

Portland Parks Commission

Annual Report

2015-2016



October 1, 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Message from the Chair of the Parks Commission

As Chair of the Parks Commission, may I proudly say that 2016 has been an extraordinary year for Portland's parks and open spaces. Passive and active use continues to increase simultaneously with community support through the creation of friends groups and collaborations with external partnerships. Highlights of activities over this past year include:

- Hiring of a full time park ranger to monitor our parks and open spaces and promote safe use;
- Resurgence of the Congress Square Park furthering its status among Portland's jewels of the Art's District;
- Publication of the Trust for Public Land (TPL) report on the status of our parks and options for consideration as we move forward; and
- Reorganization of city administration to support a dedicated Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Management Department prompting the hiring of a full-time Parks Manager as well as a Recreation Manager.

Along with increased attention and support for parks, the Parks Commission itself experienced our own evolution. We held our first retreat in the early winter of 2016 at Riverside Golf Course with the overarching goal of refining internal operations to better manage the increase demands on the commission and our effectiveness in representing Portland's prized green spaces. As a result, we created the following mission statement:

The mission of the Portland Parks Commission is to advocate for the enhancement and stewardship of our parks and open spaces.

- *Review and propose projects that impact parks and open spaces and recommend action.*
- *Foster collaboration among park users and the City.*
- *Promote public access and enjoyment.*
- *Advocate for public and private funding for parks and open spaces.*
- *Enjoy Portland for Life.*

We also formed four new committees to oversee work as outlined within this report:

1. **Park Initiatives:** Focuses on current “special” PC initiatives such as:
 - Designing consistent signage for our parks
 - Friends & Community Partners (FCP) handbook: This policy is intended to provide resource and guidance through a spectrum of practices for any partnerships formed between the City of Portland and local constituency groups seeking recognition as a “Friends & Community Partner” (FCP).
2. **Annual Report and Inventory:** Tasked with preparing the annual report and creating a single, accurate inventory of our parks,
3. **Green Space Gathering:** Organizes our annual Green Space Gathering
4. **Finance:** Charged with financial oversight and identifying mechanisms for external financial support for parks.

And finally, courtesy of Jeff Tarling, Portland City Arborist, and of the Portland Room at the Portland Public Library, on the Parks Commission website¹ we have posted annual reports of the original Portland Parks Commission from 1885, 1901, and 1909.

The success of Portland parks and recreation relies on collaborative support, advocacy and enthusiasm through dedicated public stewardship efforts. Each year, devoted Portlanders help the city’s natural areas, trails, playgrounds, open spaces, athletic and recreational facilities flourish through volunteerism. These relationships are essential for site management and successful fundraising support in a variety of ways.

The Parks Commission is dedicated to ensuring that partnerships formed between local constituency groups and city administration are beneficial for parks, open spaces and our communities throughout the City.

Diane Davison
Chair, Portland Parks Commission

¹ The Portland Parks Commission website: www.portlandmaine.gov/345/Parks-Commission

1.2 The Portland Parks Commission

The Parks Commission is a citizen body of 13 commissioners appointed by the City Council. By city ordinance, members include one City Council member who is on the Transportation, Sustainability and Energy Committee, one member representing Friends of Deering Oaks, one member representing Friends of the Eastern Promenade, one member representing Friends of Evergreen Cemetery; and one member representing Portland Trails. Seven members represent the public-at-large and one member represents the Land Bank Commission. Except for the City Council representative, all appointments are for three-year terms.

As established by City ordinance, the duties of the Portland Parks Commission include:

- Soliciting, encouraging and accepting private contributions to the city, in cash or in kind, whether by gift, trust, or subject to conditions;
- Making recommendations to the city council as to the sale of dedicated parks and public grounds and disposition of trust funds held for parks, trails and open space;
- Maintaining inventories of parks, trails and open space needs as it determines to be desirable;
- Submitting an annual report to the city council regarding the state of the city's parks and public grounds and City of Portland Parks, Recreation and Public Buildings and Grounds making specific recommendations therein about suggested goals and improvements for the parks and public grounds;
- Encouraging educational programs, through the schools or otherwise, in forestry education or other relevant subjects it determines to be beneficial to the parks programs of the city;
- Undertaking such other activities as to enhance the parks, trails and open space programs of the city as it deems appropriate from time to time; and
- Conducting an annual meeting of all parks, trails and open space advocacy groups to discuss annual projects and to recommend goals and priorities for capital improvement projects to the city council.

1.2.1 Current Members of the Parks Commission

Diane Davison, Chair, Friends of the Eastern Promenade	2014-2017
Carol Hutchins, Friends of Deering Oaks	2015-2018
Craig Lapine, Public-at-large	2015-2018
Cynthia Loebenstein, Friends of Evergreen Cemetery	2015-2018
Meri Lowry, Land Bank Representative	2015-2018
Michael Mertaugh, Public-at-large	2014-2017
Steve Morgenstein, Public-at-large	2014-2017
Jaime Parker, Portland Trails	2015-2018
Nathan Robbins, Public-at-large	2015-2018
Travis Wagner, Public-at-large	2014-2017
Dory Waxman, Public-at-large	2014-2017
Belinda Ray, City Council Representative	

1.2.2 Parks Commission City Staff

Sally DeLuca, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities

Ethan Hipple, Parks Director

Laurie Mondor, Executive Assistant, Parks, Recreation, and Facilities



Payson Park - Photo Courtesy of Jeff Tarling

1.3 Brief History of the Parks Commission

- 1885 The city Cemeteries and Public Grounds Commission was created by the Maine Legislature.
- 1913 The Cemeteries and Public Grounds Commission was changed to the Parks Commission.
- 1915 The city Recreation Commission was created by the Maine Legislature.
- 1923 Citizen Commissioners were replaced by City Councilors who also served as Parks Commissioners.
- 1947 The Parks Commission was eliminated and the Portland Department of Parks and Recreation was created.
- 1983 The Friends of the Parks Committee (popularly known as the Friends of the Parks Commission) was created by the city.
- 1987 The Friends of the Parks Commission held its first meeting.
- 2008 The Friends of the Parks Commission was changed to the Parks Commission.
- 2014 Through a city ordinance prompted by a Citizen's Referendum, the role of the Parks Commission was strengthened and given formal advisory and review function to the City Council regarding the modification and/or sale of public parks.



1.4 Heritage of Portland Parks and Open Space

Portland's parks and open spaces are a treasure – an important element of who we are. They anchor Portland's spectacular natural setting and offer repose and recreation for the population of Maine's largest city and for its many visitors. They also offer respectful places for burial and commemoration of Portland's deceased loved ones.

Of all the cities in the United States, few can compete with Portland's unique natural setting – overlooking the beauties of Casco Bay, the islands and seaway to the East, and the White Mountains to the West. Portland's parks and open spaces ensure that these priceless vistas can be enjoyed by present and future generations of Portland residents and visitors.

Portland's parks and open spaces did not just happen. They resulted from the vision, dedication, and generosity of many Portland residents, friends, and public officials over the past two centuries. Safeguarding Portland's existing parks for the benefit of future generations and creating new parks as the city continues to develop will require continuing vigilance and commitment by the citizens of Portland.

Portland's park system began with the city's acquisition in 1828 of a parcel of land on Munjoy Hill that would become part of the Eastern Promenade Park.² The Eastern and Western Promenade roadways were established by 1837, and in 1878 the city engaged Calvert Vaux, Frederick Law Olmsted's collaborator in the design of New York's Central Park, to advise on improvements in Portland's public spaces. That same year, the city's civil engineer, William A. Goodwin, outlined a vision for protection of the vistas from the Eastern and Western Promenades as permanent scenic resources of the city. The high vantage points of the Eastern and Western Promenades were key features of Mayor James Phinney Baxter's 1897 plan for Portland's park system, modeled on the linked system of parks in Boston's "Emerald Necklace." Another element of this plan was the peripheral road and pedestrian trail around Portland's Back Cove, known today as Baxter Boulevard. Baxter Boulevard with its border of linden trees has become a much-loved feature of Portland's park system. In addition to offering a splendid view of the Portland peninsula, the pedestrian trail provides a year-around outlet for exercise and renewal for many of Portland's residents.

The first of Portland's designated parks, Lincoln Park (originally named Phoenix Square), was created just after the great fire of 1866 as a central park for Portland's

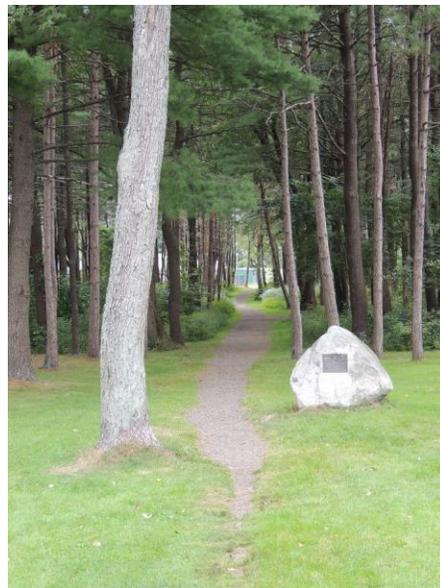
² This brief sketch of the history of Portland's parks is drawn from *Bold Vision: the Development of the Parks of Portland, Maine*, Theo H.B.M. Holtwick & Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., editors, Greater Portland Landmarks, 1999.

residents and as a fire break in the event of a future conflagration. Lincoln Park became a focal point for the city's development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but has suffered from neglect in recent years.

Through the generosity of the Deering family, Deering Oaks Park was another early addition to Portland's park system. The park was given to the city by Nathaniel Deering II and his son, Henry Deering in 1878. For many years prior to that, the park's wooded space had been freely used by the public. Once it became a Portland park, there was a risk that the park's trees would be thinned to make room for organized activities. City engineer William Goodwin successfully advocated to keep the trees and to move slowly and cautiously in deciding how to develop the park, consistent with Olmsted's design principles. He also had the mill pond dammed to create the skating pond, and installed the fountain and the first of the pond's duck houses.

Evergreen Cemetery was established by the city of Portland as a cemetery in 1852 in what was then the town of Westbrook. Its development was inspired by the garden cemetery movement, which had begun with Cambridge's Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831 and Bangor's Mount Hope Cemetery in 1834. Like Mount Auburn and Mount Hope Cemeteries, the site for Evergreen Cemetery was selected for its attractive landscape features – its hills and natural contours, pond, and specimen trees. These were enhanced with thoughtful plantings and grave layouts that respect and enhance the natural features of the site. The Friends of Evergreen was established in 1991 to help protect Evergreen Cemetery and to promote public appreciation of the cemetery. This was the first of the several friends groups that have been established since to advocate for the needs of Portland's parks and open spaces. Its first initiative was to obtain recognition of Evergreen Cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places. This was followed soon after by its effort to lead the restoration of Wilde Memorial Chapel after a period of serious neglect.

Congress Square Park has undergone a major revitalization effort and is emblematic of Portlander's support of city parks. Congress Square was created in the early 1980s through an urban renewal grant. In the 2000s, neglect compounded by a poor design led to decline and underutilization. In 2013, the City Council voted to sell most of the park to a private entity for commercial use. This proposal led to a citizen



Baxter Pines – Photo courtesy of Travis Wagner

referendum to block the sale and to restrict the selling of any public park in the future, which was subsequently approved by the voters. The proposed sale also was a catalyst to reimagine Congress Square Park led by the newly formed Friends of Congress Square Park with the intent of redesigning the park and the entire intersection in the heart of Portland's vibrant Arts District. The Park is now a destination park with numerous free events year round ranging from yoga, to music, to film, to kids events and is a focal point during Portland's popular first Friday Art Walk.

As described in this report, Portland has added many parks and open spaces to its parks system since these early park acquisitions. Together with the various parks friends groups, the Parks Commission is committed to protecting Portland's parks, promoting the respectful use and appreciation of Portland's parks by the public, and advocating for their needs.



Congress Square Park - Photo Courtesy of Bree Lacasse

2. PARKS COMMISSION HIGHLIGHTS, 2015-2016

2.1 Reorganization of Portland's Parks and Recreation

In 2015, the City reorganized the responsibility for management of parks and open spaces by consolidating them under a new Department of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities.

2.2 Reorganization of the Parks Commission

Given the renewed interest in parks and increased expectations of the Parks Commission, we had our first ever retreat in January 2016,. The goal was to create committees to perform specific functions as a means to improve the Parks Commission's organization and productivity. We created five new committees: Annual Report and Inventory, chaired by Travis Wagner, Park Initiatives, chaired by Steve Morgenstern, Friends and Community Partners, chaired by Diane Davison; Green Space Gathering, chaired by Dory Waxman, and Finance, chaired by Michael Mertaugh.



Deering Oaks Park - Photo Courtesy of Ethan Owens

2.3 Issuance of the Trust for Public Lands Report

In January 2016, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) issued its report, *Portland Open Space Vision and Implementation Plan*. The impetus for a vision plan for Portland's open spaces came from the Portland City Manager's office in 2014. The TPL and city staff formed two citizen groups, the Steering Committee and the Stakeholder Group. This

partnership helped to guide the development of the plan's components. In addition, TPL also conducted a Rapid Park Quality Assessment in the summer of 2015 to compare park quality among most major parks in Portland. Based on the results, TPL issued the 8 following recommendations in its final report:

1. Re-structure park and recreation functions within city government.
2. Follow protocol for involving commissions and general public in annual funding decision-making process.
3. Adopt project selection criteria for prioritizing park and recreation projects for funding (capital and operating).
4. Adopt 15 measurable objectives that collectively provide a desired level of service for Portland's open space system.
5. Close the gap revealed by the service area maps.
6. Improve the distribution of amenities as the park system expands over time,
7. Implement other system-wide improvements to Portland's parks.
8. Consider options for improving financing for Portland's parks and open spaces.

2.4 Hiring of Full-Time Parks Ranger

The city was able to hire the first full-time year-round ranger since 2007. The Parks Commission helped to garner support for, and contributed to the funding of this position in 2015. The park ranger provides a uniformed presence in the Portland Parks to assist park users, to discourage misuse of park property, and to represent the City of Portland. More specifically, Portland Park Rangers:

- Provide park visitors with general assistance, directions, and information of city parks, recreation programs, and other services,
- Promote safe park use and enjoyment by encouraging compliance with park rules, regulations, and requesting police assistance when necessary,



Portland Park Ranger at Evergreen Cemetery

- Assist in crowd control, directing traffic, and protecting city resources during special events,
- Manage the East End boat launch, beach, and bath house,
- Inspect, maintain, and report issues on the trail system throughout the city,
- Maintain daily log and report on park incidents, public contacts, and park conditions and provide case follow through, and
- As sworn constables, enforce rules and write tickets as necessary.

2.5 Green Space Gathering

The Green Space Gathering (GSG) was first held in 2010 with the intention of providing a forum for our parks and neighborhood groups. This annual opportunity assembles park stewardship groups to share updates on the previous year's highlights, provide projects and events for the next year, and consider longer term goals for the future of our park and open space system.

This gathering serves to inform and educate the public (and each other) about both the great work being accomplished and current needs for our city parks and open spaces. The GSG also gives the Parks Commission the opportunity to receive feedback on increasing effectiveness in our role of assisting the city and friends groups in our collaborate efforts to advocate for these invaluable spaces.

The Parks Commission held its 6th Annual Green Space Gathering on October 1, 2015 at the East End School. Our featured keynote speaker was Barbara Wilks, founder of W Architecture and Landscape Architecture in 1999 to create a design-oriented, multidisciplinary practice focused on urban issues. The title of her presentation was, "Our Parks and Open Spaces: Past – Present – Future."

The theme for the 2016 Green Space Gathering is "Get to Know Your Parks." This year's gathering is scheduled for October 6, 2016, from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM and is sponsored by Park Partners (City Manager's Office, City Council, Parks and Recreation Department, Planning Department, Land Bank Commission, "Friends" Groups, and Neighborhood Organizations).

3. DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION, AND FACILITIES

3.1 Mission and Organization

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities manages recreational and cultural activities and spaces for Portland residents and visitors of all ages. The Parks Division within the Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department oversees: 60+ parks spanning over 721 acres, including 30 playgrounds, 24 Tennis Courts, 8 Pickleball Courts, 2 Sand Volleyball Courts, 1 beach, 7.5 miles of city-maintained trails, 7 multi-use fields, 2 artificial turf fields, 4 skating ponds, 1 skate park, 5 splashpads, 10 community gardens, 16 cemeteries with over 100,000 burial plots, dozens of horticultural beds, and 20,000 inventoried park and street trees.

3.2 Summary of Major Accomplishments (2015-2016)

Presented below are lists of major accomplishments achieved or in progress for Portland parks during the reporting year.

- Consolidation of multiple “Open Space” divisions into a single new Parks Division. The new Parks Division includes the following sections:
 - Parks Maintenance
 - Park Rangers
 - Ballfields and Athletic Facilities
 - Playgrounds
 - Forestry
 - Horticulture
 - Cemeteries
 - Community Gardens
- Kaboom Foundation recognition as a Playful City USA
- Congress Square Park Redesign (in progress)
- Amethyst Lot Design (in progress)
- Fort Gorges Preservation Plan (in progress)
- Coordinated plans for Army Corps of Engineers hazard mitigation project at Fort Gorges.
- Bayside Trail Phase II Design (in progress)
- Initiated design phase for Skate Park Phase II Expansion

- Initiated Feasibility study for Disc Golf course on City property
- Planted 132 trees during Spring 2016 planting season
- Leased vacant Deering Oaks Castle space to Tiqa Café
- Constructed a new Community Garden at Eastern Promenade
- Forest Management Project at Riverton Trolley Park and Riverside Golf Course (40 acre project, \$15k in revenue)
- Developed “Meadow Labyrinth” at Riverton Trolley Park (trails mowed into the meadow for wildlife viewing, games of capture the flag, hide and seek, etc...)
- Parks branding project in progress
- Expansion of Evergreen Cemetery, \$500K project, 800 grave sites created
- Completed details of the Fort Allen Rehabilitation Project with installation of 12 interpretive, educational panels
- Implementation of monthly email newsletter to list of 6,000, publicizing parks happenings and projects

3.3 Recreation Opportunities Available at Parks

Presented below are summaries of usage through city organized events and external events.

3.3.1 Estimated Park Usage through Organized Recreation Events

- Passport to Play Scavenger Hunt Program
- Skate Park Pump Track Demo
- Youth Summer Track program
- Junior Naturalist and Hiking Programs
- Geocaching Program
- Winter Kids Program at Payson Park
- Portland Public School Use of athletic facilities **8,750 hours**
- Portland Community Use of athletic facilities **8,578 hours**
- Deering High School Fields **1,838 hours**

- Deering Oaks Park **1,506 hours**
- East Bayside Athletic Facility **658 hours**
- Fitzpatrick Stadium (major renovation in 2014) **3,862 hours**
- Lyman Moore Middle School **1,020 hours**
- Memorial Stadium (Deering High School) **2,775 hours**
- Payson Park **1,509 hours**
- Hall Elementary School **105 hours**
- Preble Street Soccer Fields **971 hours**
- Riverton School Fields **878 hours**

3.3.2 Park Usage through External Events (walks, concerts, etc.)

- 650 Permitted Events on Parks properties (includes walks, runs, marches, protests, weddings, festivals, performances, etc...)
- Adult Sports Leagues: Tennis, basketball, pickleball, volleyball adult leagues and tournaments
- Youth Sports Leagues: soccer, lacrosse, basketball, baseball, softball
- Women’s Soccer program
- Concerts on Eastern Prom
- Concerts, Movies in the Park, and Dances at Congress Square Park
- Shakespeare in the Park (co-sponsored by Recreation)
- Farmers Market at Monument Square and Deering Oaks Park

3.4.1 2015-2016 Parks Budget

Division	Budgeted Expenditures	Revenues
Parks	\$0*	\$18,044
Ballfields/Playgrounds	\$740,159	\$280,216
Forestry/Horticulture	\$624,438	\$63,143
Cemeteries	\$581,235	\$402,485
Total	\$1,945,832	\$763,888

* In Districting Budget.

3.4.2 Volunteer and In-kind Support

Project	Group	Attendees	Hours	Volunteer Hours
Riverton Trolley Park Tree Planting	TD Bank	50	4	200
General Park Cleanups x 2	Meeting of the Minds Hip Hop Collective	10	8	80
Deering Oaks Ravine Plantings	Take Action Portland	15	3	45
Playground Mulch Spreading	Cheverus High Students	10	4	40
Ludlow Skating Pond Shoveling	Neighborhood Residents	10	4	40

3.5 Capital and General Improvements

3.5.1 Projects Undertaken or Completed - 2015-2016

- Western Promenade Walkways, \$50,000
- Payson Park Title IX Improvements, \$200,000 (phase 2 of 2), construction Spring 2017
- Fitzpatrick Stadium Field and Track replacement, \$1,005,000 (completed summer/fall 2015)
- Ft Allen Park, \$1,300,000
- Evergreen Cemetery Expansion, \$500,000
- Eastern Cemetery Dead House Renovation, \$25,000
- Riverton Trolley Park and Riverside Golf Course Forestry Management Project, \$15,000 revenue
- Riverton Trolley Park Tree Planting project, trees and volunteer labor provided by TD Bank, \$12,000

3.5.2 Projects Planned for 2016-2017

- Deering Oaks Pond Restoration, \$1,200,000
- Lyman Moore Athletic Fields Improvements Planning, \$475,000, currently in planning phase, construction Spring 2017
- Lincoln Park Walkway and Fountain Restoration Planning, \$250,000 currently in planning phase, construction Spring 2017
- Libbytown Community Garden, \$17,000, construction Fall 2016

3.5.2 Projects Currently Planned for 2017-2018

- Dougherty Field Multi-Purpose Field, \$250,000
- Lincoln Park Fence Repair, \$224,000
- Island Playgrounds Upgrade, \$135,000

3.6 Pressing Parks and Recreation Issues

3.6.1 Short Term

- Rebuild staffing to appropriate levels to maintain parks to a higher standard.
- Developing Parks Maintenance Standards and performance measures, per the 2016 Open Space Vision Plan
- Advising Pesticide Task Force on current staff practices and recommendations for reduction of pesticide use (synthetic and organic) on city properties.
- Work with police and social service providers to develop plan to reduce homeless activity in parks.
- Implement Invasive Species Plan created in summer of 2016.
- Improvement and redesign of Parks website (within city website)
- Working with Deering Oaks Castle tenant on feasibility of boat rentals on Deering Oaks Pond
- Formalize and improve the “Adopt a Spot” concept, allowing citizens and businesses to adopt small garden sites and horticultural beds throughout the city.

3.6.2 Long Term

- Implement recommendations from Athletic Facilities Task Force Report approved by City Council in 2011.
- Develop 10 year plan for Parks Maintenance and Improvements
 - Replacement of old playgrounds
 - Installation of lights for Deering Oaks Tennis Courts
 - Installation of irrigation/drainage systems on ballfields
 - Replacement of old cyclone fencing (some is more than 50 years old)
 - Infield renovation of baseball fields
 - Development of new fields to handle the demand
 - Replacement of Deering Oaks lighting with improved, low-energy units
 - Monument Square rehabilitation
 - Repair of Eastern Cemetery retaining wall
 - Redesign of East End beach
 - Improved bathroom facilities at Deering Oaks
- Develop Parks app for use by the public
- Explore future uses of Harborview Tunnel
- Develop Interpretive and educational programs (Park Rangers)
- Explore the concept of a Portland Youth Corps to engage young people in meaningful service opportunities and career exploration in Portland Parks



University Park, Photo Courtesy of Travis Wagner

4. PARKS COMMISSION PRIORITIES 2016-2018

4.1 The Inventory of Parks

One of the charges for the Parks Commission is to prepare and maintain an inventory of parks. We presented an inventory in our first annual report, but, as noted below, there

are significant issues with the accuracy and completeness of the inventory. Beginning this year, we are decoupling the inventory from the written annual report and instead will be publishing the inventory as a standalone file posted on the Park Commission's website, which will allow us to maintain and update the list on an as-needed basis.

Based on the available information to date, there is no current, accurate inventory of parks and open spaces for Portland. Consequently, producing a complete and accurate inventory has been identified as one of our top priorities for the year ahead.

There are discrepancies in the city's two park inventories and the list in the TPL report. Currently, therefore, neither the Parks Commission nor the city can accurately state the number of parks or acreage that exists within our city parks. A clearly established definition as to what constitutes a park must be identified. The Ordinance enacted following the Congress Square Park referendum brought 34 city parks onto the Land Bank Registry, giving them some protection from development and sale. However, at this time, we believe there are another 17 or so parks that do not enjoy the protection of the ordinance but may be eligible. One issue is that parks have been specifically listed by name. Thus, some properties identified as parks by signage or custom are not in the ordinance or on the inventory. And, if future parks are added, such as the Amethyst Lot, it appears that this may not be a park under the existing ordinance unless and until City Council amends the ordinance to list this as a park.



Deering Oaks Park, Photo Courtesy of Jeff Turling

Thus, in the upcoming year, the Parks Commission will develop a suggested definition of parks and open spaces guided by the TPL report which aligns with the spirit and intent of the ordinance. Our goal is to present a draft definition to the City Council for their consideration and action. The goal is to eliminate the need to continuously amend the ordinance specifically to list or delist parks and open spaces. We also will be developing a single, complete inventory based on a conceptual definition of parks and open spaces keeping in mind Land Bank properties, pending Council action on a definition.

4.2 Citizen Survey of Parks

As noted above, the TPL report conducted a rapid assessment of Portland's parks to assess their quality based on accessibility, trails, park features, supportive facilities, safety and maintenance, and aesthetics. Parks were scored for each category using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (5 = abundant, well provided, very attractive, excellent condition, no concerns, true, etc. and 1 = scarce, no provision, very unappealing, derelict, very concerning, etc.). The features category was very broad and included such general subcategories as picnic facilities, playground, community garden, dog walk, and so forth. While the TPL assessment was a critical tool to gauge the overall condition of our parks and open spaces, the Parks Commission has identified the need for a citizen survey of our parks and open spaces as a priority for 2016-2017 as explained below.

We plan to include the inventory of parks and open spaces on the Parks Commission website, together with a basic description of each park's park history and features. Our intent is to go beyond a listing of major features, but to provide details such as numbers of swings, picnic tables, natural play features, unique trees, water fountains, vistas, and memorials.

The intent is to start the process and treat this as an ongoing effort over the next few years. Because of the labor involved, we do not expect this to be completed by city staff nor commissioners who serve voluntarily. Instead, the Parks Commission intends to engage friends groups, neighborhood associations, and Portland schools to help carry out the survey. In addition to providing labor, this approach has the potential to better engage citizens with their parks. Our goal will be to develop and field test a Parks and Open Spaces Inventory checklist, which will be designed to be user friendly, meaningful, and accurate.

4.3 Funding Opportunities/Goals

Portland's parks are a blessing that we cherish. But maintaining our parks so that they continue to enrich our lives and remain safe, clean, and accessible to Portland residents and visitors requires a continuing financial commitment on the part of many stakeholders. Moreover, the acquisition and development of new parks – such as the waterfront site, Amethyst Lot -- requires yet additional financial support. A key objective of the Parks Commission is to help mobilize additional financing to improve maintenance standards for Portland's existing parks and, as opportunities arise, to develop new parks.

The city budget is the main source – but by no means the only source -- of financing for Portland’s parks. With the support and encouragement of the Parks Commission, Friends & Community Partner groups have been instrumental in making recommendations for improvements to the city’s parks and mobilizing grant and private funding for upgrades to several of Portland’s parks. Significant examples are the improvements that have been carried out recently or are in progress at Congress Square Park, Lincoln Park, and Fort Allen Park. In addition, friends groups help mobilize important contributions in volunteer and in-kind support (section 3.4.2).

For the past two years, the Parks Commission has made recommendations for city expenditures on parks under the city’s investment budget, the annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP), using explicit criteria for expenditure priorities. This is an improvement over the former approach of setting priorities based on ad-hoc decisions for CIP expenditures. In 2014, the Parks Commission also received a small allocation in the CIP for improvements to city parks. Among other things, this allocation helped to finance the recruitment of the city’s first full-time park ranger.

But the quality of Portland’s existing parks is affected more by the city’s recurrent budget than by the investment budget. The recurrent budget typically receives less attention in the expenditure decision-making process than the city’s investment budget. Last year’s TPL study of Portland’s parks included an examination of alternative approaches for augmenting resources for Portland’s parks³ through a variety of measures including dedicated bond issues, special property taxes, tax increment financing, and impact fees. Where these measures have been applied to raise park financing in other communities, they have been used typically to mobilize funds for park acquisition and capital improvements, not to improve maintenance standards affecting the quality of existing parks.

Shortages of funding under the recurrent budget have led to neglect of important expenditures in the city’s parks and open spaces. Continued neglect of needed maintenance frequently leads to a need for larger capital expenditures to address the cumulative problems of deferred maintenance. For example, a scarcity of financing in the city’s recurrent budget in recent years to replace ailing trees in Evergreen cemetery has led to a large backlog of hazardous trees awaiting replacement. A recent assessment estimated at \$250,000 the cost of removal of hazardous trees in Evergreen Cemetery that pose an immediate safety threat to cemetery visitors and to privately owned monuments. The Parks commission devoted some of its discretionary budget in

³ Trust for Public Land, “Conservation Finance Feasibility Study, City of Portland Maine: March 2015.”

2014 for hazardous tree removal at Evergreen Cemetery. The city's recurrent budget this year provides an additional \$50,000 for that purpose – a positive start, but still far short of the larger need.⁴

An important instrument for documenting and defending recurrent budget requests to improve the quality of Portland's parks and green spaces is the new maintenance standards that are being developed by the Parks and Recreation Department. These standards will describe the staffing and budget requirements for maintaining Portland's parks, not only to current maintenance standards, but also to desired improved standards.

Comparison of staffing ratios for Portland's Evergreen Cemetery with those of other heritage cemeteries illustrates the magnitude of the gap in some areas between actual and ideal staffing for maintenance of Portland's parks and open spaces: Under current staffing at Evergreen Cemetery, each cemetery staff member is responsible for maintaining cemetery grounds for 5,720 gravesites. The corresponding ratio at Mount Auburn Cemetery, the first of New England's heritage cemeteries, is one staff member per 1,727 gravesites.⁵ Better staffing of our existing parks – including park rangers and seasonal workers – has been a continuing theme of the Parks Commission's advocacy work.⁶

Since 2008, Portland's parks were managed by the Department of Public Services. This arrangement contributed to neglect of ongoing maintenance needs of Portland's parks and open spaces because these needs tended to be eclipsed by the ever pressing needs for snow plowing, road & sewer repair, and other urgent public works. The recent consolidation of parks and open spaces management under the new Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Management Department should help address this problem by fostering a true sense of institutional ownership for Portland's parks and open spaces.

The Parks Commission expects and recommends that this new management responsibility will lead to increased allocations in the recurrent budget for maintenance and improved quality standards in Portland's parks and open spaces, including

⁴ Under a grant obtained recently by the Friends of Evergreen, standards are being developed for replacement tree planting at Evergreen Cemetery that are designed to restore the key landscape features of the historical cemetery.

⁵ Nathan P. Robbins, "Creation of the Turf Maintenance Calculator and Cost Assessment for Portland's Parks and Cemeteries," page 22.

⁶ The Parks Commission played an important role in the decision to recruit Portland's first full-time Park ranger.

maintaining the full-time park ranger position, adding additional seasonal staff for park maintenance and oversight, replacement of hazardous trees at Evergreen Cemetery and other parks and open spaces, removal of invasive species, and the other actions listed in Section 3.6, above. It also expects and recommends that the City include financing in either the CIP or the recurrent budget for next year to implement the signage project described in Section 4.5.

4.4 Identifying and Supporting Partnerships

Portland's Park and Opens Spaces benefit greatly from collaborative partnerships developed over time. Currently, these partnerships are primarily between the city and non-profit Friends & Community Partner (FCP) groups that support and advocate for specific parks or open spaces in the city. FCP are encouraged to report to the Parks Commission to make the commission aware of needs and improvements that will enhance the user experience in a park or open space or correct a deficiency that might create a risk to those who enjoy the park.

Although currently there is no formal procedure to be designated a FCP group, the Parks Commission has identified the following 11 "friends groups" as being active to some degree in 2015-2016:

- Friends of Capisic Pond
- Friends of Congress Square
- Friends of Deering Oaks
- Friends of the Eastern Promenade
- Friends of Evergreen Cemetery
- Friends of Heseltine Park
- Friends of Lincoln Park
- Friends of Longfellow Park
- Friends of Payson Park
- Friends of Eastern Cemetery – Spirits Alive
- Friends of Fort Gorges

Some of the above friends groups are of long standing (Friends of the Eastern Promenade, Friends of Deering Oaks, and Friends of Evergreen Cemetery). Others have been in existence a comparatively short period of time (Friends of Congress Square Park and Friends of Payson Park). These groups provide the Commission with valuable input that helps define the direction the Commission. Friends groups also secure private grant money for park design, improvements, or special events.

The success of Portland Parks and Recreation relies on the collaborative support, advocacy, and enthusiasm through dedicated public stewardship efforts. Partnerships between municipalities and local constituency groups are crucial for the support of parks and open spaces. Each year, devoted Portlanders help the city’s natural areas, trails, playgrounds, open spaces, athletic and recreational facilities flourish through volunteerism primarily through “friends groups” and community partners (FCP). While some of these groups and partners are well established, others are ad hoc, but all are important. The Parks Commission is committed to fostering the beneficially mutual relationship between FCP groups and their collaborative alliances with Portland Parks and Recreation.

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- Getting organized,
- Clarify values, obligations and expectations,
- Providing a spectrum of process and implementation guidelines, and
- Define expectations for best practices.

Friends Success Story: Congress Square Park

The Friends of CSP is an example of a highly successful and productive friends group. They currently have 51 active volunteers in addition to multiple community and external partners to help support programming, infrastructure, and community use. In 2015, the Friends of CSP held 121 events featuring 258 artists who were paid. These events engaged an estimated 8,000 people including seniors, students, families, artists, immigrants, tourists, workers, and the general public. This does not include the many thousands of people who strolled by or stopped by for a short time to enjoy the experience.

The increased activity has added to the welcoming atmosphere of CSP and brought more people to interact in the heart of the Arts District and contributed to attracting an estimated 8,500 additional visitors during non-event times of the day.

4.5 Park Signage

In 2013, the Parks Commission undertook an initiative to inventory and assess the use of signage throughout Portland Parks. The findings were that many parks have no signage; those parks with signage often relied on unwelcoming prohibition-behavior based signage, and there was no consistency in design or messaging.

In 2015, The Park Initiatives Committee was tasked with designing and implementing new and consistent welcoming and regulatory signage for the Portland Park System. The task of this committee is to standardize signage for the parks and begin the process of placing these signs in the parks of Portland. The goal is to improve user experience in parks and make better use of the resource that is the Portland Park System.

The committee researched signage from other cities that might provide a model for our parks system. Committee members identified parks where we could begin the process of placing standardized signs, which: Payson Park, Lincoln Park, Riverton Trolley Park, Back Cove Trail, and Dougherty Field. The committee also studied regulatory signs with the intent of trying to reduce sign clutter. Due to a lack of funding, the committee reconsidered the goals for the implementation of signage in the first year of the project and decided to model signage design based on preferable signs already existing in Portland Parks. One tier of signs would be used for historic parks such as Lincoln Park with the design based on signs at Deering Oaks. . The second tier would be used in general-purpose parks and playgrounds such as Payson Park and would be based on the design of existing park signage such as the sign at Riverton Trolley Park. The committee was given \$2,500 by the city to work with a consultant to site the signs in 5 parks and create a construction-ready design, including a list of materials needed to produce a quality sign, which would be both attractive and long lasting. All design work will be electronically stored for future use. The consultant will also create and collect icons used to promote uses of the park land. A database of regulations that can be adapted for each park will also be produced for use in regulatory signs.



Based on an assessment of necessary resources to design and install construction-ready signs for the five parks, the committee estimates approximately \$25,000 will be needed. Recognizing that the resources for this project are not available at this time, the committee’s goal is to work with community partners, friends groups, and the city to gradually fund and implement this important project.

Congress Square Park
Photos Courtesy of Bree Lacasse

