



GREATER BOSTON TO MARK THE BICENTENNIAL OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

*OLMSTED NOW connects neighbors and organizations through parks,
public space and enduring values*

BOSTON, MA 06 April 2021 – Visionary American landscape architect, journalist, social critic and public administrator Frederick Law Olmsted (b. April 26, 1822) will turn 200 next year. [Olmsted Now](#), Greater Boston's Olmsted Bicentennial, is a coalition-led platform to connect communities and organizations in making parks and public space more vibrant, verdant and welcoming for all. A part of the national bicentennial program "Olmsted 200", Greater Boston's Olmsted Now will kick off the countdown and planning phase with a virtual [Community Open House](#), free and open to all, at 6:30PM on 26 April 2021—Olmsted's 199th birthday.

Many of the ideas that drove Olmsted's 19th century work remain urgent, including fostering civic dialogue, building healthy environments and championing community access to greenspace. Living in Brookline at the height of his career, Olmsted founded the first landscape architecture practice in the United States here and established an expansive career and lasting legacy, including the Emerald Necklace, the nation's oldest linear park system that connects over a dozen Boston neighborhoods. Spanning journalism and abolition, public health and emergency relief, and urban planning and natural preservation against privatization, Olmsted's public work continues to engage people in relevant issues of shared use, shared health and shared power in public places—the grounding for today's calls for environmental and spatial justice.

Olmsted Now aims to share, discuss and act on Olmsted's original ideas, and to advance them with the "fierce urgency of now," in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. Work is already underway. Since 2020, the [Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site \(Fairsted\)](#) and the [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#) have co-organized monthly meetings of over 100 volunteers representing Boston neighborhoods and over 50 organizations within a 60-mile radius around the city to date. This growing coalition continues to welcome partners who seek to connect their Greater Boston neighbors to the benefits of open space through shared learning and resources. Olmsted Now is a platform for partners to highlight existing work for new audiences, form new partnerships or develop entirely new programs and events. It is an opportunity to collectively grapple with what parks and public places will mean for years to come, and to affirm and advance Olmsted's impact on civic life and public health, engage residents in learning about this common resource and intentionally build resilient and inclusive places together.

The Olmsted Now effort will connect community organizers, funders and partners who have a stake in the future of parks and public places and advance their respective missions, visibility and impact. In doing so, Olmsted Now will catalyze countless public offerings to celebrate, challenge and learn from Boston's open spaces. Bicentennial events and resources will be available starting April through October 2022, and have the potential to launch programming partnerships that last well beyond the bicentennial year.





“Even before, but certainly during the ongoing pandemic, we have seen how vital parks and public spaces are for our shared use, shared health and shared power—for safe play and protest, to reflect and recharge,” shared Karen Mauney-Brodek, President of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. “Olmsted designed the Emerald Necklace park system to connect over a dozen neighborhoods and we want to do better to make *all* visitors to these spaces feel truly connected. I personally hope the bicentennial planning and partnerships build strength to strength, by sharing valuable knowledge and amplifying voices most impacted but least often heard in spatial and environmental justice efforts.”

On 26 April 2021, Olmsted Now will launch a [new website](#) with content that will continue to grow and evolve in the coming months. This new online resource will contain information on Olmsted’s life and public works in the Greater Boston area and promote community events and programs from local and regional organizations. A vital part of the website will be an open call for users’ personal park stories—whether short, long, a memory or something new—the coalition of Olmsted Now invites site users to engage, share and connect with each other.

This past year, Stephen Gray of Cambridge, MA-based [Grayscale Collaborative](#) has helped guide Olmsted Now through outreach and [equity analysis](#). Using recent census data, the team mapped Boston’s youth and elderly from communities identifying as Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) along the major greenspace of the Emerald Necklace and analyzed how Olmsted Now can spark and support partnerships with the greatest equity impacts on these groups. With the Collaborative’s guidance, Olmsted Now is forming a representative Committee of Neighborhoods, staffed by community members who live within walking distance of the Emerald Necklace and who are already doing work on environmental and racial justice and health equity. The Committee members will oversee a grant making process for programs and learning outcomes as part of Olmsted Now and be decision makers for how bicentennial resources and activities are best prioritized in respective neighborhoods. This is a first step in modelling anti-racist and trust-based resource development and distribution by and for park communities.

“Frederick Law Olmsted and his legacy represent virtues that are best qualities in humanity: being civic minded within shared communities and passionate stewards to the physical and natural world. The values of democracy are more important now than ever before, and Greater Boston’s Bicentennial celebrates the ideals of democratic access and public space enjoyment for all. ‘Democracy in trees and dirt’ is just one of many topics to explore, including sustainable and intentional design, public health, social justice and shared environments for learning,” shared Jason Newman, Superintendent for the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. “At the Historic Site, we are excited the bicentennial will be a platform to partner more actively and make ourselves a more visible and welcoming resource to learn about how Olmsted’s work and ideas impact our daily lives. It’s been exciting to collaborate with the Conservancy team and all of our local partners on this effort.”

Planning for the Frederick Law Olmsted Bicentennial will officially kick off with a series of virtual events on April 26, 2021. All events are free and open to the public:

- Olmsted 200 invites everyone to screen *Olmsted and America’s Urban Parks*, a documentary by director Rebecca Messner and narrated by actress Kerry Washington, for free and at any time April 24 - 25, and then join other FLO fans on **April 26 from 5:30-6:30PM** for a live panel discussion about the many ways Olmsted’s values influence American life today. www.Olmsted200.org





- **6:30-8PM:** Learn about Olmsted's public work — spanning journalism and abolition, public health and emergency relief, urban planning and natural preservation against privatization — and why, 200 years later, Greater Boston will host initiatives that reanimate Olmsted's ideals at the **Community Open House** for Olmsted Now. Hear about values and goals for Olmsted Now, meet amazing partners, share park stories and ideas, discover great resources, upcoming events and many ways to get involved! Register at rebrand.ly/OlmstedNow and visit www.OlmstedNow.org
- **8PM:** “Ecologies of Memory” talk by Sarah Zewde, founding principal of Studio Zewde and Assistant Professor of Practice of Landscape Architecture at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. Organized by Friends of Fairsted. www.friendsoffairsted.org

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About Frederick Law Olmsted

After a variety of careers, Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), at mid-life, shifted his attention to landscape design and the importance of providing green spaces for urban areas. In this new endeavor, his work helped to establish the American profession of landscape architecture. He created a notable body of park, institutional and private residential designs that influenced the essential shape of cities across North America. Olmsted instilled in his colleagues and apprentices the philosophy that thoughtful and purposeful landscape design, which respected natural site conditions, should provide restorative public experiences, necessary for a healthy society.

To carry out his work, Olmsted developed a firm where he supervised the education, not only of his sons, John Charles and Frederick Law, Jr., but of his many apprentices, such as Henry S. Codman and Charles Eliot, who he felt had the talent and temperament to advance the evolving landscape design profession. The senior Olmsted believed that landscape architects needed more than knowledge of plants and soil; they needed to understand the artistic nature of their work and how designed landscapes could influence human activity and social values. When he retired in 1897, he left a legacy of diverse and well-designed landscapes and a new generation of landscape professionals who understood his vision and could interpret it for the next century. In MA, the Olmsted firm had 2,162 projects, the greatest number in any US state. Olmsted himself worked on approximately 500 projects in his long career, including the Emerald Necklace in Boston and Brookline, MA, Central Park, New York, NY, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY, the United States Capitol Grounds and Terraces, Washington, DC, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, IL, the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC, and many academic campuses, including Stanford University, CA.

About Emerald Necklace Conservancy

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is a non-profit organization founded in 1998 to steward and champion the Emerald Necklace, Boston’s largest park system. The Conservancy protects, restores, helps maintain and promotes the Emerald Necklace’s seven distinct parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, and comprises 1,100 acres of meadows, woodlands and paths. In collaboration with its public partners, the Conservancy provides maintenance of the parks and capital restoration projects, free cultural events, visitor services and environmental education. The parks serve as a respite from the city, a valuable commuting connector and a community convener for more than one million residents and tourists each year, and have taken on a special significance over the past year as a safe and socially distanced destination for local residents and regional visitors. www.emeraldnecklace.org

About Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (Fairsted)

Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site preserves the home, office, surrounding landscape and abundant archival collections associated with Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted firm. Frederick Law Olmsted is widely recognized as the founder of the profession of landscape architecture in America. From this location, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted firm designed over 6,000 projects across North America, from expansive public parks to intimate private gardens. Located in Brookline, Massachusetts, the National Historic Site offers unique opportunities for visitors to learn about and be inspired by the life and work of Frederick Law Olmsted and his sons and successors, and the central role they played in defining landscape architecture, city planning and scenic preservation in the United States. www.nps.gov/frla

For more information, please contact:

Edwina A. Kluender
KLÜNDER Communications
617 888 5859 / eakluender@gmail.com

