

**STAFF REPORT: 6/12/2023 REGULAR MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: #23-8394**

**ADDRESS: 12655 BROADSTREET (AKA RUSSELL WOODS PARK)**

**HISTORIC DISTRICTS: RUSSELL WOODS- SULLIVAN HD**

**APPLICANT: JOHN DERUITER, GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, CITY OF DETROIT**

**PROPERTY OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT, GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 5/24/2023**

**DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 5/25/23**

**SCOPE: ALTER LANDSCAPING**

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Bounded by Old Mill Place to the west, Leslie Avenue to the north, Broadstreet to the east and Fullerton Avenue to the south, this 3 acre park dates back to the early 1920s. Each corner of the park serves as an entrance to this neighborhood park with a concrete pathway under a shaded canopy of trees that then opens to a central clearing of open lawn. The path then becomes a large ellipse that takes the visitor around the outer edge of the central lawn. Larger shade trees of London plane tree, oak and maple are joined by smaller, crabapple ornamental trees and various shrubs. At some locations, overgrowth has taken over the planted material and its removal is part of this proposal. Other than some of the larger trees, there are no historic-aged structures on site. A recent addition of a picnic shelter stands toward the southwest area of the park. The surrounding adjacent neighborhood consists of residential single homes facing the park.



*Site Photo 1, by Staff May 25, 2023: (facing west) showing park signage.*



*Site Photo 2, by Staff May 25, 2023: (facing west) showing existing park shelter.*

## **PROPOSAL**

The City of Detroit's General Services Department (GSD) identified Russell Woods Park for an improvement plan in its Parks Master Plan. Through community engagement and survey to the neighborhood, the GSD has received the support to retain the park as a passive recreational space with the following proposed changes that are based on reinstating garden features of the original 1920's park plan. No new uses are proposed (please see attached drawings):

- Removal of brush and dead trees as identified in the attached drawings. No removal of mature trees.
- Repair of the main concrete pathways where necessary. Installation of exposed aggregate concrete garden paths as shown in attached drawings.
- Replacement of existing mismatch of benches with a cohesive design of four (4) benches, "classic park" metal, color black
- Installation of garden beds with perennials and annuals that follow the original park site and planting plan, with some adjustments, per the attached drawings. Natural edge bed borders.
- Installation of water tap and irrigation system.

- Installation of granite boulders at the corner entrance pathways, not along the entire perimeter of the park

## PROPOSED SITE PLAN

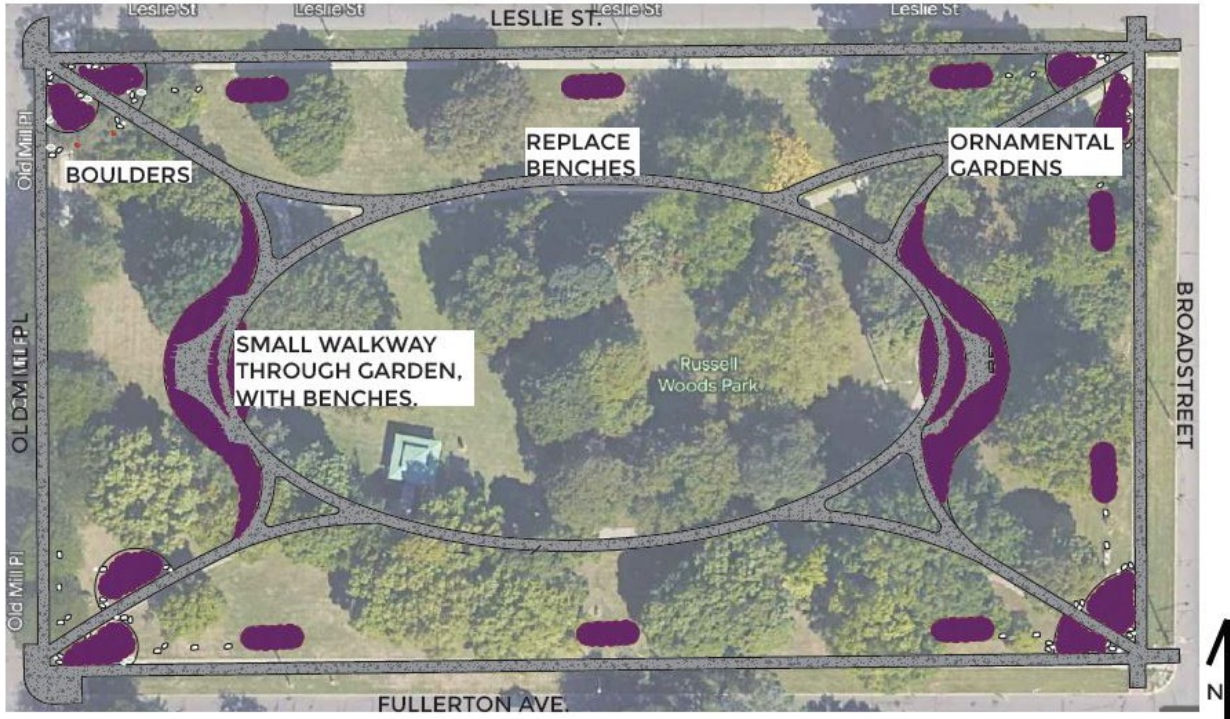


Figure 1, by Applicant: Proposed site plan showing pathway, new planting beds, benches and boulder locations.

### STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The HDAB report for Russell Woods-Sullivan HD, enacted in November 1998, offers little information regarding this park:
 

*“Russell Woods Park, a rectangular city park featuring winding walkways and mature trees, is located between Old Mill, Broadstreet, Leslie and Fullerton in the western end of the neighborhood”*
- The Elements of Design for the Russell Woods - Sullivan HD offer the following insights for this proposal:
  - *Relationship of textures... the major texture is that of brick laid in mortar, often juxtaposed with wood or smooth or rough-faced stone elements and trim.*
  - *Relationship of colors... Natural brick colors, such as red, yellow, brown and buff, predominate in wall surfaces. Natural stone colors also exist. Where stucco or concrete exists, it usually remains in its natural state, or is painted in a shade of cream.*
  - *In general, the district is rich in early to mid-20th Century architectural styles.*
  - *Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. The typical treatment of individual properties is a flat front lawn area in grass turf, subdivided by a straight or curving walk leading to the front entrance and a single width side driveway leading to a garage at the rear of the lot. Recent front yard steel lamp posts with round globes are common on some blocks. Foundation plantings, often of a deciduous nature and characteristic of the period 1920-1960, are present virtually without exception...*

- *Street lighting throughout the district is mounted on wooden utility poles, except around Russell Woods Park, where tall steel standards are located on the periphery of the park.*
- *Relationship of open space to structures. The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District has as its main open space Russell Woods Park, bounded by Old Mill Place, Fullerton Avenue, Broadstreet Boulevard, and Leslie Avenue.*
- *Orientation, vistas, overviews. The orientation of buildings and streets were created by the subdivision plans, which place the large lots and houses and a north-south street, Broadstreet Boulevard, and adjacent to a park, and assign smaller lot sizes and houses to adjacent east-west streets.*
- *General environmental character. The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District is a fully developed middle-class residential area of the second quarter of the 20th Century, with a planned hierarchy of housing stock ranging from the largest houses on Broadstreet and adjacent to the park to the smaller, including double houses, located on the eastwest streets. Its straight streets and consistent lot sizes on each street create a comfortable and handsome, urban residential environment.*

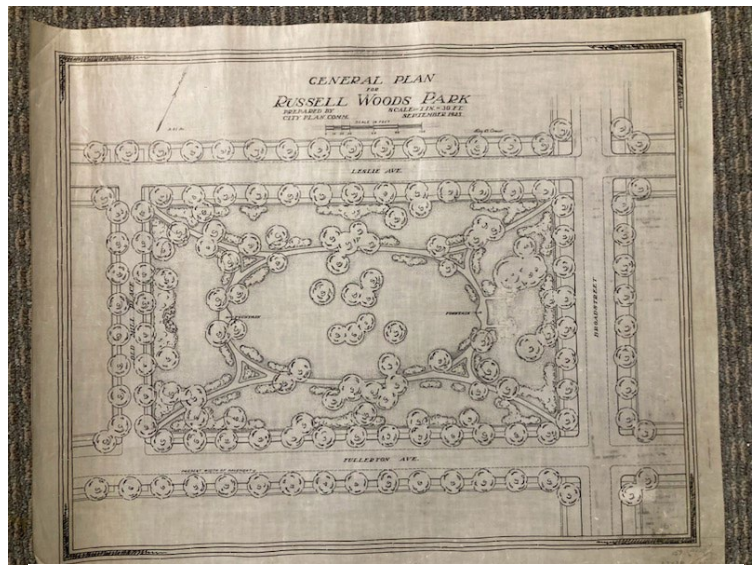


Figure 2, 1925 General Plan of Russell Woods Park, showing original pathways and plantings configuration.

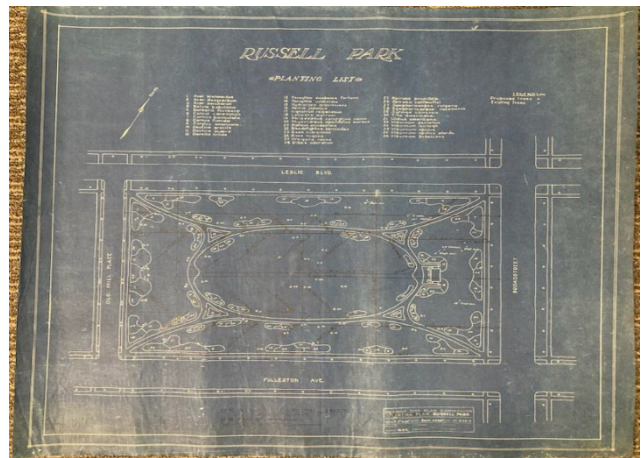
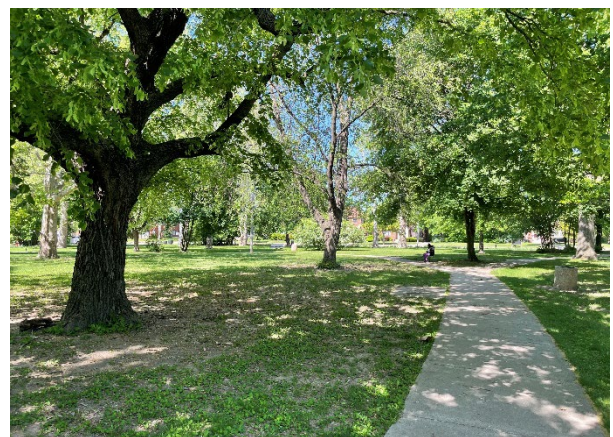


Figure 3, Planting plan for Russell Woods Park (date unknown).

- The “tall steel standards” streetlights mentioned in the Elements of Design are not original lampposts. The proposed design has no changes to any existing lampposts.
- The proposed features do not conflict with the Elements of Design in materials or design. The benches, garden beds and boulders are appropriate materials.
- Staff has identified that the current configuration of the pathways, the mature trees, open lawn and passive use of the park are historic, character-defining features of the park. The proposal is in alignment with these elements and offers to restore planting beds that were once a part of the original



Site Photo 3, by Staff May 25, 2023: (facing east) ellipse path showing canopy and existing benches.

park plan. Staff has the opinion that this proposal supports and is in alignment with the historic character of the park.

## **ISSUES**

- No issues.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness**

It is staff's opinion that the project generally conforms to the Elements of Design for the district and meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the Master Plan as proposed.