



Central Park Conservancy
A Model for Public/Private Partnerships

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The Central Park Conservancy is uniquely qualified to offer its expertise in park management. The Conservancy has a proven track record in restoring and managing Central Park. Many of the dedicated staff who work in Central Park are recognized authorities in the fields of horticulture, botany, landscape architecture, historic preservation, and park management.

The Conservancy is a model for public/private partnerships for parks throughout the country. With its partner, the City of New York, it brought Central Park from its deteriorated state in the late 1970s to its present condition, with major landscapes and historic structures restored and well maintained.

The Conservancy also has a track record in raising private funds to improve and preserve Central Park. Since its founding in 1980, the Conservancy has raised over \$300 million in private funds, which, combined with the City's investment, turned Central Park into a living symbol of New York City's revitalization.

The Conservancy takes pride in running a lean, efficient organization. Administrative expenses — and thus staff — are kept to a minimum and more than two-thirds of the Conservancy's approximately 250 full-time and seasonal staff members are operations people working directly in the Park.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Central Park Conservancy was founded in 1980 as a private, not-for-profit organization to focus attention on the deteriorated condition of Central Park and to take action to stem the Park's decline. A small group of dedicated visionaries were determined to restore the 843-acre Park and preserve the intent of the 1858 design by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux: a park for *all* the people to escape the pressures of a turbulent city. Today, the Conservancy's mission is to restore, manage and preserve Central Park, in partnership with the public, for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

In 1976, Richard Gilder and George Soros spearheaded a study done by Columbia University's Center for Government Studies, Graduate School of Business, directed by E.S. Savas, Professor of Public Systems Management and Director of the Center for Government Studies. The study took a thorough look at how the Park was being used by the public, how it was policed, and how the Parks Department managed it.

The general findings were that though there were over 250 full-time maintenance staff, there was lack of job standards, no accountability, and no defined tasks. Staff worked in large sections and on Parkwide crews (crew-based management lends itself to socializing, lack of performance, lack of individual accountability, and no opportunity to recognize individual work well done). Most of the management decisions were actually made by borough supervisors with little knowledge of the Park, and there was no specific resource allocation to Central Park, so it was difficult to establish what the actual budget was for the Park.

When Parks Commissioner Gordon Davis appointed Elizabeth Barlow Rogers Central Park Administrator in 1979, it was the first step in developing a public/private partnership responsible for the day-to-day management of Central Park, thus bring accountability back to the Park level.

Since its founding, the Conservancy has

- Prescribed a management and restoration plan for the Park
- Funded major capital improvements
- Created programs for volunteers and visitors
- Set new standards of excellence in Park care

MAINTENANCE, OPERATIONS, AND HORTICULTURE

In maintenance, operations, and horticulture, we have a staff of 150 full-time, privately funded employees (plus 30 seasonals), nearly 100 fewer employees than in 1976, maintaining a restored Park to extremely high standards. For example, graffiti must be removed within 24 hours, visible litter is picked up by 9:00 am, trash containers are emptied every day, and all the benches in the Park have been repaired and are maintained on a regular basis. Catch basins are cleaned on a regular cycle.

The Conservancy operations staff are non-union and are interviewed and selected through a joint process between the Conservancy's Human Resources and Operations Departments. Employment is at will and all staff goes through a strict 90-day probation period.

In 1995 we formally moved away from the Parkwide maintenance crews to a zone-based management system. Prior to 1995, zone management was piloted in areas like Strawberry Fields, Cedar Hill, and Bethesda Terrace. We divided the Park into 49 zones, each maintained by at least one zone gardener, trained in horticulture and responsible for all aspects of the management and maintenance of his or her zone.

The zone gardeners are assisted by specialized Parkwide crews, including tree, bench, and playground care, graffiti removal, monuments conservation, historic preservations, soil and water conservation, and storm water management.

As with the creation of the position of Central Park Administrator, which brought accountability back to the Park overall, a zone-based management brings back

accountability to specific geographic areas of the Park. It is easy to monitor the performance of individual zone gardeners — excellent work is obvious and is rewarded. When a zone falls short of Parkwide standards, it is easy to assess the reasons and increase support to the gardeners if needed. Zone management also provides for a consistent visual presence in an area. Often the public interacts and gets to know the staff, developing a sense of community and shared stewardship for the zone.

We have also decentralized the majority of the volunteer programs in the Park. Individual volunteers work directly with zone gardeners. The volunteers are treated like full-time staff and are expected to be at work at agreed upon times. The zone gardener is able to use the volunteer as an additional resource to help in his or her zone. Many excellent relationships have developed between the gardeners and the volunteers.

Zone management has been essential in maintaining a restored Park with fewer staff to significantly higher standards.

INNOVATIVE PARK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The Conservancy has developed several innovative Park management and preservation practices, which have set the standard for park management nationwide, such as the following examples:

- *Zone Management System:* Divides Central Park into 49 zones, each with a dedicated gardener who provides a uniformed presence and is held accountable for his or her zone. This system is directly responsible for cleanliness and productivity improvements throughout the Park.
- *Field Rotation/Red Flag System:* A red flag system is employed to rotate heavily used ballfields, such as those at the North Meadow and the Great Lawn. For example, in order to preserve the North Meadow's 12 fields while accommodating 6,000 baseball and softball games that are played each season, the Conservancy keeps one baseball and one softball field closed at all times, rotating from field to field every few weeks. This rotation allows the fields to recuperate and allows the Conservancy to perform necessary maintenance.

A red flag system also alerts the public to horticultural care being performed or to adverse lawn conditions (such as after rain, when wet grass is vulnerable to damage) requiring the landscape to be closed.

- *Night and Weekend Operations:* We have deployed more staff during evening and weekend hours when the number of visitors increases. This increased staff presence helps with safety and security as well as providing for a cleaner Park each morning.
- *Proactive Management of Special Events and Film:* We have developed a detailed special events and film operation plan, which keeps the Park protected from the impact of large events. (Central Park hosts over 1,500 special events and over 2,000 photo shoots and films annually.)

CAPITAL PROJECTS

As a result of the Conservancy's proven track record in renovation and supervision, it has assumed responsibility as general contractor and project manager for all Central Park capital projects, including those that are City-funded.

Over two decades, the Conservancy has restored three-quarters of Park landscapes and has built an endowment of some \$90 million. Since 1993, there have been over 30 major capital projects in Central Park undertaken by the Conservancy. Some of these projects are:

- Harlem Meer (northernmost body of water) and surrounding landscape restoration (\$10 million) and the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center on the Meer's north shore (\$1 million). Completed 1993.
- Great Lawn restoration, a 55-acre, 2-year project, completed 1997. \$18.2 million
- Maine Monument restoration and construction of a public plaza at the Park's entrance at Columbus Circle and surrounding landscape, 1997. \$4.5 million
- Reservoir running track reconstruction (1998) and Reservoir landscape reconstruction (1999-2000). \$3 million
- Rebuilding the 79th Street Maintenance Yard, 1999. \$1.5 million
- North Meadow restoration, 18-acre, 2-year project, completed 2000. \$4.6 million
- Conservatory Water (Model Boat Pond). Replaced deteriorating concrete coping with granite and restored surrounding pathways, 2000. \$1 million
- Restoration of the Pond at the southeast corner of the Park and surrounding landscape, completed in the fall of 2001. \$4 million
- Restoration of the Pool, at West 102nd Street, and surrounding landscape, completed in March 2003. \$1.5 million
- Installation of new Reservoir fence, which closely resembles original historic fence, completed in the fall of 2003. \$2 million

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

From its very beginning, the Central Park Conservancy has worked together with the City of New York to advance mutual objectives on behalf of Central Park and the public who enjoys it. Over two decades, the unique public/private partnership between the Conservancy and the City charts a new course for urban park management nationwide.

Many of Central Park's restoration projects have been joint ventures between the City and the Conservancy. For example:

- Parks Department capital funds paid for the early restoration (completed 1983) of Belvedere Castle and the Conservancy raised money for the surrounding landscape.
- A private grant in 1986 funded design work for the restoration of the Harlem Meer; in 1990, public dollars funded the dredging of the Meer and the removal of its concrete curbing. Private dollars then paid to plant a naturalistic shoreline and to build the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center on the Meer's north shore.
- In 1993, a founding Conservancy Trustee offered a \$17 million challenge gift for major landscape restoration of Central Park, including the West Side, the Great Lawn and the North Meadow. The Conservancy and the City each matched this

unprecedented gift within three years; the Conservancy went on to raise an additional \$26.2 million toward operating support and endowment for the ongoing care of restored landscapes.

THE CITY'S ROLE IN CENTRAL PARK

The City's Department of Parks & Recreation retains control, policy, and enforcement responsibility for Central Park. Capital improvements in the Park continue to undergo public review at each stage of development with advice and consent from the Commissioner of Parks & Recreation. Parks & Recreation has discretion over all events in the Park, and all revenues generated from concessions in the Park go into the City of New York's general fund.

In February 1998, a new era of public/private partnership began when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Parks Commissioner Henry Stern, and Conservancy Chairman Ira Millstein signed a management contract with the Conservancy that ensures the continuing maintenance, capital restoration, and public programming for the Park. The Conservancy provides more than 85 percent of Central Park's annual \$23 million operating budget and is responsible for all basic care of the Park. Under the terms of the contract, the Conservancy receives a \$2.6 million fee for services annually. The Conservancy funds approximately four out of every five Central Park employees. The City funds lighting and maintenance of the Park drives and security in the Park, including a New York Police Department precinct in Central Park. The contract affirmed the City's confidence in its 18-year partnership with the Conservancy.

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Central Park Today



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Central Park's Sheep Meadow c. 1930



Sheep Meadow c. 1979



Sheep Meadow Today

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Central Park's Belvedere Castle
c. 1979



Belvedere Castle Today

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Central Park's Harlem Meer Boathouse, Demolished 1989



Charles A. Dana Discovery Center, Built 1993