

OLMSTED LEGACY TASK FORCE REPORT:
REBIRTH OF OLMSTED'S DESIGN FOR EQUITY

April 5, 2019

Submitted to:

Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

and the

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners

I. INTRODUCTION

In November of 2017, the former Superintendent of Seattle Parks and Recreation, Jesus Aguirre, asked for the assistance of the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks to assist Seattle Parks and Recreation in creating a task force with the goal of preserving Seattle's rich and beloved Olmsted park heritage and to sustain it for future generations¹. In response, the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks Board of Directors offered to participate in and to support the creation of the Olmsted Legacy Task Force. The Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks confirmed its commitment to Seattle Parks and Recreation's goal of developing a long-range approach to preserving Seattle's historic Olmsted parks and boulevard system. This work was intended to provide a common-sense approach to rehabilitation, protection and curation of Seattle's historic landscapes.² In its invitation to establish the Task Force, Seattle Parks and Recreation specifically described the purpose of the Task Force to "explore and develop strategies that enhance and preserve the Olmsted parks system through core principles based on equity, access and inclusion."³ With an understanding of and a commitment to applying these core principles, the Task Force was formed.

While the charge of the Task Force was to focus on the rehabilitation of Seattle's Olmsted system of parks and boulevards, both Seattle Parks and Recreation and the Task Force recognized the long history of the Native people who were the original inhabitants of the area now known as Seattle and whose legacy dates back far beyond the Olmsted Brothers arrival in Seattle in 1903. The Task Force acknowledges Seattle Parks and Recreation's recognition and engagement with various community groups with the intention of telling many stories from Seattle's past and present. The Task Force further acknowledges the efforts by Seattle Parks and Recreation to elevate the voices of everyone in Seattle and, with this goal in mind, the Task Force encourages Seattle Parks and Recreation to continue to work with all groups to tell a more complete story of Seattle, which at times has come at great benefit to some and at a great cost to others.

In forming the Task Force, the Superintendent ensured that the Task Force was comprised of individuals representing various constituencies and points of reference throughout the city. The members of the Task Force and their affiliations are listed in **Appendix A** of this Report.

The Task Force held meetings throughout 2018, inviting various presentations on the many topics impacting and important to the Task Force's work (see **Appendix B** of this Report for more information about the topics addressed and the participants at each meeting). The meeting topics included presentations on and discussions regarding the following topics:

- Gaps in the development and maintenance levels of Olmsted legacy parks and boulevards
- Budget constraints of Seattle Parks and Recreation
- Olmsted design principles
- Regulatory and policy constraints and requirements
- Seattle Department of Transportation work impacting Olmsted legacy boulevards

¹ Jesus Aguirre Memorandum to Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks, dated November 2, 2017.

² Id.

³ Id.

- Maintenance practices at existing parks (specifically, Seward Park and Volunteer Park)
- Race, social justice and equity concerns
- Seattle Public Utilities work impacting Olmsted legacy parks and boulevards
- Current 10 site Olmsted Parks Study (regarding the current allocation of Olmsted maintenance funds)
- Current and potential volunteer partnerships
- Expanding on Seattle’s connected system of Olmsted legacy parks and boulevards

As the Task Force commenced its deliberations, it acknowledged existing studies and analysis of the historic elements of Seattle’s system of Olmsted legacy parks and boulevards and reports that may help direct expansion efforts (see **Appendix C** of this Report).

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force identified numerous current challenges – some pertaining to knowledge, some regarding maintenance resources, and some a result of changing urban conditions. One of the biggest challenges facing Seattle’s entire park system is that in 2018 only 40% of the system’s maintenance needs were met and, even more important to the Olmsted parks, although these parks represent 15.4% of the park system, the Olmsted parks received only 9% of the Seattle Parks and Recreation maintenance budget. This budget shortfall has put a strain on the Olmsted Parks that if left unchecked will result in the loss of community resources and recreational value for the City of Seattle. Through the process of analyzing the available information and the perception and realities related to the Olmsted system of parks and boulevards, the Task Force arrived at a series of recommendations to both improve these circumstances and to guide further expansion of parks and green corridors that complement the Olmsted system of parks and boulevards.

Challenges identified by the Task Force include the following:

- Insufficient knowledge and recognition
- Inconsistency and underrepresentation in planning efforts
- Inconsistency in maintenance practices
- Inadequate resources for rehabilitation and maintenance
- Retaining landscape character over time
- Changing climate and impacts
- Adapting and expanding to meet contemporary needs
- Misuse and overuse

Recommendations for preservation and rehabilitation of the Olmsted system of parks and boulevards include the following:

- Create an historic parks “curator” position at Seattle Parks and Recreation
- Develop educational resources and programming for Seattle Parks and Recreation staff
- Develop educational resources and outreach programs for Seattle residents

- Develop and maintain strong interdepartmental relationships
- Develop programs for stronger community support organizations
- Assess and analyze adequacy of existing policies and tools and adopt new/revised policies
- Assess and analyze current conditions of parks and boulevards
- Develop rehabilitation and succession plans
- Develop maintenance plans
- Expand the system of interconnected parks and boulevards
- Increase funding for the system’s maintenance and rehabilitation

Recommendations for expanding the Olmsted system of parks and boulevards include the following:

- Develop a plan for expansion of the Olmsted parks and boulevard system
- Apply Olmsted design principles and strategies
- Utilize ideas from previous plans, studies and drawings
- Incorporate other infrastructure into expansion plans
- Build the expansion plan upon principles of social and race equity
- Create clear process for designating new viewpoints
- Increase funding and develop new funding sources for the expansion of the parks and boulevard system

III. PURPOSE OF THE TASK FORCE

Seattle Parks and Recreation charged the Task Force with developing a set of recommendations for a common-sense approach to rehabilitate, protect and curate Seattle’s system of parks and boulevards as proposed, and in many cases designed, by the Olmsted Brothers, the nation’s preeminent landscape architectural firm of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. (See **Appendix D** for further background and history on the Olmsted Brothers and their work in Seattle.) The Task Force members, with the approval of the Superintendent, expanded the charge to also include the means by which the Olmsted principles of landscape design could be expanded into currently underserved areas that now, over 100 years later, include the “new” areas of Seattle. The Task Force began its work by evaluating the Olmsted design principles and values that are the foundation of our system of parks and boulevards.

Purpose 1: The Value of Equity, Access and Inclusion. As it relates to parks, at the heart of all we do today as a city, whether by volunteers or through city programs and resources, we look at both the process and the result to ensure that all residents of and visitors to Seattle are able to experience the beauty and enjoyment that come from our system of parks and boulevards. The Olmsted Brothers, applying the principles developed by Fredrick Law Olmsted, Sr., their father and one of the founders of the landscape architecture profession, designed Seattle’s system of social spaces, natural settings and playfields to be available to all. Over time, due to social influences and inequitable policies resulting in disproportionate outcomes for poor and/or minority residents, certain Seattle neighborhoods have been at a disadvantage in regard to the development and at times the maintenance of parks and boulevards. The Task Force notes that as the City of Seattle

recognizes these inequities it uses tools provided through the Race and Social Justice Initiative to address and solve them. Specifically as to our system of parks and boulevards, meaningful, real, equitable access should be an essential part of the experience that is Seattle.

Purpose 2: The Value of Open Spaces for the Health of Our City and Its Residents. The Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation has adopted a system-wide approach referred to as “Healthy People, Healthy Environment, Strong Communities.” Preserving, enhancing and expanding our system of parks and boulevards is an essential piece of this program and its success.

Purpose 3: The Value of a “System” of Parks and Boulevards. Seattle not only enjoys a significant number of outstanding parks, large and small, but also a system of parks and boulevards that makes the value of the system greater than the sum of its parts. There exists a holistic and integrated plan of connected parkland spaces and thoroughfares across the city that heightens the valuable relationship between these spaces and provides greater, more seamless access for recreation, relaxation, and the peace of mind that comes from getting “lost in nature” or being in softer greener surroundings. It is this wonderful “system” that the Task Force hopes will be rehabilitated, maintained and expanded to serve more of Seattle.

Purpose 4: The Value of Historical Significance. To many, the familiar is meaningful. It provides tranquility; it offers a form of comfort, of solace. These were and are the qualities and the effect of the Olmsted Brothers’ design for Seattle’s system of parks and boulevards. Knowing that Lake Washington boulevard will always be there; that Green Lake’s fields, paths, and views will remain for generations; it all gives us a connection to our city’s past and to its future. To enjoy the views from Volunteer Park, and to know that generations before and generations to come will share in this experience, this feeling is what connects our residents now at a time when so much separates us. Most importantly, when something that is a link to our past can also be a connection to one another today, this attribute is valuable to our city and as such must receive our care and attention. Our Olmsted system of parks and boulevards is also important from a historical preservation perspective. Seattle is blessed with one of the nation’s most complete systems of parks and boulevards designed and/or recommended by one of the nationally significant landscape architecture firms. We have a responsibility to maintain and preserve this historic feature of our city. (Please see **Appendix D** for further information on the historical significance of Seattle’s system of Olmsted parks and boulevards.)

IV. CHALLENGES TO SAFEGUARDING THE OLMSTED PARKS AND BOULEVARDS SYSTEM

The Task Force has identified the principle challenges for successfully caring for and maintaining Seattle’s system of Olmsted parks and boulevards. These challenges include the following:

Challenge 1: Insufficient Knowledge and Recognition. The Task Force discussed the widespread lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the Olmsted parks and boulevards system in Seattle, both among the general public and among those charged with the care of Seattle’s parks – including members of the Seattle Parks District Governing Board, Seattle Parks and Recreation staff, and volunteer maintenance groups. There is currently no city-wide program for educating

Seattleites on the extent, the location, the history, and the value of the extensive Olmsted Brothers designed and influenced parks and boulevards.

Additionally, within the existing system of Seattle's Olmsted parks and boulevards, there are boulevard segments and sections of parks that have been lost over time or that were never fully developed, thus impacting the value of the "interconnected" system of parks and boulevards.

There is also, at times, a misguided bias regarding the Olmsted parks system that encourages disregard of this legacy. The Task Force has heard that there are some who view the Olmsted landscapes as "elitist." This is likely due to societal influences rather than the actual design intent. The Olmsteds believed firmly in public parks being effective democratizing elements, serving all age, ethnic and socio-economic groups. The Olmsted intra-city system of connected parks and boulevards can and should be used to bring all of Seattle together.

Challenge 2: Inconsistency and Underrepresentation in Planning Efforts. Historical context is often overlooked when new city policies and regulations are adopted for our parks and boulevards. This omission can lead to inadvertently overriding critical components of a landscape's integrity. The procedural practice in developing or amending parks and boulevards, as well as the related planning documents, often omit an adherence to the original design principles and design intent. Consideration of these historic landscapes is made even more complicated, in practice, by the fact that not much precedent or published standards have yet been established for how to effectively interpret the historic aspects of a landscape. Coordination between agencies and departments for permitting, strategic planning, and analytic data gathering, are all aspects of the planning process where historic landscape consideration is often omitted or ignored.

Challenge 3: Inconsistency in Maintenance Practices. Even where there is awareness and acknowledgement of the historic landscapes in planning efforts, the intent of the design can get lost in the practical application of these procedures. There are many hands at work in the upkeep of Seattle's parks and boulevards, which can lead to inconsistencies in practice. Specific situations where this can occur include budgeting formulas that don't adequately account for the cost of proper and regular maintenance, the lack of succession planning for these "living" resources, the direction provided to partnership organizations and "friends" groups involved in maintaining specific parks, and to the Seattle Parks and Recreation maintenance crews challenged with the ongoing maintenance and repairs when there is an overwhelming backlog of regular maintenance and capital projects.

Challenge 4: Inadequate Resources for Rehabilitation and Maintenance. Lack of resources include budget shortfalls and constraints on volunteer groups who attempt to fill the budget gap. Seattle Parks and Recreation has reported that only approximately 40% of Seattle Parks and Recreation's maintenance needs are being funded. And aging landscapes also require resources for repair and replacement in addition to general upkeep, a consideration that is not currently reflected in the funds devoted to the upkeep of individual parks and boulevards.

Volunteer efforts are used in an attempt to fill the gap left by underfunded maintenance, but there are natural and imposed constraints that sometimes limit their effectiveness. For example, volunteer groups can only do limited maintenance to existing ground-level plants, but are not authorized to do tree maintenance, work involving power tools, or to make substantive changes.

Challenge 5: Retaining Landscape Character Over Time. Many of Seattle’s Olmsted parks and boulevards include landscapes that are over 100 years old. There are structures, site elements and vegetation that help define the character of these parks and boulevards that need reconditioning, repair or replacement. And this demand will never cease. The landscapes are constantly growing, maturing, and eventually passing on to the next cycle in the environment’s evolution.

Vegetation can be particularly challenging when it comes to retaining site character, as new trees and shrubs will be much smaller than the plants they are replacing and will take time to reach full size. Particular areas of concern regarding vegetation changes include the following:

Loss of Intended Views. Many of the views that the Olmsted plans originally captured are adjacent to wooded and other natural areas, which over time will change in extent and location of vegetative cover due to maturing trees, natural plant succession, and naturally seeding species adding new growth. Some previous methods for retaining views have had unintended consequences for unhealthy and/or thicker vegetative regrowth. Best practices for preserving and/or recovering these views is still evolving and thus creating a challenge in the selection and application of the available options.

Replacing Aging Trees Along Boulevards, Entranceways and Other Allees. In parks and along boulevards rows of trees, or “allees,” were planted in part to provide uniform massing and scale, along with a consistent rhythmic pattern created by the trunks as one passes through or along these plantings. These effects become apparent as the trees mature together. With the loss of individual trees due to disease or other weakening agents and the consequent need for replacement, the design intent is naturally affected and, if there is inattention to the original design intent, these features can be lost.

Challenge 6: Changing Climate and Impacts. Some native and mature stands of forest, highly prized by the Olmsted Brothers and the early Board of Park Commissioners for offering a quiet, restorative reprieve from urban living, are severely compromised by the apparent effects from climate change. Foremost among these is the phenomenon of increasingly pervasive pests – insects that were once dormant during the winter months now feed and nest through most of the year, impacting and compromising tree health. Another apparent effect of climate change is the added stress on some native plants due to changing annual mean temperatures, which affect the dormant and growing periods for these plants. Although the cause, or causes, have not yet been fully established, a stark example of recent forest decline can be found in Seward Park. Other apparent changes due to climate change include rainfall patterns, particularly intensity, and extended drought. Both these factors can play significant roles in slope stability as well as vegetative growth.

Challenge 7: Adapting and Expanding to Meet Contemporary Needs. Best practices for construction and providing public access and protecting public health have evolved substantially over the past several decades. Elements and layouts of the Olmsted system sometimes require updating to meet current standards. Code requirements for designed spaces have evolved over the past century to make areas safer, more accessible, and more environmentally sensitive (such as the addition of the Environmentally Critical Areas regulations). Updating these historic landscapes to

meet current requirements has the potential to affect landscape character. Adopted city policies can also sometimes conflict with maintaining the historical landscape. An example of this is Seattle’s Tree Protection regulations and how they may contribute to loss of views and changes in designed park spaces.

Infrastructure improvements affect the landscape setting as well. As an example, some parks along Lake Washington Boulevard have undergone necessary changes to accommodate recent combined sewer overflow projects. In addition, above-ground utility vaults and proposed cell towers can substantially impact the park-like character of these and other properties. Transportation amenities principally affect parkways and boulevards and may include safety features for bike lanes, transit stops and bus layover zones. All of these well-intentioned improvements can have unintended negative impacts on Olmsted legacy parks and boulevards.

Challenge 8: Misuse and Overuse. In addition to the challenges of maintaining a living landscape and adopting to new development and maintenance standards, Seattle’s system of Olmsted parks and boulevards is also challenged by the effects of misuse and overuse. From this misuse and overuse, physical impacts to the parks system include the following:

Vandalism. Vandalism is an ongoing reality for Seattle’s parks and boulevards as it is for the rest of the city. Its effects are highly visible or, sometimes, hidden amongst the trees.

Private Encroachment. Capturing public parks for private use has been an ongoing problem in Seattle. And now the use of park property for individual and group encampments is a rapidly growing problem in the city. Property owners have built fences extending into parks and boulevard rights-of-way. Portions of Queen Anne Boulevard planting areas have habitually been used as informal parking areas. Other examples include the natural areas in Ravenna and Cowen Parks that have seen significant destruction of undergrowth and some severe, inexperienced pruning resulting from people camping in these areas.

Increased Demand. Seattle’s population in 2019 is reported to be roughly three times larger than it was in 1910. Greater numbers of people visit Seattle’s parks and use park facilities, and more recreational programs are using these spaces. This increased use holds true for the boulevards and parkways as well, with greater numbers of cars and cyclists using these corridors. In many cases, this increased use has led to the condition where we are “loving our parks to death.”

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRESERVATION AND REHABILITATION

Recommendation 1: Create an Historic Parks “Curator” Position at Seattle Parks and Recreation. Similar to the City of Boston’s practice, create a staff position at Seattle Parks and Recreation dedicated to coordinating the maintenance and care of historic parks and boulevards, specifically the Olmsted parks and boulevards. This position would have responsibility for coordination of educational programming about Seattle’s historic parks and boulevards.⁴ In

⁴ This position would not only work on matters involving the Olmsted system of parks and boulevards, but would also work on matters involving other historic elements of Seattle’s system of parks and boulevards, such as historic Denny Park (Seattle’s first established park predating the Olmsted’s work) and other historic parks and potential park sites (such as those related to the Native people of the areas that are now part of Seattle).

addition to serving as a liaison to the Seattle Landmarks Board, this person would coordinate the review of all proposals relating to these historic resources to ensure that the appropriate parties and participants are part of the review and approval process. This person would work in conjunction with Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks, the site specific "Friends of" groups, and the public in general, to promote the awareness of the value of the Olmsted system and its historical design character and the reasons behind the construction and maintenance of its many attributes. This position would also engage with Seattle Parks and Recreation staff on issues related to rehabilitation and managing the individual parks and boulevards that comprise the Olmsted system. Finally, this position would engage with the Seattle Parks Foundation and its fundraising efforts that support this mission.

Recommendation 2: Develop Educational Resources and Programming for Seattle Parks and Recreation Staff. Create educational courses for Seattle Parks and Recreation staff that cover the history, character and features of the Olmsted park and boulevard system, its value in the past and in the future, the lack of Olmsted parks and boulevards in all areas of Seattle, and the importance of honoring the Olmsted Brothers' intent while making adjustments to accommodate today's constraints. The courses should be presented at Seattle Parks and Recreation's employee orientation for new employees and at frequent intervals for current employees. This educational programming should provide information at a level that makes Olmsted design features recognizable and knowable. Interaction with the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks should be encouraged to assist with the development of more in-depth research of park histories and the development of educational programs. Educational programming should also address ongoing maintenance practices.

Recommendation 3: Develop Educational Resources and Outreach Programs for Residents. Similar to the previous Recommendation, the Task Force recommends the creation of educational resources and programs for the public that cover the history, character and features of the Olmsted parks and boulevards system. These resources should relate Olmsted parks and boulevards to the communities in which they exist and include information about their social benefits and their contribution to health of our environment and our residents. The courses should be offered to community organizations, schools, and businesses, among others. This educational programming should provide information at a level that makes Olmsted design features recognizable and knowable. Interaction with the Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks and the site specific "Friends of" groups should be encouraged to assist with the development of more in-depth materials that cover park and boulevard histories and in the presentation of these educational programs.

Recommendation 4: Develop and Maintain Strong Interdepartmental Relationships. Seattle Parks and Recreation should look to develop key partnerships and strong working relationships with other key city departments such as the Seattle Department of Transportation ("SDOT") and Seattle Public Utilities ("SPU") to identify creative opportunities where shared City resources can be leveraged to deliver multiple benefits of recreation, improved bike and pedestrian corridors, green ways, and infrastructure to manage Seattle's storm water and to provide water for irrigation in our system of Olmsted parks and boulevards. Seattle Parks and recreation should also revisit agreements with SDOT for the management of Olmsted boulevards to improve city-wide efficiencies and to provide for more park-like spaces, similar to agreements that were in place in

the 1980's. In partnering with other departments, Seattle Parks and Recreation should work with these partners to create a better understanding of critical Olmsted design principles and their benefits so as to increase greater awareness, understanding and use of these principles. Seattle Parks and Recreation should also work closely with broad city planning efforts underway in the Office of Planning and Community Development to link the planned work of key city agencies so that consideration of impacts to existing Olmsted parks and boulevards, as well as opportunities for enhancement, are fully considered. Seattle Parks and Recreation should also work with SDOT and SPU to create clear standards for utility and transportation improvements whenever such work impacts Olmsted parks and boulevards.

Recommendations 5: Develop Programs for Stronger Community Support Organizations. Currently, Seattle Parks and Recreation and the Department of Neighborhoods register and maintain relations with volunteer neighborhood “Friends of” groups who invest in their local Olmsted parks and boulevards. The impetus for establishing these groups typically comes from the community itself. This de facto approach can create basic inequities of care and attention for neighborhood parks, as volunteer resources can vary widely based on income level, available time, and awareness of opportunities. Seattle Parks and Recreation, working with the Department of Neighborhoods, should work to greatly enhance the system to more effectively equalize resources, both volunteer and paid, among park and boulevard support groups throughout the city. The means and practices to more seamlessly interface efforts with those of Seattle community groups should be developed, evaluating availability and other factors in developing a planned approach to park and boulevard maintenance and use. Communities not already organized as “Friends of” groups should be invited to create local support groups and should be assisted with this process. These communities should be informed on how to register and how to interface with the relevant city agencies and should be assisted in the advocacy, planning, and community fundraising for such projects. All of this work with community groups should be re-evaluated on a regular and predictable basis.

Recommendation 6: Assess and Analyze Adequacy of Existing Policies and Tools and Adopt New/Revised Policies. Seattle Parks and Recreation should examine how existing policies affect historic landscapes and structures and to what extent these policies acknowledge and consider these historic resources. A “best practices” approach should be developed to bring historic designs into compliance with current policies while also conforming to “historic rehabilitation” goals as set forth by the US Secretary of the Interior, the acknowledged source for such best practices.⁵ As required, Seattle Parks and Recreation should amend existing and/or create new policies to seamlessly adopt and apply these new “best practices.” (**Appendix E** to this Report outlines a general approach of applying the Secretary of the Interior standards to these sites.)

Seattle Parks and Recreation should review and revise current analysis tools (particularly the city’s GIS mapping files) to ensure the availability of historic resources information for use by Seattle Parks and Recreation, community support groups and other city agencies.

⁵ See “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes” (<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/index.htm>).

Recommendation 7: Assess and Analyze Current Conditions of Parks and Boulevards. In partnership with Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks and the site specific “Friends of” groups, Seattle Parks and Recreation should conduct a thorough assessment of Seattle’s Olmsted parks and boulevards. This work should include the creation of an inventory of needed work and note enacted policies impacting the historic landscape and structures and then make recommendations for ongoing maintenance, rehabilitation and capital improvements. The collected information should also include utilization data on existing parks for use in developing, planning and implementing programming, maintenance and improvements.

Recommendation 8: Develop Rehabilitation and Succession Plans. Create a comprehensive set of rehabilitation policies and procedures consistent with the Olmsted design principles, informed by “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes” (as referenced in footnote 5). These policies and procedures should include the following:

- Establish a mechanism (preferably an existing one, such as standing ProView meetings) for Seattle Parks and Recreation to review proposals affecting Olmsted parks and boulevards.
- Identify stakeholders and their roles in this process, such as planners, landscape architects, project managers, crew chiefs, grounds maintenance managers, and the Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks and other relevant community groups, as well as the Seattle Parks and Recreation staff person selected to review and coordinate work on historic landscapes (as recommended above).
- Review and revise the current relevant Seattle Parks and Recreation policies (trees, viewpoints, and Vegetation Management Plans, among others).
- Analyze existing inequities regarding the location and maintenance of Olmsted parks and boulevards within the city. We note that while the Olmsted Brothers’ plans for Seattle extended to nearly all of the areas within the city limits at the time the plans were developed, not all of the Olmsteds’ recommendations were implemented. The Task Force also recognizes that the historic elements of these developed parks and boulevards have not been uniformly maintained.
- Develop boulevard landscape restoration planning projects. This effort would be a new planning project aimed at restoring landscaping along Olmsted boulevards and creating vegetation management plans that include vegetation succession plans.
- Adopt the Seattle Parks and Recreation’s proposed Encroachment Resolution Program practices and procedures. The program should create a clear and communicative enforcement strategy and practice to recognize the equity implications of private encroachments interfering with public enjoyment of open space and to address physical encroachments by private landowners. Protection of areas with native vegetation and other areas that may be severely impacted by overuse should likely be prioritized. Encroachment resolution efforts, which involve restoring the property lines and re-establishing intended landscaping design, would complement the vision of this rehabilitation plan.

- Better utilize the Seattle Parks and Recreation’s Public Involvement Policy to support the rehabilitation and succession plans described above, as well as develop a volunteer recruitment plan and volunteer management plan to support these rehabilitation and succession plans.

Recommendation 9: Develop Maintenance Plans. Establish and/or revise existing maintenance plans and practices affecting historic properties, specifically the Olmsted parks and boulevards. Plans should include methodology to prioritize maintenance tasks and their frequency and should establish internal and external training practices. Plans should establish a practice for rehabilitating Olmsted features and sites to comply with current code requirements in ways that protect overall historic character. Maintenance planning should address aging landscapes, including plant succession and replacement, and, where appropriate, adopt vegetation succession plans, and do so prior to the end of the useful life of the existing landscape elements.

Maintenance plans should set a long-term schedule for regular review of park and boulevard conditions and a regular schedule for repair and maintenance needs.

Maintenance plans should seek out and identify additional potential partnerships and sponsorship of parks (similar to the U.S. Department of Transportation program whereby companies and organizations receive public acknowledgement via roadside signage for the removal of litter along specific segments of highways). The plans would also continue interactions with existing Seattle Parks and Recreation initiatives such as the Green Seattle Partnership.

Maintenance plans should assess the diversity and character of vegetative cover. The plans should explore and tailor opportunities for volunteer efforts specific to the neighborhood and community.

Recommendation 10: Expand the System of Interconnected Parks and Boulevards. Expand and extend the Olmsted system of interconnected parks and boulevards to create and strengthen connections and address inequities in recreational opportunities city-wide. (See the next section, “Recommendations for Expansion,” for a more detailed approach to achieving this goal.)

Recommendation 11: Increase Funding for the System’s Maintenance and Rehabilitation. Given the current underfunding of the maintenance and rehabilitation of Seattle’s Olmsted parks and boulevards (in addition to other parks), a mechanism should be created and implemented to address current funding shortfalls for maintenance of Seattle’s Olmsted parks and boulevards.

Formulas for the distribution of parks maintenance funding should be re-evaluated and revised to accommodate the following:

- Re-assign funding for maintenance of the Olmsted system to be proportionate to funding for non-Olmsted parks. For example, in 2018, Olmsted parks, which represents 15.4% of the park system, received only 9% of the Seattle Parks and Recreation maintenance budget.
- Gather data assessing the need for additional funding for care of “historic properties” supported by analysis of associated maintenance and repair costs.

- Evaluate maintenance levels for different areas of the city to ensure equitable distribution of resources.

In addition to re-assigning maintenance funding, financial support for parks maintenance overall should be increased. The Task Force was informed that in 2018 only 40% of parks' maintenance needs were being met. Thus, the city should explore additional potential fundraising mechanisms, including public open space "banking" with developers, and in-kind support relationships. In addition, new and diverse funding partners and supporters should be approached.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXPANSION OF THE OLMSTED SYSTEM

The Olmsted legacy of parks, playgrounds, boulevards and parkways is one of Seattle's defining characteristics that have helped make the city more livable. Parks and playfields are Seattle's common ground, where all groups can find individual respite or gather together for recreation and community events. Additionally, equitable access to parks is a social justice issue: most low-income residents cannot afford much time or expense to travel far for recreation. The Task Force notes that Seattle has grown substantially, both in population and in geographical area, since the early 1900s when the Olmsted Brothers firm first put forth its recommendations for a park and boulevard system. There are many areas of our expanded city of today that were not included in the original recommendations when the city's land mass was smaller. Other parts of the city did not enjoy the inclusion of an Olmsted park due to the lack of funds to complete the Olmsted plan. These factors mean that sections of the city are underserved by the original Olmsted system of parks and boulevards as compared to other, older neighborhoods of Seattle. With the recent population growth and increasing density within residential neighborhoods in Seattle, improvements to and expansion of parks and public open spaces throughout Seattle have become ever more essential. For these reasons, it is in the public interest to extend the Olmsted legacy of parks and boulevards, particularly into underserved areas of the city.

Expansion Recommendation 1: Develop a Plan for Expansion of the Olmsted Parks System. The city should commission a comprehensive plan for expanding the Olmsted parks and boulevards system that is guided by the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners and Seattle Parks and Recreation staff. The expansion plan would respond to needs for equitable distribution and access as identified in the rehabilitation plans as discussed in Recommendation 8 above. The Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks has volunteered to support the efforts to develop such a plan.

Expansion Recommendation 2: Apply Olmsted Design Principles and Strategies. The expansion plan should adopt and reflect the Olmsted design principles (as described in **Appendix D** of this Report). The plan should also consider the main design aims of boulevards and parkways, as described by the Olmsted Brothers in creating links to these parks. Though newer boulevards and parkways are likely impossible to introduce within our existing city transportation labyrinth, the creation of recreational, scenic and/or pastoral routes connecting to city parks should be explored. Additionally, park connections with each other via these parkways and boulevards should be reflected in the design of newer parks, especially concerning their orientation and entry points.

Expansion Recommendation 3: Utilize Ideas from Previous Plans, Studies and Drawings.

The expansion plan should explore, synthesize and incorporate ideas and recommendations from previous plans, studies and drawings, including the Olmsted Brothers' reports of 1903 and 1908. (See **Appendix C** to this Report for a partial list of prior reports.) Among the Olmsted design principles that should be put into practice during site selection is "genius of place." (Such genius can be understood by envisioning the view of Mt. Rainier from Red Square at the University of Washington, for example.) The identification of parcels and routes that provide unique opportunities (e.g., views, shoreline, central location) that would enrich the public experience should be undertaken.

Expansion Recommendation 4: Incorporate Other Infrastructure into Plan. The expansion plan should include a process for interagency cooperation, with a view to improving design coordination at recreation sites accommodating utilities and other infrastructure needs, as well as expanding recreational resources into areas under the control of other agencies. Such areas should include shared land used for utility infrastructure and parks, such as reservoirs and storm water detention facilities, unutilized street right-of-way segments, street right-of-way improvements for boulevards and parkways, neighborhood greenways, and routes identified as "Safe Routes to Schools." Schoolyards and school playfields should also be part of a broader network of recreational sites.

Expansion Recommendation 5: Build the Expansion Plan Upon Principles of Social and Race Equity. The expansion plan should identify historically underserved neighborhoods by either proximity or ease of access and locate parks and green connections to maximize equitable access. The city should require its planners to consult with Seattle Parks and Recreation on community planning efforts to better incorporate recreation opportunities into community land use and redevelopment plans.

Expansion Recommendation 6: Create Clear Process for Designating New Viewpoints. Unless identified and actively maintained and protected, amazing views from our public properties will continue to disappear. Such view opportunities are a public amenity and a social equity concern. A clear, manageable process for identifying and designating new viewpoints should be established, thus fulfilling and expanding on Olmsted's vision for Seattle "borrowing" distant views for a greater sense of expansiveness within a physically constrained parks system and building on the Olmsted Brothers' idea to recognize "genius of place."

Expansion Recommendation 7: Increase Funding and Develop New Funding Sources for Parks System Expansion. Additional funding should be provided for expansion of the parks and boulevard system, and funding should be adequate to both develop and maintain the new sites. New funding sources should be explored, particularly related to land development, as the development of new housing relies on parks as a local amenity, creates greater demand for and use of parks, and directly affects acquisition and development cost for new parks.

VII. CONCLUSION

Seattle possesses an incredible amenity in its Olmsted parks and boulevards system. But this essential and beneficial feature of our city will be lost as a result of a “death by a thousand cuts” if we do not make a focused and significant effort to put into place a mechanism by which our system of interconnected Olmsted parks and boulevards is rehabilitated, maintained and expanded for everyone who enjoys Seattle. This work is essential if we are to ensure that our parks and connected boulevards serve future generations to the greatest extent possible.

APPENDIX A

Olmsted Legacy Task Force:

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Tom Byers | Seattle Board of Park Commissioners Representative, Task Force Co-Chair |
| Doug Luetjen | Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks Representative, Task Force Co-Chair |
| Lyle Bicknell | Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development Representative |
| Nyah Curcuruto | Student Representative |
| Ed D'Alessandro | Seattle Youth Soccer Association Representative |
| Donald Harris | National Association of Olmsted Parks Representative (and former Seattle Parks and Recreation Employee) |
| Mark Jaeger | Seattle Public Utilities Representative |
| Zoe Kasperzyk | Associated Recreation Council Representative |
| Susan McLaughlin & Aditi Kambuj | Seattle Department of Transportation Representatives |
| Andy Mitton | Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks Representative |
| Jennifer Ott | Volunteer Park Trust Representative |
| Dewey Potter | Park District Oversight Committee Representative |
| Jenifer Rees | Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks Representative |
| Eugenia Woo | Historic Seattle Representative |
| Jeremy Wood | Seattle Human Rights Commission Representative |
| Karimah Edwards | Seattle Parks and Recreation Planner |
| Danyal Lotfi | Seattle Parks and Recreation Community Engagement Advisor and Task Force Facilitator |

APPENDIX B

Task Force Meetings:

March 28, 2018: Acting Seattle Parks and Recreation Superintendent Christopher Williams welcomed the Task Force members and provided an overview of their charge.

April 25, 2018: Seattle Parks and Recreation representatives provided information to the Task Force. Susanne Rockwell, Interim Planning Manager, presented the Task Force with the 2017 Parks and Open Space Plan, including the Gap Analysis (related to areas of the city deemed to be underserved by parks and community centers). Robert Stowers, Director of Parks and the Environment Division, and Jon Jainga, Natural Resources Unit Interim Manager, provided information on challenges to providing adequate levels of maintenance at Seattle's parks. Finally, Task Force members Andy Mitton and Jenifer Rees led a discussion regarding elements of Olmsted design to be preserved and the desire to spread these elements to the areas of Seattle underserved by parks featuring Olmsted design principles.

May 30, 2018: Kathleen Connor, Seattle Parks and Recreation Strategic Advisor, provided the Task Force with information on statutory, regulatory and policy requirements involved in the planning, development and maintenance of Seattle's parks and boulevards. Aditi Kambuj, Seattle Department of Transportation representative on the Task Force, provided an overview on Seattle Department of Transportation's work to integrate and emphasize park and park-like spaces included in Seattle Department of Transportation's portfolio of properties.

June 27, 2018: Representatives from the Volunteer Park Trust and the Friends of Seward Park, as well as representatives from the Seattle Parks and Recreation ground crews for these two parks, provided information on maintenance and improvements planned, managed and implemented at these two significant parks.

August 9, 2018: Kelly O'Brien from Seattle's Office for Civil Rights and Seattle Parks and Recreation representative Karimah Edwards led a discussion on race, social justice and equity considerations. Task Force member Mark Jaeger, representing Seattle Public Utilities, provided information on Seattle Public Utilities' work impacting and interacting with the Seattle Olmsted legacy. Finally, Task Force members Andy Mitton and Jennifer Ott presented preliminary information obtained in their preparation of the Olmsted Parks Study, a comprehensive review of the condition and rehabilitation work recommended at 10 sites that are a part of the Olmsted parks and boulevards throughout Seattle.

September 11, 2018: Task Force members discussed the materials to be presented in the report of the Task Force, namely:

- What is to be preserved and rehabilitated?
- What are the challenges to these efforts?
- What are the proposed solutions and how should they be implemented?

November 14, 2018: The Task Force reviewed the initial draft of the Task Force Report regarding “Challenges” to properly maintaining the Olmsted legacy of interconnected parks and boulevards and the “Recommendations” for creating the tools for reestablishing a premier system of interconnected parks and boulevards throughout Seattle.

December 17, 2018: Task Force members discussed the value of expanding the Olmsted parks and boulevards system throughout Seattle, specifically to areas that were not part of the city during the systems’ original design. It was recognized that this expansion will require a concerted effort to identify underserved areas, acquire the land and right of ways, obtain broad-based community input, and obtain funding.

APPENDIX C

Existing Reports, Documentation & Designations:

Historic Resources Plan, adopted by the Board of Parks Commissioners in April 2005, prepared by Makers Architecture and Urban Design, Susan Black Associates, and Cathy Wickwire.

Context Statement: Seattle's Olmsted Parks and Boulevards, prepared by Mimi Sheridan, Sheridan Consulting Group, with Artifact, Inc., October 2003.

Parks, Playgrounds and Boulevards of Seattle, Washington, Board of Parks Commissioners, issued 1909, (based on the Olmsted Brothers reports to the Commissioners in 1903, 1908 and 1909).

Wash. Dept. of Archeology & Historic Preservation letter of March 23, 2017, confirming the listing of Seattle's Olmsted Parks and Boulevards in the Washington Heritage Register.

US Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service letter confirming the listing of Seattle's Olmsted Parks and Boulevards in the National Register of Historic Places, effective May 8, 2017.

Seattle Ordinance No. 125215, confirming Seattle Landmark status on Volunteer Park.

Seattle Ordinance No. 113090, confirming Seattle Landmark status on Hiawatha Playfield.

Bands of Green: A Plan for the Continuing Development of Trails, Boulevards and Linear Parks in Seattle, prepared by the Cedar River Group for the Seattle Parks Foundation, 2006.

APPENDIX D

Historical Significance of Seattle's System of Olmsted Parks and Boulevards

The Olmsted system of interconnected parks and boulevards in Seattle carries historical significance for its period of development, the designers involved, and its influence on Seattle's planning and development patterns. It is also a system that is still highly functional and relevant to city-living today.

A Period of Thoughtful Development

In 1903, when John Charles Olmsted first arrived in Seattle, the City Beautiful movement was only a few years old. Inspired and greatly popularized by the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, the City Beautiful movement espoused the notion that a physically beautiful urban setting would lead to a better society. Also at that time, the modern practice of landscape architecture – as well as the creation of public parks for recreational and social use -- was still relatively new. As described in the 2005 *Historic Resources Plan* adopted by Seattle Parks and Recreation,

the City Beautiful Movement perfectly matched the emerging profession of landscape architecture and its nationwide advocacy for urban park systems. The Urban Parks Movement that emerged was founded on the social principle that the creation of parks would replicate within the city the “good and wholesome” environment of the country.

This was a time of high ideals and great hopes that one's physical environment could influence civic-mindedness as well as living conditions. The Olmsteds – starting with Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and carried forward by his successors, his step-son John Charles and his son Frederick Law, Jr. – believed in the curative effects of the natural environment and the progressive, democratizing influence of public spaces in general. As to the latter, the senior Olmsted once stated:

[Parks are] for people to come together for the single purpose of enjoyment, unembarrassed by the limitations with which they are surrounded at home, or in the pursuit of their daily avocations, or of such amusements as are elsewhere offered.

Olmsted Design, Practice & Philosophy

The Olmsted Brothers' practice and philosophy epitomize the early development of landscape architecture and provides the foundation for the modern profession which followed. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., is generally known as the “father of landscape architecture.” Through the late 19th-century and into the 20th-century, the Olmsted Brothers were renowned throughout North America for their design and planning work. Over their many decades of combined practice (1858 to 2000), they planned and designed major urban parks and park systems, neighborhood subdivisions, college campuses, state and national parks, arboreta, and private and public gardens.

Their six design principles set the groundwork for the practice of traditional landscape architecture well into the 21st century. These principles are as follows:

- A Genius of Place. A design should be developed with intimate knowledge of the site. Characteristics unique to the site/area should be incorporated and featured in the design.
- Unified Composition. All elements of a design should support, rather than detract from, the overall design.
- Orchestration of Movement. Ways and paths should be separated for more efficient and amenable movement and to avoid collision or conflict. In addition, routes should be laid out to direct movement through the landscape in ways that support and enhance the visual and spatial qualities of the site.
- Orchestration of Use. A site design should locate and accommodate various uses so as to avoid conflict between uses and provide the best possible situation for each use.
- Sustainable Design and Environmental Conservation. A site design should make possible long-term maintenance to guarantee greater longevity of the design intent. Where suitable, a site design should retain the site's natural features and provide for the continued ecological health of the site and area.
- A Comprehensive Approach. A design should consider the larger context and surrounding area to avoid negative impacts and to optimize complementary use and effects. When possible, public grounds should be connected by parkways and boulevards to extend, maximize and connect park spaces into a greater whole.

Being at the forefront of their profession, the Olmsteds also guided policy leading to the foundation of the National Park Service and established the first college-level program in landscape architecture. Most notably, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and John Charles Olmsted were principal designers of the Chicago World's Fair campus, which directly led to the City Beautiful movement mentioned above.

A System of Parks and Boulevards to Shape Seattle

In Seattle, John Charles' 1903 and 1908 plans are early examples of a contiguous system of parks and boulevards designed to integrate well with city neighborhoods and take advantage of city location and surrounding environs. Following several weeks of exploring the new city and surrounding area, John Charles proposed locations for parks and parkways that would reach all the city's neighborhoods, take in natural areas such as wooded slopes and ravines, occupy high points to take in distant views and centrally-located open terrain to provide recreation and social gathering areas, and capture the shoreline for public use. Although much of the downtown core was already developed and so largely unavailable for the creation of parks, Olmsted's plan proposed a fully connected system that ringed the downtown area and extended to and beyond the city's boundaries at that time. His use of parkways and boulevards provided green, parklike avenues leading to and through parks as "pleasure drives" that would also, ideally, accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists.

He incorporated much of what was already on the ground – city reservoirs, private parks, a system of bike trails – into a more complete, diverse and connected system. Much of what he proposed is now part of our parks system, including public shoreline along Lake Washington, native woodland, neighborhood playgrounds, and the boulevards connecting many of them. Many of the parks are magnets for social activities, leading to greater density and growth within these neighborhoods.

APPENDIX E

Recommendations for Evaluating Seattle's Olmsted Parks and Boulevards

Site features and elements, individual properties within the parks system, and the system as a whole should be evaluated and protected. Drawing from “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes” (as referenced in footnote 5), following is a list of considerations that should be addressed in assessing what is to be protected:

- Circulation
- Vegetation and Plant Massing
- Relationship to Surroundings
- Relationship of Sites and Site Elements to Each Other
- Natural Systems and Features
- Views and Vistas
- Spatial Organization
- Constructed and/or Retained Water Features
- Buildings and Structures
- Other Built Elements (e.g., benches and lighting)

Seattle's Olmsted Brothers' system of parks and boulevards comprises park sites and the parkways and boulevards that connect them. The system is well-distributed through most of the city's neighborhoods and provides settings for a variety of recreational and social activities. The boulevard connections between parks were conceived as linear parks and scenic “pleasure drives” leading local residents to and through many of the large parks. The routes for these parkways responded to local terrain and natural features to take in distant views, wind along tops of or sides of slopes, follow old streambeds or ravines and run along shorelines and native woodlands. The boulevards were integrated within the fabric of existing neighborhoods and provided ready connections to them, but they also cut a clearly green, distinct path through them.

Features of this system overall that should be protected include:

- Circulation. Protection of the circulation among and through the parks requires maintaining and re-establishing connections, for various modes of travel, throughout the network of parks, parkways and boulevards. It also includes the physical layout of these roads and pathways and connections of these ways to the surrounding neighborhood and maintaining patterns that avoid use conflicts.
- Vegetation and Plant Massing. The system is, conceptually, a green connected system. The “green” element needs to be protected against intrusion or deterioration. Also, existing patterns of planting should be honored and maintained, and replaced where necessary.

- Relationship to Surroundings. The system is intended to be pervious to surrounding neighborhoods for access and use, but it is also to be seen as distinct and clearly bounded.

- Relationship of Sites and Site Elements to Each Other. The system as a whole is diverse in the opportunities it provides, with diverse use being relatively well-distributed through many areas of the city. As referenced above, the continuity of “green” along the entire system also should be protected.

The parks, parkways and boulevards making up the Olmsted system were all proposed with specific design ideas and functions in mind. Many of these were realized through later site design drawings produced by the Olmsted Brothers, whereas other sites were either acquired and developed much later or were designed by others. Of the latter, some involved John Charles in design-review, resulting in a site design further influenced though not designed by the Olmsted Brothers.

For all parks and boulevards within the system, whether or not designed by the Olmsted Brothers, the following should be protected:

- Natural Systems and Features
- Views and Vistas
- Relationship to Surroundings

These features all concern pre-existing qualities of the site that informed John Charles in his plan recommendations. Considerations include natural waterways, native woodland, existing terrain, site orientation and exposure, and site boundaries and entrances/approaches.

For parks and boulevards either designed by John Charles or designed with his influence, the following should also be considered for protection and maintenance:

- Spatial Organization
- Circulation
- Constructed and/or Retained Water Features
- Vegetation and Plant Massing
- Relationship of Site Elements to Each Other

These features all pertain to general site organization, including focal areas, and flow, and would have been addressed by John Charles with any design review. Where John Charles produced the design, these elements should be further identified as to design style. The Olmsted Brothers typically employed – and mixed -- both picturesque and pastoral design approaches for varying effects. The pastoral style generally employs open rolling lawn with informal plantings and paths skirting the edges of the central open space, for a generally peaceful and restful effect. The picturesque style – more incorporated than designed in the Seattle system – utilizes natural features for dramatic effect, including changing view aspects and light quality. John Charles embraced a more picturesque approach -- often juxtaposed with a more formally designed, Beaux-Arts element -- in areas with mature woodland, steep slopes and ravines, and lush native vegetation. Under the consideration, “Relationship of Site Elements to Each Other,” juxtaposed versus harmonious treatment of site features should also be identified.

For parks and boulevards that were designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm, the following additional categories should also be slated for protection:

- Buildings and Structures
- Other Built Elements (e.g., benches and lighting)