

Department of Recreation and Parks

Part 1. Agency Overview

Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks' (BCRP) mission is to improve the health and wellness of Baltimore through maintaining quality recreational programs, preserving our parks and natural resources, and promoting fun, active lifestyles for all citizens of Baltimore. To that end, BCRP's vision is to build a stronger Baltimore one community at a time through Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity. We define these components as:

- **Conservation:** Parks are critical to the preservation of natural resources that have real economic benefits for communities. The Department serves as a strong voice in communities as we advocate for protecting open space, connecting children to nature, improving our tree canopy, and providing education and programming that helps communities engage in conservation practices.
- **Health and Wellness:** Recreation and Parks lead the nation in improving the overall health and wellness of communities. They are essential partners in combating some of the most complicated and expensive challenges our country faces – poor nutrition, hunger, obesity, and physical inactivity. We have to become dedicated to this fight.
- **Social Equity:** Universal access to public parks and recreation programming are a right, not a privilege. Every day, the Department must ensure that all members of the community have access to the resources and programming offered. We have to do a better job of developing programs and facilities that reflect the communities we aim to serve.

Baltimore City Recreation and Parks is comprised of ten different divisions and employs 306 people. Divisions within the agency include: Recreation Center Operations (43 recreation centers), Therapeutic, Aquatics, Youth and Adult Sports (20 programs), Programming & Training, Seniors, Forestry, Horticulture, Parks Maintenance, and Capital Development & Planning.

BCRP manages and maintains the City's park, playground and playing field system consisting of over 4,874 acres of open space. The Department is responsible for the care of all buildings and facilities on park property. Another key agency responsibility is to provide a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities and programs in parks as well in facilities such as recreation centers, swimming pools, senior centers, soccer arenas, ice rinks, a nature center, therapeutic recreation facilities, a conservatory and arboretum. The agency's urban horticultural and forestry management and operations care for land in street right of ways, city street trees and the urban forest.

In addition to over 5,018 acres of open space, the Department manages the following capital assets:

- 119 playgrounds
- 25 swimming pools

- 2 ice-skating rinks
- 1 roller rink
- 1 bowling alley
- 80 tennis courts
- 104 basketball courts
- 18+ miles of bike trails
- 200+ athletic fields (baseball and multi-purpose fields)

Projects in the capital program include, but are not limited to, walk/bicycle trail construction, park and playground renovations, basketball and tennis court resurfacing, recreation center and pool renovation, expansion or new construction, park restroom and pavilion upgrades, and historic building improvements. Other projects include the development of plans for parks and recreation facilities system wide as well as individual park and recreation facilities to identify long term community needs and future capital projects.

Capital Projects are managed within our Capital Planning & Development Office. The office includes landscape architects, planners, architects, facility maintenance operations and construction inspectors. The office staff oversees and manages on-call contracts with professional service consultants (landscape architects, architects, planners and engineers) to develop plans and construction documents. Staff construction inspectors oversee and manage capital project construction. Capital projects are advertised and bid through the City's competitive bidding process. Individuals interested in construction jobs should contact the Mayor's Office of Employment Development.

Part 2. Capital Projects

Agency and Citywide Plans guide and inform the development and prioritization of Recreation and Parks capital projects. Key plans include:

Agency Plans

1. Rec 2025 (2019)
2. 2019 Vision Plan
3. Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan 2022-2027 (LPPRP) (2022)
4. Individual Park Master Plans (selected list recent)
 - North Harford Park Vision Plan (2022)
 - Druid Lake Vision Plan (2021)
 - Florence Cummins Park Master Plan (2020)
 - Canton Waterfront Park Master Plan (2020)
 - CC Jackson Park Master Plan (2020)
 - Solo Gibbs Park Master Plan (2020)
 - Patterson Park Master Plan (2016)
 - Northwest Park Master Plan (2012)
 - Master Plans for Druid Hill, Riverside, Carroll, Clifton and Gwynns Falls Leakin Park
5. Recreation and Aquatics Facilities Plan (2015)

Citywide Plans

1. A New Era of Neighborhood Investment (2019, Dept. of Housing & Community Development)
2. Green Network Plan (2018, Dept. of Planning)
3. CHOICE Neighborhood Grant (2018, HABC)
4. South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan (2015, Dept. of Planning)
5. Park Heights Neighborhood Master Plan (2008, Dept. of Planning)

Capital Project Program Areas

Recreation and Parks projects generally fall within several categories: Recreation/Aquatic Facility Expansion/Modernization; Park Rehabilitation; Maryland Community Parks and Playground Program and Baltimore Playlot Program, Park Building Renovations; Athletic Court and Athletic Field Renovations; Tree Baltimore Program, and Park Land Acquisition.

- **The Recreation/Aquatic Facility Expansion/Modernization Program** focuses on upgrading recreation and aquatic facilities to create a network of high quality recreation and aquatic facilities and sustainable recreation services for Baltimore City.
- **The Park Rehabilitation and Development Program** is a comprehensive effort to replace basic park amenities – including trash cans, benches, athletic and park lights, signage, walkways, utilities, fencing, fountains, dog areas and other park amenities, using products that are adapted to modern park uses and incorporate recycled materials in their design. Older features that have worn beyond repair, such as drinking and ornamental fountains will be modernized to reduce water waste and meet ADA codes.

Comprehensive replacement and re-design of park walks allows the Department to meet ADA goals, reduce impervious surface and increase the size of sidewalk street tree pits. In addition, special areas within the park system will be renovated to meet the needs of modern park programs, including dog areas.

- **Maryland Community Parks and Playgrounds Program and the Baltimore Playlot Program** focus on the renovation of park playgrounds and park facilities. Both programs are funded with State funds specifically earmarked for these uses. Playground renovations include installation of new playground structures and site improvements to comply with safety and accessibility guidelines. Providing safe, attractive outdoor recreation spaces in our neighborhoods contributes to the stability of neighborhoods as well as increases the recreational opportunities for children and families. Department staff work together in consultation with surrounding neighborhood and PTA groups to develop all new playground designs. Sites are selected from the priority list developed by recommendations from the FY2000 Playground Task Force recommendations, Department's Playground Safety Coordinator, Park Maintenance and community requests.
- **Athletic Court and Field Renovations** focus on the renovation of basketball courts, tennis courts and athletic fields (grass and synthetic turf) for team sports throughout the park system. Basketball and tennis courts need periodic resurfacing to remain in playable condition. The fields require an upgrade to renew their useful life and to better withstand the amount of play. Other improvements include pedestrian walkways, field and area fencing, and seating. All renovations include a focus on proper drainage, standardized athletic equipment, flexibility of use, increased pedestrian circulation and ADA accessibility. Many of the improvement projects include athletic field lighting and restroom facilities to extend use hours while accommodating athletes and spectators alike.
- **Park Building Renovations** encompass a variety of structures within the park system, all requiring upkeep and renovation. There are over 35 individual comfort stations, and only about 10% have been renovated to meet ADA codes. At least 30 comfort stations need a complete renovation. Projects include renovation of park restrooms, park maintenance buildings, park pavilions and other park facilities including ADA upgrades and more energy efficient building systems. Some of the park building structures are historic and require specialized restoration work.
- **TreeBaltimore** is the City's coordinated program for *all* tree plantings within Baltimore, and is managed by our Urban Forestry Division. The program also maintains the City's public-private partnership among non-profits, community associations, other city agencies, and the state and federal governments. Annually, over three thousand large shade trees are planted under contract as part of streetscape and park projects, and TreeBaltimore also provides thousands of trees to its partners and residents for additional plantings in underserved neighborhoods. Capital funds have been the only source for afforestation tree planting and purchasing.
- **Park Land Acquisition** is undertaken as land becomes available and is evaluated on a per site basis. The City's Green Network Plan will likely identify parcels to add to the existing park land, recreation facilities, reforestation, or to the exchange of several small open spaces for larger, more functional open space. As neighborhoods are redeveloped, each public parcel, including open space, will be evaluated for its ability to enhance

access to park space; host recreational amenities; enhance conservation efforts; be maintainable and become a safe, attractive community asset. The focus for natural resource protection in the future will be limited to those lands that are important for habitat enhancement, are required for the development of our Greenway trail systems or will benefit existing park and recreation on facilities.

Project Prioritization

The Department selects and prioritizes capital projects for the annual Capital Improvement Plan process through a number of steps. The Capital Development and Planning Division gathers requests during the year from a wide variety of sources: individual community members, elected officials, BCRP staff requests and agency priorities, BCRP park and facility plans and public planning processes, and other city and state agency requests, requirements, plans and priorities.

A full list of all of these requests is generated and is discussed internally with BCRP’s Director, senior management and staff to determine an initial list of agency priority projects. This list is then ranked using a slightly modified Department of Planning criteria and an assigned ranking system shown in the table below.

Criteria	Yes/ No	Range of Potential Points
Fulfills a State or Federal mandate		Y or N
Necessary to protect public health and safety		0 or 5
City funding will leverage other fund sources or complete a partially funded project		0 or 3
Capital investment will result in operating savings		0 or 2
Necessary to implement a priority housing or economic development project		0 or 1
Promotes private-public partnerships		0 or 2
Promotes equity		0 or 5
Implements the City’s Comprehensive Master Plan, area master plans and or agency/institution’s master plan (Equity Assessment Program, Community Development Framework, INSPIRE, CHOICE, 1% For Art, Disaster Preparedness & Resiliency, Greenway Trail Network, etc.)		0 or 3
Agency has prioritized the project		0 or 3
Situation critical; A lack of investment now will result in exponentially higher costs later or the loss of an asset		0 or 5
Improves air or water quality, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and/or promotes conservation		0 or 5
TOTAL		34

Every project was ranked using this system and assigned a number of points based upon the strength of justification/ responses. The priority list was then reviewed and tweaked in consultation with BCRP’s director.

Primary Funding Sources

Primary funding for capital projects comes from the City’s Bond Funds, Maryland Department of Natural Resources Program Open Space Grants, City’s General Funds, Pimlico Local Impact

Aid, South Baltimore Gateway Partnership Funds, and occasionally Federal Grant Funds. City funding is used to match a portion of the State Program Open Space Funding and Federal Grant funds where applicable.

Key Challenges

The demand for capital improvements in both parks and recreation facilities continues to be far in excess of the available capital funds. Significant assets are at risk of being lost or incurring severe damage creating health and safety risks to visitors and staff. Historic structures continue to exhibit structural issues and at many sites, basic infrastructure such as lighting, water, drainage structures and pathways are not functional or approaching the end of their life cycle. Many sites do not have basic identification signs. Recreation Center attached to closing schools are a major obstacle to overcome as well.