



MILWAUKEE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Supervisor Peter Burgelis - District 15

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Milwaukee County's Washington Park Designated a Historic Landmark

MILWAUKEE – On Monday, November 13, 2023, the Milwaukee County Landmarks Committee, managed by the Milwaukee County Historical Society, designated Washington Park as an official Historic County Landmark.

Designed by preeminent 19th-century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in 1895, Washington Park has provided a natural oasis for Milwaukeeans for over a century. The park has featured many iconic establishments over the years, including the original Milwaukee County Zoo, which existed in the park until 1958.

The park is currently undergoing a transformation exceeding \$20 million to update the lagoon bridges, build a new Urban Ecology Center, and improve accessibility. Milwaukee County Supervisor Peter Burgelis commented on the investment, stating:

“Recent investments of over \$20 million from Milwaukee County and the Urban Ecology Center show our renewed commitment to maintaining and growing Washington Park for generations to come. This park serves as Milwaukee's equivalent of Central Park, acting as a catalyst for neighborhood growth and improving overall quality of life.”

Melissa Muller, Director and Board President of Washington Park Neighbors added:

“The declaration of the historic preservation status of Washington Park is not merely an act; it's a commitment to honoring and fulfilling the legacy of Frederick Olmsted. In serving this diverse community, we ensure equity, making it a welcoming space for all. This declaration is a testament to our dedication to preserving history, fostering community, and embracing a shared future.”

In order to be classified as a historic landmark by the Milwaukee County Landmarks Committee, a location must meet one of four criteria. Washington Park successfully met three criteria:

1. Is connected or associated with a significant historic event or a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the nation, state or county.
2. Exemplifies broad cultural significance and is a notable work of a design/architect whose work influenced the development of the nation, state, or county.

3. It embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type/specimen inherently valuable for studying a period style, architectural innovation or method of construction.

Philip Schultz, Board Chair of the Olmsted Network, also commented:

“Milwaukee County has a rich Olmsted heritage that rivals other cities. Designating Washington Park a historic landmark is an important step in acknowledging Milwaukee’s ‘Central Park.’”

The Olmsted Network, based in Washington, DC, is the national champion for Olmsted parks and landscapes.

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