

Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Village of Ellenville Trustee

Strolling Through the Park, Part Two

"The enjoyment of scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it, tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration of the whole system."

-- Fredrick Law Olmsted, America's greatest landscape architect

Suggestion: More & greater park/recreation opportunities

Scope: Ellenville

Necessity: Level 2 / Medium (Working, but inadequate; could use new parts or repairs)

Ellenville's track record with parks has been spotty, at best. As noted in my last column, Resnick Park has potential, and can be improved. But it has two serious limitations – small size, and challenged location.

They say in real estate location *is* everything. I would venture that many Village residents are unaware a park even exists at Mill Street & Center, part of the old railroad right-of-way. Though there was an archway entrance, some benches, and a sizable gazebo/bandstand, lack of promotion and its location off the beaten path have left it unused and forgotten (although broken bottles and other trash suggest some stealthy, even illicit use). Plans for a youth center building or church have come and gone, as have plans for row housing (more modest plans for several detached homes have been submitted), since lying in the flood plain and near a village well, as it does, presents obstacles to conventional construction. This still *could have been* a viable park, with some upgrading, improved security and policing, and a serious village commitment to make it more inviting and usable. But, now, it's really a non-park.

Similarly, the Bob Mangels Botanical Garden at Webster and DeWitt has been allowed to dissipate. A much-used ballfield, it was later turned into an attractive venue of trees, shrubs, and flowers with a nice view of the mountains. Relatively large, quiet, and traffic-free, it is now rarely visited or used at all.

Berme Road Park has always been Ellenville's "park of the future," and faded plans from Mayor Jacobs's 1980s tenure still adorn the Village Manager's office. With its lighted ballfield and tennis/basketball courts in place, the nucleus of a fine Village/regional park already exists. Among ideas suggested over the years to flesh out the park: a new playground (Fawn Morosky has spearheaded constructing a citizen-built wooden play area, similar to those in Kingston and New Paltz; this may be one location for it, though it is not walking distance for most local small kids, which must be considered); skateboard ramps; outdoor pavilions; youth center/community building; swimming pool; hiking/nature trail/canal lock reconstruction gateway and

interpretive center; bike path; amphitheater for musical concerts, plays, and public meetings.

The amphitheater idea holds particular promise, as the natural hillside would simplify siting and construction (concrete, some stone). On a recent trip to Turkey, I saw excellent examples of small, outdoor semicircular theaters – the Odeon in Ephesus, and a similar, smaller theater in Troy – both usable after two millennia. (This could be a unique tourist draw for our community, too.) For photos and floor plans of both, go to www.factman.us/amphi to get the rough idea.

Although Ellenville's three fire companies are looking at the Berme Road site for a new joint fire district building, they have seemingly nixed any suggestions to include a community center as part of the park's amenities. The community should really consider whether speeding fire trucks and attendant noise might diminish the potential for a full-featured park in a unique and gorgeous setting, and take away space from more park-related facilities. Further, could not the Village consider re-locating the Street Dept. to where the Water and Sewer Department facilities are, and converting the existing building into, say, quaint riding stables, or eliminating it altogether, and extending the park to that spot? Sidewalks and road-widening would also add to safety and convenience.

The roomy school-owned property at Church and Warren has been under-utilized for years. This could be an excellent site for the proposed new playground (*much* easier to walk to, and closer to potential users, than Berme Rd.), and, with its existing building, plus a new outdoor pavilion, could be a viable site for the Village's summer and year-round youth programs.

It's also a shame that a potential park gem will likely never materialize – the pond off Church and Kushner would, in any other community, already have been home to rowboats and paddleboats, fountains, gazebos, Japanese bridges, fishing piers, etc. But, I presume, Ellenville's only "lake" is either private property itself, or else is fully surrounded by private homes... and don't get me started about the insurance and liability hurdles that routinely hamper such ideas.

Lastly, when I was in Durango, Colorado (a small city that resembles Ellenville in some ways), I could look out my hotel room down to the river just below; it was not any wider than the Beer Kill or Sandburgh Creek, but was deep enough to let kayakers and rafters travel right through the city's heart! This is one for the engineers to address, but couldn't a small dam, properly sited, raise the water level to where several miles of navigable current would attract kayakers, rafters, and tubers from and *to* our area? *Whoosh!*

Next: Part III, A Tale of TWO Village Squares.

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