

Center for City Park Excellence



Central Canal Greenway, Indianapolis

Photo: Tom Evers

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*The Trust for Public Land
conserves land for people to enjoy
as parks, gardens, and other natural places,
ensuring livable communities
for generations to come.*

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Case Study - Indianapolis, Indiana

When the Trust for Public Land became involved with Indianapolis in 2001, the park system had been severely underfunded for many years—so much so that not an acre of land had been bought since the 1970s, despite the city’s rapid growth. During the mayoral election of 1998, the issue finally gained some traction. When Bart Peterson was elected, he responded to the pressure by asking TPL to carry out a study and produce a report on two main questions: (1) Compared to other major American cities, did Indianapolis truly have a “park problem?,” and, if so, (2) What steps could the city take to improve the situation?

TPL put together a multi-disciplinary team that looked closely at the park system, talked in detail with key leaders and stakeholders, and analyzed the city budget and its fiscal capacity. Armed with this information, as well as knowledge about many other urban park success methods from around the country, TPL recommended a five-step approach that involved developing leadership, fostering citizen support, improving strategic connections among existing park parcels, concentrating more on implementing than on planning, and generating additional public and private funding.

The report had many results. Most important, according to Indy Parks Director Joe Wynns, it raised the profile of parks and “really got people talking about what was happening to the land in our city and county.” Mayor Peterson appointed a blue-ribbon commission of city leaders, the city council increased the park agency’s budget, the private Indianapolis Parks Foundation was able to dramatically grow its budget and, in 2003 the city purchased its first new parkland in more than a generation. The following year the AES Corp. caught the spirit and donated \$1 million to purchase an additional 57 acres for parks.

“The Indianapolis Department of Parks and Recreation entered into a contractual agreement with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to provide a land acquisition plan. The Department had two original deliverables in mind. One, to aggressively pursue property in the townships before all of the land was developed. Two, to create a funding quilt to assist the city in acquiring land. The TPL report accomplished both of these deliverables and went one step further by creating an advocacy agenda for land acquisition. This advocacy effort has created great excitement and energy among businesses, developers, and private landowners. In fact, individuals and corporations alike are contacting the Department to offer land, money, or to develop prospective deals to ensure that land is preserved; this would not have happened without the TPL report. As the Director, I strongly believe that public awareness and advocacy are two of the greatest deliverables the Department has received as a result of TPL’s land acquisition report.”

Joseph Wynns, Director
Department of Parks and Recreation
City of Indianapolis