



6

Urban Parks

6. URBAN PARKS

Cities are made up of numerous elements, including walkable streets, interesting architecture, vibrant neighborhoods and unique amenities. The best cities in the world, however, also include a cohesive and comprehensive urban park network as an organizing element that connects neighborhoods and provides a setting for the urban elements.

Parks, recreation areas and other open spaces enhance the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors. Parks provide community and environmental benefits, and can also add economic value to surrounding properties. Some of the most prestigious neighborhoods in the world are located near highly-renowned parks.

To be successful, Tysons must include a comprehensive park network. The new vision for Tysons builds on its economic strength, accommodates greater population growth, and provides a healthy, beautiful place to live, work and play. Integral to this vision is the creation of a park network that serves the community in a variety of ways. Parks provide an opportunity to connect with nature in a way that might not otherwise exist in an urban area.

Parks provide visual breaks in the urban landscape, create calming areas of green in an urban environment, and provide places for people to enjoy passive and active recreation. Public parks and open spaces are important for residents of higher density neighborhoods who may lack access to private yards or recreation facilities. Further, urban parks improve air quality, reduce stormwater runoff, provide biodiversity and improve community health.



Along with the streetscape, parks provide locations where the public interacts and socializes. As such, it is important that high-quality parks are provided in the appropriate size, location, and type to address the needs of the community.

In Tysons, there is no minimum open space requirement in the zoning ordinance. However, an urban parkland requirement based on growth in residents and workers has been established in the Comprehensive Plan. The urban park requirement is calculated based on the amount of gross floor area (GFA) of space, and the amount of people expected to live and/or work in a development. Requirements for athletic fields and recreational needs are calculated according to the policies and standards set forth in the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth four urban park types as found in the County's Urban Parks Framework. The Framework, as endorsed by the Fairfax County Park Authority Board, identified the four urban park types as: the pocket park, the common green, the civic plaza, and the recreation-focused park. The Framework is a tool to help plan for and develop urban parks in urbanizing centers, such as Tysons. These parks can range from the smallest pocket park to the largest recreation-focused park encompassing many acres and including a wide range of activities. The four urban park types include a variety of purposes, features, and sizes that respond to the wide variety of recreational and leisure pursuits expected in urban areas. The following sections include an overview and examples of each of the four park types. Design suggestions for each park type are also provided. Further recommendations which apply to all parks regardless of type follow in subsequent sections.



Opposite Top: Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA. Image: Wikimedia.org

Opposite Bottom: Boston Common, Boston, MA. Image: Sunshinerunning.wordpress.com

Above Right: City Garden, St. Louis, MO. Image: Urbanophile.com

Below Right: Bryant Park, New York, NY. Image: Meetup.com

Previous: Millennium Park, Image: Illinois Institute of Technology

6.2 Pocket Park

A pocket park is a very urban small park that is usually less than one acre in size (typical range is one-tenth acre to one-quarter acre). Pocket parks are generally located adjacent to areas with high volumes of pedestrian traffic. Pocket parks are intimate and act as a sanctuary from the urban environment. Pocket parks can offer play space for children, places to eat lunch in the shade or read next to a fountain. They can also offer opportunities for social interaction. They are easily seen and accessed from the streetscape and are framed by buildings and active uses. Each pocket park should have its own identity and be integrated into the community in which it is located. Planting, lawn areas, hardscape, fountains, seating, art, and play equipment could all be appropriate in a pocket park.

Example: Paley Park, New York, NY

Paley Park offers a unique, peaceful place to sit and provides respite from the bustling commercial neighborhood in which it is located. The park is small, but is appropriately scaled to the adjacent architecture and offers ample room for medium and small gatherings. Framed by adjacent buildings, Paley Park offers a sense of seclusion and separation from the urban streetscape and adjacent roadway and creates the sense of a comfortable garden room. The beautiful fountain and silhouetted trees draw visitors into the space, and the fountain serves as both a visual amenity and an auditory buffer to the noises of city traffic and sirens. There are attractive, moveable chairs that allow visitors to control their interaction within the space and there is a café where visitors can purchase refreshments. The plantings are few, but offer the appropriate amount of dappled shade from the trees and seasonal color in the planters.

Design Suggestions:

- ◆ Locate pocket parks appropriately so that they can best serve the immediate neighborhood. Pocket parks should be provided in areas of high-volume pedestrian activity, with easy access and high visibility to the street.
- ◆ Surround pocket parks with active uses, like retail or office that provide a beneficial synergy. Parks which are surrounded by parking garages, mechanical or service areas generate no such synergy and will not be as successful.
- ◆ Due to the smaller size of pocket parks, carefully consider the potential microclimate created by both the park and surrounding buildings. The park should optimize sun and shade conditions.
- ◆ Provide clear pedestrian access to the park. The pocket park should be well-integrated with adjacent streetscapes. As such, consider transitions in hardscape and planting materials between the streetscape and the park.
- ◆ See the Urban Park Evaluation Checklist in Appendix A for additional recommendations.





Above Left: Paley Park, chairs. Image: Flickr, tayloz

Below Left: Paley Park fountain

Above Right: Paley Park from across the street, wheelchair access and gates.

Below Right: Paley Park paving, Paley Park snack bar.

6.2 Pocket Park

Other Pocket Park Examples



Pocket park behind 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York City, NY

Allows people to walk through a waterfall.

Images: dbeard from Google.com



Park Place — Philadelphia, PA

Part of a city effort to convert vacant lots to pocket parks.

Images: Google.com



Murphy Park; Glendale, AZ
Images: Sherman Group, Inc.

Pocket park in Corsicana, TX
Images: Parks&Recreation.corsicana.tx.us, Corsicana Daily Sun, Caperton Realty

6.3 Common Green

A common green is a larger park (at least one acre in size) that can range in size and function but is always centrally located and easily accessed from both commercial and residential uses. As the name implies, it should include a large lawn area that can be flexibly used for gatherings or for informal recreation. A common green should offer a variety of spaces in addition to the lawn area, including smaller garden spaces, or rooms, that are suitable for small gatherings or individual enjoyment. A common green can be used for civic functions such as performances, markets and festivals. Although common greens can include hardscape elements, the focus typically is on the landscape element such as trees, shrubs and perennials in addition to lawn areas. A common green can also provide for small footprint recreational facilities, such as tot lots, sport courts, interactive art, etc., but such uses should not predominate.

Example: Adams & Sangamon Park, Chicago, IL

The Adams & Sangamon Park is 2.3 acres in size and is located in the West Loop neighborhood in the city of Chicago. The park is successful because it includes multiple amenities needed in the neighborhood and is located in an area of high pedestrian activity. It offers both flat lawn areas to lay out a blanket for a picnic and hardscaped areas for events and large gatherings. The park includes a playground area, shaded seating areas and sunny lawn spaces. It also includes an interactive fountain/sculpture and a large open lawn area that can be used for pick-up soccer games, kite flying, or other casual active recreation.

Design Suggestions:

- ◆ Locate common greens appropriately so that they can best serve the area. Common greens are often located in the middle of residential or mixed-use neighborhoods. They can serve as a central public gathering space or activity center, and often times they take on the name of the surrounding community.
- ◆ Surround the common green with active uses, like residential or retail. These uses will provide a beneficial synergy with the common green. Parks which are surrounded by parking garages, mechanical or service areas will not be as successful.
- ◆ Integrate a variety of spaces that can accommodate different active and passive uses. Common greens typically include a large open lawn space and several smaller areas for other uses, such as playgrounds, garden plots and dog exercise areas. Consider flexibility in the design so the spaces can function for different uses.
- ◆ Consider the integration of other facility needs underground, including stormwater vaults and parking.
- ◆ Provide clear pedestrian access to and within the park, providing routes to all facilities. Provide a variety of internal pedestrian circulation routes, including trails, sidewalks and bicycle routes.
- ◆ See the Urban Park Evaluation Checklist in Appendix A for additional recommendations.





Above Left: Adams & Sangamon Park spray fountain. Image: Chicago Tribune

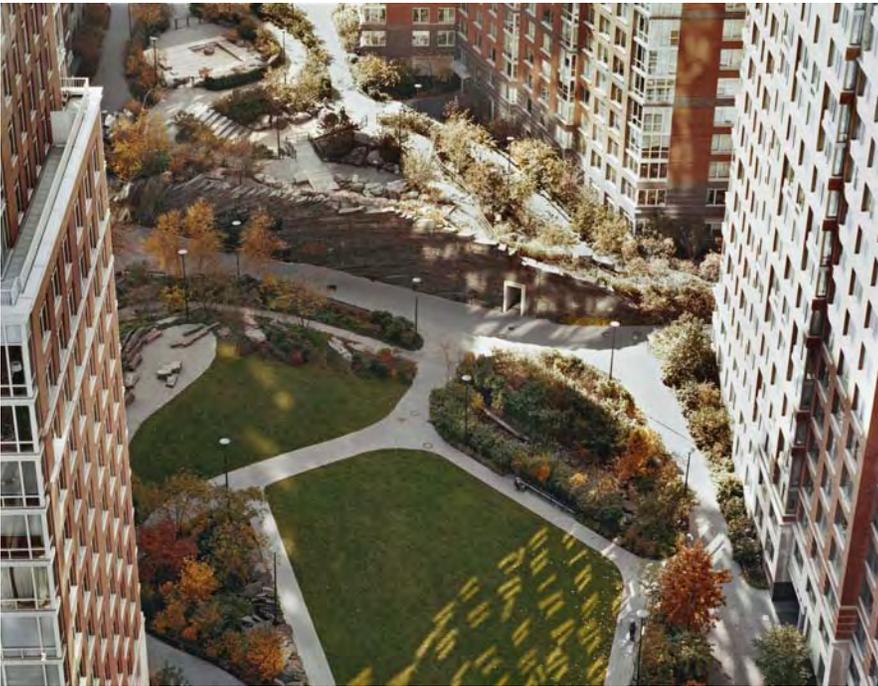
Below Left: Adams & Sangamon Park playground. Image: Chicago Tribune

Above Right: Adams & Sangamon Park lawn mounds. Image: Chicago Tribune

Below Right: Adams & Sangamon Park adjacent buildings and plaza area. Image: Chicago Tribune.

6.3 Common Green

Other Common Green Examples



Teardrop Park, New York, NY
Images: Elizabeth Felicella and Paul Warchol



Post Office Square in Boston, MA
Images: Google.com

Citygarden, St. Louis, MO
Images: David O'Brien, licensed to About.com (Top), and Asla.org (Bottom)

6.4 Civic Plaza

Civic plazas are public gathering spaces. By nature, civic plazas are located close to public transit, important intersections, cultural or civic uses, and are easily accessible by the urban street network. A civic plaza can include planted space but the emphasis is on the hardscape, such as paving, seat walls and fountains. It should include an expanse that is suitable for large gatherings of many kinds including concerts, festivals and farmers' markets. It should be flexibly designed so that when a large gathering is not scheduled, the park still offers a variety of spaces for small groups and individual users to enjoy. There should be a variety of qualitative spaces including shaded spaces, sunny spaces, small intimate spaces and large open spaces. Civic plazas are usually a minimum of one acre in size and may or may not include areas that could accommodate large-scale athletic activities.

Example: Union Square, San Francisco, CA

Union Square is an attractive landmark that acts as a collector of people and accommodates many types of gatherings from large to small. The park serves as a venue for large public concerts, a place for people to sit at lunch time, and a place that connects busy and successful retail and businesses from one side of the square to the other. Approximately two thirds of the park is built in the form of hardscape which allows for a large, symphony-sized performance space, a café and outdoor seating. The edges contrast this with their green planted areas and grassy sloped seating areas. These edge spaces provide valuable spaces for intimate gatherings and individual enjoyment.

Design Suggestions:

- ◆ Locate civic plazas appropriately so that they can best serve the immediate area. Civic plazas are often located near office and mixed-use areas, the Metro, and other high-visibility, high pedestrian traffic areas.
- ◆ Civic plazas can be integrated adjacent building entrances and provide access points to private buildings. However, civic plazas should be publicly accessible and not designed to feel as though they are private. Inviting elements, such as seating and water features should be included.
- ◆ Surround the civic plaza with active uses, like office or retail. These uses will provide a beneficial synergy with the civic plaza. Parks which are surrounded by parking garages, mechanical or service areas will not be as successful.
- ◆ Consider the surrounding development when formulating the proposed character of the civic plaza. Some plazas might be more hardscape, while other may be more lawn and landscaping.
- ◆ Provide clear pedestrian access to the park. The civic plaza should be well-integrated with adjacent streetscapes. As such, consider transitions in hardscape and planting materials between the streetscape and the park.
- ◆ See the Urban Park Evaluation Checklist in Appendix A for additional recommendations.





Above, Top Left: Union Square Park plaza and seating. Image: Bay Area Producers Conference

Above, Bottom Left: Union Square Park terraced lawn seating. Image: Bay Area Producers Conference

Above, Top Right: Union Square Park ice rink in winter. Image: San Francisco About.com

Above, Bottom Right: Union Square plaza and parking entrance. Image: indospectrum

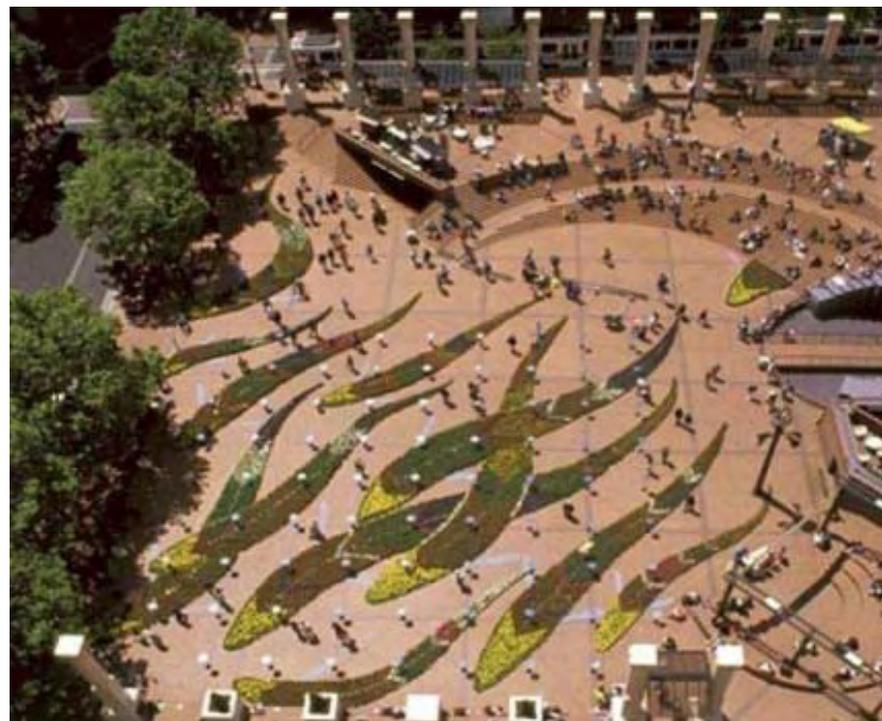
6.4 Civic Plaza

Other Civic Plaza Examples



Union Square, New York City, NY

Images: Google.com



Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland, OR
Images: Portlandenglish.com and maritros.wordpress.com

6.5 Recreation-Focused Park

This park type is distinguished by its primary function to provide recreational facilities for nearby residents and workers. These parks may be exclusively for active recreational purposes or, if space allows, could be designed to incorporate park elements of the common green or civic plaza park types to provide a variety of park amenities and spaces. Facilities such as athletic fields, sport courts and skate parks should be provided. Athletic fields should have synthetic turf and lighting to maximize usage. Support facilities and amenities, such as trails, seating, tot lots, shade structures, water features, picnic areas, restrooms, landscaping or hardscape, should be provided to complement the recreational component. Parking should be addressed through shared parking agreements with adjacent developments and/or on-street parking. The size of the park should be appropriate to accommodate the recreational facilities and support amenities located there.

Example: Quincy Park, Arlington, VA

Quincy Park is a 4.2 acre park that is located close to the heart of Clarendon in Arlington, Virginia. It is adjacent to a public library, located one block from the Virginia Square Metro station, and is within walking distance from high-rise multi-family and other residential buildings. The park includes two baseball diamonds, volleyball and basketball courts, as well as tennis courts that are lit at night, all of which can be scheduled for organized team sports. The diamond outfields can be used as rectangle fields outside of baseball season. Quincy Park also features open lawn areas for pick-up field games, a playground and picnic shelters.

Design Suggestions:

- ◆ Consider integrating a variety of recreational uses into the park. This may include larger athletic fields, smaller sport courts, and more passive areas. Indoor recreational spaces and general-use community facilities might also be accommodated. Consider co-locating recreation-focused parks with other civic uses.
- ◆ Locate recreation-focused parks appropriately to address the concerns of noise and field lighting on adjacent uses. If possible, provide buffers between fields and adjacent uses to reduce the impacts of noise. Work with a lighting engineer to direct lighting away from residential areas and reduce glare for pedestrians and drivers.
- ◆ Provide appropriate parking for patrons of sports events as well as casual park users. Also, include bike racks and bike share stations to support multi-modal use.
- ◆ Work with the Fairfax County Park Authority to meet requirements for field design, size and materials.
- ◆ Consider the integration of other facility needs underground, including stormwater vaults and parking.
- ◆ Provide clear pedestrian access to and within the park, providing routes to all facilities. Recreation-focused parks tend to be the largest type of urban park, and therefore should provide a variety of internal pedestrian circulation routes, including trails, sidewalks and bicycle paths.
- ◆ See the Urban Park Evaluation Checklist in Appendix A for additional recommendations.





Above: Quincy Park, Arlington, VA

6.5 Recreation-Focused Park

Other Recreation-Focused Park Examples



Boston Common, Boston, MA

Images: Houstononthecheap.com and Gunn Realty

Long Bridge Park, Arlington, VA

Images: Top: Jesse Snyder Photography . Bottom: www.Arlingtonva.us



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6.6 The Elements of an Urban Park



The design of a successful urban park will take into account numerous factors, including location, access/visibility, function, form, amenities, programmability and maintenance. Each of these elements should be considered prior to site selection and during the design process. These general considerations are applicable regardless of the park type. The following design recommendations provide additional details which should be considered in creating all successful urban parks.

Design Suggestions:

Location

Selection of an appropriate location is essential to the success of any urban park. Location determines how well a park will be used, how it will interrelate to the park network, and how it will interface with the rest of the public realm. Design excellence can rarely overcome a poorly located site.

- ◆ Refer to the guidance in the Conceptual Park Network Map in the Comprehensive Plan for conceptual park locations.
- ◆ Locate parks so that they are directly visible and accessible from a public street or sidewalk. Parks should be located at-grade on at least one side. Elevated parks are discouraged as they provide challenges for both visibility and accessibility.
- ◆ Integrate parks into developments. Parks should not be an afterthought in a development plan or as a way to use “left over” spaces.
- ◆ Consider the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood. Adjacent development, both existing and proposed, provides the context for the park experience. For example, pocket parks are best suited to areas with high pedestrian traffic, while commons greens should be located near residential or mixed-use neighborhoods. Civic plazas can be located near the Metro or in office and retail areas. Recreation-focused parks should be carefully located to minimize sound and lighting impacts on residential uses.

Design Suggestions (cont.):

Access and Visibility

Well-planned physical and visual access into an urban park is a critical factor in creating a successful park. Pedestrians of all mobility levels should be able to see, enter and circulate within a park with relative ease. A beautifully designed park will be empty and underutilized if it is difficult to find or inhabit.

- ◆ Consider visibility and sight lines when locating and designing a park. If people cannot see a space, they will not use it. Further, natural surveillance is important in enhancing safety and making users feel comfortable in a space.
- ◆ Topography presents challenges to designing accessible and inviting park spaces. Innovative grading techniques and use of hardscape structures to transition grades should be used to incorporate topographic changes as a park amenity. Plant materials can be used to soften the design of grade changes.



Opposite: Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York, NY, Image: flickr.com_dumbony

Above Top Right: Lincoln Center Plaza, New York, NY, Image: glenwoodnyx.com

Above Bottom Right: Boston Common, Boston MA

6.6 The Elements of an Urban Park

Design Suggestions (cont.):

Function

Function is one of the key features that differentiates the various park types. The way a park will be used is highly dependent on the park type that is proposed and what the needs are in the area.

- ◆ Review the Urban Parks Typology in the Comprehensive Plan for recommendations regarding park use and the typologies. The type of park to be considered should be based on its context, as well as district and Tysons-wide needs. The availability (or lack) of other similar parks nearby should also help guide the proposed park use and design process.
- ◆ Consider surrounding land uses. Park functions should be compatible with the surrounding land uses.



Form

Form refers to the physical elements of a park and how they are designed to respond to the needs of the users, ecological concerns, and surrounding influences, such as adjacent buildings, topography and streets. Park design should respond thoughtfully to each of these components in an integrated way.

- ◆ Make sure that the appropriate streetscapes are provided around park edges where the edges interface with the street.
- ◆ Form should reflect the expected functions of the park while still providing for flexibility in use.



Amenities

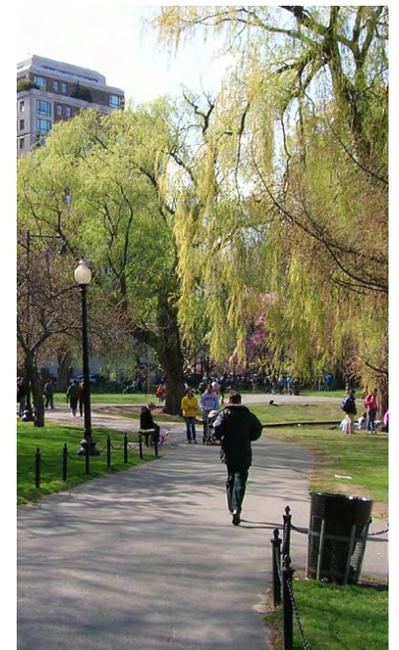
Amenities provide user comfort, support activities, and add detail and character. They can communicate an identity, style or a feel for the park. They can also determine the type of activities that will occur in a given space. Refer to the Urban Park Evaluation Checklists in Appendix A for recommendations. It is not expected that all of the amenity suggestions will be accommodated in every park.

Programmability

Programmability refers to the ability of a space to be scheduled for events of different sizes and types, including festivals, market places, concerts and sporting events. Depending on the size and type of the park, different opportunities for programming may exist. Consider flexible designs so that a variety of events can take place. If the scheduling of private events is anticipated, the spaces should be designed so that a portion of the park can remain open for the public while private events are occurring.

Maintenance

High quality urban parks must be maintained on a regular basis to ensure an ongoing healthy appearance and safety for park visitors. Plantings, fountains, art, furnishings, lighting, irrigation and grass all require regular care and financial investment in order to maintain a high quality environment. The design and selection of materials and furnishings should consider their on-going maintenance requirements.



Opposite Top: Paley Park, New York City, NY, Image: Flickr - tayloliz

Opposite Bottom: Mary Bartelme Park, Chicago, IL, Image: www.landscapeonline.com/

Above Top Left: Jamison Square Park, Portland, OR, Image: isa-and-hunter.blogspot.com

Above Top Right: Jamison Square Park, Portland, OR, Image: Flickr - pondskipper

Above Bottom Left: Pershing Square, Los Angeles, CA, Image: www.picable.com/slicedshow/tags/fountain/22

Above Bottom Right: Boston Common, Boston, MA, Image: www.lifeundersun.com/

6.7 Integrating Existing Parkland into the Urban Park Network



Within Tysons there are opportunities to enhance the existing parks and integrate them into the urban fabric. Scotts Run Stream Valley Park and Old Courthouse Spring Branch Park are existing stream valleys in Tysons that serve as green buffers as well as offer numerous ecological benefits. They have the potential to offer additional pedestrian circulation routes and an informal place to recreate and experience natural systems in Tysons.

The Comprehensive Plan calls for protection and restoration of stream valleys. It also suggests that the stream valleys could become “major linear urban parks and support the planned trail system with a variety of natural landscapes.” These parks should be ecologically repaired and improved to function as part of the urban park network and provide connectivity and recreational resources to those who live, work, and visit in Tysons. Other existing parks within Tysons can also be reconsidered and potentially redesigned to enhance the Tysons urban park network.

Design Suggestions:

- ◆ Consider opportunities to enhance and integrate existing parks into development proposals. These parks might better serve the area if their functionality, access, and amenities are improved.
- ◆ Include the stream valleys as organizing elements of neighboring developments.
- ◆ Begin the designs for parks, stream restoration, trails, natural areas and connectivity early in the development process so that technical and environmental issues can be resolved in a creative manner.
- ◆ Include ecologists, civil engineers, environmental engineers and landscape architects in the design team so that a holistic design for the site’s hydrology, ecology and human interface can be achieved.
- ◆ Design for the integration and interface of existing parks with the urban fabric. For instance, if a portion of a stream valley is adjacent to a development, consider a variety of transitions, including open space, hardscapes, and other outdoor areas which can be used by the public. These spaces could include interpretive signage, seating areas, picnic tables, bicycle racks and other amenities. Designs should take into account the County’s Environmental Quality Corridors (EQC) Policy and demonstrate their benefits.

Design Suggestions (cont.):

- ◆ Provide different types of pedestrian and bicyclist opportunities within the stream valley parks, including ADA accessible paths and boardwalks, at-grade pedestrian trails (both long and short loops), at-grade and boardwalk trails for bicycles and strollers, places to stop and rest, and overlooks at key viewsheds.
- ◆ Create destinations within the parks, including seating areas along trails for bird watching or relaxing, outdoor “classroom” spaces, and interpretative signage at key locations which helps explain important elements of the natural environment.
- ◆ Include creatively designed hardscape elements such as storm drainage outfalls, flood overflow mechanisms, and check dams as unique features that enhance both the appearance and the hydrological function of stream valleys.



Opposite: Rock Creek Park, Washington, DC. Image: Meetup.com.

Above Left Tanner Springs Park, Portland, OR Image: Archlandscapes.com

Above Right, Top Thornton Creek Project, Seattle, WA. Image: Landscape Architecture Magazine

Above Right, Bottom: Tanner Springs Park, Portland, OR, Image: Wikipedia.com

