



Crossing Sectors to Create Parks

Session 3 | January 15, 2026

Crossing Sectors to Create Parks

Session 3 Agenda

- Session 2 Recap
- Grounding Community Vision in Shared History
- Presentations
 - Paula Acevedo, El Paseo Community Garden
 - Annalisa Heppner, City of Providence
- Q&A

Transition

- Breakout Groups
- Next Steps



VISION
Unlock
Lands for
Parks and
Greenspaces



1- Identify Park Gaps



2- Ground in Community Values



3- Navigate Land Use



4- Activate the Shared Space

Finding the Gaps

How do you approach identifying under-utilized lands that can fill park equity needs?



Lens 1: Highest Need

Use existing tools to identify...

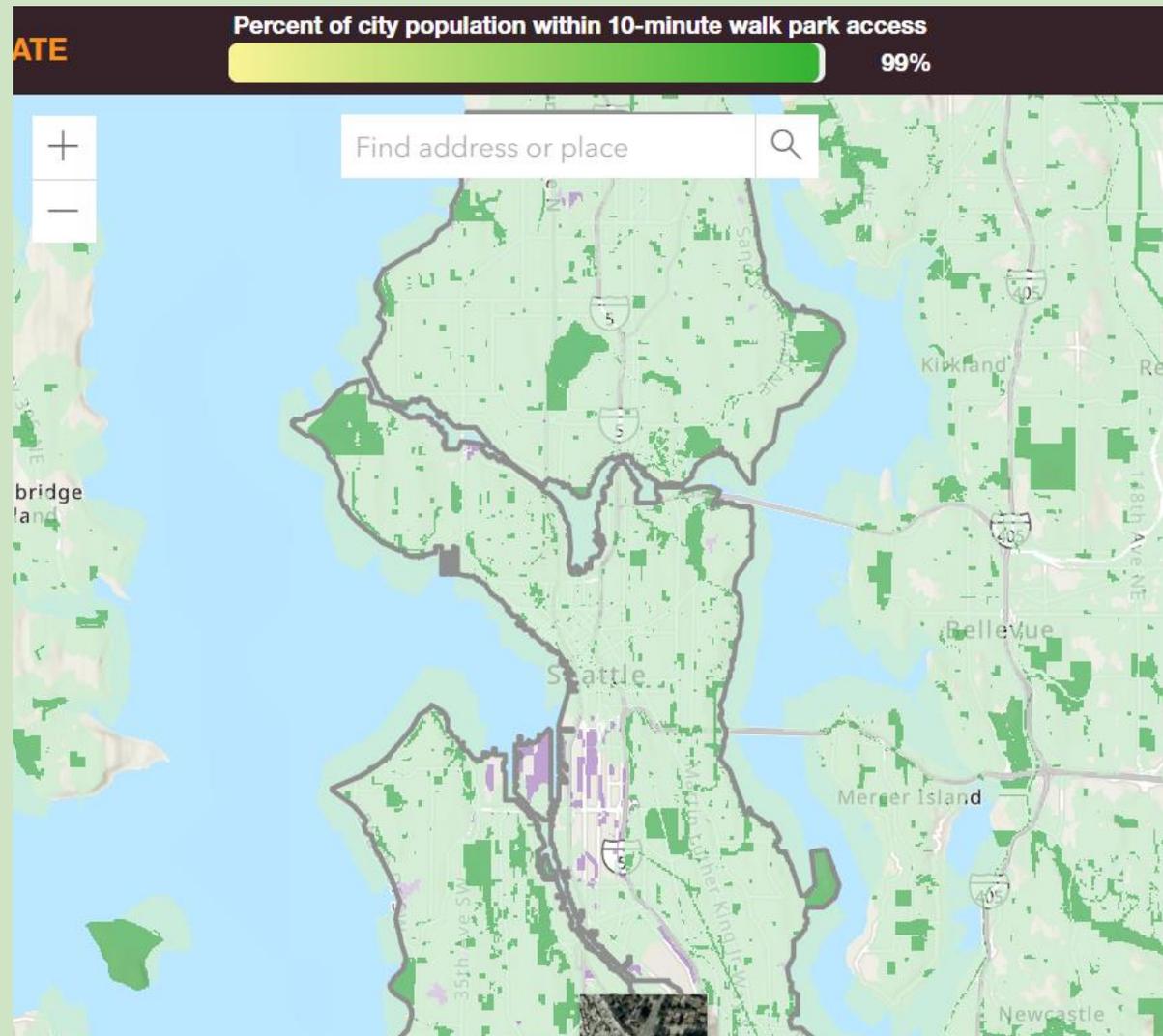
- Where are existing park equity gaps?
- Where is there community need?
- What are your agency's priorities?

Factors to Consider

- Health
- Heat
- Flooding
- Demographics
- Economics
- Population growth
- Aging infrastructure

Tools & Resources

- ParkServe
- Park Needs Assessment or Master Plan
- Comprehensive Plan
- Local GIS data



TPL's ParkServe platform.

Lens 2: Organic Activation

Use local knowledge to identify...

- Are there places where people already congregate organically?
- Are there any non-park spaces that are already functioning as parks?

Gather Local Knowledge

- On-the-ground staff
- Neighborhood groups
- Tourism data
- Positive or negative use
- Visitation data



Portland, ME. Photo by Jerry Monkman, 2015.

Lens 3: Partner Potential

Use data and staff knowledge to identify...

- Who owns the land in your priority areas?
- Who manages these parcels?
- Who can your agency feasibly work with?
- How can partnerships support resource-sharing?
- Who is ready to “prove” the concept?

Lands to Look Out For:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Libraries | <input type="checkbox"/> Utilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant lots | <input type="checkbox"/> Cemeteries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rights-of-way | <input type="checkbox"/> Public housing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schools | <input type="checkbox"/> City-owned |



Long Beach Non-traditional Land Partnerships Webmap, 2024.

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4- Activate the Shared Space

Assessing Community Context

Understanding the space's current conditions, community context, and historical/political backdrop:

- What is this space now, and who currently uses (or avoids) it?
- What histories or stories shape this site?
- What does each stakeholder know or hold (data, memory, access)?
- Where do we need each other to deepen understanding?



Defining a Shared Vision

Aligning around a shared, values-driven vision that responds to community needs and imagines new use.

- Who are the current stakeholders and adjacent communities?
- What values (e.g. belonging, joy, health) do we want this space to reflect?
- Who is positioned to lead or facilitate community voice?
- How do we balance institutional goals with grassroots input?





Appreciative Inquiry for Park Project Assessment

A strengths-based approach to evaluation and planning

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

- A strengths-based approach focusing on what works well
- Builds on successes rather than fixing problems
- Encourages collaboration and positive change
- Provides a complementary lens, as opposed to substituting existing assessments
- Benefits include
 - Builds trust and engagement
 - Encourages creativity and shared ownership
 - Generates energy for positive change

“What problems do you see in this public space?”

versus

“What do you love about this public space and want to see more of?”

Stages

Discover: Identify what works well

Dream: Imagine the best possible future

Design: Co-create improvements

Deliver: Implement and sustain changes



Appreciative Inquiry

Starts with **what works** and builds on strengths.

Focuses on **possibilities and aspirations**.

Generates **positive energy and collaboration**.

Assumes systems grow toward their **best images of the future**.

Problem-Solving

Starts with **what's wrong** and seeks to fix deficits.

Focuses on **gaps and root causes**.

Can create defensiveness or **blame**.

Assumes systems **improve by eliminating problems**.

Case Studies

El Paseo, Chicago

Providence Cemeteries



EL PASEO



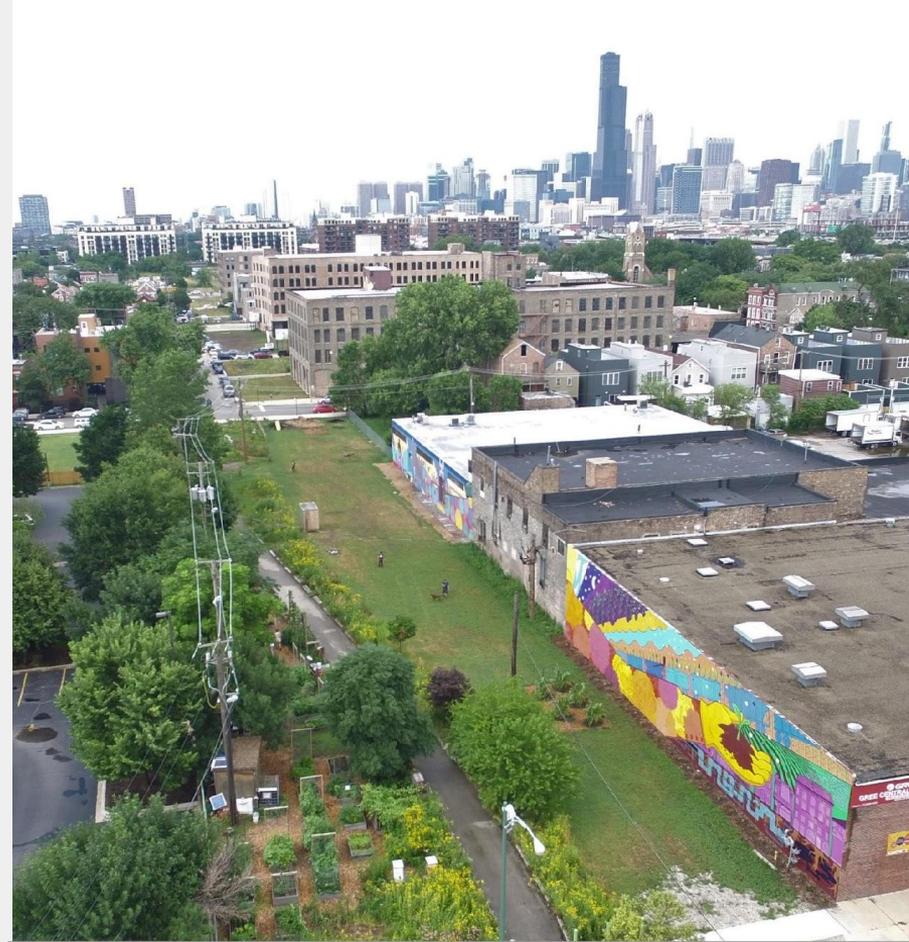
COMMUNITY

GARDEN

PILSEN, CHICAGO

Reclaiming Land & Restoring Community

Presented by Paula Acevedo, Co-Director



neighbor**space**

Protected Community-Managed Open Space



MORE THAN A GARDEN

- Volunteers
- Community conveners
- Cultural stewards
- Organizers
- Environmental justice advocates
- Long-term land caretakers
- Educators



El Paseo Community Garden's mission is to cultivate wellness, connection, and collective care through inclusive green space and community-powered stewardship.

EMPOWER THROUGH NATURE





LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY INDUSTRY

PILSEN (2019)

30,637 Population - 70.3% Latinx

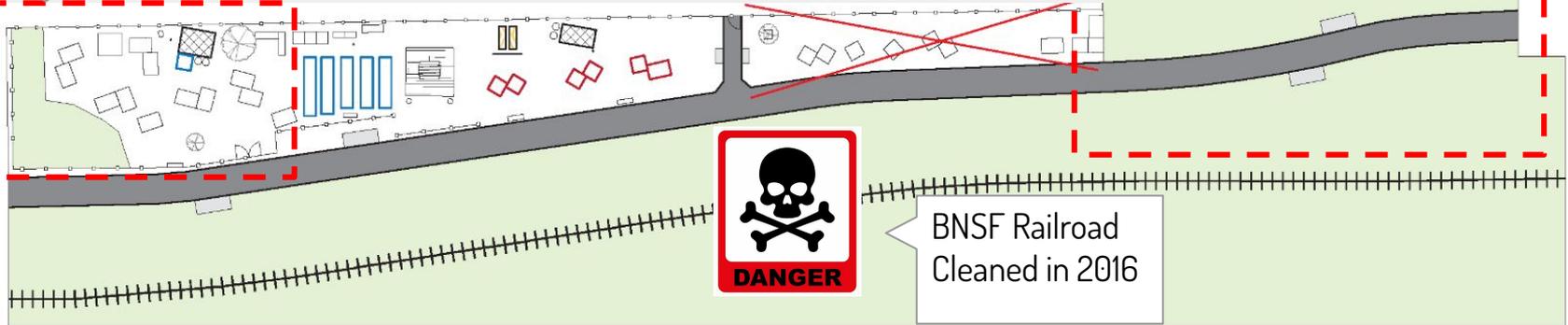
Contaminated
Brownfield
Former Metal Smelter
Cleaned in 2013 by EPA



Original garden
area in 2009



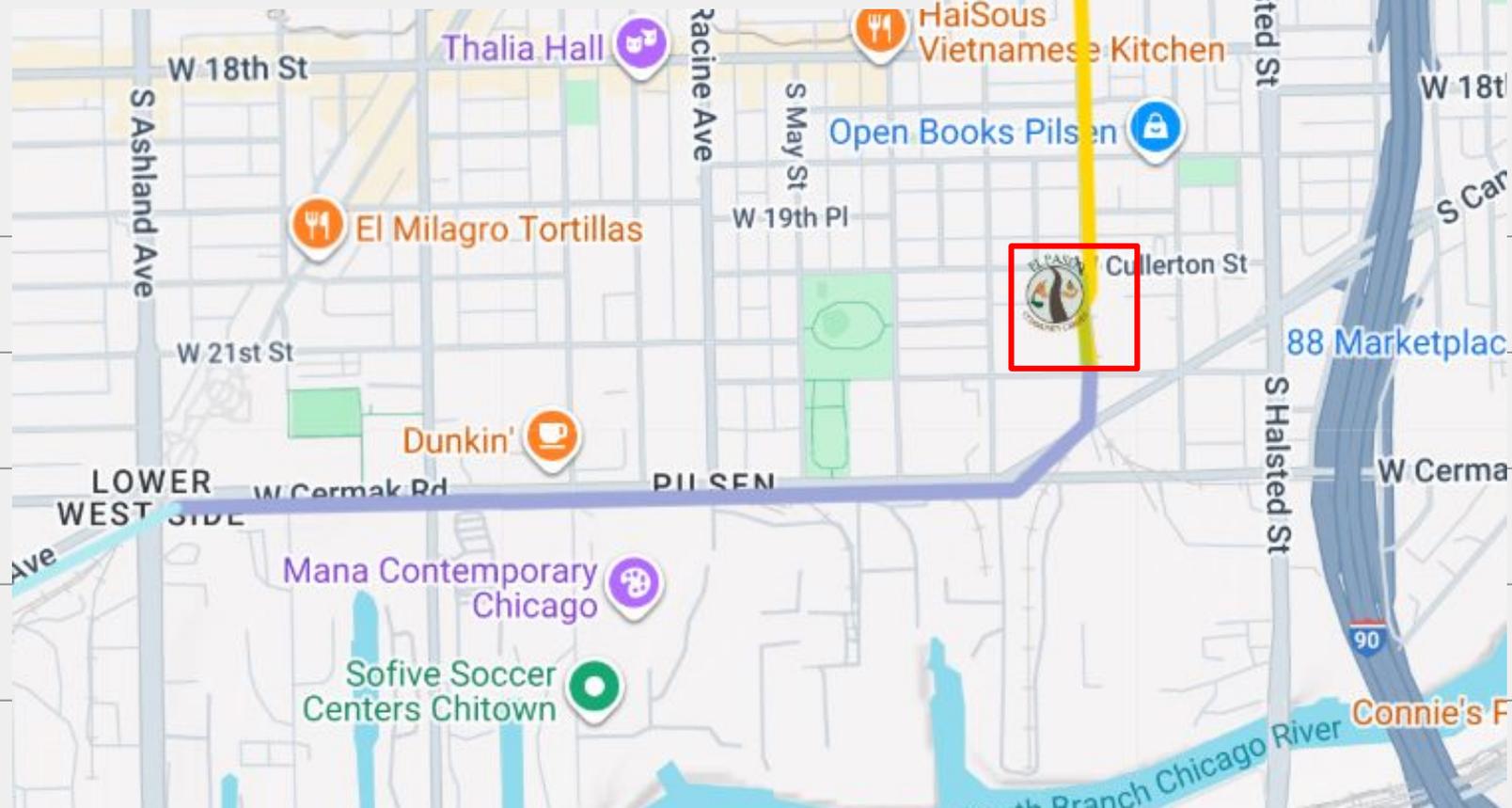
W. 21ST ST.



BNSF Railroad
Cleaned in 2016

W. CULLERTON ST.

RAILS TO TRAILS

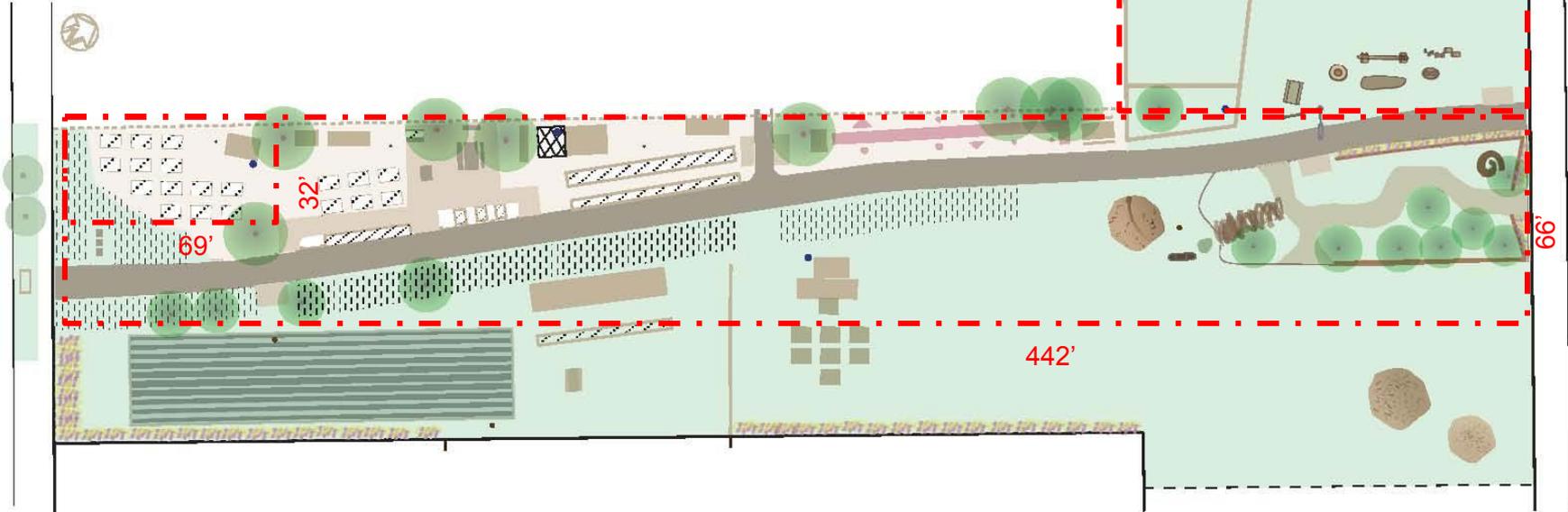




EXISTING PLAN

Expansion possible due to environmental clean-up advocated by environmental justice workers and land acquisition by city officials, and the non-profit land trust NeighborSpace.

947 W. Cullerton Expansion Design owned by NeighborSpace



WHAT CREATIVE PLACEMAKING MEANS TO US



Trust & Reciprocity



Iterative & Responsive



Inclusive & Accessible

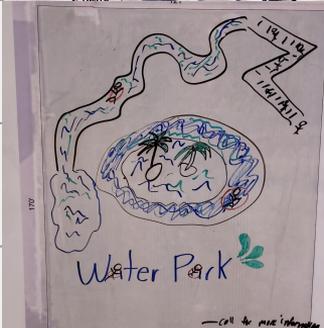
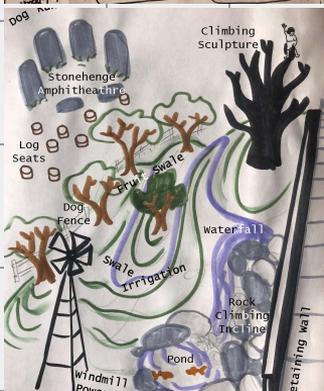
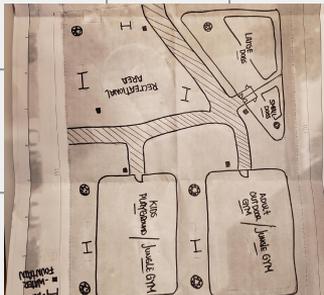


Cultural Identity



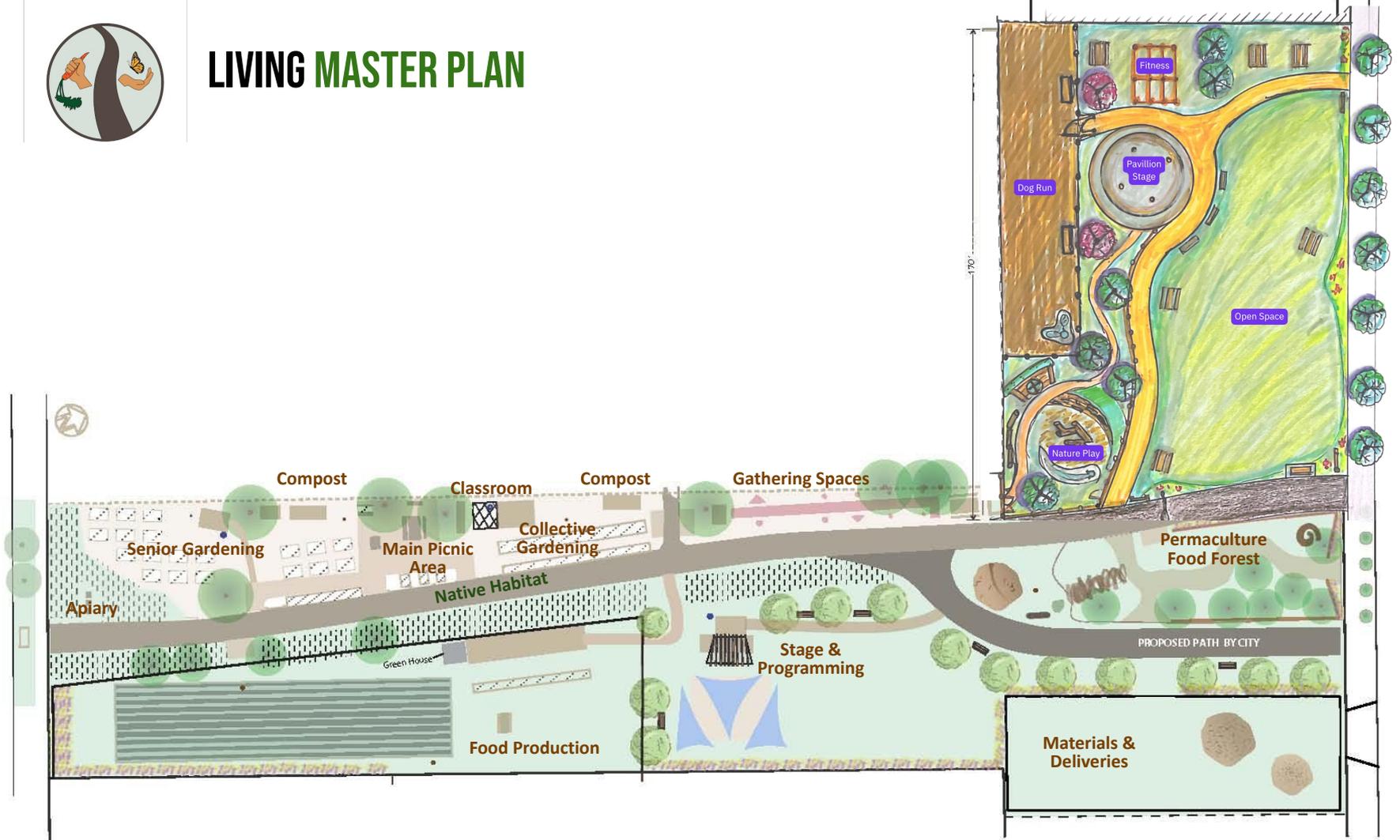
Hands-on / Co-Creation

Community Engagement That **Builds**
Social Infrastructure





LIVING MASTER PLAN



SHIFTING MINDSETS

GREENSPACE BENEFITS



Safety & Play



Health & Environment



Food Security



Nature Conservation



GREENSPACE IS A RIGHT!

CITY RECOMMENDED GREENSPACE

2 ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS

ONLY 1.54 ACRES PER 1,000

RESIDENTS IN PILSEN

HEAL RELATIONSHIPS TO NATURE.







PROGRAMS

Conservation - Wellness - Education

- Stewardship Days
- Senior Gardening
- Collective Gardening
- Beekeeping
- Quail Stewardship
- U-Pick Farmstand
- Community Market
- Residency Programming
- Community Events & Education
- Tree Ambassadors
- Compost





Welcome to El Paseo Community Garden

BY ENTERING THIS SPACE YOU AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING COMMUNITY GUIDELINES:



Be accountable for yourself, your intentions, words, and actions. Respect this space so it's welcoming for other people and other living beings who find sanctuary here (plant, animal, insect, and mushrooms).



Manage your waste as a conscientious guest. Clean up after yourself and use trash cans and cigarette receptacles.



Be responsible for your pets. Leash dogs and pick up any waste they produce.



Communicate with compassion, regardless of a person's: color, size, shape, age, ability, gender, orientation, nationality, culture, politics, housing status, income, or profession.



Caringly guide others to this sign if you feel they need to be reminded of these community guidelines.



If you are in immediate danger, call 911. To provide a suggestion or report a non-emergency concern please submit a comment by scanning the QR code below.



VOLUNTEER SUNDAYS

10 am - 1 pm

- Weather permitting
- Off on holidays
- See our Event Calendar

CONTACT US

Scan to learn more about this site, get involved, or donate.

www.elpaseogarden.org

(773) 234-6168



This garden is maintained by volunteers and donations.

This land is protected by:



neighborSpace
community-managed open space

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

- Gentrification and representation
- Rogue projects/events
- Off leash dogs
- Safety and Interpersonal conflicts
- Vandalism, Theft, & Littering
- General understanding of the space and how its operated

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Transition from Fiscal Sponsorship to 501c3
- Shared Governance and responsibility
- Job Creation & Social Enterprise
- North Lawn Development
- Growth of Stewardship for larger proposed rails-to-trails corridor
- Community Center and Trailhead Office



RECOMMENDATIONS:

***COMMUNITY
TRUST IS
FOUNDATIONAL***

- Support community-led stewardship models. Stewardship must be built into design from day one.
- Provide flexible funding for early activation to help test ideas and build momentum. Stewardship is real work.
- Integrate community voices early and often. Cultural identity is not an “add-on”—it’s the backbone.
- Collaboration with city agencies is essential for long-term success. Break down departmental silos to streamline collaboration and Protect residents



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IS NOT

just about transforming land— it's about transforming relationships, reciprocity, empowerment, and possibility.



Thank you

info@elpaseogarden.org



@elpaseogarden



Nuestra Herencia

Legacy Film Project
Proyecto Cinematográfico de Legado



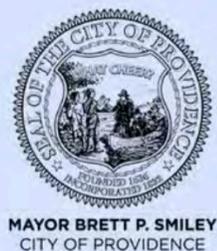
ON THE
REAL
*****FILM

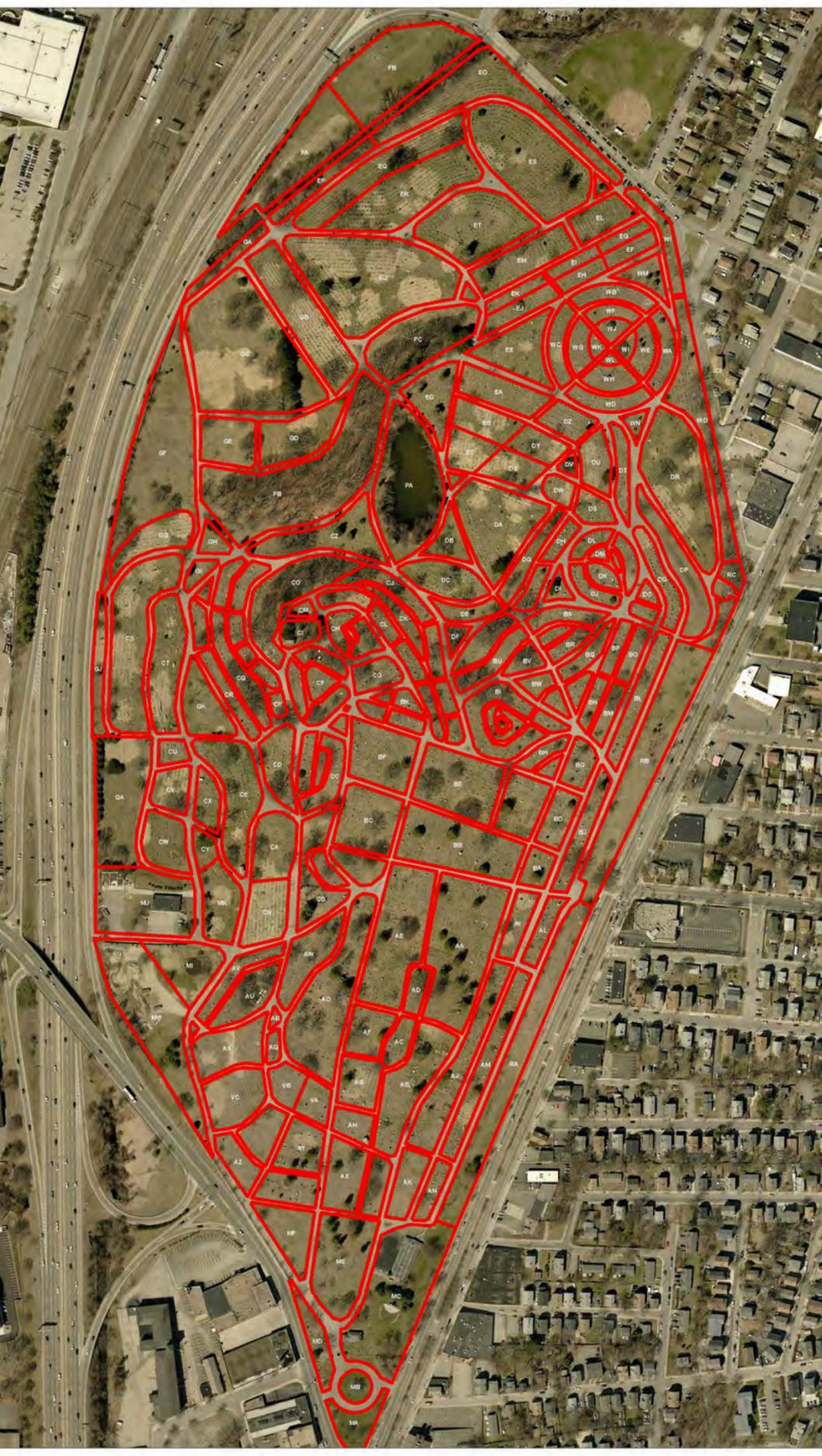
CEMETERIES

spaces for the living

Activating cemeteries as green spaces, historical destinations, and making connection in unexpected places

Annalisa Heppner
City of Providence Cemetery Director





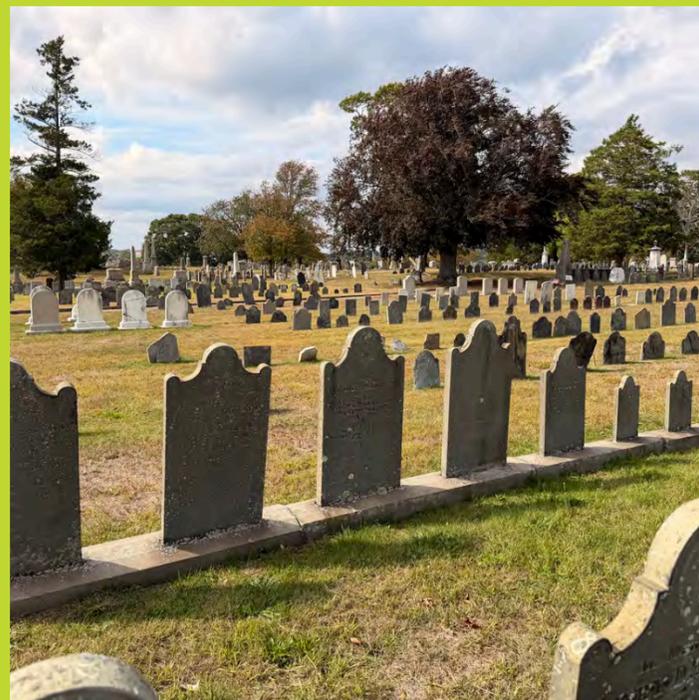
OUR HISTORY

325 years

Founded in 1700, North Burial Ground is one of the city's longest continually operating municipal services, with burial available to all, regardless of race, class, social status as enslaved for free, or religion. It was also always a multi-purpose space

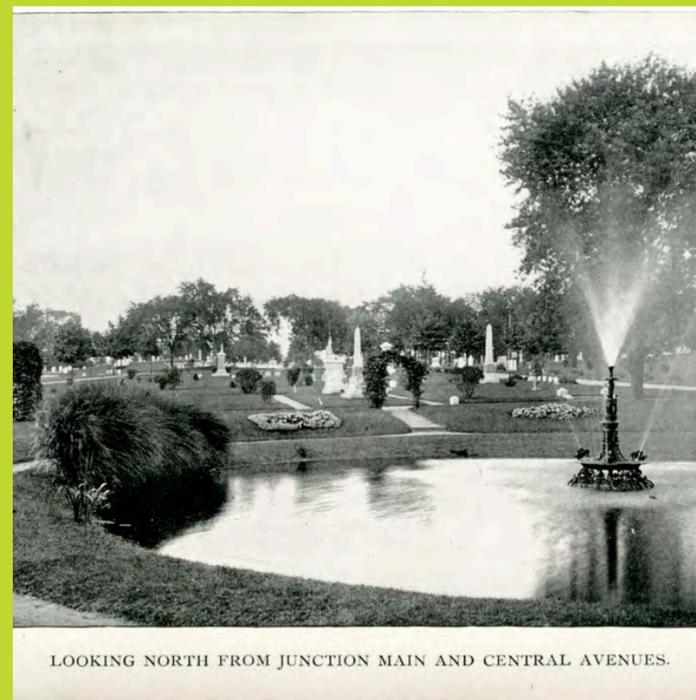
BURYING GROUND

1700-1848



GARDEN CEMETERY

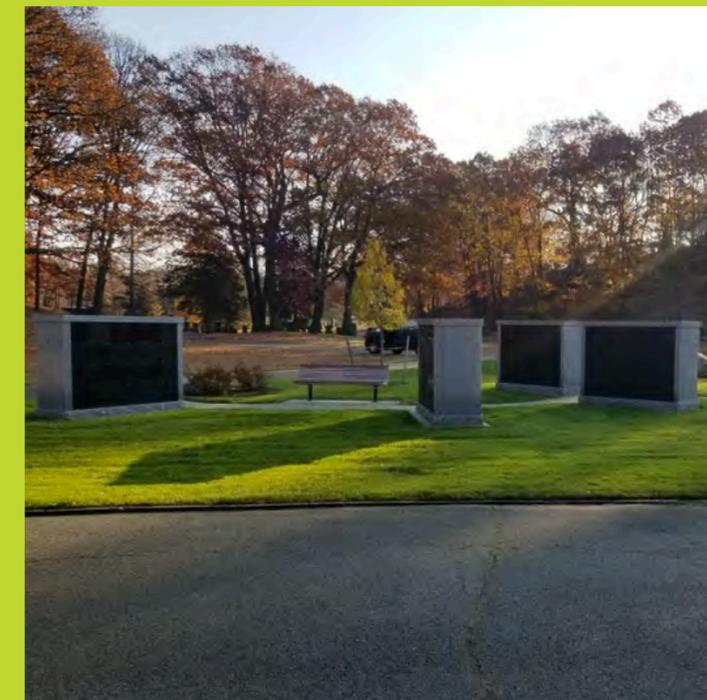
1840s-1910



LOOKING NORTH FROM JUNCTION MAIN AND CENTRAL AVENUES.

LAWN PARK

1910s-Today

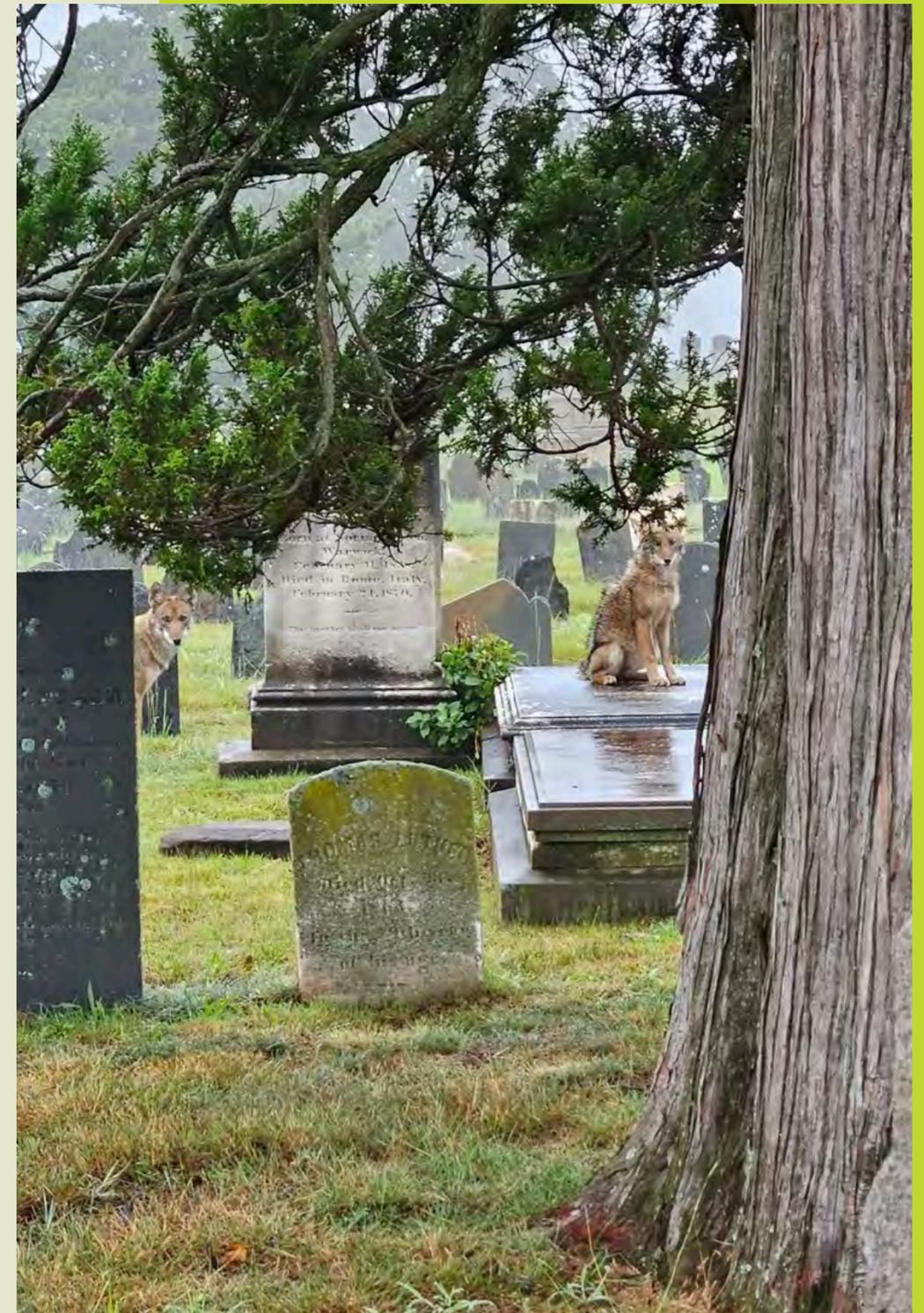


TODAY

greenspace + historical destination + cemetery

The mission of North Burial Ground is to **Remember** the deceased, **Comfort** the living, and **Preserve** the historical cemetery as a destination for the community.

At NBG we have a responsibility to care for the burial spaces of the deceased, to foster a healing relationship for those living after a loss, and to create meaningful connections to NBG even without a loved one interred in the cemetery.



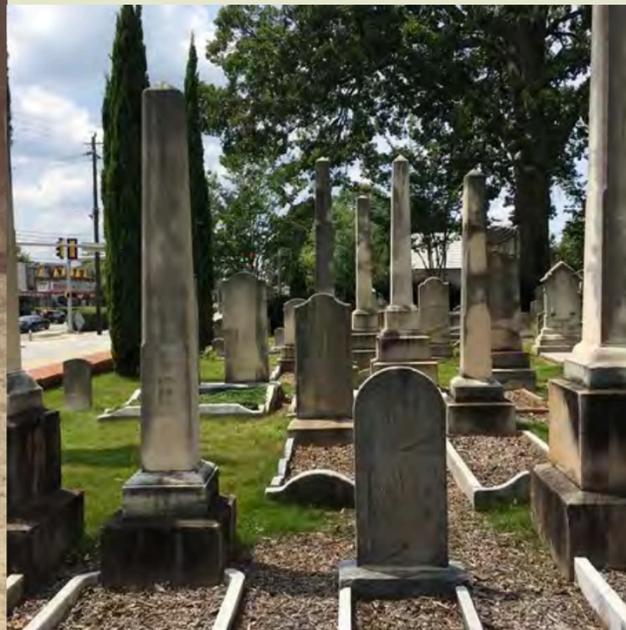
CONTINUATION

Cemeteries as gathering spaces is actually a very old tradition, and cemeteries built after the 1840s were designed to be visited.

NBG is far from the only public cemetery acting as a greenspace and public history site

OAKLAND CEMETERY

Atlanta, GA



SLEEPY HOLLOW CEMETERY

Concord, MA



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY





ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

periods of investment & divestment

factors

- Cemeteries are culturally dependent
- Boomer generation less interested in burial, thus less interested in cemeteries
- Considered a waste of space and municipal resources
- Competition from non-profit and religious cemeteries
- Cemetery shifted from independent department with own board to Department of Public Works, and finally to Parks

timeline

- Late Victorian: Rapid development
- WPA-WWII: Investment as jobs program
- Post-war era: busy as a cemetery, but choosing “low maintenance” strategies.
- 1970s-1990s: Major changes to allow for potential sale
 - destroyed historic structures
 - closed receiving tomb
 - prioritized adding graves without planning
 - staff reduction & de-professionalization of office staff
- 2000s-Now: Reinvestment in the cemetery
 - Rehiring a director dedicated to cemeteries
 - Emphasis on multi-use space and building programming
 - Infrastructure improvements coming



WHAT DOES “ACCESS” MEAN?

physical

- Car gates are restricted to specific hours, 365 days a year
- Office open regular business days and hours
- Burial available 6 days a week
- Pedestrian access via 3 gates 24-hours, 365 days a year
- 40+ programs and tours per season (May-November)

informational

- Historical or genealogical information available via email or in-person records request
- Developing a public facing cemetery management system



COMMUNITY PERCEPTION

previously held beliefs

negative

- “Abandoned”
- “For people who are destitute”
- “Only the mayor can decide who is buried there”
- “Creepy”
- “You only care about rich people’s graves”

positive

- “Hidden gem”
- “Solitary”
- “My backyard”
- Strong sense of individual ownership
- “I’ve always walked my dog off leash here”
- “I own a lot here, so I am a land owner”

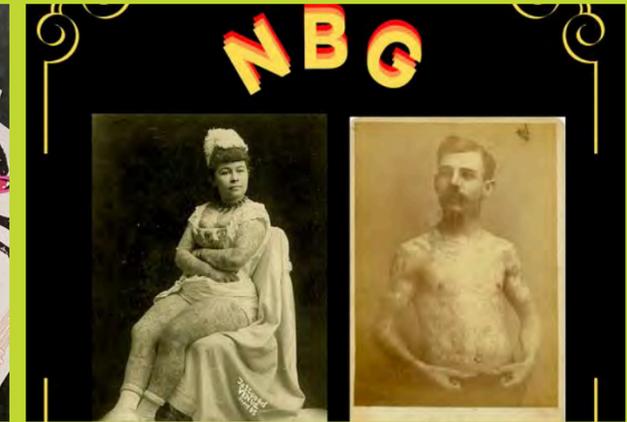
neutral

- “I thought the gates were always locked”
- “You never reopened after Covid”
- “I’m not really a ‘cemetery person””

HISTORY our foundation and future

Our original programming was built on the idea that history is a draw for the public. We create opportunities to engage with the history of NBG, Providence, Rhode Island, and the country.

Starting cemetery activation on the historical helps soothe community apprehension.



INTENTION

We build our programming with three pillars, all with some wiggle room for interpretation.

ARTS & CULTURE

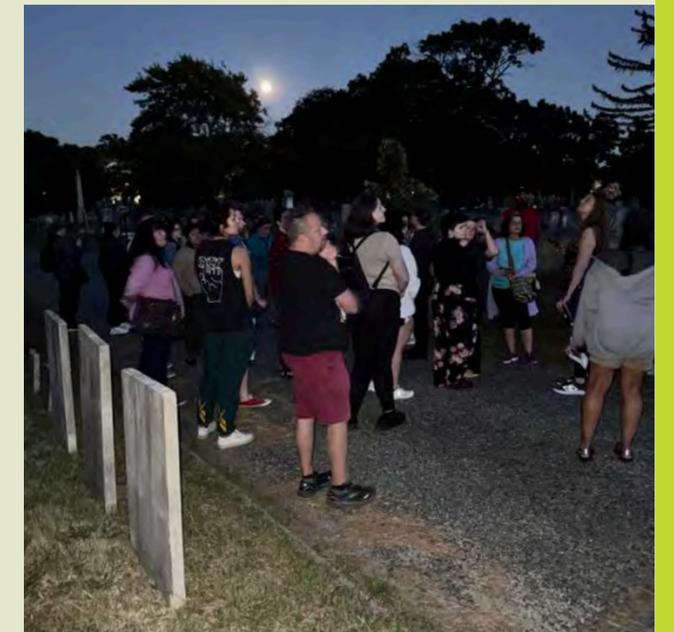
Mausoleum Hill Sessions
Cemetery Scenes
Sunday 1899
NBG Reads

MEMORIALIZATION

Dia de Muertos
Juneteenth
Docent Tours
Ghost Tour
Death Cafe

ENVIRONMENTAL

Earth Day is Every Day
Moon Hikes
Bird Walk
Tree Tour





COMMUNITY PERCEPTION

overcoming previously held beliefs

be expansive

- Say “yes” when you can
- Accept community partnerships or seek out community partnerships that align with your mission and values.
- Allow discomfort to exist-some of our most well-received programs were ones I had some discomfort over.
- Adapt to your audience-it might surprise you.

be clear

- Know when to say “no” and articulate why you are saying “no.”
- Be willing to share the “behind-the-scenes” when people have concerns.

be reliable

- Only say “yes” when you know you can deliver
- If it’s a “no” for one person, it’s a “no” for every person.
- Have a rain plan

NOTES ON COLLABORATION

Not all cities own cemeteries-so how can municipalities tap into cemetery spaces or the rich community of people who love cemeteries?

**ABANDONED
CEMETERIES ON
PRIVATE LAND**

**SUPPORTING
PROGRAMMING AT
PRIVATE NON-PROFIT
CEMETERIES**

**ENGAGING CEMETERY
AND DEATH POSITIVE
MOVEMENT
ENTHUSIASTS**



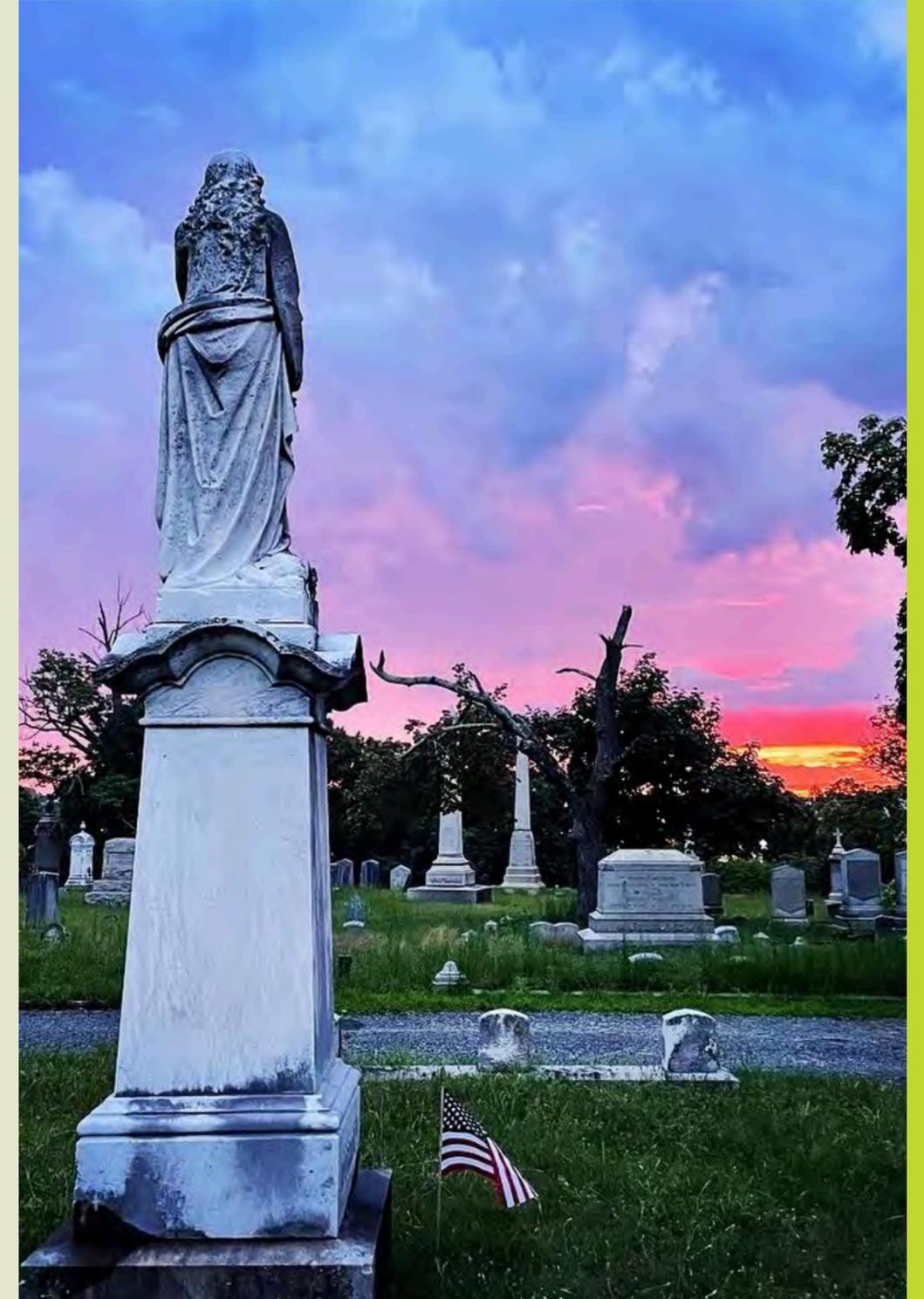
OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

**organizational support + built in audiences
+ leveraging historic preservation**

Is your cemetery in the right position for organizational support? Who or what do you need to understand within your municipality

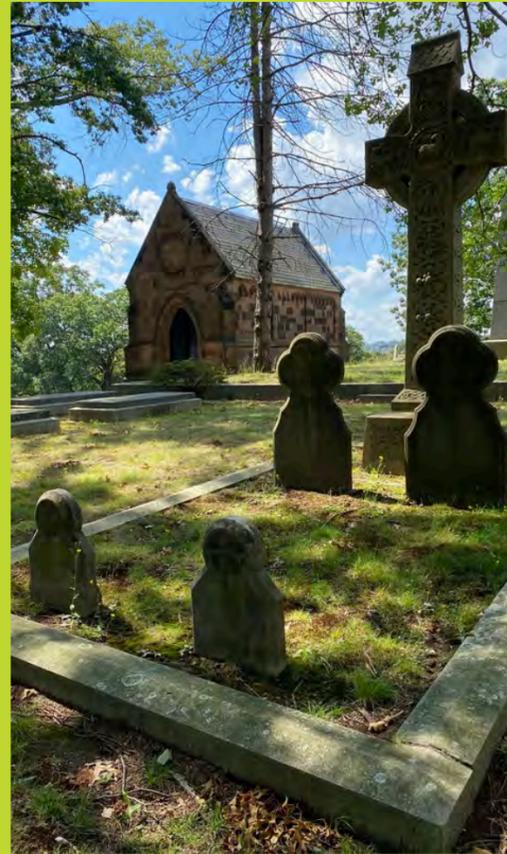
Cemeteries have audiences already-which groups exist in your community?

- Legacy or heritage organizations
- Historical societies
- Taphophiles
- LGBTQIA+ (especially youth)
- Historic preservationists
- Environmental enthusiasts



HOW DOES NBG
FILL A NEED?

burial
academic
environmental
social



Q&A

Please share your questions in the chat!



March 12
Navigating Land
Use: Policies,
Partners, and
Possibilities

Sign up for
our next
webinar!

Committed
Cohort

Stay on the line
We will split into
peer discussion
groups shortly!



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://www.tpl.org).

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

Thank you!

Sophie Neuhaus

Sophie.Neuhaus@tpl.org



**TRUST FOR
PUBLIC
LAND™**

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

**Crossing Sectors to Create Parks
Breakout Session**



Welcome!

In this committed cohort, we will...

1. Meet every other month, over 5 sessions
2. Engage in peer exchange, knowledge sharing, and circulating resources
3. Share feedback (via exit tickets) to inform topics for subsequent sessions

Crafting a Vision through Appreciative Inquiry

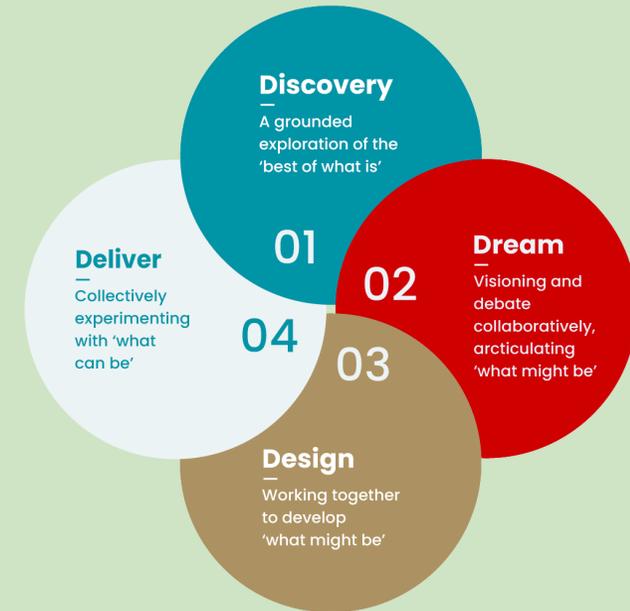
12 minutes

Independent Work (3 min.)

1. Think back on the site(s) you explored during the last session.
2. Consider:
 - What are the advantages of working with this space?
 - Who are the existing super users?
 - What are the great opportunities?
 - What is already nearby that can be leveraged?

Small Group Discussion (9 min.)

1. In groups of 2 or 3, share:
 - Why did you choose your space(s)?
 - What are the advantages and opportunities of the space(s)?
 - How did this format of analysis differ from your usual approach?



Crossing Sectors to Create Parks:

Session 3 Exit Ticket



Complete your Exit Ticket!

Click the link below or the QR code to complete your exit ticket before you log off today:

<https://forms.office.com/r/uzAuPjku95>