



Kathy Sheehan, City of Albany, Mayor  
Bill Trudeau, City of Albany, Traffic Engineering  
Creighton Manning Consulting

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August 26, 2022

Dear Mayor Sheehan, Mr. Trudeau, and the Creighton Manning team,

The Washington Park Conservancy would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to take part in the Washington Park Complete Streets Traffic Study. This important project highlights the impact from traffic in and around the park and works to improve cycling and pedestrian safety for park visitors and residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. Your administration's dedication to the city's network of parks is an important investment in the long-term health and vitality of the city for its residents. We'd also like to express our appreciation for the city's traffic engineering division and the numerous consultants at Creighton Manning. The time invested in the planning of multiple public comment periods, stakeholder meetings, and project briefs allowed for a wide range of comments from all interested parties which will only make the final plan comprehensive and more meaningful for residents and visitors alike.

We've had the opportunity to review the draft plan and would like to provide specific comments on each of the areas outlined in the draft report. Not surprisingly, we are supportive of many of the proposed changes with a few suggestions for potential improvements. We'll notate each of these in the order that the draft report provided.

**Install pedestrian countdown timers** – we agree that this improvement would be beneficial to better controlling the volume of traffic allowed in the Henry Johnson Boulevard entrance. There is notable traffic congestion between Washington Avenue and State Street along this corridor. As we have been studying access points to the playground area, we are mindful that many playground visitors walk into the park from various locations throughout the city and improving traffic controls and traffic volumes will ensure that pedestrians are able to safely enter and exit the park through these corridors.

**Englewood Place Modification** – we agree that a reworking of this intersection provides some pedestrian relief from this rather complex intersection. We agree with the removal of the Western Avenue cut over to State Street and are in favor of narrowing the street sections, giving back these reclaimed areas to park lawns. However, we have suggestions for improvements to the overall sidewalk plans noted:

- a. We recommend aligning the sidewalk from Englewood Place, south to north, to the existing crosswalk at Western Avenue. This will maintain existing pedestrian sight lines and anticipate how pedestrians will traverse this area. We feel that the rightward jog will not be utilized properly, as pedestrians will walk in the most direct route possible. (Below in red)
- b. We recommend continuing the existing sidewalk from Western Avenue onto the existing State Street sidewalk on the south side of the new intersection. Again, this will maintain existing pedestrian sight lines and anticipate how pedestrians will traverse this area from west to east. (Below in red)
- c. There was also discussion about the ability to pull the peninsula of lawn between the inner park road and Englewood Place. north towards the Western Avenue intersection. We feel this would provide another way to give back land to the park border, help simplify the reworked intersection changes, and, importantly, protect pedestrians entering the park from this corner. This corner of the park is another significant entrance point for playground visitors so improvements to the safety and layout of this intersection is imperative.
- d. On Washington Park Road moving south to north, we recommend a larger curb extension at the corner to narrow the intersection and dissuade traffic from going by the playground area.
- e. Finally, on the interior park access road leading down to the Lakehouse, there needs to be a robust plan to install bollards and increase landscaping to prevent any vehicular traffic in and around the playground area. The safety considerations are immense, and we routinely see park visitors driving their vehicles onto the pedestrian paths and closed roadways. This project presents the best opportunity to solve the recurring problem of vehicular traffic being able to enter the interior park roads at service access points. This is also the

location of the proposed raised crosswalk which is noted in the report but not called out as a major concept change in the summary document.



**Sprague Place Entrance Closure** – We are in full support of this closure as it supports the Conservancy’s draft playground re-design to make this intersection a focal entrance to the playground, improving safety. We suggest the following improvements to the proposed plan:

- a. Do not return the former street area to lawn but use this as a decorative entrance, reestablishing the historic carriage path connections to the park. This beautiful weeping beech in the island location is a focal feature and is the inspiration of the Washington Park Conservancy’s current logo and we are keen to protect and preserve this heritage feature.
- b. We recommend that this closure be one of the first actions taken since it would immediately impact pedestrian safety as the existing paved surface could be left in place and just closed off with temporary bollards. It would be a low-cost measure that the city could act on right away.

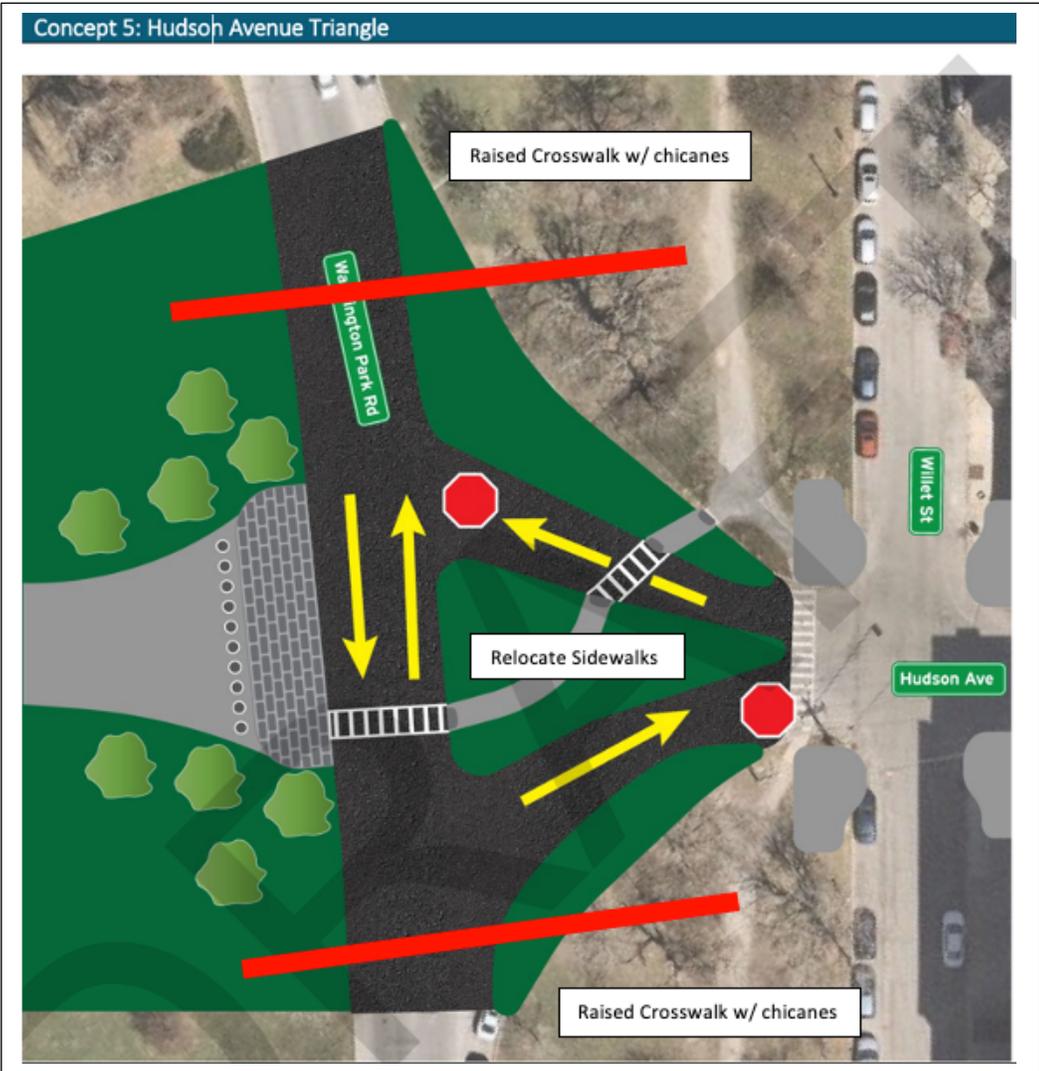
**Henry Johnson Boulevard Turnaround** – This concept elicited the greatest discussion from our board members. We agree that this intersection should be modified but the overwhelming suggestion was to do away with the turn around and just switch this to a one-way street with the exit coming out at the Sailors and Soldiers monument. This was deemed preferable for the following reasons:

- a. There are several heritage trees closest to the Sailors and Soldiers monument that could be damaged as part of this proposed modification. These mature trees provide a distinctive canopy along the street that frame the view from the main intersection.
- b. The Sailors and Soldiers monument was conceived as the formal entrance to the park from State Street. Adding additional built features on the right will prevent the current intended symmetry, intentional in the original design.
- c. Curb extensions on the end by Sailors and Soldiers can narrow the road down to a single lane, reducing the volume of traffic that can exit at this location. Only residents and visitors parking here will use this exit.
- d. Importantly, it maintains the open sight lines in this portion of the park, maintaining the original, historic character.
- e. Additionally, we are recommending that Henry Johnson Boulevard be narrowed slightly to prevent vehicles from speeding around the corner as there is a crosswalk from the monument that continually puts pedestrians and vehicles at conflict.

**Lancaster Street Entrance Closure** – we agree with this modification as it returns the park back to the original plan and prevents the complexity of the existing Washington Park Road intersection. There are original pathways that are visible in the landscape, and we would prefer that the new sidewalks align to the original plan.

**Hudson Avenue Triangle** – We agree with most changes proposed here. The one-way modifications for the traffic triangle are a significant improvement, but we do not agree that the sidewalk should cross into the traffic triangle to enter the park. We suggest the following revisions to this approach:

- a. Utilize the noted chicanes along Washington Park Road to have two access points from the park land bordering Willett Street, on either side of the Hudson Avenue triangle. One connecting to the Robert Burns statue and one connecting to the area where the volleyball players set-up their nets. Both solutions reconnect the original park pathways to their intended destinations and provides safer pedestrian access points to the park while also aiding in traffic calming along Washington Park Road.
- b. We also advocate for narrowing the large entrance off Washington Park Road to no more than a double-vehicle width to reinforce the walkable connection point to the park. With this area reclaimed, we advocate for installing granite curbing on either side and leaving the rest of the space as lawn. The curbing will prevent service vehicles from parking off the pavement addressing the problem of vehicles tearing up the grass surfaces.



**Willett Street Triangle** – We agree with this concept as presented. There was discussion of whether the Henry Johnson monument is correctly sited since any visitor wanting to see the monument would have to cross over into traffic to properly see it. It is important that the memorial statue be in a highly visible, prominent location, but we feel that an adjacent location in the park proper would provide a safer location for visitors to be able to enjoy the monument.

- a. Immediately adjacent to this traffic circle, we agree with the raised pedestrian crossing at the Knox Mall pathway.

**New Scotland Avenue Entrance Modification** – We agree with the overall concept of this modification. We offer the following suggestions for improvements:

- a. Align the crosswalk behind the bus stop to the pathway leading up the Moses Fountain. The current drawing shows this being misaligned, and these connect points should be consistently applied.
- b. Narrow the pathway entrance on the Moses side of the park. Vehicles routinely drive through this area to access the Lakehouse and with the narrowing of the main roadway to the Lakehouse, vehicles will be looking for other paths. Install additional plantings and bollards that only allow the width of a golf cart to get through. Align granite curb cuts to line up with the crosswalk. Consider a raised crosswalk in this location.
- c. When closing the road on the south side of the lake, do this at the same time as the closure of Sprague Place. The paving would not need to be immediately removed. Closure of this road would provide immediate traffic calming and bolster pedestrian safety impacts with limited cost to the city. Closing this road will reduce litter from vehicles parked by the lake, lessening the need for clean-up by park workers.
- d. Consider motorized bollard systems in these locations to ensure that only maintenance traffic can utilize the interior roadways.

**Madison Ave Crossing at Knox Street** – We agree with all the changes and additions outlined. No additional comments.

**Willett Street Modification** – This is a particularly complex intersection with a creative change being presented. We are generally in agreement that the solution presented will decrease traffic on Willett Street to favor local traffic. We additionally suggest the following:

- a. Feedback from our board members and advisors raised concerns about how vehicles would take a left turn if coming south towards Madison Avenue from the north along Washington Park Road. Conversely, vehicles turning off Madison

Avenue routinely take the right into the park at a high rate of speed, setting up potential vehicle conflicts at this newly formed intersection.

- b. We wonder how the landscape and vegetation would be installed in the newly created island at the corner of Willett Street and Madison Avenue. The reduced cross walk across Henry Johnson Boulevard is a vast improvement for cycling and pedestrian safety.
- c. Further down Willett St at the Hudson Avenue intersection, we feel that raised crosswalks from the East side of Willett Street to the West side into the park will also encourage slower vehicle speeds and prevent cut through traffic. This also has the added benefit of providing safer pedestrian connections from the Hudson/Park and Center Square neighborhoods.

**Lark Street Curb Extensions** – We understand that this project will be moved to the Lark Street improvements starting in the Spring of 2023. With the expansion of the Dana Park Island, we advocate for the extension of the granite curbing with landscaped beds being added as part of this extension. We’ve heard feedback about potentially closing the Lark Street section running by Dana Park, commonly known as Little Lark. This could cut down on the complexity of this intersection, but we defer to our neighborhood association partners in Park South and Hudson/Park to better advocate for this potential change.

**Henry Johnson Boulevard Signal Improvements** – We agree that signal improvements are important to support each of the outlined changes. Of note, the (incorrect) photo in the report is of the intersection of Madison Avenue. and South Lake, looking from the Women’s Club towards the Washington Park tennis courts.

**Traffic Signal Removal** – We agree with the outlined changes as drivers routinely race through intersections so that they are not caught at a redlight. These changes improve each of these intersections. Since many of these removals occur outside of the park proper, we defer to our neighborhood association partners who are better suited to advocate for their residents.

**Service Entrance Treatments** – As outlined in the draft summary, we agree that these service entrance points allow for unauthorized vehicles to easily enter the park, which remains a grave safety concern. Historically sympathetic, consistently applied solutions will prevent this pedestrian and vehicle conflict on interior park roads. We also suggest the following:

- a. In general, we consistently recommend narrowing these entrance points to no larger than a maintenance vehicle with any additional paving removed and given back over to lawn and/or landscaped areas.
- b. With respect to the installation of bollards at these service entrance points; our recommendation would be for the installation of mechanical and/or motorized

systems which would allow easy access for city maintenance crews but prevent the general public from being able to access off limit areas.

- c. The Conservancy board and advisors would like to highlight the weakness that these service entrance point cause. They represent most, if not all, of the problematic vehicle/pedestrian interactions on interior park roads. Visitors to Washington Park have an expectation of safety within the interior park roads, and numerous 2022 Summer special events hosted in Washington Park have highlighted how critical this system is to protect pedestrian safety. This current system is broken, but we look forward to working with the city and the Creighton Manning consultants to remedy this pain point, returning the interior Washington Park roads to non-vehicular park visitors.
- d. Mechanical bollard installations also have the benefit of being completely passive measures to keep these spaces safe which do not require additional city resources to enforce these existing rules.

There are four other items we would like the city to consider as part of this larger project scope.

- a. In any location where work is adjacent to existing park landscape, and especially heritage trees and bushes, special care must be paid to ensure that damage to these fragile features is avoided. We made mention of the large tree at the Sprague Place triangle, but there are notable other features located throughout the park. The Washington Park Conservancy will be available to identify these fragile features and work with the city and its contractors to ensure these remain undamaged throughout the construction process. We want to be emphatic that heritage landscape be maintained and preserved.
- b. Through a previous Water Department study, it was determined that the entrance at Thurlow Terrace should be completely closed, with granite curbing and landscape installed to eliminate this entrance point. There is a historic pathway that connects to the bridge over Washington Park Lake, and we encourage the city to act on closing this location. This area routinely allows an access point for silt to enter Washington Park Lake and this change would eliminate this problem area.
- c. Regarding silt entering Washington Park Lake, we recommend that interior park roads facing the lake should have curbing installed to prevent silt from running into the lake. This is particularly important along the south side of the lake as heavy rainfall will wash down the hill resulting in the accumulation of excess silt in the lake.
- d. For perimeter areas that have crosswalk signaling along the edge of the park boundaries, we recommend that crosswalk signaling should automatically give pedestrians priority over vehicles and that “beg buttons” are not utilized in any of the park intersections that are being added or reworked.

As part of the Creighton Manning draft study introduction on the first page, we noted the following statement,

*“Washington Park is the premier park in the City of Albany and the centerpiece of the Washington Park Historic District. Designed in the 1870s by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Washington Park is a valuable historic and recreational resource intended to provide a refuge from the surrounding urban environment by offering numerous monuments and vistas viewable from a series of carriageways.”*  
[https://www.albanyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7278/20220523\\_Draft-Report\\_121011-PDF?bidId=](https://www.albanyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7278/20220523_Draft-Report_121011-PDF?bidId=)

The statement, “Designed in the 1870s by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted” is not entirely accurate and should be revised. A better way to state this comes directly from the Historic Landscape Report completed for Washington Park in 1989. That Landscape Report provided an accounting of those who were involved in the design of the park over time. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux did prepare a study for the design of the park, so Olmsted was one of those people, but the city of Albany did not hire Olmsted’s firm. It is not accurate to credit him solely with the design of the park, and we suggest this revision, which accurately quotes this 1989 Historic Landscape Report:

*Designed in the 1870s by followers of Frederick Law Olmsted’s principles, Washington Park “... achieved a design integrity and a cohesive design scheme that reflects the thinking that has become characterized as “Olmstedian.””*  
*[Historic Landscape Report, Preservation Plan and Management Proposal, Washington Park. Albany, New York. Kestenbaum/Landscapes Joint Venture. May 1989. p. 7.] A full copy of this landscape report is available on the Washington Park Conservancy website, which is available at this URL: <https://www.washingtonparkconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/WPC-1989-Historic-Landscape-Report-reduced.pdf>*

We thank you for this opportunity to provide our written comments during this public comment period. We are deeply indebted to the myriad city partners who have worked on this project and look forward to continuing that partnership in the future. Please do let us know if you have any questions concerning the information provided here.

With Kindest Regards,



Jeff Crumpton  
Washington Park Conservancy, Board President

CC:

Washington Park Conservancy Board members and advisors  
David Galin, Chief of Staff, Mayor Kathy Sheehan  
Matt Peter, District 5, Albany County Legislator  
Gabriella Romero, 6th Ward Common Councilmember  
Shadi Khadivi, President, Washington Park Neighborhood Association  
Jackie Ring, President, Center Square Association  
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Andrew Harvey, President, Park South Neighborhood Association  
Andrew Neidhardt, Walkable Albany  
Jackie Gonzales, Walkable Albany