

# THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE OLMSTED PARKS

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PREPARED FOR  
OLMSTED PARKS CONSERVANCY  
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY  
2018

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Louisville has the distinction of being one of four cities in the world with a completed system of parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted was a champion of urban beauty. He believed nature should be integrated harmoniously into urban landscapes for the benefit of everyone. He saw parks as essential to creating a sense of community and improving the quality of life for all residents. Olmsted's concept for Louisville created three major parks – Shawnee, Iroquois and Cherokee – each anchoring a region of the city, with smaller neighborhood parks spread between them. Parkway were designed to connect the big parks, and were considered linear parks themselves. Today, Louisville has 18 Olmsted Parks and 6 Parkway, owned by Louisville Metro Government and managed by Louisville Parks and Recreation.

Parks are important civic investments. Increasingly, people understand and appreciate the many environmental, economic, and social values and benefits that parks bring to our lives. Environmentally, parks can help filter air pollutants, capture stormwater and reduce its downstream impact, host wildlife, and add other ecosystem benefits. Economically, parks can attract residents, tourists and businesses. Often proximity to parks raises property values, thus building a community's tax base. Socially, parks are important to mental and physical health, and they encourage community engagement.

With the 30th anniversary of Olmsted Parks Conservancy approaching, this is the time to reiterate the value of the Olmsted Parks System and the importance of the work Olmsted Parks Conservancy has undertaken.

## BACKGROUND

Since 1989, Olmsted Parks Conservancy has raised funds to restore, enhance and forever protect Louisville's Olmsted Parks and Parkway. As a non-profit partner with Louisville Parks and Recreation, the Conservancy extends the investments made in parks and parkways. Their efforts have made a difference. This report was commissioned to demonstrate the economic, social, and environmental contributions the Olmsted Parks make to the city of Louisville.

## THE APPROACH

To understand the impacts of the Olmsted Parks and Olmsted Park Conservancy it was necessary to gather quantitative data supplemented with qualitative information. Over the last six months data was gathered from the US Census, the Jefferson County Property Valuation Administration, Boxwood Means, The Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), and other sources. On the qualitative side, the team visited all 18 Olmsted Parks and interviewed dozens of stakeholders, public officials, residents, and other community members. This study excludes Waterfront Park and the Parklands of Floyds Fork.

# THE BIG NEWS

## Olmsted Parks are for everyone

The neighborhoods surrounding Olmsted Parks are the most diverse in the city.

## Olmsted Parks add value

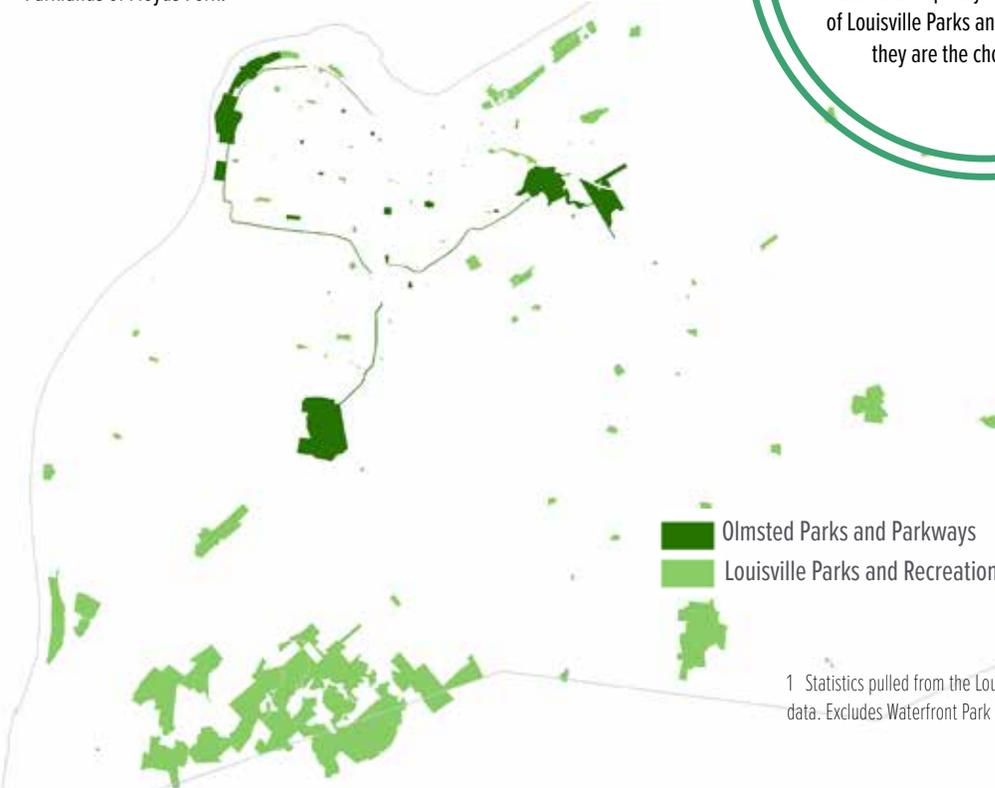
Houses fronting Olmsted Parks are collectively worth **\$94,721,000 MORE** because of that location, resulting in **\$891,000 MORE** in property taxes each year to local governments.

## Olmsted Parks keep Louisville cool

Olmsted Parks have a diverse tree canopy composition and 1.5x more trees per acre than the rest of the city.

**Olmsted Parks are sites of social cohesion.** They are overwhelmingly the chosen location for community and family gatherings, school field trips, and recreational activities. While Olmsted Parks make up only 19% of the land area of Louisville Parks and Recreation parks, they are the chosen site for:<sup>1</sup>

- 99% of Outdoor Concerts
- 99% of Outdoor Theater
- 93% of Walks/Runs
- 61% of Church Meetings
- 41% of School Field Days
- 40% of Picnics
- 38% of Festivals
- 31% of Family Gatherings



<sup>1</sup> Statistics pulled from the Louisville Parks and Recreation reservation data. Excludes Waterfront Park and Parklands of Floyds Fork.



## Environmental Contributions of Olmsted Parks

Olmsted Parks have a direct impact on environmental savings.

The 2,315 acres of Olmsted Parks land equate to:



**21,020,638 pounds**

of Carbon Emissions Reduced

This equals the energy use of 1,030 homes for one year or 319,103 incandescent lamps switched to LEDs.



**93,483,740 gallons**

of Storm Water Runoff Mitigated

This equals 3,116,125 loads of laundry, 13,354,820 toilet flushes, or 5,425,101 showers.

The dense tree canopy in the Olmsted Parks helps keep Louisville cool.

A 2014 report, *Summer in the City: Hot and Getting Hotter*, identified Louisville as 5th among US Cities with the most intense summer urban heat islands. But it is the park system in general and the Olmsted Parks in particular that provide a respite from that impact.



## Property Values

Olmsted Parks add considerable value.

Properties within 1/2 mile of Olmsted Parks represent **\$7 billion** to the local tax base.

Being near an Olmsted Park provides a property value premium. In the case of the larger parks, that enhanced value extends **at least 1/2 mile beyond the park boundaries.**



While parks in general have a positive impact on property values, Olmsted Park-fronting houses have **a per square foot value of 5.5% more** than properties fronting on non-Olmsted Parks.

## Neighborhood Diversity and Stability

Olmsted Parks connect nature and neighborhood in low-income communities.

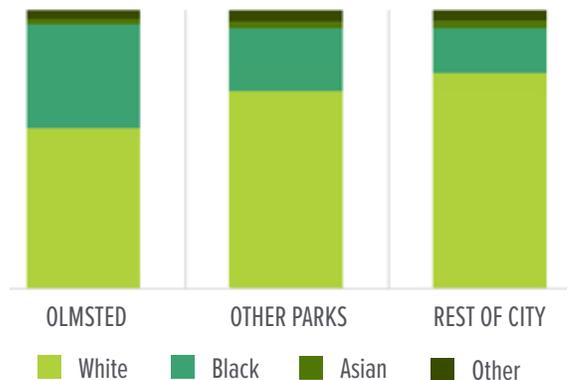
HOUSEHOLD INCOME (\$000)



Everyone deserves a park within a 10 minute walk from home. In Louisville, Olmsted Parks are super-serving lower income families. They provide public green space for outdoor recreation and community gatherings, contributing to overall community health, wellness, and social capital.

Olmsted Parks are for everyone.

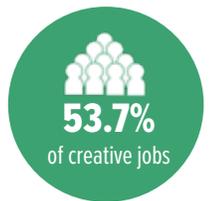
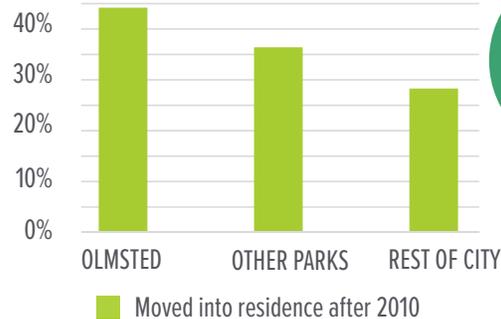
RACIAL DIVERSITY



Louisville is a diverse city, and the neighborhoods surrounding Olmsted Parks are the most diverse. Iroquois Park, Louisville's largest Olmsted Park, serves the most diverse neighborhood in our community, Southside.

Olmsted Parks attract new residents and creative jobs.

HOUSEHOLD TENURE



Olmsted Parks are a magnet for both residents and jobs. 44.2% of residents near the Olmsted Parks have moved there since 2010. That compares with only 28.3% of relatively recent move-ins in the rest of the city. Additionally, while 28.4% of all jobs are located within 1/2 mile of Olmsted Parks, 53.7% of all "creative class" jobs are within that distance.



“The parks are the biggest asset to these communities. Here, everyone has access to a park. It creates some equity to have those assets in all of the neighborhoods.”

- Jeana Dunlap

Director, of Redevelopment Strategies  
Develop Louisville



“You can’t do anything with large scale parks without looking back at Olmsted...I also think that this spirit of (Olmsted) parks is not just about recreation that takes place in boundaries, they’re more significant because of what they do for the communities around them.”

- Dan Jones

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
21st Century Parks



“These parks get me out of bed in the morning and keep me up late at night. Every urban kid deserves to have their life affected as mine was by our parks system. It’s an amazingly special opportunity and Louisville is so fortunate to have the Olmsted Parks system in place.”

-Chris Chandler

Director of Urban Conservation  
The Nature Conservancy



**Olmsted Parks Conservancy, formed in 1989, works closely with the city and citizens of Louisville to raise the necessary funds and guide the revitalization of 18 Olmsted-designed parks and 6 parkways. Since their formation, their efforts have invested more than \$35 million in Louisville, Kentucky.**



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