

Chapter 1

Introduction

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Mission of the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy

"To preserve the legacy of Louisville's Olmsted Parks and Parkways for all generations to come." This is the mission of the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy, a public-private partnership with the City of Louisville. The Conservancy acts as a long-term steward of the historic and natural resources, in order to sustain the vitality of the Olmsted Parks system for the 21st century.

Louisville's Olmsted Parks and Parkways, one of the last major works by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and one of only five parks and parkway systems he designed, had fallen into various states of disrepair and misuse by the 1980s. In 1989, Mayor Jerry Abramson established a planning and funding partnership between the City and the private sector—the Louisville Olmsted Parks and Conservancy—to undertake a master plan and raise money for its implementation.

This Master Plan addresses the original parts of the Olmsted park system—Shawnee, Iroquois and Cherokee parks and the parkways. It has been managed by the Conservancy with a multi-disciplinary team of landscape architects, historians, engineers and ecologists, who worked closely with many of Louisville's citizens the Louisville and Jefferson County Parks Department and city and county agencies. An initial period of intensive community coordination was directed by The Halvorson Company. Their work, in coordination with the Conservancy, included public workshops and interviews with more than 600 individuals, including elected officials, public agencies, community leaders, and the public at large. An intensive historical research process paralleled this community input. Dr. Charles Beveridge and Arleyn Levee uncovered the Olmsted design and park development record, and gathered documentary resources.

Initially the project team studied this information to determine common threads and shared values. We synthesized these as "Guiding Principles" which reflect enduring values that were drawn from the past, are appropriate today, and will be valid in the future.

Guiding Principles of the Master Plan

- All actions must be guided by respect for the inherent landscape quality of each park and the parkway system. The historic Olmsted design shaped places for public enjoyment, guided by the unique qualities of each park. Current and future efforts must respect and renew this legacy.
- Natural processes are the foundation of these resources. All decisions must sustain these processes so that natural systems are preserved and enhanced.
- These parks and parkways form a unique component of the city fabric, a contributing factor to the quality of life for all citizens. Future efforts must understand the parks system's larger setting, both in terms of community perception and physical environment.
- People of all ages and abilities should be able to enjoy a variety of recreational opportunities that can be supported by the landscape and facilities.
- Ultimately, the character and quality of these parks will depend on how they are managed. Skills, training, staffing, volunteer coordination, and a stable funding base are needed to ensure the fulfillment of these principles over time.

An inventory of natural, cultural and physical components of the landscapes found resources at risk throughout the system. The infrastructure of circulation, drainage and built elements is in various states of failure and functions at a minimal level. The current condition of Olmsted's original design and the environmental systems were examined in detail. Natural and historic resources are deteriorated, sometimes to a point of loss, and as these once rich and varied places have become depleted and fragmented, the community has lost touch with the power and meaning of these parks and parkways.

Three key objectives permeate this Master Plan and are perceived as the crux of its program for renewal. If these are met, the mission will be fulfilled.

- Build an ethic of stewardship for the public landscape as a community based partnership.
- Integrate ecological restoration and historic preservation to shape the future vision.
- Upgrade the staffing and expertise of Metro Parks to bring skills and resources to the management of the living and built landscapes.

The Conservancy must spark the renewal of these public resources with vision and perseverance. The purpose of this Master Plan is to focus attention and energies on the most significant factors that are responsible for the pattern of deterioration and to define a renewal program for the Parks and Parkways that frames a broader vision, recognizing original intentions, restoring health and function, and creating a new spirit of positive involvement.

Building an Ethic of Stewardship for the Public Landscape—A Community Partnership

Restoring the Olmsted Parks will succeed only when we begin to rebuild a community-based ethic of care and vision—stewardship—for the public landscape.

A massive human and financial effort was required to build Shawnee, Iroquois and Cherokee Parks and the Parkways. The people involved exhibited a constancy of care and vision to establish, maintain and manage them, over a period of about fifty years, from the late 19th century to World War II. In this period of effective stewardship, people understood the value of these public landscapes to the life and vitality of the city.

Over the last four decades, this constancy of stewardship has been lost. Although the role of parks has not changed, our society and the context in which the parks occur has been dramatically altered. The very features that first inspired the creation of this park system, including the great meadow and river frontage of Shawnee, the magnificent knob forest of Iroquois, and the pastoral character of Cherokee, are seriously imperiled today by age, deterioration, misuse and severe impacts from development both within and surrounding the parks. The Master Plan would be a failure if it sought only to restore past characters and did not take its current uses and conditions into account. Strategic planning that sets up appropriate administrative structures and public programming is equally important to ensure community-wide and agency-wide participation in the design development and implementation of the plan. A physical plan, however well thought-out, will not be enough to reconcile longstanding user conflicts and outdated management practices.

Every major city park administration is confronting similar problems. In the face of a nationwide crisis of deferred maintenance and deteriorating natural systems, this Master Plan envisions a strategy for design and management that can serve as a model for other park systems. The overall goal is to shift the balance in favor of incremental restoration rather than continuous degradation by integrating ecological management into all aspects of use and care of the landscape. This plan is intended to go beyond simple consent of the community to active participation in the renewal of the parks and parkways.

Integrating Ecological Restoration and Historic Preservation

Renewing these public landscapes calls for a blend of history, ecology, contemporary use, management and maintenance. "Sustainability" requires that we learn to support many overlapping and interrelated values, rather than favoring one over the other. Natural systems have inherent value; indigenous plants and wildlife must be protected without being impaired by recreation or other uses. Indeed this is the standard for use. Similarly historic resources must be safeguarded and maintained by a skilled workforce.

This ecological focus centers on whole systems. It requires us to integrate natural, cultural and social resource management—an integration that is long overdue in our understanding of landscapes. This management plan goes beyond the boundaries of historic landscape preservation to recognize that the overall context of these landscapes is equally vital, although substantially changed since Olmsted's era.

In addition to recreating some of the historical design interventions undertaken by Olmsted we also have to confront the need to restore the larger settings of the Olmsted era, including the indigenous natural communities and the historic pastoral scenery as well as the spirit of positive community involvement that were the context for the original designs. It is not sufficient to replant according to the original Olmsted plan without any consideration of the whole landscape that is the sum of what was planted as well as what existed there originally. In the case of Louisville's parks, what was there comprised some of the most scenic landscapes and important natural areas in the city. We cannot begin to hope to restore the character of the original Olmsted parks without the natural and pastoral landscapes that were their centerpieces.

It is tempting to guess what Olmsted would say if he were alive, and could see the condition of the parks' landscapes today. Ultimately we have to take a position based on our understanding of our time. The parks and parkways as they exist are a combination of the Olmsted vision and a series of incremental and major changes over their century of use.



13439 Spring in Cherokee Park, Louisville, Ky.

Historical view of Barringer Springs, near the Eastern Parkway entrance to Cherokee Park, as depicted in a postcard postmarked 1909. This scene is evocative of the landscape's richness of meadows and woodlands along with the park's original built features at the source of Barringer Springs, where a small boy can be seen with a cup of water. (Private collection John Gnoffo)

In his time, Olmsted represented some of the most enlightened thinking about the environment. Today we have the new discipline/science of ecology to help us see these landscapes as living systems. At the same time, we also seek to recapture past cherished historical or cultural values. The goal is to greatly expand the broader ecological mandate of historic preservation and to recognize that reclaiming the integrity of the original Olmsted design requires that we also restore the indigenous ecosystems and pastoral scenery of the parks.

For example, Barringer Hill in Cherokee Park has changed dramatically from the mature forest and specimen trees that were the setting for blankets of greensward on the gently rolling terrain. The tornado damage and cumulative impacts of surrounding development have taken a heavy toll on the forests and stream corridor. The original scale of the massive beech trees cannot be replaced at any price. The specific Olmsted plantings on record were set into a completely different context than would be the case today.

One way to reestablish this character might be to replant the Olmsted design against the backdrop of the younger forest, on the grounds that they both will mature in time and that these plantings are undertaken with a long term perspective. Another approach would be to use groves of existing younger trees to evoke the character of a single more massive past tree. Underplanting both grove and forest with beech would bring back the beech stands over the long term. All three approaches envision American beech in the future, but the character of the interim landscape is very different. Another variation would be to plant very large specimens of fast growing trees to recreate the scale of individual trees as quickly as possible. These examples illustrate how historical designs and current conditions offer options to be considered in fulfilling the goals of the Master Plan.

In this Master Plan, in response to these realities, we have tried to balance our modern understanding of the landscape as an ecological system with a recognition of the historic significance of an Olmsted landscape. In all cases, the original documentation as well as a detailed record of the changing conditions over time is reviewed. In addition to the historical record are considerations of how successful any given planting was, in terms of survival and maintenance requirements. Environmental factors are also weighed, such as invasive exotic species brought in with original plantings or in more recent times. The current landscape conditions are assessed for their value as plant and animal habitat. The recommendations have been designed to sustain both indigenous communities and historic characters.

Upgrading Staffing and Expertise

Renewing the Olmsted Parks cannot be accomplished by doing several capital projects and providing no follow through. Too often master plans become a case of one or two capital funding rounds. Without a matching increase in staffing, expertise and commitment improvements degrade quickly and the investments fail to fulfill their promises. A reality that must be faced for this Master Plan to succeed is that Metro Parks has very limited staffing, insufficient equipment and is in need of additional skills. The current work force is not adequate to meet the challenge of sustaining the Olmsted legacy. Therefore, the renewal of the parks and parkways must go hand in hand with the renewal of Metro Parks, with the support of the Conservancy and the public.

The transition to sustainable park management will depend on developing the expertise of the parks department and related city agencies, as well as the level of participation and education of the public at large, who are as much a focus of this plan as capital improvements. A core recommendation of this master plan is to effect the required linkage of three critical components: (1) Programming to help park users and park managers become "stewards" of their parks; (2) the upgrading of Metro Parks' staff, equipment, and training for on going in-house projects and to provide maintenance; and (3) a coherent sequence of capital improvements to address features and infrastructure that need rebuilding. To initiate major capital projects without the other components would lead to failure and wasted funds.

The budgets for the Master Plan reflect these interwoven components. The users are involved in educational programming and are pivotal to the realization of the projects by their direct actions. At the same time, the caretakers are keeping monitoring logs and assessing and revising implementation techniques to make them more cost effective over time.

This Master Plan recognizes that this will be a heuristic process in which the participants will learn by doing. Field trials and staff training workshops have been undertaken and will continue. This document and the staff improvements are parallel efforts that serve as ongoing vehicles for assessing and improving the process and implementation on the ground. An in-house management log that includes ecological, aesthetic, historic, and use-related documentation of all management practices has been initiated and will be expanded over time to record and evaluate landscape policies and conditions. The Master Plan also proposes a program of periodic reviews, staff-training, education, and community participation.

The strategies will change with time in response to the rapid learning curve that will inevitably follow substantial shifts in management direction. What might be seen now as a capital project in need of a block of funding such as a woodland restoration may become an ongoing monitoring and research project undertaken as a cooperative venture with staff and area schools that is integral to the curriculum and supported



Current photograph of Barringer Springs, which matches the historical view shown at far left, shows the dramatic change that has occurred to this landscape, with the removal of built features and woodlands by the 1974 tornado and replaced by an expanse of mown turf. The renewal of Barringer Springs will integrate ecological restoration with historic preservation to recapture the "genius" of place that inspired the park originally, and that is still the shared vision today. The springhead and historical features will be restored and linked to the Barringer Hill path loop, along with drainage improvements to accommodate storm flows in this stream valley. The park's native woodlands and meadows will once again make this landscape rich and diverse. (Andropogon Associates, 1993)

WHAT'S HAPPENING ?

WOODLAND RESTORATION.

This part of the North Woods called the Ravine was designed over 130 years ago by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux to provide a little bit of the Adirondacks in the City. Now under restoration, the new woodland plantings will:

CONTROL EROSION.

Woodland plants help hold top soil in place. If top soil is allowed to erode, it will clog catch basins and fill in streams and lakes. Woodland plants are very fragile. If they are trampled, they will die. That is why new stone and gravel "Adventure Trails" have been added so you can enjoy the stream and cascades without trampling the woodland plants.

REPLACE INVASIVE PLANTS.

The new plantings contain species that traditionally grow in the deciduous forests and along stream banks of New York state. They include hay scented, New York and evergreen wood fern, yellow root, bluebells, iris, violets and Virginia creeper. Let them grow so that every Park visitor can enjoy their beauty.

PROVIDE WILDLIFE HABITAT.

Since Central Park is on the Atlantic flyway, it is host to migrating birds in the spring and fall. Park woodlands are favorite places for them to rest and refuel and you can find them here along with other woodland creatures. Now that this park landscape has been restored, we invite you to enjoy and care for its health and beauty.

YOU CAN HELP THE CONTINUING EFFORT TO RESTORE THE WOODLANDS! JOIN THE CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY'S WOODLAND RESTORATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAM. IT'S A GREAT WAY TO RECREATE IN THE WOODS. CONTACT DENNIS BURTON, WOODLANDS MANAGER AT (212) 360-2751.



Sign posted at woodlands management work site educates the public about park renewal efforts and helps broaden the volunteer base. (Central Park Conservancy)

with outside moneys and grants. The need for large quantities of propagated native plant material might become a for-profit nursery coordinated with the parks to augment the renewal budget. The object is to create an environment where such connections can be made and where all actions reflect an understanding of the larger context, the whole system.

These recommendations represent new roles and real change. This challenge will be met only if all involved are full participants and work together as a team. It is the building of in-house expertise and investment in the community and public/private partnerships that will sustain the park's vitality for enjoyment by future generations.

Guidelines for a Sustainable Landscape

A crucial challenge for the Louisville Olmsted Parks is the need to develop new approaches to landscape management that restore historic character while sustaining the integrity of the natural settings of the parks. The successful restoration of Olmsted's legacy requires us to look at the present and the future as much as to the past. All the 'lenses' are important: the ecological and natural systems, the cultural values of the historic design, and the social aspects of infrastructure, management, use and access. The following guidelines are integral to a landscape management program that sustains the remarkable natural, historical, cultural and social values of the Louisville Olmsted Parks and Parkways.

- Follow a participatory and inclusive process from decision-making to implementation.

The current degradation in the parks is ultimately due to a breakdown in the relationship between the community and the landscape. Restoring the values of these parks will depend on reestablishing positive interactions. Open communication and broad participation should be encouraged at every opportunity, empowering users and managers with responsibility and accountability. The park must meet user needs or it will not function. Planning must provide for a serviceable and appropriate park infrastructure of roads, parking, paths, bridges, stormwater management, and active and passive recreational facilities, such as ballfields, overlooks etc.

- Monitor and assess, and periodically modify all actions.

Sustaining ecological health over time is a goal, but as yet no one knows how to fully achieve it. The act of restoring the functioning of natural systems is a heuristic process—that is one in which the participants learn by doing.

A monitoring program and assessment criteria should be incorporated into every aspect of planning, design, construction and management. Appropriate training and supervision are needed and clear goals and

priorities should be established for assessment purposes. An emergency-response system should be in place for all proposed actions in the event of unforeseen consequences or unexpected cutbacks in funding. Monitoring and record keeping will become one of the most useful tools for tracking progress, assessing results and developing the ability to renew the park landscapes.

- Initiate life-cycle costing at every level.

From production to ultimate disposal, real costs include all aspects of park intervention, including materials, maintenance and staff time. In principle, maintenance should cease using all hazardous, toxic and non-recyclable materials. Instead, renewable, reusable and recyclable ones should be substituted. Life-cycle costing can address other key environmental and economic issues, such as reducing long- and short-term environmental impacts of management, operations and construction, energy conservation, and reduction of greenhouse and ozone-depleting materials.

- Give highest priority to natural and cultural features that cannot be replaced elsewhere.

Natural and cultural features that cannot be re-created elsewhere, such as rock formations, mature forests, stream corridors and historic sites, should not be compromised by activities that are not integral to their character and preservation. These places are defined by their locations. Even if disturbed, they present opportunities for restoration that cannot be duplicated in other places.

The concept of reversibility is crucial to this guideline. In general, reversible actions are preferable to irreversible changes or commitments. While complete restoration, for example, may not be feasible at this time in many places, decisions that foreclose future options are inappropriate.

Projects should decrease habitat fragmentation by including provisions to link and expand existing natural areas, especially along hydrologic corridors, steep slopes and ridges.

Non-critical settings and more disturbed areas are the preferred sites for developed facilities. No relatively healthy natural system should be displaced or significantly modified by new facilities.

- Incorporate restoration of natural systems into all aspects of management.

The landscapes of these parks are already highly disturbed by human impact, including the loss and breakdown of too much habitat, extensive hydrologic changes due to increased runoff and the proliferation of exotic invasive species at the expense of native communities of plants and animals. The sources of disturbance in the parks should be moni-

tored and prioritized for action according to their relative impacts. Key trends in disturbance should be recognized in all planning, design and management decisions.

Natural patterns and processes are the most efficient and should be relied upon to the extent feasible rather than disrupted. This requires reestablishing natural patterns where they have been disrupted and increasing investment in the natural infrastructure, especially where it can replace built infrastructure, such as for stormwater management and pollutant reduction.

- *Use native plants throughout the parks, not just in "natural" areas.*

One of the most striking differences between current and historic conditions is the growing severity of ecological problems associated with the use of invasive exotic plant species, especially adjacent to valued natural areas. Many of the exotics planted by Olmsted or brought into the parks at a later date were simply unsuited to local conditions and disappeared, but a few species proliferated uncontrollably, including Tree of Heaven, mimosa, Japanese and shrub honeysuckles, privets, bittersweet and multiflora rose, which now pose serious problems. At the same time, native species have been severely impacted by habitat loss and competition from invasive exotics. Native plant communities would benefit from increased use for general landscaping. We have the opportunity to develop landscape designs and management practices that are bioregional in focus and more sustainable over time. This does not mean that the historic plant palette is abandoned or that original and Olmsted-era plant materials are removed; however, it is a factor that should influence planting priorities.

Guidelines for the Built Landscape

There are several relevant principles for the built elements of the parks and parkways that must be considered. As described in the introduction to Chapter 8, The Built Landscape, these principles include: historic precedent and value, respect for natural resources, harmony, function, diverse use, safety, durability and maintainability, and universal access. Some of these may have more importance than others in a given situation. The priorities for the built landscape are:

- *Park infrastructure of drives, drainage and utilities should be brought back to full function and requires a consistent approach to maintenance and renewal.*
- *The park and parkway circulation systems should be made more accessible and safer for park users—walkers, runners, bicyclists, and drivers.*

- *Diverse park uses are desired and conflicts in use need to be resolved. Reorganization of park uses, which relate to the historic character of the Olmsted parks and the management of the landscape, will necessitate the phased relocation of some active recreational facilities and the renewal of some historic park spaces, so that the passive use zones and active zones can coexist without conflict.*
- *Vehicular access and use of the parks should be accommodated without degrading natural and historic features and park characters.*
- *The character of the parkways should be renewed and multi-use ways should be provided consistently along the length of the parkways.*

About This Report

This Master Plan report is comprised of several different, but overlapping perspectives on the Olmsted Parks and Parkway. Chapter 2 is Charles Beveridge's historical overview of Louisville's parks and parkways as Frederick Law Olmsted's most mature public work and one of the finest examples of an Olmsted park system. Chapters 3 through 6 give a site-specific focus on each of the parks—Shawnee, Iroquois and Cherokee—and the Parkway that is intended to portray the integration of all aspects of the landscape and proposed renewal for each site. These chapters integrate historical documentation and the surveys of natural communities, infrastructure and facilities. Each chapter describes a renewal strategy that addresses project priorities and management goals. Central to each park Master Plan is a set of proposed demonstration projects that accomplish the most urgent objectives in the most singular areas of each park.

The second major perspective is system-wide and examines both the living and the built landscapes. Together Chapters 7 & 8 integrate ecological restoration with historic preservation to recapture the "genius" of each place that inspired the parks originally, and that is still the shared vision today. Chapter 7 focuses on the "Living Landscape" and serves as an initial manual for completely revising the management of the landscape to meet the goals of the Master Plan. Chapter 8 describes Olmsted's original design intent and historic landscape character as a preface for discussing the built elements of the landscape in detail. Historic material and furnishings serve as models for recapturing the visual and tactile qualities of the parks and parkways paving, curbing, lighting, monuments, signs, benches, and so forth.

The last perspective is geared toward implementation. Chapter 9 allocates responsibility for continuing the planning process, with public participation, an advisory committee, and project implementation and funding from Metro Parks and the Conservancy. This chapter also includes Metro Parks management policy options, and project development and review criteria to assure that proposed capital projects and restoration efforts are maintainable over time.