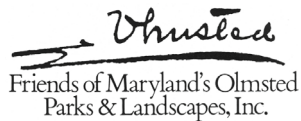


Wyman Park

A Fractured Legacy Update



FMOPL Digest

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Today, Wyman Park is a complex of highly-contrasting park spaces, half-hearted links and a variety of associated urban edges. Development of Wyman Park was one of the earliest initiatives tied to implementation of the 1904 *Report Upon the Development of Public Grounds for Greater Baltimore* by the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects (OBLA). However, its history over the past 100 years represents both success and disappointment. Indeed, the original concept of Wyman Park has lost so much of its initial identity that its main components—the Wyman Park stream valley along Stony Run north and west of Johns Hopkins University and the Wyman Park Dell opposite the Baltimore Museum of Art along North Charles Street—are seldom recognized as related spaces.

When the 1904 Report was published, creation of a Wyman Park was already in motion. The Wyman Brothers, owners of the large estate that stretched from 29th Street to Merryman Lane (now University Parkway), had already decided to

dedicate the land to public uses.¹ The center of the estate that included Homewood House would become the new campus of Johns Hopkins University. The trustees of the university subsequently gave the remainder of the estate to the City as a public park. The 1904 Report contains a map of the proposed division of the Wyman estate property into campus and park. Adjustments to the boundaries continued with the building of the Baltimore Museum of Art in the 1920s and the City's sale of the San Martin edge back to the University in the 1960s.

While the whole length of Stony Run was to be one of several stream valley parks in the city, the 1904 Report singled out the Wyman Park section with its “old beech trees and bold topography” as “the finest single passage of scenery in the whole valley.” The Report also contended that “there are few spots so near any large city that equal it.” The other key section was the small valley section of Sumwalt's Run between 29th and 31st Streets that

became Wyman Park Dell.

Over the next few years, both sections of Wyman Park received a good deal of attention from OBLA, and each was treated quite differently. The larger stream valley section was not pristine—the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad, affectionately known as the Ma & Pa, ran along the Stony Run, passing by a quarry midway between Remington Avenue and University Parkway. In Baltimore's belated effort to deal with its serious sewerage problems, a major pipeline was built along Stony Run. Despite these intrusions, the Olmsted work treated the Stony Run valley largely as a natural reservation, with San Martin Drive and pedestrian paths laid out carefully to blend into the landscape. Adjustments to the final park design, including the construction of the large bridges crossing Stony Run, continued over a decade after 1904.

In contrast, Wyman Park Dell, adjacent to North Charles Street, was planned as a much more highly ma-



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View of the lower lawn of Wyman Park Dell from West 29th Street by Maryland Avenue. Inset photo of dry stone wall construction in August 2010 by the Training Program of the Dry Stone Conservancy, Lexington, KY.

Photo courtesy of the Friends of Wyman Park Dell. Stone wall construction, August 2010 by Neil Rippingale.

nipulated space, in part because of its size and location within a more rapidly urbanizing context, including the significant embankments of 29th and North Charles Streets (and subsequently Art Museum Drive in the 1920s). Another key factor that affected design of the

Dell was the acute degradation of the Sumwalt's Run stream leading into the future park during extension of St. Paul Street. This change left the short remaining above-ground section within the park space an isolated remnant.² Other actions, such as the City condemn-

ing a spring and the raising and leveling of the stream valley floor to cover new sewer and storm drain infrastructure, further altered the original setting of the Dell.

In August 1905, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. recommended accelerating work on the Dell “as an object lesson for the benefit of those who may not see fit to appreciate the necessity of park construction in this region, if there are any such, and in general as an assistance to getting further appropriations for such work.” Within a few years, Wyman Park Dell became a showpiece as a miniature version of the signature Olmsted pastoral park based on a sweeping unobstructed lawn with a strong enclosure, dramatic play of shadows, and a contrast to the surrounding urban environment.

The contrasting treatment of the two key sections of Wyman Park ably highlights the Olmsted principle of a park system serving a wide variety of park experiences. Treatment of each section was based on the inherent characteristics of the

natural landscape and the context to which the specific spaces would eventually relate. Today’s apparent isolation of the Dell from the rest of Wyman Park represents the all too common failure after the 1904 Report to plan for the linkages between the main spaces—the failure to treat the main link, Wyman Park Drive, as more than any other ordinary urban street. Over the years indifferent landscaping, lack of additional parkway treatments and large parking lots along San Martin and Wyman Park Drives have contributed to the lack of any sense of connectedness between the main park spaces.

Adjacent development and the street network also diminished the original, more unified concept of Wyman Park. Wyman Park Dell became an island of green space in an intense urban context. Over-designed roadways and excess speed isolated nearby parkland, such as the section facing the row houses on Wyman Parkway across from the Dell along Howard Street.

The original section of the park east of Stony Run along San Martin Drive was sold back to Hopkins University in the 1960s. Most of this green space has increasingly disappeared as the campus has expanded across San Martin Drive. Much of the open space shown on the 1930s overview of the area—undeveloped portions of the Hopkins Homewood Campus, the Baltimore Museum of Art site, and sections along Beech Avenue—are now filled with buildings.

The original configuration left Wyman Park prone to fragmentation, but the severity of such divisions can still be tempered. The 2006 Master Plan for Wyman Park Dell by Mahan Rykiel Associates identified ways to better link or at least visually tie together all the green pieces that exist around the Dell. The planned Charles Street Reconstruction Project (construction starting in 2011) includes a wider, greener and more pedestrian friendly edge to the Dell that will integrate better with the proposed new boulevard from University Parkway to 29th Street. In 2010, a pedestrian promenade replaced the original sweeping roadway linking Charles Street with 29th Street to retain the original design of Wyman Park Dell.

Johns Hopkins University’s new south quadrangle across from the former public health hospital offers the possibility to rethink Wyman Park Drive as a green link to the park along Stony Run over to Druid Hill Park. Major sewer re-



The Stony Run stream in Wyman Park beckons walkers along the old Ma & Pa trail bed. In 2010, community leaders initiated planning for a Stony Run Walking Path from Roland Park to the Jones Falls Trailhead by the Steiff Building. Photo by David R. Holden, 2006.

construction and remediation projects through the Stony Run stream valley will eliminate the high levels of stream degradation which affect the water and visual quality of Stony Run where sanitary stacks frequently overflowed. Concurrent stabilization and restoration projects will address the worst slope erosion and stream flooding problems in addition to enhancing the park’s ecological quality. The surrounding communities from Roland Park to Remington and Hampden are now planning a Stony Run walking path that will follow the remaining Ma & Pa rail bed, where possible.

Whatever the fate of these current park improvement projects and enhancement efforts, both main sections of Wyman Park will remain valuable green spaces for their sur-

rounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Given the predominance of relatively secluded parkland and the presence of a stream valley of substantial size, Wyman Park on the west side plays an important role as a natural preserve while still functioning as community gathering spaces and as an active recreation area with large playing fields at both ends.

The Wyman Park Dell Master Plan also describes how to preserve the Dell’s defining characteristics and its importance as an intact historical park design. It calls for integrating more passive uses and community events as well as adding new amenities, while making the Dell sustainable as a naturalized landscape.



This drawing shows the original alignment and grading plan in the Olmsted Brothers design for Wyman Park Drive. OBLA also designed San Martin Drive, including an extensive planting plan. Drawing courtesy of FMOPL Archives.

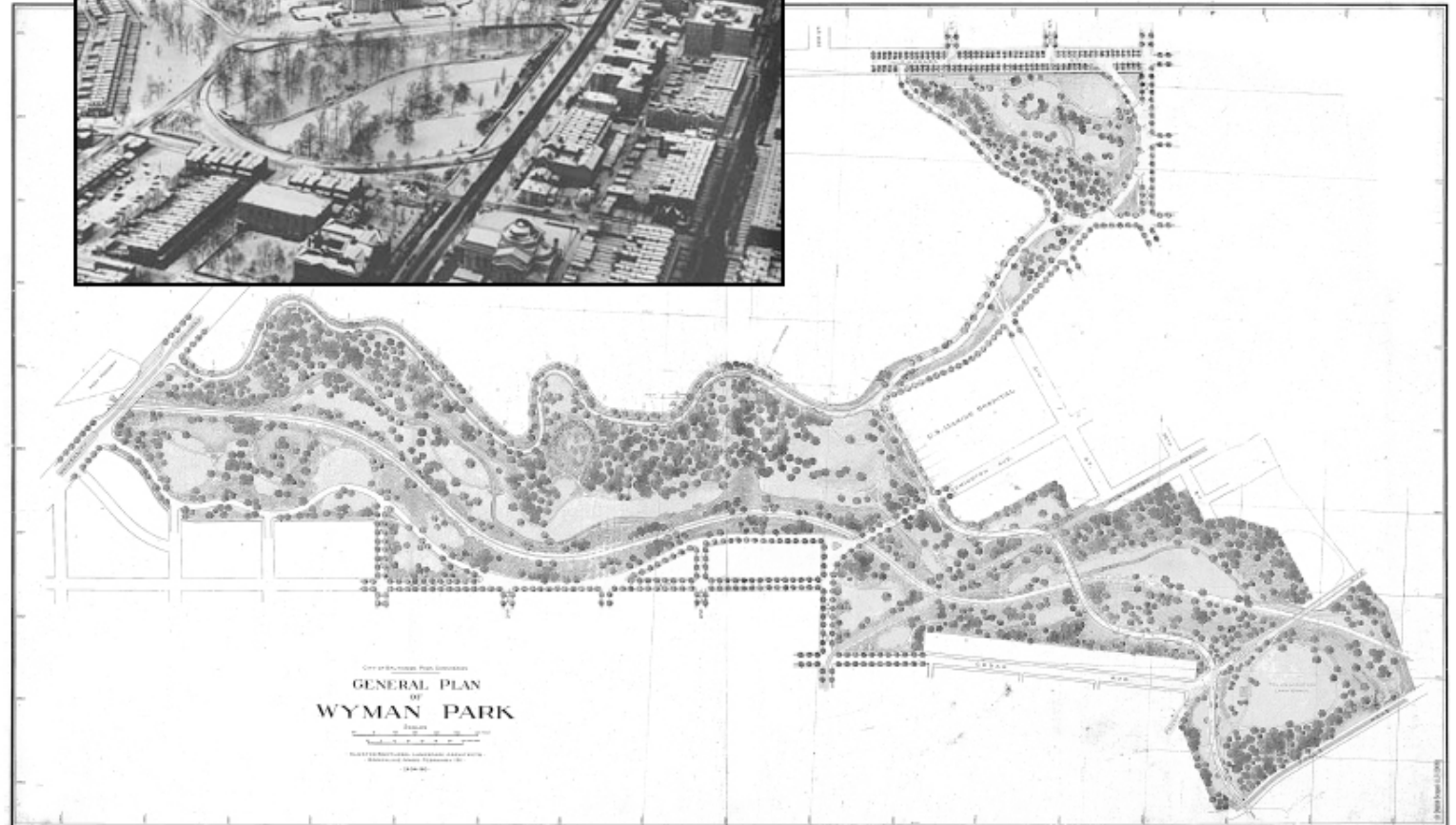
Since the completion of the master plan, the historic dry-stack stone wall has been reconstructed as a capital project by the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks, further defining the broad sweep of the lower lawn. The removal of the “sweep” at 29th Street will allow for implementation of more master plan recommendations at this important Dell gateway, including the expansion of the playground area and more flexible space for the annual Charles Village Festival. In addition, the Friends of Wyman Park Dell (FWPD) presents seasonal programming for the Dell with movies, concerts and a popular Winter Solstice Celebration. The revitalized Dell attracts many people for walking and relaxing on a regular basis.

The Dell Master Plan requires short term successes, long term commitment and adequate resources. Implementing key improvements to both park spaces again may serve as an object lesson for those who may not appreciate the necessity of investment in our parks and will serve “as an assistance to getting further appropriations for such work,” as Olmsted strategically advised 100 years ago.

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This 1930s winter aerial view shows the integrity of the original Olmsted Brothers design for Wyman Park Dell, edged by the Charles Street boulevard in the foreground and by the Baltimore Museum of Art, Johns Hopkins Home-wood campus and the Stony Run valley of Wyman Park to the north.



This 1911 General Plan for Wyman Park expresses the extent of planning and design the Olmsted Brothers firm applied to much of the former Wyman Estate, beginning in the 1900s. Several major sewer reconstruction and stream stabilization projects underway can restore much of the eroded quality of the western sections of this green network. Future installation of well-placed, well-designed plantings along Wyman Park Drive could restore some of the original parkway design intent. The section of the park at Sisson and 29th Streets currently acts as leftover green space but could easily become a signature gateway for the Remington and Hampden neighborhoods with current planning for a Stony Run Walking Path. The 2006 Master Plan for Wyman Park Dell, upper right corner, recommends landscaping the Charles Street edge to open vistas to the sweeping lawn below and to the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Drawing courtesy of FMOPL Archives. Enhanced by Digital Scapes LLC

¹ Suburban development of an expanding Baltimore often occurred with the splitting up and transformation of large estates. Many parks, however, had their origins in preserving these estates as urban green spaces. See *Baltimore's Public Landscapes: From Private Estates to Public Domain*, the second driving tour brochure published by FMOPL.

² See “The 1904 Olmsted Brothers Report: The Advancement of City Planning in Baltimore” by David R. Holden, *The Olmstedian*, Fall 2004, for details of this setback and other incidents of poor decision making by the City that thwarted key aspects of the 1904 Report recommendations, especially regarding securing rights-of-way for parkways and other linkages.