

An Active City

PORTLAND'S OPEN SPACES vary in area, purpose, and setting, and include parks, playgrounds, active playing fields, community gardens, plazas & squares, trails, natural areas, golf courses, cemeteries and public school grounds. These spaces are the cumulative result of centuries of planning that dates back to the city's first permanent settlement and represent the forethought of citizens, mayors, engineers, and world-renowned landscape architects. Today, the city hosts 63 parks encompassing 721 acres of land, 65 miles of trails, playgrounds and playing fields, a swimming pool, and a golf course. Our open spaces include areas as diverse as the Eastern Promenade, Peppermint Park, Baxter Woods and Dougherty Field. The functions they serve are equally diverse, providing public access to the city's waterfront, rivers, streams, forests, and play spaces, as well as supporting transportation, food production, public health, cultural events, plant and animal habitat, and valuable stormwater infrastructure.

Over the past decade, Portland has made efforts to improve its existing system of parks and open spaces, not only through capital investments, but also through partnership with Portland Trails, the Trust for Public Land, and various friends groups on a number of planning initiatives, including a new

Open Space Vision and Implementation Plan for the city, finalized in 2016.

Today, Portland has an open space or trail within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of every residence, a remarkable achievement for any city. Challenges remain, not in our total quantity of open space, but in funding and maintenance, in developing linkages between open spaces, and in programming to meet shifting demands, whether for increased recreational access to Casco Bay or for improved distribution of community gardens. Continuing to preserve and develop open spaces, and improve connections between them, is integral to the health and well-being of Portland's citizens, visitors, and ecology. The city's public spaces are central to the its ability to foster neighborhood vitality, sense of community, recreational opportunities, environmental health, arts and cultural programming, economic development, and local mobility. A strong, walkable, bikeable, and accessible network of open spaces is an invaluable and necessary element of an equitable, healthy, and vibrant future.



SNAPSHOT:
RECREATION & OPEN SPACE



STATE GOAL

To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine citizens, including access to surface waters.

LOCAL GOALS

Portland commits to sustain and build our system of parks, trails, and open spaces to enhance our quality of life, protect our environment, and promote the economic well-being of our remarkable city by the sea.

WE WILL:

Provide high quality, well-designed, well-maintained, safe and integrated parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational opportunities accessible to all residents.

Strengthen connections between open spaces.

Ensure sound capital planning, adequate funding, and staffing for recreation and open space.

Promote engaged citizen stewardship.

Preserve the intrinsic values of the park and open space system, including historic resources, vistas, healthy ecosystem functions, and biological diversity.

Proactively program our public spaces.

FUTURE STRATEGIES

SNAPSHOT: RECREATION & OPEN SPACE

1. ADOPT MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

- Employ measurable objectives that collectively provide a desired level of service for Portland's open space system.
- Develop specific metrics for levels of maintenance, accessibility, funding health, programming, ecological health, connectivity, safety, and citizen stewardship through the use of rapid park quality assessments and maintenance plans.
- Consistently monitor the quality of park and open space facilities.

2. MAINTAIN EXISTING FACILITIES

- Add amenities, such as cigarette receptacles, trash cans, bike racks, dog waste bags, and water fountains where appropriate.
- Maintain trails, sports fields, courts, and playgrounds.

3. APPROACH FUNDING STRATEGICALLY

- Consider state, federal and non-profit grant sources, as well as fundraising of private dollars, to supplement the local budgeting process.
- Promote inclusion and foster strategic decision-making.
- Establish a clear protocol for involving commissions and the general public in annual funding decision-making process so that the process is optimally



REDESIGNING CONGRESS SQUARE

Congress Square is a central public open space located in a mixed-use neighborhood of retail establishments, arts and educational organizations, and affordable and market-rate housing. As the city grows, Portland residents are craving social connection and demanding public gathering spaces that are inspiring and interactive. The Congress Square Redesign and Public Art Commission is a design project, three years in the making, to fulfill that need in the heart of the city's Arts District. Creative placemaking is at the core of Congress Square's transformation from a neglected, inaccessible, car-dominated space into a vibrant gathering and arts place. Building on a two-year partnership with Friends of Congress Square Park, the Portland Public Art Committee is seizing on the unique opportunity to develop a collaborative, integrated urban design and public art proposal for Congress Square to better serve neighborhood residents, visitors, and arts organizations to meet the community vision of the square as a high quality, distinctive urban space that is accessible and inviting to all.

transparent, collaborative, predictable, and incorporates the concerns and expertise of all stakeholders.

- Adopt project selection criteria for prioritizing open space and recreation projects for capital and operating funding that foster objective and strategic decision-making.

4. ENSURE EQUITY

- Pursue opportunities, in collaboration with partners, to create new open spaces in areas that are currently underserved.
- Pay particular attention to opportunities for new walking and biking trails as a means of filling existing gaps, and investigate paper streets, vacant land, medians, and other often overlooked areas for the potential for park linkages, trails, and other improvements to the urban landscape.
- Distribute community gardens, playgrounds, fields, public art, historic resources, and other program elements where the demand and need are greatest, and periodically assess demands and needs.

5. DEVELOP UNIQUENESS

- Incorporate creative design, public art, and place-making wherever possible to enhance aesthetic value and engage the community in bringing arts and culture to the open space network.

6. IMPROVE VISIBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

- Employ consistent signage to reflect distinct identities of elements of the open space system, as well as aid in wayfinding, while respecting historic district and neighborhood branding initiatives.
- Increase safe walking and cycling routes to open spaces, including crosswalks, sidewalks, and bike lanes.
- Improve ADA accessibility.

7. INCORPORATE MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS

- Improve the utility of existing spaces by developing and programming parks and open spaces for diverse, simultaneous, complementary uses.

8. INCREASE ECOLOGICAL HEALTH

- Develop and implement forest management plans for wooded parcels, improve the health and quantity of trees and natural areas in parks where forest management plans are not appropriate, and model ecologically sound landscape management practices in open spaces, such as planting native species, planning for pollinators, and limiting the use of pesticides and fertilizers.



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9. INTEGRATE RESILIENCY

- Pursue opportunities for optimizing green infrastructure and enhancing the existing stormwater management functions of the city's open spaces where appropriate and practicable.

10. CONNECT TO THE WATERFRONT

- Encourage access to Portland's waterfront - Casco Bay, Back Cove, and the Stroudwater, Presumpscot, and Fore Rivers - as a "blueway" network and an extension of public space for local and regional recreation and transportation needs.

11. CONTINUE PARTNERSHIPS

- Continue partnerships with local and regional land trusts and conservation organizations, such as Portland Trails, Maine Audubon, and other non-profit organizations in open space creation, stewardship and programming.

12. CONNECT THE CHAIN

- Create linkages between Stroudwater and the Fore River, Evergreen Cemetery and the Presumpscot River, Portland Transportation Center and Bayside, Martin's Point and the Back Cove, and the Western Waterfront and the Fore River.



TOWARD AN INTEGRATED TRAIL NETWORK

The City of Portland, in partnership with Portland Trails, hosts a world-class network of trails, accessible within a half mile of every household, which offers Portland residents and visitors opportunities to bike to work, walk to school, and access parks, businesses, and arts and entertainment. Just as importantly, the city's trails allow residents to take a hike, run, or bike, experience wildlife, and enjoy the bay, our rivers, and our woodlands.

In recent years, the city has prioritized the completion of key linkages in the trail system which would allow for more widespread use. For example, the city is currently working on the connection between the Martin's Point Bridge and the Back Cove Trail, the extension of the Bayside Trail through Parkside and Libbytown, and the completion of the West Commercial Street trail among them. With the completion of these connections, the city will have finished a Peninsula Loop, and will offer residents the opportunity to circle the entire peninsula on a series of shared use pathways.

RECENT & ONGOING INITIATIVES

Over the last decade, Portland has made efforts to address the needs of its parks and park users, including a focus on open space amenities and programming. Some of these efforts have been coordinated with citizen advocacy groups, such as Friends of Congress Square Park, Friends of Deering Oaks, Friends of the Eastern Promenade, Friends of Evergreen Cemetery, Friends of Heseltine Park, Friends of Lincoln Park, and Friends of Riverton Trolley Park. These park advocates are a powerful asset to the city and help to raise awareness of individual park needs, fundraise for park amenities, and coordinate park programming, among other functions.

In 2006, the city updated its foundational open space and recreation plan, Green Spaces, Blue Edges (1993), which still offers invaluable history on the evolution of Portland's open space system and natural environment. More recently, a city-appointed task force completed an Athletic Facilities Task Force Report (February 2011) with specific recommendations for use, maintenance, management, and capital investment in additional athletic facilities.

Most recently, Portland completed a long term planning initiative for the entire park and open space network to inform the extensive, ongoing programming and maintenance of the city's open



COMMUNITY GARDENS

The City of Portland currently hosts nine community gardens in neighborhoods across the city. Managed in collaboration with Cultivating Community, an organization that advocates for a sustainable local food system through education on urban food production, nutrition, and refugee and immigrant farmer-training, these gardens provide valuable community space with clear public health, education, social, and environmental benefits. For example, Boyd Street Community Garden, created in 2009, was built in partnership between the City of Portland, Kennedy Parks Tenants' Council, and Cultivating Community. Previously a contaminated site that required city soil remediation efforts, the garden now has an orchard of 25 fruit trees, raspberry and blackberry bushes, honey bees, and a separate youth garden run by high school students to grow food for Cultivating Community's Elder Share CSA Program.



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space network. In 2014, Portland Trails began a grant-funded effort called the Community Conversations series. Through facilitated forums in residents could discuss their hopes and concerns for Portland's parks. Six community conversations were held with additional focus on efforts to engage underserved populations. These conversations ultimately resulted in a report, including a set of priorities presented to the city for consideration.

In 2014 the city engaged the Trust for Public Land to identify ways to establish alternative funding streams to support the city's parks. Recognizing the opportunity to leverage each other's efforts, Portland Trails and the Trust for Public Land merged efforts. The Trust for Public Land's work resulted in the 2016 Portland Open Space Vision and Implementation Plan. Two groups were formed to guide development of the plan: a steering committee consisting of members of the Land Bank Commission and the Parks Commission and a larger stakeholder group representing a diverse cross section of interests. The tools developed and transferred to the city as a part of this effort, such as computer-based maps and data; the rapid park assessment tool; and the articulation of system-wide monitoring parameters, are designed to assist in realizing the plan's vision and goals.



WHAT IS CREATIVE PLACE MAKING?

Creative placemaking is a cooperative, community-based process using arts and cultural expression to make or rejuvenate parks and open spaces, thus deepening a sense of place and inspiring community pride. The Trust for Public Land identifies 5 principal components to creative placemaking:

Arts and Culture: Artists and local cultural organizations strengthen community identity and reinforce neighborhood pride. When incorporated into parks, vibrant, authentic art engages and inspires the community.

Community Engagement: Creative place-making begins with intensive participatory design. Neighbors and stakeholders learn from each other and collaborate to identify opportunities, address challenges, and create park plans that resonate with and serve the needs of the community.

Partnerships: A network of thoughtful partners ensures that new and rejuvenated open spaces are woven carefully into their neighborhoods. Partners include local governments, educational institutions, arts groups, community organizations, and not-for-profit social service providers.

Stewardship: Parks are living things that flourish when neighbors invest time and attention in ongoing operations. Establish local park stewards and connect them with resources.

Equity: Focus on underserved neighborhoods. Use GIS tools and knowledge gained on the ground to pinpoint where new or improved parks are most needed to improve health, connect children with nature, support recreation, and help nurture neighborhood identity and stability.