



Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks

P.O. BOX 9884, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98109-0884
SEATTLEOLMSTED.ORG FRIENDS@SEATTLEOLMSTED.ORG

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Briefing to the Board of Parks Commissioners – June 24, 2009

The Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks (FSOP), an all-volunteer organization affiliated with the National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), was founded in 1983 with a mission to raise awareness of and preserve the legacy of Seattle's Olmsted Brothers-designed city-wide system of parks and boulevards. This legacy began with John Charles Olmsted's first visit to Seattle in 1903, when he produced the first comprehensive park and boulevard plan and report to the Seattle Board of Parks Commissioners, which was later expanded in 1908 to include the newly annexed areas of the city (Rainier Beach, Columbia City, West Seattle, Ballard and Ravenna). Both plans proposed a system of parks, both larger parks and neighborhood parks and playgrounds, and interconnecting boulevards that became the core of Seattle's current park system.

Our mission dovetails with the Parks Department's Strategic Action Plan Goal #1C, titled "Olmsted Park and Boulevard System." Goal #1 C reads as follows:

1. Communicate the Olmsted Vision and Plan, including the location and current status of Olmsted parks; i. Develop a promotional plan to identify the locations, features, and benefits of Seattle's Olmsted Plan parks; 2. Evaluate Parks and Recreation's progress in managing the Olmsted Plan; i. Identify and implement management standards for historic Olmsted parks; ii. Evaluate possibilities to enhance park and open space linkages that strengthen connections consistent with the 1903 Olmsted Plan; 3. Continue to work with other City departments on a plan for the development of green streets and parkways."

To carry out our mission, we have concentrated on three objectives or activity areas:

1. Raising public awareness of the Olmsted legacy in Seattle;
2. Serving as a project review board for projects that would restore, enhance or alter the historic character of the Olmsted parks and boulevards, and
3. Advocating for protection measures to preserve the legacy.

Here is a brief overview of our accomplishments and on-going work in each of these 3 activity areas:

1. Raising public awareness:
 - In the spring of 2003, we celebrated the centennial of John Charles Olmsted's first visit to the Pacific Northwest, coordinating a year-long series of events, exhibits and information products including a national conference with speakers from across the United States, a series of guided parks tours and a

Seattle Channel documentary on the Olmsted Park Legacy, accessible at: www.seattlechannel.org/videos/video.ASP?ID=1080.

- Currently, we are celebrating the centennial of the Olmsted-designed Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition of 1909, with monthly walking tours; lectures to the Historians' Guild and the Historic Seattle/Museum of History and Industry A-Y-P Centennial symposium; and a panel discussion on the significance of the A-Y-P for the future of the UW campus, as part of the public Olmsted legacy, tentatively scheduled for October 15, 2009.
- Every year, we conduct monthly walking tours of the Olmsted parks and boulevards, usually beginning in April and concluding in October, with an additional walk on New Years' Day. These walks are advertised in the "Seattle Times" and in our own quarterly newsletter. This year, the usual walks have been replaced with A-Y-P/UW Campus walks.
- We have produced a number of graphic panels and materials, including the Olmsted design history panels that have been in permanent display at the top of the Volunteer Park water tower since 1997; the companion *Guide to the Olmsted Interpretive Exhibit*; the 2003 "Olmsted Centennial News" and its companion, the 2009 "Olmsted A-Y-P Centennial News;" and the recent *Guide to the Olmsted Legacy at the UW Campus*.
- Our goal for raising public awareness has recently been given an important boost by the publication of "Greenscapes: Olmsted's Pacific Northwest," by FSOP board member, Joan Hockaday.
- In addition to these activities, we continue to propose and advocate for installing brown street name signs on the park boulevards to highlight them as part of the Seattle park system, under the management of the Parks Department. Accomplishment of this objective is under way along Queen Anne Boulevard.

2. Serving as a project review board:

- Our Executive Board meets once per month to review any and all projects proposed within the boundaries of the Olmsted parks and boulevards. Sometimes these projects are proposed by the Parks Department; sometimes they are listed Parks Levy projects; and at other times they are proposed by citizens' groups, such as the Friends of Seward Park.
- In the past, one of the most significant successes we had with design review was our collaboration with the Parks Department, Seattle Public Utilities, Berger Partnership Landscape Architects and Groundswell off Broadway to develop the award-winning design of Cal Anderson Park along design principles originally proposed by Olmsted for the park (then known as Lincoln Park.)
- Examples of recent design review activities and actions by our board include: the Lake Washington Boulevard Vegetation Management Plan of 2008; the Hiawatha Park and Playground sports field improvement project; the Sound Transit alterations to the northwest corner of Cal Anderson Park; the Jefferson Park (and reservoir lid) master plan.
- Examples of current and on-going design review activities include (but are not limited to): the Seward Park Play Area design; neighborhood street and

pedestrian improvements proposed by Safeway along the northern edge of Hiawatha Park and Playground; SPU's storm drainage tank facility along the southern edge of the Washington Park Arboretum at Madison Street; the city-wide parks boulevard closure proposals, and in particular, the Arboretum Drive closure program; and most significantly, review of the design proposals for the State Route 520 bridge replacement program as they would impact the Arboretum and Lake Washington Boulevard.

- We are also often asked and are happy to comment on design proposals for other parks that have only a tangential connection to the Olmsted Parks and Boulevards, and Superintendent Tim Gallagher has specifically requested this of our board. Recent examples of such design review or parks advocacy activities include cooperation with the Seattle Parks Foundation on promoting South Lake Union Park, which was originally proposed by John Charles Olmsted, and design review of proposed alterations to City Hall Park next to the King County Courthouse.

3. Advocating for preservation, protection and implementation measures:

- Currently, four parks and boulevards designed or proposed by the Olmsted Brothers have been designated as City of Seattle landmarks. These are: Hiawatha Park and Playground; Kinneer Park; Cal Anderson Park; and Cheasty Boulevard. We would like to see that number increased in the future and we are currently preparing a nomination for Volunteer Park. Volunteer Park is the Olmsted park for which the largest number of detailed drawings were prepared by the Olmsted Brothers firm. We hope that designation of Volunteer Park will lead to designation of other Olmsted parks and boulevards as city landmarks.
- In advocating for preservation and protection, we have several on-going concerns:
 1. Segmentation of the Boulevard System
 2. Loss of historic character and intent
 3. Lack of use/enforcement of existing standards for Olmsted Parks
 4. Private encroachments on park and boulevard property
 5. Tree cutting and loss
 6. Impacts of SR 520 on Lake Washington Boulevard and Washington Park
- We are supportive of continuing efforts to implement the Olmsted vision for a comprehensive open space system for Seattle and for the region. Projects which developed out of our 2003 Olmsted Centennial include Seattle Open Space 2100 and the Cascade Agenda. We are also supportive of efforts which continue to implement Olmsted's recommendations such as South Lake Union Park, efforts to continue to green our city such as the Green Street proposals, and efforts to locate parks within walking distance for all Seattle citizens.