Long Range Plan for the Communal Grounds for the Ardens

Summary Memorandum
Site Review and Programming

Prepared for
Arden Community Planning Committee

Submitted by
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Wilmington, Delaware

April 29, 1997
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SUMMARY MEMORANDUM
Site Review and Programming

OVERVIEW

Arden is a unique community, not only because it was founded as an experimental Utopian community, but because it has survived to the present day in a form that still retains the garden city planning concepts upon which it was founded. That success notwithstanding, Arden is increasingly assaulted by impacts that arise from the growth and development occurring in neighboring communities. These impacts range from increased traffic volumes affecting the roadways to the environmental pressures causing the deterioration of the health of Arden’s streams and woods. It is essential that the community develop strategies to combat these pressures in ways that protect and enhance the Communal Grounds.

The Arden Community Planning Committee (ACPC) has retained the landscape planning and design firm of Rodney Robinson Landscape Architects (RRLA) to prepare a Long Range Plan for the Communal Grounds for the Ardens. The purpose of the plan is to provide the residents of Arden with a clear understanding of specific actions that will enable them to realize the goal of preserving and improving the Communal Grounds. Ultimately, the Long Range Plan will serve to guide the ACPC in their ongoing mission to secure the future of Arden’s open space in a way that is mindful of community traditions and responsive to the needs of generations to come.

The first task in this planning process is one of orientation and assessment. RRLA set out to familiarize itself with Arden and its open space and, together with the ACPC, to make a generalized assessment of the existing conditions. The public areas considered during this task are each located in Arden proper. They are:

- Sherwood Green/Buzz Ware Village Center Grounds
- Memorial Garden
- The Sweep/Stile Garden/Stile Path
- Village Green “A” and “B” and the Memorial Theater
Map of Arden Indicating the Communal Grounds Under Study
The assessment of these areas has been accomplished through:
1. Review of documents, including maps, video tapes and meeting notes, provided by the ACPC
2. On-site visits, including a walk-about with ACPC members and residents on January 18, to observe, record, and verify conditions
3. Participation in a planning workshop conducted by RRLA February 3, 1997

The following report represents a summary of our findings.

Introduction: Communal Grounds for the Ardens

Since the inception of Arden in 1900 by founders Will Price and Frank Stephens, the Communal Grounds have been an essential part of the village. Following the garden city concept of Ebenezer Howard, Price and Stephens provided over fifty percent of the land for residents' use. Based on the founding principles of independent lifestyle and democratic governance, the original farmland was transformed into residential leaseholds and common lands that produced a community unlike any other at the time.

Today, the Communal Grounds continue to play a major role in the lives of Ardenites who actively enjoy the greens, forests, and footpaths for recreation, experiencing nature, and circulating within the community. The Communal Grounds and their care is one of the common threads that binds together the residents, and continues to make the Ardens the unique place that it is.

Current Conditions

General
By studying the Communal Grounds, some general observations may be made regarding their collective condition. Most important, the Communal Grounds have remained open as intended for nearly one hundred years. It is worth emphasizing what an asset this is to Arden from an aesthetic, environmental, and recreational standpoint. Additionally, each of the spaces has retained its individual character with evidence of its historic appearance and use.

At the same time, however, the grounds are being threatened by a variety of contemporary pressures and problems. For example, uncontrolled or inappropriate uses are taking their toll on the sites. Horticultural concerns exist, such as aging plants and questions about appropriate grounds maintenance and management. In some cases, significant views are blocked, while unwanted views remain open. The following notes summarize the existing conditions of each area in more detail. These observations are based on independent site visits by RRLA, and site visits and meetings with the ACPC and residents.
Use and Condition of Study Sites

*Sherwood Green/Village Center Grounds*
Located at the social heart of Arden, Sherwood Green and the Village Center Grounds make up an area approximately 2 acres in size. The site is bordered by Sunset Road to the northwest, leaseholds to the northeast, The Highway to the southeast, and Sherwood Road to the southwest. The relatively flat landscape is characterized by mostly open lawn that surrounds the historic Arden School, now the Buzz Ware Village Center. The site supports the activities of the Village Center and nearby Gild Hall as evidenced by playground equipment, picnic tables, a sports field, and the poor condition of the turf due to parking.

- **Current Uses**
  - General open space
  - Social center
  - Day Care, After Care, ACRA
  - Playground
  - Ball field

- **Potential Future Uses**
  - Increased parking for Gild Hall events
  - Outdoor committee meetings

- **Existing Conditions**
  - **Concerns**
    - Unrestricted access to grass area by auto
    - Parking unsightliness and damage to grass
    - Lack of shade for playground
    - Foundation planting at school
    - Playground fence
    - Flagpole not used
    - Picnic bench location
    - Filled-in sandbox
    - Unused utility pole
    - Bike rack placement

  - **Positive Aspects**
    - Available Right-of-Way (N & E)
    - Climbing rock
    - Specimen Holly/Pine
    - Open, multiple-use space
    - Provides parking for community events

- **Other Issues**
  - Concern for increased runoff if paving were to be installed for parking
  - Loss of soft play space
  - Additional maintenance for new plantings
  - Short lived vs. long lived plants
  - Outdoor shelter for ACRA activities
Unrestricted automobile access on Sherwood Green damages the turf and limits its usability for other activities.
Memorial Garden
The 1.6 acre Memorial Garden is a pastoral setting incorporating many noteworthy landscape features including an historic spring house, a rustic foot bridge, and specimen trees. The terrain slopes gently from Harvey Road on the eastern edge of the site to the center of the garden where a low, wet area, formerly a pond, is defined by a circular stone wall. A sweeping vista is possible across the site from Harvey Road. The Arden Swimming Pool borders the garden to the northwest, Pond Lane is located to the southwest, and attractive leaseholds are along the southeast border. The graves of Arden residents are marked by inconspicuous stones and plaques that are flush with the grass lawn. They are placed throughout the site, often accompanied by plantings installed by the families.

- Current Uses
  Memorial Garden
  Memorial Services
  “Arboretum”
  Strolling

- Potential Future Uses
  Expand grave sites to behind pool
  Springhouse use?
  Expanded Arboretum

- Existing Conditions
  Concerns
  Drainage situation from memorial grove/parking
  “Pond” treatment?
  Fence at swimming pool
  Noise/Distraction from pool
  Noise/Distraction from Harvey Road
  Managing plant donations
  Overabundance of Rannunculus
  Overgrowth/removal of sentimental plants
  Failing wall at Grubb plot
  Undefined entry into garden
  Positive Aspects
  New stone bench
  Grubb Family plot
  Beautiful mature trees/shrubs
  View into garden from Harvey Road
  Flush grave markers
  Variety of grave markers
  Foot bridge
  Pond opportunity?

- Other Issues
  Short lived vs. long lived plants
Rolling terrain and mature plantings create picturesque views into the Memorial Garden.

**The Sweep/Stile Garden/Stile Path**

Across from the Memorial Garden, east of Harvey Road, lies open flat land consisting of large trees with grass below. This 1.3 acre area, known as “The Sweep,” shares its name with the road that forms its border to the northwest. A thick vegetative buffer separates the Sweep from the adjacent leaseholds to the northeast. To the southwest, the Stile, the traditional pedestrian entrance into Arden, sits next to Harvey Road within its own plot of land. The Stile Garden and the Sweep are separated by Lower Lane. The Stile Path is an asphalt walkway that provides pedestrian access from the Stile Garden and the Sweep to the Village Green. Most of the site is shady and has wet ground due to poor drainage.

- **Current Uses**
  - Connector between Arden and Ardentown
  - Identifies Arden (historic marker & stile)
  - General open space

- **Potential Future Uses**
  - Possible expansion of Memorial Garden
• Existing Conditions

**Concerns**
- Harvey Road: Noise/Safety hazard
- Wet soil
- Drainage channel through lawn
- Overgrown vegetation
- "Hidden" Stile

**Positive Aspects**
- Historical marker
- Arden Stile
- Openness/views along road
- Post and rail fence
- Mature trees
- Wildlife habitat

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The historic stile at one time welcomed visitors to Arden. Now it stands, often unnoticed, in a shaded corner along busy Harvey Road.
Drainage problems, including water channels through the turf and wet soil, contribute to the lack of activity on the Sweep.
Village Green “A” and “B” and the Memorial Theater

Village Green
At 5.3 acres in size the Village Green is the largest open space being studied. The Green is a relatively flat, rectangular shaped lot bordered by Woodland Lane, Green Lane, Cherry Lane, and Millers Road. It is divided approximately in half by Inn Lane, which forms section “A” to the west and section “B” to the east. While wooded leaseholds surround the parcel on all sides, the Green itself is an open, grassy lawn for the most part. Solitary trees and groups of trees form shady niches located intermittently along the perimeter. The Green contains several special landscape elements including Patro’s Path, which connects the former craft shop with the Memorial Theater, the Fels Oak, the War Veterans Memorial, and the Walt Whitman Memorial. Two playgrounds and a ball field are located on the lawn for recreation.

- **Current Uses**
  - Social center/”Promenade”
  - Village Bulletin Board
  - Play fields
  - Play grounds
  - Dog walking
  - General open space
  - Walt Whitman Memorial
  - War Veteran’s Memorial

- **Potential Future Uses**
  - Additional Memorials
  - Community gardens
  - Expanded ornamental planting
  - Restored pump house at school bus stop

- **Existing Conditions**
  - **Concerns**
    - Fels Oak crowded by playground, trees, etc.
    - Two playgrounds
    - Condition of aging trees
    - Replacement of trees with inappropriate species
    - Planting that is not cohesive
    - Condition of lawn-- aeration, drainage
    - “Barren”/ “Too open”/ “Boring”
    - “Not enough wildflowers”
    - Style/location of benches
    - Utility lines
    - Covering of Patro’s Path
    - Condition of Walt Whitman Memorial
    - Condition of Veteran’s Memorial
    - Rocky ground-- maintenance/safety
    - Deteriorating timber as edging at Green Ln.

  - **Positive Aspects**
    - Significant specimen plantings:
      - Fels Oak
      - Memorial “groves”
    - Open view
    - Other mature plants
    - Primary open space
    - Flexible open space-- accommodates multiple use
    - Minimal maintenance
• Other Issues
  Curbs
  Parking
  Appropriateness of use?

“Land Sculpture as play”
Short lived vs. long lived plants

A lone bench located near the baseball backstop on the Village Green offers little in terms of style or comfort.
Village Green "A" and "B" and the Memorial Theater (con’t.)

The Memorial Theater
The Memorial Theater is an outdoor performance area located within a semi-circular lot northwest of the Village Green. The Theater contains two stage levels. An elevated upper stage of compacted earth is retained by a low stone wall with a lower stage in front. Serving as permanent ornaments and as props for productions are stone Doric columns framing the stage and a large boulder draped with ivy. Curved rows of wooden benches, recently rebuilt, surround the stage on the south side. The Theater’s entrance is marked by historic cedar posts. A stockade fence behind the stage creates a place for performance preparation. The theater is quite shady and secluded due to its wooded location.

- Current Uses
  Play rehearsal and production
  Ceremonies, memorial services, weddings

- Potential Future Uses
  Expanded variety of performances
  Group meeting space

- Existing Conditions
  **Concerns**
  - Seasonally wet lower stage
  - Condition of columns
  - Lack of appropriate lighting
  - Insufficient backstage storage
  - Shadiness
  - Lack of planting
  - Condition of ground (cover)

  **Positive Aspects**
  - Refurbished benches
  - Earthen stage
  - Tradition
  - Atmosphere

- Other Issues
  Parking
  Fee for use
The Memorial Theater occupies a wooded niche northwest of the Village Green.
Planning Workshop

On February 3, 1997 RRLA conducted a planning workshop at the Buzz Ware Village Center. Approximately 20 people, mostly residents and committee members, attended the meeting (see Appendix A). The purpose of the workshop was to provide a forum whereby residents and their representatives could express their views about the Ardens' Communal Grounds. The information gathered would then be used to help create a specific list of items to be addressed by the Long Range Plan and possible remedies to current areas of concern.

The session began with an introduction by Rodney Robinson in which he reviewed RRLA's existing conditions study and presented plans illustrating the findings. Next the group was lead in an exercise that allowed each member's observations or concerns about the common space to be voiced. Participants were asked to describe what they believed to be "Assets" and "Liabilities" of the Ardens' Communal Grounds, in general or specific terms. The items were listed and later prioritized by the participants (see Appendix B).

Summary of Key Issues

Several of the assets and liabilities presented during the workshop correlate with and support the findings of the existing conditions study, and further serve to clarify the residents' values and priorities toward the Communal Grounds. The main points discussed by the group address both aesthetic and functional issues. They include:

Appreciation of the Communal Grounds: The Communal Grounds allow the residents of Arden a quality of life that cannot be found in any other community today. The residents cherish the common lands for a variety of reasons. Along with the their environmental, recreational, and aesthetic value as a whole, the residents appreciate the individual character and the specific opportunities that each site offers. For example the "big sky" quality of the Village Green and the views possible within the Memorial Garden are important features of those sites and are cherished by all. The relatively large open spaces provide a balance in contrast to the smaller, mostly wooded leaseholds. Residents expressed their feeling of "community" as represented in the common grounds, and along with their feeling of community comes one of safety and security-- so much so that the residents have no street lights and do not desire them.

Plantings: While the "generally natural quality" and the seasonal change of the open lands is seen as an asset, in general, the existing plantings received a negative response. There are many concerns regarding the age of several plants and how their replacement will be handled. Additional plantings-- the type, location, and the associated maintenance-- were also issues of concern. The environmental impact of mowing versus the aesthetic and maintenance implications of not mowing were debated.
Harvey Road: Harvey Road is seen as a visual and audible intrusion on the community. It physically and emotionally divides the village into two parts. The increased traffic on the road presents an ongoing safety hazard.

Use of the Communal Grounds: The grounds support a variety of community activities, while at the same time fulfill several utilitarian functions. Area for parking is just one of the necessities that the open lands satisfy, particularly on Sherwood Green and the Village Green. Some residents are not satisfied with the way in which parking on the Greens is being handled at present. The use of the Greens for parking is not popular among some residents, however no one wants to give up the activities that produce the need for parking cars. Most agreed that parking must be accommodated. Although social activities may cause parking problems, the activities are a vital part of Arden. The grounds are frequently used for ceremonies, celebrations and other large events that require extensive open space. Some sites may have potential for certain uses that are not being taken full advantage of. For example, the Sweep is seen as a “black hole” where no activity of note takes place. Active recreation is carried out primarily on the Greens, where areas are provided for recreation in the form of open lawns and playgrounds. The condition of the lawns (ruts left from automobiles, drainage problems, and the health of the turf and soil), the location of the playgrounds and the appearance of the recreational equipment (backstops, etc.) are all areas of concern. In contrast to active recreation, residents also recognize the opportunities available for more passive activities. The peace, tranquillity and solitude some find, particularly in the Memorial Garden, provide a setting where activities such as meditation and contemplation are possible. Because the Communal Grounds are so readily accessible to non-residents as well as residents, they sometimes encourage a level of activity that can turn them into an “attractive nuisance.” The Communal Grounds are also used by people and their pets. Lack of proper pet management often presents a problem for others using the land.

Proposed Objectives and Program Requirements

Regarding all public open spaces, the goals of the ACPC have been stated as:
1. to enhance the recreational uses of the communal lands;
2. to make the communal lands inviting through care and planting that favor nature’s creatures and resident’s desired uses, and which is low maintenance.

To achieve and support these goals, we propose the following objectives:
1. Determine the appropriate use for each area and accommodate those uses in the most efficient and aesthetically acceptable way;
2. Provide new and/or improve existing recreation areas, for both spontaneous and planned activities for all ages;
3. Restore and enhance the landscape features of the Communal Grounds such as the views, plantings, and overall character, and minimize intrusions on the landscape;
4. Develop a planting concept that addresses concerns such as aging plants, habitat development and maintenance/management issues;
5. Alleviate drainage problems by suggesting ways to mitigate erosion, runoff and wet areas or suggest ways to enhance these features if appropriate.
The following is a list of program requirements that the Long Range Plan must address. The list has been generated through analysis of the information collected during the orientation and assessment phase of the planning process. In general, the list takes into account the concerns of the residents and the desire to enhance the positive aspects of each site, keeping in mind the stated goals and objectives.

**Sherwood Green/Village Center Grounds**

1. Parking
   - Layout parking area and automobile access
   - Develop a flexible method of confining parking
   - Suggest suitable surface material for parking and access routes
   - Incorporate available right-of-way
   - Screen parking effectively

2. Planting
   - Suggest extent and treatment of lawn areas
   - Recommend appropriate planting near the school building and elsewhere
   - Incorporate means of providing shade
   - Suggest plants to be removed and replaced
   - Screen rear of school building
   - Recommend fence style alternatives
   - Provide teaching opportunities in the landscape where possible

3. Amenities
   - Improve picnic area
   - Recommend appropriate seating and furnishings
   - Provide outdoor meeting space

4. Recreation space
   - Improve quality and appearance of playgrounds and ball field

**Memorial Garden**

1. Planting
   - Suggest system to control plant donations
   - Develop an arboretum-like place
   - Screen and enhance specific views
   - Suggest plants to be removed and replaced
   - Recommend new plantings

2. The Pond
   - Improve poor drainage condition
   - Suggest appropriate use

3. Amenities
   - Recommend appropriate seating
   - Suggest adaptive use of the Spring house

4. Circulation
   - Investigate need for paths throughout the Garden
   - Investigate entry

5. Mitigation
   - Suggest ways to diminish intrusion of Harvey Road
   - Screen swimming pool
The Sweep/Stile Garden/Stile Path

1. Drainage problems
   - Develop strategy to alleviate, or enhance where appropriate, chronic wet conditions

2. Harvey Road
   - Suggest ways to mitigate visual and auditory intrusion

3. Planting
   - Recommend appropriate plantings to improve appearance and enhance habitat
   - Propose ways to minimize maintenance
   - Enhance views into the Memorial Garden

4. Stile Garden
   - Investigate ways to connect to the Sweep and to the community
   - Improve visibility of the Stile from the road
   - Recommend garden improvements
   - Improve Stile Path connection

Village Green “A” and “B” and the Memorial Theater

Village Green

1. Parking
   - Suggest locations for parking areas
   - Recommend suitable surface material for parking areas

2. Playgrounds/ball field
   - Consolidate and suggest location
   - Recommend play equipment more appropriate to the setting

3. Landscape features
   - Open up space around the Fels Oak
   - Renovate Patro's Path and install historic sign
   - Renovate and enhance Walt Whitman and Veterans' Memorials
   - Suggest locations for future memorials

4. Planting
   - Suggest appropriate new planting
   - Identify opportunities for habitat enhancement
   - Create and maintain significant views
   - Suggest screening (only where necessary)
   - Suggest plants to be removed and replaced
   - Recommend extent and treatment of lawn areas
   - Investigate the opportunity for wildflower planting

5. Amenities
   - Recommend appropriate seating and furnishings
   - Suggest pumphouse structure at school bus stop
Village Green "A" and "B" and the Memorial Theater (con't.)

The Memorial Theater

1. Drainage
   - Devise way to alleviate seasonally wet stage conditions

2. Planting
   - Suggest appropriate new planting
   - Investigate ground cover treatment

3. Amenities
   - Suggest appropriate lighting fixtures and locations
   - Recommend repair of columns, as necessary
   - Recommend storage options and ways to screen production preparation

Next Steps

The information summarized in this memorandum represents the Orientation and Assessment phase of the planning process. When funding becomes available, the next step toward the Long Range Plan will begin-- Preliminary Recommendations. As part of this task RRLA will develop and present to the ACPC preliminary recommendations that address the program requirements identified above. RRLA will meet with the ACPC in two work sessions to review and approve specific improvements, examine their projected costs, and investigate possible funding sources.
Appendix A
Workshop Participants

A planning workshop was held at the Buzz Ware Village Center on the evening of February 3, 1997. Those in attendance included:

Beverly Barnett  Arden Community Planning Committee (ACPC) Chair
Lou Bean  Arden Civic Committee (ACC) Chair
Ruth Bean  Memorial Garden Representative
Bernie Brachman  ACC Member
David Clarke  University of Delaware, Historic Preservation Seminar
Rachel Grier  ACPC nominee
Aaron Hamburger  ACC Member
Rodney Jester  ACC Member
Lynda Kolski  ACPC Member
Mary Marconi  ACPC Member
Ruth Panella  ACPC Member
John Reilly  ACPC Nominee, ACC Nominee
Ed Rorhbach  ACPC Nominee
Rick Rothrock  ACC Nominee
Gene Shaw  ACC Consultant
Larry Strange  ACC Member
Lynn Svenning  ACC Member
Leon Tanzer  ACC Consultant
Paul Thompson  ACC Consultant
Elizabeth Varley  ACPC Nominee
Marij Wiegelman  Arden resident
Rodney Robinson  Rodney Robinson Landscape Architects
Linda Walczak  Rodney Robinson Landscape Architects

Invited, but not present, were Aaron Hamburger and Larry Strange.
Appendix B

Workshop participants produced the followings lists regarding assets and liabilities of the Ardens' Communal Grounds. Items are listed in the order presented.

**ASSETS**

1. Big sky
2. Usable space for population
3. Generally natural quality
4. Sports for all
5. Peace and tranquillity (Memorial Garden)
6. Open/distant views
7. Seasonal change
8. Play space
9. Solitude
10. Individual character of each open space
11. Informal gathering
12. “Old-shoe” quality/spontaneous
13. Because it is there
14. Sense of destination
15. Belongs to everyone
16. Options
17. See community life
18. Meet animals
19. Respected/not breakable
20. Balances rest of community (size/quality)
21. Contributes sense of history
22. Both sides of community have open space
23. Communal consensus
24. Unorthodox (design/elements)
25. Importance of consensus and planning
26. No street lights
27. People from outside community come
28. Sense of safety
29. Memorials and living monuments
30. Rocks

**LIABILITIES**

1. Attractive nuisance (school/Sherwood)
2. Late August barreness (on Green)
3. Runoff (Impact on Arden Creek)
4. Wet ground (Spring)
5. Harvey Road-- Creates division/intrusion
6. Over-aged plant material
7. Greens becoming parking lots
8. Unmanicured/too rough
9. Mowing eliminates wildflowers
10. Scrubby area at Woodland Lane
11. Erosion
12. Dogs-- Running loose
13. Sweep-- “Black hole”
14. Increased traffic
15. Sherwood being developed
16. Unattractive chain-link fence
17. Back stop (arts and crafts style?)
18. Concern: are we taking care of the open space?
19. People from outside come here (don’t share respect)
20. Limitation of maintenance capabilities /cost
21. Security of school (night)
Next, participants ranked the listed items by marking the four they found to be most important on each list. The results were as follows:

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