1.0 INTRODUCTION

Chestnut Ridge Casino - Rear Terrace

Cayuga Creek - Como Lake Park

1.1 BACKGROUND

Erie County owns and operates a parks system containing nearly 11,000 acres of land on 38 sites throughout the county. These sites include eleven large multi-purpose parks, five undeveloped parks, thirteen forestry lots, seven small special-purpose parks and two multi-use recreational trails. The County park system was established in 1925, and initially was comprised of four sites and 2,280 acres of land. Periodic land acquisition, over the years, has expanded the original holdings to the system's current size, and future expansion is always under consideration.

Previous County park system master plans were prepared in 1961, 1976, and most recently in 1988. Since the last plan much has changed within the park system and throughout the County. The County therefore initiated an update of its Park System Plan in 2002. This current **Parks System Master Plan is intended to establish a framework for preservation, restoration and enhancement of the parks over the next 15-20 years.** This plan is the first component of a full update of the Erie County Comprehensive Plan. Subsequent components will address County-wide land use, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, farmland protection and similar regional planning issues.

1.2 STUDY PROCESS

1.2.1 PROJECT TEAM

From the start of this project, the master plan process has included input and collaboration from a large, comprehensive project team including County staff, steering committee *(Leadership Team)*, private consultants, various park user groups, and individuals from all over Erie County. To complete the Master Plan update, the County retained the services of two separate teams of consultants to complete the various component parts:

The following team is preparing the **Master Plan Update**, which includes: recommendations for the overall park system, individual park master plans, a strategy for the waterfront parks, management/consolidation opportunities, and a marketing and financial strategy.

PARSONS

Engineers, Planners & Landscape Architects
37 Franklin Street, Suite 300
Buffalo, New York 14202

ENVISION
the hough group

ENVISION - THE HOUGH GROUP

Environmental Specialists
916 The East Mall, Suite B
Toronto, Ontario M9B 6K1

PARADIGM CONSULTING

Strategic Planner
26 Radcliffe Drive
Amherst, New York 14068

The following firm is preparing the Inventory and Assessment portion of the project, as well as the Recreational Trails element:

ERIE COUNTY PROJECT TEAM

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

JOEL A. GIAMBRA

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION & FORESTRY

LAWRENCE JASINSKI, COMMISSIONER

ANGELO (ANDY) SEDITA, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

NICHOLAS PAGE, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING

LAURENCE RUBIN, COMMISSIONER

ANDREW ESZAK, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

THOMAS DEARING, COMMUNITY PLANNING COORDINATOR

MICHAEL KRASNER, AICP, SENIOR PLANNER

A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

ANTOINETTE "TONI" DRZEWIECKI

ERIE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION BOARD

LYNNE MARINELLI, EC LEGISLATURE

ELISE CUZAK, EC LEGISLATURE

Sample Home Page for the Project Website

WENDEL DUCHSCHERER
ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS

WENDEL DUCHSCHERER Architects & Engineers

Architects, Engineers & Landscape Architects
95 John Muir Drive
Amherst, New York 14228

The team worked closely throughout the course of the study, sharing information, and jointly conducting the public outreach. The final Master Plan document is a collaborative effort, with technical background reports documenting the detailed inventory and assessment work.

1.2.2 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Given the extent of the parks system, it was not possible to hold specific meetings for each individual park. However the public consultation approach included outreach to as many interested groups and individuals as possible throughout the course of the project. Outreach was achieved through the following methods:

Traveling exhibits at Galleria Mall

WEBSITE:

A Website dedicated to the Parks Master Plan was the primary source for ongoing information updates and public input. The site was upgraded periodically as project materials became available, Opportunities were provided for the public to share concerns and ideas for improving the park system.

PARKS USER SURVEY:

A survey was posted on the Web Site and directly distributed to an extensive list of park user groups, environmental interest groups, and municipal government organizations. Over 300 surveys were completed and sent in, with good representation from all corners of the County. ***A summary of survey results is provided in the Appendix.***

Traveling exhibits at Galleria Mall

TRAVELING EXHIBITS:

Graphic displays highlighting park plans and key Master Plan recommendations were set up at various sites and at key events

throughout the County. Exhibits were placed at the Erie County Fair, Walden Galleria Mall, downtown Rath Building and at other notable locations with heavy pedestrian traffic opportunities. Additional "park-specific" displays were distributed to the various town halls and/or libraries near the individual park sites. Displays were also posted at AutumnFest at Sprague Brook Park.

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES:

Two public open houses were held in separate areas of the County, attended by over 200 people. The open houses were conducted as drop-in events that allowed ample review of presentation boards and information pertaining to the Master Plan, as well as one-on-one discussion with members of the project team and County staff and elected officials. This format was selected over a formal public hearing, as providing for maximum input from individuals who prefer a more low-key setting for discussing their concerns or sharing their opportunities for enhancement of the parks system. ***A copy of the "posters" (graphic displays) can be found in the Appendix.***

MEETINGS AND WORK SESSIONS:

In addition to sending out surveys, the project team met with a number of park user groups and individuals that requested a separate meeting on specialized or park specific issues. *For a list of the larger meetings, refer to the side-bar.*

LIST OF MEETINGS

Date	*Meeting Focus / Organization*
April 3	*Monthly Review*
April 10	*EC Development Comm. Board*
May 1	*Monthly Review*
May 21	*County Visioning Session*
May 29	*Monthly Review*
June 25	*Park Summit, Chestnut Ridge Park*
July 3	*Monthly Review*
July 18	*Hunters Creek User Groups*
July 19	*EC Parks Superintendents*
August 1	*Hunters Creek Neighbors Meeting*
August 6	*Hunters Creek Workshop*
August 14	*Monthly Review*
August 21	*In-house Workshop*
September 4	*Monthly Review*
September 18	*EC Development Comm. Board*
September 24	*Central Park / Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy*
September 26	*Legislature, Community Enrichment Committee*
October 3	*Blue Collar Union Representatives*
October 9	*Monthly Review*
October 17	*Erie County Environmental Management Council*
October 22	*Energy Mtg / Cornell University Rep.*
October 28	*Open House #1, East Aurora MS*
October 29	*Trout Unlimited*
November 1	*Kenneglen / WNY Land Conservancy (Representative - Betty Cheteney)*
November 1	*Legislator Ranzenhoffer*
November 6	*Monthly Review*
November 6	*EC Fisheries*
November 7	*Elma Meadows*
November 13	*Open House #2, Amherst Central HS*
November 18	*Kiwanas Club- Wales*
November 19	*Delaware North Park Service Div.*
November 20	*Hunters Creek Trail Expert Mtg*
November 26	*In-house Review with L. Rubin*
December 4	*Monthly Review*
December 18	*Delaware North Park Service Div.*
January 15	*Monthly Review*
January 21	*In-house Workshop*
January 22	*EC Development Comm. Board*
February 5	*Monthly Review*

Trail within naturalized meadow setting - Ontario

1.3 MASTER PLAN COMPONENTS

The resulting Master Plan is comprised of the following five elements:

A. INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING FACILITIES AND CONDITIONS

This includes a detailed inventory of all structures, furnishings, athletic facilities, play equipment and other appurtenances within the County's developed parks. A database of inventory information was created to give the County a management tool for future maintenance and funding decisions.

B. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF EXISTING PARK PLANS

All parks in the system were looked at for specific upgrades and enhancement recommendations and Master plan updates were prepared for each of the developed parks in the County system. Recommendations are made that take into account long-term environmental sustainability, current and future recreational opportunities, maintenance requirements and fiscal responsibility. For the oldest parks in the system, with heritage significance, an emphasis has been placed on preservation and restoration of original park features. For all parks, the focus is on preserving natural resources and key scenic features, while developing a better system of interpretation and awareness within these beautiful properties.

In addition, new, conceptual master plans were created for five designated parks within the overall system. These are:

- HUNTERS CREEK PARK,
- WENDT BEACH PARK,
- BENNETT BEACH PARK,
- COMO LAKE PARK - EXPANSION AREA;
- AKRON FALLS PARK - EXPANSION AREA.

Trail in Hunters Creek Park

C. RECREATIONAL TRAILS ELEMENT

The trail plan is focused on two primary goals. The first is to better connect the parks to their surrounding communities and other area attractions. This would establish smaller area trail loops that will provide opportunities for linking the specific parks to other area destinations, business districts and neighborhood centers, and cultural attractions. The second goal is to look at broader "park to park" connections throughout the County, expanding upon the regional Bicycle Route Guide recently published by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional transportation Council. Recommendations are made for specific improvements and enhancements to the existing County trails, including the Riverwalk system along the Niagara River and the Two Mile Creek Greenway.

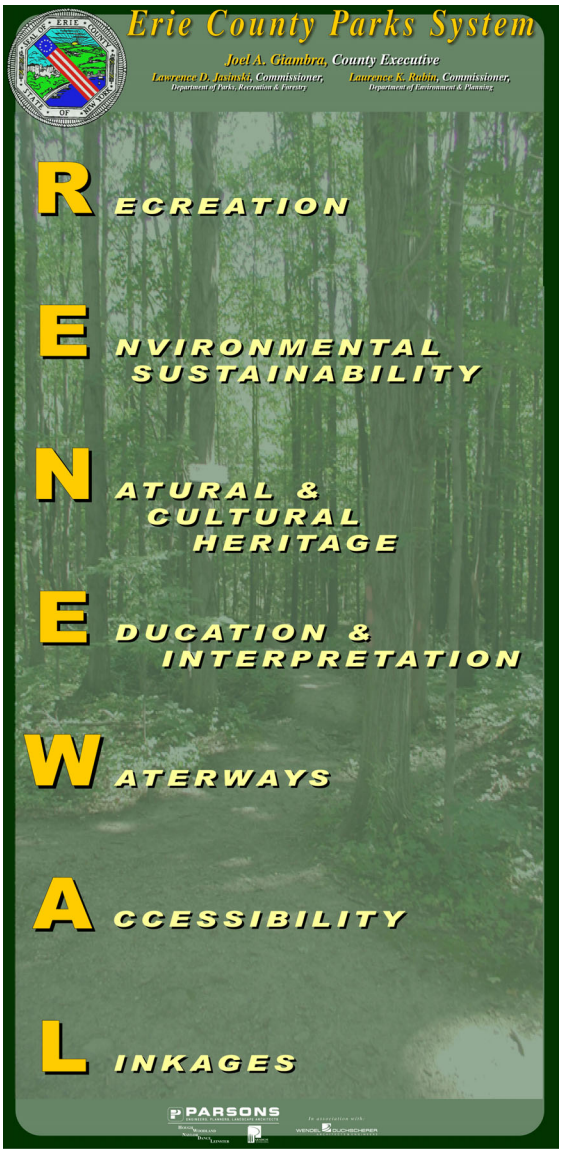
View of Historic Grain Elevators from Ohio Street Park (Buffalo River Parks)

D. WATERFRONT STRATEGY

This component of work provides a specific focus on the recreational opportunities along Erie County's 90 miles of waterfront, including strategies for gaining public access to the water and for promoting tourism potential within Erie County. The recommendations build upon previous waterfront planning efforts, including that undertaken by the County (Horizons Waterfront Action Plan) in 1992, and recognizes external initiatives proposed or underway by the state and local municipalities.

E. ASSESSMENT OF CONSOLIDATION AND MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM

Although an in-depth departmental operational review was not a component of this study, this effort begins to examine opportunities for consolidation within the County Parks Department and to look at creative management approaches to parks maintenance and funding. In addition, opportunities for establishing partnerships with local municipalities, agencies and local community-based groups were explored.



"Theme" of Project - Traveling Road Show Poster

The completed Erie County Parks System Master Plan is comprised of four documents, as follows:

VOL. 1 PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

VOL. 2 PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS

VOL. 3 RECREATIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM

VOL. 4 PARKS INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

Wendt Beach

Scoby Dam Park