



The Research Bureau

# Maintaining Municipal Parks: Thinking Outside the Picnic Basket

Report 08-04  
August 8, 2008

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parks and recreation facilities serve an important function, especially for those living in urban areas. In recent years, however, cities and towns have been faced with increasing fiscal pressure, and parks and recreation departments and programs have been among the first areas to experience budget cuts. Results of this practice have included deferred park maintenance, deteriorating park conditions, and the closure of parks or certain park features such as pools or beaches.

The City of Worcester has not escaped this trend:

- The total number of positions in the Division of Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery decreased from 67 to 56, or 16%, between FY98 and FY07.
- Total spending for this division as a percentage of the City's total budget decreased by more than 7% between FY00 and FY08.
- During the same time period, the City added seven parks and six playgrounds resulting in a 27% increase in mowing and other maintenance duties.
- Worcester spends less per capita on parks and recreation than any of the other eight cities that were surveyed.

Based on our analysis of parks maintenance in Worcester and other cities, The Research Bureau found that there are two major methods for generating revenues outside of using tax levy funds for that purpose:

- Developing partnerships with other non-profit institutions, businesses, and residents;
- Changing the fee structure for use of facilities depending on type, user, day, and length of use.

The Research Bureau recommends that the City pursue both options.

Partnerships can be formed for a variety of purposes:

- Maintenance of the park such as the agreement among the City of Philadelphia, the Friends of Clark Park, and the University City District (p.10).
- Revenue raising through park facilities and concessions such as Roger Williams Park where the Zoological Society and Friends of the (Natural History) Museum generate revenues from concessions which are then used for park operations and capital expenditures (p.12).
- Joint-use agreements between a city and a school district which share the same facilities thereby eliminating duplication of facilities and programs (pp.12-13).
- Management agreements where a city enters into a formal agreement with another entity detailing the responsibilities of each group. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and the Central Park Conservancy are examples of this kind of arrangement (pp.13-15).

## INTRODUCTION

### History of Parks

During the mid-nineteenth century, as cities became more densely populated with workers to supply America's burgeoning industrialization, public parks were established as a means of temporary escape from overcrowding, now that most urban residents lived far from the countryside. Legendary park designer Frederick Law Olmsted, for one, transformed plots of open land into New York City's Central Park and Worcester's own smaller but still substantial Elm Park, which in 1854 became the first park in the United States to be established with tax levy money. At the turn of the twentieth century, Jacob Riis, a prominent New York City social reformer, documented harsh conditions in city tenements and slums and brought attention to the need for small neighborhood parks, including recreational areas, to mitigate the unhealthy environment of crowded cities.<sup>1</sup> Riis also advocated building playgrounds and parks on school grounds.<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, spending on city parks began to decline as many Americans left the cities for the suburbs.<sup>3</sup> Parks and open space were not generally a part of the new suburban layouts because backyards attached to single-family homes provided a substitute for common parkland. However, interest in park development grew in the 1960's and 1970's as a result of the nascent environmental movement, while the strong national economy of the 1990's facilitated park expansions and improvements.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, nonetheless, as cities and towns have been faced with increasing fiscal pressure, parks and recreation departments and programs have been among areas the first to experience budget cuts. The result is deferred park maintenance, deteriorating park conditions, and the closure of parks or certain park features such as pools or beaches.

But parks and recreation facilities still serve an important function for those living in urban areas. Recent years have witnessed the generation of new ideas to retain and rehabilitate these facilities. This report considers some of them and their possible application in Worcester.

### Benefits of Parks

Parks offer several different benefits, not only for the residents they serve, but also for the greater community in which they are located. However, in order for these benefits to be fully realized, facilities must be well-maintained.

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<sup>1</sup> See Edith Patterson Meyer, *The Story of Jacob A. Riis* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> James B. Lane, *Jacob A. Riis and the American City*, Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> P. Sherer, *The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space* (San Francisco: The Trust for Public Land, 2006), [http://www.tpl.org/content\\_documents/parks\\_for\\_people\\_Jul2005.pdf](http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/parks_for_people_Jul2005.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Health Benefits**

One chief purpose of public parks is to facilitate physical activity, through recreation programs, organized sports, or simply taking a jog or walk through the park. Consistent exercise and physical activity improve overall health by lowering the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.<sup>5</sup> Physical activity has psychological benefits as well; it appears to relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety, improves mood, and enhances the person's overall well-being.<sup>6</sup> Lack of physical activity, on the other hand, can lead to poor health and obesity. In addition, the presence of trees and other green space can reduce certain air pollutants.<sup>7</sup>

### **Economic Benefits**

Several studies have shown that a property's value increases as its proximity to parks increases, since parks are seen as desirable locations and destinations.<sup>8</sup> Thus, cities or towns with well-maintained parks may have higher property values than those that do not – hence compensating for the fact that city-owned parks do not generate property tax revenue.

The presence of parks may also attract and retain businesses and residents by making the city a more attractive place to live and work.<sup>9</sup> Many residents, especially in urban areas where sizable lots and backyards may not exist, naturally find it desirable to live within walking distance of an area park. As one instance of how parks may also attract business investment, it has been noted that when Bryant Park in New York City was revitalized, the vacancy rates of the buildings in the surrounding area sharply decreased, as new businesses moved in to be close to the park.<sup>10</sup>

Cities with parks, especially parks with attractions such as zoos, also serve as an attraction to tourists.<sup>11</sup> City visitors (and hence local spending) can also be attracted as the result of parks being used to host festivals, weddings, and other organized events.

### **Social Benefits**

The most obvious social benefit of parks is that they are a venue for residents to get together, which may be difficult otherwise in urban neighborhoods. Additionally, in lower-income urban neighborhoods, parks may provide the only access to organized recreational activity. They can also serve as a venue, as in Worcester, for organized cultural events such as public concerts.

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<sup>5</sup> *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> J. Crompton, *The impact of parks on property values: A review of the empirical evidence*, *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol 33, No. 1, pp.1-31, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> As noted by Sherer, *The Benefits of Parks*.

<sup>10</sup> *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Spaces* (1999). <http://www.tpl.org>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## PARKS IN WORCESTER

In the City of Worcester, the Division of Parks, Recreation and Cemetery is part of the Department of Public Works & Parks. Besides the maintenance, upkeep, and staffing of City parks, pools, and beaches, the Division is also responsible for Hope Cemetery, some recreation programming, the municipal golf course at Green Hill Park, City trees, and the maintenance of grass median strips and squares. In addition, the Division is responsible for certain City events such as setting up elections, and the maintenance of some City buildings, including City Hall. The Department estimates that it uses about 15% of available man-hours on these secondary duties.

The City of Worcester has 60 parks covering 1,316 acres. City parks vary in acreage and amenities, from the large Green Hill Park (450 acres) to smaller neighborhood pocket parks. Some of the City parks contain fields for a number of sports, including baseball, softball, football, soccer, and courts for tennis, basketball, volleyball, and handball. Other amenities in the parks include restrooms, gazebos, playgrounds, picnic tables, pools, monuments, and paths and trails for walking, jogging, and biking.

### **Budget and Staffing**

The Parks, Recreation & Cemetery Division was a separate department in Worcester until July 2005, when the City Manager's reorganization plan moved the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery to the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Works.

As indicated in **Chart 1**, over a ten-year period between FY98 and FY07, total spending in this division increased from \$3.3 million to \$3.9 million (inflation-adjusted), or 18%. During this ten-year period, however, spending reached a high of \$4.3 million in FY02. By FY04, it had dropped to \$3.3 million, a reduction of 23%. Thus, total spending in FY04 returned to the FY98 level. Since then, spending has increased from \$3.3 million in FY04 to its current level of \$3.9 million (inflation-adjusted). Reflecting the increasing budgetary demands of other City services, spending on the Parks, Recreation, & Cemetery Division decreased from .98% of the City's overall tax levy budget in FY00 to .91% in FY08.

Inflation-adjusted average salaries have risen steadily between FY98 and FY07, from \$37,245 to \$47,610, or 28%.<sup>12,13</sup> However, the number of positions in the Division has been decreasing, from 67 positions in FY98 to 56 positions in FY07, a decrease of 16% (see **Chart 2**). Total employment reached a high of 70 positions in FY01 and FY02, the same period in which total spending reached a high. Just as with total spending, the number of positions dropped quickly from 67 in FY03 to 54 in FY04, a decrease of 19%.

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<sup>12</sup> Average salaries = total salaries expenditures/ # of total positions.

<sup>13</sup> Over 80% of current positions within the Division of Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery are union positions and therefore governed by collective bargaining.

Chart 1: Parks, Recreation, & Cemetery Division Total Expenditures in Millions, FY98-FY07 (Inflation Adjusted)

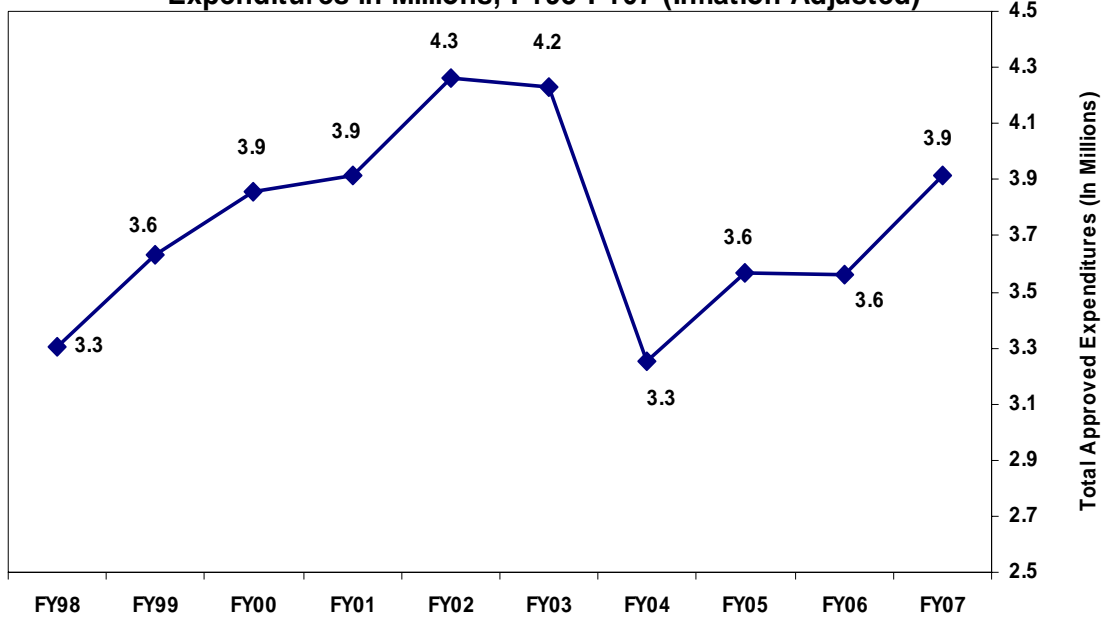
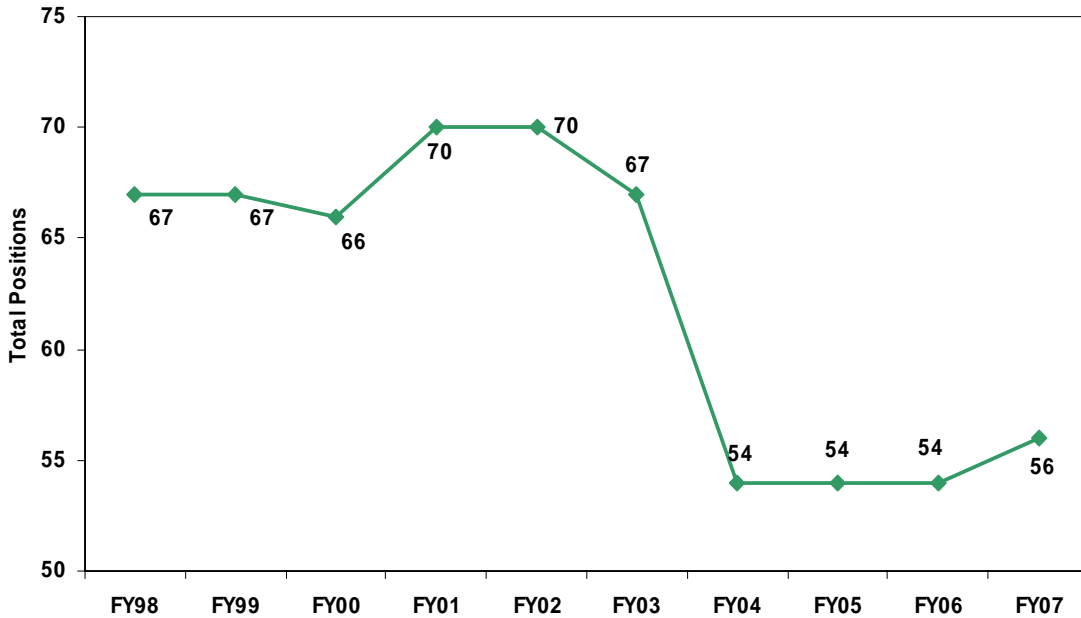


Chart 2: Parks, Recreation, & Cemetery Division Total Positions, FY98-FY07



As indicated in **Table 1**, between FY00 and FY08, the City experienced a significant increase in public park land and recreational facilities, generating additional responsibilities. One new project that will fall under the jurisdiction of Parks is the new skating pavilion at Worcester Common. The addition of seven parks and six playgrounds resulted in a 27% increase in mowing and other maintenance duties.

<b>Responsibilities/Duties</b>	<b>FY00</b>	<b>FY08</b>	<b>% Change</b>
# of Parks Maintained	53	60	13.2%
# of Acres Mowed	328	418	27.4%
# of Irrigated Areas (require increased mowing)	16	46	187.5%
Veterans Squares Maintained	32	32	0.0%
Medians/Islands	11	12	9.1%
Sidewalks Cleared (miles)	14.5	16	10.3%
Pools and Beaches	14	13	-7.1%
Skating Ponds	6	5	-16.7%
Buildings	37	37	0.0%
Playgrounds	29	35	20.7%
Facility Bookings	1000	1500	50.0%
Parks	900	1250	38.9%
Other	100	250	150.0%
# of Active Grants	1	4	300.0%
Monuments/Memorials	18	21	16.7%
Memorial Squares	241	245	1.7%
Street Trees Maintained	20277	18777	-7.4%
<i>Source: Commissioner Moylan's Overview of Parks and Recreation, Feb. 22, 2008</i>			

## **Pools and Beaches**

The City maintains nine swimming pools located in the parks plus four beaches. The pools and beaches are open for a seven-week period during July and August from noon until 7PM. Pools and beaches are staffed by temporary summer lifeguards. All the pools were built in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and have a "useful" life of about 20-25 years. City pools come in two designs (L-shaped and square) and measure 2'3" in depth at the shallow end of the pool and 3'6" at the deep end. Each pool has a mechanical room along with a building that houses restrooms, equipment storage, first aid, and outdoor showers.

All City pools have essentially reached the end of their useful life. Lack of regular capital upgrades due to a shortage of funds has caused structural problems: all nine pools leak water, with each pool losing up to a third of its water each day, or about 30,000 gallons. They have also been subject to vandalism, including fence cutting, damage to restroom facilities and pool equipment, and disposal of glass into the pools and surrounding deck.

In 2004, the City contracted with a consultant to determine what to do with the pools, given their age and condition. An in-depth study determined that all pools were physically and functionally obsolete. The study also found that less than 1% of the City's population actually used the pools. Based on this study, the Department of Public Works & Parks proposed to rehabilitate 5 of the current pools and put in 5 spray parks (3 spray parks would replace the remaining pools, while the University Park pool would permanently close and 2 spray parks would be constructed at

new locations).<sup>14</sup> This plan would provide a pool and a spray park in each of the City's 5 districts.

## **Green Hill Park**

Green Hill Park is Worcester's largest City park, with about 450 acres. It includes a municipal golf course, a petting zoo, and the Commonwealth's Vietnam War Memorial, among other features. In 2006, the City opened a new technical high school built on a few acres of parkland that were exchanged for acres added to the park.

The City is in the middle of developing a new master plan for the golf course at Green Hill Park. (The last master plan for the park was done in 1997.) One of the issues to be addressed is a long-term plan for the Green Hill Municipal Golf Course. The golf course is run on an enterprise account, meaning that revenues generated from user fees are supposed to match its operational expenditures. For the last five years, however, the golf course has been unable to generate sufficient revenues to cover its expenditures. In FY07, the golf course had a deficit of \$116,546, which necessitated a subsidy from the City's tax-levy budget. One suggestion to cover the yearly deficit and generate additional revenues to maintain the park is to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages at the course. This proposal has generated opposition from some park neighbors and the Green Hill Park Coalition. The Coalition and the Greater Worcester Land Trust (which also has legal interests in the park) argue that the City has left them out of the master plan process.<sup>15</sup> Any plan must be consistent with the agreements the City signed with the Coalition when the exchange of land occurred to build the Worcester Technical High School.<sup>16</sup> However, given the budget pressures that the City faces, allowing the sale of alcoholic beverages would appear to be the only fiscally realistic alternative to continuing to subsidize the facility with tax levy funds. Since private courses customarily serve alcohol in their clubhouses without having acquired a reputation for unruly behavior, this option is surely worth considering.

In June 2008, the License Commission allowed the sale of beer and wine at a golf tournament that took place at Green Hill Park.<sup>17</sup> Food and services were donated by a local restaurant, and all alcohol sales proceeds were given back to the park.

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<sup>14</sup> *Aquatics Master Plan Report*, Department of Public Works and Parks, July 8, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> N. Kotsopoulos, "City's Green Hill master plan was hit out of bounds," *Telegram & Gazette*, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> The Green Hill Park Coalition is a non-profit advocacy group that was established in 1998 and dedicated "to preserving the remaining acreage of Green Hill Park, to enhancing the park's natural and cultural resources, and to protecting the future of the park through a conservation restriction." (Green Hill Park Coalition, February 2008 newsletter.) In 2002, the coalition entered into three enforceable agreements with the City: the settlement agreement, a compromise between the two parties that includes restoring the Bear Brook Wetland Area, preservation of a stone quarry building, and an environmental curriculum at the technical school which prescribes 5,600 student-hours per year helping to preserve and maintain the park; a conservation restriction, designed to keep the park from any future changes to preserve natural resources and protect from damage; and a final order of conditions, a document necessary under the Commonwealth's Wetlands Protection Act.

<sup>17</sup> S. Croteau, "Alcohol sales given OK for Green Hill," *Telegram & Gazette*, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008.



# OPTIONS FOR MAINTAINING WORCESTER'S PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

## PARKS PARTNERSHIPS

### *Why Partnerships?*

In light of declining revenues for parks and increasing needs for maintenance, how can parks be maintained? One possible solution that has been embraced by many cities and towns is partnerships. Teaming up with non-profit organizations, businesses, or educational institutions has enabled park agencies to improve the maintenance of existing facilities, build new ones, and obtain support for continuing or expanding programming.<sup>18</sup>

### **Partnerships in Worcester**

There are currently a few examples of partnerships in Worcester between city parks and area educational institutions, friends groups, and other non-profit organizations. For example, six Little Leagues in the city maintain the fields that they use (Rockwood Field, Beaver Brook, Brook Street, Ty Cobb, Harrington Way, Vernon Hill). Upgraded or newly installed fields have been turned over to the leagues. Each league provides its own equipment and is given storage space at the field. The land that Rockwood Field now sits on was donated by the Rockwood family and set aside for City recreational purposes. Rockwood is located adjacent to Worcester State College, which helped develop the sports fields located there (primarily baseball and softball fields and facilities) in conjunction with the City.

The Friends of Newton Hill, founded in 2001, was formed “to promote the restoration, maintenance, and use of the Newton Hill section of Elm Park.”<sup>19</sup> The group is made up of neighbors, students and volunteers from local businesses. During the summer, a collaboration between the City, Friends of Newton Hill, and the Weed & Seed program employs and supervises high-school and college-aged workers to maintain the Park’s several paths and trails by clearing paths of brush and other debris. The City hires and pays this summer staff, with the Weed & Seed program reimbursing half of the salaries. Friends of Newton Hill then supervises the staff and assigns work as prescribed by the City.

A new park at Winslow and Pleasant Streets is being constructed and maintained by the City of Worcester with assistance from Women Together/Mujeres Unidas, a group affiliated with the Pleasant Street Network Center that was formed in 2004 to address issues of violence in the neighborhood. The park area was previously an abandoned lot and a site of frequent illegal dumping. The group organized clean-ups in the neighborhood, including this lot, and later envisioned a neighborhood park there. The City of Worcester, with Women Together/Mujeres Unidas, applied for and received a grant from the State’s Urban Self-Help Grant programs to develop the lot, while the group donated \$96,500 toward the development of the park.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chris Walker, *Partnerships for Parks: Lessons from the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Urban Parks Programs* (The Urban Institute, April 1999), <http://www.urban.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Friends of Newton Hill Mission Statement, <http://www.friendsofnewtonhill.com>.

The South Worcester Neighborhood Center puts on a summer program through a partnership with the nearby College of the Holy Cross and the Canterbury Street School. This program includes activities for children and incorporates use of the city pool at the neighborhood park. Holy Cross provides an intern to work at the park during the summer program.

Institute Park, located on Salisbury Street across from the campus of Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), has benefited from a partnership of the City, WPI, and Friends of Institute Park, a non-profit organization. They have worked together to develop a master plan for the park, which was approved by the City in December, 2007. It includes plans for physical improvements, pedestrian connections to the surrounding community, protection of natural areas, enhancement of cultural and economic opportunities in the park, and provisions for low-cost and low-maintenance landscape designs.<sup>20</sup>

The Bancroft School in Worcester, along with the YMCA Greendale Branch, worked together to keep Shore Park, a waterfront park, open during the summer months in 2007 and are doing so again this summer. The park is maintained by the school, while the YMCA helps operate the park. Bancroft also hired a high-school student to work at the park last summer. Without the help of these institutions, the City could not have kept Shore Park open for the normal seven-week period during the summer.

A master plan for Cookson Field was put together with the help of the College of the Holy Cross and the College Hill Civic Association. The City met with these groups over the course of several months to gather ideas, concerns, and inputs about the park. Holy Cross students and faculty also helped to prepare reports to inform the planning process.

### ***Green Hill Farm - Barnyard Zoo***

The Green Hill Park Zoo, which is located within Green Hill Park, is open 5 days a week from 10-4, April through November. Visits to the barnyard zoo are free and open to the public. Zoo animals include: sheep, goats, llamas, a pony, pigs, pheasants, peafowl, and ducks, plus wildlife found in the two ponds (fish, frogs, turtles, snakes, etc.). The zoo is an attraction that the City could improve to bring in more visitors and possibly some revenue. Upgrades might include expansion of the facilities and exhibits, and expansion of educational programs for school children.

During the past decade, Parks and Recreation staff have met several times with representatives of Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton to discuss the zoo's potential. Tufts is interested in providing technical assistance in developing the educational and recreational objectives for the zoo, providing guidance on the facility and exhibits, securing accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and suggesting possible revenue streams (food concessions, gift shops, birthday parties). Development of a long-term plan for the zoo should also include Worcester Technical High School, located on grounds

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ci.worcester.ma.us/reports/InstituteMasterPlan.pdf>.

adjacent to Green Hill Park, whose students in Environmental Technology, Veterinary Technology, Horticulture, Carpentry, and Electrical programs are already working with the park, and Becker College, which has a Veterinary Assistant's program. The City should establish a task force of these institutions to bring the zoo project to fruition.

## **Examples of Park Partnerships in Other Cities**

As the foregoing examples illustrate, partnerships for park support can be structured in various ways. Some partnerships are solely concerned with providing maintenance to parks; others may involve sharing facilities or generating revenues for the park. The examples below drawn from other cities were chosen for their innovative character and success. **Appendix A** provides summary data about the projects and the cities in which they are located. Even though some of the cities are much larger than Worcester, parkland per capita is not substantially different. All the cities spend much more per capita on parks than Worcester does.

### ***Park Maintenance:***

Maintenance agreements require an agreement between a city and another organization which allows this second party to help with or even take over maintenance of a specific park. Maintenance responsibilities may include mowing, graffiti removal, trash removal, other cleaning, replacement of benches or other structures, and maintaining facilities, such as restrooms.

#### *Philadelphia, PA*

Clark Park, a heavily used nine-acre park in the University City area of Philadelphia, fell victim to underfunding and a subsequent lack of maintenance. Two different groups stepped forward to help restore and maintain this park. In 1973, Friends of Clark Park formed to help the City maintain and improve the park with volunteer help.<sup>21</sup> University City District, a non-profit organization, was established in 1997 with a mission to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood and community.<sup>22</sup> The organization has a staff of 14 full-time employees. Funding comes from contributions from area businesses, institutions, and individuals.<sup>23</sup>

In 1999, Friends of Clark Park and the University City District (UCD) came together with the City to develop a fundraising proposal for park maintenance, including cleaning, planting, graffiti clean-up, mowing, and trash removal in Clark Park. The two groups organize the Park's annual "Party in the Park," which is a substantial fundraiser for the park. The park is also home to several special events and other activities including a farmers' market, music festival, and youth soccer.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.clarkpark.info>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ucityphila.org>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

*Indianapolis, IN*

The Indianapolis Parks Department assigned responsibility for maintaining smaller parks to local churches. A contract focused on mowing of the parks' land and other maintenance, for which the churches were paid a small fee. This allowed the City to focus on larger parks in the system.<sup>24</sup>

**Revenue-raising – Park Facilities and Concessions**

City departments can partner with other organizations in order to enable them to raise revenue for a specific park. This other organization may have the ability to charge fees for some type of service or admission, and can manage the revenues that come in. Generally, facilities in the park (zoos, museums, etc.) are what can be used to generate these revenues. Profits from these types of projects may go to the city or may be directed back toward park operations or capital improvements.

*Boston, MA*

Post Office Square, or the Norman B. Leventhal Park, lies in the center of Boston's financial district. The 1.7-acre park is unique because it stands atop a seven-level underground parking garage. The Friends of Post Office Square, a for-profit organization comprised of Boston firms and individuals, was formed in 1983 with the goal of creating a park on the site of the old and unsightly Post Office Square garage and building a first class underground garage.<sup>25</sup> The original parking garage was demolished, rebuilt underground, and a new park was developed on top.<sup>26</sup> The whole project was completed in 1992.<sup>27</sup>

Friends of Post Office Square's development associate, Post Office Square Redevelopment Corporation, bought the lease for the parking garage from the previous operator and paid the City \$1 million for ownership of land above the garage, all pursuant to Massachusetts' Urban renewal legislation, M.G.L. Chapter 121A. Thus, it owns and operates this underground garage and the park.<sup>28</sup> Post Office Square pays \$1.5 million a year to the City in taxes. The operating surplus goes into the City's general fund and Parks Trust Fund, which funds maintenance of other Boston parks. Space is also leased to a café in the park. The underground garage contains 1,400 parking stalls which yield \$12 million a year in revenue, with an operating budget of about \$4 million.<sup>29</sup>

The Friends of Post Office Square staff consists of volunteer officers and a Board of Directors, a full-time general manager, facility manager, maintenance mechanic, accountant and

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<sup>24</sup> *Why Build Partnerships for Parks?* Project for Public Spaces, 2008. Excerpt from Public Parks, Private Partners, 2000. <http://www.pps.org/parks>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.normanplevelthelpark.org>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "Garage Below Supports Park Above in Boston." Project for Public Spaces. <http://www.pps.org>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

administrative assistant.<sup>30</sup> Friends contracts with a parking company to operate the garage and provide staff, maintenance and security for the garage and park.<sup>31</sup>

The Post Office Square garage and park operation brings revenues to the City, parking for residents, increases in value of the surrounding properties, plus an attractive park in the center of the financial district.<sup>32</sup> This public-private partnership was an innovative way to bring more greenspace into the City, while also offering the City a parking amenity and additional revenues.

### *Providence, RI*

In the early 1980's, Roger Williams Park, a 430-acre park that includes the Roger Williams Park Zoo, Museum of Natural History, and a Victorian Carousel Village, was in disrepair and was generating less than \$3,000 a year in revenues.<sup>33</sup> Concessions in the park were being run by family-operated concessionaires without public bidding or competition. Two non-profit organizations, the Zoological Society and Friends of the Museum, were asked to manage contracts for concession bids. These concessions were expected to increase park revenue. In return, the two groups were able to use a portion of income for their own facilities.<sup>34</sup> Profits from the Park's fees and charges were to be spent on specific projects approved by the Providence Parks Department, and it was agreed that income generated from the park would be used only for park needs.<sup>35</sup>

In 1987, the City instituted admissions fees for park facilities, including the zoo; previously these attractions had been free to the public.<sup>36</sup> Annual profits for the park are now over \$1 million, and revenues from the concessions represent about 50% of the Park's budget.<sup>37</sup> The City, in turn, provides additional funding for maintenance, personnel, and animal costs for the zoo. The museum and the zoo pay for their own capital expenditures, any marketing or public relations, and other related costs.<sup>38</sup>

### **Joint-use agreements**

Joint-use agreements in the realm of parks and recreation occur between a city and a school district. In these agreements, both parties benefit from using the same facilities. For example, a playground at an elementary school can be used by both school children and the public during non-school hours. These types of agreements are efficient and productive because they eliminate duplication of facilities and programs. They also serve to expand the types of facilities and

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<sup>30</sup> Phone and email correspondence with representative of Friends.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "Concessions Overhaul Brings Major Expansion and New Exhibits, An Urban Parks Institute Success Story, Providence Rhode Island." Project for Public Spaces, <http://www.pps.org>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Phone and email correspondence with Superintendent of Providence Parks Department.

<sup>36</sup> "Concessions Overhaul Brings Major Expansion and New Exhibits, An Urban Parks Institute Success Story, Providence Rhode Island." Project for Public Spaces, <http://www.pps.org>; <http://www.rogerwilliamsparkzoo.org>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

programs that are available.<sup>39</sup> At the close of the school day, resources available to the public include libraries, fields, playgrounds, pools, performing arts centers, and gymnasiums. Cities can partner with schools on construction projects by donating land or financing in exchange for sharing the facility with the community.

#### *Laguna Niguel, CA*

More than ten years ago, the city of Laguna Niguel faced the problem of having insufficient land available to meet the demand for sports facilities from both adults and children. The city made a joint-use formal agreement in 1994 with the city's schools for a sports complex at a middle school; they worked together to re-master the site for this purpose.<sup>40</sup> The sports fields that were constructed as a result of the agreement include five softball fields, four volleyball courts, two football/soccer fields, and a track.<sup>41</sup>

Students at the middle school use the facility during prescribed hours, including exclusive use during school hours. The city schedules all remaining use of the sports fields during non-school hours, including use by the school district, the city, nonprofit organizations, and others.<sup>42</sup> The city maintains the sports fields and facilities. The city also charges different fees for other groups to use the fields which depend on the type of organization (Youth/Adult, private/City organized league) and whether the user is a resident or not, and these fees help defray maintenance costs.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Carson City, NV*

The city has a joint-use agreement with the local school district to share facilities. The schools use the city's aquatic facility, theater, and tennis courts, while the city uses the school district's gyms and fields.<sup>44</sup> The agreement mandates that each party will make its facilities available at no cost to the other party, as schedules allow. Also, each party is responsible for maintenance of its own facilities, no matter what it is being used for. The agreement has generated significant savings for the City's taxpayers.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Management Agreements (Maintenance, Planning, Capital)***

A management partnership between a city and another entity involves a formal agreement about the responsibilities of each group for a single park or multiple parks, a program, or project. Typically, an outside party steps forward to assist the city in caring for a park that may have deteriorated. Sometimes this second party is needed for the sole purpose of ensuring better maintenance, instituting new programs or enhancing park assets, conserving park land, or

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<sup>39</sup> D. Van Wyngaardt, *Joint-use agreements pool municipal, school resources: plans make public facilities more productive, useful*. Nation's Cities Weekly, Sept. 2002.

<sup>40</sup> "Joint Facilities Use Agreement, Niguel Hills Middle School," 1994; Phone interview with Deputy Recreation Director of Laguna Niguel.

<sup>41</sup> D. Van Wyngaardt, *Joint-use agreements pool municipal, school resources: plans make public facilities more productive, useful*. Nation's Cities Weekly, Sept. 2002.

<sup>42</sup> "Joint Facilities Use Agreement, Niguel Hills Middle School," 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Phone interview with Deputy Recreation Director.

<sup>44</sup> Carson City Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

<sup>45</sup> Email correspondence with Director of Operations, Carson City Parks and Recreation Department.

developing a master plan for parks. The group then takes on a leadership and management role regarding the park. The following are examples of management partnerships between a city and a nonprofit organization.

*Pittsburgh, PA*

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy was launched in 1996 with a mission to “restore, renew, revitalize and preserve the four great parks of Pittsburgh.”<sup>46</sup> Since its beginning, the organization has raised over \$37 million, including \$30 million that was raised in a capital campaign that began in 2003 and was recently completed.<sup>47</sup> A major accomplishment of the partnership between the PPC and the City of Pittsburgh was the development of a master plan in 2001 that laid out a 20-year plan for park and ecological restoration and major capital improvements for the four parks.<sup>48</sup> Citizen input in the development of the master plan was extensive.

The PPC has nine full-time employees and several part-time employees, and is supported through foundation and government grants, corporate support, receipts from special events, and individual gifts.<sup>49</sup> The PPC also depends on the help of volunteers and other community partners in its various projects. The PPC estimates that nearly 400 volunteers from the summer and fall of 2007 put in more than 1,500 hours of work with an estimated value of \$28,568.<sup>50</sup>

*New York, NY*

The Carl Schurz Park Association was formed in the 1970’s when a group of neighbors got together to upgrade the Carl Schurz Park’s playground. The group broadened its commitments when it became clear that the park needed more help during the City’s fiscal crisis. The Association developed long-term maintenance and restoration plans for the park, which were “imaginative” and required minimum maintenance, and received the approval of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.<sup>51</sup>

Today, the Association boasts over 1,200 members, whose donations help fund a full-time Park Enforcement Patrol Officer, seasonal gardeners, and horticultural, programmatic, and capital improvements.<sup>52</sup> A new management plan for the park was completed in 1999.

The Carl Schurz Park Association works closely with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. The Association has become the “caretaker” of the park, and allocates the park’s operational and capital funds.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.pittsburghparks.org>

<sup>47</sup> *The Voice*, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Winter 2008.

<sup>48</sup> *Pittsburgh’s Regional Parks Master Plan*.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.pittsburghparks.org>

<sup>50</sup> *The Voice*, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Winter 2008.

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.carlschurzparknyc.org>

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Email correspondence with Association representative.

The Central Park Conservancy started in 1980 to help restore New York's Central Park after the 843-acre park fell into disrepair during the 1970s. During its first decade, the Conservancy drew up a master plan with three goals: "rebuilding the Park's architectural heritage (both structural and landscape); greening the Park and providing constant horticultural care for its meadows, woodlands, and gardens; and providing programs and security for Park visitors."<sup>54</sup>

The Conservancy is the official manager of Central Park under a contract with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, which was signed in 1998 under Mayor Giuliani and reaffirmed in 2006. Under this agreement, the Conservancy is responsible for everyday maintenance and operations. The Conservancy's responsibilities include: providing 85% of the Park's annual \$27 million budget through fundraising and investments, providing 80% of the Park's maintenance and operations staff, and designing and implementing plans for the Park.

In turn, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation gives the Conservancy an annual fee to run the park, funds the park's roadways, maintains policy control over the park and discretion over all user and event permits, and provides the remaining 20% of maintenance staff. The Conservancy also raises money from individuals, corporations, and foundations, and has many different volunteer programs.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Brooklyn, NY*

The Prospect Park Alliance was formed in 1987 to revitalize Prospect Park after years of budget cuts and neglect led to the park's deteriorating condition. Prospect Park is a large, 500+ acre park in Brooklyn that includes a zoo, historical landmarks and buildings, a lake and boathouse, and a carousel. Funds from private donors, businesses, and members supplement the Park's basic operating budget, and volunteers also help out at the park.<sup>56</sup> The Alliance works to promote awareness of the park, promote its maintenance, and institute new projects and programs.

#### **Friends Groups**

There are several organizations whose sole purpose is to help "park friends" or "neighborhood park groups" get organized. In Boston, the Parks Partners Program is a community-based initiative that helps to create and coordinate neighborhood park groups.<sup>57</sup> It works with the Boston Parks and Recreation Department.

Partnerships for Parks is another such organization in New York City. This program aims to "start, strengthen, and support neighborhood park groups; to link these groups together so that they can learn from each other and become stronger collectively; and to promote involvement in parks so people will join in efforts to restore and preserve them."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> [www.centralparknyc.org](http://www.centralparknyc.org)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.prospectpark.org>.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.cityofboston.gov/parks/pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.partnershipsforparks.org>.



## **FEES AND CHARGES**

Another way of raising revenues for maintaining parks is through charging fees for usage of facilities. Worcester's Department of Public Works & Parks maintains a schedule of fees and charges for the City's park facilities. These fees include permits for sports fields and courts and for special events such as weddings, and rental fees for other activities. Youth groups or organizations (for City residents under the age of 18) are not charged for field permits. When there are charges, Worcester residents receive a discount ranging from 25% to 50%.

The City does not charge for other park amenities such as the zoo at Green Hill Park or the pools and beaches. Although Green Hill Golf Course has its own fee structure, high school golf teams are allowed to use the course without charge during their official competitive season.

Worcester can increase its current fees and charges in order to increase revenues. (See **Table 2** for Worcester's current fee structure and that of other selected cities.) One possibility is to change the way youth groups and organizations are charged to use park fields and facilities. Currently, there are no charges to youth groups with city residents under the age of 18 for the use of sports fields and courts for softball, baseball, football, soccer, rugby, hockey, basketball and lacrosse. Other cities such as Boston and Providence also do not charge youth for field uses. However, some cities do, including Laguna Niguel and Indianapolis. In most cases youth groups or teams are charged at a discounted rate, and different fees for adult and youth organizations are assessed.

Another option is for youth organizations that use the fields to assist in maintaining them, which would lower maintenance costs for the City. As noted previously, there are a few Little Leagues in the City that are maintaining their fields. If this idea were instituted, youth teams could decide to either pay field fees or chose instead to help with field and court maintenance.

Another possibility for charging fees to teams and organizations, whether youth or adult organizations, is to charge a flat fee. Seattle and Providence both have in place a system where teams are charged a flat fee, which could either be in place of hourly field and court fees, or on top of them. Either way, the Parks, Recreation, and Cemetery Division should establish a field and court fee structure that can maximize the amount of revenue coming in to help with maintenance costs, but also be fair to city teams and organizations that use the fields and courts.

Worcester's parks fees and charges policy is set up so that the same fee is charged for the same type of facility throughout the city (i.e., all unlighted fields are charged \$10/hour and all picnic permits are \$80/day). In some cities, such as Indianapolis and Portland, ME, permit fees depend on the facility. For example, the more capacity a function room or picnic shelter can hold, the greater the charge for its use. Different types of sports facilities could have different fees depending on their maintenance costs. For example, maintenance for basketball courts is less than that for baseball fields, which must be mowed and swept. Community buildings or centers that have more to offer, such as several rooms or different amenities, could be rented at different rates. Facility and field use fees could vary with demand; in Pittsburgh and Indianapolis, for example, picnic permits and park use for weddings have different rates for weekend and weekday use.

*Maintaining Municipal Parks: Thinking Outside the Picnic Basket*

<b>City</b>	<b>Sports Fields &amp; Courts Permits/Fees</b>	<b>Picnic Permits/Fees</b>	<b>Special Event Permits/Fees</b>	<b>Buildings/ Facility Rentals</b>
<b>Worcester, MA</b>	Youth organizations not charged, \$10/ hour (unlighted) \$16/hour (lighted), discount for residents	\$80 day - 8AM-6PM, discount for residents	Wedding ceremonies or pictures - \$60 day, other events determined on individual basis, resident discount	Rentals: Non-profit organizations - \$75 day, Private groups/individuals - \$150 day
<b>Boston, MA</b>	Lighting - Resident Adult Leagues - \$25/hour, Non-resident Leagues \$50/hour	n/a	Wedding ceremonies or pictures - Resident \$50, Non-resident \$100	n/a
<b>Seattle, WA</b>	Adult teams - \$30 flat fee, games \$40, practices \$20, lighting \$15 Youth teams - \$75 flat fee, games \$5-20, practices \$2-6, camps \$25-55	Shelter fee \$0-110 (depending on facility), plus fees for tables	Ceremonies - \$100-150, Weddings \$500	Daily or hourly charge, depending on facility type
<b>Indianapolis, IN</b>	Courts - \$4-10/hour, \$65-200/day, youth discounts	\$75-125 (depending on facility)	Weddings - \$50-200/hour, depending on day of week and facility	\$10-200/hour, depending on facility (kitchens, conference rooms, gyms)
<b>Pittsburgh, PA</b>	Issued to Residents only, \$16/hour/daytime, \$20/hour/evening	\$75 mandatory alcohol permit, plus fee of \$50-270 (depending on facility and day of week)	n/a	n/a
<b>Laguna Niguel, CA</b>	Youth Resident - \$2.50-6/hour, Adult - \$9-12/hour, Private \$12, Non-resident organizations \$10-16/hour, Resident profit/Non-resident \$20/hour (plus lighting fees)	n/a	n/a	Community center - depends on type of room, day of week, organization status, i.e. full gym \$35/hour for non-profit, \$210/hr for commercial use
<b>Dallas, TX</b>	Athletic fields - day (1.5 hours) \$15, night (1.5 hours) \$25	Large picnic site \$20/hour, small site \$15/hour	Wedding - \$15/hour, Runs/walks fee of \$150 plus participant fee	Recreation center - large room & kitchen \$75/hour, gym \$80/hour; other buildings \$60-120/hour, depending on capacity and resident status
<b>Providence, RI</b>	Youth no charge, \$500 damage deposit, bi-monthly \$75 team fee & individual fee	n/a	n/a	Casino rentals - meetings hourly rate \$150 (Mon-Thurs); 5-hour basis - rates depend on day of week, organization status, resident status (range from \$750-3,500) Plus other charges
<b>Hartford, CT</b>	n/a	n/a	Weddings - \$50 Resident, \$100 Non-resident, Pictures \$25 resident, \$50 non-resident	n/a
<b>Portland, ME</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$10-50/hour, depending on facility or type of group, plus staffing fees and fees for add'l attendants

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on our analysis of parks maintenance in Worcester and other cities, The Research Bureau found that there are two major methods for generating revenues outside of using tax levy funds for that purpose:

- Developing partnerships with other non-profit institutions, businesses, and residents;
- Changing the fee structure for use of facilities depending on type, user, day, and length of use.

The Research Bureau recommends that the City pursue both options.

According to Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, the former President of the Central Park Conservancy, the three characteristics of a successful partnership are passion, patience, and persistence.<sup>59</sup> Our review suggests many benefits from partnerships. Partnerships with non-profit agencies benefit the public sector and park constituents by increasing funding for parks through private fundraising and accessing grants not always available to the public sector.

The foregoing examples offer some promising ideas for helping Worcester's parks. The Parks Division may be able to work out maintenance agreements with local groups that patronize a given park or with local businesses that border it. For example, Elm Park is split by Park Avenue, a main street filled with several businesses that could be tapped to assist in park maintenance or other activities. It would be desirable to encourage the formation of "friends groups," like those in Boston and New York City, that help to organize community support for the maintenance of particular parks. "Friends" organizations can marshal assistance to the City in park maintenance through volunteers, and financial support. However, they should not become advocacy organizations that claim priority for parks over other public concerns (e.g., economic development, schools), through lobbying or through use of judicial processes. We do not need another publicly supported lobby; the City needs citizen assistance to help support parks, recognizing that political institutions must in the end balance park interests with other considerations.

Also, larger parks in the City should look into ways to generate revenues and turn a profit which could then be used for maintenance of that facility. The City's plans for the Green Hill Park golf course, through upgrades to the facility and allowing the sale of alcoholic beverages at the clubhouse, offer a promising experiment. The City may also consider inviting more major events into the parks, such as the Summer Nationals that are held annually in Green Hill Park, assuming that this can be done without serious interference with other users' activities. Festivals, reinvigorating summer theater, boating, and upgrading the zoo are other possibilities.

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<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Making Partnerships Work: The Central Park Model*. Project for Public Spaces, 2008. <http://www.pps.org/parks>.

## APPENDIX A: SELECTED PARKS PARTNERSHIPS

City	Population (2006)	Total Park Acreage	Park Acreage per Capita	FY07 Parks and/or Recreation Spending*	Spending per Capita	Partners Involved
Worcester, MA	175,454	1,316	0.008	\$3,917,227	\$22.33	Institute Park, Friends of Institute Park, WPI, City
Boston, MA	590,763	2,200	0.004	\$14,915,356	\$25.25	Friends Of Post Office Square, City
Providence, RI	175,255	1,200	0.007	\$8,589,502	\$49.01	Roger Williams Park, Zoological Society, Friends of the Museum, City
New York, NY	8,214,426	28,000	0.003	\$264,118,603	\$32.15	Carl Schurz Park, CSPA, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
						Central Park, Central Park Conservancy, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
						Prospect Park, Prospect Park Alliance, City
Pittsburgh, PA	312,819	2,892	0.009	\$9,999,854	\$31.97	Four regional and several neighborhood parks, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy & City
Carson City, NV	55,289	765	0.014	\$2,034,091	\$36.79	City and City's schools
Laguna Niguel, CA	64,771	335	0.005	\$2,109,995	\$32.58	City and City's schools
Philadelphia, PA	1,448,394	9,200	0.006	\$49,000,000	\$33.83	Clark Park, City, Friends of Clark Park & University City District
Indianapolis, IN	785,597	11,018	0.014	\$33,616,214	\$42.79	City Parks Department, local churches

\*Spending on Department or Division that includes parks and recreation facilities

## APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

City	Partnership Contact	Type of Arrangement	Funding Sources	Personnel Involved
Worcester, MA	<a href="http://www.institutepark.org">www.institutepark.org</a>	maintenance, master planning	Friends Of Institute Park, WPI, City	Volunteers, City staff
Boston, MA	<a href="http://www.normanbleyenthalpark.org">www.normanbleyenthalpark.org</a>	revenue-raising garage to support park	parking garage revenues, leases for other space	FOPOS full-time staff and park personnel employed by parking garage operator
Providence, RI	Superintendent, Providence Parks Department	revenue-raising, facility management	50% of Park budget - fees & charges, 50%-City, museum & zoo pay own other expenditures	parks personnel
New York, NY	<a href="http://www.carlschurzparknyc.org">www.carlschurzparknyc.org</a>	management planning, maintenance, allocates funding	CSPA members' donations, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation	CSPA employees (Park Enforcement Patrol Officer, seasonal gardeners)
	<a href="http://www.centralparknyc.org">www.centralparknyc.org</a>	official manager of Central Park under contract	Conservancy's fundraising and investments, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation	80% of maintenance and operations park staff employed by Conservancy, 20% City staff
	<a href="http://www.prospectpark.org">www.prospectpark.org</a>	maintenance, fundraising, programming	Private donors, businesses, member donations, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation	Parks Dept. personnel, Alliance staff & volunteers
Pittsburgh, PA	<a href="http://www.pittsburghparks.org">www.pittsburghparks.org</a>	planning, programming, maintenance, management,	PPC (including grants, corporations, events, private donations), City	PPC staffs 14 full-time employees, 3 part-time employees, volunteers, City staff
Carson City, NV	Director of Operations, Carson City Parks	joint-use agreement	City and Public Schools	City and school staff
Laguna Niguel, CA	Deputy Recreation Director	joint-use agreement at school sports complex	City and Public Schools	City and school staff
Philadelphia, PA	<a href="http://www.clarkpark.org">www.clarkpark.org</a> <a href="http://www.ucityphila.org">www.ucityphila.org</a>	maintenance & fundraising	private-funding from businesses, institutions, and individuals, city	UCD staffs 14 employees, volunteers, city employees
Indianapolis, IN	Director, Indy Parks & Recreation	maintenance	City	volunteers

*Mission Statement:*

*The Research Bureau serves the public interest of the Greater Worcester region by conducting independent, non-partisan research and analysis of public policy issues to promote informed public debate and decision-making.*



## The Research Bureau

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