Benchmark Parks

Introduction

• Benchmarking is a practice to establish points of reference against which the Colorado Springs Historic Downtown Parks may be compared or assessed.

• Research into a selection of parks with similarities to Colorado Springs Historic Downtown Parks (Acacia, Antlers and Alamo Square Parks) is useful as a point of reference (as mentioned above), to ground recommendations for park changes, and inspire new approaches.

• The criteria used to select a handful of benchmark parks includes:
  o Similar Size: Roughly a sq. block aka about two acres
  o Located in a downtown with some similarities to Colorado Springs (workforce, tourism, industries, population size, issues)
  o Changes to older parks has led to success in increasing park users and supporting downtown activity
  o Park features and activities are feasible (cost of improvements is not overly ambitious) and logical to CS Historic Parks.
  o The park as a whole is a useful reference, rather than an individual feature or activity in the park (individual features will also be collected for study and inspiration).

• Parks selected can be seen below:

Rosa Parks Circle (Grand Rapids, MI) ........................................................................................................... 2
Republic Square (Austin, TX) ......................................................................................................................... 6
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Rosa Parks Circle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City Population (Year)</th>
<th>Site Size</th>
<th>Year of Renovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids, MI</td>
<td>188,040 (2010)</td>
<td>3.5 acres</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Location

History of the park:
The space has been synonymous with the heart of Grand Rapids for over 150 years - first as Grab Corners, later as Campau Square. Rosa Parks Circle used to be the Monroe Mall Amphitheater, as part of a pedestrian mall built in 1980 from Grand Rapid’s main street (formed in the mid-1800s). The mall was converted back to a road with vehicular traffic in 1997, with the Rosa Parks Circle added in 2000.

Why is this a good case study?
The project has dramatically transformed the city’s urban core, drawing year-round crowds at lunch hour, in the evening, and on weekends. It also provides a civic gathering place for concerts, a farmers’ market, polka dancing and many other community activities.

The redesign has been a profound success and serves as a defining example of reinvention. The plaza has been credited with helping to activate the surrounding neighborhood by spurring redevelopment and drawing in restaurants, galleries, and shops, as well as an important institutional anchor — the Grand Rapids Art Museum. Rosa Parks Circle now provides a much-needed central public space for year-round community events such as cultural festivals, weekly dance classes, ice skating, and even public viewings of the Olympics.
## Relevant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Number of Annual Visitors</strong></th>
<th>~ 721,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum capacity</strong></td>
<td>15,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Design Features
- 13,000 sq/ft oval amphitheater- Maya Lin experiential public art piece “Ecliptic”
- Amphitheater converts to Ice skating rink (from Nov 23- Feb 24. 5,000 skaters annually)
- Mist fountain
- Table of flowing water
- Restroom
- Lighting for evening use and fiber optic art display
- Public seating

### Events/programmed activities
- 220 days of events and programming
- Music concerts
- Ethnic festivals
- Community dancing
- Public viewings of the Olympics and sports events
- Food trucks
- Oversized yard games
- Daily activities (Zumba, dance classes, tai chi, lunch concert series etc.)

### Cost of recent renovation/project
$4-8 million in redevelopment costs were covered by public and private funds, including significant contributions by the Frey Foundation ($3 million) and DDA. Bigger investments have been paid by an endowment, which is $1.5 million. Grand Rapids Community Foundation also provides endowments for the park.

### Maintenance costs
$200,000 annual maintenance (2018) for 0.5 maintained acres.

Considering repairs and upgrades to this 20-year-old park due to greater visitation than anticipated are planned to begin in early 2020. [Link](https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2018/01/hold_lead_donors_behind_rosa_p.html)

The park’s architect, Maya Lin, has very specific design standards which are costing the park thousands in maintenance costs for replacement tables. And this is written into the maintenance agreement with the city. [Link](https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2012/07/why_replacement_tables_for_ros.html)

### Operator/Partnerships
Owned and operated by the city of Grand Rapids parks department. Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. assists with event and activity programming. Considering moving to a conservancy model for management. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks Group

### Rating/Success
4.5/5 stars with about 2,000 Google reviews

Rosa Parks Circle was named one of 5 Great Public Spaces in America by the American Planning Association in 2017.
Images
Other:

- https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Departments/Parks-and-Recroation/Rosa-Parks-Circle-Ice-Rink
- http://www.qrpartners.com/project/rosa-parks-circle/
**Republic Square**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City Population (Year)</th>
<th>Site Size</th>
<th>Year of Renovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td>964,254 (2018)</td>
<td>2.3 acres (curb to curb)</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Location:**

**History of the park:**
Republic Square was established as one of the four public squares and embedded into the fabric of downtown Austin as part of its original grid. The square was identified with and used by residents in the largely Mexican-American neighborhood that was then located west and south of the square.

**Why is this a good case study?**
- “Acknowledgement of the history of the site and other plans that will influence this process such as Phase One and surrounding neighborhood plans;
- Enhancement of the connections – cultural, physical, historical, artistic, emotional, ecological, and economic;
- Comparability to other outstanding, urban, destination parks (and where possible surpass existing case studies);
- Ability to pay for implementation;
- Ability to financially support on-going operations and maintenance.”  
  (Source: Design Workshop Project Thesis)
### Relevant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Number of Annual Visitors</strong></th>
<th>Was x prior to 2016 renovation. 2018 was x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum capacity</strong></td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Design Features
- Public Art
- Native Landscaping
- Full-service café
- 17,625 sq. ft. central lawn
- Promenade

#### Events/programmed activities
- Farmer’s Market
- 20 private events a year
- Yoga in the park
- Summer movies in the park

#### Cost of recent renovation/project
- $3,212,292 (2015 dollars)
- = $1.4 M per acre or $33/sf (Source: Design Workshop)

Austin Parks Foundation raised $3.3 million towards the $5.9 million to build the park and established $1 million endowment.

#### Maintenance costs
- First-year operating budget was $730,942

Revenue is generated by renting portions of the park out.

#### Operator/Partnerships
- Park is managed/operated/programmed by the nonprofit Downtown Austin Alliance, but the redesign was in partnership with the City of Austin and Austin Parks Foundation.

Staffed daily from 6am-10pm by Downtown Austin Alliance ambassadors to keep park/restrooms clean and answer visitor questions.

#### Rating/Success
- 4.4 stars with about 850 Google reviews
- 2018 Best Public Place from ULI Impact Awards
Images:

Other:

- https://www.republicsquare.org/about
Historic Market Square Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City Population (Year)</th>
<th>Site Size</th>
<th>Year Renovated</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>2,099,451 (2010)</td>
<td>1.5 acres</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Location**
Downtown Houston near the Theater District. Bounded by Travis, Milam, Congress and Preston Streets. It is a central feature of the historic district.

**History of the park:**
The square was donated to the city in 1854 by Augustus Allen and used as an open-air produce market. Very near Allen's Landing, the original port of Houston, the downtown business district grew around the square. Early city landmarks included the briefly used Texas Capitol and White House. In addition, several City Halls rose and fell at Market Square, each destroyed by fire. In the mid '60s and early '70s Market Square was Houston’s soul – full of the day’s hottest nightclubs and restaurants and the place to be for visiting celebrities such as Liza Minnelli and Johnny Carson. The Junior League of Houston campaigned for the space’s revival in the mid '70s, turning the parking lot into a green space. Not long after, in the late 1980s, the art non-profit, DiverseWorks coordinated a renovation of Market Square Park, planting local artists’ work throughout the space. And while the oil bust of the '80s and the demolition of some of its most beloved historic buildings left the square almost forgotten for years, it is making a real comeback today.

**Why is this a good case study?**
The park is a destination element for tourists, preserves the park’s historic roots, and celebrates local public art. There is an interpretation of history that allows the visitor to follow a black granite band through the park for a tour through history. There is also a dog park, garden space, restaurant areas, and a fountain.
## Relevant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Annual Visitors</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Design Features
- Greek-American Restaurant
- Handwashing Station
- Seating
- Off-leash dog park
- History walk throughout park
- Contemplative garden
- Public art
- Lots of lighting
- Seating throughout and along edge

### Events/programmed activities
- Fitness classes
- Concerts (large and small)
- Large civic events (i.e. Super Bowl Celebration and small parades)

### Cost of recent renovation/project
Funded via Downtown Redevelopment Authority through tax increment dollars

### Maintenance costs
Partnership between the City, Downtown Redevelopment Authority and Downtown District (who is responsible for management and programming)

### Rating/Success
4.5/5 starts with over 1,260 Google reviews

2011 Good Brick Award for enhancement of Houston’s cultural heritage
Images:

Other:
- https://www.pps.org/projects/houston-market-square
- https://www.marketsquarepark.com/
**Campus Martius**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City Population (Year)</th>
<th>Site Size</th>
<th>Year Renovated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td>672,662 (2016)</td>
<td>1.2 acres</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Location**

The park is located at the intersection of Woodward Avenue and Michigan Avenue, four blocks south of Grand Circus Park. The park is also where the point of origin of Detroit’s coordinate system is located.

**History of the park:**
The original park covered several acres and was a major gathering area for citizens. The park was lost in the 1900s as the city’s downtown was reconfigured to accommodate increased vehicular traffic. Hart Plaza, along the riverfront, was designed to replace Campus Martius as a point of importance. But as Hart Plaza is a primarily hard-surfac ed area, many residents came to lament the lack of true park space in the city’s downtown area. This led to calls to rebuild Campus Martius, the site of the Civil War-era Michigan Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument. The new Campus Martius Park was dedicated November 19, 2004.

**Why is this a good case study?**
When Campus Martius Park opened in 2004, people started coming back downtown for concerts, outdoor movies, the ever-changing flower gardens, dates at the park cafe, or simply to sit and relax by the fountain. More than 500 events, ranging from the Detroit International Jazz Festival to movies and live theatre shows for kids, are held throughout the warmer months. The park’s popularity extends throughout the year. The ice rink is open—and crowded—125 days a year. Campus Martius is the Detroit area’s signature downtown public space, as Rockefeller center is to New York City. The park is has indeed delivered on its promise to be Detroit’s “gathering place” and is now recognized internationally.
# Relevant Information

## Number of Annual Visitors

In 2004 it had 750,000+ visitors and has attracted more than 1 million per year since. In 2018, there were actually more than 2 million visitors. Visitors range from nearby office employees to suburban residents coming to the park due to its destination element.

## Maximum capacity

20,000

## Design Features

- Dining options
- Plaza gifted in 2018 by Edsel B. Ford
- Monuments
- Movable chairs
  - Not one of the parks 1,500 chairs has been stolen since the park opened, demonstrating that a well-used space discourages crime (as of 2008).
- Artistic seating
- Gardens
- Two retractable stages

## Events/programmed activities

- 500+ events a year in 2006. In 2018 there was 1,500+ events.
- Ice rink open 125+ days a year
- Meditation/yoga events
- Concerts on stage
- Food trucks
- Movie nights

## Cost of recent renovation/project

$20 million (in 2004 dollars). The Detroit 300 Conservancy contributed $8 million, Compuware and Ford also contributed $8 million, and the rest was covered by the city.

However, altogether, 2.24 million square feet of new or renovated space has opened or is under construction on the lots fronting Campus Martius. $454 million has been spent on the new buildings, with multimillion-dollar projects still underway (as of 2008).

## Maintenance costs

Owned by the City of Detroit and managed by Detroit 300 Conservancy (non-profit). In 2009, the Conservancy became a subsidiary of the Downtown Detroit Partnership. Downtown Detroit Parks operates through private funding secured by Downtown Detroit Partnership and support from the City, which provides support, public safety and special event services.

## Rating/Success

- First-ever winner of prestigious, international Urban Land Institute Urban Open Space Award (2010)
- 2006 named one of the Top 10 Urban Parks by ULI
- 2010 designated a Great Place in the Great Lakes States
- 4.7/5 stars with 3,000+ Google reviews
Images

Other:

- [http://downtowndetroitparks.com/parks/Campus-Martius](http://downtowndetroitparks.com/parks/Campus-Martius)
- [https://www.pps.org/projects/campusmartius](https://www.pps.org/projects/campusmartius)
**Hemming Park**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City Population (Year)</th>
<th>Site Size</th>
<th>Year Renovated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacksonville, FL</td>
<td>892,062 (2017)</td>
<td>1.5 acres</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Location**
Downtown Jacksonville.

**History of the park:**
Land for the public square – identified in Isaiah Hart’s original plans for Jacksonville – was sold to the city in 1866 by Hart’s heirs, for a price of $10. In 1869 two major hotels were built across from the park, making the park a gateway into downtown. The park, originally known as “City Park,” was renamed after Charles C. Hemming who installed various monuments in the park before moving to Colorado Springs, CO. The park was the cultural and social center of the city for years and is the site of many presidential speeches and civil rights demonstrations. During the 1970s, the park faced a major shift away from being the hub of commerce and the public meeting place for citizens from all walks of life. Due to both a failed idea of a pedestrian mall and the removal of shade trees due to the invasion of thousands of starlings, Hemming Park was converted into a concrete paved plaza. However, the implementation of the downtown pedestrian mall never occurred due to suburbanization and all the city’s big retailers left downtown. The now empty storefronts attracted unwanted behaviors and the park fell into disrepair. After more than thirty years, investment started coming back to downtown in the form of new public investment. In 2014 the City of Jacksonville entered into a public-private agreement with a nonprofit, Friends of Hemming Park, to manage and program the park. This came after nearly two years of discussion between City Council members about how to address homelessness resulting in banning card games and removing all benches, tables and chairs in the park.

**Why is this a good case study?**
This is a downtown park that is impacted by those experiencing homelessness. In its original glory was the gateway to Jacksonville and the doormat to several hotels. Operations and maintenance are a major concern for this park. The park has been successful with working with the library across the street, as well as other organizations like the nearby art museum to create an Art Walk every Wednesday night. Their funding is very minimal and is through small improvements, grants, volunteers and donations.
Instead of focusing on construction, placemaking projects were implemented along with scheduled amenities and programming. Significant improvements continue to be made, including friendly and visible ambassadors and dedicated security, the addition of two stages for entertainment, moveable tables and chairs, an open-air outdoor seating area, and a concentrated effort to soften some of the park’s hard spaces in the park, which have remained unchanged for 30 years.

**Relevant information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Annual Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum capacity</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Hemming Café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Imagination Playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Two fountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stage area (three total stages of varying sizes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events/programmed activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Annual events include: Hispanic Heritage Celebration, Black History Celebration and Holidays in Hemming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brew fests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Music series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Food trucks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Kids zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Art walks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Yoga in the park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Civic rallies/events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost of recent renovation/project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1.2 million initially ($1 million from city and $250,000 from Friends group in form of private donations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 2016 Jacksonville City Council approved $100,000 for the Friends group which would cover operations and maintenance costs for four months. O&amp;M costs are about $29,000 a month (in 2016 dollars).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 a month on security to enforce rules and deter nuisance activity in 2016, now there are ambassadors that fill this role.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operator/Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managed by Friends of Hemming Park through a public-private partnership with the city. Friends of Hemming Park is supported by Downtown Vision, Inc. and the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Friends group often receives grants, such as a $100,000 Heart of Community grant from Southwest Airlines in conjunction with the Project for Public Spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating/Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2/5 stars on Google with over 1,100 reviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Images
Other

- [http://hemmingpark.org/park-history/](http://hemmingpark.org/park-history/)
- [https://www.jacksonville.com/photogallery/LK/20160106/PHTOGALLERY/301069909/PH/1](https://www.jacksonville.com/photogallery/LK/20160106/PHTOGALLERY/301069909/PH/1)