



October 1, 2024

Andrew Kitzmann

Executive Director, Hudson River Valley Greenway

Director, Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area

[Andy\\_kitzmann@nps.gov](mailto:Andy_kitzmann@nps.gov)

Via Email

**Re: Request for Inclusion of Downing Park in the National Heritage Area**

Dear Mr. Kitzmann:

From September 13-15, the Olmsted Network and hundreds of friends from across the country were delighted to visit Newburgh as part of our national conference — Landscapes of Renewal: Olmsted, Vaux, and Downing. Our day in Newburgh included talks, music, Downing Park guided tours and a Hudson River dinner cruise, giving us an appreciation of what the City has to offer to both its citizens and visitors. Nature and history abound, and it was amazing to experience so many of America's 19<sup>th</sup> century iconic landscapes and buildings after only knowing them from books and photographs.

Much to our surprise, despite its national significance, Downing Park has yet to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, *the* list of our country's most important historic properties. We also note that Downing Park is not included in the Hudson River Valley National Historic Area. Accordingly, we write to request that you add it to the Heritage Area.

We make this request because Downing Park is a unique part of our country's landscape history. Named to commemorate America's pre-eminent first-generation horticulturalist and landscape gardener, Andrew Jackson Downing — Newburgh's native son — **Downing Park is the only park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux and their sons, John Charles Olmsted and Downing Vaux.** Of course, Olmsted and Vaux are now known as the legendary partners that created not only Central Park in New York City but

other historic landmarks across the country including Prospect Park, the parks and parkways in Buffalo, and Niagara Falls State Park. Both John Charles Olmsted and Downing Vaux were founders of the American Society of Landscape Architects, an organization that is celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year in Washington, DC.

Downing, though little remembered today, was commissioned by the US Congress to design the National Mall — a historic assignment cut short by Downing’s untimely death in a steamboat accident on the Hudson. Because of his premature death, Downing’s significant contributions are, today, underappreciated — limited to a small memorial urn on the grounds of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and a small plaque marking the location of his home in Newburgh, demolished many decades ago.

Given the undisputed significance of Newburgh and Newburgh’s native son, this designation of Downing Park in the Historic Area appears long overdue. We note that the Heritage Area currently includes Olana, Mount Gulian, Hudson River School artists and multiple environmental sites. Adding Downing Park to this list will help make important historical connections in a variety of ways. Olmsted, Vaux and Church were involved in saving Niagara Falls. Vaux was instrumental in the design of both Olana and Wilderstein. Downing was a close friend of James F. Brown, an escaped slave, whose story as a Master Gardener is told at Mount Gulian.

We and our friends from across the continent believe that designation of Downing Park to the Heritage Area would go far to enhance the public’s understanding and appreciation of Newburgh’s role in the history of the Hudson Valley and the country more broadly. As New York State and the country prepare for America 250, the addition of Downing Park could help engage multiple audiences and spur development.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Neal Petri". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray circular stamp.

Anne “Dede” Neal Petri  
President & CEO,  
Olmsted Network

Cc:

Erik S. Kreuzsch, National Park Service Regional Office

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