



**New Conservancy to be Launched to Manage, Preserve
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park**
Wilson Foundation formalizes \$10 million commitment for park's long-term sustainability

Buffalo, NY (Jan. 27, 2021) – The [Imagine LaSalle](#) project partners have announced their intent to form the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy. The Conservancy, in a public-private partnership with the City of Buffalo, will manage and preserve the future Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park, which is currently under development at the former LaSalle Park.

“A Conservancy management structure will continue the strong public engagement that has driven the Imagine LaSalle initiative since its inception. While Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park will draw tourists beyond Buffalo and Western New York, it is first and foremost a ‘people’s park’. The Conservancy’s board and sub-committee structure will guarantee the park’s neighbors and users have a long-term voice in its physical and programming offerings,” said Mayor Byron W. Brown.

In addition, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has formalized its commitment toward the long-term sustainability of the reimagined park with a \$10 million grant to establish the Ralph Wilson Park Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The fund’s annual payout will help to support the enhanced maintenance of the park, and will be in addition to the basic maintenance, permitting and security that will continue to be handled by the City of Buffalo.

“When we announced the Foundation’s significant investment in the transformation of LaSalle Park on Mr. Wilson’s 100th birthday, our staff had already begun conversations in partnership with Mayor Brown’s team to assure that the new and reimagined park would have the necessary resources to be maintained into the future,” said David Egner, President & CEO of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “This is the next step toward ensuring sustainability and responding to the critical questions raised by the community during the engagement process. The Imagine LaSalle team has thoroughly evaluated different park governance structures and have recommended the Conservancy model. Along with the established endowment, we are beginning to assemble the pieces necessary to support and sustain Ralph Wilson Park for decades to come.”

The Imagine LaSalle initiative is being led by the City of Buffalo, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation (RCWJRF), the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI), and Buffalo Urban Development Corporation (BUDC).

Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy

The Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy will be a public-private partnership with the City of Buffalo to operate, maintain, and promote the public use of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park. The Conservancy will be a not-for-profit with a Board of Directors, including 11 board members initially. The initial Board of Directors will include representation from the City of Buffalo and other civic leaders, local community members, and representatives from the philanthropic and corporate community.

The Conservancy is intended to address the needs of the local community, reflect the priorities laid out through the Imagine LaSalle process, and establish the framework by which the Park will continue to be

operated and maintained. It will work closely with the community and the City of Buffalo Parks Department, taking on additional responsibilities such as enhanced park maintenance, non-structural improvements, turf maintenance, horticulture, furnishing, events and programming, concessions, marketing and branding.

“The City of Buffalo has deep experience with conservancy partnerships at its parks. Since 2004 the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy has managed our six Frederick Law Olmsted-designed parks, seven parkways and eight traffic circles, and harnessed millions of dollars to deliver enhancements and programming the City could not do on its own. The conservancy that manages the Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park provides similar support for that attraction which is located on City-owned land,” said Mayor Brown. “The success of those conservancy-managed sites boost the profile of the entire City of Buffalo parks system.”

“The announcement about a conservancy approach to managing the new Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park builds on intense engagement with our community focus group and research on park management systems. It assumes an approach to inclusive and sustainable governance for the communities that have used LaSalle Park and others that might come to love the park,” said Robert G. Shibley, dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo

In addition to the Board of Directors, a committee structure has been recommended to continue the Imagine LaSalle community engagement process for the park and for specific focus areas within the park. These will be further developed in collaboration with the Imagine LaSalle initiative, and will include representation from local community members and project partners. The process to form the Conservancy will continue to take place over the next 12-24 months.

\$10 Million Endowment at Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

The Ralph Wilson Park Endowment Fund has been established at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, with an initial grant of \$10 million from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. This formalizes the commitment the Wilson Foundation made on October 17, 2018 at the 100th birthday celebration of Ralph Wilson, when it committed \$40 million to support the capital improvements and \$10 million to support the sustainability of the park.

Proceeds will be directed to the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy on an annual basis starting in 2023, once the Conservancy is up and running. Prior to the park’s formal opening, the endowment funds will be used to support maintenance facilities and to purchase maintenance equipment for the park. After the opening, the funds will be used for park maintenance only.

World-renowned landscape architectural firm, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA), is designing the park in collaboration with the City of Buffalo, Buffalo Urban Development Corporation, UBRI and Imagine LaSalle project partners. MVVA is at the 100% design development milestone and will start developing construction drawings in Spring 2021. Park design renderings can be viewed [here](#). The project team continues to work toward an estimated groundbreaking date for the park in 2022.

A public virtual information session will take place Wednesday, January 27 from 6 – 7 p.m. Representatives from the City of Buffalo, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and Imagine LaSalle Focus Group will share project progress and updates. To register, click [here](#).

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About the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation:

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained

investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his Buffalo Bills franchise. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson requested that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation that bears his name. The Foundation has a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson's desire for the Foundation's impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable and overseen by those who knew him best. For more information visit www.rcwjrf.org.

About the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning and UB Regional Institute

The University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning and one of its research centers, the UB Regional Institute (UBRI), are key partners in the effort to transform LaSalle Park into Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park. Starting with the Summer 2018 visioning process, and continuing through the design work commencing in early 2019, faculty, students, and staff from the UB School of Architecture and Planning have been working to ensure broad and meaningful community engagement in shaping the park's future. This unique role draws on the professional expertise and project management experience at UBRI, the faculty's deep knowledge of design and placemaking, and the energy and ideas from students aspiring to become architects and planners. Leveraging these capacities supports the School of Architecture and Planning principle of looking at the City of Buffalo and the surrounding region as a living laboratory, where students learn through working on real-world projects and challenges.

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