



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION *for*
OLMSTED
PARKS

Oral Testimony before the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

Good morning, I am Dede Petri, president and CEO of the National Association for Olmsted Parks.

We are proud to be the managing partner of Olmsted 200, the nationwide celebration in 2022 of Frederick Law Olmsted's 200th birthday, dedicated to Parks for All People.

We are working with literally hundreds of organizations – including friends groups in Milwaukee, Lake Geneva and Kohler -- to celebrate this landmark and to draw attention to Olmsted's extraordinary legacy.

As you know, Milwaukee has not one but three Olmsted Parks – Washington, Lake and Riverside – not to mention Newberry Boulevard.

Olmsted visited four times over a period of two years, 1892-1894. He was a friend of Christian Wahl, the first City Parks Commissioner. His papers indicate that he and the Wahls became family friends. There is even one letter where Olmsted lets his family know that Mr. Wahl has been introducing him to some mighty good beer.

Yet, in too many ways this heritage is a secret [underappreciated].

So I am here to thank the Chairwoman and Supervisor Burgelis for helping to raise the profile of this important contributor to Milwaukee.

But I want to submit to you that even more important than Olmsted's landscapes are the principles behind them—**what we might call the Olmsted Way.**

We take public parks for granted. But before Olmsted, parks were largely private property, open only at the whim of the rich and powerful.

Olmsted didn't design for the elites; he designed for everyone -- urban dwellers, for the most part, who had no opportunity to leave the city.

Working both before and after the Civil War, at a time of deep divisions, he looked at parks as democratic spaces – where residents of every background could come together – be seen together and be restored.

Long before the medical community, he also understood the important health benefits of access to nature – something we have surely learned during the pandemic. And while he would not have used the term sustainability, he understood the important role that parks play in cooling our cities, in providing clean air and clean water.

In too many cities, we know that communities lack access to parks. In too many, we have seen actions that divide neighborhoods– as happened in Washington Park during the construction of the spur.

That is another reason we applaud this Resolution: to honor Olmsted at a time when city leaders are examining ways to reunite Washington Park as it was designed -- and to bring neighborhoods back together.

This is an honor for Olmsted but it is also an important step in recognizing the remarkable assets that you have not only in Washington Park, but in all your Olmsted Parks.

We wholeheartedly support this Resolution and thank you.

