Successful Partnerships for Parks

Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space

ULI Urban Land Institute

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ON THE COVER: Yanaguana Garden at Hemisfair is a 4.1-acre (1.7 ha) community gathering place in downtown San Antonio. The park is owned in partnership by Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation and the city of San Antonio, with additional partners supporting park development and operation. *Billy Hustace Photography*

ABOUT ULI

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

ULI BUILDING HEALTHY PLACES INITIATIVE

Around the world, communities face pressing health challenges related to the built environment. Through the Building Healthy Places Initiative, launched in 2013, ULI is leveraging the power of its global networks to shape projects and places in ways that improve the health of people and communities. Building Healthy Places is working to make health, social equity, and wellness mainstream considerations in real estate practice. Learn more and connect with Building Healthy Places at uli.org/health.

10 MINUTE WALK

Parks are essential to the physical, environmental, and economic health of people and communities. Parks help expand the economy by attracting homebuyers, tourists, and highly talented workers. They protect the environment, provide space for the enjoyment of arts and nature, and make people healthier, happier, and more connected.

Despite these known benefits, research shows that one in three Americans—more than 100 million people—do not have a park within a 10-minute walk of their home. 10 Minute Walk is a movement dedicated to improving access to safe, high-quality parks and green spaces in cities—large and small— throughout the United States. Led by The Trust for

Public Land (TPL), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Urban Land Institute and with support from The JPB Foundation, 10 Minute Walk is working to create a world in which, by 2050, all people live within a 10-minute walk of a park or green space. This partnership drives commitments from city leaders working to achieve this vision and transform their communities.

Nearly 300 U.S. mayors have endorsed 10 Minute Walk so far. ULI, TPL, and NRPA are working with partners in select cities on measurable policies and strategies to advance the 10 Minute Walk vision. Success in this work will require the expertise, creativity, and close collaboration of public- and private-sector leaders. ULI has a powerful role to play in catalyzing its members, networks, and partners around a vision of a green, sustainable, connected, and resilient future for all people.

Learn more and connect with 10 Minute Walk at 10minutewalk.org and uli.org/parks.

Uptown Circle in Normal, Illinois, which includes a stormwater filtration system and a public green, serves as a place of respite for users of the adjacent multiuse trail. The public green is part of the Uptown Normal redevelopment project, funded in part by a new tax increment finance district. *Scott Shigley*
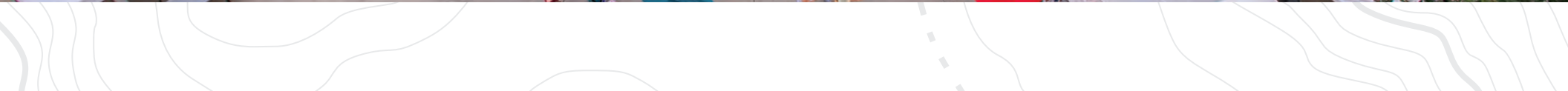
Report Background

Parks are essential building blocks of thriving places, but creative approaches are increasingly necessary to advance equitable access to parks that support quality of life in communities throughout the United States and beyond. More than ever, parks are the result of innovative approaches to partnerships and financing.

Real estate leaders are emerging as key players in supporting park creation, maintenance, and programming, and cross-sector partnerships among the real estate development industry, the public sector, nonprofit organizations, and the philanthropic community are proving essential for park success. Such partnerships can also enhance real estate value and support community health and well-being.

Countless partnership arrangements support parks. Each iteration, while unique, can offer insights to others embarking on efforts to create and sustain parks that promote health, resilience, social equity, and other goals.

This report explores case studies and examples of successful partnerships for parks, and distills lessons learned from these projects to inform potential partnership arrangements.

The Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail is a 10-mile (16 km) loop along the shores of Lady Bird Lake in Austin, Texas. The Austin Parks and Recreation Department and the nonprofit Trail Foundation partnered to develop and operate the trail. *The Trail Foundation*

Parks and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of community outdoor spaces. Parks, trails, streets closed to automobiles, and public plazas have been some of the only places that have allowed people to exercise, relax, play, or reach key destinations while engaging in physical distancing—crucial activities for lowering stress levels, reducing symptoms of depression, and maintaining physical health.

However, the pandemic has highlighted the longstanding reality that disparities in park and trail access and quality reflect patterns of segregation based on race and other demographic factors. The need to invest in a high-quality, culturally relevant public realm, and to ensure that everyone feels welcome there, is pressing. Already-strained public coffers have been further affected by the economic challenges of COVID-19, meaning that cities and communities will need to embrace new cross-sector partnerships to support parks.

"Parks need champions. We need to work with a wide array of dedicated community partners to deliver the public realm that people deserve."

Edward Henley, founding principal and project executive, Pillars Development LLC

Contents

Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park in downtown Tampa, Florida, is a central gathering spot along the Tampa Riverwalk, a 2.6-mile-long (4 km) trail. The park was created via a partnership among the city of Tampa, various corporate and nonprofit partners, and others. *Tampa Hillsborough EDC*

"Early collaboration and frequent multisector communication can build trust and ensure that there aren't missed opportunities to create or enhance parks to serve local residents."

Shmel Graham, associate, real estate, land use, and environmental practice group, Sheppard Mullin

PART I

The Power of Partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships can help bridge the gap between community needs and available public resources for parks.

Traditionally, parks departments in the United States have built, operated, and maintained parks for the long term. Today, in communities across the country, public investment in parks is stagnant or declining.

Many large U.S. cities have a substantial backlog of deferred park maintenance.[1] Although state and local ballot initiatives to fund parks generally enjoy widespread support, many communities still lack the necessary capital to maintain and operate existing open spaces—let alone create new ones.

Nationally, it is estimated that if current trends extend to 2025, total capital needs for parks and recreation will reach $114 billion, with only $12 billion allocated for spending by states—leaving an estimated funding gap of $102 billion in 2010 dollars.[2]

Additional public resources for parks are essential, especially with public coffers under further strain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities will need to look outside traditional public budgets to sustain their commitment to parks and consider and implement park-supportive partnerships.

92 PERCENT OF U.S. RESIDENTS SAY THEIR COMMUNITIES **BENEFIT FROM LOCAL PARKS**[3]

PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENTS OFTEN **MANAGE HUGE QUANTITIES OF LAND** AND ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR PARK PROGRAMMING—BUT HAVE **LIMITED OR DECLINING BUDGETS.**

IN MANY LARGE CITIES, PARKS ACCOUNT FOR **UP TO 15% OF THE CITY'S ENTIRE LAND AREA** AND PARKS DEPARTMENTS MAY BE **RESPONSIBLE FOR HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT PARCELS OF LAND.**[4]

DEFERRED PARK MAINTENANCE TOTALS MORE THAN **$1 BILLION** IN MANY LARGE U.S. CITIES.[5]

Parks improve community well-being and are valued by residents.

Ensuring that parks have adequate funding and cross-sector support is crucial—especially since they are so highly valued by communities. In fact, 85 percent of U.S. residents identify proximity to parks, playgrounds, open space, or recreation centers as an important factor in deciding where to live.[6] In 2018 alone, voters approved nearly $2 billion in local and state ballot measures for parks and land conservation, with an average 75 percent voter approval.[7]

Parks provide substantial benefits, including advancing neighborhood social cohesion, workforce development, and health and environmental equity outcomes.[8]

Parks can also catalyze nearby real estate development, in turn increasing property tax revenues that can fund park improvements, expansions, and local programs designed to meet community needs if value capture mechanisms and park-supportive policies are in place.

With intentionality, patience, and significant public input, parks can play a crucial role in advancing equity, which PolicyLink—a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity—defines as "just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential." [9]

Disparities in Park Access and Quality

Thirty-eight percent of people in the United States say their neighborhood lacks outdoor spaces where they can exercise—a barrier that disproportionately affects low-income African American and Latinx communities.[10] Others live near parks that are unwelcoming, are in disrepair, lack culturally relevant programming, or do not meet their needs for other reasons.

Disparities in park access and quality reflect patterns of segregation based on income level and demographics. Investing in parks in areas without sufficient open space can help prevent chronic illnesses and reduce symptoms of depression; the positive effects of exposure to green spaces are often amplified in lower-income communities.

Sources: Mayor of London/London Assembly, "National Capital Account for London," October 2017, www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/11015viv_natural_capital_account_for_london_v7_full_vis.pdf; Jill Johnston, "Urban Green Space, Disparities & Health," University of Southern California, 2016, www.niehs.nih.gov/research/ supported/translational/peph/webinars/green_ spaces/urban_green_space_disparities_and_ health_508.pdf; Eugenia C. South et al., "Effect of Greening Vacant Land on Mental Health of Community-Dwelling Adults: A Cluster Randomized Trial," *JAMA Network Open 1,* no. 3 (2018): 3, doi: 10.1001/jamanetowkropen.2018.0298.

All sectors have something to offer. The private sector can play a critical role.

The potential is clear. Successful partnerships can help bridge the gap between community needs and available public resources for parks—especially for highly programmed parks in urban areas with intensive capital and operational demands.

Cross-sector partnerships can bring the capabilities and competitive advantages of different actors to bear, creating and sustaining parks that advance equity as well as marrying the resources and skills of the public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors with community goals.

People might not intuitively think of private-sector real estate developers as key partners for the delivery of high-quality parks, but park investment by the development industry can produce valuable benefits. For example, developers may be able to act more quickly and flexibly than parks departments, to experiment on innovative park programs, and to achieve cost savings—for example, by purchasing park equipment or hiring repair crews on an as-needed basis.[11]

Successful partnerships can yield benefits for all, but they must be carefully established, nurtured, and maintained to achieve their true potential.

Romare Bearden Park opened in Uptown Charlotte, North Carolina, in 2013 and is funded through public and private investment. The park celebrates Charlotte-born artist Romare Bearden. *Shutterstock*

Partners must have specific, well-defined roles.

Each partner should have specific, well-defined roles throughout the design, development, and operation phases of a park project. Roles and expectations should be clarified in formal agreements and driven by the actor that is best positioned to execute a piece of the project successfully, equitably, and efficiently.

COMMON CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERS AND ROLES

SECTOR	ENTITY/ORGANIZATION	SELECTED POSSIBLE ROLES
Public	Parks departments	Accountability/enforcing park access/operations agreements, leasing land for park development, managing partnerships, making capital investments
	Other city departments/ agencies (planning, economic development, mayors' offices, housing authorities, etc.)	Facilitating community engagement/park-visioning exercises, issuing bonds for park development, coordinating park and affordable housing development, identifying partnership opportunities, making capital investments
Private	Real estate developers	Creating/operating parks alongside development projects, contributing funding for nearby parks/park operators
	Landscape architects and other designers	Incorporating sustainable/resilient design into new and renovated parks, designing parks to meet community needs
	Building owners, businesses, and corporations	Contributing funding for parks, sponsoring events/programs
	Concessions and park-related businesses	Activating public spaces, contributing new sources of revenue to offset operation and maintenance costs
Nonprofit	Community development corporations	Providing programs/services that leverage park development/ access, spearheading affordable housing and housing preservation efforts to mitigate potential park-related displacement
	Neighborhood/ community groups	Advocating for new or improved parks, working with partners to ensure that parks reflect community needs, organizing cleanups
	Business improvement districts	Developing and maintaining parks, organizing park events/ programs, making capital investments
Philanthropic	Private foundations/ individual donors	Contributing funding for parks; spearheading park-related cross-sector collaboration/coordination; advancing health, resilience, and social equity priorities

Note: This list is meant to illustrate the range of organizations that support park development and operation. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

Partnerships work best when each party brings its competitive advantage.

A private-sector firm may be able to create a park with relative efficiency because it has fewer competing demands on time or procurement challenges. For example, in Brooklyn, developer Two Trees worked with community groups and various city departments to create Domino Park for an estimated 50 percent of what it would have cost the New York City parks department.

Among the public sector's competitive advantages is the ability to convene cross-sector partners to oversee and coordinate park planning, funding, development, and operation. In Prairie Village, Kansas, a cross-sector partnership transformed the majority of a former country club into a public park. Its success was partially due to the city's ability to convene partners and issue tax increment financing (TIF) bonds to fund the park's development and to leverage the economic potential of associated real estate development.

Nonprofit organizations—such as community development corporations and neighborhood groups—are uniquely suited to ensuring that parks serve nearby residents through siting, design, maintenance,

and programming. In Houston, nonprofit Avenue Community Development Corporation advanced the creation of a park alongside a mixed-income housing development in 2015 after learning from neighborhood and partner consultation that providing space for recreation and exercise was as crucial to the community as preserving housing affordability in an area with rising property values.

Philanthropic organizations, such as private foundations, are also key partners that can convene cross-sector partnerships to coordinate park projects, provide needed funding, and advance health, resilience, social equity, and other priorities through investments in parks and in other partners.

Inspirada, a master-planned community in Henderson, Nevada, will include seven parks. The parks are owned by the city of Henderson and Inspirada. *Inspirada*

Successful partnerships create value for all parties.

Just as crucial as clarifying partnership roles and expectations is understanding the value proposition for each party involved in park planning, development, and operation. Value is driven and defined by organizational goals and may be measured financially or with regard to promoting health, equity, sustainability, or park usage, among many other potential measures.

For example, real estate developers that support parks as part of associated developments may secure community buy-in, public-sector support, or valuable zoning incentives for their projects—leading to faster project approvals and other potential financial benefits. Community, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations may leverage park investments to support improved neighborhood well-being. And public-sector organizations may find that cross-sector partnerships can lower development and operation costs for parks—freeing up public resources for other parks.
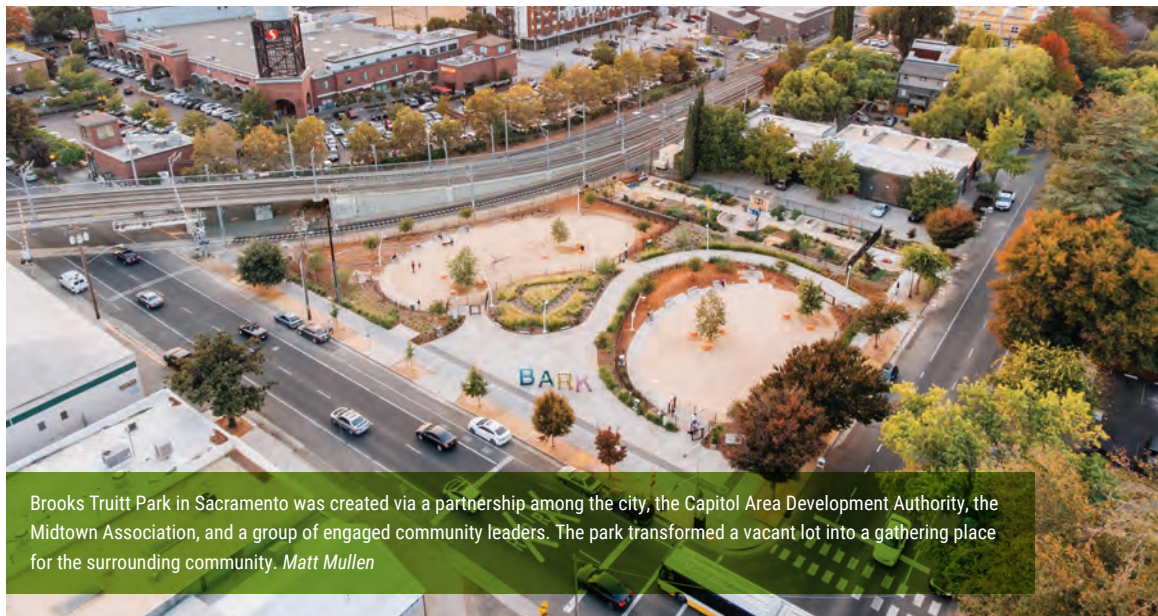
Brooks Truitt Park in Sacramento was created via a partnership among the city, the Capitol Area Development Authority, the Midtown Association, and a group of engaged community leaders. The park transformed a vacant lot into a gathering place for the surrounding community. *Matt Mullen*

"The average resident doesn't care who builds or operates their park. They care about having quality green space that is safe, accessible, and welcoming. Cross-sector collaboration is necessary to make sure people get the great parks they deserve."

Scott Gilmore, deputy executive director, Denver Parks & Recreation, City and County of Denver

Ziegler Park in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood was expanded and renovated in 2016 after years of neglect. The park is owned by the city and the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation and has a mission to foster inclusivity in a predominantly low-income community. *3CDC*

PART II

Partnerships in Action

5 Partnership Opportunities

Collaborative approaches are increasingly necessary for park success.

When combined with efforts to ensure that investments in parks are equitably distributed, cross-sector partnerships centered on park development and operation can create significant benefits for all parties and—most important—for the communities the parks serve. This section provides examples of how cross-sector partnerships are delivering parks that achieve these benefits, including project examples and issue briefs.

Detroit's Dequindre Cut Greenway was developed through a public/private nonprofit partnership that included the city of Detroit, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, and the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation. *Pravin Sitaraman*

5 Partnership Opportunities

How to maximize cross-sector partnerships to produce significant benefits for all parties.

1

Save time and money

LEVERAGE REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT TO EFFICIENTLY ENHANCE PARK ACCESS AND QUALITY.

Partnership considerations

- Real estate developers can partner to create parks quickly and efficiently because they are not restricted by public-sector operating budgets or processes. Such partnerships can help projects secure community buy-in and public-sector support, potentially leading to faster zoning approvals.

- Public-sector agencies can set and enforce access and operation standards for parks owned or operated by a developer, ensuring that these spaces support community needs.

- Cross-sector partnerships and creative community engagement to leverage real estate development may uncover previously unexplored opportunities to maximize park space and quality.

Project examples and further opportunities

- Domino Park
- Grand Park
- Issue brief: Strengths of Private-Sector Partners in Supporting Parks

2

Capture value

FUND PARKS BY PROMOTING OR INCENTIVIZING NEARBY DEVELOPMENT AND DIRECTING NEW TAX REVENUES INTO PARK ASSETS.

Partnership considerations

- Public-sector partners can incentivize the transformation of private land into park space by permitting denser development than would normally be allowed on the remaining portion of that land.

- Public/private partnerships can allow tax revenues from increased property values to be invested in nearby parks to repay the costs of park development or to support park operations.

Project examples and further opportunities

- Meadowbrook Park
- Issue briefs
  - Value Capture to Fund Parks
  - Park Value Capture in Practice

3

Serve residents, advance health and equity

PARTNER TO CREATIVELY ENGAGE RESIDENTS AND ACT ON LOCALLY IDENTIFIED PARK NEEDS.

Partnership considerations

- Partnerships among community groups and other nonprofit partners are essential in identifying the uses residents want in their parks.
- Including locally identified uses in park plans may unlock new sources of park funding, for example, from philanthropic organizations that invest in specific active recreational uses.
- Cross-sector partners—including real estate developers and public agencies—may provide crucial support for nonprofit organizations with missions to enhance local park quality and equitable park access. Such partnerships can increase the community's capacity to shape locally defined outcomes.

Project examples and further opportunities

- Avenue Place
- Regent Park
- Issue brief: How Parks Advance Equitable Outcomes

4

Promote resilience

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS TO INVEST IN PARK INFRASTRUCTURE THAT ADVANCES COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

Partnership considerations

- Park and recreation agencies—working closely with cross-sector partners—can be key actors in community resilience because they are major landowners and can thus make a big impact.
- Partners—including design firms and resident and stakeholder groups—can provide the necessary expertise to produce and implement plans leveraging parks to promote resilience.

Project examples and further opportunities

- Drexel Square
- Edison Eastlake
- Issue brief: Partnerships and Resilient Parks

5

Connect people, activate parks

CREATE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS THAT LINK PEOPLE, PARKS, AND BUSINESSES.

Partnership considerations

- Synergies with partners beyond the usual participants—including building owners, economic development organizations, and nonprofits that provide job-training services—can maximize opportunities to use parks to create valuable community connections.
- Partnerships with developers, building owners, and businesses can provide steady revenue streams for parks.
- Park operation funding from private-sector entities can help transform underused public assets into accessible, vibrant, and financially sustainable spaces.

Project examples and further opportunities

- Spicket River Greenway
- Levy Park
- Issue brief: Maximizing Partnerships to Create Connectivity

1 Save time and money

LEVERAGE REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT TO EFFICIENTLY ENHANCE PARK ACCESS AND QUALITY.

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Save time and money

Project Examples

PARK OR TRAIL	**Domino Park** Brooklyn, New York	**Grand Park** Los Angeles, California
DESCRIPTION	Publicly accessible private park, developed and operated by private developer with oversight by parks department	Public park developed with funding by real estate developer, operated by nonprofits
PARK DEVELOPER	Private—Two Trees Management	Multiple—Related California and County of Los Angeles
OWNER	Private—Two Trees Management	Public—County of Los Angeles
OPERATION	Mixed—funded and managed by Two Trees Management; operation guidelines set and enforced by New York City Department of Parks & Recreation	Nonprofit—Los Angeles Music Center and the Grand Park Foundation
FUNDING	Private	Mixed—private and public

Save time and money

— **PROJECT EXAMPLE**

Domino Park

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Publicly accessible private park, developed and operated by private developer with oversight by parks department.

Key Partners

PRIVATE: Two Trees Management (developer, park operator); SHoP Architects (master planner); James Corner Field Operations (park designer); various area businesses (programming partners)

PUBLIC: New York City Department of Parks & Recreation; New York City Department of City Planning

COMMUNITY AND NONPROFIT: Neighborhood input collected via design charrettes and by knocking on "every door in the ward"; nonprofit partnerships for park programming

Alex Staniloff

The Domino Sugar redevelopment is an 11-acre (4.5 ha) mixed-use project in Brooklyn that includes a six-acre (2.4 ha) public park and a planned 3.3 million square feet (307,000 sq m) of office, retail, and mixed-income residential development. Brooklyn-based developer Two Trees Management developed the park and manages daily operations.

The project allows waterfront access for the first time in over a century and incorporates the adaptive use of the historic Domino Sugar Refinery, which operated from 1856 to 2004.

Save time and money

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Domino Park

"For over 100 years, the entire site was fenced off and offered no waterfront access. Almost instantly, Domino Park became a true portrait of New York City—full of spontaneity and people speaking multiple languages. In terms of placemaking, the park succeeded from day one."

David Lombino, managing director, Two Trees Management

Alex Staniloff

Save time and money

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Domino Park

"Our first mixed-use, mixed-income building leased up in just over a year—much more quickly than we anticipated. Access to the park and waterfront is clearly a driver of that success."

David Lombino, managing director,
Two Trees Management

Alex Staniloff

Park Development and Operations

PARK DEVELOPER: Private—Two Trees Management

OWNERSHIP: Private—Two Trees Management

OPERATIONS: Mix—funded and managed by Two Trees Management; operations guidelines set and enforced by New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

FUNDING: Private—Two Trees Management invested $50 million in capital costs; spends $2 million annually on operations

Park Highlights

SIZE: 6 acres (2.4 ha)

STATUS: Opened in 2018

PROGRAMMING: Salsa dancing nights (in partnership with area businesses), bocce tournament, concerts, graduations, farmers market, mural painting, history walking tours, fitness events

DESIGN FEATURES: Artifact walk (five-block path with over 30 pieces of salvaged factory machinery), 1,200-foot-long (366 m) waterfront esplanade along the East River, passive recreation park, five separate gathering spaces with seating and space for programming, active recreation features

RESILIENCE/SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES: Park built two to seven feet (0.6 to 2.1 m) above Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood elevations; includes 175 new trees and sustainable plantings to support coastal resilience

SOCIAL EQUITY STRATEGIES: Park provides public with waterfront access for the first time in over a century; 700 affordable housing units planned (out of 2,200 total units), scattered throughout all residential buildings

Save time and money

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Domino Park

Alex Staniloff

Partnership Highlights

CROSS-SECTOR RELATIONSHIPS AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INFLUENCED SITE DESIGN AND PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

In 2012, Two Trees Management acquired the Domino Sugar Factory site, which had a previously approved residential development plan. Instead of executing the plan, Two Trees worked with various city departments and community organizers to solicit new ideas via design charrettes and by canvassing the neighborhood in Spanish, Polish, and English.

Two Trees learned that area residents cared most about maximizing park space. "We scrapped plans for an entire building and instead added height and density to other buildings to have more room for the park," explains David Lombino, managing director at

Two Trees. "The neighborhood was less concerned about the height of individual buildings if it meant more recreational space."

By updating the site plans and electing to go through a rezoning process and a public referendum, Two Trees took a risk that paid off. New plans—including six acres (2.4 ha) of public park space—were approved in 2014 with broad community and public support.

PARTNERSHIP ALLOWED CITY TO SET AND ENFORCE ACCESS AND OPERATIONS STANDARDS

Domino Park was built and is managed by Two Trees, with an annual operating budget of roughly $2 million. To gain approval to develop and operate the Domino Park site, Two Trees entered into an agreement with the city that set guidelines for design, maintenance, and access—including hours of operation. The city has the right to reclaim the park

if Two Trees fails to adhere to these standards. The agreement also required that Two Trees put money in escrow to continue park operations should the firm decide to sell its adjacent properties.

DEVELOPER FUNDING FOR PARK PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND OPERATIONS LOWERED COSTS

Two Trees spent $50 million to develop the park—an estimated 50 percent less than it would have cost NYC Parks due to the potential for costly procurement challenges and competing demands on time. Two Trees was able to develop Domino Park with relative efficiency and flexibility, while NYC Parks would have been restricted by its operating budget, deferred maintenance needs, the cost and complexity of land acquisition, and requirements to distribute funds equitably among existing parks.

Save time and money

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Grand Park

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Public park developed with funding from real estate developer and operated by nonprofits

Jim Simmons

Private developer Related California funded $50 million in major upgrades to transform a formerly underused public space into Grand Park—a 12-acre (4.9 ha) public park that reopened in downtown Los Angeles in 2012. Related's commitment to developing the park and its partnerships with community stakeholders and the city and county of Los Angeles led to approval for a mixed-use project on adjacent publicly owned parcels.

Related and the Grand Avenue Committee, a public/private partnership charged with revitalizing the area around Grand Park, hosted 12 community meetings to determine Grand Park's design, which they envisioned as "the park for everyone," serving people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds and income levels.

Various community meetings were conducted in Armenian, English, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish to ensure that the diverse voices of Los Angeles residents were reflected in the park's design and programming. The park includes plants and other features that directly relate to the different people and cultures of Los Angeles. The park also includes the Grand Park Rangers Program, which brings children to the park to become rangers and participate in events that connect them with healthy eating, exercise, and the natural environment.

Related completed the park in 2012—well in advance of moving forward with its associated $1 billion mixed-use project, which includes a residential tower

completed in 2014 and a mixed-use development with shopping, dining, living, and entertainment uses that is under construction as of 2020.

Partnerships with the adjacent Los Angeles Music Center and the Grand Park Foundation—a nonprofit created to enhance the experience of Grand Park—support park operations and activation.

Save time and money

ISSUE BRIEF

Strengths of Private-Sector Partners in Supporting Parks

STRENGTH	DETAILS
Efficiency and flexibility	Ability to act more quickly and flexibly than parks departments, experiment on innovative park programs, and spend less money on park development and operation—for example, by purchasing park equipment or hiring repair crews on an as-needed or emergency basis
Advocacy	Freedom and political will to publicly support initiatives like budget increases, parkland acquisition, park-related ballot measures, etc.
Fundraising and donations	Greater likelihood and ease of raising funds because of ability of private donors to have greater control over how money will be spent
Focus	Capacity and mission to holistically focus on supporting specific park assets; greater attention to detail
Consistent leadership	Relative freedom from politics and elections, allowing for more constant leadership

Source: Adapted from Project for Public Spaces, *Public Parks, Private Partners* (New York: Project for Public Spaces, 2000).

2 Capture value

FUND PARKS BY PROMOTING OR INCENTIVIZING NEARBY DEVELOPMENT AND DIRECTING NEW TAX REVENUES INTO PARK ASSETS.

Partnership considerations

- Public-sector partners can incentivize the transformation of private land into park space by permitting denser development than would normally be allowed on the remaining portion of that land.

- Public/private partnerships can allow tax revenues from increased property values to be invested in nearby parks to repay the costs of park development or to support park operations.

Capture value

Project Example

PARK OR TRAIL	**Meadowbrook Park** Prairie Village, Kansas
DESCRIPTION	Public park, created by public sector in partnership with private developer
PARK DEVELOPER	Public—Johnson County Park and Recreation District
OWNER	Public—city of Prairie Village purchased park site from VanTrust Real Estate and transferred it to Johnson Country Park and Recreation District
OPERATION	Public—Johnson County Park and Recreation District
FUNDING	Public—TIF from new private development property tax revenues

Capture value
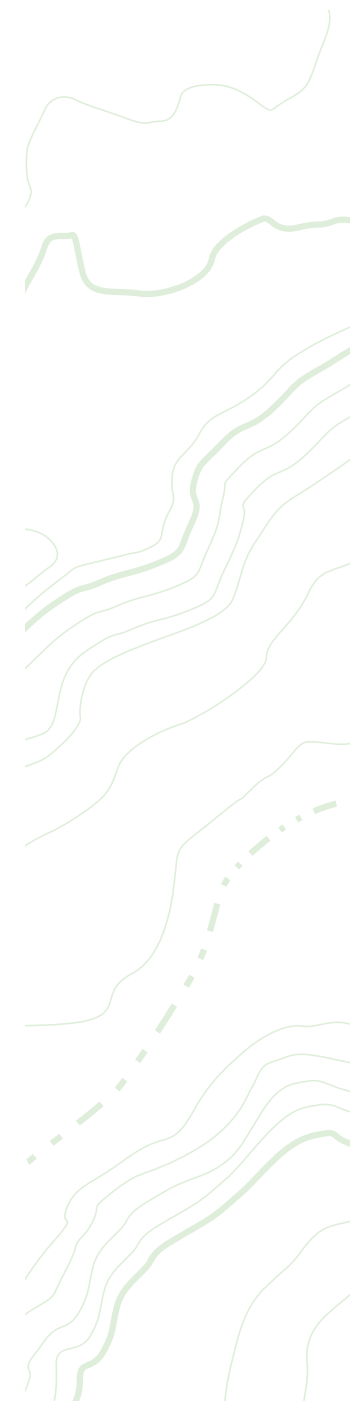
PROJECT EXAMPLE

Meadowbrook Park

PRAIRIE VILLAGE, KANSAS

Public park, created by public agency in partnership with private developer

Key Partners

PRIVATE: VanTrust Real Estate (developer, former owner of park site); LRK (land planner); Landworks Studio (park master planner)

PUBLIC: Johnson County Park and Recreation District (park owner); city of Prairie Village

COMMUNITY AND NONPROFIT: Neighborhood input collected via design charrettes

JCPRD

Meadowbrook Park is an 80-acre (32 ha) public park in Prairie Village, a suburb of Kansas City, that opened in 2019 alongside a 45-acre (18 ha), $250 million–plus private residential and mixed-use development—all on the site of a former private country club. The $19 million park was funded by TIF bonds levied on property tax revenues generated from the private development. The Johnson County Park and Recreation District created, owns, and operates the park.

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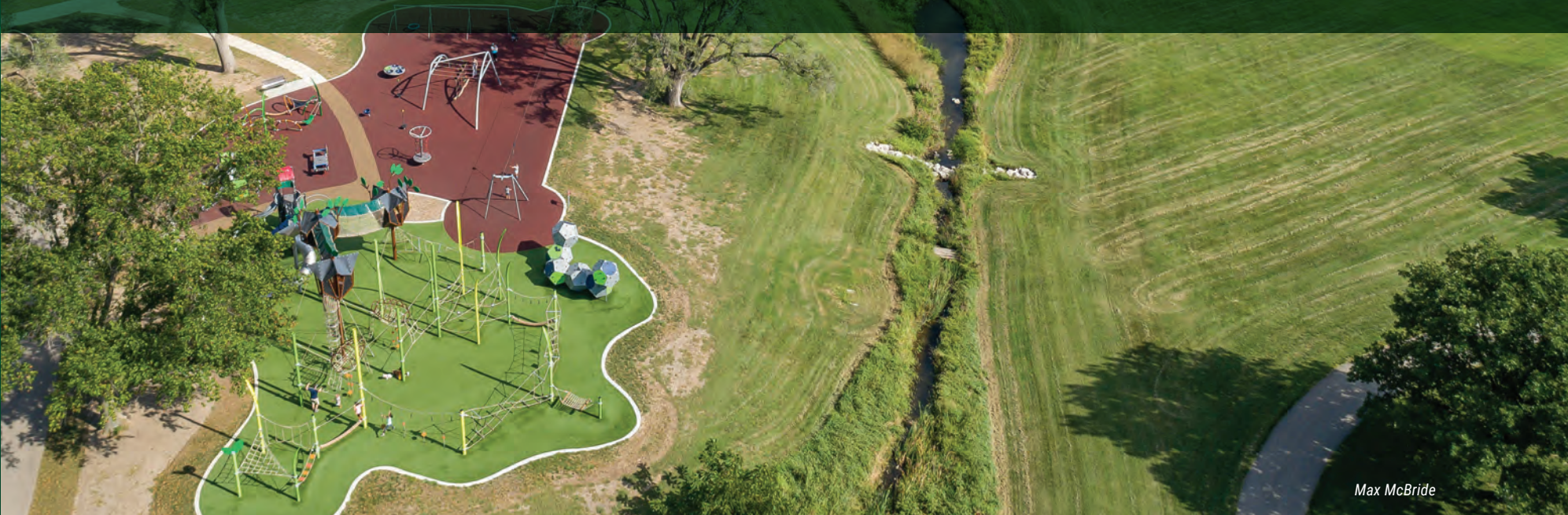
Capture value

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Meadowbrook Park

"Residents have been living in the area and paying taxes to support the county parks system—but before Meadowbrook, they didn't have a 10-minute walk, or even a 10-minute drive to a high-quality county park."

Justin Duff, senior director of development, VanTrust Real Estate

Max McBride

Capture value

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Meadowbrook Park

Meadowbrook Park includes facilities to support bicycling. The park will also serve as a hub for a new metro Kansas City bike share program. *JCPRD*

Park Development and Operations

PARK DEVELOPER: Public—Johnson County Park and Recreation District

OWNERSHIP: Public—city of Prairie Village purchased park site from VanTrust Real Estate for $5.9 million and transferred it to Johnson County Park and Recreation District to own and operate

OPERATIONS: Public—funded and managed by Johnson County Park and Recreation District

FUNDING: TIF financing—industrial revenue bonds and 9 percent transient guest tax made up incentive package used to fund purchase of park land, park improvements, and public streets and utilities; property tax increment generated from the private development will be used to repay $19 million bond issuance over 20 years.

Park Highlights

SIZE: 80 acres (32 ha)

STATUS: Opened in 2019

PROGRAMMING: Fitness classes, 5K training, bicycle groups, nature classes, cooking classes, family and holiday events

DESIGN FEATURES: "Great lawn," new trees, ponds, 3.75-mile (6 km) walking trail, clubhouse/event space, sledding hill, outdoor pavilion with fire pit, playground, pickleball courts, low-impact fitness area

"Public/private partnerships can be a win for all. We wouldn't have been able to provide the amount or quality of park space without partnering with VanTrust Real Estate and the city of Prairie Village to set up TIF financing."

Jeff Stewart, executive director, Johnson County Park and Recreation District

Capture value

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Meadowbrook Park
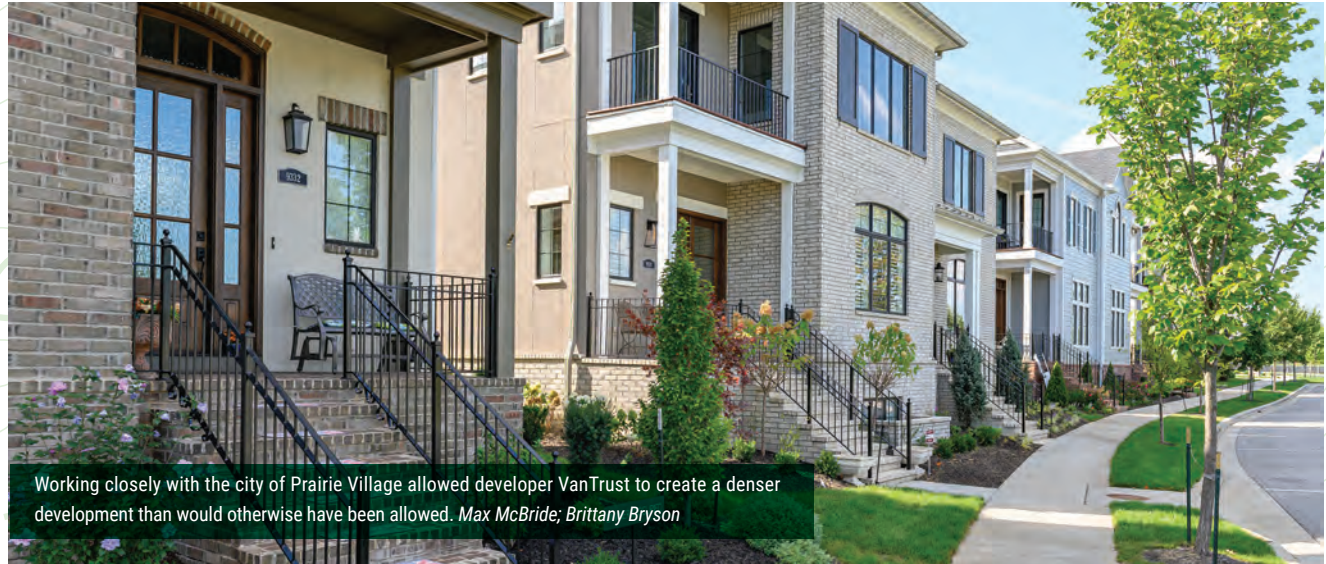
Working closely with the city of Prairie Village allowed developer VanTrust to create a denser development than would otherwise have been allowed. *Max McBride; Brittany Bryson*

Partnership Highlights

MULTISECTOR PARTNERSHIP TURNED PRIVATE LAND INTO PUBLIC SPACE

VanTrust Real Estate purchased the 136-acre (55 ha) Meadowbrook Golf and Country Club in 2010, with plans to use the majority of the site for private development. Collaboration with the city of Prairie Village and the Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD) led VanTrust to decide instead that 60 percent of the site would become a new public park, with the remaining 40 percent hosting a mix of residential units, a restaurant, a café, and the only hotel in Prairie Village, the Inn at Meadowbrook. This decision was based on recognition that the area lacked sufficient park space that could serve area residents, and that the park would add value to the project.

Meadowbook Park vastly expands access to recreational and open space in a built-out area that lacked a marquee park. "For over half a century,

people lived right beside a green space they couldn't use," notes Justin Duff, senior director of development for VanTrust. "Now, everyone is free to enjoy a beautiful park."

TIF FINANCING SUPPORTED PARK DEVELOPMENT AND LAND ACQUISITION

The development and purchase of Meadowbrook Park by the JCPRD were supported by TIF financing, with new property tax revenues from private development paying off $19 million in public bonds. No public money was spent on private development at the site.

Working closely with Prairie Village allowed VanTrust to create a denser development than would otherwise have been allowed, with alleys behind homes and front doors right at the street. The mix of uses, density of development from rezoning the project site, and integration with the park all drive value. As of 2019, the market response has been strong for both the residential and commercial product types, with values

exceeding expectations. The upside for area residents is that increased property tax revenues support the repayment of the bonds used to develop and purchase the park.

COORDINATION, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT INFORMED PARK DESIGN

A series of public meetings informed park planning. Trails were designed to connect to the new development and preserve existing trees; playground equipment was chosen by residents—including children—via an open voting process.

Trust and collaboration among partners generated a unified voice, leading to very little public opposition to the development. As a result, VanTrust was able to develop a project with enough density to be financially successful on just 40 percent of the land it controlled. The city and county were able to deliver a much-needed park, increase the tax base, and redirect tax revenues to support the initial purchase of the park, as well as the public improvements.

Capture value

ISSUE BRIEF

Value Capture to Fund Parks

Value capture is a public financing method that can be used to fund parks. In a common value capture arrangement, a governing entity rezones an area within a specific distance of a park and redirects a portion of associated property tax revenue increases on any rezoned properties to support further park development or operation.[12]

As summarized in a recent Reimagining the Civic Commons report on value capture, mechanisms that can be used to fund parks include, but are not limited to, the following:[13]

- **Special assessment districts:** applies an additional tax on properties within a defined geographic area to fund a public improvement project
- **TIF financing:** captures additional tax revenue generated when properties increase in value
- **Land control:** captures increases in real estate value by controlling land parcels

- **Sale or lease of public land:** cedes control of public land to private developers through a ground lease or sale, with the condition that parks or civic spaces be integrated into the development
- **Land value taxation:** applies all or a large portion of property tax only to the value of land, not to improvements, thereby taxing speculation and vacancy and generating funding to invest in parks and public spaces
- **Monetized savings from green infrastructure:** generates revenue streams that can be invested in parks

VALUE CAPTURE PROCESS

Invest in public places

Increase nearby real estate value

Capture new value
- Benefit existing residents
- Sustain and improve public spaces

Illustration adapted from Reimagining the Civic Commons, "Value Capture in the Commons: Tools for Sustaining Our Public Places while Benefiting Existing Communities," October 2018, http://civiccommons.us/app/uploads/2018/11/Final_RCC_Value-Capture_Updated-Oct-2018_Pages.pdf.

Capture value

ISSUE BRIEF

Park Value Capture in Practice

Cities across the United States are implementing innovative value capture mechanisms to fund parks, including in the following locations.[14]

Brooklyn Bridge Park | Brooklyn, New York: In New York, the state worked with New York City to create the Brooklyn Bridge Park Increment Recapture, a value capture mechanism through which the city can direct a portion of property tax revenue increases on any rezoned areas within 0.4 mile (0.6 km) of the park to finance park operations. Since 2000, more than 1.7 million visitors have enjoyed the free events and activities of this $365 million world-class park.

Atlanta BeltLine | Atlanta, Georgia: In Atlanta, the city is using a corridor-wide tax allocation district (TAD)—known as TIF financing in other states—to fund the Atlanta BeltLine, a $2.8 billion, 25-year redevelopment project. The city expects to raise $120 million in TAD funds to support park design and construction, nearly half the total costs. The BeltLine TAD will provide limited incentives for private development, with the majority of funds set aside for land acquisition, trails, green space, transit and transportation improvements, affordable housing, and projects for Atlanta Public Schools.

Housing Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone | Houston, Texas: In Houston, value increment recapture is used to support parks as infrastructure. In 1995, the city created the 13-acre (5 ha) Main Street/Market Square TIRZ (tax increment reinvestment zone), to support the zone's anticipated 905 housing units and 188,000 square feet (17,500 sq m) of retail, commercial, and office development. The TIRZ dedicates tens of thousands of dollars each year to park capital improvement projects and provides the Buffalo Bayou Partnership $2 million annually to support ongoing maintenance of Buffalo Bayou Park.

The Atlanta BeltLine is a burgeoning 22-mile (35 km) network of public parks, multiuse trails, transit facilities, and new development created with a mix of public and private funding. *The Sintoses*

Serve residents, advance health and equity

3

PARTNER TO CREATIVELY ENGAGE RESIDENTS AND ACT ON LOCALLY IDENTIFIED PARK NEEDS.

Partnership considerations

- Partnerships among community groups and other nonprofit partners are essential in identifying the uses residents want in their parks.

- Including locally identified uses in park plans may unlock new sources of park funding, for example, from philanthropic organizations that invest in specific active recreational uses.

- Cross-sector partners—including real estate developers and public agencies—may provide crucial support for nonprofit organizations with missions to enhance local park quality and equitable park access. Such partnerships can increase the community's capacity to shape locally defined outcomes.

Serve residents, advance health and equity

Project Examples

PARK OR TRAIL	**Avenue Place Park and Trail** Houston, Texas	**Regent Park** Toronto, Ontario
DESCRIPTION	Public park, created by nonprofit housing developer as part of mixed-income project	Public park and athletic grounds created in partnership with city, real estate developer, and philanthropic organizations
PARK DEVELOPER	Nonprofit—Houston Parks Board and Avenue Community Development Corporation	Multiple—Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division; Toronto Community Housing; Daniels Corporation (construction management of athletic grounds)
OWNER	Public—Houston Parks and Recreation Department	Public—Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division; Toronto Community Housing (park lands previously owned by Daniels Corporation conveyed to city of Toronto as part of development)
OPERATION	Public—Houston Parks and Recreation Department	Mixed—Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division and nonprofit partners
FUNDING	Mixed—public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic funding	Mixed—public, philanthropic, and private

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Avenue Place Park and Trail

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Public park created by nonprofit housing developer as part of mixed-income project

Key Partners

PRIVATE: Capital One Bank; Community Bank of Texas; Hudson Housing; National Equity Fund; Wells Fargo

PUBLIC: Houston Parks and Recreation Department (park developer, owner)

COMMUNITY AND NONPROFIT: Avenue Community Development Corporation (developer, owner of housing development); Houston Parks Board (nonprofit park developer); Houston Housing Finance Corporation; NeighborWorks America

PHILANTHROPIC: Houston Endowment; Wortham Foundation

Avenue

Avenue Place Park is a one-acre (0.4 ha) public park that opened in 2015 in Houston's Near Northside neighborhood on the site of a former freight trucking facility. The park forms the centerpiece of the 20-acre (8.1 ha) Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace mixed-income development, with a walking trail connecting homes and surrounding parks.

The entire project was a multisector collaboration led by Avenue Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization with the mission of "building affordable homes and strengthening communities." The park is now owned, operated, and maintained by the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD).

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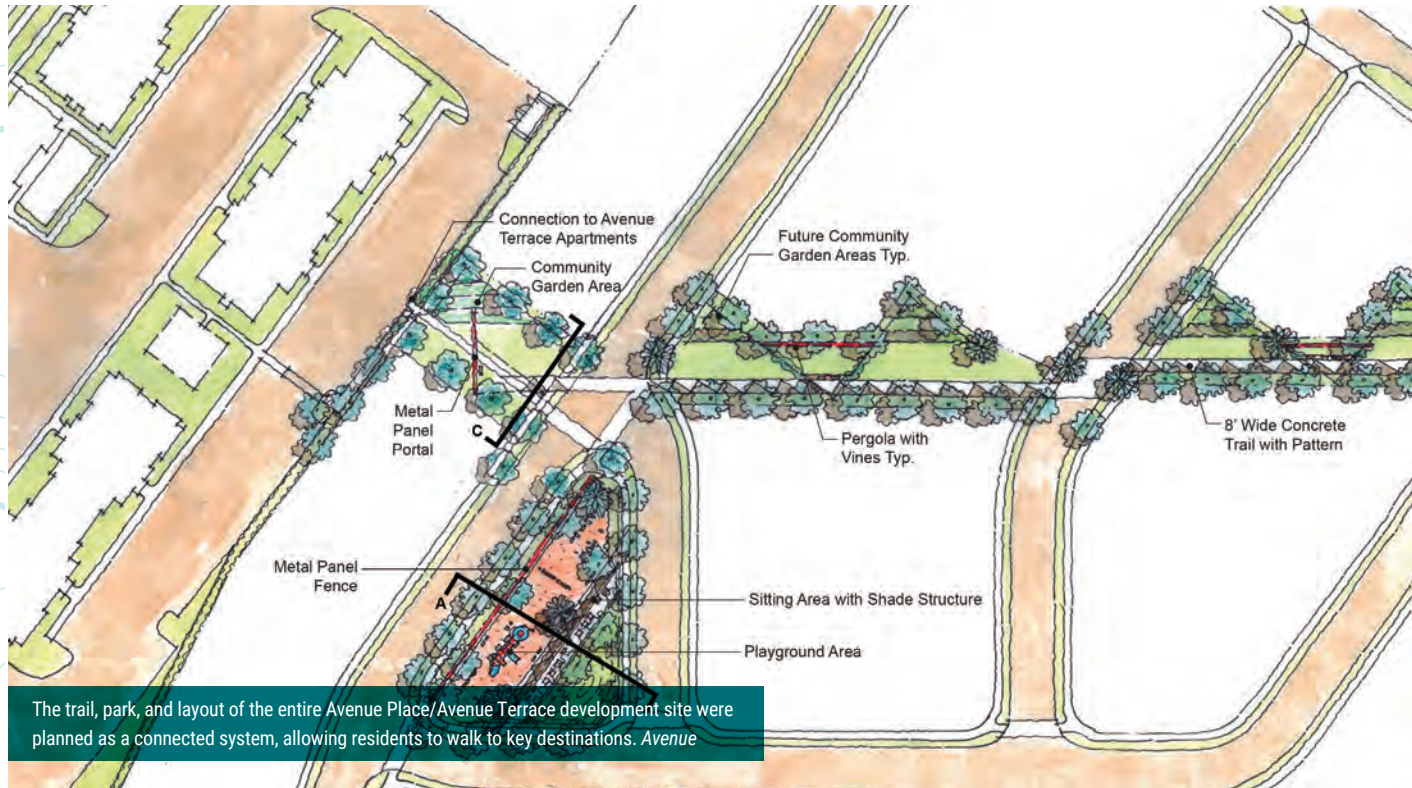
PROJECT EXAMPLE

Avenue Place Park and Trail

"We needed partnerships for the entire project, including the park. Partnering with organizations and public agencies whose expertise is building and maintaining parks just made sense in terms of efficiency."

Mary Lawler, executive director, Avenue

Avenue

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— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Avenue Place Park and Trail

The trail, park, and layout of the entire Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace development site were planned as a connected system, allowing residents to walk to key destinations. *Avenue*

Park Development and Operations

PARK DEVELOPER: Nonprofit—Houston Parks Board (project manager); Avenue Community Development Corporation

OWNERSHIP: Public—Houston Parks and Recreation Department

OPERATIONS: Public—Houston Parks and Recreation Department

FUNDING: Public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sources

Park Highlights

SIZE: 1 acre (0.4 ha); 0.25-mi (0.4 km) trail

STATUS: Opened in 2015

DESIGN FEATURES: Paved community trail, playground, benches, shade trees, grassy areas

RESILIENCE/SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES: Park site chosen because of location of large stormwater pipe/land not being ideal for homebuilding; landscaping designed for the local climate, which reduces water use and requires less maintenance

SOCIAL EQUITY STRATEGIES: Park provides recreational space for mixed-income development; provides active transportation connection to local parks, schools, and neighborhood destinations

Serve residents, advance health and equity

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Avenue Place Park and Trail

Partnership Highlights

PARTNERS WITH PARK EXPERTISE WERE CHOSEN TO DEVELOP AND OPERATE GREEN SPACE

Avenue Place Park opened at the center of the 20-acre (8.1 ha) Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace mixed-income development in 2015. The project's lead, Avenue Community Development Corporation, understood that the park would be a crucial investment in the health of the area's residents but also recognized that it would need expert partners to efficiently build and operate the park.

Avenue chose the Houston Parks Board, a nonprofit working to "connect all Houstonians through public green spaces," as project manager. After completion, park ownership was transferred to HPARD, which also maintains the space. Funding for the park came from a mix of public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sources.

TRAIL CONNECTED HOMES, PARKS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD DESTINATIONS

Working closely with HPARD, Avenue learned that creating a short walking trail to connect Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace residents to other public parks and neighborhood destinations was a top priority. The city felt that existing parks in the area were not accessible enough—especially for those who do not drive.

Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace's 287 homes are located in Houston's Near Northside neighborhood, a dense, tightly knit Latinx community. *Avenue*

"Houston's Park Dedication Fund requires residential developers to set aside land for parks or pay a fee to the city to achieve the same goal. We were one of the first developers to choose to dedicate the land. It was important to invest in the well-being of residents."

Mary Lawler, executive director, Avenue

The trail, park, and layout of the entire development site were planned as a connected system, allowing residents of Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace's 287 homes to walk to key destinations, including a city park, elementary school, public library, recreation center, and bus and rail transit.

INTEGRATION OF PARK AND MIXED-INCOME DEVELOPMENT SERVED TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND EQUITY GOALS

Avenue Place/Avenue Terrace is located in Houston's Near Northside neighborhood, a dense, tightly knit Latinx community with unemployment and poverty rates higher than city averages. The main goal of the

development was to preserve affordability in an area with rising property values—but providing space for recreation and exercise was also considered crucial.

Devoting land to create the park was a tradeoff, as it meant less space for development. But Avenue learned from community and partner consultation that the tradeoff would be worthwhile in expanding park space and providing active transportation connections to neighborhood destinations. "The park is a central gathering place, which is essential for residents," notes Maria Aguirre-Borrero, director of community initiatives at Avenue. "Having places to talk, exercise, and play was important to the community."

Serve residents, advance health and equity

■ PROJECT EXAMPLE

Regent Park
TORONTO, ONTARIO

Public park and athletic grounds created in partnership with city, real estate developer, and philanthropic organizations

The Daniels Corporation

The city of Toronto opened a new $4.7 million (C$6.2 million), six-acre (2.4 ha) public park in 2014 and a $3.1 million (C$4 million), 2.8-acre (1.1 ha) athletic complex in 2016. The park and athletic grounds anchor the 69-acre (28 ha) Regent Park mixed-use, mixed-income redevelopment project that is transforming a formerly isolated public housing complex into a healthy, safe, and vibrant multicultural community.

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the city's housing agency, provided land to the city's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division, which developed it into a park. The park contains a playground, splash pad, large green space, plaza for community events, off-leash dog area, walkways, community gardens, greenhouse, and bake oven.

Regent Park residents noted the need for a programmed sports facility during community consultations in 2014, which eventually resulted

in the addition of the athletic grounds. This complex was developed with funding from the TCHC, the city of Toronto, and a variety of philanthropic partners, including the MLSE Foundation and the Daniels Corporation—a private developer partnering with the TCHC to revitalize Regent Park. The grounds include a hockey rink, running track, basketball court, and a soccer/cricket pitch.

Daniels provided construction management services for the athletic grounds at no fee and worked closely with project partners to attract the MLSE Foundation's investment. Project partners also worked with various local community groups to ensure that they were part of the design and programming decision-making processes.

"After hearing comments from residents on the uses they wanted in the main public park, we revisited the master plan to examine the opportunity to provide more active recreational space—including a soccer

pitch and cricket grounds," notes Remo Agostino, vice president, development, for the Daniels Corporation. "The Regent Park Athletic grounds are the outcome of this process. The park is owned by the city, but the creation of the space was through a cross-sector partnership between TCHC, the city, charitable organizations including the MLSE Foundation, and Daniels."

The park and athletic grounds are providing needed opportunities for physical activity and recreation, which support Regent Park's rental buildings, market-rate condominiums, townhouses, commercial space, and community facilities. These facilities contribute to park equity for longtime neighborhood residents: all original Regent Park residents have a contractual right to return to the new development. As of January 2019, 800 of the 1,360 relocated households have rejoined the community as tenants in affordable units.

Serve residents, advance health and equity

How Parks Advance Equitable Outcomes

Parks are crucial infrastructure for community well-being and can provide numerous benefits:

- **Health equity:** Parks can help prevent chronic illnesses and reduce symptoms of depression; the positive effects of exposure to green spaces are often amplified in lower-income communities.[15]

- **Environmental equity:** When planned with intention, green spaces in urban areas can help counter higher temperatures[16] and improve air quality in communities that suffer from high rates of air pollution.

- **Social cohesion:** By shaping community identity, serving as the backdrop to social interactions among different groups,[17] and providing spaces where people of every background can feel welcome, parks and playgrounds can help strengthen cohesion in neighborhoods historically segregated by race, income, and other factors.

- **Workforce development:** Through cross-sector initiatives that target workforce development and business attraction, parks can generate thousands of new jobs in previously disinvested areas.[18]

Residents of Toronto's Regent Park noted the need for a programmed sports facility during community consultations in 2014, which eventually resulted in the addition of the athletic grounds. *The Daniels Corporation*

4 Promote resilience

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS TO INVEST IN PARK INFRASTRUCTURE THAT ADVANCES COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

Partnership considerations

- Park and recreation agencies—working closely with cross-sector partners—can be key actors in community resilience because they are major landowners and can thus make a big impact.

- Partners—including design firms and resident and stakeholder groups—can provide the necessary expertise to produce and implement plans leveraging parks to promote resilience.

Promote resilience

Project Examples

PARK OR TRAIL	**Drexel Square Park** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	**Edison Eastlake Community** Phoenix, Arizona
DESCRIPTION	Publicly accessible private park, created by private developer on land leased from university	Planned and improved public parks at mixed-income neighborhood redevelopment being created by cross-sector, health-focused partnership
PARK DEVELOPER	Private—Brandywine Realty Trust	Multiple—city of Phoenix Housing Department and Gorman & Company
OWNER	Private—Brandywine Realty Trust (under long-term ground lease from landowner Drexel University)	Public—city of Phoenix Housing Department
OPERATION	Private—Brandywine Realty Trust	Mixed—city of Phoenix Housing Department and Gorman & Company
FUNDING	Private	Mixed—public and private

Promote resilience

— **PROJECT EXAMPLE**

Drexel Square Park

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Publicly accessible private park, created by private developer on land leased from university

Key Partners

PRIVATE: Brandywine Realty Trust (park developer); West 8 and SHoP Architects (park designers)

COMMUNITY AND NONPROFIT: Drexel University (landowner); Centennial Parkside Community Development Corporation (designated codeveloper)

Drexel Square Park transformed a surface parking lot owned by Drexel University into a landscaped gathering space. *Brandywine Realty Trust*

Drexel Square Park is a 1.3-acre (0.5 ha) publicly accessible, private park that opened in 2019 as part of Philadelphia's $3.5 billion Schuylkill Yards master-planned development. The park—built and operated by developer Brandywine Realty Trust—transformed a surface parking lot owned by Drexel University into a landscaped gathering space. With a location directly across from 30th Street Station—the city's main transportation hub—the park is accessible to neighborhood residents and commuters alike.

< Contents — The Power of Partnerships — Partnerships in Action — Notes — Acknowledgments >

Promote resilience

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Drexel Square Park

"There's a reason the trees rose up before the skyscrapers [at Schuylkill Yards]. Public spaces—especially green spaces—have the power to transform communities, change perceptions, and create new realities."
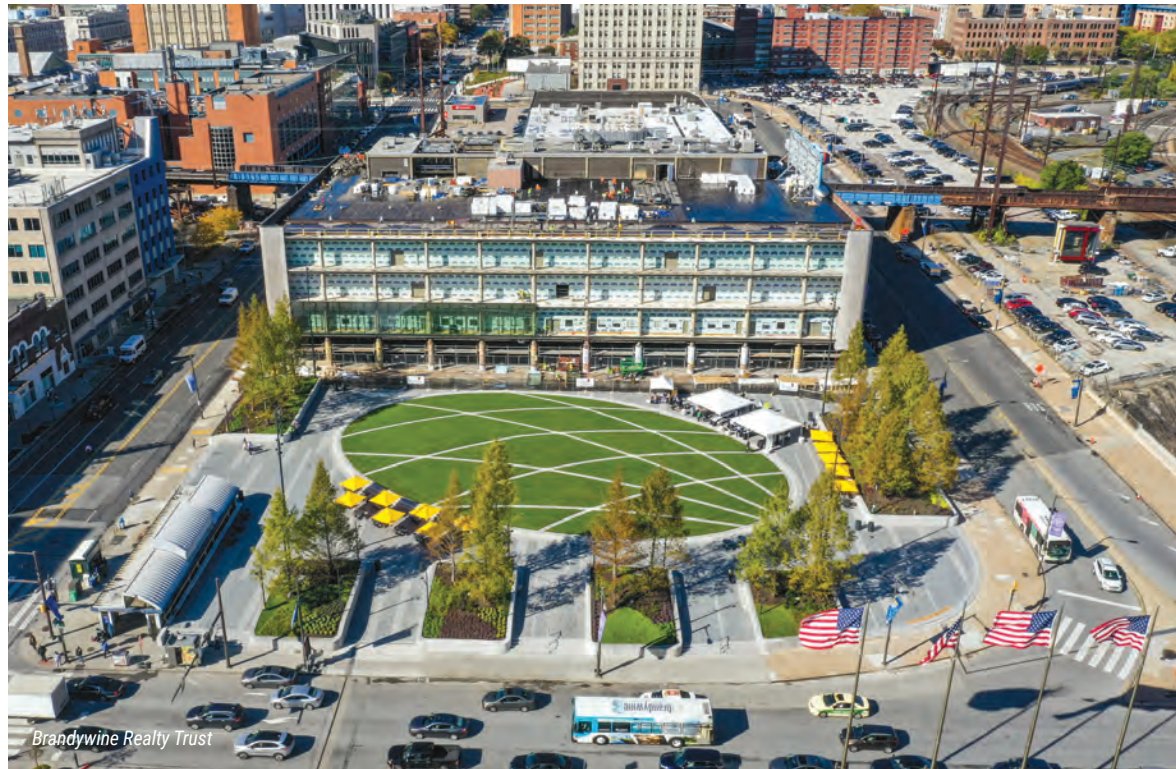
Jerry Sweeney, president and CEO, Brandywine Realty Trust

Brandywine Realty Trust

Promote resilience

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Drexel Square Park

Brandywine Realty Trust

Park Development and Operations

PARK DEVELOPER: Private—Brandywine Realty Trust

OWNERSHIP: Private—Brandywine Realty Trust (under long-term ground lease from landowner Drexel University)

OPERATIONS: Private—Brandywine Realty Trust

FUNDING: Private—Brandywine Realty Trust

Park Highlights

SIZE: 1.3 acres (0.5 ha)

STATUS: Opened in 2019

PROGRAMMING: Free community programming including fitness classes and a concert series

DESIGN FEATURES: 12,000-square-foot (1,100 sq m) elliptical green lawn; 31,000 square feet (2,900 sq m) of granite-paved plaza; 9,000 square feet (860 sq m) of raised planted beds; flexible outdoor furniture; 23 metasequoia street trees—each over 40 feet (12 m) tall—that frame the square

RESILIENCE/SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES: Reduction in impervious coverage area of 50 percent; shade from redwood trees; sustainably harvested all-natural stone throughout plaza

SOCIAL EQUITY STRATEGIES: Transit accessibility; associated job creation and training, capacity building, local sourcing, and affordable housing initiatives through the $16 million Neighborhood Engagement Initiative

Promote resilience

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Drexel Square Park

Partnership Highlights

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN DEVELOPER AND UNIVERSITY TRANSFORMED PARKING LOT INTO PARK

Drexel Square Park opened in 2019 after Brandywine Realty Trust invested $14.3 million to transform a Drexel University–owned parking lot surrounded by a six-foot-high (1.8 m) wall into a park. The park sits on land leased from Drexel and was funded entirely by Brandywine. It is the first of several green spaces that will comprise 6.5 acres (2.6 ha) of the 14-acre (5.7 ha) Schuylkill Yards development—a 6.9 million-square-foot (641,000 sq m) mixed-use project between Philadelphia's 30th Street Station, Drexel, and the University of Pennsylvania.

PARK OPENED BEFORE OTHER PARTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Drexel Square Park was the first piece of Schuylkill Yards and opened before any of the buildings in the master plan. By creating a publicly accessible park in advance of revenue-generating private development, Brandywine aimed to expand access to community gathering space, while also demonstrating the value of the larger Schuylkill Yards project.

Notably, after transforming the former parking lot into a park, the site's impervious coverage was reduced by 50 percent, leading to a significant reduction in runoff and lower temperatures at the site.

"With more focus than ever before on human well-being, Brandywine is committed to creating environments that make a positive impact on people, both during their workdays and beyond," notes Jerry Sweeney, president and CEO of Brandywine Realty Trust. "Every element of this park was carefully designed to create a sense of place, togetherness, and community. We see Drexel Square as an investment for generations to come, and the framework for what will eventually unfold at Schuylkill Yards."

COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE SUPPORTS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Schuylkill Yards development, Brandywine is investing more than $16 million in a new Neighborhood Engagement Initiative that supports local job creation, small and minority business development, affordable housing, and other community priorities.

To advance this initiative, Brandywine selected local nonprofit Centennial Parkside Community Development Corporation to serve as codeveloper for several phase one projects of Schuylkill Yards. As codeveloper, Centennial Parkside participates in biweekly construction meetings, including on the design and operation of Drexel Square Park.

The overall goal of the codeveloper partnership is to support communities surrounding Schuylkill Yards by giving local west Philadelphia organizations a voice at the table and deploying resources to neighboring communities. Centennial Parkside receives $100,000 in annual funding from Brandywine, training on real estate development, and access to support services to build the organization's capacity to create and preserve affordable housing. As the project moves forward, Brandywine will continue to expand support for local community development corporations through the Neighborhood Engagement Initiative.

"In addition to providing input on the park, the partnership with Brandywine provides us unrestricted funding for our work to support affordable housing, local businesses, and housing preservation in the area. This is a huge financial boost for a small community organization and makes up 25 percent of our operating budget."

Chris Spahr, executive director, Centennial Parkside CDC

Promote resilience

PROJECT EXAMPLE

Edison Eastlake Community

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Planned and improved public parks at mixed-income neighborhood redevelopment being created by cross-sector, health-focused partnership

Edison Eastlake is a mixed-income neighborhood redevelopment project with a planned 1,161 units adjacent to St. Luke's Medical Center in Phoenix. Initial project phases were under construction as of 2020. The redevelopment plan includes new, expanded, and improved park space to link the neighborhood with drought-tolerant and native plants to provide cool islands, among other green spaces and shaded areas. Edison Eastlake provides an example of using parks to mitigate extreme heat.

Edison Eastlake experiences some of the hottest temperatures in Maricopa County, with surface temperatures of up to 130 degrees Fahrenheit (54 degrees Celsius) in the summer. The area has low vehicle ownership and high rates of walking, bicycling, and transit use, so it is crucial to ensure that the redevelopment is heat resilient to protect the health and safety of residents, employees, and visitors.

Planned public spaces and rights-of-way at Edison Eastlake adhere to Phoenix's Walkable Urban zoning code requirement that all new sidewalks must be 75 percent shaded. Cool paving technologies—including experimental coatings and paving materials—are

being explored for paths and sidewalks. A linear park with walking paths, fitness stations, a meditation garden, and shade structures will connect the neighborhood to St. Luke's Medical Center. Parks at Edison Eastlake are also designed to support community resilience by serving as gathering places during emergencies.

The project is a partnership that includes the city of Phoenix Housing Department, Mithun Inc., Gorman & Company, Arizona State University (ASU), and other groups, with each partner providing specific expertise to ensure that people have safe and healthy housing and park space.

The Edison Eastlake One Vision Plan—led by design firm Mithun and created with residents, stakeholders, and public health experts—lays out the strategy for redevelopment and identifies cooling the urban heat-island effect as one of three top implementation priorities.[19] "Having a public health expert embedded

in the mix is a game changer," Erin Ishizaki, a partner at Mithun, observes. "And once you hear the health-related data about heat, open space, and walkability, you can't go back."

Additional partners central to the ambitious plan to address extreme heat include the U.S. Green Building Council, the Maricopa County Public Health Department, the Vitalyst Health Foundation, and the Nature Conservancy, which is conducting a "thermal comfort" study to assess how residents experience heat and to identify solutions to mitigate extreme temperatures.

Phoenix Housing also continues to coordinate with ASU to track the success of urban heat-island mitigation measures. ASU researchers have installed multiple weather stations in the neighborhood to measure baseline temperatures and track neighborhood temperature change from construction through buildout.

Holistic community resilience strategies in the Edison Eastlake One Vision Plan. *Mithun*
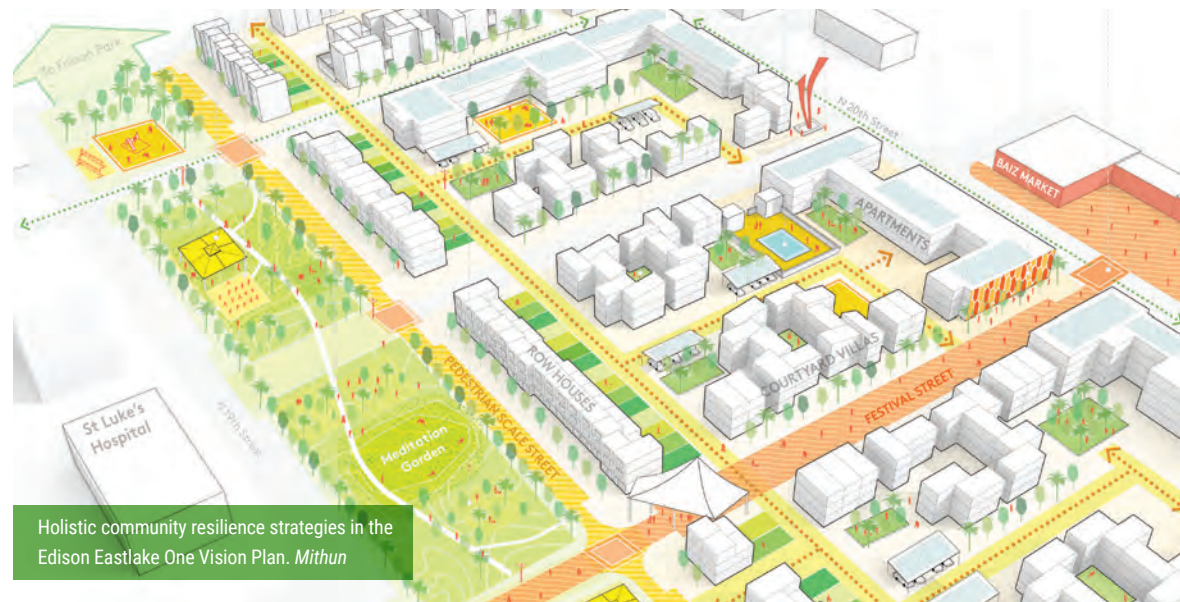
Promote resilience

Partnerships and Resilient Parks

Parks present an important opportunity to promote community and climate resilience, with *resilience* defined as "the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, and more successfully adapt to adverse events."[20]

Parks can enhance resilience through thoughtful design features that mitigate local climate extremes, by providing safer spaces to congregate or engage in exercise during times of disruption, and by supporting daily quality of life and improved resident health outcomes.

Resilient park design anticipates and plans for the impacts of climate change, such as increased heat, more intense rainfall, and more frequent flooding. Common park resilience strategies include providing shaded areas, adding drought-tolerant plants, and building living shorelines, new wetlands, and greenways designed to be underwater during floods.

Increasingly, parks are also designed to function as resilience hubs—community resource centers that are created with flexible designs to accommodate uses during disruptions and recovery periods that differ from their everyday uses.[21] Examples of park amenities that enhance both daily use and are advantageous during disruptions include wi-fi access, cooling centers, and resilient power options.

Parks and recreation agencies—often working closely with private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners—are key actors in community resilience because they are often major landowners with opportunities to invest in natural infrastructure through the creation, management, or enhancement of public space.[22] However, the ability of parks and recreation departments to prioritize resilience may be limited because of budget or capacity restraints, making creative partnerships and funding approaches even more essential.

Cross-sector partnerships—such as those that advance real estate projects with significant park components—can enhance resilience by helping address the effects of climate change in numerous ways, including protecting against water-related events and mitigating heat-island effects.

PARKS, EXTREME HEAT, AND HEALTH

Cross-sector partnerships to support parks can improve public health, including by mitigating the effects of extreme heat. Extreme heat compromises human cardiovascular and respiratory systems, making high temperatures a pressing public health risk, particularly for low-income and elderly communities.[23]

The most universally applicable resilience design strategies to combat extreme heat are the creation of shade and the preservation of open space.[24] Parks create "cool green space islands" that reduce surrounding air temperatures by at *least* 2 to 4 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 to 2.2 degrees Celsius).[25]

BEFORE

AFTER

Historic Fourth Ward Park in Atlanta transformed a neglected site into a park that addresses the problem of combined sewer overflows. The park was created through a partnership that included neighborhood residents, the Historic Fourth Ward Conservancy, the Atlanta BeltLine, the Atlanta Department of Watershed Management, and the Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation. *William R. Bryant; Steve Carrell*

5 Connect people, activate parks

CREATE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS
THAT LINK PEOPLE, PARKS, AND BUSINESSES.

Partnership considerations

- Synergies with partners beyond the usual participants—including building owners, economic development organizations, and nonprofits that provide job-training services—can maximize opportunities to use parks to create valuable community connections.

- Partnerships with developers, building owners, and businesses can provide steady revenue streams for parks.

- Park operation funding from private-sector entities can help transform underused public assets into accessible, vibrant, and financially sustainable spaces.

Connect people, activate parks

Project Examples

	Spicket River Greenway Lawrence, Massachusetts	Levy Park Houston, Texas
PARK OR TRAIL		
DESCRIPTION	Trail developed by public sector with mix of private and nonprofit partners	Public park with maintenance funded by ground lease from private development
PARK DEVELOPER	Multiple—city of Lawrence, Groundwork Lawrence, WinnDevelopment	Public—Upper Kirby Redevelopment Authority
OWNER	Public—city of Lawrence	Public—city of Houston
OPERATION	Nonprofit—Groundwork Lawrence	Mixed—Levy Park Conservancy, Midway Companies
FUNDING	Mixed—public (state and federal grants), private, nonprofit	Mixed—public and private

Connect people, activate parks

■■ PROJECT EXAMPLE

Spicket River Greenway

LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

Trail developed by public sector with mix of private and nonprofit partners

Key Partners

PRIVATE: WinnDevelopment (developer of adjacent Loft Five50 project)

PUBLIC: City of Lawrence, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, National Park Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

COMMUNITY AND NONPROFIT: Groundwork Lawrence (project catalyst and lead)

PHILANTHROPIC: Abbot and Dorothy H. Stevens Foundation, Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance

The Spicket River Greenway has produced neighborhood linkages and community trust that have led to a culture of stewardship. *Groundwork Lawrence*

The Spicket River Greenway is a 3.5-mile (5.6 km) public trail, completed in 2013, that links green spaces and walking paths in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Loft Five50, an affordable residential development completed in 2015, incorporates the greenway in its design, and developer WinnDevelopment constructed a portion of the trail. Local organization Groundwork Lawrence and a mix of nonprofit, public, and private partners have been instrumental in the trail's development and maintenance.

Connect people, activate parks

— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Spicket River Greenway

"Building relationships is central to creating and maintaining parks and trails. Whether it's volunteers from the neighborhood, nonprofits, state agencies, or developers that can help fund and benefit from these projects, strong relationships are needed to ensure these spaces remain top quality."

Heather McMann, executive director, Groundwork Lawrence

The Greenway 5K is an annual event hosted by Groundwork Lawrence on the 3.5-mile (5.6 km) Spicket River Greenway to promote health, fitness, and open spaces. *Groundwork Lawrence*

Connect people, activate parks

━━ PROJECT EXAMPLE

Spicket River Greenway

Loft Five50, an affordable residential development completed in 2015, incorporates the Spicket River Greenway in its design. Developer WinnDevelopment constructed a portion of the trail. *Gregg Shupe*

Park Development and Operations

PARK DEVELOPER: Nonprofit/public/private—Groundwork Lawrence; city of Lawrence; WinnDevelopment

OWNERSHIP: Public—city of Lawrence

OPERATIONS: Nonprofit—Groundwork Lawrence

FUNDING: Public (state and federal grants), private, nonprofit

Park Highlights

SIZE: 3.5-mile (5.6 km) trail

STATUS: Opened in 2013

PROGRAMMING: Group walks, Greenway 5K Walk/Run, annual cleanup events

DESIGN FEATURES: Paved riverside trail connecting multiple neighborhoods and local parks

RESILIENCE/SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES: Brownfield site remediation; sustainable stormwater management, river restoration

SOCIAL EQUITY STRATEGIES: Neighborhood revitalization; linkages among schools, parks, commuter rail station, and neighborhoods; increased recreational opportunities; improved environment for economic development, jobs, and housing

Connect people, activate parks

■— PROJECT EXAMPLE

Spicket River Greenway

"Investing in the Greenway benefits our project, our residents, and the surrounding community. It generates vibrancy and value."

Larry Curtis, president and managing partner, WinnDevelopment

Partnership Highlights

PARTNERSHIPS, TRAIL FORMED PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Planning for the 3.5-mile (5.6 km) Spicket River Greenway began in 1998, with the trail officially opening in 2013. The city of Lawrence—a community north of Boston that has experienced the effects of post–World War II industrial decline—and nonprofit Groundwork Lawrence spearheaded the trail's development, with Groundwork coordinating efforts among local community groups, state agencies, private-sector partners, and others.

Together, partners developed and implemented a vision focused on riverfront restoration, neighborhood revitalization, economic development, transit access, and linked community assets. Since the development of the greenway began, 10 parks have been rehabilitated or built—some on former brownfields.

Today, the trail connects the city both physically and socially. "The greenway is a catalyst for change," notes Heather McMann, executive director of Groundwork Lawrence. "It supports local businesses and development, and it connects people to schools, jobs, health care, parks, nature, and one another."

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT, MAINTENANCE SUPPORTED BY MULTISECTOR FUNDING SOURCES

The capital costs for the greenway were $10 million, with funding coming from multiple sources, including state and federal grants and private donations and investments. WinnDevelopment created and maintains a 500-linear-foot (150 m) section of the greenway along the length of Loft Five50—a 137-unit affordable residential development that rehabilitated six historic mill buildings along the Spicket River. To ensure that the greenway and river remain assets for Loft Five50 and the surrounding community, Winn also provides annual funding to support Groundwork's trail maintenance efforts.

PARTNERSHIPS BRED CULTURE OF STEWARDSHIP

The greenway has produced neighborhood linkages and community trust that have extended beyond initial trail development. As of 2019, over 7,100 residents, students, and local corporations had participated in an annual Spicket River cleanup along the trail—clearing over 136 tons (123 metric tons) of debris and 3,650 tires from the riverbanks.

"When community groups and neighborhood residents and businesses and government all work together, we can accomplish things that any one of those groups just couldn't do by themselves," Maggie Super Church, vice president of the Conservation Law Foundation and Lawrence resident, said in a 2013 Spicket River Greenway video on the Groundwork website.

Connect people, activate parks

—— **PROJECT EXAMPLE**

Levy Park

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Public park with maintenance funded by ground lease from private development

Levy Park's community garden provides an interactive opportunity for education, community engagement, and investment in the park. *Geoff Lyon*

Levy Park is a 5.9-acre (2.4 ha) public park in Houston that reopened in 2017 after a $15 million renovation that transformed it from an underused open space into the central component of an 11-acre (4.5 ha) urban activity center.

The park renovation—spearheaded by the Upper Kirby Redevelopment Authority (UKRA)—was completed with public funds, but maintenance is funded entirely through a partnership with Midway, a Houston-based real estate investment and development firm. Midway signed two 99-year ground leases on UKRA-owned, park-adjacent land that allowed the development of Kirby Grove, a 225,000-square-foot (21,000 sq m) office building with 25,000 square feet (2,300 sq m) of ground-floor restaurant space, and Avenue Grove, a 270-unit mid-rise residential tower.

The UKRA assembled properties adjacent to Levy Park to improve park access and allow adjacent development, resulting in a nearly half-acre (0.2 ha) increase in park size and roughly five acres (2 ha) of adjacent developable land. This innovative partnership unlocked new development opportunities for Midway and continues to support increased park patronage while generating the necessary funding for park operation. Since reopening, the park has seen attendance rise from 75 visitors per week to between 5,000 and 10,000 visitors.

"The public/private partnership between Midway and the city of Houston's Upper Kirby Redevelopment Authority generates ongoing funding for park operations—a great benefit for the people in the surrounding area and an essential investment in the success of Midway's adjacent projects."

Ann Taylor, senior vice president, Midway

Connect people, activate parks

ISSUE BRIEF

Maximizing Partnerships to Create Connectivity

Parks form essential physical, social, and cultural connections and may provide the only access to nature that many people have in their daily lives. Trails can connect parks and diverse neighborhoods while expanding equitable access to public transportation, area businesses, and other places that support healthy communities.

Cross-sector partnerships are necessary to maximize park and trail connection opportunities in many ways, including the following:

TYPE OF CONNECTION	NEED FOR CONNECTION	KEY PARTNERS
Neighborhood/ cultural	Investments in parks and other civic assets can "connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust, and counter the trends of social and economic fragmentation in cities and neighborhoods."[a] Parks can host and connect residents to artistic events and activities. Community-driven programming can create connections across neighborhoods when events attract residents from other parts of a city or region.	Public agencies that develop and operate parks and support local arts initiatives Developers, building owners, and businesses that provide publicly accessible park space and fund or host events Nonprofit organizations, including neighborhood/community groups, arts organizations, and park and trail advocacy groups
Transportation	Trails can provide safe, healthy, and sustainable connections to parks, schools, medical care, grocery stores, public transit, places of employment, and other key destinations. Economic considerations, such as the high cost of owning, operating, and insuring a car—which averaged nearly $8,600 annually in 2016[b]—mean that trails as transportation corridors can provide less-expensive alternatives to automobile ownership.	Public agencies and philanthropic organizations that fund, plan, and/or coordinate efforts to connect parks, trails, and other destinations Developers and landowners that create, provide land, and/or fund trails and parks Nonprofit organizations focused on parks, trails, and sustainable transportation
Connections to nature	Underserved youth may experience a range of barriers to participating in outdoor programs, including distance and lack of transportation, cost of programs, safety concerns, lack of relevant programs, and feeling unwelcome or experiencing discrimination.[c]	National and local nonprofit organizations that focus on increasing youth connections with nature, including those that provide job-skills training focused on the outdoors

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The Hoover-Mason Trestle in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is an elevated walkway that helps preserve the area's industrial history. The project is part of the SteelStacks development, created through a private/public partnership led by the city of Bethlehem and its redevelopment authority, with public improvements funded through a tax increment finance district. *Halkin Mason Photography*

Trojan Park in Wellston, Missouri, is located along the St. Vincent Greenway, which connects four towns in the St. Louis region. The park was created through a partnership among Great Rivers Greenway, the city of Wellston, and a variety of multisector partners. *Great Rivers Greenway*

"People need parks to be well designed, programmed, and maintained. It's essential to develop partnerships among city departments and beyond to produce a public realm that works for people's everyday lives."

Bridget Marquis, director, Civic Commons Learning Network, Reimagining the Civic Commons | U3 Advisors

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Successful Partnerships for Parks

Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space

Parks are essential building blocks in thriving places, and creative approaches are increasingly necessary for park success. More and more, parks are the result of innovative approaches to partnerships and financing.

Real estate leaders are emerging as key players in new and evolving approaches to park creation, maintenance, and programming. Multisector partnerships from real estate, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and the public sector, among others, are proving essential to developing and operating parks, providing opportunities to enhance real estate value and create thriving, healthy places.

This report shares lessons and considerations for real estate and other sectors—including public, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations—on how to jointly create and sustain successful partnerships for parks.

Aerial view of Domino Park, an 11-acre (4.5 ha) mixed-use project in Brooklyn, New York.

ULI Urban Land Institute