

# PARKS MATTER TO *Detroiters*









INTRODUCTION

*Land use* is extremely important to your life in Detroit. It influences your health, mobility, security, employment, and fun. We are currently at a critical point in city land use and there are big decisions to make. **You have the *power* to shape what happens in your neighborhood.** All of the elements outlined below are connected.

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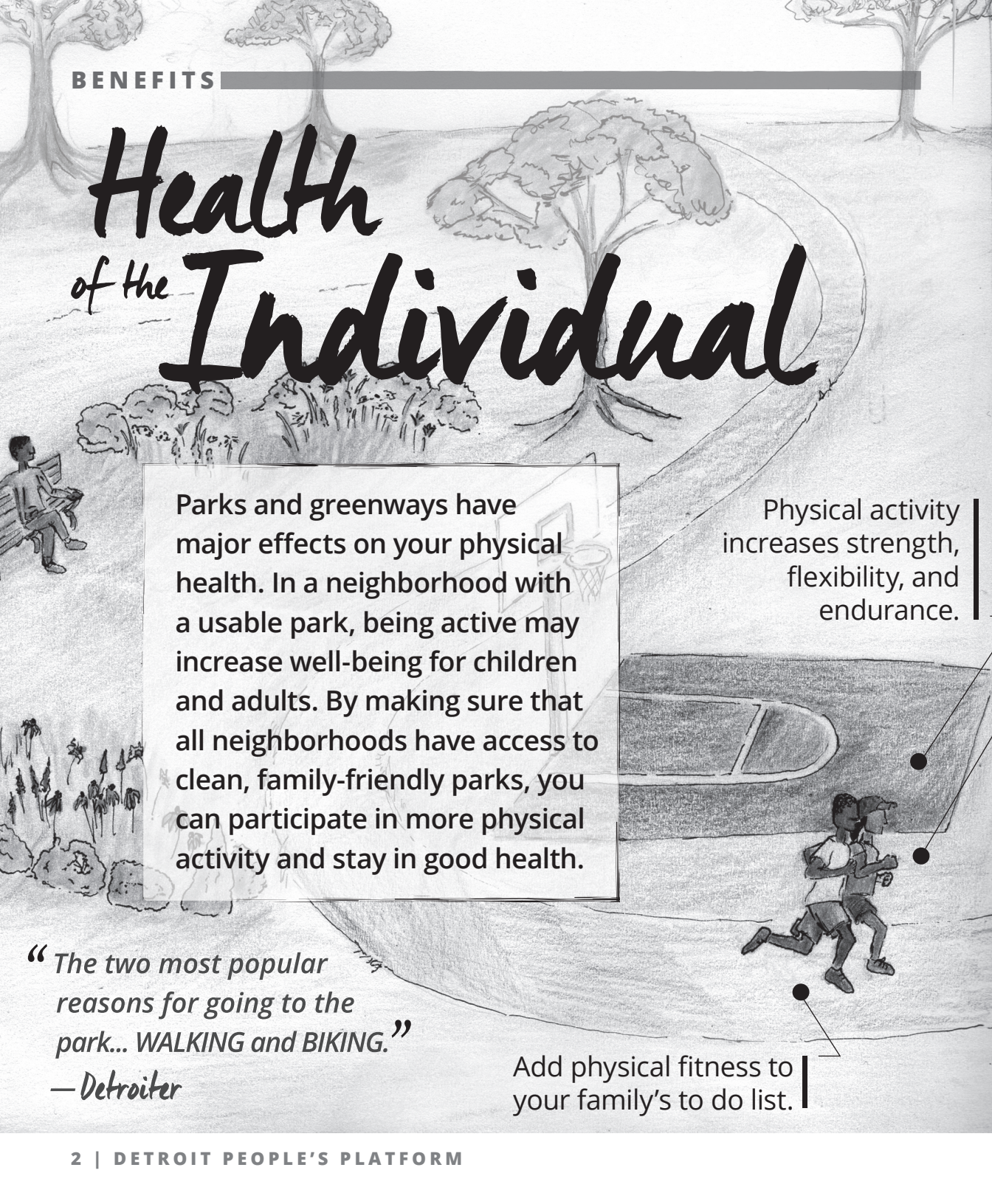
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# Health of the Individual



Parks and greenways have major effects on your physical health. In a neighborhood with a usable park, being active may increase well-being for children and adults. By making sure that all neighborhoods have access to clean, family-friendly parks, you can participate in more physical activity and stay in good health.

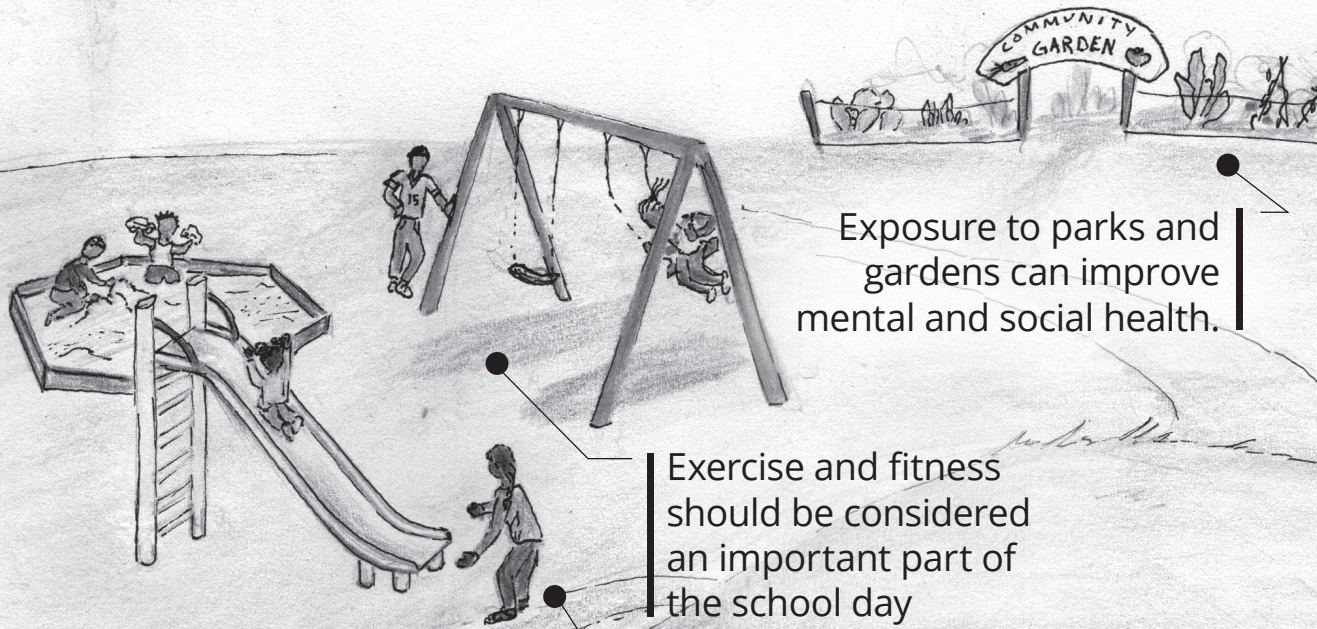
Physical activity increases strength, flexibility, and endurance.

*“The two most popular reasons for going to the park... WALKING and BIKING.”*

*— Detroiters*

Add physical fitness to your family's to do list.



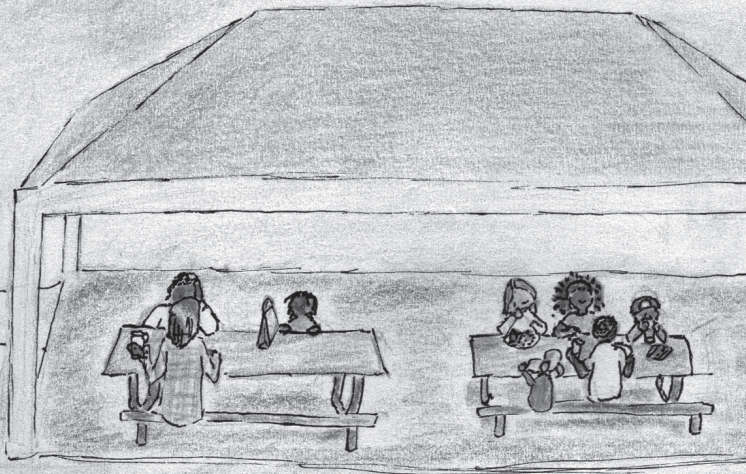


Exposure to parks and gardens can improve mental and social health.

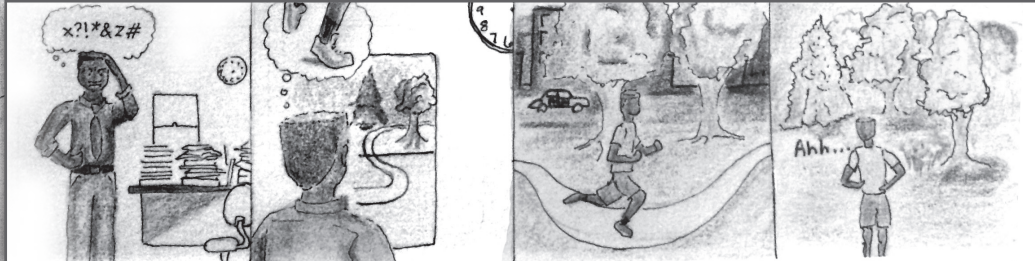
Exercise and fitness should be considered an important part of the school day

After taking part in activities in green settings, children concentrate better on schoolwork.

Being active relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety.



### *A park can transform your mood*





# Health of the Neighborhood.

Public parks are especially important to children, families, and the health of a neighborhood. A place where kids can play outside, have fun, make friends from the neighborhood, is valuable. Parks are a common place for residents of all ages to meet, play, and get to know each other, inspiring a sense of community.

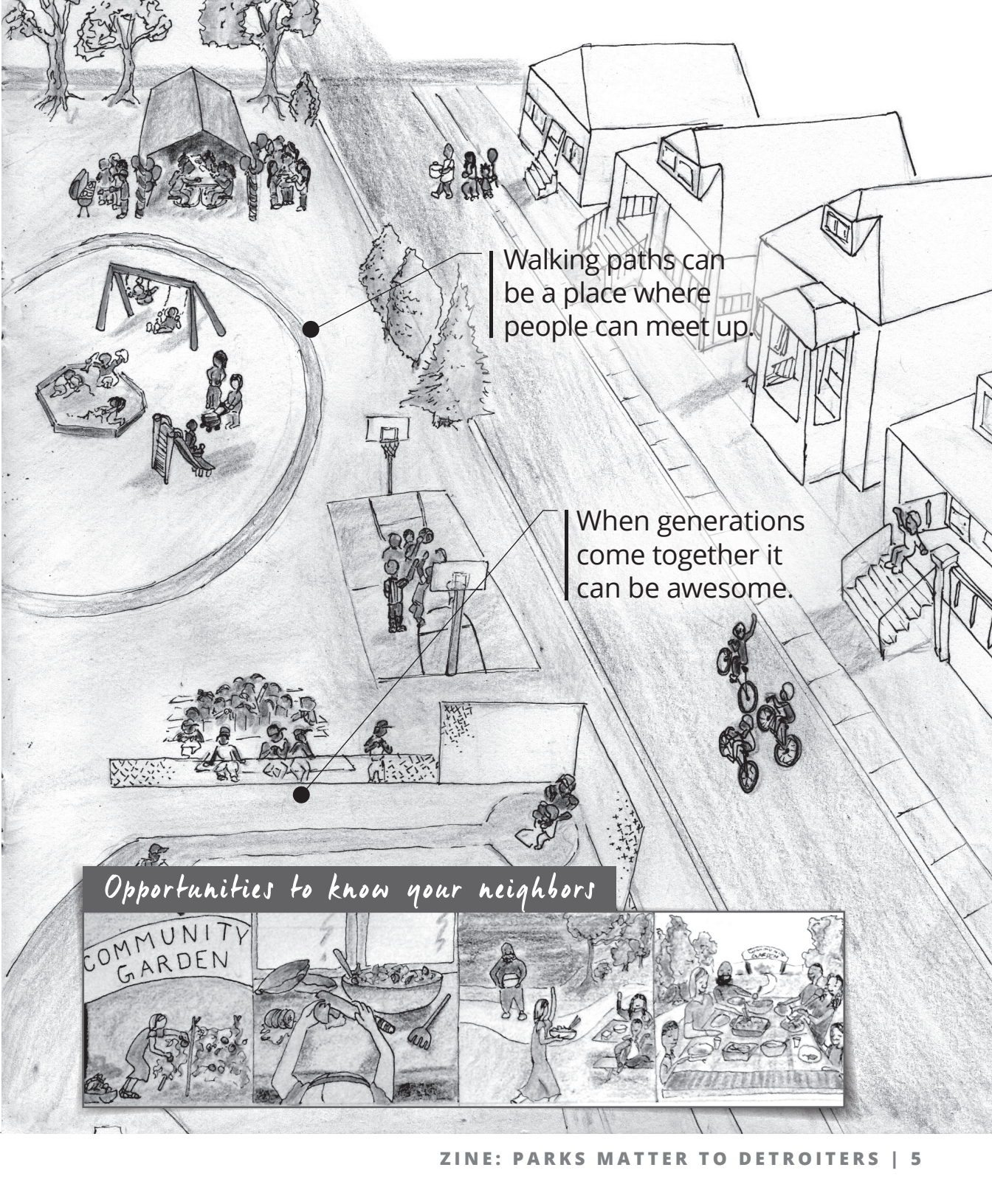
Community gardens increase sense of community ownership and stewardship.

*“More communication between neighbors —the opportunity to socialize—maybe that would cut down on some violence and aggression.”*

—Detroiters

When people interact they get to know, trust and look out for one another.





Walking paths can be a place where people can meet up.

When generations come together it can be awesome.

*Opportunities to know your neighbors*



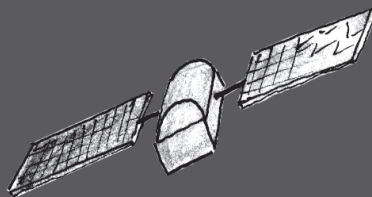


# Health of the Planet

Parks and green spaces are not only good for your health, they're also good for the health of our city and our planet. Keeping and maintaining our parks for Detroit's residents is essential to protecting our environment now and for the future.

## Reduced cases of asthma in children

All plants naturally filter pollutants from the air and contribute to a healthier atmosphere in our city.







### **Cooler summer temperatures**

Large healthy trees provide shade, a cool breeze, and they make our neighborhoods more scenic.

### **Reduced pollution from everyday car travel**

More parks and greenways for walking and biking provide a transportation alternative.

### **Storm run-off solutions**

- The trees, grass and natural landscapes found in our public parks act like a sponge and soak up water during heavy rains



## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PARKS

In 1950 Detroit had an estimated population of 1.8 million people and 300 parks. Since that time, we have less than 1 million people but our 300 parks remain. This has created a problem for the city especially with the cost of park upkeep, staffing and programming. In 2008 the city closed and/or reclassified over one third of its public parks. Currently parks are put into different categories:



### CITY PARKS

"An area of land owned and maintained by the City of Detroit for public recreation."



### GHOST PARKS

"Former Detroit public parks that have been closed and cleared, leaving an unmaintained, vacant lot."



### RECLASSIFIED PARKS

"Land that was formerly owned and operated by the City of Detroit as a public park which has been sold to a private owners."



### ADOPT-A-PARK PARKS

"A program where community groups, churches, or other organizations agree to mow and maintain a public park."

**Can you locate a park in your neighborhood?**





**CHANDLER PARK**  
A premier city park



**COLIN POWELL ACADEMY**  
A closed DPS school that once offered a neighborhood playground



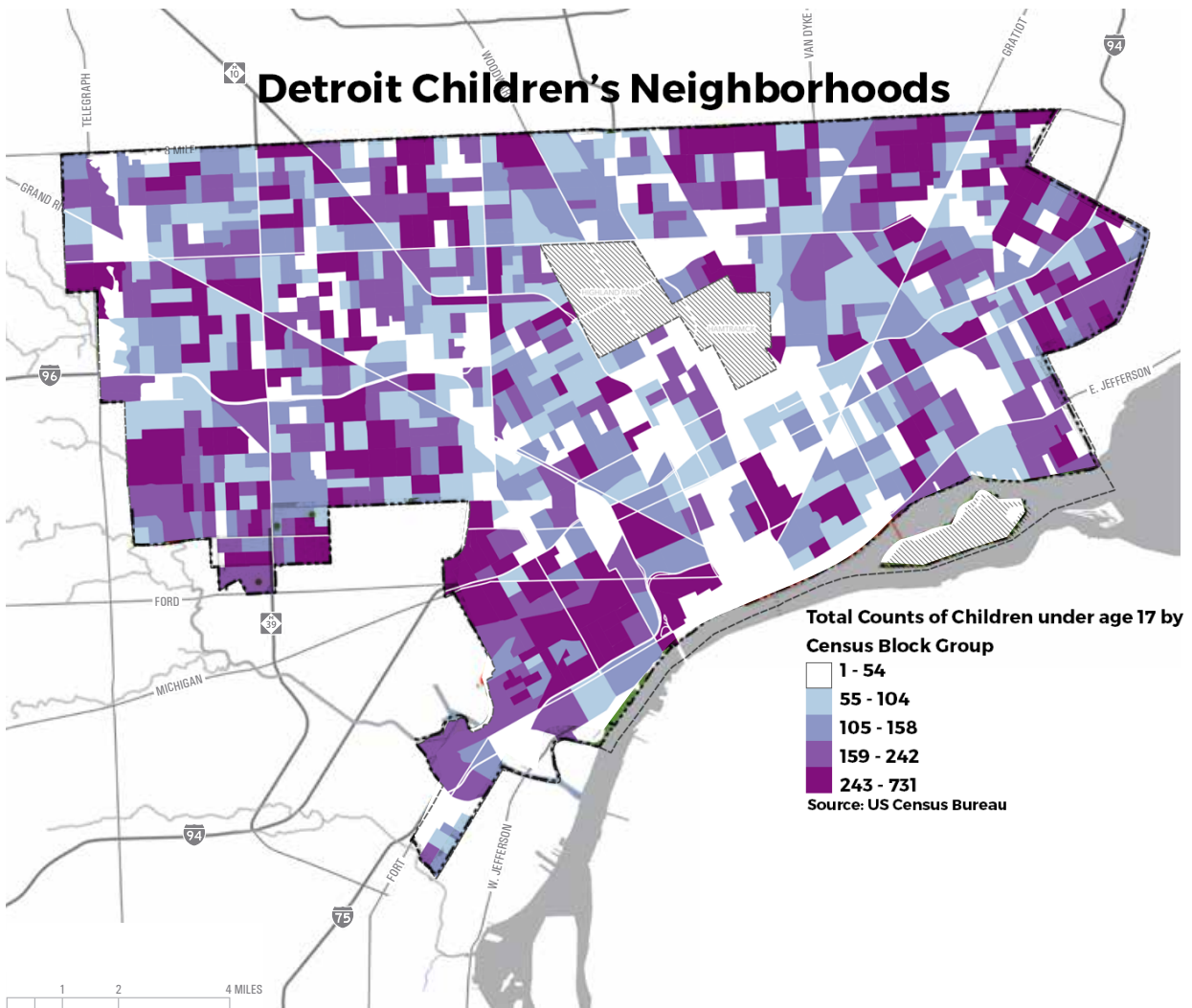
# DETROIT PARKS



**This map depicts the parks and green spaces in Detroit.**

*This map was designed by DFC based on 2012 data from Detroit's Parks and Recreation Department. Detroit Future City Strategic Framework, Land Use Section. Detroit: DFC, 2012. PDF.*





**This map depicts the population of children throughout Detroit neighborhoods.**

*This map was designed by Detroitography in 2015.*

*Hill, Alex B. "Map: Children's Neighborhoods in Detroit." DETROITography. Detroitography, 12 June 2015. Web. 23 Feb. 2016.*



## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PARKS



# City PARKS

Despite the mass closures of 2008, Detroit still owns and maintains over 100 public parks. Though the quality of equipment and maintenance can vary from park-to-park, the city's bankruptcy deal included an increased budget for the Parks and Recreation Department, which allowed it to make basic improvements, purchase updated equipment, and provide regular park maintenance. However, it is unclear how the city plans on spending this money, or what parks it will focus on first.

### BENEFITS

- Money/resources for the park*
- Cut grass (by the city)*
- Cleaned & maintained (by city)*
- Equipment for sitting, play, physical activity, & waste maintenance*
- Owned by the people*
- Part of "the commons" - public/community space*
- Area to bring people together and organize*

### CHALLENGES

- There is a cost to owning and maintaining the land*
- Not clear how parks are being used in development of the city*





## EXAMPLE: CHANDLER PARK



- Founded in 1917
- One of Detroit's Premier Parks
- Hosts the Wayne County Family Aquatic Center, the city's only water park
- Regional park that covers over 200 acres
- The park was named for Zachariah Chandler, a well-known abolitionist and former Detroit mayor

*“ Maybe buses could go all-round  
and pick up kids, take them to the  
park, and bring them back home.”  
— Detroiters*





## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PARKS



# Ghost PARKS

Since 2008, the city has decommissioned or closed one third of our city parks. Once a park is closed, the question arises: if the city isn't going to do anything with this land, who is?

### BENEFITS

*Still owned by the people and a part of "the commons"*

*Has the potential to be revitalized by the community*

### CHALLENGES

*These parks become eyesores and are often used as dumping grounds*

*Long, unkempt grasses that can be breeding grounds for rodents, crime, and trash build up*

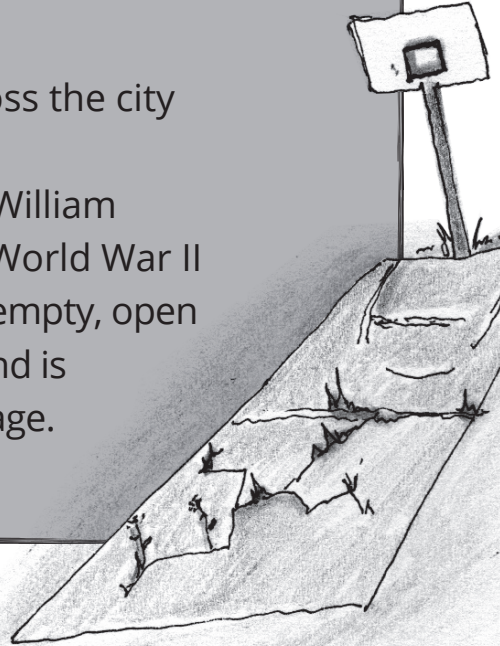
*" I move to a new neighborhood — it's not so safe. And my mom is not comfortable with me going out so much by myself, so I spend a lot of time inside. "*  
*— Detroiters*





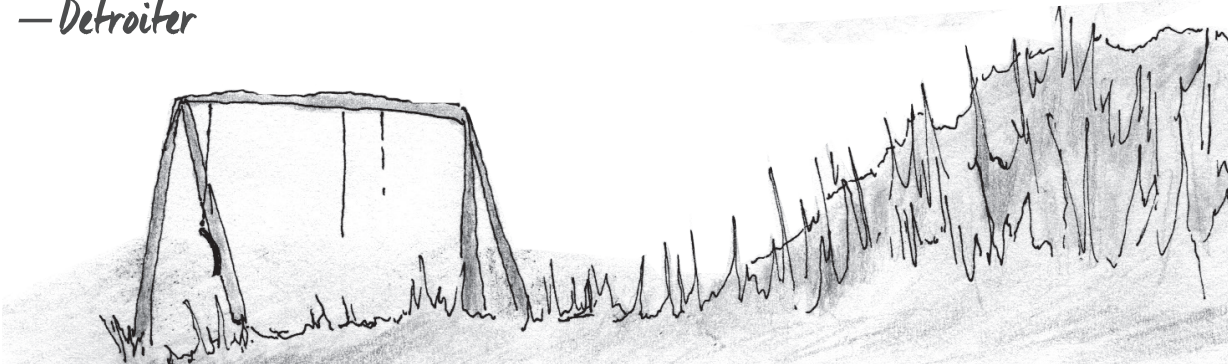
## EXAMPLE: BIRAGA PLAYGROUND

- Founded in 1952
- In February 2013, Mayor Bing announced that Detroit would end maintenance for 50 parks across the city including Biraga Playground
- The park was named for Corporal William Anthony Biraga, who was killed in World War II
- The park now looks like a prairie — empty, open fields of long, unkempt grasses — and is used as a dumping ground for garbage.



*“Some parks are empty, there’s really nothing to do, or play with.”*

*— Detrouiter*





## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PARKS



# Reclassified PARKS

Addressing the issue of what to do with public parks, the city has turned to selling former city parks to private developers. Though needed to be reclassified as “surplus land” in order to be sold, this property of the city has been given away to billionaires, nonprofits, or large corporations.

### BENEFITS

*Potential money/resources from private owner*

*Potential for cut grass*

*Potentially cleaned and maintained by private owners*

*Potentially equipment for sitting, play, physical activity, waste*

### CHALLENGES

*No longer owned by the people or a part of “the commons,” loss of land*

*Limited access, may not be accessible to everyone*

*“Some of the kids in my area play around on an empty school playground.”  
—Detroiters*



## EXAMPLE: LEWIS STONE MEMORIAL POOL AND PARK



- Founded in 1953
- Stone Pool Park was closed by the city more than a decade ago
- In 2013, it was reclassified as surplus land and sold to DTE for an undisclosed amount
- The park covered 1.94 acres
- The park was named for Lewis Stone, a children's advocate.
- Despite community efforts to restore the park, the land has been cleared and flattened





## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PARKS



# Adopt-a-Park

City Administration introduced Adopt-A-Park in order to keep city parks open and operating while relieving the city of maintenance and upkeep costs. While these parks are still owned by the City and remain open to the community, is this a long-term solution that will have positive effects on the surrounding neighborhoods?

### BENEFITS

*By assuming responsibility for maintenance and upkeep, the community has some control of the park*

*Equipment for waste, sitting, play, and physical activity*

### CHALLENGES

*There is a cost to owning and maintaining the land incurred by the neighborhood organization*

*Conditions may be set that limit the freedom of use to other residents*

*Not sustainable*

*“ I’m willing to put time and energy into my community.”  
— Detroiters*





## EXAMPLE: DELORES BENNETT PARK



- Founded in 1977
- Adopted by Historic Little Rock Baptist Church in 2013
- The park was named for Delores Bennett, a former Wayne County Commissioner and founder of the North End Youth Improvement Council
- The only city park named after a living person
- The park covers 2.7 acres
- The park is well-maintained, with amenities such as basketball courts, playground, horseshoe pits, grills, picnic shelters and tables



## WHY PARKS MATTER TO *Detroiters*

In a recent survey of roughly 200 Detroit parents and caregivers, access to safe and affordable *play and recreation space* was described as a priority need for their children. In conversations, many describe the *loss of park space* and *the shuttering of public schools* and neighborhood playscapes as leaving their children without the benefit of open and green space.

*Blight* and *abandoned buildings* mark the landscape where many Detroit children live and play. These neighborhoods are beyond the boundaries of the corridors where reinvestment and economic activity is occurring in the city. Therefore the decline of accessible *park acreage* and *public recreation space* is a key concern for Detroit families. These conditions increase risk of illness and poor health outcomes among Detroit children

*Equity* in how funds for parks, recreation and green space are invested is an important focus for those making decisions about land use.

You can *make the difference* in your own neighborhood by organizing and becoming an advocate for parks, recreation/ play space and green space.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are simple steps you can take in order to make big changes in your very own neighborhood.

### ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

1. **Talk to your neighbors** and discuss the concerns over conditions of parks in your neighborhood. (see Park Map to find parks near you).
2. **Form a committee and explore creative places** for gardens, gathering spots, and play space.

### CONTACT THE CITY

1. **Contact your local City Council member.**
2. **Talk to the Parks and Recreation Department** about the Parks Master Plan, which they are currently developing.
3. **Ask to meet with them and present them with a plan** for improving park access in your neighborhood.

### WORK WITH A NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION

1. **Find a block club or neighborhood coalition** with a unified vision for public recreation in its community.
2. **Look for funders/ partners** to support your efforts.
3. **Apply for mini-grants** available to communities who want to improve parks or provide popular programming.
4. **Non-profits and Community Development Corporations** in your area may also be able to support your project.





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Join us, visit [detroitpeoplesplatform.org](http://detroitpeoplesplatform.org) or call 313.338.9396



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