

Hamilton's Gage Park Awarded the CSLA's Inaugural Legacy Project Award (2016)

Respecting the Past - Ready for the Future

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ABOUT GAGE PARK

[Gage Park](#) is one of Hamilton Ontario's most iconic, historical and cultural landscapes. In 1920-27, H.B. & L.A. Dunnington-Grubb, (early founders of Canadian landscape architecture) created and implemented a forward-thinking concept for Gage Park in a style reflective of the Canadian City Beautiful Movement of the 1920s. Components of the park design that were critical to the grand vision are the Great Lawn, the broad meandering walkway system, the relationships of formal and informal spaces, and the creation and preservation of dominant vistas to the Niagara Escarpment. Since that time, it has retained these features and remained a prime example of that park and garden style. It holds an extremely high status in Hamilton as a unique place that enhances the sense of community pride and identification.

Over the years, the 28-hectare park has evolved to serve the needs of the public, and aged to a point where restoration and management measures were essential in order to preserve this culturally significant landscape for future generations. The City of Hamilton has approved a new Master Plan prepared by DTAH to guide the long-term restoration and management of this park. The plan has been created to preserve, enhance, and complement the original park design in a sustainable manner. Iconic historical elements, including the fountain and terrace area have been restored to their original grandeur, impacts of the park on the surrounding landscape and water management systems have been reduced through the use of innovative low-impact technologies, and a memorial monument funded by the Friends of Gage Park has been installed as a tribute to the park's rich cultural history.

A prime example of the sensitivity to the Dunington-Grubb design is the preservation of the formal perennial gardens and vistas at the park entrance, by installing an underground stormwater detention cell system to address the modern challenges related to flooding in the neighbourhood.

A future project to install a stormwater detention facility along the east side of the park actually fully completes the vision of original park designers' 1920 plan. The elegance of this solution is encompassed in the recognition that modern challenges can be addressed in a way that respects and celebrates the history of a place.

No better testament to the value of this park to the community is the donation by the grass-roots community organization, the Friends of Gage Park, of the memorial to recognize the significance of the vision of the Dunington-Grubbs. This memorial was funded by the community to celebrate both Howard and Lorrie, and has been given a place of honour in their formal perennial garden.

Despite pressures of nearly a century of use and evolution, the essence of the original Dunington-Grubb design has remained intact. As one of Hamilton's most iconic and historically rich landscapes, commitments have been made to ensure the unique character, function, and historical integrity of the park is well maintained for future generations.

ROLE OF THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

Many landscape architects have contributed to the success of Gage Park. Starting in 1920, Howard and Lorrie Dunington-Grubb were commissioned by the Board of Parks to commence work on Gage Park. Howard Dunington-Grubb, often called the father of landscape architecture in Canada, prepared a Master Plan for the park that contained a formal garden adjacent to Main Street and large vistas of open space encircled by carefully planted trees of many varieties. The fountain was designed by architect John Lyle and completed in 1927. Later in 1935, landscape architect Tom Matt Broman was hired to continue to prepare plans for the completion of Gage Park such as the Brick Pergola on the west end of the formal garden. In 1947 the band shell was constructed. In 1978, in honour of the International Year of the Child, the Children's Museum was founded and housed in the Gage family house.

Throughout the life of Gage Park, landscape architects have been heavily involved in the preservation, and adaptation of the original park design to the needs of the community. The legacy of Gage Park is founded with the Dunington-Grubb design, but continues today because of the forward-thinking and adaptable spaces it created, as well as, the thoughtful and innovative changes to the park to make it as relevant today as it was in the 1920's.

More recently, DTAH completed the Gage Park Master Plan and the Stormwater Management Plan in 2010. The plan is intended to protect and reveal the park's heritage quality, accommodate new uses and requirements, increase personal comfort and security, and incorporate a stormwater management plan.

HOW THE SITE FUNCTIONS

Gage Park contributes year-round in the quality-of-life factor for the adjacent neighbourhoods. It makes the inner-city neighbourhoods more livable, it offers recreation opportunities for at-risk youth, low income children and low-income families, and it provides places where neighbours can feel a sense of community. The needs of the community and pressures on the park have continually evolved over the last 88 years. Buildings, greenhouses, play structures and a band shell were constructed in the park, as well as an active Public Works and Forestry yard.

The park supports and reflects the diversity within the community. There are many monuments in the park celebrating different nationalities and people who helped to shape the park. The park also hosts several events and large festivals which cater to the diverse population.



THE FUTURE OF GAGE PARK

Gage Park is one of Hamilton’s finest cultural heritage landscapes. The City of Hamilton is dedicated to maintaining the unique character for future generations as a classically designed park of the 1920s era. As a testament to the value of this park to the community, and its changing use over time, the City of Hamilton has invested significant resources to the restoration and continued importance to Hamilton. The phrase “love it to death” applies here – the public is drawn to this park in such numbers that the landscape suffered significant deterioration. The City has committed significant money and resources to undertake the large-scale renewal of the park. The role of the park both functionally and spiritually to the community has been recognized by the City.

In 2005, the City of Hamilton initiated a Master Plan process with the goal of maintaining the cultural heritage of the site and responding to the growing popularity of the park for special events, organized sports, and a growing concern over maintenance issues that required specialized attention. Extensive consultation with the community and stakeholders has determined what is essential to the desires of the community while preserving the heritage aspects. Parts of the Master Plan have been implemented while others are to be phased in over time. The current master plan seeks to:

- strengthen the elegance of the historic water features, ornamental flower beds and the overall park geometry;
- improve universal accessibility within the park through hard surface conversion of major granular pathways;

- define the park identity through perimeter fencing, entry walls and signage, as well as strengthening the Lawrence Road entrance through a consistent design and material palette;
- introduce new buildings using green building technologies for the expanding Children's Museum, tropical greenhouse and aviary;
- recommend adaptive re-use of the existing Gage House;
- refurbish the Band Shell and modernizing the existing adjacent washroom;
- implement a 20-year urban forest Strategic Plan for the management of the distinct forest, a 5-year Maintenance Plan, and 1-year Operational Plan;
- introduce maintained meadows which provide outdoor education opportunities while using a reduced lawn care program;
- protect the Central Green lawn which is an invaluable flexible green space within downtown Hamilton, and used for large community events several times a year;
- ensure active sports and children focused play areas remain in the park, with the addition of an artificial outdoor skating loop and the addition of a new washroom facility near the spray pad;
- find creative solutions to store and infiltrate stormwater runoff within the park utilizing Low Impact Development techniques.

The new park vision will provide greater protection of cultural heritage elements which in turn will strengthen the park as a cultural landscape and showcase it as the City's premier regional park.