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## **10 PRINCIPLES** FOR ENHANCING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS

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**Cover photo:** People explore the Hemisfair site in San Antonio.  
(Jacqueline Canales)

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**Recommended bibliographic listing:**  
Urban Land Institute. *10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks*.  
Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2021.

ISBN: 978-0-87420-470-4

## About the Urban Land Institute

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 shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in 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.

### 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 ULI's 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: [uli.org/health](https://uli.org/health).

## About 10 Minute Walk

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. Learn more and connect with 10 Minute Walk at [10minutewalk.org](https://10minutewalk.org) and [uli.org/parks](https://uli.org/parks).

## About This Report

*10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks* distills and synthesizes key themes, lessons learned, and best practices from the recommendations of 14 Advisory Services panels and national study visits on parks and open spaces. Part One of this report discusses the 10 principles that came out of a September 2020 workshop with representatives from these technical assistance activities and other subject matter experts. Part Two features summaries of each of the panels and study visits, illustrating the many different park challenges, contexts, and recommendations that informed the 10 principles.

Please note that the principles and content of this report are a holistic representation of the September 2020 workshop and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of individual workshop participants.

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Colorful murals, such as this one along First Street, are found throughout the Boyle Heights neighborhood in Los Angeles.





Aerial view of Campus Martius Park in Detroit.

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**PART ONE:** 10 PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCING  
EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS

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Pathway through a park in San Antonio.

# Letter from the Workshop Chair

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only demonstrated that parks are a vital resource for a community's health but also helped expose inequities in park access. Over the past few years, ULI has been providing technical assistance through Advisory Services panels and national study visits to help cities across the United States increase access to high-quality parks and open spaces, especially in underserved communities. These technical assistance activities addressed longstanding inequities in communities, and now it is more important than ever to learn from how these cities are addressing obstacles to equitable park access.

During a September 2020 ULI workshop, panel participants from across the country convened virtually to distill lessons from these technical assistance activities. Over the course of two days, our conversations, debates, and insights culminated in 10 principles for enhancing equitable access to parks. These principles provide guidance for both the public and private sectors on what they should be considering as they work toward ensuring all people have safe and easy access to a high-quality park. However, the principles do not prescribe solutions, and how the principles play out in each community will vary.

The issues that the principles in this report respond to are urgent, but they are not new. Parks have a vital role to play in mitigating the health, social, and economic impacts of chronic and infectious disease, but research demonstrates that the impacts are inequitably distributed among communities.

During summer 2020, only a few months before the workshop, the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis sparked a global uprising for racial justice. This is one of many instances of structural racism and its consequences for Black people in public space throughout U.S. history. Although the workshop was already designed to focus on equity, this context encouraged us to elevate racial equity as a particular focus. Racism has been embedded in the built environment through redlining and other policies and continues to affect access to and use of parks by Black people and other people of color.

Overcoming decades of disinvestment, violence, and racist policies—both in and out of parks systems—will take commitment and resources at all levels. Addressing inequities related to race, ability, age, income, ethnicity, and more will require long-term dedication to understanding community needs and making parks places that all people can enjoy. To make progress, we must urgently learn from cities and champions for equitable park access across the United States and work toward equity and access in all park systems.

Providing equitable access to parks goes beyond addressing physical barriers. It means looking at how to redirect investments to areas where they are most needed; how to connect economic, social, and cultural assets to one other; how to get agencies to work more holistically and in more coordinated ways; and how to foster community-centered infrastructure to guide the stewardship of parks and open spaces.

Parks have always played a critical role in communities. Now, that is clearer than ever—but so are the inequities in park access. Just as the workshop provided a space for thoughtful conversation on these difficult and entrenched issues, I expect that this report will provide a starting point for further discussion on park access and how to begin making these systems more equitable.

**James Lima**

President, James Lima Planning + Development  
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ULI thanks the workshop participants for their insights and engagement. Please note that the principles and content of this report are a holistic representation of the September 2020 workshop and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of individual workshop participants.

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# 10 PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS

1

## Champion Parks as Essential

IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS ACROSS SECTORS AND IN THE COMMUNITY TO UPLIFT PARKS AS ESSENTIAL SERVICES

2

## Capture and Leverage the Value of Parks

RECOGNIZE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PARKS AND HARNESS THIS VALUE FOR COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE PARK ITSELF

3

## Empower Communities as Co-Creators

RESPECT THE ABILITY OF EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES TO DECIDE THEIR OWN FUTURES

4

## Be Visionary

DEVELOP AND COMMUNICATE A BOLD, SHARED VISION FOR EQUITY

5

## Invest in Existing Assets

RECOGNIZE AND MAINTAIN THE VALUE OF PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL STRENGTHS

# 6

## Reconceptualize Parks

REIMAGINE PUBLIC SPACES AND THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT WHAT CAN SERVE AS A PARK

# 7

## Fund Parks for the Future

EXPAND THE RANGE OF FUNDING OPTIONS TO SUPPORT PARK CONSTRUCTION AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

# 8

## Collaborate with Partners

UNLEASH THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

# 9

## Make Parks Welcoming

PURPOSEFULLY FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR ALL

# 10

## Connect People to Parks

ENHANCE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN AND AMONG PARKS, DESTINATIONS, AND OTHER COMMUNITY ASSETS

# Introduction

Parks and open spaces are essential for community life. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly elevated need for parks to be safe spaces for people to get outside, socialize, exercise, and more. The 2020 protests for racial justice have also highlighted the importance of parks as common places to gather, with protestors coming together in parks to take a stand against systemic racism.

However, access to parks and open spaces has never been equitable. Even as shared outdoor space has gained prominence as a basic community need, significant inequities in public access to parks and open space remain, with underserved neighborhoods having far fewer options that are convenient, close, spacious, welcoming, beautiful, and safe from both crime and discrimination.

Inequities—not only in terms of access to parks but also in terms of feelings of safety and belonging within parks—exist across lines of race, income, gender, age, ability, immigration status, religion, sexual orientation, and more, all of which intersect. While it is critical to keep these different lenses in mind when siting, designing, and programming parks, racism has significantly and directly led to disparities in park access by Black people, and so it is a particular focus of this report. The sidebar “Anti-Black Racism in Public Spaces” further explores this topic.



Park signage in multiple languages at Grand Park in Los Angeles.

## GLOSSARY

**Access:** The ability of people to travel to and use a park without physical, social, cultural, financial, or other barriers.

**Antiracism:** Active, intentional actions toward racial justice and against all forms of racism.

**Equity:** Whereas *equality* means providing the same resources to each person or group, *equity* means providing the resources necessary for each person or group to reach the same outcome. Distributive equity refers to the distribution of burdens and benefits, and procedural equity refers to the ability to participate in decision-making processes. Equity has many dimensions, including race, gender, ability, income, ethnicity, immigration status, age, religion, sexual orientation, and more.

**Inclusion:** The practice of providing equal access to opportunities and resources without discrimination, including overcoming barriers to unequal access.

**Intersectionality:** The complex and synergistic ways in which different aspects of identity combine and overlap.

**Park:** An outdoor space that is open to all for a variety of purposes.

**Racism:** Both individual acts of prejudice and discrimination and systemic and structural factors leading to inequitable outcomes on the basis of race.

**Underserved:** Provided with inadequate services. This report uses “underserved” rather than other commonly used terms, such as “disadvantaged,” to highlight the unjust disparities in service provision. Other terms can inaccurately imply differences in community characteristics.

## Anti-Black Racism in Public Spaces

Inequities in park access affect many populations, from the elderly to people experiencing homelessness to those facing discrimination on the basis of their religion or ethnicity. All of these issues are important and intertwined, and many are addressed throughout this report. However, this report intentionally and specifically highlights race because of the long history of anti-Black racism in public spaces, which continues to shape parks and people's experiences of them.

For most of American history, parks and public spaces were characterized by segregation—both in the south, where laws codified these practices, and in other parts of the country, including northern cities like Boston and New York City, that used a different set of tactics. After the 1964 Civil Rights Act made this discrimination illegal, harassment, resistance, and even violence served to perpetuate segregation.

Meanwhile, redlining and racial covenants ensured that communities remained divided on the basis of race. When the Home Owners' Loan Corporation assessed neighborhoods to determine mortgage risk, it color-coded predominantly Black areas as red to indicate a high risk—regardless of the neighborhood's income or actual level of risk. This classification prevented Black households from getting a mortgage and building equity, a significant factor in today's generational wealth disparities. Moreover, racial covenants prevented the sale of homes to people based on their race, ethnicity, or religion.

As White families began to move to the suburbs, investment in cities—and the communities of color that remained there—declined. Today, White, high-income people are returning to cities, bringing new concerns for existing residents about gentrification and displacement.

This history is reflected in the lack of high-quality, accessible parks in many predominantly Black neighborhoods today. Just as intentional policies and planning decisions created these inequities, fostering more equitable parks systems will also require intentional, antiracist practices to work against structural racism and toward racial justice.

The events of 2020 have illuminated the prejudice and discrimination that continue to take place in public spaces, including in parks. In New York City's Central Park, a White park user called the police on Black bird-watcher Christian Cooper and made false claims against him. Ahmaud Arbery was jogging in public when he was fatally shot. And the murders of George Floyd and many others have brought renewed attention to excessive use of force and concerns about police brutality.

These historical and ongoing issues contribute to all aspects of equitable park access: whether investments in parks have been made in Black communities, whether existing parks are adequately maintained, whether park amenities meet the needs of the communities they sit within, whether Black people are and feel safe in these public spaces, and whether parks are truly welcoming or still present barriers to inclusion.

Although this overview is not a comprehensive history of anti-Black racism in public spaces, it does help illustrate why this report is highlighting race as a particularly necessary lens when thinking about equity and its many dimensions.

*“We can think holistically about the role that parks not only play in economic development, community development, and our daily lives, but also in terms of planning and municipal service delivery. This includes dealing with the way that systemic racism is integrated into all the aspects of planning, designing, operating, policing, and coordinating service delivery in and around parks both through BIDs [business improvement districts] and parks departments. We need a mayoral, cabinet-level conversation: **How do we start to purge systemic racism from all of the design and planning work and operational work?**”*

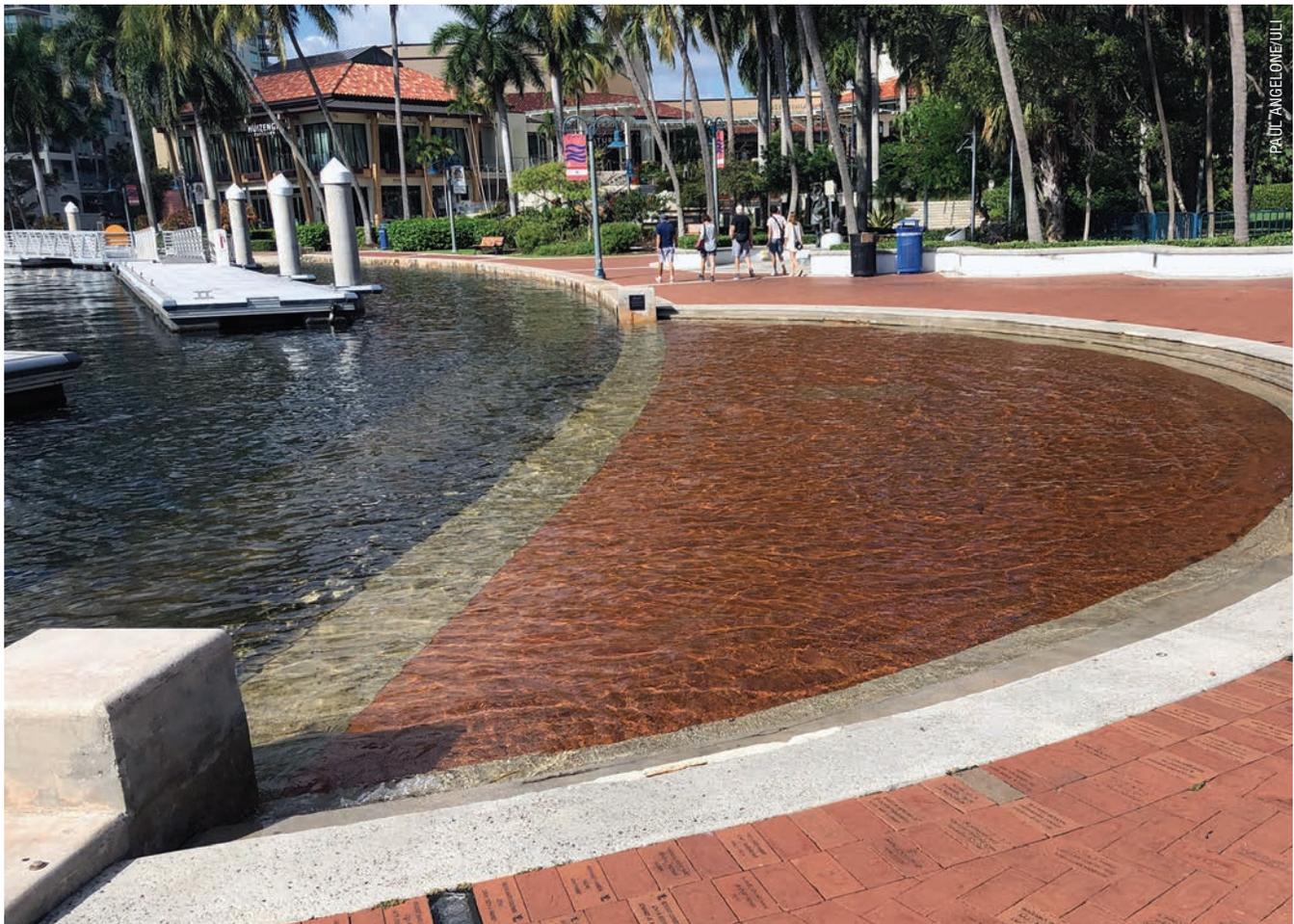
—JAMES LIMA  
President  
James Lima Planning + Development

In summer 2020, The Trust for Public Land released a study showing that, across the United States, parks serving primarily non-White populations are half the size of parks that serve majority White populations and are five times more crowded.<sup>1</sup> In addition, numerous events in 2020 have underscored the fact that people of color are policed differently in parks and open spaces.

The issues of racial injustice, park access, and health disparities are inseparable. Disinvestment and neglect of the built environment have led to worse health outcomes in some neighborhoods—primarily lower-income communities and communities of color—while whiter, wealthier zip codes nearby have investments in services and amenities that facilitate higher life expectancies. It is not individual differences

that are driving these health disparities but differences in the built environment, of which parks are a critical part. In Los Angeles, targeted investments in park infrastructure would result in a total increase of nearly 118,000 years of life expectancy for Latinx and Black residents.<sup>2</sup>

Parks also provide ecosystem services, such as urban heat island mitigation and stormwater retention, that generate health benefits as well. For example, having nearby spaces with shade can help people stay cool and safe during heat waves. The unequal distribution of parks' environmental benefits is yet another factor in health disparities across communities, often falling along the lines of race and income.



Parks can enhance resilience and help mitigate sunny-day flooding, as seen at this Fort Lauderdale site.

1. The Trust for Public Land, “The Heat Is On” (special report, 2020), <https://www.tpl.org/heat-trust-public-land-special-report>.

2. Prevention Institute, “Park Equity, Life Expectancy, and Power Building: Research Synopsis” (September 2020), <https://preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/%20Park%20Equity%2C%20Life%20Expectancy%2C%20and%20Power%20Building%20Research%20Synopsis.pdf>.

These inequities stem from urban planning, design, and development decisions and policies during much of the 20th century that divided communities on the basis of race, ethnicity, and income. Indeed, these actions reflected the mindset of some of ULI's founding members. The sidebar "Reckoning with the Past and Moving Forward at ULI" explores this history in more depth. Today's homeownership gap directly reflects this legacy of redlining and segregation, which continues to perpetuate disparities in generational wealth. In 2016, the average wealth of White families was seven times that of Black families and five times that of Hispanic families.<sup>3</sup>

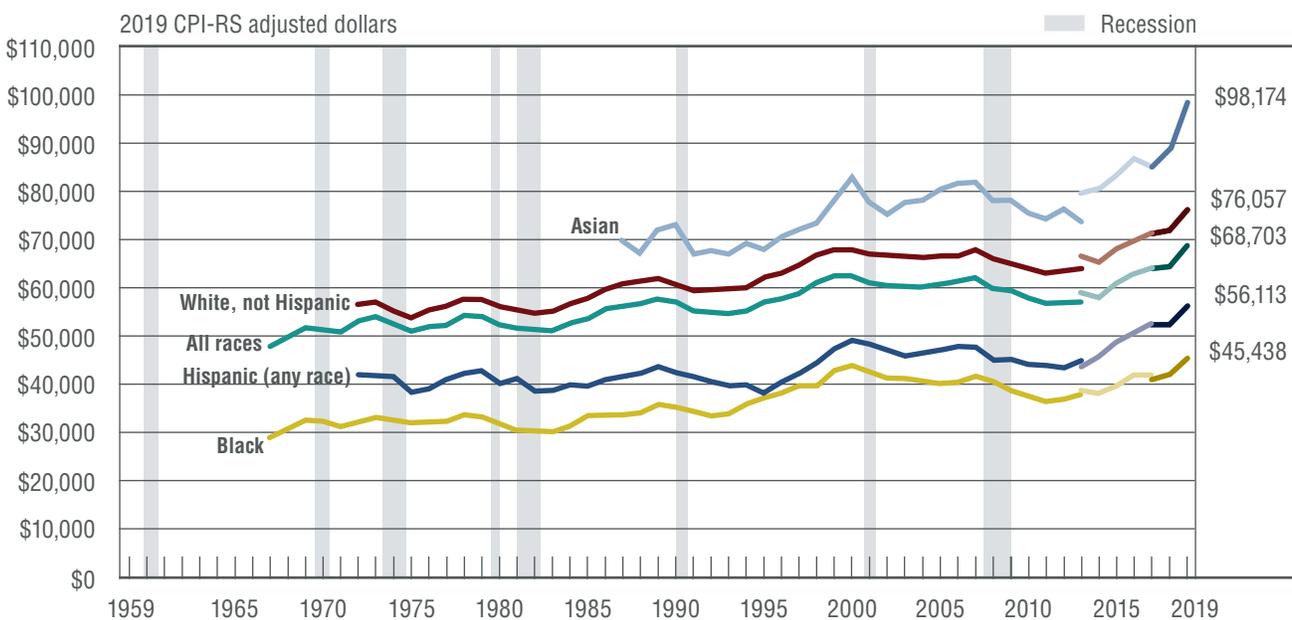
By the end of the century, as young professionals and empty nesters started migrating back to urban downtowns, inequitable practices continued, with revitalization efforts

benefiting some while leading to further displacement and exclusion for others. In neighborhoods and cities across the United States, concentrated and persistent poverty and disinvestment jeopardize the life chances of Black people and communities of color. Today, Black children who grow up in the bottom fifth of income are twice as likely as White children to stay in that quintile as adults.<sup>4</sup> From 1967 to 2019, the real median household income for Black people has consistently remained below that of Asian people, White people, and Hispanic people (see figure).

The legacy of these land use decisions and policies continues to reverberate across generations to affect community health, economic opportunity, and access to neighborhood civic infrastructure such as parks.

## Real Median Household Income by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1967 to 2019

(Households as of March of the following year)



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1968 to 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASEC).

**Note:** Breaks in lines represent redesigned income questions (2013) and an updated processing system (2017).

3. Urban Institute, "Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America (Updated)," October 5, 2017, <https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>.

4. Richard V. Reeves and Christopher Pulliam, "No Room at the Top: The Stark Divide in Black and White Economic Mobility," Brookings, February 14, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/02/14/no-room-at-the-top-the-stark-divide-in-black-and-white-economic-mobility/>.

## Reckoning with the Past and Moving Forward at ULI

In the early 20th century, many real estate and land use professionals, including some of ULI's earliest members, advocated for policies and practices that the Urban Land Institute now unequivocally stands against. Acknowledging and reflecting on this history is an important step toward moving forward and upholding ULI's commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

ULI member and influential real estate developer J.C. Nichols, who had a profound and wide-ranging impact on land development in America, is part of this history. Although Nichols's work shaped the industry in some positive ways, he was also a proponent of racial covenants, which prevented certain groups from living in the neighborhoods he developed based on their race, ethnicity, or religion.

These restrictions had long-lasting consequences for the individuals and communities they excluded. In fact, a parks and open spaces Advisory Services panel in Kansas City, Missouri, saw how the effects of Nichols's use of racial covenants in the city persist today (see Kansas City, Missouri, case study in Part Two of this report). The use of racial covenants became encoded in local, state, and federal laws, leading to redlining and other government-sanctioned policies restricting access to place based on race.

This was part of the context for the conversations at the September 2020 workshop and for this report. Today, the viewpoints of the Institute and its membership have evolved, and ULI is steadfastly committed to the creation of diverse, inclusive, and equitable communities.



DIANA SCHODER/ULI

Pathway through a park in Kansas City.

As part of ULI's commitment to advancing the goals of 10 Minute Walk, ULI convened 14 Advisory Services panels and national study visits from 2018 to 2020, focused on improving and expanding parks and open space in underserved areas of cities across the United States. Each Advisory Services panel convened national experts over an intensive five-day period, and each national study visit took place over two-and-a-half days with national and local experts.

Both types of technical assistance programs brought volunteer experts from across the United States to a city or community to provide a set of recommendations to priority areas identified by local sponsors. In September 2020, ULI convened stakeholders from these panels and study visits, along with other partners with expertise in park access, to synthesize key insights and lessons learned. The result is this publication.

ULI hosted panels and study visits in the following cities and with the following focus areas. Summaries of these 14 technical assistance activities can be found in Part Two of this report.

- **St. Paul, Minnesota (Rondo):** Exploring the development of a land bridge (March 18–23, 2018)
- **Sacramento, California (South Sacramento):** Equitable transit-oriented development (September 23–28, 2018)
- **Atlanta, Georgia (The Stitch):** Developing a freeway lid (February 24–March 1, 2019)
- **Grand Rapids, Michigan:** Land acquisition strategies for equitable park access (March 25–27, 2019)
- **Lewisville, Texas (the Triangle):** Achieving accessible community open space within the Triangle (March 27–29, 2019)
- **Detroit, Michigan:** Financial sustainability of the parks system (March 31–April 5, 2019)
- **San Antonio, Texas (HemisFair):** Urban redevelopment around a historic landmark (April 28–May 3, 2019)
- **Austin, Texas:** Trail-oriented development (August 25–30, 2019)
- **Camden, New Jersey (Cramer Hill):** Park management for financial sustainability and community benefit (October 2–4, 2019)
- **Fort Lauderdale, Florida:** Parks and open-space activation (October 13–18, 2019)

- **Los Angeles, California (Boyle Heights):** Agency coordination and new partnerships to improve park access and quality (November 13–15, 2019)
- **Kansas City, Missouri:** Equitable parks planning (December 1–6, 2019)
- **Memphis, Tennessee (South Memphis):** The role of parks in community development and connecting small neighborhood parks (January 29–31, 2020)
- **Lynnwood, Washington (City Center):** Parks and the public realm (February 26–28, 2020)

With the publication of *10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks*, ULI seeks to build on its tradition of learning from how cities have approached these complex issues and sharing these insights for the benefit of its members—and for the betterment of the land use industry and communities as a whole. The report lists 10 principles for improving equitable access to parks and open space, exemplifying ULI's commitment to finding solutions to urban challenges that are practical, practicable, and replicable. Each principle is based on knowledge shared by leading ULI members and other land use experts who participated in the September 2020 workshop. Workshop participants drew upon recommendations and observations from panels and study visits, as well as from their own professional experience, to develop these principles.

The principles will serve as a resource for parks departments, developers, local officials, and anyone else seeking to improve equity in their park systems. Supported by case studies that show what the principles can look like in different contexts, these guiding ideas are designed to inspire and inform. Illustrative quotes from the workshop appear throughout the report.

Overcoming decades of inequitable policies and planning decisions may seem daunting, but cities are already starting to work on this within their parks systems. This report shares lessons from these steps toward more equitable park access as ULI supports cities in working toward healthier communities.

# Prioritizing Parks during the COVID-19 Pandemic

People have flocked to outdoor spaces over the course of the pandemic, underscoring the contribution parks and open spaces make toward a community's economic, social, and environmental vibrancy. For years, many local governments have recognized parks and open spaces as civic infrastructure that gives their communities ecosystem benefits and economic advantages and promotes health and wellness.

However, even before the pandemic, parks have been treated as relatively low funding priorities by local governments. For example, a 2017 national survey of local officials commissioned by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) found that parks were ranked sixth in importance among 10 widely offered local government services.<sup>a</sup>

Now, with COVID-19 causing severe economic losses in communities throughout the nation, it is possible that parks and open-space funding could be cut further as communities seek ways to trim spending and redistribute funds. A survey from NRPA in June 2020 found that 66 percent of park and recreation agencies are facing a reduction in operations spending, and over half of park and recreation agencies are facing reductions to capital spending budgets.<sup>b</sup> With state and local tax revenues falling by 17 percent in spring 2020, the economic fallout of the pandemic continues to jeopardize parks budgets.<sup>c</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is important to recognize parks and open spaces as among the essential services that are vital to the physical and mental health of residents and the economic and environmental health of communities in general. They are not “nice-to-have,” but rather “must-have” services that need to be available for all community residents and should be prioritized—both in discussions and in budgets—as a critical part of the community's infrastructure.



GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY

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.

a. A.J. Mowen, A.G. Barrett, A.R. Graefe, and K. Roth, “Local Government Officials’ Perceptions of Parks and Recreation” (NRPA, 2017), <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/local-government-officials-perceptions-of-parks-and-recreation/>.

b. Kevin Roth, “NRPA Parks Snapshot: June 24–26 Survey Results,” NRPA blog, June 26, 2020, <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-june-24-26-survey-results/>.

c. Kevin Roth, “Falling Tax Revenues Affect Park and Recreation Budgets,” Parks & Recreation Magazine (November 2020), <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/november/falling-tax-revenues-affect-park-and-recreation-budgets/>.

*“We need to ensure that access to new parks is **equitable and safe**. There are all types of barriers to access. Some of them are real, and some of them are perceived. But how do you actually feel welcome when you’re coming to these parks? It also matters whether the design of that park is **culturally appropriate**. At the same time, barrier-free access is not just from an ADA perspective, but also from a multigenerational perspective. How do we design parks for people of all ages? Accessible parks must be **high quality** and culturally appropriate.”*

—RIKI NISHIMURA  
Principal  
Populous



# Champion Parks as Essential

## IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS ACROSS SECTORS AND IN THE COMMUNITY TO UPLIFT PARKS AS ESSENTIAL SERVICES

*“We need to recognize that the guise of infrastructure can be used to keep perpetuating racist practices, or it can exacerbate these issues. We should keep that in our lens and our frame when we’re thinking about championing parks as additions to the community, recognizing the negative consequences of how they’ve been used in the past.”*

—**DARRYL FORD**  
Superintendent  
City of Los Angeles Department of  
Recreation and Parks

Park champions come from all backgrounds, and having diverse champions helps build support across sectors. The public sector and government—which bear the responsibility of spearheading investments and ensuring a consistent source of funding to build, operate, program, and maintain parks—benefit from the support of the private sector, community groups, and hybrid organizations like park foundations and business improvement districts. Community park champions recognize that parks contribute to community health and neighborhood life, providing critical insights about how parks can best meet local needs.

Without champions who uplift parks as essential services, budget cuts can exacerbate inequities in access. This defunding prevents new parks from being constructed, cuts back on the maintenance and staffing that makes parks welcoming and attractive, and disrupts programming. Often, these changes disproportionately affect parks that were already struggling to obtain adequate funding. Preserving and enhancing equitable access requires champions across sectors who can advocate for parks as a priority—no matter the economic circumstance.

As parks departments, developers, and communities work to provide parks as essential services, they can identify leaders who champion not only park creation and maintenance but also equity and access.

- ✦ A public-sector champion understands the connection between the public realm and other essential public services, leads a collaborative effort between public agencies as well as other groups, and works to keep parks at the forefront of the community’s “must-have” agenda.
- ✦ Champions in the private sector, such as real estate developers, recognize that parks not only serve the community but also add value to nearby properties. And investing in parks can increase community buy-in and lower impact fees (financial contributions owed by developers to offset the impact of their projects on public infrastructure)—two benefits that speak to parks’ value for communities.
- ✦ When advocating for parks, champions in the community—including community organizations and residents—also elevate the needs of their neighborhood, such as maintaining existing parks, developing more relevant programming, or shaping policies that affect park access like how and whether police respond to safety concerns.
- ✦ Friends of Parks groups, park foundations, and park conservancies bring together volunteer efforts, philanthropy, advocacy, and fundraising to champion a specific park or a network of parks. When these different functions are streamlined under one governance structure, these nonprofit groups are able to efficiently amplify support for parks as essential infrastructure for a neighborhood.
- ✦ Business improvement districts (BIDs) provide services, raise funds, and advocate for changes within a commercial area. Because parks are economic drivers, BIDs often take on the role of championing parks to support their business interests.
- ✦ Championing parks does not mean overlooking how parks and other infrastructure have been used to perpetuate racist practices or exacerbate existing inequities, such as ability, age, income, and more. Rather, recognizing this history and context is a critical part of any champion’s lens as they consider what it means for parks to be “essential” and prioritize equitable access as part of their leadership.

## LEARN MORE

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Reflecting on the work of ULI's Advisory Services panels and national study visits makes evident that champions are critical in generating support for parks. Panelists have recognized the difficulties in providing parks as essential services when a champion is lacking.

- In **St. Paul**, the nonprofit ReConnect Rondo (RCR) is championing a community-led vision for a land bridge that would cap the freeway that bisected the predominantly Black community. RCR's leadership has mobilized residents and the city government to try to make this ambitious plan a reality.
- In **Camden**, experts on a ULI national study visit recommended immediately finding a champion for the planned Cramer Hill Waterfront Park. As the park faced urgent questions about funding, access, and community benefits, the panelists recognized that only a champion could bring together all stakeholders and inspire quick action.

In addition to these case studies of ULI's parks and open space technical assistance activities, the sidebar starting on the following page describes how parks can successfully serve their communities when leaders commit to equitable access as they champion parks.



PAUL ANGELONE/ULI

Looking over I-94, which divided Rondo in the 1950s.

## Recognized by ULI for Excellence: Campus Martius Park, Domino Park, and Trojan Park

ULI's Urban Open Space Award program, established in 2010, recognizes outstanding examples of urban parks and open spaces that have transformed, enriched, and revitalized communities while becoming a critical part of the urban social fabric.

Since the announcement of the first winner—Detroit's highly popular **Campus Martius Park**, conservatively estimated to have catalyzed more than \$500 million in economic development—ULI has recognized more than 40 parks and open spaces, including winners and finalists, that are playing crucial roles in both community regeneration and unification. They represent a mix of publicly and privately funded and developed spaces, and each demonstrates a firm commitment by local leaders—both public and private—to treat public spaces as essential services.

The latest Urban Open Space Award winners, announced in September 2020, are Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York, and Trojan Park in Wellston, Missouri.

Brooklyn's **Domino Park** is part of the transformation of the former Domino Sugar Factory site into a mixed-use, vibrant space within an area that previously had one of the lowest open space to people ratios in the city. Inspired by the site's rich history and as a response to community input, the five-acre park reconnects the Williamsburg neighborhood to the East River for the first time in 160 years. Domino Park showcases the legacy of an iconic industrial waterfront site through an "Artifact Walk," which integrates over 30 large-scale salvaged relics into an interpretive walk.

The park contains many native plant species that reduce stormwater runoff and function as an absorbent sponge and first line of defense against sea-level rise. It is also one of the first projects to be certified under Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines, an incentive-based ratings system to make waterfronts more resilient, environmentally healthy, accessible, and equitable for all. Domino Park offers a wide range of active and passive uses and has been embraced by the diverse community it serves with nearly 3.5 million visitors since opening in June 2018.



Campus Martius Park in Detroit.



Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York.



Trojan Park's grand opening in Wellston, Missouri.

Wellston, Missouri's **Trojan Park** is a one-acre community park that serves as a key destination along the St. Vincent Greenway, which stretches across four towns in the St. Louis region, connecting major parks, schools and universities, public transit, job centers, and neighborhoods. Built as part of NRPA's Parks Build Communities initiative, it is a partnership project between the Great Rivers Greenway (a regional public agency connecting three counties with greenway trails), the city of Wellston, St. Louis County Parks, NRPA, and more than 30 partners who contributed funding or in-kind services or materials to the park.

The city, county, and NRPA continue to collaborate with vendors and volunteers for operations and maintenance. The park, which attracts an estimated 20,000 visitors per year as a favorite gathering place, was designed and named by

local residents to honor the former high school mascot and contains amenities they selected. Beyond basic functions, it features universally accessible exercise equipment, musical instruments, and rain gardens with native plants.

In announcing the winners, Urban Open Space Award jury chair and ULI leader Antonio Fiol-Silva said, "Equitably accessible quality open spaces are increasingly understood as vital to the physical, social and economic health of urban neighborhoods. Domino and Trojan Parks are two brilliant examples of the profoundly positive impact that such spaces can have in the lives of their communities."

# 2

## Capture and Leverage the Value of Parks

### RECOGNIZE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PARKS AND HARNESS THIS VALUE FOR COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE PARK ITSELF

*“Value maximization isn’t just about value capture. When thinking about the park, how are you making sure that you’re getting as many benefits as possible out of it and mitigating any potential negative consequences as well?”*

—**SUJATA SRIVASTAVA**  
Principal  
Strategic Economics

Parks provide important financial benefits in the form of increased property values and economic activity that can be captured and leveraged. The payback on public realm investments can be used to help inspire a greater commitment by the public sector to invest in parks that catalyze further economic activity and enhance social equity. For instance, tax revenue generated from development sparked by park investments in underserved neighborhoods can and should be reinvested in those neighborhoods to help offset potentially negative effects of gentrification such as the displacement of existing residents and businesses. Or revenue can be used to invest in parks in disinvested neighborhoods elsewhere in a city. When done purposefully, leveraging investments beyond the park can increase quality of life for the whole neighborhood, enabling residents to access the many benefits that a park can bring to its community.



Panelists meet for a tour of the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail in Austin.



APRIL ANDERSON LAMOUR@UX/UI

A park in Detroit.

Using value-capture tools and leveraging investments are not successful without a broader strategy. Communication, intentionality, and creativity all enable these tools to serve communities more effectively in the following ways:

- ◆ Integral to capturing the value of parks and leveraging park investments is communicating the importance of these spaces to the greater community. Articulating the benefits of parks can help achieve broader support and attract funding from a variety of sources, including philanthropic organizations and corporations seeking to fulfill social responsibility goals.
- ◆ Value capture and leveraged investments can be intentionally used to promote equity and access, such as financing street improvements so that people can reach parks safely or funding anti-displacement programs so that residents can enjoy their parks long term.
- ◆ It is important to note that value capture has limitations. In depressed neighborhoods with limited real estate value, increases in value sometimes cannot be captured because of market or legal issues. Moreover, designing parks with the specific goal of increasing property values could result in further neglect of neighborhoods that need investment. Although value capture can be a powerful tool, it is important to consider other strategies as well.
- ◆ Thinking creatively about how to capture the economic, environmental, and health benefits of parks can generate ideas for different revenue streams.

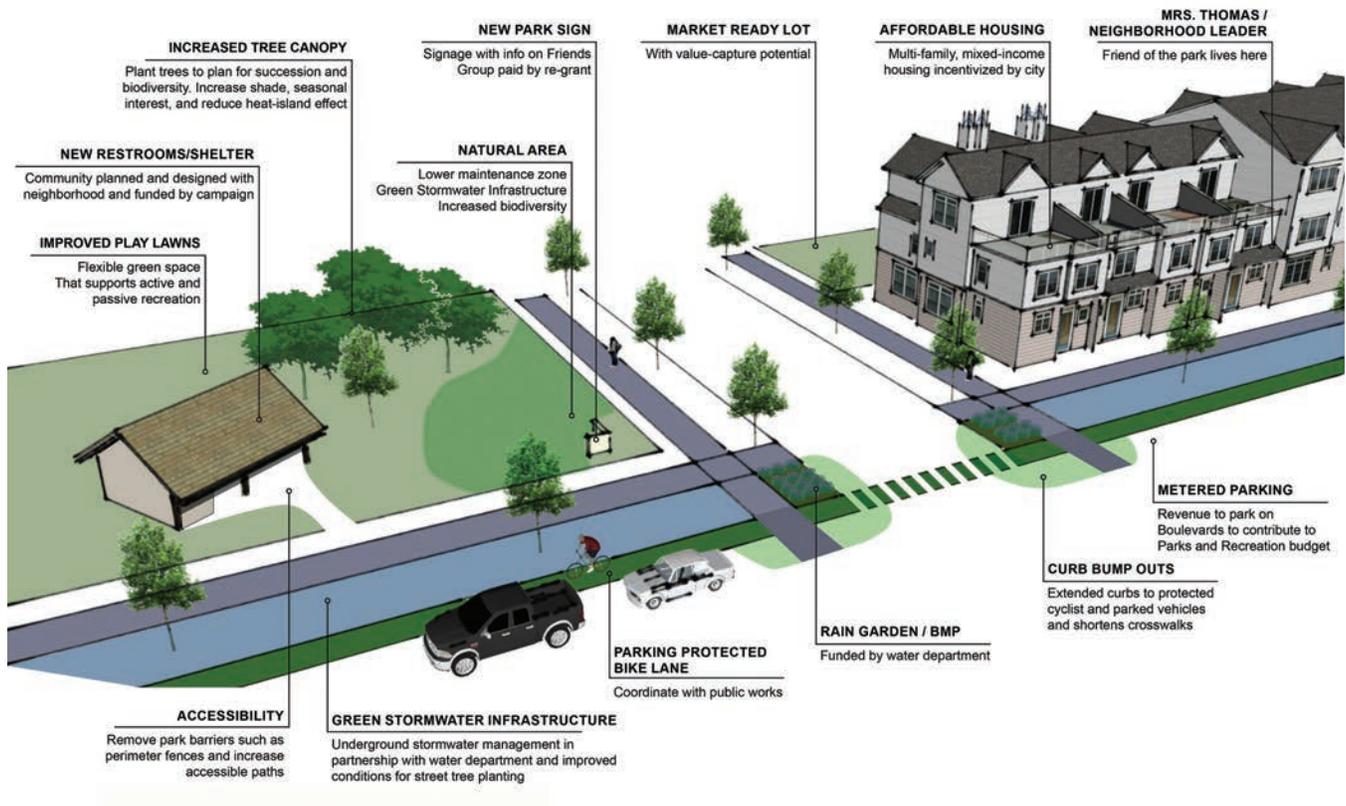
## LEARN MORE

Value capture, reinvesting in communities, and leveraging investments beyond parks are common recommendations in ULI technical assistance reports on parks and open spaces, and these tools can be used in many different cities to increase equity and access.

- In **Detroit**, panelists recommended several financial strategies to make the city’s park system more sustainable, including exploring tools such as value increment recapture, special assessment districts, park impact fees, and stormwater retention credits. Financial sustainability, panelists agreed, is the foundation of a high-quality parks system that can benefit all Detroit residents.

- Value-capture tools can be used for different types of open spaces—not just parks. In **Austin**, panelists suggested using tax increment financing to support the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail, a cherished community asset that connects neighborhoods and provides a safe place for recreation.
- In **Kansas City**, the panel envisioned a holistic investment strategy to spur residential and commercial revitalization as well as build support for the park, as shown in the diagram.

The sidebar on value capture goes into more depth on these financial tools. Later in this report, the sidebar “Making the Business Case for Parks” provides additional examples.



BONNIE ROY/ULI

Ivanhoe Park. The panel envisioned a holistic investment strategy within parks to spur residential and commercial revitalization as well as build support for the park.

# What Is Value Capture?

Community assets such as parks and open spaces that contribute to a higher quality of life are often powerful drivers of economic growth. A study from the National Recreation and Parks Association found that, in 2017, local park and recreation agencies generated more than \$166 billion in economic activity (resulting from direct agency expenditures as well as spending associated with agency vendors) and supported more than 1.1 million jobs across the United States.

Another NRPA survey of corporate executives found that more than 80 percent rated quality-of-life features—particularly access to parks and open space—as an important factor when choosing a location for a headquarters, factory, or other company facility. And in 2015, a report by The Trust for Public Land indicated that high-quality parks increase surrounding property values by as much as 12 to 15 percent. These are just a sampling of a growing body of evidence that points to the economic benefits of parks and open space.

Value capture refers to financial tools that municipalities can use to reap all or some of this economic value generated by their investments. These tools depend on the market, economic, and legal context of each place, and many of them may require legislative change or voter approval. Regardless of whether value capture is a useful tool for a specific scenario, working closely with communities to design projects that can maximize benefits from the start is important.

The following descriptions of common value-capture tools are adapted from the *Value Capture in the Commons* toolkit from Reimagining the Civic Commons.<sup>a</sup>

- **Special assessment districts (SADs)** apply an additional tax on properties within a defined geographic area to fund a specific public improvement project.
- **Tax increment financing (TIF)** is a tool municipalities use to spur development in economically distressed or underdeveloped areas. Unlike special assessment districts, TIF programs do not increase tax rates, but rather capture the additional tax revenue generated when properties increase in value.
- A direct way to capture increases in real estate value is by **controlling land parcels**. A mission-based community development organization can acquire and maintain ownership of land as a tool to advance community objectives, such as ensuring long-term housing affordability, providing affordable retail or office space for local businesses, and programming and maintaining civic spaces.
- Cities can capture value by ceding control of public land to private developers through a **ground lease** or **outright sale**, with the condition that civic space be integrated into the development plan.
- With **land value taxation**, under the typical property tax regime in the United States, property owners pay a tax that is tied to the total value of land and improvements on each piece of property.
- Green infrastructure can create a wealth of benefits that extend beyond environmental stewardship. **Monetizing savings from green infrastructure** can produce long-term revenue streams that can create value for cities and neighborhoods.

Reimagining  
the Civic Commons

## Value Capture in the Commons

Tools for sustaining our public places while benefiting  
existing communities

a. Reimagining the Civic Commons, *Value Capture in the Commons*, <https://civiccommons.us/2018/11/value-capture-commons/>.

# 3

## Empower Communities as Co-Creators

### RESPECT THE ABILITY OF EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES TO DECIDE THEIR OWN FUTURES

*“We not only talked about power sharing but also transfer of power. It’s about setting up conditions so that your community can make decisions about their future.”*

—**IRFANA JETHA NOORANI**  
Deputy Director  
11th Street Bridge Park

Creating equitable access to parks and open spaces means empowering all stakeholders—especially community residents—so that their needs, desires, and expectations are factored into every aspect of an initiative. This requires a willingness by public agencies to share decision-making with communities, thereby creating an environment that encourages residents’ participation and enabling them to determine the future of public spaces in their neighborhoods. It means avoiding planning in a vacuum and planning with—not for—residents. This is particularly true for those who live in underserved communities that have long suffered from not only lack of access to parks, but also other basic services such as transportation infrastructure.

At its core, empowering communities as co-creators of parks and open spaces is about challenging traditional notions of community engagement—not just offering residents a seat at the table, but an opportunity to shape a vision and see it through to reality. And, perhaps most important, it is about fostering a sense of ownership by promoting equity not only in the physical parks but in the processes that create them.

Co-creation necessitates reimagining community engagement. This conceptual overview provides considerations for both the public and private sectors when working toward co-creation:

- ◆ Although each community’s concerns may vary, co-creation requires taking these demands and needs—including pushback against the park—seriously and being willing to change plans in response.

- ◆ Empowerment does not mean privileging groups that already have a disproportionate say—especially when their goal is to further exclusivity in their neighborhoods. In this case, it can be useful to consider who is not in the room but is equally a part of this community, including future community members (such as residents of an affordable housing development that has yet to be built).
- ◆ Trust is critical to convince systemically under-resourced communities that their opinions matter—that it is worth their time to be engaged in changing their neighborhoods for the better. Authentically building trust involves a commitment by local leaders to be completely transparent with residents to avoid overpromising and underdelivering, and to provide frequent, clear, data-based updates on progress to hold public agencies and other stakeholders fully accountable. A firm commitment to leverage the park investments to directly benefit legacy residents—such as economic development that provides job opportunities, expands affordable housing, and improves schools—can also help foster trust.
- ◆ Co-creation is an iterative process. Iteration entails thinking creatively about how to incentivize continuous, active participation by residents, offering them ample opportunities to inform a project with their ideas, observations, and feedback. For instance, this could involve providing short-term, pilot solutions that are “tested” by residents and subject to residents’ feedback before a permanent investment is made.
- ◆ To facilitate equitable participation, provide financial compensation like honoraria and paying for child care. Nonfinancial considerations are just as important, such as the timing of meetings, selected locations of meetings, and the feeling of who is welcome at meetings. Often, lack of awareness is a barrier as well, and bringing opportunities to engage to people—rather than expecting them to come to you—can help overcome this.

## LEARN MORE

Many cities experience barriers to empowering communities as co-creators. An Advisory Services panel and a national study visit explored strategies to overcome distrust, reckon with history, and challenge misconceptions to work toward co-creation.

- An Advisory Services panel in **Sacramento** focused on equitable transit-oriented development around two light-rail stations. Panelists noted a history of planning “at the community, not with the community” has made residents distrustful of these efforts. The panelists recognized that building trust would take time, but that forming genuine relationships with the community is a precondition for equitable development.
- ULI conducted a national study visit in the Triangle, an underserved and park-poor neighborhood of **Lewisville, Texas**. From interviews and observations, experts identified a misconception held by the city that residents of the Triangle are transient. In fact, most were long-term community members. The experts recommended investing in community engagement to better understand their needs, build trust, and promote social cohesion. This community collaboration should include all stakeholders, meet people where they are, and use creative engagement tactics.

In addition to these technical assistance activities on parks and open space, another successful example of community co-creation and what it can achieve is Ricardo Lara Linear Park in Lynwood, California, a densely populated and historically park-poor city. In 2018, the park received ULI’s Urban Open Space Award for special community impact. A highly collaborative effort between public officials and community residents led to the transformation of a vacant five-acre stretch of land along Interstate 105 into a park that advances social equity, improves environmental health, and offers recreation spaces for all ages.

The linear park, which is one mile long and 45 feet wide, links neighborhoods that were divided by the construction of I-105, which for decades created visual and physical barriers separating communities. The design, inspired by SWA’s collaboration with the nonprofit Lot to Spot and community outreach, includes public art, mosaic tiles laid into the picnic tables and benches, passive recreation areas with stormwater detention, connections with the LARIO bike trail, and programs such as a dog park, fitness stations, play structures, and community gardening and education. These elements give the park a unique identity, both reflecting and serving the community. This small city park has transformed a vacant lot into a community treasure and showcases how to optimize infrastructure to address community needs.



Panelists hear from students at Luther Burbank High School.



People garden in Ricardo Lara Linear Park in Lynwood, California.

# 4

## Be Visionary

### DEVELOP AND COMMUNICATE A BOLD, SHARED VISION FOR EQUITY

*“A vision is not just about the physical design, and being visionary as a process is important. When we think about how to include the community, the developer, or the group of stakeholders, we are able to be visionary and achieve this next level of park or open space.”*

—RIKI NISHIMURA  
Principal  
Populous

Enhancing equitable access to parks requires a sense of purpose and a bold vision. Many of the barriers to equitable access are deeply entrenched—whether they are perceptions of unsafety, lack of walking and biking infrastructure to reach nearby parks, or a lack of parks altogether. Eliminating these barriers and creating great public spaces cannot happen without clear goals that are shared across sectors and agencies, and—most important—shared by the community.

Fostering a collective vision not only applies to park design and programming but also to decision-making processes. Aspiring to equity across all aspects of parks development helps solidify this commitment and provide clear standards to which cities can be held accountable.

Although each community will have a unique vision for its individual parks and park system, the concept of a bold, shared vision can be defined more generally in line with these considerations:

- ◆ Efforts to develop new parks and open space, or to revitalize and enhance these spaces, require starting with a long-range view that reflects the community’s collective vision of “what can be.” This overarching vision—which can also be a mission statement—should be broadly, clearly, and consistently communicated by all parties involved in the development to reinforce their commitment to providing park space that is easily accessible and delivers quality experiences to all users.
- ◆ The vision should reflect the character of the community, in terms of who the park is intended to serve, and it should underscore the need for flexibility and adaptability to accommodate a range of uses and users.
- ◆ Equally important, the vision should involve thinking strategically about how to leverage the benefits of the park to meet greater community goals, such as improving public health, promoting social cohesion, enhancing resilience, and boosting economic opportunities. In this regard, the vision for the park should advance the vision for the overall community.



©CITY OF LYNNWOOD/SOUTHAM CREATIVE

Lynnwood is working toward a community vision for a new mixed-use neighborhood.

## LEARN MORE

ULI Advisory Services panels and national study visits have recognized the importance of effectively creating and communicating a vision for parks and open space, and how it can drive forward planning for equitable access.

- An Advisory Services panel in **San Antonio, Texas**, focused on restoring a vibrant urban environment on the eastern portion of the Hemisfair site—a once thriving downtown neighborhood that was uprooted to host the 1968 World’s Fair and Exposition and which has been underused in the decades since. The panel advised knitting back together adjacent portions of the community to improve inclusivity and accessibility. Clarifying this vision enabled the panelists to recommend a strategic development plan that balances open space, historic structures, and new high-quality and affordable developments.
- The Seattle suburb of **Lynnwood, Washington**, created a vision for a vibrant, walkable urban core—the City Center neighborhood—in 2005. In 2020, national study visit participants commended the city for its commitment to a vision for City Center, noting that the residents’ shared desire for equitable progress offers a promising opportunity for the city to lead change.



JACQUELINE CANALES/ULI

Walkway next to new development at the Hemisfair site in San Antonio.

## Invest in Existing Assets

### RECOGNIZE AND MAINTAIN THE VALUE OF PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL STRENGTHS

*“Every neighborhood is resilient in its own way. What are the social networks, the beloved public spaces that already exist within neighborhoods that we can amplify, celebrate, activate? Knowing what’s already working in the community from both a social and a physical standpoint, reflecting on history in order to understand current challenges as well as current resources, and then working with local artists and cultural ambassadors—and finding opportunities to let them lead to a greater extent—are critical components of this approach to improve and enhance existing park systems.”*

—SUZANNE NIENABER  
Director of Partnerships  
Center for Active Design

Amplifying the strengths of spaces that are already available in neighborhoods is just as necessary for equitable access as creating more parks. In communities that lack parks, programming or activating other public spaces—such as plazas or outdated parking infrastructure—can help meet the same needs.

Where parks do exist, they may be seen as a nuisance, or residents may not be aware of them. Programming these places can help transform underused parks into more welcoming places, and regular maintenance often plays a role in ensuring that they remain high-quality parks. Celebrating existing parks can help overcome a lack of awareness while communicating the value of parks, inspiring future champions, and establishing a sense of neighborhood identity and pride around community assets. As communities recognize and invest in the assets they already have, they can expand the availability and accessibility of high-quality spaces at a low cost and in ways that meaningfully capitalize on their strengths.

Existing parks are integral parts of a community’s infrastructure, but their existence alone is not enough to promote equity. Amplifying their strengths requires ongoing, thoughtful work with the community, including the following:

- ◆ Maintaining and improving existing parks requires conducting a thorough assessment of existing facilities to determine what is working—and what is not—to determine how to maximize the value of physical assets.
- ◆ Amplifying existing strengths of parks must include careful consideration of the needs and preferences of neighborhood residents. This means ensuring that economic benefits resulting from park improvements benefit area residents, thinking holistically about improving parks as part of a greater effort to preserve community character, collaborating with residents, and mitigating any negative consequences such as displacement.
- ◆ Connecting park enhancements to community preservation can be facilitated by working with local artists and cultural ambassadors to showcase local art throughout existing parks and open spaces. Although this form of creative placemaking has been practiced for a long time, it has received renewed attention over the past months as a strategy to create new opportunities for socially distanced gatherings, as well as to draw attention to injustice and amplify diverse voices.
- ◆ Evaluating the history of how the spaces have been used and operated can help existing parks reach their full potential as community amenities with relevant design and programming.

## LEARN MORE

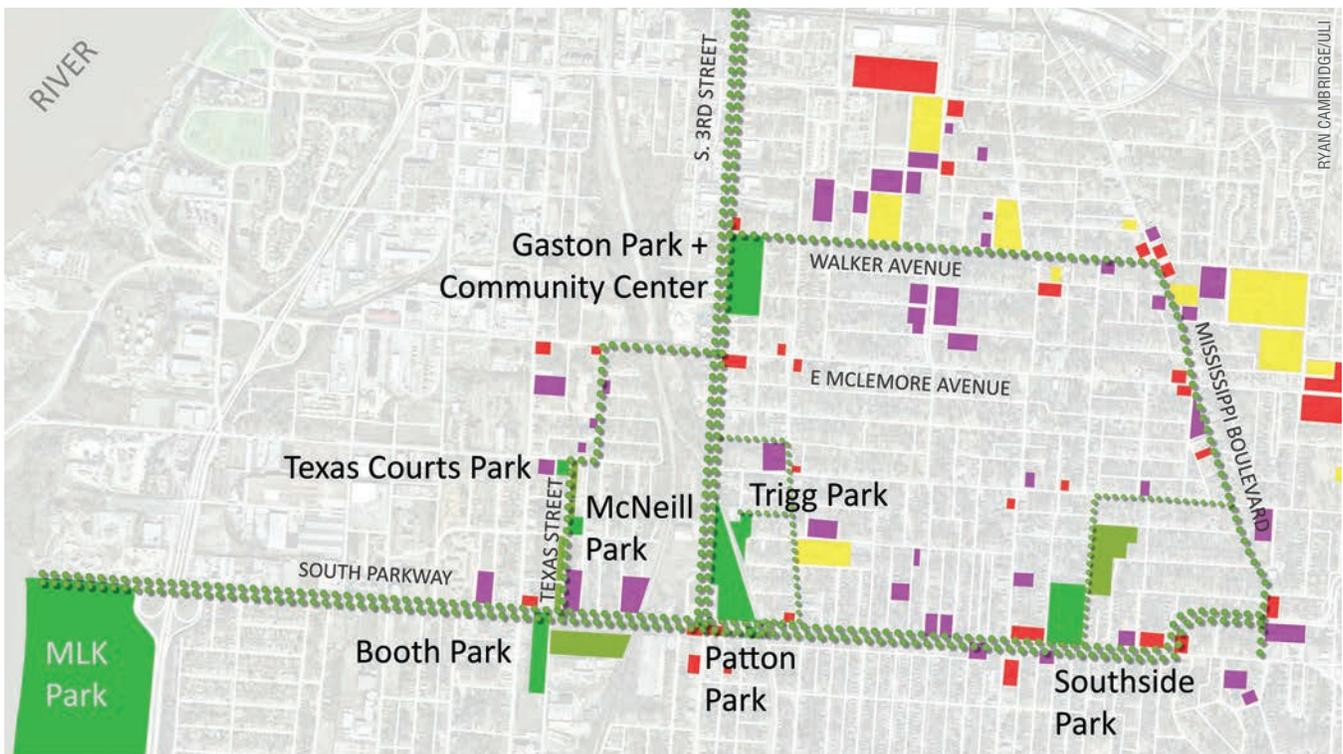
Physical assets, such as street grids and park networks, and social assets, like community champions and longtime residents of a neighborhood, together create the potential for great places that serve all users.

- In the **South Memphis** neighborhood of Memphis, Tennessee, national study visit experts made recommendations for increasing connectivity among neighborhood parks to enhance equitable access. It was clear that the neighborhood has a strong foundation to build upon: a grid layout that connects streets, blocks, sidewalks and parks; its proximity to downtown and the Mississippi riverfront; and a close-knit community of residents who are passionate about achieving greater health and equity outcomes for the area. The experts recommended that the city's parks master plan leverage these many physical and social assets to foster community development.
- **Detroit** has an extensive network of parks and open space that addresses a wide range of the city's needs, such as improving urban resilience, enhancing the health of residents, and boosting economic development. A ULI

Advisory Services panel studied how investments in existing parks and open spaces could complement the city's rich historical and cultural assets. Importantly, panelists noted that investing in people—particularly longtime residents—should remain the focus of these investments to generate equitable community benefits.



Mural in a Detroit's Ella Fitzgerald Park.



Map of existing assets in South Memphis.

## Reconceptualize Parks

### REIMAGINE PUBLIC SPACES AND THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT WHAT CAN SERVE AS A PARK

*“There are so many things that we forget about when look at our built environment in our cities large and small. We look again, and then go out to buy land to build new projects, acquire buildings to renovate them, and do all the kind of things that we need to do on a large scale, but we forget that right underneath our nose is a lot of stuff we can do in a neighborhood to substantially enhance that environment both in the short run and in the long run, whether you call them ‘pocket parks’ or anything else.”*

—**RICK DISHNICA**  
President  
The Dishnica Company

Finding land for new parks is a common barrier to equitable access, particularly in communities without many existing parks. To address this significant challenge, reimagining public spaces can help cities provide places that meet community needs.

Safe, welcoming spaces for gathering, exercise, and recreation do not require the hallmarks of the traditional park, such as grass and trees. In fact, green space may not be a priority for residents when they think about high-quality public spaces. Whether transforming an underpass into a suite of basketball courts, playgrounds, and murals or simply reallocating parking spots for public furniture, thinking creatively about the public realm opens up new opportunities for park space.



Pavilion in Fort Lauderdale.

Flexibility, creativity, and experimentation have become more common in the public realm. However, many newly created, nontraditional parks are still concentrated in more affluent and predominantly White areas. When reconceptualizing parks, cities should adopt an equitable approach and collaborate with communities to implement residents’ vision of how their public spaces can be used. Public realm projects during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the potential of reconceptualizing parks:

- ◆ One notable impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been the quick transformation of nontraditional public outdoor spaces into gathering places. In communities across the nation, creative uses of transportation infrastructure—such as closing streets to through traffic and using parking lots to accommodate outdoor food markets and children’s play areas—have added open space for people to safely socialize in more neighborhoods.
- ◆ As more communities continue to implement innovative solutions to free up space for public use, local officials are adopting more flexible approaches, loosening restrictions that could slow the process and working closely with community residents to make sure the spaces are equitably accessible. For instance, in Oakland, California, the city’s initial COVID-19 response and testing program, which began in April 2020, led to the creation of other programs such as Slow Streets, Essential Places, and Flex Streets, all of which overlap in their purpose, which is to help all residents stay safe and healthy, and help keep the city resilient.



Mariachi Plaza Station in Los Angeles.

## LEARN MORE

Thinking creatively can expand both the diversity of park types and the strategies available for acquiring new parks, when possible.

- Experts participating in a national study visit in **Lewisville, Texas**, recommended diversifying park types, given the lack of available space. Even micro or pocket parks could help deliver important benefits when their programming successfully addresses community needs.
- A national study visit in **Grand Rapids, Michigan**, described several strategies for acquiring new land for parks. Easements, licenses and leases, land swaps, and the right of first refusal could all help the city continue to provide adequate parkland for its growing population, focusing investments on currently underserved neighborhoods.

The sidebar “Pavement to Parks” showcases additional examples of cities transforming previously automobile-centric spaces into nontraditional parks.



Experts viewed Timber Creek in Lewisville, Texas, as an invaluable community asset that could be leveraged to improve park access and connectivity through trails.

## Fund Parks for the Future

## EXPAND THE RANGE OF FUNDING OPTIONS TO SUPPORT PARK CONSTRUCTION AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

*“Parks offer a broad array of benefits—everything from health to recreation to community-building to stormwater mitigation and on and on. All these different components, the diverse benefits or co-benefits of parks, broaden the constituencies, support for, and horizon of possible funding sources.”*

—JEANNE MYERSON  
Principal  
The Belgrave Group

To achieve goals of equity and access, parks need consistent, sustainable, and diverse sources of funding. Public agencies can collaborate to identify a variety of revenue streams that can fund different aspects of parks and open space—for instance, using transportation funds to support bike trails and pedestrian walkways leading to parks, which help improve general mobility throughout the community. The private sector can also benefit from investing in parks (see the sidebar “Making the Business Case for Parks”).

To unlock funding from nonprofit groups and philanthropic organizations, cities can target specific stakeholders with messages tied to benefits that align with their interests, such as health, equity, and the environment. Moreover, any funding strategy should not only focus on capital needs but also plan for operations and maintenance in the long term, and for proactively mitigating negative impacts such as displacement. To maintain funding relationships, frequent, clear communication about the multiple benefits provided by the park is an essential part of financial stewardship.

Current economic circumstances are jeopardizing parks funding, which will likely exacerbate existing inequities. Advocating for dedicated funding and its equitable allocation helps keep parks accessible even during times of financial stress.

- ◆ The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many local governments to cut back funding for public spaces, reversing a trend of increased park investments over the past several years. A survey from the NRPA in April 2020 of more than 300 local park officials found that half had been asked to make budget cuts of between 10 and 20 percent.<sup>5</sup> More than 90 percent of the respondents had already reduced agency expenses, and one-third were planning cuts for the next fiscal year. The most common cost-cutting measures were ending purchases of discretionary supplies and services, implementing a hiring freeze, deferring or canceling capital projects, laying off part-time and seasonal staff, reducing energy use at facilities, reducing or deferring ongoing maintenance, and reducing outside contractors.
- ◆ Expanding funding options also requires communicating the risks of inaction and correcting inequities in the allocation of park resources. Too often, parks and open spaces in higher-income areas receive a disproportionate amount of funding, perpetuating a cycle in which poorly funded parks in lower-income areas do not get used because they are unattractive, poorly maintained, and perceived as unsafe, which in turn can lead to even fewer funds being spent on those parks and fewer people using them. Maintaining an equitable parks program means having the will to prioritize spending in the spaces of greatest need—not just the greatest use at a certain point in time—and using those resources to create an experience that is welcoming to everyone.

5. Kevin Roth, “NRPA Parks Snapshot: April 15–17 Survey Results,” NRPA blog, April 17, 2020, <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-april-15-17-survey-results/>.

## LEARN MORE

When thinking about financial sustainability, governance and finance are closely related. With effective governance structures and diverse revenue streams, cities can better meet capital and operating needs in the present while planning for future needs.

- A ULI Advisory Services panel in **Kansas City, Missouri**, observed that the city is facing clear financial constraints, but the demands on the park system—from both exurban development and maintenance needs in the core—and associated liabilities are growing. The panelists recommended a multifaceted strategy to manage these financial demands, including establishing a parks conservancy that would be able to attract broad-based support from the community, raise funds, advocate for policies and resources to improve the public realm, and provide relevant programs, activations, and events that connect residents to parks.
- During a national study visit in **Camden, New Jersey**, experts explored how the city could lay a foundation for the future financial success of Cramer Hill Waterfront Park and the surrounding neighborhood. They recommended that the city establish a managing entity to identify or raise seed funding—to be obtained from corporate sponsorships, philanthropic foundations and individuals, and the government—to cover annual costs for maintenance, branding, marketing, and community outreach. Then, they can diversify their revenue sources with opportunities from earned revenue, including leases, license agreements, concessions, and fees; from tax revenue, including special assessment revenue; and from additional government sources at the county, state, and federal levels.



Panelists and sponsors at Loose Park in Kansas City, Missouri.

## Pavement to Parks

A 2020 ULI report, *Pavement to Parks: Transforming Spaces for Cars into Places for People*, highlights efforts by communities and organizations across the United States to transform or enhance spaces built for automobiles, such as parking lots, parking garages, and highway underpasses, into parks and open spaces that have advanced social equity and revitalized underserved neighborhoods.

*Pavement to Parks* highlights common components of successful space conversions: imagination to see the potential in underused spaces, collaboration among a broad variety of stakeholders, strong buy-in from community residents, data collection on use to inform future decision-making, the right balance of programming and flexibility, and sufficient and consistent funding sources.

Examples of such projects include the following:

- **Canal Park** in Washington, D.C., a three-acre park in the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood. Once a site for public school bus storage, it is now a vibrant and heavily visited park featuring low-impact landscaping, stormwater capture, and seasonal activities for children.

- **Chicano Park** in San Diego, located on 7.4 acres under Interstate 5. Rooted in a public protest decades ago, the space has evolved over the years and continues to embody a spirit of organic creation, with vivid and nationally recognized murals that celebrate Chicano culture along with community amenities.
- **Erie Street Plaza** in Milwaukee, a 0.25-acre former parking lot that now serves as a flexible and sustainable gathering place for nearby restaurants and buildings. Designed to filter stormwater, the plaza is also host to numerous events that connect the city to the water.
- **McGilvra Place Park** in Seattle, a 0.5-acre space created from a once overlooked traffic median, which is now a neighborhood destination, amenity for nearby office buildings, and demonstration site for green features.
- **The Porch at 30th Street** in Philadelphia, a 25,000-square-foot former parking lane that is now a lively plaza with regular events, food trucks, and movable tables and chairs.

Each of these spaces reflects creative thinking to transform underutilized infrastructure into community space. The report also includes several local programs focused on pavement-to-parks conversions, such as the Depave program in Portland, Oregon, and Make Way for People in Chicago. While some of the programs are aimed at temporary conversions, the positive response from residents has, in many cases, led to long-lasting neighborhood enhancements.



One of many murals in Chicano Park in San Diego.

# Making the Business Case for Parks

The real estate industry can and should help educate local government and private-sector leaders about the economic as well as social value of parks and open space. ULI's publication *The Case for Open Space: Why the Real Estate Industry Should Invest in Parks and Open Spaces* makes the business case for real estate investments in parks and open spaces and connects the merits of private investments in these spaces to public benefits that can lead to greater public investments.

Created with guidance from ULI's member-led Sustainable Development Council in collaboration with ULI's Building Healthy Places Initiative, *The Case for Open Space* examines five compelling development projects that have incorporated public space. In each case, developers were able to deliver greater-than-anticipated community benefits while achieving significant returns on their investments. The developments are as follows:

- **Hunter's Point South** in Queens, New York, is a mixed-use affordable housing development that includes 925 permanently affordable housing units, roughly 20,000 square feet of new retail space, a new public school, a community facility space and an 11-acre waterfront park. When fully completed, the development is expected to spur over \$2 billion in private investment and create about 4,600 jobs.
- **Levy Park** in Houston, Texas, one of the winners of the 2018 ULI Urban Open Space Award, is a nearly six-acre neighborhood park where the maintenance is funded through private development. After its redevelopment, Levy Park became the central component for an 11-acre urban activity center that now boasts around 10,000 visitors a week, up from only 75 visitors before redevelopment.
- **Grand Park** is a 12-acre public park in downtown Los Angeles that transformed a formerly underused public space into a vibrant gathering place that hosts cultural events, music performances, festivals, and fitness classes. In collaboration with the county of Los Angeles, a private developer invested \$50 million to build the park in advance of plans to move forward with an associated mixed-use project nearby.
- **Guthrie Green** in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is a 2.6-acre former truck-loading facility that has been transformed into a highly programmed urban park. It has become the area's leading destination since its opening in 2012, drawing 3,000 people a week and infusing \$150 million in public/private investment into a variety of commercial and residential projects in downtown Tulsa.
- **Solaris Plaza** in Vail, Colorado, is a mixed-use project with a central gathering place for residents and visitors, developed from a repurposed former parking lot and shopping center. The plaza hosts year-round events such as a weekly farmers market and the GoPro Games. While the town of Vail operates the space, the developer provided capital expenditures for the plaza and is responsible for its maintenance.



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

## Collaborate with Partners

### UNLEASH THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

*“The city can’t do it all. Government should consider delegating some of its responsibilities. In order to have an environment where positive collaboration can take place, the city leadership has to take a stand and create the conditions to allow partnerships to happen.”*

—**MARCEL ACOSTA**  
Executive Director  
National Capital Planning  
Commission



Panelists at the site of The Stitch in Atlanta.

Successful parks need strong multifunctional public leadership combined with partners who share aligned goals. Public/private partnerships allow municipalities to delegate some of this work—whether funding, project implementation, or ongoing operation—to the private sector, nonprofit groups, and philanthropic organizations.

Although some city governments may be reluctant to delegate, budget cuts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have shown partnerships to be more essential than ever to adequately fund and maintain parks, helping cities make the most of limited resources and build upon different groups’ strengths.

When considering opportunities for funding partnerships, cities must think comprehensively about the different benefits that can be generated by parks and match those benefits to relevant partners. When considering other types of partnerships, cities must assess their need for complementary skills and expertise and ensure that the partner is clear on its role and responsibilities.

Partnerships can take place within the public sector, across sectors, and with the community, each with its own distinct benefits.

- ◆ Within the public sector, local public leaders must move past siloed governance approaches and embrace interagency partnerships. For example, transportation, economic development, and parks and recreation departments can work toward aligned goals of improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, which enhances mobility, improves access to parks, and has related economic benefits.
- ◆ Across sectors, public/private partnerships involve both funding arrangements and the delegation of some parks-related oversight and responsibilities to nonpublic entities, including businesses, nonprofit groups, and philanthropic organizations.
- ◆ Partnerships between the local government and community residents ensure that parks meet the needs and expectations of users, enhance access, and generate benefits equitably.

## LEARN MORE

Bold park planning can shape residents' connections to the public realm for decades to come, but implementation is often costly and difficult. Partnerships are a powerful way to leverage resources so that these ambitious plans can become reality, as two ULI Advisory Services panels illustrate.

- A ULI Advisory Services panel in **Atlanta, Georgia**, assisted Central Atlanta Progress on the planning and development of the “Stitch,” a proposal for a freeway cap that would balance new private development with publicly accessible park space. Centering equity in their recommendations, panelists advised formalizing partnerships around (1) housing, to create inclusive communities and permanent affordability around the Stitch; (2) homelessness, to address the needs of Atlanta’s unhoused population; (3) transportation, to emphasize the Stitch as a unifying hub of existing cycling and greenway networks, as well as a transit-oriented development opportunity; and (4) wellness, to integrate education, research, and patient care with the park’s community health vision and help create attainable housing for adjacent hospital workers.
- In **Fort Lauderdale, Florida**, an Advisory Services panel recommended leveraging public/private partnerships to make the most of a \$200 million general obligation bond dedicated to acquiring new parkland and making improvements to existing parks. These partnerships would extend to the financing, management, and operation of public and private open spaces, including roles and responsibilities for partner agencies, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and not-for-profit groups. For the city to remain highly livable—even during a period of rapid growth and private development—partnerships can help unleash the full potential of the city’s investments in the public realm.

The ULI report *Successful Partnerships for Parks: Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space*<sup>6</sup> explores various partnerships arrangements and how cross-sector partnerships among the real estate development industry, the public sector, nonprofit organizations, and the philanthropic community can support parks while enhancing real estate value.



DAVID LOMBINO

Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York, is featured in *Successful Partnerships for Parks*.

6. Urban Land Institute, *Successful Partnerships for Parks: Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space* (Washington, DC, 2020).

## Make Parks Welcoming

### PURPOSEFULLY FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR ALL

*“You can have the best-designed park, but if it isn’t activated or people don’t see people like themselves in it, they will not go.”*

—NEELAY BHATT  
Vice President and Principal  
PROS Consulting Inc.

Critical to the success of every public park and open space is providing a welcoming environment for all users, fostering a sense of belonging so all will feel comfortable in the space, take pride in it, and take care of it. This helps maximize the impact of parks and open spaces, not just in terms of the number of visitors, but also in terms of economic and social effects that lift up the entire community. A welcoming park signifies to community residents of all races, ethnicities, genders, ages, abilities, and incomes that they matter—that they are part of a community that values their quality of life.

Importantly, creating a sense of belonging means community-wide acknowledgment of how the planning, design, operation, and service delivery of parks have historically contributed to systemic racism in many communities. It means examining racist practices, learning from the past and ongoing acts of racism, and using that learning to create and activate parks and open spaces that are truly accessible and appealing to all and that demonstrate an “all-in” commitment to antiracism and social equity.

Belonging has many dimensions, including physical and geographic accessibility, affordability, safety, and programming, and the following considerations address many of these dimensions.

- ◆ Identify and eliminate barriers to equitable participation, including keeping all aspects of the experience affordable, such as fees for parking as well as camps and classes. Ideally, all public park services should be free, but access to services that are not free can be addressed through discounts and free offerings based on income, and by using funds from revenue-generating programs to subsidize mission-driven programs such as food banks that serve the greater needs of the community.
- ◆ Activate parks with a variety of programming that reflects and respects the diversity and diverse interests of community residents, taking into account the needs and preferences of different generations and different cultures. Ensure that features and programming are flexible, so the space is easily adaptable for a variety of uses over time and will keep drawing repeat and new users.
- ◆ Ensure that the park is physically accessible to people with differing abilities. This should be a priority not only during the design phase but also in maintaining and programming the park.
- ◆ Although every park cannot offer everything for everyone, every effort should be made to reach a broad segment of users by keeping inclusivity a top priority. Having diverse types of parks in a community can help ensure that everyone has a park that can meet their needs.
- ◆ A related determinant of whether a space is welcoming is park policing. While park safety is paramount, policing should be more community-driven—perhaps patterned after a park ranger program—and less police-driven, and cultural competency training for law enforcement officers should be included as part of a community policing strategy. Although public safety is often seen as relying on policing, a wide range of other factors, such as park maintenance and providing appropriate services for people experiencing homelessness, contribute to perceptions of safety.
- ◆ “Welcoming,” “safety,” and “belonging” can be charged terms, and underserved community members should have a say in defining them. It is not enough to be race-neutral when thinking about these concepts. For example, the same behavior in public spaces is not always perceived the same way; perceptions may be informed by harmful stereotypes. Aspiring to a set of community-defined values that encompasses inclusion, equity, and antiracism is necessary to create a welcoming environment for all, and these values should go beyond the park itself to include other systemic factors that affect park access, such as transportation.

## LEARN MORE

An Advisory Services panel in **Kansas City, Missouri**, had to reckon with the historical racist land use practices that shaped the city's parks and boulevard system.

In the early 1900s, developers and homeowner associations in Kansas City used parks—in addition to discriminatory subdivision restrictions and other practices—to exclude Black communities from owning homes, having equal access to economic opportunity, and fully participating in public life.

A century later, these effects have continued to reverberate in the parks system, as development trends, zoning policies, and financial challenges have perpetuated inequity. As a result, parkland in the city's dense urban core, which has the greatest income, employment, and wealth disparities, is about half that in new and more affluent low-density neighborhoods outside the core. One recommendation from the panel was to provide an equitable approach to maintenance, park development, and programming, focusing on the people most harmed, to produce equitable social outcomes.



JESSE FRAZIER, KC PARKS PHOTOGRAPHER



JESSE FRAZIER, KC PARKS PHOTOGRAPHER



JESSE FRAZIER, KC PARKS PHOTOGRAPHER

Following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Black Lives Matter protests began across Kansas City, Missouri. Some of the largest gathering places have been near the J.C. Nichols Memorial Fountain in Mill Creek Park, and they have resulted in some graffiti on the limestone walls. To help facilitate the parks' role as venues for freedom of speech—without the destruction of property—KC Parks has installed expression walls.

## Connect People to Parks

## ENHANCE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN AND AMONG PARKS, DESTINATIONS, AND OTHER COMMUNITY ASSETS

*“Physical access to and within park spaces is a core principle of equity. The more interconnected parks are with the community as a whole—including through the lens of true multimodal connectivity—the larger the potential user group of that park.”*

—RYAN CAMBRIDGE  
Planning Practice Leader  
Browning Day

Connecting people to parks and open spaces is about much more than just providing transportation options to get them there. It involves maximizing the reach and impact of parks and open spaces that contribute to a balanced, connected system of public spaces.

The more interconnected parks are with the community as a whole and with specific user groups, the greater the opportunities for reasons to use the park. This means geographically locating new spaces strategically—with a particular emphasis on underserved areas—and evaluating existing spaces in these areas to identify solutions that make them more appealing and accessible. This can include co-locating parks with other community assets, such as recreation centers and libraries, to create a hub of destinations. Equally important strategies to connect people to parks reflect social, cultural, and financial—rather than physical—barriers.

Specific steps to connect people with parks will vary according to each community’s needs and challenges. However, all communities can strive to make their parks relevant, well known, and attractive to potential users by adapting the following ideas to their unique contexts.

- ◆ Provide spaces that people can relate to, that reflect the unique identity and characteristics of their community, and that they will be proud of and eager to use frequently.
- ◆ Ensure that community members are aware of what is available to them using a variety of community outreach strategies, with different types of communications targeted to different audiences. In a 2019 survey by the NRPA on park usage, 15 percent of respondents said they have not visited parks in their communities because they were not aware of the programs or facilities offered.<sup>7</sup>
- ◆ Identify and eliminate barriers to park usage by providing safe, affordable, convenient, high-quality places—particularly in underserved communities—that are accessible and activated to entice a diverse group of users.
- ◆ Connecting people to parks also means connecting people to the many co-benefits of parks. Having nearby, accessible parks enables people to take advantage of parks’ health benefits (both mental and physical), environmental benefits (such as reduced local flooding), and economic benefits, improving quality of life across multiple dimensions.

7. National Recreation and Park Association, “2019 Engagement with Parks Report” (NRPA, 2019), <https://www.nrpa.org/globalassets/engagement-survey-report-2019.pdf>.

## LEARN MORE

Communities across the country are tackling their challenges with connectivity using a wide range of tools, including park design, activation, and evaluation.

- In **Camden, New Jersey**, national study visit experts recommended creating and improving multiple welcoming access points to Cramer Hill Waterfront Park. Intentional design choices like these enable and encourage nearby residents to use and enjoy the park.
- The Hemisfair site in **San Antonio** has the potential to restore connectivity to the surrounding district, which is currently comprised of isolated neighborhoods. Panelists recommended a series of walkable green spaces activated by housing, locally owned retail, and restaurants to increase connectivity within the area, and a complete streets approach to enhance connectivity with the residential neighborhoods in the south and a commercial district in the north.
- **Los Angeles's** Department of Recreation and Parks has already identified immediate action steps for enhancing connectivity in the Boyle Heights neighborhood based on the recommendations of a national study visit: work with stakeholders to create a qualitative metric to identify components of a “quality park”; conduct park access and walkability audits in Boyle Heights and evaluate access to existing parks; and identify physical barriers to park access to the parks in Boyle Heights.



JACQUELINE CANALES/ULI

View from the Tower of the Americas at the Hemisfair site in San Antonio.



SARA HAMMERSCHMIDT/ULI

Ross Valencia Community Park in Los Angeles.

# Conclusion

To say that 2020 was a challenging year is a gross understatement. First, the coronavirus pandemic upended everything many people consider normal about their lives. Then, protests against racial injustice spotlighted the inequities that Black people and other people of color regularly experience in public spaces. Each of these events, in different ways, has elevated the critical role that parks and the public realm play in urban living—serving as places to escape social isolation during a health crisis and as places to organize during civil unrest.

These two observations point to the purpose of *10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks*—to demonstrate how parks and the public realm, as critical parts of urban infrastructure, are a necessity for all residents in all communities. Although each principle in the report focuses on a specific aspect of achieving equitable park access, all the principles are connected by three common themes:

## **Communities that prioritize equity make parks easy to use.**

Improving equitable access to parks means providing high-quality spaces that are easy to get to and enjoy, including by those with few resources and limited free time to spend relaxing and taking advantage of recreational activities.

## **Communities that prioritize equity make parks a lasting asset.**

Parks and public spaces need consistent funding and support for operations, programming, and maintenance to ensure that the spaces remain clean, safe, and appealing to current and future users, and that they are flexible enough to meet changing user demands and preferences.

## **Communities that prioritize equity make parks part of a larger plan to improve the overall urban experience.**

Well-designed and managed parks can help transform not just surrounding neighborhoods, but entire communities, catalyzing economic development that expands the tax base and leads to further investments that can lift up underserved areas and “level the playing field” for growth opportunities. This is true across a wide range of urban contexts, varying in size, levels of density, income, and more. Although each city has different challenges, parks can meet a variety of needs and ultimately make significant contributions to health, economic development, resilience, and residents’ quality of life.

Indeed, while the 10 principles in this report focus on equitable access to parks and the public realm, they can also contribute to improving social equity throughout communities. This point was emphasized by Minneapolis City Council member Andrea Jenkins during a September 2020 ULI webinar on the impact of creative placemaking in times of health and social crises. She noted that the intersection of 38th and Chicago streets in Minneapolis—the place where George Floyd was murdered—is part of an area that has long been a focal point for placemaking to enliven the public realm. An equitable parks and open-space system is critically important, but it is not the endgame. Rather, it is part of the solution to foster an equitable, inclusive community.



Aerial view of the National WWI Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri.

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## **PART TWO:** SUMMARIES OF ADVISORY SERVICES PANELS AND NATIONAL STUDY VISITS

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# Introduction

Part Two of this report features summaries of each of the panels and study visits that participants in a September 2020 workshop used to inform the 10 principles.

With the support of The JPB Foundation, ULI has conducted [Advisory Services](#) panels and [national study visits](#) around the country focused on parks and open spaces. In alignment with 10 Minute Walk, the guidance from these panels was intended to offer cities strategies on enhancing equitable access to parks while maximizing the social, economic, and health benefits of parks to their surrounding communities. Each Advisory Services panel took place over an intensive five days and convened national experts, and each national study visit took place over two-and-a-half days with national and local experts. Panelists are identified in this report by the company titles and positions they held when the projects took place, and places are listed in chronological order of the technical assistance.

## 10 Minute Walk Advisory Services Panels

The following case studies describe eight Advisory Services panels on parks and open spaces, providing background and context information, each panel's scope, and the panelists' overarching recommendations.

A parks and open spaces panel in Philadelphia was originally scheduled for April 2020 but has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the preparation for this panel—and now the city's response to the pandemic—provided additional insights on equity, access, and their associated challenges for the workshop. The purpose of the panel will be to understand how the Centennial District's anchor institutions, Fairmount Park Conservancy, and the city can together foster a high-quality park experience that benefits everyone and creates value for the surrounding neighborhoods, which are predominantly Black and have experienced decades of disinvestment. As the sponsor, Fairmount Park Conservancy, and ULI have worked to define

the scope of this panel, the COVID-19 pandemic and protests in response to the murder of George Floyd have shaped their guiding questions and continued to put a focus on racial justice. At the same time, the events of summer 2020 have affirmed that parks—as community spaces and critical pieces of city and public health infrastructure—can play a role in fostering more equitable neighborhoods. As this panel seeks to understand how the Centennial District can strategically invest in its parks and communities, it must also reckon with the history of and ongoing structural racism that led to this point and acknowledge the work ahead to overcome it.

## 10 Minute Walk National Study Visits

As part of 10 Minute Walk, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) led year-long engagements with park and recreation departments from cities across the United States. NRPA provided \$40,000 grants to support local efforts to incorporate 10-minute park access as a sustained planning and funding priority. NRPA grantees were also offered the opportunity for additional technical assistance from ULI in the form of a national study visit. National study visits bring volunteer experts from across the United States to a city or community to provide a set of recommendations to priority areas identified by local stakeholders. Experts were identified based on areas of expertise needed by the community.

For the 10 Minute Walk national study visits, the parks departments (or a similar entity) and local district councils were engaged in setting priorities and planning the visit. These fast-paced, three-day study visits included a briefing to the experts on the study area and the questions to be addressed; a tour of local parks and neighborhoods; interviews with stakeholders; and a public presentation of recommendations. The recommendations serve as a guide to help each city create implementable and actionable plans and priorities for the parks departments moving forward.



# St. Paul, Minnesota (Rondo)

**WHAT:** Exploring the development of a land bridge

**WHEN:** March 18–23, 2018

**WHO:** Lyneir Richardson, Center for Urban Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, Rutgers University (panel chair); Beth Callender, CallenderWorks; Rodney Crim, St. Louis Economic Development Partnership; Sarah Graham, Strategic Economics; Bert Gregory, Mithun; Ilana Lipsett, PublicDesign | PublicSpace; Ben Stone, Smart Growth America

**SPONSORS:** ReConnectRondo, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the city of St. Paul, and ULI Minnesota

Freeway construction across the United States has a long history of disrupting communities of color. Thriving neighborhoods with locally owned businesses, strong social ties, and cultural centers not only have been split in half by highways but also have experienced the resulting displacement, air pollution, and economic hardship for decades after. Rondo, a historic neighborhood in St. Paul, continues to face the consequences of an interstate that bisected the neighborhood. Residents are now trying to honor their past by constructing a land bridge (also known as a freeway lid) over the interstate to physically, socially, and economically reconnect their community.

A vibrant Black community located along Rondo Avenue, Rondo lies halfway between the cores of St. Paul and Minneapolis. When Interstate 94 began to sweep through the neighborhood in 1956, many residents left Rondo. However, those who stayed preserved the community’s local identity and cultural legacy. By the time construction had finished in 1968, 600 homes and 300 businesses had been closed or torn down without adequate compensation—an injustice that has never been repaired.

Since then, residents have organized Rondo Days, which celebrate the history of Rondo, and established the nonprofit ReConnectRondo (RCR) to advocate for a land bridge. These initiatives not only seek to preserve the spirit of Rondo for future generations but also work toward more equitable outcomes in housing, business formation, wealth creation, health, wellness, environmental justice, and social advancement.



Interstate 94 runs through the historic Black community of Rondo.

RCR describes the land bridge as a “moonshot,” or radically ambitious idea. The land bridge would physically reconnect the two parts of Rondo that the interstate had split and was the focus of ULI’s Advisory Services panel. To evaluate the land bridge’s potential, the panel toured the study area and met with stakeholders, including residents; partners at the local, city, and state levels; design and real estate professionals; and health and mobility experts. The panel’s scope included the following areas of examination:

- The benefits and constraints of each of the freeway lid concepts previously proposed by the ULI Minnesota panel;
- The most effective way to incorporate a freeway lid into the surrounding community, including the types of land uses best suited for the revitalization effort, such as retail, civic centers, green space, incubator space, residential, and office/industrial;
- Strategies for revitalization within surrounding neighborhoods that acknowledge the history of challenges associated with the placement of the freeway while promoting reconnections to ensure a bright future for the area and the region;
- Priorities for implementation of a development plan, including timing and phasing;
- Funding strategies or examples of public space management from other cities and communities that should be considered in the implementation of a development plan; and
- Actions that ReConnect Rondo, its agency partners, and other stakeholders should be taking to ensure inclusive, equitable development and to reduce displacement.

Panelists supported the land bridge as a way to remedy these past injustices and honor Rondo's enduring legacy. They assessed three options with different mixes of housing, open space, anchor institutions and other uses. Across all options, they maintained the following overarching recommendations:

- Move forward with a significant Rondo community land bridge.
- Have the Minnesota Department of Transportation construct and maintain the bridge.
- Put resources of \$6 million behind this concept now to bring the idea to the next step of design, engineering, and cost estimates.
- Use the land bridge as an opportunity for Black leadership and ownership.
- Prioritize inclusive economic development to ensure the Rondo community land bridge is an opportunity for people of color and residents. It is an opportunity for residents of Rondo to lead and drive the project and benefit from the wealth creation and job creation that will result from the project.
- Conduct comprehensive market and financial analysis. Prepare an affordable housing strategy to identify target income levels and unit types as well as policies and programs for affordable housing production and preservation to avoid displacement. Conduct an employment analysis to identify targeted industry sectors as well as policies and programs for job generation and workforce training.
- Establish official boundaries for the Rondo neighborhood that will help raise awareness. In addition to simply elevating the visibility of the Rondo neighborhood, more formal boundaries will help pave the way to create overlay districts, such as a defined business improvement district, a tax increment financing district, or a special services area to fund community projects, and an arts and cultural district.
- Canvass the neighborhood to develop a database of residents' housing status, including their ability to pay for rent or a mortgage and home improvements, to develop a true sense of displacement risks and develop a funding plan to assist those who need help.

Notably, the panel emphasized that smart land use planning can not only help reconnect Rondo but also advance racial equity by prioritizing Black leadership and ownership throughout the process—whether leading community engagement, advancing local business development, or creating affordable housing so that the original community can benefit from the value the land bridge creates. In fact, this is one of three guiding principles that ULI recommended establishing for the project: Black ownership and self-determination; it is “more than a bridge,” which acknowledges that the land bridge would contribute not only to the area's development but also to reunification and justice; and “a 100-year journey,” recognizing that 50 years of challenges have passed and 50 more can be dedicated to overcoming them.



Parks and open spaces, like the Rondo Commemorative Plaza or nearby Carty Park, should be connected to the Rondo Community Land Bridge.



The panel's proposed Rondo Community Land Bridge superimposed on ReConnect Rondo's values.

“The vision has momentum, but we all believe that now is the time for meaningful action steps and the seed funding to be put in place so that we get the bridge to the point of inevitability,” said panel chair Lyneir Richardson. If implemented, the 20-acre land bridge would rejoin the neighborhood, restoring access to the communities on both sides while empowering residents to fully honor their past and look ahead to a more equitable future.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Sacramento, California (South Sacramento)

**WHAT:** Equitable transit-oriented development

**WHEN:** September 23–28, 2018

**WHO:** David Leininger, Sasaki (panel chair); Karen Abrams, Heinz Foundation; Abigail Ferretti, Partners for Economic Solutions; Richard Lukas, National Governors Association; Leroy Moore, Tampa Housing Authority; Ralph Núñez, NúñezDesign; Stan Wall, HR&A Advisors

**SPONSORS:** Sacramento Council of Governments, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Sacramento Regional Transit, and Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District

The Florin and Meadowview light-rail stations opened more than 15 years ago in South Sacramento. Despite the strong potential for equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD) around these stations, decades of disinvestment in the surrounding areas have instead resulted in persistent challenges: unhealthy commercial corridors, declining transit ridership, increasing population, rising housing costs, a widening income gap, and poor air quality that does not align with state or local sustainability goals. Now, the city is interested in creating a development plan that leverages existing investments in public transit to help South Sacramento participate in today's regional growth while fostering healthy and inclusive community development. This includes job and income growth, diverse housing options, positive health outcomes, neighborhood amenities, access to parks and recreation facilities, and options for safe active transportation—all without displacing current residents and businesses.

The Urban Land Institute convened a group of experts to assess strategies for achieving these goals through eTOD. Like transit-oriented development (TOD), eTOD advances walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods around public transit. However, it also incorporates an equity lens to ensure that all residents can participate in and benefit from this type of development. Specifically, the panelists recommended using a racial equity lens, which one panel member remarked is “a perfect approach to use in these neighborhoods because of the diversity of residents.”



With thoughtful land use and strong public/private partnerships, South Sacramento can create equitable TOD that improves public health and safety, adds affordable housing, and enhances connectivity.

The panel studied the two light-rail station areas, toured the surrounding South Sacramento neighborhoods, and met with more than 75 city and county officials, local business leaders, representatives of local institutions, high schoolers, and residents, among others. Using what they heard from stakeholders and their observations of the study areas, the panelists provided guidance on the following questions:

- How can parks, open spaces, and active connections to transit be part of local infrastructure and community development plans?
- How should Sacramento reinvigorate existing infrastructure (physical, social, and economic) to grow an equitable, transit-oriented community around these light-rail stations?
- Which efforts should the public and private sectors partner on to accomplish early, mid-term, and long-term changes?
- With increasing home costs, how could the cost of new housing be balanced with the need for affordable housing?

The panelists recognized immediate opportunities for development around the two stations, supported by existing zoning regulations that encourage high density and mixed uses near light rail. Sacramento Regional Transit already owns the land adjacent to these stations and is marketing the sale or joint-use development of these sites.

Around the Florin station, the panelists envisioned a long-term land lease for 920 units of multifamily TOD housing—the majority of which would be affordable—and amenities such as a fresh-food market, neighborhood-supporting and community-serving retail (e.g., a daycare or bike repair shop), and a park. For the Meadowview station, panelists recommended focusing on apartments for seniors and related retail to support older residents downsizing within their community. In both areas, the transformation from underused parking lots and unhealthy corridors to TOD is expected to increase light-rail ridership by 920,000 and 540,000 annual new rides for Florin and Meadowview, respectively.

South Sacramento has the available land and community assets to act on these plans. Moreover, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency can contribute resources and expertise,

and additional funding is available through low-income housing tax credits, New Markets Tax Credits, Opportunity Zones, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grants and loans, and TOD incentives. Of course, even with these financing options, the development process will face barriers and require patience, time, and authentic commitment.

Importantly, the panelists heard government officials express a sense of planning fatigue. At the same time, a history of planning “at the community, not with the community” has made residents distrustful of these efforts. The panelists made the following recommendations to capitalize on the development-ready nature of these areas while building genuine relationships and ensuring that TOD is equitable:

- Identify and strengthen leadership within the community.
- Integrate parks and recreation facilities, community gathering spaces, and healthy food opportunities into the redevelopment of acreage available at the rail stations through station area design and programming.
- Develop a safe, connected, active, and green multimodal transportation network. Develop “complete streets” with design elements such as protected sidewalks and bike lanes, road diets, traffic-calming measures, shade trees, and greenway trails for safer and more comfortable pedestrian and bike routes.
- Build denser mixed-income and mixed-use multifamily housing to provide affordable units, draw higher incomes, and stimulate redevelopment along the corridor.
- Jump-start jobs and entrepreneurship with redevelopment and placemaking of available retail space in commercial corridors. Redevelop existing retail space to provide temporary construction jobs and permanent operating jobs.
- Use existing arts and culture capacity to further enhance the community. Incorporate programming in new parks and gathering spaces for art, entertainment, and festivals, and as a creative outlet for good mental health and youth leadership.

The panelists also zeroed in on near-term actions that can accelerate this progress:

- Commit to using an equity lens for development around transit.
- Make infrastructure improvements within a half-mile of light-rail stations.
- Enact regulation changes at city and county levels, including reducing impact fees for affordable housing.
- Expedite construction of new mixed-income and mixed-use housing.
- Improve multimodal connections to housing, jobs, retail, services, and parks and recreation through landscape design and installation of new parks, greenways, and other green infrastructure.
- Use ground-floor retail space and placemaking to activate local retail, community and business development, arts, public health, and healthy eating.



RALPH NUÑEZ/ULI

The Florin station in South Sacramento.



CALLI SLEEP/ULI

Panelists during the study tour.

“You’re already incredibly well served on transit,” said panel chair David Leininger. “The availability of public lands for development, strong public-sector partners, and a thriving locally based business and retail sector means that development should come. It’s a matter of knowing that it’s going to come, eliminating barriers impeding development, and getting ready to take advantage of it.” Once this development starts in South Sacramento, the panelists believe that Florin and Meadowview will be able to serve as models for equitable transit-oriented development throughout the region.

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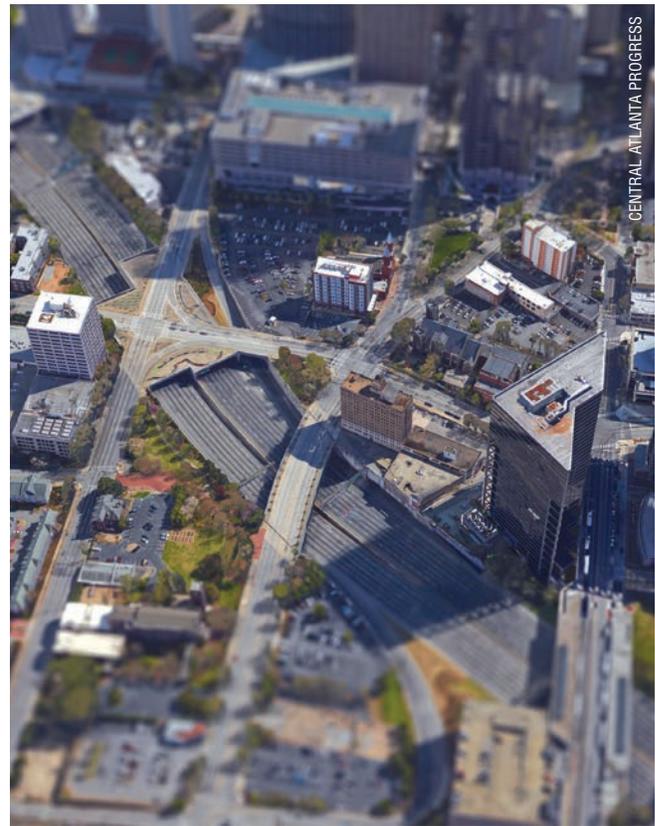
# Atlanta, Georgia (The Stitch)

**WHAT:** Developing a freeway lid

**WHEN:** February 24–March 1, 2019

**WHO:** James Lima, James Lima Planning + Development (panel chair); Dionne Baux, National Main Street Center Inc.; Gia Biagi, Studio Gang; Kathryn Firth, NBBJ; Wei Huang, Novus Real Estate; Jack Kardys, J Kardys Strategies LLC; Richard F. Krochalis, Seattle Design Commission; Glenn LaRue Smith, PUSH studio LLC; Sujata Srivastava, Strategic Economics

**SPONSORS:** Atlanta Downtown Improvement District, Central Atlanta Progress, Davinci Development Collaborative LLC, and ULI Atlanta



The project study area at the intersection of I-75 and I-85.

Atlanta’s downtown is growing and evolving. Much of the city’s population growth is taking place in the core—particularly among millennials—and the area continues to be a significant employment center, encompassing 28 percent of the city’s jobs. Moreover, the downtown is rapidly emerging as an innovation hub, tourism district, and central neighborhood for college students. Housing demand is rising, especially for lower-income households, and the city is looking for new ways to equitably develop its downtown to meet these changing needs.

The Stitch is a three-quarter-mile freeway lid that is planned to cap the Interstate 75/85 Downtown Connector, which runs directly through Atlanta’s downtown. Its name reflects its purpose: to “stitch” the downtown back together with new streets, buildings, and parks. This would reclaim about 14 acres above the highway, positioning the area to better absorb growth, increase connectivity in an already transit-rich environment, and create world-class open space.

Central Atlanta Progress sponsored the panel, seeking guidance in the following areas:

- Project positioning—key economic and community outcomes that support significant investments in public infrastructure;
- Development impacts—community development that could be catalyzed by the project;
- Design—experience and key competencies for design partners; and
- Funding—best practices and creative ways to build a coalition of funding partners.

To inform their understanding of this development’s opportunities and constraints, the panelists interviewed 70 stakeholders. They noted that important voices were missing in these stakeholder conversations, including residents, leaders of local churches and businesses, members of the school district, and neighborhood planning units. And although the interviewees were excited about the Stitch, the panelists did not perceive a clear shared vision. So the first of their recommendations is “Honor your story,” or use the history of the downtown area to better define its identity today and collectively imagine its future. Using that visioning process as a critical starting point, the panelists made the following recommendations:

- Honor your story.
- Scale the Stitch.
- Align implementation actions.
- Formalize partnerships for implementation.
- Prioritize next steps, such as the following:
  - Committing to an equitable and inclusive community that is anchored by the Stitch;
  - Engaging, collaborating, and aligning stakeholders by formalizing a diverse advisory committee, hiring a designated engagement coordinator, developing a communications strategy, and establishing a new 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to design, develop, and operate the Stitch;
  - Empowering leadership to drive governance;

- Beginning the predevelopment phase, including starting a campaign for the initial \$10 million investment; testing support from funders for an equitable community-driven approach; commencing preliminary engineering and design; obtaining permission to use freeway and airspace rights-of-way through the federal and state approval process; and initiating the environmental review process; and
- Reviewing and clarifying zoning and design with an eye toward the Stitch by enforcing design standards that prioritize the public realm framed by high-quality buildings that respect the human scale, and by futureproofing parking garages for adaptive use.

The panelists complemented these recommendations with lessons from other U.S. freeway cap projects:

- Recognize the long-term timelines associated with large-scale capital project development; be patient but persistent to achieve the project objectives.
- Build a strong coalition of supporters as well as champions to provide leadership and insight in seeking financial support from the private sector, foundations, and state and federal agencies.
- Explore innovative partnerships to foster economic development opportunities.
- Provide outreach to community groups to find out what is needed to help leverage the project's benefits, such as incentives to meet community goals like affordable housing.
- Create new governance models to work with government agencies, using nonprofit entities, if needed, to design, construct, and/or operate the parks and infrastructure associated with freeway lids.
- Develop early, small-scale “wins” or improvements that demonstrate to the community commitment to the longer-term goals.

These concepts underpin the panel's reframing of the Stitch as a network of great civic spaces that can catalyze investments in open space, mobility, housing, health and wellness, arts and culture, commercial development, and the public realm. The panelists also agree that the city should center equity across its planned investments and decision-making processes, which is critical for promoting health as well; researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University found at least a 12-year difference in life span between Fulton County residents of predominantly Black neighborhoods and their White counterparts. This vision for the Stitch provides a framework to work through the city's questions on project positioning and development impacts, with racial equity as a core component.

On design, the panelists recommended scaling down the Stitch to five acres—estimated to cost \$185 million—to make the project more feasible. Design should prioritize the human scale, including complete streets, appropriate building height and massing, and enhanced mobility and transportation through reconnecting the local street grid and improving access to transit. The Stitch is also an opportunity to connect existing open spaces, leverage the currently underused MARTA Civic Center Station for transit-oriented development, enhance access to arts and culture through programming, attract new office tenants and residents, and spark private development—especially that with a social mission.



The Stitch would strengthen the downtown's connectivity with adjacent business communities.

This transformation cannot happen without partnerships. Therefore the panelists recommended building coalitions across sectors including transportation, health and wellness, housing, and arts and culture. These partnerships are not only financially necessary but also help build community around anchor institutions, programming, and affordable housing solutions. Collaboration must also take place across the federal, state, and local levels, requiring meaningful community engagement alongside strong political leadership. Given the many stakeholders involved, a dedicated effort must align implementation actions.

The Stitch is an opportunity to harness open space to create equitable, resilient, and healthy development in Atlanta's downtown. “Great urban parks are now widely understood to be tremendous creators of real estate value as well as important centers for new economic investment, mixed-use development, and vibrant street life,” panel chair James Lima said. “When programmed and operated by local stewards to reflect local community needs, these public spaces also become important hubs of civic life in ways that address issues of inclusion, equity, and wellness. They remind us of the role that excellent design can play in enhancing our collective quality of life in cities.”

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# Grand Rapids, Michigan

**WHAT:** Land acquisition strategies for equitable park access

**WHEN:** March 25–27, 2019

**WHO:** Melani V. Smith, Los Angeles Metro/Sol Price School of Planning at the University of Southern California (study visit chair); Rachel Banner, National Recreation and Park Association; Ryan P. Cambridge, Browning Day; Juan Cano, Cano Development; Darryl Ford, City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks; Douglas W. Hattaway, The Trust for Public Land; Erin Lonoff, HR&A; Jon Trementozzi, Landwise

**SPONSOR:** City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation

Almost 80 percent of Grand Rapids residents have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of their home. However, the city is rapidly developing and growing, and it recognizes the increasing need for additional public spaces. The city also lacks sufficient parkland on a per capita basis, exacerbating the need for new land. Moreover, a 2016 equity study and the city's 2017 Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan documented an existing lack of parks in historically underserved neighborhoods, which are predominantly Black and Hispanic. As the city determines where to acquire land and how to distribute new parks equitably, it asked the study visit experts for guidance on the following questions:

- Taking into account the overall park system in Grand Rapids, where are the logical and creative locations for new parkland that would have the most significant impact on achieving 10 Minute Walk access goals in the neighborhoods of focus?
- What criteria should Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation consider when building a decision matrix and an equity-based prioritization process to evaluate parkland acquisition opportunities?
- Considering projected land values and growth patterns, what types of policies or financing structures and strategies should be developed to allow the city to quickly acquire land in park-deficient areas across the city?



Ottawa Hills Park, in the city's Third Ward, reopened in October 2018 with Grand Rapids' first universally accessible playground.



The experts recommended more signage letting residents know that millage dollars are helping fund improvements to parks across the city.



In June 2019, Grand Rapids held a groundbreaking to celebrate planned improvements to Plaster Creek Family Park, including an outdoor classroom and natural playscape.

After conducting stakeholder interviews, the experts were impressed by the city’s commitment to equity and to its park system, as demonstrated by a dedicated parks millage, the city’s equity framework for decision-making, and a widespread desire to keep Grand Rapids livable. The foundation for equitable parks development is strong, but challenges remain: the Parks and Recreation Department is underfunded and understaffed; millage funding generally does not go toward operations and maintenance; a substantial amount of deferred maintenance exists; the parks department is not well equipped to acquire and maintain new lands, especially without clear partnerships in place; not all neighborhoods experience ownership of and engagement in park planning; and there is historic mistrust between residents of color and the city. To help the city overcome these barriers, the experts recommended the following:

- Develop a communication and community engagement strategy, including dedicated community engagement staff, transparent communications, and data gathering.
- Enhance park access through improved connections to parks and between parks, improved access within parks, accommodations and amenities for a wide range of populations, and the coordination of new parks with existing city plans.
- Acquire new land for parks, using easements, licenses and leases, land swaps, and the first right of refusal.
- Look at long-term funding capital investments.
- Fund operations and maintenance.

Together, these recommendations form an integrated strategy of communication, engagement, connectivity, funding, and land acquisition to improve access and inclusion within the park system. “When you really understand what the community wants and needs,” said study visit expert Darryl Ford, “you’re able to activate spaces and facilities the way that they will use them, love them, and cherish them.”

Implementing this strategy will take time, but the city can take quick and impactful actions now to get started. The experts first recommended self-promotion of the Parks Department’s many accomplishments and successes. Even low-cost signage and marketing materials can raise awareness of the parks, how their improvements have benefited residents so far, and future projects. Another priority is developing innovative partnerships to expand resources and make implementation more feasible. Finally, maintaining a focus on equity is key. By furthering its legacy of investing in parks, Grand Rapids can remain livable for a growing population while reducing disparities in park access, thereby enabling all residents to benefit from its many great parks.

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# Lewisville, Texas (the Triangle)

**WHAT:** Achieving accessible community open space within the Triangle

**WHEN:** March 27–29, 2019

**WHO:** Cate Townley, Colorado Department of Public Health (study visit chair); Isabelle Domyeko, New Economics and Advisory; Adrian Engel, Fehr & Peers Parks; Clement Lau, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation; TJ McCourt, City of Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Culture Resources Department; Jared Mummert, National Recreation and Park Association; Molly Plummer, The Trust for Public Land; James Rojas, Placeit

**SPONSOR:** City of Lewisville Parks and Recreation

In working toward its 10-minute-walk goals, the city of Lewisville identified the Triangle, a region bounded by highways and arterial roads, as a neighborhood lacking access to parks. The automobile-centric nature of the area poses challenges related to connectivity, cohesion, unhealthy corridors, and safe and walkable access to open spaces, schools, and homes. To help the Triangle overcome these barriers, the city asked the study visit experts to focus on the following questions:

- How can we identify creative opportunities to increase connectivity to existing parks, greenbelts, and/or open space in or near the Triangle? What strategies can be used to enhance equity at new or existing connections?
- How can we identify opportunities to convert city drainage rights-of-way, easements, and/or open space in or near the Triangle to parks or trails?
- What are creative strategies for developing micro-parks in areas where larger open spaces are not achievable? Can the amenities of public spaces be incorporated into the connectivity elements to create spaces that function as both?
- What are successful community processes and creative strategies to engage a broader range of stakeholders in the study area?
- We want to ensure that the community and cultural needs of residents are represented in the study area. What are creative ways to engage the population in this area, which is dominated by multifamily housing units and home to many Spanish-speaking residents? What placemaking strategies can be used to create community gathering and activity opportunities?
- What investment and partnership strategies can the city use to encourage businesses and multifamily residential units to improve connectivity to existing parks, greenbelts, and open space in or near the Triangle?
- What incentives or regulatory approaches can the city use to spark redevelopment of properties near the northern corner of the Triangle and encourage the inclusion of parks, open space, and trails?
- The study area is within an Opportunity Zone, so how can the city leverage or market that factor to potential developers for redevelopment of multifamily housing to include public spaces?
- What strategies can be applied to fund infill sidewalk and trail projects on undeveloped property or property that was developed before the requirement for sidewalk construction? Is there a way to fund the infill with public funds and recover the cost from property owners?



Business Route 121, the eastern edge of the study area, is a barrier between the Triangle area and the communities to the east.



Timber Creek Trail is a wide green space that cuts across the southern portion of the study area.

A misconception exists that residents of the Triangle are transient, but the experts found that most were long-term community members and recommended investing in community engagement to better understand their needs, build trust, and promote social cohesion. This would provide the foundation for identifying new parkland, developing programs, and increasing connectivity through safer streets and transportation. These strategies for equitable park development are especially important in the Triangle, where the barriers to park access have been persistent. However, many of them could also serve as a model for other parts of the city as Lewisville works toward 100 percent of its residents living within a 10-minute walk of a park. The specific recommendations follow:

- Lead with equity, and incorporate social, health, and economic equity into work done toward all recommendations.
- Community collaboration should include all stakeholders, meet people where they are, and use creative engagement tactics.
- Park planning and recreation services should
  - Diversify park types;
  - Think short and long term;
  - Form innovative partnerships;
  - Think about recreation opportunities in and out of parks;
  - Enhance the trail network to create more open space; and
  - Develop Timber Creek and get the community directly involved.
- Facilitate access and connections by
  - Undertaking corridor plans and studies for Business Route 121;
  - Developing a corridor master plan for Corporate Drive; and
  - Accessing existing programs.
- Form funding and investment partnerships.

The experts suggested that, in the near term, the city could get started with pop-up events, coordinating improvements with the Texas Department of Transportation and the Safe Routes to School program and committing to using an equity lens. Since the national study visit, Lewisville has surpassed these recommendations, holding a community engagement training, running a pilot mobile recreation program, identifying grants for the purchase and development of a park in the Triangle, accelerating funding for a trail along Timber Creek, and hosting a pop-up park event. Just as past decisions about the built environment have created lasting challenges for the Triangle, today's investments will have long-term benefits. As Lewisville continues to make progress on its 10 Minute Walk goals, it is creating a healthier environment, now and in the future, for all of its residents.

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# Detroit, Michigan

**WHAT:** Financial sustainability of the parks system

**WHEN:** March 31–April 5, 2019

**WHO:** April Anderson Lamoureux, Anderson Strategic Consulting (panel chair); Neelay Bhatt, Pros Consulting Inc.; Michael Brown, Montgomery County Planning Department; Savlan Hauser, Jack London Improvement District; Stephany Lin, U3 Advisors; Ilana Lipsett, PublicDesign | PublicSpace; Steve Qualkinbush, Q2 Real Estate; Donald R. Schrottenboer, Private Equity Group

**SPONSOR:** City of Detroit



The Dequindre Cut Greenway in Detroit's Eastern Market neighborhood.

The city of Detroit has a strong history of investing in its parks and open spaces, viewing them as important assets for community life, public health, and economic development. However, Detroit's economic decline, bankruptcy, and shrinking population have made park upkeep difficult to fund. The city has been relying on philanthropy to fill the gaps, but ensuring long-term maintenance requires greater financial sustainability.

The purpose of the panel was to recommend financial models for operational support in the near term and for the following considerations in the long term:

- Reduce the cost of delivery of services where possible through economies of scale;
- Increase earned income where it makes sense;
- Coordinate private, philanthropic, and city government expenditures and maximize the use of existing public-sector funding for public space;
- Find new ways to capture a portion of the economic value that comes from locating development adjacent to high-quality public spaces;
- Examine the potential for new sources of public-sector financing, including increased funding through regional or state systems;
- Continue to expand the available pool of philanthropy, including endowment, that is aimed at public spaces, in part by communicating more clearly the value proposition for the community;

- Achieve sustainability while preserving and increasing access for longtime residents of the city;
- Define factors funders should consider in ranking the urgency and sequencing of investments; and
- Describe the tangible and intangible characteristics that create a wonderful public space.

By focusing on the financial underpinnings of successful parks, the panel aimed to support Detroit's large portfolio of more than 5,000 acres of open space while ensuring that all residents can benefit from them. However, a backlog of deferred maintenance, challenges with measuring the true cost of projects, and the lasting effects of the Great Recession on public resources make reaching financial sustainability more difficult.

Detroit does not have a dedicated millage for parks and recreation, instead depending on the general fund. Philanthropic organizations, partners who work with individual parks, volunteers, and in-kind services provide additional support for operating expenses. Moreover, not all operating costs are accounted for in long-term planning. In fact, the city has a pipeline of projects underway that may pose financial difficulties when maintenance costs kick in.

In addition to financial challenges, Detroit's General Services Department (which includes the Detroit Parks and Recreation Department) is charged with maintaining publicly owned vacant space, amounting to an additional 17 square miles (about 10,000 acres). Depending on their use and condition, such spaces can become neighborhood assets and can even be turned into open space. Nevertheless, they strain the city's capacity, even as the staff has begun to expand following Detroit's bankruptcy. Moreover, a lack of coordination among stakeholders—which make up a complicated network of community groups, the public and private sectors, nonprofits, and philanthropic organizations—has often resulted in unclear responsibilities and inequitable resource distribution.

## Variables for Evaluating Funding Sources

Variable	Definition	Range		
Implementation time frame	How quickly can this strategy be put into action?	Short term (12–18 months)	Medium term (2–5 years)	Long term (5 years and beyond)
Implementation ease	How easy/difficult will it be to implement this strategy based on political hurdles, state law changes, other hurdles?	Easy	Medium	Difficult
Revenue potential	What is the extent of revenue generation potential from this source?	\$	\$ \$	\$ \$ \$
Dedicated funding	What are the long-term sustainability and predictability of the funds obtained from this strategy?	Yes	No	
Market conditions	If the tool effectiveness is affected by the local market conditions, under what market conditions would the tool be most effective?	Weak	Average	Strong
Partnership potential	To what extent does this strategy drive public, private, or nonprofit partnerships?	Low	Medium	High

Source: ULI panel.

At the same time, the panel was impressed by the dedicated individuals who have voluntarily stepped up to create neighborhood associations, program and maintain their parks, and attract public and private investments. This individual action reflects the pride that the whole city takes in its parks system. Of the 305 parks operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation, a little over 250 are actively used, demonstrating the central role of parks in Detroit’s city life. When combined with sufficient and strategic financing, this abundance of parks and community leaders can return the park system to being a network of great public spaces.

To accomplish this, the panel recommended that the city develop a long-term financing strategy with a diverse range of elements, many of which the panel outlines in its report. The panel also suggested affirming that parks are essential to the health, well-being, and economy of the city and must be maintained regardless of the government budget. The primary recommendations are as follows:

- Create a strategic framework.
- Diversify and identify dedicated funding for ongoing maintenance and operations.
- Prioritize an equitable solution that leads to shared benefits throughout the city for all Detroiters.
- Encourage and enfranchise neighborhood groups as partners.

Prioritizing an equitable solution is especially important given Detroit’s deep history of racial disparities. Now, over 80 percent of the population is Black, and the panelists affirmed that any strategies adopted by the city should not only use a racial equity lens but also ensure that they are inclusive of all economic statuses. The following guiding principles support these recommendations:

- Contribute to the health, welfare, and stability of Detroit.
- Promote access to public spaces for Detroiters of all neighborhoods.
- Protect existing assets and investments.
- Adopt and support best practices.

- Support and leverage economic successes of neighborhoods.
- Facilitate inclusive engagement strategies.

Several financial strategies would align with these recommendations and guiding principles: identify and secure dedicated funding sources for current and future needs; build a culture of business planning to account for the true costs of providing services; and explore tools such as value increment recapture, social impact bonds, special assessment districts, park impact fees, stormwater retention credits, endowments, concession revenues, a national or historic dedication for the Riverfront, federal or state grants, a car rental tax, casino access fee, sales tax, marijuana sin tax, capital improvement fee, user fees, crowdfunding, partnerships, and corporate sponsorships and naming rights.

To accompany these financial strategies, the panel also recognized a need for structural reforms. It recommended elevating the Department of Parks and Recreation to the cabinet level, forming a Detroit Parks Alliance (DPA) to provide a coherent cross-sector governance structure, pursuing resource-sharing opportunities, and creating a special assessment district. The DPA can also build local capacity by encouraging the creation of “friends” groups. Of course, authentic and sustained community engagement is key to learning from and empowering residents while co-creating a vision for the park system.

Maintaining high-quality parks for everyone in Detroit in turn contributes to the city’s economic revitalization. “We see the parks as a central piece of the city redevelopment,” says panelist Ilana Lipsett. For parks to succeed in this role, they need financial stability and cohesive governance. Detroit has begun to make important investments in parks and the people who use them, but these investments are still vulnerable to changes in funding and economic conditions. With the park system at a tipping point, prioritizing long-term financial sustainability can return Detroit’s parks to being a centerpiece of a healthy city.

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# San Antonio, Texas (Hemisfair)

**WHAT:** Urban redevelopment around a historic landmark

**WHEN:** April 28–May 3, 2019

**WHO:** Alex Rose, Continental Development Corporation (panel chair); Marina Badoian-Kriticos, Energy and Natural Resource Policy Houston Advanced Research Center; Dan Conway, THK Associates Inc.; Rick Dishnica, The Dishnica Company LLC; Allen Folks, Ascent Environmental; Joyce Lee, IndigoJLD; Riki Nishimura, Gensler; Tyrone Rachal, Red Rock Global Capital Partners; Janine Sisak, DMA Companies

**SPONSOR:** Hemisfair

San Antonio hosted the World’s Fair in 1968, celebrating the city’s 250th birthday and creating a historic fairground. During its construction, giant exhibition halls and monuments replaced the residential, religious, retail, and other uses that had flourished within what had been an urban grid. But after the fair ended, this new infrastructure was largely inaccessible. Without connectivity to the nearby communities, the site became neglected. Automobile-oriented superblocks later compounded this isolation, further cutting off the surrounding neighborhoods, and a convention center and interstate exacerbated these issues as well.

A new vision for the fairgrounds, which are now known as the Hemisfair District, began with the formation of the Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation (HPARC) in 2009. HPARC oversees 40 acres of land, including the iconic Tower of the Americas, Henry B. González Convention Center, Magik Theatre, Institute of Texan Cultures, Mexican Cultural Institute (MCI), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), multiple historic structures, and acres of undeveloped open space. After extensive community engagement and public input processes, HPARC planned to redevelop the area as a walkable, mixed-use district that would be financially self-sustaining, constructed in three phases through private/public partnerships.

The panel was asked to focus on the third phase, the Eastern Zone, and provide development recommendations. The unique nature of the site provides both challenges and opportunities. One main challenge was constraints on the location of historical buildings, which limit how HPARC can strategically create meaningful public spaces and incorporate green space throughout the site. At the same time, these buildings and landmarks can be used to reimagine Hemisfair’s past to inspire a strong sense of place and identity for the future.



The Hemisfair site in San Antonio, Texas.

The panel’s recommendations centered on restoring connectivity to the district. A series of walkable green spaces activated by housing, locally owned retail, and restaurants would increase connectivity within the area, and a complete streets approach would enhance connectivity with the residential neighborhoods in the south and a commercial district in the north. To implement this vision, the panel recommended the following:

- Create a vision for the Eastern Zone.
  - Cluster and activate the historical buildings that currently line Nueva Street along the south side of the Convention Center to further enhance the public’s experience and draw them toward the Tower of the Americas.
  - Remove the UNAM building and the unrenovated part of the MCI with preservation of other cultural elements elsewhere on site.
  - Remove the timeworn water foundations at the base of the Tower of the Americas and redesign that area as a welcoming, contemplative green space.
  - Improve the back (south side) of the Convention Center to create a “back door” that serves as an anchor for Tower Park.
  - Renovate the historic Women’s Pavilion consistent with its architectural heritage to serve as Tower Park’s premier indoor event and civic space.
- Cultivate a development strategy.
  - Implement a residential development strategy that restores pre-1968 residential vibrancy in the Eastern Zone.
  - Bolster financial sustainability by promoting a development strategy that focuses on residential while it spurs development in the larger Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone.

- Develop a mix of housing types and a mix of affordability levels within Hemisfair to promote socioeconomic diversity, increase density to an appropriate level, and provide financial benefits to HPARC.
- Coordinate with owners of adjacent properties to meet the needs of all stakeholders and to ensure land uses are compatible and the infrastructure components are efficiently addressed together.
- Locate an engaging development (such as an Exploratorium) north of the residential buildings to draw visitors from all parts of San Antonio and provide an attraction that will complement the existing activities.
- Redevelop the surface parking lot bounded by César Chávez Boulevard, Matagorda Street, Garfield Alley, and Indianola Street as one of the highest priorities to create high-density residential mixed use.
- Implement a complete streets program, including improved traffic signals, realigned key intersections, and improved vehicular and pedestrian access and wayfinding.
- Implement development in a strategic phased order to capture maximum value.
- Strive toward long-term sustainability.
  - Implement HPARC's *Urban Design Manual* as a living document that is updated every four or five years.
  - Update the *Urban Design Manual* with sustainability best practices, including green energy generation; adherence to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), SITES, and WELL standards; and expanded green infrastructure requirements.
  - Leverage the opportunity to lead in areas of health and wellness to alleviate any health disparities in the area at the community and building scales.
  - Build branding, marketing, and constituent communications to support a public engagement and awareness strategy to reach wide audiences and create additional momentum around a project of this magnitude.
  - Establish more public/private partnerships or “creative alliances” between government and private developers such as the University of Texas at San Antonio, the city of San Antonio, and the federal government to achieve common goal.
- Use financing tools and methods to make goals attainable.
  - Make full use of the financial tools the city of San Antonio has available including city bonds and tax increment bonds.
  - Increase capacity to explore additional financial tools, including tax credits, opportunity zone equity, and corporate sponsorships.



Many of the elements from the World's Fair have undergone physical changes and relocation; this illustration shows the recommended principal clusters of preserved and relocated structures for the Eastern Zone.



The Tower of the Americas water feature, known as the Mini-Monorail fountain because of its placement on the 1968 World's Fair monorail line, is currently challenged by location and stagnant water.

These extensive and detailed recommendations are based on analysis of market potential, design and planning, development strategies, and implementation considerations. “San Antonio is continuing to grow, and that means people, that means households, and that means Hemisfair has a capture opportunity to create a foundation for that great place,” said panel chair Alex Rose. By improving connectivity, creating a sense of place, and honoring the history of the area, the redeveloped Eastern Zone has the potential to once again become a community that serves all of its residents—and all of San Antonio—with healthy urban amenities and, now, world-class public space.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Austin, Texas

**WHAT:** Trail-oriented development

**WHEN:** August 25–30, 2019

**WHO:** Julie Underdhal, Julie Underdahl LLC; Kimberly C. Driggins, city of Detroit, Planning and Development Department; Shane Farthing, city of Martinsburg; Edward Henley III, Pillars Development; Suzanna Fry Jones, High Line Canal Conservancy; Sandra Kulli, Real Estate Consultant; Amie MacPhee, Cultivate; Charlie McCabe, Parks Consultant; Beth Silverman, Lotus Campaign

**SPONSORS:** The Trail Foundation and Austin Parks and Recreation Department

The 10-mile Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail in downtown Austin was originally developed to provide urban residents with a unique, scenic landscape in the heart of the city. Ann Butler and Lady Bird Johnson established the trail, and Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) took over its operations and maintenance soon thereafter. As Austin’s population grew, a group of dedicated trail users established The Trail Foundation (TTF) to assist with trail maintenance.

Now, the partnership between PAR and TTF may be changing. They are exploring a license agreement that would transition some of PAR’s operations and maintenance responsibilities to TTF over the course of several years and develop a formalized public/private partnership. Sharing some of the financial burdens with a private entity is especially important to PAR as it faces new constraints, such as recent legislation that caps property taxes, whereas TTF is interested in having more authority to improve efficiency of general trail maintenance. Because Butler Trail is beloved in Austin, both parties are committed to taking care of the trail and ensuring that it benefits the whole community well into the future. So PAR and TTF tasked the panel with providing guidance on the following questions:

- How is authority best delineated and defined?
- How can governance of this new potential partnership be structured?
- How is liability best delineated and defined?
- How can transition be communicated?
- What are sustainable funding sources?



Running along the shores of Lady Bird Lake, the Butler Trail is heavily used.

- How can operations and maintenance be responsibly and realistically transferred?
- How does a partnership connect to broader citywide goals?

To respond to these questions, the panel interviewed more than 100 stakeholders, who confirmed that the trail is widely cherished. However, interviewees also brought up concerns about equitable access to the trail, wanting to overcome a history of institutional and structural racism related to decision-making surrounding public space and historical development patterns, and hoping to benefit from new development. Based on this feedback, a tour of the area, and the panel’s analysis, the panelists provided the following key recommendations:

- Formalize the public/private partnership between TTF and the city of Austin, using the respective strengths of each organizational partner.
- Develop a strategic plan that includes a communications strategy.
- Launch initiatives to fully fund implementation of the strategic plan that connect to the vision identified.
- Build upon past successes and explore new, better ways to maintain and improve the Butler Trail.
- Involve, engage, and reach out to the community to build support and trust.
- Plan for future growth and expansion of the Butler Trail improvements and connections.

They additionally identified guiding principles of trust, equity, collaboration, stewardship, and boldness that TTF and PAR should enact throughout the partnership-building process. These guiding principles are especially necessary because of TTF’s history, which includes redlining, choices on which neighborhoods were flooded to construct Lady Bird Lake, the construction of I-35, and current concerns about displacement from new development. TTF must acknowledge these wrongs and honor the history of those affected by these decisions.

The first step of a partnership agreement would be for TTF to develop a strategic plan and reevaluate its bylaws. Because TTF's mission is to "protect, enhance, and connect the Butler Trail at Lady Bird Lake for the benefit of all," the strategic plan should include a focus on community engagement, building trust, and distributing resources equitably. This approach would also allow TTF to more effectively act on its organizational strengths, including its commitment to equity.

From there, the panel suggested that PARD, the Watershed Protection Department, and TTF consider a formal partnership. Like TTF's strategic plan, formalizing this partnership would encourage all parties to reflect on their values and goals, set clear expectations, and think about how best to contribute their strengths to the relationship. The partnership would have at least five key separate agreements:

- Parties, vision, and public purpose;
- Understanding of baseline roles;
- Qualified partner status and criteria;
- Specific benefits for qualified partners; and
- Ongoing monitoring, evaluation, communication, and accountability expectations.

Each organization should also strengthen its governance principles to promote accountability, and they should clarify their different responsibilities around liability.

The purpose of the partnership is to keep the trail well maintained, funded, and managed so it can effectively encourage physical, social, and cultural connections. As the partnership develops, TTF should think about how, in its new role, it can bring together the trail's users and the neighboring communities. Although parks can contribute to social cohesion in historically segregated places, like the areas around Butler Trail, doing so requires intentional and meaningful work. To start, PARD and TTF could invest in programs and infrastructure developed in these neighborhoods by residents and community partners.

Although the Butler Trail itself connects places, it still needs to preserve connectivity off the trail as well—especially as private development threatens convenient access. One way to do this is by leveraging new development for park and trail improvements. Another important strategy is to ensure that the trail is accessible by public and active forms of transportation.

TTF can also convene community partners around the Butler Trail, bringing organizations with different mandates together around TTF's singular focus. Of course, engagement must go beyond local organizations. The partnership needs a comprehensive communications and engagement strategy to build awareness of the trail across populations, develop a broader sense of ownership of the trail, and use storytelling to foster new cultural connections to the trail.

In a [companion report](#) on an Advisory Services panel examining the 10-mile reconstruction of Interstate 35 through downtown Austin, panelists also recommended enhanced community engagement strategies. Because this took place in February 2020, the panel discussed COVID-19 but could not have anticipated its full range of implications. The report grapples with the difficult questions around building relationships and engaging communities during a pandemic, and its insights can help inform strategies for Butler Trail, other projects in Austin, and the virtual adaptation needed in many



Portion of the Butler Trail that had washed out in a recent storm.



The Butler Trail serves as a hub for the region's urban trail network.

communities today. The panelists suggested holding virtual town halls, with each one taking place "at" a different small business selling gift cards each week. Facilitating a group chat or page, using a digital community engagement platform like Neighborhoodland, and harnessing social media are also useful options with applications across the country.

To finance all of this work, the Butler Trail panel identified several tools available in Austin, including parkland dedication funds, bonds, tax increment financing, public improvement districts, and public/private partnerships, among others.

"Based upon the four guiding principles of trust, equity, collaboration, and stewardship," remarked panelist Julie Underdahl, "the agreement will provide a road map for what needs to be done to protect, preserve, and enhance the trail as a shared and cherished community asset, while serving as a model for other conservancies in Austin and elsewhere." As this model helps TTF and PARD strategically plan their partnership, it will also demonstrate how partnerships can foster connectivity, advance equity, and help parks and trails benefit from real estate development everywhere.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Camden, New Jersey (Cramer Hill)

**WHAT:** Park management for financial sustainability and community benefit

**WHEN:** October 2–4, 2019

**WHO:** Glenda Hood, Hood Partners LLC (study visit chair); Omar Gonzalez, Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation; Art Hendricks, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks/Vocalese Consulting; Derrick Lanardo Woody, DLW LLC; Jennifer Kanalos, Detroit Economic Growth Corporation; Bill Mahar, Norris Design; Allison Schapker, Fairmount Park Conservancy; Rob Sloop, Moffatt & Nichol

**SPONSOR:** Cooper's Ferry Partnership

The Cramer Hill Waterfront Park is planned to open in 2021. Although Cooper's Ferry Partnership (CFP), a Camden-based community and economic development corporation, has been working closely with stakeholders to plan for the park's operations, maintenance, and programming, it faces urgent questions on funding, access, and community benefits. At the time of the national study visit, the study visit experts could not identify any source of funding for the park's operations. Pedestrian access routes were prone to flooding, and high-speed traffic and declining infrastructure made them unsafe. Moreover, the adjacent Cramer Hill community had important concerns about displacement and gentrification.

CFP asked the experts to think about the following questions to help address the park's short-term needs for opening while advancing its long-term potential to benefit the surrounding community:

- Short-term park management and opportunities: In a city of extremely limited resources, how can the future park be maintained, operated, and programmed in a cost-effective and efficient manner while maximizing the potential benefit of the space itself? How can this work start now to be ready for the park's opening and then build into long-term management strategies?
- Short-term infrastructure management and opportunities: What can Camden do in the next few years to create high-quality access points to the park for residents and visitors? What mitigation strategies can be incorporated into the park or nearby



An aerial view of the study site, including the Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center (foreground), the construction area to become Cramer Hill Waterfront Park, and the North Camden and Philadelphia skylines in the background.



At the time of the study visit, Cramer Hill Waterfront Park was under construction. ULI experts toured the park on foot while learning about the site's history as a former landfill and observing the placement of key planned features, proximity to residential areas, and quality of access routes.

access routes that would address the negative impacts of Camden's weather-related infrastructure challenges (flooding, extreme heat, etc.) and would enhance the experience of park users?

- Long-term park management and opportunities: What can Camden do now to lay the foundation for the future financial success of the park and for residents in the surrounding neighborhood? What are the policies the city should implement in the next few years to ensure that the development of Cramer Hill Waterfront Park does not spur displacement of existing residents within the surrounding neighborhood?

After touring the site and meeting with 45 stakeholders, the experts provided the following recommendations for marketing, programming, governing, and maximizing the benefits of a new 60-acre waterfront park space:

- Immediately identify a park champion.
- Arrange for immediate park governance to bridge immediate and long-term governance needs.
- Establish a new nonprofit organization to manage Cramer Hill Waterfront Park.
- Raise and/or identify seed money.
- Create a compelling identity and brand.
- Begin a soft opening with community-generated pilot programming.
- Collaborate with established Camden programming experts.
- Begin corporate programming partnerships.
- Improve and create welcoming access points to Cramer Hill Waterfront Park.

- Operate with a model of excellence to create community benefits.
- Diversify funding and revenue sources.
- Demonstrate change.
- Expand the boundary for community collaboration, coordination, and value capture on a multi-neighborhood scale.
- Increase the value and desirability of Cramer Hill Waterfront Park.
- Leverage public land inventory with regional parks partnerships and master planning.

Investment in parks and open space will contribute to the city's strengthening of key neighborhoods and economic development—especially in the Cramer Hill neighborhood, where the vast majority of residents are Black or Hispanic—toward the popular slogan “Camden on the Rise.” To better serve the community, the park should maximize co-benefits for resilience and economic development, have welcoming access points, and catalyze other positive changes through affordable housing and property improvement initiatives.

Although the experts recognized that the park cannot reverse Camden's decades of decline alone, it can contribute to Cramer Hill's increasing stability and a greener, more equitable future. Despite significant challenges, the experts believe that Camden can create a park that achieves these goals. “This plan will take patience, bold leadership, and courageous decisions,” said study visit chair Glenda Hood. “It's challenging, but we feel that you are on the rise. You are the City Invincible, and you will make it happen.”

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Fort Lauderdale, Florida

**WHAT:** Parks and open-space activation

**WHEN:** October 13–18, 2019

**WHO:** Stephen Whitehouse, Starr Whitehouse (panel chair); Garrett Avery, AECOM; David Cheney, CORE architecture + design; Josh Murphy, NOAA; Jeanne Myerson, The Belgrave Group; Nan Rohrer, Midtown Community Benefits; Katie Troutman, U.S. Department of State; Stacie West, NoMa Business Improvement District/NoMa Parks Foundation

**SPONSOR:** Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority



Huizenga Plaza is owned and managed by the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority.

Currently, 6.2 million square feet are under construction in downtown Fort Lauderdale—in addition to the nearly 6.8 million square feet of private real estate development ranging from office to retail to multifamily residential built over the past 18 years. Yet despite this astounding growth in private investments, public-sector investments in the downtown have been limited, including in parks and open spaces.

In March 2019, voters approved a \$200 million general obligation bond dedicated to acquiring new parkland and making improvements to existing parks. Together, the burgeoning private development and parks bond create an exciting opportunity for Fort Lauderdale to invest in its downtown parks, complement its investments in transit, and ensure that it remains a highly livable city during this period of rapid growth. To help the city take advantage of this opportunity, the panel undertook the following assignment:

- Envision downtown Fort Lauderdale as a vibrant, livable, urban center connected by a network of publicly accessible parks and open spaces that complement existing and planned development and celebrate the charm and uniqueness of a coastal metropolitan city.
- Develop a new vision for downtown’s most central park, Huizenga Plaza, located on the iconic Riverwalk, and Las Olas Boulevard. Recommend new uses, programming, and high-quality, flexible, and resilient design characteristics that will meet the needs of the growing urban core population. Identify

potential public and private funding mechanisms, appropriate commercial enterprises, preferred operational and management models, and a recommended implementation strategy to support this vision.

- Recommend criteria and a strategic decision-making process for land acquisition and the design and development of new parks and open space, prioritizing downtown. Address factors such as demographic shifts, social cohesion, health equity, recreation trends, development and market trends, connectivity to surrounding land uses, integration into an overall parks network, resiliency planning, public infrastructure investments, and anticipated mobility improvements.
- Identify ways in which the private sector and philanthropic community can participate in and benefit from the addition of new or improved downtown parks and open spaces. Evaluate ways to capture a portion of the economic value of development adjacent to high-quality public spaces.
- Outline incentives that would be needed for private property owners and developers to participate in a public space program. Suggest strategies for the public sector to streamline processes and expedite outcomes.
- Prioritize design and programming characteristics that contribute to safe, comfortable, and interesting public space.
- Present recommendations for the financing, management, and operations of public and private open spaces in downtown. Identify successful models and recommended roles and responsibilities of partner agencies, including public, private, philanthropic, and not-for-profit organizations.
- Identify community engagement strategies to build support for changes to existing park space and to influence the design and development of new parks and open space.

With limited physical space, Fort Lauderdale will continue to densify. The panel saw this as an opportunity to redefine the downtown area while maintaining Fort Lauderdale’s character, using growth to prioritize corresponding investments in building resilience, implementing climate adaptation measures, and creating mixed-use places—all of which high-quality parks can include. After taking tours, evaluating the market context, and holding interviews with over 100 stakeholders, the panelists made the following recommendations:

- Acquire or dedicate new public land to augment downtown Fort Lauderdale’s public realm.
- Showcase new and remodeled parks with climate-adaptive components along the Riverwalk and at Huizenga Plaza and Esplanade Park.
- Begin a more robust pedestrian and bike network.
- Hire a new chief public realm officer to coordinate public space and lead the engagement process for allocating park bond funds.
- Identify resources and partnerships to supplement the bond act for open space approved in 2019.
- Implement a public/private partnership to manage and fully activate a unified vision for downtown Fort Lauderdale’s public realm.

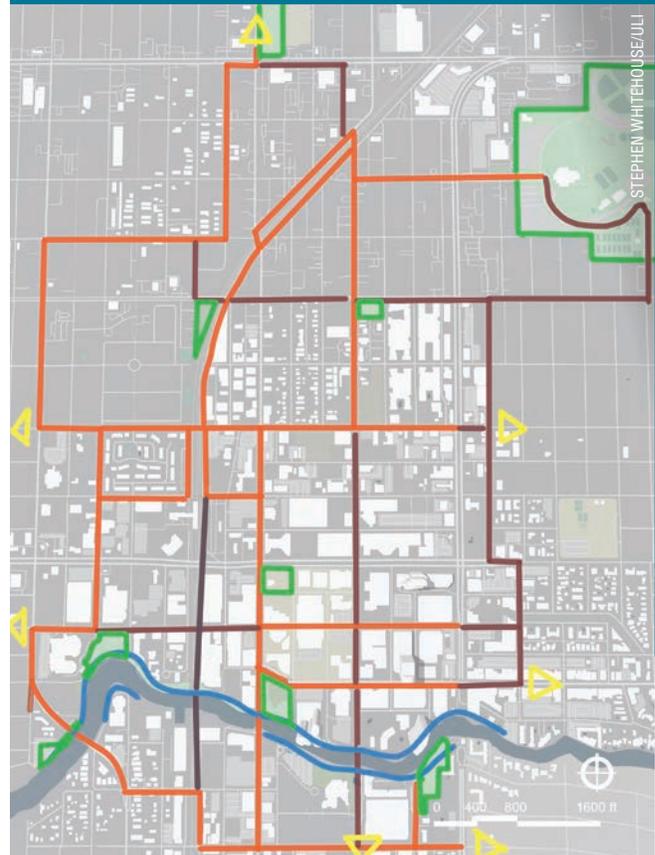
For new parks and improvements to existing ones to be successful, the city must prioritize connectivity by strengthening the downtown network of parks, connecting the network to planned trails, transit, and other destinations, and improving multimodal capabilities. Urban designers can also incorporate resilient features that mitigate coastal flooding, manage stormwater, and facilitate cooling in each of the three sites, Riverwalk East, Huizenga Plaza, and the Esplanade. All of this requires a shared vision, and the panelists recommend creating a consensus on a citywide parks vision as the foundation of improved governance structures and processes. Suggested principles to inform this vision include the following:

- Activating a connected network of public and private spaces;
- Considering public health concerns and outcomes;
- Using innovative and integrated solutions to build resilience;
- Creating a 10 Minute Walk city; and
- Providing equitable, engaging spaces for Fort Lauderdale’s community.

The city can also hire a chief public realm officer, prioritize the bond projects and oversight, develop a nongovernmental entity that can support parks, treat the Riverwalk and adjacent parks as one management space, and reconfigure the Parks, Recreation and Beaches Advisory Board to better implement the shared vision.



Plaza at SE First Street and NE Second Avenue in downtown Fort Lauderdale.



Existing and proposed extensions to enhance mobility downtown.

Fort Lauderdale will continue its “journey to density,” as the panel report calls it, but the destination must be clear. Managing the impact of growth by creating high-quality parks and open spaces will not only keep Fort Lauderdale’s downtown livable but also return economic, health, and social dividends. Rallying around this shared vision is the first step toward making the most of the parks bond and investing in a resilient and equitable future.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Los Angeles, California (Boyle Heights)

**WHAT:** Agency coordination and new partnerships to improve park access and quality

**WHEN:** November 13–15, 2019

**WHO:** Joe Brady, Metro Parks Tacoma; Scott Gilmore, Parks and Recreation, City and County of Denver; Liliana Gonzalez, Cinnaire; Shmel Graham, Sheppard Mullin; Edward Henley, Pillars Development LLC; Nate Hommel, University City District; Bridget Marquis, Reimagining the Civic Commons/U3 Advisors; Beth Silverman, Lotus Campaign

**SPONSOR:** City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks

The Boyle Heights neighborhood, due east of downtown Los Angeles, is a designated “priority community” where the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) is working to expand local park access. Boyle Heights is known for its cultural diversity, and it has historically been a destination for immigrant communities. Although 75 percent of residents live within walking distance of a park, the neighborhood lags in acreage per capita, and the city has fallen behind on needed improvement. With new development and population growth on the horizon, RAP is proactively exploring strategies for park access, ways to more effectively coordinate among city agencies and partners, and approaches for improving park quality. In line with these goals, the experts considered the following questions:

- Leveraging partnerships to build and operate parks: How can the city of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks create or enhance partnerships with other city departments and organizations (including nonprofits and private developers) to build and operate open space? How can these partnerships increase access to parks in Boyle Heights and beyond, ultimately helping the city reach its 10 Minute Walk goals?
- Implementing policies to ensure equitable public access to parks: Boyle Heights, like many areas of the city, is experiencing increased population growth and new development. What policies and tools can the city use to incentivize, or require, developers to provide publicly owned or publicly accessible open space, and/or improved access to open space, as a part of their development? What policies or practices can the city employ to encourage equitable development of these open spaces, while also supporting property values and limiting gentrification and displacement?

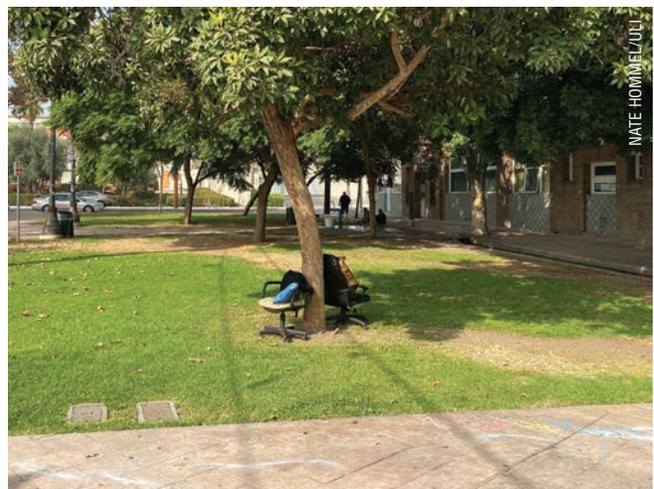


Mariachi Plaza, both a gathering place and a Metro stop, is a gateway to the Boyle Heights neighborhood.

- Improving the public realm to enhance park access: How and where can the city promote and facilitate the creation of a network of linked public spaces that connect Boyle Heights residents to planned or proposed nearby parks and recreational amenities that the city is currently investing in (including the Sixth Street Viaduct Replacement Project, the Boyle Heights Sports Center Project, and others) and other privately owned, publicly accessible open spaces?

After a briefing from RAP, a tour of the Boyle Heights neighborhood, and interviews with 30 local stakeholders—including residents, city officials, community leaders, staff from RAP and other city agencies, private developers, and representatives from local nonprofits—the experts made the following recommendations:

- Focus on park quality for existing parks in Boyle Heights.
- Form partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders.
- Improve collaboration across agencies and with community organizations.
- Show commitment to development and fundraising.



Ross Valencia Community Park is a lush green space but lacks any amenities.



The experts recommended focusing on improving the quality of existing parks in Boyle Heights, including Hollenbeck Park, whose existing amenities rated primarily as “fair” or “poor” in the L.A. County Park Needs Assessment.

- Enhance the distribution of parks personnel across the city.
- Create a Joint Planning and Operations Initiative.
- Seek out policy and funding opportunities. As part of this:
  - Use policies and funding to strengthen long-term strategic public/private partnerships.
  - Make policy tools work in practice and refine and improve State Quimby Ordinance.
  - Pilot joint use partnership with L.A. Metro.
  - Pilot interim uses of underused spaces.
  - Think big and be bold when it comes to funding options.
- Practice community engagement and storytelling for better parks by
  - Programming for success;
  - Embedding the community in the process;
  - Framing the value of parks to the city and community; and
  - Creating a platform for cross-department communications for public realm projects.

Based on these recommendations, RAP has already identified immediate action steps to work on throughout 2020: work with stakeholders to create a qualitative metric to identify components of a “quality park”; conduct park access and walkability audits in Boyle Heights and evaluate access to existing parks; and identify physical barriers to access to the parks in Boyle Heights.

What the study visit experts saw in Boyle Heights is reflected throughout Los Angeles: the city has all the necessary community infrastructure for high-quality parks but is not investing enough to adequately maintain them. Strategically reinvesting in underserved communities can improve equity and meet the community mandate for high-quality parks (as expressed by the passage of the 2018 RAP Strategic Plan). Throughout these efforts, focusing on access is not enough. According to study visit expert Scott Gilmore, “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.” To truly serve their communities, parks must meet the needs of their users and provide safe, comfortable, and healthy spaces for all Angelenos.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Kansas City, Missouri

**WHAT:** Equitable parks planning

**WHEN:** December 1–6, 2019

**WHO:** Carlton Brown, Direct Investment (panel chair); David Abraham, Rice University; Karen Abrams, The Heinz Endowments; Kate Humphrey, Housing and Revitalization Department, city of Detroit; Emeka Moneme, Menkiti Group; Bonnie Roy, SWT Design; Allison Schapker, Fairmount Park Conservancy

**SPONSOR:** Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department (KC Parks)



Panelists playing on a swing during the tour.

Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO), is known for its extensive parks and boulevard system, designed as part of the City Beautiful movement by George Kessler in 1893. The city’s network of parks today includes pocket parks, regional parks, and a wide range of park facilities, such as playgrounds, golf courses, and recreation centers. However, continuing to equitably invest in these spaces and maintain them has become a challenge.

KCMO’s history of annexation has stretched the city’s general fund and revenue base. Low-density exurban areas characterize the acquired land, which spans several adjacent counties. Without much population growth in these areas—and without the corresponding tax revenue—their roads, services, and parks have become disproportionately costly. Meanwhile, the urban core has experienced decades of disinvestment, the effects of which continue to be greatest for Black residents in formerly redlined neighborhoods.

The city is facing clear financial constraints, but the demands on the park system—from both exurban development and maintenance needs in the core—are growing. For these reasons, KC Parks asked the panel for guidance on considering equity issues as it allocates its limited resources:

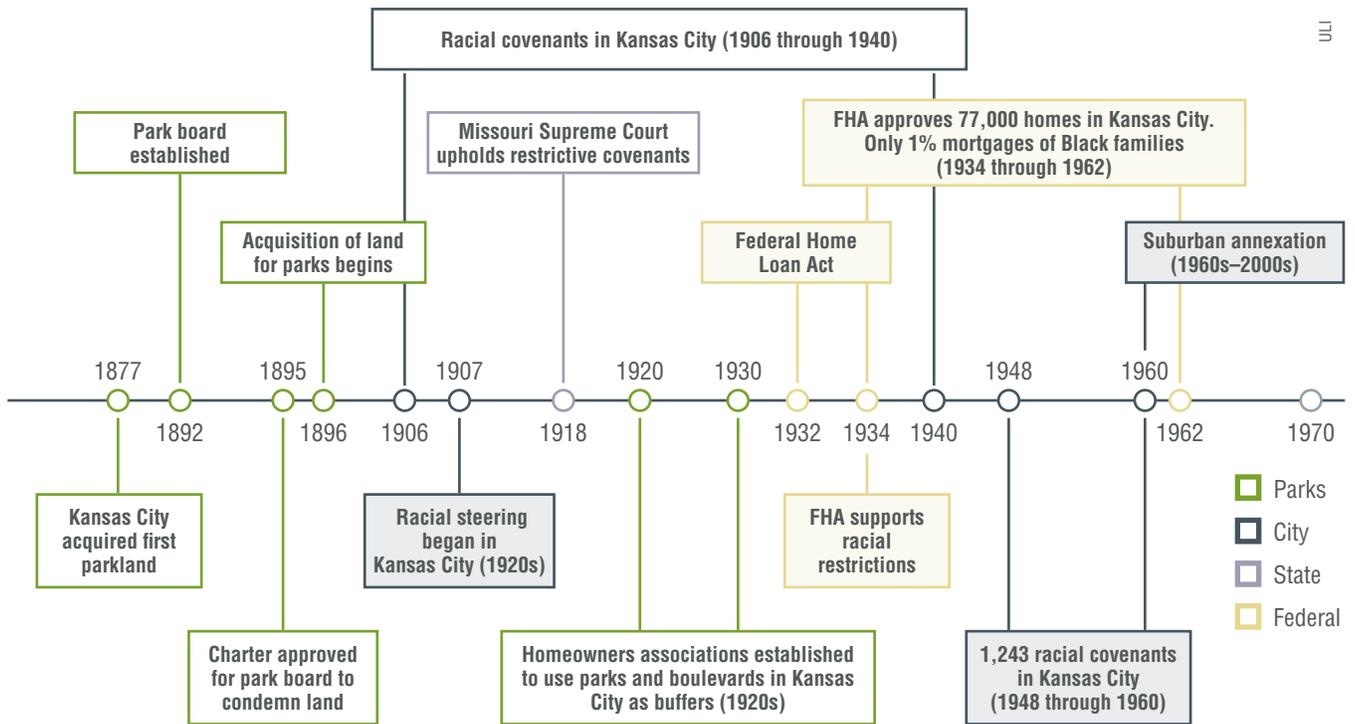
- What are the primary factors KC Parks should consider when aligning use of resources and mission?
- How should KC Parks incorporate community input in the design of facilities and open spaces to mitigate inequity?
- How can KC Parks balance newer growth areas of the city to the north with deferred maintenance of existing, older parks south of the Missouri River?

- How can KC Parks maximize its existing resources and partnerships to meet the needs of the community?
- Should KC Parks focus more attention on highest and best use of its land assets, even if this means disposal?
- How can KC Parks account for non-city-owned land being used for recreational purposes when planning for future city park space in underdeveloped parts of the city?
- What is the best strategy for developing resources necessary to fulfill the department’s mission?

Through interviews, tours, and analysis, the panelists recognized that the origins of the parks and boulevard system were inseparable from KCMO’s history of racial covenants, redlining, racial steering, and urban renewal, as well as the impact of the interstate highway system. To bring the park system into the 21st century, it must redress these injustices, which persist in the form of housing segregation, health disparities, and other social inequities. Both this history and KCMO’s present-day financial challenges inform the panelists’ recommendations:

- Improve mission clarity and the intragovernmental functional relationship.
- Develop a shared public-sector vision.
- Document and plan for expanding liabilities.
- Create a structured and directed process for growing revenues.

## Timeline of Land Use Policies That Contributed to Inequity in Parks System



A variety of policy and legal decisions were made that have had lasting impacts on social equity within KCMO today.

- Reform the development regulatory guidelines that govern developer impact fees and zoning density to encourage the development of multifamily mixed-income housing and overcome the legacy of redlining.
- Build community infrastructure and a process for the community to review, comment on, and approve park decisions and work toward high-quality community engagement.
- Form partnerships to help deliver maintenance and programming services, especially given KCMO's aging and expanding base of park assets and limited public resources.
- Establish a parks conservancy that would be able to attract broad-based support from the community, raise funds, advocate for policies and resources to improve the public realm, and provide relevant programs, activations, and events that connect residents to parks.
- Adopt an equitable approach on maintenance, park development, and programming, focusing on the people most harmed, to produce equitable social outcomes. This includes creating a shared definition of equitable planning and development so that access to KC Parks planning, programming, and maintenance can be addressed with community buy-in.

- Better align the capital budget to maximize opportunities to leverage limited resources by creating a more collaborative process surrounding citywide budgeting. This would enable KC Parks to better realign its capital budget with available capital funding and staff expertise as well as refocus to reduce operation and maintenance and new revenue opportunities.
- Use the upcoming comprehensive planning process to evaluate development patterns and code surrounding parks, including a more holistic neighborhood strategy to coordinate resources both within the urban core and suburban areas, smart growth principles, and a focus on housing as a necessary and complementary use to neighborhood parks.

"The resource constraints that we've seen really put the equity issues into sharp relief," said panelist Emeke Moneme. "They clearly show where the fault lines are as they relate to our physical asset and programming concerns." These recommendations leverage the parks and boulevard system to address equity issues by growing the city's resource pool, maximizing the impact of existing resources and assets, and strengthening governance to improve allocation. Ultimately, stronger finances will be the foundation upon which the city can build its collective vision for a more just park system that advances urban development while generating health, social, and economic benefits for all of its residents.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Memphis, Tennessee (South Memphis)

**WHAT:** The role of parks in community development and connecting small neighborhood parks

**WHEN:** January 29–31, 2020

**WHO:** James Lima, James Lima Planning + Development (study visit chair); Marcel C. Acosta, National Capital Planning Commission; Daniel Betts, Cincinnati Recreation Commission; Ray Brown, Ray Brown Urban Design; Ryan Cambridge, Browning Day; Nan Rohrer, Midtown Community Benefits District; Brian Smith, City of Durham; Beth White, Houston Parks Board

**SPONSOR:** City of Memphis Parks and Neighborhoods Division

The city of Memphis released its Memphis 3.0 Comprehensive Plan in 2019, highlighting “Vibrant Civic Spaces” as a prominent theme that garnered widespread community support. Now, the Parks and Neighborhoods Division is working on a parks master plan to guide the strategic development of parks and other civic assets. Although Memphis is racially and ethnically diverse, its neighborhoods are largely divided along socioeconomic lines. As the city considers investing in its parks, it must also seek to address this ongoing segregation and prioritize equitable development.

In South Memphis, a network of smaller, underused neighborhood parks poses both challenges and opportunities. The panel focused on seven of these parks, all of which are located in neighborhoods that have experienced decades of underinvestment: Gaston Park and Community Center, Texas Courts Park, McNeil Park, Booth Park, Trigg Park, Patton Park, and Southside Park.

South Memphis is starting to attract new interest and investment, and an enhanced parks network could encourage development in the area. The study visit experts were asked to consider the following as they developed recommendations on creating a network of high-quality parks that equitably foster economic development in historically underserved neighborhoods:

- Economic development: South Memphis is a neighborhood affected by generational poverty, blight, crime, and chronic disease. What opportunities are present for parks and park systems in future development?
  - With depopulation and urban decay, what role should parks play and how might this be applied to South Memphis (short and long term)?



The largest park in South Memphis, Gaston Park is adjacent to the Gaston Community Center and a branch of the Memphis Public Library.

- How can these parks assist in spurring economic development for the neighborhood?
- With the current transportation infrastructure, how can this neighborhood park system better connect? What strategies would work best to connect South Memphis residents to neighborhood and citywide recreational assets? Is connection between parks valuable to this neighborhood?
- Operations and programming: How might the city of Memphis with limited resources maintain, operate, and program small neighborhood parks in a cost-effective and efficient manner while maximizing the potential benefit of the space itself?
  - How can the Parks Division program (both structured and unstructured) existing parks for existing populations, with an eye toward future needs of the neighborhood if more growth occurs?
  - What strategies can be used to overcome current barriers to park usage (including real and perceived threats to safety and declining population of likely users within adjacent neighborhoods)?
- Implementing success: What are the short-term strategies, case studies, and models that Memphis might consider now for positioning small neighborhood parks for financial and operational success?



Trigg Park, a nearly two-acre neighborhood park, is adjacent to several vacant and boarded-up properties.

After a briefing from Parks Division staff, guided tour of the South Memphis neighborhood, and small group interviews with nearly 30 local stakeholders—including residents, community and faith-based leaders, city staff, private developers, and representatives from local nonprofits—the experts saw that the neighborhood has a strong foundation to build upon, such as a grid layout of connected streets and sidewalks. The park master plan should leverage the many existing parks, engaged community members, and city commitment to park maintenance, while working to improve the perception of safety, facilitate a strong identity for South Memphis, and use the park system to foster community development. More specifically, the experts recommended the following:

- Leverage existing city policies and priorities.
- Foster community development:
  - The Parks Division should work closely with other city agencies, especially to remove barriers to redevelopment of parcels near parks, and work with the development community to match them to priority parcels in South Memphis.
  - The Parks Division should continue maintenance strategies for existing parks.
  - In partnership with other city agencies, the Parks Division should create connections among parks and between South Memphis and adjacent neighborhoods, using complete streets principles.
  - The Parks Division should think of parks as hubs of community-oriented programming and plan future programming with this in mind.
  - City leaders should continue to fund parks and consider opportunities for parks alongside other city priorities.
- City leaders should work with community partners to foster entrepreneurship and small business opportunities in South Memphis. The Parks Division should serve as a community connector: continue the community engagement momentum from Memphis 3.0 into the parks master plan process; get input on redesigning existing parks and facilities to meet community needs.
- The Parks Division and city partners should look at expanding existing and building new relationships with public safety and public health organizations, human services agencies, faith-based organizations, the arts community, local corporations, local sports teams, and medical institutions; engage these partners in programming opportunities in the parks.
- The Parks Division should create new park-focused advisory councils and/or ambassador programs to engage residents as employees and volunteers.
- The Parks Division should update and/or modify park standards, including policies for regular maintenance and cleaning, assessing whether to keep underused park equipment, hours of operation, and physical features such as lighting, fencing, and signage.
- The Parks Division should document the capital needs of all city parks and recommend a priority order for implementation, potentially based on how improved parks would affect residents of low-income neighborhoods.



The experts recommended a creative placemaking project under the highway near Patton Park to help create a better sense of community.

- The Parks Division should review and modify the fee system for the entire park system, considering options such as millages, fees for service, and parking and other impact fees.

To get started, the experts recommended a set of short-term, low-cost, place-based improvements:

- Incorporate public art, including pop-up art and events.
- Paint sidewalks and crosswalks to enliven the built environment around the parks and emphasize safety measures.
- Continue programs to bring music and movies into parks; consider rotating events between parks or implementing them in more parks.
- Encourage food trucks and ensure adequate spaces for them to locate near highly visible parks.
- Focus on youth and community engagement through diversifying programming; for example, bring in other types of sports programs like lacrosse or tennis and create fun competitions.
- Look at existing corporate and civic partnerships to help fund and sponsor art, music, movies, food, and sports programming, and park cleanup and maintenance efforts.

With a stabilizing population and great location, South Memphis is poised to overcome its challenges and remove barriers to park access. The city's strategic plan can accelerate this process by developing a high-quality parks network that fosters revitalization, centers equity, and invests in the well-being of the community. Study visit expert Daniel Betts is optimistic: "You can make this happen. . . . Our parks and what we do in the community is a major part of enhancing the quality of life of citizens across the city."

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

# Lynnwood, Washington (City Center)

**WHAT:** Parks and the public realm

**WHEN:** February 26–28, 2020

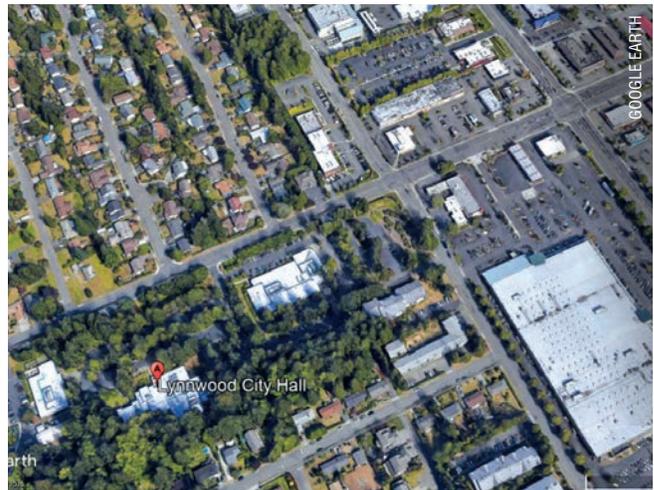
**WHO:** Aletha Dunston, Fort Harrison Reuse Authority (study visit chair); Rachel Banner, National Recreation and Park Association; Dan Eernisse, city of Everett; Erin Christensen Ishizaki, Mithun; Ellen Martin, Economic and Planning Systems; Jeanne Myerson, The Belgrave Group; Steve Qualkinbush, Q2 Real Estate; Jeff Stewart, Johnson County Park and Recreation District

**SPONSOR:** City of Lynnwood

In 2007, Lynnwood, Washington—a relatively suburban area outside Seattle—adopted the City Center Subarea Plan, which sought to create a downtown area characterized by compact, mixed-use developments. Although implementation of this new “city center” stalled because of the 2008 financial crisis, a light-rail station is coming to the City Center area in 2024 and has already spurred external investment. The city wants to move forward with its plan for a new, mixed-use neighborhood adjacent to the transit station on the current site of strip malls and parking lots.

At the same time, Lynnwood is committed to increasing the percentage of residents living within a 10-minute walk to a park from 76 to 85 percent and improving park quality through addressing \$3 million in deferred maintenance by 2030. In line with these goals, park space will be an essential part of City Center’s development. In fact, the City Center Subarea Plan includes a central 4.6-acre park to be called Town Square Park.

City staff requested this study visit to obtain actionable recommendations for advancing their City Center vision, select a site for Town Square Park, and ensure that parks and open spaces are central components in this community. The experts were asked to consider the following questions when framing their recommendations:



Bird’s-eye view of Lynnwood showing lush areas adjacent to City Center parking lots.

- What role would a City Center urban park play in catalyzing civic activity and promoting property investment in the neighborhood?
- Which tools and partnership opportunities are available to leverage public and private investment in the area to build public amenities, like parks and plazas, and how can more private development be incentivized? How can the city assist the development community with consolidation of small parcels?
- Arterials in City Center are barriers to nonmotorized movement; what streetscape interventions can remake City Center into a pedestrian oriented TOD, integrating existing infrastructure like the Interurban Trail, with active park-facade interfaces creating an integrated green space-to-urban fabric?

The experts were briefed by city staff, took a guided tour on foot and by bus—of the City Center area and nearby community spaces, and led small group interviews with nearly 30 local stakeholders, comprising residents, community leaders, city staff and leadership (including Mayor Nicola Smith), private developers, and representatives from local nonprofits. From these activities, it was clear to the experts that Lynnwood is great for families, has a special “Pacific Northwest” feeling, and is a welcoming community with many diverse cultures and identities.

However, the experts also recognized that Lynnwood is automobile-centric by design. It can be unsafe for pedestrians (especially those in wheelchairs and with disabilities), and it has several dated strip malls. Moreover, there was little to no public awareness of the city’s ongoing plans for City Center—and even skepticism that the City Center redevelopment will get started and/or be completed. Plus, the city lacks a unified identity. Based on these insights, the panelists made the following recommendations:

- Use branding to help cultivate a strong identity for Lynnwood.
- Enhance leadership to guide change by taking advantage of opportunities, updating the vision for City Center and clarifying planning and development processes, and engaging the community.



SARA HAMMERSCHMIDT/OLI

Panelists gather along the Interurban Trail adjacent to the City Center study area.

- Increase connectivity and focus on the physical realm. Connectivity within the community requires safe and reliable connections to the transit station, expanded facilities and services in anticipation of future growth, and priority pedestrian and bike enhancements. Physical design improvements include improvements to the nearby Interurban Trail and to key intersections. For parks and public spaces in City Center, create public gathering spaces within City Center, explore the potential to relocate active civic uses to City Center, and rethink a large central park.
- Attract residents and investment to City Center by providing amenities residents want (which then attract investors); reducing developer cost, risk, and uncertainty; and solidifying vision and planning fundamentals, which includes maintaining flexibility to respond to market conditions, supporting the transition of uses, facilitating land absorption through potential civic uses, considering strategic expansion of the Multiple-Unit Housing Property Tax Exemption program, and identifying and prioritizing capital improvements needed to support development.
- Explore funding options for the City Center public realm, including park impact fees, a real estate excise tax, a line of credit, and an economic development infrastructure fund. Facilitate private investment by purchasing land for City Center park (or parks) and potentially associated civic uses, such as City Hall and the library, identifying public/private partnership opportunities to co-locate civic uses with park and private development opportunities, considering the issuance of a request for proposals to seek a development partner, establishing partnerships with other public-sector and institutional users, and creating a business relocation program.

With these specific recommendations in mind, the panelists summarized key overarching points:

- Taking no action is shaping Lynnwood.
- The city needs to lead the way.
- People—not cars—should drive the design process.
- Cultivate diversity and cultural authenticity in design, programming, engagement, and leadership.
- Be strategically bold.

Parks and community development are key to economic development. Both current and potential residents expect amenities such as trails and fitness programming, and providing these can help Lynnwood remain competitive in the Seattle area market. Figuring out how to make those amenities unique and authentic to Lynnwood can also help the city brand itself, but only if residents from all ethnic and economic backgrounds are engaged in an inclusive process.

With a vision for City Center, upcoming light rail, and a commitment to an equitable parks system, Lynnwood is well positioned to create a vibrant City Center. By finally transforming its City Center into a true downtown neighborhood characterized by great green spaces, Lynnwood will remain a livable city well into the future.

[VIEW THE PUBLIC PRESENTATION](#)

Ottawa Hills Park, in the city's Third Ward, reopened in October 2018 with Grand Rapids' first universally accessible playground.



*10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks* distills and synthesizes key themes, lessons learned, and best practices from the recommendations of 14 Advisory Services panels and national study visits on parks and open spaces. Part One of this report discusses the 10 principles that came out of a September 2020 workshop with representatives from these technical assistance activities and other subject matter experts. Part Two features summaries of each of the panels and study visits, illustrating the many different park challenges, contexts, and recommendations that informed the 10 principles.



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