

Preferred Alternatives Digital Open House

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The following are some of the common questions posed during the digital open house. Please see answers below and thank you for your feedback and interest in this project.

Question	Answer and Response Point Support
<p><i>Why is the city spending money on this project now? Why is this effort relevant in the face of budget challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic?</i></p>	<p>The world has changed since we started this project, with COVID-19 requiring we present digitally rather than at a public meeting. However, in this time we are experiencing a renewed appreciation from the community for the important purposes of city parks and the health benefits of taking a walk and spending time in a natural setting. We anticipate public gathering and the activities urban parks support will again be possible.</p> <p>The master plan project lays out a vision for the parks that will be refined over time, and is not spending new general fund dollars in this COVID-19 time. The work we are doing now is the final stage of a year's worth of park planning and outreach, and is prioritized because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The 2014 Park System Master Plan identified the downtown parks as priorities for improvements. ▪ These parks are 150 years old and their locations were intentionally chosen to serve as hubs and connectors of the city. ▪ Colorado Springs has increased in population and the downtown is anticipated to grow and redevelop. Visitation to Colorado Springs has also been on the rise and increased use will put pressure on our urban parks to be many things to many people. ▪ Improvements are a long time coming for these parks. A small amount of money has been spent on their improvements over the years. ▪ We lag behind other cities in what our urban parks have to offer. ▪ Without raising taxes, this past year the voters approved Issue 2B retaining \$7 million of revenue (\$30 per household) above the TABOR cap received by the city in 2018, and to use it to address the safety and quality of parks throughout our city including; Acacia, Alamo, Antlers, and 10 other parks and trails. These dollars will be a great start to begin the improvements in these three parks.
<p><i>When are these plans construction expected to take place/be completed?</i></p>	<p>Based on use of current funding from the 2018 TABOR retention, a start of restoration efforts is targeted to begin in 2020-2021, with a goal of seeing some improvements in place for the city's Sesquicentennial Celebration. However, these Master Plans set a vision and are followed by final design plans which then can bring forward transformative improvements over a five to ten year period dependent on funding, community support, and partnerships.</p>

<p><i>What are the plans for the downtown parks urban tree canopy?</i></p>	<p>Since the parks' founding, the community has appreciated the tree canopy in these parks and its many benefits. Park protectors have replaced trees over time and made changes in planting plans. Acacia Park lost most of its trees to Dutch Elm disease in 1975, replacing the losses with other tree species. As the community responses attest, trees are vitally important in an urban environment, providing wildlife habitat, shade and water quality benefits. The vision in the master plan encourages further work on a tree succession plan to ensure each park has shady lawns and healthy trees over time.</p> <p>As a preliminary step to laying the foundation for a future tree succession plan, building off of the drafted Urban Forestry Management Plan the team worked with the City Forester to identify trees in the park that are in poor condition or are ash trees that may be threatened by the Emerald Ash Borer in the next 10+ years. Regardless of any physical changes to the parks, a succession plan for the approach to protect or replace threatened Ash trees (an annual, costly maintenance expense) and other trees in poor health is a master plan recommendation. The plans also preserve historically significant trees in the park (e.g., a stately "grandfather" American Elm in Antlers Park) and each design has a no net tree loss as a design performance metric. Furthermore, the park master plans envision more shade in the streetscapes surrounding these parks.</p>
<p><i>Does this plan propose replacing green spaces with concrete plazas?</i></p>	<p>The design team took direction from the alternative plans evaluation by the public and developed the preferred alternatives with minimal plaza areas and an emphasis on enhancing and sustaining vegetation/green spaces on the site. This is balanced with the other priority expressed by the public of encouraging more community events and activity in the parks.</p> <p>The preferred alternative for Alamo Square Park shows an 8% increase in pervious surfaces (a surface that allows water to pass through such as lawn, shrub beds, and etc.) in part because lawn and trees replace a section of Vermijo Street paving. Antler's preferred alternative plan shows an approximate 6% reduction in the amount of pervious surface in order to gain wider connected walkways. Replacing Acacia's temporary ice rink with a permanent facility is the most significant contributor to an overall 12% reduction in pervious surfaces on the site. Additionally, some hardscape improvements are required to bring all the parks up to the guidelines set out in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA).</p> <p>With the downtown population growing, the parks will see more use and wear and tear on grassy areas. Additionally, lawns require a high degree of watering and maintenance so a balance between surfacing is needed to provide shaded lawns, preserve our precious water resources and provide durable spaces that can hold up to increased use. There are several areas in the parks that use alternative surfaces like permeable paving in order to provide the benefits of water infiltration, lower maintenance than traditional lawns and hold up to increased foot traffic.</p>

	<p>The uses of gathering, celebrating events, relaxing in the parks, listening to concerts have been consistent over the last 150 years in these downtown parks. However, at the turn of the 20th century these parks were serving a citywide population of 21,000 residents, compared to 668,000 residents today and thousands more projected to live and work in downtown. Respectfully creating focused areas of high-use and more durable surfacing is a responsible choice to protect these parks.</p>
<p><i>Will these parks feel/be safer in the future?</i></p>	<p>Welcome and improved safety is a guiding principle for the park master plans. Greater levels of positive use of a park, known as “encouraging park activation” is linked in national research to perceptions of security. Additionally, the larger the percentage of park visitors involved in positive activities, the more likely that anti-social behavior is deterred. A high level of enthusiasm has been expressed by the public for the ideas explored in this process. Knowing what encourages a diversity of Colorado Springs residents to use these parks has guided the park plan designs.</p> <p>What is required to create and maintain safer park spaces is an integrative strategy involving design, programming, maintenance, social services and citizen involvement. Currently, the Colorado Springs Downtown Partnership contracts, and the City helps to fund, a locally owned private security company to cover the Business Improvement District, including Acacia Park. The preferred alternative plans primarily represent park design and programming components, although many conversations with maintenance staff, law enforcement, and public service providers have informed the designs and recommendations for implementing these plans document strategies for these topics.</p> <p>Research on design and programming aspects that contribute to greater safety in parks throughout North America was reviewed to inform the plan designs. Some of the findings on improved safety that influenced these plans include: access and visibility of restrooms, lighting, controlling access to child play areas, including a number of diverse recreation and activity facilities, maintenance of park amenities catering to children and young adults, promoting regular program offerings in the park, reclaiming underutilized park features, and durable materials for high maintenance standards.</p>
<p><i>Is there room in these parks for more traditional, passive recreation as well as the active areas?</i></p>	<p>The master plan proposes to preserve the existing passive recreation (walking, sitting, picnicking, horticultural displays) areas and build on the success of current active recreation and historic use of the park for social gatherings. For example, no new activity is proposed in Acacia, only building on the success of current activities to improve their function (ice skating, playground, story coffee, games, bandshell, and booths for events). Additional seating is also proposed in all the parks to accommodate passive recreation.</p> <p>The master plan calls out flexible areas that can be used for temporary events, but the designs also preserve spaces for everyday activity. The 1994 Acacia Park Master Plan notes that concessions are considered a positive</p>

	<p>park amenity and an essential way to support the visitors in the park and that park events deter undesirable activities from occurring in the park. This theme has continued as Story Coffee and Uncle Wilber Fountain were indicated in recent surveys as some of people’s favorite features of these parks. The purpose for activation of these urban parks is not to become a commercial entertainment venue, but to draw people in and gain appreciation from more residents for the many purposes these parks serve, including a place in the city to enjoy nature or respite. Input from the public process identified these parks as significantly underutilized and safety and security were the highest rated needs. Providing for active recreation and temporary event space helps to address these current challenges.</p>
<p><i>What about the homeless that utilize these parks?</i></p>	<p>Homelessness is a more complex challenge which the parks cannot solve alone, but with partnerships and appropriate management strategies these parks can be a place for everyone. The 2019 City of Colorado Springs Homeless Initiative set forth short term and attainable goals as a response to homelessness to address immediate needs, quickly connect people to housing, and provide services to ensure long-term stability. The Pikes Peak Continuum of Care, the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), security providers and other community resources were consulted and involved in the creation of these park master plans. Seven categories of what parks and recreation providers consider in creating strategies for managing their parks with the intent of being welcoming and serving everyone were addressed: planning and design process; park policy considerations; design features; program offerings; enforcement response; maintenance; and building public buy-in. It is difficult to balance the diverse needs of many different groups, with a need to deter behaviors that threaten others safety.</p>
<p><i>How do these parks preserve the historic character of the parks? What is planned for the Acacia Bandshell?</i></p>	<p>In the founding of Colorado Springs, General William Palmer proclaimed that “[The parks] shall be so maintained that the <u>greatest benefit and enjoyment</u> thereof may be obtained by all the people.” This has been a touchstone for the master plan development as we’ve looked at how the parks have changed over time and what historic elements have been preserved with integrity. For example, Antler’s Park has changed significantly with the addition of the 4-story parking garage on the east of the park. Originally these parks had cattle fences and more cows than people - now that’s historic!</p> <p>The Acacia Park bandshell is the feature we have heard the most about from public comments, with an even mix of people wanting it to remain as it is for its history and aesthetic attributes and those that would like a more functional bandshell so that it is used for its intended purpose. In 1908 General Palmer noted that concerts held every summer made Acacia the most used and popular of all the City parks, and thus recommended a band stand be erected. The current bandshell erected in 1914 has had little change over the years. It also has received low use for concerts or other community activities for decades. Consultations with performers and event hosts noted many functional limitations that deter use and suggest an open-air stage with improved lighting, acoustics, electrical and sound support, and weather protections.</p>

A 1970 and a 1994 Master Plans for Acacia Park both questioned the bandshell's functionality, noting substandard aspects that limited its use. The 1994 plan proposed replacement with a larger stage that could be secured at night and included acoustic functions along with expanding the restrooms. A more modest approach was implemented from the 1994 recommendations including 'rounding off' the band shell to better match the original stage built in 1893, removal of steps fronting the shell and replacing with planters, and replacing the cement viewers slab with sod.

This master plan calls for a future structural feasibility study of the bandshell to determine whether renovation or replacement makes the most sense.