April 14, 2022

The Olmsted Woods Restoration Plan

In this year celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of the visionary Frederick Law Olmsted, we recall the Cathedral Close was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., for whom the Woods are named. it is fitting, as we are the Stewards to all the gardens and grounds of the 57 acres of the Close, to put our efforts toward continuing reclamation of these five acres of urban forest.



The path through the woods is known as the 'Pilgrim Way'

The Woods are an historical treasure, a nature and wildlife preserve, an oasis of peace and beauty in the midst of our nation's capital. Pockets of

wildflowers continue to emerge where loyal volunteers have pulled out invasive ivy and garlic mustard, and spotting these ephemeral treasures uplifts the spirits of regular walkers or casual visitors. Creatures from chipmunks to deer call the Woods home.



A Nodding Trillium in bloom



Mayapples



Garlic Mustard must be diligently removed

More than two decades ago, All Hallows Guild embarked on an ambitious program to reclaim Olmsted Woods from depredations of time, erosion, soil compaction from foot traffic, and invasive species. Water control devices, a paved path to direct walkers away from the tree roots, and drainage improvements helped the Woods recover well.



Erosion in the Olmsted Woods ravine



Stones placed for drainage



Invasive ivy has been pulled and bagged

Now, with ever-increasing runoff from additional hardscape and even climate change including pounding rainstorms, there is a renewed threat.



Erosion in the ravine



Erosion near Pilgrim Road



Erosion at the hill between Sayre House and the Facilities building

In the last two years both a topographical survey and a tree survey and tree health assessment have been completed in order to have complete baseline information for the next stage of Woods reclamation.



Survey markings in the Olmsted Woods



Tree marked during the survey

The Guild has commissioned Andropogon Landscape Architects and Meliora Engineers to determine how the previously installed drainage measures are functioning and see what additional safeguards are needed. We have made two more requests:

• An appropriate design for the Woods end of the removed Woodland Bridge for safety and to create a pleasing resting spot;

• An investigation into the possibility of a horticulture yard including plant storage, mulch storage, and a leaf shredder, convenient to the Facilities Building.

Nothing in nature is static, and it is our mission to find ways to halt the damage and prevent future problems. This Woods project is a huge undertaking to preserve this wonderful asset that was so carefully integrated into our dense urban landscape.



Downed trees in the Olmsted Woods ravine



Virginia Bluebells, *Mertensia virginica*, blooming throughout the woods – April 2022



Eastern Redbud trees add a splash of color to the woods in springtime