

Summer 2015 Portland Park Evaluation

Objective:

The Trust for Public Land created a rapid assessment tool to evaluate the public parks' accessibility, active amenities, educational uses, supportive facilities, aesthetics, safety and maintenance conditions. The *Summer 2015 Portland Park Evaluation* is meant to provide a snapshot-in-time analysis to help assess comparative current park quality; provide a baseline for future evaluations; and inform decision-making regarding future investments.

The Trust for Public Land understands that park quality is not solely based upon these factors and that there are other elements that could be included in a comprehensive analysis (such as park design and/or surrounding land-use conditions), however due to resource constraints and our desire to provide a replicable and affordable tool, we developed and deployed this rapid park quality assessment tool to evaluate Portland's parks.

Process:

A total of 61 parks were evaluated over five days in mid-June by three staff from The Trust for Public Land.¹ Staff began with a three hour calibration session to assure consistent scoring between evaluators. The Trust for Public Land staff then met with two City of Portland staff to field review the tool with them. (Note: the tool had already been vetted with city staff and a subcommittee of the Portland Open Space Vision and Implementation Stakeholder Group, and it had been previously beta tested in the field).

Each park was evaluated for the following factors: accessibility; trails; park features; supportive facilities; safety and maintenance; and aesthetics. For parks that did not have certain features present (e.g. trail, active amenity, supportive facility, or other recreational and educational use), a N/A was denoted. All parks have the possibility of scoring a perfect score [5.0]. Additionally, while on site, the evaluators documented obvious (to the lay-person) location-specific deficiencies.

In tandem with the rapid assessment tool, evaluators also created an inventory of amenities (by amenity category) for each park and recorded the precise public access points for all 61 parks using GPS. This information is being integrated into Portland's GIS system.

¹ For purposes of this rapid park quality assessment, Portland city staff and Trust for Public Land staff defined a park as "any publicly owned open space in Portland that is intended to be used for passive or active recreation." Using this definition, city staff developed a list of parks for the park evaluation (See Appendix A). Trust for Public Land staff evaluated all of these parks for this evaluation except for 1 park on Peaks Island and 1 park on Cliff Island that they were not able to assess due to time constraints (denoted by asterisks).

Recommendations:

This section focuses on conveying overarching recommendations for city staff and other stakeholder consideration for improving the quality of Portland's parks. There are some suggestions for individual parks that the evaluators noted during the field work, and those will be transmitted to city staff separately.

- 1) **Promote park character.** Although the majority of parks are in good condition, many lack individuality or character; and taken together, the park system therefor lacks diversity. We recommend creative place-making on an individual park basis. Besides improving the user experience, creative place making can greatly enhance the aesthetic value of the parks.
- 2) **Improve signage.** Consider using signage to create a brand identity for the Portland park system. Every park should have a branded "City of Portland Park" sign with the name of the park. Signage can also be useful to promote Portland's history and legacy (i.e. signage for downtown plazas/squares, "Castle in the Park," Bell Buoy Park, etc.) Signs can also help better promote Portland's trail connectivity. There are currently several kiosks highlighting citywide trail connectivity; but additional maps/kiosks could be useful.
- 3) **Better maintain the basketball courts, baseball fields and soccer fields.** Among the athletic facilities, these seemed to be most in need of repair and improved maintenance.
- 4) **Re-paint crosswalks** in proximity to parks and open spaces.
- 5) **Better designate entrances and perimeters for community gardens** (i.e. flagstones or pavers leading to entrance gates, upgrade fences for gardens)
- 6) **Install more supportive facilities.**
 - i. "No Butts About it" receptacles for cigarette butts, as the vast majority of litter in the parks is cigarette butts. (*Unless this is perceived as contradictory to the "Breathe Easy" signs posted at these public spaces.*)
 - ii. Trash cans, and where trash cans are not present, have "pack in/pack out" signs
 - iii. Bike racks for parks that don't already have them
 - iv. Water fountains at school playgrounds / athletic fields
 - v. Where dogs are allowed [as shown by leash law signs, etc.] have dog waste bags available (e.g. cemeteries, natural areas, etc.)
- 7) **Address erosion of dirt trails in parks.** This should be a priority for maintenance staff or consider leveraging AmeriCorps trail crews to help with trail maintenance.

Results:

The value of the rapid park assessment tool is not so much in judging the overall park system, but rather in providing a comparative analysis for parks within the system. Accordingly, in the sections that follow we list the highest scoring parks and lowest scoring parks. In the first section (directly below) we provide the overall results. Then we list results by category.

Overall Park Evaluation Score:

This is a cumulative weighted score of park access, trails, active amenities, other recreational, fitness, and educational uses, supportive facilities, safety and appearance concerns, and aesthetics.

Highest scored parks [all sites with scores 5.0 – 4.9]

Back Cove Trail
Boothby Square
Mayor Baxter Woods
Congress Square Park
Longfellow Square
Lobsterman Park
Post Office Park
Eastern Promenade

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 3.6 – 4.0]

Lincoln Park
Longfellow Elementary school
Riverton Trolley Park
Martin Point Park
Trinity Park
Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial

Park Evaluation Score for Accessibility:

This category evaluates park entrances, safe and convenient access to entrances, transportation access, and accessibility to all park areas.

Highest scored parks [all sites with a score of 5.0]

Back Cove Trail

Boothby Square

Mayor Baxter Woods

Congress Square Park

Longfellow Square

Lobsterman Park

Post Office Park

Eastern Promenade

Tommy's Park

Hall School

Bayside Trail

Riverton School

Bell Buoy Park

Bramhall Square

Harbor View Memorial Park

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 3.0 – 4.0]

Martin Point Park

Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial

Riverton Trolley Park

Belmade Park

Stroudwater Park 1

Quarry Run Dog Park

Fox Field

Pine Grove Park

Park Evaluation Score for Trails:

This category evaluates paved trails or paths, in addition to dirt trails. Not all parks contained trails.

Highest scored parks [all sites with a score of 5.0]:

Back Cove Trail
Mayor Baxter Woods
Post Office Park
Hall School
Bayside Trail
Riverton School
Presumpscot School
Ocean Avenue School
Deering HS / Longfellow Elementary
Deering High School / Longfellow – Presumpscot Park
Capisic Pond Park
University Park
Tate-Tyng Tot Lot
Payson Park
Fort Sumner Park
Munjoy Playground
Caldwell Square
Baxter Pines
Nason's Corner Park
Pine Grove Park
Quarry Run Dog Park

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 2.0 – 3.5]

Peppermint Park
Lincoln Park
Trinity Park
Longfellow Elementary School
Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial

Park Evaluation Score for Active Amenities:

This category evaluates sports fields & courts, and other active recreational structures. Not all parks contained active amenities.

Highest scored parks [all sites with scores 5.0 – 4.5]

Back Cove Trail
Deering High School / Longfellow – Presumpscot Park
Quarry Run Dog Park
Peppermint Park
Adams School Playground
Heseltine Park
Ocean Avenue School
Deering Oaks Park
Eastern Promenade
Payson Park
Tate-Tyng Tot Lot
Munjoy Playground
Lyseth / Lyman Moore School Grounds
Bayside Playground

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 3.0 – 4.0]

Stroudwater Playground
Riverton Trolley Park
Longfellow Elementary School
Nason's Corner Park
Riverton School
Dougherty Field

Park Evaluation Score for Other Uses:

This category evaluates other recreational and educational uses. Not all parks contained other uses.

Highest scored parks [all sites with a score of 5.0]:

Deering High School / Longfellow – Presumpscot Park
Adams School Playground
Heseltine Park
Eastern Promenade
Payson Park
Lyseth / Lyman Moore School Grounds
Deering HS/ Longfellow Elementary
Western Promenade
Fox Field
Hall School
Clark Street Park
University Park
Fort Sumner Park
Caldwell Square
Baxter Pines
Pine Grove Park
Evergreen Cemetery
Conservation Area at Evergreen Cemetery
Longfellow Park
Fessenden Park
Bedford Park
Oat Nuts Park
Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial
Boothby Square
Longfellow Square
Compass Park
Belmade Park

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 1.0 – 3.7]:

Longfellow Elementary School
Martin Point Park
Lincoln Park
Harbor View Memorial Park
Reiche School

Park Evaluation Score for Supportive Facilities:

This category evaluates supportive facilities such as permanent restrooms, sufficient number of trash cans, functioning drinking fountains, man-made shelters/natural shade, and benches.

Highest scored parks [all sites with a score of 5.0]:

Eastern Promenade
Payson Park
Western Promenade
Mayor Baxter Woods
Post Office Park
Evergreen Cemetery
Longfellow Park
Oat Nuts Park
Boothby Square
Longfellow Square
Compass Park
Belmade Park
Back Cove Trail
Congress Square Park
Deering Oaks Par
Lobsterman Park
Bell Buoy Park
Quarry Run Dog Park
Dougherty Field
Capisic Pond Park
Tommy's Park
Monument Square
Reiche School
Harbor View Memorial Park
Martin Point Park
Longfellow Elementary School
Peppermint Park
Tate-Tyng Tot Lot
Bramhall Square

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 1.0 – 3.0]:

Canco Woods Natural Area
Stroudwater Park 1
Bedford Park
Pine Grove Park

University Park
Deering High School / Longfellow – Presumpscot Park
Caldwell Square
Fort Sumner Park
Heseltine Park
Trinity Park
Stroudwater Playground
Riverton Trolley Park
Nason's Corner Park
Ocean Avenue School
Stroudwater Park 2
East End School and Community Center
Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial
Fessenden Park
Lyseth / Lyman Moore School Grounds
Adams School Playground

Park Evaluation Score for Safety and Maintenance:

This category evaluates park context/surrounding environment, maintenance concerns, inappropriate park use, park design, directional signage, and nighttime safety.

Highest scored parks [all sites with a score of 5.0]

Longfellow Park
Boothby Square
Congress Square Park
Lobsterman Park
Fessenden Park
Trinity Trail
Back Cove Trail
Belmade Park
Deering HS/Longfellow Elementary
Stroudwater Playground
Caldwell Square
Bedford Park
Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 3.8 – 4.4]

Harbor View Memorial Park
Bayside Trail
Compass Park
Lincoln Park
Martin Point Park
Fox Field
Bell Buoy Park
Riverton Trolley Park
Bramhall Square
Fort Sumner Field
Dougherty Field

Park Evaluation Score for Aesthetics:

This category evaluates aesthetics; including: diversity of use and activity, variety and presence of vegetation, variety and coordination in programmed environments, high quality materials, sense of style, effective mitigation of noise and surrounding land uses, and history and culture celebrated by park design.

Highest scored parks [all sites with scores 5.0 – 4.9]

Oat Nuts Park
Conservation Area at Evergreen Cemetery
Presumpscot School
Adams School Playground
Heseltine Park
University Park
Pine Grove Park
Eastern Promenade
Congress Square Park
Back Cove Trail
Ocean Avenue School
Mayor Baxter Woods
Evergreen Cemetery
Lobsterman Park
Monument Square
Longfellow Square
Quarry Run Dog Park

Lowest scored parks [all sites with scores 3.4 – 4.3]

Bramhall Square
Fox Field
Lincoln Park
Longfellow Elementary School
Riverton Trolley Park
Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial
Trinity Park
Bell Buoy Park
Bedford Park
Riverton School
Martin Point Park
Belmade Park
Compass Park
Tommy's Park

Appendix A

A complete park list for the 2015 Portland Park Evaluation.

1. Adams School Playground
2. Back Cove Trail
3. Barrows Park / Baxter's Sundial
4. Baxter Pines
5. Bayside Playground
6. Bayside Trail
7. Bedford Park
8. Bell Buoy Park
9. Belmade Park
10. Boothby Square
11. Bramhall Square
12. Caldwell Square
13. Canco Woods Natural Area
14. Capisic Pond Park
15. Clark Street Park
16. Compass Park
17. Congress Square Park
18. Conservation Area at Evergreen Cemetery
19. Deering High School / Longfellow - Presumpscot Park
20. Deering High School / Longfellow Elementary
21. Deering Oaks Park
22. Dougherty Field
23. East End School and Community Center
24. Eastern Promenade
25. Evergreen Cemetery
26. Fessenden Park
27. Fort Sumner Park
28. Fox Field
29. Hall School
30. Harbor View Memorial Park
31. Heseltine Park
32. Lincoln Park
33. Lobsterman Park
34. Longfellow Elementary School
35. Longfellow Park

36. Longfellow Square
37. Lyseth / Lyman Moore School Grounds
38. Martin Point Park
39. Mayor Baxter Woods
40. Monument Square
41. Munjoy Playground
42. Nason's Corner Park
43. Oat Nuts Park
44. Ocean Avenue School
45. Payson Park
46. Peppermint Park
47. Pine Grove Park
48. Post Office Park
49. Presumpscot School
50. Quarry Run Dog Park
51. Reiche School
52. Riverton School
53. Riverton Trolley Park
54. Stroudwater Park 1
55. Stroudwater Park 2
56. Stroudwater Playground
57. Tate-Tyng Tot Lot
58. Tommy's Park
59. Trinity Park
60. University Park
61. Western Promenade
62. Ace Ballfield*
63. City Acres Ballfield*