More than Parks
Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the Advancement of American City Planning, and the Baltimore that Needed It

Introduction
The Olmsted Brothers 1904 park system plan was a significant milestone in the physical development of 20th century Baltimore. Solicited and paid for by the Municipal Art Society, the plan was quickly adopted in 1904 by a recently revamped Board of Park Commissioners that quickly implemented many of its recommendations. This success in guiding specific actions, spread over many years, makes this plan one of the most significant projects of the Olmsted firm in the years before World War I.1

The 1904 report2--officially the Report upon the Development of Public Grounds for Baltimore--was from its inception more than a “parks plan.”

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1 Olmsted’s contemporaries early on recognized this. Charles Milford Robinson, one of the nation’s leading advocates of city planning and civic art, writing to Olmsted in 1904, mentioned that he had seen the proofs of the soon to be published report and requested a copy of the published version declaring, “It was full of good things.” See letter February 4, 1904 of Robinson to Olmsted in Olmsted Associates papers, Library of Congress Manuscripts Division, Job File 2922, American Civic Association. Microfilm. Washington DC. (Library of Congress Olmsted Associates Manuscripts hereafter referred to as “Olmsted LOC.”)

2 Although sometimes it has been cited as a 1903 document based on the date of its completion, I have used the term “1904 plan” to identify the Olmsted report as it is more commonly accepted date of the plan and because that was the year it was submitted to and adopted by the Parks Board as its official policy.
The sponsoring Municipal Art Society directed the Olmsted firm to develop not only a plan for park system expansion into areas Baltimore annexed in 1888 but also “a street system apart from the grid” as a means to order better the anticipated spread of the city into this new territory. The success of the 1904 plan in fulfilling this mandate established in Baltimore the reputation of the Olmsted firm as the advisors most capable of helping the city resolve its many civic improvement problems.

Unfortunately, few outside Baltimore are familiar with the keystone document that is the 1904 plan. More than three decades later, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. declared the 1904 plan “one of the earliest (and I still think one of the best) comprehensive studies of a city park system which I ever made.” For that reason alone, it deserves our attention.

**Why Study Baltimore?**

Baltimore was one of the primary arenas in which Olmsted Jr. and his firm applied and advanced their approaches to city planning and urban design, environmental planning and a number of other ways to create better places. For the next 30 years, the Olmsted firm was called upon time and time again to apply its expertise as landscape architects or as leading practitioners of the new discipline of “city planning” to a wide range of planning and design needs. Examining the work of the firm in Baltimore provides a useful overview of the extremely wide range of city planning and landscape architecture services the firm could offer other cities across the US and elsewhere.

The full significance of this legacy is too little appreciated. Despite being one of the most important cities in American history with a number of important contributions to the political, economic and cultural development of the United States, the history of Baltimore is remarkably understudied. The dearth of studies on Baltimore is one reason for the dearth of awareness and appreciation of the Olmsted work that did much to shape Baltimore in the first half of the 20th century.

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4 The Olmsted firm did very little major work in Baltimore before 1900. Olmsted Senior did a plan to improve the open spaces surrounding the Washington Monument in the city’s Mount Vernon district and designed the suburban residential neighborhood of Sudbrook toward the end of the century. Until called upon to do the second section of Roland Park, the Olmsted Brothers firm had few other major opportunities to work on public spaces, large subdivisions, institutional sites, or open space issues affecting the general public on a large-scale. For the beginning of the firm’s long association with the Roland Park Company, see letter Edward H. Bouton to firm November 1897 requesting its services in laying out the second section of Roland Park north of Cold Spring Avenue and west to Falls Road. Olmsted LOC, Job File 2210. Roland Park Company. In some cases—such as Druid Hill Park, the first section of Roland Park, or the boulevard section of Charles Street—important parts of the city are often mistakenly assumed to be originally the work of the Olmsted firm. Olmsted Jr. in fact sharply opposed the final design of Charles Street that ignored all his own recommendations for this section of the city’s signature thoroughfare. See David R. Holden, *Charles Street, a Boulevard Revisited*. Occasional Papers of the Friends of Maryland’s Olmsted Parks and Landscapes. Baltimore MD. 2000, for how the original Olmsted Jr. concept unraveled.
Baltimore provides a number of insights into the younger Olmsted’s ability to continue and expand upon his inheritance from his father. This Baltimore work also provides numerous examples of how the Olmsted firm conducted its work, how it dealt with clients, its collaborations or tensions with other consultants and professionals, and the perils of implementation by others of one’s carefully thought out plans.

In its range and in its tangible results, this work is very impressive. Among the most notable of these Olmsted firm efforts were:

- Olmsted Jr.’s role as special consultant to the emergency recovery committee established by Mayor McLane in the wake of the terrifying February 1904 fire that devastated much of Baltimore’s central business district.
- His work for a South Baltimore railroad commission to investigate how to mitigate conflicts of street and railroads, consolidating rail facilities away from residential areas and promoting the value of greater cooperation between the different rail companies.
- Planning large amenity-laden middle-class and upper-class residential subdivisions in the undeveloped outer reaches of the growing city.
- Advocating a detailed study of ways to provide modest income residential neighborhoods with similar open space, street landscaping and other amenities as in the more affluent suburbs.
- Protecting natural environments as functional systems as well as scenic environments and assisting the restoration or mitigation of already impaired environments.
- Estimating future need and providing active recreation grounds and playgrounds convenient to local neighborhoods.
- Work on a special “city plan commission” to resolve a number of long standing issues affecting downtown Baltimore including mitigation of the highly polluted Jones Falls, creation of a “civic center” for government activities, better connections of the downtown to surrounding areas of the city and the possibility of a new “union station” to make more efficient Baltimore’s rail infrastructure.
- Review and evaluation of the first attempt of Baltimore in the 1920s to institute the new planning tool of comprehensive zoning.
- Review and evaluation of proposed legislation to establish an effective planning department as a permanent arm of city government.
- Promoting and designing highly visible urban design projects such the Preston Gardens along Saint Paul Street.
- Master planning and site design for major institutions such as Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore Museum of Art—many of which located near or adjacent to the park or parkway and boulevard facilities that resulted from the 1904 plan.
- Evaluating the merits and deficiencies of alternative routing for the highly controversial road viaduct crossing of the Jones Falls valley to connect midtown Baltimore to the city’s east side.
- Design or planning criticism of the work of city agencies and other consultants.
Baltimore and Washington DC
The many years of active practice of the Olmsted firm in Baltimore constituted one of the most sustained relationships of the firm and a specific major American city—perhaps only exceeded by the work of Olmsted, Jr. and his firm in Washington DC. The bulk of Olmsted work in both cities began and continued over roughly the same years and work in each city covered many of the same issues such as the role of park systems in city development. Consequently, it is instructive to contrast Olmsted’s experiences in Baltimore and Washington.

The work of the firm in Washington is widely known and appreciated, especially Olmsted’s contribution to the 1902 Senate Parks Commission Report—popularly known as the McMillan Plan—which became the blueprint for a redesigned and expanded federal core and the park system of the present city. These achievements were admirable. Nevertheless, in many respects the context within which the plan for Washington was drawn up and subsequently implemented was hardly typical of the conditions under which Olmsted had to work in other cities such as Baltimore.

Washington is a unique city. Much of the work in Washington benefited from a sustained desire to make the capital a national symbol that exemplified the nobility of the American form of republican government and the new standing of the United States as a world power by creating a capital equal to those of European nations. From the late 19th century through much of the first half of the 20th century, Olmsted made many contributions to the effort to create an attractive city “commensurate with the dignity and resources of the American nation.”

Attempts to improve the appearance of Washington to accommodate the growth of the federal government, and “avoid the compromises that have marred the beauty and dignity of the national capital” had a number of advantages denied to other cities. Among these were:

- A widespread revival of interest in the L’Enfant Plan and its ties to George Washington as the city approached its 100th birthday which fed a desire to use the L’Enfant plan as a starting point from which to develop a rational and comprehensive 20th century city planning strategy to create an exemplary national capital.
- Widespread grass-roots support across the country, often stoked by favorable newspaper and magazine articles, for creating a national capital that emanated both the beauty and the power of the nation.
- The direct interest and policy-making and funding abilities of the US Congress that ran the District in the absence of home rule until 1974. It was through Congress that much of the increasing interest from all sections of the US in beautification of the national capital could be channeled and legislated.
- The powers and funding available to the various federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the Architect of the Capitol that managed much of

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6 Ibid. p. 8
the land and improvements in Washington. Once a policy was firmly embraced, adequate funding could be made available for its full realization.

- Establishment by the federal government of formal oversight bodies with strong enforcement powers such as the Commission on Fine Arts and later the National Capital Park and Planning Commission to review and approve public improvements on the basis of consistency with adopted planning policies. (Olmsted himself serving on these bodies for long periods.)

Planning in Baltimore, in contrast to Washington, had a number of comparative disadvantages. The difficulties Baltimore posed to the Olmsted firm were more typical of the obstacles and chances for failure that the firm had to cope with in other cities. Among these were:

- A lack of many home rule powers that often inhibited the ability of city to plan and act on its own behalf. For some issues, the lack of local authority persisted until the eve of World War II.
- No agencies or programs within city government specifically empowered to coordinate various actions of the different city agencies or regulate private sector actions in accord with an official plan.
- Reliance on very informal ad hoc mixes of public and private participants put together for specific issues. This was most noticeable in the frequent decisions of the Municipal Art Society to initiate, to fund, and generate widespread support for specific city planning efforts that the city government did not or could not take on by itself.
- No assurance of adequate financing to implement city-planning improvements. Bond issues needed approval of the state legislature that sometimes could deny to the city the opportunity to secure needed funds as it did in 1929. Funding for plans was also vulnerable to local voter rejection after approval at state level as happened to vital park bond issues that were defeated in 1907.
- Nothing resembling the extensive federal land holdings in Washington that made possible large-scale planning, consistent implementation of plans and unified management of the results.
- No higher symbolic purpose or a national constituency to bring from outside the city strong pressures on the local decision makers to fulfill the aspirations for widespread civic improvement.


8 Baltimore did not get a formal Planning Department with powers of enforcement until 1939. Before then, various “Commissions on City Plan” from 1910 until the late 1930s lacked either clearly designated roles or widely effective powers except for new zoning authority established in the early 1920s.
In light of such restraints, not all of the projects of the Olmsted firm in Baltimore reached fruition. Nevertheless, in spite of any setbacks, much was accomplished.

**Baltimore 1900**

![Map of Baltimore c. 1900](image)

*Fig. 2 Baltimore c. 1900: Boundaries show results of the 1888 annexation. The developed area of the city is quite compact and largely within pre-1888 boundaries.*

What was Baltimore like as an urban center at the turn of the 20th century?

Even with the 1888 annexation, the city was only 30 square miles (compared to today’s 91 square miles). Divided into large country estates and some older villages, such as Waverly, large sections of the newly annexed territory remained highly rural.

One of the nation’s primary seaports and a center of industrial development, the 1900 Census ranked Baltimore as the 6th largest US city with a population of nearly 509,000. Much of this population was still crowded within its pre-1888 boundaries—a concentration that stemmed in part from the tendency of all classes to live in dense row-housing neighborhoods.

This concentration of people and activities was too often handled poorly; as a result much of Baltimore was an unpleasant place in which to live or work. Although it had established a noteworthy system of water supply and distribution, Baltimore lagged behind many of its large-city peers in addressing its other urban needs. Most
significantly, the city did not have a public sewage disposal system until 1911, a flaw that fostered a plethora of public health, environmental and aesthetic problems. Among its other urban woes were severe air pollution (the “smoke nuisance”), extremely polluted streams and harbor, congested and often unpaved streets, poor connections between different parts of town, numerous unsafe at-grade railroad-street crossings, and haphazard suburban development. By 1900 it was apparent that the city was about to overrun and transform the newly acquired territory. In accord with the Municipal Art Society directive, the attention of the 1904 Olmsted plan and subsequent projects would be focused on these still largely open areas in the hopes that the ills of the older sections of the city would not be replicated.

The Rise of Civic Reform

The years immediately before and after 1900 were a period of increasing determination to do something about Baltimore’s physical and environmental woes. Soliciting the aid of the Olmsted firm was part of a broader effort by private civic-minded groups, reform-minded mayors and agency heads committed to civic improvements and convinced of the value of the emerging discipline of city planning as a key element of such urban reform.

The Municipal Art Society, especially through the resolve of Theodore Marburg, one of its founders, was a principal driver of many of these initiatives. In addition to the usual “civic art” measures such as murals in public buildings, the Municipal Art Society aggressively took on such issues as the “smoke nuisance,” the need for a sewer system, the poor condition of public school facilities, and more rational suburban growth. At the behest of a land use committee headed by Marburg, in 1900 the Municipal Art Society voted to investigate ways to better organize development of the annexation area and to hire a “committee of experts” to conduct such a study. In 1902, the Olmsted firm became this committee of experts.

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9 The best readily available summary of this city’s growth and urban conditions before and after the 1888 annexation remains the “Consolidation, 1878-1899” chapter in Sherry H. Olsen, Baltimore, the Building of an American City, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 1980, pp. 198-245.

10 The principal work on civic reform in Baltimore is still James B. Crooks. Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore, 1895-1911. Baton Rouge LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1968. Although his study is anchored in the traditional “reformers vs. bosses” approach to progressive era urban history, Crooks did have the opportunity to interview several of the surviving reformers of the time. Crooks also provides a valuable chart summarizing the background of dozens and dozens of leading reform figures, the issues that principally interested them, their occupations and their general standing as political, cultural or economic leaders in Baltimore.

11 Nineteen of these initiatives of the Municipal Arts Society were described in Pennington, Josiah, “What Has Been Accomplished in City Planning in Baltimore City,” an 18 May 1909 memorandum written to detail the MAS’s first ten years of promoting civic improvements. Memorandum recorded as pp. 82-89 of the Minutes of the Municipal Art Society. MS2840, Box 4 of 18, in the archives of the Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore MD. Pennington, a local architect, was a long-time MAS Secretary and handled much of its everyday business with Olmsted and other city planning supporters and practitioners.

12 MAS 1900 decision cited in Pennington, “What Has Been Accomplished in City Planning in Baltimore City,” p. 87 in the section on the park system plan, described as "perhaps the most important work of our society." The decision to sponsor a park system expansion study also described in Theodore Marburg’s letter of submission of the Olmsted Plan to the Baltimore City Board of Park
The rise of civic reform also resulted in a turn of events crucial to successful implementation of the 1904 parks plan—a major shakeup in late 1903 of the city’s Board of Parks Commissioners.

![Image of map showing existing parks in green]

**Fig. 3** Detail from 1904 Olmsted Plan showing then existing parks in green. Note the near-absence of major open space in the city core or along the waterfront.

Baltimore’s parks were an important amenity in a city that did not have many. The centerpiece—Druid Hill Park established before the Civil War—was a highly regarded example of the large “country park” similar to those designed by Olmsted Senior in a number of other cities. But all the city’s major parks—Druid Hill, Clifton, Patterson and Carroll—were on or near the edges of the built-up urban core and the bulk of the population. This made the parks hard to reach except for those living close to the transit lines that lead to some of them. There was very little green space within the built-up sections of the city. Much of that green space was in the form of “squares” set aside.

Commissioners, February 8, 1904 (included as pp. 8-9 of Olmsted Brothers, *Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore*, Baltimore, MD, Municipal Art Society, 1904. (For this and all subsequent references to the 1904 Report, I have used the 1987 facsimile reprint edition by Friends of Maryland’s Olmsted Parks and Landscapes.)

13 The timing of the Olmsted firm’s work in Baltimore leading to the publication of the 1904 plan may lead some to conclude that the desire for a park system plan for Baltimore was in emulation of the well-publicized McMillan Plan for Washington, DC. However, the MAS decision to sponsor a parks plan was made well in advance of the issuance of the 1902 Senate Park Commission report (McMillan Plan) for Washington DC. Indeed, the MAS decision to sponsor a parks and street system plan was even earlier than Olmsted’s December 1900 address to the American Institute of Architects on the need to improve the relationship of landscapes and public buildings in Washington, an address that was one of the key steps leading to the establishment of the Senate Park Commission.
primarily to enhance the value of the surrounding town homes rather than as local parks or recreation spaces. Several recent local park acquisitions in South Baltimore remained unimproved and unused.

Although the parks were valued, they were not well managed—a trait Olmsted himself criticized in the 1904 report. There was no centralized management. Park operations and maintenance were divided among the four city quadrants—each having its own superintendent, workforce and resources. The quality of the workforce was less than ideal. Each quadrant had its own greenhouse and other redundancies in facilities that sapped park budgets.

The annual reports of the Park Board were a combination of self-congratulatory boasting and self-serving poor mouthing. In its 1901 Annual Report, for example, the Board excused the lack of any improvements for such newly acquired parks as Swann or Latrobe in South Baltimore by claiming: “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that our park system has outgrown in its demands the revenues secured to it by the tax on the street railway franchise.” This excuse was repeated verbatim in the 1902 Annual Report, much of which was a lackadaisical cut-and-paste reworking of the 1901 report.

Following his election in late 1903, reform mayor John McLane secured the resignation of four of five of the Park Board commissioners with only the highly regarded, former seven-term Mayor Ferdinand Latrobe surviving. Richard Venable, considered Baltimore’s leading real estate lawyer, became the new board president. Under his energetic leadership, the revamped Park Board quickly overhauled its approach to park management. A general superintendent, W.W. Crosby, was hired to bring managerial efficiency to the system, focusing responsibility for day-to-day operations on one key individual. The workforce was cut by about 30 per cent. Petty corruptions were ended.

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15 “...we feel it is our duty to say that in many instances the design and management of existing parks does not appear to have been controlled by a consistent and far-sighted policy, and that the city has consequently not obtained for its expenditures such large returns in usefulness as might have been possible.” 1904 Report, p. 49.

16 42nd Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1901. Baltimore MD. 1902, pp.7-8, 43rd Annual Report ...for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1902, Baltimore, MD, 1903, p 7. Both reports and others up until 1918 (1914-1918 included as part of multi-agency report) available in Maryland Room collection, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD

17 Crosby did not last long. In 1905 the board replaced him with William S. Manning, an acquaintance of Olmsted in Boston who came to Baltimore via the Essex County, NJ park system. Manning, whom Olmsted recommended to the board, held his position until 1917 when the position of general superintendent was eliminated. See obituary, “William S. Manning Dies at Massachusetts Home,” *Baltimore Sun*, April 8, 1926.

18 One such practice was the frequent distribution of free cut flowers from the various greenhouses and beds of the parks to board members, park employees, local political officials and friends—a practice of “doing favors with public property” that the new Board deemed “a violation of elementary honesty” and “one of the most insidious forms of graft.” 44th and 45th Annual Report ...for the Fiscal Years Ending December 31, 1903 and 1904, p. 9.
The Board subsequently announced that, with such changes, it had adequate resources to fulfill its obligations. Furthermore, it declared that any improvements or changes costing more than $500 “should be done under the advice of a competent landscape architect.”

Most importantly for the future of Baltimore parks, in February 1904 the board agreed to reimburse the Municipal Art Society the $3,000 paid for the recently completed Olmsted firm study, which the board then adopted as its own official policy. Accordingly, within two years of the Municipal Art Society’s initial recruitment of the Olmsted firm, the plan it devised had become official city policy in the hands of a Park Board eager to implement it.

*Report upon the Development of Public Grounds for Baltimore: The Benefits and Necessity of Parks*  
What was this document that the Park Board had now made its own?

The 1904 Olmsted report was a combination of general advocacy for urban parks and a forceful reiteration of many “Olmstedian” precepts as well as a series of detailed recommendations regarding how to carry them out in the specific context of the Baltimore region.

The first third of the 1904 report shows how much the Olmsted firm carried forward the thinking of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. on the role of parks as a primary way to civilize American cities. The lengthy opening section presented general arguments about the benefits of parks for urban populations and featured a discourse on the functions of different types of parks, open space, and natural reservations within the modern city. Using examples from Boston, Paris and other cities, the report “deduced” the benefits to Baltimore of creating a more extensive and connected park system. In fact, nothing specific about Baltimore is cited in these first 42 pages of a 120-page text.

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19 Ibid, esp. pp. 7-9. Adequate revenues cited on p. 17. Appendix A, pp. 29-38, is a lengthy report by the new General Superintendent W.W. Crosby on how the many reforming directives of the Board had been or were being carried out.

20 Ibid. p. 20 summarized the work of MAS and the Olmsted firm in developing the park system extension report that is “now the property of the Park Board.”

21 Venable, also a member of the Municipal Art Society, was quite up to date on Olmsted’s work on a park system by the time he became board president. Venable, Marburg and Olmsted had toured potential park areas as the Olmsted plan was being prepared, and Venable and Marburg were part of the same social circles interested in civic reform. Just before assuming his post as board president in September 1903, Venable notified the MAS and the Olmsted firm that he was “in urgent haste” for the park development report to be finished so he could use it in securing the needed appropriations in the upcoming fiscal year. See Olmsted memo to file “Baltimore Parks…Visit, 29th Sept. 1903,” in Olmsted LOC, Job File 2401, Municipal Art Society. See also, Crooks, *Politics and Progress*, pp.140-141.


23 1904 Report, pp. 11-18.
The report cited a number of examples from the Boston region, which had a landscape and ecological variety similar to Baltimore’s.

The report is also of interest as a specific product of the Progressive Era belief in the social value of “experts” in dealing with contemporary urban problems and is an example of how Olmsted Jr., like many of his fellow practitioners, sought fervently to elevate the status of landscape architecture and city planning as true professions. Experts such as Olmsted presented themselves as objective advisors whose status as disinterested consultants set them apart from related fields such as nurserymen or contractors who too often made recommendations based, not on the best solutions for a client’s problem, but on what plant materials, products or construction services they wished to sell.

The 1904 report gave Olmsted an opportunity to somewhat peevishly criticize such groups. Three pages in the first section of the report are devoted to a consideration of the merits of “formal” vs. “informal” approaches to park design. Formal design had its role to play in the appropriate kind of public spaces, Olmsted declared. Yet too frequently poor results attempting to implement such plans drove “many people with nice artistic discrimination” to reject all formal design. This unfortunate prejudice Olmsted blamed on those who too often overstepped their limits as designers and artists, especially with regard to the layout of formal spaces.

These efforts are most commonly perpetrated by gardeners or foremen who have neither the ability to conceive larger orderly relations nor the authority to create
them, and so satisfy their craving by introducing a petty orderliness which they can conceive without calling upon their superiors.  

In addition to defending the status of his profession, Olmsted later in the report demonstrated an inherited predisposition of many of this period’s planning and design experts regarding the ultimate beneficiaries of their work. Echoing the moralistic overtones of 19th century reformers such as his father, Olmsted expressed a belief that parks were needed to uplift the emotional and cultural outlook of city dwellers by getting them out of their everyday world and its attendant urban vices. In discussing the need of Baltimore’s industrial working class for more accessible park space in East Baltimore, Olmsted asserted:

“…Poor people cannot be forced to spend their hard-earned money and their scanty hours of recreation in travelling out on country excursions or going to Druid Hill Park, and if they are to be induced to substitute such healthful recreations for loafing on street corners or in bar-rooms or even in their own cramped homes, the path must be made easy for them.”

Whether the targeted beneficiaries of such paternalism might see their habits somewhat differently was left unexplored.

Report upon the Development of Public Grounds for Baltimore: Specific Recommendations

Only after establishing the modern city’s need for parks did the report assess the park potential of the Baltimore region’s landscape resources. Within a relatively small area were a number of different environments, ranging from estuary shorelines and tidal flatlands to the rolling Piedmont uplands and stream valleys. The report, therefore, suggested in a general fashion a number of ways to nurture the best and highest park and recreational functions for each of these distinctive landscape types while avoiding imposing functions best served elsewhere.

Most of the remainder of the report was a series of location specific recommendations for sites within the various landscapes of the region. One exception to mapping the various recommendations concerned the deficiency of adequate playground and active recreation areas within the city’s existing neighborhoods. The report stated that filling this gap was the most pressing need of the city. Nevertheless, given their generally small size compared to the regional scale of the study, the 1904 report had to limit itself to identifying only a few such sites (generally no smaller than five acres). Instead the report stressed that someone locally knowledgeable “with discretionary power to act for the city” was needed to locate and evaluate such spaces.

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24 1904 Report, pp.31-32.
25 1904 Report, p. 52.
26 1904 Report, pp. 43-45.
The other generalized set of recommendations was the regional map that outlined the beginnings of a system of “outlying reservations.” This concept seems directly derived from the thinking of Charles Eliot, a member of the Olmsted firm until his death in 1897, but the Baltimore reservations were limited in number and were in a radial pattern rather than the circumferential pattern of Eliot’s work in the Boston region. Because urban growth had hardly yet affected Baltimore’s outlying areas, the report advised that, though they were ultimately very important areas to preserve, they were “not immediately threatened” and acquiring them could be deferred. The report therefore was satisfied to show them in general outline without more precisely defining or describing them.

28 1904 Report, p. 113. It should be noted that these regions were far beyond the city limits, so Baltimore City had no authority to regulate what happened to them. The only recourse for protecting such areas was outright purchase.
Fig. 6 Park and Parkway Recommendations (sepia areas): primarily affecting the annexation area and sections immediately beyond 1888 boundaries.

...[the Olmsted plan] is all curves. It abhors the straight line.... The entire urban landscape of the Piedmont would become a park—a labyrinth of drives and walks, a harmony of man and nature.

- Sherry Olson, Baltimore, the Building of an American City. 1980

The bulk of recommendations of the 1904 report were summarized on the main park plan map (Fig. 6). Most of these were within the 1888 annexation area or for areas adjacent to the new city limits. Given the rapid speed of the city’s expansion, the report stressed the need to acquire many of these sites before they were overtaken by growth or the costs of acquiring them got out of hand. The acreage estimates for recommended park and parkway acquisitions were somewhat imprecise. Nevertheless, using the best available topographic map, the Olmsted plan recommendations were presented as a reasonably sufficient basis for immediate and long-term actions.

Perhaps the most important concepts of the proposed park system were the role of parkways and the benefits of extensive stream valley parks. Consequently, these were the main features shown on the primary map of the report.
The 1904 report devoted much attention to parkways as key connections between major parks, or as leisurely ways to access the growing suburbs such as Roland Park. The original parkway concepts of the 1904 report should not be confused with the design of the much straighter and narrower “boulevards” that the city eventually constructed as substitutes for some of the parkways proposed in the 1904 plan. The parkways as envisioned in the report were wide (preferably 200 feet or more) and sinuously fitted to the rolling Piedmont landscape through which they were to pass. These special thoroughfares would offer travelers a park-like experience while moving between different parks or on approaching or leaving them. A parkway might have separate roadways or pathways for carriage travel, horseback riders and pedestrians. Buildings were not to front on them, and commercial traffic was not to use them. Light forms of recreation could be allowed within their rights of way, mostly for nearby residents.\(^{29}\)

Creating extensive stream valley reserves was the other outstanding feature of the 1904 plan. Such valleys were difficult to develop, and the nearby upland areas offered areas sufficiently large and more suitable for future development. Consequently, stream valleys would be relatively inexpensive to purchase, and the city would gain a permanent landscape amenity quite accessible to a growing population at little cost and effort. Although industrial development and its attendant pollution had marred the lower reaches of such streams as Jones Falls or Gwynns Falls, areas further upstream had retained much of their natural beauty. Except for minor enhancements and appropriately designed parkway-like roads, the report proposed to leave them largely as is. Where some intrusions had occurred, they could be removed or mitigated. For example, in those valleys with active railroads, proper screening or even adjustments in alignments might be arranged as was done within the future Wyman Park.\(^{30}\)

\(^{29}\) 1904 Report, pp. 39-42 describes general characteristics and role within park system of parkways.

\(^{30}\) 1904 Report, pp. 62-67 describes the general benefits of stream valley parks and parkways. This section followed by specific recommendations for a number of stream valleys and areas leading to them; see esp. pp. 76-86, 88-92.
The report also included park recommendations for the shoreline areas in southwest Baltimore along the edges of the harbor and the lower reaches of the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River. If set aside before industrial and maritime development overwhelmed it, such an area would be an important park asset for southwest Baltimore and give to this port city an opportunity to enjoy the aesthetic and recreational benefits of a tidal shoreline ecology.31

**Park Systems and City Planning**

Most of the 1904 report did present itself as a typical highly focused “parks plan.” Easily overlooked, however, is how much the 1904 report promoted a number of strategies for more orderly and efficient urban growth—an aspect of the plan fully in accord with the broader agenda of the plan’s sponsor, the Municipal Art Society. Indeed, a number of sections have little to do with “parks” per se, and the report felt compelled to explain why such topics as street setbacks, or “principles of subdivision” were even included in a “park plan.”32

The 1904 report fulfilled the larger purposes of the Municipal Art Society primarily by explaining how an expanded park system plus giving Baltimore a more efficient overall transportation network could be a sound framework for the city’s inevitable growth. The 1904 report therefore stressed the need to plan a street system with a hierarchy of functions for the new areas of the city. One section, Principles of City Subdivision, condemned the practice of planning all future streets with similar widths due to lack of thought about their eventual function. One poor outcome of this approach was giving secondary roadways overly wide rights-of-way out of scale with the actual uses of those streets. Such practices wasted valuable development land and ignored the different design needs of different types of thoroughfares.33

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33 1904 Report, pp.48-49.
Delineating too rigid a system of streets based on a uniform grid was another serious flaw, for it impaired future developers in discovering the “most economical and most appropriate” ways to lay out their projects. Indeed, the 1904 report asserts that securing a logical and efficient street system would confine the mistakes of poorly conceived subdivisions to the interior of those developments. Thus the owners of such substandard subdivisions would be the principal victims, and their bad decisions would have less an impact on the overall growth and functioning of the city. Furthermore, it was not just the actions of private developers that could hurt the city in the future. By anticipating future development, parks themselves should not be located to “interfere unduly with the most convenient and economical development of the city street system.”

Another obstacle to efficient city growth was encroachment of buildings and other improvements into planned rights-of-way that were not yet officially controlled by the

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34 1904 Report, p.48 on mitigating pitfalls of bad subdivision choices; and p. 49 on need for parks to not pre-empt best roadway-rights of-way.
city. Maintaining adequate setbacks would protect the ability of future streets, especially the main thoroughfares, to accommodate their anticipated traffic. Adequate setbacks would also protect other functions such as space to accommodate various utilities. In the case of future parkways, setback maintenance was also needed to protect their aesthetic and recreational value.\textsuperscript{35}

Such passages demonstrate a belief (typical of the early city planning movement) that good planning would achieve both “efficiency” and “beauty” and produce “economical” solutions for city growth. Only in 1902 did Baltimore begin to require subdivision plan review to ensure new streets be properly aligned and graded with regard to existing streets.\textsuperscript{36} Consequently, the advice of the 1904 report regarding the importance of implementing a carefully conceptualized street system based on the actual demands that would be placed on it should not be taken by readers today as merely stating the obvious.

In truth, Olmsted’s linkage of hierarchical street systems and parks in the Baltimore report was something of an innovation for him. Writing later in 1904 to Nelson P. Lewis, Chief Engineer of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of New York City, Olmsted cited these sections of the his Baltimore report and declared:

\begin{quote}
The more I study municipal street systems, in whatever American community, the clearer my views get as to the immense economy to be effected by the study of park locations in connection with the street layout and also by a much more radical classification of thoroughfares than has ever been adopted in advance of construction hitherto…\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

The 1904 report also spoke to the need of a growing city to find adequate sites for future public facilities such as schools, police and fire stations, and libraries. Rather than scramble for such sites in surrounding development when land prices would be rising and available sites likely less than ideal, the 1904 report suggested that the acquisition of parkway rights-of-way to include the purchase of sufficiently sized adjacent areas to guarantee that future public facilities would be sited in “liberal settings” at reasonable costs.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} 1904 Report, pp. 45-46.
\textsuperscript{36} The Topographical Survey Commission began as an agency charged with mapping out the terrain and landscape features of the newly annexed areas of the city. In time it was authorized to recommend to the City Council whether to accept or reject proposed street alignments and grades of proposed subdivisions. Proceedings of the Baltimore Topographical Survey between 1899 and 1910 (BRG80-1-1) are in Baltimore City Archives, BCA/09/03/037, Box 1. Major Joseph Story, chief engineer of the Topographic Survey Commission for more than 25 years, became a strong proponent of city planning and park system expansion and one of the most important allies of the Olmsted firm in Baltimore city government.

\textsuperscript{37} Letter Olmsted to Nelson P. Lewis, November 1, 1904, in Olmsted LOC, Job File 2922, American Civic Association. Lewis was to become one of the early city planning movements leading figures in his own right and is probably best remembered today in connection with his The Planning of the Modern City, A Review of the Principles Governing City Planning. John Wiley and Sons. New York and London. 1916.

\textsuperscript{38} On utility of buying additional land along parkway rights-of-way for future city facilities see 1904 Report pp. 102-103.
Setting aside major stream valleys as publicly owned natural reserves was also a growth guiding strategy. These actions not only yielded aesthetic and environmental benefits. Such reserves would also help Baltimore avoid perpetuating the overcrowding and its attendant problems that typified much of the Baltimore’s existing urban fabric. Stream valley reserves would also avoid placing growth in areas subject to flooding and enable more efficient urban storm water management. Not having to channel and cover urban streams—measures frequently employed once urban waterways had been irreparably compromised—would ultimately save the city millions of dollars. These benefits, however, would only accrue if these stream valleys were under public ownership. Private ownership ran the risk of insufficient management and encroachments by developments that would result in a loss of the protections otherwise afforded by leaving these stream valleys largely as is.39

**Initial Successes, Initial Failures**

Plans without the means to implement them are mere wish lists. Fortunately, a willingness to do something about Baltimore’s many physical deficiencies had been increasing since the late 1890s and this wave carried park expansion and park system development with it. In the wake of the disastrous February 1904 fire that destroyed much of Baltimore’s Downtown, the state legislature and city voters approved a series of bond issues to fund a number of long needed facilities and infrastructure improvements.40 Although parks were not as pressing an issue as the city’s lack of a public sewer system or its increasingly wretched traffic conditions, the Board of Park Commissioners benefited from voter approval of a $1 million bond issue for park acquisitions. Using these new funds, the Park Board quickly began to negotiate a number of land purchases based on the recommendations of the Olmsted 1904 report.41

Park system expansion was dramatic but not always smooth or politically well received. A rider to the bond issue required that the $1 million for parkland acquisition be divided equally among the city’s four quadrants. Land was cheap in the outer portions of the northwest and southwest quadrants and the growth of Gwynns Falls Park in particular

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40 See Crooks, James B., “The Baltimore Fire and Baltimore Reform,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 65. No. 1, (1970), pp. 1-17. Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore MD; and Rosen, Christine Meisner, “Business, Democracy and Progressive Reform in the Redevelopment of Baltimore after the Great Fire of 1904,” *The Business History Review*, vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1989), pp. 283-328 for differing interpretations of the significance of the fire for pushing forward support for a number of urban reform measures including the bond issues to fund them. Crooks contends the reforming impulse had been growing long before the fire; Rosen in contrasts credits the fire as the key event ending the previous long-enduring apathy of the city with regard to its conditions.
41 Venable aggressively pursued new parkland and the Board in general deferred to his priorities and actions in obtaining such properties. For example, after voter approval of a $1 million bond issue for park expansion, the Board voted to “authorize the president to make such terms for the purchases of land from time to time as he might be able to make advantageously—reporting such terms to the board.” Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, December 12, 1905. BCA BRG 51-5-3, Box 3.
was speedy and significant. Elsewhere however things did not run so smoothly—especially in East Baltimore. 42

The Olmsted plan recognized the need for a large park more accessible to the growing blue-collar population of East Baltimore but also concluded that creating an equivalent of Druid Hill Park there was impossible. The fallback was to recommend a significant 123-acre expansion of Patterson Park, primarily to the east above Eastern Avenue. Although the report admitted such a site would never be a true “Country Park,” a larger Patterson Park could offer nearby residents many of the same experiences found in Druid Hill. Land prices around Patterson Park, however, were much higher than in northwest Baltimore. Much of this land near Patterson Park was owned by the Canton Corporation whose desired selling price was markedly higher than what the Park Board was willing to offer.43 In the end, Olmsted’s recommended enlargement was drastically reduced.

Fig. 9 1904 Proposal and Actual Results: Patterson Park Expansion.
Note also that the connecting parkway links to Clifton Park and Herring Run shown to the north on the 1904 plan never happened.

The quick successes in the north and northwest and the stagnation of acquisitions elsewhere nurtured a good deal of resentment in areas that felt short-changed. In 1907 voters irritated at not getting what they perceived as an equitable share of park acquisitions resoundingly defeated a second $1 million bond issue. Only three of the north and northwest wards--areas that had fared well through swift acquisitions funded by the first bond issue--voted in favor. Furthermore, the put-upon feelings within the closer-in wards that voted against this bond issue that they were less favored than the more

42 The end of 1908 left only $13,341.70 for the northwest quadrant while $75,969.36 remained unspent in the southeast quadrant. But acquisitions in the northwest had occurred quite rapidly while progress in the southeast had been inhibited even through the board authorized spending $200,000 on expanding Patterson Park. Indeed, most funds for southeast remained unspent until the board was able to acquire land for enlarging Patterson Park, which depleted most of the funds for other southeast acquisitions. See 48th and 49th Annual Reports of the Board of Park Commissioners... for the Fiscal Years ending in December 31, 1907 and 1908, p. 32. Also, Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, February 17, 1906. BCA BRG 51-5-3, Box 3 for Patterson Park authorization.

43 Olmsted Patterson Park recommendations in 1904 Report, pp. 52-55. For examples of difficult negotiations with Canton Corporation see Minutes of Board of Park Commissioners, March 16, 1906, July 26, 1906 and November 22, 1906. BCA BRG 51-5-3, Box 3.
affluent outlying wards persisted for many years and was at the root of many subsequent disputes over parks over the next few decades.\textsuperscript{44}

Money issues and land prices were not the only problems. Some of the key recommendations of the 1904 plan focused on the rapidly urbanizing edges of the fast growing city. Consequently, the plan had urged quick action in those areas even if they were not the most significant long-term improvements of the plan. Unfortunately, city growth too often outpaced city actions.

One of the most inventive aspects of the plan, the parkway concept was an early victim of this rapid and relentless growth. Partly because the money to acquire rights-of-way was insufficient and partly because planning mechanisms to coordinate quick action by city agencies, landowners and the Park Board were weak, a number of important parkway rights-of-way had to be drastically modified or even abandoned.

The swift demise of the original concept for a parkway to connect Druid Hill Park and Clifton Park is a good example of this failure. The 1904 report conceived of a meandering parkway, a section of which would run along a then surface-flowing stream roughly paralleling the present 32\textsuperscript{nd} Street. Within two years, however, an insensitive extension of St. Paul Street had destroyed key natural qualities that supported the parkway concept of the 1904 report. The sale and loss of important wooded areas further east along the recommended route compounded this damage. Consequently, Olmsted made no objection to shifting this east-west parkway link to a new alignment along the future 33\textsuperscript{rd} street. Nevertheless, he recommended against a proposed reduction to only a 120-foot right-of-way. Baltimore already had a number of 120-foot wide streets, he pointed out. In laying down a connecting boulevard between major parks, he argued, “We should strive for something better.” Unfortunately, his plea went unheeded and today’s 33\textsuperscript{rd} Street boulevard remains confined within such a reduced right-of-way.\textsuperscript{45}

Although this Druid Hill to Clifton parkway survived in a much-attenuated form, other parkway concepts fared less well, in large part because city expansion outpaced the decisions to implement them. As quickly as 1906, for example, Olmsted declared to Venable that the proposed parkway from Clifton Park to Patterson Park was “now

\textsuperscript{44} Crooks, \textit{Politics and Progress}, pp.148-149. Crooks argues that despite major expansions of Carroll Park in the southwest and Patterson Park in the southeast, voters nevertheless resented what they perceived as preferential treatment of the better off “suburban” wards. Crooks suggests Venable may have gotten approval of the bond issue if he had diverted more funds to acquiring small parks and squares in the built up areas. Venable himself contended the bond issue lost because voters lacked sufficient public information (e.g. that park funds were equally divided among the four quadrants, not diverted to only favored areas). See “For a New Park Loan; Enabling Act May be Submitted at Coming Session,” \textit{Baltimore Sun}, November 29, 1907. For subsequent impact of bond defeat see e.g., Minutes of Board of Park Commissioners, September 15, 1908 Special Session, BRG 51-5-3, Box 3 where the board explains to the Bloomington Heights Improvement Association that it lacks the funds needed to improve parkland already acquired, much less add to Gwynns Falls Park.

\textsuperscript{45} Conclusion in Olmsted letters to Venable, March 19,1906 and May 9, 1906. Olmsted LOC. Job File 2401, Municipal Art Society. The straighter 120-foot right-of-way concept was also later adopted as a substitute for the parkway on the 1904 plan that was to connect Druid Hill to Gwynns Falls Park.
blocked so as to be impractical.” The proposed parkway from Druid Hill Park to Robert E. Lee Park soon met a similar fate.46

Though a key feature of the Olmsted plan, the parkway concept as presented was in fact a horse-and-buggy era concept soon to be rendered somewhat anachronistic. As Olmsted himself eventually came to admit, the rise of widespread automobile ownership did not fit well with this parkway model. The higher speed of these vehicles was ill suited for the more leisurely pace of the often-serpentine thoroughfares shown on the 1904 plan. Where they were created (in Baltimore or elsewhere as in Boston or Washington’s Rock Creek Part), the later use of these parkways as major urban commuter routes too often negated the original concept of such roads as relaxed pleasure drives.47

Loss of Momentum
By 1913, the City had acquired much new parkland. But the money well was dry, and progress in expanding the system quickly stalled.

Table 1: Major Acquisitions by 191348

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwynns Falls</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>$330k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herring Run</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>$112k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyman Park</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>$127k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashburton</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>$36k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venable Park</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>$68k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Park Acreage Early 1913: 2,288 acres

Notes
- The first three parks are primarily stream valley parks.
- Ashburton Park was designed around a new large water reservoir.
- Venable Park straddled the future 33rd St. boulevard; it was later site of Memorial Stadium (north side) and Eastern High School (south side).

Compared to the early growth spurt in the years immediately after adoption of the 1904 plan, the later years up through the end of World War I were increasingly uninspiring.49 Further growth depended on donations of properties or whatever funding could be scraped out of the revenues the Park Board received from the City Council or the special transit tax that funded much of its annual budget. Much energy went into arranging an agreement with the federal government to allow recreational use of Fort McHenry (eventually done, but rescinded after US entry into World War I). The major exception to

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46 Olmsted letter to Venable, 16 March 1906. Olmsted LOC, Job File 2401 Municipal Art Society.
47 See e.g. section below on Olmsted’s 1923 Baltimore Sun article. Some parkways did conform better to the ideas put forth in the 1904 plan. The Alameda that connects Clifton Park to the 33rd Street boulevard did retain more of the generous width of the original parkway concept. Parkways running through the stream valley parks were much less subject to the development pressures that compromised the park connector rights-of-way.
48 Figures rounded off from data in 54th Report of the Board of Park Commissioners...for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1913, p. 36.
49 In 1914, e.g., no additional acreage was added to the park system. See General Superintendent’s Report in Board of Park Commissioners section of Reports of the City Officers and Departments made to the City Council of Baltimore for the Year 1914. Baltimore. 1915, p. 14 for table showing stagnation of acquisitions.
the overall stagnation of the Olmsted plan was construction of some of the adjusted parkway concepts such as 33rd Street or The Alameda that benefited from being largely funded and implemented by the Commission for the Opening of Streets rather than the Park Board. Even so, similar work on Gwynns Falls Parkway sputtered and languished until after World War I.

“The Landscape Architect”
Although expansion of the park system eventually stalled, the Olmsted firm did not lack for other work on Baltimore parks after adoption of the plan. In contrast to the inertia of the pre-Venable board, immediately after adoption of the 1904 plan the Park Board engaged the Olmsted firm to produce plans for development of the recently acquired Wyman Park, Swann Park and Latrobe Park. The firm also developed a number of improvements for the four major parks that predated 1900. These included a new entry design for Druid Hill Park, recreation facilities in Carroll and Clifton Parks, a new park in Ashburton associated with construction of a water supply reservoir, detailed design of the new 33rd Street-Alameda connection to the east, and the Gwynns Falls Boulevard connection between Druid Hill Park and Gwynns Falls Park to the west. Work on the new Wyman Park occupied the firm for almost eight years with much attention paid to the San Martin Drive and the various bridges needed to put new roads through or over the park.

50 Board of Park Commissioner’s President’s Report in Ibid., p. 5. See also, “Linking Our Great Park System by Boulevards,” Baltimore Sun, July 26, 1914 for a somewhat breathless appraisal of Olmsted plan implementation and current efforts at boulevard construction 10 years after approval of the 1904 plan.

51 The frustrations of the Park Board at the persistent delays in completing the various parkways and boulevards were constantly mentioned in the board minutes of this period. Although the Park Board put up some of the funding for constructing and landscaping these rights-of-way, the Commission for the Opening of Streets had the ultimate authority for completing such work, and the two agencies frequently were at loggerheads with regard to carrying out these projects. In October 1915 the Park Board tried to push beyond these frequent impasses by approving $25,000 for the Gwynns Falls Parkway provided: worked commenced in 1916 and the City matched this sum and if plans for parkway design were submitted to the Park Board for its review. (See Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, October 2, 1915, BCA BRG 51-5-3. Box 3. Book 2.) The offer did not work and had to be renewed the next year.

52 The determination of Venable and his Board to reverse the complacency of their predecessors is seen in the rapidity with which they assigned the Olmsted firm a number of specific park improvement projects. Even before the formal adoption of the 1904 plan, the Board directed Venable to contact Olmsted to “make a detailed and complete plan” for what became Swann and Latrobe Parks and to study possibility of adding athletic fields in Druid Hill, Clifton and Patterson Parks. See Minutes of Board of Park Commissioners’, January 29, 1904. BCA BRG 51-5-3. Box 3.
Fig. 10 Scenes from Wyman Park: one of Baltimore’s first fully Olmsted-designed parks. View (left) of lower lawn of the “Dell” and (right) a bridge for San Martin Drive in the stream valley section of the park.

In the years after adoption of the 1904 plan, P.R. Jones was a principal overseer for much of the Olmsted firm’s work for the parks, and other leading member of the firm such as Percival Gallagher sometimes spent time in Baltimore dealing with park design and implementation issues. Nonetheless, Olmsted himself remained the firm’s dominant presence.

Olmsted frequently visited Baltimore to inspect projects, consult with Marburg and attend Park Board meetings to make recommendations, discuss the progress of work underway, or to learn of new authorizations. His frequent presence and the vast array of work being done resulted in Park Board minutes on occasion simply denoting him as “the landscape architect” as if there could be no confusion about whom such a reference could apply. Marburg writing to Olmsted in early 1906 declared optimistically “there is every possibility of your plan being realized ultimately in its entirety” and described the high regard which Olmsted and his firm had earned in Baltimore.

Your name is already a household word here. This fact I know appeals to you less than the thought of being useful. You cannot but be aware of what great value your services have already been to us, and I believe that some day you will find us duly appreciative of, and grateful for, them.

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53 Olmsted’s Baltimore visits were often coordinated with his trips to Washington; in some cases breaking his rail trip to or from DC to spend part of a day dealing with Baltimore matters.

54 Nameless reference to “the landscape architect” in Minutes of Board of Park Commissioners, 3 April 1906. BCA BRG 51-5-3. Box 3, Olmsted’s frequent visits to Baltimore were often coupled to visits to Washington DC for work tied to implementing the 1902 Senate Park Commission Plan or later his activities as member of the Commission on Fine Arts. In some cases, he merely stopped off in Baltimore for several hours on his way to or from Washington.

Filling in the Framework
In addition to its park system work, up through the 1920s the Olmsted firm did much to help fill in the growth framework that its 1904 report had helped establish. Much of this was through its designs for the extension of Roland Park and the later Homewood, Guilford and Original Northwood communities as well as planning and design services for a number of public and private institutions such as Johns Hopkins University. The residential developments that the Olmsted firm planned for the northern sections of Baltimore were models of how to develop attractive and efficient residential environments for the middle classes and upper classes. These neighborhoods were built at reasonable density levels, with a variety of housing types, with a street system fit efficiently to the lay of the land, and with a good deal of urban design and landscape amenity.

Fig. 11 Guilford: one of several Olmsted firm residential communities for the Roland Park Company and laid out on a modified grid adapted to the original topography.

One Baltimore issue Olmsted raised but never got a chance to pursue in earnest was finding a new model for less privileged residential developments that could replace the high density rowhouse blocks that had proliferated in Baltimore in the late 19th century. Olmsted admitted that even if suitable access to parks and recreation could be provided to the city’s less affluent populations, it was not sufficient to make city living more comfortable and satisfying for them.

In 1906, Olmsted wrote to G. A. Parker to recruit him for a study that would demonstrate how to bring to new lower middle class or working class neighborhoods many of the same amenities that were becoming the expected benefits of the suburban-style new
middle class or upper class planned communities such as Guilford.\textsuperscript{56} Olmsted was quite enthusiastic about the value of such a study. “The more I think about it,” he declared, “the more I believe that we have here the opportunity of driving an effective opening wedge in one of the most thorough going and far reaching leads of municipal improvement that has yet been taken up.” Unfortunately, the Municipal Art Society to which Olmsted appealed for sponsorship of such an investigation seems not to have responded positively and no such study came forth.\textsuperscript{57}

In many respects, this gap in affordable housing with landscape and environmental amenities was filled by locally-based mass builders such as James Keelty or Edward Gallagher who built hundreds and hundreds of compact and comfortable “daylight” townhouses in the annexed areas from around World War I until well into the 1950’s. Such builders often sought sites along the new boulevards such as 33\textsuperscript{rd} Street or along or near park edges at Wyman Park, Herring Run and other new parks to enhance the value and appeal of their developments.\textsuperscript{58} Here too the framework established by the 1904 plan proved its worth and confirmed one of the plan’s key assumptions that a park system and an efficient network of streets and thoroughfares would encourage private developers to raise the quality of their projects.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{daylight_rowhouses.jpg}
\caption{“Daylight” rowhouses built on the edge of Wyman Park. These homes still command a sales price premium over identical housing on adjacent blocks.}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Parker was head of the Hartford, Connecticut park system and like Olmsted himself was an influential figure within the newly formed American Civic Association.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Olmsted’s interest in this issue was laid out at length in letter to G.A. Parker of Hartford CT, 5 May 1906 Olmsted LOC, Job File 2401 Municipal Art Society. Olmsted wrote to R. Brent Keyser of the Municipal Art Society and a “Mr. Buehler” on June 9, 1906 to introduce Parker and to ask Keyser to help Parker get access to the information he would need. There appears to be no reply or any drafts of any work along the lines Olmsted suggested the archives, so I have presumed this project never started.
\item \textsuperscript{58} See Hayward and Belfour, Baltimore Rowhouse, pp. 129-166 for detail on the work of local high-volume, modern row house developers in the build-out of the city from around World War I up to the 1950s. This study provides much detail on how rowhousing for Baltimore’s middle-class and working-class residents gained in efficiency and amenity from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century until the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century.
\end{itemize}
Work within the Older City
The Olmsted work in Baltimore was not confined to the newly developing outer areas. Largely through a growing personal trust and understanding between Olmsted and civic leaders such as Marburg of the Municipal Art Society, Olmsted was also drawn into a number of city planning endeavors dealing with the problems of the already developed, highly urbanized sections of the city. Indeed the variety of issues the Olmsted firm addressed in Baltimore (many cited on pages 3 and 4) illustrates the broad range of consulting services the firm offered American cities in the early years of the 20th century.

Probably the redevelopment or enhancement projects best known today are Olmsted’s work for a special commission established after the disastrous February 1904 fire that destroyed much of Baltimore’s downtown, and his work on a “Partial City Plan” begun in 1907 in collaboration with architects John Carrere and Arnold Brunner. Something of a grab bag of long desired urban design and street system improvements, this “City Plan” was presented to the Mayor and Council in 1910 with many of its recommendations concerning the Jones Falls and the Civic Center eventually implemented. The plan also led to the creation of the City’s first “Commission on City Plan,” set up primarily to oversee construction of the Fallsway but also given a circumscribed mandate to promote “city planning” in its broadest aspects as a more functional part of city government.

Fig. 13 1910 Partial City Plan of Olmsted, Carrere and Brunner. This view features the proposed Civic Centre and Fallsway.

Post War Revival of Interest in Park System Expansion

59 Recommendations presented in Municipal Art Society. Report on “Partial City Plan”. Baltimore MD. 1910. This Baltimore plan is seldom mentioned in descriptions of Olmsted’s city planning work but Olmsted himself apparently felt it significant enough to include it in a list of important city planning works he composed in April 1929 for a report on his career for his 35th Harvard class reunion report. See Olmsted LOC, “Personal Files. Job File No. 2919

60 A February 6, 1917 letter from Josiah Pennington to R.B. Woodward, Rochester Chamber of Commerce describes the origin of the commission in the wake of the 1910 Partial City Plan and the limited role and influence the commission had because of its vaguely defined role and lack of any staff resources or regulatory functions once its oversight of construction of the Fallsway project ended. Minutes of Municipal Art Society, p. 763. MS2840, Box 4.
As did other civic projects, park system development nearly ended when World War I diverted resources and manpower. Interest in park expansion revived, however, after the 1918 annexation of large areas on all sides of the 1888 borders which expanded the city to its current 91 square miles.

![Map of Census Tracts in Baltimore](image)

**Fig. 14** Both the 1888 and the 1918 boundaries are easily discerned on this 1940 census tract map.

As after 1888, the annexation of 1918 compelled the city to address how to expand streets, city services and public facilities into the newly acquired territory. By now a revived Commission on City Plan was in place to coordinate such growth. The Commission on City Plan was now under the direction of Major Joseph Shirley, who was also the chief engineer for the city’s Topographic Survey Commission. Shirley was a firm supporter of the Olmsted plan and other city planning strategies. (Especially after World War I he was one of Olmsted’s most effective allies within city government until his dismissal in 1927.) Under Shirley’s direction the Commission on City Plan in 1919 issued a plan that coordinated expansion of the city’s street system and with a revival of or necessary adjustments to many unfulfilled recommendations of the 1904 Olmsted plan.

**1923 Baltimore Sun Essay**

Unfortunately this 1919 plan remained merely a set of recommendations and it was never officially adopted, funded or put into practice. One key entity becoming increasingly unhappy with the status of the park system and lack of progress in city planning was the *Baltimore Sun*. In late 1922 Henry Hyde, chief editor of the *Sun*, contacted Olmsted and suggested Olmsted write an assessment of the status of the city’s parks and how well his 1904 plan had been carried out as well as an examination of the progress or lack thereof

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of city planning in Baltimore. In February 1923 after a visit and discussion with Sun representatives, Olmsted submitted an 11-page commentary on the Commission of City Plan park recommendations that was duly published in the paper the following March 24.

The commission’s 1919 plan focused primarily on “thoroughfare system” proposals, but it did set out to coordinate an expanded street system with park system extension. Olmsted affirmed that any commission plan’s deviations from the park recommendations of his 1904 report were justified because the commission needed to respond to changes in the built environment that had occurred since 1904. While generally endorsing the commission’s approach, Olmsted used the Sun essay to criticize the reasons such deviations had become necessary. One culprit was a lack of prompt action after 1904 which had led to a “shrinking and shaving down” process regarding many of the recommended acquisitions - a process he feared had gone too far. Such a trend resulted too often in “fragmentary little pieces …just stopped short of getting enough land to secure the full value from purchases already made…. “

A second disappointment, and the major one, was the city’s failure to fulfil the top priority of the 1904 plan – the adequate provision of playgrounds and recreation facilities close to the neighborhoods that needed them. “The houses are spreading and spreading. The open spaces for simple homely recreation near these homes are being covered up with bricks and mortar. And almost nothing is being done about it,” he lamented.

A third disappointment was the lack of a major waterfront park in a city of extensive shorelines. Olmsted’s comments about the fate of Broening Park, the primary waterfront park recommended in the 1904 plan, forcefully amplified his frustration with the absence of more effective city planning in Baltimore. With many sections sacrificed to expanding industrial and commercial uses, Broening Park –intended to be one of the city’s major new open spaces and its prime waterfront park-- was by the early 1920s only a shadow of the place the 1904 report had envisioned.

“Common sense,” Olmsted declared, should have prevailed and led to the finding of other locations for such industrial uses. Doing so would have given the thousands of new residents in developing areas to the south of Broening Park easy access to enjoyment of the waterfront. But common sense had not prevailed. In Olmsted’s mind the chief culprit was a lack of “any coordinating agency with the power and the will to bring

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62 Responding to the Baltimore Sun desire to revive public interest in city planning, the Olmsted firm also conducted a detailed review of the effectiveness of all the city’s planning powers and programs including an analysis of the city’s proposed first comprehensive zoning ordinance (work for which the firm commissioned city planner Arthur Comey). Final report in Olmsted LOC, Job File 2420, Baltimore Improvement Commission: Municipal Art Society, Baltimore City Plan.


64 “Park Plan Called Lacking in 3 Important Features by Landscape Architect,” Baltimore Sun, March 25, 1923.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.
conflicting specialists into line for the general welfare.” It was understandable for any city agency (the Harbor Board in this case) to vigorously promote its own interests and priorities. But someone needed to coordinate the priorities of the different agencies. In a quite graphic way Olmsted maintained that “it is the one big job of Comprehensive City Planning to take all such specialists with all their plans, and put them together – knock their heads together if necessary-- so as to evolve a general city plan which will have the maximum of advantages and the minimum of disadvantages for People of Baltimore as a whole.” 67

If the bulk of the Sun article focused on past mistakes and lack of mechanisms to prevent future recurrences of such lost opportunities, Olmsted did strike out in a more positive vein on one issue outside the Commission on City Plan proposals that “I cannot forbear to mention” - the need to plan for large outlying “vacation reservations.”

With city dwellers increasing their personal auto ownership, Baltimore should emulate New York and New Jersey cooperating in setting aside large protected areas to create the Palisades Interstate Park. Similar reservations outside Baltimore would provide city dwellers unable to travel to distant summer resorts an opportunity to use campgrounds with cabins or tents to get away for a weekend or longer. Administering such places as public parks would prevent the “penalty of crowding and shabbiness and loss of attractiveness” that too often plague “cheap commercial resorts, none too nice or too sanitary.”

Patapsco State Forest was “a good beginning in this direction but it is only a beginning and no beginning has been made” for areas along the Chesapeake Bay shorelands. Although the 1904 plan had called for outlying reservations, at that time there was no real experience in “providing for properly equipped public camps for extended vacations.” Now such a concept had been tested by experience elsewhere, and this “justified more extensive and rapid acquirements.” 68

The end of the Sun essay anticipates the more detailed arguments Olmsted would later make in an address “The Distribution of Metropolitan Parks” delivered by proxy to a 1924 city conference on parks, parkways and playgrounds. 69 These Sun remarks also reflect his increasing interest and experience with the planning of national and state parks, a topic that would garner much of his interest and efforts for the remainder of his career.

Background to the 1926 Plan
As it turned out, the March 1923 Sun essay was Olmsted’s last publically presented assessment of Baltimore’s park needs and related issues. By the early 1920s, Olmsted was more and more preoccupied by his work in California on Palos Verdes and the California State Park System and by his increased attention to the growth of the National

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 See below for overview of conference. Henry Hubbard delivered the address.
Park System. In Baltimore the responsibilities for the work of the Olmsted firm fell to Henry V. Hubbard.

Hubbard was the first graduate (1902) of the landscape architecture program established under Olmsted at Harvard. By the 1920s, Hubbard was on the Harvard faculty as well as a member of the Olmsted firm. As time went on, Hubbard became more and more focused on city planning as a professional discipline separate from landscape architecture. Consequently, he was well suited for assuming the firm’s lead role in Baltimore at a time when coordination of park planning with other city planning issues became more and more necessary.

During this period, the Olmsted firm also subcontracted to Arthur Comey, one of the nation's leading experts in city planning implementation, a number of key tasks regarding Baltimore parks. In 1924, for example, Comey produced a thorough analysis of Baltimore’s park and recreation holdings that documented in more detail than Olmsted’s *Sun* essay the progress (or lack thereof) of the 1904 plan.70

Indeed, by the time of Comey’s parks report, the interest of a majority on the Park Board in park system extension and finishing the Olmsted plan had become largely rhetorical. By the early 1920s the board’s attention turned to such initiatives as constructing a new Memorial Stadium, and attracting the events to fill it. Critics of the board felt such a commitment to this expensive yet seldom used facility robbed the city of the resources needed to acquire new parkland or build needed playgrounds and recreation areas within the built-up areas where such facilities were still severely deficient. Furthermore, critics increasingly considered the Park Board (which still had its own park tax separate from the city’s budget) too insulated from popular control and too aloof from other city agencies, which created situations such as the Broening Park failure that Olmsted himself had lamented.71 Reformers therefore demanded to put the Park Board under supervision of the mayor. Dissatisfaction with the Park Board was also fueled by the dismissive, often authoritarian actions of its chairman, J. Cookman Boyd, leading in late 1923 to a City Council resolution calling for his resignation.72

In June 1924 such discontent received its most public expression in a Baltimore Conference on Parks, Parkways and Playgrounds organized by a newly formed

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70 A version of Comey’s report was read to the June 1924 Baltimore Conference on Parks, Parkways and Playgrounds. Typewritten copy of original report in Olmsted LOC; Job File 2420, Baltimore Improvement Commission; Municipal Art Society, Baltimore City Plan.

71 By the mid-1920s, the Park Board was sharply split with the president, J. Cookman Boyd, and his two allies, General Felix Angus and Theodore Mottu, as supporters of current priorities pitted against William I. Norris and Edward Hanlon, a minority of two concerned about a lack of progress with regard to park system growth, the inadequate provision of playgrounds and recreation within the older sections of the city, and lack of an up-to-date-park system plan.

72 “Boyd is Asked to Resign by City Council,” *Baltimore Sun*, November 27, 1923. The resolution passed 14-10. See also Henry V. Hubbard letter to William Ellicott, June 5, 1924 for Hubbard’s criticism of the Park Board’s lack of cooperation with other city agencies and Boyd’s “histrionics.” In Olmsted LOC, Job File 2401. Municipal Art Society.
Committee of 100, headed by gadfly park advocate William M. Ellicott.\textsuperscript{73} The conference was organized to give greater voice to those upset by the “laxity” in pursuing park system expansion. It featured a number of national figures such as J. Horace McFarland of the American Civic Association as well as presentations by Arthur Comey and Henry Hubbard.\textsuperscript{74} Comey’s address repeated many of the criticisms Olmsted had aired in his 1923 \textit{Sun} article, and Comey further contended that Baltimore was falling far behind other US cities in providing for the park and recreation needs of its growing population. Hubbard read Olmsted’s essay “The Distribution of Metropolitan Parks” which elaborated the points Olmsted raised in the 1923 \textit{Sun} essay regarding the need for easily accessible outlying reservations. This address also brought up to date “Olmstedian” principles about the purposes and functions of parks serving urban populations by making them more relevant to an age of increasing auto ownership and leisure time.\textsuperscript{75}

A primary theme of the conference was a call for a new comprehensive park plan to coordinate park growth decisions with other city agencies responsible for Baltimore’s continued expansion. Obtaining such a plan would not be easy. Park Board President Boyd himself addressed the conference and vigorously asserted the wrongness of many of the charges and criticisms directed at him and his Board.\textsuperscript{76}

In the aftermath of the conference, the tensions within the Park Board intensified. Boyd defensively touted the quality of the park system and emphasized a lack of funds to acquire playgrounds and other facilities. (In a number of ways, Boyd’s defense echoed the complacency and self-satisfaction of the pre-Venable park board.) In sharp contrast, board members William I. Norris, former head of the State Senate from East Baltimore, and Edward Hanlon, a member of the family owning the Baltimore Orioles, persistently

\textsuperscript{73} The Olmsted firm endured a rather delicate relationship with Ellicott. Although devoted to promoting parks and related initiatives (he was one of the earliest advocates of a parkway between Baltimore and Washington), Ellicott’s abrasively aggressive mannerisms alienated a number of potential allies within such groups as the City Congress and the Municipal Art Society. Consequently, the Olmsted firm – which desired to maintain good relations with all parties needed to support good planning and park system development - maintained, principally through Hubbard, a cordial yet somewhat aloof relationship. Ellicott, after years of stepping on other’s toes, seems eventually to have gotten the message. Writing to Hubbard, he announced his intention to leave for Europe for the winter of 1926-1927 in large part to not detract from efforts to implement the 1926 plan.

\textsuperscript{74} Basic background information, descriptions of proceedings and follow-up actions described in the extensive \textit{Baltimore Sun} coverage before and after the conference: “Organization of Park Conference to Study Management is Begun”, April 15, 1924; “Organization is Formed to Plan Extension of System of Parks,” April 30, 1924; “Park Criticism Scored by Boyd at Conference,” June 3, 1924; “Park Association for City is Formed,” June 12, 1924; “Cooperation Urged on City Parks Plan,” June 13, 1924; “Park Development Here is Criticized,” June 15, 1924;

\textsuperscript{75} The core of the essay Hubbard delivered was written for a California audience and first delivered in Los Angeles. Olmsted himself suggested ways to revise it to address some of the issues William Ellicott had raised in the run-up to the Baltimore conference. See Frederick Law Olmsted, “Comments suggested by Mr. Ellicott’s Letter of May 15, 1924; Memorandum for Mr. Hubbard and Mr. Comey,” n.d., in Olmsted LOC, Job File 2400, Baltimore Park System.

\textsuperscript{76} “Park Criticism Scored by Boyd at Conference,” \textit{Baltimore Sun}, June 3, 1924. The Park Board meetings following the conference were particularly contentious, esp. the July 28, 1924 meeting at which Norris’s motion to sponsor a new park system plan was defeated 2-3 after a prolonged debate and often sharp personal accusations. Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, July 28, 1924. BCA BCRG 51-5-4. Book 3.
pushed for acquiring needed playgrounds, acquiring a waterfront park, and sponsorship of a new comprehensive park system expansion plan believing the 1904 plan was now too out of date.

After the parks conference, Norris in particular again pushed for these goals, both within and outside his Park Board activities. In September Norris became head of an executive committee of park advocates charged with forming a new Public Parks Association. The purpose of this new group was to carry on the conference themes including adoption of a “systematic, organic park plan, and metropolitan park system suitable to the needs of our growing city.”

Once again a comprehensive Olmsted plan would result from a shakeup of the Park Board. Although Mayor Henry Jackson had, after the June conference, reiterated his campaign pledge to increase the number of playgrounds in the city, he did little to push the Park Board into action. Furthermore, he continued to voice support for Boyd and his allies on the Park Board. Opportunity came knocking in early 1925 when a scandal regarding contracts for improving the Mount Royal Reservoir led to Boyd and his two supporters vacating their posts on the Board. A reconstituted Board was installed and Norris named president. The advocates for a new parks plan and for more playground and recreation facilities finally had their chance.

**The 1926 Park Plan**

One of the first actions of the reformed Park Board was to authorize preparation of a new comprehensive parks plan. Unlike the previous Olmsted plan that had been prepared outside the framework of city government, the process leading to a new plan would be fully city sponsored and developed. However, the process was to be managed not by the Park Board per se but rather delegated to the Commission on City Plan, the body that had proposed a number of park extensions as part of its 1919 plan. One specific charge the Park Board gave to the Commission was to investigate which recommendations of the 1904 plan had not been fulfilled and what to do about them now. A second top priority was to address the continued shortage of playgrounds and recreation spaces in built up areas. Not surprisingly, the Olmsted firm was selected to pursue this responsibility.

Work on the new plan lasted more than a year with Henry Hubbard directing the effort. In part because of Hubbard’s own approach to planning and in part because it was done in a very different context of city capabilities and responsibilities, the resulting 1926 plan, *Report and Recommendations on Park Extension for Baltimore*, was more than an update of the 1904 plan. The 1904 plan was in a number of ways a 19th century plan. It was descriptive and often philosophical in asserting its priorities but also lacked many of the techniques and approaches to support its recommendations that were soon common.

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77 Quote in “Park Association for City is Formed,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 12, 1924. See, also.

78 See e.g., “Boyd Gets Hearing in City Hall Today,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 14, 1925 and “Boyd Regards Norris Elevation as Personal Insult to Himself: Retiring park Board President Expecting to Continue as Member, Stunned by Action of Mayor,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 3, 1925.

79 Employing Olmsted firm according to terms of a May 21 Board letter to Shirley’s Commission on City Plan unanimously approved. See Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, June 12, 1925. BCA BRG 51-5-4. Box 4, Book 3.
features in city planning. In contrast, the 1926 plan felt no need for the 1904 plan’s lengthy forays into advocacy and explanation. Its opening paragraph flatly declared, “We do not bring arguments to prove that parks and playgrounds are necessary for the complete and healthful living of city dwellers. We assume the people of Baltimore already know this.”  

The report then immediately jumped into presentation of its background analysis and recommendations.

Fully of its time, the 1926 plan demonstrated the increasing technical sophistication of city planning. Unlike the 1904 plan, it had a target date for its fulfillment (1950) and a target population to accommodate (1.5 million). The recommendations for park acquisitions and provision of recreational facilities were presented on a much more analytical foundation. Conclusions and recommendations were based on such techniques as population projections based on build-out of the city’s new zoning code and level of service standards (e.g., square feet of school site playground space per student) to document current deficiencies and project future needs.

Just as the 1904 plan was about more than parks, the 1926 plan was not simply a “parks and recreation” document. The 1926 park and recreation recommendations were embedded in an elaborate scheme that featured major road extensions, new connections and assumed future population distribution. Recreation areas were only one group of city facilities and “they can be efficiently provided only if they are regarded as parts of one unified business proposition: that is, the recreation areas can be planned only as part of a complete city plan.”

Indeed, in its complexity and detail, the 1926 plan shared many traits of a contemporary comprehensive plan, and in this fashion the 1926 plan answered much of Olmsted’s complaint in his 1923 Sun essay about the lack of city plan coordination.

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80 City Plan Committee of the Department of Public Works, Report and Recommendations on Park Extension for Baltimore to the Board of Park Commissioners. Baltimore, MD. 1926, p. 9.

(Hereafter cited as “1926 Report”. I have used the 2001 facsimile edition published by Friends of Maryland’s Olmsted Parks and Landscapes. Baltimore MD.)

81 1926 Report, Appendix, pp. 63-72 explains the methodology used to do the projections and how they were related to the city’s zoning plans.

82 1926 Report, p. 9.
The 1926 plan offered a good deal more local detail with regard to provision of local playground and recreation areas than the 1904 plan. Although it did not attempt to site precisely very small facilities on a citywide-scale map, the 1926 plan did indicate based on the assumed distribution of population in 1950 and various service area concepts for the different facilities the general locations where these new facilities would be needed.  

The 1926 report discussed two types of active recreation areas: a) “district playgrounds (or athletic fields)” which combined the “passive features of the parks of a generation ago” with large-scale active recreation infrastructure such as tennis courts that would attract users from a wide service area and b) more neighborhood oriented, smaller “playgrounds.” See p.16 and p. 18 for description of each type.
Fig. 16 Proposed distribution of playground facilities

One unfortunate aspect of the 1926 plan was its deference to the established patterns and official policies enforcing increased racial segregation within the city. Edward Bouton of the Roland Park Company later questioned Hubbard about the 1926 plan not providing much for the city’s growing African-American population. Hubbard’s reply expressed his sense that the status quo with regard to such disparities could not be overtly challenged. White taxpayers would reject paying the high cost of land to site such facilities in African-American neighborhoods. Attempting to site a “negro playground” in a “white district” would be “still more repugnant” to white taxpayers. Admitting that the 1926 plan “practically dodged this question,” Hubbard confessed he had no satisfactory answer to this “apparently insoluble situation,” and no one else seemed to have one. “If

84 Earlier, Broadus Mitchell, economist at Johns Hopkins University, writing to Henry Hubbard on behalf of the Baltimore Urban League pled for the upcoming parks plan to include provision in the city’s African-American neighborhoods of desperately needed open space referring directly to the need to bring a healthier environment to the city’s nefarious “lung block” of high tuberculosis occurrence.
we had had an answer, we would have suggested it, but having no answer, we thought it unwise to saddle the report with any more controversial questions than were essential.\textsuperscript{85}

The results were not surprising. A survey of Baltimore’s park and recreation facilities in 1941 documented eight “white” playfields and zero “colored.” While whites were proposed to get 25 new facilities, only two were planned as “colored.” The situation for local playgrounds was even more contrasting. Twenty-five “white” playgrounds were to increase to 82; the nine “colored” playgrounds were to increase to twelve.\textsuperscript{86}

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\begin{center}
\textbf{Fig. 17 Proposed Dead Run Valley addition to Gwynns Falls Park.}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{85} Letter from Bouton to Hubbard, January 4, 1927 and Hubbard’s reply, January 7, 1927 in Olmsted LOC, Project File 2400. Baltimore Park System. Baltimore parks were not always officially segregated. In 1905, after a series of complaints, the Park Board under Venable “voted unanimously to end the distinction between white and colored people in issuance of picnic permits” and instituted a first come, first serve’ policy. See Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, September 5, 1905. BCA BRG 51-5-3. Box 3. Book 1. Over time, however, the Board, through turnover and under pressures from city council members voicing white constituent complaints about “Negro intrusions” altered its attitudes. For a quick overview of the impact of segregationist policies on parks and how such policies ended, see Kessler, Barry and David Zang, Play Life of a City: Baltimore’s Recreation and Parks, 1900-1955. Baltimore City Life Museums and Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks, 1989, pp. 31-45. For a general history of how racial and ethnic segregation intensified in Baltimore in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century by directing African-Americans, Jews and non-Jewish whites to separate sections of the city see Pietila, Antero, Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City. Baltimore MD. Ivan R. Dee. 2010. Such policies also affected neighborhoods the Olmsted firm designed for the Roland Park Company none of which were open to Jews or African-Americans until after World War II.

\textsuperscript{86} Allen, F. Ellwood and Weaver W. Pangburn, 1941 Recreation Plan. Typescript report in Olmsted LOC, Job File 2400, Baltimore Park System. Allen and Pangburn were consultants from the National Recreation Association, New York City. Given the African-American population was about 20% of the city, these figures indicate how poorly it was served. Because most African-American neighborhoods were grossly overcrowded and densely built up, one can argue they had a disproportionate need for public recreation facilities, especially playgrounds, unlike the white suburban areas where new residential areas had much more private green space suitable for play in form of large yards in addition to any nearby public facilities. As the circles on Fig. 16 show, there seemed to be no argument about purchasing need playground and recreation sites in white working class neighborhoods.
A second major theme of the 1926 plan was extending and expanding the stream valley parks featured in the earlier 1904 plan. The 1918 annexation now allowed the city to more easily purchase stream valley holdings beyond the former 1888 boundary. Also there was a need to add sufficient space to areas previously acquired to more effectively buffer the stream valley resources from expected nearby development. Consequently, the 1926 plan included both large-scale general acquisition taking lines and location-specific small parcels.87

Fig. 18 Detailed acquisition recommendations for connecting existing park holdings along Gwynns Falls near Wilkens Avenue.

The third major need the 1926 plan addressed was the continued absence of a large waterfront park, one of Olmsted’s major complaints in his 1923 Sun article and a priority of Norris and his allies on the Park Board. Given the amount of port area industrial development, the 1926 report conceded it was no longer possible to find sufficient land within the city limits and therefore recommended that sites be acquired east of the city in Baltimore County on both the north and south sides of the harbor.88

Adoption and Aftermath
The 1926 plan was in essence a restatement and elaboration on many of the ideas presented in the 1919 Commission on City Plan proposals such as a new series of radial and circumferential boulevards and parkways for the 1918 annexation area. The Commission, therefore, had little trouble validating the plan and quickly sent it to the Park Board for its review. The Board adopted the Olmsted plan “in its entirety“ on

87 Under half of the main body of the report was devoted to stream valleys, see esp. 1926 Report, pp.28-48.
88 1926 Report, pp. 49-52. This long thwarted desire for a major waterfront park was soon fulfilled by the acquisition of the no longer needed Fort Smallwood and Fort Armistead holdings from the federal government. Once made more accessible to city dwellers, these waterfront parks (located in Anne Arundel County) were extremely popular until destinations along Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Coast became easier to reach with the opening and subsequent expansion of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and improvements to US 50 and other roads leading to these shorelines. After a period of decline and closure, Fort Smallwood and Fort Armistead were acquired from Baltimore City by the Anne Arundel park system.
August 11, 1926, and forwarded it to Mayor Henry Jackson as the official policy of the Board regarding future park expansion.

Unlike the 1904 plan, however, adoption of the 1926 plan did not lead to quick action. The primary reason was a desperate lack of funds. For example, in late 1926 Norris had to explain to his Board that he could not enter into talks with a willing seller of 150 acres of the Jones Falls stream valley because “it was useless to negotiate” given the Board’s current lack of funds with which to make any offer.89

Having a well-conceived guide to new acquisitions proved insufficient to entice elected officials or city voters to replenish Park Board coffers. Initial estimates for implementing the plan were $2 million to $3 million for playgrounds and $1 million for stream valleys. The Park Board resolved to ask that a new park loan for $3 million be approved by the state legislature in 1927.90 To help secure these funds, Norris decided to run again (successfully) for the State Senate where he believed he could effectively push for new parks bond legislation.91

Unfortunately, this strategy failed. In March 1927, Mayor Jackson declined to include park loan legislation in his package of Maryland General Assembly legislation.92 When a park-financing bill for $2.5 million was finally submitted as part of the mayor’s package of desired legislation in the 1929 session, the issue became entangled in the factional rivalries of the Democrats within the Baltimore City delegation. In March 1929, a meeting of the city delegation in the Senate voted against the bill, an outcome that guaranteed defeat in the whole Senate by a 19-5 margin.93

This lack of funds ended any sustained involvement of the Olmsted firm in Baltimore park improvements. Replying to a late 1934 letter asking for an opinion on a potential Baltimore park acquisition, Hubbard confessed that he had “no detailed ideas…of any value” largely because, since submitting the 1926 plan, “I have not had any responsibility of the kind in Baltimore.”94 Indeed, one of the few significant park issues that involved

89 Minutes of Board of Park Commissioners, 23 December 1926. BCA BCRG 51-5-4. Box 4, Book 3.
90 Estimates cited in Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners, August 11, 1926. BCA BCRG 51-5-4. Box 4, Book 3.
91 Compounding Norris’s difficulties was the return of J. Cookman Boyd as Baltimore City’s Comptroller, a position from which he could oppose Norris and his Board’s efforts to get a new parks loan authorized. Another blow for park advocates was the politically driven dismissal of Joseph Shirley from his city post in September 1927 by Mayor William Broening (a decision Shirley learned by reading his morning newspaper). See “Leaving Staff Shirley’s Chief Regret After 33 Years Work,” Baltimore Morning Sun, September 28 1927. Shirley was subsequently retained by the Municipal Art Society to advise it on issues pertaining to “the beautification of the city.” See Shirley to Aid in Efforts to Beautify City,” Baltimore Morning Sun, January 20, 1928.
92 “Mayor Decides Not to Request Loan for Parks,” Baltimore Sun, March 19, 1927.
93 “Park Loan Bill Defeated by State Senate,” Baltimore Sun, March 20, 1929. Shirley, no longer working for the city, conveyed the news to Hubbard and declared the fight was “strictly political.” See Shirley letter to Hubbard, April 18th, 1929 in Olmsted LOC. Job File 2400. Baltimore Park System.
94 Hubbard letter to John B. Breckenridge, November 3, 1934 in Olmsted LOC. Job File 2420. Baltimore Improvement Commission; Municipal Art Society, Baltimore City Plan. The firm did continue to work for a time on other Baltimore projects such as continued development of the Roland Park

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the firm was Olmsted’s personal effort to ensure that the new Baltimore Museum of Art did not locate in Druid Hill Park as a number of museum supporters were hoping. The Olmsted firm did get to work on the initial site planning for the museum’s present site across from Wyman Park Dell. The only other notable park specific work involving Olmsted himself was in 1939 when Marburg asked Olmsted to weigh in on the longstanding controversy about the John Wilson Leakin legacy that lead to the purchase of the large park addition to Gwynns Falls named after Leakin today.95

In the mid-1930s, the Municipal Art Society under its new leader, Douglas Gordon, considered replicating its earlier sponsorship of the Olmsted 1904 report by having the Olmsted firm provide a new assessment of the status quo to re-ignite interest in the park system. However, as Olmsted noted after a discussion with Gordon, “it was not at all clear to either of us what sort of a paper would be expedient under the circumstances.”96 A 1941 report by the Olmsted firm was a low-key update on the progress of the 1926 plan. A 27-page typewritten memo, the 1941 report was never formally published or broadly publicized.97

Although the Olmsted firm did not get much chance to help fulfill its 1926 plan, that did not check all park system progress. Leakin Park was added to the system as an extension of Gwynns Falls Park, and Fort Smallwood and Fort Armistead were both acquired from the federal government. Throughout the 1930s, the Park Board remained active in managing the park system and building improvements when it could. By the eve of World War II more than 1,000 acres had been added to the park system since the 1926 plan. This was no mean feat given the impact of the depression and the increasing woes and eventual bankruptcy of the private transit company that supplied the parks.

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95 Leakin died in 1922 and left the City several downtown properties to be sold and the proceeds used to purchase land for a public park. For almost two decades, inner-city councilors lobbying for distributing the proceeds widely for small local parks struggled with others, including Olmsted, who favored one large purchase where land was less expensive. Eventually, the large single tract supporters won out in the late 1930s. Although the Park Board did not favor it, the City Council approved purchase of the Crimea estate that became renamed in Leakin’s honor. In many ways, the Leakin Park dispute carried forward the inner city vs. suburban area fight that led to the 1907 defeat of the park bond issue. MAS conveyed Olmsted’s recommendations in support of the final site chosen to the Park Board; see Minutes of the Board of Park Commissioners. September 11, 1939. BCA BCRG 51-5-4. Box 5.

96 Olmsted comments in a December 10, 1937 “Memo to Dear Mrs. Obst,” Olmsted LOC. Job File 2401, Municipal Art Society. Gordon had apparently been unaware of the 1926 plan and the Olmsted’s role in developing it, but did know of the firm’s 1904 plan, which the MAS had sponsored.

97 Request for Olmsted firm to review the 1926 plan recommendations and determine whether they were still applicable and what modifications, if any, were needed, sent by Abel Wolman, Chairman of the Advisory Engineers to Commission on City Plan, January 20, 1941. Report was submitted in July 1941.
department with a dedicated source of income in accord with the transit tax system (as amended), established in 1860 to fund Druid Hill Park.  

Comparing the maps of the 1904 and 1926 plans to the current layout of the city shows that much of the park system envisioned by the two Olmsted plans was ultimately secured. Indeed, the degree to which these plans were fulfilled compares favorably with the success or failure of city and park planning efforts of the Olmsted firm for other cities between 1900 and 1940.  

**Useful History and the Olmsted Legacy in Baltimore**

Understanding the full scope of the work of the Olmsted firm in Baltimore in the first half of twentieth century is an important contribution to more fully understanding the degree to which the Olmsted firm, as city and regional planners as well as landscape architects, shaped the urban landscape of the United States in the first decades of the 20th century. In Baltimore much of this city-shaping work was done through the Olmsted firm’s efforts to help the city develop a multifunctional and extensive park and parkway system.

The troubles and deterioration of much of this system in later years should not blind us to the significance of what had occurred by 1940. Because they continued to be attractive middle and upper class enclaves in an increasingly poor and racially divided city, Baltimore’s Olmsted-designed residential subdivisions retained a higher reputation and greater appreciation than Baltimore’s park system. Nevertheless, after a generation of fiscal, physical and environmental decline, appreciation of Baltimore parks eventually revived. This often resulted from struggles to keep park spaces from being significantly compromised by highway projects or hived off as “underused real estate” to institutions looking for cheap or free space for their own facilities. Over time a less crisis ridden, more positive interest and commitment to protect and revitalize the parks would emerge.

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98 The original trolley tax gave the parks 1 cent of each 5-cent fare or a 20% levy. By the 1930s the rate had been adjusted several times and legislation set a schedule of gradual reductions until it was to reach 3% in 1938. Declining ridership from a peak in the mid 1920s also eroded the trolley tax. These issues became moot with the eventual bankruptcy of the private system. A history of the trolley tax and other park system financial challenges in the mid-1930s are described in Kelly, J.V., “The Municipal Park Problem.” in Stieff, ed. *Government of a Great American City*, pp. 282-299. (Kelly was secretary treasurer of the Park Board for some four decades so was quite immersed in park system issues.)

99 “A Brief History of Baltimore Parks,” a 30-page typewritten “second draft” report dated December 10, 1940 documented the location, size and date of 1,023 acres of park acquisition since the 1926 plan. This report (p. 24) also states that the city had acquired 3,784.84 acres of parkland since purchasing the first parcel in 1815. Copy of document in Olmsted LOC, Job File 2400, Baltimore Park System. No author is listed

100 E.g., the section of Wyman Park east of San Martin Drive was turned over to Johns Hopkins University in the 1960s and has since been fully incorporated into its campus. The entire park had been offered to Hopkins, but neighborhood opposition limited the Hopkins acquisition to the area east of San Martin Drive. An attempt in the mid-1980s by the city to transfer to the university the remaining park west of San Martin Drive again provoked sharp opposition by the affected neighborhoods and citywide park advocates forcing the city to retract its offer. See, e.g., Katie Gunter, “City neighborhoods quick to fight for their green space,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 4, 1985.
as did a more widespread appreciation of the role of the Olmsted firm in creating this legacy.

This legacy is more than the physical spaces that have survived. It also includes a more sophisticated understanding of the original ideas behind the Olmsted firm’s recommendations for Baltimore’s parks and parkways and a heightened awareness of the underlying Olmstedian thinking about how parks should function and the role they play in improving the quality of city living. This appreciation has made contemporary park advocates, city and park planners, and local officials more sensitive to the need to think critically about any proposals to drastically modify or “repurpose” the work the Olmsted firm did for Baltimore. The Olmsteds and their associates knew what they were doing. Baltimore is a better city for keeping much of the Olmsted firm’s work intact.101

101 The Wyman Park Dell master plan for park revitalization is a good example of using greater awareness of the park’s Olmsted history to protect the essence of the original design while allowing for contemporary enhancements. A steering committee of neighborhood stakeholders, and representatives of the Friends of Maryland’s Olmsted Parks and Landscapes, the city’s planning and park departments, and the neighboring Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore Museum of Art directed the master plan process. A local landscape architecture firm with deep knowledge of the park’s Olmsted origins provided professional assistance. The master plan was developed with much public scrutiny and in time approved with slight amendments by the Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) on August 15, 2006. The master plan is available on-line at http://www.wymanparkdell.org.