POSITION PROFILE

Inaugural Executive Director
Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy
Buffalo, New York
ABOUT THE RALPH WILSON PARK CONSERVANCY

The Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy (“RWPC” or “the Conservancy”) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) established in 2021 to advance the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park (“Ralph Wilson Park”), creating a safe, vibrant, accessible, and inclusive waterfront park for generations to come, in partnership with the City of Buffalo.

Ralph Wilson Park is a 90-acre waterfront destination located on the shoreline of Lake Erie in Buffalo, New York. The Park is currently undergoing a $110 million community-driven transformation as a result of an initial $50 million commitment from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation in 2018.

The University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning and one of its research centers, the UB Regional Institute (UBRI), led ‘Imagine LaSalle’, a three-year, community-driven initiative and public engagement process that inspired the transformation and development of the city-owned park. Thousands of partners, community members, and constituents have been involved in the planning and design of this signature, year-round attraction.

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, a New York-based landscape architecture firm known worldwide for its creative and unique urban design with projects that include parks, plazas, cultural institutions, gardens and more, is leading the design. The construction of the park will break ground in the summer of 2022.

RWPC will develop the framework by which Ralph Wilson Park will be operated and maintained, with a continued focus on input from the community it serves. The Conservancy will work closely with 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.

For more information on RWPC please visit rwparkbuffalo.org.
LaSalle Park emerged from the waters of Lake Erie—literally—as much of the land that makes up the park was originally below water. In 1911, the City of Buffalo purchased a tract of land and underwater property between Georgia and Jersey Streets for $1 million. The massive Colonel Francis G. Ward pumping station, an architectural and industrial marvel that still provides the city’s water supply, was completed in 1915.

The property was used as dumping grounds through the 1920s, and gradually filled in until 1931 when plans to create a permanent park were finalized. The city then began leveling, seeding and landscaping the area, and Centennial Park opened during Buffalo’s Centennial Celebration in 1932. At that time, the Erie Canal formed the eastern edge of the park where I-190 is today. Soon after, Centennial Park was renamed LaSalle Park after René-Robert Cavalier de la Salle – the first European explorer to view the land that later became the city of Buffalo.

Over the years, the landscape of the park gradually changed as sports fields and recreational amenities were added, but little formal planning was done. In 1998, the city completed a comprehensive master plan for LaSalle Park. Some of the proposals of this plan were put in place, including the reconfiguration of sports fields. In the time since, other big changes were made to the park, such as the addition of the dog park and the skate plaza. In 2017, the park’s master plan was updated.

In 2018, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation made a lead gift of $50 million to partner with the City of Buffalo and the surrounding community to transform LaSalle Park into a world-class destination, renamed Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park.
ABOUT BUFFALO

Located on the apex of Lake Erie and the tip of Canada with proximity to Niagara Falls, Buffalo is the hidden gem of New York state.

Often touted as a “big, small city,” Buffalo is experiencing a renaissance, with significant growth and development. Despite its Northeast location, Buffalo is described as a Midwestern city with family-friendly values and a close-knit community feel.

Also known as “the City of Good Neighbors,” Buffalo has a history of welcoming immigrant and migrant communities since the 1800s. This is reflected in the vibrant cultural richness and diversity of the community.

With 1.1 million people residing in the Buffalo-Niagara region, the city provides all the attractions of a much larger metropolitan area. Given its location on Lake Erie, proximity to Western New York’s outdoor scene, and a reinvigorated waterfront, there are countless opportunities to explore the great outdoors and stay active. The city itself boasts vibrant art centers, restored architectural treasures, a noteworthy food scene, countless historical and cultural attractions, entertainment, live music, flourishing and distinct neighborhoods, family-friendly attractions, outdoor recreation, sports teams, and more.

The Ralph Wilson Park will be a world-class park within a region with a long history of designing and cultivating innovative parks and parkways. Many of Buffalo’s public parks and parkways were originally designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux between 1868 and 1896, inspired in large part by the parkland, boulevards, and squares of Paris, France. The implementation of their first-of-its kind design led to Buffalo being referred to as the best planned city. Today, Buffalo’s Olmsted Park System – 850 acres of beautifully managed parks, parkways, and circles within Western New York, managed by the not-for-profit Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy – is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

DISCOVER MORE ABOUT THE BUFFALO NIAGARA REGION
visitbuffaloniagara.com
THE OPPORTUNITY

The Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy seeks a dynamic, visionary, and collaborative leader to serve as the inaugural Executive Director. This is a unique opportunity for an exceptional leader to shape and lead a fundamentally transformational effort in a community going through a major renaissance.

This leader will build RWPC from the ground up and advance the organization’s vision of establishing Ralph Wilson Park as a world-class park through a high level of maintenance, sustainable and innovative management practices, exceptional greenspace and waterfront access, and deliver diverse, community-led programming and recreation.

Reporting to and working with a strong and engaged Board of Directors, the Executive Director has full oversight of the strategic, programmatic, operational, and financial management of the Conservancy, including an annual operating budget of $2 million per year, to begin.

The Executive Director will also oversee park operations, interfacing regularly with the City of Buffalo; MVVA, the renowned landscape architect charged with design of the park; and construction partners. In addition, they will provide leadership for the management of park use issues, focusing on the many groups interested in using the park’s current and future facilities and landscapes.

The Executive Director will lead an overall strategy for placemaking and activating the park through a variety of tools, including, but not limited to: public art, lighting, programming, furnishings, wayfinding, recreation, and signage – ensuring it is a safe, clean, and fun place for all.
Key responsibilities of the Executive Director include, among others:

- Manage complex multi-partner projects and programs from inception to completion.
- Communicate the Conservancy’s mission to a wide range of audiences and stakeholders to inspire and motivate its constituencies.
- Develop organizational structure, systems, and business practices to accomplish the Conservancy’s goals.
- Develop and implement a strategy for recruiting, hiring, and retaining high-quality employees, and develop a comprehensive strategy for evaluating performance of all park-based staff.
- Prepare annual and multi-year budgets and manage expenditures.
- Utilize innovative technological platforms to strengthen its engagement with critical constituencies such as park visitors, community partners, donors, and the media.
- Assure compliance with city, state, federal, and other governmental agencies’ regulations.
- Collaborate with the Board of Directors to develop organizational funding goals and ensure achievement of these goals.
- Bring leadership and commitment to the Conservancy’s diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives.
- Provide intellectual leadership and foster an entrepreneurial environment of creativity and innovation for operations and programming.
- Ensure that all activities and programs meet the highest standards of ethics, governance, and transparency, and are aligned with the Conservancy’s core values.
CANDIDATE PROFILE

The ideal candidate will have the following professional and personal qualities, skills, and characteristics:

An Entrepreneurial Leader & Builder

The Executive Director will:

• Be a self-starter, energized by the opportunity build an organization from the ground-up.

• Lead as an innovator, with a successful track record of translating mission and vision into strategy, systems, and action.

• Be a hands-on leader, with the ingenuity, perseverance, and humility needed to launch and sustain a safe, clean, and fun community park for all.

• Have a natural ability to act as a catalyst for action and change.

An Effective Collaborator & Coalition Builder

The Executive Director will:

• Be a culturally sensitive leader with high emotional intelligence and the ability to build and maintain strong relationships with a diverse range of constituents including local, state, and federal officials, community organizations, civic leaders, and neighbors.

• Demonstrate excellent listening skills and an ability to be a persuasive communicator with gravitas, poise, and charisma. This leader will be expected to build trust quickly, while fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and productive partnership on behalf of Ralph Wilson Park and the Conservancy.

• Have a demonstrated track record of successfully engaging across sectors, including with donors, partners, private and public organizations.

• Be politically astute, understanding how to engage in strategies that lay the foundation for strong partnerships rooted in community input and attuned to the mission-driven spirit of the Conservancy.
A Champion for Access & Belonging

The Executive Director will:

• Come to the Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy with a passion for community, relentlessly committed to ensuring the park is an inclusive, accessible, and safe gathering space for all.

• Have a commitment to leading with equity and embedding it into the structures, culture, programs, and processes that guide RWPC internally and externally.

• Bring expertise, an innovative and open mindset, and a commitment to inclusive practices that value different backgrounds and life experiences and allows everyone to authentically feel welcome at the park.

An Impact Driven & Results Oriented Executive

The Executive Director will:

• Be an impact-oriented leader who excels at execution and shows a strong aptitude for action. This leader will be a dynamic communicator, skilled at leading with transparency and having purposeful decision-making abilities.

• Understand the importance of effective operational and financial administration, implementing the best of nonprofit management practices and ensuring the day-to-day operations are aligned with strategic goals.

• Be data driven, and bring accountability to the revenue generation, communications and program strategies, establishing clear and measurable goals.

A Passion for the Mission & Community of Buffalo

The Executive Director will:

• Have an authentic passion for RWPC’s mission and vision, and a deep belief in its future and impact.

• Be a bold thinker with knowledge about or an affinity towards community parks and the role they play in their surrounding communities.

• Have a commitment to expanding the reach of RWPC to all in Buffalo, with an emphasis on leveraging the strengths, resources, and assets of the surrounding community.

• Have a steadfast commitment to centering the community of Buffalo in all that they do.

• Lead with sincerity and empathy, honesty and credibility, and the highest levels of personal and professional integrity and ethics.

The successful candidate needs to currently reside in the City of Buffalo or be willing to relocate to Buffalo within six months of hire date.
Koya Partners, the executive search firm that specializes in mission-driven search, has been exclusively retained for this engagement. Cheryl Stevens, George Theotokatos and Bryn Siberski are leading this search. To make recommendations or to express interest in this role please email ralphwilsonparkconservancy@koyapartners.com. All nominations, inquiries and discussions will be considered strictly confidential.

Koya Partners is committed to providing an accessible search process for all, including individuals living with disabilities. If you need assistance expressing interest online or any aspect of the recruitment process, please email ralphwilsonparkconservancy@koyapartners.com.

Ralph Wilson Park Conservancy is an equal opportunity employer and strongly encourages expressions of interest from people of color, individuals living with disabilities, women, and LGBTQ+ leaders.

About Koya Partners

Koya Partners, a part of Diversified Search Group, is a leading executive search and strategic advising firm dedicated to connecting exceptionally talented people with mission-driven clients. Our founding philosophy—The Right Person in the Right Place Can Change the World—guides our work as we partner with nonprofits & NGOs, institutions of higher education, responsible businesses, and social enterprises in local communities and around the world.

For more information about Koya Partners, visit www.koyapartners.com.