

# [PLAN]DC

THE DC OFFICE OF PLANNING



## PARKS, RECREATION + OPEN SPACE

### OVERVIEW

The District's parks system and green space are some of its most valuable resources. These features help define the District's character, protect natural resources, and contribute to community building and wayfinding. The District has a wide array of parks and open spaces ranging from neighborhood parks and plazas to community parks with athletic fields and recreation centers. Additionally, the District runs a vibrant recreation program that provides structured activities for youth, seniors, and families. The District's recreation programs support health and wellness, build self-esteem and pride, and connect residents to one another and to their communities. The city's parks also attract visitors and contribute to the tourism industry. DC has over 7,600 acres of parkland, which is one of the highest "acres per resident" rates in the nation. However, 74% of parks and open space is under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, and 16% is under the control of DC Public Schools. Despite its large inventory of parklands and recreational facilities. Some parts of the District have better access to open space than others. The Comprehensive Plan helps the District respond to future changes in the demand for park and recreation services in response to growth, demographic changes, and emerging recreational trends.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Improving parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces, and planning for new facilities, is an important priority for District residents. During the engagement process, which included 7 "PlanDC" citywide community meetings and various engagement forums throughout the last year, participants weighed in on this topic and indicated strong support for new parks and improved park maintenance and programming throughout the city. Specifically, the community would like high quality dog parks, parklets (turning parking spaces into mini park spaces), increased tree canopy, more modernized recreation centers, and additional programs for youth and seniors. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for continued stewardship of parks and open spaces so that they are continually improved over time. Finally, community members expressed the need to make parks accessible to nearby neighborhoods through improved transportation and wayfinding.



Photo Credit: Capitol Riverfront BID

# BACKGROUND + FACTS

## ACRES OF PARKS

**7,821**  
ACRES  
OF PARKS  
& OPEN SPACE



Department of Parks + Recreation

Other

10%

16%

**74%**

National Park Service



Source: Parks and Recreation Master Plan

## PASSIVE AND ACTIVE RECREATION AREAS

**95**

Playgrounds

**20**

Splash Pads

**50**

Aquatic Facilities

**5**

Partner Farms

**12**

Dog Parks

**135**

Athletic Fields

**11**

Indoor Pools

**12**

Outdoor Pools

**22**

Community Gardens

**4**

Urban Gardens

**336**

Courts

**5**

Skate Parks

## ACRES PER 1,000

**12.1**

ACRES OF PARK SPACE  
PER 1,000 RESIDENTS

Source:



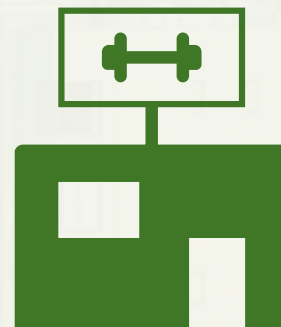
## RECREATION CENTERS

**73** RECREATION  
CENTERS



Highest # of recreation centers per capita nationwide!

Source:



## RECREATION PROGRAMS

**900** ACRES  
OF GREEN SPACE

Source:

**400** EVENTS &  
PROGRAMS PER  
YEAR!

Source:



# COMP PLAN DIRECTION

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element includes the District of Columbia's official policies for parks, recreation, and open space. It recognizes the important role parks play in recreation, aesthetics, neighborhood character, health, and environmental quality. It includes policies on related topics such as recreational facility development, the use of private open space, and the creation of trails to better connect the District's open spaces and neighborhoods. In addition, each Area Element includes a summary of existing community assets and recommendations pertaining to parks, recreation, and open space in that area. The District has also developed a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that includes detailed guidance on facilities, recreational programming, and direction for specific parks.

## PLAN AND MANAGE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES.

The Comprehensive Plan includes current policy direction to 1) classify and manage the District's parks and open space assets; 2) close gaps in recreational service delivery; 3) protect existing assets; and 4) meet the needs of a growing and changing city by expanding DC's parkland inventory.

### Example:

*Policy PROS-1.1.3: Park Diversity. Provide a diverse range of recreational experiences in parks within the District of Columbia, including a balance between passive and active recreational uses, and a mix of local-serving, region-serving, and national recreational uses. 804.10*

*Policy PROS-1.1.4: Mini-Parks. Develop a coherent identity for mini-parks through a coordinated approach to management among the various government agencies that can define the role of mini-parks in the larger park system, help the agencies manage them more efficiently, and promote system-wide investment of resources. 804.10a This goal aligns with SDC Action 3.5 (Create small parks and green spaces in areas with inadequate open space).*

*Policy PROS-1.2.1: Closing the Gaps. Achieve a better distribution of parks in all neighborhoods of the city. This will require a priority on improving or expanding parks in: (a) more densely populated neighborhoods with limited open space; (b) areas that are more than ½ mile from a neighborhood or community park (or a federal park that serves an equivalent function); (c) areas where substantial new housing growth is expected, based on the forecasts of the Comprehensive Plan; and (d) areas where the existing recreation centers and parks are in poor condition.*

*Policy PROS-1.2.2: Improving Access. Improve access to the major park and open space areas within the city through pedestrian safety and street crossing improvements, bike lanes and storage areas, and adjustments to bus routes. Improving access to parks and open spaces for all residents aligns with SDC Nature Goal 3 (By 2032, provide parkland or natural space within a 10-minute walk of all residents).*

*Policy PROS-1.2.3: Responding To Community Change. Update and improve existing parks in response to changing demographics, cultural norms, and community needs and preferences. Parks should reflect the identity and needs of the communities they serve.*



## IMPROVE PARK AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES.

The Comp Plan identifies the need to periodically assess existing park and recreational facilities and provides general direction on how gaps might be closed and how new facilities can be provided to meet future needs. It specifically calls for community input in the needs assessment process and strives to direct funding for recreational facilities to the neighborhoods where they are needed most.

### Example:

*Policy PROS-2.1.4: Responding to Local Preferences. Provide amenities and facilities in District parks that are responsive to the preferences and needs of the neighborhoods around the parks. Park planning should recognize that there are different leisure time interests in different parts of the city. To better understand these differences, the community must be involved in key planning and design decisions.*

*Policy PROS-2.1.5: Adapting to Changing Needs. Allow the development of facilities which respond to changing preferences and community needs in appropriate District parks, including fenced dog exercise areas (dog parks), skate parks, tot lots, and water spray parks.*



**ENHANCE OPEN SPACE NETWORKS.** The Comprehensive Plan provides an overview of the different types of open space in the city, noting that much of the park inventory is under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The Plan explores the concepts of “mini parks” to better utilize small green spaces to serve neighborhoods.

**Example:**

*Policy PROS-1.1.4: Mini-Parks. Develop a coherent identity for mini-parks through a coordinated approach to management among the various government agencies that can define the role of mini-parks in the larger park system, help the agencies manage them more efficiently, and promote system-wide investment of resources.*

*Policy PROS-3.1.1: Monumental Core. Preserve the integrity of the National Mall open space, and advocate for federal plans and programs that protect this area from inappropriate or excessive development.*

*Policy PROS-3.2.2: Connecting Neighborhoods to the Rivers. Develop open space linkages between the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers and adjacent neighborhoods, using stream tributaries such as Watts Branch and Pope Branch as a framework for linear parks between the shoreline and nearby residential areas.*

**EXPAND ACCESS TO PARKS AND OPEN SPACES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS.** The Comp Plan describes how the District should leverage existing partnerships to improve access to open space for all District residents. This also includes more creative use of assets such as school yards and incorporating open space in new neighborhoods.

**Example:**

*Policy PROS-4.1.2: Joint Planning and Management Strategies. Develop joint planning and management strategies for all parks where the District of Columbia and National Park Service have overlapping responsibilities. Use coordinated standards for lighting, fencing, walkways, maintenance, and security in these areas.*

