

Moving the Plan Forward

Now that the CapitalSpace planning process is complete, it is time to focus on moving the recommendations forward. As with any complex planning effort, the CapitalSpace process evolved and adapted over time to allow for the understanding of distinct but complementary missions among the key partners. It will continue to evolve as recommendations are implemented and dialogue continues. The overarching goal is clear: parks and open space must be better planned, designed, managed, and maintained within Washington, DC. 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), Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and other District agencies. A renewed commitment toward a common vision was fostered whereby each partner can work both independently and collaboratively toward implementing the CapitalSpace actions.

Work Together and Measure Progress

The unique opportunities and challenges facing Washington's park and open space network made shared goals, ongoing communication, and strengthened relationships between the partner agencies one of the most critical and valuable outcomes of the CapitalSpace initiative. The partners are confident that continuing these important activities will yield significant progress in improving Washington's parks and open space system.

To continue strengthening interagency communication and working relationships established through CapitalSpace, the partners will maintain quarterly CapitalSpace meetings to discuss shared challenges and opportunities. These meetings will supplement ongoing communications between the partners on coordinating park and open space activities and ensure that CapitalSpace action items are being implemented. The partners will also develop an annual CapitalSpace status report to track progress on CapitalSpace's key action items, including developing park partnerships, coordinating management issues, and developing a work plan of new action items for the upcoming year. This report will be made readily available to the partner agencies, external park partners, and the public.

To move forward, the partner agencies will work together to implement priority actions from the Six Big Ideas; look for opportunities to coordinate on overarching issues; seek out ways to coordinate on and effectively leverage projects, work plans and budgets; and foster external partnerships.



CapitalSpace Public Meeting

Implement the Six Big Ideas

Each of the Six Big Ideas has recommendations intended to provide environmental, historic, cultural, and recreational benefits, and support shared goals for a greener, sustainable, and healthier city for residents, workers, and visitors. These recommendations include actions to improve access; enhance the quality of existing spaces; develop strategies for programming, design and use to better accommodate diverse park visitor needs; and create education and information activities. Some recommendations may be achieved relatively quickly, while others will advance incrementally and take a number of years to fully complete.

To strategically move the CapitalSpace plan forward, priority actions were identified by the partner agencies for focused attention and action in the next few years. All partner agencies will contribute in different ways, although some actions have a clear agency leader. Successful implementation of these actions will only be accomplished through strong coordination with the community and stakeholder organizations, many of whom expressed interest in working together on these projects.

The priority action items are:

Complete the Fort Circle Parks trail

Finalize the trail alignment 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 Fort Circle Parks

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

Improve the availability and use of 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 DC Public Schools (DCPS) facilities; improve and coordinate field allocation and use policies; align permit fees; and provide clear field use information.

Ensure that schoolyards meet community recreational needs

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



Anya Zmudzka Sattler / Art Garden Design



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Tyler Elementary School opened a new schoolyard in October 2009. The school made these upgrades through donations and community support.

Launch a city-wide ecosystem consortium

Coordinate ecological research associated with 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.

Make Center City parks more inviting and active

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

Improve the maintenance and use of small parks

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

Collaborate on Overarching Key Issues

Through the development of the Six Big Ideas, several overarching issues and recommendations were identified, such as improving public access to information and implementing sustainable practices. The partner agencies believe these issues should be incorporated into any park project and should also be the subject of continuing inter-agency discussion and coordination.

Provide public information

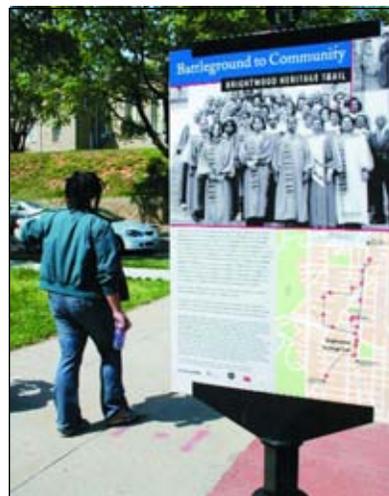
In addition to improving physical access, there are tremendous opportunities to better connect people to the city’s different park resources through multi-media information, signage and educational programming. The partner agencies will explore opportunities to improve existing communication and information tools, with a focus on exploring emerging technologies to provide easily accessible information to the public.

Further, because multiple government agencies manage varying responsibilities and activities on park land and open space in Washington, finding basic information for a specific park is not always easy. For example, it can be difficult to know who to contact to reserve a picnic area, find out about an upcoming event, or report a bench in need of repair. The partners will work together to compile complete information to determine the federal or District agency that owns or manages a specific park space; develop user-friendly approaches for the public to access park information and contact the correct agency; and find information on permitting, recreational programs, and special events.



21st Century School Fund

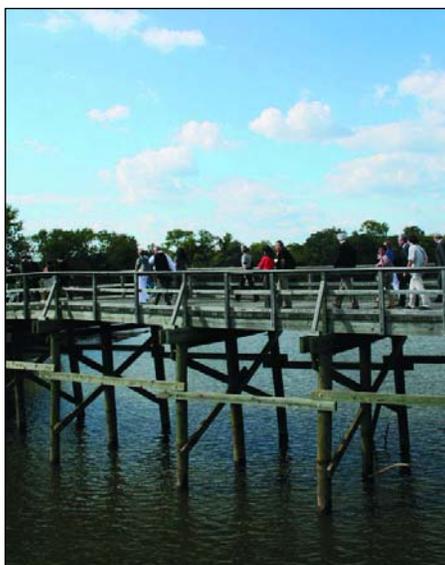
Watkins Elementary School Gardens



Interpretive signage provides the public with historic and cultural information.

“Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective.”

Rachel Carson



Kingman Island

Improve coordination for ongoing maintenance

Oftentimes, the maintenance of Washington's parks and open space lacks coordination between the multiple agencies and organizations that manage them. In addition, because maintenance budgets are often underfunded, agencies have fostered partnerships with external organizations to ensure adequate regular maintenance. This can result in situations where multiple parks along a single corridor or within a single area may be managed and maintained by multiple agencies or organizations, including DPR, NPS, DDOT, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and 'Friends of' groups. The partners will strive to improve coordination between themselves and other stakeholders in areas where efficiencies in maintenance practices and process can be found.

Align Comprehensive Plan updates and other plans with CapitalSpace recommendations

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. In particular, the partners will use the CapitalSpace plan to actively guide policy decisions for updating the federal and District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan and for developing small area plans by DCOP, NCPC, and other partner agencies.

The information and recommendations in the CapitalSpace plan will be used by the District and by NCPC as policy guidance in reviewing public and private development proposals, and specifically, to understand the types of park and open space amenities needed. DCOP has proposed CapitalSpace recommendations within its draft amendments to the District Elements, as part of its 2009-2010 Comprehensive Plan update process. NCPC plans to begin updating the Parks and Open Space and Federal Environment Elements within the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan in 2010.

Expand green job development

Enhancing and maintaining Washington's parks and open spaces creates real opportunities for creating and sustaining green jobs at every skill level. People will be needed to develop, maintain, and repair a variety of park facilities, including bio-retention areas, athletic fields, natural areas with invasive species issues, and green building systems. The partner agencies will look for opportunities collectively, and within their own work programs, to expand green job programs and workforce development.

Use sustainable practices to construct, maintain and program parks

The federal and District governments are promoting sustainable practices in their own activities, and likewise, the partner agencies are committed to further developing and implementing sustainable practices in their capital projects, maintenance, and programming activities. These practices will vary according to the wide variety of park and open space resources and activities, but will include stormwater management, recycling, transportation, building materials and operations, lighting and energy sources, and use. Where possible, the partners will share information on best practices and where appropriate, seek to develop joint or aligned guidelines.

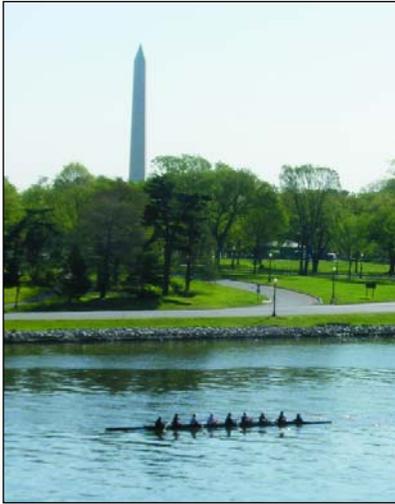


Address current and future park and open space needs

In addition to expanding the capacity of existing parks, the CapitalSpace partners are committed to future collaboration on strategies to develop new parks and open spaces and improving access to existing open spaces throughout the city, particularly in those areas that are comparatively underserved. The partner agencies will look for opportunities, jointly or within their own agency activities, to meet current and future park and open space needs across Washington, including:

- ◆ Identify and secure appropriate publicly-accessible open space and/or parks at publicly-held sites, particularly in areas of the city with comparatively less access to parks than other areas. Existing plans and past regulatory actions of the partner agencies have established a continuing commitment to look for park and open space opportunities at several sites with significant open space assets, including the Armed Forces Retirement Home, the McMillan Reservoir, and the RFK Stadium site.
- ◆ Secure appropriate land dedications or contributions to parks or open space from public and private development proposals. This includes securing appropriate access agreements, easements, or property dedications to provide continuous, complete networks connecting parks and open spaces.
- ◆ Review, on a case-by-case basis, any proposed conversion of existing parkland or open space to ensure that city-wide and neighborhood park needs continue to be met.
- ◆ Identify opportunities to make available for community use open spaces with currently limited accessibility, including schoolyards, plazas and courtyards, and other public facilities; remove physical barriers to parks and open space access, and improve connections to parks through street improvements and signage.

Redeveloping sites for park use is one way to increase accessibility. The District of Columbia is redeveloping the former Gage-Eckington Elementary School into a temporary park for the Ledroit Park community.



Rowing along the Potomac River

“The parks in and around Washington should form a systematic and well considered whole . . . an emerald setting for the beautiful city within.”

Theodore Bingham, 1899

Maximize Resources

The CapitalSpace partners are committed to advancing the CapitalSpace recommendations through their individual work programs and by working together. The partners recognize that working together can help leverage limited budgets and bring additional resources from other agencies and external groups to advance projects, programs, and activities that may be difficult to achieve individually.

Improved coordination of budgets and work plans

Current programs and funding can be coordinated and aligned across multiple agencies and departments to maximize results for specific CapitalSpace projects. Coordination of capital and maintenance budgets may identify opportunities for multiple agencies to fund complementary projects at individual sites, at a neighborhood level, or District-wide to provide a community with significant public space improvements.

Individual sites. Multiple agencies may budget for different park improvements at one location. For example, the rehabilitation of a specific park may have improvements funded by NPS or DPR, stormwater management infrastructure improvements funded by DDOE, sidewalk and street tree improvements funded by DDOT, and programming provided through an external park partner.

A neighborhood or sub-neighborhood level. Multiple agencies may align a series of projects within one specific area. For example, the projects could make significant improvements to a series of parks and open spaces that are part of a shared ecological system, a gateway corridor, a collection of historic and cultural resources, or program of recreation activities.

District-wide. Multiple agencies may tackle a significant park or open space component city-wide. For example, continuing development of hiking/biking trail systems throughout DC requires the coordination of many local and federal government agencies. Both the increased project scale and coordinated efforts on the part of agencies may draw additional attention from funding decision-makers and from potential external partners.

Reviewing and coordinating work programs and projects may also yield implementation opportunities through unique external funding sources. For example, the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided funding for one District program developed through several District agencies. The District Department of the Environment received funding to upgrade the energy efficiency of older District facilities because of a collaborative process between DC Office of Property Management, DPR, and DC Public Libraries. This process provided agencies with funding to upgrade old windows, doors, and HVAC systems.



Jogging along the Tidal Basin

External partners can also bring unique park and open space resources to agencies in a variety of other ways, including grant funding, labor, and capital improvements.

Grants and donations are available through federal agencies, private corporations, and non-profit groups to help fund improvements including community gardens, installation of public art, active recreation fields, land preservation, or other park and open space-related opportunities. While government agencies may not always be able to apply for these grants, a good working relationship with external park partners could be utilized to coordinate funds for a project with the appropriate agency.

Park providers should also look to other disciplines that are emerging or are already established as partners in improving the health, safety, and welfare of urban dwellers and visitors. Organizations dedicated to improving personal health through reduction of obesity and attention deficit disorder rates have established a direct correlation between outdoor play with improved physical and emotional health for both children and adults. Smart growth advocacy groups are also strong supporters of accessible parks and open spaces, as are urban ecology organizations and green job development groups. Partnerships with these groups should continue to be explored.

Private corporations and businesses often participate in grant funding and donation programs to help improve the communities they serve. Professional sports organizations, for example, may provide communities with funding for enhanced park facilities and programming opportunities.

Through coordinated efforts of federal and local government agencies, as well as cooperation from external park partners, creative funding mechanisms can help overcome the obstacles of budget shortfalls and provide residents and visitors with world class parks and open spaces in Washington.

As they relate to Washington's parks and open spaces, the partner agencies will look for opportunities to maximize their resources by:

- ◆ Coordination of current and future work plans.
- ◆ Coordination of current capital improvement budgets and ongoing capital improvement programs.
- ◆ Collaboration to seek opportunities for traditional and non-traditional resources.
- ◆ Incorporation, where feasible and appropriate, of the CapitalSpace recommendations into future work programs, budgets and capital improvement programs.



Stoddert Soccer League

Flickr photo courtesy of Dsidae



Chesapeake Bay Program

DC Public Schools works closely with a variety of non-profit and volunteer organizations to improve schoolyards in the District.



DC Building Industry Association

The DC Building Industry Association, together with many volunteers, worked with the NPS in 2009 to construct a trail linkage between Watts Branch and Fort Mahan as part of their yearly Community Improvement Day.

Build Partnerships

There are tremendous opportunities present in the District of Columbia with respect to partnerships. Multiple federal and local government agencies, national and international associations, foundations, and local community groups have complementary missions related to the enhancement of the many historic, cultural, and natural resources found within the nation's capital.

Partnerships could combine the assets of the public and private sectors in creative ways to support the improvement of our park and recreation resources. Successful partnership agreements with non-profit organizations, community organizations, residents, and for-profit partners have resulted in capital projects, improved maintenance and landscaping, and expanded programming at certain parks and schoolyards in the city. Partnering helps leverage limited funding sources, streamline processes, raise awareness through education, and results in improvements that lead to improved quality and increased activity within parks.

Many different kinds of partnerships have been used to augment government park operation and capital budgets. Partnership structures and priorities continue to evolve as they adapt to changing community needs and available resources. The NPS and DPR achieve improved results through partnerships that go beyond what they could achieve individually. The positive impact generated by park partners in the District is significant.

Partnership programs and arrangements

NPS and DPR, as well as other federal agencies and District departments, maintain standard partnership programs that offer a mechanism for interested organizations to work together on park and recreation initiatives. While individual partnerships are tailored to meet specific circumstances, each agency partnership program is unique and reflects the requirements of the parent agency.

The DPR maintains a Partnership Office and offers four main partnership programs: Community Gardens; Corporate Partners (in-kind services or financial contributions to park projects, programs, events or capital improvements); Park Partners (Adopt-a-Park and Friends of Program); and Programmatic Partnerships. Partnerships require a signed memorandum of understanding and completed application. In addition, DPR accepts donations and grants, and maintains a volunteer program.

Other District departments established successful partnerships in support of initiatives related to environmental education and stewardship. The Department of the Environment partners with the DCPS in a program to green their schoolyards and educate students on the importance of responsible environmental actions. The Department of Transportation's Urban Forestry Administration partnership with Casey Trees helped restore the elm tree canopy in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.

The NPS maintains a robust partnering program that operates at national, regional, and local levels. Within the District, the superintendents in each of the seven NPS park units can arrange partnership agreements, consistent with NPS guidelines. The U.S. Department of the Interior Director's Order #21 sets forth standards regarding appropriate forms of partnerships, fundraising, and roles and responsibilities that must be followed when entering into partnership with the NPS. It provides guidance on the acceptance of donations, fundraising, roles, and responsibilities of park partners. In addition, the NPS Agreements Handbook provides detailed guidance to all who have a role in the development, administration, and closeout of agreements such as cooperative agreements, interagency acquisition agreements, and other types of agreements.

The Greater Washington National Parks Fund raises private funds and partners with businesses and community and civic organizations to strengthen the visitor experience at National Parks throughout the Greater Washington area. It is an initiative of the National Park Foundation. NPS has a regional partnership coordinator who can provide assistance to interested parties such as 'Friends of' groups, community organizations, etc.

The CapitalSpace agencies recognize the great value external partners provide, as well as the challenges and capacity needs these groups can face in establishing and sustaining formal partnerships. The merits and applicability of more standardized partnerships or umbrella organizations were discussed during the development of the CapitalSpace plan. However, the partners agreed there was a greater value in being able to tailor partnership agreements to meet specific circumstances and address widely varying park types.

The CapitalSpace partners are committed to continuing and strengthening the legacy of park partnerships within the District in the following ways:

- ◆ Maintain and forge new partnerships to implement the CapitalSpace recommendations.
- ◆ Connect interested partners to the right agency through improved information sharing.
- ◆ Explore District-specific or other legislative changes that could provide increased partnering flexibility to NPS and DPR, recognizing the unique character of the District's parks and urban setting as the nation's capital.
- ◆ Seek opportunities for government agencies and external partners to collaborate in geographic areas, or for the benefit of specific park types (like small parks), or individual park projects.
- ◆ Identify opportunities for several agencies to jointly enter into cooperative agreements with a single partnership organization.



Kevin Kasli

The Downtown DC Business Improvement District (BID) has a partnership agreement with NPS to help improve and maintain parks throughout its area. The BID provides additional maintenance, daily upkeep including sidewalk and curb cleaning, litter removal, and an on-the-ground presence in several downtown parks.



Flickr photo courtesy of Kevin H.

NPS entered into a formal partnership agreement with the Trust for the National Mall. A non-profit organization dedicated to restoring and improving the National Mall through fundraising and advocacy, it also provides new educational opportunities to connect visitors to the Mall's rich history.