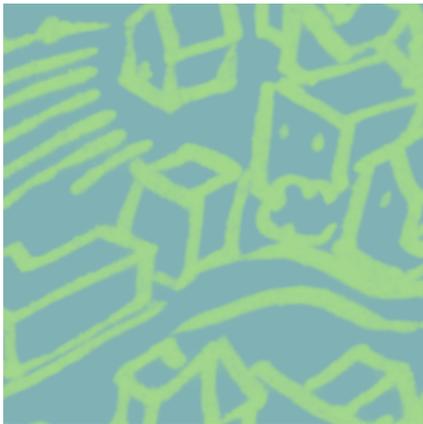


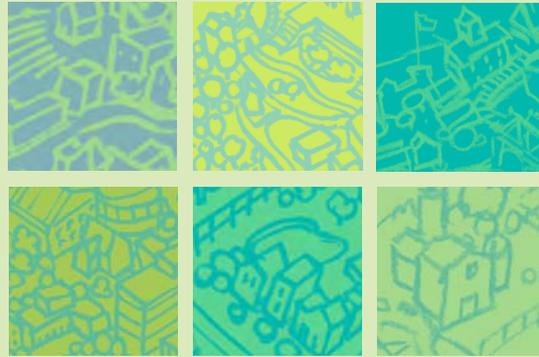


A Park System for the Nation's Capital

Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space



Draft CapitalSpace Plan, October 8, 2009



Public Input is essential to the success of CapitalSpace

We want to hear your comments on the draft recommendations within CapitalSpace.

Written comments may be sent to capitalspace@ncpc.gov. Comments may also be submitted through the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) Website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.

Public comments will be accepted through December 8, 2009. A final document will then be completed that incorporates necessary changes. For more information, please call us at 202.482.7200 or visit our Website at <http://www.capitalspace.gov>.

Visit <http://www.capitalspace.gov> to view this plan electronically and review extensive background information.

The CapitalSpace initiative is a group effort among the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Park Service, and several District of Columbia agencies. The initiative was jointly funded by the NCPC and the government of the District of Columbia. NCPC had primary responsibility in oversight of the initiative and its principal consultant, EDAW | AECOM.



Washington, DC is graced with more green space per person than any other U.S. city of its size, and its parks are one of the signature features of the nation's capital. Their proper maintenance and careful planning are crucial, but the wide variety of park sizes and uses, coupled with shared jurisdiction between local and federal authorities, presents unique challenges.

CapitalSpace provides an understanding of how Washington's parks and open space came to be, their current condition, and how they are used today. It then sets a framework to preserve and improve Washington's parks and open space by setting a common vision and identifying key areas where federal and District agencies, park partners, and the citizens of Washington can collaborate.

For the first time in almost forty years, the National Park Service (NPS) and the government of the District of Columbia, together with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), looked at Washington's park system comprehensively; however, particular attention was given to parks in city neighborhoods and along the riverfronts. This collaboration allowed the partner agencies to look at key challenges and opportunities that cut across agencies and even across units within their organizations, and to explore new approaches for working together. The CapitalSpace plan is emerging at a time when there is increasing attention on urban areas and the role parks and open spaces play in sustaining resiliency and environmental and community vitality.





CapitalSpace Partnership

Several District and federal agencies oversee the planning, development, operation, and maintenance of Washington's parks and open space.

The District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP), National Park Service (NPS), and National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) formed CapitalSpace in 2006 to coordinate existing management plans, maximize limited resources, and create a stronger park system for the city. Since the initial creation of the partnership, several other agencies have participated, including the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation (DDOT), Department of the Environment (DDOE), and Public Schools (DCPS), as well as the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

The District's primary recreation provider is the Department of Parks and Recreation, whose mission is to maintain the city's parks and open spaces and provide diverse recreational opportunities to residents and visitors. Other District agencies, including the Office of Planning, Department of Transportation, and Department of the Environment, play key roles in planning, building, and maintaining parks and open space through broader community development strategies.

The National Park Service, whose mission is to preserve the nation's natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of all generations, is responsible for managing nearly 90 percent of the city's parkland—including major park areas such as Rock Creek Park, the National Mall, Anacostia Park, and the Fort Circle Parks. The National Capital Planning Commission and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts plan for and review proposed development that may impact federal interests within Washington's parks and open spaces.

The CapitalSpace partners are working closely with the public school system, which provides 30 percent of the city's playgrounds and fields.

CapitalSpace Partners:

District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation
District of Columbia Office of Planning
National Capital Planning Commission
National Park Service

In collaboration with

District of Columbia Public Schools
District Department of Transportation
District Department of the Environment
U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA)

Contents

OVERVIEW

Summary	3
A Vision for a park system that serves both local and national purposes to its fullest ability	4
Planning Concepts that guided development of recommendations	5
Taking Action highlights the first actions that the CapitalSpace partners have committed to initiate collectively	8



ABOUT WASHINGTON'S PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

A Brief History of Washington's parks and open space	11
Benefits of Parks and Open Space to the health and well-being of Washington	16
Challenges and Opportunities of Washington's parks and open space to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors	21

SIX BIG IDEAS

Linking the Fort Circle Parks	35
Improving public schoolyards	45
Enhancing urban natural areas	55
Improving playfields	67
Enhancing Center City parks	77
Transforming small parks	87

MOVING THE PLAN FORWARD	97
--------------------------------------	----



Sculpture of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Summary

Washington is a city of parks. With its many large and small neighborhood parks, schoolyards, formal downtown parks, stream valley corridors, forest preserves, and green river banks of the Potomac and Anacostia, it is graced with more green space per person than any other U.S. city of its size. In addition, while known the world over for the symbolic power of the National Mall, parks and open space throughout Washington's neighborhoods have historic attributes and commemorative features that make them signature elements of the nation's capital.

Although Washington's parks and open space are abundant and beloved, the quality of the public space has not kept pace with the needs of expanding resident and worker populations or millions of annual visitors. To help address this cooperatively, the CapitalSpace partnership was formed, which consisted of the National Capital Planning Commission, National Park Service, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, District of Columbia Public Schools, and various agencies of the government of the District of Columbia.

Recognizing that planning and management efforts are currently underway to enhance the National Mall and parks along the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, CapitalSpace is focused on the many challenges of the other national and local parks in the neighborhoods throughout Washington.

The CapitalSpace initiative started by completing the first comprehensive analysis of all of Washington's parks and open space in nearly 40 years. This analysis found that within Washington's park system, the wide variety of park types, sizes, and traits, coupled with shared jurisdiction between local and federal authorities, presents challenges in meeting both local and national needs, as well as difficulties in planning, enhancing, and maintaining the parks. Yet the analysis also found that there are tremendous opportunities with Washington's park system to ensure that parks are accessible to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city; that they help connect various communities; that they provide a diversity of passive and active recreation; that they provide a diversity of spaces (including natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces); and that they contribute to a healthy, sustainable, and livable city.

CapitalSpace provides a vision for a beautiful, high-quality, and unified park system for the nation's capital and six action-oriented big ideas focused on key areas to help make the vision a reality. These Six Big Ideas identify recommendations that can best be accomplished by the CapitalSpace partner agencies working together and are intended to maximize existing assets, address current and future needs, and capitalize on existing opportunities. They include ideas for new planning and development policies, physical improvements and uses, and approaches to operation and maintenance.

A Vision

The CapitalSpace partners envision a **beautiful, high-quality, and unified** park system for the nation's capital that

- ◆ Is **safe** and **accessible** to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city.
- ◆ Includes a variety of parks and open spaces that **connect** communities.
- ◆ Incorporates **stewardship** and **celebration** of natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces.
- ◆ Provides a **diversity** of passive and active recreation.
- ◆ Contributes to a **healthy, sustainable, and livable** city.
- ◆ Serves as a national and international model of citizen **engagement**, and parks and open space-management and **collaboration**.

The vision of CapitalSpace will be realized through the commitments and resources of citizens, multiple agencies, and private organizations, where each group goes beyond their individual mandates and works cooperatively to create a seamless system of parks and open spaces.

Planning Concepts

These ideal planning concepts were developed as a guide to create the Six Big Ideas and their associated recommendations. The concepts represent principles the CapitalSpace partners found key to having a unified park system for the nation's capital



Weave Greenway through Neighborhoods

A continuous greenway connects the city's outer neighborhoods. The Fort Circle Parks become destinations attracting residents and visitors to historic sites, the natural environment, and many recreational opportunities.



Increase Access to Great Local Parks

A safe, accessible, and walkable green network connects neighborhoods to nearby open spaces and recreation. This network becomes an integral part of each community's identity and character.



Connect With Rivers

Washington's vibrant parks along the Anacostia and Potomac are linked together. Improved access and sustainable, diverse attractions draw people to the waterfront.



Protect, Connect, and Restore Natural Environments

Natural resources within the city's parks and open spaces, including wetlands, floodplains, wooded areas, and streams and rivers, offer natural habitats and beneficial ecological functions that support a sustainable and livable city.



Celebrate Urban Parks

The rich tapestry of urban parks are enhanced to create unique places, offering historical, commemorative, cultural, and recreational experiences that meet the needs of dense and growing neighborhoods.



Expand Park System Capacity

Our existing parks are maintained and enhanced, and new open spaces are identified, to meet the city's expanding needs for accessible recreation and green spaces, with special attention focused on growing and underserved neighborhoods.



Link the City with Green Corridors

Leafy streets, winding parkways, and natural trails connect residents and visitors to major parks, as well as enhance the regional transportation network.



Fort Stevens



Bancroft Elementary School



Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

Six Big Ideas

Linking the Fort Circle Parks by implementing a greenway and making the parks destinations through

- ◆ Promoting the fort parks as national historic, cultural, and recreational treasures and providing opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize their history.
- ◆ Increasing public access by connecting the fort parks to other parks, schools, and other destinations.
- ◆ Activating the fort parks through selective park uses that draw residents and visitors to their rich natural environment and cultural history.
- ◆ Protecting and celebrating the diverse and significant natural resources of the fort parks.

Improving public schoolyards to help relieve the pressure on nearby parks and better connect children with the environment through

- ◆ Developing a comprehensive schoolyard improvement strategy that assesses needs, provides standards for improvements, prioritizes projects, and is coordinated with the District's school modernization process.
- ◆ Preserving schoolyards for community recreation space and improving access.
- ◆ Developing goals for schoolyards including establishing safe and secure play environments, active recreation components, low-impact development opportunities, and positive identities.
- ◆ Clarifying agency responsibilities for general schoolyard maintenance and developing partnerships to provide for enhancements.

Enhancing urban natural areas and better connecting residents to encourage urban stewardship for natural resources by

- ◆ Ensuring that the natural resources found in our parks are protected.
- ◆ Adopting clear, consistent, and shared goals and guidelines among responsible agencies and adjacent jurisdictions for long-term park and natural resource management.
- ◆ Building a green infrastructure network within our natural areas to perform many of the same services as drainage pipes and spillways.

Improving playfields to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors by

- ◆ Maintaining the current level of service for recreation facilities within Washington.
- ◆ Increasing capacity through field assessments, use, improvement plans, and capital programs coordinated among responsible agencies.
- ◆ Simplifying the permitting process between NPS, DPR, and DCPS and coordinating fees, signage, and enforcement.

Enhancing Center City parks and open space to support a vibrant downtown through

- ◆ Increasing park use by improving quality, quantity, access, and connections.
- ◆ Building and strengthening park constituency support through formal partnerships with individuals, businesses, and organizations.
- ◆ Creating unique places for neighborhoods, strengthening the overall identity of parks, and using public spaces around parks to expand programs and amenities.

Transforming small parks into successful public spaces, forming a cohesive urban network of green spaces by

- ◆ Organizing small parks into clusters, where appropriate, to coordinate their uses and physical improvement.
- ◆ Coordinating planning and management of small parks among the various park and planning agencies for efficiencies and to promote investments across all small park resources.
- ◆ Providing neighborhood-oriented programming and improvements for small parks and ensuring they are clean and safe to enhance neighborhood livability.
- ◆ Leveraging related investments and tapping into funding unique to small parks.

To achieve success of the Six Big Ideas, the CapitalSpace partners recognize that existing, new, and varied partnerships with the many people and organizations that care about Washington's parks and open space are needed. In addition, new tools and funding methods to plan, enhance, and maintain Washington's parks and open space will need to be created and used.



Friendship Recreation Center



Dupont Circle



Reservation 227A

Taking action

CapitalSpace comes at a moment of great opportunity, where local and national leadership is focusing on improvements to urban life, the environment, and community health. CapitalSpace recognizes the positive contributions parks and open space can provide to these elements, and its Six Big Ideas contain many recommendations on how these contributions might be improved.

As a starting point to achieving the full potential of Washington's parks and open-space system, the CapitalSpace partners have committed to jointly start or move forward action on the following recommendations:

- ◆ **Improve overall access to our public open space**

Identify opportunities to make available for community use open spaces with limited accessibility, including schoolyards, plazas and courtyards, and other public facilities; remove physical barriers to accessing parks and open space; and improve connections to parks through street improvements and signage.

- ◆ **Improve the availability and use of our playfields**

Guide renovations and improve the scheduling and use of recreational fields through coordinated assessment and maintenance programs. Improve the permitting of fields by developing an on-line permitting system for all NPS, DPR, and DCPS properties; improving and coordinating field allocation and use policies; aligning permit fees; and providing clear information on field use.

- ◆ **Complete our Fort Circle Parks hiker-biker trail**

Finalize the alignment of the trail and identify connections from the trail to transit, schools, and other community parks and recreational activities. Identify funding opportunities to implement the trail and associated connections and infrastructure, including improved streetscape conditions, trail crossings, and signage.

- ◆ **Promote the value of our Fort Circle Parks**

Increase public awareness of the numerous historic, natural, and recreational resources within the Fort Circle Parks, building upon NPS's current development of a new wayside plan.

- ◆ **Ensure our schoolyards meet community recreational needs**

Ensure that schoolyards remain as open space that can be used by the surrounding neighborhood. Develop approaches to strengthen neighborhood involvement in the planning process for the modernization and redevelopment of schools and their yards.



Lamont Park



Youth garden located in Marvin Gaye Park

◆ **Make our downtown parks more inviting and active**

Explore opportunities to improve our existing Center City parks and the streets and sidewalks surrounding them through physical enhancements and further programming and activation, allowing the parks and street spaces to be better used by the community while retaining their national and historic significance.

◆ **Launch a District-wide ecosystem consortium**

Coordinate ecological research associated with our natural resources in the District, and collectively identify and map these resources, implement restoration and protection strategies, and increase public awareness of the ecological functions of Washington's parks and open-space system.

◆ **Improve the maintenance and use of our small parks**

Categorize the small parks and triangles throughout the District by geographic area, function, natural and cultural resources, and other characteristics, and develop a shared database to identify opportunities for improved efficiencies in their management by multiple agencies.

The CapitalSpace partners commit to continued coordination to ensure that the Six Big Idea's recommendations are implemented. The partners also see an ongoing alliance to identify additional opportunities for coordination:

- ◆ Public information on park and open-space resources and recreational opportunities
- ◆ Maintenance contracts
- ◆ Capital budget programming
- ◆ New improvements and programming where public and private investment is already taking place
- ◆ Fundraising and partnerships with individuals, businesses, and organizations.



Westminster Playground

About Washington's Parks and Open Space

For over 200 years parks and open space have played a key role in the social, economic, and environmental health of Washington. This chapter provides an overview of the history of Washington's parks and open space and why they are important to the health and well-being of the city, and discusses key challenges and opportunities of Washington's parks and open space to meet the needs of local residents and workers, as well as visitors to the nation's capital.

Park and Open-Space Development in Washington—A Brief History

Parks and open space have been an integral component in Washington's development since its inception. While sites such as the National Mall are the most widely recognized park components of the city's major plans, the location, design, and development of parks and open spaces throughout Washington have also been influenced by these plans and have a rich and diverse history. The history of parks and open space in Washington is also a history of collaboration between the federal and local governments and Washington's many communities to address both national and local interests.

The historic plan of Washington, designed by Charles Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 and revised and completed by Andrew Ellicott, established the foundation of Washington's system of parks and open space. Influenced by the designs of several European cities, the plan capitalized on the area's natural features and retained open space as settings for important monuments, grand public promenades, and major federal buildings. The ridgeline sweeping around the low-lying riparian area and the rivers became natural boundaries for the new capital, and provided a continuous green and blue visual terminus for the grand tree-lined avenues in the plan. Spaced throughout, squares and circles link neighborhoods visually and physically. At the center, L'Enfant located ceremonial parks and greenswards to frame planned monumental buildings housing the national government.

Today the concepts established in the L'Enfant Plan are well-preserved. In Washington's downtown neighborhoods, the planned public spaces now provide settings for national commemorative works and provide precious open space for residents, workers, and visitors in the center of the city. However, little of the L'Enfant Plan was implemented until after the Civil War, when Washington experienced significant population growth. During that time, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Office of Public Buildings and Grounds embarked on the systematic construction of the roads and open spaces envisioned in the plan. In 1871, Congress created a new municipal government headed by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, which continued work with the Corps on infrastructure improvements, including parks.

In the late 19th century, as Washington grew beyond the historic L'Enfant city the street patterns and features of the L'Enfant Plan, such as circles and small pocket parks, were often included in early residential subdivisions. These patterns and features became more formalized through the application of the "Permanent System of Highways" map, which identified where streets and open spaces should be located in future subdivisions. Many of the city's small parks were a result of this mapping, as were the circles located at the city's boundary edge and avenue intersections crossed, such as the Westmoreland, Chevy Chase, Tenley, and Randle circles.

During this time, several large open spaces were created and secured, including government installations such as the National Zoo and the Naval Observatory. East Potomac Park and the Tidal Basin were created as part of the Corps dredging of the rivers; and in 1890, Congress created Rock Creek Park, which remains today one of the largest natural urban parks in the United States.

In 1901, Congress directed the McMillan Commission to develop a new plan for the city, responding to interest in reviving the L'Enfant Plan's framework to better manage growth in the Nation's Capital, as well as national attention on the "City Beautiful" movement, which included a focus on providing open space to relieve dense and polluted urban conditions of the time. The McMillan Plan restored and expanded the open spaces and parks introduced by L'Enfant as leading elements in the city's federal identity. While the National Mall in its current form is the most famous legacy of the McMillan Plan, the plan's important contributions extend throughout the city. The McMillan Plan proposed a linked system of public parks and open spaces to ensure access to green space for residents throughout the city. The McMillan Plan designated the Glover-Archbald Parkway (never developed as a parkway but currently retained as a park), the Anacostia Waterfront park, and numerous smaller parks, such as Meridian Hill. In particular, the McMillan Plan recognized the opportunities presented by the old Civil War defenses ringing the city along the escarpment. These sites, linked by green corridors, were envisioned as a parkway—the Fort Circle Drive. Although the drive was never completed, the importance of the historic fort earthworks and the green belt of parks make today's Fort Circle Parks a significant open-space element in the nation's capital. The completed projects of the McMillan Plan largely shape Washington's current park and open space system.

During the 1920s, many of the open spaces provided in the L'Enfant Plan were vacant and underused, and in danger of being eliminated to better accommodate the automobile and provide additional housing. At the same time, the need for recreation and open space in urban areas was recognized, and the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (the predecessor of NCPC) recommended, through what is known as the Eliot Plan, the creation of approximately 20 neighborhood parks throughout the city. These parks included recreation centers, libraries, and schools, and were planned to serve neighborhoods within a one-quarter-mile radius of the park. Only three of these centers were constructed before the Great Depression: Banneker Recreation Center, Eckington Center, and McKinley Center. The creation of similar parks continued during or after the Great Depression with the construction of the Wilson, Coolidge, Taft, and Springarn-Phelps schools. The concept of combining recreation and education facilities on one site continued into the 1970s, and is still valid today.

In 1930, the Capper-Cramton Act provided the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, the predecessor of NCPC, significant funding for major regional parkways and parks, such as the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. Also in 1930, the Shipstead-Luce Act gave review powers to the Commission of Fine Arts for development adjacent to many significant public parks and buildings, which has influenced the aesthetics and design intent for public open space throughout Washington. The New Deal, a public works program designed to alleviate poverty and stimulate recovery during the Great Depression, funded rehabilitation work of the Mall, and resulted in other improvements, particularly building monuments.

During this era, multiple federal and local agencies were responsible for providing recreation to the residents of Washington, including the boards of education, library trustees, and recreation, and the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, which was absorbed in 1933, by the newly designated Office of National Parks, Buildings and Reservations, the predecessor of the NPS.

World War II brought a building boom to Washington. The war effort required thousands of new government employees, who often worked in temporary structures constructed on vacant land and open space in Washington. Most permanent growth, however, occurred on the outskirts of the city, and continued in the post-war decades. While significant public housing was constructed in the city, open space was not comprehensively planned during this time. The Comprehensive Plan of 1950 refocused planning and urban renewal efforts into the city, and included the creation of additional parks with reference to the McMillan Plan. Sometimes these projects were characterized by large-scale redevelopment with significant park and open-space resources accessible to the public; other times, projects involved open space and recreational amenities available only to residents. New types of residential and commercial buildings, and federal office spaces, also began to provide publicly accessible open spaces as amenities, although these spaces tended to be smaller parks and plazas.

The 1960s saw a focus on regional planning in recognition of the importance of Washington's suburbs as economic and social factors. As part of this focus, several studies in the 1960s touched upon the importance of the monumental core of the city, such as the Year 2000 Policies Plan of 1961 and the Washington



McMillan Plan, 1901



Triangular reservations formed by the intersection of streets, such as at New York, O, and First streets shown in this vintage photograph, were typically adorned with a cast-iron post and chain fence and were not intended for recreational use, but rather street beautification.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Boulder Bridge, Rock Creek Park, ca. 1920-1940



Skyline Study. The Year 2000 Policies Plan re-established the Special Streets and Special Places from the L'Enfant Plan, recognizing the timelessness of the original plan and attempting to preserve and better integrate L'Enfant Plan elements into the city fabric.

Toward the end of the 1960s, the importance of environmental planning began to be recognized. Many of the parks identified by the L'Enfant and McMillan plans were located along stream valleys, steep slopes, and rivers, and have come to be recognized as important natural resource areas. Increased awareness about our environment and health began to influence plans for new parks and the rehabilitation of existing ones, and today this has become a major influence in how we view the future of the city.

The riots of 1968 brought the importance of Washington's neighborhoods and residents to the forefront of city planning, including the need for recreation and open space for all residents. The 1967 Comprehensive Plan incorporated social, economic, and natural elements into neighborhood planning efforts. In addition, increased awareness about historic preservation began to influence how we used and rehabilitated our existing parks and open space.

The Home Rule Act of 1973 established self-governance for the District of Columbia. At this time, public land was transferred from the Federal government to the District of Columbia, sometimes in terms of ownership, and sometimes in terms of jurisdiction, which retained federal ownership but allowed the District to use the sites for specific purposes, such as parks and recreation, education, or transportation. The NPS was among the federal agencies that participated in this transfer, but retained parks and lands deemed to be nationally significant; the NPS today remains responsible for the greatest amount of park space in Washington. Many of the properties transferred to the District were recreational facilities or open spaces associated with schools or streets; today, recreational centers, fields, and schoolyards are still the major components of the District's parks and open-space portfolio. These sites have been managed by several different District agencies, reflecting changing administrative structures and responsibilities. More recently, several new parks have been and are being undertaken as part of larger redevelopment proposals sponsored through the District of Columbia, often in coordination with federal partners. These include sites along the Anacostia River and the old Convention Center, and projects such as Canal and Diamond Teague parks in southeast Washington.

The L'Enfant Plan, the McMillan Plan, and subsequent planning efforts provided a system of parks and open spaces that became the foundation of the city's unique urban design and an integral part of the day-to-day life of residents, workers, and visitors. There is no better way to celebrate the ingenuity and vision of those who built the park system over the last 200 years, than to take substantive actions to achieve the full potential of these invaluable resource and preserve them for future generations.

Benefits of Parks and Open Space

Leave all the afternoon for exercise and recreation, which are as necessary as reading. I will rather say more necessary because health is worth more than learning.

Thomas Jefferson

Washington's parks and open space serve as the green foundation of the city, delivering essential services to residents, workers, and visitors and providing economic, environmental, and social benefits.

The reasons that the District's parks and open space are important are as diverse and numerous as the parks themselves. The variety and abundance of green make it easy to take our parks and open space for granted.

We must take care of our green open space and parks, as the health of our ecosystems has a direct and meaningful impact on our own well-being. Much research and deliberation has gone into how public health is affected by the natural environment. Our lesson has been twofold: First, our trees and greenspace can help us mitigate our harmful impacts to the environment. Second, trees and open space help improve people's health and bring economic benefits to our population. Below are examples on how parks and open space bring benefits to Washington.

Reduce air pollution

While environmental laws have helped to improve air quality, air pollutants continue to contribute to health problems such as asthma and cardiovascular disease, which are serious health concerns for workers and residents of the District. In fact, approximately 1 in 10 children in the District suffers from asthma.¹

Washington's trees and green open space remove pollutants from our air that contribute to smog and greenhouse effect problems by collecting dust and other air particles on their leaves, including nitrogen oxides, airborne ammonia, sulfur dioxide, and ozone. Using the sun's energy, trees and plants also absorb carbon dioxide and convert it to fresh oxygen for us to breathe. Other means to reduce air pollution, such as changing commuter transportation habits, can be significantly more expensive than the free environmental services provided by trees and plants.

Improve the quality of our waterways

As rainfall in Washington runs along the roads and parking lots, it collects all of the pollutants that are on the ground, including petroleum, metals, pesticides, nutrients, sediment, and bacteria. Many of these pollutants flow directly into Washington's waterways and degrade the water quality. An even larger issue is the stormwater runoff from the segment of Washington served by a combined sewer system. During periods of significant rainfall, the capacity of the combined sewer is exceeded and the excess flow, a mixture of storm water and raw sewage, is discharged directly into Rock Creek and the Anacostia and Potomac rivers. In addition, Washington's summertime stormwater causes heat pollution. The water heats up considerably as it flows over hot asphalt surfaces and can increase markedly the temperature of the streams and waterways it enters, killing fish and other organisms.

1. District of Columbia Department of Health, "Burden of Asthma in the District of Columbia, 2009"



Even small gardens, such as this park next to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History at 9th Street, NW, serve as oases where urban noise is blocked out by trees and thick vegetation.

Trees and green open space can reduce the amount of runoff and lower the pollutants in stormwater. The tree canopy can intercept 30-100 percent of the rainfall from small storms. Unpaved, vegetated areas such as a neighborhood park, grassy soccer field, forested woodland, or landscaped garden, can slow down the water's flow toward the sewer. This can reduce soil erosion; increase the ground's absorption of water; reduce water flow into Washington's natural streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay; and filter pollutants. Constructing additional storm sewers, spillways, and water filtering systems can be much more costly than using our parks and open spaces to reduce water pollution.

Reduce noise pollution

Urban areas are loud because noise is reflected and amplified off hard, solid city surfaces like walls, windows, and streets. This noise pollution can trigger anger, annoyance, anxiety, tension, hearing loss, difficulties in communication, insomnia, and cardiovascular and psycho-physiological effects, and can even provoke changes in social behavior. When sound waves pass near soft, porous surfaces, such as lawns, trees, gardens, fields, or woodlands, their intensity is reduced. Fortunately, Washington's parks and open space function as ecological mufflers to the everyday noise of the urban engine.

Reduce energy consumption

Just as trees provide cool respite on a hot Washington summer day, strategically placed trees and other vegetation can reduce summer energy consumption by shading a building's windows and exterior walls and alleviating stress on building cooling systems. In the winter, leafless trees allow the sun's radiant heat to warm the building. Trees and vegetation can also lower ambient temperature by the evaporation of water through their leaves.

Provide places for exercise and physical activity

One critical factor affecting health and quality of life nationwide is the amount of exercise children and adults receive. A growing obesity epidemic affects millions of Americans; the District has an obesity rate of 35 percent for children between the ages of 10 and 17, ranking it 9th for child obesity among the states.²

Regular exercise and physical activity, even in moderate amounts, provide terrific health benefits and help lower adult mortality rates. For children and adolescents, regular physical activity is important for normal growth and development and can help prevent or manage a variety of diseases. A critical factor to increasing physical activity is improved community access to parks and open space. If people have ready access to trails, parks, and other green open space they are more likely to engage in physical activity that can affect their health positively.

2. Levy, J, et al, "F as in Fat, 2009," Trust for America's Health, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, July 2009.



Trees and green open spaces, such as Anacostia Park, help address the impacts of stormwater runoff. Source: DCOP



Well-maintained neighborhood parks such as this playground in Turkey Thicket Park, are conducive for outdoor play. When parks are used heavily by people in the community, they are perceived to be safer also.

Provide places to socialize

Washington's parks and open spaces, especially in dense, urban areas, provide places not only for recreation and play, but also to gather and socialize. This effect has the tendency to reinforce itself, as people are also drawn to green open spaces precisely because of the presence of people.

Help reduce crime

Active use of Washington's parks and green spaces can help neighborhood communities feel safer. Providing many recreational activities easily accessible to kids can help to reduce overall juvenile crime. However, to gain safety benefits, parks and open spaces must be well-maintained and well-used. Parks that are in disrepair or overgrown and neglected may discourage people from using park spaces and attract inappropriate or illegal activities.

Keep minds healthy

A landscape of trees and vistas of green are not a panacea to overcome all of the problems caused by various hardships, but natural landscapes can help mitigate stress and anxiety. Simply having access to green views and spaces is often sufficient to help alleviate the mental fatigue urban residents face often. Activities such as tilling community gardens, community tree plantings, and working to create greener landscapes can also help individuals overcome the stresses of urban living. Public programs for these activities are all relatively inexpensive and easy to implement.

Children in the community are drawn to the water spray of Friendship Recreation Center.



Increase adjacent property values and support nearby businesses

Parks and open space can increase the value of nearby private property. Parks and open space can increase the appraised property values of adjacent residential property about 8 to 20 percent above comparable properties elsewhere.³ An increase in private property value is not merely a windfall for the property owner; it also benefits the entire community. The added value of the property is capitalized when property taxes are assessed and when real estate sale taxes are collected. Washington's many historic parks and outdoor cultural amenities, its great waterfronts, and its many natural areas can add significantly to the value of adjacent properties if these parks and open spaces are safe and well-maintained. Many of these parks and amenities can and do provide value as a tourist destination, contributing to local business and economic development.

Attract new businesses and residents

Parks and open space enhance the quality of life in urban areas and attract tax-paying businesses and residents. Unlike in the industrial past, service-sector businesses and their employees are no longer tied to locating in a few industrial centers. Consequently, businesses and professionals are free to locate in communities that they find desirable. The availability of parks and open space in Washington can help it attract new businesses and new residents, boosting the tax base and keeping the local economy healthy.

Travel and tourism are also influenced by parks and open space. In 2006, tourist spending in Washington surpassed \$5.5 billion.⁴ Many tourists selected Washington as a destination for its historic buildings, cultural resources, national parks and monuments, and scenic views and vistas. To be sure, tourism in Washington is broader than just the National Mall and its environs, and some of its lesser known parks and open space have become attractions in their own.

3. Crompton, J.L., 2001. "Parks and Economic Development." Chicago (IL): American Planning Association. PAS Report No. 502.

4. Destination D.C.

Meridian Hill Park's cascading fountain





Small park at New York and Florida avenues

Challenges and Opportunities

Washington's parks and open spaces are defining and well-loved features of the city. Almost one quarter of the city's land area is devoted to park and open-space resources. There are 7,617 acres of parks, with one of the highest per capita ratios of any U.S. city, at 12.9 acres of park per 1000 residents.⁵ Looking at the numbers alone, Washington compares well to other cities. To better understand the challenges and opportunities our parks face, however, this section will go beyond these basic numbers and look at the unique attributes of Washington's park system and the complex demands placed on these resources.

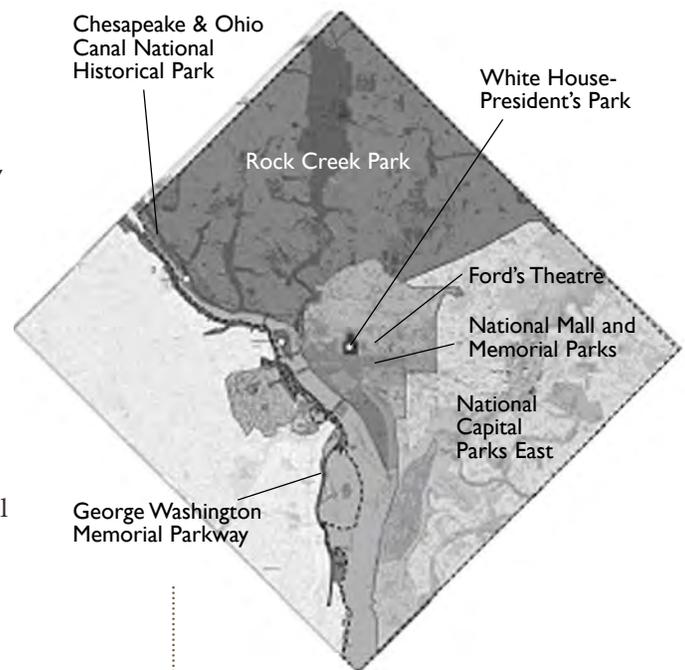
Ownership and Management

Throughout most of the city's history, Washington's parks and open spaces were planned, acquired, and developed largely by the federal government through a number of agencies. This history is reflected in two of the more interesting features of today's park system: 90 percent of Washington's parks are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS), and the ownership, management, planning, and maintenance of the remaining parks and open spaces rest with a number of other federal and District agencies.

NPS manages over 350 properties covering over 6,700 acres in the District of Columbia. These include the city's major and most well-known parks, such as the National Mall, President's Park, Rock Creek Park, Anacostia Park, and C&O Canal National Historical Park, as well as over 200 circles, squares, and triangles that were formed as part of the original street layout for the city as conceived by Pierre L'Enfant. There are seven management units with administrative oversight of the NPS properties in the District, each with a superintendent reporting to the NPS National Capital Regional Office. Washington's national parks contain many of the city's cultural, historical, and environmental resources. While focused primarily on resource conservation, the programming of the NPS parks also reflects the national capital context, including annual cultural events, commemorative sites, and first amendment activities, as well as passive and active recreation.

The District of Columbia's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) oversees much of the non-federal park space in Washington, located principally in neighborhood parks, and relies on multiple agencies to plan, build, maintain, and program their public spaces. DPR is focused primarily on providing active recreational programming to District residents, and many of its sites include fields, playgrounds, and community recreation centers providing a variety of activities including aquatics, arts, child care, senior services, and therapeutic recreation.

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), which does not have a general mission of providing community recreation, provides active schoolyards and manages one-third of the city's active recreation fields, thus playing an important role in residents' access to recreation amenities. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) owns and manages approximately 200 small parks within the rights-of-way of the city, and also plays a key role in developing



National Park Service

There are seven management units with administrative oversight of NPS properties in the District, each with a superintendent reporting to the NPS National Capital Regional Office. These seven management units are

- ◆ National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA)
- ◆ National Capital Parks East (NACE)
- ◆ Rock Creek Park (ROCR)
- ◆ White House-President's Park (PRPK)
- ◆ George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP)
- ◆ Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park (CHOH)
- ◆ Ford's Theatre (FOTH)

5. The Trust for Public Land, "2009 City Park Facts." Washington, DC

Tree Cover in Washington

Historical data on Washington's tree cover, while difficult to interpret due to advances in geographic imaging and data formatting, show a decrease in tree canopy since the 1970's – a trend seen for metro areas across the United States. Tree cover extent and condition baselines, however, have now been established, and with the help of Casey Trees are being monitored on a 5-year basis.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service data, taken in 2008, puts Washington's current urban tree canopy coverage at 36 percent. In 2009, the District government officially adopted a city-wide urban tree canopy goal of 40 percent canopy coverage by 2035 (source: Green DC Agenda), similar to other jurisdictions in Maryland and Virginia.

The District government is currently developing an implementation plan that identifies specific funding sources for tree planting and maintenance projects to help achieve the 40 percent goal.

pedestrian and biking trails, public space development and management, and urban forestry. Other District agencies play important roles in park planning (Office of Planning), park development (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development), and natural resource management (Department of the Environment).

Many of the District's parks and open spaces were transferred from the federal government as part of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act of 1973 or in subsequent years. Some of these transferred sites are managed by the District for park, school, or transportation purposes, but federal ownership has been retained.

Consequently, there are many times when DPR or DCPS must consult directly with the NPS to ensure park development complies with NPS policies. Park development must also comply with District zoning regulations. Any federally owned property should be reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and NCPC to ensure the design fits within the context of the national capital region and other federal interests.

CapitalSpace is primarily focused on public parklands. There is, however, a significant amount of open space in Washington, much of it under the jurisdiction and management of federal agencies. These sites include the U.S. Capitol Complex (Architect of the Capitol); the National Arboretum (Department of Agriculture); the National Zoo (Smithsonian Institution); and the Armed Forces Retirement Home. The Government Services Administration and the Department of Defense manage a number of federal campuses and buildings with landscaped grounds, natural areas, courtyards, plazas and recreational amenities. There are also several publicly controlled cemeteries and reservoirs, as well as open space on institutional and privately held properties.

This complex jurisdictional arrangement has the potential to bring multiple and diverse resources, reflecting the strengths and values of each agency. In some cases, different agencies contribute different resources to a park site: DDOT has helped to plan and fund trail improvements on NPS sites, as well as sites managed by other District agencies. However, complex jurisdictional arrangements also introduce a set of challenges. Each organization operates under different missions, has its own rules and regulations, priorities for improvements, and funding sources. Park development, programming, and maintenance are often uncoordinated and agencies have different policies concerning use and partnership, which can often be confusing or unclear to the public.

Natural Resources

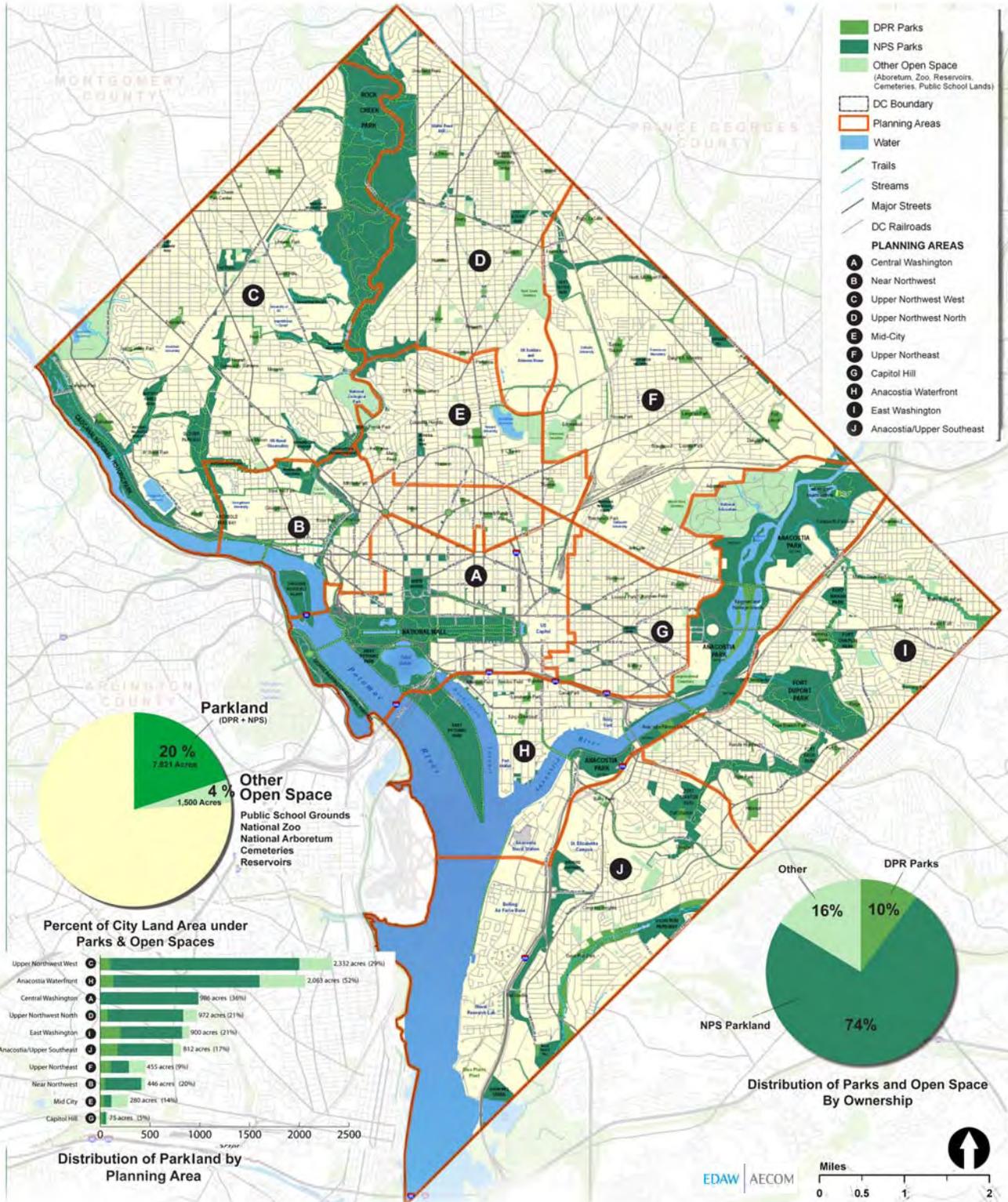
In a city designed to take advantage of its spectacular natural setting, it is fitting that Washington's parks and open spaces are home to the majority of its natural resources. Over 70 percent of Washington's wetlands and floodplains, 68 percent of its wooded areas, and 72 percent of its land with steep slopes are contained within Washington's parks. Seventy-two percent of the Anacostia and Potomac river shorelines are in park ownership, and parks protect most of the city's stream valleys, including Rock Creek, Oxon Run, and Watts Branch in Marvin Gaye Park.

Despite their urban setting, Washington's parks function as habitat corridors linked to larger regional systems, and fragile and unique ecosystems, hosting diverse plants and animals. Within minutes of some of the city's busiest neighborhoods, it is possible to hike through mature hardwood forests, or paddle up a river gorge and watch a heron take flight.

The city's natural resources, however, face challenges. As Washington developed, wetlands were filled, stream corridors were used for sewer infrastructure, and rivers were polluted; problems that affect natural resources still today, both inside and outside our parks.

Parks and Open Space

Parkland comprises approximately 20 percent of Washington's land. Almost 90 percent of our parkland—more than 6,900 acres, including Rock Creek Park, the National Mall, Anacostia Park, and the Fort Circle Parks—is under the National Park Service's jurisdiction. The remaining 10 percent is owned and managed by the government of the District of Columbia's Department of Parks and Recreation. Another 1,500 acres of open space including the National Zoo, National Arboretum, public school playfields, and cemeteries, are owned and managed by various federal and local agencies.



Invasive species and a changing climate pose new threats. Development has fragmented habitat corridors, and presents ongoing impacts from stormwater runoff, noise, erosion, air pollution, trash dumping, and altered temperatures. All these resources face being overused by the people that value and seek out these beautiful spaces, pressure to accommodate park uses that are not compatible with protecting these resources, and demands to be developed for other uses.

Ensuring that Washington's rivers, forests, and streams are protected, restored, and enhanced, and that its habitat corridors are connected, are key components of making the city green and sustainable. The premise of the city's earlier plans hold true today: the need for city dwellers to have the opportunity to connect with nature; to ensure that the noise, the crowding, and the pollution of the city are addressed through the "green lungs" of open space; and to learn about our environment through the natural classrooms that are our parks and open spaces.

Historic and Cultural Resources

As the nation's capital and as a city with a vibrant and rich past, Washington is filled with historic and cultural treasures, many of which are contained in our parks and open spaces. The Fort Circle Parks contain not just earthen fortifications from the Civil War, but also the site where the only sitting president was ever fired upon during war. The home of Frederick Douglass, looking out over the city, tells the story of this important African-American abolitionist and District resident, and is managed by the NPS. The L'Enfant Plan, including the open space covering the street grid and diagonal avenues and 214 parks and reservations, is already listed as a District Historic Landmark and is under consideration for a National Historic Landmark designation. In addition to specific buildings and designated historic districts, a number of cultural and commemorative works celebrate our nation or the city through monuments, memorials, and other landscape elements.

The NPS is responsible for managing most of the park sites with historic and cultural resources in Washington. Currently, nearly 26 percent of Washington's parkland is in a designated historic district. The NPS has identified just over 6,000 acres of land in the District as a cultural landscape, representing 87 percent of all NPS parkland in Washington and 65 percent of the city's total parks and open spaces. Cultural landscapes "are associated with a historic event, activity or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values." City and federal agencies both have responsibilities for designating and protecting historic sites and evaluating impacts to these resources from development proposals.

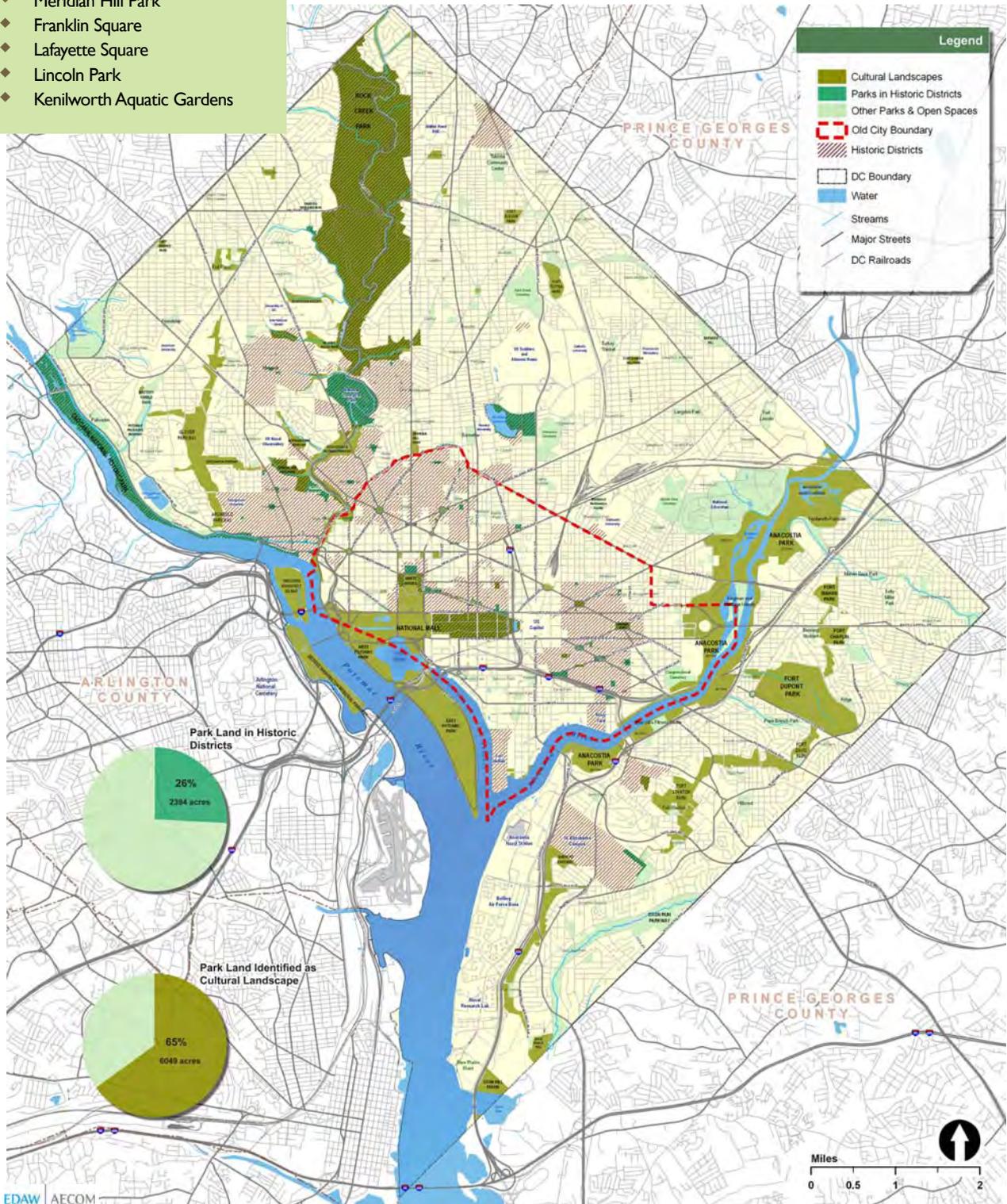
These remarkable resources already offer great opportunities for significant education and programming, attracting visitors and providing a sense of place and heritage for residents. These sites are not without challenges, however. The significance of these sites, and many of their stories, are not fully interpreted and visible. Managing and maintaining these sites requires additional attention. As with park sites containing environmental resources, protecting these sites often requires restrictions on how the sites can be designed and used; given how much of the city's park resources have these restrictions, it means that while there is an abundance of parks, not all parks are fully available to meet the needs of all park users.

There are 11 parks in the National Register (of 96 sites listed within DC):

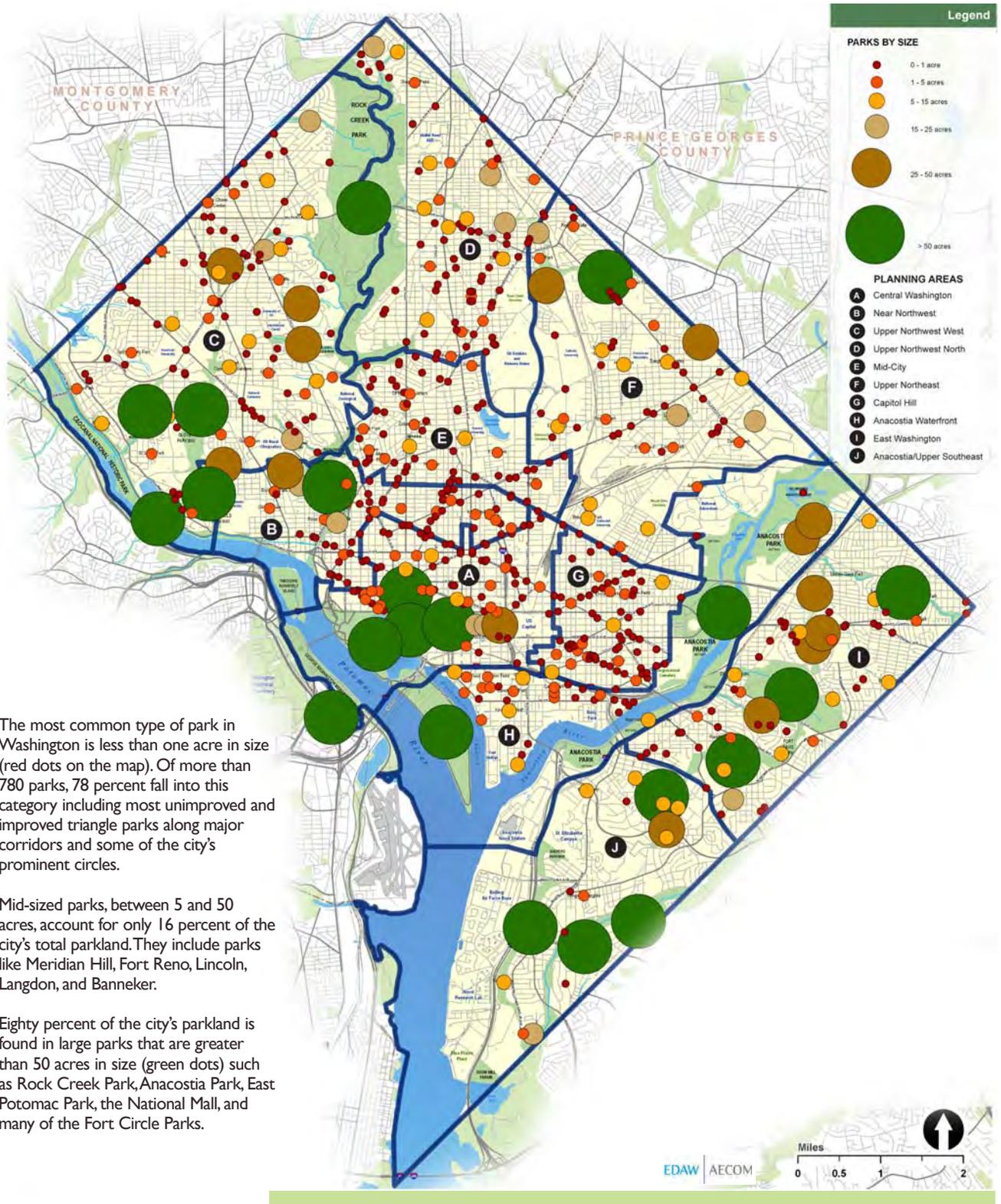
- ◆ National Mall
- ◆ President's Park
- ◆ Rock Creek Park
- ◆ C&O Canal NHP
- ◆ Montrose Park
- ◆ Dumbarton Park
- ◆ Meridian Hill Park
- ◆ Franklin Square
- ◆ Lafayette Square
- ◆ Lincoln Park
- ◆ Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

Historic and Cultural Resources

There are 214 parks and reservations contributing to the L'Enfant Plan National Historic Landmark Nomination. Also, within Washington, 65 percent of all parkland is identified as a cultural landscape by the NPS, and 26 percent of all parkland is within a designated historic district.



Parks by Size



The most common type of park in Washington is less than one acre in size (red dots on the map). Of more than 780 parks, 78 percent fall into this category including most unimproved and improved triangle parks along major corridors and some of the city's prominent circles.

Mid-sized parks, between 5 and 50 acres, account for only 16 percent of the city's total parkland. They include parks like Meridian Hill, Fort Reno, Lincoln, Langdon, and Banneker.

Eighty percent of the city's parkland is found in large parks that are greater than 50 acres in size (green dots) such as Rock Creek Park, Anacostia Park, East Potomac Park, the National Mall, and many of the Fort Circle Parks.

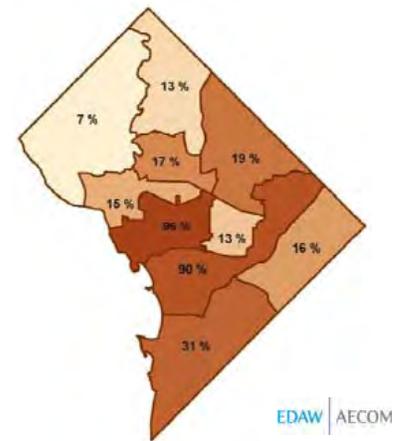
Distribution, Access and Capacity

Washington has several very large parks and many small parks, with comparatively few medium-sized parks (5-15 acres, the size of typical neighborhood parks throughout the country). There are hundreds of parks under one acre in size, best suited as pocket parks, commemorative sites, or as public space along a street corridor, but unable to accommodate active recreational facilities or events. This size distribution is a factor in several park attributes.

Despite having a lot of park space, most of the land area is provided in just a few very large parks: Rock Creek Park in the northwest, the National Mall, and East and West Potomac Parks in the center city and southwest, Anacostia Park in the southeast, and the Fort Circle Parks at the city's perimeter. All are over 50 acres and together comprise 80 percent of the land area of the park system. Overall, while parks are distributed uniformly across the city, some sections of the city have limited walkable access to a large park site, particularly in the upper north-central, mid-city, the Capitol Hill areas. While some park services are effectively provided on a city-wide basis, walkable access to park space is important.

Access to parks is also affected by physical barriers, such as freeways and railways, steep terrain, or security fencing. Superblock design, the lack of sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities can make it difficult to access parks. Washington has miles of riverfront park, but much of it has been physically difficult to access or perceptually uninviting, although recent federal and District efforts are changing this. Many of the city's open spaces at federal facilities, particularly in the post 9-11 security environment, have limited public access. Poor maintenance at park edges, trash or overgrown vegetation, lack of signage, evidence of vandalism and vagrancy, and real and perceived concerns about crime can contribute to parks being viewed as less secure and uninviting. Finally, park access is also about information. Many of the resources in our parks are unknown to the public, because there is little coordinated, easily available information about the park system as a whole.

Understanding how the city's parks can fully meet their potential means looking at their capacity. In addition to improved access, maintenance, design and programming all offer the opportunity to increase the capacity of our existing park assets.

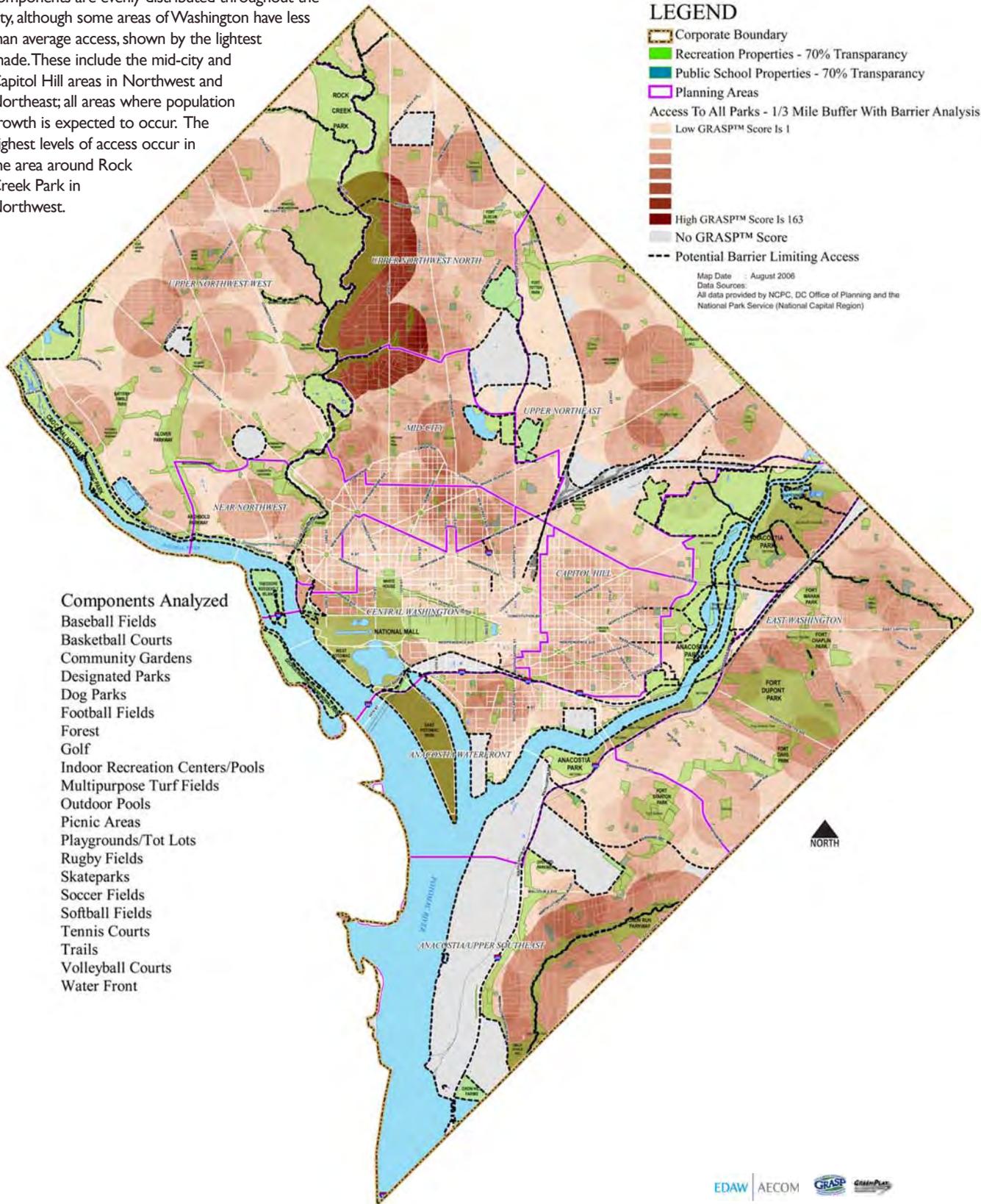


Percent Projected Growth 2005-2025

The population of Washington is forecasted to increase 21% between 2005 and 2025 to 700,000. When compared to where Washington's parks and open space are located, population growth will put pressure on our existing park resources. For example, the population of the Center City is forecasted to grow by 96 percent, but outdoor neighborhood recreational facilities have not been provided in this area historically or are located on the National Mall. Other areas, such as the upper north-central, mid-city, Capitol Hill, and the Southwest Waterfront are also forecasted to have significant population growth.

Access to all Recreation

The map shows access levels to all parks and recreation in Washington. Overall, parks and recreational components are evenly distributed throughout the city, although some areas of Washington have less than average access, shown by the lightest shade. These include the mid-city and Capitol Hill areas in Northwest and Northeast; all areas where population growth is expected to occur. The highest levels of access occur in the area around Rock Creek Park in Northwest.



Some parks suffer from over-use, while others are under-used, sometimes due to poor conditions. All of the agencies that manage park and open spaces are challenged to build and maintain parks to the highest standards while working within constrained resources. There is considerable work to be done to better define appropriate and compatible uses in parks, particularly those with sensitive resources. New designs may also allow parks to provide greater use or new uses; for example, the new Georgetown Waterfront Park demonstrates that sustainable features can improve stormwater management, and increase tree canopy and native vegetation, while also providing aesthetic and active spaces for public recreation. Some technologies may also expand capacity in specific applications, but not in others: artificial turf and lighting can extend playing time and durability on fields, but are not appropriate in national parks and certain other settings.

It is also important to consider park location in relationship to those areas of the city with the greatest density of workers and residents. Capitol Hill and the mid-city neighborhoods, for example, have some of the highest residential densities, but are located some distance from any large park, limiting access for these communities. In addition, many parts of the city are projected to grow, placing an increasing demand on existing park resources, such as the emerging neighborhoods in areas such as North of Massachusetts Avenue (NoMA) and around the new baseball stadium. Increasingly, residents and business districts will seek to ensure that adjacent public spaces are attractive and that signature elements define the neighborhood.

Washington's demographic profile is changing; the size of households is diminishing, the number of residents is increasing, and more students and retirees are moving in. All of these factors will influence the kinds of park experiences that will be demanded.

While more traditional team sports will remain popular, new team sports, such as kickball, ultimate Frisbee, or cricket may rise in popularity. There is growing interest in individual sports, such as biking and skateboarding, as well as passive recreation activities, such as picnicking and bird-watching. In urban environments across the country, there is demand for community gardens and dog parks.

Nationally, there is increased interest in park use and tourism based around cultural, historical, and ecological features. There are over 20 million visitors coming to Washington each year, many of whom focus on the Monumental Core. An opportunity is to increase awareness and highlight the cultural, historical and ecological features in parks throughout the city so that they become part of Washington's visitor experience.

Washington is growing, and how residents, workers, and visitors will seek to use the city's parks is anticipated to grow and change. The challenge is to successfully address the additional demand for parks, and ensure that overuse or inappropriate uses are prevented, while responding to new interests quickly and flexibly. The opportunity presented by this growth is to build a new constituency of urban park users and introduce them to the great resources and recreational opportunities in our national and local parks.



Watts Branch, Marvin Gaye Park



Challenges and Opportunities

The key challenge is how to achieve the potential of Washington’s existing parks fully and appropriately. It is important that we plan for our park system recognizing the unique context in which they function—as part of a vibrant urban experience, as nationally important resources worthy of conservation, and as integral components of the nation’s capital. There are clear challenges presented by complex jurisdictional responsibilities, the limitations created by size, distribution, and barriers to access, and the need to better maintain our park assets with limited resources. Demand for Washington’s parks is growing and changing, and we must find ways to accommodate many different park user needs while protecting sensitive, valuable resources within the parks.

Viewed from a different perspective, these same issues represent opportunities for more effective coordination and partnerships; to improve the quality and capacity of many of our parks and begin to think of them as a connected system; to provide better access for the public, both physically and through better information; and to fully celebrate their cultural, historical and environmental resources even as they become part of a shared commitment to a healthier, more sustainable and inclusive city.

SIX BIG IDEAS

1

Linking the Fort Circle Parks by implementing a greenway and making the parks destinations

2

Improving public schoolyards to help relieve the pressure on nearby parks and better connect kids with the environment

3

Enhancing urban natural areas and better connecting residents to encourage urban stewardship for natural resources

4

Improving playfields to meet the active recreational needs of residents, workers, and visitors

5

Enhancing Center City parks and open space to support a vibrant downtown

6

Transforming small parks into successful public spaces, forming a cohesive urban network of green spaces



Fort Reno

Six Big Ideas

Through the many community parks spread across the city, the extensive stream valley corridors, forest preserves, the sweep of the Fort Circle Parks, the formal downtown parks, and the National Mall, parks and open spaces have defined and set apart Washington from other American cities. To their users, however, Washington's parks and open spaces are often fragmented, not clearly discernable, and are not meeting their full potential as the treasured places they can be. For example, many triangle parks along L'Enfant's grand avenues have lost much of their greenery, ecological corridors have become reduced in size, and trail systems have significant gaps that limit their use. Throughout the city, parks suffer from both under- and over-use.

CapitalSpace examined federal and District parks and open space comprehensively and found that within Washington's park system, the wide variety of park types, sizes, and traits, coupled with shared jurisdiction between local and federal authorities, presents challenges in meeting both local and national needs and difficulties in park planning, enhancement, and maintenance.

CapitalSpace also found that there are tremendous opportunities with Washington's park system as a whole to ensure that parks are accessible to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city; that they help connect various communities; that they provide a diversity of passive and active recreation; that they offer myriad natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces; and that they contribute to a healthy, sustainable and livable city.

The Six Big Ideas identify recommendations that can best be accomplished by the CapitalSpace partner agencies working together and are intended to maximize existing assets, address current and future needs, and seize upon existing opportunities. They include ideas for new planning and development policies, additional physical improvements and alternative uses, and approaches to operation and maintenance.

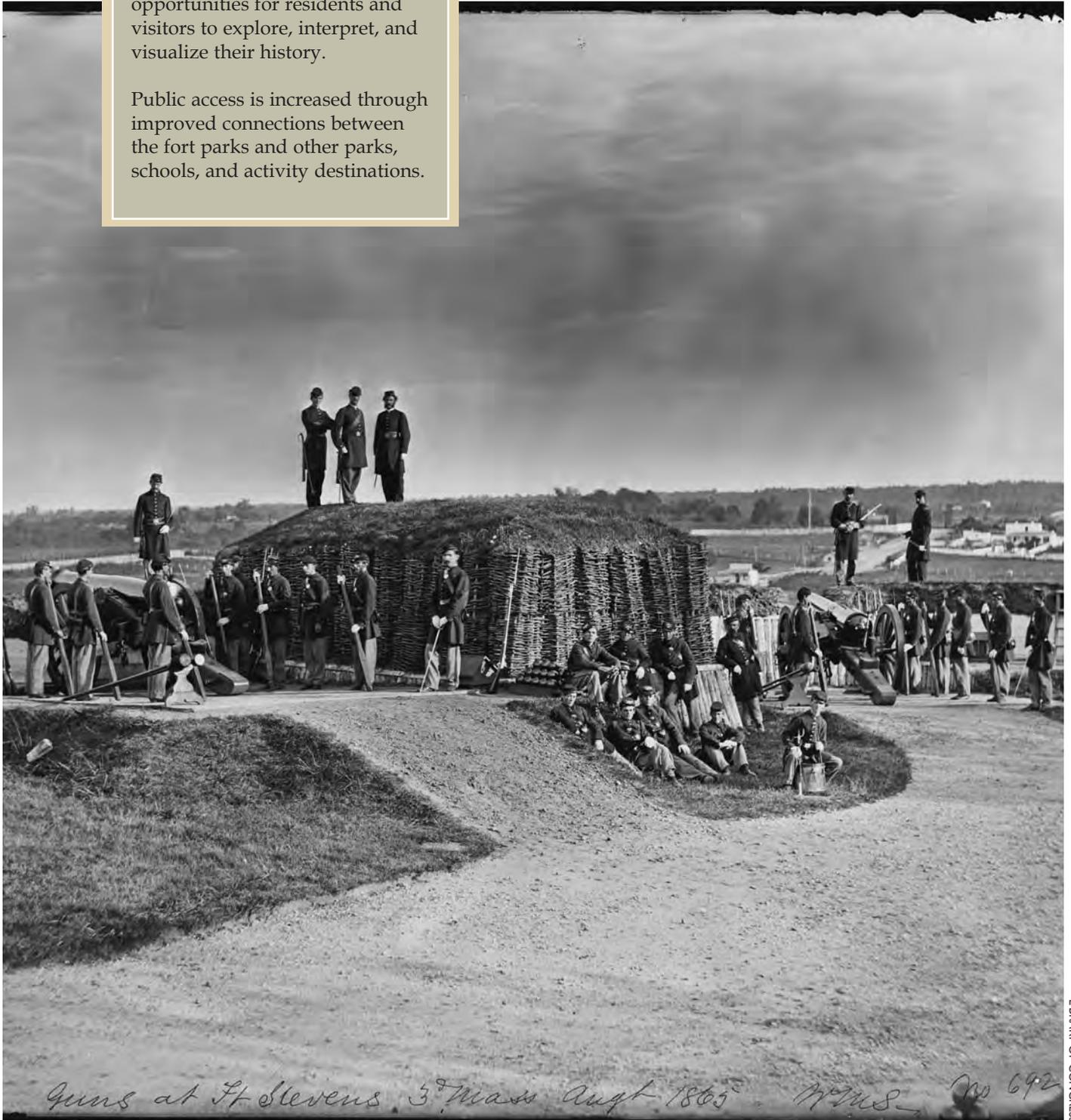


Schoolyards are maintained and improved to provide diverse opportunities for learning, healthy living, and recreation, and are recognized as a vital part of Washington's parks and open-space system.

OBJECTIVES

The Fort Circle Parks are appreciated as local and national historic, cultural, natural, and recreational treasures, providing opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize their history.

Public access is increased through improved connections between the fort parks and other parks, schools, and activity destinations.



Fort Stevens, 1865

Linking the Fort Circle Parks

1



Fort Stevens

Big Idea in Action

A ring of forts was erected around Washington during the Civil War to protect the nation's capital from the Confederate Army. Years later, the McMillan Park Commission proposed that the Civil War forts be memorialized in a unified system connected by a scenic, uninterrupted parkway. Ultimately, the forts and adjacent connecting parcels were acquired and the sites were placed in the National Register of Historic Places and became part of the National Park System.

Envisioning the future, the Fort Circle Parks will be connected in a picturesque, lush greenway that links Washington's neighborhoods with adjacent communities, the Anacostia riverfront, and diverse recreational opportunities, including the extensive regional trail system.

Residents and visitors will find within the Fort Circle Parks a myriad of opportunities for recreation, leisure, enjoyment of natural resources and wildlife, historical interpretation, and cultural education. Individual fort parks will have features that attract the interests of tourists, local historians, and civil war enthusiasts, while providing much needed green space, activities, and areas for active and passive recreation for local residents, workers, and visitors.

In 1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps reconstructed Fort Stevens partially. The fort is the only battleground in which a U.S. President, Abraham Lincoln, has come under enemy fire in war while in office. It is also the only restored fortification in Washington and offers a unique opportunity to begin interpretation of the history of the Fort Circle Parks.



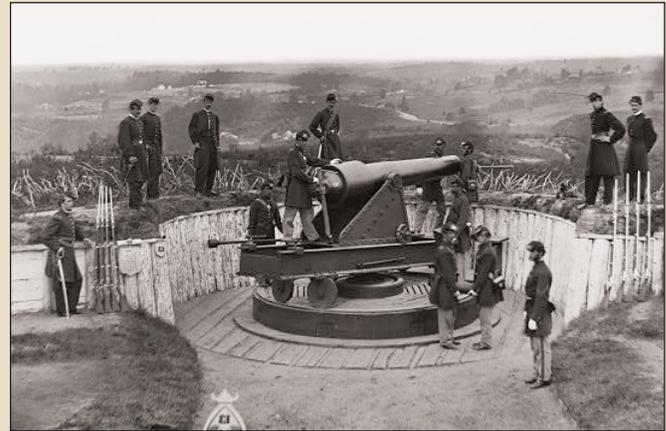
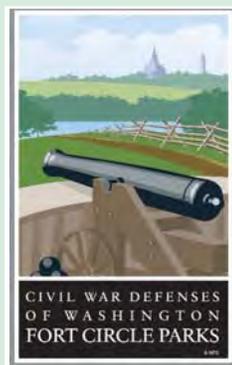
Selected History of the Fort Circle Parks

One of the legacies of the Civil War in the Washington region is a system of forts and defensive earthworks. Stretching over 37 miles, with 68 enclosed forts and batteries, 93 unarmed batteries, three blockhouses, and 20 miles of trenches, the original system of fortification extended into Virginia and protected the capital from Confederate attacks. When the Civil War ended, the forts were abandoned and the original landowners reclaimed much of the fort property. By the 1890's, organizations and neighborhoods began to advocate for the preservation of these war defenses. The War Department kept eleven forts ultimately, and one battery for historical interest.

In 1902, the McMillan Plan proposed a regional park system that included a parkway. The "Fort Drive" was to memorialize the remaining forts, maintaining them as parkland and linking them with a scenic ring road. In accordance with this proposal, two significant federal initiatives created what is now known as the Fort Circle Parks—the Capper-Cramton Act and the New Deal. Congress approved funding for the system through the 1930 Capper-Cramton Act. The legislation included a specific requirement that the forts should be recommissioned as parks if they were no longer needed for military purposes.

The Civil War Defenses of Washington

In 2004, NPS released a Historic Resource Study of the Civil War Defenses of Washington. The narrative history and accompanying historical analysis provides a comprehensive study of the Fort Circle Parks and includes detailed research on subjects such as non-federal owned sites related to Battle of Fort Stevens, logistics, roads, day to day activities within the forts, relationship of minorities, pre-Civil War background, the Fort Drive, and the post-Civil War history of the fortifications.



Fort Totten, ca. 1865

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Capper-Cramton Act provided the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (predecessor of NCPC), with the authority and funds to acquire many of the Civil War forts and adjacent land parcels for the parkway. By 1937, the Commission had acquired all but one of the 23 ½ miles planned for the parkway. Under the New Deal, the Civilian Conservation Corps completed a section of Fort Drive at Fort Dupont, south toward Good Hope Road. The Works Progress Administration completed a section of Fort Drive in the Fort Reno area. Other segments, such as Military Road through Rock Creek Park, were also completed in the 1950's, but there was no further progress on Fort Drive following construction of these segments.

After World War II, support for the Fort Drive shifted from developing it as a pleasure drive to a limited access highway. Critics claimed it was too expensive and impractical, and by the early 1960s, the idea of connecting the Fort Circle Parks with a continuous roadway was abandoned. Citizens and planners alike were concerned with neighborhood and traffic impacts. As a result, in 1965, NCPC issued a report called *Fort Park System: A Re-evaluation Study of Fort Drive, Washington DC* that proposed that the Fort Drive be renamed the Fort Park System and the scenic drive concept be abandoned in favor of a greenway trail connecting the forts. This plan resulted in construction of a short section of a bike and pedestrian trail for the section between forts Stanton and Mahan.

Although there was an increase of interest in the forts at the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Civil War, development threats to the parks increased, and encroachment upon the spaces for public uses other than recreation became a continuing threat. For example, Fort Reno has become over time the site for a new reservoir; a facility for the K-9 Division of the Secret Service; a Department of Public Works storage yard; and Federal Aviation Administration monitoring equipment.

Following a period of jurisdictional transfers between federal agencies, the NPS was given jurisdiction over the fort parks in 1933. In 1968, NPS released a master plan for the Fort Circle Parks. The master plan envisioned the forts as neighborhood parks offering a broad range of recreational and interpretative programs, including day and overnight camps all connected by a 23-mile bike and pedestrian trail. However, few of the recommendations and plans from the 1968 plan were ever implemented. In 2004, because of the lack of implementation of the recommendations in the earlier master plan, and because the management of these sites is divided among three separate NPS units—National Capital Parks-East, Rock Creek Park, and George Washington Memorial Parkway—the NPS completed the *General Management Plan: Fort Circle Parks* to provide a unified management concept for the significant cultural and natural resources associated with the specific NPS fort parks, now referred to by the NPS as the Fort Circle Parks.

This plan will guide the management of the parks over the next 10-15 years, and sets a general vision for the management of the fort parks as a system, without setting site-specific management objectives for individual park forts.

The three stated goals are to

- 1) preserve and interpret the historical resources,
- 2) conserve the urban green space linkages, and
- 3) provide compatible recreational opportunities.

The management plan also provides a direction for visitor use of the fort parks by prescribing in detail the resource conditions and visitor experiences that should be maintained in each of the park's management, or use, zones.

Today, implementation of NPS's management plan for the Fort Circle Parks is underway. *Linking the Fort Circle Parks* explores opportunities for federal and District agencies and the public to not only promote the management plan's recommendations, but to build upon them through ideas for better use of the fort parks as community assets, and link them with surrounding communities, waterfronts, and local and regional trail systems.





The entrance to Fort Mahan (top and right) and the existing stream corridor in Fort Stanton.



Challenges

After the Civil War, many of the forts were deemed surplus and the land returned to its original owners. Most forts were abandoned to the elements, as the forests and native vegetation rapidly reclaimed the land and, in many cases, obscured the earthworks completely. Now, the forts are largely forgotten, and many of the stunning views looking in toward the capital city and out from the forts have been blocked.

Few residents know about the forts, the role that they played in defending Washington from attack during the Civil War, or the unique role they played in the city's African-American history. Many freed or escaped slaves sought refuge at the forts, where they found safe haven and work. After the war, many settled in these areas establishing early African-American neighborhoods.

The residents who do advocate for the fort parks today are passionate, yet diverse in their interests and visions. Some believe that restoration and preservation of the historic elements are paramount. Other advocates believe that the fort parks should provide more active recreational opportunities, especially in the areas of the city that don't have enough active recreational facilities. Balancing the various users' interests is challenging, especially given the shortage of funding available for capital improvements and maintenance.



A trail sign at Fort Stanton helps wayfinding and informs the surrounding communities of this valuable recreation resource.

Opportunities

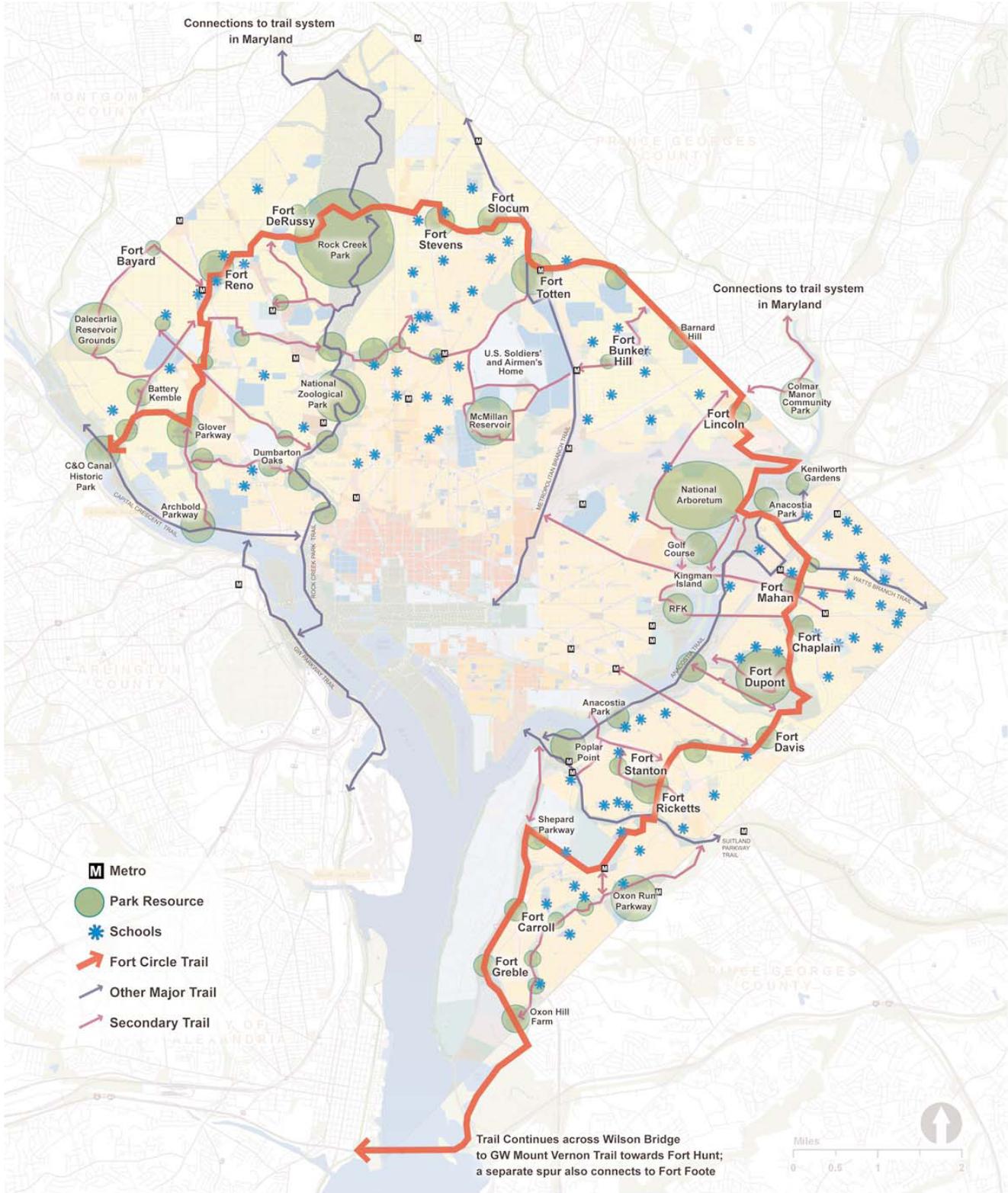
Together, the Fort Circle Parks represent a significant landscape element that played an important role in the history of the Civil War. NPS is committed to focusing on improving cultural and natural resources and recreation to create parks that tell the stories of the Civil War Defenses through interpretation, educational programs, and other experiences.

Each individual fort park has tremendous potential to provide both national and local amenities—to attract the interests of tourists, local historians, and civil war enthusiasts, and to provide much needed green space and activities for local residents and workers. Cultivating diverse and passionate users of the Forts Circle Parks will help to protect and sustain the parks and the greenway in the future.

While each fort park is unique, the strength of the entire system is the ability to link together the major fort parks, which can serve as activity hubs with their own appropriate uses, creating a verdant connected greenway around the city. The greenway could then have a series of loop segments that thread together surrounding neighborhood parks, recreational facilities, and other important cultural, historical, and community features like schools, community centers, transit, and other local and regional trail systems.

Potential Fort Circle Parks Trail Connections

This map identifies opportunities for strengthened connections between the fort parks and other parks, schools, and access points.



Recommendations

Linking the Fort Circle Parks

Battery Ricketts information sign



Promote the Fort Circle Parks and Greenway as a National Historic, Cultural, and Recreational Treasure

Providing opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize the history of the Fort Circle Parks is needed, as remains of many of the forts are slowly vanishing.

- ◆ Install park and trail signage and interpretive stations to provide information, celebrate important vistas, and impart the park's role in the Civil War.



ANDYPP TRAIL BUDDY

Hiking at Fort Stevens

- ◆ Increase visitor resources and programming, especially near trail heads.
- ◆ Build public awareness about the Fort Circle Parks and the greenway.

Increase Public Access by Connecting the Fort Circle Parks to Other Destinations

Connecting the Fort Circle Parks to other parks, schools, neighborhoods, and other destinations increases accessibility to the numbers of activities in the parks.

- ◆ Design and build the entire greenway trail to link all of the fort parks.
- ◆ Improve existing trails, including the hiker-biker trail, with increased maintenance, signage, and interpretation.
- ◆ Strengthen connections from the greenway to transit, schools, and other parks with improved streetscape conditions, street crossings, on-road bike lanes, and signage.
- ◆ Provide low-impact trails within the fort parks to offer opportunities for discovery of views, exploration of interior woodlands, and native habitats.

Activate the Fort Circle Parks and Greenway for Residents and Visitors

The Fort Circle Parks were once community gathering places. Selective park activities can engage residents and visitors in the parks rich natural environment, and cultural history.

- ◆ Improve existing recreational facilities, with an emphasis on recreation fields.
- ◆ Enhance cultural and natural interpretive amenities provided within the parks.
- ◆ Enhance the park edges to be more welcoming to residents and visitors.

Protect and Celebrate the Diverse Natural Resources of the Fort Circle Parks

The Fort Circle parks preserve significant natural features, including mature native hardwood forests and diverse critical habitat for indigenous flora and fauna that are rarely found in an urban setting

- ◆ Restore upland and stream habitats by managing invasive species and daylighting stream channels where feasible.
- ◆ Interpret natural resources through identification of native vegetation, habitat, and species.
- ◆ Expand nature-based educational programming with schools and other organizations to educate and inform about habitats and natural systems, and build park appreciation.
- ◆ Utilize innovative techniques, such as low-impact stormwater management, to address impacts to natural resources and landscapes.

Fort Circle Park Model Projects



Fort Mahan and Fort Stanton

Model approaches to applying the recommendations to link the Fort Circle Parks were studied at Fort Stanton and Fort Mahan. These fort parks were selected because they are both in communities currently underserved by neighborhood parks and are experiencing significant new development. The studies researched and analyzed challenges specific to each park, and identified opportunities based on the recommendations to link the Fort Circle Parks.

Fort Mahan—*The Gateway to Fort Circle Parks East*

Fort Mahan is an NPS park consisting of a cleared, grassy plateau with a multi-purpose recreational field that is surrounded by heavily wooded hillsides. Along the eastern edge are small, flat grassy areas. Historic fort earthworks are near the top of the eastern edge of the hillside. The park receives limited use, even though it is adjacent to a redeveloping commercial corridor and is situated between two Metro stations. Specific issues and opportunities include

- ◆ Increasing the limited interpretive and visitor resources associated with the Civil War and fort, including enhancing the incredible views to the U.S. Capitol from the park that are obscured by trees.
- ◆ Improving or installing on-site sidewalks along the perimeter and trails through the park, including improved connections to Marvin Gaye Park and Miller Park and connections to the Metro stations, bus routes, multiple schools, and Boys and Girls Club. The park has the opportunity to be a vibrant community connector rather than a barrier, as it is now.
- ◆ Capitalizing on nearby residential development and the redeveloping commercial corridor by positioning the park as a true community asset and east side gateway to the Fort Circle Parks.
- ◆ Improving and connecting the active recreational facilities at the park to the adjacent DPR/DCPS property to better serve neighborhood recreational needs.



Hiking Trails in Fort Stanton

Fort Stanton—A Grand Vista in the Nation’s Capital

Fort Stanton rests at a heavily forested ridgeline site. Most of the site falls under NPS jurisdiction, although a reservoir and active recreational facilities are located in the center and are under the jurisdiction of WASA and DPR. DPR has both outdoor and indoor active recreational facilities at Fort Stanton. Recently, an outdoor baseball field has been renovated by DPR completely. The remains of Fort Stanton are on the park’s west side in an area that straddles the property line between the park and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church. The earthworks of Fort Ricketts are on the east side of the park. Specific issues and opportunities include:

- ◆ Increasing the interpretive and visitor resources associated with the Civil War and forts. One of the most significant views to downtown Washington is on the church property adjacent to the park, near where Fort Stanton stood. This view should be protected permanently and made part of the park experience.
- ◆ Improving the trails through the park and linking these to the surrounding cultural destinations, including the Frederick Douglas House and Anacostia Museum.
- ◆ Further improvements to the existing recreational amenities and recreation center to meet neighborhood needs and changing demographics.
- ◆ Preserving the stream corridor and floodplain in the interior of the park and enhancing the recreational experience in this area of the park.



Recreation amenities at Fort Stanton



Students at Cardozo Senior High School plant a Peace Garden, which includes seedlings, perennial beds, benches, bulbs, a butterfly garden, composting area, trees, and a sculpture composed of tiles made by international artists.

OBJECTIVES

Schoolyards are maintained and improved to provide diverse opportunities for learning, healthy living, and recreation, and are recognized as a vital part of Washington's parks and open-space system.

Improving Public Schoolyards

2



Big Idea in Action

In the future, students at District of Columbia schools will gaze out their classroom windows in eager anticipation of their outdoor class time. For recess, students will be able to play kickball on green athletic fields, explore the butterfly gardens, or play quietly with friends in a shaded spot. Other students will spend some classroom time outdoors to learn from their science teacher about the role trees play in mitigating climate change and how the native wildlife habitat helps to preserve biodiversity in their neighborhood.

In the past, there was great value placed on the importance of open space and recreation in early childhood development. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, federal and local agencies worked together to provide systematically areas for active recreation across Washington. Schools played a critical component of this strategy, eventually serving as “neighborhood centers.” These joint learning and recreational facilities were the focal point of community life, functioning as the neighborhood park and community gathering place. As a result of these past planning efforts, schools provide 49 percent of playgrounds, 56 percent of football fields, and 39 percent of basketball courts in Washington. East of the Anacostia River, schools are even more important as a recreation resource, as they provide 40 percent of all active recreational facilities.

Schoolyards serve as places of recreation and physical activity, but also as centers of learning about the environment, food systems, and healthy living. This is particularly important in Washington, which has one of the highest childhood obesity rates in the country. An estimated 40 percent of children in Washington are either obese or overweight². A combination of physical activity and learning about healthy living through development of a schoolyard vegetable garden, for example, would be a powerful antidote to childhood obesity, as well as a host of other mental and physical health issues that commonly affect students.

Butterfly Garden at Cardozo Senior High School

2. Levy, J, et al, “F as in Fat, 2009,” Trust for America’s Health, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, July 2009.



Draper Elementary School

In addition to creating learning opportunities about healthy living, “greening” schoolyards is beneficial for the environment. The integration of stormwater management measures, such as rain gardens, bioswales, and green roofs convert impervious surfaces to pervious, helping to reduce the problems of excess rainfall. There is an opportunity for each community to cultivate its neighborhood schoolyard sites in an environmentally sound manner. If all the District’s schoolyards are greened, then all of Washington benefits. D.C. Schoolyard Greening, a program of the D.C. Environmental Education Consortium, has already laid the foundation for this vision, but more can be done to improve the condition and functionality of many schoolyards.

The potential for schoolyards to become vibrant places of student and community life is enormous. A joint commitment from students, neighbors, school administrators, and local and federal government partners is needed to realize this vision.

History of the Expansion of Schoolyards and Neighborhood Recreational Centers

At the turn of the twentieth century, new ideas were developing about the importance of open space and recreation in early childhood development. These ideas were rooted in the Progressive belief that an orderly environment plays a direct part in creating healthy families and communities. In 1901, the first neighborhood playground opened in southwest Washington at the Neighborhood House, a privately operated community center. In the following years, federal and local government agencies worked together to systematically provide areas for active recreation across the city. With the support of a powerful parks movement and an emerging recreational leadership, schools became a critical component of this strategy.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a number of governmental bodies, including the District's Department of Playgrounds, the municipal Board of Education, and the federal National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (NCPPC), oversaw implementation of new playgrounds and fields in schoolyards. These new schoolyards met goals for student recreation needs, as well as those of the community. The District established a 4-acre minimum size for new school sites, one of the first in the U.S. to do so. In 1927, NCPPC promoted the concept of "neighborhood centers," which provided that schools, athletic fields, and recreational areas be in close proximity to other municipal buildings, such as fire and police stations and libraries. These joint learning and recreational facilities were to be the focal point of community life, functioning as the neighborhood "park" where students and families could come together. Ultimately, Washington's high schools with football fields, tennis courts, and other recreational amenities were spaced throughout the city plan at a distance of two miles.

Today, several entities manage schoolyards, including the District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, DCPS, and DPR. The District of Columbia's Department of Transportation (DDOT) maintains the perimeters of some schoolyards, and DPR maintains 16 athletic fields located on schoolyards. This multi-purpose arrangement allows the District to maximize the use of existing resources and provide cost-effective recreation space. The generally balanced distribution of schoolyards throughout Washington provides residents with a basic level of access to parks and open space. Although inadequate to meet all recreation and open-space needs, this framework remains a critical asset.



John Quincy Adams Elementary School is one of two schools that define the Adams-Morgan neighborhood. Typical of many schools built during the early 1930s and 40s, it has an auditorium and limited outdoor recreational facilities.



The new Walker Jones Education Campus in Northwest includes a public library, recreation center, and fields, continuing the tradition of providing multiple education and recreation facilities at one site.



Some elementary school's athletic fields are waterlogged and unusable even in good weather.



The broken sight lines on the grounds of some elementary schools, like the one here blocked by an outdoor stage, present safety issues even during daylight hours.

Challenges

A number of District schoolyards suffer from overuse, contain aging infrastructure, and are in need of modernization. Although the District is making unprecedented investments in school modernization and new facilities it is not uncommon that some elementary schools are equipped with out-of-date playground equipment and many of the athletic fields are not regulation size. Recently, the District unveiled an extensive public school facilities modernization program, but the focus of the plan is on the buildings—not the schoolyards.

In addition to inadequate recreation components, school administrators may have safety concerns, because they are unable to secure the site during school hours. These security concerns may be amplified by poor site design and physical conditions, such as high walls or hidden corners, that make it difficult

to monitor students in the yard during recess and gym. School administrators also may have to address vandalism, hazardous trash, and illegitimate activities caused by unregulated access to the schoolyard.

Developing a District-wide schoolyard modernization program is difficult, because the schoolyards are diverse in size, schools have different programming needs, and there may be location and external pressures. These challenges can make it difficult to develop broad standards and policies that can be applied to every school site. In addition, private and charter schools fall outside of the scope of the school modernization process.

Another challenge is that schoolyard improvement, programming, field permitting, and maintenance responsibilities are shared by several District agencies.

Last, schoolyards are the only easily accessible recreation space for many neighborhoods. This puts added pressure on the schoolyards to accommodate the recreation and open-space needs of students and nearby residents.

Opportunities

Schoolyards can provide critical recreational and environmental education opportunities for students. Adequate exercise, outdoor play, and team sports have been proven to be critical in helping children become healthy adults. School yards designed with gardens and other natural components promote ecological literacy and environmental stewardship among students, teachers, parents, and the surrounding community.

Schoolyards also provide important community recreation and open space during non-school hours. Making use of existing open space is particularly important in neighborhoods where park resources are otherwise scarce. Consequently, any schoolyard improvements will also provide a concurrent benefit to nearby residents. Well-landscaped and designed school sites can help to beautify neighborhoods and manage stormwater in a more sustainable way.

While schoolyards are not currently the focus of the modernization program, there is an opportunity to develop a comprehensive schoolyard program and integrate it within the existing modernization process.

The District of Columbia Department of the Environment (DDOE) has already developed schoolyard programs to green school sites, and DPR is working to co-locate more of its facilities with existing schools to save money and provide more centralized and integrated community services—including open space. These programs can further increase the benefits conferred by schoolyard modernization.

One of the most positive aspects of Orr's schoolyard is a painted mural and learning landscape.



Public Schoolyard Model Project: Benjamin Orr Elementary School

Access and Safety



- Student Access Only
- Limited Public Access (organized, approved activities)
- 24-hour Public Access

Identifying appropriate public access to Orr's schoolyard can help improve student safety.

Benjamin Orr Elementary School in southeast Washington, was selected as a model project to inform recommendations to schoolyards District-wide. Built in 1974, Orr was chosen because it has not yet been through a major modernization, its 1.4 acres is considered average in size compared to other schools, and it is located in an area of the city that has been identified as underserved by parks, open space, and recreational facilities. Orr's schoolyard provides recreation opportunities for students and the community and includes a play area, baseball backstop, basketball courts and a stage/seating area.

Orr has 352 students and approximately 75 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch. A branch location of the Boys and Girls Club is also located at Orr. Although all schoolyards are different, Orr's has representative opportunities and challenges that can inform schoolyard policies District-wide.

These include

- ◆ Meet physical education and health needs by improving existing active recreation amenities: play areas, fields, and basketball courts.
- ◆ Meet environmental and educational goals through "greening" the schoolyard with gardens or other stormwater measures.
- ◆ Address visibility issues and create a new outdoor learning opportunity by expanding the stage area.
- ◆ Improve security, school appearance and delineate schoolyard space with landscaping improvements.

Recreational, Environmental, and Educational Features



This graphic identifies a potential approach to providing recreational, environmental, and educational features within Orr's schoolyard.

1. PARKING

The existing parking lot is reduced in size and 14 new parking spaces are provided along the playground edge. Shared parking with the church is encouraged for additional capacity.

2. ACTIVE RECREATION

Relocation of an existing slope and wall allows for an improved baseball field with a safety surface infield, an expanded practice/multipurpose field, and room for tetherball.

3. OUTDOOR LEARNING

A wetlands butterfly garden and vegetable garden area could be integrated with school programs and maintenance capabilities. Additional interactive elements could include weather stations, hands-on sculptures, and climbing features. Outdoor learning areas will utilize "boardwalk" access and offer outdoor classroom opportunities.

4. MUSIC STAGE

The existing stage is redesigned to remove barriers and hidden corners, allowing for outdoor music classes complete with fixed musical instruments. An expanded stage platform retains emergency egress.

5. SECURED PLAY AREA

Fenced and gated areas protect ball courts (paddle ball, four-square, etc.), resized basketball courts (age appropriate), and an expanded playground with a poured-in-place safety surface.

6. NEW ENTRY

The entryway to the secured play area is redesigned with a wider stairway, a handicapped ramp with stroller access, and seating areas.

7. INTERIOR COURTYARD

The courtyard maintains active play for 2-5 year olds and includes a "Learning Garden" on the south-facing wall.

8. WEST SIDE

Removal of the existing wall maze allows for new plantings and a bioswale.

Key Lessons Learned from Orr Elementary

Goals identified for schoolyards can be in conflict; approaches should balance these interests.

Several competing goals at Orr's schoolyard need to be reconciled. For example, the goal to provide community access to the site perpetuates a security challenge for school administrators. Guidelines should balance the need to regulate access to the site and create areas closed to the community after school hours. The concept plan demonstrates how access and security issues might be balanced.

Introducing environmental elements like rain gardens can conflict with the recreation that requires hard surfaces. Guidelines should include specific measures or approaches to analyze how to balance recreation needs with the goal of managing stormwater on-site. Fortunately, stormwater measures can be paired with outdoor learning and environmental stewardship goals to meet this balance.

Improvements to parks and open space near schoolyards may help meet demand.

Improving parks near schoolyards to provide recreation and other amenities, particularly in neighborhoods where parks resources are scarce, may reduce pressure on schoolyard sites from overuse. Improvements would also meet community recreation and open-space goals. An evaluation of opportunities District-wide should be included in any schoolyard improvement strategy. This collaborative approach can help ensure that students have fun, functional, and accessible recreation space during and afterschool hours, and at the same time, help to ensure that other park users have places for recreation and team sports that do not compete with school needs.

Recommendations

Improving Public Schoolyards

Incorporate a schoolyard improvement strategy into future school modernization programs

A comprehensive strategy to assess and improve the District's schoolyards should be developed. Schoolyards are also important recreational spaces for the neighborhood; therefore, improvements should be planned to maximize their benefits.

- ◆ Set goals for the assessment and improvement of the District's schoolyards.
- ◆ Develop a District-wide priority list for schoolyard improvements to be improved.

Preserve recreation and open space for community use

Schoolyards provide important recreation space for Washington's residents. Without schoolyards, many neighborhoods would lack access to playgrounds, athletic fields, and green open space.

- ◆ Ensure that schoolyards are safe and secure for students.
- ◆ Support community use of schoolyards for recreation space, wherever possible.
- ◆ School sites located on federally owned parcels should remain for recreational or school purposes only, unless alternative uses are mutually agreed upon.
- ◆ Schoolyards located on District land should remain available for the public, to the greatest extent possible, to ensure that residents' access to parks and open space is not diminished.



A District-wide priority list for schoolyard improvements could identify which schools will be outfitted with synthetic turf fields, such as at Key Elementary School.

Develop District-wide guidelines for schoolyards

Guidelines can assist schoolyard planning. They should be broad and address recreation, stormwater management, landscaping, and environmental education.

- ◆ Create design guidelines that encourage the basic components for a schoolyard.
- ◆ Develop guidelines regarding where stormwater measures should be located based on existing infrastructure and site conditions.
- ◆ Develop opportunities for enhanced components, such as gardens, and then identify partnership and funding opportunities from non-profits or other groups.

Develop a collaborative schoolyard improvement program

Several entities play a role in managing schoolyards. Clarifying their responsibilities will improve outcomes. Further, the District would benefit from developing long-term partnerships with community organizations to help meet maintenance challenges.

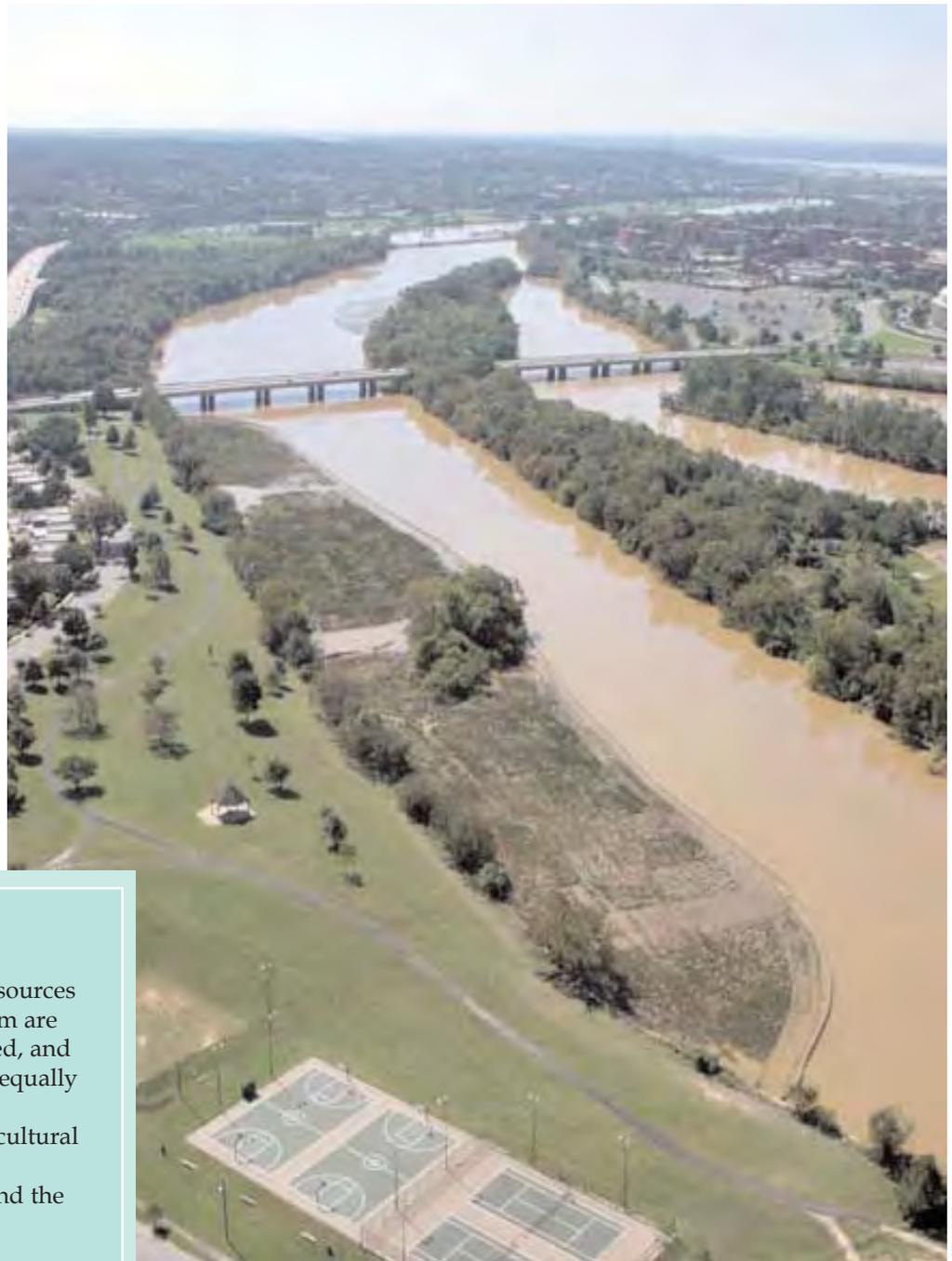
- ◆ Establish basic schoolyard maintenance standards and clarify agency roles and responsibilities for these standards.
- ◆ Reassess schoolyard funding mechanisms to determine if it is possible and preferable to have dedicated funding.
- ◆ Develop private-public partnerships to maintain schoolyard components that require a higher level of care, such as rain and butterfly gardens, and to provide additional programming.



Key Elementary School



Adams Playground



OBJECTIVES

The ecological resources of our park system are protected, restored, and recognized to be equally important as the recreational and cultural amenities in the neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

Aerial view of Kingman Island and Anacostia Park

U.S. EPA 2004

Enhancing Urban Natural Areas

3



A BRADLEY BUNT/STRAWKER APRIL 2009

Red-shouldered hawk in Rock Creek Park

Big Idea in Action

In the future, Washington will have urban natural areas that are appreciated and protected not merely for the use and enjoyment they provide to residents and visitors, but because they are respected urban sanctuaries that provide a safe refuge for wildlife and important ecological functions that enhance the entire metropolitan region.

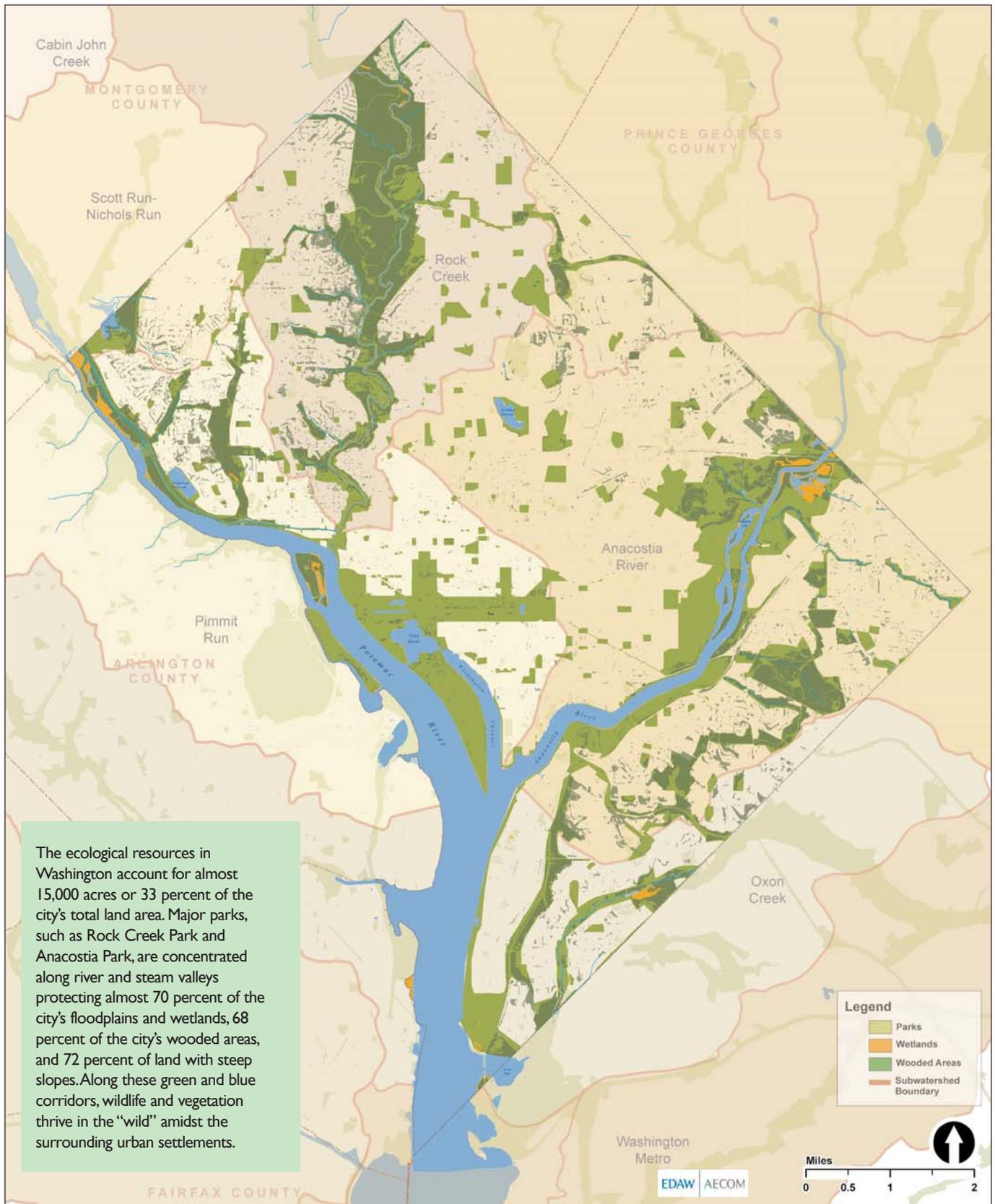
Washington's natural parkland areas, including the numerous stream valleys and wildlife corridors, will connect to each other, connect to city's neighborhoods, and connect to the greater regional system of natural areas. They will contain most of the city's forests, wetland and riparian habitats, and many unique ecosystems.



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Kayaker on the C & O Canal

Ecologically Sensitive Resources



Selected History of Washington's Natural Areas

Within Washington's largest parks are some of the most picturesque natural areas that can be found in the national capital. Rock Creek Park in Northwest Washington has its woodlands, ravines and streams. Anacostia Park in Southeast contains some of the most biologically diverse riparian habitats, including one of the last magnolia bogs in the eastern U.S., and a variety of meadow vegetation and lily ponds. In these parks, one can trace the original geologic and natural features that the Founding Fathers came upon in their initial survey of the future capital city.

The dramatic topography, extensive forests, and varied waterways of the 10-square mile area of Washington at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers defined the city-in-a-park setting that became its enduring image. Many of these natural resources were reflected in the 1791 plan of the city by Pierre Charles L'Enfant. L'Enfant envisioned a capital city framed by forests, waterways, and greenways intertwined with the street networks and monumental public buildings of the capital city. The internal ridge along the escarpment (where Florida Avenue runs today), and the two rivers, the Potomac and the Anacostia, became the natural boundaries of L'Enfant's city.

Despite admiration for its natural features, Washington's city builders were more preoccupied with the construction of roads, buildings, and other infrastructure during the first one hundred years of its establishment. These activities entailed massive forest clearing, re-engineering of natural springs to supply city water, leveling of bluffs, filling in of valleys to provide a flat terrain for development, and the use of rivers as depositories for the city's sewage. These actions and the rapid growth of population in Washington after the Civil War led to infrastructure, economic and health problems. The shoaling of the Anacostia and Potomac due to deforestation in the District and Maryland disrupted city commerce which relied on these waterways for the transport of goods. The 1881 flooding of the Potomac reached the eastern edge of the Capitol and flooded the cellars of buildings in the vicinity of the Mall south of the White House. The untreated sewage that was trapped in the silted Anacostia and Potomac rivers threatened public health with miasma and mosquitoes. Congress could no longer ignore these environmental problems.

It was also during this period that urban planning began to recognize the value of parks in elevating the quality of life of city residents. Civic initiatives focused on acquisition of many of the remaining natural areas of Washington for urban recreation and nature conservation. Rock Creek Park, whose potential as a nature conservation area and "national park" status has been noted by the Corps of Engineers as early as 1867, was created by a congressional act in 1890, with a mandate of protecting its natural beauty, while accommodating carriageways and trails for public enjoyment of the park.

The McMillan Plan of 1901 conceived Anacostia Park to celebrate and protect the marshlands and water resources of the Anacostia River. The 8-acre Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens was later purchased by Congress and appended to Anacostia Park.



The natural flow of water at Oxon Run in Southeast DC is hampered by many man-made structures such as dams and stormwater outfalls.



Land uses such as athletic fields can sometimes bring unintended impacts to ecologically sensitive areas. Fertilizers and other lawn care chemicals can contaminate adjacent streams.



Trash and sewage has kept the Anacostia River from supporting a healthy community of fish and wildlife.

Challenges

Washington is fortunate to have a number of parks with sizeable natural areas that are largely in good environmental condition, but all are disturbed in some way by surrounding urban activities.

Urban parks are often defined and valued by the way that they are used by residents and visitors. Parks can have dog runs, playgrounds, tennis courts, community gardens, soccer and football fields, baseball diamonds, and skateboard parks. Each park type has a different constituency group that serves as an ad hoc oversight committee to ensure their parks are maintained sufficiently; and the planned squares and circles within Washington, known for their traditional park landscapes of cut grass and formal planting beds, are protected by myriad historic preservation laws, regulations, and policies. Many of Washington's natural areas, however, do not have well-defined constituent groups, nor do they have the benefit of robust programs designed to protect their ecological communities and functions.

Because natural park areas are wild and unstructured spaces and not activity-focused, they are often invisible in the urban landscape. In some instances, these spaces are overgrown with vegetation and can seem forbidding and unsafe to adjacent residents. In other cases, these areas are heavily used for active recreation that may be disruptive and damaging to the fragile natural ecosystem. Often, the very measures that residents request to make a park more safe—adding lighting, paving trails, or clearing vegetation—without adequate study, are the very activities that threaten these rare urban natural places.

The pressure on Washington's natural areas is significant and continues to grow. These areas are threatened not only by those who entertain visions of new development, but also from the impacts of urban activities, the ever increasing demand for recreational opportunities from a larger and more active population, and over-use by athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. When these areas are disturbed, exotic invasive species, such as English Ivy and Tree of Heaven, are more likely to replace native plants. The habitat may become adversely modified enough to displace wildlife populations. Even more importantly, the natural processes, such as stormwater storage and filtration, may be disrupted permanently.

TRASHIER ANACOSTIA



Journaling at Rock Creek
Photo: Alice Ferguson Foundation 2006



To prevent illegal dumping of vehicles at Marvin Gaye Park, volunteers at the 2009 Hoopdreams Global Youth Service Day plant trees along its banks.

Photo: Hoopdreams 2009

Opportunities

Washington's natural areas, parks, and other urban green spaces provide great ecological value as pathways for wildlife to move within and through the city, for stormwater storage, and for filtering air- and water-borne pollutants. Beyond our local ecosystems, Washington's parks and open spaces play a role in mitigating climate change and restoring regional river systems.

Many of these natural areas are stream corridors that weave through the urban fabric and host diverse riparian and upland habitats for myriad bird and wildlife species. These areas were typically purchased as parkland for the purpose to convey storm water from neighborhood streets to rivers. When they were purchased, it was also noted that these lands were important for their contribution to future water quality in the Washington region; however, these areas themselves have suffered from environmental degradation over the years. Advances in technology allow for a better valuation of natural areas, and now is the time to transform them into healthy, functioning ecosystems.

Washington's trees, parks, and open spaces also absorb carbon dioxide from the air, nature's natural defense against global warming. Protecting and enhancing the city's natural areas and tree canopy are critical tools in its efforts to mitigate the negative consequences of climate change.

In addition, urban wild areas are not only important for their ecological benefits. Studies indicate that access to nature may have powerful preventative and curative impacts on people's health. For urban residents, nature can be a soothing and calm escape from the loud and harsh man-made environment, and natural areas can soften the hard edges of urban environments.



The Lotus Festival at the Kenilworth Gardens is one of the nature-themed special events unique to Washington.

Urban Natural Area Model Project: Oxon Run Stream Corridor



Oxon Run, a tributary of the Potomac River, has lost most of its riparian habitats to urbanization. About 85 percent of the Oxon Run-DC watershed is directly connected to the storm sewer system.

Oxon Run is a natural system in which lessons could be pulled from an in-depth analysis to inform recommendations on urban natural areas city-wide. It was selected for this analysis because a variety of public agencies, municipalities, private, and non-profit organizations are responsible for its management and the surrounding watershed; a situation to better inform the lessons.

The in-depth analysis identified the major environmental challenges to the health of the Oxon Run watershed, and reviewed previous and ongoing restoration efforts. Based on field study, stakeholder interviews, and research, the study provides recommendations specific to Oxon Run. These recommendations are focused on habitat restoration, water quality improvements, improved recreation and community access, and specific management ideas tailored to a natural area.

Oxon Run Stream Corridor Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to assist interested parties in developing plans to meet the general goals of increasing water quality, fish passage, and wildlife habitat, as well as increasing stewardship, education, and recreation opportunities in the Oxon Run stream corridor area.

Habitat Restoration

Restoring the in-stream and river bank habitat along Oxon Run requires several interrelated actions.

Maximizing habitat restoration along the stream corridor requires that

- ◆ Stream banks are well-vegetated and stabilized.
- ◆ Low flows are conveyed in a narrower channel to provide resting areas for fish.
- ◆ Annual/biannual high flows are allowed to access a floodplain to dissipate erosive energy and deposit sediments and other pollutants.
- ◆ Barriers to fish passage are removed.

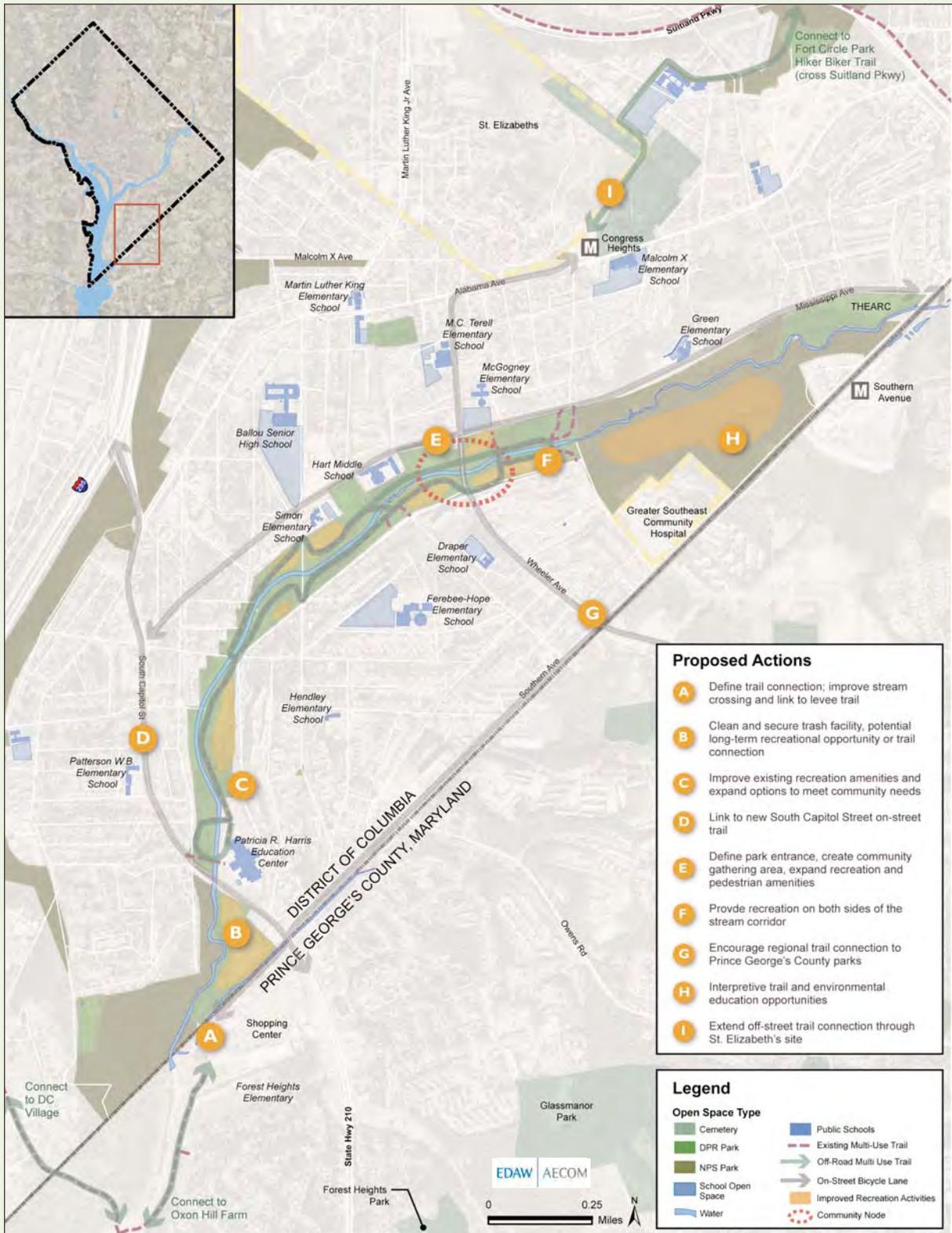
Water Quality

Stormwater runoff causes the vast majority of water quality problems in Oxon Run. Treating stormwater and increasing the water quality of Oxon Run will require action throughout the entire watershed, in both Washington and Prince George's County. Specific recommendations are as follows:

- ◆ Install Low Impact Design Components (LID) to promote a neighborhood approach to stormwater management. LID takes advantage of natural biological processes to treat urban runoff on-site. Curb cuts, bioretention features, small diversions, rain barrels, and rain gardens are all part of the LID toolkit and should be implemented in supportive neighborhoods.
- ◆ Establish no-mow areas to help provide additional habitat, help improve water quality, and enhance visual interest and enjoyment of the park.

Oxon Run Stream Corridor Recreation Recommendations

Oxon Run can become a catalyst for environmentally themed community activities in southeast DC if appropriately programmed. The map shows several opportunities for recreation and community access.



This map illustrates conceptual trail connections. Refer to current trail maps for actual existing, planned, and proposed trail alignments.

Oxon Run Stream Corridor



The Magnolia Bogs in the Oxon Run watershed are one of the last known to exist in the Atlantic Coastal Plain area, and the only one of this type in the National Park Service inventory of wetlands.

Recreation and Community Access

Improvements to the condition and function of Oxon Run will improve the level of service to nearby neighborhoods and the larger community.

- ◆ Define park entrances at key locations to create community gathering places for adjacent neighborhoods.
- ◆ Link the park to Metrorail, St. Elizabeths, and other destinations to facilitate the use of transit and alternative modes of transportation, as well as increase access and use of the stream corridor.
- ◆ Define a loop trail system with a series of bike lanes and off-street trails that provide connections through Oxon Run to Oxon Hill Farm and across the Suitland Parkway and the proposed Fort Circle Park hiker-biker trail.
- ◆ Introduce a signage system for the multi-use loop trail system, such as mile-markers and other directional and informational signage that are provided within the park and at key intersections, to direct trail users to nearby destinations.
- ◆ Improve sidewalk connections and safe connections that encourage kids to walk or bike to school through the park.
- ◆ Create a park identity that invites community interest, pride, and support, and creates a community gathering place.
- ◆ Increase park programming and stewardship using environmental educational opportunities and encourage nearby schools to hold outdoor classes within the park.
- ◆ Establish an intergovernmental watershed group to coordinate watershed-wide efforts.
- ◆ Designate natural landscapes that should be appreciated expressly for this purpose.
- ◆ Introduce additional recreation amenities in appropriate locations such as nature trails and picnic areas.

Maintenance and Monitoring

Coordinated maintenance is essential to ensure a project's long-term success or failure.

- ◆ Establish shared guidelines for stream corridor maintenance to allow multiple departments or agencies in charge of maintenance to apply uniform maintenance standards in the field.
- ◆ Provide technical maintenance training for department staff and contractors regarding maintenance within stream corridors and LID elements.
- ◆ Develop a post construction monitoring program to continually evaluate the function and effectiveness of stream restoration initiatives.

Regulatory Structures and Policies

To supplement existing policies and regulations, the District could consider the following:

- ◆ Create an urban stream corridor overlay zone as a way to preserve open space, protect natural resources, and strongly regulate design and development within a stream corridor.
- ◆ Guide developer benefits and other funding opportunities to address sustainability and recreation needs within a neighborhood. Development in the Oxon Run corridor could help fund stream restoration activities and provide improved recreation amenities.

Oxon Run Stream Corridor Lessons Learned

Following the analysis and development of recommendations for Oxon Run, lessons learned were identified. From these lessons, a range of recommendations were developed that can be implemented across Washington's natural areas.

Lesson 1: Neighborhoods and People Care

A disparate variety of agencies, groups, and individuals have deeply vested interests in seemingly "open" space.

Parks can create a sense of place by connecting residents to one another, to their neighborhood, and to the natural environment. People need natural landscapes to learn about nature close to home, to get outside and explore. At the same time, cities need natural landscapes because of the ecological functions that they provide to developed areas, such as improvements to air and water quality, provision of fish and wildlife habitat, a stop-over for migrating birds, soil stabilization, and flood control.

Lesson 2: Cooperation and Empowerment are Needed

Existing organizations lack sufficient coordination capacity and empowering the local community is critical to adequately addressing park management and maintenance issues.

Natural resource issues do not always fall neatly within jurisdictional or political boundaries, and entities within the District must also seek out and develop partnerships with each other, as well as with agencies and groups in neighboring jurisdictions. Making the connections and facilitating cooperation and coordination between management agencies are important for providing guidance and funding sources for particular projects, but empowering the local community to address park issues is crucial to its long-term success.

Lesson 3: Healthy Parks Help Create Healthy Communities

Natural Area Conservation Can Also Provide Economic Development Opportunities

Ecosystem-based approaches to park management can yield economic, as well as environmental benefits. For example, progressive land management techniques, such as LID measures and No-Mow areas will require trained staff for design, implementation, and maintenance. Natural areas can serve as in-field training facilities for developing a green workforce.

Lesson 4: Enhanced Natural Areas Can Help Improve the Quality of Life for Adjacent Neighborhoods.

Parks can improve an individual's well-being by providing a place to exercise and recreate, as well as engage residents and visitors in experiencing the natural world.

Lesson 5: Increased Recreation Opportunities and Enhanced Ecological Functions Are Not Mutually Exclusive

Oxon Run exemplifies the long-standing development pressures on natural areas; however, increased park programming, environmentally compatible forms of recreation, and environmental education opportunities can be desirable in natural areas and can help increase stewardship of the park, build a park constituency, and instill a greater understanding of the intrinsic value of nature.

Recommendations

Enhancing Urban Natural Areas

The following recommendations can be implemented across Washington's urban natural areas.

Form a Wild Spaces Team

The natural resources embedded in our parks need a coordinated team of federal and local agencies, and local organizations to ensure that they are protected in our urban environs.

- ◆ Map the ecological functions, including existing wildlife habitats, wetlands, floodplains, tree canopy, etc., within the parks and an open-space system to ensure there is a unified inventory of existing green infrastructure and essential ecological functions within the parks system.
- ◆ Coordinate future research efforts being undertaken on natural resources by the National Park Service, including the Center for Urban Ecology, District government, and other federal agencies such as the Department of Agriculture.
- ◆ Launch a District-wide ecosystem research consortium to apply new research strategies to measure and protect ecological functions, like water quality and tree canopy.
- ◆ Expand nature and interpretative programs in existing parks and institute school curriculum and teacher training programs that promote an appreciation of historic resources in parks, as well as stewardship of our natural resources and waterways

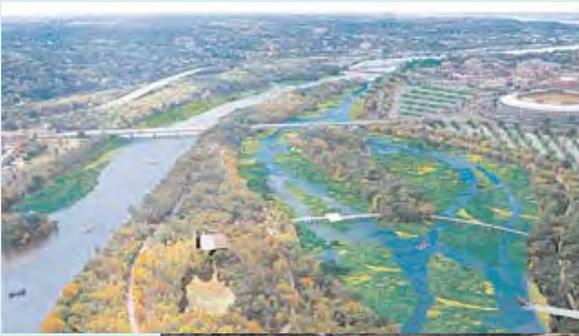


Water testing at Rock Creek

Protect Ecological Functions

In addition to preserving the resources within our parks, we need to also protect the ecological functions provided by our natural areas and parks.

- ◆ Adopt clear, consistent, and shared goals among responsible agencies and adjacent jurisdictions for long-term resource management.
- ◆ Establish and implement a District-wide tree canopy goal that applies to both local and federal parks.
- ◆ Adopt park management goals that support the conservation of native species, protect critical habitats, and increase biodiversity. Reintroduce native plants and eliminate exotic invasive species where feasible.
- ◆ Develop and map resource protection districts to minimize the impacts of urbanization and development on natural areas.
- ◆ Implement cooperative watershed management strategies with adjacent counties that engage stakeholders, leverage resources, and empower neighborhoods by limiting pollution and stormwater run-off.
- ◆ Identify the role our parks, open spaces, and rivers play in climate change, and adopt a climate adaptation plan for essential ecological functions as affected by global warming relative to floodplains and species migration. Successful adaptation planning is likely to require significant federal and local cooperation and collaboration.
- ◆ Identify mission links or gaps in the physical connection of our park system within the city and connections to larger regional systems.
- ◆ Adopt park management goals that support restoration of the Anacostia and Potomac rivers.



Simulated photo of the Anacostia showing the construction of wetlands (bright green areas) along its banks.

Photo: DCOP



DCOP

Synchronize Park Management Strategies among Jurisdictions

The importance of our parks transcends agency jurisdictions and municipal boundaries. Agencies and municipalities need to coordinate and collaborate regularly.

- ◆ Rank parks and opens spaces for preservation and restoration and target budget funds for programming, research, and mitigation based on a system of greatest need.
- ◆ Target off-site environmental mitigation methods such as the creation of new wetlands to the list of priority parks.
- ◆ Develop uniform standards and employ best management practices in all parks and natural areas for maintenance and operations, stormwater, water usage, pest management, and recreation programming.
- ◆ Launch a demonstration project for a coordinated park maintenance team for a trial period to maximize existing resources, consolidate training time, and improve maintenance outcomes.
- ◆ Integrate environmental interpretation activities in a sustainable manner at ecologically significant parks.

Build a Green Infrastructure Network

Green infrastructure such as existing stream corridors can perform many of the same services as “gray” or man-made infrastructure that include drainage pipes, spillways, and sewer systems.

Stormwater management, flood control, and water quality can be managed by plants and soil with engineering that works with nature, often at a reduced cost and more reliably.

- ◆ Design and build new green infrastructure to supplement existing gray infrastructure, when possible.
- ◆ Designate green infrastructure as a public utility in the capital programs.
- ◆ Launch a Green-Parks Force Training Program to train employees on sustainable land management techniques.
- ◆ Better connect green roof habitats to animal migration programs and patterns.

OBJECTIVES

Existing athletic fields are improved to expand capacity through ease of access (physical and through permitting) and appropriate levels of maintenance.



Improving Playfields

4

Big Idea in Action



In the future, Washingtonians will be able to engage in a wide array of team sports on high-quality, safe fields that are in excellent playing condition. Multi-purpose turf fields distributed across the city accommodate team play of all types, including lacrosse, football, cricket, ultimate Frisbee, soccer, rugby, field hockey, baseball, softball, and kickball.

As a treasured and highly sought after recreational resource, athletic facilities will be accorded the highest level of planning and upkeep.

Athletic fields will be enhanced by the addition of synthetic turf and lighting where possible. This will allow more intensive use of these spaces while still ensuring superior playing conditions. Fields that retain their natural turf will be improved with grass species that are better designed to withstand Washington's hot and humid summers and intensive field play. At various times throughout the year, fields will be closed to league play to allow the turf a sufficient time to regenerate. Both natural and artificial turf fields will benefit from a dedicated funding stream for maintenance.

The online permitting system will allow organized sports leagues and informal pick-up teams alike to easily locate, reserve, and permit any sports facility in the District regardless of which agency has management jurisdiction over the field.

Well-maintained playfields like this one at Upshur Recreation Center in Upper Northwest Washington encourage an active lifestyle and can become one of the central gathering spaces of the community.



Central High students at a track meet in 1925

Selective History of Active Recreation in Washington

Until 1942, the National Capital Parks, a division of the National Park Service, had a recreation division charged with the construction, maintenance, and operation of all recreational facilities in the parks of the Washington. While it was the policy of the federal government not to engage in supervised recreation, National Capital Parks built and maintained facilities for 30 major sports. Almost every conceivable type of athletic activity was available for park users through permits, and National Capital Parks arranged and supervised public events, such as band and symphony concerts, as well as major celebrations, ceremonies, and dedications in the parks.

In April of 1942, Congress authorized the creation of a District of Columbia Recreation Board. This board was given the authority to determine all questions of general policy relating to public recreation in and for the District and to supervise and direct the federal expenditure of all appropriations and/or other funds made available for recreation in Washington.

The Recreation Board consisted of seven members: a representative of the District Commissioners, a representative of the Board of Education, a representative of the Superintendent of National Capital Parks, and four residents of the District of Columbia.

The board was authorized to appoint a Superintendent of Recreation responsible for the administration and supervision of a public recreation program and the recreational facilities within the District.



A baseball diamond on the National Mall



Schoolyards, such as at Ross Elementary School, had always provided venues for competitive sports.

The board developed a comprehensive program of public recreation which included games, sports, arts and crafts, hobby shops, music, drama, speech, nursery play, dancing, lectures, forum for informal discussion, and other physical, social, mental, and creative opportunities for leisure-time participation. These programs took place in the major recreation centers, playfields, athletic fields, playgrounds, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, swimming pools, beaches, golf courses, community centers, and social centers in schools, parks, or other publicly-owned buildings, as well as other recreational facilities agreed upon between the Board and the agencies having jurisdiction over such facilities. The public properties utilized by the Board included those designated by National Capital Planning Commission as suitable and desirable units of the District's recreational system.

In 1949, the District and NPS entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which details the roles and responsibilities of NPS and the District in regards to the use of lands subject to the agreement, the maintenance and improvement of these lands and facilities, and the transfer of funds. To carry out the terms of the agreement, the Recreation Board was authorized to transfer to the relevant agencies such funds, equipment, and personnel as may be necessary.

The MOA has been amended at least three times since 1949 to include additional federal park areas. Originally, the MOA was to remain in effect until cancelled by either party; however, in 1966, and then again in 1972, its duration was changed to 25 years "at the end of which period it shall remain in effect until cancelled upon 30 days' notice by either party to this agreement."

The Recreation Board, together with the position of Superintendent of Recreation, was abolished in 1974 as a result of the Home Rule Act and the functions of the superintendent were transferred to the Mayor of the District of Columbia. Since Home Rule, most recreational properties under title of the government of the District of Columbia, and those still titled to the United States government but with administrative jurisdiction of the District, are managed by DPR. The NPS maintains management of the designated National Parks within the District.



Playfield at Moten Elementary School

Challenges

All across the country, cities and suburban communities are facing pressures to increase the number of playfields, including those for football, multi-purpose, rugby, and soccer, to meet growing demands for team sports. Washington is facing the same pressures, and given that the population is both increasingly active and growing, meeting needs for active recreational fields in Washington's urban environment is becoming increasingly challenging.

Locating new fields is both difficult and expensive in Washington because of the limited amount of available land. Because of the nature of organized competitive play, it may not be as important to have competition-quality athletic fields located within close proximity of people's homes as people are likely to travel to another part of the city to play. It may be more important to ensure that the District maximizes the capacity of the existing fields to accommodate new demands.

The quality of our playfields can mitigate the lack of quantity. The condition of a recreation field has a direct relationship to the usability or performance of the field for active recreation purposes. Field condition is influenced by many variables such as, but not limited to, weather, topography, type of use, frequency of use, budget, maintenance standards, and programs. The impact of field conditions can extend beyond capacity; some schools and/or jurisdictions face legal questions and liability issues associated with poorly designed, constructed, or maintained fields.

Maintenance for athletic fields has been identified as a critical challenge for NPS, DPR, and DCPS in Washington. Maintenance is constrained due to a variety of reasons, including but not limited to, increasing user demand, insufficient supply of field facilities and field types, a growth in sport leagues, tournament play, over-use of facilities, limited funding, lack of expertise, and coordination. Over time, deferred maintenance can accelerate field deterioration or even lead to unsafe playing conditions .

Both DPR and NPS experience high demand for recreational field permits in Washington and in most instances, capacity for permits is reached soon after the permitting season opens. High demand is driven by the large number of league teams that compete for space and the limited number of suitable playing fields and available hours. Multiple separate and uncoordinated recreation field permitting processes exist (DPR and the various NPS park units within Washington) that have their own application process, season, requirements, and fees.

Opportunities

DPR, NPS, and DCPS can cooperatively implement a comprehensive strategy to increase the capacity of existing playfields in Washington. This strategy can include facility and maintenance improvements to increase field conditions and quality, and simplifying the permitting process so that individuals, teams, and leagues have an easier time accessing existing playfields.

Currently, DPR, NPS, and DCPS have methodologies in place to prioritize fields for improvements following a condition evaluation. Field evaluations and surveys conducted on a regular basis could help guide infrastructure investments to areas that are underserved and/or experiencing declining conditions in facilities. A more detailed condition analysis could be a factor for identifying target areas for improvement and increasing capacity. Improving field conditions or installing features that allow fields to be used more often could help alleviate current demand, such as by converting to synthetic turf or installing lights. Condition assessments and inspections can be conducted regularly to ensure field conditions are adequate and safe and that any issues are addressed within a reasonable timeframe to ensure fields can be used to their full capacity.

More progressive and sustainable maintenance practices can be pursued if resources are available and after basic maintenance requirements have been met. Currently, field maintenance standards either do not exist (DPR) or if they do exist, are only modestly followed (NPS) due to limited funding and/or lack of expertise. In addition, the demand for playing time routinely takes priority over field maintenance, contributing to deferred maintenance and poor playing conditions. Closing fields to give them time to regenerate may reduce short-term capacity, but can provide significant long-term benefits through improved playing conditions. Ongoing fiscal restraints exacerbate the underfunding of field maintenance programs in Washington, lowering turf quality and field capacity. Dedicated funding for field maintenance by the public agencies, as well as new opportunities for public-private partnerships to provide high-quality fields can be explored.

As part of its mission to conserve natural and historic areas, NPS management policies restrict certain improvements to playfields, such as artificial turf or artificial lighting. As such, District playfields are better suited for physical improvements that can accommodate formal league play.

Although land availability is tight in Washington, creating consolidated recreation facilities that include multiple fields and other new recreational amenities in those few places where sport complexes can be accommodated is another strategy. This can alleviate the specific shortage of fields in the city and the existing pressures on existing fields.

Improving access to fields by permit process coordination and improvements can help in increasing the capacity of Washington's fields. While underlying regulations and rules need to be retained based on a field's jurisdiction (NPS or DPR), more seamless and coordinated permitting could result in a more user-friendly process.

MAINTENANCE OF PLAYFIELDS

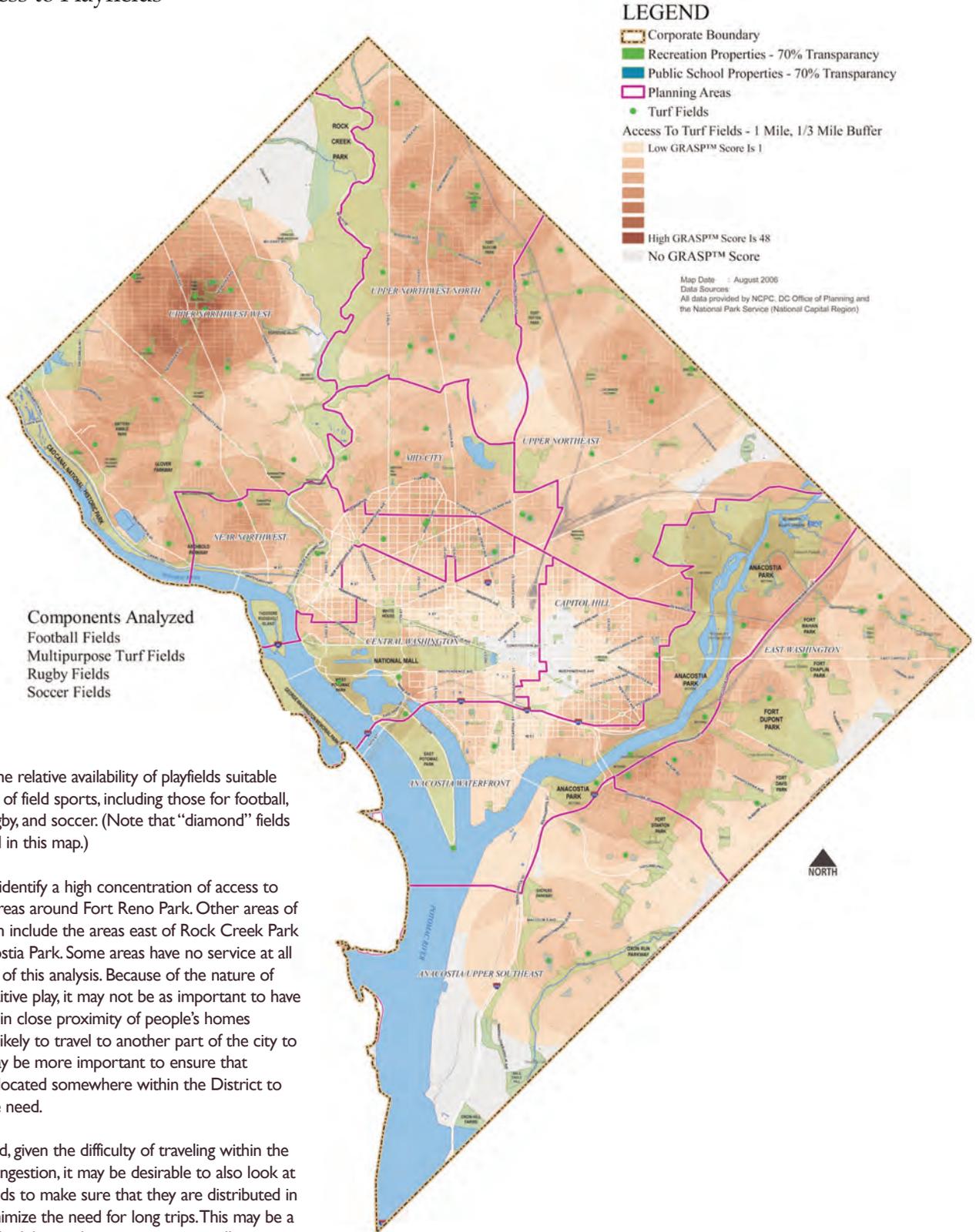
Ongoing fiscal restraints result in challenges to playfield maintenance programs, lowering turf quality and field capacity. Currently, neither NPS nor DPR have the ability to dedicate significant specific funds for maintenance to athletic fields. As user demand has increased, maintenance has not kept pace.

On some DPR fields, many users (permit holders) assist with providing field maintenance activities so that fields are ready for play.

At a larger scale, the DC Sports & Entertainment Commission Board of Directors has approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DC Public Schools (DCPS) to manage the \$21.5 million renovation of several athletic fields and associated facilities on DCPS facilities. The fields selected by DCPS to be renovated include: Dunbar Senior High, Roosevelt Senior High, McKinley Technology High School, Wilson Senior High, and Coolidge Senior High. Additional fields may be added to the list as funding becomes available. All facilities will receive the highest quality synthetic field surfaces used at many college and professional stadiums, as well as other upgrades to bleachers, press boxes, track and field race courses, and other amenities where possible.

Certain projects funded by DPR can build in costs associated with maintenance if it is related to a warranty; however, this approach is project-specific and maintenance needs are district-wide. DPR uses the capital improvement process to address field renovations on a yearly basis but only a certain amount of fields can be funded each year. Likewise, the NPS does not have a specific fund for field maintenance and volunteers play a less active role in field maintenance.

Access to Playfields



Components Analyzed
 Football Fields
 Multipurpose Turf Fields
 Rugby Fields
 Soccer Fields

The map shows the relative availability of playfields suitable for organized play of field sports, including those for football, multi-purpose, rugby, and soccer. (Note that “diamond” fields were not included in this map.)

The darker areas identify a high concentration of access to playfields in that areas around Fort Reno Park. Other areas of high concentration include the areas east of Rock Creek Park and around Anacostia Park. Some areas have no service at all under the criteria of this analysis. Because of the nature of organized competitive play, it may not be as important to have fields located within close proximity of people’s homes because they are likely to travel to another part of the city to play anyway. It may be more important to ensure that enough fields are located somewhere within the District to accommodate the need.

On the other hand, given the difficulty of traveling within the District due to congestion, it may be desirable to also look at the location of fields to make sure that they are distributed in such a way to minimize the need for long trips. This may be a combination of scheduling and programming, as well as providing facilities. Placing fields near transit stations whenever possible would be another option.

PERMITTING PLAYFIELDS—LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES

Both DPR and NPS experience a high demand for recreational field permits and in most instances capacity for permits is reached soon after the permitting season opens. This high demand is driven by the large number of league teams that compete for space and the limited number of suitable playfields and available hours.

Improving access to fields by permit process improvements could result in increased efficiencies and capacity. While underlying regulations and rules need to be retained based on a field's jurisdiction (NPS or DPR), a more seamless and coordinated permitting process could result in a more user-friendly process. To develop recommendations on improving the permitting process for playfields within Washington, CapitalSpace analyzed the processes of other jurisdictions in the region, including the City of Alexandria and the counties of Fairfax, Arlington, and Montgomery. Information analyzed included trends, responsibility and organization, and revenue. Key points learned from this analysis are summarized below:

- ◆ Technologies like synthetic turf are helping communities meet increased demand and can increase the capacity level for a number of different active recreation fields and facilities. Furthermore, maintenance programs can be structured to further streamline maintenance and provide more play time.
- ◆ Permit fees are not typically linked to specific field improvements, but instead, are directed to a general fund that is used for multiple purposes.
- ◆ Fee structures vary and are tailored to each jurisdiction; however, based on the communities studied, fees are higher (and significantly in some cases) than those fees charged by either DPR or NPS.
- ◆ Fees increase substantially for non-residents and for use of synthetic turf fields.
- ◆ Multiple ways to apply for permits help expedite and simplify the permitting process.
- ◆ Enforcement is a common issue that is being addressed in multiple ways based on available resources such as contracting with local police, hired field monitors, or through a dedicated unit within a parks department.

Recommendations

Improving Playfields

The uneven distribution of playing fields, current field conditions, and challenges faced by both the NPS and DPR in permitting and field maintenance are significant issues addressed by the following recommendations. A variety of recommendations to meet these challenges are below.

Maintain or Expand Current Recreation Field Capacity

- ◆ Thoroughly evaluate the impact of any proposed change to (including reduction of) any recreation field, and ensure facilities are provided and appropriately located consistent with the neighborhood context and city-wide demand.

Increasing Capacity

- ◆ Develop a coordinated field assessment and evaluation program for NPS, DCPS, and DPR so that public investments are guided to those fields in the poorest condition and to areas of Washington experiencing the highest needs.
- ◆ Develop a field use report inclusive of DPR, DCPS, and NPS fields for improving capacity through access, scheduling, and improving allocation of fields.
- ◆ Develop a coordinated field improvement plan and capital program for NPS, DCPS, and DPR fields that uses a collaboratively developed methodology for assessing field conditions based on where the greatest needs for improvements are located.
- ◆ Develop multi-use sports complexes that can accommodate a range of sports uses, but also include new athletic fields.
- ◆ Convert selected fields to synthetic surfaces to achieve goals of increased capacity, improved durability, and enhanced safety where environmental impacts can be mitigated.
- ◆ Explore opportunities to add lighting to DPR and DCPS fields to expand the time that they can be used.
- ◆ Pursue opportunities for private sector recreation providers to help agencies meet active recreation needs through new facilities and programs.
- ◆ Establish a mechanism to regularly coordinate athletic field programming, capital improvements, and permitting between federal and local agencies.



New residential developments near playfields could be a resource for ongoing maintenance and improvements.

Improve Maintenance

- ◆ Develop field maintenance standards that maximize opportunities to integrate sustainable practices.
- ◆ Revise sports field availability schedules to accommodate:
 - Full maintenance program requirements (pre and post- season maintenance).
 - Required in-season recuperative down time (closing fields/field rotation).
 - Playing time caps, practice time caps and team/league caps.
 - Free-play in certain locations.
- ◆ Set up a dedicated funding stream for field maintenance to ensure that fields are ready for play and that conditions do not further deteriorate.
- ◆ Link developer contributions to field upgrades and/or long-term maintenance of fields within proximity of the subject development.
- ◆ Explore opportunities for agencies with jurisdiction to jointly fund field improvements and maintenance.
- ◆ Develop an adopt-a-field program to help attract private funding sources for field improvements.

Simplify the Permitting Process

- ◆ Develop a one-stop, on-line permit application system that integrates NPS, DPR, and DCPS properties.
- ◆ Develop allocation policies to ensure accessibility to fields by managing the increasing demand for field time and reducing the monopolization of fields by a few user groups.
- ◆ Align permitting authority with park (and maintenance) jurisdiction to simplify the process, give greater control for permitting to the jurisdictional agency, and ensure that permit costs are directed to the jurisdiction responsible for maintenance.
- ◆ Increase the permit fees to partially recover impact costs and align with permit fees levied by neighboring jurisdictions.
- ◆ Develop a coordinated permit enforcement strategy (urban rangers, volunteers, etc.).
- ◆ Provide consistent signage at all fields to indicate which agency manages the field, what the regulations are, and whom to contact for more information.

OBJECTIVES

Center City parks are appropriately maintained, enhanced, preserved, and programmed in a manner that values their role as places of national, cultural, and historical significance, and recognizes their recreational and environmental contributions to the health and well-being of downtown neighborhoods.

The parks are supported by an engaged park constituency that includes strong partnerships between District and federal managing agencies and individuals, businesses, and organizations.



McPherson Square

Enhancing Center City Parks

5

Big Idea in Action

In the future, residents, workers, and visitors of Washington's dense Center City will enjoy a variety of vibrant parks and open space.

Residents and workers will embrace Center City parks and open space near their homes and offices as places to have a cup of coffee with their neighbors or coworkers, read a book, play with their kids, surf the Web, buy fresh bread at a farmers market, or just relax in the green grass to take in the fresh air and sunshine.

Visitors will delight in learning about our collective American experience through cultural markers and commemorative pieces as they explore the historic squares and energetic urban avenues in the Center City.

Everyone will come together in these spaces to listen to a free concert by a local band or rally for a national cause.

To achieve this future, the District and federal governments, along with the growing business and neighborhood communities, will join forces to meet the expanding demands for recreational opportunities in the Center City and improve the condition of its existing parks and open space.

The L'Enfant Plan's most important squares, circles, and triangles will be restored and enhanced, filled with high-quality and well-maintained trees, grass, flowers, monuments, and fountains, as well as activities that support people's high quality of life within an urban environment. Their uniqueness and national significance will be recognized as prime assets to the Center City's quality of life and experiences.

Some Center City parks will build upon the tradition of Dupont Circle, and become the place to see and be seen in their neighborhoods, providing a community hub and a sense of identity. In places where minimal park space has existed, new approaches for recreation will be taken to use street rights-of-ways, existing yards at public properties, or other public assets. In addition, sidewalks and streets surrounding parks, as well as street corridors that connect the parks, will be filled with trees, lighting, benches, and outdoor cafes; events and other recreational activities in these spaces will contribute to enjoying life outdoors within the Center City.



Dupont Circle has become the central gathering space of its namesake neighborhood and contributes to its economic vitality today.

Washington's circles and squares were designed by L'Enfant to provide visual and physical reference points in the urban landscape and serve as centers of the proposed neighborhoods he hoped would develop throughout the planned city.

It wasn't until after the Civil War, however, that grassy parks were located within most of these formal open spaces.



Selected History of Center City Parks

Most of the parks and open space within the Center City were first identified within the historic plan of Washington, designed by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791. At the center of the plan are the ceremonial parks and greenswards now known generally as the National Mall, President's Park (where the White House is located), and the U.S. Capitol Grounds. Surrounding these parks, the plan established a regular grid of streets designated numerically and alphabetically within four city quadrants, with the U.S. Capitol occupying the centerpoint. Diagonal avenues, named after states, were then superimposed on this grid. The large squares and circles and the smaller triangles that we have today in the Center City were established in planned open spaces where the gridded streets and diagonal avenues intersect.

While the L'Enfant Plan had grand intentions for Washington's parks and open spaces, it took decades before many of them were more than dirt passageways due to fiscal challenges. Apart from the National Mall, President's Park (including what is now Lafayette Square), and the U.S. Capitol Grounds, Franklin Park (previously know as Fountain Square) was the only park space maintained consistently by the federal government in the early nineteenth century. Significant completion of the L'Enfant Plan did not occur until after the Civil War, when Washington experienced significant population growth, and the U.S. Congress directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (the Corps) Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G) to embark on a systematic construction of the roads and open spaces envisioned within the plan. In 1874, Congress created a new municipal government headed by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia which continued work with the Corps on infrastructure improvements, including parks.

During the late nineteenth century, the OPB&G constructed several important center city parks within the open spaces identified in the L'Enfant Plan, including McPherson, Farragut, and Mount Vernon Squares, as well as Scott, Thomas and Dupont Circles. These were often designed as formal gardens surrounded by carriageways, and provided more passive recreation opportunities for the homes



Thomas Circle circa 1888

and residential buildings encircling the spaces during this time. The OPB&G produced congressional reports that reflected the popular belief that park development could lead to societal reform, contribute to the health and well-being of residents, and provide much-needed employment in the war-ravaged capital.

During the early part of the nineteenth century, Washington experienced explosive growth, and the neighborhood context surrounding many Center City parks changed from residential to commercial. As commerce grew within the Center City, many of the parks were reconfigured to accommodate greater traffic and new traffic patterns, and some of the smallest have been removed or paved over as concrete traffic islands. In addition, the design of the parks themselves have evolved over time to reflect current aesthetic ideals, accommodate new memorials, improve security, or ease maintenance in response to limited budgets. Franklin Park, for example, was redesigned several times and went from a curvilinear, naturalistic design aesthetic in 1888 to a more symmetrical park design of the 1930s, which is relatively retained to this day.

Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, new parks were created within many of the Center City's urban renewal areas. Sometimes these projects were characterized by large-scale redevelopment with significant park and open space resources accessible to the public, other times, projects involved open space and recreational amenities available only to residents. Some original open spaces identified in the L'Enfant Plan were significantly altered or disappeared altogether during this period. It was also during this time that new designs in commercial buildings and federal office spaces began to provide publicly accessible plazas and courtyards as open-space amenities.

Today, there is new interest in restoring or reclaiming the Center City's historic squares, streets, and original rights-of-ways that have been disrupted or closed, and protecting the visual openness and functional qualities of the L'Enfant Plan. In addition, there is a strong commitment to reinforce the Center City's, and Washington's, relationship to the Potomac and Anacostia waterfronts through new developments. These include improved access to the waterfronts, as well as new parks and active open space along the waterfront. As the cost of land continues to increase in the Center City because of residential and business appeal, there is a new push to use public properties and the air-rights above depressed highways and rail lines for new office, residential, hotel, and cultural development, and to reclaim land for parks and multi-purpose open spaces.



Lafayette Park



Issues related to homelessness are challenges that are not park specific and require a coordinated management approach among the District, federal agencies, and other partners.

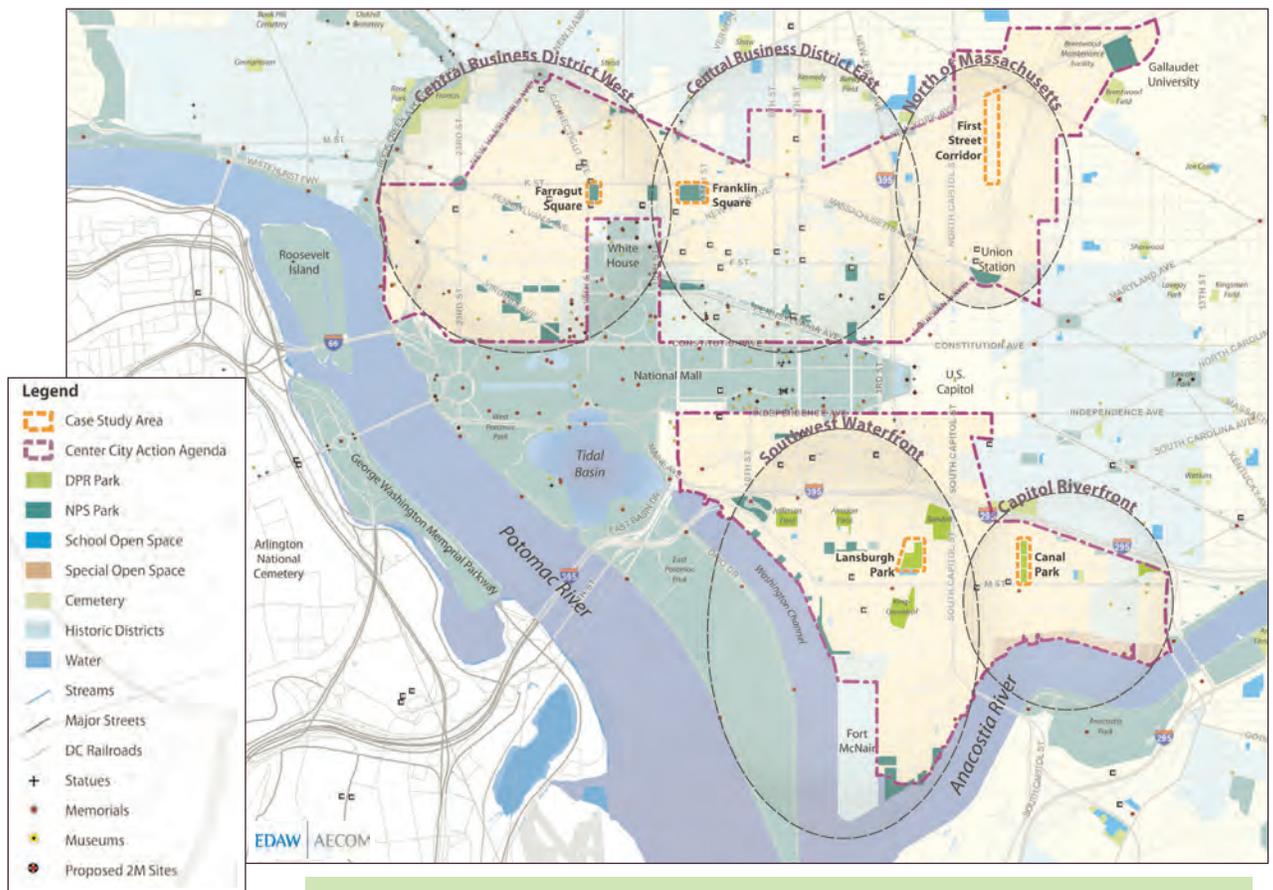
The Center City, as defined for CapitalSpace, is the dense urban area surrounding the National Mall and U.S. Capitol. Neighborhoods within the Center City have their own distinct character, issues, and opportunities related to parks and open space. Case study analyses were completed for Farragut and Franklin Squares, Washington Canal Park, and the NoMA First Street NE corridor to better understand issues and opportunities within these subregions.

Challenges

The majority of Center City parks are relatively small. The deficiency of medium and large sized parks puts pressure on the National Mall, East and West Potomac parks, school properties, and areas outside Center City to provide fields and other active recreational facilities. Additional challenges for Center City's urban parks are listed below.

- ◆ There is a lack of diversity in the type of parks needed to serve emerging residential areas.
- ◆ Resources are insufficient to enhance and maintain our parks at the desired level.
- ◆ The high cost of land makes it difficult to add new parks.
- ◆ There is not a cohesive approach to park design, security (including issues such as homelessness and drug dealing), partnerships, and programming.
- ◆ Existing federal and District laws, regulations, and policies do not provide flexibility in programming parks in a way that could keep them more active and secure.

The West and East Central Business Districts are relatively built-out areas of the Center City. Open space is primarily found within the historic circles, squares, and triangles within this area, as well as the wide avenues that connect many of these places. Given that most of these spaces contain commemorative features and historic landscapes, improvements to their physical character and how they are used in terms of events and concessions must consider how the historical and cultural resources will be impacted.



The Southwest Waterfront is primarily built-out with mixed-residential types and contain a significant amount of active play fields and recreation centers when compared to the rest of the Center City. However, with I-395 on the north and South Capitol Street to the east acting as major barriers, the Southwest Waterfront remains isolated from the rest of the Center City subregions and the other parks and recreational amenities found there.

NoMA and the Capitol Riverfront are undergoing transformations from low-density, primarily industrial uses, to dense, mixed-use communities. However, these areas lack existing parks to accommodate the demand for recreational space that new residents and workers are bringing.

Opportunities

Throughout the Center City, opportunities exist to improve the park system as a whole:

- ◆ Shape a greater understanding of the national significance of the historical and cultural resources of the Center City parks, grand avenues and streets, and the statues and monuments within them.
- ◆ Increase the recreational capacity of existing parks and open space through targeted capital improvements and maintenance beyond “clean and safe.”
- ◆ Build upon the existing structure of partnerships to address specific needs and coordinate park stewardship to improve efficiencies in management, programming, and maintenance.

Within the West and East Central Business districts, efforts have been made to enliven many of the historic park spaces through physical improvements, such as new lighting, benches, and seasonal plantings, as well as free concerts and other events. Continued physical improvements and increased programming at these parks will enable them to better meet the recreational needs that residents, workers, and visitors in these areas desire. But it is not just the park spaces themselves that can meet these needs; the streets and sidewalks that surround the parks could support park-related events and activities, as well as associated public art, landscaping, sidewalk concessionaires, outdoor seating, signage, and special paving.

The Southwest Waterfront area is seeing significant redevelopment—of particular note are the mixed-use developments at the former Waterside Mall and along the Washington Channel—which will add high-quality open space in the form of retail streets, and new parks and plazas along the waterfront. An improved green streetscape throughout the subregion can connect these new spaces with the existing active recreation fields in the community, creating a network of parks and open space within the Southwest Waterfront area that meets a variety of its recreational needs. Further enhancement of the connections between the Southwest Waterfront and the other subregions will improve the availability of a variety of parks and recreational activities for all residents, visitors, and workers within the Center City.

Within the NoMA and Capitol Riverfront subregions, local workers, residents, developers, and business improvement districts have been working with the District to explore alternative ways to create new parkland to serve these area’s new residents and workers. In NoMA, the effort is focused on creating a linear network of parks and open space along First and K streets, and on land associated with the Metropolitan Branch Trail. In the Capitol Riverfront, the community is working with the District to create a signature community park on property previously used for other municipal purposes. As these areas grow, opportunities for new public parks at other available public property or within private developments, such as the waterfront park at The Yards, will be pursued.

Learning from Center City Parks

Much can be learned about meeting our challenges and building on our opportunities by examining what is already occurring at several Center City parks.

FARRAGUT SQUARE AND FRANKLIN PARK



Farragut Square Park

Farragut Square and Franklin Park, in northwest D.C., are under NPS jurisdiction and provide 1.5 and 5 acres of historic parkland, respectively. Used during the day by commuters and office workers and with the potential to serve the growing downtown residential base on weekends, both parks suffer from a perception that they are unsafe due to a large number of homeless persons that are often present.

Landscaping and design changes have occurred in each park over the years. The Downtown DC and the Golden Triangle Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are active partners in maintenance and programming in the parks, as well as addressing issues related to homelessness and safety.

WASHINGTON CANAL PARK

Washington Canal Park is a 1.8 acre public park planned by the District to be located in the center of an emerging high density, mixed-use development district along M Street, SE. Identified as an area underserved in park and recreational resources, the park repurposes public property to create a new amenity in a growing community, offering a place for active and passive recreation, a setting for public art, unique water and sustainable elements, and other programmed uses.

NoMA FIRST STREET, NE LINEAR PARK

The First Street, NE, network of open space is one component of a park and open-space strategy for the emerging NoMA area. The open spaces, most of which are yet to be constructed, will be created in the existing street right-of-way and along the Metropolitan Branch Trail in an area that lacks park and open-space amenities.

The NoMA BID projects significant development levels over the next five years which could bring over 15,000 new residents to the NoMA community, increasing the demand for park and recreational resources. A 33-foot setback on each side of First Street will provide a setting for the linear park, offering generous room for gathering places, seating, landscaping, and other design elements to complement the new mixed-use neighborhood.



Rendering of NoMA First Street

LESSONS LEARNED

- ◆ Center City parks are truly urban and unique from other parks in Washington's surrounding neighborhoods. The unique urban experiences they offer, both in use and character, should be celebrated. Many should not be made to conform with idealized suburban park landscapes and uses.
- ◆ Due to their continuity and mission, the BIDs in the Center City represent strong partnership opportunities to move from a "clean and safe" standard of the parks to something higher that reflects the quality of the new surrounding development. Specific partnerships, however, need to be tailored to best suit the requirements and needs of the individual BIDs and park agencies.
- ◆ A park's period of historical significance and new maintenance requirements are primary factors when considering new design elements.
- ◆ Programming, vending, partnership agreements, and other support services can add vitality to a park. At NPS managed parks, some of these can be achieved through existing NPS legislation, policies, and regulations; however, desired modern urban uses of these spaces often conflict with NPS' service-wide management and preservation methods for its traditional parks.
- ◆ The District demonstrated its willingness to re-purpose city land for parks.
- ◆ Local community and business groups are willing to raise funds for design, construction, maintenance, and programming if assured some level of control.
- ◆ Coordinated development and creative use of area-wide public space can bring about results on a large scale not possible on a site-by-site basis.
- ◆ Development guidelines for public space maintained by adjacent property owners is one strategy to promote a high-quality environment and community identity.
- ◆ Sustainable design practices that balance paving and landscaped areas can promote walkability and define community image

Recommendations

Enhancing Center City Parks

Recommendations have been developed to address issues for Center City parks and open spaces. Implementation of any recommendation would need to consider park-specific content, including uniqueness and historical and cultural qualities.

Meeting Demands for Parks and Open Space

Increase capacity of existing parks by improving quality, diversity in amenities, programming, and access to green spaces.

- ◆ Identify and target capital improvements to repair and replace infrastructure and amenities, including quality landscaping, that will allow increased park usage.
- ◆ Explore the implementation and implication of a “no net loss of green space” approach for outdoor active recreational amenities.
- ◆ Identify opportunities to repurpose publicly owned spaces for park use.
- ◆ Consider the capacity of reservations to function as neighborhood amenities when designing memorial and monument installations.
- ◆ Where appropriate and to the maximum extent possible, re-establish public access to outdoor public spaces that have been closed for safety and security reasons, including schools and federal facilities.
- ◆ Enhance connections between parks with improved green streetscapes that include pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- ◆ Create and maintain an online one-stop-shop for information on recreational resources.

Partnerships and Resources

Build and strengthen community support through partnerships with businesses, residents, and visitors.

- ◆ While maintaining tailored approaches within partnerships to address specific needs, coordinate park stewardship to improve efficiencies in management, programming, and maintenance.
- ◆ Maintain and build on existing arrangements with BIDs and other groups to supplement maintenance and programming.
- ◆ The District and federal agencies should develop management, maintenance, and programming guidelines for required publicly accessible open space on private sites.
- ◆ The District should identify one responsible agency or office to manage District agreements with developers or other responsible parties.

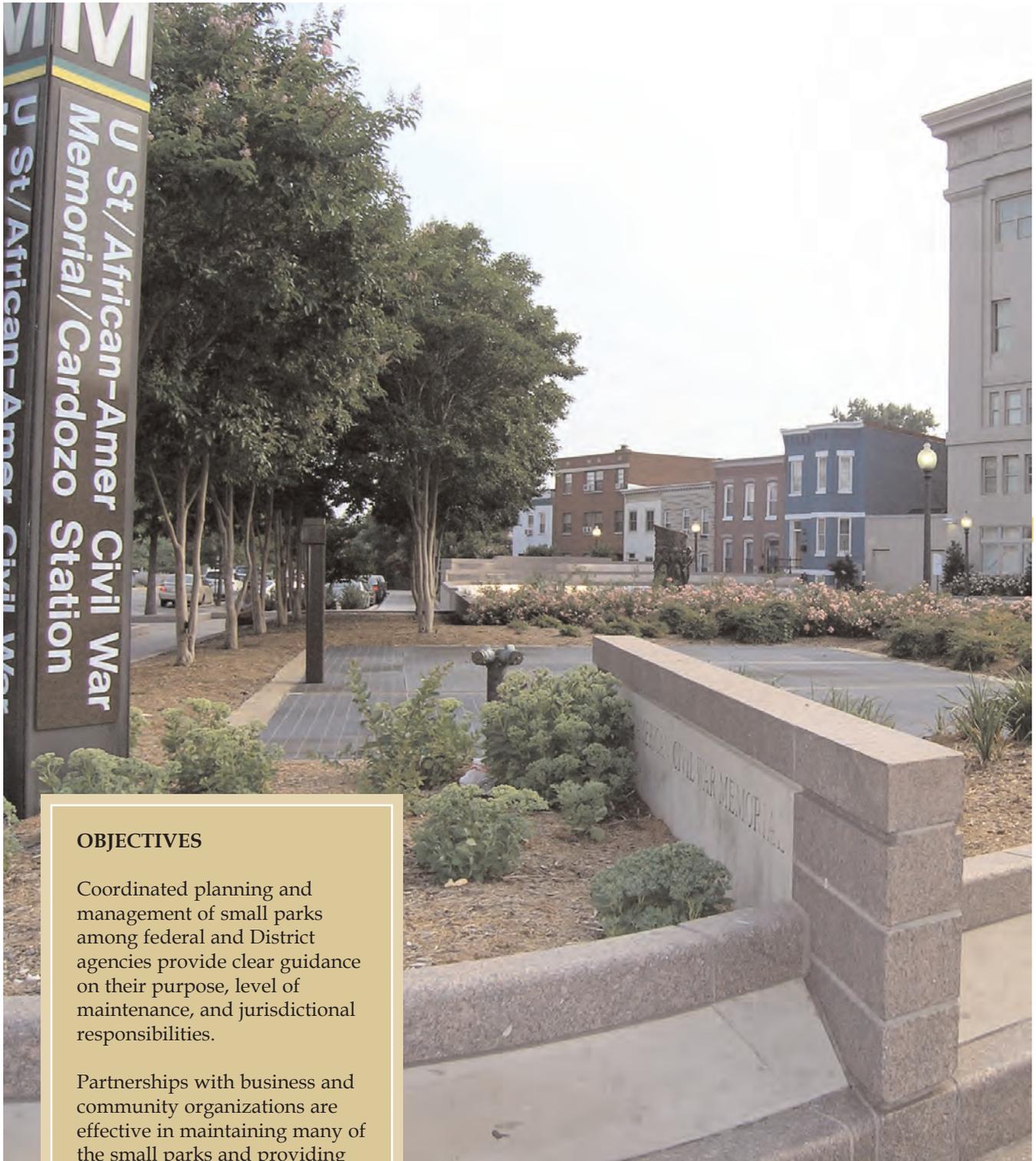


This section of Indiana Avenue across from the memorial plaza of the Grand Army of the Republic is an example of how Center City sidewalks can be transformed into a parklike greenway.

Placemaking and Programming

Create unique places for neighborhoods, strengthen the overall identity of parks and open space, and identify strategies to expand programs and amenity options.

- ◆ Identify specific parks for tailored design and programming efforts to encourage public use and celebrate the uniqueness of the neighborhood.
- ◆ Incorporate sustainable design features, low-impact development, and other greening techniques into new and existing parks and park improvements.
- ◆ Establish design guidelines that reinforce existing regulations promoting visual openness and continuity in the corridors between park spaces.
- ◆ Research, identify, and reinforce historical design elements as defining characteristics of Center City parks, including the use of elements like rounded curbs, fences, and benches that have been used historically in Center City parks. Create a palette of elements that are a basis on which to build additional amenities.
- ◆ Use elements such as public art, landscaping, sidewalk concessionaires, outdoor seating, street furniture, and special paving as a way to connect events and activities in parks to adjacent spaces and the surrounding neighborhood.
- ◆ Research, define historical significance, and build an understanding and appreciation of the park and neighborhood history through increased signage, promotions, programming, and other opportunities.
- ◆ Pursue changes to laws, regulations, and policies for both District and NPS parks within the Center City to allow greater flexibility in programming and appropriate concessions that would encourage additional public use within the parks and on adjacent rights-of-way.



OBJECTIVES

Coordinated planning and management of small parks among federal and District agencies provide clear guidance on their purpose, level of maintenance, and jurisdictional responsibilities.

Partnerships with business and community organizations are effective in maintaining many of the small parks and providing appropriate programming to address national and local cultural and recreation needs.

African-American Civil War Memorial at U Street and Vermont Avenue, NW.

Transforming Small Parks

Big Idea in Action

In the future, Washington neighborhoods will be resplendent with lushly landscaped circles, triangles, and squares. These small parks are easily visualized as accessible destinations for all residents and visitors and provide important community open space for a variety of activities. Individually, they serve as a lovely place to eat lunch outdoors, sit and chat with a neighbor, play in a tot lot, or read a good book. Collectively, they green the cityscape and beautify the public realm.

Washington's abundant small parks present an enormous untapped resource. The existing spatial distribution of small parks in Washington ensures that virtually every neighborhood in Washington can have access to green open space. By transforming underutilized small parks into successful public spaces, more residents will have access to recreation and open space. Visitors and residents alike will be drawn to the small parks with their historic features, artwork, and cultural activities.

Civic groups take pride in helping to maintain the small parks in their neighborhoods, often providing additional programming as appropriate. In many neighborhoods, including Capitol Hill, NoMA, Petworth, Mid-City, and Shaw, these small parks provide the much-needed open spaces that promote active living, walkability, community safety, and choices for an enriching urban lifestyle. They also offer an opportunity to more evenly disperse Washington's commemorative works beyond the monumental core.

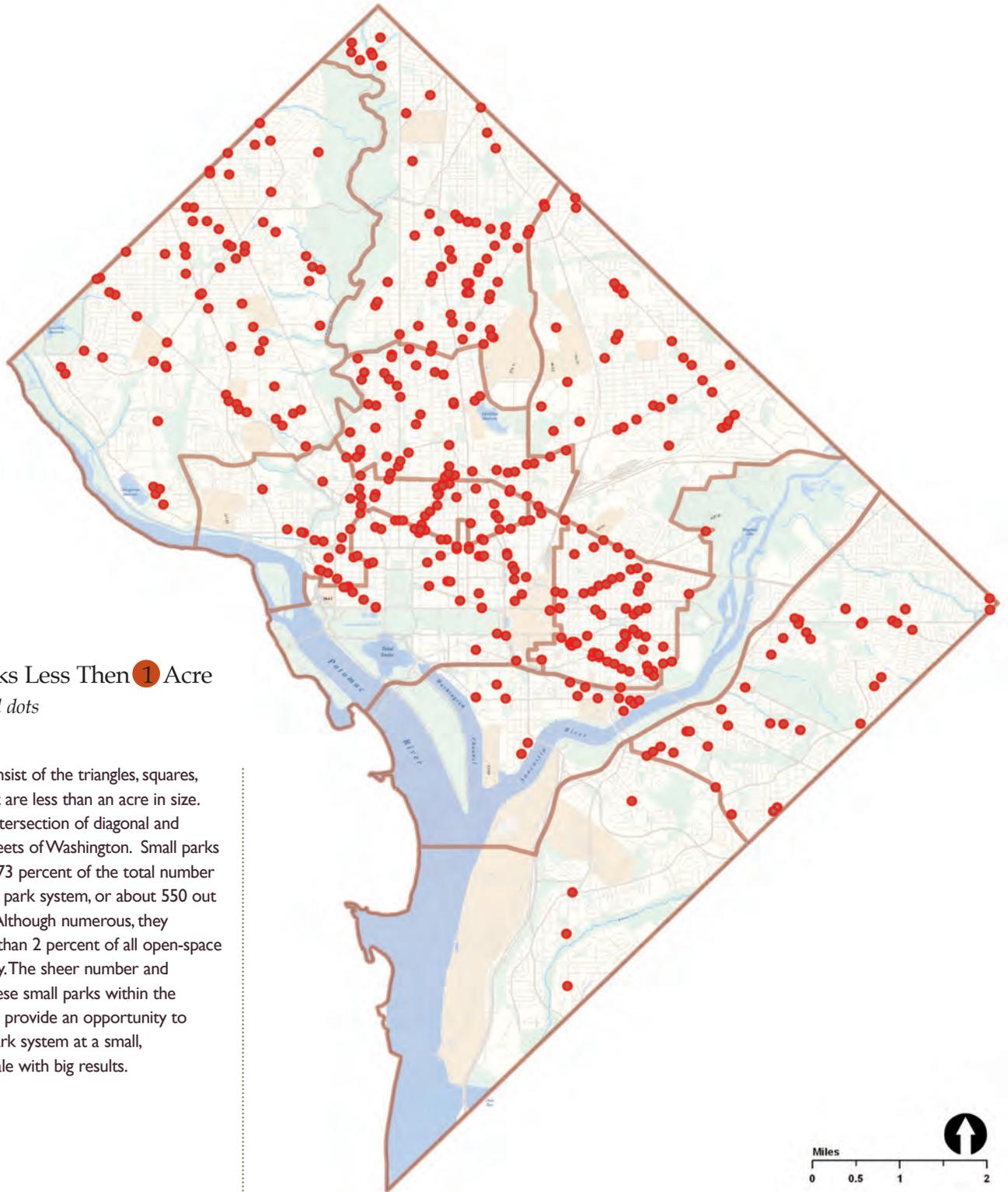
Each small park is individually important to the residents, workers, or visitors that are in the vicinity; however, collectively, Washington's extensive small park system forms a cohesive urban network of green spaces, big and small. This diverse network of park and open space distinguishes Washington as a "City of Parks," beautifies neighborhoods, and is the place where local civic life happens.



Virginia Avenue and M Street, SE

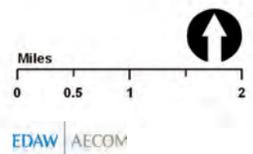


The sheer numbers and locations of these small parks within the neighborhoods provide an opportunity to improve the park system at a small, manageable scale with big results.



Small Parks Less Than 1 Acre
Shown as red dots

Small parks consist of the triangles, squares, and circles that are less than an acre in size. Often at the intersection of diagonal and orthogonal streets of Washington. Small parks make up over 73 percent of the total number of parks in our park system, or about 550 out of 750 parks. Although numerous, they represent less than 2 percent of all open-space areas in the city. The sheer number and locations of these small parks within the neighborhoods provide an opportunity to improve the park system at a small, manageable scale with big results.



History of Small Parks in Washington

Small parks are distinct features of the urban fabric of Washington and the result of multiple planning and improvement initiatives. Within the L'Enfant Plan, triangle parks are typically open spaces at the intersection of diagonal and orthogonal streets. When L'Enfant created the plan for the capital city in 1791, he envisioned "breathing rooms" in the centers of the residential areas to provide light and air to its inhabitants where the diagonal and orthogonal streets meet. It took almost another century, as the roadbeds, curbs, and utility lines were constructed, for these open spaces to be completed as park spaces.

In coordination with the Territorial Government in the 1870s, and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia in the 1890s, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G) of the Army Corps of Engineers improved the small triangular open spaces in the rights-of-way as simple lawns or flowerbeds, or as small parks with walkways, seating, fountains, statues, and ornamental iron-post-and-chain fencing; another era when significant improvements were made was during the 1930s, as part of the Works Progress Administration. Many of the small parks found south of Florida Avenue and north of the Anacostia and Potomac rivers were completed during this time. Their purpose was limited to street beautification rather than recreation.

Following the Civil War, urban congestion drove development outward from the center of Washington. Under the guidance of 1893 and 1898 highway plans, the extension of some of the major streets of the L'Enfant Plan to new residential subdivisions continued the tradition of creating small parks within the right-of-way. The small parks along 16th Street, Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Rhode Island Avenue, and Georgia Avenue in the communities north of Florida Avenue are examples of small parks built during this period.

In the mid-twentieth century, urban renewal and other government programs meant to revitalize neighborhoods developed additional small neighborhood parks as part of mixed-use developments. Many of these parks, however, are located within the city block, called squares, and usually provide active recreation amenities such as children's playgrounds and sports courts.

Today, there are approximately 550 small parks less than one acre distributed throughout Washington that are functioning as places for national monuments, street medians, traffic circles, and pocket parks in the neighborhoods.



Triangle Park on Florida Avenue and R Street, NW

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Challenges

Small parks exist in the shadow of the larger, more renowned parks of Washington. Residents and out-of-towners alike are familiar with Rock Creek Park, Potomac Park, and of course, the National Mall. Many small parks, on the other hand, are virtually invisible to everyone except for their immediate neighbors. Over the years, the squares, circles, and triangles have been used for private storage, Civil War camp sites, trash dumps, formal marketplaces, and squatter shack sites. To this day, the confusion over their purpose makes them prone to being ignored for funding, vandalized, encroached upon by private uses, or reconfigured for traffic improvements. As a result, these small parks have been underutilized as open space resources for the community.

Small parks are hard to administer because of their diminutive size and their sheer numbers. Their management and maintenance are split between one federal agency and two District agencies.



The multitude of small parks makes maintenance difficult.



Some park spaces are inaccessible, under-utilized, or both.



Ownership and ambiguity issues can lead to commercial encroachment on park space.

Opportunities

While the diminutive size of the small parks limits the amount and type of programming and facilities that can be located there, these parks can serve as small neighborhood oases. They can become the fabric that defines the community's identity. The goal is to create a distinct role for the city's small parks that contributes to local neighborhood identity and character, while providing a safe and easily accessible resource for neighborhood recreation. Activating them as vibrant community spaces can help make neighborhoods safer, encourage neighbor interaction, and engage the community in beautifying their surroundings.

In addition to serving as important neighborhood open spaces, the citywide system of small parks plays a vital role to the entire city. Washington's bountiful small parks are a defining feature of the cityscape. Collectively, the small parks can help unify and expand the existing parks and open space network. These green spaces can help cool summer air temperature, reduce air pollution, and reduce stormwater runoff. Their frequency within Washington's streetscape softens the hard urban streetscape and weaves open space throughout our residential and commercial districts.



These small parks are located at the same street intersection, but show differences in design, maintenance level, and programming because they are managed by different agencies.

The physical improvement graphic below identifies opportunities to connect and define small park clusters using themes of connectivity, sustainability, and placemaking, which focused on coordinated physical improvements to visually unify the parks and create a distinct identity at the neighborhood or corridor level. The cluster concept is appropriate for small parks with well-defined geographic areas, corridors, or neighborhoods where revitalization activities are occurring, where small parks can be linked to provide multi-purpose amenities in a community with very limited open space, or where a cluster has two or more small parks that could be used for recreation, place-making activities, and other complementary uses to adjacent residential and/or commercial uses.

Managing small parks by geographic area can create stronger neighborhood identity.

A small park triangle, median, or circle has limited potential when considered on its own; however, when small parks are considered within a larger framework, their impact can be much larger. For example, a public art initiative that targeted small parks in commercial areas could help establish a distinctive neighborhood identity. Small parks could also be used to define and establish a gateway initiative to improve the appearance of major entrances to the city. Using geographic proximity, small park clusters can provide multi-purpose amenities in a community with very limited open space. This is particularly important given that Washington doesn't have many medium-sized parks. A cluster of two or more small parks can be used for recreation, place-making activities, and other complementary uses to adjacent residential and/or commercial uses.



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● SUSTAINABLE SEAMS

- NATIVE PLANTS
- BIO-RETENTION
- PERVIOUS PAVEMENT
- OPEN GRID PAVEMENT
- SHADE
- HIGH-ALBEDO MATERIALS
- FULL CUT-OFF LIGHTING FIXTURES
- SOLAR ENERGY PANELS
- RECYCLE/RENEWABLE MATERIALS
- RAIN GARDEN
- PLANTED MEDIAN

● PLACE MAKING SEAMS

- PLAYGROUND
- CAFE
- SITTING AREA
- DISPLAY GARDEN
- ENTRANCE
- PLAZA
- MARKET
- OUTDOOR AMPHITHEATER
- MEMORIAL
- SEASONAL FESTIVAL/EVENTS
- PUBLIC ART
- SIGNAGE INTERPRETATION

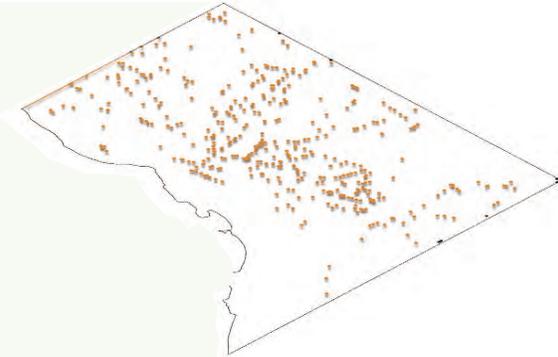
● CIRCULATION/CONNECTIVITY SEAMS

- BUS STATION
- BIKE RACKS
- SIDEWALK/TRAIL
- PEDESTRIAN CROSSWALK
- ADA RAMP

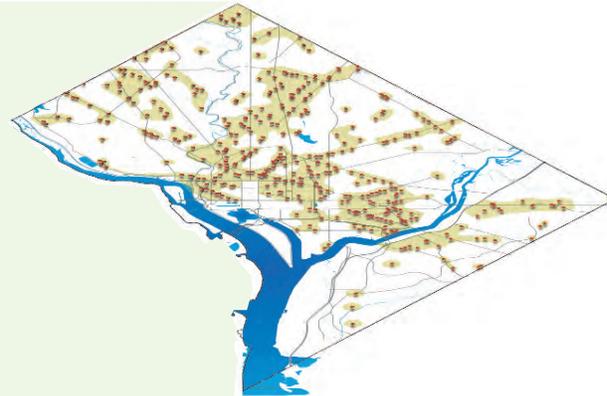
Moving Toward a Systematic Approach to Small Parks

While a cluster approach to improving and maintaining the small parks address needs at a neighborhood level, addressing system-wide challenges of managing small parks can have dramatic results. To appreciate this opportunity, it is helpful to step back and look at how small parks are distributed across the city. Small-scale improvements to all the small parks can have cumulative benefits to the whole park system, as illustrated below.

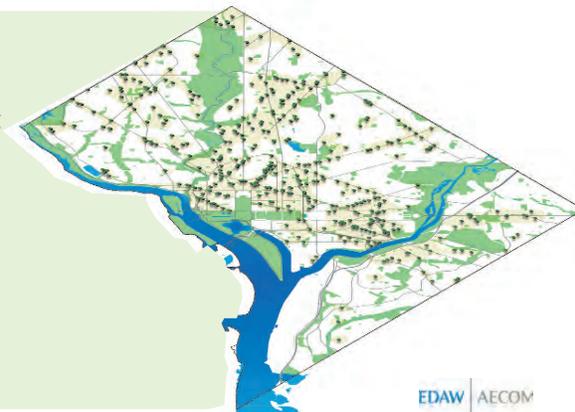
Initially, when considered in isolation, the city's small parks appear as small voids or left over spaces in a somewhat scattered pattern, similar to individual stars in the sky.



By grouping the parks into clusters or constellations, the parks appear more connected. The fragmentation and voids are replaced with the beginnings of a unified pocket park system.



When overlaid with the existing parks and open-space network, the impact of the small parks in the urban environment is realized. The clusters serve to unify and expand the existing parks and open-space network.



EDAW | AECOM

Recommendations

Transforming Small Parks



Lamont Park

Focus on System-wide Improvements for Small Parks

Small parks can provide a greater contribution toward the existing open space network than their size suggests, provided that they are considered together as a system and not in isolation from one another. Small parks can be coordinated as a network to reinforce placemaking, sustainability, and connectivity.

- ◆ Categorize small parks by geographic area, function, adjacent use, and/or size as a basis for determining the appropriate agency to manage them, their purpose and programming, and their local or national identity.
- ◆ Prioritize improvements of small park clusters in areas with limited access to parks and open space, and a growing population.
- ◆ Coordinate the programming, physical improvements, and management of a cluster of small parks to capitalize on the synergistic benefits of several parks with complementary functions such as a tot lot, rain garden, memorial, and seating area in the center of the neighborhood.
- ◆ Apply common themes such as sustainability, place-making, or connectivity to plan, enhance, and maintain the small parks as a system.

Develop a Coordinated Management Approach

Defining the role of small parks in the larger park system will help develop a coordinated approach to management among the various park and planning agencies, help the agencies manage them more efficiently, and promote system-wide investment of resources.

- ◆ Develop a shared database of small parks to inform coordination efforts between agencies and with the public, including data on ownership, size, location, function, level of use, historic or cultural value, commemorative elements, programs, and condition.
- ◆ Assess existing agency jurisdiction for certain small parks to ensure that each parcel is managed effectively to meet District and/or federal objectives and clarify responsibilities of the managing agencies.
- ◆ Provide an email address and one telephone number to a call center for service requests and inquiries of small parks regardless of jurisdictions. The call center staff will refer the public to the responsible agency that could best address their concerns.
- ◆ Incorporate local commemoration, linear or neighborhood gateways, public art, and way-finding as landmark elements.
- ◆ Provide informative and interpretive signage to identify the parks and any park and/or neighborhood history.

Simulations of Opportunities

To illustrate the application of potential physical improvements, three photo simulations were prepared for the small park located on the south side of Florida Avenue, at the intersection of Florida Avenue and R Street, NW. The park currently faces private encroachment challenges.



Existing small park

EDAW/ARCOM

Increase Capacity and Improve Livability

Providing appropriate programming and improvements, and ensuring the parks are clean and safe for daily use can enhance neighborhood livability since these parks are the most accessible to residents, workers, and local businesses. In some neighborhoods, small parks are the only available open space; thus, their usability contributes significantly to the quality of life.

- ◆ Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along all the streets adjacent to small parks to improve park access.
- ◆ Identify appropriate recreation opportunities based on park size, park function, access, safety considerations, and natural and cultural resource protection.
- ◆ Encourage social interaction among park users with various pedestrian elements.
- ◆ Establish a shared baseline “clean and safe” standard for small park maintenance that considers the various maintenance practices and resources of the agencies.

Employ Creative Resource Strategies

Leveraging related investments and uncovering untapped funding resources for small parks are vital to achieving the goal for the small parks.

- ◆ Employ the “City of Parks” branding as a means of fundraising for the larger system of small parks.
- ◆ Use themes such as sustainability, placemaking, or connectivity to tap partnerships and funding programs focused on these issues.
- ◆ Tailor funding for maintenance and enhancements to park usage.
- ◆ Coordinate current planning and capital improvement efforts across agencies that affect small parks in clusters or corridors to achieve the biggest impact.
- ◆ Seek out partners to provide improvements for small parks on an area- or District-wide basis.
- ◆ Explore unconventional transportation funding sources for improvements to small parks in challenging in-street locations.



Placemaking

EDAW/ARCOM



Connectivity: Urban Trail

EDAW/ARCOM



Sustainability: LID

EDAW/ARCOM



Watts Branch, Marvin Gaye Park

Moving the Plan Forward

Now that the planning process of CapitalSpace is complete, it is time to focus on moving the Six Big Ideas forward. As with any complex planning effort, the CapitalSpace planning process evolved and adapted over time to allow for the understanding of distinct but complementary missions among the key partners. The overarching goal is clear: parks and open spaces must be better managed and maintained within Washington.

There is now an increased awareness and appreciation of this goal by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), the National Park Service (NPS), and the District's Office of Planning (DCOP) and Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and other District agencies. A renewed commitment has been fostered toward a common vision whereby each partner can work both independently and collaboratively toward implementing the CapitalSpace actions.

Working Together

Ongoing communication and strengthened relationships between the partner agencies have been successful, valuable consequences of the CapitalSpace initiative. The partners have agreed to continue the established communication and working relationships to ensure parks and open spaces remain a primary component of a growing and sustainable city.

Analyses within CapitalSpace can be used to better understand community needs and inform decision-makers on ways to improve access to and the capacity of parks and open spaces. Individual partner agencies that undertake future planning initiatives and projects internally may use CapitalSpace to inform project outcomes.

CapitalSpace will actively guide policy decisions for updating the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: District Elements* and developing small area plans by DCOP, and NCPC will use CapitalSpace to inform policy updates within the *Comprehensive Plan: Federal Elements*, particularly the Open Space Element.

DCOP can use CapitalSpace as a guide to understand the types of community recreation amenities needed as it works with developers who are going through the Planned Unit Development or large tract review processes. Similarly, NCPC can use CapitalSpace to provide guidance in reviewing and evaluating federal and District project proposals. Information within CapitalSpace can be used by DCOP and NCPC on both District and Federal projects to encourage certain types of park and recreation public benefits to meet an increasingly diverse constituency. The NPS and DPR can use CapitalSpace to better coordinate and inform the development of park planning across Washington.

Working with Others

CapitalSpace recognizes and values the role that a diverse range of stakeholders have in realizing the CapitalSpace vision. Within Washington, a number of organizations actively promote and support efforts intended to benefit the city's network of parks and open spaces by providing advocacy, funding, sweat equity, and passion for the benefit of all Washington residents and visitors. These organizations have collaborated with federal and District agencies in

- ◆ Restoring and revitalizing major city parks, such as what the nonprofit Washington Parks and People is implementing at Marvin Gaye Park.
- ◆ Providing support for park maintenance, programming and financing of capital improvement projects, as multiple Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have done for many downtown parks.
- ◆ Planting trees and providing technical assistance and training to support the expansion of the District's tree canopy; as the nonprofit Casey Trees has done throughout Washington.
- ◆ Providing support through park maintenance, beautification, programming, and provision of equipment for recreational activities as "Friends of" and athletic organizations have done at many of Washington's parks and open spaces.

Strong partnerships, both formal and informal, will remain a major element by which the CapitalSpace priority action items can be realized. Through the framework of CapitalSpace, federal and District agencies will cooperatively engage in partnership building by reinforcing existing stakeholder relationships and forming new ones as they collectively implement CapitalSpace. Advocacy for parks, open space, and recreation is a shared responsibility that will become a by-product of implementing CapitalSpace. CapitalSpace's recommendations can be used by park stakeholders to invigorate related efforts, thereby increasing the Plan's endurance for years to come.

Funding the Vision

The Capitalspace initiative has highlighted areas where agency coordination may be particularly beneficial. The Partners will continue to actively coordinate park and open-space planning, design, and programming wherever possible. The Partners recognize that working together may help leverage limited budgets and resources and bring additional resources from new partner agencies and external groups providing the "critical mass" to advance projects, programs, and activities that may be difficult to achieve individually.

Implementation, however, is not reliant upon only coordinated funding. Progress will occur as individual agencies continue their own ongoing work to improve and plan for parks and open space.

Specific projects may be submitted by a federal agency or listed as recommended by NCPC in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, and the District can influence the type of park and open-space projects that are funded in the local government agencies' annual Capital Improvement Plan budgets in support of CapitalSpace.

Many projects implemented as part of CapitalSpace will have components that could be funded by other partner agencies, including the District's Department of Transportation and Department of Environment, Public Schools, and Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization. Funding potential for projects can also expand to include other non-government partner organizations as a more holistic approach to parks, recreation, and open spaces is pursued.

For the purposes of this Draft Plan, the partner agencies seek public input on the priority action items listed below, and welcome suggestions on how to move them forward effectively and in a collaborative manner.

Taking Action

Partner agencies are committed to regular recurring meetings, project collaboration, information dissemination, and monitoring progress on implementation of CapitalSpace's eight priority action items, including:

- ◆ Improving overall access to our public open space
- ◆ Improving the availability and use of our playfields
- ◆ Completing the Fort Circle hiking trail
- ◆ Promoting the value of the Fort Circle Parks
- ◆ Ensuring our schoolyards are considered to meet community recreational needs
- ◆ Making our downtown parks more inviting and active
- ◆ Launching a District-wide ecosystem consortium
- ◆ Improving the maintenance and use of our small parks

Public input

Public input is essential to the success of CapitalSpace. To develop the CapitalSpace plan, numerous interviews, consultations, focus group meetings, workshops, and presentations to stakeholders, local civic groups, and public officials were conducted.

A citywide public outreach event was also held on April 2007, to introduce CapitalSpace, followed by an update meeting May 2008.

A CapitalSpace website was launched in April 2008, as a means of maintaining continuous communication with the public plan development and meeting announcements.

Written comments may be sent to capitalspace@ncpc.gov or submitted through the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) Website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.

Public comments will be accepted through December 8, 2009. A final document will then be completed that incorporates necessary changes. For more information, visit <http://www.capitalspace.gov> to view this document electronically and review extensive background information.

Please contact us at 202.482.7200 or visit our Website: <http://www.capitalspace.gov>.

