At the point where the main path at Atlanta’s Fourth Ward Park goes over the pond, the
designers transformed modular concrete fountains into blackened steel Sculptures 2 pieces; LED lights up the 18' high ‘Tree of Life’ installation. The 2000 roosters illuminate the four
table ripples. (Owen Wright). Water plants around the pond are: Scarlet Niblets, reed X
water lilies, lilies; Polygonæus, stalks. ‘Halo’ iris, ‘Chasteaster’, brush. In the native
plantation, there is a variety of grasses, ‘Van’ Tall oats, ‘Kiln’ moss. Brilliant, willowy, ‘Clover’ Sky, ‘Raven Metal’ and ‘Shenandoah’ switch grasses; ‘Haven Dwarf’ and ‘Ratt’ fawn’ fountain grasses; ‘The Blue’ tall bryanthem, ‘Indian’ grasses and ‘Creeping’

Atlanta’s Historic
Fourth Ward Park
By HDR, Inc., and Wood-Partners, Inc.

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Below & Right

Atlanta’s Historic Fourth Ward Park is a 17-acre park that has been transformed from a barren, contaminated site near Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthplace into a vision for sustainable redevelopment. Flood protection and stormwater overflow solutions are disguised through artistic park features “celebrating” water. Economic redevelopment has been jump-started by additional park amenities, such as flowing walkways and a city greenwood, a splashpad and playground; a recirculating stream and wildflower meadow; a multipurpose recreation field and Atlanta’s first skate park.

Atlanta’s Historic Fourth Ward neighborhood had become what The Atlanta Journal-Constitution called “...a barren expanse of cracked concrete, woods, and towering trees surviving against a background of neglect.” Plagued by industrial waste, the lowland area of an urban basin was subject to flooding and combined sewer overflows (CSO) when there was heavy rain.

The property is adjacent to the Atlanta BeltLine, a proposed network of parks, multiuse trails and transit along a 22-mile corridor circling downtown Atlanta, directly connecting 45 neighborhoods. The BeltLine concept is an integrated approach to land use, transportation, greenspace and sustainable development intended to create a framework for future growth in Atlanta.

The impetus for the new park came from a consent decree to increase capacity in the Atlanta combined and separated sanitary sewer service areas, which initially pointed toward a $70 million traditional sewer tunnel system. Instead, designers worked with community leaders to envision a stormwater detention pond that could resolve the sewer overflows, while being the centerpiece of a new, multi-modal greenspace – thus aligning the needs of the Atlanta Department of Watershed Management and Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. with a single project.

Construction for the stormwater pond cost just $25 million, including land purchase and environmental cleanup of the brownfield site. This was a significant savings for the city, especially considering the $50 to $75 million estimates for tunnel construction – and paved the way for adjacent, connected amenities that now make up the first park along the Atlanta BeltLine.

Quality of Design and Execution

“The resulting Historic Fourth Ward Park successfully disguises its stormwater management solutions by ‘celebrating’ water as it enters the detention pond.”

In dramatic contrast to traditional discharge pipes, the pond showcases these engineered features with artistic design. Stormwater becomes a focal point with overlooks, platforms and plazas positioned near points where the water is both piped into and directed to run off into the pond.

Pond design integrates distinct artistic features on each side of the pond to facilitate the flow of stormwater, including a stepped-down, river stone lined drainage channel alongside a curving staircase with a 35-foot elevation change and a 40-foot waterfall, which drops from a 13-foot retaining wall onto sculptural stones. This approach uniquely combines the functional movement of water with aesthetic value.

The area surrounding the pond features sculptural artistic elements, curvilinear retaining walls, intricate landscape detailing and multiple viewing platforms. A terraced amphitheater surrounded by walkways,
Above The 17,500 SF skatepark was designed by Pillar Design of Toronto, with input from skater Tony Hawk pictured in action. Street features were modeled after original handbuilt elements previously constructed on site by the local skate community.

Plazas and greenspace create a dramatic sense of place for parkgoers.

The second phase of the park brings the total size to 37 acres, adding a variety of distinct park "rooms" offering both active and passive recreation. Atlanta’s first skate park proved to be a major attraction, enhanced through funding and design input from the Tony Hawk Foundation. In addition to open lawns, trails, a rainwater harvesting stream and a wildflower meadow, the second phase added a multipurpose recreation field, a splash pad, a playground and a large event greenspace.

Environmental Sensitivity and Sustainability

Historic Fourth Ward Park is one of seven Georgia pilot projects selected for the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) to test the this rating system for green landscape design, construction and maintenance. SITES, of course, is the interdisciplinary effort by the ASLA, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (University of Texas at Austin) and the U.S. Botanic Garden to create national guidelines and performance benchmarks for sustainable land design, construction and maintenance practices. The site was a brownfield and required remediation of contaminated soils.

The 55,000 cubic yards of soil excavated to build the stormwater pond was reused in other local restoration projects, while landscape elements were designed using granite from a local quarry.

Rainwater is managed on site, and many impervious surfaces were replaced with landscaping. The design of the detention pond below the water table allows for a constant inflow of water, allowing generated water to be used as irrigation for the existing park’s lawns and playing fields.

Additional runoff supplies water to the recirculating stream. A cistern underneath the multipurpose field also harvests excess rainwater.

Curved walls along the pond protect old-growth oak trees, and soil tail walls were used during wall construction to avoid impacts to the critical root zone.

New plantings feature drought tolerant species, and areas to showcase southern heritage plants and a wetland habitat. Extra elements of urban forest, native grass and Top & Middle, Right The playground has poured-in-place rubber safe surfacing (GF Impala). The play structure left is "Pumptrack Plus Kid's (Gandykink) with "Choo Choo Panel”, "Piston Panel and "Train Whistle,” the distinctive swings see the "Big Fo" (Dynamax).

Bottom, Right The steel-framed bridges with (polishing) are a design response to the railroad and industrial beginnings of the Atlanta BeltLine project, and reinforce the connection to the recirculating stream and the stormwater management.
Wildflower meadows and employing organic land care standards reinforce sustainable systems and practices that will begin to offset current unsustainable land uses.

The park also demonstrates cost-neutral energy usage, with a series of solar panels designed as an architectural shade canopy along the park pathways. The renewable energy is sold to Georgia Power Co. Atlanta purchases power off the grid at a lower rate, keeping the park cost neutral for energy usage. The park also has LED lighting, system controls, and a maintenance plan, all designed to lower energy costs.

Design Value to the Client and Other Designers:

The final product is a public park that reduces energy use, contributes to vital ecological processes and is maintained in an environmentally responsible way. The design principles of Historic Fourth Ward Park provide the successful template of land use, green space and sustainable development for the entire Atlanta BeltLine.

The project demonstrated a true collaboration that began with public meetings designed to ensure the park program was defined to specifically meet the needs of stakeholders and communities:

- The Atlanta Department of Watershed Management addressed flooding and CSO issues at a fraction of the cost of a traditional sewer tunnel system.
- Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. has its first park node along the 22-mile corridor, along with the design principles for future development.
Top, Right
In the rare eventuality of a 100-year storm, the water level would cover this path and reach the first riverstone band in the granite wall, the higher band marks a 500-year storm event. According to Atlanta BeltLine officials, this detention pond, versus installing additional storm water tunneling, saved the city more than $15 million.

- The Atlanta Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs has new park attractions and the city's first skate park.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency contributed funding toward the cleanup of a contaminated and neglected neighborhood.
- The Historic Fourth Ward Park Conservancy, made up of neighborhood residents and business owners, has witnessed a neighborhood transformation into a hub of activity that includes occupied high-rise residences, new restaurants and shops, and regular parkgoers.

The development of Historic Fourth Ward Park demonstrates the value of sustainable, collaborative design and the positive social, environmental and economic impact it can have on a community.

As an Atlanta City Council member said, “Because the process respected the core values of the Old Fourth Ward—diversity, innovation, and a commitment to social justice—one of the city’s most historic neighborhoods is now home to its most forward-thinking park.”

VENDORS
Artist: Artemis Studios, LLC, Atlanta
Bike Rack: Forms + Surfaces
Irrigation: Baseline, Hunter and Rainbird
Bench and Trash Receptacles: Landscape Forms
Lighting:
Bela, Bronzelight, King Luminaire, GE, Day Brite and McPhilen
Favors: Harover
Pet Waste Stations: Zero Waste USA, Inc.
Play Equipment: Dynamo, Gametime and Markus Ehring
Site Furnishings: Thomas Steele
Solar: Hannah Solar, Atlanta
Stone: Kalka Granite