
Executive Summary:

Creating Better Urban Parks and Open Space

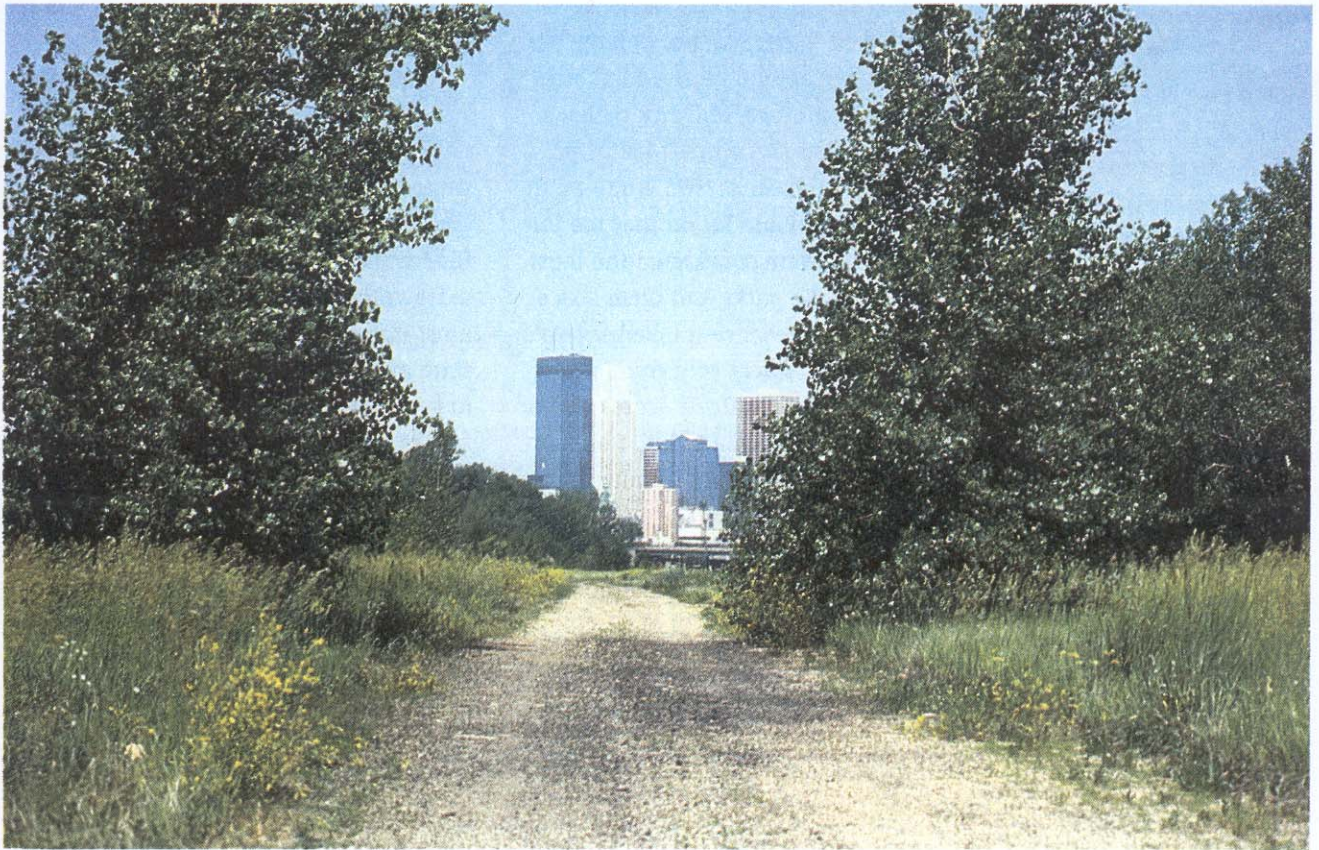
Christopher B. Leinberger and Gayle Berens

The efforts of the citizens' group Save Cedar Lake Park made it possible to turn a railyard into a much-used linear park and to preserve a natural expanse of meadows, trees, and wildflowers just a few short miles from downtown Minneapolis.

The 15 case studies presented in this book represent 15 very different efforts by the public and private sectors to bring much-needed urban parks and open space to their communities. Although this volume could not include every possible type of project, it does represent a healthy cross section of park projects and partnerships that have brought value to the

cities where they are located. Many of the parks profiled here also represent efforts to ensure sustainability, so that these new parks do not meet the fate of so many other well-designed parks, falling into disrepair and becoming liabilities instead of assets.

The case studies include many lessons worth looking at closely. Ultimately, they



demonstrate that each generation, through its public and private sectors, must keep investing and reinvesting in its urban parks and open space in order to ensure that the next generation has an environment worth preserving. It's easy to forget that each generation has different open space needs. Like fashion and music, parks and park design become passé. Recreational preferences change: thirty years ago, no one used in-line roller skates, and few Americans played soccer. City, state, and federal funding priorities shift. The public sector often forgets what successful private sector entrepreneurs never do: maintaining a continuous connection to market preferences is critical to success.

How individual Americans value their parks and open space changes from generation to generation and does not always reflect public sector budgeting priorities. Our parks have never had as many visitors as they have now, and many suffer from overuse and insufficient public funding. Many of our large city parks have been allowed to deteriorate, in large part because they came to be regarded as insecure environments, and city budgets were inadequate to counter real or perceived safety issues. A 1993 study by the Trust for Public Land found that the following issues were considered the most serious in public parks and open space: inadequate maintenance (ranked severe in 17 of 23 cities); safety concerns (severe in 10 of 23 cities); difficult access due to remoteness, inadequate public transportation, physical barriers, or limited hours of operation (severe in 10 of 23 cities); deficient recreation programs (severe in 10 of 23 cities); and design that does not serve current user needs (9 of 23 cities).

But usable open space is an invaluable amenity that most people instinctively desire. Unfortunately, we have difficulty isolating and measuring the many tangible and intangible benefits that parks and open space provide. In our "bottom-

line" society, only short-term benefits are usually attended to. The long-term, qualitative benefits of outdoor space defy the rigors of discounted cash flow analysis.

The emotional attachment that people have to open space (and the idea of it) is often the catalyst that drives parks to be revitalized over and over again. Central Park—arguably the most famous U.S. city park—was allowed to degenerate until some citizens with a love for the park worked to raise money and set up a plan for its revitalization. Through that private involvement, it has once again become—and can remain—the great park that Olmsted and Vaux envisioned. Through Forest Park Forever, Forest Park in St. Louis is undertaking a large-scale fundraising effort to revive its once-grand form. The creation of a greenway alongside the Los Angeles River, if successful, will be the result of a tremendous, caring effort on the part of many different parties, that could create one of the great stories of greenspace rebirth and its role as a unifying element in the resurgence of a vibrant American downtown.

San Antonio's Riverwalk is a similar story. In the 1950s, the San Antonio city fathers wanted to pave over the river but were defeated by historic preservationists. Today, the widely studied and imitated Riverwalk is the major source of vitality in downtown San Antonio—the second most important tourist attraction in the state after the Alamo—and is estimated to generate \$1.2 billion for area businesses each year.

For our urban residential neighborhoods to survive and prosper, parks and open space have to be vital unifying elements working with the built environment. Walking access to parks and community gathering places is one of the few reasons for urban neighborhoods to continue to be meaningful competitive alternatives for middle-class households that have the option of moving to the suburbs. To maintain their middle-class tax



Forma Design Group

Because of the natural features that many cities were originally built around, cities are often able to offer much more dramatic spaces than suburban areas. This new pier was erected in the San Francisco Bay as part of the redevelopment of the San Francisco waterfront.

base—a necessity for remaining fiscally viable—cities must focus on things that they can do better than the suburbs: one of the most important is to provide parks and open space within walking distance of every household, reinforcing the urban neighborhood's viability in this automobile age.

Assessing Value

That the American public values parks and open space more than nearly every other land use has been confirmed by many surveys and studies.

Two 1995 surveys, conducted by American LIVES, Inc., and InterCommunications, Inc., showed that homebuyers identified natural open space and walking and biking paths as among the top four features (77 and 74 percent, respectively) that they ranked very or extremely important. Also highly ranked were gardens with native plants and walking

paths (56 percent); wilderness areas (52 percent); community/recreation centers (52 percent); and interesting little parks (50 percent).¹ Another 1995 poll measuring quality of life showed that two major elements were critical to a satisfactory quality of life: first, low crime and safe streets; and second, greenery and open space.²

This preference for greenspace, as several studies (although few large-scale ones) have shown, translates into dollar value for homes located near to or on the edge of parks. While not all the studies are recent, their findings are consistent. As early as 1856, when Frederick Law Olmsted began tracking the value of the real estate surrounding Central Park, he found that by 1864, when the park was only half-finished, it had begun generating a net revenue of \$55,880. He also charted the average increase in property value in the three wards surrounding the park and in the city's other wards. If the

When it constructed a park and playground, the Elliott Donnelley Youth Center on Chicago's south side relied heavily on the participation of neighborhood children. By involving them early on, the center created a partnership with the children that gave them an almost immediate sense of ownership and pride in the community effort.



three wards around the park had increased in value 100 percent between 1856 and 1873, as did other wards throughout the city, in 1873 their appraised value would have been \$53 million; instead, it was \$236 million. Although Olmsted's analysis was simple (and there were other variables that influenced value), the difference was striking.³

In the early part of this century, a study in Elizabeth, New Jersey, showed that from 1922 to 1939, values for properties within 1,300 feet of Warinanco Park increased 631.7 percent at a time when the overall increase in property values in Elizabeth was 256.7 percent. It was later reported that it took only five years for incremental tax revenues to equal the \$1.2 million spent to acquire and develop the park.⁴

A 1973 study in the Columbus, Ohio, neighborhood of Whetstone Park showed that over 7 percent of the selling price of a house was estimated to be related to its proximity to the park and river.⁵ In a 1974 study, property values were shown

to correlate significantly with proximity to Philadelphia's 1,300-acre Pennypack Park, when allowance was made for the type of house, year of sale, and special characteristics such as a corner location. The park accounted for 33 percent of land value at 40 feet from the park, 9 percent at 1,000 feet, and 4.2 percent at a distance of 2,500 feet.⁶ (This study also showed that while property owners want to be very near a park, they don't want their backyards to border one; properties bordering the park were slightly lower in value than those across the street.)

In Dayton, Ohio, a 1985 study showed that 5 percent of the average selling price of homes located near the Cox Arboretum and Park was due to their proximity to the open space.⁷ A 1991 survey of Denver residential neighborhoods showed that from 1980 to 1990, the percentage of residents who said they would pay more to live in neighborhoods with greenbelts and parks rose from 16 to 48 percent.⁸

This sampling of surveys shows that residents and property owners place a strong value on proximate open space, but it does not represent the value that commercial enterprises realize through proximity to trails or other recreational amenities.

The efforts at measuring economic impacts of urban parks and open space have yielded important information for researchers and developers. But the value that most *individuals* place on parks has to do with "softer," quality-of-life issues, which are often less quantifiable: parks and open space can provide recreational amenities; make an aesthetic contribution to the neighborhood; offer educational opportunities through the study of nature or science; nurture and preserve the natural environment; create an image or identity for a city or neighborhood; and boost morale by providing something residents can point to with pride. Moreover, people's commitment to these "softer" values is often a powerful cata-

lyst, driving the economic value that accompanies preservation or creation of public open spaces.

By illustrating both the economic and the “softer” value of parks and open space, the 15 case studies in this book confirm the important role that urban parks can play in strengthening neighborhoods, attracting development and new residents, and revitalizing cities.

Urban Parks and Suburban Development

Since World War II, the ongoing competition between older urban neighborhoods and their newer suburbs has most often resulted in the loss of urban jobs and residents. The suburbs offer larger lots for more privacy; homogeneous neighborhoods where residents feel that they

The restoration of Bryant Park in Manhattan is one of the great success stories in urban park revitalization. Through the use of a business improvement district, the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation was able to take advantage of the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, ridding the park of its reputation as an unsafe place and making it a welcoming spot for visitors.



Norman Mintz



Fred George

Private sector creativity made it possible to bring golf to Manhattan, a small, densely populated urban island. At Chelsea Piers Sports and Entertainment Complex, golfers can take advantage of stunning Hudson River views and innovative Japanese technology to practice their swings.

can be with “their own kind”; low-density campus settings where workers are protected from urban distractions (and presumably more productive); and huge shopping complexes with plenty of free parking. Cities, with their high-density environments, have found it difficult to compete with these features. However, the suburban growth and land use patterns of the past 50 years may be suffering from too much success. Suburbanites must drive nearly everywhere for nearly everything, struggling through congested streets filled with other suburbanites doing the same thing. And social isolation is now seen as the flip side of privacy.

Hundreds of billions of privately invested dollars depend on cities’ ability to compete with the suburbs. To do so, cities must emphasize the unique advantages of social integration and pedestrian access to amenities. By knitting together physical and social space, parks and open

space play a crucial role in defining and strengthening the advantages of city living. In terms of aesthetics and transportation, urban neighborhoods with access to open space may be particularly suited to compete with the suburbs. Thus, there may be solid economic reasons for increasing urban investment in parks and open space.

Most older cities made that investment in parks long ago, but many of the parks have been neglected because of budget cuts and local governments’ decisions to focus on other services. When a local parks department cannot ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all segments of the community, fewer visitors use the park, and lack of use becomes another reason not to invest more tax dollars in parks. And when occasional public enthusiasm for parks and open space does arise, the burst of capital improvements over a few years is often followed by decades of deferred main-

tenance and ever-lower operating budgets, as municipal priorities shift to other, apparently more pressing, needs. Left in a state of benign neglect, many urban parks are perceived to be—and may eventually become—dangerous. “Economizing” can thus begin a downward spiral in which each element reinforces the other: a run-down appearance leads to perceived and real safety concerns, which lead in turn to lack of use. Believing that government’s track record has not been exceptionally good, citizens and investors have been reluctant to agree to the tax increases that would strengthen government’s ability to do the job.

While such mistrust of government is not always justified, the conventional public sector approach to providing parks and open space is at times fundamentally flawed. As the case studies demonstrate, private or civic sector partners can sometimes provide better financing, marketing, and management of parks and open space. It is encouraging to see innovative joint ventures between public, private, and civic groups succeeding in cities across the country.

Trends in Open Space Development and Management

The case studies in this book illustrate the continuum of approaches to park development and highlight some emerging innovations in development and planning. The case studies can be organized into three basic management and development models—two conventional models and one newer, more resourceful model.

The first model is a purely public sector approach: under pressure from a neighborhood, an individual, the business community, or a politician, a city agrees to provide a new park or renovate an existing one. Designs are agreed upon (often with some citizen involvement), construction estimates are made, and

public money is allocated. Once built, the park is put under the management of the parks department.

In the second model, the public sector maintains ownership and responsibility for the park, but coventures with the private sector for development or redevelopment through traditional fundraising programs, donations, benefactors, etc. Once complete, the park is fully under public sector purview, although the private sector may continue to be involved through special fundraisers for various programs or improvements, or through concessions or sponsorships that provide supplemental revenue.

The third approach, which could be called the market-oriented civic model, is newer and more controversial: it relies on a long-term partnership between the public and private sectors for park development and management. Using mechanisms such as a nonprofit development corporation or a business improvement district (BID), this approach brings together private sector responsiveness to market needs, dedicated taxes from surrounding property owners, private donations, better accountability to user needs, and revenue-producing functions to provide for the improvement and management of parks and open space for all. During the past 15 years, the market-oriented civic model has been successfully employed enough times to be considered proven and viable. (The advantages and disadvantages of each of these three approaches are outlined in Figure 1.)

Appropriate Use of Each Model

All three models play major roles in meeting urban park and open space needs. The public approach has been and should continue to be the main approach to the development and operation of our urban parks. Park creation is a key role for governments. However, the days when a fig-

Figure 1 • Park and Open Space Models

Model	Advantages	Disadvantages	Case Examples
Public Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad-based funding. • Broad-based view of needs. • Obvious choice for addressing needs. • Long history of meeting the public's needs for parks. • Ability to address large-scale park needs. • Openness to citizen and business involvement in design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public can be mistrustful of government's ability to manage parks. • Lack of effective management by many parks departments. • Lack of creativity and entrepreneurial ability compared to private sector. • Decisions can be influenced by special-interest groups. • Park budgets generally get cut first in times of municipal fiscal pressure. • Occasional bursts of enthusiasm for parks, resulting in capital improvements, followed by deferred maintenance and low budgets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embarcadero Promenade (San Francisco) • Riverbank State Park (New York City) • Shreveport Riverfront Park (Shreveport, La.)
Public/Private Coventure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to market needs. • User fees raise capital. • Broad-based constituency can be served with selective subsidized improvements that will be a minor part of the park (unless a major corporation underwrites it). • Openness to citizen and business involvement in funding of development and maintenance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not serve a broad constituency if user fees are employed. • Few corporations are able to subsidize improvements for an extended period of time, especially given the changing business environment. • Relies on long-term, ongoing enthusiasm, commitment, and contributions from private sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Park (Bellevue, Wash.) • Cedar Lake Park and Trail (Minneapolis) • Elliott Donnelley Youth Center Park (Chicago) • Flagstar Corporate Plaza and Jerome Richardson Park (Spartanburg, S.C.) • Hawthorne Park (Kansas City, Mo.) • Mill Race Park (Columbus, Ind.) • Pinellas Trail (Pinellas County, Fla.) • Turtle Park (Kansas City, Mo.)
Market-Oriented Civic Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to market needs. • Innovative user fees and dedicated taxes provide services to a broad-based constituency. • In high-land-cost parts of city, extraordinary level of capital improvements and level of management can be provided. • In low-land-cost parts of city, the combination of inexpensive or free land and volunteer labor can provide necessary capital improvements and ongoing management. • Self-perpetuating financial and legal mechanisms and management motivation will continuously improve park and maintain high level of service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for improvements throughout the city, not just high-land-cost areas, may be diluted. • In low-land-cost neighborhoods, the volunteer management structure may be unsustainable long term. • Public sector agencies may feel challenged by strong private sector leadership and will need to be won over. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryant Park (New York City) • Hudson River Park Conservancy and Chelsea Piers (New York City) • Park at Post Office Square (Boston) • Philadelphia Green (Philadelphia)

ure like Robert Moses could dictate every detail of park planning and development are over. Decisions are now more often made from the bottom up, with both citizens' groups and businesses actively lobbying for improvements and with additional funding provided by "friends of the park" organizations. This political and financial clout makes parks departments far more responsive today.

The public model is also essential for large-scale park development. Riverbank State Park, built for over \$100 million as part of a larger, billion-dollar sewage treatment plant, would probably never have been created by the private sector. Similarly, the Embarcadero Promenade was a rather inexpensive (\$5.4 million) project that was attached to a much larger (\$91 million) transportation and development project—again, a public sector investment that would probably not have been made by the private sector.

The second model, the public/private coventure, and the third model, the market-oriented civic approach, have proven particularly successful for the development or rehabilitation of small or medium-sized parks, providing valuable additions to the efforts of city parks departments.

The public/private coventure model is best employed to bring the variety and innovation of the private sector to special opportunities available within the context of a larger public purpose. The Tavern on the Green in Central Park, vendors in many parks, and special musical events add a great deal to the park experience—as well as providing much-needed revenue to the parks department. Similarly, some cities have experimented with corporate sponsorship of a city park, which gives an amenity to the public in exchange for a public relations opportunity.

Within the public/private coventure model (and the public model), local governments, usually under pressure from citizens' groups, are being forced to be more creative in their approaches to park development. At Hawthorne Park in Kansas City, the city, along with citizen and advocacy groups, redeveloped a neighborhood park to accommodate children with disabilities on all the play equipment and throughout the park. That effort took much more work and time than a quick fix-up would have, but the result has been an overwhelming success and is leading to the development of a second such park.

Boston's Park at Post Office Square came about because some of the most creative business minds in the city came up with an innovative approach to financing and developing a park that is supported by an underground parking garage.



Bill Horsman

The market-oriented civic model has much to recommend it, particularly given the limited budgets and rising social and infrastructure needs that all American cities face. Whether in downtowns, where land is expensive, or in blighted neighborhoods, where it may be far less expensive, this model can provide the best of both the public and the private approaches, with few drawbacks.

First, the costs and the benefits are intimately connected to the users and the funding sources. Whether funds come from a dedicated tax on local property owners or from user fees, volunteer efforts, or gifts, the providers of both financial and labor capital are usually the same people who benefit from the park. This connection allows the users to gain a better understanding of how the park is being improved and maintained, and by whom; it also provides a sense of ownership. Vandalism is minimal in those parks that are developed and maintained by market-oriented civic groups, not just because of adequately funded security but because users tend to enforce a standard of behavior in "their" park that discourages rowdy or destructive actions.

Second, under the market-oriented civic model, the level of capital and operational funding is generally higher than that provided by the public sector,

and is often designed to be maintained at an adequate level for many years to come, if not in perpetuity. This is because of the direct connection between users and the benefits they receive, as mentioned earlier, but it also stems from the fact that market-oriented civic managers are, by necessity, generally more creative than public sector managers. Finding multiple ways to finance the capital and operating costs of Boston's Park at Post Office Square or Manhattan's Bryant Park took some of the brightest and most sophisticated real estate and environmental professionals in those cities—talent not often found in a parks department accustomed to simply asking for an appropriation from city council. When Bryant Park was run by the New York City Parks Department, its operational budget was \$250,000 per year and it was a drug-infested, crime-ridden place. Under the management of the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, which manages Bryant Park and its revenue-earning amenities on a day-to-day basis, this oasis in midtown Manhattan now has an annual budget of over \$2 million (which includes a contribution from the original parks department budget). Planning the development of a grand space and ensuring its continued greatness through self-supporting, revenue-generating mechanisms—if the space remains democratic space and open to all—may help stave off the budget "ups and downs" typical of city parks.

Third, the motivation of the market-oriented civic management team combines the best traits of the private and public sectors. On the one hand, members of the management team tend to be people who, like private developers, believe that anything can be done if only enough thought and commitment can be brought to bear on "the challenge" (as opposed to "the problem"). On the other hand, these managers, like many people who enter public service, want to make

The community has been involved every step of the way in the planning process for Manhattan's Hudson River waterfront—a project that has the potential to change a large section of Manhattan in a way that will affect generations to come.



Quennell Rothschild Associates

Mill Race Park, in Columbus, Indiana, is a lovely use of bottomlands prone to severe flooding. The design of the park was enhanced through the use of existing historic structures as well as striking new architecturally significant structures.



Michael Van Valkenburgh

a long-term difference to society. In other words, they are people who want to do well while doing good.

Fourth, once the public understands the model, a market-oriented civic project generates an extremely high level of goodwill. These projects can motivate people and companies to give money, raise taxes, donate time and services, and sell land or lend money at below-market rates. The public sector can rarely motivate this kind of behavior, and the private sector can rarely inspire gifts and tax incentives.

The need to balance public access (particularly when a user fee is charged) with private economic objectives is one important issue that arises with the market-oriented civic approach. The successful private redevelopment of New York's Chelsea Piers, which includes substantial public space, is a good example of a balanced strategy. Its success has led to plans for similar approaches to other piers and riverfront land: a combination of public funds and privately generated revenues will ultimately make it possible to reclaim all of the Hudson River waterfront.

One of the criticisms of the market-oriented civic model is that it depends on neighborhoods with high land costs

and well-to-do residents and workers, and therefore excludes the poorer sections of town and dilutes support for the city's efforts to provide public parks for all. The past decade's explosive growth of downtown BIDs, primarily in commercial neighborhoods, has prompted this complaint.

However, the case studies in this volume show that such complaints are not justified. The Park at Post Office Square, Bryant Park, and Hudson River Park—three case studies illustrating the market-oriented civic approach in urban areas with high land costs—are open to anyone, without charge. In Bryant Park, the management has actively discouraged what it deems inappropriate behavior, such as drug dealing and living in the park; but in the past, such behavior had driven away the vast majority of users to the benefit of a small minority. And the Philadelphia Green case study shows that the market-oriented civic approach works equally well in poor neighborhoods, where small-scale initiatives have been a substantial part of a larger effort to revitalize residential neighborhoods, which are not generally suited to the kinds of commercial efforts described in some of the other case studies.

Lessons Learned from the Case Studies

In addition to illustrating the three basic models of park development and management, the 15 stories in this book offer many hopeful and instructive examples of how parks can be reborn. Not surprisingly, there are many commonalities among the various kinds of park efforts. While each city, each piece of land, and each parks department is unique, and each effort must be started anew, lessons can be learned from other cities' efforts. This section lists some of the tools and practices that have helped create and rejuvenate parks. Clearly, not all the lessons are applicable to all parks and all cities, nor are they intended to be in order of importance, but they are worth considering by all future planners and participants in the park designing process.

Lesson 1: Involve the Neighborhood

Encourage—and do not bureaucratically resist—the active participation of neighborhood groups in planning, funding, and maintaining parks. In virtually every case study, residents provided input and often-times resistance that ultimately made the park a better place. Cedar Lake Park and Trail would not have been built if not for a group of tenacious Minneapolis citizens who were willing and able to put all their resources—intellectual, networking, financial—into creating what is now a cherished and much-used greenspace. At Chicago's Elliott Donnelley Youth Center Park, a design charrette was held in which the children who would be the park's ultimate users dressed up as pieces of playground equipment and situated themselves in various places on the future playground. Involving the children in decisions about where each piece would finally be set up helped ensure their ongoing commitment to the park and its maintenance.

In Philadelphia, Norris Square Park and the surrounding neighborhoods were

reclaimed from brazen drug dealers only because of the perseverance and commitment of the community. Working in cooperation with the city and later with the Philadelphia Green program, residents were able to obtain a much-improved park and to undertake more than 70 community greening projects, which have provided a new sense of hope and involvement for the neighborhood.

In Kansas City, the Hawthorne Park planning committee was composed of people living in the neighborhood, corporate groups located in the neighborhood, and a variety of health professionals who provided expert advice on play and safety issues related to children with disabilities. In Shreveport, Louisiana, the Riverfront Development Committee, comprising representatives from the city council, the Downtown Development Authority, the metropolitan planning commission, the tourism bureau, and the Red River Revel Arts Festival, along with more than two dozen citizens, debated and planned the future of the riverfront.

Mill Race Park, in Columbus, Indiana, involved a four-month master-planning process, during which the landscape architect met with community leaders, interested citizens, and groups such as the River Rats, and even made presentations to elementary schools. The landscape architect said that the process not only allowed people to feel involved in the development of the park, but also aided him in creating a vision for the park.

Downtown Park, in Bellevue, Washington, came about because of the involvement of the private sector and the value it placed on such a park. The park's importance was reflected in the fact that the community took responsibility for financing and building the first phase with the city's oversight.

While some park developers—be they private or public sector—may privately complain that neighborhood involvement holds up the development process,

Parks are often an appropriate use for unused, underused, or unusual spaces. Harlem's Riverbank State Park, on the roof of a wastewater treatment plant, provides the neighborhood with much-needed recreational space—from swimming pools to skating rinks to an athletic building, as well as numerous outdoor courts.



Stanley Greenberg

residents ultimately feel more of a sense of ownership when they have been active participants in park development. And that translates into cleaner, safer spaces that are actively used instead of being avoided or abandoned.

Public participation also helps generate local support for use of the park and for protection from vandals. And active community involvement helps win political support for public funding of parks in general, which can be matched with private funds.

Lesson 2: Design with a Vision

Don't underestimate the power of imaginative design. Park design is more than a matter of recreating the soft, pastoral, "Olmstedian" spaces beloved in many American cities. Visionary design can affect a park's safety, viability, and usability—and most certainly affects its long-term success.

Whether the dangers are perceived or real, safety concerns are among the biggest contributors to the downfall of urban parks. But even in neighborhoods where safety has been a long-standing concern, changes in design, landscaping, and use patterns can make parks viable

once again. All of the park designers in these case studies have considered safety and security issues and taken innovative approaches to dealing with them.

Bryant Park's 1940 design, while lovely in its heyday, was no longer workable in today's urban environment. The park had been intended to provide seclusion and quiet spaces for users; instead, the closed environment encouraged crime, and the park's nickname—"Needle Park"—was deserved. Designers of the new Bryant Park kept many of the basic elements of the park, but pried open the space by removing shrubbery and by providing more and larger entrances and better lighting. The design has been a major contributing factor in the increased safety of the park.

Many other parks have simply kept plantings low and therefore hard to hide behind. At Shreveport Riverfront Park, where crime was not much of a problem to begin with, the redesign incorporated crime prevention design elements such as open sight lines and low plantings. The original design of Bellevue's Downtown Park had small enclosures on its periphery, which were removed at the advice of the police department.

Safety and security are just one element of park design. Using art as a fundamental feature of a park can provide a special quality that will endure over time. In Turtle Park in St. Louis, a rather small space (300 by 100 feet) was transformed into a vibrant neighborhood amenity through the use of art objects—sculptures—that are also play equipment. The whimsical sculptures are so appealing that children come from beyond the neighborhood to play on them. The Ribbon in San Francisco’s Embarcadero Promenade is an art piece that not only serves as an identifying image for the project but is a functional element as well, providing seating and tables in various sizes and combinations. At the Elliott Donnelley Youth Center Park, where art was the driving force behind the restoration, local artists and neighborhood children created unique environments that are grounded in the locale and that residents point to with pride.

Incorporating old uses and structures into the design of a park can also add

character and provide an inexpensive link to the past. Building on the history of a site can provide an unusual and visually interesting theme and may be less expensive than clearing the site and creating a theme from scratch. The designers of Mill Race Park incorporated existing structures, added other historical structures, and designed a set of striking new structures for the park. Cedar Lake Park and Trail’s effort to reintroduce and sustain indigenous prairie grasses has set it apart from the many other lovely parks in Minneapolis and given the community a focal point for future efforts.

Lesson 3: Revive Underused or Unused Space

Underused, unused, or unusual space—such as underground parking garages, piers, air rights, and floodplains—can be successfully transformed into viable parks and open space. In Harlem, the state of New York provided much-needed recreational facilities by building Riverbank State Park atop a wastewater treat-

Pinellas Trail in Pinellas County, Florida, funded largely through ISTEA funds, draws over a million users annually and connects seven communities that had previously had little to do with one another.



Pinellas County Department of Public Affairs

ment plant. Careful planning of load capacities and the use of lightweight materials did not upset the integrity of the park's design. In Boston, the Park at Post Office Square rests on top of a seven-level underground parking garage. Park users sit in peace, barely aware of entrance and exit ramps for the many vehicles that use the garage daily, and the revenues from the garage support upkeep of the park. Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, a large-scale private recreational facility, took advantage of the enormous spaces created by once-decrepit piers that jut into the Hudson River and created completely modern facilities that provide New Yorkers with a dramatic venue for recreation. Even in Bryant Park, the redesign took advantage of the unused space beneath the great lawn and provided room for much-needed book stacks for the New York Public Library; by accommodating the needs of the library, the thoughtful redesign of the park made it possible for that vital institution to remain next to the park.

As illustrated by the Mill Race Park and Shreveport Riverfront Park case studies, formerly underused or abandoned floodplains—particularly when they are adjacent to expensive downtown real estate—can be transformed into parks and open space that recover easily after flooding. Instead of fighting Mother Nature, it is wise to consider accommodating the low-cost, flood-prone land that may be adjacent to some of the highest-priced land in the region. Mill Race Park, for example, was successfully reclaimed through a design that allowed all elements to withstand annual flooding; among other features, the park has an automatic shutoff for electric power that goes into effect when the water reaches a certain height, and rest room walls that begin eight inches from the ground to allow easy drainage. While flood cleanup may be time consuming and add costs that would not be associated with a park that is not in a flood-

plain, the cost of cleaning or rehabilitating flood-damaged open space is almost too small to measure when compared with the cost of rebuilding flood-damaged residential or commercial neighborhoods.

Lesson 4: Program Parks

Make a concerted effort to program activities in the park, insofar as programming is manageable and appropriate for the type of park and open space. Steady use has been shown to enhance revenues—and, as Page Gifford in the Mill Race Park case study put it, “A high level of activity is the cheapest security there is.” At the redesigned Shreveport Riverfront Park, increased usage coincided with an increase in programmed events, eventually causing debate about the primary focus of the park: passive versus programmed use. At Mill Race Park, steady use is greatly enhanced by programmed events, typically around the amphitheater, and nearly every weekend is programmed from June through September. Bryant Park's programmed events are calculated to provide a benefit to the participants, the sponsors, and the revenue-generating mechanisms within the park.

The use of Flagstar Corporate Plaza and Jerome Richardson Park, in Spartanburg, South Carolina, for civic programmed events has given the city a new focal point and brought people downtown. Using specific programmed events to draw people to a park increases potential users' awareness of and interest in the park, increases overall use of the park, and can help to create the kind of community gathering places that can have other social ramifications in building stronger neighborhoods.

Lesson 5: Remember that Cleanliness Equals Respectfulness

Keep public open spaces clean and well maintained. This lesson is backed up by each of the case studies. Several factors can influence the cost and relative ease of

maintaining a park: first, the availability of adequate operating funds, whether from public, private, or civic sources; second, strategic use of maintenance staff; and third, a design that is not only attractive but also inherently low maintenance.

Users tend to respond to a pleasant, well-designed space with pleasant, orderly behavior. As the Bryant Park case study demonstrates, park users can be trusted—in this instance, trusted not to make off with movable chairs. However, to encourage appropriate behavior, it is essential that the park be well maintained: high standards of maintenance are a sign of respect to users—which will, in turn, elicit respectful treatment of park property.

Lesson 6: Be Creative in Funding Parks

By “pushing the envelope” of possibilities, resourceful public and private sector groups have been very successful at finding money to develop and maintain parks. They have, for example, taken advantage of federal programs that may not be intended for parkland per se. For example, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), due for reauthorization and probable modification in 1997, has been an important source of funds for rail-to-trail conversions. Linear park development can be a particular boon to a region because it not only adds recreational space but also adds to the transportation network of a region or community. While obtaining such funds may involve cumbersome bureaucratic processes, a certain percentage of ISTEA money spent in every metropolitan area must be spent on non-highway, transportation-related projects.

In addition, groups like the National Endowment for the Arts have various public arts program funds that can be applied to parks and open space, as was the case in the Embarcadero Promenade. At the time of the redevelopment of the Shreveport Riverfront Park, a special pro-

gram of the Small Business Administration—an unlikely resource for park development—provided the city with a \$9,000 grant to plant trees.

The sale of shares at the Park at Post Office Square was an innovative entrepreneurial approach to funding that jump-started that project and provided purchasers with a real benefit: access to parking in a dense city center. Private sector donations for a successful first phase may spark increased public support for subsequent phases (see the case studies on Downtown Park, Hawthorne Park, and Flagstar Corporate Plaza).

Lesson 7: Consider Using Parks as Organizing Elements

An urban park can create a sense of place, a landmark, and a community focal point, which may in turn increase property values and create incentive for new development. Since few great downtowns have evolved without a sense of connection to nature, an urban park should be an important component of any successful city redevelopment.

Bellevue’s Downtown Park was a critical element of a vision to create a livable downtown for a rapidly growing suburban area with no center. The Pinellas Trail connected seven communities that had previously had little to do with one another. Philadelphia Green, through its network of community gardens and greening projects, weaves connections between different sections of a neighborhood.

And two large-scale waterfront projects—the Hudson River Park Conservancy effort and the Embarcadero Promenade—have the potential to reshape substantial portions of two major cities. The revival of large, underused spaces will put a new focus on an underdeveloped resource.

Lesson 8: Parks Departments Must Play a Leadership Role

While many of the case studies focus on private sector involvement and leader-

ship, one small park stands out and provides a valuable lesson for other cities. Hawthorne Park, thought to be the nation's first fully accessible park, came about because of a parks department that had vision and leadership. Using the talent already available on the parks department staff and drawing in equally talented private sector participants, the parks department exemplified an entrepreneurial approach to park development that produced an innovative, precedent-setting park facility. The creativity and perseverance of park planners and designers transformed Hawthorne Park from a somewhat run-down, nondescript neighborhood park into a model park and play area that is 100 percent accessible to able-bodied children and children with disabilities, setting a new standard that is receiving nationwide attention. Most other parks departments in the country have the capability, but for many reasons may lack the motivation and leadership to play a strong role.

In some cases, like Minneapolis, segregating the tax base to support the parks department can make it easier to take the kinds of risks that were required to build Cedar Lake Park and Trail. A guar-

anteed budget, not subject to political whims, ensures basic park maintenance, leaving room for the vision and leadership that have helped give Minneapolis perhaps the finest park system in the country.

Sometimes leadership must come first from elected officials. The city councilwoman—and later mayor—in Bellevue who had a vision of a grand city park was able to lead her colleagues to take the risk that will forever shape Bellevue's downtown. But regardless of whether the impetus comes from an elected official or a city department, the public sector needs to reclaim its leadership role in protecting some of our cities' most valuable assets.

Conclusion

For relatively little money in comparison to the private capital and public improvements invested in our cities, the character and civility of our cities can be vastly improved through the development and adequate maintenance and operation of our parks. Moreover, parks and open space can significantly increase the value of the private capital base. The leverage

Bellevue's Downtown Park was designed to provide a center for the burgeoning suburb. The vision of a grand central park was realized through the efforts of many public and private entities.



The parks department in Kansas City, Missouri, showed some private-sector entrepreneurship in transforming a nondescript, somewhat run-down neighborhood park into an innovative park and play area that is 100 percent accessible to able-bodied children and children with disabilities.



in value gained through properly developed and maintained parks is one of the great unexploited opportunities in our cities today.

An urban park can create a sense of place, a landmark, and a community focal point, which may in turn increase property values and create incentive for nearby development. Yet it takes effort to create a space that works and provides value. Most often, that effort is best made by taking advantage of the skills and initiative of the public, private, and civic sectors. Relying on the public sector alone risks limiting the resources and creativity that can be brought to bear on urban parks and open space and the sense of ownership and interest that communities feel toward their greenspace.

Notes

1. Brooke Warrick and Toni Alexander, "Looking for Hometown America," *Urban Land*, February 1997, pp. 27-29, 51-53.

2. The poll was conducted by the Regional Plan Association and Quinnipac College Polling Institute in Hamden, Connecticut. Some 1,500 residents in 31 counties in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, and 400 people liv-

ing in Los Angeles/Riverside/Orange County, Dallas/Fort Worth, Atlanta, and Seattle/Tacoma/Bremerton were polled. See the summary of results in "Avenues for Social Programming," *Urban Land*, February 1997, pp. 30-31.

3. Tom Fox, *Urban Open Space: An Investment That Pays* (New York: Neighborhood Open Space Coalition, 1990).

4. Charles Little, *Challenge of the Land* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1969), p. 87; cited in Fox, *Urban Open Space*.

5. John C. Weicher and Robert H. Zerbst, "The Externalities of Neighborhood Parks: An Empirical Investigation," *Land Economics* 49, no. 1 (1973), pp. 99-105.

6. Thomas R. Hammer, Robert E. Coughlin, and Edward T. Horn IV, "Research Report: the Effect of a Large Park on Real Estate Value," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (July 1974), pp. 274-277.

7. Margaret M. Kimmel, "Parks and Property Values: An Empirical Study in Dayton and Columbus, Ohio" (thesis, Miami University, 1985).

8. Rocky Mountain Research Institute study, 1991, referenced in *Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995).