



November 18, 2015

Daniel Saunders, Administrator
Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
P.O. Box 420
501 East State Street, 4th Floor
Trenton, NJ 08625-0420

Dear Mr. Saunders,

On behalf of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) and The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), we write to express our organizations' deep concern about an imminent threat to Rahway River Park in Union County, New Jersey. Designed by Olmsted Brothers between 1921 and 1929, the 124-acre park is one of Union County's most significant cultural and historical resources. The Freeholders of Union County have recently proposed to expand an existing track and field within the park in order to create a new sports complex on the central lawn. The plan would adversely affect the park's historic design and transform a pastoral neighborhood haven into a venue for interscholastic spectator sports.

Rahway River Park is distinctive for the expansive views from its large central lawn, which is encircled by trees and tucked within a bend of the Rahway River. As I am sure you are aware, John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., established the Olmsted Brothers firm after the retirement of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., the "Founding Father" of American landscape architecture.

The new sports complex that Union County is proposing includes a 1,200-seat stadium for use primarily by Rahway High School's football team. The plan calls for the installation of stadium lighting, bleachers, and fencing, as well as a field house, restrooms, locker rooms, and a concession stand. The imposition of such a sports complex on the greensward would destroy the open sight lines that characterized Olmsted Brothers' original design, and would recast the park as a sports venue suited to a narrow constituency.

Finally and most notably, TCLF and NAOP are not alone in their assessment of the value of the park's historic design: In 1980, the deputy state historic preservation officer of New Jersey declared in writing the park's eligibility for listing in the New Jersey and the National Registers of Historic Places; and in 2002, the park was again declared eligible for listing in the National Register as one of six parks included within the Rahway River Parkway Historic District. Given the park's widely recognized historical and cultural significance, we urge you to bring the resources of your office to bear on this matter.

Sincerely,

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR
President + CEO, The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Piera Weiss
NAOP Administrator

Cc:

- Scott Aruta, Spokesperson, Coalition to Save Rahway River Park;
- Thomas Biro, President, New Jersey Chapter, American Society of Landscape Architects;
- Margaret Hickey, Vice President, Preservation New Jersey