

Urban Parks: Programming Areas and Facilities.

THE VISION OF AN URBAN PARK.

Urban parks are places of significant size and location that offer respite to city dwellers in the form of natural or artful aesthetic beauty, recreation and education be it cultural, historic or wellness. The Olmstedian idea of urban parks as cultural oases for a person's renewal from urban pressures is still valid. Urban parks can offer private settings for contemplation or active settings for socializing. The best urban parks have places for all these things.

Central Park in New York City is the quintessential urban park in a big city, but there are small town equivalents. A town square, a nature park near downtown, an historic site that invites individual and group enjoyment or a public place with a big tree near a stream can play the role of the urban park in a smaller setting. A place that allows and encourages beauty, health, recreation, education and socialization in the urban environment is the prize.

CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIZING FACILITIES.

- Beauty, existing or potential.
- Costs, capital and O&M.
- Demographics.
- Risks, injury.
- Peripheral benefits, i.e., nearby property values.
- Environmental and infrastructure impacts.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.

The planning and development of parks is intended to serve the population in the community. To determine what the community needs, several activities are necessary including demographic studies to characterize the resident population and a needs surveys conducted face-to-face or with indirect means such as social media, the newspaper or telephone. Community workshops can present ideas from the professional planning/design team and obtain information and preferences from stakeholders.

Extensive efforts are warranted to tailor the park to the needs and characteristics of the resident population. Annual or five-year monitoring is necessary to gage how the community is changing by becoming younger, older, or attractive to people with special needs. An important design feature of the initial park is to anticipate changes and build-in the flexibility to morph the parks program elements to meet a changing community demographic profile.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS.

What goes into an urban park depends on the park's size and location as well as the population to be served. The following list is a "menu", a list of choices; certainly not a list of required elements. Pick, choose, modify and adapt areas and facilities for the list below to tailor an urban park to the town.

Paraphrasing Churchill...the town's character will shape the park, and then the park will shape the community's character.

Co-locations are important. Siting a new park near a school, library or museum pays multiple benefits; or vice versa. Not only are efficiencies achieved with parking, stormwater areas and signage, but attendance goes up when people go to one place, say a library, and find themselves near another interesting place. Co-locations offer great opportunities to expand community participation.

- **Active recreation areas and facilities:**
 - Exercise parcourses.
 - Golf course, 9 hole, mini-golf, par three, disc golf.
 - Indoor gymnasiums.
 - Multi-purpose courts for basketball, pickle ball, tennis.
 - Multi-purpose fields for baseball, soccer, football, field hockey, lacrosse.
 - Sand volleyball courts and areas.
 - Skate parks.
- **Community and education centers focused on:**
 - Adult fitness.
 - Classes in cooking, language, pottery, etc.
 - History.
 - Nature.
 - Performing arts.
 - Seniors.
 - Special needs.
 - Static arts.
 - Teens.
 - Wellness.
- **Food and Beverage fixed facilities and mobile vendor areas and facilities:**
 - Concession buildings and stands in combination with rest rooms and kiosks.
 - Drinking fountains.
 - Food truck areas.
 - Roving vendors concessions.
- **Kiosks for education:**
 - Demonstrations of solar power, natural processes, recycling opportunities and conservation practices.
 - Local flora and fauna.
 - Local history.
- **Kiosks for information:**
 - Assistance, emergency and non-emergency.
 - Destinations.
 - Directions.

- **Mobility facilities and areas:**
 - ADA access
 - Bike and scooter racks and rental stands and re-charging facilities.
 - Parking areas, trail heads and transit centers.
 - Sidewalks and crossings to adjacent destinations.
 - Walking paths and trails.
 - **Museums and libraries:**
 - Arts and crafts.
 - Historic buildings and places.
 - Local history.
 - Natural history.
 - Special persons.
 - Specialty collections.
 - **Nature areas and facilities:**
 - Arboretum.
 - Bioretention, rain gardens
 - Butterfly gardens
 - Community gardens, flower gardens, native flora gardens.
 - Specimen trees and vegetation preservation areas.
 - Vegetable gardens.
 - **Passive people facilities and areas:**
 - Benches, seat walls and grassed areas for people-watching areas.
 - Moveable tables and chairs.
 - Pavilions with grills for picnics, table games and a variety of gatherings.
 - Picnic tables, open air pavilions.
 - Playgrounds with shade structures.
 - Shade, umbrellas, awnings, rain protection areas.
 - **Performance areas and facilities:**
 - Amphitheaters and outdoor performance areas, casual and formal.
 - Movie screens, outdoors.
 - Performing arts centers.
 - **Public art:**
 - Contemporary sculptures, exhibits and displays.
 - Fountains and water features.
 - Monuments to important persons and/or significant events.
 - Outdoor exhibitions.
 - **Rest Rooms and concessions, preferably in a single pavilion.**
 - Public showers.
 - **Safety equipment.**
 - Emergency buttons, alerts
 - Lighting
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- **Special purpose facilities and areas:**
 - Chess, checker and other table game platforms in pavilions and free-standing.
 - Day care facilities, child and adult.
 - Designated areas for operating drones.
 - Dog park delineated areas with waste stations.
 - Outdoor tables for ping pong, foosball and billiards in pavilions.
 - Paved areas for remote vehicle practicing, racing and demonstrations.
 - Phone charging stations.
 - Pop-up art, education, F&B facilities: rotating.
 - Wi-Fi.
- **Stormwater areas, LID.**
- **Water engagement areas and facilities:**
 - Aquatic centers, swimming and diving.
 - Boating with canoes and kayaks.
 - Fishing.
 - Splash pads.
 - Wading.
- **Wayfinding signs, displays and kiosks for in-park and nearby destinations.**

SOURCES:

1. ***Parks and Recreation System Planning, A New Approach for Creating Sustainable, Resilient Communities***, David L. Barth, PhD, Island Press, Washington D.C., 2020.
2. ***Parks, People, and Places: Making Parks Accessible to the Community***, Urban Land Institute, The 2005 ULI/Charles H. Shaw Forum on Urban Community Issues Sept. 2005, Deborah L. Myerson.
3. **The Digital Public Library of America** at <https://dp.la/exhibitions/urban-parks/types-parks>.
4. ***Urban Planning and Design Criteria***, Second Edition, Joseph De Chiara and Lee Koppelman, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1975.

ARTICLES

Parks, People, and Places: Making Parks Accessible to the Community.

The 2005 ULI/Charles H. Shaw Forum on Urban Community Issues September 22–23, 2005.
Prepared by Deborah L. Myerson

“Design for the Place and Its Users.

Design has an enormous impact on how users experience a park. Good, responsible design yields a beautiful, green, safe, clean park that will exert a strong positive influence on the community. The design of the park should be integrated with surrounding uses and should be accessible and appealing for users with a wide range of ages, backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Features such as lighting, seating (both movable and fixed), restrooms, and food and beverage sales all contribute to the comfort and appeal of a park.

Aesthetic considerations should not stop at the park’s boundaries: the perimeter of the park and the adjacent sidewalks are gateways and are also an important part of users’ experience.

“Make No Small Plans.

Parks embody a city’s public realm. In many ways, how a city embraces its recreational open spaces and their diverse users reflects its sense of community and its quality of life. A great parks system starts with a vision and a plan—both of which require periodic updates. The vision sketches the park’s role in the community from the present into the future, describes the park’s assets, and indicates how the park can serve diverse residents and visitors.

“To keep sight of the big picture, the park system should also have its own master plan, which will reflect both the anticipated neighborhood uses and how the park fits into the larger municipal park system. The plan should: ■ Consider who the park users are (by activity, age, gender, etc.); ■ Identify the range of needs; ■ Be adaptable to social, economic, and environmental changes. Regularly revisiting the master plan provides opportunities to reexamine previous assumptions and to adapt to changes in demographics or park usage.”

LINK: https://www.ignitecda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ULI_Parks_People-Doc-to-post.pdf

Urban Parks in the United States.

From *The Digital Public Library of America*. DPLA empowers people to learn, grow, and contribute to a diverse and better-functioning society by maximizing access to our shared history, culture, and knowledge.

“It is possible to distinguish some broad categories of parks in the United States: town squares, large city parks, pleasure grounds or cultural parks, neighborhood parks, and pocket parks.

“Each form or type of park was shaped by the social needs and perspectives of the historical period in which it was created. This led to a progression of types that can be described chronologically, but it is important to note that new types of parks emerged alongside existing ones, so that multiple types exist concurrently.

“Also, an established park may evolve to meet the changing needs of its users, taking on characteristics more common in another category of park, as in the case of a playground being added to a cultural park.

“Parks require oversight and maintenance. Larger communities with multiple parks are likely to administer parks as a system, thinking about each park in relation to the others and in relation to the needs of the community as a whole, combining types and approaches to most fully address those needs.”

The Digital Public Library of America can be found at LINK: <https://dp.la/exhibitions/urban-parks/types-parks>