



PARK DISTRICT  
of OAK PARK

# Mills Park Master Plan Update



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of OAK PARK

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# Tonight:

A look at the Park in 2008

The Master Plan from 2008

What has been added or changed since 2008?

Discussion



# Mills Park Timeline

Mills Park Master Plan 2008

Fence Restoration 2010-11

\$300,000

IDNR Grant for \$400,000 May 2011

Phase 1 Construction 2011-2012

\$651,000



# Mills Park in 2008 looked to many like a Private Home



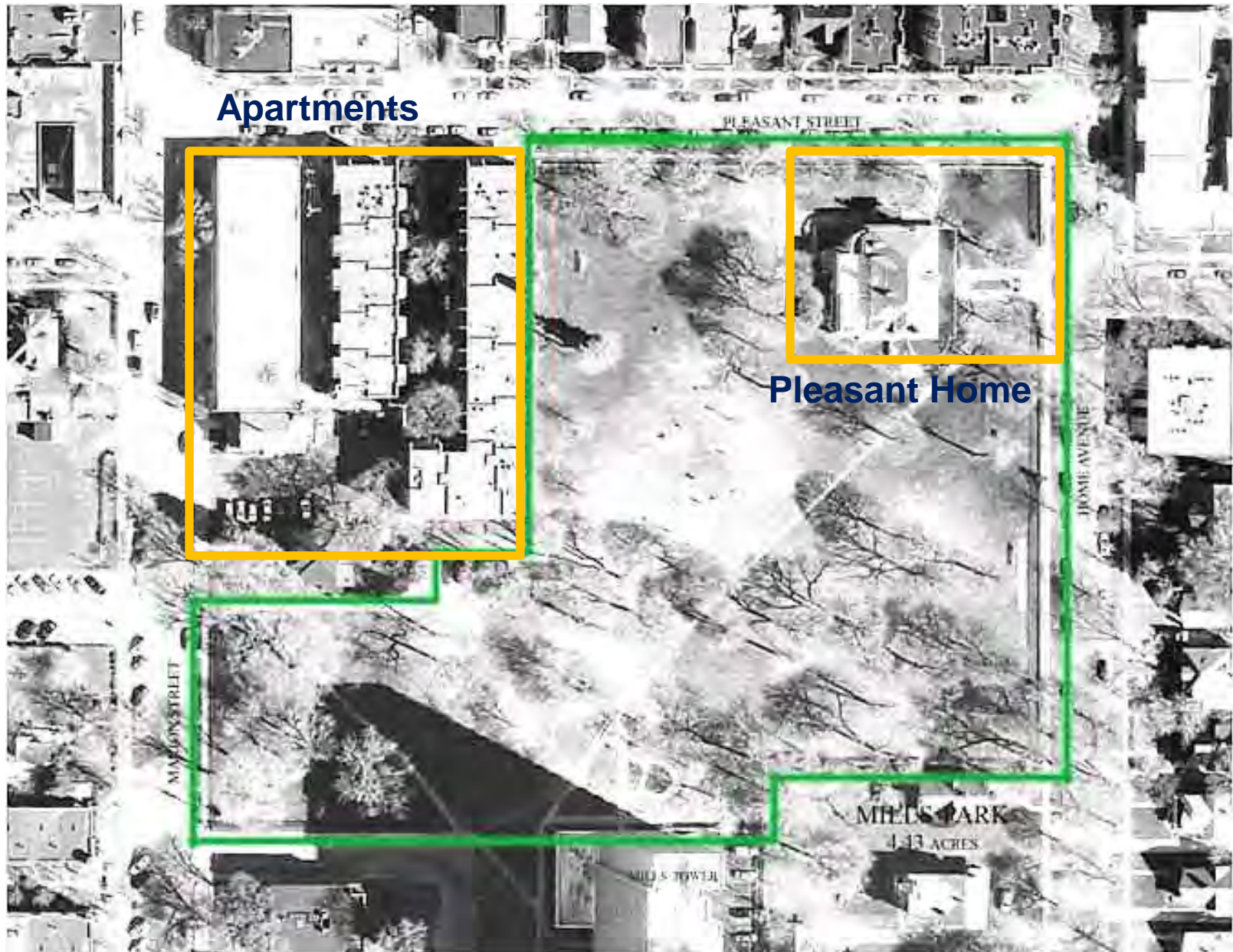


# Pleasant Home



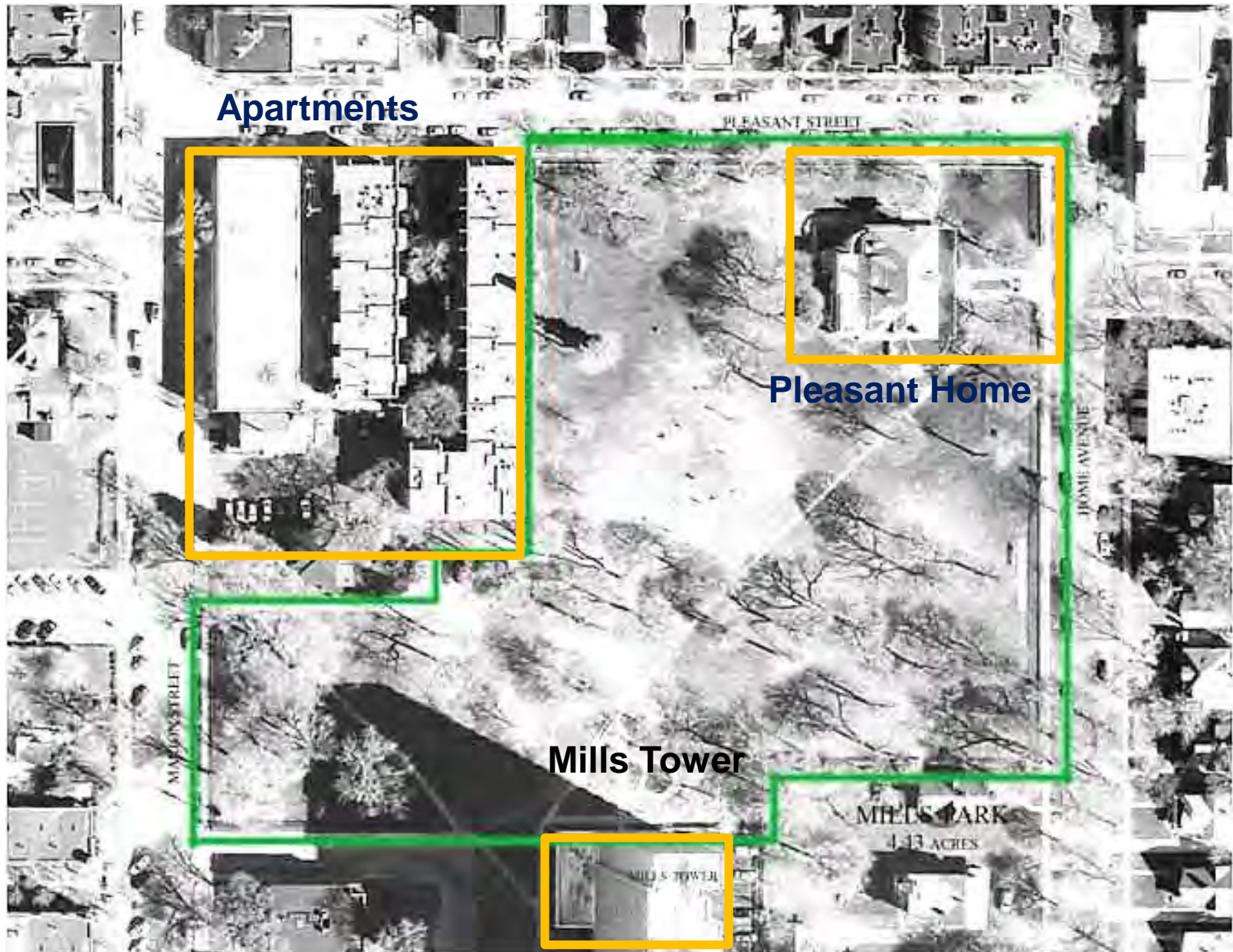


# Isolated by Apartments



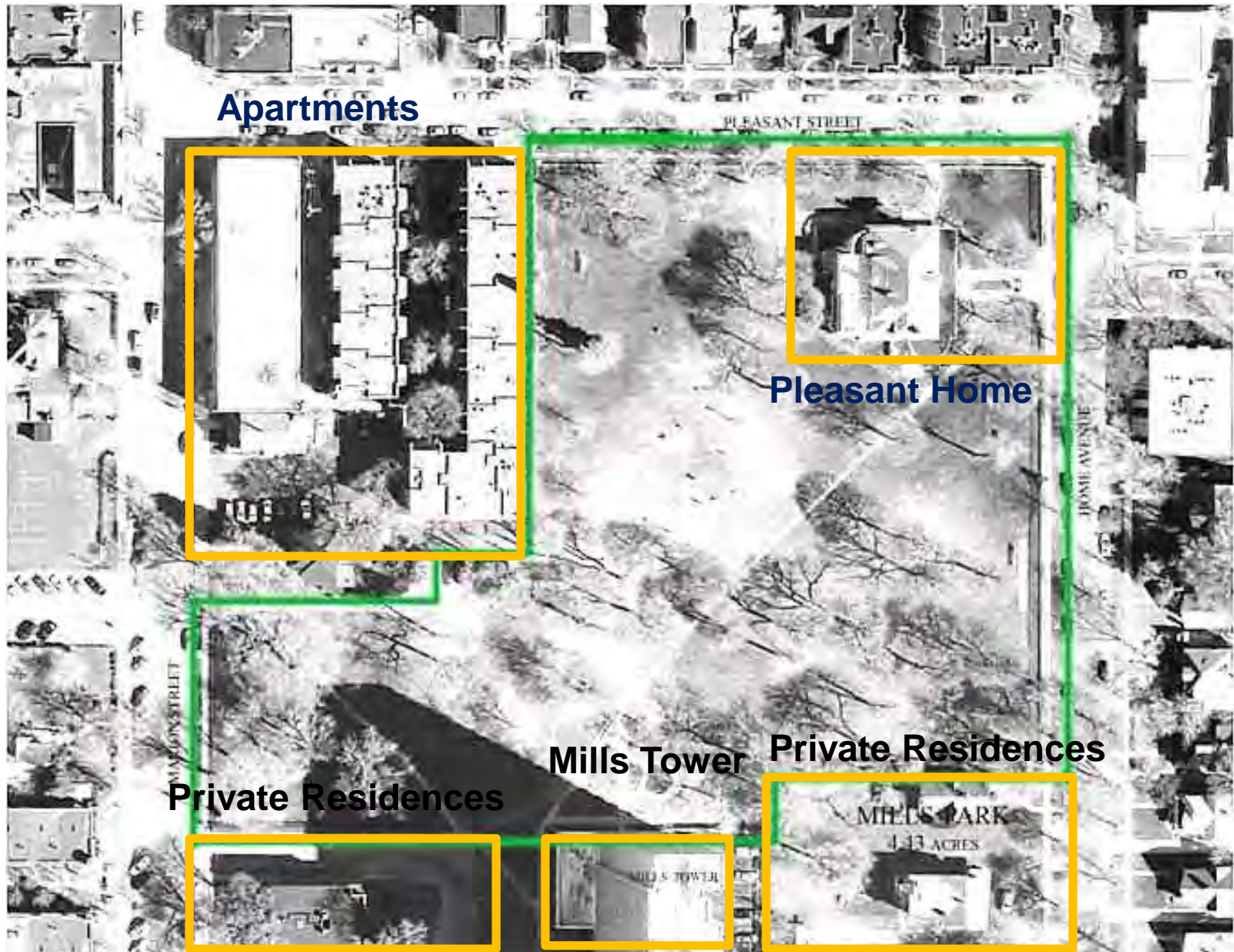


# Isolated by Apartments





# And homes





# And hidden behind an imposing Fence (2008)



Imposing Historic Fence in Poor Condition  
The park appeared to be a private property  
to many residents



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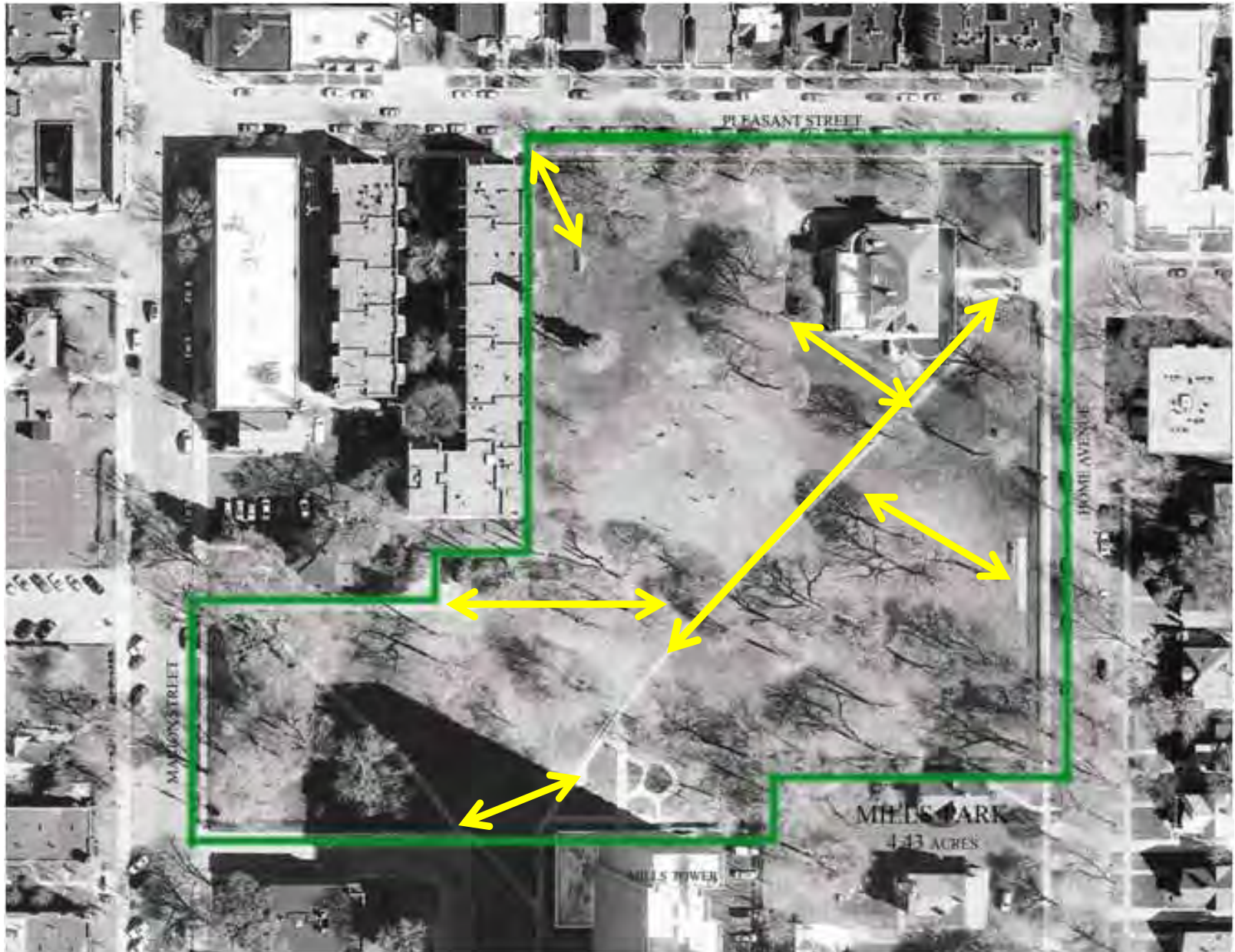


# 2008 Desire Lines in the Landscape





# Few Paths, Desire Lines Formed in the Landscape





# The Park in 2008



It was a much loved “Greensward” but

- Only One Path
- Desire Lines through the landscape
- Turned to Mud after Rain
- Not Accessible
- Security Issues



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# The Park in 2008



Desire Lines, Erosion and Lack of ADA



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# The Park in 2008



The park was so cloistered that some thought it appropriate to park their cars in and drive through the Park



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# Images from Community Meetings Spring 2008

Planning Process: Focus Groups, 4 Community Meetings, Emails, Letters  
Questionnaires, etc.



# Community Meetings were held in Historic Pleasant Home



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And History was very Important

# Farson Estate & Herbert S. Mills Additions are very important

## HOWEVER

### History is relative

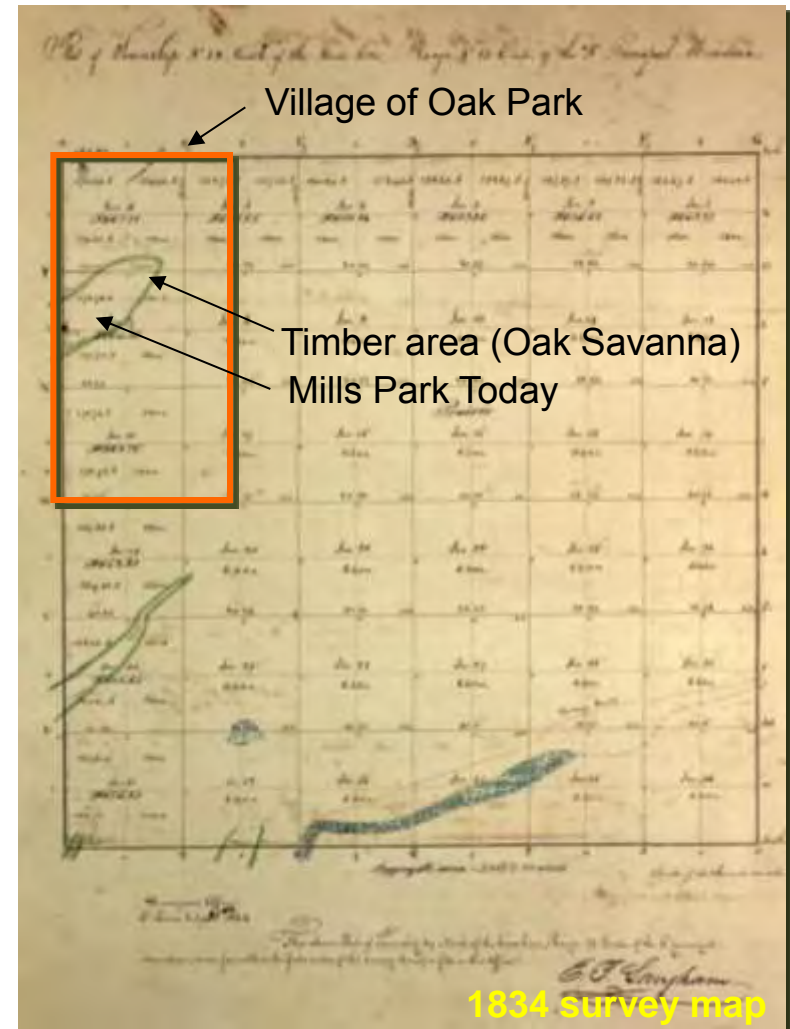
Current 'Naturalesque' layout 2008-1966  
**42 years**

Farson/Mills layout 1966-1897  
**69 years**

Prairie and Oak Savanna 1850's-9,000 BC  
**7,150 years**

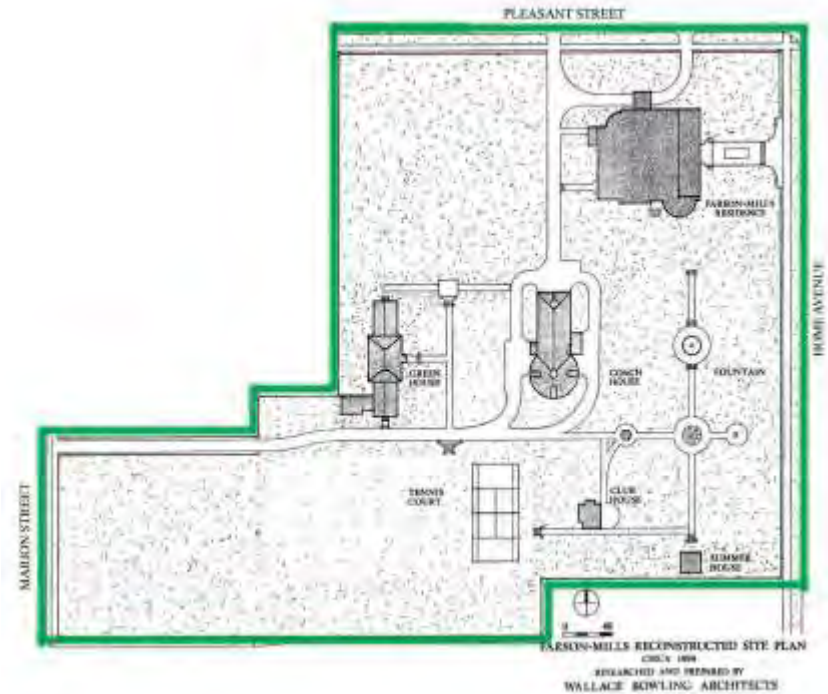
Lake Chicago 9000-14,000 BC  
**5,000 years**

Mills Park is on the edge of the Oak Park Post Glacial Spit, the edge of which can be seen at Scoville Park and Taylor Park





# The Mills Park Landscape 2008 & The Farson Estate 1897-1910



- The site was divided into rectangular spaces that were defined by predominately straight paths, allees of trees and the straight lines of the terraces
- Today's park has been described as “naturalesque” or English Style” by nearby residents

## Let's compare the Landscape Today & The Farson Estate 1897-1910



Historic Photos used with the kind permission of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest

### View 1:

Looking south from the house one could see steps down to a fountain, with more steps down to a circular bed of flowers and on to a small "Summer House"



Look closely and you can still see the change in grade and an some original trees that formed an "allee"



Architect George Maher and John Farson sitting just to the north of the fountain – circa 1900





View 2: There was a “Summer House” set on a mound and a tall brick wall.

The largest trees had romantic Victorian octagonal benches



A brick wall marked the southern boundary– its foundation is still there but in very poor condition



Note the brick wall on the south edge of the property and the tree benches



View 3: Looking north one could see a circular planting bed with the fountain in the distance.



Contemporary view looking north from the site of the Summer House along north-south axis



Plantings along the axis looking north towards the fountain







View 5: Looking southwest from the house was the stables also designed by Maher. It burnt down in 1913 but was rebuilt by the Mills family who purchased the property. It fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1966.



Desire line (informal path) that runs diagonally across the park crosses the former stable/coach house site



The stables/coach house was also designed by Maher and completed by the time the main house was finished



## The Herbert S. Mills Additions to the Grounds 1910 - 1939

After the sudden death of John Farson the property was purchased by Herbert S. Mills, the inventor of coin-operated vending and gambling machines, in October 1910.







View 7: Looking south west. The conservatory, was constructed in 1911-1912. It was located of another raised terrace that is still prominent today.



The Greenhouse terrace is recognizable today building rubble just below soil



Notice the pergola on the right – it connected the stable to the conservatory



View 8: Looking north west towards Mills Apartments the terrace is still visible, in fact some of the concrete foundation can still be seen not far from the electrical box in the picture. Notice how the terrace is used for seating and for play.



You can still see the terrace today



The conservatory was constructed in 1911-1912. It fell into disrepair and demolished by 1966





View 9: Looking west. The tennis court another Mills family addition. It was located on a large sunken lawn, the lowest elevation of the property. This area has been filled and the ground level raised.



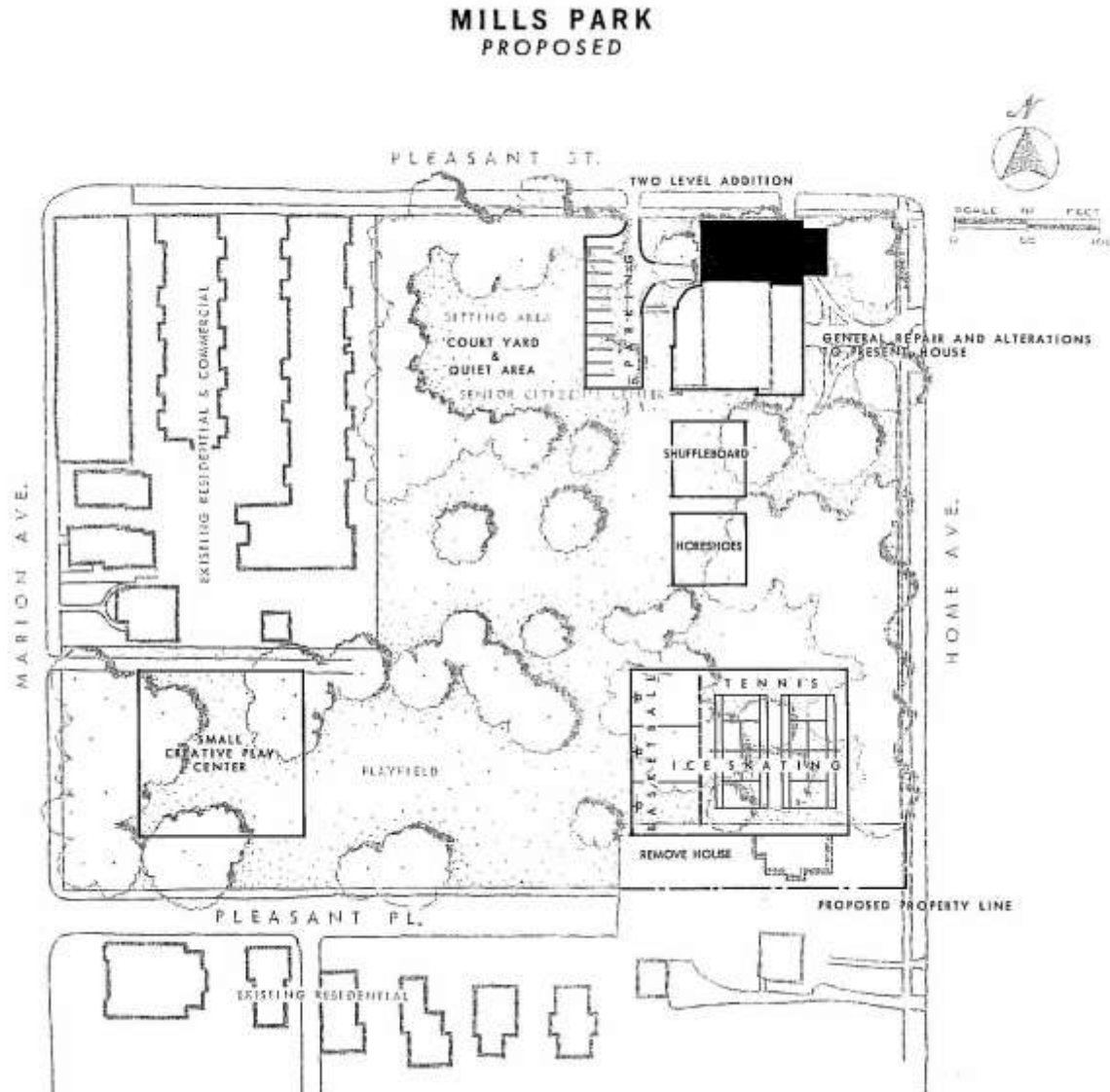
The open sunken lawn today is dotted with mature trees



A continuous sloped terrace bordered the tennis court set in a large open lawn

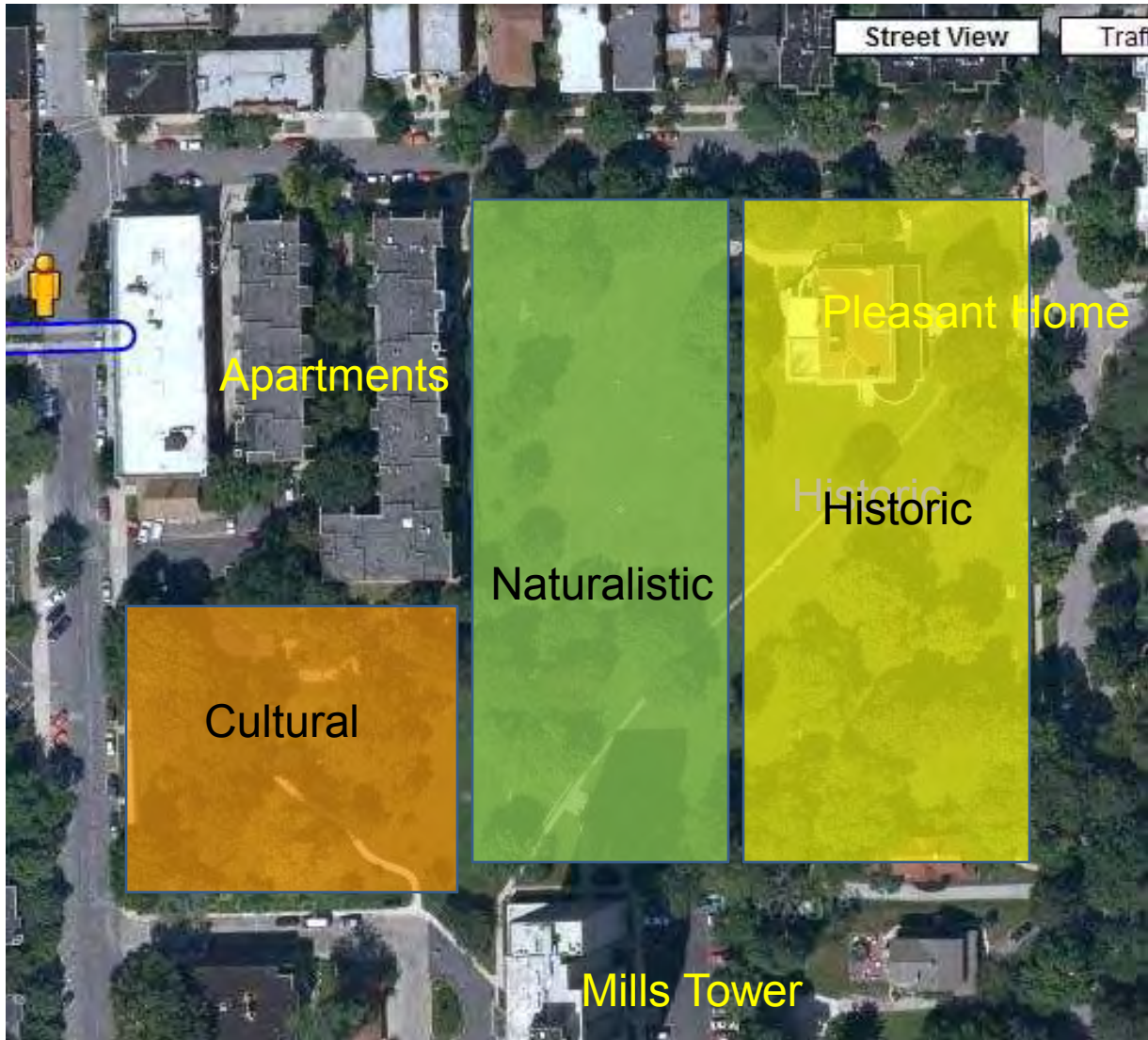
# What we avoided

## Times and Attitudes Change – Proposal Report 1967





### 3 Primary Character Zones emerged in the Community Meetings



# In 2008 only the Path to Marion was Accessible

This became an important Issue to Senior Residents in Mill's Tower  
Many wanted to keep the Park hidden but it was agreed at  
Community meetings that **“The Park is for Everyone”**



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## In 2008 there was an overall consensus on the following:

- Keep the park passive.
  - Historic Template is important.
  - Current paths are inadequate.
  - Make park handicap accessible.
  - Create a natural/creative play area for children, nothing too obtrusive.
  - Add benches.
  - Issues at night - add low impact lighting.
-

## And:

- Restore the Historic Fence
  - Make additional entry in the fence on Home, connected by a path to Marion
  - Redesign Entry on Marion
  - Add sustainable flower beds
  - A Pavilion should be added to Pleasant Home in a sympathetic design to the house and park.  
It should be noted that a minority were against the Pavilion
-



# The Fence was Restored and Openings Created



The sections of the fence removed were saved and placed in the landscape



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# Marion side of the park –New Entry to Connect to Marion and to say THIS IS A PARK!! (sketch from 2008)



Private entry has domestic scale and park entry has public scale,  
the fence steps up to main metal columns



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# New Fence an Interpretation of the Historic Fence



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# The Fence in 2008 and New Entries Today





# The Desire Lines in 2008 and Paths 2012



Curvilinear Paths, Seating and  
Landscape Setting for the Home  
New Trees and Grasses



IRVINE DISTRICT  
401 DOW ROAD

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# The Park in 2008 and 2012



Curvilinear Paths and Interpretation of Historic Bench



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# Concepts taken from the Fence Design



Curvilinear Paths and Interpretation of Historic Bench



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# “Does Anyone Use those Concrete Seats?”



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# Sustainable Planting – Grasses Became an Issue



Grasses were planted on the site of the Stables so that a Future Reconstruction could take place



# Sustainable Planting – Grasses Became an Issue



Grasses have a great winter aspect



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# Sustainable Planting – Spring Ephemerals





# Historic Section – Circular Flower Bed



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# Part of Axial View



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# Sustainable LED Lighting



The Community asked for “Low Impact Lighting”



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# Create a natural/creative play area   Became The Discovery Zone





# The Discovery Zone

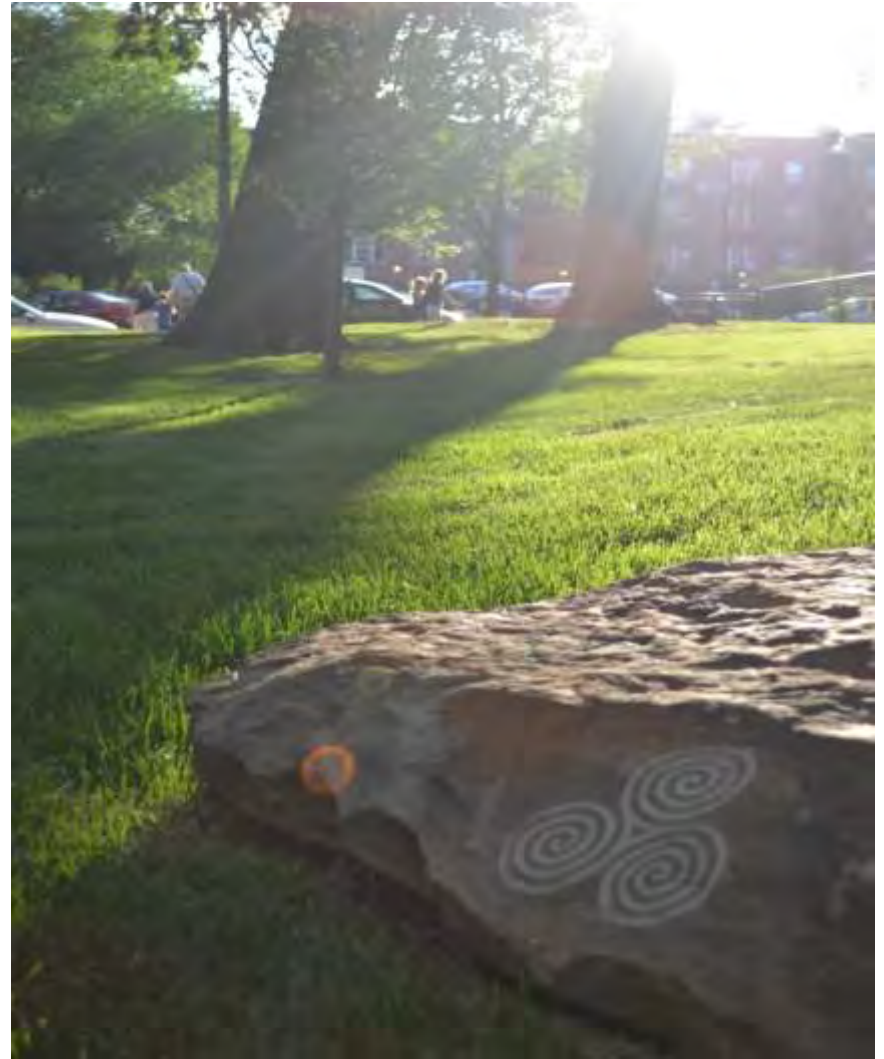
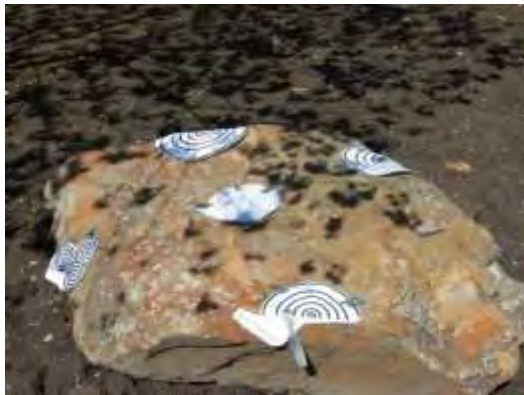


Simple Exploration



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# Petroglyphs Sand Blasted into Boulders



References to the details in the House



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# The History of the Site became the Labyrinth





# The History of the Site Became The Labyrinth



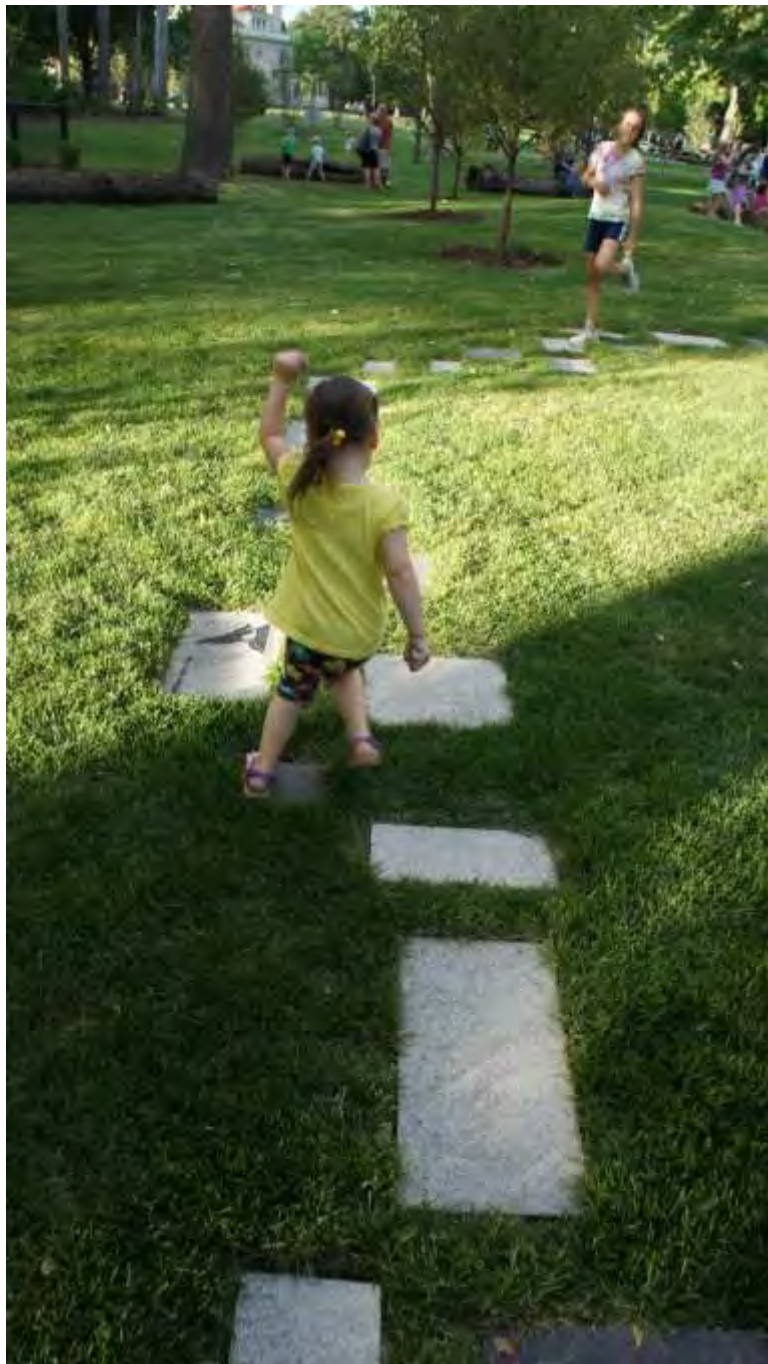


# The History of the Site Became The Labyrinth



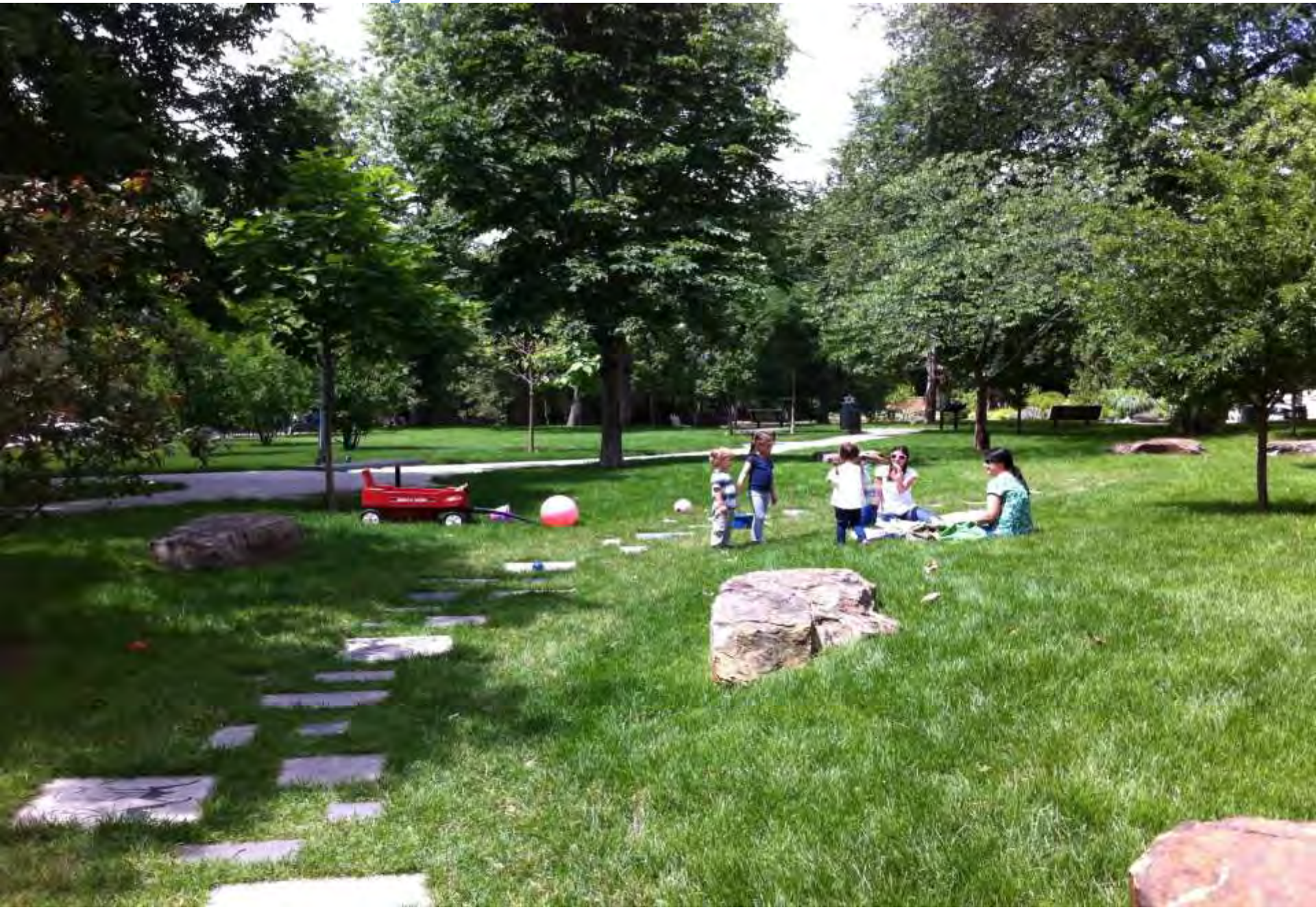
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# The Labyrinth Summer 2016





# The Lion Chair Reference to Decoration on the House



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# Lion Chair



“Kodak” moment



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And adults had fun with it as well!!!



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## Addition of a Pavilion (from 2008)



Why is it needed?

To reduce wear and impact on the home/ museum.  
To maintain access to the community and  
for private events that assist in sustaining revenue

Issues Raised:

Suitability to house, Affect on Neighbors, Potential  
Noise, Potential affect on Trees, .....

in fact trees will be added (from 2008)





There were many versions of the Master Plan produced this is the one selected by the Community in 2008





# Issues Today



Erosion of Jogging Path and Chestnut Trees need to be Replaced



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# The Mills Park 2008 and 2016



## DISCUSSION



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