

A park without trees creates a city without history.

We cheer for the historic Harriet Tubman Park for a new, prosperous, and most of all just Newark.

However, nobody should even imagine cutting down these 66 century-old trees, oaks, elms, sycamores, all of which represent our history and particularly African-American experience. In America, trees symbolize both freedom and brutal oppression, should any sensible person forget. Unlike any historic treasures – architectural remnants, shriveled old maps, aged documents, or battled artifacts – these trees are among our most valuable historic icons, standing tall for our children.

Tubman embodied the notion of reclaiming the symbolism of trees and woods as tools of freedom in the black tradition. In the antebellum America, abolitionists always voiced lyrics about glorious trees that bore the fruit of freedom. Dr. Martin Luther King famously said, “Even if I knew tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plan my apple tree.” Tubman was famous for knowing the terrain of trees, woods, and swamps along her journey to freedom. In Tubman’s biography by Sarah Bradford, the black Moses said, “When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.”

On the other hand, Billie Holiday sang about fruits produced by these trees: “Southern trees bear strange fruit/Blood on the leaves and blood at the root/Black bodies swing in the southern breeze/Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees/ ...Here is a strange and bitter crop.” The blood of black men, women, and children who refused to remain silent, and who deserve justice, life, liberty, and love, over the hate that surround them.

Last year, Rutgers Newark restored the history and voices of Frederick Douglass in the Historic James Street Commons. Let us not forget, Douglas also said, “If Americans wished to partake of the tree of knowledge, they would find its fruit bitter as well as sweet.” It is unimaginable that Tubman will allow these venerable trees of knowledge to be annihilated.

How did we discover the plans to cut all trees?
Here is what we discovered through geospatial analysis.

Something is happening. The City of Newark's communication with residents and stakeholders does not mention one crucial detail about their plans for our park: The new park will have no old trees. Yes, no trees. Every tree in the current park – some up to two hundred years old and over one hundred feet high – will be cut down.

How did we find this out? A request on June 2 through the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) revealed city officials wrote a 73-page internal report of their plans. The report never mentions tree removals... until one reads secrets between the lines. Here are some of our discoveries:

1. Their report includes two scale plans: one of the current park and another of the proposed. At first glance, the two plans appear similar. And it would be logical to assume that trees in the current park will be preserved for the future park. And yet, overlaying the two maps above each other reveals that at almost no point do trees in the current park align to tree locations in the new park. Despite the city never mentioning tree removal, it is clear from these plans that all trees are at risk. (See Exhibits 1 and 2.)

2. Is it possible the City is not cutting down trees but rather moving them around the park? It is possible, but unlikely. The oldest trees in the park weigh up to 350 tons and would cost about \$400,000 each to move. The 73-page report never mentions relocation and never describes which trees would be removed and how much that would cost. On this basis, we think it is reasonable to assume trees will be cut rather than relocated.

3. I am an architectural historian by training. Over years of schooling and practice, I was trained in how to read maps. And yet, the City's plan of current site conditions in Washington Park is illegible. The map has hundreds of annotations that cover the locations and species of trees. What this does is hide the fact that there are large trees in the current park that disappear in the proposed. Is this just bad draftsmanship or something intentional? (See Exhibits 3, 4, and 5.)

4. The city's report includes nine pages of photos of current park conditions. All photos were taken in winter 2019 when the park was covered in dirty yellow snow and when no trees had leaves. Is it only a coincidence that photos of the current park depict it at the bleakest time of year? Regardless of intent, what this sleight of hand does is hide the fact that the current park has ancient trees and that these trees are worthy of saving.

Another question: Why is the survey of current site conditions dated to 2019? According to the city's timeline from the March 22 public meeting, the survey and redesign of the park was *in response to* and *after* the 2020 George Floyd protests. And yet, the timing of the site documentation predates George Floyd. This raises the question: Are there other actors and other agendas at work for the past several years? (See Exhibit 6.)

5. There are several other monuments in the park: Don Luis Munoz Rivera (1959), Seth Boyden (1890), Line of March of Washington's Army (1932), First Academy in Newark Marker (1941), and Dr. Abraham Coles (1897). Seth Boyden has no connection with racism and white

supremacy. However, the report never mentions the many other statues in this park. This raises the question: What will happen to them? Will Seth Boyden be sent to the landfill, too, to be ground up into the statue's value in gravel and scrap metal? Why does a 73-page report written by design professionals not inventory the other statues and their fates?

6. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection sent us all of the city's plans *except* for the archaeological report of current site conditions, which would have included a tree survey. Here is the Department of Environmental Protection's justification for their secrecy: "The Phase IB archaeological survey report that was included as part of the application was redacted, as it involves certain archaeological information that is protected and restricted from public disclosure pursuant to N.J.S.A. 47:1A-9 & Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act 16 U.S.C. 470w-3(a)." What does this survey mention? Why is the survey of current site conditions in our public park confidential information?

8. The city claims that saving the park's trees "does not meet the project need." The city's report describes and quickly dismisses an alternative that would have preserved the park and saved all the trees. Here is a direct quote:

"Under this alternative, Washington Park would be rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. The property would continue to be used as it was historically and its existing historic character preserved. The current features, including the path network and paving, landscaping, trees, monuments, and footprint would be retained in their current locations and any repairs conducted in kind. If the severity of deterioration required replacement, the new feature would match the historic element in design, color, texture, and where possible, materials. Any additional elements, such as bathroom facilities or new construction, would be designed to be compatible with the historic nature of the park as to their size, scale, and proportion. This alternative would not constitute an encroachment on the James Street Commons Historic District or the *Indian and the Puritan* sculpture. **However, this alternative does not meet the project need.**"

What is the project need? The city must clarify *why* these ancient trees are incompatible with landscape design. From attending previous community meetings, I do not remember the public complaining that they do not like parks with old trees. The only historical precedent in Newark for removing all trees from a public space is at Military Park. To construct the parking garage beneath Military Park in the 1960s, all trees above had to be removed. The empty expanse of the Great Lawn at Military Park once had dozens of hundred foot-tall trees like those that still survive at Washington Park.

When laying out this park in the 17th century, Newark city leaders had the wisdom and foresight to predict that public spaces might one day be destroyed for carriage and now car parking. As they wrote in the old city ordinances of 1676: "The Town seeing some trees spoiled in the streets by parking, or otherwise: The Town hath agreed that no green tree within the town as marked with N shall be barked or felled, or any otherwise killed, under the penalty of Ten Shillings so killed." The message is simple: Save our trees.

Exhibit 1: Map of proposed park overlaid with locations of trees in existing park
Green (tree locations in current park) vs. **Red** (tree locations in proposed park)

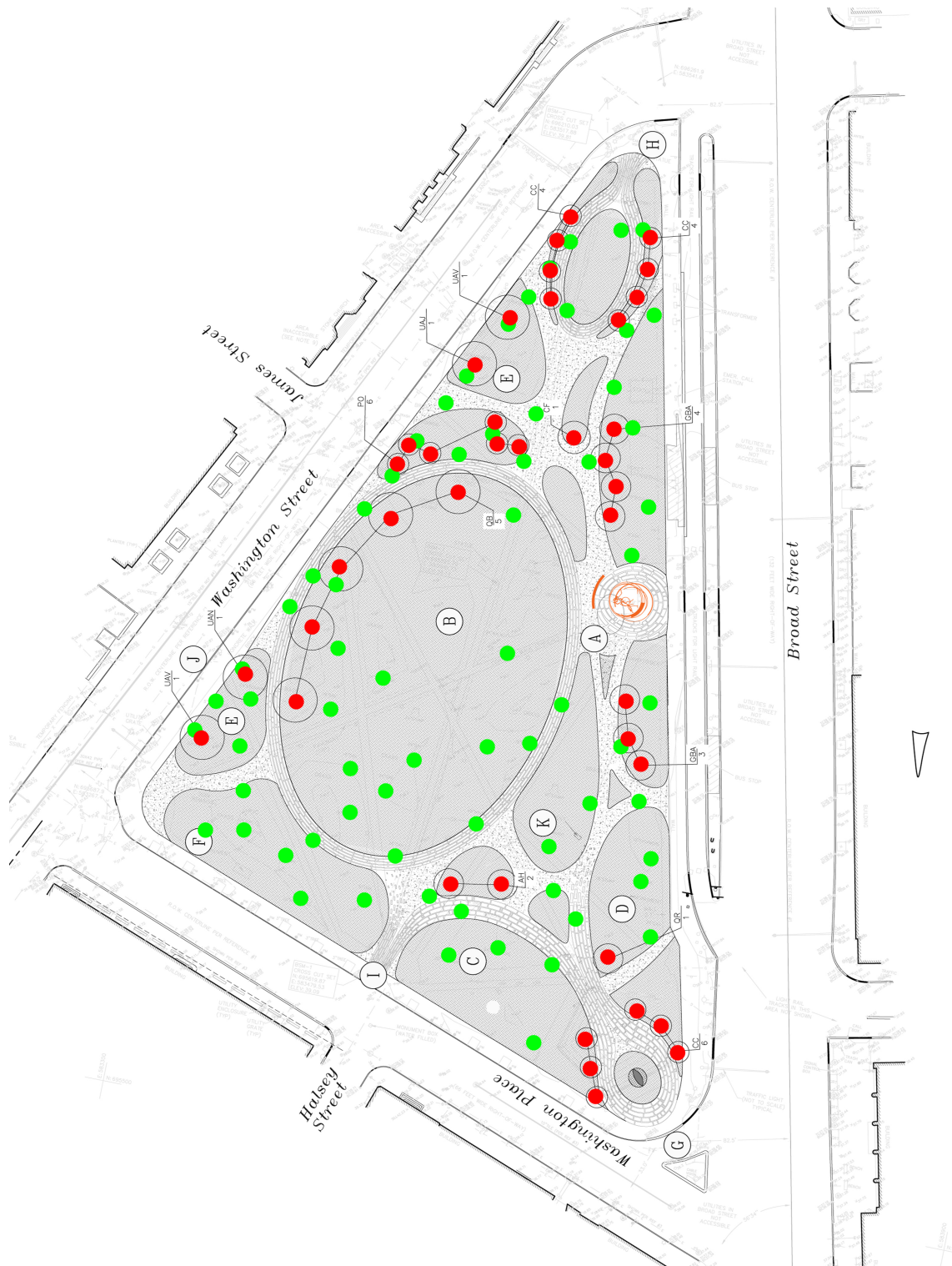
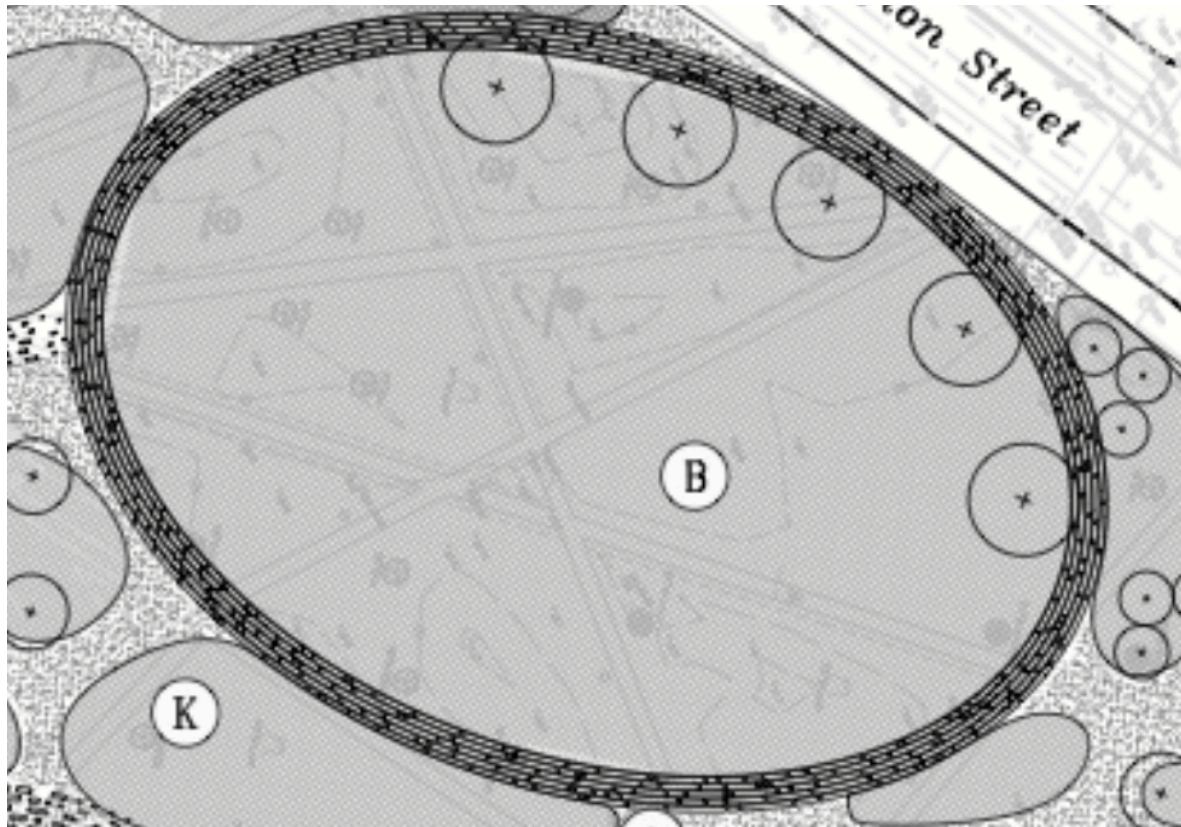


Exhibit 2: Detail of new park plan. The barely visible circles and light lines beneath the crosshatched grass indicate trees to be removed:



The City's report includes a detailed map of the new park with all new path locations. Traced beneath this map in low opacity is the plan of the current park, indicating dozens of trees lost. This contrast of the park before vs. after is almost invisible to the naked eye and requires a magnifying glass to view on the city's plans.

Exhibit 3: City’s illegible survey of current tree locations:



edgevate
landscape architecture & site planning
110 N. 11th St., Suite 200
East Orange, NJ 07027
973-821-6211 phone
973-821-6212 fax

CONSULTANTS

NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

PROJECT:
Harriet Tubman Monument
Tubman Square
Newark, NJ

SHEET TITLE:
Existing Conditions Plan

DATE: APRIL 19th, 2023
SCALE: AS NOTED
DRAWN: EDGEWATER
CHECK: EDGEWATER
SHEET: 3 OF 8
DESCRIPTION:

EXISTING CONDITIONS LEGEND:

- LIGHT POLE
- DECIDUOUS TREE
- SPOT ELEVATION
- SGN
- DECORATIVE FENCE
- ELECTRICAL LINE
- CONTOUR
- LIMIT OF DISTURBANCE
- PROPERTY LINE

Washington Street

Broad Street

Washington Place

STAGE

STONE PLAZA

MONUMENT

Scale: 1"=50'-0"

EXISTING CONDITIONS PLAN

X-101

Exhibit 5: Details from city's survey of tree locations in current park:

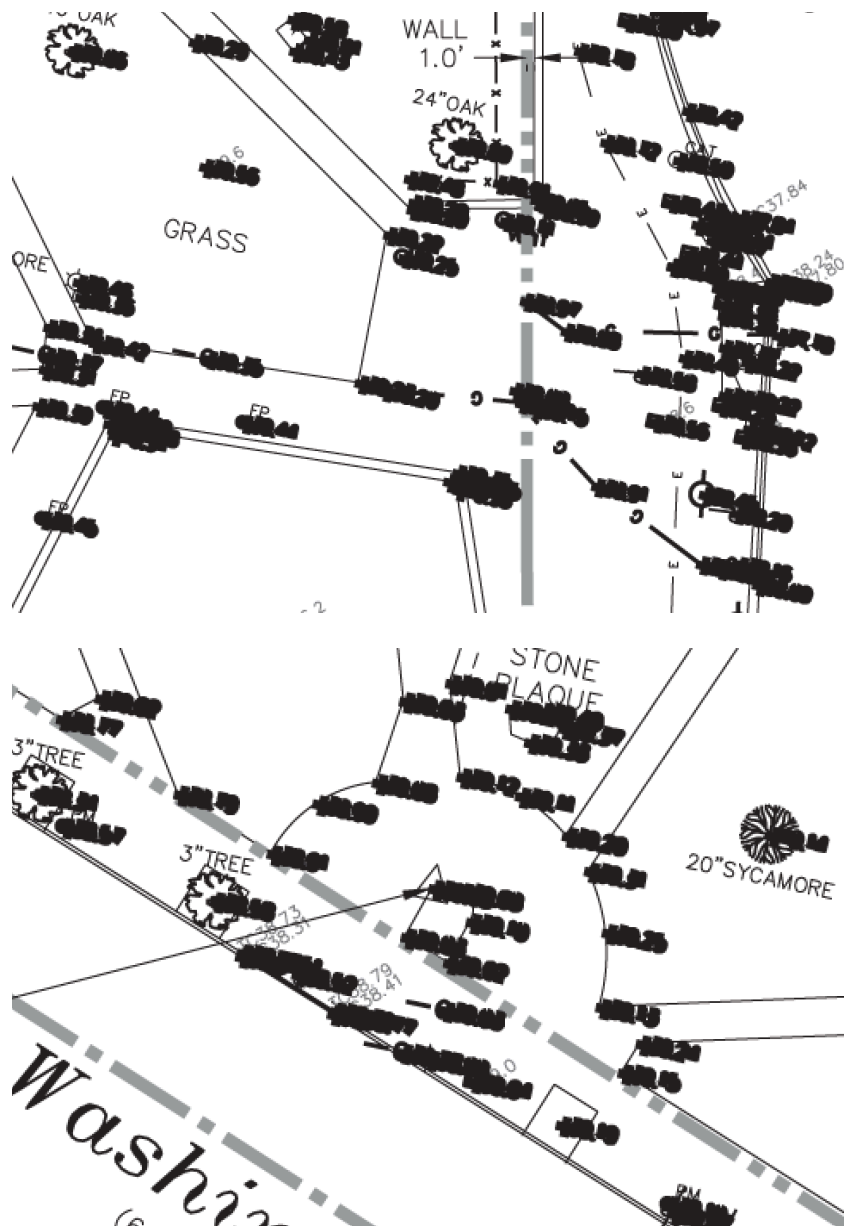


Exhibit 6: Excerpt from city's documentation of current site conditions



Exhibit 7: Inventory of trees to be killed:

Species	Trunk Diameter in Inches
Basswood (19X total)	5" 5" 9" 10" 10" 10" 10" 10" 10" 10" 11" 12" 12" 15" 15" 16" 18" 19" 36"
Cherry (2X)	2" 2"
Locust (2X)	14"

	24"
Maple (1X)	20"
Oak (26X)	12" 12" 14" 16" 16" 16" 16" 16" 16" 18" 20" 20" 24" 24" 24" 24" 24" 24" 24" 24" 26" 26" 26" 26" 30" 40"
Red Maple (1X)	10"
Sycamore (12X)	5" 12" 15" 18" 20" 20" 24" 24" 24" 24" 24" 34"
Tulip (1X)	30"
Walnut (2X)	24" 48"
66 trees total at risk	

Exhibit 8:

Inventory of replacement trees to be planted:

Species	Trunk Diameter in Inches
Red Horse Chestnut (2X)	3 to 3.5"
Forest Pansy Eastern Redbud (14X)	2.5 to 3"
Flowering Dogwood (1X)	3 to 3.5"
Autumn Gold Gingko (7X)	3 to 3.5"
Taiwan Cherry (6X)	3 to 3.5"
Swamp White Oak (5X)	3 to 3.5"
Northern Red Oak (1X)	3 to 3.5"
Jefferson American Elm (1X)	3 to 3.5"
American Elm (1X)	3 to 3.5"
Valley Forge American Elm (2X)	3 to 3.5"
40 replacement trees	