



# OLMSTED PARKS CONSERVANCY

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023





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To our dedicated friends and supporters,

## This past year, we worked hard.

We have worked with Louisville Parks and Recreation to install a beautiful new, fully ADA-accessible playground at Central Park; completed more miles of trail restoration in Cherokee and Iroquois Parks; broken ground for a complete park restoration of Elliott Park; and have been working at Chickasaw Park supporting the pond restoration, a new pollinator meadow and the completion of a massive new nature playground with Wilderness Louisville. We completed a restoration of Enid Yandell's Hogan Fountain at Cherokee Park and added a new nature playground in Shawnee Park.



The planning and design work for Beargrass Preserve continues to drive forward. We have worked with stakeholders and neighbors to align our vision for the site of a new building that will house our staff and archives and serve as a place to showcase the history and vibrancy of our parks and our organization. Additional site improvements will include interpretive signage, walking and biking paths, and places to escape the stress of city life and find the mental and physical refreshment that only nature can provide.

Our Team for Healthy Parks continues to focus on environmental restoration driven by data and science. The team worked with Kentucky State University on a research project at Iroquois Park using goats, testing management practices and proving environmental stewardship can be fun, too. We continue to maintain the landscape beds in our 17 Olmsted Parks, including new installations at Wayside Park, Iroquois Park, and Central Park. Our stewardship team also plants and cares for hundreds of trees each year and leads our incredible team of volunteers.

We worked closely with neighbors and community groups to improve and activate the parks. Friends of Central Park effectively lobbied Metro Government for additional funding for a new spray pad and worked with our team on new landscaping. Friends of Iroquois Park have been instrumental in getting important deferred maintenance projects moving forward.

We enlisted the help of the Kentucky School for the Blind while building our new website to ensure full accessibility, knowing that online research before a park visit is key to an enjoyable and smooth experience for visually impaired park users. The new site features improved mapping and park guides that benefit all park users.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the tornado that tore through our city and wiped out 80% of the tree canopy in Cherokee Park. This devastating event is what precipitated the founding of Olmsted Parks Conservancy. We spent years developing the 1994 Master Plan, a guiding document created after our formation to define and prioritize the restoration of our Olmsted Park system. We still use it daily.

As we recognize these significant historical milestones, we are also looking forward. We developed a new strategic plan to prioritize our resources and ensure we are meeting the needs of the community while remaining true to our mission. We can do anything, but we can't do everything. Our strategic plan and staff reorganization will allow us to drive forward with a focused clarity on our vision – to elevate all our parks to bring the restorative power of nature to all.

See you out there,

A handwritten signature of Layla George in black ink.

Layla George  
President & CEO





## Mission & Vision

Olmsted Parks Conservancy's mission is to **restore, enhance and forever protect** Louisville's Olmsted-designed parks and parkways, connecting nature and neighborhood while strengthening the community's well-being. Our vision is to elevate our parks to bring the restorative power of nature to all.



## Diversity & Inclusion

At Olmsted Parks Conservancy, we value diversity in all its forms for the same reason we value biodiversity in our parks: **it makes communities more resilient, sustainable, and vibrant.** Our parks are an intrinsic part of Louisville, and as an organization striving for inclusivity, we commit to fostering diversity and respect both in nature and neighborhoods.



# Strategic Summary

2023-2033

**Park Investments:** Fill the gap in funding to enhance and protect the parks

**Stewardship:** Work for perpetual sustainability

**Outreach and Advocacy:** Center community voices in park planning

**Community Programming:** Deepen the connection between people and parks

**Organizational Excellence:** Align with the legacy of the Olmsted Park System

### Initiatives

### Mission

Restore, enhance and forever protect Louisville's Olmsted-designed parks and parkways, connecting nature and neighborhood while strengthening the community's wellbeing.

### Vision

Elevate our parks to bring the restorative power of nature to all.



### Values

**Stewardship:** Act as trustworthy caretakers

**Community:** Bring people together on common ground

**Inclusivity:** Represent all park users

**Enduring:** Uphold Olmsted's vision for future generations



# Park Investments

Fill the Gap in Funding to Enhance and Protect Our Parks

| Project                                     | COST               | OPC CONTRIBUTION   |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| Central Park Playground & Spray Pad         | \$1,400,000        | \$400,000          |
| Gaulbert Pavilion at Big Rock, Phase 1      | \$700,000          | \$600,000          |
| Elliott Park Master Plan Implementation     | \$2,972,000        | \$722,000          |
| Natural Surface Trail Improvements          | \$355,000          | \$165,000          |
| Chickasaw Park Lodge                        | \$500,000          | \$250,000          |
| Hogan Fountain Restoration at Cherokee Park | \$235,000          | \$235,000          |
| Shawnee Park Natural Playground             | \$15,000           | \$15,000           |
| Tyler Park stage                            | \$350,000          | \$350,000          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                | <b>\$6,527,000</b> | <b>\$2,737,000</b> |

“There’s just something remarkable about a new playground that promotes accessibility for people of all bodies. The laughter from both children and adults here in Central Park has been inspiring and infectious. During the height of the pandemic this playground was off limits and it was a sad reminder walking by to see the swings tied up. The older equipment was also slowly deteriorating, and parts had even been removed as they were no longer safe and operable.

This community deserved new life and the residents and businesses of Old Louisville stepped up to see this happen. Just like a brand new baby, this new play area brings about joy, hope, and new life. The outdoors is open and welcoming for all. Having an ADA-compliant playground and splash pad shows that all humanity is recognized and celebrated. Please y’all, you deserve a treat; come check out the new area and say hi. An investment in parks is an investment in ourselves.”

— Amanda Pendley  
Central Park Donor





# Park Investments

## Beargrass Preserve Update



Thanks to a generous \$8 million gift from Norman and Belita Noltemeyer, Olmsted Parks Conservancy was able to purchase approximately 25 acres of land from the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in December 2021. The property acquisition represents the first major expansion of Louisville's Cherokee Park.

Known as **Beargrass Preserve**, the land is currently the subject of a master planning process led by Taylor Siefker Williams Design Group. In 2023, we held two public meetings and three task force meetings to gather input for the master plan. Stakeholder meetings continue with Beargrass Preserve neighbors as we refine the vision together.







## In Loving Tribute...

During the 2020 COVID lockdown, Ethan Peng discovered he had lost his beloved friend, Andy Wiseman. Louisville was the first U.S. city Ethan had visited and Andy took him to see all the best spots—the steamboat, the walking bridge, the giant baseball bat.

Ethan decided to honor his friend and their shared memories with a bench near Dog Hill in Cherokee Park. Only one problem: Ethan lived in China and was restricted from travel.

Fast forward to 2023. Ethan was finally able to make the trip to Kentucky and tour Cherokee Park with us, looking for the perfect bench site. You will find “Andy’s Bench” on Baringer Hill path. Come sit and sow a spring breeze.

IN EVERY HEART, THERE'S AN ACRE OF LAND. WHAT SHOULD YOU SOW? PEACHES, PLUMS, AND SPRING BREEZES. ONCE THE FLOWERS BLOSSOM, SPRING WILL COME AGAIN. IN MEMORY OF JAMES ANDREW "ANDY" WISEMAN (1979-2020)

## Norman Noltemeyer

### 2023 Frederick Law Olmsted Award Winner

At Frederick Law Olmsted's 2023 birthday celebration, we honored Norman Noltemeyer with the annual Frederick Law Olmsted award. A Hop Hornbeam tree was planted in his name in Cherokee Park, and he received a reproduction of the dog head sculptures on Hogan Fountain.





# Stewardship

## Working for Perpetual Sustainability

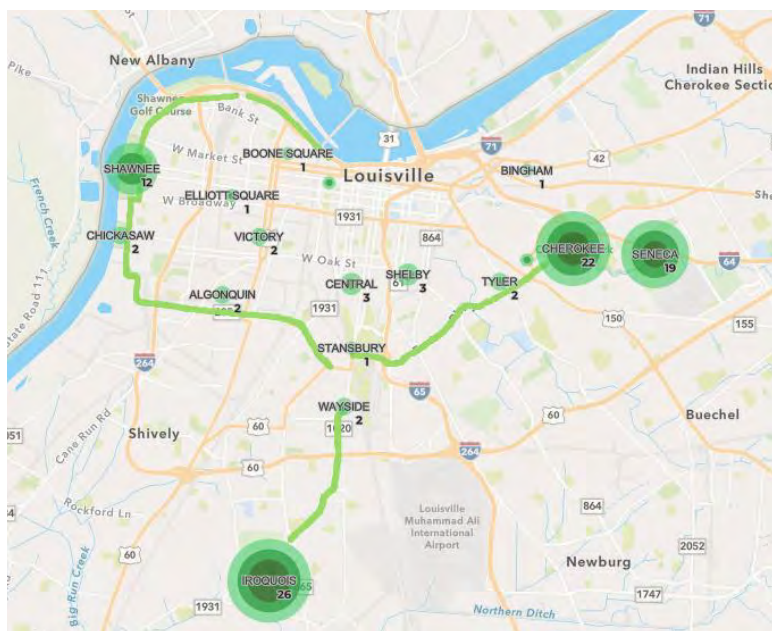
**Jen DeLeeuw** was honored as the 2023 Volunteer of the Year at our volunteer appreciation party. Jen is a trained Park Steward who volunteers regularly in Cherokee Park and has also supported Olmsted Parks Conservancy on grant applications and proposal work.

Our Park Stewards complete training to support the work of our Team for Healthy Parks. They will “adopt” an area and work independently and collaboratively to remove invasive plants, install native plants, pick up trash, and accomplish so much more in the parks than we could with our small staff.



“I’ve gained so much through the Park Steward program. That word – steward – is exactly the relationship I want to have with our parks. Many people have special relationships with their favorite parks, but they might not know how much work goes into making those spaces vibrant and healthy. Serving as a Park Steward keeps my mind and body active and deepens my connection to the places that are important to me. It’s also great to connect, learn, and work with other folks who care about our parks as much as I do. I encourage anyone who is curious to get involved!”

— Jen DeLeeuw  
Park Steward



*Green areas indicate the amount of time spent in each park.*

## 2023 Volunteers



**6,506**

Volunteer  
hours



**3,701**

Trees & shrubs  
planted



**551**

Volunteers



**73**

Trained  
park stewards





## Stewardship

### Working for Perpetual Sustainability

Our **Team for Healthy Parks** is a dedicated group that monitors and enhances park environments with the support of Park Stewards and volunteers. They restore, enhance and protect natural areas in the Olmsted Park System through ecological restoration, woodlands management, and horticulture.

#### 2023 Team for Healthy Parks



**1,261**

acres of invasive  
plant management



**23**

different invasive  
species treated



**9,500**

sq. mi. of woods surveyed  
to understand forest health



**53,736**

sq. ft. of landscape beds  
(~1.2 acres)

Iroquois Park's Summit Field was the site of some of the biggest news in stewardship for 2023. Summit Field has a unique prairie ecosystem, but it is under threat from invasive plants. Working with Kentucky State University, Olmsted Parks Conservancy is assessing three options for managing the area: large machinery like forestry mulchers, working with hand tools, and goat grazing. To evaluate these methods, researchers collected baseline data via drone flyover. Each of the three methods were completed in a one acre section of the treatment area, and a second drone flyover assessed the results. The study will be repeated in 2024 for additional data collection.

In December, it felt like an early holiday gift to get the right combination of conditions to conduct a prescribed burn at the prairie! Historically, the Summit Field area of Iroquois was known as Burnt Knob and had been maintained by fire. Due to the urban surroundings, any prescribed burn must be cleared with Louisville Parks and Recreation, Air Pollution Control District, Soil and Water Conservation, the Kentucky Division of Forestry, and Fairdale Fire. We worked the entities listed above plus Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest and Jefferson Memorial Forest Natural Areas to conduct the burn with great success.





## Outreach & Advocacy

### Centering Community Voices in Park Planning

Community engagement is the first step to identifying opportunities for a better park user experience. Neighborhood meetings, surveys and Olmsted Parks Conservancy's own Friends of Olmsted Parks groups are valuable tools that make park projects community-led endeavors.

In 2023, we worked with park users to set the following projects in motion:

- Chickasaw Park Improvements: Meadow installation and improvements to lodge, tennis courts, lighting, and walkways
- Central Park spray pad and landscape improvements; installation of Nature Play Area
- Cherokee & Seneca Trail improvements
- Road safety improvements in Cherokee and Iroquois Parks
- Iroquois Amphitheater improvements

"Shelby Park is very accessible, with flat walking paths in a large green oasis in the middle of the city. We want more people to benefit from all that the park has to offer, so we work to activate the park and establish annual traditions for the benefit of everyone in the neighborhood. Our Friends of Shelby Park group connects us to city government and resources with Olmsted Parks Conservancy as a liaison. **This connection helps us accomplish so much more than we ever thought possible.**"

— Katie Vollmer  
Friends of Shelby Park





# Outreach & Advocacy

## Centering Community Voices in Park Planning

In addition to raising funds from donors like you, Olmsted Parks Conservancy also advocates for city funding for our parks.

In 2023, Olmsted Parks received **\$1,200,000** in the Metro budget allocation, the highest investment to date! It is clear that the city of Louisville has heard your requests for park improvements and is taking steps to preserve and elevate the Olmsted Park System.

Additionally, Inflation Reduction Act Funding includes **\$1,100,000** for Elliott Park that will support the field house restoration, spray pad, accessible bathrooms, and improved walking loop.

Metro Council also approved the Mayor's reallocation of **almost \$10 million** for deferred maintenance and equipment. The Shelby Park tennis courts and the Seneca Park playground are projects that will benefit from this funding.

The city is also investing **\$11.5 million** in the Baxter Square Community Center, Chickasaw Park pond, Algonquin Park pool, and Iroquois Park tennis courts.







## Planting Seeds of the Future

### 1891 and Oak Leaf Societies

Many of those who are passionate about parks choose to include Olmsted Parks Conservancy in their estate plans. This is an impactful way to ensure that the Olmsted parks continue to receive investment for future generations.

The annual 1891 Society Dinner is our way of celebrating those with planned gifts. We create an exclusive park experience that includes a catered dinner and tour. In 2023 we brought the dinner to Beargrass Preserve, making those in the 1891 Society the first to enjoy a special event at our newest park property.

We held the first ever event at Beargrass Preserve with the 1891 Society Dinner. These supporters have chosen to leave a legacy of support for Louisville's Olmsted Park System by including the Conservancy in their estate plans.

We also hosted an enchanting evening under the leaves and stars for our Oak Leaf Society. This special group of donors have made significant investments in Beargrass Preserve.



# Community Programming

## Deepening the Connection Between People and Parks

Community events create synergy between nature and neighborhood:

- Ballet Bound Workshop auditions in Algonquin, Boone Square, Central, Chickasaw, Seneca, and Shelby Parks
- Pet vaccination clinics in Iroquois and Chickasaw Parks
- Movie nights in Central Park
- Spring Festival in Shelby Park
- Tennis clinics in Central and Shelby Parks
- Beer Gardens in Bingham, Cherokee, Seneca, Shelby, and Tyler Parks
- Hayrides in Shawnee and Iroquois Parks



**6,925**

event attendees



**45**

events



**282**

community meetings



**1,784**

Olmsted Park Conservancy members



**71**

community organization collaborations



**7**

Friends of Olmsted Park groups



“Mother nature was on our side for Iroquois Park's first Hayride on the Hill! The radiant sunshine set the scene for a fun-filled afternoon of hayrides, face paintings, games, great food, and even greater company.

Hayriders young and old swapped stories about their favorite memories of Iroquois Park as the wagon passed over park landmarks, including Jacob's Lodge, Summit Field, and Panther Point. The gold and deep red hues of leaves on the trees created the perfect atmosphere for connections to bloom.

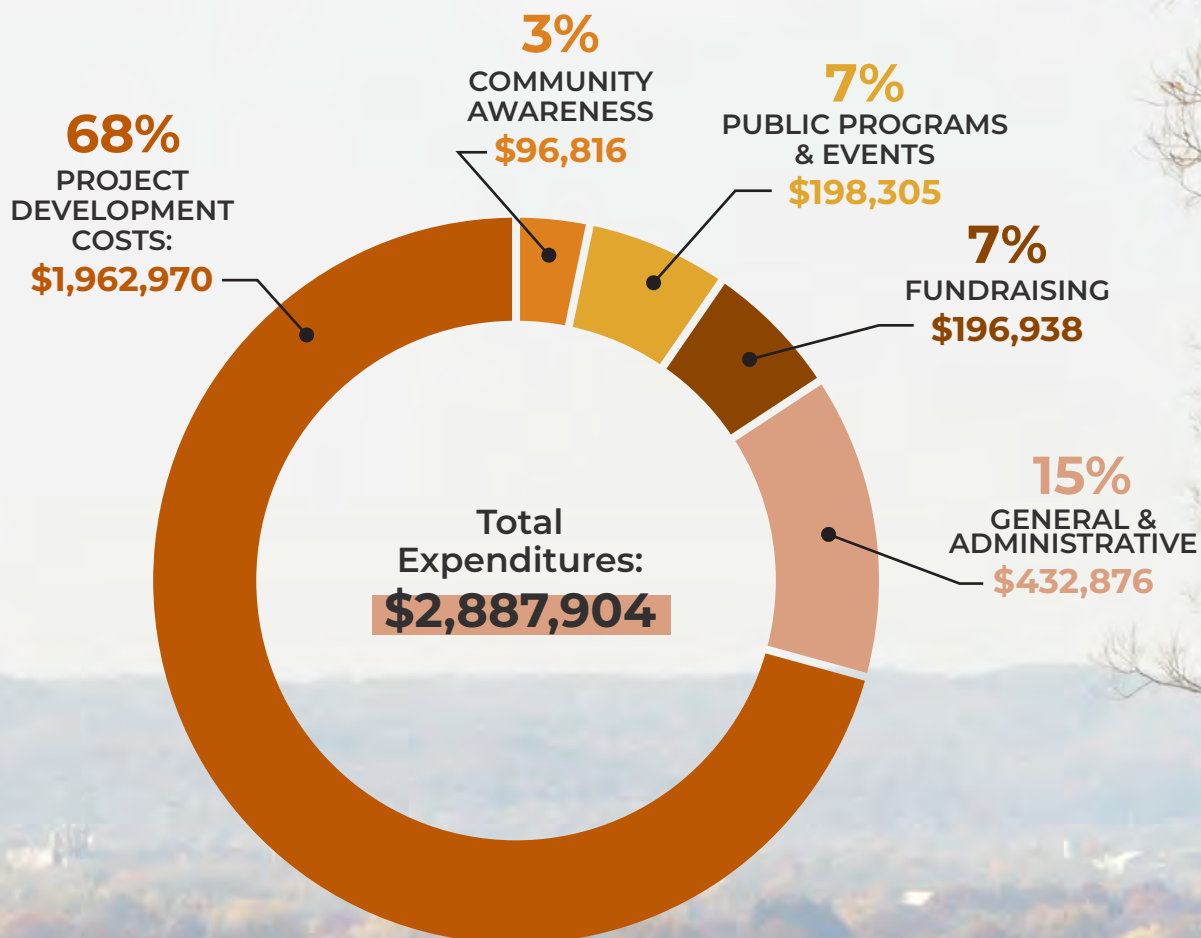
It was an honor to witness how this hayride demonstrated the unifying power of the outdoors by connecting generations of Louisvillians to appreciate our beloved Iroquois Park.”

—Jelisa Chatman  
Olmsted Parks Conservancy Volunteer



# Financials

## Distribution of Funds



## Sources of Support

|                                 |           |   |             |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---|-------------|
| Corporate Sponsorship.....      | \$143,446 | Investment Income.....  | \$123,146   |
| Major Donors.....               | \$842,120 | Other (Sales, Other Income,<br>Endowment Transfer,<br>In-Kind)..... | \$108,440   |
| Members.....                    | \$206,891 | Funds Restricted for Projects.....                                  | \$1,171,556 |
| Memorials and Celebrations..... | \$84,385  |   |             |

Total income = **\$2,679,984**

Total ending net assets = **\$6,787,670**



## Staff

**Danielle Archer**  
SR. DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT  
& MARKETING

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