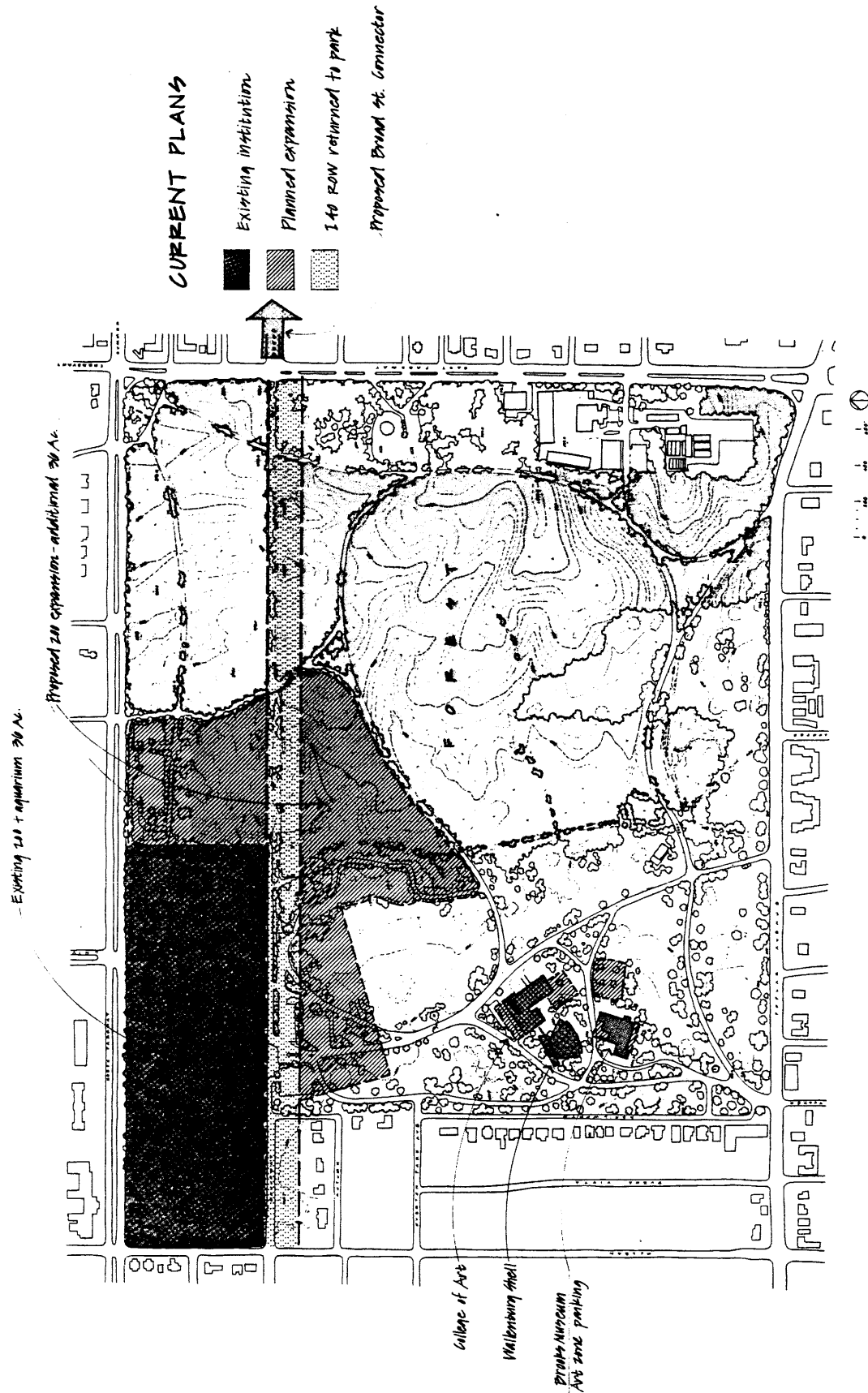
Part of the impetus for this Master Plan stemmed from the expansion needs of certain institutions. One of the first duties of the Planning Team was to address the expansion plans for Brooks Museum, prepared by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (Houston), and Askew Nixon Ferguson & Wolfe (Memphis). Certain modifications to drives, parking and landscape were made to enhance the relation between museum and park. The 70,000 SF expansion is underway and will be completed in 1989.

Memphis College of Art is contemplating a 20,000 SF addition. Planning Team recommendations include improvements to driveway alignments and parking. The Wallenburg Shell was restored and reopened in 1986 by the citizens committee "Save Our Shell". All of these actions enliven and enhance the "Arts Zone" in the park.

Memphis Zoo and Aquarium is contemplating major improvements and eventual expansion of the 36 acre facility. A master plan has been prepared by Design Consortium, Ltd. (New Orleans). The Planning Team has coordinated refinements of this plan to enhance the relation of zoo and park. Phase I improvements to the south zoo entrance will be constructed in 1989.

A significant action, with a positive effect on the entire park, concerns the disposition of the I-40 right-of-way. Through the efforts of the city Administration, the jurisdiction of the corridor area within the park has been transferred from the state to the City of Memphis.







## V. APPENDIX: ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT PLANS

The synthesis of park activities programming and site and traffic analysis yielded a number of alternative park plans. Various ideas from these alternatives were consolidated into eight distinct plans, and these were in turn refined into three basic alternatives.

All three plans share a common assumption about land use and park activities. This is that these activities should remain passive in nature, and that - with few exceptions - their current locations within the park are appropriate now and in the future. Therefore, the alternative plans concentrate on improvements to existing land uses and activities, and the connections and circulation routes between them. For example, all plans offer significant improvements to the Greensward, acknowledged as the prime open space and activity area in the park. All plans recommend restoration of Rainbow Lake and the Formal Garden, and the elimination of Doughboy drive.

In addition, all plans include improvements to the Art Zone, comprised of Brooks Museum, the College of Art, and Shell. Improved vehicular circulation and a new shared parking lot are common plan ingredients.

Another assumption common to all three plans concerns the existing park drives, some six miles in total length. This is that certain drives, particularly in the forest and around the Greensward, should be eliminated. The alternative plans propose little, if any new drive construction. In addition, all plans reduce the number of vehicular entrances into the park, by closing such entrances as Overton Park Avenue, east Poplar, and those near the intersection of North and East Parkway.

All plans propose more destination-oriented vehicular circulation, with particular attention to the Art Zone and Zoo. All plans recommend that the weekend drive closings for "People Day" be maintained and extended if necessary. The off-street parking requirements in all three plans are the same:

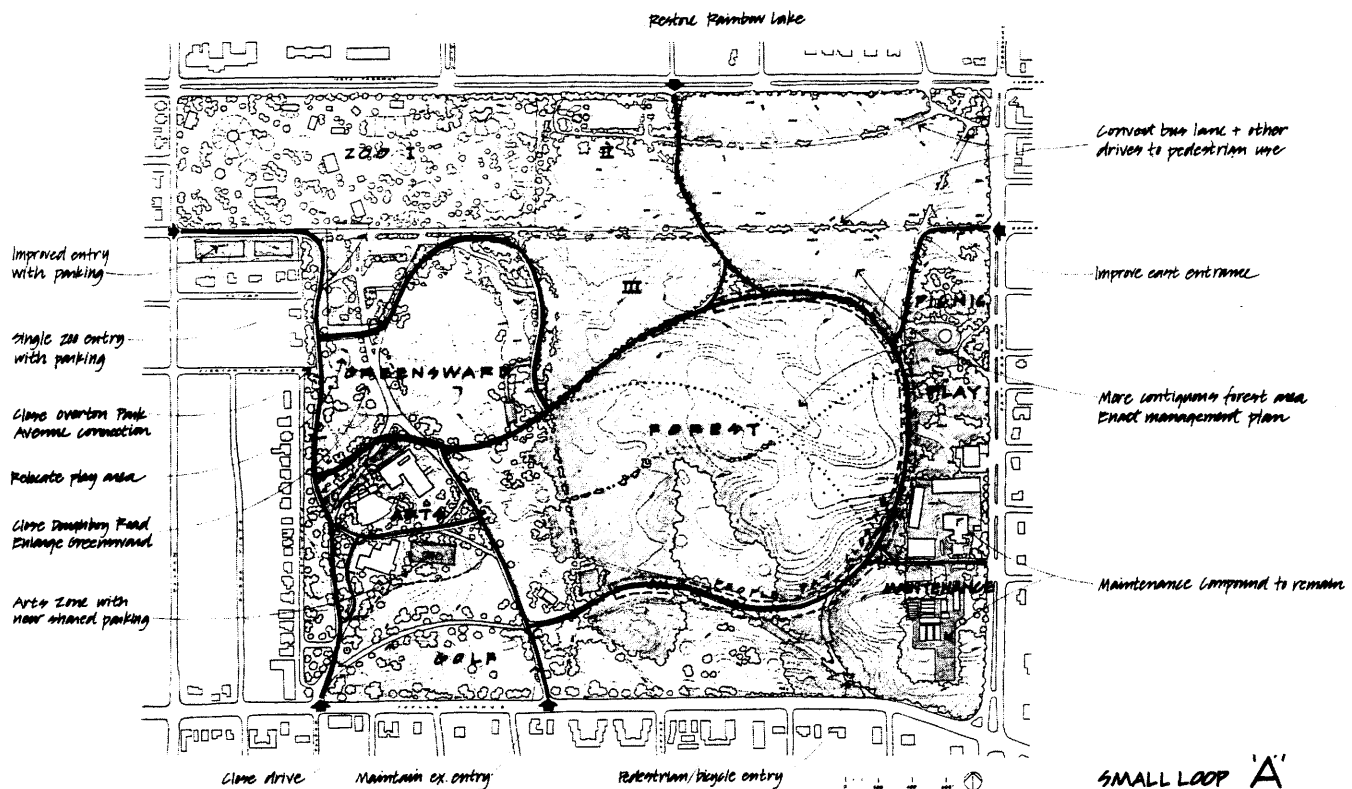


Art Zone	175 cars
Shell North	65
Greensward	55
Golf Course	35
East Picnic Pavilion	100
Zoo and Aquarium	800 (eventual)
New Southeast Greensward	65 (eventual)

Finally, all plans recommend acquisition of a 3.0 acre undeveloped parcel east of McLean and south of Galloway. This would enhance the current Galloway entrance into the park, and would pre-empt land use conflicts which would occur from private development of this land. The proposed use of this parcel would be as a "green" area and buffer zone for residences immediately south.

The basic differences in the three alternative plans are summarized on the following pages.

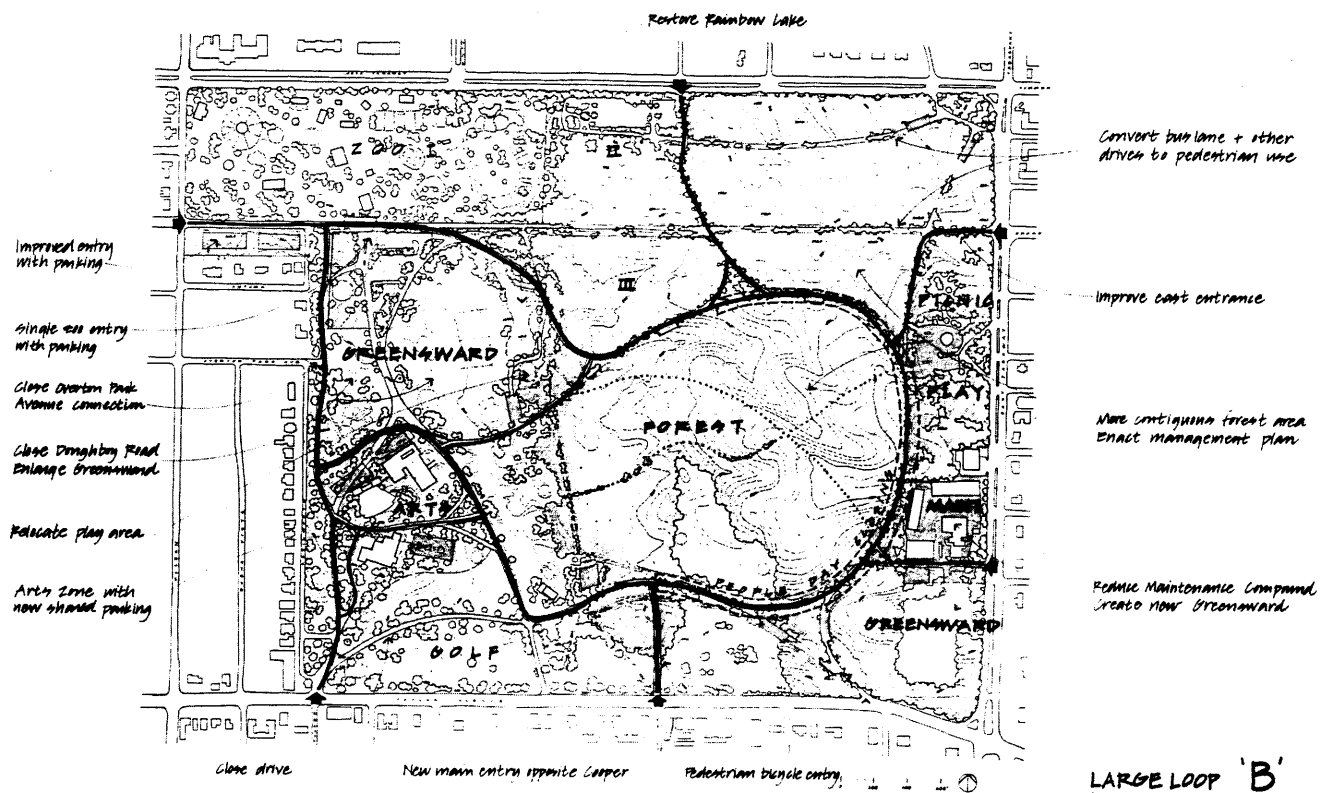




### Alternative Plan 'A'

This plan would reduce the number of park entrances from eleven to five, and would improve the existing middle Poplar entrance. Two vehicular loop drives are included: one in the forest (weekday traffic only), and one around the Greensward. The Bus Lane, north forest road, and east Poplar entry and drive would be eliminated and possibly converted to pedestrian usage. In this plan, the Play Area would be relocated to accommodate future Zoo parking, and the large maintenance compound at Poplar and East Parkway would remain.





### Alternative Plan 'B'

This plan also eliminates all but five park entrances. The middle Poplar entrance would be closed, and a new main entrance established by extension of Cooper into the park loop road. This would allow vehicular and pedestrian traffic to enter or exit the park at a safe, well marked, signalized intersection. The entrance drive would be carefully routed through a portion of the forest, with a slight westward curvature and textured paving. This solution would entail redesign - and lengthening - of Number Seven golf hole, made feasible by elimination of the middle Poplar park drive.



Plan 'B' proposes a large loop drive which encompasses the forest (weekday traffic only) and the Greensward. The play area would be relocated to the eastern edge of the Greensward, just south of Rainbow Lake. The drive between the eighth and ninth golf holes would be eliminated.

Plan 'B' includes development of a new Greensward area in the southeast corner of the park. This non-programmed open space would provide additional area for relief of recreation pressures at other park areas. In addition, it would enhance the park image from the busy intersection of Poplar and East Parkway. The southeast Greensward would occupy the existing south half of the Maintenance Compound, which is presently paved or cleared, reclaiming this area for "green" uses. This proposal would entail either relocation or consolidation of certain maintenance functions to the primary facility immediately north, which would remain intact.

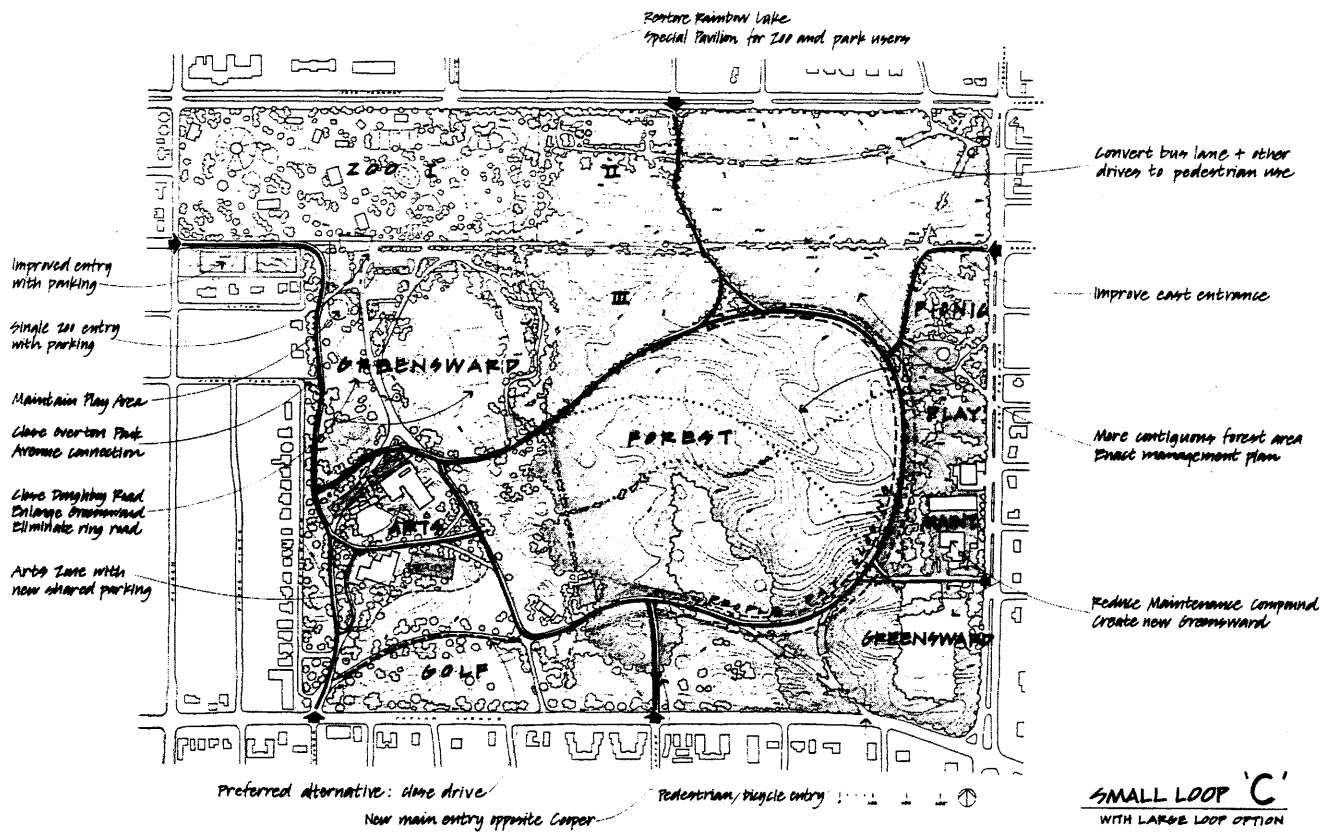
#### Alternative Plan 'C'

This plan may be termed the "least roads option". This reduces the six miles of existing park drives to four, for a 33% reduction. Vehicular circulation is very direct and destination-oriented, with five primary entrances, including the new Poplar entrance opposite Cooper. The drive between the eighth and ninth golf holes may either remain or be removed in this plan.

The loop drive is removed from the Greensward in this plan; cars have access only along the south and west periphery. This improves the pedestrian environment in the Greensward, particularly around Rainbow Lake and the forest edge.

As in Plan 'B', the south half of the Maintenance Compound is converted for park use as a new Greensward.







## Public Input and Plan Refinement

Two major public meetings were held in April, 1986 - one at the College of Art auditorium, attended by 150 people, and one at a regular monthly meeting of the Memphis Park Commission. Program data, site and traffic analysis, and the three alternative plans were presented. In addition, these plans and related articles were published in The Commercial Appeal. This feature story, illustrated in color, appeared prominently on the front page of the Metro Section.

During and after these presentations, input was received over a four week period from many individuals, interest group representatives, and neighborhood leaders. The consensus of these comments was in favor of Plan 'C', which was also preferred by the Planning Team. Since that time, several plan modifications have occurred. These include the deletion of the Cooper entrance in favor of site improvements to the existing middle Poplar entry.

Additional traffic analysis indicates that the proposed East Parkway entrance opposite Broad Avenue will not function at the level desired. This entrance has been relocated south, opposite the Picnic Pavilion.

The design for the Greensward has been refined to include a pedestrian Promenade. This occurs within the existing location of Doughboy drive, in the very active pedestrian area east of the Formal Garden. A new orientation Pavilion is also proposed, in an architectural style reminiscent of the former structure. The northward orientation of the Promenade creates a much improved pedestrian linkage between the Art Zone and Zoo. A walkway encircles the Greensward, winding east to Rainbow Lake and the relocated Play Area.

The new southeast Greensward would have an entry from East Parkway, with ample parking. A separate entrance and parking area are recommended for the Maintenance compound.

Sidewalks should be developed where needed, especially along Poplar Avenue.



A jogging trail is proposed adjacent to the main loop road, with a 1.4 mile circuit free of road crossings.

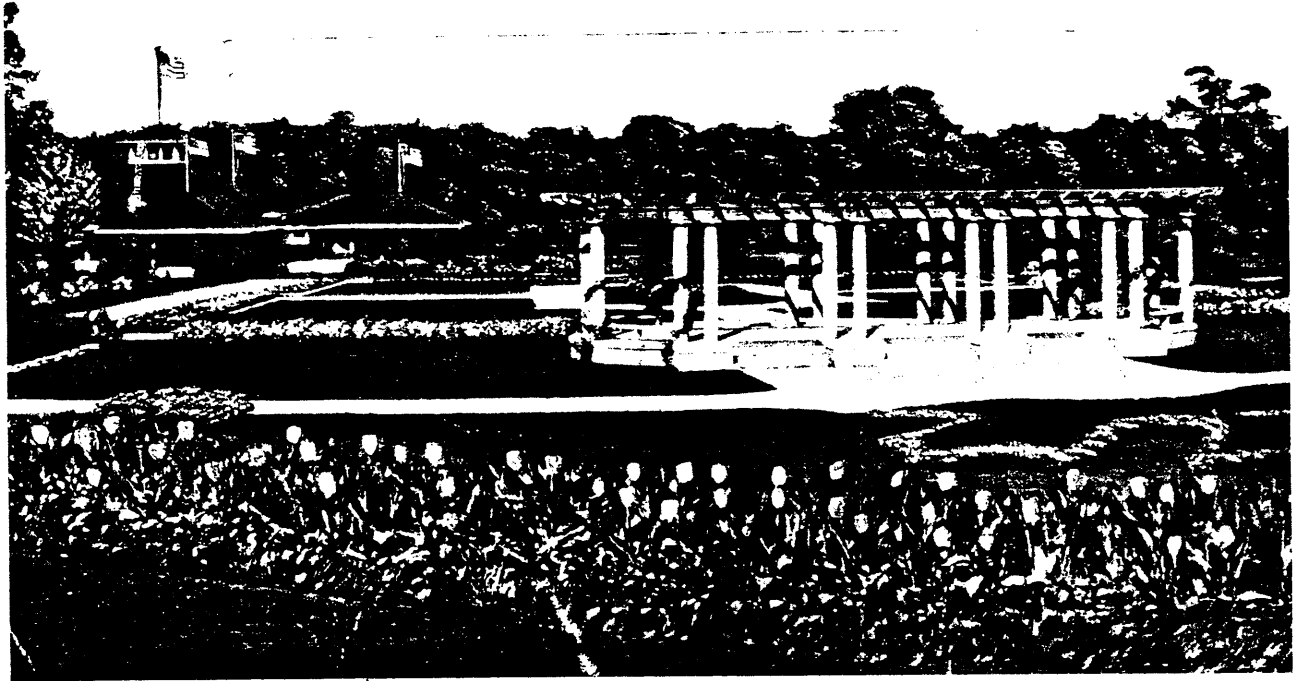
The six main vehicular entrances to the park are to have improved visibility and signage. An internal graphics and signage system is also proposed, along with new off-road parking lots at key locations.

With respect to the forest, it is very important that further evaluation leading to a forest management plan be implemented. This will entail periodic monitoring, re-evaluation, and complementary field action. The use and appreciation of the forest would be enhanced by a new interpretive trail system. This is proposed as a 1.7 mile hiking loop, with descriptive signs and small seating areas, designed in the style of National Park Service nature trails.

Finally, all park elements, including walkways, benches, tables, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, rest rooms, site lighting, and landscape should be steadily upgraded. This program should include historic memorials, stone bridges, and creeks as well. Interpretive signage and a corresponding self-guided "History Trail" should be a long term goal.



OVERTON PARK



Overton Park Pavilion (left) and Conway Memorial Pergola in the Formal Garden - ca. 1905



## VI. APPENDIX: CLIENT and PLANNING TEAM / ADDITIONAL REPORTS

### Client

City of Memphis

Richard C. Hackett, Mayor

Memphis Park Commission (Staff):

Bob Brame            Executive Director

Harry McLeod      Director of Planning and Research

Larry Keenan       Program Planner

Building Design and Construction Department:

Clark Eden Sr.     Manager

Ken Badowski      Project Manager

### Planning Team

Ritchie Smith Associates - Park Planning and Landscape Architecture

J. Ritchie Smith, ASLA   Project Director

Lissa Thompson           Associate Planner and Landscape Architect

Allen & Hoshall Inc. - Traffic and Transportation Planning

Harry Pratt                   Project Engineer

John Linn Hopkins - Consulting Historian

James M. Guldin, Ph.d. - Consulting Silviculturist

### Additional Consultant Reports

Survey of Visitor Use and Traffic Patterns in Overton Park, Allen & Hoshall Inc.  
with Ritchie Smith Associates, 1987.

Appendix 2: Overton Park Traffic Study, Allen & Hoshall Inc., 1987.

Overton Park: The Evolution of a Park Space, John Linn Hopkins, 1987.

Ecological Assessment and Management Recommendations for the Overton Park  
Forest, James M. Guldin, 1987.



Memphis Park Commission Members

William Wolbrecht, Chairman

Rob Baird

Reggie Barnes

Carolyn Dobson

Verties Sails



