

ACTIVATING JACKSONVILLE'S RIVERFRONT:
**BENCHMARK
REPORT**



INDEX

INDEX

00 INTRODUCTION	5
01 AUSTIN, TX	7
02 BROOKLYN, NY	13
03 BUFFALO, NY	19
04 CHICAGO, IL	25
05 CINCINNATI, OH	31
06 COLUMBUS, OH	37
07 COPENHAGEN, DENMARK	43
08 DETROIT, MI	49
09 HOUSTON, TX	55
10 LITTLE ROCK, AR	61

11 LOUISVILLE, KY	67
12 NASHVILLE, TN	73
13 PITTSBURGH, PA	79
14 ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS	85
15 SAN DIEGO, CA	91
16 SAVANNAH, GA	97
17 ST. PETERSBURG, FL	103
18 TAMPA, FL	109
19 TORONTO, CANADA	115
20 WASHINGTON, D.C.	121

INTRODUCTION

Many great cities around the world have seen the immense impact of what a revitalized waterfront can do for a city's economy, health, and well-being of citizens, and also in attracting tourists and newcomers alike. The value of great waterfront districts and public spaces, more generally, has only become more evident during COVID and should be prioritized and emphasized as we look to the future.

The Report

The following is a benchmark report conducted to support the larger Activation Study for Jacksonville's Downtown Riverfront, initiated by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. The overall goal of the project is to develop an Activation Plan for the riverfront that will bring energy and life to Downtown and create year-round activities for all residents and visitors.

This report is the result of a collaborative effort between DVDL—cultural strategists and forecasters working at the intersection of cultural analysis and human behavior—and Riverfront Parks Now—a citizen-led initiative advocating for green space and parks in Jacksonville.

The research looks at waterfront projects in 20 cities around the country and from around the world. It is meant to inspire and provide learnings for Jacksonville as we collectively reimagine the future of the Downtown Riverfront. For each of

the case studies, we highlight interesting design and landscaping features, look at how parks and public spaces are activated through everyday programming, large-scale events, education, and art. We spotlight examples of interesting partnerships between institutions, public-private partnerships, and the City, and investigate how parks and public spaces are funded, managed, and maintained.

The Case Studies

The benchmark cities included in the research were chosen based on criteria ranging from size, scale, costs, geography, and climate, to design features and activation of public spaces. The 20 cities included are geographically spread out throughout the country, with a stronger concentration in the South, Midwest, and Northeast. Most cases were included for comparison to Jacksonville in size, climate, scale, or context (working waterfront). Important to note is that the cost of the projects vary greatly depending on the size and scale of the revitalization of the waterfront project at which we are looking.

We hope what follows will bring excitement and inspiration to residents, businesses, organizations, and City officials in Jacksonville, and allow for this great City to think aspirationally about the future of Jacksonville's Downtown Riverfront.

AUSTIN, TX

LAMAR BEACH METRO PARK AND BUTLER METRO PARK

Downtown Austin has two large parks spanning over 60 acres along the Colorado River—[Lamar Beach Metro Park](#) on the north shore, and [Butler Metro Park](#) on the south, linked by a pedestrian bridge. Trails connect to the Barton Springs Pool and a 10-mile hike and bike trail. The parks offer a mix of passive and active programming, including a performing arts center and exhibition venue, a dog park, children's play garden, public art installations, multi-use fields, an animal adoption center, an amphitheater, a boat ramp, and a picnic pavilion.

Years developed:
1999–2014

Cost: \$28 million

Size: 65 acres

Visitors annually: 2M



Lamar Beach and Butler Metro Park face each other across the river. Image credit: Lars Plougmann, via Flickr



Barton Springs Pool is a natural, spring-fed pool that flows into the Colorado River via Barton Creek. Image credit: Todd Dwyer, via Creative Commons



Austin, TX. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The **parks connect to the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail**, which runs 10 miles along the river. Green space links the previously separated east, central, and west sections of Austin.
- **Landscaped hills and berms** lend topography and river views to an otherwise flat area.
- The **Austin Boardwalk** runs over part of the Colorado River. The “Belting it Out” **installation, welded onto the boardwalk**, features bronze-cast belts inscribed with lyrics by Texan singers and songwriters.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The parks provide flexible space for nearby nonprofits to host their own events.
- ✦ Connectivity is more than just linear. Future plans will add “spokes” of greenways along creeks that radiate from the inner city to the river.
- ✦ The parks are linked to a heavily-used hike and bike trail that runs 10 miles out of the city.



A 1.3-mile-long boardwalk meanders along the water's edge and passes by skyscrapers, neighborhoods, ball fields, and cultural attractions. Image credit: Lars Plougmann, via Flickr



Landscaped wetlands and pools along the Roy and Ann Butler Hike and Bike Trail. Image credit: sk, via Flickr

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The **Long Center for the Performing Arts** is nestled in Butler Metro Park, and has a diverse line-up of local & national artists, plus free community events. Next door, the **Palmer Events Center** is a **multipurpose venue** rented out for conferences, weddings and exhibits.
- The Dougherty Arts Center is an **art gallery offering exhibition space and free art classes**. Open Room Austin is an **interactive, al-fresco art installation** featuring a long dining table, benches, and lamps that the public is free to use for lawn parties.
- The “auditorium” is a **great lawn** that features an off-leash dog area, seasonal events, and picnic tables. It is often used as a performance space during **Austin City Limits** music festival.
- The two-acre **Alliance Children’s Garden** features a large playscape and splashpad, located next to a **BYOB pitch and putt green**.



Trapeze Texas Aerial Arts Academy performs at the Long Center for the Performing Arts. Image credit: ejmc, via Creative Commons



Austin City Limits Radio's "Blues on the Green" brings thousands of folks together once a month in summer for a series of free concerts. Image credit: Sanjoy Ghosh, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Sometimes **simple, functional, tried-and-true programming** serves the highest public use.
- Efforts are underway to **develop more greenways along Austin’s small urban creeks** that will eventually link to the riverfront. The Austin Economic Development Corporation is trying to incorporate other social needs into the master plans, such as more housing.
- Connectivity can be more than just linear along a riverfront. This park adds “spokes” of greenways to **connect the inner city with the main linear path**.

BROOKLYN, NY

BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK

Brooklyn Bridge Park extends 1.3 miles along a historic cargo shipping and storage complex on the East River. While preserving the dramatic experience of the former industrial waterfront, the park encompasses new and refurbished connections between the city and river, serving as a key threshold between Manhattan and Brooklyn. The park is divided across six programmed piers with lush lawns, barbecue grills, an outdoor gym, dog runs, public art, promenades, playgrounds, boat ramps, and beaches. It also sits adjacent to two residential communities, many restaurants, and the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway, an 18-mile stretch of bike paths around Brooklyn.

Years developed:
2003–2018
Cost: \$370 million
Size: 85 acres
Visitors annually: 5M+



Sunset views from the park over Manhattan's Financial District. Image credit: Sebastian Anthony, via Creative Commons



Brooklyn Bridge, built in 1883, is the park's focal point. Image credit: Carol Labashosky, via Flickr

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The park's **stormwater recycling system** can satisfy 70 percent of its irrigation needs. It makes use of salvaged wood, recycled granite, and materials from infrastructure demolition.
- Unlike other waterfront parks, where visitors are perched above the water, the park uses **soft edges, like pebble beaches and marshy wetlands**, to encourage close interaction with the water while also increasing flood resilience.
- A 30-foot-tall **sound-attenuating berm muffles traffic noise** from the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway that runs past the park.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Ecological processes are not treated like exhibits in a museum, but are integrated into visitors' sensory experience.
- ✦ Ten percent of the park is devoted to mixed use development, which pays for 90 percent of the park budget. This is largely possible due to the high value of real estate in New York.
- ✦ Adaptive reuse of industrial structures continues the park's living history. Nineteenth-century warehouses have been repurposed for mixed use and public art.



Brooklyn, NY. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



A rendering of Pier 3 shows how the park brings people onto/into the water rather than just along/above it. Image credit: JVSantorePatch, via Creative Commons



Pilings, salt marsh, and riprap stone create a porous boundary between land and water and encourage intimate interaction with the river. Image credit: Ted McGrath, via Flickr

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The park feeds directly into an existing waterfront tourist area and commercial corridor. **Food concessions and ferry terminals** at the park's main entrances tie the park to daily city life.
- Pier 1 has large gathering spaces that bring crowds and help build an audience for more everyday uses like **children's play, exercise, and sunbathing**. Larger events include **Photoville, a free photo exhibition**, Sounds at Sunset—where the American Symphony **Orchestra plays free chamber music concerts**, and the **Harvest Festival**, a celebration of fall with pumpkin patches, arts, and crafts.
- There are beach **volleyball pits, public grills, outdoor gym equipment, outdoor fitness and yoga classes, three basketball courts, hand-ball courts, a roller rink**, and five acres of multipurpose turf fields.
- Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy's **environmental education center** is a year-round space for teaching people of all ages and backgrounds about the park's setting and ecology.



The park has ample space for temporary public artworks, like Anish Kapoor's "Descention" swirlpool. Image credit: Shinya Suzuki, via Flickr.



Kakayers take to the East River from a boat launch off Brooklyn Bridge Park. Image credit: Shinya Suzuki, via Flickr.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- **Commitments to sustainability and ecology are more meaningful when there are opportunities for the public to engage** with them, not just see them.
- To generate long-term maintenance revenue, **ten percent of the park is open for private development**.
- **Adaptive reuse** of building materials and industrial spaces is both sustainable and maintains a connection to the site's rich cultural history.
- **Stone riprap is an inexpensive, versatile material** that can be used for informal seating, steeply graded slopes, sheltered planting pockets, marine habitat protection, and breakwaters against storm surge.

BUFFALO, NY CANALSIDE

Canalside is the epicenter of Buffalo's waterfront revival—a formerly deserted stretch of the Buffalo River that now hosts over 1,000 events per year. The success of the waterfront has been achieved through phased stages of activation and a mix of large annual events, combined with a robust year-round program calendar with many low-cost or free events. In 2014, Canalside was connected with the Outer Harbor through the reconstruction of Ohio Street as a bike and pedestrian friendly parkway.

Years developed:
2008–ongoing
Cost: \$90 million
Size: 21 acres
Visitors annually: 1.5M



Boats moored Canalside blur the public and private realms. Image by: chrisforsyth, via Flickr



Watching the fireworks Canalside in Buffalo, NY. Image by: Invest Buffalo Niagara.

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

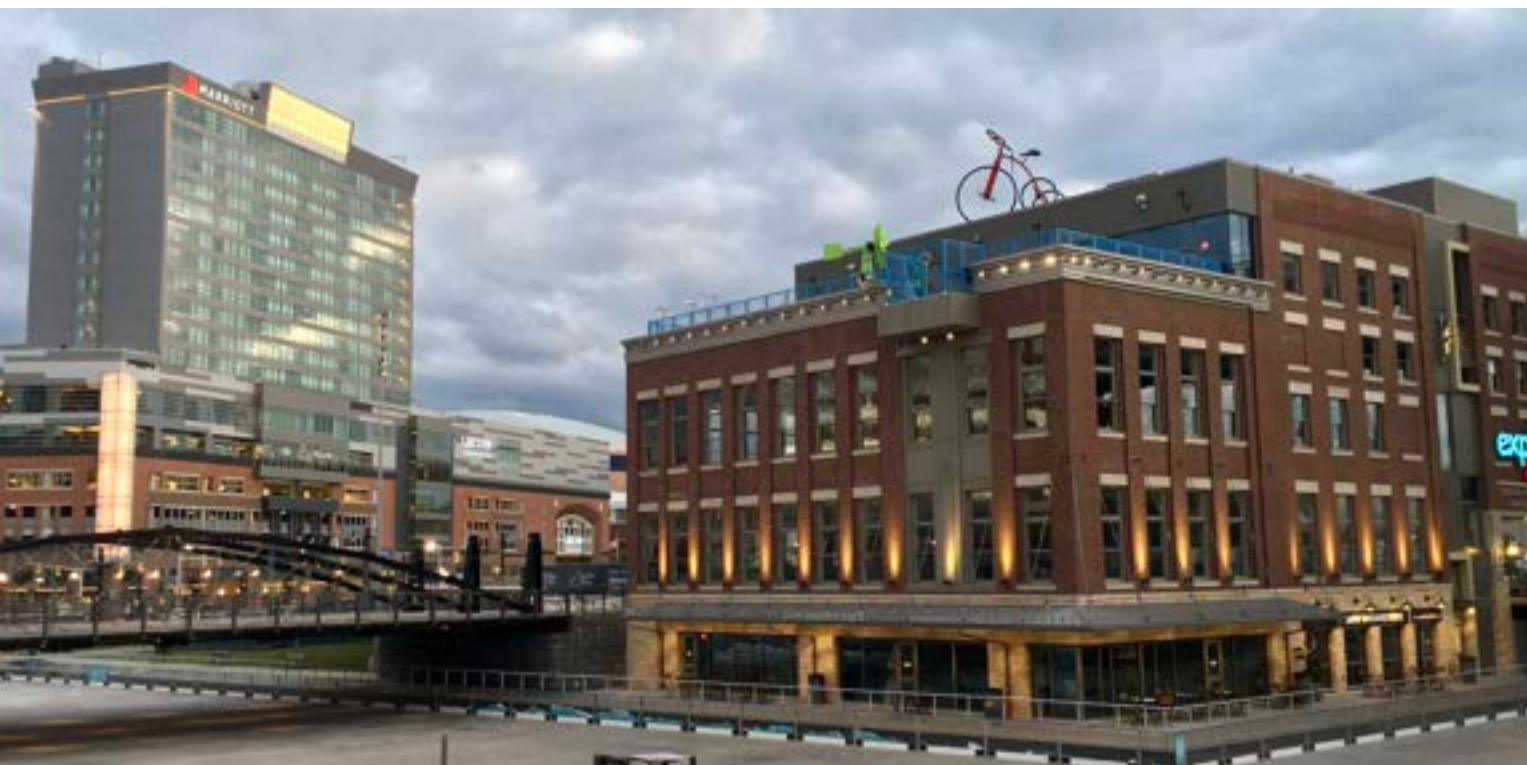
- Main areas include the **expansive promenade**, the **Beach at Canalside** with a large enclosed play area in the sand, and the **largest ice and roller rink in the state**.
- The Canalside area is **heavy on development** with **little park space**. There are, however, notable park areas on the water nearby, including the **Outer Harbor** and the **Naval and Military Park**.
- In 2014, the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) completed the reconstruction of **Ohio Street** into a **pedestrian and bicycle friendly parkway**, connecting Canalside to the Outer Harbor

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The park offers year-round water activities and weather-proofed programming even in cold months.
- ✦ There is a special focus on children's educational programs.
- ✦ The park has integrated its informal activities into its online presence and branding.



Buffalo, NY. Image: Google Maps Satellite



View of Buffalo Children's Museum along the canal. Image by: Andre Carrotflower



Enjoying the expansive boardwalk at Canalside. Image by: Invest Buffalo Niagara

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Canalside offers a **range of on-the-water activities**, including: kayaking, stand-up paddle-boarding, **water biking**, pedal boating, historic boat tours, cocktail cruises, sunset cruises, sailing, catamaran experiences, **floating tiki bars**, and even **fishing charters**.
- **Buffalo and Erie Public Library** provides regular **children's programming** in Canalside. Programs take place weekly during the summer and include educational and hands-on programs with titles like **"The Science of Sound,"** "Superheroes Craft Fun," "Weather and Environment" (Buffalo weather history), and **"Electricity and Circuits."**
- The historic replica canals are frozen during the winter months, becoming New York state's **largest outdoor ice-skating rink**. Starting in 2021, the ice rink is converted to a **roller rink during the slower months of Fall**. With support from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York, the rink is affordable to the community at large.



Rotary Duck Derby. Image credit: Buffalo Library, via Creative Commons



A protected area of the canal for sailboat racing and paddleboarding. Image credit: chrisforsyth, via Creative Commons

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- **Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs)** were leveraged in order to ensure equitable development, local and minority hiring, and living wages.
- Initially, Buffalo's waterfront development was contested due to a proposed opening of a **Bass Pro Shops**, powered by a **substantial state subsidy**.
- Canalside's **mixed-use profile** and high level of **community engagement** has created a space true to **local character** that employs hundreds of locals.
- Integrating informal aspects of typical park activity (Canalside Caricatures, for example) into the destination's **online presence**. Many more traditional parks have poor online presence and branding.

CHICAGO, IL RIVERWALK

The Chicago Riverwalk today is a vibrant 1.25-mile path and series of civic spaces that connects the 18-mile Chicago Lakefront Trail to the river and downtown. The Riverwalk is a level below the downtown streetscape, and is a short walk to the city's grand waterfront parks, Millennium Park and Grant Park. Conceived in 1909 by famed planner Daniel Burnham, the Riverwalk provides an example of how transportation, recreation, ecology, resilience, and business combine for the public benefit. Amenities include two museums, a theater, kayak dock, fountains, interactive nature areas, restaurants and cafes, floating wetlands, and public art.

Years developed:
2001–2015

Cost: \$419 million

Size: 3.5 acres

Visitors annually: 1.5M



The Chicago Riverwalk recast an industrial and underused riverfront into a bustling urban destination. Image credit: R Boed, via Flickr



DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

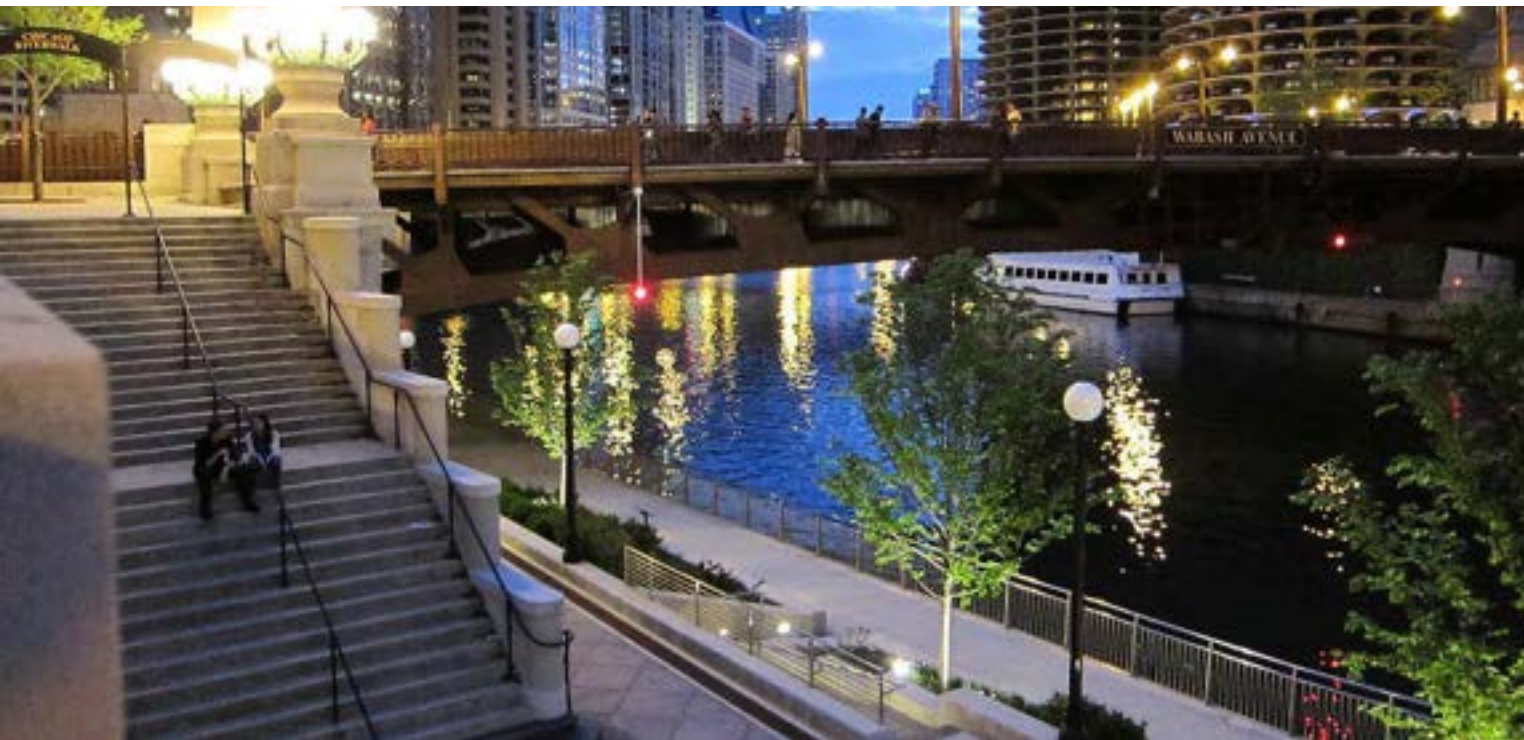
- The Riverwalk was divided into sections that take on **the form and program of different river-based typologies**. For example, the **marine plaza** provides views of passing boats; the **cove** is a space to sit among wetland plants; the **river theater** is a sculptural staircase; and the **jetty** includes piers where people interact with the aquatic ecosystem.
- The Riverwalk **provides both continuity and variety** for visitors—the accessible walkway provides continuous access to Lake Street, while the distinct forms and programs of each segment create diverse experiences from dining to outdoor education.
- **Design materials provide visual cohesion**. For example, pavers and stones mirror the Beaux-Arts style of the surrounding architecture.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Each river segment is planned with a different form and theme.
- ✦ The city led design with bold transportation changes to make the riverwalk more walkable.
- ✦ Tiered amphitheater seating works for both passive observation and performances.



Chicago, IL. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



The Riverwalk is full of access points to/from the street level. Image credit: cristinabe, via Creative Commons



Materials were chosen to be consistent with downtown's Beaux-Arts style. Image credit: ajay_suresh, via Flickr

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- **Art on the Mart** is the largest **permanent digital art projection** in the world, in which moving images by renowned artists are splashed across a big building façade facing the river. **Make Music Chicago** is a free city-wide event that invites Chicagoans to make music together on the river.
- There are two **museums on the river**, the Chicago Architecture Center and the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum. The Chicago Architecture Foundation offers a **boat tour of Chicago's iconic buildings**.
- The River Theater has tiered steps that double as amphitheater seating and a **performance space**. The Jetty, a series of **floating wetlands on piers**, offers **fishing** and **bird-watching**. Marina Plaza has **restaurants and wineries with front-row seats on the river**.
- The Cove offers **rentals for kayaks, paddleboats, electric boats**, and docks for the Chicago Water Taxi. In summer, visitors can **charter a party boat** that takes them to Lake Michigan for swimming.



The Chicago Architecture Foundation runs an architecture tour by boat.
Image credit: Thomas van de Weerd, via Flickr



Eateries are barely set back from the river, creating social exchange. Image credit: Shelby L. Bell, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Dividing the riverwalk into **segments with different forms and programs can create distinct atmospheres**, drive different activities, and connect back to the river's inherent hydrologic variation.
- The Riverwalk is an example of how to **lead with bold transportation changes**, like moving a major downtown arterial to make space for a continuous pedestrian promenade.
- Designers **turned spatial restrictions and flood risk into opportunities** for

CINCINNATI, OH

SMALE RIVERFRONT PARK

Smale Riverfront Park is the front door to Cincinnati. Flanked by two stadiums, the Paul Brown Stadium (NFL) and the Great American Ball Park (MLB), the park's events range from small picnics to concerts and large pre- and post-game activities for the Bengals and Reds sports teams. Set back from the water's edge is a lively mixed-use residential and shopping district, that brings 24-hour life to the park and continues Cincinnati's historic commercial relationship to the river. The historic Roebling Bridge is an architectural icon running from the park to Kentucky.

Years developed:
2008–2012

Cost: \$120 million

Size: 45 acres

Visitors annually: 1.1M



Smale Park is framed by great city landmarks like the Roebling Bridge and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Image credit: 5chw4r7z, via Flickr

The cascading fountain is a sight to see at night with LED color changing underwater lights. Image credit: Carol Labashosky, via Flickr



Cincinnati, OH. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The whole park is designed as a **series of terraces that create a procession down to the water's edge**. This tiered design helps to lift key areas out of the floodplain and create hidden space under the slope for restrooms and parking.
- **The Great Lawn was intentionally left open** for programmatic flexibility and also to absorb floodwaters. **Native plantings support wildlife** and pollinators.
- An integrated bike center, locker room, and restaurant pavilion are supported by **geothermal heating and cooling**.
- Vine Street, which runs from downtown directly into the park, turns into a staircase flanked by **water cascades, water curtains, and glass balconies**, which are often featured in wedding/graduation photography.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The park was designed to flood, with elevated electrical equipment and many mobile elements like picnic tables and planters.
- ✦ Colorful LED lights make the park feel safe and inviting at night.
- ✦ There is a high degree of connectivity between the park and the city.



Illuminated water curtains and cascades make for a spectacle and improve public safety. Image credit: 5chw4r7z, via Flickr



A grand staircase, flanked by water features, leads directly from the downtown street grid to the park. Image credit: Travis Estell, via Creative Commons

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- **Interactive water features** throughout the park are illuminated by **rainbow LED lights**. Visitors can walk behind the water curtains and splash in them on a hot day.
- The **Great Lawn** can host 350,000 people for pre- and post-game events, fireworks displays, concerts, and Tall Stacks—Cincinnati's **annual music, arts, and heritage festival**. **Giant porch swings** allow visitors to take in sweeping river views. A **labyrinth** and **rose garden** have meandering pathways for contemplation, and there is a 1,000-foot waterfront pedestrian promenade.
- There are many children's play areas, including a **carousel**, a **sculpture zone**, a **colorfully-lit splash pad**, and a set of interactive play features like a **giant foot piano** and water pumps and channels.
- The Annie W. and Elizabeth M. Anderson Pavilion is a **banquet center** with river views that provide a great setting for parties, weddings, and corporate functions. The Moerlein Lager House is a working **microbrewery** with beer gardens and balconies overlooking the park.



Steamboat tours down the Ohio River during Cincinnati's Heritage Festival. The park wraps around the baseball stadium, attracting fans. Image credit: redlegsfan21, via Flickr



Colorfully lit, interactive fountains are fun for all ages. Image credit: LouisvilleUSACE, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- The use of **LED lights** is a great way to add a sense of safety and spectacle to public spaces.
- **Every facet of the park was designed to withstand seasonal flooding**, from the lower Great Lawn, which absorbs water, to the planters and picnic tables that can be wheeled away in advance of a storm.
- The **integration of mixed use development** and the two sports stadiums bring 24-hour activity to the park and makes it an extension of the city.
- **Children have multiple opportunities to interact with water** in the park's playscapes and interactive fountains.

COLUMBUS, OH

SCIOTO MILE AND BICENTENNIAL PARK

In the heart of downtown Columbus, Scioto Mile connects the city's main cultural district to the Scioto River via an integrated system of parks, boulevards, and paths. Critical to the park's success were two large infrastructural changes—first, removing a dam and thereby creating 45 additional acres of riverfront land, and, second, reducing the number of lanes on the road running parallel to the river. Comfortable seating, interactive fountains, open space, skyline views, and proximity to pubs and museums have made it a point of pride and have changed residents' perceptions of the urban core.

Years developed:
2011–2015

Cost: \$105 million

Size: 175 acres

Visitors annually: 1M



Pedestrian promenades and lush green space are the defining feature of Scioto Mile.
Image credit: Randall L. Schieber, via MKSK



Bicentennial Park is home to one of the nation's largest outdoor rock climbing walls.
Image credit: Sixflashphoto, via Creative Commons

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The Promenade features a stone **colonnade with swings, gardens, water canals, and table seating for a game of chess or dominoes**. Lined with trees and seasonal flowers, the stone-paved pedestrian walk provides a canopy of shade during hot summer days.
- **1,000 linear feet of concrete floodwall were removed to recover more parkland**, and 600 feet of bio-retention were installed to improve water quality.
- The pedestrian **paths and bridges are nestled within two broader greenway systems**, the Scioto Greenway trails and the Ohio-to-Erie Trail. Linking downtown to these systems was a primary objective.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ First priority was making major changes to dams and roads to create park space.
- ✦ The city's small early investment in pocket parks paved the way for larger development.
- ✦ There is an emphasis on shaded watery areas for relief on hot days.



Columbus, OH. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



Joggers pass by the trellises and swings on Scioto Mile. Image credit: Randall L. Schieber, via MKSK



The park's main lawn during Jazz and Rib Fest. Image credit: Randall L. Schieber, via MKSK

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Bicentennial Park is a large lawn facing a performance pavilion, which hosts **free music, dance, and theater** performances. Large summer festivals like the **Jazz & Rib Fest, Rhythm on the River Music Festival**, and the **Columbus Arts Festival** take place on the lawn.
- Daily park activities include **chess tournaments, bike club events, daycare class visits, tai chi, and martial arts classes**. Milestone 229 is a local, family-run **restaurant embedded in the park** with riverfront views.
- The **15,000-square-foot interactive water fountain** is enhanced at night by lights and fog effects. There are whimsical statues of humanized animals that children like to climb on, and the Columbus Center of Science and Industry, a **hands-on science museum shares the space as well**.
- The Scioto Audubon Metro Park includes a **rose garden, a nature center** offering educational programs, a **beach volleyball area, picnic shelters, a boat launch, a dog park, sledding hills, and an obstacle course**.



Whimsical fish fountains along the promenade. Image credit: Randall L. Schieber, via MKSK



The Scioto Mile fountain is both an architectural marvel and interactive area for aquatic play. Image credit: Randall L. Schieber, via MKSK

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Investing in **major infrastructural changes**—including narrowing the parallel street and removing a dam—was expensive but **created much more park space, drove new programming possibilities, and increased public safety**.
- **The city started building small parks along the riverfront as stepping stones for more expansive development**. This set the stage for the **public-private-partnership** that built the park. The city's initial investment has been amplified by over \$1 billion in private support for the districts around Scioto Mile.
- The project won an **Urban Land Institute Award for Excellence in Community Impact**, for leadership in the responsible use of land for communities.

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

THE HARBOUR PARK

Islands Brygge Harbour Park is a public park directly on the waterfront in Central Copenhagen and one of the most lively and popular places along the harborfront. Islands Brygge is a versatile space, previously serving military, industrial, and residential purposes until its redevelopment in 2003, when it became a multi-functional recreational area. The park contains the famous Islands Brygge Harbour Bath, where locals and tourists alike flock for a swim with a view of the city's skyline. The park's lawn space provides room for a variety of exercise and games. The area is also home to many open air concerts and contains a cultural center.

Years developed:
1984–1995

Cost: € 520.000

Size: 28.000 m²

Visitors annually
(harbour bath):
40.000



Locals and visitors meet and hangout on the lawn at Islands Brygge Harbour Park, with a view of the Harbour Bath in the back. Image credit: Kars Alfrink, via Flickr.



Copenhagen, Denmark. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The park is located in a **former dockland area** and has retained a number of features from its industrial past, including **railway tracks**, an abandoned **railway car used for exhibition space**, and an old ship hull that functions as a **bandstand**.
- The park is surrounded by three **adapted industrial warehouse-turned apartment buildings**, most notably the “silos” buildings.
- The famous **Islands Brygge Harbour bath** extends the park over the water and is part of a system of recreational bathing facilities along the waterfront of Copenhagen.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Islands Brygge Harbour Park is a famously livable park that gives people the ability to claim it as their own through swimming, un-programmed lawn areas, and biking or walking.
- ✦ As the municipality worked to improve the area, they addressed poor water quality and maintained some of the old industrial landmarks.
- ✦ The park area is heavily used by bikers, pedestrians, locals, and visitors alike.



Islands Brygge Harbour bath, designed by Bjarke Ingels Group and JDS architects. People go to the harbour bath in the way that people go to the beach, not necessarily to exercise but to socialize, play, and enjoy the sun. Image credit: Webjay, via Flickr.



The park has preserved industrial elements like this abandoned railway car, which is used for exhibitions. Image credit: Fred Romero, via Flickr.

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Islands Brygge Harbour Bath has **5 pools** (2 dedicated to children), **springboards**, and a capacity for 600 people. The **water quality is monitored and reported daily** and was improved through consistent efforts, now allowing for bathing to take place.
- The park includes a lawn with room for **games, sunbathing, and picnics**. It contains a playground and facilities for **skateboarding** as well as **beach volleyball** and **pétanque**.
- The area is home to many open air concerts and contains a **cultural center**. The community arts center hosts around 350 events annually, including **drama, concerts, dance, communal dinners, and comedy**.
- Kulturhavn is an **annual festival** that sheds light on Copenhagen as a harbor city by kickstarting the new cultural and sports season in August. The festival hosts events along the waterfront to **encourage the use and development of the “blue urban space”**.



Connecting with the park's history as a former dockland area, an old ship hull has been turned upside down and functions as a bandstand. Image credit: Esther Westerveld, via Flickr.



The waterfront park includes a cultural center that hosts around 350 events annually. Image credit: Jose Ma Izquierdo Galioit, via Flickr.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Providing **swim options and interactions with the water** throughout the year was a consistent effort that took decades to complete, but the pay-off for the city was huge in terms of popularity and visitors.
- Islands Brygge Harbour Park combines **interesting, high-quality design with passive lawn space** for sunbathing, games, sports, and many **cultural events**, as well as **community arts spaces** for play and coming together.
- Hosting the **annual harbour festival** to encourage the use and development of the city's waterfront is a successful way to **bring visitors and locals together** and draw attention to great waterfront urban spaces.

DETROIT, MI

RIVERFRONT AND CENTENNIAL PARK

The nonprofit Detroit Riverfront Conservancy envisioned a park and promenade that continuously extends along the city's five-mile-long river, revitalizing obsolete warehouses and drawing families and tourists back downtown. Nearly 80 percent complete, Riverfront and Centennial Park will soon be a ribbon of transportation between the Ambassador Bridge that runs to Canada, Gabriel Richard Park, and Belle Isle. The city put a prime focus on creating public space, inviting the water in, and telling the story of Detroit through artwork, ornamental pavings, native landscaping, and fun amenities.

Years developed:
2009–2022

Cost: \$170 million

Size: 42 acres

Visitors annually: 3M



A rendering of the future Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park, which dismantles the static barrier to the waterfront. Image credit: Mar Pasco via Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates



08



Detroit, MI. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- “The Cove”—a 1.5-acre inlet framed by two long stone jetties—will **make water a central experience** in Centennial Park. Wetlands will **restore fish habitats** and provide new experiences of nature in the city.
- **Core recreational areas**—including a playground, sport courts, and a large events lawn—**will be supported by more intimate spaces** like smaller lawns, gardens, groves, promenades, and plazas.
- The next phase will include several “park houses” or community centers including a **Pool House, a Sports House, a Park House, and a Maker House**.
- The **Dequindre Cut Greenway** along a former rail line provides biking and walking paths from Detroit’s inland Eastern Market to the river.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The Cove’s beaches and wetlands will create a porous boundary between land and water.
- ✦ Programs and events, like morning meditation tied to counseling resources, early literacy programs, and swim lessons, aim to improve quality of life for residents.
- ✦ The Riverfront has been instrumental in Detroit’s resurgence and more positive city image.



Gabriel Richard Park is a serene oasis with lush landscaping, butterfly gardens, a labyrinth and fishing areas. Image credit: Marc Pasco, via detroitriverfront.org



Robert C. Valade Park features a sandy beach with chairs and umbrellas, a children’s musical garden, a floating bar, and a community barbecue pavilion. Image credit: Marc Pasco, via detroitriverfront.org

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Cullen Plaza is a favorite gathering space. Between **comfortable seating, a carousel, fountains, a playground, a skatepark, and a bike rental shop and cafe**, there is something for kids, youth, adults, and seniors.
- The **Canine to Five community dog walk** happens monthly on the riverfront. Rise Together is a free **morning meditation session** on the waterfront that connects Detroiters with a network of resources for social, emotional, and grief support.
- Reading and Rhythm on the Riverfront is a **6-week early literacy program** for children to hear stories, receive a book, eat healthy food, and see live entertainment for a day of fun. **Detroit River Days** is a yearly celebration of the river through live music and food.
- The Riverwalk facilitates non-vehicular travel to the storied **Aretha Franklin Amphitheater** for big concerts. The **TCF Convention Center** hosts large expos, job fairs, and immersive installations.



A rendering of the future “sports house,” one of four community hubs that will activate Centennial Park. Image credit: Marc Pasco, via Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates



The Centennial Park Cove will create porous boundaries between land and water. Image credit: Marc Pasco, via Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- The Detroit RiverFront Conservancy was launched by three partners: the **City of Detroit**, who provided the land and infrastructure improvements; **General Motors**, who provided large donations; and the **Kresge Foundation**, who gave a \$50 million grant.
- **Programming focuses on improving the quality of life for all residents**, like linking people with counseling resources and early literacy programs.
- **Partnerships** between the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (a regional organization that does parks programming) and the RiverFront Conservancy **provide mutual benefits**. The Authority gets downtown visibility, while the Conservancy gets help with programs and land stewardship.

HOUSTON, TX

BUFFALO BAYOU PARK

Buffalo Bayou Park is a series of public spaces that double as critical stormwater infrastructure in a city where floods are common—Hurricane Harvey was just one of many hurricanes to devastate the area. The park stretches 2.3 miles west of downtown Houston along the region's primary river. The park's ten acres of trails wind past seven major public art installations, three gardens of native flora, and over four pedestrian bridges. Two festival lawns, a dog park, a skate park, a nature play area, a restaurant, and an art exhibit hall draw visitors from afar.

Years developed:
2008–2012

Cost: \$58 million

Size: 160 acres

Visitors annually: 1.1M



Buffalo Bayou recovers from Hurricane Harvey. The park has a double function: part urban drainage way, part civic green space. Image credit: j daniel escareno, via Flickr.



In a sprawling city of concrete and prone to frequent floods, Buffalo Bayou Park's green infrastructure plays a critically important role in stormwater absorption. Image credit: Bry0909, via Creative Commons



Houston, TX. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The park's **pervious surfaces, soft edges, and green infrastructure facilitate stormwater drainage** and enable development along downtown's neglected north edge.
- Allen Parkway, **an expressway bordering the park, was reconfigured with stoplights, crosswalks, and service roads**, to reduce the impact of traffic on trail users.
- Structures were carefully sited above the path of potential floods, while **park elements within the valley were built to be submerged**.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The park's structures are designed to withstand not only inundation, but also impacts from whatever debris might wash through.
- ✦ All programs and activities were located above the flood zone.
- ✦ Adaptive reuse of the cistern, a former underground drinking water reservoir, preserved a historic relic and created a unique space.



The park travels through a diverse cross-section of the city. Here, it travels through a parkway of high-rise mixed use development. Image credit: alphantangobravo, via Creative Commons



A pedestrian bridge over Buffalo Bayou was lifted above flood levels. Image credit: Patrick Feller, via Creative Commons

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The Lee & Joe Jamail **Skatepark** has areas for skaters of all skill levels. A large **amphitheater** hosts tens of thousands of people at concerts and the city's Independence Day festivities. The Johnny Steele **Dog Park** offers swimming pools, drinking fountains, and wash stations for dogs.
- Seven **permanent public art installations** are scattered across twelve acres of restored prairie. A local nonprofit leads **morning wellness walks** along the promenade. There are **artistic performances on the water** in partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts and Houston Grand Opera.
- The annual **Buffalo Bayou Park Regatta** is the largest public boat race in the state of Texas, running 15 miles along the river. The park offers **tours of the Waugh Bridge Bat Colony** that lives in the park.
- BioArt Bayou-torium is a mobile **bilingual bio-art project housed in a shipping container** that travels along the bayou. It brings art and natural science activities to cultivate stewardship of the bayou among underserved youth.



Kayakers can float under old steel railroad bridges. Image credit: Patrick Feller, via Creative Commons



The Cistern, a former underground drinking water reservoir, is now used for tours, art installations, and sound healing and meditation sessions. Image credit: Bill Staney, via Flickr.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Activities and programming were clustered in the only places on site that are outside the floodplain. The rest was built to be submerged. **The park's structures are designed to withstand not only inundation, but also impacts from whatever debris and detritus might wash through.** Everything built into the park, even the trash cans, has a foundation anchored far below the surface to prevent it from washing away.
- Preserving **historic structures adds character and creates unique programming opportunities.**

LITTLE ROCK, AR

CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL PARK AND BILL E. CLARK PRESIDENTIAL WETLANDS

Little Rock's Presidential Park and Wetlands are the main entry points to the Arkansas River Trail, a 14-mile loop starting in Riverfront Park and winding through 13 acres of restored wetland. Boardwalks transport visitors into a natural sandbar habitat protected and enhanced for native species of the Arkansas River. The Riverfront Park stretches 11 blocks along the south bank and includes pavilions for outdoor events, a longtime farmer's market, children's play areas, environmental education classes, an amphitheater, leisure activities, and a sculpture garden.

Years developed:
1996–2010
Cost: \$165 million
Size: 46 acres
Visitors annually: 2M



Joggers take advantage of the morning solitude over the wetlands. Image credit: Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau



10

Boardwalks provide an outdoor living classroom, inviting walkers to hover over native ecology. Image credit: Gayle Nicholson, via Flickr

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The park was **built around pre-existing community anchors** like the Clinton Presidential Library and Museum and River Market District, but the park's trails helped to better connect them all to each other and to downtown.
- Primary landscape features include **upper and lower riverfront promenades**, grassy gathering spaces, a multi-use amphitheater, terrace gardens, a grove of native Arkansas trees, and **lawns that stretch down to the river**.
- A 1,600-foot **boardwalk immerses visitors in natural ecology**, including low marsh, high marsh, sandbar, and elevated wetland.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The park gives coherence to pre-existing community anchors.
- ✦ Connections to the Arkansas River loop trail allow for more exploration.
- ✦ Partnerships with local hospital systems suggest that the medical community can be a valuable partner in the development and activation of a public space.



Little Rock, AR. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



Aerial view of the William E. Clark Presidential Park Wetlands, tucked away between the Clinton Library and the Arkansas River. Image credit: Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau



The Clinton Presidential Library and Museum overlook the river and draw passerby over the Rock Island Railroad Bridge. Image credit: PunkToad, via Creative Commons.

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- A section of the trail is known as “Medical Mile,” a **linear “health museum”** whose trails encourage exercise and where interpretive signage and artwork promote physical activity and nutrition. Medical Mile features a 1,300-foot mural wall, a wellness promenade, and a plaza.
- The park is adjacent to the **River Market District**, which offers a market hall full of food vendors, pubs, galleries and music venues. The seasonal Little Rock **Farmer’s Market** has made its home in the River Market’s two open-air pavilions overlooking the river.
- The Vogel Schwartz **Sculpture Garden** consists of landscaped outdoor “rooms” housing more than 90 whimsical works of art by local sculptors. Outdoor movies are shown at the First Security **Amphitheater**, and the Margaret Clark **Adventure Park** is designed for preschool-aged children to climb trees, explore tunnels, and perform on stage.
- The **Rock Island Railroad Bridge**, originally a railroad trestle, was converted to a pedestrian and bike bridge spanning the Arkansas River. **The Clinton Presidential Library**, nestled in the park, is cantilevered over the Arkansas River and provides sweeping river views.



The Little Rock Market Pavilion hosts seasonal Farmer’s Markets. Image credit: Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau



The Vogel Schwartz Sculpture Garden invites visitors to explore landscaped, outdoor “rooms” full of art. Image credit: Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

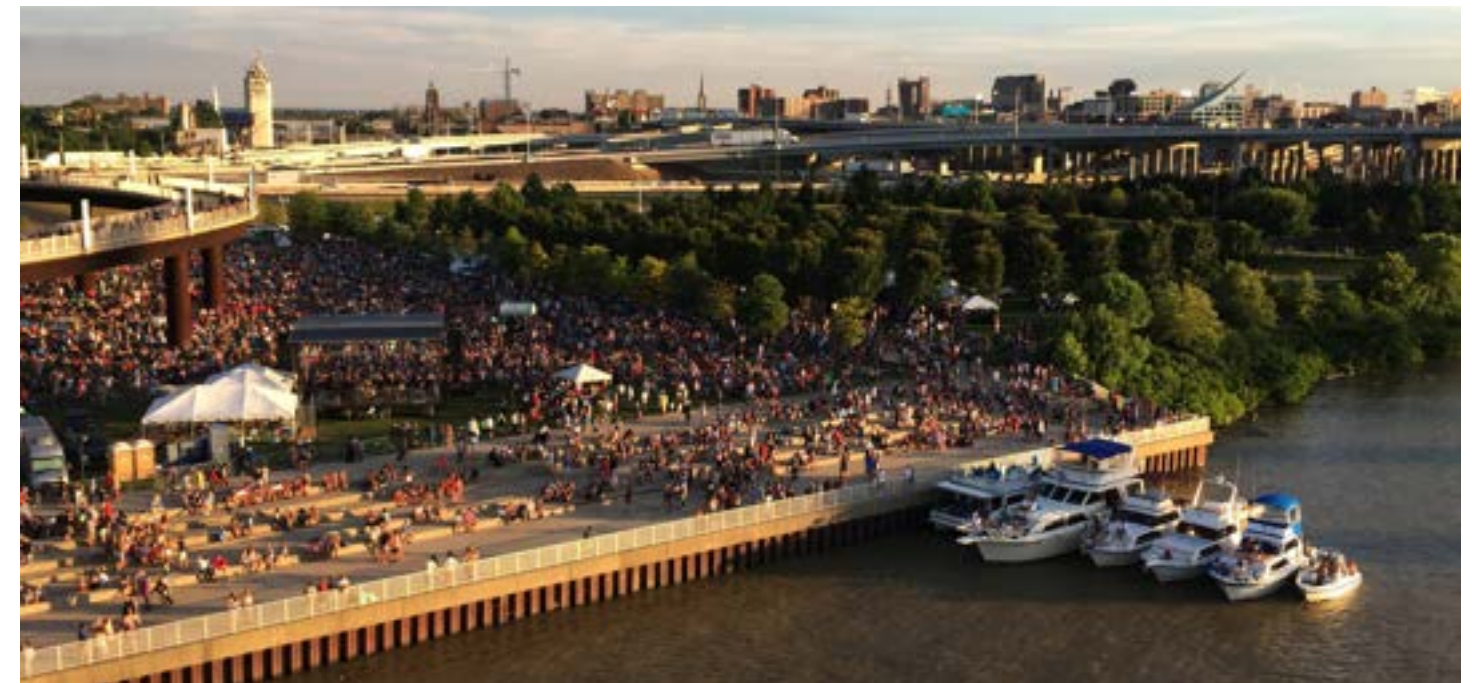
- The park offers a **smooth transition between ecological and urban spaces**.
- Partnerships with local hospital systems suggest that **the medical community can be a valuable partner** in the development and activation of public spaces.
- Serves as a **focal point and impetus for further revitalization efforts** and investment in downtown Little Rock.

LOUISVILLE, KY

WATERFRONT PARK

Waterfront Park is a former industrial site on Louisville's Ohio River, previously cut off from the urban fabric by train tracks and highways. It is now a vast park with a Great Lawn sloping down to the river, absorbing floodwater and providing views that were previously obscured. The park is home to music festivals, playgrounds, a riverside esplanade, bike trails, a cafe plaza, an amphitheater, public docks, a swing garden, and a Lincoln memorial. The Big Four Railroad bridge was converted into a pedestrian and cycling bridge that connected Louisville to the City of Jeffersonville, Indiana across the river. The park's wide variety of settings, events, and activities appeal to a wide range of people.

Years developed:
1986–ongoing
Cost: \$95 million
Size: 86 acres
Visitors annually: 1.5M



The park's summer concerts draw over a quarter-million visitors to the river. Image credit: Ourwaterfront.org

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- At the park's center, a **vast sloped lawn** tilts downward from the city toward the river. This allows the park to absorb floodwater and provide panoramic views of the city from downtown.
- An **overlook plaza sits above flood levels**, creating a promontory perch with tiered seating to the lawn.
- **The site is graded downward so that it flows under the highways**, with lighting and tree systems placed perpendicularly between downtown and the river. This attracts the eye toward the water and reduces the visual impact of the roads.
- All spaces are linked via a **continuous public riverfront walkway**.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The sloped design allows the river to be a river, creating "breathing room" for it to expand during floods, while also allowing expansive views.
- ✦ The park's large and small spaces offer different oppattracts a diverse user base.
- ✦ The park's size and bold landscaping **create** an attractive visual statement.



Louisville, KY. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



Cyclists enjoy a network of bike paths that spiral up to the repurposed railroad bridge. Image credit: Charles Mayer, via Hargreaves Jones



People of all ages flock to the splash area on a hot day. Image credit: Ourwaterfront.org

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The Great Lawn is large enough to host **music festivals, fireworks, sports events, 5K runs** and more. The park includes **playgrounds, cafe plazas, splash pads, swing gardens, performance stages, five shaded picnic areas** and **linear running paths** that connect runners and cyclists to the Big Four Bridge - an old rail line restored as a bike/pedestrian trail.
- The “Belle of Louisville” is a **100-year old steam-powered paddle boat** and National Historic Landmark that attracts tourists and locals for river tours. **Public docks, kayak launches, and two boat rental houses** offer accessible ways to get out on the water.
- WFPK Wednesdays are **free, family-friendly concerts** on the Great Lawn held every week in summer that showcase emerging, local recording artists.
- **Public art offers peaceful, unprogrammed spaces to rest and reflect**, including the Lincoln Memorial and Amphitheater, Gracehoper sculpture, Tetra sculpture, and a series of 32 bird sculptures by a local folk artist.



The Lincoln Memorial offers a place to rest, learn and celebrate the 16th president's Kentucky roots under a canopy of his favorite trees. Image credit: Ourwaterfront.org



A boathouse offers canoeing, kayaking, and rowing rentals year-round. Image credit: Ourwaterfront.org

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- The park's sheer size, bold landscaping, and high quality urban design **creates an attractive visual statement from all sides of the city**. What the public once perceived as a derelict and inaccessible eyesore is now considered an iconic place that represents the best of Louisville.
- The park strives to make a place where **activities and spaces cater to all races, ages, and social classes**, and where the public feels comfortable together.
- **Repurposes historic infrastructure in creative ways**, like turning the former railway trestle into a bike/ped trail with great views.
- **The design overcomes key flood challenges in an unobtrusive manner**, using slopes and grades rather than flood walls.



NASHVILLE, TN

CUMBERLAND AND RIVERFRONT PARKS

Cumberland and Riverfront Parks which sit on opposite banks, transformed former wastelands into vibrant public spaces on the banks of downtown Nashville's Cumberland River. The parks provide more than just green space, they also remediated brownfields, mitigate flooding, and revitalize downtown. Initially a simple terraced area next to the NFL stadium, Cumberland Park has kept expanding, with ornamental gardens and more than one mile of multi-use tree-lined trails that are integrated into flood walls. The parks are just a stone's throw from Nashville's central business district.

Years developed:
2010–2015

Cost: \$62 million

Size: 19 acres

Visitors annually: 1.5M



Cumberland Park's tiered waterfront seating doubles as a flood wall. Image credit: Derrick Brutel, via Flickr



Nashville, TN. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- A **flood wall doubles as seating**, but the park mostly relies on **green infrastructure for flood control**, including a bioswale, bioretention areas, and rainwater harvesting. There is also a geothermal heating and cooling system, green roofs, solar panels, permeable pavers, and a solar phone charging station.
- The Hollow is a **kids adventure zone** with buried fossils, a bouncing pad, a green maze made of live plants, rainbow-casting prisms and lights, splash pad, and more.
- The Scoop is a **cooling-off lawn** area with a grove of trees, featuring stepping stone paths dipping through drifts of **mist that are activated by motion and step sensors**.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The park's resilient design came in response to devastating chronic floods.
- ✦ There is a major emphasis on adventure and play for all ages. Unlike other recreational playgrounds, the zones of play are not limited to a specific spot or age group.
- ✦ The park will be expanded across four phases over the next 25 years.



The green roof on top of the Ascend Amphitheater. Image credit: dianaconnolly101, via Flickr



Creative landscaping and diverse textures create a play zone for all ages. Image credit: HargreavesJones

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The **Country Music Association festival** happens every summer at the Ascend Amphitheater, an open-air venue on the Cumberland River that can accommodate 6,800 in seats and surrounding lawns.
- The **Cumberland River Dragon Boat Festival** is a public boat race that celebrates the importance of the Cumberland River to the City of Nashville.
- The **Bridge Building Event Space** is a historic, 1908 office building with a rooftop deck that has been refurbished for large social gatherings like weddings, parties, speaking events, writer's workshops, and more.
- Cumberland Park is home to **The Marketplace East Nashville**, which includes a flea market, go-karting, airsoft course, and indoor gym.



Folks turn out for Pride Fest at Riverfront Park's main lawn. Image credit: Zepfanman.com, via Flickr



Families gather on hot days at the splash pad in Cumberland Park. Image credit: HargreavesJones

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- A business improvement district will eventually draw a tax surcharge to fund additional public benefits in the future, including a pedestrian bridge across the river from downtown.
- The parks **combine practicality (flood retaining wall) with fun program elements (climbing wall)**. Resilient design elements have been blended into the landscape so they are multipurpose and not immediately recognizable.
- **A park doesn't need state-of-the-art equipment to be a success with children.** Interesting landscapes and a diversity of materials can be enough, and kids' imaginations do the rest.

PITTSBURGH, PA

THREE RIVERS PARK

When Pittsburgh's steel mills closed in the 1970s, its location at the confluence of three polluted rivers put it at a disadvantage. Over thirty years, the city turned that challenge into an opportunity, and, now, its riverbanks cover 65 acres of publicly accessible green space. More than 80 percent of the 13-mile Three Rivers Park loop has been redeveloped into parks, trails, and open space, stimulating development in the surrounding areas and improving connectivity among Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. Ongoing development projects include habitat restoration, relocating industrial lots away from the waterfront, and the development of a large mixed-use project called The Esplanade.

Years developed:
1974–2013

Cost: \$130 million

Size: 65 acres

Visitors annually: 2M



Pittsburgh has ample riverfront opportunity at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers. Image credit: Tony Webster, via Creative Commons





Pittsburgh, PA. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The **parks are connected via switchback paths** that lead from an urban upper level park over a major regional highway down to a lower level park at the river's edge. The lower level is deliberately wild in its **native plantings, which are resilient to floods or ice flows**.
- On the paths, there are **access passageways every 600 feet** to increase connectivity with adjacent neighborhoods.
- A large cobblestone **boat launch connects the Pirates and Steelers stadiums**, and accommodates personal canoes and large boats that people take to games.
- The **Three Rivers Heritage Trail** regional trail system runs through the park, as does the multi-state Great Allegheny Passage trail.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The parks are activated by the energy and events from the adjacent sports stadiums.
- ✦ The Three Rivers Water Trail connects the city to the rural interior via its waterways.
- ✦ Maintenance is shared between the Conservancy, Parks Department, and sports teams.



A peaceful view from the pedestrian underpass at Interstate 279. Image credit: Dicklyon, via Creative Commons



Switchbacks and ramps provide access to the river from the upper promenade. Shade structures provide relief on hot days. Image credit: rgrasmus, via Flickr

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Point State Park is downtown Pittsburgh's front lawn and premiere space for outdoor events and recreation. It hosts **fireworks displays, tailgating parties, concerts, and outdoor movies**. The rest of the park is linear, so it is suited for routine activities like **jogging, skating, skiing, and dog walking**.
- 'To be determined' is a **temporary outdoor urban gallery meant to inspire and ignite public discussion**. Galleries have included a giant whiteboard asking for public input on design projects, and an artists residency program for local muralists.
- The Market Street Pier and boat launch offers kayak and canoe rentals, and transports people to/from sports games via a **river taxi**. Visitors can take **boat tours** or paddle the **Three Rivers Water Trail**, which runs from the city for 22 miles into rural Pennsylvania.
- The annual Three Rivers Regatta is a **public boat race** in summer. The Rachel Carson **Bridge is adorned with temporary LED light installations**, and the Fort Pitt Museum is a riverfront **indoor/outdoor museum** dedicated to the city's history.



Three Rivers Park with Heinz Field in the back during PrideFest 2005. Image credit: Mavi Kemani, via Flickr



Kayakers paddle up the Allegheny River on the Fourth of July for fireworks. Image credit: Via Tsuji, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Co-locating public amenities like parks, stadiums, museums, and dining options can open up **sympiotic partnerships with local institutions** like sports franchises, **which have their own unique funding sources**. For example, park maintenance is paid for by the Steelers and Pirates sports teams.
- **Many young people have moved back** to town since the city invested in waterfront placemaking. Since then, property values along the water have jumped by 60 percent compared with 32 percent in the rest of the city.
- There is **less of an emphasis on design and beauty in favor of function and accessibility**.

ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

PARK MAASHAVEN

As part of Rotterdam's Seven City Projects, introduced in June 2020, Park Maashaven will add to the existing parks and public space infrastructure of Rotterdam-Zuid. The park will consist of three parts: the urban park, the square between the Maashaven and Maassilo metro stations, and the boulevard of Maashaven-Oostzijde. SWA/Balsley won the commission to design this new park in Rotterdam that is part of a larger project to green the city. It serves as a 17-acre "destination comprised of naturalized shoreline, marsh habitats, multi-purpose lawns, tree groves, sculpted knolls and overlooks from which to view urban life, the historic Maassilo building, and the Harbor.

Projected completion: 2026
 Cost: Not yet known
 Size: 7.5 acres
 Visitors annually:
 Data not yet available



View of the East side of Maashaven, the site of the future SWA/Balsley-designed park.

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The **Nelson Mandela Park** is planned to provide much needed green space to an **area that has low access to parks**. It will blend in with the City's **flood defense levee** along with a new promenade beside a nearby commercial boulevard.
- The park will provide important connections to **public transit**, inviting diverse groups from far and wide to gather and engage.
- The water's edge was conceived as a dynamic experience and features **innovative tidal pools, wetland habitats**, and integrates a **local water taxi station** and pavilion.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ Masterplan design for an underused portion of the Rotterdam port will provide much needed green space to a neighborhood without much access to parks.
- ✦ Cleverly integrating a dynamic waterfront experience with the City's flood defense levee.
- ✦ Integrating housing, work, leisure, and green space into the waterfront.



Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



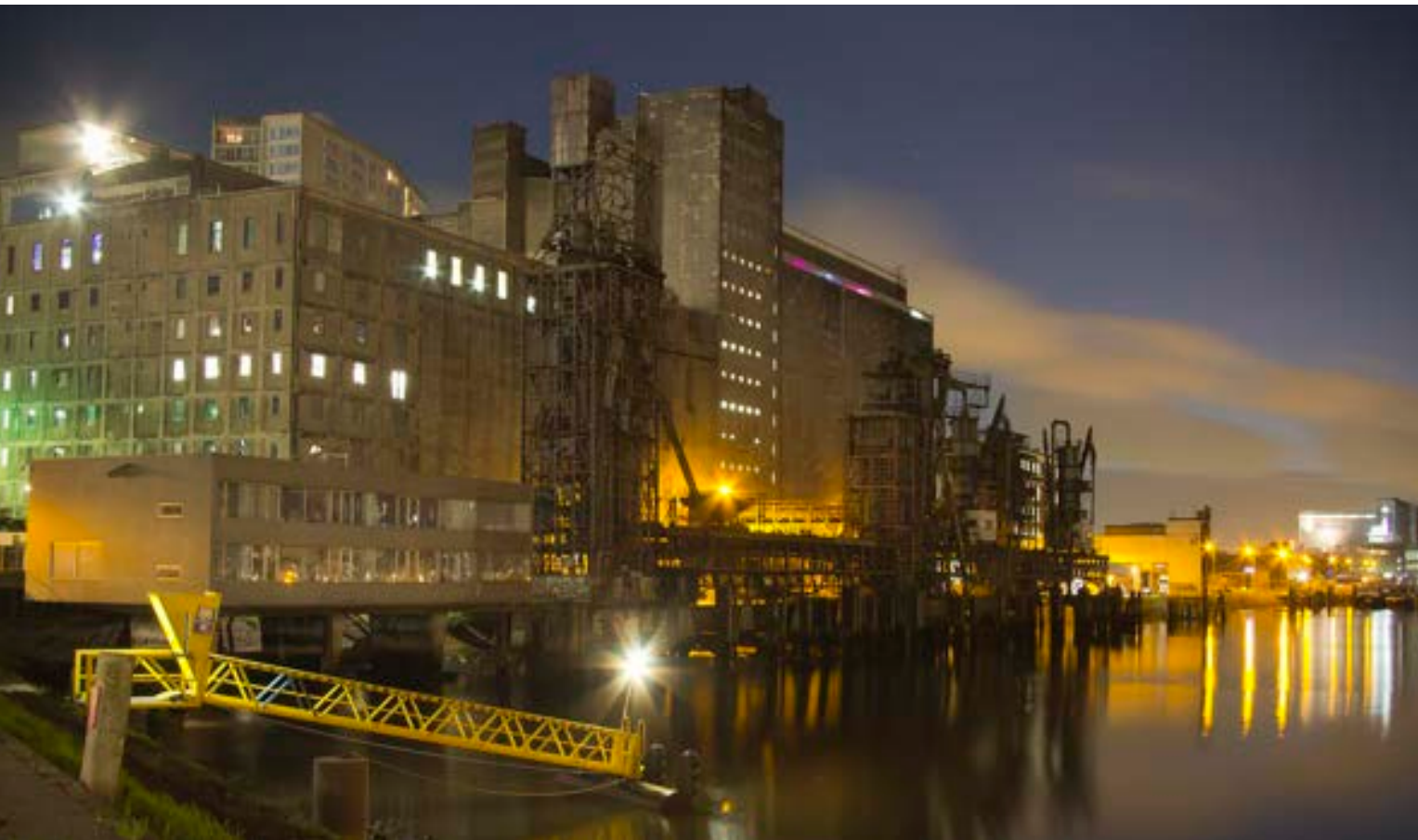
Rendering of Nelson Mandela Park by SWA/Balsley. Image credit: SWA/Balsley.



Elevated train at Maashaven, which will overlook the newly planned oasis of green. Image credit: Koen Brouwer, via Creative Commons.

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Innovation and experimentation in the form of **Rijnhaven floating pavilion**, has become a **center for demonstrating** inspiring methods for tackling climate, energy, and water issues. The pavilion is a pilot and a catalyst for floating construction in Rotterdam as part of the City's ambitious plans to **adapt to a rising sea level**.
- **Maassilo**, a former grain silo from 1910, was converted into an **events facility**, comprised of 4 halls with a capacity of 300 to 5000 people. The facility hosts business events, dance parties, and concerts.
- **The Master Plan** features multiple flexible lawn areas for **community events**, **all-age play grounds** in a shaded **tree grove**, a **cultural plaza**, **overlooks**, and a **marsh walk**.



Maassilo, Rotterdam. A former grain silo from 1910, converted into an events facility. Image credit: LukePricePhotography, via Creative Commons.



Rijnhaven Floating Pavilions, a center for demonstration and innovation in tackling climate change. Image credit by: Harry_nl, via Creative Commons.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- An extensive **public outreach process** resulted in the design team strongly advocating for a large enough size to accommodate **more community programming**.
- **Experimentations** and **prototyping** is a great way to introduce new elements and spark conversations around topics like climate change and sea level rise.
- **Floating pontoons** for **docking boats** were removed for several months in the construction process for Maashaven, leaving some **boaters doubtful how this park's development will impact them**.

SAN DIEGO, CA

WATERFRONT PARK

San Diego's Waterfront Park transformed what used to be eight administrative parking lots into a 12-acre civic space with grand views of the Pacific ocean. Central features include a hardscape promenade, large green space, swings, benches, a playground, interactive fountain and wading pool, and public art. The park surrounds the San Diego County Administration Center building, which is a historic landmark, and includes Bocce courts and a local restaurant. The park sits across the street from the Maritime Museum of San Diego, home to the world's oldest active sailing ship.

Year developed: 2014

Cost: \$49.4 million

Size: 12 acres

Visitors annually:

Data not available



People strolling along the transformed San Diego Waterfront Parks, with plenty of green space and views of the water. Image credit: Port of San Diego, via Creative Commons.



San Diego, CA. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The park features a **promenade**, two large **green lawns**, **plazas**, **terraces**, a **playground**, fountains, and wide views of the downtown skyline and waterfront. The **wading pool is the country's largest**, with 31 jets that gush water up into the air.
- To maximize usable public space and ocean views, designers moved what used to be **12 above-ground parking lots to a 250-car underground lot**.
- 100 percent of **storm water** is captured on the streets at Harbor Drive and treated before being released back into the bay. An intricate high-tech subsurface drip irrigation and **drainage system, built below the gardens**, contains rain sensors and provides a means for utilizing rain runoff.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The Waterfront Park serves as an event lawn for major concerts, and provides rare greenspace along the mostly paved waterfront, whereas the Embarcadero and Balboa Park are more heavily programmed.
- ✦ The fountains and collecting pools divide the park nicely between the more shaded, "wet" area, with benches and trees from the open lawn.
- ✦ The newly opened Rady Shell at Jacobs Park provides the first permanent open-air venue on the waterfront for the San Diego Symphony.



The new Rady Shell at Jacobs Park, the permanent open air waterfront venue for the San Diego Symphony. Image credit: Rady Shell at Jacobs Park.



Children playing in the interactive water fountains at San Diego Waterfront Park. Image credit: Bob Perry, via Creative Commons.

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The **Rady Shell at Jacobs Park** is **San Diego Symphony's brand new waterfront performance space**. Built with an \$85M philanthropic investment, it is the first permanent open-air performance venue in the San Diego Symphony's century-long history. This site will be open as a public park 85% of the year for San Diegans and visitors to gather and take views of the harbor and the city.
- The park's main lawns host concerts and food festivals monthly, including the **San Diego Bayfest reggae festival**, annual **crawfish boil**, **taco fest**, and **chihuahua races**.
- The City converted an empty snack shack on the waterfront into a **"marriage hut"** to safely provide **marriage services during the pandemic** and kept **"Walk up Wednesdays"** where couples can get marriage licenses without an appointment.



San Diego Maritime Museum on the shore of the Waterfront Park. Image Credit: SMWalton, via Creative Commons.



The new Waterfront Park provides many different areas for play and new restroom facilities that can be seen in the back. Image credit: Bob Perry, via Creative Commons.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- The Waterfront Park serves as an **event lawn** for major concerts, providing **green space** along the mostly paved waterfront, whereas the Embarcadero and Balboa Park are more **highly programmed**.
- The fountains and collecting pools divide the park nicely between the more **"wet" area** and the **shaded areas** with benches and trees from the open lawn.
- **The San Diego Waterfront Parks can cater to community interests while also providing novel and interesting experiences for tourists.**

SAVANNAH, GA

PLANT RIVERSIDE DISTRICT

The Plant Riverside District is a newly opened adaptive reuse and mixed-use development on the site of the former Savannah Power Company building. The power company ceased operation in 2005 and the 4.5-acre property was acquired by the Kessler Collection developer in 2012. The district is developed as a riverfront entertainment destination offering luxury hotel stays, high-end shopping, and dining options. The area also includes science exhibits integrated into public spaces with kids splash pads and spaces to passively enjoy the river views.

Years developed:
2012–2020
Cost: \$375 million
Size: 4.5 acres
Visitors annually:
data not yet available



View of the Plant Riverside District riverwalk from one of the many rooftop bars. Image credit: Nancy Powell, Riverfront Parks Now.



Locals and visitors strolling along the newly opened Plant Riverside District by night. Image credit: Nancy Powell, Riverfront Parks Now.

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- The site's original **1912 power plant** was restored with the preservation of historic characteristics like the **iconic twin smokestacks** and brick exterior.
- The power plant building was completely renovated as a **luxury J.W. Marriott hotel**, which anchors the site and includes two buildings, the new **Three Muses** building and the **Power Plant building**.
- Additional design features include **fountains/splash pads** (changing colors at night), **public art**, **public bathrooms**, and small open areas that often feature **musicians** or small events.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ A quarter mile extension of Savannah's popular riverwalk and the preservation of the power plant's iconic 176-foot twin smokestacks.
- ✦ Public-private project that converted a single-entity owned parcel into 40% publicly owned.
- ✦ The district converted a power plant into a thriving center, re-establishing public access to the waterfront from the oldest wards of the city.



Savannah, GA. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite



The building in front of the mixed-use hotel houses public bathrooms and a coffee shop with outdoor seating. In the background can be seen the steam stacks from the restored power company. Image credit: Nancy Powell, Riverfront Parks Now.



Stone benches line the entire riverfront, allowing ample places to stop and enjoy the views. Image credit: Nancy Powell, Riverfront Parks Now

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The lobby of the J.W. Marriott hotel is “Generator Hall,” a **natural science exhibit** showcasing fossils, tusks, and a replica chrome dinosaur, in addition to areas devoted to the history of the power plant.
- The district has a variety of **specialty retailers and restaurants on the ground floor**, several rooftop restaurants and bars, small pop-up retail, and casual open-air café dining areas that line the area between the building and the Riverwalk.
- The Plant Riverside District offers **history lessons**, traveling back 150 million years with their unique dinosaur tours led by **Dusty the Dinosaur Ranger**. The tours mix games, music, and lots of science and history.



Structures along the Riverwalk house seating areas that are covered but open. Most areas are owned by eateries along the waterfront. Image credit: Nancy Powell, Riverfront Parks Now.



This zero depth fountain is artistic and provides a respite from the heat, along with a place for children to play. It changes color at night. Image credit: Nancy Powell, Riverfront Parks Now.

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- The Riverside Plan District provides an **upscale experience** and plenty of spaces for **retailers—both temporary and permanent**.
- The district provides activities for kids and youth to learn and play through integrated **science exhibits** and **kids splash pads** into public spaces.
- The district connects key **rights-of-way** from the oldest wards of the city to the riverfront, **re-establishing public access** that had been lost for more than 100 years.

ST. PETERSBURG, FL

WATERFRONT PARKS AND ST. PETERSBURG PIER

The Waterfront Parks in St. Petersburg are a blend of old and new. These parks run the length of 23 downtown blocks and overlook Tampa Bay. In 1909, the City made the bold decision to use the waterfront as a series of contiguous parks that now make up the third-largest dedicated public waterfront park system in the country. Although initially a controversial decision, they have become a point of civic pride and adoration. Because these parks were designed so long ago, they are largely traditional green spaces perfect for passive uses like barefoot games of frisbee and picnics by the water.

Years developed:
1973–2020
Cost: \$148 million
Size: 65 acres
Visitors annually: 2M



Vinoy Park offers prime views of Tampa Bay from downtown. Image credit: City of St. Pete, via Flickr



St. Petersburg, FL. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- There are a **string of eleven waterfront parks, each offering different atmospheres and programming**, but all with unobstructed views over Tampa Bay.
- The St. Pete Pier is a 12-acre public pier jutting out a quarter of a mile into Tampa Bay. It offers dramatic views of the city and ocean from the same vantage point. A series of concrete piles create a **“wet classroom”** outdoor learning zone.
- The city wrote a **Waterfront Master Plan** to bring the parks under one vision.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The Pier does not stand out as an isolated attraction, but is, rather, an extension of the park system itself, offering a variety of familiar programs.
- ✦ A combination of commercial, educational, recreational, and passive experiences on the Pier make it a vibrant and inclusive node.
- ✦ The integrity of the city's “green necklace” of parks has been left intact for 100 years.



The new St. Pete Pier extends 1/4 mile into Tampa Bay, granting ocean and city views. Image credit: City of St. Pete, via Flickr



View of Pier Head from Spa Beach. Image credit: City of St. Pete, via Flickr.

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- **The St. Pete Pier** offers waterfront restaurants and free activities like play areas for families, a **marketplace for local artisans** and vendors, public **art installations**, a beach, and a **fishing deck**, along with a **discovery center** and a history **museum**.
- “Bending Arc” is a **permanent art installation** on a tilted lawn. Illuminated billowing nets create a space that is **both an immersive art experience and a captivating place to gather**.
- The Boyd Hill Nature Preserve hosts a **Green Thumb Festival with plant giveaways, flower shows, and gardening training**.
- Vinoy Park hosts dozens of community events each year, from **The Reggae Rise Up Festival** to the **Mainsail Art Festival** to the St. Pete’s Ocean Sweep, a **scuba-diving trash collection competition**.



“Bending Arc” is a permanent installation by local artist Janet Echelman. Billowing nets make for a captivating place to gather at the St. Pete Pier’s tilted lawn. Image credit: City of St Pete, via Flickr



Festival-goers at the annual Reggae Rise Up Festival in Vinoy Park. Image credit: City of St. Pete, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- The St. Pete Pier **offers something for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities**. A combination of commercial, educational, recreational, and passive experiences make it a vibrant and inclusive node.
- The **integrity of the city’s “green necklace”** of waterfront parks has been left intact for over a century. No one design element steals the show or detracts from that.
- The **Pier serves as an unusual and beautiful focal point** that communicates the ethos of the city and **works well for branding purposes**.

TAMPA, FL

RIVERWALK AND CURTIS HIXON PARK

Tampa has created a system of riverfront parks connected by the Tampa Riverwalk, a 2.6-mile trail along the Hillsborough River. The Riverwalk passes through several smaller parks and, after extending over the river, the trail reaches Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park. This 8-acre park, adjacent to two museums, includes a grand lawn and terraced area that serve as the site of exciting events all year long. This vibrant urban artery has catalyzed over \$1 billion in private investment and transformed the character of Downtown Tampa.

Years developed:
1989–2010

Cost: \$100 million

Size: 8 acres

Visitors annually: 1M



Curtis Hixon Park attracts over one million people annually to its special events.
Image credit: Matt Paulson, via Flickr



Thirty-foot-tall sculptures inspired by the river to welcome visitors to Julian Lane Riverfront Park.
Image credit: Photomatt28, via Creative Commons



Tampa, FL. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- A 15-foot-wide pedestrian walkway incorporates **art and interpretive signage**, **retail and restaurants**, parks and open space, **links to cultural institutions**, and other amenities. The riverwalk is divided into 24 segments, some over water and some over land.
- Landscaping reflects Tampa's tropical waterfront and heritage, and incorporates cabana-like **shading elements** and trellis features to offer relief and playful interaction with the Florida sunshine.
- The main design features that the public wanted to see were better lighting, connectivity to downtown, anchors, viewsheds, and a stronger civic image.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The main strategy was to use the Riverwalk to connect downtown with the cultural and entertainment venues on the river, which were previously hidden.
- ✦ The Pirate Water Taxi shuttles people to/from fourteen attractions on the Riverwalk.
- ✦ Investment has attracted high-paying jobs and incentivized graduate students to stay local.



The Tampa Riverwalk's shops lit up at Christmas. Image credit: Matt Paulson, via Flickr



Water Works Park's event pavilion and splash pad from above. Image credit: City of Tampa

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- The **Gasparilla Pirate Flotilla** is an annual re-enactment of Tampa's historic pirate invasion. A fully-rigged pirate ship, the José Gasparilla, chugs down the river, followed by thousands of motor boats and people dressed as buccaneers.
- The **Gasparilla Festival of the Arts** at Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park showcases local art, and the **Bamboozle Fit Club** is a free crossfit/boot camp style class in Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park for all experience levels.
- The Riverfront path links the **Tampa Bay History Center**, the Amalie **Arena**, the **Florida Aquarium**, the **Glazer Children's Museum**, the **Tampa Museum of Art**, and the **Straz Center for the Performing Arts**.
- There are many opportunities to get on the water, from **kayaking and water biking** to taking the **Pirate Water Taxi**, which offers boat tours of Tampa Bay and makes 14 stops at the Riverfront's main attractions.



The annual Gasparilla Pirate Fest attracts a flotilla of pirate re-enactors. Image credit: allenran 917 via Flickr



The Pirate Water Taxi shuttles people to/from attractions along the river. Image credit: Matt Paulson, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- After forty years of fits and starts, work on the Riverwalk got underway when Mayor Pam Iorio created the Friends of the Riverwalk committee and won \$10 million in **federal TIGER grants (Transportation Investments Generating Economic Revitalization)**. This funded a full-time staff person to oversee development, maintenance, and operations with the Friends committee.
- The Riverwalk has attracted over **\$1 billion in private investment**, which has brought high paying jobs to Tampa that are attracting and retaining university graduates.
- The Riverwalk **enhances pedestrian, cyclist, and scooter access to the cultural venues on the river, which were previously only accessible by car.**

TORONTO, CANADA

QUEENS QUAY WATERFRONT

Queens Quay is a 2-mile waterfront boulevard that has been reclaimed as a place for people, bikes, and transit. Running alongside the promenade is the Martin Goodman Trail—a safe place for cyclists and joggers. Now a grand lakefront boulevard, there are streetcar lanes in the center, vehicular traffic on the north side, and a pedestrian promenade about three times the size of a normal city sidewalk on the south side. Several cultural landmarks are located on Queens Quay, from the Toronto Music Garden to the Harbourfront Cultural Center.

Years developed:
2006–2015

Cost: \$47 million

Size: 14 acres

Visitors annually: 12.5M



The Toronto Music Garden is an oasis of calm in a bustling city. Image credit: Bill in DC, via Creative Commons



Toronto's skyline and a tour boat from the Queens Quay promenade. Image credit: open grid scheduler via Creative Commons



Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

- A series of cedar “**wave decks**” provide water access. The **stairs act as an informal amphitheatre** and the decks’ varying heights offer captivating views of the city and lake. Colourful LED fixtures mounted below the structures cast a vibrant glow on the water’s edge at night, making each site an attraction around the clock.
- A pedestrian promenade runs alongside a **series of floating public spaces at the heads of boat slips and moorings**, each programmed differently.
- The park’s **green space is irrigated exclusively by harvested rain and lake water.**

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ A year-long artists residency program invites artists to further activate the waterfront.
- ✦ The city first prioritized infrastructural change along the boulevard, reclaiming the street for bikes, pedestrians, and a streetcar.
- ✦ Many structures are multipurpose, such as the wave decks, which combine lighting, views, benches, interesting acoustics, and an amphitheater seating.



The Wave Decks serve as a pier, viewpoint, and amphitheater at the same time. Image credit: Jacob Mitchell, via Creative Commons



The Queens Quay bike and pedestrian paths are well-marked and set with textured pavers to signal that they are not for cars. Image credit: Numinosity by Gary J Wood, via Creative Commons

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Pirate Life is a **nonprofit on a pirate ship that brings immersive arts and theater classes to children**. It allows artists to use the ship as their floating rehearsal stage, and, at the same time, provides tunes for anyone enjoying the lakefront on any given day.
- Sugar Beach is a whimsical park that transformed a surface parking lot in a former industrial area into **Toronto's second urban beach** at the water's edge.
- Speak Surge Amplify is a **summer dialogue series** inviting artists, community, and thought leaders into current critical conversations, affording audiences the opportunity to engage and be heard.
- Created in collaboration with Yo-Yo Ma, **Toronto Music Garden** is a swirling green landscape that offers seasonal concerts.



The Toronto Music Garden's landscaping evokes movements of Bach's First Suite. Image credit: Randy Landicho, via Creative Commons



A free summer concert series at the Toronto Music Garden. Image credit: oe3ib, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- Previously dominated by four lanes of traffic with narrow sidewalks, Queens Quay used to be a barrier rather than a gateway to the waterfront. **Leading with major transportation changes, the city's first priority was to reclaim the street for pedestrians and cyclists.** Economic development considerations came afterward.
- Extensive consultation with adjacent property owners allowed the granite paving to extend from the curb to building facades, **crossing property lines and vastly increasing the visual limits of the public realm.**
- There is an **emphasis on small businesses and cultural programming.**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT

The [Georgetown Waterfront Park](#) is a National Park. Part of the Georgetown Historic District, it stretches along the banks of the Potomac River, linking 225 miles of parkland from the city into rural Maryland and Virginia. Visitors come to enjoy quiet contemplation or to take advantage of the large accessible pathways to exercise and recreate. Cyclists, skaters, and pedestrians have a designated pathway, free of cars, allowing them to enjoy views of boaters, kayakers, college crew teams, as well as views of Theodore Roosevelt Island, Key Bridge, and the Potomac River.

Years developed:
2008–2011

Cost: \$24 million

Size: 10 acres

Visitors annually: 3M



Georgetown's Waterfront Park is a perch to watch crew regattas. Image credit: BeyondDC, Creative Commons



Washington, D.C. Image credit: Google Maps Satellite

DESIGN & LANDSCAPING

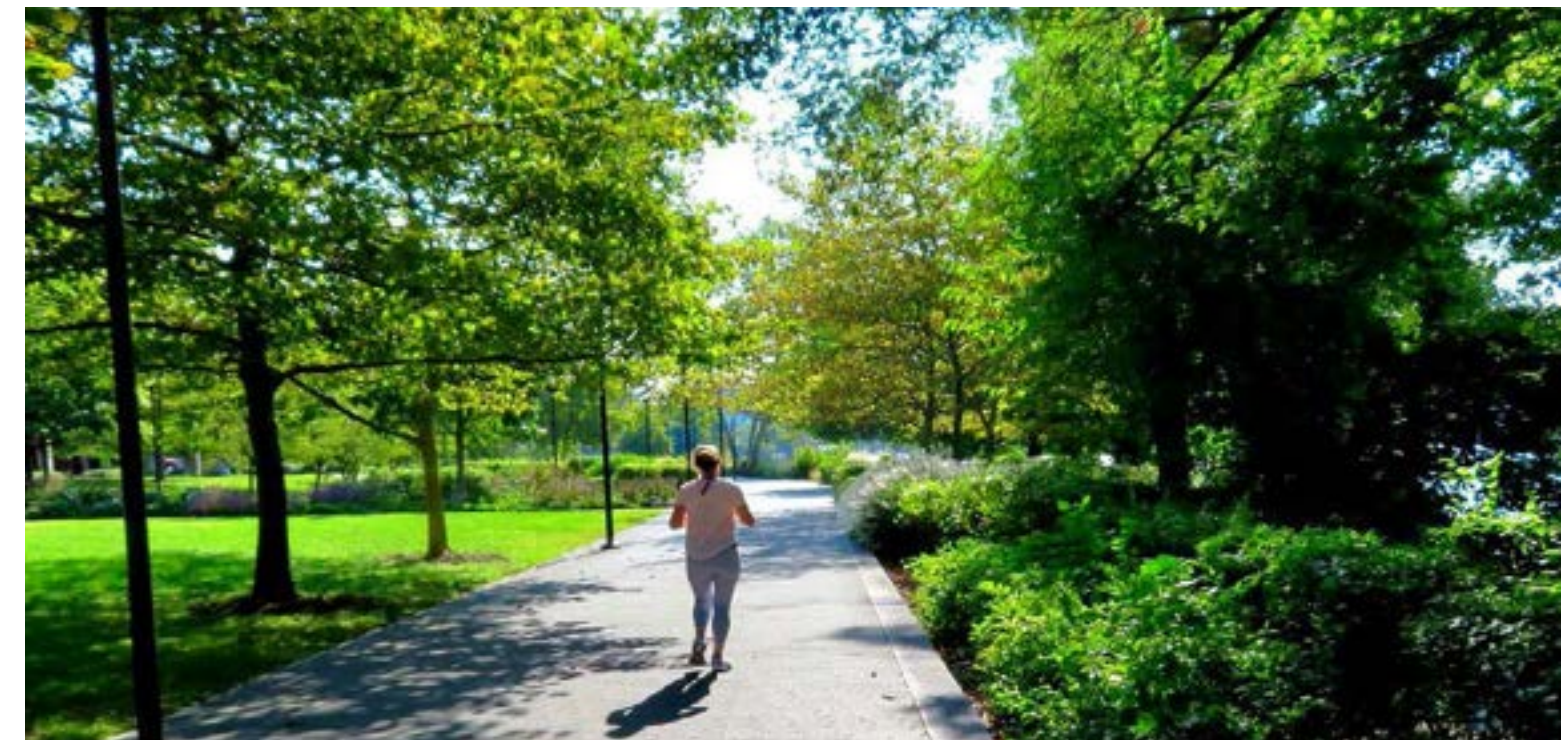
- The design aimed to express the **confluence of a historic wharf environment with the garden-oriented townscape** that defines Georgetown. There are **river steps to watch regattas, a pergola, pollinator gardens, and a central fountain**.
- There are **sectionalized spaces dividing the park into garden rooms**, like divisions in a ship's hull, framed by wide walkways extending the street grid to the waterfront.
- A crumbling retaining wall has been transformed into a **riparian bank** of native soils and pollinator habitat, which filters rainwater as it flows off the concrete into the Potomac.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✦ The Georgetown Business Improvement District and Georgetown residents have a large advocacy role to play in the park's programming.
- ✦ The park filled the missing link that now connects 225 miles of river paths between the city and rural Maryland and Virginia.
- ✦ The design respects the site's historic importance as an old wharf, while creating a waterfront garden ambiance.



The park's edges are an invitation to watch river activities and offer views of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Image credit: Jeff Vincent, via Flickr



Joggers and cyclists can travel from the park to rural Maryland and Virginia via the Capital Crescent Trail. Image credit: vincentpix, via Creative Commons

EVENTS & ACTIVATION

- Visitors can **rent a kayak, canoe, or paddleboard** from Key Bridge Boathouse, connect to three biking trails, **picnic in the park, meditate at the labyrinth, or catch an impromptu musical performance** on the weekends.
- **Waterfront dining opportunities on docked boats, river cruises, and water taxis** get visitors out on the water. The park is adjacent to D.C.'s largest **ice skating rink**.
- The park hosts outdoor events like the Georgetown BID's annual **Sunset Fitness classes and Sunset Cinema series**—and is a favorite D.C. respite on hot summer days, thanks to its large fountain.
- **Georgetown GLOW** is a seasonal curated outdoor public light art experience with artist meet-and-greets.



The park was designed as a spectator's perch to watch the Georgetown crew regattas. Image credit: Rose Physical Therapy Group, via Flickr



Summer outdoor movie screenings bring college students to the park. Image credit: Mike Maguire, via Flickr

LESSONS FOR JACKSONVILLE

- **Even a small park can thoughtfully incorporate resilience** and ecological elements like the riparian bank, the stream gauge to measure water levels, and the pollinator gardens.
- The park seizes an opportunity to **link the urban and rural**, with a continuous bike and pedestrian access to over 200 miles of trail along the Potomac.
- This is a good example of **park as spectator's perch** to activity on the river.

ACTIVATING JACKSONVILLE'S RIVERFRONT:

THANK
YOU!

