Physical and Social Topography:

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Washington Grove is and must be a place apart, a forest enclave. But it’s also part of a city park and an important component of a city-wide park system of great historical and cultural importance, as well as a resource for recreation. Of course, both for human and non-human users (birds, insects, animals) it is connected to wider environments. However, the connections could be made more explicit. It’s also important to think about connections between the local and the global!

Both biologists and city planners currently see connectivity as a key priority, especially when combined with access to green space. So there is interest in establishing wildlife corridors as well as (often identical with) tree-lined streets and other kinds of pathway providing easy and pleasant access, especially for pedestrians, from urban neighborhoods to parks (a major example is the 15-minute city project being implemented in Paris). In Rochester some initiatives are underway that are reshaping the city, notably the filling in of part of the Inner Ring and its replacement by a boulevard, and the expansion of the Riverwalk in and near downtown. Monroe Avenue, which connects Cobb’s Hill Park to downtown (in fact to the new boulevard), has seen impressive enhancement in recent years, partly through the efforts of local neighborhood groups who have created gardens along the street. It is an important commercial and mixed-use artery (State Route 31) leading out of Rochester to the SE and passing by the W side of Cobb’s Hill on its way through Brighton to Pittsford and the Barge Canal. As the Monroe Avenue Association’s web site claims, it is a major gateway to downtown. Where the Avenue passes Cobb’s Hill, it leaves Rochester City and enters Brighton; this lower saddle (caused by gravel mining around 1900) between two higher sections of the glacial moraine known as the Pinnacle Range might receive more emphasis as a gateway into Rochester!

So the question is: how do we enhance knowledge of the Grove in the wider community not just as a special enclave in its own right, worthy of attention and care, but also within the larger context of a city increasingly concerned, like cities globally, to spread the benefits of access as equitably as possible to residents in the city and surrounding communities? Since the Grove most closely approaches a “natural” or even wilderness condition, can it become a model for other areas, perhaps in line with the idea of “re-wilding” that is beginning to influence the treatment of urban spaces as well as degraded non-urban landscapes? Examples of the latter include efforts to revive prairie ecosystems in the Mid-West, as well as forest restoration projects, on a larger scale than in the Grove, along the Niagara River in Buffalo and the Bronx River in New York City.

One potential model is Louisville, KY, which like Rochester has a park system partly designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the late 19th century (one of only four park systems by the creator of Central Park, NY), but which has gone through a process of park restoration and expansion like nothing here. There is also a campaign in Louisville to make it the first National Park City in the US, on the model of London and, in the works, Toronto and Adelaide; this movement seeks to unify disparate green and blue (water) spaces within a city to transform at least consciousness of the relationship between hard and “soft” surfaces. It requires assent on the part of every district in a city on the basis of informational campaigns and public meetings and consultation.

Useful webpages:

City of Roc site on Olmsted and the park system

<https://www.cityofrochester.gov/olmsted/>

Southeast Neighborhoods - Cobbs Hill

Southeast Quadrant - Cobbs Hill Neighborhood

<https://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=8589944126>

Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. - National Association for Olmsted Parks

www.olmsted.org › the-olmsted-legacy › frederick-law-olmsted-sr

(Note: Cobbs Hill park was designed initially by the Olmsted firm after the death of FLO Sr.. His sons John Cahrles and Fred Jr (Rick) took over. Rick worked on the parks section in the Rochester plan of 1911 advocating parkways connecting various green spaces, as his father had achieved in Buffalo.)

Bloomberg article on Paris as possible model for US cities

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-11-12/paris-s-15-minute-city-could-be-coming-to-an-urban-area-near-you>

Guardian article on the launch of the 15-minute city in Paris (by Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris and an immigrant)

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/07/paris-mayor-unveils-15-minute-city-plan-in-re-election-campaign>

National Park City Foundation

<https://www.nationalparkcity.org/>

Barcelona

https://www.dezeen.com/2020/11/19/barcelona-eixample-masterplan-streets-green-space/