

3.BDA-2025-08294

Flagstaff Hill, Schenley Park

Individual Landmark

Squirrel Hill South Neighborhood

Pathways and entrance improvements

FLAGSTAFF HILL PATHWAYS AND ENTRANCE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

PERMIT NO: BDA-2025-08294

Certificate of Appropriateness Narrative

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (PPC), in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh, the Department of Public Works (DPW) and Carnegie Mellon University requests the support of the Historic Review Commission (HRC) in issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed pathway improvements, enhancements to existing gathering areas, and the addition of new stair and overlook elements within Flagstaff Hill.

Background

Flagstaff Hill, located within Schenley Park, is one of Pittsburgh's most recognizable and well-loved open spaces. It serves as a major recreational lawn and event venue for the city, hosting community gatherings, outdoor movies, and daily park use throughout the year. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University, is leading the Flagstaff Hill Pathways and Entrance Improvement Project to restore and enhance this significant landscape while maintaining its historic and cultural character.

The project builds on the City's ongoing commitment to reinvest in Schenley Park's historic landscapes and infrastructure. Over time, heavy use, erosion, and aging materials have led to deteriorated pathways, poor drainage, and accessibility challenges. The project aims to address these conditions through thoughtful design interventions that respect the site's history and support its continued role as a central gathering space within the park system.

This project aims to achieve the following goals:

- Renovate Flagstaff Hill by restoring and realigning deteriorated pedestrian pathways and addressing erosion and stormwater issues through sustainable design practices.
- Enhance Amenities with new gathering areas and a rain garden near the gazebo to manage runoff and provide a more defined and welcoming setting for visitors.
- Improve Connections between Flagstaff Hill, the Carnegie Mellon University campus, and surrounding areas of Schenley Park through upgraded paths, stairways, and safer street crossings.
- Maintain Historical Character by protecting mature trees, preserving open views, and ensuring new materials and features complement the park's historic landscape design.

Since beginning their work with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy in 2024, GAI Consultants, serving as the lead landscape architecture and civil engineering firm, have worked with PPC, the City of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie Mellon University to assess existing conditions at Flagstaff Hill, engage with City stakeholders, and develop schematic and design development plans for the Flagstaff Hill Pathways and Entrance Improvement Project. EvolveEA is supporting the project as a sustainability and design consultant, helping to integrate green infrastructure and environmentally responsive design strategies throughout the site.

The project proposes improvements to the existing network of pedestrian pathways and entrance connections within Flagstaff Hill to enhance accessibility, circulation, and stormwater management. Pathways are being designed at varying widths to provide a clear hierarchy between pedestrian only pathways and pathways that can accommodate maintenance vehicles, ensuring a balance between public use and long-term maintenance and programming needs. The approach also reduces impervious surfacing and improves stormwater management within the park. The design largely retains the historic pathway layout, with minor modifications to entrances and access points to improve access.


Key features include a new stairway connection and overlook from Frew Street that strengthens physical and visual connections between the Carnegie Mellon University campus and the upper slopes of Flagstaff Hill, as well as a new rain garden near the gazebo area to manage runoff, improve drainage, and introduce pollinator-friendly native plantings. New site walls will be constructed using split-faced sandstone in an ashlar pattern, and will be sympathetic to the existing historic walls on site.

These improvements are consistent with the goals of maintaining the historic character of Schenley Park while addressing connectivity and sustainability challenges. The work represents a continued partnership between the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, the City of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie Mellon University to ensure Flagstaff Hill remains a welcoming civic landscape for generations to come.

The Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition (SHUC) and Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy hosted a Development Activities Meeting on October 6, 2025, to present the project and get public feedback. Department of City Planning Neighborhood Planner, Christian Umbach, commented that Development Activities Meeting was well received, and that the community is supportive of this project. In addition, we have enclosed letters of support from Councilperson Warwick, Councilperson Strassberger, and Carnegie Mellon University.

Please review the attached presentation materials for additional information, including site plans, renderings, and proposed materials. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out directly by email to hbernardt@pittsburghparks.org. Thank you for your consideration of this project.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hayden Bernhardt". The signature is stylized with a large initial "H" and a cursive "Bernhardt".

Hayden Bernhardt, Project Manager
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy



FLAGSTAFF HILL PATHWAYS AND ENTRANCE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

HISTORIC REVIEW COMMITTEE
11/05/2025

MEET THE TEAM

APPLICANT:

PITTSBURGH PARKS CONSERVANCY (PPC)

- BRANDON RILEY
- HAYDEN BERNHARDT

PARTNER:

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY (CMU)

- BOB REPPE
- JEN BECK

DESIGN TEAM:

GAI CONSULTANTS

- TODD WILSON
- BOB GENTER
- CAMERON WALTERS
- JAMES YOST
- RUBY COLE
- STEPHEN WALKER

EVOLVEEA

- ALLISON KOLL
- CHRISTINE MONDOR

CONTENTS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

CONCEPT DESIGN

PEDESTRIAN PATHWAY IMPROVEMENTS

GATHERING SPACES

PLAN

RENDERINGS

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS: SCHENLEY DRIVE, TECH
STREET, AND FREW STREET



HOW WE GOT HERE



PROJECT GOALS

RENOVATE FLAGSTAFF HILL

- PATHWAY RESTORATION
- STORMWATER IMPROVEMENTS

ENHANCE AMENITIES

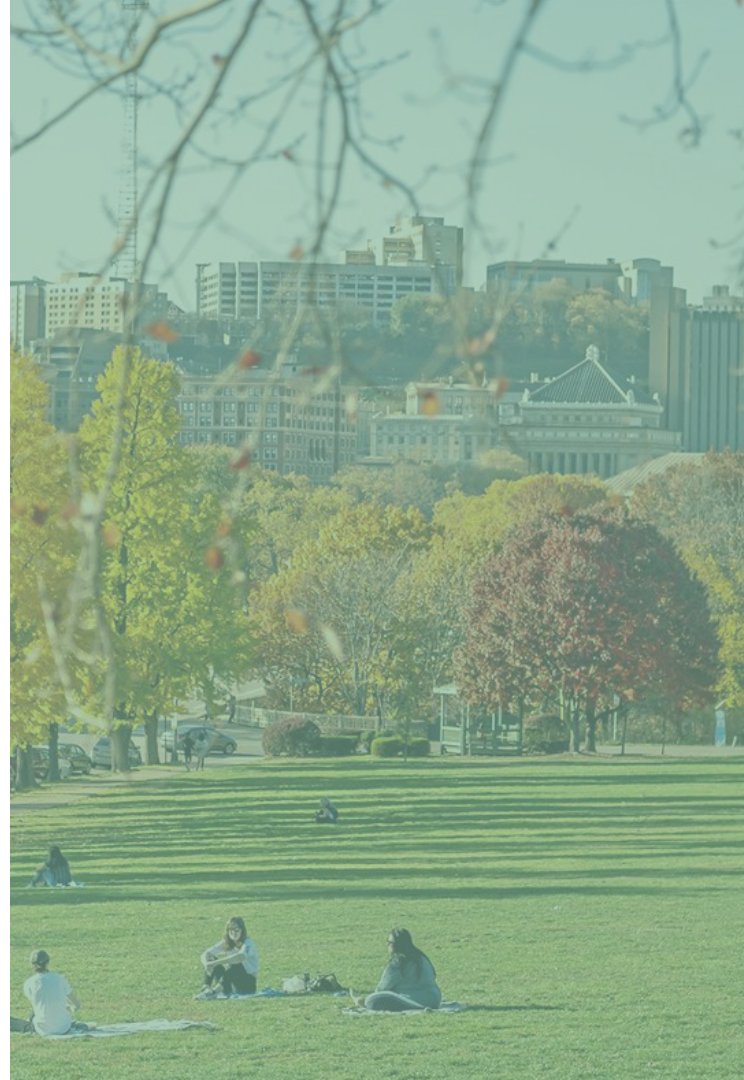
- CARNEGIE MELLON / FREW STREET OVERLOOK TERRACE INSTALLATION
- REDUCE IMPERMEABLE SURFACES

IMPROVE CONNECTIONS

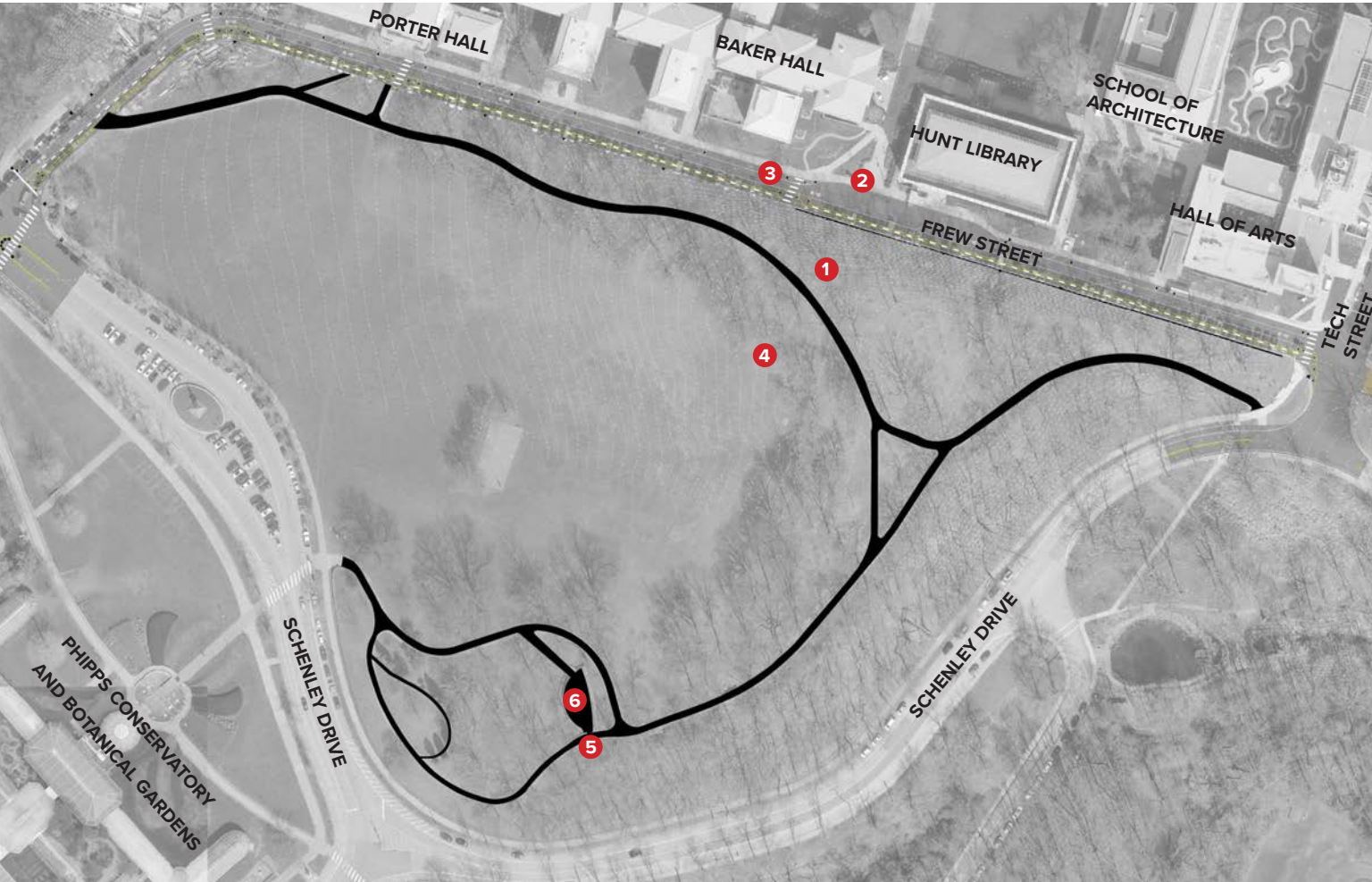
- CARNEGIE MELLON CONNECTOR STAIRCASE
- FREW STREET TO SCHENLEY DRIVE PATHWAY
- STAIRCASE BYPASS OPPOSITE PHIPPS CROSSWALK
- SCHENLEY DRIVE AT TECH STREET SIDEWALKS AND CROSSINGS
- FREW STREET CROSSWALKS
- EVENT ENTRANCE/EXIT

MAINTAIN HISTORICAL CHARACTER

- SITE FURNISHING
- PEDESTRIAN AND VEHICLE SEPARATION
- TREE PROTECTION



EXISTING CONDITIONS



LEGEND

- EXISTING PATH
- VIEW LOCATIONS

EXISTING CONDITIONS



1 VIEW FROM PROPOSED OVERLOOK



2 VIEW TO PROPOSED OVERLOOK FROM
FREW STREET



3 VIEW TO PROPOSED STAIRS FROM
FREW STREET

4 VIEW OPPOSITE PROPOSED
OVERLOOK PATHWAY



5 DESIGN INSPIRATION EXISTING
TERRACE STAIRCASE



6 DESIGN INSPIRATION
EXISTING TERRACE



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT










ATTENDEES:

- CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 5
- CITY OF PITTSBURGH FORESTRY
- PITTSBURGH PARK RANGERS
- PITTSBURGH DPW
- PITTSBURGH DOMI
- PITTSBURGH DCP
- PWSA
- CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY
- PITTSBURGH PARKS CONSERVATORY
- GAI CONSULTANTS
- EVOLVEEA

DESIGN OVERVIEW



LEGEND

-  KEY DESIGN AREAS
-  GATHERING SPACES
-  RAIN GARDENS
-  10' PATH
-  8' PATH
-  6' PATH
-  TRAIL REMOVAL

DESIGN OVERVIEW



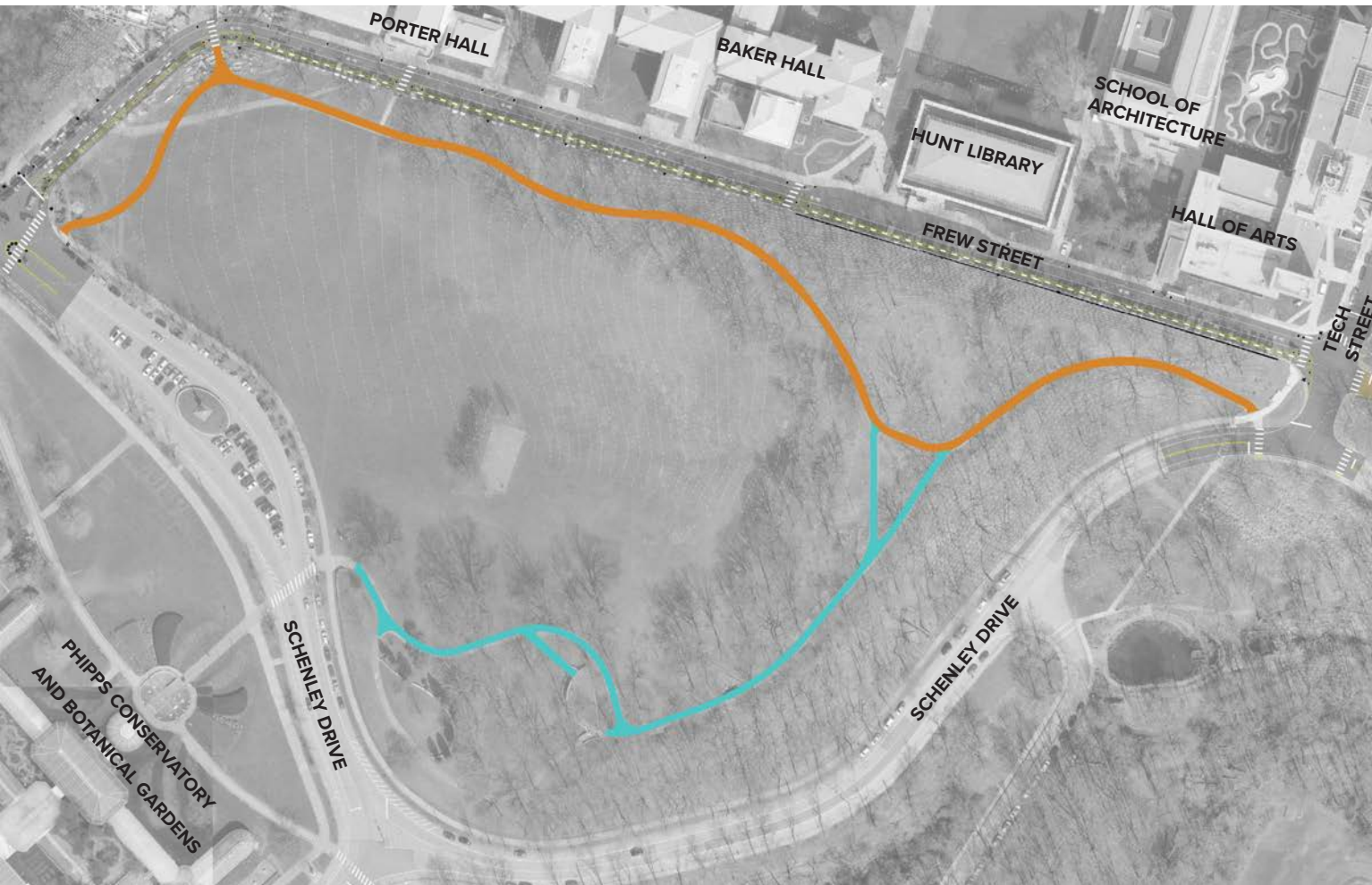
LEGEND

 10' PATH

NOTES:

ACCESS ACCOMMODATIONS
FOR MAINTENANCE
VEHICLES AND EMERGENCY
SERVICES VEHICLES

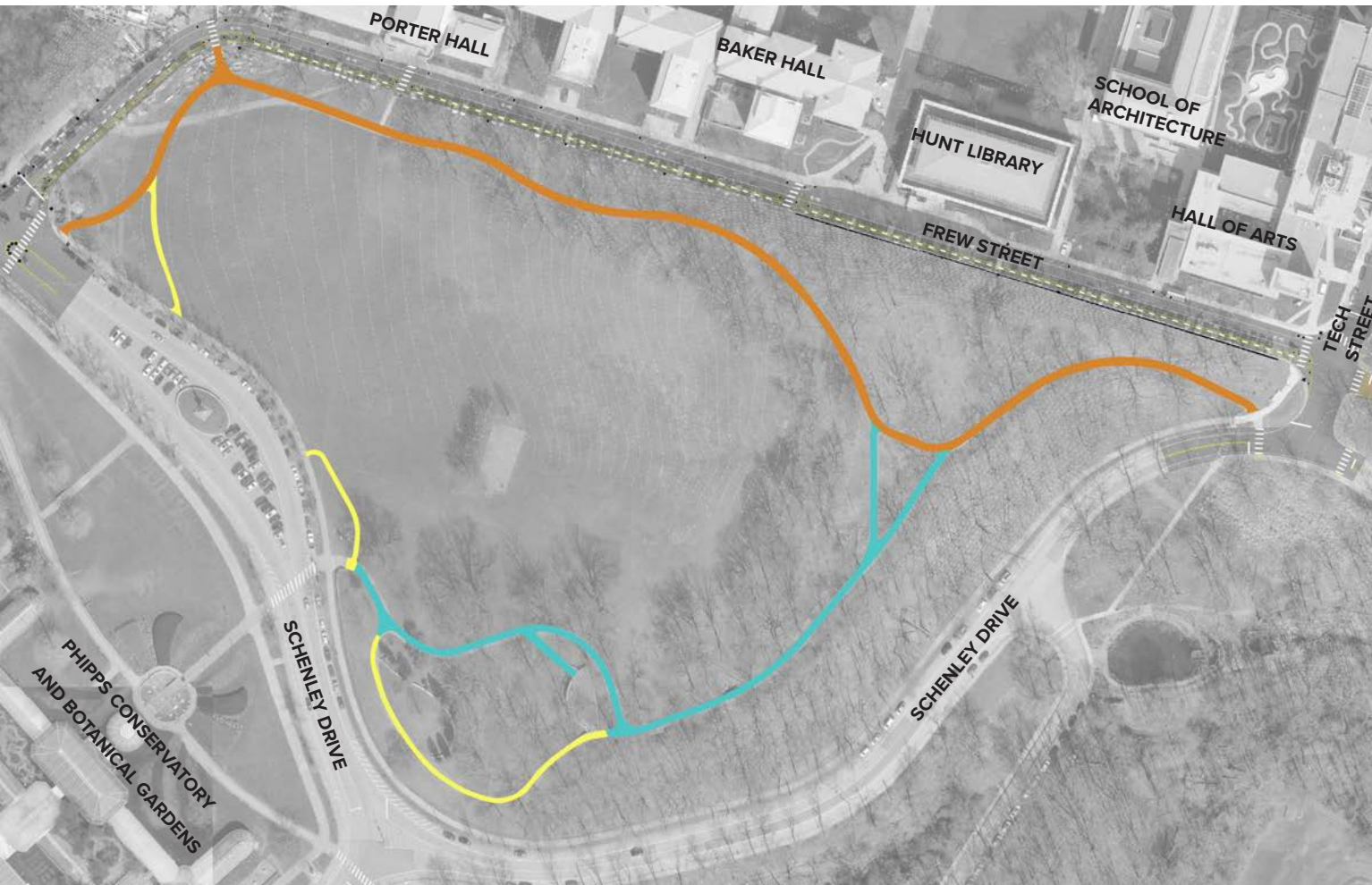
DESIGN OVERVIEW



LEGEND

- 10' PATH
- 8' PATH

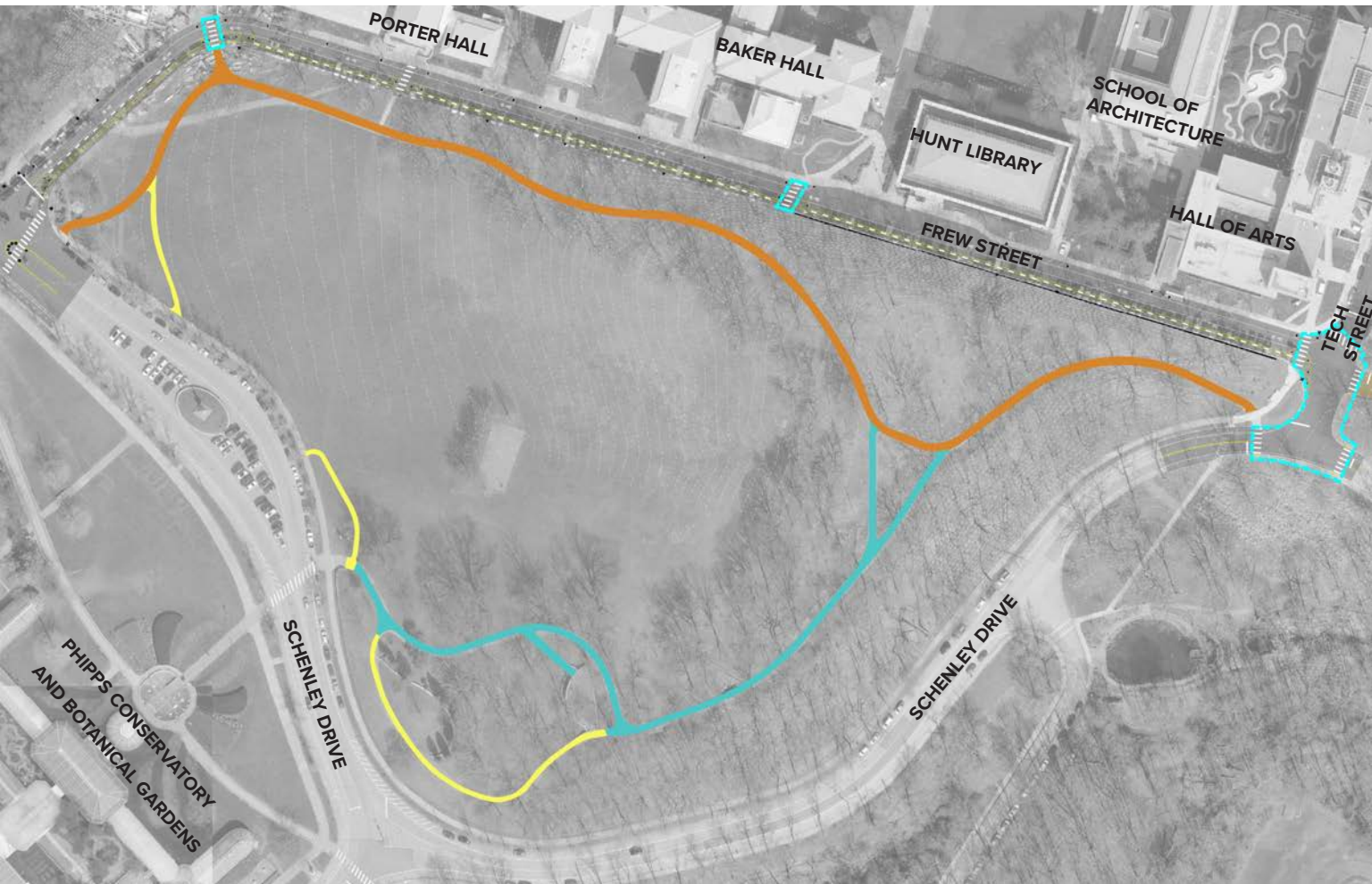
DESIGN OVERVIEW



LEGEND

- 10' PATH
- 8' PATH
- 6' PATH

DESIGN OVERVIEW



LEGEND

- 10' PATH
- 8' PATH
- 6' PATH
- SIDEWALKS + CROSSWALKS

DESIGN OVERVIEW



LEGEND

- RAIN GARDENS
- PROPOSED TRAIL

RAIN GARDENS

BENEFITS OF A RAIN GARDEN IN FLAGSTAFF HILL

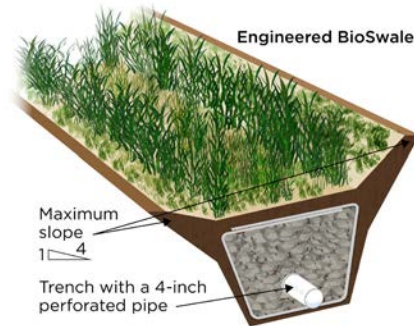
- ADDRESS ISSUES OF RUNOFF AND POOR INFILTRATION ACROSS THE LAWN AT FLAGSTAFF HILL.
- CAPTURE STORMWATER RUNOFF
- ENHANCE THE VISUAL QUALITY OF THE GAZEBO AREA, CREATING A MORE DEFINED SENSE OF PLACE AND IDENTITY.
- PLANTS SELECTED FOR THEIR SEASONAL APPEAL, LOW MAINTENANCE, AND ABILITY TO SUPPORT POLLINATORS
- LOCATION SELECTED TO ALLOW FOR PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION AND SPECTATOR GATHERING DURING EVENTS
- NOD TO THE HISTORIC ELECTRIC FOUNTAIN THAT WAS ONCE IN THIS AREA



VEGETATED SWALE



RAIN GARDEN



FLAGSTAFF HILL FOUNTAIN



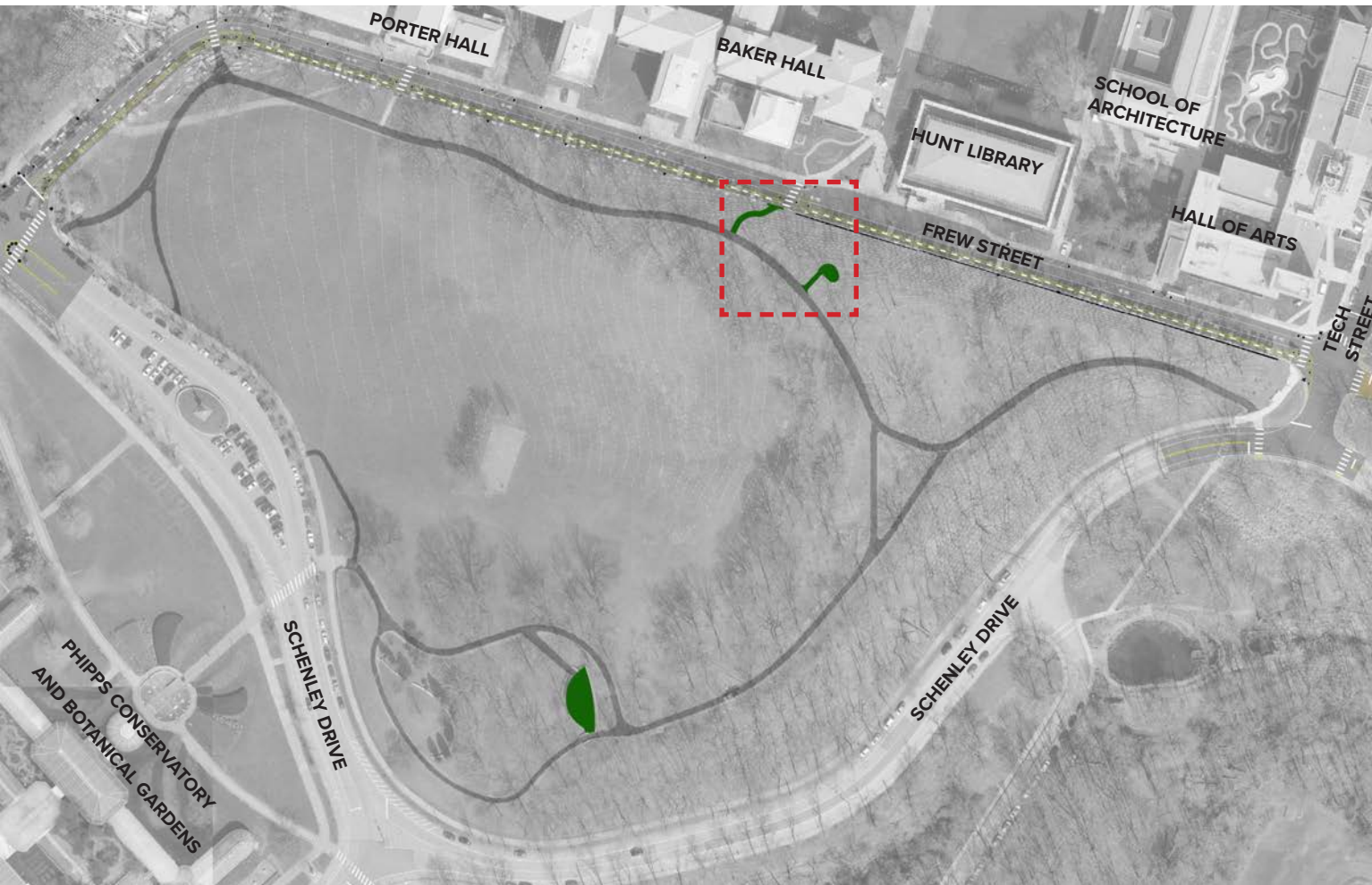
GATHERING SPACES






LEGEND

-  GATHERING SPACES
-  PROPOSED TRAIL

PROPOSED GATHERING SPACES



LEGEND

-  GATHERING SPACES
-  PROPOSED TRAIL
-  PROPOSED SPACES

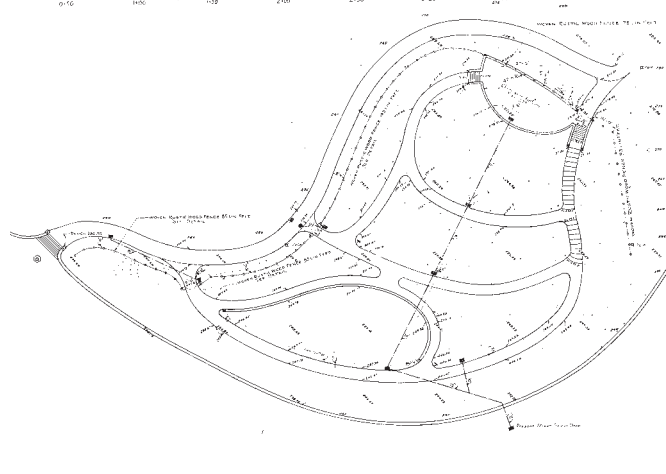
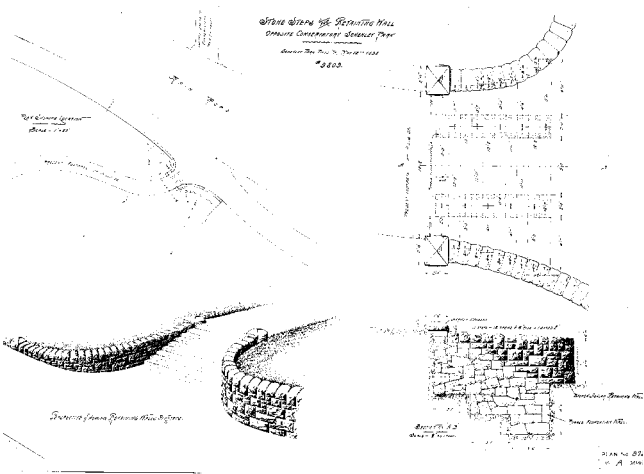
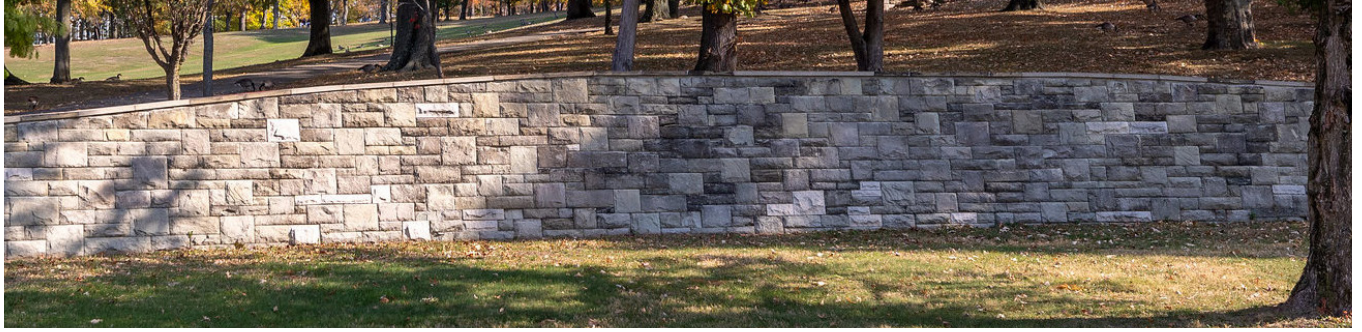
CONCEPT: STAIRS



CONCEPT: STAIRS

STAIR MATERIALS

- WE PROPOSE USING SPLIT-FACED SANDSTONE BLOCK WALLS IN A CLASSIC ASHLAR PATTERN TO MATCH THE HISTORICAL RENOVATIONS ALREADY COMPLETED.



CONCEPT: PROPOSED STAIRS



CONCEPT: PROPOSED STAIRS



CONCEPT: OVERLOOK



LEGEND

 TREE TO REMOVE

 EXISTING TREE TO PROTECT

 TREE TO EVALUATE FOR POTENTIAL REMOVAL

QTY TAKEOFFS

32'-0" LF OF STONE SEATWALL (2' DEPTH)

6' WIDTH - OVERLOOK PATH

10' WIDTH - PATH

CONCEPT: PROPOSED OVERLOOK



CONCEPT: PROPOSED OVERLOOK



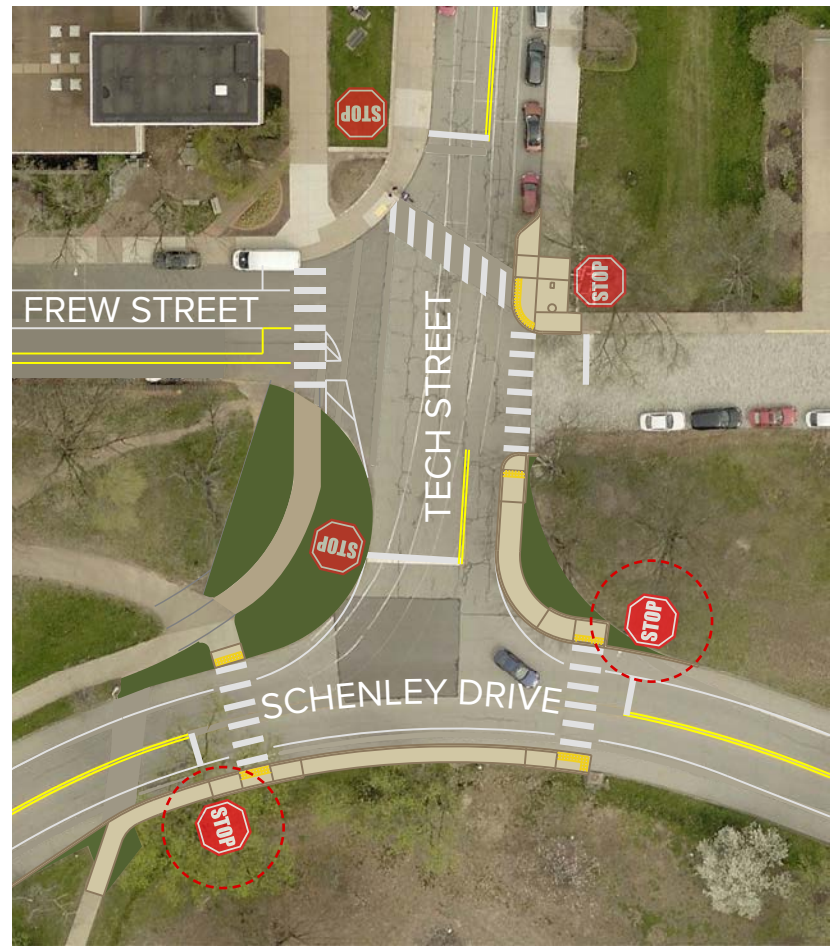
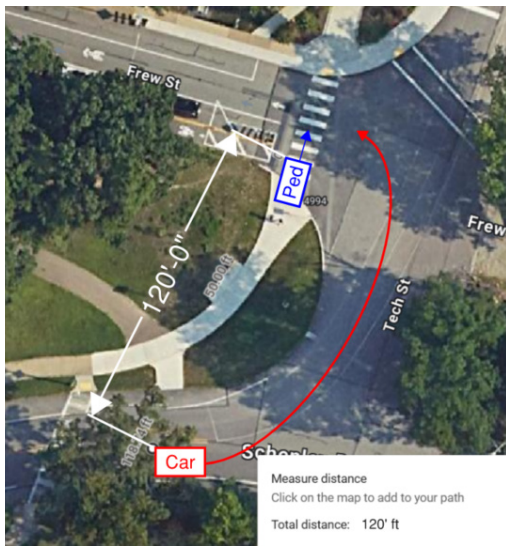
CONCEPT: PROPOSED OVERLOOK



INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

TECH STREET, FREW STREET, AND SCHENLEY DRIVE INTERSECTION

- IMPROVE SAFETY TO REACH FLAGSTAFF HILL AND CMU
- NEW SIDEWALKS WITHIN ROADWAY SHOULDERS
- 10-11 FT LANES, 5-7 FT SHOULDERS
- MULTI-WAY STOP CONTROL TO ADDRESS LIMITED SIGHT DISTANCE (SUBJECT TO APPROVAL PROCESS)



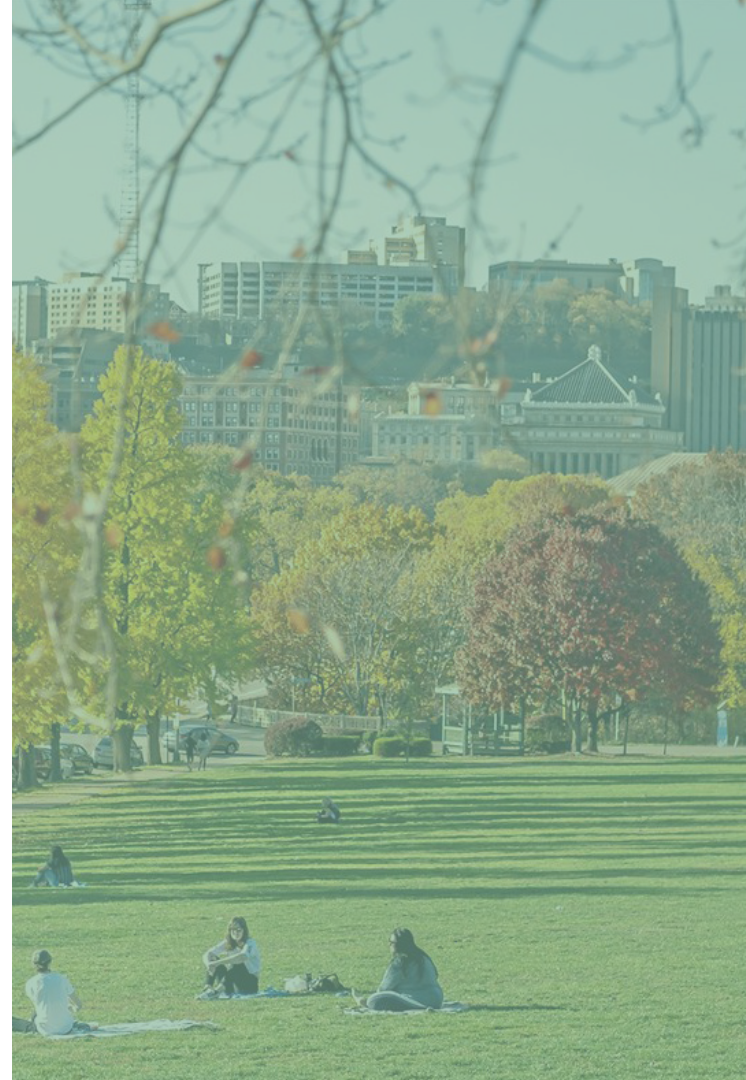
PROJECT SUMMARY

RENOVATE FLAGSTAFF HILL

ENHANCE AMENITIES

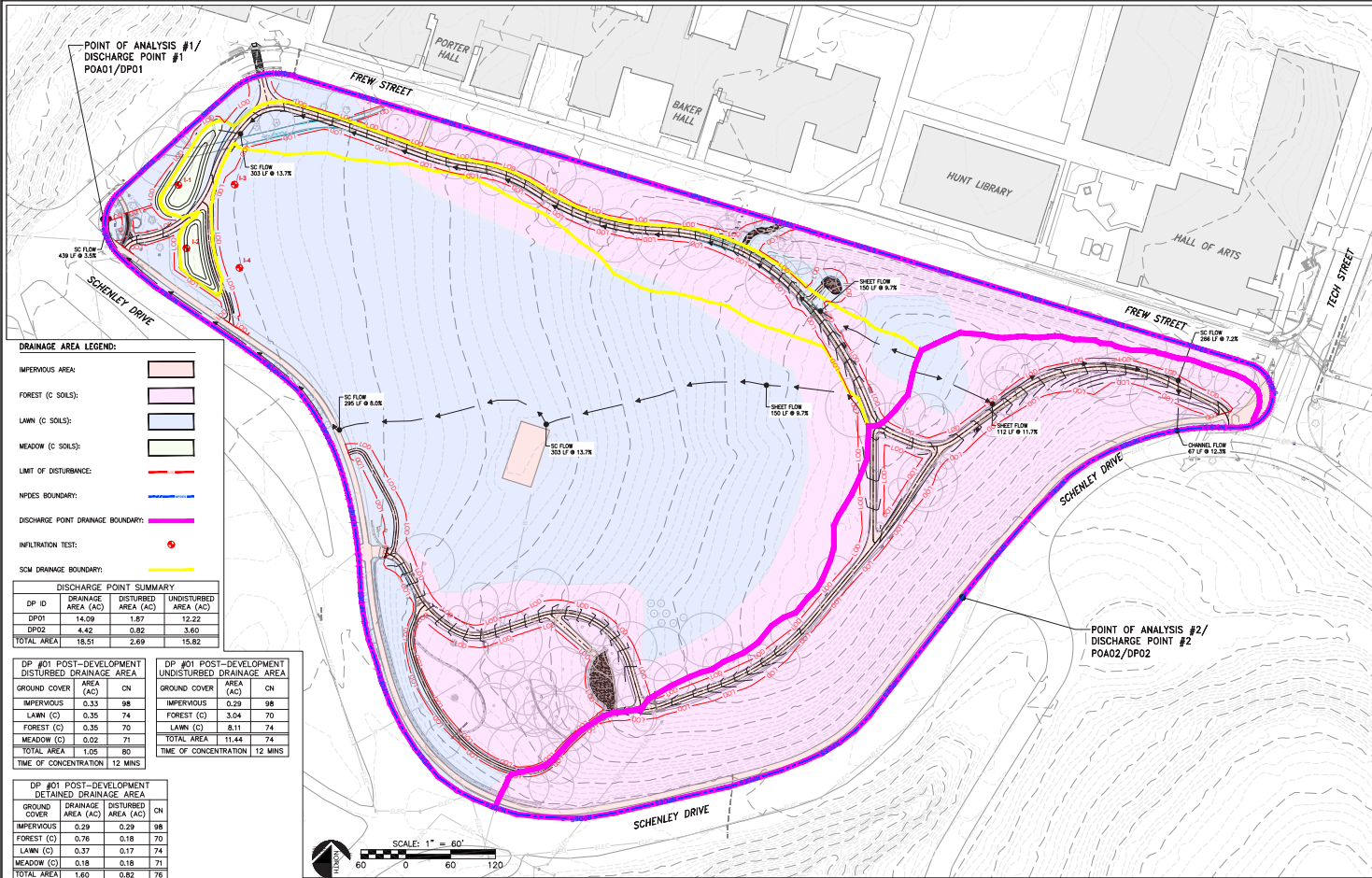
IMPROVE CONNECTIONS

MAINTAIN HISTORICAL CHARACTER



A scenic view of a city park during autumn. The foreground is a large, green lawn where several people are sitting or lying down, enjoying the sun. The middle ground is filled with trees displaying vibrant yellow and orange autumn foliage. In the background, a dense city skyline with various buildings is visible under a clear sky. The text "WRAP UP & QUESTIONS" is overlaid in the center of the image.

WRAP UP & QUESTIONS



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POST-DEVELOPMENT DRAINAGE MAP				Pittsburgh				<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>NO.</th> <th>DATE</th> <th>BY</th> <th>CHKD</th> <th>APPD</th> <th>DESCRIPTION</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				NO.	DATE	BY	CHKD	APPD	DESCRIPTION						
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