



10/6/2023

# Embrace Lake Wales Envisioned: A Model for the Nation

By Anne Neal Petri and Lucy Lawliss



Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. created the first zoning and building codes for the City of Lake Wales in 1930, after designing the city's street landscaping plan. Olmsted is famous as the world's premier landscape architect of his generation.

**Editor's Note:** This guest Commentary, offered by two distinguished scholars of the works of the father and son who shared the honored name of Frederick Law Olmsted, is the first of a series of guest editorials that will address the effort known as *Lake Wales Envisioned*.

A century ago, Lake Wales was in the news: The most famous landscape architect in America, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., was transforming one of Florida's highest points into Bok Tower Gardens, today a National Historic Landmark. As part of the firm's work in the area, they also consulted with the City of Lake Wales to shape a city in a garden. This month, city leaders are expected to review and vote on a revived Olmsted plan, *Lake Wales Envisioned*, to show how—in Florida and elsewhere—thoughtful zoning and planning that overlays an Olmsted-inspired approach can produce a thriving community that prioritizes mental and physical well-being and sustainable ecological health for all.

Current and future residents will not only find beautiful green infrastructure such as a system of parks, trails and greenways but also healthy economic development fostered by equitable design ideals that ensure residents-of all backgrounds and income levels- access to a walkable urban core, affordable housing and a variety of outdoor recreational and inspirational experiences.

In the 1920s, Olmsted, Jr., son of famed Central Park designer, collaborated with philanthropist Edward Bok and local leaders to upgrade city plans to create a community that would enhance public and civic well-being through the restorative qualities of thoughtful landscape and urban design.

Bok and Olmsted, whose picture graces a mural in downtown Lake Wales, understood the important role a thoughtfully designed environment plays in creating livable communities. This month, Lake Wales has the opportunity to reinvigorate these plans by Olmsted and anonymously funded by Edward Bok between 1925-1931 and extend this



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natural vision into the community which adjoins Bok’s magical nature sanctuary.

*Lake Wales Envisioned* will make official the city’s embrace of its Olmsted inheritance by adopting the key principles of Olmsted’s design: create an environment that builds a community where neighbors meet and share ideas, a landscape scenery that protects and promotes beauty along with mental and physical well-being and a park system of natural and designed landscapes that connect people to nature and each other. All these principles—and more—have been “Envisioned” in this new plan. *Lake Wales Envisioned* looks to a future where housing development of all types share complete streets—sidewalks, bike lanes, lighting, etc.—with commercial and learning nodes that are interspersed and easily accessed without a car. It offers a community where green infrastructure—parks, natural areas and greenways—can also serve as natural solutions to storm water management to create the healthiest and most sustainable environment.

The Olmsted Network has long partnered with Lake Wales Heritage and Bok Tower Gardens to promote the Olmsted legacy for future generations, and we were delighted to highlight this visionary plan during a recent national webinar, *Conversations with Olmsted: Stewarding Olmsted Parks & Places* (see below). Planning that prioritizes community, brings us together and promotes human and ecological health is the Olmsted way, and it is needed—now more than ever before!



CELEBRATING PARKS FOR ALL PEOPLE



Watch the full webinar **Conversations with Olmsted: Stewarding Olmsted Parks & Places** on YouTube.