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Hartford Park Condition Assessment and Custom ParkScore® Analysis

Conducted in partnership with Blue Hills Civic Association and Connecticut Green Bank

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BHCA

Executive Summary

"When kids don't have a place to be kids, they have to grow up faster."
- Elisha Bailey, Blue Hills Civic Association Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program student leader.

Trust for Public Land, in partnership with Connecticut Green Bank, Blue Hills Civic Association, and an Advisory Committee, conducted a study of Hartford's park system during the summer of 2023. This includes all publicly accessible parks & park-like spaces such as community schoolyards open outside of school hours, downtown plazas, and those managed by non-profit groups such as Riverfront Recapture. This study consisted of two components:
- **Part 1: Park Condition Assessment:** An evaluation of every park in Hartford conducted by students participating in Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program. This partnership was notable in two-ways: 1) it created a platform for youth living in Hartford to assess and prioritize the public spaces that influence them and 2) it provided a way to assess who has access to high quality parks and identify priorities for future investment.
- **Part 2: Hartford ParkScore Analysis**: A holistic comparison of Hartford's park system to identify city-wide strengths and weaknesses relative to the 100 most populous U.S. cities as well as two Connecticut cities, New Haven and Stamford. The ParkScore index ranks park systems on five measures of an excellent park system: Acreage, Access, Equity, Investment, and Amenities. Published since 2012, it is widely considered the gold standard when comparing park systems between U.S. cities.

The condition assessment of all parks, plazas, and community schoolyards revealed a systematic need for additional investment to improve the quality of Hartford's public spaces, in particular the backbone of a public park system – neighborhood parks.
- Neighborhood parks have the greatest maintenance needs relative to other park types, while the downtown plazas are significantly better maintained than the parks throughout the city.
- Parks or park-like spaces with supplemental public or private funding are in better condition than those solely managed by the city or school district.
- This combination results in clear economic and racial disparities in who has access to well-maintained parks (scores ranged from a low of 42% to a high of 133%):
  - The 10 parks with the highest percentage of nearby Black residents had an average condition score of 66% while the 10 with the highest percentage of nearby White residents averaged 106%.
  - Parks serving the wealthiest residents scored an average of 97% compared to those serving households with the lowest incomes scoring an average of 81%.

Hartford received a ParkScore rating of 59 out of a possible 100 points, indicating its park system is slightly above average relative to U.S. big cities in 2023.
- This score falls just short of New Haven's 2022 rating of 60 points and significantly higher than Stamford's 2023 rating of 40 points. Boston scored 73 points in 2023, 10th best in the country.
- The strength of Hartford's park system is park access. 96% of Hartford residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, one of the highest marks in the country.
- However, the average park size in Hartford (2.2 acres) is smaller than 85 of the 100 biggest cities in the country. Hartford has many parklets and plazas and several large regional parks, but relatively few neighborhood parks – a missing "middle."
- Additionally, Hartford's average of $71 per person of public investment in parks places it among the bottom 25 of the 100 biggest cities. Hartford's overall park funding is boosted by an additional $31 per person in private investment, but the findings of the condition assessment suggest that these funds are not sufficient to address park maintenance for all of Hartford.

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Partnership Acknowledgements

Blue Hills Civic Association managed the data collection for the condition assessment. Established in 1962, The Blue Hills Civic Association (BHCA) is Hartford's oldest civic organization. BHCA serves as a catalyst to inspire vibrant, healthy, civically engaged residents and leaders who are supported by strong schools, culturally competent health care, economic equality and safe neighborhoods. We accomplish this by empowering the people living and working in the Blue Hills and surrounding communities to create stable and attractive neighborhoods through Youth, Family and Community impact. This impact includes serving more than 1,000 youth annually as the largest Summer Youth Employment & Learning Program (SYELP) Provider in the City of Hartford, as well as the lead Community School Provider at Weaver High School. Through these avenues, we provide employment training, internships, mentorship, youth organizing and extended-day learning programs to youth and young adults with the goal of building a dynamic workforce with in-demand skills.

BHCA was interested in this project because of its impact on the quality of life for Hartford's youth, families, and communities as a whole. By engaging our youth to lead the condition assessment data, this project empowered our community to have their voices heard about the features and facilities of their parks. This project afforded them the opportunity to explore parks and green spaces in the city that they were unaware of, compare conditions and facilities across the city and make direct recommendations for improvements. This project also exposed our youth to mapping technology, careers in sustainability and professionals from right here in Hartford working to improve the environmental conditions and access to safe outdoor spaces for all residents. We anticipate using these findings to advocate for improvements in local parks and engage residents in features and facilities they didn't know were accessible to them including rowing with Riverfront Recapture, golf lessons in Keney Park, and so much more. This project truly connected our youth to parts of their city that they'd never explored and expanded their ability to learn, grow and engage here in Hartford.

Connecticut Green Bank (Green Bank) initiated this project and provided the project's funding. The mission of the Green Bank is to confront climate change by increasing and accelerating investment into Connecticut's green economy to create more resilient, healthier, and equitable communities. Within its Comprehensive Plan,[1] and its Environmental Infrastructure: Parks and Recreation Primer, increasing and accelerating investment in parks and recreation can both mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience against the impacts of climate change. Supporting the expansion of TPL's ParkScore Analysis to the most populated cities in Connecticut was recognized as an area of research and development that could not only monument the current state of urban parks but also could support future investment in parks development and parks assets. The City of Hartford is important because it is the capitol of Connecticut and the headquarter city of the Green Bank, birthplace and burial location of renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead, and the "Insurance Capital of the World." The Green Bank seeks to engage with the insurance and health care industries as well as other project sponsors and stakeholders to increase and accelerate investment in parks and recreation to confront climate change and improve public health.

The Green Bank's mission to confront climate change incorporates environmental infrastructure, as outlined in Connecticut Public Act 21-115. This expansion broadens the Green Bank's scope to include various facets crucial for building resilient, healthier, and equitable communities, including water, waste and recycling, climate adaptation and resiliency, agriculture, land conservation, parks and recreation, and environmental markets. The Act significantly increases the Green Bank's potential impact, which is why the Green Bank supported and convened the ParkScore research in Hartford.

Trust for Public Land (TPL) conducted the analysis and authored the report. Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. TPL is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. In Connecticut and across the

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[1] Connecticut Green Bank Comprehensive Plan Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024 (pp 24-26, – click here)

country, TPL collaborates with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. We are committed to creating more places that bring us outside—parks, trails, playgrounds and public lands—and making them available and welcoming to everyone, everywhere. This project included both TPL's Connecticut office and its 'think and do tank' - the Land and People Lab.

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is committed to building partnerships and promoting statewide park advocacy through this project. While Connecticut has some state funding for land acquisition, it lacks adequate funding sources for creating and expanding parks. TPL plans to use these findings to conduct similar analyses in other Connecticut cities, thereby building a comprehensive database to identify investment patterns and highlight gaps in equitable access and investment in city parks. Leveraging these results, TPL aims to advocate for statewide park funding and the establishment of dedicated funding sources for parks across Connecticut. By continuing to conduct custom ParkScore analyses in the state's largest cities, TPL seeks to strengthen partnerships and promote collaboration across the environmental field, collect vital data, and make a compelling case for increased statewide park funding.

Additionally, we convened an advisory group who met three times to provide guidance on the study design, share their expertise with the students, and help translate the study's findings to make change. The advisory members were:
- Cherell Banks, Community Organizer with Blue Hills Civic Association
- Yaw Darko, Senior Project Specialist at Connecticut Land Conservation Council
- Joseph Dickerson, Senior Advisor for Outdoor Equity at CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP)
- Ryan Grew, Executive Director of Friends of Keney Park
- Kamora Herrington, Founder of Kamora's Cultural Corner and Creator of The Sterling Street Sanctuary and Nature Reserve Land Trust
- Alycia Jenkins, an organizer at the Sierra Club Connecticut chapter
- Lauren Little, an urban farmer, activist and educator in Hartford
- Kelvin LoveJoy, Lead Community Organizer at Blue Hills Civic Association
- Brian Martin, Community Organizer with Trust for Public Land
- Kory Mills with the City of Hartford
- Michael Zaleski, President and CEO at Riverfront Recapture

Other contributors over the summer include Mary Zeman, Conservancy Manager at Bushnell Park Conservancy; Zoe Chatfield, a GIS consultant and community development partner; Raul Irizarry, Project Manager at FHI studio; Jasmine Peele, Assistant Director of Planning in the City of Meriden; Jackie Gorsky Mandyck, Executive Director of the iQuilt Partnership and Kathy Kraczkowsky, Park Operations Director at Elizabeth Park Conservancy.

Additionally, this report builds on the ideas generated through prior planning and visioning efforts that have sought to improve Hartford's park system:
- *Renewing a Historic Legacy: Hartford Parks for People.* Trust for Public Land, 2007. (link)
- *Hartford Green Ribbon Task Force, Partnerships for Hartford's Parks.* City of Hartford, 2011. (link)
- *Hartford Capital City Parks Guide.* Sasaki, 2014. (link)

Introduction

Over the course of six weeks in summer 2023, 70 high school students from Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program visited every publicly accessible park or park-like space throughout the City of Hartford. The students documented both the joys of parks – '*peaceful,*' '*nice long trails,*' '*beautiful park to hang out with friends and family,*' '*very nice view*' – and the missing investment and care for many of the city's parks. For example, students described Dominick DeLucco Park as "*the potential to be a 10. However, right now the park is poorly maintained, very dirty, and unsafe…. Kids can get hurt or sick from going to this park.*"

When properly invested in, parks can be the secret "superfood" for cities and communities – providing health, environmental, economic, and societal benefits. Elisha Bailey, one of the high school student leaders who conducted the assessments, described what it felt like to live in neighborhoods without this 'superfood': "*When kids don't have a place to be kids, they have to grow up faster.*" A recent Trust for Public Land study, *The Power of Parks to Promote Health*, found that cities with the best park systems are healthier places to live. In 2023, people living in the 25 cities with the best park systems were, on average, 9% less likely to suffer from poor mental health and 21% less likely to be physically inactive than those in lower-ranked cities. These patterns hold even after controlling for race/ethnicity, income, age, and population density.

Students discussing the context of a local park as part of their assessment process.
Photo: Blue Hills Civic Association

Parks are also critical for protecting residents from the dangers of climate change—neighborhoods without parks are up to 6 degrees hotter than those adjacent to parks. Moreover, park landscapes provide valuable green infrastructure that can infiltrate rainwater and minimize stormwater runoff, which causes flooding and combined sewage overflows. Green infrastructure of park landscapes also recharges groundwater that is needed to support pollinator habitat and trees during extreme heat and drought. And parks are vital to local economies: across the U.S., local parks generate hundreds of billions of dollars in economic activity and support over a million jobs. As climate impacts continue, so also will be the need to manage and mitigate the impacts from more extreme weather events and increased stormwater runoff associated with those events. Urban local parks can provide benefits that include reducing heat stress through tree canopy cover, managing stormwater with bioswales and retention systems, increasing carbon sequestration with mature trees. Research has also shown that parks provide health benefits (i.e., lower stress levels, decreasing blood pressure, reducing asthma, allergies, cardiovascular disease and boosting mental health and life expectancy.

Yet, the historical legacy in which cities and parks were developed has meant parks are often not available to those who could benefit the most. Across the country, more than 100 million people—including 28 million kids—

do not have a park within a 10-minute walk of home[2]. Across the 100 largest U.S. cities, residents in neighborhoods of color have access to 43% less park space than those in White neighborhoods[3]. A similar disparity exists when comparing low-income neighborhoods relative to the wealthiest ones. Or in simpler terms, kids do not have safe places to be kids.

Residents of the City of Hartford experience the ramifications of many of these historical forces today. To assess and document the state of the city's park system today, Trust for Public Land partnered with the Connecticut Green Bank, Blue Hills Civic Association, and a stakeholder Advisory Committee (See Partnership page for list of participants). The study consisted of two components:

- **Part 1: Park Condition Assessment:** An evaluation of every park in Hartford conducted by students participating in Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program. This partnership is notable in two-ways: 1) it creates a platform for youth living in Hartford to assess and prioritize the public spaces that influence them and 2) it provides a way to assess who has access to high quality parks and identify priorities for future investment.
- **Part 2: Hartford ParkScore Analysis**: A holistic comparison of Hartford's park system to identify city-wide strengths and weaknesses relative to the 100 most populous U.S. cities as well as two Connecticut cities, New Haven and Stamford. The ParkScore index ranks park systems on five measures of an excellent park system: Acreage, Access, Equity, Investment, and Amenities. Published since 2012, it is widely considered the gold standard when comparing park systems between U.S. cities.

These two components complement one another, providing a comparison of the city's park system as a whole relative to other city park systems (the ParkScore Index) while also documenting park inequities within Hartford through the condition assessment. This analysis reflects all publicly accessible parks, recreation, and park-like facilities within the city of Hartford. 'Park-like' facilities include schoolyards open outside of school hours, the downtown plazas such as those included in the iQuilt plan (e.g., Nassau), and those managed by non-profit groups such as Riverfront Recapture.

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[2] https://www.tpl.org/parkserve
[3] https://www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Power-of-Parks-to-Promote-Health-A-Trust-for-Public-Land-Special-Report.pdf

Part 1. Hartford Park Condition Assessment

This study expanded on the traditional ParkScore analysis in its inclusion of a park condition assessment, in which high school students evaluated every park or park-like space in Hartford. This was enabled through a partnership with Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program which provided a platform for youth living in Hartford to assess and prioritize the public spaces that influence them. The results of these condition assessments both a) inform prioritization of park investment to address individual park needs and b) enable a systematic analysis of patterns in park deficiencies by park type and neighborhood that will inform equitable park investment strategies.

Over the course of six weeks in July and August 2023, high school students participating in the Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program conducted two types of park assessments: 1) park condition assessments and 2) a self-rating score of all parks and publicly accessible park-like spaces in Hartford (all referred to as 'parks' in this report), classified into five park types for this report:
   a) **Mini Parks**, which small in size (< 1 acre) and generally provide a place to sit and one or two park amenities. All are managed by the city.
   b) **Neighborhood Parks** are moderate in size (1 – 20 acres), and typically have multiple park amenities for neighborhood residents to play and exercise. They are all managed by the city.
   c) **Regional Parks** (or Identity Parks) are large (20+ acres), have multiple activities, and attract visitors from throughout the region. All have a 'friends of' or conservancy group and are managed by the city except for Riverside Park which is managed by Riverfront Recapture.
   d) **Plazas** are generally associated and managed by a downtown commercial or institutional building (e.g., privately managed) and provide public space for downtown visitors to relax and socialize.
   e) **Schoolyards** include the K-12 schools that allow for community use outside of school hours. They primarily reflect Hartford Public Schools facilities.

For the condition assessment, students assessed each feature (e.g., playgrounds, ballfields) on three criteria:
   • Does it have any cleanliness needs (e.g., graffiti, overflowing trash)?
   • Does it have any maintenance needs (e.g., cracked surfaces, chipped paint)?
   • Is it broken or unusable (e.g., missing swings or hoops)?

Students assessed each park using a mobile phone app.
Photo: Blue Hills Civic Association.

The scoring system is a two-step process, with each park receiving a condition score between 0% and 133%. Each park feature type (e.g., playgrounds) starts with 3 points and is docked 1 point for each 'yes' determination based on the criteria above and can gain a bonus point if there is a 'like new' feature. The maximum points any feature type can receive is 4/3 points (133%), while the minimum is 0/3 points (0%). The park's overall condition score is then calculated in a second step by averaging the scores across all feature types. Thus, a park condition score of less than 100% indicates there is at least one deficiency in the park, with scores closer to 0% indicating multiple all-encompassing challenges (e.g. broken swing set, missing hoops, cracks in the court, etc.). A score of 100% indicates no condition issues, but none of the features are 'like new.' Meanwhile, scores above 100% indicate parks that have a 'new' feature.

Additionally, the assessors provided a 'self-rating' score for each park based on the following question: "On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to recommend this park to a friend or colleague?" A 0 indicates 'not at all likely', while 10 indicates "extremely likely." This self-assessment rating provides an alternate approach to assessing park quality. While it provides an opportunity to capture the 'appeal' of the park activities as opposed to only the condition, it has wider variance in scores depending on who does the rating. For the purposes of this study, these ratings provide insight into the perspectives of Hartford high school students associated with Blue Hills Civic Association.

In this report, percentage scores indicate the condition score, while scores out of 10 indicate the students' self-rating. The students also provided qualitative feedback on the parks, which is indicated in quoted italics. Of the 64 parks assessed, 46 had at least one feature (i.e., 18 did not have any park features other than benches, signage, or waste receptacles). The 46 parks with at least one feature form the basis of the condition assessment findings. More information on the methodology can be found in Appendix B.

The park condition analysis finds three clear, and related, trends:
1. Neighborhood parks have the greatest maintenance needs relative to other park types, while the downtown plazas are significantly better maintained than all park types.
2. Parks or park-like spaces with supplemental public or private funding are in better condition than those solely managed by the city or school district.
3. There is a clear need for improved park maintenance and renovations, especially of parks that are in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of Black residents or low-income residents.

Neighborhood parks have the greatest maintenance needs relative to other park types, while the downtown plazas are significantly better maintained than the parks throughout the city.

The 12 neighborhood parks assessed averaged a 73% condition score, which roughly translates to a quarter of park features (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields) in need of improvement. This is in stark contrast to the 7 plazas, which were more likely to have a 'new' feature (as indicated by a score over 100%) than a broken one (Table 1). This disparity may reflect the lack of supplemental public or private funding for neighborhood parks. The importance of sufficient funding is further illuminated by a comparison of the condition of regional parks. Five of the seven regional parks received strong condition scores, while two (Keney and Goodwin) did not. Having a large park with multiple features does not necessitate a poorly maintained public space. The complete list of parks and their condition assessments is provided in the Data Supplement while key trends are shared below.

Park Type	Count	Condition	Self-Rating	Examples
Plazas	7	109%	7.1	Nassau, Old Statehouse Square
Regional Parks	7	80%	6.9	Riverside, Pope
Neighborhood Parks	12	73%	6.0	Lozada, Sigourney Square
Mini Parks	8	84%	4.4	Roberta L Jones, Porter
Schoolyards	9	76%	4.8	Hartford High, Annie Fisher

Table 1. Comparison of average park condition and self-rating scores by 'park' type. Excludes sites that were not assessed or did not have any park features present other than signage or waste receptacles.

There were three **neighborhood parks** with a condition score less than 50%: Lozada Park, Dominick DeLucco Park, and Sigourney Square Park. Each of these parks had multiple broken park features and significant maintenance and cleanliness concerns. This neglect was easily understood and reflected in the assessors' comments: "*wouldn't call it the safest park*;" "*has the potential to be a 10 but right now is poorly maintained*"; "*Not the best. Poorly managed.*" Five parks received a condition score in the 65% - 80% range: Joseph V. Cronin Park, West

Quirk Turf, Hyland Park, Forster Heights[4], and Hudson Street. While these sites were generally regarded as 'good,' the assessors noted that there were still signs of neglect: "*'It's a good park. It just needs to be maintained regularly.*" "*The play area is not in good condition. The basketball court is fair. The garden is in great condition.*" Four neighborhood parks scored above 90%: Rice Heights, North Pope (though the assessor felt this was a *'kiddy park'*), George Day, and Windsor Street Park.

In contrast, the **downtown plazas** averaged over 100%, meaning they were more likely to have 'new' park features than to have any maintenance issues at all. Among the seven plazas assessed, there were almost no condition needs, and no plaza scored less than an 87% on its overall condition score. Their high 'self-rating' was earned in large part because the assessors found the plazas to be *'nice,'* *'very clean'*, *'well taken care of'*, and *'calm.'* A few assessors remarked that the plazas were *'boring,'* which likely prevented them from receiving a higher overall rating.

Most **regional parks** received high condition and self-rating scores. However, two of the seven stood out with poor self-rating scores: Goodwin and Keney. Goodwin and Keney both received 2/10 self-rating

Students conducted the assessments in groups, with each student assessing a particular feature in the park and taking notes before re-grouping and submitting on the mobile app.
Photo: Blue Hills Civic Association

scores, while Keney also received one of the worst condition scores in the city, with a score of 42% (Goodwin was only slightly better at 60%). Keney Park's low score was because every single one of its features had at least one condition deficiency. As one of the assessors remarked in explaining their self-rating, "*I put 2 because most of the stuff in the park are damaged and have broken stuff.*" Goodwin scored poorly on the condition score because many of the plants were dead. In contrast, the other regional parks received glowing reviews:

- Riverside Park – "*It's a really big park and a lot of activities happen there.*"
- Pope Park – "*It's peaceful and there are many activities to do there. Also, they have nice long trails.*"
- Elizabeth Park – "*It's a beautiful park to hang out with friends and family.*"

Schoolyards, which can serve a similar function as a neighborhood park, scored similarly in terms of condition needs but were significantly less desirable by the assessors self-rating, scoring a 4.8/10 compared to 6/10 for neighborhood parks. Most schoolyards did not feel like publicly accessible parks to the assessors, as they commented "*It's great but that area belongs to the school*" or "*This is school property, so I wouldn't really have my friends just go over there.*" Most schoolyards scored between 65% and 85%, with one scoring poorly (Bulkeley High North) and two scoring well (Annie Fisher and Environmental Sciences Magnet). Many cities are developing community schoolyard programs to make their schoolyards open and welcoming to the surrounding community to increase park access and improve safety. For more, see Trust for Public Land's Community Schoolyards program.

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[4] The City of Hartford completed a renovation at Forster Heights following the summer assessments.

The **mini parks** scored lowest on the 'self-rating,' in large part reflecting the lack of activities present at those sites. The lack of features other than signage also means less maintenance is required as reflected by their higher condition score.

Parks or park-like spaces with supplemental public or private funding are in better condition than those solely managed by the city or school district.

At least eight of the top 10 best-maintained parks receive supplemental public or private funding, while none of the bottom ten have substantive supplemental funding (Table 2). Two of the bottom 10 have a 'friends of' group as partners. Only one of the top 10 sites is managed by the city, while all of the bottom 10 are managed by the city or school district.

Top 10 best maintained sites	Bottom 10 sites in most need
1. Burr Mall***	37. Rawson School
2. Turning Point Park	38. Hudson Street Community Garden
3. Nassau Plaza***	39. Gallaudet Square – Triangle
4. University of Hartford***	40. Charter Oak Tree Memorial Park
5. Minuteman Park**	41. Goodwin Park*
6. Old State House Square**	42. Lozada Park
7. Bushnell Plaza Sculpture Garden***	43. Dominick DeLucco Park
8. Constitution Plaza***	44. Keney Park*
9. Riverside Park***	45. Sigourney Square Park
10. Environmental Sciences Magnet	46. Bulkeley High School North – Temporary

Table 2. List of park-like sites with the highest and lowest condition scores & supplemental funding or volunteer groups. *indicates 'Friends of' group; ** indicates state funding; *** indicates significant private funding.*

There is a clear need for improved park maintenance and renovations, especially of parks that are located in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of Black residents or low-income residents.

Finally, we conducted an equity analysis to determine if there were any systematic patterns in where the 'best-maintained' parks are in Hartford and who has access to them. We did this in two ways:
1. *Neighborhood comparison:* We mapped the amount and quality of parks for each 'neighborhood' in Hartford, using 'Census Block Groups' as the geographic unit because they are small enough to reflect block-by-block differences within a city (they represent about 1,000 people on average).
2. *Park comparison:* We classified parks based on the average demographics (race/ethnicity and income) of the people who live closest to them. This enables us to then compare the average condition of parks who primarily serve the highest income households vs those that serve the lowest-income households, and similar for race/ethnicity.

Mapping the quality of parks by neighborhood makes the need for investment in improving the quality of parks (e.g., renovations), rather than acquisition, clear. The central portion of Hartford, which includes the downtown plazas and riverfront parks that have benefitted from significant private investment via iQuilt and Riverfront Recapture, has significantly more park amenities and better maintained parks than either north or south Hartford (Figure 1). This is in stark contrast to a comparison of the amount of park space (acreage), which is anchored by Keney Park to the north and Goodwin Park to the south and thus more evenly distributed throughout the city.

Fig 1. Comparison of the relative amount of three park metrics – acreage per capita, amenities per capita, and average park condition score – by neighborhood across Hartford.

The amenities per capita metric represents playgrounds, ballfields, picnic areas, and other opportunities for residents to play, exercise, or socialize with one another. A recent study of neighborhood parks found that each amenity added to a park is associated with a 10% increase in physical activity rates and its associated health benefits, such as reduced cardiovascular disease[5]. Comparing park conditions across the city paints an even starker picture. These same centrally located parks and plazas are less likely to have maintenance needs such as broken park equipment, overgrown fields, or overflowing trash. Not to mention less likely to have anything approaching 'new.' When people in North and South Hartford visit their neighborhood park, they are more likely to encounter an unmaintained space, which represents neglect and disinvestment in their communities.

Additionally, we sought to understand if there are differences in the quality of parks based on the demographics (race/ethnicity and income) of the people who live nearby. The answer is a resounding yes (Figure 2). The 10 parks with the highest concentrations of nearby Black residents have the worst condition score – 66%. Meanwhile the 10 parks with the highest concentrations of nearby White residents scored an average 106% - meaning not only were they not likely to have a maintenance issue, but they were also likely to have new amenities. And the 10 parks with the highest concentrations of nearby Hispanic residents scored in the middle – an average of 91%. This trend was similar when comparing the 10 parks with the most and fewest low-income households.

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[5] https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP66493.html

Average Park Condition Score by Race/Ethnicity & Income

Each bar represents the average park condition score across the ten parks in Hartford that have the highest concentrations of the given race/ethnicity or income group among nearby residents.
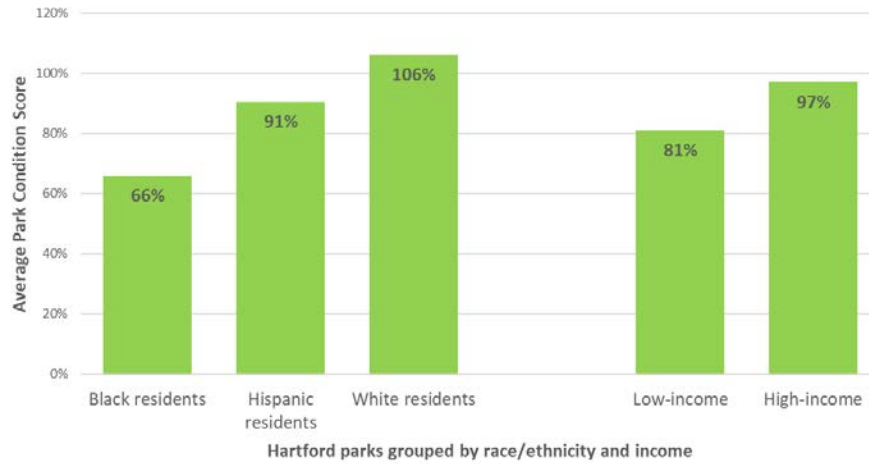
Fig 2. Comparison of average park condition scores by race/ethnicity and income among Hartford's park system.

Investing in the parks with the biggest condition needs also means investing in the communities and neighborhoods who have been historically disinvested in for so long. It means investing in the same people who are at the highest health risks. And it means investing in the youth of our future – people like Elijah and the students associated with Blue Hills Civic Association with incredible talent and motivation to make their neighborhoods better.

Part 2. Hartford ParkScore Analysis

The ParkScore® index is the most comprehensive rating system developed to measure how well the 100 largest U.S. cities are meeting the need for parks. The ParkScore index ranks cities based on five categories reflective of an excellent city park system: Acreage, Access, Investment, Amenities, and Equity. The Acreage and Access categories reflect the importance of both large 'destination' parks as well as ensuring all residents have access to a public park within a short 10-minute walk of their home. The Investment and Amenities categories reflect the importance of high-quality parks – the spending needed to maintain and program them and a wide range of activities available for multi-generational user groups. The Equity category reflects the importance of ensuring park space is fairly distributed between neighborhoods within a city.

Trust for Public Land publishes the ParkScore Index annually, ranking the 100 most populous U.S. cities. Because none of the Connecticut cities meet this population criteria, Trust for Public Land is applying the methodology to a series of Connecticut towns and cities as part of a longer-term goal to better support statewide park advocacy efforts. Hartford is the third Connecticut city to be assessed with this protocol; New Haven was assessed in 2022 and Stamford in 2023.

For each measure, points are awarded on a relative basis, based on how a city compares to the 100 most populous cities. For example, a score of 90 can be interpreted that Hartford is among the top 10% of cities for that measure. The score for each of the five categories is an average of its measures; a city's overall rating is an average of the five categories. The measures are selected to facilitate comparison across a wide range of cities; more information and detailed results can be found in the methodology section (Appendix A).

59
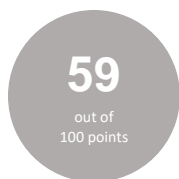
out of
100 points

Overall Score

Based on our analysis, Hartford's park system received a ParkScore rating of 59 out of a possible 100 points, indicating that it ranks slightly above average when compared to the most populous cities in the country. A strength of Hartford's park system is that 96% of its residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park (see Access Map in Data Supplement). The city ranks among the middle of the pack in terms of its amenities and park acreage, indicating that although most residents live within a walkable half-mile, there is room to increase the range of activities and space for residents to enjoy once they get to their nearby parks. This is particularly true when comparing park access between low- and high- income neighborhoods. In Hartford, residents in low-income neighborhoods have access to 46% less park space per person than those in high-income neighborhoods. This divide is even starker when comparing the availability of park activities or assessing park condition (see Park Condition Assessment for more). Perhaps the biggest opportunity to improve Hartford's park system is to increase the total investment in park and recreation facilities. After aggregating across all park agencies and organizations in the city, Hartford ranks among the bottom half of the country's most populated cities in terms of spending per resident.

In addition to comparison against the 100 most populous cities, we also used the ParkScore Index's five scoring categories to compare Hartford against two Connecticut peers – New Haven and Stamford – as well as one aspirational city in the region, Boston, MA (ranked #10 park system in the country in 2023).

Hartford's park system scored 59/100 points, slightly below New Haven at 60/100 and significantly better than Stamford's 44/100 points. Boston, the #10 park system in the nation, scored 73/100 points in 2023. Hartford's park system is very comparable to New Haven's – both cities have similar scores on four of the five categories: Acreage, Access, Equity, and Investment. However, New Haven has significantly more playgrounds and dog parks (on a per capita basis), resulting in an Amenities score nearly twice that of Hartford and giving New Haven a slight edge. Stamford scores lower than both New Haven and Hartford in terms of overall park acreage and percentage of residents within a 10-minute walk of a park. Boston sets itself apart from the Connecticut towns with its per capita park investment at nearly twice that of all Connecticut towns.
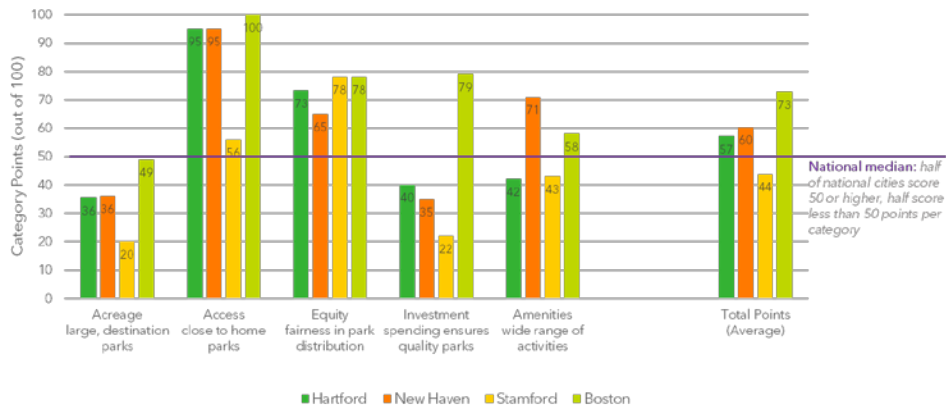
Fig 3. A comparison of Hartford's ParkScore rating relative to New Haven, Stamford, and Boston across the Index's five categories.

Acreage

44
out of
100 points

1,595 acres of parkland (14% of city area), median park size of 2.2 acres (~size of a schoolyard)
The acreage score indicates the relative abundance of large 'destination' parks, which include large natural areas that provide critical mental health as well as climate and conservation benefits. This category is scored as an average of two metrics, parkland as percentage of city area and median park size. Hartford scores above average in overall acreage (14% of city area, 71 / 100 points) and above average compared to New Haven (13% of city area) or Stamford (4%). However, Hartford scores among the lowest in the country in terms of median park size (2.2 acres, 16 / 100 points). New Haven (1.5 acres) and Stamford (3 acres) similarly score among the lowest on this metric as well. This suggests that while Hartford has a significant amount of park acreage, there is a 'missing middle' in terms of park types in the city, with relatively few neighborhood parks.

Access

95
out of
100 points

96% of Hartford residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park
The access score indicates the percentage of a city's residents that live within a walkable half-mile of a park – the average distance that most people are willing to walk to reach a destination. In Hartford, 96% of its residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, making the city one of the best in the nation in ensuring residents have access to at least one close-to-home park. This is true of many New England peers - New Haven scores similarly (96%), while Boston is at 100%. In Stamford, however, only 71% of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park.
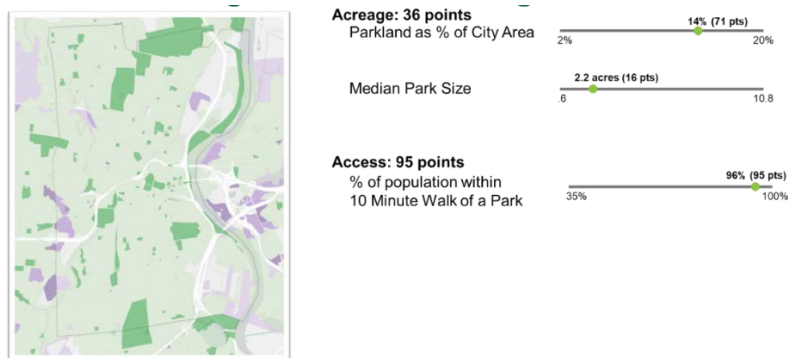

Fig 4. Comparing Hartford's Acreage and Access metrics against the 100 most populous U.S. cities.
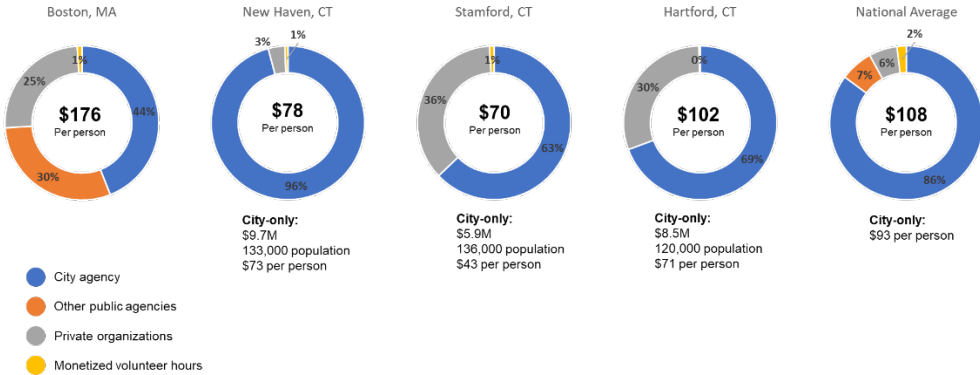
<div style="border-radius: 50%; display: inline-block;">

40
out of
100 points

</div>

Investment

An average of $102 per person is spent on parks and recreation in Hartford each year

The investment score indicates the relative financial health of a city's park system, which is essential to ensuring parks are maintained at a high level for all to enjoy and there is ample programs and staff to make residents feel welcome in their parks. This category is scored based on the total parks and recreation spending per person across all public agencies and private organizations, including monetized volunteer hours and programming. With a score of 40 points ($102 per resident per year), Hartford ranks below most cities in terms of sufficient spending to maintain its parks at a high level. Of the $102 per resident spending, $71 (69% of total) reflects spending from the city's park and recreation department[6], with the remainder reflecting volunteers and spending from private or philanthropic organizations.

This public investment in Hartford's park and recreation facilities is significantly below average among U.S. cities – its average of $71 per person spent on parks and recreation would rank Hartford 79th among the 100 biggest cities and behind New Haven. However, Hartford has strong philanthropic and private partners who provide 30% of the overall spending on parks and recreation, resulting in the combined average of $102 per person that remains slightly below average (40th percentile). Notably, there is a gap of other public agencies, such as the state, supporting park and recreation in all Connecticut towns, including Hartford.

Boston, MA — $176 Per person (44%, 30%, 25%, 1%)

New Haven, CT — $78 Per person (96%, 3%, 1%)
City-only:
$9.7M
133,000 population
$73 per person

Stamford, CT — $70 Per person (63%, 36%, 1%)
City-only:
$5.9M
136,000 population
$43 per person

Hartford, CT — $102 Per person (69%, 30%, 0%)
City-only:
$8.5M
120,000 population
$71 per person

National Average — $108 Per person (86%, 7%, 6%, 2%)
City-only:
$93 per person

- ● City agency
- ● Other public agencies
- ● Private organizations
- ● Monetized volunteer hours

Fig 5. Comparison of the mix of public and private organizations spending money on parks and recreation across Hartford and peer cities. Values reflect the three-year annual average of all spending on publicly accessible parks in the given city. The national average reflects the 100 most populous U.S. cities from ParkScore 2023.

<div style="border-radius: 50%; display: inline-block;">

44
out of
100 points

</div>

Amenities

61 basketball hoops, 0 dog parks, 36 playgrounds, 4 senior and rec centers, 10 restrooms, and 13 splashpads

The amenities score indicates the relative abundance of six park activities popular among a multi-generational cross-section of user groups (playgrounds, basketball hoops, dog parks, senior and rec centers, splashpads, and permanent restrooms)[7]. With a score of 44 points, Hartford ranks below average in terms of providing key amenities that drive the park usage necessary for residents to enjoy the full range of benefits parks can offer. Of the six amenities, Hartford ranks among the nation's best in terms of splashpads (100/ 100 points) and one of the lowest for dog parks (0) and permanent restrooms (25 / 100 points). In Connecticut, Stamford scored similarly on Amenities (43 points) while New Haven scored much higher at 71 points.

Hartford's below average amenity score reflects the relatively few structured opportunities for play or exercise among its park system, which limits its potential to improve the health of Hartford residents. This gap further reinforces the gap identified in the acreage category – a lack of neighborhood parks. In most cities, neighborhood

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[6] This analysis reflects the 2021, 2022, and 2023 fiscal years. Since then, the city has invested an additional $3M in improving its pools.

parks are the park type most associated with amenities such as sports fields, playgrounds, basketball courts, and other opportunities to increase physical activity and improve mental health.
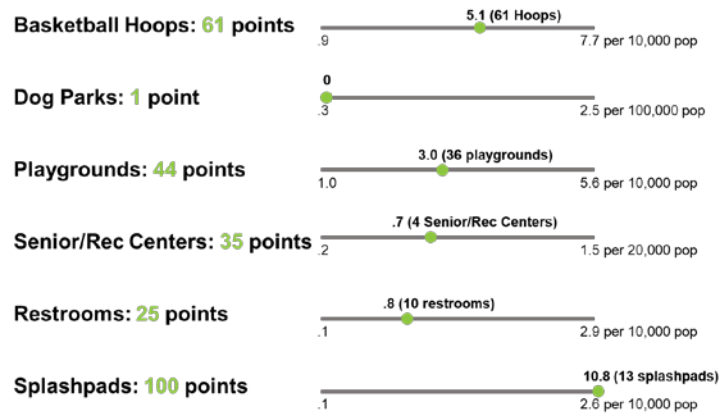
Fig 6. The Amenity category is the average score of six popular amenities, scored on a scale of 1 -100, with 100 points awarded if among the highest in the country. Hartford's scores are shown in green relative to 100 most populous U.S. cities, with value on left reflecting the lowest in the country and value on right indicating amount needed to receive 100 points for the category.

73
out of
100 points

Equity

In Hartford, 97% of people of color live within a 10-minute walk of a park; 97% of low-income households
When comparing park space per person, neighborhoods of color have 5% more than white neighborhoods and low-income neighborhoods have 46% less than high-income neighborhoods.

The equity score indicates how fairly parks and park space are distributed within a city. This category is an average of two types of metrics: 1) the percentage of people of color and low-income households within a 10-minute walk of a park and 2) a comparison of the amount of park space between neighborhoods by race and income. In Hartford, and in cities across the country, residents who identify as Black, Hispanic and Latinx, Indigenous and Native American, or Asian Americans and Pacific Islander have about the same, and in some cases better, 10-minute walk access as white residents. The same pattern holds when comparing by income. However, we know this doesn't tell the complete picture.

Hartford scores among the lowest in the country when comparing the *amount* of park space between neighborhoods by income (Table 3). Residents in low-income neighborhoods have access to 46% less park space per person than those in high-income neighborhoods, despite being equally likely of living within a park within 10-minute walk. This pattern differs when comparing neighborhoods by race/ethnicity. People who live in neighborhoods of color have access to about the same amount park space per person as those in white neighborhoods.

	% Population within 10 Minute Walk of a Park		Comparison of park acreage per person	
	People of color	*Low-income households*	*Neighborhoods of color have more/less than white neighborhoods*	*Low-income neighborhoods have more/less than high-income neighborhoods*
Hartford, CT	97%	97%	5% more	46% less
New Haven, CT	97%	98%	47% less	47% less
Stamford, CT	82%	85%	13% more	39% less
Boston, MA	100%	100%	12% less	19% less
National Average, 100 biggest cities	75%	75%	43% less	42% less

Table 3. A comparison of the four components of the Equity category among Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, and Boston.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to assess two questions: 1) what is the condition of Hartford's parks and where are the biggest needs and 2) how does Hartford's park system as a whole compare to nearby peers on a set of key measures reflective of excellent park systems. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this study was conducted in partnership with Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program to create a platform for youth living in Hartford to assess and prioritize the public spaces that influence them. When conducting prioritization studies, it is easy to focus on the problems and what is missing. Working with the students helped center Hartford's strengths and opportunities.

This study identified three core strengths within Hartford's park system:
- Hartford has a robust network of park conservancies, non-profits, and corporate entities that believe in and invest in the value of public space. This is reflected in both the number of organizations and advocates as well as the financial investment in the parks – thirty percent of all park investment in Hartford comes from private partners, which is significantly higher than New Haven (3%) or the average U.S. big city (6%) and slightly above nearby Boston (25%) and behind Stamford (36%).
- Hartford has preserved significant acreages of both large regional park space as well as ensured that there is a park within walking distance of almost every resident. Fourteen percent of the city's area is dedicated to park space, well above the national average of U.S. big cities (10%) as well as above nearby New Haven (13%) and Stamford (4%). Ninety-six percent of Hartford residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, one of the best marks in the country and similar to both New Haven (95%) and Boston (100%) and above Stamford (71%). This includes a robust network of schoolyards & privately maintained public plazas that are generally open to the public (in the case of schools, outside of school hours), maximizing the potential of public space in Hartford.
- Most importantly, the energy from the high school students participating in Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program and the dedicated advocates who volunteered to serve on this project's advisory board demonstrate the tremendous value residents of Hartford place in parks and public space and hope that they have for a better future.

The study also identified three catalytic opportunities to improve the park system and improve racial and economic disparities in park conditions that impact the overall health and climate resilience of Hartford:
- There is a clear need for a maintenance and renovation fund, primarily in North and South Hartford. The park condition assessment identified significant condition needs in parks lacking significant private support. These maintenance needs were concentrated among neighborhood parks and schoolyards, with Keney Park's condition an outlier from the relatively well-maintained regional parks.
- This paints a clear need to invest across the city in its neighborhood parks and schoolyards, which will also result in investments in the same communities of color with the longest histories of public disinvestment. Lessons can be learned from successful public/private partnerships, such as the iQuilt Partnership and Riverfront Recapture.
- Overall investment in Hartford's park system, when compared on a per capita basis, is in the bottom half of major U.S. cities. And when private spending is excluded, the city of Hartford falls to the bottom 25% of U.S. cities. This is in large part driven by a lack of either management or funding from other public agencies towards parks within the city of Hartford. As an average, about 40% of park acreage within the 100 biggest U.S. cities are managed by a public agency other than the city, such as the state or a regional entity. Support from other public agencies can occur in other ways beyond land management – such as funding support, creation of joint ventures, or programmatic partnerships.

Alongside this report, the results of the park condition assessment are available to help prioritize future investment. For prioritizing park renovation projects, a supplemental excel spreadsheet provides a) amenity counts, b) amenity condition assessments, and c) student feedback for each park in the city. For prioritizing park acquisitions, an accompanying web map tool highlights neighborhoods with the least park space in the city.

What's Next? Reflections from the Study's Partners.

Blue Hills Civic Association:

This parks assessment project was truly an eye-opening experience for our youth, but also their families and communities as a whole. Youth were able to make connections between safe and well-resourced green spaces and reductions in youth violence, improvements in community health and neighborhood building. They are using what they've learned to expand their footprint in Hartford by enjoying access to facilities they did not know existed before this project, and becoming increasingly engaged in advocacy work around community health, leveraging existing parks infrastructure to bridge the gaps between neighborhoods, make new peer-to-peer connections and remain connected to the Connecticut Green Bank to study and recommend ways to leverage green infrastructure to improve storm water management in North Hartford.

This project also exposed our youth to mapping and GIS technology which has opened new career doors in green infrastructure and sustainability. In addition to having a great time over the summer and having access to parks and recreation facilities, this project provided career exploration in hands-on ways our youth would not have otherwise had access to. Expanding minds, improving health outcomes through physical activity and access to park spaces, building inter-neighborhood connections and career exploration were all key parts of this project that will live on with our youth, their families and our community as a whole. BHCA is committed to continuing our relationship with Trust for Public Land and the Green Bank to expand on the knowledge gained through this project and improve access and engagement in Hartford's green spaces to our seniors and individuals with disabilities. This includes a new project to investigate the impact parks can have on storm water management, community and youth mental health and so much more. We are excited about the opportunities and partnerships ahead of us that were created from this project.

Trust for Public Land:

Hartford represents the third city with which TPL has conducted a ParkScore analysis, joining New Haven and Stamford. In the coming year, TPL aims to work with two additional large Connecticut cities to complete additional ParkScore analyses. This reflects an initiative to fill a significant data and advocacy gap for Connecticut's local parks – none of Connecticut's towns are large enough to be included in TPL's national ParkScore Index. These analyses will provide critical data to advocate for systematic statewide funding for local parks within our state and serve as a platform to connect various stakeholders to this initiative and to each other.

Additionally, the park condition assessment protocol developed in partnership with the Connecticut Green Bank and Blue Hills Civic Association for this project reflects the most advanced effort TPL has taken to date of systematically assessing park quality. There is considerable interest from advocates and city staff across the country to adopt the approach deployed in Hartford, and TPL looks forward to applying lessons learned from this project to other cities in Connecticut and across the country.

Connecticut Green Bank:

Together with Trust for Public Land and Blue Hills Civic Association, the Hartford ParkScore initiative was critical in identifying the opportunities, needs, and potential projects across the municipality. The Connecticut Green Bank hopes to present this data as a pathway forward in local resilience through park investment, an issue of special importance in communities like Hartford facing historic and present-day disinvestment. We see this work as ripe for corporate partnerships with community-based foundations as well as investment from other beneficiaries, spanning health care, insurance, and other private industry to improve parks as community assets. By investing in projects that enhance public health and water management, promote sustainable local community lead agriculture, conserve urban land, and improve

parks and recreation facilities, we all can foster positive environmental and social outcomes across Connecticut.

As the Green Bank expands its scope into environmental infrastructure per Connecticut Public Act 21-115, we aim to leverage public-private partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms to catalyze investment in projects that not only mitigate climate change but address long-standing disparities in public infrastructure, park care and maintenance, and community development. Furthermore, the Act's emphasis on environmental markets, including carbon offsets and ecosystem services, highlights the potential for innovative financing models that incentivize sustainable practices and create additional revenue streams for green infrastructure projects.

The Hartford ParkScore project opens avenues for investment in critical areas such as park development, stormwater management, and community revitalization. Particularly, the potential for investment in Hartford's green stormwater infrastructure, neighborhood parks, and green and healthy schoolyards across the city stand out. These investments not only address environmental concerns but also tackle historic public disinvestment. Drawing lessons from successful public-private partnerships, this collaborative effort demonstrates the potential for transformative change through strategic investment in both environmental and community infrastructure.

The students participating in Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment Program who participated in the project and visited most sites via school bus. What's next?
Photo: Blue Hills Civic Association

Appendix A: ParkScore Index Methodology & Scoring Details

To determine a city's ParkScore rating, we assign points for 14 measures across five categories: acreage, investment, amenities, access, and equity.

For each of the 14 measures, points are awarded on a relative basis, based on how a city compares to the 100 largest U.S. cities. To prevent outliers from skewing the results, the top bracket for each measure includes all values equal to more than double the median of the data range. To control distortion from local anomalies, all cities that score more than double the median value are assigned to the highest bracket. With the top bracket thus defined, the parameters for the remaining brackets are established so that each bracket comprises an equal portion of the remaining data range.

In order to accurately represent park access across large communities, open public access is the key criteria for inclusion in our database. We include a wide variety of parks, trails, and open space, so long as there is no barrier to entry. Across all five categories, including the new equity measures, large water bodies are generally excluded from any acreage calculations to better compare across the 100 cities.

Examples of parks we include:
- Publicly owned local, state, and national parks, trails, and open space
- School parks with a joint-use agreement with the local government
- Privately owned parks that are managed for full public use

Examples of parks we don't include:
- Parks in gated communities
- Private golf courses
- Private cemeteries
- School parks/playgrounds without active joint-use agreements
- Zoos, museums, professional sports stadiums

The ParkScore Index compares city park systems based on an analysis of their park assets – their size, location, and distribution; their amenities, and the investment in them. Park systems provide numerous important benefits such as improving mental health, physical health, social connections, ecosystem services, and economic vitality. Notably, these benefits are not explicitly scored as part of the Index – there is emerging research on how to best do this. However, recent analyses from TPL have found that cities with higher ParkScore ratings have better rates of physical activity and mental health as well as increased social capital. Future research can evaluate the relationship with ecosystem services and economic vitality as well as continue to inform the evolution of the Index.

Acreage: The ParkScore index awards each city up to 100 points for acreage based on the average of two equally weighted measures:
- Median park size is calculated using park inventories acquired from park-owning agencies within each city. Parks less than .1 acres are excluded.
- Parkland as a percentage of city area is calculated for all publicly accessible parkland within the city limits. We remove unpopulated railyard and airport areas from the baseline city land area.

Access: The ParkScore index awards each city up to 100 points for access based on the percentage of the population living within a 10-minute (half-mile) walk of a public park.

- For each park, a 10-minute walkable service area was created using a nationwide walkable road network dataset provided by Esri. The analysis identifies physical barriers such as highways, train tracks, and rivers without bridges and chooses routes without barriers.
- All calculated population statistics are based on 2020 US Census Block Group estimates provided by Esri.

Investment: The ParkScore index awards each city up to 100 points for investment in its park system based on a three-year average of total spending per resident (capital, acquisition, maintenance, programming, and administrative). This figure is a sum of the following: public spending, nonprofit spending, and monetized volunteer hours.

Amenities: The ParkScore index awards each city up to 100 points for the availability of six key park amenities on a per capita basis: Basketball hoops, Off-leash dog parks, Playgrounds, Recreation and senior centers, Restrooms, Splashpads and spray grounds.

Equity: The ParkScore index awards each city up to 100 points for equity based on the average of four equally weighted measures that compare the availability of nearby park space between neighborhoods within a city:
- On a per person basis, ratio of nearby public park space between neighborhoods of color and white neighborhoods
- On a per person basis, ratio of nearby public park space between low-income neighborhoods and high-income neighborhoods
- Percentage of people of color living within a 10-minute (half-mile) walk of a public park
- Percentage of low-income households living within a 10-minute (half-mile) walk of a public park

Nearby park space per person measures the available park space within a 10-minute walk of a micro-neighborhood (census block group, which is about 1,000 people), identified as those with the highest concentrations of people of color or white population and high-income or low-income households. The metrics for people and neighborhoods of color reflect each of the Census-designated race/ethnicity groups: Black, Hispanic, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, multiple races, and other communities of color.

Appendix B: Park Condition Methodology and Scoring Details

Precedent

Trust for Public Land's park condition score methodology was developed to accomplish three things: 1) facilitate comparison between parks to help prioritize needs (i.e. is quantifiable), 2) can be replicated by different assessors (i.e. the assessment questions are 'yes/no' rather than a self-rating), and 3) captures the essence of how the public perceives park conditions in the simplest set of questions possible (i.e. is relatively short). It was not developed to provide a holistic measure of park quality, which would reflect additional factors beyond condition such as amenity types, programming, quality of natural experiences, etc.

The park condition score methodology is adapted from the [protocol developed and used by the City/County of San Francisco](#) for the past decade. Every quarter, over 200 city employees from the City Auditor's Office and Department of Parks & Recreation visit an assigned park to assess it on 200+ yes/no metrics that can be grouped into the three categories utilized here: cleanliness needs, maintenance issues, and broken equipment. The park's overall score is based on the percentage of 'yeses.' This approach has enabled the city to demonstrate a measurable improvement in park system condition over the years, which has helped justify increased public funding of maintenance needs. It also allows them to assess for inequities and prioritize park improvement projects.

Data Collection

The park assessments were conducted by high school students participating in the Blue Hills Civic Association's Summer Youth Employment program during July and August 2023. On weekday mornings, the students split into groups of 4-5 with each group visiting 1-4 parks.

The survey asked students to primarily do two things: 1) count the number of park features and 2) assess the condition of those features. The students could complete the survey via a mobile application or paper-based survey. The survey questions are included as an appendix. If the group felt unsafe in any way, they did not assess the park and reported the safety concern.

Trust for Public Land provided training on the assessment protocol and jointly conducted a test assessment at Riverfront Park in Glastonbury, CT. Riverfront Park also provided a chance for students to see what a highly resourced park looks like as a benchmark for comparing parks throughout Hartford during their assessments.

Park Condition Score

Each park's condition score is calculated based upon the percentage of park features (e.g., playgrounds, ballfields) in need of clean-up, maintenance, or replacement. Fifteen common park feature types were assessed across all parks within Hartford: Sport fields & ball diamonds, basketball courts, other sport courts (e.g. tennis), walking loops & tracks, playgrounds, splashpads, fitness/exercise stations, off-leash dog areas, picnic shelters, open restroom facilities, natural features, waste receptacles, signage, and water fountains.

For each park feature type, assessors make a 'yes' or 'no determination on the following three criteria, with an additional option to identify if a park feature is in 'like new' condition (Figure 1):
- Are there cleanliness needs (e.g., overflowing trash, graffiti)?
- Are there maintenance issues (e.g., cracked playing surface; varies by feature)?
- Are there broken equipment or unplayable surfaces?

This determination is made once for each 'type' of feature. For example, if there are multiple playgrounds, it only takes one of the playgrounds to have maintenance needs in order for the playground feature type to receive a 'yes' for maintenance issues.

| Broken/ Unusable | Maintenance issues | Cleanliness needs |

Figure 1. Examples of park features that would receive a 'yes' for each of the three respective condition criteria (missing swings, weeds growing in cracks in the court, and graffiti across the walls).

A park's condition score is calculated by translating these assessments into points. Each feature type starts with 3 points and is docked 1 point for each 'yes' determination and can gain a bonus point if there is a 'like new' feature. The maximum points any feature type can receive is 4 / 3 points, while the minimum is 0 / 3 points. The park's overall condition score is calculated by averaging the scores across all feature types. These condition scores can then be averaged for variables of interest, such as by neighborhood, by park type, by demographics served, etc.

For example, the park shown in Figure 2 has 2 diamonds, 1 playground, and 2 basketball courts. The diamonds have no condition issues, so accrue 3/3 points. The playground is brand new and accrues 4/3 points. One of the basketball courts is missing a hoop, so loses a point because that's a 'yes' on broken equipment, and scores 2/3 points. The park's overall condition score is 9/9 points, or 100%.
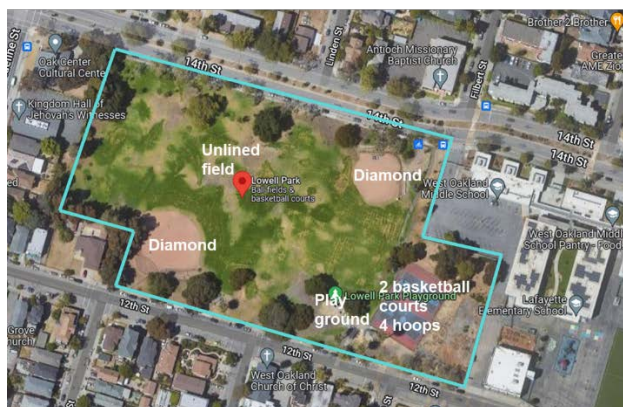
Example:

Fields/Diamonds: 3 / 3 points
Playground: 4 / 3 points
Basketball Courts: 2 / 3 points

Park Condition Score:
9 / 9 points = 100%

Figure 2. Example of a park condition score calculation.

Park Assessment Rating & Qualitative Feedback
In addition to assessing the condition of each park feature type, assessors were asked to score each park based upon the following question:
- On a scale of 0 - 10, with 10 being 'extremely likely', how likely would you be to recommend this park to a friend or colleague?

This self-assessment rating provides an alternate approach to assessing park quality. While it provides an opportunity to capture the 'appeal' of the park activities as opposed to only the condition, it has wider variance in scores depending on who does the rating. For the purposes of this study, these ratings provide insight into the perspectives of the perspectives of Hartford high school students associated with Blue Hills Civic Association.

Additionally, the assessors were asked to explain 'why' they gave their score and had the opportunity to provide additional written feedback on the following questions:
- Are there any additional [recreational, social or cultural, natural] park features that were not captured above? If so, please describe.
- In one sentence, what stands out to you as the most notable feature of this park?
- Are there any major damages, issues, or safety concerns that should be shared with the city's staff?
- Anything else to share?