3 OPEN SPACE

INTENT

As the County's CRDs and CRAs continue to grow and evolve, there is an opportunity to support and complement new development with a variety of open spaces that enhance the quality of life for those who live and work in, and visit these areas. These spaces may be publicly-owned spaces or privately-owned spaces available for public use. They may vary in size and character - from larger parks and greens to smaller plazas and pocket parks - and offer a range of experiences, including active and passive recreation, programmed activities and events, playspaces, and areas for quiet respite and conversation.

Regardless of size or type, all open spaces and trails should be welcoming, comfortable and accessible while imparting a distinct sense of place that extends to the larger CRD or CRA. They should foster community connections by bringing people together for gatherings large and small, casual and programmed, while serving as catalysts for economic development. They should preserve and protect natural assets, while adding new greenery to balance and complement new development. Collectively, these open spaces should function as a larger network of parks and open spaces that connect neighborhoods, natural areas and economic centers with linkages to the larger countywide network of open spaces and trails. Trails and open spaces should connect neighborhoods and wildlife habitats by serving as natural corridors for people and animals.

This chapter describes the major typologies of urban open spaces included in the County's Urban Parks Framework and identifies a series of design principles and strategies to ensure that these open spaces maximize their potential benefits to the CRDs and CRAs. These design recommendations build on previous open space planning efforts, and the design of parks and open spaces should be consistent with the recommendations in the following documents:
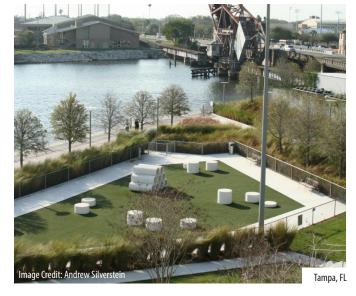
– The planned open space network as described in each area's Comprehensive Plan.

– The open space network map for the individual CRD and CRA, as contained in the Volume II: District Design Guidelines.

Image Credit: Landezine

San Francisco, CA

Image Credit: soapboxmedia

Blue Ash, OH

Image Credit: Andrew Silverstein

Tampa, FL

Image Credit: visithoustontexas

Houston, TX

Urban parks designed to be compact, multifunctional, and relate to adjacent uses and context; design elements provide opportunities for a range of active and passive recreation and ensure that these spaces function as community gathering places

3A
URBAN PARKS FRAMEWORK

Urban parks are generally the types of parks that will be found in the CRDs and CRAs, as they provide functions, uses, amenities, and visual form that are appropriate in an urban context. Urban parks are important because residents in these areas are likely to have little or no private outdoor space and, therefore, may rely on publicly-accessible open space for socializing, recreation and exercise, and enjoying the outdoors. Similarly, workers and visitors seek attractive, safe and comfortable spaces for leisure and social activities.

The Fairfax County Urban Parks Framework includes several distinct types of parks: Civic Plazas, Recreation-Focused Parks, Linear Parks, Common Greens, and Pocket Parks. These park types, each of which is described briefly below, span a continuum of purposes, uses, sizes, and features that can flexibly accommodate a 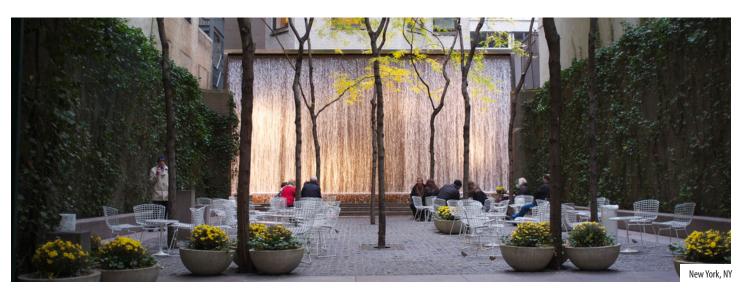broad spectrum of needs. Ideally, each CRD and CRA will contain a variety of urban parks in order to serve local leisure pursuits, support revitalization goals, and create or enhance an area's sense of culture, liveliness, and identity. Other methods may be considered to fulfill community park needs, including rooftop parks, recreation facilities provided within commercial buildings, and redevelopment of nearby existing parks with new park facilities. The precise number, size and arrangement of the park types should be determined by evaluating the demand created by the development, as well as by referencing the area's Comprehensive Plan recommendations regarding parks.

For more detailed recommendations pertaining to Urban Parks, please refer to the Fairfax County Urban Parks Framework located in Appendix 2 of the Parks & Recreation Chapter in the Comprehensive Plan, Policy Plan.

RIGHT
Plaza with programmed pedestrian activity areas; active ground floor uses, landscaping and pedestrian-scaled lighting lend vibrancy to the space
Image Credit: thelightingpractice.com

Arlington, VA

New York, NY

TOP
Pocket park with movable seating, shade and a water wall create an active gathering place and community amenity
Image Credit: Theodora Park

Tampa, FL

Sydney, Australia

BOTTOM LEFT
Recreation-focused urban park that includes a trail, splash pad, playground, pavilions, a Common Green and a bandshell for events and music
Image Credit: Plan Hillsborough

BOTTOM RIGHT
Linear park with active recreation amenities including a trail, dining tables, study pods, table tennis, and active water play features
Image Credit: ASPECT Studios

URBAN PARK TYPES

New York, NY

Image Credit: Fairfax County

CIVIC PLAZA:
Civic Plazas include public gathering spaces set aside for social purposes and that are supportive of commercial activities, such as open air markets, summer concerts, festivals, outdoor exercise classes and/or special events. They are often planned at the intersection of important streets, within a town center or at other significant locations, and serve as community focal points. The size of a Civic Plaza will generally depend on the context and planned programming, but should be a minimum of one acre in size.

Arlington, VA

Image Credit: Fort Myer Construction

RECREATION-FOCUSED PARK:
Recreation-Focused Parks include facilities such as athletic fields and multi-use courts, along with associated amenities such as trails, seating, tot lots, shade structures, water features, picnic areas and restrooms. The size of the park should be appropriate to accommodate the proposed recreation facilities, while recognizing space constraints that may exist within the CRDs and CRAs.

One specialized type of Recreation-Focused Park is a dog park. While dog parks fit into this urban park type, they are generally sized similar to a Pocket Park. Dog parks should include the following types of features: special surfacing, ideally grass or synthetic turf grass, fencing that is a 4 to 5-feet high, access vestibules, shade, benches, and a drinking water source.

LINEAR PARK:

Linear Parks are continuous spaces, generally designed for recreational use that may include sidewalks or trails, recreational amenities, public art, wayfinding signage, and environmental amenities. Linear greenways that utilize urban stream valleys for trails and trail connections are a form of Linear Park.

Image Credit: Landezine
Dallas, TX

COMMON GREEN:

Common Greens are flexible open spaces with lawn areas that serve as the recreational and social focus of a neighborhood. These spaces may include amenities such as tot lots, playgrounds, fitness courses, paved trails, and sport courts. While the size of Common Greens depends on each space's context and function, they should generally be a minimum of one acre in size.

Image Credit: Landezine
New York, NY

POCKET PARK:

Usually less than one acre in size, pocket parks are small-scale open spaces incorporated into developments or located on small, underutilized pieces of public or privately-owned land. Typically designed for casual, passive use by people working and living in the immediate area, these spaces may consist of hardscape elements, lawns, or landscaped areas and may incorporate elements such as seating, water features and art.

Image Credit: world-architects
New York, NY

3B
OPEN SPACE

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Contribute to, and integrate with, a network of on-site and off-site open spaces. The planned parks and open spaces in the CRDs and CRAs are the primary components of an open space network intended to provide a variety of amenities to meet the needs of the area-wide population. On-site open spaces should be designed to integrate with other nearby open spaces to form a network of parks and plazas. This network should contain pedestrian-friendly spaces that serve to draw people to these areas.

Create and define a sense of place. Well-designed open spaces help to create and define a sense of place by providing environments that foster social interactions, build connections between neighborhoods, increase civic pride, and support active, healthy lifestyles. Open spaces should be designed to incorporate existing natural features and utilize sustainable design practices.

Program open spaces to support recreation, education and public events. Safe, attractive, and publicly-accessible open spaces should be designed to provide recreational opportunities and support public events. They can incorporate elements that are reflective of the area's history; provide educational information; and, use design features that reinforce the character of the area. Careful attention should be paid to ensure that the design of an open space supports the intended use, whether it be active, recreational, or passive. Programming of spaces is critical to their ability to attract users. Designers, the community, and the county staff should work together to identify potential programming, recreational activities and special events to ensure that facilities are designed appropriately to accommodate these activities.

DESIGN STRATEGIES

1 **OPEN SPACE DESIGN**

A. Parks and open spaces, among other local serving destinations, should be located within reasonable walking distances of residential areas and other uses.

B. The design of an open space should respond to its context, support and complement adjacent land uses, and incorporate existing natural elements:

   i. Where appropriate and feasible, the design of open spaces should respond to, and support activities related to adjacent land uses (for example, outdoor seating areas for patrons to enjoy food or beverages from adjacent business).

   ii. Existing natural features, such as terrain and topography, mature trees, and other environmental features, should be incorporated into the design of open spaces. Minimize disturbance to existing vegetation, including soils that are in good condition.

C. Plazas, parks and other open spaces should be designed to protect pedestrians from parked and moving vehicles, weather, and adjacent undesirable uses. Features that can be used to visually and physically buffer pedestrians include parking lanes, trees, landscaping, low walls, bollards, and art.

D. Open spaces should contain appropriate levels of seating, lighting, shade, plantings, and other amenities to make the spaces desirable places in which to spend time.

E. The design of open spaces should accommodate a range of experiences and activities within a single open space. For example, an open space design could include distinct spaces or "outdoor rooms" with different characters (i.e., green and secluded, open and visible, spaces for passive use, and spaces designed and programmed for specific activities) as well as flexible spaces that can be adapted for a variety of uses and activities.

DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

F. Publicly-accessible open spaces should be welcoming and accessible to users of all ages and abilities; as such, they should be highly-visible, clearly-signed, well-delineated from private spaces, and easily accessed by those with special mobility needs.

G. Public art should be integrated into all park types, but particularly into high-visibility park spaces such as Civic Plazas, Common Greens, and Linear Parks.

    i. Consideration should be given to incorporating art that serves a dual function, such as "playable art" that serves both an artistic and play function (for example, mosaics incorporated into a water fountain that serve as an interactive play feature for children).

    ii. Additional guidance regarding public art is provided in *Section 6C ("Public Art")*.

H. Low walls and raised planters should be considered in plazas, pocket parks and other gathering spaces.

    i. If walls are to be used for seating purposes, they should be 18 to 24 inches high and a minimum of 18 inches deep.

    ii. Walls above 5-feet in height should be avoided within public spaces and along street edges.

I. Water features should be incorporated as landmarks, focal points, and places to play that enhance the open space. Additional details regarding water features are provided in *Section 6D ("Water Features")*.

J. Public open spaces are encouraged to be integrated into small, othewise unprogrammed spaces. Potential locations include street corners and curb extensions on busy pedestrian streets, alongside sidewalks on streets with a wide Landscape Panel and Amenity Zone, or on undeveloped lots. Midblock passages and the spaces between buildings should be designed as linear open spaces with outdoor seating areas and other amenities surrounding pathways, while providing access to midblock destinations and parking. These spaces should serve the dual function of providing safe and inviting pedestrian connections to the rears of buildings, while also providing outdoor amenities for those who live and work nearby.

K. Trail connections should link open spaces within a CRD or CRA to surrounding neighborhoods and destinations, including other open spaces. Additional trail linkages should provide connections to the larger countywide trail network.

BOTTOM
Water feature creates a playful, welcoming environment for families
Image Credit: parentmap.com

Seattle, WA

DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

2 **PROGRAMMING AND AMENITIES**

A. As appropriate, both active and passive recreational amenities should be incorporated into the overall design of open spaces. For example, recreational facilities, play structures, public art, and water features can help attract people into the open space and encourage a variety of activities, while amenities such as seating, tables and chairs, shade, trees, grass, and lighting can make visitors feel comfortable and provide opportunities to linger.

B. Open space features should be included that support a range of activities that occur beyond daylight hours and throughout the seasons of the year, especially in areas where an active open space will contribute to the vibrancy and economic health of the area.

   i. Open spaces should include features such as seasonal plantings or displays and/or water features; outdoor heaters; overhead weather protection; movable seating

and tables; opportunities for outdoor dining; sufficient pedestrian lighting; trees for shade; co-located trash and recycling receptacles (where pickup and regular maintenance is available); and, Wi-Fi service.

   ii. Parks, plazas, and other open spaces should be well lit. Full cut-off optics should be used to direct lighting downward.

   iii. If events such as festivals or farmer's markets are anticipated, electric service should be provided.

C. The design of open spaces should incorporate opportunities for active play, to make the CRDs and CRAs welcoming and healthy environments for children and families.

   i. A variety of playspaces that challenge and interest a range of ages and abilities should be incorporated into open spaces. Where sufficient space exists and where appropriate, designated playground areas may be established. In smaller spaces, elements such as

LEFT
Open space activated with programming for all ages
Image Credit: Scioto Mile

Columbus, OH

RIGHT
Activated open space with areas for play and relaxation
Image Credit: Bethesda Magazine

Rockville, MD

individual play structures, playable art, or water features can provide compact yet engaging opportunities for play.

ii. Seating and other amenities should be provided within view of playspaces so that parents and caregivers have places to sit and socialize while monitoring playing children.

3 OPEN SPACE PARKING AND ACCESS

A. Adequate parking should be provided to serve those who are not within walking distance of an active recreational park space. Shared parking with adjacent uses is encouraged to minimize the number of parking spaces required.

B. Vehicular access to open spaces should be limited; if necessary for maintenance and emergency purposes, such access should be separated from open space activities to the maximum extent feasible.

i. If emergency access is necessary, breakaway or retractable bollards should be provided in coordination with the Fire Marshal's office.

ii. If dedicated emergency access beyond walkways is needed, soil stabilization methods should be used to provide an adequate sub-base that is covered with turf or permeable pavers.

C. Wherever possible, prioritize the planting of native, pollinator and bird-friendly plants as part of the landscape design in green spaces of all sizes and types.

i. Strive to increase the quality and amount of habitat for pollinator and bird species through plant selection and open space design.

ii. Incorporate native plantings to the maximum extent feasible.

4 MATERIALS AND MAINTENANCE

A. Materials selections should be used to define the edges of spaces and to visually enhance entire spaces, such as plazas.

B. Design decisions, such as the selection of materials, should consider durability and ease of maintenance.

C. Businesses adjacent to open spaces are encouraged to play a role in trash collection, cleaning and litter removal to ensure that spaces are being attended to regularly and remain attractive.

D. Landscaped open spaces requiring irrigation should include an automated irrigation system using collected rainwater and/or recycled gray water to the fullest extent possible.

BOTTOM
Material selection and plaza design visually enhance the pedestrian environment and help delineate spaces and uses
Image Credit:BCT Architects

Arlington, VA