

**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) Seaside Park / Seaside Park		
<b>COUNTY</b> Fairfield	<b>TOWN/CITY</b> Bridgeport	<b>VILLAGE</b>
<b>JOB NUMBER</b> <b>Primary:</b> 12021 <b>Related Job Numbers:</b> 00691		
<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> 1867-91 <b>SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS:</b>		

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**DESIGNER(S) (primary)**

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

**Other Designers (prior to or following Olmsted project):** Oliver and Elizabeth Bullard (father, daughter) and P. T. Barnum

**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
- Springfield, Massachusetts, NPS archives
- Other: National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Seaside Park (1982)

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

Surviving features resulting from the Olmsted and Vaux design work include: Original primary divided entrance at Broad and Main Street; Second entrance at Park Avenue; Separate curvilinear circulation system for vehicles and pedestrians; Grove of large deciduous trees at the heart of the original park bounded by Grove Road on the north and Monument Drive; Views and vistas of Long Island Sound from Soundview Drive with pullouts, the largest associated with Park Point, Two "Greens" are extant, as they were labeled on an early plan—one is bounded by Monument Drive and Soundview Drive and at the north end by Grove Road, the other is within the large grass field with the concert shelter between Waldemere Avenue and Soundview Drive.

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To quote renowned Olmsted scholar, Charles Beveridge, Seaside is “the first park that Olmsted [Sr] and [Calvert] Vaux designed outside of metropolitan New York . . . , which they planned in 1867 on a site between P. T. Barnum’s mansion ‘Waldemere’—later taken down after the construction next door of his fourth and final home called “Marina”—and Long Island Sound. Nearly two decades later, Olmsted returned to design Beardsley Park, making Bridgeport the only city of its size for which he created more than a single park.” Although along the shore, Olmsted and Vaux included their signature meadows and groupings of large trees for the experience of dappled light and shade and the views and vistas they provided in contrast to the open vistas of the sea. The eastern divided entrance with Broad and Main joining to become Soundview Drive in the park is a signature, and original design element that survives from the earliest period of development.

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	<b>COUNTY</b> Fairfield	<b>TOWN/CITY</b> Bridgeport	<b>VILLAGE</b>											
	<b>STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location)</b> Waldemere Avenue, Barnum Boulevard, Soundview Drive													
	<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													
	<b>LAT/LONG COORDINATES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Center Point <input type="checkbox"/> Polygon 41.161994 / -73.188489													
	<b>PARCEL INFORMATION</b> Acres: 325                      PID(s): 2844                      MBLU(s): 9/ 422 /1 / /													
	<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) 1881-1891 Olmsted Research Guide Online													
	<b>DESIGNERS</b> (Entities that created, designed, constructed, or shaped the landscape) Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., Calvert Vaux, Oliver and Elizabeth Bullard, P. T. Barnum													
	<b>DESIGN SCOPE</b> (For designed landscapes, explain what work was commissioned) A city park along the tidal shore of Long Island Sound with walks, drives, meadows with groups of trees.													
	<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 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 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 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 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>
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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: Introduction of bandshell, ballfields, art/sculpture. Additional shoreline and land west of core park.		
	<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 checked="" 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) A 2.5-mile crescent-shaped park along the Long Island Sound. Olmsted and Vaux work at eastern end.		
	<b>VEGETATION</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maintained Open Land <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural Open Land <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland/Forest <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wetland <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specimen Plants <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other – specify: water view and edge		
	<b>SLOPE</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level/Nearly Level <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Slope <input type="checkbox"/> Steep Slope                      Elevation (ASML): 11'		
	<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: Sited dominated by well-drained smoothed Udorthents soils.		
<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.) The first park that Olmsted and Vaux designed outside metropolitan New York and only sea-side park.		
	<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: Nomination needs to be updated with current information confirming Olmsted/Vaux work.		
	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, HLA	<b>ORGANIZATION</b> Red Bridge Group	<b>DATE</b> December 2021
	<b>ADDRESS</b> 2100 Green Street, San Francisco, CA 94123		
	<b>PHOTOGRAPHER</b> Lucy Lawliss	<b>DATE</b> Sept 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:** The original Seaside Park was a composition of gently curving paths and drives along the edge of Long Island Sound. The interior of the park is noted by lawn and shade trees, while the edge is open to the sea view and air.

**Circulation:** Soundview Drive was the way carriages and now cars circle along the water's edge with separate paths for walking. Both systems are paved.

**Topography:** The park is flat with a low area in the center of a large meadow that tends not to drain well after heavy storms.

**Plantings/Vegetation:** Most of the vegetation are shade trees that either line interior circulation paths or are planted singly and in clusters for shade and dappled light.

**Views & Vistas:** The primary views are out across Long Island Sound with secondary interior views along circulation paths to areas in the park.

**Drainage:** A bowl that tends to hold water was created when land was lifted along the sea edge (date TBD) to prevent flooding. No major drainage structures seen in the park, which suggests that most storm water is handled by sheet flow.

**Buildings/Structures/Objects:** The National Register nomination does a good job of listing the many historic sculptures in the park. The buildings, both historic and contemporary are located outside the Olmsted and Vaux area of the park (eastern zone).

**Recreational Space:** The park was created for passive recreation—walks and drives along the coast. But active recreation has been added in the form of a major ballfield and a bandshell for outdoor concerts.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

The development of Seaside Park in Bridgeport reflects the confluence of post-Civil War city planning and the leadership of three of the era's well-known figures – P.T. Barnum, famed creator of the Barnum and Bailey Circus and a resident of Bridgeport, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Calvert Vaux.

Today the park, located along the Long Island Sound shore, encompasses approximately 300 acres stretching in a crescent shape along 2½ miles of waterfront.

The public's interest in a park was cultivated by a series of editorials in the *Bridgeport Standard* in 1864 and 1865. In light of the city's growth in population and businesses, the newspaper advised "there ought to be no time lost in making those great public improvements, which not only add to the attractions of a place, but are essentially necessary for the comfort, enjoyment, and health of the population."<sup>1</sup>

By the winter of 1865, Barnum, who was already involved in planning for other areas of the city, worked with colleagues to persuade property owners of the South End waterfront to donate their land for a public park. The *Bridgeport Standard* reported in August of 1865 that the newly formed parks commission "hired a gentleman (Olmsted) from New York who was prominent in designing Central Park to assist in preparing a

<sup>1</sup> "Public Parks," *Bridgeport Standard*, October 1, 1864

CONTINUATION SHEET Seaside Park (#12021) / Waldemere Ave, Barnum Blvd, Soundview Dr, Bridgeport

plan for Seaside Park.”<sup>2</sup> Two years later, an article directly named Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux as the park’s planners.<sup>3</sup>

Seaside Park represents the first work of Olmsted and Vaux beyond the borders of New York City. “While an article from *Bridgeport Standard* in 1867 discusses the team’s design report and an atlas plan shows the area, there are no surviving drawings, plans or correspondence. It would also seem that both father and daughter—Oliver and Elizabeth Bullard—worked with the Olmsted at several of their parks, including Beardsley and there is every reason to think that they assisted with Seaside Park, too.

In his autobiography, Barnum recalled planning for the original 44-acre site: “At the beginning, the park on paper and the park in reality were two different things.” Barnum describes the creation of driveways and walkways, construction of a seawall, and planting trees. Although no correspondence has been found between Barnum and Olmsted, Barnum’s recollection that he “aided and advised in all important matters in the laying out and progress of the new park,” infers collaboration on the project.<sup>5</sup>

Continued expansion over the years brought the park to a total of approximately 300 acres. Barnum, who developed his own estate “Waldemere” in c. 1869, immediately north of the park in, was responsible for some of the additional acreage, including a 33-acre salt marsh which required enclosure through construction of a massive dyke. Today there are three differing character areas in the east, central and western sections of the park.

The eastern section is the earliest part of the park and was the focus of Olmsted and Vaux’s work. An 1867 article in the *Bridgeport Standard* describes features of Olmsted’s plan including “a wall constructed along the shore and a broad drive and walk,” unification of the “approaches from Main and Broad Streets...in one central entrance,” and preservation of the “existing grove...to form a nucleus for the general scheme.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic is the same design used by Olmsted in Central Park.<sup>7</sup>

The National Register of Historic Places nomination describes Seaside Park’s design: “(the park) deliberately capitalizes on the pleasing, harmonious qualities of its site: the view of Long Island Sound and the accompanying fresh sea breezes. The clusters of carefully spaced shade trees, interspersed with open, flowing greens overlooking the water, combine to produce a setting that is orderly yet pleasing to the senses, and above all, serene. Such an ambience, central to the “beautiful” mode of expression of 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape, remains extremely well preserved in the eastern section of Seaside Park.”<sup>8</sup>

The Olmsted and Vaux designed eastern section reflects the late 19<sup>th</sup> century expectations that parks were for passive recreation. Rather than including athletic areas such as tennis courts or ball fields, the park was designed for walking, biking, horseback riding, carriage riding, and gatherings.

Within a few years of its creation, the park became a destination for a multitude of gatherings such as church outings, veterans’ reunions, school picnics, and concerts. Newspapers throughout the area regularly reported on these events: “A couple of busloads of pupils and friends of the school...enjoyed a picnic at Bridgeport’s beautiful Seaside Park last week at the close of school,”<sup>9</sup> “Company I Veterans – About Sixty Taking Part in their Seaside Park Excursions,”<sup>10</sup> “Second Light Battery – Their Eighteenth Annual Reunion Held at Seaside

<sup>2</sup> Article, *Bridgeport Standard*, August 18, 1865.

<sup>3</sup> Article, *Bridgeport Standard*, August 15, 1867.

<sup>4</sup> Olmsted Legacy Trail, [www.olmstedlegacytrail.com/seasidepark](http://www.olmstedlegacytrail.com/seasidepark), accessed January 6, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> *Struggles and Triumphs*, P.T. Barnum, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> “Seaside Park,” National Register of Historic Places, Alison Gilchrist, Connecticut Historical Commission, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Olmsted Legacy Trail, [www.olmstedlegacytrail.com/seasidepark](http://www.olmstedlegacytrail.com/seasidepark), accessed January 6, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> “Seaside Park,” National Register of Historic Places, Alison Gilchrist, Connecticut Historical Commission, 1982.

<sup>9</sup> *The Newtown Bee*, Newtown, Connecticut, July 4, 1890.

<sup>10</sup> “Company I Veterans,” *The Meriden Daily Journal*, Meriden, Connecticut, June 18, 1889

**CONTINUATION SHEET Seaside Park (#12021) / Waldemere Ave, Barnum Blvd, Soundview Dr, Bridgeport**

Park Yesterday,”<sup>11</sup> “The Seth Thomas Clock Company, Thomaston, are making arrangements to give their employees, numbering 300 or 400, a clambake at Seaside Park, Bridgeport,”<sup>12</sup> “The pleasure steamer, Ivernia, will leave Robinson’s Wharf, Fair Haven, at 8:15 and Belle Dock at 9 o’clock. Returning, leave Seaside Park in time to reach New Haven at 5 o’clock...will give about three hours at Seaside Park.”<sup>13</sup>

**REFERENCES**

NPS - Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

Library of Congress – Olmsted Resources

Olmsted Research Guide Online

National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Seaside Park, 1982

Olmsted Legacy Trail, Connecticut ASLA, [www.olmstedlegacytrail.com](http://www.olmstedlegacytrail.com)

Charles E. Beveridge, Lauren Meier, and Irene Mills, editors. Frederick Law Olmsted: Plans and Views of Public Parks. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

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<sup>11</sup> “Second Light Battery,” *The Morning Journal-Courier*, New Haven, Connecticut, September 18, 1884.

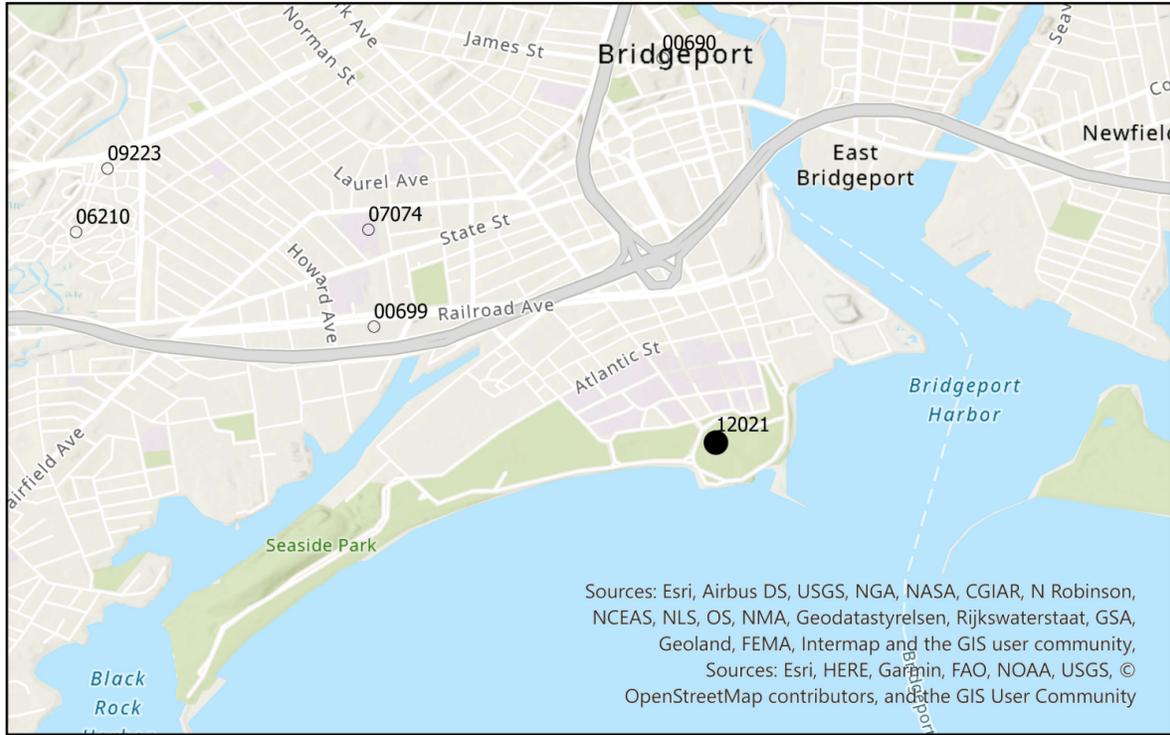
<sup>12</sup> *The Morning Journal-Courier*, New Haven, Connecticut, August 26, 1881.

<sup>13</sup> “Excursion Steamer Ivernia,” *The Morning Journal-Courier*, New Haven, Connecticut, July 3, 1886.

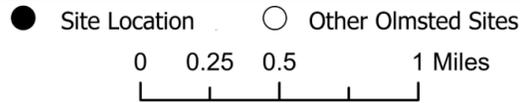
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CONTINUATION SHEET Seaside Park (#12021) / Waldemere Ave, Barnum Blvd, Soundview Dr, Bridgeport

**GRAPHICS**

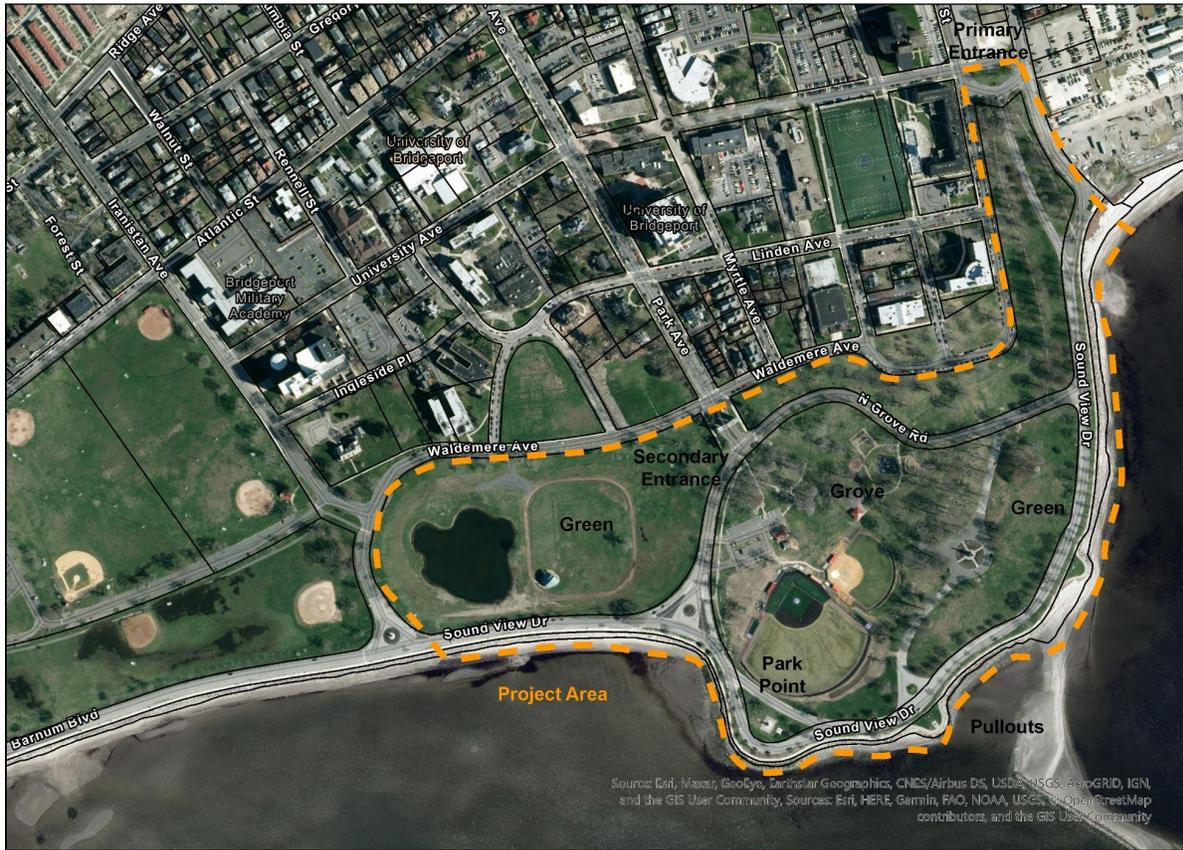


JOB: 12021 LOCATION: Bridgeport

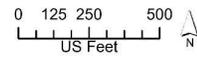


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CONTINUATION SHEET Seaside Park (#12021) / Waldemere Ave, Barnum Blvd, Soundview Dr, Bridgeport



JOB: 12021 LOCATION: Bridgeport PROJECT: Seaside Park



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CONTINUATION SHEET Seaside Park (#12021) / Waldemere Ave, Barnum Blvd, Soundview Dr, Bridgeport



View north along Park Avenue, one of the approaches to the park. (All photographs taken by author in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View east along Soundview Drive and Long Island Sound. Note clusters of trees on the landward side of the drive.



View looking north across park meadow to where P. T. Barnum's estate "Waldemere," stood. Site now owned by University of Bridgeport.



View looking south to Long Island Sound at one of the "points" that are illustrated on the early plans.



Looking west to Long Island Sound from Seaside Park at the intersection of Soundview Drive and Waldemere Avenue. Seated sculpture of P. T. Barnum occupies a planted circle at the intersection.



View looking south through Perry Memorial Arch to original area of the park by Olmsted and Vaux. Park Avenue continues from the right into the park. (Lawliss, 2021)



View looking south into park where Broad and Main Streets meet at Soundview Drive.



Detail of statue/fountain at the half circle where Broad and Main Streets meet at Soundview Ave.