

# NEW VIEW

## WASHINGTON PARK GETS THE FACE-LIFT OF THE CENTURY.

City parks are rare gems. Situated just north of downtown at the entrance to Over-the-Rhine, Washington Park dates back to 1855—well before Cincinnati's venerable parks system took root. Its 21st-century transformation (scheduled for completion in July) has been made possible by a partnership between the Park Board and the local nonprofit urban development group Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC). The freshly polished jewel in OTR's crown will join a cavalcade of new projects and old overhauls in the rapidly changing neighborhood. Curious? We were. Here's what's coming.

**A** Safeguarding old trees was a top priority for Christopher Manning, the project's principal landscape architect from local firm Human Nature. "It's really surgical, working around these trees," Manning says. "They're like gold." Some did have to come out; new plantings will mean a net increase of about 50 trees throughout the park.

**B** Washington Park's original design included a dense, leafy canopy and meandering paths in the pastoral south end—just across 12th Street from the new School for Creative and Performing Arts. It was an oasis in the grimy 19th-century city. "We wanted to preserve that," Manning explains.

**C** According to Steve Schuckman, Superintendent of Planning and Design for the Cincinnati Park Board, for the last 157 years "there was an iron fence all around—mainly to keep the pigs out." The new design will forgo the perimeter fence to keep the park open and welcoming.

**D** Around 18,000 perennials and flower bulbs have been planted.

**E** Dog park fencing is from the 150-year-old Stewart Iron Works in Covington—the same firm that created many of the elaborate balconies in New Orleans.

**F** Keep an eye out for the native limestone, granite, and sandstone throughout the park.

**G** With a nod to Cincinnati's canal town days, the playground offers kids their own 1830s-style flatboat. Neighborhood children at Emanuel Community Center weighed in on the plan, Manning says. "We asked them what they like to do in parks. They wanted water and sand, and secret passages. And we had them draw a picture of their perfect park. There were a couple roller coasters in there."

For security, there's only one way into the playground, and one way out. There's also a family restroom inside the fenced area, so playtime won't be interrupted by long treks to the potty. Signs will say: "No adults in the playground unless accompanied by a child."

**H** If you climb up onto the refurbished 1909 bandstand you can see the Findlay Market cupola. "That alignment was intentional," Manning says.

Once an ugly blacktop patio, the area around the bandstand has been transformed into a colorful paved plaza with an abstract circle rose pattern.

**I** Among the earth-friendly features: a green roof over the concession shop and dry wells that collect storm water.

**J** Before it was a park, the area held three separate cemeteries. "We brought in an archaeologist to oversee the excavation," says Schuckman. "They found 90 grave sites, which will be moved to Spring Grove."

Three memorial stones found underground will commemorate the park's unique history. "We have nothing to hide here," Schuckman says. "In fact, there are some things to learn." ☺



The 7,000-square-foot fountain includes 129 pop-up jets for kids to play in. "We couldn't keep them out if we tried," Schuckman says, "so we made it interactive."

The site of the former Washington Park School is now a "civic green"—a football field-sized public lawn for concerts and festivals. It sits atop a 450-space underground parking garage.

Playground features are modeled after local landmarks such as the Eden Park Water Tower. Look for "Lazarus lizards" in the masonry.

Have a downtown dog? This will be your new go-to spot to... go. Pups get a built-in water trough and a leash-free space inside a double-gated fence.

After the Civil War, a memorial cannon was aimed south, toward the Confederate states. "But when the new School for Creative and Performing Arts building went up," says Schuckman, "we realized the cannon was pointed right at the school." It has since been redirected.

The bandstand is upping the romance factor by adding a canopy of twinkling "Tivoli" lights and a row of benches nearby.