

IDEAS FOR A  
CONOMO POINT PARK

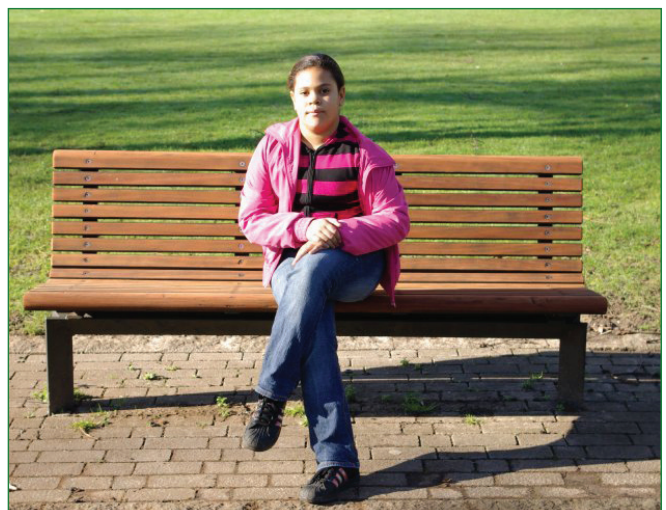
Conomo Point and the Essex Estuary are one of most spectacular recreational areas in the country. They demand a creative, fun, innovative park.



CONOMO POINT

Traditional park design - give the public benches and a glorified suburban lawn - is boring.

We can do better.





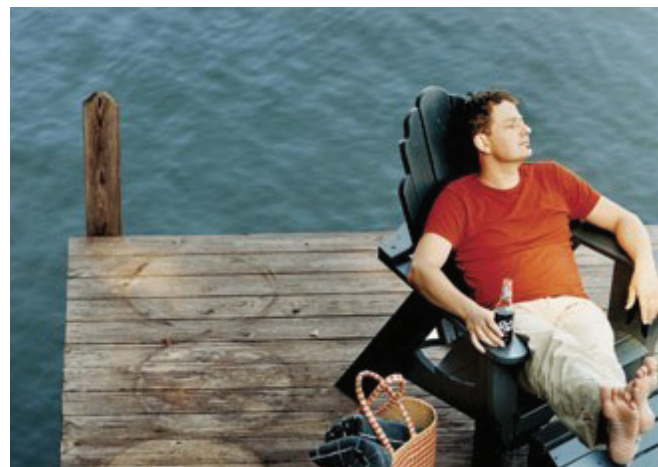
There has been a revolution in park design in the last decade. We don't have to regurgitate the off-the-rack, you've-seen-it-a-hundred-times-before park. New park design emphasizes welcoming, alluring amenities (think [HGTV Outdoor Room](#)) and designs uniquely adapted to the site. The picture below shows a park that - to use a technical architectural term - has the "Oh Wow!" factor.



How can we get that "Oh Wow!" quality at Conomo Point?

By satisfying peoples' dreams.

People dream of being right on the water.



I have biked most of the coast of New England. I have seen scores of water overlook parks. The iron law of water overlook parks is that people gather on the water's edge of the park. To create a magical park and to get the most bang for our buck, we should concentrate our efforts on facilities directly on the water or in the water. Pricey "Big Dig" options should be avoided.

## What waterfront amenities should the park feature?

1) The heart and soul of Conomo Point are the private front porches overlooking the ocean. Walk along the frontage road on a nice day and you will see scores of people on their porches taking naps, reading a trashy book, talking with friends, barbecuing. **WE SHOULD ATTEMPT TO GIVE THE PUBLIC AMENITIES THAT MIMIC THE PRIVATE VERANDA** - low-slung decks about the same size as a private porch, slightly cantilevered over the seawall, featuring chaises, hammocks or Adirondack chairs and a barbecue. Decks might also be placed beneath the seawall.





2) Docks. Even without any amenities, people congregate on the docks in far greater numbers than they do on the grassy verge above the seawall. Why not tart up the existing docks and create a few special-built recreational docks? Would you rather be on a park bench or swinging on a hammock on a gently rocking dock?



3) Floats. The great unused asset of Conomo Point is the low tide beach. The beach is relatively unused because the sand is cold, damp, and often times corrugated. To spend stationary time on the beach, people have to drag out beach chairs, then drag them back when the tide comes in. Why not put a string of floats along the beach equipped with awnings and comfortable furniture. At low tide, people could walk to them, enjoy the beach lifted above the clammy sand. At high tide, the floats could be destinations for kayakers and swimmers. Ask a local Essex craftsman or artist to design each float. Harold Burnham could create a float modeled on a schooner, Chris Williams a floating bestiary, and Burt Story an aviary of fantastic birds.



Chris Williams

And 4) A boathouse so that Essex residents have access to thousands of acres of the Estuary, not just to a few acres of Conomo Point land. We can start simply and inexpensively. Many cities have kayak racks on their beaches. A kayaker purchases a season sticker for his kayak, locks his kayak to the rack and does not have to transport his kayak every time he wants to use it.



One idea that many have advanced for Conomo Point is the removal of the frontage road.

The cost of removing the road and adding a narrow strip of grass to the existing lawn area (or substantially transforming the road) would be over \$100,000.

The frontage road works wonderfully in terms of traffic, recreation, pedestrian circulation and biking. It is used by mothers pushing prams, 90 year-olds with walkers, kids pedaling along, dog walkers, knots of friends or families walking together and older people who like to make a round of Conomo Point by car.

Are we, in fact, increasing public access by replacing a much-used feature of Conomo Point with a patch of sod at the cost of \$100,000? In these difficult economic times, wouldn't this one project soak up most or all of any money that was available for this park?

It is odd that while other municipalities are cherishing their old promenades, celebrating their new promenades (Newburyport, for instance) and other cities are busy creating new promenades, we are contemplating removing ours at great expense .





Another \$100,000 dollar project to avoid is a pavillion. We already have a more centrally located, beautifully restored, waterfront pavillion with ample parking at Centennial Grove. Centennial Cottage could be to Essex what Tucks Point is to Manchester. Why build a new pavillion that in style and location cannot rival what we already have? ( According to current plans, a CP pavillion would be marshfront instead of waterfront and would have no dedicated adjacent parking).

What kind of park do we want at Conomo Point?

Do we want a traditional, expensive, boring grasscentric park, assuming we could afford it?



Or do we want a fun, water-oriented park that relies more on creativity than on huge public expenditure?



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