

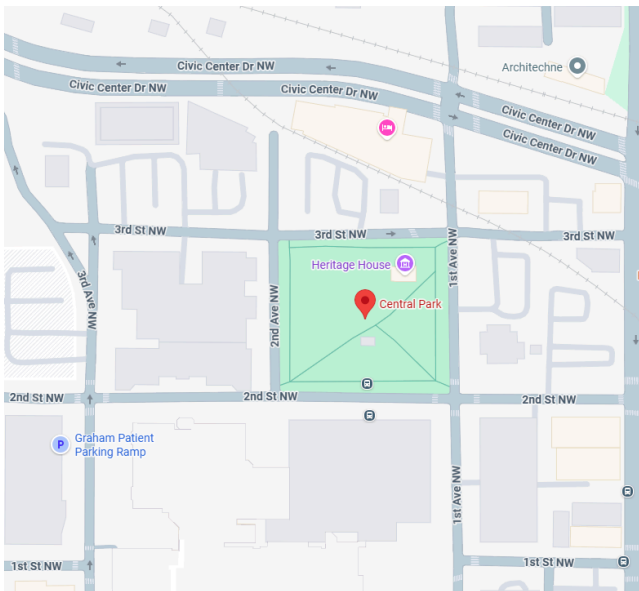
CENTRAL PARK PLAZA

Dedicated July 30, 2004

In 1856, W.D. Lowery donated his cow pasture to establish Rochester's first park, Central Park. In the 1800s Central Park was the gathering place for picnics, band concerts and ice cream socials with a majestic fountain as the centerpiece.

In 2004, Rochester's 150th anniversary, Leadership Greater Rochester—a program of the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce—partnered with Rochester Park and Recreation Department to restore the majesty of Central Park. This project included replacing the fountain, creating a brick plaza, replacing the sidewalks and improving accessibility for everyone.

The Leadership Greater Rochester class of 2004 would like to recognize the following community members for their generous support of our vision of Enhancing the Future While Preserving the Past.



Central Park Audit

Summary Report for Rochester Parks and Recreation

May 2026

AGE FRIENDLY
OLMSTED COUNTY
Livable communities for longer lives.

Central Park Older Adult Park Audit

Summary Report for Rochester Parks and Recreation

*Prepared from scanned audit worksheets and handwritten notes
submitted through Age Friendly Olmsted County*

May 2026

Purpose of this report: Compile practical observations from older adult park audit worksheets for Central Park near Charter House. The audit was designed as a resident observation exercise, not a technical engineering inspection. Comments below should be read as lived-experience feedback to inform future park planning, maintenance, accessibility, safety, and programming decisions.

Executive Summary

Older adult auditors generally described Central Park as valued, pleasant, shaded, and full of potential. The park's fountain, mature trees, and historic character were repeatedly identified as features to protect. At the same time, the worksheets point to several practical barriers that affect comfort, safety, and use, especially for older adults and people with mobility or vision concerns.

- Overall impression: Mostly positive, with several auditors rating the park as good for safety, comfort, welcome, ease of movement, and pleasantness. A few rated key elements only fair or poor, especially where safety, seating, or park usability were concerned.
- Most valued features: Fountain, mature trees, shade, historic character, quiet atmosphere, central gathering space, and proximity to Charter House.
- Recurring concerns: Uneven pavement and brick surfaces, trip hazards, hard-to-see edges, speeding bikes or scooters, traffic proximity, restroom usability and location, litter, lighting, and perceptions of safety.
- Most common improvements requested: More stable and age-friendly seating, chairs or benches with arms and backs, better tables, improved lighting, safer walking surfaces, more landscaping, clearer signs, restroom attention, and more regular activity in the park.
- General conclusions: Auditors did not call for a complete redesign. The strongest message was to preserve the park's historic, shaded, quiet character while making it safer, more comfortable, more accessible, and more actively used.

Findings at a Glance

Theme	What auditors noticed
Access and movement	Most auditors could enter and move through the park, but several noted uneven pavement, broken bricks, steps, hard-to-see edges, and trip hazards.
Seating and tables	Seating was appreciated but often described as needing improvement. Notes called for shorter chairs, arms, backs, stable tables, and more seating.
Fountain, trees, and history	The fountain, mature trees, and historic character were repeatedly named as assets that should not be lost.
Safety and comfort	Concerns included lighting, traffic, speeding bikes/scooters, litter, restroom concerns, visibility, and a desire for emergency call options.
Landscape and identity	Auditors asked for better landscaping, color, texture, native plantings, and maintenance that does not block visibility.
Use and programming	Auditors suggested music, small events, walking groups, exercise classes, workshops, pop-up exhibits, food trucks, and other regular uses.

Background and Method

The Central Park audit used a park audit worksheet focused on access, movement, seating, shade, comfort, the plaza and fountain, historic character, safety, maintenance, visibility, usefulness for older adults, and desired improvements.

There were six auditors. Five were residents of the Charter House senior living community selected by Charter House staff. The residents were two men and three women ages 70+, white, one using a cane. The sixth auditor was a Charter House staff member who assisted in organizing the audit. Auditors were accompanied by Jeff Feece, Park Planner, City of Rochester Parks and Recreation Department and Dave Beal, Age-Friendly Olmsted County Coordinator, Family Service Rochester.

After a brief orientation regarding park audits, the role of a park auditor, and the park audit worksheets (included with this report), the participants walked to Central Park which is adjacent to the Charter House residence building. The group walked through the park, offering and discussing their observations followed by a general discussion.

The worksheet asked auditors to check boxes and add handwritten comments. This report organizes those comments into themes. The emphasis is on repeated themes rather than exact survey tabulation.

Detailed Findings

1. Overall impression of the park

Overall ratings leaned positive. Multiple worksheets marked the park as good for comfort, welcome, ease of movement, and pleasantness. Several fair ratings appeared for safety, comfort, or pleasantness, suggesting that the park is valued but not yet consistently comfortable for all older adults.

Handwritten descriptions included phrases such as “active, cool, peaceful,” “calm,” “historic,” and “filled with potential to be a central treasured park.” One auditor concluded simply that the park “needs work.”

The overall tone was not rejection of the park. It was an invitation to improve a valued public space while protecting what makes it distinctive.

2. Getting to and moving through the park

Most auditors were able to enter from Charter House or nearby sidewalks, but several marked the experience as only somewhat easy or noted issues with traffic and nearby street conditions.

Positive checkmarks appeared for smooth, wide, easy-to-follow paths and mobility-device friendliness, but these were offset by written concerns about uneven pavement, broken brick, steps, hard-to-see edges, and trip hazards.

Several comments raised bike and scooter speed or traffic as a safety concern. This is especially important because older adults may need more time to react, cross, or navigate shared spaces.

3. Seating, tables, shade, and comfort

Shade was one of the park's strengths. Auditors consistently valued the mature trees and generally found enough shade.

Seating and tables were a more mixed finding. Comments mentioned chairs without arms, furniture in disrepair, wobbly tables and chairs, a need for shorter chairs with arms, a need for more seating, and picnic tables needing improvement.

The worksheets suggest that seating should be treated as core accessibility infrastructure, not just a convenience. For many older adults, the difference between a pass-through park and a usable park is the availability of stable, well-placed seating with arms and backs.

4. Plaza, fountain, and historic character

The fountain, plaza, Heritage House, mature trees, and historic character were repeatedly identified as important. "Fountain" and "big trees" were among the most common answers to what the park should not lose.

Auditors generally saw the central plaza as attractive and meaningful but needing maintenance, better signage, and attention to repair. Some comments suggested that the central area can remain a gathering place if surfaces, seating, and supporting features are improved.

The historic character appears to be a major source of identity. Several comments called for highlighting or interpreting the park's heritage and historic significance rather than allowing those features to fade into the background.

5. Safety, maintenance, and visibility

Safety concerns were among the most repeated findings. Auditors checked or wrote comments about uneven pavement, trip hazards, poor lighting, hard-to-see edges, litter, restroom concerns, and landscaping that can block visibility.

Perceptions of safety also mattered. Some notes mentioned restrooms not being usable or not open to the public, concerns about vagrancy or people lingering, and a desire for emergency call boxes or call stations similar to those used on campuses or in parking ramps.

These comments point to a combination of physical repairs, maintenance routines, visibility improvements, lighting review, and activation. A park that is used regularly and visibly cared for is likely to feel safer.

6. Usefulness for older adults

Auditors identified quiet sitting, reading, visiting, small gathering, walking through, fountain/history, and occasional programming as appropriate uses for the park.

Suggested additions included music, exercise, activities, workshops, group walks, pop-up exhibits, ice cream or food trucks, and other small events. These ideas imply that Central Park could serve both as a quiet refuge and as a modest neighborhood gathering place.

The strongest programming theme was not large-scale events. It was regular, manageable activity that gives older adults a reason to enter, stay, and feel connected to the space.

Identified Preferences

- 1. Start with safety and accessibility repairs.** Review and address uneven pavement, broken brick, hard-to-see edges, steps, and trip hazards. Focus first on the most-used paths from Charter House, sidewalks, plaza entries, benches, fountain, and any restroom or destination points.
- 2. Upgrade seating as an age-friendly feature.** Provide a mix of stable benches and chairs with arms and backs. Include seating in shade and sun, near the fountain, along routes, and around gathering spaces. Avoid furniture that is too low, too wobbly, or difficult to rise from.
- 3. Preserve and highlight the fountain, mature trees, and historic character.** Make these features anchors of the future plan. Improve maintenance, interpretation, and signage so visitors understand why the park matters.
- 4. Improve lighting, visibility, and perceived safety.** Assess lighting, sightlines, landscaping height, restroom visibility, and areas where people may feel isolated. Consider emergency call options, clearer wayfinding, and routine maintenance practices that reinforce care and safety.
- 5. Address restroom access and usability.** Clarify whether restrooms are intended for public use and, if so, make them visible, signed, accessible, and reliably maintained. If not, communicate nearby alternatives and consider future facility needs.
- 6. Add landscape beauty while maintaining open sightlines.** Use plantings for color, texture, seasonal interest, and possibly native species, while avoiding plantings that block visibility or narrow accessible movement routes.
- 7. Test small-scale programming and activation.** Pilot group walks, music, exercise classes, pop-up exhibits, workshops, seasonal events, or regular small gatherings. Programming can help determine what improvements will support real use.
- 8. Return to older adults with concept options.** Before finalizing a plan, share two or three concept alternatives with Charter House residents and other older adults. Ask which features would make them use the park more often and which features must be protected.

Possible Quick Wins

- Remove or repair the most obvious trip hazards and uneven brick or pavement areas.
- Add or reposition a small number of stable chairs or benches with arms and backs.
- Inspect and repair wobbly tables and movable chairs; remove furniture that is unsafe or difficult to use.
- Improve lighting and edge visibility where feasible.
- Add temporary signs explaining the fountain, Heritage House, and historic park character.
- Trim or adjust landscaping that blocks visibility while preserving shade and mature trees.
- Clarify restroom availability and improve signage if public restrooms are available.
- Pilot one or two small recurring activities, such as a weekly walk, coffee gathering, music hour, or pop-up exhibit.

Themes Reflected in Individual Worksheets

Notable comments and themes
Mixed overall ratings; concerns about usefulness and safety; comments about limited usable options, need for tables/chairs with arms, flowers/landscaping, activities, and protecting the historic house/park character.
Annotated handout emphasized practical observations such as fountain, stairs without arms, uneven ground, tables/chairs, daytime activity, and possible programs such as group walks, exercise classes, workshops, and events.
Described the park as “filled with potential” and a possible treasured central park. Noted busy street context, possible nighttime uncertainty, need for signage, lighting in the center space, improved chairs/tables, maintenance, and historic interpretation.
Described the park as “active, cool, peaceful.” Marked concerns about pavement, trip hazards, restrooms, and landscaping. Recommended protecting trees, improving landscaping, and not losing big trees and the fountain.
Described the park as calm and historic. Noted uneven pavement, poor lighting, restroom concerns, need for better paths, lighting, flowers/landscaping, activities, and more safety. Emphasized fountain protection.
Raised safety concerns, including scooters/bikes traveling fast and people lingering. Suggested emergency call boxes, better furniture, landscape upgrades, and possible quiet or meditative space.
Saw the park as nice and useful, but noted steps, broken or uneven bricks, small wobbly tables/chairs, lighting and trip hazards. Suggested more benches, shade, paths, lighting, landscaping, activities, restrooms, signage, and regular pop-up activities. Identified the fountain as a feature to keep.
Generally positive overall ratings. Noted need for more seating, safety concerns about speeding bikes/scooters, and value in historic significance, quiet space, and beautiful fountain.