

BALTIMORE: PATTERSON PARK



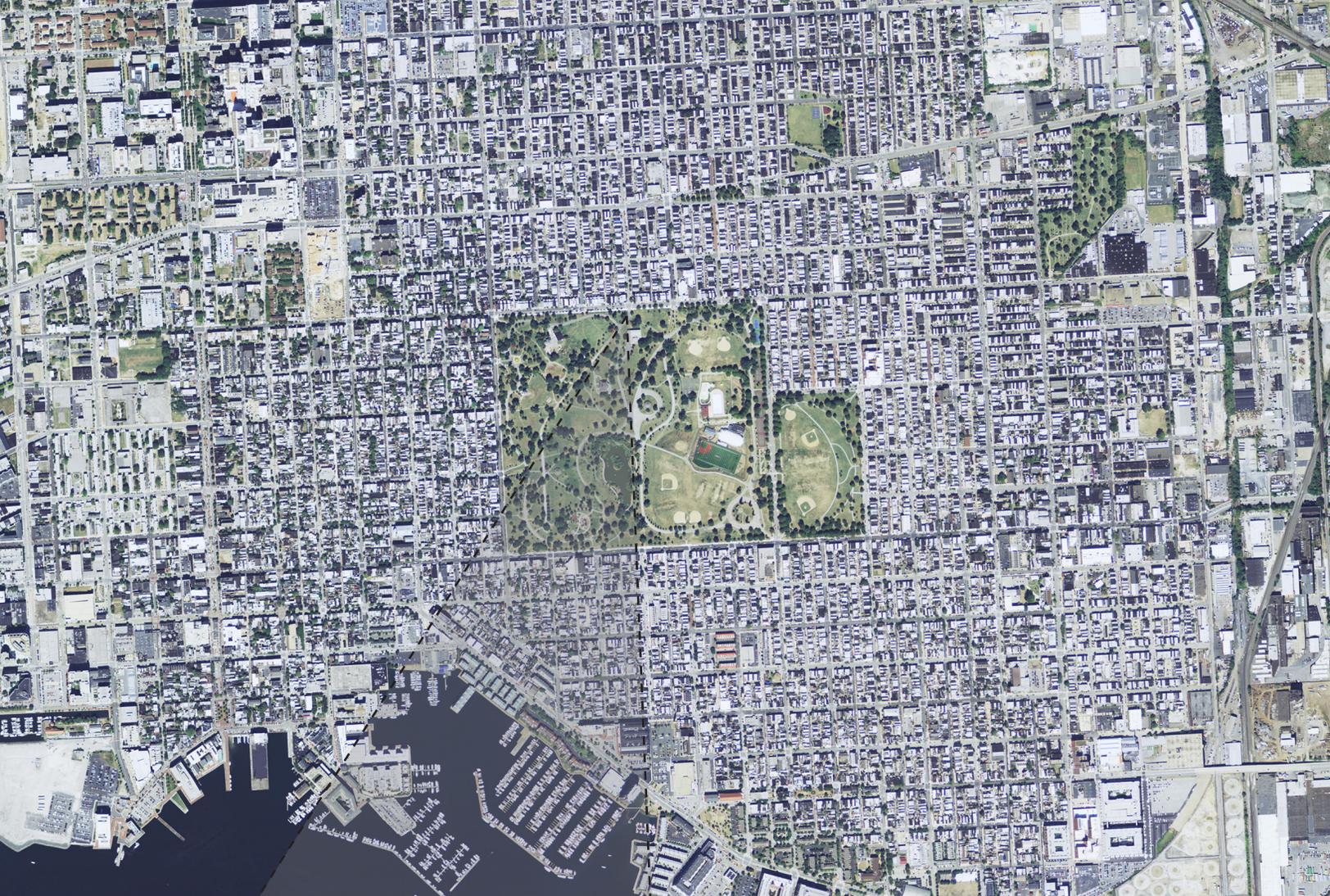
EARTH STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

PATTERSON PARK

Demonstration Project Brief
Ecological Society of America Conference
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I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

This project explores urban parks and park systems in Baltimore as hybrid ground for cultural and ecological integration. Building on the ongoing Patterson Park master plan process, we are looking for ways that urban ecological research can stimulate and enhance the relationship between people, parks, and urban environments. We will identify human and non-human influences across biotic and abiotic systems.



The project acknowledges and embraces the layered and negotiated terrain of urban parks; serving as venues for recreation, leisure, gathering, and protest, as well as, sites for habitat, carbon sequestration, stormwater management, and more. Teams of ecologists, landscape architects, urban designers, and community members will unpack and interrogate master plan concepts for Patterson Park in an attempt to target areas of opportunity in which the site's cultural and ecological systems can be coupled to function more effectively within the urban context for people and ecosystems. An overarching goal of this study will be to identify leverage points at the scale of both the neighborhood park and recreational center and the regional destination within Baltimore's park systems where cultural and ecological goals converge and diverge; seeking ways in which design and ecological science can be marshalled to support a healthier, more vibrant urban condition.

Urban parks, like Patterson Park in Baltimore provide cities with functionally diverse landscapes that perform essential social, economic, and environmental services. These services, however, are conditional on the effective prioritization and efficacious allocation of limited urban resources. As such, civic



Patterson Park's iconic pagoda. All images courtesy of the 2015 Patterson Park Master-Plan and Mahan Rykiel.

negotiations that impact investment like public planning/design processes represent viable opportunities for collaboration between design practitioners and ecologists interested in influencing the social and ecological vitality of urban landscapes.

For this kind of partnership to be effective, practitioners and ecologists must listen to and develop strategies that support and enhance the vision and values of the community, while simultaneously reflecting on, modifying, and offering their professional perspectives. Facilitating creative compromise, as well as targeting innovative approaches to implementation are tactical maneuvers that alongside creative monitoring programs and experimental design can yield fertile ground for urban ecological research and design practice. Sensitivity to the give and take of this process requires careful attention to a range of variables and scales from the biogeophysical and geopolitical, to the tactile and aesthetic experiences of a site.

Like other parks in Baltimore, Patterson Park has evolved to serve the needs of city residents. At each evolutionary stage the park's landscape was altered; shifting ecological resources to meet cultural demands. This project examines the continuum of change and the successional trajectory of Patterson Park as embodied by the past and present physical and conceptual plans for the park. The project takes advantage of the city's ongoing master plan process for Patterson Park, which is being led by a committed group of community stakeholders including among others the Friends of Patterson Park and the Audubon Society, the Department of Recreation and Parks, and Mahan Rykiel Associates.

By engaging city residents, municipal agencies, and private practitioners we are hoping to cultivate a cross disciplinary exchange where ecological science can be linked directly to community needs, public investment, and design praxis. With the final master plan report scheduled to be complete by the end of October 2015, the outcomes of this exploration are poised to serve as a valuable contribution to the overall master plan process. The project will plug in to and leverage the ongoing community engagement and planning efforts to ensure that the ideas and deliverables build on, reinforce, and expand the momentum and energy of the Patterson Park planning process.

Within the context of this study we will consider the role of urban parks and park systems in Baltimore and other major American cities. We will discuss the influence and return on investment by the city of more than \$11 million in Patterson Park, as well as, the investment of community groups like Friends of Patterson Park and the Audubon Society; asking questions that seek to understand how such investments influence broader social and ecological dimensions of urban environments and how the integration of design and science can support a more vibrant and just city.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Patterson Park Master Plan is a living document that identifies and defines relationships between and amongst park elements. It is a framework document that lays the foundation for resource allocation and investment grounded in the community's and city's shared vision for Patterson Park. The plan is organized around five strategies:

- I. Protecting Assets: Maintenance, Enforcement, and Governance
- II. Big Moves, Significant Capital: Major Facilities & Relationships
- III. Small Steps, Big Gains: Incremental Improvements
- IV. Staging Success: Programs, Events, and Logistics
- V. Ecological at the Core: Systems, Performance, and Preference

This project will explore and expand the ecological framework of the Patterson Park Master Plan; deepening and developing the ecological lens through which the community and city can engage and understand the park. This will include conceptual, physical, and management recommendations that reconcile ecological goals with cultural and recreational goals, as well as, constraints such as budget and politics.

When designing and making recommendations consider how Patterson Park might serve as a model for other parks within the city's open space network and how resources (capital, carbon, etc.) flow within and between nodes in the system. Consider how such flows might be augmented or attenuated by site specific interventions and how data might be monitored/tracked by citizen science or other collaborative programs.

Consider the demographics and urban context surrounding Patterson Park, as well as, the community's vision and desires for the park. In developing your proposals consider how they might be realized and what funding and/or partnership mechanisms might be leveraged to see them through. Be mindful of the ways in which this effort can catalyze additional action and investment in Patterson Park and in Baltimore; building bridges between and across disciplines (ecology, design, etc.) and sectors (public, private, non-profit, etc.).

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

THE OPPORTUNITY

Prior to the last decade Patterson Park experienced a prolonged period of disinvestment; leaving much of the site's cultural and ecological infrastructure in various states of decay. However, in recent years both Patterson Park and neighborhoods west and south of it have seen increases in investment; yielding growth in residential housing, retail, and population. As a result, programming and activities in the park are expanding; pushing the limits of the parks capacity to accommodate new program or incorporate increased ecological function.. Non-profit organizations like the Friends of Patterson Park and the Audubon Society augment the work of the Department of Recreation and Parks in managing the park's assets, but conflicts and challenges remain in balancing the recreational and ecological function of the park

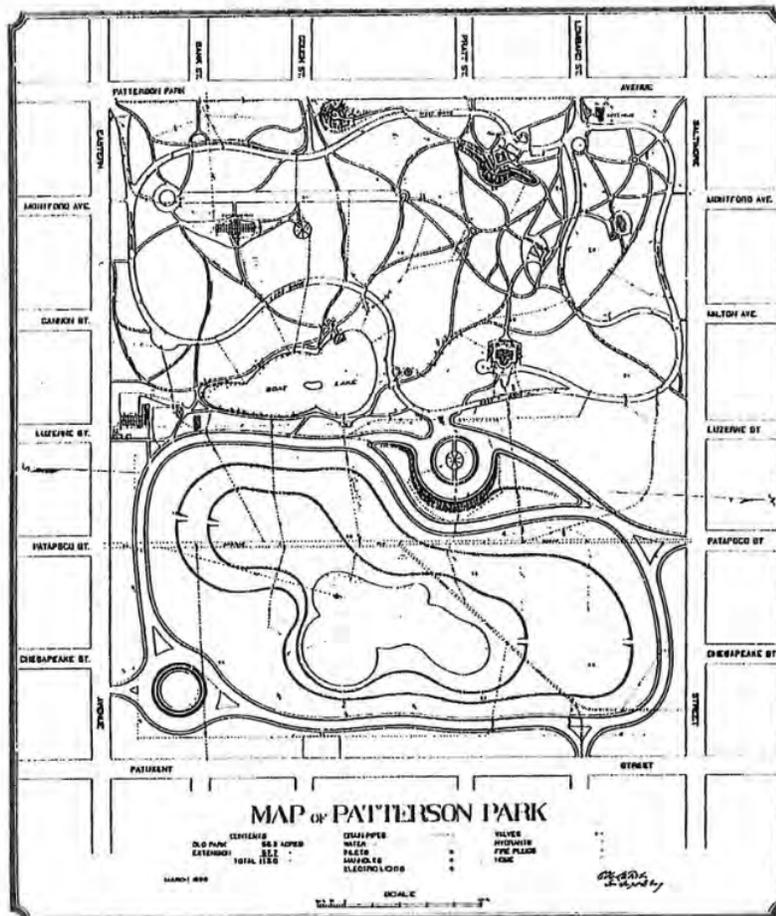
The Patterson Park master plan process has precipitated a public dialogue about the role of the park within the community, as well as collaborative management strategies that might enhance its cultural and ecological function. The ESI program is poised to contribute to this ongoing effort by teasing apart and exploring integrated solutions that address the cultural, ecological, economic, and political issues associated with programming and managing a hybrid civic landscape. Adaptive and flexible solutions for Patterson Park that fit within the framework of the master plan will be considered for inclusion in the official master plan report, with the potential to influence broader ecological management decisions throughout the city's park network.



Master Planning Discussion Groups and Feedback Session

PATTERSON PARK: LANDSCAPE HISTORY & CULTURAL CONTEXT

“Patterson Park is culturally significant within the context of 19th and 20th Century Park Planning in Baltimore.’ Patterson witnessed three major stages of growth and decay, each of which is integral to an understanding of American social history; and landscape architecture. From its origins as a formal ‘Public Walk’ in 1827, to its romantic development as a ‘country park’ between the 1860s and 1900s, to its early 20th century conversion and expansion into the city’s most comprehensive athletic center, Patterson Park is a unique reflection of the changing ideals of American leisure over the course of 100 years... it is the first and only known ‘public walk’ in the city, and ... it is one of two parks originally established under authority of Ordinance No. 227, approved June 4, 1860, which established the first Park Commission. Patterson Park, along with Druid Hill Park, reveals Baltimore’s stature as one of the earliest cities in the country to embrace the new country park tradition spawned by Central Park in 1857 (Lamp Associates, NRHP Report).”



Vegetation and Tree Canopy Map: Patterson Park in 1899

The evolving cultural attitudes identified in each of the park's three stages of growth dramatically influenced the physical condition and function of the landscape. Throughout this process of change, the site's soils, vegetation, and hydrology were profoundly altered. Major modifications include defensive earthworks and grading, deforestation and reforestation, and cutting and filling of stream channels to create lakes and bury streams.. The legacy of these decisions continues to influence the park during its current and fourth stage of growth; a stage typified by increasingly large events (e.g. Kinetic Sculpture Race, Lantern Festival, Dia Del Nino, etc.), intensive daily recreational (e.g. jogging, cycling, dog walking, etc.), and a growing environmental sensitivity that challenges and asks how both of the aforementioned activities can be accomplished while simultaneously supporting a vibrant urban ecosystem.

PARK SYSTEMS: MEASURES, MONITORING, & REPORTING

In order to evaluate the influence of design recommendations and/or ecological management strategies on the function of Patterson Park it is necessary to establish baseline measurements, monitoring protocols, and reporting procedures. In order to learn from Patterson Park more generally for ecological applications to urban park systems, hypothesis driven experimental research provides added value and the ability to generalize. However, there are limited resources within the city's budget to fund such projects. In addition, the interdisciplinary and relational approach of design often yields results that are entangled, spatially distributed, and personal; making it difficult to measure and assess impact. As a result, Patterson Park and other parks in Baltimore receive limited funding and struggle to make compelling cases for investment; perpetuating a cycle that suppresses their potential both ecologically and culturally.

Questions:

What ecological theory is most relevant in urban parks like Patterson Park? What hypotheses could be tested that span relevant ecological and social issues?

What kind of baseline measurement would be useful for urban parks like Patterson Park? What data is most relevant in evaluating the impact of design and/or ecological management on the park's cultural and environmental systems? What collaborative methodologies might be used to gather data?

What resources are necessary to collect the data and where might the city, community, and/or other partners find such resources? What type of annual monitoring and reporting program would be most effective in conveying the value of Patterson Park (whether it declines or increases)?

MAINTENANCE: FREQUENCIES, TECHNIQUES, AND TOOLS

The frequency, techniques, and tools used in maintenance operations speed up and/or slow down ecological processes and influence the aesthetic experience of a space by altering its physical and sensory qualities. As such they represent critical variables and levers that can be used to augment or attenuate the short and long-term impacts of design recommendations for Patterson Park. Despite their potential, however, funding for maintenance operations is thin and as a result, its execution is often carried out without adequate planning, attention, or expertise. Low-bid contractors, volunteers, and overburdened city workers are responsible for everything from trash pick-up, to mowing, to changing lightbulbs, to cultivating flower beds, and everything in-between. A comprehensive stewardship strategy is essential to maximizing the cultural and ecological performance of Patterson Park.

Questions:

What best management practices from other parks and park systems might be appropriate for Patterson Park? How might these practices (frequency, techniques, and tools) be adapted to fit the particular site conditions, budget constraints, and design recommendations of Patterson Park? Can maintenance regimes from other land use typologies (agriculture, conservation, restoration, etc.) be modified to meet the needs of the Patterson Park community? How might design recommendations be modified prior to execution to make maintenance easier (plant type, arrangement, location of trash receptacles, material choices, etc.)? What experimental maintenance practices offer potential for Patterson Park and how might they be tested in the park? How might these 'improved' practices be applied the scale of the city's park network?



Maintenance in Patterson Park

LANDSCAPE TYPOLOGIES: COMMUNITY, COMPOSITION, & CONSTRAINTS

The scale and diversity of soils, slopes, and elevations within Patterson Park suggests it can accommodate a wide range of landscape and habitat types. However, recreational programs, public concerns about safety, and cultural attitudes about aesthetics/nature constrain the park's capacity to realize its full ecological potential. At the same time, there is growing recognition that the park is a city asset; providing essential ecosystem services.

Questions:

How might the landscape typologies in Patterson Park be reimagined within the context of both its ecological and cultural dimensions? What design recommendations (plant species, composition, arrangement, etc.) can be made that increase the park's ecological function/performance without diminishing its recreational utility? In what ways might these design decisions be communicated to the community that helps them understand and/or appreciate a potentially unfamiliar aesthetic? In what ways might the design decisions incorporate existing community and cultural attitudes to define new landscape typologies or habitat types?



Ecological System Improvement Map from 2015 Patterson Park MasterPlan

III. SYNOPSIS OF ECOLOGY AND DESIGN PHASE

Fellows will focus their studies in six different concentrations based on the themes as well as the particular constraints and opportunities of the site and its context.. Fellows will go through the design process using their individual concentration as a guide. The conference week in August will provide a dynamic and energizing setting in which to pin down conceptual design recommendations for Patterson Park. Over the course of the week, fellows will complete a series of assignments to help inspire and focus designs.

RELATED PLANNING STUDIES

Patterson Park 1998 Master Plan: <http://pattersonparkmasterplan.weebly.com/resources.html>

Patterson Park 2015 Master Plan: <http://pattersonpark.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Patterson-Park-Master-Plan.pdf>