



GREAT URBAN PARKS CAMPAIGN CASE STUDIES:

FUNDING

Strong relationships with local organizations and national partners can generate funding for green infrastructure projects and leverage additional financial support.

Ambrose Kennedy Park – Baltimore

The Parks & People Foundation had worked closely with the Baltimore Department of Recreation and Parks (the Department) for years, but the renovation of Baltimore's Ambrose Kennedy Park was the first time Parks & People had attempted to leverage the strengths of public agencies and nonprofits at a large scale. This project re-envisioned a blighted 1.75-acre neighborhood park with new ADA-accessible amenities including a swimming pool (with restrooms and changing areas), an open playing field, walking paths, flowering shade trees, a landscaped amphitheater, and long-desired lighting throughout the park.

Their first success was securing committed funding from the state of Maryland in the form of a general obligation bond from the Department of Natural Resources. Laura Connelly, environmental parks projects manager for Parks & People, said that, because they had previously done pavement removal at Ambrose Kennedy, the park was already on DNR's list for consideration of grant funding so it was easy for them to approve investing in eligible expenses for the larger park project. The DNR funding allowed Parks & People to maintain flexibility with how the funds were applied to meet project goals as needed to address the constraints associated with specific funding sources, and also allowed them to better justify the necessary dedication of their own staff time as part of a very time-intensive project.

The next largest funding sources came directly from the Department and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), a nonprofit developer that has been extremely active within the neighborhood and larger surrounding community. Initially, the

Having access to flexible money early in the process is key, allowing you to move money around as necessary to address the constraints that come with specific funding sources.

—Lisa Schroeder, *Parks & People*

Department had planned to do the work that it was able to fund, then Parks & People would take control of the project to complete the remaining work. However, in the end they agreed that it worked best to officially transfer the city funds directly to Parks & People. Although the process has not been seamless, Parks & People president and CEO Lisa Schroeder says it has put them on track for an even stronger partnership with the Department moving forward.

Although Parks & People has been very successful in obtaining funding matches, they eventually realized that not every funding source was a good match (for example, a public art grant opportunity that initially sounded promising, but ended up not being a good fit for the project design, time line, or parameters). They learned that it is important to not present potential grant opportunities to the community before thoroughly vetting them, since it is difficult for people who are not familiar with the grant process to understand the significant constraints and requirements that often come along with external funding.

The initial investment from the Great Urban Parks Campaign has also led to significant improvements in the

surrounding community. Because of this project, the city's Department of Housing has accelerated their plans by two years to demolish an adjacent row of abandoned row houses, thereby expanding the boundaries of the park and also enhancing nearby private property values throughout the community. The expanded park will improve green storm-water management capability and make an attractive urban gathering place, as well as improving the economic value of nearby housing.

McKinley Park – Pittsburgh

As the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (the Conservancy) has built up their portfolio of funding sources for the renovation of historic McKinley Park in Pittsburgh's Beltzhoover neighborhood, they have been able to attract new funding from a variety of sources. The Great Urban Parks Campaign funding is allowing the Conservancy to take the lead in revitalizing and reconnecting the 78.5-acre park to its users and community, while also providing significant stormwater benefits. The Conservancy recently restored an iconic stone wall at one of the park entrances and included accessible walkways that lead residents from the street and through the new rain gardens on their way to the playground and basketball court. This 2013 project led to the development of the *McKinley Park Master Plan* and the current project in the Chicken Hill area of the park, which will:

- reduce stormwater flowing into combined sewers;
- resolve drainage and erosion problems that are adversely impacting the park; and
- restore accessibility and connectivity both within the park and with the Beltzhoover neighborhood.

The city is very much on board with the project and is taking on one-third of the costs, which has covered much of the needed capital funding. The Conservancy has seen great success in attracting funding for the non-capital elements of the project from a variety of new sources that are making contributions earmarked for ecological restoration, community engagement, and wildlife viewing. One new source was a \$35,000 grant from The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, approximately one-third of which will be used by local nonprofits Voices Against Violence and UrbanKind institute on a youth project to survey and restore the forest ecosystem within the park.

High visibility, in terms of both the project itself and the process we are going through, have given us notoriety that has attracted new funding.

—Heather Sage, *Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy*

According to Heather Sage, director of community projects for the Conservancy, the local notoriety of the project and the process have been instrumental in obtaining that interest and funding. Local media have given them a great deal of exposure, with local and regional publications such as the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pittsburgh Courier, South Pittsburgh Reporter, and Greenville Journal covering various aspects of the project. The McKinley Park restoration is the first project in what the Conservancy hopes to be a long series of capital investment and longer-term maintenance investments that the community hasn't seen in decades.

This case study was written by Jennifer Henaghan, AICP, Deputy Research Director and Green Communities Center Manager at the American Planning Association.

Cover Image: Environmental Learning for Kids and the Trust for Public Land receive a \$25,000 contribution from Xcel Energy at the groundbreaking ceremony for Montbello Open Space Park. Credit: Environmental Learning for Kids

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