Tonight:

A look at the Park in 2008

The Master Plan from 2008

What has been added or changed since 2008?

Discussion
Mills Park Timeline

Mills Park Master Plan 2008

Fence Restoration 2010-11
$300,000

IDNR Grant for $400,000 May 2011

Phase 1 Construction 2011-2012
$651,000
Mills Park in 2008 looked to many like a Private Home
Isolated by Apartments

Apartments

Pleasant Home

MILLS PARK
4.43 ACRES
Isolated by Apartments

Apartments

Pleasant Home

Mills Tower
And homes

Apartments

Pleasant Home

Private Residences

Mills Tower

Private Residences
And hidden behind an imposing Fence (2008)

Imposing Historic Fence in Poor Condition

The park appeared to be a private property to many residents
2008 Desire Lines in the Landscape
Few Paths, Desire Lines Formed in the Landscape
The Park in 2008

It was a much loved “Greensward” but
- Only One Path
- Desire Lines through the landscape
- Turned to Mud after Rain
- Not Accessible
- Security Issues
The Park in 2008

Desire Lines, Erosion and Lack of ADA
The Park in 2008

The park was so cloistered that some though it appropriate to park their cars in and drive through the Park.
Images from Community Meetings Spring 2008
Planning Process: Focus Groups, 4 Community Meetings, Emails, Letters, Questionnaires, etc.
Community Meetings were held in Historic Pleasant Home
And History was very Important
Farson Estate & Herbert S. Mills Additions are very important

**HOWEVER**

**History is relative**

Current ‘Naturalesque’ layout 2008-1966  
**42 years**

Farson/Mills layout 1966-1897  
**69 years**

Prairie and Oak Savanna 1850’s-9,000 BC  
**7,150 years**

Lake Chicago 9000-14,000 BC  
**5,000 years**

Mills Park is on the edge of the Oak Park Post Glacial Spit, the edge of which can be seen at Scoville Park and Taylor Park
The site was divided into rectangular spaces that were defined by predominately straight paths, allees of trees and the straight lines of the terraces.

Today’s park has been described as “naturalesque” or English Style” by nearby residents.
Let’s compare the Landscape Today & The Farson Estate 1897-1910

Historic Photos used with the kind permission of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest

View 1:
Looking south from the house one could see steps down to a fountain, with more steps down to a circular bed of flowers and on to a small “Summer House”

Look closely and you can still see the change in grade and some original trees that formed an “allee”

Architect George Maher and John Farson sitting just to the north of the fountain – circa 1900
A brick wall marked the southern boundary—its foundation is still there but in very poor condition.

View 2: There was a “Summer House” set on a mound and a tall brick wall.

The largest trees had romantic Victorian octagonal benches.
View 3: Looking north one could see a circular planting bed with the fountain in the distance.

Contemporary view looking north from the site of the Summer House along north–south axis.

Plantings along the axis looking north towards the fountain.
View 4: Continuing north we can see the fountain and steps. Look closely and you can see the arched windows of the house in the distance.
Desire line (informal path) that runs diagonally across the park crosses the former stable/coach house site.

The stables/coach house was also designed by Maher and completed by the time the main house was finished.

View 5: Looking southwest from the house was the stables also designed by Maher. It burnt down in 1913 but was rebuilt by the Mills family who purchased the property. It fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1966.
After the sudden death of John Farson the property was purchased by Herbert S. Mills, the inventor of coin-operated vending and gambling machines, in October 1910.
It is almost impossible to tell that there was a pergola and a set of eight steps here.

View 6: The pergola was also designed by Maher and completed for the Mills family.

The pergola, also designed by Maher, was one of the most photographed features.
The Greenhouse terrace is recognizable today building rubble just below soil

View 7: Looking south west. The conservatory, was constructed in 1911-1912. It was located of another raised terrace that is still prominent today.

Notice the pergola on the right – it connected the stable to the conservatory
The conservatory was constructed in 1911-1912. It fell into disrepair and demolished by 1966.

You can still see the terrace today.

View 8: Looking north west towards Mills Apartments the terrace is still visible, in fact some of the concrete foundation can still be seen not far from the electrical box in the picture. Notice how the terrace is used for seating and for play.

The conservatory was constructed in 1911-1912. It fell into disrepair and demolished by 1966.
The open sunken lawn today is dotted with mature trees. A continuous sloped terrace bordered the tennis court set in a large open lawn.

View 9: Looking west. The tennis court another Mills family addition. It was located on a large sunken lawn, the lowest elevation of the property. This area has been filled and the ground level raised.
What we avoided
Times and Attitudes Change – Proposal Report 1967
3 Primary Character Zones emerged in the Community Meetings
In 2008 only the Path to Marion was Accessible
This became an important Issue to Senior Residents in Mill's Tower
Many wanted to keep the Park hidden but it was agreed at Community meetings that “The Park is for Everyone”
In 2008 there was an overall consensus on the following:

• Keep the park passive.
• Historic Template is important.
• Current paths are inadequate.
• Make park handicap accessible.
• Create a natural/creative play area for children, nothing too obtrusive.
• Add benches.
• Issues at night - add low impact lighting.
And:

• Restore the Historic Fence
• Make additional entry in the fence on Home, connected by a path to Marion
• Redesign Entry on Marion
• Add sustainable flower beds
• A Pavilion should be added to Pleasant Home in a sympathetic design to the house and park.

It should be noted that a minority were against the Pavilion.
The Fence was Restored and Openings Created

The sections of the fence removed were saved and placed in the landscape
Marion side of the park – New Entry to Connect to Marion and to say THIS IS A PARK!! (sketch from 2008)

Private entry has domestic scale and park entry has public scale, the fence steps up to main metal columns.
New Fence an Interpretation of the Historic Fence
The Desire Lines in 2008 and Paths 2012

Curvilinear Paths, Seating and Landscape Setting for the Home
New Trees and Grasses
The Park in 2008 and 2012

Curvilinear Paths and Interpretation of Historic Bench
Concepts taken from the Fence Design

Curvilinear Paths and Interpretation of Historic Bench
“Does Anyone Use those Concrete Seats?”
Grasses were planted on the site of the Stables so that a Future Reconstruction could take place.
Grasses have a great winter aspect
Sustainable Planting – Grasses Became an Issue

Grasses have a great winter aspect
Sustainable Planting – Spring Ephemerals
Historic Section – Circular Flower Bed
Part of Axial View
Sustainable LED Lighting

The Community asked for “Low Impact Lighting”
Create a natural/creative play area  Became
The Discovery Zone
The Discovery Zone

Simple Exploration
Petroglyphs Sand Blasted into Boulders

References to the details in the House
The History of the Site became the Labyrinth
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The Lion Chair Reference to Decoration on the House
Lion Chair

“Kodak” moment
And adults had fun with it as well!!!
Addition of a Pavilion (from 2008)

Why is it needed?  To reduce wear and impact on the home/museum. To maintain access to the community and for private events that assist in sustaining revenue.

Issues Raised:  Suitability to house, Affect on Neighbors, Potential Noise, Potential affect on Trees, .........................
in fact trees will be added (from 2008)
There were many versions of the Master Plan produced; this is the one selected by the Community in 2008.
Issues Today

Erosion of Jogging Path and Chestnut Trees need to be Replaced
The Mills Park 2008 and 2016

DISCUSSION