

**GREAT HILL PUBLIC RESTROOM RECONSTRUCTION**

## PROJECT SUMMARY

August 2023

**Background**

The part of the Park occupied by the Great Hill is rich in history. Once known as Harlem Heights, it commanded panoramic views in all directions. Because of its strategic elevation—134 feet above sea level—it was used as a military encampment during the Revolutionary War. Olmsted and Vaux in their design for Central Park took advantage of the site's steep topography, creating an oval carriage concourse that encircled the summit of the Great Hill and served as an outlook. The concourse offered spectacular views of Manhattan, the Hudson River and Palisades, and the Long Island Sound. From it, pedestrian pathways led into the surrounding landscape. The area along Central Park West between 103rd and 104th Streets is a spot of special significance in that it was the site of the Bogardus House, a farmstead that served as Olmsted's home during the Park's construction and the spot where he was married in 1859.

From the Park's early days, the Great Hill was conceived as a site for family outings. It is listed in an 1872 handbill, signed by Olmsted, that recommends locations in the Park suited to day-trips for children. Families arriving by carriage would take in the breathtaking views of the concourse, disembark and go for a stroll in the adjoining picturesque landscapes, and picnic or play in the shade of the central lawn. In 1909, wooden steps that had been added to provide access to the Great Hill from the 106th Street entrance were removed and replaced with the more rustic path and stone staircase that now exist.

The first half of the 20th century marked a shift away from flexible, multi-use landscapes to the creation of purpose-built facilities designed to accommodate specific recreational demands. Modifications to the Great Hill landscape reflected this trend. From the 1930s through the 1950s, it was transformed through the addition of game courts, benches, a public restroom, and numerous new paths. By the 1980s, the area had fallen into disrepair. The outdated recreational facilities were abandoned and deteriorating, and the surrounding landscapes were overgrown. In 1985, the Central Park Conservancy began the process of returning the Great Hill to its original character. The game courts were removed and returned to lawn. The Conservancy continued to restore the area through the 1990s and 2000s, improving the infrastructure, rebuilding pathways, and diversifying plantings along paths to better define the woodland edge. In renewing the Great Hill over the past two decades, the Conservancy has sought to emphasize the naturalistic character intended by the Park's designers.

**Existing Conditions**

The 400 SF single story structure includes a men's and women's restroom and a mechanical/storage room. It is a brick structure with a limestone cornice and a slate roof. The interior of the restrooms have a glazed terracotta block finish, quarry tile flooring and plaster ceiling. The elevation of the interior finished floor is 6" above the exterior grade, making the restrooms inaccessible. At some point in the building's history, the original windows were replaced with CMU blocks and the gas service that originally heated the building in winter was disconnected.

As part of the work performed on the surrounding landscape in 2005-2006, irrigation and water supply infrastructure was added to the mechanical/storage space of the building, including new

potable water service for the public restroom, and an electric service upgrade was completed. Additionally, an accessible exterior drinking fountain was installed adjacent to the building, with an area of accessible granite block adjoining the tumbled, inaccessible block surrounding the rest of the building. An older, inaccessible drinking fountain with granite step mounted on the exterior wall of the building remains.

## **Project Goals**

- Restore the building's exterior consistent with the historic design
- Update MEP systems to minimize carbon footprint while introducing electric heating to make the building a year round facility
- Improve restroom accessibility to meet jurisdictional requirements and best practices
- Create accessible routes to restroom facilities and adjacent park locations

## **Scope of Work**

### Building Envelope

- Selective replacement and repairs to the slate roof
- Restoration of the exterior masonry, including cleaning and repointing
- Replacement of windows and doors based on historic drawings
- Repair original drinking fountain

### Interior Renovation

- Reconfigure interior walls to accommodate an accessible stall in each restroom
- All new finishes, fixtures and fittings and accessories.
- Upgrade interior lighting to LED

### Building Systems

- New mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems

### Site Accessibility Improvements

- Replace existing granite blocks with ADA-accessible blocks
- Create accessible landings at each restroom entrance
- Slope up from existing loop trail to restroom entrance landings to create accessible route
- Pitch walkways away from building to achieve positive drainage