



World Landscape Architecture (WLA) defines the practice of landscape architecture as "the study and practice of designing environments (outdoors & indoors) of varying scale that encompasses elements of art, environment, architecture, engineering, and sociology." Dubbed the "Father of Landscape Architecture", Frederick Law Olmsted's innovative work created the philosophical and aesthetic foundation for American landscape design. With his renowned work on Central Park and throughout the rest of his robust career, he elevated the profession of landscape architecture as an art practice, and not simply a trade. Although each site was unique to its context, all Olmsted parks were shaped by the same set of key principles that still serve as a blueprint for the design of today's parks and open spaces. In 1986, Dr. Charles Beveridge, editor of the "The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted," developed the Seven S's of Olmsted's Design: Scenery, Suitability, Style, Subordination, Separation, Sanitation, and Service. Here's a closer look at how the Seven S's are prevalent right here in Passaic County in our own everyday spaces.

The Seven S's of Olmsted Design

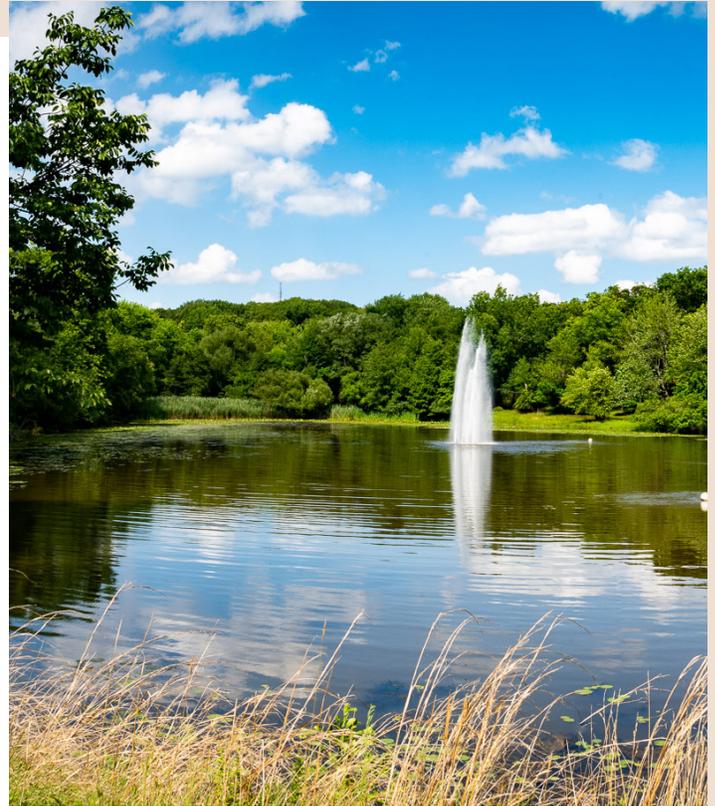
Scenery *Suitability* *Style* *Subordination*
Separation *Sanitation* *Service*

Want to learn more about landscape architecture?
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Scenery

As America was rapidly urbanizing in the mid-19th century, Olmsted was astutely aware of the need to preserve green, open spaces where people could relax and connect with nature. One of his greatest legacies to planning, urban design, and landscape architecture was in the conservation and enhancement of natural scenery in the parks and cities in which he worked. His vision was to create an enhanced sense of space, indefinite boundaries, and constant opening up of new views and where possible, he connected these open spaces to one another to maximize their impact.

In coordination with the Passaic County Parks Commission, the Olmsted Brothers Firm identified and created the first County Park at Garret Mountain Reservation. The development of the 310-acre park preserved a pristine tract of forest within a rapidly industrializing urban area. The park design takes users through a variety of scenic experiences from mountainous trails to a tranquil lake, and in one of the most notable features, the Auto Overlook, to the top of the mountain for sweeping views of Paterson and the New York City skyline. Even in the most manicured areas of the park, spaces flow into one another with no harsh boundaries so that park goers are immersed in the nature of the park while subconsciously guiding them through different experiences.

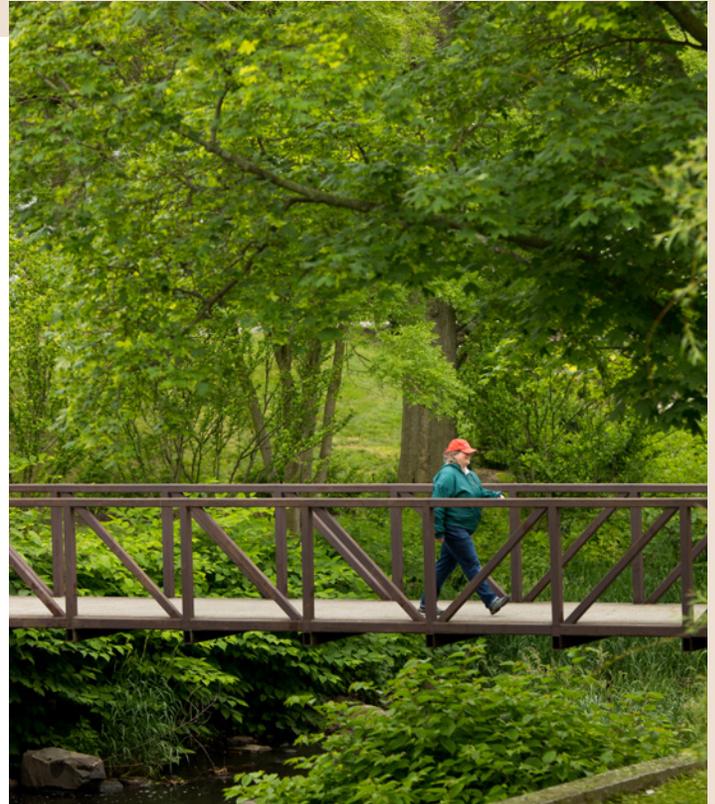


Suitability

A key hallmark of Olmstedian design is respect for what he commonly referred to as “the genius of the place”—the belief that every individual site has unique characteristics that should inform all design decisions and be integrated into the landscape. Natural scenery and topography are protected to the greatest extent possible, and newer plantings must be native to the site to allow for sustainable maintenance. Located on the eastern slope of the First Watchung Mountain, Garret Mountain Reservation is a perfect Passaic County Parks example of Suitability as the park takes advantage of utilizes the existing topography, rock outcrops, and forested areas to create sweeping views at the Auto Overlook, a wide array of trails, a circular walking loop along Park Road that varies in elevation, and many more amenities.

Style

Olmsted visited Europe and toured many world famous gardens early on in his career; he was particularly influenced by the walking tours he took in England and took these precedents back to his work at home. He would design in specific styles for a specific effect ,most often combining the picturesque and the pastoral styles of landscape design. The picturesque style embodies the richness of nature with rugged, rocky terrain, wild ground covers, and dense naturalistic plantings, while the pastoral style was characterized by open green swaths, small bodies of water, and trees scattered throughout. The combination of these styles is evident in Goffle Brook Park where rolling, green open space and manicured meadows merge with lush riparian brook edges and shady respites under mature tree canopies.



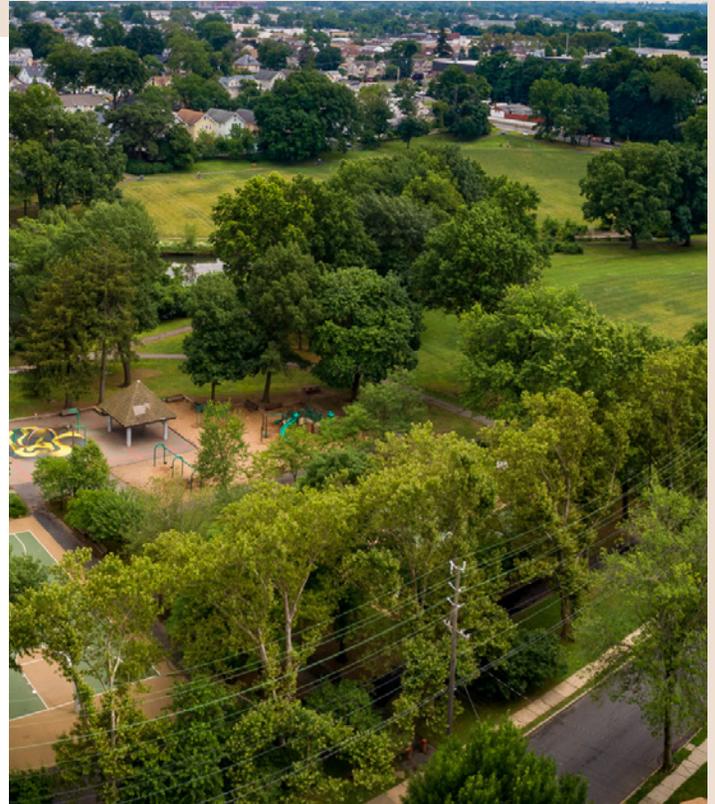
Subordination

Olmsted strongly believed that the elegance of his designs was a result of subordinate details. In the context of art, subordination is a technique that tones down elements and creates an equal level of interest between all features and objects. In a similar painterly fashion, Olmsted thought of his landscapes as unified compositions and avoided overly decorative plantings and structures that distracted from the overall park design. He often said that “the art is to conceal art”; if done successfully, the designed landscape feels so natural that park goers would not know it was constructed. As exemplified in Weasel Brook Park, trees, lawn, water, paths, and benches are like mosaic pieces that blend seamlessly to create a bigger picture.



Separation

Olmsted sought to subtly guide circulation and uses so that park goes interacted with the landscape, and with one another, in the way he intended. A key technique was to separate spaces for different purposes so that competition and distraction between different uses was reduced as much as possible. Areas of active recreation (fields, courts, playgrounds) are separated from passive recreation (gardens, seating, picnic areas, walkways) which can be analyzed in this bird's eye view of Weasel Brook Park.



Sanitation

Olmsted understood the important role that the landscape could play in addressing public health. In addition to the restorative benefits of open space on physical and mental health, he also focused on integrating landscape architecture and engineering to solve complex issues. In Boston, he is credited with creating the first constructed wetlands known as the Back Bay Fens to mitigate sewage contamination and flooding. The current flooding challenges in Passaic County are not unfamiliar to those that Olmsted was attempting to alleviate in much of his previous work. At Dundee Island Park, the newest addition to the Passaic County Parks system, rain gardens are interwoven throughout the park at strategic locations to maximize floodplain storage and increase water quality through the use of native plantings, storm water systems, and other sustainable design elements.

Service

One of Frederick Law Olmsted's living legacies is his that he believed in "parks for all"—that every person should have equitable access to the services and benefits that green spaces provide. He recognized the power of the parks to bring people together, and the restorative powers they had on mental and physical well-being, community interaction, and ecological health. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the critical role parks and open space play in public health. Public outdoor spaces safely brought Passaic County communities together when meeting indoors was simply not possible, and access to local recreational spaces for exercise and fresh air were among the many crucial services the Passaic County Parks system provided.



THE FUTURE OF THE OLMSTED VISION IN PASSAIC COUNTY

By understanding the enduring landscape architecture design theories behind Olmsted's work and that of his successors, we can learn how to best preserve the past while also adapting for the future. The Olmsted 200 celebration is a call to action to continue the preservation of these key features in the ever-evolving landscapes of the Passaic County Parks System. Frederick Law Olmsted constantly sought a balance between the needs of the landscape and the needs of the people. As the County prepares for an update to its Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan in 2023, the Olmsted 200 campaign places a renewed focus on that critical balance.