Comments for the Rededication of the Great Lawn

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A University is, of course, a place of individual growth and the pursuit of knowledge. But beyond that, I believe a great University requires a strong sense of community – a community with a shared identity, a shared history, and a shared sense of hope and support for all the ways that students, staff and faculty can grow and excel.

I believe that central to this shared experience and central to a great university is a shared campus landscape. For us we have Horse Barn Hill and our beautiful agricultural landscape, the new Hillside Road with its vibrant urban feel. And the park-like places like the Great Lawn.

We grow to love the places where we can sit and reflect like the Benton Garden or Mirror Lake. We desire the social places like the Forum on Fairfield Way. And we revel in the open spaces where we can sit in the sun or throw a Frisbee.

Each of these makes up our campus landscape. And while we each spend large amounts of time in our own offices or our own dorm rooms or even our own vehicles - it is the time we spend in the landscape either with others or with our own thoughts that is the most meaningful to us.

In 2009 the Office of University Planning under the Direction of Alex Roe undertook a study to help the University enhance this campus landscape. The overarching goal of this effort and the Landscape Master Plan which came out of it was set a clear path to improve the safety, function and aesthetics of the Storrs Campus in a responsible and sustainable way.

To set this clear path for improvement the Landscape Master Plan focused on two methods of guiding the design of the campus landscape. First it set standards and selected specific materials or specific items for use in the campus landscape. Pavements for roadways and walkways were selected, the materials to be used in steps and walls were specified and benches, lighting, bike racks and even trash receptacles were chosen. These selections are intended to promote a level of uniformity and consistency across the campus while still allowing for individual places to have a unique character when appropriate.

The second way that the Landscape Master Plan guides the design of the campus landscape is by describing the character and design goals of all of the areas of campus. To accomplish this the campus planners at Sasaki Associates, who assisted the University with the study, split the campus into 9 distinct districts based on their unique character.

A good deal of observation and research was undertaken to decide on these district and to understand each of them. The report describes the Defining Characteristics of each district and then lays out specific Objectives and then Guidelines for each district. Together these describe what makes each of the districts unique and valuable; and then lays out how to best move forward to protect and improve the character of the districts. The report goes on to describe specific areas within each district and gives specific guidance, through words, images, plans and other drawings for the planning and design of each area.

The Great Lawn is located within the Lower Park District which also includes Mirror Lake and Swan Lake, the historic quad between Beech Hall and CLAS, the area around Wilbur Cross and the Benton Museum and the Oak Lawn area behind Arjona. Some of the words used to describe the Lower Park District include:

- It is remarkable for its stylistic unity and spatial composition
- Buildings and landscape play equal roles.
- The architecture has a consistent style
- It is an informal, naturalistic park
- The Campus as arboretum is an over-arching concept
- 87% open space, 11% building space and 2% parking
- It is listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places

The Landscape Master Plan goes on to specifically describe the Great Lawn, calling it the public face of the University. I believe this to be very true and find that whenever I talk with alumni or others who visited campus the great lawn remains in their memory. The report also describes the Great Lawn as having large spaces, with long views and irregularly planted edges and large, notable specimen trees.

The Landscape Master Plan recommends that the undulating, irregular edges of the Great Lawn be maintained to create both large spaces and smaller subspaces that allow for a continuous sequence of discovery. Pedestrian lighting should be limited so as not to interrupt the long, gracious views. And plantings should consist of large and medium sized trees that will be appropriately scaled to the size of the space and have the potential to reach a grand size.

And that brings us to one of the reasons we have gathered here today. Along with gathering folks with an interest in our environment and campus landscape and hearing about the history of the great lawn and rededicating this wonderful landscape - we are here to plant three trees as a tangible symbol of our rededication. These trees will enhance the undulating edges of the

great lawn, add visual interest, assist with storm water management, and help to improve our shared campus landscape - the shared campus landscape which is central to our sense of community and to our great University. We hope these trees live a good long life so that they continue to mark our rededication to the Great Lawn and to our campus landscape for many years to come.

A digital version of The Landscape Master Plan can be found on this page:

http://www.masterplan.uconn.edu/storrs.html