4.0 SPECIAL PURPOSE PARKS

4.1 BOTANICAL GARDENS

DESCRIPTION
The Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens is a world-class facility that features 11 greenhouses which houses unique collections of orchids, bromeliads, begonias, cacti, ferns, palms, citrus, and an herb marketplace. It is all housed in a masterly designed glass conservatory structure, which reminds us of Buffalo’s wealth and progressiveness from over a century ago. Seasonal flower shows are a popular attraction within the region. The grounds of the Botanical Gardens occupy 11.57 acres within the 153-acre South Park on the southern edge of the City of Buffalo at the Lackawanna City line. The land is generally level with a slight rise at the building approach. The building has recently undergone extensive restoration of its steel and glass structure and the grounds have been the focus of recent master planning efforts.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY
The Botanical Gardens is the product of three extraordinary visionaries: landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, architects Lord & Burnham and botanist/plant explorer John F. Cowell. The Botanical Garden was an original element in the plan for the City of Buffalo’s South Park, which was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1880s. South Park was constructed between 1894 and 1900 from 156 acres of farm land. A conservatory was included to showcase tropical plant species while the rest of the park was designed to feature more hardy temperate species including an Arboretum, a Pinetum, a Shrub Garden and a Bog Garden. The more formalized gardens around the conservatory were designed to lead visitors into the more informal park.

The Botanical Gardens is a tri-domed, Victorian-style, glass, wood and steel structure opened in 1900 and designed by the premier conservatory architects of the time: Lord & Burnham, Co. from Downstate New York. It was designed in a similar style to the earlier “Crystal Palace” in London built around 1850. When it was built in 1897-1899, it was one of the largest public greenhouses in the country built at a cost of $130,000.00. Today there are
less than a dozen large Victorian conservatories remaining in America.

Over the past 100 years, the facility has had numerous cycles of deterioration and rebirth. In 1979, the conservatory was once again in poor shape and city budget difficulties threatened the facility with closure. A neighborhood advocate formed the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical gardens Society to help save the structure. The publicity worked and the County of Erie took over the Conservatory in 1981. recent years have seen much renovation and rejuvenation of the facility, including the front entrance portico, glass dome structures, outdoor Shrub Garden and numerous other facility enhancements and repairs.

LOCAL CONTEXT
The Botanical Garden is located within South Park at the City of Buffalo border with the City of Lackawanna. Access into the facility is from South Park Avenue leading north-south from Downtown Buffalo, and also the major east-west route, Ridge Road, which links to the I-90 Thruway to the west and NY Route 5 to the west. Contextually, the Botanical Garden and Park are more closely related to the adjacent business district along Ridge Road (Lackawanna) than they are to the nearby South Buffalo Neighborhoods. However, the Olmsted Parkway system is a direct linkage into the area neighborhoods, with the Botanical Garden at the southerly terminus. There is also great potential to link the Botanical Garden better to the “Our Lady of Victory” Basilica, a world-renowned structure only a couple blocks away.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT
Given its “Special Purpose” within this study, the Botanical Garden is a one of a kind facility and therefore has no equal in the area.

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS
· Continuing to maintain this unique and costly structure

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS
· Consider the Botanical Gardens as an important part of the County’s overall cultural and heritage attractions, including an important linkage with the oldest 5 County Parks, the Olmsted Park System, Old Wendt Mansion,
OLV Basilica, etc.
• Continue to support restoration efforts currently in progress, to ensure complete and authentic restoration of one of the County’s premier heritage attractions.
• Work closely with the City of Buffalo and Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy to achieve full and authentic restoration of South Park, including the phased relocation of the park’s 9-hole Golf Course to a new “reclaimed” Brownfield site just north of the existing park (see the South Buffalo Redevelopment Plan by the City of Buffalo).
• Support the initiatives recently developed on the County’s Strategic Area Plan for South Park/Botanical Gardens/Our Lady of Victory Basilica in both South Buffalo and the City of Lackawanna.
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

**PRIORITY KEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Short Term (1 - 3 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mid Term (4 - 10 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Long Term (11 - 20+ years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Ongoing (Continuing Efforts each year)</td>
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4.2 ELMA MEADOWS GOLF COURSE

DESCRIPTION
Elma Meadows is a 220-acre facility functioning primarily as an 18-hole par 72 golf course in the Town of Elma, but also has a secondary use as a picnic grove and passive recreation area. The picnic area occupies approximately 25 acres of land. The property has impressive topography with highpoints in the northwest to lowlands in the southeast. The golf course takes advantage of this change of elevation, and the large grassy slopes being heavily used in the winter for sledding. The east and north sides of the park border Buffalo Creek.

Given its impressive topography and scenery, as well as reasonable rates, Elma Meadows has been a favorite with area golfers. An average of 55,000 rounds of golf are played here each year.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY
Elma Meadows was acquired by the County in 1957. The winter sports component was ready in 1958 and the golf course was completed in the spring of 1959.

LOCAL CONTEXT
This Park and Golf Course lies about 20 miles south and east of the City of Buffalo. It lies on the east side of the Town of Elma, close to the Marilla Town line. It is also only minutes from the Village of East Aurora to the south. Access to the Park and golf course is easy from Route 400 from either the Jamison Road or Maple Street Exits, cutting over to Girdle Road to the park entrance. The area around the property is quite rural, with numerous newer residential developments having been built over the past 10-20 years. A few farms do still exist in this area of the County.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT
Elma Meadow’s separate 25-acre park is unique when compared to the other County-owned golf course, Grover Cleveland. The park provides the surrounding communities areas for picnicing, playgrounds and a baseball court in addition to the eighteen-hole golf course. Reorganization and upgrade of its current setting would provide

EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES
- 18-hole par 72 golf course.
- Driving Range and Practice putting green
- Clubhouse with pro shop, restaurant and lounge, and fireplace for use as a winter warming hut.
- Sledding hill
- Cross country ski use
- Maintenance building
- Storage building / storage garage
- Superintendent’s residence
- Pump station
- Play structures
- 2 single basketball hoops
- picnic shelters
- 2 comfort stations
- Golfer rest shelters
the public with better facilities and the potential for additional recreational opportunities (ie. volleyball / tennis courts).

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

· The course needs to re-evaluate its fee schedule to prevent a money-losing scenario each year.
· General course improvements and enhancements need to be made to keep the course competitive in the area.

RECENT PARKS DEPARTMENT PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS

· Painted and made other improvements/upgrades to the Clubhouse and other park buildings, including adding new air conditioner.
· Painted interior of Starter Shed
· Installed new pump in the pump house
· Installed new pump in pumphouse
· Repaired and/or rebuilt park tables
· Replaced doors on Shelter #7
· Stripped and re-roofed a number of park buildings
· Planned tee expansions
· Planned drainage work on course
· Planned implementation of top dressing / aeration program on green / tees.
· Planned installation of sand volleyball court in park
· Planned repaving of park road and course parking lot.
· Removed trees around practice greens
· Installed new tee-time system
· Reconstructed sand traps
· Installed hole sponsor signs
· Installed new cart paths in certain areas.
· Built concession building next to starter shed.

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

· Follow the recommendations for course improvements recently made by the United State Golf Association (USGA) in their USGA Green Section – Turf Advisory Service Report, July 29, 2002, including turf grass conditions, drainage, etc.
· The County must re-evaluate its current fee rates and

NEARBY PARKS WITH UNIQUE FEATURES

(TOWNS WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS)

Town of Elma:
· Elma Town Park (separated from the County Park by Buffalo Creek)  
  A 63-acre town park, which includes a community building with meeting rooms
· Elma Village Green  
  A 30-acre town park, which includes a senior center
· Knabb Road Park  
  A 53-acre undeveloped town park

Village of East Aurora:
· Hamlin Park  
  Includes a rotary bandstand and a quarter-mile running track
· Hawk Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center  
  Educational programs available
· Sinking Pond Wildlife Sanctuary
· Knox Farm State Park
schedules and consider increasing its fees to “break even” in its operations and maintenance of the course. Current low rates and challenging play has made Elma Meadows one of the best golf values in Western New York (over 50,000 rounds per year).

- Consider additional use of the clubhouse facility as a revenue generator, i.e. meetings and special events, etc.
- Consider major upgrades and improved maintenance in order to raise course standards and expectations (i.e. leverage higher fees by improving the facilities).
- Promote four-seasons use of Elma Meadows, including sledding and cross country skiing, nature walks, picnicking and associated play areas, etc.
  - Increase the seasonal attraction of the clubhouse, i.e. utilize the fireplace more often, promote more sledding, winter sports competitions, cross country-skiing, and seasonal events and tournaments, etc.
- Consider adding a volleyball court to the park area near the picnic shelters.
- Provide traffic calming measures along the entrance road to prevent speeding.
- Improve the picnic shelters
- Remove upper backstop. Re-install at ballfield by bleachers.
- Aesthetic improvements are needed at the park maintenance building.
- Given the park’s isolation, additional park patrols may be needed to prevent undesirable and illegal activities.
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

S  Short Term  (1 - 3 years)
M  Mid Term  (4 - 10 years)
L  Long Term  (11 - 20+ years)
O  Ongoing  (Continuing Efforts each year)
4.3 GROVER CLEVELAND GOLF COURSE

DESCRIPTION
Grover Cleveland Park and Golf Course is a 112-acre park fully developed as an 18-hole golf course. The current Golf Course was designed to put a premium on accuracy not distance. The course plays over 5600 yards with par being 34-35-69. Previously a City of Buffalo Park, Grover Cleveland Golf Course was sold to Erie County for one dollar in 1986. The Golf Course is relatively flat overall with no dense tree cover. Mature trees border the north and west sides, with only linear groupings of trees within the course area. Now primarily a golf course with supporting golf-related facilities, Grover Cleveland used to serve as much more of a community park, with other community related recreational amenities.

Another notable “heritage” aspect of the Grover Cleveland Golf Course is that the site has one of the oldest stone buildings in Erie County on it, possibly dating back as early as the 1810s. This structure is currently used for limited offices and storage for the golf course operations, and is in need of upgrades to preserve its structural and architectural integrity.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY
The Grover Cleveland Golf Course has an impressive and storied history within the Western New York region. It is one of the oldest Golf Courses around, and was the original site of Country Club of Buffalo (between 1900 – 1926). The original clubhouse building was built in 1901, designed by Architect George Cary, who also built the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. The 18-hole Golf Course, tennis courts and a Polo Field were added in 1902. To highlight, the Country Club of Buffalo hosted the 1912 U.S. Open Golf Tournament, won by John McDermott with a score of 283. Club history tells that original course design was by Depew, and that Travis was brought in to upgrade the course before the US Open. Unconfirmed history also states that Donald Ross, famous Golf Course Architect, also recommended some course upgrades in the 1920s, but not all of his recommendations were actually implemented. (Ross was the designer of the current Country Club of Buffalo Golf Course in Williamsville). The City of Buffalo purchased the club in 1925 for $800,000.00, and renamed the
site to honor the former Mayor of Buffalo, Governor of New York State and President of the United States of America.

Unfortunately, over the years, many things have changed, including the Country Club of Buffalo moving out to its current site in Williamsville. Following the sale of a portion of the golf course property by the City of Buffalo to the Veterans Hospital in the 1940s, the Grover Cleveland course lost much of its original status, and given new land constraints, the course needed to be shortened to its current length of 5600 yards. Many historical design features are still visible, even though years of neglect and other haphazard changes have erased some of the course’s character. Unfortunately, the original Clubhouse building burned to the ground in the 1970s. The County acquired the course in 1983. Although the “shortened” course length has made it hard to compete with newer, longer courses in the area, Grover Cleveland remains a very popular venue in Erie County (52,000 rounds per year) and one of the best “deals” in the region.

The old stone house is also one for the history books. Records show that it is one of the oldest structures of its kind in Erie County, possibly dating back as far as the 1810s. This property was originally a large farm / estate, which was acquired by the Country Club of Buffalo who was forced to move from their Nottingham Terrace (North Buffalo) location to make way for the Pan-American Exposition of 1901.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The Grover Cleveland course sits very strategically in an urban and “first-ring suburb” neighborhood adjacent to the University at Buffalo South Campus, and is located between four major municipalities in the northeast corner of the City of Buffalo, adjacent to the Town of Amherst and close to both the Towns of Tonawanda and Cheektowaga. Residential and institutional land uses compose most of the surrounding neighborhood, with commercial strips along Main Street off the northeast corner of the course and along Bailey Avenue off the southeast corner. The main entrance for the course is on Main Street. Main Street forms a portion of the northern border; single family residential backyards form the northeast and part of the eastern boundary; Eggert Road also forms part of the eastern boundary of the course; the southeast end borders a single family residential
area while the southwest property line borders the Veteran’s Administration Hospital. Lastly, Bailey Avenue and the University at Buffalo South Campus form the entire western boundary line.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT
Grover Cleveland Gold Course sits in an urban setting with very few other parks and recreation facilities nearby. Those limited facilities include:
- City of Buffalo
- Town of Amherst
- Town of Tonawanda

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS
- The course needs to re-evaluate its fee schedule to prevent a money-losing scenario each year.
- General course improvements and enhancements need to be made to keep the course competitive in the area.
- The course is much too exposed to the perimeter roadways

RECENT PARKS DEPARTMENT PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS
- Installed new water line and service to the facilities.
- Planned improvements and enlargements to various tees
- Planned re-roofing to starters shack
- Continuation of the water line

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS
- Due to low fee schedules and intensive course play, limited resources are taking their toll on the course. The new master plan, in support of the recent USGA study (July 26, 2002), recommends a rate increase to assist in at least establishing a “break-even” business within the County.
- The master plan supports the recommendations made by the USGA study, including improvements to the turf conditions throughout the course.
- Recent water line improvements have given course workers the ability to better care for the course. Additional utility upgrades should be made as the need
arises and funding is available to keep the course in top shape.

- Interpretive signage and markers should highlight the rich history of the course and past events.
- Upgrade course facilities in the future, as funding becomes available. This includes resurfacing the existing parking lot, etc.
- Provide a landscaped berm to screen the maintenance facility from the parking lot.
- Consider the inclusion of the stone house and outbuildings on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Consider a public/private partnership in restoring the old stone house structure and associated out-buildings. Potential exists for a heritage-related museum, restaurant, upgraded golf course-related facility, meeting rooms, etc. Maximize the access and visibility to Main Street, the proximity to the University at Buffalo and the close proximity to some of the region’s most prestigious homes as major marketing advantages for future uses at this facility.
- Given its unique historical design, it would be in the County’s best interest to undertake a course master plan to reinvigorate some of its original design features, and to promote the course as a regional “heritage” attraction. A Golf Course Architect should be hired to assist with this restoration plan.
- Off season recreation should also be considered for Grover Cleveland, including a cross-country ski trail.
- Increase corporate sponsorship opportunities throughout the course and at the club facilities.
- Provide additional tree plantings between various “tight” fairaways and holes to improve safety measures on the course.
- Provide additional tree and shrub plantings along the Main Street and Bailey Avenue course edges to improve safety and playability at this course.

Note: Some of the above information excerpted from the USGA Service Report, dated July 26, 2002).
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

S  Short Term  (1 - 3 years)
M  Mid Term   (4 - 10 years)
L  Long Term  (11 - 20+ years)
O  Ongoing    (Continuing Efforts each year)
4.4 SPRAGUE BROOK PARK

DESCRIPTION

Sprague Brook Park is one of the largest of the developed, multi-purpose County Parks at 974-acres, and is the only facility in the park system offering overnight camping. The park is located in the rural, well-forested towns of Concord and Sardinia in southeast Erie County, just off of Route 240 on Foote Road. Functionally, Sprague Brook Park centers around 130 Campsites in three large camping areas. Additional recreational amenities are meant to enhance the camper’s use and experience of the park and allow for large group picnics and outings. While some “active” recreation is offered, emphasis is on passive recreation throughout the park’s vast open spaces and woodlands.

Sprague Brook is a park of hidden natural treasures, from flora and fauna to incredible natural scenery along the Brook, in the woodlands, atop the hillsides, etc. One of the most impressive sites is the views to the opposite distant hillside of Kissing Bridge Ski area. The terrain is gently sloping throughout, with some severe topography in the park’s northeast section. Three ponds add to the park’s beauty and usefulness for park users and wildlife enhancement. Numerous trails traverse the forested areas, and the park is also a popular destination for winter activities, such as sledding and cross-country skiing.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY

Sprague Brook Park was acquired by Erie County in 1963 by using state and federal aid programs to assume title to more than 2,200 acres of parkland (including Eighteen Mile Creek, Beeman’s Creek, Larkin Woods). In 1964, Erie County bought 86-acres of land for expansion in the Town of Sardinia and Concord for $1,500.00.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Sprague Brook Park is approximately 28 miles southeast of the City of Buffalo, and is located off the main Route 240 traveling south from Orchard Park and West Falls. The Park is on the opposite hill from Kissing Bridge Ski Area, one of the region’s popular winter destinations for families.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES

- Approximately 130 individual camp sites, with electrical hook-ups and nearby shower facilities
- Nature Trails
- Picnic Shelters and pavilions
- 4 Tennis Courts
- 2 basketball mini-courts
- Sledding Hill
- 2 Baseball Diamond
- Fishing access
- 4 Restroom Facilities
- Playgrounds
- Office
- Maintenance and storage garages, bulldozer building, and lumber shed
- Superintendent’s residence and barn
- 3 ponds
- Memorial site
Since the earliest days of the Akron Falls Park development, the area around Akron and Newstead has seen and continues to see significant growth. While in its earlier days, Akron Falls Park served the recreational needs of nearly all area residents. Now, with more recent developments of other local park and recreation facilities, there is less demand on Akron Falls Park for certain types of active recreation, while more and more people have rediscovered the park for its natural beauty and “heritage” features.

**CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS**

- Too much of the park’s open space is regularly mowed. This detracts from the park’s overall theme of nature and wildlife.
- The maintenance facilities should be better screened from the public use areas.

**MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Begin a “re-naturalization” initiative in the park to phase out current practices of regularly mowing large expanses of lawn. Transition the little-used lawn expanses to natural meadows; some areas mowed down once at the end of each season, and others never mowed again.
- Consider an expansion to the existing popular camping facilities, mainly adding more sites to the northernmost campground.
- Promote winter use through expansion of cross-country ski trails, sledding, winter camping; Potential exists to widen the current sledding hill for additional capacity at peak snow times.
- Upgrade existing park facilities; renovate and potentially expand existing cross-country ski warming hut.
- Establish overlook areas in the park to highlight the impressive vistas to the surrounding hillsides, Kissing Bridge Ski Area, etc.
- Promote the use of Sprague Brook Park for important seasonal events, including the hugely popular Autumnfest. Consider upgrading existing facilities to accommodate a future expansion of this events and the addition of other events.
- Review and evaluate the numerous “unmarked” existing

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**PARKS WITH UNIQUE FEATURES (WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS)**

**Town of Concord:**
- Klissing Bridge Ski Resort
  A private ski resort open to the public providing year-round activities, including golf, downhill skiing and snowboarding

**Town of Sardinia:**
- Chaffee Sardinia Town Park, 31 acres
  A major town park with numerous sports fields, including tennis, volleyball, basketball, baseball and horseshoe pits
- Manion Park, 13 acres
  A medium sized town park with additional sports fields, including soccer, basketball, baseball and horseshoe pits

**Town of Colden:**
- Ski Tamarack
  A private ski resort open to the public during the winter providing winter activities, including downhill skiing and snowboarding
trails for appropriate route alignments and proper signage/blazes; Trail “loops” are preferred.
· Consider a more formalized (“structured”) trail network to include Mountain Biking in a safe and regulated manner. A trails design expert would handle the decision between segregated or Multi-use trails for various user types in a subsequent review. This, along with the use of some Forestry lots and other undeveloped park properties, would take some of the pressure off Hunters Creek Park as one of the most popular hiking and biking sites in the region.
· Establish a better signage program throughout the park, including entrance signs, wayfinding signage, interpretive signs (natural systems, park features, flora and fauna, etc.), camp site demarcation, trail signage, etc.
· Reevaluate the purpose of the existing dirt road that parallels the creek on west side of park. Current use is a maintenance road/dumping ground, however should be considered for future creekside nature trail, with linkages to Kissing Bridge. Remove materials storage from edge of creek.
· Provide creek bank stabilization / erosion control in area in back of main parking lot.
· Consider introducing an outdoor grass amphitheater in “natural bowl” in back of main parking area. This site could offer outdoor concerts or theater, and could accommodate educational lectures focused on environmental issues and opportunities in the park.
· Improve and enhance main entrance to park. Provide enhanced landscape treatments and signage. Utilize the secondary entrance near the service area for service vehicles only.
Legend

Nature Reserve Zones
Includes significant natural features or areas that require management to ensure the long-term protection of the natural heritage, i.e., woodlands, wetlands, natural open space areas (meadows), waterways, ravines, gorges and escarpment faces, steep slopes, etc.

Recreation Zones (Active and Passive)
Includes the ‘maintained’ landscape areas of the parks in which facilities development is permitted to support low to moderate intensity recreation activities, i.e., sports fields, specialized activities, picnic areas, campgrounds, parking lots, etc.

Heritage Zones
Includes areas of significant cultural heritage or archaeological features that require management to ensure the preservation of these important heritage assets.

Service Zones
Includes maintenance and service areas for the developed parks, as well as access points or staging areas within the Conservation Parks (e.g., trailheads and parking lots) where minimal use facilities are needed to support allowable uses within the Nature Reserve Zone.

Sprague Brook Park
MANAGEMENT ZONES
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

S  Short Term  (1 - 3 years)
M  Mid Term   (4 - 10 years)
L  Long Term  (11 - 20+ years)
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