


# Baltimore's Olmsted Parkway Connecting Communities with Green Corridors

  
Friends of Maryland's Olmsted  
Parks & Landscapes, Inc.

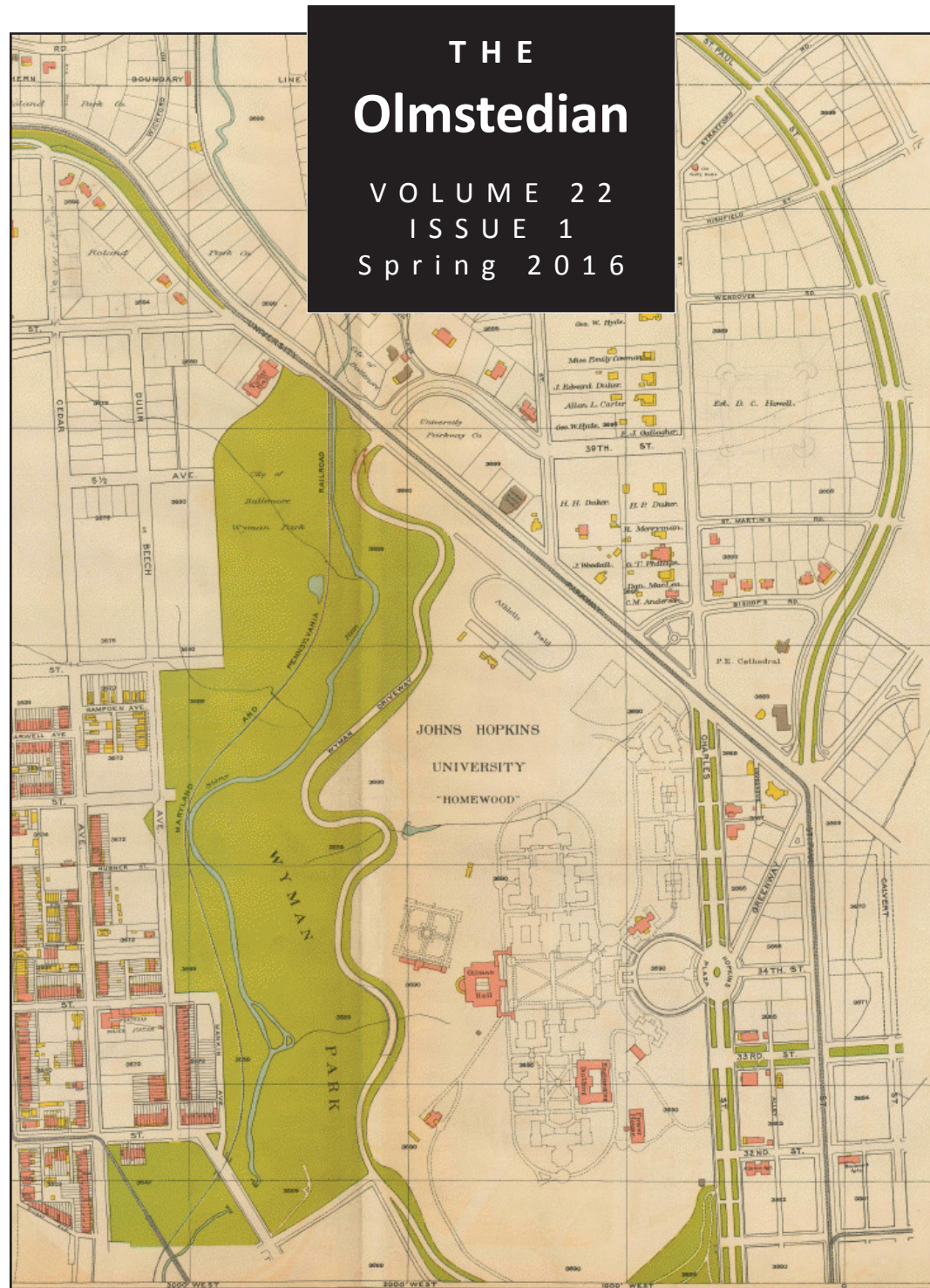
FMOPL Digest  
[olmstedmaryland.org](http://olmstedmaryland.org)

*How fortunate for Baltimore to have the benefit of early comprehensive planning by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., for a regional system of parks and parkways. . . This leafy corridor across the urban grid, linking diverse green nodes, was designed to make the quality of life in the city more habitable and civilized.*

—Arleyn A. Levee, Landscape Historian, American Association of Landscape Architects (ASLA), Community Assistance Team, Revitalization Plan for the Wyman Park Drive, 33rd Street Corridor, poster for ASLA National Conference, Baltimore, October 1987

Baltimore's principal east-west parkways—The Alameda, 33rd Street and Gwynns Falls Parkway—represent a 100-year-old heritage, fulfilling the vision of the Olmsteds and the city's planners and civic leaders to provide a green corridor connecting parks, afford green spaces for neighborhoods along the route, and contribute immeasurably to the quality of life for Baltimore's citizens.

The parkways were a key component of the vision of an integrated, comprehensive park system for Baltimore advanced in 1904 by the noted Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects firm, under the direction of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and John Olmsted, son and step-son of landscape architecture pioneer Frederick Law Olmsted. Recognizing historic Druid Hill Park as the



The 1914 Topographical Survey Map shows the vision of Olmsted parkways and boulevards connecting north central Baltimore communities, institutions and parks. Map from Maryland State Archives.



The 1914 Topographical Survey map (east at top) showed that the green median already had been completed along 33rd Street by that year. The Park Board bore the cost of parking the route with grass medians and street trees, while the Commission for Street Openings paid for the cost of the paving portion. Map from the Maryland State Archives.

metropolitan centerpiece of Baltimore’s parks, their report called for parkways or connecting boulevards to link Druid Hill to newer parks in the city’s outer ring—Gwynns Falls to the west, Wyman Park to the immediate east, and Clifton and Herring Run Parks and Lake Montebello farther to the east.

The 1904 Report argued that parkways “should be treated as far as possible like extensions of the parks to bring them to the people and place them in touch with each other.” Over the next decade the Olmsted Brothers worked directly with the Park Commission and city government on the plans for these parkway corridors. While the Olmsteds conducted park and landscape plans for many cities, their impact upon the landscape of Baltimore is among the most significant in scope and implementation.

Equally important as the Olmsted vision was the commitment of Baltimore civic leaders to the development of the parkways. With the support of the Park Commission, City Council, and Mayor, over the following two decades plans for this set of parkways were developed and implemented. Baltimore Sun articles from

the period particularly credit the leadership of Richard M. Venable, president of the park board, who championed the idea of a “chain of modern parkways,” based upon the plan prepared by the Olmsted Brothers. Urging voter approval of a one million dollar loan in 1906, Venable told the *Sun* that the expenditure would enable the “great extension of parks, connected by handsome boulevards.”

At the time of the 1904 Olmsted report this east-west corridor represented the northern edge of the built-up city, and the Olmsteds had recommended a curving route and wide clearances to provide a park-like experience.

By the time plans were underway, city officials recognized that the pace of development and the cost of land acquisition would mean that the corridor would have to be straighter and less wide than the Olmsteds envisioned. The Olmsted report of 1926 acknowledged this change, terming transportation corridors like these as *boulevards*, which “should be treated with ample planting strips and trees so that they are attractive and passage over them pleasant.”

As the parkways were planned and developed, Baltimore's press and public understood the logic of this set of east-west parkway connectors as distinctive in plans for the city's landscape. A 1909 *Baltimore Sun* article announced the "Design for New Parkway to Connect Druid Hill and Gwynns Falls Park," noting that ordinances already had been passed for a comparable boulevard along 33rd Street and The Alameda.

A 1914 *Sun* article noted that Baltimore for generations had been "famous for its parks, squares, and monuments . . . but it was not until Frederick Law Olmsted [Jr.] presented his comprehensive plan that the work of linking them into one vast system was begun." The article celebrated the work underway—concluding, "It is reasonable to suppose that another decade will not pass without seeing the chain com-

plete and all the parks linked together by one continuous boulevard."

Over succeeding decades, the parkway corridor became a front yard for fine row house development and some of the city's most vital neighborhoods. Open spaces along the east-west span afforded sites for important cultural and educational institutions, past and present—on the east, Baltimore City College, Eastern High School (now JHU Eastern), Memorial Stadium (now senior housing and The Y of Central Maryland), Union Memorial Hospital and the JHU Homewood Campus (also designed by the Olmsted Brothers). On the west, along Gwynns Falls Parkway, are the sites for Frederick Douglass High School (originally Western High School), Coppin State University and the Mondawmin Shopping Center.

Never fully implemented plans, as well as subsequent roadway changes, altered the envisioned connectivity to the Baltimore park system's centerpiece, Druid Hill Park. The Olmsteds planned the Gwynns Falls Parkway as a direct western gateway—though its implementation was constrained by development and an awkward approach to Gwynns Falls Park via Windsor Mill Road. On the park's east side, the opportunity for Wyman Park Drive to serve as a seamless parkway approach from Wyman Park was seriously diminished by the routing of traffic along Druid Park Lake Drive and construction of the Jones Falls Expressway.

Landmark designation is imperative to assure that the Olmsted Parkways receive the recognition, protection and enhancement that they deserve. In March 2015, with the support of the Friends of

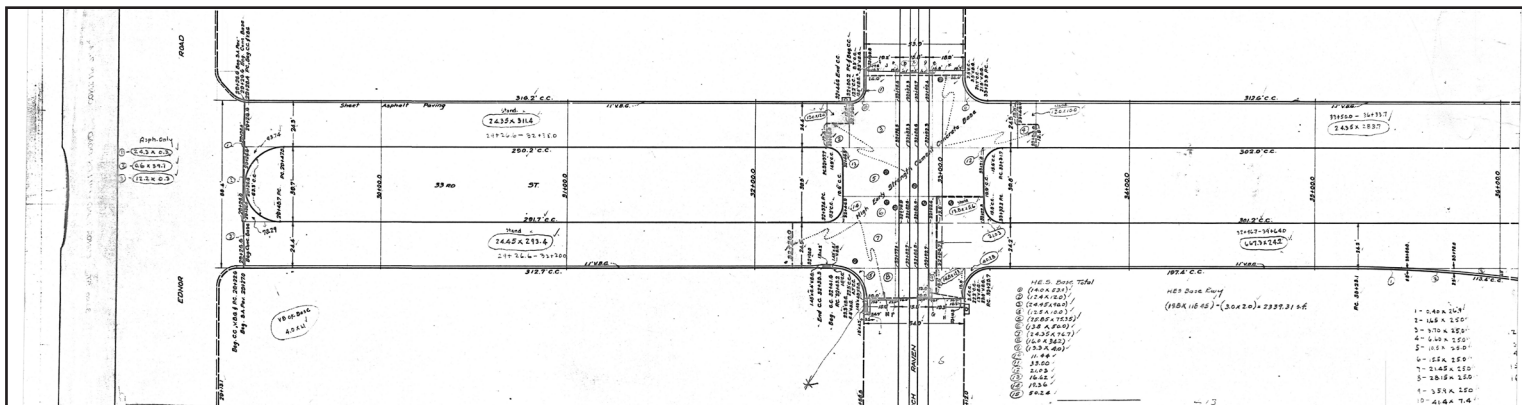
Maryland's Olmsted Parks & Landscapes and other park and community advocates, the Olmsted Parkways—Gwynns Falls Parkway, 33rd Street and The Alameda—were officially designated as Baltimore City Landmarks, the first landscapes to receive such City recognition.

Today, many Baltimoreans who live near or travel these east-west boulevards may take them for granted—not likely appreciating the green canopies of shade and the contribution to the area's quality of life, nor fully recognizing the century-long heritage represented. These are not simply tree-lined roadways, but important linkages in Baltimore's comprehensive park system.

—Ed Orser, *Urban Cultural Historian and Lauren Schiszik, Historic Preservation Planner*

## Baltimore's Olmsted Planned/ Designed Parkways and Boulevards

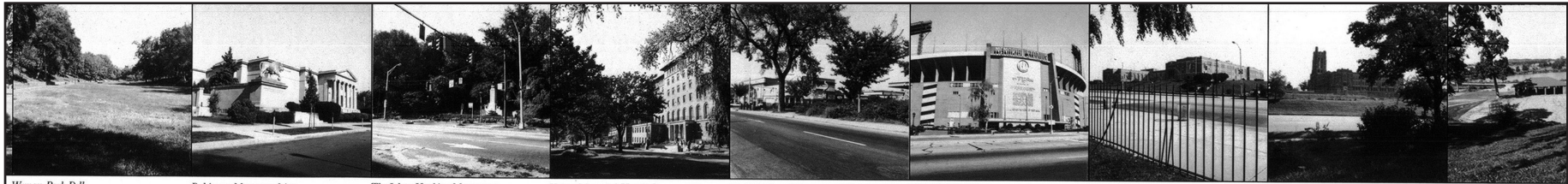
- The Alameda
- Broadway
- Charles Street Boulevard
- East 33rd Street
- Ellicott Drive
- Greenway
- Gwynns Falls Parkway
- Hilton Parkway
- Loch Raven Boulevard
- Mount Royal Avenue
- North Avenue Blvd
- Roland Avenue
- San Martin Drive
- Spring Lake Way
- University Parkway
- Wyman Park Drive



This construction drawing for the eastern section of East 33rd Street at Tivoly Avenue details the dimensions and curb lines of the boulevard intersections. Drawing from FMOPL Archives, Baltimore City Archives.

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*Photo of Gwynns Falls mill race path from Enoch Pratt Free Library, Hughes Co. Black Fund. Poster of The Revitalization Plan for Wyman Park Drive, 33rd Street Corridor, 1989, FMOPL Archives.*



Wyman Park Dell

Baltimore Museum of Art

The Johns Hopkins Monument

Union Memorial Hospital

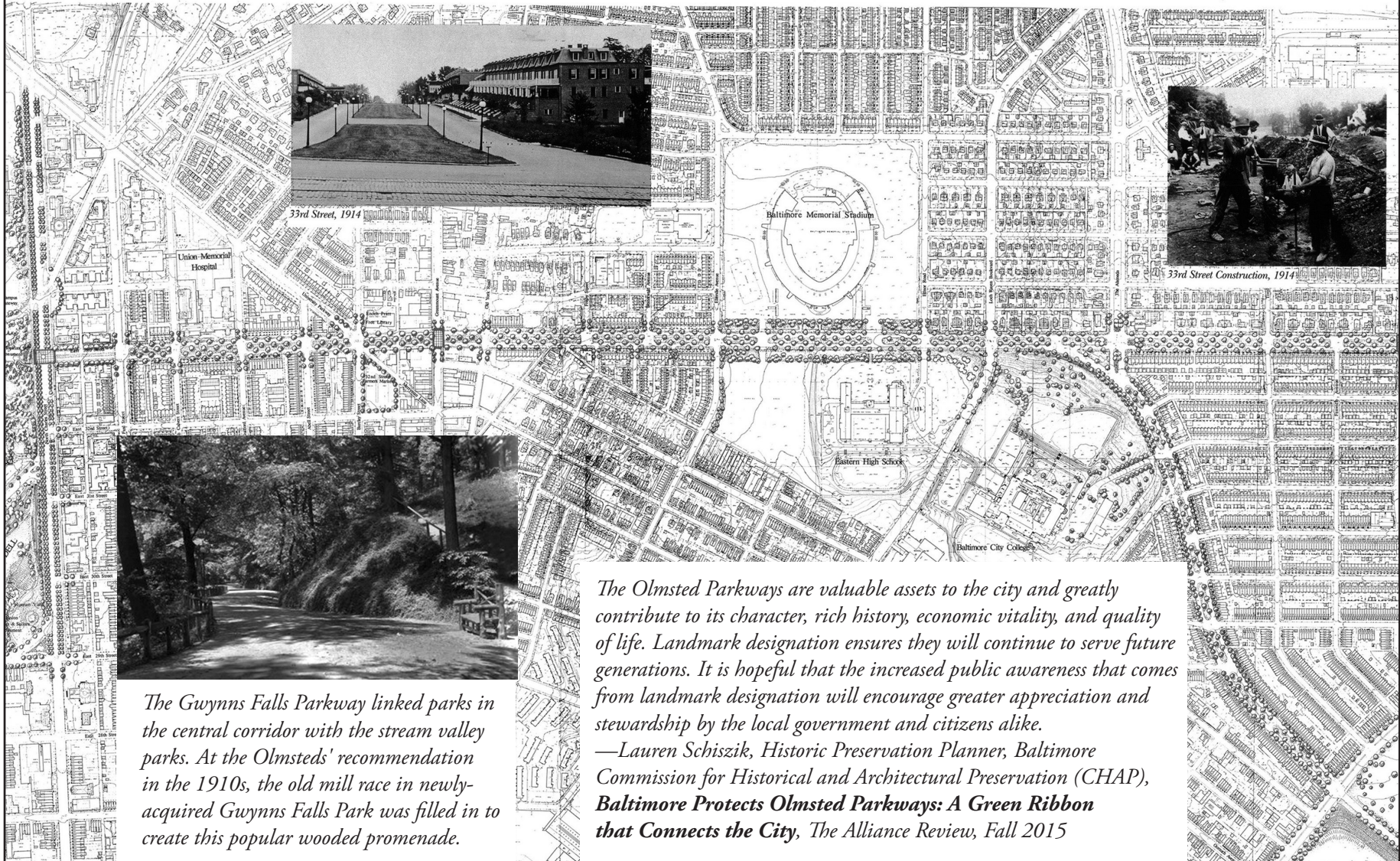
33rd Street and Greenmount Avenue

Memorial Stadium

Eastern High School

Baltimore City College

Lake Montebello



33rd Street, 1914



33rd Street Construction, 1914



*The Gwynns Falls Parkway linked parks in the central corridor with the stream valley parks. At the Olmsted's recommendation in the 1910s, the old mill race in newly-acquired Gwynns Falls Park was filled in to create this popular wooded promenade.*

*The Olmsted Parkways are valuable assets to the city and greatly contribute to its character, rich history, economic vitality, and quality of life. Landmark designation ensures they will continue to serve future generations. It is hopeful that the increased public awareness that comes from landmark designation will encourage greater appreciation and stewardship by the local government and citizens alike.*  
 —Lauren Schiszik, Historic Preservation Planner, Baltimore Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP), **Baltimore Protects Olmsted Parkways: A Green Ribbon that Connects the City**, *The Alliance Review*, Fall 2015

*For the National ASLA Conference in Baltimore in October 1989, a Community Assistance Team of over 50 volunteers created the Revitalization Plan for Wyman Park Drive, 33rd Street Corridor, a two-sided poster based on FMOPL's initial research of documents and drawings representing Baltimore's extensive Olmsted legacy.*