

**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

<b>I D E N T I F I C A T I O N</b>	<b>PROPERTY NAME</b> (Current/Historic) Riverside Park		
	<b>COUNTY</b> Hartford	<b>TOWN/CITY</b> Hartford	<b>VILLAGE</b>
	<b>JOB NUMBER</b> Primary: 00806 Related Job Numbers:		
	<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> 1897 <b>SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS:</b> 1959		

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**DESIGNER(S) (primary)**

- Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.
- John Charles Olmsted
- Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.
- Other firm member(s): J.B. Herbst
- Other notes:

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:

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

Riverside Park was designed by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects in 1899 on behalf of the City of Hartford Park Commission as part of a broader system of parks and parkways also proposed by the firm. The plans prepared for the park were for a large picturesque open space along the Connecticut River shoreline east of the downtown area. The park featured open lawn areas designed as a boys' playfield, little folks lawn, and additional undesignated playfields. The center of the park was marked by a large meadow pond and a smaller wading pond nearby. The plan also featured a boating and skating pavilion, floating bathhouse, lawn shelter, various walks, and an overlook. Administrative features included a pumping station, shed, caretaker's house, and toilet rooms. The open lawn areas were edged by rows and groves of trees, while the park itself was edged by a tree-lined boulevard—Water Street—to the north. The New York & New England Railroad rail line formed the boundary of the park to the east.

During the 1960s, Interstate 91 was built to the west of the park, resulting in the loss of Water Street and truncating the park in this direction. The ponds have also been removed, although it is still possible to see their outlines on the ground. The southern portion of the park has been further developed with boat launch facilities, playground equipment, and parking for visitors. Otherwise, various aspects of the original

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Olmsted site design remain recognizable, including the form of the park, the groves of tree plantings, and open space areas. The park possesses integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association, with diminished integrity of design. Integrity of materials and workmanship has been lost.

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I D E N T I F I C A T I O N	<b>PROPERTY NAME</b> (Current/Historic) Riverside Park (Job #00806)													
	<b>COUNTY</b> Hartford	<b>TOWN/CITY</b> Hartford	<b>VILLAGE</b>											
	<b>STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location)</b> 20 Leibert Road and Riverside Road													
	<b>OWNER(S)</b> <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 City of Hartford Parks and Recreation													
	<b>LAT/LONG COORDINATES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center Point <input type="checkbox"/> Polygon 41.777648, -72.663308													
	<b>PARCEL INFORMATION</b> <b>Acres:</b> 75, currently 63.7 <b>PID(s):</b> <b>MBLU(s):</b> 432000001, 651004001													
	<b>USE (Present)</b> Public park		<b>(Historic)</b> Public park											
	<b>SURVEY TYPE</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Reconnaissance-Level <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intensive-Level													
	D E S C R I P T I O N	<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) 1897; 1959 (Olmsted Research Guide Online)												
<b>DESIGNERS</b> (Entities that created, designed, constructed, or shaped the landscape) Olmsted firm; Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects														
<b>DESIGN SCOPE</b> (For designed landscapes, explain what work was commissioned.) Site plan for riverside park with open space and amenities for active and passive recreation														
<b>LOCATION OF DRAWINGS/IMAGES/SOURCE MATERIAL</b> Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; Library of Congress; Hartford History Center														
<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"> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Layout &amp; Spatial Relationships</b></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Water Features</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Circulation</b></td> <td><input 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> Picturesque</td> </tr> </table>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Layout &amp; Spatial Relationships</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Water Features</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Circulation</b>	<input 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> Picturesque
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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: Interstate 91 has truncated the western edge of the park and a large boathouse has been added		
	<b>POTENTIAL THREATS</b> <input type="checkbox"/> None Known <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure Improvements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Onsite Development <input 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: River flooding <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 arises from a rural road that leads through a mixed use area		
	<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 type="checkbox"/> Moderate Slope <input type="checkbox"/> Steep Slope   Elevation (ASML): 16-71'		
	<b>CONNECTICUT PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE (Eco-Region)</b> <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: Dominated by Ocum, Hadley, Winooski silty loamy soils, 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.) Designed by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects as part of a system of parks proposed for the perimeter of Hartford during the 1890s, Riverside Park is a recreational open space designed to include a wading pond, Meadow Pond, public bathhouses, active recreational fields, and a boat dock. A 1907 article in the Hartford <i>Courant</i> described the park as a “paradise for children on the east side.” In the 1960s, construction of Interstate 91 truncated the park, a playground, boathouse, and parking were added, and the ponds lost..		
	<b>NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATION</b> <b>Entered by:</b> Liz Sargent HLA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recommended Eligible (Criterion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Eligible <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evaluated Explanation: The park continues to convey its associations with the Olmsted firm NR Listed: <input 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> Liz Sargent and Maeve Corcoran	<b>ORGANIZATION</b> Red Bridge Group	<b>DATE</b> December 2021
	<b>ADDRESS</b> 2100 Green Street, San Francisco, California 94123		
	<b>PHOTOGRAPHER</b> Liz Sargent	<b>DATE</b> September 17, 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

**DESCRIPTION (Visual Assessment Summary)**

**Layout & Spatial Relationships:** Riverside Park is a lozenge-shaped parcel that sits on the west bank of the Connecticut River. Interstate 91 is to the north of the park and Interstate 84 crosses the river to the south of the park. The open space includes playing fields, a playground, boat launch, a kiosk sited atop a graded knoll, and climbing equipment. A long access road—Riverside Road—leads to the park features from Leibert Road. Parking areas are associated with the playing fields, the playground area, and the boat launch and adjacent community boathouse. Groves of large trees, many wetland species, are located throughout, and edge the open space of the playing fields and playground and kiosk.

**Circulation:** The primary circulation feature is Riverside Road that leads into the park from Leibert Road. The paved asphalt road provides access to a gravel parking area near the playing fields. It continues to a large, paved parking area near the playground, and a separate parking area near the community boathouse. The road continues, providing access to the boat launch. Asphalt walks lead from the parking areas to the playground and kiosk features within the park, and a paved walk that follows the river southwest of the playground.

**Topography:** A large berm edges the park to the north that was likely built to protect the rail line from flooding. Much of the park is relatively level and low-lying along the margins of the river. A knoll is at the edge of the open space where the playground is located. The park is edged to the west by a berm associated with the Interstate 91 corridor. The berm is armored with rock rip rap.

**Plantings/Vegetation:** There are many mature trees within the park, most deciduous, but also some evergreens, planted in groves. Younger tree plantings edge the playing fields. The trees are primarily associated with wet to mesic soils.

**Views & Vistas:** Views toward the river and the Interstate 84 bridge crossing are afforded from the walk that follows the edge of the water in the southern part of the park.

**Water Features:** The boat launch area has constructed accessways for people to use in putting their boats in the water.

**Buildings/Structures/Objects:** The community boathouse is the primary building within the park. There are stone walls associated with the boathouse complex. Other features include a kiosk sited atop the graded knoll overlooking the open green space of the playground area, play and climbing equipment, lighting and benches. A wall edges the riverside walk as it approaches the bermed Interstate 91 corridor. A pedestrian bridge spans Interstate 91 and lands in the park.

**Recreational Space:** The playing fields, playground equipment, and climbing equipment, along with the boat launch constitute recreational spaces within the park.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

Riverside Park was designed by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects in 1897 on behalf of the City of Hartford Park Commission as part of a broader system of parks and parkways also proposed by the firm. Plans prepared for the park were for a large picturesque open space along the Connecticut River shoreline east of the downtown area. The park featured open lawn areas designed as a boys' playfield, little folks lawn, and additional undesignated playfields. The center of the park was marked by a large meadow pond and a smaller wading pond nearby. The plan also featured a boating and skating pavilion, floating bathhouse, lawn shelter, various walks, and an overlook. Administrative features included a pumping station, shed, caretaker's house, and toilet rooms. The open lawn areas were edged by rows and groves of trees, while the

## CONTINUATION SHEET Riverside Park (#00806) / 20 Leibert Road, Hartford

park itself was edged by a tree-lined boulevard—Water Street—to the north. The New York & New England Railroad rail line formed the boundary of the park to the east.

Riverside Park opened to the public on Saturday, September 3, 1898. Upon its opening, it was proclaimed that “the park is now open to all and henceforth will never be closed.” The park was designed to relieve crowding and provided opportunities for recreation to those living near the park on Hartford’s east side. Residents of Hartford eagerly anticipated the opening of Riverside Park. Upon its opening “residents of the east side were out in full force dressed in their best clothes and all wore happy expressions on their faces. The number of baby carriages that were about the ground showed that the new grounds will be a blessing to the people of that section,” and the park provided an escape, “where those tired with labor might enjoy freedom and rest and the young have an outlet for youthful enthusiasm.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1907, nine years after the park’s opening, an article titled “Hartford’s Busiest Park: always something to do at the riverside, where special provision is made for the children ” was published in the *Hartford Courant*. According to the article, Riverside remained a “paradise for the children of the East Side” [2]and provided “amusements for young and old.”<sup>2</sup> The park was used for many events, including water sports, performances, and ‘Circus’ Day. A swimming pool was later added to the park that is no longer extant.

Several changes were made to the park beginning in the 1940s. Dikes were built along the river in the 1940s following the 1936 flood and 1938 hurricane. These edge the riverside walk leading towards the city of Hartford today. During the 1960s, Interstate 91 was built to the west of the park, resulting in the loss of Water Street and truncating the park in this direction where a parkway had originally been proposed but never built.

In 1981, the Riverfront Recapture program was initiated. The program was intended to transform “the Riverfront from an overgrown area that was walled off by flood dikes and cut off by Interstate 91 into four public parks connected by river walks.”<sup>3</sup> Floating docks were installed at Riverside Park to facilitate expansion of a community rowing program in 1989. A landscaped platform was built over Interstate 91 to provide access to Riverside Park in 1990. In 1993, planning was initiated to establish a riverwalk connecting downtown Hartford with Riverside Park. New lighting, picnic areas, riverside walks, and parking were also added to the park that year. In 1994, a new entrance road was built to the park and planning was initiated for a new boathouse at the park. By 1999, pedestrian access between the downtown and the park was completed. The boathouse and associated boat launch were also completed during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Trails were improved to allow visitors to enjoy the floodplain forest in 2014.

**REFERENCES**

The Cultural Landscape Foundation. City of Hartford Parks System. Available at [tclf.org/landslides/city-hartford-parks-system](http://tclf.org/landslides/city-hartford-parks-system).

Hartford History Center.

Riverfront Recapture. “History.” Available at <https://riverfront.org/history/>.

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<sup>1</sup> “Riverside Park Opened to the Public On Saturday,” *The Hartford Daily Courant*, 5 Sept. 1898, 8–9.

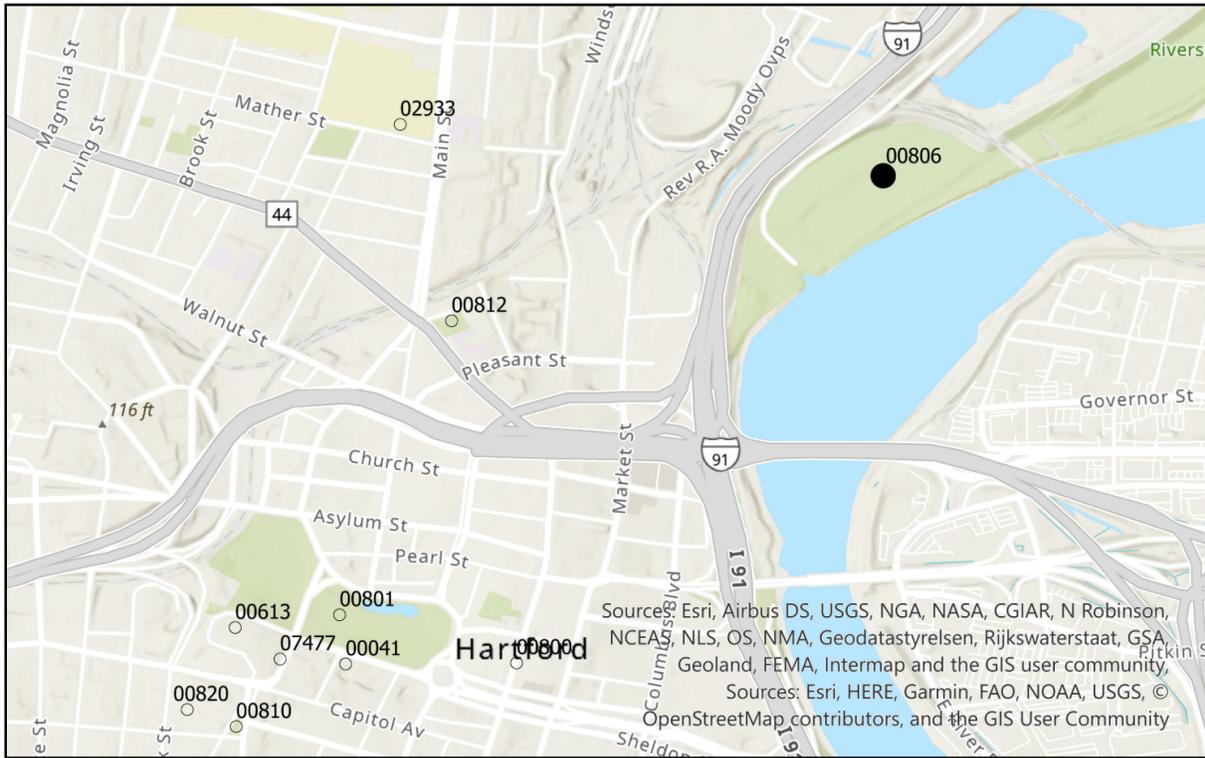
<sup>2</sup> “Hartford’s Busiest Park: Always Something to Do at Riverside, Where Special Provision Is Made for the Children.” *The Hartford Courant*, 27 July 1907.

<sup>3</sup> “Riverside Park,” *Riverside Recapture*, 1 June 2021. Available at <https://riverfront.org/riverside-park/>.

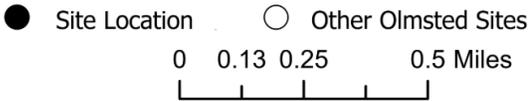
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**GRAPHICS**

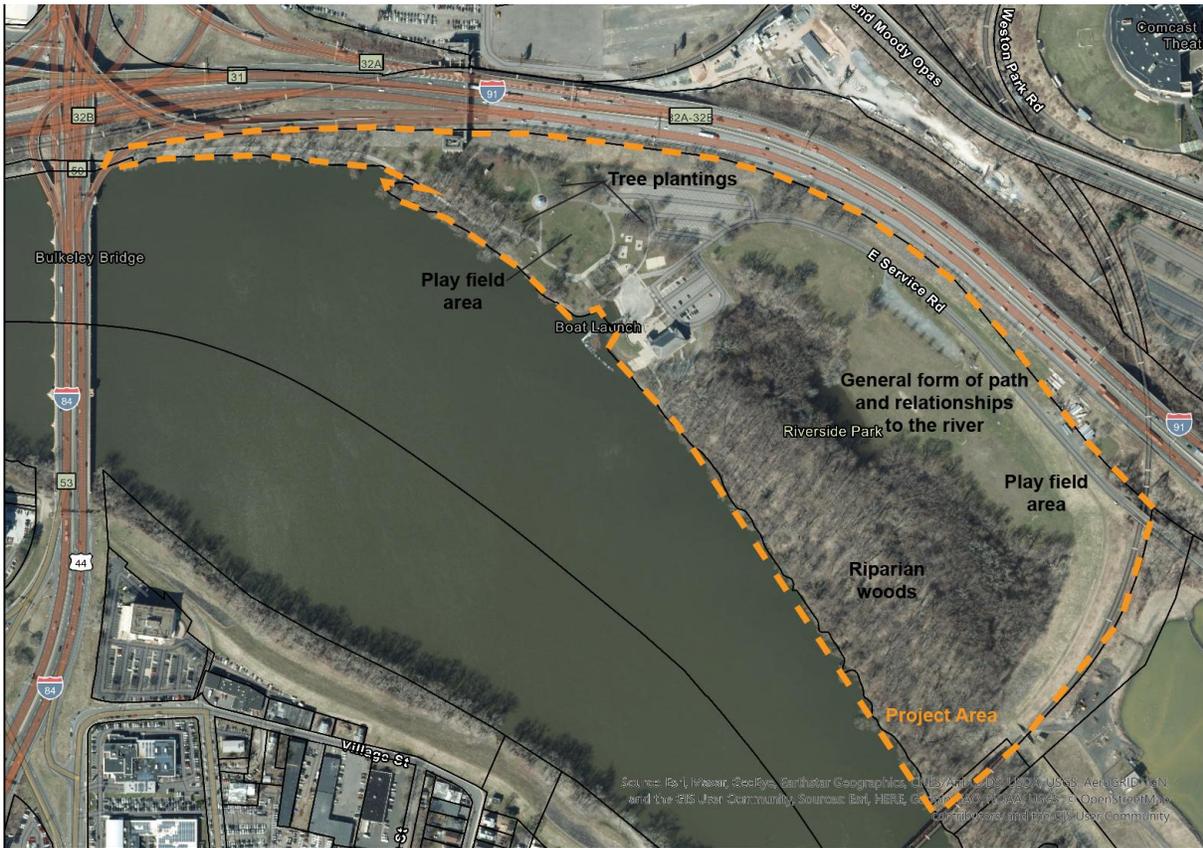


JOB: 00806 LOCATION: Hartford



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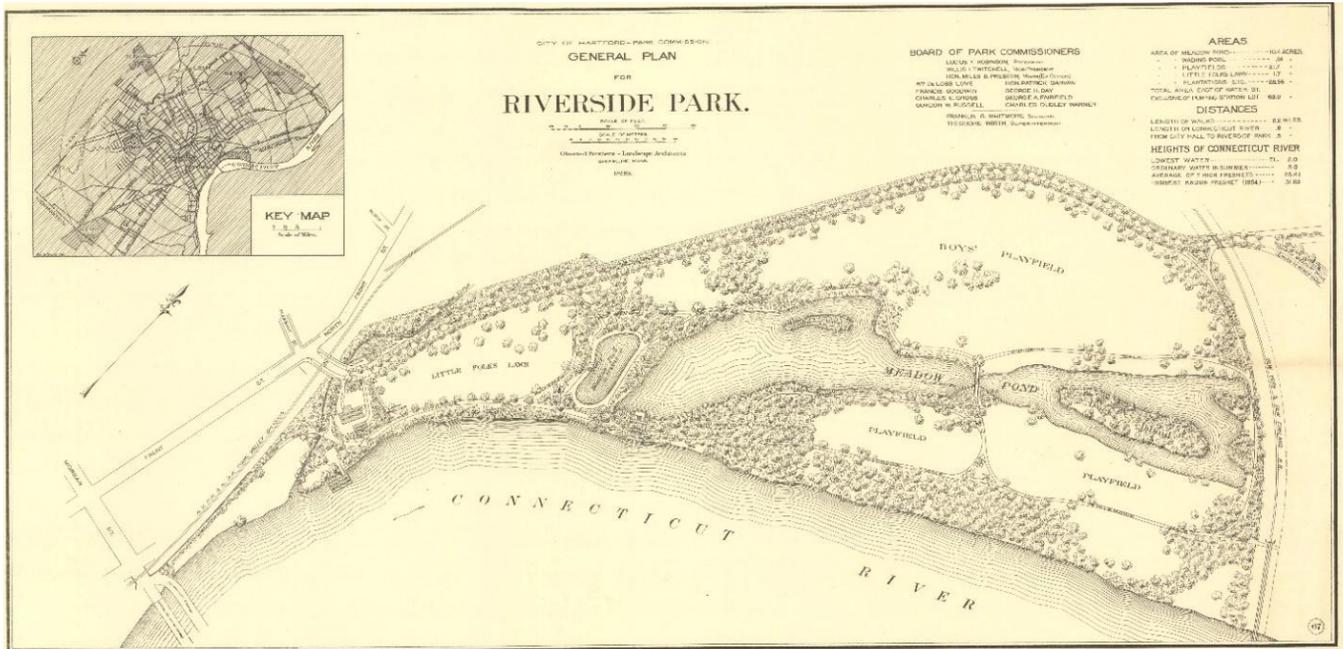


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General Plan for Riverside Park, 1899, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)

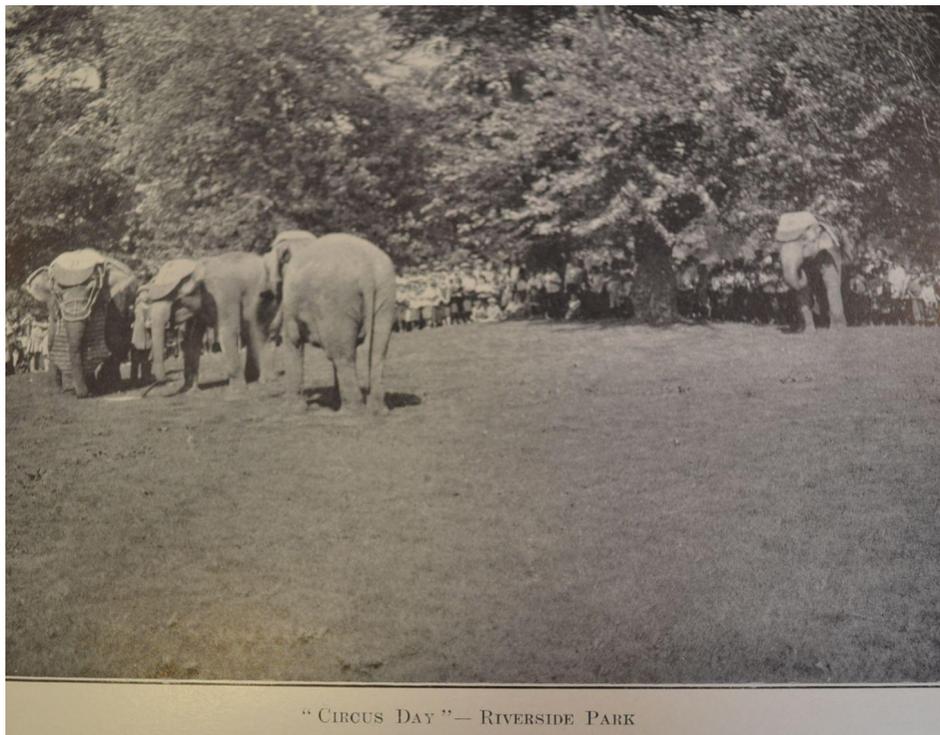


Water sports at Riverside Park, ca. 1916. (Source: Board of Park Commissioners Annual Report)

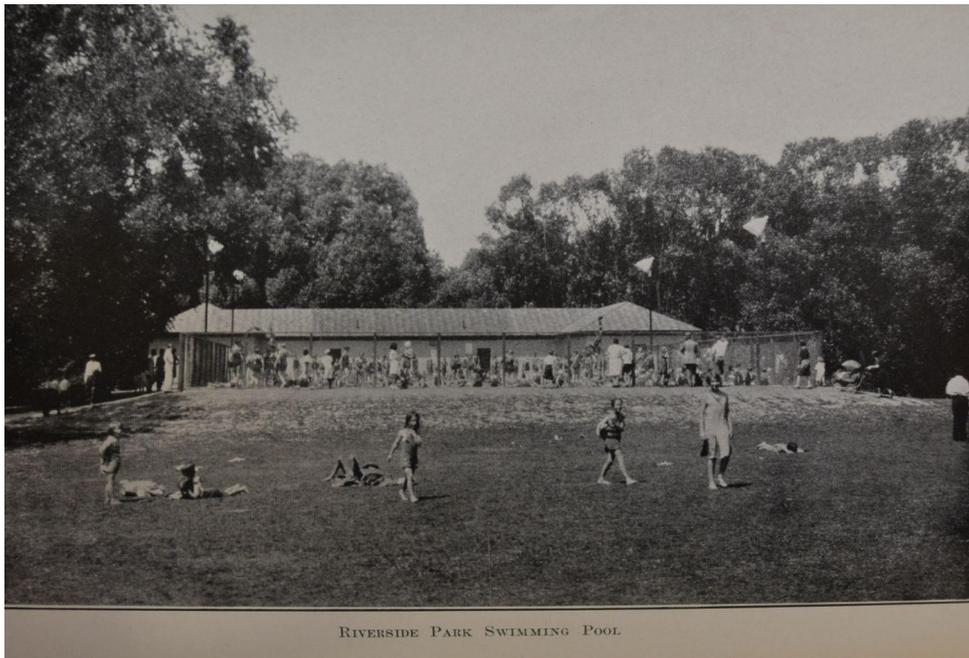
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Children playing in the wading pool, ca. 1922. (Source: Board of Park Commissioners Annual Report)



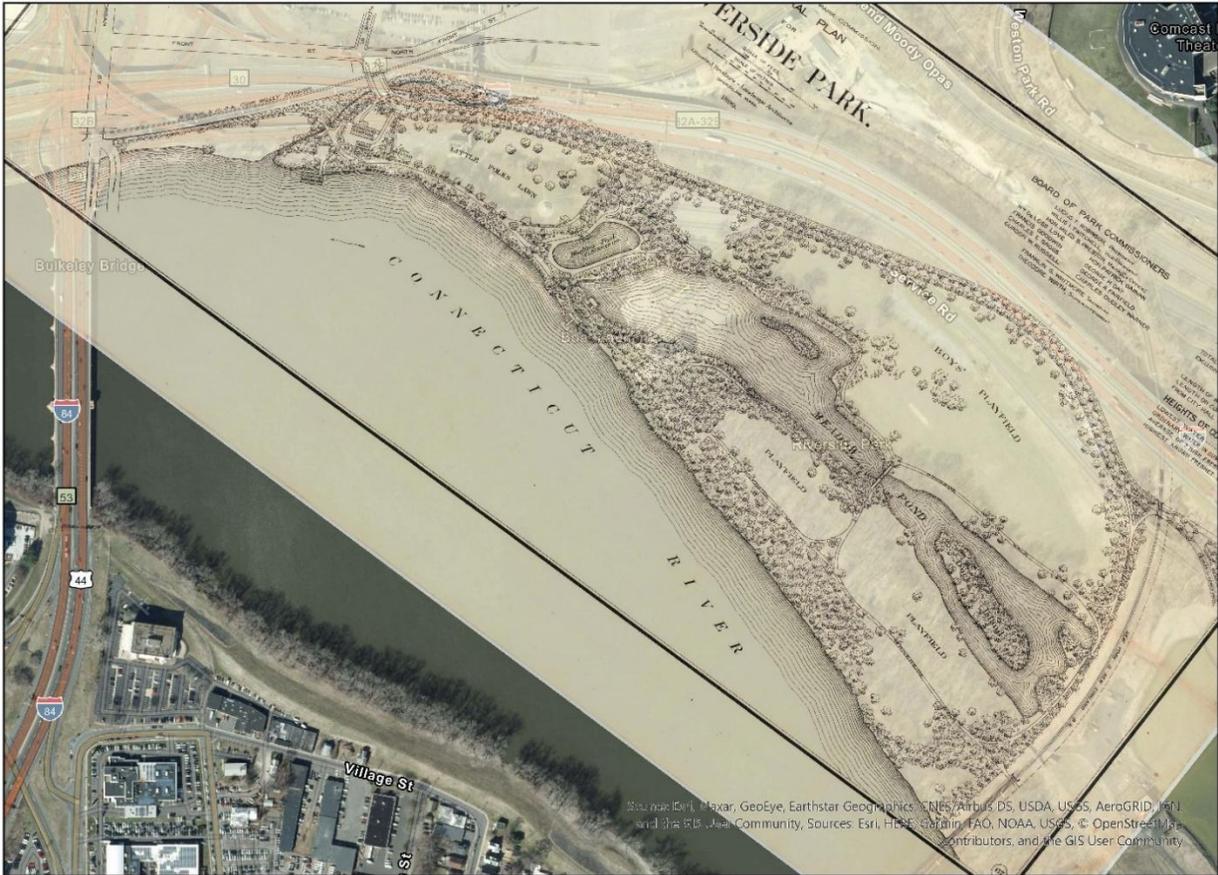
Circus day at Riverside Park, ca. 1923. (Source: Board of Park Commissioners Annual Report)



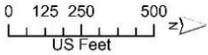
View of the Riverside Park swimming pool, ca. 1929. (Source: Board of Park Commissioners Annual Report)

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Aerial photograph overlaid with the 1899 plan by Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: Kevan Klosterwill)



View northeast across the open space and fields at the northern end of the park. (All photographs taken by authors in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View south toward the open grass field and trees with playground equipment in the southern section of the park.



View southeast toward the boathouse from the access road.



View east of the boat launch area along the river east of the boathouse.



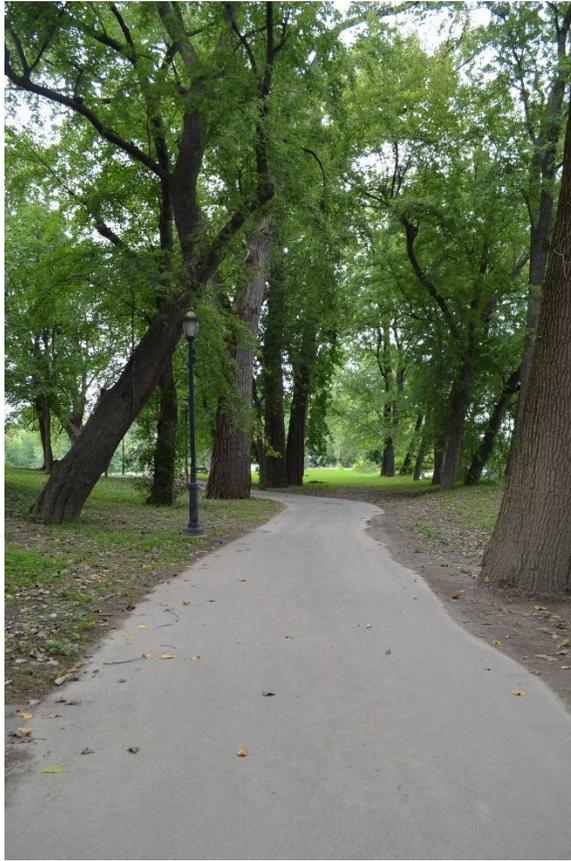
View northeast across the open space and fields from the overlook.



View south to the Interstate 84 bridge crossing of the Connecticut River with downtown Hartford beyond.



View southwest along the riverside walk edged by stone walls and flood control structures.



View northeast along the walk that extends through the river floodplain forest.