

10 Best: Parks that have helped revive their cities

by Larry Bleiberg

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Too often new highways divide cities, but downtown Dallas overcame that challenge by burying a major thoroughfare and covering it with a 5.2-acre deck that became Klyde Warren Park. The space now has a playground, a dog park, performance areas and a restaurant pavilion. (Photo: Thomas McConnell)

As cities have evolved in the last 20 years, so have city parks. The newest open spaces place an emphasis on interaction, fitness and good food, with restaurant pavilions and dining areas, says Patrick Phillips, global CEO of the Urban Land Institute. "It's very different from the previous generation of parks that were designed to provide beauty and contemplation." Many of the new parks also rely on public-private partnerships. The institute sponsors an annual

open space award, and Phillips shares some recent finalists and winners with Larry Bleiberg for USA TODAY.

Klyde Warren Park

Dallas

Too often highways divide cities, but downtown Dallas overcame that challenge by burying a major thoroughfare and covering it with a 5.2-acre deck. The space now has a playground, a dog park, performance areas and a restaurant pavilion. "It's a beautiful place, a superbly well-designed park with a huge impact," Phillips says. 214-716-4500; klydewarrenpark.org

Falls Park on the Reedy

Greenville, S.C.

Once the Reedy River was seen as a boundary in this historic textile town. Now thanks to this park with gardens and a sweeping signature pedestrian bridge, it has become the heart of one of the liveliest small cities in the South. "It's one of the more beautiful urban spaces," Phillips says. Downtown now bustles with scores of restaurants, shops and a minor league baseball stadium. 864-467-4350; fallspark.com

Olympic Sculpture Park

Seattle

The scenery at this waterfront park isn't limited to views of Puget Sound or the Olympic Mountains. There's also art on display at what once was an industrial site. "It fundamentally transformed this space. It's very dramatic," Phillips says. "This is a museum that happens to be a park." Tours and admission are free. 206-654-3100; seattleartmuseum.org

Railroad Park

Birmingham, Ala.

Alabama's largest city had been an industrial powerhouse that largely ignored its physical environment, Phillips says. But this 19-acre park turned a former rail yard into a city showcase with outdoor event spaces, adult exercise areas, a central dining pavilion and high-quality design. "It's an outstanding transformation." 205-521-9933; railroadpark.org

Citygarden

St. Louis

Just a few blocks from the Gateway Arch and the St. Louis Cardinals' Busch Stadium, this new park has helped revive the city center, Phillips says. "It was a park that didn't work and we have so many of these in the United States." Now with a video wall, sculpture garden and a 102-jet spray plaza, the public has finally embraced the area, and made it a success. 314-241-3337; citygardenstl.org

The High Line

New York

One of the most celebrated new parks has transformed the West Side of Manhattan, turning a former elevated rail line into a top city attraction. "It's extraordinary as an experience itself, as well as a model for other cities. There are another half dozen High Line-like projects in the works," Phillips says. The linear park has changed entire neighborhoods, bringing visitors to places like Chelsea, Hell's Kitchen and the Meatpacking District. The final northernmost section opened last September. 212-500-6035; thehighline.org

Campus Martius Park

Detroit

Since opening in 2004, this open space has proved to be a bright spot in downtown Detroit, helping revitalize its troubled urban core. With a skating rink, fountain, gardens, event stage and high-end French bistro, it has lived up to its slogan as "Detroit's Gathering Place," Phillips says. "It created its own demand." campusmartiuspark.org

The Parks and Waterfront at Southeast False Creek

Vancouver

Too often former Olympic sites are forgotten after the Games. But the 2010 Olympic Village area is an exception, Phillips says. It now holds exemplary open spaces like Hinge Park and Habitat Island, which have playgrounds and trails, and preserve natural habitats in the middle of the city. "It pays a lot of attention to migratory birds, fish habitat and native vegetation."

tourismvancouver.com

The Yards Park

Washington

Washington's other river – the Anacostia – has always been overshadowed by the Potomac, but this new open space near the Washington Nationals baseball park is the latest sign of its emergence. "So many ingredients were in place here, it was almost a situation begging for a park to pull things together," Phillips says. It features distinct outdoor "rooms," with wooden lounge chairs, a kids' water play area, and a riverfront boardwalk. yardspark.org

Washington Park

Cincinnati

Although more than 150 years old, this old park found new life with a recent makeover, adding an interactive water park, a restored historic bandstand and a playground with climbing walls inspired by the city's architecture. It has helped connect the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood which had experienced racial conflict, with the rest of the city. "It creates a gathering place for everybody in Cincinnati," Phillips says. washingtonpark.org