

Six Big Ideas

The Six Big Ideas focus on key areas that can best be accomplished by federal and District agencies working together and include recommendations for new planning and development policies, physical improvements and uses, and approaches to operation and maintenance.

The Six Big Ideas are intended to address Washington's current and future recreational needs by maximizing the use of existing parks and open space and building upon existing efforts and opportunities to make to make these spaces the best they can be.

1 Linking the Fort Circle Parks

The Fort Circle Parks are appreciated as local and national historic, cultural, natural, and recreational treasures, providing opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize their history.

Public access is increased through improved connections between the fort parks and other parks, schools, and activity destinations.

4 Improving playfields

Existing athletic fields are improved to expand capacity through ease of access (physical and through permitting) and appropriate levels of maintenance.

2 Improving public schoolyards

Schoolyards are maintained and improved to provide diverse opportunities for learning, healthy living, and recreation, and are recognized as a vital part of Washington's parks and open-space system.

5 Enhancing Center City parks

Center City parks are maintained, enhanced, preserved, and programmed in a manner that values their role as places of national, cultural, and historical significance, and recognizes their recreational and environmental contributions to the health and wellbeing of downtown neighborhoods.

The parks are supported by an engaged park constituency that includes strong partnerships between District and federal managing agencies and individuals, businesses, and organizations.

3 Enhancing urban natural areas

The ecological resources of our park system are protected, restored, and recognized to be equally important as the recreational and cultural amenities in the neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

6 Transforming small parks

Coordinated planning and management of small parks among federal and District agencies provide clear guidance on their purposes, level of maintenance, and jurisdictional responsibilities.

Partnerships with business and community organizations are effective in maintaining many of the small parks and providing appropriate programming to address national and local cultural and recreation needs.



A Vision for Washington's Parks and Open Space

CapitalSpace envisions a beautiful, high-quality, and unified park system for the nation's capital that

- ◆ Is safe and accessible to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city.
 - ◆ Includes a variety of parks and open spaces that connect communities.
 - ◆ Incorporates stewardship and celebration of natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces.
- ◆ Provides a **diversity** of passive and active recreation.
 - ◆ Contributes to a healthy, sustainable, and livable city.
- ◆ Serves as a national and international model of citizen engagement, and parks and open space management and collaboration.

Park and Open Space Issues

CapitalSpace examined the ownership and management of Washington's parks and open space; their distribution, access and capacity; and the historic, cultural, and natural resources they contain.

Natural Resources

Over 70% of Washington's wetlands and floodplains, 68% of its wooded areas, 72% of its land with steep slopes, and 72% of its riverfronts are within parks and open spaces. However, Washington's natural resources have many challenges. These include the filling-in of wetlands, the use of stream corridors for sewer infrastructure, invasive species, the fragmentation of habitat corridors, stormwater runoff, noise, erosion, air pollution, trash dumping, and a changing climate. In addition, these parks and open spaces face pressures to accommodate park uses incompatible with their natural resources, demands to be developed for other uses, and being overused by the people that seek out their beautiful spaces.

Distribution, Access and Capacity

Parks and open space occupy 25% of Washington's land area. 80% of this parkland is in a few very large parks, the rest is in medium-sized parks and hundreds of small parks (under one acre) throughout the city. This uneven distribution of parkland is one factor contributing to an over-use and under-use of different parks; other factors include barriers that restrict access to parks, such as the freeways, waterways, and secured sites.

Changing demographics, such as diminishing household sizes and increases in students and retirees, are also influencing how Washington's parks are used. Areas that currently have the least access to parks and recreation, like mid-city, are expected to see much of the city's population growth, increasing demands on already burdened park space.

Where land is unavailable for new parks or land costs are too high, new designs and improvements for existing parks and available open space may help meet growing and changing recreational needs. However, some designs, improvements, and uses may not be appropriate in National Parks and certain other park settings, and finding sufficient funds to build and maintain parks to a standard that allows for increased use remains a challenge.

Ownership and Management

The NPS manages approximately 6,900 acres; nearly 90% of Washington's parkland. DPR manages the other 10%; approximately 900 acres. Other federal and District agencies oversee another 1,500 acres (including the National Zoo, National Arboretum, public school playfields, and cemeteries). Each of these agencies has a different mission, funding sources, and policies and regulations concerning park use and partnerships.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The NPS identifies nearly 65% of Washington's parkland as a cultural landscape, and 26% is within District designated historic districts. 11 parks are on the National Register of Historic Places, and 214 parks are included in the District's Historic Landmark listing of L'Enfant Plan. However, the significance of these sites, and many of their stories, are often not fully understood and visible; and protecting, managing, and maintaining these sites adequately requires extra attention and resources as well as restrictions on their design and use.



Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space

Why?

Washington's parks and open space are abundant and beloved, but the quality of the public space has not kept pace with the needs of expanding resident and worker populations or millions of annual visitors. CapitalSpace comes at a moment of great opportunity, where local and national leadership is focusing on improvements to urban life, the environment, and community health. CapitalSpace recognizes the positive contributions parks and open space can provide to these elements, and its Six Big Ideas contain many recommendations on how these contributions might be improved.

What?

CapitalSpace began by completing the first comprehensive analysis of Washington's parks and open space in nearly 40 years. This analysis found that the wide variety of park types and sizes, coupled with their split jurisdiction between local and federal authorities, presents challenges in meeting both local needs and national interests, and in planning, enhancing, and maintaining the parks. Yet the analysis also found tremendous opportunities for Washington's parks to be more accessible to those who live in, work in, or visit the city; to connect communities; to provide a diversity of passive and active recreation in a diversity of natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces; and to contribute to a healthy, sustainable, and livable city.

The draft CapitalSpace plan provides an overview of this analysis; a vision for a beautiful, high-quality, and unified park system for the nation's capital; and Six Big Ideas focused on actions to help make the vision a reality.

Where?

Recognizing that planning and management efforts are currently underway to enhance the National Mall and parks along the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, CapitalSpace focuses on the many challenges of the other national and local parks throughout Washington's neighborhoods.

Who?

The District of Columbia's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and Office of Planning (DCOP), the National Park Service (NPS), and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) formed the CapitalSpace partnership.

Since the creation of the partnership in 2006, other agencies have participated in the initiative, including the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation (DDOT), Department of the Environment (DDOE), and Public Schools (DCPS).

Taking action

As a starting point to achieving the full potential of Washington's parks and open-space system, the CapitalSpace partners have committed to jointly start or move forward action on the following recommendations within the Six Big Ideas:

- Improving interpretation and promotion of the Fort Circle Parks
- Categorizing small parks and coordinating management and maintenance
- Coordinating scheduling and maintenance of playfields to improve availability and use
- Coordinating research and restoration of natural areas through a District-wide multi-agency ecosystem consortium
- Completing the Fort Circle Parks hiking trail
- Making our downtown parks and surrounding streets more inviting and active
- Ensuring schoolyards are available to meet community recreational needs
- Improving overall access to our public open space

The CapitalSpace partners also see an ongoing alliance to identify additional opportunities for coordinating public information on park and open-space resources and recreational opportunities, maintenance contracts, capital budget programming, new improvements and programming where public and private investment is already taking place, and fundraising and partnerships with individuals, businesses and organizations.

CapitalSpace will inform policy decisions, including updates to the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* by NCPC and small area plans by DCOP, and provide guidance in development review and park planning in the District.

Progress will occur through individual agency projects and by working together which may help leverage limited budgets and resources. Strong partnerships, both formal and informal, among the partner agencies and the many people and organizations that care about Washington's parks and open space will remain a major element by which CapitalSpace actions can be realized.

Comment on the draft plan



We want to hear your comments on the draft CapitalSpace plan. Comments may be submitted through:

- Email: capitalspace@ncpc.gov
- Mail: NCPC, Attention: CapitalSpace, 401 9th Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20004
- PEPC (the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>)

Visit <http://www.capitalspace.gov> to view the draft plan electronically and review extensive background information. The plan is also available at www.ncpc.gov and <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.

If you would like a hard copy of the draft plan, please call NCPC at 202.482.7265 or email capitalspace@ncpc.gov.

Public comments will be accepted through December 8, 2009. Comments will then be reviewed and considered for incorporation into the final CapitalSpace plan.

For more information, please call NCPC at 202.482.7200 or visit <http://www.capitalspace.gov>.

Your input is essential to the success of CapitalSpace!