

Complete Parks Playbook



ChangeLab Solutions

Foreword

As a public health advocacy professional working with local governments, I struggle on an ongoing basis with how a significant number of local elected officials do not link their land use policy decisions to public health problems. Specifically, parks, recreation, and open spaces provide a potent strategy for the treatment and prevention of weight-gain, obesity, and diabetes epidemics, and various chronic health problems. They also have great potential to be the engines of economic development, yet their administration is on the chopping block every time local governments have trouble balancing their budgets!

The Complete Parks Systems concept originated under the auspices of the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign through a series of statewide brainstorming sessions held with the California Parks and Recreation Society leadership in early 2014, looking at parks' contributions to community health and how they are perceived by locally elected officials. This Playbook is intended to be a valuable resource for local policymakers, professionals working in local government, and local advocates to help place parks, recreation, and community services in a central position they deserve in local government.

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Creating a Complete Parks System



Connect

Creating safe routes to parks



Fund

Committing to finance the complete parks system



Grow

Planting and maintaining sustainable parks



Locate

Ensuring equitable access to parks



Activate

Programming activities and amenities for parks



Protect

Making parks safe



Engage

Engaging everyone in the process

Complete Parks System: What Is It and Why Is It Important?

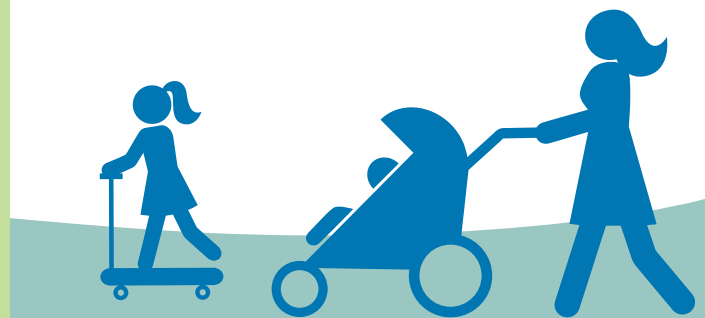
What Is a Complete Parks System?

Parks bring numerous health, social, economic, and environmental benefits to a community, and every person in every neighborhood should be able to enjoy these benefits. Unfortunately, too many cities and counties are “park poor,” lacking adequate parks and green spaces. Low-income communities often have the fewest (and worst-maintained) facilities. Many communities are now looking for ways to expand and improve their parks systems, while grappling with how to persuade decision makers that parks should be consistently funded and prioritized as essential infrastructure.

The concept of a “complete parks system” is a lens through which to assess parks, green spaces, and open spaces in a community. It is also a tool to identify areas in need of improvement as well as policy levers that can facilitate those improvements. To maintain a fully utilized parks system that serves a community’s needs, it is necessary to take into account numerous factors, including how people travel to parks; equitable access to parks; how parks are designed; what types of activities and amenities are planned for parks; how and by whom parks are used; what types of plants and trees are planted in parks; how parks are maintained; and how parks are funded. This holistic approach looks beyond the traditional borders of a park, encompassing trees and other vegetation that exist along streets, paths, and other neighborhood areas. Wherever they are, trees and greenery can benefit a community and its residents.

What Is a “Park”?

Depending on context, the word “park” can mean many different things. While many people may think of a park as a large grassy space with a playground and fields, the term will evoke a vastly different image for others. The fact is that parks come in various shapes and sizes, from small parklets to large sports complexes. In addition, green spaces interwoven throughout a community, as well as undeveloped open spaces, offer many of the same physical, emotional, sociological, and community benefits as a traditional public park. This Playbook refers to “parks” in the broadest sense, meaning all manner of parks, green spaces, and open spaces. Some of the Playbook’s elements apply more distinctly to certain types of parks, but many of them are universally applicable. In assessing a community’s parks system, it is important to consider the entire range of possibilities for parks, green spaces, and open spaces.





Why Is a Complete Parks System Important?

Overwhelming evidence demonstrates that parks and green spaces improve our physical and psychological health, strengthen our communities, improve our economies, and make our neighborhoods more attractive places to live, work, and play. In fact, some researchers use the phrase “Vitamin G” to describe nature’s role as a necessary ingredient for a healthy life.¹ Nature, parks, and green space improve physiological and psychological health, social cohesion, and safety for all people, regardless of age, race, or income level. In an increasingly complex world, parks and open spaces can be “sacred spaces” where we find solace and re-energize.

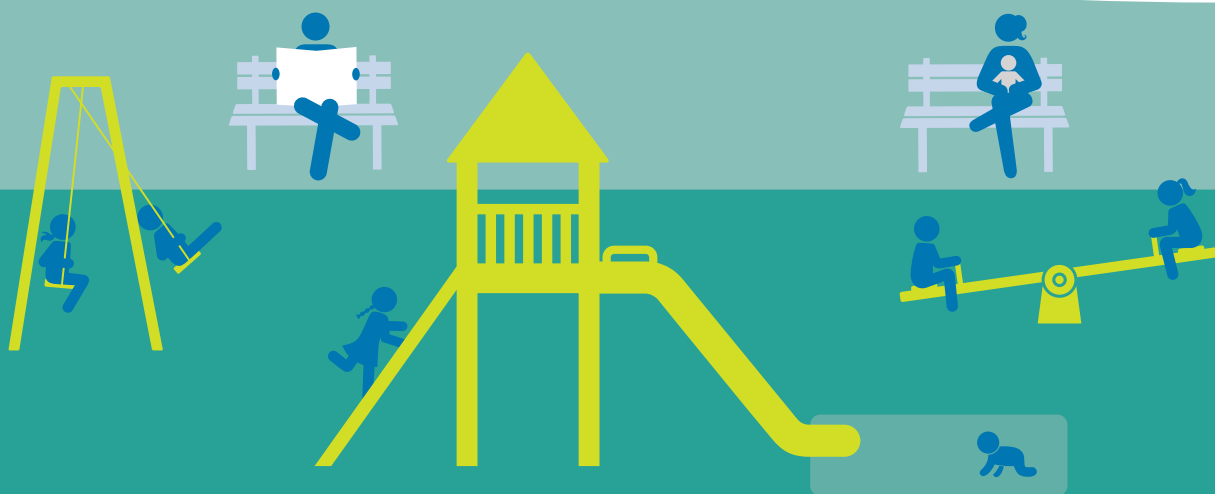
Because parks are essential to the core functioning of a community, a parks system cannot be evaluated independently from other infrastructure in a city, county, or region. Many of the elements that make a successful parks system also affect other foundational aspects of a community. For example, creating safe routes to parks will often result in safe routes to other destinations. Creating safer parks will result in safer communities overall and allow public safety resources to be directed elsewhere. Identifying sustainable funding sources for parks can only be done while also assessing the entire budget for a city, county, or special district.

Parks are a fundamental feature of community life, just like law enforcement, schools, and libraries. As such, parks are inextricably connected with all other aspects of the community. Community decision makers must recognize this, and weigh the funding and development needs of their parks systems alongside other basic community functions. A complete parks system approach provides not only a comprehensive overview of a parks system but also a basis for making parks-related policy decisions.

Using this Playbook

The *Complete Parks Playbook* provides an overview of all the elements necessary for a fully utilized parks system that is completely integrated into a community's built environment. It is intended for anyone interested in using parks to promote health: Decision makers, professionals working in local government or for a special district, community-based organizations, and persons serving on a board or commission that creates park policy or advises decision makers can use this comprehensive guide to assess their community's parks system. While the Playbook was conceived for California communities, most of the laws and policies it covers are applicable in other states.

The Playbook briefly explains each of the elements of a complete parks system. It provides additional resources for implementing each element, and highlights community examples of each element. Many communities are very successful in several of the areas outlined in the Playbook but could improve in other areas. The Playbook is intended to help a community assess the strengths and weaknesses of its parks system. However, in an attempt to keep this guide short, we have not included extensive legal or policy discussion about each strategy. [Contact ChangeLab Solutions](#) for more information about linking parks to public health issues or about any of the strategies discussed in this Playbook.



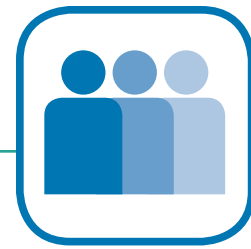
KEY RESOURCES

[Making the Case for Designing Active Cities](#) (Active Living Research)

[The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space](#) (The Trust for Public Land)

[Parks and Trails Health Impact Assessment Toolkit](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; this toolkit provides techniques and strategies for conducting health impact assessments of parks)

[Healthy Parks, Healthy People: Community Engagement eGuide](#) (National Park Service; this guide provides recommendations, case studies, and best practices pertaining to how parks support public health)



ENGAGE

Engaging *Everyone* in the Process

Community engagement is essential to creating parks that meet community needs. There are three primary avenues for community engagement: (1) during the creation of formal plans; (2) at regular, ongoing government meetings; and (3) through surveys, meetings, and other tools or forums designed to gather data about park usage and community needs.

Planning Process: When Plans Are Being Created

All cities and counties in California are required to adopt and regularly update a General Plan that provides the policy framework for future development decisions. While parks are largely addressed in the Open Space element of a General Plan, the principles supporting parks may also be addressed in other elements (e.g., Land Use, Housing, Transportation, etc.). Community engagement during a General Plan update generally involves large community-wide forums and workshops, online (and/or telephone) surveys, task force meetings to help guide the process, and several stakeholder meetings. All community members should be encouraged to participate at any or all of these meetings.

Two other planning documents of particular importance for a complete parks system are Parks/Open Space Master Plans and Trails, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Master Plans (or Trails Plans). Some cities and counties create specific plans to focus on these important issues. The planning processes for these documents should include similar opportunities for community input as the ones described above.

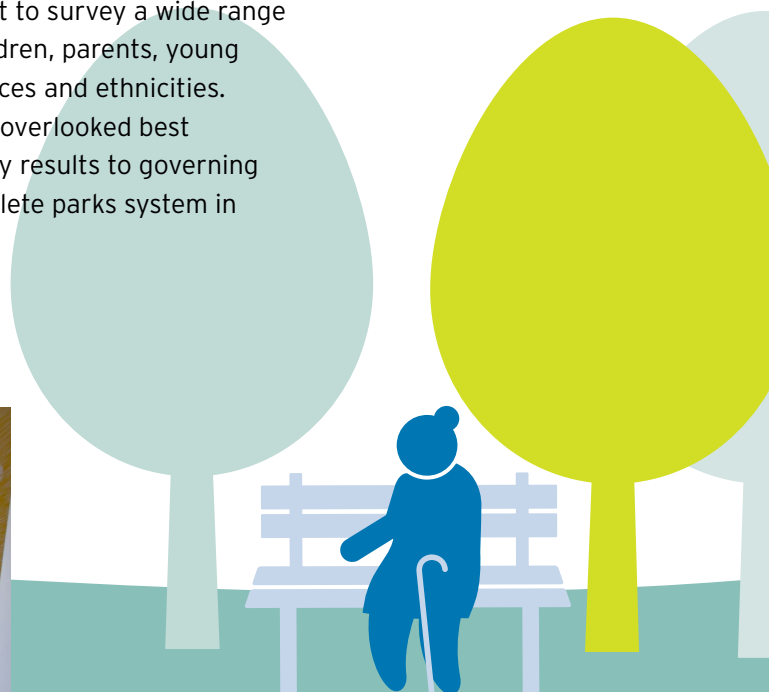


City/County Meetings: Ongoing, Regular Meetings

A city, county, or special district can also receive public input at meetings, such as meetings of the city council, board of supervisors, board of directors, or parks and recreation commission. When items relevant to parks are on the agenda, these bodies should not only reach out to known user groups and stakeholders, but also publicize the issue widely to potentially interested groups, such as schools, faith-based organizations, and neighborhoods that are underserved or park poor.

Surveys and Forums: Gathering Data from Residents

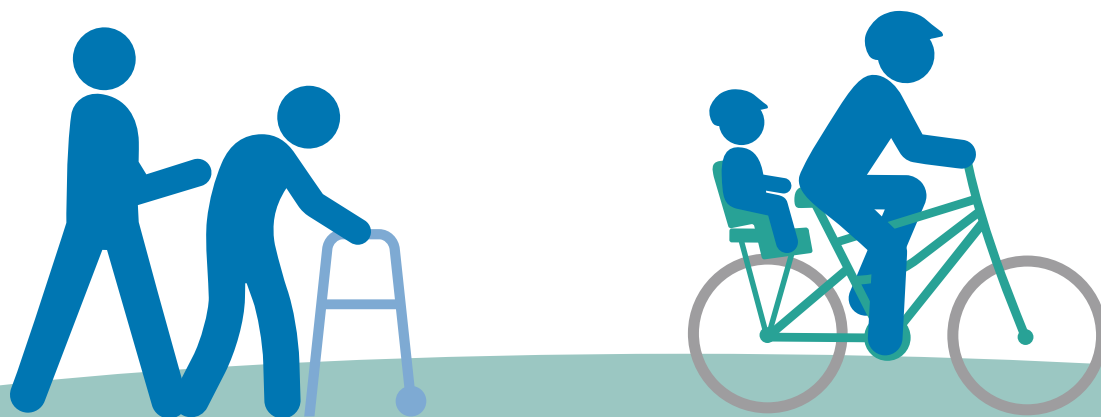
Cities, counties, and special districts should also consider taking routine, ongoing surveys of parks users and residents to better understand their needs. These could include telephone surveys, online surveys, and in-person surveys at parks. Asking the community what they want in a particular park will help a jurisdiction determine what to build (e.g., community center or pool) as well as what types of activities to program (e.g., knitting class, yoga, etc.). Surveys can reach broad swaths of the community if they are conducted at diverse locations, such as schools, churches, libraries, or other community institutions, rather than only at meetings held at the city hall. It is important to survey a wide range of people with different needs, such as older adults, children, parents, young adults, low-income residents, and persons of differing races and ethnicities. Demographically balanced surveys are critical. An often overlooked best practice is presenting a regular report on the user survey results to governing boards and councils, which can keep the issue of a complete parks system in front of community decision makers.



COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

Windsor, CA: Parks and Recreation Master Plan

In updating its Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Town of Windsor in Sonoma County initially held two community outreach meetings at the Windsor Branch of the Sonoma County Library. Afterward, Parks and Recreation staff and Master Plan consultants from Gates + Associates realized that they had not received enough input from two important demographic groups in the community – Hispanic residents and youth – so they scheduled additional meetings designed specifically to engage these residents. The town collaborated with a Catholic church to publicize and host a Spanish-language workshop following mass, and it sponsored a meeting for approximately 60 youths through a leadership class at a local high school. Finally, the town hosted a roundtable for everyone who had attended any of the community meetings or workshops. By seeking input from residents who do not necessarily follow town politics or attend city meetings, and by offering the workshops offsite and making them as accessible as possible, the town was able to better assess the needs of the entire community.



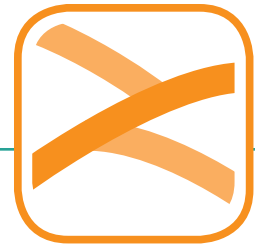
KEY RESOURCES

[How to Create and Implement Healthy General Plans](#) (ChangeLab Solutions, see the section on Parks and Recreation Master Plans)

[Local Practices in Public Engagement](#) (National League of Cities)

[How Cities Use Parks for Community Engagement](#) (American Planning Association)

[Engaging the Public in Planning, Housing & Sustainability](#) (Institute for Local Government Community)



CONNECT

Creating Safe Routes to Parks

Parks and green spaces should be easily accessible by foot, bicycle, or public transit. In fact, a street system is an extension of a parks and green space system. With more trees and vegetation along sidewalks, medians, and streets, street networks become green networks that link neighborhoods, schools, and commercial areas with parks and green spaces. These walkable green neighborhood environments contribute to residents' physical and mental health.²

Local governments can use parks and recreation master plans, Complete Streets policies, and Safe Routes to School policies to support safe routes to parks. Safe routes to parks should also be designed to eliminate disparities in access. Low-income neighborhoods often lack access to parks, and residents in these areas are more likely to rely on non-automotive means of transportation, such as walking, biking, or public transit. Therefore, a complete parks system must ensure that parks and open spaces are readily accessible via these modes of travel.

In order to assess ease/difficulty of access to parks, it is important to map the walk routes that link parks with schools, libraries, dense housing complexes, and other community facilities. Pedestrian-friendly infrastructure improvements along these routes should be a community priority. Moreover, early in the design process, development projects within a half-mile of a park boundary should be reviewed for opportunities to increase pedestrian connectivity, reduce route distance to the park, and improve park visibility.



POTENTIAL POLICIES FOR CREATING SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS

- Complete Streets Policy
- Safe Routes to School Policy
- Green Streets Policy
- Tree Canopy Policy
- Greenways Policy
- Circulation Element of General Plan



COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

San Francisco, CA: Green Connections

Green Connections, a project in San Francisco, aims to “increase access to parks, open spaces, and the waterfront by envisioning a network of ‘green connectors’ – city streets that will be upgraded incrementally over the next 20 years to make it safer and more pleasant to travel to parks by walking, biking, and other forms of active transportation.” Green Connections brought together government agencies and community organizations to develop this vision, which includes features such as pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, street trees, and public art installations.

KEY RESOURCES

[Safe Routes to Parks: Improving Access to Parks through Walkability](#) (National Recreation and Park Association)

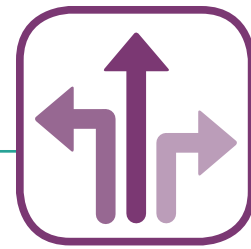
[Safe Routes to Parks](#) (American Planning Association)

[Active Transportation and Parks and Recreation](#) (National Recreation and Park Association)

[Green Connections Design Toolkit](#) (San Francisco Green Connections)

[Move This Way: Making Neighborhoods More Walkable and Bikeable](#) (ChangeLab Solutions)

[California Complete Street Policies](#) (ChangeLab Solutions)



LOCATE

Ensuring Equitable Access to Parks

The numerous benefits of parks and open spaces are realized only by those who live or work near parks or can readily access them via safe routes to parks.

In a complete parks system, every resident should live within walking distance of a park, open space, or green space (i.e., within half a mile). In assessing a parks system, it is especially important to focus on low-income neighborhoods, which are less likely to have accessible sports areas, parks and green spaces, and/or public pools and beaches.³

Parks and green spaces can come in all shapes and sizes. Larger parks may draw people from the broader region, whereas smaller parks usually serve the neighborhoods immediately surrounding them. In urban settings and other areas where green space is limited, there may be opportunities to create pocket parks, parklets, or play streets or to increase trees and greenery on streets. Cities or counties can also open up existing recreation areas in schools and faith-based organizations to the larger community through shared use agreements. Communities that are already built out will need to be creative in order to ensure that all residents in all neighborhoods have access to a park or green space.

In addition to parks, the mere presence of street trees, shrubs, and green spaces can provide an important mental refuge for people. It is important for all communities, regardless of density or location, to provide high-quality green spaces.

POTENTIAL POLICIES FOR ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS

- Shared Use Policy
- Open Streets Policy
- Play Streets Policy
- Parklet Policy
- General Plan (which includes policies such as traffic calming)



COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

San Francisco, CA: Parklet Program

The San Francisco Parklet Program creatively brings space for relaxation into an otherwise crowded urban environment. A parklet transforms part of a street – usually about two parking spaces – into a public recreational space. Often featuring plants, places to sit, bike parking, and art, parklets make public streets more inviting at a minimal cost. Parklets are designed, paid for, and maintained by neighboring businesses, residents, and community organizations. Although parklets are privately funded and maintained, they are publicly accessible and open to all.

Los Angeles, CA: Avalon Green Alley Network Demonstration Project

The Avalon Green Alley Network Demonstration Project transformed several alleys into vibrant neighborhood spaces, focusing on low-income and high-crime areas where obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are prevalent. This project illustrates a whole-system approach to developing parks and green spaces in a neighborhood that lacks supportive infrastructure for a healthy, safe community. The improvements include light-colored permeable pavers; sustainable stormwater management; increased green and open spaces; increased tree canopy; and improved crosswalk striping, lighting, and signage. The alleys create a connective network between residential homes and community amenities, including the local schools, parks, and grocery store. Outreach to residents, schools, and community groups has been an integral part of the process, leading to the formation of the Avalon Green Alley Green Team, which has assisted with alley cleanups, tree planting, and community art projects.





KEY RESOURCES

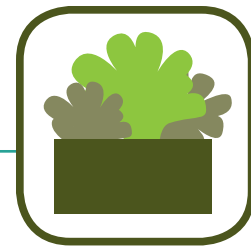
San Francisco Parklet Manual (Pavement to Parks)

National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the network provides national, state, and county data on selected indicators in the form of maps, tables, and charts. See the Access to Parks indicator, which illustrates the percentage of a population living within half a mile of a park boundary.)

This Land is Our Land: A Primer on Public Land Ownership for Recreational Access (ChangeLab Solutions)

Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours: A Toolkit for Increasing Physical Activity (ChangeLab Solutions)

Landscape Performance Series: Case Study Briefs (Landscape Architecture Foundation; this database contains more than a hundred projects that benefit communities environmentally and economically.)



ACTIVATE

Programming Activities and Amenities for Parks

The most successful parks are those that the entire community can use and enjoy. Communities should provide a variety of programs and amenities throughout the day to serve all populations, including children, low-income families, the elderly, and people with limited physical mobility or other disabilities. These programs should be responsive to community needs and changing demographics. Ongoing engagement with both park users and nonusers (discussed in the Engage section of this Playbook) is critical to determine community preferences for programming and amenities as well as needs that remain unmet. Local policy and programming should prioritize activities that the residents want to participate in, as determined by the results of community surveys or other means. The goal is to attract a diverse group of people and eliminate “dead” times when few people are in the park.

Staff responsible for programming should think creatively about how to meet community needs. For example, a neighborhood concerned about rising obesity rates may be interested in exercise classes at their local recreational facility. But since high obesity rates often go hand-in-hand with high levels of food insecurity, a park could further support that community’s needs by promoting access to healthy food. A park can host farmers’ markets, community garden plots, fruit tree orchards that can be harvested by residents, and/or nutrition education classes. Parks can also promote community health by providing healthy vending options.

Parks often provide a space for quiet reflection or respite from a busy day. Public art can contribute to a peaceful atmosphere where community residents can recharge.

POTENTIAL POLICIES FOR PROGRAMMING ACTIVITIES FOR PARKS

- Healthy Vending Policy
- Tobacco Free Policy
- Zoning for Farmers’ Markets and Community Gardens
- Nutrition Guidelines
- Public Art Policy
- General Plan (which includes policies to support a variety of programming activities)



Perceptions of lack of safety can stop many people from using parks. More supervised programming in parks can make park users feel (and be) safer. Law enforcement agencies, park and recreation staff, residents, and other community stakeholders can work together to implement safety strategies that make parks more secure.⁴ (Safety is discussed further in the Protect section of this Playbook.)

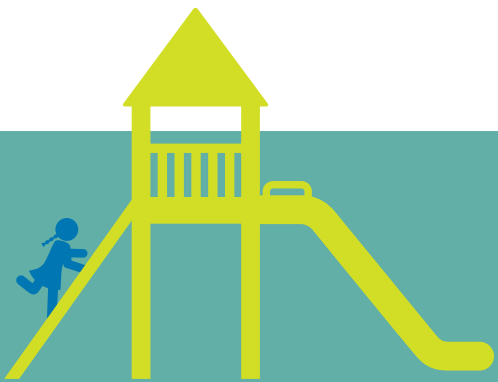
COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

Dublin, CA: Emerald Glen Park Farmers' Market

Emerald Glen Park is a 40-acre park that offers a wide variety of amenities for the surrounding community, including play equipment, walking trails, and a picnic area. The park hosts a weekly farmers' market with special events, including musical performances, tastings, cooking demonstrations, and children's activities.

Brentwood, CA: Parks, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan

A good master plan should include a requirement for a yearly update or report on the past year's accomplishments as well as information pertaining to surveys of community residents. This type of report can help to determine future programming and/or amenities. (See action element #8 in the City of Brentwood's Master Plan.)



KEY RESOURCES

Best Management Practices Used at Urban Parks in National and International Locations: A Background Report for the National Mall Plan (National Park Service)

Park Planning, Design, and Open Space (Municipal Research and Services Center)

Nature Play & Learning Places: Creating and Managing Places Where Children Engage with Nature (National Wildlife Federation and Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University; experts from 20 organizations came together to create guidelines for planning, designing, and managing nature play areas so that kids have a chance to connect with nature at places they visit every day, such as parks, schools, and childcare centers)

Fair Play Act Toolkit Materials: Ensuring Gender Equity in California Community Sports Programs (Legal Aid Society Employment Law Center)



GROW

Planting and Maintaining Sustainable Parks

Parks and green spaces support not only humans but also other species of animals, insects, trees, and plants. Environments that are ecologically healthy are also healthy for people. Designing our parks to protect and support biodiversity and ecological integrity will enhance sustainability and enable users to better connect with nature.

California experiences regular drought cycles, and water is becoming an increasingly scarce resource. To comply with existing and future restrictions on public water use, parks must be designed to use water efficiently and sparingly whenever possible. Leaders will need to balance water conservation with several competing interests, including the needs of park users, neighborhood aesthetics, and fire safety. Thoughtful park design will also help conserve water. Parks can be designed to control stormwater runoff and replenish groundwater supplies.

In addition, tree canopies remove greenhouse gases from the air, and reduce the overall urban heat island effect. Parks should be designed and maintained to grow sustainable (preferably native) tree canopies. Cities should also consider an Urban Forest Master Plan for the proper management and care of urban forests.

Using environmentally sustainable practices in the construction, renovation, management, and maintenance of parks will help protect native species, preserve groundwater supply, and remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

POTENTIAL POLICIES FOR PLANTING AND MAINTAINING SUSTAINABLE PARKS

- Low-Impact Development Policy
- Drought Resistant Vegetation Policy
- Stormwater Management Guidelines
- Water Usage Policy
- Urban Forest Master Plan





COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles River Revitalization

After deadly floods in the 1930s, the Army Corps of Engineers deepened the Los Angeles River and encased its bed and banks with concrete. Though it has prevented subsequent flooding, the concrete structure is an eyesore, unwelcoming to humans and nature. In recent decades, community leaders, elected officials, environmental groups, and concerned citizens have sought a way to restore the natural river habitat while still keeping residents safe. This collaborative effort resulted in the Los Angeles River Master Plan, a 20-year blueprint for restoring and managing the river, protecting wildlife, promoting the health of the river, and facilitating stormwater management. Leveraging local economic development, the proposal also includes green streets and walking loops that give pedestrians and bicyclists a safe way to reach the river from nearby neighborhoods. In May 2014, in support of the Master Plan, the Army Corps of Engineers recommended a \$1 billion commitment to the revitalization of the river.

Elk Grove, CA: Rain Garden Plaza

The Elk Grove Rain Garden Plaza is a low-maintenance, habitat-friendly plaza that uses rainwater and stormwater runoff for plant growth and soil enrichment. The plaza's design includes biofiltration swales, pervious paving systems, water harvesting features, and drought-resistant plants native to California for landscaping. It serves not only as a demonstration project but also as a fully functioning park benefiting the Elk Grove community.

KEY RESOURCES

Sustainability in Parks (Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy)

Urban River Parkways: An Essential Tool for Public Health (Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, UCL; this 2014 report examines the health benefits of urban river parkways, networks of trails, and parks along bodies of water)

Developing Sustainable Parks Systems in Oregon (Oregon State Parks)

A Plan for Sustainable Practices within NYC Parks (New York City Department of Parks & Recreation)

Environmental Best Management Practices Manual (City of Fort Collins Parks and Recreation)

Creating Sustainable Community Parks (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association)



PROTECT

Making Parks Safe

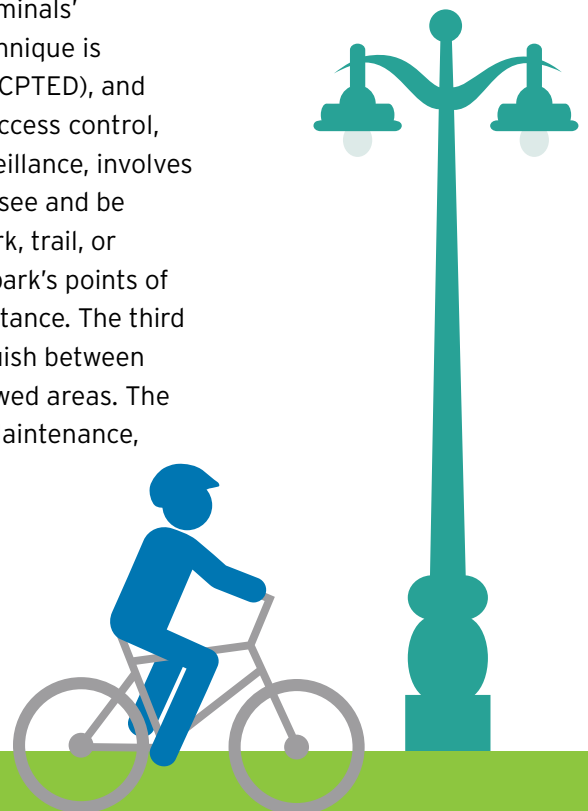
Residents living in “greener” surroundings experience “lower levels of fear, fewer incivilities, less aggressive and violent behavior,” and fewer total crimes (including both property crimes and violent crimes).⁵ Therefore, the absence of green surroundings, or nature deprivation, is not merely unhealthy; it is dangerous.⁵

Unfortunately, many people, particularly in low-income communities, perceive their neighborhood parks to be unsafe. In fact, California teens who live in lower-income neighborhoods are less likely to live near a park they consider safe and less likely to be physically active than teens in higher-income neighborhoods.⁴ Increased programming at parks – particularly supervised programming – “can make parks more secure and increase [public] use of these parks.”⁴ Simply put, if a park is used regularly, it is less likely to be a harbor for criminal activity. To encourage residents to use a park, it is critical to install amenities and provide programming that the community wants.

Certain architectural features and streetscapes can reduce criminals’ opportunity and temptation to commit crimes. This design technique is often called Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), and it employs four basic strategies: natural surveillance, natural access control, territoriality, and maintenance. The first strategy, natural surveillance, involves keeping the environment maintained so that people can easily see and be seen by other users, staff, and anyone who may pass by the park, trail, or playground. Natural access control is focused on controlling a park’s points of entry and departure, using a fence or even a flower bed, for instance. The third strategy – territoriality – concerns reinforcements that distinguish between public and private spaces, such as signage, flower beds, or mowed areas. The idea is to show that someone owns and cares about a space. Maintenance, the fourth strategy, simply means that parks should always be maintained. Absent maintenance, a public area invites criminal behavior. Combining CPTED techniques with engaging programming is essential to creating safe, inviting parks and green spaces where people can play and be active.

POTENTIAL POLICIES FOR MAKING PARKS SAFE

- Maintenance Policy
- People-Scale Lighting Policy
- CPTED Policy
- Tobacco Free Policy
- Neighborhood-Based Programming





COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

Los Angeles County, CA: Parks After Dark Program

Parks After Dark, a collaboration among Los Angeles city and county government, law enforcement, and community partners, began as an effort to reduce crime by keeping parks open later during the summer. By providing residents – especially young people and gang-involved community members – with opportunities for recreation and other government services, Parks After Dark has grown into a broader health-promotion initiative. Today, Parks After Dark programs offer everything from athletics to dance classes to legal and social services. They also foster positive connections between residents and deputy sheriffs, who participate in Parks After Dark events with the community.

KEY RESOURCES

Better Park Design Can Prevent Crime (National Trails Training Partnership)

Promoting Open Space and Environmental Clean-Ups (National Crime Prevention Council)

Creating Healthier Suburbs: Tools for Transforming Sprawl into Livable Communities (ChangeLab Solutions)

Healthy Planning Guide: A Guide for Development Strategies (ChangeLab Solutions)



FUND

Committing to Finance the Complete Parks System

Perhaps the biggest challenge for any community seeking to improve access to parks, open space, and recreational opportunities is to identify an adequate source of funding. A successful parks system needs sufficient resources not only to obtain, improve, and maintain the necessary land and infrastructure but also to support the amenities and programming necessary to maximize community use of park facilities.

A few traditional funding mechanisms for public lands, facilities, and programs are taxes, assessments, fees, bonds, grants, and general fund expenditures, often incorporated into a community's Capital Improvement Program. However, in an era of growing demand for increasingly scarce public funds, parks and recreation programs are often among the first to be defunded. In addition, due to a series of voter initiatives approved in California over the past several decades (beginning with Proposition 13 in 1978), raising revenues has become even more difficult for local governments.

To supplement dwindling traditional funding sources, local governments must identify new financing mechanisms for parks and recreation. For example, several communities have successfully structured public-private partnerships to finance new facilities. Others are exploring funding sources that have historically not been used for parks, such as nonprofit hospital community benefits allocations. ChangeLab Solutions has published a white paper, [*Local Agency Strategies for Funding the Development and Maintenance of Parks and Recreation Facilities in California*](#), that provides details on the most promising potential funding sources, including both traditional funding mechanisms and more creative options that are generally underutilized.

Since many elements of a complete parks system are closely related to other features of a community's built environment, local governments can also explore ways to leverage existing funding streams for parks. For example, funds that are set aside for stormwater management can be used to design parks that aid in that function.



Regardless of funding sources, the task for advocates and parks professionals will be to make elected officials in their communities, as well as the general public, prioritize this issue and allocate funds to create and maintain adequate parks, open space, and recreational opportunities for the entire community.

COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

Bakersfield, CA: Successful Partnerships to Improve Recreational Opportunities

The City of Bakersfield has successfully negotiated and entered into numerous partnerships with private businesses to fund recreational facilities. In one partnership, the City entered into a naming rights agreement with State Farm Insurance four years ago for the State Farm Sports Village, a master-planned park of 170 acres that is to be built in stages. The park currently includes eight lighted soccer fields, four regular soccer fields, and four youth football fields with restrooms and concessions. Under construction are a stadium field, additional entrance, children's playground, picnic areas, and numerous walking paths. State Farm agreed to pay \$500,000 toward the construction of the park within the first two years of the approved agreement. The entire park is irrigated with tertiary water from the city's adjacent water treatment plant. This is one of many sponsorship agreements Bakersfield has successfully implemented.



KEY RESOURCES

Supporting Our Parks: A Guide to Alternative Revenue Strategies (New Yorkers for Parks)

Revitalizing Inner City Parks: New Funding Options Can Address the Needs of Underserved Urban Communities (National Recreation and Park Association)

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