



Essex County Parks Archives

Essex County Department of Parks,
Recreation, and Cultural Affairs

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News:

#EssexParks125

Throughout 2020, Essex County is celebrating the 125th anniversary of the Essex County Park System, the first of its kind in the nation. The Essex County Park System and the Archives of the Essex County Park System will both be making frequent social media posts with old photos and historical information. Follow us and learn more about the parks where your memories grow!

Upcoming:

Olmsted Parks Symposium

The National Association for Olmsted Parks will hold its annual meeting and symposium in Essex County from April 23-25. The public is invited to register for "Olmsted Legacy: Honoring the Past, Treasuring the Present, Shaping the Future." More information about the conference's educational sessions, speakers, and park tours will be posted soon at <http://essexcountyparks.org/>.



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Putting Essex County First



Preliminary Park Commission Completes Its Job

In January 1895, the preliminary park commission for Essex County deliberated several matters necessary to lay the groundwork for a permanent commission that could successfully build and maintain the first county-wide park system.

The preliminary commission discussed how future members were to be chosen. While they were concerned that an appointed commission might seem un-American, in the end they unanimously agreed upon an appointed system, chosen by a single court judge. Their extensive research into other park systems showed that appointed park commissions like Chicago's bore better, less politically-motivated results than elected park commissions.

Park funding was another topic of deliberation. The decision came to either individual tax assessments or levying a tax on the county's overall tax base. The commission opted for a tax levy on the entire county. Direct individual tax assessments were considered cumbersome and too difficult to assess uniformly and fairly, because of differences in location, size, property environment, and other conditions between park sites.

The number of park commissioners was debated as well. Despite dissent from certain quarters, the preliminary commission decided five would work best to prevent tied voting while keeping a manageable number of commissioners.

On February 1, 1895 the preliminary park commission submitted a bill to Trenton to create an Essex County Park Commission that would have authority to make a county park system a reality. In order to prevent the legislation from being deemed unconstitutional, it was modified to include a referendum. The bill passed the Senate and Assembly by the end of the month and was signed into law by Governor Werts on March 5. The referendum was set for April 9.

The preliminary county park commission finished its job early and under budget. Newark and the rest of Essex County would finally get the parks that some had been dreaming of for decades.