

PARK EQUITY COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Summary Report

Aligning Park Equity and Affordable Housing: City Insights and Strategies

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Acknowledgements

This report builds on insights shared through the 2023–2024 Park Equity Community of Practice track *Parks Plus Affordable Housing*, which included approximately 75 stakeholders from 20 cities. We thank them all for their insights, contributions, and time shared throughout this year-long training and peer learning program.

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Trust for Public Land's 10-Minute Walk® program developed this report as part of the effort to help cities create parks that drive equitable, healthy, and thriving communities. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented here, as well as any errors, are those of the Trust for Public Land.

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Executive Summary

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 4 million acres of public land, created more than 5,504 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, raised $112 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected nearly 10 million people to the outdoors.

TPL works to scale this impact through systems-level change by identifying recurring barriers to parks and public land delivery and developing repeatable solutions that help governments, nonprofits, and communities overcome them. Parks bring people together, but the leaders and practitioners who shape these spaces are often left siloed and disconnected from their peers. Since Fall 2021, the **10-Minute Walk®** program has convened the Park Equity Communities of Practice to provide a national forum for information exchange and collaborative problem-solving across a range of high-impact issues in the field. To date, the Communities of Practice have brought together over 1,000 stakeholders including city officials, planners, and parks professionals from over 250 communities.

The *Parks Plus: Affordable Housing Community of Practice* (CoP) track held in 2023–2024 explored practical ways to bridge the disconnect between the development of parks and the creation of affordable housing. These two priorities are often addressed separately in city planning, yet both are essential to community well-being. Over nine months, the CoP brought together practitioners in housing, planning, parks, and community development to share examples, lessons, and challenges from their own cities and to examine how parks can be built alongside or integrated within affordable housing developments to advance more equitable outcomes.

A central takeaway from the CoP is that while limited land, funding, and policy support often lead parks and affordable housing to be treated as competing priorities, these two systems can reinforce one another's benefits when intentionally aligned. When planned together, they strengthen community health and well-being, enhance community cohesion, and support environmental and social resilience. Participants also noted that integrated approaches to parks and affordable housing creation can open new opportunities for collaboration across sectors, funding alignment, and design innovation.

This report summarizes the key themes, examples, and insights discussed in the CoP. Discussions centered on questions such as:

- How are cities currently connecting parks and housing through planning, design, development, and investment decisions?
- What partnerships, policies, and funding tools are helping to make those connections work in practice?
- What lessons can be drawn from case studies to guide more equitable, lasting community outcomes?

To build shared understanding across many geographies and market contexts, the CoP identified three emerging development types where parks and affordable housing integration is most evident:

- **Masterplanned Communities:** Parks and housing are co-designed as part of large, coordinated redevelopment.
- **Park as Catalyst:** New or improved parks spark nearby investment, creating opportunities for proactive affordability strategies.
- **Housing as Catalyst** Affordable housing development prompts the creation of new or improved parks nearby.

Across these examples, participants emphasized the role of local government leadership, policy alignment, durable partnerships, and creative funding models. They also shared common challenges, such as siloed funding, regulatory barriers, and the difficulty of maintaining parks in under-resourced communities.

Key Insights Include:

- **Integrated parks and affordable housing multiply benefits.** When planned together, they strengthen community health, stability, and resilience.

- **Cities need enabling tools for an integrated approach to parks and affordable housing.** Modernized policies, flexible zoning, and clear development requirements unlock opportunities for integrated projects.
- **Successful projects rely on intentional collaboration.** Durable, cross-sector partnerships are essential across planning, funding, design, and long-term stewardship.
- **Diverse funding stacks make projects possible and sustainable.** Integrated efforts depend on blending municipal, federal, private, and philanthropic sources—and securing sustainable maintenance funding.
- **Community priorities and equitable development must guide design.** Early, inclusive engagement and anti-displacement safeguards help ensure benefits for existing residents.
- **Redevelopment and adaptive reuse create key openings.** Industrial transitions, vacant land, and infrastructure projects can provide opportunities to combine parks and housing.

This report serves as a summary of CoP dialogue and is also informing future work. Building on the insights and questions raised by the cohort, Trust for Public Land is advancing new partnerships to develop deeper research, shared language, and practical tools to help cities intentionally integrate parks and affordable housing. New resources and materials will be shared at 10minutewalk.org/parks-housing/.

Parks Plus: Affordable Housing Track

Communities of Practice Model

Since Fall 2021, the 10-Minute Walk® program at TPL has convened the 10-Minute Walk® Park Equity Communities of Practice as a national forum for peer learning and collaborative problem-solving across high-impact issues. The "Parks Plus: Affordable Housing" track ran from November 2023 to July 2024 and brought together cities across the country to address the need for the integrated planning of parks, open space, and affordable housing. The track was designed and facilitated in collaboration with evolve environment :: architecture (evolveEA), a Pittsburgh-based design and consulting practice with a multidisciplinary approach and deep experience in integrated planning for parks and housing.

Sessions convened participants from 19 cities across the U.S., representing a range of population sizes, geographies, and market contexts. Cities in the cohort ranged from those experiencing rapid growth to those facing population decline. They also varied in levels of public and private investment shaping land use and development choices. This diversity highlighted the many conditions under which parks and affordable housing must be planned and implemented.

Because the development of parks with affordable housing requires collaboration across sectors, each participating city was asked to form an interdisciplinary team representing at least two relevant fields. The final cohort included members from:

- Parks and recreation departments
- Housing and planning agencies
- Economic and community development agencies
- Housing authorities
- Land conservancies

Participating Cities: Atlanta, GA; Aurora, CO; Boston, MA; Buffalo, NY; Chattanooga, TN; Cleveland, OH; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Lewisville, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis, MN; New York, NY; Pittsburgh, PA; Raleigh, NC; San Diego, CA; Scranton, PA; Seattle, WA; Washington, D.C.; Wheeling, WV.

Session Schedule

Session Date	Session Topic	Case Study
November 15, 2023	National trends in parks and affordable housing development	Story Mill Park in Bozeman, Montana
January 17, 2024	Policies and programs to support developing parks with affordable housing	Southend Urban Village and Davis Park in Lexington, Kentucky
March 6, 2024	Funding models to align affordable housing development with parks and green space	Buckeye-Woodhill Neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio
May 1, 2024	Role of sustainability goals in furthering parks with affordable housing	Yesler Terrace Redevelopment in Seattle, Washington
July 10, 2024	Affordable housing and park development typologies	Highland Bridge Project in Saint Paul, Minnesota

Introduction and Context

Parks are essential, multifaceted solutions to some of society's most pressing challenges, from social isolation and fragmented communities to the escalating effects of climate change. Parks connect people, strengthen communities, and build resilience across the nation. Yet, 1 in 3 people in the U.S.—including 28 million children—do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home. Where parks do exist, disparities persist: in neighborhoods with a majority of people of color, parks are on average half the size of those in majority-white neighborhoods and serve nearly five times as many people; in majority low-income neighborhoods, parks are about four times smaller than those in wealthier neighborhoods.[1]

At the same time, cities are grappling with a housing affordability crisis. Too often, parks and affordable housing are treated as competing priorities in the face of scarce land, limited funding, and constrained policy frameworks. In reality, when planned together, they can reinforce one another—creating livable, inclusive communities where residents have access to both stable housing and high-quality outdoor spaces.

However, cities must also account for risks. Without anti-displacement strategies, new or improved parks can unintentionally contribute to residential displacement, pushing out long-time residents before they can benefit from public investment. Millions of people, particularly in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, still lack access to quality parks, and the addition of new green space without safeguards can deepen inequities. TPL's publication *Great Parks Should Not Uproot Communities* highlights how cities can navigate this challenge by identifying the drivers of "green gentrification" and embedding anti-displacement strategies directly into park planning and investment.

The *Parks Plus: Affordable Housing Community of Practice* invited cross-sector city teams from across the country to examine the opportunities and challenges of coordinating green space development with housing. Over five facilitated sessions, participants shared examples, explored enabling policies, and discussed how collaboration, creative funding, and community-centered planning can achieve integrated outcomes. This report captures the key themes, case studies, and lessons that emerged. It is intended to serve both as a reflection on shared learning and as a foundation for future action.

Parks and Affordable Housing: Establishing a Shared Framework

As cities across the U.S. continue to grapple with a growing affordable housing crisis, there is increasing recognition among planners, housing advocates, and parks professionals of the need to align housing and open space development.[2,3] When intentionally integrated, parks and affordable housing can work together to promote equitable, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

To begin this work, participants in the Community of Practice (CoP) identified the need for a shared language and conceptual framework. Because parks and housing practitioners often operate in different policy and planning worlds, establishing common definitions and typologies was an essential first step.[4]

Establishing Common Definitions

To build a shared understanding across disciplines and geographies, participants used the following definitions:

- **Parks and green spaces were defined broadly** to include formal parks with recreation amenities, community gardens, trails, and informal vegetated gathering areas. This inclusive definition allowed for discussion of projects in both high-density urban areas and more transitional neighborhoods.

[1] Trust for Public Land. (2020). The heat is on. *https://www.tpl.org/the-heat-is-on*.
[2] Desilver, Drew. 2024. "A look at the state of affordable housing in the U.S." Pew Research Center, October 25, 2024. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/10/25/a-look-at-the-state-of-affordable-housing-in-the-us/.
[3] American Planning Association. 2024. "A Worsening Affordable Housing Crisis." APA Foresight, Housing. https://planning.org/foresight/trends/housing/#housingcrisis.
[4] Thomas Yee, Sissy Trinh, and Natalie Zappella. "Pathway to Parks & Affordable Housing Joint Development." LA THRIVES and Los Angeles Regional Open Space and Affordable Housing (LA ROSAH). https://larosah.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Pathway_to_Parks_and_Affordable_Housing.pdf.

- **Affordable housing was considered across a spectrum**, from deeply affordable units for households earning 30–50% of the Area Median Income (AMI) to "missing middle income" housing serving those earning 80–120% of AMI. Examples included projects by public housing authorities, nonprofit developers, and private entities using affordability tools such as tax credits, inclusionary zoning, and land trusts.

Emerging Spatial Typologies

Participants examined two general spatial typologies for how housing and parks intersect:

- **Park-integrated Development:** Parks or open spaces are intentionally included within the footprint or site plan of a housing development.
- **Park-adjacent Development:** Affordable housing is developed near an existing or planned park or green space but not physically integrated into the site.

Emerging Development Types

Overlaying the spatial typologies, participants examined three development types where parks and affordable housing are strategically coupled for greater community benefits:

- **Masterplanned Communities:** Parks and housing are co-designed within a coordinated redevelopment or new neighborhood plan, often with strong city or institutional leadership and multiple phases.
- **Park as Catalyst:** A new or improved park sparks investment in nearby housing. While this can accelerate affordability concerns, it also provides opportunities for preemptive anti-displacement strategies.
- **Housing as Catalyst:** Affordable housing development or rehabilitation prompts the creation of new parks or green spaces, either on-site or through nearby public investment.

Masterplanned Communities

Masterplanned communities provide an ideal opportunity to integrate parks and affordable housing into cohesive urban design. These projects often include parks of all scales, from small pocket parks to regional parks and trails, and frequently leverage federal funding programs with open space requirements.

These communities offer valuable lessons for cities seeking to align housing and parks as part of a unified development strategy. The following examples illustrate how large-scale planning efforts can embed public space and affordability into the fabric of new neighborhoods, often leveraging long-term visions and diverse funding sources.

Examples:

- **Lexington, KY – Southend Park Urban Village and Davis Park:** A highway realignment created opportunities for new affordable housing with integrated open spaces.
- **Saint Paul, MN – Highland Bridge Project:** A former Ford automotive plant site was revitalized into a new mixed-use neighborhood that includes both parks and affordable housing.
- **Seattle, WA – Yesler Terrace:** Adjacent to downtown, the Seattle Housing Authority partnered through the Choice Neighborhoods program to reimagine a mixed-income neighborhood with community gardens and open spaces.

See case studies in the Appendix for full project details.

Observations from CoP Discussions:

- Masterplanned developments allow cities to plan for diverse types of housing and parks, often benefiting communities beyond the immediate neighborhood.
- Federal and municipal planning programs, such as Choice Neighborhoods and local comprehensive planning efforts, can catalyze the integration of parks and housing by linking revitalization, infrastructure, and equity goals.
- Extensive community engagement and public approval processes are central to ensuring that design and development outcomes reflect community priorities.

- Cross-sector partnerships among housing developers, municipal agencies, and community-based organizations are essential for aligning funding, design, and programming.
- Philanthropic and private funding often supplement public investment in land acquisition, park planning, design, and programming, which can help enable equity-focused or innovative elements.

Park as Catalyst

New or redeveloped parks can significantly improve neighborhood quality of life. However, they can also raise property values and risk displacing residents unless paired with proactive affordability strategies.

To ensure parks are a force for inclusion rather than displacement, cities are adopting integrated strategies that link green space investment with long-term housing affordability.

Examples:

- **Atlanta, GA – Rodney Cook Sr. Park:** Built after flooding forced the removal of 16 acres of houses in Vine City. To reduce displacement, a nonprofit created a fund to help homeowners in the neighborhood cover property tax increases and supported the development of additional affordable units.
- **Bozeman, MT – Story Mill Park and Bridger View Neighborhood:** Following a failed development that displaced more than 40 households, advocates built Story Mill Park and paired it with missing-middle income housing in the adjacent Bridger View neighborhood.

See case studies in the Appendix for full project details.

Observations from CoP Discussions:

- Parks can become both high-quality community assets and regional destinations. Land use tools such as inclusionary zoning or redevelopment zones can ensure affordable housing accompanies park investment.
- Parks that offer valuable infrastructure, such as stormwater management or mobility corridors, can enhance quality of life but may require thoughtful economic impact assessments and early anti-displacement strategies.
- Parks and housing organizations are often siloed; deliberate collaboration is needed.
- Neighborhood plans and vision documents help align diverse stakeholders.
- Creative financial tools, such as community land trusts, are valuable for securing long-term affordability near parks.

Housing as Catalyst

Affordable housing initiatives can drive the creation of new parks or open spaces, especially in areas with infill opportunities, redevelopment pressure, or legacy disinvestment.

Affordable housing initiatives can sometimes serve as a springboard for public space creation, particularly in neighborhoods facing redevelopment pressure or disinvestment.

Example:

- **Cleveland, OH – Buckeye-Woodhill Neighborhood:** Blighted homes and vacant lots were transformed into both affordable housing and distributed public green spaces. Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity and the Cuyahoga Land Bank led the housing redevelopment, while Western Reserve Land Conservancy and partners created gathering spaces and gardens that improved neighborhood quality of life.

See case studies in the Appendix for full project details.

Observations from CoP Discussions:

- Preserving and developing new affordable housing in existing neighborhoods requires regular reassessment of nearby parks and open space, supported by neighborhood plans.

- New green spaces can serve as critical urban infrastructure managing stormwater, improving air quality, and mitigating urban heat islands in older more affordable neighborhoods that may experience heightened environmental risks.
- Community-based organizations often play a key role in developing new parks alongside housing, shaping community identity and ensuring resident involvement.

Key Questions and Insights

The cohort studied a range of projects across the country and invited participants to reflect on their experiences of developing parks and affordable housing. To guide the sessions, participants considered questions such as:

- How do you encounter public parks and green spaces in the context of affordable housing in your city?
- What are the motivations for building parks with affordable housing?
- Who are the stakeholders driving these developments?
- What level of collaboration exists between different sectors?
- What policies and funding options facilitate or prevent integrated development?
- Can existing policies and funding be used in new ways?
- What role do environmentally focused or sustainability policies and funding play in integrating affordable housing and parks?

Case studies, presentations, and discussions addressed these questions, and participants shared practical insights into how to effectively develop parks and affordable housing across a range of project sizes and contexts. This section summarizes those insights under four themes:

- Local Government Policy, Planning, and Leadership
- Partnerships and Cross-Sector Collaboration
- Diverse and Sustainable Funding
- Development Opportunities and Adaptive Reuse

Local Government Policy, Planning, and Leadership

The cohort reported that challenges and opportunities for integrating parks and affordable housing are highly context-specific, but they are largely shaped by local government policies, planning frameworks, and leadership capacity. Cities set the conditions for how projects move forward through their regulatory systems, planning priorities, and the strength of their civic leadership.

The policies most frequently discussed were traditional land use regulations such as zoning ordinances, subdivision rules, and land use controls. These establish permitted uses across a city and can act as barriers to integration. Variances and amendments are often possible, and approvals are more likely when proposals align with city goals such as higher-density housing or stormwater management paired with green space.

Specialized policies were also discussed as playing a key role. For example, inclusionary zoning can require or encourage a share of units in new developments to be affordable, which can place affordable housing near existing parks. Parkland dedication ordinances (PDOs) were brought up as tools to mandate the inclusion of park space in housing developments. Together, participants shared that these tools can support integration when paired with strong civic leadership.

Across all examples shared, committed leadership emerged as critical to project success. Cities with mayors or agency heads who championed a shared vision were best able to align stakeholders, navigate regulatory complexity, and sustain cross-sectoral partnerships.

Takeaways

- **Political will and coalitions:** Strong leadership and broad alliances sustain projects over time, embedding considerations like maintenance, stewardship, and long-term cost savings into decision-making.
- **Linked priorities:** Connecting broader city goals—such as affordable housing development and improving citywide park or trail access—creates co-benefits for health, connectivity, and equity.

- **Integrated planning:** Master plans and comprehensive plans provide mechanisms to align housing and parks, giving agencies a shared framework for collaboration.
- **Land use and zoning:** Codes remain critical levers; adjustments can open or close opportunities for integration.
- **Development requirements:** Municipal policies may require inclusion of parks or green spaces in new developments, ensuring growth contributes to public space and community well-being.
- **Development incentives:** Density bonuses and tax credits can incentivize new development to include public space, and dedicated funding can help finance the parks needed to support new housing development.
- **Land conversion:** Creative reuse of underutilized parcels offers opportunities for park creation in areas with stronger housing mandates.

Challenges

- **Restrictive zoning** and land use codes can limit or exclude housing from certain areas or limit land available for parks.
- Development requirements such as **parking minimums** reduce potential space for affordable housing and open space.
- Developer requirements for parks sometimes allow for "**private parks**" that restrict community benefit.
- **Rising land and housing construction costs**, combined with pressure to keep properties on tax rolls, limit incentives for public ownership and make long-term park maintenance more difficult.
- Developers may seek **exemptions from park fees or dedication requirements**, undermining policy intent.

> ***Example:*** *In Saint Paul, Minnesota, the Highland Bridge redevelopment shows how a strong master planning process and clear policy tools—particularly the city's parkland dedication ordinance—guided the inclusion of both affordable housing and over 55 acres of new public open space.*
>
> *See Appendix for the full case study.*

Partnerships and Cross-Sector Collaboration

The cohort shared that integrating parks with affordable housing is a cross-sector challenge. Success depends on collaboration among housing, community development, and park agencies, as well as private developers, nonprofits, and community organizations. When residents are engaged as stakeholders from the beginning, projects are more likely to reflect community priorities, attract philanthropic support, and maintain long-term legitimacy.

Participants emphasized that partnerships must be durable, with clearly defined roles and accountability from planning to implementation to ongoing maintenance. Collaborative relationships help bridge funding gaps, align visions, and uphold momentum for projects that might otherwise stall.

Takeaways

- **Sustained partnerships:** The most effective projects build relationships that last from early planning through construction and beyond. A shared mission, not just transactional agreements, supports longevity.
- **Collaborative relationships:** Joint initiatives, such as developing co-funding mechanisms or inter-agency projects, help agencies establish trust before taking on large developments.
- **Neighborhood leaders:** Trusted local actors, including community groups and philanthropies, play key roles in keeping projects aligned with community priorities.
- **Local players:** Hyperlocal developers, unions, and neighborhood institutions can provide insight into resident needs and support affordability goals.
- **Community engagement:** Community development processes often drive the open space discussion, ensuring parks are responsive to resident priorities.

- **Clear roles and responsibilities:** Development agreements or shared maintenance contracts clarify expectations, create accountability, and prevent disputes.

Challenges

- Ensuring **park quality and maintenance** over time requires cooperation beyond traditional responsibilities. Housing advocates and park stewards often work in silos and sustaining long-term alignment between them requires intentional effort.
- Overlooking questions of **belonging and community use** can limit the benefits of new parks near affordable housing. Without established and ongoing engagement and programming, residents may not feel that the spaces are truly for them.

> ***Example:*** *In Lexington, Kentucky, the Southend Park Urban Village and Davis Park redevelopment illustrates how cross-sector partnerships between city agencies, consultants, a community land trust, and residents shaped both affordable housing and a revitalized park space.*
>
> *See Appendix for the full case study.*

Diverse and Sustainable Funding

Participants shared that to ensure sustainability and long-term success, parks and affordable housing projects require a diverse mix of funding sources, including federal, state, municipal, private, and philanthropic contributions.

The cohort highlighted several federal programs run by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that provide critical resources:

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program** provides annual grants to state and local governments to develop urban communities, tailored to local needs and priorities.
- **Choice Neighborhoods Program** offers flexible resources to support affordable housing and neighborhood improvements, including public amenities like parks.
- **HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program** distributes formula grants to state and local jurisdictions for affordable housing development.

All three programs emphasize consolidated planning and primarily fund housing development. Two programs–the Choice Neighborhoods and CDBG programs–allow a portion of funds to be allocated for green space construction. The Choice Neighborhood Program asks that investments catalyze neighborhood improvements through "Community Assets and Amenities" that can include parks and green space.[5] Similarly, the CDBG Program allows funds to be used for public improvement projects that are publicly owned and open to the general public, which can drive construction of public parks within a housing development.[6] [7]

Another federal funding program referenced as a potential source for mixed-use neighborhood developments is the EPA Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program, which supports community remediation and reuse of brownfield sites to clean contaminated lands to levels that could support either parks or residential buildings. Two other federal funds cited would allow for green space development in existing neighborhoods: the USDA Urban Agricultural Innovation Production Grant and the National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund's Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, both of which can fund new urban parks.

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[5] "Request for Information for HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Grant Selection Process and Award Implementation." 2024. Federal Register. August 12, 2024. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/08/12/2024-17822/request-for-information-for-huds-choice-neighborhoods-grant-selection-process-and-award.

[6] Community Development Block Grant Program. "Chapter 2. Categories of Eligible Activities." https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_17133.PDF

[7] HUD, Office of Block Grant Assistance. n.d. "CHAPTER 6: PUBLIC FACILITIES, SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS AND PRIVATELY-OWNED UTILITIES." In *Basically CDBG (July 2012)*, 6–1. https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Basically-CDBG-Chapter-6-Public-Facilities.pdf.

A final financing tool introduced was value capture. Value capture leverages the increased property value generated by public investments, such as parks or infrastructure, to finance further development or community benefits. These strategies ensure that public investments stimulate private investment while generating resources for long-term affordability and maintenance.

Takeaways

- **Diverse funding stack:** Building a "funding stack" that combines federal, state, municipal, private, and philanthropic sources is key. Many creative projects have used non-traditional sources for funding, including highway funds or open space preservation funds.
- **Project scale:** The scale and complexity of a project determine funding opportunities and difficulties, e.g., projects on former industrial lands require remediation and associated funding.
- **Leveraging existing development plans:** Targeting areas of a city or county where there is already development activity can give access to existing investment and funding.
- **Land trusts and land banks:** Cities and nonprofit partners can use land trusts or land banks to hold land, especially in areas experiencing high market pressure, and ensure affordability for both housing and park spaces.
- **Joint development with transit funding:** Partnering with transit agencies on Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) projects allows cities to leverage transit funds to build parks and affordable housing near transit hubs.
- **Long-term maintenance funds:** Creating a dedicated maintenance fund helps ensure that parks and shared spaces remain sustainable.
- **Value capture mechanisms:** TIF (tax increment financing) districts allow cities to reinvest increases in property tax revenue from rising property values back into community improvements.

Challenges

- Parks and housing often have **separate funding streams** with distinct eligibility requirements, which makes it difficult to finance integrated projects.
- **Land acquisition and construction costs are significant,** especially in urban areas. Integrating parks with housing adds to costs.
- In many urban areas, land may require **environmental remediation** before development, which can be expensive.
- Funding is often allocated for construction but **not for the long-term maintenance** of parks and shared spaces.
- Cities can be **overly dependent on private or philanthropic funds** to cover gaps, but these sources can be inconsistent or competitive.
- Programs like Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) support affordable housing but have **limited flexibility** to fund integrated park spaces.
- Certain park funding sources, like those from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), **limits land use for purposes beyond parks.**

> ***Example**: In Bozeman, Montana, Story Mill Park was developed alongside the Bridger View neighborhood, where half the homes were sold below market rate. The project combined city bond funds, private philanthropy, public grants, and market-rate sales revenues, illustrating how a creative funding stack can sustain both parks and affordable housing.*
>
> *See Appendix for the full case study.*

Development Opportunities and Adaptive Reuse

Participants shared that cities often confront shifting conditions—such as industry change, population loss, or redevelopment pressure—that open opportunities to rethink land use. These transitions can create space for innovative projects where parks and affordable housing are built together.

Takeaways

- **Remediation grants:** Industrial transitions often leave behind contaminated land. While remediation adds upfront costs, it can unlock new funding sources, such as federal brownfield grants or developer contributions.
- **Preservation of existing housing:** Rehabilitation of affordable housing stock can be more cost-effective than new construction and, when paired with green space investments, can improve neighborhood livability.
- **Repurposed land:** Parcels constrained by underground infrastructure may be unsuitable for housing but can still serve as parks, benefiting residents and preserving open space in urban areas.
- **Adaptive reuse of commercial sites:** Vacant big-box retail, shopping centers, or large parking lots can be transformed into mixed-use developments with both housing and parks.
- **Public agency exchanges:** Land swaps between agencies allow governments to align resources for shared goals, such as expanding green space or supporting affordable housing.
- **Targeted acquisitions:** Land banks can strategically acquire properties in alignment with park and housing priorities, ensuring affordability and equitable access to green space.

Challenges

- Many joint park and housing projects **arise from unique, one-time circumstances** such as availability of specific funding streams or land. Cities currently lack standardized frameworks to systematically pursue these opportunities.
- Even when land becomes available for creative **reuse, cleanup or acquisition costs can be prohibitive.**
- Cities face difficult choices about **whether limited parcels should prioritize housing, green space, or both.** Without intentional planning, outcomes may skew toward one use at the expense of the other.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Cities across the U.S. are navigating what are often framed as competing priorities: the need to build affordable housing for equitable growth and the need to create public green spaces that support neighborhood health and resilience. In practice, these goals are not mutually exclusive. When planned together, parks and affordable housing can reinforce one another, creating inclusive communities where residents have access to both stable housing and high-quality outdoor spaces.

The Parks Plus: Affordable Housing Community of Practice demonstrated how cities are working to integrate these essential assets. Across sessions, participants shared real-world examples and surfaced practical strategies to align planning, funding, and development for greater collective impact. The cohort's insights showed that parks and affordable housing are a natural fit, and that when designed with intention, grounded in community priorities, and supported by strong partnerships, these projects expand opportunity and improve health and resilience outcomes.

Participants also identified innovative models and tools already in use by cities, including:

- Requiring green space in new developments through municipal policy.
- Incentivizing developers with density bonuses or tax credits to integrate open space.
- Using equitable development planning processes to center community voices.
- Establishing dedicated funding sources, such as impact fees and bond initiatives, for park acquisition and maintenance.
- Leveraging land trusts, public land swaps, and brownfield remediation grants to unlock land for both housing and parks.

These tools provide practical entry points for aligning land use, housing, and park policy to achieve equitable, community-serving outcomes. Yet challenges remain. Current frameworks are fragmented, and many cities struggle with siloed funding streams, regulatory barriers, and the need for long-term maintenance resources. Moving from promising local examples to scalable, systemic policy solutions requires clearer guidance, more research, and stronger implementation support.

The cohort also recognized the limits of the examples shared. While the projects highlighted useful lessons, many were large-scale or context-specific and not easily replicated elsewhere. Participants emphasized the importance of developing tools and research to support smaller-scale and infill opportunities that could be more broadly applied. These limitations highlight the need and opportunity for future in-depth research.

Next Steps

Building on this Community of Practice, Trust for Public Land is launching new partnerships to deepen the research and resources available to help cities integrate parks, open spaces, and affordable housing. This next phase will focus on three goals:

Making the Case

Building a robust evidence base that demonstrates the value of parks and affordable housing integration for health, equity, and resilience. This work will highlight not only the immediate benefits of planning and building parks and housing but also the long-term advantages residents gain from sustainable stewardship and maintenance of nearby parks.

Clarifying the Intersection

Define the multiple pathways, such as policy, funding, land use, leadership, and governance, that connect housing and parks. By making these connections explicit, cities will be better equipped to align planning, strengthen cross-sector collaboration, and support civic leaders in advancing shared goals.

Building a Toolbox

Creating a practical, adaptable set of strategies that cities can use to ensure equitable park access in housing contexts. The toolbox will include approaches for embedding anti-displacement safeguards, centering community engagement, and developing mechanisms for sustainable funding and maintenance. It will serve as a foundation for future technical assistance, peer learning, and expanded research in collaboration with cities and partners.

Together, these efforts will help scale promising practices, address structural barriers, and build a shared language and strategy for equitable, integrated community development.

Additional Resources

Community of Practice Sessions and Recordings

Find and download resources by track at 10minutewalk.org/community-of-practice/.

Trust for Public Land

We create parks and protect public land where they're needed most so that everyone will have access to the benefits and joys of the outdoors for generations to come. Visit tpl.org.

The 10-Minute Walk® Program

The 10-Minute Walk Program helps cities expand access and green spaces for everyone. Visit 10minutewalk.org.

The Land and People Lab

The Land and People Lab is TPL's "think and do" tank that advances TPL's work through the power of evidence. Visit tpl.org/lab.

The Parks & Affordable Housing Guidebook: An Action Framework for Connecting Housing, Parks, and Community Well-Being

Developed through a partnership between Enterprise Community Partners and Trust for Public Land, this guidebook offers a practical action framework for helping communities deliver affordable housing and high-quality parks together to support stronger neighborhoods, housing stability, and shared community well-being. Visit tpl.org/resource/the-parks-affordable-housing-guidebook.

Appendix: Case Studies

The following case studies expand on examples highlighted in the main report, providing additional context, history, funding strategies, and lessons learned.

Buckeye-Woodhill Neighborhood | Cleveland, Ohio

Park Project Type	Housing as Catalyst
Housing Type	61 homes, all sold at below market rate prices
Project Lead	Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity
Key Partner(s)	Cuyahoga Land Bank, Mayor's Office of Sustainability
Housing Funding	Property acquisition by Cuyahoga Land Bank with funds from banks, government agencies, and philanthropy; building by Habitat for Humanity with state and regional grants
Green Space Funding	Habitat for Humanity, USDA Urban Agricultural Innovation Production grant, Cuyahoga County supplemental funding, regional sewer district green infrastructure grant, private philanthropy, local community development corporations (CDCs)

Identifying vacant land redevelopment as an opportunity to revitalize Cleveland's Buckeye-Woodhill neighborhood, Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity, working with Cuyahoga Land Bank, Western Reserve Conservancy, the City of Cleveland, and local leaders spearheaded a community-centered process to renovate and rehabilitate abandoned properties into affordable homes. In adjacent vacant lots that could not support housing, Western Land Conservancy and Habitat for Humanity furthered neighborhood revitalization by developing open gathering spaces for residents to socialize and garden.

For several decades, Cleveland has suffered from steady population decline following industrial closures across the midwestern U.S. Since its peak population in 1950, the city has seen a 40% decrease in residents. In recent years, the city's Buckeye-Woodhill neighborhood has withstood even heavier declines than the city as a whole, with a 16% decrease in population between 2010 and 2020.

This resident loss has resulted in a large influx of vacant properties, many falling derelict and consequently affecting neighborhood quality of life. Property vacancy and neighborhood disinvestment increased further in Cleveland following the 2008 foreclosure crisis, which hit the city particularly hard, transforming thriving neighborhoods into empty streets.

Recognizing the negative impacts of vacant lots, in 2015, Western Reserve Conservancy, with the City of Cleveland and local community development corporations, completed a property inventory, ranking parcels based on quality and vacancy status. This inventory then facilitated acquisition of vacant and distressed properties by the Cuyahoga Land Bank, which formed in 2009 after the foreclosure crisis.

In the Buckeye-Woodhill neighborhood, local pastors engaging residents discovered poor housing conditions as a pressing issue. Subsequently, the church and neighborhood groups invited Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity and Western Reserve Land Conservancy to discuss remedies, resulting in Habitat for Humanity's commitment to build new homes in the neighborhood.

After identifying properties in the neighborhood prime for renovation or demolition, Habitat for Humanity worked with Cuyahoga Land Bank to acquire the properties for a cost as low as one dollar. Then, working with state and regional grants, Habitat for Humanity was able to renovate or build new properties on the acquired lands.

While Habitat for Humanity's primary goal in the neighborhood was to build housing, opportunities arose to develop green spaces in properties that could not support housing due to challenges such as underground infrastructure. Western Reserve Conservancy; East End Neighborhood House; Buckeye Ministry in Missions Alliance; Burten, Bell, Carr Development; and Habitat for Humanity developed the spaces through a community design process centered around residents, resulting in the Ubuntu Gathering Space and Woodhill Community Garden.

Important to note in Buckeye-Woodhill's revitalization is the role of resident and local neighborhood groups whose continued involvement in the recently developed green spaces has ensured continued maintenance. Both spaces are owned and stewarded by a local neighborhood institution and church who obtain local source funding and operate off drafted rules to manage issues and address maintenance needs.

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Highland Bridge Project | Saint Paul, Minnesota

Park Project Type	Masterplanned Community
Housing Type	3,800 housing units, 20% affordable housing
Project Lead(s)	City of Saint Paul, Department of City Planning; Ryan Companies; Saint Paul Parks and Recreation
Key Partner(s)	Ford Motor Company
Total Cost	$1.0 billion (when fully built out)
Funding Sources	Tax increment financing (TIF) infrastructure, municipal state aid, capital improvement budget funds, developer funds, special assessments, utility fees

Highland Bridge, a development featuring mixed-income housing and over 55 acres of public open space, benefited from a master planning process initiated by the City of Saint Paul and supported by Ford Motor Company, owner of the development site.

This master plan drove the project's vision as well as cross-agency and public-private partnerships. The project found further support from a mayor who encouraged interdepartmental collaboration in the city, leading to a project that meets sustainability, housing, open space, and economic goals.

For nearly a century, Saint Paul, Minnesota was home to the Twin Cities Assembly Plant, a Ford Motor Company manufacturing facility. The plant opened in 1925 in the Highland Park neighborhood of the city, a location favored due to proximity to the Mississippi River and the promise of hydroelectric power. In 2007, Ford Motors announced their intention to close the 120-acre plant. With this announcement, the city launched a 10-year engagement and master planning process to re-envision the site into a community destination.

In 2017, the City of Saint Paul adopted the Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan. The plan calls for the creation of a vibrant, mixed-use urban village centered around six key tenets: mixed-use development, affordable housing, parks and open space, sustainability, economic and tax base development, and integration into the existing urban fabric.

From the start of the project, careful collaboration between the City, Ford Motors, and developers proved critical to its success. Ford Motors took responsibility for rehabilitating the project site to residential standards, eliminating a massive barrier to development and greatly increasing the land value of the site. Ford Motors then selected a developer who would adopt the City's plan.

In addition to cross-sector collaboration, the City's commitment to securing a mix of public and private investment was crucial to the project's overall success. In 2016, a tax increment financing (TIF) district was established to help finance the project. The City also worked with Ryan Companies and a public finance consultant to identify additional funding streams and develop appropriate budgets for each project component.

Today, construction on Highland Bridge is proudly underway with plans for a final development that includes 66 acres of private development space, 3,800 units of housing, of which 20% are affordable, and four parks covering over 55 acres: Gateway Park, Assembly Union Park, Uŋčí Makhá Park, and Míca Park. The four city parks are already completed, and these spaces serve as activators and have been a critical tool for drawing people to the site.

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Rodney Cook Sr. Park | Atlanta, Georgia

Park Project Type	Park as Catalyst
Housing Type	Maintenance of existing affordable housing stock
Project Lead	Trust for Public Land
Key Partner(s)	Westside Future Fund, Department of Watershed Management
Total Cost	$45 million for Cook Park
Park Funding	Atlanta Department of Watershed Management funding, private philanthropy
Housing Funding	Social impact fund, private philanthropy

With the City of Atlanta, TPL transformed 16 acres in Atlanta's Vine City neighborhood, formerly the site of 60 flood-damaged homes, into Cook Park—a rich green recreational space designed with green infrastructure to manage stormwater and reduce future flood risk. Recognizing the deep community ties to the neighborhood and site, design of Cook Park included partnership with community groups such as Westside Future Fund, whose work includes maintaining housing affordability and providing home ownership opportunities across the neighborhood.

The opportunity to build Cook Park came after the unfortunate aftermath of severe flooding in Vine City. In the fall of 2002, Tropical Storm Hanna battered the southeastern U.S., causing severe flooding in the neighborhood. The torrential rains overwhelmed Vine City's combined sewer system, resulting in extensive property damage and rendering many homes uninhabitable. Faced with the tremendous cost of rebuilding, city leaders opted to relocate residents and acquired the properties affected in a 16-acre portion of the neighborhood.

After over a decade of conversations about the best use for the flood prone property, TPL agreed to undertake a transformative project for Atlanta's Westside that would both address flood risks and rejuvenate the community. Collaborating with the City of Atlanta's Department of Watershed Management, TPL designed Cook Park to serve as a green infrastructure solution that would mitigate flooding for the surrounding 160 acres.

Cook Park was not just about flood control; it was also envisioned as a vibrant community space. The park offers diverse recreational amenities such as a towering playground, splashpad, climbing boulders, outdoor fitness equipment, sports courts, and public performance areas, alongside ample green spaces for relaxation.

Community involvement was pivotal throughout the park's development. TPL engaged local residents in the design process and partnered with community groups to ensure the project addressed their needs. The Westside Future Fund played a crucial role in mitigating potential displacement and supporting housing affordability in the neighborhood, emphasizing anti-displacement measures and homeownership opportunities.

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Southend Park Urban Village and Davis Park | Lexington, Kentucky

Park Project Type	Masterplanned Community
Housing Type	155 rental units, all affordable to residents at 80% or less AMI; 28 homes, all sold at below market price with gap subsidies
Project Lead	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, EHI Consultants
Key Partner(s)	Lexington Parks & Recreation, Lexington Community Land Trust
Total Cost (as of 12/2024)	$1.2 million for Davis Park; $5.6 million for Southend Park Urban Village housing
Park Funding	FHWA, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet
Housing Funding	HUD CDBG, HOME Investment Partnerships Program, low-income housing tax credits

Development of the Newtown Pike, a roadway adjacent to the historic Davis Bottoms neighborhood in Lexington, KY, resulted in a robust planning process that led to Southend Park Urban Village, a neighborhood redevelopment with affordable single and multi-family housing that surround a revitalized city park to be managed and programmed for the benefit of residents.

Southend Park Urban Village

The Southend Park Urban Village effectively utilizes the Lexington Community Land Trust (LCLT) to maintain long-term housing affordability while fostering community stability. This approach was part of a broader community-led planning process initiated during the Newtown Pike Extension Project, which had initially threatened to displace residents from the historic Davis Bottoms neighborhood.

The Lexington CLT plays a key role by separating land ownership from homeownership, allowing homeowners to build equity while keeping the land in trust. This setup ensures that homes remain affordable over generations, as future sales reflect the community's affordability goals rather than market-driven price increases.

Residents were actively involved in this planning process, participating in educational sessions on regulatory challenges and collaborating on neighborhood design. This grassroots engagement has been essential to ensure that the community's needs are prioritized, especially in an area with a history of displacement concerns.

Davis Park

During the Southend Park Urban Village planning process, an opportunity was presented to replace and construct Davis Park, a five-acre city-owned park with limited amenities. To fund redevelopment, the City of Lexington received transportation mitigation funds as part of the overall State Highway roadway extension project and utilized EHI Consultants to assist in the engagement and redesign of the park.

The park, which opened to the public in spring 2024, now includes a playground, basketball courts, a multi-use trail, and green space for social activities. So that residents of adjacent housing can maintain a sense of belonging in the park space, the CLT and Lexington Parks & Recreation will work together to plan and program activities that include a neighborhood focus.

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Story Mill Park and Bridger View Neighborhood | Bozeman, Montana

Park Project Type	Park as Catalyst
Housing Type	62 homes, 50% sold at below market price
Project Lead(s)	Trust for Public Land, Headwaters Community Housing Trust
Key Partner(s)	Navigate LLC, EvolveEA, Human Resources Development Corporation (HRDC)
Total Costs (as of 12/2024)	$16.5 million for Story Mill Park; $44 million for Bridger View Neighborhood
Park Funding	City of Bozeman 2012 Trails, Open Space, and Park bond fund; private philanthropy
Housing Funding	Public grants, business partnerships

Story Mill Park and the adjacent Bridger View neighborhood benefited from a diverse mix of funding sources including the city's open space bond, private philanthropy, public grants, business partnerships, and proceeds from market-rate unit sales. This combined funding approach supported both the creation of the park and the goal of keeping fifty percent of the neighborhood's homes affordable for households earning middle incomes.

Story Mill Community Park

TPL secured land acquisition funds to protect the 60 acres of land that became Story Mill Park. This funding protected the area's natural resources and ensured it could be transformed into a public park while maintaining ecological health. To develop the park, TPL and local partners raised funds through a combination of tax revenue from a bond measure, public grants and philanthropic donations from individuals and foundations focused on conservation, recreation, and community development.

In order to generate local tax revenue to fund park development, TPL helped Bozeman residents put an Open Space Bond Referendum on the 2012 ballot, which passed with 73% approval. TPL obtained further funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and other federal environmental grants aimed at conservation and public access.

Bridger View Neighborhood

Housing in the Bridger View neighborhood leveraged a community land trust model to separate land ownership from homeownership and ensure long-term affordability. The neighborhood included half market-rate units and half affordable units. The mixed-income neighborhood helped spread some of the costs between the market and below-market homes, provided socio-economic integration, and ensured market and below-market homes were built to the same quality.

Combined Impact

Both projects represent a successful, complementary approach to community development by creating affordable housing and green spaces. Bridger View's mixed-income housing and proximity to Story Mill Park offer residents direct access to high-quality recreational areas, enhancing quality of life and promoting social equity.

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Yesler Terrace | Seattle, Washington

Park Project Type	Housing as Catalyst
Housing Type	4,000 rental units, 40% affordable
Project Lead	Seattle Housing Authority
Key Partner(s)	City of Seattle, Department of Housing and Urban Development; Seattle Parks and Recreation
Total Cost	$1.7 billion
Funding Sources	HUD Choice Neighborhoods program, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, land sales proceeds, private

The Seattle Housing Authority led a multi-tiered process for the planning and construction of Yesler Terrace, a large-scale redevelopment project in a Seattle neighborhood immediately east of downtown. Following initial stakeholder engagement and recognizing the cultural importance of the area, SHA acquired Choice Neighborhood funding to develop market rate and affordable housing units with integrated passive and active green spaces.

Yesler Terrace, constructed in 1941 by the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA), was Washington state's first public housing development and the nation's first racially integrated public housing development. Spanning 30 acres, it was home to over 1,000 residents across 561 public housing units.

Recognizing the site's high value and the need to address aging infrastructure and buildings, SHA identified an opportunity to redevelop the neighborhood to better serve low-income families. Early planning and stakeholder engagement for redevelopment began in 2006. In 2010, SHA secured seed funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development Choice Neighborhoods program, and in 2013, SHA began construction to transform Yesler Terrace.

SHA led a broad effort to rezone and replat the neighborhood to encourage density, reconnect Yesler to surrounding areas, and provide generous park and amenity spaces for residents and visitors. The Yesler Terrace redevelopment was designed to feature 4,000 units of mixed-income housing. SHA developed nearly 1,000 deeply affordable apartments and partnered with for-profit developers to build a mix of market-rate and workforce units.

SHA also saw the integration of parks and open gathering spaces as a critical component of the redevelopment. In partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation, SHA acquired land and capital funding to design intentional parks and open spaces for Yesler residents. Capital funding sources for parks and infrastructure included proceeds from land sales, JPMorgan Chase, the City of Seattle, HUD, and the RAVE Foundation.

The completed redevelopment features three small pocket parks, owned by the Yesler Terrace Owners Association, a central pedestrian corridor, gathering spaces, and Yesler Park, owned and operated by Seattle Parks and designed as a central recreational hub. Additionally, affordable and market-rate unit owners pay dues to the Yesler Terrace Owners Association (YTOA) totaling roughly $800,000 a year, which helps fund the maintenance of SHA-managed park spaces.

Today, Yesler Terrace is a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood with 4,000 units of affordable, market-rate, and workforce housing along with multiple green spaces for residents to enjoy.

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