

A Master Plan for
Delano Park

September, 2003

The City of Decatur, Alabama and
The Friends of Delano Park

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Delano Park Master Plan

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Albany Plan:

- 1890 Albany Plan by Landscape Architect Nathan Barrett
- Arranged around natural drainage way and highpoints
- School and Water Tower were focal points
- Plan combines informal and formal elements
- Park is characterized by open space and vistas

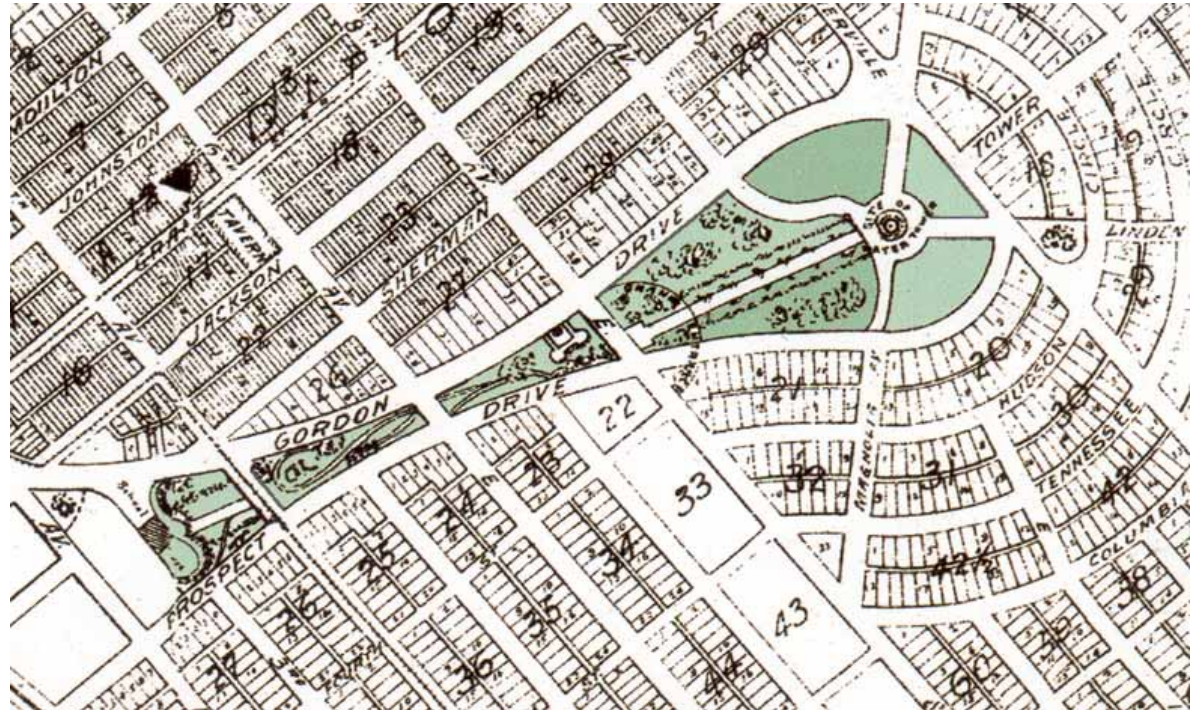
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Delano Park Master Plan

Research Approach

The history of Delano Park was researched as part of the documentation for the Albany Heritage Neighborhood Historic District. The non-profit Friends of Delano Park have performed additional research on the park's origins and development. This master plan is based in part on the research documentation of both sources.

Research has turned up few plan documents that indicate the park's original design and few visual images from its long history. We examined these additional sources to search specifically for visual documentation of the park and its history.

1. Alabama Department of Archives and History:
 - Newspaper microfilm
 - Civil Works Administration Photographs collection
Morgan County, 1933-34
 - Clippings file
 - Postcard collection

2. Birmingham Public Library Archives Department:
 - Clippings file
 - Postcard collection

3. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, MD):
 - Record Group 35 -- Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps
 - Record Group 69 -- Records of the Work Projects Administration

4. Tennessee Valley Authority (Chattanooga, TN):
 - TVA Map Store for historical aerial photography of Decatur

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Civil Works Administration 1933-1934:



Wading Pool and Bath
House

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Civil Works Administration 1933-1934:



4th Avenue Stars, Plantings
and Sports Field
(Armory Site)

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Civil Works Administration 1933-1934:



Dance Pavilion
(Girl Scout Hut)

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Civil Works Administration 1933-1934:



Rose Garden

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Works Progress Administration:



Bandstand

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Public Works Administration, 1937-1938:



The Armory

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Existing Conditions

At 115+ years, Delano Park retains much of the open rolling character that Nathan Barrett must have envisioned. The odd and organic form of the park survives intact from Barrett's original plan, as do the three major focal points of school, public garden (Rose Garden) and water tower.

It seems logical that Barrett took advantage of a rolling topography and natural drainageways in the arrangement of the park and surrounding neighborhoods. We believe that Barrett also intended the park's openness as a counterpoint to the development of the neighborhoods. Today the open aspect of the park is dramatically different from the more enclosed tree-lined residential streets surrounding it. The surrounding residential architecture reinforces this character by providing a strong visual edge for the park. The interface between park and neighborhoods is an important part of what makes Delano Park work.

There is little evidence to suggest any actual plantings were installed in the park to the outlines indicated on the Barrett plan. Most of the major trees in the park today date more closely to the 1930's period of significance. This mature canopy of

hardwoods is one of the great character defining elements in the park today.

Historically, the period of the 1930's saw the most significant development in the park. Much of the construction accomplished in those years remains a very visible and rich aspect of the park's character. The rustic stone structures built in the 1930's gave the park its own architecture for the first time, and defined smaller areas within the 33 acre site. They remain in large part in use and part of the park's current usage.

The 1930's work also included significant planting in the park. Photographs from that time show not only newly planted trees, but also shrub masses and large planting beds associated with the new structures. All of this understory planting is now gone from the park, succumbing to the passage of time and later construction.

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Delano Park Today



Aerial Photograph, 1998

Delano Park Master Plan

Delano Park Today



Current Park Characteristics:

- Open, rolling vistas
- Mature Hardwoods
- Park retains its original 1890 boundaries
- Comfortable interface with adjoining historic residential area

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Delano Park Today



Negative Conditions:

- Recreational facilities visually dominate the east park and detract from the park's open character.
- Utility lighting and overhead power service are visually distracting.
- Incompatible structures clutter the east park (bathroom, basketball courts and second softball field).
- Later plantings (Bradford Pears) do not blend with the character of original native tree plantings.

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Delano Park Today



East Park: NE corner at Somerville Road and Gordon Drive.



West Park: View East from Armory parking to the Girl Scout Hut.

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Delano Park Master Plan:



- Maintain the open, informal character
- Cluster more intensive uses by activity, access and user group
- Develop a comprehensive pathway system
- Use pathways and planting to create distinct use areas in the East park.
- Adopt standards for park furniture, lighting
- Remove overhead power wherever possible

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New Uses – History Trail:

- Trail will provide an important link to park's historic structures
- Trail will provide pedestrian connections between schools and park
- Interpretive signage or markers should tell park's history and importance to Decatur's growth

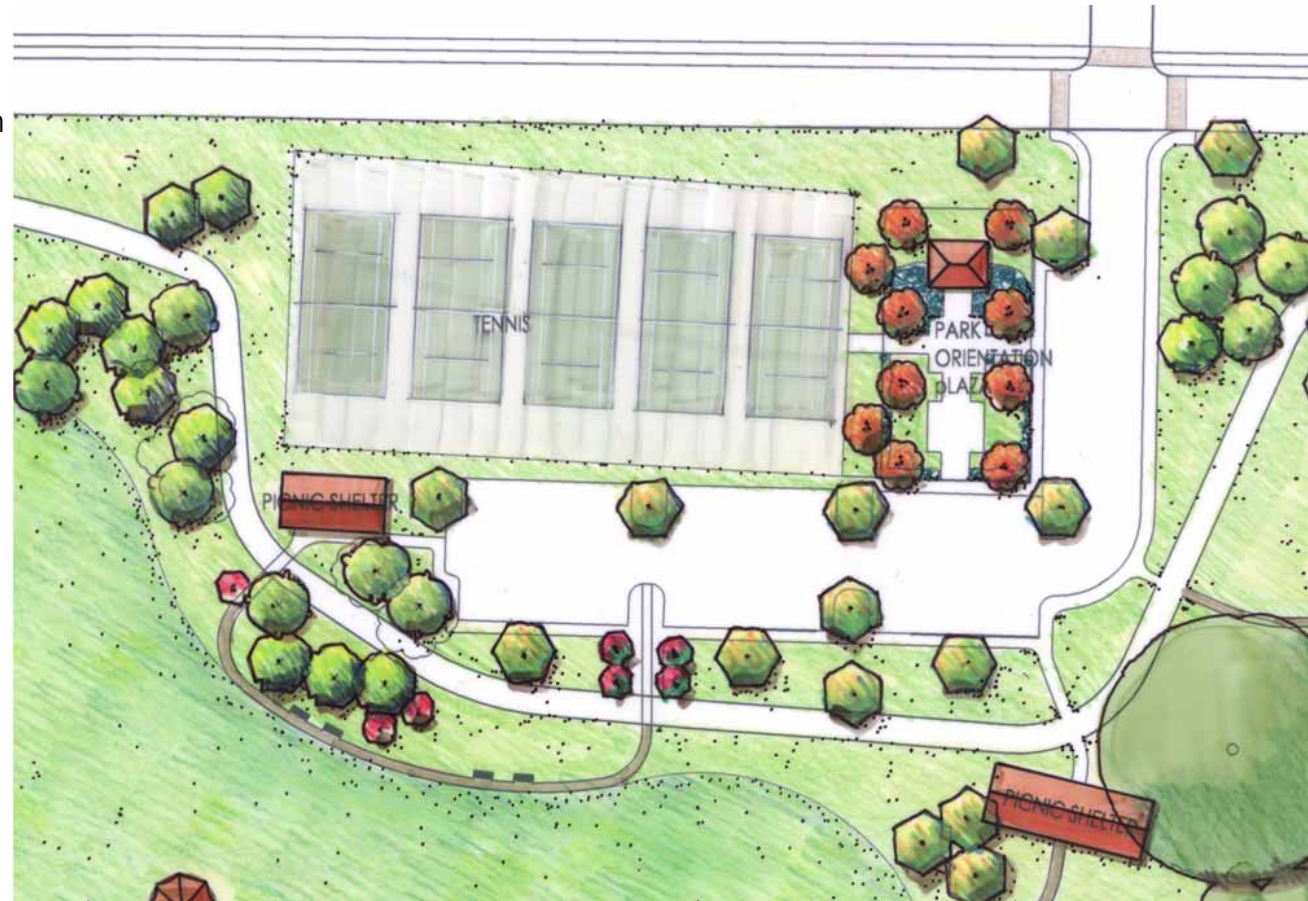
- Trail materials should reflect materials characteristic of the 1930's park construction, and be appropriate for current park use
- Trail should provide an accessible route to park facilities
- Incorporate seating and water fountains for park users
- Subsequent phases of the trail may focus on specific structures and park areas



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New Uses -- Tennis Complex/Park Orientation Center:

- Create single entry/exit drive aligned with Gordon Drive/10th Ave. intersection
- Structure parking with tree islands and sidewalks
- Create park orientation kiosk and seating area and restrooms adjacent to tennis courts
- Connect existing picnic pavilions to parking with sidewalks
- Upgrade tennis lighting to eliminate overspill into residential areas
- Remove existing restroom structure



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New Uses – Water Play Feature/Playground:

- Add a new water play area next to playground
- Shape and location should recall original wading pool
- Rehab original bath house for restrooms
- Replace existing picnic pavilion with new facility and garden between playground and water play area.

- Upgrade playground with modern equipment and surfacing, and add enclosure
- Playground can be more efficient, fun and take up less space
- Add trees and landscaping for shade and visual appeal



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New Uses – Armory Picnic Pavilion:

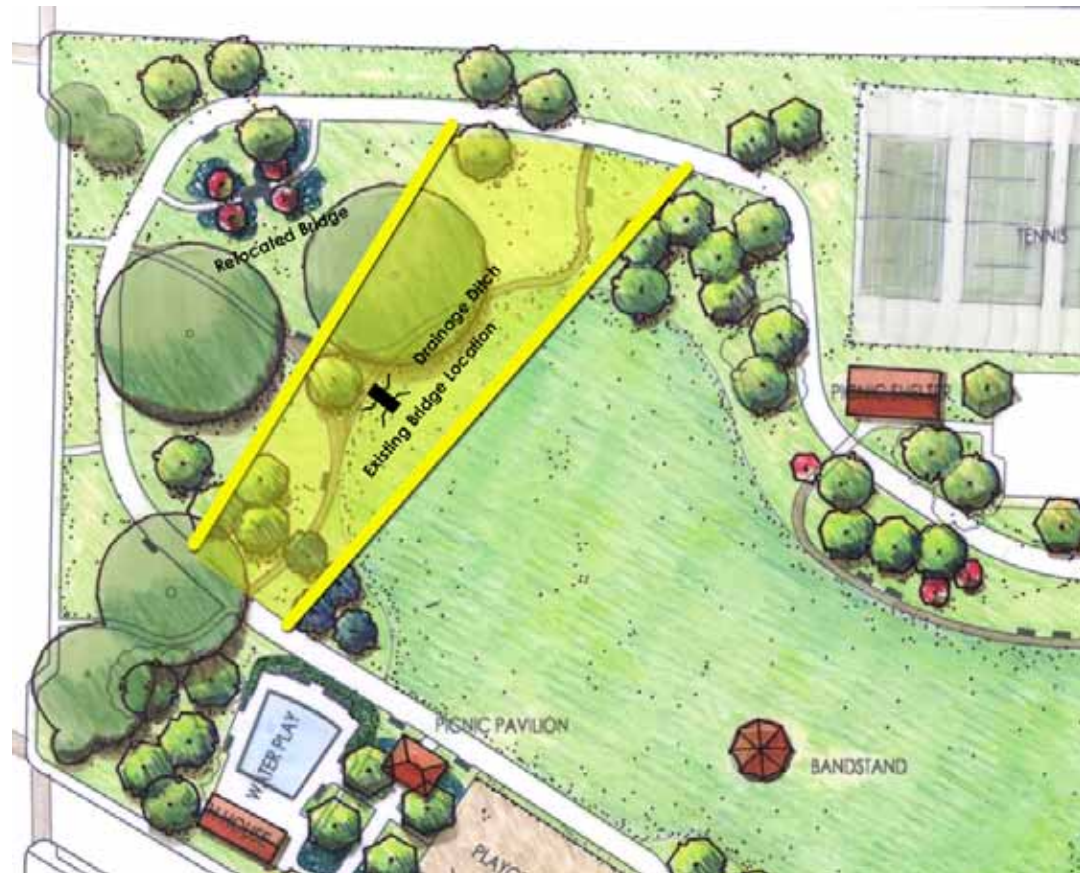
- Create a group-use area in the West park between the Armory and Girl Scout Hut
- Add a new picnic pavilion adjacent to Armory parking
- Create a memorial plaza adjacent to the pavilion and connected to History Trail
- Use plantings, sidewalks and benches to define the lawn area between pavilion and Girl Scout Hut
- Lawn and pavilion may be reserved by larger groups or groups that want some separation from other park users



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The Bridge and Drainage Ditch:

- Fill and pipe the existing drainage ditch to gain more usable park area
- Add subsurface drainage in this area of park to control stormwater problems
- Remove two legs of the walking trail and close the loop at the north end of the ditch.
- Replace sections of walking trail with more informal walkways and seating areas oriented to the Bandstand and lawn area
- Relocate the Bridge to a new landscaped setting closer to the Gordon Dr./8th Ave. corner



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Lighting Recommendations:

- Replace utility lights with decorative pedestrian-scale poles.
- Replace overhead service with underground.
- Upgrade sports lighting for efficiency and to limit overspill to adjacent residential areas.
- Select poles and fixtures that are similar in material and scale to fixtures used in Decatur in the 1930's.



Decatur Post Office streetlight, ca. 1930's



Decatur High School streetlight, (relocated)



City of Mobile streetlight, 2003

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Site Furniture and Materials:

- Select a common bench and trash receptacle for use throughout the park.
- Benches and trash receptacles should be located by pathways and installed on hard surface for maintenance.
- There is no evidence of site furniture in use in the park – new furniture should be selected for durability and should be style-neutral.
- Concrete, brick and stone are the historic construction materials of Delano Park.
- New paths, plazas or walls should use these materials rather than introducing new materials such as concrete pavers.



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Landscape Planting and Maintenance:

- Tree maintenance is very important to retaining the park's historic look
- Implement the recommendations of the tree report, and update the tree report on a 5-year cycle
- Introduce new tree plantings to anticipate loss of mature canopy trees.
- Trees should be selected from native species; over time work to remove non-natives at odd with the park's character.
- Keep shrub plantings minimal to maintain the open character of the ground plan and for security.



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