

CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY – LANDSCAPES * OLMSTED PROJECT 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

I D E N T I F I C A T I O N	PROPERTY NAME (Current/Historic)		
	Walnut Hill Park / New Britain Proposed Park		
	COUNTY	TOWN/CITY	VILLAGE
	Hartford	New Britain	
	JOB NUMBER		
	Primary: 00600 Related Job Numbers:		
Landscape Type			
<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			
DATE OF ORIGINAL PROJECT: 1867-1870			
SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS: 1921			

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DESIGNER(S) (primary)

- Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
- John Charles Olmsted
- Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
- Other firm member(s):
- Other notes: Olmsted and Vaux; Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects

Other Designers (prior to or following Olmsted project):

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: Olmsted Legacy Trail (olmstedlegacytrail.com)

Observations regarding features characteristic of Olmsted firm design

Walnut Hill Park was established on the site of a water reservoir built for the Town of New Britain in 1856. A 36-acre site with the reservoir was transferred to the town in 1857 with plans to create a city park with recreational and cultural amenities. After five years of drainage and road work, little progress had been made, and the Walnut Hill Park Company engaged Frederick Law Olmsted to prepare plans for the park. Olmsted recommended expansion of the property with purchase of an additional 40 acres in 1867. Olmsted's plans for the larger park area, completed in 1870, included several areas—the Bergmonte Close atop the hill, the Common or western meadow, and the Fountain Close, a formal area in the southwest portion of the property that was intended to counterbalance the informal and naturalistic character of the rest of the park. While the Fountain Close was never implemented, the Common remains a key element of the plan, although several active recreational features have been added to the open space. A World War I monument was added atop Walnut Hill in 1930 after Olmsted's proposed overlook

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was never implemented. A band shell was added in the 1930s. The Olmsted Brothers firm was brought in to inspect park construction in 1908 and 1921.

Walnut Hill Park remains consistent in form to the original design, although roads edging and leading to the park in the south proposed as tree-lined parkways are not in evidence today. Much of the loop road around the Common appears consistent with the original design. The top of the knoll, originally designed as an overlook, is now a formal commemorative plaza centering around a large monument. Active recreational facilities and the bandshell occupy formerly open space. Tree plantings appear to have been replaced over time and there are fewer trees today than in the original design. Additional commemorative elements that have been added include a marker dating to 1910 and stone curbing etched with "GAR" that relates to post-Civil War commemoration by the Grand Army of the Republic. The curbing may have been considered in the Olmsted design. Walnut Hill Park is a surviving example of an Olmsted designed park that retains sufficient integrity to continue to convey its historic associations. The park is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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	COUNTY Hartford	TOWN/CITY New Britain	VILLAGE											
	STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location) 184 West Main Street													
	OWNER(S) <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUNICIPAL <input type="checkbox"/> STATE <input type="checkbox"/> FEDERAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRIBAL <input type="checkbox"/> EASEMENT New Britain Parks and Recreation													
	LAT/LONG COORDINATES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center Point <input type="checkbox"/> Polygon 41.662795, -72.790244													
	PARCEL INFORMATION Acres: 98 PID(s): 1602 MBLU(s): 4071001													
	USE (Present) Public park		(Historic) Public park											
	SURVEY TYPE <input type="checkbox"/> Reconnaissance-Level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intensive-Level													
	D E S C R I P T I O N	LANDSCAPE TYPE (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:												
		DATE OR PERIOD (Include source of date) 1867-1870; 1921 (Olmsted Research Online Guide)												
DESIGNERS (Entities that created, designed, constructed, or shaped the landscape) Olmsted and Vaux; Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects														
DESIGN SCOPE (For designed landscapes, explain what work was commissioned.) Park layout, grading, circulation, plantings, and a variety of use areas including an overlook														
LOCATION OF DRAWINGS/IMAGES/SOURCE MATERIAL Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; Library of Congress														
VISUAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY (Check boxes for the qualities that are key features of this landscape. If attaching descriptive narrative, consider these categories.) <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Layout & Spatial Relationships</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Water Features</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circulation</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Drainage</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Topography</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buildings/Structures/Objects</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plantings/Vegetation</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Recreational Space</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Views & Vistas</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Design Style: Picturesque</td> </tr> </table>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Layout & Spatial Relationships	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Features	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circulation	<input type="checkbox"/> Drainage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Topography	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buildings/Structures/Objects	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plantings/Vegetation	<input type="checkbox"/> Recreational Space	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Views & Vistas	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Design Style: Picturesque
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C O N D I T I O N	EXISTING CONDITION <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recognizable <input type="checkbox"/> Not Extant/Not Recognizable Changes: (with dates): Additions include commemorative monuments, active recreation, a bandshell		
	POTENTIAL THREATS <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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Overuse <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deferred Maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> Invasive Vegetation <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental – specify: storms, stormwater flow <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify:		
E N V I R O N M E N T	SETTING (One sentence description) The setting is generally residential. There is a hospital and other healthcare facilities east of the park		
	VEGETATION <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maintained Open Land <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Open Land <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland/Forest <input type="checkbox"/> Wetland <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specimen Plants <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify:		
	SLOPE <input type="checkbox"/> Level/Nearly Level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Moderate Slope <input type="checkbox"/> Steep Slope Elevation (ASML): 215-306'		
	CONNECTICUT PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE (Eco-Region) <input type="checkbox"/> Northwest Highlands <input type="checkbox"/> Western Uplands <input type="checkbox"/> Western Coastal Slope <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Central Valley <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Coastal Slope <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Uplands		
	Soil Description: Varied well drained soils, including urban, loamy, and rocky soils, varying by topography.		
H I S T O R Y	SUMMARY (Provide a brief overview in this space. More detailed narrative can be attached.) Walnut Hill Park was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux circa 1867-1870. The original design featured three principal areas—the Bergmote Close, Common, and Fountain Close. The plans feature an overlook and a more formal area, as well as unprogrammed open space edged by an elliptical drive. The two close features were never implemented. One became the site of a World War I monument in 1927-1930. Active recreational features and a bandshell have been added since the 1930s.		
	NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATION Entered by: <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: Walnut Hill Park is listed, the landscape is contributing NR Listed: <input type="checkbox"/> District-Contributing <input type="checkbox"/> District-Non-Contributing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient Documentation		
R E P O R T E D B Y	NAME Liz Sargent and Maeve Corcoran	ORGANIZATION Red Bridge Group	DATE December 2021
	ADDRESS 2100 Green Street, San Francisco, California 94123		
	PHOTOGRAPHER Liz Sargent	DATE September 13, 2021	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permission to use photographs (public domain)
	SURVEY METHOD <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

Forms containing sensitive information may be withheld from public disclosure (CGS 1-210)

DESCRIPTION (Visual Assessment Summary)

Layout & Spatial Relationships: Walnut Hill Park is a 98-acre public park situated three blocks west of downtown New Britain, adjoining a residential neighborhood in the Walnut Hill National Register Historic District. The irregularly-shaped park property features an expansive central greensward, several active recreation venues, a bandshell, and a commemorative monument and associated plaza. The park is framed to the north by West Main Street, to the west by residential neighborhoods and Vine Street, to the south by Hart Street, Hart Terrace, and Grand Street, and to the east by residential neighborhoods. There are several entrances into the park from adjacent roads, one of which features formal stone entry elements. A curvilinear park road, narrow and one-way, edged by parking in several places, encircles the greensward section. A park road also winds up the hill where the commemorative monument and plaza are located.

Circulation: The main park road—Walnut Hill Park Circle Road—forms a loop that extends along the perimeter of much of the western portion of the park between the entrance at West Main Street and the entrance at Hart Terrace/Grand Street. A cross road connects the two sides of the loop. It leads past the New Deal era bandshell. Parking for recreational facilities is located in the southeastern part of the park. Parking is also afforded along the margins of the road in some locations. A portion of the road near the loop terminus is edged by tall stone curbing etched in several places with G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic). Walks are also present at several of the entrances into the park. The plaza atop the hill has formal walks and paved terraces that lead on axis to the monument, with a cross axis leading to pergolas to either side of the plaza.

Topography: Much of the park is gently rolling topography, although the land rises steeply from West Main Street. There is a high knoll in the eastern part of the park.

Plantings/Vegetation: There are numerous large shade trees that dot the turf grass that is prevalent throughout. There are shrubs and a rose garden associated with the commemorative monument atop the knoll.

Views & Vistas: Views are afforded across the commemorative monument plaza to the tall columnar World War I monument atop the knoll. From the hilltop, there are also views over downtown New Britain. There are long views across the open greensward from many angles. Views into the park occur at the various entrances.

Buildings/Structures/Objects: There is a bandshell located in the eastern part of the park, as well as a columnar monument honoring those who fought in World War I. Stone walls and a stone structure mark entrances along Hart Street and Hart Terrace at Grand Street. Tennis courts are edged by chain link fencing. There is also a gazebo structure, near the stone curbing, that is used for concessions.

Recreational Space: Tennis courts and ballfields are present in the park.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

A portion of the land which became Walnut Hill Park was acquired by a group of New Britain citizens and industrialists, including Frederick T. Stanley of the Stanley Works, who desired to establish a site for residents of the city to have access to open space in 1856. The land was in poor condition and in need of improvement. After purchasing the land, the group formed the Walnut Hill Park Company, even as they considered options for managing the land that included leasing and selling parcels for commercial use. The group donated the parcel atop the hill to the town of New Britain in 1857 to allow for construction of a water reservoir, completed in 1858. The reservoir served as part of New Britain's early water supply system, particularly to furnish an additional source of water in case of fire.¹

¹ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Section 8.

CONTINUATION SHEET Walnut Hill Park (#00600) / 184 W. Main Street, New Britain

The Walnut Hill Park Company later engaged Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, by then known for their work on New York's Central Park, to design a public open space on their land in 1867. Walnut Hill Park is an early example of the work of the designer and among the first half dozen of approximately 80 commissions completed during Olmsted's career.

Olmsted visited New Britain in July 1869, viewing the terrain of the property and advising the group on the purchase of additional adjoining properties to the west and southwest to expand on the available land. In 1870, the City purchased 34 acres from the Walnut Hill Park Company and 56 acres from eight adjacent owners, establishing a parcel totaling 90 acres for the park. Olmsted and Vaux then completed initial designs for the park.²

Olmsted and Vaux's design was consistent with other work being done by the firm at the time, whereby they sought to establish picturesque landscapes within urban areas for the pleasure and refreshment of residents, using open greens edged by groves and individual trees to create immersive experiences of natural beauty.³ Their design took advantage of the existing topography by establishing three distinct areas using the knoll to the east and the lower lying land to the west to create very different experiences. These three sections are labeled on the Olmsted and Vaux plans as "The Bergmote Close," "The Common," and "The Fountain Close." They were accessed from a total of seven entrances into the park suggested by the designers; the primary entrance for both pedestrians and vehicles was from West Main Street, which lead to a road encircling the Common and a drive rising southwesterly around the hill.⁴

The elliptical drive surrounding The Common connected to entrances at Lexington, Vine, Hart, and Linwood Streets. In the southern corner of The Common, Olmsted and Vaux's design included a large fountain surrounded by a series of winding walking paths. The elliptical drive was shown as edged by dense groves of trees. It appears that the trees were planted over time on various occasions throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but may have never been fully implemented consistent with the plans. Historic arial photographs suggest the fountain was also never constructed.⁵ On the north side of the Common, Olmsted and Vaux designed "The Playsted" for outdoor recreation. Today it features tennis courts and ballfields.⁶

The Bergmote Close was indicated as a site suitable for erecting a monumental tower atop the hill to eventually replace the reservoir.⁷ While never built during Olmsted's lifetime, the hill was eventually developed with a World War I memorial, erected in 1927-1928, based on designs prepared by H. Van Buren Magonigle. The plaza atop the hill contains two 28 x 38-foot shelters located to either side of the space. At the north end of the pool the memorial rises 90 feet in height. At its base are 123 bronze plaques, one for each man who died during the war, mounted on a limestone wall encircling the memorial. This wall is divided into two segments terminated with piers topped with bronze bowls. At the bottom of the memorial, on the north side, is a bronze tablet with raised letters that reads "The City of New Britain, Here records with pride, That of her citizens, More than four thousand, Served in, The World War, 1917 * 1918." Symbols in the four corners of the tablet represent the Army, the Navy, Industry, and the Red Cross.⁸

The Fountain Close, designed as a formal foil to the picturesque landscape in the southwest portion of the property, was never implemented.

² David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 8-1.

³ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 8-1.

⁴ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 2.

⁵ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 7-3.

⁶ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 7-2.

⁷ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 2.

⁸ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination "Walnut Hill Park," (1982), Page 7-1.

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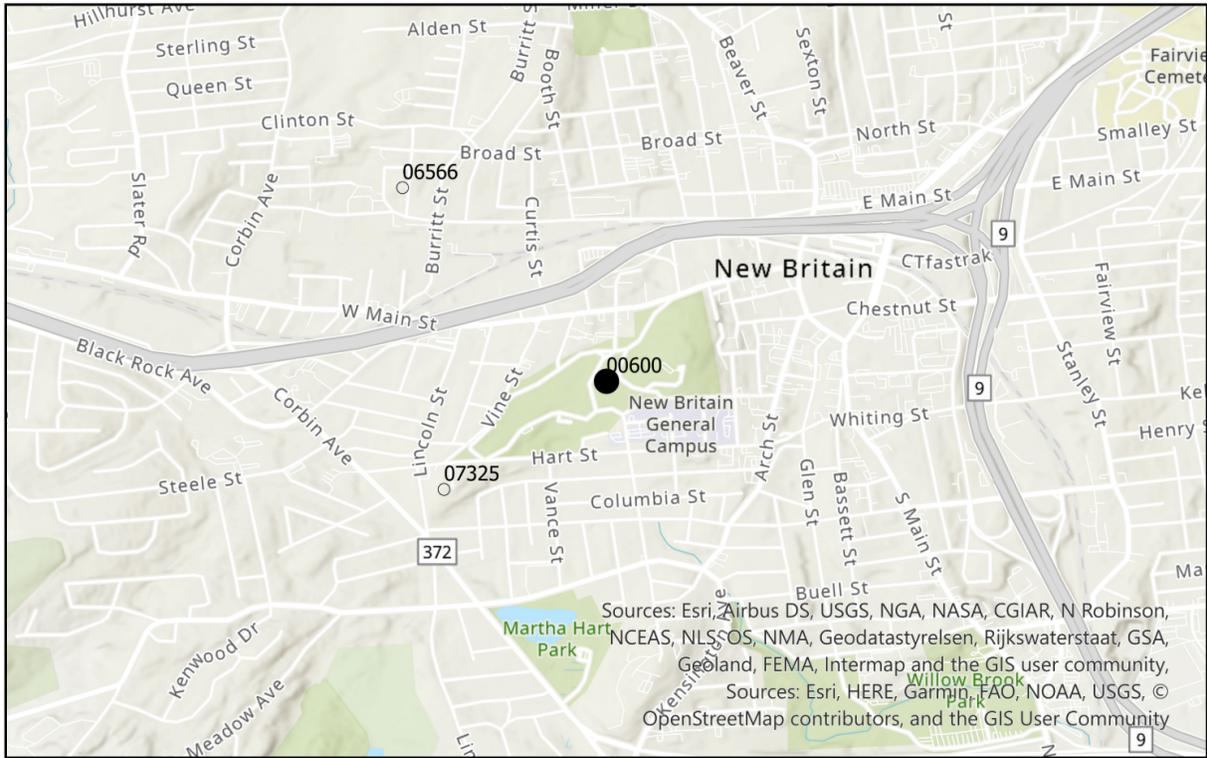
Added later to the park is the Darius Miller Music Shell, designed by Harold Field Kellogg in 1939. The shell was destroyed in a fire in 1966 and soon rebuilt to the original design.⁹

Walnut Hill Park has historically been the site of many community gatherings in New Britain. In the 1890s, the Barnum Bailey Circus showed on The Common, and in 1910 Charles Hamilton famously exhibited the flying of a Wright biplane. The Park also supported New Britain’s efforts to support the troops in World War I. During the war years, acres were provided to the Home Garden Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to raise vegetables. New Britain’s five-day “Welcome Home to Her Service Men” celebration linked the Memorial Arch and Court of Honor to an extensive program of events at the park that included a carnival, high-dive acts, trained wild animal exhibition, baseball game, girls’ baseball game, fireworks, and a long and impressive parade.¹⁰

REFERENCES

Ransom, David F. National Register of Historic Places nomination “Walnut Hill Park.” November 30, 1982. 82001000.

GRAPHICS



JOB: 00600 LOCATION: New Britain

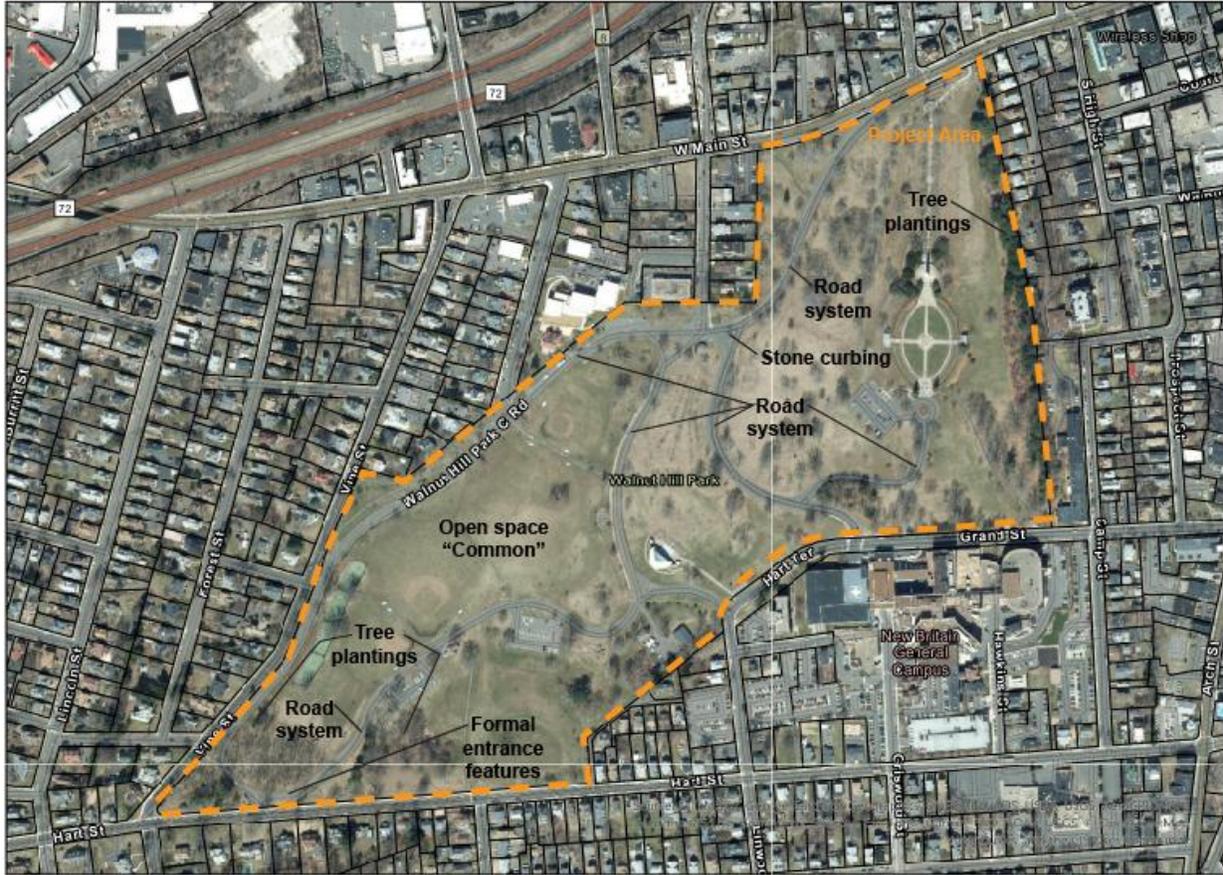
● Site Location ○ Other Olmsted Sites
 0 0.1 0.25 0.5 Miles

⁹ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination “Walnut Hill Park,” (1982), Page 8-3.

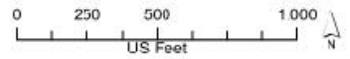
¹⁰ David F. Ransom, National Register of Historic Places nomination “Walnut Hill Park,” (1982), Page 8-2.

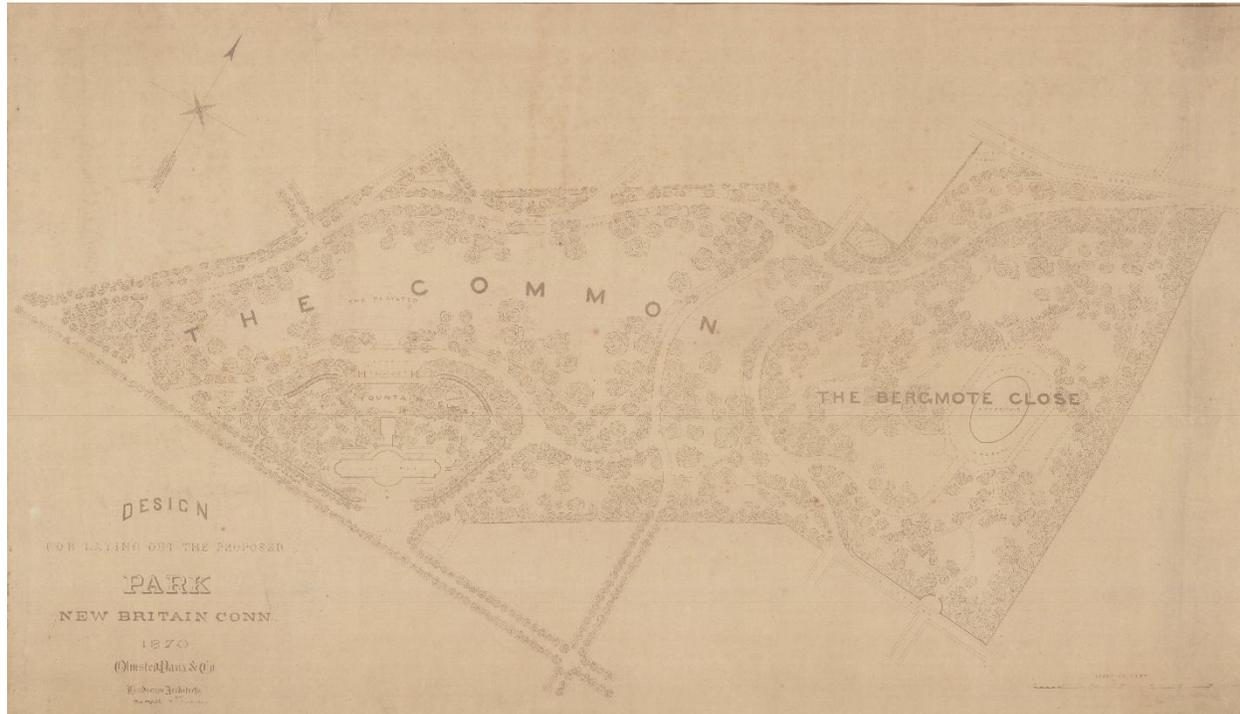
CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY – LANDSCAPES * OLMSTED PROJECT

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JOB: 00600 LOCATION: New Britain PROJECT: Walnut Hill Park





Design for Laying out the Proposed Park, New Britain Conn. Olmsted Vaux & Co. 1870. (Source: Courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)



View northeast across the greensward of Walnut Hill Park. (All photographs taken by authors in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View southwest across the greensward of Walnut Hill Park.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Walnut Hill Park (#00600) / 184 W. Main Street, New Britain



View southwest toward the tennis courts at Walnut Hill Park.



View south across the greensward of Walnut Hill Park.

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View southwest along the perimeter road around the greensward.



View north along the entrance road leading into the park from Grand Street.



View southeast along the perimeter road near the entrance at Hart Street.



View northeast of the entrance features at Hart Street.



View northeast of the entrance features at Hart Street.



View north of the entrance leading into the park from Hart Terrace.



View northeast of the road leading to the top of the hill and the monument.



View north toward the monument plaza.