



Parks and Urban Open Space Equity Overviews

Atlanta

“Park equity” is a growing topic of conversation across the metro Atlanta region, and especially in the City of Atlanta proper. The Atlanta BeltLine, anticipated to complete in 2030, will ultimately connect 45 City of Atlanta neighborhoods via a 22-mile loop of multi-use trails, modern streetcar, and parks – all based on railroad corridors that once encircled the city. As of 2019, the Atlanta BeltLine consists of [five open trails](#) and [seven parks](#). The success of the Beltline has also brought unintended consequences in cycles of displacement and vocal resident concern about gentrification. To combat displacement, the city passed a number of ordinances, including [a local workforce requirement with living wages](#) and [an inclusionary zoning ordinance](#) requiring 10% of units for households earning 60% AMI, or 15% of units earning 80% AMI or less. Developers may also opt to pay a one-time fee, which feeds into the affordable housing trust fund, to skip this requirement.

Even with these ordinances, the market moves quickly, and neighborhoods that still have affordable housing stock are squarely in the bullseye for price and tax increases. In the Oakland City neighborhood, near downtown Atlanta and with Beltline access, the per square foot price for homes increased 168% in just one year.

Atlanta is fortunate to have local parks and greenspace advocates like [Park Pride](#), the [Trust for Public Land](#), and the [Conservation Fund’s Parks With Purpose](#) who are growing in their understanding of how parks can both help and harm communities of color, if the investment is not done carefully and with great intention. This kind of commitment shows up in pilot programs like [this partnership with Atlanta Public Schools](#) to turn school yards into public park spaces in communities where a park is more than a 10 minute walk away for residents. The TransFormation Alliance’s work with members like [Station Soccer](#) and the [West Atlanta Watershed Alliance’s](#) programming at the Outdoor Activity Center has moved us towards expanding our own language to include “urban open spaces”; these are spaces that leverage existing transit infrastructure or publicly owned land in ways that promote social gathering and healthier outcomes. These benefits are important because all too often, urban open spaces can introduce harmful dynamics such as over-policing and overt racism outdoors. The TransFormation Alliance believes that we must re-establish true “third spaces” for Black and Brown people in Atlanta, where we can gather, celebrate, organize, and live without fear and with great joy.



Source: Atlanta BeltLine Partnership

Chicago



The 606 trail is a 2.7-mile linear park and active transportation corridor on Chicago's northwest side. While the 606 trail provides much needed open space and multi-use recreational area for neighborhood residents, it has accelerated gentrification and displacement trends near the trail. Property prices in the 606 residential area of

Western Avenue have increased by 48.2% since ground was broken on the trail. These displacement concerns were seen ahead of time by organizations at Elevated Chicago's collaborative table-- including LUCHA and Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA)-- who were fighting to center the concerns of the community in the planning process.

LUCHA, LSNA and members of Elevated Chicago must now be reactive in addressing the affordability and cultural and economic shifts in the neighborhood. Together, LUCHA and LSNA have advanced the 606 Preservation Ordinance, which would raise the fee of demolition and deconversion from \$500 to a minimum of \$250,000 in a pilot around the trail. This proposal will be introduced to city council in the coming months. In addition to policy work, they are also pursuing land acquisition strategies and creating a community land trust. LUCHA is a HUD-certified Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) which designs, builds, rehabilitates, and manages affordable housing for low-income residents at 50% or less of AMI. The Community Land Trust will create affordable homeownership opportunities for low- to moderate-income legacy families in opportunity rich neighborhoods well served by transit.

Denver

As in many cities, there is a concentrated effort in Denver to bring more urban green spaces to fruition. This includes building green spaces into transit stations and increasing pedestrian walkways and trails. As the conversation develops in Denver, Mile High Connects is working to learn more deeply about the current park issues in the Denver metro area and looking to bring a racial equity lens to the conversation. A central concern for MHC is ensuring park development maintains place and does not exacerbate or cause further displacement.

To that end, MHC is paying particular attention to



Denver's comprehensive plan's *Game Plan for a Healthy City*. The plan focuses on "easy access to

parks and open space as a basic right for all residents and establishes city parks, facilities and recreational programs as essential for a healthy environment, healthy residents and a high quality of life for everyone”. Additionally, in the North Federal community, MHC is focused on the specific station area plans along Federal that might impact the Westminster station.

Memphis

The land-use planning map provides the City’s template for where and how the community should grow into the future. One of the cornerstones of the community is its parks and public facilities. Two key recommendations that align with various planning goals and Mid-South Greenprint include: 1. the development of approximately 500 miles of greenways and trails



throughout the region, with Memphis at the center of the network, and 2. access to a park, trail, or green space within ½ mile of all City residents.

In addition to these goals for parks, trails, and green spaces, the parks master plan should align the recreation, athletics, and park priorities to the Comprehensive Plan by assessing parks, community centers, golf courses, athletic fields and sports facilities, conducting a gap analysis, and engaging community to identify needs and preferences. The parks master plan should also consider opportunities for establishing new parks, expanding existing parks, or improving underused parks where opportunity exists to connect communities to the City’s valuable water resources, such as rivers and lakes, in the model of the Memphis Riverfront Concept plan.

One of the highlights for the conversation around parks and open space equity is the work being led by the Heights Community Development Corporation. The [Heights Line](#) is a community-led project that proposes a 1.75 mile multi-use promenade that will enhance accessibility to pedestrians and cyclists, expand green space, and through increased walkability, bring back the community hub.

Additional parks-oriented projects include:

- [Memphis River Park Partnership](#)
- HUG Park Friends (park advocacy group)
- [City of Memphis, Parks Division - Master Plans for Parks](#)

Los Angeles

The Los Angeles River stretches 51 miles across the LA region, winding through various neighborhoods and cities along its path. As a barrier against potential flooding damage, the river was engineered into the concrete channel we think of now. Following many tireless years of advocacy by river activists, the City of Los Angeles, the County and Los Angeles, the Army Corps, and many



others, groups are joining forces to restore the river to its natural state, incorporate more green infrastructure, and bring back a waterway that residents can interact with. One such proposal is the Alternative 20, which reimagines 11 miles of the river stretching from Griffith Park to downtown LA. Alternative 20 will bring a lot of new development to both the businesses tapped by the project and the neighborhoods bordering the river. As investment and development increases in Los Angeles, so will the displacement of residents and small businesses. Already residents are experiencing rising rents, and evictions; painfully ironic given the historic disinvestment and associated health inequities in these neighborhoods.

In addition to the efforts to revitalize the LA River, the Los Angeles Regional Open Space and Affordable Housing collaborative (LA ROSAH), ACT-LA, and other partner groups, such as the Park Equity Alliance, are working to increase equitable investment in more urban green spaces, while preventing green gentrification and the displacement of low-income communities of color. LA ROSAH has focused on policy and funding initiatives, such as working with the Los Angeles Regional Parks and Open Space District to institute a Displacement Avoidance Policy tied to Measure A, which funds parks and recreation improvements in Los Angeles County. Additionally, LA ROSAH is working toward the implementation of the joint affordable housing and parks strategies outlined in their [Pathways To Parks and Affordable Housing](#) report and has several pilot projects in development.