



INFRASTRUCTURE PRINCIPLES: PARKS ARE INFRASTRUCTURE

PARKS DO MORE THAN YOU THINK. Parks are an essential part of our civic infrastructure and require investment to meet 21st-century challenges and ensure prosperity. When functioning to their fullest potential, parks provide safe, convenient, and equitable access to recreation, well-documented human health benefits, connection with nature, reduced crime, increased property values, and more vibrant local economies. Parks also function as green infrastructure that performs a public good similar to hard infrastructure, which assures water, power, communications, and mobility.

Across the nation, from grain belt to sunbelt to rust belt, to the east, west, and gulf coasts, the suburbs and downtowns of American cities seek to retain or attract residents and businesses. This has raised the pressure to provide parks and recreation services to maintain and improve quality of life. To keep our cities livable and globally competitive, we need new and refurbished parks, just as we need functional hard infrastructure. These three principles demonstrate how recognizing parks as infrastructure will benefit communities.

1. USING PARKS AS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE REDUCES DISASTER RISK

Extreme weather is causing residents, elected officials, and community advocates to rethink municipal safety in the face of more frequent and increasingly violent floods, fire, and winds. Resourceful decision-makers are making new use of parks to enhance critical urban infrastructure, manage stormwater, reduce community risk, and address public health issues.

2. MIXING GREEN AND HARD INFRASTRUCTURE PROVIDES MULTIPLE BENEFITS

Decades of underinvestment has left most American cities with an infrastructure deficit that threatens their long-term economic stability with water and wastewater, one of the largest deferred infrastructure costs. “Mixed-use infrastructure” that combines parks and trails as green infrastructure with traditional hard infrastructure reduces the cost of building and maintaining large underground pipes and tunnels while improving the environment and creating close-to-home recreation.

3. MIXED-USE INFRASTRUCTURE LEVERAGES RESOURCES

The incremental cost to major infrastructure projects of public open space improvements is proportionally minimal. For a modest increase in overall project cost, mixed-use infrastructure delivers immensely popular and visible community benefits. Combining public and private investment in mixed-use infrastructure projects also makes wise use of limited funds.



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GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE EXAMPLES - SAVING MONEY WHILE ADDING ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

City of Houston

The City of Houston's 160 acres of parkland (Buffalo Bayou) improved flood reduction by 400%; increased employment from 1,400 to 11,000; increased retail sales from \$10.5 million to \$57 million; and increased property value by 20%.

City of Philadelphia

Philadelphia's Green City, Clean Waters program will invest \$2 billion in parks and green infrastructure to capture 85% of the city's stormwater runoff. The program not only will lead to green jobs but also will save \$14 billion that would otherwise be spent on underground pipes and tunnels. And Philadelphians will enjoy beautiful parks for decades to come.

City of Atlanta

Historic Fourth Ward Park and Reservoir in Atlanta shows what is possible. Atlanta's Department of Watershed Management saved \$16 million by constructing a water retention pond to mitigate flooding, rather than tunneling and installing a single network of pipes to handle the problem. The park is one of many that are linked to the Atlanta BeltLine, which has been described as the most comprehensive transportation and economic-development effort ever undertaken by the city. This visionary project includes a 22-mile network of parks and trails connecting 45 neighborhoods and providing new transportation options. The park and the nearby Ponce City Market have attracted an additional \$600 million in commercial investment and residential construction. Quality of life has surged, and community services have improved dramatically.

A CALL TO ACTION

Urban parks are not luxuries; they are essential infrastructure for 21st-century cities. Parks can help cities with aging infrastructure to thrive and save billions of dollars.

City Parks Alliance urges the administration and Congress to consider parks as critical components of every infrastructure package moving forward.