

# Department of Recreation and Parks

## Agency Overview

Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks' (BCRP) mission is to improve the health and wellness of Baltimore through quality recreational programs, preserving our parks and natural resources, and promoting fun, active lifestyles for all ages. To that end, BCRP's vision is to build a stronger Baltimore one community at a time through several components:

- Conservation- Parks are critical in the role of preserving natural resources that have real economic benefits for communities. We are the leaders, often the only voice in communities, for protecting open space, connecting children to nature, and providing education and programming that helps communities engage in conservation practices.
- Health and Wellness- BCRP leads Baltimore in improving the overall health and wellness of communities. We are essential partners in combating some of the most complicated and expensive challenges our city faces—poor nutrition, hunger, obesity and physical inactivity
- Social Equity- Universal access to public parks and recreation are a right, not just a privilege. Every day we are working hard to ensure that all members of the community have access to the resources and programming we offer.

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 also 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 includes urban horticultural and forestry management and operations to care for land in street right of ways, city street trees and the urban forest.

## Capital Projects

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.

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

#### Agency Plans

1. Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan 2017-2022 (LPPRP) (2017)
2. Individual Park Master Plans (selected list recent)
  - Solo Gibbs Park Master Plan (2019)
  - Patterson Park Master Plan (2016)
  - Northwest Park Master Plan (2012)
  - Master Plans for Druid Hill, Riverside, Carroll, Clifton and Gwynns Falls Leakin Park
3. Recreation and Aquatics Facilities Plan (2015)

#### Citywide Plans

1. Green Network Plan (2018, Dept. of Planning)
2. CHOICE Neighborhood Grant (2018, HABC)
3. South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan (2015, Dept. of Planning)
4. 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.
- **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.

### **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.