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Olmsted Properties

Category

# Olmsted Properties



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Washington State Department  
of Enterprise Services

## Mission

We strengthen the business of government.

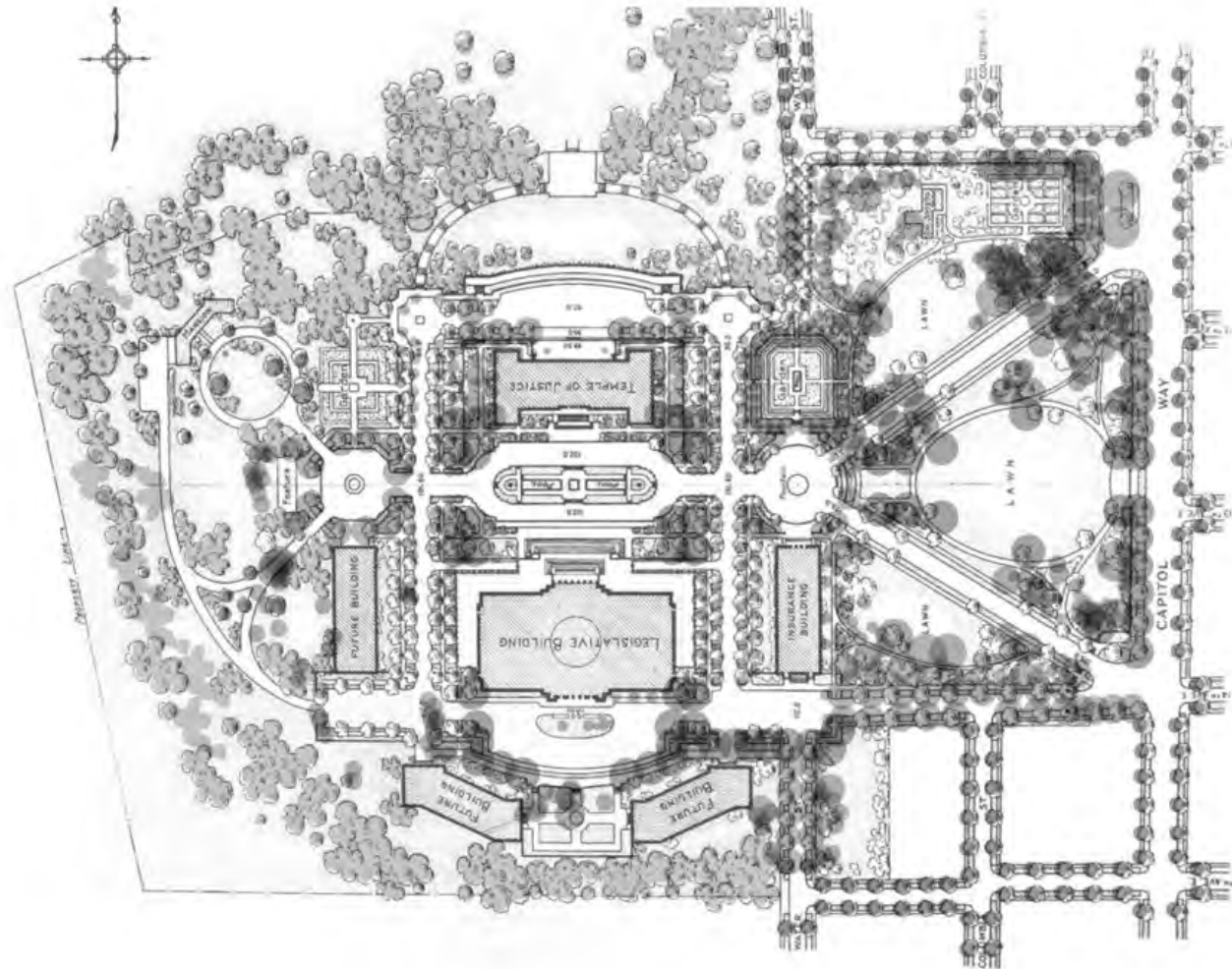
## Vision

We take an enterprise view of government operations and provide shared services, policy and governance for our customers so they can focus on their core missions.

## Capitol Campus Grounds Goals

- Provide a safe and welcoming experience for campus tenants and visitors
- Develop the historic west campus grounds based upon the Olmsted vision and principles
- Manage the grounds using current best management practices for sustainability and optimum plant health
- Prioritize campus areas for various standard levels of care
- Utilize available resources to achieve priorities
- Utilize a quality assurance program to guide resource allocation

# Original Master Plan



With the Legislative Building at the core, the plan utilized a concept of natural plantings around the perimeter of campus, with ever increasing landscape formality by the time a visitor entered the six-building governmental complex.

*The original 1928 John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. landscape master plan for the historic 54-acre State of Washington Capitol Campus*

This aerial photo captures several signature Olmsted elements – the Great Lawn oval, the two welcoming diagonal approach roads, curvilinear lines that progress to straight lines around the building complex, the traffic circle around the World War I Winged Victory Memorial and the classic, rectangular sunken garden.

*Capitol Campus image taken in 1938 from the northeast*



# Historic Landscape



# Historic Landscape

The original Olmsted plan called for three sunken gardens throughout the campus. However, only one sunken garden was installed due to the effects of the Great Depression on funding levels. The sunken garden design and layout utilizes classic formal European garden design elements – a sense of mystery created by a boxwood hedge, formal, straight lines and rectangular-shaped beds that contain a mix of annual and perennial plants. These plants yield a plethora of forms, colors and textures throughout three seasons of interest.

*Sunken Garden photo taken in 1965 from the northeast*



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## Current Master Plan

A landscape architecture firm specializing in historic landscape preservation was hired in 2009 to provide an updated assessment of the Capitol Campus landscape and create strategies for preserving and augmenting the historic Olmsted Brothers master plan to guide future landscape efforts.





# Current Landscape

Sports turf quality management of the classic Olmsted oval and surrounding Great Lawn is illustrated.

*Capitol Campus image taken in 2021 from the Legislative Building rotunda*

# Current Landscape



Funds were received to establish ADA access into and around the garden beds. This renovation of the sunken garden allowed for the original Olmsted path layout to be implemented for the first time since the establishment of the garden. Classic Victorian planting features such as vertical accent shrubs, phormium and seasonal color bowls on original pillars were also added during the renovation.

*Image of the historic Olmsted sunken garden taken in 2021 from the north*





# Landscape Quality

Spring seasonal interest is layered in a landscape bed in front of the Legislative Building. Overhead layer is flowering cherry, middle layer is bicolor daffodils and ground cover layer is pansy, all surrounded by a fresh layer of organic mulch.



# Landscape Quality

The Du Pen Fountain in front of the Pritchard Building is surrounded by new spring growth of bigleaf and Japanese maple leaves and rhododendron blooms. The sound of spouting and cascading water is a magnet for state employees and campus visitors alike. The pool is even visited frequently by Mallard ducks.

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# Landscape Quality



A late summer photo inside the historic Olmsted sunken garden shows crisp path edges, formally pruned boxwood hedges, informally pruned herbaceous perennials and freshly mulched flower beds.



A mid-summer photo in front of the Tivoli Fountain along Capitol Way shows a vibrant monochromatic color scheme created by New Guinea impatiens. The classic Olmsted turf oval and Great Lawn surround the fountain and color planting, with Olmsted specified trees forming a pleasant green background.

# Landscape Quality



# Olmsted Principles

The Olmsted Brothers specified a symmetrically designed landscape in front of the Temple of Justice Building in order to mirror the building architecture. When this landscape had to be renovated approximately 20 years ago, Olmsted principles were followed to maintain the original symmetry. High levels of diversity in plant form, color and texture were also utilized as diversity in plantings is another Olmsted principle.

# Olmsted Principles

This view of the Legislative Building from north diagonal road and Capitol Way showcases the Olmsted principles of utilizing both tree placement and layering to frame an important view. Recently planted smaller maturing trees compliment original site trees and trees planted 90 years ago as part of the original Olmsted planting design to achieve this layering and framing.



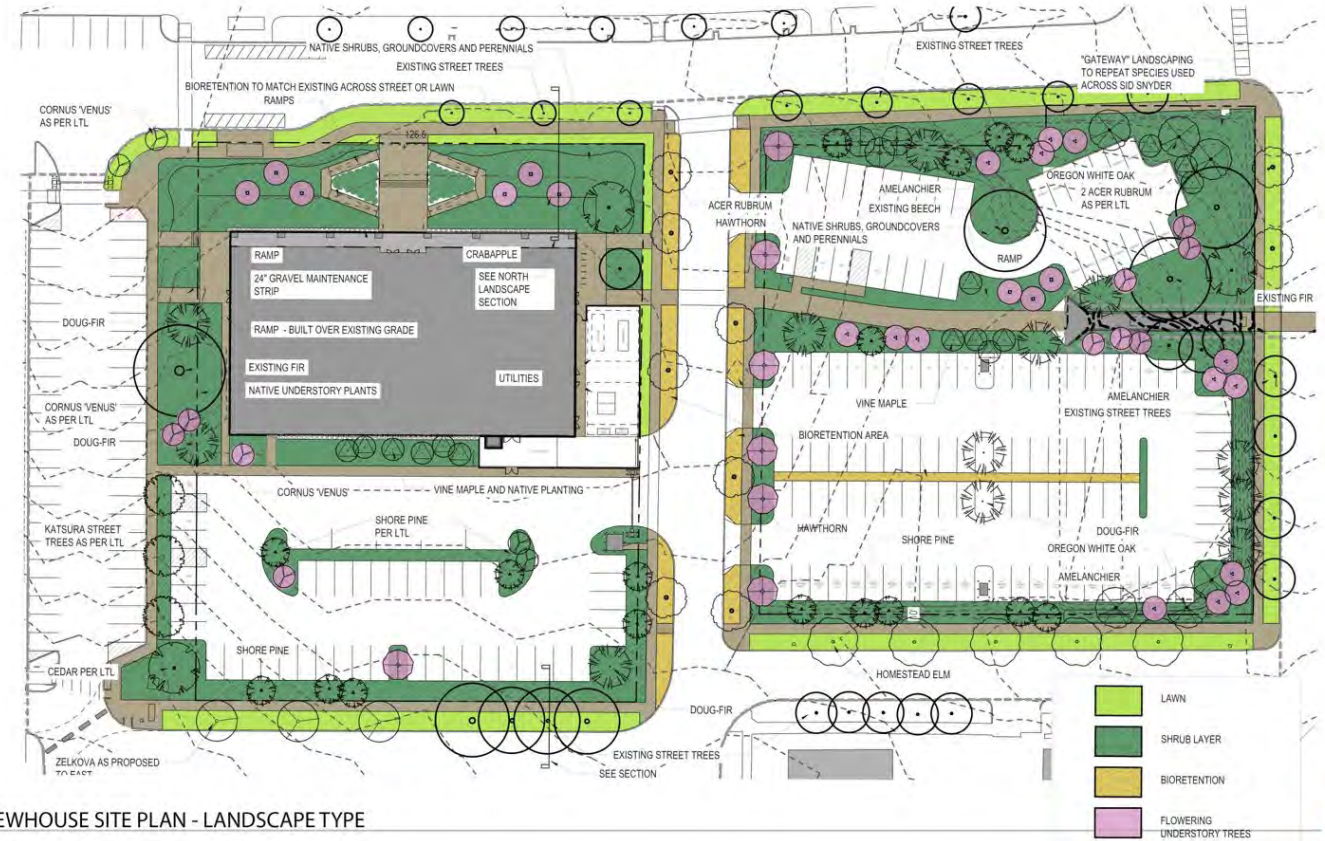
# Olmsted Principles

Shortly after the original Olmsted design plantings were starting to be installed in the late 1920s the Great Depression brought all intended plantings to a halt. Ninety years later the Grounds team has been able to develop new beds per the original Olmsted principles and design that create layers of trees, shrubs and grounds covers. Following another Olmsted principle, organically sculpted turfgrass areas create pockets of subspaces for different viewing experiences as one moves from Capitol Way, through the Great Lawn and towards the historic government buildings in the epicenter of campus.



# Olmsted Principles

The Department of Enterprise Services is developing plans to replace one of the buildings on campus that houses State Senators. The landscape architects that developed the landscape plan for this new building carefully reviewed the original Olmsted plan and principles to ensure that this new landscape integrated with the historic Olmsted landscape immediately to the north of this site. Examples of Olmsted principles incorporated include utilizing a diverse palette of plants, including many native species, layering trees, shrubs and grounds covers, creating a woodland edge, creating subspaces and framing different views as one moves through the landscape.





# Site Safety



Due to the age and site conditions of the historic sidewalks throughout the Olmsted landscape it is necessary to periodically grind a portion of the walks at expansion joints where the walks have shifted to eliminate potential tripping hazards. Note the darker color of the original exposed aggregate concrete that reflects the black pigment specified by the Olmsted brothers.

# Site Safety

Buildings and Grounds staff remove newly fallen snow to keep critical pedestrian pathways clear and safe so that the business of state government can continue nonstop.



# Challenges

Several of the original Capitol Campus trees that the Olmsted brothers retained in their landscape plan are reaching the end of their life cycle.

A consulting arborist was hired to design a support system for this elder bigleaf maple. This system, which is checked and adjusted periodically, has allowed this tree to provide its aesthetic and ecosystem services for the campus for many more years. A replacement tree was planted nearby a few years ago.



# Challenges

Due to favorable habitat on and around the Capitol Campus there are deer that pass-through campus almost every day. Deer protection fencing was installed to protect young trees such as this crabapple from deer grazing. A matt black color was selected for the fence to minimize visibility by people. These crabapple trees are thriving now thanks to this fencing.



# West Capitol Campus

Historic Landscape Preservation Master Plan

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The Department of Enterprise Services (General Administration at the time) contracted with Mithun and Arbutus Design, both specialists in historic landscape preservation and development, in 2009 to review the original Olmsted Brothers landscape plan for the Capitol Campus, assess current landscape conditions and create a document guiding future preservation and development of the original Olmsted Brothers design.



General Administration  
STATE OF WASHINGTON

MITHŪN

Arbutus Design

# Preservation & Authenticity



# Preservation & Authenticity

Classic Olmsted curvilinear walkways converge in three different locations around the Great Lawn to form what are referred to as “Olmsted Triangles.” The Olmsted Brothers specified a very unique tree to be planted in the center of each of these triangles. Rather than removing this weeping European white bark birch when it started to impact pedestrian traffic, the Grounds team strategically prunes the branches to continue to enhance its unique character, to allow for unimpeded pedestrian traffic and to honor the original Olmsted intent for this space. Pedestrians now get to pass through a tunnel of birch branches.

# Education & Training

The Department of Enterprise Services commissioned a trifold brochure outlining the history and significance of the Olmsted Brothers participation in the design of the Capitol Campus. Hard copies of the brochure are used to train new Grounds staff and campus tour guides. It is also available for campus visitors to pick up from the Capitol Campus Visitor Center. The same brochure is posted to DES's web page for anyone to assess for educational purposes.

## *Olmsted* and the Washington State Capitol

*“...the planting...should, if possible, be of the finest quality...confined to dignified masses...and not in any way be scattered or small in effect. ...the buildings are very large and of a splendid character, and...the planting ought to correspond...”*

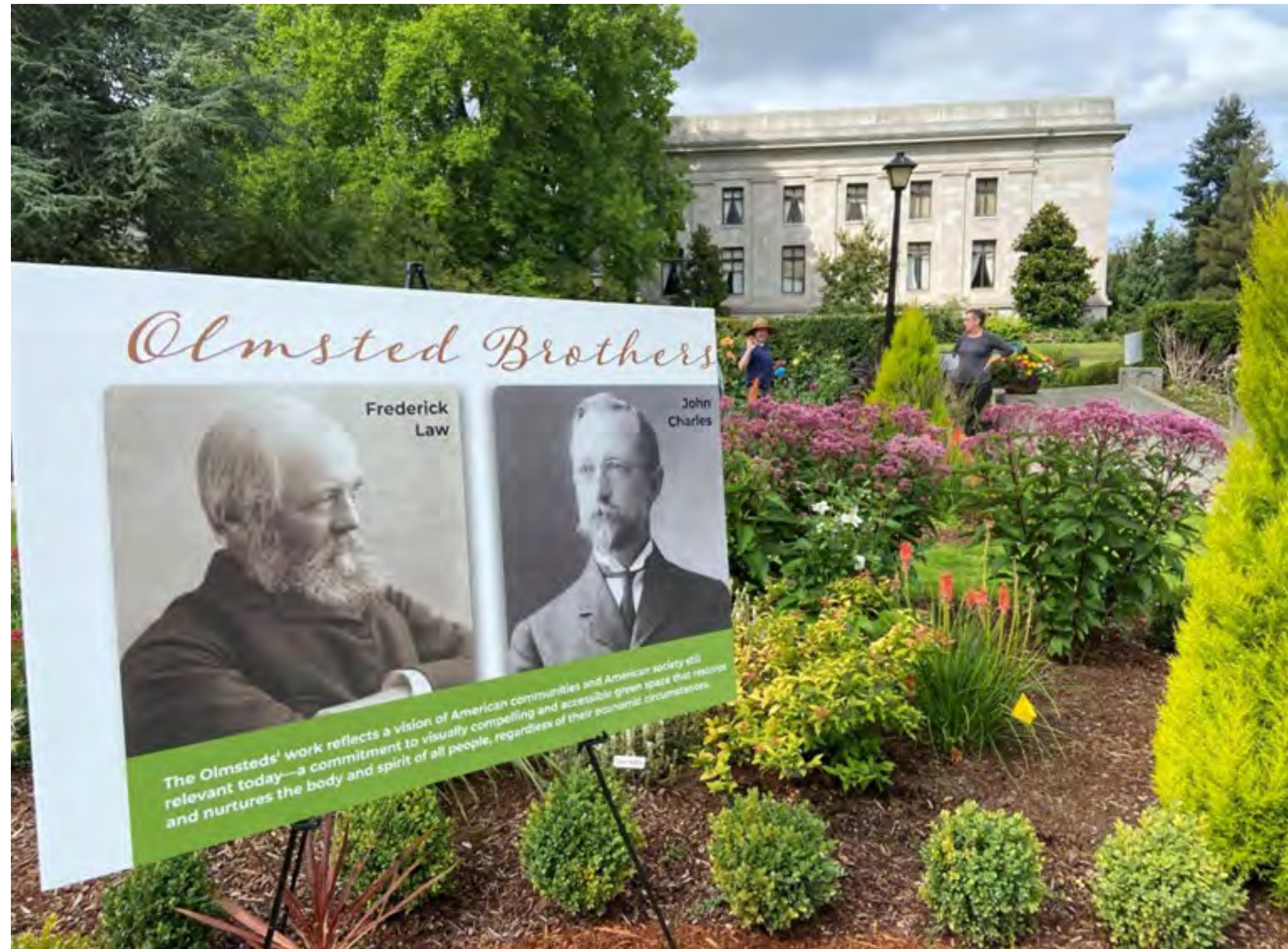
*James F. Dawson*  
JAMES FREDERICK DAWSON - APRIL 25, 1927

## The Landscape of the Capitol



The Department of Enterprise Services commissioned a large poster to display during various events on campus to educate the public on the Olmsted Brothers' legacy at the Capitol Campus. The poster is on display in this photo for the 2021 grand reopening of the historic sunken garden after ADA access and pathway upgrades and landscape bed renovations.

# Education & Training







# People in Charge

*Kevin Battin, Grounds Supervisor*  
*Dr. Brent Chapman, Horticulturist*



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