The Promise of Parkland:
Planning Detroit's Public Spaces, 1805-2018

by

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Dedication

To my parents

Acknowledgements

Not every bright, ambitious kid from Hazel Park gets the chance to go to college, let alone pursue a doctorate. The fact that I've completed a dissertation at the University of Michigan testifies to the extraordinary support I've received throughout my life to follow my curiosity wherever it might lead. I'm especially grateful for my parents and siblings, who gave me the confidence that I could succeed as an intellectual.

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who approached urban studies from every possible disciplinary angle at universities throughout the world. I benefited too from joining the Planning and Architecture Research Group, which sparked my interest in landscape architecture and urban design. I also learned every day from my peers in the doctoral program. I'd especially like to thank Thomas Skuzinski, David Weinreich, Danielle Rivera, and Carla Maria Kayanan, for their advice and friendship, and Matthew Weber, Ian Trivers, Eric Seymour, R.J. Koscielniak, Joel Batterman, and Robert Pfaff, for the same and for countless discussions about Detroit and shrinking cities. I was also glad to have friends earning doctorates in other fields with whom I could commiserate, especially Jane Lawrence Sumner, Arthur Brannon, Nico Baier, Meg Berkobien, Kelly Goodman, Alex Elkins, and Lia Wolock. Finally, in the fall of 2017, I was lucky to join the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at Wayne State University as a faculty member. My new colleagues have been exceptionally kind and supportive, even as my dissertation dragged on an extra year. It's been a privilege to teach and do research at an urban university with such earnest, hard-working students who hail from all economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds.

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Preface

In the fall of 2010, I began an AmeriCorps position at Focus: HOPE, a storied nonprofit on the west side of Detroit dedicated to "practical and intelligent action to overcome racism, poverty, and injustice."[1] I was assigned to the HOPE Village Initiative, a comprehensive, community-based campaign to revitalize the 100-block area around Focus: HOPE's campus. The initiative had just launched when I arrived, and the nonprofit and its partners were still defining their goals and strategizing how to fulfill them. I was hired to run a small grant program to improve the neighborhood's commercial corridors, but in keeping with non-profit praxis, I found myself doing a bit of everything: writing a community newsletter, boarding up vacant homes, planting trees, leading neighborhood tours, helping a group of business owners launch a community association, and contributing to strategy sessions for the HOPE Village Initiative itself.

It was in this context that I began to think about the topics at the heart of this dissertation: the reconfiguration of urban governance, the purpose and "publicness" of parks, and the pursuit of social and racial equity in the public realm. The first topic—how to organize the provision of city services—came up in discussion with seemingly everyone I met, whether at work, on the bus, or in the checkout aisle of the grocery store. Detroiters were desperate to live in a city where the streetlights would turn on at night, the police would show up when called, and children would receive a good education at their neighborhood school. But with the city teetering toward bankruptcy, none of these expectations were being met, prompting urgent debate over how to shift roles and responsibilities for public service provision. Could the city do more for its residents despite its precarious finances? Should the county or state step in? Should new regional authorities be created? How much work should residents take on themselves, individually or collectively through block clubs and neighborhood associations? What

[1] Focus: HOPE adopted its mission statement on March 8, 1968, in response to the urban uprising of the previous year. Focus: HOPE, "Mission," http://www.focushope.edu/about-focus-hope/.

should corporations and foundations be doing to help? All of these alternatives were in the mix as politicians debated how to restructure public service provision to make Detroit safe and livable again. They also debated the ramifications. If the provision of a public service shifted from local government to some other agency, whether public or private, what might the consequences be for local democracy?[2]

At Focus: HOPE, we were striving to create a neighborhood where every resident would be "educationally well-prepared, economically self-sufficient, and living in a safe and supportive environment."[3] Achieving that latter goal—a safe and supportive living environment—would require not only reordering responsibility for service provision but also remaking the neighborhood's open spaces. One of the neighborhood's assets was its abundance of open land: several city parks, a community garden, three schools with playgrounds and athletic fields, two small parks on Focus: HOPE's campus, a landscaped boulevard, an vacant rail corridor, and numerous vacant lots. When neglected, these spaces became unsightly with knee-high grass and illegally dumped trash. If maintained, these spaces could beautify the neighborhood and solve collective problems. Parks could provide children with safe places to play. Vacant lots could be turned into rain gardens or community farms. But who would pay to maintain them? Most of the neighborhood's open spaces belonged to the city of Detroit, but the municipality could barely afford to mow the grass. If a new provider took over management of these spaces, I wondered, would they still be *public* spaces? On the other hand, were the spaces meaningfully public as they were, if the grass grew so tall that the parks became impassable prairies and if no one at City Hall was listening or responding to residents' complaints?

When I entered graduate school, I thought about these questions as I read through scholarship on public management, urban planning, and public space. What I found was this: while few cities were as fiscally insecure as Detroit, many cities were shifting how they managed parks and plazas, often in ways that blurred the distinction between public and private control. In cities like Los Angeles and New York, zoning incentives had spurred developers to create "privately owned public spaces" in exchange for permission

[2] Kimberley Kinder captures this period of uncertainty in Detroit's history in her book, *DIY Detroit: Making Do in a City Without Services* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2016).
[3] Focus: HOPE, *HOPE Village: A Community Strategic Vision and Plan for Equitable, Sustainable Community* (Detroit: Focus: HOPE, September 2016).

to build taller skyscrapers. The resulting parks, plazas, and atriums were public spaces by law, but they remain privately owned and managed.[4] Cities were also outsourcing management of existing parks to private partners, including nonprofit park conservancies and business improvement districts.[5] These management models have created new parks in high-priced real estate markets and refurbished older parks in need of reinvestment, but not without controversy. Critics contend that private control threatens the special function of public space in a democracy: as a physical place where citizens may exercise their constitutional rights to free speech and assembly. More broadly, critics argue that private managers prioritize the dollar value of public space over its use value—that is, they design and manage public space in order to drive up real estate values rather than serve non-commercial needs, like providing space for political protests or multicultural encounters. To reverse the threat of privatization, critics call for democratizing public space, either by strengthening governmental control or by creating new forms of common ownership to counter the capitalist impulse toward commercialized space.[6]

I was and am sympathetic to this critique, but I found it incomplete. Like Los Angeles and New York, Detroit had also witnessed the growth of privately owned public spaces, but these spaces were more liable to be community gardens or pocket parks than corporate plazas. Similarly, Detroit had experimented with new models for managing city parks. Private partners had led the redevelopment of Campus Martius Park, the RiverWalk, and the Dequindre Cut, and the state of Michigan was poised to take over management of the city's flagship island park, Belle Isle. Yet it was the latter move—a transfer from one public agency to another—that sparked outrage and resistance from residents because it registered as a loss of autonomy for a majority black city in a majority white state. At community meetings, residents identified the gutting of local

[4] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Privatisation of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience," *The Town Planning Review* 64, no. 2 (April 1993): 139-167, doi:10.3828/tpr.64.2.6h26535771454436; and Jerold S. Kayden, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).
[5] Peter Harnik and Abby Martin, "Public Spaces/Private Money: The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies" (Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Public Land, 2015).
[6] See, for example, Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell, *The People's Property?: Power, Politics, and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and Harold A. Perkins, "Turning Feral Spaces Into Trendy Places: A Coffee House in Every Park?" *Environment and Planning A* 41, no. 11 (2009): 2615-2632, doi:10.1068/a41384.

government—not commercialization—as the principal threat to the city's park system. Park activists were fighting efforts to sell parkland, but they were also fighting in *favor* of public-private partnerships to keep neighborhood parks maintained. Residents wanted safe parks in their neighborhoods, primarily as places of play for the young and respite for seniors, and they were willing to forge creative alliances to maintain them.

None of these facts readily fit a narrative of ongoing corporate takeover. This disjuncture led me to realize that scholars were generalizing from particular kinds of public space under particular conditions. Studies of the provision of public space most often focus on prominent parks and plazas in the central business districts of global cities. They also typically focus on the political and social dimensions of public space: on the freedom of any group, however dissident, to assemble in public and speak, and on the capacity of public space to foster multicultural encounters among strangers. But the spaces that have received the most attention from scholars, like Millennium Park in Chicago and the High Line in New York, are exceptional, not typical. How, I wondered, did the adoption of new management models affect the more prosaic kinds of public space found throughout most cities: pocket parks, athletic fields, nature trails, recreation centers, playgrounds, and so on? Should a city like Detroit embrace new management models to gain the resources needed to maintain its neglected parks and recreational facilities? Would the adoption of these models pose any unrecognized threats?

In other words, I was interested in the provision of *parkland*, not public space per se, and in order to better plan for the future, I wanted to understand how the management of parkland had already changed and with what effects. I decided to make this the subject of my dissertation. Furthermore, while my initial focus was contemporary—I planned to compare several parks under different management models—I ultimately decided to approach the subject in historical perspective. I did so in order to engage a broader set of scholarship beyond the literature on parks and public space. Critiques of the privatization of public space are often nested within critiques of neoliberalization, the market-oriented turn in public policy over the past forty-plus years. These critiques often assume that the provision of parkland *used* to be more equitable before a turn toward privatization. While I had not yet studied the history of parkland in detail, I knew enough to be skeptical. While it is true that local parks were once better funded, the post-World

War II peak of urban prosperity was also marred by segregation. Historians have shown that racist management practices were as common at municipal pools, beaches, and recreation centers in the North as they were in the South.[7] I suspected this would hold true for Detroit as well. Since race was also at the crux of contemporary debates over the governance of public space in Detroit—especially with regard to control of Belle Isle—I knew I had to consider racial equity as a factor in assessing the effects of different forms of provision on the "publicness" of public parks. I could best accomplish this through historical comparison, which would enable me to compare the publicness of parkland across time as its governance evolved. Writing a history would also have the added benefit of sharing previously untold stories about the development of parks, recreation, and planning in Detroit. No one had written a history of Detroit's park system before, and I relished the chance to investigate the city's history from a new perspective.

The end result is the dissertation that follows. At its heart, the dissertation is a genealogy of the city's park system, from its roots in the early 1800s to the present. This history resets the conventional narrative of park governance by making clear that urban parkland has *always* been the product of public-private partnership and intergovernmental negotiation. These are not just recent phenomena. This history also makes clear that debates over park governance have never been about resources alone. In addition to influencing the conditions for democratic life, as recent scholarship has emphasized, governance also affects how much parkland is provided, what forms it takes, where it is provided, for whom it is provided, and who controls decision-making. In each of the six eras that I analyze in the dissertation, coalitions of public and private partners advanced distinct agendas for parkland, like city beautification or the promotion of play and recreation. These coalitions not only disagreed on the proper form and use of parkland; they also differed over who should benefit. The goals and biases of these coalitions have had lasting effects on the distribution of green space because they influenced how much parkland was built and where as successive rings of the built environment were

[7] See, for example, Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

developed. Understanding these differences helps make clear why access to urban parkland remains inequitable with respect to socioeconomic status and race today.

As I discuss in the conclusion, ideological differences about urban parkland are also central to the contemporary debate over the restructuring of park governance. As urban park provision has changed in the neoliberal era—not simply privatizing, but fragmenting, with a variety of private and public partners taking on new management roles—some agendas and geographies of parkland have flourished while others have withered. Detroit's riverfront and downtown parks are as lively as they've ever been thanks to growing public and private support for placemaking as a driver of real estate investment. A new emphasis on mobility has also inspired the conversion of unused rail tracks into greenways. Detroit's neighborhood parks, by contrast, have witnessed only modest reinvestment post-bankruptcy because deep-pocketed partners have not prioritized the social justice agenda that led Progressive Era reformers and civil rights activists to push for recreation centers, playgrounds, pools, and playfields as essential components of all working- and middle-class neighborhoods. Most of Detroit's historic landscaped parks and boulevards remain neglected as well, although the city's passionate but under-resourced "Friends" groups are trying to change that.

Going forward, there needs to be more public discussion about priorities. The debate over privatization is still an important one. Scholars have shown convincingly that the distinction between public and private control of public space matters for labor practices and for the freedom and vitality of democratic public life. But the management of parkland also influences the socioeconomic and racial equity of park systems as a whole. We therefore need more debate over which *kinds* of parkland most need investment and *where*. Doing so will enable local leaders to assess how well the interests and capacities of different park providers align with residents' needs. Otherwise, selective reinvestment in parkland—by both public and private providers—is liable to perpetuate a long history of socioeconomic and racial inequity rather than correct it.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how and why the provision of urban parkland has changed over time, with different levels of government and different organizations in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors taking on different responsibilities. Based on a case study of park provision in Detroit in six sequential periods spanning 1805 to 2018, I argue that governance influences more than just the "publicness" of any given park or plaza. It also matters for socioeconomic and racial equity at a metropolitan scale, influencing which kinds of spaces and facilities get funded, how many spaces and facilities are provided, where they are provided, for whom they are provided, and who sets these priorities.

In the nineteenth century, park systems were developed according to an ideology of privatism. Before 1865, the city of Detroit built only a handful of squares and parks, either in or near the city center, in partnership with developers. After 1865, metropolitan-level commissions developed a separate system of scenic parks and boulevards on donated farmland. This public-private approach to provision produced iconic parks like Belle Isle, but it left working class neighborhoods without open space.

Progressive Era social reformers partially addressed this deficiency by launching a recreation commission to open play facilities in working class neighborhoods. A city plan commission began buying land for parks and playfields in new subdivisions, and county, regional, state, and federal agencies opened scenic parks at their respective scales. Yet enduring racial disparities emerged. Few parks were added in the inner city, where most African Americans resided, and the recreation commission relied on private agencies to supplement its few racially integrated services. Not only were African Americans served by fewer, separate, and unequal facilities, the enduring lack of open space was later used to justify discriminatory plans for urban renewal.

In the late 1960s, urban rioting and organizing led to the reordering of park governance. Public agencies at all scales invested funds in urban recreation for the first time and new forms of public-private partnership emerged. As Detroit became a majority

black city, politicians embraced these options selectively, soliciting revenue sharing but retaining local control of public space and keeping a focus on recreation. However, the municipal recreation system steadily declined as the local government lost revenue.

Since 2000, some parks have flourished again under new management. The state of Michigan began operating riverfront facilities, including Belle Isle. Nonprofit real estate development organizations have used public and private funds to renovate parks and greenways located on the riverfront and downtown in order to spur real estate investment. But neighborhood recreational facilities remain neglected because deep-pocketed partners have not prioritized the social agenda they represent. The selective revitalization of parkland contributes to the disparity between the quality of life in much of the majority black city and that in its gentrifying core and wealthier, whiter suburbs.

In addition to shedding new light on Detroit's history, these findings suggest that with respect to park equity, what matters is not private or public control of public space per se but instead whether the goals and capacities of park providers align with the needs of city residents. Public and private partners alike will exacerbate inequity rather than correct it if they invest only in parks with the potential to spur economic development.

Introduction

Roles for funding and managing parkland have shifted significantly over time, with different levels of government and different organizations in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors taking on new responsibilities. As this dissertation will demonstrate, these changes shape how much parkland is maintained, where it is maintained, why it is maintained, how it is maintained, and for whom it is maintained. The structure of park provision therefore plays an important role in shaping the quality of life enjoyed by residents of different neighborhoods and by people of different means and backgrounds. Park governance affects how many children have safe places to play, how often city dwellers come into contact with nature, and how easily adults can exercise and maintain their health. Governance determines whose needs and passions are satisfied through park facilities and to whom those park facilities are made accessible. The governance of urban parkland also affects the freedom with which people may assemble, speak, and interact in public and is therefore critical to the vitality of democratic public life. Yet despite considerable scholarly interest in the management of public space, the evolution of park governance and the implications of that history for park planning are not well understood.

Although few works cover the entire history of parkland in the United States, the literature collectively portrays park governance as a three-period historical drama, with power oscillating between elite and working class interests. In the first period, spanning the second half of the nineteenth century, parks served the class interests of the wealthy. Landscaped parks and parkways became commonplace municipal goods, but these amenities were built on a limited basis through appointed commissions that prioritized real estate development, public health, and social order.[1] In the second period, from the

[1] Histories that discuss nineteenth-century parks in relation to capitalist development include Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke

Progressive Era to the 1960s, social reformers successfully expanded the domain of parkland to include playgrounds, playfields, and recreation centers, auguring in an era of more egalitarian distribution of facilities, strong public funding, and a greater focus on working class leisure.[2] However, a reversal took place in the 1970s. After a period of disinvestment in the 1960s, when cities began to feel the fiscal effects of ongoing suburbanization, urban elites reclaimed control of parkland through the use of new forms of public-private partnership, including business improvement districts, nonprofit conservancies, and zoning incentives for the construction of privately owned public spaces. These privatized forms of governance brought new levels of capital and care to the management of prominent parks and plazas, but they also changed how and for whom they were designed and managed, stoking considerable controversy.[3]

Indeed, a large body of scholarship by geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and urban planners suggests that privatization threatens the essential "publicness" of public space. Planners and politicians often praise public-private partnerships for bringing needed investment to the public realm and for making public spaces safer and livelier. The resurgence of New York's Central Park and the instant popularity of the High Line, each under the auspices of a richly endowed public-private partnership, exemplify how private funders can reinvigorate the public realm.[4] On the other hand, private control can produce spaces that are sterile or intentionally inhospitable, the better

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University Press, 2009); and Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[2] For a discussion of the transition from upper-class-oriented parks to working-class-oriented facilities for play and recreation, see Roy Rosenzweig, "Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play: The Struggle Over Recreational Space in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1870-1910,' *Radical History Review* 21 (Fall 1979): 31-46; Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982).

[3] The shift toward neoliberal park provision has received the most sustained attention from social scientists, e.g. Harold A. Perkins, "Turning Feral Spaces Into Trendy Places: A Coffee House in Every Park?" *Environment and Planning A* 41, no. 11 (2009): 2615-2632, doi:10.1068/a41384. For an historian's take, see Suleiman Osman, "'We're Doing It Ourselves': The Unexpected Origins of New York City's Public–private Parks during the 1970s Fiscal Crisis," *Journal of Planning History* 16, no. 2 (2017): 162-174.

[4] Peter Harnik and Abby Martin, "Public Spaces/Private Money: The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies" (Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Public Land, 2015).

to prevent the indigent or other undesirable groups from occupying them.[5] In fact, privatization can alter the publicness of public space even if a park's popularity rises. Studies show that privatized parks attract narrower bands of the public than city-run parks and that visitors are expected to engage in a narrower band of behaviors. While private plazas encourage people watching and chatting over coffee, municipal parks more readily accommodate political protests, homeless encampments, and other activities that may disrupt the social order.[6] Private managers also have greater leeway to restrict park use because the legal rights to free speech and assembly hinge on public ownership of land; these rights are only fully protected in government-owned spaces that are deemed by courts to be "traditional public forums."[7] Nor are private managers bound by rules requiring public hearings regarding design changes. Privatized governance has also transformed park labor, as contractors and volunteers have replaced unionized public-sector employees.[8] For all of these reasons, many scholars argue against privatization in any form, including public-private partnerships, like the Central Park Conservancy, that have markedly improved the physical condition of badly deteriorated parks. Instead they call for stronger governmental control or alternative forms of common ownership.

At the heart of this critique lies the normative assumption that the publicness of public space should be defined primarily in relation to publicity: to the capacity of different groups of people to assemble and represent themselves within particular spaces. In other words, the claim rests on the equation of public space with political or social space. As political space, public space can be conceived as the physical analogue of the "public sphere," which the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas has defined as the "realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion

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[5] Mike Davis, "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space" in Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 154-180.

[6] Sharon Zukin, "Union Square and the Paradox of Public Space," in *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 125-158; and Jeremy Nemeth and Stephen Schmidt, "The Privatization of Public Space: Modeling and Measuring Publicness," Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design 38, no. 1 (2011): 5–23, doi: 10.1068/b36057.

[7] Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell, *The People's Property?: Power, Politics, and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[8] John Krinsky and Maud Simonet, *Who Cleans the Park? Public Work and Urban Governance in New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

can be formed."[9] Public space, in this sense, is any site where citizens can assemble and speak freely. In its broadest sense, public space can encompass any site—whether a plaza, a sidewalk, or an underpass—where people stake their claim to the right to the city, regardless of that site's intended use.[10] The publicness of any given space varies along a continuum, not according to how the space is managed but by how the space is *peopled*—that is, by how the space is actually put to use and by whom.[11]

This pluralistic conception recognizes that no space is strictly public or private. Any space can be more public or less public depending on its attributes. Nor are the people in any given space drawn from a singular "public" or body politic. As feminist philosophers like Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser, and Patricia Hill Collins have made clear, *the* public is really a composite of many publics—publics that are differentially positioned in society according to class, race, sex, gender, ability, and other intersecting markers of identity.[12] This implies that every public space will be peopled differently and every space's publicness must be assessed relative to its peopling. The particular people that convene in a given space—and the rights and amenities the members of that public may enjoy there—depend on factors within the space (including its design, upkeep, and policing) and beyond the space (including its neighborhood context, accessibility to different populations, and the laws and institutions regulating its use and management).[13]

The equation of public space with political space contrasts with an alternative notion of public space: as open space that is designed to be used by the public in

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[9] Jurgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 49-55.
[10] Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guildford Press, 2003).
[11] Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell, *The People's Property?: Power, Politics, and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
[12] Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 250-274; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80; and Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection," *Race, Sex & Class* 1, no.1 (1993): 25-45.
[13] Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2004); George Varna and Steve Tiesdell, "Assessing the Publicness of Public Space: The Star Model of Publicness," Journal of Urban Design 15, no. 4 (2010): 575–98, doi: 10.1080/13574809.2010.502350; and Jeremy Nemeth and Stephen Schmidt, "The Privatization of Public Space: Modeling and Measuring Publicness," Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design 38, no. 1 (2011): 5–23, doi:10.1068/b36057.

particular ways. Plazas, for example, provide space for people to socialize. Playgrounds give children room to run and play. Forest preserves protect ecological habitat and connect urban residents to nature. These are all public spaces in the sense that they are spaces provided for public use, but functionally speaking they are designed as *parkland* with particular programmatic uses in mind. They are provided as amenities, typically through the practice of urban planning, to improve residents' quality of life. These spaces are managed in networks of parkland that encompass a wide array of spaces and facilities, from playgrounds and plazas to nature trails, pools, and athletic complexes. The use of urban parkland for speech and assembly is one of its important and legally protected functions, but as the diversity of park facilities suggests, other public interests are also at stake in its provision: city beautification, the conservation of wildlife, stormwater management, the advancement of public health, and the provision of space for play and athletics, to name just a few of the many reasons cited to justify parkland.

While parkland frequently functions as political space through its use, these two different notions of public space are often in tension. Drawing upon the terminology of the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, the critical geographer Don Mitchell calls parkland a form of *abstract space*, or space that is built with a standardized design and function, just like any other commodity. Abstract space is the kind of space routinely produced through state planning and capitalist real estate development. By contrast, Mitchell equates political space with *representational space*: space defined by the freedom with which any public may assemble and represent itself within it. For Mitchell, a truly public space must necessarily be open to anyone, regardless of age, income, political stance, or soundness of mind. As spaces of unmediated human interaction, representational spaces can be disorderly and even dangerous. Programming a public space as parkland—whether as basketball courts, a playground, or some other fixed use—effectively voids its publicness through "the thwarting or overlimiting or total scripting of possibilities for self-forming publics to appear, to represent themselves, to be represented."[14] In that sense, abstract space is the antithesis of representational space, and under capitalism, public space is always at risk of conversion to abstract space.

[14] Don Mitchell, "People's Park Again: On the End and Ends of Public Space," *Environment and Planning A* 49, no. 3 (2017): 513.

Indeed, Mitchell and other critical scholars allege that in the aggregate, traditional public forums like plazas and parks have undergone significant privatization since the 1970s in conjunction with the neoliberal turn in the global political economy. If that trend goes unchecked, they argue, there will no longer be any space left capable of functioning as political space. Neoliberal capitalism therefore threatens the "end of public space" as an open stage for representation, encounter, and exchange.[15]

These concerns have led scholars and activists to examine the relationship between the governance of particular parks and plazas—who owns them, who funds them, who designs them, who manages them day-to-day—and the consequent freedom with which different publics are able to assemble, speak, and interact within them. Critiques of privatized control have led to the adoption of stronger design standards for privately owned public spaces, legislation and legal action to protect the rights of protestors and the indigent, and greater consciousness about design choices, from the choice of food vendors to the use of surveillance cameras, that might influence who feels welcome to enter a particular space. Scholarship on public space has also informed social movements, like Occupy Wall Street, that have succeeded in transforming anodyne corporate plazas into spaces of radical political possibility, if only temporarily.[16]

However, this approach tells us little about the link between governance and the publicness of parkland in its more conventional sense: as a planned network of spaces and facilities provided for public use. Yet the scripted purposes of parkland also matter for democracy, which is why so many social movements have organized to redefine the scope and purpose of park systems. In her classic book, *The Politics of Park Design*, Galen Cranz identifies four successive approaches to park design between the 1850s and 1960s: the pleasure ground, the reform park, the recreation facility, and the open-space system.[17] Each of these reflects a distinct set of beliefs regarding the purpose of parks, and each is associated with unique types of spaces and facilities. For example, the City Social movement advocated the reform park. Reform parks included facilities like

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[15] Setha Low and Neil Smith, eds., *The Politics of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
[16] Ron Shiffman, Rick Bell, Lance Jay Brown, and Lynne Elizabeth, eds., *Beyond Zuccotti Park: Freedom of Assembly and the Occupation of Public Space* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2012).
[17] Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982).

playgrounds, bath houses, and community centers in accordance with the belief that parkland should be used to integrate poor immigrants into American society.[18] To demonstrate the utility of these facilities, activists founded new charitable organizations to open prototype facilities. After proving their benefits, advocates organized to create and fund public agencies to operate these facilities at scale. Similar struggles are ongoing today on behalf of new types of parkland, from skate parks to greenways to urban gardens. Yet few scholars have analyzed the interplay between changes in the use of parkland and the governance reforms that enabled those shifts in form and purpose.

Governance also matters for park access—within particular parks and for park systems as a whole. In *The Park and the People*, historians Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar show that Central Park was repeatedly remade as its leadership was forced to answer to a widening public that came to include not just upper class men but also women, laborers, immigrants, and racial minorities.[19] Likewise, park systems as a whole have been reshaped by campaigns to expand access to parkland by changing the size, number, and location of facilities. Since the advent of geographic information systems, scholars have documented significant disparities in access to parks and recreational facilities by income and race and ethnicity.[20] Today, park planners generally seek to satisfy demands for access in two ways: by meeting demand for particular uses of parkland through the construction and maintenance of suitable facilities, and by maximizing overall usage—by the public at large and by particular subsets of the population—through placement standards. National standards specify how many spaces and facilities to build of each kind at different scales. Neighborhood parks, for example, are designed with the daily needs of children, families, and seniors in mind, whereas state parks protect beautiful and ecologically significant landscapes and enable residents to

[18] K. Gerald Marsden, "Philanthropy and the Boston Playground Movement, 1885-1907," *Social Service Review* 35, no. 1 (1961): 48-58; Marta Gutman, *A City for Children: Women, Architecture, and the Charitable Landscapes of Oakland, 1850-1950* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[19] Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
[20] Emily Talen, "Visualizing Fairness: Equity Maps for Planners," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 64, no. 1 (1998): 22-38, doi:10.1080/01944369808975954.

spend leisure time outdoors hiking, camping, swimming, and fishing.[21] Yet most studies of park access focus on parks provided by a single local government without taking into account the adoption of new forms of park provision. While some studies have analyzed the influence of specific governance changes on park equity—including nonprofit involvement in public bonding campaigns, the distribution of privately owned public spaces, and the fundraising power of different nonprofit conservancies—no study has fully addressed how shifts in park governance have affected park access.[22]

Evidence also suggests that governance matters for racial equity. In addition to geographic access, racial equity requires culturally appropriate facilities and a welcoming environment. Achieving racial equity therefore requires addressing the legacy of racial discrimination within park and recreation systems—a legacy that is still not widely known.[23] Yet recent historiography has made clear that for much of the twentieth century, public parks and recreational facilities were provided on a segregated basis in both the South and North, whether by law or custom.[24] At the height of Jim Crow,

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[21] Christopher R. Edginton, Samuel V. Lankford, Susan D. Hudson, and Dale Larsen, *Managing Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Services: An Introduction*, 4th edition (Urbana, IL: Sagamore Publishing, 2015).

[22] Stephanie Pincetl, "Nonprofits and Park Provision in Los Angeles: An Exploration of the Rise of Governance Approaches to the Provision of Local Services," *Social Science Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2003): 979-1,001; Jerold S. Kayden, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000); and Charles Brecher and Oliver Wise, "Looking a Gift Horse in the Mouth: Challenges in Managing Philanthropic Support for Public Services," *Public Administration Review* 68, no. s1 (December 2008): S146-S161, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2008.00985.x.

[23] Jason Byrne and Jennifer Wolch, "Nature, Race, and Parks: Past Research and Future Directions for Geographic Research," *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 6 (2009): 743-765, doi:10.1177/0309132509103156; and Jason Byrne, "When Green is White: The Cultural Politics of Race, Nature and Social Exclusion in a Los Angeles Urban National Park," *Geoforum* 43, no. 3 (2012): 595-611, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.10.002.

[24] Studies of Jim Crow recreation in the North and West include Richard Kraus, *Public Recreation and the Negro: A Study of Participation and Administrative Practices* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1968); James E. Wells, Geoffrey L. Buckley, and Christopher G. Boone, "Separate But Equal? Desegregating Baltimore's Golf Courses," *The Geographical Review* 98, no. 2 (April 2008): 151-170, doi:10.1111/j.1931-0846.2008.tb00294.x; Allison Rose Jefferson, "African American Leisure Space in Santa Monica: The Beach Sometimes Known As the 'Inkwell,' 1900s-1960s," *Southern California Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 155-189, doi:10.2307/41172469; Lawrence Culver, "America's Playground: Recreation and Race," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed. William Deverell and Greg Hise (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), 421-437; Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Victoria W. Wolcott,

African Americans were commonly barred from public pools and beaches in northern industrial cities.[25] African Americans were also excluded from private clubs, theaters, and amusement parks.[26] Lack of recreational space was a key complaint identified by the Kerner Commission after the uprisings of 1967, and dozens of studies since have shown patterns of unequal provision within major cities and across metropolitan regions.[27] As scholars are beginning to recognize, the fight to make parks more or less egalitarian has also been a fight over governance. Historian Kevin Kruse has shown that Southern whites threatened to privatize or close recreational facilities to prevent integration. After a court required the city of Atlanta to integrate its public pools, some neighborhoods voted to close them instead. Residents also pushed to privatize the entire park system to maintain racial separation.[28] Kruse's study indicates one way that governance and racial equity have intersected, but the topic overall has received insufficient attention.

The ramifications of park governance clearly extend beyond the publicness of any given space. However, most research on park governance focuses on individual parks and plazas under privatized management. Few studies have assessed the governance of urban parkland holistically, so it is unclear whether privatization is as pervasive as critics believe or how governance change has impacted entire park systems. There is therefore a significant gap in the literature with respect to understanding how parks are provided, how their provision has changed over time, and what kinds of effects those changes are having on the publicness of parkland at the urban and metropolitan scale.

That is the challenge to which this dissertation is addressed: tracking the evolution of park governance over time and revealing the implications of that change for social and racial equity. The dissertation does so through a case study of park provision in Detroit, from the origins of the city's park system in the early 1800s up to 2018. The dissertation

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Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[25] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 154.

[26] Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[27] National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

[28] Kevin M. Kruse, "The Politics of Race and Public Space Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt in Atlanta," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 5 (2005): 610-633.

investigates the roles played by all kinds of advocates and providers—including governments, real estate developers, philanthropic organizations, and community-based organizations at different geographic scales—in shaping the purpose, form, placement, and extent of different kinds of parkland at the city and metropolitan scale.

Though the focus is on Detroit alone, I make reference to other cities throughout the narrative, noting where Detroit's park and recreation system is ahead of or behind the national curve. As a case, Detroit cannot labeled stereotypical, archetypical, or prototypical because its standing relative to other cities shifts dramatically over the course of two hundred years.[29] Yet Detroit is a consistently interesting case throughout for two primary reasons. The first is the outsized influence of industrial capital on the city's development. Capital investment produced extreme growth from the late 1800s to World War II, and its withdrawal interacted with racist housing policy to produce extreme decline from World War II to the present. These extremes of growth and decline reveal aspects of the relationship between capital investment, urban governance, and parkland that other case studies have not yet examined. The second distinguishing characteristic of Detroit is the size and significance of its African American community, especially from the 1910s to the present. The geography of parkland in Detroit has been deeply shaped by the long struggle for racial equity—probably more so than typical.

For evidence, I have scoured Detroit-area libraries and digital collections for primary and secondary evidence on the development of all parks in the city and region that are intended for use by Detroit residents. The most important sources are government plans, reports, legislation, and meeting minutes at the local, county, regional, state, and national levels. I also draw extensively on newspaper accounts from the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Detroit News*, the *Michigan Chronicle*, and other periodicals; national periodicals dedicated to parks, playgrounds, recreation, and leisure; maps and images of specific parks or park systems at different points in time; memoirs and selected interviews of park officials and residents; websites and media for contemporary park organizations; and, whenever available, secondary studies and reports issued by scholars, activists, and professional societies. I also searched the broader historiographical and

[29] Neil Brenner, "Stereotypes, Archetypes, and Prototypes: Three Uses of Superlatives in Contemporary Urban Studies," *City & Community* 2, no. 3 (2003): 205-216.

social scientific literature on Detroit, both for historical context and for clues that led to primary sources. Archival evidence—like the letters of Clara Arthur, leader of Detroit's Playground Movement in the early 1900s—also enrich several chapters.[30]

I narrate Detroit's park history in six chapters. Each chapter marks a shift in the structure and logic of park provision. Chapter 1 discusses park planning before the Civil War, an era when privatism was dominant and parks were rare except in elite residential neighborhoods. Chapter 2 discusses the movement for landscaped parks and boulevards and explains why public investment remained limited for the remainder of the nineteenth century, causing the under-provision of open space in what later became known as the "inner city." Chapter 3 explains how Progressive Era activists expanded access to parks and, for the first time, recreation through assertive public planning—and why white and black communities did not benefit equally. Chapter 4 highlights the racially biased reconstruction of the inner city from the 1930s to the 1960s, in part to create the open space that privatism failed to produce. Chapter 5 highlights the realignment of park provision after the mid-1960s, when activism against racial bias helped spur a shift in focus from the maintenance of open spaces to the provision of recreation in a variety of formats. Activists also fought successfully for greater intergovernmental funding and community control, even as a collapsing tax base led to a general decline in park quality. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the fragmentation of park provision after the 1990s, a period in which public and private partners gave new life to public spaces in Detroit's downtown and along its formerly industrial riverfront but most parks fell into disrepair. Multiple providers now maintain networks of urban parkland, but each operates independently, while the municipal parks and recreation system remains severely underfunded.

Some will read this dissertation for new insight into the development of Detroit. Not only does this dissertation provide the first comprehensive history of Detroit's park system, it is one of just a few studies that analyzes planning in Detroit before World War II. Although formal city planning was limited—Detroit did not adopt a zoning code or a master plan until the 1940s—early park planning nevertheless shaped the trajectory of the

[30] Between 2014 and 2017, I also observed more than 20 meetings organized by the Detroit City Council, the Mayor's Office, the Recreation Department, the Belle Isle Advisory Committee, the Detroit Parks Coalition, and various "Friends of the Park" groups. These observations inform the final two chapters. They also shaped my research strategy and interpretation of history.

city. In the 1800s, park advocates influenced the geography of development through the siting of the Grand Boulevard and the donation of landscaped parks in what was then the suburban periphery. In the 1900s, the City Plan and Improvement Commission shaped present-day Detroit through the construction of Outer Drive, the expansion of Belle Isle, the erection of the Michigan Central Station and Roosevelt Park, the creation of a cultural center anchored by the Detroit Public Library and Detroit Institute of Arts, and siting of playgrounds and playfields. Planners and park advocates also influenced the future through their failures. Few of Detroit's natural features were preserved as parkland, and few neighborhoods were designed in relation to significant parks, likely contributing to their future decline. Nor were parks and recreational facilities distributed fairly. Racial inequity led to costly conflicts and planning interventions from World War II forward.

Others will read this history for insight into park planning today. As prior studies suggest, shifts in parks governance broadly followed three phases. Elites governed parkland for most of the nineteenth century, bureaucrats controlled parkland for much of the twentieth century, and public-private partnerships are essential to the provision of parks today. Yet a simple narrative of "privatization" to describe recent change is misleading. This is not because privatization has not taken place. It has. Real estate developers have indeed asserted greater influence over high-profile public spaces, whether directly through the creation of privately owned public spaces or indirectly through the management of parks through corporate-led conservancies. But a narrative of privatization downplays the simultaneous change in the roles played by many nonprofit and governmental agencies and the diverse, non-commercial values they bring to the public realm, from improving the natural environment to providing low-income youth with access to recreation. A narrative of privatization also obscures the role that organized struggles for social and racial equity have played in driving governance change of all types. In order to make the public realm more equitable, generations of activists worked to reshape the structure of park provision, whether by rescaling governmental responsibility or by shifting the roles played by for-profit or nonprofit organizations, and the structure of park provision today reflects the outcomes of those struggles.

Today, in post-bankruptcy Detroit, responsibility for park provision is distributed among multiple public and private provider networks with different resources and

priorities. As a result, some park agendas and geographies are flourishing while others have withered. Detroit's riverfront and downtown parks are as lively as they have ever been thanks to growing public and private support for placemaking as a driver of real estate investment. Federal funding for mobility has also enabled the conversion of unused railroad tracks into greenways. Detroit's neighborhood playfields, by contrast, which remain under the purview of the municipal Parks and Recreation Department, have witnessed only modest reinvestment post-bankruptcy because deep-pocketed partners have not prioritized the social agenda they represent. Most of Detroit's historic landscaped parks and boulevards remain neglected as well, although the city's passionate but under-resourced "Friends" groups are trying to change that. The overall trend of uneven park investment contributes to the disparity between the quality of life in much of the majority black city and that in its gentrifying core and wealthier, whiter suburbs.

These findings suggest that with respect to park equity, what matters is not private or public control of public space per se but instead whether the goals and capacities of park providers align with the needs of city residents. Scholars have shown convincingly that the distinction between public and private control of public space matters for labor practices and for the freedom and vitality of democratic public life. But the management of parkland also influences the socioeconomic and racial equity of park systems as a whole. We therefore need more debate over which *kinds* of parkland most need investment and *where*. This kind of debate will help local leaders assess how well the interests and capacities of different park providers align with actual needs. Otherwise, selective reinvestment in parkland—by both public and private providers—is liable to perpetuate a long history of socioeconomic and racial inequity rather than correct it.

Chapter 1: Privatism over Planning (1805-1865)

Histories of urban parkland in the United States often begin midway through the nineteenth century with the decision to build Central Park in New York City.[1] Even before it was completed, Central Park was hailed nationwide as a must-see success. Civic leaders across the country lined up to hire its designers, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, to engineer similar parks in their own cities: expansive, natural-seeming landscapes of woodland, pond, and meadow, cut through by winding walks and carriage drives, all carefully arranged to convey a sense of peace and pastoral beauty evocative of the English countryside in contrast to the bustle and grime of the city. Nevertheless, Central Park represents just one tradition of park planning and only briefly the dominant one. By the 1850s, a typical American city already included many spaces of greenery and leisure, including civic and residential squares, picnic groves, pleasure gardens, island getaways, rural cemeteries, and athletic clubs.[2] The origins of these spaces are worth examining because they reflect other enduring ideas about the value and purpose of parkland, including beautifying the city, commemorating the past, and providing space for outdoor activities from political assemblies to athletic games. The history of these spaces also points toward the importance of privatism as an ideology that would dominate park planning from the beginning of the nineteenth century to its end and contribute toward increasing inequities in access to parkland over time.

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[1] See, for example, Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982); and Terence Young, *Building San Francisco's Parks, 1850-1930* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[2] John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 128-129; Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 226-235; and Lake Douglas, "Certain Pleasures, Ambiguous Grounds: The Etymology and Evolution of the Pleasure Garden," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 48-53, doi: 10.1080/18626033.2013.798924.

Privatism is the belief that cities should be governed in such a way as to further the private accumulation of wealth. In his seminal book, *The Private City*, historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr., calls privatism the animating force of nineteenth-century urbanism in the United States. In short, Warner argues, "What the private market could do well American cities have done well; what the private market did badly, or neglected, our cities have been unable to overcome."[3] So it is that the provision of early parks and recreational spaces was often left to the whims of real estate developers, industrialists, and philanthropists rather than elected officials or bureaucrats.[4] Even proponents of *public* investment in parks did not necessarily emphasize their social or health benefits; instead they argued that landscape improvements would pay financial dividends because real estate values would rise, as had been proven by private squares like Gramercy Park.[5]

The preference for privatism over public planning was especially pronounced in Detroit. In 1806, federal officials imposed the so-called Woodward Plan, a geometric street plan that set aside many of the public grounds that continue to adorn the city's central business district today. Yet local leaders resisted the plan from the start, voiding it in favor of ad hoc growth as soon as Detroit became a municipality in the late 1820s. As a result, most spaces for greenery and leisure in antebellum Detroit were either private initiatives or the result of public-private partnerships. The only public parks were either developed on donated land or on land that had previously been used for other public purposes. They were improved in order to beautify the city and spur real estate development, not to provide public space for residents to use. Private entrepreneurs provided grounds for political rallies, sporting events, picnicking, concerts, and other outdoor assemblies. This conservative approach to park planning did add beauty to the city's most fashionable quarters, but it left most working-class neighborhoods without any open space at all—a problem that would compound over time as the city grew.

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[3] Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), X.
[4] Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 121-129.
[5] Catherine McNeur, "Parks, People, and Property Values," *Journal of Planning History*, 2016: 1-14, doi:10.1177/1538513216657563.

1805-1835: The Rejection of Town Planning

In the early 1800s, Detroit seemed poised to become a national model for town planning. At the behest of federal officials sent from Washington, D.C., Detroit began following a new street plan that promised to gradually transform Detroit from a frontier fur-trading post into a commercial metropolis. Included in this plan was provision for public grounds: open spaces that would serve as a precursor to parks. Yet from the start, landowners worked to overturn the plan in favor of unregulated, ad hoc development. The victory of privatism over planning would have lasting effects for park development.

The debate over how to plan Detroit began with the arrival of federal officials in 1805. Earlier that year, the United States Congress created the Territory of Michigan, and the Town of Detroit was named its capital. President Thomas Jefferson appointed five men—a governor, a secretary, and three judges—to lead the new territory and its capital effective June 30, 1805. Yet when Jefferson's appointed leaders first assembled in Detroit in July, they found the town in ruins. On June 11, nearly every building had burned to the ground in an accidental conflagration known thereafter as the Great Fire.[6] In the wake of the fire, Father Gabriel Richard, the pastor of Detroit's founding Catholic church, St. Anne's, is said to have coined Detroit's motto: "*Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus*." The phrase means, "We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes."[7] The fire left residents devastated, but like Father Richard, Detroit's newly arrived leaders saw opportunity in crisis, and they set immediately to work on a town plan that would override the French and British settlement that had existed prior to their arrival.

The Detroit settlement dated to 1701, when the French officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit on the strait between Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie in what is now the state of Michigan. The people indigenous to the region,

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[6] Paul Szewczyk, "The Woodward Plan Part I: Origins," *Detroit Urbanism: Uncovering the History of Our Roads, Borders, and Built Environment*, April 4, 2016, http://detroiturbanism.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-woodward-plan-part-i-origins.html.

[7] The phrase, "*Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus*," was added to the city seal in 1827. It is commonly attributed to Father Gabriel Richard, but this origin story may be apocryphal. Twentieth-century biographers of Father Richard credit him for the phrase, without citing a source. Earlier historians of Detroit do not mention it. See, for example, Stanley Pargellis, *Gabriel Richard: Second Founder of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Catholic Study Club of Detroit, 1958), 9, versus Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 139.

the Ojibwe, the Odawa and the Potawatomi—collectively known as the Anishanabeg, or the People of the Three Fires, who lived throughout present-day Michigan—used the strait as a meeting ground and fishery. In the wake of European colonization, other nations, including the Wyandot, Iroquois and Meskwaki, migrated to the region from the east to hunt, fish, and participate in the fur trade.[8] Initially a French settlement, Detroit was captured by the British in 1760 and ceded to the United States in 1796.

A map depicting the settlement as it appeared in 1796 reveals a frontier town clustered tightly along the Detroit River (Figure 1). Six hundred people lived within the wooden walls of the town, including dozens of enslaved men and women of African and indigenous ancestry.[9] More families lived in the countryside on the long, narrow "ribbon farms" that lined the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. The town itself had about three hundred wooden buildings inside of it. A British-built fort stood just to the northwest. Between the fort and the town ran the Savoyard, a creek feeding into the Detroit River. Within the walls of the town were a series of gardens, some formally landscaped with fruit trees and bushes. French settlers planted the gardens in honor of the king in the early 1700s, and they were maintained under British and then American rule.[10] Just beyond the walls were the "Garrison Pastures" or "Commons," an expanse of federal land where residents could graze their animals and where military drills were held.

[8] Paul Szewczyk, "Indian Villages, Reservations, and Removal," *Detroit Urbanism: Uncovering the History of Our Roads, Borders, and Built Environment*, March 7, 2016, http://detroiturbanism.blogspot.com/2016/03/indian-villages-reservations-and-removal.html.
[9] Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017).
[10] Guillaume Teasdale, *The French of Orchard Country: Territory, Landscape, and Ethnicity in the Detroit River Region, 1680s-1810s* (PhD Diss., York University, 2010).

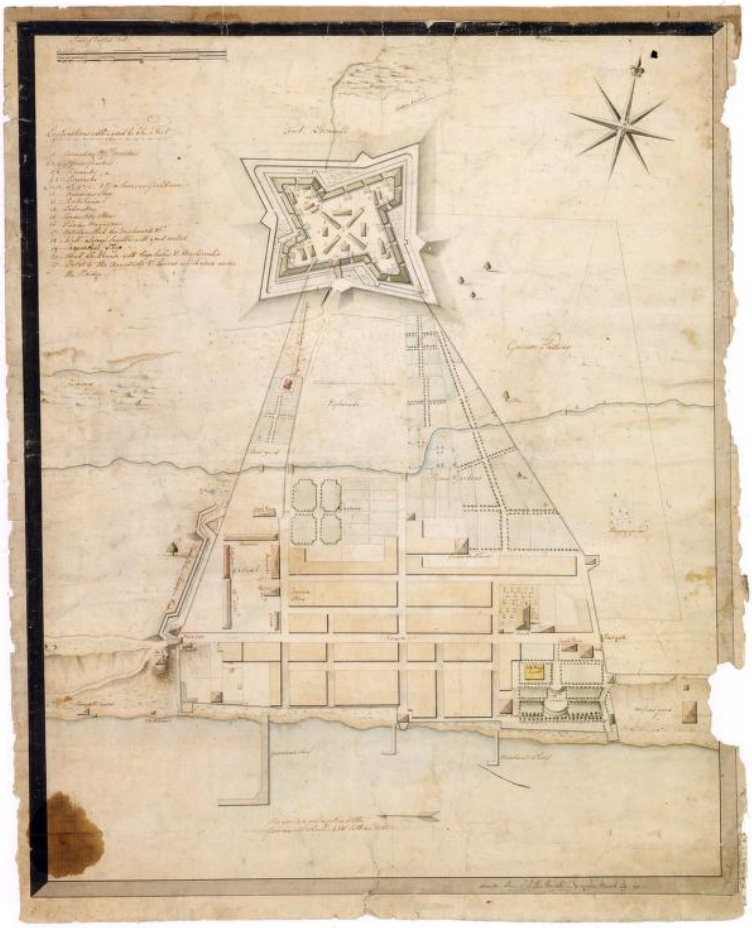

Figure 1: The Plan of Detroit in 1796.[11]

In some American cities, these holdovers from the colonial era—the royal gardens and the commons—provided the land and the precedent for the first public parks.[12] In Detroit, by contrast, the first parks were made possible by a formal town plan crafted by Judge Augustus Brevoort Woodward, one of the federal officials appointed by President Jefferson to manage the affairs of the new territory. Woodward had served on the first city council of Washington, D.C., and he was an admirer of architect Pierre L'Enfant's plan for the nation's capital, which superimposed diagonal boulevards over a simple grid of rectangular streets. Woodward was given the task of leading the rebuilding of Detroit.

[11] "[Plan of Fort Lernoult and the town of Detroit]," University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, William L. Clements Library Image Bank, accessed February 15, 2017, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/w/wcl1ic/x-630/wcl000741.
[12] Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3-5.

In 1806, he unveiled a plan for Detroit, seen in Figure 2. Planning historian John W. Reps calls it "the honeycomb in the hinterland" because of its intricate patterning.[13]

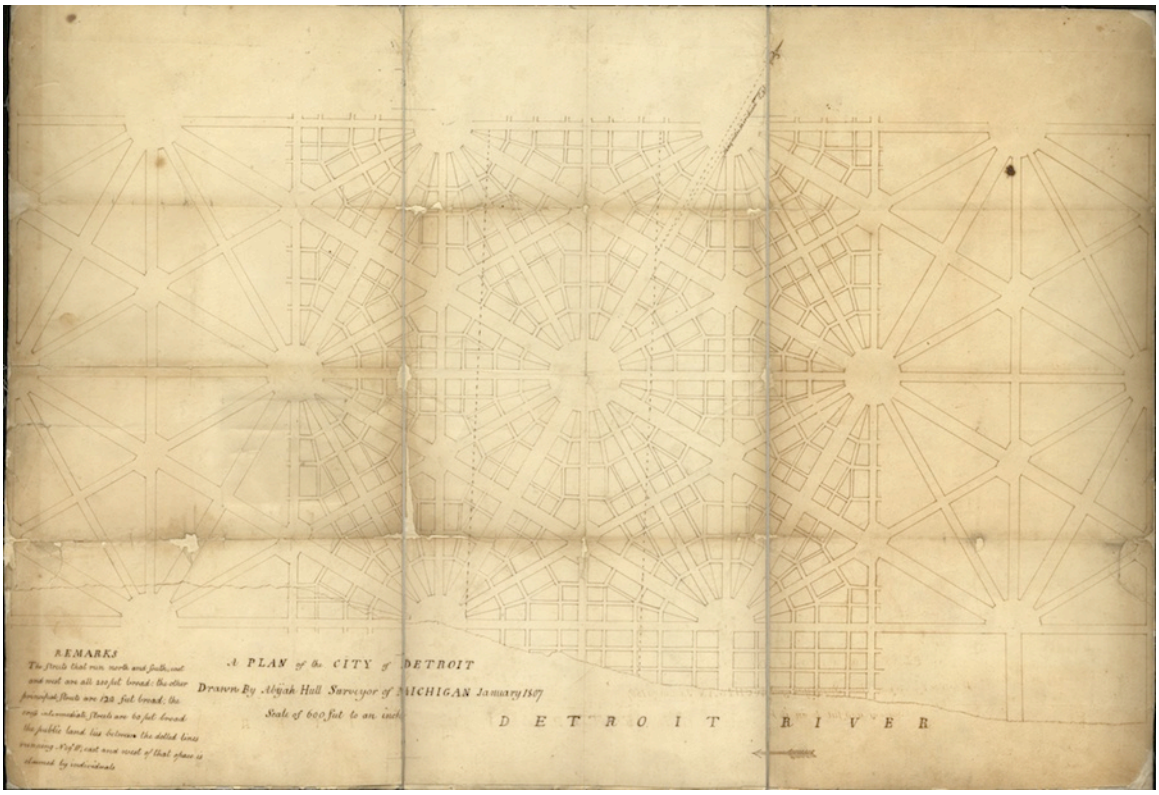

Figure 2: A Plan of the City of Detroit, 1807.[14]

Under the Woodward Plan, the destroyed town would be rebuilt on a simple grid of rectangular streets along the riverfront. However, north of what is now Jefferson Avenue, on the grazing land held by the federal government, Woodward envisioned a new metropolis. This new city would be built on wide avenues that would meet at angles to form triangular sections. The blocks forming the sides of each triangular section would be parceled out and sold as private lots. Triangles of land at the center of each section would be reserved as public grounds. As such, they were to be ornamented with

[13] John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 264.
[14] "A Plan of the City of Detroit Drawn by Abijah Hull Surveyor of Michigan January 1807," Detroit Public Library Digital Collections, Burton Historical Collection, accessed August 3, 2018, https://digitalcollections.detroitpubliclibrary.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A144617.

trees, either as adjacent property owners saw fit or by decree of the city council.[15] Public grounds would also be created at every point where multiple avenues intersected. The intersection of six avenues would produce a rectangle of public ground; the intersection of twelve avenues would produce a circle.

Like similar spaces in other cities, including Washington, D.C., the public grounds were intended to serve as ornamental sites for public works, broadly construed to include not only government buildings but also churches and the meeting places of private associations, like literary and scientific clubs. The authorizing legislation decreed that "the internal space of ground, in the middle of every section, shall be reserved for public wells & pumps, for markets, for public schools, for houses for the reception of engines or other articles for the extinction of fires, and the preservation of the property of the inhabitants, for houses for the meeting of religious, moral, literary, or political societies, or other useful associations, and generally, for such purposes of utility or ornament, as the city council of Detroit may, at any time, by law, provide; or as, otherwise, the inclination and the taste of the proprietors of the lots in such section, or that of the major part of them, may direct; and in the same manner shall be paved, gravelled, planted with trees, or otherwise improved and ornamented."[16] All of the Woodward Plan's triangles, rectangles, and circles were to be maintained as public grounds in perpetuity. However, until the Common Council said otherwise, nearby property owners had the right to landscape the spaces as they saw fit.

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[15] The statute reads: "*And be it enacted*, That the squares or other spaces of public ground, where six avenues intersect, and those spaces of public ground where twelve avenues intersect, shall be planted with trees, in such manner and of such kind, and to be preserved by such means, as the inclinations and taste of the proprietor of the lot, fronting on the said squares or spaces, shall direct, or as the city council of Detroit may, at any time, by law, provide; but so as not to impede or obstruct the purpose to which such public space of ground shall be converted, or may be designed." William Hull, Augustus B. Woodward, and John Griffin, "An Additional Act Concerning the Town of Detroit. 1807," in *Laws of the Territory of Michigan. Laws Adopted by the Governor and Judges*, vol. 1. (Lansing, MI: W.S. George & Co., 1871), 286-289, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015070720266;view=1up;seq=310.

[16] William Hull, Augustus B. Woodward, and John Griffin, "An Additional Act Concerning the Town of Detroit. 1807," in *Laws of the Territory of Michigan. Laws Adopted by the Governor and Judges*, vol. 1 (Lansing, MI: W.S. George & Co., 1871), 286-289, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015070720266;view=1up;seq=310.

The United States Congress approved the Woodward Plan in 1806.[17] Had it been implemented as proposed, the plan would have produced a fixed ratio of private to public land throughout the city, with new triangular sections, new avenues, and new public grounds added ad infinitum as the city grew.[18] However, Woodward's utopian scheme quickly encountered opposition from Territorial Governor William Hull because it called for the removal of the town's fortifications. Woodward considered the town's walls and fort to be a hindrance to the city's future development. Hull, by contrast, saw the fur-trapping town as it then was: tiny, distant from Washington, and vulnerable to attack. He pushed for the construction of a new stockade and the maintenance of the old British fort. Hull succeeded in keeping the fort, but the stockade was allowed to rot. Yet Hull's point was ultimately proven when the failure to fortify the town contributed to its quick, humiliating surrender during the War of 1812.[19] The temporary British occupation that followed convinced city leaders to continue to reserve a corner of the Commons for federal troops rather than plat it in accordance with the Woodward Plan.

After the war, the Woodward Plan faced additional opposition from landowners. The wealthiest men in Michigan owned the ribbon farms to the east and west of the Commons.[20] These landowners—including the new governor of the territory, Lewis Cass—supported parts of the Woodward Plan, like the planting of street trees, but they considered the plan's requirements for wide boulevards and public grounds to be an impediment to the city's near-term growth. As the town grew, they demanded the right to subdivide and sell their farmland as they saw fit. They wanted to maximize their own real estate profit by minimizing the public right of way, and they were willing to let the city develop piecemeal and haphazardly rather than according to a rigid plan. They also

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[17] *An Act to Provide for the Adjustment of Titles of Land in the Town of Detroit and Territory of Michigan, and for Other Purposes*, Chapter 43, U.S. Statutes at Large 2 (1806): 398, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=002/llsl002.db&recNum=435.

[18] William Hull, Augustus B. Woodward, and Frederick Bates, "An Act Concerning the Town of Detroit. 1806," in *Laws of the Territory of Michigan. Laws Adopted by the Governor and Judges*, vol. 1. (Lansing, MI: W.S. George & Co., 1871), 283-285, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015070720266;view=1up;seq=305.

[19] After surrendering Detroit, Hull was court-martialed and sentenced to death for cowardice and neglect of duty, but President James Madison pardoned him. Ryan Dibrano, "Hull, William," *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, Detroit Historical Society, http://detroithistorical.org/.

[20] As historian Tiya Miles has documented, these families profited from the labor of enslaved men and women of African and native ancestry. Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017).

opposed the plan's extension to the so-called Park Lots, which were part of a 10,000-acre allotment of land deeded to the town by the federal government. The gradual sale of this land, which began a half-mile north of the river, at the northern edge of the Commons, financed local government during the years of federal control. Opponents of the Woodward Plan argued that the Park Lots should be sold as multi-acre lots for farmland, not platted for boulevards and plazas to serve an imagined metropolis.[21]

To protect the integrity of his plan, Woodward agreed to divide some of the federal land into large blocks for use as farmland as long as the government retained the right to later build boulevards and public grounds across it before it was converted to residential or commercial use. Yet after the War of 1812, the governor and Woodward's fellow judges largely stopped enforcing the plan.[22] In 1824, Judge Woodward lost his appointed position when the territorial legislature agreed to make Detroit a self-governed municipality. From then on, an elected Mayor, Recorder, and Common Council would run the city's affairs rather than appointed federal officials.[23] Once local elites gained control of local government, any lingering commitment to the Woodward Plan ceased. In 1827, with Woodward reassigned by the federal government to Florida, the territorial legislature formally nullified the plan. Woodward died just months later.[24] Ultimately, fewer than ten triangular sections of the plan were even partially built. Six triangular sections were built converging upon the Grand Circus, a half-circle of public space marking the town's northern edge, and four additional sections converged on the Campus Martius, a rectangle of public land that marked the Woodward Plan's point of origin. In total, the Woodward Plan produced three partial boulevards, six triangles of public ground, one rectangle, and one half-circle. These legacies are visible in Figure 3, which shows the extent of the plan as platted in 1830.

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[21] Paul Szewczyk, "Woodward Plan Part III: Interruptions," *Detroit Urbanism: Uncovering the History of Our Roads, Borders, and Built Environment*, June 6, 2016, http://detroiturbanism.blogspot.com/2016/06/woodward-plan-part-iii-interruptions.html.
[22] Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *Frontier Metropolis: Picturing Early Detroit, 1701-1838* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 173.
[23] Lent D. Upson, *The Growth of a City Government: An Enumeration of Detroit's Municipal Activities* (Detroit: Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, 1942), 10.
[24] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 918-919.

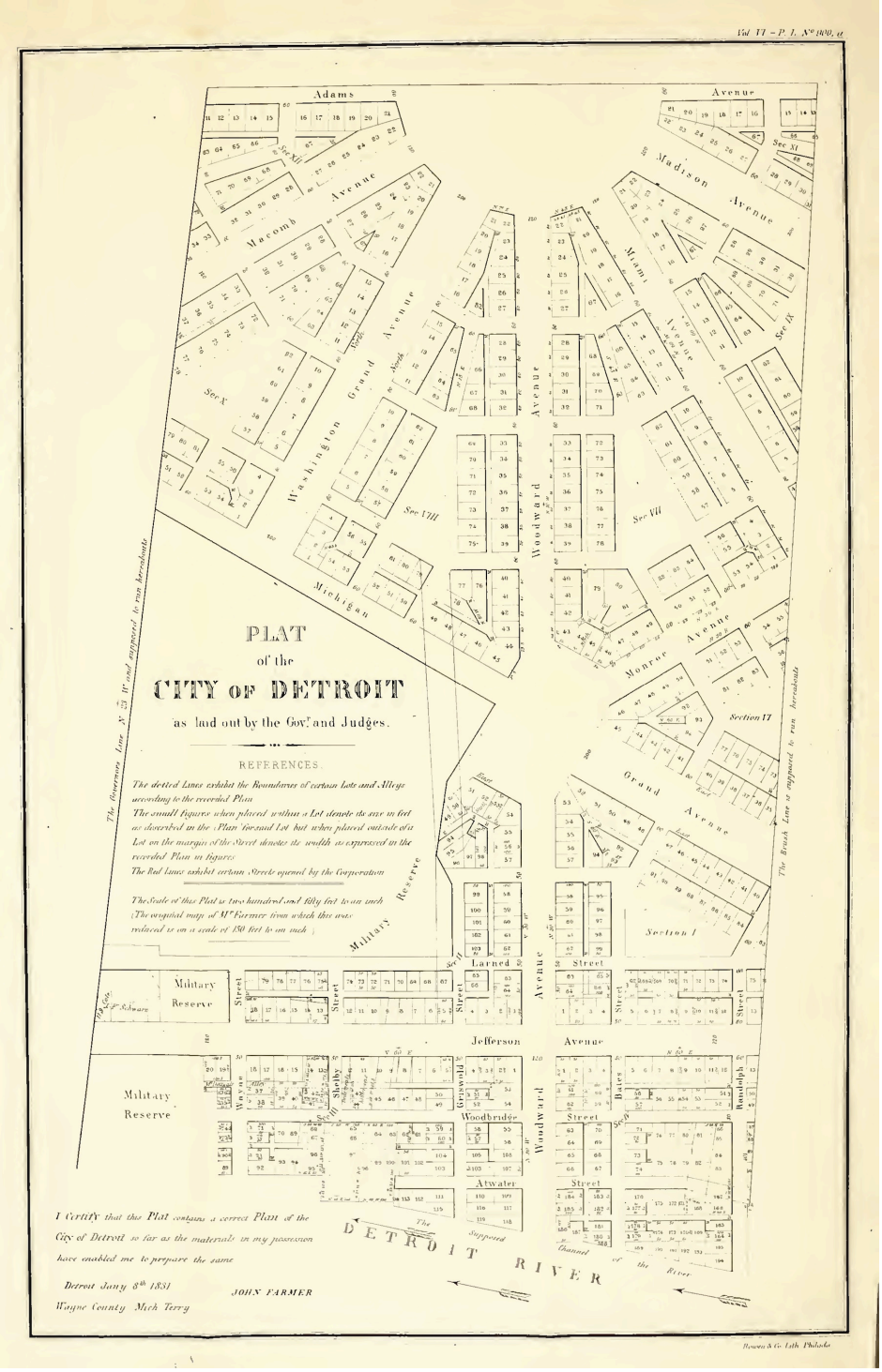

Figure 3: Plat of the City of Detroit in 1830.[25]

[25] "Plat of the City of Detroit as laid out by the Govr. and Judges—engraving after a plan by John Farmer," *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C., 1834), 270-271, accessed August 3, 2018, http://archive.org/stream/americanstatepap06unit#page/n298/mode/1up.

1835-1855: The First Private and Public Parkland

Despite its limited reach, the Woodward Plan gave Detroit its first open spaces. Yet the public grounds of the Woodward Plan were not initially conceived or used as parks. City leaders hoped instead that entrepreneurs would provide landscaped spaces for public enjoyment. The municipal government only slowly followed their lead at the behest of real estate developers, who called for the conversion of the city's public grounds into parks and who donated additional plots of land for the same purpose.

The first public grounds set aside by the Woodward Plan were those used to house the city's corrective institutions: the public jail, the public courthouse, and the Roman Catholic Church. The first triangle to be improved, in Section 1 of the plan, was deeded to St. Anne's parish, which had lost its church in the Great Fire. Construction of the new church began in 1818. The triangle in Section 7 became the site of the jail in 1819. Its grounds were used for public hangings until 1830.[26] The triangle in Section 8 became a courthouse in 1828. This courthouse would later serve as the state capitol and then the public high school. These grounds were "public" in two senses: the city owned them, and they were reserved by law for uses deemed to be of general benefit to the town. As landscaped spaces, they were intended to impress upon visitors a sense of the city's rising wealth and stature. However, they were not "public spaces" in the contemporary sense of being places designated for public assembly. Furthermore, the grounds were on the northern fringe of town, far from the bustle of the riverfront where most residents were still living and working, so they were not yet central to the town's public life.

The first public ground to fulfill the definition of a public space was the Campus Martius. Campus Martius was built in the tradition of the town square. It was a place for people to meet, speak, and exchange. Its development was enabled by the imposition of a property tax in 1835. This tax enabled the city to build sewers, sidewalks, streets, and a water supply, and it paid for the grading of the Campus Martius as the city's first public

[26] J.L. Hudson Company, *Sixty Years: A Compilation of Articles Describing Six Decades in the Growth and Development of Detroit and Its Environs 1881-1941* (Detroit, MI: The J.L. Hudson Company, 1941), 43; and David Chardavoyne, *A Hanging in Detroit: Stephen Gifford Simmons and the Last Execution under Michigan Law* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

square.[27] The Common Council hired contractors to remove four feet of soil from the grounds—then "rough, muddy, unpaved, and uneven"—and dump it over the Savoyard, the creek that ran through the square, which was enclosed as a sewer.[28] Afterwards, the square was laid with sod and planted with trees. Two buildings were erected on its edges—the Michigan Central Railroad depot and a seminary for women—but the remainder of the campus was left open as a gathering place. To encourage such use, Reuben N. Rice, the superintendent of the railroad, paid to have a pagoda erected "for the use of speakers, bands of music, etc."[29]

As the city developed around it, the Campus Martius became Detroit's central meeting place and bazaar. Silas Farmer, an early historian of Detroit, recalled the campus serving as "a hay and wood market, as a standing-place for farmers' wagons, and a rendezvous for hucksters and peddlers of every kind. Here patent medicine-men, 'lightning calculators,' cheap jewelry auctioneers, peddlers of knife-sharpeners, cements, toy-balloons, oranges and bananas, have filled the air with their cries … Huge bonfires have often illuminated the surrounding buildings, and hundreds of political speeches have here been made to the throngs that so many times gathered at this grand old meeting-place."[30] The square's liveliness owed in part to the foresight of the Woodward Plan, which anticipated the growth of the city around it; in part to the Common Council's willingness to impose a tax to improve it; and in part to the railroad, which promoted the square as the town's social, economic, and political hub. Heavy use quickly degraded its role as a green space, but it served ably as a heavily trafficked plaza.

In 1832, the *Detroit Journal*—one of the town's first newspapers—was the first to advocate the development of a different form of public space for Detroit: a garden setting that could beautify and distinguish the small but growing town. The editorial board called upon men of "vigor and spirit" to improve the Grand Circus as "a place of public resort and amusement." Such an enterprise, they predicted, "would well indemnify any

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[27] Lent D. Upson, "The Growth of a City Government: An Enumeration of Detroit's Municipal Activities" (Detroit: Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, 1942), 10.
[28] Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 74.
[29] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 716.
[30] Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 74.

person or number of persons who could spare the capital necessary for such an investment."[31] They had in mind a place like Vauxhall Gardens in London.[32] The editorialists pictured a setting of fruit trees and flowerbeds. Musicians would play in the gardens, and refreshments would be for sale. The east and west sides of the park would be linked "by one or more arches thrown over the road, on which might be erected some light structure, somewhat in the style of a Chinese pagoda, approached by terraced walks on each side, where vines and fruit might be trained, and flowers cultivated." Doing so would give Detroit a landmark on par with the great capitals of Europe. "Nothing in our country," the *Journal* warned, "strikes foreigners with greater force than the entire absence of the venerable parks and highly ornamented pleasure grounds they have been accustomed to see in their own country, and the chilling influence of what they term the newness of every thing around them." The opening of a private pleasure garden—built on public land and aided by a "liberal contribution" from the public purse—would send a reassuring signal to foreign investors that Detroit was here and here to stay.

In 1835, a private entrepreneur, Colonel D.C. McKinstry, answered the *Journal*'s call. McKinstry—an entertainer and entrepreneur who later opened two theaters and a museum of curiosities—debuted the Michigan Garden, a four-acre, for-profit pleasure garden, which he built on his own land rather than on the public ground of the Grand Circus.[33] According to an 1837 city directory, the Garden boasted "admirably arranged" walking paths and "fruit trees of every description, besides a choice selection of foreign and domestic plants … It is decidedly a summer retreat from the bustle and cares of business, of no ordinary character, combining utility and gratification with pleasure, there being a commodious bath and splendid recess attached to the concern—also tasty summer-houses in every part of the garden."[34] The garden was free to the public, but paying customers could enjoy "almost anything in the way of refreshments, ices and soft

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[31] "The Grand Circus," *Detroit Journal & Michigan Advertiser*, October 10, 1832, 2.
[32] Lake Douglas, "Certain Pleasures, Ambiguous Grounds: The Etymology and Evolution of the Pleasure Garden," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 48-53, doi: 10.1080/18626033.2013.798924.
[33] The Michigan Garden occupied a full city block, which is now bordered by Randolph Street, Monroe Avenue, Brush Street, and East Lafayette Street. George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 430.
[34] Julius P. Bolivar MacCabe, *Directory of the City of Detroit, with Its Environs, and Register of Michigan, for the year 1837* (Detroit, MI: William Harsha, 1837), 29.

drinks."[35] Over time, McKinstry grew the garden into a wide-ranging entertainment complex: "A small pavilion gave shelter to a band which played Saturday and holiday evenings. Another low building served the purpose of a restaurant and at the lower end, adjoining the restaurant, was a bathhouse consisting of plain stalls, each one containing a wooden tub for bathing … There one could bathe in privacy while the band played … From the adjoining restaurant would come the clatter of knives and forks, the clink of glasses, the quips of the town wits and the giggling of the girls."[36] McKinstry also hosted rowdier entertainments in his garden, ranging from "bear baiting and dog fights to shooting matches," which would have attracted men of different social classes.[37]

McKinstry's garden was the only park-like setting in Detroit until the late 1840s, when two other private, landscaped grounds opened to the public: Elmwood Cemetery and Belle Isle. Inspired by the "rural cemetery" movement on the East Coast, a group of wealthy Protestant men purchased a foreclosed farm just east of the city during the recession of 1846.[38] The property featured gentle hills and a creek called the Bloody Run—so named after a 1763 battle between the British and the Odawa that left twenty Redcoat soldiers dead on its banks.[39] The trustees of the cemetery hired a sexton skilled in horticulture to prepare the grounds in the English romantic style of earlier rural cemeteries, including Boston's Mt. Auburn, Philadelphia's Laurel Hill, and New York's Green-Wood.[40] These scenic cemeteries, which opened outside their respective cities in the 1830s, were designed as rural retreats for the dead and living alike. By the 1840s, they were well known to Detroit businessmen as tourist attractions.[41] Hoping to duplicate their success, the sexton at Elmwood proceeded to plant shade trees and lay out walks and drives.[42] The improvements had the desired effect. "Although yet in its infancy," the

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[35] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 702.
[36] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 430.
[37] Frank B. Woodford and Arthur M. Woodford, *All Our Yesterdays: A Brief History of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 237
[38] Michael S. Franck, *Elmwood Endures: History of a Detroit Cemetery* (Detroit, MI; Wayne State University Press, 1996), 16.
[39] Michael S. Franck, *Elmwood Endures: History of a Detroit Cemetery* (Detroit, MI; Wayne State University Press, 1996), 31.
[40] "Wanted," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, August 26, 1846, 3.
[41] Thomas Bender, "The 'Rural' Cemetery Movement: Urban Travail and the Appeal of Nature," *New England Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1974): 196-211.
[42] "City Matters," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, June 23, 1847, 2.

Daily Free Press noted approvingly, "it bids fair to out vie those of many of the eastern cemeteries in displays of shrubbery and flowers."[43] Burials began in 1849.[44]

The year 1846 also saw the opening of Belle Isle, the first of several island pleasure grounds in the Detroit area. Located three miles upriver from the town, Belle Isle was a 640-acre island owned by soldier, merchant, and fur trader Barnabas Campau. The island had once served as a commons: first for the Anishanabeg, who hunted and fished there, and then for French farmers, who grazed their animals on the island. That tradition ended in 1768, when the King of England authorized British Lieutenant George McDougall to acquire title to the island for his personal use. In 1769, McDougall signed a treaty with three Ojibwe and Odawa leaders, who relinquished their claims to the island in exchange for "rum, red paint, tobacco, and wampum having a total value of 192 pounds."[45] Over the following decade, prominent Detroiters repeatedly challenged the validity of the treaty without clear legal resolution, but after McDougall's death in 1780 his sons were allowed to sell the island to William Macomb, a wealthy Detroit merchant who owned 26 slaves at the time of his death in 1796.[46] In 1817, Macomb's heirs sold the island to Barnabas Campau. Campau farmed the island and operated several fisheries. Until 1845, the island was called "Ile au Cochon" or "Hog Island," in recognition of the old French practice of sequestering pigs there. The island was renamed "Belle Isle" on July 4, 1845, in anticipation of its new use as a pleasure garden or grove, at least at the western end closest to the town.[47] With its new branding, Campau began to market Belle Isle as a picnicking destination. The steamboat United began making daily trips to the island on Wednesdays and Saturdays for a fare of 12.5 cents.[48]

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[43] "Local Matters," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, September 13, 1847, 2.
[44] "Legislative Proceeedings," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, February 17, 1849, 2.
[45] J.L. Hudson Company, *Sixty Years: A Compilation of Articles Describing Six Decades in the Growth and Development of Detroit and Its Environs 1881-1941* (Detroit, MI: The J.L. Hudson Company, 1941), 9.
[46] "Abstract of Title. Belle Isle, Hamtramck, Wayne County," *Pioneer Collections: Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan Together with Reports of County, Town, and Detroit Pioneer Societies*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Lansing, MI: Robert Smith Printing Co., 1901), 585-611; and Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 102-104.
[47] "Belle (late 'Hog') Isle, July 4, '45," *Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 1845, 2.
[48] "Belle Isle Pleasure Excursion," *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 1846, 2.

For many years, private properties like McKinstry's Garden, Elmwood Cemtery, and Belle Isle were the only landscaped grounds in the city, although natural and rustic landscapes were still within reach of all residents, as farms, orchards, creeks, and ponds could all be found within walking distance. The first city-run parks took much longer to develop and were comparatively austere in their landscaping and design. An 1835 map optimistically labeled the triangles in sections ten and six of the Woodward Plan as West Park and East Park respectively. If developed, these would have been among the earliest public parks in the Midwest. Yet they remained unimproved for another two decades.[49] The Grand Circus likewise remained grand in name only. Until the 1840s, it remained "an unoccupied piece of ground, a common."[50] An early Detroiter recalled: "The west side was an extensive pond of water, that furnished good skating during the winter and good shooting of ducks, plover, snipe and tip-ups during the season."[51] An English tavern fronted the pond and hosted raucous hunting competitions on holidays. The east side of the circus "was marked by several bog holes," which fed into May's Creek.[52]

The municipal government made its first investments in parkland in the 1840s in partnership with private property owners. As the small city expanded—more than tripling in population from 2,222 in 1830 to just over 9,000 in 1840—the Grand Circus wetlands became a dumping ground, and the tavern closed. In the late 1830s, Henry H. LeRoy, chief engineer of the Fire Department, purchased the site of the tavern as an investment property, but, according to a contemporary, "the ground was so swampy that no one seemed to care to take it off his hands, so he was forced to occupy it himself, improving the grounds by draining, etc."[53] In 1844, having drained his own property, LeRoy led a campaign to drain the Grand Circus as well.[54] He and other property owners contributed $400 to raise the ground by several feet. Yet the ground was still wet, so they

[49] West Park became known as Times Square after the *Detroit Times* moved across from the park in 1929. Times Square became the site of the Rosa Parks Transit Center in 2009. In 1883, the Common Council voted to erect a police headquarters inside East Park. Since 1928, the site has been fully occupied by the Detroit Water Building.
[50] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 709.
[51] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 713.
[52] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 405.
[53] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 924.
[54] Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 73.

petitioned the city for help. In 1846, the Common Council agreed to sell two city-owned lots at the southwest corner of Adams Avenue and Clifford Street, for the sum of "$150 and $125 respectively," to pay for additional fill to make the grounds suitable for landscaping.[55] Shade trees, shrubbery, and a walking path were then added to the western half of the circus in 1847, giving West Grand Circus Park the distinction of being Detroit's first municipal park (the eastern half of the circus remained unimproved).[56]

This modest investment in the Grand Circus—in part by property owners, and in part by the Common Council—kicked off two decades of public-private cooperation to improve all the public grounds of the Woodward Plan as parks. This push coincided with the transformation of Woodward from Jefferson Avenue to Campus Martius into the commercial heart of the city. At the same time, the streets to the west and north of the commercial center became a fashionable area for the wealthy to live.[57] As part of this transformation, the Common Council sought the removal of previously erected buildings from public grounds in order to landscape them as parks. In 1847, the city reclaimed title to the jail and had it torn down the next year, rededicating the ground as Centre Park.[58] In 1849, the railroad depot was removed from the Campus Martius. In 1855, the Board of Education agreed to remove a schoolhouse from the ground of West Park. With the grounds cleared, nearby property owners could petition for landscape improvements. In 1850, real estate developer Edmund A. Brush received permission to erect a fence and plant trees in East Park at his own expense. He promptly advertised lots for sale fronting the newly landscaped park.[59] In 1852, property owners and the Common Council split the bill for planting trees and erecting a fence around Centre Park.[60] In 1853, the

[55] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 406; and "Improvements," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, October 6, 1846, 2.
[56] "Grand Circus Park," Detroit Historical Society, accessed December 7, 2017, http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/bysearchterm?keyword=Grand+Circus+Park.
[57] John C. Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order, 1830-1880: A Geography of Crime, Riot, and Policing* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 32-36, 45-52.
[58] Today this park is home to the Skillman Branch Library. Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 215.
[59] Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, "Common Council Proceedings," *Detroit Free Press*, April 27, 1850, 3.
[60] Daniel Munger, "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, March 25, 1852, 3.

Common Council agreed to spend $1,500 on trees and a fence for Grand Circus Park.[61] The city did not have its own workforce, so private contractors bid for the work.

With park improvements becoming a regular expense, the Common Council moved to create a Committee on Parks and a Park Improvement Fund. On April 3, 1855, the mayor appointed Henry H. LeRoy, the champion of Grand Circus Park, to lead the three-person committee of aldermen.[62] As his first act, LeRoy convinced the council to pass a unanimous resolution rededicating all the public grounds of the Woodward Plan as "public *parks*" in perpetuity, to be known thereafter as Centre Park, Middle Park, East Park, West Park, North Park, East Grand Circus Park, and West Grand Circus Park. The resolution did not define the term park, but the committee's meaning became clear as it adopted similar plans for every space. Parks were to be simple open spaces adorned with shade trees and a fountain—and fully enclosed by a picket fence to keep stray animals out. The committee also adopted a policy that a share of the cost of improving any park would be borne by adjacent property owners.[63] The public share would be funded by general taxation and revenue derived from licenses for circuses or public exhibitions.[64]

The Common Council also formed a committee to consider purchasing land for a much larger "park and pleasure ground" in the nearby countryside.[65] At the time, New York City had just finished acquiring land for what would become its Central Park. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux had not yet been selected as the park's designers, but the arguments of an earlier park evangelizer, landscape gardener Andrew Jackson Downing, were already well known. In a series of essays published between 1849 and 1851 in his influential magazine, *The Horticulturalist*, Downing argued that every modern city needed a public park of 500 acres or more in order to convey to its visitors "a real feeling of the breadth and beauty of green fields" and "the perfume and freshness of nature."[66] By 1850, New York's population exceeded half a million, and for many residents, "green fields" were but a memory. Downing advocated a park that could

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[61] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 406.
[62] "City Intelligence," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, April 4, 1855, 1.
[63] *Journal of the Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: W.F. Storey, 1857), 7.
[64] "Common Council," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, July 13, 1855, 1.
[65] "Common Council," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, July 27, 1855, 1.
[66] Andrew Jackson Downing, "The New York Park (1851)," in *Andrew Jackson Downing: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 240.

reintroduce the denizens of the city to nature while also civilizing them. Like a rural cemetery, a proper public park, in Downing's estimation, would encompass a vast expanse of wooded hills cut through by shaded walks, country roads, broad lawns, flowering gardens, and shimmering ponds. Like a private pleasure garden, a public park would offer music and refreshments that would stimulate the senses and attract crowds. However, the public park would operate on a more elevated moral plane. The grounds of the park might feature statuary, a zoological garden, an art museum, or an exhibition hall—edifying institutions with the capacity to "soften and humanize the rude, educate and enlighten the ignorant, and give continual enjoyment to the educated."[67] Visitors could socialize freely, gathering in the park "to meet, sip their tea and coffee, ices, or other refreshments from tables in the open air, talk, walk about, listen to bands of admirable music stationed here and there."[68] Most importantly, unlike the rural cemetery or the pleasure garden, public parks would always be run as "public enjoyments, open to all classes of people, provided at public cost, maintained at public expense, and enjoyed daily and hourly by all classes of persons."[69]

In 1855, Detroit's Common Council briefly eyed the farm of ex-Governor William Woodbridge as a suitable site for such a park. The Woodbridge farm featured extensive apple orchards as well as the "Woodbridge Grove," a popular picnic grounds and beer garden where political rallies were often held.[70] But the aldermen declined to buy it. With about 30,000 residents in 1855, Detroit was growing quickly, but it was not anywhere near as crowded or as large as New York City, and residents could still easily

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[67] Andrew Jackson Downing, "A Talk About Public Parks and Gardens (1848)," in *Andrew Jackson Downing: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 219.
[68] Andrew Jackson Downing, "A Talk About Public Parks and Gardens (1848)," in *Andrew Jackson Downing: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 218.
[69] Andrew Jackson Downing, "A Talk About Public Parks and Gardens (1848)," in *Andrew Jackson Downing: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 216.
[70] J.C. Holmes, "The Early History of Horticulture in Michigan," in *Michigan Historical Collections*, vol. 10, ed. Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan (Lansing, MI: Thorp & Godfrey, 1888), 70-72; and Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 351.

walk to the countryside.[71] The aldermen also rejected using tax dollars to buy private land for parkland—a use of public funds not yet authorized by the state legislature. Furthermore, they rejected Downing's vision of a good park as necessarily expansive, pastoral, and open to all classes. Whereas Downing saw public parks as potential rivals to private pleasure gardens—similarly expansive and open to the masses, but more edifying in nature—the Common Council instead conceived of public parks as city-owned gardens that should express beauty and order. Such "beauty spots" were recognized as an important public good, but not one worth considerable expense.

1855-1865: The Limits of Privatism

Moving forward, park expansion would depend not on government spending but instead on the city's landowners, who could deed parkland to the city, if they so chose, when they platted their farmland for development. This is also how Chicago acquired its first parkland in the 1840s.[72] Yet following this practice would prove to have serious limitations—with respect to the kind of land collected, its location, its number, and the acrimonious feelings it would arouse among competing real estate developers.

Francis and Cynthia Crawford were the first to donate parkland in Detroit when they subdivided their ribbon farm on the city's western edge in 1850. At the urging of their real estate agents, William B. Wesson and Albert Crane, the Crawfords agreed to donate two small, oval-shaped parcels to the city: Elton Park, at Fifth and High, and Crawford Park, at Fifth and Orchard (shown in Figure 4 as they were first platted). For more than a century, these parks would mark the eastern edge of the Corktown neighborhood.[73] Other park donations followed. Lewis Cass—at the time the Secretary

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[71] Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998), https://www.census.gov/.

[72] Julia S. Bachrach, *The City in a Garden: A History of Chicago's Parks*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2012), 6.

[73] Both parks are now lost. Crawford Park was removed to make way for the interchange of I-75 and M-10. Elton Park is now part of the site of MGM Grand casino. The realtors who created the parks, Wesson and Crane, developed national reputations for being the first to sell plots of land through long-term contracts that required little money down up front, which made home ownership affordable to more of the middle class. Clarence M. Burton, ed., *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, vol. 1 (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 652.

of State under President James Buchanan and Michigan's most prominent politician and landowner—donated the land for Cass Park when he platted his farm in 1860. Stephen K. Stanton donated the land for Stanton and Macomb parks in 1861. The brothers T.J. and Daniel J. Campau donated the land for Adelaide Campau Park 1865.[74]

[74] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 434.

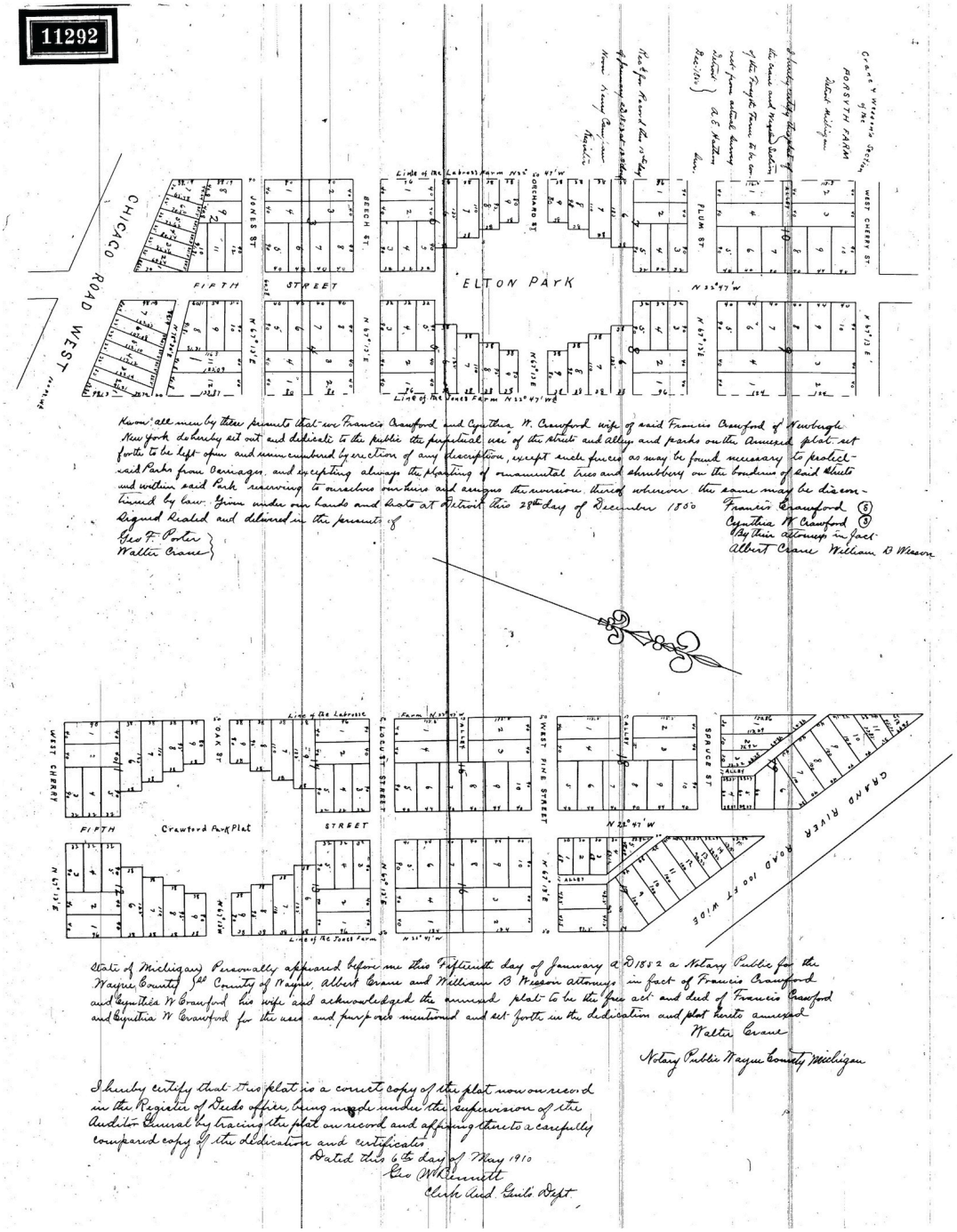

Figure 4: Elton and Crawford Park Plats, 1850.[75]

[75] "Crane and Wesson's Section of the Forsyth Farm," Wayne County, Michigan, recorded January 15, 1853, Statewide Search for Subdivision Plats, accessed August 3, 2018, http://w1.lara.state.mi.us/PlatMaps/dt_image.asp?BCC_SUBINDEX=11292.

These donations fit a pattern. They were marginal spots of land too soggy to build on. Elton Park and Crawford Park were the sites of a spring and a bog hole that fed into a tributary of May's Creek.[76] Cass Park was a slough further upstream. Like other wetlands, it had become a dumping ground. Dead dogs and horses were submerged in its muck. By deeding the slough to the city, Cass sought "to enlist the authorities in the suppression of the nuisance."[77] Like other land developers, Cass also sought to profit. By giving the slough to the city, Cass shifted the burden of improvement to the public sector while at the same time raising the value of his adjacent landholdings. By accepting the deed, the Common Council agreed to improve the park "without unnecessary delay," maintain the park "in good order and condition," and "from time to time … continue the improvements, on a scale commensurate with the growth of the city."[78] In other words, the deed required annual expenditures in perpetuity. It also included a reversion clause. If public investment in the park ever ceased, the land and "all improvements" would revert to Cass or his heirs "as if no dedication had ever been made."[79]

In effect, such deeds required the Common Council to subsidize new growth at the expense of older neighborhoods. In order to retain donated land, the council had to prioritize parks in areas where no one yet resided, on the outskirts of town, while most residents continued to live in tightly packed neighborhoods closer to the river without open space.[80] As a result, park donations were often met with opposition. The Common Council nearly rejected the deed to Cass Park. Opponents then fought for years to minimize spending on the new park. In 1868, eight years after the deed was accepted, an inspector counted 275 dead trees in the park and lamented its "wet and filthy condition," which was exacerbated by "cows being allowed continually to graze therein."[81] Parks without restrictive deeds fared little better. Most public parks were maintained on an ad hoc basis—sometimes by volunteers. A neighbor arranged to mow the grass at West

[76] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 405.
[77] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 406.
[78] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, July 12, 1860, 4.
[79] "The Cass Park. The Deed of Conveyance from General Cass to the City," *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 1860, 1.
[80] Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 122.
[81] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, April 1, 1868, 1.

Park in exchange for the clippings, which he fed to his cattle.[82] So while leaders like LeRoy had succeeded in developing a small park system, parks remained a low priority for the city government, and their placement and improvement had more to do with developing new neighborhoods than serving the laborers in existing ones.

To the extent that any of the parks were kept in good order, the Common Council did so with the city's reputation and public image foremost in mind, rather than the needs of its residents. In contrast to Downing's vision of public parks as places of refined entertainment and social mingling—with music and refreshments at hand—the first ordinance governing "Public Parks and Places" in Detroit, enacted June 12, 1861, enforced the principle that parks were to be seen and appreciated but not touched. The ordinance specified that within the white picket fence enclosing each park, "no person shall play at any game, or sport," "no person shall stand, walk, or lie upon any part of a public park or space, laid out and appropriated for grass or shrubbery," and "no person shall hang, post, place, or put any bill, notice, sign, placard, carpet, or other incumbrance."[83] In this sense, public parks were far more restrictive than private picnic groves, which were frequently used to host political rallies, sporting events, and outdoor concerts, and where patrons could purchase beer and refreshments. The ordinance also forbade the dumping of rubbish—a constant problem for the Campus Martius, which had no fence.[84] The rest of the parks were generally kept under lock and key. East Park was enclosed by a tall picket fence and its grounds were given over to "a lordly buck and two sleek does," which roamed the park for more than a decade.[85] The gates to Grand Circus Park were open only on Sunday afternoons.[86] The Superintendent of Parks—first appointed in 1864—enforced the rules of decorum. He could punish anyone who disobeyed the park rules with fines up to $100 and jail time up to six months.[87]

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[82] "Further From the Committee on Parks," Detroit Free Press, June 1, 1860, 4.
[83] "Chapter XXXV. Of Public Parks and Places," *Ordinances of the City of Detroit, Revised and Published by Order of the Common Council* (Detroit, MI: Walker, Barns & Co., 1864), 83-84.
[84] "Local Intelligence. Of Parks and Avenues," *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 1864, 1.
[85] "Police! Police! See the Design for the New Headquarters of the Department!," *Detroit Free Press*, September 2, 1883, 9.
[86] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 430.
[87] "Chapter XXXV. Of Public Parks and Places,"*Ordinances of the City of Detroit, Revised and Published by Order of the Common Council* (Detroit, MI: Walker, Barns & Co., 1864), 84.

Attitudes toward public parkland began to liberalize in the 1860s as the town became more crowded and as word spread of successful parks in other cities—especially Central Park in New York. When the first public grounds were landscaped as parks in the early 1850s, Detroit had just over 20,000 residents. By the end of the 1860s, Detroit would have nearly 80,000 residents.[88] Every day, new immigrants were coming by ship and rail to work as sawyers, smelters, brewers, and ship builders at the factories that had sprung up throughout the city, especially since the onset of the Civil War, which boomed Detroit's economy. In recognition of this demographic reality, the Common Council sought out larger plots of land that could accommodate the overflow of people. Yet legal obstacles and political dissension stopped the park system from developing much further.

After the Civil War, existing parks were improved for public use. In 1865, Elton Park, Center Park, and West Grand Circus Park were furnished with seats for the first time and opened to the public until 10 p.m. each day. The Committee on Parks announced the change in the newspaper, noting, "police officers will be present to preserve good order."[89] In 1866, wealthy patrons sponsored the first summer concert series in West Grand Circus Park.[90] In 1867, all of the park fountains were upgraded, and in May of 1868, park hours were extended to 10 p.m. citywide.[91] Then, in August, the council voted to create a new park by repurposing the grounds of the City Cemetery—just as Chicago had recently done, converting its City Cemetery into Lincoln Park.[92] Detroit's City Cemetery occupied a block on the eastern edge of the town bounded by Gratiot, St. Antoine, Clinton, and Raynor streets. Although it lacked the landscaping and embellishments of Elmwood Cemetery, it had still become a popular gathering spot. According to historian Silas Farmer, "scores and hundreds of children and grown people, on pleasant Sabbaths, wandered about the grounds, reading and comparing the tombstone

[88] Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998), https://www.census.gov/.
[89] "To the Public," *Detroit Free Press*, July 20, 1865, 2.
[90] "To Be Closed," *Detroit Free Press*, August 4, 1866, 5.
[91] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1868, 1.
[92] Lois Wille, *Forever Open, Clear and Free: The Struggle for Chicago's Lakefront* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 41-42.

inscriptions."[93] By 1868, the cemetery could no longer accommodate new burials, so the Common Council voted to reinter the graves on a new site. The decommissioning of the cemetery enabled its rededication as Clinton Park on August 7, 1868.[94] In 1869, the council made another move to expand access to parkland by finally agreeing to drain the waterlogged Cass Park—an improvement it made, by one account, only after adjacent property owners agreed to tax themselves to drain their own properties first.[95]

Yet legally and practically, park expansion could not proceed further without political reform. No other surplus public property was available for park development, and no private land could be condemned for park use until the city obtained new powers from the state of Michigan: the authority to purchase land for park purposes and the authority to issue bonds to pay for it. The Common Council was also hesitant to allow existing public parks to be used for recreation. In 1863, aldermen agreed to open an ice skating rink at Woodward and Duffield Street (now the northern service drive of I-75) at the former site of the state fairgrounds. This was the first municipal sponsorship of public recreation. Yet rather than run it as a public park, the Common Council chose to lease the land to a private company, which operated the rink as an exclusive, for-profit, members-only club. Fully private athletic clubs, like the Detroit Boat Club and the Peninsula Cricket Club, were even more exclusive, with membership limited to the scions of the city's wealthiest families.[96] Acquiring land for new public parks and boulevards, and opening up those facilities to the working class, would require a decades-long fight. That fight and its consequences are the focus of Chapter 2.

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[93] Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 55.
[94] Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 73.
[95] Donald Z. Danuloff, "The Acquisition of Belle Isle and the Grand Boulevard Project: A Study of Two Aspects of the Expansion of the Governmental Functions of the City of Detroit" (master's thesis, Wayne State University, 1966) 15.
[96] Ken Voyles and Mary Rodrique, *The Enduring Legacy of the Detroit Athletic Club: Driving the Motor City* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 10-14.

Conclusion

In keeping with its rising commercial stature, Detroit had a growing number of landscaped spaces and facilities for private leisure by the end of the Civil War. Thanks to the Woodward Plan, which set aside public grounds, the city center included small parks every few blocks: Campus Martius, East and West Grand Circus Parks, Center Park, East Park, West Park, and North Park. Real estate developers donated land for Crawford Park, Elton Park, Cass Park, Stanton Park, Macomb Park, and Campau Park on spots of marshy ground in newly platted neighborhoods built within a short walking distance of the central business district. The Common Council also converted an east side cemetery into Clinton Park. In addition to these spaces managed by the Common Council's Committee on Parks, Detroit also included a range of private groves and pleasure grounds, steamboat destinations like Belle Isle, a rural cemetery, and private athletic clubs, including the Detroit Boat Club, for young men of privilege. This landscape of greenery and leisure was typical, if not above average, for a mid-nineteenth-century American city.

Yet this landscape's reliance on private beneficence limited its reach. Public parks were small and oriented toward elite enjoyment, with strict restrictions on their use. Park maintenance was a low budget priority. Because the city depended on donations and prior landholdings, the parks were located inside or adjacent to the planned center of the city, which emerged as Detroit's commercial heart and where many of the wealthiest residents resided. The most congested and polluted neighborhoods—older areas like the east riverfront district where poorer residents lived amidst factories—had no parks at all. As was typical for the time period, the provision of recreational facilities was not yet considered a public responsibility, and the city provided none, although it did allow a private corporation to open a members-only ice-skating rink on public land. Yet as the next chapter will explore, the consensus position on privatism—that parks and recreational spaces should be provided with minimal public involvement, if at all—began to shift after the Civil War as a faction of elite real estate developers, politicians, and businessmen pushed the city and state to follow the precedent set in New York and issue debt to build a system of landscaped parks and boulevards—whether to spur suburban growth, as some hoped, or improve the lives of working people, as others advocated.

Chapter 2: Landscaped Parks and Boulevards (1865-1900)

When Detroit's Common Council passed on the opportunity to purchase the Woodbridge Grove as a park in 1855, New York's Central Park was still just a proposal. The city of New York had used the power of eminent domain to buy the land and expel more than 1,600 residents, but a design had not yet been chosen and construction had not begun.[1] Ten years later, Central Park was a landmark achievement. Thousands of men labored in the park before and during the Civil War, hauling dirt, blasting rock, dredging swamps, and planting trees and flowers, gradually turning a landscape of hard-scrabble farms into the pastoral paradise that Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux envisioned in their brilliant "Greensward Plan." By the end of the Civil War, the completed portions of Central Park were generating nationwide praise as landscapes unlike any other in the country. Within Central Park, visitors found they could refresh their health by breathing the fresh air and exploring the bucolic scenery, or they could socialize and see-and-be-seen. Other East Coast cities, including Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston, hurriedly funded their own landscaped parks to match.[2] In the same period, Olmsted also helped spark interest in the conservation of extraordinary scenery where it naturally occurred. In 1864, the federal government made its first commitment to conservation, transferring control of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove to the state of California. As chairman of Yosemite's first park commission, Olmsted urged the board to protect the

[1] In 1857, the Republican-dominated New York legislature took over management of Central Park from the Democratic-leaning city government through the appointment of a state-appointed Board of Commissioners. This board hired Frederick Law Olmsted as Park Superintendent and promoted him to Architect in Chief after he and Calvert Vaux won the competition to design the park. Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 268-273.

[2] David Schuyler, "Cities and Parks: The Lessons of Central Park," *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 101-125.

land's scenic qualities from inappropriate development.[3] Together, these two precedents—the engineering of Central Park as a rustic landscape and the conservation of Yosemite's awe-inspiring scenery—redefined what a "park" could mean in the United States, whether in the city or the hinterland, and prefigured a wave of park building to follow.

Yet it was not just the aesthetic or social qualities of these parks that convinced so many civic leaders to champion the construction of landscaped parks in their own cities after the Civil War. By building Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux had also shown that public parks could be used to reorganize and expand the American city. If carefully planned in relation to nearby streets, a park could do more than serve as a sylvan retreat to uplift people of all classes, as Andrew Jackson Downing had argued. A park could do more than improve public health by providing access to fresh air and opportunities for relaxation. According to Olmsted and Vaux, a park could also raise and sustain property values through the cultivation of a new type of suburban landscape.[4]

This idea animated three reports that Olmsted published between 1868 and 1869. Asked to design Prospect Park in Brooklyn, the suburb of Riverside outside of Chicago, and a park in Buffalo, Olmsted outlined a similar vision in each case.[5] For each commission, Olmsted proposed building one or more landscaped parks, but whereas Central Park had stood alone as a singular destination, these parks would be linked with

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[3] Dayton Duncan, *Seed of the Future: Yosemite and the Evolution of the National Park Idea* (San Francisco: Yosemite Conservancy, 2013), 72-79; Rolf Diamant, "Lincoln, Olmsted, and Yosemite: Time for a Closer Look," *George Wright Forum* 31, no. 1 (2014): 10-16; and Frederick Law Olmsted, "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove," in Larry M. Dilsaver, ed., *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 5-20.

[4] For more on the importance of raising property values to early park building, see Catherine McNeur, "Parks, People, and Property Values," *Journal of Planning History*, 2016: 2, doi:10.1177/1538513216657563. For more on the dream of constructing a suburban metropolis around parks and parkways, see David M. Scobey, *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

[5] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Report of the Landscape Architects and Superintendents to the President of the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, Brooklyn (1868)" in *Landscape Into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted's Plans for a Greater New York City*, ed. Albert Fein (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 129-164; Frederick Law Olmsted, *Preliminary Report Upon the Proposed Suburban Village at Riverside, Near Chicago* (New York, NY: Sutton, Bowne & Co., 1868); and Frederick Law Olmsted, *Preliminary Report Respecting a Public Park in Buffalo, and a Copy of the Act of the Legislature Authorizing Its Establishment* (Buffalo, NY: Printing House of Matthews & Warren, 1869).

other major parks to form a regional chain. To connect the parks, Olmsted proposed a network of parkways: broad avenues, lined with trees, with multiple rights of way, including a tree-lined promenade for pedestrians in the median, pleasure drives on either side for carriages, and, where appropriate, additional lanes on the edges for local traffic. Olmsted took his inspiration for parkways from the boulevards of Paris, but he adapted the form to its American context. In place of the Parisian apartment building, Olmsted pictured a line of stately single-family homes. Elite residential neighborhoods would also encircle each of the parks, allowing the upper middle class to enjoy easy access to the city without sacrificing the visual stimulus of the countryside. The net effect of building parks and parkways would be to transform each city into a suburban metropolis.[6]

The appeal of this vision is evident by the number of state legislatures that took up "park and boulevard" bills in the ensuing years. Illinois was among the first, creating the Lincoln, South, and West park commissions in 1869 with the objective of building an integrated network of parks and parkways throughout the Chicago region.[7] In 1870, the state of California authorized the San Francisco Park Commission, the state of Louisiana authorized the New Orleans Park Commission, and the state of Massachusetts authorized the Boston Parks Commission.[8] The state of Michigan followed suit in 1871, creating a commission with the authority to build parks and boulevards in Detroit. Many more states created park and boulevard commissions in the following two decades. Yet the success of these park commissions varied widely. In cooperation with their state legislatures, some cities made substantial public investments in the construction of landscaped parks and boulevards. Yet in many American cities, including Detroit, privatism still prevailed, and public investments in parkland remained quite modest, with park and boulevard commissions given little power and less funding.

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[6] Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 126-133; and Elizabeth MacDonald, "Structuring a Landscape, Structuring a Sense of Place: The Enduring Complexity of Olmsted and Vaux's Brooklyn Parkways," *Journal of Urban Design* 7, no. 2 (2002): 117-143. doi: 10.1080/1357480022000012203.

[7] Julia S. Bachrach, *The City in a Garden: A History of Chicago's Parks*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2012), 8-9.

[8] Randolph S. Delehanty, "San Francisco Parks and Playgrounds, 1839 to 1990: The History of a Public Good in One North American City" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 1992), 160; Craig E. Colton, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 73; and Stephen Hardy, "'Parks for the People': Reforming the Boston Park System, 1870-1915," *Journal of Sport History* 7, no. 3 (1980): 7.

This chapter details the factors that continued to limit public investment in parkland after the Civil War. Like park proponents in rival cities, boosters in Detroit began petitioning for the power to build a park, a boulevard, or both in the late 1860s. In the long run, these boosters produced new state legislation, a new city charter, new patterns of development, and new fortunes, in addition to the city's most beloved public park, Belle Isle, and one of its most controversial road projects, the Grand Boulevard. Yet achieving those victories would take more than two decades, a period in which all park acquisition ceased, despite the city's steady growth in both area and population. Neither the park nor the boulevard was authorized until 1879, and most improvements did not begin in earnest for another decade. Why? In order to expand public investment, the city first needed to win new powers from state government: the power to take land for park purposes, the power to do so beyond municipal boundaries, and the power to issue debt to pay for land acquisition and improvement. Winning these powers also required settling arguments about the proper purpose and distribution of parks: where they should be located, how they should be designed, how many were necessary and of what size, and whose interests they would serve. In Detroit, as in many cities, the debate over the "Park Question" pitted park proponents against boulevard proponents rather than uniting them in a single cause for planned suburban growth as Olmsted advocated. While the city ultimately developed Belle Isle into one of the premier public parks in the country, Detroit's leaders could not reach consensus on the larger vision that animated the development of leading park systems in cities like New York, Boston, and Minneapolis.

1865-1874: The Park Question

In the late 1860s, leading landowners and reformers in Detroit began calling for the construction of a public park, a boulevard, or both. Yet they failed to produce public investment in either for a full decade. The delay was partly due to disagreement over the merits of the projects. Not all aldermen agreed that parks or boulevards were necessary. However, disagreements over governance and finance were more serious obstacles, as the "Park Question" became embroiled in a larger debate over the proper division of powers between local and state governments and over the prudence of issuing debt to finance

public works—debates that were shaped by national events, including the exposure of the Tweed Ring in New York in 1871 and then the onset of a long recession in 1873.

Detroit's Common Council first appointed a special committee to pursue the acquisition of a landscaped park in 1868.[9] In keeping with the precedent set in New York, where a state-appointed commission had managed the building of Central Park since 1857, the committee proposed state legislation in 1869 that would authorize the city to borrow $200,000 to purchase parkland—more than the city had hitherto invested in all of its smaller parks combined.[10] In August, the council unanimously adopted a complementary resolution "directing the Commissioners on the Plan of the City and the City Surveyor to report upon the feasibility of the laying out and construction of a grand avenue or boulevard of a semi-circular or curved form."[11] Like one of Olmsted's parkways, the envisioned boulevard would be 200 feet wide—wide enough to accommodate two lanes for horse-drawn carriages, a tree-lined promenade down the middle, and tree-lined sidewalks on either edge—and it would encircle the outer limits of the city, in the hopes of making farmland profitable to plat and develop. However, the state legislature declined to act on either bill, and the issue lay dormant for another year.[12]

Park and boulevard supporters tried again when the next legislature convened. In 1871, the mayor, William W. Wheaton, used his annual address to urge the purchase of a landscaped park. The park, he promised, would "pay its own interest and more in the annual increase in value."[13] A few weeks later, thirty-two leading businessmen published a notice for a meeting "to consider the expediency of purchasing suitable grounds for a public park; also in regard to laying out and constructing a grand avenue of boulevard."[14] The signers included many of the largest landowners in the three townships bordering

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[9] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, November 25, 1868, 1.
[10] "Common Council. Special Meeting for the Consideration of Charter Amendments," *Detroit Free Press*, February 5, 1869, 1.
[11] "Proposed Boulevard. Detroit Grand Avenue and Pleasure Drive," *Detroit Free Press*, August 22, 1869.
[12] "Common Council. Special Meeting for the Consideration of Charter Amendments," *Detroit Free Press*, February 5, 1869, 1; and Clarence M. Burton, "A History of Belle Isle," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 454.
[13] William W. Wheaton, "Annual Message of the Mayor," in *Annual Reports of the City of Detroit, 1871* (Detroit, MI: Daily Post Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1871), 8.
[14] "A Public Park—Call for a Public Meeting," *Detroit Free Press*, January 22, 1871, 1.

Detroit: Springwells to the west, Greenfield to the north, and Hamtramck to the east. At the meeting, a split became clear between supporters of the two projects. Whereas Olmsted promoted parks and parkways as necessarily linked, most of the assembled men supported only one project or the other, not both. The organizers began the meeting by reading a resolution that favored the construction of "a circular park or boulevard."[15] A boulevard, they argued, obviated the need for a standalone park because the boulevard would itself be landscaped and accessible from all parts of the city. As one supporter put it: "The city needs a park. Well, the boulevard is a park to all intents and purposes, and would accommodate a larger proportion of the people every evening or at any time than any park could do."[16] George V.N. Lothrop, a former Attorney General of Michigan and prominent Democrat, countered that the city needed a park not to furnish a pleasure drive but to create a place of refuge for laborers and their families. "The time is coming," he said, "when those who *do not drive* will want a retreat for shade, for walks, for picnicking, where fathers and mothers and children may go for recreation."[17] Although a majority favored a boulevard over a park, the men agreed to form a committee, composed of both landowners and elected officials, to write legislation that could authorize a public commission to purchase land for a park, a boulevard, or both, as the commission saw fit.

Lothrop joined the private committee and prepared legislation on its behalf. His bill would enable the Common Council to appoint a six-member commission "to adopt plans for a public park, or boulevard, or both, with the necessary avenues or approaches thereto."[18] The commission could issue up to $200,000 in bonds and purchase up to 500 acres of land, subject to the approval of the Common Council, the mayor, and a majority of citizens at a public meeting. Once the land was purchased, the commission could spend up to $50,000 per year to improve it. The Common Council passed a resolution endorsing Lothrop's bill and forwarded it to the legislature. This time, it was quickly approved, becoming law on April 15, 1871. Yet to the surprise of some of the aldermen

[15] "Citizens Meeting. Important Public Improvements Proposed," *Detroit Free Press*, January 25, 1871.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid. Lothrop himself retreated to a 130-acre, lakeside estate in Grosse Pointe each summer. He was among the first wealthy Detroiters to build a cottage there in the 1850s.
[18] "Parks and Boulevard. The Adjourned Citizens' Meeting Last Evening," *Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1871, 1.

who had endorsed it, the approved act named the first six commissioners to the board, including Lothrop himself, usurping the mayor's right to nominate the board.[19]

Soon it became clear that the Park Act had been amended as part of a broader effort to consolidate state control over metropolitan development. Three days after the passage of the Park Act, the legislature passed a complementary act creating a metropolitan Board of Public Works. Not only would this new board oversee any new parks or boulevards that the Park Commission might create, it would also take control of all existing municipal infrastructure, including public sewers, drains, water works, hydrants, pipes, reservoirs, streets, parks, and public grounds. Furthermore, like the Park Commission, its initial board members were named in the act, half Republicans and half Democrats, and these members would serve terms as long as eight years in office, giving the state near-term control over all public works in Detroit and its adjoining townships.[20]

These acts sparked a backlash among local elected officials. Before the new Board of Public Works could hold its first meeting in August, a judge issued an injunction against it until the courts could rule on its legality.[21] George V.N. Lothrop represented the legislature's side in court, defending the state's right to appoint commissioners to local boards. At the same time, Lothrop began convening the park commission as though its legality were not also in doubt. At the first meeting, in April, Lothrop was named chair, and at his direction, the commission immediately moved to request bids for a park.[22] In his request for proposals, Lothrop again made clear his preference for a park to the exclusion of a boulevard, arguing that parks were both a social balm and public right: "Public parks for large cities are not mere pleasure grounds and costly public luxuries, but public necessities. Their utility has been recognized through all the ages of civilization…the public health, moral as well as physical, requires them. Any principal of sanitary law demands them. The poor, the sick, and the children cry out for them. The prolonged existence of the thousands who are born, live, [and] die within the walls or limits of large towns depends upon these 'public lungs.' The millions that people our great cities cannot each have the costly private grounds, nor even the

[19] "The City Park Bill," *Detroit Free Press*, March 7, 1871, 2.
[20] "The Public Works Bill," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1871, 3.
[21] "The Board of Public Works," *Detroit Free Press*, August 6, 1871, 1.
[22] "The Detroit Park Commission," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1871, 1.

simple 'door-yard' and garden, but all may have, own, and enjoy in common, one still grander and better, a public 'door-yard' and garden, towards which the doors of the whole city open."[23]

As the lawsuit over the Board of Public Works made its way through the courts, the Park Commission kept meeting. In October, the members chose a 450-acre plot of land three miles east of the city center in Hamtramck Township.[24] The boundaries, as depicted by the *Detroit Free Press* in Figure 5, were Jefferson, Van Dyke, Mack, and Holcomb Street—an area that encompasses the neighborhood now known as Indian Village, as well as the streets immediately west and east of it. Robert Burns and John Owen owned most of the proposed park, which was little-used farmland with substantial native tree cover and a view of the Detroit River.[25] The bid also came with $15,000 in pledges from nearby property owners, who promised that if the site were selected, they would extend the park across Jefferson Avenue to the river's edge at their own expense, making the park approachable by ferry.[26] The park was already accessible by two avenues, Jefferson and Mack, which could be widened and landscaped as boulevards.

[23] *Minutes of the Parks and Boulevard Commission*, 1871-80, 49, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, as quoted in Joseph S. Cialdella, "Gardens in the Machine: Cultural and Environmental Change in Detroit, 1879-2010" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 33.
[24] "The Public Park," *Detroit Free Press*, October 5, 1871, 1.
[25] Burns was a member of the legislature and a vocal supporter of the choice of park. As one of his contemporaries later wrote, "Mr. Burns may have been a bit selfish in his efforts, as it would undoubtedly have enhanced the value of the adjoining property, which was owned by Mr. Owen and himself." Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 403.
[26] "The Public Park," *Detroit Free Press*, August 24, 1871, 1.

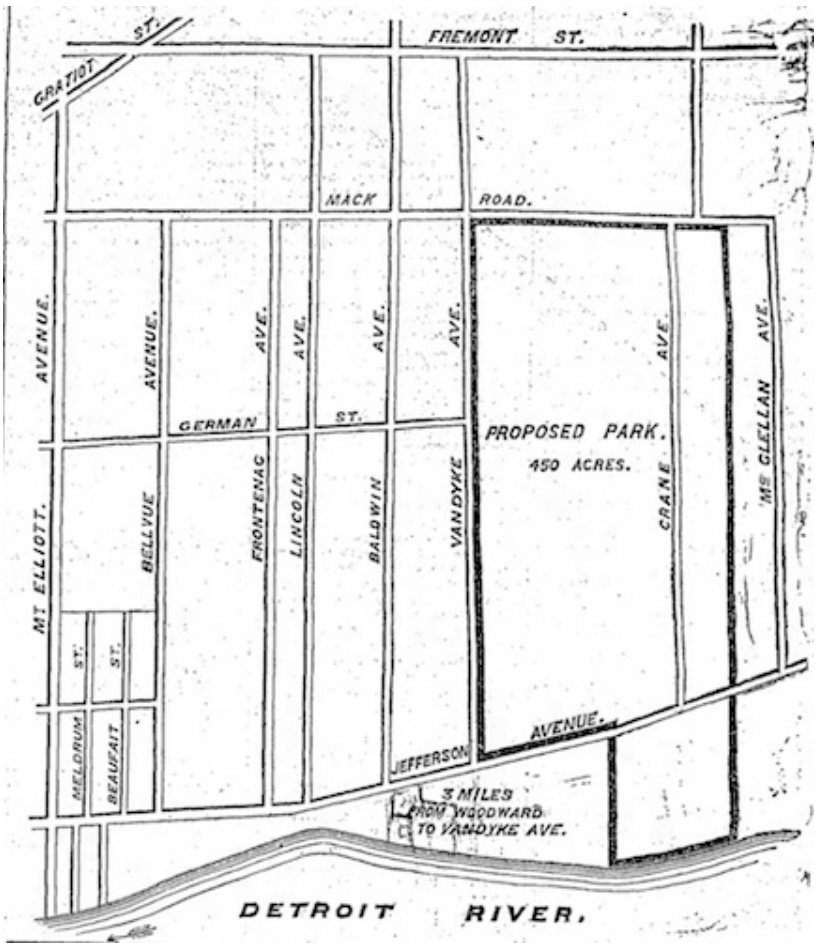

Figure 5: The proposed boundaries of Hamtramck Park in 1873.[27]

On December 8, 1871, the Common Council approved the new park over objections from property owners on the west and north sides of the city, who argued the park would unfairly tip the scales of development toward the city's east side. Their request for three smaller parks linked together by a boulevard—one on the west side, one to the north, and one on the east side—was ignored.[28] Yet a more serious threat to the park cause came not from rival landowners but instead from the courts. On November 29, 1871, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled the Board of Public Works unconstitutional, arguing that the state did not have the right to create an un-elected board with the power to compel the city to issue debt and spend tax dollars. The power of the purse belonged to local elected officials. In light of the decision, Mayor Wheaton, a park supporter,

[27] "The Park," *Detroit Free Press*, March 30, 1873, 1.
[28] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 403.

decided to veto the resolution authorizing the purchase of the park.[29] Wheaton conceded that the chosen site would make a suitable park, but he argued the Park Commission itself had operated unlawfully because the legislature had selected its members when he himself should have had the right to nominate them. However, a majority of the Common Council disagreed with his position. Satisfied with the choice of parkland and eager to move forward with the purchase, they maintained that the Park Act was lawful because unlike the Board of Public Works, the park board could not issue debt or spend money without aldermanic approval. The council granted that approval a second time, overriding the mayor's veto and forcing Wheaton to convene a public meeting, as required, on December 27, 1871, to make the final decision.[30]

What followed was by all accounts extraordinary. As many as three thousand men showed up in the dead of winter at City Hall to cast their vote on the fate of the park. Some were there to vote no because they opposed the particular location that had been chosen, preferring sites on the west side of town or the north side that wouldn't preclude further industrial development of the riverfront. Others opposed parks on principle, preferring a boulevard or nothing at all. Others were there to express their opposition to state influence over local affairs. Others were agnostic on the merits of a park but were opposed to the use of debt to finance public works—a position widely shared after the 1871 exposure of the Tweed Ring revealed the shocking depth of New York's public debt and the misuse of taxpayer funds.[31] On the other side were assembled just as many supporters of the park cause who hoped to see the board move forward with the purchase. Some supporters owned property on Detroit's east side and were eager to see the land rise in value. Many believed the park would make life better for laborers. Others were concerned that without a great park Detroit would fall in stature behind rival cities and lose out on future opportunities for capital investment

The vote was supposed to be held inside the Circuit Court Room of the City Hall, but the mayor moved the meeting outdoors after a brawl broke out inside the packed

[29] "Common Council: The Park Project Protested by the Mayor," *Detroit Free Press*, December 13, 1871, 1.
[30] "Proclamation by the Mayor," *Detroit Free Press*, December 21, 1871, 1.
[31] Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 285-288.

room. A witness recalled the scene as the vote took place: "Those who were in favor of the park were to bunch themselves together on one side of the entrance, and those opposed on the other. The mayor, stationed at an upper window, was to decide. After all had taken their places he took a long and critical look at the assembly beneath him, and decided no park. I was there, and it seems a mighty close squeak."[32] After the chaotic meeting, which the *Detroit Free Press* called "criminally riotous," outraged park supporters demanded a second vote, alleging that many supporters were unable to be seen and counted during the first vote.[33] The next Common Council obliged. On May 1, 1872, an even larger crowd assembled, this time before a new mayor, Henry Moffat, who opposed the park under any condition. According to the press, as many as six thousand men jammed the streets outside the City Hall. The crowd was impossible to control or to count, and Mayor Moffat declared the anti-park side the victor.[34]

After failing to win a clear majority at either of the raucous citizen's meetings, park supporters lobbied to change the rules. In March of 1873, the legislature amended the Park Act to expand the authority of the park board.[35] The revised law allowed the park board to spend up to $300,000 on land acquisition—$100,000 more than before—and, despite the 1871 ruling against the Board of Public Works, it obligated the Common Council to issue debt on the board's behalf without review. The state legislature also voted once again to create a Board of Public Works to oversee all public works in the city, including parks. This time, however, the board's members would be nominated by the mayor and approved by the Common Council. Additionally, like many state legislatures in the fallout from the exposure of the Tweed Ring, the Michigan state legislature also adopted laws restricting the spending power of local government. The state capped the issuance of municipal debt at two percent of a city's total valuation—the strictest standard in the country—and amended Detroit's city charter to permanently replace citizen's meetings with an elected Board of Estimates.[36] For the next four decades, this board would act as a check against the expansion of local government.

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[32] Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Hunt & June, 1906), 404.
[33] "Park Pow-Wow," *Detroit Free Press*, December 28, 1871, 1.
[34] "Park or No Park," *Detroit Free Press*, May 2, 1872, 1.
[35] "Lansing," *Detroit Free Press*, March 12, 1873, 1.
[36] Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 288.

Whereas the Common Council held the power to appropriate tax dollars for any authorized public purpose, the Board of Estimates was given the power to reduce or eliminate any line item in the budget before it became law. The board could also veto municipal bond issues. Board members were democratically elected—two in each ward and five at-large—but the playing field was tilted toward the wealthy, with positions unpaid and restricted to owners of real property, enabling the board to function as an elite check against the power of aldermen, who, although typically businessmen themselves, sometimes came from working-class backgrounds and often represented working-class constituencies.[37]

In August, the newly empowered park board restarted negotiations for the park in Hamtramck.[38] But Lothrop's end-run around local officials provoked a backlash. In April, a bipartisan group of anti-park businessmen took control of the new Board of Estimates.[39] Park opponents also won exactly half the seats on the Common Council—just enough to stop the council from issuing the bonds requested by the park board, in defiance of state law, which made Common Council approval compulsory.[40] Notably, the defiant vote took place just five days after the bankruptcy of Jay Cooke & Company, a major New York banker, which prompted the temporary closure of the New York Stock Exchange and set in motion the Panic of 1873—a panic that would produce a wave of austerity policies restricting municipal debt.[41] After the Common Council's deadlocked vote, the park board asked the Michigan Supreme Court to issue a writ of mandamus to force the council's hand, arguing that the Park Act of 1873 gave the Common Council no choice but to approve the bond issue. In late October, however, the Supreme Court sided with the park opponents, declaring the Park Act of 1873 unconstitutional.[42]

The ruling did not yet kill the park cause. In a letter to the council in early December, Lothrop reminded the aldermen that they still had the authority to issue the park bonds under the Park Act of 1871, which again became law with the repeal of the

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[37] "The Spring Election," *Detroit Free Press*, March 29, 1873, 2.
[38] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, August 13, 1873, 1.
[39] "Anti-Park," *Detroit Free Press*, April 3, 1873, 1; and "The City Election," *Detroit Free Press*, April 8, 1873, 1.
[40] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1873, 1.
[41] David M. Scobey, *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 259.
[42] "The Supreme Court," *Detroit Free Press*, October 29, 1873, 4.

Park Act of 1873, but the Common Council would have to act soon, because the contract for the land in Hamtramck would expire on January 1.[43] Under pressure, the council reversed itself. Having established the constitutional principle that a commission created by the state could not compel the council to issue debt, the council now agreed to do so voluntarily—on the condition that no improvements would be made to the new park until the city had also acquired additional parkland on the west side of the city, a concession made to win support from aldermen whose west side constituents were unlikely to make the journey to a park located three miles east of town.[44] Mayor Moffat immediately vetoed the council's decision, but a supermajority overruled him.[45] Impatient for the park to open at last, the U.S. Representative for Hamtramck Township, Moses W. Field, who owned the ribbon farm west of the proposed park, pledged $5,000 of his own money to start improvements at once. Other landowners chipped in, too.[46] But their efforts were in vain. When the council finally issued the bonds, Mayor Moffat exercised his final veto by refusing to sign them. Without his signature, the bonds were not legally valid. Moffat also refused to appoint new park commissioners to fill vacancies on the board, thereby depriving it of a quorum. Lothrop asked the Michigan Supreme Court to force the mayor to sign the bonds and appoint new commissioners, but the court effectively sided with Moffat by declining to hear the case, and with that decision, in May of 1874, the park effort finally failed after three bitter years of legal wrangling.[47] With the Panic of 1873 deepening into a long-term depression, the park cause was seemingly stymied.

1874-1879: Belle Isle and the Boulevard

In the wake of the court's decision, park proponents in Detroit saw two possible ways forward. One was to acquire a park in the name of another cause: constructing a modern waterworks. While some businessmen and politicians derided park spending as frivolous, nearly all were united in the belief that Detroit needed a new waterworks to

[43] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, December 6, 1873, 1.
[44] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press,* December 10, 1873, 1.
[45] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press,* December 17, 1873, 1.
[46] "The Park," *Detroit Free Press*, December 27, 1873, 1; and "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, January 10, 1874, 1.
[47] "The Supreme Court," *Detroit Free Press*, May 13, 1874, 1.

protect public health. Park proponents saw an opportunity to landscape the grounds of any new waterworks as a park, as Philadelphia had done with Fairmount Park. In 1874, the Common Council entertained a number of properties along the Detroit River as possible sites, including a riverfront property east of the proposed Hamtramck Park and Belle Isle, the privately owned island pleasure ground.[48] Those who favored the island said it represented a three-for-one deal. Not only could Belle Isle host a waterworks, it could also serve as a beautiful public park—after all, it was already a popular venue for picnics, sporting events, and soirees—and it was *also* large enough to accommodate a rail bridge or tunnel to Canada. Buying Belle Isle could therefore solve three of the most contentious issues in 1870s Detroit politics: siting a landscaped park, distributing clean water, and beating rival cities in the race to link the railways of Michigan to the railways of Ontario and New York. Intrigued by the Belle Isle proposal, the Common Council went so far as to request the purchase price.[49] Ultimately, however, the council opted for the riverfront site on Jefferson because it would be easier to engineer. Bowing to pressure from park opponents and fiscal conservatives, the council also made assurances that public money would not be used to beautify the grounds of the new waterworks as a landscaped park.[50] That led park supporters back to the proposal first advanced by businessmen in 1869: building a network of small parks linked together by a boulevard—a proposal that could be advanced, to start, through private initiative.

With the park commission disbanded and the economy anemic, Representative Field of Hamtramck took it upon himself to jumpstart the park and boulevard enterprise himself. A successful wholesale grocer and manufacturer, Field had begun speculating in suburban real estate in the mid-1860s, buying up farmland in Springwells Township to the west of Detroit and Hamtramck Township to the east. Knowing that parkland could raise the value of his holdings, Field became an enthusiastic backer of landscape projects of all kinds. In 1867, he co-founded Woodmere Cemetery in Springwells Township, giving the west side a rural cemetery to match Elmwood Cemetery on the east.[51] In 1868, he unsuccessfully bid on a riverfront farm near his property in Springwells with the

[48] "The Water Works," *Detroit Free Press*, April 10, 1874, 1.
[49] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, April 22, 1874, 1.
[50] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, August 19, 1874, 1.
[51] "Local Matters," *Detroit Free Press*, August 9, 1867, 1.

intention of donating it to Detroit as Lincoln Park, in honor of the late president.[52] In 1871, he tried again, offering to sell a different riverfront farm he had acquired in Springwells to the park commission.[53] When the park commission winnowed the competition down to two other bids, Field threw his weight behind the Hamtramck site because he owned the ribbon farm just west of it. Hoping to sway the commission, Field was the one who solicited $15,000 in pledges to extend the Hamtramck site to the riverfront. When city officials refused to fund the park after it was chosen, Field circulated a petition to have Hamtramck Township annexed to the City of Detroit and offered to start improving the park at his own expense—all to no avail.[54]

Finally, in July of 1875, Field decided to create his own park. He offered the city a 33-acre parcel across the street from his Hamtramck farmhouse to be dedicated as Linden Park. The parcel was bounded by what are now the streets of Kercheval, Field, Mack, and Townsend. Like the rejected Hamtramck park, Field's property sat on a ridge above the Detroit River and was forested with native trees, including "maple, oaks (several varieties), hickory, butternut, sassafras, elm, beach, tulip, balm-of-gilead and linden."[55] The latter species gave the park its name. Field promised to hire a surveyor and landscape gardener to ensure that "walks, drives, rustic bridges, fountains, etc., are plentifully arranged."[56] Like philanthropists before him, Field also expected to profit from the donation. By the time the Common Council accepted the deed in November of 1875, Field had already auctioned off the majority of the lots facing the promised park.[57]

The deed to the park came with an unnoticed stipulation. To keep the land, the city would have to spend $3,000 dollars per year on its improvement—in perpetuity. If the city ever failed to invest, the park would revert to Field's ownership. When the clause came to light, the council chose to invest nothing instead.[58] In March of 1876, Field offered to renegotiate the terms. The city would still be required to expend $3,000

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[52] "Astounding Developments in the Reeder Farm Case-The State Officers Guilty Beyond a Question," *Detroit Free Press*, July 17, 1870, 2.
[53] "The Public Park," *Detroit Free Press*, July 27, 1871, 1.
[54] "The Public Park," *Detroit Free Press*, August 24, 1871, 1; "Detroit and Hamtramck," *Detroit Free Press*, January 18, 1872, 1; and "The Park," *Detroit Free Press*, December 27, 1873, 1.
[55] "Linden Park," *Detroit Free Press*, July 11, 1875, 1.
[56] Ibid.
[57] "Lively Times," *Detroit Free Press,* July 27, 1875, 1.
[58] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, December 29, 1875, 1.

per year, but only for ten years. Field also offered to create a second park on his land in Springwells, to the west of the city, if a boulevard could be constructed through adjoining townships to link them together. The council agreed to the new terms and hired laborers to build a fence around Linden Park and begin laying pipes for an artificial lake at its north end.[59] In recognition of his generosity, the council presented Field with a huge, $375 plaque featuring a watercolor painting of the park's design.[60] At last, it seemed, the city had its landscaped park—albeit on a far smaller scale than initially imagined. But work ceased just a few weeks later. The city's lawyer informed the council that it lacked the statutory authority to improve a park beyond Detroit's municipal boundaries.[61]

As Linden Park entered a state of limbo, Field pushed forward on the boulevard project. Well-heeled landowners in Springwells, Greenfield, and Hamtramck townships began meeting in mid-1876 to discuss possible routes and political strategy.[62] For most of the men, the boulevard was a business endeavor. For others, including Field himself, the boulevard project was also motivated by civic and aesthetic ideals. This was especially true for Bela Hubbard. Born into wealth in Hamilton, New York, Hubbard studied the classics at Hamilton College, which his father helped found. He then moved to Michigan in 1835, purchasing a farm in Springwells Township. He lived there, off and on, for sixty years, distinguishing himself as a farmer, explorer, scientist, lawyer, logger, real estate developer, artist, and historian.[63] Today he is best known for completing the first geological survey of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and for proposing the founding of Michigan State University as the nation's first land grant college. Like the founders of the landscaped park movement, Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted, Hubbard also had a lifelong passion for horticulture and rural aesthetics. In 1849, Hubbard published a prize-winning essay, "The Proper Improvement and Enjoyment of Country Life," which could have been printed in the pages of Downing's *Horticulturalist*. "Children," he wrote, "should be taught to venerate trees and everything rural. As much

[59] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, March 4, 1876, 1; "Legal News," *Detroit Free Press*, March 9, 1876, 1; "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press,* May 13, 1876, 1; and "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, October 21, 1876, 1.
[60] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1876, 1; and "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, June 7, 1876, 1.
[61] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 1876, 1.
[62] "Local Matters," *Detroit Free Press*, December 16, 1876, 1.
[63] "Death's Claim," *Detroit Free Press*, June 14, 1896, 1.

as possible, they should be brought up amid scenes of picturesque rural beauty, multiplied and enriched, but not distorted by art. They will derive from such scenes, not merely a love of nature, but a taste for what is elegant and lovely, that will have a salutary effect upon their lives."[64] True to his ideals, Hubbard hired Downing's creative partner, architect Alexander Jackson Davis, to design an Italian villa on his Springwells farm in 1853.[65] In the 1860s, Hubbard joined Moses W. Field in co-founding Woodmere Cemetery.[66] Captivated by Field's boulevard proposal, Hubbard was the first to break ground on the project, laying out the western end through his farm in 1877.[67]

Seeking state authorization for the project, boulevard backers incorporated as the Detroit Boulevard Company in 1877 and drafted legislation. Their bill would empower five landowners, including Field and Hubbard, to choose the route of the boulevard and then improve it through special district taxation.[68] The bill failed in the House due to out-state opposition from rural lawmakers.[69] Boulevard proponents tried again in 1879 on different terms. The new bill—spearheaded by Representative Eber W. Cottrell of Greenfield Township—forbade the use of special district taxation for the boulevard. Instead all improvements would be made using annual appropriations from the city of Detroit and adjacent townships. As commissioners, the bill appointed the mayor of Detroit, the members of Detroit's Board of Public Works, and one representative from each township.[70] To sway critics who said the Grand Boulevard would simply be a wide street, and not a true park, Cottrell commissioned an artist to prepare color sketches of the boulevard's central median. The sketches showed a fifty-food wide median "planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, with serpentine walks and pretty outlines for flower beds and at suitable intervals large oval grass plots for croquet grounds."[71] This time,

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[64] Bela Hubbard, "Essay on the Proper Improvement and Enjoyment of Country Life," in *Transactions of the State Agricultural Society, with Reports of County Agricultural Societies, for 1850* (Lansing, MI: R.W. Ingals, State Printer, 1851), 215-224.
[65] Historic Designation Advisory Board, *Proposed Hubbard Farms Historic District: Final Report* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1993).
[66] "Local Matters," *Detroit Free Press*, August 9, 1867, 1.
[67] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, April 24, 1877, 1.
[68] "Local Matters," *Detroit Free Press*, March 13, 1877, 1; and "Lansing," *Detroit Free Press*, March 22, 1877, 1.
[69] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, May 3, 1877, 1.
[70] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, January 17, 1879, 7.
[71] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, January 25, 1879, 8.

legislators were persuaded. The act became law on May 12, 1879.[72] Ten years after the Common Council first passed a resolution seeking authorization to construct a boulevard, Detroit finally had a commission with the power to begin assembling the land.

By chance, the long-debated "Park Question" was also resolved a few weeks later—not thanks to organizing by park proponents or appeals to public welfare but as a byproduct of a mad scramble to build a railroad crossing to Canada. On February 24, 1879, word had spread that William H. Vanderbilt—owner of Canada Southern Railway and Michigan Central Railroad, and the wealthiest man in the United States—would soon build a railroad tunnel linking the two lines together downriver from Detroit on the island of Grosse Ile.[73] Panic ensued. City leaders saw the proposed tunnel as an existential threat to the city's economic future. If rail cars could pass seamlessly from one railroad line to the other at Grosse Isle, then Detroit would fade as a center of transportation and industry because businesses would relocate downriver to be closer to the junction. Yet businessmen in Detroit feared there was little they could do to sway Vanderbilt to build the crossing in Detroit instead. In the past, local governments had issued bonds to boost private railroad projects, but the state had forbidden the practice. So Detroit couldn't raise the funds for a bridge or tunnel on its own, even though capitalists in Detroit were offering to tax themselves to finance it.

Just when it seemed Detroit was out of options, William K. Muir, General Manager of Canada Southern Railway, revived an idea that had first bubbled up five years prior during the debate over siting a waterworks. What if the city built a railroad bridge to Belle Isle? According to the idea's backers, who had Figure 6 drawn up in 1874 to illustrate the feasibility of the concept, doing so would cut the distance to Canada in half, putting Detroit on an equal footing with Grosse Ile for consideration for a rail tunnel to complete the crossing. To comply with the state law forbidding cities from issuing debt for private rail, proponents devised a clever workaround: the bridge would be billed *not* as an international rail project but instead as a *local* connection from an

[72] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, May 29, 1879, 7.
[73] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, February 25, 1879, 1.

existing public rail line to a new city park. Incidentally, that new public rail connection might also double as a bridge for Ontario-bound freight cars.[74]

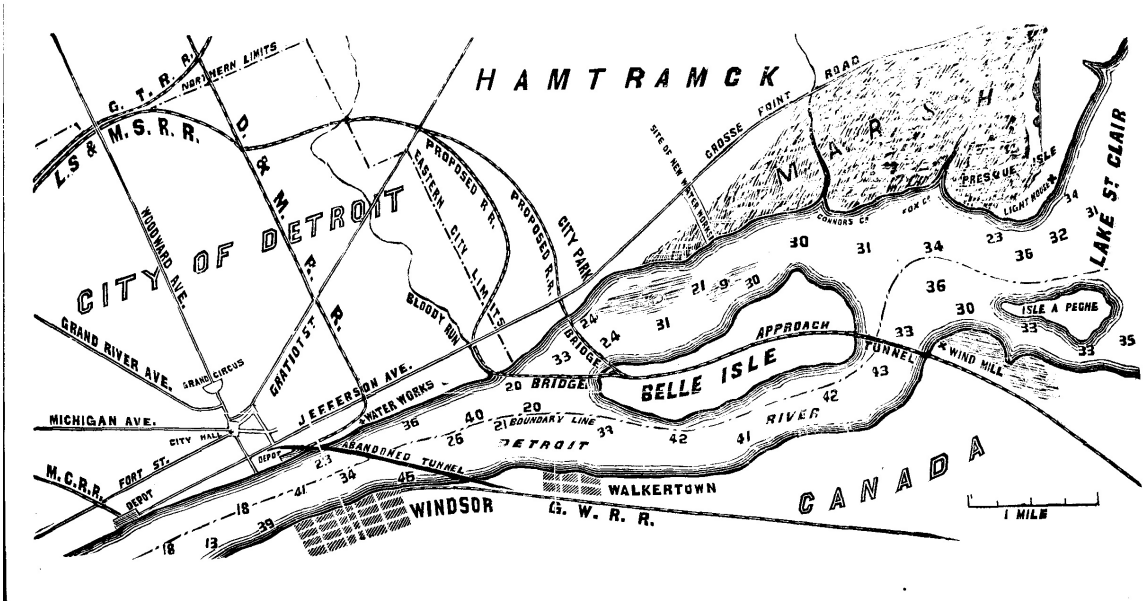

Figure 6: Proposed rail connection to Canada running through Belle Isle.[75]

Muir proposed the idea on March 27. The Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants' and Manufacturer's Exchange Council met together and endorsed the plan on April 8. Calling it "a vote to save the city," the Common Council endorsed the plan the same night.[76] On April 10, George H. Hopkins, chair of the Committee on Railroads in the Michigan House of Representatives, introduced a bill for the "purchase of Belle Isle by the City of Detroit for the purposes of a park, and for the incidental purpose, if thought desirable, of a bridge or tunnel."[77] As lawyers scrambled to finalize the purchase with the island's private owners, critics came forward. Vanderbilt disavowed any interest in a crossing at Belle Isle.[78] Officials from Windsor also denounced the plan because the projected tunnel would land closer to the neighboring city of Walkerville, threatening

[74] "The Bridge Question," *Detroit Free Press*, March 28, 1879, 1.
[75] Anonymous, *Address to the Public. The Advisibility of Purchasing Belle Isle for a Park, Water Works and Basis for a Tunnel.* (Detroit, MI: Union Job Printing Company, 1874), 10-11, http://elibrary.wayne.edu/search/o=14248606.
[76] "Belle Isle," *Detroit Free Press*, April 9, 1879, 1.
[77] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, April 11, 1879, 7.
[78] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, April 16, 1879, 7.

Windsor's own economic future.[79] But as soon as the Campau family agreed to sell the island for a reasonable $200,000, the bill sailed through the legislature. At that price, some argued, it didn't matter whether a railroad tunnel was ever built or not. A park alone was sufficient justification. On May 27, 1879, the act became law, authorizing Detroit to spend $200,000 to purchase Belle Isle and $500,000 to build a bridge to it.[80]

By the time the Common Council and Board of Estimates approved the bonds in June, they did so knowing that Belle Isle was probably unsuitable for a railroad crossing to Canada. They voted yes anyway to give the city its long overdue landscaped park.[81] In October, a report delivered to the Board of United States Engineers confirmed what critics had been saying for months. Detroit's leading railroad men testified that not only was a rail tunnel on Belle Isle technically and financially unfeasible, so was the proposed rail tunnel in Grosse Isle.[82] Neither would be built. With that, the frantic pursuit of a tunnel ended as suddenly as it had begun, and Belle Isle's surprise turn as Detroit's first and most significant landscaped park could commence.

1879-1889: The People's Park vs. the Boulevard

After a decade of debate, Detroit had the capacity to build a park and boulevard system. Yet perhaps unsurprisingly, given how the "Park Question" had been resolved, passage of the boulevard and park bills did not usher in an era of swift improvements. Instead the bills created a three-way battle for funding. The legislature had created two new park agencies: one for the boulevards and one for Belle Isle. The Board of Public Works retained control of all the smaller parks in the city. Yet because all three agencies depended on the Common Council for annual appropriations, they competed bitterly for funding. While cities like Minneapolis and Boston added new parks and parkways throughout the 1880s, Detroit's park system actually declined in size. The city made significant investments in Belle Isle, but no other parks were added to the system until the boulevard board orchestrated the takeover of the other park agencies in 1889.

After the addition of Clinton Park in 1868, Detroit's small parks were caught in the crosshairs of the "Park Question." As indifferent aldermen took power, the expansion

[79] "Windsor Speaks," *Detroit Free Press*, April 19, 1879, 1.
[80] "Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, May 29, 1879, 7.
[81] "At the Summer Resorts," *Detroit Free Press*, June 18, 1879, 4.
[82] "Aldermanic Action," *Detroit Free Press*, October 18, 1879, 1.

of the park system went into reverse as proposals were made to devote parkland to other uses. While the well-heeled neighbors of West Park successfully blocked the construction of an observatory in 1870, a high school in 1875, a fish market in 1877, and a science museum in 1879, other parks were lost.[83] In 1872, the council voted to transfer Center Park to the Board of Education for use as a library.[84] In 1878, East Park was nearly paved as an annex to the farmer's market.[85] The Board of Estimates then zeroed out the parks budget completely, forcing neighbors to cut the grass for a year.[86] In 1882, Clinton Park was named as the site of an Armory, reverting to a park only when funding for the project fell through.[87] East Park was targeted again in 1883. This time the Council voted to decommission the park in favor of a new police headquarters.[88] In 1886, a section of nearby Clinton Park was sacrificed to house a criminal court.[89]

East Park and Clinton Park were singled out for police functions because they were located within a growing vice district on the near east side. This area—later to be known as Black Bottom—housed the city's poorest immigrants and the majority of the city's small African American community. As early as the 1850s, this area also had the highest concentration of saloons, brothels, and billiard halls in the city, and the police saw the neighborhood as an epicenter of crime.[90] In the 1880s, the *Detroit Free Press* called on the police to restore order to the neighborhood, in part by restricting use of public space. The editorial board asked police to evict vagrants from Clinton Park and East Park and to punish children for playing baseball in the same.[91] In response to complaints like these, city officials decided to site the police headquarters and the

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[83] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, November 26, 1870, 3; "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, March 25, 1875, 1; "The Market Question," *Detroit Free Press*, September 9, 1877, 1; and "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, June 11, 1879, 6.
[84] Center Park is the site of the Skillman Branch Library today. "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 1872, 1.
[85] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, February 20, 1878, 3.
[86] "Local Matters. Board of Estimates," *Detroit Free Press*, April 5, 1878, 4.
[87] "Local Legislation," *Detroit Free Press*, March 11, 1882, 6; and "No Armory," *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1884, 8.
[88] "Police! Police! See the Design for the New Headquarters of the Department!," *Detroit Free Press*, September 2, 1883, 9.
[89] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, July 27, 1886, 5.
[90] John C. Schneider, "Public Order and the Geography of the City," *Journal of Urban History* 4, no. 2 (1978): 183-208.
[91] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, June 23, 1880, 1; and "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, September 6, 1886, 4.

criminal court on park property. The closure of the parks left neighborhood residents—among the poorest and most diverse in the city—without access to open space.[92]

The loss of these parks contributed to Detroit's unusual reputation as either having one of the most generous or one of the least generous park systems in the world, depending on how one counted. In 1888, the Canadian social scientist E.R.L. Gould published what was likely the first statistical comparison of park systems. Gould compiled statistics on park acreage, park size, and population in the leading cities of Europe and the United States. Measured purely in terms of acreage, he found Detroit to be among the best park systems in the sample, with a low ratio of 163 people per acre of parkland. Only the city of Minneapolis performed better. However, Detroit's standing was largely thanks to just one park, Belle Isle, which, at the time of its purchase in 1879, was the eighth largest park site in the world. If massive parks like Belle Isle were excluded from the rankings, Detroit's standing changed dramatically. Without the island park, Detroit had 8,309 people per acre of parkland—the second worst ratio in the sample. Detroit had only eleven other parks, none of them larger than five acres, and nearly all located within the central business district or just beyond it. By contrast, Washington, D.C. had 234 that size. Thus, while Detroit could now claim one of the largest and prettiest parks in the country, it failed by the measure that Gould considered most important: equity of access, which required an abundance of "small open spaces, well distributed over a city, but numerously located in populous districts."[93]

Nor could Detroit boast of an extensive boulevard system like Buffalo, Chicago, or Minneapolis. After the boulevard act became law in 1879, landowners held a surprise fete for its sponsor, Representative Cottrell, presenting him with a gold watch and chain at a lavish party.[94] Yet the declaration of victory was premature. The Common Council gave the commission just $250 in 1880, nothing in 1881, $2,500 in 1882, and nothing in 1883.[95] The stingy appropriations meant that even though the board held the power of eminent domain, it couldn't afford to use it. The board had to rely on donations to

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[92] "Police Headquarters," *Detroit Free Press*, March 1, 1883, 1.
[93] E.R.L. Gould, "Park Areas and Open Spaces in Cities," *American Statistical Association* 1, no. 2/3 (1888): 49-61.
[94] "Our Alderman," *Detroit Free Press*, June 14, 1879, 1.
[95] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 433.

acquire rights-of-way. Fortunes depended on the chosen route, and commissioners clashed over where it should go. Ultimately, a majority voted for the "outside" route—outside because it ran through three rural townships beyond the furthest railroad tracks encircling the city.[96] The largest stretches of land for the boulevard were donated by Bela Hubbard on the west side and Moses W. Field on the east side.[97] Elsewhere the route had to twist and turn around landowners who refused to participate. Boulevard backers even purchased some segments privately on the commission's behalf.[98] By 1882, the board had surveyed the full route and held an initial dedication, but little progress followed. The board could not afford to build more than a few blocks with the funding on hand.[99]

Belle Isle Park got off to a similarly slow start. In 1879, as his last act in office, the outgoing mayor used the 1871 Park Act to appoint the first board of commissioners to develop the island. The incoming mayor refused to recognize their authority, and a two-year standoff ensued. No progress was made until the state legislature nullified the old act and created a new Board of Belle Isle Park Commissioners.[100] In 1881, the mayor appointed future U.S. Senator James McMillan to lead the commission.[101] McMillan was one of the wealthiest industrialists in Detroit, having made a fortune building railroad cars and wheels. He was also president of Recreation Park, one of the newest and most elaborate athletic clubs in the country.[102] Today Recreation Park is best remembered as the home of the team that became the Detroit Tigers, but it was much more than a baseball stadium. Opened in 1879, just as the boulevard and Belle Isle acts were approved, the grounds of Recreation Park included clubhouses, a skating rink, an archery ground, a curling rink, an outdoor gymnasium, croquet grounds, a lawn for bowling, a lawn for tennis, two baseball diamonds, lacrosse grounds, cricket grounds, a horse racing

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[96] Ibid.
[97] "The Boulevard," *Detroit Free Press*, July 1, 1880, 1; and "The Boulevard," *Detroit Free Press*, July 22, 1880, 1.
[98] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 433.
[99] "Detroit's Boulevard," *Detroit Free Press*, September 29, 1882, 1.
[100] Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan or The Metropolis Illustrated* (Detroit, MI: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), 75-76.
[101] "Detroit's Park Commission," *Detroit Free Press*, September 1, 1881, 1.
[102] "Recreation Park," *Detriot Free Press,* March 19, 1870, 1.

track, a carriage drive, a fish pond, flower gardens, and graveled walks.[103] At the time, sports were still prohibited in the city's small parks, so Recreation Park offered a new experience for those who could afford it. Annual memberships cost $6 to $10 (roughly $156 to $261 in 2017 dollars).[104]

As head of the Belle Isle Park commission, McMillan moved immediately to hire Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., to plan the island park as a pleasure ground.[105] At the behest of the Common Council, Olmsted was asked to design the island with economy foremost in mind.[106] In an effort to comply, Olmsted proposed the straightforward design seen in Figure 7. All visitors would approach the island by ferry, disembarking at one of two piers that would bookend the west shore of the island. A two-story-tall, 1,600-foot-long pavilion would run between the piers along the length of the western shoreline. From the pavilion, visitors could look west for views of Detroit and Windsor or east to see the island's main attractions: a lookout tower, a racing course, athletic fields, a boathouse, and a refectory. Further east, visitors would find picnicking areas, a parade ground, and a bathing beach. A single road, called Central Avenue, would run the length of the island. Canals lining either side would serve to dry out the marshy ground, free the island of mosquitoes, and enable paddlers to explore by canoe. At the eastern end of the island, visitors would enter an old growth forest cut through by trails. Once there, visitors could hike, observe wildlife, or watch the ships slip past on the river.[107]

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[103] "Recreation Park," *Detriot Free Press*, April 27, 1879, 7.
[104] "Local Matters," *Detroit Free Press*, April 8, 1879, 6; and "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, May 10, 1879, 1.
[105] McMillan would go on to play a critical role in the City Beautiful movement. As a U.S. Senator, he led the Park Commission that enlisted Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Charles F. McKim, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens in an effort to redesign the national mall. For a discussion of McMillan's career in both Detroit and Washington, D.C., see Geoffrey G. Drutchas, "Gray Eminence in a Gilded Age: The Forgotten Career of Senator James McMillan of Michigan," *Michigan Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (2002): 78-113.
[106] In an 1882 pamphlet, Olmsted writes, "What Detroit most wants in a park, as I am often advised, is economy." In the pamphlet, he entreats the Common Council to be less stingy. Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Park for Detroit: Being a Preliminary Consideration of Certain Prime Conditions of Economy for the Belle Isle Scheme* (Boston, MA: Franklin Press, 1882), 11.
[107] Frederick Law Olmsted, *Belle Isle: After One Year* (Boston, MA: Franklin Press, 1884); and Witold Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Fredrick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 350-351.

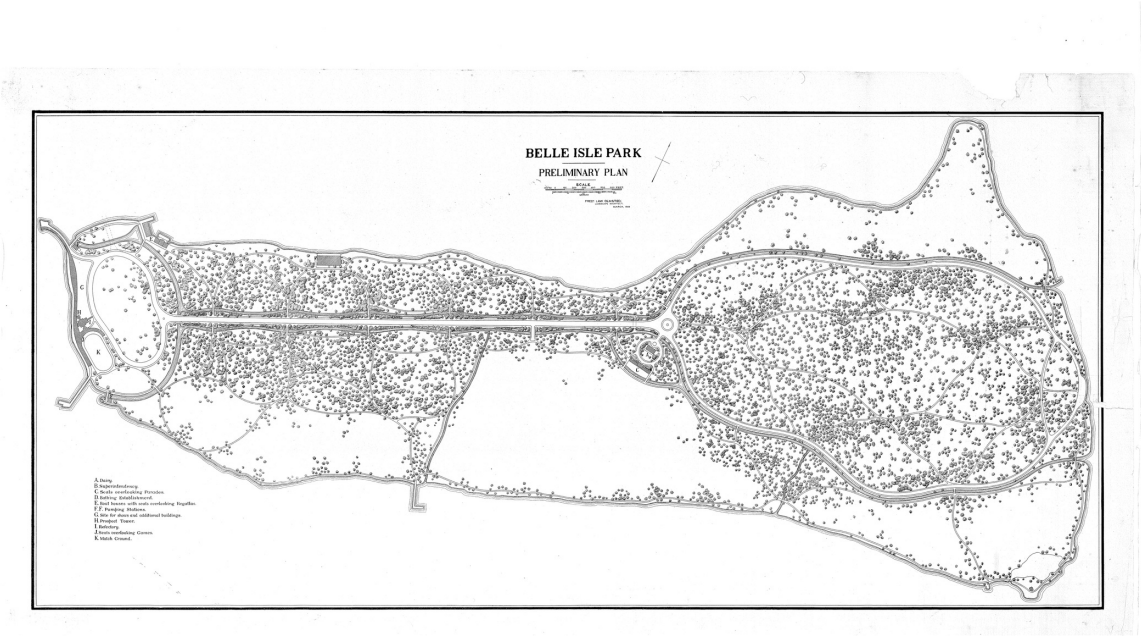

Figure 7: Belle Isle Park Preliminary Plan, March 1883.[108]

Ultimately, a bridge would be built to the west end of the island, enabling visitors to arrive on foot or by carriage rather than by ferry. Although Olmsted had no say over the boulevard's design, he met with the boulevard commissioners while in town and entreated them to choose a route for the boulevard that would link directly to the future Belle Isle Bridge so that the boulevard and Belle Isle would work together as one unified park system. He also made landscaping suggestions to ensure that the boulevard would feature trees and flowering plants that would be harmonious with those on the island.[109]

In practice, most of Olmsted's suggestions were ignored. The council approved just a few pieces of Olmsted's plan: a much smaller pavilion, one loop of canal to drain the western edge of the island, and a Central Avenue leading to the woods. The Common Council did not even reimburse Olmsted for his travel costs to Detroit.[110] Yet even in a rudimentary state, the island proved more popular than even park advocates had hoped. By 1880, Detroit was home to more than 116,000 people—more than half foreign born—

[108] "Belle Isle Park Preliminary Plan, March 1883," courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.
[109] "Detroit's Drive," *Detroit Free Press*, September 8, 1882, 6.
[110] "Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, October 11, 1882, 6.

and all were eager to escape the city's crowded streets on muggy summer days.[111] Thousands of families lined up to board private ferries to visit the island even before any improvements had been made. The park proved popular among people of all classes and ethnic backgrounds, including the city's small African American community. In 1881, local organizers decided to move the annual celebration of Emancipation Day from a picnic grove in Ontario to the island park. On August 1, 1881, thousands of people of African descent—including many from Ohio, Illinois, and Ontario—gathered on Belle Isle to commemorate the forty-eighth anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the British Empire and the more recent abolition of slavery in the United States.[112] The park's instant popularity among people of all backgrounds helped convince the Common Council to appropriate more funding to the park than either the boulevard or the existing small parks. The island's popularity also convinced the Common Council to move forward with building a bridge, even though it was no longer necessary as a rail crossing. After receiving approval from the Michigan legislature and the United States Congress to build a bridge across the Detroit River, the city issued a $270,000 bond.[113] Construction began in 1887, and the first Belle Isle Bridge opened in May of 1889.[114]

At the time of its opening, the Belle Isle bridge connected with Jefferson Avenue, but the road led no further north because no more than a few blocks of boulevard had been built. The first section of the boulevard to see any improvement was the half-mile stretch running east of Woodward to Russell Street.[115] What had been farmland became a simple dirt road. James A. Randall, a Democratic politician, newspaper publisher, railroad owner, and real estate developer, became the first to build a home there in 1884 (see Figure 8).[116] But appropriations were so small that little further progress was made.

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[111] Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 33-39.
[112] "Emancipation Day," *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1881, 1. This was, remarkably, the second time that Emancipation Day had been celebrated on Belle Isle. The first celebration was held in 1861 in the early months of the Civil War. The openly racist *Detroit Free Press* mentioned the gathering in a mocking editorial opposing the abolition of slavery. "First of August – Colored People on a Splurge," *Detroit Free Press*, August 1, 1861, 1.
[113] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, November 22, 1886, 4.
[114] "Belle Island All Ready for the Public," *Detroit Free Press*, May 19, 1889, 3.
[115] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 433.
[116] "Fine Buildings," *Detroit Free Press*, March 19, 1884, 8.

Sidewalks were extended in some places, but the commission couldn't afford to continue building the road itself.[117] Undeterred, Randall bought up dozens of lots on the promised boulevard and worked to make his investment pay off. He made himself ubiquitous in the press—in his own newspaper and in rival papers—as an advocate for a citywide bond to improve the boulevard as a true Olmstedian parkway.

Figure 8: James A. Randall's house on Grand Boulevard in the 1890s.[118]

By the late 1880s, backers of Belle Isle Park also came to believe a bond would be necessary to complete improvements to the island. Yet despite Olmsted's urging to link the two projects together, backers of each project remained at odds. In 1887, Mayor Marvin H. Chamberlain argued that only adjacent property owners should finance the

[117] "Work on the Boulevard," *Detroit Free Press*, August 24, 1885, 5.
[118] "James A. Randall Residence," Detroit Public Library Digital Collections, Burton Historical Collection, accessed August 3, 2018, https://digitalcollections.detroitpubliclibrary.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A149433.

boulevard, not the general public. "On and in the vicinity of the Boulevard," he said, "values have been enhanced several hundred percent. It stands to reason that that property should pay a larger proportion of the cost of the improvement than other property two or three miles removed which has not been increased in value five per cent."[119] The *Detroit Evening News* repeatedly attacked Randall's plan to issue debt to improve the boulevard, arguing Belle Isle should come first. "Nearly a quarter of a million people visited the Island Park last summer," they opined. "These are the people who demand the improvement of the island. How many people visited the Boulevard? All around its dreary length one could drive on any pleasant Sunday without meeting more than a dozen vehicles and not a single pedestrian. Who demands the improvement of the boulevard? A few big real estate owners who are trying to make fortunes at the public cost."[120]

Yet despite his numerous and vocal critics, Randall ultimately prevailed in his quest after rising to the top of the local and state Democratic parties and winning seats on the boards that controlled funding for the boulevard. He first won a seat on the Board of Estimates in 1887, where he convinced his fellow members to slash funding to Belle Isle until the Common Council would agree to increase funding for the boulevard.[121] Two years later, he won office as a state legislator. As the leader of the Democrats, he shepherded two bills through the chamber. The first enabled Detroit to borrow $500,000 to improve the Grand Boulevard.[122] The second created a new board—the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards—which would control *all* parkland in Detroit: the small parks, the boulevard, and Belle Isle together.[123] For the first time, the bill would also give Detroit the power to purchase new parkland without seeking state authorization. The first four members of the board were named in the bill. After it was approved, Randall let another bill move to the floor, this one granting $400,000 for

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[119] As quoted in Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 122.
[120] As quoted in Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 122.
[121] "A Blow to the Park," *Detroit Free Press*, April 12, 1888, 4.
[122] "The Boulevard," *Detroit Free Press*, April 6, 1889, 8.
[123] "The Liquor Tax," *Detroit Free Press*, April 20, 1889, 4.

improvements to Belle Isle. It too passed.[124] All told, the new commission would control $900,000 in bonds for the improvement of the boulevard and Belle Isle, plus annual appropriations from the Common Council.[125] Although not as strong as some park commissions—not only could the park commission in Minneapolis issue debt, it also had a dedicated property tax millage and the power to impose special district taxation—the bill nevertheless marked a notable increase in power, enabling major improvements and expansion of the park and boulevard system in the decade to come.[126]

1889-1900: Populism and Privatism

In addition to James A. Randall's legislative coup, three other events marked 1889 as the dawn of a new era for the park and boulevard movement in Detroit. The first was the opening of the Belle Isle Bridge. Before 1889, all visitors to Belle Isle arrived by private ferry or yacht, and no one visited during the long winter. After 1889, anyone could enter the park for free at any time of year by walking across the bridge. Those with carriages could also pay a toll to drive onto the island. Although the new park board had no reliable method to count visitors, the board estimated that attendance doubled within a year, from half a million visitors to a million. Belle Isle became the city's cultural heart in a way it had not yet been, as Detroiters of all backgrounds made a habit of escaping to the island on hot weekends to seek shade, river breezes, and recreation.[127] The increasing carriage traffic would also lead to the widening and extension of the island's roadways—changes that would accelerate dramatically after the invention of the automobile.

The second was the opening of the Detroit International Fair and Exposition. Like the more famous World's Columbian Exhibition that followed in Chicago in 1893,

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[124] "The Voting Machine," *Detroit Free Press*, June 8, 1889, 4.

[125] Moses W. Field did not live to see Randall's victory. He died early in 1889, just before passage of the legislation. After Field's death, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that Linden Park belonged to his heirs, not the City of Detroit. Field had argued as much since 1884, when he announced that he would begin to improve Linden Park at his own expense but not as a municipal park. However, Field had continued to promote Linden Park as a neighborhood amenity in his real estate listings. His heirs, however, opted to plat the park for development. By October of 1892, his son, Vincent Field, was advertising lots for sale in the "Linden Park Subdivision."

[126] For a history of the Minneapolis park board, see David C. Smith, *City of Parks: The Story of Minneapolis Parks* (Minneapolis: The Foundation for Minneapolis Parks, 2008).

[127] *First Annual Report of the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards to the Common Council of the City of Detroit, February 19th, 1890* (Detroit: Free Press Printing Company, 1890), 35.

the fair involved the erection of a temporary town, complete with showcase buildings and landscaped grounds, on a riverfront site downriver from Detroit in the burgeoning industrial community of Delray—a site that had Moses W. Field had once offered to the city as a potential park. Although the fair closed after three years, it proved that Detroit's capitalists were ready to deploy their private wealth to burnish Detroit's image and drive development. That same commitment motivated a series of park donations in the years to come. Indeed, the multi-millionaire sponsors of the fair—James McMillan, Russell A. Alger, Thomas W. Palmer, Dexter M. Ferry, George H. Barbour, William B. Moran, and Francis Palms—would all go on to play leading roles in building Detroit's park system, whether by donating land, serving on the Parks and Boulevard Commission, or both.[128]

The third turning point was the election of Hazen S. Pingree as mayor of Detroit. A lifelong Republican, Pingree campaigned for mayor on the basis of his business acumen, promising to run the city's affairs with efficiency and fairness. Before taking office, Pingree operated the largest shoe factory in the United States. Yet Pingree proved to be much more than a no-nonsense administrator. Over the course of four terms as mayor and two terms as governor (offices which he briefly held simultaneously until forced by the Michigan Supreme Court to resign as mayor), Pingree earned an international reputation as a progressive. He fought to break up railroad monopolies, championed the municipal takeover of private utilities, and pioneered the use of public works programs to combat joblessness and hunger during the Panic of 1893.[129] Pingree was also a passionate proponent of public parks, whether civic squares, boulevards, or landscaped parks like Belle Isle. As mayor, he repeatedly called for public investment to build new parks and boulevards in Detroit. Yet even during Pingree's administration, privatism still prevailed. Despite his full-throated advocacy of public power, every new park and boulevard developed in the 1890s would be constructed on donated land.

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[128] William Willard Howard, "Detroit, and Her International Fair and Exposition," *Harper's Weekly*, August 17, 1889; and Richard Bak, "A Fair to Remember," in *Detroitland: A Collection of Movers, Shakers, Lost Souls, and History Makers from Detroit's Past* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 1-15.

[129] Melvin G. Holli, "Hazen S. Pingree, 1890-1897," in *The American Mayor: The Best and the Worst Big-City Leaders* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 35-43.

In his first term, Pingree renewed construction on the Grand Boulevard. Pingree had backed the project from the beginning, voicing support as early as 1877.[130] As mayor, he sought to reward Randall—who crossed party lines to endorse him in the 1889 election—with a seat on the new Parks and Boulevard Commission, but the Common Council blocked the appointment.[131] Nevertheless, the boulevard moved forward, with Pingree and Randall breaking the ground together in August of 1891.[132] Pingree also encouraged other developers to donate new boulevards to the city as they platted their property. In 1892, a developer deeded land for Medbury Park—a boulevard on Medbury Avenue from John R to Rivard.[133] In 1893, Recreation Park was torn down and the land subdivided. The owner of the land, former Mayor William G. Thompson, dedicated a stretch of the land from Brady Street to Willis Street as Recreation Parkway.[134] Both of these parkways were located east of Woodward Avenue between Mack Avenue and Grand Boulevard, an area that would see the construction of numerous upper and upper-middle class homes, including mansions like the Colonel Frank J. Hecker House, built in 1888, and the Charles Lang Freer House, which was built next door in 1892.[135]

Pingree had less success convincing aldermen to appropriate funding to condemn land to build new parks. In his 1891 mayoral address, he championed an audacious plan to construct a large park in the heart of Detroit by expanding Grand Circus Park to encompass nearby blocks. "A large park, in the center of the city, would boom Detroit more than the establishment of half a dozen union depots or of 18 or 20 factories," he told the Common Council. "It could be obtained by the city either by purchase or condemnation, for a reasonable amount. The space south of Elizabeth east to Brush or Beaubien streets; south to Gratiot avenue; up Miami [Broadway] avenue, crossing Woodward avenue at Park street, down Washington to Grand River, and up to its intersection with Elizabeth street … Such a magnificent space of 82 acres, of which only 43 acres would have to be purchased, would be a lasting monument to the wisdom of the

[130] "House of Representatives," *Detroit Free Press*, March 29, 1877, 1.
[131] "The Mayor and the Park Commission," *Detroit Free Press*, May 31, 1890, 4.
[132] "Paving the Boulevard," *Detroit Free Press*, August 11, 1891, 3.
[133] "Busy Realty Dealers," *Detroit Free Press*, April 3, 1892, 19.
[134] *Fifth Annual Report of the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards to the Common Council of the City of Detroit, for the Year of 1893* (Detroit, MI: John F. Eby & Co., Printers, 1893), 4.
[135] "D.M. Ferry & Co. Superintendent's House Historic District, 612 East Ferry Avenue, Final Report" (Detroit, MI: Historic Designation Advisory Board, n.d.).

city fathers who procured it, and would justly entitle all who aided in the cause to the gratitude, not only of this generation, but of generations yet unborn."[136] The cost of the plan—about six million dollars in 1891—left aldermen incredulous.[137] The press treated the proposal with ridicule and the council refused to take it up for a vote. However, Pingree did convince the Common Council to tear down the old Central Market that stood in Cadillac Square.[138] In 1894, the Common Council designated the square as a public park, and the park and boulevard board proceeded to landscape it, restoring green space to the heart of the central business district for the first time in decades.[139]

Pingree then championed a new cause: turning the obsolete reservoir north of Eastern Market into a mounded park. Pingree saw it as a rare opportunity to vary the city's otherwise flat topography. But this plan, too, died in the council, and the dirt from the reservoir walls was instead used to fill in marshy ground on Belle Isle.[140] Pingree promoted another failed park plan near the end of his mayoralty. He sought to condemn an eighteen-block stretch of riverfront property from the foot of Third Street to the foot of Orleans Street to enable the creation of "a public park with an esplanade of shade trees, walks, lawns and pavilions for public use."[141] As part of the plan, he also called for the construction of a riverside convention center. None of these prescient proposals—which a century later would see realization—were taken up by the Common Council. Pingree did succeed, however, in lowering the cost of riding the ferry to Belle Isle by threatening to start a public ferry to rival the existing private service. The ferry company also diversified its business, starting passenger service to Bois Blanc Island in 1898, which it rebranded as the Bob-Lo amusement park after the company purchased the island in 1901.[142] Pingree also secured greater public access to the riverfront by forcing businesses

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[136] "Down to Business," *Detroit Free Press*, January 17, 1891, 8.
[137] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 646.
[138] Demolition of Central Market only proceeded after Western Market and Eastern Market opened in 1891 as replacements.
[139] "The council's work last evening …," *Detroit Free Press*, September 26, 1894, 4.
[140] "East Side Citizen's Protest," *Detroit Free Press*, November 28, 1893, 5.
[141] George B. Catlin, *The Story of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, 1923), 646.
[142] "Bob-Lo Island," Encyclopedia of Detroit, Detroit Historical Society, accessed November 3, 2018, https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/bob-lo-island. A rival steamship service, the White Star Line, had opened its own island amusement park, Tashmoo Park, in 1897, spurring the Detroit, Belle Isle and Windsor Ferry Company to do the same. Arthur M. Woodford, *Tashmoo Park and the Tashmoo Steamer* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012).

to clear debris from the landings at the foot of each street, which businesses had used as storage space. The riverfront was fully developed, but residents could at least enjoy views of the water.[143]

Although blocked from purchasing new parkland, Pingree made the most of donations. In 1888, commercial fisher and shipbuilder James P. Clark had left the city a wooded part of his farm as part of a bequest. His will required the city to purchase the remainder of his property to accept the gift. Pingree pushed the Common Council to appropriate the funds, creating Clark Park in 1890.[144] In 1892, the land that could have become Hamtramck Park was subdivided as Indian Village—one of the most luxurious neighborhoods ever built in Detroit. The owners dedicated a narrow stretch of land fronting the river as Owen Park, giving the city its first riverfront park as an extension of its toniest neighborhood.[145] More donations followed in 1893, as the city accepted Palmer Park and Perrien Park.[146] The donation of Palmer Park, by former Senator Thomas W. Palmer, required the state to pass enabling legislation—the so-called Log Cabin Park Bill—because it was located four miles north of city limits in Greenfield Township. The bill not only gave Detroit the power to acquire parkland beyond city limits, it also allowed the city to extend utilities to the park with the expectation that all of Greenfield Township would ultimately be annexed.[147] Dexter M. Ferry, owner of America's largest seed company, also announced plans in 1893 to donate farmland to the northwest of the city for Ferry Park, but he held onto the land until his death in 1907, preferring to retain ownership as he developed the neighborhoods around it.[148]

Two other park projects began in 1893 on municipal property. One was the creation of Capitol Park on a triangle of public ground on the west side of downtown. Since 1828, the ground had been occupied by a building that had served first as the territorial courthouse, then as the state capitol, and finally as the public high school. On

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[143] Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 30.
[144] "Once More the Park," *Detroit Free Press*, April 13, 1890, 4.
[145] "The Realty Market," *Detroit Free Press*, March 12, 1893, 10; and "Accepted the Park," *Detroit Free Press*, April 13, 1893, 9.
[146] "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, June 11, 1893, 5; and "Palmer Park Visited: The 'Citizen's' Magnificent Gift to the City," *Detroit Free Press*, September 2, 1893, 5.
[147] "The 'Log Cabin Park Bill,'" *Detroit Free Press*, April 9, 1893, 12.
[148] "Better and Better," *Detroit Free Press*, June 19, 1892.

January 27, 1893, the high school burned down. Pingree considered the fire fortuitous—he had hoped to have the building razed—and he immediately moved to landscape the grounds as Capitol Park.[149] The second project was the landscaping of Water Works Park. In 1885, Chauncey Hurlbut, the city's longest serving water commissioner, had bequeathed his fortune to Detroit to beautify the ground of the waterworks as a park and to open a library there.[150] The bequest did not become available to spend until 1893, after a series of lawsuits were settled. Pingree used the money to hire out-of-work laborers amidst the Panic of 1893.[151] Pingree also started a major public works program on Belle Isle. The park board oversaw the construction of new roads, canals, bridges, and a bathhouse. Laborers also transformed the large marsh at the northeast corner of the island into a lake suitable for canoeing.[152] The park board then opened a "zoological garden" on Belle Isle in 1895, which consisted initially of a bear den and a deer pen.[153]

Although Pingree failed in his quest to buy land for new parks, he nevertheless expanded the system through donations and conversions of public land. Residents also gained slightly more freedom to use the parks for recreation. A law regulating parks and boulevard, adopted by the legislature on May 24, 1895, retained previous prohibitions against walking on the grass and playing boisterously within parks. The law also forbade unauthorized assembly, banning "any act tending to the congregating of persons on said boulevard or in said parks."[154] But for the first time, the law carved out exceptions for approved recreation, providing that "ball, cricket, lawn tennis and other like games of recreation may be played upon such portions of said parks as may be designated from time to time by the commissioners, and under such rules and regulations as may be

[149] Jack Dempsey, *Capitol Park: Historic Heart of Detroit* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 45-47.
[150] "An Excellent Example," *Detroit Free Press*, September 18, 1885.
[151] "A Fine Showing," *Detroit Free Press*, February 1, 1893.
[152] Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 69.
[153] *Seventh Annual Report of the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards to the Common Council of the City of Detroit for the Year 1895* (Detroit: City of Detroit, 1896), 11.
[154] "An Act to Amend an Act Entitled, 'An act supplemental to the charter of the city of Detroit, and relating to parks, boulevards, and other public grounds in said city …'," May 24, 1895, in *Laws Enacted by the Legislature of 1895 Affecting the Municipality of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: James H. Stone & Co., 1895). 143.

prescribed by them."[155] Such grounds were built in Belle Isle Park, Clark Park, and Palmer Park. Overall, however, the parks were still regarded primarily as beautiful, health-enhancing landscapes, not as spaces for play, protest, or other unsanctioned activities. Nor were any parks or boulevards intentionally located in working class neighborhoods. Because developers donated every new park and parkway, they were necessarily located in newly built neighborhoods, which typically catered to the upper or upper middle class. The composition of some neighborhoods would later change, as the proximity of industrial development made them less desirable, but in the 1890s most parks were only incidentally for the laborers who made up Pingree's electoral base.

Conclusion

Politicians and real estate developers in Detroit began advocating the construction of landscaped parks and boulevards in the late 1860s. Instead the park system shrank in size as several related debates played out: a battle between the state legislature and the city for control of metropolitan growth; a battle over the fiscal autonomy of cities and the prudence of issuing debt to finance public works; and finally a debate over the purpose of parks and boulevards themselves, and whether the two kinds of parkland were necessary and necessarily linked. Two major efforts to build a park in Detroit in the 1870s—the proposed purchase of Hamtramck Park as Detroit's answer to Central Park, and the donation of the smaller Linden Park to its west as a private alternative—both failed.

Finally, in 1879, the city agreed to purchase Belle Isle as a park, albeit with the initial intent of building a rail link across it to Canada. The legislature also gave the green light to a group of developers to begin rounding up property donations for the construction of a boulevard that would encircle the city. Yet unlike similar agencies elsewhere, these two boards had no power to tax and lacked sufficient revenue to use eminent domain. Nor did they control the city's smaller parks. As a result, even as some park systems elsewhere blossomed, like those in Boston, Minneapolis, and New York, the city of Detroit saw rapid economic and population growth without a corresponding increase in open space. It would take a decade more to create an agency—the Parks and

[155] Ibid., 142.

Boulevards Commission—with sufficient funding and authority to adequately improve and manage the small parks, the boulevard, and Belle Isle Park together.

In the 1890s, Detroit's park and boulevard system finally took concrete shape under the authority of the new board, which moved quickly to extend the boulevard and beautify Belle Isle and the existing small parks. Within a few years, every park saw new public investment. The board installed fountains and flower gardens in every park, pruned trees, laid pipe for sprinkling and drainage systems, and planted fresh sod.[156] Yet in other respects, privatism prevailed. Despite Mayor Pingree's vocal support for public parkland, the city of Detroit would buy no additional land in the 1890s, only expanding through donations, even as its population jumped from 205,876 in 1890 to 285,704 in 1900.[157] Donations enabled the creation of Clark Park, Medbury Park, Owen Park, Ferry Park, Palmer Park, Perrien Park, Recreation Parkway, and Waterworks Park in the 1890s. Capitol Park and Cadillac Square also became parks after municipal buildings were torn down.

Aesthetically, the park system shone as never before, but only the largest parks—Belle Isle Park, Clark Park, and Palmer Park—included any facilities for recreation, and then only for adults. Among Detroit's capitalist elite, parks were viewed like art museums: as cultural gifts to be bestowed on the city through the generosity and foresight of the wealthy. Although some elites also saw parkland as important places for working class leisure, parks were primarily promoted as visual signifiers of Detroit's economic power and as inducements to new suburban development.[158]

However, as the next chapter will discuss, the immediate legacy of nineteenth-century privatism was a park system too small, too scattered, and too restrictive to serve the crowded and diverse city that would emerge within the bounds of Detroit's Grand

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[156] *First Annual Report of the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards to the Common Council of the City of Detroit, February 19th, 1890* (Detroit: Free Press Printing Company, 1890).
[157] Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998), https://www.census.gov/.
[158] A park commission report sums up the agency's mission like this: "We are doing all that can be done to ameliorate the conditions of a distinctively metropolitan life, the inevitable result being that Detroit, blessed beyond any other city of the country, grows in beauty as she grows in size and importance." *Ninth Annual Report of the Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards* (Detroit: Raynor & Taylor, Printers, 1898), 5.

Boulevard in the early twentieth century. The donation of larger parks on the fringes of town did nothing to improve living conditions along the city's industrializing riverfront or on the near east side, where immigrants and African Americans lived together in the city's most crowded and least safe neighborhood. Not until the early 1900s would business leaders and social reformers organize to provide parkland *within* these working class neighborhoods as a form of relief from congestion and to provide places for youth to play. Unfortunately, they would do so in a discriminatory manner, setting up separate and unequal systems of parks and recreation for white and black residents.

Chapter 3: Planning, Parks, and Play (1900-1929)

At the start of the twentieth century, three movements redefined the form and purpose of urban parks. All were reactions to the growing industrialization of America. The first was conservationism. In the early years of the park movement, landscaped parks were designed in the English romantic, or melodramatic, style. In pursuit of this aesthetic, parkland was often dramatically re-engineered to incorporate rolling hills, towering trees, placid water, and open meadows—regardless of its original condition.[1] Yet as the park movement progressed, some landscape architects began calling for parks that sprang more directly from natural conditions. Rather than showcase romanticized rustic landscapes, parks could instead protect fragile natural features—like rivers, ravines, hilltops, and stands of old growth forest—from encroaching development. In 1893, the landscape architect Charles Eliot—son of the president of Harvard University and a former apprentice to Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.—proposed a park system for greater Boston that would preserve all of the region's remaining wetlands, waterways, rocky hillsides, and old growth forest.[2] A decade later, the landscape architect Jens Jensen helped create the first county-level system of Forest Preserves for Chicago and pushed for the use of native vegetation in that city's major parks.[3] These precedents, which reimagined parks as natural areas possessing innate beauty and ecological value, were especially influential at the regional, state, and national scales, where park systems

[1] Terence Young, *Building San Francisco's Parks, 1850-1930* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 4-13; and Heath Massey Schenker, *Melodramatic Landscapes: Urban Parks in the Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009).
[2] Steven T. Moga, "Marginal Lands and Suburban Nature: Open Space Planning and the Case of the 1893 Boston Metropolitan Parks Plan." *Journal of Planning History* 8, no. 4 (2009): 308-329.
[3] Samuel Kling, "Regional Plans and Regional Plants: Jens Jensen's Vernacular Landscape and Metropolitan Planning in Chicago, 1904-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 6 (2018): 1,154-1,175.

were created in the early 1900s with a dual focus on the conservation of scenic nature and the promotion of an outdoors lifestyle, including camping, hiking, hunting, and fishing.[4]

Two concurrent movements had greater influence on park planning at the city scale. The first was the Playground Movement. In the nineteenth century, few cities provided children with designated places to play because there was little need. Children could play safely in or near their homes. But as cities industrialized and neighborhoods became more congested, safe places for play could no longer be taken for granted, especially in working class neighborhoods where families lived in tenements alongside factories and warehouses. The Playground Movement arose in response to these conditions. In the mid-1880s, philanthropists in Germany constructed the first "sand gardens" in congested neighborhoods. Poor children were invited to play in the sand under the supervision of trained volunteers. The idea spread to Boston, where the Massachusetts Emergency and Hygienic Association began to operate its own sand gardens and playgrounds, which, in addition to sandboxes, often featured simple metal structures for swinging and climbing and open spaces for running and jumping. The idea of supervised play then spread to other northern American cities, where settlement houses took the lead in opening and operating playgrounds.[5] Led by well-to-do women and their male allies in the business community, this movement maintained that landscaped parks on the suburban periphery—while valuable—failed to meet the needs of working class and immigrant laborers. Instead of large, naturalistic landscapes, play activists instead sought to open small playgrounds, bath houses, and community centers within walking distance of laborers' homes. These facilities were intended to improve the health of the poor and assimilate immigrant children into American society. In order to make these

[4] For histories of state and national parks in the United States and their evolving approach to the conservation of nature, see Ney C. Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004); Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); and John C. Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

[5] Sadie American, "The Movement for Small Playgrounds," *American Journal of Sociology* 4, vol. 2 (1898): 159-170; and K. Gerald Marsden, "Philanthropy and the Boston Playground Movement, 1885-1907," *Social Service Review* 35, no. 1 (1961): 48-58.

facilities accessible to all, playground activists campaigned for higher taxes to provide them as public goods in every working class neighborhood.[6]

At the same time, many businessmen also championed the City Beautiful, a cultural and civic movement that sought to reorder and beautify urban industrial America through the creation of new public buildings, monuments, boulevards, and parks. This movement echoed Olmsted's earlier call for the laying out of parks and parkways to guide suburban growth, but it promoted a different aesthetic. Instead of rustic cottages and naturalistic landscapes, City Beautiful proponents called for neoclassical architecture and formally arranged streets and parks. City Beautiful proponents also called for new powers. Inspired by the example of Baron Georges Haussmann, who built wide boulevards through the congested heart of Paris in the 1850s and 1860s, City Beautiful proponents insisted that existing city centers in the United States could and should be remade, even at the cost of demolishing and rebuilding existing streets and buildings.[7]

This chapter examines the repercussions of these movements on Detroit. At the start of the twentieth century, Detroit was already among the leading manufacturing cities in the world, with a highly diversified economy and an immigrant-majority population of more than a quarter million. Yet its growth was just beginning. Over the next thirty years, its population would skyrocket to 1,568,662, moving from the thirteenth largest city in the United States to fourth.[8] The city would also quintuple in size through annexation, from 28 square miles in 1900 to 139 square miles in 1926, when its expansion finally halted due to the incorporation of suburbs at its borders.[9] Every day, new arrivals came to the city in search of industrial work, including, for the first time, large numbers of African Americans from the South. Numbering fewer than 6,000 in

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[6] For histories of the Playground Movement in its larger context of women-led social reform, see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Marta Gutman, *A City for Children: Women, Architecture, and the Charitable Landscapes of Oakland, 1850-1950* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[7] William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

[8] Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998), https://www.census.gov/.

[9] Board of County Auditors, *Manual: County of Wayne, Michigan, 1926* (Detroit, MI: Wayne County, 1926), 245.

1910, African Americans would exceed 40,000 by 1920 and 120,000 by 1930.[10] Driving this unprecedented growth were two economic inventions: the automobile and the moving assembly line. The spectacular growth of the car industry between 1900 and 1930 would transform Detroit in all respects—indeed, it would transform the whole world—including how the city approached the provision of parks and recreation.[11]

As new rail lines and factories spread across the increasingly industrialized city, Detroit saw robust campaigns for playground construction, City Beautiful reform, and the establishment of a planning commission with the power to make spatial reform happen. The success of these campaigns would lead to a new division of park administration, with three municipal agencies tending to different aspects. The City Plan and Improvement Commission gave order and beauty to the city through the placement of new boulevards, parks, and civic structures; the Parks and Boulevards Commission maintained the city's scenic parkland once built; and the Recreation Commission ran the city's playgrounds and organized wholesome leisure activities for youth and adults at all social venues in the city, whether public or private, including playgrounds, libraries, schools, churches, and community centers. At the same time, governments at the county, state, and national levels began to provide complementary parks and recreational facilities at their respective geographic scales, with a focus on the conservation of extraordinary scenery.

All of these public agencies pledged to provide parks and recreational facilities on an equitable basis in accordance with emerging national standards. These standards specified the proper type, quantity, and placement of parkland at the scale of the neighborhood, city, region, state, and nation. The number and size of park facilities would rise with population density to ensure that everyone had access, regardless of neighborhood. In practice, however, these standards were selectively followed. In Detroit, the parks and boulevard agency focused on providing large open spaces in outlying neighborhoods where land was more readily available. It therefore operated

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[10] Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States," Population Division Working Paper No. 76 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005), http://www.census.gov/.

[11] For an excellent economic, social, and geographic history of Detroit's industrial transformation, see Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

parks to the exclusion of the city's growing African American population, which resided within the bounds of the Grand Boulevard in neighborhoods with few existing parks, except for nearby Belle Isle. The recreation commission, by contrast, did prioritize the needs of the working class, but it did so on a separate and unequal basis. Municipal pools were kept racially segregated, and some responsibilities, like providing summer camps for African American children, were outsourced to private agencies. Private agencies themselves, like the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., also provided facilities on a segregated basis, with separate buildings and programs provided for white and black members.

1900-1909: The City Beautiful and the Playground Movement

Although sometimes portrayed as rival movements, the City Beautiful and the Playground Movement were closely aligned agendas of spatial reform. Although the former was male dominated and concerned primarily with beautification, and the latter was female led and concerned more with the welfare of children and families, both were backed financially by the same business lobbies, which sought to increase the power of government to manage the negative externalities imposed by industrialization. The two together became justifications for the establishment of city planning commissions.

Detroit's first playground opened in 1900 in a warehouse district along the east riverfront. Private supporters of the Franklin Settlement—the first settlement house in Michigan—paid to build a playground on a donated lot on Franklin Street, between Joseph Campau Avenue and Chene Street. At the time, this was an active industrial and warehouse district, where ships were built and goods were made and stored. The neighborhood was also home to some of the city's poorest residents. Irish, German, and French Canadian immigrants shared the neighborhood with white and black Americans.[12] The playground proved popular. Sixty to seventy boys and girls would gather each day to play baseball or use the swings under the supervision of a volunteer play director.[13]

Leaders of the Playground Movement were motivated by different ideals. Some prominent playground advocates were concerned about the effects of immigration on

[12] Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 139.
[13] "At the Public Playground: Detroit's Modest Beginning of a Very Good Thing," *Detroit Free Press*, August 26, 1900, C3.

American society. Joseph Lee, a wealthy Bostonian who became known as the "Father of the Playground Movement," was equally famous in his lifetime for directing the Playground Association of America and for founding the Immigration Restriction League. Through the League, Lee fought to prevent people "of the lower and peasant classes" from entering the United States. In an influential book on "constructive and preventative" philanthropy, Lee argued that poor immigrants were degrading America. "The filling of the unskilled occupations by a squalid imported population," Lee wrote in 1913, "has … checked the natural increase of the original stock to an extent probably equal to the whole volume of the immigration, the native American being unwilling to take the risk of his children falling into the lower caste which these importations have established. Our immigration, in short, has decided that the people who get born shall, to an increasing extent, be of the lower and peasant classes of Europe rather than of the native American stock."[14] In order to limit this alleged harm, Lee advocated the opening of supervised playgrounds and community centers in immigrant enclaves. Play instructors at these facilities were charged with educating the children of southern and eastern European peasants and assimilating them into American society through team sports and organized activities. Playgrounds were fun places for children to play, but they were also an intentional form of social engineering.[15]

Nativism, while common, was not the only motivation of the movement. The Playground Movement was also tied to the municipal housekeeping movement, or what historian Susan Wirka later termed the City Social as a contrast to the City Beautiful.[16] This movement was associated with the rise of women's clubs and settlement houses at the end of the nineteenth century. At a time when women were denied the right to vote, women successfully extended their political influence beyond the home by championing public causes related to education, hygiene, and the family. In doing so, they made the case for suffrage. While some clubwomen shared Lee's nativist political agenda, others

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[14] Joseph Lee, *Constructive and Preventive Philanthropy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 8.
[15] M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 21-23.
[16] Susan Marie Wirka, "The City Social Movement: Progressive Women Reformers and Early Social Planning," in Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, eds., *Planning the Twentieth Century City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 55-75.

did not. Many clubwomen came to see playgrounds as a necessity for all neighborhoods, not just immigrant enclaves, because they considered play to be an essential element of a healthy childhood. Clubwomen also rallied for the construction of bath houses, recreation centers, and community centers, which promised to improve the health and wellbeing of children and adults alike. In the early 1900s, women across the country organized to pressure cities and school districts to build these facilities at public cost.[17]

Detroit's leading playground advocate, Clara B. Arthur, exemplifies the feminist strand of the Playground Movement. Arthur co-founded the Michigan Equal Suffrage Association in 1885 with U.S. Senator Thomas W. Palmer, and she devoted her life to the cause of extending the franchise to women. Her activism from the 1880s to the mid-1910s made her a prominent political figure in Michigan. As the director of several women's clubs in Detroit, Arthur also became known locally as the "Mother of the Playground Movement" for her decades-long campaign to build public playgrounds and bath houses throughout the city. She was the first Detroiter to publicly advocate the construction of playgrounds, making her first speech on the subject in 1899, and she devoted much of the next decade of her life to the cause.[18]

Arthur initially favored organizing playgrounds as summer "vacation schools." These playgrounds would provide children safe, outdoor, instructional environments while public schools were out of session. Clubwomen built the first "vacation school" north of Eastern Market on the grounds of the Russell School (Figure 9). The public school board endorsed the experiment but provided no funding.[19] Undeterred, clubwomen organized subscription drives and asked businessmen for donations. The funds paid for both playground equipment and the salaries of play instructors.[20] Clubwomen volunteered at the playgrounds as well. However, the women did not intend for vacation schools to remain charitable endeavors for long. Instead they hoped to demonstrate the necessity of incorporating supervised playgrounds into all schools and

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[17] Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
[18] Judy Reinicker, *Clara B. Arthur Suffragist and Philanthropist and the Woman Suffrage Campaign in Michigan* (Newark, DE: privately printed, 2000).
[19] Clara B. Arthur, "History of Playground Beginnings in Detroit, Michigan," *The Playground* 3, no. 1 (April 1909): 2-7.
[20] "Mrs. Helen P. Jenkins Writes in Defense of Public Playground," *Detroit Free Press*, August 25, 1901, C5.

parks. As historian Dominick Cavallo has written, "Play organizers spent a great deal of time and money persuading city officials that play was too serious a business to be left to children and parents."[21]

"Ten Minutes the Limit."

Figure 9: The Russell School playground in 1908.[22]

To advance the playground cause, Clara Arthur worked closely with Joseph L. Hudson, Detroit's most successful merchant and philanthropist. In 1903, Hudson co-founded the Detroit Board of Commerce after the merger of two existing business organizations. Hudson became President in 1904. In that position, he spoke for the city's business community.[23] A teetotaler and lifelong bachelor, Hudson funded numerous

[21] Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 2.
[22] W. T. Martindale, "Playgrounds and Vacation Schools (From Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools of the City of Detroit for the Year Ending June, 1908)," *The Playground* 3, no. 1 (April 1909): 11.
[23] "Standing Committees," *Detroit Free Press*, May 26, 1904, 9.

Progressive causes, from municipal reform to alcohol prohibition.[24] He was especially active in causes related to children, health, and recreation. For example, as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Hudson led a fundraising campaign in 1906 to construct a downtown "Y." Like most YMCA facilities nationally, the new building was segregated. African Americans were granted memberships but were denied access to the locker rooms and gyms.[25] After protests by African American members, Hudson personally funded a small black community center, called the Douglass Institute, which opened in 1911.[26]

In addition to his work with the YMCA, Hudson also promoted recreation through the Playground Movement. At the request of Clara Arthur, Hudson financed several early playgrounds. He also raised funds from other members of the Board of Commerce. Frustrated by the slow pace of progress, Arthur and Hudson jointly founded the Detroit Recreation League in 1907. The league sought to increase private fundraising while simultaneously lobbying the school board to take responsibility for managing the city's growing network of playgrounds.[27] Arthur, Hudson, and their allies also joined the newly formed Playground Association of America.[28] At the Recreation League's urging, the mayor of Detroit, William B. Thompson, backed a plan to appropriate $10,000 to the Board of Education to provide playgrounds at most city schools.[29] The Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards, Phillip Breitmeyer, proposed bringing playgrounds within the purview of his commission instead. However, conservative members of the Board of Estimates refused to fund either plan, and playgrounds remained privately operated.

The debate over playgrounds played out concurrently with a debate over how to beautify Detroit's increasingly industrialized landscape. Like the real estate developers who championed the construction of the Grand Boulevard in the 1880s, the proponents of

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[24] Edward L. Lach, Jr., "Hudson, J. L.," American National Biography Online, last modified January 2001, accessed May 19, 2016, http://www.anb.org/articles/10/10-02233.html.
[25] "Race Line Drawn in the Y.M.C.A.," *Detroit Free Press*, November 16, 1909, 7.
[26] "Liberal Offer for a Negro Y.M.C.A.," *Detroit Free Press*, January 4, 1911, 16; and Adolph G. Studer, *One Hundred Years With Youth: The Story of the Detroit YMCA, 1852-1952* (Detroit, MI: Young Men's Christian Association, 1952), 36.
[27] "Play Grounds League Now: Organization is Effected to Provide Places for Children of Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, March 8, 1907, 12.
[28] "Members of the Playground Association of America," *The Playground* 1, no. 6 (Sept. 1907): 2-7.
[29] "Mayor Favors Public Playground System," *Detroit Free Press*, May 14, 1907, 5.

the City Beautiful sought to reorganize Detroit's neighborhoods around an expanded network of landscaped parks, boulevards, and monuments.[30] They praised the beauty of Detroit's existing parks and boulevards, but they considered them woefully insufficient. Like other advocates of the nationwide City Beautiful movement, they also called for the construction of monumental civic buildings, like those constructed in Chicago in 1893 for the World's Columbian Exposition. Yet unlike the City Social movement, businessmen dominated the City Beautiful movement. In historian Daphne Spain's words, "Male professionals built grand boulevards and civic monuments in search of the City Beautiful. Female volunteers built the places of everyday life, the neighborhood institutions without which a city is not a city—hallmarks of the City Social movement."[31] These gender divisions prevailed in Detroit, too, but both movements depended on the male-only Board of Commerce for financial and political backing.

Charles Moore played a key role in both movements. A writer by training, Moore became an aficionado of urban design after agreeing to serve as secretary to James McMillan after his election to the United States Senate in 1889. McMillan's interest in urban design dated at least to the early 1880s, when, as chair of the park commission, he hired Frederick Law Olmsted to design Belle Isle Park. McMillan was also a founder of the Detroit Museum of Art and a backer of the Detroit International Fair and Exposition of 1889, one of several precursors to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. In 1901, when McMillan organized the Senate Park Commission to redesign the National Mall in Washington, D.C., he drew upon some of the same talent that had built the "White City" at the Chicago fair in 1893. McMillan hired architect Daniel Burnham, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., architect Charles F. McKim, and sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to redesign the nation's capital. Charles Moore organized the commission's work. As secretary to the park commission, Moore accompanied Olmsted, Burnham, and McKim on an extended sightseeing trip to Europe in search of design inspiration. Moore also edited and promoted the commission's so-called McMillan Plan, which Congress adopted shortly after Senator McMillan's sudden

[30] William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
[31] Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

death from heart failure in 1902. These experiences made Moore one of the nation's leading experts on the emerging practice of city planning to reorganize American cities to be more beautiful and orderly, and in 1904 he brought this expertise back to Detroit.[32]

After securing passage of the McMillan Plan, Moore moved home to Michigan, where he became an executive at a major Detroit bank. He joined the Detroit Board of Commerce in 1904, the same year that Joseph Hudson took leadership as President. Soon after, the board invited Moore to give a public lecture on the merits of city planning. In October, Moore spoke before a rapt audience, showing lantern slides of City Beautiful plans from across the country.[33] He stressed to his audience that private initiative alone could not make Detroit beautiful; the city needed to fully fund its public Commission of Parks and Boulevards. After his speech, the Board of Commerce formed a committee to plan Detroit's beautification. Moore was named chair. Moore was also appointed to a new Municipal Art Commission tasked with advising the mayor on the design and placement of new civic monuments and buildings. In these two roles, Moore sought to build support for a municipal planning commission with the power to coordinate all new parks, roads, monuments, and playgrounds. This commission would beautify Detroit and protect the livability of its neighborhoods amidst the city's rapid industrialization.[34]

In 1905, at Moore's request, the Board of Commerce commissioned Charles Mulford Robinson to recommend improvements to the city's landscape. Robinson had recently published *Modern Civic Art*, a manifesto for the City Beautiful movement.[35] The commission in Detroit launched his planning career. Robinson's suggestions for remaking Detroit were wide ranging. He advocated a new boat landing at the foot of Woodward, a riverfront promenade, a second bridge to Belle Isle Park, new small parks and squares in every neighborhood, the rationalization of the street grid, and the

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[32] John W. Reps, *Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); Geoffrey G. Drutchas, "Gray Eminence in a Gilded Age: The Forgotten Career of Senator James McMillan of Michigan," *Michigan Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (2002): 78-113; and Kathryn Kozora, *Charles Moore: His Life & Contribution to Detroit Planning* (master's thesis, Wayne State University, 1983).
[33] "Beautifying Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, October 9, 1904, 20.
[34] Daniel M. Bluestone, "Detroit's City Beautiful and the Problem of Commerce," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 47, no. 3 (1998): 245-262.
[35] Charles Mulford Robinson, *Modern Civic Art: or, The City Made Beautiful* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903).

remaking of Cadillac Square with new civic buildings as its bookends. Not satisfied with his proposals, which the Board of Commerce deemed more visionary than practical, the board then hired Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., for a second opinion.[36] Olmsted repeated many of Robinson's recommendations, emphasizing most strongly the need to reclaim a stretch of the riverfront near downtown as a promenade and park. At the same time, Olmsted suggested that most of the riverfront further downstream could be devoted to the growth of industry. With regard to smaller parks, Olmsted argued for the adoption of a planning standard first enacted in Chicago: a commitment to building a park or plaza within a half mile of every resident. A diagram accompanying the report displayed the many areas of Detroit then more than a half mile from a park.[37]

The Board published the two brief reports together in 1905 as a demonstration of the value of professional planning for shaping the future of Detroit. These were the first city plans for Detroit since the Woodward Plan a century prior. Yet without a municipal planning commission to turn the suggestions into reality, little changed initially. Moore instead turned his focus to Chicago. In 1906, the Merchants Club of Chicago hired architect Daniel Burnham to draft the first comprehensive plan for the region. Burnham developed the plan with architect Edward Bennett, who prepared its visual elements, and Charles Moore, who wrote much of the text. For two years, Moore made frequent trips to Chicago to consult on the developing plan, and as with the McMillan Plan, he edited the final document. The publication of *The Chicago Plan* in 1909 marked a landmark moment in the history of city planning in the United States.[38] While other plans had sparked the national imagination before—the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C., being the most notable example—no plan before was so lushly illustrated, well argued, or comprehensive in its treatment as the Chicago Plan. From its opening pages, the plan made the case that Chicago was destined to become the greatest commercial power the world had known, and with proper planning, it could also be the most orderly and beautiful. To achieve that end, the plan called for the creation of a monumental civic

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[36] Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 190.
[37] Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Charles Mulford Robinson, *Improvement of the City of Detroit* (Detroit: Detroit Board of Commerce, 1905).
[38] Carl Smith, *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

center, the laying out of wide boulevards connecting every major park, the conversion of the entire Lake Michigan lakefront as parkland, the installation of small squares and playgrounds in every neighborhood, the conservation of forestland beyond city borders.[39]

Its instant fame—owing in part to a brilliant marketing campaign that included adding the plan to the curriculum of every Chicago school—helped Moore convince local politicians that Detroit needed its own comprehensive plan to match. City Beautiful and playground activists both believed a planning commission could help their cause by identifying sites throughout the city where parks and playgrounds were needed. Soon after *The Chicago Plan*'s publication, Mayor Phillip P. Breitmeyer—a professional florist and the former Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards—endorsed the creation of a City Plan and Improvement Commission and nominated Charles Moore to run it.[40]

1909-1918: From Private Advocacy to Public Planning

As chair of the City Plan and Improvement Commission, Moore moved to prepare a comprehensive plan for Detroit. However, a lack of funding limited implementation. Over the next decade, the commission would release many plans, but few would see realization. In the meantime, park advocates watched with rising alarm as industrial capitalists rapidly bought many potential park sites for use as rail lines and factories.

The limitations of the new City Plan and Improvement Commission were clear from the start when the Board of Estimates denied its first request for $1,000 to plan new parks and boulevards. Unable to get public funding, Moore leveraged private funding to press his case. In 1910, the Board of Commerce commissioned a map that visualized the limited reach of the existing park system (Figure 10). Existing parks are shown in green; proposed parks are shown in red. After a series of annexations—including in 1891, 1894, 1905, 1906, and 1907—the city had grown in size to 41 square miles.[41] Yet most of this land was devoid of parks. An accompanying table showed that Detroit provided just one

[39] Daniel H. Burnham, Edward H. Bennett, and Charles Moore, *Plan of Chicago* (New York: De Capo Press, 1970 [1909]).
[40] "The Beautification of Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 1909, 57.
[41] *Manual: County of Wayne, Michigan* (Detroit, MI: Board of County Auditors, 1926), 245.

acre of parkland per 370 residents. Boston, by comparison, offered one acre of parkland per 259 residents. Hartford had one acre per 76 residents.[42]

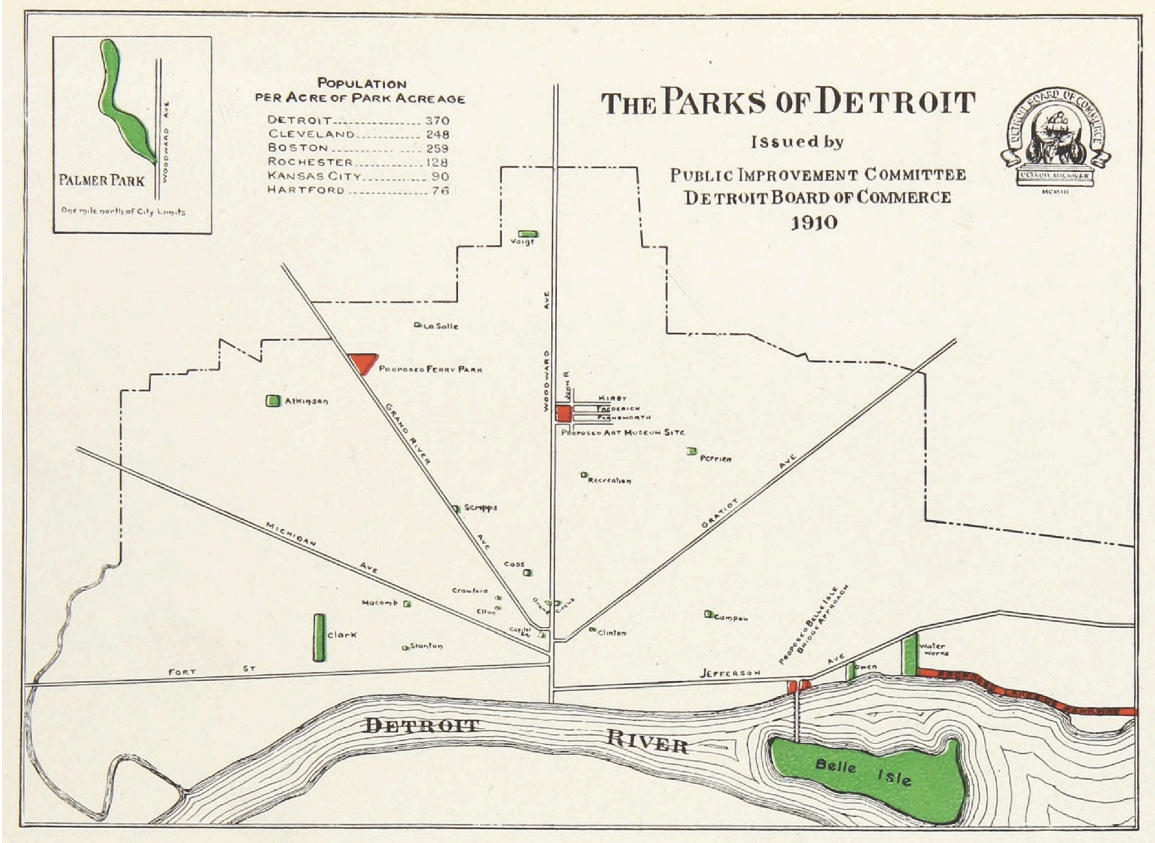

Figure 10: The Parks of Detroit, 1910.[43]

Moore felt the need for more parkland was obvious, but the commission did not get funding to hire a city planner until late in 1911. Moore's preferred planner, Daniel Burnham, died suddenly, so the commission hired his partner, Edward H. Bennett, instead. Because appropriations were limited, Bennett accepted a series of small commissions over the next three years rather than develop one major plan. In 1912, he prepared plans for Roosevelt Park: a new, formally landscaped park that would greet new arrivals to Detroit upon their exit from the monumental Michigan Central Station, which

[42] "The Parks of Detroit, 1910," printed in *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Department of Parks and Boulevards* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1911), no page.
[43] "The Parks of Detroit, 1910," printed in *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Department of Parks and Boulevards* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1911), no page.

was then under construction in the Corktown neighborhood on land formerly occupied by working-class housing.[44] In 1913, Bennett published a plan for a new fine arts center on Woodward to be anchored by new locations of the Detroit Public Library and the Detroit Institute of Arts, with direct diagonal connections to Belle Isle and the new train station via new boulevards.[45] In 1914, Bennett prepared plans for a riverfront boulevard that would run from Water Works Park in Detroit to Lakeshore Drive in the city of Grosse Pointe Park. He also prepared plans for an outer boulevard that would follow the paths of the Rouge River on the far west side of Detroit and Conner Creek on the far east side—the only significant rivers in the city besides the Detroit River itself—and then link the two together with a connecting series of parks and parkways in between. In 1915, all of these sketches and more were published together as a *Preliminary Plan of Detroit*. In addition to many park proposals, the plan also advocated widening and straightening Detroit's streets and remaking the Campus Martius area as a monumental Civic Center.[46]

The *Preliminary Plan* was published the same year as two other reports. One, by landscape architect Arthur C. Comey, extended Bennett's recommendations to the city's growing suburbs.[47] Together, Comey and Bennett's reports applied the ideas of the *Chicago Plan* to Detroit. Although lacking the *Chicago Plan*'s design qualities—the two reports were printed in black and white with only sparse accompanying text—they reflected the same spirit. Each of these documents stressed the need to aggressively acquire new parks, playgrounds, parkways, and forest preserves to give order to the city's rapid growth. Comey's report included detailed maps recommending park sites to acquire, with top priority given to areas with the highest population density (see Figure 11). The plan also recommended park acquisitions beyond city limits, including, if possible, *all* islands in the Detroit River, the lake district of Oakland County, the banks and shores of the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair in Macomb County, the banks of the

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[44] "City Plan and Improvement Association Plans Beautiful Approach to New Station," *Detroit Free Press*, July 14, 1912, 9.
[45] Edward H. Bennett and Frank Miles Day, "A Site for a Center of Arts and Letters," in Detroit City Plan and Improvement Commission, *A Center of Arts and Letters* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1913).
[46] Edward H. Bennett, *Preliminary Plan of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: City Plan and Improvement Commission, 1915).
[47] Arthur Coleman Comey, *Detroit Suburban Planning: Report to the City Plan and Improvement Commission* (Detroit, MI: City Plan and Improvement Commission, May 1915).

Rouge River and Connors Creek in Wayne County, and forest preserves throughout the metropolitan area. Comey also called for reorganizing residential areas as "neighborhood units," each with its own schools, playgrounds, library, and medium-sized park.[48]

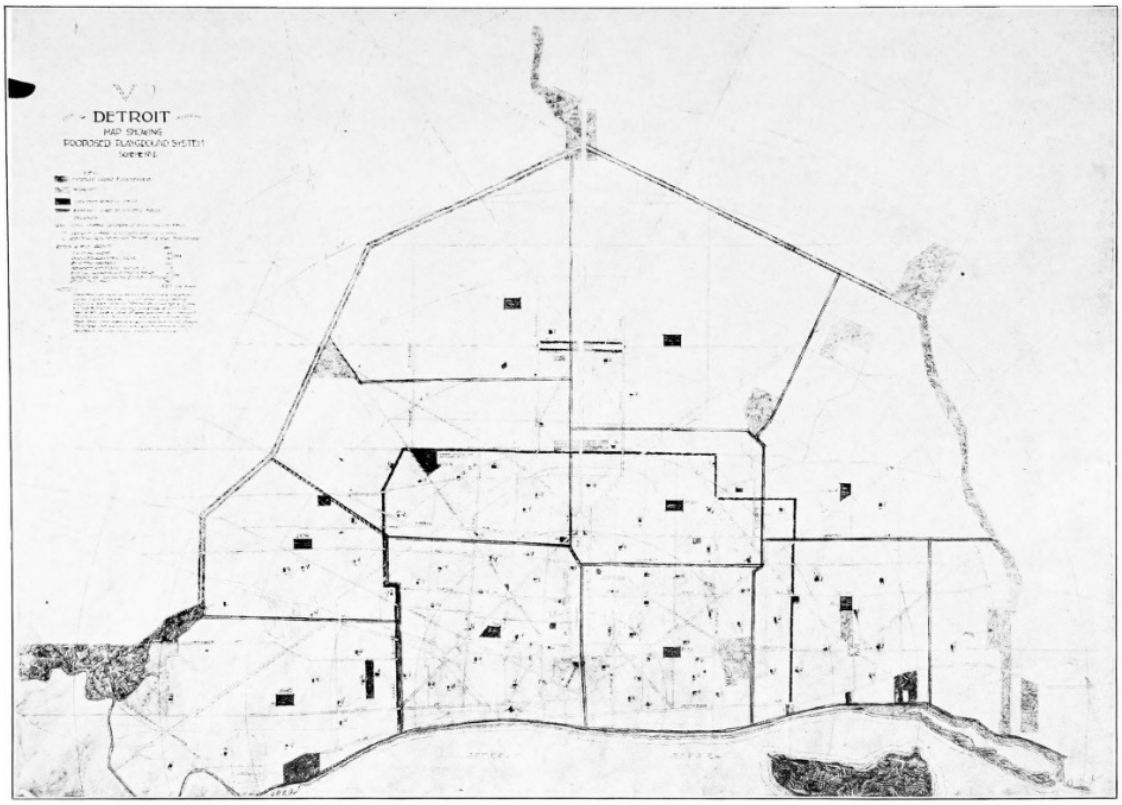

Plate XV. Map Showing Location for Playgrounds, Based Upon Population.

Figure 11: Map Showing Location for Playgrounds Based Upon Population, 1915.[49]

The City Plan and Improvement Commission also paid Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to update his earlier recommendations for improving the city's park system. With respect to the Detroit riverfront, Olmsted warned, "I see no apparent advance toward the conservation of this great civic opportunity and some indications that it may slip away forever, and I feel it my duty to point out that most improvements of detail in the parks, however desirable, can better afford to wait than definite steps toward a proper control of

[48] Ibid.
[49] "Plate XV. Map Showing Location for Playgrounds, Based Upon Population," in Arthur Coleman Comey, *Detroit Suburban Planning: Report to the City Plan and Improvement Commission* (Detroit, MI: City Plan and Improvement Commission, May 1915).

the development of the water front, which is the one great natural asset which gives distinction to the city."[50] Olmsted concurred with Bennett and Comey that the city needed to act immediately to protect at least some portion of the riverfront from industry.

Despite the flurry of recommendations released in 1915, only a few were acted on. The Common Council had approved the condemnation of houses for Roosevelt Park in 1913. The park was finally completed in 1921 after the last residents were evicted from their homes. The new Detroit Public Library and Detroit Institute of Arts were eventually built across from each other on Woodward, north of Warren, but the diagonal boulevards that were supposed to link the new Cultural Center to the train station and to Belle Isle were never built. Nor was a riverside boulevard ever built between Water Works Park and Grosse Pointe Park. The city did begin acquiring land for an outer boulevard—later to be known as Outer Drive—but little progress was made until the 1920s. Most critically, the opportunity to control development of the riverfront did indeed slip away, as new industrial enterprises opened rapidly along the length of the Detroit River.[51] The city opened a single park on the riverfront in the 1910s, called Riverside Park. Located on the west side of the city, in former Springwells Township, it featured Detroit's first outdoor swimming pool for children. However, the site would be converted to industrial use in 1922, becoming the site of the Mistersky Power Plant, and the city made no other attempt to protect its riverbanks in the 1910s.[52]

The Board of Commerce had more success in the realm of recreation than it did with beautification, presumably because of greater consensus within business and political circles about the need to make life tolerable for workers. In 1910, the board announced its support for a plan by Detroit's playground advocate, Clara Arthur, to build

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[50] Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., *Conditions in Detroit 1915* (Detroit, MI: City Plan and Improvement Commission, 1915), 11.

[51] Daniel M. Bluestone, "Detroit's City Beautiful and the Problem of Commerce," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 47, no. 3 (1998): 245-262; Donald E. Simpson, "Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013); and Krysta Ryzewski, "No Home for the 'Ordinary Gamut': A Historical Archaeology of Community Displacement and the Creation of Detroit, City Beautiful," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 15, no. 3 (2015): 408-431.

[52] In its place, the commission opened a different "Riverside Park" at the foot of West Grand Boulevard. This is where Riverside Park still exists today—with additional land that was added later. "Park Lighting Plant Site Trade Is O.K.'d," *Detroit Free Press*, August 22, 1922, 5.

a municipal bath house. Voters approved a bond issue in 1911 to construct the first bath house at Orleans and Erskine, just northeast of Eastern Market, near a heavily populated immigrant neighborhood. The lot had been the site of the old reservoir where Mayor Pingree had once hoped to build a park. Reformers then petitioned the Common Council to convert the land behind the bathhouse into a playground, shifting the responsibility for offering playgrounds from the school district to the city for the first time.[53] The reformers also pushed for state legislation that would enable the condemnation of private property for playground use.[54] These victories were enabled, in part, by Clara Arthur's lobbying success at Michigan's constitutional convention of 1907-1908. The delegates to the convention were exclusively male. However, Clara Arthur and other women showed up to press the case for woman suffrage. In a partial concession to their demands, the male delegates agreed to modify the state's constitution to grant tax-paying, property-holding women the right to vote on local bond issues. Michigan voters approved this limited extension of the franchise in 1908.[55] As a result, women were able to secure the votes during the next decade to pass local bonds for what historian Daphne Spain calls "redemptive places"—facilities like bath houses, playgrounds, parks, and community centers that were designed to make industrial cities tolerable places to live.[56]

After the success of the bath house campaign, the Detroit Recreation League and the Board of Commerce called for the formation of a public Recreation Commission. This commission would be responsible for providing recreation activities for children and adults throughout the city, at venues both public and private, including schools, while the Parks and Boulevard Commission would continue to operate the city's landscaped parks. In 1913, the Board of Commerce commissioned Rowland Haynes, Field Secretary of the Playground and Recreation Association of America, to prepare the *Detroit Recreation*

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[53] "Make Plea for City Playground: Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs Presents Needs to the Common Council," *Detroit Free Press*, November 16, 1910, 1.
[54] "Plan State Fight to Save Children: Charitable Workers Organize Bureau to Get More Effective Legislation; Want Power to Condemn Land for Playgrounds," *Detroit Free Press*, June 28, 1910, 3.
[55] John A. Fairlie, "The Michigan Constitutional Convention of 1907-1908," *The American Political Science Review* 2, no. 3 (May 1908): 443-447.
[56] Judy Reinicker, *Clara B. Arthur Suffragist and Philanthropist and the Woman Suffrage Campaign in Michigan* (Newark, DE: privately printed, 2000); and Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Survey. The report surveyed the city's existing recreational offerings in relation to the geography of young people in the city's neighborhoods (Figure 12). The report called for developing new playgrounds in the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of children per acre. The most densely crowded neighborhoods were those on the near east side, which were home to thousands of African American migrants and working class European immigrants, including a large community of Russian and Eastern European Jews. The report also outlined a five-year plan for expanding access to recreational facilities, and it included draft legislation to enable a Recreation Commission.[57]

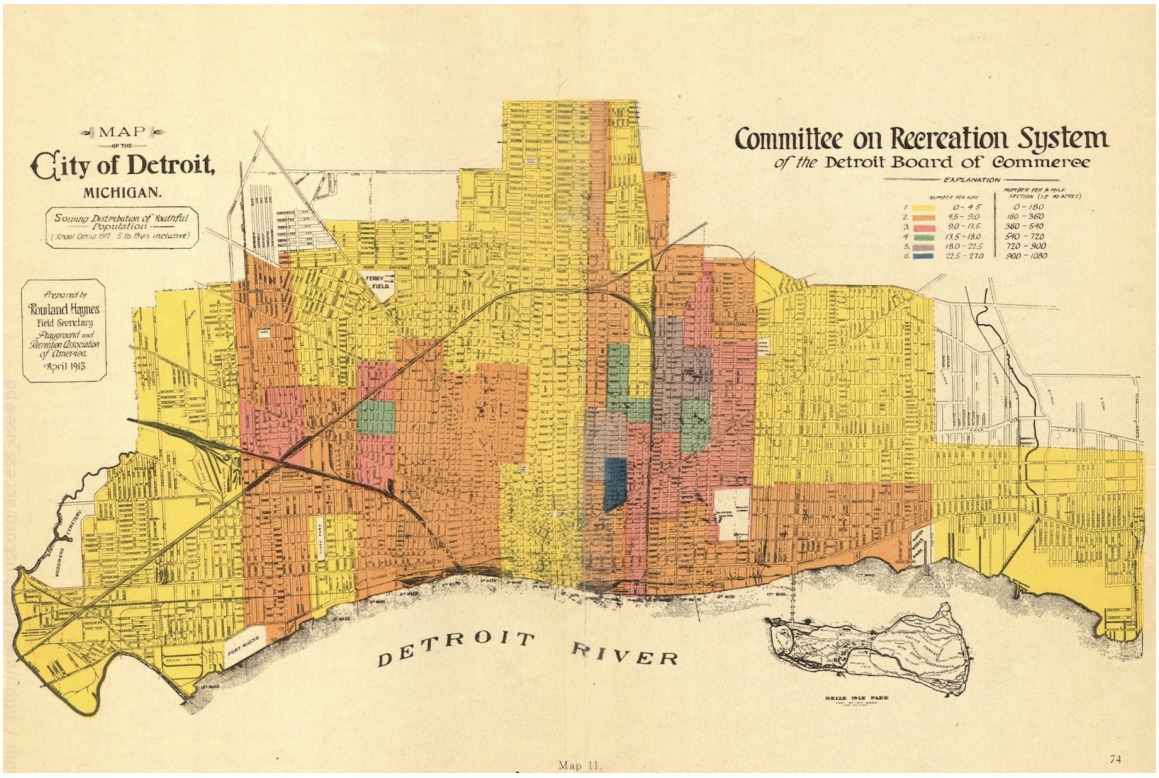

Figure 12: Distribution of Youthful Population in 1912.[58]

Voters approved the proposed Recreation Commission in 1914 with the passage of a new city charter. Ira W. Jayne became the first commissioner the following year.

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[57] Rowland Haynes, *Detroit Recreation Survey: March and April, 1913* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Board of Commerce, 1913).

[58] "Map of the City of Detroit, Michigan, Showing Distribution of Youthful Population," in Rowland Haynes, *Detroit Recreation Survey: March and April, 1913* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Board of Commerce, 1913), 74.

Jayne had served on the Board of Commerce subcommittee that had hired Haynes to survey recreational opportunities in Detroit. Under Jayne, the commission consolidated programs that had been conducted separately by the Board of Education, the parks commission, and volunteers. In addition to taking over management of the city's existing playgrounds, the new commission began organizing recreational programs for existing public and private agencies, including at parks, schools, churches, ethnic halls, settlement houses, and factories. The locations of the commission's programs are displayed in Figure 13 in relation to major roads and rail lines. At the same time, the Recreation Commission became the licensing agency for theaters, dance halls, and other commercial forms of recreation, giving the commission the power to suppress forms of working-class recreation that were deemed undesirable while promoting wholesome alternatives.[59]

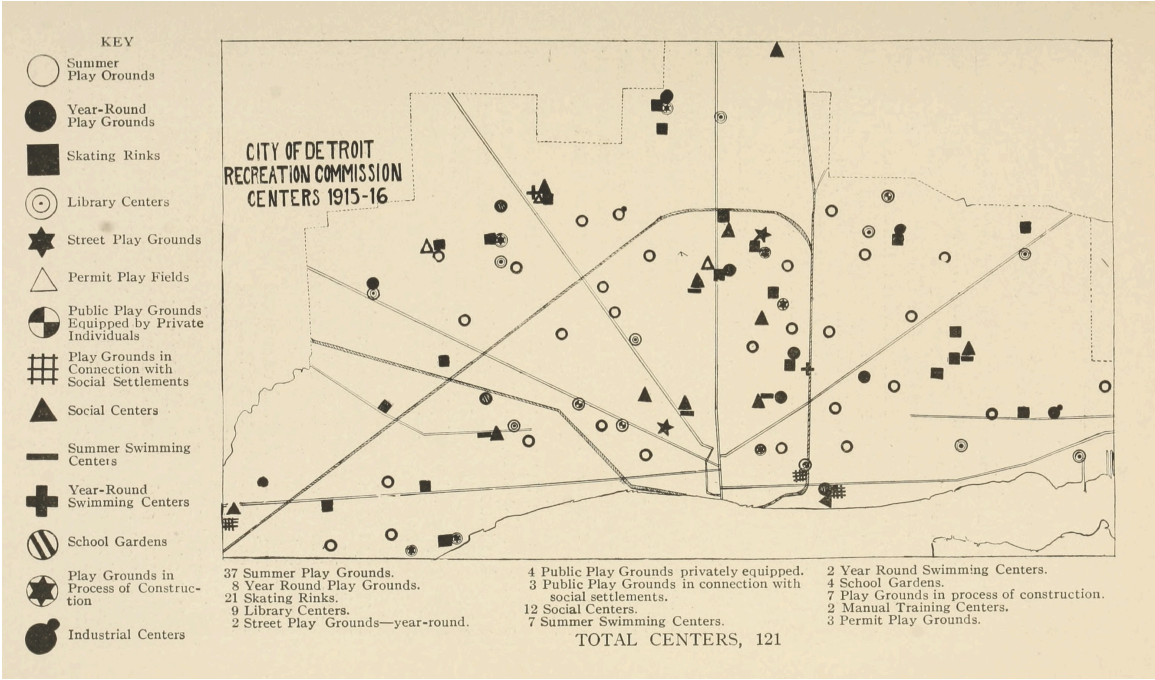

Figure 13: City of Detroit Recreation Commission Centers, 1915-1916.[60]

Under Jayne's leadership, the Recreation Commission pursued a socially liberal but paternalistic agenda. Jayne had previously served as an attorney for the Society for

[59] Fred M. Butzel, "Ira W. Jayne," *The Playground* 12, no. 12 (March 1919): 530-531.
[60] Detroit Board of Education, *Education in Detroit, 1916* (Detroit, MI: National Education Association, 1916), 135.

the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, where he was responsible for finding homes for Detroit orphans. He was also a founding member of the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1911.[61] Jayne believed strongly that the commission should serve all residents regardless of race or ethnicity, but he was accustomed to doing so on "separate but equal" terms.

As commissioner, Jayne formed a close working relationship with the leadership of the Detroit Urban League (DUL). The DUL formed in 1916 at the behest of white business leaders from the Detroit Board of Commerce, Associated Charities, and the Employers Association of Detroit. These businessmen were concerned that few, if any, social service agencies were meeting the needs of black migrants from the South, even though these migrants shared many of the same challenges as European immigrants, including high rates of poverty and illiteracy and a lack of job opportunities due to racial bias among employers. The businessmen decided to launch a Detroit chapter of the Urban League to improve living and working conditions for African American laborers and their families. The group hired Forrester B. Washington, an African American graduate of the New York School of Social Work, to serve as the DUL's first director.[62] Jayne worked with Washington and his successor, John C. Dancy, to develop a set of recreational offerings for African Americans separate from those offered for white residents. Jayne leased city-owned halls to the League for supervised dances, and he arranged after-hours access to Cass Technical High School for an African American basketball league.[63] However, the Recreation Commission itself had an almost exclusively white workforce, with only a single full-time black employee before 1920.[64]

While the campaign to create a Recreation Commission had been a success, advocates of both the City Social and the City Beautiful remained frustrated by the city's failure to build new parks and playgrounds to match its burgeoning population. By 1916, Detroit's park system was considered the second-least generous in the country, with 669 residents for every acre of parkland—a problem made worse by the 1915 fire that

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[61] "Freedom News," *The Crisis*, 77, no. 5 (May 1970): 209.
[62] Njeru Wa Murage, "Organizational History of the Detroit Urban League, 1916-1960," vol. 1 (PhD Diss., Michigan State University, 1993), 100.
[63] Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 62.
[64] "Social Progress," *The Crisis* 18, no. 4 (August 1919): 206.

destroyed the original Belle Isle Bridge, temporarily restricting access to the city's largest park.[65] However, the city couldn't afford to build new parks without taking on debt, and bond issues for parks and playgrounds required legislative approval from Lansing.

That restriction was lifted in 1917 by the passage of the Recreation and Playgrounds Act. This act gave all municipalities in Michigan the power "to operate a system of public recreation areas and playgrounds, including acquiring, equipping, and maintaining land, buildings, or facilities, employing a superintendent of recreation, and voting and expending funds for the operation of such a system."[66] After its passage, Detroit put a $10 million bond measure on the ballot to fund and expand both its parks and recreation systems. In spring of 1918, the bond measure passed overwhelmingly—again with the support of property-owning women, who were able to vote on local bonds since 1908. Voters also approved a new city charter, which officially gave the renamed City Plan Commission the authority to choose where to locate all new parks and recreational facilities, subject to Common Council approval.[67] Park supporters were hopeful for the first time that the *Preliminary Plan* would actually be enacted.

Park supporters also looked forward to new parks at the county and state level, in fulfillment of the *Preliminary Plan*'s calls for conserving beautiful natural scenery beyond city limits. In the 1910s, the Board of Wayne County Road Commissioners began planning an inner, middle, and outer belt of scenic roadways that would encircle Detroit.[68] These were proposed in the same spirit as the outer boulevard called for in Detroit's *Preliminary Plan*, except they were expressly designed for use by automobiles. Construction of Huron River Drive—a scenic road to the south and west of Detroit along the path of the Huron River, starting at its outlet into Lake Erie—began in 1913.[69] The board then proposed a county park system in 1915, noting that Wayne County residents

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[65] *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Department of Parks and Boulevards* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1916), 23; and Dan Austin, "The Day the Belle Isle Bridge Burned Down," *Detroit Free Press*, April 27, 2015.
[66] Recreation and Playgrounds Act of 1917, Mich. Comp. Laws § 123.51 *et seq*.
[67] Detroit Charter Commission, *Proposed Charter of the City of Detroit* (Detroit: City of Detroit, 1918); William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 435-436.
[68] Bob Garrett, "Legacy of Wayne County Road Commission," *Seeking Michigan*, February 18, 2015, http://seekingmichigan.org/look/2015/02/18/wcrc.
[69] Board of County Road Commissioners of Wayne County, *Seventh Annual Report* (Detroit, MI: Wayne County Board of Supervisors, 1913), 62.

already owned 41,308 licensed automobiles and needed pleasant destinations for Sunday drives.[70] In 1918, the children of Elizabeth Slocum donated their family estate, a farm located on an island downriver from Detroit, to Wayne County as Elizabeth Park, the first county park in Michigan. Playing double duty as a road commission and a parks board, the Wayne County Road Commissioners took control of the island in 1923 and began plotting a system of parkways throughout the county.[71] In the same period, the State of Michigan began planning its own park system. The state accepted its first donation of land—the future Interlochen State Park—in 1917 and formed the Michigan State Park Commission in 1919. This commission announced plans to open parks throughout the state, including on sites near Detroit, like the lake district of Oakland County.[72]

1918-1929: Separate and Unequal Park and Recreation Systems

With new powers and funding at the local, county, and state levels, the 1920s promised to be a major era of park expansion. However, not all Detroiters would benefit equally, if at all. The bond issue enabled Detroit to massively expand both parks and recreation, but the Common Council selectively funded the City Plan Commission's recommendations. Facilities were neither constructed in every neighborhood nor scaled to population density. While playgrounds were built in all working class areas, the city would build no parks or community centers near African Americans. Instead the Recreation Department relied on social service agencies to serve the black community. New parks built by county and state governments were not segregated per se, but they were not accessible either, both because they required a car to reach and because of hostility from white patrons. In order to have safe places to enjoy nature, African Americans had to build their own summer camps and campgrounds in the countryside.

Passage of the municipal bond for parks was in many ways transformative. In the 1920s, Detroit tripled the size of its park system, from 1,100 acres to 3,100 acres, by exercising its authority to condemn land up to five miles beyond city limits. Among the

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[70] Board of County Road Commissioners of Wayne County, *Tenth Annual Report* (Detroit, MI: Wayne County Board of Supervisors, 1916), 10-11.
[71] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 436.
[72] Claire V. Korn, *Yesterday Through Tomorrow: Michigan State Parks* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 12.

new parks were Memorial Park (now Erma Henderson Park), Nardin Park, Campau Woods Park (now Chandler Park), Connors Creek Parkway (now Conner Playfield), Baby Creek Park (now Patton Park), Riverside Park (now Gabriel Richard Park), Dover Park, Russell Woods Park, Sherwood Park, and, grandest of all, River Rouge Park, which alone added more than 1,000 acres to the park system. Most of these parks had to be brought within city limits through annexation, the last of which was approved in 1926.[73] The bond also funded the opening of five public golf courses, the most of any American city, and it brought the Outer Drive closer to completion.[74] A separate bond measure enabled the construction of a new bridge to Belle Isle, and bequests left by two wealthy businessmen and their friends paid to enlarge Belle Isle by a third through the dumping of fill material on both ends. Two memorials—the Scott Fountain on the west end and the Livingstone Memorial Lighthouse on the east end—commemorate these gifts. Each memorial stands on solid ground where the Detroit River once flowed.[75]

Play facilities also expanded. Before the bond, the Recreation Department owned 21 playgrounds and employed 70 permanent staff and 100 additional summer workers. In 1919 alone, the department built seventeen new playgrounds and five new playfields. Sixteen of these facilities were located within the Grand Boulevard, mostly on the east side, in the districts with the greatest number of children per acre. The largest was a 75-acre playfield northeast of city limits, which included 40 baseball diamonds and 50 tennis courts, more than doubling the total of each in the city. In total, Detroit's Recreation Department's land grew tenfold, from 57 acres before World War I to 547 acres by the end of the 1920s.[76] These new facilities proved enormously popular. The department counted over eleven million visits to its playgrounds and playfields in 1928 alone.[77]

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[73] Board of County Auditors, *Manual: County of Wayne, Michigan, 1926* (Detroit, MI: Wayne County, 1926), 245.
[74] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 436.
[75] Michael Rodriguez and Thomas Featherstone, *Detroit's Belle Isle: Island Park Gem* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 76-77.
[76] William Stocking, "Parks and Boulevards," in *The City of Detroit Michigan: 1701-1922*, ed. Clarence M. Burton (Detroit: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 1: 437.
[77] Daniel Amsterdam, *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, 72.

Wayne County and the State of Michigan also expanded their park holdings. In the 1920s, the Wayne County Road Commission developed a network of parks and parkways along the Huron River and the Middle Rouge River in the rural periphery of the county. Parks acquired in the 1920s include Huron River Park, Victory Park, Phoenix Park, and Cass Benton Park. These parks were designed to be visited by automobile and were advertised in the newspaper as a circuit for driving on the weekends.[78] State parks began opening in the same time period and were similarly marketed as destinations for family outings on weekends. Like Detroit's early municipal park system, the state commission depended at first on donations of land. The Dodge Brothers Corporation donated eleven parks in 1922, doubling the size of the nascent state park system. Howard Bloomer, an executive of the Dodge Brother Corporation, donated another four.[79] The majority of these new parks were small sites in the lake district of Oakland County, located about an hour's drive from downtown Detroit.[80]

While the expansion of park systems at the local, county, and state level greatly increased park acreage, Detroit's park network had two major shortcomings. The first was its failure to protect rivers and creeks from development. Condemnation added two new parks on the Detroit River: a new Riverside Park at the foot of the Belle Isle Bridge and Memorial Park a few blocks further east. Yet the vast majority of the riverfront was left to private development. The problem was one of both cost and priorities. City leaders were adamant that the entrance to Belle Isle Park be beautified—in part because a new bridge would have to be constructed to replace the one that had been lost—and no expense was spared to buy the land. Yet Riverside Park proved to be the most expensive acquisition in city history because it required the condemnation of a profitable amusement park. In 1927, a court ordered the city to pay a sum of $8,319,812 in

[78] "Wayne County Throws Open 5 Parks to Tourist Host," *Detroit Free Press*, April 28, 1928, 69.
[79] Charles K. Hyde, *The Dodge Brothers: The Men, The Motor Cars, and the Legacy* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 154.
[80] Many of these parks were converted to local parks in subsequent decades as the state park system redefined itself as an agency dedicated to wilderness and wildlife protection. Claire V. Korn, *Yesterday Through Tomorrow: Michigan State Parks* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989).

exchange for the 23 acres—an extraordinary $120 million in 2018 terms.[81] The city intended to acquire additional riverfront land, but its coffers were drained.

Bond money was also used to purchase parkland along Connors Creek and the River Rouge, but this too was limited in scope. Both of these waterways saw increasing industrial development after 1905 due to construction of the Detroit Terminal Railroad. The railroad encircled the city and its industrial suburbs, with its eastern leg following the path of Conner Creek and its western leg following the path of the Rouge River. When the automobile industry boomed, land along the Detroit Terminal Railroad became highly prized. So rather than a huge park, as planned, the last mile of Conner Creek became host to a coal-powered Detroit Edison plant and a series of car factories, including the Chrysler, Hudson, Continental, and Chalmers brands.[82] In the 1920s, the city bought what remained of the creek as a parkway, but the creek itself was buried underground in what was then the largest sewer project in United States history. The sewer would enable the construction of dozens of new residential subdivision on the east side. By the mid-1920s, most of the parkway above the sewer was repurposed as City Airport, leaving just enough parkland for an athletic field.[83] On the west side of the city, Detroit was able to preserve much more of the River Rouge corridor in massive River Rouge Park, but the river's final mile leading into the Detroit River became the most heavily industrialized waterway in the world, with Ford's massive River Rouge Complex completed in 1928.[84]

The second failure of the park expansion was the Common Council's decision not to acquire open space within the Grand Boulevard, where it was most lacking. As with playgrounds, the City Plan Commission had advised building new parks in the most congested neighborhoods of the city, including the near east side where the majority of African Americans resided. The reliance on park donations before 1900 meant that hardly any open spaces were located in the area known by the 1920s as Black Bottom. The neighborhood included just one open space on its western edge, Clinton Park, which was small, neglected, and in the shadow of the city's carceral institutions. Dedicated as a

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[81] "Fabulous Cost of Park Shown," *Detroit Free Press*, December 22, 1940, 2.
[82] Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 296.
[83] "Ask Airport Bond Issue of $5,000,000," *Detroit Free Press*, September 26, 1928, 1.
[84] Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 297.

park in 1869 on the grounds of a former cemetery, Clinton Park was progressively cut in size to make way for the extension of a road and the construction of St. Mary's Hospital, a jail, and then a police court. In 1909, the *Detroit Free Press* called Clinton Park the "Lowest in Caste of All City Greens," and Mayor Breitmeyer narrowly stopped the Police Department from constructing its headquarters on what little was left of it.[85]

To rectify the lack of open space on the east side, the planning commission proposed spending two million dollars to condemn all property on the block bounded by Chene, Maple, Joseph Campau, and Waterloo streets. Yet against the petitions of local residents, who endorsed the project, given the need for open space in the neighborhood, the Common Council unanimously rejected the appropriation, calling it too costly.[86] The council would only approve the construction of playgrounds. These too required the condemnation and demolition of apartment buildings, but the demolitions were carried out in the name of improving public health.[87] The board did not replace the housing it demolished, displacing families and exacerbating problems of overcrowding.[88]

Beyond this limited expansion of recreational and park facilities, the Recreation Department expected private agencies to take the lead in providing outdoor and indoor recreational opportunities to black Detroiters. In 1919, with some public funding, the Urban League built its first community center at 553 East Columbia near St. Antoine. In 1921, under the leadership of the Recreation Department's second director, Clarence E. Brewer, the department pledged, "to break down race prejudice through competition in play."[89] Like his predecessor, Ira W. Jane, Brewer worked closely with John Dancy, leader of the Urban League, and he joined the Detroit Urban League Board in 1923.[90]

In 1920, the Douglass Institute opened by Joseph Hudson was reorganized as the St. Antoine YMCA. In 1924, the Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald donated $25,000 to construct a new building. Rosenwald had made similar gifts in cities across

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[85] "Aged Romances Hang Over Clinton Park," *Detroit Free Press*, November 22, 1909, 4.
[86] "Council Rejects Play Site Project," *Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1921, 13.
[87] "New Playgrounds Planned by City," *Detroit Free Press*, March 28, 1924, 9.
[88] Elizabeth Anne Martin, *Detroit and the Great Migration, 1916-1929* (Ann Arbor, MI: Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 1993), 26.
[89] Clarence E. Brewer, "What Detroit Is Doing: Activities of Recreation Department in the Convention City," *Parks & Recreation* 4, no. 4 (1921): 314.
[90] David Allan Levine, *Internal Combustion: The Races in Detroit, 1915-1926* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 117.

the country.[91] Construction began in 1924. At the opening ceremony in 1925, the Vice President of the regional YMCA spoke to the African American in a paternalistic tone. "This marks a new era in the history of Detroit," he said, "because it will give an opportunity for many Negro young men to be brought under Christian influence and make them God fearing and decent citizens." Harvey B. Wallace, Chairman of the Building Committee, added, "This building should serve as an expression to you colored people of the interest and cooperation we white folk have in you and should inspire you to make of this building one dedicated to the purpose of developing a race of men and boys of Christian character." The General Secretary of the Detroit YMCA, Dr. Adolph G. Studer, made similar remarks. "This new building," he told the crowd, "will be a potent factor in breaking prejudice between the races and will bring a new relationship of good will and understanding. In the days to come the Negro and white races will live in closer fellowship and friendship than in the past. But when the building is completed the responsibility is yours as to whether or not, it functions as it ought."[92]

Despite this paternalistic overture, black Detroiters generally could not count on access to philanthropic or public recreational facilities. Technically, discrimination was illegal in Michigan. In 1890, the Michigan Supreme Court rejected the "separate but equal" doctrine in *Ferguson v. Gies*, holding that a civil action for damages could be brought for discriminatory treatment in public accommodations like restaurants or theaters. However, the awarded damages were so low that the ruling, in effect, enabled continued discriminatory treatment for the price of a small fine.[93] Nor did the ruling apply to private clubs like the YMCA, which continued to operate separate facilities for whites and blacks. Private amusement parks, like Bob-Lo Island, excluded black Detroiters into the 1940s. Black Detroiters had to seek amusement far from Detroit at resorts like Idlewild, which was founded in northern Michigan by investors from Chicago in 1912 as a summer getaway for African Americans who were unable to vacation

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[91] Adolph G. Studer, *One Hundred Years With Youth: The Story of the Detroit YMCA, 1852-1952* (Detroit, MI: Young Men's Christian Association, 1952), 38.
[92] Adolph G. Studer, *One Hundred Years With Youth: The Story of the Detroit YMCA, 1852-1952* (Detroit, MI: Young Men's Christian Association, 1952), 37.
[93] Paul Finkelman, "The Promise of Equality and the Limits of Law," in Paul Finkelman and Martin J. Hershock, eds., *The History of Michigan Law* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 207.

elsewhere. Many settlement houses were also segregated. The Franklin Settlement, which built the city's first playground, did not accept African American children in its nursery until 1923, and even then, racial integration was the exception, not the norm.[94] Nor were new public parks and recreational facilities at the county, state, or national levels necessarily open to black Detroiters. The proximity of Wayne County and Michigan parks did not necessarily make them accessible to black Detroiters, who, even if they were wealthy enough to own a car to reach them, would risk harassment or even violence for hiking or bathing in all-white suburban and rural communities.

In 1926, the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations—a special commission formed in the wake of racist violence on the city's east side—made plain the continuing inadequacy of service in a report that describes widespread discrimination. Reverend Reinhold Niebuhr, then a pastor in Detroit, served as chairman of the committee and Bishop William T. Vernon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church served as vice chair.[95] The report blamed increasing racial violence in the city on two factors: the white desire to maintain separation of the races, on the one hand, and the "incomplete adjustment" of recently arrived black migrants from the South to the city, on the other. The report argued that unlike "educated blacks," these newer migrants to the city failed to properly maintain their property or keep up their "personal appearance and demeanor."[96]

With respect to recreation, the report argued that the city's Department of Recreation had "an excellent record of service to the colored people." African Americans made use of many of the department's facilities, and unlike the Department of Parks and Boulevards, the Recreation Department also had a record of hiring African Americans, including Leon "Toy" Wheeler, who became the first black Recreation Director in 1919. Pools, however, were an exception to the rule of integration: "The chief exception is in the matter of swimming in indoor pools where mixed bathing unfortunately becomes the occasion of unpleasant incidents. Difficulties seem to be confined to certain indoor pools and have not occurred at outdoor beaches." According to the report, "The department is

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[94] Joseph A. Beattie, Stuart Courtis, and Samuel Sheplow, *The Franklin Scene: An Informal History of Detroit's Oldest Settlement* (Detroit: Franklin Settlement, 1948), 17.
[95] Jayne Morris-Crowther, *The Political Activities of Detroit Clubwomen in the 1920s* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 43.
[96] Jayne Morris-Crowther, *The Political Activities of Detroit Clubwomen in the 1920s* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 45.

making every effort to preserve the legal rights of the colored group and at the same time to make its facilities available for all groups with the least possible friction."[97] The language suggests that opening city pools to black swimmers—which would "preserve the legal rights of the colored group"—could come at the cost of making its facilities "available for all groups with the least possible friction." In other words, the report blamed the "colored group" for provoking racist reactions in white patrons.

The report also noted the "serious lack of summer camping facilities for Negroes, particularly for women and children." The Detroit Free Press, for example, operated a free summer camp for poor boys, but it excluded African Americans. Agencies that tried to start campgrounds for black children faced opposition from rural landowners. Per the report, "Race prejudice in country communities adjacent to possible camp sites adds special difficulty to the problem of providing fresh air facilities for the Negro people of the congested districts."[98] Notably, the report does not ask the Department of Parks and Boulevards to open its own campground to African American children, even though the department purchased Camp Brighton in 1924 for the purpose of running an outdoor children's camp.[99] Rather than opening the city's own camping facility to black youth, the report called on private agencies to fill the gap: "We suggest that institutions such as the Y.M.C.A., which possess camping facilities, make these available for certain periods for colored people under the same conditions which apply to their other camp periods. The acquisition of additional camping facilities for the use of colored people by such agencies, is also highly to be desired."[100] The authors did urge the city to build a new

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[97] Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, *Report of the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations: Embodying Findings and Recommendations Based Upon a Survey of Race Conditions in the City, Undertaken in 1926* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1926),12.
[98] Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, *Report of the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations: Embodying Findings and Recommendations Based Upon a Survey of Race Conditions in the City, Undertaken in 1926* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1926),12.
[99] "Recreation Body Buys Camp Site," *Detroit Free Press*, June 14, 1924, 10.
[100] Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, *Report of the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations: Embodying Findings and Recommendations Based Upon a Survey of Race Conditions in the City, Undertaken in 1926* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1926),12.

recreation center specifically for African Americans on the site of the Ginsburg library, which was scheduled to be closed due to its inadequate size and condition.[101]

After 1926, several private agencies expanded recreation facilities for African Americans. The Detroit branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) established the Lucy Thurman Branch for Colored Girls and Women in 1927. In 1928, the Detroit YWCA opened Camp Norcom in Dexter for black girls. The Lucy Thurman Branch Building opened on Elizabeth Street in 1933.[102] Yet the YMCA and YWCA maintained white-only policies at their other new facilities. The Northwestern Branch YMCA, for example, was built in 1925 on West Grand Boulevard just east of Grand River, directly across from Northwestern High School. Until at least the 1940s, black high school students attending Northwestern were not allowed to join their white classmates for athletics or dances at the Y across the street.[103] Because all private and public summer camps were white only, the Urban League also worked to purchase its own campground. In 1931, the League opened the Green Pastures Camp in Grass Lake, Michigan, south of what is now Waterloo State Recreation Area.[104] The Urban League's director, John C. Dancy, came to regard the Green Pastures camp as his single greatest success. For decades, the Green Pastures Camp offered an enriching and beloved outdoors experience to thousands of black children from Detroit.[105]

The city's own response to the 1926 report was to open its first recreation center for African Americans. The Central Community Center—later renamed the Brewster Center, and then the Brewster-Wheeler Center, after the recreation center's founding director, Leon "Toy" Wheeler—opened on October 25, 1929. Acting Mayor John C. Nagle dedicated the facility on November 1 before a crowd of 5,000. He presented the

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[101] Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, *Report of the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations: Embodying Findings and Recommendations Based Upon a Survey of Race Conditions in the City, Undertaken in 1926* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1926),12.
[102] Nancy C. Curtis, *Black Heritage Sites: An African American Odyssey and Finder's Guide* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 1996), 448.
[103] Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 343.
[104] Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 75-81; and Joseph S. Cialdella, "Gardens in the Machine: Cultural and Environmental Change in Detroit, 1879-2010" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 153-203.
[105] John C. Dancy, *Sand Against the Wind: The Memoirs of John C. Dancy* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1966).

new recreation center as a symbol of racial healing. "I dedicate this building," he said, "for the people of the city of Detroit, regardless of race, color or creed. I realize that much prejudice exists in Detroit, but a building of this kind will wipe it out."[106] The Central Community Center was a state-of-the-art facility, and its opening was heralded nationally as a sign of racial progress in the urban North.[107] Yet the building's opening happened to coincide with the onset of the Great Depression, which quickly brought any further expansion of Detroit's parks and recreation systems, and any further efforts to advance racial equity within those systems, to a halt.

Conclusion

The reformers of the Progressive Era fought to build public agencies with the power to provide parks and recreational facilities to all urban residents. Yet as Detroit's experience shows, they only succeeded in part. After successful campaigns by City Beautiful and playground activists, Detroit formed a Recreation Commission and a City Plan Commission to complement its existing Parks and Boulevard Commission. With voter approval, the city of Detroit then went on a spending spree, acquiring dozens of new park properties in the 1920s, including major new parks at the edge of the city like Rouge Park, Baby Creek Park (the future Patton Park), and Campau Woods Park (the future Chandler Park). The funding also helped build Outer Drive and beautify the gateway to Belle Isle. However, the park system that resulted did not honor planners' intentions to distribute parks and recreational facilities on an equitable basis.

African Americans were particularly disadvantaged. Citing the expense, the Common Council vetoed the creation of a park on Detroit's near east side, which would have required clearing an occupied block of buildings. The Common Council *did* vote to demolish apartment buildings to create playgrounds, but other recreational facilities were absent from the area. As a result, the overcrowded Black Bottom neighborhood remained deprived of open space and recreational facilities. With the exception of Belle Isle, which was located a short streetcar ride away, the Parks and Boulevard Department hardly served the black community at all, leaving that responsibility to the more welfare-

[106] "Dedicate Largest Community Center in Detroit, Mich.," *The Chicago Defender*, November 2, 1929, 2.
[107] Forrester B. Washington, "Recreational Facilities for the Negro," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140, no. 229 (November 1928): 272-282.

minded Recreation Department. The Recreation Department, in turn, depended on private agencies like the Detroit Urban League to organize separate African American summer camps, community centers, and athletic leagues to compensate for its own gaps in service. The Recreation Department did not open a racially integrated recreation center until 1929, when the black population of Detroit was nearing 150,000. Settlement houses and social agencies also provided separate and unequal facilities to black Detroiters, prompting black-led organizations like the Detroit Urban League to fill the gaps in service through privately provided community centers and summer camps.

This separate and unequal system of park provision would prove untenable in the long run. As the next chapter explores, racial tensions would explode during World War II, leading to violence in and beyond the city's parks. After World War II, African Americans would organize against inequality, fighting for equal access to public and private recreational facilities and sports league. They would also organize against plans to clear and redevelop inner city neighborhoods—urban renewal schemes that were justified, in part, by the need to provide access to open space, an amenity not present due to the privatism of the nineteenth century and the racial bias of the 1920s.

Chapter 4: The Unequal Peak of Public Provision (1929-1967)

After the initial crash of the Great Depression, the New Deal enabled a wave of park improvements and acquisitions. In New York, Robert Moses oversaw a massive expansion of city, regional, and state park systems using federal funds, inspiring park leaders elsewhere.[1] Not all cities saw the same frenzy of construction during the 1930s, but most cities were able to hire laid off laborers and build new facilities for recreation like pools and stadiums. Park improvements paused again during World War II, but the postwar boom brought another wave of park building. Across the country, planning commissions enacted comprehensive plans that called for new parks in every subdivision and the clearance of inner city neighborhoods to make way for modern housing and long-desired open space. Unlike in the 1920s, the latter prospect of urban renewal was now feasible thanks to federal funding and a drop in property values near the decaying core of the city.[2] The parks built in this period largely dispensed with nature and artifice—most were formulaic rectangles of grass and asphalt designed principally for team sports and family gatherings—but they met workers' need for recreation and leisure. However, while park and recreation systems were flush with funding as never before, they operated against a backdrop of intensifying racial strife and a festering urban crisis.

Hardening racial divisions rendered many parks and recreational facilities inaccessible to people of color. As the nation entered World War II, fights between white and black youth became common in parks, pools, and amusement centers. Some of the worst fighting took place in Detroit—the nation's so-called Arsenal of Democracy. In the summer of 1943, at the height of the war, fighting on Belle Isle sparked a citywide

[1] Moses began building parks in the 1920s with bond money. In the 1930s, he switched to federal funds to accelerate the construction of parks, parkways, and playgrounds. Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974).
[2] The literature documenting and critiquing urban renewal is vast, but some of the best sources focus on Detroit. These include Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), and June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

race riot that would rage for four days.[3] The riot highlighted the fact that access to parks and recreational facilities, whether public or private, remained inequitable in both the South and the North. African Americans were routinely barred from municipal pools in northern cities like Grand Rapids, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland until the 1950s. While not legally off limits, white hostility prevented African Americans from patronizing beaches in cities like Buffalo, Boston, and Chicago.[4] Private amusement parks routinely stopped African American youth from entering. When urban amusement parks did integrate, they sometimes lost so many white customers that they were forced to close.[5] In the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans won legal battles securing equal access to public accommodations, yet the backlash was often extreme. After court decisions in 1961 and 1962 required the city of Atlanta to integrate its public pools, some neighborhoods voted to close them instead. Some residents circulated petitions to privatize the entire park system to maintain racial separation.[6] In the North, white families avoided integration by moving out of central cities. Tens of thousands of families relocated to newly built, racially exclusive suburbs beyond city boundaries that were reachable only by car.[7]

The racial crisis intersected with an economic crisis—one that shook Detroit particularly hard. During World War II, industrial cities like Detroit had boomed beyond capacity as they ramped up production of tanks, airplanes, and other military equipment. With few greenfield sites remaining in the central city—and with proximity to a rail line no longer essential for many forms of production thanks to the advent of highways and trucking—manufacturers began opening factories in rural communities where they could build huge, single-story factories. As an added benefit, these communities also promised lower taxes, and with Detroit boxed in by newly incorporated charter townships, villages, and municipalities, the city could not simply annex these communities to recapture the

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[3] Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1991).
[4] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 154-155.
[5] Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
[6] Kevin M. Kruse, "The Politics of Race and Public Space Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt in Atlanta," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 5 (2005): 610-633.
[7] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

lost tax base. Between 1947 and 1967, the number of manufacturing jobs in Detroit fell 47 percent, from 281,500 to 149,600, as work shifted to the suburbs. The job losses were compounded by technological upgrades that enabled far fewer workers to build the same number of cars. Deindustrialization and white flight combined to generate a crisis that city planners saw happening but struggled to address. In order to arrest decline, planners had to make the central city appealing again to both employers and middle-class families, and that would require remaking the built environment and healing racial tensions.[8]

Parks and recreation were one component of that broader agenda of postwar renewal. After the war, a combined Department of Parks and Recreation and a newly empowered City Plan Commission pledged to amend the city's unequal provision of open space and recreational facilities. The two agencies worked together to enact a dual mandate: to acquire enough new parkland in outlying neighborhoods to keep pace with development and to reconstruct the neighborhoods within the Grand Boulevard to include open space. In practice, however, the Department of Parks and Boulevards continued to prioritize larger parks in outlying areas, and the department gained a reputation for racial bias. The City Plan Commission, by contrast, fought hard to create large areas of open space in the inner city, but implementing its far-reaching vision required displacing thousands of black families. In the 1950s and 1960s, both departments would face rising resistance as residents fought back against institutional indifference and displacement. Activists would also push to integrate private athletic leagues and recreational facilities. However, the grassroots movement for racial justice in the park and recreation system would not capture significant political attention or resources until after the rebellion of 1967, when Detroit was again beset by harrowing violence and destruction.

1929-1940: Reordering the Provision of Parks and Recreation

At the onset of the Great Depression, the city of Detroit entered a period of severe fiscal distress. However, the initiation of the federal New Deal soon enabled local, regional, and state park systems to begin expanding and improving again. Federal support also jumpstarted long-stalled plans to increase access to open space in inner city Detroit through a controversial program of "slum clearance" and redevelopment.

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[8] June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

During the Great Depression, the Department of Recreation and the Department of Parks and Boulevards each experienced severe cutbacks in personnel. At the peak of unemployment, in 1930, half of Detroit's labor force was out of work.[9] Unemployment increased patronage of recreation centers, but the Recreation Department's budget was nearly eliminated by the Common Council. According to the historian Sidney Fine, the department only survived because Mayor Frank Murphy believed the department was an essential "bulwark against 'crime, unsocial conduct and poisonous ideas.'"[10] The Department of Parks and Boulevards also eked by on a sharply reduced budget, even though the size of the park system had greatly increased over the past decade.

The acquisition of new parkland ceased with two exceptions: land acquired through foreclosure and land acquired with federal funding. Eliza Howell Park was acquired in 1936 through negotiations with a real estate developer who had fallen into arrears on his property taxes.[11] The parks department and the recreation department also received generous assistance from New Deal agencies, which kept numerous Detroiters employed in construction and maintenance. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), in particular, employed thousands of Detroiters in park-related work. WPA men planted trees, picked up rubbish, supervised playgrounds, and built dozens of new amenities in city parks, including tennis courts, skating rinks, and playfields. The Works Progress Administration also built Gallagher Field, the Lasky Recreation Center, and Keyworth Stadium in Hamtramck, among other large projects.[12]

The New Deal also jumpstarted plans to reconstruct the inner city of Detroit. In 1933, the Federal Housing Corporation allocated $3 million to Detroit to start the nation's first federally funded "slum clearance" project. The state legislature created the Detroit Housing Commission to implement the project. The commission considered four sites, all of them on the near east side.[13] Ultimately, the commission chose to condemn ten blocks bounded by Rowena (now Mack), Wilkins, Beaubien, and Hastings (now the I-75

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[9] Elizabeth Clemens, *The Works Progress Administration in Detroit* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 10.
[10] Sidney Fine, *Frank Murphy: The Detroit Years* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), 321.
[11] "Deed to Park Site Given to the City," *Detroit Free Press*, December 16, 1936, 14.
[12] Elizabeth Clemens, *The Works Progress Administration in Detroit* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).
[13] "3 Million Allotted for Slum Clearing," *Detroit Free Press*, November 22, 1.

Service Drive). Planning consultants at the University of Michigan recommended the chosen site for several reasons: 1) the living conditions there were among the worst in the city; 2) the area was already predominantly black, so building public housing there would not change the city's racial geography; 3) the neighborhood had been losing population and assessed value since the mid-1920s; and 4) the new Central Community Center, located just outside the site boundaries, could serve as an anchor for the new neighborhood.[14] The director of the community center, Leon Wheeler, personally endorsed the plan. "Unless you can take the sting out of this district first, it will continue its blighting influence on any decent area near it," he is paraphrased as saying. "I believe that the only reasonable place to start is in this area."[15] Clearance would also allow for new playgrounds and athletic fields in close proximity to the recreation center.

WPA laborers began clearing the neighborhood in 1935. The site became the location for a series of low-rise, publicly owned townhouses, known as the Brewster Homes. The Central Community Center became known as the Brewster Recreation Center. The WPA also provided the manpower for a parallel project, called the Parkside Homes. The Parkside Homes were built on vacant land alongside Chandler Park on the city's far East Side.[16] These two projects were racially segregated. The Brewster Homes were only open to black families; the Parkside Homes were only open to white families. Both projects enabled low-income residents to live in good housing next to playgrounds and parks, but the Brewster Homes did so at far greater cost. The land was more expensive to acquire, and nearly one thousand families were temporarily displaced and relocated as their homes were demolished. However, the Detroit Housing Commission's director, Josephine Gomon, handled the task of relocation with sensitivity and speed, and the Brewster project was widely regarded as a success.[17]

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[14] Allan A. Twichell, *A Planned Housing Community for Rehabilitation in a Blighted Area on the East Side of Detroit, Michigan: A Preliminary Study* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1933)

[15] Allan A. Twichell, *A Planned Housing Community for Rehabilitation in a Blighted Area on the East Side of Detroit, Michigan: A Preliminary Study* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1933), 11.

[16] Elizabeth Clemens, *The Works Progress Administration in Detroit* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008) 105.

[17] June Manning Thomas, "Josephine Gomon Plans for Detroit's Rehabilitation," *Journal of Planning History* (2017), doi: 10.1177/1538513217724554.

The New Deal also gave support to regional and state authorities to create new parkland and recreational amenities on the outskirts of metropolitan regions. Rather than improve public health or beautify cities, these new parks were intended to conserve natural areas and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, including picnicking, camping, fishing, and hunting. In 1936, Harlow O. Whittemore, the chair of landscape architecture at the University of Michigan, and Henry S. Curtis, a national figure in the recreation movement, began plotting a regional park system for metropolitan Detroit. They were motivated initially by a desire to preserve the scenery of the Huron River valley in Washtenaw County. They proposed a series of large parks along the Huron River connected by scenic parkways. These parkways would link up with Huron River Drive in Wayne County. In pursuit of political support and funding, they extended their proposed system of parkways first to the Clinton River, which wound its way through Livingston and Macomb counties before emptying into Lake St. Clair, and then, in pursuit of Wayne County's tax base, to the shorelines of Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River, and Lake Erie, which, though heavily developed, still had open spots of land that could be made accessible to Detroiters for fishing, boating, picnicking, and bathing.[18]

[18] Clifford W. Senne, "A Historical Study of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority" (Master's thesis, University of Michigan, 1948); Cynthia F. Reynolds, *Metroparks for the People: A History of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority* (Ypsilanti, MI: Harbor Links Pub., 2006); Joseph S. Cialdella, "Gardens in the Machine: Cultural and Environmental Change in Detroit, 1879-2010" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 204-263; and "Organization History," Metroparks, https://www.metroparks.com, accessed February 4, 2018.

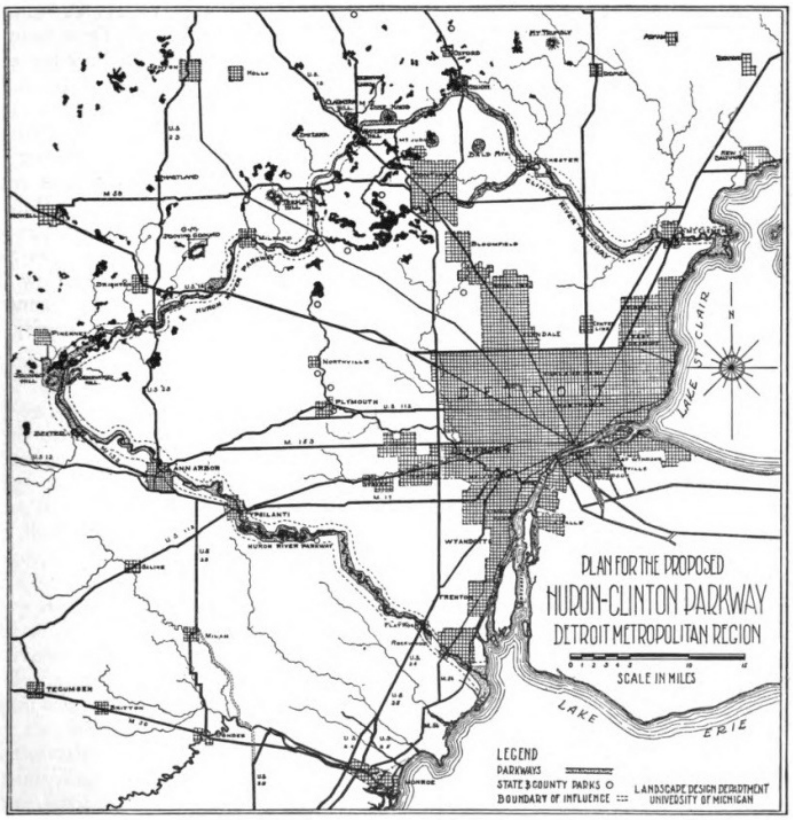

Figure 14: Plan for the Proposed Huron-Clinton Parkway, 1938.[19]

In the end, Whittemore and Curtis proposed a five-county regional authority, called the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA), to build and maintain a 200-mile circuit of parks and parkways to be known as the Metroparks (Figure 14). The Michigan State Legislature authorized the authority in 1939. The following year, a majority of residents in all five counties approved a millage to fund park acquisition and development. After the election, Wayne County commissioners sued to stop the collection of the millage. They complained that Wayne County residents would pay nearly all of the taxes while benefiting the least because so many of the prospective parks would be located far from Detroit. Residents of the inner city would find the Metroparks particularly hard to reach because few of the parks were accessible by transit. Wayne County was also the only regional government that already operated its own system of parks and parkways—a system it was busy expanding. They felt they could satisfy the

[19] Harlow Olin Whittemore, "The Proposed Huron-Clinton Parkway," *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* 44, no. 19 (Spring 1938): 211.

demand for regional parks through their own combined road and park board. Yet the court ruled that voters had lawfully approved the millage, and Wayne County therefore had no grounds to sue. The county lost, and the HCMA proceeded to acquire land and build out its first parks in 1942.[20]

In Detroit, meanwhile, Mayor Edward J. Jeffries, Jr., decided to narrow the focus of the municipal park system to focus on meeting the city's recreation needs, not on maintaining inspiring natural scenery. In 1940, he merged the Recreation Department and the Department of Parks and Boulevards into one Department of Parks and Recreation. A report justifying the decision argued that the old notion of parks—as sylvan retreats from the bustle of city life—had fallen out of favor. Now urban parks were places of vigorous recreation for people of all ages. The report also argued that both departments were providing many of the same services at needless expense. The Department of Parks and Boulevards was engaged in the provision of recreation through the maintenance of pools, playgrounds, athletic fields, and golf courses inside its larger parks. The Department of Parks and Boulevards duplicated some of the services of the Public Works Department by maintaining the Grand Boulevard and Outer Drive. These boulevards were built as lushly landscaped parkways, but by 1940, they were clogged with traffic and were no longer lined with delicate plants and flowers—only hardy grass, shrubs, and trees. After the creation of the Department of Parks and Recreation, all boulevards were transferred to the Public Works Department, and the Department of Parks and Recreation largely ceased to emphasize beautification and contact with nature through parks. Instead it focused on recreational programming and the physical maintenance of small and large parks and their built facilities.[21]

The reorganization of the department around a mission of recreation fit a national pattern. In the mid-1930s, the national government surveyed all recreational and park lands in the United States and sought to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of city, county, regional, state, and federal park systems.[22] Federal bureaucrats argued that

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[20] Ibid.
[21] J.M. Leonard, *The Place of a Recreational Program in the Organization of a Municipality* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, 1940).
[22] National Park Service, *Recreational Use of Land in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1934); and National Park Service, *A Study of the Park*

local parks and recreation centers should satisfy urban residents' daily needs for outdoor leisure and exercise through facilities located in their neighborhoods. County and regional parks should be larger in size and located beyond the central city's borders. These parks were promoted as driving destinations that could give urban residents the chance to enjoy the countryside, hold picnics, or swim. Regional parks also protected critical streams and forests from development. State and national parks increasingly served a mission of conservation. State park systems focused on purchasing large areas of natural beauty in order to give state residents the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature. Smaller state parks, like those in Oakland County that had started the Michigan state park system, were transferred to local governments, and the state focused on larger properties.[23] National parks, meanwhile, were the grandest of all. They protected the most important natural, historical, and cultural landmarks in the country. Increasingly, national parks were valued for ecological reasons, not just aesthetics. This made them wholly distinct from urban parks, which were typically manmade environments designed to meet everyday human needs for social and physical activity.[24]

1940-1945: Wartime Racial Conflict

In addition to consolidating parks and recreation into a single department, Mayor Jeffries also convinced the Common Council to adopt a zoning ordinance in 1940. This marked a victory twenty years in the making for Detroit's planners. When zoning was first proposed in the early 1920s, commercial real estate developers had resisted, fearing that height limitations would limit the profitability of downtown development. By 1940, some of the same developers rallied in favor of zoning. The downtown building boom had long since ceased, and the central business district was losing value.[25] The following year, Mayor Jeffries asked the City Plan Commission to begin preparing a comprehensive master plan for the city—the first since Edward Bennett's *Preliminary Plan* was released

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and Recreation Problem of the United States (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1941).

[23] Claire V. Korn, *Yesterday Through Tomorrow: Michigan State Parks* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989).

[24] Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

[25] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed Zoning Ordinance* (Detroit: City of Detroit, 1940); and "Zoning At Last," *Detroit Free Press*, December 26, 1940, 6.

in 1915. The commission issued a preparatory report in May of 1941 that outlined the expected cost and timeline.[26] A core goal of the comprehensive plan was to reconstruct the "inner city," defined as the area within the Grand Boulevard. By clearing and redeveloping older neighborhoods, planners hoped to boost downtown property values, relieve traffic congestion, open up land for economic development, and meet rising standards for the quantity and quality of housing, open space, and recreation. Yet the preparation and implementation of the plan were delayed by the onset of World War II. The focus of the new Department of Parks and Recreation, meanwhile, turned to alleviating the racial conflicts that coursed through the city as Detroit's population swelled with new arrivals seeking factory work in the nation's Arsenal of Democracy.

Since the department's founding, the Recreation Department had pledged "to break down race prejudice through competition in play."[27] The new Department of Parks and Recreation reaffirmed this commitment to promoting ethnic and racial harmony. In its mission statement, the department's Recreation Division pledged "to provide safe recreational facilities for the leisure hours of children and adults; to promote the physical and moral life of the people in the neighborhood communities; to eliminate race prejudice and promote a civic and community spirit among the mixed racial groups through group games, contests and social activities; and to develop and educate the heterogeneous population of Detroit to the American democratic ideals."[28] Yet as black activist Snow F. Grigsby protested in a 1937 pamphlet, the department had long failed to treat white and black residents equally. "What answer will the Recreation Commissioner give for not allowing Negro youths to attend summer camp as other youths attend?" Grigsby asked. "What answer will the City Planning Commissioner give for having provided for the Recreation Commission several swimming pools and playgrounds in the last two years, but none of which are located in the community convenient for its colored citizens?"[29]

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[26] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Preliminary Report on the Preparation of a Master Plan for the City of Detroit* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1941).
[27] Clarence E. Brewer, "What Detroit Is Doing: Activities of Recreation Department in the Convention City," *Parks & Recreation* 4, no. 4 (1921): 314.
[28] Warren M. Banner, *Observations on Conditions among Negroes in the Fields of Education, Recreation, and Employment in Selected Areas of Detroit, Michigan* (Washington, D.C.: National Urban League, 1941).
[29] Snow F. Grigsby, *White Hypocrisy and Black Lethargy* (Detroit, MI: Snow F. Grigsby, 1937).

Complaints about unequal treatment became more frequent in the 1940s as racial conflict became more pronounced in the booming city. With factories gearing up for war production, Detroit's population reached 1,623,452 in 1940. Many of the newcomers were white and black Southerners, and they competed bitterly for work and housing in the congested city.[30] In a sign of brewing trouble, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that a brief "riot" overtook Belle Isle during 4th of July celebrations in 1940. According to an account in the *Detroit Free Press*, a dozen police officers were injured after a crowd of "up to 3,000 Negroes stormed the Belle Isle police station at 7:00 P.M. Thursday and attempted to liberate a youth who had been suspected of stealing a canoe. Rioting continued for more than half an hour, and ten scout cars, four patrol wagons, several cruiser crews were dispatched to the island to augment special holiday forces on duty there."[31] The youth in question, a 19-year old African American, protested his innocence in court. He told the judge that he had taken an unoccupied canoe for a ride without the intent to steal it. A few weeks later, he accepted a plea deal. He served ninety days in jail after pleading guilty to charges of simple larceny and disturbing the peace.[32]

The following winter, racial conflict erupted at Northwestern High School, a predominantly white school on the edge of a growing black neighborhood. Three days of skirmishes between black and white youth inside and outside the school led many to believe that a race riot was imminent. Afterward, black activists and faith leaders pressured Mayor Jeffries to organize the Mayor's Committee on Race Friction, a committee with a similar mandate as the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations that had been organized in 1926. The new committee hired Warren N. Banner, Research Director

[30] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[31] "Police Hurt As Mobs Stone Belle Isle Station," *Detroit Free Press*, July 5, 1940, 1.
[32] "Ninety Days Given in Belle Isle Riot," *Detroit Free Press*, August 1, 1940, 5.

of the National Urban League, to investigate race relations in Detroit.[33] In a telling sign, Banner himself was stopped and frisked by police while conducting his investigation.[34]

In his report to the committee, Banner found that incidents of racial bias were commonplace in Detroit, including in the school system, the police department, and City Hall. Racial bias was also common in the administration of parks and recreation. Banner reported that African Americans were excluded from the outdoor pool at Rouge Park. The Supervisor of Swimming Pools told Banner that the policy was a holdover from the Department of Parks and Boulevards; the supervisor ordered the pool desegregated on May 30, 1941, in response to Banner's report. Banner also reported that some African Americans working for the Recreation Department had lost their jobs after the merger. In addition, some neighborhoods experiencing racial transition had no integrated recreational facilities. The North End, for example, only had a private Jewish Community Center, and the center did not admit non-Jewish members. North of Hamtramck, the private Dodge Community House operated two facilities with public subsidies: one for white residents and one for black residents. The black facility was located on the first floor of a vacant school and only included "a ping pong table, materials for games and crafts, an old piano and an embryonic library." The community center was surrounded on three sides by a schoolyard, but rather than serve as a park, it served as a parking lot. Factory workers paid five cents per day to park their cars there. The proceeds funded the community center and its single staffer. The white community center, by contrast, offered a full array of recreational offerings.[35]

Despite the damning report, little changed. More racial conflicts broke out as the war progressed. In a particularly infamous incident, in February of 1942, white residents resorted to violence to stop black families from moving into some of the Sojourner Truth

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[33] Karen R. Miller, "'We Cannot Wait for Understanding to Come to Us': Community Activists Respond to Violence at Detroit's Northwestern High School, 1940–1941," in Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005): 235-258.

[34] Warren M. Banner, *Observations on Conditions among Negroes in the Fields of Education, Recreation, and Employment in Selected Areas of Detroit, Michigan* (Washington, D.C.: National Urban League, 1941), 14.

[35] Warren M. Banner, *Observations on Conditions among Negroes in the Fields of Education, Recreation, and Employment in Selected Areas of Detroit, Michigan* (Washington, D.C.: National Urban League, 1941).

homes, a public housing development located in northeast Detroit next to an all-white, Catholic Polish neighborhood. Some feared that their property values would plummet because banks would not lend in neighborhoods undergoing racial transition. Others voiced fear of rising crime. Some resented the gains that African Americans were making in the workplace. Egged on by the pastor of nearby St. Louis King Catholic Church, 150 white residents gathered in protest on February 27, 1942, on the eve of the project's opening. Some burned a cross on a nearby field. The next day, a crowd of 1,200 assembled to stop the arriving black families from entering their new homes. The police arrested 220 people in the ensuing melees. Only six families were able to enter their homes the first day. Afterward, they had to live under armed guard. In the following weeks, 1,100 police officers and 1,600 Michigan National Guard troops were assigned to the area to protect the black residents of the integrated project.[36]

The most severe racial disturbances took place in June 1943. The month began with a "hate strike" at the Packard Motor Plant. On June 3, more than 25,000 white workers left the assembly line after learning that three black workers had received promotions. The strike lasted three days.[37] Two weeks later, on June 15, police were called to the Eastwood Amusement Park at Gratiot and Eight Mile. A group of two hundred young white people, including high school students and enlisted soldiers, began attacking black teenagers who tried to use the pool. More than one hundred black youth were forced to flee the park for their safety.[38] The following Sunday, June 20, the second-worst riot in Detroit's history began with intermittent fights throughout the day on Belle Isle. These fights culminated in a melee on Belle Isle Bridge, which then spilled into nearby city streets. As word of the growing conflict spread throughout the city, white youth began to mass on Woodward and descend on Black Bottom. Black men and women were pulled off of streetcars by the crowd and beaten in the streets. Homes and cars were lit on fire. Fighting continued for three more days, until 6,000 federal troops occupied the streets and enforced a curfew. In all, thirty-four people were killed. Of

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[36] B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence,* revised edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989 [1972]), 99; Lloyd D. Buss, "The Church and the City: Detroit's Open Housing Movement" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 40-44.
[37] B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence,* revised edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989 [1972]), 97-98.
[38] "Police Clubs Quell Youths in Zoot Fight," *Detroit Free Press*, June 16, 1943, 1.

those, twenty-four were African-American. The police were responsible for killing seventeen of them.[39] In the most notorious incident, a white police officer entered the St. Antoine YMCA and shot a black man in the back after the man mockingly shouted "Heil Hitler" at the officer. Police officers then assaulted bystanders in the YMCA lobby who witnessed murder. The police waited forty minutes to call for medical help, until after the gunshot victim had bled to death on the floor.[40]

The violence of the war years made clear that Detroit's parks and recreational facilities were not simply amenities to be enjoyed by all; they could also be sites of exclusion and conflict. Achieving integration would take concerted pressure and action. One object of protest after 1943 was the popular Bob-Lo Island amusement park. Since the private park's founding in 1898, Bob-Lo had excluded African Americans from the island except on designated "colored" days. Coleman A. Young—the man who would become Detroit's first black mayor—experienced the shame and humiliation of this policy firsthand as a child. In his memoir, Young recalls boarding the ferry along with his white classmates after their eighth grade graduation. Suddenly, "one of the guides jerked the cap off my head to check out my hair and officiously informed me that black children were not permitted at the park." Young's classmates continued on to the park without him. Looking back, Young recalled this early encounter with racism as a turning point in his life. "I honestly wasn't prepared for that," he wrote. "And I was never the same person again."[41]

A dozen years after Young's experience, Bob-Lo's Jim Crow policy remained in force. In 1944, a group of thirty-five girls on a YWCA outing attempted to board the ferry to the park. The entire group was refused admission because two of the girls were black. The Young Women's Christian Association reported the incident to the Mayor's Interracial Committee, but no action was taken against the park's owner.[42] A similar incident took place that year at the Rouge Park pool. Detroit's Supervisor of Swimming

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[39] Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1991).
[40] B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence,* revised edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989 [1972]), 106-107.
[41] Coleman A. Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994), 30.
[42] Megan Taylor Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans": African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1954* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 76.

Pools had ordered the pool desegregated in 1941. Nevertheless, park attendants were still preventing African Americans from using it. In 1944, a group of white and black girls visited the pool on a YWCA outing. The white girls were allowed to enter the pool, but the black girls in the group were subjected to an impromptu "health inspection." After looking over the girls' feet and arms, an attendant refused them entry.[43]

After the Bob-Lo incident, a group of black investors announced they would open an integrated alternative to the island park. In 1944, the investors purchased Sugar Island in the Detroit River and announced the formation of the Sugar Island Amusement Corporation to operate it. However, the park never opened. The local township rezoned the land to residential and refused to allow the park to operate. The company's ferry also sank in suspicious circumstances.[44] Instead, Bob-Lo itself was integrated in 1948 thanks to the courage of Sarah Elizabeth Ray. The only black woman in her secretarial class, Ray sought to board the Bob-Lo boat with her white classmates in 1945 to celebrate the completion of their studies. Like her classmates, Ray was sold a ticket and boarded the ferry, but an attendant noticed her skin color and forced her to de-board. Afterward, Ray asked the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to represent her in a lawsuit. In court, the Bob-Lo Excursion Company defended its practice of refusing admission to "negroes and disorderly persons," arguing that the State of Michigan's Civil Rights Act did not apply to Bob-Lo because the ferry operated in international waters. In 1948, the dispute went to the United States Supreme Court, where Thurgood Marshall argued Ray's case. Ray prevailed. In another landmark ruling, the Supreme Court also disallowed the enforcement of racial restrictions in deeds.[45] The cases were precedents for the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that would follow in 1954.[46]

Despite this victory, other forms of discrimination persisted, even in public facilities. In 1947, the neighboring city of Dearborn—home to the Ford Motor Company and its integrated workforce—held a public meeting where city officials strategized how

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[43] Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 251n59.
[44] Patrick Livingston, "Sugar Island: The African-American Amusement Park That Never Was," *Historical Society of Michigan Chronicle* (May 2012): 22-24.
[45] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). 182.
[46] Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 65-66.

to prevent African Americans from entering its new rural campground. At the urging of Dearborn's openly segregationist mayor, Orville Hubbard, the officials agreed to a residents-only admission policy for the new facility. Through a combination of deed restrictions, racial steering, a refusal of mortgage lending, and threatened violence against potential black homeowners, Dearborn proudly maintained itself as one of the largest industrial communities in the United States without a single black resident, so treating the campground like a members-only club would have the effect of enforcing the color line.[47] Similarly, the upscale Grosse Pointe communities, which bordered Detroit to the east, did not allow non-residents to enter any of their lakeshore parks. These five communities had no black residents until the 1960s—again due to deed restrictions, racial steering, lack of lending, and intimidation of aspiring black homeowners—so the residents-only policy had the effect of maintaining the color line. In other cases, public facilities were inaccessible not by law but due to the lack of available transportation. Regional and state parks were not accessible by public transit, so most inner city residents, who relied on public transit in disproportionate numbers, had no means of reaching them. These parks were instead the near-exclusive domain of white families who arrived by car.

1945-1952: The Post-War Boom and Its Biases

After World War II, and the terrible racial violence it wrought on factory floors and city streets, the City Plan Commission began working again on a comprehensive master plan for Detroit. Among other objectives, including clearing land for light industry and upgrading the city's aging housing stock, city planners hoped to make it easier for residents to access parks and recreational facilities. Arguing, "the need for recreation is almost as important as the need for food and shelter," the commission called for a massive increase in parks and recreational facilities in all quarters of the city.[48] Yet opening space in the inner city would once again prove to be a challenge.

The completed 1947 master plan, prepared under Mayor Jeffries in August 1946, embraced the concept of planning residential areas as "neighborhood units." Each

[47] David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property, State Policy, and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[48] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 3.

neighborhood unit would have a set of shared civic institutions—including a school and a park—at its center.[49] To achieve this vision, the plan called for building new parks "in all parts of the city, but especially in the area within Grand Boulevard—the noisy, congested, inner city, where people hardly know the lift of spirit which a man experiences in open spaces." The report continued: "These things are essential to healthful living. Without them, we shall continue to reap the harvest which is sown by shortsightedness. Our children, playing in the streets, will still be exposed to the hazards of traffic. Juvenile and adult delinquency will remain on the increase. The heart of our city will experience progressive depopulation as people seek the open suburban areas. Even with an adequate recreation system, we will not solve all our problems by any means, but we will check undesirable tendencies, and we will take a long stride toward making the city a better place in which to live."[50]

Judged against the national standard of ten acres of parkland for every thousand residents, Detroit's acreage was woefully insufficient.[51] In 1946, Detroit owned 4,942 acres of parkland within city limits, or 2.8 acres for every thousand residents—one fifth of the desired standard. Moreover, just three parks—Belle Isle, Rouge, and Palmer—accounted for more than half of all the acreage. Rouge and Palmer were located at the city's edges, far from inner city residents. The city also failed to meet the national standard for neighborhood playgrounds and playfields. Detroit had less than one acre per thousand residents when it should have had three. Within the Grand Boulevard—its most congested area—Detroit had less than a half-acre per thousand people. Planners blamed this deficiency on the city's past reliance on gifts and donations. "Detroit has never established any practice providing for the simple and orderly acquisition of neighborhood playgrounds," the report noted. "Most of those now in existence are school grounds. The rest came to the city mainly as gifts from generous citizens or were salvaged at tax sales.

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[49] June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 40-41.
[50] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 5.
[51] The National Park Service developed standards for parks and recreation at all geographic scales in the late 1930s and published them in 1941. These standards were also promoted by the National Recreation Association. National Park Service, *A Study of the Park and Recreation Problem of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1941).

Many neighborhoods have no playgrounds or open space at all."[52] Detroit also lacked sufficient recreation centers. Only five of its centers—Brewster, Kronk, Lasky, Parkside, and St. Clair—offered a full range of recreation options. With regard to outdoor swimming, in 1946 Detroit had a single beach on Belle Isle and a single outdoor pool at Rouge Park, and the Rouge pool was closed to African Americans.[53]

To remedy the situation, the plan called for purchasing more than 1,000 acres of land for playgrounds, 1,300 acres for playfields, and 1,800 acres for large parks. The plan also called for building 19 new recreation centers, eight outdoor swimming pools, three stadiums, and two arenas.[54] These facilities would be distributed throughout the city, but planners acknowledged they faced a dilemma in deciding which areas to prioritize. "There is, as everyone knows, a desperate need for recreational facilities in the older sections of the city, a need that must be met," the report noted. "But, unless park and playground sites are also acquired in the more sparsely settled outlying districts, the time will come when they, too, will be confronted with the same desperate need. Furthermore, unless they are acquired soon, these sites, now vacant, will be built upon, and the cost of acquiring them will become prohibitive." The report concludes that "the only course open to the city is to purchase and improve sites in both the old and new sections simultaneously," without preference for one priority or the other.[55] This failure to choose one priority over another gave leeway to future administrations to choose.

The plan's priorities were clearer with regard to playgrounds, which were deemed to be necessary but ultimately unworthy of public investment: "Since playlets may be needed in great numbers, the Plan Commission advocates that they be developed and maintained through private initiative—as adjuncts to apartment developments or as co-operative neighborhood projects."[56] Alternatively, neighbors could petition to form

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[52] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 17.
[53] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 17.
[54] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 19.
[55] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 21.
[56] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 6.

special assessment districts to tax themselves for play space.[57] Not surprisingly, few neighborhoods took advantage of the offer in the years to come, and the provision of playgrounds in the inner city would remain deficient.

Planners did not advocate the purchase of any sizable natural areas. No natural areas remained in city limits, and unlike in the past, Detroit could no longer buy prime land beyond city borders and expect to annex the surrounding subdivisions. Detroit stopped expanding in size in 1926 after the state made it easier for surrounding suburbs to incorporate as charter townships or their own municipalities rather than join the central city. Instead the City Plan Commission expected the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, Wayne County, and the State of Michigan to buy more land near Detroit. In 1943, the governor of Michigan had commissioned a report on the desirability and feasibility of purchasing such recreational land in Southeast Michigan. The report recommended the purchase of 10,000 acres of land on the outer edge of the region—overlapping in some cases with the target area of the Metro Parks system. The state was only interested in purchasing the most scenic land, which it defined as areas with many hills, rivers, lakes, and tree cover. Consequently, the state focused on purchasing land far north and west of Detroit, in Oakland and Livingston counties, where such conditions prevailed due to the retreat of glaciers long ago.[58] This state-level program of land acquisition was approved, and by 1948, the sites in Figure 15 had been purchased.[59]

[57] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*. (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, August 1946), 22.
[58] Michigan Conservation Commission, *A Program to Provide Recreation Areas in Southeastern Michigan* (Lansing, MI: State of Michigan, 1943).
[59] Michigan Department of Conservation, *State Recreation Lands in Southeastern Michigan: A Progress Report* (Lansing, MI: State of Michigan, 1948).

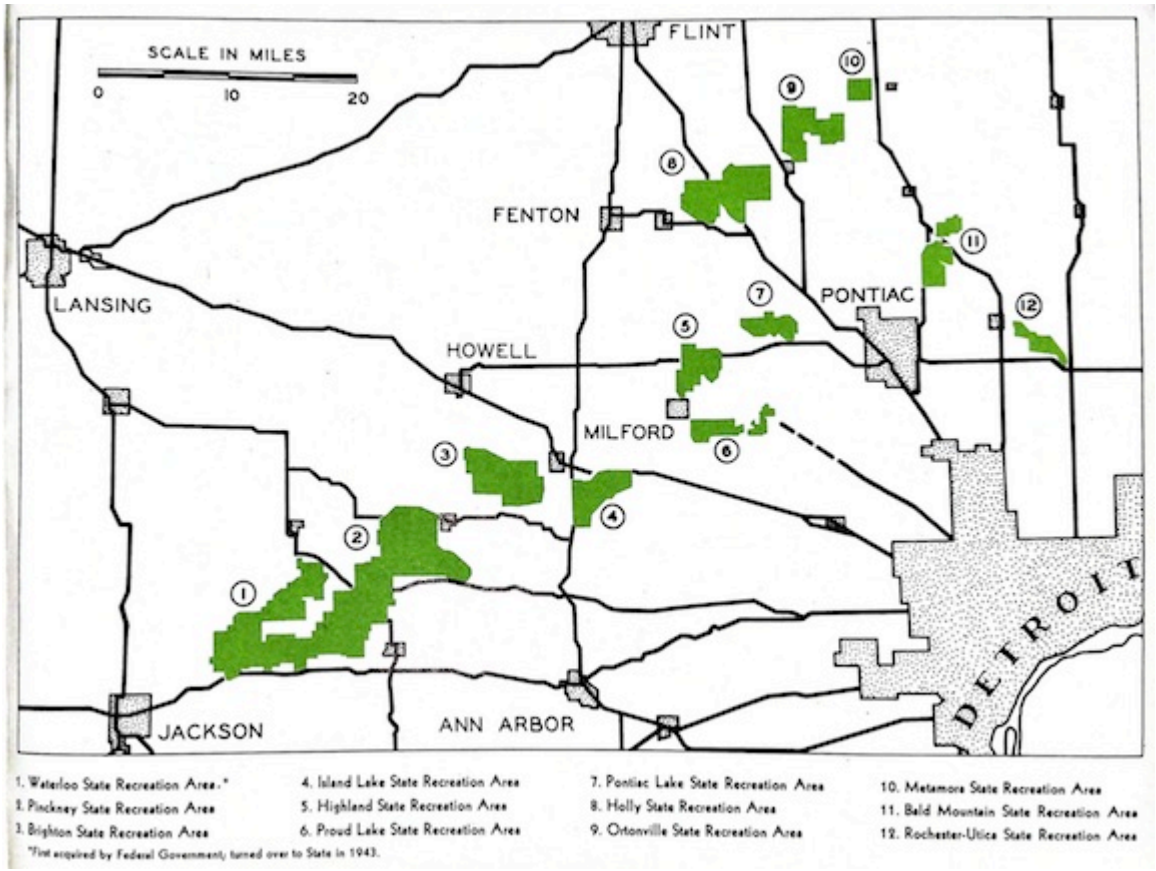

Figure 15: State and Recreational Land Purchases in Southeast Michigan, 1948.[60]

A report issued in 1952, twelve years after the creation of the Recreation Department and several years after the adoption of the city master plan, documented many acquisitions at the local level as well—most of them after the completion of the war. The map in Figure 16 shows the properties purchased between 1940 and 1952 in black. The department spent $5.6 million to acquire new properties in all corners of the city.[61] However, the largest purchases were along the east riverfront, from the entrance to Belle Isle to the Grosse Pointe communities, and on the city's edges, where small farms were still available for purchase. However, although the master plan had identified the inner city as most in need of public spaces, only smaller playgrounds and playfields were developed on scattered vacant lots. That's because the existing street grid and pattern of development allowed for little else. Doing more would require condemning whole

[60] Michigan Department of Natural Resources, *State Recreation Lands in Southeastern Michigan: A Progress Report* (Lansing, MI: State of Michigan, 1948).
[61] Frank Beckman, "Parks—Our Shame or Pride?," *Detroit Free Press*, May 3, 1953, 24.

blocks of property and demolishing them—a task the City Plan Commission estimated would cost $45 million, nine times more than the entire budget for park acquisition since the end of the war. The responsibility for clearance and redevelopment fell to the City Plan Commission and the Detroit Housing Commission, which shared responsibility for planning and implementing urban renewal throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[62]

Figure 16: City of Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation Property Map, 1952.[63]

1952-1967: Open Space and Urban Renewal

Clearance and redevelopment of the inner city became financially feasible after the passage of the federal Housing Act of 1949. This act reimbursed municipalities for the majority of the cost associated with acquiring and demolishing "blighted" residential

[62] Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation, *"Twelve Years of Progress!"* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1953).
[63] Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation, "Twelve Years of Progress!" (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1953), no page.

property. Over the next twenty years, Detroit would use this act in conjunction with the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 to enact the far-reaching agenda of redevelopment called for in the master plan. The City Plan Commission was charged with refining the vision for redevelopment, while the Detroit Housing Commission took charge of implementing the vision, including condemning property, relocating displaced residents, demolishing buildings, and soliciting redevelopment proposals from private developers.

The first residential project to move forward with the new source of federal funding was the Gratiot Redevelopment Area. This project targeted a section of the Black Bottom neighborhood between Larned and Gratiot. The neighborhood's business corridor, Hastings Street, would also be cleared to make way for an interstate expressway that would separate the central business district from the redevelopment area. Initially, plans called for some public housing on the site. However, Mayor Albert E. Cobo nixed the public housing component after his election in 1950. In all, he stopped nine public housing projects, most of which were planned for outlying, white neighborhoods where single-family homes predominated. Cobo made it clear he would only approve public housing on a few slum clearance sites and that the housing would take the form of high-rise towers.[64] As a result, those displaced from the Gratiot site would struggle to find affordable housing because so few units of public housing were available. Evictions began that June. Nearly eight thousand people were displaced along with several hundred businesses. By 1952, all structures had been cleared. Cobo then invited private developers to bid on the site to build luxury housing, but to the mayor's embarrassment, no one bid. Developers doubted that anyone could be enticed to live in luxury housing on the near east side, especially in close proximity to the poor black residents who still lived nearby. So after the trauma of mass displacement, the site simply sat vacant.[65]

In the midst of this crisis, Detroit's planning director stepped down, offering an opportunity to jumpstart the stalled redevelopment agenda under new leadership. After earning the highest score on the civil service exam, Charles Blessing became the new

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[64] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 84-86.

[65] Robert J. Mowitz and Deil S. Wright, "The Gratiot Redevelopment Project: Regenerating the Core City," *Profile of a Metropolis: A Case Book* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1962), 11-79.

Director of Planning in 1953. Blessing was trained as an architect, planner, and urban designer. He had most recently served as head of the master plan division in Chicago. In Detroit, Blessing set himself the task of re-envisioning Detroit to the highest standards of urban design. He fully embraced the project of rebuilding Detroit's historic core: the riverfront and all the neighborhoods bounded by the Grand Boulevard, which, by the 1950s, were marred by failing industry and blighted homes. Yet his greatest challenge proved to be mediating conflicts over redevelopment, particularly with respect to race, in the face of a collapsing tax base and widespread physical decline.[66]

Although Blessing could not have known, at somewhere just shy of two million, Detroit had reached its peak population by 1949 or 1950. Going forward, Detroit would lose population every single year—so far without cease. Detroit would also experience a profound racial and income transition. In 1950, Detroit was 16.25 percent black. By 1970, it would be 43.7 percent black. By 1990, it would be 82 percent black. The region would still grow steadily, but Detroit would shrink as it gradually lost most of its white population. The central city would also become steadily poorer because those moving out were predominantly middle class and those remaining were working class or poor.[67] Although tasked with a seemingly hopeless job in retrospect, Blessing moved to Detroit with optimism in 1953, hopeful that Detroit's nascent economic slide could be reversed through a comprehensive program of urban renewal addressing all of the city's deficits.

Blessing's first challenge was reviving the stalled Gratiot Redevelopment project. With the encouragement of the United Automobile Workers, who wanted to demonstrate the viability of integrated housing in Detroit, Blessing's staff began sketching possible designs for the Gratiot site, including a central park, townhouses, a school, and a shopping center. A UAW-backed nonprofit development corporation then hired an internationally renowned design team to prepare a final site plan. The team included architect Ludwig Mies van Der Rohe, planner Ludwig Hilberseimer, and landscape

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[66] June Manning Thomas, "Seeking a Finer Detroit: The Design and Planning Agenda of the 1960s," in Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, eds., *Planning the Twentieth Century City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 383-403.

[67] Margaret Dewar, Matthew Weber, Eric Seymour, Meagan Elliott, and Patrick Cooper-McCann, "Learning from Detroit: How Research on a Declining City Enriches Urban Studies," in *Reinventing Detroit: The Politics of Possibility*, edited by Michael Peter Smith and L. Owen Kirkpatrick, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2015), 37-56.

architect Alfred Caldwell. They proposed a beautifully landscaped series of glass-walled townhouses and two high-rise towers surrounding a central Lafayette Park, from which the development gained its name. The first new housing opened just south of the site in 1958 as construction on Mies's design was underway. The townhouses opened the following year, and the twin 22-story Lafayette Towers opened in 1963. The housing opened to rave reviews and drew a range of middle and upper class professionals. The housing was also racially integrated, although only ten percent of Lafayette Park's early residents were black, and few if any residents had lived there before clearance.[68]

More clearance and redevelopment projects followed Lafayette Park. Some of these, including the Corktown industrial project, the Civic Center, the Medical Center, and University City, created new institutional or business space. Others—including Elmwood Park I, II, and III, all to the east of Lafayette Park—created new affordable housing amidst parks and playgrounds. Outside of the inner city, the City Plan Commission broadened its residential agenda to encompass blocks in lesser degrees of decline. Like their planning peers in cities like St. Louis and Chicago, Detroit's planners began sorting all residential blocks into one of three treatment groups. The most deteriorated blocks would be cleared and redeveloped, blocks in the early stages of decline would be rehabilitated, and blocks in good condition would be maintained as is. The responsibility for the second treatment group—rehabilitation—fell to planner Maurice Perkins and his young community organizer, Mel Ravitz. A sociology Ph.D. student and future Common Council member, Ravitz began working for the City Plan Commission in 1953 as Director of Community Organization. Ravitz was responsible for bringing residents into contact with the city's physical planners to discuss low-cost improvements—like the insertion of playgrounds, streetscape improvements, and enhanced code enforcement—that could stabilize neighborhoods teetering on the edge of decline. Ravitz distinguished himself by the passion and skill with which he approached community organizing. He formed hundreds of block clubs in middle- and lower-income neighborhoods. Yet he struggled to induce residents to invest in their homes. Many simply lacked the income to do so. Others pointedly refused to invest in neighborhoods

[68] June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 56-64.

undergoing racial transition. Try as he might, Ravitz couldn't convince white residents to invest in declining neighborhoods when it was easier to move to the suburbs. He left his position in 1960 after Mayor Louis Miriani transferred his division from the progressive City Plan Commission to the more conservative Detroit Housing Commission.[69]

In the 1960s, the pace of urban renewal slowed as Detroit began showing the first signs of fiscal distress. The total value of property in Detroit peaked in 1958. To make up the shortfall in property tax revenue, incoming Mayor Jerome Cavanagh instituted a one percent income tax on residents, nonresidents and corporations, starting in 1962.[70] Urban renewal also slowed because residents were increasingly organizing to stop it.[71] Yet despite the growing outcry over the risks of displacement, especially by civil rights leaders who criticized the preponderance of clearance projects in black neighborhoods, Blessing's vision for remaking the inner city only grew more expansive and utopian. In 1963, Blessing received a grant from the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) to further develop his ideas about the role of open space in structuring the future city.[72] The HHFA began promoting open space planning in 1961 at the urging of President John Kennedy.[73] Blessing believed in this new direction wholeheartedly. Between 1963 and 1966, he and a team of designers prepared a visionary document, *Detroit 1990 – An Urban Design Concept for the Inner City*, to showcase the kind of city Detroit could become if the master plan were fully funded. After a two-month study trip to Greece and Egypt, Blessing began preparing sketches of a reimagined Detroit. The end product was nothing if not audacious. Blessing proposed to build not one but three massive new parks: Forest Park to anchor East City, University Park to anchor West City, and Woodward Park to anchor New Center. While Detroit is flat in all directions, these

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[69] June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 83-102.
[70] Nathan Bomey and John Gallagher, "How Detroit Went Broke: The Answers May Surprise You--and Don't Blame Coleman Young," *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 2013, 1.
[71] June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 103-124.
[72] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Detroit 1990: An Urban Design Concept for the Inner City* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1970), no page.
[73] Ann Louise Strong, *Preserving Urban Open Space* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Renewal Administration, Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1963), 3.

proposed parks featured varied topography and would do far more than merely provide space for sports and recreation.

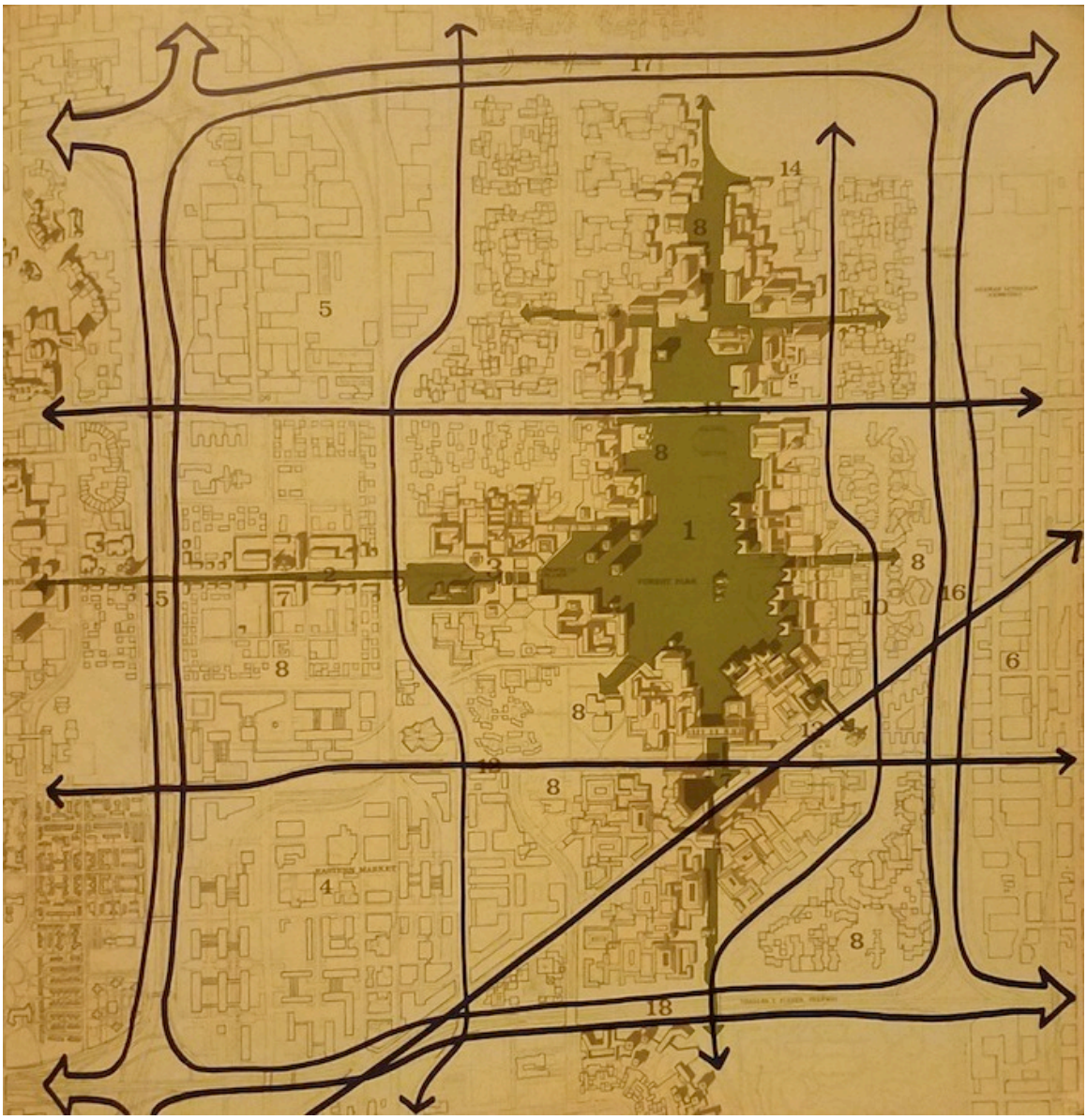

Figure 17: A projection of "East City" centered on Forest Park.[74]

Forest Park, for example, seen in Figure 17 at the heart of the projected "East City," would include 180 acres of undulating woods and open plains. The park would

[74] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Detroit 1990: An Urban Design Concept for the Inner City* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1970), no page.

meet the standards set out in the city's recreational plan—with the proper allotment of play space and athletic fields—but it would also serve as the glue to bind together a new neighborhood of 100,000 people, socially and aesthetically. The plan described the function of the park in poetic terms:

> The park is that symbol of community that is lacking in the present environment. While acting as a meeting place in the spirit of a civic center, the intensity and diversity of activity in the park and through the gates to centers will make the park a vital community core: organized sports, children sledding on snowy slopes, community concerts and plays, students rushing to class, old men chuckling on a shady bench, people going to stores, churches, and gin mills. And people there for the park alone … Everyone living in East City is near open space, for open space is the central structural element that knits the fabric of houses and community places with accessibility. Running free or eddied in courts and commons, it is the dynamic essence of community form and accessibility. A sense of here. And there. And the path between.[75]

In addition to the landscaped spaces at their center, each new neighborhood would include a series of linear pathways leading to the riverfront. The riverfront itself would be a long linear park, completely free of its existing industrial clutter. In a nod to plans first developed at the turn of the century, Blessing included a riverside boulevard that would extend from Belle Isle Park to Lakeshore Drive in Grosse Pointe Park.[76]

Blessing's vision was undeniably compelling, but if fully implemented, it would have displaced up to 200,000 people—people who, by the mid-1960s, expected to have some say in the future of their neighborhoods. Nevertheless, Blessing received federal funding for portions of his vision. An early phase of the East City redevelopment was approved in 1965; demolition was already underway near Wayne State University's

[75] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Detroit 1990: An Urban Design Concept for the Inner City* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1970), no page.
[76] Detroit City Plan Commission, *Detroit 1990: An Urban Design Concept for the Inner City* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1970).

campus as part of the broader West City proposal, which included the university.[77] Yet these plans encountered more vocal opposition than any previous effort. In 1965, a group of pastors on Detroit's near west side founded the West Central Organization (WCO) to fight urban renewal. After hiring Saul Alinsky as a consultant, the WCO repeatedly confronted the mayor and the Common Council. They were unable to stop Wayne State's expansion, but their demonstrations embarrassed and annoyed liberal Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, and they pressured the Common Council to pass a resolution that mandated citizen participation and relocation assistance for all future renewal projects.[78]

The Department of Parks and Recreation was also the object of increasing protest and controversy. In 1966, Mayor Jerome Cavanagh appointed John May, a retired auto executive and personal friend of the mayor, to lead the department. In response, Olga M. Madar, the United Automobile Workers' Director of Recreation, resigned in protest from the department's advisory commission. The only woman on the board, and the only one to speak out against May's appointment, Madar argued that May was unqualified for the position.[79] She wanted someone steeped in the field of recreation who would tackle the city's growing racial crisis. The mayor's Commission on Community Relations—created in 1953 as the successor to the Mayor's Interracial Committee—had documented racial confrontations on Belle Isle in 1964, 1965, and 1966.[80] In response to community protests, Madar had asked the department to draw up a plan in 1965 to address racial disparities in park spending.[81] She also pressured the department to take action against the all-white Detroit Yacht Club and the all-white Detroit Boat Club, warning them that their Belle Isle leases would be canceled if they did not open their clubs to African Americans and Jews.[82] Madar hoped that Mayor Cavanagh would appoint someone to lead the Department of Parks and Recreation who would further her agenda of promoting

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[77] Barbara Stanton, "City's New Face Is Look of the Future," *Detroit Free Press*, May 5, 1965, 2.
[78] June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 108-110.
[79] Harry Golden, Jr., "Parks Aide Quits over New Chief," *Detroit Free Press*, January 11, 1966, 3.
[80] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: the Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 132-135.
[81] "City Urged To Expand Parks Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, November 25, 1965, 20.
[82] Harry Golden, Jr., "City Warns Boat Clubs On Bias," Detroit Free Press, June 17, 1965, 3.

racial equality. May, by contrast, said that his top priorities as director were improving the city's five public golf courses and building new marinas for boat owners.[83]

Rather than dampen tensions in the city, May contributed to them. A few months into May's tenure, Donald Lobsinger, a park employee and far-right activist, received permission to use one of the department's Playmobiles—a mobile play structure that could be driven from neighborhood to neighborhood—in a parade calling for the expansion of the Vietnam War to mainland China. A park employee drove the vehicle with a sign attached to it reading, "Support Our Troops in Vietnam." The mayor was outraged when he learned of it. May apologized, but he declined to criticize Lobsinger.[84] Nor did he discipline Lobsinger for subsequent incidents involving violence. In 1967, Lobsinger was arrested for shoving police officers after calling them "un-American" and "Communists" when they asked him to leave the St. Patrick Day's parade.[85] In 1968, Lobsinger and his organization, Breakthrough, interrupted and heckled Martin Luther King, Jr., with shouts of "Traitor!" during a speech at Grosse Pointe South High School. King was assassinated three weeks later.[86] In 1973, Lobsinger was arrested again, this time for punching a Catholic priest on the steps of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral after he called for an end to the Vietnam War. Lobsinger's extremism tarnished the reputation of his employer but failed to draw a rebuke from May. "Lobsinger does a good job for the city," May explained to a reporter after his arrest for assaulting the priest. "He may have some troubles but they're not work-related. Don is smart, very intelligent. I just don't think he uses his head when he's working on Breakthrough." He added, "I don't condone the way he's acted. But everybody has their own beliefs. He's doing his thing."[87]

In the summer of 1967, under May's watch, Detroit's parks became flashpoints of violence. In May of 1967, the police violently shut down a planned "Love-In" on Belle

[83] "'Night Golf … and More Boat Marinas': New Recreation Boss … and His Program," *Detroit Free Press*, June 5, 1966, 42.
[84] George Walker, "City Truck Used in Viet War Parade," *Detroit Free Press*, May 3, 1966, 3.
[85] "Rightist Faces Trial for Parade Fracas," *Detroit Free Press*, March 23, 1967, 3.
[86] Kimberly Hayes Taylor, "King's Visit to Grosse Pointe High School to be Commemorated Monday with Playing of Speech," *Detroit Free Press*, January 14, 2018.
[87] Jim Neubacher and John Griffith, "Can Attack Cost Job of Lobsinger?," *Detroit Free Press*, January 23, 1973, 1-B.

Isle in an action that some called a "police riot."[88] The following week, bikers vowed to hold a "Hate-In" at Rouge Park, but the police intervened to stop it before it began.[89] A few weeks later, in mid-June, Rouge Park was the scene of shocking violence. A black man and his pregnant wife had spent the evening in the park listening to records. They danced and drank alongside several dozen other young people whom they had met at the park. Later that night, a group of white men confronted the couple, telling them they didn't belong there. The couple attempted to leave, but their car wouldn't turn on. When the men began throwing rocks and bottles at the car, the couple ran for shelter, but the park's custodian refused to open the door to the maintenance building. The wife was able to hide behind a pillar, but the husband was attacked by the mob and shot three times.[90] The husband died in the park before police arrived, and the woman later lost her baby. The following week, the Michigan Chronicle, Detroit's largest black-owned newspaper, published the following headline across its front page: "Rouge Park Victim's Widow Loses Baby / 'Our Story Not Told' / Widow Tells How She Pleaded for Life on Knees."[91]

These events contributed to the atmosphere in which the rebellion of late July would take place. In the early hours of July 23, 1967, police raided an unlicensed bar, or blind pig, at Twelfth Street and Clairmount, which was in the midst of a densely populated and poor black neighborhood on the west side of Detroit. The raid precipitated one of the deadliest civil disturbances in United States history. The violence lasted five days, left 43 people dead, and destroyed over 2,000 buildings. Like the race riot of 1943, it required the intervention of the United States Army to subdue.[92] In the wake of the riot, both the City Plan Commission and the Department of Parks and Boulevards would be forced to reconsider their structure and organization, and agencies at all levels of government were reorganized to address a crisis that could no longer be ignored.

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[88] Gary Blonston and Susan Holmes, "Belle Isle Love-In Turns to Hate," *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 1967, 1; and Nancy Goldsworthy, "Police Started Riot," *Detroit Free Press*, May 3, 1967, 6.
[89] "Police Turn Park 'Hate-In' Into Midnight 'Chase-Out,'" *Detroit Free Press*, June 4, 1967, 1.
[90] "Husband Murder Charged to One; 5 Held," *Detroit News*, June 25, 1967.
[91] Carol Schmidt, "Our Story Not Told," *Michigan Chronicle*, July 1, 1967, 1.
[92] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: the Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

Conclusion

The number of parks in metro Detroit increased significantly in the 1940s and 1950s. In accordance with its 1946 master plan, Detroit opened dozens of playfields, pools, playgrounds, and recreation centers in its outlying neighborhoods. Detroit ceased to acquire large new parks beyond its boundaries—as it had between the 1870s and the 1920s—but Detroit taxpayers contributed significantly to three park systems beyond city limits: the Wayne County park system, the Huron Clinton Metroparks system, and the state park system. The Wayne County parks were primarily located on tributaries of the Rouge River in western Wayne County. The Huron-Clinton Metroparks were opened along the Huron River in western Wayne and Washtenaw counties and the Clinton River in Livingston, Oakland, and Macomb counties. At the same time, the state of Michigan expanded its network of recreation areas in Southeast Michigan, most about an hour's drive from the city. Together, these park expansions helped fulfill the mandate first articulated in the 1915 *Preliminary Plan* to conserve the region's best remaining scenery.

However, not all Detroiters had access to these amenities. The city of Detroit built far fewer parks and recreation centers in African American neighborhoods, in large measure due to the elevated cost of acquiring and clearing land close to the city center. The task of opening space within the Grand Boulevard fell to the City Plan Commission, which fought to remake nineteenth-century neighborhoods through urban renewal, but it did so belatedly and at the cost of significant displacement. All of the Wayne County, Huron-Clinton, and state parks were located in white, rural communities accessible only by car, so few African Americans could safely enjoy those new parks. Discrimination was common at all parks and recreational facilities through the 1960s, and racial violence was a pervasive threat at the boundaries between white and black neighborhoods.

As the next chapter will show, demands for racially equitable treatment would not be heeded until after the deadly rebellion of 1967 demonstrated the frustration that so many of Detroit's black residents felt in response to unjust conditions. After the rebellion, efforts to undo racial bias within Detroit's park and recreation system would not only change the city's approach to open space and recreation; it would also lead to the reordering of nonprofit and governmental responsibility for recreation at all scales.

Chapter 5: The Pivot to Partnership (1967-1994)

The late 1960s were a turning point for urban parks. As the white middle class fled central cities, neglected parks became sites of experimentation. Increasingly shabby in appearance but still beloved by many, one-hundred-year-old landscaped parks became venues for rock concerts, Love-ins, anti-war protests, and more.[1] In 1969, free speech advocates occupied a university-owned urban renewal site in Berkeley, California, and declared it "People's Park"—an unplanned, unsanctioned space where radical activists and the homeless were free to spend time—inspiring copycat efforts in other cities, including Detroit.[2] In the 1970s, landscape architects worked with community-based organizations to create free-form play areas on vacant, inner city lots for children.[3] Black and Puerto Rican urbanites also put vacant lots to use as community gardens.[4] As older factories shut down, industrial waterfront sites became available for environmental reclamation, inspiring new approaches to park design, as seen in Gas Works Park in Seattle, which blended new greenery with the restored machinery of an old gas works in an homage to the city's industrial past.[5] In the 1980s and 1990s, decommissioned rail

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[1] Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 135-154.
[2] Don Mitchell, "Iconography and Locational Conflict from the Underside: Free Speech, People's Park, and the Politics of Homelessness in Berkeley, California," *Political Geography* 11, no. 2 (1992): 152-169.
[3] Mariana Mogilevich, "Designing the Urban: Space and Politics in Lindsay's New York" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012), 87-87; and Alison B. Hirsch, "Urban Barnraising: Collective Rituals to Promote *Communitas*," *Landscape Journal* 34, no. 2 (2015): 113-126.
[4] Mark Francis, Lisa Cashdan, and Lynn Paxson, *Community Open Spaces: Greening Neighborhoods Through Community Action and Land Conservation* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1984); and Kameshwari Pothukuchi, "Five Decades of Community Food Planning in Detroit: City and Grassroots, Growth and Equity," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 35, no. 4 (2015): 419-434.
[5] Richard Heyman, "Postindustrial Park or Bourgeois Playground? Preservation and Urban Restructuring at Seattle's Gas Works Park," in Michael Bennett and David W. Teague, eds., *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments* (Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), 111-134.

lines were put to use as greenways.[6] Other parks fell into disrepair as cities struggled to maintain the facilities they had built in anticipation of growth that never occurred.

From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, local spending on parks fell nationwide, in part due to the declining value of urban property and in part due to the passage of anti-tax proposals at the state level that limited how much revenue cities could raise through property taxes.[7] To make up for the shortfall, cities experimented with new methods for funding parks and plazas. Some of these methods blurred the distinction between public and private space. In Los Angeles and New York, real estate developers built taller skyscrapers in exchange for building "privately owned public spaces." The resulting parks, plazas, and atriums were publicly accessible by law, but they remained in private hands.[8] Cities also outsourced management of existing parks to new kinds of private partners, including nonprofit park conservancies—philanthropic organizations dedicated to raising private money for the improvement of public parks and squares—and business improvement districts—quasi-public agencies with the power to raise supplemental tax revenue on behalf of property owners in a defined area to be used to improve the business district.[9]

Detroit, too, saw its parks put to new uses, and city leaders desperately sought new funding sources to maintain them. Yet its experience highlights two little discussed facts about urban parks in this period. First, the reshaping of park governance after the 1960s was not driven by fiscal austerity alone. The struggle for racial equity was also a major contributing factor to the remaking of park governance. In the aftermath of urban uprisings in the late 1960s, civil rights activists pushed for increased public investment in the inner city and a greater focus on recreational *services* rather than the provision of

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[6] Charles E. Little, *Greenways for America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[7] John L. Crompton and Andrew T. Kaczynski, "Trends in Local Park and Recreation Department Finances and Staffing from 1964-65 to 1999-2000," *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 21, no. 4 (2003): 124-144.

[8] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Privatisation of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience," *The Town Planning Review* 64, no. 2 (April 1993): 139-167, doi:10.3828/tpr.64.2.6h26535771454436; and Jerold S. Kayden, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

[9] Jerold S. Kayden, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000); and Peter Harnik and Abby Martin, "Public Spaces/Private Money: The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies" (Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Public Land, 2015).

large green spaces. Activists demanded new facilities, like mobile pools and pocket parks, which could be added to neighborhoods without demolition or displacement. When local bureaucrats resisted, activists began building playgrounds, pocket parks, and urban gardens themselves, using both public and private funds.

Second, contrary to the picture that has often been painted, park governance did not simply "privatize."[10] Innovative intergovernmental partnerships emerged as well. In an effort to stave off further unrest, governments at all levels agreed to transfer revenue to cities or provide urban parks and recreation directly. In the 1970s, county, regional, state, and national park systems built their first nature-oriented parks in central cities. The extent and success of these partnerships hinged, in part, on the willingness of higher-level governments to modify their visions of parkland to encompass smaller, post-industrial sites. But they also hinged on local demands for racial equity and political autonomy. In Detroit, Coleman A. Young strategically navigated the politics of park partnership throughout his four terms of office, accepting partnerships that would advance his vision of parkland but rejecting those that would undermine the authority of a majority black city in a majority white state—even at the expense of passing up funding opportunities.

1967-1974: Fighting for Racial Equity and Community Control

The summer of 1967 was one of riot and rebellion across the United States, and Detroit's uprising was the most destructive.[11] Among other changes, that deadly summer provoked a restructuring of the provision of parks and recreation—not just in Detroit but nationwide—with governments at all scales taking on new roles to serve the inner city.

After the unrest of 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—commonly known as the Kerner Commission—surveyed residents affected by violence in

[10] The historian Suleiman Osman has already shown that the pivot toward park partnerships—that is, partnerships between park agencies and external partners, including community organizations, businesses, and other levels of government—began from below and was not primarily motivated by a desire to privatize or monetize public spaces. Suleiman Osman, "'We're Doing It Ourselves': The Unexpected Origins of New York City's Public–private Parks during the 1970s Fiscal Crisis," *Journal of Planning History* 16, no. 2 (2017): 162-174. Nor was the movement toward park partnership limited to New York City or the East Coast. For example, Oakland, CA put its parks up for adoption 1979 after the passage of Proposition 13 sharply curtailed the property tax revenue it relied on to fund the park system. William Endicott, "Wanted: Rich Parents to Adopt Struggling Parks," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1979, A5.

[11] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: the Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

twenty cities to diagnose the causes of unrest. Residents expressed dissatisfaction with municipal recreation in nearly every city. Indeed, lack of recreational opportunities tied with low-quality schools as the fourth most common complaint in riot-affected neighborhoods.[12] In 1968, Richard Kraus, a leading scholar in the field of recreation, corroborated these findings with a federally funded study of "the participation by Negroes in public recreation programs" in New York City and twenty-four of its suburbs in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.[13] Kraus found segregation to be pervasive, particularly in youth sports. In most communities, African American children were either assigned to black-only teams or excluded from participating altogether. When asked why, suburban recreation directors responded that black youth had to be separated from white youth to limit outbursts of "aggressive behavior," "vandalism," and "racial antagonism."[14] Recreation directors in New York City, by contrast, argued that integration was not possible because "white residents withdrew almost automatically from many programs in which Negroes began to be involved."[15] In 1969, the National Recreation Association held a national "Forum on Parks and Recreation in Urban Crises" to discuss racial discrimination in the provision of recreation and its role in contributing to urban unrest. The meeting led to the publication of *Recreation and Leisure Service for the Disadvantaged*, an edited volume that offered a twenty-point plan for reforming the field to overcome pervasive racism.[16]

A similar reckoning took place in Detroit. In a survey conducted after the uprising, more than half of black Detroiters said they were "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with their neighborhood parks and playgrounds, and half indicated

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[12] National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 81-83; Carl S. Taylor, "Sports and Recreation: Community Anchor and Counterweight to Conflict," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 2, no. 4 (1996): 346.
[13] Richard Kraus, *Public Recreation and the Negro: A Study of Participation and Administrative Practices* (New York: Center for Urban Education,1968), 1.
[14] Ibid., 33.
[15] Ibid., 33.
[16] John A. Nesbitt, Paul D. Brown, and James F. Murphy, eds., *Recreation and Leisure Service for the Disadvantaged: Guidelines to Program Development and Related Readings* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1970), v-viii.

similar dissatisfaction with their recreation centers.[17] An investigative committee appointed by Mayor Jerome Cavanagh called the Department of Parks and Recreation an "ingrown agency … viewed with hostility by large segments of the community."[18] The committee urged the department to redirect resources to the inner city and involve low-income and black Detroiters in decision-making. "The Recreation Department needs to expand its efforts to involve more lower income persons in the implementation of its services. Such persons need to be presented with more numerous and diversified opportunities to become paid employees of the department and to assist in voluntary capacities," the report concluded. "The Recreation Department also needs to accelerate its efforts to decentralize by 'reaching out' to low income neighborhoods. This could include increased use of store fronts, churches, developed and undeveloped lots and fields, streets and play mobiles, with geographic and social accessibility to services a primary concern."[19] However, Recreation Director John May dismissed the report's findings, claiming the department was already "leaning over backward for Negroes."[20]

Hoping to forestall further unrest, Republican Governor George Romney and Democratic Mayor Jerome Cavanagh called upon Joseph L. Hudson, Jr.—the 36-year-old president of the J.L. Hudson Company and grand-nephew of the store's founder—to coordinate a private sector response to the rebellion. Hudson recruited 38 prominent civic and business leaders, including the chairmen of the Big Three auto companies, the president of the UAW, and the president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP, to serve with him on the New Detroit Committee. Of the thirty-nine members, nine were black, including three who self-identified as "militant." The committee also brought on more than one hundred staff members, including fifteen African Americans.[21] Most were junior executives on loan from local law firms and corporations. "Sitting in their little cubicles at New Detroit headquarters," the *Free Press* commented, "they look more like

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[17] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: the Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 40.
[18] Mayor's Development Team, *Report to Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh* (Detroit: City of Detroit, 1967), 27.
[19] Ibid., 326.
[20] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: the Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 40.
[21] Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 73-75.

Madison Avenue than 12th and Clairmount." Indeed, "before July," the *Free Press* found, "the only thing most of the men who work every day in the New Detroit Committee's headquarters knew about Detroit's Negro community was that you could see it from the freeway."[22] Nevertheless, the committee and its staff were optimistic that they could tackle the major challenges dividing Detroit. The committee formed nine task forces, including one dedicated to "Youth, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs."[23]

The task force pledged to invest heavily in recreation in areas affected by rioting.[24] In partnership with the mayor's office, New Detroit sponsored a summer program that provided temporary jobs and recreational opportunities to black youth.[25] New Detroit expected the Department of Parks and Recreation to do most of the hiring, but John May declined to join the initiative. So New Detroit funneled the funding to other agencies, including the school board, the Boy Scouts, and the Catholic Church.[26] New Detroit also agreed to fund a community organizing initiative called the Deprived Areas Recreation Team (DART). DART was the brainchild of Olga Madar, the parks commissioner who had resigned in protest of John May's hiring. A few months after her resignation, UAW President Walter Reuther nominated Madar to be the first woman to serve on the UAW's board. As one of her first initiatives as a UAW director, Madar pledged to independently audit Detroit's park spending. Her goal was to "persuade the Parks and Recreation Commission to allocate a more equitable portion of their $10 million budget to the unsightly and recreationally deprived areas of our city" and to initiate "programs aimed at improving the community's race relations." Toward that end, two of her staff members were charged with launching DART in January of 1967.[27]

With an infusion of funding from New Detroit, DART was able to hire African American activist Mary Williams as its executive. Williams recruited 53 neighborhood-

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[22] Gary Blonston, "New Detroit's 30-Man Task Force Does the Heavy Digging," *Detroit Free Press*, November 6, 1967, 11B.
[23] Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 73-75.
[24] Brandon Ward, "(Re)creation of Detroit after the 1967 Riots: Playgrounds and the Urban Crisis," Sport in American History, April 13, 2015, https://ussporthistory.com.
[25] Judy Neuman, "A $15 Million Summer—How Successful Was It?," *Detroit Free Press*, September 19, 1971, 1-D.
[26] Judy Neuman, "A $15 Million Summer—How Successful Was It?," *Detroit Free Press*, September 19, 1971, 1-D.
[27] "UAW Aide Plans City Park Quiz," *Detroit Free Press*, September 17, 1966, 3.

based organizations to DART's coalition. As its first ask, the coalition demanded that the Department of Parks and Recreation construct a series of "vest pocket" parks on vacant lots in the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Inspired by a similar program in Philadelphia, DART also demanded that African American youth be engaged to design and build them. Funding would come from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Urban Beautification Program—a new federal grant intended to improve recreation in the nation's inner cities. With the mayor's backing, DART hired an Ann Arbor-based landscape architecture firm called Cooperative Planning Office to work with residents to generate site-specific designs for each proposed vest pocket park, like the one pictured in Figure 18. Every design included a water fountain or splash pad, as well as free-form play equipment intended to encourage exploration and creativity.[28]

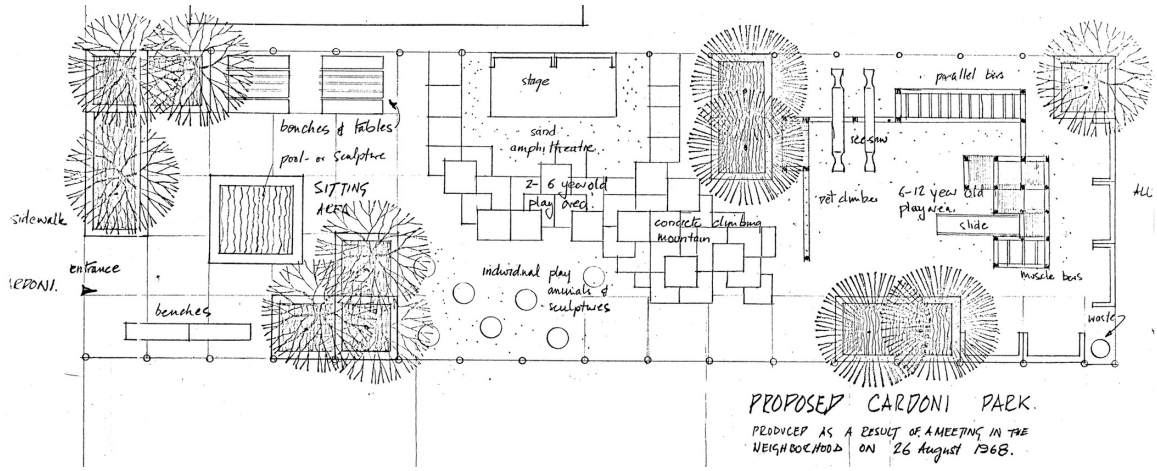

Figure 18: DART's proposed design for Cardoni Park, 1968.[29]

However, John May opposed the project from the start, calling the pocket parks "a knee-jerk response to the riot."[30] May considered the parks impractically small, noting they violated the minimum size for a playground specified in the 1946 master plan. The department only agreed to build the pocket parks because HUD had approved Detroit's

[28] Linda Janien Mayberry, "The Development of Vest Pocket Parks in Urban Detroit" (master's thesis, University of Michigan, 1972).
[29] Linda Janien Mayberry, "The Development of Vest Pocket Parks in Urban Detroit" (master's thesis, University of Michigan, 1972), 88.
[30] Brandon Ward, "(Re)creation of Detroit after the 1967 Riots: Playgrounds and the Urban Crisis," Sport in American History, April 13, 2015, https://ussporthistory.com.

Urban Beautification grant. However, May warned DART that his department would not staff the parks with play supervisors or clean them more than once per season because the grant didn't include funding for maintenance. In fact, before the department would begin construction, neighboring residents were asked to sign waivers agreeing to maintain the parks themselves. While DART hoped the parks would be built by a minority contractor, the department chose a white, suburban firm that refused to train the local youth who had been hired to assist with construction. The African Americans teens were paid to pick up trash each morning but had little else to do. Residents were also dismayed to find that the department had ignored their community-generated designs. To save money, the department developed a standardized design without any water elements. Whether due to miscommunication or malice, the department nevertheless spent half the federal grant installing pipes below each park, even though no water fountains were installed. As promised, the department refused to staff the parks after they opened. They fell into disrepair almost immediately, and some were never even completed.[31] Of the ten parks, only one—Elba Ellery Park—still has play equipment today. It has been incorporated into the Heidelberg Project. The other pocket parks are once again vacant lots.

Outraged by the willful sabotage of the vest pocket park initiative, DART and the NAACP jointly demanded John May's resignation in October 1969. They also asked the city to transfer ownership of the pocket parks to the neighborhood organizations that had proposed them and were now trying to maintain them.[32] In a sympathetic editorial, the *Detroit Free Press* argued that May deserved to be tarred-and-feathered for his abysmal record as Director of Parks and Recreation.[33] Yet civil service rules prevented his ouster.

Unable to work productively with the department, DART began developing its own vision for Detroit's parks system. In the spirit of advocacy planning, DART worked again with Cooperative Planning Office, the Ann Arbor-based landscape architecture firm, this time on a grassroots recreation plan that could serve as a counter-narrative to

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[31] Linda Janien Mayberry, "The Development of Vest Pocket Parks in Urban Detroit" (master's thesis, University of Michigan, 1972).
[32] William Serin, "Citizen Group Tells Park Chief to Resign," *Detroit Free Press*, October 23, 1969, C19.
[33] "Parks Make You Wonder About Tar and Feathers," *Detroit Free Press*, February 22, 1970, 2-B.

the city's official master plan.[34] The resulting report substantiated DART's concern that inner city and black residents were not adequately served by the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Wayne County Parks, the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, or the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Hand-drawn maps illustrated the lack of park space in much of the city. Figure 19, for example, shows Detroit's eight major parks with a two-mile buffer drawn around each. Although not shown on the map, a visualization of Detroit's black population in 1970 would show that few African Americans lived within walking distance of a major park, with the exception of those on the east side who lived close to Belle Isle. Other predominantly black areas—like the North End, near the center of the city, and the west side neighborhoods around 12th Street and Clairmount, where the rioting began in 1967—were not proximate to major parks.

[34] Paul Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31, no. 4 (1965): 331-338.

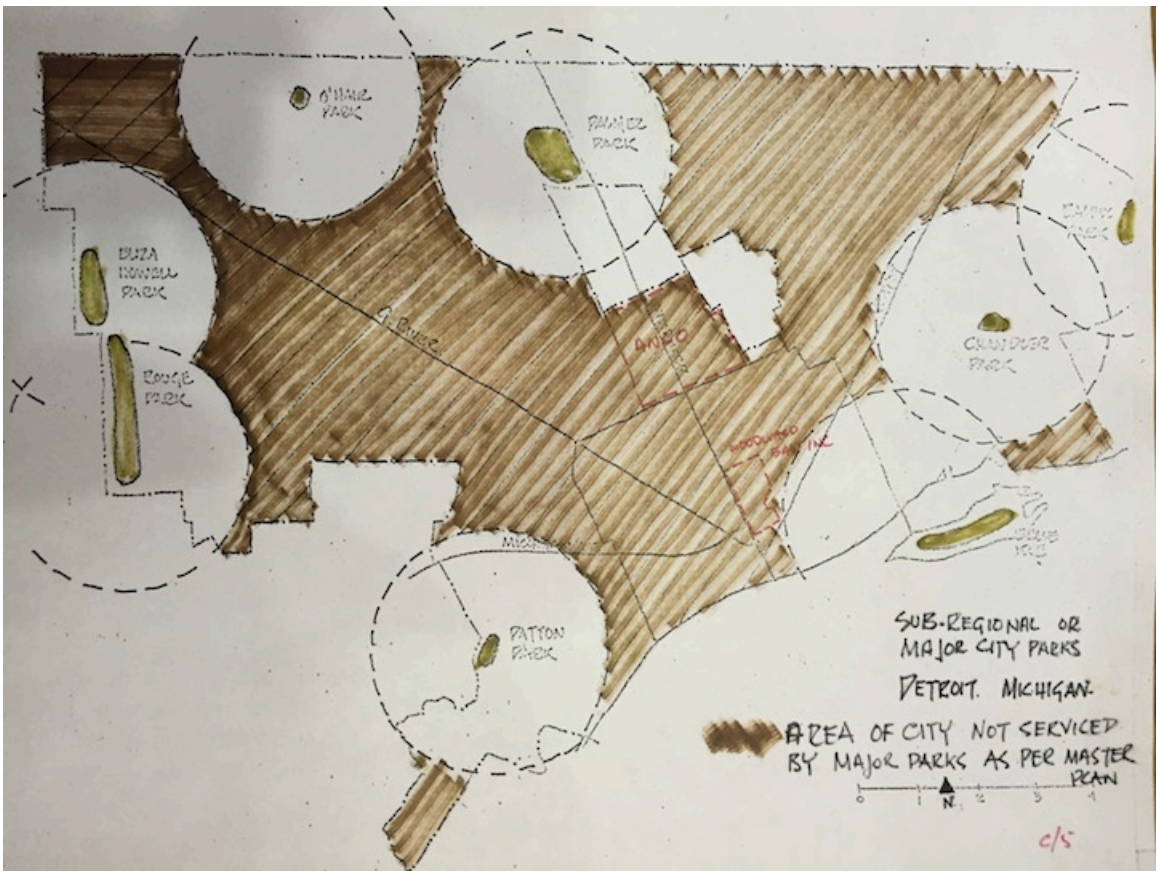

Figure 19: Area of City Not Serviced by Major Parks As Per Master Plan, 1970.[35]

However, unlike the City Plan Commission, DART did not call for large new parks in the inner city, fearing that their construction would displace more residents. Instead they asked the city to invest in Belle Isle and reclaim the Detroit riverfront as a linear park. The report included a visualization of a revitalized waterfront, which DART considered the best opportunity to increase inner city access to recreation without displacing residents (Figure 20). With industry there already in decline, DART believed the time was right to repurpose the riverfront for recreation and residential living without unduly harming the city's economy. In place of factories, DART imagined a series of high-rise residential towers intermixed with parks and marinas. They also advocated the launch of a riverfront ferry. Ferry service to Belle Isle had ended in 1957. By restoring the service, DART hoped to make the island more accessible to Detroiters without cars.

[35] Cooperative Planning Office, *An Urban Recreation Planning Policy* (Detroit, MI: Deprived Areas Recreation Team, 1970), 55-56.

Ferry service would also reduce traffic congestion on the island, allowing for the removal of some roads and the possibility of ecological restoration on the east end of the island. On the west end of the island, by contrast, the report advocated "intensive" recreational development, including for-profit entertainment, as long as it was priced affordably.[36]

Figure 20: DART's proposal for a residential riverfront lined with parks.[37]

While DART's report places greater emphasis on recreation than nature, the report does hint at the need to restore Belle Isle's landscape. Of all the city's parks, Belle Isle had suffered the greatest wear and tear by the 1960s. Since the park's opening, tens of millions of visitors had explored the island, thereby compacting the soil beneath their feet. A herd of European fallow deer, first introduced in the 1890s, had steadily nibbled

[36] "DART: An Urban Recreation Planning Policy, 1970," Box 4, Folder 2, UAW Recreation Department Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library and Archive of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI.
[37] Cooperative Planning Office, *An Urban Recreation Planning Policy* (Detroit, MI: Deprived Areas Recreation Team, 1970), 28-29.

away at the native vegetation. The island's roadways needed constant repaving to handle the thousands of cars that crossed the MacArthur Bridge every weekend. The dumping of fill material on both ends of the island had severed the connection between the Detroit River and the canal system, stagnating the island's creeks and lakes. Many of the island's structures were aging. Wooden nineteenth-century pavilions and picnic shelters were succumbing to rot. On the eastern tip of the island, the federal government had abandoned a Nike-Hercules anti-aircraft missile site. Installed in 1954 at the height of the Cold War, the missile site cut off access to the Livingstone Lighthouse until 1969, when the army unceremoniously walked away without securing or cleaning up the site—just months after a Lieutenant General accidentally revealed that the missiles there were likely equipped with nuclear warheads.[38] On the north shore of the island, the massive Belle Isle Bath House hulked over the beach, awaiting demolition. During the 1967 rebellion, the bath house was put to use a makeshift jail, with hundreds of prisoners sequestered inside. It was never reopened to the public.[39] All of these deficiencies made it critical that the Department of Parks and Recreation invest in Belle Isle's restoration.

With the release of DART's policy plan, Williams hoped the organization would gain new traction to win park improvements. Instead, New Detroit finally bowed to pressure from the Department of Parks and Recreation and canceled DART's contract. Mary Williams was laid off.[40] In a 1973 interview, a victorious staffer in the Department of Parks and Recreation called DART's disbanding a victory for rational planning and bureaucracy. "Most 'professionals' in the Department," he explained, "do not care for the intrusion of citizen groups, which often demand that the Department acquire a particular parcel of land and transform it into a recreational facility."[41]

While community groups initially failed to gain much control over local policy, they had more success convincing higher levels of government to invest new resources

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[38] Saul Friedman, "A-Weapons Near Cities for Years," *Detroit Free Press*, February 12, 1969, 1; and Ladd Neuman, "Army Gives City a Big Mess," *Detroit Free Press*, September 23, 1969, 1.
[39] Dan Austin, "Belle Isle Bath House (second)," Historic Detroit, accessed November 20, 2018, http://www.historicdetroit.org/building/belle-isle-bath-house-second/.
[40] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: the Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 432-433.
[41] Bryan D. Jones, Saadia R. Greenberg, Clifford Kaufman and Joseph Drew Jones, "Service Delivery Rules and the Distribution of Local Government Services: Three Detroit Bureaucracies," *The Journal of Politics* 40, no. 2 (May 1978): 367.

into urban recreation. All levels of government reconsidered their responsibility for providing urban recreation in the wake of urban unrest. In 1968, for example, Michigan voters approved a $100 million bond measure for state parks. Over resistance from his own party and many environmentalists, incoming Republican Governor Bill Milliken pledged to spend a third of the bond money in urban areas rather than spending it solely on the state park system.[42] As Michigan's largest city, Detroit received the largest share. The city spent most of the grant on improvements to Belle Isle.[43] Seeking private revenue to fund the island's refurbishment, Director John May had previously proposed converting one end of the island into a private amusement park and the other end into a 1,000-boat marina.[44] Outraged residents had stopped both of these proposals, but park supporters welcome the influx of state bond money to make needed repairs.[45]

Knowing that millions more would be needed before the island could be restored to its peak condition, Governor Milliken even floated the idea of running Belle Isle as a state park.[46] Instead, incoming Mayor Roman Gribbs—a former prosecutor and sheriff who narrowly won election in 1969 on a law-and-order platform—offered to lease the park to the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA). In 1970, the HCMA announced that it had accepted Gribbs' offer to transform Belle Isle into a Metropark. However, fulfilling their master plan for the island, which called for a new marina and the relocation of the park's beach to the south shore, would require a $40 million overhaul and a corresponding tax hike to finance it. Later that year, Detroit voters narrowly approved a nonbinding ballot measure endorsing the HCMA plan.[47] Yet two years would pass before the HCMA received state authorization to ask voters in the five-county region to actually fund the plan. When it did, the HCMA proposed not just the redevelopment of Belle Isle but also the acquisition of three new regional parks: one in

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[42] Clark Hoyt, "Rec Funds Tipped to Urban Use," *Detroit Free Press*, March 8, 1969, 3.
[43] Roger Lane, "New Park on Belle Isle Asked," *Detroit Free Press*, October 8, 1969, 3.
[44] Joe Dowdall, "Proposed $2.5-million, 1,000 Boat Marina for Belle Isle's Blue Heron Lagoon," *Detroit Free Press*, April 6, 1967, 1; and Gary Glonston, "Giant Slide Is Preview to Belle Isle Funland," *Detroit Free Press*, August 10, 1968, 3.
[45] Glenna McWhirter, "Problems at Belle Isle, Understaffed and With Budget," *Detroit Free Press*, September 2, 1968, 3.
[46] Clark Hoyt, "Belle Isle State Park Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, February 21, 1969, 3.
[47] Tom DeLisle, "Voters Approve Belle Isle Lease Plan: Tax Hike Needed," *Detroit Free Press*, August 6, 1970, 3.

western Washtenaw County, one in northern Oakland County, and one in northern Macomb County. Acquiring and renovating all four parks would require doubling the authority's existing millage.[48] By including the three regional parks, the HCMA hoped to secure more votes in outlying suburbs. Instead, it invited a backlash. Voters in Detroit opposed the new plan because it would force them to contribute even more money to the HCMA without adding any new parkland in Wayne County. Rural voters also united against the plan, not because they necessarily opposed investing in Belle Isle (although some probably did), but because they feared that the new HCMA parks would bring unwanted development to their own communities. The proposed Mill Creek Metropark generated especially strong opposition from farmers and environmentalists in Washtenaw County who felt the park would despoil the area's rural character. Arguing that the proposal was neither equitable nor environmentally sound, Olga Madar of the UAW urged all union members to vote no.[49] In August, the millage increase lost decisively, 324,564 to 184,599. Not a single county voted in favor of the HCMA plan.[50]

Afterward, the HCMA withdrew its offer to operate Belle Isle. Yet to the shock of urban and rural voters alike, the HCMA announced months later that it would proceed with acquiring the three suburban parks, even without the millage increase.[51] In response, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments withdrew its support for the HCMA's master plan. The SEMCOG board told the HCMA that it needed to invest in Detroit before expanding any further.[52] The Wayne County Commissioners concurred. The county board voted to withhold the taxes they collected on the HCMA's behalf—more than half of the authority's total budget—until the HCMA made new investments in the county.[53] However, Wayne County lost its leverage when a court ruled that the county did not have the legal authority to stop collecting taxes on behalf of the HCMA. While

[48] Tim McNulty, "Park Officials Plan 3 New Ones and Belle Isle Face-Lift," *Detroit Free Press*, June 28, 1972, 1.
[49] Brandon M. Ward, "Suburbs Against the Region: Homeowner Environmentalism in 1970s Detroit," *Journal of Planning History* (2018), doi: 10.1177/1538513218760579.
[50] John Oppedahl, "City May Spruce Up Belle Isle Despite Millage Defeat," *Detroit Free Press*, August 10, 1972, 12.
[51] "Three New Area Parks Planned," *Detroit Free Press*, January 14, 1973, 46.
[52] David Cooper, "Big Battle Is Under Way On 3 New Metro Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, February 22, 1973, 3.
[53] Jim Neubacher, "County Cuts Fund for Area Park," *Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 1973, 3.

the HCMA was able to retain its funding, the board's decision to move forward with park acquisitions on the region's edge, without making any corresponding investments in Detroit, nevertheless damaged the HCMA's political standing in urban and rural areas alike. In Wayne County, political leaders were incredulous that the HCMA wouldn't build new parkland in their communities despite their tax contributions. In rural areas, political leaders were angry that HCMA wouldn't *stop* building new parkland in theirs.

Detroit also lost out on an opportunity to develop a National Urban Recreation Area. In 1970, Republican President Richard Nixon announced a competition to build the first national parks to be located inside or adjacent to major cities. Detroit partnered with Toledo on its proposal, which called for protecting the western shore of Lake Erie between the outlets of two rivers, the Huron River south of Detroit and the Ottawa River north of Toledo.[54] However, the Detroit-Toledo park was not selected. The two parks that did receive funding—Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City and Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco—represented a radical break in national park policy. While the National Park Service had operated parks in urban areas before, like the parks that composed the National Mall, those parks were managed as civic sites, not as natural environments. True national parks were expected to be pristine landscapes of unsurpassed natural beauty. The new National Urban Recreation Areas, by contrast, were far from pristine. They contained compelling natural landscapes—parts of which had previously been protected as smaller municipal or county parks—but these landscapes had been transformed and degraded by decades of industrial and military use. Their inclusion in the park system symbolized the federal government's willingness to redefine the nature of parkland to meet urban needs.[55] A similar transformation in values would have to take place at the state, regional, and county levels before Detroit would be considered a viable site for any new parks from those park agencies.

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[54] Paul Clancy, "Detroit-to-Toledo Parks Proposed," *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 1970, 39.
[55] Ethan Carr, "Two Gateways: The First U.S. Urban National Parks," in Alexander Brash, Jamie Hand, and Kate Orff, eds., *Gateway: Visions for an Urban National Park* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 88-97.

1974-1980: Seeking Aid Without Ceding Autonomy

By the mid-1970s, fiscal distress would eclipse civil rights activism as the leading driver of change to the governance of Detroit's park system. Nevertheless, demands for racial equity and community control continued to shape policymaking in critical ways.

Post-1967 activism had produced fewer victories than community organizers had hoped, but an opportunity to create enduring change arose in November of 1970 when city voters elected a Charter Review Commission. The commission proposed replacing the Department of Parks and Recreation with a Recreation Department. The new department would "coordinate *all* recreational programs and facilities being offered in the City," regardless of provider.[56] The change was made at the behest of Forrest F. Green, past chairman of the Detroit Parks and Recreation Commission and one of two African Americans elected to the nine-member commission. The change in name and mission was made to "emphasize that the principal function of the department is recreation and that it should only carry on those maintenance functions that are necessarily incident to the recreation function."[57] This change was intended to force the department to work with community groups like DART and to prioritize the provision of recreational services where the most people were living—not where the largest parks were located. Just as importantly, under the new charter, the department's director would now be a mayoral appointee, not a protected civil servant like John May. Even if the charter passed, May could still not be fired, but he could be demoted, and a new director could take his place. The same would be true of City Plan Director Charles Blessing, whose authority to pursue new clearance and redevelopment projects would be curtailed under the new charter, which emphasized community and economic development over Blessing's brand of master planning and urban design.[58]

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[56] Detroit Charter Revision Commission, *The Final Report of the Detroit Charter Revision Commission including the New Detroit Charter with Commentary* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1973), 31.
[57] Detroit Charter Revision Commission, *The Final Report of the Detroit Charter Revision Commission including the New Detroit Charter with Commentary* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1973), 31.
[58] June Manning Thomas, "Racial Crisis and the Fall of the Detroit City Plan Commission," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 54, no. 2 (1988): 150-161.

Voters ratified the new charter on November 6, 1973.[59] In that same election, voters narrowly elected Coleman A. Young to be the first African American mayor of Detroit. After years of white flight, the city's population had become nearly evenly divided between whites and blacks, and the vote followed racial lines. Most white residents voted for Police Commissioner John F. Nichols, who promised to get tough on crime. Young's platform called for reforming the police department, improving public services, integrating city government through affirmative action, and jumpstarting the economy by rebuilding downtown, transforming the riverfront, and retaining heavy industry. With the backing of most African Americans and the city's white liberals, Young squeaked to victory over white Police Commissioner John F. Nichols.[60]

As mayor, Young advanced an agenda of affirmative action and racial equality. To run the new Recreation Department, he appointed none other than the department's fiercest critic, Mary Williams, the former director of DART.[61] Williams was not only the first woman and the first African American to lead the department; she was the first African American woman to lead any municipal department in Detroit. In her first interview as director, Williams vowed to operate the department on a tighter budget, make the department more responsive to community concerns, and advance a mission of racial equity. Recognizing that the department's budget would more likely shrink than grow, she called for increasing the use of volunteers to maintain city parks. She also asked for corporate donations and announced plans to hire a team of grant writers and volunteer managers. Williams also vowed to expand the city's mobile offerings in order to bring swimming pools and playmobiles to inner city neighborhoods.[62]

From her first day on the job, Williams faced a hostile work environment. After her appointment, rightwing agitator Donald Lobsinger put a sign on his desk reading, "This white ain't running or bowing to black racism."[63] Lobsinger would be suspended twice that year, once for calling Williams "paranoid" and once for calling a black

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[59] Jim Neubacher, "New Charter Adopted by Voters in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 1973, 1.
[60] Julie Morris, "Young Elected City's 1st Black Mayor," *Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 1973, 1.
[61] William J. Mitchell, "Critic Gets Her Big Chance to Shape Up Detroit Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, July 8, 1974, 3.
[62] Judith Serrin, "City Needs Better Places to Play," *Detroit Free Press*, July 28, 1974, 1F.
[63] "In Hot Water Again," *Detroit Free Press*, July 18, 1974, 3.

colleague, Alonzo Bates, "scum" and "boy."[64] Yet Lobsinger could not be fired due to civil service protections. In fact, he would keep working for the department until the 1990s. Nor could Williams dismiss the former parks and recreation director, John May, who was reassigned to manage Belle Isle.[65] As Williams fought to be treated with respect by her staff, Williams also found herself fighting for respect from Mayor Young. The mayor complained that Williams was generating negative publicity for the administration by being "too abrasive," and he pressured her to resign less than a year on the job.[66] Senior staff members of the Department of Parks and Recreation greeted her resignation with the same jubilation with which they greeted the demise of DART. "The feeling downtown and out in the districts, when we heard Mrs. Williams resigned, was like New Year's Eve," one staffer told the *Free Press*. "We put on paper hats and blew horns."[67]

While Williams' tenure was brief, her agenda endured under her successor, Leon Atchison. Atchison began as director in 1975, just as a severe recession forced the Recreation Department to suspend summer programming for a full month.[68] To stabilize the budget, Young turned to state and federal revenue. In 1976, the Michigan legislature initiated an annual "equity package" for Detroit. The transfer payment reimbursed the city for the costs it bore to run regional institutions like the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Detroit Zoo, and Belle Isle Park. The state transferred $27.5 million the first year and more in subsequent years.[69] Federal support was even more generous. Leveraging his close relationship with Democratic President Jimmy Carter, Young pulled in more revenue sharing in this period than almost any other mayor in the country. By 1978, 429 recreation department positions out of 1,501 total were federally funded, or 28 percent, a

[64] "Right Winger Back on Job After Name-Calling Incident," *Detroit Free Press*, February 15, 1977, 4-B.
[65] "Empire Shrinks Even More for Former Parks Chieftan," *Detroit Free Press*, December 16, 1974, A3.
[66] William Mitchell and Ellen Grzech, "Woman Quits Top Rec Job After Dispute," *Detroit Free Press*, January 30, 1975, 3.
[67] Judith Serrin, "Fiery City Parks Chief Left Her Mark on Dept.," *Detroit Free Press*, February 5, 1975, 3.
[68] William M. Bulkeley, "Troubled City: How A Budget Pinch Diminishes Amenities in Depressed Detroit," *Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 1975, 1.
[69] "Aid for City a Matter of Equity," *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1976, 3-C.

higher ratio than any other city department.[70] Young also negotiated a partnership with the Kresge Foundation. In 1978, the foundation announced a $720,000 grant "toward the construction of a paddle-boat lagoon, promenade, fountain and decorative plazas as the first phase of a three-part program to improve Belle Isle."[71] Overall, however, foundation support was marginal as a percentage of the Recreation Department's budget. The Kresge Foundation grant was the department's only philanthropic support in 1978. All existing grants, and all pending grants, at that time were state or federal.[72]

Despite the budget crunch, Young also worked with state and federal partners to acquire more parkland. In 1976, the federal government gave Detroit control of Historic Fort Wayne, a complex of military buildings on the Detroit River in heavily industrialized Southwest Detroit.[73] In 1982, the federal government donated a shuttered marine hospital on the border with Grosse Pointe Park for use as Mariner Park.[74] Federal grants would also enable Detroit to purchase thirty acres of riverfront land in the 1980s for three proposed parks east of downtown: St. Aubin Marina, Chene Park, and Mt. Elliott Park.[75] These park expansions took place even as the Recreation Department continued to shed personnel. Although the city could not afford to open these sites as parks in the short term, Young bet that future prosperity would make them essential amenities. "We find it very important to build while we are cutting back," Young announced after the acquisition of Historic Fort Wayne. "Such is our confidence in the future of Detroit."[76]

While Mayor Young welcomed intergovernmental grants and transfers, he rejected opportunities to save money by transferring city parks to other agencies. After Young won election in November 1973, the HCMA came forward with a new proposal

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[70] Thomas J. Anton, *Federal Aid to Detroit* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 29.
[71] "$720,000 Donation by Kresge Boosts Belle Isle Project," *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1978, 7.
[72] Detroit Recreation Department, *1978-1979 Annual Report* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1979), 18.
[73] Dave Anderson, "City Gets Fort Land; Park Will Be Built," *Detroit Free Press*, May 11, 1976, 3.
[74] Robert Musial, "Hospital to Make Way for City Park," *Detroit Free Press*, June 28, 1984, 152.
[75] Kirk Cheyfitz, "U.S. to Fund 3 Riverfront Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, February 10, 1978, 3.
[76] Dave Anderson, "City Gets Fort Land; Park Will Be Built," *Detroit Free Press*, May 11, 1976, 3.

for Belle Isle. This time, the board offered to operate the park in its existing configuration, without major capital improvements. The board also agreed to let the city retain control of the children's zoo, the aquarium, the conservatory, and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. However, the HCMA would charge drivers a one-dollar fee to enter the park.[77] Young said no. Instead he asked the HCMA to subsidize the city's Recreation Department using a share of the taxes already paid by Detroiters. In other words, he favored a revenue sharing agreement like those he had negotiated with the state and the federal government. Because its tax base was so much larger than other communities' in Southeast Michigan, Detroit residents had contributed more than half of the authority's budget every year since the HCMA's inception, despite having limited access to the parks. Young argued it was only fair that the HCMA return some of that funding to support city parks that served the whole region. A revenue sharing agreement would also ensure that Young's administration would retain control over Belle Isle's management and design. The HCMA board had no representatives from Detroit, and the mayor had no power to appoint his own. Young preferred to keep control of Belle Isle and renovate the island in-house as a showcase for what his administration could accomplish.[78]

HCMA briefly floated a counteroffer, suggesting that instead of taking over Belle Isle, the authority could condemn industrial land between Jefferson and the Detroit River to form a new riverfront park. Young balked at this too, arguing it would harm the city economically by displacing industry, like the massive Uniroyal Tire factory near the entranceway to Belle Isle.[79] The HCMA Director, David Laidlaw, later denied having ever made the offer. Besides, Laidlaw admitted, "We believe there is another problem with building a park in the city besides cost. Parks and housing are in large measure incompatible. People don't want to live next to parks because they are associated with crime. Take Palmer Park. A nice park, but who'd go in there now and build houses?"[80] The comments were surprising coming from a man who promoted the virtues of parkland

[77] Billy Bowles, "Metro Plan for Belle isle Includes Fee for Parking," *Detroit Free Press*, December 29, 1973, 3.
[78] Nancy Gordon and Trudy Gayer, *Dynamics of a Political Controversy: the HCMA Versus Detroit* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, April 19, 1976).
[79] Dave Anderson, "City Receives Two Riverfront Park Plans," *Detroit Free Press*, January 4, 1976, 1.
[80] Robert Ostmann Jr., "Metropark Board Ignores Detroit—But Hints at Shift," *Detroit Free Press*, December 1, 1975, 1.

for a living. A different HCMA spokesperson, board member William Kreger, said the problem was simply one of geography. A regional park needed to be at least 1,000 acres in size, he told a reporter. It also needed to feature varied natural topography. No such site existed in Detroit, which was heavily developed and almost completely flat. Yet fewer than half of the existing Metroparks met Kreger's criteria either.[81]

After negotiations with HCMA broke down, Young became an enduring critic of the agency. In 1979, Young's appointees to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments helped kill a plan to build Mill Creek Metropark west of Ann Arbor on the grounds that it was too far from the city center to effectively serve as a regional park.[82] Wayne County Commissioners representing Detroit also banded together to stop Wayne County from increasing its parks budget. Just like Detroit's parks, the county's parks were falling into disrepair. However, all of the county's park were outside the city of Detroit—mostly beyond the reach of public transit—and Detroit commissioners refused to increase the agency's funding until the county committed to building at least one park inside Detroit city limits, a request that suburban commissioners summarily rejected.[83]

Young took a similarly selective approach to public-private partnership. His administration would only partner with organizations that shared the 1974 city charter's vision of parkland: as places for socializing, entertainment, and active recreation. Young also embraced parks as drivers of economic development. These priorities were clearly reflected in the design of Hart Plaza—a large, granite plaza that opened on the riverfront at the foot of Woodward in 1978 as the final component of a long-desired Civic Center. Although planning for Hart Plaza began years before Young entered office—Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi was hired to design the plaza and its fountain in 1971—Young put his own stamp on the plans, modifying the design to include a $3.15-million subterranean level with commercial kitchens, bathrooms, and other event facilities to

[81] Robert Ostmann Jr., "Park Agency's Ideals Challenged," *Detroit Free Press*, November 30, 1975, 1.
[82] Tim Kiska, "Detroit-Farmer Alliance Beats Park," *Detroit Free Press*, April 24, 1979, 3.
[83] Chris Christoff, "Parks: Kicking the Political Football," *Detroit Free Press*, April 10, 1986, 6A.

ensure that the plaza up above could comfortably accommodate hundreds of thousands of people during music festivals and cultural events.[84]

Detroit's most prominent park advocates—the Friends of Belle Isle—saw parks differently. The Friends began in 1973 after a group of historic preservationists met to nominate the aging monuments and structures on Belle Isle to the National Historic Register. Like similar "Friends" groups that formed around the country in the 1970s, a majority of the members were liberal, white professionals who believed that Belle Isle should be restored in line with the ideals espoused by its first designer, Frederick Law Olmsted.[85] The Friends couldn't "preserve" Frederick Law Olmsted's design for Belle Isle because so little of it had ever been implemented, but they believed that his vision for landscaped parks should the guide the island's management.[86] Above all, the Friends cherished Belle Isle as a quiet place to appreciate nature with friends and family. These values brought the Friends into immediate conflict with the mayor. In contrast to the Friends, Young cited Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen's lively amusement park and pleasure ground, as his model for a successful park.[87] In the coming years, Young's proposals for the island would include a children's amusement park, a high-end restaurant, gambling casinos, and a Grand Prix racecourse—all projects vigorously opposed by the Friends.

Hoping to make their own vision for Belle Isle the official one, the Friends joined with the Junior League, a private charity with branches in Detroit and the tony suburb of Birmingham, to hire landscape architect Dan Kiley to develop a new master plan for the island. Young gave his consent to the project, but he never promised to follow Kiley's advice.[88] The master plan that Kiley submitted in 1976 aligned with the Friends' values rather than Young's. In a section listing the plan's objectives, Kiley wrote that Belle Isle's primary "role should be to provide an open space of quiet and tranquility for the

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[84] Kirk Cheyfitz, "A Century Later, City Plaza is Near," *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977, 3.
[85] "'Friends of Belle Isle' Unite," *Detroit Free Press*, July 31, 1973, 32. For a comparative perspective, see Suleiman Osman, "'We're Doing It Ourselves': The Unexpected Origins of New York City's Public–private Parks during the 1970s Fiscal Crisis," *Journal of Planning History* 16, no. 2 (2017): 162-174.
[86] Frank Angelo, "Belle Isle Has Found a True Friend," *Detroit Free Press*, November 23, 1973, 11.
[87] "Belle Isle Talks Produce Sparks and Little Else," *Detroit Free Press*, April 22, 1975, 3A.
[88] Correspondence between Mayor Coleman A. Young and the Friends of Belle Isle, Box 41, Folder 18: "Belle Isle (1975)," Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library.

citizen of this city—a sanctuary where they might escape the turmoil of the city and enjoy the rejuvenation which quiet and solitude and an intimate contact with nature can bring."[89] Toward that end, Kiley recommended the island gradually be closed to cars, with roads and parking lots phased out in favor of hiking trails and meadows. Rather than drive onto the island, visitors would take ferries or public transportation. Kiley also favored the removal of discordant attractions, like the Big Slide and the driving range, and unsightly facilities, like the incinerator that processed the island's trash.[90]

Young shelved the plan in favor of his own vision, the first step of which was repairing the island's roadways for improved traffic flow.[91] Although Young encouraged the Friends of Belle Isle to continue volunteering, he never granted the organization any control over the park's planning or operations.

In New York City, by contrast, Mayor Ed Koch elevated similar organizations to positions of power. In 1976, the same year that the Friends of Belle Isle hired Kiley, the Central Park Community Fund—an advocacy organization backed by wealthy New Yorkers living in sight of Central Park—hired Emanuel S. Savas, a former city administrator, to evaluate the park's management. Central Park had deteriorated dramatically as New York teetered on the brink of bankruptcy. Although New York's fiscal problems were common to all northern industrial cities, Savas blamed the park's poor condition on inefficient public management. To restore the park, Savas called for the appointment of a single public manager to oversee the park year-round. This manager would report to an appointed "Board of Guardians," who, like the trustees of an art museum or an opera house, would be responsible for raising money and safeguarding the park's reputation.[92]

After Ed Koch became mayor in 1978, he followed through on Savas's recommendations. Koch named Elizabeth Barlow Rogers—a city planner and the head of the Central Park Task Force, another private advocacy organization—as the first

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[89] Dan Kiley, *Belle Isle Park, Detroit, Michigan: Master Plan Proposal* (Wings Point, Charlotte, Vermont: Kiley, Tindall, Walker 1976), 6.
[90] Ibid, 6-10.
[91] Correspondence between Mayor Coleman A. Young and the Friends of Belle Isle, Box 41, Folder 19: "Belle Isle, Friends of Belle Isle (1975)," Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library.
[92] Emanuel S. Savas, *A Study of Central Park* (New York: Columbia University Center for Government Studies, 1976).

Central Park Administrator. Rogers also continued to lead the Central Park Task Force, which, in 1980, merged with the Central Park Community Fund to form the Central Park Conservancy. In her dual roles as Central Park Administrator and president of the Central Park Conservancy, Rogers embodied an emerging paradigm of public-private partnership to renovate and manage urban parks. With the support of wealthy individuals living near the park, the conservancy developed a master plan for Central Park that was as loyal as possible to Olmsted and Vaux's original design. The conservancy then led a multi-million dollar fundraising campaign to implement it. The conservancy's success would later inspire dozens of cities, including Detroit, to adopt the same model of public-private partnership to improve their own landscaped parks, but the Friends of Belle Isle could not follow a similar path without the Young administration's trust.[93]

However, the Young administration did embrace partnerships on a smaller scale. In 1977, Leon Atchison began one of the nation's first Adopt-a-Park programs. Mutual Insurance Inc. adopted the first park in 1979, but most participants were neighborhood groups.[94] Grandmont No. 1 Improvement Association, for example, adopted the Flintstone play lot in 1979. After volunteers painted the equipment and installed a new sandbox, the association hired a laid-off autoworker to mow the grass throughout the summer. The association later hired an extra play director to help the city run a summer youth program at the play lot. "It's a constant debate at membership meetings whether we're encouraging the city not to supply the programs they're supposed to," the group's leader told a reporter. "We wonder all the time whether we get the services we should for taxes we pay. But the bottom line for us is that the neighborhood is maintained as a fine place to live and play. We're willing to do whatever we have to for that."[95]

Businesses and community groups also began building their own small parks and gardens on formerly occupied vacant land. In 1977, General Motors built three pocket

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[93] Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 338-364; and Peter Harnik and Abby Martin, *Public Spaces/Private Money: The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies* (Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Public Land, 2015), 8-9.
[94] Editorial, "Some Civic Pride," *Detroit News*, August 26, 1979, 22-A.
[95] Gerry Storch, "Neighbors Adopt-A-Park … and the Kids Pitch In to Pitch Out and Clean Up," *Detroit News*, August 13, 1980, 1-G.

parks near its headquarters in New Center and began hosting a summer concert series.[96] In cooperation with the mayor's office, the Concerned Citizens of Cass Corridor obtained a $193,000 federal grant to build Redmond Plaza in the Cass Corridor in 1979.[97] The mayor's office also encouraged the nascent urban agriculture movement in Detroit through the Farm-A-Lot program, which began in 1974.[98] By 1977, more than 1,500 residents were signing up annually to maintain their own garden plots on more than 1,000 vacant lots throughout the city—land that became vacant after population loss led to the abandonment and demolition of homes in the city's poorer neighborhoods. Participants in the Farm-a-Lot program received free seeds and training from United Community Services, Michigan State University Extension, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.[99]

1980-1988: Self-Help

Young's approach to recreation became harder to sustain after 1980. By then, Detroit's population had fallen to 1,203,368, two thirds of the peak population in 1950. Property values plummeted too, from $750 million in 1970 to less than $300 million in 1980.[100] And more shocks were coming, including property tax restrictions, a recession, and the neoliberal turn in federal policy under Republican President Ronald Reagan. The city remained solvent, just barely, but the Recreation Department was forced to scale back operations and beg for donations to sustain its ever-shrinking budget. Meanwhile, the mayor's recreation policy drifted in orientation toward economic development.

The first threat to the city's financial health came in 1978, when Michigan voters joined a nationwide tax revolt by amending the constitution to restrict the collection of property taxes. After the passage of the Headlee Amendment, local governments could not increase their year-to-year property tax collection faster than the rate of inflation. If

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[96] Thomas C. Fox, "GM Plans Mini-Parks in New Center," *Detroit Free Press*, September 8, 1977, 89.
[97] Karl Payne, "Cass Corridor Gets a Park," *Detroit News*, December 20, 1970.
[98] Kameshwari Pothukuchi, "Five Decades of Community Food Planning in Detroit: City and Grassroots, Growth and Equity," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 35, no. 4 (2015): 419-434.
[99] Brandon M. Ward, "Detroit Wild: Race, Labor, and Postwar Urban Environmentalism" (PhD Diss., Purdue University, 2014), 178.
[100] These figures are measured in 2013 dollars. Nathan Bomey and John Gallagher, "How Detroit Went Broke: The Answers May Surprise You--and Don't Blame Coleman Young," *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 2013, 1.

assessed values rose faster, cities had to reduce their tax rate to keep within the limit. For Detroit, this meant that even if the city were lucky enough to experience rising property values, the government could not reap the full fiscal benefit, unless voters approved a special ballot measure that allowed the city to capture the full value of that year's increase.[101] With property value still declining in Detroit, the Headlee Amendment did not pose an immediate risk, but it ensured that even if the city's property market did rebound, the city would not be able to bank on rapidly rising property tax revenue.

A more serious setback came in 1980, when the economy again went into recession. Gross domestic product fell 2.2 percent as the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates in an attempt to reduce inflation. After a brief recovery, the economy crashed again in 1981, this time due to a mounting global energy crisis that crippled the auto industry.[102] In the midst of this double-dip recession, which nearly bankrupted Detroit, the Recreation Department and the Detroit Chamber of Commerce debuted the "PARTNERS" gift catalog. The catalog listed 125 items that could be bought on the city's behalf, including trees, park benches, and picnic tables. The Recreation Department promoted the catalog through a speakers' bureau. At the program's peak, donations totaled $365,629 in a single year. The department also launched the Park Alliance—the first effort by the department to organize its community partners. Ten years prior, Director John May had fought to shut down DART. Now the department was embracing community organizing in the hopes of rallying residents to fight proposed cuts to its budget.[103]

With Republican President Ronald Reagan in office, Detroit's bootstrapping approach to recreation became federal policy. In 1981, the Department of the Interior released a booklet called *Cost-Cutting Strategies for the Park and Recreation Agency*. The booklet promoted a variety of cost-saving and revenue-generating ideas from across the country, including Detroit's PARTNERS catalog, which had drawn the attention of park directors from across the country, some of whom flew to Detroit to learn how they,

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[101] Elizabeth Pratt, "Property Tax Millage Limitations in Michigan," *State Notes* (Spring 2016), http://www.senate.michigan.gov/sfa/.
[102] Thomas J. Anton, *Federal Aid to Detroit* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 52.
[103] Detroit Recreation Department, "1980-1981 Annual Report" (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 1981), 39.

too, could run a recreation department on gifts and donations.[104] Kirk Cheyfitz, a Detroit journalist, mocked the creation of PARTNERS as the dawn of the "Self-Serve City." As he put it in a story for *The New Republic*, "In the old days, under a system known as democracy, if the neighborhood park lacked a picnic table, a citizen could call a favorite City Council member and holler until the rec department installed one. Now citizens can stop yelling and start buying their own picnic tables."[105] However, Mayor Young argued that self-help was better than ceding control or not providing services at all.

Unlike other cities in this period, Detroit did not change its zoning ordinance to encourage the construction of parks and plazas in its central business district. Zoning reforms could have allowed developers to build taller skyscrapers than otherwise permitted if the developers agreed to include a park, plaza, atrium, or arcade in their site plan. Rather than become municipal parks, these "bonus plazas" would have become "privately owned public spaces"—spaces that remained privately owned and managed but were open to public use.[106] However, these incentives only work in strong real estate markets, which give governments leverage to bargain with developers. In Detroit, no unsubsidized development was taking place, and adding to the height of buildings would not have increased profitability. Some businesses voluntarily included plazas in their site plans, but they did so to create an amenity for their workers and to improve available vacant land, not as a concession to increase the floor area ratio of their development.

Some state governments also authorized the formation of business improvement districts, or BIDs, as a way to fund improvements to public spaces. A business improvement district is a special assessment district that can be voluntarily created by commercial property owners within a defined geographic area. Once enacted, the BID assesses a property tax millage within the district. The property owners can then use that revenue to provide extra services, like trash pick up and graffiti removal. The first BIDs

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[104] Mai-Liis Bartling, et al., *Cost-Cutting Strategies for the Park and Recreation Agency* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Park and Recreation Technical Services, 1981).
[105] Kirk Cheyfitz, "Self-Service: The City that Governs Least Governs Least," *The New Republic* 183, no. 20 (November 15, 1980): 14-15.
[106] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Privatisation of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience," *The Town Planning Review* 64, no. 2 (April 1993): 139-167, doi:10.3828/tpr.64.2.6h26535771454436; and Jerold S. Kayden, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

were created in Toronto in the early 1970s, and the concept spread to the United States.[107] In 1982, New York's Bryant Park Restoration Corporation became the first BID to manage a public park as part of its operations. Neighboring businesses paid supplemental taxes to the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation in the hopes that a safer, more attractive park would increase foot traffic to their businesses.[108] Creating a BID, like the one that funded Bryant Park's restoration, generally requires an active and supportive commercial base, something that Detroit lacked. Some businesses in Detroit renovated parks, but they did so on a voluntary basis, as when General Motors built and maintained three pocket parks in New Center through the New Center Area Council.

Detroit survived the recession by hiking taxes and cutting costs. In 1981, Young negotiated a deal with the state legislature that would allow the city to issue $125 million in long-term bonds and to raise the city income tax from 2 to 3 percent for residents and from .5 to 1.5 percent for nonresidents. In exchange, the city had to secure wage concessions from unionized city employees and pass a balanced budget. After tense negotiations, Young secured union support, and voters approved the income tax hike.[109] Young also laid off more workers, including recreation workers whose positions had previously been subsidized by the federal government. All told, Young cut the municipal workforce by 6,000 between 1978 and 1984. In 1986, federal revenue sharing ceased, adding new stress to the budget.[110] However, with municipal debt in check and the economy on the rise, Wall Street restored Detroit's bond rating to investment grade.[111]

As the city's fiscal position improved, Young moved forward with plans to build new parks as a form of economic development. Using intergovernmental grants and land transfers, the city built an open-air auditorium, called Chene Park, on the east riverfront in 1985. Just as Hart Plaza had become a multicultural showcase for Detroit, with its

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[107] Lorlene Hoyt and Devika Gopal-Agge, "The Business Improvement District Model: A Balanced Review of Contemporary Debates," *Geography Compass* 1, no. 4 (2007), 946-958.
[108] David J. Madden, "Revisiting the End of Public Space: Assembling the Public in an Urban Park," *City & Community* 9, no. 2 (June 2010): 187-207.
[109] Thomas J. Anton, *Federal Aid to Detroit* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 53.
[110] Zachare Ball, "Budget Woes Materialized 30 Years Ago," *Detroit Free Press*, April 16, 1993, 9A
[111] Nathan Bomey and John Gallagher, "How Detroit Went Broke: The Answers May Surprise You--and Don't Blame Coleman Young," *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 2013, 1.

ethnic festivals drawing tens of thousands of visitors, Chene Park became a showcase for black culture specifically through a concert series that brought blues, jazz, soul, and hip hop musicians to the Detroit riverfront. Mt. Elliott Park and St. Aubin Marina opened nearby in 1988.[112] These parks were meant to be the first in a series of linked riverfront parks that would run the length of the Detroit River, from the Ambassador Bridge to the MacArthur Bridge, with private residential developments interspersed throughout—the vision that ultimately produced the Detroit RiverWalk in the 2000s. But the city could not afford to build parks without state and federal grants, so progress was made slowly.[113]

Young also toyed with bringing auto racing and gambling to Belle Isle—positions that once again brought him into conflict with the Friends of Belle Isle, who opposed any commercial ventures on the island. In 1985, Young alarmed the Friends of Belle Isle when he declined to rule out a developer's proposal to place gambling casinos on Belle Isle. Young also floated Belle Isle as a suitable location for the Grand Prix auto race after its sponsor, Detroit Renaissance, announced the race would no longer run downtown. The Friends of Belle Isle denounced both proposals. When Young tried again to move the Grand Prix to Belle Isle in 1988, he dismissed the Friends' opposition as irrelevant. "Who the fuck are the Friends of Belle Isle?" he flippantly asked a reporter. "What did they ever do for Belle Isle but plant two trees every other year?"[114] Marginal or not, the Friends convinced the Common Council to keep the race downtown for the time being. But Young's willingness to move the race to Belle Isle indicated the importance he placed on economic development as a primary reason to invest in parkland.

Another effort to bring new parkland to the city ended in failure. In 1985, in an ill-conceived effort to expand its footprint to Detroit for the first time, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources announced a plan to condemn 225 homes near Eight Mile and Woodward to make room for a motor vehicle campground adjacent to the State

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[112] Rick Ratliff, "What's Head for Detroit Riverfront?," *Detroit Free Press*, September 1, 1985, 1; and Bill McGraw, "City Park Cost Follows Pattern: It's Up Tenfold," *Detroit Free Press*, October 2, 1988, 1.
[113] Harriet Saperstein, "Recycling Detroit's Riverfront," *Trends in Water-Based Recreation* (Washington, D.C.: Park Practice, 1981), 14-19.
[114] Bill McGraw, "What's Best for Belle Isle?," *Detroit Free Press*, June 26, 1988, 1B.

Fairgrounds.[115] Acquisition and demolition proceeded slowly. After two years, the state had purchased 143 properties, but it had only demolished a few of the homes.[116] The remaining residents were increasingly upset. Vandals were stealing appliances and piping from the vacant homes awaiting demolition. Others were illegally dumping trash on vacant lots in the area.[117] In April of 1990, the state tried to accelerate demolition. The governor sent the Michigan National Guard to demolish the remaining homes as part of training exercises for new members.[118] The land was finally cleared, but no construction followed because the state hadn't appropriated enough funds to actually build the campground. By the end of Young's mayoralty, in 1993, the state would abandon the project, settling for the construction of a small pocket park that would open only once a year, for the duration of the annual state fair. The rest of the land would sit vacant for several decades, ultimately becoming the site of a commercial strip.[119]

1988-1994: Regional Disparity

At the end of the 1980s, with Mayor Young approaching his fourth term in office, the park system was stable, if not thriving. Belle Isle and the riverfront had both seen improvements, and in 1988, Detroit voters approved $44 million in bonds to be shared by the Detroit Zoo and the Recreation Department. State voters also approved $140 million in bonds to be split equally between state and local parks. Both bond issues provided needed capital for repairs.[120] Yet the disparity between urban recreation and suburban recreation had grown stark, and those disparities would widen with the next recession.

When Young became mayor in 1974, the city's population was split evenly along racial lines, with neighborhoods in northeast Detroit and the far West Side of Detroit still predominantly white. To advance racial equity, activists fought to increase the number of

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[115] Margaret Trimer, "State Plans to Expand Fairgrounds," *Detroit Free Press*, October 12, 1985, 3.
[116] Duane Noriyuki, "Fair Is Cleaning Up," *Detroit Free Press*, August 26, 1988, 1.
[117] Michael Betzold, "Home Owners Fight Campground Near 8 Mile and Woodward," *Detroit Free Press*, March 14, 1990, 1.
[118] Michael Betzold, "National Guard Gets a Lesson in Wrecking Houses," *Detroit Free Press*, April 10, 1990, 12.
[119] Dawson Bell, "Money Crunch May Kill Chances of Putting Campsite in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, July 16, 1993, 1.
[120] "Election Results," *Detroit Free Press*, August 4, 1988, 16; Bob Campbell, "Item Could Rescue Parks, Backers Say," *Detroit Free Press*, October 18, 1988, 6; and Bob Campbell, "Officials Debate Meaning of Environment Vote," *Detroit Free Press*, November 10, 1988, 19.

recreational facilities in majority black neighborhoods near the city center. They also pressured the Recreation Department to integrate its workforce and engage community members in planning decisions. By the mid-1980s, the terrain of struggle had shifted. The Recreation Department was now considered an ally to the black community, and African Americans had access to all city facilities. However, the quality of parks and recreation had declined as the budget contracted. Most of Detroit's suburbs, by contrast, were growing in population and prosperity, and they could afford excellent park and recreational facilities. But the suburbs remained racially divided from Detroit.[121] In that sense, the fight for racial equity had shifted from a battle to redirect Detroit's resources to a battle to ensure equitable access to parks and recreation throughout the region.

In the fall of 1985, in a decision that generated national headlines, voters in the neighboring suburb of Dearborn approved a referendum closing all city parks to non-residents.[122] All five of the upscale Grosse Pointe communities, located just east of Detroit, had long since done the same. The difference was that the parks in the Pointes were gated. Every visitor had to show identification to gain entry. The Dearborn parks were not gated. As a result, critics argued, the only plausible enforcement strategy would be racial profiling. At the same, Dearborn still had virtually no black residents—only 83 of its 90,660 residents were African American—while Detroit was two-thirds black. Furthermore, the neighborhood group that placed the referendum on the ballot had explicitly expressed a desire to keep black Detroiters out of Dearborn's parks. After the vote, Mayor Young condemned the new policy as racist, and the Michigan chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Detroit Branch of the NAACP filed suit against the City of Dearborn. Pending a ruling, the ACLU and NAACP also organized a holiday boycott of the Fairlane Town Center mall, causing sales to plummet.[123]

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[121] A 1981 survey found that most Metro Detroit residents were satisfied with the recreational facilities available to them, but that black Detroiters were dissatisfied with the facilities in their neighborhoods, especially facilities for children. Robert W. Marans and J. Mark Fly, "Recreation and the Quality of Urban Life: Recreational Resources, Behaviors, and Evaluations of People in the Detroit Region" (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1981).
[122] "Suburban Results," *Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 1985, 10.
[123] James Risen, "Dearborn Dispute: Town Finds It Hard to Shed Racist Image," *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1986, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-01-06/news/mn-13436_1_black-leaders.

A court overturned the Dearborn ordinance in 1986.[124] Nevertheless, the threat of racial hostility kept many African Americans from enjoying parks outside Detroit. In 1985, the state of Michigan surveyed 6,000 state park visitors. The survey found that while 13 percent of Michiganders were black, only one tenth of one percent of visitors to the state parks were black.[125] A separate study conducted by Patrick C. West, a social scientist at the University of Michigan, helped explain why. After the Dearborn park controversy, West asked a panel of Detroit residents whether and how often they visited parks inside and outside of city limits. He found that 75% of black Detroiters visited city parks, but only 38% visited parks outside the city, and they did so infrequently. By contrast, just under half of white Detroiters visited city parks, but more than half visited regional parks and did so often. Follow up questions revealed two reasons for the disparity. First, black Detroiters were less likely to own cars, so parks outside city limits were difficult to reach. Second and more importantly, black Detroiters avoided regional parks due to the likelihood of negative racial interactions with other park users. The survey results did not support a third hypothesis: that black Detroiters avoided regional parks due to lack of interest. The barriers were economic and racial.[126]

While the study focused on regional disparities, it also highlighted the ongoing cultural importance of Detroit's park system to the black community. Unfortunately, the quality of city parks continued to decline. After several years of budgetary stability, Detroit began running annual deficits again in 1989. After two years of minor cutbacks to the Recreation Department, a crippling recession in 1991 pushed Mayor Young to consider drastic cuts. Neither federal nor state aid was expected to ease the crisis. Just as the federal government had cut aid under President Reagan in the 1980s, now Michigan was cutting back under Republican Governor John Engler, who sought savings at the state level by transferring state parks to private agencies or local governments. Engler also eliminated the Michigan Conservation Corps, which provided the state Department

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[124] Brenda J. Gilchrist, "Judge Voids Non-Resident Ordinance," *Detroit Free Press*, September 30, 1986, 1.
[125] Claire V. Korn, *Yesterday Through Tomorrow: Michigan State Parks* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 77.
[126] Patrick C. West, "Urban Region Parks and Black Minorities: Subculture, Marginality, and Interracial Relations in Park Use in the Detroit Metropolitan Area," *Leisure Sciences* 11, no. 1 (1989): 11-28.

of Natural Resources with low-cost labor, and he reduced the "state equity package" to Detroit by over 40 percent—after initially promising to eliminate it completely. These cuts forced the Recreation Department to shift more resources to Belle Isle, which no longer benefited from state funding, and to make cutbacks elsewhere.[127] Regional park providers like the HCMA were stressed too, as the Headlee Amendment, passed in 1978, had gradually restricted the growth of property taxes.[128] Facing the same fiscal pinch, Wayne County government formed a fundraising arm, the Friends of Wayne County Parks, which announced an ambitious goal of raising $8.5 million in private funding.[129]

Unable to fill its budget hole, Detroit turned to deeper cutbacks and private aid. Over protests by residents and City Council members, Mayor Young cut the recreation budget by $10 million in 1992 and closed twelve recreation centers. Two centers, Delray and Bradby, later reopened under the management of People's Community Service and Metropolitan Baptist Church respectively, which paid $1-a-year leases to take control of the facilities. The city tried to lease the other closed recreation centers to nonprofit organizations as well. Yet few nonprofits had the capacity to take on the job, leaving most of the centers shuttered.[130] Only one more reopened. In 1992, residents, recreation center volunteers, and staff members from the Western YMCA across the street from Clark Park formed the Clark Park Coalition and took control of the park's recreation center and ice rink.[131] The Hubbard Farms Community Group had already adopted the park in 1990.[132] Chuck Lewis, supervisor of the city's recreation division, pledged to help the Clark Park Coalition maintain the ice rink, which required special equipment.[133] Beyond that, all upkeep would be the community's responsibility going forward.

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[127] Michael Betzold, "More Park Closings Disputed: Engler Aide Rejects DNR Chief's Claim," *Detroit Free Press*, March 16, 1991; and William Kleinknecht, "Layoffs, Cuts Affect 3 Historical Museums," *Detroit Free Press*, December 20, 1991, 18.
[128] Georgea Kovanis, "Parks in Peril: Boomtowns Can't Create Them; Older Cities Can't Maintain Them," *Detroit Free Press*, 1-F.
[129] Dennis Niemiec, "Foundation to Aid Wayne County Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, March 21, 1990, 4B.
[130] Vivian S. Toy, "Community Groups Lease Shuttered Recreation Centers for $1 a Year," *Detroit News*, July 2, 1992, 1-B.
[131] Joe Cybulski, "Clark Program Heeds Kids' Cries for Help," *Detroit News*, January 25, 1992, 5-B.
[132] Heidi Mae Bratt, "Unity Festival at Clark Park: Focal Point for Neighborhood for 100 Years," *Detroit News*, September 13, 1990, 2-B.
[133] Ibid.

In this new climate of austerity, the Friends of Belle Isle reluctantly shifted its position on the Grand Prix. After opposing the transfer of the auto race from downtown to Belle Isle in the 1980s, the Friends narrowly endorsed the transfer in 1992 after Detroit Renaissance, the sponsor of the race, agreed to donate the proceeds from a $2 ticket surcharge to the Recreation Department for island improvements.[134] The decision outraged Olga Madar, who by then had retired from the UAW but was still an active member of the Friends; she renounced her membership after the decision.[135] The Friends soon regretted their endorsement. After the first Grand Prix race was held on the island, the leader of the Friends recanted his support. "Detroit Renaissance has not lived up to their obligations," Sam Trentacosta, president of the Friends of Belle Isle, told a reporter. "Renaissance promised to remove all concrete barriers but left barriers in the pit area. The casino looks a mess."[136] City administrators, by contrast, expressed no regret. The Recreation Department's new director, Alonzo Bates, told a reporter, "They've worked with us very well. They've given us money for the island. The partnership is working." In its first year on the island, he noted, the Grand Prix raised $116,000 for the Recreation Department. Detroit Renaissance provided an additional $200,000 in grants for Belle Isle through partnerships with the McGregor and Matilda Wilson funds.[137]

It wasn't enough. In 1992, the 21st Century Committee—a group of business and civic leaders commissioned by Mayor Young to provide emergency budgetary advice—urged Young to transfer Belle Isle to the HCMA or impose an entrance fee. The Friends of Belle Isle signaled support for either measure, but the mayor declined to act. Young had invested $16 million in Belle Isle's restoration during his administration, and he was determined to retain control of the park and keep it free for all to use, even if the city

[134] Kathleen Bohland and Scott Martelle, "Island Friends Relent Some on Prix," *Detroit News*, June 21, 1988, Detroit edition, 3-B; and Chauncey Bailey, "Belle Isle Group Divided on Prix," *Detroit News*, August 16, 1991, 3-B.
[135] William Kleinknecht, "Testimony Is Divided on Belle Isle Prix," *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 1991, 15.
[136] Kim Trent, "Grand Prix Sponsors Neglecting Belle Isle, Boosters Say," *Detroit News*, May 13, 1993, 1-B.
[137] Kim Trent, "Grand Prix Sponsors Neglecting Belle Isle, Boosters Say," *Detroit News*, May 13, 1993, 1-B.

could not afford to fully maintain the island.[138] However, Young was open to selling other parkland. In 1993, Young tried to sell riverfront parkland in Maheras Park to a luxury housing developer. The Common Council blocked his plan.[139]

In poor health and lagging in the polls for the first time in his career, Young reluctantly decided not to run for reelection. Dennis Archer, the first African American to serve as chief justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, and attorney Sharon McPhail, the highest-ranked African American prosecutor in Wayne County, competed to replace him. In his closing months in office, Young warned that suburbanites wished to exploit the city's fiscal crisis to seize control of the city's "jewels," including the Department of Water and Sewerage, the Detroit Zoo, the Detroit Department of Transportation, and Belle Isle. "They want to take our property," Young told a reporter. "That is stealing."[140] McPhail echoed the sentiment. She argued the central question of the campaign was the following: "Who is going to run Detroit, us or somebody outside of us?"[141] She opposed regional control of Belle Isle, although like Young, she supported regional revenue sharing to fund operations. Archer said he preferred regional revenue sharing as well, but he would consider transferring management as long as the city retained legal title to the park. After a bitter election that saw McPhail and her supporters paint Archer as an "Uncle Tom" willing to sell out the city to suburbanites, Archer won decisively.[142]

Conclusion

In the wake of the 1967 riots, community organizers sought to make Detroit's park and recreation system more equitable by pressuring all levels of government to invest in recreational facilities in the inner city. Community-based organizations and businesses also began building and managing more community facilities themselves,

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[138] Kim Trent, "Councilman Suggests Belle Isle, Metroparks Merger," *Detroit News*, June 9, 1993, 3-B.
[139] Dan Holly, "Most on Council Against Turning Park Into Upscale Homes," *Detroit Free Press*, November 10, 1993, 3B. The park was later renamed Maheras-Gentry Park in honor of Bronson Gentry, the activist who led the effort to protect the park from real estate development.
[140] Bill McGraw and Jeffrey S. Ghannam, "Young Dishes Out, Receives Criticism," *Detroit Free Press*, February 26, 1993, 16.
[141] Bill McGraw, "Archer Makes Mayoral Bid Official Today," *Detroit Free Press*, November 19, 1992, 14A.
[142] Patricia Montemurri, "The Making of the Mayor," *Detroit Free Press*, November 4, 1993, 37.

including pocket parks, playgrounds, and gardens. Yet activists faced resistance from within the Department of Parks and Recreation, which did not embrace change.

Activists took hope when Coleman. A. Young won election in 1973 with a mandate to expand service and end racial bias in the parks department. However, the city's collapsing tax base made that mandate difficult to fulfill. Rather than expand service, Young would turn to self-help and intergovernmental transfers to partially sustain existing parks and programs. Like leaders in other cities, Young encouraged nonprofit organizations and corporations to adopt city parks and transform vacant lots into pocket parks. The Young administration also depended on transfers of aid from the state and federal governments. However, Young rejected another option—transferring control of municipal parks to nonprofit, regional, state, or federal authorities—as an affront to local autonomy, which, by the mid-1970s, meant the right of a majority black city to govern its own affairs in a majority white region and state. Young also declined partnership opportunities that clashed with his vision of parks as places for physical activity, socializing, and entertainment. By the end of the 1970s, the department became more aggressive about soliciting private donations and support as federal aid diminished, but it still treated partnerships as a supplement, not a replacement, for public provision.

Young's approach—filling service gaps through selective partnerships, revenue transfers, and self-help programs, while retaining local control—worked initially. The city made some cutbacks, but the park and recreation system remained mostly intact. Young also initiated the post-industrial greening of the Detroit riverfront. With the help of federal and state grants, Young built parks, marinas, and amphitheaters amidst the cement siloes and factories that continued to dominate the riverfront until the early 2000s. He also temporarily reinvigorated Belle Isle as a regional destination for recreation. However, Young could not overcome deindustrialization, white flight, or the neoliberal turn in state and federal policy, which together ensured the corrosion of Detroit's city revenues. By the end of Young's time in office, municipal parks and recreation were falling into a worse state of disrepair than Young had initially found them when he entered office in 1974. Young ended his fourth and final term by slashing funds for parks and recreation, undoing any progress that had been made toward achieving parity in the quality of parks and recreation between majority-black Detroit and its majority-white

suburbs. The 1991 recession—coupled with cutbacks in revenue sharing—caused a severe fiscal crisis that led Young to close recreation centers, cut personnel, and ask community and corporate partners to take over operations of some facilities. Like municipal leaders elsewhere, the next mayor, Dennis Archer, would have to reconsider how to organize the provision of parks and recreation given the city's poor long-term economic outlook.

Chapter 6: Networks of Park Partnership (1994-2018)

In the early 1990s, critical geographers and urban design scholars warned that austerity and privatization were threatening to extinguish democratic public space from American cities. In his searing critique of urbanism in Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis warned that liberal politicians had "collaborated in the massive privatization of public space," with the wealthy now enjoying "upscale, pseudo-public spaces—sumptuary malls, office centers, culture acropolises, and so on," while the poor were confined to a public realm in which "parks are becoming derelict and beaches more segregated, libraries and playgrounds are closing, youth congregations of ordinary kinds are banned, and the streets are becoming more desolate and dangerous."[1] In a study of privately owned public spaces in Los Angeles, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris found that corporate plazas were meeting the needs of office workers but excluding the poor and the homeless.[2] Even the best park systems in the country, like San Francisco's, were found to be in a state of disrepair and decline after years of cutbacks and neglect.[3]

Yet at the same time, a renaissance in public park investment had already quietly begun. After a decade-long decline, average municipal spending on parks began to rise in 1986. Park investment would continue to rise annually until 2008.[4] New spending allowed cities to rehabilitate existing parks and build new kinds of parks and recreational

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[1] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990), 226-228.
[2] Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Privatisation of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience," The Town Planning Review 64, no. 2 (April 1993): 139-167, doi:10.3828/tpr.64.2.6h26535771454436.
[3] Randolph S. Delehanty, "San Francisco Parks and Playgrounds, 1839 to 1990: The History of a Public Good in One North American City" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 1992).
[4] Nicholas A. Pitas, Austin G. Barrett, and Andrew J. Mowen, "Trends in Local Park and Recreation Department Finances and Staffing in the Early Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 35, no. 3 (2017): 20-34.

amenities, including skate parks, dog parks, rain gardens, and greenways.[5] Designed with sustainability in mind, newer parks sought to restore lost ecological habitat, allow stormwater to recharge local aquifers rather than run off into sewers, and bring urbanites into greater contact with nature.[6] Led by the example of the Central Park Conservancy in New York, an increasing number of nonprofit organizations formed to raise money to rehabilitate historic parks and sponsor new amenities like rails-to-trails greenways.[7] By the 2000s, in stark contrast to the fears aired a decade prior, some park scholars were heralding a new "golden age" for parks and recreation.[8] However, critics remained skeptical of public-private partnerships, noting the subtle ways that private partners restricted speech and assembly through design and management decisions.[9] Scholars also voiced concern that park improvements were sparking gentrification, leading to calls to make cities "just green enough" to improve quality of life without pricing out the poor.[10]

Detroit, too, experienced a renaissance in the quality of its most high profile public spaces. The city has won awards for the transformation of Campus Martius and the riverfront under the auspices of public-private partnerships that formed in the late 1990s. However, as this chapter will show, the municipal recreation system experienced no such renaissance, although it too depends on public-private partnerships. When Dennis Archer became mayor of Detroit in 1994, he inherited a park and recreation system in crisis, and it has remained in crisis. While Detroit's population loss slowed

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[5] Stanton Jones and Arthur Graves, "Power Plays in Public Space: Skateboard Parks as Battlegrounds, Gifts, and Expressions of Self," *Landscape Journal* 19, no. 1-2 (2000): 136-148; Julius G. Fabos, "Greenway Planning in the United States: Its Origins and Recent Case studies," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 68, no. 2-3 (2004): 321-342;; and Daniel Matisoff and Douglas Noonan, "Managing Contested Greenspace: Neighborhood Commons and the Rise of Dog Parks," *International Journal of the Commons* 6, no. 1 (2012): 28-51, doi: 10.18352/ijc.299.

[6] Galen Cranz and Michael Boland, "Defining the Sustainable Park: A Fifth Model for Urban Parks," *Landscape Journal* 23, no. 2 (2004): 102–20

[7] Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 356.

[8] John L. Crompton and Andrew T. Kaczynski, "Trends in Local Park and Recreation Department Finances and Staffing from 1964-65 to 1999-2000," *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 21, no. 4 (2003): 124-144.

[9] Sharon Zukin, "Union Square and the Paradox of Public Space," in *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 125-158.

[10] Jennifer R. Wolch, Jason Byrne, and Joshua P. Newell, "Urban Green Space, Public Health, and Environmental Justice: The Challenge of Making Cities 'Just Green Enough,'" *Landscape and Urban Planning* 125 (May 2014): 234-244.

during the economic boom of the Clinton years, it never stopped declining, and the municipal budget remained tight. Like his predecessor, Coleman Young, Archer turned to intergovernmental revenue, corporate donations, and volunteers to sustain the system's deteriorating facilities to the extent possible. Unlike Young, Archer and subsequent mayors were able to simultaneously negotiate with nonprofit and intergovernmental partners to build *and* operate new public-private spaces in the central business district and along the riverfront. As Detroit's financial position further deteriorated, culminating in the nation's largest municipal bankruptcy filing in 2013, the recreation system broke down further, with more parks and recreation centers permanently shuttered. Yet parks controlled by public-private partnerships continued to improve and draw visitors.

The result has been a two-tiered local park system. On the one hand, Detroit has an aging and poorly maintained municipal recreation system that serves its residential neighborhoods. This recreation system, which includes most large parks built between the 1890s and the 1920s, as well as all of the remaining playfields and recreation centers built over the course of the 1900s, has seen modest reinvestment post-bankruptcy, but it operates at a fraction of its former capacity. Detroit's other public spaces—its civic squares; its most treasured landscaped park, Belle Isle; and its post-industrial riverfront and rails-to-trails greenways—are designed, financed, and managed separately from the municipal recreation system by either public or nonprofit partners, each of which controls its own network of public spaces in accordance with its own values and resources.

1994-2002: Partnering to Sustain Recreation and Build New Parks

When Dennis Archer ran for mayor, he pledged to restore the recreation system. Once in office, he aggressively pursued intergovernmental revenue, corporate donations, and volunteer labor, forging partnerships to renovate existing parks and reopen recreation centers. He also pushed for new revenue sources, including new local and county taxes and an entrance fee to Belle Isle. Yet despite some successes at revenue generation, the recreation system continued to decline. At the same time, however, the Archer administration was able to lay the groundwork for the revival of parks, plazas, and promenades along the riverfront and downtown through the creation of public-private partnerships that operated outside the bounds of the municipal recreation system.

Archer attempted to address recreational disparities in office, but he did so facing severe fiscal limitations. In 1994, Archer inherited an initial recreation budget of just $43 million—one-third what it had been just three years prior, although above the low point of $36 million in 1993.[11] While Detroit was no longer on the brink of bankruptcy, Archer could not count on rising property tax revenues to restore the budget. Detroit was still losing population—falling 14.6 percent between 1980 and 1990, from 1.2 million to just over one million—and voters had just approved Proposal A, a statewide ballot measure limiting the ability of local governments to increase property tax collections.[12] The Headlee Amendment, passed in 1978, already prevented local governments from increasing total property tax collection at a rate faster than inflation. Proposal A went a step further by restricting the taxable value of any particular property from rising faster than inflation. Regardless of how quickly a particular property gained value, its taxable value could never rise faster than five percent or inflation, whichever was less. So even if the economy grew and property values rose—which held true for much of Archer's term—Detroit could not expect windfall revenue.[13]

To run the Recreation Department, Archer nominated Ernest Burkeen, Jr., a native Detroiter with two degrees in park administration. Burkeen had previously served as the senior administrator of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority. As Detroit's Recreation Director, Burkeen was charged with raising new revenue to improve service. He took his first idea from Coleman Young's 21st Century Committee, which had advised the mayor to either transfer Belle Isle to the Metroparks system or charge drivers a fee for entering the park.[14] The revenue from an entrance fee could pay for capital improvements to the island while allowing the department to reallocate general fund dollars to other parks. Archer and Burkeen championed the fee proposal and tried repeatedly to win the City Council's approval. However, the council upheld the principle that public parks should be free to all to enter. Council members blocked the proposed

[11] Bill Alexander, "Once Wrecked Rec Dept. Back on Track in Detroit," *Youth Today*, May 1998, 42, http://www.youthtoday.org.
[12] Elizabeth Pratt, "Property Tax Millage Limitations in Michigan," *State Notes* (Spring 2016), http://www.senate.michigan.gov/sfa/.
[13] Andrew Lockwood, *School Finance Reform in Michigan: Proposal A: Retrospective* (Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Treasury, December 2002.)
[14] Kim Trent, "Councilman Suggests Belle Isle, Metroparks merger," *Detroit News*, June 9, 1993, 3-B.

fee in 1994, 1996, and again in 2001, despite a pledge from Burkeen that the revenue would be used to undo cuts made to recreation centers and parks elsewhere in the city.[15]

Archer also made new overtures to state government. In Republican Governor John Engler's 1994 "State of the State" address—made just as Archer was taking office—Engler revived the idea of building a state park in Detroit.[16] The previous effort to build a campground near the State Fairgrounds, announced with fanfare in the mid-1980s, had fizzled out after wrecking a neighborhood, but Archer was eager for new state investment. However, existing state parks were underfunded—Engler had just launched an "Adopt-a-State-Park" program to increase volunteer maintenance—and little came of the state park offer initially. However, Michigan did increase funding for local and state parks. The passage of a statewide ballot measure in 1994 established a new state parks endowment fund and enhanced the existing Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund—a land acquisition fund that drew upon revenue from gas and oil extraction on public lands—ensuring that the state would help improve existing local parks through grants and revenue transfers, including in Detroit.[17]

Archer and Burkeen had more luck partnering with corporations and foundations on an initiative to expand access to recreation in low-income neighborhoods.[18] In 1994, the mayor joined William Davidson—owner of Guardian Industries, managing partner of the Detroit Pistons and founder of the Pistons-Palace Foundation—to announce the PARK program, or Partnership to Adopt and Renovate Parks for Kids. PARK aimed to "revitalize Detroit neighborhoods through the renovation of parks, basketball courts, baseball diamonds, running tracks and playground equipment."[19] Davidson and Archer

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[15] Andre Jones, "City Council Gets a Jump on Recreation Initiatives," *Michigan Citizen*, March 1, 1997, A1; and M.L. Elrick, "Detroit's Parks Boss to Leave for Florida Position," *Detroit Free Press*, May 11, 2000, B1.
[16] Chris Christoff, "Engler Portrays Safe State, Good Schools," *Detroit Free Press*, January 19, 1994, 1.
[17] Mike Williams, "'Sky's the Limit' on a New City Park," *Detroit Free Press*, January 25, 1994, 11; and Eric Sharp, "New State Park in Detroit? Engler Can't Really Mean It," *Detroit Free Press*, February 4, 1994, 28; and Dennis Niemiec, "Statewide Proposals: Insurance, Convention Issues Lose; Others Pass," *Detroit Free Press*, November 9, 1994, 11.
[18] Bill Alexander, "Once Wrecked Rec Dept. Back on Track in Detroit," *Youth Today*, May 1998, 42, http://www.youthtoday.org/.
[19] Robert W. Marans et al., *Revitalizing Detroit Parks: An Evaluation of the Pistons-Palace Foundation's PARK Program* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Urban & Regional Planning Program, 1997).

pledged to raise $20 million, which they hoped would be enough to build new basketball courts and baseball diamonds at all 250 neighborhood parks. The Pistons-Palace Foundation ultimately gave $3 million to the initiative. The Kresge Foundation gave $5.5 million: $2 million for parks and another $3.5 million to reopen closed recreation centers. All told, between 1994 and 1998, the PARK initiative brought in $12 million, which was enough to improve facilities at 33 neighborhood parks—a far cry from 250, but nevertheless a substantial boost to the city's ailing park network.[20] However, the city struggled to maintain them. Unsatisfied with the upkeep of the renovated parks, the Pistons-Palace Foundation started a youth "Park Rangers" program with support from Domino's Pizza. The program recruited teen "rangers" to pick up litter in newly renovated parks in exchange for Pistons merchandise and ticket giveaways.[21]

Soon after the PARK initiative launched, the Skillman Foundation announced the creation of the Youth Sports and Recreation Commission, a public-private effort to address disparities in recreational access between the majority-minority cities of Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park and the rest of the region.[22] The commission funded a similar agenda to New Detroit's "Youth, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs" committee after the 1967 rebellion, except the region of deprivation now encompassed the entire central city rather than the inner city alone. In addition to supporting the PARK fund, the new commission sponsored a youth baseball and softball league, ran a summer jobs program, paid schools to extend their hours so they could function as community centers, provided mini-grants to nonprofits working with youth, and reopened four Detroit recreation centers with the previously mentioned $3.5-million gift from the Kresge Foundation, which was matched by $4 million from the city of Detroit.[23]

The commission also sponsored new nonprofit athletic leagues to ensure that low-income children would be able to play team sports. Disappointed to learn that the Police Athletic League routinely turned kids away for lack of funding, Dan Varner and Michael

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[20] Darci McConnel, "Charities Help Update City Parks, Rec Centers," *Detroit Free Press*, February 19, 1998, 21.
[21] Lisa Brooks, "Park Program: Parks Soothe the Soul, Mind," *Detroit Free Press*, March 17, 1998, 55.
[22] Skillman Foundation, *Re-creating Recreation in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park* (Detroit: Skillman Foundation, 1995).
[23] "Recreation Commission Establishes Youth Programs," *Michigan Citizen*, January 31, 1998, B5.

Tenbusch founded their own youth sports league, Think Detroit, in 1996.[24] Think Detroit began as a baseball league but later expanded to soccer and other sports. A decade later, Think Detroit would merge with the Police Athletic League, managing athletics for ten thousand student athletes by 2002.[25] Smaller sports programs, like the Detroit Eagles Athletic Club and Healthy Kidz, Inc., formed in the mid-1990s as well. Groups like these provided athletic opportunities in particular neighborhoods. They received some public funding but depended more on corporate and nonprofit sponsors.[26]

Despite the support of PARK and the Skillman Foundation, Recreation Director Ernest Burkeen struggled with a limited budget that only increased marginally year-to-year. In the first two years of Archer's term, Burkeen reopened five recreation centers total, but he was forced to scale back programming at the centers almost immediately.[27] The department's five-year strategic plan, published in 1997, explained the funding challenge. "Detroit's population loss translates into lost resource dollars from local tax revenues and from federal and state revenue sharing packages," the plan stated. "While the population of the City has been brutally downsized over the last few decades, Recreation Department responsibility for buildings and land ownership has remained the same. In essence, [there are] fewer dollars to support the same number of aging parks and centers, and for increased service demands. Since the early 1980s, Recreation Department staffing has been reduced by about 45 percent."[28]

To turn the budget around, the Archer administration sought new tax revenues. In August of 1996, voters approved two new sources of revenue for recreation. First, voters in Detroit authorized $15 million in municipal bonds to improve the Detroit Zoo and recreational facilities in Detroit. Eighty percent of the funds went toward the Recreation

[24] Christopher Walton, "Everyone Gets to Play on His Ball League," *Detroit Free Press*, February 5, 1998, 52.
[25] David Josar, "Athletic Leagues Team Up," *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 2002, 32.
[26] Patrick Cooper-McCann, "Partnerships for Parks and Recreation in Detroit" (Detroit, MI: Detroit Parks Coalition, June 2017).
[27] Cassandra Spratling, "Parks Boss Has Tough Job," *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1994, 11; and Andre Jones, "City Council Gets a Jump on Recreation Initiatives," *Michigan Citizen*, March 1, 1997, A1.
[28] Detroit Recreation Department, *Detroit Recreation Department Five-Year Plan: 1997-2001* (Detroit: City of Detroit, 1997).

Department.[29] The bonds allowed Burkeen to renovate some smaller parks and to hire planning consultants to develop a new master plan for Belle Isle. Second, in the same election, Wayne County voters approved a five-year, .25-mill property tax to fund county parks—the first dedicated source of funding for the county park system since its founding in 1918. In order to win widespread support, the county negotiated the list of projects ahead of time. Nearly half the funding would be invested in Detroit. Projects included a $7-million pool complex at Chandler Park, a new riverfront boardwalk at Mariner's Park, and the restoration of Historic Fort Wayne in Southwest Detroit.[30] Prior to 1996, Wayne County had not invested in any Detroit parks. The decision to prioritize projects in Detroit proved decisive. Strong support in the city outweighed suburban opposition, and the millage passed.[31] These two measures enabled a series of capital improvements, but they provided no new operating support to the municipal Recreation Department.

Despite these infusions of funding, Burkeen was unable to improve most parks and recreation centers during his seven years as director, largely because tax revenue remained flat, even though property values rose modestly starting in 1996 thanks to the robust national economy.[32] In 2000, a nationwide survey by the Urban Land Institute found that Detroit spent less per capita on recreational facilities than any other major U.S. city. In 1999, Detroit budgeted $52 million for recreation—above the low point of $36 million in 1993, but no better than the austerity budgets of the early 1980s. In 1999, the department employed 620 full-time workers, compared to more than 1,000 workers a decade prior and more than 1,500 in 1980. Despite partnerships, grants, and bonds, overall park service was poor.[33] A scathing audit released in 2001 concluded that despite good management, the Recreation Department "significantly fails in their mission of

[29] Lekan Oguntoyinbo, "Voters to Decide Bonds for Museum, Recreation," *Detroit Free Press*, July 30, 1996, 14.
[30] Unfortunately, the funds ran out before the restoration of Historic Fort Wayne could proceed. Patricia Montemurri, "More Perks at the Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 1997, 12.
[31] "Election '96," *Detroit Free Press*, August 8, 1996, 21.
[32] Nathan Bomey and John Gallagher, "How Detroit Went Broke," *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 2013.
[33] Corey Dade, "Detroit Ranks at the Bottom in U.S. for Parks Spending," *Detroit Free Press*, September 12, 2000, 1.

providing world-class recreation facilities and services to the city of Detroit."[34] While a few facilities were in excellent condition, most were in a state of disrepair. At one east side recreation center, the auditors found "damaged and exposed pipes and electrical outlets, a broken water fountain, dirty rest rooms lacking stall doors, a gym floor with missing tiles, grass 1- to 2-feet high, and a crumbling walkway."[35] The Archer administration acknowledged the problems but attributed them to a lack of funding, not a lack of effort or concern. The Recreation Department estimated it would cost $300 million to renovate all of the city's 391 parks and 33 recreation centers.[36] The Belle Isle master plan alone would cost $180 million to implement over a 15-year period.[37]

The continual loss of capacity undercut all of the department's efforts, including the PARK initiative with the Pistons-Palace Foundation. After the 33rd and final park renovation, in 1998, the Pistons-Palace Foundation created a small endowment with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan for ongoing maintenance. However, the endowment was not substantial, and William Davidson arranged for the payouts to be disbursed to a nonprofit organization, the Greening of Detroit, rather than to the city. Davidson had lost faith that the mayor could follow through on his promises to properly maintain the renovated parks, and he worried that the poor condition of the parks would harm the reputation of the Detroit Pistons.[38] The Greening of Detroit had already taken over a substantial share of the city's forestry operation, becoming the primary planter of new trees throughout the city, so it was well positioned to add supplemental park maintenance to its operations.[39] Burkeen, meanwhile, shared Davidson's frustration. Unable to convince the City Council to charge an entrance fee to Belle Isle, Burkeen announced in 2000 that he would leave Detroit for a job directing parks in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Asked to explain his decision, Burkeen replied: "I've worked for

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[34] M.L. Elrick, "Report Slams City Recreation Facilities," *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 2001, 1B.
[35] Ibid.
[36] M.L. Elrick, "Shy of Funds, Parks, Rec Centers Need Fixup," *Detroit Free Press*, October 2, 2001, 1B.
[37] Corey Dade, "Task Force Floats Belle Isle Toll Idea," *Detroit Free Press*, June 22, 1998, 1.
[38] Interview with William Davidson Foundation officers, November 7, 2017.
[39] The Greening of Detroit was founded in 1989. By 1995, the Greening was responsible for most new tree plantings in the city, allowing the Forestry Department to specialize in tree maintenance. Paige St. John, "Volunteers Plant Seeds of Hope," *Detroit Free Press*, April 2, 1995, 26.

Huron-Clinton that had money; I've worked for Detroit that doesn't have money. Ft. Lauderdale has money."[40] Unable to raise dedicated revenue for recreation, despite repeated efforts, Burkeen left in exasperation to work for a better-resourced system.

Yet even as the Recreation Department lost its capacity to fulfill the recreational needs of Detroit residents, Archer was able to lay the groundwork for the revival of parks, plazas, and promenades along the riverfront and downtown. Archer did so by negotiating public-private partnerships to build *and* manage new parks outside the purview of local government. Unlike prior partnerships for recreation, which sought to improve the social welfare of at-risk youth, these partnerships were explicitly intended to spur real estate redevelopment, even as they also promoted other goals, like providing fun places for families to go and allowing residents to better enjoy the Detroit River.

The first partnership—to construct a riverfront promenade—kicked off in March 1996. At the urging of Peter Stroh, a major real estate developer and owner of Stroh's Brewery, the city of Detroit and the Rivertown Business Association asked the State of Michigan to buy 6.3 acres of riverfront land east of the Renaissance Center, or RenCen, for $4.5 million. The park would be the fourth in the Linked Riverfront Park system that Young had initiated. The goal was to link all the parks to each other and to downtown by a continuous riverfront boardwalk. The boardwalk, in turn, was supposed to entice more private developers like Stroh to invest their capital to convert the district's nineteenth-century warehouses into lofts and offices.[41] Not only did the state agree to buy the land on Detroit's behalf, the state's investment helped convince General Motors (GM), the state's largest corporation, that the riverfront was the right location for its world headquarters. Two months after the parcel was acquired, General Motors completed negotiations to purchase the RenCen.[42] As the most powerful property owner on the riverfront, GM pushed the city and state to complete the linked riverfront park system. As part of a $500-million overhaul of the RenCen, GM agreed to build a glass atrium as a riverside entrance to the massive office and hotel complex. The atrium would open onto

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[40] M.L. Elrick, "Detroit's Parks Boss to Leave for Florida Position," *Detroit Free Press*, May 11, 2000, B1.
[41] Lekan Oguntoyinbo, Tina Lam, and Judy Rose, "Plans Proceed for Riverfront Redevelopment," *Detroit Free Press*, March 30, 1996, A2.
[42] Rachel Konrad and Judy Rose, "GM Makes RenCen Its New Home," *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1996, 1.

a riverside plaza with an interactive water fountain that children could race through during the summer. In return, the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan agreed to build the first leg of the riverfront promenade, from Cobo Hall to the new plaza, which would link the isolated RenCen complex to the rest of downtown.[43] GM also urged the state to take over management of Belle Isle, but the City Council's opposition prevented consideration of the proposal, even though Archer was supportive.[44]

The second partnership—to remake Campus Martius—began the same year. In 1996, Archer announced the launch of the Greater Downtown Partnership (GDP), a new real estate development organization sponsored by Detroit Renaissance, the exclusive committee of Detroit's leading chief executives. At its first press conference, the GDP announced that it had secretly purchased the Hudson's building, the iconic skyscraper where merchant and philanthropist Joseph L. Hudson had run the world's second-largest department store. Despite the building's importance to the city's history, the GDP decided to demolish it in order to offer developers a blank slate for new construction. After the demolition, the GDP and the city together controlled real estate on five blocks near Kennedy Square—the rundown plaza that had once been called Campus Martius. The GDP hoped to redevelop all five blocks at the same time, effectively remaking the center of downtown in a bid to attract corporations that had long since decamped for the suburbs.[45] As the centerpiece of the development, the GDP planned to transform Kennedy Square into Campus Martius Park, an oval-shaped park that would lie in the middle of Woodward and feature a fountain, a restaurant, a winter ice rink, and a summer stage. The new park would be surrounded on all sides by new high-rise office buildings with ground-floor retail. The adjacent Cadillac Square would also be restored as a linear park, with the existing bus depot on the site relocated to another section of downtown.[46]

While downtown Detroit had seen major redevelopment projects before, like the massive Renaissance Center complex on the east riverfront and Joe Louis Arena and

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[43] R.J. King, "Detroit's Changing Riverfront," *The Detroit News*, January 26, 1997, C1.
[44] Dennis W. Archer and Elizabeth Ann Atkins, *Let the Future Begin* (Grosse Pointe Farms, MI: Atkins & Greenspan Writing, 2017), 311.
[45] The Greater Downtown Partnerhsip later merged with another organization and became the Downtown Detroit Partnerhsip. Jon Pepper, "Power Elite Designing a New Downtown," *Detroit Free Press*, March 10, 1996, 1; and Lekan Oguntoyinbo, "Group Targets Detroit Blight," *Detroit Free Press*, March 12, 1996, 9.
[46] Daniel G. Fricker, "Detroit Gives Downtown Vision," *Detroit Free Press*, May 29, 1997, 4E.

Cobo Hall on the west riverfront, the Campus Martius project marked a new approach because it sought to rehabilitate the existing fabric of downtown. After the release of GDP's vision, the chief executive officer of Compuware, a computer services firm based in Detroit's suburbs, agreed to move his firm to Detroit to be the lead tenant in the Campus Martius redevelopment.[47] Lured by incentives and the promise of positive press coverage, Compuware began building a new headquarters facing Campus Martius in 2000.[48] To make the park itself a reality, Archer turned to the Detroit 300, a new commission charged with organizing the celebration of Detroit's 300th anniversary, which would take place in 2001. As chair of the commission, Edsel Ford II, president of Ford Motor Company and an heir to the family fortune, was asked to raise at least $15 million for a legacy "gift" to the city. The commission chose to fund both of Archer's public-private park initiatives—the riverfront promenade and the redevelopment of Campus Martius Park—and to remake Woodward in between to link them together.[49]

The city and state led the riverfront promenade project. Building the promenade from Cobo Hall to the RenCen cost $7.8 million; the Detroit 300 commission raised $1.25 million privately, and the State of Michigan paid the remainder.[50] The city and state began construction in June of 2000 and dedicated the promenade one year later in time for the celebration of Detroit's 300th anniversary.[51] The opening of the riverfront promenade brought Young's vision of a Linked Riverfront Park system one step closer to reality. Moreover, it also fulfilled Hazen Pingree's vision of a riverfront boardwalk from Third Street to Orleans Street—a plan repeated in planning documents for a full century.

As construction began, Governor Engler also pledged to fulfill his 1994 promise to build a state park in Detroit. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources planned to build a 40-acre state park at the eastern terminus of the promenade, just beyond the RenCen. It would be the first urban park in the state system, other than a small pocket park adjacent to the State Fairgrounds at Woodward and Eight Mile where children could

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[47] Jon Pepper, "Compuware Considering Shifting Suburban Headquarters to Detroit," *The Detroit News and Free Press*, August 24, 1997, 1.
[48] Daniel G. Fricker, "Big Plans on Campus," *Detroit Free Press*, May 21, 1998, G1.
[49] Jennifer Dixon, "Worthy Gift to Aid Gem of a Spot," *Detroit Free Press*, April 19, 1999, 1.
[50] M.L. Elrick, "At Last the Riverside Is Open," *Detroit Free Press*, July 19, 2001, 91.
[51] Daniel G. Fricker, "Detroit to Start Construction on a Riverfront Promenade," *Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 2000, A1.

fish during each summer's State Fair.[52] As proposed, the new state park would include the existing St. Aubin Park and Marina, which the state would begin operating immediately, as well as adjacent industrial land, some of which the state had already purchased in 1996. If the city could acquire the remaining land, the state promised to tear down the cement silos, remediate the contaminated soil, and reconstruct the site as a wetlands in a recreation of the city's pre-industrial landscape. The park would also include a short greenway extending to the Lafayette Park neighborhood to the north.[53]

Despite the emphasis on wetlands restoration, the new park was motivated more by economic considerations than environmental ones. The deal to build the park came together as part of a plan to open gambling casinos in the riverfront district, a project backed by economic development officials at the local and state level. In 1996, Michigan voters authorized the opening of three casinos in Detroit. Archer backed the casino plan as a way to generate wagering taxes for the fiscally strapped city, but he vowed to keep the casinos off the riverfront, fearing they would dampen residential and commercial investment. However, he reversed himself in 1998, seeing an opportunity to increase the economic impact of the casinos by linking them to the state park project. He announced that two of the three casinos would be built on Atwater Street directly across from the proposed park. In effect, the state park would serve as the casinos' front yard. The reconstructed wetlands would function as an environmental attraction to draw patrons out of the casinos and onto the riverfront, where they could enjoy views of the RenCen and the Windsor skyline. Thanks to the marina, casino visitors could also come and go by boat.[54]

However, the park would only be built if the city of Detroit first acquired the land.[55] Over the vocal objections of historic preservationists and local merchants, the Archer administration invested $140 million between 1998 and 2000 to buy and clear dozens of properties in the riverfront district, leveling a landscape of nineteenth-century

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[52] Eric Sharp, "DNR Shows Ware at Fair," *Detroit Free Press*, August 21, 1997, 8D.
[53] Eric Sharp, "State Park Is Long Overdue in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, June 8, 2000, 8-D.
[54] Bill McGraw and Darci McConnell, "Archer Takes Gamble on Riverfront Casinos," *Detroit Free Press*, February 17, 1998, A1; and Eric Sharp, "State Park Is Long Overdue in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, June 8, 2000, 8-D.
[55] Bill McGraw and Darci McConnell, "Archer Takes Gamble on Riverfront Casinos," *Detroit Free Press*, February 17, 1998, A1.

saloons and warehouses. Most of the money came from casino developers, who were required to contribute to the project. But the city ran out of cash before the job was completed. Much of the site had already been cleared, but Archer was forced to reverse himself again. He allowed the casinos to operate at the edges of the central business district, where they had already established "temporary" locations. The failure of the riverfront casino plan—together with Archer's surprise decision not to run for reelection a second time—left the state park plan in limbo, and the demolition of historic structures set back the nascent revival of the riverfront district by smaller businesses.[56]

As Archer left office, construction had also not yet begun on Campus Martius Park. However, one thing was certain: the new park would not be designed or operated by the struggling Recreation Department. From the beginning, the Detroit 300 committee pushed for the new park to be operated independently of the city through a nonprofit park conservancy with its own operating endowment. More than anything else, this operating arrangement would differentiate Campus Martius from any previous public-private park partnership in Detroit. Along with Millennium Park in Chicago and the High Line in New York—two parks that were planned concurrently—Campus Martius would become one of the first urban parks in the country to be operated by a nonprofit organization from its inception. Nonprofit park conservancies first formed in the 1970s to raise money for the restoration of historic public parks. Some of these organizations expanded their scope in the 1980s to include park planning and management. The Central Park Conservancy was the most prominent. After raising hundreds of millions of dollars to refurbish its namesake park, the conservancy signed a contract to take full control of operations in 1998.[57] Its success inspired copycat efforts in numerous cities.

Philanthropists came to demand the creation of nonprofit park conservancies before they would commit to investing in new parks. Not only did conservancies grant donors greater control over their donations, they also protected their investments from future cutbacks. Rather than rise and fall with the tax base, a typical conservancy budget rose and fell with earned revenue, donations, and an investment portfolio. Most conservancy-run parks still received public funding—some through business

[56] Tina Lam, "Lack of Casino Deal May Kill Park Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, July 2, 2001, B1.
[57] Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 356.

improvement districts—but private, supplemental support insulated them from the kinds of budget cuts that fully public parks and recreation centers were facing.[58]

Still, at the end of Archer's mayoralty in 2001, nonprofit park conservancies were an untested model for new parks, and it was unclear whether Campus Martius Park could draw real estate developers to a downtown dominated by dozens of abandoned office buildings. With the collapse of the riverfront casino development, it was also unclear whether the state of Michigan would still build a park on the riverfront. Further complicating the picture, the national economy again dipped into recession in 2001.

2001-2014: Divergent Paths for Recreation and Park-Driven Development

The 2001 recession, though mild nationally, was deep and enduring in Michigan. Michigan's downturn began with the 2001 recession and didn't let up, even when the national economy recovered from 2003 to 2007.[59] As a result, Archer's successors as mayor—first, Kwame Kilpatrick, and then, after his resignation, Ken Cockrel, Jr., and Dave Bing—slashed spending on recreation as the city fought unsuccessfully to remain solvent amidst a prolonged economic contraction. Between 2000 and 2010, Detroit's population fell by another quarter, from roughly 950,000 to 714,000, and the government became increasingly indebted as first Kilpatrick and then Bing turned to long-term bonds and risky credit instruments to cover both short-term payroll and long-term legacy costs. After the onset of the mortgage foreclosure crisis and the Great Recession, bankruptcy became unavoidable in the absence of a state bailout.[60] Yet even as the municipal recreation system collapsed, new and historic parks were incorporated into networks of public-private parkland as real estate developers, foundations, the state of Michigan, and the federal government continued to commit new resources for park-driven development.

Unlike his predecessors, Kilpatrick promised no infusion of resources to the Recreation Department. In his first year, Kilpatrick cut $2.5 million from the

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[58] Peter Harnik and Abby Martin, *Public Spaces/Private Money: The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies* (Washington, D.C.: The Trust for Public Land, 2015).
[59] "Michigan's Single-State Recession and Its Effects on Public Employment," CRC Memorandum No. 1124 (Lansing, MI: Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2013).
[60] Nathan Bomey and John Gallagher, "How Detroit Went Broke: The Answers May Surprise You—and Don't Blame Coleman Young," *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 2013, 1.

department's budget and closed the Belle Isle Zoo.[61] In 2003, he closed six recreation centers.[62] In 2005, he closed nine more recreation centers and laid off 171 workers, reducing the Recreation Department's workforce to fewer than 300 people—less than one per park.[63] He also slashed the Police Athletic League's budget, prompting PAL to merge with the nonprofit Think Detroit. The combined organization, Think Detroit PAL, became the leading organizer of baseball, softball, football, cheerleading, and soccer leagues in Detroit, enrolling 10,000 young people annually.[64] Most controversially, Kilpatrick abruptly closed the Belle Isle Aquarium—the nation's oldest operating aquarium—despite a frantic grassroots effort by the Friends of Belle Isle Aquarium to raise the funding necessary to keep the facility operating for at least another year.[65]

Kilpatrick didn't just cut back on maintenance or personnel. His administration also reduced the size of the park and recreation system by selling parkland. In 2006, the Recreation Department adopted a "repositioning" strategy. The strategy recognized that parks and recreation centers remained vital to neighborhood health for their utilitarian benefits. Small parks were needed "to provide daily recreation opportunities for the neighborhoods in the immediate areas surrounding them," and large parks were needed "to support a wider range of specialty recreation activities, such as swimming and facilities for organized sports."[66] However, the department had more parks and recreation centers than it could afford to maintain. To save money, the plan proposed selling all of the city's playlots—the system's smallest parks, which dated to the early days of the Playground Movement. The plan also called for relocating some larger parks and recreation centers to achieve a more even distribution of facilities across the city that would better account for the dispersal of Detroit's population away from the inner city and toward outer neighborhoods. After the restructuring, Detroit's park inventory was

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[61] Tina Lam, M.L. Elrick, and James G. Hilll, "Mayor Set to Offer City a Sweeter Casino Deal," *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 2002, 4E.
[62] M.L. Elrick and Erik Lords, "Mayor's Plan Cuts Workers," *Detroit Free Press*, April 15, 2003, 1B.
[63] Mike Brudenell, "Steward Bids to Save Kronk," *Detroit Free Press*, December 1, 2005, 2D; David Josar, "Spruced-Up Rec Facilities Getting Ready to Reopen," *The Detroit News*, September 18, 2005, 2D.
[64] David Josar, "Athletic Leagues Team Up," *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 2005, 32.
[65] Marisol Bello, "Belle Isle to Close in April," *Detroit Free Press*, March 4, 2005, 13.
[66] Detroit Recreation Department, *Strategic Master Plan, vol. II* (Detroit: City of Detroit, May 2006).

projected to fall from 308 properties to 220. As illustrated in Figure 21, the number of recreation centers would fall from thirty to fourteen. Other longstanding park priorities—like beautifying the city and preserving natural environments—were hardly mentioned in the strategic plan at all.

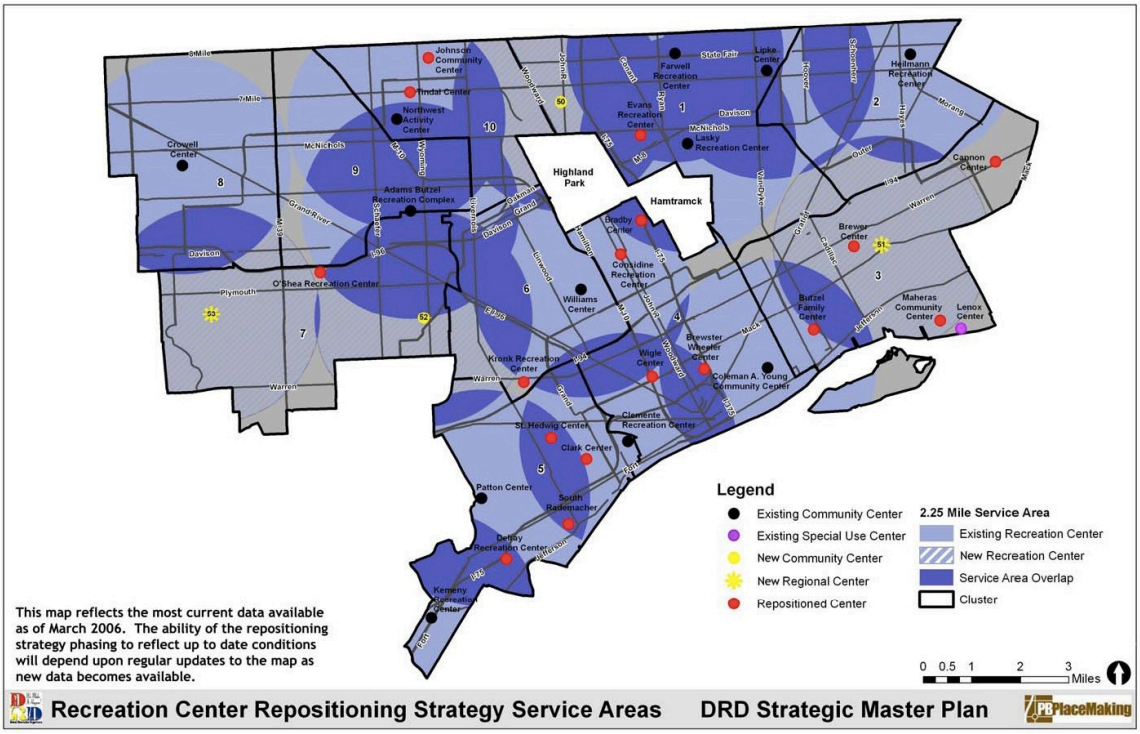

Figure 21: Recreation Center Repositioning Strategy Service Areas, 2006.[67]

A few park sales moved forward. In 2007, the city sold Camp Brighton, the 200-acre rural campground the city had acquired in 1924. The city also sold the Rogell Golf Course to Greater Grace Temple, a mega-church located nearby, which promised to keep it open as a golf course.[68] However, City Council blocked other proposed sales in defiance of the repositioning strategy. In 2006, the Kilpatrick administration tried to sell a portion of Rouge Park for development, but the mayor backed down after protests by the Friends of Rouge Park, a nonprofit organization formed in 2002 to promote the

[67] Detroit Recreation Department, *Strategic Master Plan, vol. II* (Detroit: City of Detroit, May 2006), 61.
[68] Marisol Bello and John Wiseley, "Mayor Wants Cash for Tunnel," *Detroit Free Press*, April 13, 2007, 1.

restoration of the park.[69] In 2007, newspapers reported that the Kilpatrick administration was preparing to sell 92 park properties in accordance with the strategic plan, with half targeted for residential development. City Council used its power to review all land sales to stop the planned sell off.[70]

However, while the 92 parks were retained, many city parks were increasingly difficult to distinguish from vacant lots as the city largely ceased to mow them. In 2006, Kilpatrick created a General Services Department to manage all of the city's public land and buildings, including parks. Going forward, parks were maintained by the same crews that maintained the tens of thousands of vacant lots scattered throughout Detroit's neighborhoods. The Recreation Department's mandate was narrowed to managing the programs offered within recreation centers and parks—much as the Recreation Commission first did when it was created in the 1910s. However, the city no longer retained a division equivalent to the former Commission of Parks and Boulevards, except for a small Landscape Design Unit within the General Services Department.[71]

In stark contrast to the rapid decline of the municipal recreation system, a series of public-private parks opened to acclaim during Kilpatrick's tenure. As soon as Kwame Kilpatrick became mayor in 2002, General Motors' real estate director advised Kilpatrick to let a nonprofit park conservancy take over the riverfront promenade project. From GM's perspective, the failure of the casino plan had a silver lining. The city had cleared several blocks of land close to the riverfront, and now those blocks could be developed as luxury condos or office buildings to complement its headquarters. To orchestrate the redevelopment, GM urged the creation of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, a nonprofit organization whose mission would be to extend the riverfront promenade from the Ambassador Bridge to the MacArthur Bridge and then coordinate the mixed-use redevelopment of property between the riverfront and Jefferson Avenue. Knowing the city couldn't complete the expensive project on its own—yet eager to take credit for the

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[69] "Rally Will Protest Selling a Chunk of Park's Land," *Detroit Free Press*, September 28, 2006, 3B.
[70] Zachary Gorchow, "Detroit Plans to Sell Off Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, October 26, 2007, 1; and Zachary Gorchow, "Mayor's Park Plan Can't Get Past Council," *Detroit Free Press*, February 22, 2008, 3B.
[71] Marisol Bello, "Detroit's Land Sell-Off Lags Budget Needs," *Detroit Free Press*, January 18, 2007, 1B.

riverfront's post-industrial transformation—Kilpatrick readily agreed. Under the conservancy's leadership, the promenade became the Detroit RiverWalk. All property owners along the riverfront were invited to join the board of the conservancy, as were regional corporations and foundations with a stake in downtown real estate. The conservancy's operations would be covered by a hoped-for $60-million endowment, which, if raised in full, would pay out $3-million per year to the conservancy.[72]

For its first project, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy set out to raise $100 million to extend the Detroit RiverWalk eastward, from the RenCen to a new plaza at the foot of Rivard Street. The plaza would feature a carousel, a café, bike rentals, and a restroom. The Kresge Foundation pledged $50 million—the largest gift in its history. The gift was structured as a challenge grant; the conservancy had to raise $25 million more from private sources to receive the full gift. Following through on its earlier pledge, the State of Michigan agreed to invest $150 million to rebuild nearby roads and open Tri-Centennial State Park just east of Rivard Plaza. The city of Detroit pledged $180 million, most of which it had already spent under Archer to buy and clear land. General Motors agreed to invest $95 million, including money already spent, to complete the riverfront plaza in front of its headquarters and build new parking garages. Private developers were also invited to bid on contracts to build luxury condominiums facing the new RiverWalk on the land that had been secured and cleared for the casinos.[73]

Unlike the riverfront promenade, Campus Martius Park moved forward with private funding alone because the city already owned the property. Construction of the park was initially expected to cost $8 million, but the commission raised $20 million from area businesses, which allowed for a more sophisticated design. Rundell Ernstberger Associates designed the park in consultation with the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a New York-based nonprofit consulting firm. Detroit's auto companies, banks, and utilities all contributed, with donations coming from Compuware, Daimler-Chrysler Corporation Fund, Ford Motor Company Fund, General Motors Foundation, Bank One, CMS Energy Corporation, DTE Energy Foundation, and Comerica Charitable Foundation. Crucially, approximately $3.4 million was set aside as an operating

[72] Erin Chan, "Make It a Long Walk," *Detroit Free Press*, October 4, 2007, 16A.
[73] Tom Walsh, "Cash Will Flood Into Riverfront," *Detroit Free Press*, December 12, 2002, 1A.

endowment to fund maintenance and programming of the park under the auspices of the Detroit 300 Conservancy, a new nonprofit park conservancy.[74]

Campus Martius Park opened in 2004 to rave reviews.[75] Like its inspiration, Bryant Park in New York, every square inch of the two-acre park was carefully designed and programmed to draw visitors. In keeping with the design philosophy of William H. Whyte—the writer and urbanist whose research for the book and film *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* led to the founding of PPS in the 1970s—the park included a stage, art, a restaurant, a dazzling water fountain, and plenty of moveable chairs. PPS promoted these elements as foundational to "placemaking," PPS's signature approach to designing and managing distinctive public spaces that would draw crowds.[76] Starting with the Campus Martius commission, downtown Detroit became a showcase for PPS's work. As "a year-round entertainment venue," Campus Martius Park promised to host more than 150 events per year. The events were designed to draw visitors and provide foot traffic to revive downtown's dormant retail sector. Property owners, in turn were expected to reward the park conservancy by contributing annually to its budget.[77] Although short of the original $10 million goal, corporations gave $3.5-million for an endowment.[78]

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources opened the first segment of Tri-Centennial State Park—a refresh of the former St. Aubin Park and Marina—just before Campus Martius Park opened in 2004.[79] Rivard Plaza and the extended RiverWalk opened in 2007.[80] The wetlands portion of Tricentennial State Park finally opened in 2009 after a $6 million investment by the state of Michigan and nearly $1 million in investment from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and a group of private donors. The park was renamed William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor, in

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[74] R.J. King, "Compuware Gift for Park Disclosed: $3 Million to Help Create Oasis," *The Detroit News*, May 18, 2003, D1.
[75] "Week in Review," *Crain's Detroit Business*, November 8, 2004, 38.
[76] William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington, D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1980).
[77] Robert Ankeny and Brent Snavely, "Campus Martius Park to Be All-Year Venue," *Crain's Detroit Business*, August 26, 2002.
[78] Jennifer Bott, "Downtown Park Plans Finished," *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 2002, 1F.
[79] George Weeks, "Engler's Detroit Park Idea Becomes a Reality," *Detroit News*, May 20, 2004, 15A.
[80] Robert Ankeny, "River Renaissance: Public-Private Effort Leads to Waterfront Jewel," *Crain's Detroit Business*, June 18, 2007, 3.

honor of the former Republican governor, who first considered managing Belle Isle as a state park in the late 1960s. Together, these projects vastly improved access to the city's greatest natural asset—the Detroit River—a goal of park advocates since the 1890s. The RiverWalk and the state park won design awards and attracted notably diverse crowds, with white suburbanites intermingling with working- and middle-class black Detroiters—a notable feat in a region that was still starkly divided on racial and economic lines. However, unlike the PARK partnership in the 1990s, the Detroit 300 Conservancy and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy did not improve parkland in the city's neighborhoods.

Only one major public-private partnership—the GreenWays Initiative—produced new parkland in Detroit's residential neighborhoods. The GreenWays Initiative was a regional, foundation-led effort that aimed to build a linked network of trails throughout Southeast Michigan. The Michigan chapter of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy—a national organization that promoted the conversion of abandoned railroad lines into hiking and biking corridors—had been pushing for the greenway network since the early 1990s. Rails-to-Trails released a conceptual plan for a Southeast Michigan trail network in 1998. Two years later, a proposed trail linking many of Detroit's suburbs together received national recognition as a Millennium Legacy Trail, which opened the door to state and federal non-motorized transportation matching grants.[81] However, the Lansing-based chapter had limited success implementing its vision for greenways, especially in the city of Detroit, where it lacked strong political and financial connections.

In 2001, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan gave a $25-million boost to the cause with the announcement of the GreenWays Initiative.[82] Private donors pooled their money together in the hopes of leveraging $50 to $100 million in private, local, state, and federal matches to build a series of linked greenways throughout the city of Detroit and its suburbs. The Kresge Foundation alone contributed $10 million.[83] The initiative ultimately funded 65 trails, including the Conner Creek Greenway, Southwest Detroit-Dearborn Greenway, Lyndon Greenway, and Midtown Loop in Detroit. Unlike the PARK initiative of the 1990s, these greenway projects were developed in partnership

[81] Dan Shine, "Greenways Plan Gets Boost," *Detroit Free Press*, October 21, 1999, 1A.
[82] Maite Paulina Salazar, "Promises and Challenges of Urban Community-Oriented Conservation: The Case of Greenways in Detroit" (Ph. Diss., Michigan State University, 2005).
[83] Frank Provenzano, "Group Has a Vision of Green," *Detroit Free Press*, March 1, 2001, 108.

with community development organizations rather than the city, and the Greening of Detroit maintained them.[84] These organizations welcomed the new funding source for recreation, but many voiced frustration at its limitations. Neighborhood-based groups were far more interested in improving the quality of existing parks, which were almost universally in disrepair, than they were in building walking and biking connections between them on streets that were often unsafe. They complained that the GreenWays Initiative reflected the priorities of white suburban professionals, not the African American residents of Detroit's low-income neighborhoods.[85]

The most significant greenway project was the conversion of a 1.2 mile-long section of the Grand Trunk Western Railroad line—which once marked the eastern boundary of Black Bottom—into the Dequindre Cut, a linear park extending north from the riverfront near the new Milliken State Park and Harbor. The Dequindre railroad line was called the "Cut" because it was 25-feet below street level. In the 1920s, the City of Detroit had paid half of the cost to lower the busy railroad below grade from Mack Avenue to the riverfront, which required the construction of twenty-two bridges. Since the 1980s, when rail service stopped, the retaining walls supporting those bridges had become canvasses for graffiti artists. The Dequindre Cut would preserve those murals, making the Cut both a walking and biking trail and an outdoor art gallery.[86] In 2009, the Dequindre Cut opened to the public. The GreenWays Initiative had invested $1.6 million in the project. The state of Michigan provided roughly $2 million, which came from grants from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and the federal government via the Michigan Department of Transportation. Additional funding came from the Kresge and W.K. Kellogg foundations when costs ran high.[87] The Dequindre Cut debuted at the same time as the more famous High Line in New York—a project that converted an elevated Manhattan rail line into a park—but it opened at a fraction of the cost: under $4 million rather than $150 million. By eschewing the latter's sophisticated and expensive

[84] "Greenway Grant Given," *Detroit Free Press*, February 7, 2010, 3B.
[85] Maite Paulina Salazar, "Promises and Challenges of Urban Community-Oriented Conservation: The Case of Greenways in Detroit" (Ph. Diss., Michigan State University, 2005).
[86] Ian Riekes Trivers, "Mobilizing the High Line" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2017), 259.
[87] Sherri Begin Welch, "Developers See Dequindre Cut as First in String of Greenways," *Crain's Detroit Business*, May 15, 2009.

landscaping and design flourishes, the Community Foundation ensured that the Cut could be built and maintained long-term without local tax revenue.[88]

Rather than entrust the Dequindre Cut to the Recreation Department or create a new nonprofit park conservancy, the Community Foundation and the City of Detroit agreed to transfer operations of the greenway to the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. The Community Foundation raised a $2-million endowment to cover the costs of cleaning and policing the linear park.[89] In 2009, the State of Michigan agreed to extend the Cut two blocks south to the riverfront.[90] In 2012, the federal government awarded the city a $10-million grant from the so-called TIGER program, an acronym for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, to extend the Dequindre Cut a mile north, from Gratiot Avenue to the northern boundary of Eastern Market. The extension opened in 2016, as did a surface-level linkage westward to a greenway in Midtown.[91]

Unfortunately, most parkland in the city continued to degrade in quality. After five-and-a-half turbulent years in office, Kwame Kilpatrick resigned on September 18, 2008, after he was convicted of perjury and obstruction of justice. The president of the City Council, Ken Cockrel, Jr., served as interim mayor. During his nine-month tenure, the Great Recession took hold, exacerbating Detroit's already severe fiscal crisis. Detroit was also the epicenter of the national mortgage foreclosure crisis. Between 2005 and 2014, more than 78,000 properties would go through mortgage foreclosure, many of them more than once. More than half of these properties became blighted.[92] By the time Dave Bing became mayor in May 2009, a state takeover seemed likely.

During tense budget negotiations, Bing and the City Council debated the necessity of funding recreation at all. Bing warned he would be forced to "close" parks—not just cutting staff or programming, but ceasing all maintenance—if the City Council enacted

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[88] Ian Riekes Trivers, "Mobilizing the High Line" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2017), 273-274.
[89] Walter Wasacz, "Dequindre Cut: The Missing Link," *Model D*, November 22, 2005, http://www.modeldmedia.com/features/dequindre.aspx.
[90] John Gallagher, "Dequindre Trail to be Linked to RiverWalk," *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 2009, 10A.
[91] Sherri Begin Welch, "Developers See Dequindre Cut As First in String of Greenways," *Crain's Detroit Business*, May 13, 2009, 33.
[92] Lan Deng, Eric Seymour, Margaret Dewar, and June Manning Thomas, "Saving Strong Neighborhoods From the Destruction of Mortgage Foreclosures: The Impact of Community-Based Efforts in Detroit, Michigan," *Housing Policy Debate* 28, no. 2 (2018).

its preferred budget, which was more austere than Bing's alternative.[93] When the City Council rejected Bing's budget, Bing announced he would shutter 77 parks, including many of the largest and most popular, like Rouge, Palmer, Patton, and Stoepel.[94]

Bing's decision to close the parks spurred the formation of "Friends of the Park" groups across the city. Groups like the People for Palmer Park, Friends of Riverside Park, Friends of Eliza Howell Park, Roosevelt Park Conservancy, Detroit Mower Gang, Navin Field Grounds Crew, and Friends of Scripps Park formed to defend their specific parks—and the park system as a whole—from further cuts and neglect. These new organizations joined others that had formed over the previous decades. The oldest, like the Friends of Belle Isle, dated to the 1970s. Others, like the Friends of Rouge Park and the Friends of Belle Isle Aquarium, formed in response to earlier threats in the 2000s. New and old organizations alike banded together to form a Detroit Parks Coalition—an informal network of "Friends" dedicated to reversing cuts to the city's park system.[95] These organizations were representative of the broader do-it-yourself movement that arose in response to Detroit's financial crisis. Across the city, residents banded together to fight austerity and maintain a minimal quality of life. If the municipal government could not be pressured into maintaining adequate city services, residents would try to provide those services themselves if doing so were both necessary and feasible.[96]

The "Friends" had few connections with nonprofit park conservancies like the Detroit 300 Conservancy and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. Those organizations had powerful backers in the mayor's office and the business community. They had their own staff and were funded by donations, concessions, and endowments, so they were not directly affected by cutbacks to the Recreation Department. The "Friends of the Park" groups, by contrast, were usually neighborhood-based and volunteer-driven. Few were incorporated as nonprofits. Most raised negligible sums of money and couldn't afford to hire anyone. Yet they acted as a voice for their parks. Members showed up to public

[93] Suzette Hackney and Naomi R. Patton, "Bing Details Plans to Slash City Budget," *Detroit Free Press*, June 11, 2010, 4.
[94] Suzette Hackney and Naomi R. Patton, "Detroit to Close 77 Parks in July," *Detroit Free Press*, June 25, 2010, 8A.
[95] "About," Detroit Parks Coalition, https://detroitparkscoalition.wordpress.com/about/, accessed May 18, 2018.
[96] Kimberly Kinder, *DIY Detroit: Making Do in a City Without Services* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

hearings to demand investment in their parks and neighborhoods. Many also registered with the Recreation Department to formally "adopt" their parks, improving conditions themselves by picking up trash, mowing the lawn, and organizing public events.[97]

Two weeks after closing the parks, City Council agreed to a compromise budget that restored funding to the park system.[98] Yet most "Friends" remained active even after the parks reopened. Some "Friends"—generally those led by skilled professionals—were able to gradually scale up their activities to include long-term planning and management. In 2011, the Friends of Rouge Park partnered with Lawrence Technical University to develop a master plan for their park guided by the mission statement, "Keep It Natural."[99] The People for Palmer Park began hosting a tennis academy, a little-league baseball league, children's story hours, and outdoor yoga. They organized festivals in the park, planted an apple orchard, and commissioned a master plan.[100] Another organization—the Belle Isle Conservancy—emerged from the merger of four organizations representing different constituencies on the island: the Friends of Belle Isle, the Friends of the Belle Isle Aquarium, the Friends of the Belle Isle Conservatory, and the Belle Isle Women's Committee. By joining forces, the separate organizations could approach governments and foundations as a single voice and fundraiser for the island park.[101]

With the Recreation Department no longer able to effectively manage parkland, nonprofit real estate development organizations also moved to assert greater control over existing parks, not just renovated parks like Campus Martius and the Detroit RiverWalk. The Downtown Detroit Partnership, or DDP, formed in 2005 through the mergers of the Greater Downtown Partnership, Detroit Downtown Inc., and the Rivertown Business Association.[102] The DDP began to take a greater role in public space provision in 2008 when it negotiated to take over the Detroit 300 Conservancy. The team that managed

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[97] I attended all Detroit Parks Coalition meetings from June 2014 to 2017, and I reviewed the group's meeting minutes from June 2010 forward.
[98] "City Budget Is No Picnic, But Teamwork Saves Day for Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, June 30, 2010, 9A.
[99] "The Rouge Park Master Plan," Friends of Rouge Park, http://www.rougepark.org/master-plan.html, accessed May 18, 2018.
[100] Sven Gustafson, "Detroit's 'Other' Jewel," *Hour Detroit*, April 2013.
[101] John Gallagher, "4 Belle Isle Groups Form Conservancy," *Detroit Free Press*, October 25, 2011, 1.
[102] Tom Walsh, "Giving Detroit a 2nd Chance," *Detroit Free Press*, July 22, 2005, 1C.

Campus Martius Park gradually expanded its coverage to include all the public spaces in the central business district, including boulevard medians and parks, including Cadillac Square, Capitol Park, Grand Circus Park, and Paradise Valley Park.[103] The DDP also orchestrated the return of the Grand Prix auto race to Belle Isle Park.[104]

Another nonprofit real estate development organization took control of public spaces north of the central business district in the area rebranded as "Midtown." The real estate development organization Midtown Detroit Inc. (MDI) formed in 2011 through the merger of the University Cultural Center Association (UCCA) and New Center Council (NCC), two organizations with a history of investing in public space. In the 1970s, NCC created New Center Park as part of GM's redevelopment of the area. In 2004, UCCA raised $800,000 to renovate Peck Park. After the merger, MDI managed both of these parks. MDI also created new public spaces, including two community gardens, a dog park, a plaza, and the Midtown Loop, even as other public parks in the area, like Stone Pool and Wigle, were sold by the city to developers.[105] At the south end of Midtown, the Illitch family—owners of Little Caesars, the Detroit Tigers, the Detroit Red Wings, and MotorCity Casino—asked to take control of Cass Park as part of negotiations to build a new arena for the Detroit Red Wings. The Illitches saw the revitalization of Cass Park as an essential component in their plan to redevelop the neighborhood around the new arena, where they had been acquiring property for decades, buying up historic buildings and clearing them for parking lots as part of their expanding entertainment district.[106]

Meanwhile, Detroit's finances continued to worsen. The city couldn't keep up with the interest payments on its debt, let alone the principal, and the Republican state legislature signaled it would not provide a bailout. In fact, state revenue sharing to Detroit decreased by 48% from 1998 to 2012. That withdrawal of support contributed significantly to the crisis. With property and income taxes also in free fall, Detroit had

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[103] Project for Public Spaces, *A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit* (Detroit: Opportunity Detroit, 2013).
[104] Downtown Detroit Partnership, *2015 Annual Report* (Detroit: Downtown Detroit Partnership, 2016), 26.
[105] "Community Development," Midtown Detroit Inc., http://midtowndetroitinc.org/what-we-do/community-development, accessed May 19, 2018.
[106] Paul Beshouri, "Historic Cass Park Could Soon Belong to the Ilitch Organization," *Curbed* Detroit, January 16, 2014, http://detroit.curbed.com/2014/1/16/10153890/historic-cass-park-will-soon-belong-to-the-ilitch-organization/.

little hope of generating enough revenue to even meet payroll.[107] In a last-ditch attempt to stave off bankruptcy, Detroit entered a consent agreement with the state to resolve its debts. As part of the agreement, Bing began negotiating to remove the two largest line items from the Recreation Department's budget: management of the city's recreation centers and upkeep of Belle Isle. In August 2012, Bing announced the Detroit Recreation Trust, a $24-million commitment by corporations and foundations to cover the cost of running the city's seventeen remaining recreation centers for three years.[108] This was the first public-private partnership since the Pistons-Palace Foundation to focus on youth and recreation rather than downtown development. However, unlike past corporate partnerships, this one promised no improvements in service. The trust was intended solely to keep the doors open temporarily and maintain social order in the city.

Soon after, Bing announced a deal with the governor to make Belle Isle a state park. The announcement generated more dissent than any other park-related decision since the 1870s, when Detroiters first resolved the "Park Question" by buying Belle Isle. For Bing and his allies in the business community, the deal's merits were obvious. Transferring upkeep of the island to the state would allow the city to shift millions of dollars in spending from Belle Isle to neighborhood parks. The deal would also enable the island's refurbishment while keeping the park in public hands. However, a majority of City Council members voted to reject the offer. Council members generally cited two reasons for their votes: first, the desire to keep the park free to enter, as it had been since the opening of the first Belle Isle Bridge in 1889, and second, the desire to retain control of the city's most popular public space. Retaining political control was especially important to African American activists who distrusted white Republican state leadership and feared that the DNR would change the distinctive culture of the island, with its huge family gatherings, cook outs, music, and parties.

Citing the lost savings the deal would have produced, Bing retaliated against the Council by closing 51 parks, including large parks like Rouge and Palmer.[109] The parks

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[107] Wallace C. Turbeville, *The Detroit Bankruptcy* (New York, NY: Demos, 2013), http://www.demos.org/publication/detroit-bankruptcy, 3.
[108] Cecil Angel, "Private Money to Fund Rec Centers," *Detroit Free Press*, August 23, 2012, 4A.
[109] Matt Helms and Joe Guillen, "Bing to Close 51 Parks in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 2013, A1.

only reopened after a group of corporations and foundations agreed to a second bailout for the Recreation Department, this time donating $14 million for park maintenance.[110] However, by the time the parks reopened, Bing's role as mayor was ceremonial. In March 2013, Republican Governor Rick Snyder appointed Kevyn Orr as Emergency Manager of the city. Detroit filed for bankruptcy on July 18, 2013.[111] After the bankruptcy declaration, the governor again proposed operating Belle Isle as a state park. The City Council again rejected the deal, but this time the state-appointed Michigan Emergency Loan Board overruled the council, approving a 30-year lease with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. In March 2014, Belle Isle officially became a state park, furthering the Recreation Department's decades-long downsizing.[112]

2014-2018: The Uneven Geography of Park Partnership

By the time Detroit exited bankruptcy in December 2014, the city had five distinct networks of parkland—two led by governments and three led by real estate development organizations. The renamed Parks and Recreation Department operates more than 300 parks and eleven recreation centers in residential neighborhoods. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources manages three riverfront facilities: Belle Isle Park, Milliken State Park, and the Outdoor Adventure Center. Three real estate development organizations also manage public and private parks in the greater downtown. The Downtown Detroit Partnership manages all public spaces in the central business district, Midtown Inc. manages all public spaces in the district between downtown and the Grand Boulevard, and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy manages the RiverWalk and all the municipal parks and rails-to-trails greenways that connect to it. Arguably, the Detroit Public Schools Community School District and the city's many charter school providers

[110] It is not clear whether the Detroit Recreation Trust actually raised $25 million. Nor is it clear whether Bing raised $14 million for parks. The announced figures were pledges, not cash in hand. Some corporations, like Lear, followed through on their pledges in subsequent years, but there are no articles or reports confirming whether all the pledges were collected. Matt Helms, "Mayor Bing Rounds Up Cash to Save Parks," *Detroit Free Press*, April 25, 2013, A1.
[111] Wallace C. Turbeville, *The Detroit Bankruptcy* (New York, NY: Demos, 2013), http://www.demos.org/publication/detroit-bankruptcy.
[112] Paul Egan, "State Pledges Pleasant Belle Isle Changes," *Detroit Free Press*, November 14, 2013, A11.

could constitute a sixth park network, which consists of school playgrounds and athletic fields, many of which double as neighborhood parks if the gates are not kept locked.

Under the leadership of Mayor Mike Duggan, who took office in 2014, the city of Detroit is once again investing in its municipal parks, but most are still in poor condition, even with the assistance of "Friends." As of 2016, the Parks and Recreation Department and the General Services Department jointly operated eleven recreation centers and 308 parks encompassing 5,633 acres of land. Partners operated another dozen park properties on the city's behalf, primarily along the riverfront, in the central business district, and in Midtown. Partner agencies also ran six city-owned recreation centers in low-income neighborhoods. These partner-run parks and recreation centers do not appear in the 2017 *Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan*, which limits itself to facilities under the department's direct control.[113] Per the strategic plan, the department is now dedicated to advancing health, wellness, and neighborhood stability—a subtle but significant change from the longstanding focus on recreation, which often equated to athletics. In keeping with the new mission, the plan calls for investing $10-12 million in city parks each year for ten years. The improvements are intended to remake the image of city parks from liabilities into amenities that will boost property values and improve wellbeing.[114] Forty neighborhood parks have been refurbished so far using unspent bond money discovered during the bankruptcy.[115] Duggan has pledged to continue investing about $10 million per year in city parks. In 2017, the mayor also announced an initiative to keep sixteen public schools open during the summer months as low-cost community centers. Nine of those centers continued to operate during the 2017-2018 academic year.[116]

All parks are being mowed and cleaned regularly, but the department still depends on volunteers. According to the parks plan, of the 75 largest cities in the United States,

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[113] General Services Department and Detroit Recreation Department, *2017 Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan: Expanding Recreation Opportunities in Detroit Neighborhoods* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 2016).
[114] General Services Department and Detroit Recreation Department, *2017 Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan: Expanding Recreation Opportunities in Detroit Neighborhoods* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 2016).
[115] Christine Ferretti, "Duggan Unveils $11.7M Plan to Upgrade City Parks," *Detroit News*, March 16, 2016.
[116] Lori Higgins, "16 Detroit Schools to Serve as Rec Centers This Summer," *Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 2017, 7A.

Detroit spent the least on parks per capita in 2015. The plan proposes doubling the city's investment, from $19.36 per capita to $34.18 per capita, which would only raise the city's ranking from 75th to 72nd.[117] Even after the budget increase, volunteers will remain crucial. Under Duggan's leadership, park adopters are required to pick up trash from adopted parks once per week, mow the grass at least once every 10-14 days so it doesn't get taller than six inches, and remove any weeds near park edges, fences, paths, trees, and equipment. Parks are inspected every other Monday throughout the summer to ensure that adopters are fulfilling their pledges. In 2015, 77 parks were adopted, up from 25 in prior years.[118] The department is also seeking partners to manage "community open spaces"—a new designation for the small, unmaintained park properties that Kilpatrick tried to sell (see Figure 22). These properties no longer resemble parks due to a lack of facilities and maintenance. The strategic plan invites partners to convert the properties into green buffers, meadows, farms, or other alternative uses.[119] Overall, most parks are still in poor condition, and the department's staffing levels remain modest, although parks are noticeably cleaner. Duggan has also shown a willingness to sell parks, in whole or in part, including Stone Pool, Wigle, and Forest, when development opportunities arise.[120]

[117] General Services Department and Detroit Recreation Department, *2017 Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan: Expanding Recreation Opportunities in Detroit Neighborhoods* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 2016), 18.
[118] "Detroit's Parks Adoption Program: By the Numbers," *WDET*, August 21, 2015, https://wdet.org/posts/2015/08/21/81278-detroits-parks-adoption-program-by-the-numbers-data/.
[119] General Services Department and Detroit Recreation Department, *2017 Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan: Expanding Recreation Opportunities in Detroit Neighborhoods* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 2016), 94-100.
[120] Bill McGraw, "Shh! Detroit's Little-Known Success Story: Its Parks Are Getting Better," *Bridge,* July 14, 2015, https://www.bridgemi.com/; Christine Ferretti, "City Unveils $77M Development for Wigle Center," *Detroit News*, April 27, 2017; and Sherri Welch, "Wolverine Packing Seeks Tax Incentives to Build Plant," *Crain's Detroit Business*, February 4, 2018.

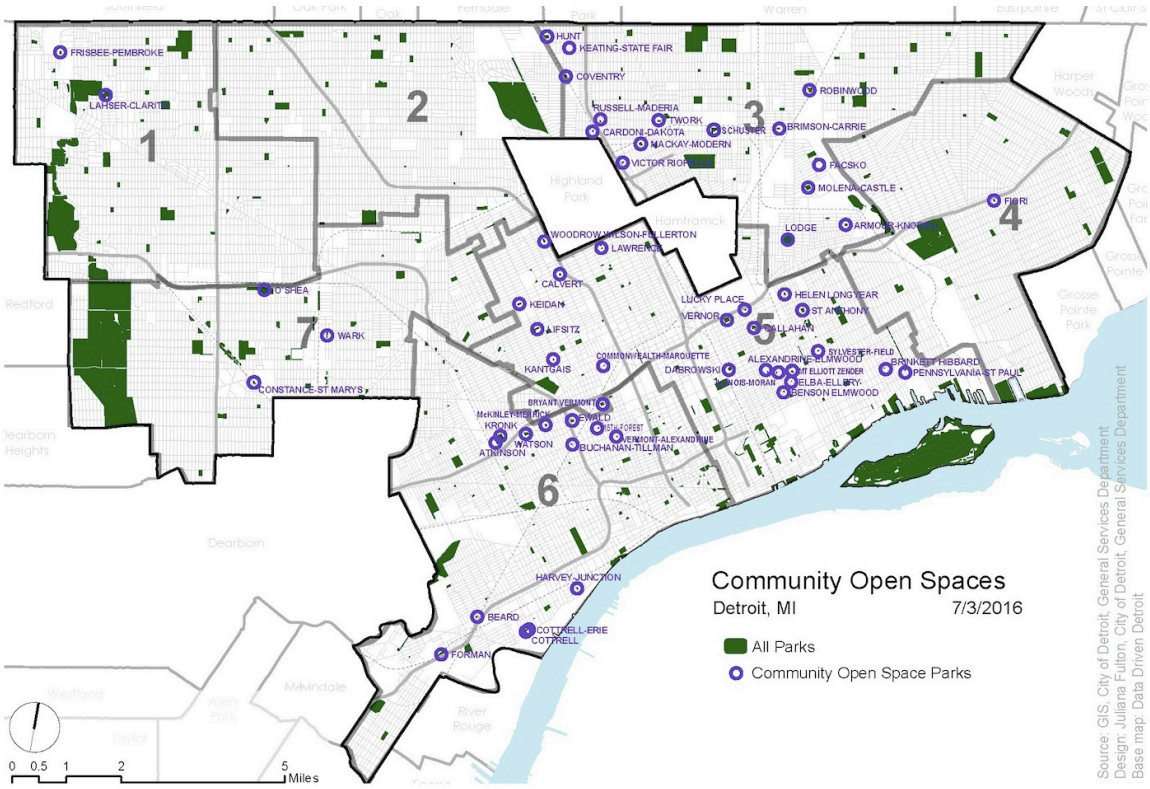

Figure 22: Community Open Spaces proposed in 2016.[121]

Detroit also faces significant challenges and opportunities related to repurposing vacant land. The Detroit Land Bank Authority is the largest agency of its kind in the country, with more than 95,000 properties in 2018. The same agency that maintains municipal parkland—the General Services Department—is responsible for mowing the grass on these properties. Between 2010 and 2012, major foundations sponsored a contentious planning process, called the Detroit Works Project, to provide guidance on how the city could adapt to long-term population loss. In 2010, Detroit had one million fewer residents than it had in 1950. Unlike previous planning efforts, the Detroit Works Project frankly acknowledged that reality and tried to develop recommendations to improve neighborhood livability without significant property redevelopment or growth. The resulting *Detroit Future City Strategic Framework* was released in January 2013.[122]

[121] City of Detroit General Services and Recreation Departments, *2016 Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan: Draft for Public Review* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, April 2016), 98.
[122] Detroit Works Project, *Detroit Future City: Detroit Strategic Framework Plan* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Works Project, 2012).

It envisioned a city redefined around an expansive open space network (Figure 23), including recreational parkland, forests, and blue/green infrastructure. The *2017 Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan* tentatively embraces these ideas through its designation of "community open spaces."

Figure 23: Detroit Future City's Future Open Space Network, 2012.[123]

The Department of Parks and Recreation has also played a role in the ongoing redevelopment of the Fitzgerald neighborhood in Northwest Detroit. Public and private partners have funded a plan to revitalize the neighborhood without new residential

[123] Detroit Works Project, *Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, 2nd edition (Detroit, MI: Detroit Future City, May 2013), 28.

construction. The plan calls for demolishing sixteen abandoned homes, renovating 115 homes, landscaping 192 vacant lots, and opening a 2.5-acre park on formerly residential land.[124] In the first milestone for the project, the Department of Parks and Recreation opened Ella Fitzgerald Park in July 2018.[125] If the rest of the plan is enacted, vacant lots in the neighborhood will soon be transformed into meadows, orchards, gardens, or farms. Other lots will be connected together as a greenway that will link the University of Detroit-Mercy to Marygrove College. However, it remains unclear whether the Parks and Recreation Department has the capacity to maintain network of open spaces like that proposed for Fitzgerald, or whether some other agency will need to be responsible.

Two real estate development organizations—the Downtown Detroit Partnership and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy—have also expanded their park operations post-bankruptcy. In 2010, billionaire investor Dan Gilbert began accumulating properties in and near Detroit's central business district. Gilbert owns and operates Quicken Loans, the Cleveland Cavaliers, and several casinos, among other businesses. Since moving Quicken Loans from the suburb of Livonia to Detroit, Gilbert has purchased dozens of additional buildings and parking structures, becoming the most influential player in the Downtown Detroit Partnership. In 2013, at Gilbert's urging, the DDP hired the Project for Public Spaces to create a "placemaking" plan that would encompass the entire downtown rather than Campus Martius Park alone. The resulting plan calls for adding more seating, food, art, fountains, and events to all downtown parks, including Capitol Park, Cadillac Square, and Grand Circus Park.[126] In 2014, downtown property owners voted to create a business improvement zone, enabling the DDP to implement the plan.[127]

The DDP has also extended its reach to new privately owned public spaces. In 2017, DTE Energy, an investor-owned utility that provides gas and electric service in Southeast Michigan, opened Beacon Park, a privately owned public space, on the west

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[124] "Fitzgerald Revitalization Project: Productive Landscape Development" (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 2017); and Kurt Nagl, "City, Partners Break Ground on Ella Fitzgerald Park, Community Center," *Crain's Detroit Business*, October 17, 2017.
[125] Sarah Rahai, "Residents Celebrate Grand Opening of Ella Fitzgerald Park," *Detroit News*, July 28, 2018.
[126] Project for Public Spaces, *A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit* (Detroit: Opportunity Detroit, 2013).
[127] John Gallagher, "Downtown Landowners OK Business Improvement Zone," *Detroit Free Press*, April 16, 2014, 7A.

side of downtown on the site of a former parking lot. The triangular park is similar in size to Campus Martius and shares the same management team. The park is run by the DDP with funds raised through the business improvement zone and donated by DTE. Like Campus Martius Park before it, Beacon Park is designed to attract real estate investment. The park was named to signal its role as a "Beacon" to developers. The park includes a high-end restaurant, and it is designed to host public and private events year-round.[128] The Downtown Detroit Partnership also opened two new public spaces—the Spirit of Detroit Plaza and the Woodward Esplanade—by closing the intersection of Woodward and Jefferson and installing a winding pathway in the center median that divides the two sides of Woodward Avenue from Jefferson Avenue to Campus Martius Park. The DDP is also preparing to rebuild Capitol Park for the second time in a decade in conjunction with the refurbishment of several historic buildings into condominiums and retail.[129] To supplement its budget, the DDP is preparing a campaign to increase the permanent endowment for Campus Martius from $3.4 million to $20 million.[130]

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy has also expanded its operations. In 2014, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy extended the RiverWalk to the west for the first time with the opening of West Riverfront Park—a large, open field suitable for holding music festivals or other large events. More investment in public-private space is planned. With the RiverWalk nearing completion, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is now focused on catalyzing real estate development on nearby streets by adding new amenities and attractions to the parks along the riverfront.[131] The conservancy is currently embarking on a $150-million capital campaign to transform West Riverfront Park from an open field into a high-design destination like Millennium Park. Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, the high-profile landscape architecture firm, won a competition in 2018 to redesign the 22-acre park in relation to industrial buildings and infrastructure on nearby

[128] Kirk Pinho, "DTE to Create Public Park Downtown," *Crain's Detroit Business*, June 14, 2015; and Leah Graham and Nadav Pais-Greenapple, "New DTE Park Has Fun for All," *Detroit Free Press*, July 21, 2017, 4A.
[129] Downtown Detroit Partnership, *2017 Annual Report* (Detroit, MI: Downtown Detroit Partnership, 2018), 18-23.
[130] Sherri Welch, "Downtown Detroit Partnership Looks at Funding Sources for Campus Martius Upkeep," *Crain's Detroit Business*, April 8, 2018.
[131] Sherri Welch, "New CEO Mark Wallace Brings Development Background to RiverFront Conservancy," *Crain's Detroit Business*, July 13, 2014.

streets, which will be redeveloped to link the park to the gentrifying neighborhood of Corktown. If built, the redesigned park will feature the only swimming beach in the city outside of Belle Isle State Park.[132] The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is also building "Atwater Beach" on the east RiverWalk—a sandy area next to a floating cafe—but while this "beach" will feature plenty of sand and sun, swimming will not be possible.[133]

Other organizations are also investing in public-private space. The Detroit Zoo, for example, has floated an unfunded plan to build a $150-million aquarium on the riverfront, ideally near the heart of downtown.[134] The Detroit Greenways Coalition is also partnering with the mayor's office to develop the Joe Louis Greenway—a 26-mile, $235-million rails-to-trail project that will extend the Dequindre Cut north from the east side of Detroit, west through Hamtramck and Highland Park, and then south to the riverfront in Southwest Detroit.[135] Collectively, private fundraising for these public-space projects could easily exceed $200 million—enough to fully fund the 10-year capital improvement plan for the municipal parks and recreation system two times over.

What remains to be seen is whether external investment will play a significant role in the improvement of parks in Detroit's neighborhoods. Community-based park conservancies, like the Friends of Rouge Park, People for Palmer Park, Chandler Park Conservancy, and Clark Park Coalition, are building relationships with foundations and intergovernmental agencies in the hopes that these funders will invest in their respective municipal parks. The first three of those organizations have produced professional master plans for their parks, and they are seeking funding to implement them.[136] These organizations view park improvement as a form of community development. Other organizations, like Think Detroit PAL and Eagle Sports, are renovating baseball diamonds and athletic fields in parks in order to expand access to athletics. Still other

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[132] John Gallagher, "Detroit's West Riverfront Park: Dip Your Toes In," *Detroit Free Press*, April 11, 2018, 1A.
[133] Ann Zaniewski, "Gannett Grant to Improve Atwater Beach," *Detroit Free Press*, July 15, 2017, 1A.
[134]; JC Reindl, "Detroit Zoo Pushing to Build Huge Aquarium in Downtown Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 2018.
[135] Rochelle Riley, "Lasting Monument for Legendary Boxer," *Detroit Free Press*, October 28, 2017, 4A.
[136] Rochelle Riley, "A New Season for Chandler Park," *Detroit Free Press*, February 16, 2015, A1.

organizations improve parks as part of their focus on environmental education or arts and culture. However, most of these organizations supplement municipal provision without formal contracts, and to date no neighborhood-based conservancies have raised sums of money on par with the DDP or the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy.[137]

The other major investor in Detroit parkland is the State of Michigan. The state began managing Belle Isle in 2014. In addition, the Department of Natural Resources opened the Outdoor Adventure Center in 2015 at the intersection where the Dequindre Cut meets Milliken State Park and Harbor. In keeping with the state park system's focus on outdoor recreation and conservation, the 41,000-square-foot center includes interactive exhibits on climbing, archery, kayaking, and off-road vehicles. The center also includes environmental-themed exhibits on the state's natural resources and wetlands.[138] Yet in managing Belle Isle, the state and its closest partner, the nonprofit Belle Isle Conservancy, have struggled to balance competing priorities for the park's use, including economic development, environmental restoration, and family get-togethers.

Per its lease, the DNR manages the city-owned island in partnership with the Belle Isle Conservancy. Like the Detroit 300 Conservancy and Detroit Riverfront Conservancy before it, the Belle Isle Conservancy has received multimillion-dollar donations from foundations. In 2015, the conservancy hired Biederman Redevelopment Ventures—a New York consulting firm founded by the manager of Bryant Park—to write a strategic plan. However, the conservancy ultimately concluded that Biederman's focus on placemaking and high-intensity use did not translate well to the island, so it declined to release the firm's plan.[139] Furthermore, unlike the Bryant Park Corporation or the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, the Belle Isle Conservancy does not manage its namesake park. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is in charge, not the conservancy. The DNR recently released its own draft management plan for the island that emphasizes environmental restoration on the east end of the island while designating

[137] Patrick Cooper-McCann, "Partnerships for Parks and Recreation in Detroit" (Detroit, MI: Detroit Parks Coalition, June 2017).
[138] "Outdoor Adventure Center Will Be Opening Its Doors on Monday," *Detroit Free Press*, July 19, 2015, 5A.
[139] Sherri Welch, "Foundations Buoy Belle Isle's Future," *Crain's Detroit Business*, March 29, 2015.

the majority of the island for active recreational and cultural use.[140] A forthcoming report will provide clarity on the conservancy's role going forward. Per the request for proposals, the conservancy wants "to develop a strategy for how to best tell the Belle Isle Conservancy story and provide clarity on who the park stakeholder organizations are, who is responsible for what, and how park users can easily enjoy the Island. There should be a specific focus on the campaign to engage those who may no longer feel welcome."[141] The latter requirement relates to the conservancy's concern that the park—which is patrolled by the Michigan State Police and is no longer free to enter—has ceased to feel welcoming to some Detroiters, especially low-income African Americans, for whom the park has been a refuge for more than a century, even when other parks were inaccessible. However, there are no hard figures documenting how park use has changed since 2014.

The DNR and the Belle Isle Conservancy have also been accused of conflicts of interest. In 2018, the DNR agreed to renew the contract for the Grand Prix, the annual auto race sponsored by the Downtown Detroit Partnership and the Penske Corporation. The race, which returned to the island in 2007 after a hiatus of several years, restricts access to the most popular end of the park for two months each spring. While the park remains open during the race's extended set up and tear down time, concrete barriers, metal fencing, and grandstands line the roadways, blocking viewing and limiting access to the Scott Fountain. The race has also required road widening and the construction of a large parking lot, which critics say violates the DNR's mission of protecting wildlife and natural scenery. However, race organizers say they have invested $13.5 million on the island since 2017 and have raised over $4 million total for the Belle Isle Conservancy. The mayor has also appointed the manager of the Grand Prix to the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee, an appointed board that oversees park management. These unresolved conflicts of interest exemplify the challenge of forging a new form of public-private partnership between the city, the state, park advocates, and corporate partners.[142]

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[140] Michigan Department of Natural Resources, *Belle Isle Park Strategic Management Plan Draft* (Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2017).
[141] "Request for Proposals: Strategic Services for Clarity & Engagement Campaign Implementation," Belle Isle Conservancy, March 2018.
[142] Aleanna Siacon, "Protestors: Belle Isle a Park, Not a Racetrack," *Detroit Free Press*, April 17, 2018, 3A.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, Detroit's parks system has cleaved in two. On one side there is the municipal Parks and Recreation Department, which oversees more than 300 parks and eleven recreation centers scattered throughout Detroit's neighborhoods. After decades of cutbacks and decline, some of these spaces have seen post-bankruptcy improvements, as Mayor Duggan seeks to stabilize residential property values and improve community health and wellbeing through investments in recreational facilities and natural areas. Nevertheless, Detroit still only provides basic upkeep through general taxation. So the condition of parks often depends on supplemental aid. "Friends" pick up litter, organize nature walks, and host fundraisers for many parks. Some have even created master plans. County, state, and federal governments also provide capital through grants and transfers.

The second system consists of scenic parkland managed by public and private partners. Since the late 1990s, corporations, foundations, the state of Michigan, and the federal government have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to create or renovate Campus Martius Park, Cadillac Square, Capitol Park, Paradise Valley Park, Grand Circus Park, the Spirit of Detroit Plaza, Beacon Park, New Center Park, the Detroit RiverWalk, Rivard Plaza, Milliken State Park and Harbor, the Outdoor Adventure Center, Mt. Elliott Park, Gabriel Richard Park, the Dequindre Cut, and West Riverfront Park. In 2014, the state of Michigan also took control of Belle Isle.

Unlike municipal parks, which emphasize recreation and are primarily designed as amenities for residential neighborhoods, public-private spaces are marketed as regional attractions, and they are designed to promote mixed-use real estate development. They are intensively developed and host hundreds of public events per year. Primarily located along the riverfront and in the central business district, they are the most visible and visited public spaces in Detroit, but while these public-private spaces may be city-owned, they are planned and operated by either nonprofit or governmental partners without direct coordination with the municipal parks system. Midtown Inc. operates parks throughout Midtown, the Downtown Detroit Partnership operates parks in the central business district, and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy operates all parks that connect with the RiverWalk, except for Milliken State Park and Harbor, the Outdoor Adventure Center, and Belle Isle State Park, which are planned by the Michigan Department of Natural

Resources. The management of these spaces varies according to the mission of their providers. Real estate development organizations, like the Downtown Detroit Partnership, emphasize placemaking and economic development. The state of Michigan places more emphasis on outdoor recreation and environmental restoration. Yet it also promotes economic development, including by hosting the Grand Prix.

Both systems for providing public parkland—the municipal system and the public-private system—depend on private and intergovernmental funding for capital improvements, but far more resources are being invested in public-private spaces than in municipal parks or recreation centers. The municipal recreation system employs only enough personnel to perform basic maintenance and trash pickup at city parks. After decades of deferred maintenance, the quality of parks and recreation centers varies greatly neighborhood-to-neighborhood and partnership-to-partnership, and no single agency or master plan guides Detroit's fragmented network of parkland. Detroit's public-private spaces have been widely heralded as success stories, but new disparities are arising between the quality of parkland in the greater downtown, which has begun to gentrify as a result of decades of public and private reinvestment, and the city's neighborhoods, the majority of which are predominantly black and many of which are also quite low-income and have access to lower-quality parks and recreational facilities.

Conclusion

The history of park provision in Detroit shows that governance influences more than just the "publicness" of any given park or plaza. It also matters for socioeconomic and racial equity at a metropolitan scale, influencing which kinds of spaces and facilities get funded, how many spaces and facilities are provided, where they are provided, for whom they are provided, and who sets these priorities. With respect to park equity, what matters most is not private or public control of public space per se but instead how the interests and capacities of park providers align with the needs of city residents.

Today, in post-bankruptcy Detroit, responsibility for park provision is split among five provider networks. Two are led by governments: the Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Three are led by real estate development organizations: the Downtown Detroit Partnership, Midtown Inc., and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. Additional agencies, including the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, operate parks beyond city limits that Detroiters also patronize. While these providers coordinate with the mayor's office, they design and manage parkland separately from the municipal Parks and Recreation Department in accordance with their own resources and priorities.

Under this model, some agendas and geographies of parkland are thriving. The state of Michigan funds outdoor recreation, environmental restoration, and economic development. The state's urban facilities—Milliken State Park and Harbor, the Outdoor Adventure Center, and Belle Isle State Park—are all located on the Detroit riverfront, where they link up with the Detroit RiverWalk and add value to nearby sites slated for redevelopment, even as their programming emphasizes bringing residents into contact with nature. Real estate development organizations, like the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and Downtown Detroit Partnership, invest in parks in the name of placemaking. They seek to catalyze the real estate market by drawing visitors from across the region and by enhancing the appeal of living and working downtown. They do

so by designing and programming parks that emphasize entertainment and events. State and federal transportation grants—paired with private foundation funding—have also enabled the city of Detroit to partner with foundations to build a greenway network.

Every provider network draws upon both public and private resources, whether in the form of land, money, or labor. For example, the federal government and the state of Michigan have contributed tens of millions of dollars to build the Detroit RiverWalk and renovate other riverfront parks. Those parks are owned by the city but managed by the private Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. But while public and private resources alike are present in every partnership, all resources contribute to the same growth agenda. Every mayor since Coleman A. Young has coordinated public and private investment to ensure that most park investment also advances the economic development objective of revitalizing the greater downtown. As a result, only certain kinds and locations of parkland have seen significant reinvestment: the former public grounds in the central business district, remade into vibrant urban plazas; Detroit's most treasured landscaped park, Belle Isle; the post-industrial riverfront; and rails-to-trails greenways.

These investments have partially fulfilled the demands of activists in the 1960s who sought a more racially equitable park system. Those activists demanded that the Parks and Recreation Department renovate Belle Isle, remake the industrial riverfront, and invest in small parks in the inner city. Forty years later, those investments finally began to materialize through the State of Michigan and nonprofit park conservancies. The riverfront is now a vibrant public space for Detroiters of all backgrounds. However, the core of Detroit has changed demographically and is poised to change more. Some neighborhoods within the Grand Boulevard have almost fully depopulated. Others have experienced rebuilding, but they are wealthier and whiter than in the 1960s. By contrast, most outlying neighborhoods have become majority black, and a rising share of the black middle class resides beyond the city's boundaries in the inner ring suburbs.

Unlike the inner city neighborhoods where most African Americans once resided, most of the outer neighborhoods and inner ring suburbs have good access to parks and playgrounds. However, the quality of those facilities has declined as municipal resources have declined. The municipal system, which includes all the large parks built between the 1890s and the 1920s as well as all of the remaining playfields and recreation centers

built over the course of the 1900s, has seen only modest reinvestment post-bankruptcy after experiencing dramatic cutbacks between the 1970s to the 2000s. The system operates at a fraction of its former capacity, and many parks remain neglected. As a result, achieving racial equity in park provision may now require investment not in the inner city but in these outlying parks and recreational facilities. However, with the exception of the PARK initiative in the 1990s and the Fitzgerald initiative today, deep-pocketed funders have invested little in parks located in outlying neighborhoods.

The municipal parks and recreation system does benefit, however, from community-based partnerships. Businesses and community-based organizations have adopted many small city parks. Some organizations have built their own pocket parks, playgrounds, and gardens on land made vacant by demolition. Community development activists and environmentalists have also launched non-profit park conservancies to redevelop major parks like Rouge, Palmer, and Chandler. These conservancies have big dreams of environmental restoration, thriving youth sports leagues, and family-friendly events, but they have limited budgets to enact their master plans. One option to increase their resources would be to form a citywide parks conservancy to serve as a financial intermediary for smaller "Friends of" groups throughout the city. A citywide parks conservancy could also pressure foundations to expand their grant making to encompass other causes besides placemaking and economic development. New partnerships could also be formed to repurpose some of Detroit's abundant vacant land as new forms of parkland, whether as wetlands, prairies, community gardens, or something else.

More resources could also be solicited from other park agencies to reinvigorate neighborhood recreation or to improve access to water and nature—key park functions that were neglected when Detroit's park system was first built out in its industrial heyday. At the local level, Detroit could adopt a dedicated municipal tax for parks and recreation. The city could also seek more grants, revenue sharing, or direct provision of parkland from Wayne County, the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, the state, and the federal government. While the state has made significant investments in urban parkland, there are still no county, regional, or federal parks inside city limits, although the county does operate a water park inside Chandler Park. However, transfers of parkland must be negotiated with the recognition that more is stake than money alone. As the contentious

history of Belle Isle shows, park transfers also raise questions of values (the ends that parks and their facilities should serve), design (the forms that parks and their facilities should take to meet the desired ends), access (how much parkland of various kinds should be built, where, and for whom), and accountability and control. On the other hand, not seeking partnerships could mean lost revenue and opportunities.

These tradeoffs are also reminders that reaching the ideal of an excellent and equitable park system will require greater planning and coordination. The City Plan Commission once oversaw the acquisitions of both the Department of Recreation and the Department of Parks and Boulevards and did so at a regional scale. Today there is no master plan that encompasses all parks and recreational facilities in the city, let alone the region. Each park operator—the city, the state, and the different real estate development organizations—holds separate public hearings and runs separate planning processes. If the city did initiate a comprehensive plan for all parks, it might or might not produce more equitable outcomes, but it would at least force a conversation about priorities. For example, the new parks that are planned for Detroit's riverfront will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. These promise to be popular amenities, but should they take precedence over reinvesting in neighborhood parks? As of now, there is no setting in which Detroiters can debate questions like these. Planning that cuts across different scales and sectors will be essential if parks are to serve the interests of all city residents, including low-income residents and racial minorities. As it stands, uneven investment by park partners risks perpetuating socioeconomic and racial inequity rather than fixing it.

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