



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION for  
OLMSTED  
PARKS

*“... advances Olmsted’s principles and legacy of irreplaceable parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people’s lives.”*

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May 2, 2018

Mr. Ron Forman, President and CEO, Audubon Nature Institute  
6500 Magazine Street  
New Orleans, LA 70118

Dear Mr. Forman:

The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP) is writing to register its significant concern about the Audubon Park master plan that we understand has been in development for several years and is now approaching completion. Audubon Park is an Olmsted Brothers-designed heritage landscape of national significance. As such, it deserves respect and warrants protection. The park is far more than the sum of features and functions that to date have been the focus of the master planning process. The landscape itself must be elevated as a core consideration, for without it there is no integrating setting in which to embed human activities.

Audubon Park is arguably New Orleans’ finest park, a public green space that contributes greatly to the city’s unique identity and serves people from all walks of life. It offers both opportunities for active recreation and a beautiful natural setting for informal use and personal rejuvenation. Audubon Park is also a masterwork of the renowned Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm, which for over a century shaped the profession of landscape architecture and the livability of cities across the country. New Orleans is among those fortunate communities that still reap the benefits of park acquisition and planning undertaken by insightful citizens generations ago. These historic public green spaces grow more valuable every year, yet are highly vulnerable to loss through insensitive change. Olmsted parks are irreplaceable but not indestructible.

John Charles Olmsted spearheaded Audubon Park’s original design in 1898, generating a Preliminary Plan followed by detailed topographic, grading, drainage, planting, circulation, hardscape and special park feature plans. Olmsted and his successors continued to guide park development, refinement, alterations and expansion for over forty years. Despite changes Audubon Park still embodies essential Olmstedian design characteristics transmitted from founder Frederick

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Law Olmsted to his sons through close collaboration and by example. The most evident features are:

- Capturing Genius of Place, the distinctive qualities that give New Orleans its unmistakable atmosphere and character.
- Sustainable Design and Environmental Conservation, taking advantage of the site's natural characteristics rather than ignoring or degrading them.
- Orchestration of Use, providing for an array of uses while avoiding conflicts among them by thoughtful separation.
- Unified Composition, creating an aesthetic and psychological experience greater than and irreducible to its parts, instilling awareness of beauty, order and continuity.

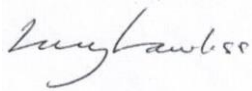
One universal goal of Olmsted-designed urban parks is to provide democratic space available to everyone and permanently protected from private appropriation and non-park use. Frederick Law Olmsted conceived of New York's Central Park as a place "to which people may easily go when the day's work is done, and where they may stroll for an hour,...where they shall in effect, find the city put far away from them." (1870) He, and his sons after him, believed that "City dwellers need contact with the natural world in order to preserve not only their physical health but also their mental tranquility." Will this overarching purpose for Audubon Park survive if more facilities are added and ever less green space remains accessible and free?

Established in 1980, NAOP is a coalition of design and preservation professionals, historic property and park managers, scholars, municipal officials, citizen activists, and representatives of numerous Olmsted organizations around the United States. Its concern is the legacy of landscape work left by Frederick Law Olmsted and the firm continued by his sons, John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. NAOP is the only national organization solely dedicated to preserving the Olmsted legacy by providing the advocacy, research, and education needed to protect, restore, and maintain these exemplary parks and landscapes.

Before adopting a new master plan for Audubon Park, we urge that those participating in its creation pause and fully consider the under-represented elements of park heritage and physical landscape characterization. In particular NAOP recommends that, before continuing, a Heritage Landscape Report be generated by a qualified professional with experience in historic landscape rehabilitation, and that its results be formative in shaping the final master plan.

Audubon Park and the people of New Orleans stand to benefit from a more inclusively conceived plan. It can likewise elevate the national prominence and foster future integrity of this special heritage landscape. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Lucy Lawliss, FASLA  
NAOP Co-Chair



Addy Smith-Reiman  
NAOP Co-Chair

cc: Ms. Laurie Conkerton, Executive Vice President  
Mr. Mark Ripple, Principal of Eskew+Dumez+Ripple  
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