

# The Virginia·Highland Voice



Special Edition by the Virginia-Highland Civic Fund, Inc.

P.O. Box 8401, Station F / Atlanta, Georgia 30306

## JOHN HOWELL PARK

### Park Planning Update

By Jerry Bright

The Virginia-Highland Civic Association through its charitable arm, the Virginia-Highland Civic Fund, Inc., has been busy on our neighborhood park on Virginia Avenue. The park land was obtained in the late 1970s from the Georgia Department of Transportation through the efforts of Councilperson Mary Davis, Civic Association Chairman John Howell, and Civic Fund board members. At that time, our community contracted with the City to maintain the land and raise funds for the development of the site.

Through 1985, our resources went into maintaining the park. In 1986, we made a survey of neighborhood residents and entered into new negotiations with the City to begin adding improvements to the park. Based on survey results, we asked Dan Franklin, a long-established Atlanta landscape architect, to develop a design. In April of 1987 we presented our plans to the City's Parks Department and established a working relationship with Commissioner Betsy Baker. With the Commissioner's support, the City agreed to cut the grass on a regular basis, and the park plans received initial review by various city agencies. The park design is currently undergoing a final review process and we are wrapping up our negotiations with the City. We hope to adopt the park formally through the City's Adopt-A-Park program by the end of this year.

Over the past two years, the Virginia-Highland community has raised approximately \$8,500 for the park. The next step is for the Civic Fund to initiate a major fund-raising campaign. We are pleased with our steady course of progress and believe a solid foundation has been laid for a quality park. The board of directors of the Civic Fund encourages and welcomes your interest and support of this historic effort.

### In Memoriam: John Howell

By Mary Davis

John Howell was a true friend to so many of us, as he was to me. For those of you who did not have the pleasure of knowing John, he was a sunny, loving man who moved into Virginia-Highland in 1971. I remember John with rake in hand on many neighborhood clean-up days in the park where he walked his beloved dog, Sally.

When the park was created from I-485 highway land, John chaired the Virginia-Highland Civic Association. He was active in the Civic Fund until his death, and served on many other community and civic boards. He was a staunch supporter of human rights: active in civil rights, civil liberties, gay rights, and the arts. He was an active Episcopal Church member. Professionally, John was a social worker with expertise in combatting alcohol and drug abuse, and was appointed to the City's License Review Board.

John's illness swept him away quickly this June. The night he was dying, a number of his friends and family members visited with him and with one another. Many of us felt then that renaming the park for John would be an appropriate way to honor his memory. In the weeks following John's death, many friends and neighbors made the same request in an outpouring of desire to honor this gifted and loved friend and neighbor. Naming the park for John is an appropriate symbol for us because John's life embraced our community life. John passionately worked to build a world where all people can live and work together. The park in his neighborhood for all to enjoy is a perfect reflection of that ideal.

I introduced a successful ordinance which renamed the park "John Howell Park." The City, John's family and friends, and the Civic Fund are planning a dedication ceremony to be held within the next few months.



# MAJOR THEMES

## Natural Image

Our neighborhood was built in the 1920s, in the craftsman style which uses natural materials like brick and stone and landscaping with native plants like hardwood trees, dogwoods, and azealeas. Our park should be the same.

## Neighborhood Scale

Our park is small, a strip of lots where houses once stood. The land rolls gently and large-scale things won't fit. The park should be one step beyond the yards of our own houses, an extension of the places where we live.

## Open to All

Our park is a city park. It should be open and easily visible from the street and sidewalk. It should not seem to be an enclave cut off and only for a few, but should invite any passersby to come and enjoy it.

The neighborhood survey we took in 1986 and the guidance of the Atlanta Parks System have been blended into this plan. We hope you like it.

## Children's Playground

Our neighborhood has many families and a playscape was the most requested element.

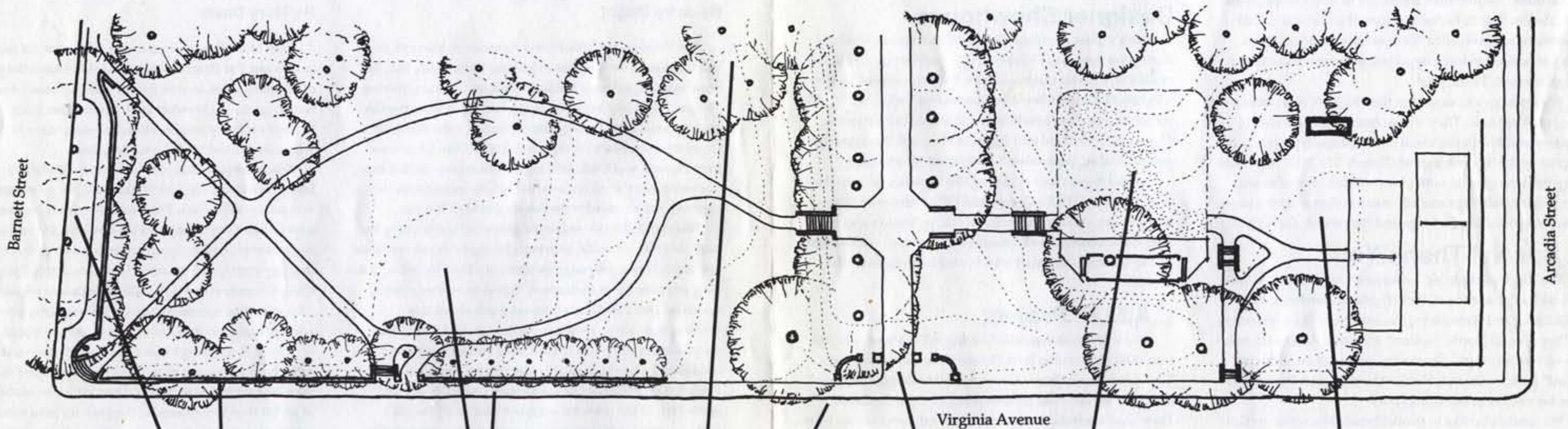
Facilities should be provided for toddlers, kindergartners, and elementary school-age children, and should reflect the natural image of the park.

## Passive Uses

Our park is too small for large playfields like softball or soccer, or for use that would attract large crowds like a community swimming pool. Activities like jogging, picnics, kite flying, or just walking are the sorts of things that are suitable.

## Maintenance

The Parks Department insists that the park be easy to maintain. Features like ponds or reflecting pools or beds of annual flowers require intensive work. Paved paths will control erosion where traffic keeps the grass from growing.



## Save Big Trees at Barnett

Move the sidewalk west so that these magnificent oaks will have room for roots and not damage the sidewalks.

## Rebuild Walls at Virginia

Rework and repair so that the current three walls of former houses become one element. Replace crumbling steps with safe stone stairway.

## Provide Natural Village Green

Make the main area open grass for free open uses like frisbee, running dogs, or sunbathing.

## Repair Sidewalks

We hope that all of Virginia from Midtown Promenade to the Virginia-Highland shops will become a pleasant pedestrian way.

## Buffer Nearby Houses

Retain existing shade trees, adding dogwoods and evergreen shrubs to provide a background when viewed from Virginia Avenue.

## Close DeLeon Street

Remove traffic through the park and link the two halves with a small plaza. Retain the existing trees.

## Build Gates

How could we have a park without gates like the ones on St. Charles and St. Augustine? They are granite and wrought iron and lend a sense of presence to the entrance to these streets.

## Provide Playscape

We want a nice big play area like the one in Orme Park, with timber beams and a big wood chip pit. Benches and a shade arbor will let adults enjoy it as much as the kids.

## Complete Volleyball Area

Volleyball is an intensive use but just small enough to work in this park. Permanent restrooms are needed and nicer fences. The neighborhood volleyball league will do this part.

# DESIGN DETAILS



# Virginia-Highland Civic Association Update: Good News

The Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board of Trustees has unanimously endorsed the Virginia-Highland Civic Fund, Inc.'s plans for John Howell Park on Virginia Avenue. We are pleased and encouraged by the Civic Fund's ongoing efforts and will continue our support of their fundraising campaign during the next few months.

An agreement was finally reached concerning the property located at 764-784 Ponce de Leon Place. After lengthy negotiations, the VHCA Trustees and Sefri Development, Inc. agreed to limit the development to townhomes and condominiums without changing the City's Comprehensive Development Plan. This is a big success story for the neighborhood, because prior proposals for the development of this parcel had included high density rental units. Appreciation should go to Sefri Development, Inc., their architect, Richard Nelson, their attorney, Carl Westmoreland, and all of the concerned residents who worked so hard to bring appropriate development to this neighborhood. Thank you!

We are happy to announce that the YWCA is coming to Virginia-Highland. They will be located at the corner of Hudson and North Highland on the property formerly occupied by the Spanish Baptist Church. The YWCA worked very hard to come up with plans which included saving our historic buildings and addressing other neighborhood concerns, including parking--and they did it! The VHCA

## A Special Thank You

The Virginia-Highland community would like to thank Sharon Bagby and the staff of Highland Hardware for revitalizing and maintaining the triangle at the intersection of Virginia and North Highland Avenues. As a board member of the Civic Fund, Sharon has provided an attractive "mini" park for the neighborhood and a good first impression for visitors to our community.

We would also like to thank Shemin Nurseries for their donation of ten flowering cherry trees to the park. Judith Stogner, a Civic Fund Board member, arranged to have them planted last spring, and with careful watering by several neighbors through the drought, they are doing well.

Thanks to everyone for all of your special efforts.

Board of Trustees were pleased to support this application for a Special Use Permit. Our thanks Linda Wiltse, YWCA Branch Director, and to Rusty Barber, architect for this proposal.

In May, the VHCA held elections for the Board of Trustees. The following people were elected: Carol Holloway, President, Burn Sears, Vice President, Eric Gershon, Secretary, Gail Novak, Treasurer, Steve Jagggers, Kathy McGowan, Illarae Erdmann, Jerry Bright, Jim Smith, Betty Baumann, and Joy Glucksman.

The Virginia-Highland Civic Association mailing address is P. O. Box 8401, Atlanta, GA 30306. Our phone number is 876-8970. Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

## Designer Showhouse

The Virginia-Highland Designer Showhouse was held during the month of October at the newly renovated home at 1166 St. Charles Place in Atkins Park. Sponsored by the Virginia-Highland Civic Association and Twigs, the proceeds from the Showhouse will benefit the Virginia-Highland Civic Fund and Egleston Hospital. An opening gala on Friday, September 30, benefited Heartstrings.

Special thanks for organizing the Showhouse go to Barbara Van Dyke, Tinka Green, and Eli Saleeby, who spent many hours making the project a reality. Thanks also to all the local businesses and designers who made contributions, and to the volunteer staff who hosted tours through the house.

## L.A.M.P. Project

A new organization called Living AIDS Memorial Park would like to develop John Howell Park a different way. They propose a national shrine, where both large and small memorial services can be conducted on a regular basis. They want a fountain, a pavilion, and extensive flower beds. We do not believe that our park is a suitable place for such intensive development. Large crowds cannot be accommodated without parking, and the maintenance of their design would be a long-term burden. We believe they should seek a different, more suitable site.

## Board of Directors, Virginia-Highland Civic Fund, Inc.

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