Denver
Parks + Recreation

Washington Park Master Plan

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wenk

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- Washington Park Neighborhood
- Bike Denver
- Washington Park Tennis Club
- Volleyball of the Rockies
- Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC)
- City & County of Denver Parks & Public Works Staff

Grasmere Lake provides a tranquil place to experience the outdoors.

Introduction

Washington Park is one of the most visited and most loved parks in Denver's historic system of parks and parkways. As such Washington Park faces unique challenges to preserve its historic character while adapting to the changing needs of the community and its visitors. Some of those challenges include:

- Decades of heavy use have contributed to significant deterioration of many of the park's historic features. While many have been restored and plans for others are ongoing, a comprehensive strategy for reinvestment in the historic fabric has not yet been developed.
- There has been a gradual and consistent increase in recreational use of the Park, resulting in a significant increase in the number and types of user conflicts.
- Tensions between neighborhood and regional uses have increased. For example, special events ranging from weekend charity runs to weddings, often conflict with neighborhood access and enjoyment.
- Conflicts between pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular circulation within the park have been a perennial concern. Higher volumes of all types of traffic, combined

with deteriorating park roads and trails have contributed to the problem.

- Changing environmental conditions have impacted the quality of the historic park landscape, including the lakes and trees, plantings and grass areas. There have been significant changes to the Park's tree canopy due to maturing trees, stress from drought, changes in the quality of irrigation water and inconsistent plant replacements. Water quality in the lakes has been impacted by changes in water source, stormwater runoff from streets and parking and by heavy Park use.

- Many existing Park facilities do not meet the contemporary recreation needs of the community or current safety and accessibility codes. In addition, past changes were not always implemented with the best interests of the Park's historic significance in mind.

- Growing public awareness about sustainable practices highlight the need to improve the Park environment to provide better access, improve plant diversity and water quality and reduce water use.

- Competition for funding among City parks has become much more competitive, requiring projects to be clearly scoped and prioritized. Alternative sources of funding provide opportunities for implementation of high priority projects that have broad public support.

The Washington Park Master Plan provides a vision for future Park improvements and a blueprint for action, with steps for implementing the plan over a period of time. This will include public process, preservation, designed improvements, administration of resources and actions that support the principles outlined in this report. These recommendations will guide City staff in accomplishing the goals of the plan by providing an overall framework for implementation and a prioritized list of projects that have broad public and City agency support.

high levels of use and outdated improvements

deterioration of historic elements

The master plan builds on the community's desire and the City's goal to preserve the integrity of this historic Park while keeping it relevant for contemporary recreation needs. During the planning process a wide range of issues were raised by members of the community, the stakeholder group and public agencies. This input resulted in goals, strategies and a set of prioritized recommendations that will allow for Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) to coordinate funding, phasing and detailed design of future Park improvements.

The master plan is organized into five sections, beginning with overall purpose and a summary of conclusions. It will describe the context of the Park; the process of developing the plan and engaging the community; establishing a basis for master plan recommendations; specific goals for maintaining and improving the quality of the Park; and recommend strategies for improving, phasing and operating the park for future generations of Washington Park visitors.

The impetus for this plan was the recognition by the community and the City that there must be a strategy for improvement in order to maintain the integrity of the Park. While recognizing that protecting and restoring historic integrity is essential, the Plan must also provide an organizational framework that accomodates a changing environment by:

- addressing elements of the historic design that have changed over time;
- adapting the infrastructure of roads, buildings and landscape that accommodate changing uses;
- anticipating the environmental impacts of changing climate and use;
- accomodating the number and types of Park users and their expectations for recreation and safety.

current level of visitor services

potential conflicts between park visitors

1.0 Purpose of the Master Plan

The ultimate purpose of the master plan is to identify and prioritize park improvements that will ensure a quality experience for Park visitors and to attract funding for such improvements. The plan provides a clear strategy to guide City agencies, with ongoing community involvement, in the implementation of projects that will preserve and improve Washington Park for the future. In order to achieve its goals, the plan:

- Identifies common user and agency needs and preferences with respect to Park conditions, uses and priorities.
- Establishes implementation strategies for the goals of Parks policies and prior Park plans such as the Cultural Landscape Assessment and Preservation Plan.
- Evaluates Park uses in terms of visitor experience and conflict management in the Park and in surrounding neighborhoods.
- Identifies substandard and deteriorated Park elements. Develops and prioritizes recommendations for improvements.
- Applies City policies and Industry Best Practices to preserve the Park's historic integrity and to provide visitors with a quality recreational experience.
- Implements sustainability objectives and apply Sustainable Best Practices.
- Reviews management and maintenance practices to support ongoing Park stewardship.

Denver Park master plans are intended to be flexible and should be updated periodically. The plan should provide a basis for implementing goals established with the input of the community. The goals of this Plan are both visionary and pragmatic, short-term and long, providing clear direction for improvements, maintenance and community stewardship.

The Washington Park Master Plan will serve as an important policy guide for future improvements in the Park. As issues and needs are identified, driven by changes in visitor use patterns, recreation trends, environmental conditions and normal aging and deterioration of infrastructure, the master plan will provide flexible tools to implement projects that have broad public support.

The Master Plan is a tool for the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Community to agree on improvements, policies and management that will benefit the Park. As these issues are addressed broadly in the plan, additional community input is encouraged, supported and required by City policy, when significant changes are made that will impact the Park. Projects that are funded through capital improvement programs, bond programs, that propose significant Park changes will be subject to community input. Those that involve normal operations, maintenance and city-wide policy changes not specific to Washington Park do not. The City will make every attempt to include community groups in decisions that might impact their use and enjoyment of Washington Park.

2.0 Planning Process

The Washington Park Master Plan was developed through a process that included:

- review and assessment of prior planning efforts, site surveys and data collection;
- mapping, site visits and existing conditions analysis;
- a user intercept survey;
- public input at public meetings and through the website;
- focus group input from stakeholders and City staff;
- development and refinement of guiding principles and goals;
- preparation and review of conceptual alternatives;
- development, review and refinement of the Plan.

2.1 Washington Park Context

Located in the heart of southeast Denver and including the Washington Park and West Washington Park neighborhoods, the Park is an important community recreational resource that is part of the daily lives of thousands of residents and visitors. At 165 acres the Park provides a large park resource that includes lakes, trails, community buildings and recreation resources for the neighborhood and the community. "Wash Park" is surrounded by mature residential neighborhoods that have retained a high property values, at least in part due to their proximity to the Park.

The park was master planned in 1899 by well known Denver Landscape Architect Reinhard Schuetze, and constructed in several phases until 1929. Now, it is one of 15 Denver parks that are part of the Denver Park and Parkway System that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. From 1929 until now, surrounding neighborhoods have matured and Denver's population has increased several-fold. While increasing use has caused wear and conflicts within the Park, no comprehensive master plan update has been developed until now.

Washington Park is a jewel in Denver's vast park system. Recognizing that the Park has accommodated heavy use associated with its increasing popularity, DPR has focused efforts on improving other nearby and city-wide regional parks to provide quality recreation options throughout the City.

165 acres in the heart of Southeast Denver

2.2 Park User Survey

A Park user intercept survey was utilized to gain important information regarding visitor demographics, use patterns, and perceptions of the park.

- The Survey was conducted between September 10 and 19, 2009. It captured more than 1,000 interviews with park visitors to understand who they are, where they come from, why they use the park and how often, how they get there, and other observations from their visit.

- Between October 26 and November 4, more than 300 of the previously surveyed users completed an online follow-up survey. In this response they provided additional, more detailed information about their use of the Park, including their satisfaction with the experience, conflicts they encountered, and how they would rate potential park improvements. They were also asked to provide input on what they thought were the most important park deficiencies and improvement needs.

- The Survey results generated are statistically valid and have a margin of error of +/- 2.9 percent. The margin of error for the online follow-up survey is +/- 5.6 percent. The results could be skewed by seasonal fluctuations in use patterns and the limited ability of survey takers to guarantee a representative cross section of park users. It should be noted that the survey took place after normal peak summer Park use so a follow up survey would be valuable to collect additional data about specific programming needs such as:
  - sports and recreation activities
  - events and entertainment
  - craft and farmers markets

Most Popular Activities in the Park

- Walking
- Visiting the Playgrounds
- Hanging Out
- Recreational Bicycling
- Jogging
- Walk/Play with Dog
- Picnicking
- Visiting the Gardens
- Watching Wildlife

Most Important Park Concerns

- Parking Closer to Activities
- Conflicts between Vehicles and Other Users
- High Speed Bicyclists and Rollerbladers
- Non-bicyclists in Bike Lanes
- Off-leash Dogs
- Lack of Food Vendors
- Lack of Ranger Presence
- Geese Population

User Survey Summary

Who Uses the Park?

Park visitors are generally active adults that come to the park regularly, often accompanied by children, other people and/or dogs.

Less than half of Park users come from the neighborhood and the rest are from throughout the City and region. Washington Park is a signature park that is valued by many.

Most people drive to the Park even those who live close by.

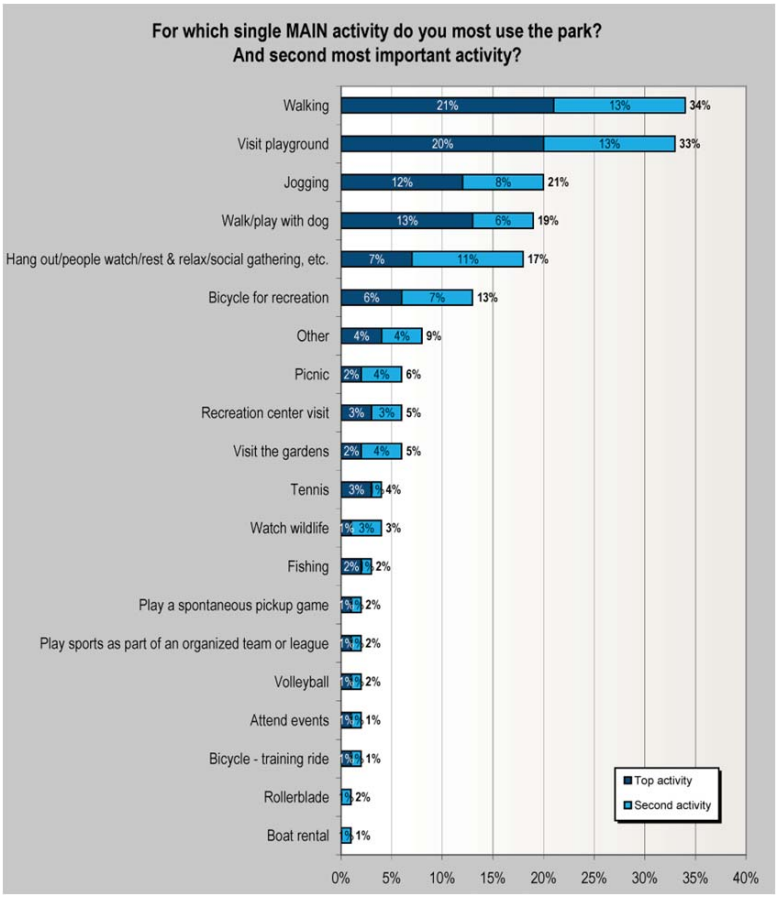
People try to park inside the Park but often end up parking on nearby streets. There is a strong preference to park as close as possible to the activities they come to the Park for.

The following are the top responses to some of the main survey questions:

What are the most popular destinations in the Park?

- Park Roads and Trails
- Boathouse Playground
- Perennial Garden
- Meadow and Open Lawn areas
- The Lake areas
- Picnic areas
- Tennis Courts

The least popular destinations are the horseshoe pits, basketball courts and the Bowling Green.



What are some of the most evident problems in the Park?

- not enough parking close to one's destination
- conflicts with vehicles on roads
- unable to find a park ranger
- off-leash dogs
- inability to reserve permit areas
- encroachment by another group
- not enough space for an activity
- conflicts between pedestrians and high speed bicyclists

What do people like/dislike about visiting the park? What can be improved?

Like:

- overall experience
- the gardens
- park road
- meadow areas
- playgrounds
- lakes

Dislike:

- conflicts with off-leash dogs
- absence of food/vendors
- inability to park near their destination
- absence of park rangers

Potential Improvements:

- improving water quality in the lakes
- providing an off-leash area for dogs
- improving the lake edges
- rehabilitating the Boat House
- increasing wildlife areas
- increasing native and drought tolerant vegetation

Conclusions that were drawn from the user survey were that most park visitors are generally satisfied with the Park's condition and amenities and feel safe there. There is agreement that the Park landscape suffers from its popularity and demands a high level of management.

There are existing uses and conflicts that detract from the park experience and should be either relocated or otherwise addressed.

2.3 Community and Stakeholder Meetings

The project consulting team worked closely with the City and with the stakeholder group to identify and address Park planning issues. The team consisted of park and transportation planning professionals that interviewed Park users, City agencies and interested individuals, then prepared and reviewed alternative solutions for:

- restoration of historic design integrity
- providing positive visitor recreation experience
- applying sustainable practices
- resolving access and circulation conflicts

Stakeholder involvement was passionate and discussions at the several meetings held were lively. It was clear that the community cares a great deal about this "jewel" of Denver's Park system.

Community, stakeholder and user input are integral to the success of any planning effort. Input was gathered from a wide variety of sources to obtain a broad cross section of community concern and interest.

Three public meetings were broadly advertised and well attended by the Washington Park Community. Attendance at each of the meetings ranged from 50 to 100 persons. These were an opportunity for the project team to share progress on and ask critical questions about the master plan, and for community residents to provide both general and focused input on how they would like to see the Park improved. Community input was critical to development of the plan recommendations.

The first meeting, held in November, 2009, reviewed the findings of the user survey and requested focused input from the community in breakout groups to address concerns about historic preservation, recreation, environment and circulation conflicts.

The second meeting, held in April, 2010, presented conceptual approaches and recommendations and requested feedback in an open forum session. The outcome of this meeting was a general sense by the design team that proposals developed with the stakeholder group were on the right track.

The third public meeting, held in November, 2010, presented the final draft master plan and reviewed its specific recommendations. Particpants were asked to review and provide written comments that would then be considered in the final development of the Plan.

Meeting notes from all meetings are included in the appendix.

Stakeholder Meetings

The project stakeholder group was set up by the Department of Parks and Recreation to provide broad represetative input and guidance to plan development from outside the City as well as from other agencies within the City.

This group met regularly during the plan development to hear, review and provide feedback on project team progress on the plan. During the 10 stakeholder meetings there was spirited discussion and an interactive process with the design team that resulted in resolution of key issues.

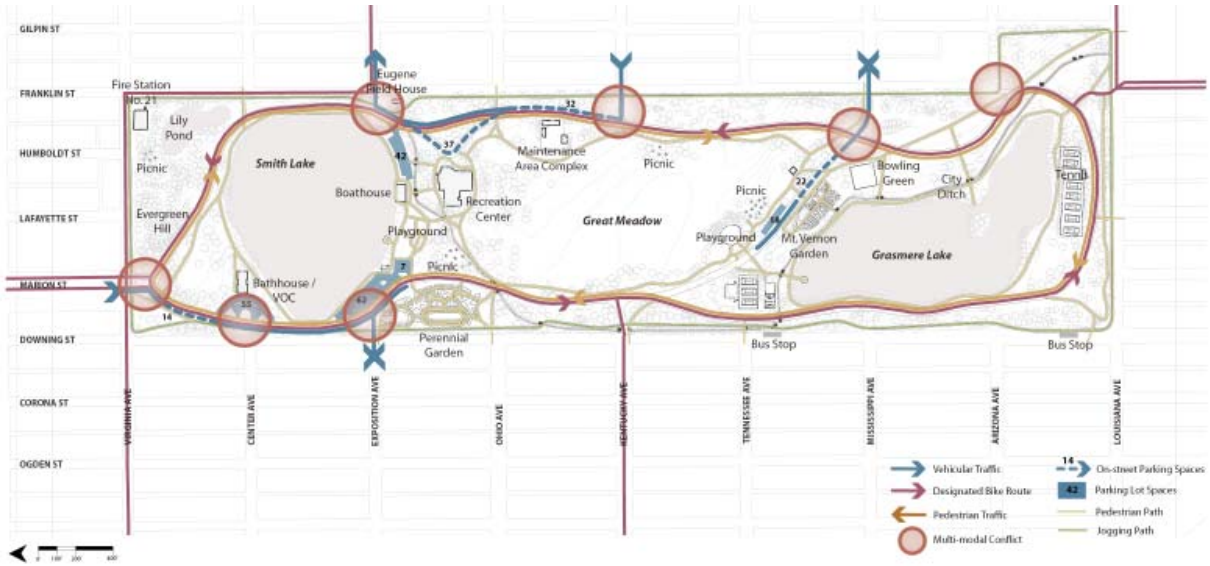
See the appendix for detailed notes of meeting discussions and stakeholder input.

Participants in the Stakeholder meetings included:

- Bike Denver
- City Council Districts 6 and 7
- Denver Department of Environmental Health
- Denver Department of Parks and Recreation
- Denver Department of Public Works
- Denver Department of Public Safety
- Friends and Neighbors of Washington Park (FANS)
- Denver Public Schools
- Park People
- Volleyball
- Volunteers of Colorado
- Washington Park Neighborhood Association
- Washington Park Tennis Club
- Washington Park Lawn Bowling/ Croquet
- West Washington Park Neighborhood Association

Top Stakeholder Group Recommendations

- Improve the Park loop road to safely accommodate a variety of users
- Improve water quality in the lakes and ditch
- Improve wildlife habitat in the Park by providing better plant diversity
- Simplify and improve Park signs for better orientation and enforcement of Park rules
- Restore historic features including the Lily Pond and Wynken Blynken Nod sculpture
- Improve access to the Park at perimeter streets, especially across Downing Street



early assessment identified several critical areas where there are often conflicts between vehicals, bicyclists and other park users

Focus Groups

Focus groups were set up by Parks staff to include City agencies that could provide input and review draft recommendations as they relate to City goals, policies, programs and projects. The focus groups met 4 times and focused on addressing access, circulation and parking in the Park and in the neighborhoods, intersection design on perimeter streets, Park operations, maintenance, enforcement and ongoing projects that might impact this plan.

Participants in the Focus Group meetings included:

- Denver Department of Finance
- Denver Department of Parks and Recreation
- Denver Department of Public Works
- Denver Office of Disabilities
- Denver Department of Environmental Health

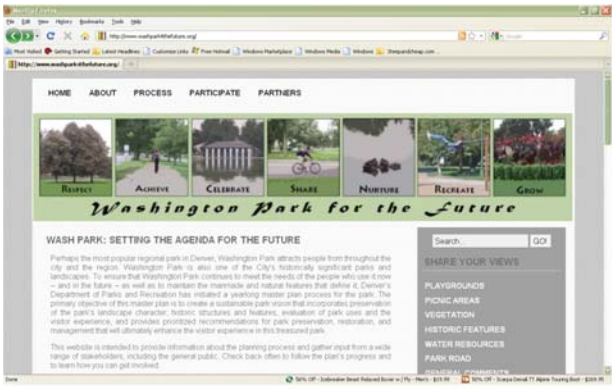
Notes from focus group meetings are included in the appendix.

Key Focus Group Findings

- Public Works is improving pedestrian and bike access across Alameda north of the Park.
- Public Safety has held Neighborhood Watch activities for neighborhood residents around the Park.
- Parks is considerating relocating the Regional Parks Maintenance headquarters from Washington Park to another nearby Regional Park.

Project Website

A project website – washpark4thefuture.org – was developed to keep the community updated on project progress while providing an additional opportunity for comment and discussion. Dozens of comments were received in several categories including park roads and trail, environmental conditions, historic preservation, playgrounds and access/circulation.



website page

"I love Washington Park and use it daily. Thanks so much to all the Parks and Rec. employees who keep the park looking so beautiful."

- (comment from website)

2.6 Community Input Summary

The feedback received from the survey, community and stakeholder input can be captured under four common themes, which became Guiding Principles for the Plan:

- Preserve and Restore the Park's Historic Character
- Provide a Positive Recreational Experience for Park Users
- Be Environmentally Responsible - Implement Sustainable Practices
- Reduce Conflicts in the Park

Key input specific to each category is summarized below.

Preserve and Restore the Park's Historic Character

- Restore Park buildings to match historic architecture
- Address non-historic elements that detract from the Park
- Restore Park elements, such as the Wynken, Blynken and Nod sculpture and the Lily Pond rock garden
- Address future appropriate uses of the Eugene Field house
- Respect historic view corridors
- Preserve the meadows, tree canopy and overall composition of the Park

Provide a Positive Recreational Experience for Park Users

- Better accommodate recreation needs of users through permitting, access improvements and enforcement of rules
- Increase the level of capital improvements and maintenance to assure operable facilities such as restrooms and drinking fountains
- Provide more amenities such as seating, recycling receptacles and bicycle parking
- Assure adequate lighting on the main Park trails
- Upgrade the landscaping and building exterior at the recreation center to better fit into the Park
- Provide more flexible programming for group activities and events
- Consider providing regular food and beverage service concessions to support active use areas

Be Environmentally Responsible - Implement Sustainable Practices

- Improve the water quality in the lakes and eliminate algae
- Improve the condition of lake edges and allow safe access to them
- Enhance wildlife habitat and provide for better species diversity
- Increase plant diversity and the numbers of native trees, plants and grasses
- Reduce irrigation water demand by reducing the amount of turf grass and replacing with plants that are drought tolerant

Resolve Conflicts

- Resolve circulation conflicts at "hot spots": higher traffic areas where vehicles, parked cars, bicycles and pedestrians share the park road
- Provide better access across Downing, Louisiana and other perimeter streets
- Encourage the use of South High parking to reduce vehicle traffic in the park
- Provide better (not more) signage to promote wayfinding and enforcement of rules in the Park
- Establish better vehicle controls to limit access within the park
- Improve parking efficiency
- Separate conflicting uses on the Park roads

2.7 City Plans and Policies that Impact Washington Park

Denver's policies and plans provide a context for the improvements, programming, maintenance and operations that are recommended by this plan. These plans establish funding mechanisms, preservation policy, rules and procedures that must be followed for City Parks' projects. *These plans include:*

- The Cultural Landscape Assessment and Preservation Plan (CLA) provides the basis for historic preservation recommendations in this document.

  The significance of the Park's historic features, its listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the community's support for preservation and restoration support the CLA as a basis for master plan recommendations.

  The Washington Park Master Plan recognizes that the CLA defines the Park's historic and cultural character-defining features and conditions. While its focus was identifying physical Park features that are historically significant (or "contributing") and recommending projects to restore the Park's historic character, the master plan balances those recommendations with the need to renew the quality of the Park's recreational and environmental quality and resolve conflicts associated with its popularity.

- Greenprint Denver – Adopted in 2007, this is the City's sustainability policy. This executive order requires all City facilities to be constructed and maintained according to sustainable principles, including requirements for water and energy conservation.

- Parks and Recreation Game Plan – Adopted in 2003, the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan establishes goals and policies for sustainability, equitable access, public involvement and funding for City parks and programs.

- Denver Playground Master Plan – recommends updating city-wide playgrounds (including those at Washington Park) to improve play value, rethink types of play and make them safer and more accessible.

- Draft Denver Dog Park Master Plan – does not propose a dog park at Washington Park.

- Admissions Based Events Policy: Adopted in 2010, the Department will be permitting admission based events beginning in the 2011 season. In Washington Park, this policy is currently only applicable in the Washington Park Boathouse Event Facility.

- Draft Parks Maintenance Facilities Master Plan – currently in review, this plan identifies the potential to relocate the regional maintenance facility in Washington Park to another lower use park, while retaining the existing historic buildings for Washington Park maintenance facilities.

- Other Denver Parks and Recreation Department policies include park rules, speed limits, and permit requirements. These policies will normally supercede specific recommendations of the plan.

City and Parks policies are often updated and subject to change. They are available for review on the City of Denver's website.

historic boathouse

2.8 Prior Plans and Projects at Washington Park

The Denver Parks and Recreation Department is currently implementing projects at Washington Park to restore or improve existing facilities. These projects are taken into consideration by the recommendations of this plan and, upon adoption of this plan, should be reviewed and adapted to meet the goals of the plan. Specific projects include:

- Restoration of the historic Boathouse – construction of the phase 1, bond-funded renovation is expected to be completed in 2011. This project will improve accessibility and provide facilities for events and activities near the south shore of Smith Lake.
- City Ditch Restoration – an improvements assessment was completed in 2010 and phase 1 implementation will begin in 2011. This project will improve the edges of the ditch near Downing Street, realign the jogging path and reintroduce low water use native landscaping.
- Restroom improvements – bond-funded upgrades to the restroom building at the Diagonal were completed in 2010.
- Alameda pedestrian improvements – The City is considering the redesign of E. Alameda Ave. to reduce the number of lanes and install a center median, between Marion Street and Franklin Street, to improve north-south pedestrian and bicycle access to Washington Park.
- Historic tree inventory and evaluation – this ongoing effort by the City Forester has recommended selective removal and replacements of trees in order to preserve and restore the historic tree canopy, beginning in 2011.
- Pump house near Smith Lake – bond funded installation of a new pump house to serve Park irrigation needs was completed in 2009.
- Recreation Center exterior renovation – bond funded renovation of the Recreation Center included exterior improvements completed in 2009.
- Lake improvements – bacterial control (to replace chemical treatments) of lake algae began in the Spring of 2010.
- Irrigation upgrades – were completed in 2007 for certain areas of the Park, to provide better equipment and controls to meet the City's water conservation goals and Denver Water's budget requirements.
- Rehabilitation of Grasmere Lake – included the reconstruction of the historic stone edge and a new liner completed in 2007, but left sections of the Lake and the island in need of work.

1 Lily Pond, Rock & Water Garden, Girl Scouts Fireplace / Picnic Site
- Preserve and restore Lily Pond and surroundings.
- Improve the edge of Lily Pond.
  - Remove the gabion baskets and create a natural edge.
- Restore the Rock & Water Garden.
  - Stabilize stacked boulders.
  - Remove overgrown plantings.
- Preserve and restore the Girl Scouts Fireplace.

2 Smith Lake
- Improve the lake edge.
- Improve lake capacity.
- Replace the narrow asphalt path around the perimeter with a path that is more in keeping with the historic character.
- Re-establish the historic relationship between the buildings and the lakeshore.
- Re-establish the historic relationship between the Bathhouse and the Boathouse.
- Develop a naturalistic planting concept.

3 Wynken, Blynken & Nod
- Restore and re-create the original setting.
- Clean and repair the sculpture.

4 Eugene Field House
- Preserve and protect the house.
- Open views into and from the house.
- Develop a plan for exterior site uses.
- Prepare a Historic Structure Assessment (currently underway).

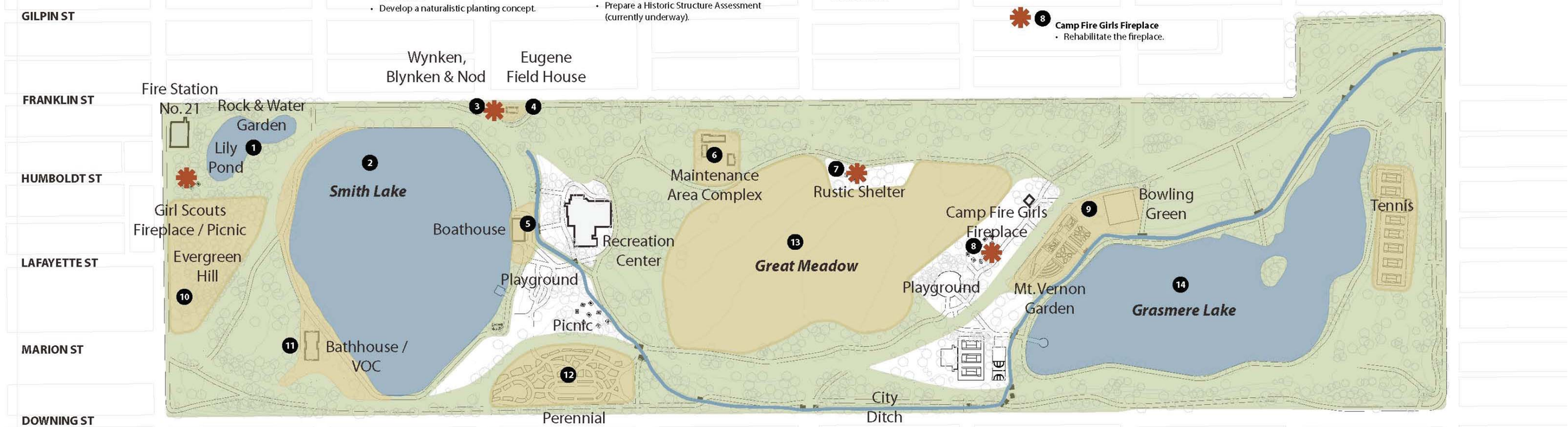
5 Boathouse
- Prepare a Historic Structure Assessment.
- Rehabilitate the Boathouse.
- Redesign the immediate setting to better connect to the playground, recreation center, and park.
  - Rehabilitate the boat wharf.
  - Replace the haphazard paving on the east, south and west sides.
- Reconfigure the parking area to the east to allow for a more prominent view of the Boathouse.

6 Maintenance Area Complex
- Evaluate the district's maintenance needs to determine if they can be met at the current location.
- Prepare a Historic Structure Assessment.

7 Rustic Shelter
- Rehabilitate the shelter.

8 Camp Fire Girls Fireplace
- Rehabilitate the fireplace.

9 Mt. Vernon Garden & Bowling Green
- Restore the garden.
  - Replace asphalt with gravel.
  - Re-establish arrangement to reflect the original plan.
  - Rehabilitate the sandstone wall.
  - Replace the hedges.
  - Remove the urns.
- Ensure the garden is accessible.
- Rehabilitate the irrigation system.



10 Evergreen Hill
- Preserve and protect the topography.
- Preserve and protect the historic patterning of trees.
- Remove the perimeter road's curb and gutter.
- Remove visual obstructions such as san-o-lets.

11 Bathhouse
- Re-establish the historic relationship between the Marion Street Parkway and the Bathhouse.
- Restore the historic sandstone wall that defines the parking area.
- Re-create the lake edge along the north shore of Smith Lake.
- Re-enforce the historic relationship between the Bathhouse and the Boathouse.

12 Perennial Garden
- Preserve and protect the garden's arrangement and form.
- Restore elements within the garden to more closely follow the original plan.
- Change materials, narrow paths, and widen flowerbeds.
- Restore gravel paths and the original configuration of the grass panel.
- Revise the irrigation system.

13 Great Meadow
- Preserve and protect the meadow.
- Re-establish the meadow's historic edges.
- Develop a tree planting concept.
- Rehabilitate the irrigation system.

14 Grasmere Lake
- Preserve and protect the lake.
- Improve the lake edge.
- Rehabilitate the historic sandstone edge on the west and south shores.
- Replace the asphalt path with a path that follows the original alignment.
- Improve lake capacity.

Historic Destination

Historic Feature

preservation plan recommendations

Exhibit A

3.0 Basis for Plan Recommendations

Previous sections have described the public process by which issues and opportunities in the Park have been identified. Prior design studies have contributed recommendations to preserve and restore historic Park elements.

This section develops guiding principles that were identified in the planning process, establishes goals and objectives by which alternative approaches can be evaluated, and creates a framework for executing the desired outcomes of the master plan.

During the planning process questions were asked and alternatives proposed that helped develop the boundaries of what would be appropriate levels of improvements at Washington Park. For example, alternative approaches to how traffic conflicts might be resolved, how native vegetation and wetlands might be expanded and how permit recreation areas might be located in the park, were reviewed with stakeholders. Feedback from this group was considered in the development of plan goals and recommendations.

3.1 Guiding Principles

The guiding principles for the master plan reflect broad public opinion and ongoing City policy regarding the importance of maintaining of Washington Park as a historic, cultural and recreational resource for the City of Denver. These principles provide a broad philosophy and frame of reference for decision making regarding changes and improvements at Washington Park.

- Plan for contemporary needs while preserving the historic context of the Park
- Maintain a high quality visitor experience while protecting adjacent neighborhoods' quality of life
- Plan for improvements that implement sustainable best practices
- Resolve conflicts and provide a high quality recreation experience

3.2 Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives for the plan were developed by the consulting team from input received through public, stakeholder and City staff input, user survey, City policies and prior plans. Goals and objectives are aligned with the guiding principles of the plan.

Goal: Preserve and restore the Park's historic character

Objectives:

- Implement recommendations of the Cultural Landscape Assessment (CLA) and Preservation Plan and adapt recommendations as required to meet contemporary recreation needs in desgnated areas.
- Preserve and restore the Park's historic landscapes, including the lakes, meadows, gardens, roads, trails and tree canopy.
- Identify appropriate uses for the Eugene Field House, the Boathouse, Bath House, the Maintenance building and other contributing structures that are identified in the CLA.
- Rehabilitate historic sculptures, bridges and other park structures, to maintain the Park's design integrity.
- Restore the historic trail hierarchy to provide year-round choices for pedestrians and wheeled users while accomodating people with disabilities.

Goal: Provide a positive recreational experience for Park users

Objectives:

- *Balance the need for* exclusive recreational use areas with flexible, passive use areas, minimizing conflicts and impacts on the Park landscape.

- Maintain support for a variety of recreational uses appropriate to a regional park, such as playgrounds, picnicking, jogging, bicycling, boating, recreational sports and other passive and active uses.
- Update recreation facilities to accommodate contemporary needs, comply with current standards and improve user enjoyment and safety.
- Provide spaces and amenities that are adequate and appropriate to meet user and program needs.
- Allow for partnerships to provide necessary services to support Park facilities and programs.
- Improve process for permitting use areas by making application process easier, more interactive, flexible and transparent.

Goal: Implement Sustainable Practices

Objectives:

- Improve the lakes by:
    - Better managing and treating stormwater runoff fom both on site and off-site sorces.
    - Rehabilitating the edges to better balance human access and wildlife habitat.
    - Restoring wetlands to contribute to water and visual quality as well as riparian habitat.
    - Continuing to monitor and report water quality levels.
    - Implement means to control Canadian Geese populations.
- Improve Park landscape and habitat by:
    - Providing plant diversity consistent with the Park microclimate.
    - restoring shrub masses utilizing adverse mix of native and adapted materials placed in historic locations.
    - naturalizing meadows using low water use meadow grasses with wildflowers.
    - Managing to encourage a greater diversity of wildlife and discourage overpopulation of undesirable species such as Canada Geese; in accordence with state guidelines.
- Reduce Water and Energy use by:
    - Reducing irrigation demand by replacing high water use plants, such as bluegrass, with native and adapted low water use plantings.
    - Implementing energy efficient lighting and electrical devices and encouraging the use of renewable energy sources.
    - Reducing the need for fossil fuel powered maintenance equipment
    - Encouraging the use of using alternative modes of transportation (bicycling, walking, transit) to get to the Park.
    - Reviewing buildings for sustainable practices and upgrading them accordingly to meet city-wide sustainability goals.

Goal: Reduce conflicts in the Park

Objectives:

- Reduce conflicts between pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles in the Park and surrounding neighborhoods.
    - Encouraging better pedestrian/ bicycle facilities, signs, signals and crossings of all Park perimeter streets to encourage local residents to walk to the park.
    - Redesign access and parking to

eliminate parallel parking on the loop road and reduce the amount of loop road open to vehicles.

- Relocate vehicular parking away from lake edges and close to recreation destinations.
- Establish an agreement with Denver Public Schools to encorage shared parking at South High School, especially for peak use times and special event parking.
- Require event permittees to park at South High School and provide shuttles for access to other park locations.

- Provide better signage posting Park rules, speed limits and community interest information.
- Increase Ranger presence in the Park and/or create a Park Ambassador program to assist visitors in moderating conflicts and finding their way in the Park.
- Promote community outreach and partnerships to provide opportunities for involvement in Park stewardship.
- Improve permitting process to avoid conflicts between users and user groups.

lake edges should be rehabilitated.

3.3 Master Plan Framework

The ability to accommodate change varies considerably within the Park. For example, areas around the Boathouse and Recreation Center have already have been changed dramatically and are no longer compatible with the historic design of the Park. This area can tolerate, and benefit from a significant amount of change because it does not contribute to the Park's historic character. In contrast, the Great Meadow, one of the more important features of the Park's landscape, has seen little change, is well preserved and contributes significantly to its historic character.

In order to develop a framework for plan recommendations, the accompanying diagram Exhibit B, "Areas of Preservation, Rehabilitation and Flexibility", was developed to categorize the tolerance to change of different areas of the park.

Areas of Preservation and Restoration

These areas include the overall organization and spatial definition of the Park, the lakes, meadows and wooded perimeters, as well as historic buildings, structures and site elements that, according to the CLA, should be preserved and/or restored to their original condition.

Areas of preservation and restoration are those areas in the Park where features shall be stabilized and maintained. For example, the Perennial Gardens, Mount Vernon Gardens, the Bowling Green and the south tennis courts should not be changed substantially from their historic precedent. Where appropriate, historic features like the Wynken, Blynken and Nod sculpture/pool, might be restored to a prior location and condition. With restoration, these areas provide the opportunity to implement appropriate adaptations to comply with current building, safety and accessibility codes.

For example the Boat house recently underwent restoration design which included addition of a ramp for accessibility and upgrades to the building to provide life safety and code

compliance upgrades to electrical and plumbing systems.

Areas of Rehabilitation

Areas of rehabilitation make possible new and existing compatible uses through repair, alterations and additions, while preserving the essential conditions and features that have contributed to the Park's historic significance. These areas can accommodate adaptive changes to improve their function, quality of the Park enviroment and associated visitor experience.

An example of rehabilitation in this context: the Park loop road should maintain its historic alignment and its role in the Park's hierarchy of trails. While, over time it would be marked to accommodate changing uses eventually it would be restored to remove unnecessary curbs and elements that were added that do not contribute to its historic character.

Another example is the Park's smaller meadows: Designed to accommodate the recreational pursuits of a century ago, they now can serve contemporary recreational uses such as volleyball and informal picnicking, while maintaining their visual quality and historic integrity.

Areas of Flexibility

Areas of flexibility are identified where changes over time have occurred in the Park that have significantly altered historic character, functions and/or quality. These locations provide opportunities for improving spaces and facilities by redesigning them so that they meet current recreation needs.

These include the area that surounds the Boathouse south of Smith Lake and the areas in the center of the park around the diagonal park road. They include playgrounds, picnic areas, the recreation center, parking areas, and courts area and park entrances.

The area at the southeast of the Park, near the Louisiana Avenue and Franklin Street entrance, is identified as an area of flexibility. The southern end of the Park would benefit from activation from new activities and uses and a better Park entrance for visitors parking at South High School.

While recommendations for park improvements include the entire Park, areas of flexibility provide opportunities to go well beyond the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation recommendations of the CLA to allow new design solutions that address the most appropriate uses for these areas. Conceptual alternatives included in the master plan consider ways to improve these areas to incorporate new uses over time.

The recommendation contained in the following sections are organized within areas of preservation, rehabilitation and flexibility. Community involvement will be critical in the development of detail design in all areas were physical changes to the Park are proposed.

areas of preservation, rehabilitation and flexibility plan

4.0 Master Plan

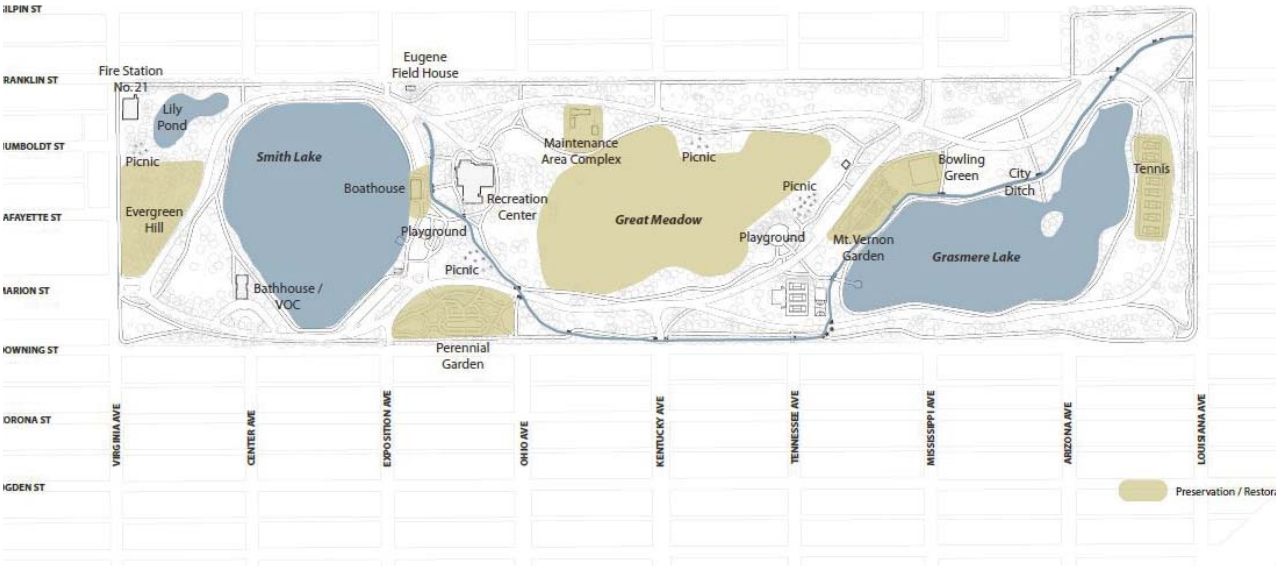
The Washington Park Master Plan's recommendations are organized in three sections: Areas of Preservation and Restoration, Areas of Rehabilitation and Areas of Flexibility. The CLA has established basic recommendations for the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of contributing historic elements in the Park. This master plan adds to that by addressing design approaches for non-contributing Park areas and elements, including adaptive use of rehabilitated areas and management and maintenance recommendations that meet preservation, recreational needs, sustainability and conflict reduction goals.

The recommendations of this section provide general guidance for the type and extent of proposed improvements. They are developed as performance guidelines, stating preferred outcomes and describing them in terms of type, level of use and intended character.

When specific capital improvement projects are identified for implementation, City policy establishes a process in which stakeholders, members of the public and other interested parties will be invited to participate in planning and design of each project.

4.1 Areas of Preservation and Restoration

Areas of preservation and restoration are sections of the Park where the majority of existing park elements contribute to the Park's historic character. In these areas, recommended changes are limited to those required to preserve or restore the elements or area to reflect the original design. Modifications could be considered only as required to comply with building codes, address safety concerns and adapt to changes in environmental conditions. Recommendations for these and other projects are detailed in the CLA and supported by this master plan.



areas of preservation

The following areas are identified as Areas of Preservation and Restoration and recommendations build on the CLA.

Evergreen Hill

Restore the overall historic landscape character of Evergreen Hill, including the types and arrangement of trees.

Rehabilitate the landscape in the ground plane to include glades where turf grass is reduced and replaced with low native grasses to form informal grass areas that allow seating and soft surface paths.

Restore the adjacent picnic area and fireplace.

Preserve the historic tranquility of Evergreen Hill by supporting the succession of mature evergreen trees.

The Great Meadow

Support preservation and restoration of the Great Meadow by rehabilitating the perimeter wooded areas, edge paths and picnic areas.

Maintain existing programmed recreation uses, such as volleyball and youth sports, located near the edge of the meadow, preserving flexible and passive uses in the main lawn area.

Perennial Garden and Mt Vernon Garden

Continue to maintain and restore both gardens and their contributing areas, consistent with the recommendations of the CLA.

Continue to allow limited, permitted use of the Mt Vernon Garden for special events such as weddings.

Update and change the plant palette in the gardens to include more durable and sustainable platings while maintaining seasonal interest.

Mt. Vernon garden and the perennial garden are among the most visited gardens in the Denver park system.

Maintenance Area Complex

Preserve the existing complex of buildings and contributing area.

Relocate the regional maintenance function, and associated staff parking requirements, to another lower use park nearby. Continue to utilize the existing facility to serve the needs of Washington Park.

Other Historically Contributing Facilities

Allow for periodic consideration of historic facilities to be adapted to new uses so that they remain relevant and vital to the Park.

There is community support for certain restoration projects that already are planned or underway that address the immediate needs of the Park.

Recommendations

- Restore the City Ditch to reduce erosion and the potential to undermine Downing Street and improve its function as both a water conveyance and Park amenity.
- Continue restoration and adaptive re-use of Park buildings, such as the Boathouse and the Bathhouse, upgrading as required to address access and safety building code requirements and improve facilities to meet current and future needs of park users.
- The Eugene Field House will be vacated by its current tenant in the near future. Identify a new use or tenant that supports Park uses, such as a visitor center, history museum, coffee shop or other appropriate use. Include community stakeholders in the tenant selection process.
- Continue to improve the water quality in the lakes and the condition of the lake edges, especially around Smith Lake, the Lily Pond and at the southern end of Grasmere Lake.
- Restore the Lily Pond area and its historic rock garden.
- Work with the tennis organizations that program the complex to implement improvements that provide seating and shade in the court spectator areas.

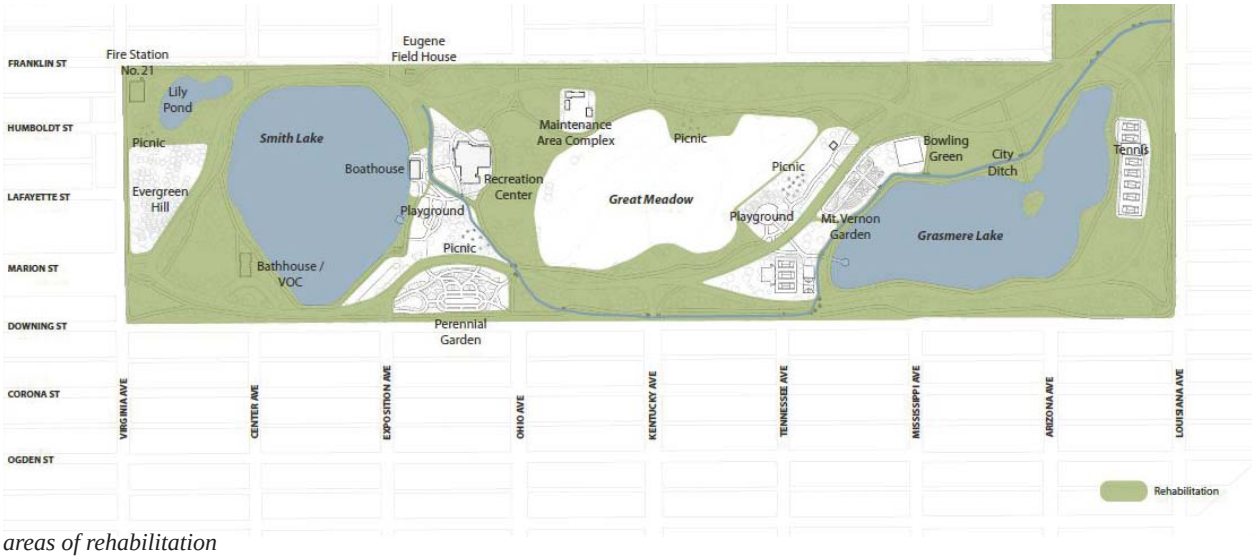
Provide high quality amenities in all areas of the Park. Improvements in the Park must be consistent with the quality established by the historic design and construction of the Park and the quality standards of the Denver Park and Recreation. The intent is not to establish detailed guidelines but to identify the types of

historically, the Field House was open to the park.

today the Eugene Field House is overgrown.

improvements that the community has said are most important to them. These include:

- Updated and additional site furnishings including benches and seating areas in the Park, including both fixed and flexible types. More bike racks where people are most likely to park.
- Improved and operational facilities such as restrooms, drinking fountains and waste receptacles, including implementing park-wide recycling, to service the needs of Park users.
- Better Park signage including identity, wayfinding and regulatory.
- More consistent, historically appropriate and environmentally responsible lighting – only in those places where it is already located or might be deemed necessary for site safety.



areas of rehabilitation

4.2 Areas of Rehabilitation

Areas of Rehabilitation are broad sections of the Park where changes in the landscape character and recreational use patterns have evolved over time, resulting in conflicts or significant deterioration in Park conditions.

For example, the loop road has evolved from its original purpose of pleasure driving and parking to become one of the primary cycling and pedestrian attractions in the Denver Parks system.

Areas of rehabilitation also include lawns and other landscape areas where naturalized meadows have been eliminated over time and replaced with bluegrass turf. In areas that receive little recreational use, shrub masses could be restored to provide habitat improvement and lawns could be naturalized with drought tolerant grasses to reduce water use and maintenance.

Recommendations for areas of rehabilitation include broadly applied modifications that address deteriorated conditions and conflicts while preserving historic character, providing for a positive recreational experience and improving environmental conditions.

existing tree canopy map

The Wooded Park Perimeter

Groves of trees, interspersed with small meadows, generally define the edges of the three primary open spaces in the Park – Smith Lake, the Great Meadow and Grasmere Lake.

These edges and associated groves of trees are critically important for informal group gatherings, picnicking, volleyball and other recreational uses. It is important that the small meadows with mown turf be maintained in areas receiving the most use. In less heavily used areas, trees could be maintained in their historic condition while the ground plane was replanted with native grasses and other plantings that support historic planting schemes and enhance wildlife habitat.

To restore and maintain historic tree groupings and patterns, a detailed survey of existing tree types, locations and condition should be completed. A strategy should be developed to provide succession for marketing trees, replacing them incrementally by in filling while maintaining historic groupings. At the same time there is an opportunity introduce added tree diversity for long tem health of the urban forest in this location.

Recommendations

- Restore the edges of the three major park spaces and historic view corridors by preserving historic trees, removing non-contributing trees and by developing a plan for forest succession in the park.
- Complete the inventory and assessment of existing trees, including specific recommendations for removal and replacements while establishing a diversity of species to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic loss due to disease.
- Naturalize steeper slopes, perimeter areas and narrower bands of turf along heavily traveled streets as well as small islands between trails and perimeter streets that receive little recreational use and are difficult and expensive to maintain.
- Convert these areas to more naturalized meadow plantings (compatible with planting schemes in historic parks) while increasing visual amenity and decreasing water and maintenance requirements.
- Conversion of these areas to a more naturalized condition will require less water and maintenance, allowing limited park resources to be focused on maintenance of more heavily used areas.
- Restore the historic allees of trees around Smith Lake.

Naturalized Meadows

The historic meadows are the most important use areas in the Park, essential to the recreation needs of visitors. While most of the meadow areas will remain bluegrass turf, more isolated and less accessible areas at the edges of the Park should be planted and cultivated with low water use materials, such as native grasses. Public outreach and input will be solicited before any areas are converted from bluegrass to naturalized meadows. These areas, often narrow and sloping, are more difficult to maintain. Changing the surface cover to a native material reduces the

a typical natural meadow

naturalized meadow

historic character of City Ditch and Grasmere Lake

need for water and adds plant diversity that can improve aesthetic quality and wildlife habitat, while remaining historically appropriate and not compromising recreational use.

Meadows of regionally appropriate, drought tolerant native grasses, perennials, wildflowers and groundcovers also provide habitat cover for the broad range of wildlife species that inhabit the Park, providing a richer experience for park visitors.

Recommendations

- Rehabilitate areas to include plantings that are appropriate for the Park's microclimate, are drought and recycled water tolerant and meet the water efficiency standards of DPR and Denver Water.
- Provide a variety of landscape and seasonal interest, consistent with the historic design intent and current Park uses and management approach.
- Implement pilot projects for trial areas within the approved areas to introduce low water use grasses and plantings. Monitor their growth and health and look for opportunities to expand successful areas. Revisit the success of this program with the community and adjust program if necessary.

Park Lakes and Lake Edges

The two lakes at Washington Park have a very different character and function in the Park framework. Smith Lake was designed to be more urban, with buildings along its shore and areas for people to stroll and engage the water. Grasmere Lake is more pastoral. Separated from major activity areas it is a refuge to get away from the crowds and enjoy more natural landscape.

Lake water quality and edge conditions were identified as important issues to be addressed in the Master Plan. Since the lakes are an important part of the visitor experience as well as its historic and environmental character, water quality is a critical issue.

deteriorated gabion edge at Smith Lake

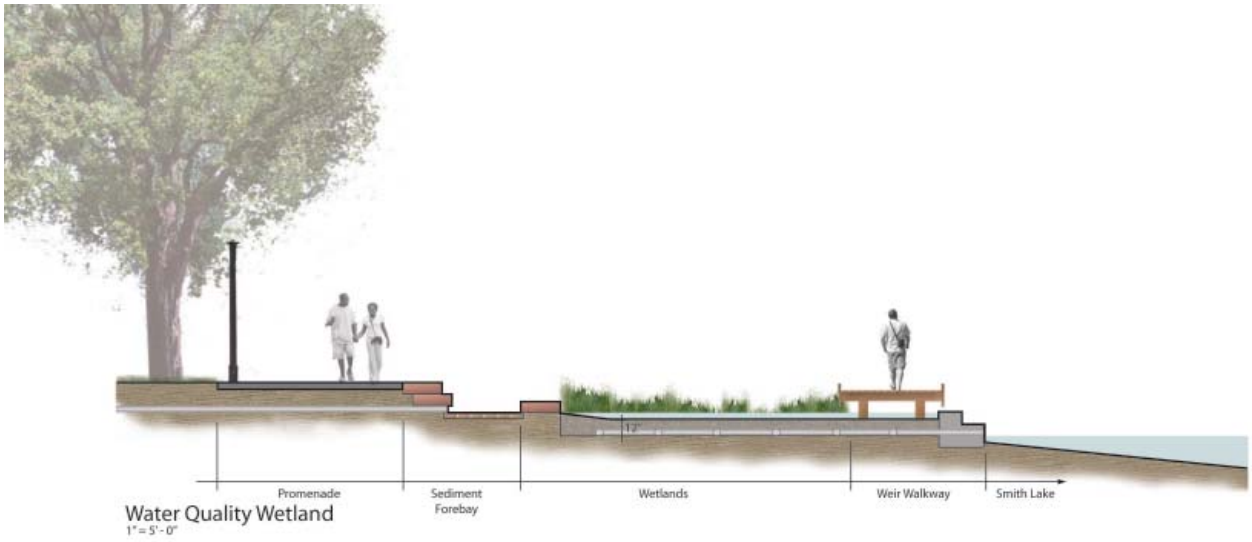
Current efforts are underway by the City to reduce chemical treatment and use biological methods to improve water quality and reduce algae.

Deteriorated lake edges, especially the gabions at Smith Lake, are hazardous to wildlife and Park users. Reconstruction of the lake edges to provide a variety of edge conditions will benefit user experience, water quality, habitat diversity, and reduce maintenance.

Lake edge plantings can integrate riparian upland and wetland areas, provide nutrient uptake and can treat stormwater runoff from adjacent park areas and city streets before it enters the lakes. Riparian plantings and passive stormwater treatment supports project goals of improving water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat and landscape diversity in the Park.

Recommendations

- Improve water quality in the lakes through a combination of source, point and non-point measures to reduce incoming contaminants and sediments from on-site and off site sources. Provide further monitoring and study of water quality to determine specific solutions that meet City water quality standards.
- Move vehicular parking areas away from the lakes to help reduce the runoff of oils and sediments directly into the lakes while providing more area around the lake edge to include recreational access and riparian landscape treatments.
- Implement water quality best management practices for all parking areas, impervious surfaces and stormwater outfalls that contribute to the lake.
- Create wetlands areas at disjointed areas of the lake edges that aid in water quality improvements. Those should include diverse plant species and conditions in which they can thrive.
- Investigate other water treatment options, such as bacterial treatment and floating water quality islands, to improve water quality.
- Monitor lake water quality and the health of the water dependent wildlife population. Provide regular assessments and adjust procedures accordingly.



water quality wetland concept

Smith Lake

The perimeter of Smith Lake is one of the most popular areas of the park. Heavy traffic around the lake has caused compaction and erosion of adjacent landscape areas, and expanded parking has limited pedestrian access to the lake, diminishing visitor experience.

Recommendations

- Improve the Lake edges by removing gabions and reconstructing the edges using combinations of the three prototypical edge conditions shown in the accompanying diagrams.
- Relocate existing parking areas away from the edge of the lake to allow shoreline restoration and Park user access.
- Reconstruct walkway and lighting around the lake to provide a pedestrian promenade that allows a variety of opportunities to access the lake edge and water.
- Support non-motorized boating such as paddle boats, canoes and kayaks, by providing docks and landing areas that accommodate lake access in designated launch areas.

historic Smith Lake

Restore the Lake edges by removing gabions and reconstructing the edges using a combination of the following three edge treatments:

naturalized lake edge - soft edge: gently sloped edge creates gravel, turfgrass or vegetated beach

promenade lake edge - hard edge: wall allows access to water's edge for walking, viewing, boating and fishing

stepped lake edge: structural elements create sitting areas or planted tiers

Grasmere Lake

Grasmere lake was originally designed as a more naturalized water feature in a pastoral setting. It receives lower levels of use than Smith Lake and provides great opportunities for enhancement of wildlife habitat along its shores. In the recent past, the lake was lined and stone shoreline edging along portions of the lake has been restored.

The south forebay near "Monkey Island" was historically (and could again become) a rich environmental area, incorporating restored native vegetation and wildlife habitat.

Recommendations

- Restore the remaining portions of the lake shoreline to a more natural condition to assist with water quality, provide greater landscape diversity and improved wildlife habitat. Edge restoration should consider protection of the lake liner.
- Complete the perimeter path to provide a soft surface pedestrian loop that is set back from the lake edge to sufficiently allow for establishment of lake edge vegetation.
- Provide environmental education opportunities at wetland and riparian areas established at the southeast end of the lake and including the existing forebay and underwater dam.
- Develop a boardwalk trail with environmental education and interpretive elements to allow visitors to explore the wetlands and lake edge and understand the environmental system.
- Restore the vegetation on "Monkey Island" and continue to limit access to protect its function as a wildlife nesting area.

Lily Pond

The Lily Pond is a respite from the activities associated with the other lakes in the Park. The Colorado Division of Wildlife stocks the pond each year for youth fishing. Improved access to its shoreline and restoration of the historic rock garden are the most important issues.

Recommendations

- Restore the pond shoreline to retain its naturalized condition while incorporating soft surface paths or boardwalks that allow shoreline access for all ages and abilities.
- Restore the historic rock garden to incorporate the realigned jogging path. Stakeholders have prepared a sketch concept for restoration. *It is included below.*
- Evaluate water source, quality, pond depth and recirculation requirements needed to provide for a sustainable aquatic habitat for youth fishing.

historic Lily Pond

Lily Pond rock garden concept (sketch courtesy of FANS)

Park Roads Trails, and Paths

Washington Park's network of roads, trails and paths form the framework of the Park. The primary uses of this circulation system have changed significantly over time. The internal "Loop Road", originally designed for park access and pleasure driving, has evolved into one of the premier walking and bicycling destinations in the City. Meanwhile, the deterioration of much of the original trail system has forced more people to use the Loop Road for recreation.

The increasing popularity of the Park has added to the number of vehicles crossing and parking on the loop road, causing congestion and added conflicts with recreational uses.

The perimeter jogging path was a more recent addition to the Park, taking some of the pressure off internal roads and paths. Sections of the jogging path are in poor condition due to excessive use and other site constraints. The jogging path requires upgrades for safety, accessibility and a better fit within the historic context of the Park.

Recommendations

Restore a hierarchy of Park roads, trails and paths with a variety of loop lengths, widths and surfaces, to provide a variety of choices for park users to move at various speeds through various distances, to support a diversity of user ages, abilities and experience levels in the Park.

Improve surfacing of pedestrian walkways. Provide looped trails of varying lengths, widths and surface types:

- Loop Road: hard surface for year round accessible use, restored to historic widths: When sections are replaced consider removing raised curb and replacing flush with adjacent landscape areas.
- Promenade Walk: hard surface, designed to accommodate pedestrians and discourage wheeled vehicles. Located in high traffic pedestrian areas, provides places to stop at edges, move through as a pedestrian, and support service vehicles.
- Park Walk: hard surface, 8 to 10 feet wide. Located in moderate traffic areas. Provides plowable surface for year round walking and strolling.
- Jogging Path: soft surface, 8 feet wide. Located at park perimeter, it provides a soft surface alternative for exercise in the Park.
- Park Path: soft surface, 4 to 6 feet wide. Follows historic alignments in lower use areas, to allow exploration of more remote areas of the Park.

program public safety and volunteer education and enforcement days

sample striping pattern for loop road with speed separated areas

use more parklike texture markings and signage (sketch courtesy of FANS)

*The **park loop road** provides alternative speed zones established by pavement markings and park signage*

*The **park walk** provides a pedestrian alteratives to the loop road*

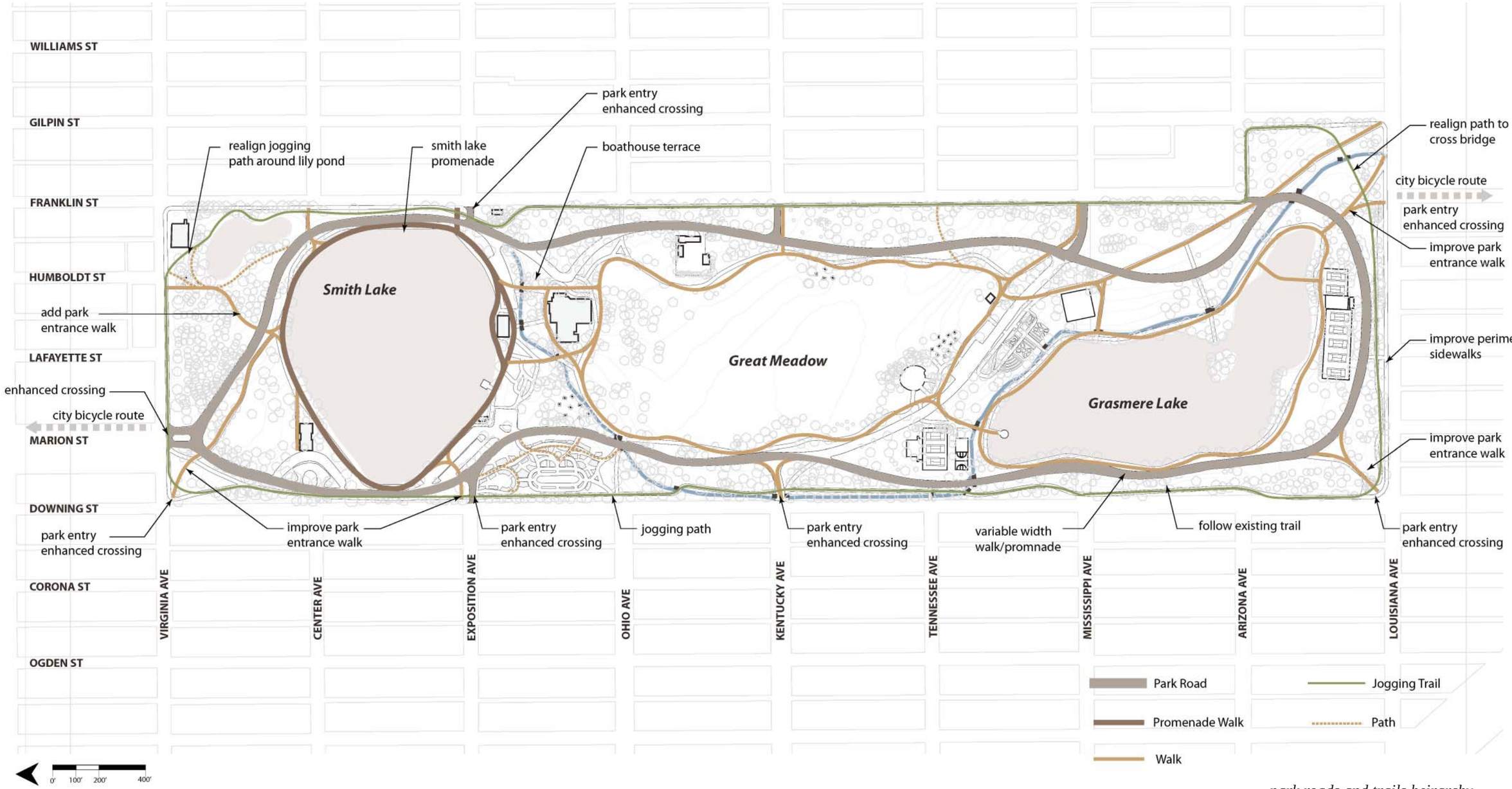
*The **park promenade** provides a pedestrian environment wide enough to stop, sit, talk and stroll.*

*The **jogging path** provides a soft surface for runners to exercise in the park*

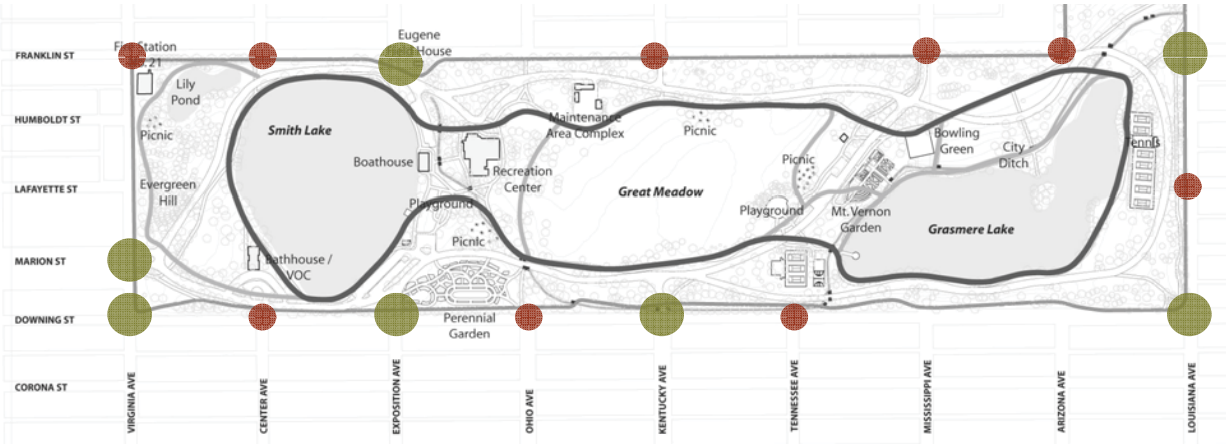
*The **park path** provides access to more remote areas of the park.*

Reduce auto, pedestrian and bicyclist conflicts by eliminating parallel parking and reducing vehicle access to the Loop Road.

- Preserve and restore the park roads and paths by re-creating the historic hierarchy of trails, to accommodate a broad range of options for use by pedestrians, bicyclists and other wheeled users that have a wide variety of abilities and experience.
- Establish Vehicle, bicycle and other wheeled circulation on the Loop Road to move one-way only.
- Clearly mark loop road for shared use. See sketch of proposed loop road markings.
- Provide traffic control markings and signage that clearly marks user circulation zones and encourages appropriate speeds and awareness of obstacles.
- Discourage high speed wheeled uses by enforcing speed limits. Speed limits are established by city-wide Parks policy and are posted in the park.
- Consider alternatives to fixed bollards, such as raised planters or speed tables, at vehicular control points to develop safer and more visible means of separating vehicular access and recreational use of the loop road.
- Design clearly marked crosswalks on the Loop Road at major trail crossings.
- Improve Park signage and wayfinding, utilizing a consistent set of signs and pavement markings that designate appropriate use and establish rules for enforcement.
- Create looped trails of specific and various lengths for recreation use.
- Revisit jogging path alignment to better conform to historic path locations and restore deteriorated portions.
- Consider Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements in all access and circulation improvements.



park roads and trails heirarchy



Park Access Locations:
Primary:
Secondary:

Access from Adjacent Neighborhoods

Washington Park accommodates visitors that come from various distances to enjoy the Park. Many of them drive to the Park, parking on the streets in adjacent neighborhoods and getting to the Park by crossing busy perimeter streets. Traffic volume and speed, especially on Downing Street and Louisiana Avenue, has made crossing into the Park from the neighborhoods fairly difficult.

Public and stakeholder input has identified the need for better crossings of all perimeter streets to be a priority. While all perimeter Park entry points from the neighborhood should be addressed to promote pedestrian and bicycle access and safety, their relative importance and priority is reflected in the Park Access Locations diagram.

While these areas are generally outside the jurisdiction of Parks and Recreation. Public Works has agreed to consider these improvements as part of future street improvement planning efforts.

Recommendations

- Make pedestrian and bicycle access and safety a priority in future plans for street and intersection improvements along Downing and Louisiana at the Park perimeter.
- Incorporate traffic calming measures in street improvement plans to reduce traffic speed and enhance pedestrian crossing safety.

Perimeter Street Treatments:

- Consider the following traffic calming techniques to improve pedestrian crossing safety:
  - Additional parallel parking where possible along the Park perimeter streets.
  - Pedestrian bulb-outs at primary park access and entrance locations to reduce crossing distances.
  - Improve sidewalks on all streets around the Park to provide accessible routes to the Park.
  - Consider marking unsignalized intersection crossings at Park entrances to warn vehicles of pedestrian presence.
  - Improve bus stop waiting areas and associated connections to the Park.
  - Provide bicycle warning and guidance markings and signs around and in the Park.

Specific locations addressed in this plan include:

Primary Access Locations

- Marion Parkway and Virginia Avenue
  - create pedestrian prioritized intersection

- consider sidewalks and ramps entering Park
- accommodate bicycle route crossing and transition to Loop Road

- Downing Street and Virginia Avenue
  - consider pedestrian bulbouts at intersection
  - enhance pedestrian crossings in all directions
  - enhance Park entrance with Park identification sign and information kiosk

- Downing Street and Exposition Avenue
  - consider pedestrian bulbouts at intersection
  - enhance pedestrian crossings of Downing
  - enhance Park entrance with Park identification sign and information kiosk

- Downing Street and Kentucky Avenue
  - consider pedestrian bulbouts at intersection
  - enhance pedestrian crossings of Downing

- Downing Street and Louisiana Avenue
  - consider pedestrian bulbouts at intersection
  - enhance pedestrian crossings in all directions
  - enhance Park entrance with upgraded park trail, identification sign and information kiosk

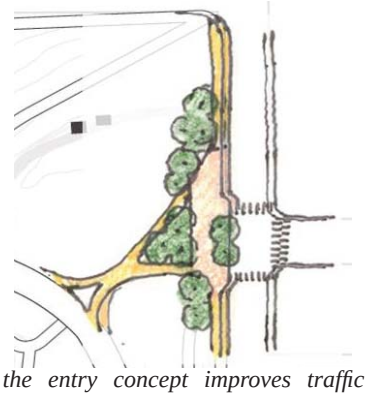
- Franklin Street and Louisiana Avenue
  - consider pedestrian bulbouts at intersection
  - enhance pedestrian and bicycle crossings of Louisiana.
  - enhance Park entrance with Park identification sign and information kiosk

<u>Secondary Access Locations:</u>

- At all locations provide:
  - accessible walks, ramps and landings on all four corners

proposed improvements welcome visitors and provide information about the Park

existing Park entrance at Louisiana and Franklin



the entry concept improves traffic calming at this artificial intersection

- pedestrian warning signs
- marked and accessible entrances

Other Park Perimeter Access Locations:

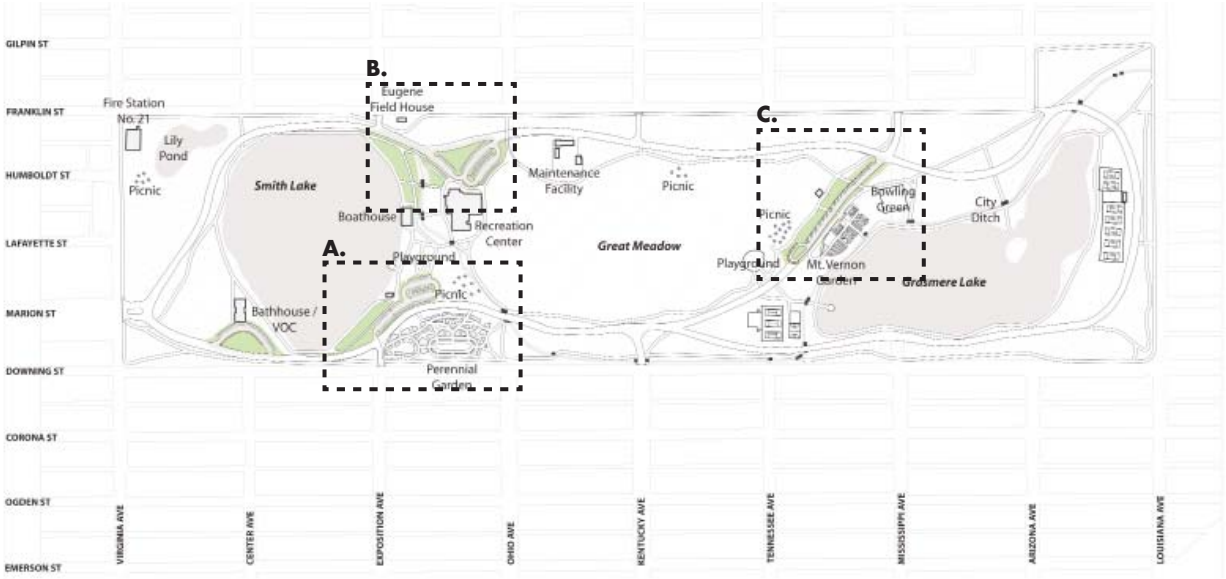
- Monitor and review all remaining intersections around the park to identify vehicle, pedestrian, bicycle conflicts and opportunities to provide better Park access.
- Design Park entrances at major entrances to include:
  - Park identification signage meeting Denver Park and Recreation standards
  - Design entry area with adequate paved surface and seating
  - A community information kiosk with Park map, safety and historic information
- Provide adequate bicycle parking facilities in and around the park to encourage visitor bicycle use.
- Accommodate city-wide bicycle routes adjacent to and in the park by providing direction and route identification signs, transition ramps at park entries from on-street to a shared Park trail system.
- Consider the feasibility of adding a B-Cycle bicycle station in the Park near the Louisiana Street entrance.

proposed improvements should give pedestrians and bicyclists more priority crossing Downing Street

existing park entrance at Exposition and Downing

proposed entrance - provide a small entrance plaza, seating, park identification and seasonal color plantings.

existing park entrance Virginia and Downing



the revised parking scheme takes vehicular parking off of the loop road and into improved facilities at three locations

Parking

Vehicular parking is an important amenity at Washington Park that provides access to activities and reduces on-street visitor parking in the surrounding neighborhoods. While parking capacity is not sufficient to handle peak visitation, it is generally agreed that the amount of parking in the Park should not be increased.

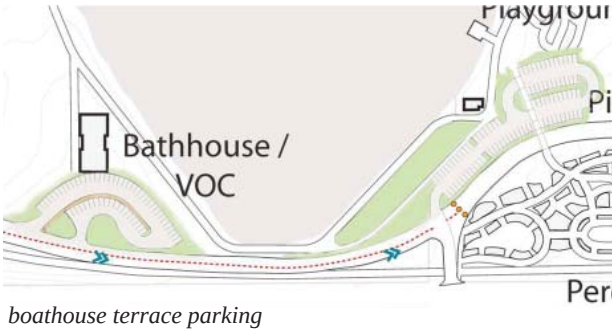
The plan recommends ways to redesign parking to be more efficient, improving access and reducing conflicts and the pavement footprint in the Park.

Recommendations

- Maintain or reduce the current number of parking spaces in the Park. Relocate and redesign parking areas to reduce the pavement footprint and improve intersections on the Loop Road.
- Prohibit on-street parking on the Park Loop Road, relocating displaced spaces to redesigned parking areas in Areas of Flexibility.
- Locate parking close to major park activities. Provide areas for passenger drop-off, loading and universal access.
- Relocate parking areas away from lake edges to promote pedestrian access to valued park areas and reduce stormwater runoff to the lakes.
- Redesign access and egress into the Bath House parking area to minimize conflicts.
- Relocate parking for DPR maintenance staff by designating off-site spaces at a nearby regional facility or providing priority spaces in the re-designed recreation center parking area.
- Reconstruct parking areas in the park to improve the Park environment:
  - reduce the amount of impervious pavement in the park
  - add landscape screening and shade to reduce visual impact and heat island effect
  - convey stormwater runoff from parking areas to water quality treatment areas
- Develop an agreement with Denver Public Schools to utilize the South High Parking area on a regular basis for overflow and event parking needs for the park.
- Commission a parking management plan for Park events (working with Public Works) that addresses the parking needs of both the activity and the neighborhood.

A. Boathouse Terrace

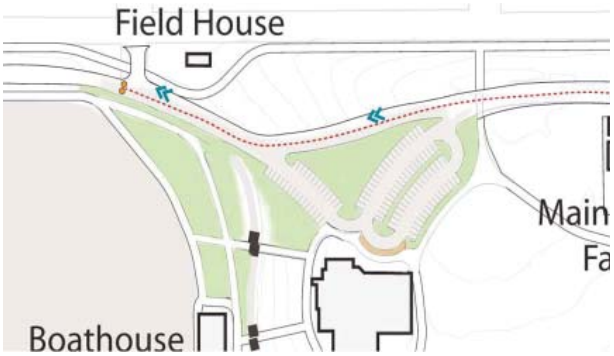
- Remove on street parking from the loop road
- Redesign parking area to:
  - Accommodate parking removed from the loop road
  - Provide drop-off fro picnic area and service access to Boathouse
  - Incorporate sustainable stormwater strategies
  - Meet ADA requirements
  - Improve access and intersection at the loop road and close a section of the loop road to vehicle traffic.



boathouse terrace parking

B. Recreation Center

- Remove on street parking from the loop roads
- Remove parking lot at Smith Lake edge
- Improve parking east of recreation center to:
  - Respect historic road alignment
  - Add for displaced spaces above
  - Provided drop-off for RTD access-a-ride and recreation center patrons
  - Meet ADA requirements

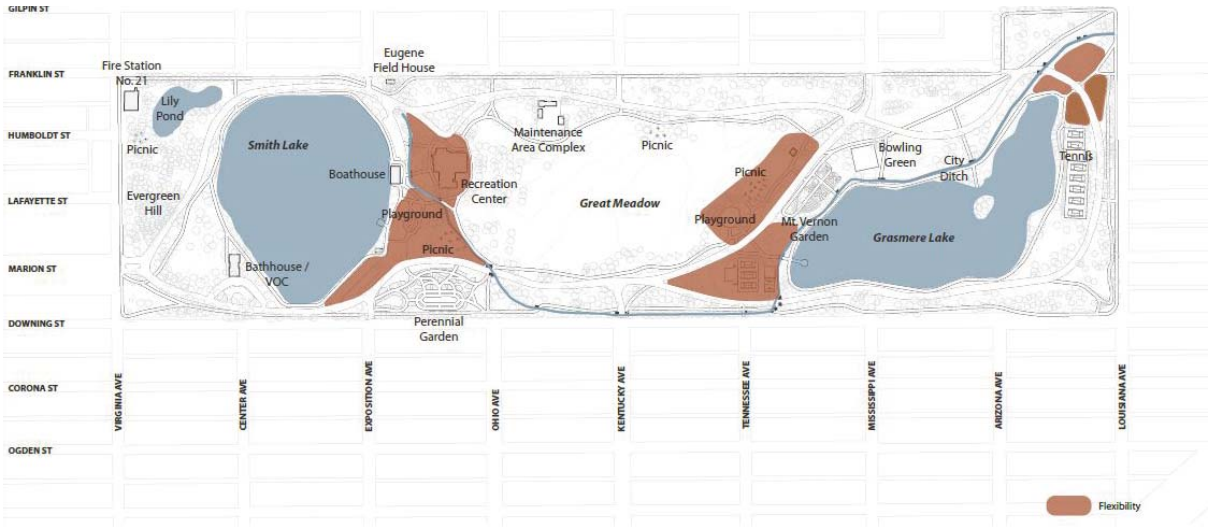


recreation center parking

C. Diagonal

- Provide head in parking on one side
- Provides drop-off and turn-around loop

diagonal parking



areas of flexibility

4.3 Areas of Flexibility

Areas of Flexibility are sections of the Park that have changed significantly over time to accommodate changing user needs. While they are centers of activity and support high levels of Park use, these areas generally do not contribute to the Park's historic character. They currently suffer from their inability to accommodate growing numbers of Park users and their recreational needs.

For example the area around the Boathouse currently accommodates visitors that park their cars, visit the lake and the playground, use the picnic area and access the recreation center. The current design of the Boathouse area does not anticipate nor accommodate the thousands of peak time visitors to this area, resulting in a deteriorated landscape and inadequate facilities.

In these areas public and stakeholder input has suggested a tolerance for design interventions that better accommodate user needs and provide facilities that are not available (or perhaps not appropriate) in other parts of the Park. These areas are intended, with redesign, to continue to serve as centers of activity in the Park.

Three areas have been identified as Areas of Flexibility. They are the Boathouse Terrace, the Diagonal and the South Portal as described in the accompanying diagrams.

Recommendations

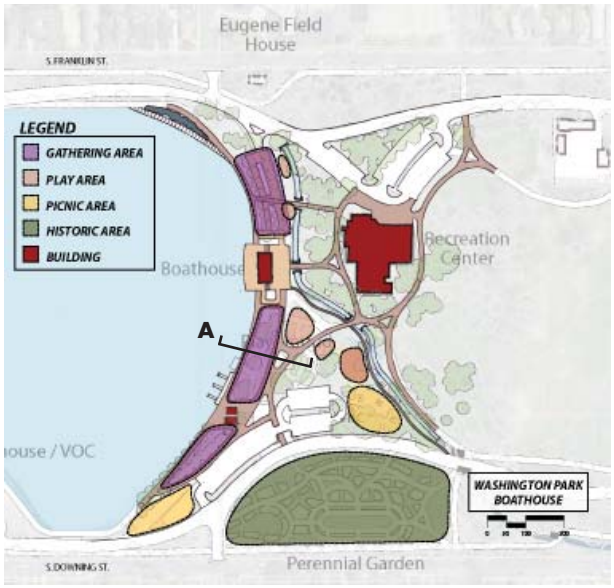
The areas of flexibility should be redesigned to accommodate Park and user needs to:

- complement historic Park context
- provide flexible use of space to accommodate a variety of uses and activities
- provide places for people to interact, gather, sit, play, eat and enjoy Park views and amenities
- enhance the Park landscape by incorporating high quality design, materials and maintenance practices
- reduce user conflicts by programming use areas, providing adequate space and access and designing for flexibility.
- Improve the picnic area by clustering areas to accommodate both small and large groups. This will provide City staff flexibility in permitting a variety of group sizes and locations.

The Boathouse Terrace

The Boathouse area is what many visitors associate with Washington Park. The design integrity of the area was significantly impacted when a section of the Loop Road connecting across it was removed for addition of the Recreation Center. Parking areas near Smith Lake contribute to congestion and traffic while interfering with pedestrian access to the shoreline.

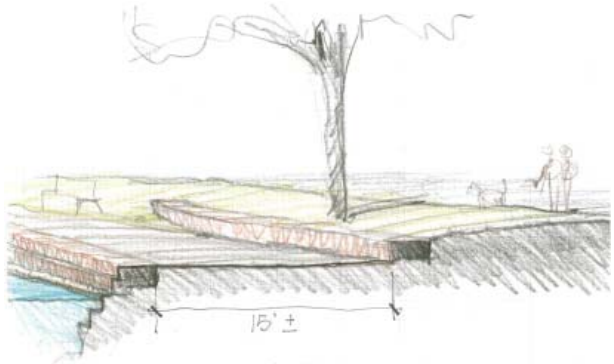
The location of many of the Park's most popular attractions – the Boathouse, playground, picnic area, Perennial Garden, Smith Lake and boat and surrey rentals – this area is crowded with visitors at peak times and in need of significant change to support Park recreation, environmental and historic character needs.



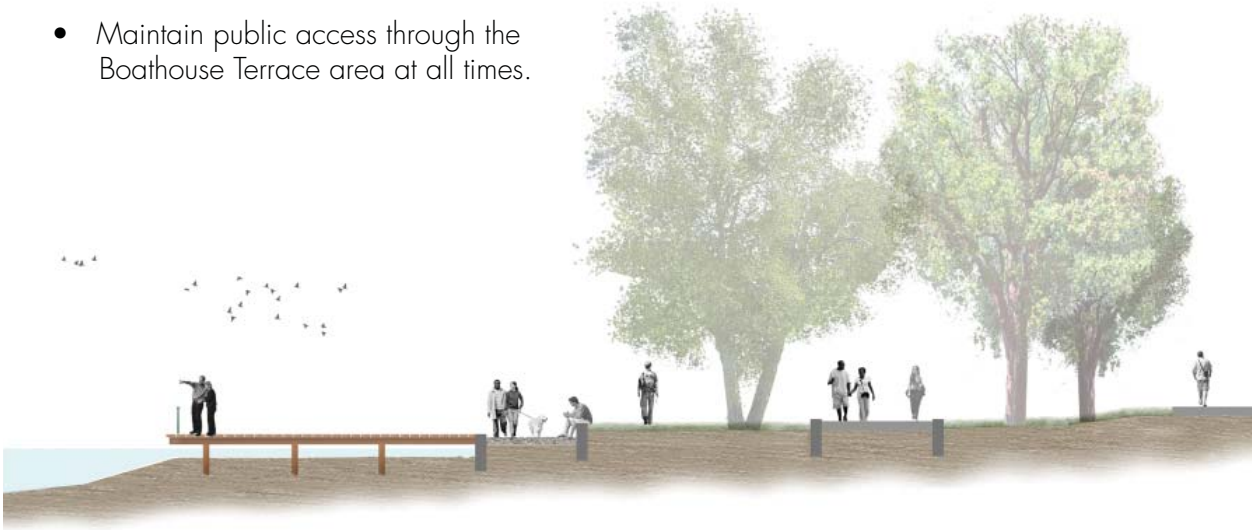
concept planning for boathouse terrace includes better access to and flexible use areas near Smith Lake.

Recommendations

- Create a design plan for the Boathouse Terrace area integrating present and desired uses into an attractive and functional centerpiece for the park.
- Improve the Smith Lake edge by creating a more urban lake promenade along the south shoreline that allows pedestrian circulation at the lake edge and opportunities for outdoor seating at the Boathouse and around the lake. Provide lake overlooks, access areas and fishing and boating opportunities at key locations around the lake.
- Maintain public access through the Boathouse Terrace area at all times.



terraces take advantage of existing grades to preserve trees and create a variety of use areas



section A

- Improve the Boathouse area by creating plaza spaces around the building that support its restoration and provide outdoor space for events and activities that are anticipated for the renovated building.
- Provide service vehicle controlled connections to and from parking and drop-off areas on both east and west sides of the Loop Road for access to the Boathouse and surrounding plaza. Maintain access for fire, handicapped parking, deliveries and support for events at the boathouse
- Utilize the sloping topography to create landscape "terraces" that allow a variety of scaled spaces for both passive and active recreational uses. Facilities and activities to be supported include:
    - sitting areas for individuals and small groups with both fixed and flexible seating in the shade and sun
    - a sequence of small themed play areas for children's play that complement the Wynken, Blynken and Nod sculpture
    - water related features and activities that reflect historic character and lake access
    - relocation and conservation of the Wynken Blynken and Nod sculpture as part of a water play feature.
    - walks and trails that support access to the lake and recreational loops for strolling and exercise
    - places for larger sized community gatherings such as event staging, farmers markets, etc.
    - vendor and concession spaces for recreation rentals and food and beverage service.
- Accommodate boat, bicycle and associated equipment rental services in existing park structures or off-site, instead of in temporary facilities.
- Require rental vendors to store rental equipment off-site when out of season.
- Provide outdoor seating to support concessions, vendor or event space planned for the lower level of the Boathouse, facing the lake.

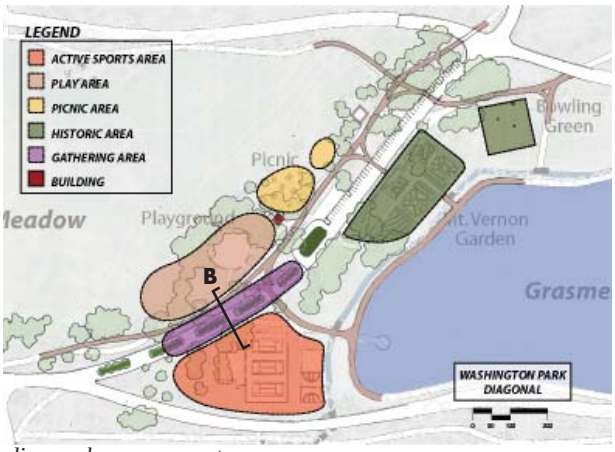
The Diagonal

The Diagonal area is the most popular group picnic area in the Park. Bounded by the Great Meadow and Grasmere Lake and adjacent to the "diagonal" section of the Loop Road, it supports several activity areas. These include the large picnic area, Mount Vernon Garden, a playground, court games area and access to the north section of Grasmere Lake. It includes a section of the Loop Road that has the smallest number of users for walking and bicycling.

Community input reflected the need to improve vehicular circulation and parking and support a wide range of needed recreational activities that serve all age groups in this area.

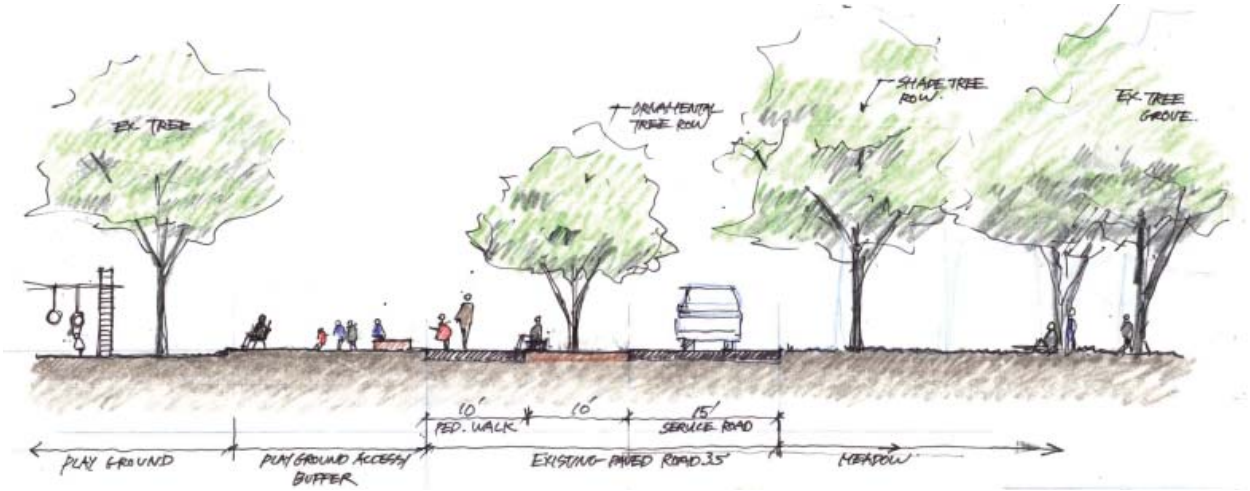
Recommendations

- Upgrade picnic facilities to include current Parks Department standard picnic tables, grills, and trash receptacles (including recycling facilities) to improve accessibility and ease of maintenance.



diagonal area concept

- Improve vehicular access and parking by adding a looped turn-around and passenger/loading drop-off at the closed end of the diagonal in order to improve traffic flow and reduce parking requirements at the picnic area.
- Re-stripe parking to provide diagonal spaces on the existing loop road pavement area to more efficiently provide required parking.
- Improve the playground to serve regional park needs, increasing its role as the primary play facility in the Park. Provide play activities for a variety of age groups, adapting the design to Denver Parks and Recreation playground design goals and the historic significance of the Park.
- Restore the historic fireplace as a central feature of the picnic area.
- Reprogram and design a youth sports area (now tennis, basketball and horseshoes) to reflect the recreation needs of older youth and young adult Park users. Consider such activities as a small skatepark or skate plaza, sand volleyball, ping pong, basketball and/or tennis. Other uses should be considered based on additional needs studies and community input.
- Redesign the portion of the diagonal road that is currently closed to vehicles, to support the new children's playground and youth sports area. Include additional landscaping, shade, seating and a recreational use area that supports smaller scale activities such as bicycle training, chalk art programs and smaller event staging.



section B: diagonal concept at loop road

South Portal

In order to better encourage visitor parking at South High School, this area needs to be transformed into a major Park entry. The area should also accommodate new facilities that provide added recreation opportunities and supporting facilities.

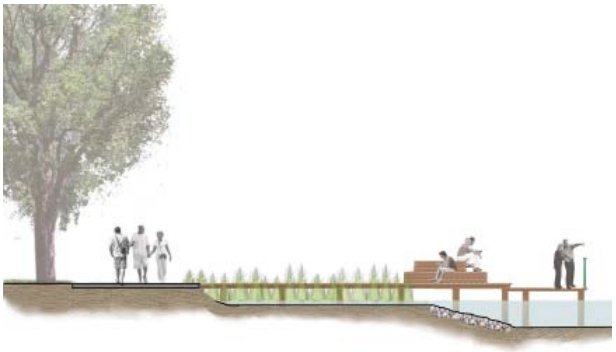
The master plan envisions creating a small use area that welcomes people to the Park and encourages them to use the parking area at South High School.

Recommendations

Possible facilities and activities include:

- Improved Park entry plaza that includes intersection design changes at Louisiana and Franklin, Park entry feature or signage, improved trails, seating and lighting
- A small park administration and rental kiosk that would provide recreation rentals, including bicycles and volleyball nets, and a place for Park rangers to furnish information to visitors.
- Programmed activity areas on the adjacent Park lawn for small group recreational activities such as volleyball, mommy boot camps or individual lawn games.
- Support facilities for tennis including a new shade structure.
- Environmental education facilities including a Grasmere Lake nature walk with boardwalk/overlook and interpretive signage.

Activate the south portal by improving the park entry and supporting group activities.



section C: Incorporate lake/wetland overlooks and environmental education opportunities at Grasmere Lake.

project priorities

5.0 General Plan Recommendations

As recreation demands have increased at Washington Park so has the need to improve, manage and maintain Park resources in a manner that respects its historic character, provides a high level of service for recreation and environmental value, safety and accessibility for the community and maintains efficiency in the utilization of City resources.

This section includes general recommendations for capital improvements, management and maintenance based on Denver Parks and Recreation Department standards and policies and takes into account public input and industry best practices.

5.1 Projects and Design Requirements

Recommendations have been established for preservation and restoration as well as change throughout the Park. In order to implement change the plan, considers priorities, funding sources and quality standards to effectively carry out the goals of the master plan.

Implementation Priorities: the relative importance of Park implementation projects should be based on sound evaluation of conditions and criteria necessary to evaluate alternative projects. The rationale established are consistent with the guiding principles of the plan and:

- Are required to meet public health, safety and accessibility requirements;
- Meet the most immediate needs of the community;
- Meet the long-term goals of the plan;
- Are feasible in terms of cost and value.

The following are several projects that have been identified to implement the recommendations of this plan in the short term. As conditions and priorities change, this list is subject to change. Each project will undergo a scoping, programing and design process that includes budgeting and cost estimation, concept and schematic design, design development, production of construction documents, bidding and construction and will include regular community participation in accordance with City policy.

Priority list of projects (see diagram pg. 46):

1. Create a new regional destination playground and improve the picnic area, court games area and associated parking and drop-off at the Diagonal.
2. Implement the South Park Portal area including Franklin Street Entry improvements, kiosk trail and recreation facility improvements.
3. Improve the Boathouse Terrace to include small themed play areas, restoration of historic sculpture and ditch, integrating the Smith Lake promenade and Boathouse deck, relocating parking and creating public spaces along the lakeshore and between the boathouse and the recreation center.
4. Improve the Smith Lake edge; adding a pedestrian promenade along the South edge and implementing water quality improvements for on site and off site storm water.
5. Implement Park (Loop) Road and trail upgrades to create a hierarchy of trails and alternative loops within the park, including accessibility and picnic area improvements, signage, park amenities and naturalizing of perimeter park areas.
6. Realign and improve the jogging trail moving it away from Franklin and Louisiana Streets and better integrating it into the Park and the Lily Pond.
7. Improve perimeter streets around the Park at Downing, Louisiana, Virginia and Franklin (by Public Works), to review parallel parking, improve sidewalks, crossings and park entries.

5.2 Park Activities, Recreation and Programming

Permitting of Activities: Denver Parks and Recreation issues permits for organized sports such as volleyball and other group activities such as picnicking and events. The conditions of the permits stipulate time, rules and cleanup requirements and permits are associated with a cost intended to cover administration of such activities. The following permitting recommendations have support from staff and community stakeholders:

- Improve permit operations: including the use of technology to make reservations and changes more fluid. This would be more convenient for users and increase their likelihood of using the permit system.
- Increase the number of existing activities that are permitted: Identify group activities that occur regularly at Washington Park without permits, such as mommy boot camps, exercise classes, etc. in order to regulate their impact on park condition and operations.
- Require groups to post permits at sites to avoid confusion over permission to be there.
- Designate specific areas for permitted activities that keep such activities to the perimeter of significant spaces in the Park and do not compromise the open public use in Areas of Preservation and Restoration.
- Post permits for larger events at bulletin boards in the Park to notify Park users of unanticipated and ongoing activities in the area.
- Coordinate road permit requirements for races and other events that utilize City and Park roads and trails with public safety and public works.
- Establish a maximum number of permitted events at the Park that can occur simultaneously, during a given week, season or year, taking into consideration the capacity of the Park open spaces, parking and access requirements, while accommodating the recreation needs of other Park users.

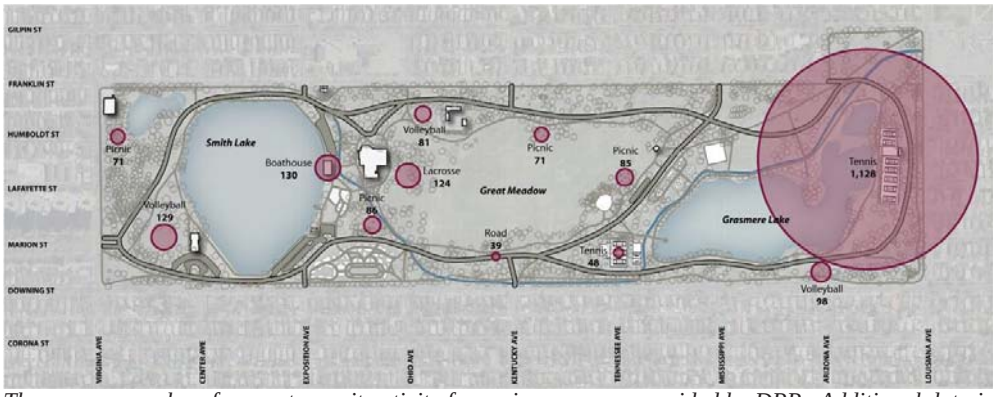
Washington Park Recreation Center

The recreation center in Washington Park is the busiest in the Denver Parks system. It provides programming and summer camp activities as well as indoor fitness, swim programs and youth sports. Recreation center programs utilize several of the lawn areas at the north end of the Great Meadow for activities such as youth soccer and lacrosse. Provide ongoing support for these programs as follows:

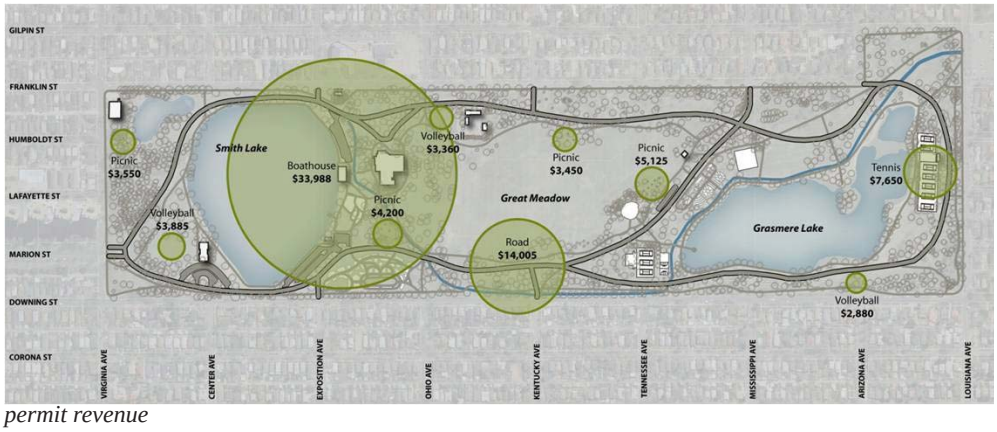
- Allocate existing outdoor space near the recreation center for youth sports and activities as required to support program needs.

Volleyball leagues and pick up games flourish in the small meadows.

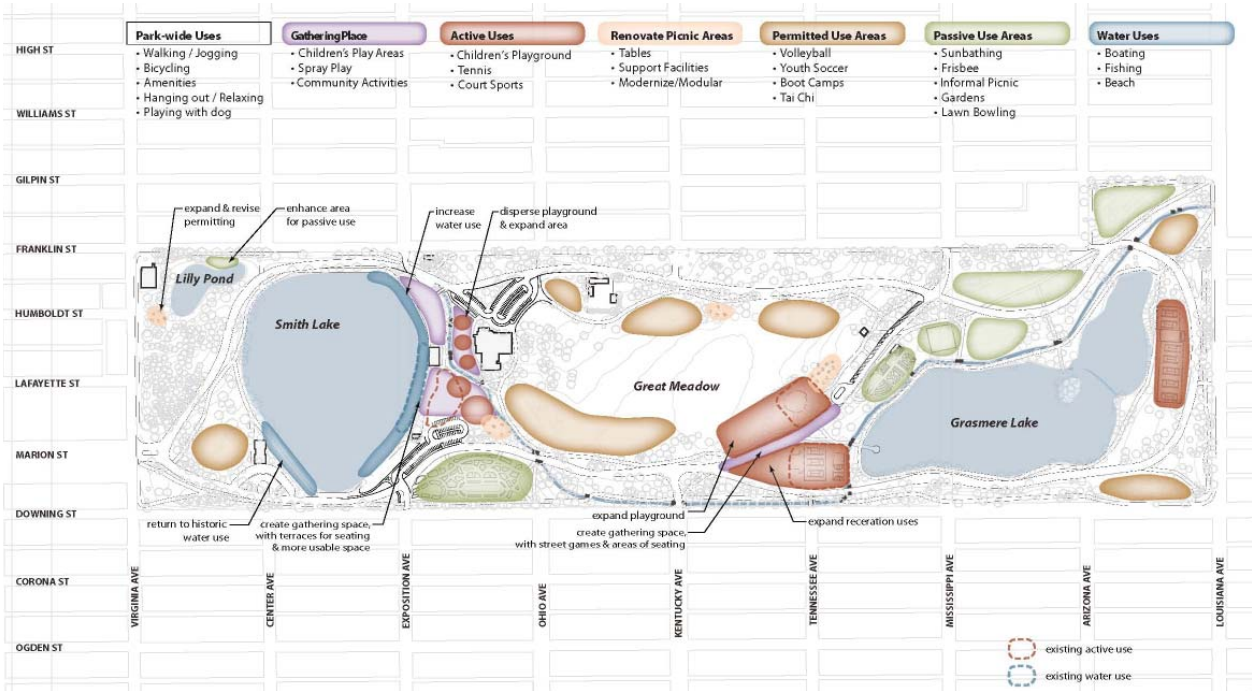
Washington Park is a popular venue for community events



These are examples of current permit activity for a given year as provided by DPR. Additional data is available from DPR.



permit revenue



Park activity areas were identified based on permit activity and program input from DPR and stakeholder groups. Locations are approximate and should be considered for consistency with areas of preservation, rehabilitation and flexibility.

5.3 Park Support Services

Concessions and Vendors: Denver Parks and Recreation regularly contracts with concessions and vendors to serve the needs of the park visitors. These services include selling food and beverages and renting recreation equipment.

Washington Park support services are currently accommodated by mobile and temporary facilities that are not all compatible with the historic character of the Park. Based on feedback from citizens involved in the planning process and to continue to support visitor needs, recommendations include:

- Concession and vendor services should support the predominant recreational uses of the Park, including family picnicking and other outdoor recreation, such as running, walking, biking and other athletic activities. Services provided should be consistent with such uses.
- Commercial activities in the Park should remain understated and not overt, so as to complement the historic character of the Park.
- Park support services should be located in appropriate locations within the Park. Commercial concessions and vendors should be limited to Areas of Flexibility, in close proximity to designated activity areas.
- Prohibit parking and operation of mobile concessions and vendors on Park roads. Temporary or portable facilities should only be permitted in locations that are designed and equipped to accommodate them. These facilities should complement the Park and the recreational use which they are intended to support.
- Wherever possible facilities for Park vendors and concessions should be located in existing buildings and structures. Where new structures are required they should be compatible with the historic character of the Park.

Mobile venders can be accommodated in designated areas of the Park.

Temporary facilities, signs and storage should be comparable with the historic park character.

Concessions and kiosks such as this are at the streets at Southglenn, should meet park department quality standards.

5.4 Park Security and Safety

Visitors generally feel that Washington Park is a safe place to be, but conflicts between users, perception of inadequate enforcement and occasional disturbances by user groups have informed the following recommendations:

- Investigate funding sources for additional Rangers in the Park to provide information for Park users, interpret the significance of the Park elements and provide a higher perception of user security in the Park.
- Establish protocols and processes for increased enforcement of laws, rules and regulations that affect the Park, including speed limits on Park roads, enforcement of alcohol limits and crime prevention.

5.5 Maintenance

The ongoing viability of the Parks landscape requires a variety of maintenance best practices. Implementation of the restored hierarchy of roads and trails, the restoration of wetlands and native grasses to Park areas and accommodation of year round program uses may require some chances in the way that park maintenance is approached. Several key maintenance issues are identified to allow the Park to become more sustainable:

- Park maintenance should develop a plan to support the recreation needs developed by implementing this plan. Adjustments to the maintenance plan may be required to allow year round trail use on certain trails and to accommodate recreation and program needs in flexible use areas.
- Healthy wetland and native grass areas have unique needs and require specialized attention from maintenance staff. Monitoring and contributions from DPR Natural Areas Program will need greater involvements.
- Contribution of reuse water for the lakes' water source as well as storm runoff into the lakes will require ongoing water quality testing and treatment.
- Park landscapes must be managed to maintain the diversity and balance required to support wildlife.
- Dated irrigation systems, such as quick couplers, should be replaced with automatic systems that monitor and control water use and application.

A well maintained landscape blends naturalized and recreational use areas.

5.6 Funding Resources

Funding Sources: Parks' resources are continually challenged to keep up with updating and maintaining Park facilities. Washington Park is an example of where the Parks & Recreation maintenance staff has done an extraordinary job of keeping facilities operational under heavy use conditions. In order to provide better facilities and conditions at Washington Park, DPR will need to consider new models of funding that take advantage of private as well as public resources.

Several mechanisms that have been discussed and are worth further consideration at Washington Park, include:

- Capital Improvement Plan funding, prioritized for essential projects.
- Specific projects identified in the master plan and identified for voter approved bond funding.
- Grants, donations and fund raising from philanthropic organizations and individuals.
- Establishing special areas within the Park, such as the historic gardens, Boathouse and the Bath House, that would qualify for endowments.
- Creation of a Special District, Conservancy, or other type of public-private partnership.
- Utilizing funding from Park user organizations and events (both for profit and not-for profit) as permitted by the City Charter, to supplement existing City resources.
- Using potential income from the City's admissions based events policy to supplement normal funding mechanisms.
- Establishing market rates for vendors and concessions that allow excess revenues to be reinvested with the Park.

All future design projects at Washington Park should also include a funding plan that addresses opportunities to provide partnerships and creative funding opportunities for Park improvements, programming and maintenance.

Washington Park will remain one of Denver's most loved amenities.