



OAKLAND PARKS and
RECREATION FOUNDATION

OPRF 2015 Community Report Card on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks



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Executive Summary

This tenth year of surveying Oakland Parks brought into focus the acute need for more resources to solve problems in our parks which are no doubt shared by many other California cities: a dramatic uptick in homeless encampments; stress on park landscaping and trees by four years of drought and a years' long steady shrinkage of gardener care; and, finally, increases in vandalism. Public Works has been very creative in dealing with these problems with limited resources but the agency is stretched very thin.

The survey's Park Overall Rating average in 2015 for 113 parks and green spaces was 3.47, equivalent to a C grade. Parks in council districts with higher concentrations of lower income-earning families generally tend to score lower when compared to other parks and this year is no exception—Council District 3 scored a 3.13 (C-) and District 7 scored a 2.73 (D) in the Park Rating Overall while Districts 2 and 4 scored 3.7 (C+) and 3.75 (C+). The lowest scoring survey categories in all districts were Restrooms and Homeless.

Our parks are threatened by diminished care and protection. We urge City Council to carefully consider our recommendations at the end of this report. They are made with the understanding of the importance of well-maintained and safe parks to the welfare and quality of life of its citizens and the opportunities they give to youth to grow up with safe and healthy alternatives to the streets. Good parks enhance the value of neighborhoods and cities. Oakland needs to strive to be a first-class city with first-class parks for every neighborhood.

Introduction

During the month of September, 2015, Oakland Park and Recreation Foundation Park Stewards surveyed conditions in their parks for our annual event called *Love Your Parks Day*. The survey of 113 Oakland parks, medians, and green spaces was concluded on October 3rd by thirty additional volunteers. This was the 10th annual park survey but the first by the OPRF, the new organization formed from a merger in January, 2015, of FOPR (Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation) and Oakland Parks Coalition. Of the areas surveyed 102 were of discreet parks, three were of medians, and nine were of areas within our two largest parks, Lakeside Park and Joaquin Miller. OPC, and now OPRF, have committed to conducting this annual survey because we understand how indispensable attractive, well-maintained, safe parks are to the quality of life we wish for all Oaklanders.

OPC was established in 2002 when Oakland Residents Gillian Garro and Audree Jones-Taylor, concerned about what they perceived as a gradual decline in conditions in their local parks, applied for and were awarded a grant from The Trust for Public Land to found a new organization they named *Oakland Parks Coalition*. With a newly formed board composed of leaders of various organizations also concerned about Oakland parks they set out to create a comprehensive survey that would shed light on park conditions in all of Oakland.

The first survey was conducted in 2003 and the resulting survey report described deteriorating park conditions, attributing those conditions in large part to the loss of skilled gardeners. OPC urged City Council to strive to maintain adequate staffing for park maintenance by any means. But, as the years passed and revenues slowed, the Landscape and Lighting Assessment District [LLAD] which was approved by voters in 1989 but did not include a cost of living increase fell short of providing the necessary funds to sustain maintenance without a commitment of monies from The General Fund to close the shortfalls.¹ Our survey and report were reprised in 2006 and continued to recommend that City Council hold the line on maintenance cuts.

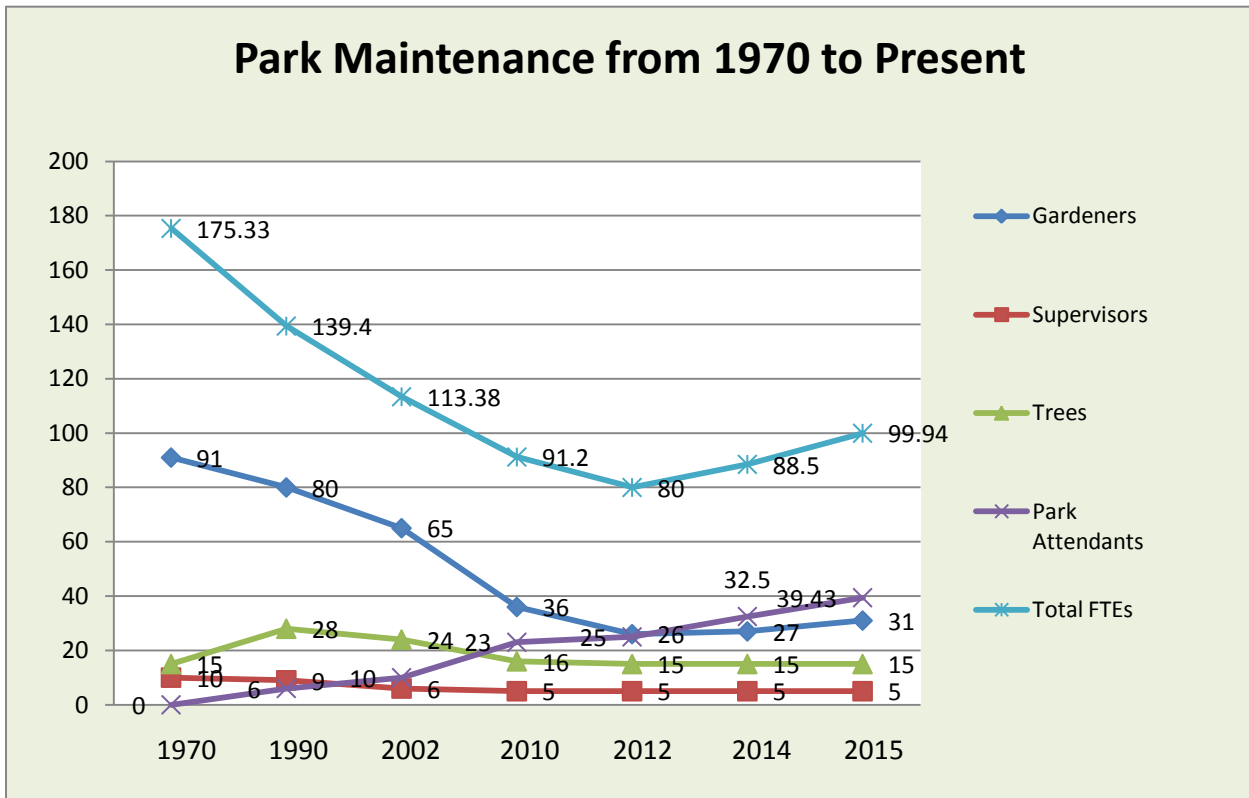
That didn't happen. In 2003 there were 113.38 FTEs (Full-Time Employees) maintaining our parks. That number fell to 80 FTEs in 2012 and has since risen to its current number of 99.94 FTEs², twelve more FTEs than in 2014, an improvement, but with a caveat—all the new FTEs will be managing grounds that have been added to the pre-existing load. The additional workers--one Crew Leader and two Gardeners IIs—have been funded specifically for maintenance of the landscaping surrounding Lake Merritt. This funding is a necessity since the Measure DD improvements will no longer be under contracted maintenance by July of 2016. But it is a one-time event and must be renewed with the next budget cycle if we wish Lakeside Park to continue to be the crown jewel of Oakland.

One more crew leader will head up the ball-field team of nine Park Attendants. The ball field crew has recently been transferred from the direction of OPR to Public Works and

¹ By 2009, the shortfall had reached 6.02M. With dwindling revenues came staffing cuts and transfer of expenses to other appropriate sources to balance the budget.

² This number includes, Supervisors, tree specialists, equipment operators, irrigation specialists, crew leaders, gardeners and park attendants.

may improve a heretofore fractured maintenance plan for ball fields.



To contend with budget cuts through the 20-teens Public Works elected to concentrate more of the budget in less costly part-time positions called Park Attendants: in 2000 there were 9.8 Park Attendants, a ratio of one to every 6 Gardeners; in 2015 the number of Park Attendants swelled to 39.43, outnumbering the 31 Gardeners by almost a third. Park Attendants are relatively unskilled—they acquire skills on the job but they are hired for only a portion of the year and some do not return. Those who return consistently may eventually be promoted to gardener positions but if this trend of relying heavily on the unskilled side for park maintenance continues it portends dire consequences for our parks.

Tree Maintenance is a crucial component that completes the maintenance program but its numbers, too, have been drastically reduced. Since a high of 28 tree-related personnel in 1990, crews have been slashed to 15 members, of whom only eight are certified tree trimmers (climbers). Necessarily, their focus must be on hazardous tree or limb removal but preventative pruning plays an essential part in maintaining the health of a tree. Without essential pruning branch health is compromised and falling limbs can present a serious safety problem.

It cannot be emphasized enough that understaffing of maintenance crews and, especially, cutbacks in skilled gardeners have taken a great toll on our parks but this is nothing new; it has been a chronic problem for decades. Now, two new challenges have emerged to threaten our parks--four years of drought have taken a harsh toll on the landscaping of countless parks, and a dramatic increase in homeless encampments has rendered many of our parks unsuitable and unsafe for citizens' use. In the pages ahead we will look at the survey data and analyze its significance in the broad picture of these challenges and others to conditions in our parks.

Why are Parks Important?

There is ample research demonstrating the benefits of parks to cities.³ Parks are an essential component to successful cities. The Trust for Public Land⁴ notes four primary benefits of parks:

- Parks, greenways, and trails enable and encourage people to exercise.
- Exposure to nature improves psychological and social health.
- Play is critical for child development.
- Parks help build healthy, stable communities.

The American Planning Association⁵ makes several key points about the health benefits of parks including:

1. Parks provide people with contact with nature, known to confer certain health benefits and enhance well-being.

“Health studies have shown that contact with nature — with plants, with animals, with pleasing landscapes, and with wilderness — offers a range of medical benefits. These include lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, enhanced survival after a heart attack, more rapid recovery from surgery, fewer minor medical complaints, and lower self-reported stress. In children with attention disorders and in teens with behavioral disorders, contact with nature has resulted in significant improvement (Frumkin, 2001).

³ “Benefits of Parks and Open Space” from the Open Space San Francisco website lists many links to research and data on parks. <http://www.openspacesf.org/node/30>

⁴ “The Health Benefits of Parks.” Trust for Public Land, 2006. <https://www.tpl.org/health-benefits-parks>

⁵ “How Cities Use Parks to... Improve Public Health”
<https://www.planning.org/cityparks/briefingpapers/physicalactivity.htm>

In fact, recent research suggests that exercise is more beneficial — leading to enhanced tranquility, and more relief of anxiety and depression — when it occurs in natural settings, like parks, rather than along urban streets (Bodin and Hartig, 2003). The opportunity for so-called "green exercise" is an important asset that city parks offer."⁶

2. Physical activity opportunities in parks help to increase fitness and reduce obesity.

“Overweight and obesity are epidemic problems across the country, and related conditions such as diabetes are on the rise. Scientists attribute these worrisome trends to two factors: more calories consumed, and fewer calories burned. A primary focus of attention is providing environments where people can be physically active. Parks offer such an opportunity....

Certain features [of parks] predict greater use for physical activity. These include accessibility, proximity, good lighting, toilets and drinking water, and well-designed and well-maintained paths, as well as attractive scenery (Frumkin, 2003).”⁷

To these points one can add a final, but by no means exhaustive, point about the importance of parks in cities.

3. Community value and public safety.

“Well-maintained parks promote community engagement and civic pride. Neighborhood parks attract and connect individuals of all ages and ethnic backgrounds who share a vision for the betterment of their surroundings.... Parks control urban sprawl and reduce crime, creating safer communities. Research shows that there is less crime in residential areas close to parks, in part because these green spaces are frequent gathering places for community members. The result is stronger community connections that empower residents to look out for one another.”⁸

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Community Value” from City Parks Alliance website: <http://www.cityparksalliance.org/why-urban-parks-matter/community-value>

Survey Results

Explanation of Rating System

Our annual survey consists of 51 questions and a final Park Overall Rating.⁹ The questions are divided among eight categories (*Picnic Areas, Restrooms, Hardscape, Homeless, Gophers, Greenery, Outdoor Sports, Outdoor Children's Play Areas*). The rating scale for each question is 1 to 5, where 1 would be equivalent to an F grade and 5 would be an A. Our On-Line survey, which about two-thirds of the surveyors completed, has additional questions including one about the top concerns of the surveyor.

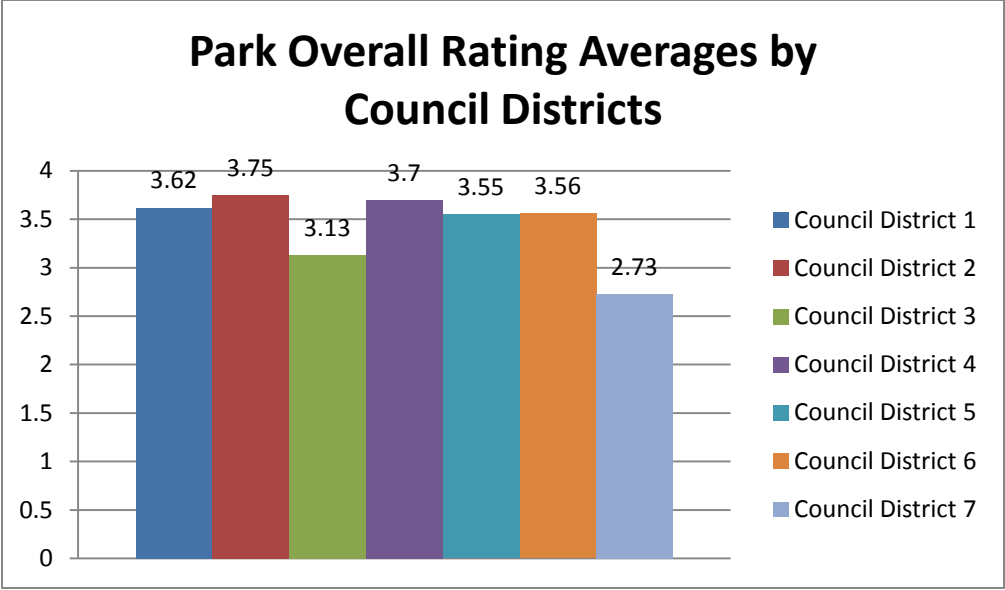
Ratings by Council District

Some of our council districts—1, 2 and 4-- have for decades had more pockets of affluence than others but Oakland demographics are changing and we must stay alert to the demands that the current influx of new residents bring to neighborhoods. Newcomers may try to take ownership of the local parks with an interest in rehabilitating them to fit their lifestyle. This can be a lifeline to some parks, but it may also stir up resentment among long-time residents. Navigating that transition can be a bumpy ride as conflicts surface between new and old residents but it can result in improvements to our parks and green spaces.

Let's look at how economic inequalities among districts are reflected in the Park Overall Rating by council districts.

The last question on the survey, a Park Overall Rating, averaged 3.47 for all 113 parks and green spaces surveyed. On a 5-point scale this is equivalent to a C. One would expect the more prosperous districts to have the best ratings and that is generally true with our survey. District 2 scored highest with 3.75(C+), District 4 next with 3.7(C+) and District 1 with 3.62 (C).

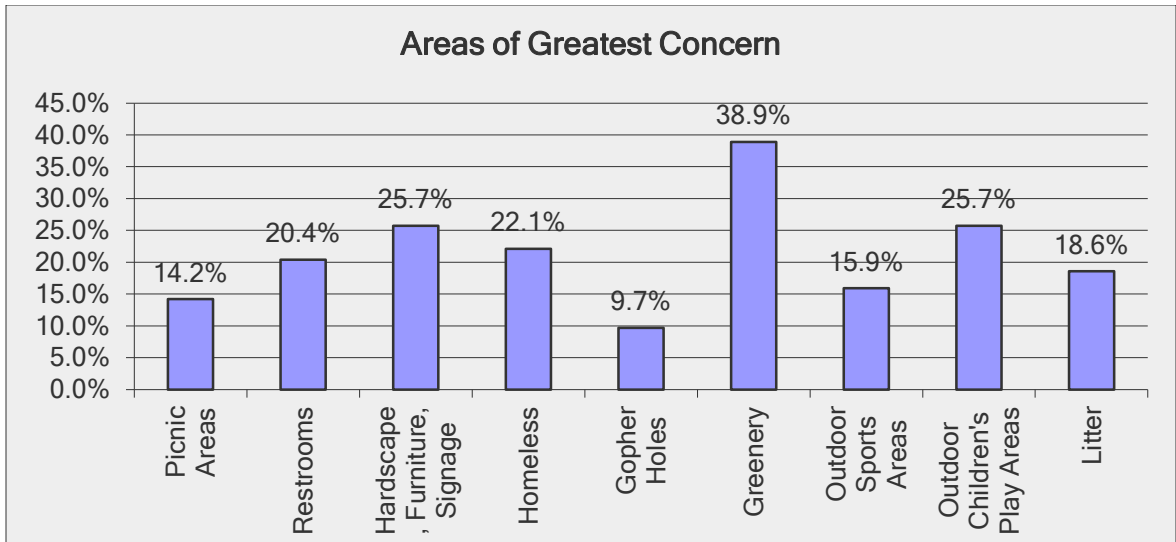
⁹ Note:A survey is appended to the report.



West Oakland (District 3) has the most parks, many of which are located in former industrial or blighted areas. District 3 averaged 3.13 (C-) while District 7, with its heavy concentrations of economically poor neighborhoods, scored the lowest Park Overall average with 2.73 (D+). In these districts we find greater numbers of parks in jeopardy, often due to the presence of gangs or drug users or occupation by the homeless.

Area of Greatest Concern

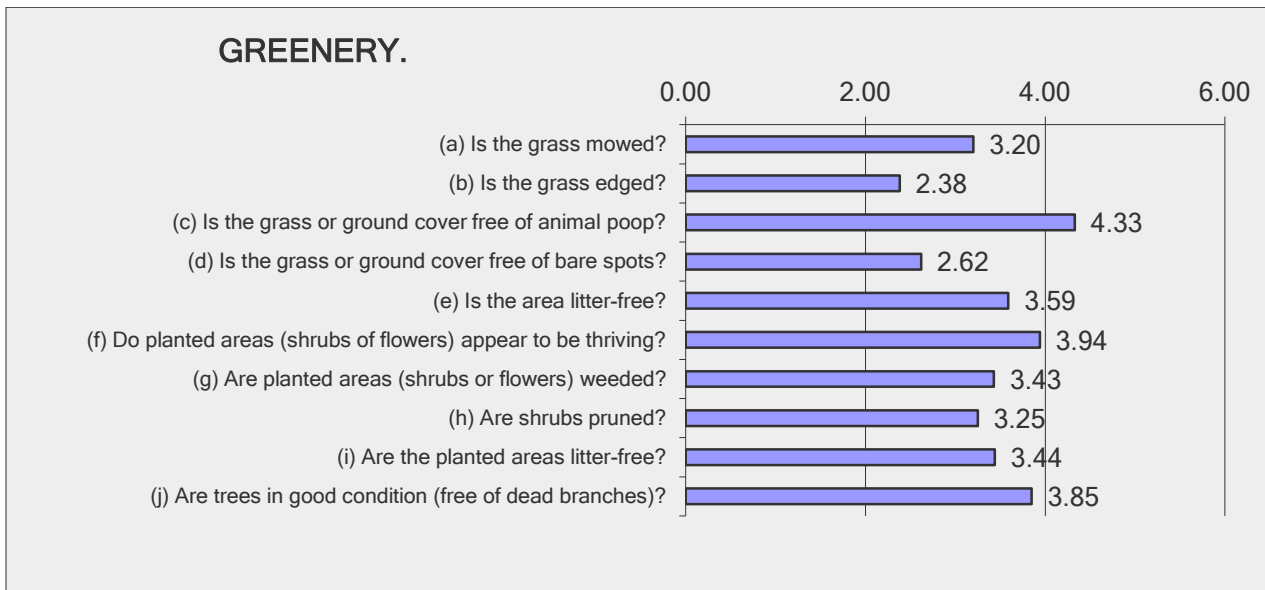
The last question on the on-line version of the survey asked for surveyors’ three areas of greatest concern. *Greenery* came in first by a large margin and this is not surprising. You may not find a restroom or a play structure in all parks but you will likely find some sort of greenery and the condition of the greenery in a park is likely to be the first thing that captures the attention of the park user.



Top Concern-Greenery

The Drought

This is the fourth year of the drought and irrigation has been reduced by half in some parks and discontinued in others. The first year of the drought, parks were irrigated three days a week with varying start times scheduled to maximize the effect. Parks were green then. Year two began water rationing, and careful monitoring of the flow and pooling of water. State mandates kicked in the third year so irrigation was curtailed to two days a week and limited to the larger, highly used parks. As can be seen in the chart below the average rating for question (d)-bare spots was very low, at 2.62 (D). This is a direct consequence of the drought and the mandated rationing of irrigation.



OPW is always on the lookout for water saving methods or systems. One such technology is the CalSense irrigation control system and is installed in all park renovations. This electronic watering system relays warnings to a central command center when areas have an overflow warning or mainline breaks have occurred. There are currently 48 CalSense controllers in the system but most parks are manually monitored for leaks and broken sprinkler heads. Whenever possible, OPW personnel aerate turf and add organic compost to improve the soil moisture holding capacity. The most effective water saving measure is to replace existing ground cover with drought tolerant plants and this is being applied to all new installations.

Drought tolerant planting at the OPW demonstration garden.



OPW Park and Tree Services Division Manager Brian Carthan muses: “We’ve always tried to conserve water because our water bill tended to be too high. We have a very old system that hasn’t been updated in years. One break went undetected for a long time and cost thousands in water bills but the last two years, staff has done a great job

monitoring the system for major breaks.” These days, he says, the bill from East Bay MUD often contains a congratulatory note.

Routine Maintenance

With approximately 685 acres of developed park land, OPW’s 21 maintenance crews (a crew is generally one crew leader, one Park Attendant, and occasionally, one Gardener II) are each responsible for 20-30 acres or 10+ acres per person. (Optimally, each worker should be responsible for only 7-8 acres.) The maintenance schedule is set: Monday and Fridays are litter pick up days and preparation for the weekend. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are for routine maintenance —“edging, mowing and blowing”. However, in practice, routine tasks such as edging (question b, 2.38 [D-]) and pruning (question h, 3.25 [C-]) are often postponed to attend to emergencies, like removing homeless encampments. Unfortunately for our parks, failure to perform those gardening tasks regularly results in unattractive landscaping, overgrown walking paths, and unhealthy plants.



No edging at McClymonds



Beautifully edged lawn at Lafayette Park

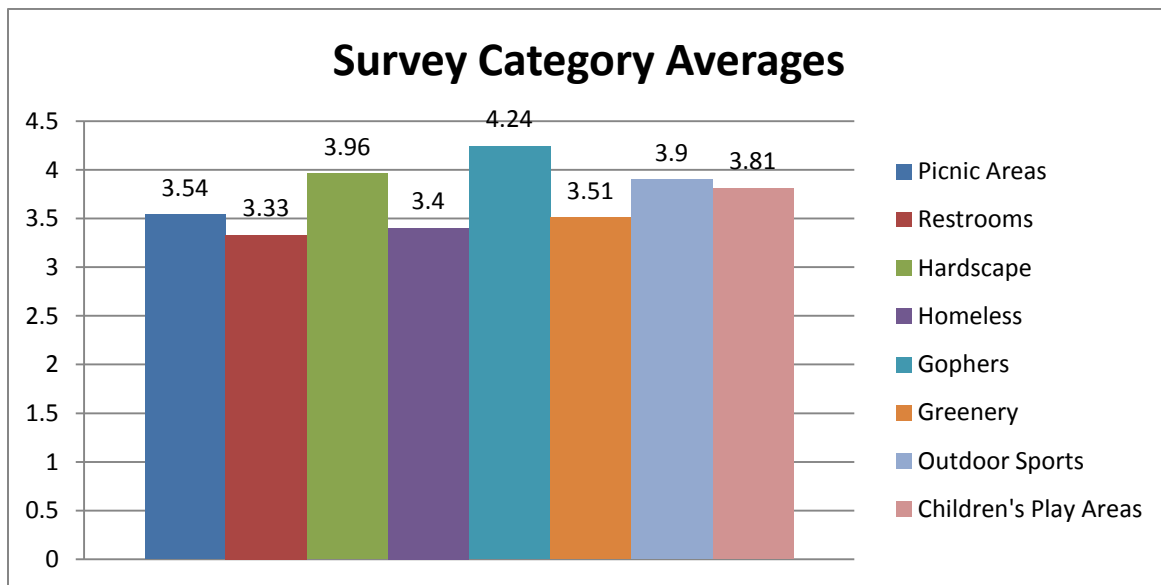
Lowest Scoring Survey Categories—Restrooms and Homeless

Survey Category Ratings

Our survey consists of eight categories (see chart below), each with a certain number of questions tailored for each section. For instance, in the section called *Children’s Play Areas*

Question (c) Is the sand or fibar clean?

is one of eight questions. When the ratings for all eight questions in this category are averaged and compared to the other categories we can see which categories stand out.



Restroom received the poorest ratings (3.33 [C-]) while the section on homelessness in the parks was just a shade better (3.4 [C]). Greenery, which has already been discussed, was the third lowest scoring area (3.51 [C]).

Restrooms-Lowest Rated Category

Six maintenance mechanics and three plumbers are responsible for keeping freestanding restrooms open, clean and well-supplied each weekday. On weekends their ranks are reduced to two workers. Each of the thirty-six free-standing restrooms is scheduled for maintenance every day but when there are special events or emergencies, workers are diverted from their schedules.

In light of the heavy load for this division of Public Works it's not surprising to know that our surveyors found restrooms that do not conform to the standards we would like to see for anyone using them. Depending on when the survey is taken, the same restroom may be found significantly cleaner or dirtier although, by the end of busy weekends, normally clean restrooms are often unsightly. Emergencies—stuffed and overflowing toilets, floods, use of restrooms for illicit purposes—occur three to four times each day. In some parks-- Sobrante, Willie Wilkins, Snow Park--free-standing restrooms have been closed permanently because of vandalism. In still others, one or the other side, Women's or Men's, may be closed. While it is crucial that our parks provide a place for people to relieve themselves, many restrooms are being misused by parks users or the homeless. Once-a-day cleaning is not enough to keep our restrooms suitable for public use.

Comments Regarding Restrooms

San Antonio Park: *women's open, men's closed, H2O appears turned off, toilets and floor full of toilet paper, no inside trash can, no doors, curtains removed. bad odor in men's. --Joyce Stanek and Ruth Tretbar*

Lowell Park: *Toilets and sink not clean, but do have water/flush. No trash receptacle inside the bathroom, but one nearby outside. No locks on the door; closes by wedging in the wood (stays closed as long as no one pulls it). No soap or toilet paper, and electric dryer is missing a knob. Smells, but half the restroom is in open air which prevents it from being too bad. One stencil on a door, otherwise no graffiti. No handicapped stall. --Michelle Dong*

Montclair: *Restrooms are often tagged with graffiti but cover up is usually prompt. -
-Daniel Swafford*

Cesar Chavez: *There is 1 restroom for each gender. The female restroom is functioning but extremely dirty and lacking all supplies but water. The male restroom doesn't flush well. They share a trash can that is placed outside the bathrooms. The bathrooms smell and are littered and graffitied.*

-- Victoria Herreraq

Arroyo Viejo: *Bathroom was open but smelled like urine and lacked supplies to clean hands.* --Dwayne Aikens

Officer Willie Wilkins Park: *Closed and disgusting.* --Paul Vidican and Terry Boom

Ira Jinkins: *The restrooms are in great condition because all the bathrooms on the site are maintained by staff from the fitness center, recreation center, or public library. In order to use the outdoors bathroom you have to have a key.* --Dwayne Aikens and Mike Udkow

Homelessness-Second Lowest Rated Category

The chart below shows the ratings for each of the two questions in the Homeless section. Any rating of 1-3 would indicate that there was evidence of homeless people in the park.

Indicate what you observe regarding THE HOMELESS at this park. 1 = worst and 5 = best.							
Answer Options	1-worst	2	3	4	5-best	N/A	Rating Average
(a) Is there evidence of homeless people using this park? (If your answer is yes, give this a low rating.)	27	9	15	9	41	12	3.28
(b) Is there evidence of homeless people living in this park? (If your answer is yes, give this a low rating.)	19	11	17	5	47	14	3.51

Out of 113 surveys, fifty-one surveyors rated *question a)* at 3 or lower and forty-seven surveyors gave *question b)* similar ratings. That amounts to a homeless presence in almost half the parks surveyed and those ratings could very well swell were the survey taken at nighttime, or early in the morning when homeless people are still sleeping in our parks. Reports of homeless are not limited to our surveyors. Forty-two percent of calls or reports to the Call Center in 2015 have been about issues around the homeless. In parks, that can mean encampments and the detritus that accompanies them; it can also pertain to park safety, when people are threatened by the erratic behavior that many homeless exhibit.

Public Works reports that roughly \$90K has been spent cleaning up encampments and illegal dumping so far in fiscal year 2014-15.

Homelessness is not restricted to parks, of course. We see homeless people sleeping in doorways and under overpasses and other places where some shelter is available. But, homeless activities in parks can compromise normal park use: in the absence of restrooms the homeless are forced to use the open park as their bathroom making conditions there unsanitary; dangerous objects are left strewn behind; belongings are parked on benches and picnic tables. Their use of the park as a shelter can make the park hazardous and unhealthy for children and adults.



Lafayette Square Homeless



Eula Brinson (85th St) Homeless Encampment

The problem of homelessness is a monumental challenge to the health of our City and its parks and it is a problem shared by practically every urban city in California. Only a few have had any success in providing shelter for these individuals. Dealing with the proliferation of homeless encampments imposes huge costs on public services. OPD officers often have to be called to corral obstreperous individuals and Public Works expends many hours cleaning up homeless encampments only to return the next day to find those individuals reinstalled in the very same places. Normal maintenance is put in abeyance when this duty calls and parks suffer doubly, to wit, this report by Supervisor II Robert Kennedy: *“A recent encampment clean-up effort took all of the gardening staff for Zone 2, so all of the routine maintenance for the zone was deferred for an entire day. Unfortunately, the encampment returned within a few hours forcing our staff to start the process over.”*

Comments Regarding Homeless Use of Parks

Garber Park: *They regularly park in the parking turn-out at the Claremont Avenue entrance; and set up camps in some of the more remote parts of the park, which we have removed a couple of times a year when sanitation becomes a problem.*

--Shelagh Brodersen

Rockridge Temescal Greenbelt (FROG Park): *I have observed a single person to small groups of homeless on the green belt near DMV on morning runs along the green belt. --Travis Crawford*

Chinese Garden: *Lots of homeless people. --Ken Lupoff*

FM Smith: *Problems with homeless sleeping on picnic table that is on backside of park...mostly on weekends. --Steve Cunningham*

Splashpad: *In order to discourage homeless from inhabiting the park, four-five months ago the electrical outlet was disabled. The parties, etc by homeless have stopped and the overnight use has lessened. --Jennie Gerard, Ken Katz*

Estuary: *Only a few "regulars" sleep on the benches, and some nights not at all. Most go across the tracks on Embarcadero and camp there in a bigger enclave. --Steve Lowe*

Lafayette Square: *6-10 permanent residents --Scott Reinstein, Nancy Friedman*

Lakeside Park, Sailboat House to Pergola: *My answers are "#1" because there is evidence of homeless in the park - the worst part of it being them defecating frequently in choice areas including at the base of the cork trees, next to benches - especially adjacent to the play area, and in the play area. --Marian Bell*

Allendale: *no evidence of homeless. --Don Hamilton*

Avenue Terrace: *No homeless people use the park. --Kirsty Gumina*

Fruitvale Bridge: *This park earns a #3 for overall rating because of the homeless residents living in the park. Attempts are made to keep the walkway clear to the waterway in order to pick up litter near the water. Residents were cleared out by police about 6 months ago, but others have returned. --Joyce Stanek*

Union Point Park: *Multiple locations of homeless encampments and activity. –Dale Hagen*

William Wood: *Though we try to monitor for homeless encampments, we have had a routine problem keeping the park free of homeless camps and human feces are routinely found and require cleanup. –Jennifer Lilla*

Eula Brinson: *There was a major set-up where someone was clearly living. It was against the back fence of the park, and was quite neat. It was not clear if the person was inside or not when we were there. -- Nancy Karigaca, Midge Estep, Barbara Hartford*

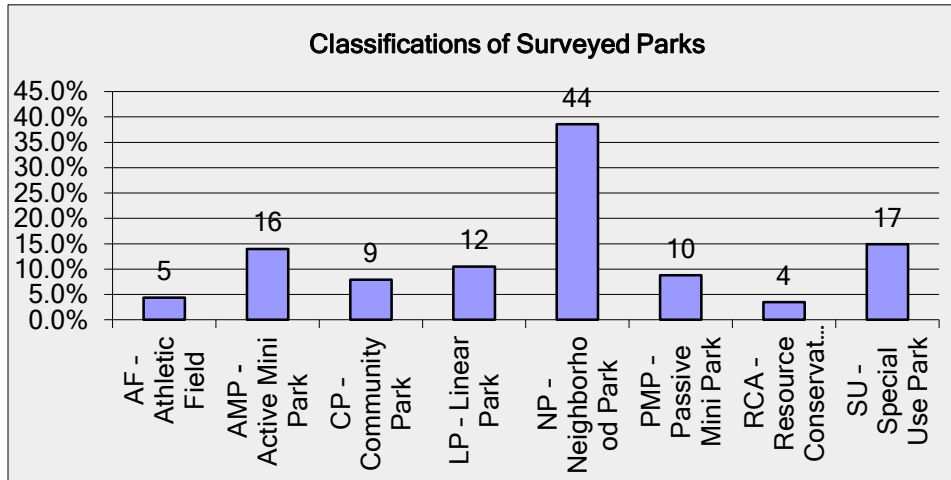
Ratings by OSCAR Classification

Another ways to assess park conditions is by their classifications. Parks are classified according to the standards set by the OSCAR (Open Space Conservation and Recreation) plan and eight of the nine classifications apply to park land managed by the city. Each park in existence at the time of the 1996 General Plan (and any new parks since then) was given a classification according to the California state mandate of 1970. The classifications were determined by acreage, use and park facilities or amenities. Below is an overview of existing Oakland parks at the time of the inclusion of the OSCAR element into the General Plan in 1996. A few parks have been developed since then.

Summary of Oakland Parks in 1996		
Type	Number	Acreage
Region Serving Parks	5	332.0
Community Parks	9	101.1
Neighborhood Parks	44	126.0
Active Mini-Parks	16	5.8
Passive Mini-Parks	5	2.2
Linear Parks	12	33.0
Special Use Parks	24	651.1
Resource Conservation Areas	19	1,622.8
Athletic Field Parks	14	68.6
TOTAL	147¹⁰	2,942.6¹¹

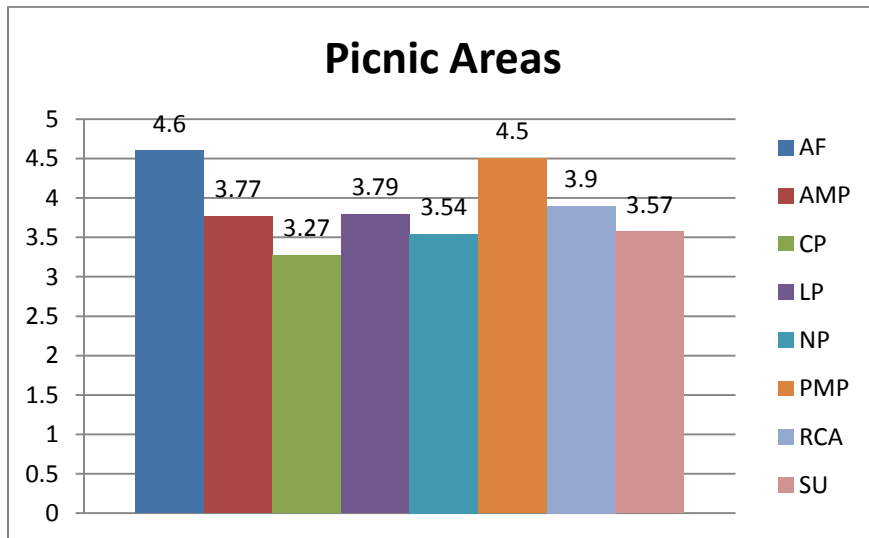
¹⁰ Actual number of parks is smaller; several parks have been divided into multiple categories.

¹¹ 906.2 acres of this total is within East Bay Regional Parks within Oakland city limits. When we eliminate Region Serving Parks—they are not maintained by Oakland Public Works—and the park land that is actually within the East Bay Regional Park system we are left with 2036.4 acres of parkland to be maintained by Oakland Public Works. That was the total in 1996.



The chart above shows that one-third of surveyed Oakland parks are Neighborhood Parks. Resource Conservation Areas may have more acreage but Community and Neighborhood parks have the most developed acres and provide opportunities for the most activities. Notwithstanding, most parks have certain things in common, like *Picnic Areas*, *Hardscape*, and *Greenery* so we will compare those survey categories in smaller and larger parks and will suggest reasons for the high or low ratings.¹²

Picnic Areas by Classification



The lowest ratings for picnic areas were found in Community Parks, Neighborhood Parks and Special Use Parks. Community Parks are the largest City-managed parks in our system,

¹² A list of OSCAR designations for Oakland Parks is appended to this survey.

Neighborhood Parks are next in size. These parks attract people of all ages for their recreation facilities and for picnicking. Picnic tables can be filled on holidays and weekends and this high use of picnic areas takes its toll on their tables, benches and grills. Wooden tables are the norm in most parks but are targets for graffiti “artists”. Keeping the graffiti painted over requires the work of one full-time worker who spends his days moving from park to park repainting tables and benches. Tables made of other materials are routinely vandalized for their metal content. Rusted and unusable grills can be found in many parks but they are replaced quickly enough when they are posted on the CityWorks¹³ site.



Clinton Square graffiti-covered picnic table

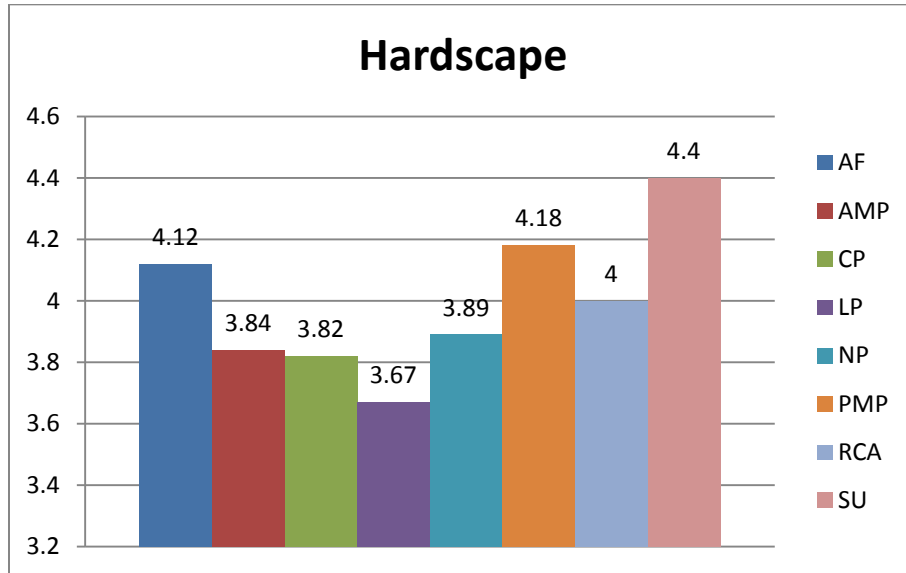


Diamond Barbecue Grill

This category also poses questions about trash containers, litter and water fountains. Special Use Parks scored lowest for those questions. Special Use Parks run the gamut in Oakland from the Morcom Rose Garden to golf courses, the zoo and some public squares to parks like Union Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald, situated between Peralta and 34th Street in West Oakland, is a gathering place for the homeless, especially on days when church groups hand out free food there. As can be expected from the kind of activity there, it received low ratings of 1 and a 2 for the litter and trash receptacle questions.

¹³ CityWorks is the computerized system used by Public Works to report problems on line or by phone. Once entered into the system a complaint is placed in the queue and the sender is notified when the repair is completed.

Hardscape by Classification



The *Hardscape* category includes questions about signage, fences, benches and walkways.

a) Are signs graffiti-free? b) Are fences in good condition? c) Are benches/seating in good condition? d) Are benches/seating areas graffiti-free? e) Are walkways in good condition?



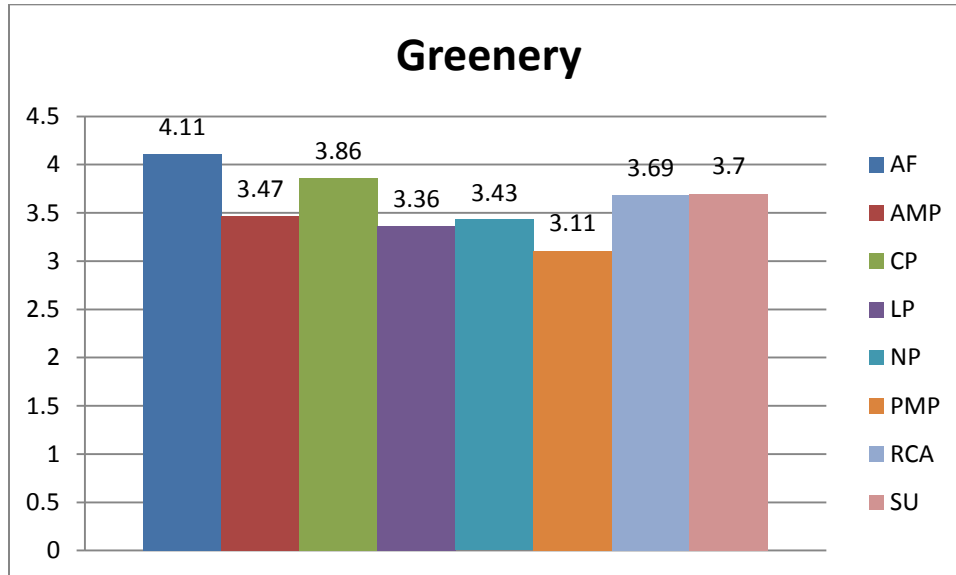
Linear Park Oak Glen Bench in Need of Repair



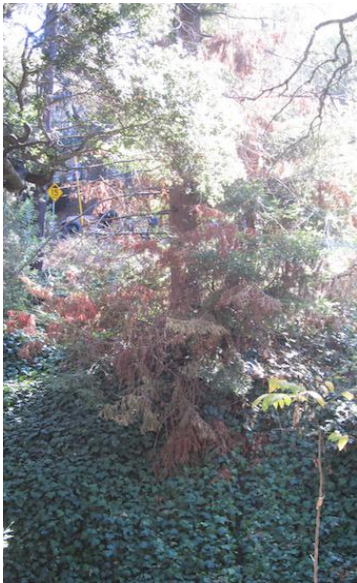
Clinton Square walkway

Linear parks were rated lowest in the Hardscape category. Just as their name implies they are long, narrow stretches of green space which may have walkways or benches. Of the twelve Oakland Linear Parks half received ratings of 3 or below for various questions in this category but Ostrander and one section in Lakeside Park received very low ratings for questions about graffiti and walkways bringing the category average down considerably.

Greenery by Classification



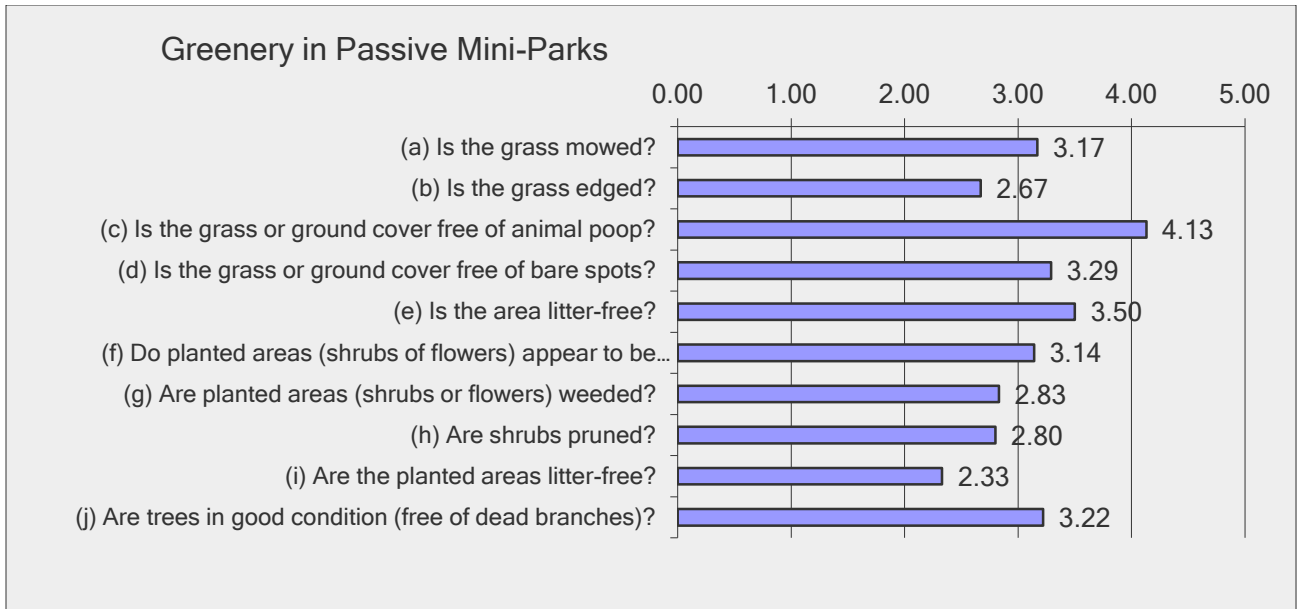
The smaller parks, Passive Mini Parks, Active Mini Parks, Linear Parks, all scored lowest in this Greenery category. This is very likely due to the withdrawal of anything but basic care—mowing and litter pickup--and the discontinuation of Irrigation to these parks.



Linear Park Oak Glen-Dead Tree



Passive Mini Park Cypress Memorial-Weeds have replaced the grass.



Passive Mini-Parks, averaging in at 3.11 (C-), have suffered most by the cutback in services in the smaller parks. *Questions b-edging), g-weeding), h-pruning) and i-litter) all received rating averages in the 2s (Ds). Of the ten PMPs surveyed, four--Cypress Memorial, Vantage Point, Ayala and Fruitvale Plaza-- received ratings in the 2s almost across the Greenery category.*

Comments about Greenery in Passive Mini Parks

Cypress Memorial: *overgrown with weeds. 2 trees look dead. Maybe firehouse next door could adopt. Looks neglected. Broken drinking fountain.--Mike Kent, Myra Redman, Nancy Forbord*

Vantage Point: *Flowering shrubs that shield park from E. 8th haven't been trimmed or pruned in AGES. Perfect place for homeless to reside. Very little green grass - mostly dead and dried.....quite forlorn. Right next to 880 so much of the trash might be from the freeway.—Judy Johnson*

Ayala: *Dead tree on Northern boundary - should be removed and replaced. Manzanita and juniper shrubs have been hacked off without regards to plants health and regeneration. Everything needs weeding. Dead tree needs to be removed.—Don Link and Natalie Van Osdol*

Gophers by Classification

Twenty parks received ratings of 1-3 for this question: *Is the landscape free of gopher holes and mounds?* The majority of rodent reports are in Neighborhood Parks and Athletic Fields and nine of the twenty parks are in District 3. Those parks are: Cypress Memorial, DeFremery, Mandela Parkway, Marsten Campbell, Raimondi, South Prescott, Wade Johnson and Willow.

In our 2014 report we featured gophers as a serious problem at many of our West Oakland parks but pocket gophers have made their homes in parks throughout the Bay Area. Their holes and mounds represent a safety problem, especially on playing fields where runners can trip over them. A single gopher can make as many as 300 soil mounds in a year. *“Burrows are sometimes quite dynamic, with portions constantly being sealed off and new areas excavated. A single burrow system may contain up to 200 yards (180 m) of tunnels.”*¹⁴ An attempt at eradication of the pests met with some success in 2014 at deFremery but that was ephemeral—they returned in force after trapping ceased.

In 2015 OPW contracted with a private firm to eradicate gophers at two Athletic Fields in Council District 7--Oak Port and Otis Spunkmeyer--on an ongoing basis and this plan has brought positive results. Reports of gopher holes and mounds have decreased significantly at those two locations according to Park Supervisor Robert Kennedy, *“If you go to Otis Field you’ll see dramatic changes. We stuck to two fields to make sure it was effective in a year’s time. Now that we know it’s manageable we’ll be able to expand to other parks.”*

Is the landscape free of gopher holes and mounds?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
AF - Athletic Field	15.0%	3
AMP - Active Mini Park	10.0%	2
CP - Community Park	5.0%	1
LP - Linear Park	10.0%	2
NP - Neighborhood Park	45.0%	9
PMP - Passive Mini Park	5.0%	1
RCA - Resource Conservation Area	5.0%	1
SU - Special Use Park	10.0%	2

¹⁴ **Ronald M. Case.** Professor of Wildlife Biology - Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife. University of Nebraska. Lincoln, Nebraska 68583-0819

Comments about Gophers

Bertha Port: *Man-made hills have many gopher holes. Also some in other lawn area.—Elizabeth Brandon and Margaret Pinter*

DeFremery: *They are still here. There are a lot of new dirt hills again.—Phyllis Lun*

South Prescott: *Extensive, throughout.-- Elizabeth Brandon and Margaret Pinter*

Willow: *Extensive Damage.-- Elizabeth Brandon and Margaret Pinter*

Summary of Park Ratings by Classification

Taking into account their limited resources OPW has devised a management plan that favors larger, and/or well-use parks (Community, Neighborhood, Athletic Fields, Active Mini-Parks) to the smaller local parks or squares. While litter pickup and mowing are performed for all parks, other tasks or repairs that keep a park healthy are complaint-driven exclusively so only the small local parks that enjoy the support of a neighborhood group or steward are being well cared for. This leaves many parks in jeopardy.

Theft, Dumping and Vandalism in Our Parks

Theft of copper wire from the lighting systems in restrooms and on fields has become big business. Carter Gilmore/Greenman Field restroom, the necklace of lights around Lake Merritt, Mandela Parkway, all have fallen victim to wire theft. Vandalism has severely damaged Willow—a car drove across the park destroying the children’s play structure. At Cesar Chavez (a brand-new park) 160 plants were stolen and had to be replaced and holes in the soccer field repaired. The restrooms at Arroyo and Sobrante have been vandalized. Dumping is rampant at Union Point and Oak Port, Lafayette Square and St. Andrews where the homeless put down stakes.

Park and Tree Services Division Manager Brian Carthan recalls a much calmer time when the parks were patrolled by Park Rangers who could be called in cases of emergency. When the Park Ranger positions were eliminated OPD said they would step in and patrol the parks but, for various reasons, that hasn’t happened and the vandals, the thieves and the homeless have claimed many of our parks for their commerce and their homes. OPD may become more involved now that the Mayor’s office has identified six priority parks for OPD to focus on. Tune in later.

Parks in Jeopardy

OPW developed the Hub System of maintenance around the major parks, i.e, concentrating maintenance in the large Community and Neighborhood parks so that a greater portion of the population would have access to the many activities and amenities these parks offered. This resulted in the small tot lots and mini-parks receiving minimal attention unless complaints were registered with the Call Center. These small parks that are most in need are often located in areas where residents do not feel empowered to complain about lack of care. Conditions and safety in these parks decline, neighbors stop using the parks and they are abandoned to the elements. These are parks in jeopardy.

Our criterion for naming parks in jeopardy is that adverse conditions have worsened over the years or that they have already reached rock bottom. When parks are not used by local families and children they are in jeopardy. We fear that many more parks could make this list if their conditions are not remedied soon.

However, being in jeopardy is not a death sentence for a park. It is never too late to redeem a park. When our surveyors visited Dolphin (a park often on our jeopardy list) on *Love Your Parks Day* this year they were happily surprised to find a small group of people socializing at the park who were sincerely interested in seeing it cleaned up. Can an outreach program at these parks help to jump start a community buy-in? Can we find the resources to conduct such a program? We believe these parks can be saved but it would take a commitment of extra resources to do so.



Cypress Memorial



St. Andrews Square



Willow



88th Mini



Columbian gardens



Dolphin Play Structure



Dolphin Locals



Holly Mini

Parks Need Neighborhood Support

Our on-line survey asked: *To your knowledge, is there an established group that regularly participates in the maintenance of this park/area?*

Here are two examples of parks that have flourished because of neighborhood involvement



- The Rockridge Temescal Greenbelt (aka FROG Park), in District 1, was conceived by the Rockridge Community Planning Council and built by Rockridge neighbors: *“Built by over 1,300 volunteers in 2001 and sustained over the years by volunteer maintenance and generous donations, Frog Park is a testament to the power of a community-driven vision.”*¹⁵

When it takes a village to build a park it is axiomatic that the park will be

used and cared for by the neighborhood.



- William Wood Park, in District 5, owes its calm beauty and clean environment in great part to its dedicated neighborhood group. Jennifer Lilla speaks for Friends of Wood Park: *“[We] have discussed potential ways to improve the park to better meet the needs of the community, but at present, we only have the capacity to try to maintain the native plants, keep the area litter- and weed-free, and discourage use by homeless. It*

would be nice to have a picnic table or two, or have the grassy field better maintained. It would be REALLY nice to have the walkways improved/restored.”

¹⁵ www.frogpark.org home page

Two examples of failed parks stand out because there was no substantial buy-in by their neighborhood:



- Cypress Memorial (CD 3), built on the very site of the Cypress freeway collapse, was a fitting memorial to the people who died in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. The concept for the park was noble but there is no foot traffic there and it's easy to miss it as you drive by. During the planning process local residents asked that it be a family-oriented park, but the final plan

did not include any play structures or picnic tables. Sadly, other than a peaceful place of contemplation, there is really nothing to entice the locals. Instead, the homeless have claimed the park.



- In 2008 the construction of 25th Street Park on Martin Luther King, also in council district 3, was approved with funds from the East Bay Regional Park District Bond WW Funds. During the design hearings at the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission meeting commissioners asked the council member to form a solid support group for the park. The project came back to the Commission, ostensibly supported by a local group and the project was approved. It wasn't long before drug dealers took over the park and "the group" became the keeper of

the keys to the gate of the park soon after it opened and it is now locked most days and all nights.

Conclusion

This year's survey points to growing concerns about the future of our parks. OPW officials are constantly challenged to keep parks clear of homeless encampments without sacrificing maintenance care. They are besieged by theft of materials of park infrastructure and they struggle with reduced budgets for maintenance. This has meant sacrificing skilled gardener positions for unskilled labor over the decade, perhaps a necessity, but definitely not, in our opinion, the best decision for the continued viability of our parks. Furthermore, the drought has forced the agency to forego watering some parks which may ultimately necessitate new landscaping unless the agency has some very creative ideas to revive them. Yet, our larger parks continue to be well-maintained although safety in some of them is still an issue.

We urge our City representatives to commit to resuscitating our city's parks by following our recommendations. We feel that will go a long way toward improving conditions in all our precious parks so that young and old alike can enjoy safe harbors for recreation and relaxation.

Recommendations

Restore Funding for Park Maintenance—Rising revenues from property taxes should be applied to augmenting our tree and gardener crews.

Bring back the Park Rangers.—Park Rangers provided tremendous value to Oaklanders using our parks—they knew our parks well and knew how to deal with park problems. They provided the safety and support that is sorely lacking in parks now.

Provide a Long-Term Funding Solution for Maintenance of Measure DD Improvements.—Thanks to a one-time infusion of funds the lake landscaping will be maintained properly for at least a year but all of the Measure DD installations and the new medians need ongoing care if we wish to keep those areas up to standards.

Find a More Effective Way to Deal with the Homeless.—42% of all calls to the Call Center this year were about homelessness, yet, real solutions have yet to be found. It's a challenge that the City must confront.

Increase Support to Neighborhood Groups and Stewards.--The Environmental Stewardship Team is building a strong program of support for volunteers but more should be done to encourage the creation of new neighborhood park groups, especially in our less advantaged neighborhoods. Nothing safeguards the health of a park better than the involvement of active volunteers.

Parks in Jeopardy—Make some difficult decisions about parks that have been abandoned to the elements. Should we close these parks or redesign them to require less maintenance and to attract neighborhood families?

Stay Creative—Continue to explore alternative maintenance funding approaches such as conservancies, dedicated fees or taxes, private funding, etc.



Surveyed Parks with Park Overall Ratings

District 1	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
Ayala Park	PMP	3
Bushrod Park	CP	4
Chabot Park	NP	4
Colby Park	AMP	4
Dover St Park /MLK	AMP	4
Driver [Jasper P.] Plaza	PMP	3
Frank Ogawa Firescape Garden	SU	4
Garber [John] Park	RCA	3
Gateway Gardens Park & Pavillion	SU	5
Glen Echo Park	LP	4
Golden Gate Park	NP	3
Hardy Park	NP	3
Helen MacGregor Plaza	SU	2
Linden Street Park	AMP	3
North Oakland Regional Sports Center	AF/RCA	4
Ostrander Park	LP	3
Pleasant Valley Road Median	LP	5
Racine Point	PMP	4
Redondo Park	AMP	3
Rockridge Blvd Park	PMP	4
Rockridge-Temescal Greenbelt (FROG Park)	LP	4
District 2	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
Athol Plaza Park	NP	3
Bella Vista Park	NP	4
Channel Park	LP	2
Chinese Garden Park	SU	2
Cleveland Cascade	SU	5
Clinton Square Park	NP	5
Eastshore Park (Embarcadero & Astro Park)	NP	3
FM Smith Park	NP	4
Franklin Park	NP	5
Garfield Ball Field	AF	4
Lincoln Square Park	NP	4
Madison Square Park	SU	4
Mandana Plaza Park	PMP	4
Morcom Rose Garden	SU	4

Morgan Plaza Park	AMP	3
Park Blvd Plaza Park	PMP	4
Pine Knoll	SU	4
San Antonio Park	CP	5
Splashpad Park	SU	3
Vantage Point Park	PMP	3
Lakeside Park	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
LP-A:Lake Merritt - sailboat house to Pergola. (Includes tot lot and labyrinth)	LP	3
LP-B:sailboat house to Grand Ave. (Includes bandstand)	SU	4
LP-C: Gardens @ Lake Merritt	SU	4
LP-D: Fairyland to Perkins St. along Grand Ave	NP	3
LP-E:Harrison & Grand to Cameron Stanford House	LP	4
LP-F:Veteran's Center (grounds & creek, not building)	SU	4
LP-G:Lake Merritt Parkway	LP	4
District 3	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
25th St Mini Park	AMP	1
Bertha Port Park	AMP	4
Cypress Freeway Memorial Park	PMP	1
deFremery Park	CP	3
Durant Mini Park	AMP	5
Estuary Park	LP	4
Grove Shafter Park	NP	3
Jefferson Square Park	NP	5
Lafayette Square Park	SU	4
Lowell Park	NP	4
Mandela Parkway (8 th – 20 th Streets)	LP	3
Marston Campbell Park	NP	3
McClymonds Mini Park	AMP	2
Mosswood Park	CP	4
Oak Glen Park	LP	4
Oak Park	AMP	4
Poplar Park /Willie Keyes Rec Ctr	NP	4
Raimondi Park	AF	3
Snow Park	NP	4
South Prescott Park	NP	2
Union Plaza Park/Fitzgerald	SU	3
Wade Johnson Park [aka Cole]	NP	1
Willow Mini Park	NP	1

District 4	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
Allendale Park	NP	3
Avenue Terrace Park	NP	4
Brookdale Park	CP	4
Dimond Park	CP	2
Joaquin Miller Playground (Perry Field & Tot Lot)	NP	5
Marj Saunders Park	RCA	3
McCrea Park (casting pool)	SU	4
Montclair Park (RC)	CP	4
Redwood Heights Park	NP	5
Shepherd Canyon Park	NP/RCA	3
District 5	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
Central Reservoir Recreation Area	NP	4
Cesar Chavez Park (formerly Foothill Meadows)	NP	3
Fruitvale Bridge Park	LP	3
Fruitvale Plaza Park	PMP	4
Josie De La Cruz Park (rec center/Carmen Flores, formerly Sanborn)	NP	4
Manzanita Park	NP	4
Nicol Mini Park	AMP	4
Peralta Hacienda Park (upper)	SU	4
Peralta Hacienda Park (lower)	SU	4
Union Point Park	NP	3
William Wood Park	NP	2
District 6	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
85th Ave/Eula Brinson Mini	AMP	2
Arroyo Viejo Park	CP	3
Burckhalter Park	NP	5
Carter-Gilmore/Greenman Field	PMP/AF	5
Concordia Park	NP	3
Lion's Creek Crossing (formerly Coliseum Gardens)	NP	5
Maxwell Park	NP	4
Owen Jones/Pinto Park	AF	4
Rainbow Park	NP	2
Tomas Melero-Smith	AMP	4

District 7	OSCAR Codes	Park Overall Rating
88th Avenue Mini Park	AMP	2
Columbian Gardens Park	NP	2
Dolphin Mini Park	AMP	2
Hellman Park	NP	4
Holly Mini	AMP	1
Ira Jenkins/Brookfield Park	CP	4
Officer Willie Wilkins Park (formerly Elmhurst Plaza)	NP	2
Sobrante Park	NP	2
Stonehurst Park	NP	5
Tassafaronga Park	NP	4
Verdese Carter Park	NP	2



2015 LOVE YOUR PARKS DAY SURVEY

Rate every question by circling one rating only. More is better: 5 = Best, 1 = Worst. N/A = Not Applicable

1. PICNIC AREAS (Picnic areas are designated by picnic tables with benches)

a. Is the picnic area generally litter-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. Are enough trash receptacles available in the picnic area?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. Is the water fountain in the picnic area working? (no fountain? N/A)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
d. Are barbecues in good condition? (no barbecues? N/A)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
e. Are picnic benches & tables in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
f. Are picnic benches & tables graffiti-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

2. RESTROOMS Freestanding Only (not in Rec Centers, NOT porta-potties) No restroom?--circle N/A for all.

a. Is the restroom open? (If open circle 5. Closed? circle 1 & N/A-other questions)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. Are toilets clean & working?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. Are sinks clean & working?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
d. Are trash receptacles available?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
e. Is the bathroom clean?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
f. Are doors on stalls & do locks work?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
g. Are supplies (soap, paper towels, toilet paper) available?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
h. Are restrooms free of odor?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
i. Are restrooms free of graffiti?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

3. HARDSCAPE, FURNITURE, SIGNAGE

a. Are signs graffiti-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. Are fences in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. Are benches/seating areas in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
d. Are the benches/seating areas graffiti-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
e. Are walkways in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

4. HOMELESS

a. Is there evidence of homeless people using this park? (If the answer is yes give this a low rating.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. Is there evidence of homeless people living in this park? (If the answer is yes give this a low rating.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

5. GOPHER HOLES AND MOUNDS

a. Is the landscape free of gopher holes & mounds?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
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6. GREENERY							
GRASS & GROUND COVER							
	a. Is the grass mowed?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	b. Is the grass edged?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	c. Is the area free of animal poop?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	d. Is the area cover free of bare spots?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	e. Is the area litter-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
FLOWERS & SHRUBS							
	f. Do planted areas (shrubs or flowers) appear to be thriving?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	g. Are planted areas (shrubs or flowers) weeded?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	h. Are shrubs pruned?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	i. Are the planted areas litter-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
TREES							
	j. Are trees in good condition (free of dead branches)?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
7. OUTDOOR SPORTS AREAS							
	a. Is the turf/grass (sports fields only) in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	b. Is court (tennis or basketball) surfacing in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	c. Are courts free of pools of water?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	d. Are drinking fountains at sports fields or courts working?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	e. Is there netting (tennis or basketball) where it is needed?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	f. Are courts (tennis or basketball) properly marked with lines?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	g. Are bleachers graffiti-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	h. Are bleachers in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	i. Are trash receptacles available?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	j. Are the sports areas litter-free?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
8. OUTDOOR CHILDREN'S PLAY AREAS							
	a. Is the play area free of litter?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	b. Is at least one trash receptacle available?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	c. Is the sand or fibar clean?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	d. Is play equipment in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	e. Is the resilient surface/safety padding in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	f. Is play equipment free of graffiti?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	g. Is seating for parents in good condition?	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
	h. Is there a working water fountain in this area?						
PLEASE GIVE THIS PARK/AREA AN <u>OVERALL RATING.</u>		1	2	3	4	5	

Many thanks to the following individuals who contributed most importantly to this report with their park surveys and photos.

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