



## PROJECTS FOR SUPPORTING PARKS

You can help a local park in ways that range from formal commitments of time and resources to simpler one-off volunteer opportunities. We'll walk you through the steps for both one-time assistance efforts and longer-term, more ambitious commitments.

Either way, the first step is to identify a nearby park you want to help. It can be a national park or a local gem. If it's an Olmsted park, that's terrific, but many other parks need help. The Olmsted 200 website can help you find a park. Beyond these lists, one easy way to get ideas for helping your park is to call your local Parks Commissioner or Parks Department and ask how you can help the park.

Once you've found a park you would like to support, here's a list of ideas for short- and long-term projects you can do.

### Short-term Projects

- **Volunteer for a project** at your park, such as weeding or cleaning up trash. Consider hosting or joining a [Weed Wrangle®](#). Become a docent, or guide, at a national or local park.
- **Organize a community park celebration** that highlights the important role parks play for all of us while encouraging creative use of these public green spaces.
- **Write to a local or federal official** about Olmsted's work and vision for parks and its enduring importance. Solicit support for your park or speak out if planned actions will harm the park or place's integrity. *(See sample letter templates below.)*
- **Convene a Park Summit to bring together community activists and citizens**, health professionals, parks and rec agencies, city planners and others to examine the general state of parks, access to the parks, social and economic benefits of parks, how to enhance the use of the parks by diverse audiences, and park funding.
- **Urge your city to create a Task Force to examine parks' general state, access to parks, use of parks by diverse audiences and park funding.** In Seattle, an Olmsted Legacy Task Force was established to examine its park system and offer a range of recommendations focused on equity and access, funding and community-based input. The final report, [Olmsted Legacy Task Force: Rebirth of Olmsted's Design for Equity](#), was submitted to the Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation and the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners.

## Longer-term Projects

**Researching your park** or historic landscape-- as well as documenting its current condition -- can be an important first step. Understanding the space's original design can inform maintenance and upgrade plans. Documenting the original purpose of certain features and the use of specific materials can help illuminate what makes a space unique and important and guide any upgrade or expansion plans. Here is a research checklist to help guide you through the process.

- Define the scope of your research: To what end are you studying the history? The grander the project, the more you'll need to know. Basic questions include:
  - Who were the landscape's originally intended users?
  - What did the original design look like, and how has it been changed over the years?
  - When and why was it modified?
  - What remains from the original design and/or construction, and what condition is it in?
  - Who uses the property now, and for what purpose?
  
- Identify potential research sources:
  - Historical societies
  - State historical preservation agencies
  - Public libraries
  - Garden clubs
  - University libraries and archives
  - Municipal archives
  - State historic preservation offices
  - Old newspapers, many of which are available online (even some which are no longer published).
  - [Olmsted Online](#), a digital resource that provides access to project plans, Library of Congress records, and Flickr Records, made available through the [Olmsted Archives](#) at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.
  - [Library of Congress](#), whose Manuscript Division includes the Frederick Law Olmsted Papers and the Olmsted Associates Papers, and other potentially useful resources.
  - The [Archives of American Gardens](#), which contains documentation of more than 5,500 gardens and landscapes.
  
- Specific things to look for:
  - Official documents such as annual reports, minutes, journals, construction contracts, maintenance records, census records, municipal ordinances and charters, state laws and constitutions, wills and real estate deeds
  - Histories of the municipality, city, state or region
  - Biographies of park designers
  - Unpublished material such as diaries, letters, catalogs of local plant nurseries, seed catalogs
  - Visual records such as maps, plans, drawings, sketches, photographs or postcards
  - Transcripts or taped materials of interviews and oral histories
  - Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places or similar state registries.
  - Remember that historical research should be undertaken with a level of caution because documents and reports can be incomplete and misleading. Where possible, double- and triple-check designs to ensure that they are accurate. For more information on

researching, see the [National Association for Olmsted Parks](#)' guidance, which can largely be applied to non-Olmsted parks and landscapes as well.

**Start an organization** dedicated to developing stronger community support for your park or landscape. Creating your own "Friends of" groups can give you a mechanism for generating investment and ensuring that the space is cared for and maintained through volunteer programs. [The Friends of Buttonwood Park](#) offers a great example of how a friends group can be a powerful advocate for preserving the integrity of a historic landscape.

- Discuss what needs to be done in the park, why it is not being done and who in government has the authority to fix it.
- Decide what the group's goals are: Do they want to help with master planning? Facility rehabilitation? Trash removal? Gardening? Events? Education? Advocacy? Fundraising? Research? Publicity? Set priorities and rank them.
- Assess the advocacy landscape.
  - Do any other groups operate in this space, and what work have they done? How do you plan to interact with them? The [National Association for Olmsted Parks](#) has a list of friends groups and conservancies which can share their experiences.
  - Are there other civic groups that may not be explicitly park- or conservation-focused but might be open to helping out, such as a Rotary Club or a school?
  - Identify the highest-ranking officials who are likely to be both sympathetic to your cause and in a position to help out. Meet with them to discuss your goals — and get their thoughts on what needs to be done.
- Organize your organization, including answering questions such as:
  - Who will lead it, and how will they be chosen?
  - Who should be on the board, and how will they be selected? Will the group have full-time staff, and if so, how will it be selected?
  - Who can sign contracts?
  - Who can approve materials?
  - How will the group coordinate with the park administrator or other key officials?
  - Will the group have an office? If so, where?
  - How will the projects the group undertakes be chosen?
  - Will volunteers be trained? How and by whom?
  - What is the budget and fund-raising plan?
- Find a name for your new organization.
- Create a charter and by-laws. The former — which will be filed with the state when you incorporate — may require a lawyer, hopefully working pro bono.
- Create an accounting system so that you can keep track of your finances.
- Apply for 501(c)3 tax-exempt status with the [Internal Revenue Service](#).
- Create a logo: Make your own using a free online design platform such as [Canva](#) or commission a low-cost custom design from a web-based marketplace for graphic designers such as [Fiverr](#).
- Select an initial project.
- Start fundraising and recruiting volunteers for your project.
- Work with state and local governments to form public-private partnerships.

**Create** a master plan for your park. Here is an excellent example of friends groups who helped spearhead a park restoration in the [Essex County Branch Brook Park](#).

**Nominate** an Olmsted-designed landscape to the National Register of Historic Places (NR), the official list of the nation's significant historic properties.

- First, contact your [State Historic Preservation Office](#) (SHPO). The National Park Service (NPS) coordinates the national effort through state-administered programs. Check the [NPS website](#) for a link to your state office.
- Through your state or NPS website, you can get information to guide the survey and evaluation process necessary for designed historic landscapes and details on preparing a national register nomination. Download a copy of the NR Bulletin [How to Evaluate and Nominate a Designed Historic Landscape](#).
- Familiarize yourself with the guidance issued by the Park Service on nominating cultural landscapes. A property may be eligible for listing because of its association with a significant historical event, person, design, and/or its archaeology. A designed historic landscape is often associated with landscape architecture or a style employed by a trained individual.
- [Sample nominations](#) for Olmsted landscape types can be found here and at [OlmstedOnline](#). Once you have completed the process, a template for a letter supporting a nomination can be found [here](#).
- Anyone or any group may submit an NR nomination, including property owners, historical societies, preservation organizations, local, state and federal government offices. Once the property survey, research and evaluation are completed and entered into the NR form, the nomination is submitted to SHPO. The application forms are [downloadable online](#).
- Your state office will notify affected property owners and local governments and solicit public comment. The SHPO and other bodies generally have a 90-day review period but depending on the community's size or possible controversy associated with a listing, it can take much longer.
- Completed nominations, with support and recommendations from the state, are forwarded to the National Park Service for a final decision, which should come within 45 days.
- The property cannot be listed in the National Register if the property owner objects (or, in the case of a district nomination, a majority of owners' object), but it can be determined to be eligible for listing.
- You can also check whether your state or locality has any other areas or periods of significance for which your landscape might be eligible. Designed landscapes are often the site of earlier human activity and design work that overlays the original design. There may also be other artists, architects, etc., who worked on projects within the designed landscape that warrant their own evaluation and listing.
- The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers maintains this helpful [directory](#) and website, which provides information about Tax Credits (for buildings only), Historic Preservation Laws and Shared Heritage Travel Itineraries, several of which include Olmsted landscapes. See, for example, [Ashland Park Historic District](#), Lexington, KY, and [Asheville, NC](#).