

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PARKS + RECREATION MASTER PLAN



Vision Framework | March 2014







“Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play.”

– Herodotus, Greek historian

## Letter from the Mayor



Dear Friends:

The District of Columbia boasts one of the most outstanding parks and recreation systems in the entire country. This was recently underscored when we learned that the National Recreation and Park Association honored our Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) with the prestigious Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) designation – an award that recognizes the District's park system for its high level of excellence, efficiency and effectiveness. But the District must build on its remarkable foundation to ensure its parks and recreation system serves as a powerful catalyst for physical activity and engagement.

Two years ago, DPR launched the Play DC Playground Improvement Initiative—the largest playground renovation project in the District's history—to reinvent and revitalize forty playgrounds throughout all eight wards. Through this groundbreaking effort, we have helped to energize neighborhoods with state-of-the-art spaces for children of all ages to exercise, become healthy, relax and imagine. The Play DC Master Plan has used this investment in our communities as a down payment, and now sets a strategic course for more exciting improvements.

The vision in the Play DC Master Plan provides a clear, tangible 15-year framework for how the agency's programs, parks, activities and facilities become more effective. It is an image for all that is possible in parks and recreation in the District of Columbia. In the 21st century, great park systems develop through creative synergies and partnerships among residents, nonprofit organizations, public, and private sectors.

When fully implemented, the Play DC Master Plan will realize the goals of equitable access to outstanding parks and facilities close to the homes of all residents; foster community health and sustainability; respond to existing residents' needs and priorities; address changing trends; and fulfill DPR's mission to Move, Grow, Be Green. I cannot help but feel proud of the progress we are making as a city, and on so many fronts in our parks and recreation system. No matter where you go, you will find consistent quality, and a range of experiences to meet your needs.

The District government is committed to this vision. Please join us in making it a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent C. Gray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# Contents

## Where Are We Headed?

Our City + Our Parks	1
5 Project Goals	2
3 Department Principles	3
7 Elements	4
21 Big Moves	5

## Why This Plan?

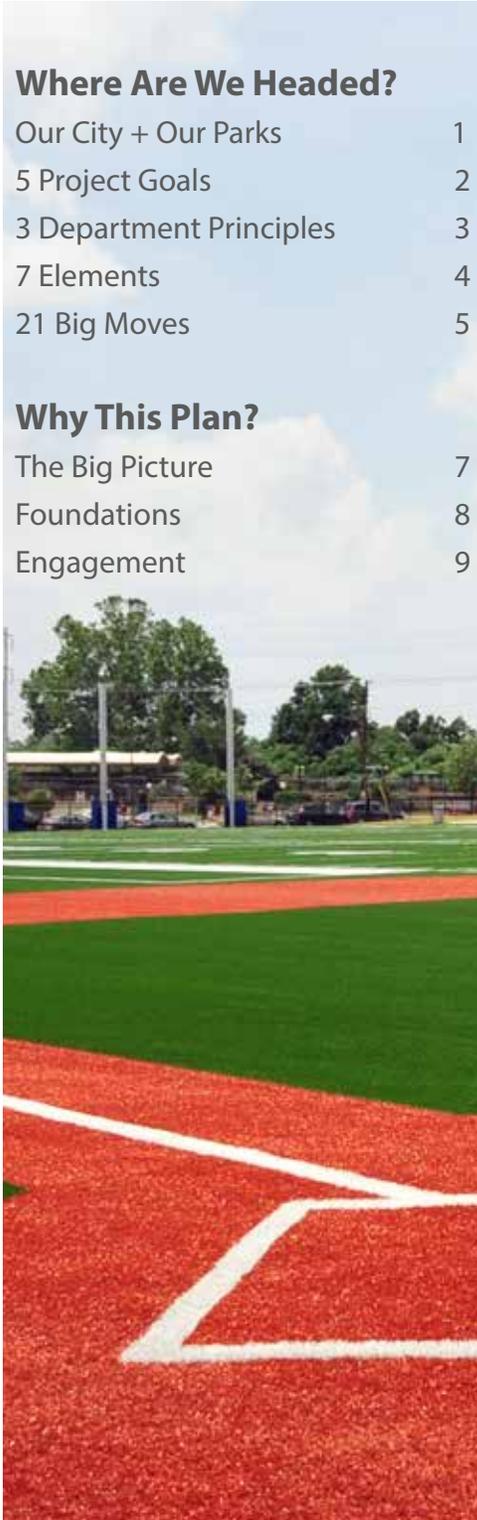
The Big Picture	7
Foundations	8
Engagement	9

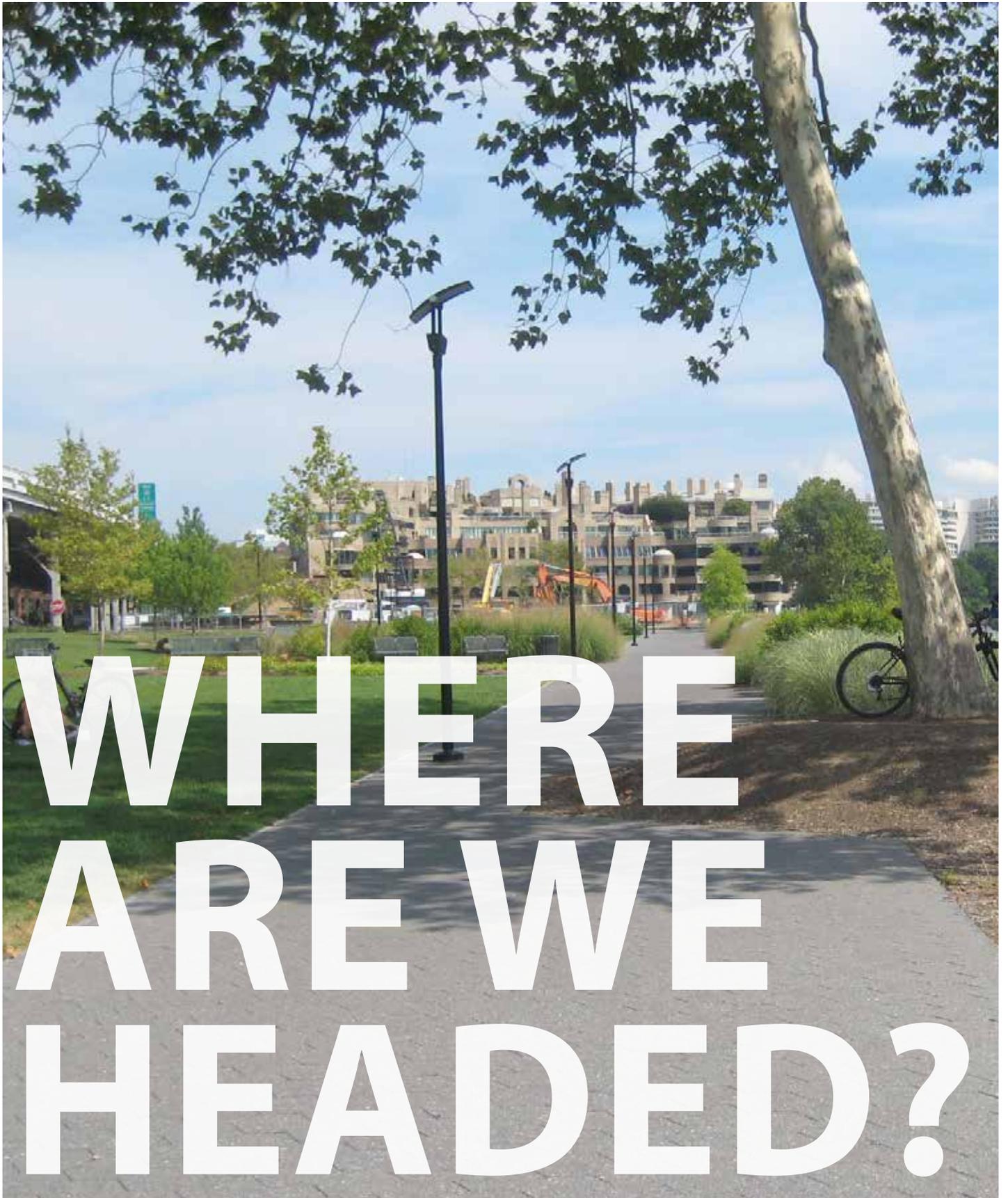
## Our Dynamic City

What We Have	11
How We Will Grow	13
What We Need	15

## Our Vision

Parkland	20
Recreation Centers	24
Aquatics Facilities	28
Outdoor Facilities	30
Programs	32
Bikeways + Trails	34
Environmental Lands	
+ Natural Areas	36
An Integrated Vision	38





**WHERE  
ARE WE  
HEADED?**



## OUR CITY + OUR PARKS

The District of Columbia is an exciting place to be! More than just a backdrop for national politics, the city teems with the energy of diverse neighborhoods, job growth, and the enjoyment of the District’s impressive legacy of monuments and civic spaces.

With renewed focus on improving the quality of life for all District residents and ensuring a sustainable future, the city has also turned its attention to a foundation of what makes DC a great place to live: its **parks and recreation system**.

The DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is the primary provider of recreation services and a leading steward of the parks legacy in the District. DPR believes that everyday living should be filled with activity and engagement for all ages and abilities; neighbors helping neighbors learn new skills; inspiration for children’s imagination; pride and satisfaction in creating a more sustainable city; and the many benefits of a robust park system.

**Play DC** is a long range plan for the District’s parks and recreation resources. It celebrates what the District has already achieved and defines a path for improving parks and services in a dense, growing city.

# 5 PROJECT GOALS

The DC Department of Parks and Recreation and DC Office of Planning launched the **Play DC** Master Plan in the spring of 2013. Since that time, the project has followed an ambitious course, gathering residents' needs and evaluating conditions and service levels. Through this in-depth process, five key project goals have emerged:

- 1 Deliver equitable access, great spaces, and world class experiences.**  
All residents will be able to reach outstanding parks and facilities close to home. These spaces will be designed for beauty and function, and support creative and diverse activities for all kinds of users.
- 2 Foster community health and sustainability.**  
The District's parks and facilities will be places where people go to get active and lead healthier lifestyles. These resources will help boost the local economy, strengthen civic bonds, and enhance environmental quality.
- 3 Respond to existing residents' needs and priorities.**  
Although the District has many parks and recreation assets, there are still needs to be met. It is imperative to first take care of our existing system and tackle long-standing deficiencies as identified by residents.
- 4 Address changing demographics and other trends.**  
The District's parks and recreation system must be flexible enough to change with population growth and other emerging issues. Programs, in particular, will adapt to changing interests, and facilities will be designed for multiple purposes.
- 5 Fulfill the DPR mission to Move. Grow. Be Green.**  
All projects and programs in the District's parks and recreation system will champion the principles of Move, Grow, and Be Green.

# 3 DEPARTMENT PRINCIPLES

Through our parks, recreation facilities, and programming efforts, the DC Department of Parks and Recreation encourages residents and visitors to **Move. Grow. Be Green.** This is the Department's mission, motto, and philosophy. It frames agency decisions and underpins the **Play DC** Vision.



## **MOVE.**

**Provide all residents affordable, enjoyable opportunities for physical fitness and recreation.**

DPR invites you to activate our spaces, both indoors and out, through programs and self-directed play and fitness.



## **GROW.**

**Support personal development among residents through self-enrichment activities—like classes, clubs, tours and lessons.**

DPR encourages you to participate in our programs, decision-making, and partnerships to develop the diverse services most important to you.



## **BE GREEN.**

**Promote practices that connect residents to their local environment and economy.**

DPR uses our facilities and programs to help sustain and strengthen your community—by championing public health, job growth, ecological quality, neighborhood investment, and civic engagement.

# 7

# ELEMENTS

## Targets

### Parkland



Every resident will be able to access a meaningful greenspace within a 1/2 mile (10-minute walk) of home.

Every neighborhood cluster will have access to at least 4 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents (2 acres for every 1,000 residents in the downtown core).

### Recreation Centers



Every resident will be able to access a DPR Neighborhood Center—or the equivalent—within 1 mile of home.

### Aquatics Facilities



Every resident will have access to an indoor pool within 2 miles, an outdoor pool within 1.5 miles, and a splash pad within 1 mile.

### Outdoor Facilities



80% of District residents will rate their access to desired outdoor facilities as Good or Excellent.

Develop service targets for specific types of outdoor facilities.

### Programs



25% of DC residents will participate in a DPR program.

90% of participants will rate their experience in DPR programs as Good or Excellent.

### Bikeways + Trails



100% of DPR parks will be accessible by foot.

90% of DPR parks will be accessible by bicycle.

### Environmental Lands + Natural Areas



Increase natural features on DPR properties, such as trees, gardens, or wetlands, by 40%.

# 21

# BIG MOVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

<p><b>UPGRADE</b></p> <p>Make the best of existing District-owned parks. Develop an enhanced maintenance and improvement schedule to upgrade the quality of passive and active spaces.</p>	<p><b>INTEGRATE</b></p> <p>Make green space owned by District government agencies available and accessible to DC residents for recreation purposes—with an emphasis on opening DC Public School facilities to the community.</p>	<p><b>EXPAND</b></p> <p>Acquire more parkland under District jurisdiction through strategic property transfers, purchases, and private development proffers.</p>	<p>Parkland</p>
<p><b>RECLASSIFY</b></p> <p>Develop and consistently apply a new classification system for DPR Recreation Centers, which establishes minimum design standards based upon program needs.</p>	<p><b>REINVEST</b></p> <p>Invest capital funds to bring all Recreation Centers up to the minimum standards of the new classification system, prioritizing those centers where gaps in the network exist.</p>	<p><b>PARTNER</b></p> <p>Request formal proposals from private and non-profit organizations to manage select DPR Recreation Centers.</p>	
<p><b>STABILIZE</b></p> <p>Make necessary renovations and upgrades to extend the life of DPR's generous network of pools to meet growing demand.</p>	<p><b>EVALUATE</b></p> <p>Conduct an in-depth study of each type of Aquatics Facility to refine needs and priorities.</p>	<p><b>MODERNIZE</b></p> <p>Transform the District into an Aquatics destination by making key strategic investments that will enrich offerings for residents and draw customers from surrounding jurisdictions.</p>	<p>Aquatics Facilities</p>
<p><b>IMPROVE</b></p> <p>Raise the bar on the condition of our existing outdoor facilities: re-invent playgrounds across the city; convert some fields to artificial turf; and add lighting, seating, and other support features.</p>	<p><b>MULTIPLY</b></p> <p>Increase the access to high-quality outdoor facilities by building new athletic fields and courts in areas of demonstrated need.</p>	<p><b>UTILIZE</b></p> <p>Be creative - take advantage of the rich network of urban infrastructure to meet recreational needs and promote exercise.</p>	<p>Outdoor Facilities</p>
<p><b>ORGANIZE</b></p> <p>Develop a framework to guide DPR in the recreation programs marketplace and how to invest and prioritize funds.</p>	<p><b>ANALYZE</b></p> <p>Collect and analyze participation data regularly, and apply to future decision-making on program operations.</p>	<p><b>DEVELOP</b></p> <p>Develop a detailed Program Action Plan that elevates, standardizes and expands the quality of offerings of DPR programs.</p>	<p>Programs</p>
<p><b>LINK</b></p> <p>Add perimeter multi-use trails within select parks that can connect to the city-wide trail system, and provide secure bike parking and trailheads.</p>	<p><b>SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Support proposed transportation projects with recreation benefits such as the Metropolitan Branch Trail, Oxon Run Trail, and the Fort Circle Parks + Greenway.</p>	<p><b>COOPERATE</b></p> <p>Forge agreements to open up other opportunities for walking and biking, such as school tracks and trail easements.</p>	<p>Bikeways + Trails</p>
<p><b>CONNECT</b></p> <p>Provide more places for people to access the waterfront and better opportunities to experience natural areas within the DPR system.</p>	<p><b>RECLAIM</b></p> <p>Within the larger parks, establish healthier tree cover and green landscapes. Weave plantings and other natural features into mini and pocket parks, especially in areas with inadequate open space.</p>	<p><b>COORDINATE</b></p> <p>Work with the National Park Service and other expert providers to offer nature programs, particularly in neighborhoods where natural areas are limited.</p>	<p>Environmental Lands + Natural Areas</p>



**WHY  
THIS  
PLAN?**



## THE BIG PICTURE

Why do we love parks and recreation centers? For many of us, they are where we meet friends, where we exercise, where we teach our children to dance, or where we learn how to grow and prepare healthy foods. Our indoor and outdoor recreation and leisure spaces are a central component to what makes a city great.

The District's parks system is one of its most valuable resources. Research nation-wide has shown that parks and recreation improve public health, protect natural ecology, raise property values, and foster civic bonds and quality of life:

- A wide body of academic and medical research has shown that access to parks and greenways can lead to a 50 percent increase in the frequency of physical activity, improve mental and social health, and even reduce hospitalization recovery rates.
- A city's tree canopy can enhance the city's ability to address stormwater, reduce heat island effects, and improve air quality.
- Academic and professional research has demonstrated that homes located within 1/4 mile of a park benefit from an increase in property values ranging from 5 percent to over 22 percent depending on the proximity and quality of the park.
- Cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Philadelphia and our own Washington D.C. have seen juvenile related crimes drop to record lows when injecting recreation programs into troubled neighborhoods and extending program hours late into the night.

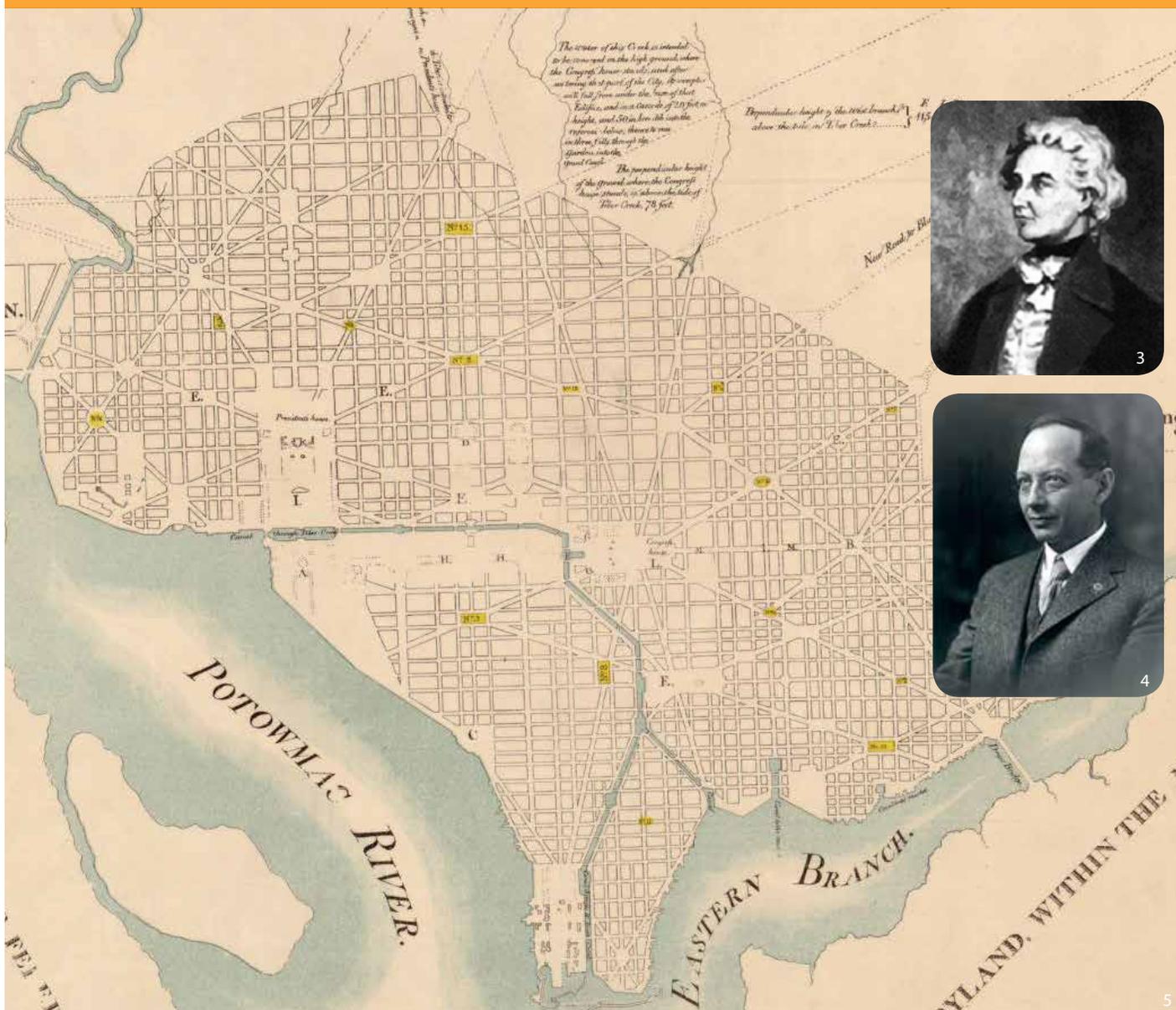
Our parks system is part of a greater network of public space. Experts estimate that the public realm accounts for 25 to 50 percent of every community's land area. "Through the parks window," we can make significant impacts in our neighborhoods by approaching every improvement to the public realm as an opportunity to make the District a friendlier, healthier, and more beautiful place. Although these improvements may be small and incremental, together they have the power to be truly transformative.

**Play DC** defines a vision for the future of the District's parks and recreation system and its role as a leader in the public realm. It champions and builds upon a unique legacy. We already have a good system—this plan charts a course to make it great.

# FOUNDATIONS

**Play DC** is not starting from scratch. Instead, it is rooted in a rich foundation of plans starting as far back as 1791, when Pierre L'Enfant first sketched out the District's wide boulevards and grassy open spaces. L'Enfant's plan was not 100 percent realized, but its intent was carried on through a plan in 1901 by the McMillan Commission. Led by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr, the McMillan Plan looked at parks beyond the National Mall; it envisioned a robust system of parks that would serve the region. Special places such as the District's waterfronts and Rock Creek Park were just some of the outcomes.

These historic plans set the stage for the next era of the District's parks. Building upon more recent planning efforts such as the Comprehensive Plan, Sustainable DC, and the CapitalSpace Plan, the **Play DC** Master Plan focuses specifically on elevating DPR parks, facilities, and programs to the next level.



# ENGAGEMENT

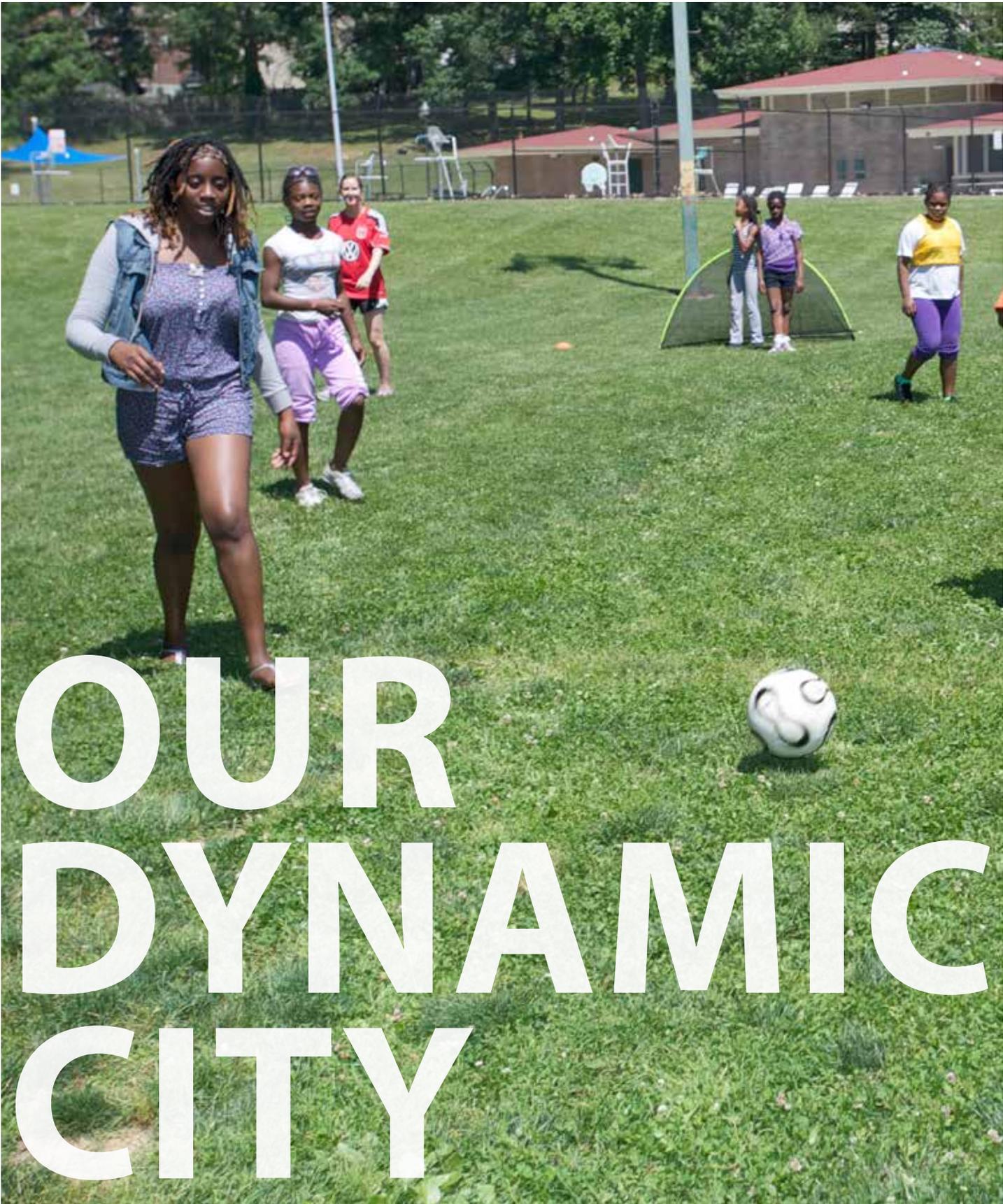
**Play DC's** priority is District residents. How do we meet their needs, and provide the best possible recreation experience? There's no better way to find out than to ask residents directly. Public input was gathered in eight ways:

- Statistically-valid mail / telephone survey
- Public workshops and events
- Customer survey available online and at recreation centers
- Focus group meetings
- "MindMixer" interactive online forum
- Senior staff executive workshops
- One-on-one stakeholder interviews
- Advisory committee

These meetings and surveys attracted the **input of over 4,600 residents** from across the District. Residents participated in a number of ways:



Figure A: Number of Participants by Type of Engagement



# OUR DYNAMIC CITY



## WHAT WE HAVE

Parks are everywhere in the city: from the small triangles along DC’s grand avenues to large, sweeping monumental spaces that frame national icons. In total, there are **7,821 acres** of parks and open spaces in DC—the equivalent of almost **6,000 NFL-sized football fields**.

One of the most unique characteristics of parks in DC is that they are not all owned by the same agency or department. As illustrated in Figure B on page 12, the National Park Service (NPS) owns the bulk of parks acreage in the city at 74 percent, DPR owns 10 percent, and District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and other organizations own the rest (16 percent). Although there are some advantages to having multiple agencies in the mix, coordination between everyone can be challenging.

Recreation centers are also everywhere in the city. While DPR does not own the majority of parkland, it does provide essential recreation services to residents, workers, and visitors. The District owns and manages **73 recreation centers** throughout the District’s neighborhoods, which gives it one of the highest number of recreation centers per capita nationwide.

The District features a host of other active recreation opportunities, including **11 indoor** and **18 outdoor pools**, **4 children’s pools** and **20 splash pads**, **22 community gardens**, over **340 fields and courts**, and **5 skate parks**. DPR animates many of these places with a diverse array of recreation programs, offering more than **400 events and programs** over the course of a year to make it the foremost recreational provider in the District.

The District’s parks and facilities are well-served by the city’s robust network of trails and bikeways. They are also made up or bounded by extraordinary natural features such as beautiful rivers and wooded areas. All of these elements together form a special system that allows people in the District to recreate, relax, and connect to nature.

The numbers of parks, acres, and programs just scratch the surface. What are these parks actually like? Do they provide a great experience? Are some a lot better than others?

As part of developing the **Play DC** plan, the project team visited and collectively evaluated a spectrum of District owned parks and recreation centers across the city. Below we highlight strengths observed and challenges.

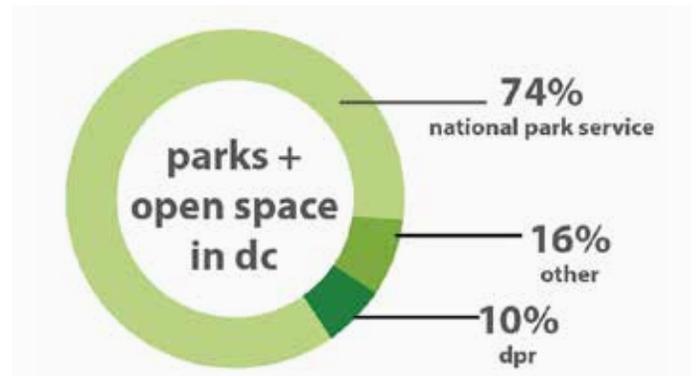


Figure B: Percent of Parks Acreage By Ownership

## STRENGTHS

- The District has an impressive number of recreation centers that are huge assets to District residents, many with unique amenities and state of the art spaces.
- Parks can easily be spotted throughout the District and are generally easy to walk to.
- The District offers a large number of youth camps, after school programs, youth sports, and self-improvement/character-building programs, as well as a nationally recognized summer meals program.



New play space at Fort Greble in Ward 8

## CHALLENGES

- Some District parklands are not activated with amenities or things to do.
- Some parks are showing their age, and maintenance across the city is inconsistent.
- Because of the large number of recreation centers, there are overlaps in service and upkeep is expensive.
- The quality of experiences at parks and recreation centers can vary widely.



Old play space, pre-renovation at Banneker Recreation Center in Ward 1

## HOW WE WILL GROW

The Washington, DC metropolitan area is one of the fastest-growing urban areas in the country. Between 2010 and 2020, the District is expected to gain 114,390 people — not including other cities in the surrounding suburbs. Since the year 2000, the population of the District has grown steadily, with a significant spike upward over the last few years. As of July 2013, it was estimated that 646,449 people now live in DC. See the graphic below to get a sense of how much our DC family is expanding.

### 2010 POPULATION

**601,723**  
residents  
in 2010



### 2010-2020 growth

**+ 114,390**  
additional  
residents  
by 2020

For the purposes of our plan, it is important to understand the characteristics of the District's population growth. Here are some highlights:

- The city is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, especially in the center.
- On average, household size is increasing (unlike the U.S. trend).
- The influx of young professionals (age 25-34) is expected to continue.

Because youth and senior programming is especially important to the Department of Parks and Recreation, the graphics on the right depict where these age cohorts are showing especially strong growth.

## PEOPLE 0-9 YEARS OLD



## PEOPLE 55 YEARS AND OLDER



# WHAT WE NEED

Parks and recreation needs are different in every city. To find out what District residents need most, the **Play DC** Plan used public surveys, meetings, workshops, and other engagement techniques (detailed on page 9) as well as three additional methods:

- **Level of Service (LOS) analysis:** This method determines how far residents must travel to reach parks and recreation resources, and how much space is in the system per capita.
- **Benchmarking to other cities:** This method compares the District’s parks and recreation resources with cities known for their great park systems, such as San Francisco and Minneapolis, as well as with “peer” cities, such as Philadelphia, Seattle, and Los Angeles.
- **Project team site visits:** This method observes and evaluates a spectrum of parks and recreation centers across the District for facility quality, accessibility, and sociability



Figure C: Priority Recreation Program Needs in the District

Once all of these methods were completed, we tallied up the results. Figure E on the next page shows how different program, facility, and operations needs stacked up. On the left side of the table are all the possible parks and recreation needs in the District and across the top are the 11 different assessment methods. Every time that a method identified a specific need, it was noted

with a green dot in this matrix. The method that carries the most weight is the Mail/Telephone Survey. Needs identified through this statistically valid method are considered high priorities. The more a specific need is identified in the other assessment methods, the better confirmation there is that it is a high priority need.



Figure D: Priority Parks and Recreation Facility Needs in the District

Figure E: Summary of Needs Assessment Findings

		Needs Assessment Techniques										
		Site Visits	Advisory Committee	Stakeholders	Staff Interviews	Focus Groups	Public Workshops	MindMixer	Rec. Center Survey	Level of Service	Mail/Phone Survey	2006 Survey
<b>*Top Priority Facilities or Programs</b>												
<b>PROGRAMS</b>	<b>Adult Fitness + Wellness*</b>	●	●		●		●		●	●	●	●
	<b>Nature Programs*</b>	●	●		●		●	●		●	●	
	<b>Youth Learn-to-Swim*</b>			●	●				●	●	●	●
	<b>Community Special Events*</b>			●	●		●	●	●		●	
	<b>Programs for Adults 55+ *</b>		●	●			●	●		●	●	
	Youth Arts, Dance, Performing Arts	●	●		●		●			●		●
	<b>Adult Arts, Dance, Performing Arts*</b>	●			●					●	●	
	<b>Adult Continuing Education Programs for Degree/Trade Certification*</b>				●		●		●		●	
	Before / After School		●				●		●	●		
	Youth Athletic Leagues (Recreation)						●		●	●		●
	Youth Fitness / Wellness	●			●					●		●
	<b>Water Fitness*</b>								●	●	●	
	<b>Adult Learn-to-Swim*</b>			●	●				●	●	●	●
	Youth Athletic Leagues (Competitive)						●			●		●
	Teen Programs				●					●		●
	Programs for People with Disabilities				●					●		
Tennis Lessons / Leagues									●		●	
<b>FACILITIES</b>	<b>Natural Areas / Wildlife Habitat*</b>		●	●			●		●	●	●	●
	<b>Indoor Swimming Pools*</b>						●		●	●	●	●
	New Indoor Facilities		●		●	●				●		
	Playgrounds		●	●			●	●		●		
	Flexible Outdoor Space		●	●	●		●	●				
	<b>Walking Trails*</b>		●						●		●	●
	<b>Small Neighborhood Parks*</b>						●		●		●	●
	<b>Indoor Fitness / Exercise Facilities*</b>						●		●	●	●	
	<b>Outdoor Swimming Pools*</b>								●	●	●	●
	Community Gardens		●				●	●		●		
	Soccer Fields			●	●	●				●		
	Youth Softball / Baseball Fields			●	●	●				●		
	Adult Softball Fields			●	●	●				●		
	Football / Lacrosse Fields			●	●	●				●		
	<b>Running / Walking Track*</b>				●	●					●	
	<b>Picnic Shelters / Areas*</b>	●	●								●	
	<b>Biking Trails*</b>			●							●	
	New Outdoor Facilities (General)					●		●		●		
	Dog Parks			●	●					●		
	New Parks / Open Space (General)									●		●
Spray Parks							●		●			
<b>OPERATIONS</b>	<b>Improve / Maintain Existing Facilities*</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	<b>Marketing*</b>	●		●	●	●	●		●		●	●
	Coordination / Partnerships	●	●	●	●	●	●					
	Internal Coordination	●			●	●	●					
	Staff Training / Professional Development	●		●	●							
	Consistent Program Delivery	●			●		●					
	Consistent / Simple Rec Facility Hours	●					●					



# OUR VISION



## 7 ELEMENTS

Our vision for the future is simple yet ambitious: an equitable, top-notch system of parks and recreation resources District-wide. To break this vision down into more manageable pieces, we focus on seven key elements.

**Parkland** 

**Recreation Centers** 

**Aquatics Facilities** 

**Outdoor Facilities** 

**Programs** 

**Bikeways + Trails** 

**Environmental Lands + Natural Areas** 

# Parkland



## BIG MOVES

### UPGRADE

**Make the best of existing District-owned parks. Develop an enhanced maintenance and improvement schedule to upgrade the quality of passive and active spaces.**

### INTEGRATE

**Make green spaces owned by District government agencies available and accessible to DC residents for recreation purposes—with an emphasis on opening DC Public School facilities to the community.**

### EXPAND

**Acquire more parkland under District jurisdiction through strategic property transfers, purchases, and private development proffers.**

## Targets

**Every resident will be able to access a meaningful greenspace within a 1/2 mile (10-minute walk) of home.**

**Every neighborhood cluster will have access to at least 4 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents (2 acres for every 1,000 residents in the downtown core).**

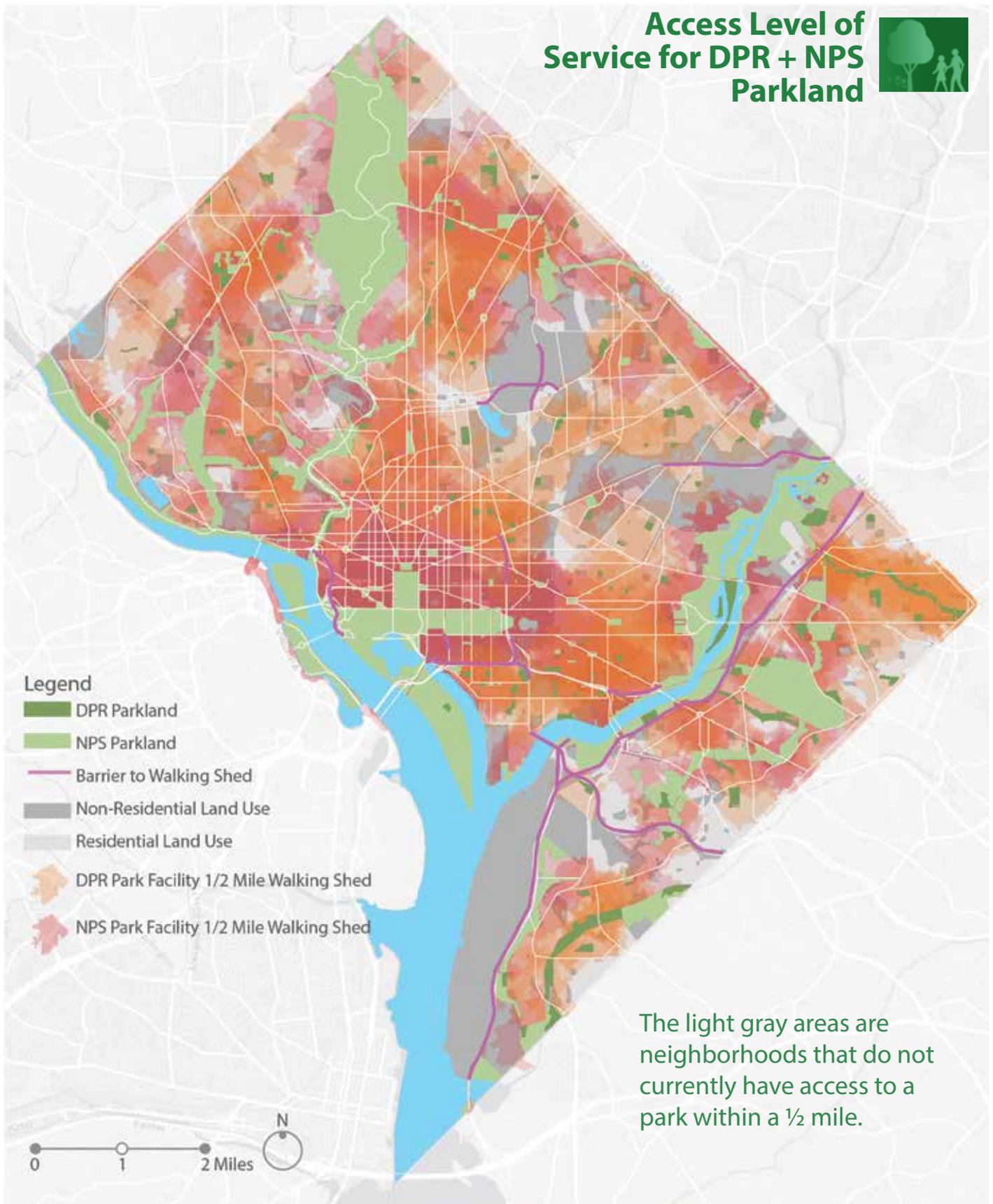
As a rule of thumb, the more parkland a community has, the better its quality of life. Typically, the amount of park space a city has is measured by a Level of Service (LOS) ratio. This ratio tallies up all of the parks acreage, and divides it by the city's population—usually in units of 1,000 people.

The District currently has a great LOS ratio: 12.4 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. It is even higher than cities known for their park systems, such as Seattle and San Francisco (see Figure F on page 22). With new residents expected over the next decade, the District's ratio would slide down to 10.89 acres per 1,000 residents—which is still a good number. But throughout **Play DC's** meetings, people consistently talked about the lack of equity of parks, programs, and facilities in the District.

One way to measure equity is to look how far people have to travel to reach a "meaningful" park. By "meaningful," we mean a park that is at least 1/3 of an acre in size. When these parks in the city are mapped with a 1/2 mile trip around them (the longest many people are willing to walk), there are at least a dozen neighborhoods that are not served well. The map on the next page illustrates that even though there are many acres of parkland in the District, not everyone is benefiting equally. The light gray areas are neighborhoods that do not currently have access to a park within a 1/2 mile. The areas in dark orange and red have the most parks in walking distance.



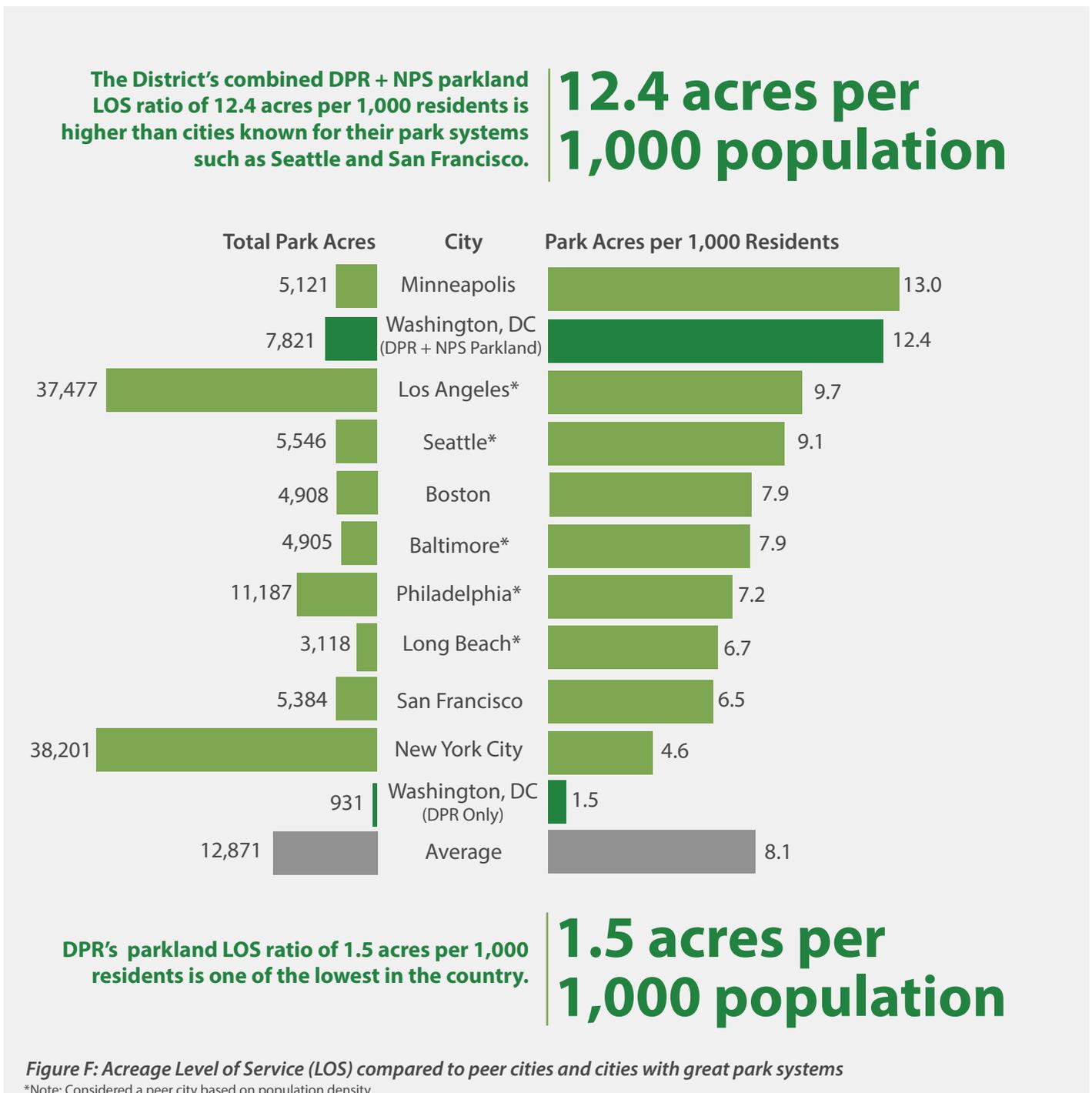
## Access Level of Service for DPR + NPS Parkland



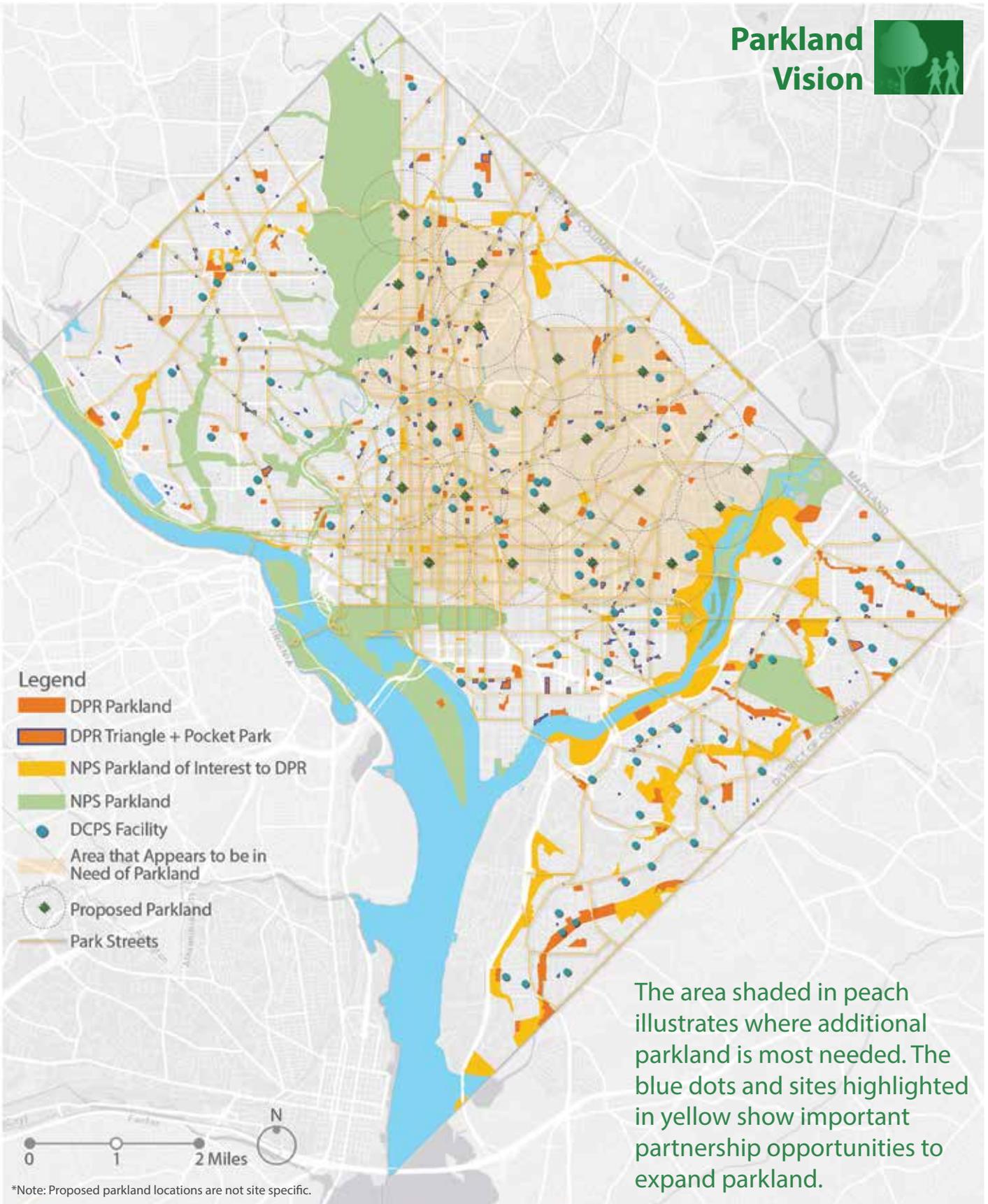
The light gray areas are neighborhoods that do not currently have access to a park within a 1/2 mile.

The targets highlighted on page 20 aim to ensure that every resident has a neighborhood park close to home, and that each neighborhood has adequate park space. To meet these targets, the District will need to provide about 180 acres of new parkland. The vision map on the next page illustrates where this new parkland is most needed, and should be acquired through leasing, buying, or partnering.

One major partnership opportunity is with DC Public Schools (DCPS). If DCPS facilities were open to the public after school hours and during the weekend, many residents that currently do not have access to a park within ½ mile would be served.



# Parkland Vision



The area shaded in peach illustrates where additional parkland is most needed. The blue dots and sites highlighted in yellow show important partnership opportunities to expand parkland.

# Recreation Centers



## BIG MOVES

### RECLASSIFY

Develop and consistently apply a new classification system for DPR Recreation Centers, which establishes minimum design standards based upon program needs.

### REINVEST

Invest capital funds to bring all Recreation Centers up to the minimum standards of the new classification system, prioritizing those centers where gaps in the network exist.

### PARTNER

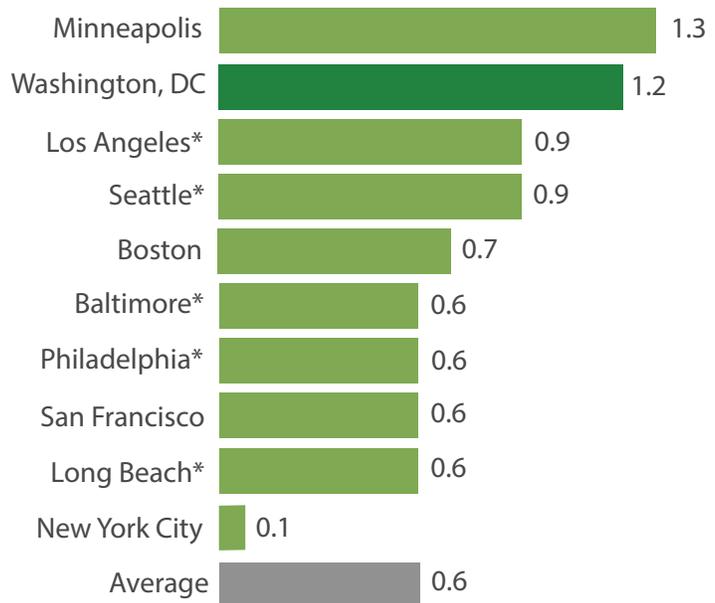
Request formal proposals from private and non-profit organizations to manage select DPR Recreation Centers.



## Targets

Every resident will be able to access a DPR Neighborhood Center—or the equivalent—within 1 mile of home.

One of the biggest assets of the District’s parks system is its number of recreation centers. Similar to parkland, one way to measure recreation centers is through a Level of Service (LOS) ratio that compares the number of recreation centers to the District’s population. As illustrated in Figure G below, DC currently has one of the highest numbers of recreation centers of any city in the country.



**Figure G: City Recreation Centers per 10,000 population**

\*Note: Considered a peer city based on population density.

Just like parks acreage, simply looking at quantity is not enough. Another way to look at it is by analyzing the LOS ratio of recreation center square footage to population. Currently, the District has 1.40 square feet of recreation center space per resident. Considering that the parks and recreation industry suggests 1 square foot of recreation center space per capita, the District’s overall recreation center square footage LOS is excellent.

However, not all the neighborhoods in the District have equitable access to this amount of space, especially if you consider the additional residents the District is expected to gain by the year 2020. Furthermore, some of the District’s recreation centers are top-of-the-line, while others have not been updated in decades and are very small—some are smaller than a typical two-bedroom apartment in DC. The map on page 25 shows the distribution of recreation center square footage per resident. It’s clear to see that some neighborhoods have more recreation center square footage than others.



The map on the next page is the Recreation Center Vision. Although each neighborhood’s needs are unique and will need to be explored individually, areas in orange are prime candidates for additional recreation center square footage. Neighborhoods in blue likely have a surplus of square footage and may have opportunities to transition smaller centers over to other organizations for management.

Moving to a more streamlined, equitable system of recreation systems will likely be tough. Having some guidelines, however, will help. Going forward, recreation centers should be at least 7,500 square feet in size. Starting at this minimum, a new tiered system of recreation center types is recommended (see Figure H below).

## Types of Indoor Spaces per Recreation Center Classification

### Neighborhood Center

Multipurpose room; Classroom(s); Support spaces (restrooms, storage, office space, etc).

### Community Center

Gym or multipurpose room; Kitchen; Classrooms (2); Computer Lab; Fitness Center; Lounge area (teen or senior); Aquatics (indoor or outdoor) could be included; Support spaces (locker rooms, restrooms, storage, office space, etc.)

### District Center

Gymnasium; Elevated track; Multipurpose room; Kitchen (teaching); Classrooms (2); Computer Lab; Arts & Crafts Room; Fitness Center; Lounge area (2 - teen and senior); Game room; Aquatics (indoor or outdoor) most likely included; Support spaces (locker rooms, restrooms, storage, office space, etc.)

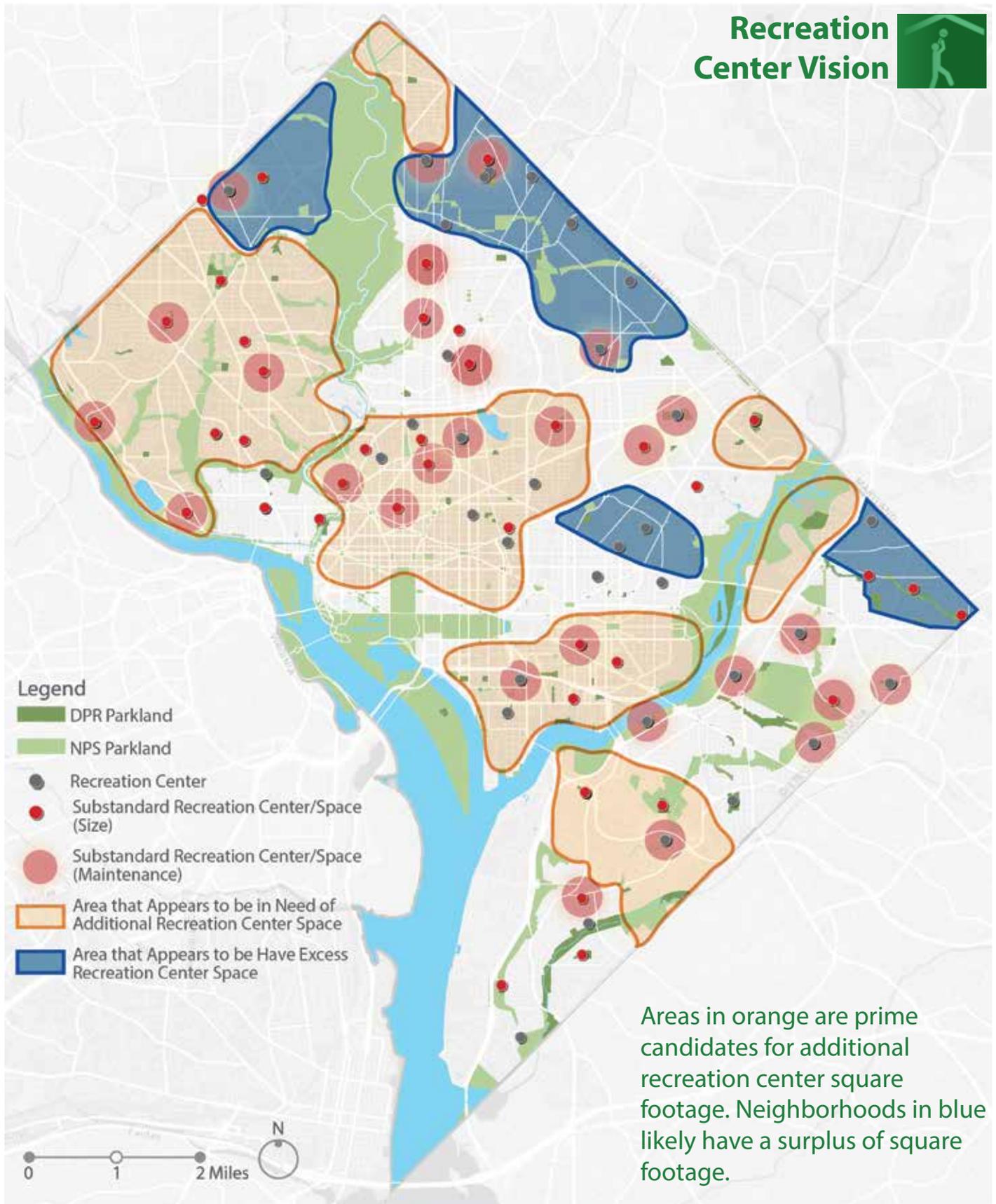
### Specialty Center

Specialty facilities designed to accommodate a specific user group or activity, usually on a City-wide basis.



Figure H: Recreation Center Guidelines By Classification

# Recreation Center Vision



Areas in orange are prime candidates for additional recreation center square footage. Neighborhoods in blue likely have a surplus of square footage.

# Aquatics Facilities

## BIG MOVES

### STABILIZE

Make necessary renovations and upgrades to extend the life of DPR's generous network of pools to meet growing demand.

### EVALUATE

Conduct an in-depth study of each type of Aquatics Facility to refine needs and priorities.

### MODERNIZE

Transform the District into an Aquatics destination by making key strategic investments that will enrich offerings for residents and draw customers from surrounding jurisdictions.

## Targets

Every resident will have access to:

- An indoor pool within 2 miles;
- An outdoor pool within 1.5 miles; and
- A splash pad within 1 mile.

On a hot, humid DC day, few things can beat jumping into the cool water of a swimming pool or splash pad. Compared to its peer cities, DC has one of the most aquatics facilities per capita in the country. Despite this wealth of indoor and outdoor pools, residents have expressed their desire for more or better facilities and more aquatics programs during the Play DC planning process. Why?

Over the years, the District has built an impressive array of aquatics centers, to include centers with Olympic-sized racing pools, water slides, and therapeutic facilities. Yet, sometimes these facilities are not in the best location, best condition, or of the best size to meet demand. To promote equitable access and excellent aquatics experiences, the District must continue investing in its baseline network of pools, and should aim for the service targets shown in Figure I (below).

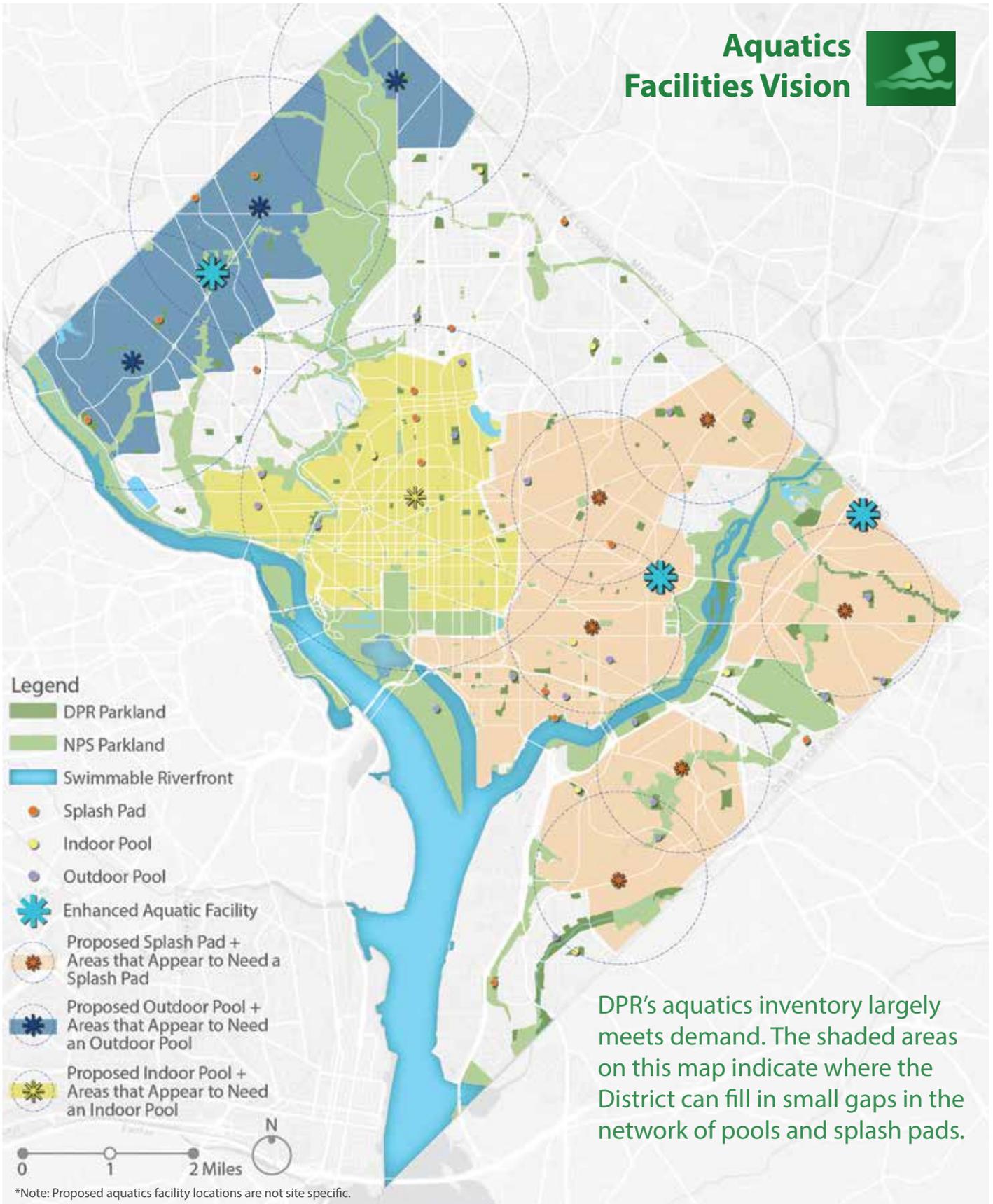
These targets can help the District establish an interconnected system of facilities to meet demand across the city, especially when planning for new construction. The good news is: the foundation is largely in place. Still, there are a handful of areas where we'll want to consider new pools or splash pads to keep up with population growth. The Vision Map on the following page shows what to keep an eye on.

Other big possibilities for aquatics include a consolidated Aquatics Complex and/or family Water Park that serve as regional draws. Not only would these offer terrific destinations for District residents, they could produce revenue to support the system. Lastly, we must not forget our riverfronts, which are undergoing a remarkable renaissance. Opportunities abound for additional outdoor recreation, such as canoeing, kayaking, swimming, fishing, and more.



Figure I: Aquatics Facilities Guidelines

# Aquatics Facilities Vision



DPR's aquatics inventory largely meets demand. The shaded areas on this map indicate where the District can fill in small gaps in the network of pools and splash pads.

# Outdoor Facilities

## BIG MOVES

### IMPROVE

**Raise the bar on the condition of our existing outdoor facilities: re-invent playgrounds across the city; convert some fields to artificial turf; and add lighting, seating, and other support features.**

### MULTIPLY

**Increase the access to high-quality outdoor facilities by building new athletic fields and courts in areas of demonstrated need.**

### UTILIZE

**Be creative - take advantage of the rich network of urban infrastructure to meet recreational needs and promote exercise.**

## Targets

**80% of District residents will rate their access to desired outdoor recreation facilities as Good or Excellent.**

**Develop service targets for specific types of outdoor facilities.**

Facilities in parks bring green space alive with activity: people exercising at DPR fitness zones, children playing on swing-sets, and players fielding ground balls. This activity not only makes for better parks, but also for better neighborhoods.

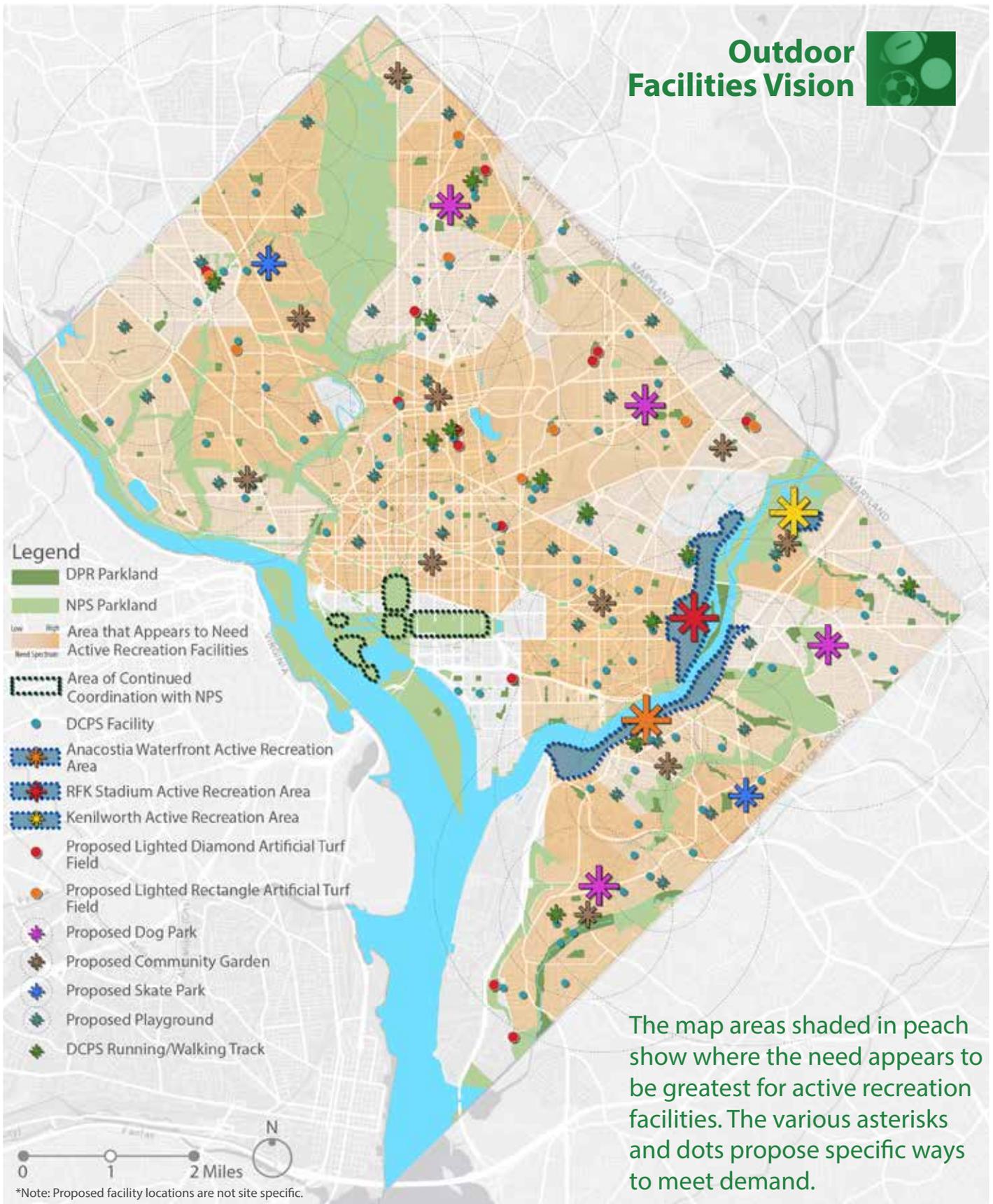
Across the District, our parks have hundreds of facilities, ranging from various kinds of fields and courts to community gardens and skate parks. But big questions persist. Are there enough? Are they spread out evenly and generally of the same quality no matter what neighborhood you are in?

The short answer is...no. Not yet. When these facilities are all mapped and measured for service areas, it is clear that certain kinds are not meeting likely demand. As the population of the District increases and shifts in age over the next ten years, there appears to be a significant shortfall in active recreation facilities including softball/baseball fields, football/soccer fields, basketball courts, tennis courts and playgrounds.

Over the last year, we have tackled playgrounds in a big way. Thirty-two sites and counting have been completely transformed to meet pent-up demand, attracting scores of children and enlivening neighborhoods. Improving the quality of playgrounds has shown how raising the bar on the design of outdoor facilities can have a dramatic impact on both the number of people served and the way communities come together. We can do the same for fields in the District by focusing on improvements such as artificial turf and lighting—which will extend their hours of play time significantly.

Field improvements alone, however, cannot satisfy the demand of the District's active and expanding population. We also need to secure more outdoor facilities in an environment where space is at a premium. This means getting creative. It means using the urban infrastructure that already exists—such as streets and schools—for exercise. It means partnering with other agencies to maximize field and court spaces. And it means seeking opportunities to build new outdoor facilities. Since land is scarce, the District may need to find ways to serve a wider radius of residents at fewer sites. Consolidating facilities at an active recreation area such as those shown in the Vision Map (next page) would be a bold and effective way to go.

# Outdoor Facilities Vision



The map areas shaded in peach show where the need appears to be greatest for active recreation facilities. The various asterisks and dots propose specific ways to meet demand.

# Programs



## BIG MOVES

### ORGANIZE

Develop a framework to guide DPR in the recreation programs marketplace and how to invest and prioritize funds.

### ANALYZE

Collect and analyze participation data regularly, and apply to future decision-making on program operations.

### DEVELOP

Develop a detailed Program Action Plan that elevates, standardizes and expands the quality and offerings of DPR programs.



25% of DC residents will participate in a DPR program.

90% of participants will rate their experience in DPR programs as Good or Excellent.

In the past year, DPR offered over 400 different programs or events to District residents ranging from youth sports to cultural arts and enrichment programs. Despite these options and benefits, only about **18 percent of residents** participate in DPR programs. When asked why they don't join in, most people said they don't know what's offered, there aren't enough programs, or they think the quality isn't up to par. Due to limited financial resources, sometimes decisions have to be made about which programs offer the most bang for the buck, and which programs may be better left to other providers. To help the District determine its own approach by program, three types of roles are possible:

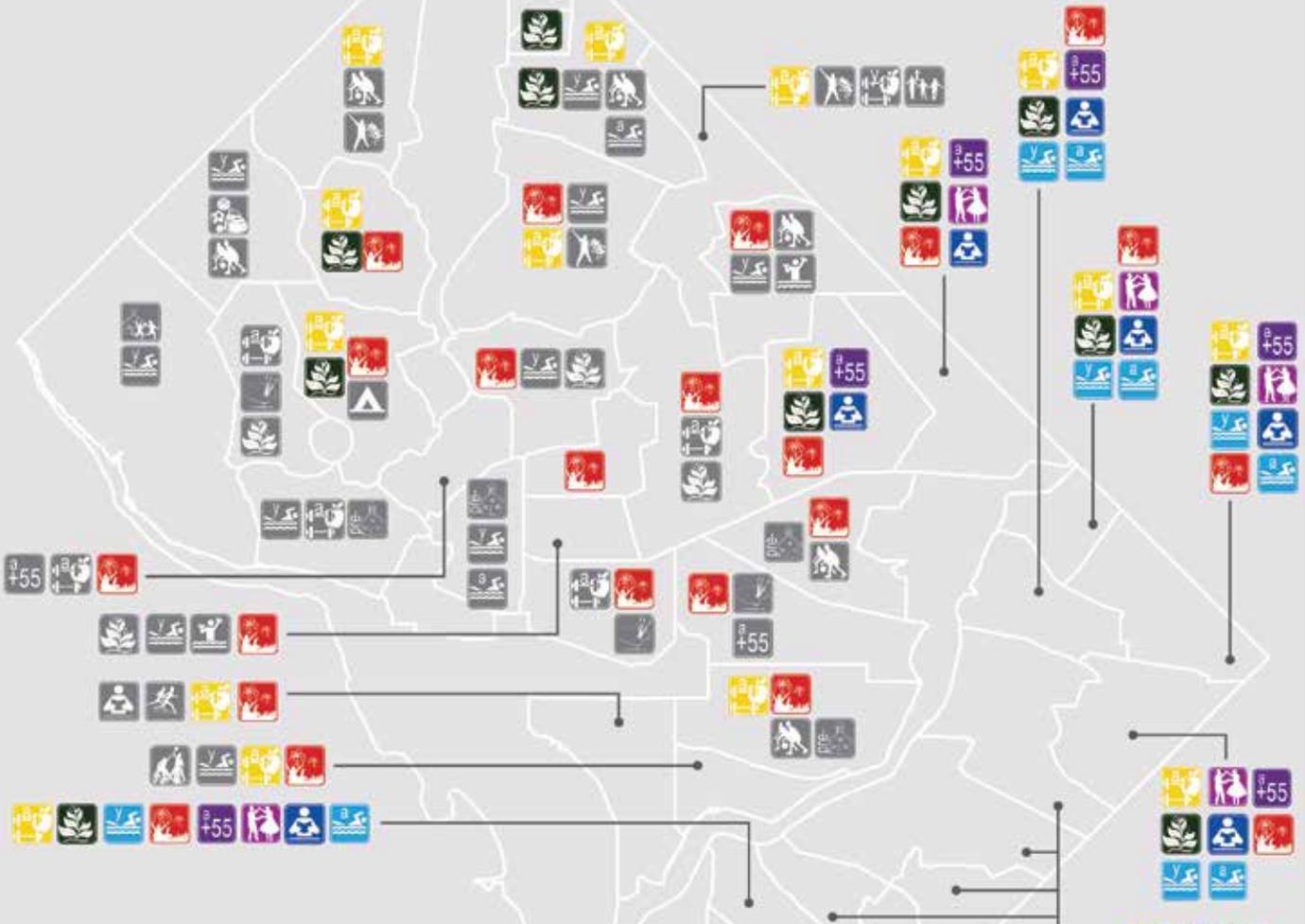
- **Leading Provider:** These are the programs where DPR excels and are seen as the “bread and butter” of the department’s program offerings. As a leading provider, DPR would directly run these programs.
- **Shared Provider:** DPR may or may not provide the program directly, depending on factors such as staff expertise, market supply, and customer demand.
- **Support Provider:** DPR does not run these programs but may support them through promotion, monitoring, or facility provision.

Figuring out an approach for every program is no simple task. Before the provider type can be determined, DPR will need to consistently gather participation data and feedback over a number of program seasons. This data will help the District identify where it provides the most value, and where other organizations may be the better option. Figure J below is an initial framework to help guide DPR in prioritizing its programs.

Program Type	Age	Leading Provider	Shared Provider	Support Provider
Sports + Fitness	Youth	██████████		
	Adult		██████████	
	Senior	██████████		
Cultural Arts + Enrichment	Youth	██████████		
	Adult		██████████	
	Senior	██████████		
Nature + Environment	Youth	██████████		
	Adult			██████████
	Senior			██████████

Figure J: DPR Program Prioritization Framework

# Program Needs Per Neighborhood Cluster



- Top Program Priority Needs**
- Adult Fitness + Wellness
  - Nature
  - Youth Learn-to-Swim
  - Community Special Events
  - Programs for Adults 55+
  - Adult Arts, Dance, Performing Arts
  - Adult Continuing Education Programs for Degree/Trade Certification
  - Water Fitness
  - Adult Learn-to-Swim
- Desired Programs**
- Adult Fitness + Wellness
  - Youth Fitness + Wellness
  - Adult Learn to Swim
  - Youth Learn-to-Swim
  - Water Fitness
  - Youth Arts, Dance, Performing Arts
  - Youth Recreation Leagues
  - School Break
  - Programs for People with Disabilities
  - Teen
  - Programs for Adults 55+
  - Pre-School
  - Before/After School
  - Nature
  - Adult Continuing Education Programs for Degree/Trade Certification
  - Adult Leisure Learning
  - Athletic Special Events

The colored icons represent program priorities expressed through the statistically valid survey. The icons in gray represent desired programs expressed through other public engagement methods.

# Bikeways + Trails



## BIG MOVES

### LINK

Add perimeter multi-use trails within select parks that may connect to the city-wide trail system, and provide secure bike parking and trailheads.

### SUPPORT

Support proposed transportation projects with recreation benefits, such as the Metropolitan Branch Trail, Oxon Run Trail, and the Fort Circle Parks + Greenway.

### COOPERATE

Forge agreements to open up other opportunities for walking and biking, such as school tracks and trail easements.



## Targets

100% of DPR parks will be accessible by foot.

90% of DPR parks will be accessible by bicycle.

Bikeways and trails are a top wish in cities across the country: from remote rural counties to dense cities, residents everywhere are looking for more trails where they can exercise and get around town safely without a car.

In this case, the District is no different. In fact, 38% of households do not own a vehicle, so having transportation options is essential. Although DPR is not the lead agency for transportation, there are ways to add to bike and trail facilities through parks. For example, opportunities exist to build perimeter paths in larger parks, creating internal loop trails that double as park circulation.

But the opportunities extend beyond park boundaries. By partnering with other agencies, DPR can work to build new bike lanes, trails and pedestrian paths to its parks. This not only expands the city-wide trails system, but will improve access to parks and programs.

**Play DC** heartily endorses extension and rehabilitation projects proposed by the District Department of Transportation, including the Anacostia Riverwalk, Metropolitan Branch, Oxon Run, Klinge, and Rock Creek Park trails. In the same vein, trail concepts like the Fort Circle Parks and Greenway project would not only establish a near-loop trail of the District, but attract more visitors and activity to its parks.



# Bikeways + Trails Vision



### Legend

- DPR Parkland
- NPS Parkland
- Fort Circle Greenway
- Existing Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Existing Bike Lane
- Proposed Bike Lane
- Proposed Cycle Track
- Park with Proposed Internal Trail Network



This map shows the system of existing and planned bikeways and trails in the District. It also highlights DPR parks that could construct internal trails that connect with the citywide network.

# Environmental Lands + Natural Areas

## BIG MOVES

### CONNECT

Provide more places for people to access the waterfront and better opportunities to experience natural areas within the DPR system.

### RECLAIM

Within the larger parks, establish healthier tree cover and green landscapes. Weave plantings and other natural features into mini and pocket parks, especially in areas with inadequate open space.

### COORDINATE

Work with the National Park Service and other expert providers to offer nature programs, particularly in neighborhoods where natural areas are limited.

## Targets

Increase natural features on DPR properties, such as trees, gardens, or wetlands, by 40 %.

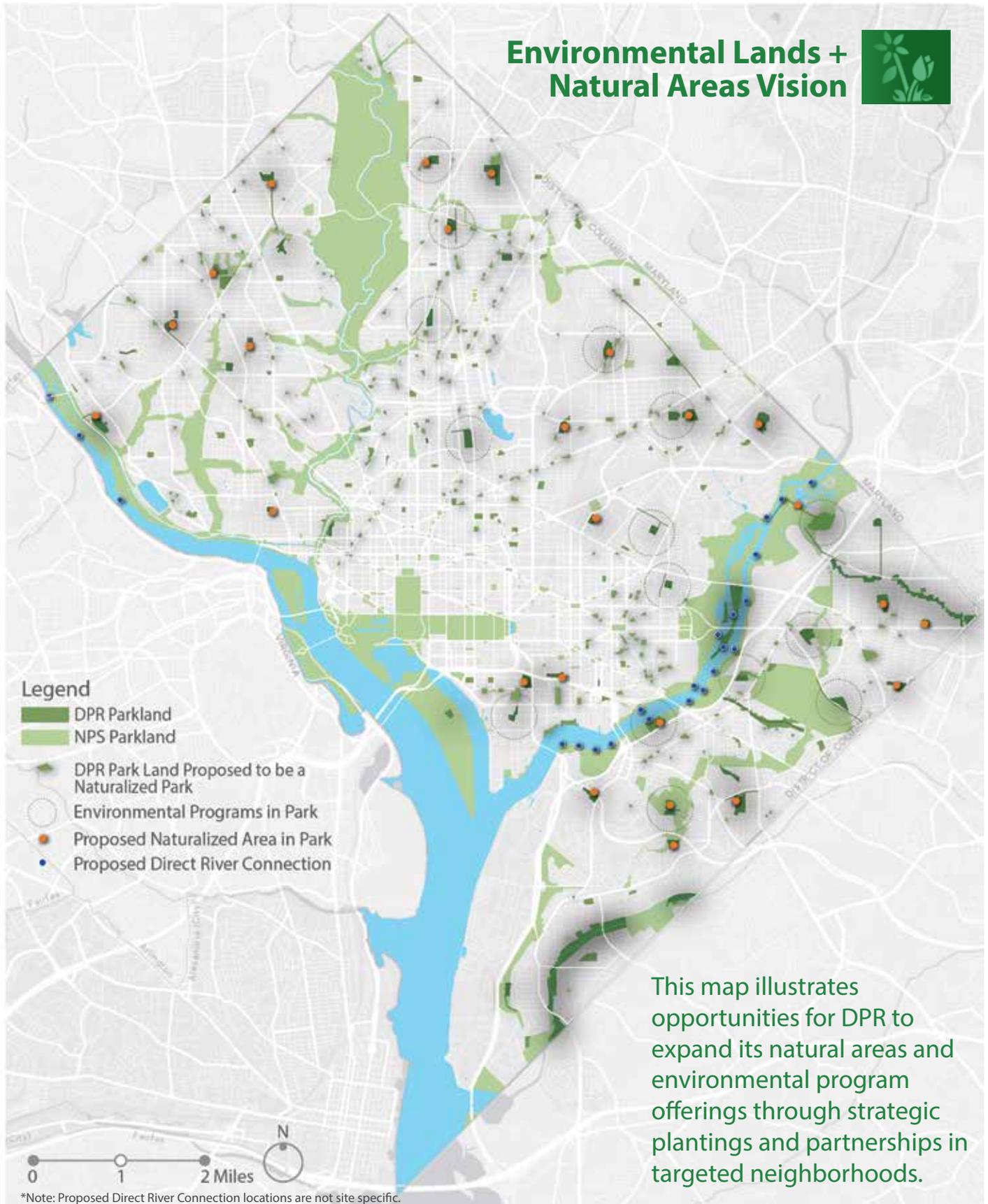
Urban parks not only provide opportunities for recreation, but also are ways for people to experience nature close to home. Natural areas present a particular challenge for parks agencies—unlike playgrounds or ball fields, they cannot be simply established. The District can, however, better connect and draw people to these special places to celebrate them and build constituencies for their protection.

Further, **Play DC** recommends using native plantings and other restorative landscaping techniques to support a strong, local ecosystem. Even in small parks in dense neighborhoods, it is possible to design features that allow residents to enjoy glimpses of nature and provide environmental services such as shade and storm water capture.

The map on the following page illustrates some opportunities for DPR to expand its natural areas and environmental program offerings. These improvements are mostly in currently under-utilized patches of open space and along the riverfronts. In larger parks, there is also potential for some acreage to be “reclaimed” and reverted to a more natural look and experience.



# Environmental Lands + Natural Areas Vision



This map illustrates opportunities for DPR to expand its natural areas and environmental program offerings through strategic plantings and partnerships in targeted neighborhoods.

\*Note: Proposed Direct River Connection locations are not site specific.

## An Integrated Vision

**Play DC** is more than just a plan: it is a vision that will bring about meaningful benefits for all of our residents in every neighborhood. Its implementation will lead to beautifully designed parks within a short walk from everyone's home. It will mean splash pads and swimming pools around the District, and a range of recreation center types designed to support DPR programs. Most importantly, it is a commitment to a high quality of life for all of us.

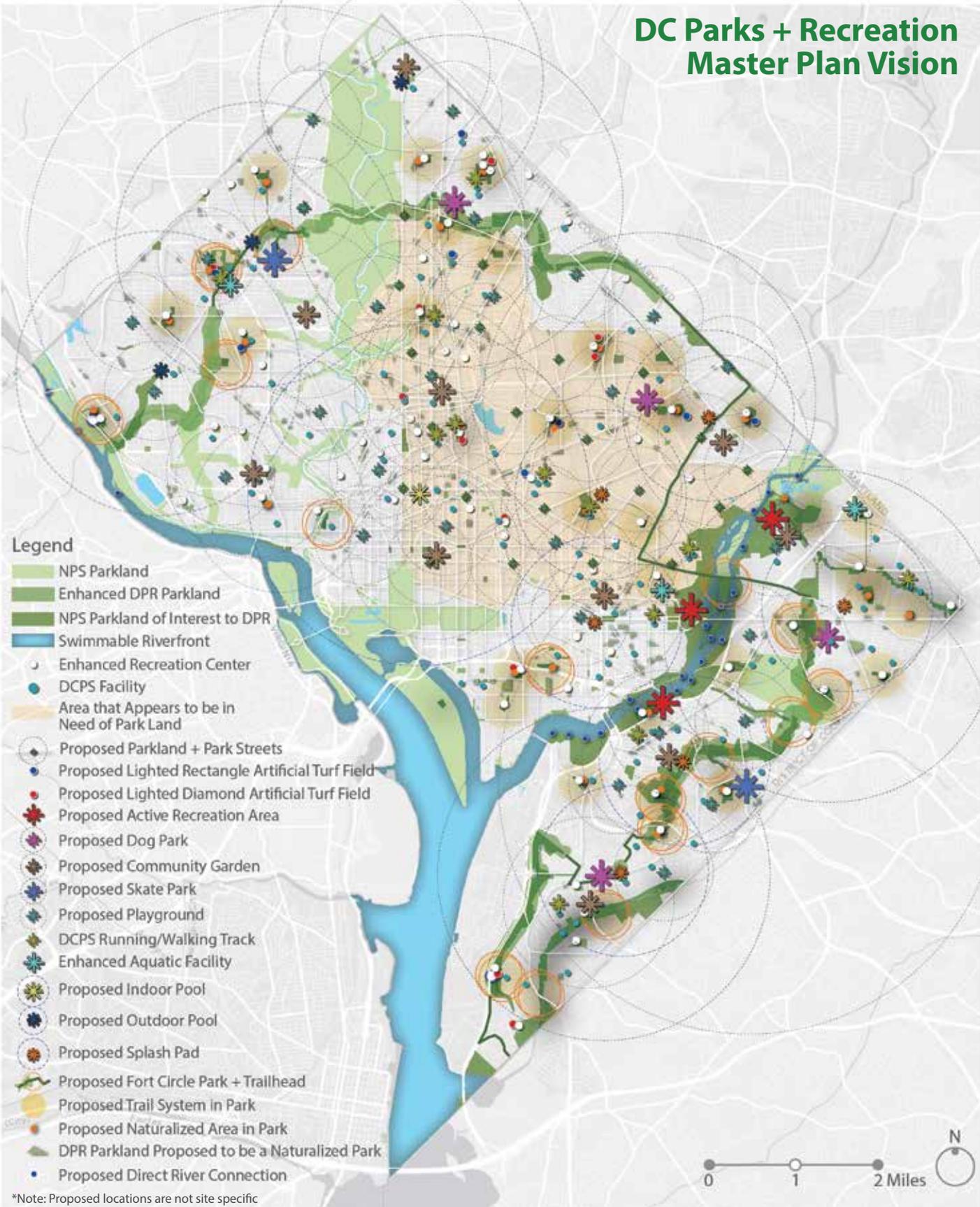
The strength of **Play DC** is that it envisions a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Every proposed project, no matter how big or how small, is a step towards the realization of the vision. Over time, all of these improvements add up, and amplify the strength of the parks and recreation system. The result is an increasingly comprehensive network of recreation opportunities, where each element is unique yet plays an important part in the greater whole. The map on the next page demonstrates what the fully-realized vision could be for the District.

**But we have a lot to do!** Our legacy of parks provides an extraordinary foundation and we owe it not only to our predecessors, but to our current and future residents to capitalize on and fully realize our rich heritage. We must continually invest in, and improve our existing parks and recreation centers citywide to provide quality and equity of service. We must continue to evaluate programmatic needs and provide opportunities for residents to **Move. Grow. Be Green.** We must increase the amount of green space for those areas most in need. We must elevate our facilities to encourage more active sports, community gardens, playgrounds, and experiences in nature District-wide. We must ensure that our parks, facilities, and programs are welcoming and accessible to all people. And finally, we must strengthen the connections between parks and neighborhoods, and residents and their communities.

**Play DC** is just the beginning – it outlines the way forward, but there is still more hard work ahead. Our next step is to finalize an implementation strategy that prioritizes projects, clearly defines partnerships, identifies funding sources, and begins to enact the Big Moves fashioned in this vision.

Our residents too have a big job. We ask you to keep lending your voice to the plan, invest in your neighborhood's parks, facilities, and programs, and be part of our dynamic city's future. If you are interested in diving further into the details of the Play DC analysis or wish to share your ideas, please read more at [www.playdc.org](http://www.playdc.org).

# DC Parks + Recreation Master Plan Vision



# Acknowledgments

## Play DC Advisory Committee

Casey Trees  
Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation  
Cultural Tourism DC  
DC Building Industry Association  
DC Business Improvement District Council  
DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities  
DC Council Committee on Workforce + Community Affairs  
DC Department of Employment Services  
DC Department of the Environment  
DC Department of Health  
DC Department of General Services  
DC Department of Transportation  
DC Department of Transportation, Urban Forestry  
DC Housing Authority  
DC Metropolitan Police Department  
DC Office on Aging  
DC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education  
DC Office of the Deputy Major for Planning and Economic Development  
DC Office of Disability Rights  
DC Public Charter School Board  
DC Public Library  
DC Public Schools  
DC Public Schools, Chancellor's Office  
Downtown DC Business Improvement District  
Events DC  
Executive Office of the Mayor – Community Affairs  
Executive Office of the Mayor – Budget and Finance  
Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission  
Montgomery County Department of Parks  
Montgomery County Department of Recreation  
National Capital Planning Commission  
National Park Service  
National Recreation and Parks Association  
Prince George's County Parks and Recreation  
University of the District of Columbia  
Washington Parks and People

## Play DC Project Team

DC Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services  
DC Department of Parks and Recreation  
DC Office of Planning  
AECOM

## Photo Credits

Page 3

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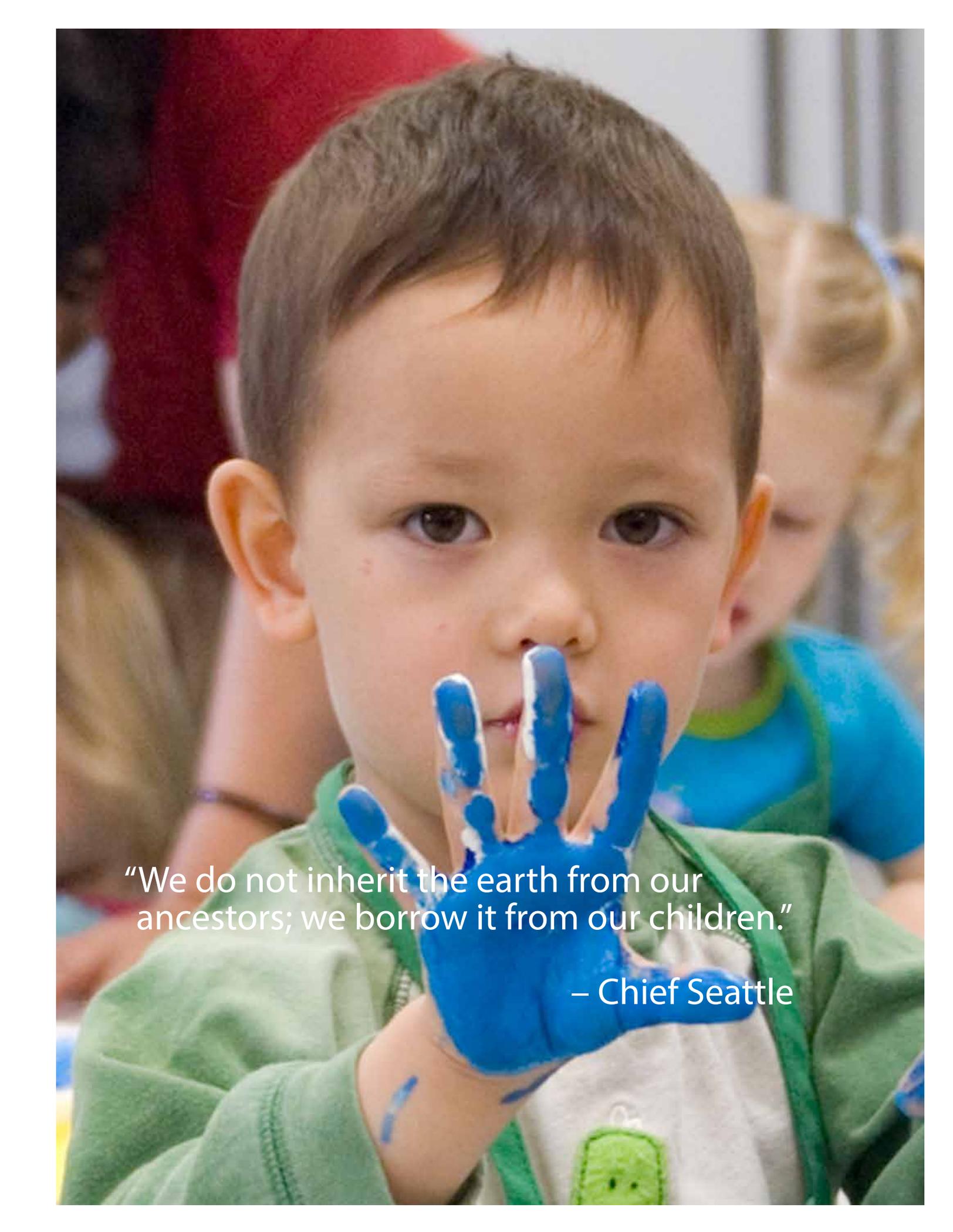
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A close-up photograph of a young child with short brown hair and dark eyes. The child is wearing a green zip-up jacket over a white shirt. Their hands are painted with bright blue paint, and they are holding their right hand up to their mouth as if about to eat or drink. In the background, another child with blonde hair is partially visible, also wearing a blue shirt. The background is slightly out of focus, showing a red wall and some vertical lines.

“We do not inherit the earth from our  
ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

– Chief Seattle



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