



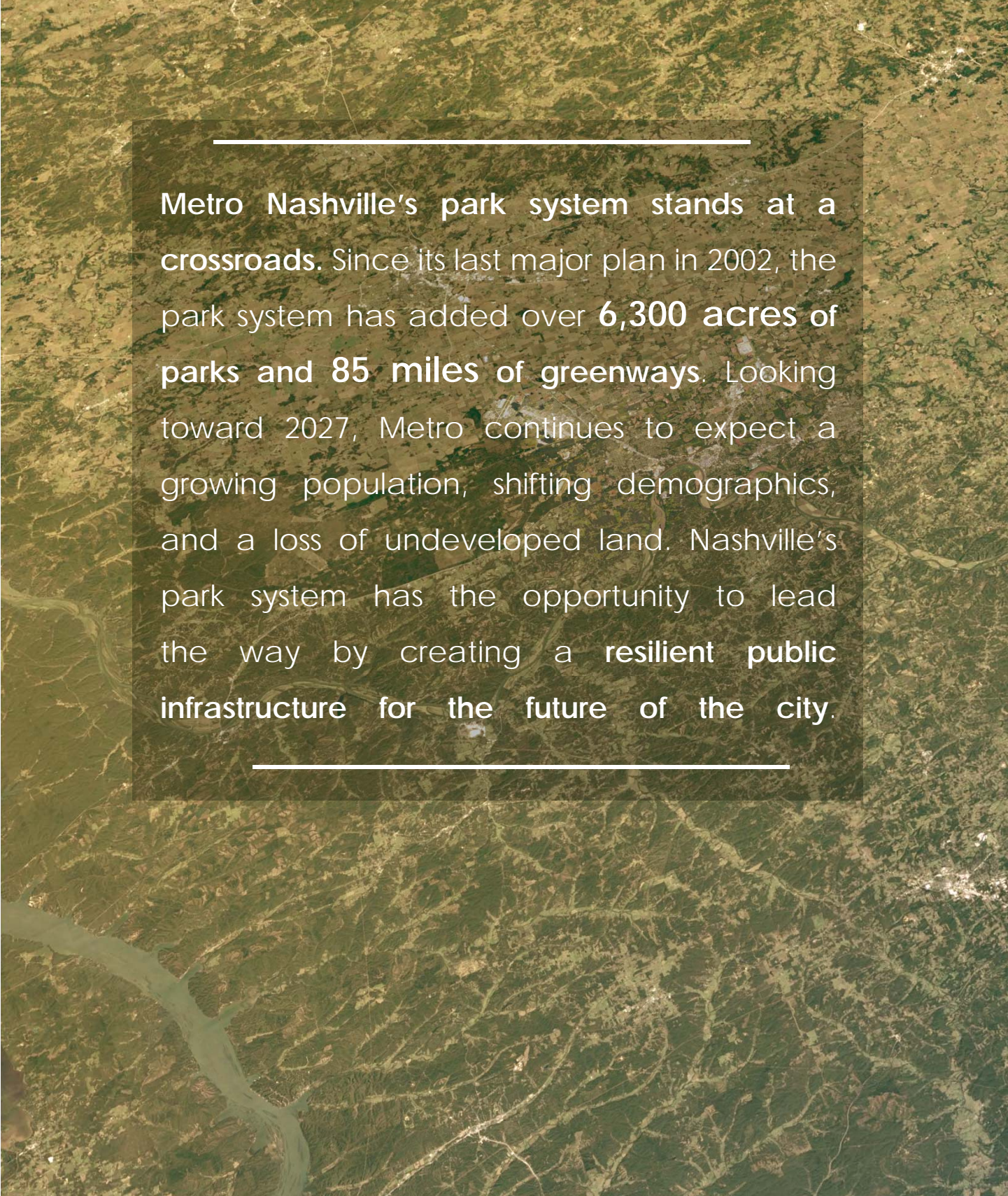
PLAN  
TO  
*play*

# The Nashville Parks & Greenways Master Plan

## Executive Summary

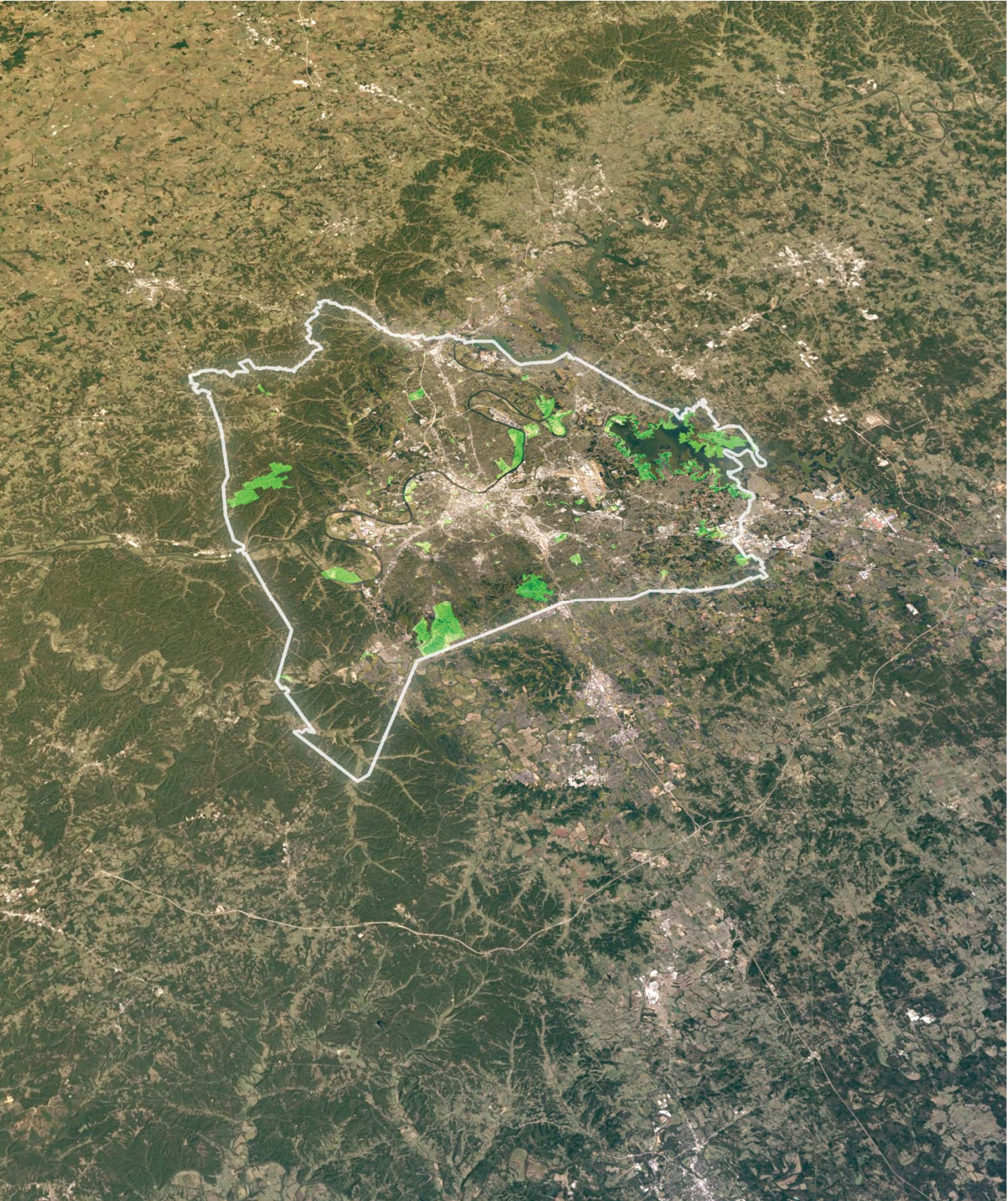
Megan Barry, Mayor  
Christy Smith, Chair,  
Metropolitan Board of Parks  
and Recreation  
Tommy Lynch, Director



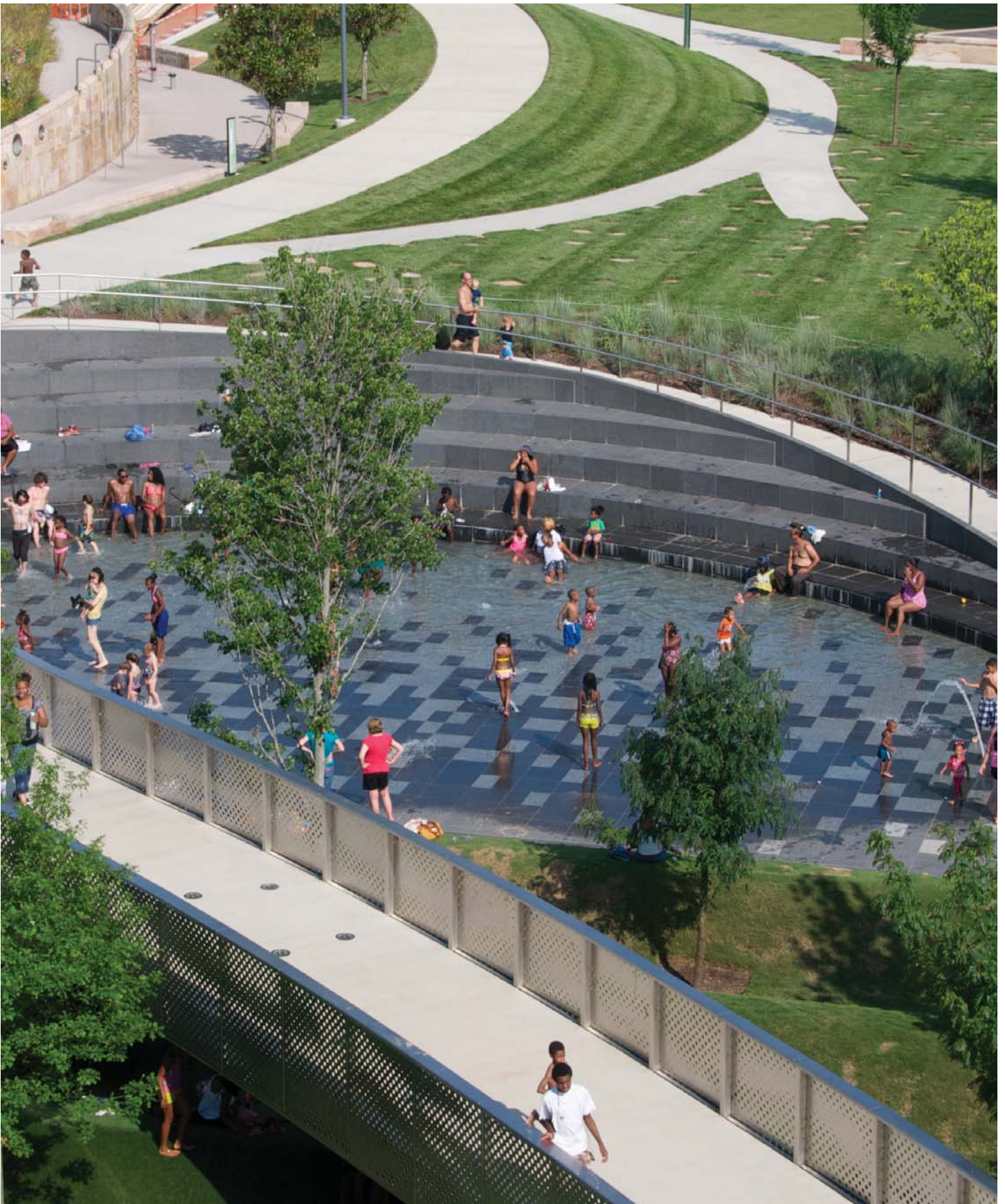


Metro Nashville's park system stands at a crossroads. Since its last major plan in 2002, the park system has added over **6,300 acres of parks and 85 miles of greenways**. Looking toward 2027, Metro continues to expect a growing population, shifting demographics, and a loss of undeveloped land. Nashville's park system has the opportunity to lead the way by creating a **resilient public infrastructure for the future of the city**.









# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

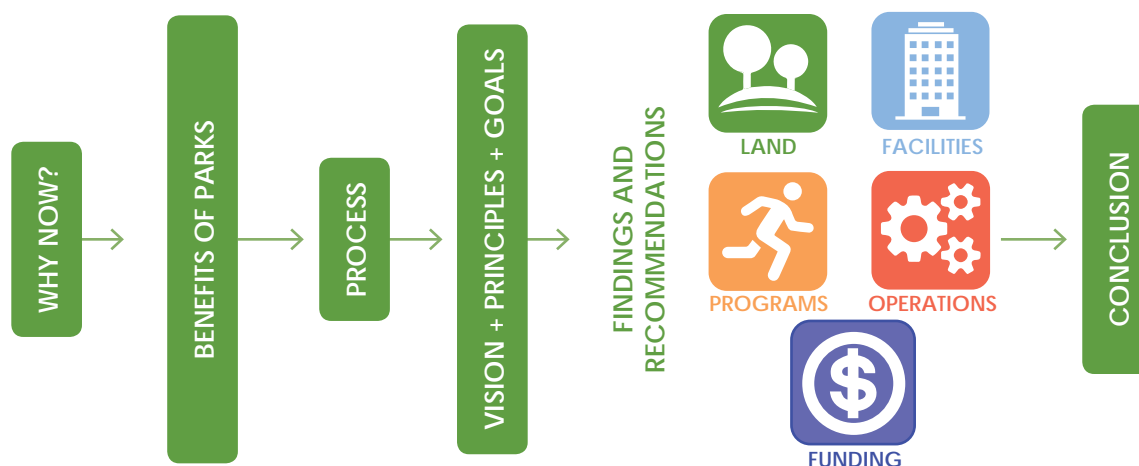
Nashville emerged into the 21st century as a world-class “It” city. Among its many attributes is a valuable parks and greenway system that provides residents and visitors access to great park land, natural environments, greenway trails, and varied recreation facilities and programs. Decisions by the community’s leadership have been deliberate about supporting the system to address growing demand. Those decisions have contributed to a highly prized quality of life in the region surrounding Metro Nashville.

In 2015, the Department of Parks and Recreation of Metropolitan Nashville / Davidson County decided it was time for a new parks and greenways master plan. The original plan, produced in 2002 and updated in 2008, has proved to be a valuable planning roadmap to guide the growth of Metro’s recreation acreage and facilities. However, the area’s continued population growth, land development patterns, and changing demographics demand a fresh perspective.

**2002** PARKS: 153  
ACRES: 9,483  
POPULATION: 570,000

**2016** PARKS: 185  
ACRES: 15,873  
POPULATION: 678,413

The 2016 Plan to Play Master Plan is intended to offer a set of tools that will continue to guide deliberate decisions, and provide a 10-year vision to sustainably meet the community’s needs through 2027. It identifies the amazing economic, social and environmental values that a healthy park system returns on the investments made. The plan supports this vision with a series of findings and recommendations divided into the following categories: Land, Facilities, Programs, and Operations. The final section of the recommendations, Funding the Future, projects the recommended levels of investment needed to build and sustain the Metro Parks and Greenways system through 2027.



## 1.1 MASTER PLAN INTRODUCTION

## 1.2 2002 MASTER PLAN

## 1.3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY APPROACH

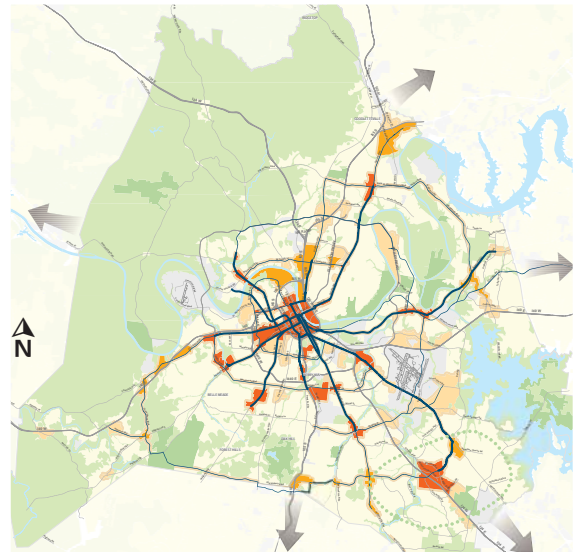


## 1.4 WHY NOW?

Nashville has a parks and greenways system that is among the many superlatives that draw people to this thriving community. So why was a new master plan required?

NashvilleNext, the planning process conducted over three years by the Metro Planning department provides some insight into why Plan to Play was needed. **Nashville's projected rapid population growth, demographic shifts, densification of the urban core, transportation issues and other factors present a new set of challenges and opportunities for this community.** Indeed, the extraordinary changes witnessed over the last several years are likely to continue as Nashville's economy and profile grow.

Within this context, parks and greenways are more important than ever. **No great city is without a great park system, and indeed, parks are more central to Nashville's identity than ever before.**



NashvilleNext Plan encourages growth in centers and corridors.

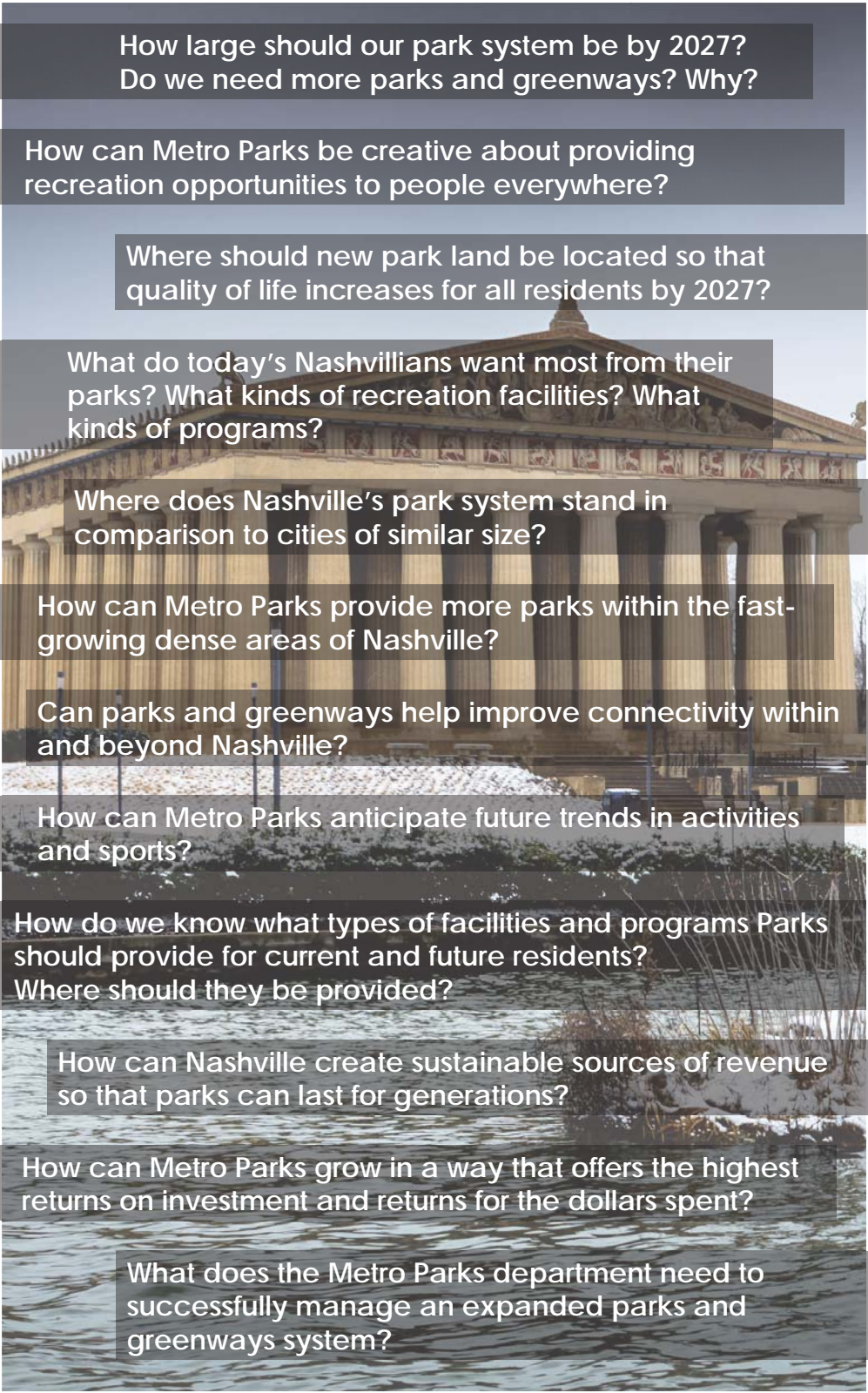
Another key factor in planning the future of the park system is its value to the community as **a shared space for ALL, regardless of economic status, age, race, or religious or political affiliation.** Keeping pace by managing change will ensure that there is a civic space for the entire community in the future.

With continued growth and prosperity, aspects of Nashville's park system are seeing intensified use pressure on existing parks due to the popularity of park land, facilities and programs. Improvements need to be made now and planned into the next decade to address growing demand and reduce damaging pressure.

The time to act is now. The community's leadership continues to share the perspective that parks and greenways are valuable public infrastructure. To be a world-class park system, Metro Nashville must:

- **Take care of what we have**
- **Grow the system methodically, equitably and sustainably**

## 1.5 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS



How large should our park system be by 2027?  
Do we need more parks and greenways? Why?

How can Metro Parks be creative about providing recreation opportunities to people everywhere?

Where should new park land be located so that quality of life increases for all residents by 2027?

What do today's Nashvillians want most from their parks? What kinds of recreation facilities? What kinds of programs?

Where does Nashville's park system stand in comparison to cities of similar size?

How can Metro Parks provide more parks within the fast-growing dense areas of Nashville?

Can parks and greenways help improve connectivity within and beyond Nashville?

How can Metro Parks anticipate future trends in activities and sports?

How do we know what types of facilities and programs Parks should provide for current and future residents?  
Where should they be provided?

How can Nashville create sustainable sources of revenue so that parks can last for generations?

How can Metro Parks grow in a way that offers the highest returns on investment and returns for the dollars spent?

What does the Metro Parks department need to successfully manage an expanded parks and greenways system?

## 1.6 THE BENEFITS OF PARKS

Parks and greenways help build on the foundation of NashvilleNext guiding principles:

- Ensure opportunity for all
- Expand accessibility
- Create economic prosperity
- Foster stronger neighborhoods
- Advance education
- Champion the environment
- Be Nashville

Parks offer an array of community benefits that can often be both intangible and priceless. However, there are other metrics that allow a city to gauge the value of parks. These equally important metrics offer a quantifiable bottom line in real financial terms.



The Triple Bottom Line

Parks and greenways system investments rank extraordinarily high when assessed against the triple bottom line metrics of sustainability. Environmentally sustainable investments should meet the following metrics:

- **Create economic value**
- **Promote environmental benefits**
- **Improve social well-being**

The economic benefits of parks collectively enhance the quality of life in Nashville. **Quality of life is economic development.** Most employees in today's economy consider more than just salary when choosing places of employment. They choose to live where the quality of life is good for them and their families.





As part of Plan to Play, an economic analysis was completed that addresses six specific areas in which parks and greenways provide economic value to Metro Nashville. Using conservative methodologies, Nashville's parks and greenways generate on a mostly annual basis:

## \$550,410,000 in economic benefits



### PROPERTY VALUES AND TAX REVENUE

Parks and greenways raise the value of nearby residential properties in total by **\$200 million**. This translates into an additional **\$2.15 million in annual tax revenues to the city**.



### TOURISM

Nashville's parks are essential to the area's ability to attract visitors. In 2015, four festivals hosted in parks attracted 378,000 attendees who spent \$96.1 million in the local economy. Each year, tournaments at the Centennial Sportsplex attract 12,700 visitors who spend \$19.6 million. **In total, these 390,000 visitors spend \$116 million annually.**



### HUMAN HEALTH

Independent research shows that park use translates into increased physical activity resulting in medical cost savings. The approximately 23,000 adults who use Nashville's parks and recreation system engage in physical activity at a level sufficient to generate measurable health benefits. **This yields an annual medical cost savings of \$27.5 million.**



### RECREATION USE

Residents enjoy Nashville parks, greenways, sports fields, and community centers for a variety of activities with an annual market value of \$69.5 million. This translates into a benefit of approximately \$105 per resident. **Since Metro Parks typically receives \$53 per resident annually in tax dollars, the recreational benefits alone offer an excellent return on investment.**



### STORMWATER INFILTRATION

Since the percentage of impervious surfaces (pavement and roofs) in most parks and greenways is very low, they offer more stormwater benefits than most other forms of development. Parks absorb precipitation, slow its runoff and reduce the volume of water that enters the sewer system. **This is valued at \$16.9 million annually.**



### AIR POLLUTION REMOVAL

Parks with trees and shrubs remove air pollutants that endanger human health and damage structures. These green spaces **provide health benefits and reduce air pollution control costs in Nashville by \$3.66 million per year.**



## 1.7 THE PROCESS

Public engagement is a key component to the success of any public planning process. Successful engagement breathes life into a project and ensures that it reflects the values and priorities of the community it serves. For Plan to Play, the objective was to learn how residents use the park system, understand their needs and concerns, hear what Metro Parks is doing well, and identify areas for improvement. From the onset, the plan embarked on a robust community engagement and promotional strategy to ensure broad public involvement and engagement throughout the process. The goal was simple: Cast a wide net and engage as many people as possible.





Plan to Play recommendations are built upon data and input deliberately gathered from a variety of sources.

- **People:** The self-determined opinions and thoughts of residents, visitors, business owners, stakeholders and partners.
- **The System:** Metrics on how and how well the current park and greenways system serves the residents of Nashville.
- **Peers:** Cities of similar size and population with which Metro Nashville competes or shares aspirational goals.
- **Best Practices and Market Research:** A look at who's doing the best work and how recreation is projected to evolve.

### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Over 9,000 people participated in the planning process to help planners assess how residents use the park system, understand their needs and concerns, hear what Metro Parks is doing well, and identify areas for improvement.

### COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Public meetings were held in regionally diverse locations to offer attendees an opportunity to provide valuable input and stay informed of Plan to Play progress. Over 488 people attended these meetings. Metro Parks, Metro Public Works, and the Metro Transit Authority also teamed up to host an open house where people came to offer input on the three plans related to parks and greenways (Plan to Play), sidewalks and bikeways (WalknBike), and public transit (nMotion).

### STAKEHOLDER AND PARTNER AGENCIES

Local not-for-profit “friends” groups, environmental organizations, and sports groups were interviewed.

### PEER CITY BENCHMARKING

Five peer cities were identified and contacted to compare Metro Parks system data to those of **Austin, Louisville, Charlotte/Mecklenberg, Denver, and Portland, Oregon.** Some of the benchmark metrics include:

- System Acreage
- Facility Types
- Budgets / Operations Expenditures

### NATIONAL TRENDS ASSESSMENT

Trends in recreation were identified to help Metro Parks anticipate future needs in programs and facilities.

### SYSTEM LEVEL OF SERVICE ANALYSIS

The purpose of an existing Level of Service (LOS) analysis is to quantify how well the park and recreation needs of a community are being met with existing resources. It is also used to help determine where Metro Parks resources are deficient. The method used in determining the desired LOS for Nashville and Davidson County is based on community needs, existing facilities and amenities, and park acreage and access.



Sampling of public interactions during master plan process.



1.8 VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Plan to Play process re-evaluated and articulated Metro Parks’ purpose and values. This exercise was intended to help ensure that everything the department does aligns with a foundational vision that is relevant to Metro Nashville’s contemporary needs and ethos. These statements were crafted by the Plan to Play Steering Committee and Metro Parks staff and resulted in a new mission statement, a first-ever vision statement, and a first-ever set of guiding principles. Together, these statements have guided the development of Plan to Play’s recommendations and will be the standards by which departmental decisions are made.

Nashville’s parks and greenways offer life-enriching everyday experiences that are central to the city’s identity as a green, active, diverse, creative, thriving, and healthy community.

PARKS SHOULD BE ...

- Open to All**  
We distribute resources throughout Nashville to ensure equitable access and inclusion for everyone.
- Relevant and Diverse**  
We offer places, activities and experiences that are as varied as the Nashville community itself.
- Healthy**  
Our facilities and programs support the integration of health and wellness into everyday life.
- Green**  
The acquisition, development, and management of our park infrastructure reflect best practices in the management of natural resources and the ecological services they provide.
- Strategic and Productive**  
We plan for successful outcomes through efficiency, cost-effectiveness and the balancing of varied interests. We develop effective partnerships in the public interest.
- Safe**  
We design and manage clean and safe parks and facilities.
- Uniquely Nashville**  
Through community spaces, stewardship and education, we promote the natural, cultural and creative character of our community.
- Transparent**  
The community is invited to participate in key decision-making.
- A Good Investment**  
We contribute to the prosperity of Nashville through economic impact, public health, climate resilience and quality of life.

## 1.9 GOALS

**Land**

Increase the livability for Nashville and Davidson County residents by improving access to an excellent regional system of public parks and greenways that provides recreational, educational, ecological, and aesthetic benefits to enhance the quality of life for all.

**Facilities**

Provide a wide variety of park facilities and amenities within the parks and greenways system to offer opportunities for valuable recreation experiences in appropriate settings for the benefit of residents and visitors to the region.

**Programs**

Grow Metro Parks program participation, visibility, and facility use by offering all residents opportunities to participate in cultural, athletic, and environmental education programs to increase health, and build and support social and community cohesion across the region.

**Operations and Management**

Sustainably manage Metro Parks' operations so public tax dollars are being used as responsibly and efficiently as possible, while ensuring residents enjoy first-rate experiences and facilities. Use staff, technology, planning, and best business practices to increase Metro Parks' performance and community impact.

**Finance**

Responsibly balance service delivery and facilities management with multiple sources of sustainable funding. Strategically look for opportunities to maximize Metro Parks' resources, staff, and facilities to best serve Metro Parks' growing and diversifying population. Ensure no one service or set of services places an undue or inappropriate burden on the Metro Parks budget.

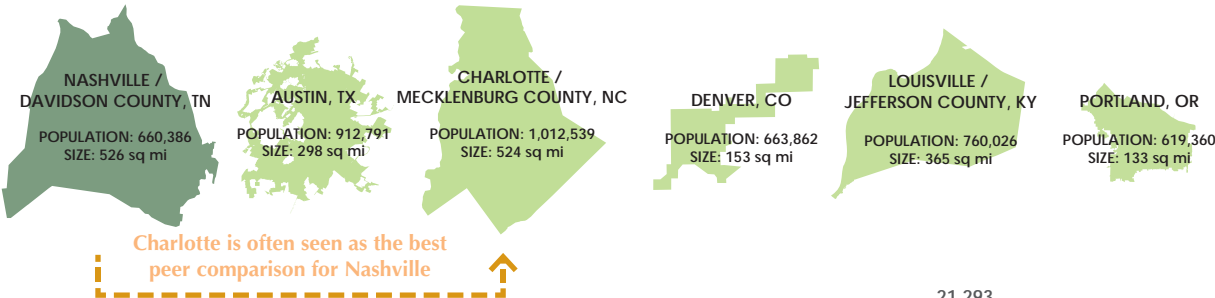




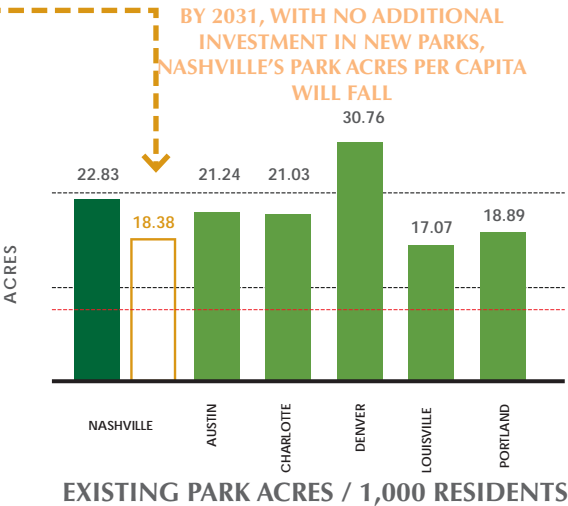
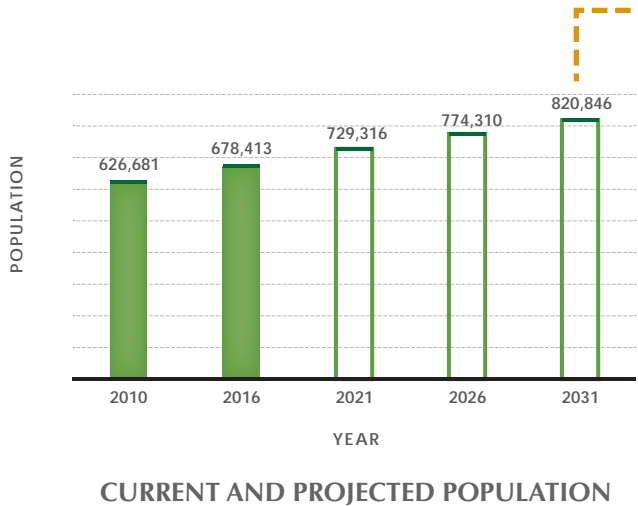
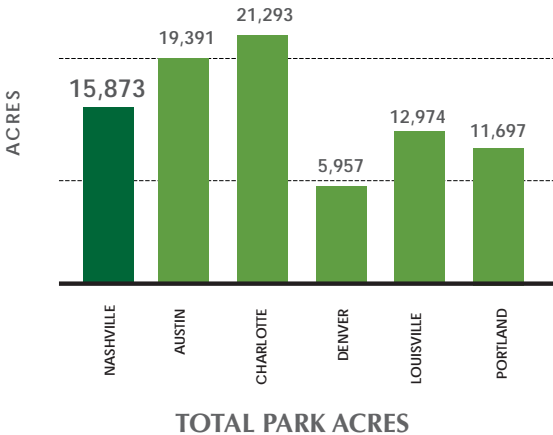
# LAND

## Key Findings

**Land is a fundamental element of the park system.** It not only includes formal developed parks but also natural areas and greenway corridors used to accommodate trails that provide transportation within and beyond the parks. Of the comparable cities used in this plan’s analysis, Metro Nashville has the largest county land area with the second-smallest population. This presents Metro Parks with challenges and opportunities.

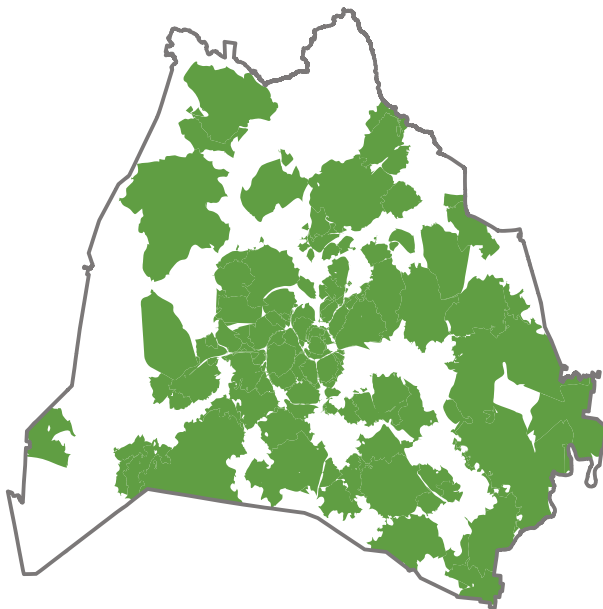


- For its size, **15,873 acres**, the Metro system has a unique identity with an unusually high percentage of large regional park acreage compared to peer cities.
- There is **a shortage, however, of more developed park land** with active recreation facilities when compared to peer cities.
- Nashville’s projected population growth rates and demographic shifts in the next 10 years **will require park land acquisition to provide an acceptable level of service.**





- Plan to Play recommendations can be built on NashvilleNext's foundation of consensus that answered:
  - » Where development and growth in the community should occur.
  - » Where neighborhood character and conservation landscapes should continue.
- **Downtown parks** are under intense pressure. With a growing population, these parks are at or **are reaching maximum capacity**.
- Metro Parks needs to update the system of classifying parks and set goals for existing and future park sizes.
- Greenways are a valuable tool for land preservation as well as connecting places. **Over 2,700 acres of floodplain lands are already preserved as corridors.**
- Though Nashville has a significant acreage of park land, its distribution is not even across the county. After analyzing the locations of parks, **gaps in system coverage were identified as opportunities for future expansion.**



PARK SERVICE GAP MAP

\*Data from the Telephone Survey. See section 5.1.1

\*\*Data taken from the Online Community Survey. See section 5.1.1

WOULD YOU SUPPORT THE PARKS DEPARTMENT PRESERVING MORE GREEN SPACE AND ACQUIRING ADDITIONAL PROPERTY TO DEVELOP NEW PARKS AND GREENWAYS?\*

**94% SUPPORT**



WOULD STRONGLY (61%) OR SOMEWHAT (33%) SUPPORT

HOW DO YOU GET TO THE PARK OR FACILITY?\*

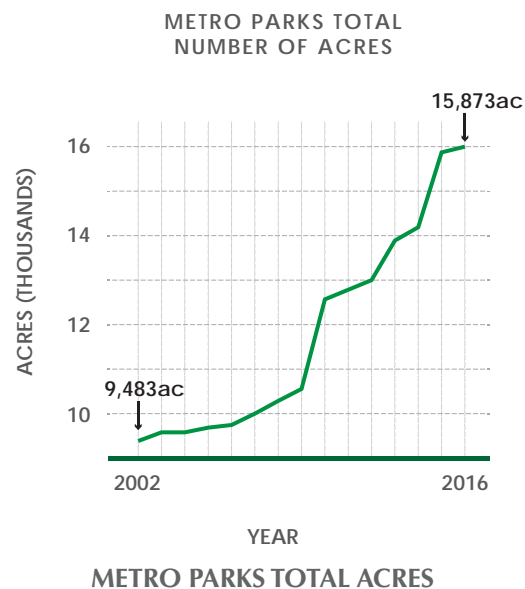


**92% DRIVE TO THE PARK OR FACILITY**

WHY DO YOU DRIVE INSTEAD OF OTHER MODES OF TRANSPORTATION?\*



**64% LIVE TOO FAR TO WALK OR BIKE**



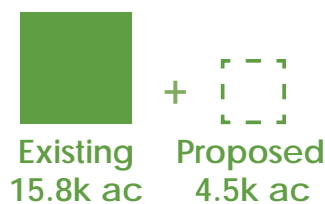




## LAND Key Recommendations

Metro's projected increase in population alone will require continued significant investment in park land acquisition just to maintain its current levels of service. In order to achieve the even higher standards derived from Plan to Play's needs assessment, park land acquisition must exceed the rate of the projected population growth.

### □ Expand park land by over **4,500** acres



Plan to Play establishes new level of service goals for each park type based on the plan's needs assessment. These park acreage goals were arrived at by taking a comprehensive look at the current system; comparing the current system to peer cities; reviewing public input, needs assessment, and priorities; and looking at the projected growth rate of the population.

PARK TYPE	SERVICE LEVELS				PARK ACRES	
	EXISTING 2016	2016 RECOMMENDED SERVICE LEVELS			METRO-OWNED EXISTING 2016	ADDITIONAL ACRES NEEDED FOR 2026
Pocket Parks (incl. school playgrounds): < 3 acres	0.12	0.15	acres per	1,000	54	37
Neighborhood Parks: 3 - 20 acres	0.83	1.00	acres per	1,000	511	226
Community Parks: 20 - 100 acres	1.77	2.00	acres per	1,000	1,169	379
Regional Parks: 100 + acres	28.10	28.10	acres per	1,000	10,176	3,187
Signature Parks	0.26	0.40	acres per	1,000	168	141
Special Use Park (incl. sports facilities)	1.09	1.50	acres per	1,000	721	440
Greenway corridors	0.97	1.00	acres per	1,000	643	130
Total Developed Park Land*	33.14	34.15	acres per	1,000	15,873	4,541

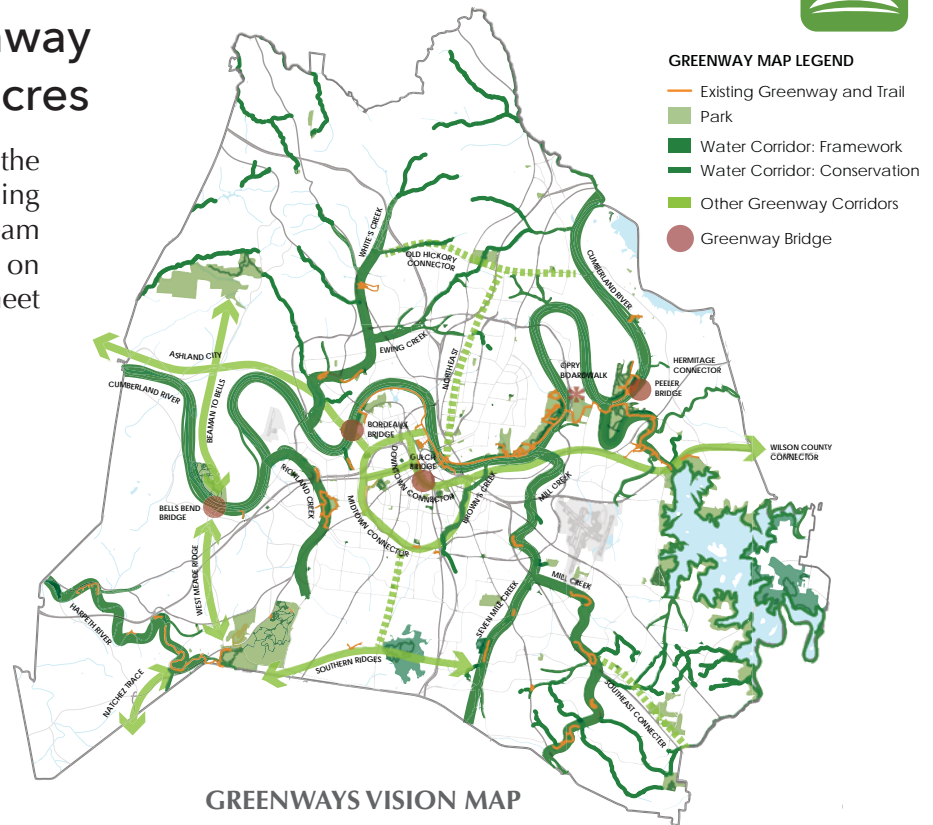
\* Includes land bank properties

#### EXISTING AND RECOMMENDED PARK ACREAGE



## Expand greenway land by **130** acres

Continue to build out the greenway system, focusing on river and stream corridors. Expand focus on overland corridors to meet transportation needs.



## Update park typologies

Identifying the appropriate facilities, amenities, and sizes of parks according to new classifications will allow for better park planning and equitable distribution of services.

## Prioritize expanding parks equally across communities where growth is high and service limited

Areas not highlighted on the analysis maps help identify underserved neighborhoods.







# FACILITIES

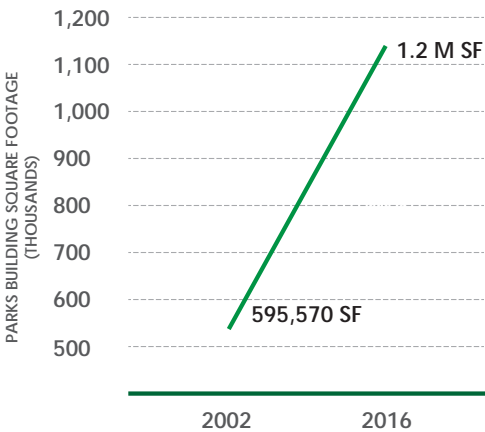
## Key Findings

Park facilities are the physical infrastructure within the park system that allow people to utilize the parks in a variety of ways. These facilities need to be accessible and flexible in order to accommodate a wide range of expanding future trends and needs.

- **Paved and unpaved trails are among the most valued facility** types in the system, and the community wants more of them across the county.
- The smaller existing recreation centers may provide great access in neighborhoods today, **but larger regional mega-centers will provide the best practices model for financial sustainability to satisfy growing demand for indoor recreation and program services.**
- Higher-quality maintenance and more programmatic management of historic park sites is considered an unmet community need.
- Because of population growth and demographic shifts, **Metro must to invest in both existing and new recreation facilities** to maintain or conservatively increase the level of service enjoyed today.
- **Needed key facilities and amenities can be added to existing park land** in order to meet some of the growing demands.
- Many neighborhoods of the county are underserved geographically by both park land and facilities, which affects equitable access for all residents.

Existing Park Facilities	
Facility Type	Metro-Owned Existing 2016
Reservable Shelters	60
Multipurpose Fields	83
Ball Fields (Adult and Youth)	86
Basketball Courts	61
Tennis Courts	147
Playgrounds	156
Dog Parks	7
Paved Multiuse Trails	102
Unpaved Trails/ Hiking Trails	66
Mountain Bike Trails	23
Outdoor Pools	4
INDOOR AMENITIES:	
Community Center/Recreation /Gymnasium/Fitness Facility	810,069 SF

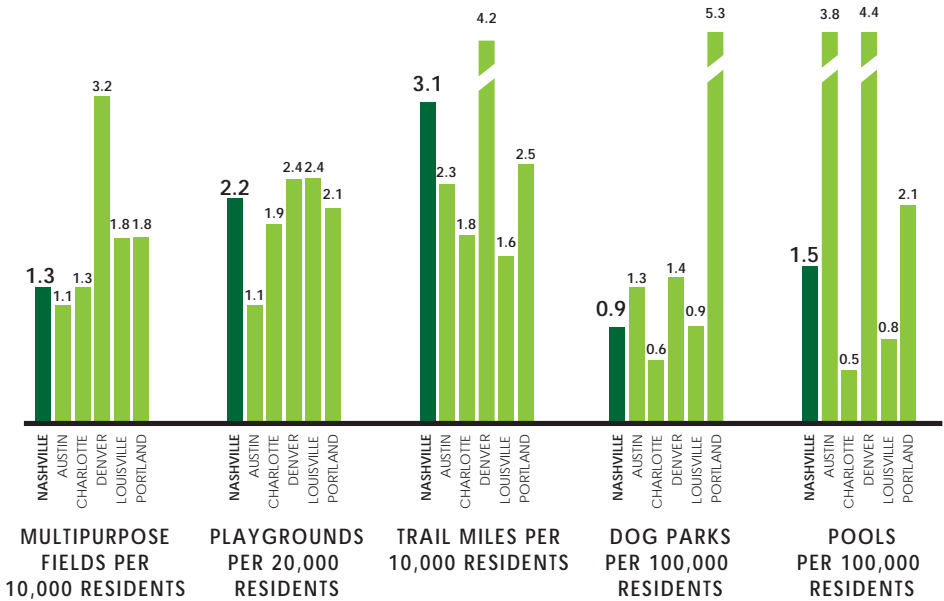
EXISTING PARK FACILITIES BY TYPE



GROWTH IN PARKS BUILDING SQUARE FOOTAGE

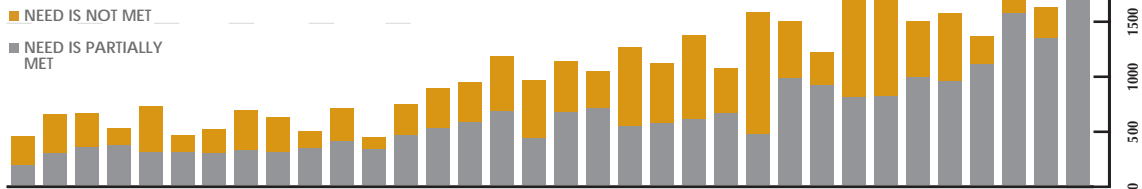


AMENITIES

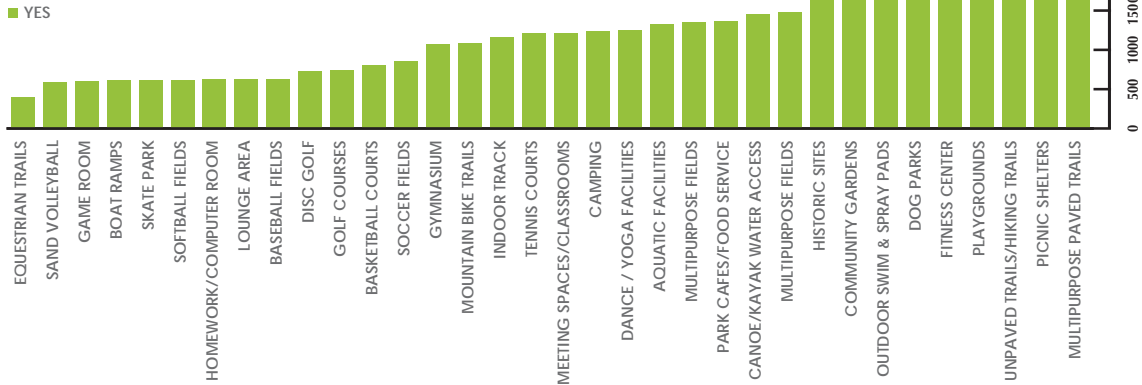


COMPARISON OF KEY AMENITIES\*

IS YOUR NEED FOR THIS FACILITY MET?



DO YOU OR DOES YOUR HOUSEHOLD HAVE A NEED FOR THESE FACILITIES?



FACILITY NEEDS MET\*\*

\*Data from the Peer City Comparison. See section 5.2

\*\*Data taken from the Online Community Survey. See section 5.1.1





# FACILITIES

## Key Recommendations

Facilities are all of the built assets and amenities in the park system. They range from community centers to trails, from swimming pools to museums and playgrounds, and have a total estimated asset value of approximately \$628 million. These facilities support both general informal use by the public as well as specialized or scheduled use for athletic competitions, recreation programs, or other events.

Expand investment in park facilities within existing parks and in new parks

In order to provide a broader distribution of recreation services, facilities can be added to existing park land as well as in newly acquired park land.

FACILITIES			
TYPE	EXISTING 2016	Additional Facilities/ Amenities Needed	
Paved MultiUse Trails	102	53	Mile(s)
Unpaved Trails/ Hiking Trails	66	50	Mile(s)
Picnic Shelters	60	17	Sites(s)
Outdoor Pools	4	5	Site(s)
Playgrounds	156	65	Site(s)
Dog Parks	7	8	Site(s)
Multipurpose Fields	83	46	Field(s)
Basketball Courts	61	50	Court(s)
Tennis Courts	147	25	Court(s)
Ball Fields (Adult and Youth)	86	43	Field(s)
Mountain Bike Trails	23	16	Mile(s)
INDOOR AMENITIES:			
Community Center/Recreation /Gymnasium/Fitness Facility (Square Feet)	870,069*	481,000	Square Feet

\*Includes 60,000 SF under construction in Madison and Smith Springs parks in 2017

Expand outdoor aquatic facilities (pools and spray-grounds) by 125,000 square feet

Pools and spraygrounds should have a true regional service radius, and consideration should be given to co-locating them with megacenters and indoor pools for operational and maintenance efficiency.

Expand community centers by 481,000 square feet

Community centers are one of the largest and the most expensive categories of park facilities to build, staff, and maintain, and demand for new centers throughout Metro is high.

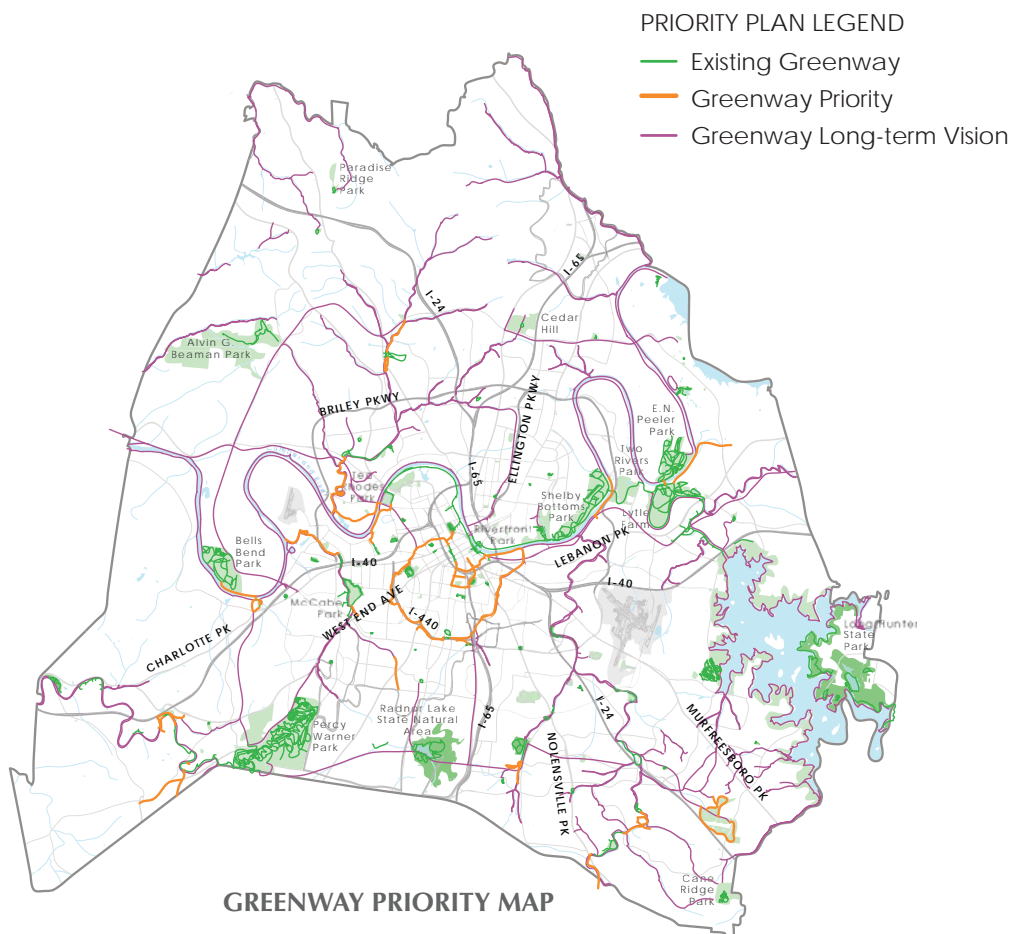
EXISTING AND PROPOSED LEVEL OF SERVICE FOR FACILITIES





- Improve other key facilities such as historic sites, community gardens, blueways, park cafes, golf facilities and Wave Country
- Expand the greenway trail network by adding **53 miles of paved and 50 miles of unpaved trails**

During the public engagement phase of Plan to Play, as well as at public meetings for years, Metro Parks has heard how important it is for people to be able to walk or bike to their park or greenway. The result is greenway plans that place a higher priority on connectivity and transportation, and sidewalk and bikeway plans that interface with parks and greenways.







## PROGRAMS

### Key Findings

Metro Parks offers over 1,200 programs a week, covering a wide variety typical for a system of its size. Programs are generally defined as staffed, guided, or facilitated activities, or events and activities provided by the issuing of a reservation or permit. Programs range from ballet classes to canoe trips, boot camps to after-school programs, and farmers' markets to history tours. These programs offer cultural, health and wellness, and nature education opportunities for all ages across the county.

- The strongest message received from public input is that Nashvillians **want more opportunities to participate in programs.**
- Many programs, including summer enrichment, arts programs, and the disabilities program, are oversubscribed and have wait lists. Competition to get into limited programs has in some cases driven people to wait outside the door of a community center at 4 a.m. to be assured a place in a popular program.
- Regional and neighborhood centers offer a diversity of program types, but are short on nature, history and cultural arts programs. Due to staffing and resource limitations, it appears that these programs are mostly confined to their own facilities, which limits their countywide benefit.
- **Productivity of space is low at many community centers and arts facilities** until after-school hours.
- Over 95 percent of programs are offered free of charge. Community centers, nature centers, and arts venues operate at net loss in aggregate. While not entirely unusual in principle, the degree of loss is likely compounded by the very high number of free programs.
- Membership and program fees are considered low compared to those of private competitors.
- In community and user surveys, those who use Parks programs **rate them high, but only a small part of the population participate in programs.**
- Programs are not widely marketed due to staffing capacity and resource limitations.

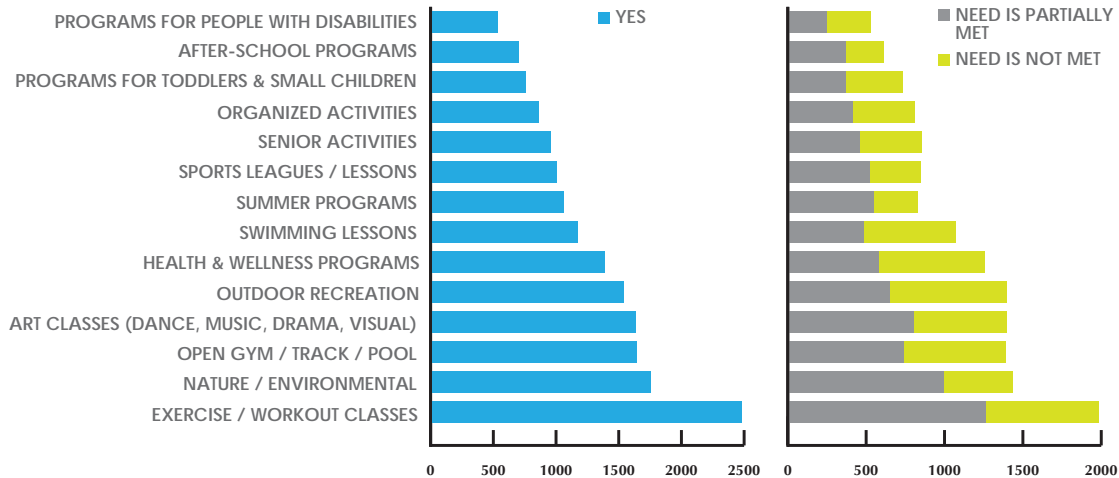
#### Core Program Areas:

- Community Enrichment (after-school and summer programs, senior programs)
- Cultural Arts (theater, dance, music, visual arts)
- Fitness and Wellness (boot camp, yoga, Zumba, spin class)
- Nature and History
- Outdoor Recreation (kayak and canoe, hiking, mountain biking)
- Specialized Recreation (golf clinics)
- Sports and Aquatics (swim and sports lessons, leagues)
- Special Events (both Parks-sponsored and community-hosted events including festivals, concerts, walks, runs)



### DO YOU OR DOES YOUR HOUSEHOLD HAVE A NEED FOR THESE PROGRAMS?\*

### IS YOUR NEED FOR THIS PROGRAM MET?



PROGRAM MET AND UNMET NEEDS\*

### HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE QUALITY (APPEARANCE & RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES) OF PARKS & GREENWAYS?\*\*\*



**82%**

EXCELLENT / GOOD

RATE THE QUALITY OF PARKS & RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES TO BE EXCELLENT (36%) OR GOOD (46%)

**21%** HAVE PARTICIPATED IN A PARKS PROGRAM

**88%**

RATE THE QUALITY OF THE PROGRAMS AS EXCELLENT OR GOOD

### HOW DO YOU USE PARKS & GREENWAYS?\*

**43%** WALK, RUN, HIKE, OR BIKE

**22%** RELAX / ENJOY NATURE

**8%** FAMILY OUTING

**7%** SPORTS ACTIVITY

**4%** DOG PARK

**18%** OTHER

**2%** PARTICIPATE IN A PROGRAM

**2%** PLAY GOLF

**2%** CONCERT OR FESTIVAL

**2%** FITNESS CENTER / WEIGHT TRAINING

**1%** SWIMMING

**1%** DON'T KNOW

### DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMMING OFFERED?\*\*\*

**54%**

DO NOT PARTICIPATE DUE TO BEING UNAWARE OF THE PROGRAMS OFFERED

### HOW DO YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF ACTIVITIES OR PROGRAMS?\*\*\*



**72%**

RATE THE QUALITY OF ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS TO BE EXCELLENT

### SURVEY FINDINGS

\*Data taken from the Online Community Survey. See section 5.1.1

\*\* Data taken from Telephone Survey. See section 5.1.1

\*\*\* Data taken from Facility User Survey. See section 5.1.1





## PROGRAMS

### Key Recommendations

One primary desire of Nashvillians as expressed in public input is more – more program offerings, at more locations in the county, and more promotion about available program offerings. As a result, many of the recommendations focus primarily on expanding access to existing programs. That said, the list of programs offered should continue to be assessed annually to be dynamically responsive to shifts in the market.

#### □ Improve access to programs

- **Expand the operating hours at community centers** with more opportunities throughout the week and over the weekend.
- **Improve efficiency of spaces within existing facilities to expand program availability.** Where utilization rates for rooms appear to be low, identify programs to increase usage.
- Develop an age segment matrix of users for each type of recreation facility to **determine how well each age segment is being served by each program type and identify areas of need.**
- **Create new partnerships with businesses and outfitters to expand recreation program opportunities** as they apply to performing and visual arts, outdoor recreation, wellness and fitness, active senior adults, people with disabilities, and after-school and summer programs.

#### □ Prioritize program offerings

- **Expand programs by expanding the hours of operation at facilities, hiring more staff, and exploring partnerships and opportunities to engage contract providers.**
- The public engagement process identified a list of existing programs that were highly regarded but were considered in too short supply:
  - » Outdoor Recreation (kayaking, rock climbing, camping)
  - » Exercise and Fitness (boot camps, yoga, Zumba classes)
  - » Health and Wellness (teaching kitchens, nutrition courses)
  - » Art (dance, painting, theater)
  - » Summer Enrichment (children's summer program)
  - » After School (organized play, tutoring)
  - » Senior Citizens
  - » Visual and Performing Arts
  - » Disabilities Programs



## □ Expand environmental education

- Before building additional nature centers, expand countywide program offerings through existing community centers, especially in areas of the county where residents may not have access to or the ability to visit a nature center.
- Consider new nature centers when master planning new parks with an eye toward the reuse of any available historic buildings.
- Incorporate environmental education into outdoor recreation programs in order to improve the experiential aspect of learning.

## □ Develop innovative and new programming in urban parks

- Activate downtown parks with frequent planned activities and small-scale performances to encourage daily use and neighborhood activities.
- Provide programs for neighborhood parks in low-income areas that are rarely targeted for permitted events by outside groups.

## □ Program historic sites systematically

- Classify all historic properties as a **new management section within Metro Parks.**
- Program historic sites in a systematic approach that utilizes the system collection of historic sites to provide **comprehensive and countywide programming.**

## □ Establish volunteerism as a formal program

- **Develop a volunteer recruitment and training program.**
- Identify targeted volunteer projects that ensure a good return on investment.
- Hire a volunteer coordinator to build the program.
- Train staff on how to effectively work with volunteers in park settings.



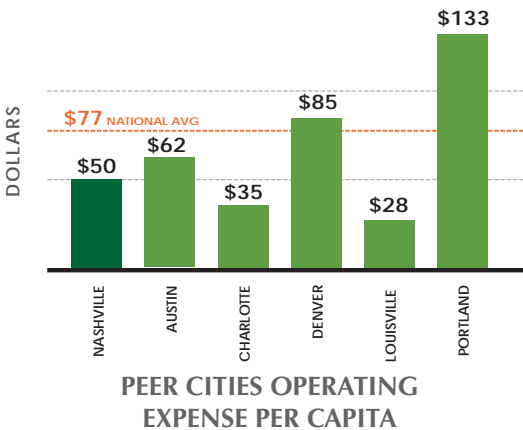
# OPERATIONS

## Key Findings

Over the last 10 years, Metro Nashville has made substantial strides with regard to capital investments by adding new facilities and land to the park system. The department, however, has not seen the same amount of operational growth to support the new additions to the system. This has created a gap between the operational needs of the system and the current operating budget. For a park system to be sustainable, capital and operational investment must be made together because new capital projects require additional operational and maintenance needs.

Operations of the Metro Park system depend on a well-trained and dedicated staff who are responsible for planning and delivering programs, maintaining the land and facilities, and administering and promoting the system on a day-to-day basis. A continued, sustainable level of investment in park operations is the foundation of capital investments in land, facilities, and programs.

- Metro Parks’ staff have extremely high loyalty and dedication to the department.
- When comparing operating expenses per capita, Metro Parks’ budget of \$50 per person is significantly lower than the national average of \$77 per person.
- Metro Parks’ total operating budget in 2015 was just over \$33,400,000, the second -lowest operating budget among peer cities.



- **Metro Parks ranks second among peer cities for operating cost recovery. It retains the lowest percentage of revenue at 3% with the next lowest peer city being 54%.**

Agency	Fees Kept by Agency	Non-Tax Revenue	Fees Kept as % of Non-Tax Revenue
Portland	\$ 26,768,718	\$ 28,703,839	93%
Charlotte / Mecklenburg County	\$ 1,631,000	\$ 2,442,614	67%
Denver	\$ 11,095,320	\$ 17,561,412	63%
Louisville	\$ 5,722,986	\$ 10,400,471	55%
Austin	\$ 2,166,170	\$ 4,002,170	54%
Nashville*	\$ 360,000	\$ 12,122,960	3%

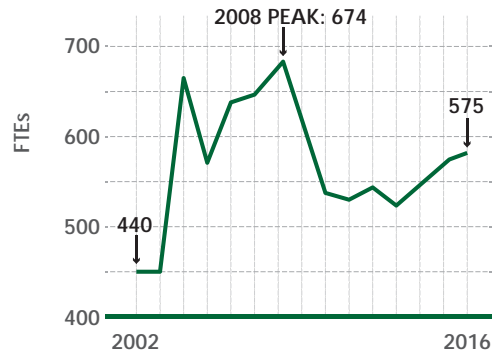
\*Figures adjusted from information provided by TPL for Nashville based on internal data. Includes golf surcharge, that has now expired.

PEER CITIES OPERATING REVENUE RETENTION

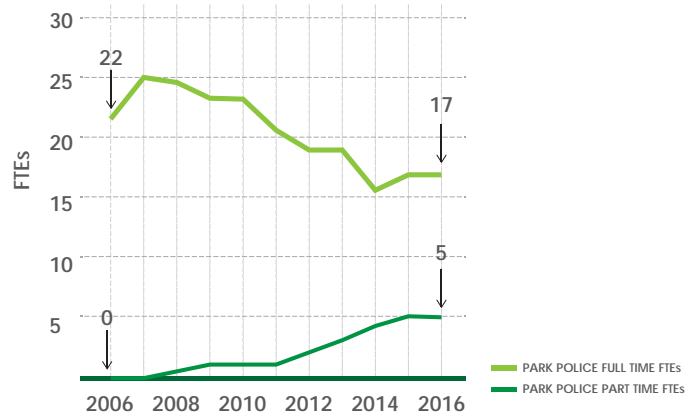




- In order to manage it, first measure it. Understanding trends, costs of services, the market, and usership allow the department to more efficiently and effectively allocate resources.
- Sustainable funding of operating expenses can:
  - » Increase staffing levels.
  - » Expand high-demand program offerings.
  - » Increase hours of operation.
  - » Allow expanded marketing of services.
  - » Grow revenue stream.
  - » Improve levels of maintenance.
- **Program types should be classified to ensure core essential programs remain free and accessible, and value-added programs do not place an operational and financial burden on the park system.**
- Individual business plans can identify the operational and funding needs of a facility or program, as well as opportunities to offset costs with revenue and improve customer service.



METRO PARKS TOTAL FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) HOURS



METRO PARKS TOTAL FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) HOURS FOR PARK POLICE

WOULD YOU SUPPORT INCREASING PROGRAM FEES SO THAT SPECIFIC USERS ARE PAYING A BIGGER SHARE OF COSTS?\*



**49% AGREE**

STRONGLY (16%) OR SOMEWHAT (33%) AGREE

HAVE USER FEES PROHIBITED YOU FROM PARTICIPATING IN PROGRAMS?

**94% NO**

FEEL FEES HAVE NOT PROHIBITED THEM FROM PARTICIPATING IN PROGRAMS



\* Data taken from Telephone Survey. See section 5.1.1



## OPERATIONS

### Key Recommendations

This section identifies the operational support necessary to support and implement land, facility and program recommendations. When combined, these recommendations form a strategy by which the growth of the park system and the capacity of the Parks Department to manage the system grow in tandem. Operations recommendations reflect a more entrepreneurial approach to the management of the department, using both performance indicators and outcomes to operate the system in a more efficient and measurable manner. In addition to department-specific recommendations, opportunities exist to scale up existing partnerships and other successful strategies already in place to maximize benefits.

#### □ Conduct a staffing level assessment

to determine appropriate levels throughout the department. Given the known maintenance and operating challenges faced by the existing system, as well as the recommendations to add parks, expand programs, and extend the hours at many facilities, this in-depth study will help ensure that system growth and departmental capacity expand in tandem.

#### □ Create an office of collaboration

to lead the process of developing and managing many of the operational and financial recommendations in Plan to Play that relate to alternative revenue streams, scaling up partnerships, and otherwise bringing new resources to the department in order to help fulfill its mission.

#### □ Invest in communications, public relations, marketing, and branding across the system

Metro Parks' communications staffing level (one person) is far below those of peer cities and even other Metro departments. Given the many quantifiable economic and quality-of-life benefits of parks, including tourism and public health, and the more entrepreneurial business model recommended in this plan, it is critical for Metro Parks to invest in additional marketing and communications.

#### □ Upgrade technology

to improve efficiency and operations, and allow the department to accomplish more with fewer human resources. There are several critical technological needs at Metro Parks, including upgrades to payment systems, online reservations, and an asset management/work order system.



## □ Conduct a program assessment

to understand the goals, priorities, and changing financial realities of a growing and changing park system.

## □ Cultivate and nurture partnerships

as Nashville's population continues to boom and the needs and complexities of the system grow. This is a critical time to examine what public-private partnerships exist in Nashville today and what partnerships can grow, evolve, and be augmented to best serve Metro's properties and the area's residents and visitors into the future.

## □ Track data and performance department wide

to more efficiently and effectively allocate resources by better understanding the market, true costs, usership, life cycles, trends, and other factors. Using measurable outcomes will allow the department to identify the greatest areas of need, track success, and know where and when additional support is needed.

## □ Classify services

using a systematic approach to assess the value and priority of the range of services provided by the department. Understand the distribution and delivery of services as well as opportunities to grow the system to better serve the community, and identify which programs and services should be available to every taxpayer and which justify a fee.

## □ Develop business plans

for community centers, sports complexes/field houses, golf courses, aquatic facilities, Hamilton Creek Marina, and any other facility with yearly revenue of \$100,000 or more. To understand the operational and funding needs of these facilities, business plans should be the first step in the implementation process.

## □ Implement a Natural Area Management Plan

Using standards and policies already developed, implement a proactive natural area management plan to inform maintenance practices and operational standards for the purposes of resource conservation, habitat preservation, biodiversity, and appropriate recreational and programmatic use.





## FUNDING THE FUTURE

### Key Findings

Funding impacts every park element discussed thus far. A critical decision for Metro government is not only how much money to invest in the future of the park system, but also what funding structure best suits Metro Parks. The system relies heavily on public dollars annually allocated by the Metro Council. Could Metro Parks be allowed the ability to generate some of its own funding and revenue sources? What role can or should private partnerships play in Nashville's park system?

- Today, the total asset value of the park system is approximately **\$683 million**.
- **Metro government continues to provide great financial support** for capital investments to the park system.
  - » **Capital spending is highest per person** compared to peer cities.
  - » **Capital spending is highest per acre** compared to peer cities.

Agency	Jurisdiction Population	Total Capital Spending	Capital Spending per Capita
Nashville*	660,836	\$ 35,488,720	\$ 53.70
Denver*	663,862	\$ 23,370,519	\$ 35.20
Austin	912,791	\$ 22,645,132	\$ 24.81
Portland	619,360	\$ 8,516,570	\$ 13.75
Charlotte / Mecklenburg County*	1,012,539	\$ 7,600,000	\$ 7.51
Louisville	760,026	\$ 4,141,951	\$ 5.45

\*Figures adjusted from information provided by TPL for Nashville, Denver, and Charlotte / Mecklenburg County based on internal data.

#### PEER CITIES CAPITAL SPENDING PER CAPITA

Agency	Fees Kept by Agency	Non-Tax Revenue	Fees Kept as % of Non-Tax Revenue
Portland	\$ 26,768,718	\$ 28,703,839	93%
Charlotte / Mecklenburg County	\$ 1,631,000	\$ 2,442,614	67%
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Nashville*	\$ 360,000	\$ 12,122,960	3%

\*Figures adjusted from information provided by TPL for Nashville based on internal data. Includes golf surcharge, that has now expired.

#### PEER CITIES OPERATING REVENUE RETENTION



- National and peer city analyses suggest that **it is unusual for a system this size to rely solely on public tax dollars for annual funding.**
- **There are opportunities to grow revenue** generated by Metro Parks with minor adjustments to the cost recovery system.
- Great opportunity exists for **strengthening private partnerships**, like friends groups, to increase the number of revenue streams and leverage public dollars.


WOULD YOU SUPPORT THE PARKS DEPARTMENT PRESERVING MORE GREEN SPACE AND ACQUIRING ADDITIONAL PROPERTY TO DEVELOP NEW PARKS AND GREENWAYS?

**94% SUPPORT**   
WOULD STRONGLY (61%) OR SOMEWHAT (33%) SUPPORT

SHOULD PARKS DEPARTMENT USE ANY ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO IMPROVE EXISTING PARKS & FACILITIES OR NEW DEVELOPMENT?

**65%** FAVOR NEW INVESTMENT AT EXISTING PARKS & FACILITIES  
 **29%** FAVOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

WOULD YOU SUPPORT THE INCREASING PROGRAM FEES SO THAT SPECIFIC USERS ARE PAYING A BIGGER SHARE OF COSTS?

 **49% AGREE**  
STRONGLY (16%) OR SOMEWHAT (33%) AGREE

WOULD YOU AGREE THAT METRO SHOULD PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO THE DEPARTMENT WHEN COMPARED TO THE NATIONAL AVERAGE?

**77% AGREE**  
STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT AGREE TO RAISING THE PARKS DEPARTMENT BUDGET



#### SURVEY FINDINGS

\* Data taken from Telephone Survey. See section 5.1.1



# FUNDING THE FUTURE

## Key Recommendations

Land, facilities, program, and operational recommendations collectively represent a future for Nashville’s park system built on equity, sustainability, and best practices. These recommendations are often the “what” part of the plan. There are few recommendations that do not have a cost for their implementation. Funding describes the “how” part of the master plan - how will Nashville fund this bold vision? Achieving the goals of Plan to Play will require an increase in Metro funding while Metro Parks simultaneously diversifies its revenue streams – not to replace Metro funds but to supplement them and increase operational efficiency.

Nashville’s parks and greenways generate **\$550,410,000** in economic benefits through:

- property values and tax revenue
- tourism spending
- human health benefits
- recreation use
- stormwater infiltration
- air pollution removal

### Recommended investment for improvements by 2027:

#### Capital Investment

**\$ 667 million**

Includes community centers, blueway access sites, trails, athletic fields, courts, planning projects, other park amenities and facilities.

New Capital Investments  
Capital Investments in Existing Assets  
Deferred Maintenance

#### Operating Investment

**\$ 67.7 million** (annually)

Operating costs quantify the annual dollar value to fulfill the strategic recommendations set forth in this plan. They include administrative, program, and maintenance staff as well as the upkeep and operational needs of a mix of amenities within park land and community centers.

Maintenance and Operations of:

- Park land
- Facilities
- Programs

Staff Positions

#### Land Acquisition

**\$ 534 million** MARKET VALUE

\$534 million, at the current market rate, to acquire the recommended park land acreages needed over the next 10 years.

Park land  
Greenway Corridors





## □ Diversify funding strategies

Metro Nashville's Parks system is unusually dependent on the Metro budget as its single source of funding. Most other parks departments in large cities have between 25 and 30 sources of funds. Metro should diversify its funding and revenue streams. Strategies include:

- Earned Income
- Open Space Ordinance
- Business Improvement Districts
- Sponsorships
- Impact Development Fees
- Enterprise Funds
- Parking Fees
- Tax Increment Financing
- Land and Property Leases
- Service Providers
- Hotel Tax
- Partners and Friends Groups

## □ Land acquisition will need to utilize the funding strategies above to execute acquisitions outside of the General Fund

Due to the extremely high cost to acquire the needed park land for the next 10 years at the current market rate, land transactions will require alternative funding sources to shift the financial burden off the tax base.

## □ Retain earned income

by transitioning toward a practice of allowing some or all of the revenue produced by Metro Parks to be retained by Metro Parks. Currently, Metro Parks generates approximately \$12,000,000 in revenue from fees each year. Nationally, large cities average \$8,800,000 in revenue and most keep all or a percentage of this revenue without its negatively impacting annual budget allocation.

## □ Friends groups and partners

Friends groups and partners have proved to be an essential part of running a park system. They contribute to the Parks Department mission by raising private funds, donating volunteer hours, helping to deliver programs, and raising public and political awareness of park-related issues. Metro Parks should explore how these partnerships can be augmented to best serve the park system and the department's public mandate.

- Develop memoranda of understanding or equivalent agreements to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- Create work plans to help ensure both partners are working toward shared and synergistic goals.
- Provide dedicated Parks staffing to coordinate with friends groups and partners.

1.12 CONCLUSION:  
THE ROAD TO  
2027

The Metro Parks and Greenways system must grow to address projected needs, to maintain Nashville’s quality of life, and stay competitive with peer cities. The community has expressed strong support for the existing system and its improvement.

**“Must care for what we have built - and build what we can care for.”** This means re-balancing capital and operating investments in park and greenway infrastructure.

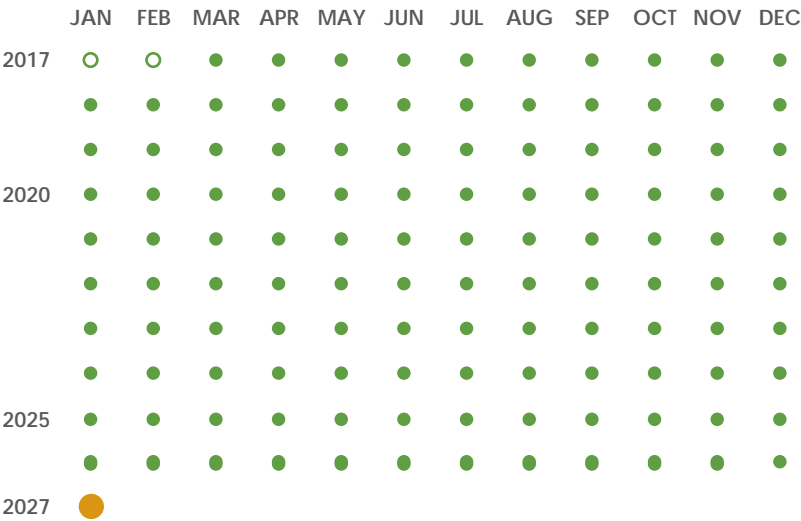
Metro has a great system of parks and greenways that can manage the demand for “more and better” by using a combination of well-tested financial strategies, used by peer cities and others, that leverage public dollars.

This park system made up of land, facilities, programs and people provides great economic, social and environmental value (i.e., a Triple Bottom Line) annually. It offers remarkably high “ROI” and also generates revenue every year that can contribute to its own operational needs.

**Parks and greenways are shared community spaces for ALL, every resident regardless of age, socioeconomic status, gender, race or political affiliation.**

1.13 THE FUTURE  
COMES EVERY  
DAY

Plan to Play represents an ambitious, sweeping plan to improve and expand not only Nashville’s parks and greenways but also an agenda to create policies and funding mechanisms that will support this expansion. Though 10 years might seem a long time to accomplish these tasks, 2027 is fast approaching. Time is of the essence.



An aerial photograph of Centennial Park and the Tennessee State Capitol building in Nashville, Tennessee. The Capitol building is a large, classical-style structure with many columns. Centennial Park is a large green space with a circular lawn in the foreground. The image is used as a background for a series of text boxes containing community comments.

"More greenways please. The ones we have are wonderful!"

"I use the arts programs at Centennial and hope they continue."

"More summer jobs for teenagers!"

"Love the big band dances at Centennial."

"We love the Farmers Market"

"Please add more dog parks."

"Need to incorporate kayaking in the area."

"More multipurpose fields for football / soccer."

"We need to preserve natural areas as parks so they are not developed."

"We love the blackberries at Shelby Bottoms."

"Our family treasures the undisturbed natural space provided by Parks."

"We need to invest in our parks now. Expanding their services to a wide audience will help secure that future"

"My husband proposed in Centennial Park!"

\* selected comments from Community Online Survey