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**Title**

Inclusive Park Design for People of All Housing Statuses: Tools for Restoring Unhoused Individuals' Rights in Public Parks

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# Inclusive Park Design for People of All Housing Statuses

## Tools for Restoring Unhoused Individuals' Rights to Public Parks

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A comprehensive project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Urban & Regional Planning

## Acknowledgments

## Disclaimer

This report was prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master in Urban and Regional Planning degree in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles. It was prepared at the direction of Kounkuey Design Initiative as a planning client. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department, the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA as a whole, or the client.

# Contents

# Executive Summary

Increasingly hostile design has created public parks that ostracize people experiencing homelessness. Hostile architecture not only excludes unhoused people from public space, but makes public environments less accessible for all. Inclusive design can be used to combat defensive architecture and build parks that are more valuable and accessible public assets. In order to combat hostile design, exclusionary park planning, and discrimination in public spaces, urban planners and designers must design parks to evoke a sense of ownership and belonging for all. I argue that planners and designers can restore unhoused individuals' spatial rights in public parks by including them in the planning and engagement process, by programming parks with their needs in mind, and by designing park facilities to support this population.

I began with a review of relevant planning literature to document the existing research on unhoused people's use of public space. My research methodology includes three case studies of parks designed with and for unhoused park users: Folkets Park in Copenhagen, Woodruff Park in Atlanta, and Lafayette Square Park in Oakland. I validated my research findings through interviews with urban designers and an advocate for the rights of unhoused people.

My research findings demonstrate that urban designers, planners, policymakers, and advocates can create parks that are inclusive of unhoused people by engaging them in the participatory planning process, offering place-based outreach, programming for community cohesion, and designing parks with flexible, inviting spaces and well maintained facilities. By including people experiencing homelessness in the planning and design process, planners can make parks that are equitable for all users.

# Introduction

Parks are a fundamental piece of the urban landscape that provide space for recreation, connection with nature, leisure, and community cohesion. They are one of the few spaces in cities where all are welcome and entrance is free. Nonetheless, there is a long list of communities who are less safe in the public realm than others, and some who are criminalized for existing in public parks. Urban planners and designers must design parks to evoke a sense of ownership and belonging for all in order to counteract hostile design, exclusionary park planning, and discrimination in public spaces.

Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) partnered with UCLA urban planning Masters students to create this toolkit to guide planners and designers on inclusive park design. The toolkit is organized by chapters that address inclusive park design for specific populations. I contributed the following chapter on inclusive park design for unhoused individuals. The toolkit is meant as a tool to advise public agency staff, urban planning and design practitioners, advocacy organizations, and/or community members when planning and designing parks for inclusion of communities often excluded from public space design. Leaning on strategies gleaned from KDI's experience with inclusive park planning, literature reviews, interviews with planning practitioners and advocates, and an analysis of park case studies, this toolkit outlines the steps one can follow to implement inclusive park design. Each chapter outlines a brief history of a specific population's exclusion from public space, discusses research methodology for designing and planning for that group, and then outlines how to plan and design a park to be inclusive of that specific community through engagement, park programming, and site design. This chapter will provide guidance for three different stages of the park planning lifecycle, (1) planning and engagement, (2) programming, and (3) design.

# How to Use Toolkit

### Goal of the toolkit

- Provide an intuitive and modular outline of policy, engagement, programming, and design recommendations that can increase access to public space for distinct marginalized groups.

### Who is it for

- Urban designers, planners, policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders.

### How to navigate this toolkit

- Planners, designers, and advocates can use this toolkit as a starting point for designing a new park or renovating an existing park. Given that all public space projects present unique and site-specific considerations, this toolkit seeks to provide individuals embarking on a new project with design and policy considerations that they can build on within the context of their particular project. The toolkit can also serve as an evaluation tool to think through adaptations to an existing park that can better accommodate the specific community under consideration.

### How to navigate this chapter

- This chapter focuses specifically on unhoused individuals as a population that is excluded from the public realm. The format of the toolkit is designed to be replicated and built upon. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a long list of community groups that are excluded from the public realm, and each community requires specific research and consideration. Subsequent chapters will have different focuses, i.e. gender minorities, older people, people with disabilities, etc.

# Methodology

To write this chapter on inclusive design for unhoused park users, I first completed a literature review of relevant scholarly articles, news articles, and other design toolkits related to how unhoused individuals experience public space. This research provided background on the rise of hostile architecture in response to increasing housing insecurity in the United States, who spatial rights are afforded to in the public realm, how those rights are enforced, and tactics for restoring unhoused people as stakeholders in public space. Next, I completed case studies of three parks that were designed with and for unhoused park users. In these case studies, I researched the history of the park, the engagement process used in park renovations, park programming tactics, and the site design strategies that planners relied on to create parks that are better resources for all community members, regardless of housing status.

I validated and built on the engagement, programming, and design recommendations I garnered from my literature review and case studies by conducting interviews with urban designers and an ACLU, Southern California advocate working to eliminate laws criminalizing unhoused people and propel affordable housing access.

These interviews were conducted with:

## Urban Designers

- Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI)
  - Jerome Chou, Senior Planning Principal
- Gehl
  - Eamon O'Connor, Project Manager and Coexistence Toolkit

## Advocate

- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Southern California
  - Eve Garrow, Homelessness Policy Analyst & Advocate

# Housing Status and Public Space

As of 2020, over half a million people are experiencing homelessness in the United States (State of Homelessness, 2022). While homelessness is often posed as a contemporary problem, and it certainly is a problem that has been exacerbated in recent years by the housing crisis in Los Angeles and other major US cities, encampments have existed in American cities, such as Los Angeles, since 1870 (Laborde, 2021). People experiencing homelessness often rely on transit stations, industrial areas, and parks or open spaces to live in (Parker, 2021). This reliance on parks and public space for shelter makes unhoused populations key stakeholders in park design. However, unhoused individuals have a history of being criminalized and excluded from public parks instead.

Early urban parks were thought of as socio-ecological shock absorbers for health, social, and environmental concerns during the industrial revolution (Hoover, 2020). In the early 20th century, the concept of parks being places for recreation was born, and parks came to include playgrounds and other recreation facilities (Walls, 2009). When the U.S. government subsidized suburban white homeownership after World War II, more Americans left cities for single-family homes in suburbs with private yards leading to the decline of urban parks (Walls, 2009). As urban populations grew again in the 1990s, urban parks subsequently saw a revival in funding and public interest (Walls, 2009). Urban park visitation declined during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, particularly in socially vulnerable communities (Jay et al., 2021). The pandemic further revealed that parks can only serve as places of refuge when they are developed to equitably meet the needs of a variety of users. Parks must be designed to accommodate users with diverse sets of needs and as places to support those living in public so that we can ensure safety and respect for all users of public space (Huttenhoff, 2021). When designed for inclusivity, public space can promote joy and connection, while also evoking a sense of belonging and safety for all.

Unhoused park users are typically not only excluded from the park planning process and park programming, but more commonly are the targets of hostile design and policing that is deliberately aimed at keeping them out of parks.

Hostile architecture can include armrests in the middle of benches, sloped or curved benches, spiked surfaces, leaning bars, and jagged rocks in open spaces instead of grass (Wandalowski, 2021). Hostile architecture not only harms unhoused park users, but all park users by creating public spaces that are harsh, unwelcoming, uncomfortable, and impractical for everyone. Parks are meant to be places of community, of leisure, and of connection with the natural environment, but exclusionary design transforms these valuable public assets into inhospitable spaces for all. Therefore, parks designed to be inclusive of unhoused people are not only more effective spaces for this population, but for all park users. Hostile design is an irrational response to homelessness and the housing crisis, while inclusive design is a rational approach to facilitating flexible, active public space that can be enjoyed as a resource by all.



*Benches with armrests in the middle to prevent lying down in Richmond Park in Salt Lake City (Stevens, 2021).*

A grass park strip in Salt Lake City, where unsheltered people used to pitch their tents, has been replaced by rocks  (Stevens, 2021)



Concrete spikes under a road bridge in Guangzhou city, Guangdong, China (Reed, 2015)



Spikes used to deter loitering in Coutts Bank, Fleet Street, London (Reed, 2015)

Sharp metal spikes on a low garden wall on East 96th street in New York City (Hu, 2019).



A leaning bench at the 28th street subway station in New York City (Kim, 2019).



A bench with a "No Loitering" sign in a public plaza in New York City (Hu, 2019).

## A Brief History of Homelessness in America

During the Great Depression, the United States federal government invested greatly in affordable housing construction, leaving the country with a surplus of subsidized housing through the 1970s (Garrow et al., 2021). When the Ronald Reagan administration cut federal funding for affordable housing by almost 80 percent, the nation's subsidized housing stock plummeted (Garrow et al., 2021). The demand for affordable housing quickly outgrew the supply (Garrow et al., 2021). In the 1990s, housing costs rose while wages stagnated, leading to a growing demand for affordable housing. Federal and local government funded housing has not kept pace with this demand (Garrow et al., 2021).

The lack of affordable housing available to unhoused people is a humanitarian crisis created and proliferated by the State. In the absence of federal strategies aimed at homelessness, municipalities are typically responsible for addressing the needs of unhoused populations. Rather than address this crisis with policy that catalyzes affordable housing construction, municipalities instead often employ discriminatory strategies to eliminate the visibility of homelessness (Garrow et al., 2021). These strategies are based on the widespread, irrational bias that not having secure, permanent housing is a crime in and of itself (Garrow et al., 2021). These strategies are not only ineffective at reducing homelessness, but actually make the problem worse by creating additional barriers to securing permanent housing (Garrow et al., 2021). Strategies such as homeless encampment sweeps destroy people's property and items they need to survive. Policies geared at policing the use of public space impose citations, fines, and subject unhoused people to arrest and jail (Garrow et al., 2021). As the ACLU of Southern California aptly explains:

> "By misdiagnosing the symptoms of oppression and injustice as crimes perpetrated by the survivors, these policies deflect attention from real causes and solutions. These discriminatory tactics cause incredible suffering and deprivation among people who are already among California's most economically deprived and vulnerable community members. And, by scapegoating the survivors of an unjust system, they promote the dangerous idea that unhoused people are deviant and

deserving of punishment, confinement, or removal."
-ACLU Southern California Outside the Law Report

More than 100 American cities have passed legislation that excludes or restricts the presence of unhoused individuals in open spaces and public rights of way (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Unhoused individuals live outside the economy in a visible way and are therefore often criminalized for occupying public space as non-consumers. California, and Los Angeles in particular, have some of the most aggressive anti-homeless legislations in the United States, drawing from a long history of anti-vagrancy laws (Laborde, 2021). There are now 32 "anti-homeless" restrictions in California (Laborde, 2021).

The City of Los Angeles has the largest unhoused population in the country. The Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA) estimated that 41,980 people were experiencing homelessness in the City of LA in 2022 (LAHSA, 2022). While the City of LA has made progress in developing more affordable and permanent housing in past years, there is still not enough permanent housing to meet the needs of LA residents unable to afford market rate rent. A rehousing system is nationally understood to work best when there are five permanent housing units available for every shelter bed (LAHSA, 2022). Los Angeles County currently only has one unit of housing available for every shelter bed available (LAHSA, 2022). Given this shortage of housing in LA, many people are unable to live in safe places and experience short to long-term periods of housing instability. It is therefore worth understanding the policy landscape of Los Angeles that governs the spatial rights of unhoused individuals, as it is representative of wider trends in American policing of public space.

## 1968

**The "Sit-Lie" Ordinance**
Los Angeles Municipal Code
SEC. 41.18.
Prohibits sitting, lying, or sleeping or storing, using, maintaining, or placing personal
property in the public right-of-way.

## 1980

**Loitering – River Bed**
Los Angeles Municipal Code
SEC. 41.22.
No person shall camp, lodge, make or kindle a fire, wash any clothes or bedding, bathe, sleep, lay any bed or any blanket, quilt, straw or branches for the purpose of resting or sleeping thereon, or remain or loiter in the official bed of the Los Angeles River.

## 1983

**Regulating the Use of Vehicles for Dwelling**
Los Angeles Municipal Code
SEC. 85.02.
Use of Vehicles for Dwelling Restricted on City Streets.

## 2010

**The "Bulky Items" ordinance**
Los Angeles Municipal Code
SEC. 56.11.
Prohibits the storage of personal property on public sidewalks and other public spaces

## The "Sit-Lie" Ordinance (1968)
### Los Angeles Municipal Code (L.A.M.C.) SEC. 41.18.

The Los Angeles "sit-lie" ordinance makes it a criminal offense to sit, lie or sleep, or store, use, maintain, or place personal property in the public right-of-way (i.e. a sidewalk) (L.A.M.C. § 41.18). The ordinance was first implemented in 1968 as an anti-littering ordinance and later amended to include provisions related to the storage of personal property on public sidewalks (Garrow et al., 2021). The ordinance was legally contested in the 2006 case Jones v. City of Los Angeles. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that "So long as there is a greater number of homeless individuals in [a jurisdiction] than the number of available beds [in shelters], the jurisdiction cannot prosecute homeless individuals for 'involuntarily sitting, lying, and sleeping in public" (Jones v. City of Los Angeles, 2006). As a result of this ruling, the City cannot prosecute homeless individuals for 'involuntarily sitting, lying, and sleeping in public unless shelter availability is "adequate," "realistically available for free," and otherwise "practically available" (Jones v. City of Los Angeles, 2006). The City of Los Angeles was required to provide 1,250 permanent housing units for chronically homeless individuals before it could resume enforcement of the "sit-lie" ordinance (Jones Settlement Agreement, 2015).

Martin v. The City of Boise is a landmark legal case that had significant implications for the enforcement of anti-camping and anti-storage ordinances, such as the "sit-lie" ordinance in Los Angeles. In this 2019 case, a group of homeless individuals sued the City of Boise, Idaho arguing that the City's enforcement of an anti-camping ordinance similar to LAMC SEC 41.18 violated their Eighth Amendment rights protecting them from cruel and unusual punishment (Martin v. The City of Boise, 2019). The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, finding that the enforcement of the anti-camping ordinance constituted cruel and unusual punishment and that citizens had a right, under the Eighth Amendment, to engage in "life-sustaining activities" like sleeping or resting in public when they had no other options for shelter (Martin v. The City of Boise, 2019).

The Los Angeles "sit-lie" law was revised in 2019 in response to the Martin case ruling and now requires the city to engage in outreach and offer shelter or other housing options to homeless individuals before enforcing LAMC SEC.

41.18 (Garrow et al., 2021). The revised policy limits the use of criminal penalties unless an unhoused individual refuses offers of housing and services. The City of Los Angeles is still tweaking this ordinance to legally justify homeless encampment sweeps and the removal of unhoused people from public spaces. In September 2022, the City amended this ordinance to apply to sitting, lying, sleeping, using, maintaining, or placing personal property on any street, sidewalk, or other public property within 500 feet of a school or day care center (L.A.M.C. § 41.18).

### Loitering – River Bed (1980)
### L.A.M.C. SEC. 41.22.

The Los Angeles loitering ordinance prohibits any person from camping, lodging, making or kindling a fire, washing any clothes or bedding, bathing, sleeping, laying any bed or any blanket, quilt, straw or branches for the purpose of resting or sleeping thereon, or remaining or loitering in the official bed of the Los Angeles River (L.A.M.C. § 41.22).

### Regulating the Use of Vehicles for Dwelling (1983)
### L.A.M.C. SEC. 85.02.

Los Angeles ordinance section 85.02 prohibits people from sleeping in their vehicles overnight (L.A.M.C. § 85.02).

### The "Bulky Items" ordinance (2010)
### L.A.M.C. SEC. 56.11.

First introduced in 2010, the Los Angeles "bulky items" ordinance prohibits the storage of personal property on public sidewalks and other public spaces, including vehicles parked on public streets (L.A.M.C. § 56.11). This ordinance allows the city to seize and destroy unhoused individuals' belongings in public spaces (L.A.M.C. § 56.11). In 2016, a federal court in Los Angeles found this law to be in violation of the "unreasonable searches and seizures" clause of the 4th Amendment (Garrow et al., 2021). The City has since revised the policy to require at least 72 hours of notice for an individual to retrieve their property before it is seized and destroyed (L.A.M.C. § 56.11).

In reaction to such policies and restrictions prohibiting and criminalizing peoples' use of public space based on their housing status, it is crucial that planners and designers recognize unhoused individuals' untransferable rights to public space in the design of parks (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Planners and designers can create parks to be inclusive of people of all housing statuses by (1) understanding the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the policy landscape they contend with, (2) engaging unhoused park users and advocates in the design process, (3) planning and programming for ongoing coexistence and connection, and (4) through inclusive site design.

This toolkit is not meant to solve the systemic causes of homelessness or the housing crisis. Instead, it is meant as a resource that urban planners and designers can use to reestablish unhoused individuals as valued stakeholders in the built environment. Inclusive design for people experiencing homelessness will not provide housing and therefore will not solve the underlying causes of homelessness, but it does acknowledge the reality that affordable housing is scarce and takes a long time to become available and that in the meantime it is reasonable to make the public spaces and parks that unhoused people occupy work better for them and do more to offer the support and services they need. Inclusive design for people of all housing statuses should not be interpreted as a sign of acceptance or complacency towards homelessness. While this design work is being carried out, federal, state, and municipal entities must continue to work toward a more just housing system in the United States to end homelessness.

Hostile designs and policies intend to decrease the visibility of homelessness and restrict equal access to public space amidst an ongoing housing crisis with no discernable endpoint. These tactics put unhoused people, who have no choice but to live in public, at further risk and further distance them from life-affirming services. Although inclusive park design cannot address the root causes of homelessness, it can help alleviate its symptoms by fostering community and understanding between housed and unhoused neighbors, providing place-based outreach, and ultimately restoring humanity and dignity to people frequently criminalized in public space.

# 1 | Planning and Engagement Recommendations

Public engagement with unhoused stakeholders is a  key step in designing and managing spaces that people of all backgrounds enjoy and feel safe in. Engagement activities have traditionally not been accessible to individuals with varying degrees of vulnerability in their right to claim space in cities (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). This, combined with the transitory nature of houselessness, makes engaging unhoused people in co-design or community meetings challenging (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Engagement toolkits and research on outreach to unhoused individuals emphasizes the importance of employing a few key methods to engage people experiencing homelessness in the design process.

## Needs Assessment

University of California, Davis landscape architect Cory Parker studied the types of infrastructure unhoused people repurpose for living in his article Homelessness in the Public Landscape: A Typology of Informal Infrastructure. Parker argues that by taking into account the agency of people experiencing homelessness and consulting with unhoused communities about their needs from public space, planners can redesign infrastructure to be safe places of stability and potential places of transition to housing for people experiencing homelessness (Parker, 2021).    Planning parks to be inclusive of people without shelter must recognize unhoused individuals' ability to procure resources, socialize with others, and protest exclusionary practices (Parker, 2021). Planners need to align the needs of unhoused park users with the park services they provide.

When Folkets Park in Copenhagen was redesigned, designers interviewed people who were already using the park to ask what they needed from the space as opposed to what they wanted (Balfelt, 2017). The designers' goal in doing this was to align the needs of different park users and prioritize the most necessary amenities. Planners and organizers should operate within a place of

authentic curiosity and leave their assumptions at the door when consulting with unhoused park users to avoid preconceived assumptions about poverty (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022).

## Informal Meetings

The Safe Place for Youth (S.P.Y) access center serves young people experiencing homelessness in Venice, California. KDI is working with the center to engage with the center's clientele to determine what improvements would best enhance the space to meet their needs. The planning team conducted small, informal meetings with different individuals who regularly use the center. In these meetings, the planners shared meals and discussed topics outside of the young people's lived experience of homelessness in order to subvert the idea that the design team was coming in as the experts on the space. The goal of informal meetings such as this is to find common ground between planners and the community they are serving.

## Recurring, Ongoing Advising Opportunities (for both Design and Evaluation)

Engagement with community members about a new park design should be an ongoing dialogue. The planners redesigning Folkets Park coordinated individual, small group, and community meetings throughout the design process (Balfelt, 2017). In his toolkit, An Engagement Toolkit to Center Unhoused Stakeholders in the Design and Programming of Open Space, urban planner Miguel Dávila Uzcátegui suggests that it is beneficial to conduct initial outreach meetings separately for housed and unhoused park users to avoid possible aggression from housed stakeholders (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). However, beyond this, planners can hold separate meetings for specific groups, such as LGBTQ+, women of color, youth, or veterans, that are open to both housed and unhoused park stakeholders (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). When KDI designers discussed plans for a community event with both housed and unhoused residents at S.P.Y. in Venice, the unhoused youth they consulted with made it clear they didn't want the event to create distinctions between them and other members of the community, and expressed a desire for informal shared activities.

This approach allows for informal conversations and securing more input

from marginalized groups whose voices may not otherwise be heard at large community meetings. The Coexistence in Public Space: Engagement Tools for Creating Shared Spaces in Places with Homelessness toolkit created by the planning and urban research association SPUR and urban design research consultancy Gehl demonstrates how recurring engagement and advising opportunities for unhoused stakeholders yields valuable input throughout and beyond the design process (Huttenhoff, 2021). To facilitate the ongoing dialogue with community members that was critical to the Folkets Park redesign, the planning team circulated final interview, meeting, and park analysis reports to all the people they met with and provided routine updates throughout the design process (Balfelt, 2017). A continuous exchange between planners and community members builds trust, ownership, and increased park usage (Huttenhoff, 2021).

## Compensation for Engagement Meetings

Dávila Uzcátegui recommends that participants, especially unhoused stakeholders, who take the time to attend public engagement events be compensated for their time and consultation (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Meeting attendees can be compensated financially, or with free snacks, free bus passes, etc.

## A Safe, Neutral Meeting Space for Engagement

Both the Coexistence toolkit and Dávila Uzcátegui's engagement toolkit emphasize the importance of securing safe, neutral space for engagement meetings. Public libraries can be good sites for engagement meetings as they are already a trusted and well used resource for unhoused individuals (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Local advocacy groups can also be helpful in identifying a neutral space for engagement meetings with unhoused community members. Creative methods can be employed to facilitate co-design with unhoused park users. One example of this was in Seattle, where designers set up a temporary "living room" parklet near a homeless services center to facilitate community dialogue between housed and unhoused neighbors (Huttenhoff, 2021). The "living room" offered free food, music, games, and magazines and comfortable furniture for discussion (Huttenhoff, 2021).

### Include Social Workers in the Engagement Process

Dávila Uzcátegui suggests planners invite social workers and advocates to address any safety concerns at engagement meetings instead of having a police presence (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Social workers experienced in working with this population will have crisis management training and therefore will be better equipped to address any concerns that arise. As outlined earlier in the chapter, unhoused people are disproportionately policed and may avoid policed spaces. Planners may also want to provide space at engagement meetings for participants to store their belongings (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022).

### Engage Local Housing Advocates and Formerly Unhoused Individuals

Urban designer and co-author of the Coexistence toolkit Eeamon O'Connor recommends that park planners consider engaging formerly unhoused people to contribute to the co-design process. This population may have more stability and availability for engagement meetings. Planners can consult local organizations providing services to people experiencing homelessness to connect with formerly unhoused people who have an interest in the park project. Community advocates working with unhoused populations should also be considered a valuable asset during the engagement process.

### Co-Design Park Rules

Park stakeholders of all housing statuses need to co-design rules for their park (Huttenhoff, 2021). All stakeholders should establish shared values through engagement activities (Huttenhoff, 2021 and Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022).The Coexistence toolkit provides three exercises that planners can use to foster coexistence in both existing parks and parks undergoing a redesign. One of the exercises asks participants to establish shared values and create mutually-agreed upon rules based on those values (Huttenhoff, 2021). For this exercise, facilitators show participants five values and ask participants to agree or disagree with each (Huttenhoff, 2021). The facilitator then provides participants with a second values worksheet that calls for reflection on the values presented and their reactions to each (Huttenhoff, 2021). Participants are then asked to discuss what behaviors they deem acceptable based on their established shared values and to create park rules based on these discussions (Huttenhoff, 2021). This

process ensures that park rules target behaviors and not individuals (Huttenhoff, 2021).

This type of exercise ties accountability to behaviors, and not to stereotypes of one population group (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). This collaborative process allows community members to co-design a safe, functional public space where they can create a shared civic life (Huttenhoff, 2021). It is important that these rules enforce behaviors equitably across different groups (Huttenhoff, 2021). Loitering laws or restrictions therefore should be reconsidered with recognition of how racial bias plays into the enforcement of these rules (Huttenhoff, 2021 and Loh and Kim, 2021). Research on inclusive design for more equitable public spaces emphasizes the importance of reimagining how to manage and hold people accountable for their behavior in park spaces without a police response. One example of an alternative to a police presence is having a social worker assigned to the park, a strategy that is explained in the programming section of the toolkit.

## Place Values
## Agree or disagree?

**1**

People and the structures they build should respect the natural environments and ecosystems they inhabit.

**2**

Public space should be accessible, safe, delightful, and welcoming for all, without privileging one person or group over another.

**3**

Public space should be shared among people of different backgrounds, identities, and experiences (e.g., race, ability, income).

**4**

Everyone has a responsibility to fulfill the social contract — an implicit commitment to mutual protection and well-being.

**5**

The community should help define how the social contract is maintained with respect to everyone's dignity.

## Your Take

—

What are your reflections on the 'values' exercise?

**Which resonate with you most or least? Why?**
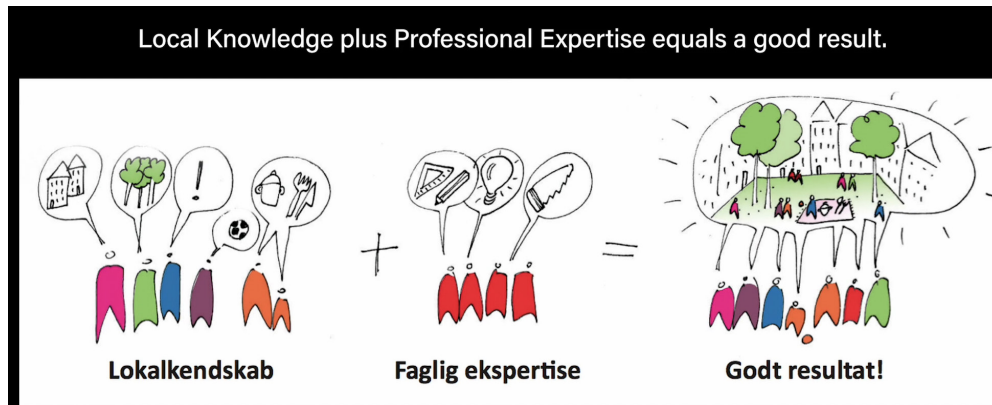
**What would you add?**

**What would you remove?**

Determining Shared Values Exercise designed by Gehl, SPUR, and their advisory committee for the Guadalupe River Park Project (Huttenhoff, 2021).

## Case Study - Folkets Park

Folkets Park is a small square park located in Copenhagen, Denmark. When calls for more green space went unanswered, residents of the Norrebro neighborhood of Copenhagen organized and established Folkets Park and converted an adjacent abandoned building into a community center in 1971 (Tholl, 2017). The City of Copenhagen officially recognized the park in 2008. The park came to be used by a diverse group of residents in recent decades with users ranging from families, activists working in the adjacent community center, gang members, immigrant youth, and unhoused people living in the park (Tholl, 2017). In 2012, four teenagers were beaten and stabbed in front of the park when they were mistaken as members of an opposing gang (Tholl, 2017). This violent act shocked the neighborhood and led to calls for local officials to address the spatial tensions occurring in the park (Tholl, 2017).

The City of Copenhagen employed artist Kenneth Balfelt, whose art focuses on community inclusion, and Spektrum Arkitekter to co-design park renovations with the community (Tholl, 2017). The park had recently undergone renovations that lacked community input and were generally disliked by local residents, so park users were initially distrustful of this process (Tholl, 2017). Copenhagen's parks and services decided to address safety concerns with improved design and activated spaces as opposed to with increased surveillance and police presence (Thol, 2017). Balfelt approached the redesign with the ethos that physical infrastructure goes hand and hand with social processes to affect change and get more users to come to park (Balfelt, 2017). Balfelt relied on consistent ongoing communication, small individual and group meetings prior to large community meetings, and community involvement days to instill ownership in the park during the design process (Tholl, 2017).

## Engagement



Local Knowledge plus Professional Expertise equals a good result.

**Lokalkendskab** + **Faglig ekspertise** = **Godt resultat!**

Kenneth Balfelt graphic illustrating the Folket Park design approach (Balfelt, 2017).

The artists and architects involved in the project emphasized the process in their approach and focused on establishing all park users as stakeholders, including unhoused users, drug dealers, and gang members (Tholl, 2017). The design team started the renovation process by listening to local residents and establishing an understanding of the context they were in (Balfelt, 2017). They did not start off with mass community meetings, but instead had around 35 small meetings, with a maximum of five people, with members from each of the groups represented in and around the park (Balfelt, 2017). In these small meetings, the designers consistently asked the same questions: 1. What do you need from the park space? And 2. What is your experience in the park during the day and at night? They later had four large meetings open to the entire community, where designers shared what they had learned in the smaller meetings to inform the wider community of what different types of park users needed out of the space (Balfelt, 2017).

The design team then produced a "social report" compiling all of the information learned throughout their interviews and meetings (Balfelt, 2017). They circulated this report to everyone who they interviewed (Balfelt, 2017). This report was not only used to inform the design

of this particular park, but the designers submitted it to the City as well with policy recommendations that address homelessness and gang activity (Balfelt, 2017). Architects drafted a design based on the report and created renderings that were again reviewed in smaller stakeholder meetings (Balfelt, 2017). This team's process demonstrates the value of having a dialogue with stakeholders throughout the design process as opposed to only at the beginning of a project.

### Zone Lighting

During interviews with park users, some groups expressed a need for dark corners in the park either to do business or to feel safe (Tholl, 2017). Unhoused people sleeping in the park felt unsafe at night under bright lights because for them this visibility left them exposed to muggings or attacks (Tholl, 2017). So, the design team incorporated the treatment of dark corners into the design, allowing for a well lit central pathway with selected zones that remain black during dark hours (Balfelt, 2017). Zoned lighting is one design feature that can be used to suppress the panopticon effect of public spaces.

### Instill Local Pride in Public Space

During interviews with park users, people were synonymous in their hate of the metal bridge structure in the park that was a relic of the recent failed renovations (Balfelt, 2017).  So, the design team repurposed the bridge as a play structure, brought an artist in and asked locals to come help paint the new structure (Balfelt, 2017). The idea behind getting the community involved directly in painting this play structure was to instill local pride in the new space (Balfelt, 2017).

Folkets Park Play Structure being painted and later in use (kennethbalfelt.org).

**Decentralized Seating & Landscape Design**

In meetings, all park users asked for more seating and less car traffic around the park (Tholl, 2017). The new design provided more seating options that were scattered throughout and integrated into the small hill topography that was added for children's play and to break up the terrain (Balfelt, 2017).




Folkets Park Seating (Tholl, 2017).

**DISPOSITIONSFORSLAG FOLKETS PARK**
SPEKTRUM ARKITEKTER 22.08.13



Spektrum Architects 2013 Design for Folkets Park (kennethbalfelt.org)

# 2 | Programming Recommendations

Housed and unhoused park users can mutually benefit from programming of events and activities that draw visitors into the park and foster greater levels of understanding for one another. Designers can program parks to facilitate shared activities between housed and unhoused neighbors. Engaging in shared activities helps to destigmatize and decrease the "social othering" and us-vs-them attitude common between housed and unhoused neighbors in park spaces (Laborde, 2021). Park programming can also include public education on homelessness and programs that deliver resources to unhoused people directly in parks. The programming tactics outlined in this report are often referenced or agreed upon in other writings on the subject.

## Partner with local BIDs, CDCs, and Advocacy Organizations

Park managers can form partnerships with local business improvement districts (BIDs), community development corporations (CDCs), or local advocacy groups to fund and develop park programming (Huttenhoff, 2021 and Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). In Woodruff Park in Atlanta, which is frequently used by people experiencing homelessness, the park management team partnered with the local BID to secure funding for a full-time social worker dedicated to the park. Local BIDs and CDCs have a vested interest in park improvements, as a park that is safe and enjoyable will attract more visitors who will also likely patronize surrounding businesses. Park management can also find program partners in local advocacy groups which can provide resources for job-training programs within the park or the surrounding neighborhood.

## A Resident Social Worker for High Needs Parks

Beyond planning parks for inclusion, planners can also reimagine parks that people live in as public resources that support a transition to long-term housing. Park space can be leveraged for place-based outreach to people experiencing homelessness. Woodruff Park, which employs a park case worker,

provides a good template for how site-specific outreach can be carried out (Huttenhoff, 2021). The Woodruff Park social worker builds trust through everyday interactions with the people habitually living in the park, making these individuals experiencing homelessness more likely to accept offers of services and support to transition to short and long-term housing ("Woodruff Park PPS").

The urban designers interviewed for this toolkit pointed out that having a case worker stationed in a dense, heavily populated park benefits all park users, not just unhoused park users. Park staff can not be expected to act as social workers or mental health counselors, yet this responsibility is often placed on them when a park visitor is in crisis. A park social worker provides resources for unhoused people while also serving as an alternative to a police presence in parks. As discussed, funding for a full-time social worker can come from local partnerships, community grant programs, and place management organizations. This model brings social services to meet people where they are. One option is to have a social worker stationed at a kiosk that is visible and located near a park entrance as urban designer Eamon O'Connor suggested.

## Public Education

Given the hostile social and physical landscape facing unhoused people, park managers can use public education to dispel the preconceptions housed community members have about homelessness (Neild and Rose, 2019). The National Recreation and Park Association recommends that park managers organize education programs to form better rapport and understanding between housed and unhoused park users (Neild and Rose, 2019). There are multiple approaches that park agencies can take to educating the public, such as interpretive signage, community meetings, pamphlets, social media, and public statements (Neild and Rose, 2019). The talking points employed in signage or written communication should emphasize that public space is shared and welcome to all. Some other talking points that the National Recreation and Park Association suggest emphasizing in public education are:

- All members of the community are welcome to use public parks and open spaces (Neild and Rose, 2019).
- Parks and other public spaces are key spaces for functional communities

(Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Everybody is welcome to use parks for recreation, relaxation, rest and leisure (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Those experiencing homelessness are part of our community (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Public parks and open spaces can be a more comfortable space for those experiencing homelessness (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Anyone can experience homelessness (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Those experiencing homelessness may face issues, such as extreme poverty, physical and mental health concerns and/or addiction (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Such barriers and limited community resources make homelessness difficult to overcome (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Depending on individual circumstances and available community resources, securing housing can take longer than six months (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- We will see less unsheltered homelessness as our community works to resolve homelessness (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Become familiar with the organizations that serve those experiencing homelessness (Neild and Rose, 2019).

- Public complaints may result in the displacement of those experiencing homelessness and make it more difficult for organizations to engage people in resolving their homelessness (Neild and Rose, 2019).

### Community Gardens

Two formerly unhoused people started a community garden in Echo Park in Los Angeles where a large community of unhoused people lived (Fedigan-Linton, 2020). The garden was managed in partnership between housed and unhoused Echo Park residents and included signage and art promoting inclusion and diversity and memorials for unhoused people from the community who

had passed (Fedigan-Linton, 2020). Both of the urban designers consulted in the creation of this toolkit emphasized how community gardens can facilitate cooperation between housed and unhoused park users.

The S.P.Y. access center in Venice hosts a community garden that grows produce to distribute to the access center as well as local housing sites (SPY Garden Program). Produce grown in the garden is also sold at the S.P.Y. farmer's market and the center provides internships and workshops at the community garden for the youth they serve (SPY Garden Program). Community gardens address food inequality while also serving as a meeting point for housed and unhoused neighbors to engage in a shared activity.

## Free Activities

Free activities can be a crucial meeting ground for different park users. Associate director of UCLA's CityLab, Rayne Laborde Ruiz, recommends low-cost, high-impact wellness programming to emphasize the interests and needs shared among housed and unhoused park visitors in her policy brief Living Landscapes: A New Approach for Including Unhoused Angelenos in Park Space and Programming (Laborde, 2021). It is important to offer areas where park users can mingle with each other or engage in activities tangentially without having to purchase anything. In Woodruff Park, park users convene over free board games offered at a game cart.

## Food Distribution

Woodruff Park and Lafayette Park in Oakland had both official and unofficial weekly food distribution programs operating within the parks. These programs can provide free food to community members in need, regardless of housing status. Parks in densely populated neighborhoods are ideally situated for these types of programs as they have the space and accessibility to serve a large number of people at once. Parks are similarly ideal places to host mobile health clinics, again meeting people where they are.

## A Maintenance and Operations Plan that Ensures Park Longevity

Too often, ongoing maintenance plans are not adequately considered beyond initial park designs or renovations. Operations and maintenance plans

determine how repairs, landscaping, cleaning and waste management are carried out (Huttenhoff, 2021). The Coexistence toolkit describes the planning and research initiative that Gehl and SPUR completed in Guadalupe River Park in San Jose, California, a park frequented and at times lived in by unhoused people (Huttenhoff, 2021). They found during their research process that maintenance was one of the major tensions playing out in the park that left residents unwilling to visit (Huttenhoff, 2021). It is crucial that planners work with park managers to develop a long-term maintenance and operations plan to avoid park facilities falling into disrepair and detracting visitors.

Park bathrooms and water fountains are survival resources for unhoused people, so keeping these facilities clean and operational is critical to making these spaces reliable public resources. Sometimes cities and park agencies remove amenities such as bathrooms, water fountains, picnic tables, and seating to intentionally create a hostile landscape for unhoused individuals. The City of Oakland did this in Lafayette Park, spurring protests that led to the park's inclusive redesign. Removing park facilities like this to detract unhoused people results in a hostile environment for all, especially older people and people with disabilities who rely on these facilities in cities. Planners and park managers should think through maintenance in their design plans and be intentional about long-term maintenance plans in order to sustain the inclusivity of a park.

## Case Study - Woodruff Park

Woodruff Park is a large park located in the dense urban center of Atlanta, Georgia. The park, built in 1973, is used by more than 5 million people annually ("Woodruff Park"). In and around the park, there is a high concentration of people experiencing homelessness who aren't reaching the services they need ("Social Impact"). In 2016 Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), which manages Woodruff Park, partnered with Project for Public Space to engage downtown residents, students, office workers, business owners, and government agencies in evaluating the park ("Woodruff Park" PPS). After consulting with park users and local stakeholders, CAP invested in a custom games cart and hired staff to help activate the southwest portion of the park ("Woodruff Park" PPS).

### Game Cart

The Woodruff Park Game Cart offers games that anyone can check out and use in the park for free. The cart is painted in bright, welcoming colors and is on wheels, allowing it to move within the park as needed. The kiosk was conceived of as an inclusive amenity inviting community members of all ages and economic backgrounds to come together and share the public space.

Woodruff Park Game Cart (Woodruff Park - Project for Public Spaces).





Woodruff Park Game Cart (Miller, 2017).

**Full-Time Social Worker**

In 2018 CAP got a grant to hire a full time social-worker for the park from a local social services provider ("Woodruff Park" PPS). The social worker provides park users experiencing homelessness with case management, information, and referrals to supportive housing, public assistance, shelters, and treatment programs ("Woodruff Park" PPS). In the first year the social worker was stationed in Woodruff Park, she was able to enroll 1,485 people with local social service programs such as HOPE Atlanta, placed 300 individuals into shelters, and connected 109 individuals to permanent housing ("Woodruff Park" PPS).

**Mobile Kitchen**

Since 2017, Deaundrea Stephens has run a mobile kitchen called Soup or Something every Saturday in Woodruff Park where she serves home cooked meals to unhoused park users (Buckner, 2022). At this mobile kitchen, people experiencing homelessness can also receive personal hygiene kits, water, oatmeal, and some clothing basics (Buckner, 2022). This mobile kitchen is a volunteer effort and not coordinated with city officials.

# 3 | Design Recommendations

There is not a great deal of writing about site design tactics or the physical infrastructure needed to make a public space inclusive of people of all housing statuses. There is a clear gap in previous research when it comes to urban design tactics that use the built environment to restore dignity and respect to people experiencing homelessness and to facilitate place-based outreach. On the contrary, there is a great deal of hostile architecture present in public space meant to guide or deter certain behaviors. This type of defensive design often targets unhoused individuals by designing public space to exclude informal uses and to prevent sitting, sleeping, or camping (Parker, 2021).

While there are few examples of parks designed for unhoused residents, other inclusive design strategies offer benefits to address the needs of this community. The organization of space in parks can influence its usability for unhoused individuals. Existing parks, such as Lafayette Square Park and Folkets Park, use zone lighting, park edges, and distinct spaces to create dynamic public space that embraces the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Urban researchers have also found that environmental noise buffers, contemplative spaces, and flexible spaces help make parks more amenable and welcoming to people of all housing statuses. In a review of literature on the subject matter, park case studies, and interviews with designers and advocates, the following site design strategies were recommended.

## Flexible Space

Avoid any spaces in parks that feel too fixed, as this limits the flexibility of public space and how it can be used. Landscape architect Wan Zhang argues that public space design should be flexible to respond to different social situations and to function for multiple uses in her report Designing for unhoused people: An inclusive public space strategy (Zhang, 2021). Designers can provide public space for people experiencing homelessness by preserving space for informal use in parks as Parker recommends (Parker, 2021). This type of design

acknowledges that people living without housing are not passive actors in the making of their environment, but rather active participants in the creation of alternative public landscapes (Parker, 2021).

## Inviting Park Edges

When urban designer Walter Hood redesigned Lafayette Square Park, he converted the previously wide-open square to a conceptual series of floating "rooms" by creating rambling geometric spaces that function both on their own and together (Lubell, 2019). All of the activity "rooms" within the park are located on the edges of the park so as to invite people in from the sidewalk, while not forcing them to immediately cross paths  (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001). This site design not only broke down the physical and social barriers between the park and the rest of the city, but also allowed for dynamics between park users to evolve over time as the edges slowly encroached the inside of the park (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001). Designing for disparate park uses to occur concurrently facilitates coexistence between housed and unhoused park users, and creates a more dynamic and active public space.

Hood envisioned this as "social programming" whereby different groups contesting the park space have their spatial rights within the park restored. San Francisco urban designer Ilaria Salvadori explains the effect of this when describing the Lafayette Square Park design in a 2001 issue of the University of California, Berkeley Places journal:

> "Yet it is precisely along the edges that the park's character
> is revealed. The critical line between the park and the more
> unpredictable public space of the street, a line that in so many
> other places fences and excludes, speaks elegantly about
> inclusion. Flexible and open, complex and interesting, the edge
> invites you, and before you know it you are in the park. This edge
> speaks most clearly about the park's character, an act of faith in
> social design and a bold act of inclusion."

The edge of a park where the park intersects with the sidewalk conveys the ethos behind the park. Planners should consider how the park edge can be used to welcome visitors in and signify the space as an inclusive one. This will help to

create what Hood calls an "inhabited edge" (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001).

## Quiet, Contemplative, Healing Alcoves

The urban planners I spoke with for this toolkit shared that the current and formerly unhoused people they consulted with in their professional experience often shared a desire for quiet, contemplative, healing spaces. Quiet spaces are typically not easy to find in dense urban settings but are necessary for mental and emotional health. Providing space in parks for reflection and meditation can be a reparative act for people living in public. One way to facilitate meditative space in parks is to include alcoved spaces that branch off of park pathways and activity hubs. These spaces can provide a brief escape from the panopticon effect of wide-open public spaces.

Open sightlines are important in public space because they make visitors feel safe from crime or harassment. However, exclusively wide-open space can make some park users feel vulnerable. Parks should have places to see and be seen but also include spaces where one can tuck away for a quiet moment. All park users can benefit from spaces where they can escape the noise of the park or surrounding city momentarily. Semi-enclosed spaces, decks, and overlooks make parks more compelling as they enable visitors to have multiple different possible experiences of a park. The Montgomery County Department of Parks advises planners to frame these park niches using topography, foliage, and/or light fixtures to establish a transition from one space to another in their Energized Public Spaces Design Guidelines (The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 2019).

## Zone Lighting

When designers engaged with individuals living in Folkets Park, some park users expressed how bright lights made them feel vulnerable to attacks or muggings and prevented them from sleeping (Tholl, 2017). In response to this, they installed zone lighting that allows for safety and visibility on pathways and low lighting or darkness in other areas (Tholl, 2017 and Huttenhoff, 2021). Balfelt designed the park lighting so that selected zones remained almost black during dark hours, while a central path remained lit at all times, not dramatically, but enough to cast light over most of the park (Balfelt, 2017). While this tactic

may be more of a challenge to implement in the United States, the location of lighting should be thought of as another tool to designate specific spaces for different uses.


Zone Lighting in Folkets Park, Copenhagen (Tholl, 2017).

## Shade and Noise Buffers

In his engagement toolkit, Dávila Uzcátegui emphasizes how trees buffering traffic noise can be an antidote to hostile design that makes spending long periods of time in a particular park untenable (Dávila Uzcátegui, 2022). Trees also provide shade which has become a critical health resource as cities face increasingly extreme heat.

## Restrooms, Water Fountains, and Seating

Urban designers Jerome Chou and Eamon O'Connor, as well as ACLU homelessness policy analyst Eve Garrow, all underscored how important well maintained public restrooms and water fountains in parks are for unhoused individuals. Maintenance plans should allow restrooms to remain unlocked overnight in parks that unhoused people live in. Ample water fountain facilities are an essential public resource for people experiencing housing insecurity, but also for all park users. Lastly, parks must include well-dispersed comfortable seating in order to be inclusive of unhoused people, as well as people with disabilities, older people, and caretakers.

## Natural Materials

O'Connor recommended that designers incorporate natural materials in parks to make them more welcoming, inclusive spaces for people of all housing statuses. Natural materials are more comfortable and can be used as an antidote to defensive urban design strategies that typically rely on metal and hard surfaces.

## Case Study - Lafayette Sqaure Park

Lafayette Square Park in downtown Oakland, California has a history of as a resource and place of refuge for people experiencing homelessness or unemployment going back to the Great Depression ("Lafayette Square Timeline"). The 1.5-acre park is also known as "Old Man's Park" because it was used predominantly by a transient community of people in the past, typically older men ("Lafayette Square Timeline").  After the Oakland Union of the Homeless protested against the City of Oakland removing public restrooms and picnic tables from the park in 1989, the City's Homeless Commission engaged a local group, The Center for Urban Family Life, to develop a strategy for Lafayette Square improvements through engagement with regular park users ("Lafayette Square Timeline"). After securing funding through the LEF Foundation, the City brought on urban designer Walter Hood to create a master plan for an improved Lafayette Square ("Lafayette Square Timeline").  This master plan recognizes the parks' historical significance and facilitates coexistence between different marginalized groups who were longtime users of the park and the newcomers to the neighborhood (DelVecchio, 1998).

The park improvements were completed in 1999 ("Lafayette Square"). From the beginning of the design process, the ethos behind the park was inclusion for all local residents, including people experiencing homelessness who historically were key users of the Square.

### Engagement

The design process for Lafayette Square began with a local group interviewing people who were already using the square (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001). Hood followed this up with community meetings to determine broader needs from the park ("Lafayette Square

Timeline"). To avoid displacing the people who lived in and used the park during the construction, the park was built in stages so as to avoid shutting the entire park down all at once (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001).

**Site Design**

Hood approached the park as a "set of rooms" to envision a space where disparate uses could happen concurrently without crowding out other activities (DelVecchio, 1998). The design contains a children's play area and flower garden, picnic tables, improved restroom facilities, card tables, additional seating, improved horseshoe pits, and an amphitheater  (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001). The park design recalls the park's original layout and functions, historic patterns of vegetation, use, physical movement and form (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001).
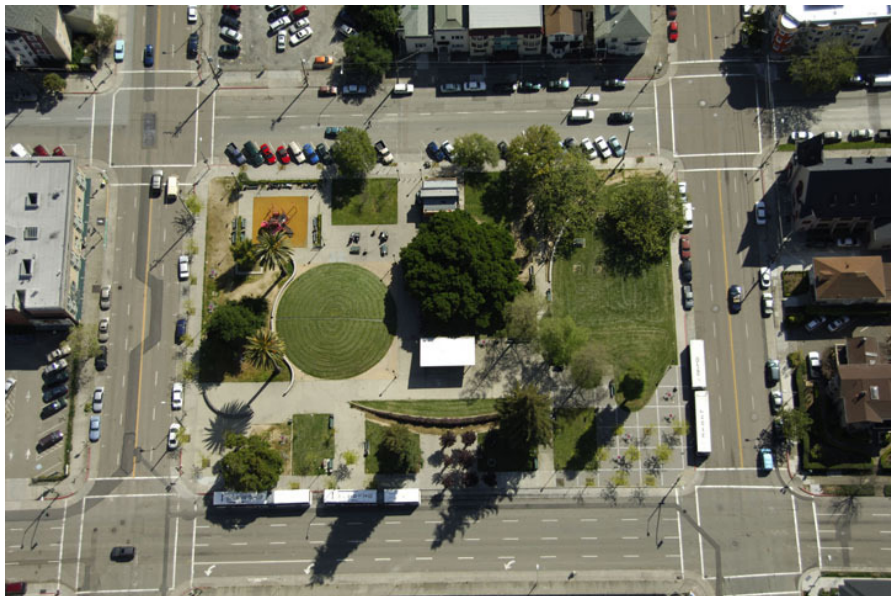


Aerial View of Lafayette Square Park ("Walter Hood").

**Rooms**

The park was designed for people to cohabitate and use space in disparate ways synchronously.
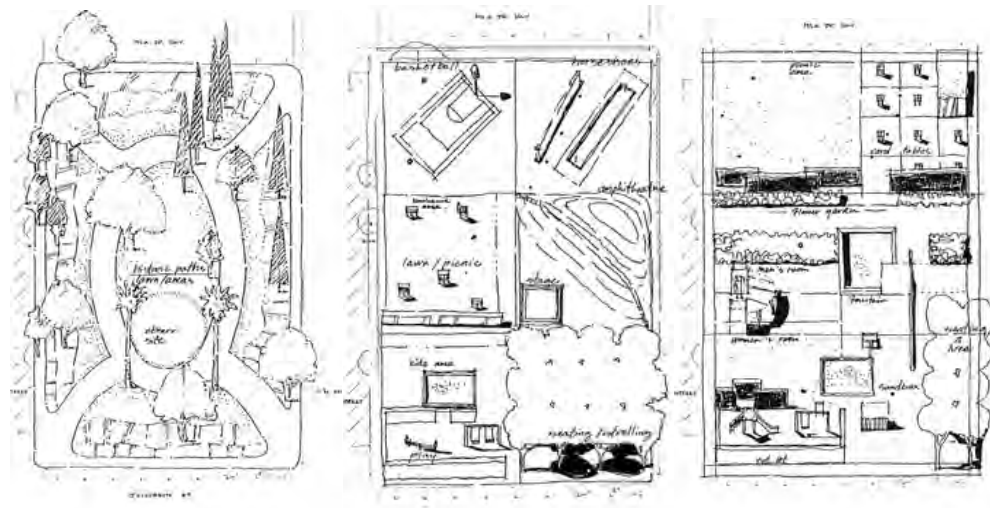


"Analysis of different urban characteristics of Lafayette Park, historic, recreation, and social" (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001).

**Hill Feature**

All of the park's different uses exist not at the center of the park, but rather on the edges of a small grassy hill that was inspired by an observatory that used to be on the site. The hill is just east of the center of the park site and is adjacent to a large oak tree. Hood intentionally did not locate the hill feature at the center of the park to allow for multiple non-central elements to meet the diverse needs of all park users (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001).

View from beneath the large Oak tree in Lafayette Square Park looking towards the small hill ("Walter Hood").

## Programming

After the first phase of the Lafayette Square Park was complete, local residents organized a community group to plan events and programming for the park. This helped to get residents to engage with the park and its new design.

## Engagement

The design process for Lafayette Square began with a local group interviewing people who were already using the square (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001). Hood followed this up with community meetings to determine broader needs from the park ("Lafayette Square Timeline"). To avoid displacing the people who lived in and used the park during the construction, the park was built in stages so as to avoid shutting the entire park down all at once (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001).

# Conclusion

Parks play an important role in our communities and through inclusive design practices they can become even more valuable public resources for all. Antihomeless laws establish public spaces as realms of exclusion where the most vulnerable communities are criminalized. While we work to address the systemic causes of widespread homelessness in American cities, urban planners and designers can concurrently work to restore parks as safe, inclusive spaces for people experiencing housing insecurity. I argue that the design of public parks should recognize the spatial rights of unhoused individuals. This can be achieved by implementing engagement, programming, and design strategies that foster solidarity between housed and unhoused neighbors, while also preserving parks as valuable community assets where necessary resources and services are provided. The tactics presented in this toolkit are meant to facilitate place-based outreach, enhance community cohesion, and provide recreational opportunities for all in urban parks. This toolkit asserts that designing parks to embrace the needs of unhoused people makes parks better, more inclusive spaces for all visitors, regardless of housing status.

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