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Greenway planning in the United States: its origins and recent case studies

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Abstract

The thesis of this paper is that the origin of greenway planning goes back to the beginning of the landscape architecture profession in the United States. This thesis is substantiated below through an extensive literature review. It describes three phases of this evolution of planning which started with Frederick Law Olmsted's Boston's Emerald Necklace, the planning of this Boston Park System by Frederick Law Olmsted, during the late 19th century and by Charles Eliot, a pupil of Olmsted. The second phase of this evolution was during the early 20th century. This time, Olmsted's sons and Eliot's nephew expanded the work of Olmsted and Eliot. The third phase of this greenway evolution reviewed here was by Phil Lewis, Ian McHarg and others during the post-World War II decades, also known as the environmental decades. Interestingly, all planners of these first three phases of greenway planning were landscape architects.

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After describing the origin of greenway planning in America, the paper traces the beginning of greenway planning during the 1980s and 1990s, and summarizes the greenway literature of these two decades. The result of this literature review concludes that while the greenway movement has resulted in thousands of greenway plans and projects in the USA, it produced only a small amount of publications, which are placed in research libraries. Unfortunately, the greenway reports of greenway projects are published for limited distribution and only a handful of these reports become part of "scholarly literature". Secondly, the greenway reports seldom include relevant literature review or descriptions of the study methodology. Hence, their research and educational value is limited.

The second part of the paper describes two current greenway plans in the United States. Both of these plans were initiated and done at the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts. The author served as co-director of both of these plans. The first plan is a vision plan for the New England region, which consists of six states in the Northeast corner of the United States. This plan was prepared for the Centennial Conference of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1999. Its aim was to stimulate landscape architectural professionals to join the greenway movement. The second plan builds on planning efforts of the US governmental, non-governmental agencies and some visionary planners of the past century. Our team mapped all published greenways and greenspaces; then gathered recent proposals by governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and individuals. Finally, our team made additional proposals, which if implemented would result in an ideal network of greenways and greenspaces at the national level in the USA. This plan would protect all nationally significant and environmentally sensitive corridors and areas or green spaces. It would also provide the population of the United States with increased recreational opportunities and thirdly, it would restore all nationally significant historical and cultural greenway corridors.

In summary, the aim of this national vision plan was to show a plausible planning direction based on the principles of both, landscape and greenway planning. It illustrates the importance of planning greenways comprehensively. It calls for nature protection, for the development of appropriate recreational uses, and for the preservation and restoration of valuable historical/cultural resources. Not surprising, the vast majority of the nation's historical and cultural resources are within river corridors, which constitutes the framework for many greenways corridors. Greenway planning has, indeed, evolved as a planning tool of multipurpose greenway corridors at every scale and planning level, ranging from sites through municipal and regional to national levels.



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Keywords

Greenway planning; United States; New England

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