



“City Within a Park” Collaboration Set to Lift Long-Term Support for Buffalo Parks

***\$25 million lead gift to endowment will fund ongoing maintenance, beautification measures
in partnership with the City of Buffalo, others***

Buffalo, NY (June 26, 2025)—The Buffalo Common Council—in conjunction with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC), City of Buffalo’s Division of Parks and Recreation, and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo—has announced a formal resolution to establish “City Within a Park,” an endowment of up to \$50 million, with a leading gift of \$25M from the Wilson Foundation, to support ongoing maintenance of Buffalo parks for generations.

"The pandemic reminded us how essential parks are to community wellbeing," **said David Egner, president & CEO of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation.** "Buffalo's parks have received significant capital investments through American Rescue Plan funds and our foundation, but ongoing maintenance funding remains a challenge. The City Within a Park collaboration represents a continued strategic shift toward long-term stewardship of these vital community assets."

The City of Buffalo boasts an impressive array of accessible parks and trails across all neighborhoods, but managing these considerable assets' ongoing maintenance has been a frustrating financial challenge. Over the past few years, city leaders and its partners that support park maintenance have held ongoing discussions to establish a fund to benefit parks across the city for years to come. Those talks have now yielded an agreed-upon endowment structure to fund “City Within a Park.”

Initiated with a lead gift of \$25 million from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, the Frederick Law Olmsted philosophy-inspired initiative will facilitate collaboration and support of operations and maintenance for parks across the City of Buffalo.

“Buffalo’s parks are more than just green spaces—they’re gathering places, safe havens, and essential parts of our neighborhoods. The ‘City Within a Park’ endowment represents a transformative step forward in ensuring that these treasured spaces are maintained and uplifted for generations to come,” **said City of Buffalo Mayor Christopher P. Scanlon.** “Thanks to the leadership and vision of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, we are embracing a long-term, sustainable approach to parks funding—one that prioritizes equity, particularly for neighborhoods that have long been under-resourced. My administration is fully committed to doing our part by maintaining strong public funding, and I look forward to the impact this initiative will have on our city's quality of life for years to come.”

Additional funding toward endowment

Along with the \$25 million gift to start the endowment, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is providing \$1 million to augment and support incremental maintenance in city-owned and operated parks on the East Side of Buffalo, starting immediately. This additional funding is intended to “jump-start work” in parks identified with the most need. Furthermore, the Buffalo Olmsted Conservancy—who’ve served as a critical partner in the development of [“City Within a Park”](#)—is launching their own fundraising campaign, as part of this initiative, to raise funds for maintenance and operations of the city’s historic

Olmsted parks. To support their campaign, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation has committed to a structured challenge grant with details to be announced in the future.

“The Conservancy is honored and humbled by the support from the Wilson Foundation as it validates the important role all of Buffalo's parks play in making this community a great place to live. Our vision is ambitious - to create an exceptional park network for all of Buffalo. Ensuring sustainability in the operations and maintenance of the historic parks, and all parks, is critical. This support is an important start in our effort to fully fund BOPC now and in perpetuity,” **said Catie Stephenson, Executive Director, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy.**

As stated in the resolution, a condition to determine ongoing “City Within a Park” funding from the endowment is that the City of Buffalo must maintain annual parks funding levels at least equal to the same numbers reported in its 2023-2024 Division of Parks and Recreation budget. The city's ability and willingness to maintain these funding levels will be integral for the long-term stability of the parks-focused initiative and allow the endowment funding to incrementally improve park maintenance and operations across the City of Buffalo.

The endowment announcement is the latest news in a very busy season of milestones and momentum for the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. Over the past 10 years, the organization has had a seismic impact within various focus areas across Western New York, including in the realm of parks and recreation. From inventive play spaces and more connected regional trails across Western New York, the Foundation's legacy continues to be galvanized by its transformation of the region's outdoor spaces and sustainability efforts. “City Within a Park” plans to play a significant part in assuring this work is maintained.

“Since 2018, the Foundation has intentionally built in funding to support parks and trails for generations to come,” **says JJ Tighe, Senior Director of Parks & Trails Initiative for the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation.** “The parks and trails investments are important for connecting people, for connecting places, for recreation opportunities and for economic development to thrive. However, the quality of these spaces and if they can be clean, well-maintained and safe for future generations will be the enduring legacy of these investments.”

(Contact the Buffalo Common Council for full details of the resolution.)

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 beloved Buffalo Bills NFL team. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson provided 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. Based in Detroit, the Foundation began with 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.

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