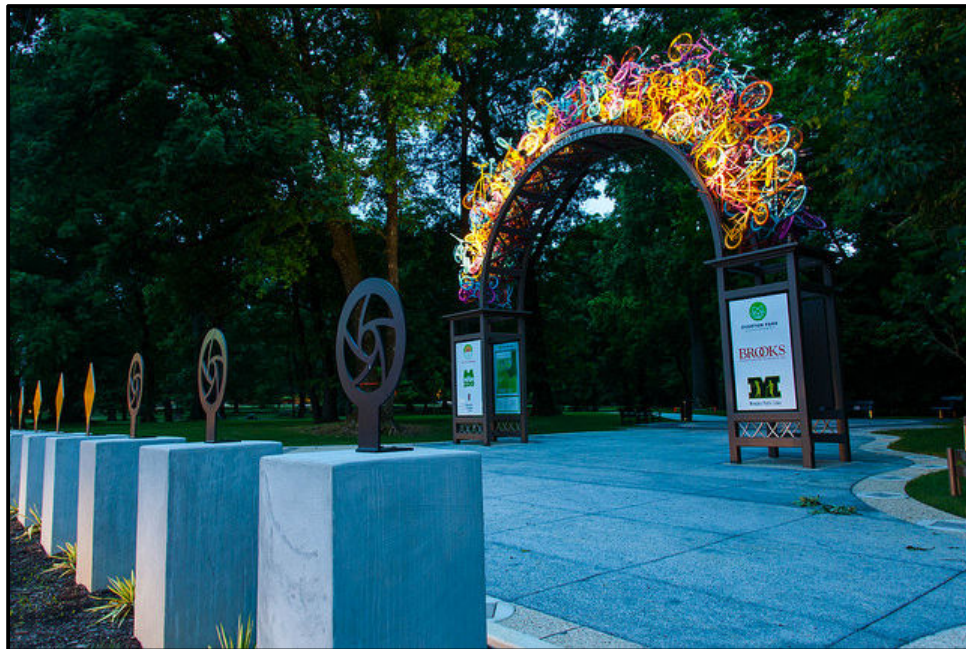


# The Parks of Memphis – Past, Present & Future

A Report Produced for the Hyde Family Foundations and the City of Memphis

## *The Trust for Public Land*



*December 2014*



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## HISTORY AND CURRENT PROGRESS

The city of Memphis has a venerable park system with many past and present moments of glory. It began in 1901 with the groundbreaking purchase of Lea's Woods for the creation of Overton Park and the hiring of noted landscape architect George Kessler to design a great park-and-parkway system. Seventy years later, Overton Park was catapulted into nationwide significance when it was saved from impending bisection by the construction of Interstate 40; the tenacious legal defense by neighbors and park lovers took the case all the way to the Supreme Court, resulting in a decision that has restricted unwarranted highway construction and protected parkland in scores of locations around the country. This tradition of deep citizen involvement led to the formation in 2011 of the Overton Park Conservancy, which has several notable successes, including a rebuilt playground, a new dog park, and a new artistic Bike Gate at the spot where Interstate 40 would have barreled through the park.



*All photos in this report are courtesy of Memphis Parks Department.*

Recently, the rapid and impressive development of Shelby Farms Park, growing out of the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy's spectacular fundraising success, has garnered national attention while raising Memphians' expectation of what can be created for public access from a previously difficult space. Moreover, the two

newest playgrounds in the city – in Shelby Farms Park and in Overton Park – are truly outstanding and could serve as springboards for more playground development, potentially on the south and north sides.

Great enthusiasm exists for new trails that interconnect the parks, particularly among bicyclists and advocates who want bike lanes on streets. Most notable trail accomplishments are the ongoing development of the Wolf River Greenway and the recent acquisition and development (through several generous anonymous donations) of the 6.5-mile CSX rail corridor that has become the Shelby Farms Greenline. The V&E Greenline, the first rails-to-trails project in the city/county, is a lovely, park-like, neighborhood walking path that was created from a different rail line by the entrepreneurial Vollintine Evergreen Community Association. An outgrowth of all this activity has been excellent participation in the Mid-South Regional greenprint planning activities over the past year.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Within Memphis's boundary exists a voluminous amount of railroad trackage, some of it already abandoned and available for rail-to-trail conversion. Other tracks may potentially come up for abandonment in the future. Even functioning rail lines are potentially available for "rail-with-trail" usage, most notably on the Harahan Bridge which has garnered a federal transportation grant and is already under design. When open to bicyclists and walkers, the Harahan will become a nationally-noted destination as one of only three non-motorized crossings of the Mississippi River between St. Louis and New Orleans. (Of equal importance is linking the Harahan Bridge with the nearby Martyrs Park and Mississippi Riverwalk.)



The development of Tom Lee Park and the great success – and fun – of the Memphis in May Festival provides a venue and an event upon which to build, particularly in the potential context of an auto-free park situation. (However,

there is still much room to add significant programming during the rest of the year, particularly in conjunction with Beale Street Landing.)

In a surprising way, even some park threats may be rebounding to the advantage of park supporters. The current crisis in Overton Park due to the conflict over using the Greensward for overflow zoo parking provides Memphians with an opportunity to express their love and commitment to the park and its values by seeking alternative solutions to land use demands.

## CHALLENGES

However, a number of political, demographic, and economic factors – both past and present – have weakened the park system and reduced its ability to serve the people of Memphis and their visitors.

Even though the city's greatest amenity is the Mississippi River, the river's size, power, and extreme changeability present challenges due to its massive floodplain, strong currents, and water level fluctuations. Unlike cities on "easier" rivers like New York and Washington, no city on the lower Mississippi has been able to implement a fully satisfactory riverside park system, and Memphis is thus far no exception.

The Riverfront Development Corporation has not yet developed a program that has captured the public's imagination or resulted in an outstanding riverfront park or trail system. (Ironically, Memphis's downtown riverfront provides fewer physical barriers than such cities as Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis that have noisy, intrusive interstate highways close to the shoreline. This competitive advantage could be worth millions of dollars in tourist revenue if properly celebrated and positioned as a community asset.) The RDC does a good job of keeping the waterfront mowed and litter-free, and it has developed the \$43-million Beale Street Landing. But it has not provided the physical connectivity and human programming that "Riverfront Memphis" needs and deserves. Memphis in May is very popular, but it's only two weeks out of fifty-two. Successful waterfronts program their parkland so that it is active with people, events, and "serendipitous surprises" all year round.

The city's low population density and its relative dearth of walkable neighborhoods, such as Cooper-Young in Midtown or Harbor Town on Mud Island, results in relatively less "critical mass" political pressure to create new



parks in underserved areas. Moreover, the low density makes it relatively easy for many people to drive to higher-quality distant parks.

Also, despite the excellence of Overton Park, the city doesn't have a "central park" in which everyone has a psychological investment, comparable to Forest Park in St. Louis. This lack of unifying focus can make the vision of a citywide parks effort more difficult to present to citizens, funders, and local government.

A stark reality is that the budget for Memphis's parks and recreation program is very low, with a spending level of only \$47 per resident in the latest reported year (*see Table 1*), which is 64% of the national big-city median of \$73. (Spending includes both capital and operating programs.) Without a Parks Commission, the city doesn't have a good structure for proactively approaching park projects and park planning. (While there is a Mayor's Citizen Service Center and occasional

*Table 1*

<b>Spending and Revenue by 4 Memphis Park Agencies</b>					
<b>Agency Name</b>	<b>Memphis Div. Parks and Neighborhoods</b>	<b>Shelby Farms Park Conservancy*</b>	<b>T.O. Fuller State Park</b>	<b>Riverfront Development Commission</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Population</b>	655,155				
<b>Operating Revenue</b>	\$21,204,673	\$1,398,431	\$33,792	\$3,885,280	\$26,522,176
<b>Operating Spending (Most Recent Year)</b>	\$21,093,301	\$1,656,898	\$66,024	\$3,885,280	\$26,701,503
<b>Operating Spending per Resident</b>	\$32.20	\$2.53	\$0.10	\$5.93	\$40.76
<b>Maintenance Portion of Operating Spending (Most Recent Year)</b>	\$5,771,096	\$788,302	\$66,024	\$283,000	\$6,908,422
<b>Maintenance Portion of Operating Spending per Resident</b>	\$8.81	\$1.20	\$0.10	\$0.43	\$10.54
<b>Capital Spending (Most Recent Year)</b>	\$2,828,000	\$1,301,393	\$0	\$0	\$4,129,393
<b>Capital Spending per Resident</b>	\$4.32	\$1.99	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$6.30
<b>Full-Time Employees</b>	206	19	6	34	265
<b>Seasonal Employees</b>	499	0	8	18	525
<b>Full-Time Employees per 10,000 residents</b>	3.1	0.3	0.1	0.5	4.0
<b>Number of Designed Acres</b>	2,911	1,000	138	250	4,299
<b>Operating Spending per Designed Acre</b>	\$7,246	\$1,657	\$478	\$15,541	--

*\* Shelby Farms Park is technically owned by Shelby County, but the Conservancy operates similarly to a park agency.*

Town Hall meetings, these do not take place regularly.) Decisions tend to be made on a reactive basis which can give the public the impression that responses are impulsive or crisis-driven. Of course, despite these handicaps, the Parks and Neighborhoods Division receives less formal but still productive input from the public which results in targeted improvements, such as to Zodiac Park in Southeast Memphis and Fletcher Creek Park in Cordova. (Upgrades are also scheduled soon for Charjean Park, Denver Park, and Southside Park.)

### THREATS TO EQUITABLE PARK DEVELOPMENT

The relentless expansion of the city eastward has had two negative impacts on parks. By hollowing out the population of existing communities nearer to the Mississippi River, it reduces the number of people using established parks in the core. Second, it puts expensive pressure on the Division of Parks and Neighborhoods to create new parks on the east side.



There is no unifying civic vision for Memphis around which a parks vision can be layered. The city's greatest "brand" may be its music heritage, but parks and recreation currently do not have a role in that. The African-American civil rights story, including a potential monument for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., might have a powerful and beautiful park element to it, but that concept is far from being a citywide vision at this point.

A rigorous factual analysis of the Memphis park system bears out the anecdotal evidence that the city is below average in most park and recreation categories compared with other large U.S. cities, from acreage, facilities, spending, and employees (*see Tables 2 and 3*).

Bringing Memphis up to the national median would add 18 parks (bringing the city to a total of 223), 29 playgrounds (for a total of 144), 141 park employees (for a total of 347), and 2,180 acres of parkland (for a total 11,570). Doing all this strategically would increase the number of Memphians who live within a half-mile walk of a park by approximately 164,000, which would be near the national average of 64.5 percent of all city residents.

**Table #2**

<b>Peer City Comparisons - Land and Facilities</b>					
	Cincinnati, Ohio	Kansas City, Mo.	Louisville / Jefferson, Ky.	Nashville / Davidson, Tenn.	<b>Memphis</b>
<b>Population</b>	296,943	459,787	714,501	601,222	646,889
<b>City land area (acres)</b>	50,910	204,181	248,143	316,982	207,362
<b>Average Population Density (persons per Acre)</b>	5.8	2.3	2.9	1.9	3.1
<b>Parkland (acres)</b>	6,820	17,424	16,778	22,699	9,140
<b>Parkland as % of city area</b>	13.40%	8.53%	6.76%	7.16%	<b>4.41%</b>
<b>Acres parkland per 1,000 residents</b>	23.0	37.9	23.5	37.8	<b>14.1</b>
<b>Individual Park Units</b>	363	229	124	131	194
<b>Park Units per 10,000 Residents</b>	12.22	4.98	1.74	2.18	<b>3.00</b>
<b>Playgrounds</b>	151	100	121	121	114
<b>Playgrounds per 10,000 Residents</b>	5.1	2.2	1.7	2.0	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Baseball Fields</b>	119	147	84	89	114
<b>Baseball Fields per 10,000 residents</b>	4.0	3.2	1.2	1.5	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Basketball hoops</b>	205	77	187	258	186
<b>Basketball hoops per 10,000</b>	6.90	1.67	2.62	4.29	<b>2.88</b>
<b>Dog Parks</b>	4	1	4	3	2
<b>Dog Parks per 100,000</b>	1.3	0.2	0.6	0.5	<b>0.3</b>
<b>Pools</b>	26	12	6	15	18
<b>Pools per 10,000 Residents</b>	0.9	0.3	0.1	0.2	<b>0.3</b>
<b>Recreation Centers</b>	25	10	17	27	31
<b>Recreation Centers per 10,000 Residents</b>	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.4	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Skate Parks</b>	0	2	1	2	1
<b>Skate Parks per 1,000,000 Residents</b>	0	4.35	1.40	3.33	<b>1.55</b>
<b>Tennis Courts</b>	125	107	175	170	81
<b>Tennis Courts per 10,000</b>	4.2	2.3	2.4	2.8	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Tournament Fields (football/soccer)</b>	3	102	23	55	35
<b>Practice Fields (football/soccer)</b>	73	82	77	39	16
<b>Garden Plots</b>	45	182	516	(not available)	(not available)
<b>Garden Plots per 10,000 Residents</b>	1.5	4.0	7.2	-	-
<b>Nature Centers</b>	6	1	(not available)	4	2
<b>Contracts with Nonprofit Providers</b>	8	45	21	24	21
<b>Restrooms</b>	218	68	242	76	20
<b>Restrooms per 100,000 Residents</b>	73.4	14.8	33.9	12.6	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Biggest Event</b>	Butterfly Show	Ethnic Enrichment	(not available)	Celebrate Nashville	Memphis in May
<b>Biggest Event Attendance</b>	84,000	38,500	-	60,000	70,000



Of course, undertaking such a major park system upgrade could not occur without the detailed planning and funding analysis that would be provided by a thorough, thoughtful master plan. That plan would define the location of the new park acreage and facilities as well as the kinds of services provided by the additional recreation and park staff. The above numbers merely demonstrate the scale of improvement necessary to become competitive with other peer and contender cities in the region and across the nation.

**Table #3**

<b>Peer City Comparison -- Spending and Employees by City</b>						
<b>City</b>	<b>Cincinnati, Ohio</b>	<b>Kansas City, Mo.</b>	<b>Louisville/ Jefferson, Ky.</b>	<b>Nashville/ Davidson, Tenn.</b>	<b>Memphis</b>	<b>Median of 4 Other Cities</b>
<b>City Area (acres)</b>	49,883	201,568	243,466	322,581	201,635	
<b>Population</b>	296,550	464,310	750,828	648,295	655,155	
<b>Full-time Employees (Primary Agency)</b>	289	292	357	380	206	
<b>Employees per 10,000 Residents</b>	9.7	6.3	4.8	5.9	<b>3.1</b>	6.1
<b>Total Spending, Operating plus Capital, Most Recent Fiscal Year</b>	\$53,412,724	\$53,643,772	\$50,533,581	\$40,494,915	\$28,448,453	
<b>Total Spending per Resident</b>	\$180.11	\$115.53	\$67.30	\$62.46	<b>\$43.42</b>	\$91.42
<b>Operating Spending, Most Recent Fiscal Year</b>	\$38,911,596	\$27,345,719	\$33,767,287	\$32,006,651	\$25,620,453	
<b>Operating Spending per Resident</b>	\$131.21	\$58.90	\$44.97	\$49.37	<b>\$39.11</b>	\$54.13

Because of all these strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats, the Hyde Family Foundations and the City of Memphis commissioned The Trust for Public Land to undertake a study, which included community involvement, that engaged scores of Memphians in hard deliberations about the present realities and future possibilities of the park system. Our findings below are the result of this research as well as public and private conversations. *(For a list of meeting attendees, see Appendix 1.)*



## **Findings**

1. **Advocacy.** While there is a small nucleus of outspoken park advocates and activists in Memphis, there is a large “silent majority” of residents who love parks but are not sure that parks are “important enough” to merit a larger budget and better maintenance. Similarly, there are members of the city government who strongly support parks but cannot see a political path for more park funding without hearing from the voters that parks are important to them. Too often in Memphis some people despair that things can ever be changed or improved or that new concepts can be spread.

In point of fact, Memphians have scores of outstanding ideas for improving their parks, creating new ones, connecting them, and making the existing parks more lively and better used. Many Memphians have memories of their parks in earlier days and also ideas they’ve learned from other places they’ve lived or

visited. In addition, citizens have ideas for partnerships between many existing institutions and the city to adopt, refresh, fund, and energize parks in many different ways (*see Appendix 2*). Many citizens are ready right now to roll up their sleeves and put the necessary work into the parks that are particularly dear to them (*see Appendix 3*).

A goal is to encourage the “silent majority” to recognize the validity and importance of its ideas and to constructively speak up. By combining the enthusiasm of the outspoken advocates with the latent political strength of the more reticent majority, Memphis will be in a much better position to develop a park plan that builds upon the city’s strengths and moves it forward to the next level.

***Short-Term Solution: Begin the process of converting Park Friends, Inc. from an Overton Park-centric institution into a citywide parks organization with a broadly representative board and program that can provide a consistent citywide voice for citizens committed to an expansion of parks. Secure funding for at least one staff person and form individual friends groups for each park.***

***Another Short-Term Solution: Increase the number of park-oriented educational events offered to the citizens of Memphis – speakers from other cities, speakers on a variety of natural and recreational topics, radio and TV specials, reports and analyses by experts, journalists and students, etc. These events should be sponsored both by private organizations (such as Overton Park and Shelby Farms Park Conservancies, Park Friends, etc.) and public agencies (such as Riverfront Development Corp., Clean Memphis, Memphis Beautiful, etc.).***

***Long-Term Solution: Create and maintain a private park advocacy-and-support structure that includes a paid, staffed, citywide “Memphis Parks Alliance” along with a volunteer “friends” group for each individual park, as well as the already-existing major, staffed conservancies for Shelby Farms Park and for Overton Park. This Memphis Parks Alliance could be modeled on similar institutions in Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago, and elsewhere and could include research, education, publicity, advocacy, volunteer promotion and park agency monitoring and support.***

**2. A Less than Optimal Bureaucratic Configuration.** From the standpoint of governmental structure for parks, Memphis has two major hurdles: (a) a portion of its park maintenance work is split between two agencies (Parks and Neighborhoods, and General Services), and (b) its long-standing Parks Commission was abolished in the year 2000 and has never been recreated, leaving the city without a formal mechanism to serve as an advisor and sounding board for potential parks development and improvements.

The Trust for Public Land's Center for City Park Excellence has found through years of study that park systems are generally more successful when all aspects of park planning, budgeting, maintenance, and recreational programming are lodged in one agency with one decision-maker at the top. This is not the case for Memphis, where planning, recreation, and golf are located within the Division of Parks and Neighborhoods, while mowing and maintenance is handled by the Park Operations Department and the Property Maintenance Department of the General Services Division. (Note that in addition to this, there are three other entities that operate parkland within the city – Riverfront Development Corp., Shelby Farms Park Conservancy, and Tennessee State Parks. *See Table 1*)

Many logistical problems can and do arise when tight coordination does not exist between programming and maintenance. For instance, sometimes a pavilion is rented by Parks and Neighborhoods but is not cleaned and made ready in a timely fashion by General Services. Also, General Services might decide that wet conditions do not allow the use of a field that has been rented by a league through Parks and Neighborhoods. These and similar frictions can result in complaints or even a loss of confidence by the public.

Also, the abolition of the Memphis Parks Commission in 2000 removed an entity that, while sometimes a thorn in the side of elected officials, served the community by adding a forum to discuss park needs and park solutions. While the Commission's record may have been mixed over the years, it is important for Memphis to have a political mechanism whereby citizens can effectively make their interests and concerns known and heard. If not through some kind of Advisory Group, another mechanism to consider would be a modified Parks Committee of the Memphis City Council if it were retooled to meet monthly and to provide an open invitation to the public for input and involvement.

**Shorter-Term Solution:** Convene a “Blue Ribbon Panel” to (1) analyze the governmental structure by which park and recreation services are delivered to the public; and (2) analyze the pros and cons of establishing an official Memphis Parks Advisory Group or of an alternative mechanism to assure robust citizen involvement with the parks of Memphis.

**Longer-Term Solution:** Restructure the city government organizational chart to unite all park programming and maintenance activities within a single Division and under a single Director.

3. **Planning.** Memphis’s most recent comprehensive city plan was produced in 1980. The last park master plan was produced in 1999. Numerous local plans have been produced over the years, but few have been carried through, due to political or economic hurdles. The 2010-11 effort to update the parks plan internally fizzled out and was put on hold. A good plan should have not only outstanding analyses of needs and proposals for solutions, but also a clearly articulated timeline and a realistic plan for achieving the budget.

**Solution:** Undertake a full-scale parks master plan that is jointly funded by the city of Memphis, Shelby County, and members of Memphis’s private sector foundations and corporate community. (For an overview of an ideal plan’s structure, content, and cost, see Appendix 4.)

4. **Connectivity.** The sprawling development of the city (see #8, below) has left the park system far-flung and disconnected. This reality also contributes to the lack of a unified vision for parks across the scores of neighborhoods in Memphis – there is no “central park” to which all citizens feel a unified attraction and ownership. One way to overcome this is to promote an interconnected web of trails and greenways that link many of the existing parks, increasing everyone’s ownership of all of them.





Ideally this would be accomplished through greenway parks formed out of creeks, rivers, sewer lines, and abandoned railroad corridors. An outstanding example of this is the Shelby Farms Greenline; two others in the works are the Wolf River Greenway and the Chelsea Avenue Greenline; and there is also a possibility of a South Memphis Greenline near the intersection of I-240 and South Parkway. Currently there is an opportunity to convert the L&N Railroad Bridge over North Parkway into a continuation of the V&E Greenline. On a city-wide basis, a second-best remedy would be the addition of bike lanes on roadways (although bike lanes are not appropriate for many trail users, including children, stroller-pushers, dog-walkers, and strolling lovers).

***Shorter-Term Solution: The Mayor should create an official Greenline Task Force to oversee the implementation of the Memphis greenlines that are being recommended through the regional greenprint that is currently underway. Since implementation does not always result from a planning process, the Task Force should include a wide array of motivated leaders from such diverse constituencies as bicycling, water quality, ecology, running, railroading, health, disabled-access, wildlife, forestry, housing, smart growth, and economic development.***

***Longer-Term Solution: Create the positions of trail planner and trail implementation specialist within the Division of Parks and Neighborhoods to provide an ongoing structure for success in connectivity.***

**5. The Role of the Private Sector.** In cities throughout the nation, the private sector is playing a larger role with city parks, particularly in the context of capital investment. While trying to find the fair balance between public and private funding of public amenities is sometimes a controversial topic, it is a well-established reality in today's urban scene. Private donors in New York and Chicago have led the way, but even smaller cities like Philadelphia, Atlanta, St. Louis, Louisville, and Houston have seen multi-million-dollar investments into parks by foundations, corporations, and wealthy individuals.

Memphis is certainly no stranger to park philanthropy, particularly in the context of Overton Park and Shelby Farms Park which have received significant gifts from the Hyde Family Foundations, the Assisi Foundation, the Plough Foundation, George and Bena Cates, Bill and Amy Rhodes, the First Tennessee Foundation, and others. However, in general, the culture of major corporate and

philanthropic park support in Memphis is less well-developed than in, St. Louis (with the Danforth Foundation, Emerson Corp., Enterprise Holdings), Cincinnati (Procter and Gamble), or Pittsburgh (the Mellon, Heinz, Laurel and McCune Foundations, and PNC Bank).

Nationally, another notable and growing private partner in park development is the health community, perhaps best exemplified by the Colorado Health Foundation's work in Denver and the Arkansas Heart Clinic's leadership of Little Rock's Medical Mile. Memphis is seeing some movement in this direction with the sponsorship of mile markers along the Shelby Farms Greenline by Campbell Clinic Orthopaedics, Baptist Memorial Health Care's support of the Shelby Farms Park master plan, and Methodist Healthcare's support of Overton Park and Shelby Farms Park. Potentially, a larger park partnership could be forged with Methodist Healthcare, Baptist Memorial Health Care, or St. Jude Children's Hospital.

***Shorter-Term Solution: A group of private sector funders is presented with the opportunity to match city funding of a full-scale master planning process for the Memphis park system.***

***Longer-Term Solution: A regularly scheduled, informal convening of private sector leaders who care about parks should be arranged to provide a forum to discuss issues, opportunities, and lessons learned. Even if this group starts out small, it can grow as it demonstrates increasing relevance and success in using parks to enhance the health, environment, and economic viability of Memphis.***

**6. The Role of the Public Sector.** Another large, robust, and valuable partnering resource is the public sector. Among several public agencies and institutions that could conceivably work cooperatively with Memphis Division of Parks and Neighborhoods and/or city park advocates are the Engineering Division (trails), the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department/Healthy Memphis Common Table (programming), Memphis Light Gas and Water (water-absorbing landscapes) and the University of Memphis Center for Partnerships in GIS (program effectiveness measurement). Also, if and when Foote Homes is redeveloped by the Memphis Housing Authority, a considerable amount of parkland could be incorporated into the new design to better serve the community.

***Short-Term Solution: Under the instigation and leadership of the Mayor, begin a dialogue between the Divisions of Engineering, Health, Education, MLGW, University of Memphis, and the City of Memphis Division of Parks and Neighborhoods to identify programs that could yield multi-objective, win-win solutions for both park and other urban challenges faced by Memphis.***

***Longer-Term Solution: Create an office within the Mayor's office to develop and submit multi-agency grant applications that work across bureaucratic boundaries to strengthen parks and other infrastructure needs of the city of Memphis. (The Division of Parks and Neighborhoods has recently hired a grant administrator who could work with this new person.)***

**7. Insufficient City and County Funding for Parks and Recreation.** While partnerships are valuable tools for stretching resources and amplifying strengths, there is no substitute for an ongoing, predictable revenue stream from the city and county. The municipality, speaking for the voters, must be the leader, with all the partners serving in a helpful yet subsidiary role. This means not only strong planning and direction, but also the ability to allocate meaningful sums of money when needed. Some jurisdictions, such as Southaven, Miss., have passed a "Penny for Parks" sales tax to assure enough revenue to buy land, modernize facilities, and implement programming; many other jurisdictions tackle park funding problems through the passage of a substantial multi-year bond measure, approved either by the council or directly by the voters.

***Initial Action: Undertake a detailed study of (1) the capital and other needs of the Memphis/Shelby County park systems, (2) the fiscal ability of the city or county to sell and repay park bonds, (3) the most appropriate taxing structure to repay the bonds, and (4) the level-of-willingness of Memphis/Shelby County residents to pay for more and better parks, and more recreation programs.***

***Next Action: Assuming a positive outcome from the study, place a park bond measure on the ballot in an upcoming election.***

**8. As an Underlying Problem, the Pattern of Development.** Memphis's 600,000 residents are spread across a large geography of over 200,000 acres. This low population density, combined with the continual movement of people east and

south (both inside and outside the city limits) puts a heavy strain on Memphis's ability to provide excellent city services including quality parks.

**Short-Term Solution: *Begin a dialogue between infill developers, park advocates, the Community Redevelopment Agency, and the Division of Parks and Neighborhoods to identify a small number of existing parks that could serve as nodes for quality smart-growth redevelopment. Then use a portion of the fiscal gains from redevelopment to improve the parks.***

**Long-Term Solution: *Institute a more robust planning process that encourages and rewards infill development, walkability, transit and parks, while discouraging greenfield development and highways.***

## **Conclusion**

While Memphis has an accumulated legacy burden from city expansion, park underfunding, unimplemented plans from the past, and other challenges, it also has many recent accomplishments that have energized the city's park lovers and drawn national attention. Because of this, there is an upwelling of interest by advocates, funders, and other city leaders in investing in parks for both their benefits to public health and to the environment and the economy.

We believe that this report provides a rich menu of options for continuing the growth and improvement in Memphis's park and recreation system. As described, it is our opinion that the starting point is through a good deal of citizen input, encouraged and enabled by city government. From this input and advocacy, other critical steps can follow, including the creation of a robust park system analysis and a master plan and, potentially, the electoral passage of a major park improvement bond measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this report grounded in our research and influenced by Memphians' wishes for the future.

## **Appendix 1.**

### **Attendees at one or more park meetings, October 2, 2013, February 4, 2014 and June 11, 2014.**

Art Wolff	Citizen-Sierra Club
B. Lee Mallory	Victorian Village, Inc.
Barbara Cooper	State Representative
Barbara Kabakoff	Wolf River Conservancy
Barbara Standing	Sierra Club, Friends for Our Riverfront
Barry Flanagan	UT Health Science Center
Becky Muska	Park Friends Riverfront
Benny Lenderman	Riverfront Development Corporation
Bob Wenner	Wolf River Conservancy
Caroline Todd	Student
Chooch Pikard	Architect
Chris Shaw	Memphis Flyer
Cyndy Grivich	Memphis City Beautiful
David Cox	U of Memphis
Debra Lovelace	Denver Park
Dennis Lynch	Sierra Club
Dexter Muller	Greater Memphis Chamber
Don Richardson	Overton Park Conservancy, Sierra Club
Earlice Taylor	CDC, Glenview Neighborhood Association
Eddie Settles	
Eldra White	Memphis City Beautiful
Emily Carothers	Park Friends, Inc.
Emily Percer	HFF
Emily Trenholm	Community Development Council
Frank Ricks	
Gayla Burks	Crosstown Development
Greg Maxted	
Janet Boscarino	Clean Memphis
Janet Hooks	City of Memphis Parks Department
Jason Hodges	
Jeanne Arthur	
Joan Parker	Frayser Community Association
John Richardson	
Joseph E. Jones Jr.	
Josh Hodges	SCHD
Josh Shumaker	Memphis Areas Assoc. of Gov't
Karl Muska	
Keith Cole	Wolf River Conservancy
Ken Muska	



Larry Smith	
Laura Adams	Shelby Farms Park Conservancy
Lauren Taylor	HFF
Lee Millar	Sons of Confederate Veterans
Lisa Snowden	
Lissa Thompson	
LueElla Marshall	
Marie Branch	
Mark Buchanan	
Martha Dancy-Danier	South Memphis Citizens for Action
Mary Wilder	
Megan Higgins	
Mike Flowers	City of Memphis Parks Department
Mike Kirby	V & E Greenline
Molly Laster	
Naomi Van Tol	Overton Park Conservancy
Nellie McHanlin	
Nora Tucker	Victorian Village, Inc.
Peter Harnik	TPL
Preailie (n/l) Richardson	Denver Park
Ray Christman	TPL
Regenia Dowell	Denver Park
Renee Lartigue	
Rep. Barbara Cooper	TN General Assembly
Rick Wood	TPL
Rob Elder	
Robert Gurley	Westwood Neighborhood
Ryan Hall	Wolf River Conservancy
Sam Blair	Park Friends, Inc.
Steve Auterman	L RK Architects
Steve Basar	Chair, Shelby County Commission
Steven Sondheim	Sierra Club
Stoy Bailey	
Sue Williams	Citizen
Sutarn Sworthful	
Syd Lerner	Greater Memphis Greenline
Tara Wohlgemuth	Mid-South Greenways
Terence Ryan	Circle 3 Disc Golf
Tina Sullivan	Overton Park Conservancy
Tommy Crawford	
Trip Farnsworth	
Virginia McLean	Friends for Our Riverfront
Wayne Roberts	
Willola Marshall	

## ***Appendix 2.***

# **Comments, Suggestions and Concerns Voiced by Public Meeting Attendees, 2013-14**

## **Meeting #1, October, 2013**

1. Revitalize existing parks.
2. Add directional signs throughout the parks/paths (i.e.: bikes travel this → way)
3. Include information about the history of the park.
4. Clean up east side of Greenlaw Park downtown.
5. Who do community members need to contact about partnering with parks for activities?
6. Ensure that parks are safe and clean.
7. Concerned that children don't get to utilize parks as they should because of safety concerns
8. By improving the parks, we can improve the city.
9. Get community organizations, churches, neighbors, etc. to take responsibility to keep their parks up.
10. Ideal to have a "friends of the park" organization for each park, that operates under a larger citywide parks organization. –Modeled after Philadelphia's parks plan.
11. Introduce an "adopt a park" program.
12. Add water features/fountains to make the parks more attractive.
13. Incorporate youth engagement activities such as volunteer days.
14. Urge MATA (Public transportation) to include more routes that go closer to the parks.
15. Denver (Frayser neighborhood) wants a park.
16. Need volunteers/citizens to collaborate with the city to improve the parks.
17. Make school playgrounds available as public parks during non-school hours.
18. Convert vacant/blighted land into parks, rather than starting from "scratch."
19. Find out what kinds of park attractions are most important, specific to each neighborhood.
20. Incorporate "pop-up" parks at the parks (i.e.: dog park day).
21. Raise monies or allocate funds that go towards maintenance of the park, not just the initial park project.
22. Have companies adopt parks with naming opportunities.
23. Form conservancies for Overton Park and Vollintine Evergreen Community Association.
24. Need a dedicated stream of funding for parks or some sort of collection fee to raise funds for park projects and maintenance.
25. Make a case for parks that includes the economic impact and benefits. (Benefits include health, resource conservation, attracts tourism, increased property value, revitalization of neighborhoods)
26. Utilize social media to share information about parks.
27. Donate tools for neighborhood members to use in maintaining their parks.
28. Incorporate special events at the parks like fairs, block parties and festivals.
29. How do we go about assembling groups of volunteers for each park?

30. Engage elderly members of the community.
31. Create a master plan for city parks network.
32. Add better signage to increase visibility of the parks.
33. Improve lighting and programming and reduce overgrown plants to make the parks safer.
34. Create sponsorship opportunities for community members to buy a “part” of the park such as benches, trails or bricks.
35. Next time have a meeting for community members/leaders (neighborhood association presidents, church leaders, etc.).
36. Identify a champion (key leader) for each park.
37. Get political support for funding
38. Organize or identify an advocacy organization that can be the voice for the park groups throughout the city.

## **Suggestions from Small Group Discussions, February 4, 2014**

### Group 1 – Connectivity, Trails and Greenways.

- Fix sidewalks, install curb cuts and reduce overly high curbs.
- Complete the continuity of the Mississippi Riverfront
- Utilize the findings of the Greenprint within the city of Memphis to seek consensus and stimulate specific cooperative action among the pro-park groups
- Analyze opportunities for a north-south non-motorized connection route in the Midtown area and organize a campaign to achieve it.
- Complete a greenway along Lick Creek
- Complete a greenway on the Chelsea Greenline (abandoned rail line) route
- Determine the desires of the different neighborhoods
- Reconnect the Wolf River Greenway with the Harbor and construct a boat launch at that location.
- Convert alleyways (in places like Evergreen) into attractive, functional connections.

### Group 2 – Park Maintenance, Improvement, Reconstruction, Development and Protection

- There are potentials for creating new Blueways (including a boat launch where the Wolf River meets the Mississippi) and a new pocket park in the Poplar Avenue Corridor.
- There is the potential to convert an underutilized golf course within T.O. Fuller State Park into a bird-watching wildlife sanctuary.
- Reality Check: With an estimated \$20 million in deferred park maintenance and an annual funding level of under \$1 million for repairs, the situation is dire
- The cost of an average park repair (Southside Park) is \$300,000.
- In FY14, the city allocated \$3 million to substantially renew four parks: Denver Park, Morris Park, Holmes/Tchulahoma Park and Charjean Park.
- Reality Check: The Department receives requests every month from persons seeking to purchase park property. The city considers some of these requests; currently a 50-acre property near Kennedy Park is in discussion for sale.

### Group 3 – Civic Engagement, Public-Private Partnerships

- Identify all the existing “friends of parks” groups in the city, using lists developed for the Greenprint.
- Identify additional potential “friends of parks” (individuals and groups) by calling/e-mailing all the presidents of the neighborhood associations in Memphis (list maintained in Director Hooks’s office) and asking those presidents for the names of local park-oriented members.
- Hire staff or utilize an intern or students to carry out the above work.
- Incentivize the formation of friends groups with innovative programs such as annual prizes for park improvements
- Create a 501c3 umbrella “Friends of Memphis Parks” organization that represents all the local park groups, has citizen board members and has a least one paid staff member.
- Conceptualize a role that specific park conservancies can play in citywide park advocacy and also, perhaps, in the establishment of new conservancies.

### Group 4 -- Integrating Parks into the Surrounding City (and its development plans)

- Position parks to benefit from and stimulate eco-tourism and heritage tourism. Possibilities could include Civil War sites in the city; the Fisher Steel site and Shelby Farms Park (for green infrastructure development sites and linkages); the Crosstown Development Park and a connection to the V&E Greenline; Morris Park and the Lee House (including tours for children and for history); the Cobblestones/Bass Pro Pyramid/Wolf river Harbor.
- Calculate and/or predict the economic impacts of park investment, using such factors as property values, neighborhood stability, attraction and retention of families, reduction of sprawl and associated environmental impacts.
- Exploit the opportunity of turning underutilized properties into pocket parks in neighborhoods that lack parks
- Close unused parks in unneeded locations
- Analyze underused parks for reasons for their lack of success and make improvements, such as by improving access.
- Decide on the best locations in Memphis for parks.

## **Using Other Memphis Developments for Park Creation: Suggestions from Small Group Discussion, June 3, 2014**

Some major housing, retail or light-industrial developments in the planning pipeline that have – or could have – a parks component:

- Crosstown
- Heritage Landing/L.E. Brown park
- Foote Homes – possibly if redeveloped
- A park along Broad Avenue?
- Conversion of the Fairgrounds?
- Near Tobey Park?

Some major transportation developments (or reconstructions) in the pipeline that have – or could have – a parks component:

- Bike lanes coming to Cleveland to Chelsea
- Harahan Bridge
- An Overton Sq./Overton Park shuttle to relieve pressure on greensward
- I-40/240 interchange is under construction, but with no park/trail component
- Roundabout at I-55 planned, close to Harahan
- 1-240 widening in East Memphis, but no park/trail integrated
- Poplar median in Medical Center

Some major flood protection or stormwater mitigation developments in the pipeline that have – or could have a parks component?

- Lick Creek project (Overton Square garage),
- Snowden School detention field

Some possible railroad corridor abandonments that might become park/trails:

- Greenline at Crosstown
- Chelsea Greenline
- South Memphis Greenline
- Shelby Farms Greenline extension eastward to Lenow Road
- A “Rail with Trail” in Arlington
- Nonconnah Creek
- The Aerotropolis area

A utility facility (gas, electrical, fiber optic, oil, water) that could be designed so as to include a park/trail:

- Possibly beautify some MLGW pumping station properties around town?
- Possibly beautify the airport approach zones?

An institution located near an unsuccessful park that could possibly "adopt" the park and improve it:

- Possibly Methodist/LeBonheur Hospital and Morris Park
- Possibly UT and Forrest Park

Some possible partners/resources:

- Community LIFT
- Community Development Council
- Mayor’s Innovation Team
- Center for Transforming Communities
- Clean Memphis
- the two conservancies,
- Memphis Police Department
- The Parks and Neighborhoods Division’s quarterly newsletter.



**Appendix 3.**

**"What Park Do You Want to Help With?"**

Responses from Citizens, Public Meeting, June 11, 2014

Blueways	Virginia McLean
Bluffwalk	Sue A. Williams
Cameron Brown Park	Greg Maxted
Confederate Park	Lee Millar
Dalstrom Park	Robert Gurley
Edwin Circle (future)	Renee Lartigue
Forrest Park	Lee Millar
Fort Pickeing	Lee Millar
Frayser Park	Willola Marshall
Greenlines	Virginia McLean
Hampline	Steve Auterman
Harahan Bridge	Greg Maxted
Jefferson Davis Park	Lee Millar
Kennedy Park	Terry Ryan
Kennedy Park	Wayne Robert
Martin Luther King, Jr. Riverside Park	Sue A. Williams
Martin Luther King, Jr. Riverside Park	Terry Ryan
Memphis Botanic Garden	Lisa Snowden
Memphis Zoo	Dennis Lynch
Morris Park	Steve Auterman
Neighborhood parks	Stephen Sondheim
Orange Mound Parks	LueElla Marshall
Overton Park	Rob Elder
Overton Park	Dennis Lynch
Overton Park	Virginia McLean
Overton Park	Sue A. Williams
Riverfront Parks	Lisa Snowden
Riverfront Parks	Virginia McLean
Rodney Baber Park	Willola Marshall
Sea Isle Park	Molly Laster
Shelby Farms Park	Dennis Lynch
T.O. Fuller Park	Robert Gurley
T.O. Fuller Park	Terry Ryan
V&E Greenline	Steve Auterman
Victorian Village Park	Steve Auterman
Westwood Park	Robert Gurley
Wolf River Greenway	Marie Branch
Wolf River Greenway	Steve Auterman
All parks	Janet Boscarino
All parks	Marie Branch
All parks	Dexter Muller
All parks	Eldra White
All parks	Don Richardson

## ***Appendix 4.***

### **Sample Costs, Duration and Contents of Selected Park Master Plans from Other Cities**

#### **PLAN 2000, Seattle Parks & Recreation Department.**

This report was done using only in-house resources for approximately \$60,000. It included two months of the full-time attention of the Planning Director and part-time work from two other planners. After an initial presentation to the City Council, the public process was unexpectedly positive and smooth, which made the whole process quicker than anticipated (months rather than a year or more). The document includes park and open space inventories, gap analyses, development plan surveys, and capital improvement plans. It was updated in 2011.

##### **Contents**

- Vision Statement
  - Mission & goals
- Policy Statement
  - Background
  - Fundamental Responsibilities
  - Policy Statement—Partner for Recreation (developing and maintaining park facilities and recreation programs)
  - Policy Statement—Steward of Park Resources (environmental stewardship & education, plus parkland acquisition & management)
  - Distribution Guidelines (ensuring resource equality)
- Six Year Action Plan
  - Action Plan—Partner for Recreation (developing and managing park & recreation facilities, building programs)
  - Action Plan—Steward of Park Resources (acquisitions & development, park management & environmental stewardship, environmental education)

#### **2008 Outdoors Plan, Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation Department**

This report was done with in-house resources, except for some external GIS work and the use of benchmarking data from the Center for City Park Excellence. It cost approximately \$115,000 and took about two years, including all the community meetings.

##### **Contents**

- Background and Introduction
- Community Involvement
- Land and Outdoor Facility Standards
- Outdoors Recreation System Components
- Regional Connectivity
- Recommendations by Geographic Area
- City-wide Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

#### **2020 Vision, Portland (Ore.) Dept of Parks & Recreation**

This report, which took two years to produce and came out in 2001, was overseen by a full-time planner plus a writer, a graphic designer, and several contractors who put together the final document and presentation. The \$250,000 cost was covered by the city.

##### **Contents:**

- Parks 2020 Vision & Principles
- The State of Portland's Park System (outstanding facilities, park benefits not available to all, and missed opportunities)
- The Funding Picture (overview of park funding options, including new developer impact fee)
- Trends (changing population with increasing development and more recreation demand)
- The Need (parks essential, few aware of threats to system)
- The Vision (visioning process, plan's objectives and strategies, immediate & more distant steps)
- Sub-Areas (city divided into zone-specific plans)

### **2007 Master Plan, Houston Parks & Recreation Department**

The report was put together with a combination of in-house and external resources, over an 18-month period, and it cost about \$350,000.

#### **Contents:**

- Community Input—the Soul of Houston
- Demographic Analysis
- Local Recreation Trends
- Parks and Facilities—Houston's Green Foundation (includes summary of previous planning projects, inventory and assessment of facilities and needs)
- Park Facility and Recreation Development Program (strategic vision, community values & objectives, tracking performance and implementation, and communicating results & updating the plan in future)

### **1998 Cityspace: An Open Space Plan for Chicago, Chicago Park District and Chicago Department of Planning**

This document took more than four years to develop and cost about \$400,000. A consultant was hired as project-specific staff, making it technically an in-house work. Although the effort took an extended period of time, the final result was groundbreaking and so influential that it is still a guiding document nearly 20 years later.

#### **Contents:**

- Background
  - The Historical Perspective
  - What Chicago Needs Today (valuing open space & defining community/regional needs, Chicago's standing vs. other cities)
  - Places to Grow (focused especially on open space opportunities, rather than programmatic opportunities)
- The Plan
  - Framework Plan (from neighborhood spaces to greenways to transportation corridors)
- Implementation
  - Getting the Job Done (maintaining momentum, acquiring and developing the land, zoning for open space)

### **2013 Parks Master Plan, Oklahoma City Department of Planning**

This report took 14 months, cost \$175,000 and was done by outside consultants with the support and cooperation of the city planning department. (However, the budget was probably inadequate to accomplish everything the city wanted from the process.)

**Contents:**

- Laying a Foundation (background and key findings from previous efforts, planning goals of ongoing efforts, benchmarking, stakeholder themes)
- Setting Strategic Direction
- Park Classifications (local vs. regional parks, summary of amenities, crime prevention through design)
- Level of Service Standards (central city, urban area, urban growth area, rural area)
- Analysis and Applied Standards (local and regional park access, areas served by multiple parks, connectivity between parks, transit and sidewalk access to parks, off-street trail access, demographics, evaluating whether park meets community needs)
- Action Plan
- Funding Options and Strategies
- Maintenance Guidelines
- Partnerships