

Pocket Parks

In a Nutshell

Pocket parks, also known as vest-pocket parks, mini parks, or parkettes, are small parks. The largest pocket park would be two-acres. These parks are open to the public but they are usually meant for people within the immediate vicinity of the park.

The “How To”

Pocket parks are becoming more popular in urban areas. These parks can be developed in one of two manners. The first is when there is land not being used that is suitable for a park. The second is a lot, or a series of lots, that are vacant and blighted.

The Town of Erie, Colorado has a [handbook](#) on its park system. On the bottom of page 51, the town's pocket parks are discussed. In Erie, pocket parks have been developed where there is unused land. Many of the parks are maintained by local neighborhood groups.

This [article](#) on Los Angeles's pocket parks showcases how pocket parks can be used to alleviate blight. The city used funds from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) to buy vacant/blighted properties. The Department of Recreation then toured the properties that were identified as needing to be torn down. About 20 sites were listed as being suitable for a pocket park. Community hearings were held, and ultimately 8 properties had community support for a pocket park.

The following two sources are excellent examples of how pocket parks are developed. This [green guide](#) has a list of things to consider and a summary of the steps needed to build a pocket park. This [Issue Brief](#) from the National Recreation and Park Association is a more detailed how-to manual for building a pocket park. The brief states that the four main qualities for a successful pocket park are accessibility, space for people to engage in activities, a comfortable area with a good image, and sociable. On page two, there is a detailed step-by-step guide for building a pocket park. This [article](#) has examples of pocket parks from around the country. On page five there is a list of patterns the authors noticed in pocket parks. One of the more interesting was the tendency for pocket parks to be well-suited for year-round use because park builders take the microclimate into account when building the park.

Examples of pocket parks in the St. Louis area include:

1. Strauss Park- Located at 3534 Washington Avenue St. Louis, MO, next to the Fox Theatre.
2. Walker Park- Located at 135 E. Washington Street in Kirkwood, MO.
3. Avery Park- Located at 225 Avery Drive in Kirkwood, MO.
4. Berthold Square Park- Located at 221 S. Main Street in St. Charles, MO.

Planning & Zoning

The City of Kirkwood did not face any changes needed in planning or zoning when developing pocket parks. Since the city developed the parks, they were able to do so without changing the zoning in the areas where new parks were built.

Keep Indianapolis Beautiful also has not faced any planning or zoning issues when developing pocket parks, because they work closely with the city parks department and within the parks planning process.

Dollars & Cents

Pocket park costs vary depending on the size, purpose and maintenance of the park. Communities looking to build a pocket park can expect to spend between \$150,000 to \$600,000. Luckily the states and many of the counties in the St. Louis region have grants to help counties finance building the park.

Costs to Consider

1. Comprehensive Plan- Cities should be going through comprehensive planning routinely, and these plans should address pocket parks. This will help the city utilize resources more efficiently and better serve their community.
2. Purchasing the land- Land can be acquired through a lot of different ways including purchasing, foreclosure, and blight-abatement programs.
3. Construction of the park- This is where costs on pocket parks greatly vary. Parks can be as simple as a couple of tables and benches or as complicated as a water fountain and playground.
4. Park maintenance- Parks need to be maintained including cleaning up trash, cutting the grass and other maintenance.

Funding Mechanisms Through States

Missouri- Missouri State Parks administers a federal grant for park improvements called the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#). Federal grant money carries with it the stipulation that the land must stay a park for eternity.

Illinois- Illinois Department of Natural Resources administered several [grants](#) geared toward parks. Most of the grants are state grants but a few are Federal grants. Almost all of them are for general park construction and improvements.

Funding Mechanisms Through Counties

St. Louis County- Since 2000, the [Municipal Park Grant Commission](#) awards grant money for parks and trails in municipalities within St. Louis County. The funds are from 20% of the proceeds of the 1/10 cent sales tax approved by the voters in 2000. St. Louis County receives 30% of the funds for park improvements in unincorporated areas. Similar funds are available in St. Charles County and the City of St. Louis. Grants are available for both construction and planning. [St. Louis County Municipal League](#) helps administer the grant, and they are available to answer questions.

Madison County- [The Park and Recreation Grant Commission](#) awards grants for park construction and improvements. This commission awarded 27 park enhancement grants totaling \$844,500 in 2011.

St. Clair County- The St. Clair County Parks Grant Commission awards grants for St. Clair County.

Measuring Success

Pocket park development can contribute to changes in several of the [performance indicators](#) used for OneSTL, including [tree canopy](#). Tree canopy is measured by the percent of land with tree canopy cover, and the desired trend is for an increase. The 2010 baseline for this measurement is 39%.

Case Studies

Keep Indianapolis Beautiful IPL Project Greenspace

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Description

Connecting people to nature, creating vibrant places rooted in community and building lasting value by

working together. IPL ProjectGreenSpace is a grassroots driven effort that helps transform vacant lots and underused spaces into natural, beautiful and functional pocket parks and greenspaces for a neighborhood. By bringing together each of KIB's programs from Adopt-A-Block and Great Indy Cleanups to NeighborWood Tree plantings, we are able to work empower neighbors to improve their community.

IPL Project GreenSpace is an intensive and highly engaged effort within KIB that is a multi-year creation process and a long-term maintenance commitment. It is heavily based upon the success of involvement with other KIB programs. It is a grant-based program. The grants are project management grants that are not financially driven.

Keep Indianapolis Beautiful provides:

- **Expertise, Support and Guidance**
- **Native Plants and Trees**
- **Paths, benches, shelters and nature plays**
- **Art, Nature, Beauty**
- **Maintenance Support**

Project Partners Provide:

- **Volunteers**
- **Partnership Development**
- **Maintenance Commitments**
- **Celebrations**

Goals are to create a space for outdoor enjoyment, social gathering and environmental education that build upon the principles of sense of place.

Cost

The cost of constructing the parks is between \$5-10,000. This includes materials, plants, shelters and other park components.

(Keep Indianapolis Beautiful specifies that the grants for building the parks) are not cash grants (directly exchanged with the project partners), but (rather) project grants. KIB will provide engagement support, design, materials, project management support and two year maintenance support while applicants provide the ideas, volunteers and future maintenance.

Lessons Learned

The IPL Project Greenspace has become team oriented over the years as opposed to single member oriented over the years. This was done to make the program and projects more sustainable. There is now more emphasis on community engagement. The program now integrates the Keep Indianapolis Beautiful staff and designers more, this helps to keep the projects in better shape and more beautiful longer. One of the main benefits to the program is that it has lasted for over 20 years with long term success.

McEntee Park/Walker Park/Mitchell Park

Contact

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Description

Kirkwood has three parks which are half an acre or less.

“MCENTEE MEMORIAL PARK

This half-acre park honors the memory of Police Sergeant Bill McEntee, who lost his life in the line of duty. The half-acre park features a playground, gazebo and picnic site and offers a great view of the railroad as it heads towards the Kirkwood train station. The Park connects to the Memorial Walkway, completed in 2010. – 131 W Madison Avenue

WALKER PARK

The land for this beautiful half acre park was donated to the City in 2004 by Earl and Myrtle Walker. The park has a gazebo, playground, walking path, drinking fountain, water feature and two game tables. Don't forget to see the beautiful bronze turtles and the unique butterfly chair also donated by the Walkers. – 135 E Washington Avenue

MITCHELL PARK

This "vest pocket" park features a playground (renovated in 2009) and picnic area. – 115 Mitchell Place”

Cost

For the latest small park that Kirkwood built the costs break down into:

- \$250,000 for land acquisition
- \$25,000 in demolition costs
- \$25,000 for planning and design
- \$450,000 for construction

Lessons Learned

Kirkwood has had a positive experience planning their parks. For the latest park (a pocket park) they chose to place it in the North end of Kirkwood, and area that had no parks. Since the neighborhood the park is located in had been asking for a park for years, Kirkwood made sure there was citizen input on the planning process.

They started the process by holding a charrette. They made sure that the neighborhood adjoining the proposed site was notified of the public meeting about the proposed park. During the charrette the city showed the citizens various pictures and options of features that the park could have. Then the citizens voted on their favorites. This allowed for the park to be shaped around the neighborhood wants and needs. The only cons that the park faced have come from teenagers doing small amounts of vandalism and climbing on top of the park pavilion.

South Grand Common

Contact

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Description

A planned pocket park with a market day/vendor set up, water feature, seating and an amphitheater. It will also include landscaping that “is designed to soften the space with plant material that also serves as an architectural element. The “Green Screen” will be planted with English Ivy which will provide an evergreen “wall” to the space. Columnar Hornbeam, Maiden Grass and color plantings serve as a backdrop to the fountain. Color plantings will accentuate the monument sign for the park. The central lawn panels cool the space and provide an area for activities such as yoga and lawn seating for Movie Night.”

Cost

The neighborhood still has not gone out for bid for the pocket park we are waiting on approval from Metropolitan Sewer District. When approved we will go out to bid so the actual cost we do not know as of yet we are assuming between \$300,000-325,000 and \$21,000 on architect and civil engineering cost.

Lessons Learned

We have a lease to own contract with the Treasurer’s office for the land and no conflict from the neighborhood or alderman. Everyone is very excited about the project. The South Grand Community Improvement District has a great relationship with the city departments and does not expect any issues.