



# Connecting People to Parks

**Session 2: Exploring new opportunities to  
develop parks and green spaces**

December 5, 2025



# Agenda

## 1. Welcome

- Session 1 Recap
- Session 2: Exploring new opportunities to develop parks and green spaces

## 2. Icebreaker (10 minutes)

## 3. Plenary presentations

- Community Schoolyards
- From Open Streets to a Linear Park

## 4. Q&A with speakers

## 5. Closing





# Session 1: Mapping Park Equity Gaps

## How Cities are Using ParkServe

- Understanding your park system's strengths and weaknesses
- Identifying areas with high park access need
- Prioritizing investments based on data
- Benchmarking to guide strategic planning efforts
- Supporting case-making to leaders and funders



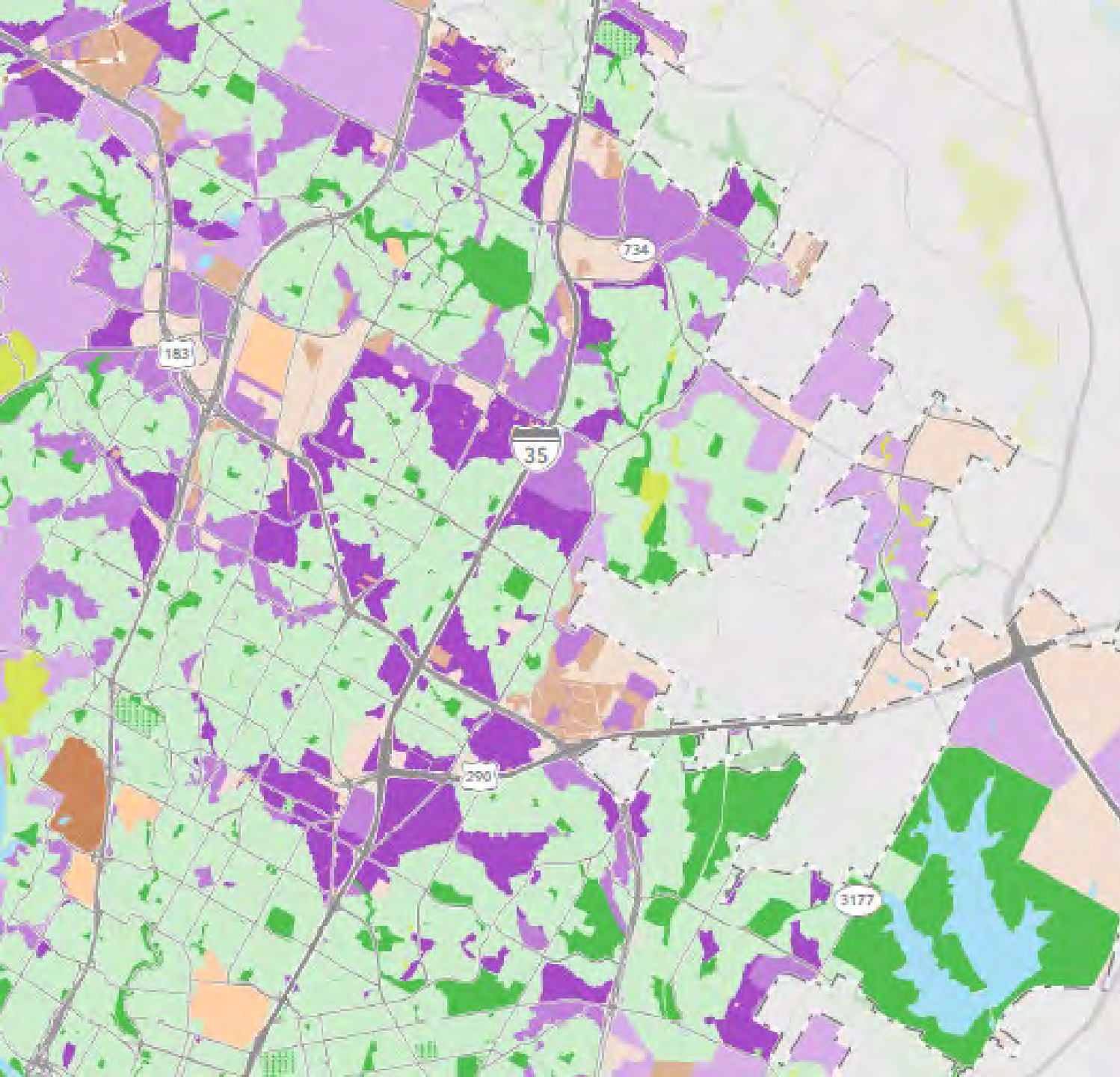
# Session 1: Mapping Park Equity Gaps

## Feedback on Opportunities to Expand ParkServe

- Incorporate trails outside of parks
- Integrate amenities into access scores
- Integrate quality data (condition, amenities) into service scores
- Account for barriers (such as major roadways) in access scores
- Expand definition of access to include topography and other determinants of use
- Expand to counties and rural areas







## Park Equity Divide

**1 in 3 U.S. residents** lacking access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home.

*What other land types can we explore to daylight opportunities for the development of parks and green spaces?*



**Uncover underutilized spaces for parks and green spaces**



# Strategies in High Need Areas

- Shared Use Agreements
  - Schoolyards
  - Watershed and Utilities
  - Libraries
- Activate spaces with Amenities + Programs
  - Public Housing Properties
  - Vacant Lots
- Greenways and Trails
- Open streets + Pop-Up Parklets
- Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPs)





## ICEBREAKER (10 minutes)

Current context: Share a project that you are actively pursuing or interested in exploring, to develop parks and/or green spaces **in one of the following land types:**

- Schoolyards
- Streets and greenways
- Public housing properties
- Affordable housing developments
- Vacant lots
- Other municipal lands (watershed, utilities, other)
- Other land type

Case making: In advocating for the development of your park and/or green space, share 1 of each—your biggest opportunity and biggest challenge.







**Welcome Back!**

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## Community Schoolyards





# Community Schoolyards

Trust for Public Land

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

# Climate change is compounding environmental injustice



*BEFORE: Winthrop Campus, Brooklyn, NY*

Of the 2 million acres of school grounds, most in urban communities are **void of trees and covered with asphalt**. Asphalt traps heat, floods during storms and releases petrochemicals into the atmosphere.



# Community schoolyards clean the water and air, cool schools and demonstrate climate action for students



*AFTER: Winthrop Campus, Brooklyn, NY*



If all schools had a Community Schoolyard: **50,000,000 students and 80,000,000 community members would benefit** from increased tree canopy, improved air quality, reduced flooding and **10.08 MMT CO<sub>2</sub>/yr could be avoided or captured.**



# Activity levels among children are at an all time low



Of the 100,000 public schools in the U.S., many lack outdoor facilities to support vigorous activity levels. Activity levels among children are at an all-time low, which contribute to childhood obesity.

Many schoolyards lack nature. Isolation from nature is associated with poor mental health.

*BEFORE: Elmhurst Pan Am, New York, NY*



# Transforming Schoolyards across the country will provide 50 million children with every-day access to healthy places to play



If all schools had a Community Schoolyard: 50,000,000 students would have daily access to quality play, recreation, nature and social spaces. 80,000,000 residents would have access to the amenities needed most by the community. **Proximity to parks is associated with improved mental and physical health.**

*AFTER: Elmhurst Pan Am, New York, NY*



# Parks serving communities of color are not equitable



Parks serving communities of color are **half the size and 40% more crowded** than parks in predominantly white communities.

Parks and schoolyards serving communities of color receive **less investment and offer fewer amenities**.

*BEFORE: E.M. Stanton School, Philadelphia, PA*



# Transforming Schoolyards across the country will provide 80 million residents with access to a park within a 10-minute walk



*AFTER: E.M. Stanton School, Philadelphia, PA*





# Schools in under resourced communities lack the features students need for learning



*BEFORE: Scott Elementary School, Atlanta, GA*

Of the 100,000 public schools, most lack places for teachers to take students outside to learn.



# Community Schoolyards provides students with places to learn, play and thrive outdoors



If all schools had a Community Schoolyard:  
50,000,000 students and 6.8 million teachers would  
have daily access to outdoor classrooms and gardens  
to enhance STEM education.

*AFTER: Scott Elementary School, Atlanta, GA*



# Overlapping Impact

Community Schoolyards deliver health, climate, equity and learning outcomes for students, the school and the surrounding community.

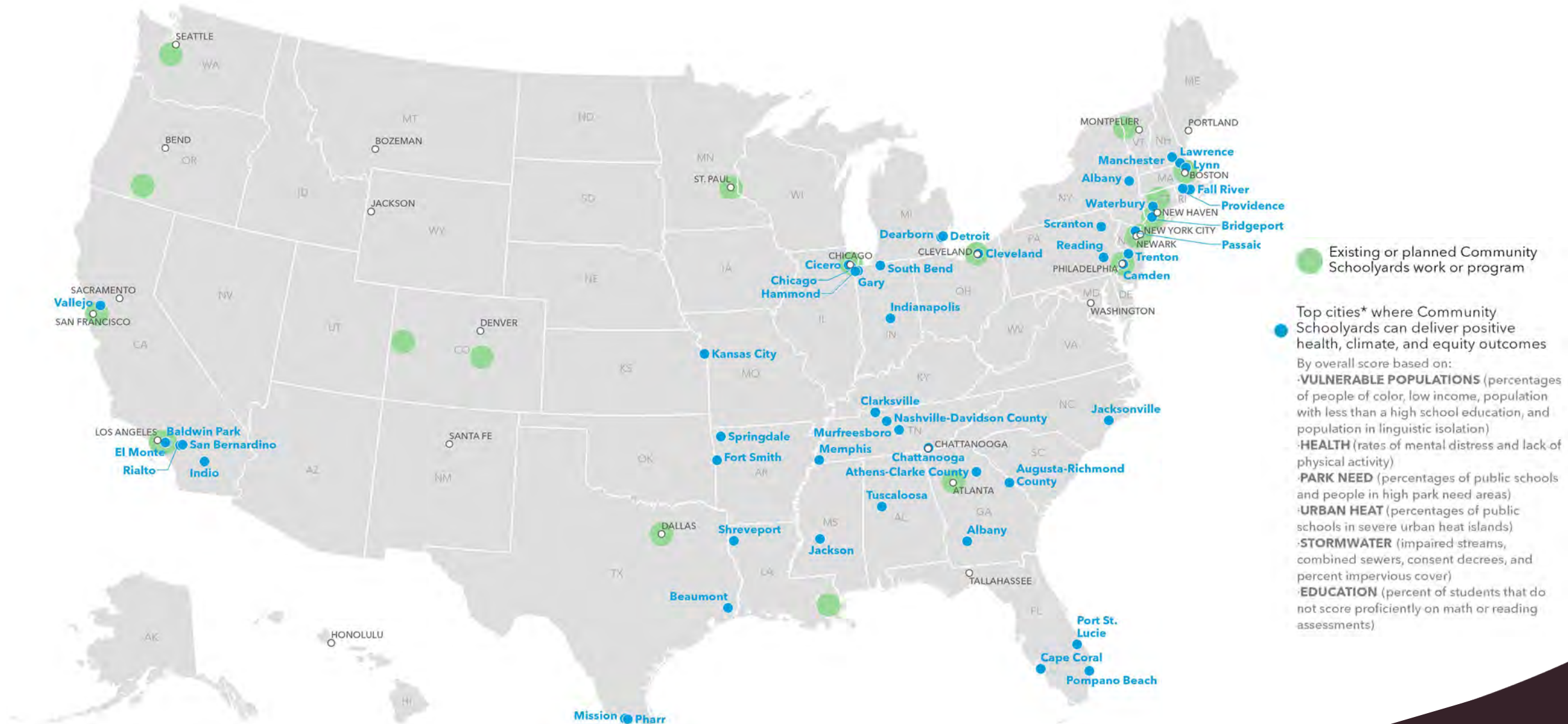
Community Schoolyards are one of the few public space interventions that can deliver so many positive outcomes at once.

- Improved climate and equity outcomes advance **environmental justice**
- Improved equity and learning **empower students and communities**
- Improved learning and strengthened community advance **student achievement**
- Stronger community and health advance **social capital and reduce loneliness**
- Improved health and climate improve **resilience and climate adaptation.**





# Cities where Community Schoolyards are needed most



<https://web.tplgis.org/communityschoolyardsmap/>







# Why aren't community schoolyards standard?

We encounter three common barriers to community schoolyard development and have developed strategies for navigating each barrier

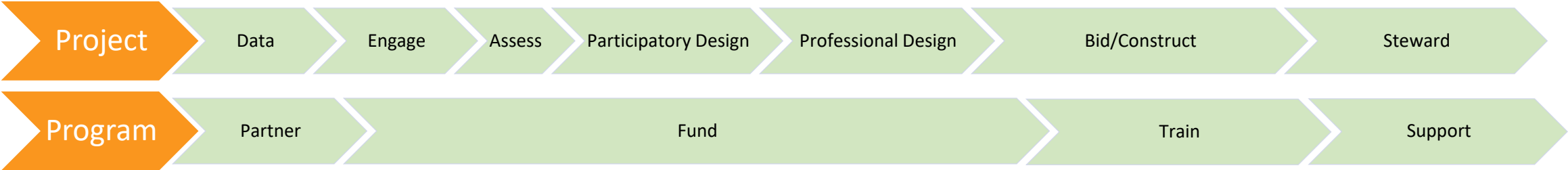
- **Limited funding for capital improvements** in the education sector
  - Public Private Partnerships
  - Bond measures
  - Increasing public funding
- **Limited capacity for maintenance and operations** at schools
  - Shared responsibilities in MOU's
  - Advocacy
  - Capacity Building
  - Durable Design
- **Perception of risk regarding open access**
  - Building ownership
  - Following the data
  - Demonstrating success





# Community Schoolyard Process

The community schoolyard process includes project development and capacity building steps at the school and school district levels:



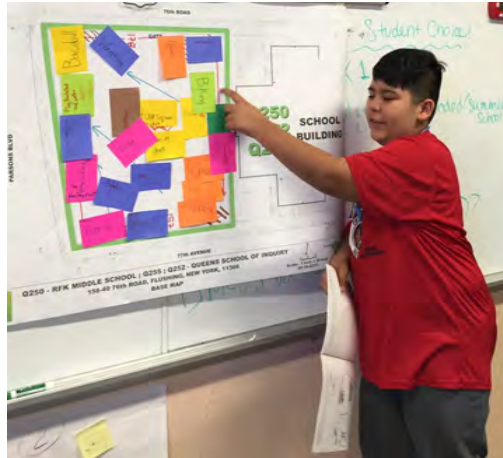


# Participatory Design



## Site Analysis:

Geometry  
Spatial Analytics  
Urban Heat



## Mapping Play:

Social Studies  
Psychology  
Equity



## Water Quality:

Watershed  
Urban Water Cycle  
Green Infrastructure



## Field Trips:

Site Design  
Playful Design  
Outdoor Learning

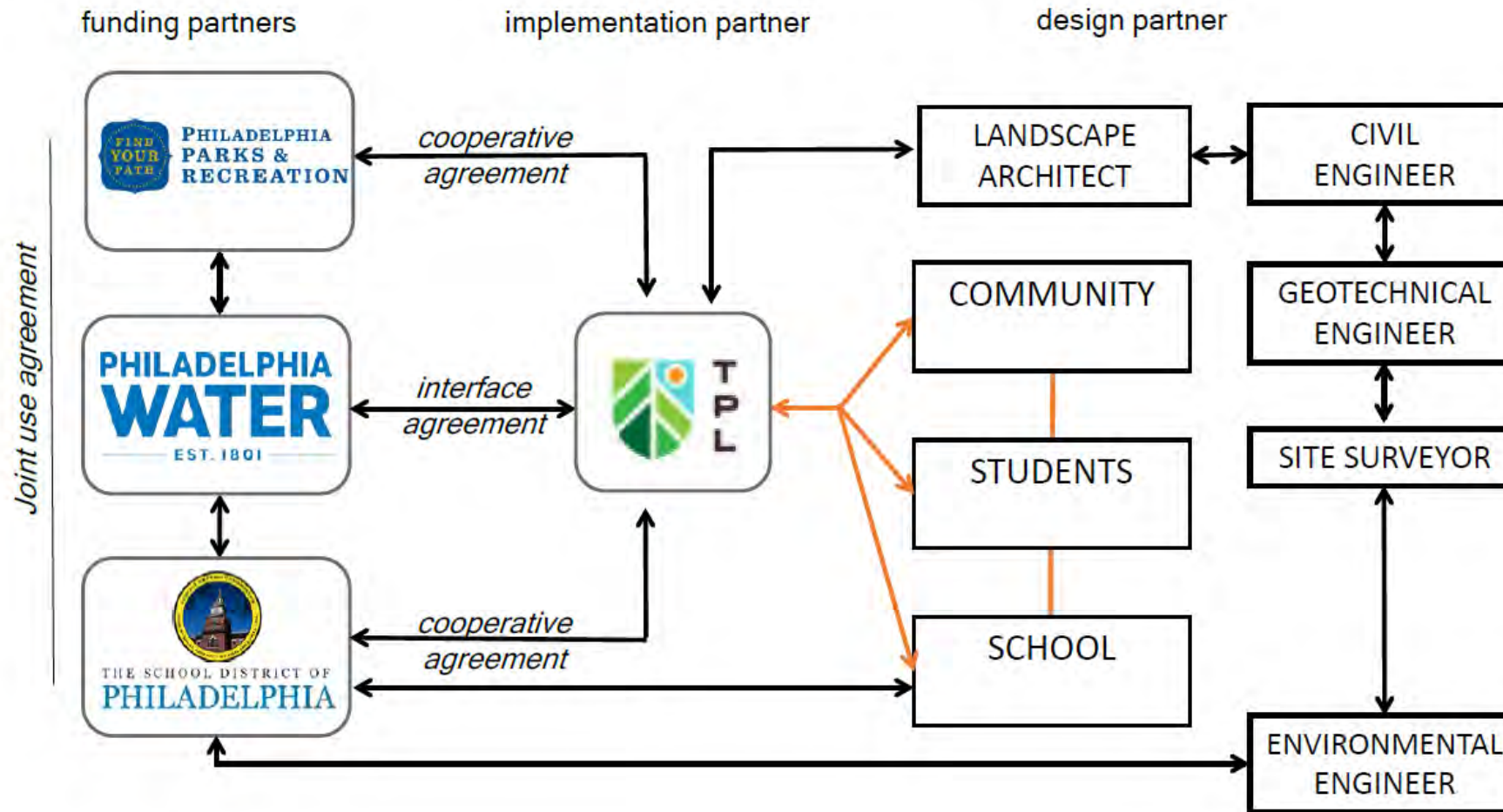


## Design:

Native Plants  
Urban Forestry  
Budgeting



# Public Private Partnerships



*Philadelphia Example*



PS 156 Waverly and LS 392 Brooklyn, NY

We saw these barren asphalt schoolyards and we recognized an amazing opportunity to reinvent them as vibrant city parks.

Photo by: Joe Martinez



Thank you!



**TRUST** FOR  
**PUBLIC**  
**LAND**™

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™





## Paseo Park



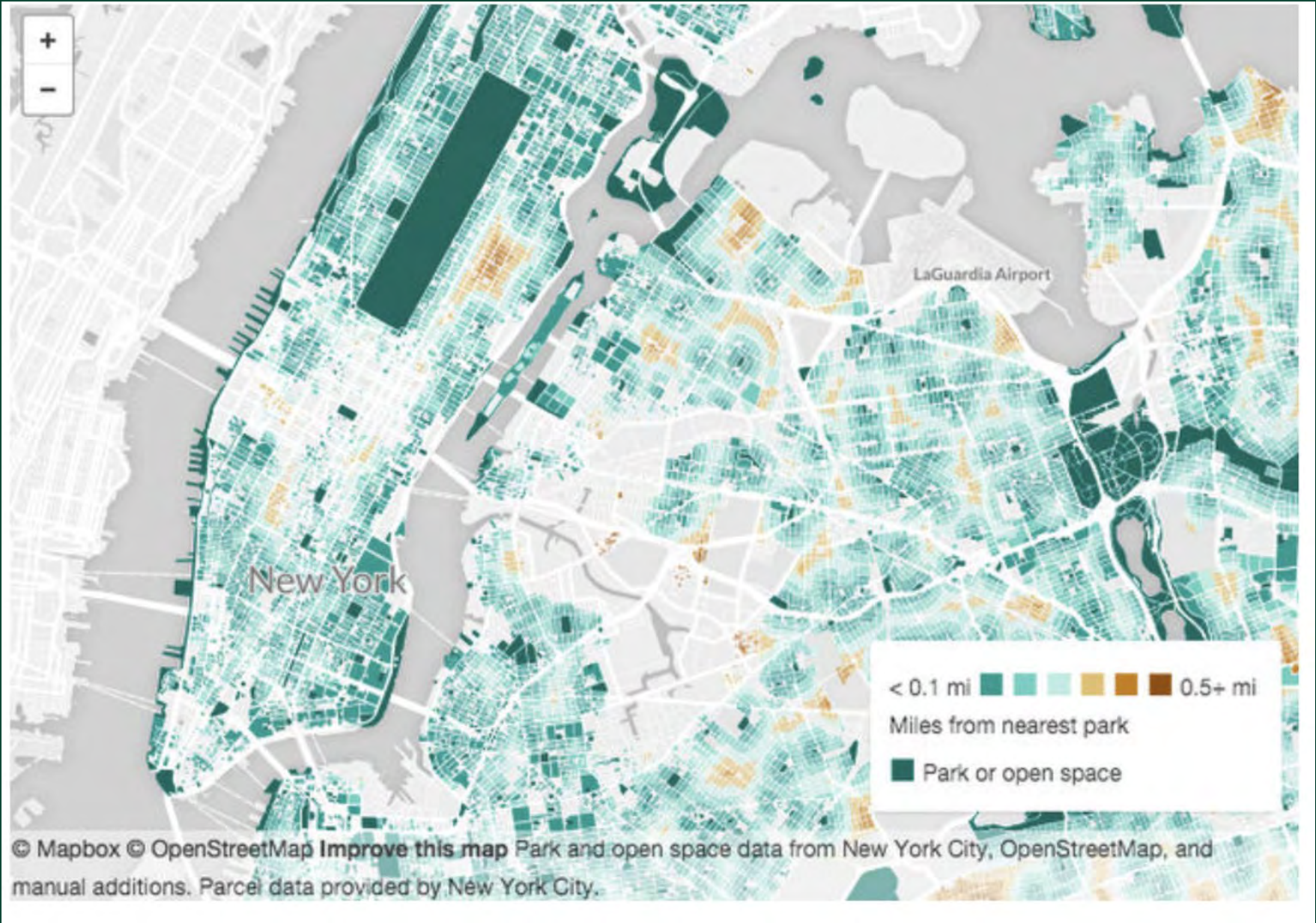
# Paseo Park

*26 blocks of joy!*  
*ছাব্বিশ আনন্দের ব্লক!*  
*¡26 cuadras de alegría!*



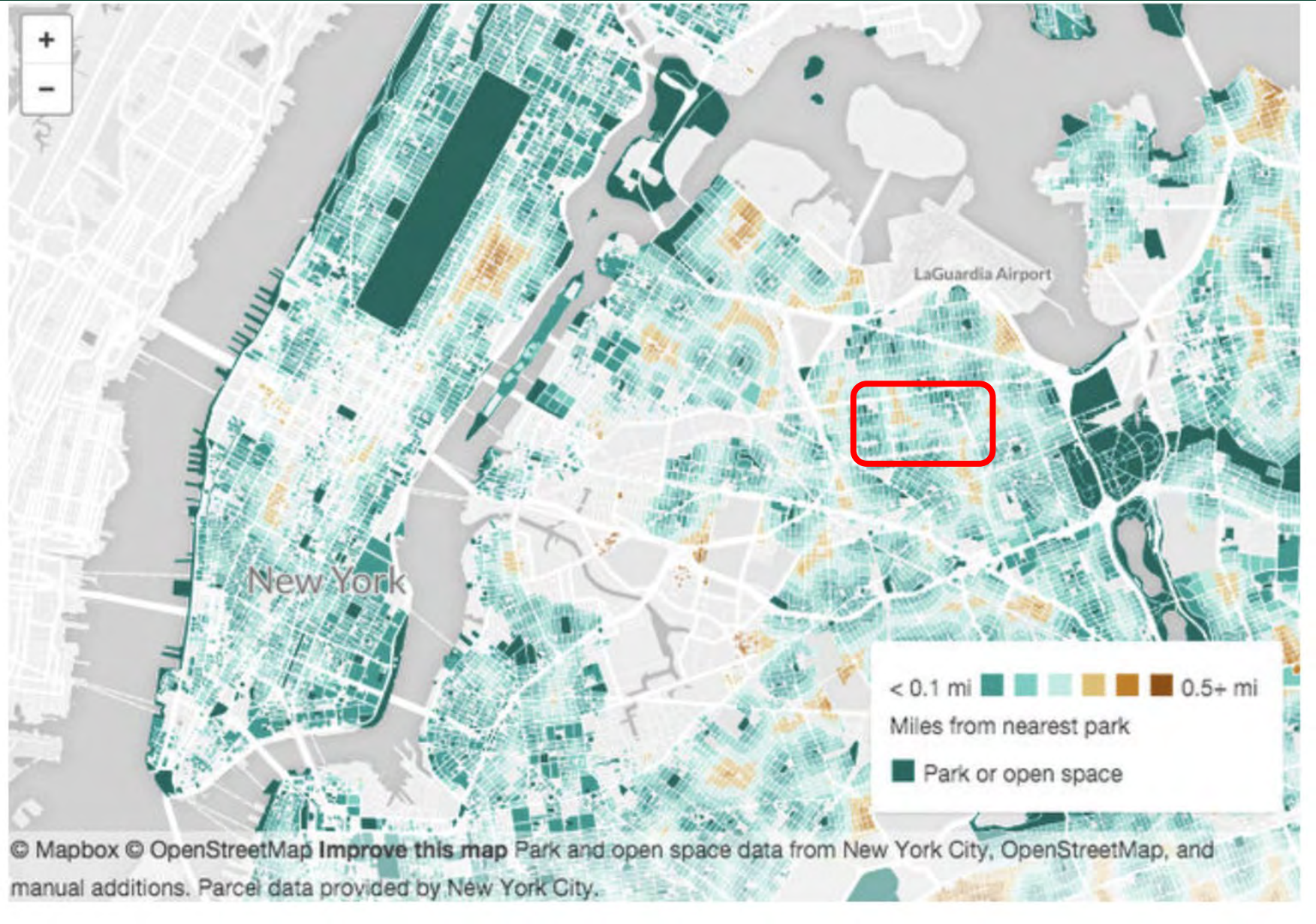


# 1.1 Million New Yorkers Lack Access to Green Space





# Jackson Heights Ranks Last





# Jackson Heights



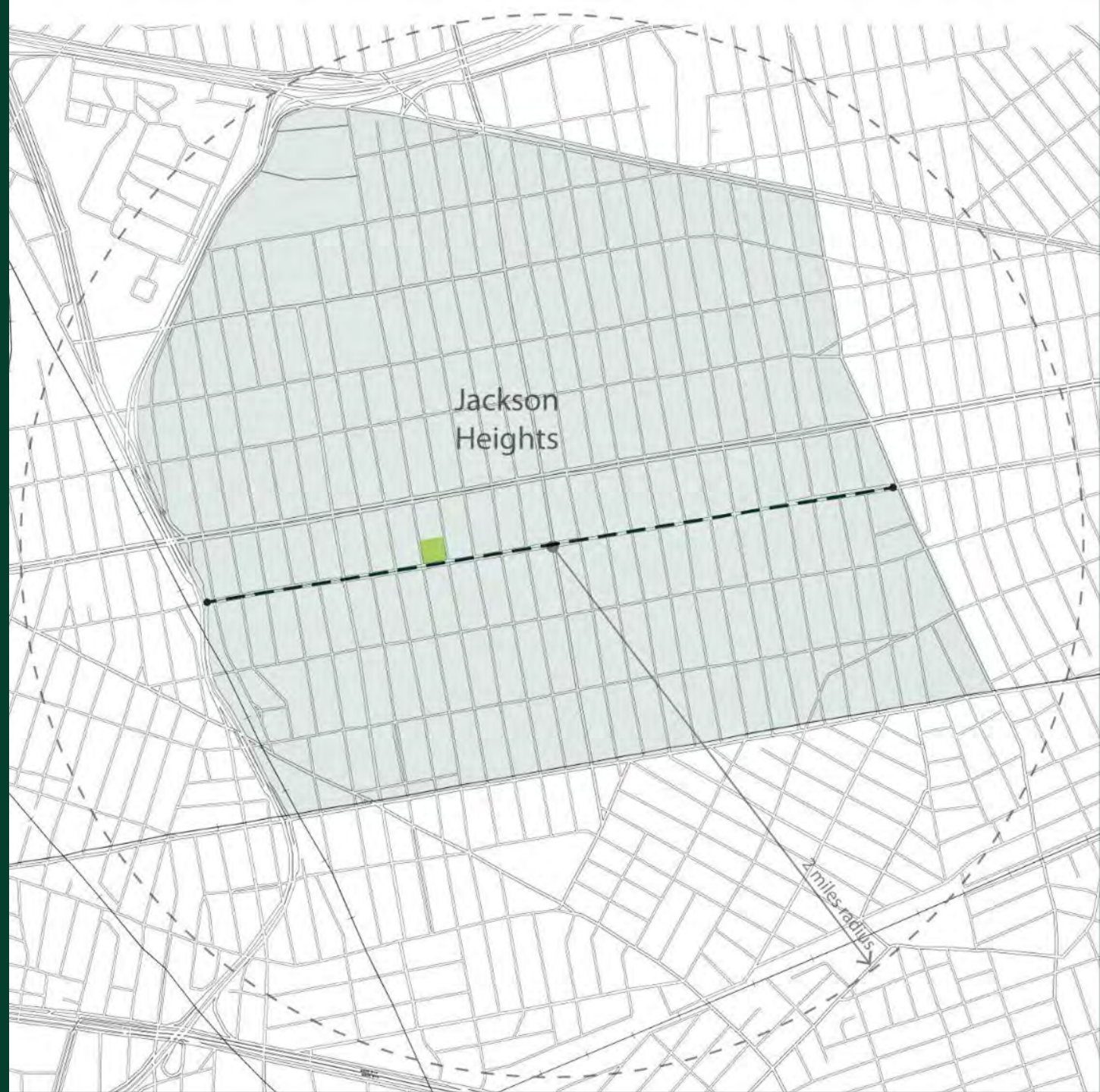


# Jackson Heights:

- Most diverse district in all of NYC
- One of City's most densely populated neighborhoods
- Ranks Last in per capita park space in all of NYC
- Working class community
- Overcrowded public schools
- No community center



**Travers Park**  
**Our Only Public Green Space**  
is mostly concrete –  
with 1 small area of grass





# The “Mound” at Travers Park











## Our public schools lack outdoor space

- Pick up & Dismissal is packed
- Limited recess
- Limited outdoor learning
- 10 am lunchtimes



"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

**Late Edition**

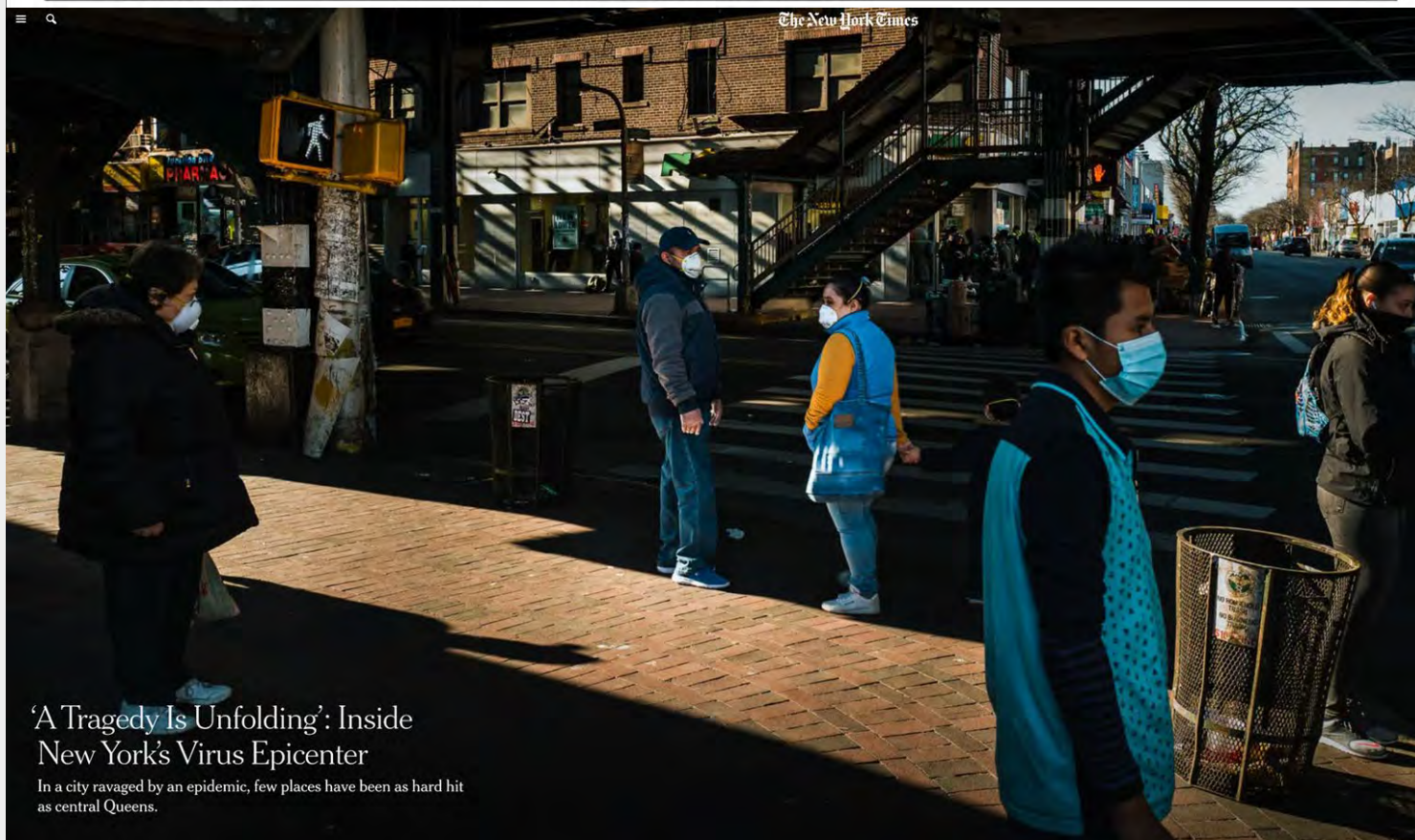
Today, some sunshine giving way to clouds, spotty showers, high 52. **Tonight**, clear to partly cloudy skies, low 37. **Tomorrow**, mostly sunny, high 55. Weather map, Page A22.

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\$3.00



## 'A Tragedy Is Unfolding': Inside New York's Virus Epicenter

In a city ravaged by an epidemic, few places have been as hard hit  
as central Queens.

"We're the epicenter of  
the epicenter...  
This has shaken the whole  
neighborhood."

—Councilman Dromm



Elmhurst Hospital Center, a public medical facility, was among the earliest and hardest hit hospitals in New York.











# Paseo Park





# The New York Times



Children racing on 34th Avenue in Queens, which is closed to vehicles to give people more space.

## On Car-Free Streets, Rethinking Urban Living

By WINNIE HU

The metal barriers go up every day at 8 a.m. to keep the cars at bay.

Then 34th Avenue turns into a 1.3-mile-long block party. It serves as a connector not for vehicles but for people in a space-starved, melting pot neighborhood in Queens.

### A CITY STIRS *A Lesson in Queens*

People come out for coffee breaks and stay for free classes in yoga, zumba, salsa and Mexican folk dance. A pop-up circus brought clowns, jugglers and acrobats to delight children. Dogs in rainbow-hued outfits and their

owners marched together in a pride parade. One couple even got married on the avenue with a state senator officiating.

"This is a whole exercise in what is possible," said Myrna Tinoco, 45, a social worker who roller skates on the avenue with her 6-year-old son. "At a minimum, just to have the legroom to

*Continued on Page A14*

"34th Avenue in Queens has become the gold standard for an open street that puts people ahead of cars."

Published Aug. 9, 2021





# PASEO PARK

A daily parade celebrating  
the diversity and humanity of  
our community





# Outdoor space for 6 public schools along 34th Ave





## Safe Passage for 7,000 School Children





## Current State, 7am to 8pm – Light touch changes, easy to reverse





## Current State

### The New York Times

#### How New York City Lost 63 Miles of Pedestrian-Friendly 'Open Streets'

The program, which was made permanent last year, gave New Yorkers more public spaces, but is retreating in many areas. Community advocates hope to stop that slide.

*"Eventually, as the city reopened, traffic sneaked back as drivers squeezed past the barriers."*

*—The New York Times, Aug. 2022*





## NYC is Behind



Barcelona



Paris (2030)



# Our Vision



- NYC's First park from street space in a residential community.
- Outdoor space for 7 schools
- Climate Infrastructure
- Civic engagement
- 7.5 acres of park space
- New paradigm for parks in NYC



ECLECTIC AVENUE

# Paseo Park planning is a public process

Three events in six days as 34th Ave. transformation continues

by [Peter C. Mastrosimone](#), Editor-in-Chief Aug 15, 2024



The Alliance for Paseo Park is continuing its series of public events, including tonight, Aug. 15, and this Sunday, for people to join in planning the future of Paseo Park, the 26-block stretch of 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights that has morphed into a hybrid space. Above, Dawn Siff, center, and Luz Maria Mercado, both of the Alliance, speak with Ligia Gualpa, right, executive director of the Workers Justice Project, at a June 18 workshop.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Linear Park petition (2,600 signed)
- 12 Community Ambassadors
- Online survey – *3 languages*
- 8 Pop-Up Tabling Events
- 2 In-Person Workshops



# Our community wants park space





# What We Heard:

- Green park space
- Safe respite from cars and mopeds
- Outdoor space for schools
- Protection from flooding
- Holistic design – services & accessibility







# Challenges

1. Unprecedented
2. Limited DOT “tool kit”
3. Opening Imaginations
4. Fundraising
5. Equity
6. Fear





## Next Steps

1. Community consensus
2. Sustainable organization
3. New model for creating public space







Thank you.



## Art Activation

### PAINTING PASEO : 26 BLOCKS OF JOY





Art Activation

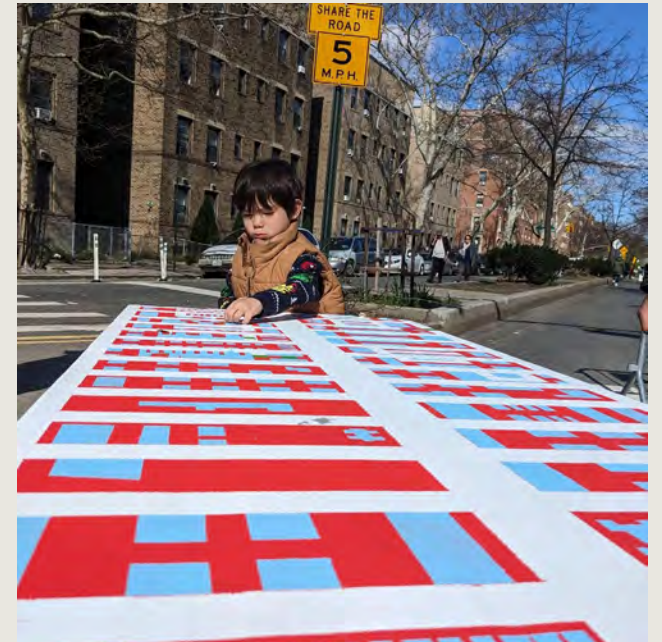
PAINTING PASEO : 26 BLOCKS OF JOY





# Our Part – We will keep building

- Local community support
- Local political support
- A new conservancy model
  - support from foundations, institutions and local donors*
  - Central Park Conservancy
  - Friends of the High Line
  - Charles H Revson Fdn
  - Tiger Baron Fdn





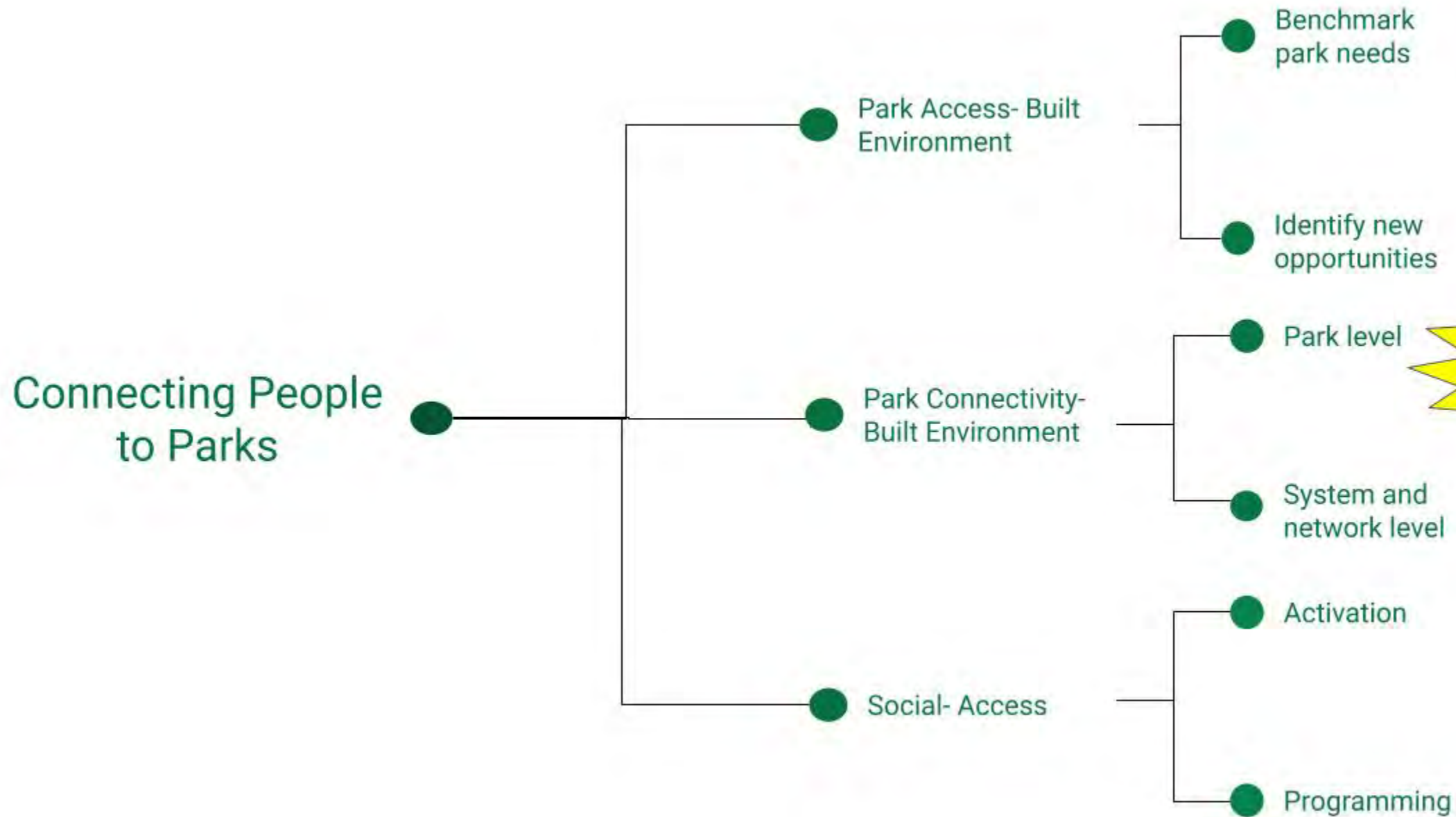


**What's Next?**

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## **Upcoming Sessions:**

**February 13- Safe Routes to Parks**

April 10- Integrated Mobility Planning with Parks

June 12- Social Access: Activation and Programming





## Upcoming Webinar

**Date:** January 23, 2025 from 2pm-3pm ET

**Title:** Federal Funding Opportunities to Close Park Equity Gaps

**Presenter:** TPL Federal Affairs Team

**Goal:** Learn about the current landscape of federal funding opportunities and their grant requirements (eg- ORLP)

**Opportunity:** Aside from highlighting federal grants, TPL will share how you can receive direct assistance from our Federal Affairs team to apply for these grants.





## Exit ticket

Please take a moment to share your feedback with us.







Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised \$93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

To learn more, visit [tpl.org](https://tpl.org).

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

# Thank you!

Christina Jang

[christina.jang@tpl.org](mailto:christina.jang@tpl.org)