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**Testimony of Anne Neal Petri
President and CEO
National Association for Olmsted Parks
Before the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Committee on Parks and Culture
Tuesday, July 19, 2022**

Good morning, I am Dede Petri, president and CEO of the National Association for Olmsted Parks. Thank you to Chairwoman Nicholson and Supervisor Burgelis for this opportunity.

Biographer Justin Martin says Frederick Law Olmsted may be the "most important historical figure that the average American knows least about."

With this in mind, the National Association for Olmsted Parks heartily supports the resolution to name the roadway in Washington Park Olmsted Way, particularly in 2022, as the country celebrates Olmsted's 200th birthday.

We serve as a national voice for Olmsted parks and landscapes and are proud to be the managing partner of Olmsted 200, the nationwide celebration of Olmsted's 200th birthday, dedicated to Parks for All People. We are pleased to work with Olmsted friends groups in Milwaukee, Lake Geneva and Kohler. Our board chair Philip Schultz is from Fox Point and I come from Fond du Lac.

We can honestly say: Milwaukee has an extremely important and underappreciated Olmsted heritage. Drawing attention to this heritage is timely and appropriate.

Thanks to Milwaukee's first Parks Commissioner Christian Wahl -- for whom Wahl Avenue is already named -- Olmsted visited Milwaukee four times.

In the course of his visits from 1892-1894, Olmsted helped site parks as well as create Washington, Lake, and Riverside Parks and Newberry Boulevard, connecting the latter two. He was focused on green space, but he was also attentive to circulation and connectivity. Roads in his plans are not mere roads but essential to the park's enjoyment. A signature feature of his park designs is a separation of ways, providing for safe and separate pathways for pedestrians, horses and carriages.

Olmsted designed the circulation system to achieve his vision of an accessible democratic space --where residents of different neighborhoods and different backgrounds could come together.

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Olmsted was a great landscape architect, and founder of the profession. But, more importantly, he was a visionary reformer, and his parks, and the principles underlying them – equitable access, public health and sustainability -- deserve our recognition, our understanding and our stewardship.

Olmsted was working both before and after the Civil War. He served as an undercover reporter for the New York Times, showing the moral and economic bankruptcy of slavery. He was appointed the first head of the US Sanitary Commission, the precursor to the Red Cross, saving hundreds of Union soldiers' lives through improved sanitation, food, and medical care.

These experiences and others, throughout his life, informed his belief that parks were and should be critical infrastructure and community assets. He believed that the thoughtful built environment could have positive social, cultural and economic impacts: Parks for all people.

In Milwaukee and Buffalo – and other communities—parks have too often failed to be accessible for all people. In too many cities, we have seen actions that divide communities– as happened in Washington Park during the construction of the spur.

That is another reason we applaud this plan 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 asset that is Washington Park.

As we celebrate Olmsted's bicentennial, Olmsted has bequeathed us valuable lessons for the twenty-first century – indeed, we might call them “the Olmsted Way.” He has shown us, in city after city, the value of green and open spaces accessible to all. He has provided us with designs that renew our spirits and restore our souls. He has invoked the better angels of our nature to come together in a spirit of community to each other in the park.

Olmsted's enduring vision for Washington Park merits recognition. We wholeheartedly support this Resolution. Thank you.