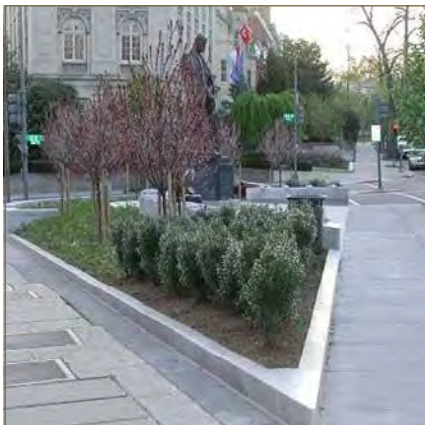




A Park System for the Nation's Capital

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



Draft CapitalSpace Plan, March 2010



The CapitalSpace initiative is a partnership 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 for oversight of the initiative with its principal consultant, AECOM.

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



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





## 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, District of Columbia Office of Planning, National Park Service, and National Capital Planning Commission 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, Department of the Environment, and Public Schools, 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 work 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 (DPR)  
District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP)  
National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)  
National Park Service (NPS)

### **IN COLLABORATION WITH**

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)  
District Department of Transportation (DDOT)  
District Department of the Environment (DDOE)  
U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)  
U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA)

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Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk Memorial

# Overview

## 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.

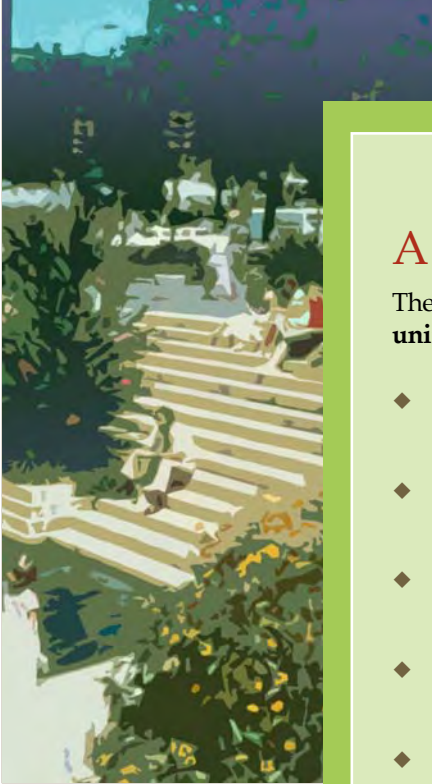
Although Washington's parks and open space are abundant and beloved, the quality and capacity of these spaces has not kept pace with the growing, changing, and sometimes conflicting needs of residents, workers, or millions of annual visitors. To help address this cooperatively, the National Park Service, the government of the District of Columbia and the National Capital Planning Commission formed the CapitalSpace partnership. 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 other national and local parks in the neighborhoods throughout Washington.

CapitalSpace began by completing the first comprehensive analysis 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 to ensure that Washington's parks are accessible to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city. The city's parks and open space can connect communities; provide a diversity of passive and active recreation that enhances urban living; and offer rich natural, cultural, commemorative and historic resources that define neighborhoods and provide unique experiences. The CapitalSpace plan highlights the critical role parks play in achieving District and federal goals for a healthy, sustainable, and livable city.

CapitalSpace provides a vision for a beautiful, high-quality, and unified park system for Washington and offers six action-oriented 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 operation and maintenance approaches. CapitalSpace sets the framework for an enduring partnership between federal and District agencies.





## 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 space that **connect communities**.
- ◆ Incorporates **stewardship and celebration** of natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces.
- ◆ Provides a **diversity** of passive and active recreational opportunities.
- ◆ 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 CapitalSpace vision will be realized through the commitments and resources of federal and local agencies, citizens, and private organizations, where each group goes beyond their individual mandates and works cooperatively to create a seamless system of parks and open space.





## Planning Concepts

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

### Weave a Greenway through Neighborhoods

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



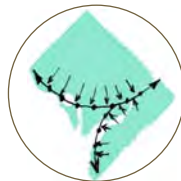
### Increase Access to Great Local Parks

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

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



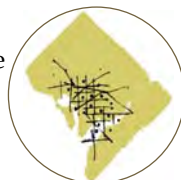
### Protect, Connect, and Restore Natural Environments

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.



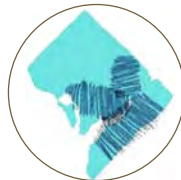
### Celebrate Urban Parks

The rich tapestry of urban parks is 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

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. Special attention is 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.



## Six Big Ideas

Using the information from the parks assessment, the partner agencies decided to address a limited number of priority topics in depth—the Six Big Ideas—rather than develop a plan that would broadly address all park issues or specific park and open space sites. This approach was used to focus on areas where significant improvements could be made to the city’s park or open space resources by the CapitalSpace partner agencies working together to maximize existing assets, address current and future needs and seize upon existing opportunities. Each of the Six Big Ideas were explored through more detailed analyses, often using model projects or case studies to test out ideas and identify broadly applicable lessons learned. The recommendations for each Big Idea include ideas for new planning and development policies, additional physical improvements and alternative uses, and approaches to operation and maintenance.



1

### Link the Fort Circle Parks by implementing a greenway and making the parks destinations.

- ◆ Promote the fort parks as national historic, cultural, and recreational treasures and provide opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize their history.
- ◆ Increase public access to the Fort Circle Parks by connecting them to other parks, schools, and other destinations.
- ◆ Activate the fort parks and greenways through selective park uses that draw residents and visitors to their rich natural environment and cultural history.
- ◆ Protect and celebrate the diverse and significant natural resources of the fort parks.



2

### Improve public schoolyards to help relieve pressure on nearby parks and better connect children with the environment.

- ◆ Develop a comprehensive schoolyard improvement strategy that assesses needs, provides standards for improvements, prioritizes projects, and is coordinated with the District’s school modernization process.
- ◆ Preserve schoolyards for community recreation space and improve public access.
- ◆ Develop guidelines for schoolyard planning including establishing safe and secure play environments, active recreation components, low-impact development opportunities, and environmental education curricula.
- ◆ Clarify agency responsibilities for general schoolyard maintenance and develop partnerships to provide for enhancements.

**Enhance urban natural areas** and better connect residents to encourage urban stewardship for natural resources.

- ◆ Coordinate future research and share environmental data among federal and local agencies and their partners.
- ◆ Protect park natural resources.
- ◆ Adopt clear, consistent, and shared goals and guidelines among responsible agencies and adjacent jurisdictions for long-term park and natural resource management.
- ◆ Build a green infrastructure network within natural areas to perform many of the same services as drainage pipes and spillways.

**Improve playfields** to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors.

- ◆ Maintain or expand the current level of service for recreation facilities.
- ◆ Increase capacity through field assessments, use, improvement plans, and capital programs coordinated among responsible agencies.
- ◆ Simplify the permitting process between NPS, DPR, and DCPS and coordinate fees, signage, and enforcement.

**Enhance Center City parks** and open space to support a vibrant downtown.

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

**Transform small parks** into successful public spaces, forming a cohesive urban network of green spaces.

- ◆ Organize small parks into clusters, where appropriate, to coordinate their uses and physical improvements.
- ◆ Coordinate planning and management of small parks among the various park and planning agencies for efficiency and promote investments across all small park resources.
- ◆ Provide neighborhood-oriented programming and improvements for small parks to ensure they are clean and safe to enhance neighborhood livability.
- ◆ Leverage related investments and tap into funding unique to small parks.





## Taking Action

CapitalSpace comes at a moment of great opportunity, when local and national leadership is focused on improving urban life, the environment, and community health. To achieve the full potential of Washington's parks and to continue the coordination established through the CapitalSpace initiative, the partner agencies are committed to advancing the recommendations in the CapitalSpace Plan, as summarized here and described in more detail in the Moving the Plan Forward section, starting on page 91.

### Work Together and Measure Progress

One of the most valuable outcomes of the CapitalSpace initiative is the development of shared goals, improved communication, and strengthened relationships between the partner agencies. These outcomes will allow the partners to better promote opportunities and address challenges facing Washington's parks. The partner agencies are committed to holding quarterly meetings and developing an annual CapitalSpace status report to track progress on key action items.

### Coordinate on Overarching Issues

Several overarching recommendations arose in the development of the Six Big Ideas that partner agencies believe should be incorporated into any park project: expand and coordinate information-sharing with the public; improve coordination for ongoing maintenance; expand green jobs; and use sustainable practices to construct, maintain, and program parks. The partners will continue to work together on opportunities for new or more accessible open space.

### Maximize Resources

The CapitalSpace partners are committed to advancing recommendations by working together, which can help leverage limited budgets and bring additional resources from other agencies and external groups to advance projects, programs, and activities. The partner agencies will look for opportunities to maximize their resources by coordinating work plans, capital improvement budgets, and other programs, where appropriate.

### Build Partnerships

There are tremendous opportunities to forge partnerships to improve Washington's parks, which combine the assets of the public and private sectors in creative ways. NPS and DPR maintain standard partnership programs, which can be tailored to meet specific goals and reflect the requirements of the parent agency. The partner agencies are committed to strengthening the legacy of park partnerships by connecting interested partners to the right agency through improved information sharing; exploring legislative changes that could provide increased partnering flexibility; and identifying opportunities for agencies to jointly enter into cooperative agreements with a single partnership organization.

## Implement Priority Actions From the Six Big Ideas

To move the Six Big Ideas forward, the CapitalSpace partners have prioritized the following recommendations for initial attention and action. Each partner agency will contribute in different ways. Coordination with community and stakeholder groups will be critical to successful implementation.

### *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 our 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 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 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.

### *Launch a city-wide ecosystem consortium*

Coordinate ecological research associated with Washington's natural resources, 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, additional 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*

Building upon the initial CapitalSpace assessment, further 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.



Robert F. Lederer Youth Garden



Lamont Park





Westminster Playground



# About Washington's Parks and Open Space

## A Brief History

For more than 200 years, parks and open space have played an important 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, describes why they are important to the development and well-being of the city, and discusses key challenges faced by Washington's parks and open space.

## Park and Open Space Development in Washington

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 the city also have a rich and diverse history. This history is a story of collaboration between federal and local governments and Washington's many neighborhood 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 cities such as Paris and Versailles, 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 land and adjacent rivers became natural boundaries for the new capital, and provided a continuous green and blue visual terminus for the plan's grand tree-lined avenues. Squares and circles spaced throughout the city link neighborhoods visually and physically. L'Enfant located ceremonial parks and greenswards in the center of the city to frame planned monumental buildings.

Today, the L'Enfant Plan's concepts are well-preserved. In Washington's Center City, the planned public spaces are settings for national commemorative works and provide open space for residents, workers, and visitors. Little of the L'Enfant Plan was implemented until after the Civil



Influenced by the designs of several European cities, the L'Enfant Plan capitalized on the area's natural features and retained open space as settings for important monuments, grand public promenades, and major federal buildings.



Scientific American September 19, 1881

East Potomac Park and the Tidal Basin were created as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging of the rivers

War, when Washington experienced significant population growth. During that time, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' 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 city, new residential subdivisions often included features of the L'Enfant Plan such as circles, small pocket parks, and street grid layout. This pattern became more formalized through the application of the Permanent System of Highways Plan, which identified where streets and open spaces should be located in future subdivisions. The legacy of these plans include the circles located at the city's boundary, such as the Westmoreland, Chevy Chase, Tenley, and Randle circles.

During this time, two large open spaces were reserved for the National Zoo and the Naval Observatory. East Potomac Park and the Tidal Basin were created when the Corps dredged the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers; and in 1890, Congress created Rock Creek Park, which remains one of the largest natural urban parks in the United States.



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 known as Fort Circle Drive.

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. The Commission was influenced by a national interest in the "City Beautiful" movement, which focused on providing open space to relieve dense and polluted urban conditions of the time. Once approved, 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 referred to as 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.

During the 1920s, some of the open spaces provided in the L'Enfant Plan were vacant, underused, and in danger of being eliminated to either better accommodate the automobile or provide space for additional housing. At

the same time, the need for recreation and open space in urban areas was increasingly recognized. The National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (NCPC's predecessor) recommended, through what is known as the Eliot Plan, the creation of approximately 20 neighborhood parks throughout the city. In addition to open space, these parks would include recreation centers, libraries, and schools, and were planned to serve neighborhoods within a one-quarter-mile radius. However, only three 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 its popularity is again on the rise.

Multiple federal and local agencies were responsible for providing recreation for residents during the early and mid-20th century. These included the Board of Education, library trustees, 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 National Park Service).

In 1930, the Capper-Cramton Act provided the National Capital Park and Planning Commission with 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 U.S. 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 on the National Mall, and resulted in other park improvements, particularly the construction and rehabilitation of monuments.

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. 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.

While significant public housing projects were constructed in the city, open space was not comprehensively planned during this time. 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.



McMillan Plan, 1901



Library of Congress

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



Library of Congress

World War II required thousands of new government employees, who often worked in temporary structures constructed on vacant land and open space in Washington.





NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, 2004

The C & O Canal was designated a National Historic Park in 1971, and is now managed by the National Park Service.



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

Toward the end of the 1960s, the importance of environmental planning was increasingly recognized. Many of the parks identified by the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans were located along stream valleys, steep slopes, and rivers, and came to be recognized as important natural resource areas. Increased awareness of the environment and community health began to influence plans for both new and existing parks, and these topics continued to shape a sustainable future for the city. 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 parks were used and rehabilitated.

When the Home Rule Act of 1973 established self-governance for the District of Columbia, some public land was transferred from the federal government to the District. Sometimes, these transfers were of ownership; more commonly, they were transfers 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. While some NPS land was transferred, the agency retained parks and lands deemed to be nationally significant. Today, the NPS is 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. Recreational centers, fields, and schoolyards are the major components of the District's parks and open-space portfolio. These sites are managed by several different District agencies, reflecting changing administrative structures and responsibilities. In the early 2000s, several new parks were planned as part of larger redevelopment proposals sponsored through the District of Columbia, often in coordination with federal or private partners. These include sites along the Anacostia River and at the old Convention Center site, 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 space 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 this invaluable resource and preserve it for future generations.



Library of Congress

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.



STAR COLLECTION, DC PUBLIC LIBRARY, ©WASHINGTON POST

Lafayette Park in the 1970s

## 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*

The CapitalSpace partners share a vision of Washington as a more sustainable, livable, and beautiful city. Washington's parks and open space are a critical element of that vision. They can uniquely foster the development of inclusive, connected and engaged communities, an important building block for any city. The improvement of Washington's park system offers a dynamic opportunity to explore new approaches to sustainable living and growth and to plan for the green jobs of tomorrow. The reasons for the importance of Washington's parks and open space are as diverse and numerous as the parks themselves.

The health of parks and open space has a direct and meaningful impact on citizens' well-being. Much research and deliberation has gone into how public health is affected by the natural environment. The lesson is three-fold: first, parks and open space can help mitigate environmental impacts created by the built environment through sustainable design practices. Second, parks and open space can help improve the physical and emotional health of residents, workers, and visitors. Finally, parks provide economic benefits and support the local economy in many ways, including increasing property values and providing green jobs for the community. Below are some examples of how parks and open space benefit Washington.

### Washington's Parks Protect Environmental Health

#### *Improve air quality*

While environmental laws helped to improve air quality, pollutants continue to contribute to health problems such as asthma and cardiovascular disease, which pose serious health risks for workers and residents. According to statistics, approximately 10 percent of children in the District suffer from asthma.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, Washington's green space removes pollutants from the air that contribute to the greenhouse effect and smog. Using the sun's energy, trees and plants also absorb carbon dioxide and convert it to fresh oxygen.

#### *Improve water quality*

As rainfall in Washington runs along roads and parking lots, it collects pollutants on the ground such as metals, pesticides, nutrients, sediment, and bacteria. Many of these pollutants flow into Washington's waterways and degrade the water quality. An even larger issue is the storm water runoff from the segment of Washington served by the 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. During the summer, the water heats up considerably as it flows over hot asphalt surfaces. This can increase 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.



Fortunately, open space can reduce the amount of runoff and lower 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 can slow the water's flow toward the sewer. This can reduce soil erosion, reduce water flow into Washington's waterways, and filter pollutants. Constructing additional storm sewers, spillways, and water filtering systems can be much more costly than using parks and open space to reduce water pollution.

## Washington's Parks Promote Personal Health

### *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 engage in on a regular basis. 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 childhood obesity among the states.<sup>2</sup>

Regular exercise and physical activity, even in moderate amounts, provide terrific health benefits and 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, such as diabetes.

A critical factor in increasing physical activity is improved community access to parks and open space. If people have easy access to trails, parks, and other open space, they are more likely to engage in physical activity that can positively shape their health.

### *Provide places of respite and places to socialize*

Washington's parks and open spaces, especially in dense, urban areas, provide not only places for recreation and play, but also places to relax and socialize. Parks and open space function as ecological mufflers to the everyday noise of urban life, making them excellent spots to unwind alone or to spend time with family and friends. Natural landscapes can help mitigate the stress and fatigue of everyday life. Activities such as tilling community gardens, planting new trees, and greening the landscape not only contributes to environmental health, but it can help individuals overcome everyday stress and develop community pride. With active community participation, public programs for these activities are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement.

If well-used and maintained, community gathering places can make neighborhoods safer through open access to positive activities for children and adults. However, parks in disrepair may discourage community use and attract inappropriate or illegal activities. Through community-building efforts, neighbors can develop 'ownership' of the park and turn parks into the heart of a neighborhood.

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



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



Dupont Circle

### *Increase community environmental awareness*

Parks provide opportunities for people to learn about the natural environment and become active participants in the physical world. A diversity of activities from planting trees to hiking can help integrate parks into everyday life. Many local programs on environmental science and urban ecology are provided by government agencies such as the National Park Service and the District Department of the Environment, and by local non-profit organizations such as Casey Trees.

Community gardens are a growing component of park systems nationwide, and the District is a part of the trend. By locating gardens throughout a city, residents are able to reduce their carbon footprint and grow their own produce, which is often difficult to find in urban areas. When linked with school curricula, the space turns into a new classroom to integrate math, history, and science programs into the outdoors. Other educational programming can teach children and adults about healthier eating habits, urban agriculture, and can encourage entrepreneurship through the sale of produce at local farmers' markets. Food grown in the gardens can also be donated to local shelters and food banks to help provide healthy meals to those in need. For example, the Capital Area Food Bank now teams up with local farmers and gardeners to distribute fresh produce to underserved communities.

### *Washington's Parks Support the Local Economy*

#### *Fosters development of green jobs, technology, and practices*

America's green economy is growing. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included more than \$80 billion in clean energy investments to jump-start America's economy and build the clean energy jobs for tomorrow's workforce. The General Services Administration is

Community children are drawn to the water spray in Friendship Recreation Center.



planning a number of construction and modernization projects in the District. Many of these include greening measures, such as the incorporation of more efficient materials to reduce energy consumption. In 2009, the District Department of Transportation's Urban Forestry Administration was awarded nearly \$2.8 million in federal funding to create green jobs in the District and improve the health of the city's urban tree canopy. The District Department of the Environment provides educational opportunities, such as the Green Jobs Expo, to District's residents and leaders to prepare the city's workforce for this new economy. Youth-focused programs are also available. For example, DDOE works closely with other District agencies and the Mayor's Office to coordinate the Summer Youth Employment Program, which focuses on a variety of subjects including a sustainable design and maintenance program.

*Reduce energy consumption*

Just as trees provide cool respite for people on a hot summer day, strategically placed trees and other vegetation can reduce energy consumption by shading a building's windows and exterior walls. Conversely, in the winter, leafless trees allow the sun's radiant heat to warm the building. These measures are good for the environment and are good for business because they reduce energy bills.

*Increase adjacent property values and support nearby businesses*

Parks increase the value of nearby private property. Market research has shown that parks and open space increase the appraised property values of adjacent residential property approximately 8 to 20 percent above comparable properties.<sup>3</sup> An increase in property value is not only beneficial to the owner, but also to the community because the added value is capitalized when property and real estate taxes are collected.

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

Meridian Hill Park's cascading fountain





### *Provide value to local tourism*

Many of Washington's historic parks and outdoor cultural amenities provide value as tourist attractions, contributing to local business and economic development. In 2007, tourist spending in Washington surpassed \$5.5 billion,<sup>4</sup> and tourists enjoy visiting the city for its historic buildings, cultural resources, national parks and monuments, and scenic views and vistas. Tourism in Washington is broader than the National Mall and its environs, and some of the lesser known parks and open space have also become attractions.

### *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 industrial centers. Consequently, businesses, and the professionals they attract as their workforce, are free to locate in communities that they find desirable. The availability of parks and open space in Washington can help attract businesses and new residents, boosting the tax base and supporting a healthy local economy.



Parks such as Dupont Circle help to define a neighborhood.

## 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 city in the United States, at 12.9 acres of park per 1,000 residents. Looking at the numbers alone, Washington compares well to other cities. 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 to better understand the challenges and opportunities parks face.

How can the partner agencies achieve the potential of Washington's parks and open space? It is important to plan for the park system recognizing the unique context in which it functions—as part of a vibrant urban experience, as a nationally important resource worthy of conservation, and as an integral component of the nation's capital. But 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 park assets with limited resources. Demand for Washington's parks is growing and changing, and it is important to balance 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 parks and begin to think of them as a connected system; to provide better public access, 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.

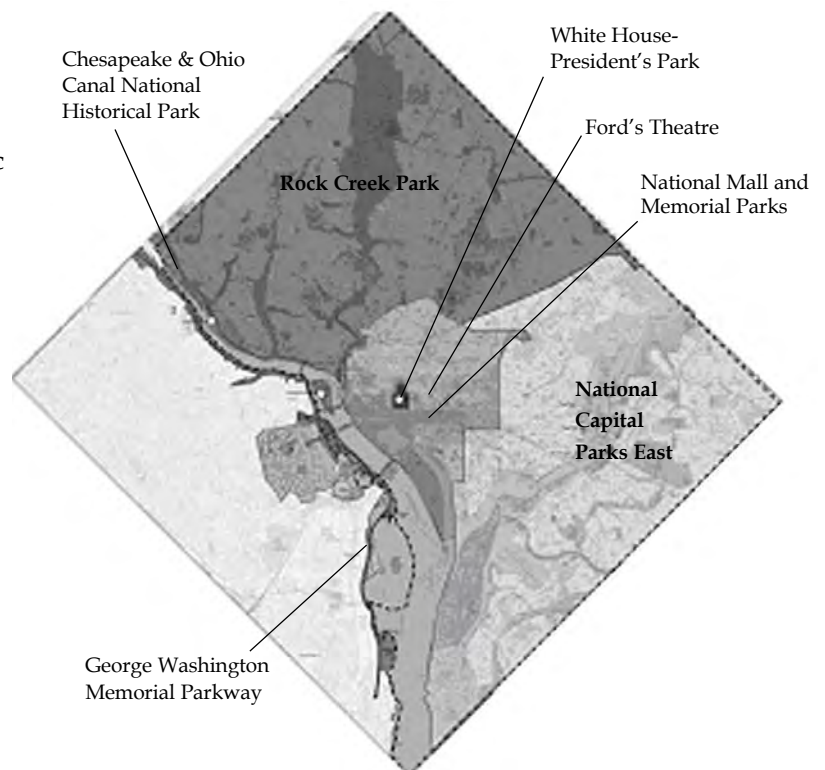
### Ownership and Management

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. Ninety percent of Washington's parks are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, and the ownership, management, planning, and maintenance of the remaining parks and open spaces rest with a number of other federal and District agencies.

### 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.

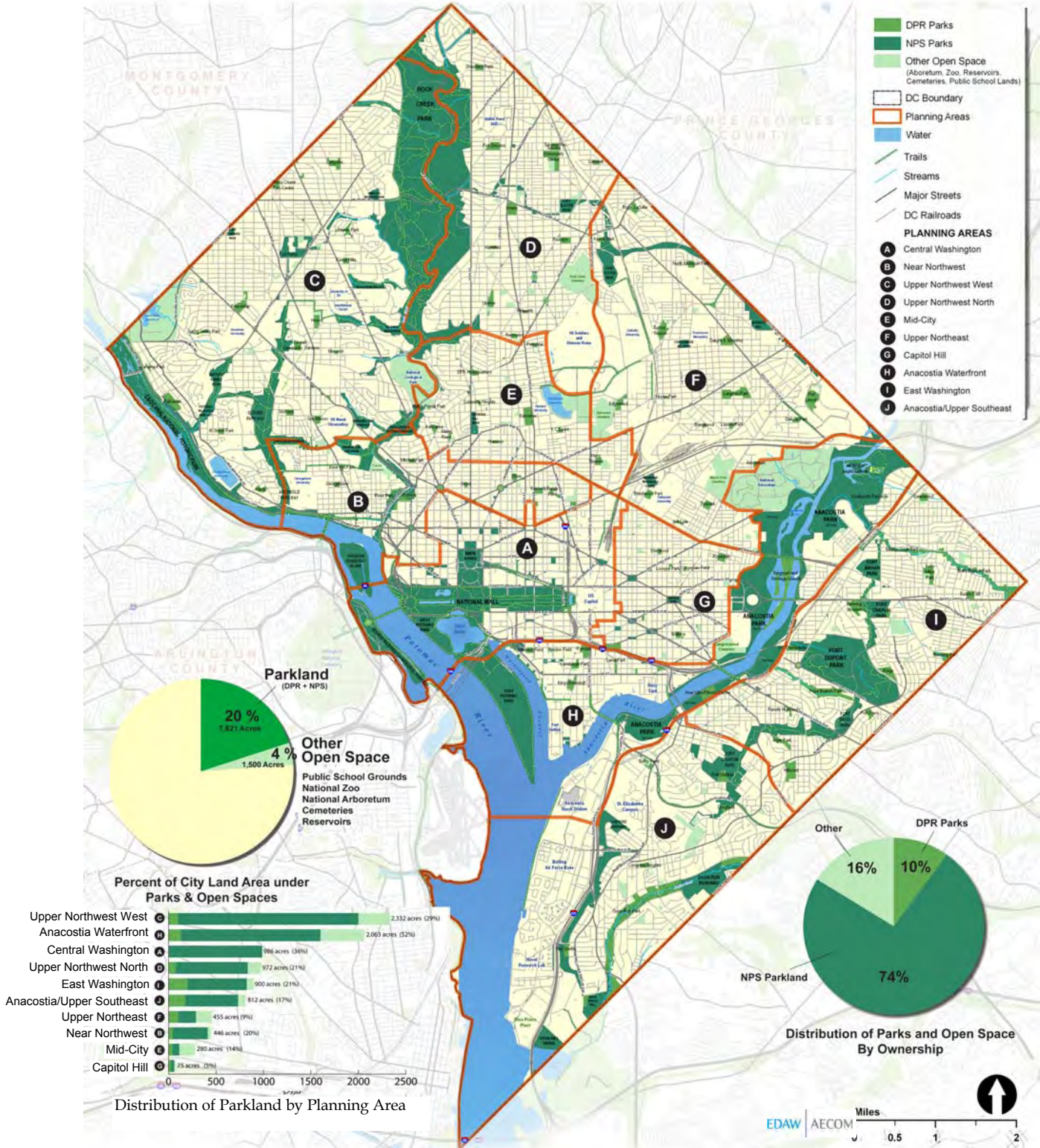
- ◆ National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA)
- ◆ National Capital Parks East (NACE)
- ◆ Rock Creek Park (ROCR)
- ◆ White House-President's Park (PRPK)
- ◆ George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP)
- ◆ Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park (CHOH)
- ◆ Ford's Theatre (FOTH)





## Parks and Open Space

Parkland comprises approximately 20 percent of Washington’s land. Almost 90 percent of 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. Another ten percent is owned and managed by the government of the District of Columbia’s Department of Parks and Recreation. The remaining 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.







NPS manages more than 350 properties covering over 6,700 acres in the District of Columbia. These include most of the city's major and well-known parks, such as the National Mall, President's Park, Rock Creek Park, Anacostia Park, and C&O Canal National Historical Park, and approximately 200 circles, squares, and triangles formed as part of L'Enfant's original street layout for the city. Seven NPS management units have administrative oversight of their properties in the District, each with a superintendent reporting to the NPS National Capital Regional Office. 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 that is principally located in neighborhood parks. It relies on multiple agencies and park partners to plan, build, maintain, and program their public spaces. DPR is focused primarily on providing active recreational programming to District residents, and many of the park sites include fields, playgrounds, and community recreation centers offering a variety of activities including aquatics, arts, child care, senior services, and therapeutic recreation.

While the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) does not have a general mission to provide community recreation, it does play an important role in providing active recreation amenities through its management of one third of the city's active recreation fields. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) owns and manages approximately 250 small parks within the city rights-of-way, and also plays a key role in developing pedestrian and biking trails, public space development and management, and urban forestry. Other District agencies have 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, and additional sites were transferred in subsequent years. Some of these transferred sites are managed by the District for park, school, or transportation purposes, but the federal government retains ownership.

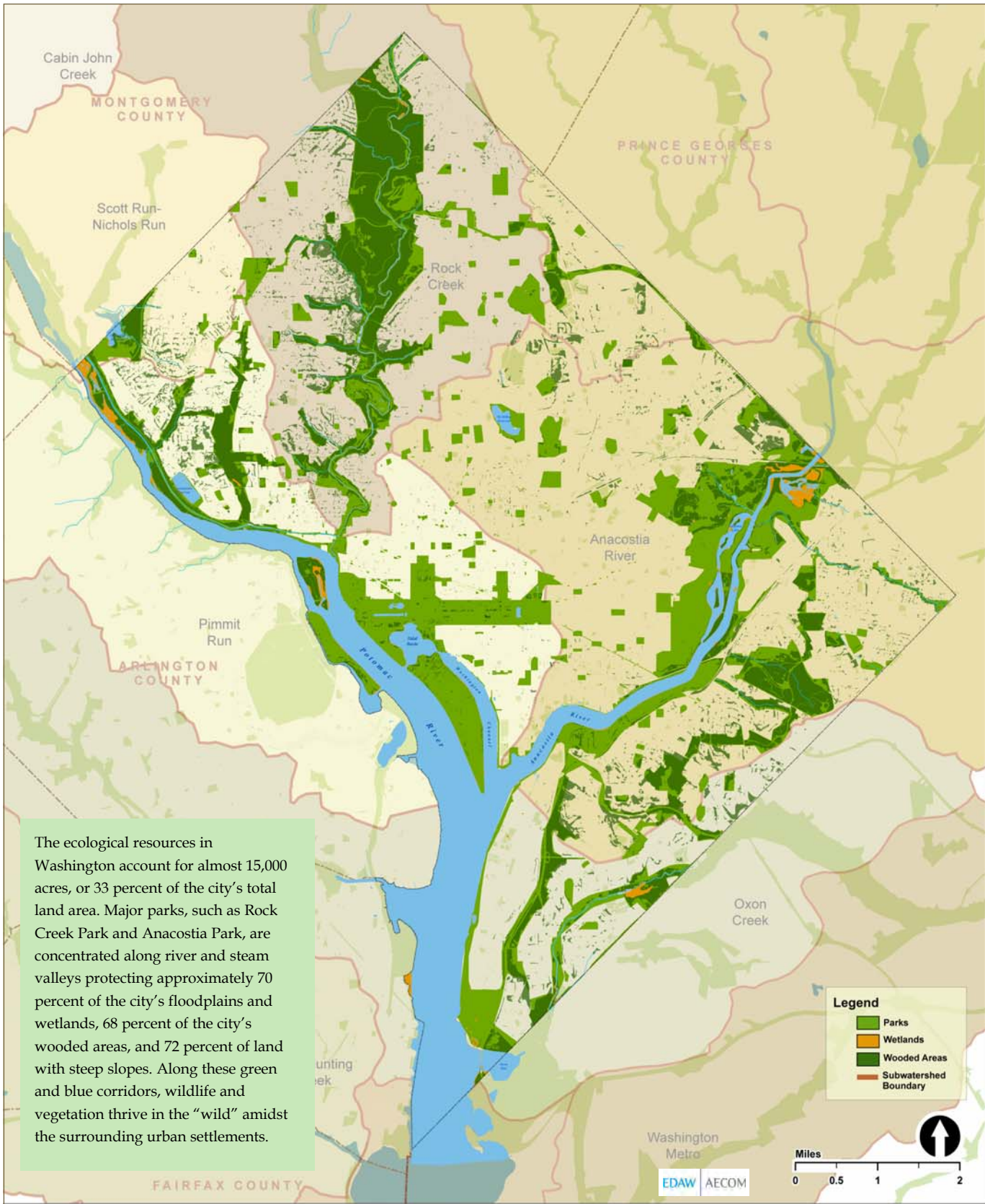
## Tree cover in Washington

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 experienced by metro areas across the United States. Tree cover extent and condition baselines 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.

## Ecologically Sensitive Resources



The ecological resources in Washington account for almost 15,000 acres, or 33 percent of the city's total land area. Major parks, such as Rock Creek Park and Anacostia Park, are concentrated along river and steam valleys protecting approximately 70 percent of the city's floodplains and wetlands, 68 percent of the city's wooded areas, and 72 percent of land with steep slopes. Along these green and blue corridors, wildlife and vegetation thrive in the "wild" amidst the surrounding urban settlements.



Consequently, there are many times when DPR or DCPS must consult directly with the NPS to ensure that park development complies with NPS policies. Park development must also comply with District zoning regulations. Changes to federally owned property are reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and NCPC to meet design standards and ensure compliance with other federal interests.

CapitalSpace is primarily focused on public parkland. There is, however, a significant amount of other open space in Washington, much of it under the jurisdiction and management of federal agencies that will not be impacted by the plan. 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 General 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.

While there are complex jurisdictional arrangements, there is also the potential to join multiple and diverse resources, reflecting the strengths and values of each agency. In some cases, different agencies contribute different resources to a park site. For example, 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. Approximately 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.

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. It is possible to hike through mature hardwood forests, paddle up a river gorge, and watch a heron take flight within minutes of some of the city's busiest neighborhoods.

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

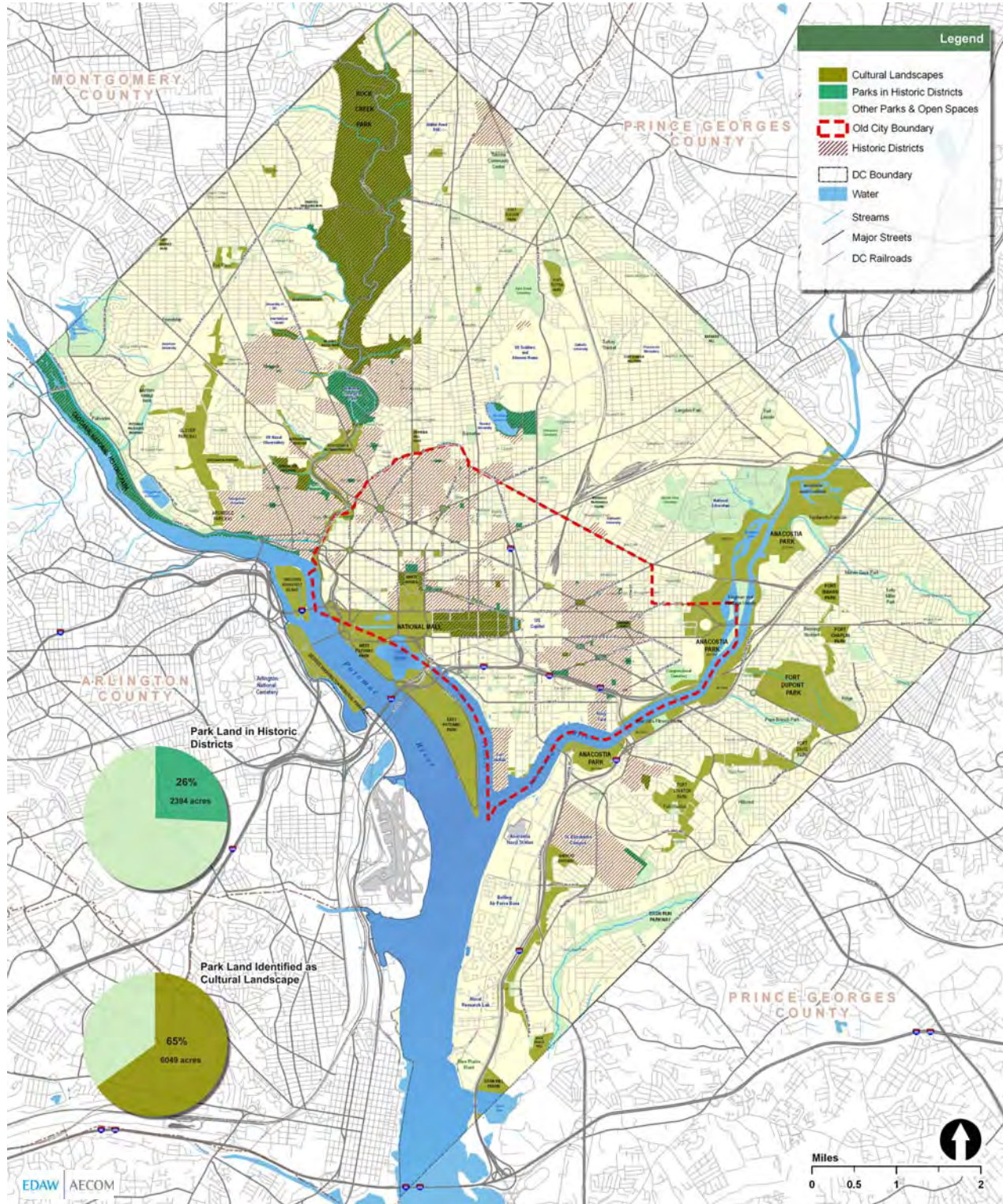


Oxon Run



## Historic and Cultural Resources

There are 214 parks and reservations contributing to the L'Enfant Plan National Historic Landmark Nomination. 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.



Invasive species and a changing climate pose threats to existing natural resources. Development can fragment habitat corridors, and can result in stormwater runoff, noise, erosion, air pollution, trash dumping, and altered temperatures. The city's natural resources face overuse by the people that value and seek out these 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 the environment through the natural classrooms that are the city's 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 parks and open spaces. City and federal agencies both have responsibilities for designating and protecting historic sites and evaluating impacts to these resources from development proposals. 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. Cultural landscapes are associated with a historic event, activity or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values. 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.

For example, 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 a war. The home of Frederick Douglass, overlooking the city from east of the Anacostia River, tells the story of this important African-American abolitionist and District resident, and is managed by the NPS. The Plan of the City of Washington, familiarly known as the L'Enfant Plan, is formed by the streets, parks and reservations of the original city. It is listed in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and in the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to specific buildings and designated historic districts, a number of cultural and commemorative works celebrate the nation or the city through monuments, memorials, and other landscape elements.



National Park Service

President's Park

Of the 96 District of Columbia sites in the National Register of Historic Places, 11 are parks:

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



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.

## 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 which are best suited as pocket parks, commemorative sites, or as public space along a street corridor. However, due to their size they are unable to accommodate active recreational facilities or events.

While Washington has a lot of park space, most of the land area is located in 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 along the city's perimeter. All are more than 50 acres in size and together comprise 80 percent of the park system's land area. 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, and Capitol Hill. While some park services are effectively provided on a city-wide basis, walkable access to park space is important.

There are a limited number of sites in the city that offer opportunities to establish significant new parkland or publicly accessible open space as sites redevelop. These include sites located in parts of the city with comparatively less access to parks than other areas. Examples include the Armed Forces Retirement Home, the North Capitol Street Cloverleaf, McMillan Reservoir, and the RFK Stadium site. Many of these sites are already identified in the Federal and District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan as possible sites for parks and open space that can benefit underserved communities and meet long-term park needs.

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 historically much of it was physically difficult to access or perceptually uninviting. Fortunately, recent federal and District efforts are changing this.

There are a number of federal and District-held public sites with significant open space, including the National Arboretum, the National Zoo, the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, several Department of Defense facilities, and the city's reservoirs and cemeteries. Many federal and institutional facilities have significant public plazas or are situated in campus-like settings. Access to these open space sites varies significantly, often shaped by security and mission/use-driven issues.



A freeway barrier south of Banneker Park





Ehrenkrantz Eckstut and Kahn architects

## Armed Forces Retirement Home

In July 2008, NCPC approved a master plan for the 272-acre Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH), which serves slightly more than 1200 military veterans. This master plan included the leased development of the southeast corner for private residential, office and retail uses, providing a revenue stream to support the AFRH's activities, as well as approximately 23 acres of public park space to serve the new development and the larger surrounding neighborhood.

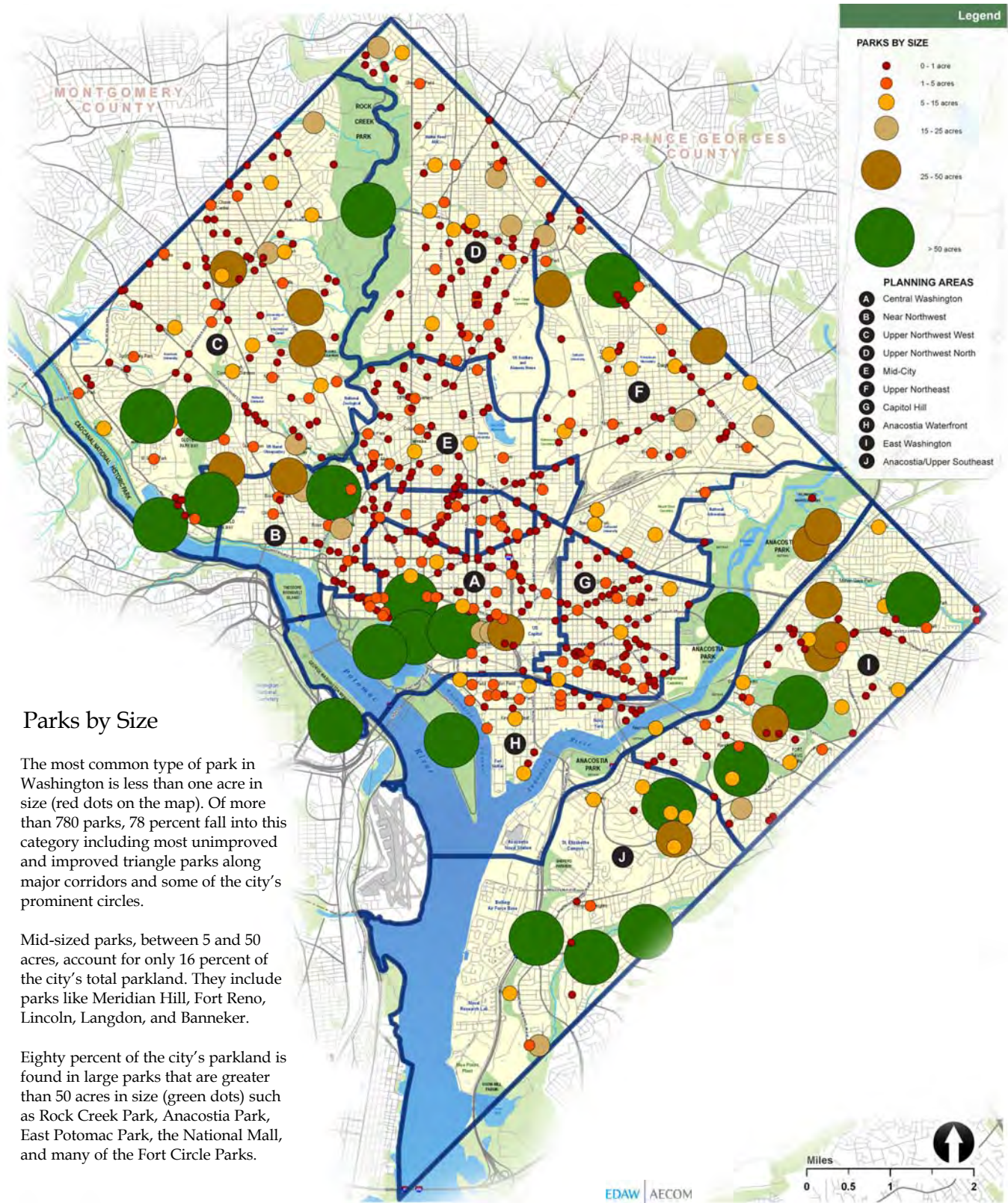
To further improve access to publicly accessible open space in the upper north-central part of the city, Washington Central Parks, a non-profit organization, and other neighborhood advocates have identified an opportunity to connect existing public parks with publicly-held, but often publicly-inaccessible, open space into a linked system of public spaces. Specifically, the concept is to connect Fort Totten on the north with open space on a redeveloped McMillan Reservoir sand filtration site to the south, using open space areas along the perimeter of the AFRH and the Washington Hospital Center as linkages in this system. This concept presents an opportunity to thread together many recreational facilities and important cultural and historical elements, and to improve the overall access to open space for the surrounding community.

Perception can also limit 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. Park access is also about information. Many of the resources in 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. Improved access, maintenance, design, and programming offer the opportunity to increase the capacity of existing park assets.

Some parks suffer from over-use, while others are under-used, sometimes due to poor conditions. All the agencies that manage parks and open space are challenged to build and maintain parks to the highest standards while working with 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, Georgetown Waterfront Park demonstrates that sustainable features can improve stormwater management, increase tree canopy and native vegetation, and provide aesthetic and active spaces for public recreation. Some technologies may also expand capacity in specific applications, but not in others. For example, artificial turf and lighting can extend playing time and durability on fields, but are not appropriate in national parks.





## 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.

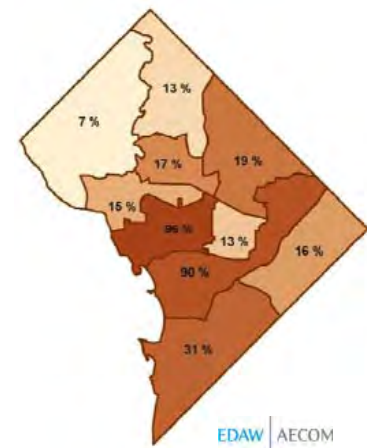
It is also important to consider park location in relationship to neighborhoods with the greatest density of workers and residents. Parts of Capitol Hill and Mid-City, for example, have high residential densities, but are located some distance from any large park, limiting access for these communities. 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 Nationals Park. Increasingly, residents and business districts will seek to ensure that adjacent public spaces are attractive and that signature elements define the neighborhood. The high cost of land in Washington presents challenges to acquiring affordable land for public parks and open space, so it is important to be creative in meeting increasing demands for park space. There are opportunities to work with public and private developers to include publicly-accessible open spaces within new developments throughout the District, or provide appropriate benefits that enhance park facilities.

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 sought after in the future.

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 more than 20 million visitors coming to Washington each year, many of whom focus on the Monumental Core. An opportunity exists to increase awareness and highlight the cultural, historical and ecological features in parks in other parts of the city so 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, particularly in underserved areas, 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.



**Percent Projected Growth 2005-2025**

The population of Washington is forecasted to increase 21 percent 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 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.



# SIX BIG IDEAS

1

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

2

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

3

Enhance urban natural areas and better connect residents to encourage urban stewardship for natural resources.

4

Improve playfields to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors.

5

Enhance Center City parks and open space to support a vibrant downtown.

6

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



Fort Reno

**T**hrough the many community parks spread across the city, the extensive stream valley corridors, forest preserves, the sweep of the Fort Circle Parks, the formal Center City parks, and the National Mall, parks and open spaces have defined and set Washington apart 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 provide diverse opportunities for learning, healthy living, and recreation, and are recognized as a vital part of Washington's open-space system.



PLANNING CONCEPTS



Weave Greenway through neighborhoods



Increase access to Great Local Parks



Protect, Connect, and Restore Natural Resources



Expand Park System Capacity



Link the City with Green Corridors



Library of Congress

Fort Stevens, 1865

**OBJECTIVES**

The Fort Circle Parks are appreciated, both locally and nationally, as 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 Circle Parks and other parks, schools, and civic destinations.

## 1

# Link the Fort Circle Parks



Fort Stevens

## Big Idea in Action

**A** ring of forts was erected around Washington during the Civil War to protect the nation's capital. In the early 1900's, 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 many of the 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.

In the future, the Fort Circle Parks will be connected by a picturesque, lush Greenway that links Washington's neighborhoods with adjacent communities, the Anacostia riverfront, and diverse recreational opportunities, including an 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. They will also provide much needed green space for activities and recreational opportunities for local residents, workers, and visitors.

In 1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps partially reconstructed Fort Stevens. The fort is the only battleground on which a United States President, Abraham Lincoln, came 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.





## Brief History of the Fort Circle Parks



Library of Congress

Fort Totten, ca. 1865

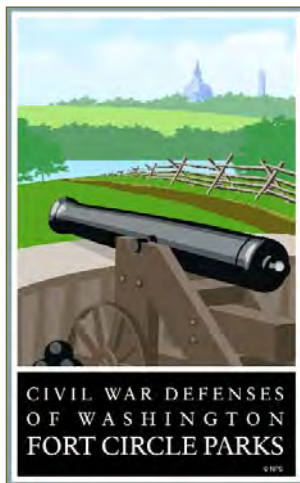
One of the legacies of the Civil War in the Washington region is a system of forts and defensive earthworks. Stretching over 37 miles, with 68 enclosed forts and batteries, 93 unarmed batteries, three blockhouses, and 20 miles of trenches, the original system of fortification extended into Virginia and 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 ultimately kept eleven forts and one battery for historical interest.

In 1902, the McMillan Plan proposed a regional park system that included a parkway. The "Fort Drive" would 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.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Capper-Cramton Act provided the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (predecessor of the National Capital Planning Commission), 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 23.5 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 1950s, 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. However, critics claimed that this idea was too expensive and impractical, and by the early 1960s, the idea of connecting the Fort Circle Parks with a continuous roadway was abandoned because citizens and planners were concerned with neighborhood and traffic impacts of the proposed roadway. As a result, in 1965 NCPC issued *The 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 between Forts Stanton and Mahan.

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



### The Civil War Defenses of Washington

In 2004, the NPS released *A Historic Resources Study: The Civil War Defenses of Washington*. This narrative history and accompanying historical analysis provides a comprehensive study of the Fort Circle Parks and includes detailed research on subjects such as non-federally owned sites related to The 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.

Following a period of jurisdictional transfers between federal agencies, the National Park Service (NPS) was given jurisdiction over the fort parks in 1933. In 1968, the 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. The parks would be 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, 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 was done 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.

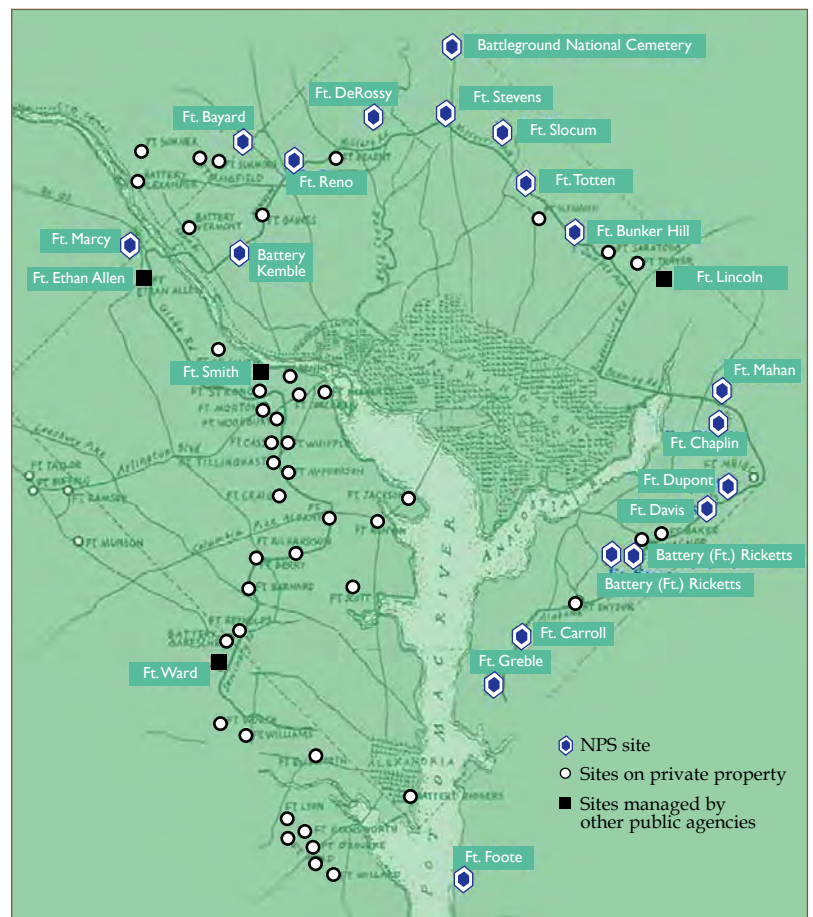
This plan will guide the management of the parks over the next 10-15 years, and sets a general vision for the management of the fort parks as a system, without setting site-specific management objectives for individual park forts.

The plan has three stated goals:

- ◆ Preserve and interpret the historical resources.
- ◆ Conserve the urban green space linkages.
- ◆ Provide compatible recreational opportunities.

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

Implementation of NPS's management plan for the Fort Circle Parks is underway. In 2009, the NPS hired their first full-time site manager whose primary focus is to coordinate improvements and programming for all the Fort Circle Parks. Linking the Fort Circle Parks creates opportunities for federal and District agencies and the public to promote the management plan's recommendations. It also builds upon these opportunities through ideas for better use of the fort parks as community assets by linking them to surrounding communities, waterfronts, and local and regional trail systems.



This 1919 topographic map shows the strategic location of the ring of Civil War forts around Washington. The dots, signifying elements of the fortification system, are spaced to ensure that no part of Washington is vulnerable to enemy penetration and are located at natural high elevations. The high vantage point of the forts that surrounded Washington commanded unobstructed sweeping views of the city, inspiring the McMillan Commission in later years to recommend their incorporation into the park system.





The historic and cultural resources of the Fort Circle Parks are not fully appreciated due to inadequate programming, maintenance, and signage. This image shows the DPR section of Fort Mahan prior to a service clean up day by the DC Building Industry of America in September 2009.

## Challenges

As the forts were abandoned after the Civil War, many were deemed surplus and the surrounding land returned to its original owners. Most forts were abandoned to the elements; as the forests and native vegetation rapidly reclaimed the land, the earthworks were oftentimes completely obscured. Now the forts' stunning views toward the capital city have been blocked.

Unfortunately, today 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 the surrounding areas, establishing early African- American neighborhoods.

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



Trails throughout the Fort Circle Parks provide a connection to natural resources in the urban setting of Washington.

## Opportunities

Together, the Fort Circle Parks represent a significant landscape element that played an important role in Washington during the Civil War. The NPS is committed to improving cultural and natural resources and recreational opportunities 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. They also have the potential 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 ability to link together the major fort parks into a cohesive system is its greatest potential strength. A united system would provide 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.



## Fort Circle Park Model Project

# Fort Mahan and Fort Stanton

Model approaches to link the Fort Circle Parks were studied at Fort Stanton and Fort Mahan. These fort parks were selected because they are in communities that currently have comparatively less access to parks and are experiencing significant new development. Challenges specific to each park were researched and analyzed, and opportunities were identified. Together, these informed the recommendations to link the Fort Circle Parks at the end of this chapter.



### *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 the Minnesota Avenue and Benning Road Metro stations. The park has the opportunity to be a vibrant community connector rather than a barrier, as it is now.

Specific issues and opportunities include:

- ◆ Increase the limited interpretive and visitor resources associated with the Civil War and fort, including enhancing the incredible views to the United States Capitol that are currently obscured by trees, while respecting existing forest resources.
- ◆ Improve existing on-site sidewalks, and install new ones as needed, along the perimeter and on trails throughout the park.
- ◆ Improve connections to Marvin Gaye Park, Miller Park, the Metro stations, bus routes, nearby schools, and the Boys and Girls Club.
- ◆ Capitalize on nearby residential development and the redeveloping commercial corridor adjacent to the site by positioning the park as a true community asset and east side gateway to the Fort Circle Parks.
- ◆ Improve and connect the park’s active recreational facilities to the adjacent DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and DC Public Schools (DCPS) properties to better serve neighborhood recreational needs.

## Fort Stanton—*A Grand Vista in the Nation's Capital*

Fort Stanton is located on a heavily forested ridgeline site, most of which falls under NPS jurisdiction. A reservoir and active recreational facilities are located on the site and are under the jurisdiction of the DC Water and Sewer Authority (DCWASA) and DPR. DPR has both outdoor and indoor active recreational facilities at Fort Stanton, including an outdoor baseball field renovated by DPR in 2009. 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:

- ◆ Increase 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 once stood. This view should be protected permanently and made part of the park experience.
- ◆ Improve the trails through the park and link them to surrounding cultural destinations, including the Frederick Douglass House and the Smithsonian Institution's Anacostia Community Museum.
- ◆ Improve the existing recreational amenities and recreation center to meet neighborhood needs and changing demographics.
- ◆ Preserve the stream corridor and floodplain in the park's interior and enhance the recreational experience in this area.



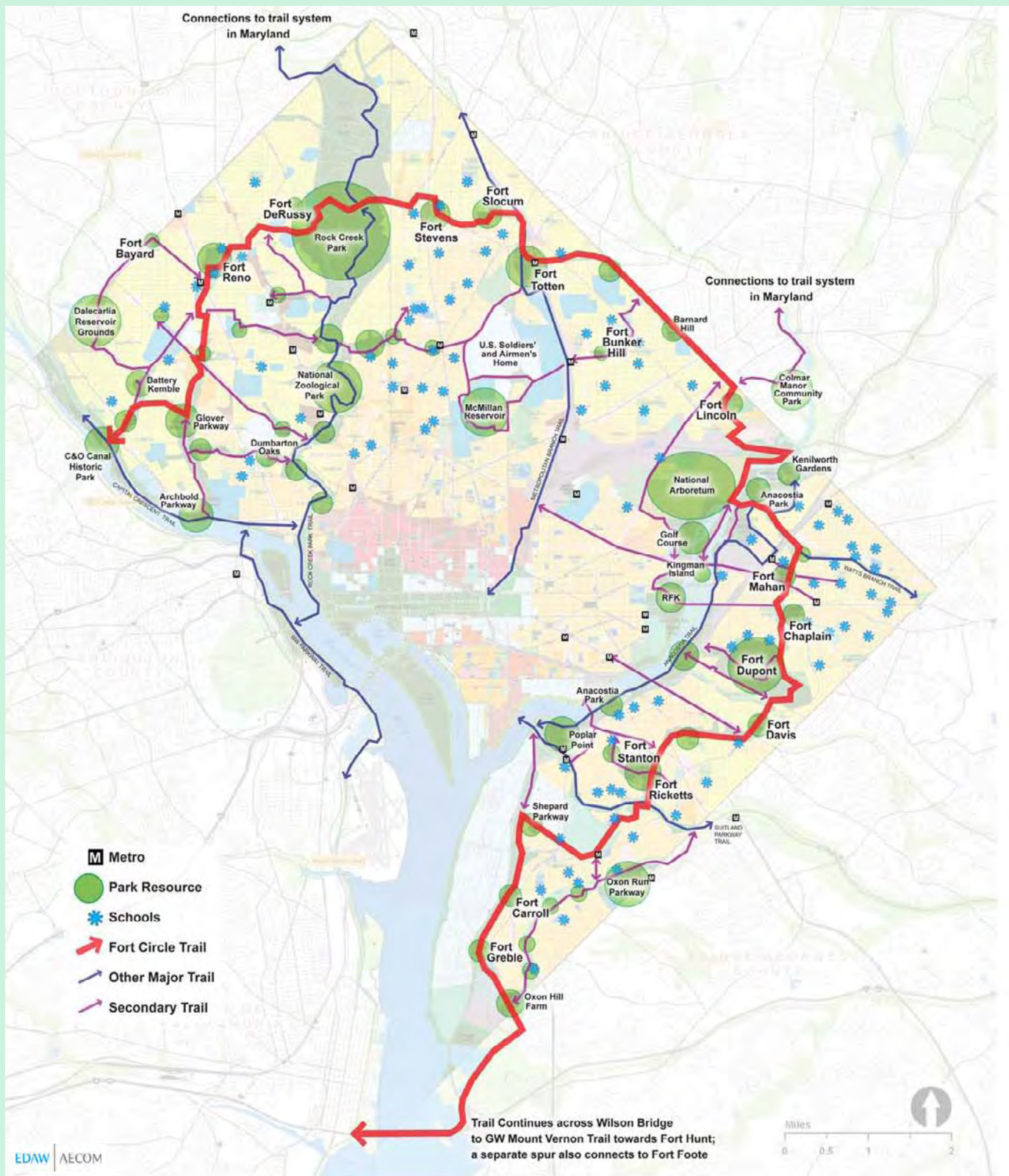
The existing trail at Fort Mahan is not easily identifiable due to lack of maintenance and signage.





## Potential Fort Circle Parks Trail Connections

This map identifies opportunities for strengthened connections between the fort parks and other parks, schools, and access points. It also illustrates conceptual trail connections. Refer to current trail maps for actual existing, planned, and proposed trail alignments.



## Recommendations

# Link the Fort Circle Parks

### Promote the Fort Circle Parks and Greenway as a National Historic, Cultural, and Recreational Treasure (FCP-1)

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Provide opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize the history of the Fort Circle Parks. Remains of many of the forts are slowly vanishing.

- ◆ Install park and trail signage and interpretive stations to provide information, celebrate important vistas, and describe the park's role in the Civil War.
- ◆ 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 (FCP-2)

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Connecting the Fort Circle Parks to other parks, schools, neighborhoods, and other destinations increases accessibility to 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 (FCP-3)

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The Fort Circle Parks were once community gathering places. Selective park activities can once again 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 (FCP-4)

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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 students and visitors 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.



PLANNING CONCEPTS



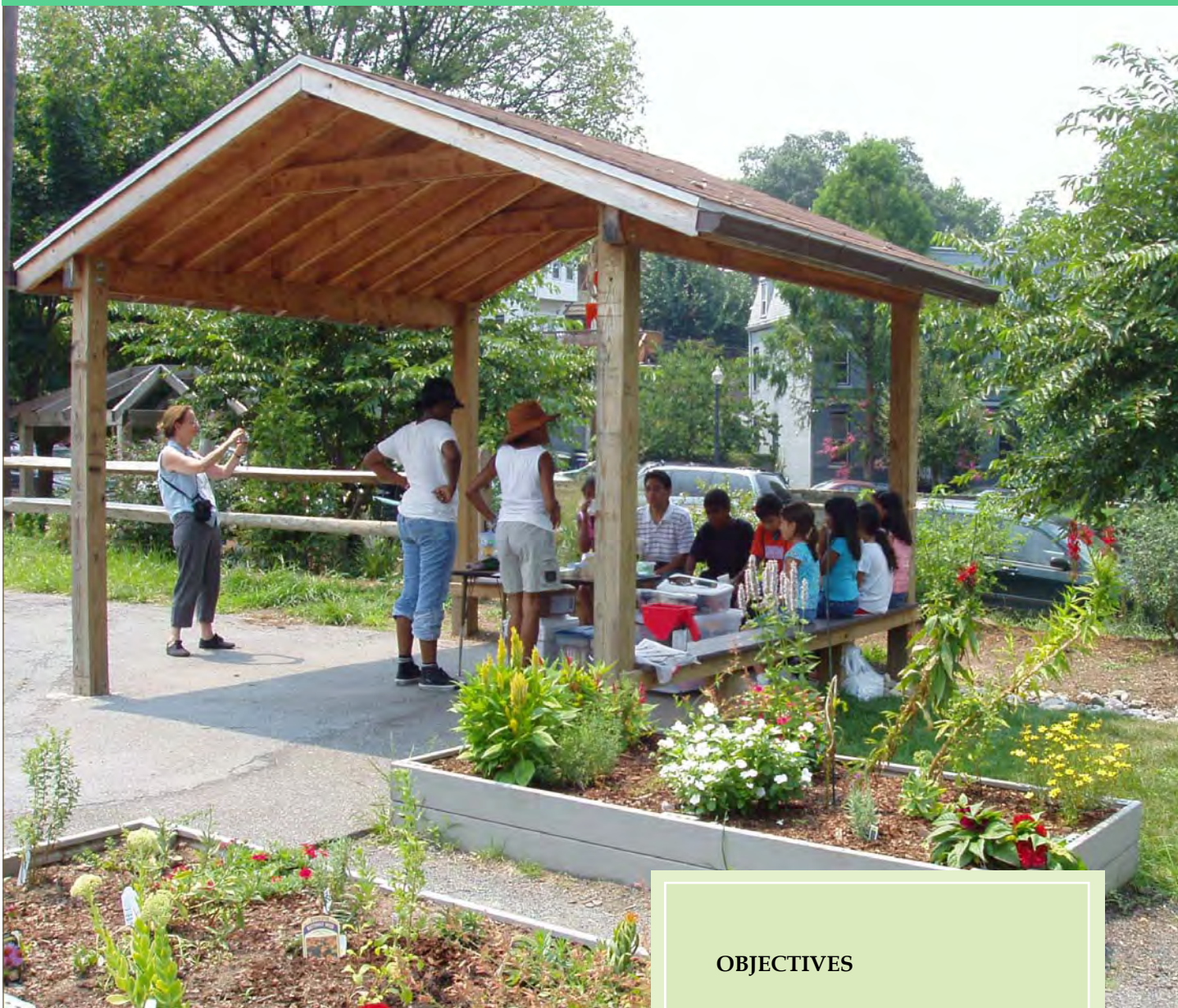
Weave Greenway through neighborhoods



Increase access to Great Local Parks



Expand Park System Capacity



21st Century School Fund

Teachers, volunteers and students at Bancroft Elementary School attend an outdoor classroom workshop in August 2009.

**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.

## 2

# Improve Public Schoolyards



## Big Idea in Action

In the past, great value was placed on the importance of open space and recreation in early childhood development. Further, federal and local plans sought to co-locate public facilities and use them for broader community purposes. Schools played a critical component in this strategy, offering joint learning and recreational facilities and serving as neighborhood centers. Schoolyards continue to play an important role in providing open space and recreation for the city's children, and as a focal point of community life.

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 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.

Public schoolyards serve as places of recreation and physical activity, and also provide 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. A combination of physical activity and learning about healthy living, for example, through development of a schoolyard vegetable garden provides a powerful antidote to childhood obesity and a host of other physical and emotional health issues that commonly affect students.

With innovative stormwater management features, such as rain gardens, integrated into schoolyards, children can learn how greening their schoolyard is beneficial for the environment. With the District's public schoolyards using sustainable design strategies, all of Washington benefits through improved water quality.

Butterfly Garden at  
Cardozo Senior High School



Central High students at a track meet in 1925

Library of Congress



## Brief History of the Expansion of Schoolyards and Neighborhood Recreational Centers

At the turn of the 20th century, new ideas were developed about the importance of open space and recreation in early childhood development. These ideas were rooted in the Progressive belief that an orderly environment played an important role in creating healthy families and communities. In 1901, Washington's first neighborhood playground opened in Southwest 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 in providing publicly accessible recreation areas throughout Washington.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, a number of governmental bodies, including the District's Department of Playgrounds, the municipal Board of Education, and the federal National Capital Park and Planning Commission, oversaw implementation of new playgrounds and fields in schoolyards. These new schoolyards met goals for student and community recreational needs. The District established a four acre minimum size for new school sites, one of the first cities in the United States to do so. In 1927, NCPPC promoted the concept of neighborhood centers, planning for new schools, athletic fields, and recreational areas to be located 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 neighborhood open spaces where students and families could come together.

As of 2006, public schools contained many of the city's overall recreational resources, providing 49 percent of playgrounds, 56 percent of football fields, and 39 percent of basketball courts.

Today, several entities manage the construction and maintenance of schoolyards, including the District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, DCPS and DC Parks and Recreation. The District of Columbia's Department of Transportation (DDOT) maintains the perimeters of some schoolyards, and DPR maintains 16 athletic fields located on schoolyards. In some instances, the federal government retains the underlying ownership of schoolyards. The generally balanced distribution of schoolyards throughout Washington provides important access to recreation and open space that meets some, but not all, of resident needs.



Library of Congress

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



Some schools' 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 public 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, some elementary schools are still equipped with out-of-date playground equipment and non-regulation size athletic fields. In 2009, the District unveiled an extensive public school facilities modernization program, with a focus on the buildings—not the schoolyards. Private and charter schools fall outside of the scope of the school modernization process.

School administrators may have safety concerns about opening schoolyards to the public 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 may also have to address issues of vandalism, hazardous trash, and illegitimate activities caused by unregulated access to the schoolyard.

Developing a District-wide schoolyard modernization program is difficult because public schoolyards are diverse in size, schools have different programming needs, and there may be potential location and external pressures. These challenges can make it difficult to develop broad standards and policies that can be applied to all school sites.

Another challenge is that schoolyard improvement, programming, field permitting, and maintenance responsibilities are shared by several District agencies. While the public may only see a unified open space, the number of agencies involved makes coordinating ongoing maintenance, improvements, and overall access challenging.

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



Opened in 2009, the 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.

J.O. Wilson Elementary School received a new schoolyard in 2009. Amenities include new playground equipment, plaza and outdoor garden.



## Opportunities

Schoolyards can provide critical recreational and environmental education opportunities for students. More classroom plans are incorporating the outdoors, and children need accessible outdoor spaces to learn about a wide variety of subjects including biology, history, personal health, and the environment. Adequate exercise, outdoor play, and team sports have proven to be critical in helping children become healthy adults. Physical activity can also help reduce childhood obesity, affecting 35 percent of the District's children, as estimated in 2007.

Schoolyards can also provide important community recreation and open space locations during non-school hours. Making use of existing open space is particularly important in neighborhoods where park resources are otherwise scarce. Schoolyard improvements thus provide concurrent benefits to nearby residents. Well-landscaped and designed school sites can help to beautify neighborhoods and increase environmental stewardship among students, teachers, parents and the surrounding community.

While schoolyards are not currently the focus of the school modernization program, there is an opportunity to develop a comprehensive schoolyard program and integrate it within the existing modernization process with the help of other District agencies. The District of Columbia Department of the Environment developed programs to green school sites, and the agency works closely with DC Schoolyard Greening, a program of the DC Environmental Education Consortium, to lay the foundation for improving schoolyards. DPR is also 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. Through shared agency goals, these programs can further increase the benefits conferred by schoolyard modernization.



21st Century School Fund



21st Century School Fund



21st Century School Fund

## Public Schoolyard Model Project

# Public Schoolyard Model Project: Benjamin Orr Elementary School



A positive aspect of Orr's schoolyard is a painted mural and learning landscape.

### Proposed Access and Safety



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

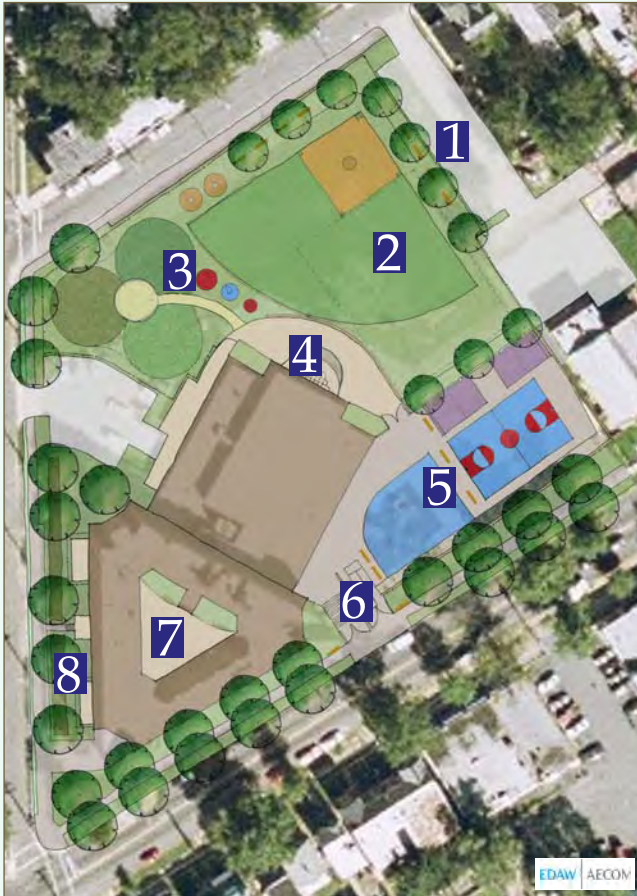
Built in 1974, Benjamin Orr Elementary School was selected as a model project because it has not been through a major modernization, its 1.4 acres are considered average in size compared to other schools, and it is in an area of Southeast Washington identified as underserved by parks, open space, and 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 276 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 schoolyard has representative opportunities and challenges that can inform schoolyard policies District-wide. The project identified the following goals:

- ◆ Meet physical education and health needs by improving existing active recreation amenities, including the play areas, fields, and basketball courts.
- ◆ Meet environmental and educational goals through "greening" the schoolyard with gardens or other stormwater measures.
- ◆ Address visibility issues.
- ◆ Create a new outdoor learning opportunity by expanding the stage area.
- ◆ Improve security, school appearance and delineating 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 an adjacent 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 could 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 age appropriate basketball courts, 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 with each other; approaches should balance all goals.**

Several competing goals at Orr's schoolyard need to be reconciled. For example, providing 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 proposed access and safety graphic (see prior page) demonstrates how schoolyard access and security issues might be balanced.

Introducing environmental elements such as rain gardens can conflict with recreational activities that require hard surfaces. Guidelines should include specific measures or approaches to analyze how to balance recreation needs with 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 needs. An evaluation of neighborhood park improvement opportunities should be included in any schoolyard improvement strategy. This collaborative approach between schools and parks can help ensure that students have fun, functional, and accessible recreation space during and after school hours, and simultaneously help to ensure that other park users have places for recreation and team sports that do not compete with school needs.

## Recommendations

# Improve Public Schoolyards

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



## Incorporate a Schoolyard Improvement Strategy into School Modernization Programs (SCH-1)

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 and enhancements.

## Preserve Recreation and Open Space for Community Use (SCH-2)

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 and whenever 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.

## Develop District-Wide Guidelines for Schoolyards (SCH-3)

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 schoolyard components.
- ◆ 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 (SCH-4)

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.



PLANNING CONCEPTS



Increase access to Great Local Parks



Connect with Rivers



Protect, Connect, and Restore Natural Resources



Expand Park System Capacity



Link the City with Green Corridors



Watts Branch Park

**OBJECTIVES**

The ecological resources of the 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.



## 3

## Enhance Urban Natural Areas



A.Draughts Furnituremaker

Red-shouldered hawk in Rock Creek Park

## Big Idea in Action

**I**n the future, Washington's parks will contain the majority of the city's forests, wetland and riparian habitats, and many unique ecosystems. Washington's urban natural areas are appreciated and protected for the use and enjoyment they provide to residents and visitors, but also 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, connect to each other, connect to urban neighborhoods, and connect to the greater regional system of natural areas. Natural areas are protected, restored, and enhanced.

The natural areas in Washington's parks play a critical role in fulfilling the city's sustainability and environmental goals. Low impact and sustainable measures to reduce pollution are incorporated across the city and around the region. The natural and built environment now work in concert, providing the city with green infrastructure to improve air and water quality and address climate change.



DCpages.com

Kayaker on the C &amp; O Canal





Library of Congress

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

## Brief History of Washington's Natural Areas

Washington's parks contain most of the city's river and stream valley corridors, escarpment, and forested areas, and provide many ecological functions. Historically, the preservation and management of these spaces was related to two main purposes. First, natural areas provided a critical element of much-needed city infrastructure by serving as discharge areas for stormwater. Second, there was an interest in conserving aesthetically pleasing natural features and recreational opportunities, which provided places of public respite. Neither purpose, however, was fully informed by the ecological value of these areas now recognized by park providers, environmental advocates, and the public.

Despite having admiration for its natural features, Washington's city builders were more preoccupied with the construction of roads, buildings, and other infrastructure during the city's first 100 years. During the 19th century, these activities included massive forest clearing, re-engineering of natural springs to supply city water, leveling of bluffs and 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 population growth post-Civil War led to infrastructure, economic, and health problems that in turn further impacted natural areas. Deforestation caused the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers to fill with silt, disrupting navigation and exacerbating flooding. Untreated sewage trapped in the silted rivers threatened public health, resulting in the filling of many wetlands and marshes. City-wide sewer infrastructure was constructed in stream valley corridors, and many streams were put into underground pipes. Stream valleys were purchased as parkland in part for the purpose of conveying stormwater from neighborhood streets to the rivers. Even park plans could negatively affect natural areas—the McMillan Plan of 1901 resulted in additional filling of low-lying areas along the Potomac River to complete the National Mall.

However, use as city infrastructure was not the only reason tracts of land were converted into parks. Towards the end of the 19th century there was growing recognition of 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 was created by a Congressional act in 1890 with a mandate to protect its natural beauty while accommodating carriageways and trails for public use.

The McMillan Plan established a city-wide plan for a connected system of park and open spaces that included sites along the escarpment, the stream valley corridors, and river edges, including a proposal for Anacostia Park. This plan subsequently drove park acquisition in the first half of the 20th century, resulting in the majority of the park areas present today. These significant park acquisitions and their inclusion in the National Park System, often under the directive that their natural resources be protected, has resulted in the city's many connected and largely intact natural corridors.

Increasing recognition of the importance of natural areas for wildlife habitat, community health and to provide critical climate, air, soil and water quality, continued to gain momentum throughout the 20th century. Inspired by publications such as *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *Design with Nature* by Ian McHarg, this growing environmental awareness led to federal and local legislation and programs to protect and restore natural resources. Beginning in the 1980s, regional efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and their tributaries raised public awareness on the need to balance healthy ecosystems with the built environment.

The early 21st century has seen more work to restore urban natural areas and protect them from future development pressures. Spearheaded by the work of the Casey Trees Foundation, Washington is working towards restoring the city's tree canopy to 40 percent by 2030. Plans are also underway to make the Anacostia River safe for swimming and fishing by 2032. The creation of the Mayor's Green DC Agenda program in 2009 commits Washington to become one of the most sustainable cities in the world. These goals for a sustainable, resilient city highlight the continuing need to integrate restored natural areas into the fabric of the urban environment.



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Rock Creek Park, ca. 1920



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.



## Challenges

Urban parks are often defined and valued by the way they are used by residents and visitors. Some parks have a variety of more active recreational uses, with each use represented by a different constituency group. These groups serve as an ad hoc oversight committee to ensure their parks are maintained sufficiently. In addition, the historic planned squares and circles within Washington are protected by a number of 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 policies designed to protect their ecological communities and functions.

Because natural park areas are wild and unstructured spaces, and are 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, they 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 safer—adding lighting, paving trails, or clearing vegetation—end up threatening these urban natural places.

The pressure on Washington’s natural areas is significant and continues to grow. These areas are threatened not only by the potential for new development, but also urban activities, 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, invasive plant species such as English Ivy are more likely to out-compete native plants for resources and replace them. In turn, the habitat may become so adversely modified that wildlife populations are displaced.

Even more importantly, natural processes such as stormwater storage and filtration may be disrupted permanently. City and regional growth puts additional pressure on wetlands and other low-lying, permeable areas to detain and filter stormwater during storms. Without adequate on-site treatment of stormwater in the built environment, natural areas are negatively impacted by a quantity and quality of water that causes so much damage that the area is no longer capable of treating any water. This, in turn, destroys the carrying capacity of streams and rivers, and damages flora and fauna that have existed in this area for thousands of years.



Trashfree Anacostia

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



Fishing along the trail at the C & O Canal National Historic Park.

National Park Service

## Opportunities

Washington's natural areas, parks, and other urban green spaces provide significant ecological value as corridors for wildlife to move within and through the region, for stormwater storage during periods of flooding, and for filtering air- and water-borne pollutants. Beyond local ecosystems, Washington's parks and open spaces play a role in mitigating climate change and restoring regional river systems throughout the larger Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Many of Washington's urban natural areas are stream corridors that weave through the urban fabric and host diverse riparian and upland habitats for myriad bird and wildlife species. Further protection and restoration of these areas will create a stronger wildlife corridor system that can connect to each other and to natural areas throughout the mid-Atlantic region. As more green roof development continues in Washington, these spaces can expand these corridors to provide additional habitat opportunities for native flora and fauna.

Washington's trees, parks, and open spaces absorb carbon dioxide from the air, and wetlands help to improve water quality. Combined with the inclusion of sustainable design elements in new developments, urban natural areas can become a critical component of a green infrastructure system to improve environmental health. Advances in sustainable design technology and urban ecology allow for restoration of urban natural areas, and it is important to transform them into healthy, functioning ecosystems.

Urban wild areas are not only important because of their ecological benefits. Studies indicate that access to nature may have powerful preventative and curative impacts on personal health. For urban residents, nature can be a soothing and calm escape from the loud and harsh manmade environment, and natural areas can soften the hard edges of urban environments. Understanding how natural systems function and allowing residents and visitors to reconnect to nature helps create and retain a core group of advocates to protect and enhance these important spaces.



Hoopdreams 2009

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



Alice Ferguson Foundation 2006

Journaling at Rock Creek



## 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.



National Park Service

Oxon Run is a natural system selected as a model project because a variety of public agencies, municipalities, and private and non-profit organizations are responsible for its management and the surrounding watershed. Based on field study, stakeholder interviews, and research. This analysis identified the major environmental challenges to the health of the Oxon Run watershed, and reviewed previous and ongoing restoration efforts. The model project provided recommendations specific to Oxon Run.

From this in-depth study, lessons were learned that informed recommendations on urban natural areas citywide, including:

- ◆ Habitat restoration.
- ◆ Water quality improvements.
- ◆ Improved recreation and community access.
- ◆ Specific management ideas tailored to a natural area.

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.

## Lessons Learned

### **Involve Neighborhoods in Protecting Natural Areas**

Cities need natural landscapes because of the ecological functions they provide to developed areas, but natural areas also need neighbors to protect their functions for future generations.

### **Cooperation and Empowerment are Needed to Keep a Functioning Urban Ecosystem**

Natural resource issues do not always fall neatly within jurisdictional or political boundaries, and District entities must seek out and develop partnerships with each other, and with agencies and groups in neighboring jurisdictions.

### **Healthy Parks Help Create Healthy Communities**

Ecosystem-based approaches to park management can yield economic and environmental benefits.

### **Natural Areas Help Improve the Quality of Life for Neighbors**

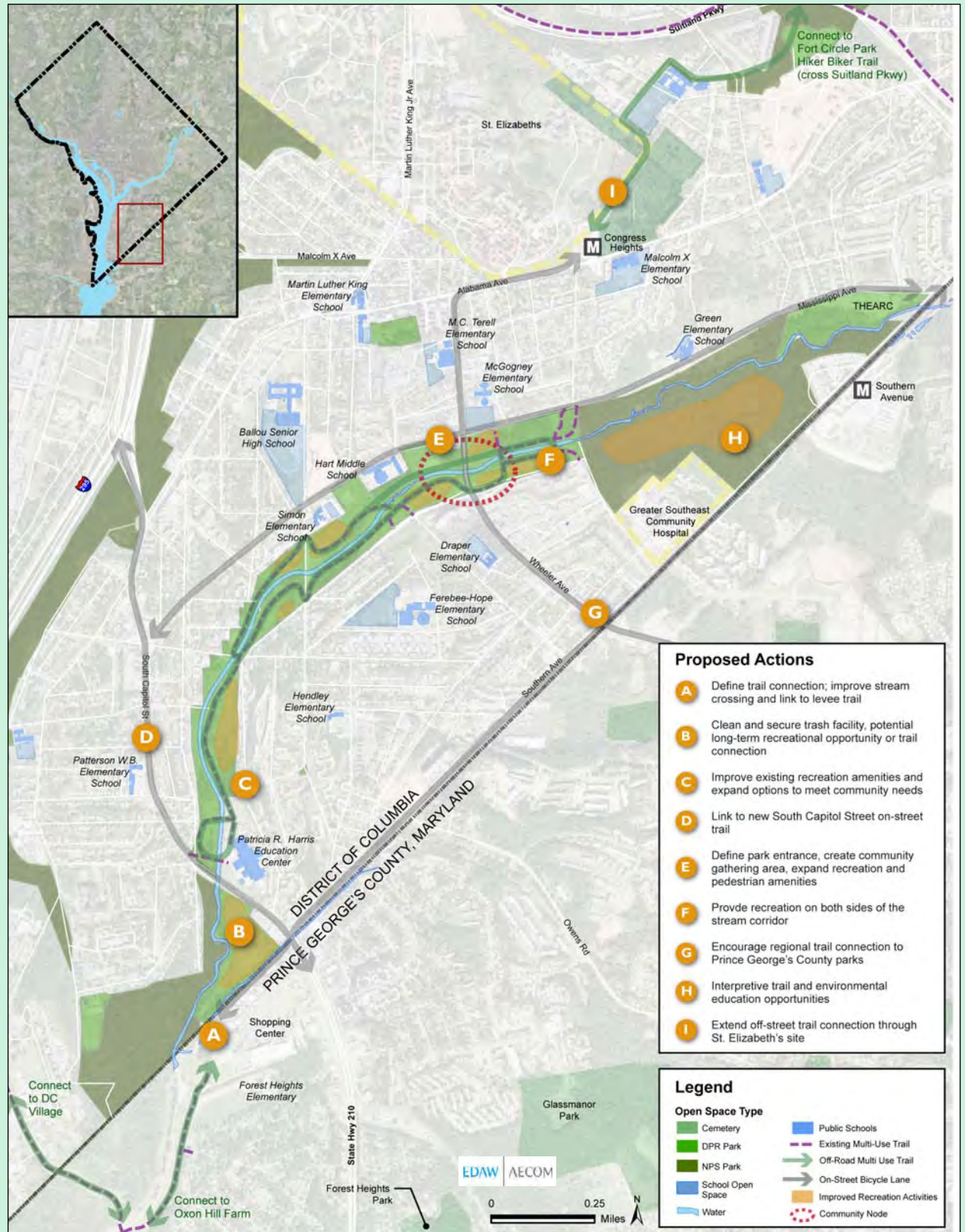
Parks can improve an individual's well-being by providing a place to exercise and recreate, as well as engage residents and visitors in experiencing the natural world.

### **Increased Recreation Opportunities and Enhanced Ecological Functions Are Not Mutually Exclusive**

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.

## 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.



## Recommendations

# Enhance Urban Natural Areas

### Form an Urban Natural Areas Team (ENV-1)

The natural resources embedded in Washington's parks need a coordinated team of federal and local agencies, as well as local organizations, to ensure that they are protected.

- ◆ 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, the 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.
- ◆ Expand nature and interpretative programs in existing parks that promote an appreciation of environmental resources, and institute school curriculum and teacher training programs that promote stewardship of the natural resources and waterways.



Alice Ferguson Foundation 2006

Water testing at Rock Creek

### Protect Ecological Functions (ENV-2)

It is important to protect the ecological functions provided by 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 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 to limit pollution and stormwater run-off.
- ◆ Identify the role Washington's 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 the environmental corridors that create the physical connection of the 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 Kingman Island and the Anacostia River showing the construction of wetlands (bright green areas) along its banks.



### Synchronize Park Management Strategies among Jurisdictions (ENV-3)

The importance of Washington's parks transcends agency jurisdictions and municipal boundaries. Federal and local agencies need to coordinate and collaborate regularly.

- ◆ Identify and rank parks and open spaces in need of preservation and restoration. Target funding for programming, research, and mitigation based on greatest need.
- ◆ Target off-site environmental mitigation efforts towards enhancing or restoring designated urban natural areas.
- ◆ 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 (ENV-4)

Stormwater management, flood control, and water quality can be reliably managed by integration of natural systems with engineered design elements that work with nature, often at a reduced cost. Green infrastructure can perform many of the same services as gray or man-made infrastructure.

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



PLANNING CONCEPTS



Increase access to Great Local Parks



Celebrate Urban Parks



Expand Park System Capacity



DC Department of Parks and Recreation

Little League baseball continues to be a popular pastime in Washington.

**OBJECTIVES**

Existing athletic fields are improved to expand capacity through physical ease of access and permitting. Appropriate levels of maintenance are funded and implemented to further increase capacity.

## 4

# Improve Playfields



## Big Idea in Action

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

As a highly sought after recreational resource, athletic facilities will be accorded the highest level of design, construction, 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 intensive field play and hot and humid summers. At various times throughout the year, fields will be closed to play to allow the turf a sufficient time to regrow. Both natural and artificial turf fields will benefit from a dedicated funding stream for capital projects and maintenance.

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

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



## A Brief History of Active Recreation in Washington

The first active recreation facility in Washington available to the public opened when the privately operated Neighborhood House constructed a playground in 1901. Active recreation facilities were not provided by a government agency until 1911, when the Playground Department and Board of Education were authorized to provide community-oriented recreation. In 1911, the District Commissioners created the Department of Playgrounds to administer municipal land used for playgrounds and athletic fields. A second municipal agency, the Board of Education, also planned to increase recreational use at their facilities by increasing the number and size of playgrounds and athletic fields at all of Washington's schools. In 1916, a collaborative agreement between the Board of Education and the Department of Playgrounds resulted in public recreation facilities on school grounds becoming increasingly accessible to children after school hours and during the summer.

Prior to the 1930s, most active recreation facilities in the District were located at District operated playgrounds or public school sites. However, between 1933 and 1942, the National Capital Parks, a division of the National Park Service, had a recreation division charged with the construction, maintenance, and operation of many recreational facilities in the parks of 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 1942, Congress authorized creation of a District of Columbia Recreation Board. With both federal and District representation, the board was given authority to determine general policy for public recreation in the District and to supervise and direct the expenditure of all federal appropriations and local funds made available for recreation in Washington.

This NCPPC 1929 plan depicts the need to include athletic fields as a typical component of recreation centers in Washington.



The board developed a comprehensive public recreation program offering physical, social, emotional, and creative opportunities in the major parks, publicly-owned buildings, and other recreational facilities agreed upon by the Board and the agencies with jurisdiction over them. The public properties utilized by the Board included those designated by National Capital Park and Planning Commission as suitable and desirable units of the District's recreational system.

In 1949, the District and the National Park Service entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) detailing the roles and responsibilities of the NPS and the District government regarding 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 original MOA was to remain in effect until cancelled by either party. The MOA was amended several times to include additional federal park areas. In 1966, and 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."

In 1974, the Home Rule Act abolished the Recreation Board and Superintendent of Recreation. 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 some, but not all of those still titled to the United States government but with administrative jurisdiction of the District, are managed by the DC Department of Parks and Recreation. The NPS maintains overall management of the designated national parks within Washington, although DPR provides permitting services for certain NPS fields.



The Watkins Hornets, who practice on the football field at Watkins Recreation Center, won the 2009 Pee Wee Division One National Championship

DC Department of Public Works





D.C. Department of Public Works

The playfield at Fort Stanton before (left) and after (right) a 2008 - 2009 renovation. The field now uses Patriot Bermudagrass, a warm season grass that is drought and heat tolerant, resistant to most pests, and holds up well to heavy use year-round.

## Challenges

Washington, like many cities and suburban communities across the country, faces pressure to increase the number of playfields for team sports, including soccer, football, and baseball. The growing population in Washington, along with the demands for active recreation spaces, is exerting pressure on the existing fields. As such, meeting needs for active recreational fields in Washington's urban environment is becoming challenging.

Locating new fields is both difficult and expensive 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 and, where feasible, locate new fields closer to public transit.

The quality of Washington's 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 weather, topography, type of use, frequency of use, budget, maintenance standards, and programs. The impact of field conditions can extend beyond capacity issues; some jurisdictions face legal questions and liability issues associated with poorly designed, constructed, or maintained fields.

Maintenance of athletic fields in Washington is a critical challenge for the NPS, DPR, and DC Public Schools. Maintenance is constrained by a variety of reasons, including increasing user demand, an insufficient supply of field facilities and field types, a growth in sport leagues and tournament play, over-use of facilities, limited funding, lack of expertise, and overall coordination. Over time, deferred maintenance can accelerate field deterioration or even lead to unsafe playing conditions.

Both DPR and the 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 (mainly through DPR and the various NPS park units within Washington) with their own application process, season, requirements, and fees.

## Opportunities

DPR, the 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 improve field conditions, as well as simplifying the permitting process so that individuals, teams, and leagues have an easier time accessing existing playfields.

Currently, DPR, the 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 facility conditions. 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 also help alleviate current demand. Examples include converting grass fields 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.

As part of its mission to conserve natural and historic areas, the 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.

More progressive and sustainable maintenance practices can be pursued if resources are available after basic maintenance requirements are 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, should be explored.

Improving access to fields by permit process coordination and improvements can help increase 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.

Although land availability is tight in Washington, one strategy to pursue is the creation of consolidated recreation facilities with multiple fields and other new recreational amenities at available sites. This can alleviate the specific shortage of fields in the city and the existing pressures on existing fields.



## Maintenance of Playfields

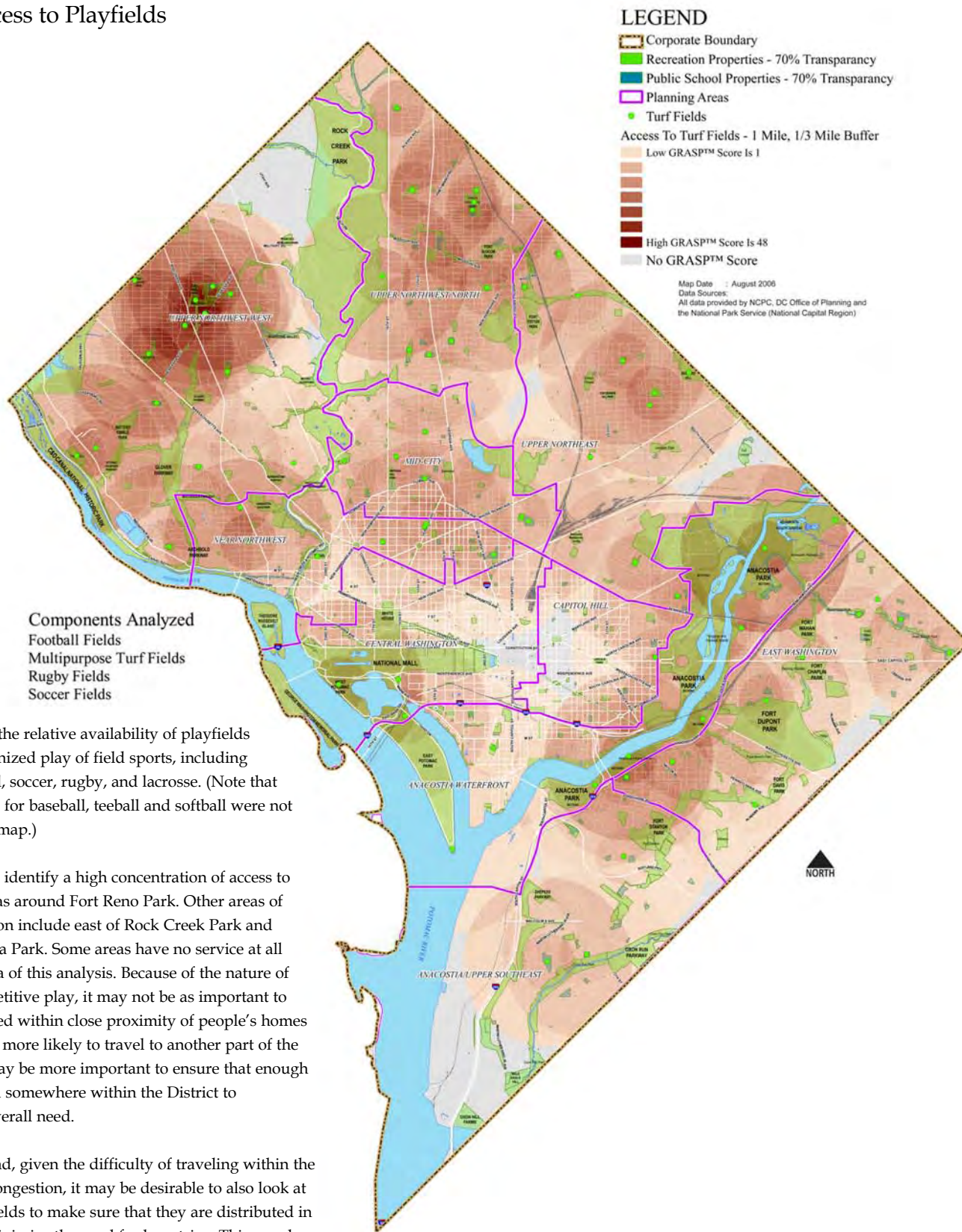
Maintenance has not kept pace with user demands. Ongoing fiscal restraints result in challenges to playfield maintenance programs, lowering turf quality and field capacity. Neither the NPS nor DPR currently have the ability to dedicate significant specific funds for athletic field maintenance. On some DPR fields, users (permit holders) assist with providing field maintenance activities so that fields are ready for play.

In 2007, the DC Sports & Entertainment Commission Board of Directors approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DC Public Schools to manage the \$21.5 million renovation of five athletic fields and associated facilities on DCPS facilities. Renovation schedules are based on the DCPS Master Facilities Plan. All facilities will receive high quality tracks and synthetic field surfaces used at many college and professional stadiums, as well as upgrades to bleachers, press boxes, and other amenities where feasible.

Certain projects funded by DPR can build in costs associated with maintenance if 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, soccer, rugby, and lacrosse. (Note that "diamond" fields for baseball, tee-ball and softball were not included in this map.)

The darker areas identify a high concentration of access to playfields in areas around Fort Reno Park. Other areas of high concentration include 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 more likely to travel to another part of the city to play. It may be more important to ensure that enough fields are located somewhere within the District to accommodate overall 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 at transit-accessible locations whenever possible would be another option.

**LEGEND**

- Corporate Boundary
- Recreation Properties - 70% Transparency
- Public School Properties - 70% Transparency
- Planning Areas
- Turf Fields

Access To Turf Fields - 1 Mile, 1/3 Mile Buffer

- Low GRASP™ Score Is 1
- 
- 
- High GRASP™ Score Is 48
- No GRASP™ Score

Map Date : August 2006  
 Data Sources:  
 All data provided by NCPD, DC Office of Planning and  
 the National Park Service (National Capital Region)

## Permitting Playfields

### PERMITTING PLAYFIELDS— LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES

Both DPR and the 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 (the 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, the CapitalSpace partners 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 permitting trends, agency responsibility and organization, and revenue.

Key points learned from this analysis are summarized below.

- ◆ New athletic field amenities, such as synthetic turf, help 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 (significantly in some cases) than those fees charged by either DPR or the 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 different ways based on available resources such as contracting with local police, hired field monitors, or through a dedicated unit within a parks department.

Various application systems used by other jurisdictions were studied, such as this on-line permit application form used by Montgomery County, Maryland.





## Recommendations

# Improve Playfields

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



### Maintain or Expand Current Recreation Field Capacity (REC-1)

The relatively good access to athletic fields that District residents across the city share should be maintained.

- ◆ 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 citywide demand.

### Increase Field Capacity Where Feasible (REC-2)

The NPS and DPR both experience high demand for athletic fields, and capacity is soon reached after permitting season opens.

- ◆ Develop a coordinated field assessment and evaluation program for the 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 the NPS fields for improving capacity through access, scheduling, and improving field allocation.
- ◆ Develop a coordinated field improvement plan and capital program for the 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 and 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.

### Improve Field Maintenance (REC-3)

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More progressive and sustainable maintenance practices can be pursued if resources are available after basic maintenance requirements are met.

- ◆ 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
  - ◆ Unstructured 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 (REC-4)

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Improving access to fields by permit process coordination and improvements can help increase the capacity of Washington's fields.

- ◆ Develop an on-line permit application system that integrates the 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 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.



PLANNING CONCEPTS



Increase access to Great Local Parks



Connect with Rivers



Celebrate Urban Parks



Expand Park System Capacity



Link the City with Green Corridors



McPherson Square

**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.

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

## 5

# Enhance Center City Parks

## Big Idea in Action



In the future, residents and workers embrace Center City parks and open space near their homes and offices as places to have a cup of coffee with friends, read a book, play with their kids, surf the Web, buy fresh bread at a farmers market, or just relax to take in the fresh air and sunshine. Visitors delight in learning about our collective American experience through cultural markers and commemorative works as they explore the historic squares and energetic urban avenues in the Center City. Others come together in these spaces to listen to a free concert or rally for a national cause.

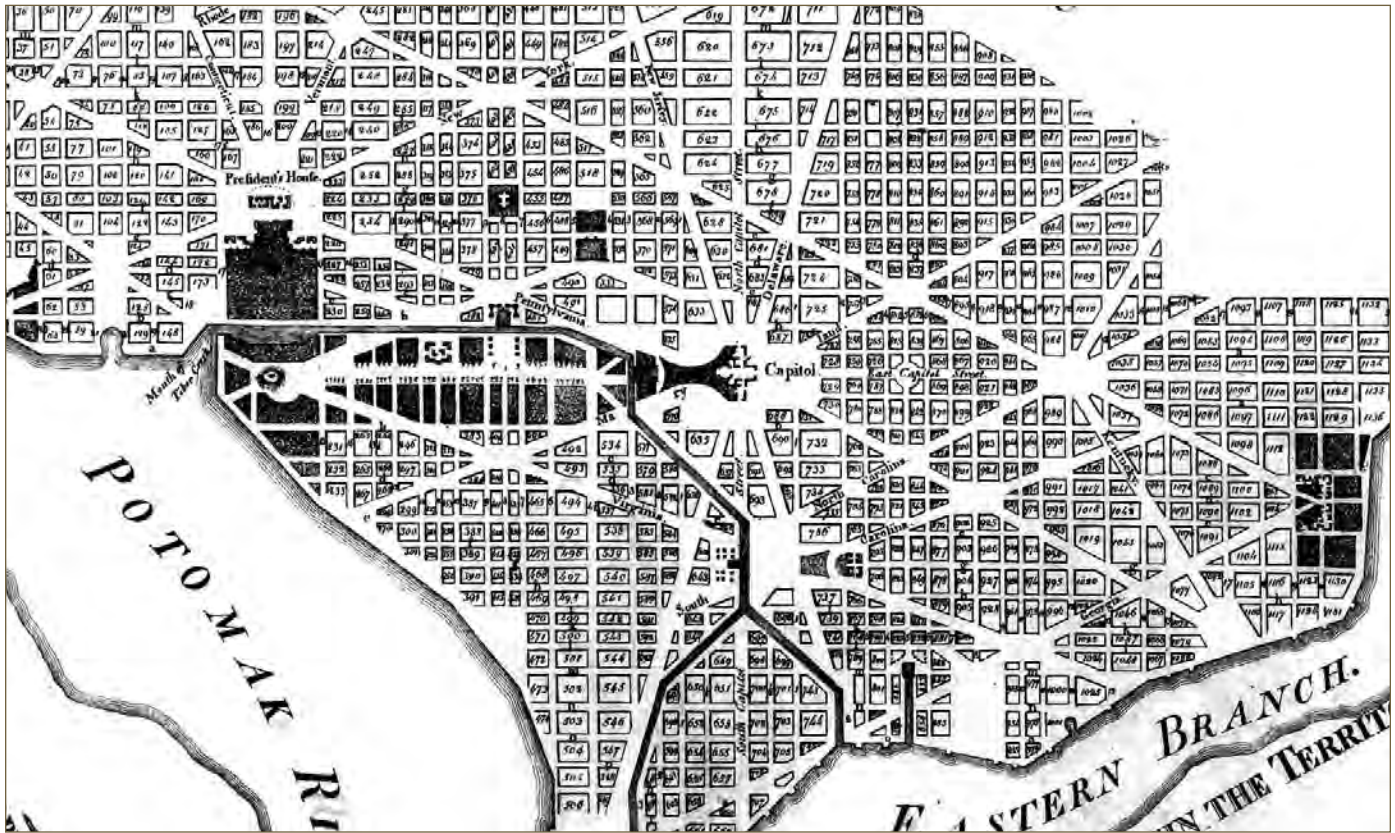
To achieve this future, the District and federal governments, along with the growing business and neighborhood communities, join forces to meet the expanding demands for recreational opportunities in the Center City and improve the condition of its existing parks and open space.

The L'Enfant Plan's squares, circles, and triangles are restored and enhanced, filled with well-maintained trees, grass, flowers, monuments, and fountains, as well as activities that provide exciting urban experiences. 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 vibrant outdoor activities in the Center City. The parks' uniqueness and national significance are recognized as prime assets to the Center City's quality of life.

Some Center City parks will build upon the tradition of Dupont Circle, and become a community hub and provide a strong sense of neighborhood identity. In places where minimal park space has existed, new approaches for recreation will use street rights-of-ways, public properties, existing yards, or other public assets.

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





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 was not until after the Civil War, however, that grassy parks were located within most of these open spaces.

## A Brief History of Center City Parks

While the L'Enfant Plan had grand intentions for Washington's parks and open spaces, due to fiscal challenges it took decades before many of them were more than dirt passageways. Apart from the National Mall, President's Park (including what is now Lafayette Square), and the United States Capitol Grounds, Washington Circle and Franklin Park (previously known as Fountain Square) were the only park spaces maintained consistently by the federal government in the early 19th century. Significant completion of the L'Enfant Plan did not occur until after the Civil War, when Washington experienced large population growth.

During the late nineteenth century, several important center city parks within the open spaces identified in the L'Enfant Plan were constructed. These include 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 and residential buildings encircling the spaces. Similar park improvements were made in the small triangle parks along the major avenues. Congressional reports on parks reflected the popular belief that their 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.

Growth of the city continued into the twentieth century, 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 parks were removed or paved over as concrete traffic islands. In addition, the design of the parks themselves evolved over time to reflect current aesthetic ideals, accommodate new memorials, improve security, or ease



Thomas Circle circa 1888

Library of Congress

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. During this time, center city parks were maintained by the District's Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, and improvements of the parks reinforced their importance as neighborhood amenities.

By the second half of the 20th 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.

Interest in restoring or reclaiming the Center City's historic squares, streets, and original rights-of-ways that have been disrupted or closed is increasing during the early 21st century. Protecting the visual openness and functional qualities of the L'Enfant Plan is a high priority. In addition, there is a strong commitment to reinforce the Center City's, and Washington's, relationship to the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers through new development. These include improved waterfront access and new parks and active open space along the waterfront. As the cost of land in Center City continues to rise because of residential and commercial demand, 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



## Challenges



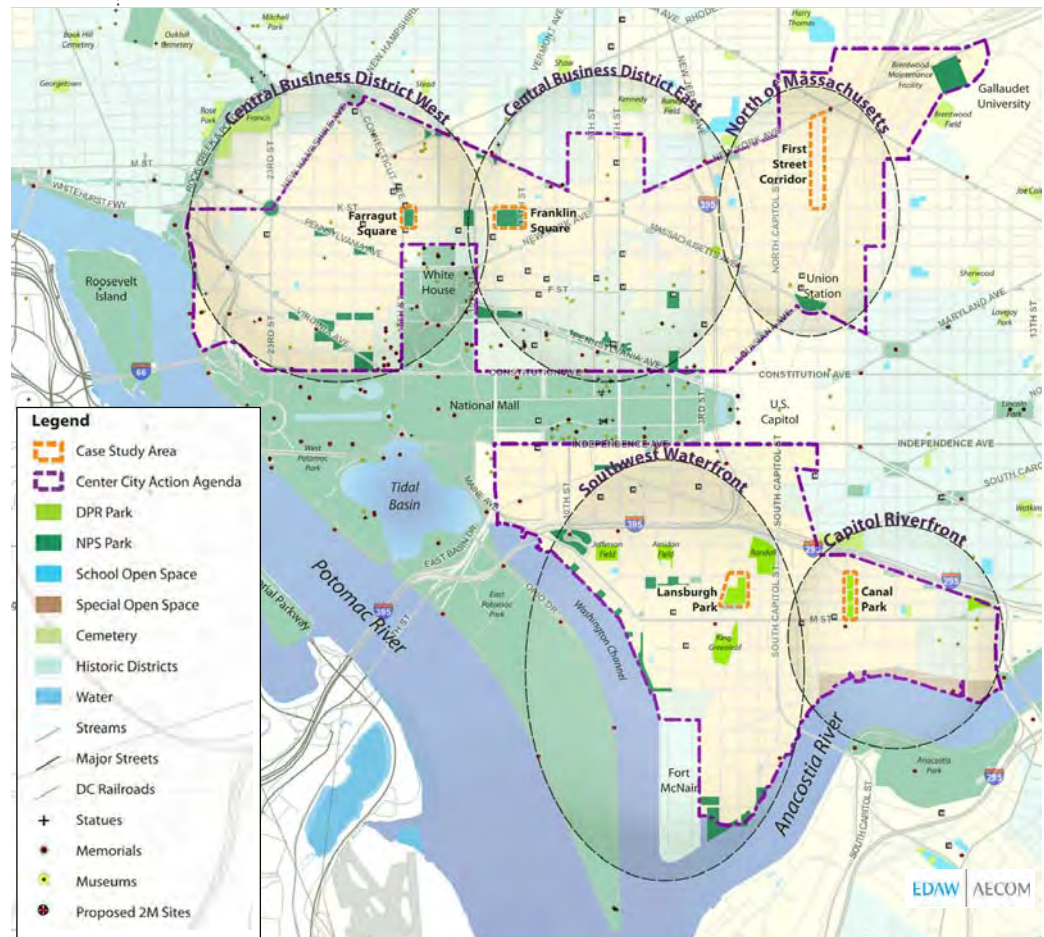
Issues related to homelessness are challenges not park specific and require a coordinated management approach among the District, federal agencies, and other partners.

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 include:

- ◆ A lack of diversity in the type of parks needed to serve emerging residential areas.
- ◆ Insufficient resources to enhance and maintain the parks appropriately.
- ◆ A high cost of land that makes it difficult to add new parks.
- ◆ No cohesive approach to park design, security (including issues such as homelessness and drug dealing), partnerships, and programming.
- ◆ Lack of flexibility in existing federal and District laws, regulations, and policies in programming to keep parks more active and secure.

Central Business Districts East and West are relatively built-out areas of the Center City. Open space is primarily found within the historic circles, squares, and triangles of 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 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.



The Southwest Waterfront district has a number of mixed-use projects that will be redeveloped in the early 21st century, and contains a significant number of active play fields and recreation centers when compared to the rest of the Center City. However, with I-395 to the north and South Capitol Street to the east acting as major barriers, the Southwest Waterfront area remains isolated from the rest of the Center City neighborhoods and the other parks and recreational amenities found there.

NoMa and the Capitol Riverfront are undergoing significant 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 from new residents and workers.

## Opportunities

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

- ◆ 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 Central Business Districts West and East, efforts were 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 the parks will enable them to better meet the recreational needs that residents, workers, and visitors in these areas desire. But it is not just park spaces 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.

There is significant redevelopment in the Southwest Waterfront neighborhood. Of particular note are mixed-use developments at the former Waterside Mall and along the Washington Channel that 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 neighborhood 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 neighborhood that meets a variety of its recreational needs. Further enhancement of the connections between the Southwest Waterfront and the other neighborhoods 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 neighborhoods, local workers, residents, developers, and business improvement districts are working with the District to explore alternative ways to create new parkland. 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 Canal Park, 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 challenges and building upon opportunities by examining what is already occurring at several Center City parks.



Farragut Square

### Farragut Square and Franklin Park

Farragut Square and Franklin Park, in Northwest DC, are under the National Park Service 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 people often present in the area. 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 maintaining and programming in the parks, as well as addressing issues related to homelessness and safety.



Canal Park

### Canal Park

Washington Canal Park is a 1.8 acre public park planned by the District and the Capitol Riverfront BID for the center of an emerging high density, mixed-use development district along M Street, SEA, near Nationals Park and the United States Department of Transportation headquarters. Located in an area underserved in park and recreational resources, the park will transform a contaminated and abandoned bus lot 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. The park is scheduled to open to the public in 2011.



Rendering of NoMa First Street

### 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 through 2015 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.



“Sounds in the Square” is a summer concert series in Farragut Square sponsored by the Golden Triangle BID.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- ◆ Center City parks are truly urban and unique from other parks in Washington’s surrounding neighborhoods. The experiences they offer, both in use and character, should be celebrated. These parks 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, should 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 the 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 the NPS’ service-wide management and preservation methods for its traditional parks.
- ◆ The District has 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

# Enhance Center City Parks

The DC Office of Planning began the Mount Vernon Square District Project in 2009, which includes recommendations for improving parks and open space in the neighborhood.



### Meet Park and Open Space Demands (CTC-1)

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 parks 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 system for information on federal and local government park resources.

### Build Stronger Partnerships and Resources (CTC-2)

Build and strengthen community support through partnerships with businesses, residents, workers 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 Business Improvement Districts 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 regarding parks and open spaces 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.

### Utilize Placemaking and Programming to Expand Recreational Opportunities (CTC-3)

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.



PLANNING CONCEPTS



Increase access to Great Local Parks



Celebrate Urban Parks



Expand Park System Capacity



Link the City with Green Corridors



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

**OBJECTIVES**

Coordinated planning and management of small parks among federal and District agencies provides clear guidance on their purposes, 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.

## 6

# Transform 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, or read. Collectively, they green neighborhoods 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 can have walkable 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.

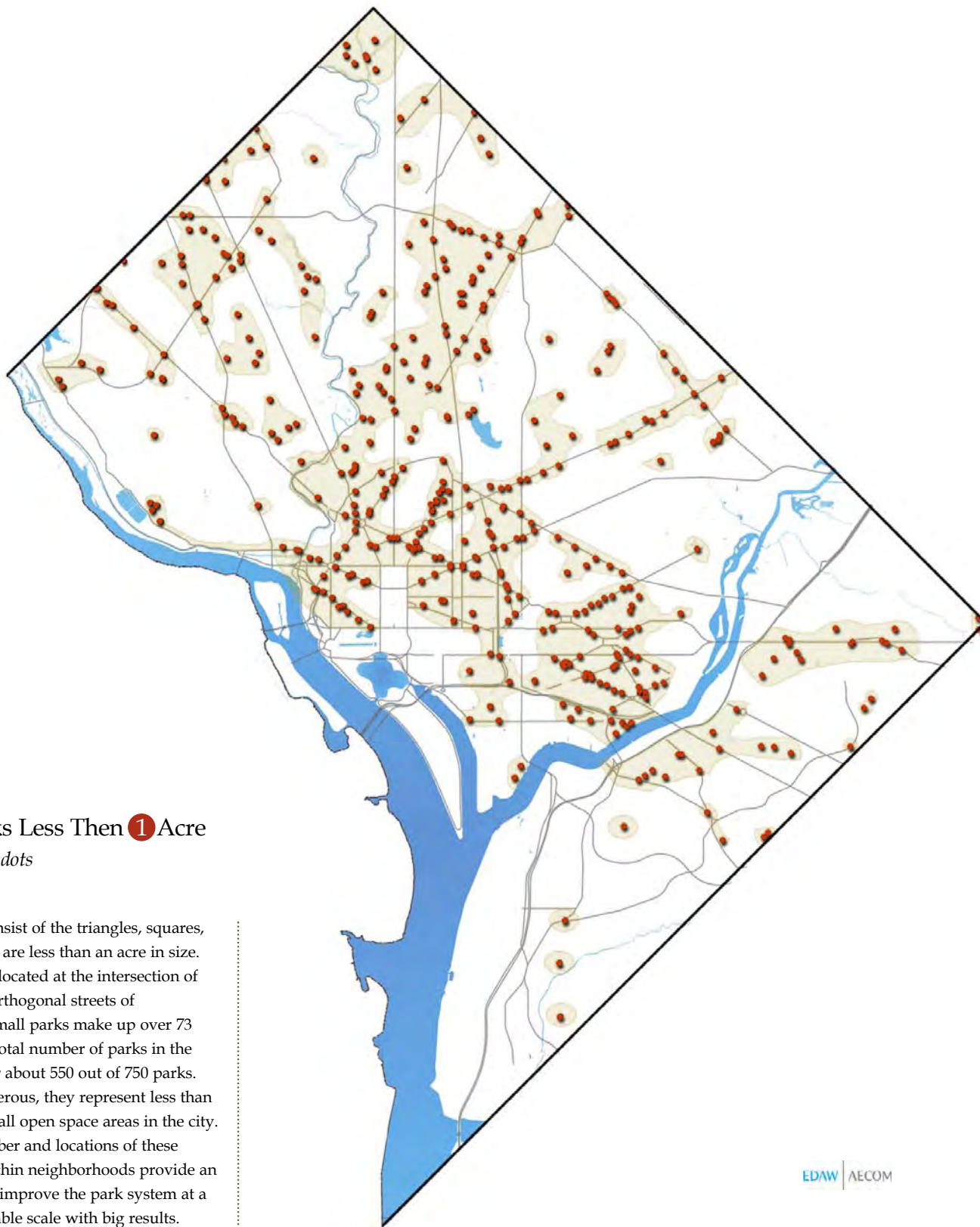
Civic groups take pride in helping to maintain the small parks in their neighborhoods, often providing additional programming as appropriate. In many neighborhoods, these small parks provide much-needed open spaces that promote active living, walkability, community safety, and choices for an enriching 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 area residents, workers, and visitors. Collectively, Washington's extensive small park system underpins a cohesive urban network of green spaces, serving as the glue of the larger parks and open space network. 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.



The sheer numbers and locations of these small parks within Washington neighborhoods provide an opportunity to improve the park system at a 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. They are often located at the intersection of diagonal and orthogonal streets of Washington. Small parks make up over 73 percent of the total number of parks in the park system, or about 550 out of 750 parks. Although numerous, they represent less than two percent of all open space areas in the city. The sheer number and locations of these small parks within neighborhoods provide an opportunity to improve the park system at a small, manageable scale with big results.

## A Brief 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 open spaces 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 parks.

While L'Enfant envisioned park spaces to serve the needs of residents of the new capital city, the largely undefined smaller open spaces only slowly took shape through the next century as the city plan was developed and streets were improved. In the mid-1800s, streets and neighborhoods began to be platted outside the boundaries of the L'Enfant Plan. Some of the earliest suburbs—such as Uniontown (Anacostia) and LeDroit Park— included small parks as a community amenity. Until the 1890s, the subdivision of nearby farms and estates were platted with streets and building lots that did not relate to an overall plan and lacked coordination. This occurred most notably in the northwest section of the city bounded by Florida Avenue, Rock Creek Park, North Capitol Street and Spring Road. This unregulated development prompted the creation of the 1893 and 1898 highway plans, developed in consultation with the noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. These plans extended major L'Enfant avenues, pre-determined locations for all city streets, and continued the tradition of creating small parks at the intersection of diagonal and orthogonal streets. The small parks along 16th Street, Mount Pleasant Street, Rhode Island Avenue, and Georgia Avenue north of Florida Avenue are examples of small parks resulting from these plans.

In the late 19th century, the Office of Public Buildings and Ground of the United States Army Corps of Engineers improved many of the smaller triangular spaces as simple lawns or flower beds, or as small parks. Significant improvements also occurred during the 1930s as part of the Works Progress Administration.

By the mid-20th century, urban renewal and other government programs intended to revitalize neighborhoods developed additional small neighborhood parks as part of mixed-use developments. Many of these parks are located within the city block, and usually provide active recreation amenities such as playgrounds, picnic tables, and multi-use courts.

Today, there are approximately 550 small parks less than one acre in size distributed throughout Washington. These parks function as sites for national and local commemoration, street medians, traffic circles and pocket parks in neighborhoods.



Triangle at Florida Avenue and R Street, NW



Ownership and ambiguity issues can lead to encroachment on park space by adjacent uses, such as this small park at the intersection of Florida Avenue and R Street, NW. Conceptual improvements are illustrated on the following page.



EDAW/EAONM

## Challenges

Small parks often exist in the shadow of the larger, more renowned parks. Residents and out-of-towners alike are more familiar with Rock Creek Park, Potomac Park, and the National Mall. Many small parks, on the other hand, are virtually unseen to any except for their immediate neighbors. Over the years, many of 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, confusion over ownership and purpose makes them prone to being ignored for funding, vandalized, encroached upon by private uses, or reconfigured for traffic improvements. As a result, many of these small parks have been underutilized as open space resources for the community.

Small parks can be hard to administer because their management and maintenance are split between the National Park Service and multiple District agencies. Each agency has a different mission, which determines the level of improvement, programming, improvement and maintenance of these parks. Management jurisdictions, and in many cases, ownership, of many small parks was transferred from the federal government to the District of Columbia at the time of Home Rule. Subsequently, various District agencies have been assigned responsibility for these spaces. This development history has resulted in confusion over site management that persists today.

Small neighborhood parks are difficult to maintain because they are not large enough to merit dedicated site staff. Instead, smaller maintenance crews responsible for a significant number of locations are assigned to small parks. However, they often only visit after a problem is reported. The multi-jurisdictional management structure for small parks makes it difficult for community users to know who to turn to when maintenance is needed or when there is an interest in the community to fix up a park. Even agencies are sometimes uncertain who has jurisdiction over some spaces. Thus, it is not uncommon to find a small park that is not maintained next to other well-maintained small parks in a neighborhood. Some neighborhoods resort to maintaining and making unsanctioned changes to the small parks themselves after unsuccessfully finding the appropriate park agency that could give them permission.

The lack of maintenance leads to other issues that go beyond park management and touch upon larger societal challenges, most notably homelessness and crime. While these small parks are not the root of the social problems, they are public spaces in neighborhoods that can become venues for anti-social activities when the people in the community do not take ownership of them. Lack of formal coordination between police, park departments and organizations dedicated to social change is an ongoing challenge that must be addressed.



The multitude of small parks makes maintenance difficult.

## Opportunities

While the size of the small parks limits the amount and type of programming and facilities that can be located within individual sites, each has the potential to become a defining component of a neighborhood. Small parks located along avenues or thoroughfares can serve as gateways to neighborhoods, while those located on local streets could be a central gathering place. They have the potential to be a character-defining feature of a neighborhood, while providing a safe and easily accessible resource for recreation. Activating them as vibrant community spaces can help encourage neighbor interaction, make neighborhoods safer, and improve the environmental health of the city through additional tree canopy, native landscapes and permeable surfaces.

In some neighborhoods, the small neighborhood parks can provide much-needed recreation space. These spaces can accommodate a wide variety of passive and active recreational opportunities. Some activities can be formally programmed as community gardens, playgrounds, or dog parks. Other activities that can be accommodated by small parks are more spontaneous, such as picnicking, throwing a Frisbee, or reading. With the increased use of a small park comes a stronger sense of community ownership over the space. These parks provide direct opportunities to incorporate positive behavior into the lives of its residents, and in turn can reduce the number of activities that hurt the fabric of a community, such as drug dealing and robberies. The more a neighborhood is involved, the safer the small parks are for the community.

Small parks are an ideal venue to showcase sustainable practices, specifically those for stormwater management in every neighborhood across the city. Many of the parks are too small to be used for recreation or inaccessible because of traffic. With appropriate improvements, many small parks could play an enhanced role in capturing and treating stormwater runoff from adjacent streets. This practice could raise awareness of stormwater issues and incorporate small parks more fully into the city's green infrastructure. These green spaces can also help cool summer air temperature, increase Washington's tree canopy, and reduce air pollution.

In addition to serving as important neighborhood open spaces, the citywide system of small parks plays a vital role in defining the character of the nation's capital. Washington's bountiful small parks are a defining feature of the cityscape. Their frequency softens the hard urban streetscape and weaves open space throughout residential and commercial districts. Small parks are increasingly important as sites for distinctive local and national commemorative works. Collectively, the small parks can help unify and expand the existing parks and open space network. Coordinated improvements and maintenance along a corridor or within a neighborhood can reinforce their importance as a significant park type within a larger network of parks and open spaces.

## Small Space, Big Opportunities

Well-designed physical improvements can significantly enhance the contributions of small parks to a surrounding neighborhood. The three photo simulations below illustrate potential improvements, each highlighting a different park theme.



Placemaking



Connectivity: Urban Trail



Sustainability: LID



## Learning from Small Parks

### Managing small parks by geographic area

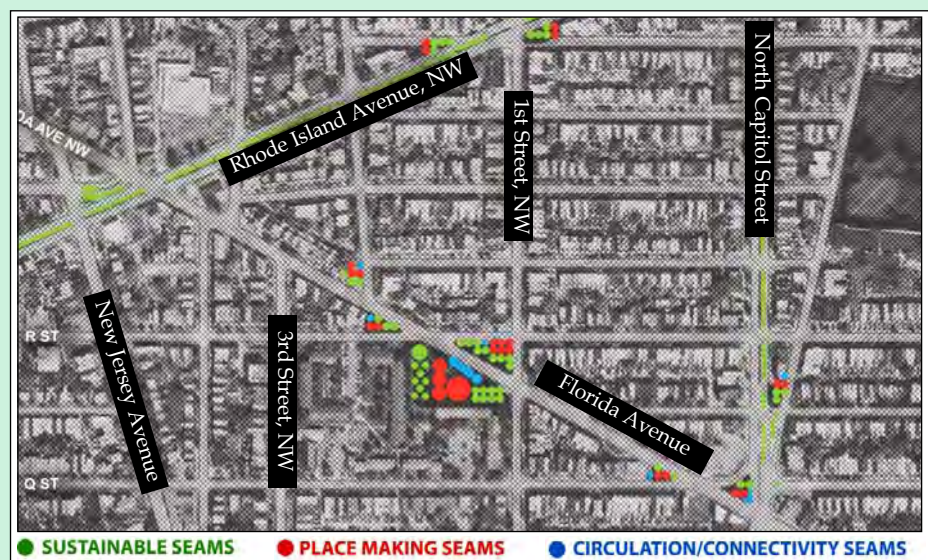
As Washington has relatively few medium-sized parks and several neighborhoods with comparatively less access to open space, linking geographically clustered small parks can be an important strategy in providing multi-purpose, complementary amenities. Thirteen small parks near the intersection of Rhode Island and Florida Avenues, NW, were considered as a neighborhood cluster case study. The four parks south of Florida Avenue are within the boundaries of the L'Enfant Plan and are considered contributing elements for its historic plan designation. None of the parks exceeds 0.7 acres in size and ten are less than 0.1 acre. Ownership and management of the parks is diverse, and is reflected in their improvements. The largest park at the southwest corner of Florida Avenue and 1st Street, NW, is managed by the District Department of Parks and Recreation, contains playground equipment, a court and benches, and sees heavy community use. The National Park Service park immediately across Florida Avenue is landscaped and helps define the Bloomingdale neighborhood. The District Department of Transportation park at Florida Avenue and North Capitol Street is a busy transfer point for several bus lines. The remaining parks are minimally landscaped or paved. Truxton Park, formerly at the intersection of Florida Avenue and North Capitol Street, was eliminated by earlier transportation projects.

These small parks face many challenges:

- ◆ Size, location, and other restrictions, such as historic designations, can constrain use and design. These same factors, along with a lack of coordinated features, make these parks, and their potential, less visible to adjacent neighborhoods.
- ◆ High traffic volumes on adjacent streets pose challenges to connect park spaces, and bike and pedestrian access can be unsafe or unclear. Encroachment by adjacent uses and inappropriate activities discourages use.
- ◆ Maintenance and programming responsibilities are divided between three agencies. Without coordinated maintenance, design standards or complementary uses, parks are not used, or perceived, as part of a network. Small parks often bear the brunt of limited agency resources, resulting in less maintenance and fewer amenities.

### The Shaw/Rhode Island/Florida Avenue Cluster

The adjacent graphic identifies some of the physical opportunities to connect and define small park clusters in the Florida and Rhode Island Avenue neighborhood so that their impact is magnified. Using the themes of connectivity, sustainability and placemaking, parks can be visually unified and create a distinct identity at the corridor or neighborhood level.

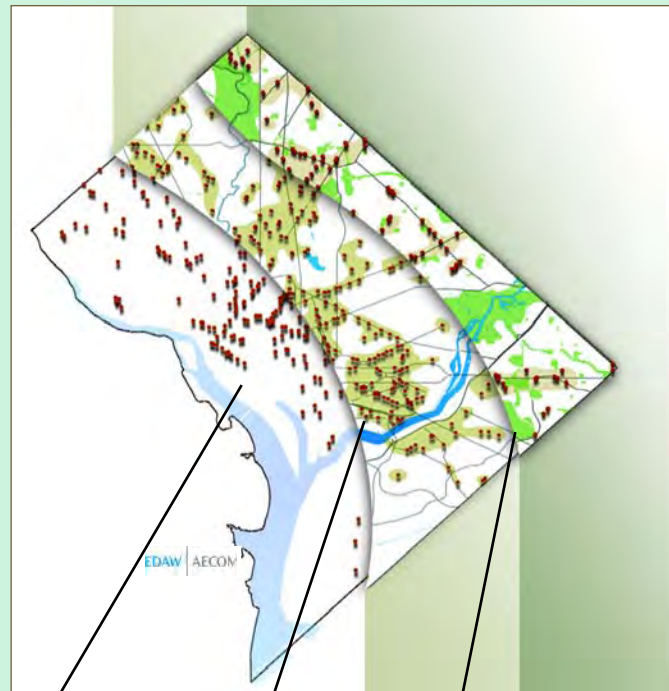


## Moving towards a systemic approach to planning small parks will improve design, programming, and maintenance.

While a cluster approach to improving and maintaining the small parks addresses needs at a neighborhood level, addressing system-wide challenges of managing small parks could have dramatic results. To appreciate this opportunity, consider the potential benefits of coordination between the federal and District agencies responsible for these small parks. A coordinated approach to programming, improving and maintaining these urban spaces would compliment efforts to better define their use and design, and present opportunities to use scarce resources more effectively. It is helpful to step back and consider that improvements to small parks can have cumulative impacts to the whole park system, as illustrated to the right.

### Lessons Learned

- ◆ The full potential of small parks is largely untapped.
- ◆ Using parks to their best advantage and establishing a clearly defined role increases their visibility and provides great opportunities to build a sense of community.
- ◆ Their small size makes it easier for civic or business groups to provide improvements or maintenance.
- ◆ Given the widespread distribution and number of small parks, they have the potential to transform the image of the city and strengthen neighborhood identity.



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.



## Recommendations

# Transform Small Parks

### Focus on System-wide Improvements to Small Parks (SMP-1)

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 to 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 clusters 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 (SMP-2)

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 to clarify responsibilities of the managing agencies.
- ◆ Develop a coordinated approach to handle service requests and inquiries of small parks regardless of jurisdiction. The approach could include a central site to receive requests and inquiries that are then referred 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 park management and any park and/or neighborhood history.



Lamont Park

### Increase Capacity and Improve Livability (SMP-3)

Providing appropriate programming and improvements and ensuring that the small parks are clean and safe can enhance neighborhood livability as 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, and include bike parking where feasible.
- ◆ Identify appropriate recreation opportunities based on park size, 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 (SMP-4)

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 their maximum benefits.
- ◆ 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.





# Moving the Plan Forward

**N**ow 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 (DROF), 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.



## 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 to 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 hiker-biker 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 the 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.

### **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 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.



### **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 DROP, 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. The District's Office of Planning 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.



Redevelopment of 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.

### 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.



## 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.

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.



Chesapeake Bay Program



DC Public Schools works closely with a variety of non-profit and volunteer organizations to improve schoolyards in the District. Tyler Elementary School was redesigned in 2009.

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 our 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 entitled 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. The order 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 our 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.



The Downtown DC Business Improvement District 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.



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 provides new educational opportunities to connect visitors to the Mall’s rich history.