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EMERALD NECKLACE CONSERVANCY INVITES ALL TO EXPLORE EQUITY ACHIEVEMENTS, LEARNINGS AND COMMITMENTS IN OLMSTED NOW IMPACT REPORT

*“Olmsted Now: Greater Boston’s Olmsted Bicentennial” Amplified
Neighborhood Voices and Raised Discourse on Parks Equity Through
Creative, Purposeful Cultural Partnerships*

BOSTON, MA April 26, 2023 — The [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#) invites all to explore parks equity accomplishments, learnings and future commitments through the [Olmsted Now Impact Report](#), which summarizes the activities and measures the impacts of [Olmsted Now: Greater Boston’s Olmsted Bicentennial](#). From 2020 through 2022, Frederick Law Olmsted’s enduring legacy prompted a Boston area-based, coalition-led platform to connect neighborhoods and organizations in making parks and public space more vibrant, verdant, equitable and welcoming for all. The resulting 2023 Report will guide the Conservancy’s future work and serve as a lasting community reference and resource. Below are highlights of the bicentennial’s parks equity values and models that could inform new initiatives and impacts for Greater Boston.

Olmsted Now was collaborative by design. Rather than focus on a single person, date or place, the 2022 programming for *Olmsted Now* invited neighborhood leaders, creatives, cultural stewards and larger organizations to experience the contemporary relevance of Olmsted’s legacy values: shared use, shared health and shared power across parks and public space. The bicentennial’s planning and administration was co-organized by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, serving as fiscal sponsor, fundraiser, communications coordinator and parks program permit advocate, in partnership with [Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site](#), whose team of National Park Service rangers and experts gave the effort a federal reach, archival depth and excellent interpretive scope. *Olmsted Now* was structured as a “practice field” to initiate new models of partnership, power sharing and collaborative public events called Parks as Platform that could foster cross-neighborhood connection to counter segregation exacerbated by Covid.

Partnerships

From 2019 through 2022, the *Olmsted Now* coalition grew, resisting silos and embracing relationships, creating opportunity, not obligation, and prioritizing process over product. Totalling 186 partnerships across more than 25 cities and towns in Massachusetts (nearly 20 percent were outside Greater Boston), the coalition came together from shared areas of interest in advocacy, arts and culture, civic and community organizing, place-keeping, education and empowerment, environment and health, food and transit justice, landscape history and park design, philanthropy and stewardship and more. Nearly 58 percent of the



186 organizations were primarily committed to missions of shared power, defined as cultural affirmation, education, expression and advocacy.

Collaboration also flourished, bringing strength in numbers to existing programs. In total, 65 partners held 241 public events and 31 partners shared 74 public stories on OlmstedNow.org. Further, 42 partners participated in 16 power sharing projects on parks equity and spatial justice and 22 partners became active in 10 ongoing public dialogues.

Based on learnings through 2022, the Conservancy has examined how partnerships can bolster its core initiatives, governance recruitment and fundraising approaches. *Read the full Partnerships section on the **Olmsted Now Impact Report** on pages 23–52.*

Power Sharing

Initiated through [an equity analysis](#) for the bicentennial, the Olmsted Now Committee of Neighborhoods was formed to rectify a structural inequality in park decision making in Greater Boston. Comprising 14 intergenerational leaders working in the Dorchester, Grove Hall, Mattapan and Roxbury neighborhoods across an array of disciplines, the Committee re-centered decisions to prioritize programming that could expand what is possible in Boston parks—and for whom. The Committee distributed over \$200,000 in grants to fund community-generated bicentennial programs focused on park equity and spatial justice. The Committee received 87 proposals totaling \$1,175,000 in funding requests—a testament to both the deep talent and overwhelming demand for more culturally inclusive, neighborhood-determined greenspace programming in Boston.

Inspiring proposals from 16 local creatives that strove to turn the idea of parks equity into strategic action were selected to receive [Olmsted Now Parks Equity and Spatial Justice Grants](#). Each creative proposed to engage participants through intersections of movement, making, music, storytelling, ritual, history-keeping and future-making. Themes of cultural affirmation, healing and revitalization ran through all projects. The Committee chose to award six projects with grants of \$20,000; seven projects with grants of \$10,000; and three projects with grants of \$5,000. The projects ran from July until November 2022 in 24 neighborhood locations within East Boston, Charlestown, North End, Downtown, Chinatown, Kenmore Square-Back Bay, South End, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Franklin Park, Dorchester, Hyde Park and Roslindale, presenting 43 unique events that were 100% BIPOC-led.

Based on these learnings, the Conservancy has committed to center its 2023 public programs in cultural partnership and parks equity, including a program budget that is more than five times larger than in prior years. *Read the full Power Sharing section on the **Olmsted Now Impact Report** on pages 53–98.*

Parks as Platform

The Conservancy sought to practice partnership-centered programming and listen to park users to understand which park uses resonated most in each greenspace. To achieve this, its annual free *Summer on the Emerald Necklace* event series was expanded into a shared resource for cross-neighborhood collaboration and community-generated public events from April to October 2022. Each month, the Conservancy collaborated with a partner, focusing on a site along the Necklace park system to anchor programming with extra support as needed, including volunteer coordination, securing permits, portable utilities and restrooms, convening space and seating, promotion and more. In addition, the Conservancy



hosted a parkwide event, called Emerald Necklace Parkfest, which centered on the goals of Olmsted Now: shared use, shared health and shared power. This was achieved by providing the necessary infrastructure (furniture, tents and power) to facilitate a range of activities, inviting partners to program in the parks, and creating easy, attractive wayfinding, access points and shareable marketing strategies. The goal of all the Parks as Platform events was to increase park access, amplify partner capacity to welcome expanded audiences and maximize the impacts of diverse public offerings using the “parks as platform.”

Using these events as a kind of “listening tour,” the Conservancy sought to understand what people want and need from the parks now and how the Conservancy might build stronger community connections to the parks in future. In total, 22 musical acts, 9 art activities and 48 volunteers enlivened the sites during this period. The Parks as Platform approach generated ideas for creative uses of the parks, strategies for being more inclusive for different audiences, attracted more youth than typically use the parks and created a safe environment for the surrounding neighborhoods to engage with the parks—and each other.

With these successes, the Conservancy has committed its 2023 programming to amplify parks equity for partners already offering fests in the parks, such as BAMS Fest, JP Porchfest and Fenway Porchfest. The partners behind these long-standing Necklace-based programs are invited to take part in a new cohort coordinated by the Conservancy with monthly dialogues for transparent knowledge sharing and dedicated funding to meet partner-specific needs to increase parks access. Additionally, the Conservancy will build upon its one-day Parkfest event to select a single location for focused audience outreach and increase impact of investment in an intentionally inclusive, neighborhood-driven park experience. *Read the full Parks as Platform section on the **Olmsted Now Impact Report** on pages 99–138.*

Recognition and Support

Olmsted Now received many forms of recognition including three civic declarations, three awards, eight major speaking invitations, four gratitude feedback reflection sessions and over 40 media pieces locally and beyond. Olmsted Now was supported by 124 funders, of which 66 percent were individuals, 18 percent were foundations or non-profit organizations, 14 percent were corporations, and 2 percent were government sources. Since the Conservancy assumed the role of fiscal sponsor and fundraiser for Olmsted Now, it learned a great deal from donors who recognized the value of the bicentennial’s ambitious and unique goals to try something new, specifically a combination of ‘trust-based philanthropy’ and ‘community-determined programming.’

“The Olmsted Now effort came out of the stark realities of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that open space must be welcoming to all,” shared Karen Mauney-Brodek, President of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. “Olmsted’s bicentennial was an opportunity to grow and change with the times. Olmsted Now allowed us to listen to neighbors, invest in and support amazing people who were already doing great work, empowering their ideas with resources while learning new ways the parks can empower all of us. We took risks, learned valuable lessons, welcomed new board members and park advisors, and created new collaborative models. As a result, we were able to focus on the people and process and not just projects and programs, building partnerships and relationships, creating dialogues, strengthening our network, and reaching even more people who rely on our parks.”



About Olmsted Now

Visionary American landscape architect, journalist, social critic and public administrator Frederick Law Olmsted (April 26, 1822–August 28, 1903) turned 200 in 2022. Many ideas that drove Olmsted's 19th-century work remain urgent, including fostering civic dialogue, building healthy environments and championing community access to greenspace. *Olmsted Now, Greater Boston's Olmsted Bicentennial* formed as a coalition-led platform to connect neighborhoods and organizations in making parks and public space more vibrant, verdant, equitable and welcoming for all. Olmsted Now has been a forum to share, discuss and act on Olmsted's enduring legacy, and to advance contemporary ideas of shared use, shared health and shared power in parks with the "fierce urgency of now," in the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. To inspire local programming from April through October 2022, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (Fairsted) co-organized monthly meetings for a growing multidisciplinary coalition to connect and learn from each other, and to coordinate Greater Boston's planning with the national effort [Olmsted 200](#). Olmsted Now 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 shared stewardship and intentionally build more resilient and inclusive places together.

Olmsted Now was made possible by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (Fairsted), with generous support from Paul and Katie Buttenwieser, Kate and Ben Taylor, U.S. Forest Service Eastern Region, National Collaborative for Health Equity, Ashley and Jamie Harmon, Verizon, Four Lucky Dogs, Davis Family Charitable Foundation, Brooke and Jeff Cook, Marjorie and Nicholas Greville, Hastings Family Foundation, The Caroline Loughlin Fund, The Lawrence & Lillian Solomon Foundation, Trillium Brewing Company, Sarah Freeman, Focus Real Estate, the "Come Together" Fund of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy Board and other individuals, organizations and businesses. www.olmstednow.org

About the Emerald Necklace Conservancy

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is a community-supported non-profit founded in 1997 to steward and champion the Emerald Necklace, Boston's largest park system of seven distinct parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted to connect over a dozen neighborhoods with 1,100 acres of meadows, woodlands, waterways, paths and parkways. Working with civic and neighborhood partners, the Conservancy strengthens parks, people and policy by advocating for the Emerald Necklace and advancing access, maintenance and restoration, park stewardship and education through volunteer and youth programs and inclusive public programming. The parks serve as a healing 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 as a safe destination for recreation and reconnection since the COVID-19 pandemic. www.emeraldnecklace.org

Acknowledgment

For millennia before and in the centuries since Olmsted designed a park system for a rapidly industrializing city and metropolitan area, the lands and waters of and around Greater Boston have served as a traditional site of stewardship and exchange for the Massachusetts Tribe with their Pawtucket, Nipmuc and Wampanoag neighbors to the north, west and south. Olmsted Now acknowledges the Greater Boston region as their unceded ancestral territories. This acknowledgement is a starting point toward right relations with Indigenous neighbors and their understandings of land stewardship. <https://www.boston.gov/news/city-council-offers-land-acknowledgement>

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