

CAPITAL CITY PARKS GUIDE

**Plans for Hartford's Regional,
Community, & Neighborhood Parks**

August 2014

Steering Committee

Thomas E. Deller (DDS)
Khara C. Dodds (DDS)
Kristina Newman-Scott (DDS)
Jillian Massey (DDS)
Irena Lazic (DDS)
Tom Baptist (DPW)
Keith Chapman (DPW)
Heather Dionne (DPW)
Tony Matta (DPW)
Mark Tamaccio (DPW)
Kevin J. Burnham (former DPW)

CITY OF HARTFORD

Mayor Pedro E. Segarra
Hartford City Council
Department of Development Services Staff and
Department of Public Works Parks Staff
Department of Families, Children, Youth and
Recreation
Hartford Police Department
Hartford Public Schools
Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission

FRIENDS OF PARKS AND PARK STAKEHOLDERS

Hartford Park and Recreation Advisory Committee
(PRAC)
Knox Park Foundation
Ancient Burying Ground Association
Bike Walk Connecticut
Bushnell Park Foundation
Connecticut Landmarks
East Coast Greenway
Ebony Horsewomen
Elizabeth Park Conservancy
Friends & Neighbors of Forster Park
Friends of Colt Park

Friends of Day Playground
Friends of Goodwin Park
Friends of Keney Park
Friends of Pope Park
Friends of Sheldon Charter Oak
Friends of Sigourney Square Park
Green Ribbon Task Force
Hartford Food System
Hartford Preservation Alliance
Keney Park Sustainability Initiative
Park River Watershed Revitalization Initiative
Riverfront Recapture

NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS AND DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDERS

Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association
Blue Hills NRZ
Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association
Frog Hollow NRZ
Hartford Business Improvement District (BID)
Maple Avenue Revitalization Group (MARG)
Northeast Revitalization Association
Parkville Revitalization Association
Sheldon/Charter Oak (CSS/CON)
South Downtown NRZ
South Green NRZ
South Meadows
Southend Neighborhood Revitalization Association
Southwest and Behind the Rocks
West End Civic Association

ADDITIONAL THANKS

Hartford Public Library
Hartford History Center at the Hartford Public Library
Samuel Valentin Arroyo Recreation Center at Pope
Park

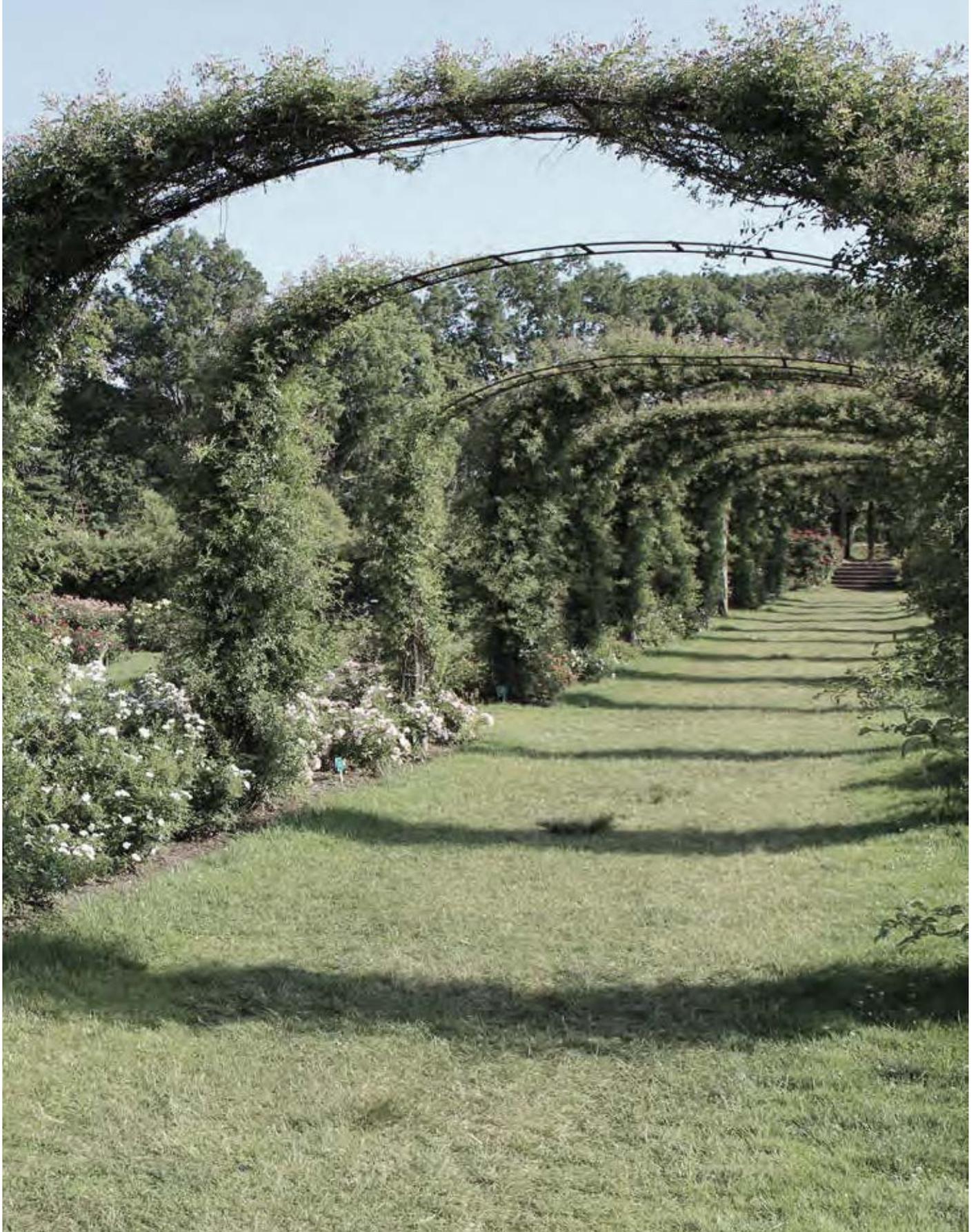
CAPITAL CITY PARKS MANUAL

- A. Executive Summary
- B. Historic Legacy & Today's Setting
- C. Process & Engagement
- D. Meeting Community Needs
- E. Partnerships
- F. Governance and Financial Sustainability
- G. Implementation / 10 Year Action Plan
- H. Connectivity Plan
- I. Concept Plans



**By connecting, expanding,
enhancing, and preserving
our parks and open
spaces, we are sustaining
the City's vitality for
future generations.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



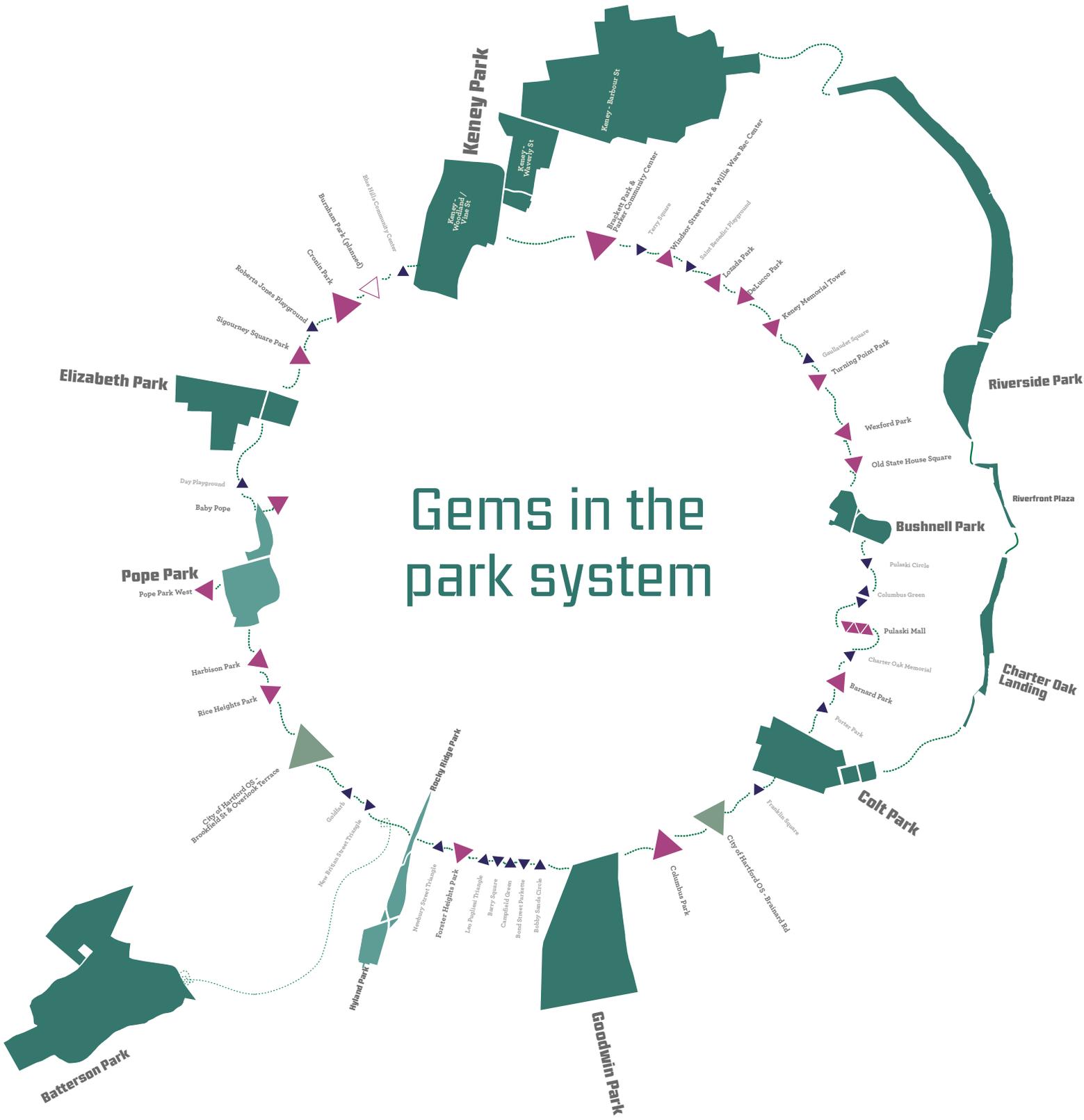
Capital City Parks Guide

The 2014 Capital City Parks Guide seeks to reposition the parks system as a connected network of high quality, diverse parks.

The City of Hartford's park system has all the ingredients to be a world class park system. With abundant acreage and a centuries-long history of park design, Hartford today benefits from a rich legacy of urban parks, ranging in size from small pocket parks to large parks that are a regional attraction for the city. Yet this abundance is also a challenge. Recent economic challenges have brought increasing difficulty for maintaining the system's vast acreage and highly utilized fields, for projecting a sense of safety to citizens, and for ensuring transparent communication of park offerings and events to the diverse community. The 2014 Capital City Parks Guide seeks to reposition the parks system as the connected network of high quality, diverse parks that was always envisioned, seeking ways to connect the parks and city, prioritize investments, and reduce maintenance burdens.

The Capital City Parks Guide is intended to provide the tools to help the city - and the community - nurture its park system over the coming decades. While the guide recommends physical design ideas, it gives equal value to strategies to foster partnerships and stewards of the system, generate revenue, and govern and sustain the plan and parks system, all with the goal of achieving more successes amid constrained resources. The responsibility for taking care of the system belongs to both the city departments and the community. This guiding document integrates all roles, in hopes that the Capital City Parks System can change existing patterns so that all are meaningful participants in the creation of a park system that honors its legacy, is safe, well-maintained, better connected, and accessible to all.

Gems in the park system



Capital City Parks Vision

Hartford’s Capital City Park System plays many roles within the city and region. Its future vision is multi-faceted and reflects the strengthening of key assets and improvements to long-flagging resources. Based on community feedback and the strength of the existing system, this guiding document is focused on three major goals, to:

1. Restore the Park System’s Legacy
2. Create a Connected System
3. Enhance the Network of Parks to Serve All Parts of the Community

These three goals will be accomplished through a systematic look at the parks system, the connective network of streets, paths, and sidewalks, and at operational and financial support.

Restore the Parks Legacy

Hartford owes its ample park acreage and promise for the future to a history of valuing urban open space. This legacy requires maintenance to protect its value. A high priority of the Parks Guide is to promote the historic nature of parks, ensuring that future improvements renew historic elements and complete connections between parks as originally envisioned.

Connected System

A connected “ring of parks” is part of the historic park vision. It is also critical to contemporary walkability and equitable access. The Parks Guide includes a

phased connectivity plan to enhance circulation within parks, create connections between parks and neighborhoods, and improve ecological links.

Community Wide Parks Network

The park system is diverse, ranging from hundreds of acres at Keney Park to small pocket parks. The Capital City Parks Vision must work for all the different park types. To clarify the future roles of each park, the Parks Guide organizes implementation by three major types:

- **City-wide Identity Parks:** Identity parks include large parks that are critical to Hartford’s historic legacy, to future revenue generation, and to staging and managing major public events. Bushnell Park, Keney Park, and Elizabeth Park are emblematic of Hartford’s identity parks, which are nurtured, revitalized, and maximized for revenue potential through this guiding document.
- **Neighborhood Parks:** Neighborhood parks provide local walkability, family amenities, and additional green space. Important projects for neighborhood parks are to reduce maintenance and create basic upgrades to amenities.
- **Other open spaces:** Beyond active parks, Hartford’s open space system also includes cemeteries, natural spaces, traffic triangles, and school yards. Collaboration and partnerships between these entities and the city will allow a more connected, robust system. Key goals are to enhance these partnerships, support ecological connections, and reduce maintenance.

Overview of the Planning Process

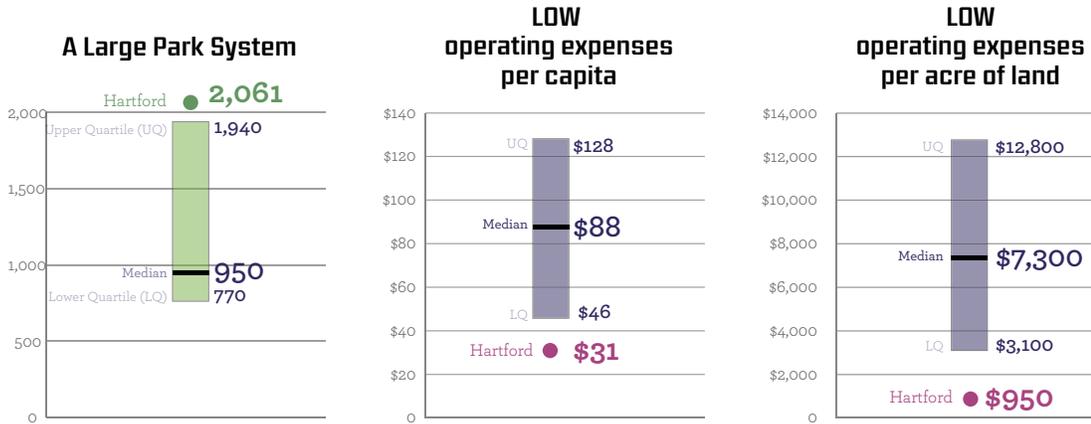
Achieving the Capital City Parks vision calls for a full team effort. To this end, the planning process included a steering committee and comprehensive outreach. The steering committee included representatives from Public Works and Development Services who met at key milestones within each phase of the process and provided guiding input. The planning process included three open, public meetings; a series of focus group discussions with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC), “Friends” groups who advocate for individual parks, members of Neighborhood Revitalization Zone groups (NRZs), and other key stakeholders such as the Knox Foundation. Additional meetings were held with

City Departments, including the Board of Education, Department of Families, Youth, Children and Recreation, and Police Department. “MyHartford,” an interactive on-line survey, supplemented these in-person conversations. Throughout the conversations, improving maintenance emerged as the #1 priority for the park system. As the Parks Guide is implemented, the discussions that occurred as part of this process should continue into the future, expanding the network of partners caring for Hartford’s parks.



Participants offer ideas at the first public meeting in June 2013.

Assessing Current Needs



Data source: National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS database; Hartford was compared to 28 park systems nation-wide with a population of 100,000 to 200,000

Hartford staff maintain more acres with less money than comparably sized cities.

Hartford has a diverse park system, with a particular abundance of regional parks. Overall, the system is appropriately sized for the city’s population trends; there is no need for additional acreage. As measured against national standards and peers, Hartford is doing well in the quantity of active recreation amenities. Baseball fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other amenities meet or exceed recommendations. However, the *quality* of open spaces and amenities is in need of improvement. In addition, social amenities, such as picnic shelters and casual gathering spaces, are lacking across the system.

Improved connections for bicycle and pedestrian access between parks is critical because forty percent of Hartford’s total park acreage is outside the city. Several large regional parks like Keney, Goodwin, and Elizabeth partially cross Hartford’s boundary,

and Batterson Park lies entirely in Farmington/New Britain. Access to Hartford’s largest parks is greatest in at the city’s edges, but population densities are highest in neighborhoods ringing downtown, where many residents do not own a vehicle.

Hartford’s parks provide important ecological functions as well, including protecting the city from flooding, reducing and filtering stormwater, and providing significant tree cover and habitat for wildlife. Keney, Goodwin, and Cedar Hill Cemetery in particular are home to many resident and migratory bird species in the area. The Connecticut River and North and South branches of the Park River also are important environmental corridors in the city. The concept plans and connectivity plan within the Parks Guide aim to better connect the parks and open spaces as a means to improve watershed quality.

Implementing the Vision



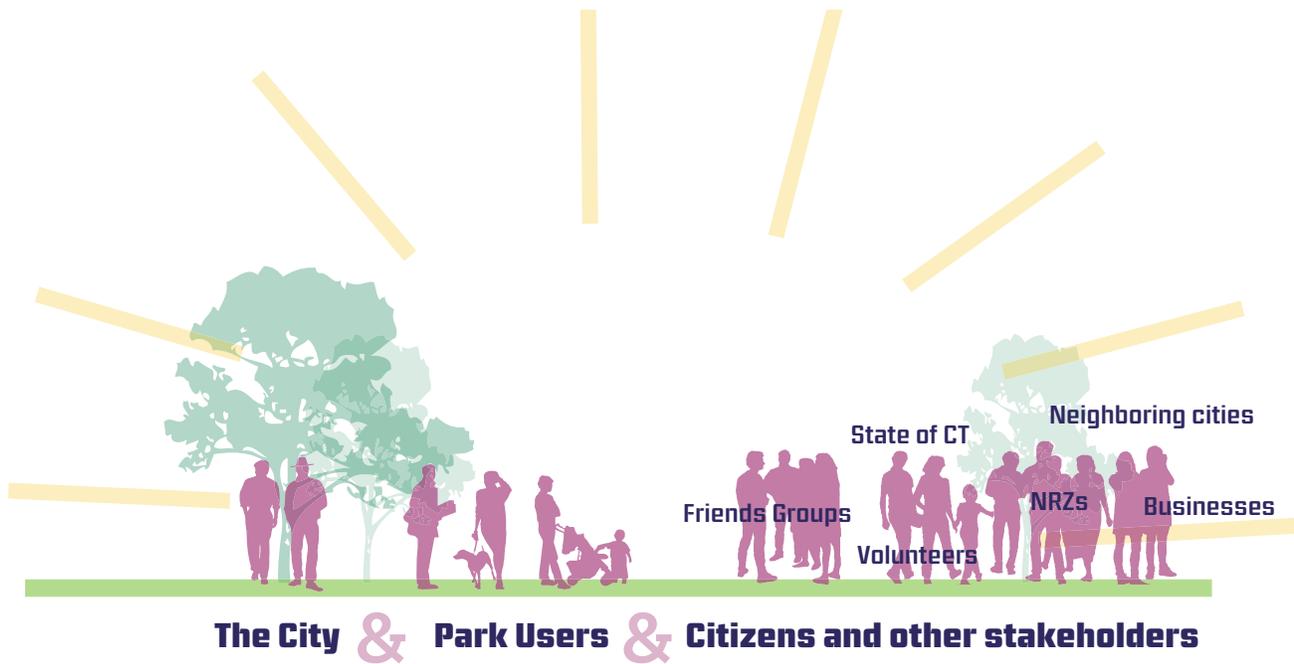
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Decades of deferred maintenance and decreasing budgets have created significant challenges for Hartford's parks. These challenges have been well-documented in reports by the Trust for Public Land in 2007 and the Green Ribbon Task Force in 2011; yet, the issues persist today. Everyday maintenance is a challenge, and this is reflected in community feedback. On average, there are more than 60 acres of park space per park employee responsible for care. This is three to four times less than best practices across the county which suggest between 15 and 22 acres per staff. Fiscally, Hartford's parks operate with significantly smaller budgets than even the lowest quarter of comparable agencies nationwide. How can we restore the Capital City Parks System amidst operational and budgetary realities?

Positive changes are already underway. A Parks Maintenance Manual completed last year outlines standards, work scheduling, athletic field condition assessment, and renovation recommendations. A new position, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works, has already begun to increase training programs and reinstate standard maintenance practices that had not been done in many years. Building on this momentum, the Capitol City Parks Guide recommends growing the size of the parks work force incrementally, expanding existing partnerships, decreasing maintenance burdens through design, increasing revenue generation, and emphasizing appropriate behavior by park users.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR AN IMPROVED SYSTEM

Today, groups such as the Knox Foundation, Riverfront Recapture, and Friends Groups and



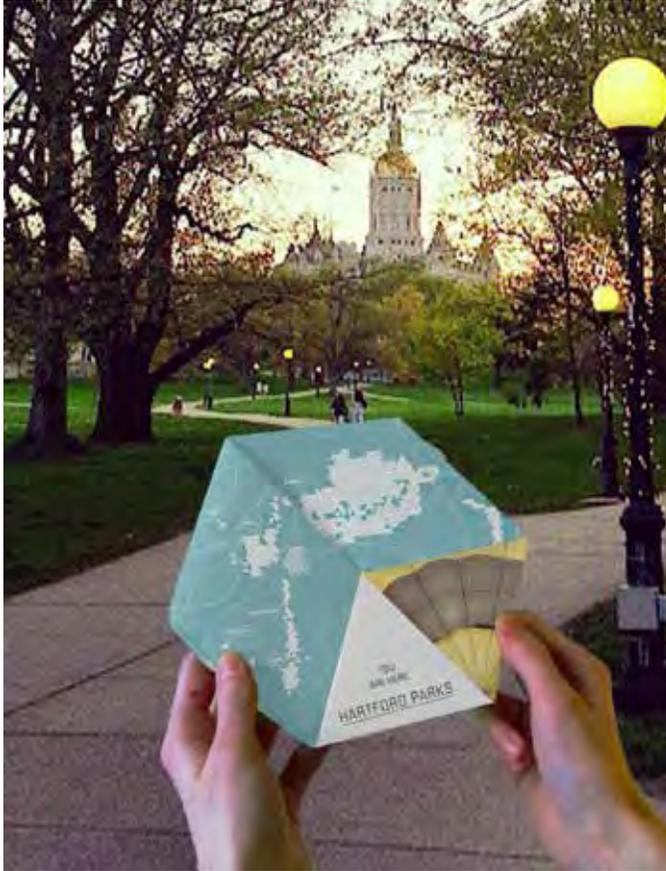
foundations contribute significantly to improvements in Hartford’s parks. To maximize and better coordinate their contributions, the city should formalize existing agreements, increase volunteer help, and expand partnerships, especially corporate support.

However, park users must also do their part to help improve Hartford’s parks. Changing the culture of park use and improving behavior will reduce additional maintenance efforts. The City will work alongside to provide rule enforcement, informational signage with a positive tone, and coordinated clean-up schedules. Despite shared tasks across multiple departments, the City of Hartford can present a single, unified point of contact for the public, improving user experience. Behind the scenes, different departments and divisions can ensure implementation of the Capital City Parks Guide, coordinate scheduling,

conduct park maintenance, organize programming, publicize events, and keep parks safe.

A FISCALLY SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

Nationwide, cities are working to find ways to generate more revenue within parks and create a more self-sustaining system. For Hartford, a near term priority needs to be establishing more revenue-generating projects within the large “Identity Parks” of the system that can help support both those parks’ operations and other smaller parks. The City is currently undertaking a study of Hartford’s two golf courses. Golf course revenue is another opportunity for increasing operating income for the system. Revenue generation must also include a careful look at the current fee structure in Hartford’s parks. Hartford has historically not charged fees for park services or programs, such



Wayfinding and branding improvements, system maps, and color-coded bicycle routes will make the park system more accessible to all.

as summer camps and outdoor pool use. However, this is an extremely uncommon practice among peers and may not be tenable for Hartford to continue in the future. Fees can also reinforce the value of parks and programs, instituting a culture of respect and value. Scholarships, free nights, charging only non-residents, or implementing fees only for new services are options to ensure any changes in fee structure do not have the impact of excluding Hartford's residents from using the parks and services.

SPREADING THE WORD: MARKETING & BRANDING

In concert with physical upgrades, Hartford's park system is also in need of positive marketing.

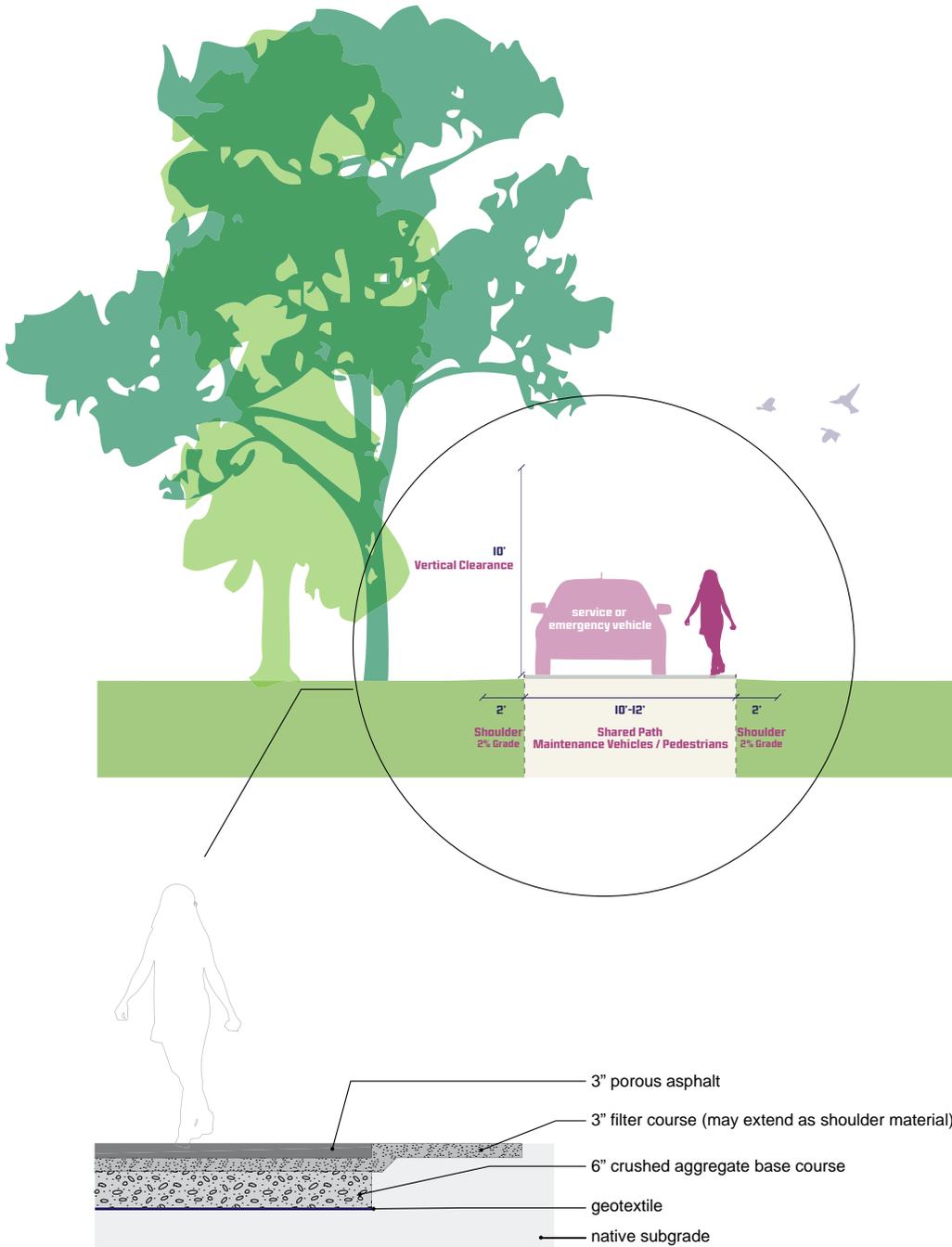
Improving perceptions will help increase park activity and contribute to an improved sense of safety at parks. With improved signage within and between parks; park system maps; a coordinated, easily accessible event calendar; and other marketing and branding efforts, the City can promote a consistent message of welcoming, safe, and attractive parks.

WHERE DO WE START?

Near-term capital projects should prioritize two goals: revenue generation as and reduction of maintenance burdens. For instance, implementing low mow zones on hillsides and in treed areas in parks throughout the system will help to reduce maintenance efforts. Other immediate improvements should include renewing and "bringing up the basics" in the parks – improving park furnishings, lighting, signage, and paths. Implementation of the connectivity plan can also begin immediately; Phase 1 includes bicycle lanes and sharrows that can be implemented now at a low cost and without significant modifications to existing traffic lanes or on-street parking. Improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity was seen as a high priority for participants at public meetings. The city should also consider hiring a volunteer coordinator to maximize volunteer help and corporate support.

Specific projects and park-by-park improvements are outlined in more detail in the 10 year Action Plan and Park Concept Plans later in this manual. Operational recommendations are covered in the Partnerships and Governance chapters.

“Bringing Up the Basics”



Typical Porous Asphalt Detail*

Designated Service Pathways are shared-use paths designed to structurally accommodate service and emergency vehicles. Currently, vehicles drive across and park on grassy areas, damaging tree roots and creating erosion. These proposed pathways are an example of a small upgrade that will help improve parks.

* Typical detail shown. Exact design depends upon site and soil conditions, and will require geotechnical analysis.

CAPITAL CITY PARKS GUIDE



Historic Legacy & Today's Setting

As Hartford continued to grow rapidly, nearly doubling in population from 1890 to 1900, it also prioritized expanding its park system.

Founded in 1636 on the banks of the Connecticut River, Hartford's earliest open spaces reflected practical needs of the fledgling city. The Ancient Burying Ground was created less than four years after Hartford's founding, and South Green (present day Barnard Park) was set aside in the early 1800s as a shared area for livestock grazing, a common practice in New England towns.

In the 19th century, Hartford grew rapidly and emerged as a cultural leader. The center of the insurance and arms industry and supporter of abolitionist and suffrage movements, Hartford was also on the forefront of public park thinking. Midcentury, Reverend Horace Bushnell suggested creating a new kind of public open space. Bushnell Park would be the nation's first voter-approved, publicly financed park. The city acquired a central parcel of land in the 1850s along the banks of the Park

River (then called the Little River) and hired Jacob Weidenmann to design a city park. Weidenmann's design included meandering paths, naturalistic plantings, and a series of bridges over the Park River; the main purposes of the park were formal social meetings, parading in carriages along the paths, and other passive recreation.

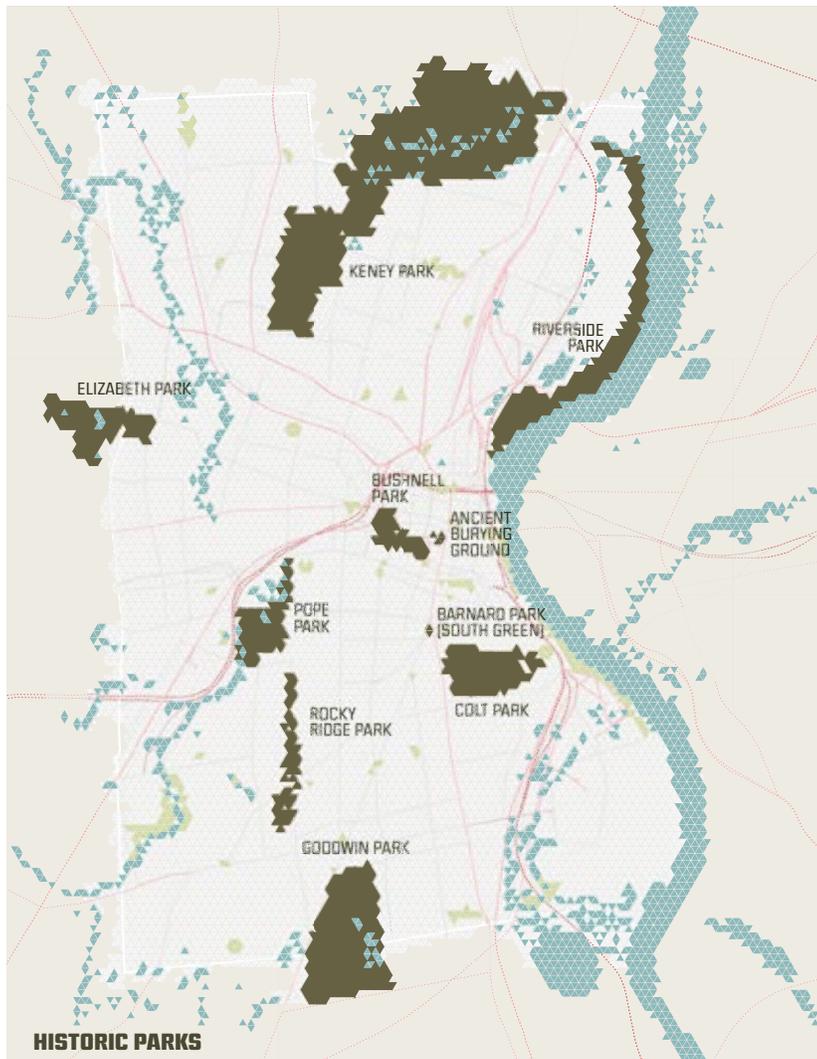
In the 1870s, Frederick Law Olmsted provided advice about the character and layout of the overall park system, planting the idea for a connected ring of parks. As Hartford continued to grow rapidly, nearly doubling in population from 1890 to 1900, it also prioritized expanding its park system. The decade from 1894-1905 were known as the "Rain of Parks" because public open space was added so plentifully during this time. Roughly 1,000 acres of new park space were added, primarily in large regional parks. Elizabeth, Pope, Keney, Goodwin, Riverside, Rocky

Ridge, and Colt all date to this era. Park designs reflected similar ideas to Bushnell – that parks were places for gathering in a naturalistic setting. Early photos show May Day celebrations with local school children in Goodwin and “calvary stunts” by mounted uniformed men surrounded by crowds of onlookers in Colt.

Frederick Law Olmsted’s influence continued through the involvement of his firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot, and later the Olmsted Brothers. The principal landscape architecture consultant in the early twentieth century, the firm was responsible for the design of many jewels in Hartford’s park system including Pope, Keney, Goodwin, and Riverside.

Park Superintendent Theodore Wirth also played an important role in the park system during this period, designing Colt, Rocky Ridge, and Elizabeth Park, including the first municipal Rose Garden in the US. The design of individual parks took precedence over the completion of the linking system of parkways, which was never completed as envisioned. Westbourne Parkway running from the southwestern corner of Keney gives a sense of the curving, tree-lined boulevards imagined for the city as a whole.

Following the “Rain of Parks,” park space in Hartford grew more slowly and incrementally. In contrast to the regional parks developed earlier, the early decades of the 1900s focused on smaller parks within walking



Historic Gems

distance of neighborhoods. Community playgrounds were a particular emphasis, with parks like George Day and Windsor St. (now home to Willie Ware Rec Center) added in the 1910s and 1920s.

The 1930s brought the Great Depression, and a surplus of inexpensive labor to help with park projects. Several large floods in the late 1930s prompted a shift in park design. The Park River was culverted through much of the city, and a more engineering focus dominated park decision-making. Economic changes in the second half of the 20th century resulted in demographic changes in the city. Population began trending downward in the 1950s, and funding for parks followed a similar trajectory. As city involvement slowed, “Friends Groups” formed to help with park maintenance, including the Friends of Elizabeth Park (today, the Elizabeth Park Conservancy) founded in 1977 and the Friends of Keney Park, founded in 1988.

The Friends Groups were (and continue to be) successful in making a difference at a few individual parks, but by 1992, the majority of the park system was in trouble. The master plan written that year concluded, “Hartford’s parks are in crisis. The decay of infrastructure, natural systems and built elements

is evident . . .” The master plan outlined a program of capital improvements totaling \$43.3 million to restore the system.

Widescale improvements were not undertaken, and in 1996, the Parks Department was abolished as an independent entity. Park maintenance was moved under the purview of the Department of Public Works (DPW), and recreation programming moved into the Department of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation. After 1996, deferred maintenance continued to mount, and park funding and staffing continued to fall.

In the context of limited resources within the city, additional private groups continued to step forward. The renewal of the Connecticut River parks over several decades points to strategies of partnerships and revenue generation that could be replicated across the system. Riverfront Recapture was founded in 1981 and began working with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) several years later to integrate riverfront access into its redesign of the I-91/I-84 interchange in downtown Hartford. Riverfront Plaza, one of the results of this partnership, was completed in 1999. 1998 marked two important milestones for Riverfront Recapture

Park uses have changed over the years. May Day celebration at Goodwin Park.



Image credit: Hartford History Center at Hartford Public Library

that demonstrated the importance of the river as a regional resource. Riverfront Recapture assumed management responsibility for the riverfront parks in both Hartford and East Hartford. In addition, the MDC, the region’s water and sewer authority, began providing day-to-day park maintenance and funding for “Riverfront Rangers” park rangers program. Since then, Riverfront Recapture has continued to expand its partnerships to support programming, capital improvements, and maintenance. Businesses, schools, City departments, and others help contribute to the parks’ success.

Unfortunately, little changed system-wide over the next fifteen years: reports by the Trust for Public Land in 2007 and the Green Ribbon Task Force in 2011 describe on-going, similar issues with park maintenance. “Sadly, Hartford parks have continued to decline,” writes the Green Ribbon Task Force. “The current staffing and funding levels fall significantly short of what is required to meet even the basic needs of the park system.” The report goes on to outlines

steps to improve the City’s parks and reverse the trend of decline.

Within Hartford, population has rebounded downtown over the past decade, and planned new developments could double downtown’s population within five years. Major planning efforts including iQuilt, the Intermodal Triangle Project, and Downtown North Plan have focused on improving cultural, open space, and multimodal transportation links in the heart of the city.

Today, signs of improvement in Hartford’s parks are starting to show as well, but much work still remains to be done. Significant progress has been made in some areas. The City has recently completed a Parks Maintenance Manual, which identifies standards, work scheduling, athletic field condition assessment, and renovation recommendations. Standardizing processes will help improve schedules, communication, and skillsets. A new position, Superintendent of the Department of Public

Trends in Hartford Park and Recreation Spending



Data: FY97-06 from TPL Report (2007); FY11-13 from recent budgets (?)

Works, has been dedicated to increasing training and reinstating standard maintenance practices that had not been done in many years. The City is also undertaking a separate study on golf course management.

These improvements will help address some of the maintenance issues, but without additional revenue, full renewal of Hartford's assets will be difficult. Compared to similar sized cities, Hartford's staff maintain more park acreage with significantly less funding. Improving efficiency can only go so far. Additional partnerships, formalization of existing relationships, and diverse revenue streams are urgently needed to renew Hartford's parks as a world-class system. Recent years have seen an increase in available funding for capital improvements. How can these improvements best be leveraged to create a more sustainable park system, fiscally and environmentally?

Parks Planning Context

Recent Plans

- 1992 Parks Master Plan
- 2007 Renewing a Historic Legacy (Trust for Public Land)
- 2010 "One City, One Plan"
- 2010 North Branch Park River Watershed Management Plan
- 2011 Hartford Parks Green Ribbon Task Force
- 2011 iQuilt
- various NRZ Plans

Shared Themes

- Rich historic legacy
- Maintenance
- Safety
- Need for improved connections
- Identity and wayfinding
- Departmental structure
- Multiple functions of open space, including recreation and environmental



Process & Engagement

Hartford's parks have great stewards beyond the city administration, such as Friends groups, non-profits, and advisory committees.

Improving Hartford Parks will require a team effort – from residents, to Friends Groups and other stakeholders, to the City staff. Accordingly, involving these groups in the planning process was critical. Feedback from public events and focus group meetings shaped the Parks Guide in multiple ways, ranging from overall principles, to near-term priorities, to details in the concept plans for individual parks. Overall, engagement included three public meetings, a series of focus group discussions, and meetings with City Departments, including the Board of Education and the Police Department. MyHartford, an online and paper survey distributed to the public, supplemented these in-person conversations.

In Hartford, responsibility for City parks and recreation services are shared among several departments. Public Works (DPW) is responsible for daily maintenance and capital improvements, while Development Services is managing this long term

planning and visioning process for the park system. At the same time, recreation services are handled within the Department of Families, Children Youth & Recreation. With these shared responsibilities, an interdepartmental Steering Committee was formed to manage the planning process, including representatives from Public Works and Development Services. The Steering Committee met at key milestones within each phase of the process, helping to shape the guide's ideas and the outreach strategy.

The Hartford parks also have great stewards beyond the City administration, such as Friends groups, non-profits, and advisory committees. Additional focus groups meetings were held with other stakeholders and groups, both within City administration and outside of it. These meetings helped the team understand opportunities, challenges, and what efforts were already underway in specific parks. Focus group conversations were a chance to hear more detailed

These repeating themes helped establish overall priorities and principles for the Capital City Parks Guide. In addition to these overall topics, detailed comments about specific parks or ideas were also helpful, especially in shaping park concept plans.

feedback from community members who know the parks most intimately. Focus groups included Friends Groups and Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) members, Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) members, and riverfront and transportation stakeholders. The focus group meetings served a dual purpose, both to draw critical information for incorporation into the guide and to allow the disparate groups to come together, an opportunity that has not been common or formally arranged.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Three public meetings were scheduled at key moments in the planning process to share progress with attendees and to obtain feedback. The **first meeting** in July, 2013, gave an introduction to the project and shared the findings from the Parks

Needs Assessment. Following this presentation, the 80 attendees divided up into smaller groups for discussion about connectivity, history/vision, events/programming, and park characteristics. Attendees jotted down their ideas, observations, and concerns on colorful triangles. In total, 339 notecards were collected at the meeting. Across these hundreds of comments, several themes emerged repeatedly:

- Increase publicity & marketing
- Improve basic maintenance
- Provide system-wide maps & signage
- Increase events, art, picnic opportunities, & paths, as well as information about these events
- Enhance connectivity between parks
- Think about implementation: partnerships, park rangers, and park commission



These repeating themes helped establish overall priorities and principles for the Capital City Parks Guide. In addition to these overall topics, detailed comments about specific parks or ideas were also helpful for the process, especially in shaping individual park concept plans. A complete list of feedback received at all public meetings is available in the appendix.

In October, 2013, residents returned to the Hartford Public Library for the **second public meeting**. The evening was an opportunity for the community to review the draft park vision, individual concept plans, revenue generation, and connectivity. Attendees conveyed excitement about the opportunities for improving Hartford's bicycle network as a quick win. Partnerships were another frequently discussed topic; attendees felt improving the parks needs to involve many groups, including schools and the Board of Education, volunteers, Friends Groups, the PRAC, and businesses. Many comments dealt with specific parks,

and these ideas helped in concept plan refinement. These suggestions were compared with current master plans or budgets, the existing parks inventory, and then along with feedback from Friends Groups, the PRAC, and DPW used to improve the park master plans. Golf course management and revenue potential was also mentioned several times.

Attendees braved wintry weather in early December, 2013, to attend the **final public meeting**, held in the Samuel Valentin Arroyo Recreation Center in Pope Park. The focus of this meeting was implementation: how to make the parks vision a reality. Following the meeting, attendees were asked to provide feedback by listing their top 3 priorities or writing anything that was missing. Most frequently mentioned top priorities included implementing the bicycle connectivity plan and addressing maintenance (including facility maintenance). Top priorities mentioned multiple times included marketing, programming, and expanding partnerships. Other high priorities

The survey confirmed maintenance is the #1 priority for the community. Eighty six percent of residents felt that maintenance should be a top priority for the park system over the next three to five years.

included rule enforcement, improving the health of park water bodies and ecosystems (and educating children), and improving inter-departmental coordination.

Park concept plans were finalized after examining comments about park concepts from the last public meeting and final reviews with DPW, Development Services, and Friends Groups.

MY HARTFORD: PARKS SURVEY

In addition to these structured meetings, a public survey provided additional data. The MyHartford survey was available online from July through December, 2013, and paper copies were distributed at EnvisionFest, several NRZ meetings, and throughout the community at key gathering spots. The online version also included an optional mapping component. In all, more than 250 residents participated in the survey, with significant

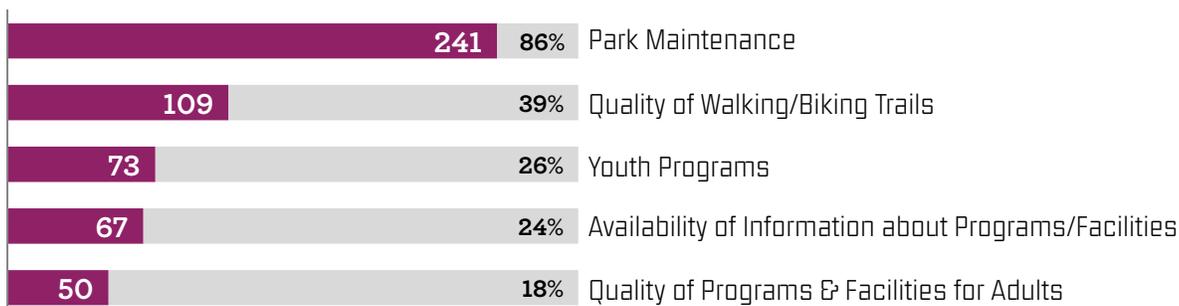
representation from Downtown and West End neighborhoods. Families with children and northern and southern neighborhoods were underrepresented in the survey, relative to Hartford’s overall population. Twenty-seven percent of respondents lived outside of Hartford, reinforcing the regional importance of Hartford’s park system, especially its large, regional parks like Bushnell and Elizabeth.

The goals of this survey were to learn about the community’s:

- Satisfaction with current park system and recreation offerings
- Barriers to park use and recreation participation
- Current park use activities
- Future priorities
- Existing conditions and ideas for specific parks (map activity)
- Circulation patterns (map activity)

Top Near-Term Priorities for Park System

Which of the following Parks and Recreation services do you believe require the most support in the next three to five years? (Top 5 shown)



Park Perceptions from MyHartford

Would love to know more about [Keney] - don't ever hear about it as a downtown employee

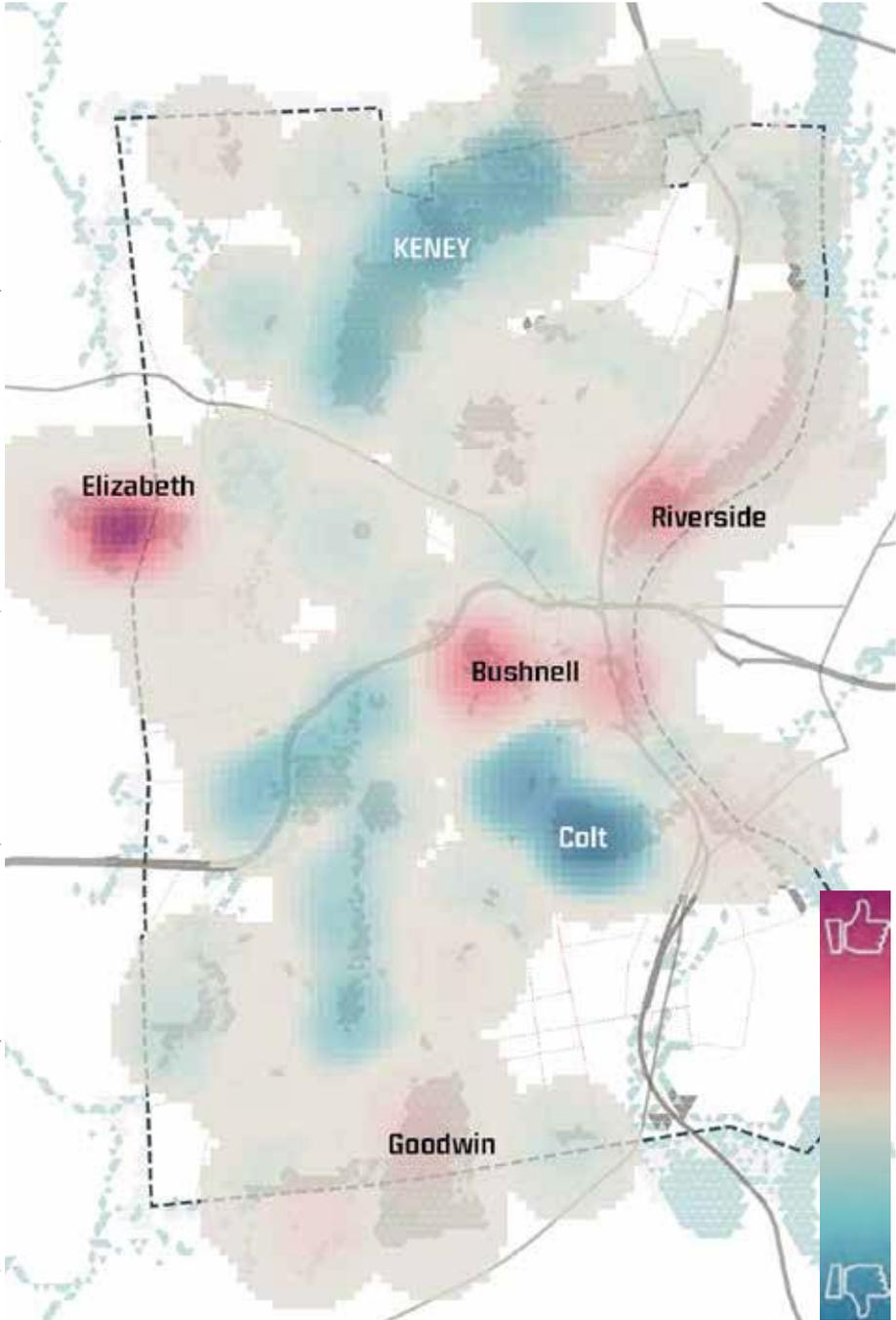
[Keney Park] has a reputation of being unsafe.

I personally do not visit [Colt] park. Locals do not speak highly to me about this park although I find a lot of young professionals from neighboring towns tend to use this space frequently to host athletic events.

The views of Downtown from [Colt] park are great. I am not sure too many people know about all the playing fields here.

Elizabeth] is a great park. Mostly because people think it's a great park.

I love [Bushnell] park but we need more litter collection and clean up. It took way too long for the pond to get fixed.



The survey confirmed maintenance is the #1 priority for the community. Eighty six percent of residents felt that maintenance should be a top priority for the park system over the next three to five years. Creation of additional walking trails was a distant second (less than 40%) Respondents enjoy visiting parks for a wide range of reasons, particularly passive recreation and community events. Walking was the top activity survey respondents enjoyed doing in parks (85%), and attending events, passive activities, and enjoying nature also ranked high. Sports and recreation were less frequently mentioned, but this may be more of a reflection of respondent demographics than city-wide demand for fewer active recreation opportunities.

For respondents who reported not participating in

recreation programs or visiting parks in the past, the most common barriers to participation were a lack of information about parks and recreation services (35%) and poor park maintenance (34%). Fees were only cited by 1% of respondents as a reason for non-participation (the least frequently selected barrier). Currently, people are most likely to hear about parks and recreation through word of mouth or the newspaper.

The mapping component of the online survey asked respondents to share their opinions about Hartford’s parks. By dragging and dropping an icon a park, respondents could show which parks they enjoyed or which ones they felt needed more attention. After an icon was dropped, respondents had the opportunity

Why haven't you participated?

If you have not participated or visited a program or park, why not?
Please check all that apply.

	Percent of Respondents
I don't know what parks and recreation services are provided by the City of Hartford	35%
Parks are not well maintained	34%
Recreation programs I am interested in are not offered	23%
I don't feel safe in the parks	22%
I use other providers of park and recreation services	20%
Parks are not convenient to the location of my house	15%
I do not know where parks are located	6%
Too difficult to register for programs, events and rentals	4%
Fees are too expensive	1%
Other, please explain	20%

to write more detailed comments. The map tool also allowed people to draw how they traveled to the parks – by bicycle, car, public transit, or on foot. More than 800 separate icons and nearly 300 paths were collected in total.

Key themes that emerged from mapping comments and analysis included:

- Reputations and perception matter
- Visibility/marketing/advertising are lacking
- Safety is perceived as a major concern for several large parks in the city (especially Pope, Colt, and Keney)
- More maintenance is desired, even for parks that people generally love

The MyHartford survey results provided detailed comments, showed common mobility patterns, and revealed interesting patterns in overall park perception. When asked about the system as a whole in the survey, respondents reported moderate satisfaction with park maintenance; however, the mapping tool showed opinions about individual parks vary widely. Some parks like Elizabeth, Bushnell, and the riverfront parks are viewed positively overall by the community, although improved maintenance is needed. On the other hand, Pope, Colt, and Keney suffer from poor reputations. Not every comment about Pope, Colt, or Keney was negative, but there were significantly more comments reflecting concerns

than praising positive aspects. Comments imply that negative impressions of these parks proliferate, while positive aspects (which are very real) tend to be less well known.

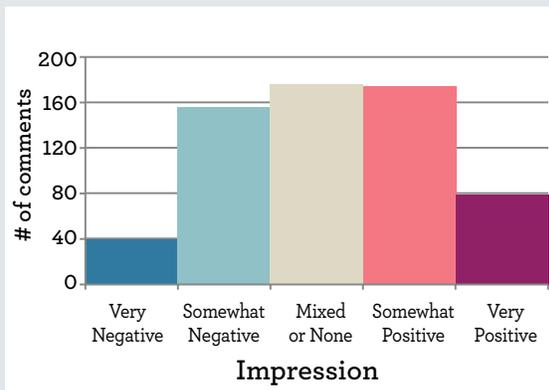
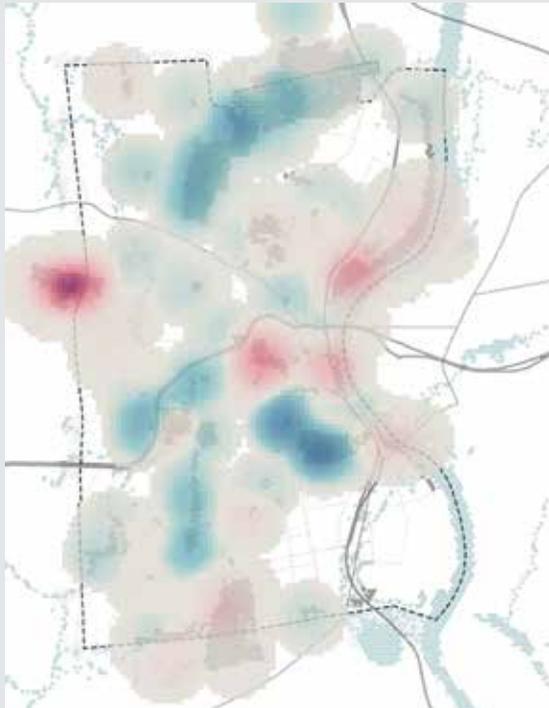
Perceptions of safety and park reputations play real roles in decisions to visit parks, especially because people most frequently hear about parks from friends and neighbors. Visibility, marketing, and advertising are lacking for most of the park system. Comments refer to several different parks as “hidden gems.”

Feedback from the survey influenced park concept plans, overall park system priorities, and other aspects of this guiding document.

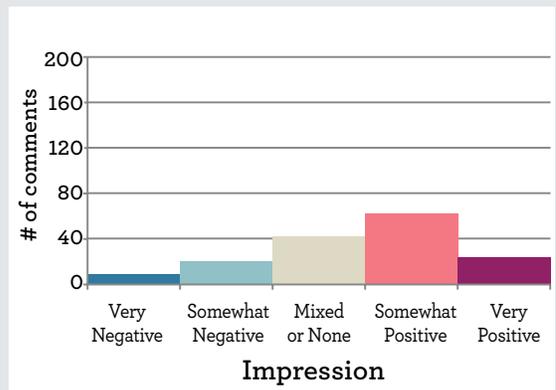
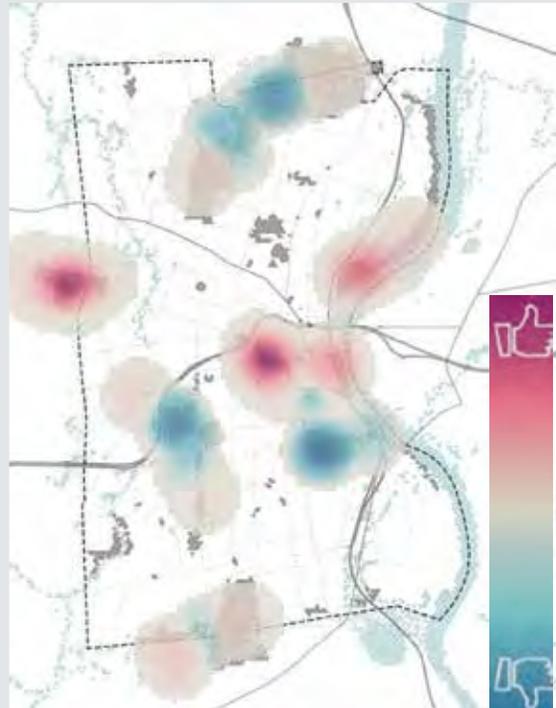
How does home location influence perceptions?

- Generally, the same parks (Elizabeth, Bushnell, and CT River Parks) are viewed well by residents and non-residents.
- Impressions by non-residents are limited to a few of the larger parks; Hartford residents unsurprisingly have more nuanced views of Hartford's park system.
- Non-residents are more likely to have positive views of Hartford's parks than Hartford residents.

Impressions by Hartford Residents



Impressions by Non-Hartford Residents





Meeting Community Needs

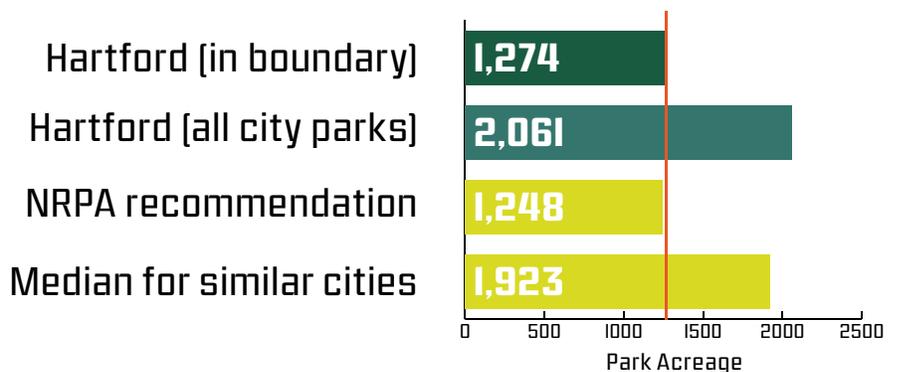
Hartford's Park System is appropriately sized for the city's population, but the quality of open spaces and amenities is in need of improvement.

The Park Needs Assessment helps identify key issues system-wide; its goal is to determine how well the current park system meets the needs of the community. The Needs Assessment asks and answers the following key questions:

- Is there enough park space overall?
- Is it distributed appropriately across the city? In different kinds of parks?
- Does the system offer the right amenities? Are these amenities functional, well-maintained, and well-distributed across the city?

OVERALL PARK SYSTEM QUALITY

The City of Hartford maintains approximately 2,000 acres of park space overall, including 1,275 within the city. Comparisons with national standards and other cities suggest that Hartford has ample park space to meet the needs of its community and to have a high quality park system. National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) standards recommend that a city of Hartford's population should have about 1,250 acres of parks, and Hartford has 1,275 acres within its boundary alone, and operates nearly 2,000 acres. Compared to other cities, Hartford's park system is roughly average size. If population size and service



Assessment Methodology

Parks Inventory

An inventory of 2013 Parks data was created and updated through consultations with Client, site visits, GIS and other data. Includes 61 total park and open spaces, designated by Client

Parks Classification

Parks were classified into categories of mini-parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, regional parks, special use (natural areas, golf courses) parks, based on park size and utility to the community. Additional open spaces, such as urban agriculture or school yards, were mapped for future opportunities and partnership value.

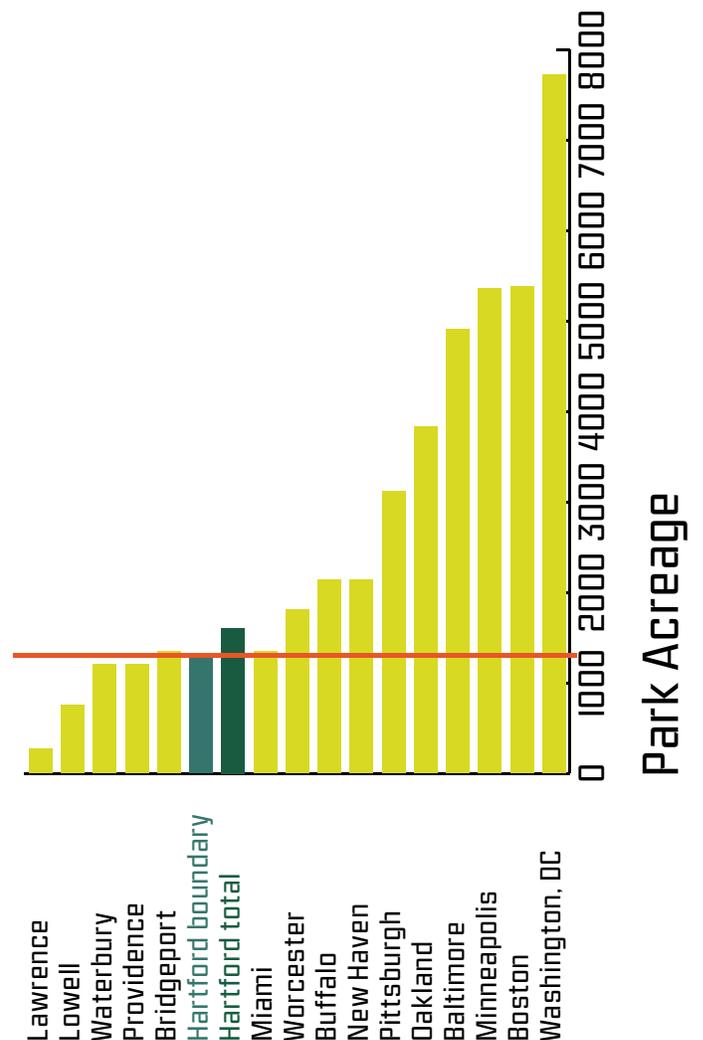
System Benchmarking

System-wide, park acreage and amount of different park types were benchmarked against peer cities (similar population) and aspirant, large systems nationally.

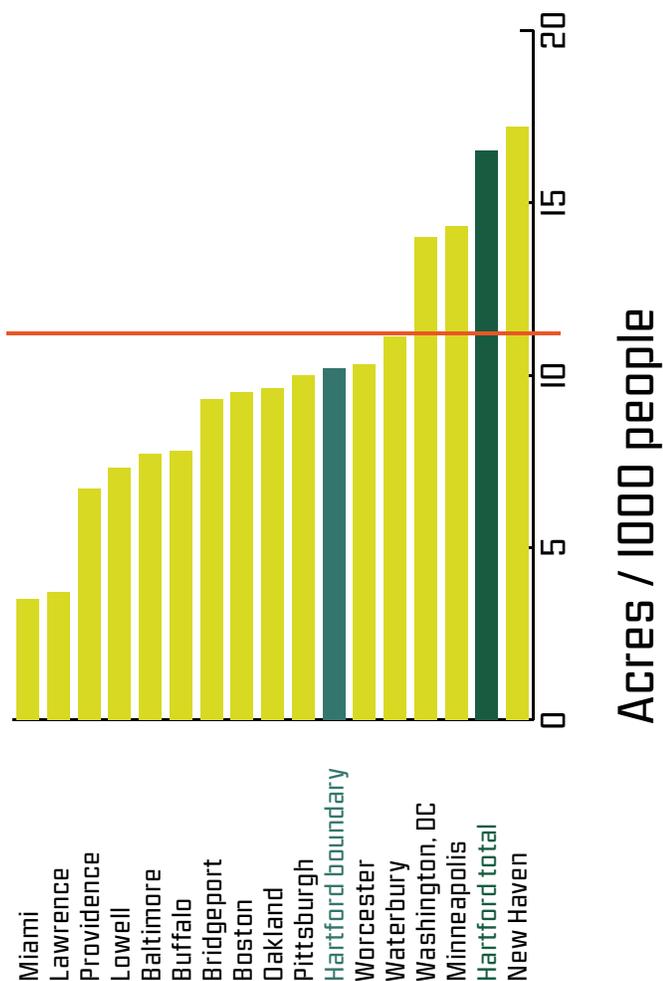
Park Assessment

Park types were compared against National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) national standards, Park and Recreation Operating Ratio and Geographic Information System (PRORAGIS), and recommendations by consultant team to suggest achievements or deficits within the system.

Park Acreage by City



Acres/1,000 people by City

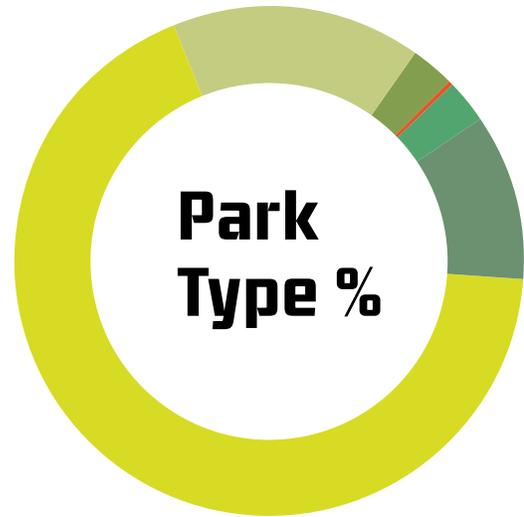


per resident is taken into account, Hartford’s total system ranks among the best in terms of park acres per thousand residents. In a comparison to peers and aspirants, Hartford ranks second to only New Haven and better than Boston, Bridgeport, and Pittsburgh.

In terms of size, Hartford is doing well. However, the distribution of the parks across – and outside – the city raises questions of access. Forty percent of Hartford’s total park acreage is outside the city. Several large regional parks like Keney, Goodwin, and Elizabeth partially cross Hartford’s boundary, and Batterson Park lies entirely in Farmington/New Britain. Access to the city’s largest parks is greatest in at the city’s edges, but population densities are highest in the neighborhoods ringing downtown. Lower rates of vehicle ownership in these neighborhoods hinder access to open space in other parts of the city by car.

TYPES OF PARKS

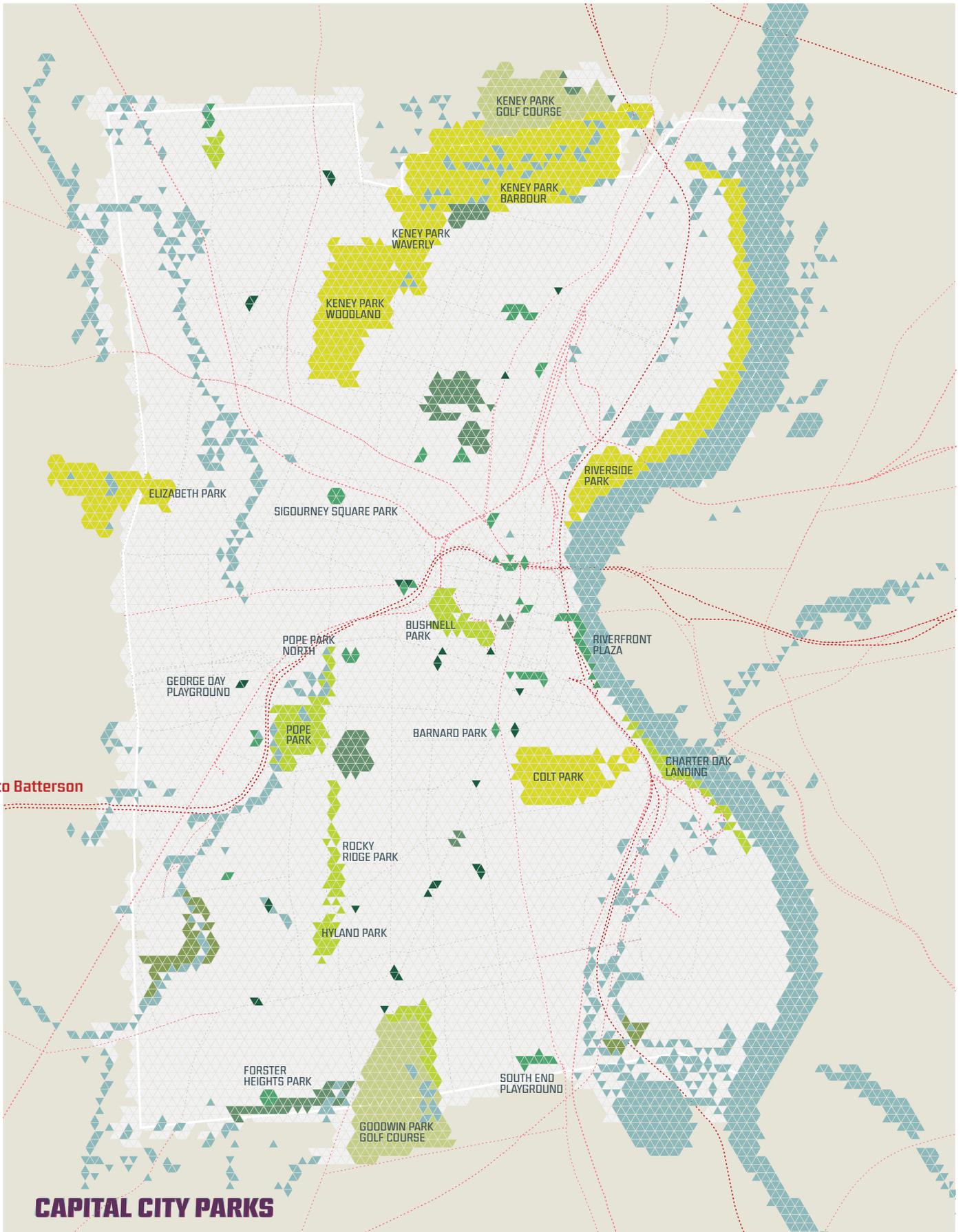
Not all acres of park are created equal; different types of parks provide different kinds of benefits to residents. Neighborhood playgrounds like Forster Heights function differently than large regional parks like Keney. Cities need to provide sufficient park acreage overall to residents, and they also need to make sure it is distributed across a range of different kinds of parks. Park types are typically divided into 5 major categories: mini-parks (<1 acre), neighborhood parks (1-10 acres), community parks (10-100 acres), regional parks (100 or more acres), and special use parks like golf courses and natural areas (any size). Park size is the primary classification method because it typically relates to park function, service radius, and amenities. National standards recommend how many acres of each type of park are needed in a city.



Regional	68%
Special Use - Golf	16%
Special Use - Natural	3%
Mini-Park	<1%
Neighborhood	3%
Community	11%

Not all acres of park are created equal; different types of parks provide different kinds of benefits to residents. Neighborhood playgrounds like Forster Heights function differently than large regional parks like Keney.





CAPITAL CITY PARKS

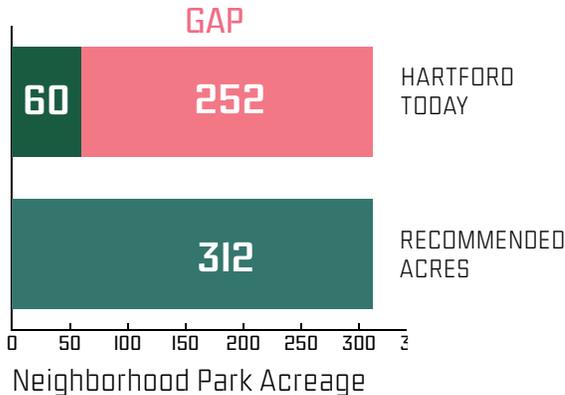
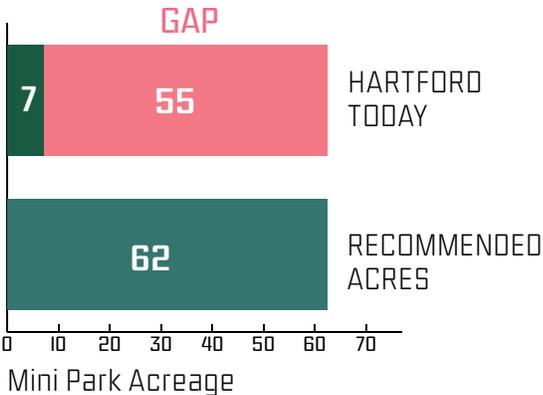
Park Types

Mini parks (1 acre or less)

- Existing: 7 acres total = 0.1 acres per 1,000 residents
- Recommended: 0.5 acres per 1,000 residents
- Address limited, unique, or isolated recreation needs
- Can complement neighborhood parks in dense, urban areas
- Amenities typically include: Tot lots, picnic tables, or passive uses (public art, gathering spaces, or overlooks)
- Distributed across city
- Highest concentration immediately south of downtown, including multiple monuments

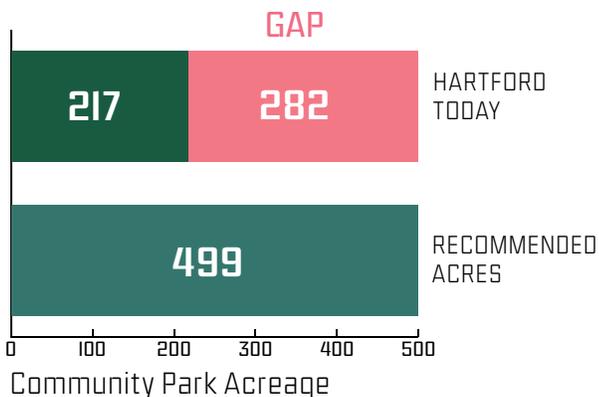
Neighborhood Parks (1-10 acres)

- Existing: 60 acres total = 0.5 acres per 1,000 residents
- Recommended: 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents
- Focal point of a neighborhood with family activities, walkable from home
- Amenities typically include: Playgrounds, picnic tables, shelters, sports courts / fields, lawns, skate parks, volleyball, horseshoe pits, bocce, restrooms
- Parks in this size in Hartford include traditional neighborhood parks, as well as historic open spaces like Pulaski Mall and Keney Memorial Tower
- Greatest concentration in central Hartford, in and around downtown
- Interstates and rail lines block access to parks from western neighborhoods, especially Parkville
- Severe shortage of neighborhood park acreage compared to national standards



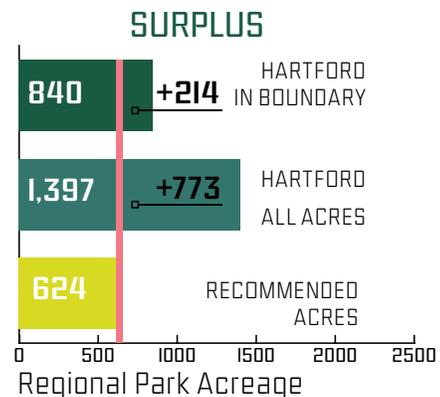
Community Parks (10-100 acres)

- Existing: 217 acres total = 1.7 acres per 1,000 residents
- Recommended: 4.0 acres per 1,000 residents
- Meet broad community recreation needs, preserve unique landscapes, and contribute to a connected system
- Amenities typically include: Maintenance areas, playgrounds, picnicking, restrooms, concession, small centers, amphitheaters, pavilions, swimming beaches and pools, water features, trails
- All community parks except Cronin Park are located south of I-84
- Only about half of recommended acreage for community parks exists
- Neighborhoods to the west lack access to community parks
- However, regional parks like Keney currently fulfill similar recreation needs to community parks and serve a more local population
- Bushnell's size places it within the community parks category, but it functions as a regional park, drawing visits from outside the city



Regional Parks (more than 100 acres)

- Existing: 840 acres in Hartford; 1,397 acres in total system = 6.7 in Hartford [11.2 total] acres per 1,000 residents
- Recommended: 4.0 acres per 1,000 residents
- Serve broad spectrum of regional recreation needs, require partnerships, and substantial funding
- Destination activities: boating, hiking, fishing, and other uses.
- Distributed at perimeter of city or beyond (Batterson)
- Hartford has a surplus of these largest parks, almost twice the recommended acreage when all parks are included; this additional acreage can help compensate for shortages of smaller parks in adjacent areas of the city
- Regional parks usually draw residents from a larger area



Special Use Parks

- Include golf courses and natural areas
- Located at northern and southern perimeter of Hartford
- Walkability is currently less important for these areas
- Golf courses are typically accessed via cars, and most natural areas are largely inaccessible

Special Use Parks In Hartford

- 150 acres in Hartford; 380 acres in total
- 1.2 [3 total] acres per 1,000 residents
- No standard for total acreage exists for these types of parks

Beyond Parks

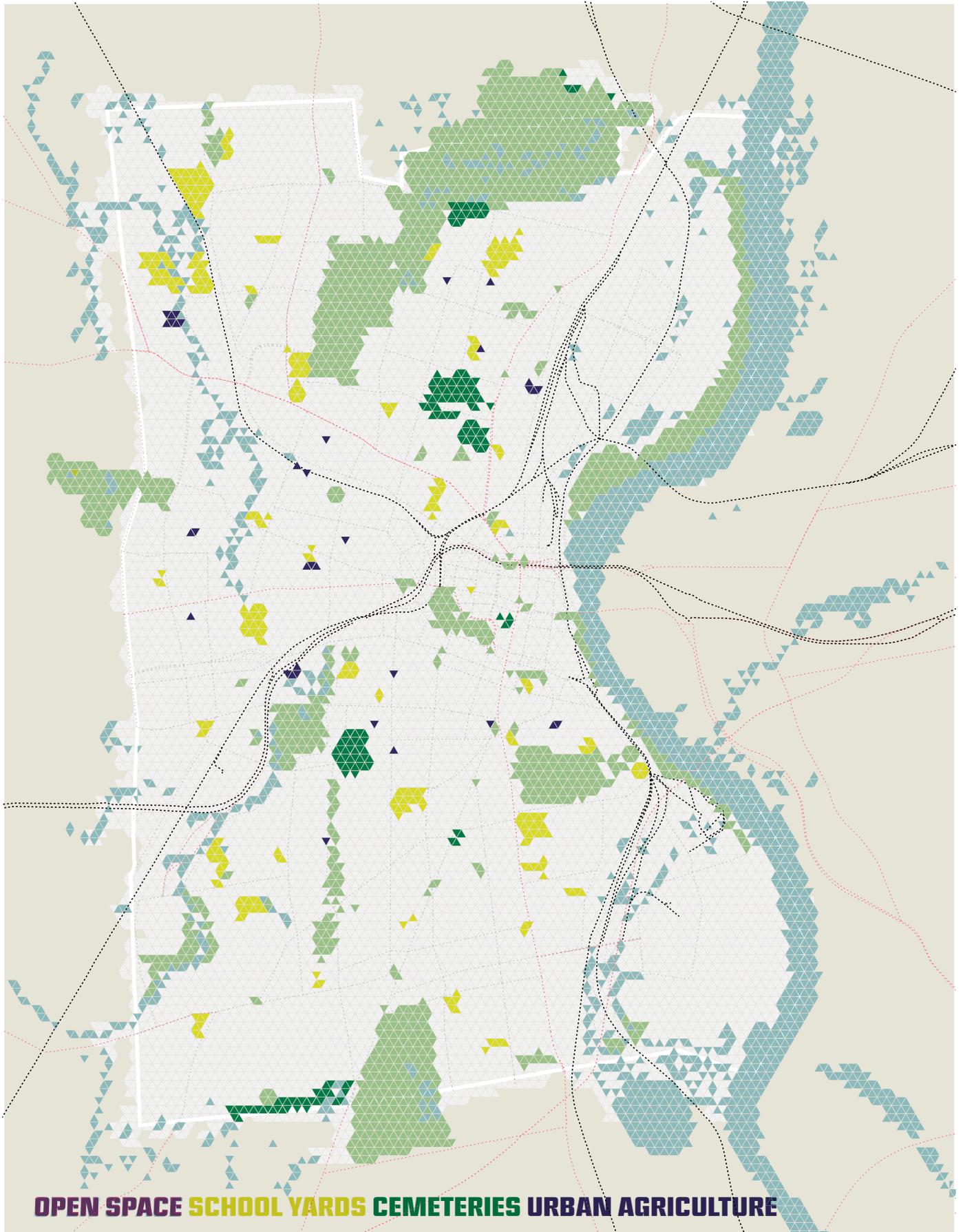
Parks are not the only “open spaces” in Hartford. School grounds, cemeteries, community gardens and other urban agriculture sites, and even some vacant lots provide important recreation, connective, ecological, and health benefits for Hartford. Together, all these open spaces can create a robust, diverse network for Hartford’s residents.

Other Types of Open Space In Hartford

- 173 acres of cemeteries
- 20+ urban agriculture sites
- 43 school grounds (K-12)

Key Park Type Findings of the Needs Assessment

- Hartford has a diverse park system, with a particular abundance of regional parks.
- Community and neighborhood parks fall below national standard recommendations, but the surplus of regional park acreage can compensate.
- Parks function differently in Hartford than is typical: Hartford has regional parks that function like community parks, and community-size parks that are regional attractions.
- Bicycle and pedestrian links are important parts of the park system, so people can access all kinds of parks and amenities.



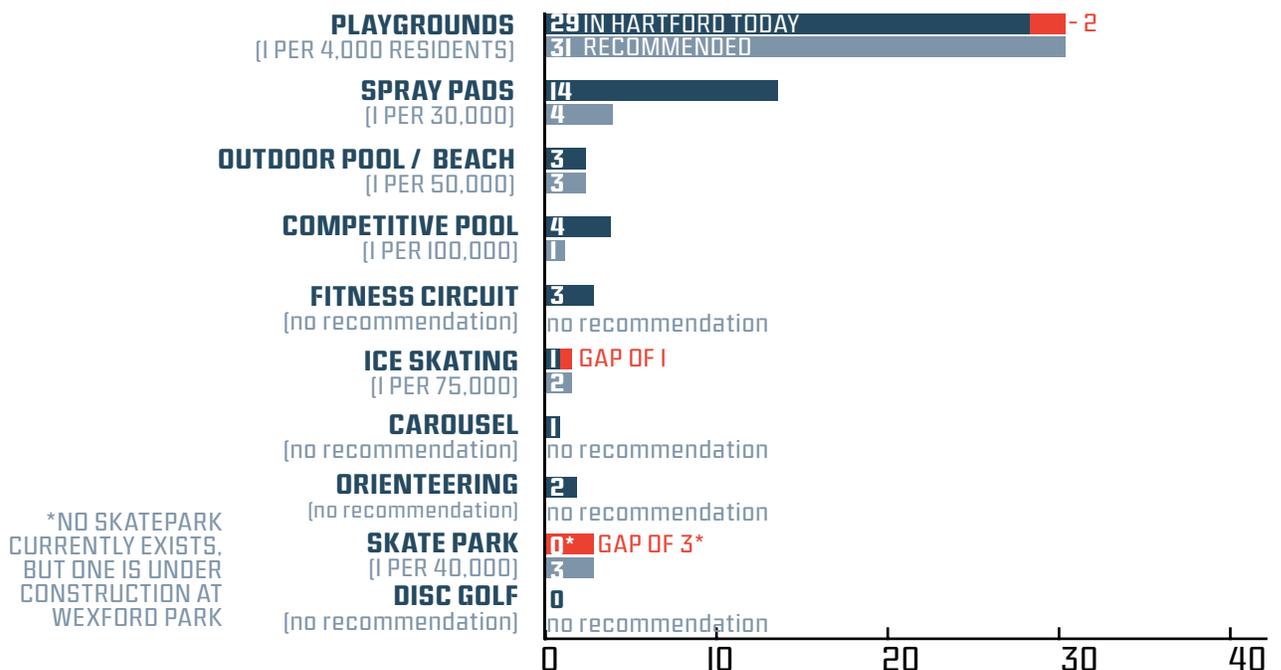
OPEN SPACE SCHOOL YARDS CEMETERIES URBAN AGRICULTURE

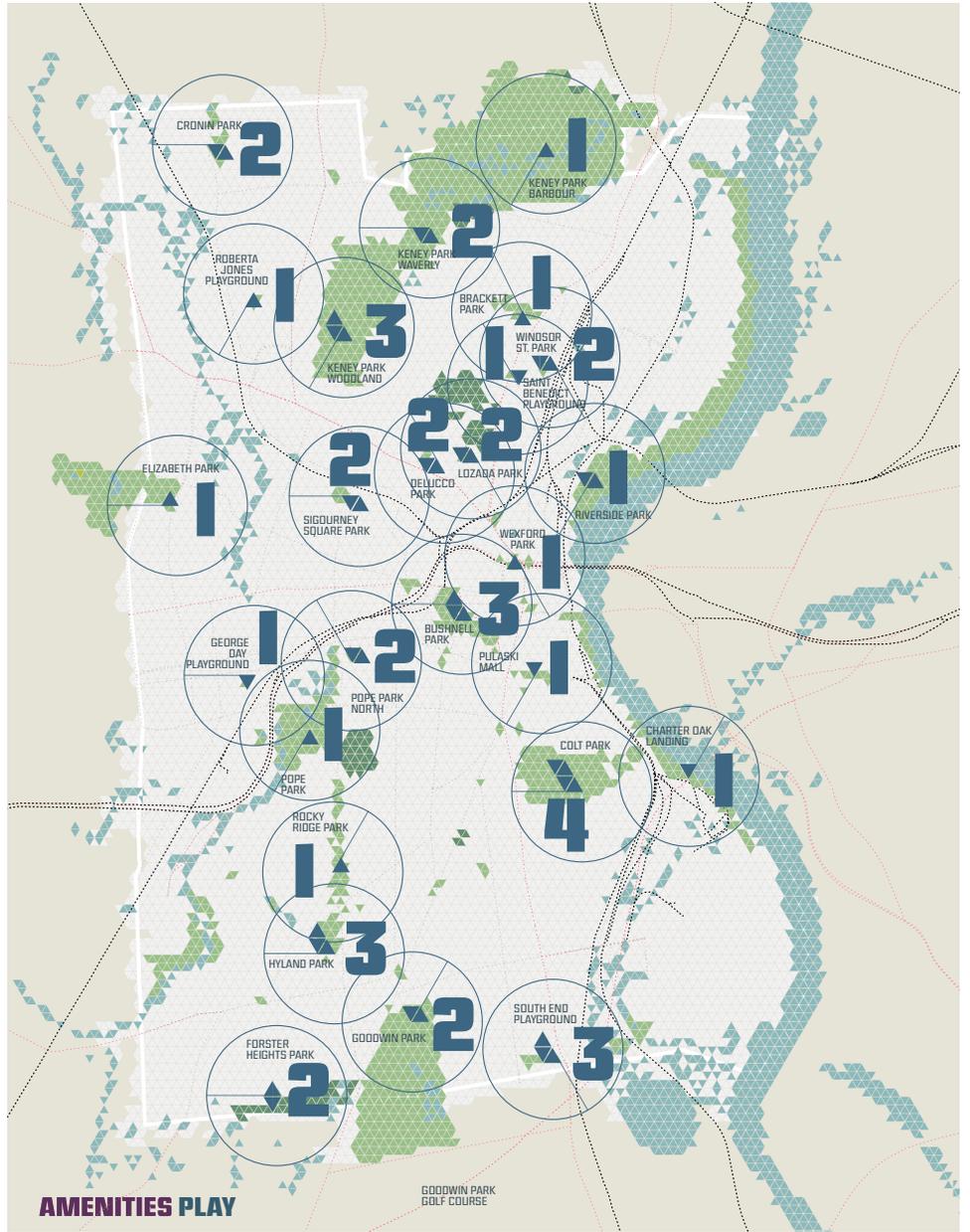
PARK SYSTEM AMENITIES

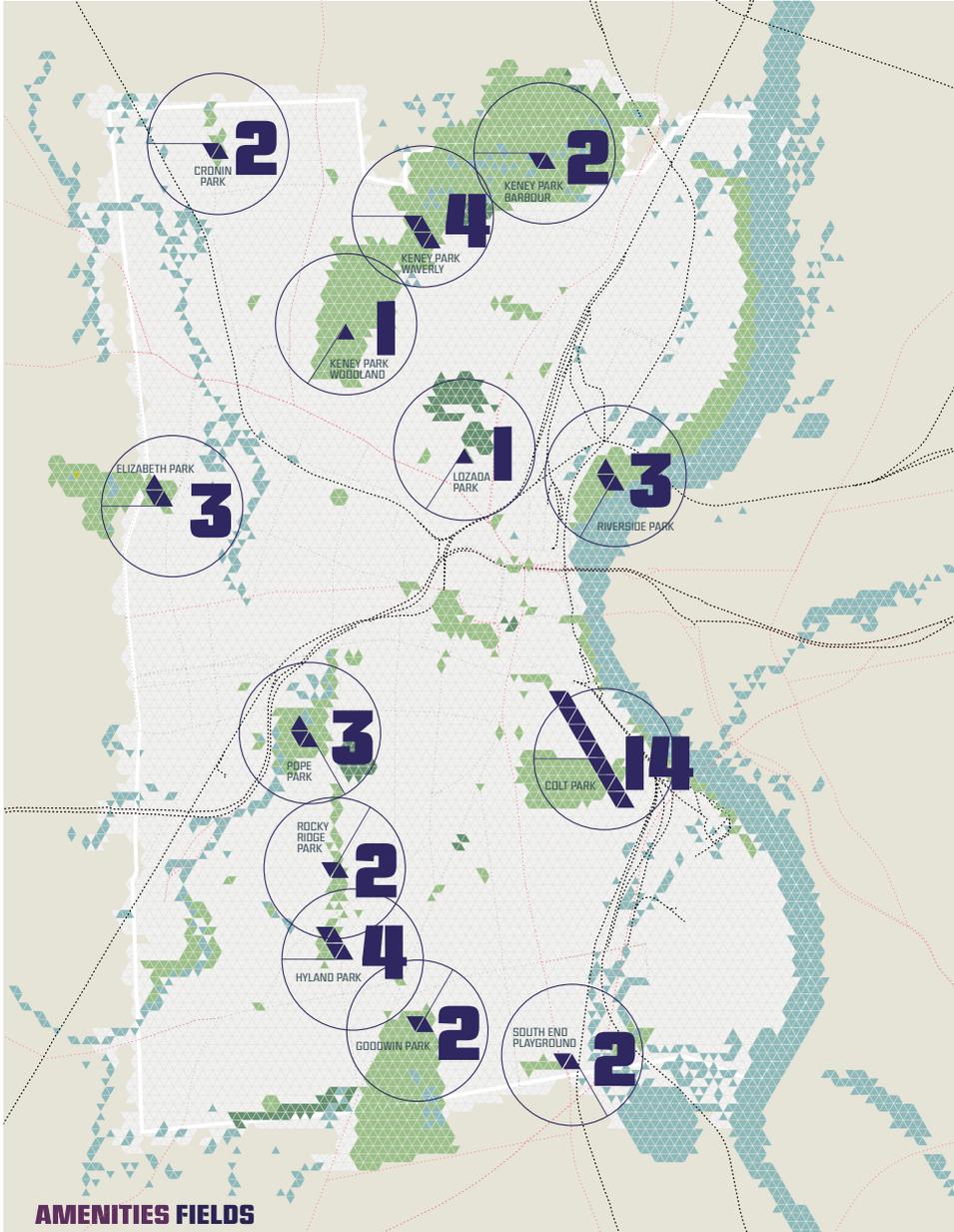
Beyond park size and location, the amenities within each park create different characteristics and inform use. For example, Colt Park is the city’s major sports fields destination, drawing users from across the city, while Lozada Park features neighborhood scale amenities for informal, flexible play. Park amenities have been evaluated by provision of play amenities, fields, courts, and leisure elements.

Play Amenities

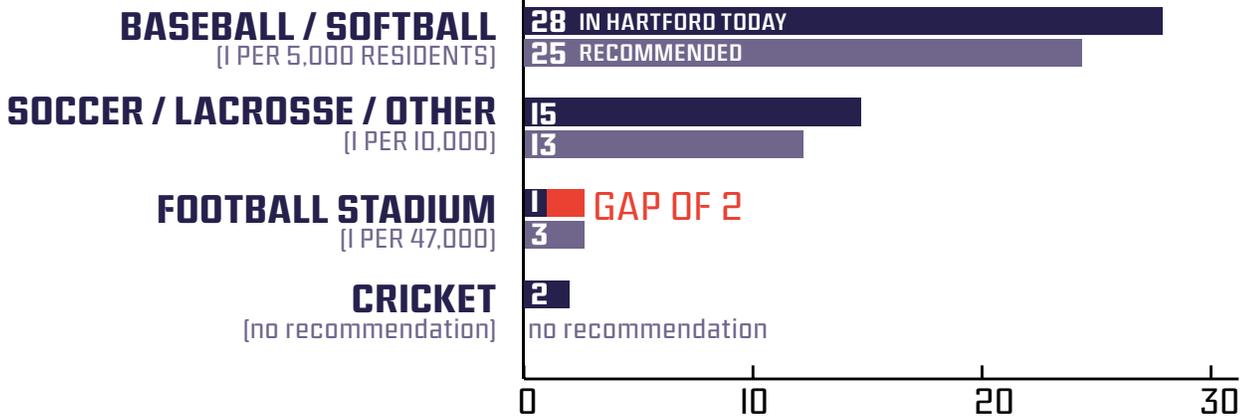
Hartford’s parks include a wide range of play amenities like playgrounds, spray pads, pools, and even orienteering courses and a carousel. These amenities are well-distributed across the city, with the exception of a slight gap around the Barry Square neighborhood. Overall, Hartford has just under the recommended number of playgrounds, but a large surplus of spray pads. Many playgrounds and spraypads in the city, including Lozada, Keney Woodland, and Sigourney Square, have recently been renovated. Other playgrounds like Rocky Ridge, Roberta Jones, and Elizabeth (eastern portion of park) are in need of renovation and upgrading. A new skatepark currently under construction at Wexford Park will help close the current gap in this kind of activities.







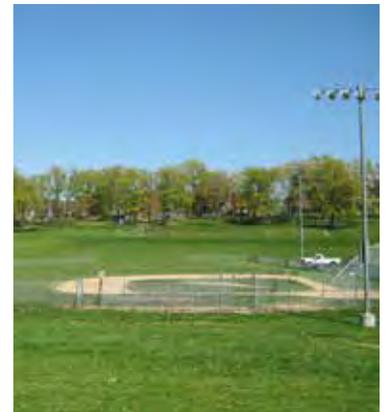
AMENITIES FIELDS



Sports Fields

The majority of Hartford's sports fields are found in a few regional parks. Colt is the center of sport field opportunities in Hartford. Roughly 40% of all soccer and football fields are located in Colt. North of downtown, the majority of fields are located in Keney Park. Citywide, Hartford has about the recommended number of sport fields, although, it falls slightly below national recommendations for football stadiums. Overall, many fields are in need of improved maintenance. Mowing schedules could be improved to better align with field use, and some fields have uneven terrain. Efforts are currently underway to address some of these issues, through recent production of a system-wide maintenance guide and efforts to adjust topography in uneven field areas. Field restorations at Cronin and Keney Waverly were completed within the past year, and three durable, synthetic Cal Ripken fields are planned across the city in the near future.

Citywide, Hartford has about the recommended number of sport fields. Overall, many fields are in need of improved maintenance.



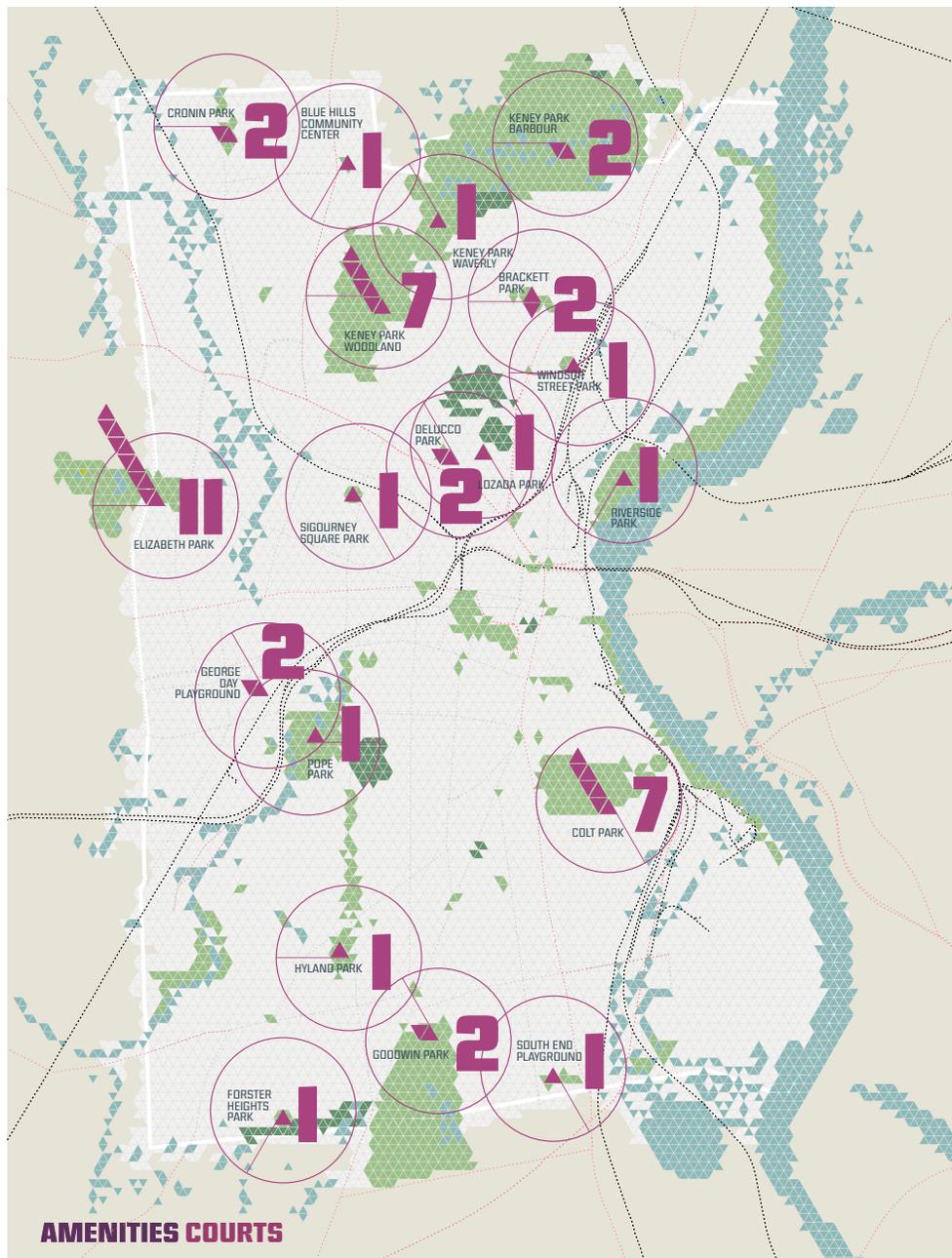
Courts

Hartford currently has 53 playable courts for basketball, handball, tennis, and volleyball. These totals exceed national recommendations for basketball and volleyball, but fall a bit short for tennis. Community feedback suggests that the gap in tennis may not be a concern for the city, and instead reflects community demands and demographics. The current tennis courts at Elizabeth, and to a lesser degree Goodwin, are well used, but there does not seem to be a demand for additional courts. For instance, anecdotal stories suggest the surface damage at Columbus Park's tennis courts resulted from neighborhood children using the courts to play soccer. This suggests a need for additional soccer space, rather than a need to repair the tennis courts for tennis playing to meet national standards.

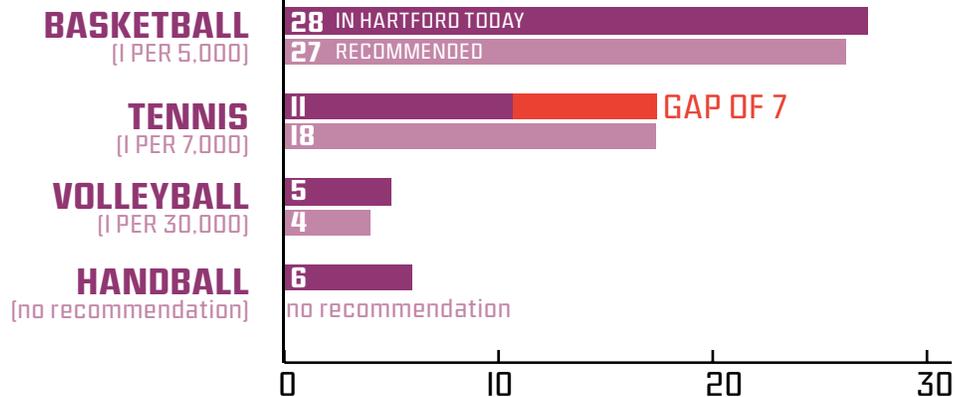
Hartford parks also include an additional 26 courts which are not usable due to missing nets or backboards. Repairing these amenities is recommended for basketball and volleyball courts where possible. National standards suggest that Hartford has approximately the right number of

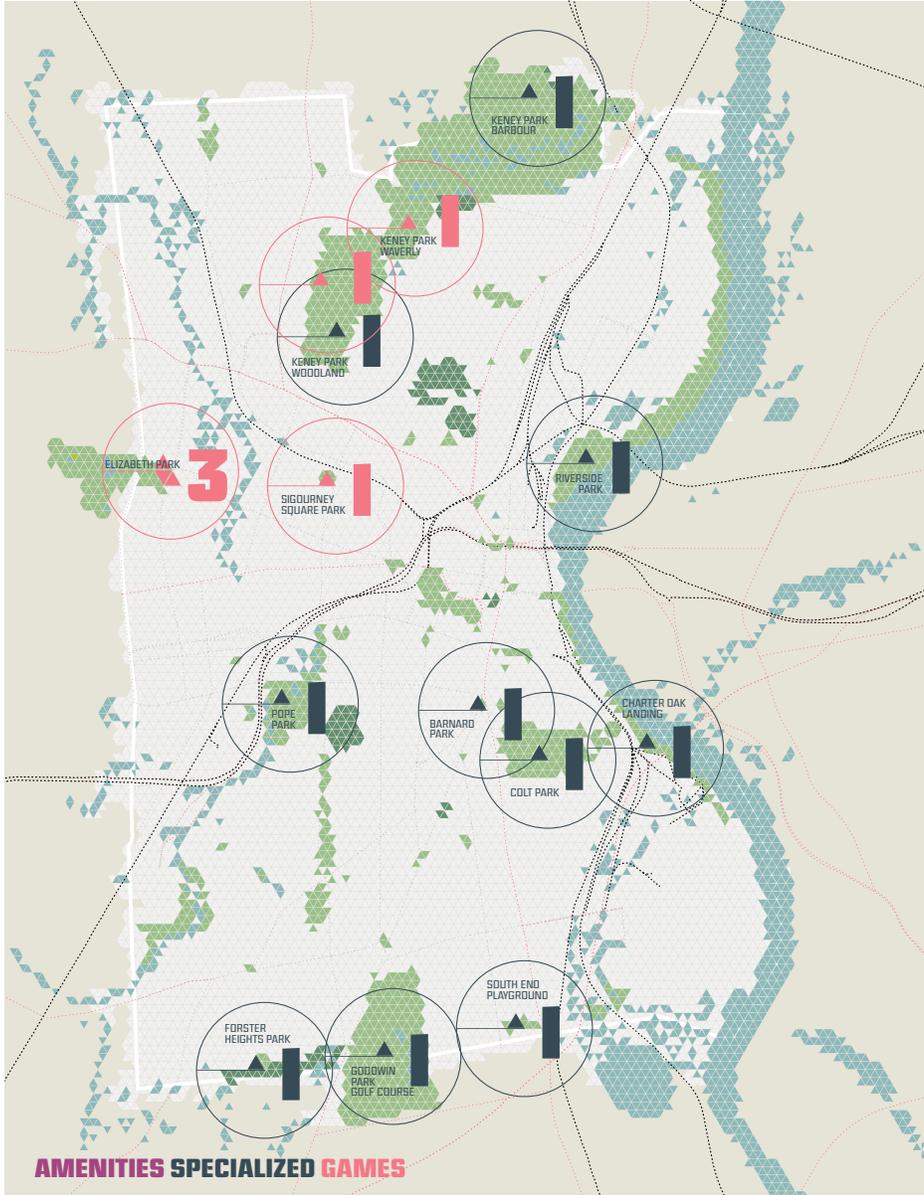
basketball courts currently (counting only usable courts), but virtually all courts appear to be heavily used, suggesting sufficient demand for repairing existing courts where possible. In this way, Hartford will exceed national standards, but meet the apparent needs and demand of its own community. However, the persistent disrepair of nearly one third of all courts reflects the daily challenges that the city faces in maintaining its own assets. Operations funding, staff levels, and high levels of use all create challenges. The addition of any future amenities should be carefully weighed against maintenance capacity. Reductions in the number of courts may be advisable if it helps to bring the current inventory into better alignment with the city's ability to maintain. To this end, DPW is currently reducing the number of courts at Day Park, Brackett Park, and Baby Pope Park. Fewer numbers of well-maintained, quality courts will meet the needs of the system better than a large quantity of difficult to maintain amenities.





AMENITIES COURTS





More amenities that allow for casual hang-out and socializing are needed in Hartford.

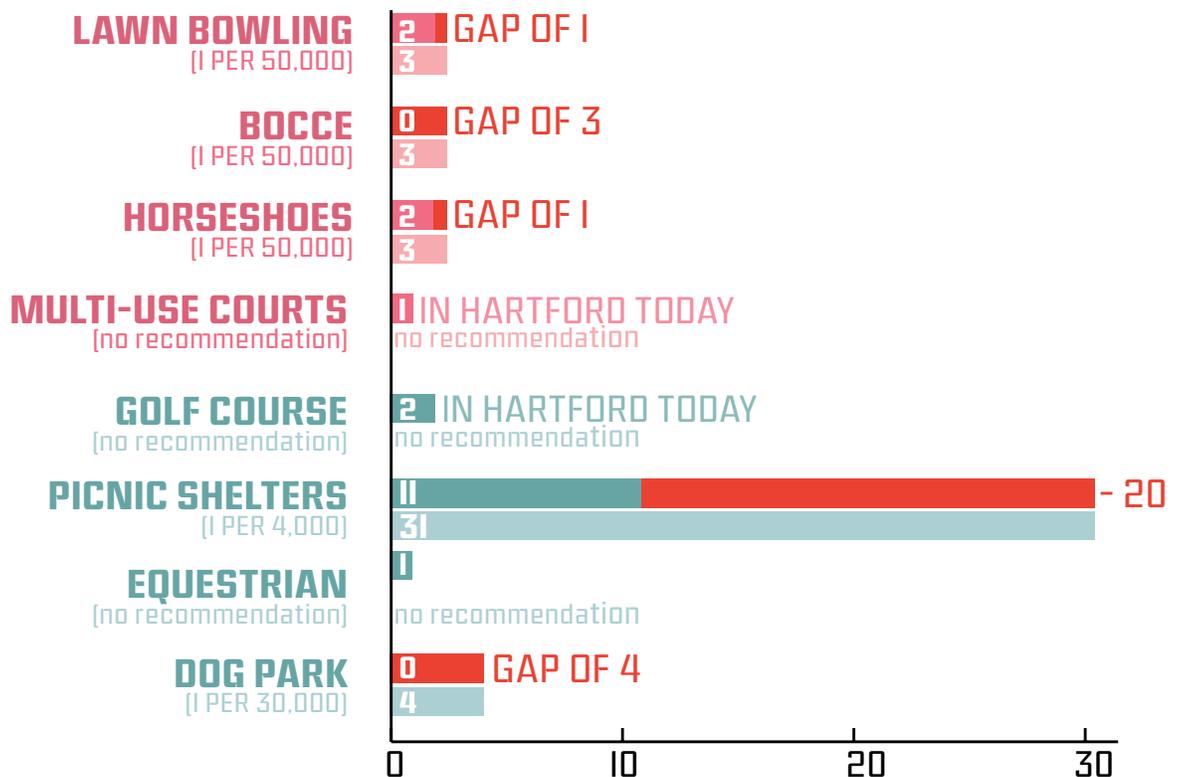


Games & Specialized Amenities

In addition to courts, fields, and play features, parks also offer opportunities for socializing and participating in specialized activities. Hartford has two golf courses and Keney Park is home to the Ebony Horsewomen, which provides unique equestrian opportunities. A specialized amenity gap in Hartford is a dog park. Hartford currently has no dog parks, but national standards would suggest several for a city of Hartford’s population. Public feedback has indicated demand for a new dog park in the area, especially in and around downtown. Thirty-three percent of survey takers say that they visit parks to walk their dogs. At the same time, other park visitors report concern with off-leash practices at some parks. A fenced dog-park

would allow dog owners a designated area for canine play. Parks that could be options for a dog park addition include Keney, Pope West, Pope - Bankside Grove, Turning Point, or Porter. Options should be vetted with multiple departments, Friends Groups, and the community to determine a suitable location.

National standards suggest more amenities that allow for casual hang-out and socializing are needed in Hartford. Many parks have at least a few picnic tables and benches, but many lack picnic pavilions. In addition, very few “game” opportunities like lawn bowling, bocce, or horseshoes currently exist in Hartford’s parks.



System-wide Findings

KEY FINDINGS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Tremendous opportunities for world-class; deep historic legacy + diversity of system
- Issues relate to quality rather than quantity for active amenities
- No need for additional maintained park space (not priority)
- No need for additional recreation amenities
- Need for more social spaces
- Maintenance of parks and amenities are key problems
- Importance of links – highest needs for park space in central neighborhoods, but greatest opportunities for park access on edges of city – bicycle links
- Currently, the parks assessment system does not have a clear way to measure environmental health or ecological value contributions. An assessment of the environmental role of the parks system is included in the Historic Legacy and Ecology chapter of this report.

DEMOGRAPHICS & PARK NEED

With a population of 124,867 in 2011, Hartford is Connecticut's third-largest city. It is a diverse city, in many ways. The character of neighborhoods change across the city. Denser urban communities with significant multifamily housing lie closer to downtown, and detached homes on slightly larger lots are more common at the city's north, western, and southern edges. Downtown is the densest area in terms of buildings, but it has only recently begun to grow into a significant residential area. Several thousand additional units are expected over the next decade.

Ethnic and racial diversity is high across town; 22% of residents in Hartford are foreign-born. The vast majority of foreign-born residents (72%) are from Latin America, primarily from the Caribbean but with an increasing number from South America. In addition, Hartford has a strong Puerto Rican community.

Hartford has a strong business community, including 3 Fortune 500 companies, but this corporate wealth exists in stark contrast to tight household budgets. Poverty is a significant issue in Hartford, with 33% of residents living below the poverty line. Poverty is not distributed evenly across the city; higher concentrations ring downtown. Citywide, 35% of households do not own a vehicle, and these households are also more common just outside of downtown.

Park needs vary by age group. Hartford is a very young city, with 25.8% of residents under 18, including 15.2% less than 10. High concentrations of families

with children live in the neighborhoods ringing downtown and in Parkville. In these areas, play, sports fields (including little league), court, and other active recreation amenities are important. Young adults live around Hartford’s higher education institutions, including University of Hartford and Trinity College. Much of the population growth downtown is also driven by young adults. This age group has a demand for amenities like frisbee golf, sports fields and courts, passive parks, games, and dog parks. Overall, 8.9% of residents in city are more than sixty years old. These residents need passive recreation parks with opportunities for games and benches for sitting. Parks need to be located close to homes so access is possible.

ownership rates and household incomes are also lower. These “high-need” areas in Hartford exist just beyond downtown. Fortunately, community and neighborhood parks are within convenient walking distance of many residents in these neighborhoods, but access to regional parks is more limited, with the exception of Keney in north Hartford. As a result, pedestrian and bicycle links between high need neighborhoods and regional parks with a wider range of recreation amenities are critical.

Data sources:

- Race/ethnicity & density - 2010 Census (Blocks)
- Other statistics - 2011 American Community Survey

How do these demographic characteristics influence park need? Parks are needed the most in the city’s densest neighborhoods, where car

HIGH NEED AREAS



LOW INCOME

POPULATION DENSITY

LACK OF CAR ACCESS

