

# Morningside Park Master Plan

Prepared for The Friends of Morningside Park

Quennell Rothschild & Partners, LLP, Landscape Architects

**December 31, 2001**

## **Letter from the President**

Dear Reader,

Over the past four years a new and vibrant sense of community pride and ownership has grown in the communities that surround Morningside Park. This spectacular rebirth of Morningside Park as a valued community resource is a testimony to the efforts of individuals, community associations and institutions that have made a commitment to its revitalization.

The historically strained relationships and negative perceptions between Central Harlem, Manhattan Valley and Morningside Heights have begun to break down as residents have rediscovered the park and are working together for its future. We are now poised to move to the next steps in ensuring a sustained future based on solid, long term planning.

The activities of the past few years illustrate the steady progress made by the Friends of Morningside Park. Much of this success has grown from our annual festival, Celebrate Morningside Park - Our Common Ground which began in 1997. This led to a community based planning process which produced the Revitalization Plan in 1999-2000.

The J.M. Kaplan fund provided resources for a new position of Community Coordinator which has ensured the continued growth of activities and community development necessary for the sustained success of the park and enabled the Friends to develop an effective volunteer corps for the park and be instrumental in planning and implementation of park initiatives.

In 2001 an impressive set of 18 program events responded to the community interests outlined in our Revitalization plan. With numerous collaborations, we have seen new support of the Frederick Law Olmsted designed park. The Friends are now poised to address numerous critical long-term issues that will effect the future of Morningside Park. The success of long term future planning will need significant financial and other resource support.

Building on the strong community support for Morningside Park and a \$50,000 grant from the J. M. Kaplan Fund, the Friends retained landscape architects Quennell Rothschild & Partners to develop a master plan, to facilitate setting capital priorities and identifying costs in such a way as to allow fundraising and support for specific phases of the capital improvement plan. Assuming implementation of the plan will extend over a 10-15 year period, this Master Plan will provide a critical foundation for future action.

Now the Friends must accomplish a well-defined sense of direction if we are to be successful in meeting the needs of the park in the future. Upon reading this report, we are confident you will see our long-term vision and join us in protecting this magnificent park. We are very enthusiastic about our future and the future of Morningside Park!

Sincerely,

**Doug Robinson**

President – Friends of Morningside Park

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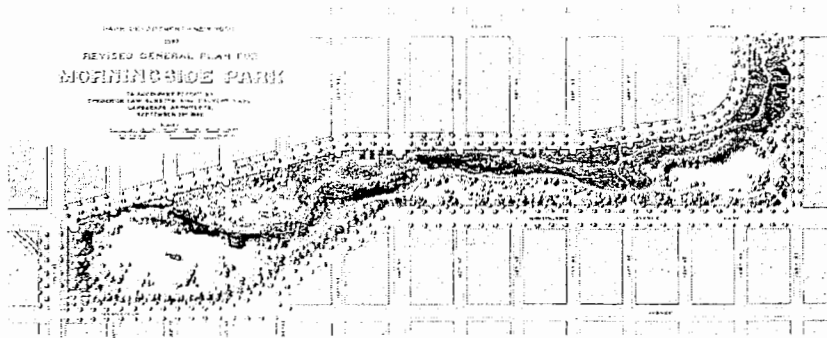
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# Executive Summary

## Background

Morningside Park, located between the Harlem and Morningside Heights neighborhoods of Manhattan, provides its neighbors with 30 acres of parkland, encompassing active and passive recreational facilities, diverse topography and magnificent views from its upper elevations.

Despite the additions and alterations which have been made throughout its history much of the original park plan remains, an important example of the work of landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Their design for Morningside Park was finalized in 1887, after the completion of their plans for Central Park and Prospect Park.



1887 park plan

Neglect and reduced maintenance have led to widespread deterioration of the park, following the 1968 community protests which forced Columbia University to abandon its plans to construct a gymnasium in the park. Since 1973 several community-based plans for the park have been proposed, and the southern portion of the park was extensively renovated in 1988 based on an earlier master plan prepared by Quennell Rothschild Associates in 1985, but fiscal crises of the 1990's put further work on hold.

Recently, the Friends of Morningside Park commissioned this master plan to

guide future restoration efforts, which will repair the damage caused by neglect and years of heavy use, and provide the renovations needed for the park to serve new generations of families and children.

The plan will be financed through a combination of public and private funding. Its implementation will be phased over several years, each phase carefully coordinated to maintain use of the park while restoration work is carried out.

## The Master Plan

The plan proposes comprehensive improvements and renovation of the park as a whole, beginning at the northern section. The work will balance sensitive restoration of the park's historic features with rehabilitation of inadequate drainage and water supply systems. Overgrown rock areas will be cleared, and stabilization will control erosion at planted slopes and lawns. Weeds and invasive plantings will be thinned to open up views within the park, providing greater visibility and safety, and bringing back the distant vistas from the park to the city and beyond.

Throughout the park paths and steps will be refurbished, and walls, paved areas, park furnishings and equipment will be renovated or replaced. Lighting and signage will be improved, and seasonal flower plantings will be added. The water supply system will be expanded to provide hose connections throughout the park to allow easy watering of lawns and planted areas.

Specific improvements proposed for the early phases include the reconstruction of the 120<sup>th</sup> Street steps and improvements to the 123<sup>rd</sup> Street play area and steps.

# Introduction

This master plan for the restoration and improvement of Morningside Park is the result of a newly re-energized commitment by surrounding neighborhoods to return the entire park to useful service. It builds significantly on the previous master plan prepared in 1985, updating suggested improvements to reflect current conditions and needs.

Despite significant, periodic improvement efforts since the park was created in 1887, dereliction and disrepair remain prevalent. Capital projects designed to improve the park generally as well as address specific problems have been implemented at regular intervals throughout the park's history, resulting in the improvement of large areas of the park, but comprehensive restoration of the entire park remains a challenge.

Significant improvements such as the construction of extensive play facilities in the 1950's, or the new pond, waterfall, and baseball fields installed at the south end in 1988 left other parts of the park untouched. It is clear that a more sustained, coordinated effort to address park-wide problems is necessary. Ongoing maintenance of restored areas is fundamental to sustained improvement.



*view of field house before 1988 restoration project*

The Friends of Morningside Park, founded in 1968 amidst controversy and

confrontation, has re-emerged as a consistent, strong advocate for improvement. Increasingly, throughout the park, evidence of renewed maintenance and restoration efforts is noticeable, guided and largely carried out by the Friends. Its success indicates, that for the first time in decades the necessary combination of capital improvements and ongoing maintenance is being applied to restoration efforts.

In commissioning this master plan, the Friends, in concert with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, NYC Councilman Bill Perkins, and with the generous support of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, recognized the need for a unified, coordinated plan for improvement.

Following a review of park programs and facilities carried out by Projects For Public Spaces in 1999 and meetings with a range of neighborhood and community representatives, several goals and objectives were defined to guide the creation of new plans for the park.



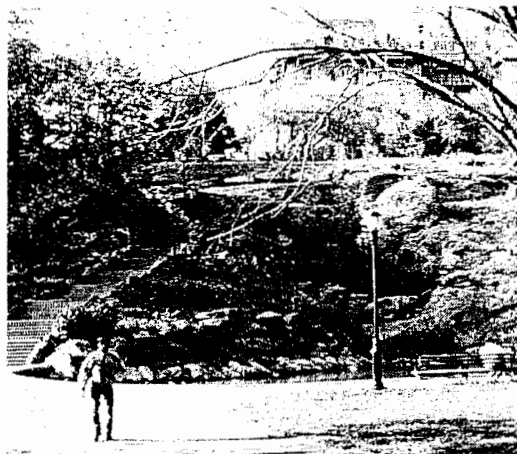
*view of restored field house and ball fields after completion of 1988 project*

# Introduction

## Goals for the Master Plan

The original design of the park, by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux is still evident today despite numerous alternations, additions, and modifications implemented over the intervening 134 years. The park retains much of the original 19<sup>th</sup> Century intention; the dramatic topography, bold rock outcrops, "pastoral" lawns, meandering paths and monumental stairs, remain defining visual and structural elements of Morningside's distinctive character.

Similarly, almost since inception, the needs and desires of surrounding community have played an important role in defining the programs and facilities incorporated within the park's design. A balance has been sought between active and passive uses: sports facilities and naturalistic meadows and woodlands.



*the 1988 restoration of the south end of the park included two baseball fields, and a basketball court set in a pastoral landscape, with a new pond replacing the previously scarred landscape caused by excavation for the gym site, successfully incorporating active and natural elements into the park*

There is broad consensus that maintaining both the historic qualities of the original design while at the same time continuing to respond and adapt to contemporary needs and desires remains the highest priorities. Specifically, overall goals for the master plan are:

- Seek and respond to community concerns to define programmatic and physical improvements.
- Respect the history of the park and the original intentions of the 1887 plan developed by Olmsted & Vaux. New construction should be sympathetic with the spirit of the original design. Utilize historically appropriate materials for repairs and replacements.
- Improve park safety. Repair unsafe conditions including repairing deteriorated masonry and pavements, and thinning or removing overgrown vegetation. Repair and maintain lighting along major routes through the park.
- All improvements must be designed for long life and low maintenance.
- Improvements should encourage park use by all age groups. Physical improvements should be planned in to respond to ongoing community events and other programs and to the involvement of local area schools.

These general goals and objectives are supported by the specific improvement projects proposed. They suggest a continuing process of refinement and adjustment made in response to changing community needs. They anticipate the continuation of the Friends of Morningside Park to help to bring about the necessary dialogue between community residents, city departments, and public and private sources of funds for improvement efforts.

# Introduction

## Park History - A Brief Summary

When the city legislature passed an act to create the Manhattan street pattern in 1811 it disregarded topography and other local conditions. When street development reached 110<sup>th</sup> Street in 1867, it was clear that the existing rock escarpment separating Morningside Heights from Harlem would constitute a prohibitive barrier to construction of through streets. It was suggested that a park be built instead.

Designs for the park were developed first in 1873 by Olmsted & Vaux, revised 1881 by Jacob Wrey Mould, and finally re-revised by Olmsted & Vaux again in 1887 reflected the challenges presented by the precipitous rock cliffs, the scarcity of flat or gently sloping land, and the lack of clear programmatic direction. Over the years, since its original construction, its further development and maintenance have been hampered by these same factors.

Notwithstanding, the Olmsted & Vaux 1887 plan as executed remains as one of the best preserved examples of their work, remaining largely intact. Many of the original materials and plantings have been replaced, but the plan for the park today is mostly as it was originally designed, featuring woodlands, pastoral lawns, meandering paths, and a massive stone retaining wall along the west side.

The most important departure from the original design came about with the proposal by Columbia University to construct a gymnasium in the middle of the park between 113<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> Streets in the 1960's. Construction of the gym was arrested shortly after it commenced in 1968 because of widespread community objection, leaving a gaping excavation pit.

In the period following, community representatives organized a series of design efforts to restore the park as a whole as well as the abandoned construction site. Between 1973 and 1984, successive plans were

developed but none received the necessary consensus of community support or the public funding to be realized.

In 1984 a design team including historic park restoration specialists met extensively with community groups and other local residents to try again to create a broadly supported restoration plan. Utilizing a combination of past proposals and new ones, the 1985 master plan achieved the necessary support from both the community and city departments to be implemented.



*the Columbia University gym site after excavation was abandoned, showing the scarred hillside*

Restoration of the "gym site" was identified as the highest priority among more than 25 discrete projects proposed. The five acre area between 110<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> Streets at the southern end of the park was completely restored in 1988 according to the plans proposed by the master plan.

Since 1988, decreased capital funding for city parks has severely inhibited further restoration. The reconstruction of the stairs at 116<sup>th</sup> Street and the installation of some new play equipment at the north end of the park are the only major capital projects undertaken recently.

## Implementing the Plan

An important challenge still facing efforts to restore the park remains sustaining improvement efforts over time in the face likely substantial variations in public funding available for city park improvement.

The master plan proposes several strategies for ensuring a sustainable restoration program far into the future. These include:

- Maintain Friends of Morningside Park as the primary advocate for the park. Creating a consistent advocacy effort requires securing private support from individuals and foundations to provide essential permanent staff. On-going advocacy is necessary to sustain all other improvements efforts.
- Create a multi-year phasing plan anticipating several levels of funding, a range of desirable projects, each including a maintenance and operations budget capable of sustaining the improvements over time.
- Meet with elected representatives, city parks officials, and members of the Community Boards annually to review proposed improvement projects, probable sources and levels of funding, and the schedule for securing the necessary commitments to implement each project.
- Review master plan and phasing plan with a range of private foundations and individuals with specific concerns for similar projects and local community improvement. Create an ongoing program to secure private financial support.
- Review scopes and budgets with the Capital Projects division of NYC Parks and Recreation, the Community Board Parks Committee, and other relevant agencies.
- Create a permanent endowment fund to support continuing

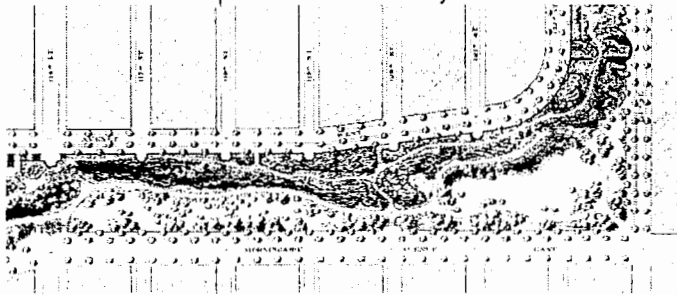
maintenance, operation and advocacy efforts.

The most successful public/private partnerships supporting park improvement efforts have demonstrated that sustained efforts achieve the greatest, durable results. Morningside Park is attracting dedicated support from neighborhood residents as never before. Consistent advocacy for park improvement over the next several years will create the momentum necessary to achieve a broad range of improvements.



## Master Plan – Priorities & Costs

The master plan design shown and described on the following pages uses the original Olmsted and Vaux plan and design philosophy as the basis for any modifications to the existing park layout. The proposed plan attempts to restore portions of the original park layout which have been lost through changes over time, and to recreate the original design intent of making naturalistic landscapes accessible to city residents.



*northern section of 1887 park plan*

### Projects

In order to complete the renovation of the park it is necessary to create a number of discrete, fundable projects, which can be carried out over several years as funds become available. Accordingly, a major goal of this master plan is to establish an order of priority for the master plan projects. Each project will require detailed design work, and more community input and review of these detailed designs will be required before any construction can begin.

The master plan and the order of priority for the individual projects was developed through input with the Friends of Morningside Park. The costs for the individual projects shown are 2001 estimates, and include all demolition and construction costs as well as allowances for survey, design and engineering fees. The costs are for complete renovation, although the level of renovation work for each project may need to be modified to fit with the available funds.

The park is divided into three broad areas of priority:

- **First Priority area** includes the northern section of the park from 123rd Street down to 120<sup>th</sup> Street at the west side and down to 116<sup>th</sup> Street on the east side  
Projects in this area will include the renovation of the steps at 120<sup>th</sup> Street, improvements to the 123 Playground and surrounding area, repairs to basketball courts at the “aircraft carrier” and removal of the remainder of the “aircraft carrier” and its replacement with a new playground and lawn area, slope stabilization and control of erosion, and improvements to the drainage, water supply and lighting systems.
- **Second Priority area** includes the central section of the park from 120<sup>th</sup> Street on the west side and from 116<sup>th</sup> Street on the east side down to 113<sup>th</sup> Street.  
Projects in this area will include the renovation of the upper steps at 114<sup>h</sup> Street and construction of a new overlook, improvements to the narrow “goat path” below the Morningside Avenue retaining wall, slope stabilization and control of erosion, and improvements to the drainage, water supply and lighting systems.
- **Third Priority area** includes the south section of the park from 113<sup>th</sup> Street to 110<sup>th</sup> Street.  
This area was extensively renovated by a major projects in 1988. Additional proposed projects include upgrades to the water supply system, and improvement of the picnic and play area close to the 113<sup>th</sup> Street , as well as sidewalk and park perimeter projects.

Within each area a number of discrete projects have been defined. These projects are identified on the master plan, with estimates for their probable cost, and each project is described in greater detail in the Improvement Projects section of this report.

# Master Plan – Priorities & Costs

## First Priority Projects

- 1. 120th Street stair reconstruction ..... \$655,034
- 2. 123rd Street link - new stairs, overlook and entrance on 123rd Street ..... \$1,119,496
- 3. Central lawn/Aircraft carrier – repair of Existing basketball courts, new play area and lawn ..... \$1,838,804
- 4. 123rd Street playground building improvements ..... \$552,144
- 5. 123rd Street playground improvements ..... \$1,628,923
- 6. Playground perimeter - walks, benches, planting..... \$521,065
- 7. Improve drainage, water supply and lighting 120th to 123rd Streets..... \$662,837
- 8. Slope planting and erosion control 120th to 123rd Streets..... \$976,005
- 9. North lawn improvements, including walks, path rehabilitation and benches ..... \$381,938

**total** ..... **\$8,336,247**

## Second Priority Projects

- 10. Goat path rehabilitation ..... \$504,666
- 11. 114th Street upper stairs and new overlook ..... \$1,139,863
- 12. Improve drainage, water supply and lighting 114th to 120th Streets ..... \$535,084
- 13. Slope planting and erosion control 114th to 120th Streets ..... \$1,942,753
- 14. Lawn and walk improvements, including additional benches 114th to 116th Streets ..... \$325,335
- 15. Pond improvements..... \$327,980
- 16. 113th Street picnic area and play area improvements ..... \$363,555

**total:** ..... **\$5,139,235**

# Master Plan – Priorities & Costs

## Third Priority Projects

|   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 17. Improve water supply and hose connections<br>110th to 114th Streets.....                | \$409,711                 |
| 18. Slope planting and erosion control<br>110th to 114th Streets.....                       | \$976,005                 |
| 19. Lawn and walk improvements, including additional benches<br>110th to 114th Streets..... | \$464,198                 |
| 20. Sidewalk and wall – 110 <sup>th</sup> Street and<br>Morningside Drive .....             | \$1,509,634               |
| 21. Sidewalk and fence – 123rd Street and<br>Morningside Avenue .....                       | \$2,681,633               |
| <b>total</b>  | <b><u>\$6,041,180</u></b> |

MASTER PLAN TOTAL ALL PROJECTS ..... \$19,516,662

## Ongoing Improvement Projects

These are projects which have already begun or can be carried out using existing operating funds, or by volunteers, or through neighborhood fundraising efforts for relatively small financial amounts:

- Establish and maintain school/community volunteer garden areas.
- Flower plantings at all entries.
- Flower plantings at Morningside Drive overlooks.
- Signage for nature trails.
- Signage/bulletin boards at major entries.
- Tree pruning and fertilizing.
- Dog run upgrade, including new fencing and additional benches.

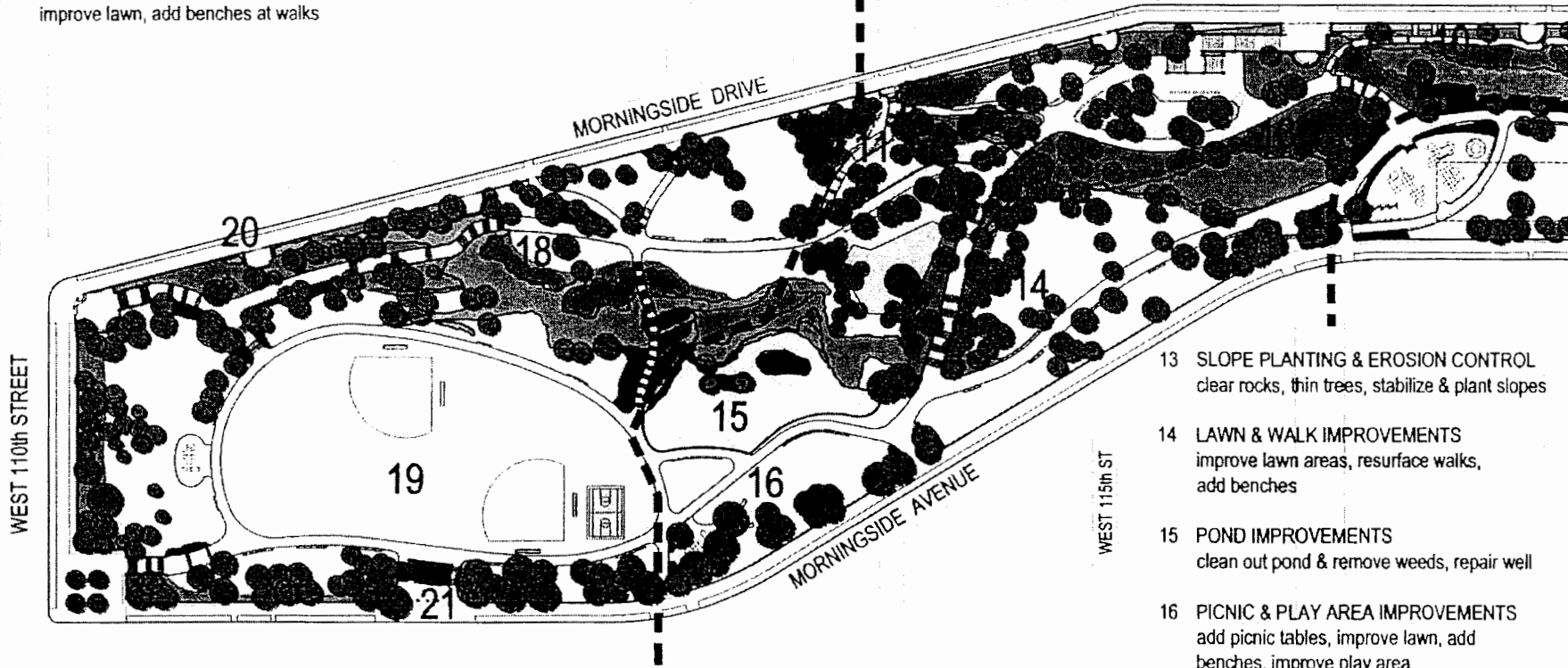
Morningside Park Master Plan  
**Conceptual Plan – South Area**

**THIRD PRIORITY PROJECT AREA**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>17 <b>WATER SUPPLY</b><br/>add hose connections &amp; drinking fountains</p> <p>18 <b>EROSION CONTROL &amp; SLOPE PLANTING</b><br/>clear rocks, thin trees, stabilize &amp; plant slopes</p> <p>19 <b>LAWN IMPROVEMENTS</b><br/>improve lawn, add benches at walks</p> | <p>20 <b>PERIMETER IMPROVEMENTS - WEST</b><br/>improve all entries &amp; overlooks at Morningside Drive &amp; 110th Street, improve sidewalks, add benches and trees, repair stone wall</p> <p>21 <b>PERIMETER IMPROVEMENTS - EAST</b><br/>improve all entries at Morningside Avenue &amp; 123rd Street, improve sidewalks, add benches and trees, repair fence</p> |
|---|---|

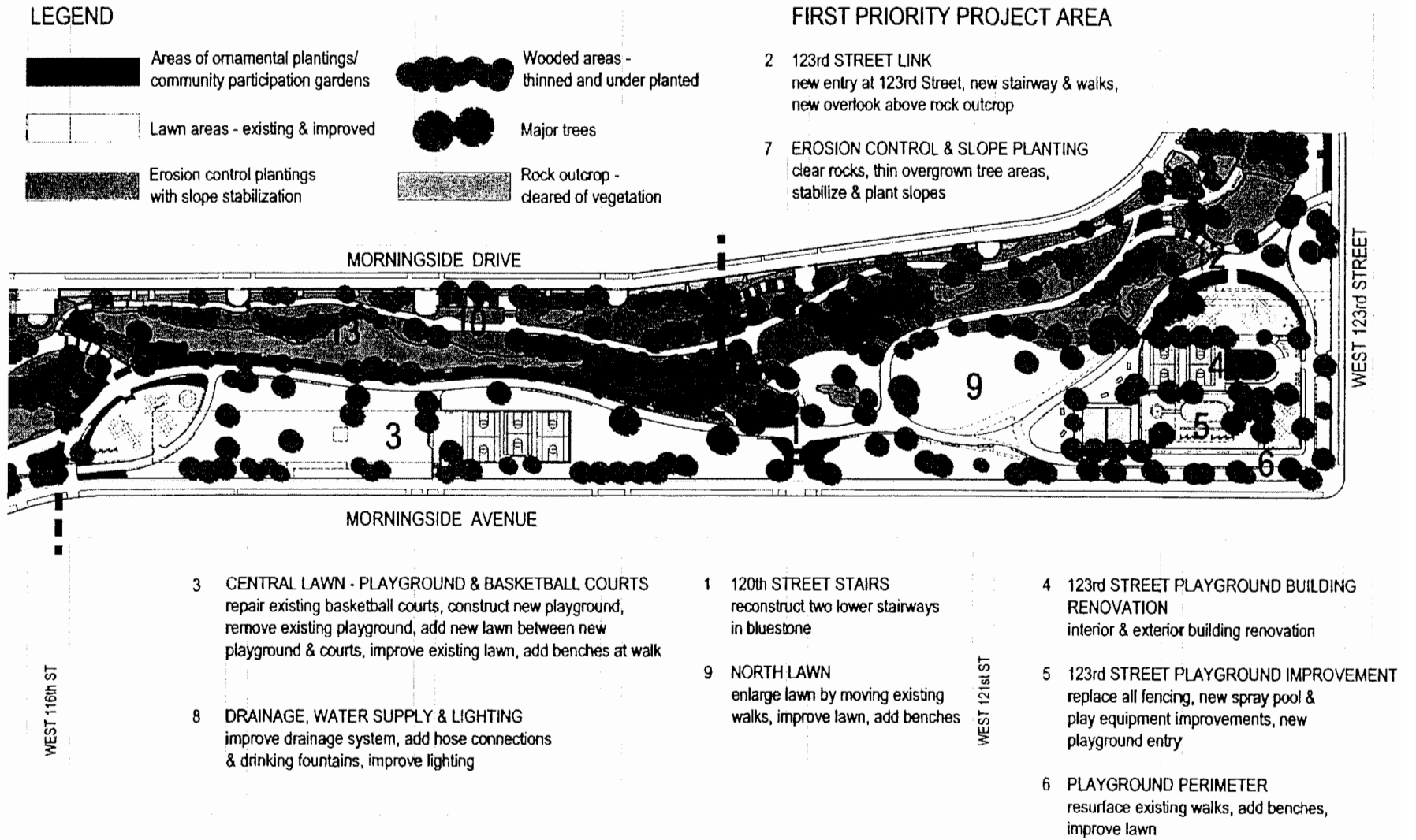
**SECOND PRIORITY PROJECT AREA**

- 10 **GOAT PATH**  
improve walks & fencing, reconstruct steps in bluestone
- 11 **114th STREET UPPER STAIRS**  
new entry, new stairs & walks, new overlook using remnants of "Restawhile" shelter
- 12 **DRAINAGE, WATER SUPPLY & LIGHTING**  
improve drainage system, add hose connections & drinking fountains, repair & upgrade lighting



# Morningside Park Master Plan

## Conceptual Plan – North Area



## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

The following is a description of the construction work required for each of the projects included in the master plan. Each of these projects will require detailed design work, producing drawings and specifications which will be used to obtain competitive bids from contractors to construct the work.

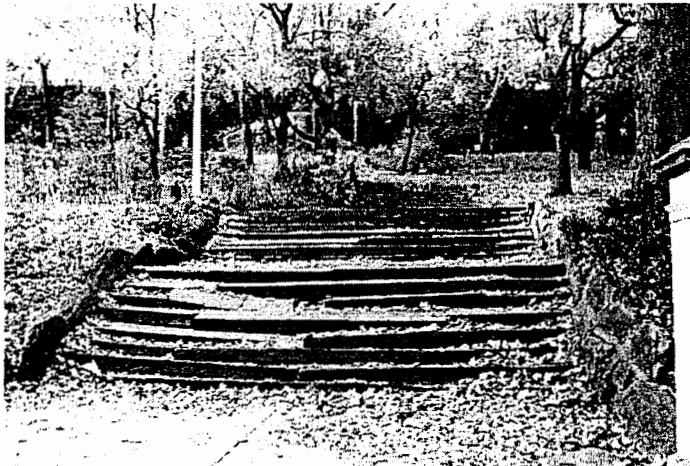
The projects are listed in their proposed order of priority, as shown on the mater plan.

### 1. 120<sup>th</sup> STREET STAIRS

Remove and salvage existing bluestone treads and stone cheek walls at two lower sets of steps.

Reconstruct two lower sets of steps with concrete footings and new and site-salvaged bluestone treads and stone cheek walls, with steel handrails.

Install new concrete pavement at Morningside Avenue entrance.  
Regrade and re-plant slopes adjacent to steps.



*lower portion of 120<sup>th</sup> Street stairs*

### 2. 123<sup>rd</sup> STREET LINK

Remove and salvage existing bluestone treads and granite block cheek walls. Remove connecting walks and path and benches at west side of 123 Playground. Clear rock outcrop of vegetation



*existing steps to be removed*

Construct new steps with concrete footings and new and site salvaged bluestone treads and rough stone cheek walls, with steel handrails.

Construct new overlook at top of rock outcrop, with stone faced wall and benches.

Construct new asphalt walk at west side of 123 Playground, connecting existing walk at north side of playground and to 123<sup>rd</sup> Street. Install benches at new walks.

Construct new entrance at 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, with concrete pillars to match existing at Morningside Avenue.

Construct fenced enclosure for existing maintenance storage container, with

# Master Plan – Improvement Projects

lockable gate.

Regrade and plant new lawn areas, regrade and plant slopes adjacent to steps. Install new lighting at steps, walk and entrance.

### 3 “AIRCRAFT CARRIER”/CENTRAL LAWN

This area of the park was originally a large lawn area with informal groups of trees. In the 1950's a large rectangular play area and three basketball courts were constructed, with access only from the street, and no through access into the park.

The linear enclosure has been nick-named the “aircraft carrier” as its long and fortified shape recalls a warship. The play facilities are in very poor condition, consisting only of a swing set and two free-standing slides, but the basketball courts are heavily used and a popular destination.



*park side view of the “aircraft carrier”*

The physical configuration of the space creates a negative impact on the

park, as park users walk by almost three continuous blocks of high chain link fencing, with no through access or connection between the park and the play area and basketball courts.

Throughout the master planning process which began in 1973 there has been disagreement on how best to improve this area, but after several meetings with neighborhood groups we believe we have a consensus to propose the following improvements to this area:

The three existing basketball courts will remain in place. Repair court area to improve fencing, lighting and steps.

Add benches and open bleacher seating at court sitting area

Add new steps from the basketball courts to the west to connect the park area and the courts.



*existing courts to be repaired*

## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

Construct new play area at the south end of this space close to the 116<sup>th</sup> Street entrance with water/ environmental theme. Playground to include walls, fences, benches, play surfacing, play equipment, water spray feature, and a new walk from 116<sup>th</sup> Street entrance to play area and park with no steps, allowing handicapped and stroller access.

After completion of new play area, demolish existing playground at “aircraft carrier”, including removal of existing building, walls, fences, steps, ramps, paving, benches and equipment.



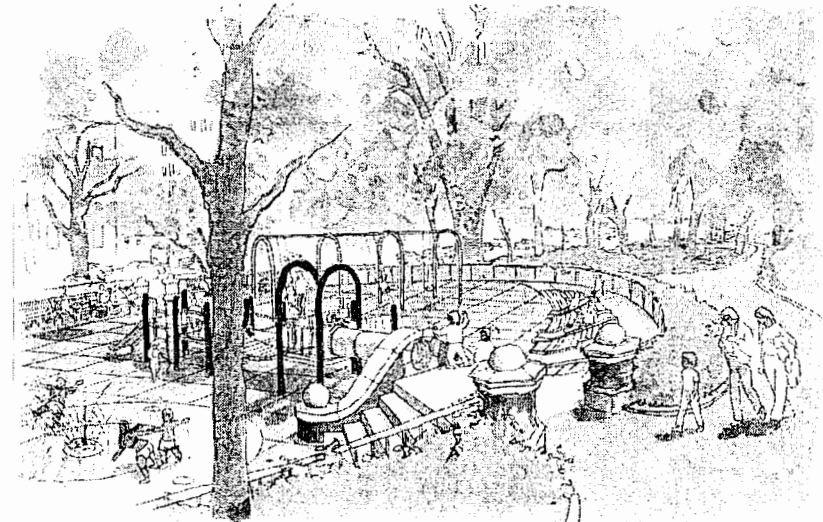
*existing play area at “aircraft carrier” to be removed*

Protect existing trees. Regrade area and install new lawn at area of removed playground between new play area and basketball courts, and improve existing lawn north of courts by clearing, rocks and debris, grading and lawn seeding.

Install planting around playground. Install new lighting at playground and basketball courts.



*view of existing lawn area between “aircraft carrier” and 116<sup>th</sup> Street entrance*



*rendering of proposed playground at 116<sup>th</sup> Street*



## Master Plan – Improvement Projects



*view of existing lawn area with of "aircraft carrier" play area*



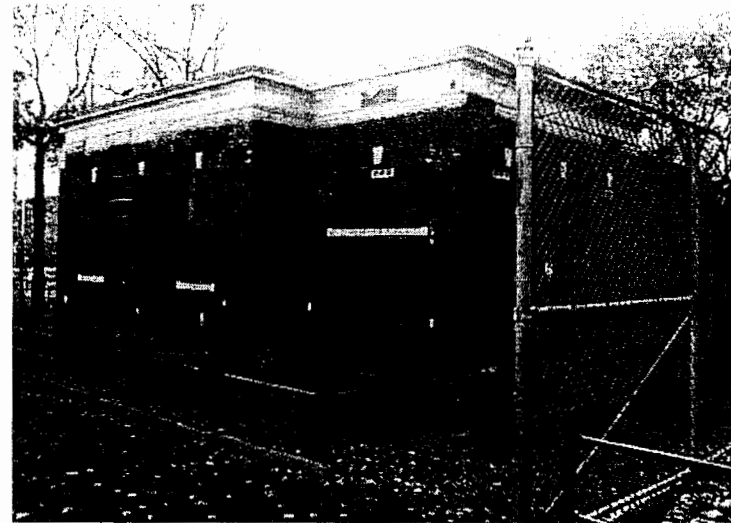
*rendering of proposed central lawn with basketball courts at north*

#### 4. 123<sup>rd</sup> STREET PLAYGROUND BUILDING

Renovate existing building to reconfigure interior space with new partitions and doors.

Provide new bathroom facilities, new kitchen facilities, improve office and community space. Improve heating and ventilation systems.

Renovate exterior of building with new entrance doors and barrier-free access to all entries. Improve widow protection treatments

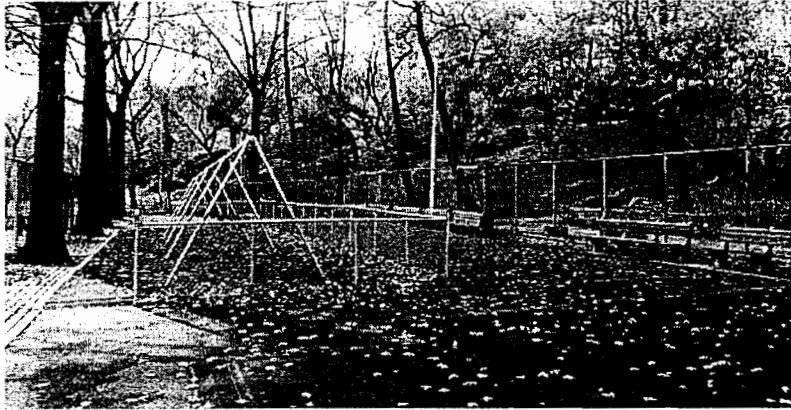


*existing playground and park office building*

## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

### 5. 123<sup>rd</sup> STREET PLAYGROUND

Remove all existing fencing at playground. Remove existing spray pool at east side of playground and entire upper western portion of play area.



*western portion of play area to be removed*

Reconfigure area at existing spray pool to provide new water spray feature and additional play equipment.

Reconfigure and enlarge western portion of play area with new play equipment, new entrance and plantings.

Install new fencing at all perimeter areas of playground. Reconfigure entrances to playground.

Repair paving and walls where required, provide additional benches and game tables. Provide barrier-free access to building and upper level of playground.

### 6. 123<sup>rd</sup> STREET PLAYGROUND PERIMETER

Repair, resurface or replace existing asphalt walks as required. Install new bluestone edging at walks.

Remove broken benches. Install new benches and chess tables with granite block paving. Repair existing concrete pillars at entrance. Provide new signs and bulletin boards at entrance. Regrade and rehabilitate lawn areas.

### 7. DRAINAGE, WATER SUPPLY & LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS – FIRST PRIORITY AREA

Test and survey existing drainage system. Clean out and repair existing drainage structures and piping where feasible. Remove existing drainage structures and piping beyond repair.

Install new drainage structures and piping, with connections to existing system. Repair all damage caused by trenching and regrade pavements and planted areas where required to provide positive drainage to inlets. Test and survey existing water supply system. Provide new water supply piping and new hose connections. Install new drinking fountains close to basketball courts and play area.



Coordinate with NYC DOT (responsible for all park lighting) to repair broken light fixtures. Upgrade electrical supply where required.

Replace non-conforming light fixtures with new tall B-poles. All light poles to be controlled by photo-electric cells.

## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

### 8. PLANTING & EROSION CONTROL – FIRST PRIORITY AREA

Remove invasive vegetation from rock outcrops, slopes and planted areas. Remove dead or dangerous trees. Thin overgrown wooded areas to allow sunlight to ground surface. Prune or remove plants as required to allow restoration of views.

Stabilize steep slopes with logs, rocks, mesh and topsoil, and install erosion control plantings.



*eroded slope with exposed roots and no surface vegetation*

Aerate lawns and add topsoil and organic materials. Reseed all bare areas.

Maintain and expand areas of perennial plantings and create joint community/school garden planting project adjacent to 123<sup>rd</sup> Street playground.

### 9. NORTH LAWN IMPROVEMENTS

Remove portions of existing walks close to handball courts. Reroute walks at 121<sup>st</sup> Street lawn to enlarge lawn area. Repair, resurface or replace existing asphalt walks as required. Install new bluestone edging at western walk at base of slope.

Install new benches at walks. Install new picnic tables at lawn close to handball courts

Aerate lawn and add topsoil and organic materials. Reseed entire lawn area.

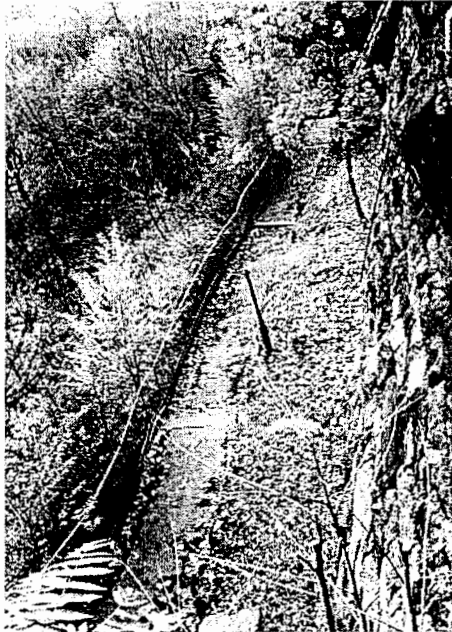


*north lawn area to be improved and enlarged*

### 10. “GOAT PATH” REHABILITATION

## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

Repair, resurface or replace existing asphalt walks as required. Install new bluestone edging at edges of walk.



Remove portion of walk and steps at northern section, and regrade to eliminate steps. Install new asphalt paving.

Remove and reconstruct bluestone steps with new concrete footings and new and site salvaged bluestone treads and stone cheek walls with steel handrails at steps.

Regrade and plant slopes adjacent to steps.

### 11. 114<sup>th</sup> STREET UPPER STAIRS

Remove and salvage existing bluestone treads.

Remove connecting walks at upper portion of 114<sup>th</sup> Street steps. Clear rock outcrops of vegetation

Construct new steps with concrete footings and new and site salvaged bluestone treads and rough stone cheek walls, with steel handrails. Construct new overlook with stone paving and benches at top of existing stone wall, remnant from the original "Restawhile" shelter.



*existing 114<sup>th</sup> Street steps*

Construct new asphalt walk to west of dog run, connecting existing walks to north and south

Regrade and plant new lawn areas, regrade and plant slopes adjacent to steps. Install new lighting at steps, walk and entrance.

### 12. DRAINAGE, WATER SUPPLY & LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS – SECOND PRIORITY AREA

Same as item 6, above

### 13. PLANTING & EROSION CONTROL – SECOND PRIORITY AREA

Same as item 7, above.

Maintain and expand areas of perennial plantings and create joint

## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

community/school garden planting project adjacent to 114th Street entrance.

### 14. LAWN & WALKS

Repair, resurface or replace existing asphalt walks as required. Install new bluestone edging at walk edges adjacent to base of slopes. Install new benches at walks.

Weed and clear lawn areas. Aerate lawns and add topsoil and organic materials. Reseed all bare lawn areas. Add signage at entries and nature trails.

### 15. POND IMPROVEMENTS

Drain pond and remove weeds from pond. Repair any leaks in pond base. Repair existing well water pond supply.

Remove weeds from planting areas around pond and install additional plants to fill bare areas.

### 16. 113<sup>th</sup> STREET PICNIC AREA

Repair existing playground equipment. Repair and extend play surfacing.

Add new benches at playground perimeter, and at adjacent walk. Relocate existing picnic tables and add new heavy but moveable picnic tables.

Weed and clear lawn areas. Aerate lawns and add topsoil and organic materials. Reseed all bare lawn areas.



*existing picnic area at 113<sup>th</sup> Street*

### 17. DRAINAGE, WATER SUPPLY & LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS – THIRD PRIORITY AREA

Same as item 6, above. Drainage generally and lighting are generally in good condition in this area

### 18. PLANTING & EROSION CONTROL – THIRD PRIORITY AREA

Same as item 7, above

Maintain and expand areas of perennial plantings and create joint community/school garden planting project close to 113th Street entrance. Provide boardwalk access to limited areas of pond plantings.

### 19. LAWN & WALKS

Repair, resurface or replace existing asphalt walks as required. Install new bluestone edging at walk edges adjacent to base of slopes. Install new benches at walks. Add signage at entries and nature trails.

Weed and clear lawn areas. Aerate lawns and add topsoil and organic

## Master Plan – Improvement Projects

materials. Reseed all bare lawn areas.

### 20. PERIMETER IMPROVEMENTS – MORNINGSIDE DRIVE & 110<sup>th</sup> STREET

Remove and replace all areas of concrete sidewalk in poor condition. Install new and site-salvaged granite blocks at all sidewalk planting strips.

Repair or replace all broken benches and install new benches in areas without existing benches.

Repair existing stone wall by repointing or resetting stone as necessary. Remove all vegetation from walls. Repair all broken fence sections and clean and paint entire fence.



*existing park entry at Morningside Drive and 110<sup>th</sup> Street*

Improve major entries and all overlook areas with new paving and benches. Provide flower planting beds at all overlooks (except at spray shower area).

Plant new trees at all areas missing existing trees. Add new signs and bulletin boards.



*existing overlook at Morningside Drive*

### 21. PERIMETER IMPROVEMENTS – MORNINGSIDE AVENUE & 123<sup>rd</sup> STREET

Remove and replace all areas of concrete sidewalk in poor condition. Install new and site-salvaged granite blocks at all sidewalk planting strips and beneath benches adjacent to fence.

Repair or replace all broken fence sections and clean and paint entire fence. Repair all damaged concrete posts at entries and add new signs and bulletin boards.

Repair or replace all broken benches and install new benches in areas without existing benches. Plant new trees at all areas missing existing trees.

## Restoration Policies – Vegetation Management

### LAWNS

Maintain and increase areas of mown lawn, to maximize areas for recreation.

Improve conditions of existing lawns by installing adequate numbers of new hose connections to allow watering of all areas. Improve soil quality through aeration and organic materials. Reseed worn lawns regularly and thin or remove trees to reduce shade.



*lawn in poor condition due to shade and lack of water, with weeds and erosion tracks*

### ORNAMENTAL PLANTINGS

Maintain and increase areas of ornamental plantings, including annual and perennial flower plantings, shrubs and flowering trees, especially at park entries and focal points. Where fencing of such areas is required, fencing should be attractive, sturdy and allow access for maintenance.

Provide areas for community and school involvement in naturalistic and ornamental garden areas.

### WOODLAND

All the wooded areas within the park are secondary woodlands, which have developed over the past 100 years. They consist mainly of invasive species such as Locust, Ailanthus, Norway Maple and Ash, as well as some Oak and Elm.

These secondary woodlands can be destructive to other habitats as the trees form a dense canopy and the resulting lack of light leads to a loss of vegetation at ground level. The loss of ground level vegetation allows water to run over the surface more quickly, leading to soil loss and erosion. The secondary woodland areas can have other negative impacts on the park, by eliminating views and creating areas which feel unsafe.

The areas of secondary woodland should not be allowed to increase, and should be selectively reduced through thinning and removal, to restore important views. Such operations should emphasize the removal of non-native tree species.

Where woodland areas remain, they should be managed to prevent erosion, through selective thinning or removal of existing trees and establishment of under-story plantings. Under-story plantings should emphasize low-growing shade tolerant native species, to provide a greater diversity of habitats for birds and other wildlife.

### SLOPE PLANTINGS & ROCKS

The rock outcroppings, one of the most dramatic features of the park are covered in many areas with weedy growth.

Remove plants from the rocks to maximize their visual impact, and provide

## Restoration Policies – Vegetation Management

opportunities for sitting and climbing on the rocks.

Areas of invasive weeds, which cover large portions of the inaccessible slopes should be managed by either periodic cutting or “weed-whacking” to keep growth low and views open, or, by removal of existing weeds, and planting of native low-growing shade tolerant species, in association with erosion control soil stabilization procedures, such as rock or wood cribbing or installation of jute fabric.



*rock outcrop obscured by weeds and volunteer trees*

### THE POND

The pond should be cleared of invasive weeds, especially phragmites. This will require periodic draining of the pond. Marginal plantings at the pond edge, and submerged plants including water lilies should be maintained and replaced as necessary.

The plantings at the upper slopes above the pond should be maintained as a naturalistic ornamental area, emphasizing flowering shrubs and

perennials. Invasive weeds and trees should not be allowed to take over this area.



## Restoration Policies – Park Materials

### WALKS

The majority of walks within the park are paved with asphalt, with some small areas paved in concrete. Most of the asphalt paving is in fair condition, with some significant exceptions, especially in the northern portion of the park, the narrow "goat path" below the Morningside Drive retaining wall, and areas around the 114<sup>th</sup> Street steps. All of the concrete paved areas are in poor condition.

Asphalt should remain the paving material throughout the park. Some areas may need only resurfacing, but badly deteriorated sections should be completely replaced.

### CURBS

Edging the park walks are a variety of curb materials: some walks have no curbs, others are edged with concrete curbs, bluestones curbs, or a rough edging of natural schist stone.

Curbs are not required at all locations, and walks without curbs generally have a more pastoral quality. Where curbs are required, for example to channel water to drains or to protect planting areas, we recommend that the curbs are of either bluestone or the rough schist stone edging. Existing curbs of these material should be maintained, and concrete curbs should be replaced with stone as part of any reconstruction project.

### STEPS

Stairways are a major feature of the park, and consist of three types:

Granite steps with elaborate cut stone cheek walls and copings are found leading down from the Morningside Drive entries. These were part of the oldest plan for the park, and were built on solid foundations. The majority of these stairs are in good condition, or need only minor repair work.

Bluestone stairs, frequently found with rough stone schist edging, are either

original to the 1887 design or were rebuilt in the 1960's and 1980's. The condition of these stairs varies from good at the more recent construction, to very poor, dangerous conditions. These stairs should be replaced with new stairways constructed from the same materials on solid concrete footings. Some portions of the existing stone is salvageable for reuse.



*renovated bluestone steps with rough schist edging, installed as part of the 1988 improvement project*

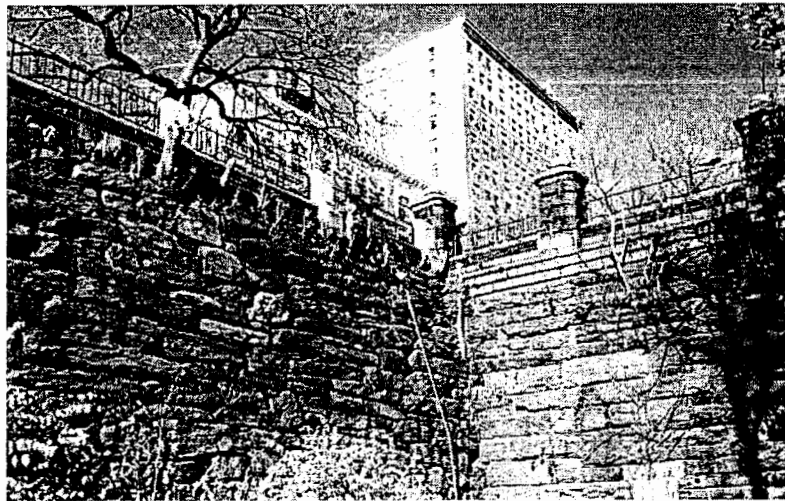
Concrete stairs, at 114<sup>th</sup> Street and 120<sup>th</sup> Street, date from rebuilding work of the 1930's and 1960's. Also during these periods concrete landings and cheek walls were added to some of the bluestone stairs. The condition of the concrete ranges from fair to poor. Where replacement of these steps is required, new stairways should be constructed to match the original design, using bluestone treads and rough stone schist edging on concrete footings as described above. Handrails should be added for safety where practical.

## Restoration Policies – Park Materials

### WALLS

A variety of walls exist, including the massive stone retaining wall at Morningside Drive; a stone wall remnant of the “Restawhile” a shelter structure original to the park near 114<sup>th</sup> Street; low stone walls of roughly coursed granite and schist boulders; and concrete walls.

The monumental stone retaining wall at Morningside Drive is in generally good condition. The wall is constructed without mortar, and in places enough debris has collected between stones to allow trees to grow from these areas.



*stone wall at Morningside Drive with recently cut tree stumps*

To maintain the structural integrity of the wall vegetation should be removed before it extends roots into the wall. Continual cutting of new growth will be required, followed by applications of herbicide to prevent future growth. The vines which generally have their roots in the ground and only cling to the wall are not as serious a threat, but should be kept to minimum. Some

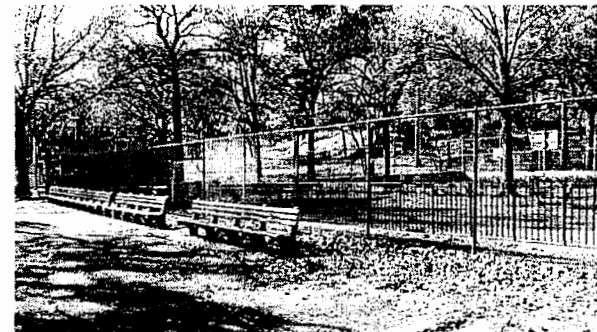
minor repairs of the wall are necessary, including resetting of some stones and improvements to the openings below the overlooks.

The low stone walls which edge some lawn areas are generally in fair condition and should be maintained in place.

Concrete walls include some low retaining walls, and walls within the play areas and basketball courts. As these courts and play areas were not part of the original 1887 park design the use of concrete within these areas is in keeping with their design period. Within the park itself the use of concrete for walls should not be continued, and where new walls are required they should be of roughly coursed granite or schist boulders to match those described above.

### FENCES

Chain link fencing and steel picket fencing are found at the play areas and basketball courts. Chain link fencing is also used at the 116<sup>th</sup> Street entrance on Morningside Drive, and at portions of the goat path. Horizontal pipe rail fencing is used at some walk edges at steep slopes. Temporary mesh fencing is used to protect flower plantings, with a heavy duty mesh used at the dog run.



*chain link fence at 123 playground*

## Restoration Policies – Park Materials

We recommend that chain link fencing be used only at the basketball and handball courts. When this fencing is replaced a black vinyl-coated chain link material should be used as it is less visually obtrusive. At the play areas we suggest use of the standard Parks Department 4-foot high steel panel fence, consisting of vertical bars with a flat top rail.

Pipe rail fencing should be the standard where edges of walks need to be defined to prevent short cuts or protect steep slopes. This fencing could also be used, perhaps with mesh infill, at flower planting areas. The dog run area requires durable fencing, and we suggest a steel panel fence similar to the playground fencing.

### BENCHES

Two types of benches are found within the park:

Parks Department standard wood and concrete benches, consisting of a cast concrete support and painted wood slats, often used in long rows, and found in and around the 123<sup>rd</sup> Street playground and surrounding walks.

“World’s Fair” benches, developed for the 1939 World’s Fair, consisting of cast iron supports and generally unpainted hardwood slats. These are found around the baseball fields and other locations in the park, and are generally used by the Parks Department where a more “historic” appearance is appropriate.

We have no information on what type of bench, if any, may have been used in the original park design. Both of the existing bench types are durable and long lasting, with easily replaceable wood slats, and we do not suggest introducing any new bench designs to the park.

With the exception of the walks around the 123<sup>rd</sup> Street playground, there are relatively few benches in the park. The addition of many more benches along the major paths would encourage greater use and enjoyment of the

park. Benches should not be provided at inaccessible or potentially dangerous areas such as the “goat path” where they may be subject to vandalism

Benches at the park perimeter sidewalks are heavily used and should be maintained and replaced as necessary. At portions of Morningside Drive where the sidewalk has been replaced it appears that benches have been removed, and in these areas new benches should be added.

### PERIMETER WALLS & FENCES

The stone retaining wall at Morningside Drive is described above. At the Drive side this is topped by a cut stone wall and low infill fencing. The original fencing was a heavy bronze horizontal pipe rail. This was later removed and replaced with a low steel picket fence. The wall is generally in good condition although some areas require repointing or resetting of stones. The wall should be repaired as required and maintained generally free of vines and other vegetation. The fence should be repaired as required and repainted in all locations.

At Morningside Avenue and 123<sup>rd</sup> Street the perimeter consists of a concrete curb and 5-foot high steel picket fence, with the entries marked by concrete posts. In most areas these elements are in fair condition, but there are some broken fence sections, which require repair, and the entire fence should be repainted.

*damaged section of fence at Morningside Avenue*



### PERIMETER SIDEWALKS

The perimeter sidewalks are an important extension of the park

## Restoration Policies – Park Materials

with tree plantings and benches, and are heavily used especially by older residents. The Morningside Drive sidewalk was included in the original park design, intended as a broad promenade to take advantage of the views from its high elevation.

The present condition of the sidewalks varies from good to very poor, with some areas of broken and cracked concrete. The benches also vary in condition, and are missing from some areas. The tree planting is generally in a continuous strip of granite block, although in some areas these blocks are partially or completely missing, and have been replaced by grass, dirt or weeds.



*Morningside Drive sidewalk with missing areas of granite block and concrete sidewalk in poor condition*

We recommend that all the tree planting strips use granite block, which will eliminate the need for mowing. Existing granite block areas should be repaired and weeded as required. Trees should be planted where they are missing, using a variety of species including Oaks, Elms, Ginkgos, and London Plane Trees.

Benches should be repaired or replaced where necessary, with one type selected to be the standard perimeter bench. Trash receptacles should be provided at regular intervals.

We recommend that all perimeter improvements consider the park edge as one, using the same materials consistently around all four edges to enhance the sense of the park.

### OVERLOOKS AND ENTRIES

The recent plantings at the Morningside Drive overlooks have been a successful means for community involvement, and should be maintained and continued. Repairs to the paving and benches are required at several overlooks.



*seasonal planting at Morningside Drive overlook*

The major entrances to the park provide opportunities for benches, informational signs or bulletin boards, and possibly food vendors. The entries should provide an attractive face to the neighborhood, which may include ornamental plantings and distinctive paving materials.

## Restoration Policies – Drainage, Water Supply & Lighting

### DRAINAGE

The existing drainage system consists of an old network of small drainage inlets and pipes, which are inadequate for collection of storm water run-off. Many of the drains and pipes are clogged or rusted out. Some portions of the existing system are working and may be able to be cleaned and renovated, but large sections will require complete rebuilding, with new inlets and pipes. This work should be done at the same time as improvements to the water supply system, as both will require extensive trenching and excavation work.



*drainage problems causing areas of standing water at park walks*

### WATER SUPPLY

The provision of a park-wide watering system is essential to the maintenance of vegetation. This should consist of quick-coupler hose connections located throughout the park in areas easily accessible from the main walks, at no more than 200 feet apart to provide complete coverage to all planted areas and lawns.

Drinking fountains should be provided at locations throughout the park,

especially close to the ball fields, courts and play areas.

### LIGHTING

A variety of light fixtures exists in the park, including: the cast iron "B-poles" a Parks Department fixture now used as standard in most parks, and the "cobra-head" fixtures, located along the main walk between 116<sup>th</sup> Street and 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, which were designed as a highway lighting fixture.

The B-poles include both the older short fixtures, approximately 10 foot high, and the newer tall fixture which are approximately 14 foot high, making them less vulnerable to vandalism.



*cobra head fixture*



*B-pole fixture*

We recommend that the taller cast iron B-poles become the standard for the park, as they are for many of the city parks. Where existing cast iron

## **Restoration Policies – Drainage, Water Supply & Lighting**

fixtures can be repaired they should remain in place, but the cobra-head fixtures, and all un-repairable fixtures should be replaced with the tall B-poles.

Major routes through the park should be identified, and rigorously maintained as well lit paths. Other areas could perhaps have a reduced number of lights, for example at the "goat path" where maintenance of the fixtures is difficult as there is no vehicular access.

## Restoration Policies – Maintenance

Protecting the proposed investment in the park is important to the long-term, sustainable success of this plan. The substantial funds required to restore and improve the park will be wasted if the result is not adequately maintained. As public sector funding has been reduced in recent years, maintenance has suffered. While basic maintenance must continue to be funded by public funds, to ensure a consistent high quality of care, additional maintenance will be necessary as well.

The use of both private funds and volunteer labor will enable an improvement above the current level of maintenance. Such efforts should be targeted to specific areas and projects, and closely coordinated with park staff. An understanding that there will be no reduction in the current level of service provided by public expenditures will be required to secure private support.

### Existing Maintenance

Currently NYC Parks & Recreation is responsible for the following tasks:

- § Regular lawn mowing in summer months.
- § Watering of plants, using hoses and sprinklers attached to existing water supply connections, which exist only in the portions of the park, leaving large sections un-watered.
- § Maintenance of trees on an as-needed basis.
- § Rodent control.
- § Daily litter collection.
- § Cleaning of bathroom facilities.
- § Repair of broken benches or other features.

Generally maintenance beyond the tasks listed above, such as replanting areas, installing new paving or furnishings, or major fence repair, requires the NYC Parks & Recreation to create a capital project, funded from the Capital Fund, and not from park maintenance funds.

Although Morningside Park has its own full-time horticulturist, the work of

maintaining plantings over 30 acres is beyond the ability of one person. More full-time horticultural staff are vital to the success of this restoration plan.

### Proposed Maintenance

To upgrade the existing level of maintenance the plan proposes physical improvements which will help simplify maintenance tasks. Specifically these would include: more hose connections to allow full coverage watering of all planted areas; control of erosion at slopes and regrading of lawns to reduce erosion and run-off.

In addition it is proposed that as the physical improvement projects are completed, additional park maintenance personnel are hired, either by the City, by Friends of Morningside Park, or another organization set up to manage the park.

Such staff would be responsible for horticultural maintenance including weeding, cultivating and pruning at newly stabilized slope and at shrub and perennial beds; installation of additional plantings where required to fill areas of dead or failing plants; and maintenance of seasonal display planting of annuals or other plants at specific areas.

Newly planted trees, shrubs and plants are the most likely to die, with the stress of planting causing an average failure rate of 10% to 20% in the first two years. This figure can be greatly reduced through careful maintenance of newly planted material, making additional full-time horticultural staff a necessity.

Some maintenance tasks may be contracted out to specialists, covered by annual service contracts. This work could include tree maintenance,

including an annual survey of tree health, followed by any required treatments, fertilization, pruning or removal of dead specimens. The many

## **Restoration Policies – Maintenance**

mature trees in the park represent an enormous investment. They are both irreplaceable and important historically, so their preservation justifies the cost of a specialist tree service to maintain them in the best possible condition.

### **Management**

For both the physical improvement plan and the maintenance work to succeed an effective on-going management structure must be created to implement the plan. The management structure may be set up within the existing structure of NYC Parks & Recreation, or may be an independent non-profit organization.

Ideally, a full-time paid Park Manager assisted by staff as required, would coordinate the implementation of the phased capital projects of the plan, direct the Morningside Park maintenance staff, coordinate volunteers and groups such as a dog owners group a playground group, write grant proposals, disseminate information about the park to the community, and become the face associated with the park in all dealings with public agencies and private funders



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|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Bob Redmond       | New York City Parks & Recreation   |
| Andre Blacknall   | Community Coordinator, The Friends of Morningside Park                             |
| Bill Ryall        | Fund Raising Committee, The Friends of Morningside Park                            |
| Barbara Johnson   | Treasurer, The Friends of Morningside Park   |
| Pauline Johnson   | The Friends of Morningside Park and the 118 <sup>th</sup> Street Block Association |
| Maggie Lee        | The Friends of Morningside Park  |
| Doug Robinson     | President, The Friends of Morningside Park   |
| Ann McIver        | Executive Director, Morningside Area Alliance                                      |
| Telia Virgin      | The Friends of Morningside Park  |
| Angelita Rucker   | Maintenance Chair, Morningside BARC  |
| Burt Reynolds     | The Friends of Morningside Park.   |
| Ernestine Augusts | The Friends of Morningside Park  |
| Carolyn Kent,     | Community Board 9  |
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