



Dennis Kois
Executive Director
Yerkes Future Foundation
373 West Geneva Street,
Williams Bay, WI 53191

Dear Dennis,

The Olmsted Network is the national organization dedicated to preserving and advancing the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted firm. As part of this mission, we advocate for the protection of Olmsted-designed landscapes across the country, including the historically significant grounds at Yerkes.

Designed by John Charles Olmsted, a principal of the Olmsted firm, the Yerkes landscape is a distinguished example of American landscape architecture. We appreciate Yerkes requesting an advisory opinion as to what elements constitute the key features of the landscape design at Yerkes. The Foundation's efforts to protect the integrity of the overall landscape design in Williams Bay even as you update it for future generations to enjoy are to be commended.

A signature element of the Olmsted design for Yerkes is the entry sequence: a narrow approach with the view tightly framed by foliage, followed by an expansive view to the building with the great ellipse, defined by a narrow elliptical pathway at its edge, in the foreground. The scale of the ellipse in particular was crafted to frame the Beaux Arts observatory and create a sense of harmony between structure and setting.

You asked about possibly modifying the ellipse to allow two-way traffic in whole or in part. In our view, such a change would compromise the design and diminish the

landscape's historical authenticity. Circulation patterns are a critical part of Olmsted designs, influencing how people move through—and connect with—a space. The ellipse is more than a road—it is a defining feature of a national treasure.

Additional key features of the Olmsted design at Yerkes include the curved pathways encircling the building site (which were not fully completed in-period), the inclusion of three viewsheds allowing glimpses of Geneva Lake (since overgrown), and the extensive foundation plantings that provided a transition between the building and the landscape (which were removed in later decades).

We commend the Yerkes Future Foundation for its exemplary restoration efforts and urge you to honor and protect the key elements of the original design as you update your site and facility for contemporary use. This particular landscape design represents some of the best Olmsted work, more of a work of art than solely a functional design to alter the ellipse would be akin to painting over a Rembrandt.

We would be happy to provide additional information or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Breitkopf', written in a cursive style.

Sue Breitkopf
President
Olmsted Network

cc: Tom Nickols, Chair, Yerkes Future Foundation