

THE RAMAPO COLLEGE SPIRITUAL CENTER

“Education is one of the most effective ways of improving the quality of human life. Intellectual brilliance is most valuable when it is balanced with a sense of awe before the mystery of the universe and a sense of reverence for the whole environment of life in which we live. Ramapo College is committed to these ideals.”

-- From the Dedication of the Salameno Spiritual Center

HISTORY OF THE RAMAPO COLLEGE SPIRITUAL CENTER

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, faculty members, students, administrators, and friends of Ramapo College were concerned about the students, particularly their mental health. Many students knew someone who had a family member who perished in the attacks, and all students had either visited or knew about the World Trade Center site, given our close proximity to downtown Manhattan. The attacks were top-of-mind for months afterward, and dominated conversations among all members of the campus community. It soon became clear that Ramapo needed a space on campus where students could step out of the hubbub of our busy campus and spend a quiet moment in thoughtful reflection.

In response to this need, Ramapo created the Salameno Spiritual Center (herein referred to as the Spiritual Center). The Center is located in the heart of campus, yet transports the visitor to a peaceful space that is close to nature. After passing through an aluminum gate designed by sculptor and faculty member Jay Wholley, the visitor walks a short path to the main building, with native plantings on either side. To the right of the main building is a wooden terrace that overlooks Kameron Pond. Continuing to the right, just steps from the terrace, is the Padovano Commons, a bright, airy stone building suitable for small events and gatherings.

In its first years the Salameno Spiritual Center fulfilled its purpose of providing a serene place for reflection, where individuals could feel closer to nature, where faithful groups could meet, and where members of the community could connect with each other in a thoughtful way. In the words of former Board Chairman Rev. Dr. Vernon C. Walton, it became a place “where joy can be celebrated, where our hearts can be healed, and where love can be shared.”

CURRENT STATE OF THE SPIRITUAL CENTER IN 2024

Unfortunately, in recent years the three Spiritual Center buildings have experienced water infiltration, mold, decay, and other safety issues. As a result, the main structure has been deemed uninhabitable, and the other problematic buildings have not been used since 2016. Rather than have a Spiritual Center that is unusable and empty, the College would like to dismantle the existing structures and create a new environment that fulfills the Center’s original intent of meeting the spiritual needs of students and the campus community.

THE CONCEPT FOR REJUVENATION (Please refer to the diagrams at the Enclosure.)

Ramapo College will rejuvenate this area of the campus to take advantage of its natural setting on the edge of Kameron Pond. This rejuvenation will complement recent renovations to the Padovano Commons and link the two together. The renovation of the Padovano Commons created an attractive indoor space that is climate controlled, is large enough to hold up to 100 people, and includes an open floor plan with seating for small groups and individuals, gender inclusive restrooms, and an area for food service.

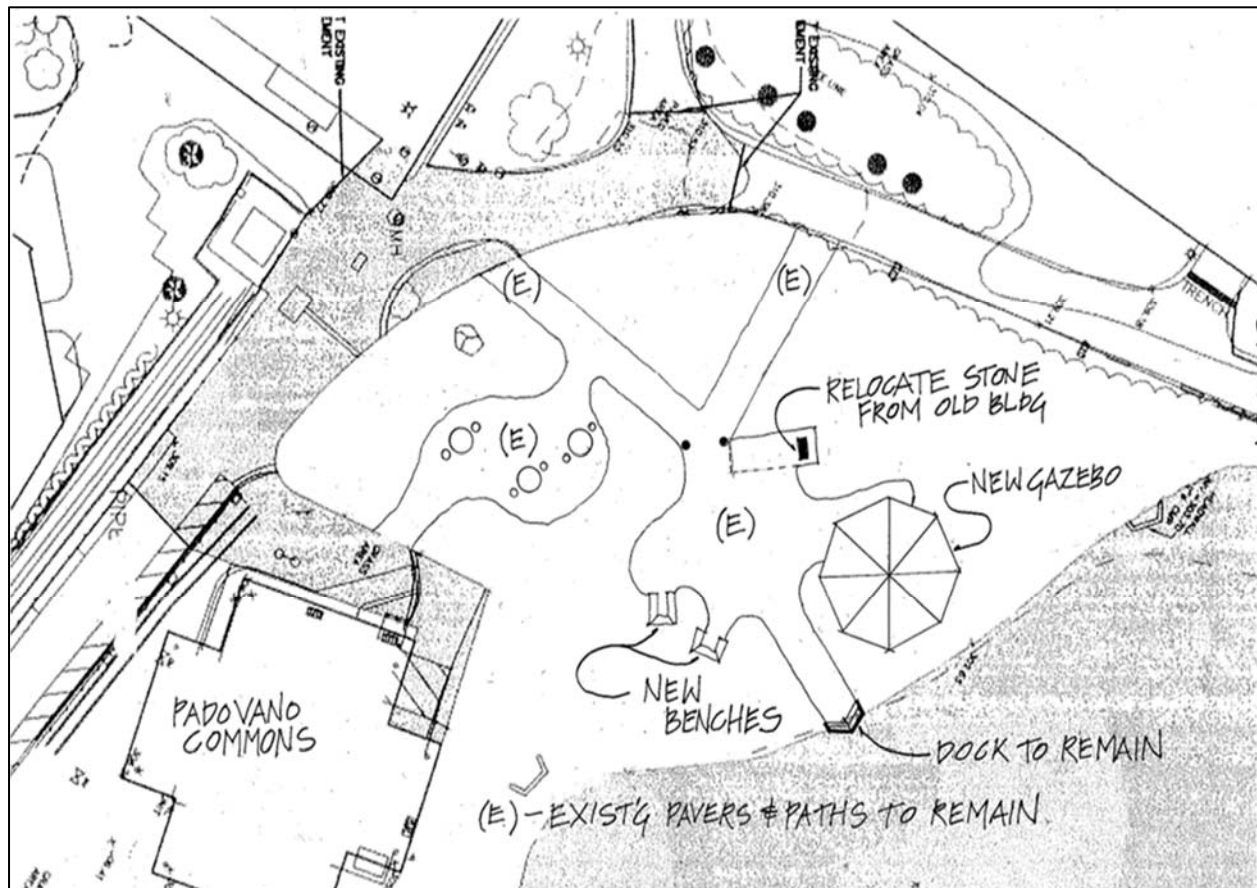
On the site of the former Peace Pavilion, the College wishes to create an environment that is more connected to the outdoors, and has more direct views of Kameron Pond and the surrounding landscape. The main building will be replaced by an open, gazebo-like structure that is covered yet allows for open-air views on every side. The two individual meditation pods will be replaced by comfortable outdoor seating places. The restroom and storage building will no longer be needed, as those functions are better served by the adjacent Padovano Commons building that is linked by a short pathway. Those structures will be removed which will better connect the center back to the campus rather than hide it. Interspersed among the plantings will be the signage that recognized the original donors to the Spiritual Center, several of the existing finished marble benches, and small pathways which use the same style and pattern as the existing stone pavers.

The rejuvenated outdoor Spiritual Center will continue to serve the needs of the college community. Students will be able to meet for quiet conversation or contemplation, take yoga classes, participate in guided meditation sessions, share a meal, and hold student club meetings from late spring through the fall. It will be an attractive space for faculty members to hold a class outdoors. Alumni, friends of the College, and members of the public will be able to rent the space separately or in conjunction with the Padovano Commons for small events and gatherings.

CONCLUSION

Ramapo College strives to ensure the well-being of students, and to take a comprehensive approach toward their education. The quality of Ramapo's educational experience is outstanding, but the College recognizes that there are moments in a student's day where they may need to step back from the pressures of class work, issues in the news, social media, and challenging relationships. Having a space where not only students, but also all members of the campus community, can find tranquility in nature fits with Ramapo's mission, and strengthens students by fostering hope and well-being.

Enclosure. Diagrams of Rejuvenated Salameno Spiritual Center.



Schematic of the site (formerly known as the site of the Peace Pavilion).



View into the rejuvenated outdoor spiritual center via the path entering near the Student Center.



View into the rejuvenated outdoor spiritual center from the entrance gate.



View into the rejuvenated outdoor spiritual center via the path entering near H-wing.



View into the proposed gazebo from the new benches in the plaza connected to the Padovano Commons.



Reverse view from proposed gazebo toward new benches in the plaza connected to the Padovano Commons.



Similar view from outside the proposed gazebo toward new benches and the Padovano Commons.



View of new benches as facing the Padovano Commons (with proposed gazebo to the rear).



View of new benches as facing Kameron Pond with proposed gazebo on left and the Padovano Commons to the right.



Close up view of new benches as facing Kameron Pond.



View from proposed gazebo toward main gate and the entrance near the Student Center.



View from Kameron Pond toward the proposed gazebo and the main academic complex.



View from the proposed gazebo toward the entrance path as facing H-wing.



View from path as exiting toward H-wing.



View from near the main gated entrance toward the academic complex.