

Community-maintained Parks:

How they function and what can be learned from other communities that seek to improve the vitality of parks in their community



Community-maintained Parks

This document will provide examples of community-maintained parks and specifically explain:

- How they function
- What a community needs to successfully maintain a park(s) in their community
- Important learning points from other communities that have embarked on similar projects
- Recommendations that may assure that parks in your community have the support it needs from residents and other vested parties

It should be noted that the examples vary in regards to the communities' mission and vision of their local parks, which may differ from the mission of your proposed community-maintained park, but the examples are definitely useful to any group who wants to improve the vitality of parks in their community.

How do community-maintained parks function?

Communities that have managed local and national parks have used different approaches in maintaining their green-spaces.

- ❖ A community group in Japan, using a bottom-up approach:
 - Acted as coordinators between residents and stakeholders in the decision-making process
 - Identified persons of interest (nearby business owners, corporation, organization, schools, etc.)
 - Defined the local community (residents that live in close proximity to the park)
 - Clarified the roles of the stakeholders and residents in regards to the short and long-term vision of the park

This approach allowed the group to build a system that involved the local community in developing and sustaining the park. The local residents also had an important role in maintaining the landscape and the recreational use of the parks (Hiwasaki, 2005).

- ❖ The National Recreation & Parks Association offered community forums and skills-based workshops that provided residents with the tools they needed to maintain their local parks
 - In your community, skill-based workshops could focus on topics such as landscaping, how to build and maintain playground equipment, eco-friendly materials, or any other issue related to park maintenance and management.

- ❖ A community in Virginia appointed residents in the community to serve on a board that would supervise the development of their local park (Bragg, 2002).
- ❖ Atlanta's Grant Park Conservancy, gathered volunteers that were responsible for planting trees and shrubs in their local parks, which cut cost of development tremendously.
- ❖ A community in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, has a Summer Playground program for youth aged 6 to 12. The seven-week, city funded program, has a paid staff of high school graduates and college students who organize and supervise free activities around sports, art & crafts, and nature activities. They assigned a supervisor to each park site that monitored activities and ensured the safety of youth who participated in the program

What are their success rates?

All communities were successful in their efforts obtaining control of their local parks. Yet, the most pressing issue in the communities that took charge of their local green spaces was funding. Some communities used the support of volunteers in the community to minimize cost while others secured grant funding.

From 1978 to 2002, the Urban Park & Recreation Recovery ACT (UPARR), a federal grant program, provided matching funds for urban areas that wanted to rehabilitate their local parks. Although this funding option is no longer available, other opportunities may exist that would allow your community to secure funding to implement the revitalization of urban parks. Without secured funding, the communities found it difficult to sustain the parks on a long-term basis.

In 2006, city officials, mayors, advocates, residents, and parks and recreation professionals, held a summit to revitalize parks across America. Some important points can be drawn from the Urban Parks and Recreation Summit.

There are four guiding principles, which should be at the forefront of the revitalizing process of parks in your community and can be helpful in your campaign to create sustainable change that improves condition of local parks. They are:

- ❖ Urban parks promote health and wellness
- ❖ Urban parks strengthen our diverse communities and stimulate economic development
- ❖ Urban parks protect the environment
- ❖ Urban parks & recreation educate, protect & enrich the lives of America's youth

Other Recommendations

A few things should be considered before developing a community-managed park. The Urban Parks and Recreation summit also provided a few concrete action steps that are useful to any community who wants to redevelop parks in their community.

- ❖ Identify areas (parks, other green spaces, vacant lots, etc.) in the community that can be improved and used to promote physical activity, healthy development, and positive interaction with peers.
- ❖ Make sure opportunities are available for youth to participate and lead the initiative to revitalize the park. Also identify ways in which youth can create summer programs at the local parks that would promote the growth and development of children and youth in the community.
- ❖ A local committee, coalition, or board should be established and should be responsible for identifying sources of funding that would support the development and activities offered at the local parks.
 - Consider holding several community meetings to recruit residents for various tasks related to funding and obtaining resources (i.e. proposal writing, fundraising, etc.)
- ❖ Using the media or hosting a community forum, which addresses the needs of revitalizing parks in the community, will also help to keep the efforts in focus.

Gathering support of residents that would be responsible for the upkeep of the local park can be challenging but not impossible. You can use this initiative as an opportunity to collaborate with local high schools so youth can have an opportunity to build their community service hours. Also be sure to outline the goals and objectives of your revitalization plan. It is important to develop a long-term plan that can be easily followed by others that may take on the responsibility down the road.