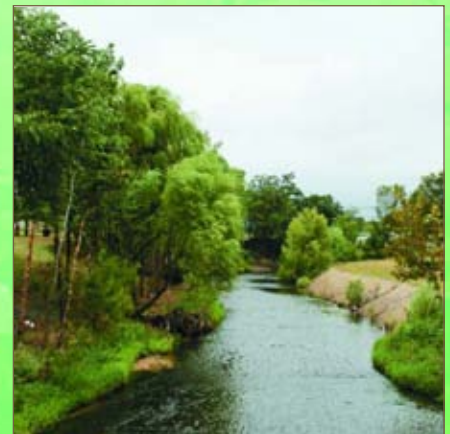


# CapitalSpace

A Park System for the Nation's Capital

## Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space





The CapitalSpace initiative is a partnership effort among the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Park Service, and several District of Columbia agencies. The initiative was jointly funded by NCPC and the government of the District of Columbia. NCPC had primary responsibility for oversight of the initiative with its principal consultant, AECOM.

Visit [www.capitalspace.gov](http://www.capitalspace.gov) to view this plan electronically and review model projects and extensive background information.

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**Adopted by the National Capital Planning Commission, April 1, 2010**

L. Preston Bryant, Jr., *Chairman, Presidential Appointee*

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*Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs*  
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The Honorable Vincent C. Gray, *Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia*

Represented by Robert Miller

Marcel Acosta, *Executive Director*



April 30, 2010

The National Capital Planning Commission along with the Government of the District of Columbia and the National Park Service are proud to jointly present the CapitalSpace plan. The CapitalSpace initiative is the first comprehensive parks project in nearly forty years to assess Washington's parks and open spaces and develop strategies for realizing the full potential of these extraordinary assets. The joint plan serves as a road map for identifying key challenges and opportunities that cut across jurisdictional lines and presents new approaches for collaboration.

CapitalSpace builds on the continuing desire of the partner agencies, community organizations, and the public to improve parks and open space in Washington. While each group brought its unique perspective to the discussion, all share goals to create healthy and sustainable neighborhoods, enrich the capital city experience, and protect our natural, cultural, and historic resources.

In the months and years ahead, we will use the CapitalSpace plan as a catalyst to improve Washington's parks and open space. We remain committed to sustaining the partnership that has been forged through the CapitalSpace initiative to make its goals and objectives a reality today and for future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Preston Bryant, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

**L. Preston Bryant, Jr.**  
Chairman  
National Capital Planning Commission

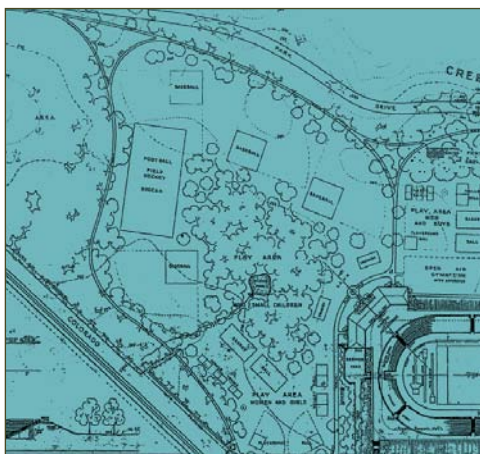
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neil O. Albert", written in a cursive style.

**Neil O. Albert**  
City Administrator  
Government of the District of Columbia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peggy O'Dell", written in a cursive style.

**Peggy O'Dell**  
Director, National Capital Region  
National Park Service





## CapitalSpace Partnership

Several District and federal agencies oversee the planning, development, operation, and maintenance of Washington’s parks and open space.

The District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation, District of Columbia Office of Planning, National Park Service, and National Capital Planning Commission formed CapitalSpace in 2006 to coordinate existing management plans, maximize limited resources, and create a stronger park system for the city. Since the initial creation of the partnership, several other agencies have participated, including the District of Columbia’s Department of Transportation, Department of the Environment, and Public Schools, as well as the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

The District’s primary recreation provider is the Department of Parks and Recreation. Its mission is to maintain the city’s parks and open spaces and provide diverse recreational opportunities to residents and visitors. Other District agencies, including the Office of Planning, Department of Transportation, and Department of the Environment, play key roles in planning, building, and maintaining parks and open space through broader community development strategies. The CapitalSpace partners work closely with the public school system, which provides 30 percent of the city’s playgrounds and fields.

The National Park Service’s mission is to preserve the nation’s natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of all generations, is responsible for managing nearly 90 percent of the city’s parkland—including major park areas such as Rock Creek Park, the National Mall, Anacostia Park, and the Fort Circle Parks. The National Capital Planning Commission and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts plan for and review proposed development that may impact federal interests within Washington’s parks and open spaces.

### CAPITALSPACE PARTNERS

- District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)
- District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP)
- National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)
- National Park Service (NPS)

### IN COLLABORATION WITH

- District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
- District Department of Transportation (DDOT)
- District Department of the Environment (DDOE)
- U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA)

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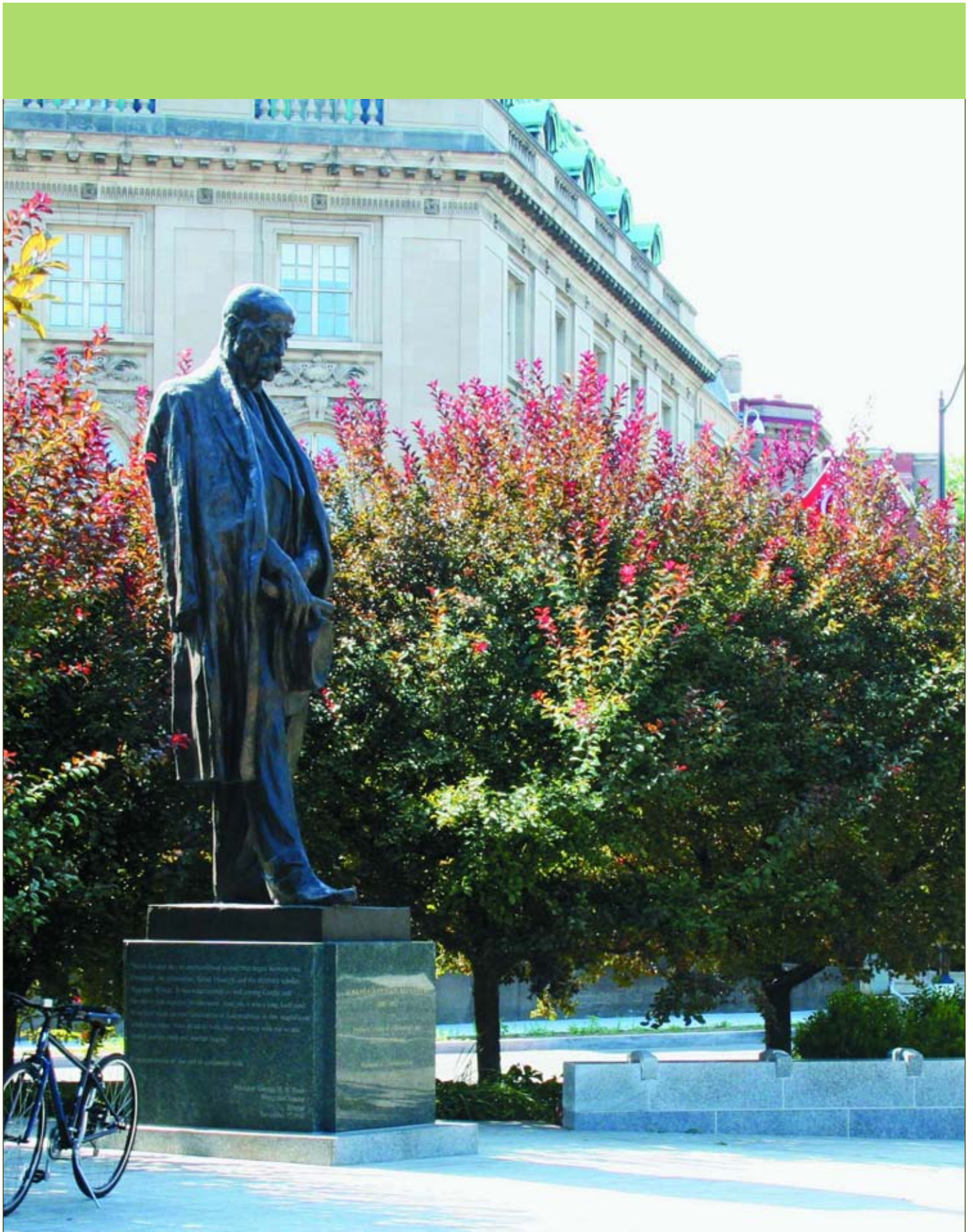
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....





Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk Memorial

# Overview

## Summary

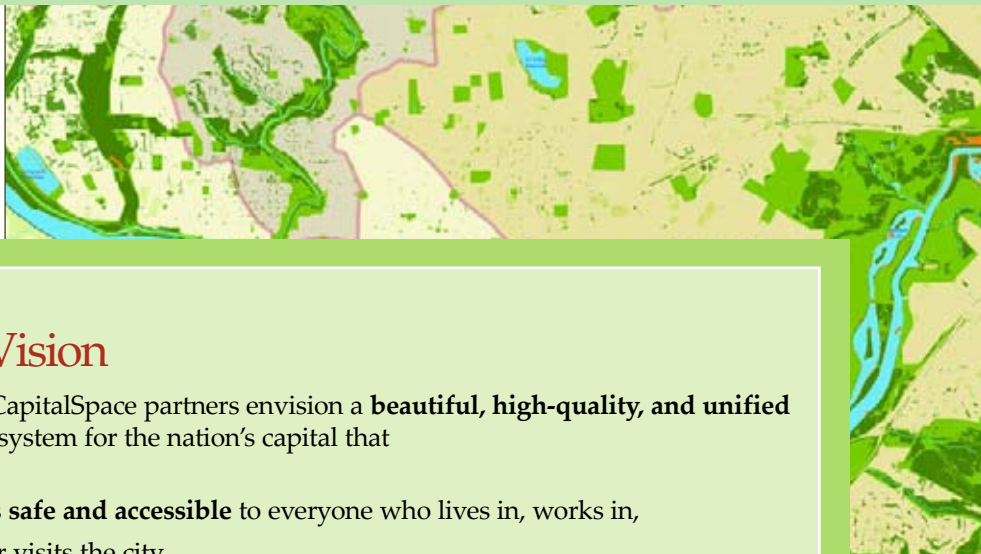
Washington is a city of parks. With its many large and small neighborhood parks, schoolyards, formal downtown parks, stream valley corridors, forest preserves and green river banks of the Potomac and Anacostia, it is graced with more green space per person than any other U.S. city of its size. In addition, while known the world over for the symbolic power of the National Mall, parks and open space throughout Washington's neighborhoods have historic attributes and commemorative features that make them signature elements of the nation's capital.

Although Washington's parks and open space are abundant and beloved, the quality and capacity of these spaces has not kept pace with the growing, changing, and sometimes conflicting needs of residents, workers, or millions of annual visitors. To help address this cooperatively, the National Park Service, the government of the District of Columbia, and the National Capital Planning Commission formed the CapitalSpace partnership. Recognizing that planning and management efforts are currently underway to enhance the National Mall and parks along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, CapitalSpace is focused on other national and local parks in the neighborhoods throughout Washington.

CapitalSpace began by completing the first comprehensive analysis of Washington's parks and open space in nearly 40 years. This analysis found that within Washington's park system, the wide variety of park types, sizes, and traits, coupled with shared jurisdiction between local and federal authorities, presents challenges in meeting both local and national needs, as well as difficulties in planning, enhancing, and maintaining the parks.

Yet the analysis also found that there are tremendous opportunities to ensure that Washington's parks are accessible to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city. The city's parks and open space can connect communities; provide a diversity of passive and active recreational opportunities that enhance urban living; and offer rich natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic resources that define neighborhoods and provide unique experiences. The CapitalSpace plan highlights the critical role parks play in achieving District and federal goals for a healthy, sustainable, and livable city.

CapitalSpace provides a vision for a beautiful, high-quality, and unified park system for Washington and offers six action-oriented ideas focused on key areas to help make the vision a reality. These Six Big Ideas identify recommendations that can best be accomplished by the CapitalSpace partner agencies working together and are intended to maximize existing assets, address current and future needs, and capitalize on existing opportunities. They include ideas for new planning and development policies, physical improvements and uses, and operation and maintenance approaches. CapitalSpace sets the framework for an enduring partnership between federal and District agencies.



## A Vision

The CapitalSpace partners envision a **beautiful, high-quality, and unified** park system for the nation's capital that

- ◆ Is **safe and accessible** to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city.
- ◆ Includes a variety of parks and open space that **connect communities**.
- ◆ Incorporates **stewardship and celebration** of natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces.
- ◆ Provides a **diversity** of passive and active recreational opportunities.
- ◆ Contributes to a **healthy, sustainable, and livable city**.
- ◆ Serves as a national and international model of **citizen engagement**, and parks and open space **management and collaboration**.

The CapitalSpace vision will be realized through the commitments and resources of federal and local agencies, citizens, and private organizations, where each group goes beyond their individual mandates and works cooperatively to create a seamless system of parks and open space.





## Planning Concepts

These planning concepts were developed as a guide to implement the Six Big Ideas and their associated recommendations. The concepts represent principles the CapitalSpace partners found important to developing a unified park system for the nation's capital.

### Weave a Greenway through Neighborhoods

A continuous greenway connects the city's outer neighborhoods. The Fort Circle Parks become destinations that attract residents and visitors to historic sites, the natural environment, and provide recreational opportunities.



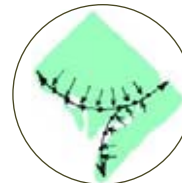
### Increase Access to Great Local Parks

A safe, accessible, and walkable green network connects neighborhoods to nearby open spaces and recreation. This network becomes an integral part of each community's identity and character.



### Connect with Rivers

Link together Washington's vibrant parks along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. Improved access and sustainable, diverse attractions draw people to the waterfront.



### Protect, Connect, and Restore Natural Resources

Natural resources within the city's parks and open spaces, including wetlands, floodplains, wooded areas, and streams and rivers, offer natural habitats and beneficial ecological functions that support a sustainable and livable city.



### Celebrate Urban Parks

The rich tapestry of urban parks is enhanced to create unique places, offering historical, commemorative, cultural, and recreational experiences that meet the needs of dense and growing neighborhoods.



### Expand Park System Capacity

Existing parks are maintained and enhanced, and new open spaces are identified, to meet the city's expanding needs for accessible recreation and green spaces. Special attention is focused on growing and underserved neighborhoods.



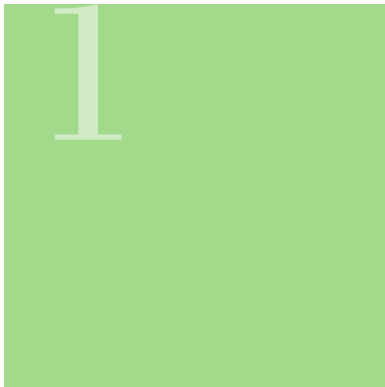
### Link the City with Green Corridors

Leafy streets, winding parkways, and natural trails connect residents and visitors to major parks, as well as enhance the regional transportation network.



## Six Big Ideas

Using the information from the parks assessment, the partner agencies decided to address a limited number of priority topics in depth—the Six Big Ideas—rather than develop a plan that would broadly address all park issues or specific park and open space sites. This approach was used to focus on areas where significant improvements could be made to the city's park or open space resources by the CapitalSpace partner agencies working together to maximize existing assets, address current and future needs, and seize upon existing opportunities. Each of the Six Big Ideas were explored through more detailed analyses, often using model projects or case studies to test out ideas and identify broadly applicable lessons learned. The recommendations for each Big Idea include ideas for new planning and development policies, additional physical improvements and alternative uses, and approaches to operation and maintenance.



### Link the Fort Circle Parks by implementing a greenway and making the parks destinations.

- ◆ Promote the fort parks as national historic, cultural, and recreational treasures and provide opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize their history.
- ◆ Increase public access to the Fort Circle Parks by connecting them to other parks, schools, and other destinations.
- ◆ Activate the fort parks and greenways through selective park uses that draw residents and visitors to their rich natural environment and cultural history.
- ◆ Protect and celebrate the diverse and significant natural resources of the fort parks.



### Improve public schoolyards to help relieve pressure on nearby parks and better connect children with the environment.

- ◆ Develop a comprehensive schoolyard improvement strategy that assesses needs, provides standards for improvements, prioritizes projects, and is coordinated with the District's school modernization process.
- ◆ Preserve schoolyards for community recreation space and improve public access.
- ◆ Develop guidelines for schoolyard planning including establishing safe and secure play environments, active recreation components, low-impact development opportunities, and environmental education curricula.
- ◆ Clarify agency responsibilities for general schoolyard maintenance and develop partnerships to provide for enhancements.

## Enhance urban natural areas and better connect residents to encourage urban stewardship for natural resources.

- ◆ Coordinate future research and share environmental data among federal and local agencies and their partners.
- ◆ Protect park natural resources.
- ◆ Adopt clear, consistent, and shared goals and guidelines among responsible agencies and adjacent jurisdictions for long-term park and natural resource management.
- ◆ Build a green infrastructure network within natural areas to perform many of the same services as drainage pipes and spillways.

## Improve playfields to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors.

- ◆ Maintain or expand the current level of service for recreation facilities.
- ◆ Increase capacity through field assessments, use, improvement plans, and capital programs coordinated among responsible agencies.
- ◆ Simplify the permitting process between NPS, DPR, and DCPS and coordinate fees, signage, and enforcement.

## Enhance Center City parks and open space to support a vibrant downtown.

- ◆ Increase park use by improving quality, quantity, access, and connections.
- ◆ Build and strengthen park constituency support through formal partnerships with individuals, businesses, and organizations.
- ◆ Create unique places for neighborhoods, strengthen the overall identity of parks, and use public spaces around parks to expand programs and amenities.

## Transform small parks into successful public spaces, forming a cohesive urban network of green spaces.

- ◆ Organize small parks into clusters, where appropriate, to coordinate their uses and physical improvements.
- ◆ Coordinate planning and management of small parks among the various park and planning agencies for efficiency and promote investments across all small park resources.
- ◆ Provide neighborhood-oriented programming and improvements for small parks to ensure they are clean and safe to enhance neighborhood livability.
- ◆ Leverage related investments and tap into funding unique to small parks.

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## Taking Action

CapitalSpace comes at a moment of great opportunity, when local and national leadership is focused on improving urban life, the environment, and community health. To achieve the full potential of Washington's parks and to continue the coordination established through the CapitalSpace initiative, the partner agencies are committed to advancing the recommendations in the CapitalSpace Plan, as summarized here and described in more detail in the Moving the Plan Forward section, starting on page 90.

### Work Together and Measure Progress

One of the most valuable outcomes of the CapitalSpace initiative is the development of shared goals, improved communication, and strengthened relationships between the partner agencies. These outcomes will allow the partners to better promote opportunities and address challenges facing Washington's parks. The partner agencies are committed to holding quarterly meetings and developing an annual CapitalSpace status report to track progress on key action items.

### Coordinate on Overarching Issues

Several overarching recommendations arose in the development of the Six Big Ideas that partner agencies believe should be incorporated into any park project: expand and coordinate information-sharing with the public; improve coordination for ongoing maintenance; expand green jobs; and use sustainable practices to construct, maintain, and program parks. The partners will continue to work together on opportunities for new or more accessible open space.

### Maximize Resources

The CapitalSpace partners are committed to advancing recommendations by working together, which can help leverage limited budgets and bring additional resources from other agencies and external groups to advance projects, programs, and activities. The partner agencies will look for opportunities to maximize their resources by coordinating work plans, capital improvement budgets, and other programs, where appropriate.

### Build Partnerships

There are tremendous opportunities to forge partnerships to improve Washington's parks, which combine the assets of the public and private sectors in creative ways. NPS and DPR maintain standard partnership programs, which can be tailored to meet specific goals and reflect the requirements of the parent agency. The partner agencies are committed to strengthening the legacy of park partnerships by connecting interested partners to the right agency through improved information sharing; exploring legislative changes that could provide increased partnering flexibility; and identifying opportunities for agencies to jointly enter into cooperative agreements with a single partnership organization.

## Implement Priority Actions from the Six Big Ideas

To move the Six Big Ideas forward, the CapitalSpace partners have prioritized the following recommendations for initial attention and action. Each partner agency will contribute in different ways. Coordination with community and stakeholder groups will be critical to successful implementation.

### *Complete the Fort Circle Parks trail*

Finalize the trail alignment and identify connections from the trail to transit, schools, and other community parks and recreational activities. Identify funding opportunities to implement the trail and associated connections and infrastructure, including improved streetscape conditions, trail crossings, and signage.

### *Promote the value of the Fort Circle Parks*

Increase public awareness of the numerous historic, natural, and recreational resources within the Fort Circle Parks, building upon NPS's development of a wayside plan.

### *Improve the availability and use of playfields*

Guide renovations and improve the scheduling and use of recreational fields through coordinated assessment and maintenance programs. Improve the permitting of fields by developing an on-line permitting system for all NPS, DPR, and DCPS facilities; improve and coordinate field allocation and use policies; align permit fees; and provide clear field use information.

### *Ensure that schoolyards meet community recreational needs*

Ensure that schoolyards can be used as open space by surrounding neighborhoods. Develop approaches to strengthen neighborhood involvement in the planning process for the modernization and redevelopment of schools and their yards.

### *Launch a city-wide ecosystem consortium*

Coordinate ecological research associated with Washington's natural resources, and collectively identify and map these resources, implement restoration and protection strategies, and increase public awareness of the ecological functions of Washington's parks and open space system.

### *Make Center City parks more inviting and active*

Explore opportunities to improve existing Center City parks and surrounding streets and sidewalks through physical enhancements, additional programming, and activation. This will allow the parks and street spaces to be better used by the community while retaining their national and historic significance.

### *Improve the maintenance and use of small parks*

Build upon the initial CapitalSpace assessment and further categorize the small parks and triangles throughout the District by geographic area, function, natural and cultural resources, and other characteristics. Develop a shared database to identify opportunities for improved efficiencies in their management by multiple agencies.



Robert F. Lederer Youth Garden



Lamont Park



Westminster Playground