Frederick Law Olmsted & Co. and the Linear Parks of Atlanta

Unless one has stopped, parked and stepped out of their car while driving down Ponce de Leon Avenue in Atlanta, then one has not seen the linear parks. It is only on a walk through the parks that they can be appreciated. This editor went on a two day walk through the parks to understand their purpose and beauty. And yes, there are parks – not just one. It is the hope of this writer that many will be inspired to do just that – take a walk!

It was mentioned in the last Landscape Newsletter that Frederick Law Olmsted was the first to use the term “Landscape Architect” and is considered as America’s preeminent landscape architect. He is well known for the designing of New York’s Central Park, the U.S. Capitol grounds and the grounds of Biltmore Estate. However, his work can be seen without leaving the state of Georgia.
To learn more about Olmsted, read Frederick Law Olmsted – Writings on Landscape, Culture, and Society, Charles E. Beveridge, editor published by The Library of America. In reading this, it is recognized that he lived in Victorian America but was very much a man of the 21st Century in his thoughts and ideas.

THE LANDSCAPE DESIGN PROCESS
(Credit to Stewards of the Land, A Survey of Landscape Architecture and Design in America published by National Garden Clubs, Inc.

1. INVESTIGATION AND DATA COLLECTION
2. ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION
3. SYNTHESIS AND DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
4. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

To learn more about the steps, see the above text. To develop a design, there must be a logical sequence of steps.

Central Park, NYC, an Olmsted Design
HISTORY OF THE LINEAR PARKS

In 1890, Joel Hurt, developer of the Kirkwood Land Company, persuaded F.L. Olmsted, Sr. to travel south to see the fifteen hundred acres of land that he had purchased in Atlanta. At the time, Olmsted was working on the Biltmore Estate grounds. Olmsted had presented a preliminary plan in 1893. The final plan was presented by his sons in 1905 two years after Olmsted, Sr. had passed away. His sons remained involved with the project until 1908.

The original plan was devised so that the visitor could enjoy the most scenic vistas while walking or riding through the park. (Originally a trolley ran through the park. Now there are only walking paths.)

The park consists of six segments; Virgilee, Oak Grove, Shadyside, Dellwood and Deepdene – all in the heart of Atlanta and Druid Hills. The most eastern park, Deepdene, is a wooded tract with a stream winding through its twenty-two acres. Deepdene is the property of Fernbank.

THE OLMS TED LINEAR PARK ALLIANCE

OLBA was founded in 1997. Since its founding, more than 9.5 million dollars has been raised through a master plan developed by the City of Atlanta, DeKalb County and Fernbank Inc. to insure the restoration and preservation of the park.

For more information on the parks and the alliance, search atlantaolmstedpark.org.
And now, take a visual tour through the Olmsted Linear Parks.

First, pictured are some of the signs that will let you know your location in the park. And then you will see maps along the way.
Winding Pathways and Vistas
Spend a day and read every sign. You will become a minor expert on Olmsted and these parks!
A Beautiful Stroll through the Park, Unusual Sightings and Taking a Break
Beautiful vistas were planned throughout the park by Olmsted.

Deepdene at the Eastern End of the Park