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Harrisburg City Beautiful 2.0: The Inspirational Legacy of Mira Lloyd Dock, Horace McFarland and Vance McCormick

Historical Background:

During the Progressive Era of American history (1890s-1920s), the City of Harrisburg was a national leader and model for comprehensive civic improvement. The “City Beautiful” movement, as it was known, was a reaction all across America against industrial pollution and waste, and an effort to remake cities into beautiful functional entities. Harrisburg’s Plan was one of the most successful. Led by civic and environmental advocates Mira Lloyd Dock and J. Horace McFarland, together with the young mayor Vance McCormick, Harrisburg remade itself by developing a sewer system, paving streets, providing water filtration and designing an “Emerald Necklace” of parks and boulevards. The spirited and passionate citizen advocates added a strong voice to the efforts of this dynamic trio to implement environmental reform.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the City Beautiful movement was this notion of civic engagement. While the city had an important role to play through capital investment in infrastructure improvements, the work that was done to move the city from a back-water, derelict environment to a nationally recognized, beautiful city was accomplished through the personal engagement of citizens working for a common public purpose.

Purpose of Proposed Project:

With the City of Harrisburg once again in peril from dire financial and social conditions, a new group of civic-minded advocates is rolling up their sleeves to support the City’s renaissance. Phase I of the Harrisburg City Beautiful 2.0 project proposes a series of community presentations to inform citizens and businesses about the history of Harrisburg’s participation in the City Beautiful Movement and how a plan, championed and supported by the community, created the character of Harrisburg’s neighborhoods and landscapes. This phase of the project will initiate the conversations citywide and is meant to inspire citizen engagement and commitment to communal well-being.

Ultimately, the intention of this modern day Harrisburg City Beautiful project is the creation of a Harrisburg City Beautiful Conservancy whose purpose will be long-term engagement of citizens and businesses in supporting the City of Harrisburg’s effort to maintain the beauty, utility and efficacy of its parks and neighborhoods. Through coordination with a coalition of citizens, civic, educational, business and neighborhood organizations, actions will be taken to plan for, protect, rehabilitate and sustain the historic system of parks, playgrounds, infrastructure and neighborhoods that contribute to authenticity of place that is the City of Harrisburg, the proud capital city of Pennsylvania.



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We hope this communal civic effort will inspire the residents of greater Harrisburg to become personally invested in improvements to the city's built environment and social fabric and find common purpose, which will, in the long run, make the City of Harrisburg a safer and more attractive place for investment, business, tourism and residency.

Some of Harrisburg's Extant City Beautiful Historic Assets

Riverfront Park
Wildwood Park
Reservoir Park
Italian Lake
Paxton Creek
City Island
The Emerald Necklace (The Capital Area Greenbelt)
Approach to the capital
Trees
Paved Streets
Planned Parkways
Sewer System
Breeze Hill (Horace McFarland's Home, located in Bellevue Park)
Mira Lloyd Dock's home, located on Front Street
The State Archives holds the papers of and slides made by Horace McFarland

Project Partner Organizations/Agencies (partial list)

PA Historical and Museum Commission
Historic Harrisburg
Capital Area Greenbelt Association
The Civic Club of Harrisburg
Dauphin County Recreation and Parks Department
Open Stage of Harrisburg
Art Association of Harrisburg
Harrisburg Community College
Audubon PA
Historical Society of Dauphin County
Harrisburg Young Professionals
Friends of Italian Lake
Historic Harrisburg Cemetery Association