

# Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages

## A Step-by-Step Guide



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THE TRUST  
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## About Us

Our organizations have come together to highlight the importance of parks — and give community leaders (and park advocates from all corners) tools they can use to both create and improve green spaces and public places for people of all ages. This resource is funded by AARP.

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Founded in 1958, AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social welfare organization with a membership of nearly 38 million that empowers people to choose how they live as they age. The AARP Livable Communities initiative works nationwide to support the efforts of neighborhoods, towns, cities and rural areas to provide safe, walkable streets; age-friendly housing and transportation options; access to needed services; and opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in community life.

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8 80 Cities, a nonprofit organization based in Toronto, Ontario, works to improve the quality of life for people living in cities. 8 80 Cities brings citizens together to enhance mobility and public spaces in order to create more vibrant, healthy and equitable communities. 8 80 Cities believes that if everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for all people. 8 80 Cities has worked on park and public space projects in more than 300 cities on five continents.

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The Trust for Public Land's mission is to create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Every park, playground and public space created is an open invitation to explore, wonder, discover and play. The Trust for Public Land has been connecting communities to the outdoors and residents to one another since 1972. Today, millions of Americans live within a 10-minute walk of a park or natural area the organization helped create, and countless more visit those spaces every year.

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See page 41 for information about the front and back cover images.

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# Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages

## A Step-by-Step Guide

By AARP, 880 Cities and The Trust for Public Land

### 2 Introduction

**Parks Help Make Communities Livable for People of All Ages**

### 4 Part 1: Goals, Strategies and Spotlights

**Improve Existing Parks**

- Provide Activities
- Design for All
- Engage and Energize

**Connect People to Parks**

- Put Pedestrians First
- Remove Barriers

**Create New Parks (Even in Unconventional Spaces)**

- Take Back Space
- Think Outside the Box

### 20 Part 2: The Tool Kit

**Worksheets and Planning Resources**

- The Steps
- AARP Livability Index
- ParkServe
- AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit
- Intercept Survey
- Public Space Audit
- Public Space Field Study
- Programming Calendar
- Community Asset Map
- AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit

### 40 5 Fun Facts About Having Fun

#### About This Guide

***Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages*** has been

produced for a broad audience — local leaders, policymakers, community advocates and neighborhood residents — for use in collecting data, evaluating opportunities, and generating ideas for how to increase the quality and quantity of parks and outdoor spaces nationwide. This free publication is available for order or download at

**[AARP.org/LivableParks](https://www.aarp.org/LivableParks)**.

## INTRODUCTION

# Parks Help Make Communities Livable for People of All Ages

Public parks are important places for building a sense of community and social belonging. They are spaces that belong to everyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or income. However, the way parks are designed, maintained and programmed doesn't always reflect the purpose and promise of such uniquely public spaces. Pinched for funds by competing priorities, many municipalities neglect their park networks or fail to invest in these vital places as their communities grow and change.

## Quality Parks and Green Spaces ...

- **IMPROVE PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Parks help raise the physical activity levels of park users, reduce their obesity rates, increase vitamin D levels and improve blood pressure, bone density and cardiorespiratory fitness.

- **PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS**

Access to parks and natural areas has been shown to reduce stress, anger and aggression; improve coping abilities; lessen social isolation; enhance relationship skills; and improve cognitive function. For children, learning in natural environments can boost reading, math, science and social studies skills. Time spent in quality outdoor spaces can enhance creativity and problem-solving; reduce hyperactivity; and improve focus, attention and behavior.

- **CREATE CLEANER AIR AND WATER**

Parks, green spaces and trees play a vital role in overall ecosystem health by reducing stormwater runoff and absorbing pollutants.

- **ENHANCE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

Great parks and public spaces build community pride, bring people together, and increase civic engagement and the sense of belonging.

- **ADD VALUE AND SAVE MONEY**

The Trust for Public Land reports that city parks provide both direct economic value and cost saving benefits to municipalities. The impact is seen and can be measured by looking at seven factors:

1. Increased property values (which bring increased tax revenue)
2. Park-related spending by tourists
3. The direct use of a park system by residents
4. The good health of residents
5. A sense of community cohesion (which, by building social bonds, can help prevent problems that would otherwise incur costs for law enforcement or fire protection)
6. Clean water
7. Clean air

## But Many Parks and Green Spaces Aren't Benefiting People of All Ages

- **PUBLIC PARKS ARE FALLING SHORT FOR OLDER ADULTS**

Throughout the world and across the United States, populations are aging.

By 2050, the global population of people age 60 or older is projected to nearly double to 2.1 billion.<sup>1</sup> By 2050, 1 in 5 Americans will be age 60-plus. By 2060, 25 percent of the entire U.S. population will be age 60 or older.<sup>2</sup>

Older adults represent an increasingly large share of the U.S. population, but their use of parks is disproportionately low.

A 2014 study of 174 neighborhood parks in 25 major U.S. cities found that children — representing 20 percent of the total U.S. population — made up 38 percent of park users. Although adults age 60 and older accounted for 20 percent of the general population, they represented only 4 percent of total park users.<sup>3</sup>

- **CHILDREN ARE SPENDING LESS TIME OUTDOORS**

Even though children in the aforementioned study represented the highest percentage of park users, the amount of time children spend outdoors has declined significantly over the past two generations. Limited outdoor play opportunities and a lack nature-rich experiences have a negative impact on child development.

- **THERE IS A SOLUTION, AND A RATHER SIMPLE ONE AT THAT**

Says Gil Penalosa, the founder and chair of 8 80 Cities and a parks and public spaces expert: “If everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for people of all ages.”

### The Goal

#### A PARK WITHIN A 10-MINUTE WALK

The Trust for Public Land — along with the National Recreation and Park Association and the Urban Land Institute — is leading a movement to ensure that everyone in the United States has access to a quality park or green space within a 10-minute walk of his or her home.

From Portland, Maine, to Honolulu, Hawaii, more than 200 mayors endorse the 10-minute walk as a park standard for all.

While the U.S. has a vast and inspiring national parks system as well as much state-managed and protected parkland, the nation is short on community-level parks and green spaces — and there's an even greater deficit of high-quality community parks that are well-used and well-loved.

The good news is that everyone in a community can help keep local parks safe, accessible and vibrant. Some efforts may take years to show results, but any initiative of any size can start today.



▲ The 5.4-acre Romare Bearden Park in Charlotte, North Carolina, features gardens, an open lawn and a shaded plaza with cafe-style seating.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2015), *World Population Aging Report*, [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> United States Census (2014), *An Aging Nation: The Older Population in the United States*, <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1140.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (2016), “The First National Study of Neighborhood Parks: Implications for Physical Activity,” 51(4), p.3-5



MELISSA STANTON, AARP

▲ Formerly an asphalt parking lot adjacent to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania’s Schenley Park, Schenley Plaza features cafe-style seating that welcomes diners and non-diners alike.

▼ In Dallas, Texas, Klyde Warren Park sits atop an eight-lane freeway that cuts through the city’s downtown. With the construction of the 5.2-acre deck park, which was completed in 2012, two parts of the city were reunited. Klyde Warren is now a gathering place from morning to night with “rooms” and activities for toddlers on up. Fun Fact: To prevent the park deck from becoming too heavy, it was built with foam blocks and special soil. (See page 7 to read more about Klyde Warren Park.)

WOODALL RODGERS PARK FOUNDATION



## PART 1

# Goals, Strategies and Spotlights

Good park management goes beyond routine maintenance, such as emptying trash cans and repairing broken benches. The first step for any county, city, town or neighborhood that's looking to improve its parks or build new ones is to take a holistic view of what a park is and what park workers can and should be doing. That means looking strategically at existing assets, how to connect the community to those assets and how to identify potential new resources that can create opportunities for interaction. In all of these strategies, employing a focus on creativity — paired with bringing diverse user groups together — will pay dividends.

## Let's Look at How To ...

### 1. IMPROVE EXISTING PARKS

The typical American city has 18,000 acres of parkland within its borders. That's a lot of real estate to work with. Cities have a massive opportunity to leverage their existing parkland assets to create healthier, more connected and more vibrant communities.

### 2. CONNECT PEOPLE TO PARKS

What use is a park if people can't get to it? For communities to be healthy and active, residents must be able to safely walk and ride their bicycles to and within public parks.

### 3. CREATE NEW PARKS (EVEN IN UNCONVENTIONAL SPACES)

Building connected, active, dynamic park systems within walking distance of every home may not be achievable in the short term, especially in communities that lack parks and green spaces. In such cases, planners and advocates may need to think outside the box and look for opportunities in unconventional spaces, such as underused or abandoned public areas that can be transformed into places for gathering, playing and other types of recreation.



CITY OF SUWANEЕ, GEORGIA

◀ In 2001, Suwanee, Georgia, had just 16 acres of parks and trails. The city's strategic plan to increase and preserve its green spaces has resulted in more than 350 acres of parks, paths, playgrounds and gardens.



## GOAL

# Improve Existing Parks

When a town or city builds a community center, it doesn't just let the building sit there unstaffed. The municipality hires employees to organize classes and activities to ensure that the center serves the community and is a vibrant social hub. The same thinking must be applied to underperforming and underused parks and similar public places. Bringing life to green spaces requires year-round use and activities geared toward diverse ages, backgrounds and abilities. Parks and other green spaces are, in effect, outdoor community centers; they require the same level of management and investment to thrive.

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## STRATEGY

# Provide Activities

Have you ever been to a beautiful park only to find there isn't much to do in it? Energy is the hardest quality to bring to a park because energy can't be designed or built.

A wide range of programs, events and activities are critical to creating parks that are dynamic, inclusive, accessible and welcoming to people of all ages and interests.

A consistent calendar of community-building activities will draw people to a park. Quality programming balances large-scale events such as concerts, festivals and movie nights with smaller activities along the lines of dance classes, knitting groups and book clubs.

### **Among the ways to create dynamic parks for people of all ages:**

- **OPERATE YEAR-ROUND**  
Cities and towns often invest millions of dollars to build and maintain park systems. If those parks are only used for part of the year, the community isn't getting a very good return on its investment. By developing uses and activities for all 12 months, park management can maximize the facility's value. (See an example from Anchorage, Alaska, on page 33.)
- **SCHEDULE SEASONAL ACTIVITIES**  
If parks and green places are to be used year-round, park management must take advantage of the opportunities each season brings. Lighting, music, food, shade and warmth are among the key ingredients for successful seasonal programming.
- **PROGRAM FOR ALL AGES**  
Parks and public spaces should — as much as possible — be for everyone, which means offering activities for toddlers and teens, adults and older adults. Public places with varied and dynamic programming that's responsive to the community's needs often result from building a culture of partnerships and participation.
- **OFFER VARIETY THROUGHOUT THE DAY**  
Visit any park or outdoor gathering place at 7 a.m. Visit again at noon, once more at 5 p.m. and again at 8 p.m. The people who use the space differs each time. Understanding the ebb and flow of a park space and the different interests of its users can help in developing programs that engage existing users and attract new ones.



## SPOTLIGHT

# Klyde Warren Park

5.2 acres | Dallas, Texas

Located across from the Dallas Museum of Art and Nasher Sculpture Center, Klyde Warren Park is a popular gathering spot for city residents and a fun destination for tourists.

Built on a deck secured above the Woodall Rodgers Freeway and between two downtown streets, the park is publicly owned but privately operated and managed by the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation. It is well-populated from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. thanks to a rich schedule of activities that appeal to people of all abilities and ages.

The free offerings include yoga and dance classes, storytelling, lectures, and outdoor performances and movies. (See page 4.) The WiFi-equipped park has clean restrooms, including in the gated children's play area.

Dogs are welcome on leash throughout the park and off leash in the My Best Friend's Park area, which features a dog-friendly drinking and frolicking fountain. Food trucks and vendors are stationed in and alongside the park, and a park restaurant hosts weekday happy hours.

Park guests can easily plan their visits by checking the park calendar, activity guide and map

▼ The park's "Reading & Games Room" is a spot for catching up on the news or playing board games outdoors.



at [KlydeWarrenPark.org](http://KlydeWarrenPark.org). The website also provides a way for individuals and groups to reserve park spaces for weddings or other events.

Klyde Warren Park demonstrates how a prime location, community-led ideas and a multitude of activities can keep a park vibrant year-round.

**RELEVANT TOOL:** [Programming Calender](#), page 36

▼ The circular structure seen to the left in the photo is a tree house for kids and adults.



## STRATEGY

# Design for All

Seeking to understand what draws families and children to parks, urban planners examined 50 inner-city and 50 suburban parks. The researchers found that active recreation facilities and well-designed natural features are key to capturing children's attention — getting them away from electronic devices and outside and into parks.<sup>3</sup>

We know that women, older adults and parents with young children rate park safety and comfort as high priorities. Because of that, the presence of women, children and older adults is a significant indicator of good park design. If a park doesn't have many such users, think about what elements or qualities might be deterring their visits.

Park infrastructure should enable rather than discourage inclusive and dynamic uses and activities. When that isn't happening, park management can leverage any pleasant and popular areas that do exist while improving the areas that don't feel safe or comfortable.

### Among the ways to design for all:

- **CREATE COMFORTABLE PLACES**

Even the most active park user needs a place to occasionally sit. Well-placed and welcoming park seating is especially vital for older adults. Quality seating encourages people to use parks more often and for longer periods of time.

- **PROVIDE AMENITIES**

Small-ticket items — such as functioning water fountains, clean and safe restrooms, informative signage — say a lot about the quality of a park and its home community. Signage should be legible, attractive and consistent. While trash bins are a must-have park item and not an amenity per se, such receptacles should enable visitors to sort their throwaways for recycling and the bins need to be regularly emptied and kept as insect- and rodent-free as possible.

- **SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES**

The structures and equipment in parks and public spaces should appeal to users of diverse ages, abilities and interests.

**Playgrounds** should be available and have equipment suitable for the very young, for school-age children (including teens) and even adults. Outdoor table and field games such as boccie, ping-pong, checkers and chess can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

**Pedestrian paths** are consistently rated by older adults as the most desired infrastructure feature to have in parks. Even in small parks, walking paths with marked distances provide users with an easy way to exercise. Paths should be wide enough to accommodate visitors who are pushing strollers or using wheelchairs.

**Fitness lots** are often designed to be used by a narrow age demographic. But exercise spaces can and should enable physical activities by people of all ages. Park planners need to think strategically about where to place exercise equipment and fitness lots so the spaces will attract users.

**Natural design** features, such as community gardens, can encourage outdoor activities, local pride and intergenerational projects.

**Flexible design** allows for customizing spaces for different uses. An example: a basketball court that becomes a skating rink in the winter.

Great parks provide spaces for active, passive and contemplative recreation. A mixture of sports facilities, public art, open spaces, quiet nooks, running paths and seating areas will create a park that has something for everyone.

<sup>3</sup>“What Brings Children to the Park?” (2010), *Journal of American Planning Association*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944360903418338>

## SPOTLIGHT

# Zachary Reyna Memorial Playground

1 acre | LaBelle, Florida



PLAYCORE

▲ The Zachary Reyna Memorial Playground was created for the benefit of young children, teens and adults.

The Hendry LaBelle Civic Park is a 22-acre recreational compound in the rural central Florida community of LaBelle (population 4,600). The park contains several soccer fields and basketball courts, a pickleball court, a recreation center, a dog park and more.

In 2014, the park set aside an acre within its grounds for the multigenerational Zachary Reyna Memorial Playground. Named in honor of a young resident who was stricken by a rare and deadly infection, the space features an area for children ages 2 to 5, another for 5- to 12-year-olds, several exercise stations for adults, picnic tables, barbecue pits, benches and a drinking fountain.

The city positioned the playground beneath a canopy of trees and within walking distance of the area's schools and residential neighborhoods.

This sort of project is typically found in larger

cities, where tax dollars for park projects are more readily available. That's why Ramiro Rodriguez, Hendry LaBelle's recreation director, put together a board of influential community members.

"At the conception of this playground project, we recognized that the funding would not be coming from local revenue," he said.

An all-volunteer board of community members launched and ran the fundraising campaign that made the playground a reality. One of the largest donors wasn't even a LaBelle resident.

When asked why she contributed, the donor explained, "I wanted children to have a safe place to play, and I believe in paying it forward."

While donations and grants funded the playground's creation, the city provides its maintenance.

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**RELEVANT TOOL:** Community Asset Map, page 38

## STRATEGY

# Engage and Energize

The first thing people typically encounter when entering a park is a large sign with an exhaustive list of restricted and forbidden activities.

Many local governments see their role in park management as regulators, with park visitors needing to be monitored and supervised.

But good park management is about facilitation. Residents, community groups and local businesses possess an often untapped capacity to bring life and energy to parks.

### Among the ways to engage and energize:

- **INVITE THE COMMUNITY**

Include residents and other stakeholders before, during and after making major decisions or changes. To do this, community engagement activities can't be limited to 7 p.m. meetings at city hall. Hosting fun, innovative engagement activities at various times of the day can catch people as they go about their daily routines. When leaders, advocates and municipal staff seek out people at nearby libraries, community centers, transit hubs and schools they can gather information about and from individuals who aren't regular park users.

- **BUILD BROAD-BASED ALLIANCES**

The most successful and well-used parks require a range of committed partners, each of whom can lend a flavor and expertise to creating a vibrant park or outdoor public space. Developing partnerships between parks and local chambers of commerce, neighborhood associations, libraries, community centers, businesses, hospitals, schools, retirement homes, faith groups and other community organizations will build the kind of sustainable, inclusive community stewardship needed for parks management.

- **ENCOURAGE STEWARDSHIP**

Engaged and energized residents tend to have stronger connections to their local parks and public spaces. A common form of organized park stewardship is "Friends of ..." groups, which are typically nonprofit organizations composed of volunteers who care deeply about the park and will advocate for improvements and organize fundraisers, special events, programs and more. Creating a friends group or working closely with an existing one is an excellent way to get park improvements off to a good start and ensure that the park is cared for and enhanced for years to come.



PUBLIC ART SAINT PAUL

▲ In Saint Paul, Minnesota, Amanda Lovelee (left) of the city's Public Art Saint Paul initiative, gathered community input about issues by traveling in her Pop Up Meeting van. A sign reading "Ask me how to get a FREE St. Pop" helped start conversations.



VAN NESS MAIN STREET

▲ By organizing a plaza party, a small group of residents in Washington, D.C.'s Van Ness neighborhood got other neighbors out of their apartments to meet one another and discuss how to energize the area's barren public spaces.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Elm Playlot

0.5 acre | Richmond, California

▼ Planned, designed and built by neighborhood residents, the Elm Playlot hosts classes, drop-in activities, and services for children and adults.



POGO PARK (2)

Located in the city's Iron Triangle neighborhood, the Elm Playlot sits in an area with high levels of poverty and, at times, crime. The city's attempt to revitalize the park by installing generic off-the-shelf playground equipment failed. The play set was vandalized within the first week.

Help arrived in 2008 in the form of Pogo Park, a community development corporation that transforms blighted, neglected and little-used inner-city parks into, the firm says, "safe, green and beautiful public spaces for children to play."

The Pogo Park team understood that a successful transformation of the space depended upon residents being directly involved in the process. Pogo Park hired and trained residents to serve on the Elm Playlot Action Committee.

Members committed to planning, designing, building and managing the Elm Playlot. They adopted an iterative approach to their work by constructing prototypes of ideas collected from the community. The successful samples were fine-tuned for permanent use.

"If the community makes the changes themselves, then the change is deeper and felt more widely," said Toody Maher, executive director of Pogo Park.



Open from sunrise to sunset, the Elm Playlot has an on-site staff and offers a variety of free arts, nature and exercise programs. The space features a community center with a kitchen and bathrooms. There's a zip line, a tot lot, a community garden, a trike path, several barbecue pits, custom-made benches and more. Regular offerings include a homework club, chess club, and activities run by a performing arts center.

**RELEVANT TOOLS:** Intercept Survey, page 25  
AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit, page 39



## GOAL

# Connect People to Parks

In 2017, San Francisco became the first city in the United States to ensure that all of its residents were within a 10-minute walk of a park. Compare this with sprawling Los Angeles, where only 54 percent of the people live within a 10-minute walk of a park. Despite being the only U.S. city to meet the 10-minute goal, San Francisco continues to invest in its park portfolio by focusing on improving the walking and biking routes that connect people to their parks and other public spaces.

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## STRATEGY

# Put Pedestrians First

All journeys begin and end with a walk, and walking is the most popular activity in parks.

The economic, social and health benefits of walking are well-documented, so much so that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes walking as “the closest thing you can have to a wonder drug.”

Walking also allows people to interact, which encourages a sense of belonging, pride and participation. Children and older adults especially benefit from walkable neighborhoods with strong connections to amenities and public spaces.

People who interact often with others are less likely to experience dementia if they walk regularly, and research shows that children who walk to local destinations, such as school or a park, exhibit higher levels of happiness, energy and relaxation.<sup>4</sup>

### Among the ways to put pedestrians first:

- **PUT PARKS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE**

Can a parent or caregiver easily push a stroller to a local park? Can a teen or older person walk to a park to meet a friend? An area might have green spaces galore, but if people can't walk to those places, many in need of time outdoors won't get out and about.

- **THINK HUMAN SCALE**

If the walk to a park is difficult or unsafe, people won't make the effort. That's why streets must be designed at a human scale, which means creating an atmosphere of comfort, dynamism and safety for pedestrians, as well as a connected network of sidewalks that are maintained, properly lit, and lined with a varied and interesting streetscape.

- **SLOW DOWN THE STREETS**

Lower income neighborhoods see a disproportionately high number of pedestrian fatalities. Older adults and children account for more than 25 percent of all pedestrian deaths and more than 20 percent of all pedestrian injuries. Pedestrians struck by vehicles traveling at 40 mph die as a result 80 percent of the time. When struck by a vehicle traveling 20 mph, pedestrians *survive* 90 percent of the time.<sup>5</sup> Slower speeds, safe crossings and continuous sidewalks are key ingredients for connecting parks to the people who need them the most.

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<sup>4</sup>“Health Benefits of Walking,” America Walks (2017), <http://americawalks.org/learning-center/benefits-of-walking-2/health/>

<sup>5</sup>“Traffic Safety Facts 2015 Data: Pedestrians,” U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2017), Publication: DOT-HS-812-375

## SPOTLIGHT

# Tattnall Square Park

16 acres | Macon, Georgia



MELISSA STANTON, AARP (4)

◀ Dubbed the “peace fountain,” Tattnall Square Park’s centerpiece structure inspires splashing — and reading. The brick paths leading to and around the fountain feature inspiring words (“Trust,” “Hope,” “Justice,” “Love”) and other engraved messages. The park’s trash cans double as displays for quotations from both famous names and local residents.

**T**attnall Square Park is one of the oldest parks in the United States. But over time, as the city of Macon’s fortunes declined, the park was poorly maintained and became crime-ridden.

The creation of the volunteer group Friends of Tattnall Square Park, and a grant in 2010 from the Knight Foundation, helped restore the public square into a vibrant gathering space in Macon’s College Hill neighborhood.

Numerous design changes made the park a safer, more comfortable and overall more useful place for people of all ages.

Many of the improvements were inspired by the municipality’s decision to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. (Learn more about that program at [AARP.org/ AgeFriendly](https://www.aarp.org/agefriendly).) Working with AARP Georgia and a livability consultant, local stakeholders assessed the walkability and age-friendly features of the park and its surroundings.

Among the recommended and implemented changes: Bicycle lanes and wide sidewalks were installed. A roundabout was constructed to make the nearby streets safer by slowing the fast-moving traffic around the park. Motor vehicles are now barred from the park’s interior.

Asphalt surfaces were torn up and replaced with trees and landscaping. Benches, performance spaces and drinking fountains were added. The lighting was updated, and an elegant fountain was installed to replace one removed in the 1960s. Prominent entrances welcome pedestrians into the park and define Tattnall Square’s boundaries.

“People of all ages can enjoy nature without being a consumer, without purchasing anything,” said Andrew Silver, chair of Friends of Tattnall Square Park. “Up to 1,000 people visit the park every week to enjoy the open space and trees.”

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**RELEVANT TOOL:** AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit, page 24

## STRATEGY

# Remove Barriers

In 2016, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation launched the Parks Without Borders initiative to make those in the city more open, welcoming and beautiful by improving “entrances, edges and park-adjacent spaces.” Small-scale yet high-impact design changes can make parks more inviting and accessible.

### Among the ways to remove barriers:

- **PUT OUT THE WELCOME MAT**  
Improving access to park spaces and upgrading entrances and perimeters are excellent ways to enhance the connectivity and accessibility of a park or other public space. For instance, an entrance can be widened, repositioned or aesthetically enhanced. Gates and fences can be lowered or removed to increase visibility between a park and the neighborhood it serves.
- **DECORATE!**  
Improving a park and its perimeter can involve adding outdoor furnishings, such as benches, tables and sun umbrellas. Adjacent spaces can get a facelift in the form of, for instance, distinctive pavement, artwork and attractive accessories. Whimsically crafted bicycle racks are dually beneficial as decorative and practical additions.
- **GO GREEN OR GREENER**  
Sometimes, in some places, an area that’s considered to be a park or public space isn’t particularly green. In such cases, greenery needs to be added with in-ground landscaping and trees or, if that’s not possible, potted plants and flowers.  
▼ For decades, when Parkside Avenue–area residents wanted to spend time sitting in Fairmount Park, they had to carry folding chairs across the busy roadway.



ABBY SULLIVAN, FAIRMOUNT PARK CONSERVANCY



## SPOTLIGHT

# Centennial Commons

0.5 acre | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



▲ Centennial Commons has been dubbed a “park within the park” and a “front porch” to Fairmount Park.

The Parkside neighborhood of Philadelphia lacks basic amenities, such as a recreational center or library. What it does have, directly across Parkside Avenue, is Fairmount Park, a space that was enhanced in 2018 by adopting both “borderless park” and pedestrian-friendly principles.

Launched by the Fairmount Park Conservancy, the Centennial Commons project, named for the site of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, is part of Reimagining the Civic Commons, a national initiative that counters economic and social fragmentation in cities by revitalizing and connecting parks and other public spaces.

The two goals of the project’s “Parkside Edge” effort: make it easier for pedestrians to access the park (Parkside Avenue can be challenging to cross) and make them *want* to visit the park.

“Parks only reach their potential when people use them,” said Jamie Gauthier, executive director of the Fairmount Park Conservancy. “Through an extensive community engagement process, we

learned that Parkside residents have long used these lawns for picnics, but they wanted some proper seating. We realized that people were risking fast-moving traffic just to cross the street.”

By adding pedestrian crossings and traffic-calming measures, the project improved the safety of park-bound pedestrians.

To entice residents into the park, custom swings and benches were placed along the street to make the area more than just an accessway to a large open field.

The additions have helped to integrate the park into the streetscape and attract people of all ages and abilities to the space.

When the first phase of the improvements opened for use, Gauthier declared, “We’re seeing the beginnings of how this historic site can be remade into a welcoming community gathering place.”

**RELEVANT TOOLS:** AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit, page 24  
Intercept Survey, page 25



## GOAL

# Create New Parks (Even in Unconventional Spaces)

Many publicly owned buildings, such as schools, libraries and civic centers, have outdoor spaces, be they courtyards or parking lots, lawns or open fields, that can be repurposed for passive or active recreation and other forms of programming. Other examples of unconventional places for parks, greenery and gathering places include vacant lots, laneways, highway underpasses, bus shelters and streets. For neighborhoods lacking traditional parkland, such spaces can serve as catalysts for community transformation.

## STRATEGY

# Take Back Space

The point of “parkifying” unconventional spaces is to turn underused and/or neglected locations into places for people.

**Among the ways to** Take Back Space:

- **BE IMAGINATIVE**

When a location wasn’t originally intended to be a park or recreational space, or when items weren’t designed for such places, creativity is key. For instance, a seaside town might turn a no-longer-seaworthy boat into a playground structure for kids to climb on. In 2011, artist Candy Chang used chalkboard paint to cover the facade of an abandoned house in New Orleans, Louisiana. She then stenciled the prompt “Before I die I want to ... ,” inviting people to complete the statement by writing their responses using colorful chalk. The wall was quickly filled with statements. After receiving worldwide attention, Chang created a guide for how other communities could do the same.

- **ADD VALUE**

Whatever is created needs to improve the area and be useful to it. For example, it might not be

▼ It gets hot, very hot, in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. An easily accessible splash fountain in a commercial district plaza provides welcome relief from the heat — and some silly fun — for people of all ages and abilities.



the best idea to create a pocket park (see page 19) in a vacant lot located in an area people can’t easily walk, bicycle or drive to. However, the same project might be a great addition in a walkable, bike-friendly neighborhood that has no parks.

- **BUILD IT BECAUSE IT’S WANTED**

Whatever type of park or green space is added needs to be wanted by the community. Successful examples of parkifying unusual spaces spur people to think differently about their communities and inspire others to attempt similar projects where they live.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Gallery Alley

Less than 0.5 acre | Wichita, Kansas



WICHITA DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CORP.

▲ Like some other projects in this guide, downtown Wichita’s alleyway makeover received Knight Foundation funding.

The phrase “Meet me in the alley” has often served as a threat. That’s changing in many downtowns nationwide.

For instance, in 2017, the Wichita Downtown Development Corp. transformed an underused alley (located at 616 E. Douglas Street) into Gallery Alley, a vibrant, walkable public space filled with outdoor dining and activities and art and music by local artists and entertainers.

To make the space cozier, the alley’s brick pavement was painted in bright colors and bistro lights were strung along the entire 140-foot length.

In its prior life, the 15-foot-wide alley was used by downtown drivers as a traffic-avoiding

shortcut. Yet even drivers considered the space unsafe as well as inconvenient. (If two cars entered from opposite ends, one would have to back out. Moreover, visibility was limited for cars exiting the alley and merging into traffic on the city’s streets.)

Sometimes all it takes to transform a space is some paint and strings of lights, tables and chairs, music, and people. By “activating” the alley with simple design-and-use interventions, Wichita turned a dark, unsafe space into a safe and inviting destination for all.

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**RELEVANT TOOL:** Programming Calendar, page 36

## STRATEGY

# Think Outside the Box

There are times when a great idea or project hits a dead end simply because there's no official process for getting it done. This is a common stumbling block for ideas so novel and creative that they've never been attempted before.



RYAN RUSSO, NYC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (2)

▲ The NYC Plaza Program is run by the New York City Department of Transportation, which transformed a chaotic parking site at the Pearl Street Triangle in Brooklyn into a sunny seating area.

### Among the ways to think outside the box:

- **CREATE IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS**

It's worth taking the time to learn what might prevent a project from being implemented. Innovators need to know the rules in order to relax them. Pioneers often need to achieve their goals by simultaneously ignoring and abiding by the rules. Effective advocacy and community outreach, as well as finding loopholes in, for instance, zoning codes and permitting processes, can reveal ways to circumvent the norms in order to create people-friendlier spaces.

- **FIND CHAMPIONS IN UNLIKELY PLACES**

Parkifying unconventional spaces will likely require finding champions — municipal offices, business owners, nonprofits — that might be unaccustomed to dealing with park- and public-space-related issues. Since these stakeholders may be unfamiliar with the benefits of activating underutilized spaces for recreational use, the onus is on the placemaker to build a strong case for the project.

- **IDENTIFY SHARED GOALS**

When park advocates seek out potential partners or benefactors, the advocates need to know how their goals align with those of the individuals or groups they're hoping to work with. For instance, if the proposed project takes place on a privately owned parking lot, identify how the activities can also benefit the landowner. If the aim of the project is to reduce social isolation, try approaching the city's public health department, which may have the same goal. When a project's goals are aligned with those of others, the project's wins can also become their wins.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Plazas, Pocket Parks and Parklets

20 square feet and up | Lots of locations — *nationwide*

**W**hen a community has more asphalt than green acres, parks and public spaces often need to take to the streets.

The NYC Plaza Program partners with local organizations to transform underused streets into vibrant public spaces. The program is a key part of the city’s effort to ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality open space.

A similar solution is the “pocket park.” Such spaces, which sometimes consist of little more than a mowed lawn and a few tables and chairs, are an excellent way to fill vacant lots or oddly shaped parcels of land and keep them from becoming eyesores or outright hazards.

The term “parklets” describes on-street parking spaces that have been transformed into public seating areas. Municipal-transportation, planning or economic-development departments often manage parklet programs. However, the concept’s origins are grassroots, going back to 2005, when the San Francisco–based design firm Rebar transformed a parking spot into a mini-park by rolling out a carpet of live grass and topping it with a bench and potted tree.

As retold by *CityLab*, after feeding the parking meter, the designers “retreated across the street to observe the results.... Within minutes, a man sat down on the bench, took off his shoes, and began to eat lunch. Another person joined soon after, and the two began having a conversation. That’s when [the] collaborators knew they were on to something: ‘We created an opportunity for social interaction that wasn’t there before.’ ”

The experiment inspired PARKing Day, usually celebrated on the third Friday of September and part of a worldwide movement. In many places, semipermanent parklets are making regular

seasonal appearances. And communities of various sizes have established guidelines and permitting processes that both encourage parklets and regulate their placement. In Eureka, California, for instance, an 18-month pilot program led to parklets being allowed as permanent installations.

“The goals of this program are to enliven Eureka’s streets, foster neighborhood interaction, and support local businesses,” the city explained on its website. “Through the creation and use of parklets, we hope to increase our ability as a City to balance the needs of people walking, riding bicycles, taking transit and travelling by car, provide spaces for people to gather and spend time enjoying the weather, and enhance the pedestrian streetscape in our commercial cores areas.”

Said Eureka’s development director: “We’re working really hard to be business-friendly, and one of the options we’ve come up with are parklets — where we encourage businesses to invest in the public space, create a place people can enjoy without any funds from the city being expended, and we try to make the process as simple as possible while creating really high quality places.”

**RELEVANT TOOL:** ParkServe, page 23



► **Parklets, like this one in the Rosslyn neighborhood of Arlington, Virginia, typically occupy a single parallel parking space, making them about 6 feet by 20 feet in size.**

## PART 2

# The Tool Kit

This section features worksheets and planning resources to guide local leaders and residents through the planning phases of improving a park or public space. These tools were developed and are used by AARP, 8 80 Cities and The Trust for Public Land. Regardless of the type of space being improved, these tools, resources and worksheets (yes, go ahead and make copies) will help answer the following questions before a public space project is implemented:

- Who uses the community's existing parks and public spaces and what do they do there?
- What challenges do the community's parks and public spaces face?
- What opportunities exist for enhancing the community's parks and public spaces?
- What people and groups should be included in efforts to improve the parks and public spaces?



MELISSA STANTON, AARP

▲ The forestlike Guy Mason Park playground is located down a hill off of busy Wisconsin Avenue in Washington, D.C.



880 CITIES

▲ A mobile sauna in Como Park was a hot spot during Saint Paul, Minnesota’s annual winter carnival.



880 CITIES

▲ Can’t get the kids to the beach? Take them to a parking lot instead. That’s what many parents did in Macon, Georgia, after the city delivered two truckloads of play sand for a downtown event.



PLAYCORE

▲ A FitLot is an outdoor fitness park that makes gym-quality exercise equipment accessible to the public. An AARP Challenge Grant helped fund some programming at this lot in New Orleans, Louisiana, where a team of coaches provided 36 hours of free training to, reports an organizer, “an extremely dedicated group of seniors in a community that suffers one of the largest health disparity gaps in the country.”

## PARK PLANNING TOOL The Steps

**STEP 1:** Use the **AARP Livability Index** (page 22) to gain a deeper understanding of the community and identify its strengths and weaknesses.

**STEP 2:** Use the **ParkServe** tool (page 23) from The Trust for Public Land to learn how many residents live near a park or green space.

**STEP 3:** Visit the actual or potential project location and conduct a **Public Space Audit** (page 28).

**STEP 4:** Use the **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** (page 24) to assess the area’s walkability.

**STEP 5:** Use the **Public Space Field Study** (page 32) to understand who visits the park or public location and what they do there.

**STEP 6:** Recruit volunteers and have them help conduct an **Intercept Survey** (page 25) so the project team can understand how visitors feel about a park or green space location.

**STEP 7:** Collect and organize data from the **Public Space Audit**, the **Public Space Field Study** and the **Intercept Survey** to identify key themes and commonalities.

**STEP 8:** Complete the **Community Asset Map** (page 38) to identify key stakeholders and partners who might support the community’s parks and public space efforts.

**STEP 9:** Complete the **Programming Calendar** (page 36) to understand what types of activities or events already happen in the location and identify new ideas that could make the space more inclusive and accessible.

**STEP 10:** Use the **AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit** (page 39) to test potential solutions or livability features.



## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# AARP Livability Index

The web-based **AARP Livability Index** is an interactive tool that assesses the livability of states, cities, neighborhoods and even streets throughout the United States.

Developed by the AARP Public Policy Institute, the index was created to inform and encourage local leaders, policymakers and residents to make their communities more livable for people of all ages.

The index can use an address; zip code; or town, city or county name to access an overall livability assessment or determine a score in any of seven major categories. (See below.) The results can be customized by choosing which categories to include in the calculation.

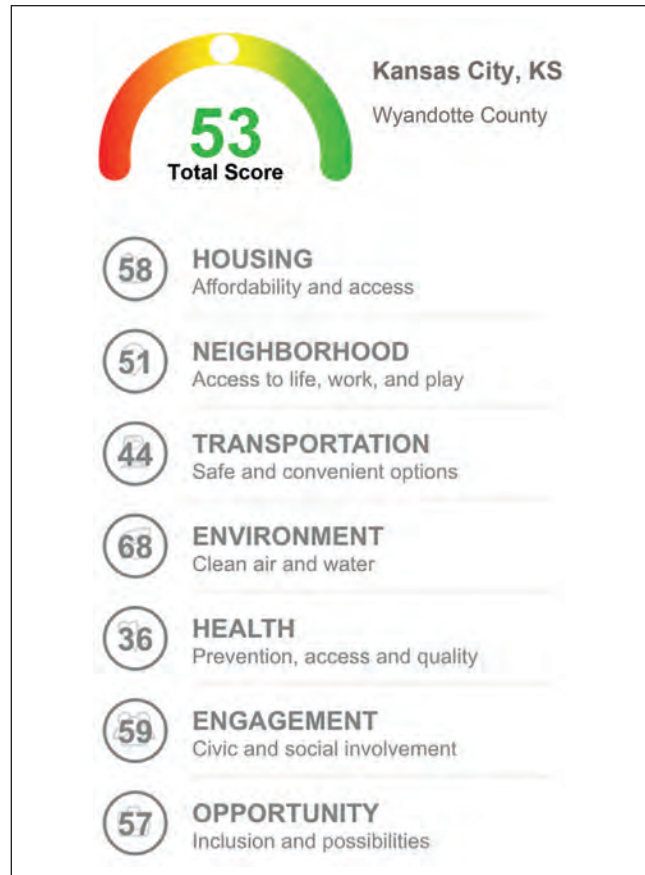
### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Go to [AARP.org/LivabilityIndex](http://AARP.org/LivabilityIndex) and search for an address, zip code, municipality or state.
2. Record the index scores in the grid (below left).

### ANALYZING THE RESULTS

- Note which livability categories the community performs well in and which need improvement.
- List the scores that could be improved by enhancing the accessibility and vibrancy of the community's parks and public spaces.

Location	
<b>Total Index Score</b>	
<b>Housing</b>	
<b>Neighborhood</b>	
<b>Transportation</b>	
<b>Environment</b>	
<b>Health</b>	
<b>Engagement</b>	
<b>Opportunity</b>	



▲ To calculate livability scores, the **AARP Livability Index** uses more than 50 national data sources and 60 indicators spread across the seven categories at left. The example is a sample report.





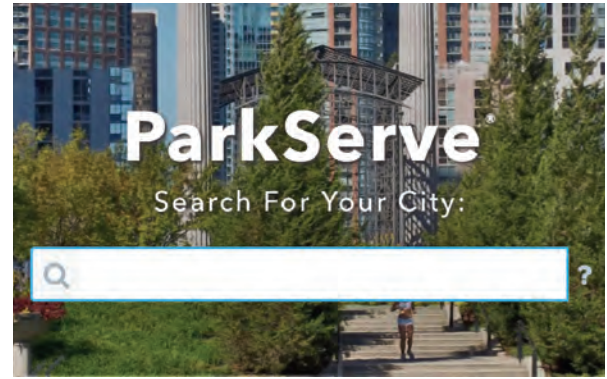
## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# ParkServe®

Developed by The Trust for Public Land, **ParkServe** is an online database that assesses the availability of parks and green spaces within a 10-minute walk of residential properties.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Go to **ParkServe.org** and search for a city. Complete the Community Parks Profile below.
2. Click the Deep Dive or Explore and Map Parks option. This will generate a map of the city and identify areas of need for park space based on the 10-minute-walk principle.
3. Use the website's Park Planning Tool to identify where you'd like to add new parks or public spaces.



### ANALYZING THE RESULTS

- Note whether the neighborhood lacks access to parks. If so, this data can be used to develop awareness and a sense of urgency about a parks project.
- If the neighborhood is already well-served by parks, consider what can be done to improve those and other green spaces.

## Community Parks Profile

<b>Percentage of residents within a 10-minute walk of a park</b>	
<b>Number of parks within the city</b>	
<b>Total park acreage within the city</b>	
<b>Median park size</b>	
<b>Persons per acre of parkland</b>	
<b>Percentage of youth within a 10-minute walk of a park</b>	
<b>Name of the city's largest park</b>	
<b>Acreage of the city's largest park</b>	



## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit

**Too many communities in the United States are designed exclusively or almost exclusively for automobile travel, with little consideration given to the needs of pedestrians. Multilane roadways that are unsafe to cross and a lack of sidewalks and street maintenance are all factors that discourage or outright prevent people from walking within their communities.**

- Walk audits are observational surveys that document the safe walkability of a particular street, sidewalk, intersection or area.
- Although not all parks can be walkable destinations for all users, people within a park space should be able to safely walk without having to dodge motor vehicles or inattentive cyclists.
- The **AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit** is a free, two-booklet resource. The main guide is for conducting do-it-yourself assessments; the second is for hosting walkability events or workshops and then leading others on a community walk audit.
- The data and documentation gathered during a walk audit can be shared with elected officials and municipal staff to help bring about needed change.

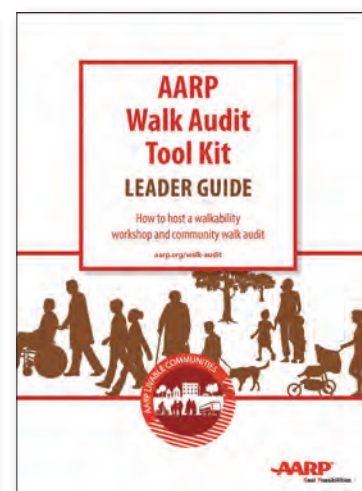
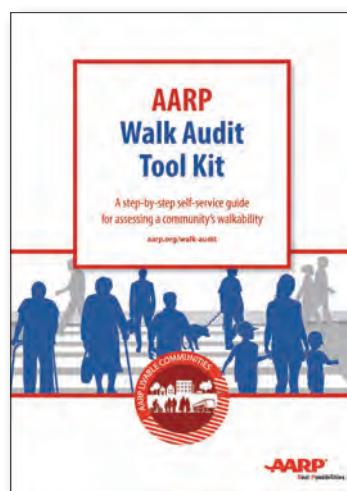
### **A walk audit can improve communities by:**

- Helping to create a pedestrian-friendly environment
- Increasing exercise opportunities for community members
- Fostering more social interactions among neighbors
- Reducing the need to drive
- Reducing traffic congestion and pollution
- Increasing property values

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

**A resident, community group or local leader can survey and report on the safety and walkability of a street, intersection or neighborhood by downloading or ordering the free AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit guides.**

Visit [AARP.org/Walk-Audit](https://www.aarp.org/Walk-Audit)





# PARK PLANNING TOOL

## Intercept Survey

Learn how people feel about and use an area's parks and public spaces. Combined with the **Public Space Audit** (page 28), this data will provide a detailed picture of the area's existing assets and needs.

### SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Pens (10)
- Clipboards (5-10)
- Intercept Survey Worksheets (50)

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### 1. Identify a Space

The location can be an existing park, public space or underused site (e.g., a street, school playground, alley, parking lot).

#### 2. Visit the Location, Distribute the Surveys

Approach people who are spending time in or passing through the park or public green space. Identify yourself as a researcher and ask if they have a couple of minutes to answer an anonymous survey about the location. Give each person a survey sheet. Stay close by to answer any questions he or she may have.

### ANALYZING THE RESULTS

- Read all of the completed survey forms to identify patterns or common responses.
- Sort the data by characteristics such as age, gender and/or income level. That can help identify common themes or specific needs of groups that may be underserved by the space.

*(Continued on page 26)*

► A 120-foot-long alley in downtown Camden, South Carolina, was uninviting. The city asked passersby to help make stained-glass globes for hanging alongside LED string lights (shown). The space has become an attractive and useful connector for shoppers, diners and chalk artists.

### TOOL KIT TIPS

- Conduct the survey at different times of day and during different days of the week to ensure that a diverse mix of park users are represented.
- Recruit friends or volunteers to help.
- Record and organize the results on spreadsheets to help identify patterns and key findings.



CITY OF CAMDEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

# Intercept Survey Worksheet

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Why did you come here today?** *(Check all that apply)*

- Just passing through
- Waiting for transit
- An event *(Which one?)* \_\_\_\_\_
- Food and/or drink
- Active recreation (walking, bicycling, exercise, sports, etc.)
- Meeting family and/or friends
- Spending time by myself
- Other *(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

**2. How often do you visit this park or outdoor space?**

- Daily                       Weekly                       Monthly                       Annually or less

**3. How did you get here today?** *(Check all that apply)*

- Walk                       Bike                       Transit                       Private car                       Taxi / Uber / Lyft
- Other *(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

**4. How was your trip here?**

- Very good                       Good                       Fair                       Poor                       Very poor

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**5. If you walked, how would you rate the sidewalks you used to get here?**

- Very good                       Good                       Fair                       Poor                       Very poor

**6. If you bicycled, how would you rate the bicycle lanes or bicycle-priority streets, if any?**

- Very good                       Good                       Fair                       Poor                       Very poor

**7. If you took public transit, how would you rate the nearest transit stop?**

- Very good                       Good                       Fair                       Poor                       Very poor

**8. If you drove, how would you rate the parking situation here?**

- Very good                       Good                       Fair                       Poor                       Very poor

**9. Have you ever actively supported or helped maintain this park or outdoor space?**

- Yes                       No                      If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Overall, how would you rate this park or outdoor space?**

- Very good                       Good                       Fair                       Poor                       Very poor

11. What do you like about this park or outdoor space? \_\_\_\_\_

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12. What don't you like about this location? \_\_\_\_\_

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13. What uses or activities would you like to see here in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

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14. In your opinion, which age groups would enjoy this space? *(Check all that apply)*

- All ages     Children     Teens     Adults     Older adults

15. What is your age?

- Under 13     13-17     18-24     25-44     45-64     65+

16. Do you identify as:

- Female     Male     Nonbinary

17. What is your household's income? *(Do not include roommates unless taxes are filed jointly)*

- Under \$15,000     \$15,000-\$24,999     \$25,000-\$34,999     \$35,000-49,999  
 \$50,000-\$74,999     \$75,000-\$99,999     \$100,000+

18. Do you identify as: *(Check all that apply)*

- African American     Asian American  
 Hispanic or Latinx     Indigenous, American Indian or Alaska Native  
 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander     White  
 Other *(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

19. What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

20. Is there anything else you would like to share? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Public Space Audit

The **Public Space Audit** provides a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to identify what is currently working in a space and what aspects need to be improved. This activity will help evaluate the experience of visiting the area and provide insights about the location's design and programming.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Pen
- Clipboard
- Copy of the Public Space Audit Worksheet

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Identify the Location

The audit space can be an existing park, public place or underused site (e.g., street, school playground, alley, parking lot).

### 2. Visit the Location

Become familiar with the site and its surroundings before answering the questions.

### 3. Complete the Worksheet

Record the date, time and location. Feel free to make additional notes and observations.

## ANALYZING THE RESULTS

- Since these results will represent the experience of the auditor, it's important to supplement the data by collecting feedback from others in the neighborhood. The Intercept Survey (page 25) will help do that.

### TOOL KIT TIP

- For some questions, about a site's size, for instance, it may be better to seek the answer through online resources such as Google Maps or by contacting the parks or transportation department.



MELISSA STANTON, AARP

▲ A park along Water Street in remote, tiny Eastport, Maine (population 1,600), has walking paths, benches, picnic tables, a Little Free Library — and a great view.

# Public Space Audit Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ a.m. | p.m. (Circle one)

Weather: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Describe this location:

What is it? (e.g., park, alley, street corner) \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it? (address or nearest intersection) \_\_\_\_\_

How big is it? (approximately) \_\_\_\_\_ Is it public property? \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Describe the surrounding area:

What type of area is it? (Check all that apply)

Residential     Industrial     Rural/Undeveloped     Commercial     Mixed-Use

What are some key destinations in the area? (e.g., library, school, coffee shop) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 3. How does this location make you feel?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relaxed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why do you feel this way? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. On a typical day, how do people use this location?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. How many programs, activities or events take place in this location during different seasons and times of day and for which age groups?**

	Many	Some	Few	None	Examples:
Spring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Summer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Fall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Winter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Daytime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Nighttime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Children (under age 13)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Teens (13-19)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Younger Adults (20-39)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Adults (40-64)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Older Adults (65+)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

**5. Rate the quality of the following features:**

	Good	Fair	Poor	None	Comments:
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Drinking fountains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Lighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Places to be physically active	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Places to eat and/or drink	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Places to sit or take a break	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Restrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Shelter from the weather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Street noise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Trees and landscaping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____



**6. How well-connected is the location?**

**Walking**

- a. The streets in or adjacent to the location have sidewalks. Agree | Disagree
- b. There are clear directional signs or visual cues to guide people to the space. Agree | Disagree
- c. There are pedestrian signals at intersections. Agree | Disagree
- d. The signals provide adequate crossing time for slower walkers. Agree | Disagree
- e. There are signals or design elements for blind/visually impaired pedestrians. Agree | Disagree
- f. Sidewalks and crossings are accessible for people using mobility aids (e.g., a wheelchair). Agree | Disagree
- g. There are traffic calming features (e.g., speed bumps) in the area. Agree | Disagree
- h. What is the posted speed limit in the area? \_\_\_\_\_
- i. Traffic is moving at or below the speed limit. Agree | Disagree

**Cycling**

- a. There are designated bike lanes or trails connected to the space. Agree | Disagree
- b. There is a secure place to park your bike in the space. Agree | Disagree

**7. How likely are you/would you be to allow your child or an older relative to visit this location?**

- Likely       Somewhat likely       Not likely

**8. What opportunities do you see for this location?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**9. What challenges do you see for this location?** \_\_\_\_\_

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## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# Public Space Field Study

The **Public Space Field Study** is divided into two observational surveys, which you will fill out yourself: One is focused on how people move to and from a space, the other on what people do in the space. If possible, conduct the survey at different times of the day, different days of the week and even different seasons of the year.

### SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Pen
- Clipboard
- Public Space Field Study Worksheets

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### 1. Identify a Space

The location can be an existing park, public space or underused site (e.g., street, school playground, alley, parking lot). Become familiar with the site and its surroundings. Determine the entry/exit point of the space or the area of greatest activity. Stand in a location that provides a broad view of the area.

#### 2. Select and Complete a Worksheet

Draw a simple map on the worksheet and mark a spot at which you'll be able to see the greatest number of park users. Record the date and time of your data collection at the top of the sheet.

#### **Worksheet A: Movement** *(see page 34)*

- Record the number of people walking into or out of the space, the number of people riding a bicycle and, as accurately as possible, the gender and age of those who pass by.
- Observe and record information about the people in the area for 15-minute intervals.

#### **Worksheet B: Activity** *(see page 35)*

- Record the activities of people in the space, dividing the activities into categories if necessary. Also record, as accurately as possible, the gender and age of those who pass by.
- Observe and record information about the activities in the area for 15-minute intervals.

### ANALYZING THE RESULTS

- Who is missing or underrepresented, based on the observations? (It can be useful to compare the survey findings with local census data to determine whether the mix of people who visit the site reflects the area's demographics.)
- Age data are useful when developing new programming or design ideas. For instance, if older adults aren't visiting the area, consider reaching out to them to understand why.
- The presence or underrepresentation of women during the observation period can be a significant issue. Women tend to be selective about the public spaces they visit. A lack of female park visitors could be an indication that a space is considered unsafe.
- Are a range of activities taking place in the park or public space?
- Are there activities the community might enjoy that aren't currently happening in the space?
- Is a mix of passive activities (sitting, socializing) and active activities (playing, exercising) occurring in the space?

### TOOL KIT TIP

- Try to complete these activities during typical weather conditions.
- Recruit friends or volunteers to help implement the activity studies.
- Record the final results in a spreadsheet to help organize and summarize the data.

▼ In 2015, elected leaders in Anchorage, Alaska, voted to turn a former greenhouse property that was in disrepair into a much-needed 12-acre recreation area and green space in the city's east end. The Muldoon Town Square Park is usable year-round, with a colorful “all-inclusive” playground, picnic shelter and running track. In the winter, the track becomes a curvy ice ribbon that’s used by both new and experienced skaters.



JERRIANNE LOWTHER

# Public Space Field Study Worksheet

## Part A: Movement Study

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Weather: \_\_\_\_\_

### Pedestrians

AGE	FEMALE	MALE
Children (under 13)		
Teens (13–19)		
Younger Adults (20–39)		
Adults (40–64)		
Older Adults (65+)		

### Bicyclists

AGE	FEMALE	MALE
Children (Under 13)		
Teens (13–19)		
Younger Adults (20–39)		
Adults (40–64)		
Older Adults (65+)		

# Public Space Field Study Worksheet

## Part B: Activity Study

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Weather: \_\_\_\_\_

### Age and Gender

AGE	FEMALE	MALE
Children (under 13)		
Teens (13–19)		
Younger Adults (20–39)		
Adults (40–64)		
Older Adults (65+)		

### Activities

ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	ACTIVITIES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Walking		Resting	
Sitting		Exercising	
Talking/Socializing		Bicycling	
Eating/Drinking		Vending	
Board games, etc.		Entertaining	
Playing		Waiting	
Team sports			



## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# Programming Calendar

Create a calendar of activities, programs or events to ensure that a park or public space is used during all seasons, both day and night, and is accessible to people of all ages.

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### 1. Identify a Space

The location can be an existing park, public space or underused site (e.g., street, school playground, alley, parking lot).

#### 2. List the Existing Activities

Use the Programming Calendar Worksheet to record the current activities, programs and events, checking all that apply. (These details can often be found online.) Also record the season, time of day and intended audience.

#### 3. List Ideas for New Activities

Complete a second calendar worksheet by noting ideas for the types of activities, programs and events that seem appropriate. Check all that apply.

### ANALYZING THE RESULTS

- The activities listed should be suitable for a range of seasons, times and age groups.
- Every column (season, time of day, age group) should be marked at least twice.
- Ideally, some activities will apply to more than one season, time or age group.



LIFE ON THE GREENWAY

▲ The Rose Kennedy Greenway is a linear park that spans 1.5 miles through several neighborhoods in Boston, Massachusetts. The greenway partners with cultural institutions and businesses to host more than 400 free, multicultural, multigenerational public programs and events a year.

# Programming Calendar Worksheet

Activity, Program or Event (Include a brief description)	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter	Day	Night	Children (under 13)	Teens (13-19)	Younger Adults (20-39)	Adults (40-64)	Older Adults (65+)



## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# Community Asset Map

A **Community Asset Map** is useful for identifying local stakeholders, like-minded organizations and potential partners, including decision-makers who may need to approve any park or green space project.

Other local figures, such as elected officials or influential residents, can give a project legitimacy and momentum by lending their support.

Altogether, an asset map is a way of creating a list of people and groups to connect with when planning a public space improvement project.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. List the names of influential people and organizations in the community, divided by category.

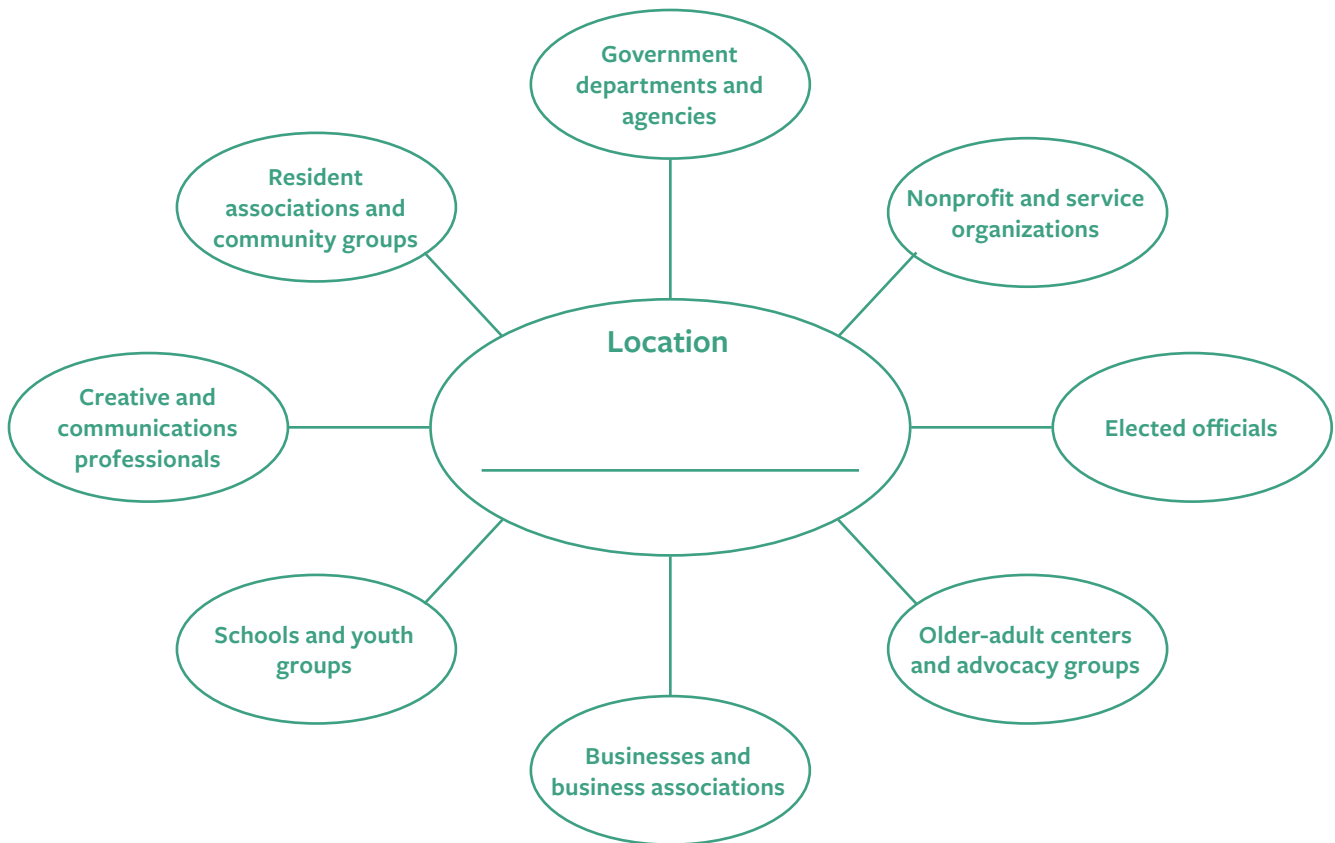
2. Include any contact information.

3. If desired, enter the information into a spreadsheet.

### ANALYZING THE RESULTS

Consider the needs and interests of each stakeholder:

- How do the interests of those stakeholders align with the project’s goals?
- What questions or concerns might they have?
- Before approaching any individuals or organizations, consider what aspects of the project are and are not negotiable.







## PARK PLANNING TOOL

# AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit

When done right, temporary livability projects can lead to permanent change. Testing potential solutions by demonstrating them for the community can build support — and often outright enthusiasm — for needed change.

- Pop-up projects typically involve community members working together to bring attention to overlooked spaces, address neighborhood issues, or test ideas for how to make improvements within a public or, sometimes, private space such as streets, empty buildings or underused lots.
- A pop-up demonstration project can be organized and implemented quickly or over time. The **AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit** guides users through a three-month timeline for implementing a pop-up project or event.
- These projects may involve the temporary placement of bike lanes, crosswalks, parklets, sidewalk cafes, plazas, benches, potted trees and more. Employing trial runs enables communities to evaluate new concepts and make improvements before investing in large-scale change.



TEAM BETTER BLOCK

▲ The urban planners and placemaking specialists of the firm Team Better Block are pop-up demonstration experts. Visit [AARP.org/Livable](https://www.aarp.org/Livable) and search for “Team Better Block” to learn about projects AARP and Team Better Block have done together, such as the Fort Wayne, Indiana, transformation shown here.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Visit [AARP.org/Livable-PopUp](https://www.aarp.org/Livable-PopUp) to access the online tool kit, which contains the following chapters:

1. Getting Started
2. Engaging the Community and Making a Plan
3. Organizing and Marketing the Project or Event
4. Building and Launching the Project or Event
5. Next Steps and Maintaining the Momentum

The tool kit features the following examples:

1. Pop-Up Parklet: *Anaconda, Montana*
2. Pop-Up Plaza: *Camden, New Jersey*
3. Streetscape Revitalization: *Memphis, Tennessee*
4. Protected Bike Lane: *Oakland, California*
5. Pop-Up Road Diet and Plaza: *Portland, Oregon*
6. Protected Intersection: *Minneapolis, Minnesota*



# 5 Fun Facts About Having Fun

According to research by The Trust for Public Land ...

**1** Thanks in part to **PICKLEBALL** — a game that combines tennis, badminton and ping-pong — intergenerational park amenities and recreational centers that appeal to older adults are growing in number. In 2017, the 100 largest cities in the United States had 420 pickleball courts. By mid-2018 that number exceeded 700. (Two pickleball courts fit into the space of one tennis court.) The top five cities for pickleball courts:

- Seattle, Washington
- Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Madison, Wisconsin
- Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Omaha, Nebraska



CHIPPewa VALLEY PICKLEBALL CLUB

▲ The tennis-like game of pickleball is super popular among the 50-plus set — so much so in Wisconsin’s Chippewa Valley that the area has several dozen indoor or outdoor courts.

## **2 A SOLUTION THAT’S GAINING TRACTION: JOINT USE AGREEMENTS**

An example is an agreement in which a school district and the local parks and recreation department join forces so school fields and playgrounds can be used by the public when school isn’t in session.

## **3 THE TOP U.S. CITY FOR RECREATION AND SENIOR CENTERS PER PERSON: HONOLULU, HAWAII**

The Aloha State’s capital city has 4.6 recreation and senior centers for every 20,000 people.

## **4 TOP CITIES FOR COMMUNITY GARDEN PLOTS**

- Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Portland, Oregon
- Washington, D.C.
- Boston, Massachusetts
- Madison, Wisconsin
- Louisville, Kentucky

**5 PARK SPACES THAT FEATURE** any of the following will attract people (and often pets) of all ages:

- Dog parks
- Community gardens
- Splash pads
- Pickleball courts
- Walking and hiking trails



JEFF RUPPENTHAL, LNP MEDIA GROUP

▲ People and pets of all ages have fun at Beau’s Dream Dog Park in Lancaster, Pennsylvania’s Buchanan Park. (The city with the most dog parks per 100,000 residents: Boise, Idaho. The city with the most dog parks overall: New York.)

Source: “The Trust for Public Land 2018 City Park Facts Report”



# Additional Resources

From **AARP Livable Communities** | [AARP.org/Livable](https://www.aarp.org/Livable)

- **AARP Roadmap to Livability Series and Workbooks**
- **Where We Live: Communities for All Ages — 100+ Inspiring Examples from America's Community Leaders**

From **8 80 Cities** | [880Cities.org](https://www.880cities.org)

- **Building Better Cities with Young Children and Families — How to Engage Our Youngest Citizens and Families in City Building: A Global Scan of Best Practices**

From **The Trust for Public Land** | [TFPL.org](https://www.tfpl.org)

- **City Park Facts Reports**
- **Conservation Economics Reports**

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## **Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages**

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# Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages

## A Step-by-Step Guide

Public parks are important places for building a sense of community and social belonging. They are spaces that belong to everyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or income.

However, the way parks are designed, maintained and programmed doesn't always reflect the purpose and promise of such uniquely public spaces. Pinched for funds by competing priorities, many municipalities neglect their park networks or fail to invest in these vital places as their communities grow and change.

**AARP, 8 80 Cities** and **The Trust for Public Land** have come together to highlight the importance of parks — and give community leaders (and park advocates from all corners) tools they can use to both create and improve green spaces and public places for people of all ages.



*“Livable communities don’t just happen. They require leadership, vision and engagement. This guide provides tools and ideas for community members and leaders to ensure that great, intergenerational parks are integral to their livable communities approach.”*

— **Nancy LeMond**, Executive Vice President  
AARP Community, State and National Affairs

*“If everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for people of all ages.”*

— **Gil Penalosa**, Founder and Chair  
8 80 Cities

*“The Trust for Public Land, along with mayors and local leaders nationwide, is working to establish parks for the one-third of Americans who cannot walk to a park. This guide puts resources in the hands of citizens to further that goal, as it will take volunteers, public officials and funders to help close the gap.”*

— **Charlie McCabe**, Director  
The Trust for Public Land,  
Center for City Park Excellence



Visit [AARP.org/LivableParks](https://www.aarp.org/LivableParks) to download a PDF of this guide or order a free printed edition.