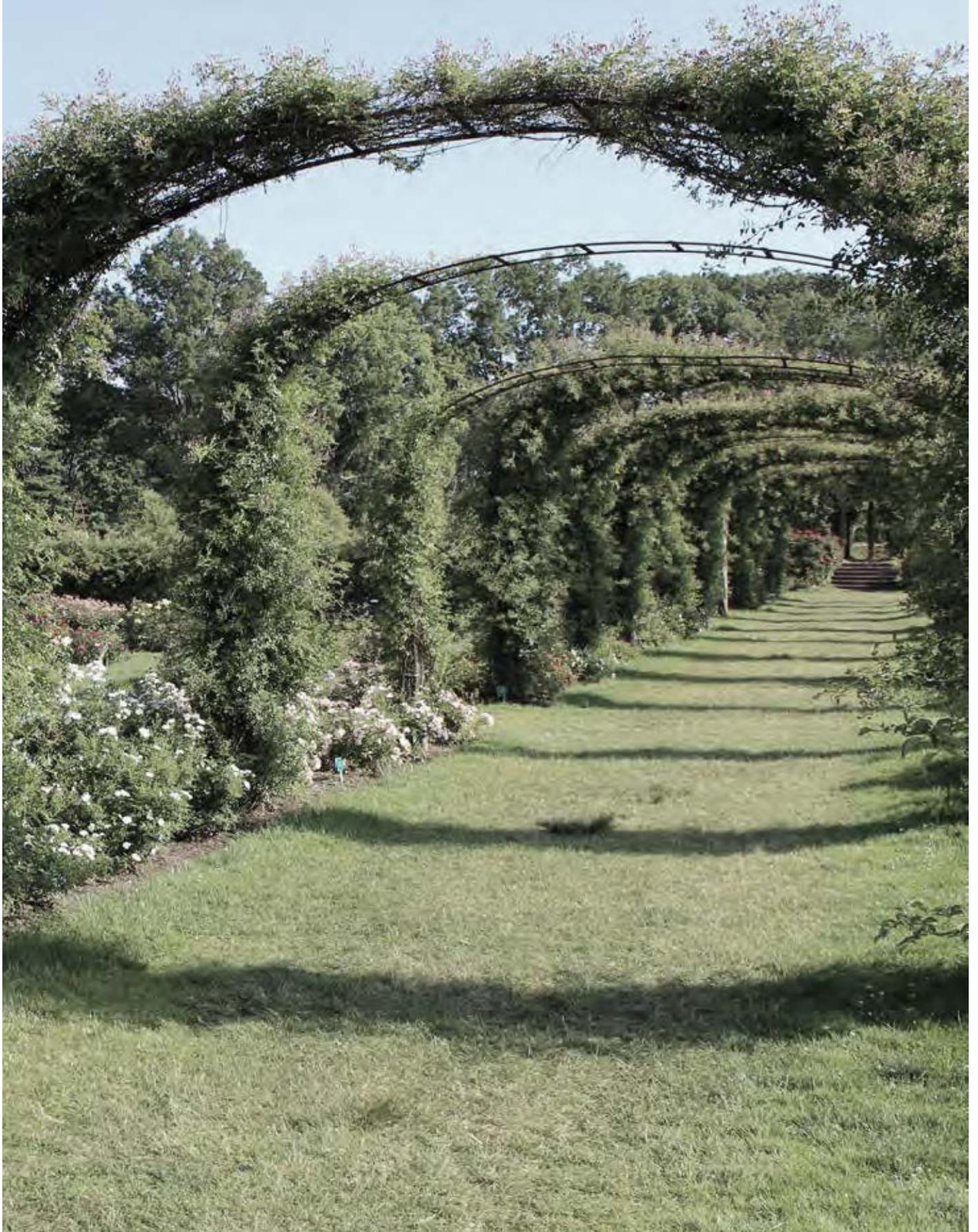


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Capital City Parks Guide

The 2014 Capital City Parks Guide seeks to reposition the parks system as a connected network of high quality, diverse parks.

The City of Hartford's park system has all the ingredients to be a world class park system. With abundant acreage and a centuries-long history of park design, Hartford today benefits from a rich legacy of urban parks, ranging in size from small pocket parks to large parks that are a regional attraction for the city. Yet this abundance is also a challenge. Recent economic challenges have brought increasing difficulty for maintaining the system's vast acreage and highly utilized fields, for projecting a sense of safety to citizens, and for ensuring transparent communication of park offerings and events to the diverse community. The 2014 Capital City Parks Guide seeks to reposition the parks system as the connected network of high quality, diverse parks that was always envisioned, seeking ways to connect the parks and city, prioritize investments, and reduce maintenance burdens.

The Capital City Parks Guide is intended to provide the tools to help the city - and the community - nurture its park system over the coming decades. While the guide recommends physical design ideas, it gives equal value to strategies to foster partnerships and stewards of the system, generate revenue, and govern and sustain the plan and parks system, all with the goal of achieving more successes amid constrained resources. The responsibility for taking care of the system belongs to both the city departments and the community. This guiding document integrates all roles, in hopes that the Capital City Parks System can change existing patterns so that all are meaningful participants in the creation of a park system that honors its legacy, is safe, well-maintained, better connected, and accessible to all.

Capital City Parks Vision

Hartford’s Capital City Park System plays many roles within the city and region. Its future vision is multi-faceted and reflects the strengthening of key assets and improvements to long-flagging resources. Based on community feedback and the strength of the existing system, this guiding document is focused on three major goals, to:

1. Restore the Park System’s Legacy
2. Create a Connected System
3. Enhance the Network of Parks to Serve All Parts of the Community

These three goals will be accomplished through a systematic look at the parks system, the connective network of streets, paths, and sidewalks, and at operational and financial support.

Restore the Parks Legacy

Hartford owes its ample park acreage and promise for the future to a history of valuing urban open space. This legacy requires maintenance to protect its value. A high priority of the Parks Guide is to promote the historic nature of parks, ensuring that future improvements renew historic elements and complete connections between parks as originally envisioned.

Connected System

A connected “ring of parks” is part of the historic park vision. It is also critical to contemporary walkability and equitable access. The Parks Guide includes a

phased connectivity plan to enhance circulation within parks, create connections between parks and neighborhoods, and improve ecological links.

Community Wide Parks Network

The park system is diverse, ranging from hundreds of acres at Keney Park to small pocket parks. The Capital City Parks Vision must work for all the different park types. To clarify the future roles of each park, the Parks Guide organizes implementation by three major types:

- **City-wide Identity Parks:** Identity parks include large parks that are critical to Hartford’s historic legacy, to future revenue generation, and to staging and managing major public events. Bushnell Park, Keney Park, and Elizabeth Park are emblematic of Hartford’s identity parks, which are nurtured, revitalized, and maximized for revenue potential through this guiding document.
- **Neighborhood Parks:** Neighborhood parks provide local walkability, family amenities, and additional green space. Important projects for neighborhood parks are to reduce maintenance and create basic upgrades to amenities.
- **Other open spaces:** Beyond active parks, Hartford’s open space system also includes cemeteries, natural spaces, traffic triangles, and school yards. Collaboration and partnerships between these entities and the city will allow a more connected, robust system. Key goals are to enhance these partnerships, support ecological connections, and reduce maintenance.

Overview of the Planning Process

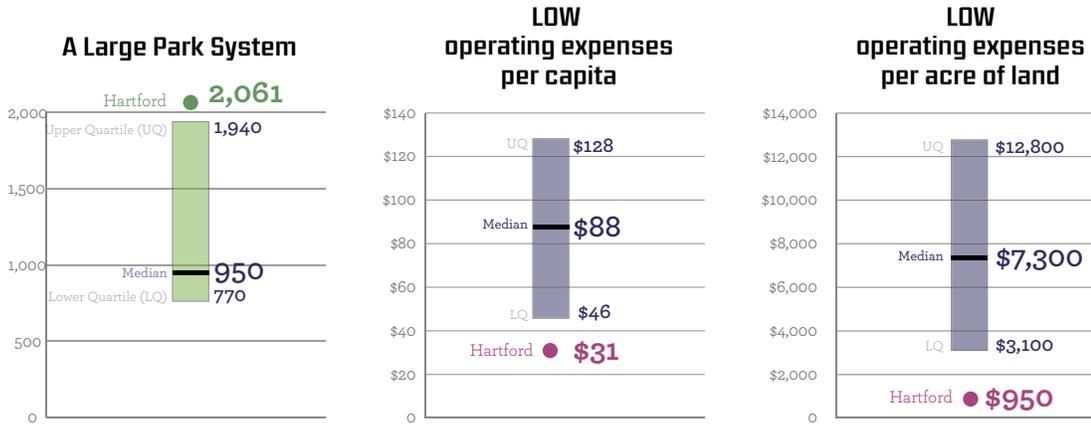
Achieving the Capital City Parks vision calls for a full team effort. To this end, the planning process included a steering committee and comprehensive outreach. The steering committee included representatives from Public Works and Development Services who met at key milestones within each phase of the process and provided guiding input. The planning process included three open, public meetings; a series of focus group discussions with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC), “Friends” groups who advocate for individual parks, members of Neighborhood Revitalization Zone groups (NRZs), and other key stakeholders such as the Knox Foundation. Additional meetings were held with

City Departments, including the Board of Education, Department of Families, Youth, Children and Recreation, and Police Department. “MyHartford,” an interactive on-line survey, supplemented these in-person conversations. Throughout the conversations, improving maintenance emerged as the #1 priority for the park system. As the Parks Guide is implemented, the discussions that occurred as part of this process should continue into the future, expanding the network of partners caring for Hartford’s parks.



Participants offer ideas at the first public meeting in June 2013.

Assessing Current Needs



Data source: National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS database; Hartford was compared to 28 park systems nation-wide with a population of 100,000 to 200,000

Hartford staff maintain more acres with less money than comparably sized cities.

Hartford has a diverse park system, with a particular abundance of regional parks. Overall, the system is appropriately sized for the city’s population trends; there is no need for additional acreage. As measured against national standards and peers, Hartford is doing well in the quantity of active recreation amenities. Baseball fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other amenities meet or exceed recommendations. However, the *quality* of open spaces and amenities is in need of improvement. In addition, social amenities, such as picnic shelters and casual gathering spaces, are lacking across the system.

Improved connections for bicycle and pedestrian access between parks is critical because forty percent of Hartford’s total park acreage is outside the city. Several large regional parks like Keney, Goodwin, and Elizabeth partially cross Hartford’s boundary,

and Batterson Park lies entirely in Farmington/New Britain. Access to Hartford’s largest parks is greatest in at the city’s edges, but population densities are highest in neighborhoods ringing downtown, where many residents do not own a vehicle.

Hartford’s parks provide important ecological functions as well, including protecting the city from flooding, reducing and filtering stormwater, and providing significant tree cover and habitat for wildlife. Keney, Goodwin, and Cedar Hill Cemetery in particular are home to many resident and migratory bird species in the area. The Connecticut River and North and South branches of the Park River also are important environmental corridors in the city. The concept plans and connectivity plan within the Parks Guide aim to better connect the parks and open spaces as a means to improve watershed quality.

Implementing the Vision



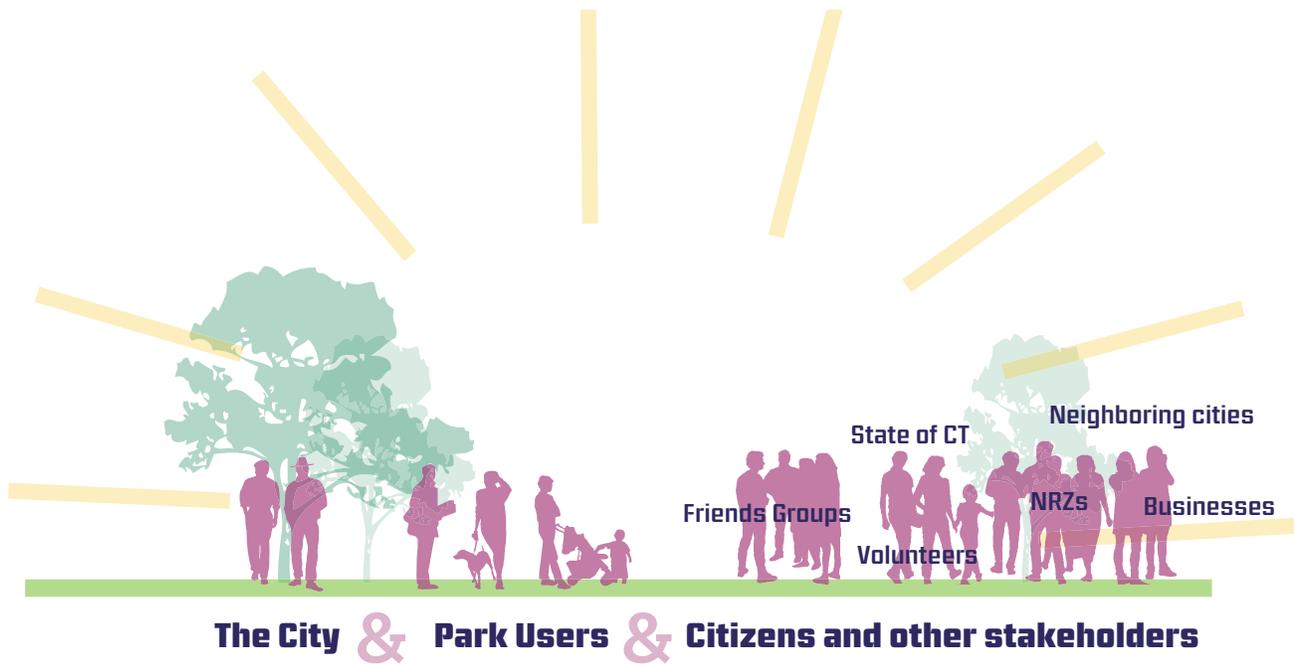
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Decades of deferred maintenance and decreasing budgets have created significant challenges for Hartford's parks. These challenges have been well-documented in reports by the Trust for Public Land in 2007 and the Green Ribbon Task Force in 2011; yet, the issues persist today. Everyday maintenance is a challenge, and this is reflected in community feedback. On average, there are more than 60 acres of park space per park employee responsible for care. This is three to four times less than best practices across the county which suggest between 15 and 22 acres per staff. Fiscally, Hartford's parks operate with significantly smaller budgets than even the lowest quarter of comparable agencies nationwide. How can we restore the Capital City Parks System amidst operational and budgetary realities?

Positive changes are already underway. A Parks Maintenance Manual completed last year outlines standards, work scheduling, athletic field condition assessment, and renovation recommendations. A new position, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works, has already begun to increase training programs and reinstate standard maintenance practices that had not been done in many years. Building on this momentum, the Capitol City Parks Guide recommends growing the size of the parks work force incrementally, expanding existing partnerships, decreasing maintenance burdens through design, increasing revenue generation, and emphasizing appropriate behavior by park users.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR AN IMPROVED SYSTEM

Today, groups such as the Knox Foundation, Riverfront Recapture, and Friends Groups and



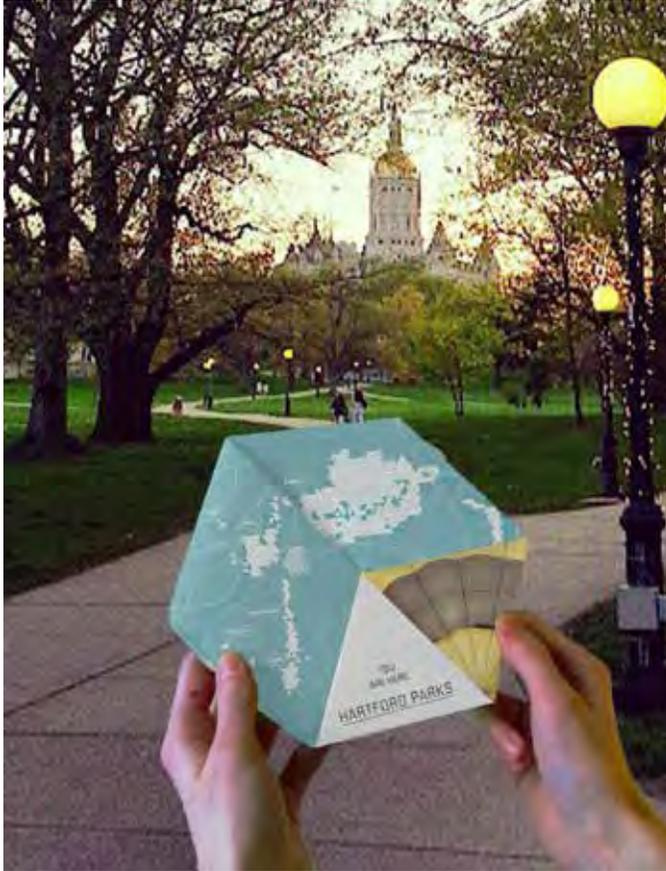
foundations contribute significantly to improvements in Hartford’s parks. To maximize and better coordinate their contributions, the city should formalize existing agreements, increase volunteer help, and expand partnerships, especially corporate support.

However, park users must also do their part to help improve Hartford’s parks. Changing the culture of park use and improving behavior will reduce additional maintenance efforts. The City will work alongside to provide rule enforcement, informational signage with a positive tone, and coordinated clean-up schedules. Despite shared tasks across multiple departments, the City of Hartford can present a single, unified point of contact for the public, improving user experience. Behind the scenes, different departments and divisions can ensure implementation of the Capital City Parks Guide, coordinate scheduling,

conduct park maintenance, organize programming, publicize events, and keep parks safe.

A FISCALLY SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

Nationwide, cities are working to find ways to generate more revenue within parks and create a more self-sustaining system. For Hartford, a near term priority needs to be establishing more revenue-generating projects within the large “Identity Parks” of the system that can help support both those parks’ operations and other smaller parks. The City is currently undertaking a study of Hartford’s two golf courses. Golf course revenue is another opportunity for increasing operating income for the system. Revenue generation must also include a careful look at the current fee structure in Hartford’s parks. Hartford has historically not charged fees for park services or programs, such



Wayfinding and branding improvements, system maps, and color-coded bicycle routes will make the park system more accessible to all.

as summer camps and outdoor pool use. However, this is an extremely uncommon practice among peers and may not be tenable for Hartford to continue in the future. Fees can also reinforce the value of parks and programs, instituting a culture of respect and value. Scholarships, free nights, charging only non-residents, or implementing fees only for new services are options to ensure any changes in fee structure do not have the impact of excluding Hartford's residents from using the parks and services.

SPREADING THE WORD: MARKETING & BRANDING

In concert with physical upgrades, Hartford's park system is also in need of positive marketing.

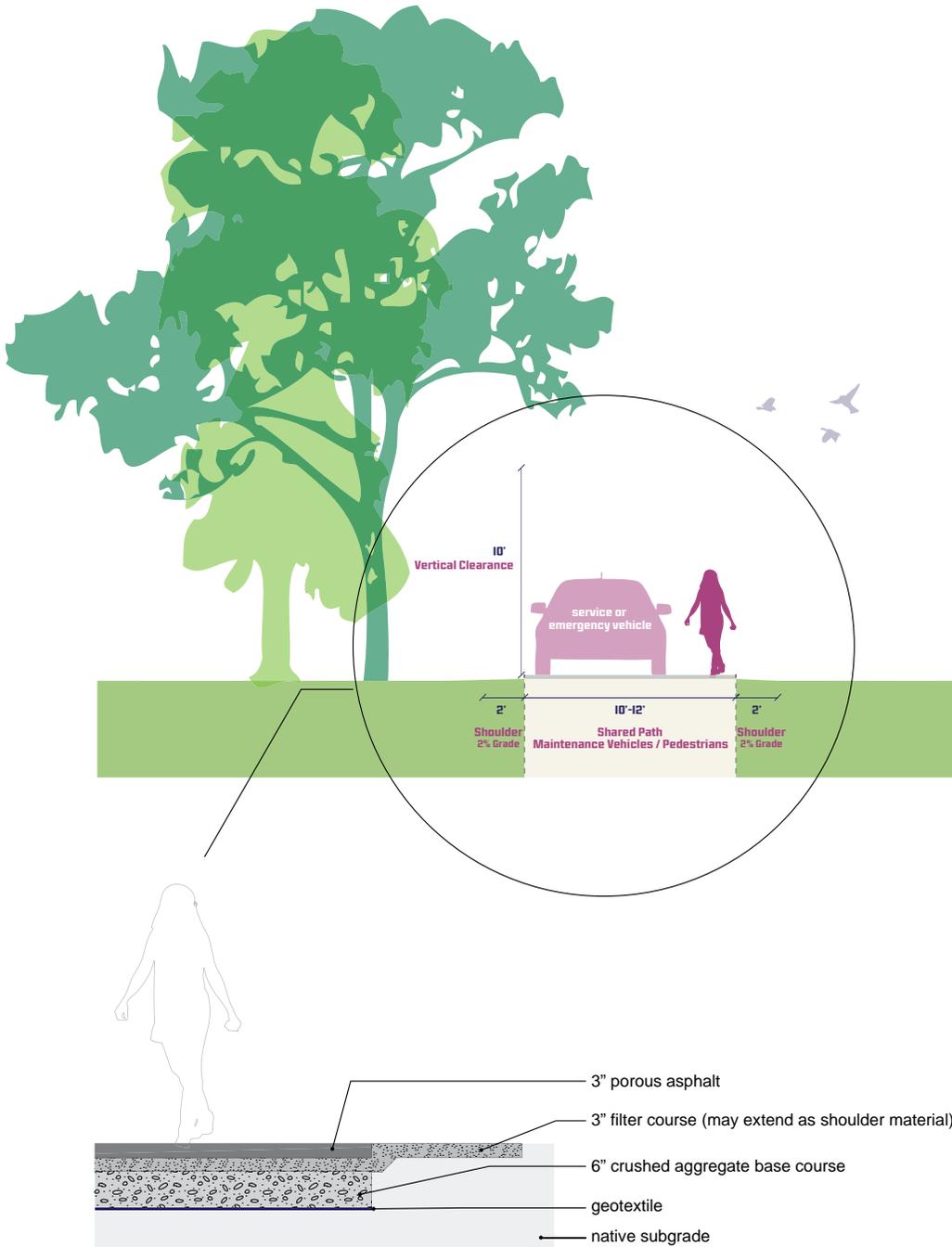
Improving perceptions will help increase park activity and contribute to an improved sense of safety at parks. With improved signage within and between parks; park system maps; a coordinated, easily accessible event calendar; and other marketing and branding efforts, the City can promote a consistent message of welcoming, safe, and attractive parks.

WHERE DO WE START?

Near-term capital projects should prioritize two goals: revenue generation as and reduction of maintenance burdens. For instance, implementing low mow zones on hillsides and in treed areas in parks throughout the system will help to reduce maintenance efforts. Other immediate improvements should include renewing and "bringing up the basics" in the parks – improving park furnishings, lighting, signage, and paths. Implementation of the connectivity plan can also begin immediately; Phase 1 includes bicycle lanes and sharrows that can be implemented now at a low cost and without significant modifications to existing traffic lanes or on-street parking. Improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity was seen as a high priority for participants at public meetings. The city should also consider hiring a volunteer coordinator to maximize volunteer help and corporate support.

Specific projects and park-by-park improvements are outlined in more detail in the 10 year Action Plan and Park Concept Plans later in this manual. Operational recommendations are covered in the Partnerships and Governance chapters.

“Bringing Up the Basics”



Typical Porous Asphalt Detail*

Designated Service Pathways are shared-use paths designed to structurally accommodate service and emergency vehicles. Currently, vehicles drive across and park on grassy areas, damaging tree roots and creating erosion. These proposed pathways are an example of a small upgrade that will help improve parks.

* Typical detail shown. Exact design depends upon site and soil conditions, and will require geotechnical analysis.

