



October 28, 2018

City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission  
Zeidler Municipal Building  
841 N. Broadway, Room B-1  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Commission:

I am writing from The Cultural Landscape Foundation in Washington, D.C., to support the nomination of Washington Park as a local historic district within Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When I was invited in 2005 by the Boerner Botanical Garden to present a lecture about cultural landscapes in the Milwaukee region, I toured and photographed several historic designed landscapes there. I was especially impressed with Washington Park and Lake Park; both were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and both clearly display his enduring design principles. Moreover, both parks possess a high degree of design integrity. Notably, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, which I founded twenty years ago, includes both parks in its illustrated, searchable database, *What's Out There*, which today features more than 2,000 nationally significant landscapes.

Several of Olmsted, Sr.'s, design principles are evident in Washington Park, including its rolling topography with meandering pathways, deciduous canopy trees planted in naturalistic patterns, an expansive Picturesque lagoon (the park's centerpiece), and carefully orchestrated views and vistas, which guide park users through an unfolding scenographic experience. Having visited and written about countless Olmsted-designed landscapes as a former chairman of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, and as the coordinator of the National Park Service's Historic Landscape Initiative (the latter for fifteen years), I can unequivocally state that Washington Park is worthy of historic designation, protection, and wise stewardship.

Historic designation has played a key role in preserving and renewing many Olmsted-designed public parks, park systems, and other landscapes throughout the country. Invariably, such recognition bolsters efforts to retain the landscapes' design integrity, even as they are updated to serve emerging needs and meet contemporary ecological standards. Well-preserved Olmsted-designed landscapes enrich communities by increasing visitor use and enjoyment, stimulating economic development near them, and promoting civic pride and an understanding of American history.

Indeed, more than 200 Olmsted-designed landscapes throughout the United States have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places, affirming both their historical significance and value as civic assets. As you know, Milwaukee's Lake Park is already included within a local historic district. By granting Washington Park the same status, you will begin to provide a framework for preserving and enhancing the local value of a nationally significant park. Conversely, denying this nomination would leave Washington Park vulnerable to future alterations without appropriate scrutiny or review. Finally, as nationwide celebrations are now being planned for 2022 to honor the 200th anniversary of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.'s, birth, your decision to grant Washington Park the historical designation it deserves would prove most prescient, as new and increasing attention will no doubt be paid to maintaining and interpreting Olmsted's legacy across the country. I therefore strongly urge you to look favorably on this proposal to designate the park individually, thus recognizing the significant cultural asset that it is.

Sincerely,

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR  
President + CEO  
The Cultural Landscape Foundation