# CITY PARK
Master Plan Update

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**Letter from Denver Parks & Recreation and Historic Denver**

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Dear City Park Community:

Denver Parks & Recreation and Historic Denver are pleased to share the 2018 City Park Master Plan Update with Design Guidelines. Over the past year, we have had the privilege of working with park users, advocates, neighbors and partners who contributed their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for the park to help establish a framework to guide the park’s long-term physical improvement, use and management. We are grateful for everyone’s contributions.

Affectionately known as ‘the People’s Park,’ City Park is a crown jewel in Denver’s City Beautiful park and parkway system. City Park is treasured for its historic legacy, natural features and diversity of experiences it offers park users. This document establishes an integrated approach to park master planning, using an inclusive range of considerations—history, park composition, ecology, park uses and experiences—to enable City Park to continue to evolve while maintaining the park’s unique character.

The recommendations and guidance provided in this document are supported by Denver Parks & Recreation, Historic Denver and the City Park Master Plan Stakeholder Working Group. We look forward to implementation of the master plan and will continue to work with the community to ensure City Park remains ‘the People’s Park’ for future generations.

Sincerely,

Happy Haynes
Executive Director
Denver Parks & Recreation

Annie Levinsky
Executive Director
Historic Denver, Inc.
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City and County of Denver
*Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)*
Allegra “Happy” Haynes, Executive Director
Gordon Robertson, Director Park Planning, Design & Construction
Kelly Ream, Project Manager, East Denver Parks Planner
Adam Smith, Superintendent

Historic Denver, Inc.
Annie Levinsky, Executive Director

History Colorado - State Historical Fund
Anne McCleave, Historic Preservation Specialist

Consultant Team
Mundus Bishop
Tina Bishop, PLA, ASLA, Principal
Rachel Scarborough, PLA, Landscape Architect
Josh Spinner, ASLA, Landscape Designer
Shelby Scharen, Landscape Historian

Anderson Hallas Architects
Nan Anderson, FAIA, Historical Architect
Andy Duckett-Emke, AIA, Architect

Muller Engineering Corporation
Karl Buchholz, PE, Transportation Engineer

Technical Review Team
City and County of Denver
*DPR Operations*
Joe Renteria, City Park Operations Supervisor
Doug Woods, Parks Director

*DPR Planning Design and Construction*
Kathleen LeVeque, Assistant Director of Parks Planning
Cincere Eades, Natural Resource Planner
Kent Sondgerath, Landscape Design & Construction Supervisor
Adrienne Burton, District Planner

DPR Natural Resources Division
Rob Davis, City Forester
Mike Swanson, Forestry Superintendent
Kelly Uthing, City Naturalist
Vicki Vargas-Madrid, Wildlife Program Administrator

Public Works
Scott Burton, Senior City Planner
Dan Raine, Senior City Planner

Community Planning and Development
Caryn Champine, Director
Jennifer Cappetto, Landmark Preservation Supervisor

Stakeholder Working Group
Patrick Brown, Kick In For A Cause (KIFAC)
Karen Collier, Whittier Neighborhood
Greg Davis, City Park Alliance
Peggy Day, Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS)
Megan Deffner, Denver Zoo
Mike Fernandez, City Park Alliance
Georgia Garney, City Park Friends and Neighbors (CPFANS)
Matthew Gullicksrud, Cole Neighborhood
Libby Kaiser, Mayor’s Bicycle Advisory Committee
Emily Lapel, City Council District 9
Jacqui Lansing, City Park Friends and Neighbors (CPFANS)
Brandi Micheau, Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
Paul Nihara, Soka Gakkai International (SGI-USA)
Liz Orr, City Park Master Plan Exploratory Committee
Dawnisha Penny, Skyland Neighborhood
George Pond, Denver Zoo
Andrew Rowan, Denver Zoo
Andy Sense, City Park Neighborhood Advisory Committee (CPNAC)
Darrel Watson, Game Plan Task Force
Jeff Williams, Mayor’s Pedestrian Advisory Committee
Ellen Yu, City Park Racquet Club

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Introduction
Introduction

City Park is a crown jewel in Denver’s City Beautiful park and parkway system. It is ‘the People’s Park’ with a 120-year legacy as one of the city’s most important and largest public spaces. The park’s historical and architectural significance is recognized by its listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

City Park’s distinct spatial patterns of large open meadows and lakes are defined by mature forested groves, curving roads and paths, and allees of trees. Living collections and gardens, gateways, monuments, and buildings create the park’s characteristic entries, views, and park experiences. A broad range of offerings from tranquil walks to play and biking, to outings at the zoo and museum makes City Park a place of diverse users and experiences with a special place for everyone.

The future of ‘the People’s Park,’ as named by pioneer planner Charles Robinson in 1906, is guided by this Master Plan Update. This plan was developed through an inclusive planning process involving neighbors, users, and the community. It builds upon the park’s 120-year legacy and provides actions for its preservation and evolving use. The year-long planning process engaged multiple stakeholders. Community outreach offered many opportunities for individual, community, and partner involvement.

City Park Master Plan Update provides a vision to guide the preservation and improvement of City Park. The plan identifies repair and improvement to facilities, access, circulation, and infrastructure in balance with the continuity of park character. It addresses recreational and facility needs, and provides policy and implementation strategies to address short- and long-term priorities.
Introduction

Purpose of the Master Plan Update

The purpose of the Master Plan Update and Design Guidelines is to take a comprehensive look at City Park to create clear guidance for its future through a process that engaged neighbors, park users, and regional visitors. The process identified challenges and opportunities and established recommendations to ensure City Park evolves to meet contemporary needs while remaining the historic jewel of Denver’s Park and Parkway system.

Several recommendations from the 2001 *City Park Master Plan*, the last major plan for City Park, have been addressed but some remain. This Master Plan Update acknowledges the significant changes in the city and neighborhoods surrounding the park since 2001. Changes in population, demographics, and recreational needs and interests continue to influence the use and character of City Park. This Master Plan Update builds upon the 2001 plan and reconciles other recently completed studies. The plan addresses a range of pressing issues from user needs to infrastructure improvements to protecting the park’s historic integrity. Identified community needs include physical infrastructure upgrades, improved circulation and wayfinding, preservation of historic features, vegetation management, and updated recreational amenities for all ages and abilities.¹

This Master Plan Update is the comprehensive planning and decision-making framework that will guide the long-term physical improvement, use, and management of City Park. The update provides goals, principles, recommendations, and an implementation strategy to guide the efforts of the City and County of Denver and its partners. Together the City Park Master Plan Update and City Park Design Guidelines provide a vision and clear guidance to manage City Park’s future evolution in balance with its historic character.

¹ The Master Plan Update and Design Guidelines build upon the 2001 *Revitalizing the Legacy of City Park*, and supersede the 2010 *Circulation and Use Plan for Denver’s City Park*. 

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During the Master Plan Update process more than 350 people participated in open houses & special events, and more than 700 participated online. Participants shared these aspirations for City Park:

- a “people-centered park”—inclusive and welcoming for all
- a renewed urban forest for the next 100 years
- preservation of the park’s legacy
- protection of natural features and tranquility
- balance of active and passive uses
- a topnotch road, bicycle, and pedestrian system with connection to park destinations
- holistic and integrated park with a balance of uses, events and institutions
Study Area

City Park is Denver’s premiere regional park located two miles east of downtown Denver. The park encompasses 320 acres. It is bounded by York Street on the west, Colorado Boulevard on the east, East 23rd Avenue on the north, and East 17th Avenue on the south. Two civic institutions within the park—Denver Zoo and Denver Museum of Nature & Science—attract more than three million visitors annually.

City Park attracts a diversity of parks users from nearby neighbors to regional users from Denver’s metropolitan area. It is an important neighborhood and community park providing recreation and respite to the region and its eight adjacent neighborhoods. The park is connected with Denver’s renowned parkway and boulevard system via City Park Esplanade, Colorado Boulevard, Montview Boulevard, and East 17th Avenue Parkway. Several bicycle routes connect the park with all parts of the city.

The future of ‘the People’s Park,’ as named by pioneer planner Charles Robinson in 1906, is guided by this comprehensive Master Plan Update. Developed through an engaging community process, this plan:

- Identifies changes in the park, its neighborhoods and the city since the 2001 Master Plan;
- Identifies significant resources to be protected and actions to preserve the special character of Denver’s largest urban park while guiding improvements and managing change;
- Identifies current and future park uses and needs and establishes a framework and shared vision for City Park.
Planning Process

City Park Master Plan Update and Design Guidelines were developed through a collaborative process involving city staff and the community over a 12-month period. A comprehensive outreach process, supported by a 21-member Stakeholder Working Group (SWG), provided opportunities for community engagement and involvement. The SWG, consisting of a broad range of interests including neighbors, park institutions, user groups, and others, represented individual communities/groups and shared information.

Three open houses, an online community forum on Denver Parks website, special events including an ice cream social, and two preference surveys engaged the community. Use and behavior observations were conducted to understand the range of activities and times people use City Park. Intercept surveys of park users helped define preferences and use. Open houses introduced the planning effort, solicited input on challenges, opportunities, and desires, presented ideas and concepts for park improvements, and proposed recommendations, implementation priorities, and an improved project review process.
City Park Master Plan Update informs and guides the work of Denver Parks and its partners in the repair, improvement, and preservation of City Park. This Master Plan Update provides detailed recommendations for projects, planning, and research to assist in managing change in thoughtful ways that ensure the ‘the People’s Park’ remains a beloved icon and refuge for decades to come.

Recommendations are organized according to six topics: park composition; circulation; vegetation and ecology; water; buildings, structures and objects; and park use and experiences. This Master Plan Update brings forward recommendations from the 2001 plan that remain relevant today, and identifies additional needed improvements. These include projects initiated by other City agencies or partners. Maintenance and day-to-day operations are not addressed.

- Proposed projects will be guided and evaluated by this Master Plan Update and City Park Design Guidelines through an improved City process. Review by a new advisory committee to ensure projects adhere to this Master Plan Update and the Design Guidelines will be included. The committee will review projects and provide recommendations to the Department of Parks and Recreation Manager, as well as offer a forum for community input.

- General recommendations are included for Denver Zoo (the Zoo), Denver Museum of Nature & Science (the Museum), and East 23rd Avenue. These are presented as separate sections.

City Park Design Guidelines:
- provide criteria for evaluating proposed improvements, and;
- provide guidance for new additions (location, mass, scale, form), use of materials, compatible uses, and measures to protect and repair historic features.
Relevant Planning Initiatives

Several past and current planning efforts include recommendations for City Park. Efforts that address City Park exclusively include the 2001 Revitalizing City Park Plan, the 2010 Transportation Study for City Park, and the Event Park Plan for City Park. Currently the city is updating several citywide plans through Denveright: the city-wide process to update Denver’s Game Plan, Blueprint Denver, and Denver Moves. The Platte to Park Hill: Stormwater Systems program also influences City Park.

Revitalizing City Park is the most recent master plan prepared for City Park, completed in 2001. The plan provided “a comprehensive strategy for preserving and enhancing . . .” City Park. It is composed of two parts: the Historic Site Assessment and Preservation Plan, and the Land Use and Circulation Plan. The goal of the plan was to “fully understand City Park’s historical development and significance, and to use preservation planning as the basis for informing implementation recommendations. Since 2001, more than $60 million on 50+ projects has been completed. This investment includes rehabilitation projects, park repair projects, roads and circulation improvements, additional park facilities such as restroom upgrades, and urban forest replenishment.

The 2010 Circulation and Use Plan for Denver’s City Park was prepared as a supplement to the 2001 Revitalizing City Park plan. The 2010 plan specifically provided recommendations for improved and safe multi-modal access for as many users and user types as practical within City Park, and for improved park infrastructure to meet current needs. The Master Plan Update, presented in this document, supersedes the 2010 plan by integrating relevant recommendations and by updating or eliminating others.

In 2011, Denver Parks completed a planning process to define special events within the city’s parks including those within City Park. The Event Parking Plan for City Park was developed during this process to provide staff and event organizers information on “availability and location of on-street and off-street public parking with City Park, as well as locations of additional off-street parking near the park.” The plan encourages event organizers to adopt a good neighbor policy by enacting plans to minimize the number of event attendees using on-street parking in neighborhoods. This topic is not part of the Master Plan Update and Design Guidelines, however, needs related to event use such as trail or road upgrades are addressed.
Denver’s Parks and Recreation 2018 Game Plan is the update to the city’s 2003 Game Plan. The updated plan is currently in progress. Once completed, it will define new park and recreation offerings, identify relevant programs, and address how existing assets are maintained and enhanced. Constraints such as financial limitations, climate change, changing demographics, and increases in use have been evaluated, and four principles and 19 goals identified. All principles and most goals apply to City Park. Recommendations are anticipated in late 2018.

Denver Moves is the city’s adopted plan for improving non-motorized transportation within Denver. Making walking a primary mode for people to move around the city comfortably and safely is a key goal. So is creating a bicycling and walking network where every household is within a 1/4 mile of a high ease of use trail or bicycle route. The plan identifies citywide needs and defines priorities for improving and connecting bicycle and pedestrian trails. These include improvements for roadway crossings into City Park. Denver Moves offers guidance for enhanced bicycle lanes along East 23rd Avenue, shared roadways, roadway crossings, and bicycle treatments at intersections.

City Park Golf Course redesign is one of four components of the Platte to Park Hill Comprehensive Storm Water Management Plan. This project addresses flood protection for several Denver neighborhoods, and also improves water quality. Although this Master Plan Update does not address the golf course specifically, it addresses the relationship between City Park and the golf course. City Park Golf Course is being rebuilt to accommodate stormwater detention with an updated course design including a new club house and maintenance facility, improved course playability, and modifications to East 23rd Avenue.

The 2004 study for Denver’s system of designated parkways and boulevards provided an assessment and specific recommendations for the preservation and repair of each. The study included recommendations and design guidelines for East 17th Avenue and Montview Boulevard that begin at City Park’s east edge; Colorado Boulevard that defines the park’s east boundary; and the park’s south entrance, City Park Esplanade. Consult Denver’s Designated Parkways and Boulevards: Assessment and Management Recommendations for these parkways and boulevards.
Goals and Guiding Principles
Goals and Guiding Principles

Park Character

City Park is 'the People's Park' with a 120-year legacy as Denver's most loved public space. The park's distinct spatial patterns of large open meadows and lakes are defined by mature forested groves, curving park roads and paths, and allees of trees. Living collections and gardens, gateways, monuments, and buildings and structures create entries, views, and park experiences. These characteristics express 'the People's Park' where experiences are offered for all from tranquil walks, to play and biking, to outings to the Zoo and Museum.

Goals

Five goals guide the repair and improvement of City Park. These goals ensure park character will be preserved and contemporary use addressed through a balanced approach.

- Re-connect the community with City Park—physically, visually, and socially;
- Preserve City Park's historic features and patterns while integrating new compatible elements;
- Follow an integrated approach—considering aesthetics, historical integrity, ecological function and performance, and visitor experience—in designing new improvements;
- Improve ecological function and environmental performance for City Park;
- Improve the condition of City Park including park infrastructure, vegetation, and features while recognizing the operational needs of the park and institutions.

Guiding Principles

Six guiding principles provide the framework for the Master Plan Update recommendations.

**Park Composition:** Protect and enhance City Park's distinct composition of spaces along with views, topography, and individual features that define these spaces.

**Circulation:** Establish a comprehensive circulation system with improved connections and access to, and within, the park for all modes that builds upon City Park's character.

**Vegetation and Ecology:** Protect and preserve City Park's established tree and vegetation patterns, plant species, and significant and notable trees to preserve character, enhance the urban tree canopy, provide wildlife and bird habitat or other ecological benefits, and to enhance biological diversity.

**Water:** Protect constructed water features to preserve park character and to enhance water quality and ecological function.

**Buildings and Structures:** Preserve contributing buildings and structures, ensure new buildings and structures are consistent with park character, and provide opportunities for compatible park uses.

**Park Uses and Experiences:** Maintain a balance of uses and experiences that are integrated with the park's character and composition.