Best Practices

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CENTRAL PARK
CONSERVANCY

CENTRAL PARK AND THE CONSERVANCY

Why is Central Park so important to New York City?

- Central Park owes its existence to the vision and leadership of civic-minded New Yorkers who saw an emerging need to provide people who lived and worked in the rapidly developing city with a means of escaping the stresses of urban life. They believed that a great urban park would be vital to sustain the citizens of New York and to position it as a world class city.
- This vital role that the Park's nineteenth century creators imagined it would play in the life of the city is what makes it so important to this day. No single public space or cultural institution contributes more significantly to the quality of life in our city, and none is more reflective of New York's identity, its vitality, and its image to the rest of the world.
- Nothing in its 150 year history has done more than the near-demise of Central Park, and its rebirth, to demonstrate its uniquely essential value and the connection between its outlook and that of the City. Just as the Park's dramatic deterioration in the 1960s and 70s reflected the decline, hopelessness, and lawlessness that defined the City in those decades, its remarkable turnaround under the Conservancy's leadership generated renewed hope for the future of New York, anticipating and contributing to the extraordinary recovery of a city whose decline had reached crisis proportions.

What is the Conservancy?

- The Conservancy is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1980 by civic-minded citizens, representing New York's philanthropic community and business leaders, who were determined to rescue Central Park from a crisis of deterioration by supplementing the City's management of the Park through private fundraising and involvement in its governance.
- Through a series of early successes, the young organization proved itself capable of making visible improvements in the park and raised the level of public expectation regarding the standards for its care. Building on successive accomplishments, the Conservancy worked with the City to skillfully restore Central Park and over time grew into its present role as the organization officially entrusted with its management.
- In 1998, the Conservancy signed an agreement with the City that formally recognizes its role as the keeper of the Park and outlines the fundraising and management responsibilities the Conservancy is required to meet in order to receive the City's contribution of funds towards the management of the Park.

The Conservancy's accomplishments:
Since it was founded in 1980, the Conservancy has:

- Restored approximately 80% of the Park.
- Invested more than $300 million in restoration, management, and programming.
- Assumed responsibility for the design and construction of all capital improvements in the Park, from planning through the preparation of contract documents, bidding the contract, and supervising construction.
- Assumed full responsibility for the day-to-day management and operation of the Park.

- Increased the use of the Park by making it clean, safe, and beautiful—and therefore, open and inviting to all—and contributed ultimately to a 91% reduction in crime.
- Transformed Central Park into the vital public space it was meant to be and, in so doing, contributed to the rebirth and sustained revitalization of New York.
- Emerged as a model organization and a leading authority on park management, with a proven track record that is internationally acclaimed.

What does it take to care for Central Park?

Central Park is a completely artificial landscape—an artistic composition of meadows, lakes, and woodlands supported by a complex system of underground infrastructure that transformed the original rocky, swampy site. The unique and fragile landscape requires intensive management and maintenance in order to sustain the unparalleled and unprecedented level of use it accommodates.

- Central Park receives more than 25 million visits annually, making it one of the top three tourist destinations in the City. The Conservancy operates four visitor centers to enhance their use, enjoyment, and stewardship of the Park.
- The Park's 843 acres are divided for management purposes into to 49 distinct zones, each of which is assigned at least one full-time zone gardener assisted by a core group of regular volunteers.
- Parkwide crews support the zone gardeners in areas requiring special expertise and equipment, including turf care, tree care, soil and waterbody management, historic preservation and monument conservation, mechanical services, pest management, event management, and others.
- The Park's 250 acres of lawn are mowed as often as once a week and require routine irrigation, overseeding, aeration, and fertilization.
- 26,000 trees are pruned on a seven-year cycle and regularly monitored and treated for disease and infection.
- Seven lakes and ponds covering 150 acres are monitored daily for water quality.
- Visible litter, amounting to more than 5,000,000 pounds annually, is removed on an ongoing (by zone gardeners) and daily (by a night and weekend crew) basis.
- Any graffiti is removed within 24 hours.
- 9,000 benches, 40 bridges, 21 playgrounds, and 58 miles of paths are kept in constant repair.
- The impact—on the Park and users—of the nearly 2,000 special events and 3,000 film, television, and photo shoots that take place annually, is carefully managed by the Conservancy's event crew.
- To accomplish all this, the Conservancy must maintain a staff of 225 full-time employees plus 30-35 seasonal employees, supplemented by the 25-30 Parks Department employees assigned to Central Park. Of the Conservancy's full-time personnel, approximately 150 are field staff directly involved in the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the Park. Another 25 provide program services through our education and recreation programs, visitor centers, and volunteer programs. 12-15 planners and landscape architects comprise our design office. And 35-40 staff work in administration, fundraising, and communications.
- The work that goes into caring for the park requires an annual operating budget of nearly $25 million, of which the Conservancy provides approximately 85%. The majority of the Conservancy's contribution is raised annually—through individual and corporate gifts, special events, foundation grants, and membership. In addition, income from a maintenance endowment established by the Conservancy helps to offset annual operating costs.

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A Brief History of
the Conservancy's Partnership with the City of New York
1980 – 2005

The Central Park Conservancy was founded in 1980 to supplement and support the City's efforts to care for Central Park. In the course of a twenty-five year history during which the dramatic decline of previous decades has been reversed, and management excellence restored to the Park, the Conservancy's role has evolved into that of the organization officially entrusted with the care of Central Park.

Prelude to the Partnership

Prior to the founding of the Conservancy, New York's fiscal and social crisis had contributed to the severe management neglect that transformed Central Park's lawns and meadows into barren dustbowls, hastened the deterioration its infrastructure and architecture, and ushered in an era of vandalism, territorial use, and illicit activity. By the mid-1970s, several citizen groups had emerged intent upon reclaiming the park by fundraising and organizing volunteer initiatives. One of these groups, the Central Park Community Fund, commissioned a study of the park's management that concluded by calling for the establishment of a single position within the Parks Department responsible for overseeing the planning and management of Central Park, and for a board of guardians to provide citizen oversight. The Koch administration was receptive, and in 1979 Parks Commissioner Gordon Davis established the office of Central Park Administrator, appointing to the position the executive director of another citizen organization, the Central Park Task Force. The Conservancy was founded the following year to support the office and initiatives of the Administrator and to provide consistent leadership through a self-perpetuating, citizen-based board that would also include as ex-officio trustees the Parks Commissioner, Central Park Administrator, and mayoral appointees.

The Conservancy's Early Years: Supplementing and Supporting

Central Park's transformation under the leadership of the Conservancy began with modest but highly significant first steps toward reclaiming the Park, addressing needs that could not be met within the existing structure and resources of the Parks Department. These included an initial focus on hiring interns and establishing a small restoration staff to reconstruct and repair unique rustic structures, undertake horticultural projects, and remove graffiti.

Planning and Restoration

By the early 1980s the Conservancy was engaged in design efforts and long-term restoration planning, using a combination of its own staff and consultants. Through this work, the Conservancy provided the impetus and leadership for several early restoration projects funded by the City, while at the same time preparing a comprehensive plan for rebuilding the Park. With the completion of this plan in 1985, the Conservancy launched its first capital campaign. Through the campaign, the Conservancy assumed increasing responsibility for funding the comprehensive restoration of the Park, and full responsibility for designing, bidding, and supervising all capital projects in the Park.

Transforming the Management
The restoration of Central Park has been accompanied by a crucial transformation of its management. As the Conservancy rebuilt the Park beginning in the mid-1980s, it provided dedicated staff to maintain restored zones; and as citywide budget cuts in the early 1990s resulted in attrition of the Parks Department staff responsible for routine maintenance, the Conservancy began to hire staff to replace these workers.

Management of the restored landscapes by the Conservancy's "zone gardeners," who develop a strong sense of ownership and accountability as well as an intimate understanding of their area of the Park, proved so successful that core maintenance and operations staff were reorganized in 1996 and a zone-based system of management implemented throughout the Park—supported by specialized crews in areas of maintenance requiring specific expertise or equipment, or more effectively conducted on a parkwide basis. Today the Conservancy employs four out of five maintenance and operations staff in the Park, and effectively oversees both the private and public employees under the authority of the Central Park Administrator, a publicly appointed position reporting to the Parks Commissioner, who is also the President of the Conservancy.

An Evolving Partnership
For the first thirteen years of its existence, the Conservancy's role in the Park evolved without any formal agreement regarding its partnership with the City.

In 1993, the Conservancy and the City signed a Memorandum of Understanding that defined the partnership as a function of the jointly held positions of Central Park Administrator and Conservancy President, as well as the inclusion of mayoral appointees and ex officio members on the Conservancy's Board. The MOU confirmed the Administrator's authority to accept gifts on behalf of the Park and oversee the work of Conservancy and Parks Department employees in the Park. It also confirmed the Parks Commissioner's final authority over all capital projects, maintenance and operations activities, programs, and events in the Park.

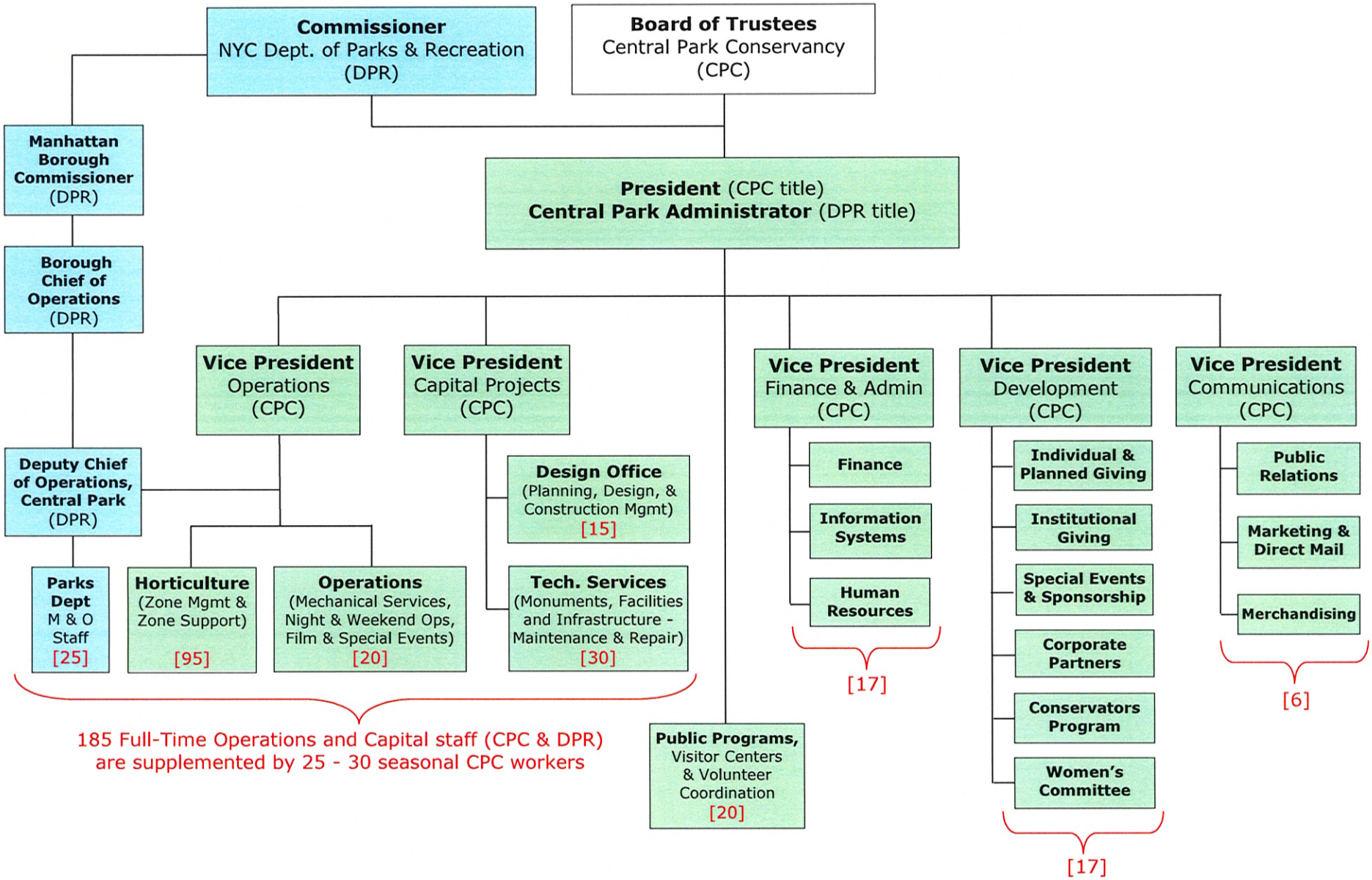
In 1998, the MOU was superceded by a formal agreement between the Conservancy and the City that officially recognizes the Conservancy as the organization responsible for the management of Central Park. Whereas the Central Park Administrator had previously coordinated two separate budgets (The Conservancy's and the Parks Department's) in managing the Park, this contract provides for the City to make an annual payment to the Conservancy in exchange for its services, and it defines those services. The payment is determined by a formula that is based upon the amount of funds raised by the Conservancy and spent in the Park the previous year: if the Conservancy raises and expends $5 million on park maintenance, it receives $1 million from the City. For each $1 beyond the first $5 million, the City contributes an additional $0.50, up to a maximum of an additional $1 million. The Conservancy receives additional funding according to a formula based on the City's annual net revenues from concessions in the Park. The Conservancy receives $0.50 for every dollar over the first $6 million earned by the City, to a maximum of an additional $2 million.

Presently the Conservancy provides approximately 85 percent of Central Park's annual $25 million operating budget and is responsible for all basic care of the Park.

Central Park Conservancy

Organizational Structure and Staffing, April 2005

** For Informational Purposes Only **



CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY

MANAGEMENT CONTRACT WITH THE CITY OF NEW YORK

In February 1998, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Parks Commissioner Henry Stern, and Central Park Conservancy Chairman Ira Millstein signed an 8-year management contract that formalized the relationship that had evolved between the Conservancy and the Parks Department, and their respective roles, at the time it was executed—eighteen years into the partnership. While it is in many respects uniquely applicable to this specific relationship at a particular point in time, this contract provided a mechanism for establishing three fundamental conditions important to any private partner in the management of a public space:

1. It affirms the Conservancy's **authority** to manage, maintain, and operate the Park.
2. It **indemnifies** the Conservancy from liability against claims by Park patrons
3. It establishes a contractual basis for a **fee** to the Conservancy for the services it provides

Today, the Conservancy provides more than 85 percent of Central Park's annual $25 million operating budget and is responsible for all basic care of the Park.

Under the terms of the contract, the Conservancy receives a fee for its services calculated annually based upon a formula that takes into account Conservancy funds raised and spent in the Park, as well as concession revenues generated for the City, in the previous year. The Conservancy is officially responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the Park, including cleaning, snow removal, landscape maintenance, and repairs. In practice, the Conservancy's management role extends beyond these services, encompassing in addition to them: the operation of visitor centers; provision of public programs; coordination and support of special events; and the design, contract bidding, and supervision of all capital projects.

The Conservancy presently funds approximately four out of every five maintenance and operations personnel in Central Park. The remaining 25 Parks Department staff assigned to Central Park work side by side with Conservancy employees, and are overseen by a supervisor with dual reporting responsibility to the Conservancy and the Parks Department.

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. The Department of Parks & Recreation has discretion over all user permits and events in the Park, and all revenues generated from concessions in the Park go into the City of New York's general fund.

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.

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MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Under the 1998 agreement with the City of New York that formally recognizes the Central Park Conservancy as the manager of Central Park, we are responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the Park, including cleaning, landscape maintenance, snow removal, and repairs. (In practice, the Conservancy's management role extends beyond these services, encompassing in addition to them: the operation of visitor centers, provision of public programs, coordination and support of special events, and design and supervision of all capital projects.) The staff responsible for upkeep of the Park is organized through a zone management approach, supported by the existence of specialized parkwide crews. This approach places accountability for a defined area with a single individual, while providing that individual with the necessary support in areas of maintenance and operation that require specialized expertise and equipment, or are most effectively addressed on a parkwide basis. It has proven a highly effective strategy in managing Central Park with a maintenance and operations workforce that presently numbers approximately 150 Conservancy and 30 Parks Department staff—nearly 100 fewer employees than in the 1970s, when the Park was in its most severe state of decline.

Today, Central Park is managed to extremely high standards. Some examples include: visible litter is removed by 9:00am each morning and continuously throughout the day; any graffiti is removed within 24 hours; trash receptacles are emptied daily; benches and playgrounds are maintained in full repair; catch basins are cleaned regularly. Lawns are classified into three maintenance categories—based upon investment in their restoration, nature of their use and popularity, and landscape significance—with Class A lawns requiring daily irrigation, fertilization as necessary, aeration and overseeding, weekly mowing, and careful management of use.

Zone Management

Central Park's zone management system was instituted parkwide in 1996—in a departure from crew-based management—in order to introduce accountability for every aspect of maintenance at the level of the individual landscapes. Central Park's 843-acres are divided into 10 sections and 49 zones; the zones are defined both by their unique characteristics and by geographical boundaries. This approach to organizing staff fosters a sense of ownership and pride among the zone gardeners as well as the volunteers assigned to each zone.

- Zone Gardeners are front-line staff, responsible for: assessing all aspects of what goes on in their zone; addressing conditions that fall within their broad and diverse horticultural and maintenance tasks; and reporting to their Section Supervisors conditions or problems requiring assistance from parkwide crews or upper management.
- Zone Gardeners supervise the horticultural volunteers assigned to them, who commit to one or more regular three-hour shifts on weekdays.
- Zone Gardeners are the "ambassadors of the Park"—in the most direct contact with the public—and develop positive relationships with regular park patrons in their zone.
- Zone Gardeners develop a valuable understanding of their individual zones that enables them to monitor and respond to unique conditions.
- By establishing a single point of accountability and coordination for each distinct area, zone management enables Section Supervisors to quickly assess successes or failures within a zone.

Zone Support
In addition to the zone gardening staff and section supervisors, a number of specialized, parkwide crews support zone operations throughout the Park.

Horticulture Crews:
- Turf care
- Tree care
- Pest control
- Landscape horticulture
- Soil and water body management
- Seasonal help
- Volunteers

Operations Support:
- Mechanical services
- Trash collection
- Night and weekend operations
- Special event management
- Film coordination

Technical Services: (reports to Capital Projects department)
- Historic conservation and preservation
- Facility and infrastructure repair
  - Structures
  - Bench repair
  - Playground repair
  - Bathroom maintenance
  - Graffiti removal
  - Drainage infrastructure

Proactive Management Practices
The dramatic restoration and transformation of the Park's management since 1980 has made it more integral to the life of the City than ever before. More people use Central Park, and in more ways, than at any time in its history. Proactive management of its use is critical to balancing the many demands upon Central Park in order to ensure its continued use and enjoyment by all, and includes:

Film and Event Management
The Conservancy's event and film management crew coordinates the operational side of the 3,000 film, television, and photo shoots take place annually in Central Park (including as many as 100 feature films each year), as well as over 2,000 permitted events. These events range from the many picnics and field trips that take place daily, to races and concerts every week, to major events such as large-scale concerts, the Marathon, and unique happenings such as the artist Christo's 16-day installation of "The Gates."

Red Flag System
A red flag system is used to alert the public when lawns are closed due to adverse lawn conditions (such as after rain, when wet grass is vulnerable to damage), for horticultural maintenance, or to recuperate after an event. The red flag system is also employed as part of the Conservancy's strategy of rotating heavily used ballfields in order to allow the fields to recuperate and to enable the Conservancy to perform necessary maintenance.

User and Advisory Committees
The Conservancy's proactive management of the Park includes regular consultation with a number of user and advisory groups, including a recreation roundtable, woodlands advisory committee, and dog owners advisory committee, among others.

Accountability

The single most important factor that the Conservancy contributes to the management of Central Park is accountability. As a private, not-for-profit organization managing a public space on behalf the City, we have to earn the right to remain entrusted with its care, as well as earn the confidence of those whose support we rely upon to fund our work. This means proving ourselves every day by being vigilant about the standards we maintain and responsive to immediate needs and ongoing challenges. Zone management is the cornerstone of the Conservancy's approach to accountability, establishing absolute clarity about who is responsible for what, supported by a clear chain of command. In application, two principles—visibility and communication—have been key to the success of this approach to management and accountability.

Visibility

Part of being accountable is being visible. Our staff, as well as our volunteers, wear uniforms to ensure that they are identifiable and accountable (to the general public as well as our donors). Visibility is also about maintaining a visible presence of senior management in the Park, so staff know that their work is noticed and valued.

Communication

Clear responsibility and a clear chain of command are effective only to the extent that they are supported by good communication. Staff cannot perform to their potential if they do not have adequate opportunity to exchange information and ideas that affect their work, or if they cannot reach one another quickly and efficiently in the field. The Conservancy's management strategy therefore includes: (1) a weekly meeting of section supervisors that focuses on horticultural maintenance parkwide; (2) a weekly operations meeting that includes police and other agencies; and (3) regular meetings with a variety of constituent groups and citizen advisory committees. In a large park like Central Park, effective communication also means ensuring that every zone gardener, supervisor, and crew is accessible at all times via radio or cell phone.

Central Park - Zone Map

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JOB DESCRIPTION:
Zone Gardener

Department: Operations
Reports to: Section Supervisor and Foreperson

Position Responsibilities:

- Perform general landscape maintenance
- Carry out general park maintenance (including trash pickup) and monitoring of maintenance and repair needs
- Complete horticultural maintenance duties (planting, deep-root and soil fertilization, moisture monitoring and irrigation, etc.)
- Supervise and train seasonal personnel and volunteers in various horticultural tasks
- Use supplied equipment to execute all tasks properly and safely
- Interact with the public and represent the Conservancy in a professional and cordial manner
- Position requires that job duties be performed in all weather conditions

Position Requirements:

- Must be highly motivated
- 1-3 years horticultural experience or a degree in horticulture or related field
- ability to work closely with other staff members and interact extensively with the public
- New York State Driver's License
- Ability to perform heavy, physical labor on a daily basis
- Some weekend and holiday work required
- CDL license and experience in operation of heavy equipment a plus

Safety Requirements:
Establishment and maintenance of a safe work environment is the shared responsibility of this organization and employees at every level. The Conservancy will make every effort to assure a safe environment and be in compliance with federal, state, and local safety regulations. Employees are expected to obey safety rules and to exercise caution in all their work activities. Accordingly, employees should be aware of any hazards, which could cause an injury or accident (e.g., spills, obstacles in walkways, etc.). If an employee discovers a potential dangerous condition, he or she should alert other employees and notify his or her supervisor immediately.

CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY

JOB DESCRIPTION:
Section Supervisor

Department: Operations
Reports to: Director of Horticulture

Position Summary:
Oversee the daily horticulture and operational activities for one of 10 park sections, each containing multiple zones

Position Responsibilities:
- Train permanent and seasonal personnel in landscape maintenance, including operation of a wide variety of power equipment
- Organize daily, monthly, seasonal, work schedules
- Supervise zone gardeners in carrying out all routine maintenance and horticultural duties necessary to maintain their individual zones
- Supervise operational tasks, including bathroom maintenance, playground cleaning, inspection, minor repairs of infrastructure, daily openings and closings, and monitoring of concessionaires
- Meet weekly with zone gardeners and evaluate performance on a regular basis
- Ensure that lawn areas are open and closed as weather conditions change (in accordance with parkwide management standards and applicable management plans for specific landscapes) and that all user groups are advised accordingly
- Perform administrative duties as needed, including equipment and materials requisition, review and approval of timesheets, preparation and administration of staff evaluations, etc.
- Ensure all equipment is maintained
- Coordinate support of special events and weekend operations
- Work with community groups and the Department of Parks & Recreation to resolve user issues
- Must work a varied schedule and be available for overtime.

Perform other duties as required

Position Requirements:
- Bachelor's degree in turf management or related field
- 3-5 years supervisory experience
- Sound organizational and interpersonal skills
- NYS Pesticide and Driver's license required
- Ability to operate a variety of equipment and to work a flexible schedule

Safety Requirements:
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JOB DESCRIPTION:
Section Foreperson

Department: Operations

Reports to: Section Supervisor and Director of Horticulture

Position Summary:
Responsible for leading section staff in performing horticultural and operational duties, serving as point person in the absence of section supervisor and demonstrating to other section staff a proper work ethic and work performance.

- Position Responsibilities:
- Lead section staff in all landscape maintenance and general maintenance tasks
- Assist the section supervisor with administrative duties
- Supervise and train seasonal staff in various horticultural and operational tasks
- Conduct inventories of tools, equipment, and supplies, and recommend purchases to section supervisor
- Position requires operation of vehicles in accordance with acceptable safety standards
- Position requires manual labor and use of hand and power tools and equipment.
- Position requires that job duties be performed in all weather conditions
- Must work a varied schedule and be available for overtime.

Perform other duties as required

Safety Requirements: Establishment and maintenance of a safe work environment is the shared responsibility of this organization and employees at every level. The Conservancy will make every effort to assure a safe environment and be in compliance with federal, state, and local safety regulations. Employees are expected to obey safety rules and to exercise caution in all their work activities. Accordingly, employees should be aware of any hazards, which could cause an injury or accident (e.g., spills, obstacles in walkways, etc.). If an employee discovers a potential dangerous condition, he or she should alert other employees and notify his or her supervisor immediately.

CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY

PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT: TURF CARE PROGRAM

The Conservancy's turf care and use management strategies are designed to ensure that Central Park's lawns and meadows will continue to be used and enjoyed by more people, in more ways, than ever before. Key strategies include:

- Lawns are closed when they need to recover from heavy use during large events, when they are especially susceptible to damage (such as when the turf is dormant or wet), and for necessary maintenance.
- Activities and behaviors that can significantly impact the lawns are prohibited (soccer players must not wear cleats; barbeques are prohibited; vehicles may never be driven on the lawns, etc.)
- All operations, events, film shoots, etc. in the Park are carefully managed by the Conservancy to minimize impact.

Two key aspects of our turf care program are the Red Flag system and our proactive management of special events.

Red Flag System

Field Rotation

A red flag system is employed to rotate heavily used ball fields, such as those at the North Meadow and the Great Lawn. For example, 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.

Vulnerable Conditions

The red flag system also alerts the public to horticultural care being performed or to adverse lawn conditions requiring the landscape to be closed (such after a large event, when soil is compacted from heavy use, or after rain, when soil is especially vulnerable to compaction).

Management Strategies for Special Events

Crowd Control

For events with the potential to attract extremely large crowds the Conservancy employs mechanisms to ensure that capacity is not exceeded (for example, requiring that the event be ticketed) and that crowd circulation is managed in a safe and orderly way that minimizes any possibility of harm to people or damage to the landscapes.

Supervision of Event Set-Up and Logistics

For any event that takes place in the Park, Conservancy staff manage the details and timing of equipment type and location, working with the event organizer in the planning phase and overseeing the duration of the event, from load-in and set-up through break-down and load-out.

Rain Dates

For any event that takes place on a lawn or meadow, there is the requirement of a rain date or cancellation provision to prevent use when the turf is vulnerable.

Recovery Periods

Landscapes are closed to all use for a period following an event as necessary to permit recovery of the turf and its remediation, as needed, through aeration and overseeding.

Restoration Bonds

Event organizers are required to post a bond sufficient to cover the cost of restoring any potential damage to landscapes used for an event.