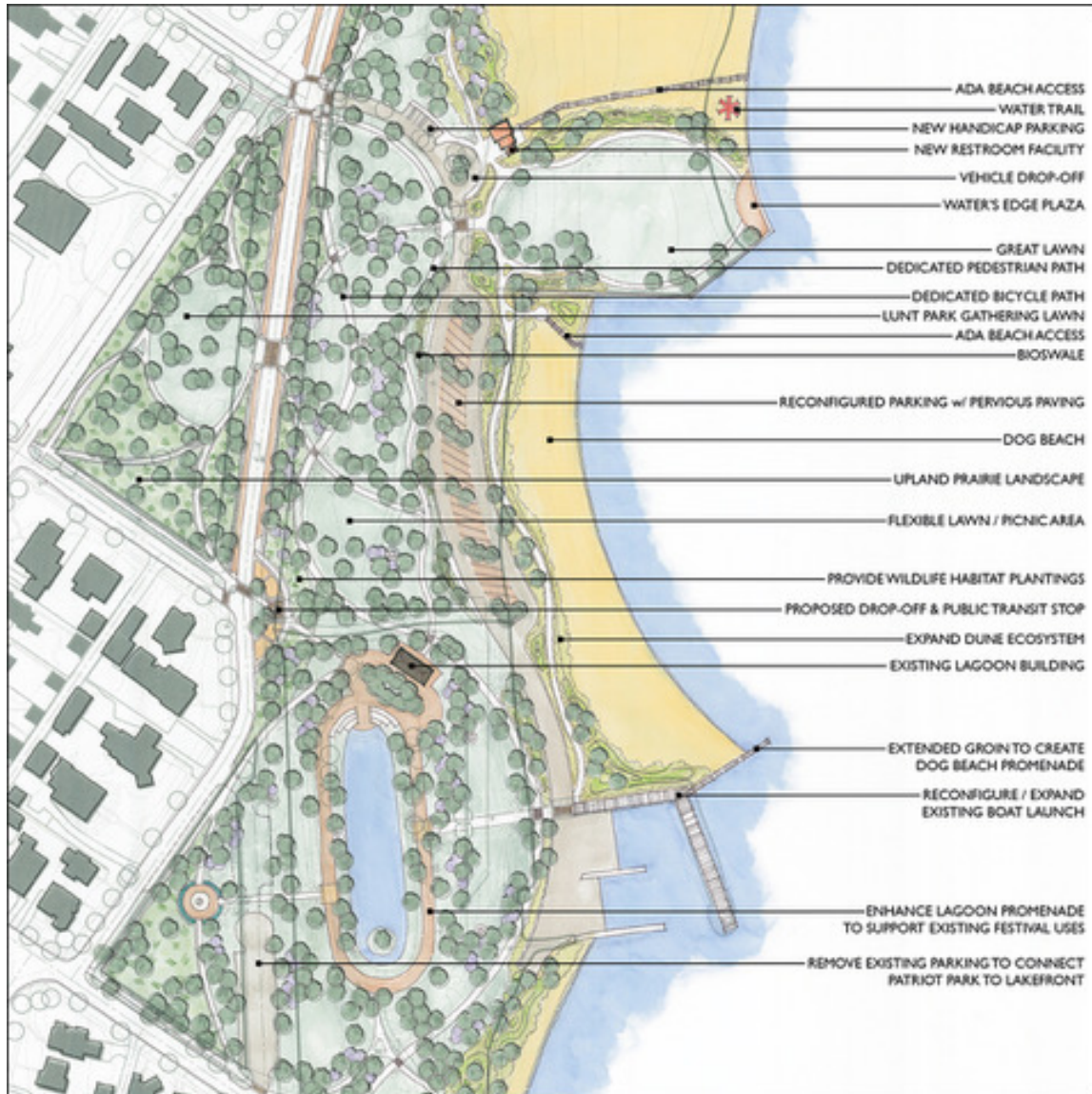


Eye On Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Evanston's parks and open spaces

by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) March 15th, 2023

It might be said that Philo Judson, hired by Northwestern University to plat the village of Evanston, is the founder of Evanston's public park system. In 1853-54 Judson set aside areas for parks and the university campus, including the open space that we know today as Fountain Square. In 1882 Northwestern deeded lakefront land between Lake and Church streets for the city's first public park.



Detail from the 2008 Lakefront Master Plan showing the section that features the lakefront lagoon.
Credit: City of Evanston

In the 1880s Evanston resident Volney Foster, known as "The Father of Sheridan Road," promoted the building of a pleasure drive between Chicago and Milwaukee along the Lake Michigan shore. He formed the Sheridan Road Association and helped to reclaim land from the lakefront and establish parks along the drive.

In 1900, Frank Elliot donated over 7 acres of his property – from Lee to Hamilton streets along the lakefront – for a park, now named Elliot Park. In 1911, a number of prominent landowners donated the

land at Greenwood Street for a park. As a result, the city passed an ordinance that set aside the land south of the university and north of Greenleaf Street for public parks.

The Plan of Evanston was presented in 1917. Despite the land set aside for parks as noted above, the plan committee – composed of Dwight Perkins, [Thomas Tallmadge](#), Daniel Burnham Jr. and Hubert Burnham – intended to address the need for more park space along the lakefront.

In 1927 the Evanston Plan Commission Parks Committee, under the chairmanship of Tallmadge, began a comprehensive plan to develop and beautify the lakefront. Due to financial constraints at the time, only the seawall at Calvary Cemetery was built. (See 1929 photograph at end of article.)

On July 4, 1929, an \$8,000 flagstaff memorializing Evanston's war dead was dedicated at Patriots Park at Forest Place and Sheridan Road. The flagstaff base was designed by Tallmadge and executed by sculptor Stephen Beames.

In the 1930s the lakefront lagoon was built as a federal Works Progress Administration project. Restored in 2015, the lagoon gained new life as the Arrington Lakefront Lagoon, named to honor [former state Sen. W. Russell Arrington](#).



Lakefront Lagoon built in the 1930s and named the Arrington Lakefront Lagoon in 2015. Credit: Shutterstock

The chain of Evanston lakefront parks is, by any standard, the jewel in Evanston's park system. For decades it has been the Lake Michigan lakefront that attracts residents and visitors alike to its magnetic charms.

The lakefront park system includes parks from north to south. Lawson Park at Sheridan Road and Clinton Place includes [Noah's Playground for Everyone](#), an accessible playground giving opportunities to all children, no matter their physical circumstances.

Moving south, lakefront parks include Centennial, between Church and University Place; Dawes, between Dempster and Church streets; Burnham Shores, between Dempster and Hamilton streets; Elliott, between Hamilton and Lee streets; Clark Square, between Main and Kedzie streets; Garden, north of Sheridan Square; and South Boulevard, between Sheridan Square and Sheridan Road.

At the lakefront, Evanston's five public swimming beaches are open seven days a week during the beach season. Three are accessible to people with disabilities: Lighthouse, Clark Street and Lee Street. The [beach house](#) built at Clark Street in 2009 was designed by David Woodhouse Architects and received a Design Evanston Award in 2010.



Clark Street Beach Building designed by David Woodhouse Architects in 2009. Credit: David Woodhouse Architects

Evanston has two boat launch facilities: the Church Street Powerboat Ramp and the Dempster Street Launch Facility for canoes kayaks, and sailboats. Windsurfers launch from Greenwood Street Beach.

On Evanston's far northwest side, the 18-acre Lovelace Park is at Gross Point Road just south of the Wilmette border. Previously a gravel pit and garbage dump site, the park was completed in 1980 and dedicated to Walter Lovelace, former managing editor of the Evanston News-Index and editor of the Evanston Review. Fishing programs for children are sponsored at the park's pond. The park also features a soccer/football field, basketball court and tennis courts.

The 9-acre Twiggs Park, south of the North Shore Channel at Ashland Avenue, was dedicated in 1986. It features a bike/walking path that connects with Butler Park on the west at Bridge Street. The city recently approved [a 10,000-square-foot skate park](#) near the Ashland entrance. The 15-acre Butler Park extends the bike/walking path farther southwest to Emerson Street. From that point bicyclists and walkers can find the North Shore Channel bike path at McCormick Boulevard and continue into Chicago's parks along the North Branch of the Chicago River.

One popular open space in Evanston that is not a city park is [Dwight Perkins Woods](#). This charming nature preserve is the only Cook County Forest Preserve parcel in Evanston. Named after the founder of the Forest Preserve, it is surrounded by a residential area on four sides. Perkins Woods is popular with

joggers, walkers and bird-watchers. The only human-made features of the preserve are paths that connect the four corners to a central meeting place.



Perkins Woods Forest Preserve, 2353 Ewing Ave., Evanston. Credit: Claudia G./Our Evanston Plog

In 2008 the City of Evanston completed a detailed [Lakefront Master Plan](#) in an effort to reinforce and celebrate the importance of our lakefront parks and plan for their future. Evanston-based firm McGuire Iglesk was one of four consultants on the project, which received a Design Evanston Award in 2010.

One of the more interesting recommendations made by the Master Plan team is one that affects all residents and visitors who arrive in Evanston via Sheridan Road. In the executive summary of the June 2008 plan, the city and its consultants noted, “At the southernmost end of Evanston, the master plan seeks to restore the amazing experience of driving along Lake Michigan on Sheridan Road. The narrowing of Sheridan Road, coupled with the expansion of green space and lowered rock revetment will create an open, gracious space that welcomes visitors. No landscape or architectural monument could provide a more compelling entry statement for the City of Evanston than a clear view of Lake Michigan.”

On the team’s Site Inventory (South) Map they noted: 1. Narrow, hazardous bike path. 2. Informal/unofficial beach south of South Boulevard. 3. Wide roadway with median. 4. Potential to reduce roadway width/number of lanes. A plan there, if implemented, would reduce the width of Sheridan Road by eliminating the median and adding a landscaped pedestrian/bike path along the lakefront.



(L) Detail from the 2008 Lakefront Master Plan site inventory (south). Credit: City of Evanston

(R) Sheridan Road at Calvary Cemetery, October 1929. Credit: DN-0088753, Chicago Sun-Times/Chicago Daily News collection, Chicago History Museum

Like Lovelace Park, both the 16-acre Crown Park and 48-acre James Park were built on sites previously filled with city waste. Land for Crown Park, formerly Boltwood Park, near Dodge Avenue and Main Street, was purchased by the city in 1917, the same year that the first Plan of Evanston was initiated.

In 1975 the city hired Evanston-based architects O'Donnell Wickland Pigozzi to design the Robert Crown Community Center and Ice Complex at 1701 Main St. The original facility was demolished in 2020 to make room for a new facility. Completed in 2020, the new [Robert Crown Community Center](#) at 1801 Main St. houses two NHL-sized rinks, a library, an indoor running track and a gymnasium, among other public facilities. Outdoors the park features soccer/football fields, baseball/softball fields and tennis courts.

In 1963, the city converted the former clay pit at Oakton Street and Dodge Avenue to a park with multiple baseball diamonds and tennis courts. On the southwest corner of the park, a 65-foot high hill was built with construction waste. "Mount Trashmore" became a winter destination for tobogganers and sledgers for many years until it was partially closed due to injury litigation. Today sledding is allowed only on the small and medium runs in the winter. The park also features a playground, soccer/football fields, basketball court, baseball/softball fields and tennis courts.

Today the City of Evanston Parks Division provides the maintenance of all public grounds within the city. The city manages 97 sites totaling more than 300 acres of land, including 76 parks and 50 playgrounds. In addition to the parks operated by the City of Evanston, there are two independent park districts in the city.

Lighthouse Park District in northeast Evanston consists of three parcels near Lighthouse Beach, which the city maintains. The Lighthouse Park District, formerly the North East Park District, was established in Evanston in 1929. In 1935 the district became responsible for administration of the [Grosse Point Lighthouse site](#) and was renamed Lighthouse Park District.

[Ridgeville Park District](#), with headquarters at 908 Seward St. in south Evanston, consists of seven parks covering more than 14 acres in all. It is named after the historic settlement around present day Ridge Avenue south of Oakton.

This essay expands on content that appears in Evanston: 150 Years 150 Places, 2015.

Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" column focuses on Evanston's design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.

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