

THE **ARCHITECTS** NEWSPAPER

A GREENER EDGE

Massive parks system takes shape in Louisville.



A PROPOSED BRIDGE TRAVERSING THE CREEK BASIN.
COURTESY WRT

Like most cities, growth in Louisville, KY continues to push out to the city's suburban fringe, eating up undeveloped land surrounding the city. Recognizing the pristine farms and woodlands that would otherwise be developed into ubiquitous suburban housing tracts, a group of civic and business leaders headed up by Dan Jones organized the non-profit 21st Century Parks in 2005 to undertake one of the nation's largest new park projects to protect over 3,700 acres of prime land along a winding watershed. The so-called Parklands of Floyds Fork will encompass four large,

distinct parks—each named for a tributary to the waterway—designed by Philadelphia-based landscape architects WRT, formerly Wallace Roberts & Todd.

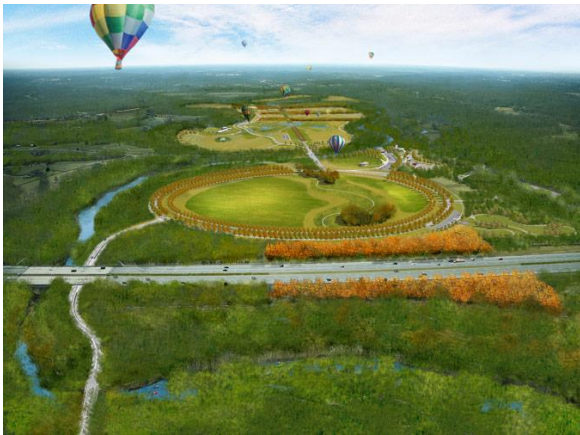
Building off a rich parks legacy in Louisville that brought about three large parks and dozens of smaller projects a century earlier by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and his successors, The Parklands hopes to redefine the fringe conditions of a growing city. “This park is similarly developed on the fringe as were the Olmsted parks,” said WRT Principal Ignacio Bunster-Ossa. Since then, the area surrounding Olmsted’s parks has filled in. “Where will Louisville be in 100 years?”



A WALKING PATH IN THE WETLANDS OF BROAD RUN PARK(LEFT); A TREE-LINES PATH AROUND THE EGG LAWN (CENTER); THE SILO ADVENTURE CENTER AT TURKEY RUN PARK (RIGHT).

Construction began this May, and the \$113 million project’s first phase, the 616-acre Beckley Creek Park, includes plans for a 23-acre tree-lined “egg lawn” and an axial tree-lined promenade providing structure to woodlands, meadows, wetlands, and recreational fields. “The Fork is a wonderful meandering feature, but the valley itself doesn’t have dramatic power in and of itself,” said Bunster-Ossa. “We had to create a series of places that are distinctive to reveal the drama of the landscape.” The promenade forms a rigid line across the rolling landscape to reveal the subtleties of the landscape’s changing contours. Angular pavilions and auxiliary structures designed by local architecture firm Bravura are distributed throughout the park. The first phase will be completed in 2013, and following phases will be complete in 2015.

Floyds Fork is a narrow stream in a very wide flood plain, but the site’s topography can vary up to 200 feet in height as the fork slices through steep hills and limestone cliffs. While this creates challenges for park management, it also means that much of the land surrounding the park is unbuildable under current codes.



AERIAL VIEW OF THE GRAND ALLEE (TOP); A VIEW OF THE EGG LAWN AND BECKLEY CREEK PARK (ABOVE, LEFT); AND A BRIDGE OVER FLOYDS FORK (ABOVE, RIGHT).

With a perimeter of nearly 50 miles, the park will undoubtedly spur increased suburban development, but 21st Century Parks incorporated their masterplan into Louisville's comprehensive plan, Cornerstone 2020, distinguishing design guidelines for the area. Structures built along the park's perimeter roads must face the park and street trees must be incorporated into the design, among other requirements. "A city has both a core and an edge," Jones said. "You can't ignore the edge condition."

The Parklands' operations and maintenance will be funded by a private endowment that is looking beyond traditional investments in stocks and bonds. The endowment acquired three ailing, partially developed, adjacent subdivisions—ranging from 30 to 600 acres—during the economic downturn and plans to adapt their designs to create a model subdivision that will take into account aesthetics, connectivity, density, and environmental protection. "We are interested in exploring what a model subdivision means," Jones said. "We would like to find ways to create neighborhoods that are beautiful and done in a way that's sensitive to the landscape." No firm design guidelines have yet been established, but Jones hopes both the park and the model subdivisions will guide future growth in the area.

“We have a big concern about how the city grows around The Parklands,” Jones said. “This project gives Louisville an opportunity to do planning at the city’s edge.”

Branden Klayko