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PARKS

5A INTRODUCTION

Public parks and open spaces play key roles in shaping the built environment and the quality of life of residents. They not only provide active, social, contemplative, natural, and cultural recreational opportunities, but they also help establish a sense of place within their surrounding communities. Parks and open spaces foster community connections by serving as place for people to gather and interact. When designed as an integrated network, they connect people, neighborhoods, natural areas, community hubs, and economic centers. Parks are not only beneficial to people, but they also benefit the urban ecology by preserving natural assets and promoting biodiversity.

As development occurs in the McLean CBC, parks and open spaces must be seamlessly integrated into the district's fabric emphasizing vegetation and green space while minimizing imperviousness. Well-designed and properly sited parks best benefit the community when they are considered a primary use

of the site and designed as such, rather than an afterthought. They should encourage active use by cojoining the public realm with complementary architecture and building uses, such as restaurants.

The chapter that follows establishes a park and open space concept along with design principles to guide the future development of parks in the McLean CBC. For each design principle, a series of design strategies are provided to implement or enhance the guidance set forth in the Comprehensive Plan, The Urban Design Guidelines Volume I, and The Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Access (PROSA) Strategy. See more information here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/planning-development/planning/prosa>

Publicly accessible parks may be publicly owned, privately owned, or provided through public-private partnerships.

BOTTOM LEFT
The Signet Park, a sizable pocket park in the McLean CBC
Image Credit: Fairfax County



Signet Park, McLean, VA

BOTTOM RIGHT
The Palladium Fountain, a small pocket park in the McLean CBC
Image Credit: Fairfax County



The Palladium, McLean, VA

5B PARK AND OPEN SPACE PRINCIPLES FOR THE McLEAN CBC

1. Contribute to the Park & Open Space Network

A range of park types, including a Signature Park, linear parks and pocket parks, should be used to form a network of recreational green spaces and continuous green corridors in the McLean CBC (See Figure 5-1). The park and open space network should convey a unified theme and appearance that contributes to a sense of place. It should be seamlessly connected by a well-designed public realm of streetscapes, trails, and other pedestrian facilities to promote easy access. Walkable access to a park is generally defined as being within a 5-minute (¼-mile) walk from offices, retail, and residences. Lastly, the network should include opportunities for connecting wildlife habitats and include the creation of diverse ecological environments for a variety of plant types. Shade trees and multi-layered plantings are critical elements to all spaces in the network.



Signet Park, McLean, VA

TOP RIGHT

The paved trail is made of similar pavers as the public sidewalk
Image Credit: Fairfax County

2. Integrate Existing Assets

Parks and open spaces should be designed to enhance existing amenities such as retail areas, residential communities, and pedestrian-oriented streets. They should incorporate and/or provide linkages to natural features, historic sites and other important natural and heritage resources, as may be appropriate. Likewise, parks and open spaces should be seamlessly connected to other aspects of the public realm and the surrounding community.



Hunter's Point, South Park, Long Island, NY

BOTTOM RIGHT

Rain garden planted within old, non-working rail tracks
Image Credit: nycgovparks.org

FIGURE 5-1: PARK & OPEN SPACE NETWORK PLAN



PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PRINCIPLES FOR THE McLEAN CBC (CONT'D)

3. Incorporate the Urban Parks Framework

Parks and open spaces of different sizes support a variety of programming. They should be based on the park typologies outlined in the Urban Parks Framework (See Appendix 2 in the Comprehensive Plan's Parks and Recreation Element and Volume I: Urban Design Guidelines) which provides descriptions and character images for each park type. An evaluation of existing and planned parks and open spaces within McLean should be used to understand how a proposed development can fill unmet recreational and park needs.



Klyde Warren Park, Dallas, TX

4. Introduce a Signature Urban Park to Function as the Town Square

A Signature Park is a major feature of the Parks and Open Space Concept. The park should provide opportunities for active, passive, and social recreational activities. The design of the surrounding land uses and streetscape should ensure that it is inviting for park users of a variety of ages and abilities. Ground floor spaces in buildings that surround the park should include uses that activate the park during the day and night. Publicly accessible parking should be available for visitors.



Rockville Town Center, Rockville, MD

5. Build Upon McLean's Sense of Place

There are features that define McLean's sense of place, which should be enhanced through the design of and activities held in its parks. From Chapter 1: *"McLean has a small town feel with a variety of human-scale gathering spaces that foster social interaction and communal experiences. The diversity of local merchants and dining options help define McLean as a destination for area residents. Well-designed streetscapes and off-street pathways offer comfortable connections to these destinations as well as from the surrounding neighborhoods into the district. McLean showcases itself as a sustainable community with shade trees, green areas, and innovative environmental features."*



City Place at West Palm Beach, FL

TOP RIGHT

Variety of passive and active experiences for people of all ages.
Image Credit: elevatearchitecture.com

MIDDLE RIGHT

Central gathering space surrounded by commercial uses.
Image Credit: Dan Reed via Flickr

BOTTOM RIGHT

Fountain plaza creates an iconic image for the City Place development.
Image Credit: palmbeachculture.com

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PRINCIPLES FOR THE McLEAN CBC (CONT'D)

6. Provide a Multifunctional Space

Parks and open spaces should be activated through programming and be designed in a manner that supports their intended uses. They should incorporate active, passive, social, natural, and cultural recreational features as appropriate given the space and context. Parks and open spaces bring people together for events such as outdoor movies and/or concerts. They may contain open play areas, trails, sports/fields, play areas, gathering spaces, and areas of respite. They also provide opportunities for seating, casual recreation, spaces for dogs, and activities such as picnicking and observing nature.



Rockville, MD

7. Organize Development Around Parks

Parks and plazas should be used as focal points of activity. Consideration should be given to organizing buildings and amenities around them. Publicly accessible parks that are provided by private developments should be oriented towards McLean's streets and trails and/or towards adjacent commercial and public uses.



Pentagon Row, Arlington, VA

8. Incorporate Community Input and Diverse Perspectives

Designers, county staff and community stakeholders should work together to identify potential programming, recreational activities and special events anticipated for each proposed park and open space. Including stakeholders during early stages of a project's design will encourage community building by creating places where residents desire to spend time. Emphasis should be given to incorporating perspectives that represent diversity in terms of age, race, and ethnicity, recognizing the variety of experience among community members.



TOP RIGHT
Rockville Town Square pavilion and water feature
Image Credit: City of Rockville

MIDDLE RIGHT
Buildings frame an active public plaza with synthetic turf
Image Credit: Fairfax County

BOTTOM RIGHT
Community stakeholders working together to find solutions to park needs
Image Credit: Delaney and Associates

5C DESIGN STRATEGIES

5C.1 SIGNATURE URBAN PARK DESIGN STRATEGIES

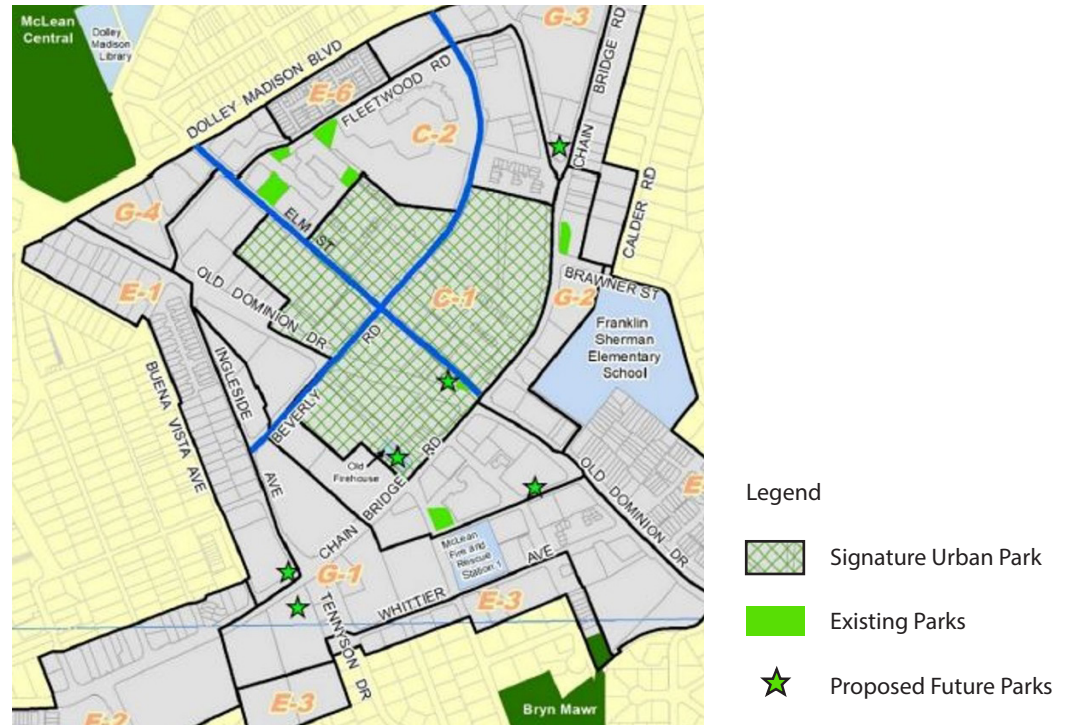
The Signature Urban Park should be a prominent space located in the heart of McLean. It is intended to be a major placemaking element, providing a central gathering space for the community and recreational opportunities for users of all ages and abilities. In an urban context, a space of this scale should provide a similar design aesthetic as a town square or village green. The shape of the Signature Park is intended to be flexible, although minimum design expectations should be met as provided for in the following criteria.

These baseline expectations are not intended to restrict more ambitious design pursuits. In addition to these criteria, the design of the Signature Urban Park should reflect the design principles contained in the Volume I Design Guidelines.

Signature Urban Park: Location, Size, and Configuration

- The park is anticipated to be provided through a consolidated redevelopment within the Bonus Height Area of the McLean CBC Center Zone (See Figure 5-2). If the development is phased, a substantial portion of the Signature Park should be delivered with the initial phase of development and should include the park's focal point.
- The Signature Park will be located within the Bonus Height Area and is preferred to include frontage along Elm Street or Beverly Road. The optimal location emphasizes this frontage and locates the park near the intersection of Elm Street and Beverly Road.
- The park should be at least 2/3 acre. Retaining the integrity of the minimum 2/3 acre as dedicated park space is paramount; thus, the boundaries of the park should be clearly defined. Public right-of-way and/or Building Zones should not be included.
- The park should be visible from the public realm and accessible for users of a variety of ages and abilities.

FIGURE 5-2: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PARK CONCEPT



- Legend
- Signature Urban Park
 - Existing Parks
 - ★ Proposed Future Parks

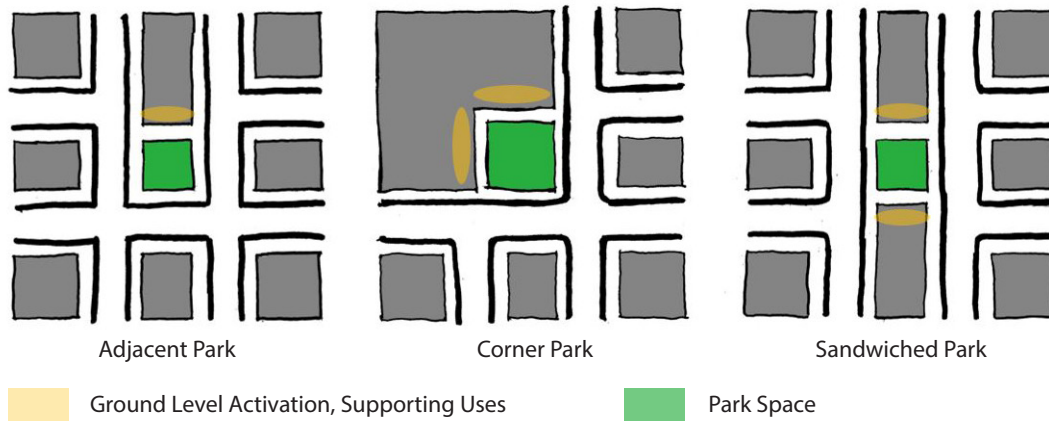
- Connections to surrounding pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and supported by wayfinding signage and nearby multimodal parking should be provided.
- Publicly accessible non-motorized/active transportation and motorized parking should be available for park visitors.

Signature Urban Park: Focal Point

- The park should possess a main focal point as a defining feature. It should be spatially significant and offer a unique sense of identity to the space. Examples of focal points include, but are not limited to, large architectural pavilions, prominent art pieces or sculptures, interactive water features for child play, etc.

FIGURE 5-3: SIGNATURE PARK BLOCK CONFIGURATION

- The “Adjacent Park” configuration orients the park at the terminus of the block which provides retail and other supporting uses on at least one edge while the remaining sides front adjacent streets or public right of way.
- The “Corner Park” and the “Sandwiched Park” configurations offer ground level retail on at least two edges providing a more activated and energized space while also improving safety by exposing fewer of park edges to adjacent roadways.



- The focal point should be arranged to offer strong symmetry within the overall park and should align with prominent architectural elements such as main entrances, or elements such as clock towers, etc. The goal is to create a strong visual axis, or sight line, through the park to prominent architectural elements and from the buildings back into the park space. Views across the center of the open lawn area may present opportunities to make such relationships.

Signature Urban Park: Active Nodes

- “Nodes”, or moments in which the circulation pattern comes together, should contain a variety of program elements and points of interest. Consider such elements as historically interactive monuments, educational signage, seating areas, statues, water features, artwork, interactive sculpture, musical instruments, small shade structures, etc. These should be provided in addition to a main focal point.
- Consider flexible uses when selecting elements and features to be located in the “nodes”. For example, a single bench could also be sculptural in form, provide a children’s play feature, and/or offer some sort of educational or cultural statement about the area’s history.

BOTTOM LEFT

An open lawn area offers space for a variety of uses
 Image Credit: Ed Wonsek



BOTTOM CENTER

A modern, interactive fountain in a downtown plaza
 Image Credit: Fairfax County



BOTTOM RIGHT

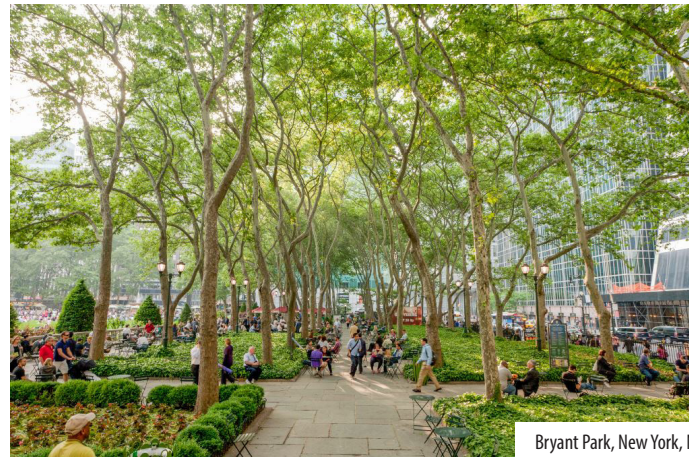
A social plaza with focal point water feature and clear sight line to the public library
 Image Credit: Wally Gobetz



DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONT'D)



Bryant Park, New York, NY



Bryant Park, New York, NY

TOP LEFT

Temporary retail kiosks activate park edges
Image Credit: Poitras Industries

TOP RIGHT

Naturalized buffer area
Image Credit: nycco.com

Signature Urban Park: Park Edges

- All edges abutting the park should be activated.
- Activate the ground level of at least one edge of the Signature Park with restaurants, retail, theaters, and/or other publicly accessible uses. In order to improve safety, streets and roadways should avoid bifurcating the active edge and storefront retail from the park or any portion of the park.
- Other edges can be activated with building entrances, residential lobbies, stoops, porches, building patios, etc.
- Exterior architecture of buildings facing the park should include pedestrian-friendly, human-scaled ground floors employing design features that distinguish the first floor from the rest of the building, are highly transparent with lots of windows or openings, and incorporate arcades, canopies, recesses or overhangs, etc.
- On-street parking and lay-by spaces are strongly encouraged near or adjacent to the park. These spaces can promote use of the park by those who do not live within walking distance and can function as an extension of the park for large events such as for street vendors, food trucks, etc. On-street parking and lay-by spaces should not be considered as park space but as support features.

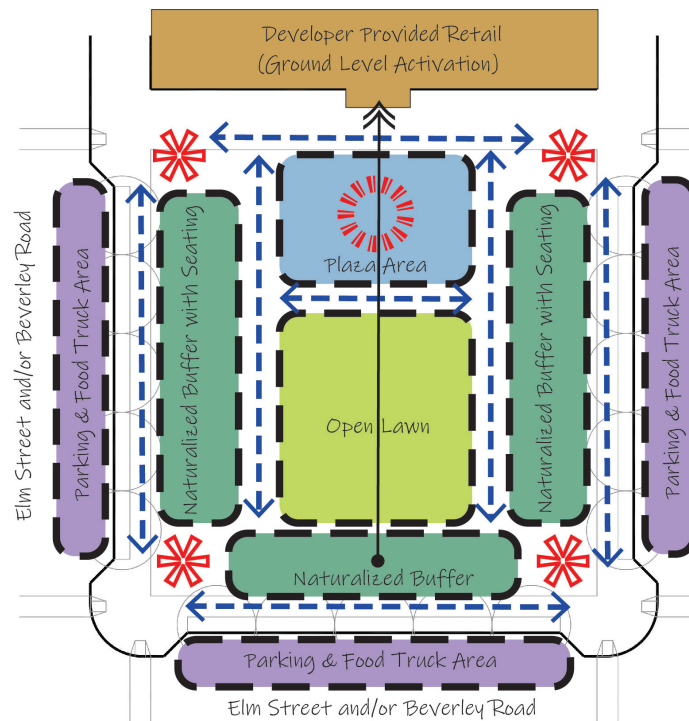


FIGURE 5-4:
SIGNATURE
PARK CONCEPT
DIAGRAM

KEY

- Focal Point
- Node/Point of Interest
- Area of Use
- Sight Line
- Circulation

DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

- Where a residential use abuts the Signature Park, ensure that sufficient distinction is made between the semi-private realm of the residential frontage and the park. Low walls, fences, landscaping, signage, elevation changes, and walkways can help distinguish between public and private.

Signature Urban Park: Open Lawn Area

- An open lawn area should be provided for flexible and unprogrammed opportunities for both active and passive recreation. It should be one contiguous area and should make up between 20 - 30 percent of the total park area. It should not be considered the focal point feature.
- The open lawn area should have a synthetic turf surface to lower the maintenance demands, increase drainage, and improve its seasonal usability. Synthetic turf is durable and will allow for uses such as a temporary ice rink during winter months.

Signature Urban Park: Social Plaza

- A social plaza area should be provided as a paved area in which large groups of people can gather and provide space

for large groupings of tables and chairs. This area is intended to receive considerable foot traffic on a regular basis. The focal point of the park is typically located within the Social Plaza Area. The paved Social Plaza Area should comprise between 10 - 25 percent of the total park area.

Signature Urban Park: Naturalized Buffer

- The park should include naturalized buffer areas comprised of canopy tree groves and/or carefully designed planting beds defined by low lying shrubs and ornamental grasses. Such planting should soften the visual and spatial transition between a naturalized park-like atmosphere and the surrounding urban environment. The plantings in the buffer areas should not completely hinder visibility for safety.
- The naturalized buffer areas should be designed to include opportunities to provide shaded seating, as called for in the Comprehensive Plan. The buffer areas should include a combination of passive areas and pathways lined with rows of benches. The buffer areas should also offer a setting for more active uses such as dog runs (1/4 acre or less per the [Fairfax County Park Authority's dog park guidelines](#)), playgrounds and interactive or sculptural play features, or similar outdoor activities.

Signature Urban Park: Stormwater Management

- Stormwater should be handled through permeable paving and/or bioretention in conformance with Chapter 3 and the Volume I Design Guidelines.
- Stormwater features should be located in the naturalized buffer areas and appear as part of the natural design of the space rather than as an afterthought.
- In the instance of underground detention, structures and manholes or other access points for these facilities should not be located in park spaces, particularly where these facilities prevent the planting of shade trees.

BELOW

Integrated bioretention area and boardwalk in a linear park
Image Credit: Woltz Landscape Architects



Alethia Tanner Park, Washington, DC



Image Credit: Fairfax County

Repurposed trolley car cafe

Signature Urban Park: Amenities

- McLean was historically a streetcar suburb. Consider creative ways to integrate street cars and other relevant history into the park design. A salvaged streetcar could serve as a cafe or coffee shop, steel railways can be set integrally with paving patterns, play equipment can be sculptural and thematic, or interpretive signage could be placed throughout the landscape.
- All hardscape materials should be consistent with the materials identified in Chapter 3 of these guidelines. Use of distinctive materials around the park's focal point and/or in the social plaza space is encouraged.
- The park should be well lit with pedestrian-scale lighting that coordinates with street or other lighting in the McLean CBC. The lights should include GFI outlets to support special events such as farmers markets and holiday gatherings, and lights may be strung in the adjacent trees for special occasions.
- Native and non-invasive tree and plant species should be planted. Species selection should be consistent with Chapter 3 and the Volume I Urban Design Guidelines.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies helped to define the design parameters for the Signature Urban Park. These parks showcase designs, amenities, and park arrangements that are desirable to the community. The intent is not to emulate these designs but to draw upon their features as inspiration. The cases include:

- Bryant Park, New York
- Old Post Office Square, Boston
- Rockville Town Square, Rockville
- Old Town Square in City of Fairfax



Bryant Park, NY

ABOVE

Unprogrammed open lawn space
Image Credit: Michael A. Wang

CASE STUDIES

BRYANT PARK

Case Study 1: Bryant Park, New York City

1) Circulation Pattern

- ADA compliant pedestrian pathways

2) Use Zones

- Natural grass open lawn, café plaza, fountain plaza, vegetated buffer areas with seating and tables

3) Focal Points

- Large decorative fountain

4) Nodes & Points of Interest

- Cafés & shops, flexible seating areas, carousel, outdoor games, Bryant monument

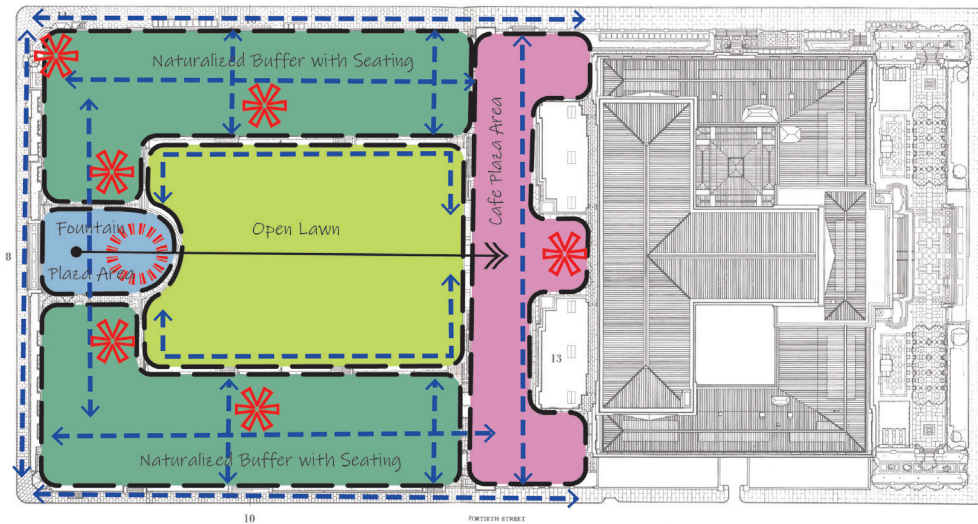
5) Edges & Relationships

- Raised walls and wrought iron fence at sidewalks
- Sight line to public library
- Restaurants, ground level activation



PARK SCALE COMPARISON

2/3 ACRE



KEY

- Focal Point
- Node/Point of Interest
- Area of Use
- Sight Line
- Circulation

CASE STUDIES

BRYANT PARK



Image Credit: scenariojournal.com



Image Credit: Wally Gobetz

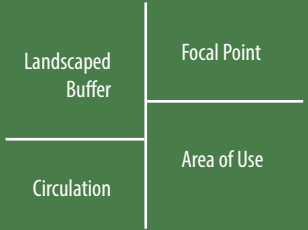


Image Credit: Lin Da Saphan



Image Credit: Fadi Kheir

CASE STUDIES

OLD POST OFFICE SQUARE

Case Study 2: Old Post Office Square - Boston, MA

1) Circulation Pattern

- ADA compliant pedestrian pathways
- Sub-surface parking garage vehicular access

2) Use Zones

- Natural grass open lawn, fountain plaza

3) Focal Points

- Interactive water feature

4) Nodes & Points of Interest

- Vine trellis and seating area, restrooms and café

5) Edges & Relationships

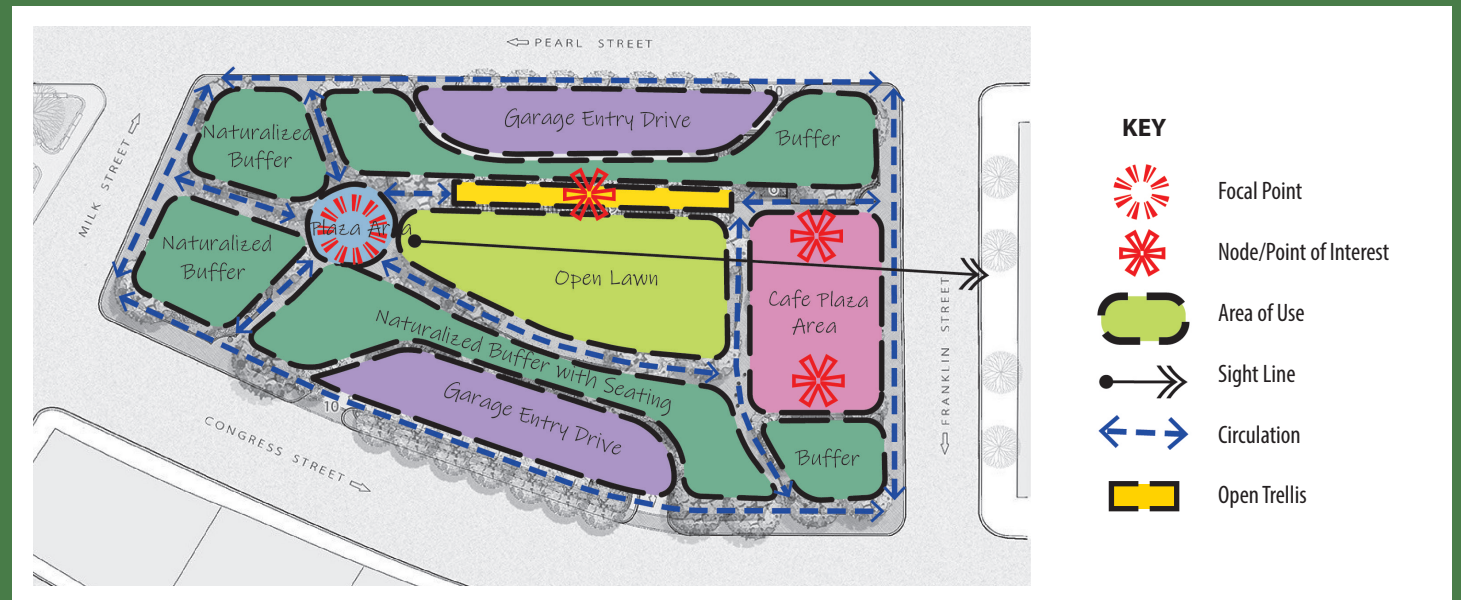
- Raised seat wall planting areas
- Sight line to the old post office



Image Credit: Ed Wonssek

PARK SCALE COMPARISON

2/3 ACRE



CASE STUDIES

OLD POST OFFICE SQUARE



Image Credit: Ed Wonssek



Image Credit: Ed Wonssek

Node / Point
of Interest

Focal Point

Circulation

Area of Use



Image Credit: Google Streetview



Image Credit: Ed Wonssek

CASE STUDIES

ROCKVILLE TOWN SQUARE

Case Study 3: Rockville Town Square - Rockville, MD

1) Circulation Pattern

- ADA compliant pedestrian pathways

2) Use Zones

- Synthetic turf lawn, fountain plaza, pavilion plaza, seating areas and game tables, vegetated buffer

3) Focal Points

- Covered pavilion

4) Nodes & Points of Interest

- Ornamental boulders
- Interactive water feature
- Ice skating rink (winter)

5) Edges & Relationships

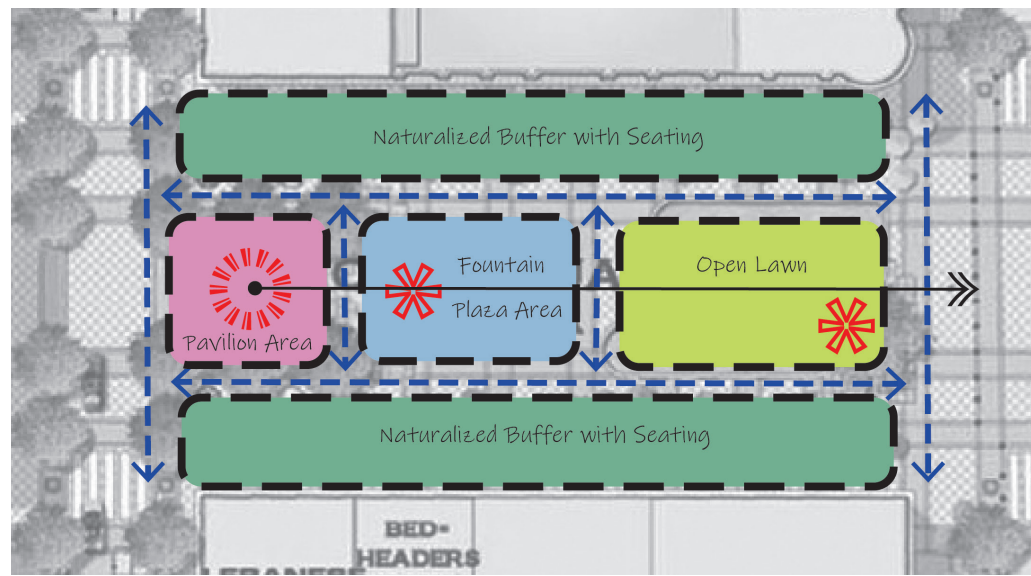
- Bollards and flush crosswalks
- Sight line to adjacent clock tower building



Image Credit: City of Rockville

PARK SCALE COMPARISON

2/3 ACRE



KEY

- Focal Point
- Node/Point of Interest
- Area of Use
- Sight Line
- Circulation

CASE STUDIES

ROCKVILLE TOWN SQUARE



Image Credit: Simmons B. Buntin



Image Credit: City of Rockville

Node / Point of Interest

Focal Point

Circulation

Area of Use



Image Credit: Google Streetview



Image Credit: Dan Reed via Flickr

CASE STUDIES

OLD TOWN SQUARE

Case Study 4: Old Town Square - City of Fairfax, VA

1) Circulation Pattern

- ADA compliant pedestrian pathways
- Surface parking vehicular access

2) Use Zones

- Lawn areas, plaza areas, buffer plantings, parking lots

3) Focal Points

- Interactive water feature

4) Nodes & Points of Interest

- Monument sign, seating areas, clock tower, shade trellis

5) Edges & Relationships

- Water feature/retaining wall and monument sign



Image Credit: Fairfax County

PARK SCALE COMPARISON

2/3 ACRE



KEY	
	Focal Point
	Node/Point of Interest
	Area of Use
	Sight Line
	Circulation
	Open Trellis

CASE STUDIES

OLD TOWN SQUARE

Node / Point of Interest

Circulation

Area of Use

Focal Point



DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

5C.2 LINEAR PARK AND TRAIL DESIGN STRATEGIES

Linear Parks are characterized by an elongated shape and usually occur in an area between destinations or points of interest. Linear Parks are more than a single recreational trail. They can serve many different purposes including active and passive recreation facilities (e.g., fitness stations, dog runs, seating areas) and can link to existing pedestrian and bicycle elements. Linear Parks can also provide opportunities for resource protection and offer natural areas with trails and waysides for a combination of active and passive enjoyment.

The size and design of Linear Parks in McLean will vary depending on their context and function. They may function as a green spine facilitating pedestrian connections either alongside of a street or as part of mid-block connections where a street is not desired. Due to the variety of Linear Parks, typical facilities will vary but will generally consist of a continuous multi-use trail unless adjacent to a roadway, waysides and seating, and other active and/or passive recreation components.

Location and Connectivity

- Linear Parks should seamlessly connect with other aspects of the public realm, such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes, and be part of the interconnected framework with visible and coordinated connections with parks on adjacent sites.

Uses and Functions

- Linear Parks should comprise a balance of passive and active recreational spaces. The trail within the Linear Park may be considered an active amenity provided it is at least 8-foot wide to accommodate multiple users, such as walkers, joggers, and cyclists, and is supported by additional facilities such as fitness stations and/or distance markers.
- Unprogrammed lawn space or open plaza spaces are encouraged to be provided at given moments along the Linear Park. Such spaces should be wide enough to accommodate seating opportunities and unprogrammed uses. An open

LEFT

Linear Park located in McLean that contains exercise facilities, bike racks, and bollard lighting adjacent to the multi-use, asphalt path
Image Credit: Fairfax County



Signet Linear Park, McLean, VA

RIGHT

Linear Park that also provides recreational and connectivity functions. Lighting, wide pathways, seating, and landscaping are important features
Image Credit: Craig Duncan, Daniel Showalter



Centennial Mall & Potter Quad, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

lawn space should at a minimum be large enough for a variety of recreational uses, such as a pick-up game of soccer, volleyball, etc.

Lighting and Wayfinding

- Visibility should be unimpeded throughout Linear Parks, especially at turns, and enhanced with lighting fixtures that coordinate with street and other lighting in McLean.
- Wayfinding elements should be in high visibility places and may include maps, distinctly designed signage that incorporates graphical elements such as icons, and multi-lingual text. Additional guidance is in Chapter 6.

Amenities

- Minimum 8-foot wide paved walkway, 10-foot wide is preferred.

- Linear Parks should offer a variety of seating and shade opportunities in the form of distinctly paved plaza spaces.
- Bicycle parking should be located near building entrances and other activity areas.
- Distinctive landscaping should be a defining feature of the Linear Park. Linear Parks should be generously landscaped with native plantings in naturalized settings, and creatively integrate stormwater management facilities.



The Goods Line, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia

BOTTOM

Linear Park with a mix of active and passive elements including table tennis, green lawn, seating, lighting

Image Credit: UTS.edu

DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

5C.3 POCKET PARK DESIGN STRATEGIES

Pocket Parks tend to be the most flexible of the park typologies.

Size

- Pocket Parks are small-scale, open spaces incorporated into developments and are designed for casual use by people working and living in the immediate area. They typically range in size from 1/10 acre to 2/3 acre in area.
- When determining a Pocket Park's size, any adjacent Building Zone and public right-of-way should not be included.
- Planting beds, unique paving materials and variations in paving patterns are the best ways to delineate the boundaries of pocket parks.

Location

Although Pocket Parks can be appropriately integrated into many urban settings, they can be most effective in the following situations:

1. On or adjacent to a historically or culturally important place.
2. Adjacent to an existing retail location or intersection.

3. Adjacent to a proposed retail or other commercial building use that will help activate the space.

Programming

- Pocket Parks, due to their smaller scale, tend to function more as passive spaces supported by social gathering and potentially some small-scale active recreation.

Safety

- Pocket Parks should have clear signage and wayfinding to invite park visitors into the space.
- Fences or gates are not recommended, but may be required by code.

Amenities and Design

- Maximize sun exposure in locations between tall buildings.
- Consider the use of green walls whenever possible.
- Movable seating, along with lighting, and trash and recycling receptacles should be provided.
- Seating options in both shady and sunny locations are encouraged.

LEFT

A small, public Pocket Park that balances green space with seating areas and shade and light. Green walls soften the blank walls

Image Credit: CCD Parks



John F. Collins Park, Philadelphia, PA

RIGHT

Pocket Park designed for older residents that integrates stormwater management, a shade pavilion, seating, walkways, and habitat for wildlife

Image Credit: LSG Landscape Architecture



Sunrise McLean Heritage Park, McLean, VA

References

The park and open space concept along with design principles should guide the future development of parks in the McLean CBC. For each design principle, a series of design strategies have been developed to implement or enhance the policies and plans set forth in:

- The Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2017 edition, McLean Planning District Section, McLean Community Business Center Section, pg. 18
- The Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2017 Edition, Parks and Recreation Section, Appendix 2: Fairfax County Urban Parks Framework, pg. 15
- Volume 1: Urban Design Guidelines for Fairfax County Commercial Revitalization Districts, Chapter 3: Open Space
- Fairfax County Park Authority's Great Parks, Great Communities Parks & Recreation System Master Plan
- Fairfax County Park Authority's Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Access (PROSA) Strategy (adoption anticipated in late 2023)