

**CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY – LANDSCAPES \* OLMSTED COVER SHEET**

Please submit completed form to: Architectural Survey Coordinator  
State Historic Preservation Office, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development  
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5, Hartford, CT 06103

<b>PROPERTY NAME</b> (Current/Historic) Beardsley Park and Zoo / Beardsley Park		
<b>COUNTY</b> Fairfield	<b>TOWN/CITY</b> Bridgeport	<b>VILLAGE</b>
<b>JOB NUMBER</b> <b>Primary:</b> 00691 <b>Related Job Numbers:</b> 00693, 12021		
<b>Landscape Type</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park, Parkway, Recreation Area. Scenic Reservation <input type="checkbox"/> City/Regional Plan, Improvement Project <input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision, Suburban Community <input type="checkbox"/> College/School Campus <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Residential Institution <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Public Building <input type="checkbox"/> Private Estate / Homestead <input type="checkbox"/> Cemetery / Burial Lot / Memorial / Monument <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Commercial / Industrial Building <input type="checkbox"/> Country Club / Resort, Hotel, Club <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds of Church <input type="checkbox"/> Arboretum, Garden <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibition, Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Miscellaneous		
<b>DATE OF ORIGINAL PROJECT:</b> 1880-1892 <b>SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS:</b> 1902-1904; 1908; 1913		

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**DESIGNER(S) (primary)**

- Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
- John Charles Olmsted
- Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
- Other firm member(s): Charles Eliot
- Other notes: N/A

Other Designers (prior to or following Olmsted project): Oliver and Elizabeth Bullard (father, daughter)

**Repositories consulted with source materials**

- Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Olmsted Archives (online albums)
- Library of Congress
- Olmsted Online (OlmstedOnline.org)
- National Archives and Record Administration
- Connecticut State Library
- Hartford History Center
- Other: National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Beardsley Park and Zoological Gardens (1999)

**Observations regarding features characteristic of Olmsted firm design**

Surviving features resulting from the Olmsted firms's design work (F.L. and J.C. Olmsted) include: Internal circulation systems—separate pedestrian and vehicle paths—that are curvilinear and provide a variety of visual experiences; Views and vistas of water, meadows, wooded areas; Large scenic waterbody (Bunnells Pond); Picturesque island and bridge at Bunnells Pond; Heavily planted margins in contrast to large open, grass meadows and park perimeter planting to visually buffer it from surrounding properties..

On an original 100-acre land donation from local businessman James Beardsley to the City of Bridgeport, Beardsley Park is Frederick Law Olmsted's most intact park landscape in Connecticut and reflects, despite many changes and additions, the key characteristics of an Olmsted park landscape: Scenery—both picturesque and sublime; water; tree-lined borders in contrast to large open meadows; and a separate, and gently curving system of walking and vehicular circulation systems within the park. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1999 and the Connecticut chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (CTASLA) lists it in their Olmsted Legacy Trail website ([www.olmstedlegacytrail.com](http://www.olmstedlegacytrail.com)). In addition to Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., Beardsley Park may be one of

Department of Economic and  
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the few in the nation that contributions from John Charles Olmsted, Charles Eliot, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. as well as the one of the first women who worked with the firm (but not for them) in Elizabeth Bullard of Bridgeport, the daughter of Oliver Bullard, who also worked with the firm.

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<b>I D E N T I F I C A T I O N</b>	<b>PROPERTY NAME</b> (Current/Historic) Beardsley Park and Beardsley Zoo / Beardsley Park (Job #00691)													
	<b>COUNTY</b> Fairfield	<b>TOWN/CITY</b> Bridgeport	<b>VILLAGE</b>											
	<b>STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location)</b> 1875 Noble Avenue, East Main Street													
	<b>OWNER(S)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUNICIPAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STATE <input type="checkbox"/> FEDERAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRIBAL <input type="checkbox"/> EASEMENT													
	<b>LAT/LONG COORDINATES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center Point <input type="checkbox"/> Polygon 41.21188, -73.18096													
	<b>PARCEL INFORMATION</b> <b>Acres:</b> 125 <b>PID(s):</b> 2803--09A----- <b>MBLU(s):</b>													
	<b>USE (Present)</b> City park	<b>(Historic)</b> City park												
	<b>SURVEY TYPE</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Reconnaissance-Level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intensive-Level													
	<b>D E S C R I P T I O N</b>	<b>LANDSCAPE TYPE</b> (Check all that apply) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Designed <input type="checkbox"/> Vernacular <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural/Ethnographic <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Linear <input type="checkbox"/> System/Multi-Site <input type="checkbox"/> Residential <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime <input type="checkbox"/> Green <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park- Active Recreation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park-Passive Recreation or Commemorative <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify:												
		<b>DATE OR PERIOD</b> (Include source of date) 1880; 1913 (Olmsted Research Guide Online)												
<b>DESIGNERS</b> (Entities that created, designed, constructed, or shaped the landscape) Olmsted firm, including Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects														
<b>DESIGN SCOPE</b> (For designed landscapes, explain what work was commissioned) A major park for the City of Bridgeport along Bunnell's Pond, it was originally designed as a passive, rural park, but now includes ball fields, playgrounds and a zoo (under separate management from the park)														
<b>LOCATION OF DRAWINGS/IMAGES/SOURCE MATERIAL</b> Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Library of Congress – Olmsted Associates Resources														
<b>VISUAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY</b> (Check boxes for the qualities that are key features of this landscape. If attaching descriptive narrative, consider these categories.)  <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Layout &amp; Spatial Relationships</b></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Water Features</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Circulation</b></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Drainage</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Topography</b></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Buildings/Structures/Objects</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Plantings/Vegetation</b></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Recreational Space</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Views &amp; Vistas</b></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other:</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Boundaries</b></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Design Style:</b></td> </tr> </table>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Layout &amp; Spatial Relationships</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Water Features</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Circulation</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Drainage</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Topography</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Buildings/Structures/Objects</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Plantings/Vegetation</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Recreational Space</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Views &amp; Vistas</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Boundaries</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Design Style:</b>
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<b>C O N D I T I O N</b>	<b>EXISTING CONDITION</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recognizable <input type="checkbox"/> Not Extant/Not Recognizable Changes: Improved (new) playground areas, ballfields, expanded zoo, modified vehicular/pedestrian circ.		
	<b>POTENTIAL THREATS</b> <input type="checkbox"/> None Known <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure Improvements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Onsite Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adjacent Development <input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism <input type="checkbox"/> Overuse <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deferred Maintenance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Invasive Vegetation <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental – specify: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify: _____		
<b>E N V I R O N M E N T</b>	<b>SETTING</b> (One sentence description) The park is edged by residential streets to the east and south, and highways to the west and north.		
	<b>VEGETATION</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maintained Open Land <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural Open Land <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Woodland/Forest <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wetland <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specimen Plants <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify: _____		
	<b>SLOPE</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level/Nearly Level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Moderate Slope <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steep Slope                      Elevation (ASML): 38-125'		
	<b>CONNECTICUT PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE (Eco-Region)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Northwest Highlands <input type="checkbox"/> Western Uplands <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Western Coastal Slope <input type="checkbox"/> Central Valley <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Coastal Slope <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Uplands		
	Soil Description: Varied soil types, including urban soils and Charlton-Chatfield and Udorthents, generally well-drained		
<b>H I S T O R Y</b>	<b>SUMMARY</b> (Provide a brief overview in this space. More detailed narrative can be attached.) This is an important park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., with key members of the firm, with additional work completed by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. See <i>Continuation Sheet</i>		
	<b>NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATION</b> <b>Entered by:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Recommended Eligible (Criterion <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Eligible <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evaluated Explanation: The park is individually listed. NR Listed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District-Contributing <input type="checkbox"/> District-Non-Contributing <input type="checkbox"/> Individual <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient Documentation		
<b>R E P O R T E D B Y</b>	<b>NAME</b> Lucy Lawliss	<b>ORGANIZATION</b> Red Bridge Group	<b>DATE</b> December 2021
	<b>ADDRESS</b> 2100 Green Street, San Francisco, California 94123		
	<b>PHOTOGRAPHER</b> Lucy Lawliss	<b>DATE</b> September 14, 2021	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permission to use photographs (public domain)
	<b>SURVEY METHOD</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site Visit/In-Person Walkover <input type="checkbox"/> Drive-through/Windshield <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Review Only		

**ATTACHMENTS (Include the following items in the PDF)**

- Location Map    Site Map    Photographs with captions    Historic Images (if applicable)  
 Narrative Description of Property    Historical Narrative of Property    References

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY (Visual Assessment Summary)**

**Layout & Spatial Relationships:** A long park organized around an internal road and pathway system with a mid-park crossing. Large meadows/lawns anchor either end of the park and are surrounded by evergreen and deciduous plantings, some of which are original. Bunnell's Pond—a dammed body of water along the Pequonnock River.

**Circulation:** As typical to Olmsted parks, there is a separate circulation system for vehicles and pedestrians around most of the park, although altered from the original it has much the same feel and intent. An important bridge for a park road crossing near the E. Main Street exit survives but the road is only a trace because of the zoo's development, which blocks its route through to Noble Street.

**Topography:** The park's topography is gently rolling in character with some more level areas associated with the meadows/lawns and areas developed for active recreation (ballfields and playgrounds).

**Plantings/Vegetation:** The plan was to mass evergreen and deciduous trees around the edges of the park with large meadows as contrast where there would be clusters of trees to provide dappled shade. Denser shrub and small trees screen edges with the zoo and some vegetation has been allowed to come up along the north end of Bunnell's Pond, which block views in some areas.

**Views & Vistas** Views and vistas are both internal—across meadows and along pathways as well as outside the park across Bunnell's Pond and along that waterway. Increased development along the western edge of the park has diminished that experience.

**Drainage:** Storm water is mostly handled by sheet flow across meadows toward Bunnell's Pond. Most of the park road has a rolled asphalt curb, but no large drainage structures were observed as part of an underground system, although it may exist.

**Buildings/Structures/Objects:** There are several historic buildings and structures that are covered in the National Register nomination.

**Recreational Space:** Several ballfields and playgrounds have been added to the park in response to contemporary needs, and for the most part, they are situated along the cross-park road so as not to distract from the larger meadow experience.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

In 1878, James W. Beardsley (1820-1893), a local farmer, gave approximately 100 acres of land for a park in Bridgeport. On the occasion of the 1909 dedication of a statue to James Beardsley, the *Hartford Courant* recounted the story of his gift to the city: "Refusing an offer of \$20,000...on February 4, 1878, he sent a communication to the common council proposing to donate this track of land to the city on the single condition that it should accept and keep it forever as a public park with the name of Beardsley Park." <sup>1</sup>

Although the offer was accepted with "heartfelt thanks," the story continued, "...park commissioners, guided by its donor, began the work of beautifying it, but on account of inadequate appropriations it proceeded too slowly to suit Mr. Beardsley." <sup>2</sup>

Undeterred, Beardsley made a second gift in 1881, assembling a total of 151 acres for a park with conditions: "First, said lands would be forever reserved, held and improved by the city as a public park to be

<sup>1</sup> "James W. Beardsley Honored," *Hartford Courant*, Hartford, Connecticut, June 21, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**CONTINUATION SHEET Beardsley Park (#00691) / 1875 Noble Avenue, Bridgeport**

called by the name of Beardsley Park; Second, that upon the tract...the city should expend \$3,000 per annum for the next ten years for laying out and improving the same as a public park, including the proper mapped layout for the improvement of said lands as a whole.”

With this acquisition, the city retained Frederick Law Olmsted to submit a plan – one that would direct the park’s development. Beardsley Park would become the city’s third park, following the development of Seaside Park (Job 12021) and Washington Park.

The park is significant because it was an early project for Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and received his personal attention. His nephew/stepson, John Charles Olmsted, was also engaged in designing the park – the 1884 preliminary plan is signed “F.L. and J.C. Olmsted.” Charles Eliot also joined the firm (which would later include his name) and visited the site during the early planning stage. Olmsted Brothers, which included John Charles and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., and Charles Eliot provided additional plans for the park in 1904.<sup>3</sup> Of special note is the work of Oliver Bullard and his daughter Elizabeth Bullard, residents of Bridgeport and assistants to Frederick Law Olmsted and the firm on a number of projects including Beardsley Park.

Beardsley Park was designed as a rural park, emphasizing gently rolling landscapes, plantings designed to appear as if they grew there naturally, curving roadways, and large open meadows/lawns with few intrusions. Entering from Noble Avenue, visitors can see the pedestrian bridge added in 1921 that connects the main park to a small island. As the road straightens, the view melds to a large open field that slopes to Bunnell’s Pond. The main road follows two loops around greenswards, traveling through the rolling landscape and leading through wooded areas by a running stream.<sup>4</sup>

In its early years, the park also acquired a unique role – which was not part of the Olmsted firm’s plans - as winter quarters for animals like zebras, camels, and elephants from the Barnum and Bailey circus (owned by Bridgeport resident P.T. Barnum). This foreshadowed the park’s future, as in 1920, city officials began the process of creating a zoo. Beginning with exotic birds from local citizens and circus retirees from Barnum and Bailey, the zoo grew quickly as the city built a greenhouse and added monkeys, leopards, and llamas to the zoo. (In 1997, the Connecticut Zoological Society bought the zoo from the city and runs it as a nonprofit institution.)<sup>5</sup>

**REFERENCES**

- National Register of Historic Places – Beardsley Park and Zoological Gardens (1999)
- Olmsted Legacy Trail – Connecticut ASLA. Available at [www.olmstedlegacytrail.com](http://www.olmstedlegacytrail.com).

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<sup>3</sup> “Beardsley Park and Zoological Gardens,” National Register of Historic Places, 1999.

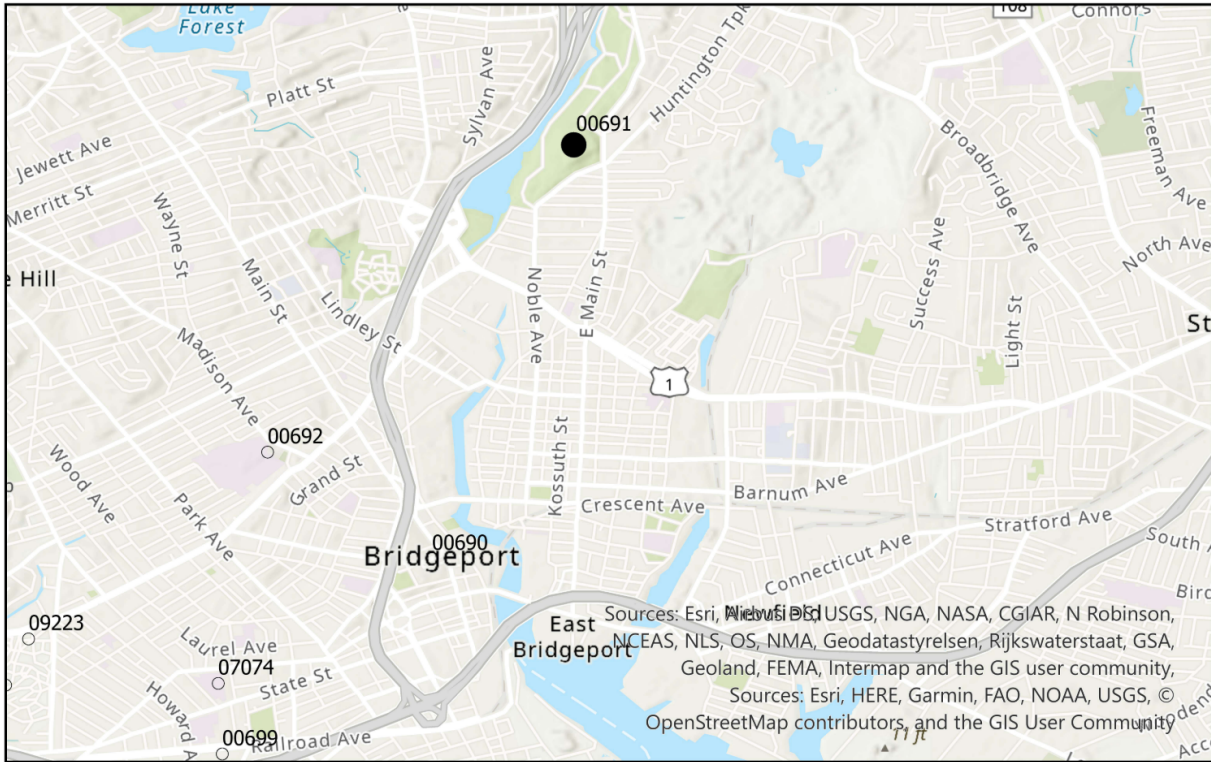
<sup>4</sup> “Beardsley Park,” <https://www.olmstedlegacytrail.com/beardsley-park>, accessed January 7, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> “Beardsley Park and Zoo,” <https://bportlibrary.org/hc/fairfield-county/beardsley-park-and-zoo/>, accessed January 7, 2022.

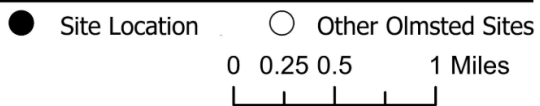
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CONTINUATION SHEET Beardsley Park (#00691) / 1875 Noble Avenue, Bridgeport

**GRAPHICS**



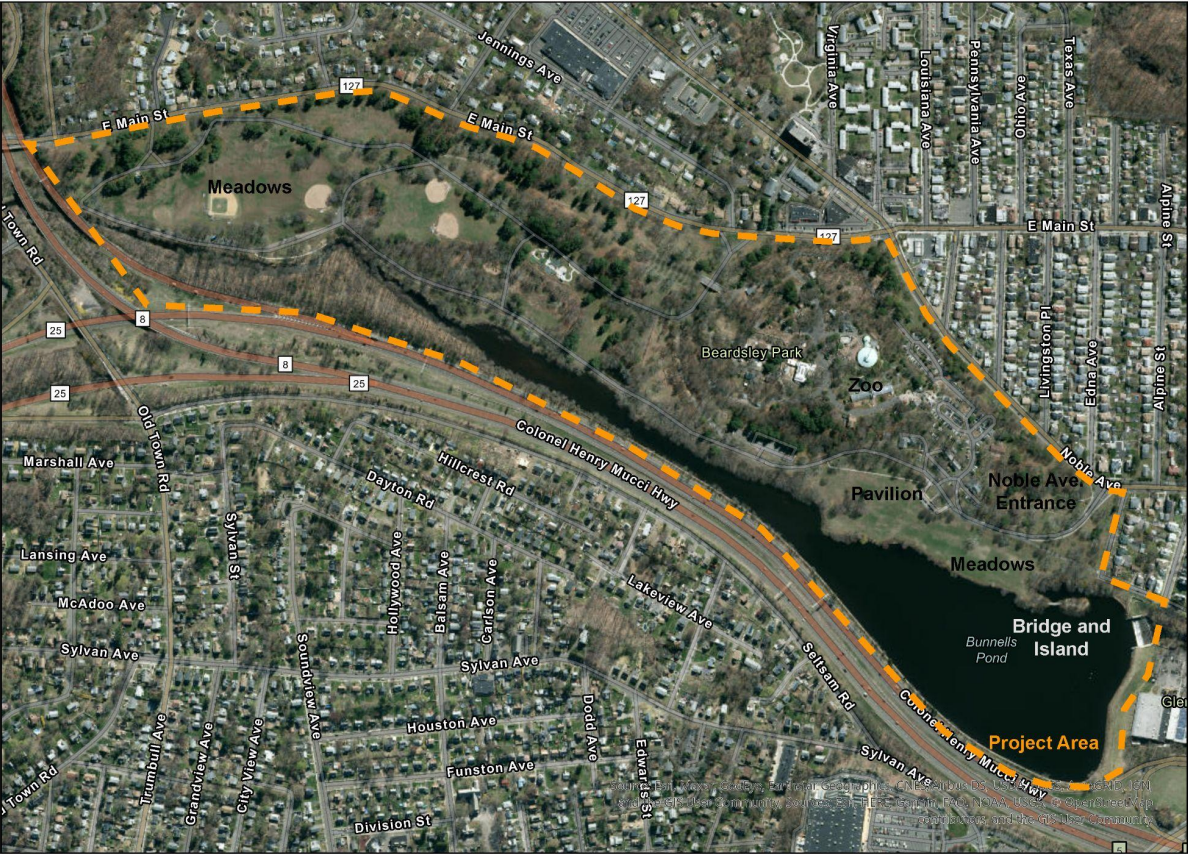
JOB: 00691 LOCATION: Bridgeport



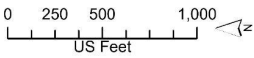


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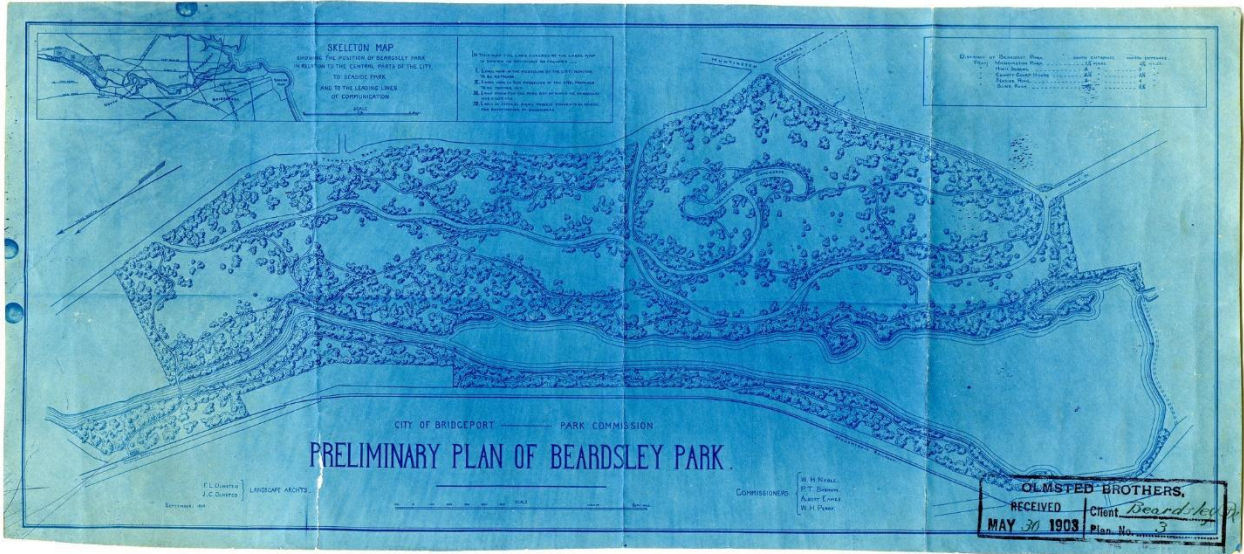


JOB: 00691 LOCATION: Bridgeport PROJECT: Beardsley Park



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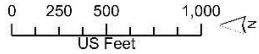
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Preliminary Plan of Beardsley Park, 1884, F.L. Olmsted and J.C. Olmsted. (Source: courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)



JOB: 00691 LOCATION: Bridgeport PROJECT: Beardsley Park



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View looking north at entry sign near Noble Avenue. (All photographs taken by the author in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View looking east at the park's entry to statue of James W. Beardsley (1899).

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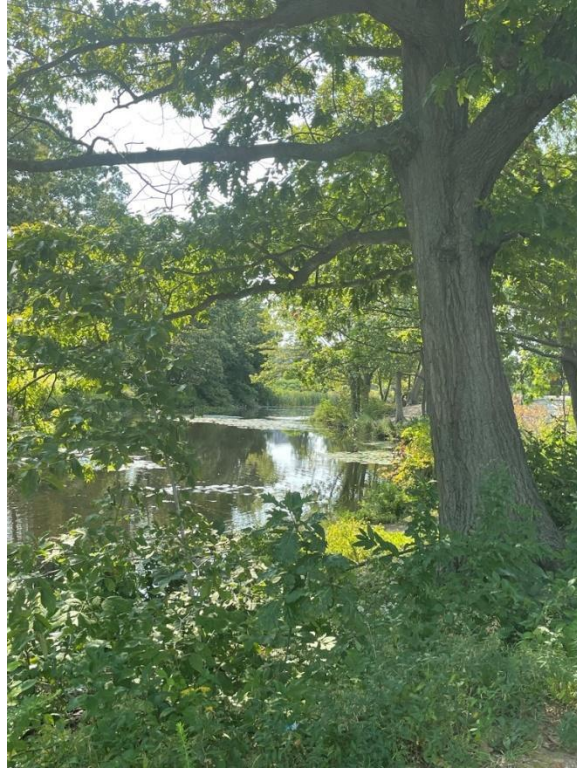


View looking north along park road with separate walking path (both asphalt) with characteristic planting of large and small trees.



View southwest to island bridge designed by Joseph W. Northrop, architect, with Bunnell's Pond in the background.

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A picturesque scene at the island in the southwest corner of the park.



View looking northwest across an open meadow. Note the shade and shadow patterns of the mature trees. Bunnell's Pond is just out of view to the left/west.



Characteristic view of the road and path as it curves in a northerly direction. Views are just opening to the second large meadow/lawn at the north end of the park.



View east at intersection with mid-park road. Note ballfield to the left of picture, which is at the south end of the north meadow/lawn.

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View south from the terminus of the park path as it follows the park road and continues under the highway to Fairchild Memorial Park. Narrow dirt path is where walkers continue along the park road.



View looking southwest across the large north meadow/lawn with massing of trees along the edge. Restroom facility along park road at the left of photograph.

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View looking west into the park exit to Rt 127/East Main Street. Note bridge that allowed a separation of traffic in the park. Upper road now abandoned.



View north along upper abandoned park road. Beardsley Zoo boundary fence is immediately south of this point along the road. Note tree planting along road trace.



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View looking east into Beardsley Zoo entrance at the historic park Casino (ca. 1884).



View east into Beardsley Zoo at fence. Historic brick maintenance buildings at the back of photograph (c. 1900).



View generally northeast of the Beardsley Zoo. Oldest building in the zoo is the greenhouse, which predates the zoo's establishment. Not the large evergreen, deciduous, and specimen tree plantings in this area.