

A photograph of a large field of flowers. In the foreground and middle ground, there are numerous tall, thin green stems with bright yellow daisy-like flowers. Interspersed among these are dense, low-growing purple flowers, likely lavender. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the same floral landscape under a dark sky.

# The Midway Plaisance Master Plan

Summer 2000



An aerial photograph of a park with a winding path and many trees. The trees have green and yellow leaves, suggesting autumn. The path is light-colored and curves through the park. The overall scene is lush and green.

# VISION STATEMENT

*The Midway Plaisance Master Plan creates an invigorating park in an important, historic space. A vibrant Midway will engage visitors with festivals,*

*sports, gardening, and the simple pleasures of nature. The development of park*

*facilities, the improved management of traffic, and the creation of year-round gardens*

*will support new and diverse programs that will draw people from all over the city. The*

*plan will recreate the Midway; integrate it with the revitalized Burnham, Washington, and*

*Jackson parks; and help make the South Side park system an exciting place for all Chicagoans*

*to relax, socialize, and play.*



# A PARK FOR BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

## REVITALIZING THE MIDWAY PLAISANCE

The redevelopment of the Midway Plaisance is a keystone in the revitalization of the mid-South Side of Chicago. Close to the communities of Hyde Park, Woodlawn, North Kenwood-Oakland, and South Shore, the Midway is a narrow, eighty-acre, historic boulevard between Stony Island and Cottage Grove avenues and bordered on both sides by the University of Chicago campus.

Originally designed by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted as a water link between the lagoons of Jackson Park and Washington Park, the mile-long Midway is currently cut off from Lake Michigan by a dark, crumbling viaduct and from the neighborhoods surrounding it by hurtling traffic. While some enjoy the open space of the Midway, most recognize it as a space greatly underutilized by the surrounding communities and the University.

The Midway, however, has the potential to be transformed in less than a decade into a great park, one that will satisfy the social, athletic, and relaxation needs of Chicagoans from all across the city and build a bridge between the Hyde Park and Woodlawn communities.

Already a venue for youth soccer, winter ice skating, and intramural sports, the Midway can become a vibrant attraction for families, amateur gardeners, athletes, and those looking for a lovely walk on a Sunday afternoon. The Midway Plaisance Master Plan envisions three new

activity hubs—the Children's Garden Playground, the Urban Horticulture Center, and the permanent skating rink and warming house—that will draw people of every ethnicity and from every neighborhood to the Midway Plaisance. A year-round schedule of programming and festivals will bring them back again and again.

This kind of recreational area is crucial to the continued revitalization of the mid-South Side and is consistent with plans to revitalize Burnham, Jackson, and Washington parks. The new Midway Plaisance will be an anchor for the redevelopment of the surrounding communities and a gateway to the many outstanding cultural opportunities nearby.

## A COMMUNITY ENVISIONS A NEW MIDWAY

The Midway Plaisance Master Plan is a community effort of the best kind. When the University of Chicago formulated its campus master plan, it became clear that the Midway Plaisance, which bisects the campus, was a challenge that needed to be addressed. Fortunately, the Chicago Park District had simultaneously started a community process to reinvent Burnham, Washington, and Jackson parks, and was seeking ways to revitalize the lakefront. The collective result would be the redevelopment of the park system on the South Side.

"The Midway Plaisance of the new millennium is a bridge—between the lake and the city, the neighborhoods of Hyde Park and Woodlawn, and among Chicagoans of every cultural heritage."—Community Resident



*The mile-long, eighty-acre Midway Plaisance, looking east toward Lake Michigan*

A steering committee was formed, comprised of South Side neighborhood leaders in addition to representatives from the University of Chicago and the Chicago Park District, which owns and maintains the park.

Community members were invited to three public meetings, and their ideas were solicited at these working meetings and through questionnaires.

With input from the community and from consultants—Wolf Clements, a Chicago landscape design firm, and the Philadelphia landscape design firm the Olin Partnership—the steering committee decided to focus on four areas: generating year-round activity and visitors; improving infrastructure; making the Midway beautiful during all four seasons; and managing the traffic flow.

The result will be a Midway Plaisance that is accessible and enjoyable for all Chicagoans. When the plan was presented during the third public meeting, support was overwhelming. To ensure continued support, community input will continue throughout the process with the assistance of local park advisory councils.

#### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The completion of the master plan will provide all Chicagoans with a reason to spend a Saturday afternoon on the Midway. With the aid of a cultural loop bus to bring visitors to local attractions and a Friends of the Midway association to plan programming, the Midway Plaisance will serve as a gateway to the Hyde Park–Woodlawn–Kenwood neighborhoods.

Other opportunities will arise in the future, as the master plan elements are completed and the preferences of an expanded population of Midway users become clear.

Within ten years, the Midway will no longer be underutilized space. Instead, the Midway Plaisance will be a fresh, new kind of park where South Siders, North Siders, West Siders, and out-of-towners bring their children for an afternoon of fun, exercise, stimulation, or relaxation as Olmsted originally intended.

When the master plan is realized, the Midway will reclaim its heritage as a sparkling treasure of the South Side.

#### A RICH VARIETY OF CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

The Midway is surrounded by an extraordinary group of cultural resources, including world-class theater and museums. With a surrounding population that includes thousands of University of Chicago students and staff, the strong Hyde Park neighborhood, and the residential redevelopment in Woodlawn, the Midway is ideally situated to become one of the area's premiere attractions.

Some of the nearby cultural amenities include:

Court Theatre  
David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art  
DuSable Museum of African-American History  
Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House  
Midway Studios  
Museum of Science and Industry  
Oriental Institute Museum  
Renaissance Society  
Rockefeller Memorial Chapel



Community members gather at a public workshop to plan the Midway.

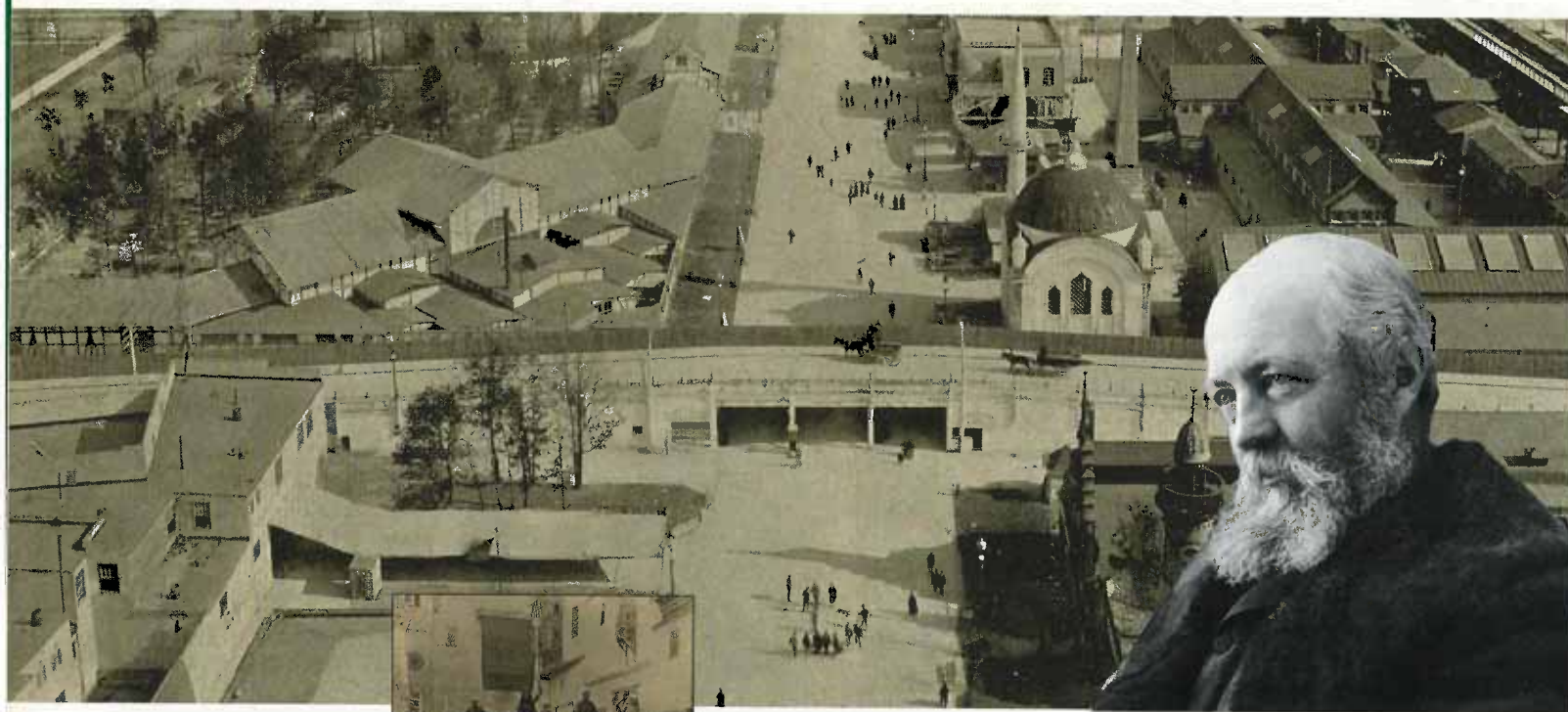


The DuSable Museum of African-American History (top), Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House (center), the Museum of Science and Industry (bottom), and the Oriental Institute Museum (left) are all within a short walking distance of the Midway Plaisance.





# REVIVING THE VISION OF THE GREAT SOUTH PARK



*Frederick Law Olmsted (portrait) was the first designer of the Midway Plaisance, seen here in a photo from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. During the exposition, the Midway exhibited cultures from around the world, including the Berbers (inset).*



## THE HISTORY OF THE MIDWAY

In 1871, Frederick Law Olmsted pictured a time when Chicagoans could walk from Jackson Park on the lakefront, along the formal Midway Plaisance, to Washington Park, a mile inland. For almost 130 years, Olmsted's vision of a great, united South Park has gone unrealized.

The current master plan for the Midway Plaisance hearkens back to Olmsted's idea of the Midway as connector and incorporates the notion that the mile-long strip of park should also generate interest and excitement on its own as a destination.

The South Park Commission of the City of Chicago selected Olmsted in 1870 as he was designing New York City's Central Park. Evaluating the uninhabited prairie and wetlands, Olmsted planned a large, sprawling park united by the flow of water through a series of lagoons and canals from Washington Park to Lake Michigan.

Due to a series of civic disasters, the plan languished, but focus again turned to the Midway when Jackson Park was chosen in 1890 as the site of the

World's Columbian Exposition. A large number of attractions—including the first Ferris wheel—appeared on the Midway, which forever after has lent its name to thousands of carnival grounds.

After the exposition, the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot revised the original park plan to incorporate a single, wide canal down the length of the Midway. The South Park Commission officially accepted this plan, and digging began in the center panels in anticipation of the canal. These depressions are still part of the Midway landscape today, though instead of water filling the space there are now athletic activities.

## LORADO TAFT'S WATER CANAL

In 1910, sculptor Lorado Taft was commissioned to develop a plan for the Midway Plaisance. This, too, was abandoned, as were a succession of other plans over the past eighty years, though elements of each contributed to the look of the current Midway. Taft again proposed a water canal, this time with bridges spanning the water at Cottage Grove, Ellis, Woodlawn, Madison (now Dorchester), and Stony Island avenues. He envisioned the Midway as a monument to humanity, with a Fountain of Creation to the east and a Fountain of Time to the west, and a garden in between of sculptural figures representing the great artists, scientists, and thinkers of history. The Fountain of Time, completed in 1922 and currently being restored, was the only monument built under this scheme.

# A FESTIVAL OF ACTIVITIES ON THE SOUTH SIDE

## GENERATING ACTIVITY

A stream of bicycles jockeying for position on a warm summer morning. A colorful parade of Native Americans in traditional dress, filling the park with drums and chanting. A whisper of ice skates as neighbors glide around a rink. Youth soccer, college intramural sports, community skating, and the occasional festival are just a few of the activities currently taking place on the Midway Plaisance, but the park is ripe for many others.

The Midway Plaisance Master Plan proposes three new activity hubs—the Children’s Garden Playground, the Urban Horticulture Center, and the permanent skating rink and warming house—as well as new gardens, improved athletic fields, and safer bike paths. With the streets blocked off, the long stretch of the Midway is also ideal for city-sponsored and local festivals. The Boulevard Lakefront Tour and the Chicago Half-Marathon begin at the Midway every year and so could many other events. Ethnic festivals, kite festivals, book fairs, antique fairs, and other events would be welcome on the new Midway.

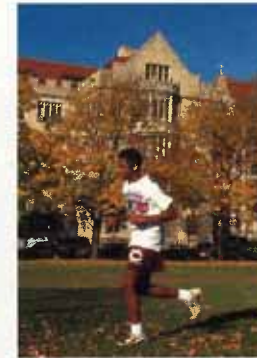
The creation of new spaces would also allow for new activities. The skating rink, for instance, can be converted into an outdoor performance space or used to show films under the stars, and a new soccer garden east of the



*Current activities on the Midway include Frisbee, youth soccer, jogging, the Monsters of the Midway bicycle race, and ice skating on a Chicago Park District rink.*

Metra railroad tracks could support a summer soccer program and high-school level soccer.

From bike races to picnics, flag football to festivals, the new Midway will become a preferred site for a variety of activities for all Chicagoans.



“The Midway is used in so many ways. I learned to ice skate there. I flew kites with my father.”

— Community Resident



# ENHANCING AND PRESERVING A HISTORICAL SPACE

A master plan for the Midway Plaisance must honor its historical importance and grandeur, while addressing the current needs of the neighborhood. Therefore, preserving Frederick Law Olmsted's original ideas is a priority.

The Midway Plaisance Master Plan follows the recommendations of Olmsted scholar Charles Beveridge: keep the center panels free from visual clutter; preserve the long, horizontal sight lines of the Midway; and maintain the rows of trees.

Olmsted envisioned the Midway as one piece of a great South Park, with pedestrians walking from the lake, along the Midway, to Washington Park. To pay homage to this tradition, the Midway Plaisance Master Plan seeks to increase east-west pedestrian traffic flow and establish a bike path connecting the lakefront to Jackson Park and Washington Park.

To draw pedestrians from Lake Michigan to the Midway, the damp, cracked automobile viaduct under the Metra railroad tracks will be repaired and then painted to resemble a forest of red-striped arches, similar to those at the Great Mosque in Cordova, Spain.

The arches already exist, but their drama will be heightened by recessed lighting and the tracing of the lines of the arches in fiber optics. Pin spotlights may be placed to illuminate their surfaces and accentuate their repetitive, sculptural forms.

One exciting idea is to recreate a grand tunnel under the Metra tracks that in the Midway's past connected it with the large grassy area east of the train embankment. The University and the Chicago Park District plan to remove the land bridge barrier of the train embankment to open it up once again to pedestrians.

There will also be practical enhancements and infrastructure improvements to the Midway. The center panels will be raised twelve to eighteen inches and crowned for better drainage; the turf will be improved for better field play; and the manholes in the easternmost north and south lawn panels will be lowered flush to the turf or removed, so that they will no longer interfere with soccer and football. The bridle path, now used for jogging, will be moved to the southern

edge of the south panels, and new and safer paths for jogging and bicycling will be added.

Lighting along the Midway will also be improved. Pedestrian-friendly lampposts, accent lighting, and more effective lighting for automobiles will be added along the main passageways, most likely using fixtures similar to those on the University of Chicago campus. Trash receptacles and benches will be placed in high traffic areas of the park. Sculptures may be added in appropriate locations, and information kiosks and directional signs will guide newcomers to the numerous destinations on the Midway and on campus.



*The Midway viaduct, as it is now and under the master plan.*

*More effective lighting for pedestrians and for automobiles is needed on the Midway.*

*The Midway needs modern park facilities, including water fountains and rest rooms.*

# CHANGING THE MIDWAY FROM EXPRESSWAY TO “STROLL” WAY

With heightened activity on the Midway, the number of cars using the roadways as an expressway becomes more of a danger.

The single issue of greatest concern to community members involved in discussions about the future of the Midway was the high volume and speed of traffic racing along the Midway streets.

Innovative and time-tested solutions will make the Midway safer for pedestrians and for those playing and watching sporting events: timed stoplights can slow speeding cars; sidewalk additions called “bulb-outs” will allow a safer way for pedestrians crossing the street to peek around parked cars in order to better judge oncoming traffic; and low shrubs around playing fields will catch stray balls before they roll into the street.

On weekends, the Midway may be closed to traffic entirely, as is New York City’s Central Park, thereby creating a pedestrian-friendly zone.

By controlling the speed of traffic, discouraging non-crosswalk street crossings, and enabling pedestrians to judge when they may cross safely, the Midway Plaisance will become a safer place in which to stroll.



Chicago’s 28-mile system of historic boulevards links seven inland parks with Lake Michigan. The Midway Plaisance is the widest boulevard, measuring 750 feet across. One of the city’s most overlooked treasures, the boulevard system is one of the oldest and largest in the nation and encircles the heart of the city.

A schematic of the proposed traffic calming features to assist pedestrians crossing the Midway streets includes:

“Bulb-out”	Distinctive paving at crosswalks
Low plantings	Pedestrian lighting



# A PARK RENAISSANCE: A NEW VISION FOR THE MIDWAY

The new gardens, playgrounds, and activity centers of the Midway Plaisance will flow into each other, making the Midway a fascinating, vibrant place in which to walk—without disrupting its historic horizontal planes.

## Enhancing and Preserving a Historical Space

- 1 Jogging Path
- 2 Playing Fields
- 3 Practice Fields
- 4 Refurbished Viaduct Underpass

## Centers of Fun and Learning

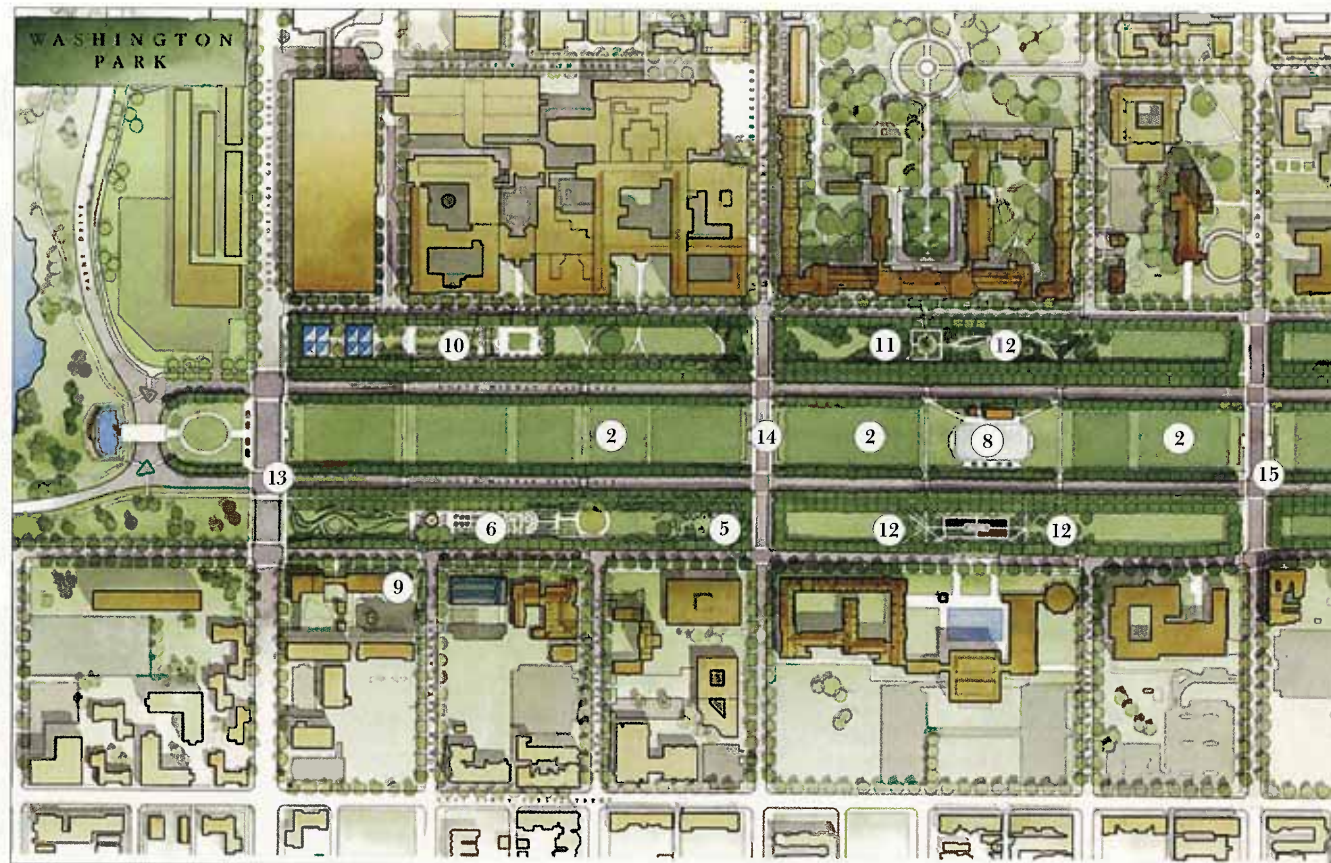
- 5 Children's Garden Playground
- 6 Demonstration Gardens
- 7 Park Playground
- 8 Skating Rink and Warming House (under construction)
- 9 Urban Horticultural Center

## Gardens for All Seasons

- 10 Health and Healing Garden
- 11 Reader's Garden with Linné Monument
- 12 Winter Gardens

## Graceful Bridges and Lively Waters

- 13 Cottage Grove Symbolic Bridge
- 14 Ellis Symbolic Bridge
- 15 Woodlawn Symbolic Bridge
- 16 Dorchester Symbolic Bridge
- 17 Fountain and Gardens
- 18 New Passage through Viaduct
- 19 Reflecting Pool
- 20 Sledding Slope





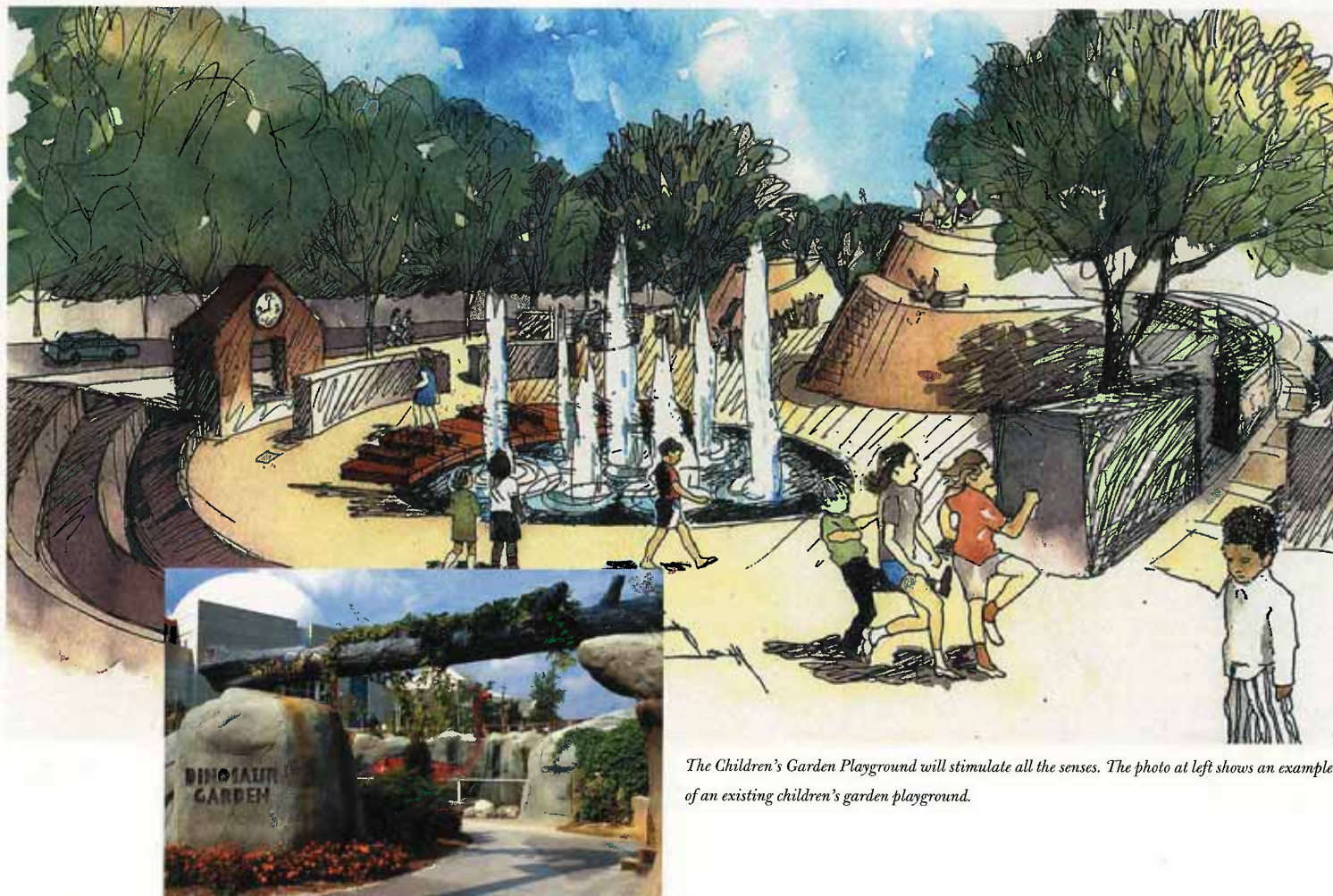
# PLAISANCE





# CENTERS OF FUN AND LEARNING

*A Place for Discovery and Imagination*



*The Children's Garden Playground will stimulate all the senses. The photo at left shows an example of an existing children's garden playground.*

## THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN PLAYGROUND

The Children's Garden Playground will be an innovative environment located on the south panel of the Midway Plaisance, directly across from the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration.

Building on the best models worldwide, the Children's Garden Playground will be a "can't miss" listing for children in any city guidebook, capturing the imagination with innovative materials, themes, and elements not typically found in playgrounds. It will draw families of all backgrounds to the Midway.

What makes true children's gardens extraordinary is the creation of a non-traditional play environment, which challenges the imagination and accommodates the cognitive, motor, and sensory development skills of children.

Proposed elements use false and real perspective with strong geometry and rhythms, huge objects representing familiar things, tilted and textured surfaces, hedges and low walls, fragrances from plants, and sensory developmental elements such as water (sound, touch, reflection), wind chimes, and bird feeders. The garden will incorporate concepts of mystery, stability, privacy, flexibility, and discovery.

The Children's Garden Playground will be developed with the help of a team of child development specialists and will be designed appropriately to Olmsted's artistic vision of the Midway.



### *Learn to Make Your Garden Grow*



*The Chicago Urban Horticulture Center will be a resource for the many amateur gardeners in the Chicago area.*

### **THE URBAN HORTICULTURE CENTER**

**T**he Urban Horticulture Center will be a site for garden information, planting demonstrations, gardens, and horticultural education and training, as well as a place to purchase planting and gardening supplies.

Studies have shown that gardening is the most popular amateur recreational hobby in the United States, crossing all classes, races, ethnicities, and income groups. The center, designed in partnership with a major horticultural center, will educate and engage gardeners from all over the city. It will assist in neighborhood beautification projects, inform the gardening

public about the variety of plants grown in Chicago, provide training for landscaping careers for Chicago youth, and provide a range of programs, lectures, and field trips.

A new 21,000-square-foot horticulture center, likely located on the southeast corner of 60th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, will house classroom, lecture, library, gallery, office, and retail spaces. Just north of the center will be beautiful display and demonstration gardens, including a reflecting pool with aquatic plants and a year-round glass tea house.



*Planting demonstration gardens will be included in the Urban Horticulture Center.*



# SKATE THE MIDWAY ALL YEAR ROUND



*The new skating rink and warming house will offer improved facilities for a popular Midway activity.*

## SKATING RINK AND WARMING HOUSE

For many years, ice skating has been a winter tradition of the Midway Plaisance. Until recently, the Chicago Park District simply flooded a low panel of the Midway and allowed it to freeze, inviting students and neighbors to bring their own ice skates. Two years ago, the Park District installed a temporary rink and skate rental trailer similar to those it operates in other parks. The experiment has been so successful that, in a public and private partnership, the University and the Park District decided to build a permanent rink and warming house on the Midway Plaisance.

The warming house, donated by the University of Chicago to the Chicago Park District, will be built into the embankment of the low center panel. The architecture firm of Nagle Hartray Danker Kagan McKay designed the building with low, clean lines to maintain the strong horizontal lines of the Midway. Inside, there will be two fireplaces, a café, and plenty of comfortable seating for people to relax and watch the skaters. A viewing area on the roof will allow for better vistas, yet the building is just slightly higher than the street.

In summer months, the warming house will continue as a café, and the rink will be converted for use as an inline skating rink, a dance floor, or an outside venue for theater or film presentations. The skating rink and warming house are scheduled to open in January 2001.



*University students teaching public school students how to skate.*





# CREATIVE GARDENS FOR ALL FOUR SEASONS

## MORE THAN FLOWERS

**T**hese gardens will draw day visitors to the Midway Plaisance and provide opportunities for reflection, relaxation, and enjoyment for pedestrians passing through the area. The proposed gardens—the Children’s Garden Playground, the Winter Gardens, the Health and Healing Garden, the Reader’s Garden, and the Demonstration and Idea Garden at the Urban Horticulture Center—will provide focal points for visitors. The spring bulbs on the embankments of the center panels and other plantings will lend brightness and color to the long green line of the Midway.



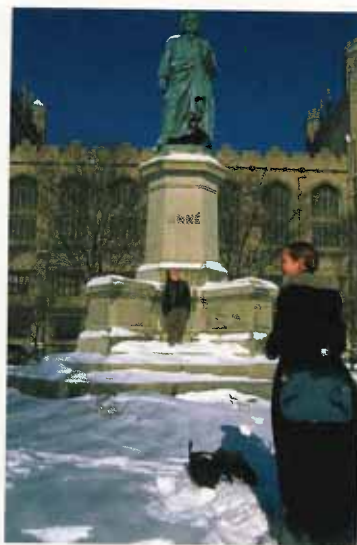
*The Reader’s Garden will be a place for book readings, story time, or just reading the newspaper.*

## READER’S GARDEN

**N**estled near the University of Chicago’s Harper Library, the Reader’s Garden will be tucked into the panel to the west of the Linné statue. Shrubs and beds of perennials will enclose a private place to read a book or the newspaper, though the hedges will be low enough so that passers-by can look in.

Children can gather on the sloping grass and listen to storytellers, and adults may come to hear their favorite authors give readings. Sculptures based on themes of reading, words, or the alphabet will provide a spot for adults to sit and for children to climb.

The Reader’s Garden will provide a connection between the intellectual pursuits of the University and the physical joys of being outdoors.



*“I consider it essential to my physical and spiritual well-being. I meditate under the trees, on a bench, on the grass.”—Community Resident*

## WINTER GARDENS

**A**winter garden is a play of textures and colors: waxy, red berries peeping from under a covering of new white snow; prairie grasses waving against a geometry of hedges; feathery evergreens spreading against the dark stems of oak trees.

Visitors expecting barrenness will instead find contrasts of light and color as they wind their way toward the skating rink from both the north and south sides of the Midway. Some may pause to sit on a whimsical bench and soak up the view.

In the summer, the Winter Gardens will transform into a riot of foliage and flowers, with their fragrances wafting across the plains of the Midway.



*The winter gardens will bring visual interest to the Midway year round, even in the coldest months.*



# GRACEFUL BRIDGES & LIVELY WATERS

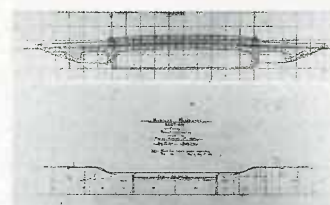
## HEALTH AND HEALING GARDEN

**T**herapeutic gardens reduce stress and induce a sense of well-being that promotes health. The Health and Healing Garden, located near the University of Chicago Hospitals, will be a quiet, calm space for relaxation and exercise. Gardens will feature colorful plantings and grassy spaces for tai chi and yoga. The western panels will accommodate tents for health awareness seminars. An eastern panel will feature a curving, subtly mounded stretch of grassy lawn for relaxation and meditation. Surrounding it all will be a perimeter walking or jogging path, with signs indicating distance markers.

*The Health and Healing Garden will promote health and relaxation.*



*The proposed symbolic bridges (top) along the major north-south streets of the Midway are based on Frederick Law Olmsted's 1894 plan (right).*



## BRIDGES AND FOUNTAINS

**T**he many plans for the Midway Plaisance, from Frederick Law Olmsted's design of 1871 to the Chicago Park District's 1990 plan, have often revolved around water. Canals, fountains, and reflecting pools have all been central elements of the envisioning of the Midway over the years. To pay homage to this tradition, the Midway Plaisance Master Plan proposes a series of symbolic bridges, arched



# WILL ATTRACT VISITORS TO THE MIDWAY PLAISANCE

rises at Cottage Grove, Ellis, Woodlawn, and Dorchester avenues that will resemble bridges. These decorative bridges, enhanced with plantings, sculpture, and inventive lighting, will provide viewpoints over the Midway, and the activities taking place there will add visual interest for those crossing.

According to photographs of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, the embankment on the east end of the Midway was once a pedestrian passageway. That passageway, if it can be

re-opened, will allow visitors to walk or bike from Jackson Park to Washington Park with ease.

Additionally, the master plan envisions the appropriate placement of fountains and reflecting pools. The Children's Garden Playground and the gardens of the Urban Horticulture Center will all have fountains as focal points. In the future, a large European-style, celebratory fountain may be placed on the lawn east of the Metra railroad tracks, creating a grand entrance to the Midway.

"I would like the plans to make the Midway into a Great Bridge Builder—a place that would bring people of the divided neighborhoods together, to know one another and learn to live together in real harmony."— Community Resident



*A long reflecting pool at the Masaryk Monument (above). A large celebratory fountain may be added to the Midway east of the viaduct at a later date (left).*



*The new Midway will draw those who want to play sports or simply enjoy the gardens.*



# THE MIDWAY PLAISANCE MASTER PLAN WAS DEVELOPED BY:

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT, DAVID DOIG, *Superintendent*

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Fund for Community Redevelopment and the  
Woodlawn Preservation and Investment  
Corporation

RICHARD BUMSTEAD, *University Planner*  
The University of Chicago

CECILIA BUTLER  
Washington Park Advisory Council

KAY CLEMENT, *Board Member*  
Friends of the Park

ALLISON DAVIS  
The Davis Group

LEON DESPRES, *Former Fifth Ward Alderman*  
*and community resident*

ROBERT FEITLER, *Trustee*  
The University of Chicago and  
Friends of the Park

DR. LEON D. FINNEY JR., *Chairman*  
The Woodlawn Organization and Woodlawn  
Community Development Corporation

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*Photograph of Frederick Law Olmsted on page 4 and  
Olmsted's plan of bridge (August 1, 1894) on page 14  
courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law  
Olmsted National Historic Site. Roses on page 11 courtesy of  
Carolyn Ulrich.*