



Parks Plus: Affordable Housing Session 1 Summary

November 15, 2023

With this summary, you can...

- ❑ Share: Important insights at your next team meeting.
- ❑ Identify: 2-3 opportunities or challenges most relevant to your city.
- ❑ Discuss: What is one approach or partnership you can make to advance the opportunity identified as most relevant to your city?

Session Framing & Overview

This track elevates the complex relationship between **parks** and **affordable housing** and emphasizes the importance of **thinking holistically** about parks and housing to drive **equitable outcomes** for urban residents.

During the November session, participants reviewed national trends in parks and housing planning and discussed opportunities and challenges their cities faced regarding co-development of the two.

Parks & Housing: Current Landscape in Cities

- Across the country, green space and affordable housing **compete** for space. This competition is often exacerbated by local housing mandates.
- Cities are thinking more holistically about affordable housing and green space but have little knowledge of **how** to do it.
- The challenges and capacities cities face in integrating housing and parks are **highly specific** to their local contexts and markets.
- As agencies that control a lot of land in cities, parks departments can play a larger role in deciding the **best use of land**.
- **Partnerships** with public housing authorities/agencies vs. private housing developers present different challenges and opportunities for parks departments.

Identified Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

- ❑ **Non-traditional land** conversion can support park development in areas with stronger housing mandates.
- ❑ **Land swaps** can creatively leverage assets across city agencies to meet collective goals.
- ❑ **Identifying non-market benefits** of parks. Measuring and tracking non-market benefits of green space can support parkland conversion in cities where land is at a premium.

Challenges

- ❑ **Land use and zoning** policies often dictate what can or can't become a park or affordable housing. Utilize local codes to develop an inventory of available land and its restrictions and opportunities.
- ❑ The Land and Water Conservation Fund pays for many park developments in the US, but it restricts the ability of land to be used for other purposes, including housing. **Collective advocacy** is needed to modify restrictions to create opportunities for co-development.

Story Mill Park: Planning & Governance Recommendations

- ❑ Establish clear **roles and responsibilities** of all partners upfront through formal MOUs to ensure expectations are aligned and to create accountability throughout the partnership.
- ❑ Maintain a **long-term view** to ensure decision-making incorporates maintenance, stewardship, sustainability, and long-term cost savings throughout the project.
- ❑ Engage stakeholders early to develop a **collective vision** and communicate transparently and often about what it will **cost** to bring the vision to life.

Story Mill Park: Q&A

How do the financing flows function for both the park and the housing?

The park was \$16.5 million from start to finish. Private philanthropy gave \$12.5 million, and another \$4 million came from the city's open space bond. Total development costs for the Bridger View neighborhood are about \$44 million. Sales proceeds generated about \$30 million, private philanthropy about \$14M, and public grants/business partnerships about \$500,000. Development costs were reduced by designing a compact neighborhood, building modest homes, and having the city pay for some off-site infrastructure. Please note that the neighborhood is nearing completion, and these are not final numbers.

How long does the memorandum of understanding last when the agreement is created?

The MOU for this project lasted through conveyance of the property to the entity that initially started guiding the final design and construction. Post-conveyance responsibilities of the various parties through buildout were set forth in detail in the MOU.

Story Mill Park: Q&A

Is there any potential or plans to use the trust's shared equity to help the housing trust grow in the future, possibly adding units?

The Headwaters Community Housing Trust is building partnerships with the business community, developers, and the City of Bozeman to grow its inventory of below-market homes using the shared equity model.

Different city codes were adopted after the project—what permanent change were made? Mostly setbacks and spatial requirements or also use-related laws?

The changes to the Unified Development Code (UDC) influenced by Bridger View are spatial: smaller setbacks, road widths, lot sizes, etc. The City of Bozeman is also purchasing smaller fire trucks that are easier to maneuver and require a smaller turning radius, which allows for smaller road widths.

Case Study: Atlanta, GA

Atlanta Parks has a master plan that encourages improved partnerships and collaboration with Atlanta Housing Authority.

- One city park is managed by the developer that built a nearby mixed-income property in partnership with the Atlanta Housing Authority.
- Some former public housing spaces had public parks that were owned by the city and housing that belonged to the housing authority.
- Rely on partnerships but emphasize ownership and belonging to city of Atlanta.

Challenges: Park Management and Equity

- Private developers often better at maintaining open space because they have more capacity than the city agency, but affordable housing teams aren't always interested in maintaining parks.
- Park projects have historically been difficult for legacy communities and residents, and once a park is announced, speculation starts.
 - Atlanta Beltline had affordable housing goals that were not prioritized before the announcement of a new park.

Case Study: Cleveland, OH

Experiences a different environment than other cities.

- More land available to build on and lower population density from shrinking population.
- Economics of housing and construction market: higher construction costs due higher wages due to the legacy of union cities.
- Given the space available, there is more opportunity to create smaller park projects as part of development. But conflicts can still emerge due to the cost of development, which requires a reduction in green space acreage.
- Focus is often on neighborhood development, with several actors working on several projects at once. Look to infill parks and gardens across projects, not just at one site, to spread benefits across the neighborhood while stabilizing existing housing at the same time.

Case Study: San Diego, CA

- City owns many parcels. State has a law that requires excess public land be used for affordable housing, which presents conflicts for park planning.
- City is currently studying all city-owned properties and their potential for affordable housing development. They now have a second grant from their regional transit organization (SANDAG) to study this.
- Identified challenges to co-development:
 - State has requirement for any excess public land to be used for affordable housing. (Surplus Land Act).
 - Parcels currently zoned for open space or parks can't be used for housing.
 - Affordable housing projects normally get their park fee waived.

For Future Exploration

Meeting Community Needs

- How should cities balance accessibility and efficient use of resources with **safety** and **community ownership** needs?
- Who is responsible for long-term **maintenance, stewardship, and programming** of green space around affordable housing?
- What social costs and benefits arise from **open access** to parks in/adjacent to affordable housing?
- Co-developing parks and affordable housing not only presents opportunities for **multiple benefits**, but also for reducing operational redundancies.
- Over-emphasis on park access is too simplistic – equal focus should be on **park/amenity quality**.
- Cities should not just consider parks in the context of new affordable housing, but should also ensure that when parks get built, **existing housing** stays affordable.

Additional Resources

[10-Minute Walk Communities of Practice](#)

Find session recordings, presentations, and resources for each track.

[evolveEA](#)

For more information on evolve environment::architecture.