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2019 MAY -2 PM 3: 13

AGENDA REPORT

TO: Sabrina B. Landreth
City Administrator

FROM: J. Nicholas Williams
Director

SUBJECT: Response to Recommendations
In the Oakland Parks and Recreation
Foundation (OPRF) Report

DATE: April 22 2019

City Administrator Approval

Date:

5/11/19

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report Responding To The Recommendations From The Oakland Parks And Recreation Foundation's (OPRF) 2018 Report On The State Of Maintenance In Oakland Parks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This informational report provides a response to the recommendations contained in the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation (OPRF) Report titled: "Continuing Crisis: 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks".

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

On March 5, 2019, the Public Works and Life Enrichment Committees heard a presentation from the OPRF regarding their report titled: "Continuing Crisis: 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks" (see **Attachment A**). At that meeting the Public Works Committee asked that Administration bring back a response to the OPRF's recommendations. The six (6) recommendations follow:

1. Find a new stream of Funding for Maintenance of Existing Parks
2. Alleviate Homelessness in City Parks
3. Increase Staffing and Fill Current Vacancies for Gardeners
4. Keep Restrooms Clean and Functional
5. Improve Sports Field Maintenance and Playground Repair
6. Improve Park Safety and Security

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ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Below are staff's responses for each of the six (6) recommendations posed by OPRF.

Recommendation #1: Find a new stream of Funding for Maintenance of Existing Parks

City's Response

Oakland Public Works (OPW), Bureau of Environment (BOE), Parks and Tree Services Division (PTSD) is funded by the Landscape and Lighting Assessment District (LLAD). Since its inception, the LLAD has not grown or been adjusted with the consumer price index (CPI). This has caused a continual budget shortfall that resulted in the layoff of nearly 50 percent of skilled park and tree maintenance staff in 2008, and the subsequent hiring of unskilled temporary Park Attendants.

With additional training and dedicated staff, park conditions have improved; however, with additional funding, parks and tree maintenance service levels will increase. OPRF has also reached out to City staff regarding a potential park's maintenance ballot measure that they hope will qualify for the November 2020 ballot. Without an additional funding source, the Parks and Tree Services Division will continue to experience a reduction in staff, and a corresponding reduction in service and service delivery.

Recommendation #2: Alleviate Homelessness in City Parks

City's Response

The City of Oakland acknowledges that Parks are not intended or designed to support homeless encampments and the existence of encampments in parks affects the ability of Oaklanders to use the parks as they were designed. The City recognizes that it is facing a homelessness crisis that affects everyone. Between 2015 -2017 the unsheltered population grew by 25 percent and that percentage is expected to show an even greater increase in the most recent point-in-time count to be released next month. Parks, right-of-ways, sidewalks, and under freeway overpasses are not safe or acceptable places to live and were never designed for human habitation. All Oaklanders deserve safe, affordable housing.

The City also recognizes that parks pose a unique set of challenges in regard to preventing encampments; unlike a City sidewalk which is clearly defined and highly visible, many parks have vast, expansive areas that are difficult to patrol, monitor, and maintain. Nevertheless, the City's Encampment Management Team applies the same standard to parks as it does to other areas; evaluating safety, health, location, and size of encampments to determine the best intervention. Those interventions can include encampment closures or less aggressive actions such as a deep cleaning or regular garbage service. There are parks the City has closed to encampments successfully and others where enforcing the closure has been unsuccessful, even after repeated attempts. While the City is taking aggressive steps to provide emergency shelter and housing through innovative new programs, such as the Community Cabin Program, Safe Parking Programs, and an expansion of its year-round shelter bed capacity, it will continue to monitor encampments in parks and respond with the goal of reducing the impact those encampments have on the intended use of the parks as designed.

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Recommendation #3: Increase Staffing and Fill Current Vacancies for Gardeners

City's Response

OPW agrees with this recommendation. Ongoing vacancies have a negative impact on OPW's operational effectiveness and efficiency. OPW is working closely with the City's Department of Human Resources Management (DHRM) to fill vacancies throughout OPW. Due to the absence of a cost of living adjustment within the LLAD, the fund suffers from a continual budget shortfall that resulted in the layoff of nearly 50 percent of skilled park and tree maintenance staff over the last decade, and the hiring of unskilled temporary Park Attendant staff. The reduction of skilled staff and the increased percentage of unskilled staff has led to reductions in service delivery. Oakland's parks are not maintained at a level that meets industry best practices.

Recommendation #4: Keep Restrooms Clean and Functional

City's Response

OPW agrees with this recommendation, however OPW believes that OPRF's assessment of the condition of restrooms at parks and recreational facilities is inadequate. Absent a strategy to improve park safety and security, adding additional custodial staff will not fully resolve the issue of restroom cleanliness and vandalism. Custodial staff have encountered drug dealing, prostitution, and assaults occurring in and around park restrooms in various areas of the City. As a safety policy, staff will not enter a restroom when it is occupied by someone who is unhoused, or by a person engaged in illegal/criminal activity. Custodial and maintenance staff are not law enforcement and are neither trained nor equipped to handle criminal and unlawful activities. OPW will revisit custodial staffing levels in parks and recreational facilities once the City has developed, adopted and implemented a strategy to address park safety.

Recommendation #5: Improve Sports Field Maintenance and Playground Repair

City's Response

OPW agrees with this recommendation. In fiscal year (FY) 2019-20, OPW has implemented a parks inspection program as part of the asset management program to track data to maintain and enhance the parks and facilities at a higher service level. The inspections will include irrigation system checks, tot-lot inspections, and pathway erosion monitoring. This data is necessary to procure additional funding (such as grants from the state) and to allocate the City's capital improvement project funds, Measure KK (Infrastructure Bond) funds, and other competitive grants. In addition, OPW is in the process of adding all parks assets to the department's Geographic Information System (GIS), enabling easier access to and more accurate management of all park assets.

Recommendation #6: Improve Park Safety and Security

City's Response

Park safety and security requires a level of Oakland Police Department (OPD) staffing which is neither currently funded nor available at this time. As of March 4, 2019, OPD is understaffed by 54 sworn officer positions and all available recruiting, hiring and retention efforts are designed to minimally bring the Department to its full authorized strength of 792 officers. This level of optimal strength is designed to fully staff and support current public safety commitments and expectations. The OPD agrees that all opportunities for additional staffing should be continuously explored and evaluated; however, adding staff and customized units is not the only manner of providing support, solutions and safety to Oakland parks, community members and city staff.

Many different approaches currently address the complex issues of crime and fear of crime at and near parks, and there may be opportunity to further collaborate and provide more focus on serious or prioritized public safety issues. In addition to routine police response to emergency and non-emergency calls for service, Community Resource Officers (CROs are Measure Y - Violence Prevention and Community Policing Act funded) and Neighborhood Service Coordinators (NSC) may attend or facilitate community meetings at or near parks where park issues may be prioritized as community policing projects. CROs and NSCs have engaged park issues through this existing program of neighborhood problem-solving. Likewise, CROs and our OPD Neighborhood Services Division have assessed physical designs of parks using a strategy known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

The extent to which these resources and collaborations are known and utilized may be addressed through further outreach, education and partnership using current and available police and park staffing. OPD also agrees that planners, architects and developers play important roles in enhancing the safety of our park communities; OPD recommends that any initial design or design improvement include an assessment of best practices to maximize the benefit that design has in decreasing crime.

FISCAL IMPACT

This item is for informational purposes only and does not have a direct fiscal impact or cost.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

This item does not require additional public outreach, other than the required posting on the City's website.

COORDINATION

This report was produced in coordination with the City Administrator's Office, OPW, OPRYD, and OPD.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: There are no economic opportunities associated with this item.

Environmental: There are no environmental opportunities associated with this item.

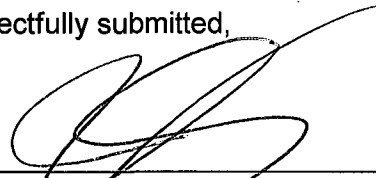
Social Equity: There are no social equity opportunities associated with this item.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff recommends that the City Council receive an informational report responding to the recommendations from the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation's (OPRF's) 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland parks.

For questions regarding this report, please contact J. Nicholas Williams, OPRYD Director, at (510) 238-7527.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments (1):

A: Continuing Crisis: The 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks



OAKLAND PARKS and
RECREATION FOUNDATION

CONTINUING CRISIS: The 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks



"Supporting Parks and Recreation Programs for Everyone in Oakland"

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Executive Summary

The Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation’s mission is to support “*parks and recreation programs for everyone in Oakland.*” This report presents the Foundation’s 2018 assessment on the state of maintenance in Oakland’s parks. Park maintenance is essential to the success of our park system and the ability of our parks to serve everyone in Oakland. More fundamentally, park maintenance shapes the livability and image of Oakland itself. Our parks should reflect Oakland’s commitment to becoming a more inclusive and equitable city. While there are some bright spots, there is much work to be done.

The Parks Foundation assessment is based on a field survey conducted on October 20, 2018. Volunteers assessed 51 community and neighborhood parks. Parks were evaluated in multiple categories, including picnic areas, outdoor sports areas, litter, impact of homelessness, etc., with 47 rating questions in all. This report compares the 2018 findings to the 2016 findings in several categories, including greenery, restrooms, homelessness, playgrounds, and athletic fields.

The Report identifies challenges and highlights areas for improvement. Specifically, it finds:

- Modest improvements over 2016 in most categories but a rating average well below historic standards.
- Inequitably worse park conditions in Oakland’s most vulnerable and underserved neighborhoods. particularly in Council Districts 3, 5, and 7.

We are concerned that diminished maintenance conditions are becoming the “new normal” and that our parks are now operating at a level that would have never been acceptable to prior generations of Oaklanders. Of significance, the homeless crisis has overwhelmed some of the city’s parks, impeding them from serving their intended function and placing new demands on an already under-resourced system. The crisis is particularly glaring as it coincides with one of the greatest economic booms in Oakland’s history.

The Parks Foundation believes the challenges identified in our survey are surmountable. Further, we believe it is imperative that Oakland take action if we are to meet 21st Century demands related to growing population, expanding notions of recreation and community, and climate change. Based on our findings, we ask that the Oakland City Council, the Mayor, and other leaders:

-
- Develop new funding sources for maintenance
 - Expedite hiring for vacant park and maintenance positions
 - Restore park gardener positions
 - Hire additional safety personnel
 - Work collaboratively with community partners to address homelessness in the parks

Great parks are part of Oakland’s distinctive legacy and are vital to our quality of life. Oakland must take immediate action to end the long-term disinvestment and neglect that has plagued our parks for the past two decades. A parcel tax for park maintenance placed on the 2020 ballot would be a positive first step.

I. Introduction

“Parks, trails, and community centers ... provide recreational opportunities, improve human health, attract visitors, and provide natural goods and services such as filtering air pollutants and managing storm water.”

-- Trust for Public Land, 2016 ¹

We can all agree that the health and economic benefits of city park and recreation systems cannot be achieved without attractive, well-equipped and well-maintained parks. The health benefits are crucial to the well-being of residents and the economic benefits are invaluable to the sustainability and flourishing of any city:

- Parks, greenways, and trails enable and encourage people to exercise
- Exposure to nature improves psychological and social health
- Play is critical for child development
- Parks help build healthy, stable communities
- Parks generate additional property tax revenue
- Parks reduce municipal storm water management costs
- Parks improve air quality
- Parks are an essential part of cohesive, complete communities²

In this report, our 12th in a series of Community Report Cards on the State of Maintenance of Oakland Parks, we once again give an account on conditions in Oakland parks and on how well those conditions comport with the standards that Oaklanders expect for their recreational spaces. Our report is based on our park survey, performed by volunteer teams that work to achieve a rating consensus on each survey question. Questions cover a broad range of park issues and amenities including safety of play areas, condition of sports fields, park landscaping and hardscape, park cleanliness, restroom availability, homeless encampments and more. Results from the survey will be discussed in depth on the following pages.

¹ <https://www.tpl.org/economic-benefits-park-recreation-system-san-jos%C3%A9-california#sm.00016mauajk1neicr791s8cwyrp45>

² https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/updated-san-jose-econ-rept.pdf

Unfortunately, the realities of long-term inadequate funding and staffing for parks maintenance continue to result in sub-optimal conditions. This report, like our previous reports, serves to impartially document these conditions, and most importantly, serves as a tool to encourage and facilitate increased maintenance resources so that our facilities may reach their fullest potential.

This year's survey and subsequent analysis has determined that our *Overall Park Rating* is a C+ for 2018, as it was in 2016. City staff should be commended for their work with limited resources, but greater investment is essential. Special emphasis should be placed upon:

- Unsheltered Residents in Parks
- Greenery and Trees
- Restrooms
- Playgrounds and Athletic Fields

II. Park Survey Background

Oakland Parks Coalition (OPC), led by its founders Gillian Garro and Audree Jones-Taylor, conducted the first park survey in 2003 out of concern for declining park conditions. Although the causal issues have been discussed in many City government venues and stopgap remedies have found their way into the maintenance program, the slow decline of park conditions has not been stopped. Aging parks require more care as years pass yet it has been more than 50 years since our park maintenance resources were at their zenith. Since then, multiple new parks have been created with little or no additional provision of maintenance resources or maintenance staffing. Oakland's population also has grown, increasing by 38,000 residents in the last eight years alone.³

The 2018-19 Oakland budget document points to the urgency for increased resources to care for parks:

“New and renovated parks and plans are being developed primarily funded by voter-supported Measure DD, Measure WW, State Park Bonds and former Redevelopment funds (still funding projects in process). Bonds and former Redevelopment funds are restricted to supporting the creation of a park or other facility, and are not available to fund staff or

³ California Department of Finance, [Table E-5](#)

materials for ongoing maintenance. No funds have been budgeted to maintain these newly constructed parks.⁴

OPC reorganized in 2006 and initiated this current series of survey events known as *Love Your Parks Day* and reports. In 2015 OPC merged with the former *Friends of Oakland Parks and Recreation* to form *Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation* which conducted the 2016 survey and the 2018 survey related to this report. The Parks Foundation did not survey parks in 2017.

The Parks Foundation suspended the survey last year (2017) to consider ways to improve both the survey and the report. We looked at our methods and the traditional scope of the survey and decided that in 2018 it was important to limit the survey to the larger parks that are more highly used. We also modified our survey training so that surveyors' ratings would conform more closely to the same model. Additionally, we elected to conduct the survey biennially, in even years, allowing more time for improvements to maintenance between surveys.

Volunteers who participated in survey-taking this year all received their training on October 20 and every park was surveyed on the same day, providing uniform conditions for ratings. In other years we attempted to survey almost every park in Oakland (approximately 130) from the tiny tot lots to wilderness parks. This year we limited the survey to the largest parks, known as Community Parks (CP) and Neighborhood Parks (NP), where recreation opportunities are often similar. We excluded, however, our two largest city parks, Joaquin Miller and Lakeside Park. These parks attract users not just from Oakland but also from nearby cities and have unique assets. We determined that they would require a different survey and the undertaking should be a collaborative effort with their support groups. We feel that the changes we made have produced more focused and accurate information about current conditions in our parks.

Figure 1 shows the surveyed parks.

⁴ http://budgetdata.oaklandca.gov/#!/year/2017-2018/operating/0/departments/Oakland+Public+Works/0/service_area/Parks,+Grounds+%2526+Medians+Maintenance/0/fund_fund_number_and_name

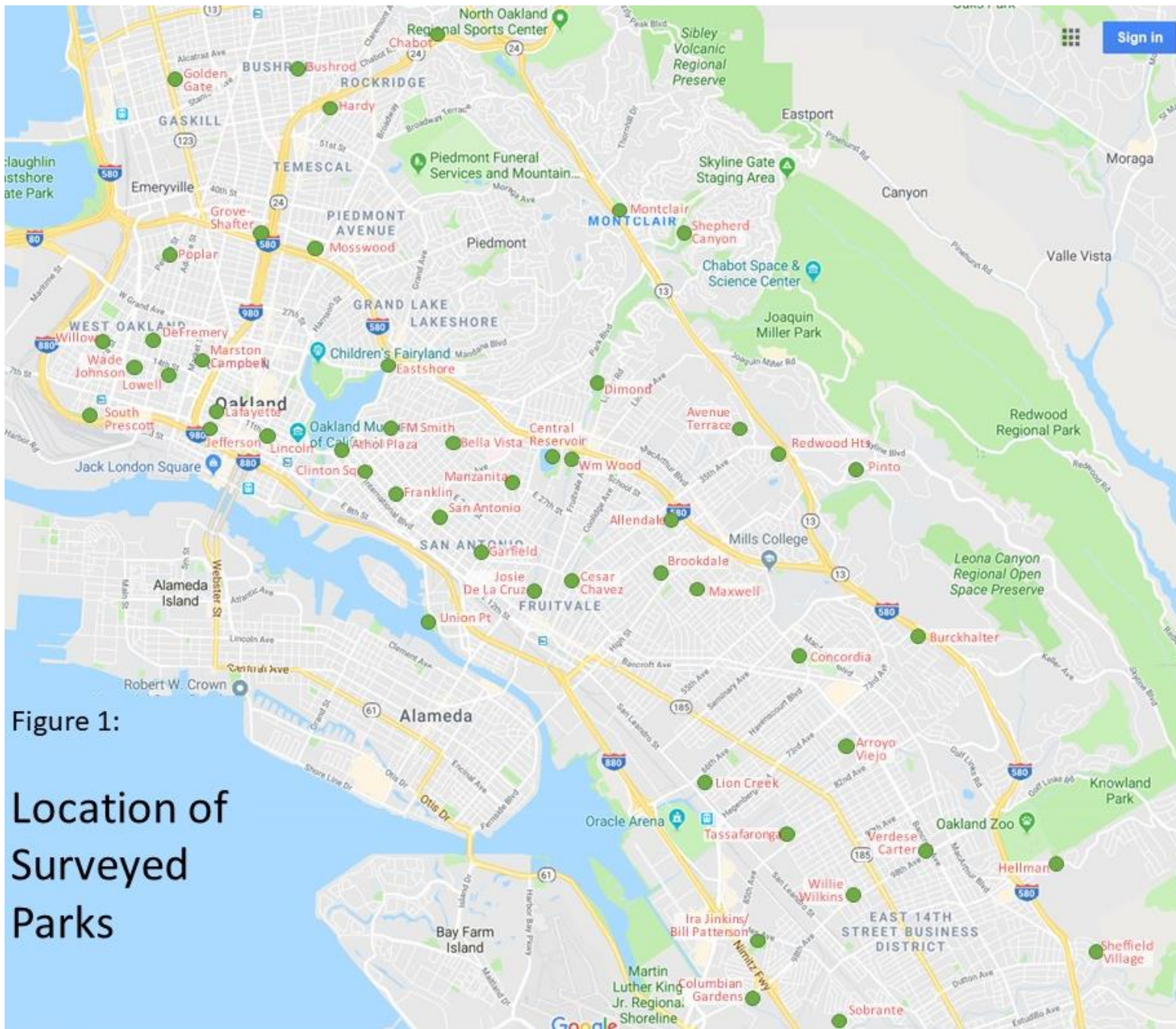


Figure 1:
Location of
Surveyed
Parks

The 2018 *Love Your Parks Day* training and survey were conducted on Saturday, October 20, from 9:00am-12:30pm by eighteen teams composed of 2-4 volunteers each, many of whom were park stewards or members of park organizations. Fifty-four Neighborhood and Community Parks were assigned for surveying; for various reasons three of those parks were not surveyed, leaving fifty-one.⁵



Love Your Parks Day Volunteers, 2018

Survey questions cover the complete range of park amenities. Survey teams are directed to reach a consensus for ratings for each question.

The last task on the survey has always been to give the park an *Overall Rating*. Ratings are A-F: (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and F=0). This year's *Park Overall Rating* was 2.63, a slight improvement over the 2016 *Overall Rating* of 2.55 for the Community and Neighborhood parks. In the following pages we will compare 2016 survey results with 2018 and take a closer look, through survey charts, survey comments and historical perspective, at the ratings of conditions in the survey categories.

III. Survey Results-Overview Comparing 2016 to 2018

Park Overall Ratings by OSCAR

Oakland adopted the Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation (“OSCAR”) Element of its General Plan in 1996. The OSCAR established a classification system for Oakland’s parks, intended to guide their planning and programming. The largest parks, like Lakeside and Joaquin Miller, were designated as Region-Serving Parks. OSCAR identified nine “Community Parks” and 44 “Neighborhood Parks.” Other park categories include mini-

⁵ Snow Park and Rainbow Recreation Center were under construction at the time of the survey, and Stonehurst Park is an OUSD facility that was not accessible on the day of the survey. Thus, these parks were not surveyed.

parcs, linear parks, resource conservation areas, athletic fields, golf courses, and special use parks (such as Knowland Park Zoo and Peralta Hacienda).

As noted in the Introduction, the 2018 survey focused on the Community and Neighborhood Parks. The Community Parks are typically large, draw users from multiple neighborhoods, include recreation centers and ballfields, and have a diverse array of recreational facilities. The Neighborhood Parks are smaller, serve a more localized population, and have more limited facilities. Chart 1 shows the overall ratings for each category. This year, the overall rating for Community Parks was 2.78, which was slightly above the citywide average. The overall rating for Neighborhood Parks was 2.60, which was slightly below the citywide average.

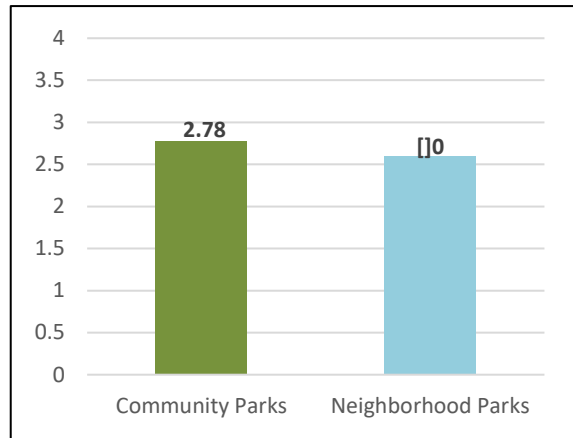


Chart 1: Overall Ratings by Park Classification (OSCAR)

Survey Category Ratings

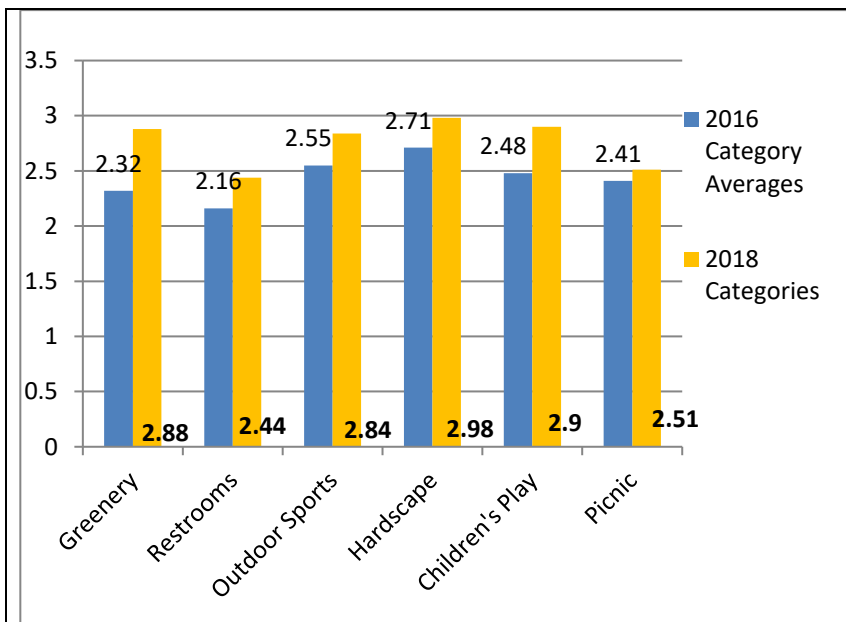


Chart 2: Category Averages 2016/2018

A comparison of the last two surveys (2016 and 2018) by survey categories (chart #2) shows that 2018 ratings surpass 2016 in all categories. Greenery appears to have improved the most while Restroom conditions were rated lowest in both years.

Park Overall Ratings by Council Districts

Chart #3 shows the averages for the *Park Overall Rating* question for each council district for 2018 and 2016. The number of Community and Neighborhood parks for each council district (CD) is listed in parenthesis in the label below the graph bars.

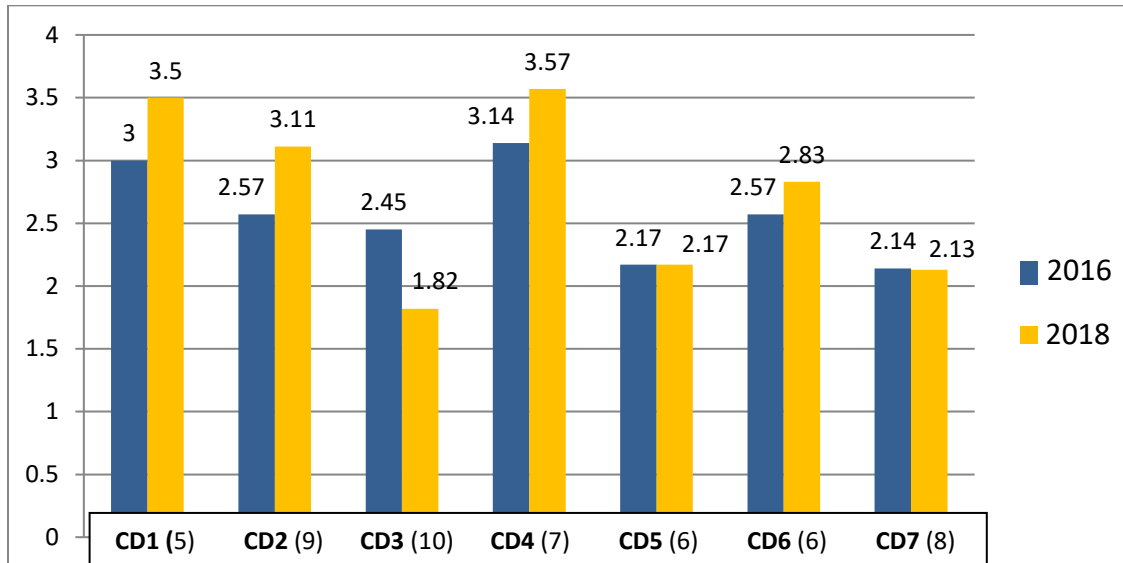


Chart 3: 2016/2018 Park Overall Ratings by Council District

- CD4 had the highest *Overall Rating* in both 2016 (3.14-B) and 2018 (3.57-B+).
- Parks in CD1 come in second in both years, 3.0 in 2016 and 3.5 in 2018.
- CD3 draws our attention for its exceedingly low rating in 2018 of 1.82 (D+). Districts 5 and 7 also lag well below the citywide average. This is discussed in a later section of this report on Park Equity.

IV. Park Maintenance Background

According to the 2017-18 budget, the Oakland Public Works Agency (OPW) provides landscape maintenance, litter removal, and homeless encampment abatement to 134 parks and public spaces and 1,055 acres of Resource Conservation Area. It also maintains approximately 100 landscaped medians and streetscapes, as well as grounds at City

facilities.⁶ Park maintenance activities include litter pickup and removal, pruning, weeding, turf mowing, irrigation system repairs and planting.

There are currently 105.4 Full-Time Employee (FTEs) positions allocated to provide these services. Charts #4 and #5 show that park maintenance staffing is only 60% of what it was in 1970, when there were 175.33 FTEs allocated. Park maintenance staff was particularly hard hit by the 2008 recession. Staffing dropped to its lowest point in 2012 when the FTEs numbered only 80; however, the recent gains came at a sacrifice of skilled gardener positions. Charts #4 and #5 also show the downward spiral of skilled gardeners from a once high of 91 to the current level of 34.

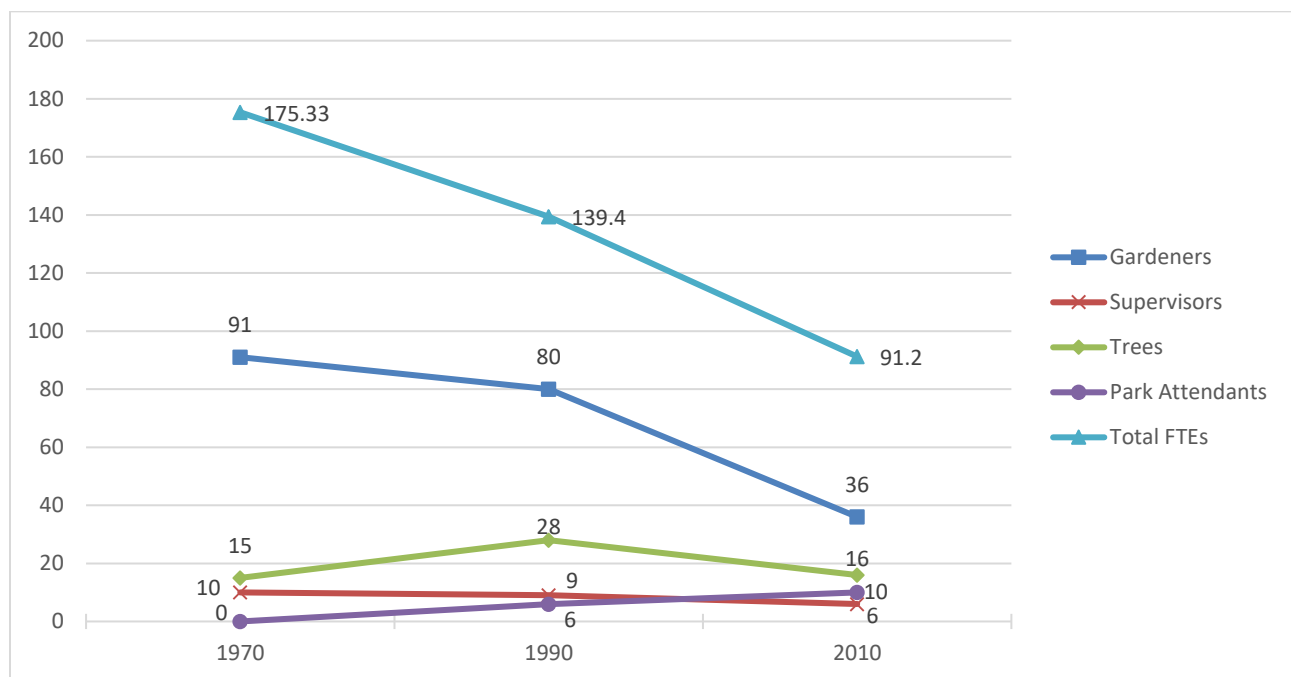
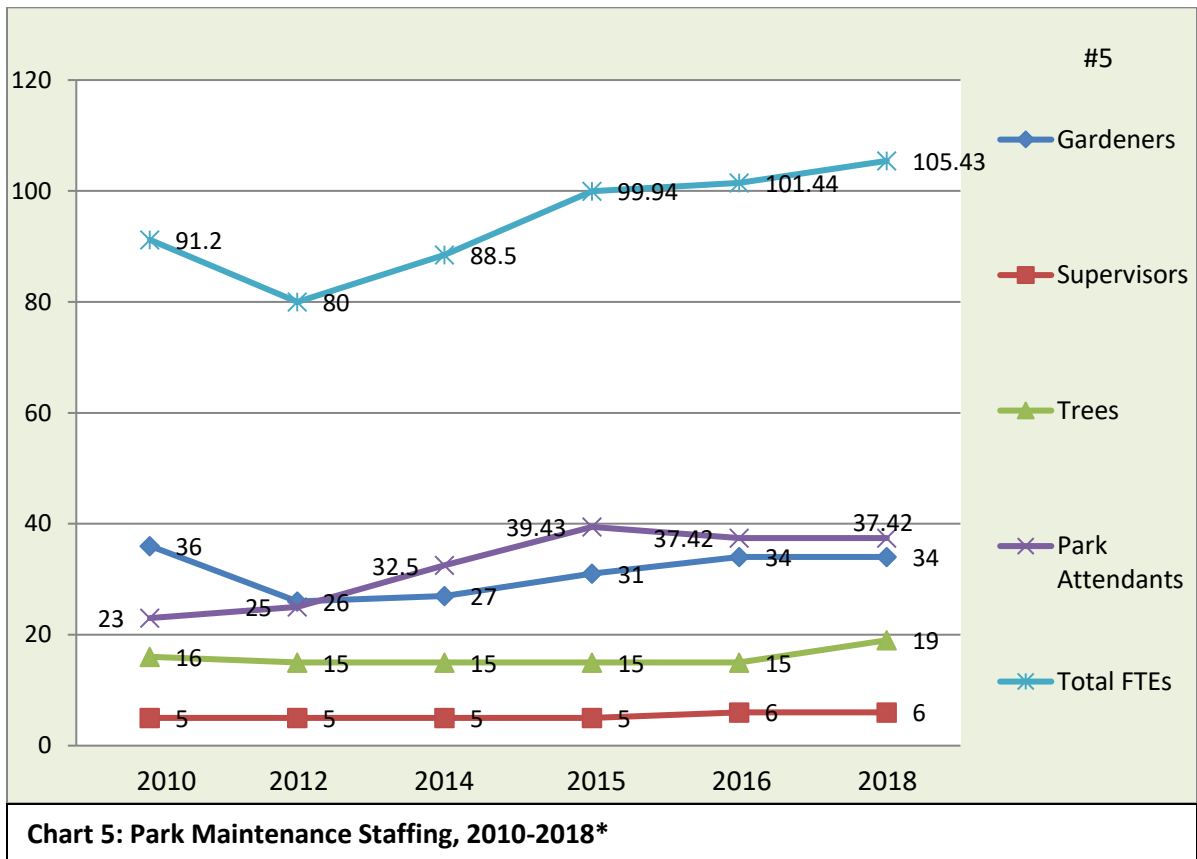


Chart 4: Park Maintenance Staffing, 1970-2010

⁶ http://budgetdata.oaklandca.gov/#!/year/2017-2018/operating/0/department_name/Oakland+Public+Works/0/service_area/Parks,+Grounds+%2526+Medians+Maintenance/0/fund_fund_number_and_name



*The figures do not represent actual workers on the ground. They represent budgeted positions and at any point in time a number of those positions may be vacant.

A new category of workers was introduced in 1990-Park Attendants (PTs or PPTs). The numbers of these part-time workers have risen steadily to the current level of 37.4 FTEs (see chart #5), even outnumbering gardeners. It is questionable whether this trade-off of gardeners for part-timers results in greater efficiency. Part-timers often begin their employment with few or no skills. They are trained by seasoned gardeners but attaining the skills needed to ascend to the ranks of gardeners is complicated by the punctuated and seasonal status of their employment. Many part-timers fail to return because of the insecurity of their job status. The increase in full-time gardener positions from 26 in 2012 to 34 in 2018 is a positive sign and should continue in the future.

As part of this report, Parks Foundation board members met with park maintenance staff at the Public Works Agency to discuss current challenges and opportunities. Key findings are reported here:

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- Despite the addition of positions to the organization, the Agency is still challenged by a large number of vacancies. Vacancies can take from six months to more than a year to fill, in part because Oakland is competing with many other Bay Area jurisdictions—and with the private sector—for the same candidates. At the time of this writing, vacancies included:
 - 2 of the 5 Park Supervisor I positions
 - 6.43 Gardener positions out of 37.43 budgeted
 - 1 Tree Supervisor I position
 - 3 tree trimmer positions
 - The unsheltered population continues to pose a challenge to park maintenance, but the transfer of some of the clean-up responsibilities to Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful (KOCB) has helped. KOCB is a division of Oakland Public Works and is responsible for reducing litter and illegal dumping, removing graffiti on public property, and providing garbage service and clean-up associated with homeless encampments. Some of this work was previously done by park gardeners, making it difficult for them to focus on landscape care.
 - Volunteers have made a difference. The number of neighborhood and Adopt-a-Spot volunteers has increased substantially in the last few years. However, volunteer sign-ups have been uneven, with some parks reaping the benefits while others languish.
 - There is a significant backlog of tree-trimming work. Staff resources are still not sufficient to keep pace, and the backlog continues to grow. The 2012-2016 drought severely impacted Oakland's parks.
 - Funding levels are adequate to provide "C-plus" maintenance service in most categories, but sustained investment and new funding sources will be necessary to deliver "A" maintenance grades for all parks. Basic services such as weekend restroom clean-up and locking of restrooms during night-time hours cannot be provided under current funding levels. Ballfield repair and maintenance is likewise underfunded, even as demand for field use remains at very high levels.

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- Park vandalism remains an intractable issue. Restrooms are particularly prone to damage, but parks are also subject to frequent wire theft, damage to irrigation systems, and misuse or destruction of play equipment. Park vandalism is especially damaging because it discourages legitimate park use, which creates conditions that foster more anti-social behavior.

In the last decade, Oakland has invested millions of dollars in capital improvements for parks through grants and bond measures. Funding for maintenance has not increased at the same rate. This widening gap has hampered the City's ability to serve community needs.

V. Four Major Issues in our Parks

In our 2016 report we focused on three main survey categories that had been identified as priorities by surveyors—**Homelessness, Greenery/Trees, and Restrooms**. We will revisit those categories here and add a fourth—conditions of our sports fields and playgrounds -- and compare 2018 results to 2016.

A. Homelessness

2015: This was the first survey with questions about unsheltered residents in our parks:

- “Is there evidence of homeless people using this park?” Surveyors named 18 parks with evidence of homeless people using the parks.
- “Is there evidence of homeless people living in this park?” Surveyors found evidence of 15 parks housing the homeless.

2016: In 2016 we eliminated the question about homeless people using the park (it was difficult to differentiate between using and living) and simply asked if the surveyor saw evidence of people living in the park. The result is very similar to the 2015 responses—16/50 parks were cited as housing the homeless.⁷

⁷ Note: We are being careful to compare apples to apples with these charts, limiting our data to only Neighborhood and Community Parks, of which 51 were surveyed in 2018. Overall, 112 parks were surveyed in 2016 and 37 of those were reported to have homeless persons living in them.

2018: By 2018 the homeless situation in our parks had morphed from a scattering of individuals to established homeless encampments. In 2018, around the same number of parks were identified as housing homeless people as in 2016-13 parks out of 51-but the numbers of people and tents in these parks had ballooned. To capture this trend we asked our surveyors three questions whose answers, we felt, would provide better insight:

- Q23: Estimate the number of tents/shelters you see in this park.
- Q24: Is there any dumping at the site of the tents or shelters?
- Q25: Are people living in their RVs/vans/cars around the perimeter of the park?

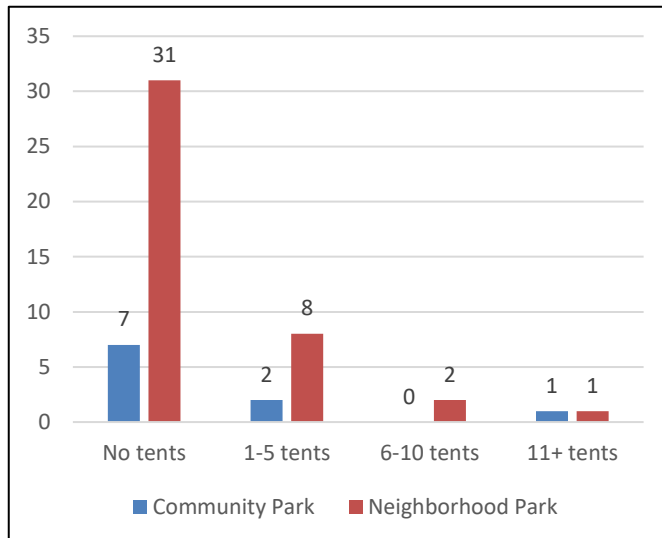


Chart 6: Number of Tents/Shelters Reported in Each Park Category, 2018

The answers to these questions are shown in Chart 6 and Table 1.

Two parks had 11 or more tents—Union Point and Mosswood. Two others, Lafayette and Jefferson Square, were cited as having encampments of 6-10 tents or shelters. Ten other parks were named in the 1-5 tent/shelter range.

In Which Parks Do the Homeless Reside?

Table 1 shows all Neighborhood and Community Parks in 2016 and 2018 where homeless people were living. Note that eight highlighted parks in the chart below are repeats. For the most part, parks with the most tents (more than six) do not have recreation centers (parks with recreation centers are starred). Mosswood, with eleven or more tents, is a special case since its recreation center burned and has not yet been replaced. The homeless encampments at Mosswood are at the back of the park, away from the play areas. The principle of safety in “eyes on the street” may contribute to the smaller number of homeless encampments in parks with recreation centers where staff is present on a daily basis.

Since the survey, the encampment in Lafayette Square has been cleared. Most of the residents of that encampment were placed in Tuff sheds at Northgate; others moved to Jefferson Square Park. We know that a group of new local residents began a campaign to

clean up Lafayette Square and make it safe to bring their children. They have worked with City agencies in this endeavor for at least two years.

Table 1: Unsheltered Population in Oakland Parks, 2016 and 2018

| Park | OSCAR | Council District | 2016 | 2018 | # of tents |
|------------------------|-----------|------------------|---------------|---------------|------------|
| Bushrod | CP | 1 | NO | YES | 1-5 |
| Hardy | NP | 1 | YES | NO | |
| Athol | NP | 2 | NO | YES | 1-5 |
| Clinton Square | NP | 2 | YES | NO | |
| San Antonio | CP | 2 | YES | YES | 1-5 |
| Grove Shafter | NP | 1 | NO | YES | 1-5 |
| Jefferson Square | NP | 3 | YES | YES | 6-10 |
| Lafayette | NP | 3 | YES | YES | 6-10 |
| Lowell Park | NP | 3 | YES | YES | 1-5 |
| Mosswood | CP | 3 | NO | YES | 11+ |
| Wade Johnson | NP | 3 | NO | YES | 1-5 |
| Willow | NP | 3 | YES | YES | 1-5 |
| Snow | NP | 3 | YES | NO | |
| Brookdale Park | CP | 4 | YES | YES | 1-5 |
| Dimond | CP | 4 | YES | NO | |
| Union Point | NP | 5 | YES | YES | 11+ |
| William Wood | NP | 5 | YES | NO | |
| Arroyo Viejo | CP | 6 | YES | NO | |
| Maxwell | NP | 6 | YES | YES | 1-5 |
| Columbian Gardens | NP | 7 | YES | NO | |
| Officer Willie Wilkins | NP | 7 | NO | YES | 1-5 |
| Verdese Carter | NP | 7 | YES | NO | |
| TOTALS | NP | | 16-YES | 14-YES | |

The photos and questions below relate to encampments, encampment dumping, and park perimeter conditions. Table 2 presents the findings of Survey Questions 24 and 25 regarding dumping at the site of tents/shelters and persons living in vehicles at the park perimeter.

Table 2: Impact of Unsheltered population on Surveyed Parks

| | A Lot | Some | No | Not Applicable | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|----|----------------|-------|
| Question: Is there any dumping at the site of the tents or shelters? | 4 | 8 | 4 | 35 | 51 |
| | Yes | Maybe | No | Not Applicable | Total |
| Question: Are people living in their RVs/ vans/cars around the perimeter of the park? | 4 | 8 | 37 | 2 | 51 |



Lafayette Square Encampment in July, 2018



Lafayette Square November 2018, following abatement



Mosswood Encampment



Jefferson Square



Union Point Dumping



Wade Johnson Perimeter Dumping



Officer Willie Wilkins Perimeter Car Camping. Homeless Encampment of cars on perimeter of tennis courts. Court nets are being used to fence off the encampment.



Officer Willie Wilkins Perimeter Car Camping. Extension cords have been connected to electrical box on court to supply electricity to encampment.

How Does Oakland Address the Proliferation of Residents Seeking Shelter in in our Parks?

The following quote is from our 2016 survey report and is as germane today as it was then except that the homeless problem is now at a crisis level.

“Although cities throughout California are experiencing what appears to be a rise in homelessness, the problem in the Bay Area is far more acute due to the steep increase in home values and the concomitant increases in rents. Oakland is experiencing astronomical rent increases, more than most cities, and homelessness is the fallout from this housing market disruption. Our parks have become havens for citizens who have lost their homes and this is not a tenable solution for anyone, either the homeless or the residents who frequent those parks.”

Every two weeks, representatives from the departments and organizations that are tasked with finding solutions to homelessness in Oakland meet under the direction of Assistant to the City Administrator Joe DeVries. Among other tasks, they create the schedule which is informed by outreach by Health and Human Services and Project Dignity for cleanups and cleanouts for the next two weeks. Cleanups and garbage service to encampments is on a routine service schedule while cleanouts or closures of encampments occurs only occasionally. These closures are coordinated by Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful (KOCB) and they are implemented on a needs basis. A park closure is never a permanent solution. If the homeless have no place else to go, inevitably, the tents will reappear, much as they were before.

Mosswood is a case in point; after a summer 2018 cleanout the park is once more filled with tents. Lafayette Park was cleaned out in late October and was still clean of tents at this writing. We know that many of those experiencing homelessness received temporary shelter at the Northgate Tuff Shed site.

B. Greenery and Trees

“People’s desire to live near a park depends on characteristics of the park. Beautiful natural resource parks with great trees, trails, meadows, and gardens are markedly valuable. Other parks with excellent recreational facilities are also desirable. Less attractive or poorly maintained parks are only marginally valuable. And parks with frightening or dangerous aspects can reduce nearby property values.”⁸

⁸ Trust for Public Land, 2009, Economic Value of a City Park System

From a distance and from one's first step into a park what strikes the senses is the condition of its landscaping-its greenery, its grass, plants and trees. It is a given that parks need to be well-maintained to provide a healthy and enjoyable experience for park users.

Maintenance Service Schedules

At the height of the recession, in 2008, after revenue declines forced deep cutbacks in park maintenance staffing.⁹ parks, City landscapes and medians were grouped into three levels of service provision.¹⁰ These levels still pertain today.

- *Areas in Service Level 1 would receive a high level of "frequent, regular routine maintenance"*
- *Service Level 2 "a moderate level with regular monitoring, and adjustments to keep the area 'appealing'."*
- *Service Level 3 "little to no routine maintenance."*

Of the 163 parks and city landscapes on the maintenance list 95 are in Level 1, 58 in Level 2, and nine in Level 3. In an additional list of 77 medians most are Level 3.¹¹ Forty-five of the 51 parks surveyed this year were listed in Service Level 1 on the Park Service Zones and Service Levels document. The six remaining surveyed parks were listed as Service Level 2. The great majority of the surveyed parks are thus scheduled for "a high level of maintenance." Survey findings do not bear that out.

Survey Findings

Our survey poses nine questions pertaining to park greenery (see Chart 7). The first question won very positive reviews. It asked whether the grass looked as if it had been mowed and the average for that question was 3.49 (B+). The 2016 mowing schedule showed a three-week turn-around. Other landscaping tasks are performed on a seasonal calendar, usually in winter when the parks are not crowded, and the ratings in Chart 7 reflect this.

⁹ City of Oakland FY 2015-17 Adopted Policy Budget, G-69: "Park maintenance staffing levels for fulltime staff was reduced nearly 50% in 2008. These reductions have impacted the maintenance; resulting in a look and feel that Oakland parks are unkempt and have increased risk."

¹⁰ See Park List beginning on page I for current service levels of the surveyed areas.

¹¹ <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/pwa/documents/marketingmaterial/oak050141.pdf> This list is being revised by OPW and service levels for many parks will be downgraded as a result.

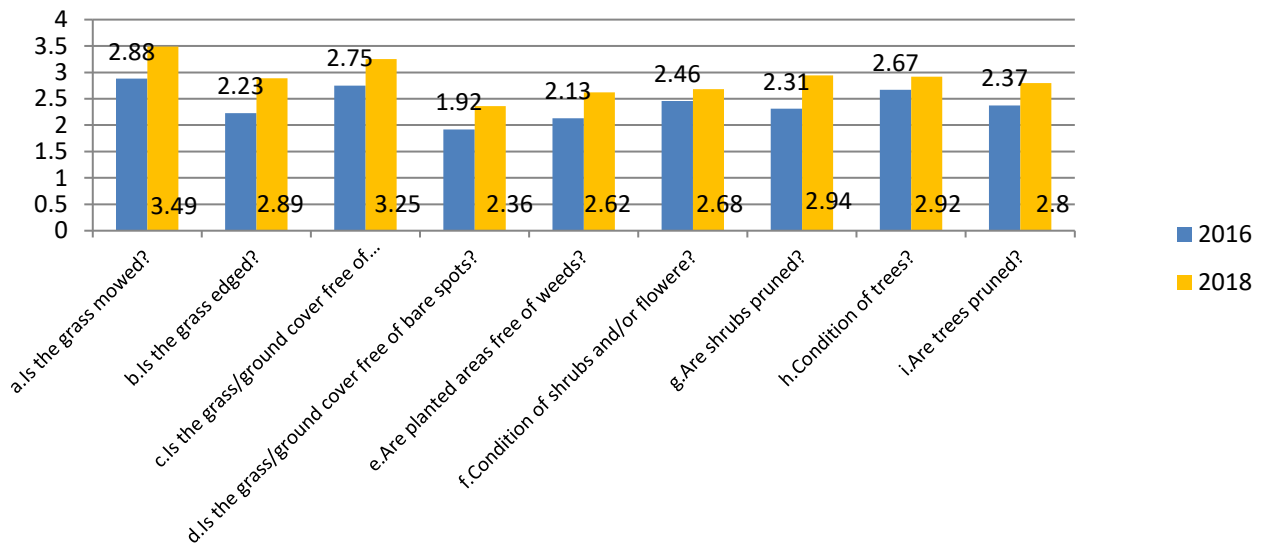


Chart 7: Greenery 2016/ 2018



Mowing in progress at Verdesse Carter Park

Is the grass mowed? YES! This question received the highest number of A ratings. The mowing crew is fully staffed and, thanks to the procurement of new trucks a few years ago, mowing equipment is in good working order. Mowing is a top priority and this is reflected in these numbers. Forty-two parks received an A or B rating for mowing!

Three Trouble Areas for Greenery

These three Greenery questions about bare spots, weeding and tree pruning had the lowest ratings in both 2016 and 2018. 2018 ratings were generally better but continue to fall into the C range. Table 3 provides a summary of the rankings in both years. The paragraphs that follow address each issue.

Table 3: Three Trouble Areas for Greenery

| | 2016 | 2018 |
|-----------------------------------------|------|------|
| Is the grass/ground free of bare spots? | 1.92 | 2.36 |
| Are the planted area free of weeds? | 2.13 | 2.62 |
| Are the trees pruned? | 2.80 | 2.37 |

Is the grass/ground cover free of bare spots? The standout among the low ratings is this question. It received a 2.36 rating. Irrigation cutbacks since the beginning of the drought have done lasting damage to the ground cover in some parks. Bare ground also attracts gophers, complicating an already bad situation.



South Prescott: Bare spots, weeds and gophers

Are the planted areas free of weeds? The ratings to this question averaged 2.62. Eradicating weeds in planted areas requires weeding by hand. It's time consuming and, therefore, not practiced regularly. The preferred OPW method for weed removal is weed whacking but whacking can't be used effectively in planted areas and it is not as effective as hand pulling weeds.

Are trees pruned? Public Works is still playing catch up since its numbers were drastically cut in 2010. With only nine tree trimmers, two tree high climbers and a long backlog of priority jobs, it may take years before the team can get back to scheduled tree pruning in our parks.

Tree Maintenance

Because of the prolonged drought and cutbacks in staffing for tree services hundreds, it is entirely possible that thousands of our trees are dying; that translates to a loss of metric tons of stored carbon, contributing to climate change. The 2017-18 budget document states:

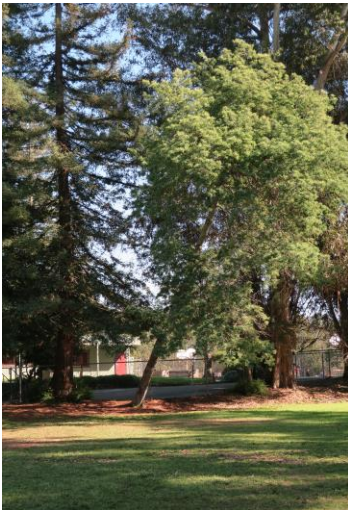
We are dedicated to protecting and maintaining the beautiful trees in Oakland while educating the public about the history and benefits of the trees in our community. Oakland has held the honored status of a [Tree City USA](#) for 28 years. The City maintains over 200,000 trees that grow in parks and along streets. In 2008, nearly half of the Tree Services unit was eliminated due to lack of funding. The tree planting, watering, [aesthetic]pruning and pollarding services were all eliminated. The City of Oakland will only prune trees in hazardous or emergency situations.¹²



Officer Willie Wilkins Park

This problem has been acute for years now as noted in this 2015 City budget document:

“Landscaped assets and Trees have been compromised by staffing decreases, resulting in increased blight, weeds, litter and a generally unkempt appearance. Tree maintenance is limited to hazardous response only.”¹³



Hellman Park

Some staffing for tree services was restored in 2018, bringing team positions to 19 from 15 (Chart #8). Four of those positions are still vacant but local competition is steep for these skilled workers and the last time the jobs were posted only nine people applied. The backlog of tree maintenance calls for service is daunting and routine maintenance has been postponed for years.

¹² <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/tree-services>

¹³ City of Oakland Fiscal Year 2015-2016, G-61, Prior Reductions

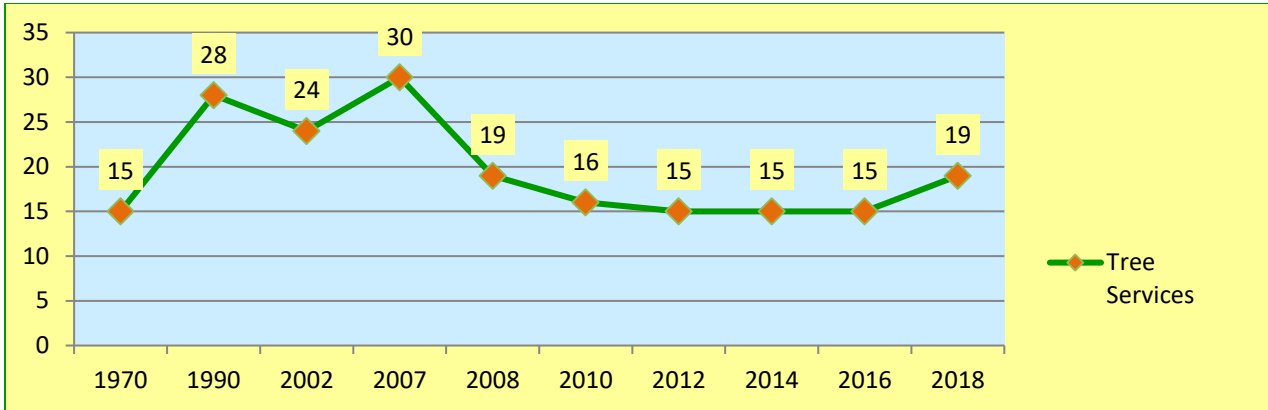


Chart 8: Tree Services FTE Staffing, 1970-2018

C. Restrooms

Our survey covers only free-standing restrooms, not recreation center restrooms or porta-potties. There are 42 free-standing restrooms in 36 parks. We surveyed 20 of those restrooms on October 20. Chart 9 shows the results.

For various reasons some restrooms were locked. One example is Officer Willie Wilkins Park which remains locked due to long-term abuse of the facility. Attempts were once made to reopen this restroom but they were short-lived since trashing continued. In some cases, where the restroom has been closed because of needed repairs, porta-potties are provided but the maintenance of those units has been unreliable. Generally, where there are homeless encampments the restrooms are unusable for the general public.

The restroom maintenance schedule calls for a thorough daily cleaning and resupplying of every park restroom, including:

- Wash down walls and floors
- Refill soap dispensers where applicable
- Refill toilet paper and hand towel dispensers
- Remove trash from interior litter receptacles and perimeter receptacles within a 50 foot radius
- Sweep and wash down entrances and perimeter

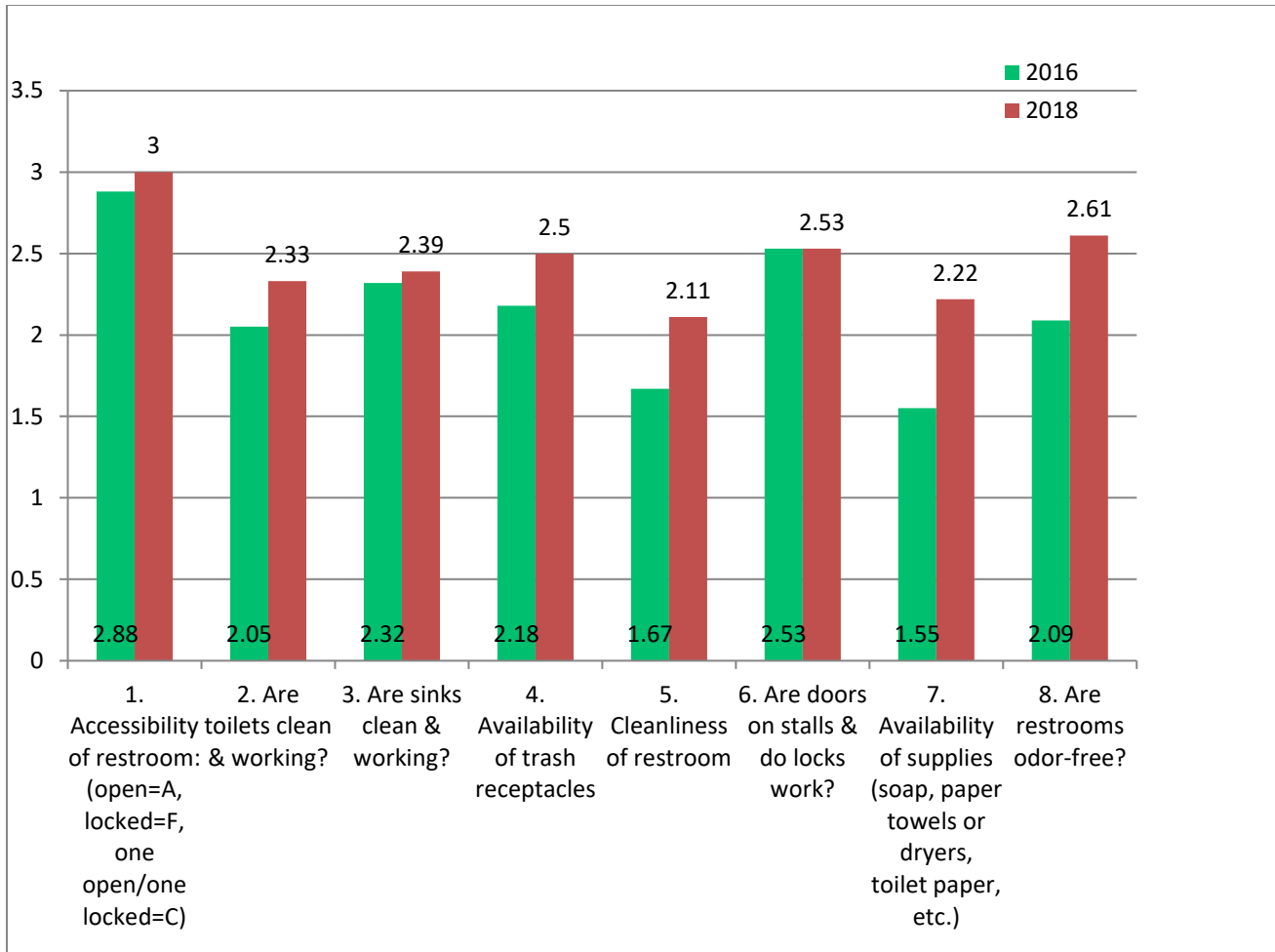


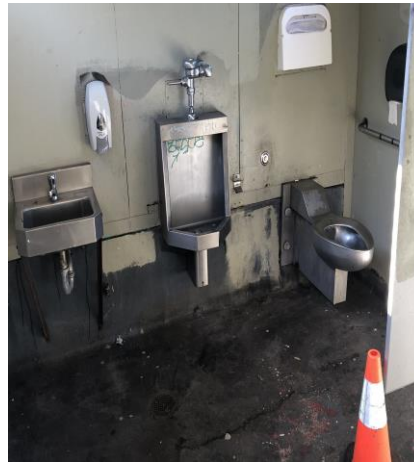
Chart 9: Restroom Conditions, 2016/2018

The free-standing restrooms are supposed to be open to the public seven days a week during park hours. On the morning of our survey, conditions at 20 restrooms were assessed. Of those, 13 were fully accessible, 4 had one side—men’s or women’s—locked and 3 were fully locked. In Chart 9 note that no question received above a 3 (equivalent of B) average rating. In fact, most averages were in the C- to C+ range.

The photos on the following page profile restroom conditions observed by our surveyors. They range from Maxwell Park, which has been beautifully tiled by neighborhood children, to Sobrante Park, which has been locked for years. The cumulative rating score for each park (e.g., the average of the eight rating factors) is noted. We have also included a few direct quotes from our surveyors indicating what they observed.



Montclair
Cumulative restroom score: 3.125



Central Reservoir
Cumulative restroom score: 2.375



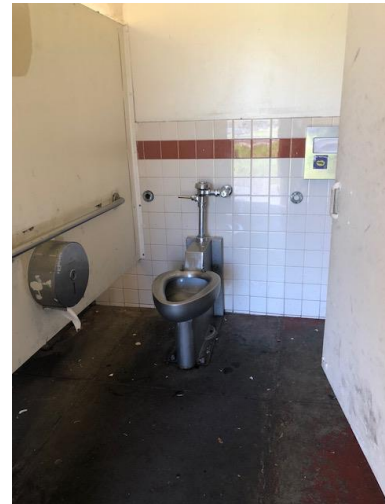
Officer Willie Wilkins
Cumulative restroom score: Zero



DeFremery
Cumulative restroom score: 1.875



Dimond
Cumulative restroom score: 3.75



Eastshore/Astro
Cumulative restroom score: 3.375



Maxwell
Cumulative restroom score: 3.83



Sobrante
Cumulative restroom score: Zero

The photos speak volumes about restroom conditions but many of the worst restrooms are not included in this montage. The bathrooms at Eastshore/Lakeview Library and Dimond get high marks. Others, less so. The bathrooms at Sobrante and Officer Willie Wilkins have been closed for several years, the former due to a fire, the latter because of abuse by park denizens.

High volume use of bathrooms presents a particular challenge to Public Works. Only 4.5 custodial positions are currently allocated to the maintenance of Outside Restrooms/Pools. These few crew members are tasked with cleaning all of the open free-standing restrooms once a day (more frequently at enterprise facilities) from Monday to Friday; however, only two weekend workers cover the same territory when usage, especially in summer months, is at its peak. Keeping 42 restrooms functional, clean and well-stocked over busy weekends often proves a challenge that cannot be met by only two maintenance workers and results in unhappy park users.

We cannot stress enough the importance of increased restroom maintenance for a good park experience, especially for parents and their children. Park users tell us they will not take their children to a park that does not have a clean restroom available. With just an additional two custodial positions restrooms could be locked at night so they wouldn't be trashed and enhanced weekend service, so drastically needed, could be applied.

Sample Surveyor Comments on Park Restrooms

"Restrooms are horrible!"
(Lafayette)

"Locked" (Arroyo Viejo)

"Clean and stocked" (Cesar Chavez)

"Recently renovated but already vandalized by graffiti" (Montclair)

"No trash receptacles" (Hardy)

"Soap, but not much else" (Lowell)

"Men's room missing partition"
(Central Reservoir)

"Women's room- good condition, locks working. Men's room-so-so conditions no tissue, no locks, and smells." (Eastshore)

"Some stalls without toilet paper— it's not clear where it's supposed to be held when it's available."
(Dimond)

"Missing lock in men's restroom stall hand dryer not working no water in one of the sinks of women's restroom" (Shepherd Canyon)

"Both doors locked—smells terrible" (Officer Willie Wilkins)

"Only two of six stalls working"
(Union Point)

D. Playgrounds and Athletic Fields

Two of the recreational features common to most community and neighborhood parks in Oakland are playgrounds and athletic fields. All but a few of the parks surveyed in 2018 have a playground or tot lot and most have ballfields or other multi-purpose fields. The condition of these facilities defines the user experience for park visitors; playgrounds and fields are the reason many visitors come to the park in the first place.

Chart 10 indicates the condition of playgrounds in 2016 and 2018. The questions reflect key attributes of playgrounds, including the condition of play equipment, the condition of the sand or fibar (engineered wood fiber) beneath the equipment, the condition of rubberized surfaces in the playground, and the adequacy of seating areas for parents. Overall, the scores show slight improvements in all categories. However, the average remains in the “C+” range in most categories, and an unacceptably large number of parks are still scoring “D’s” and “F’s.”

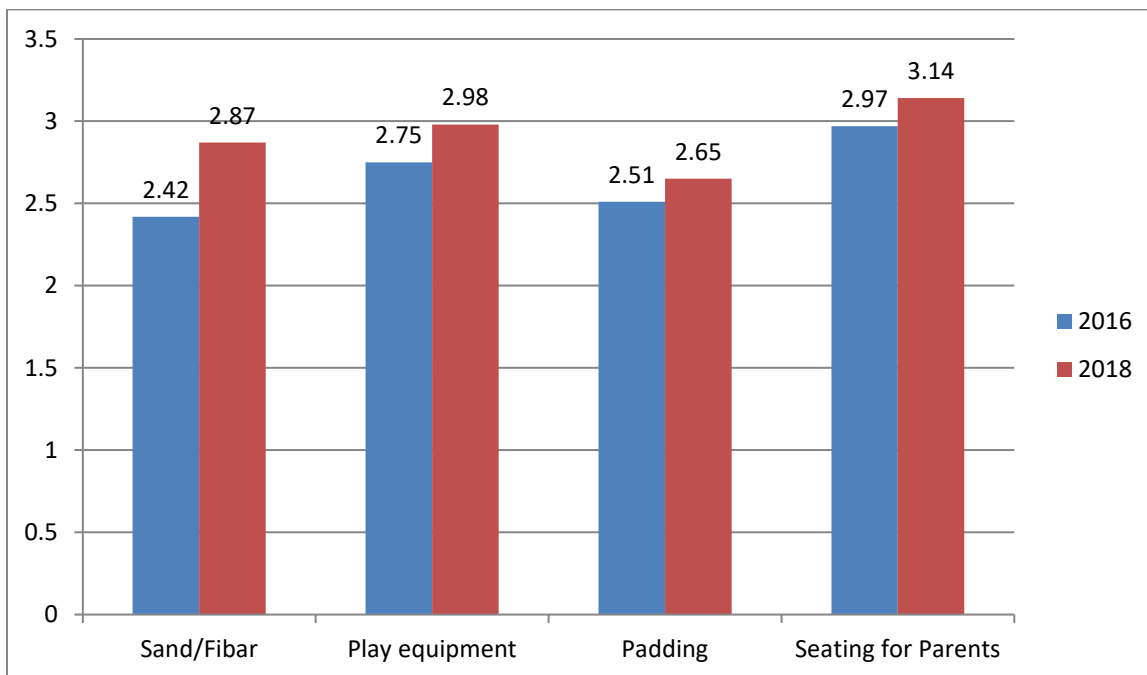


Chart 10: Scores for Playground Condition, 2016 and 2018



Vandalized swings at Columbian Gardens Park



Tot lot at Sobrante Park

For playground equipment, including swings, tot lots, climbing structures, and similar amenities, the average score was 2.98 in 2018, up from 2.75 in 2016. Community parks scored better than the neighborhood parks in 2018, averaging 3.11 compared to 2.95. There were six parks with scores of “D” or “F,” compared to eight in 2016.

Sand/Fibar condition scores were slightly lower, averaging 2.87. This was an improvement from the 2016 score of 2.42. Again, the community park scores in 2018 (3.13) were higher than the neighborhood parks (2.80). For rubberized surfaces, scores increased from 2.51 in 2016 to 2.65 in 2018.

Holes in the rubberized play surfaces remain a persistent problem, especially under slides and swings. The name “safety surface” loses all meaning when there is no cushion for children to land on if they take a tumble. These areas of the surface wear out quickly and must be patched to prevent injuries when children fall. The backlog of patching requests is extensive and the repair is expensive. On the positive side, the Public Works Agency is trying a new rubberized tile surface in its latest installation, which is purportedly more resilient. The photos on the next page provide a sampler of current conditions.



Clockwise from top left: Playground surfaces at Bella Vista, Hellman, Manzanita, Montclair, Officer Willie Wilkins, and Willow Mini-Park

While the condition of many playgrounds have improved, the reverse is true for athletic fields (see Chart 11). Average scores for field condition declined from 3.08 in 2016 (a solid “B” grade) to 2.78 in 2018 (barely a C+). Many fields showed signs of overuse and stress from years of drought, while others were overwatered or not watered at all. Field equipment, such as chain-link backstop fencing, was damaged in some locations. Fields in neighborhood parks generally ranked higher than the community parks, with average scores of 2.89 and 2.38 respectively. The low score for community park ballfields is of particular concern given the reliance on these fields for youth sports and the shortage of athletic fields in the East Bay as a whole.

Similar low scores were observed for bleacher condition. The average score dropped from 3.22 in 2016 to 2.83 in 2018. Bleachers are prone to vandalism and appear to be suffering from deferred maintenance in some cases. On a positive note, gopher damage to fields was less severe in 2018 than it was in 2016. Two years ago, the cumulative score was 2.49. In 2018, it was 3.2, a significant improvement. Still, there were five parks with “D” or “F” grades with respect to gophers.

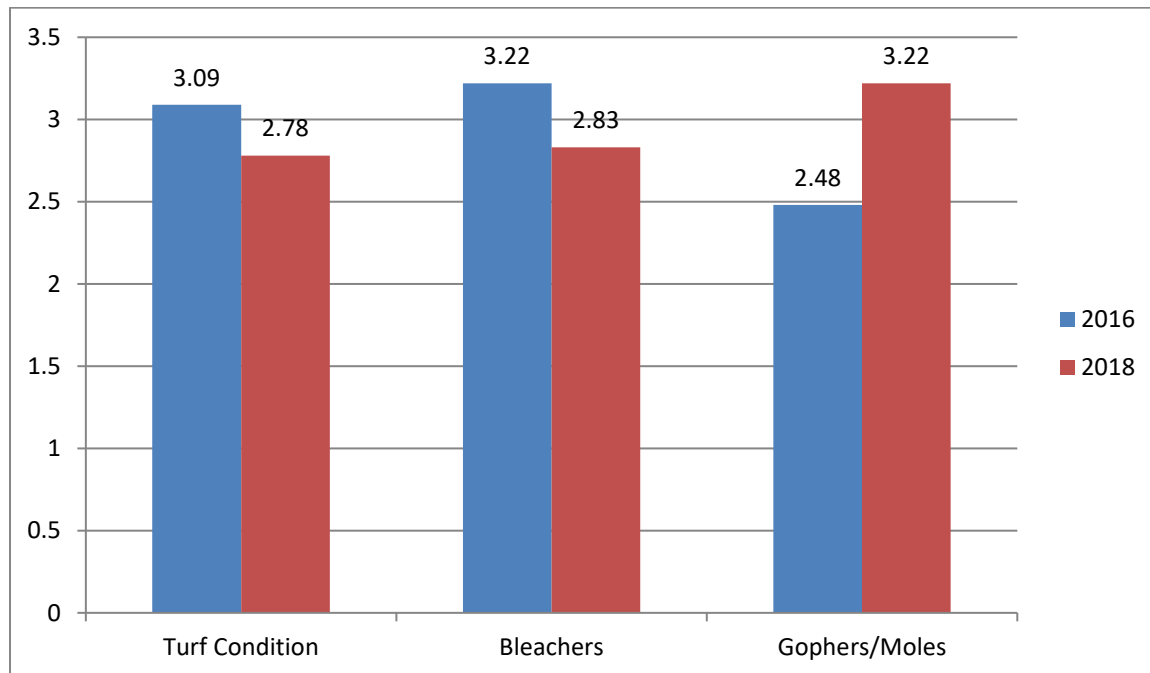


Chart 11: Scores for Athletic Field Condition, 2016 vs 2018



Brookfield/Ira Jinkins baseball field



Gopher holes at Ira Jinkins baseball field

VI. Park Maintenance: A Matter of Equity

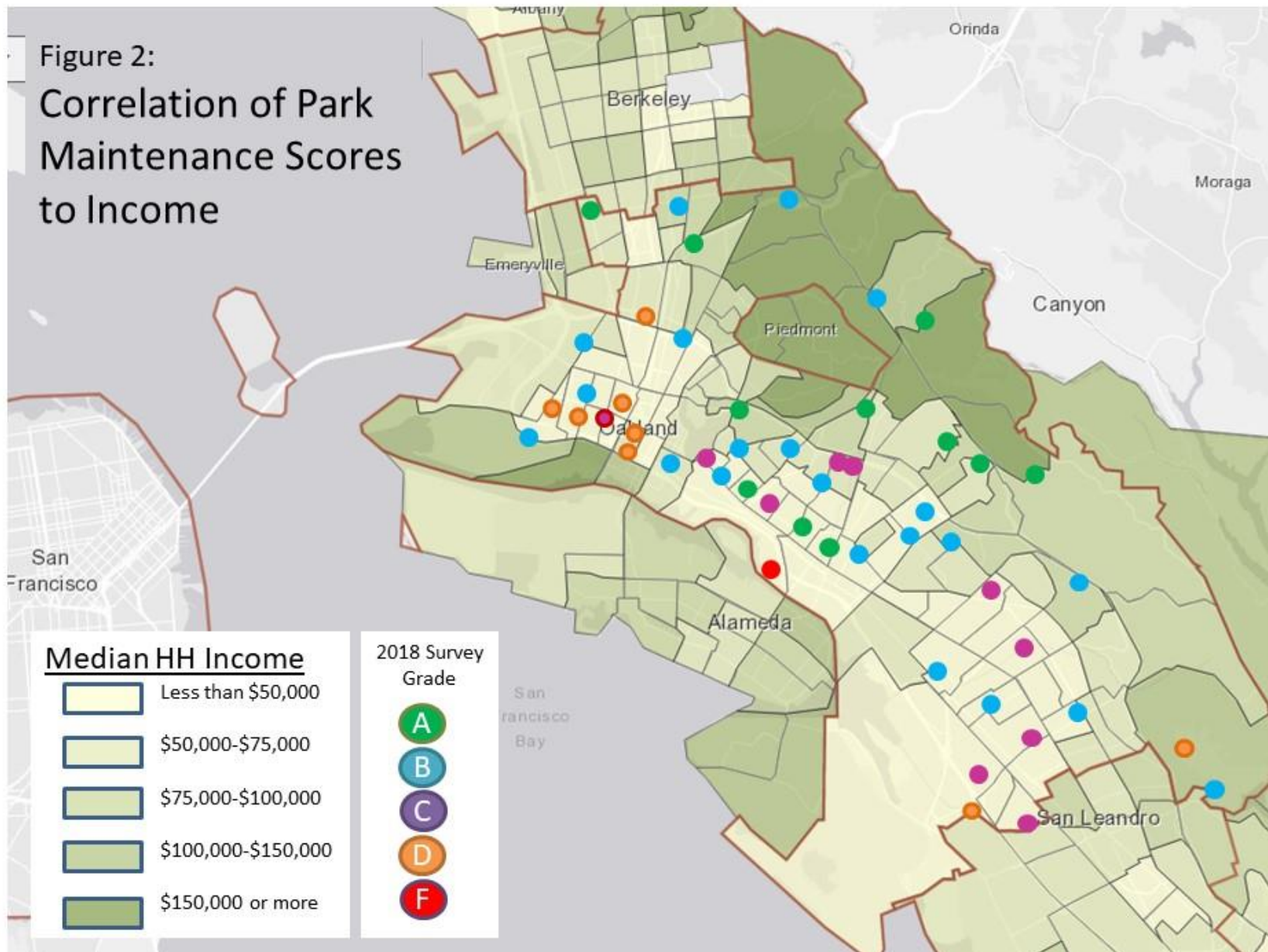
As Oakland aspires to be a more equitable city, it is worth taking a look at our park system. This year's survey revealed significant differences in park conditions across Oakland neighborhoods, with a strong correlation between household income and the condition of our parks.

As Figure 2 indicates, parks in the city's higher income neighborhoods were more likely to receive "A" and "B" scores, while the "D" and "F" parks were generally located in economically disadvantaged or gentrifying neighborhoods. High-scoring parks in the city's lower income neighborhoods tended to be those with active volunteer organizations, where City resources are supplemented by community resources. For example, DeFremery and Poplar Parks are neighborhood jewels, strongly supported by advisory groups and effective recreation directors. Other parks in West Oakland did not fare as well.

There are success stories in all parts of the City but the stories of park distress are most often in the neighborhoods that need parks the most. At the time of the last decennial census, 59% of City Council District 3's households had incomes below \$50,000, giving it the lowest median income among Oakland's seven Council District. District 3 also had the lowest park maintenance score in our survey, with a cumulative average of 1.82. By contrast, Council District 4 has the highest median income in the city, with 54% of its households earning over \$75,000 (2010 data). District 4 also had the highest park maintenance score—3.57. Districts 5 and 7 both have substantial concentrations of poverty—and average park maintenance scores of 2.17 and 2.13.

The disparities are even more troubling when specific facility types are considered. For example, children's play equipment in District 3 parks received a cumulative score of 1.80 (a D+) while play equipment in District 4 parks received a cumulative score of 3.86 (A-). Turf condition in Districts 3, 6, and 7 parks were all below 2.75, while scores in the other Council Districts were all 3.0 or better. We must do more to close these gaps if we are to be a fair and just city.

Figure 2:
Correlation of Park Maintenance Scores
to Income



Stellar Parks

Special mention is well deserved for the nine parks that received A's-the highest *Overall Rating*: Golden Gate, Hardy, Eastshore/Astro, Avenue Terrace, Dimond, Redwood Heights, Shepherd Canyon, Josie de la Cruz, and Pinto Ranch Recreation Area. The high scores for Josie de la Cruz, in particular, are laudable. Sustained community investment has made this park an essential resource in a neighborhood with high social and economic needs and very little access to open space.



Josie de la Cruz Park

We have included a few Survey photos of the stellar parks on the next page.



The Neighbors behind Neighborhood Parks

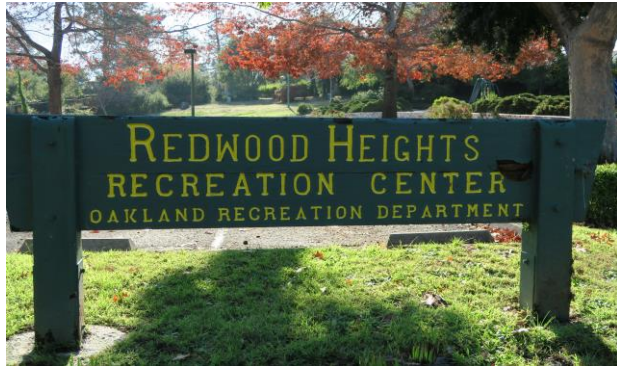
We'd like to give a shout out to the neighborhood groups that invest their time and energies to improve conditions in their parks. There are dozens of groups attached to parks, some of which have been working together for decades. Some of these groups meet on a monthly basis, others on designated workdays throughout the year. They weed, rake, plant, paint, tile, plant trees, etc. We caught a glimpse of one such group working on the day of our survey at William Wood.



Golden Gate (Council District 1)



Hardy Park (Council District 1)



Redwood Heights (Council District 4)



Eastshore/ Astro (Council District 2)



Avenue Terrace (Council District 4)



Shepherd Canyon (Council District 4)



Dimond (Council District 4)

Parks in Jeopardy

In reports prior to and including 2016 we chose parks for the jeopardy list that received an F rating for *Park Overall*. They were generally the smaller tot lots with the exception of Union Point in 2016, and they were in poor condition--graffiti plagued, often used by local gangs and off-limits to local families. Union Point was the only park to receive an F rating in the 2018 survey. This year's list, presented in Table 4 below, includes the sole F and the nine parks that were rated D. Comments from the surveyors are included for each park.

Table 4: Parks in Jeopardy

| Council District | Park | Overall Rating | Surveyors' Comments |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Grove Shafter | D | There is no park design here and it is disconnected from the neighborhood because of freeway underpass.- <i>Gretchen Till</i> |
| 3 | Jefferson Square | D | Park is not utilized due to homeless encampments. Signage is out of date and faded.- <i>Ray Oducayen</i> |
| 3 | Lafayette Square | D | Restrooms used by homeless and are unacceptable. Play equipment unsafe.- <i>Ray Oducayen</i> |
| 3 | Marsten Campbell | D | Good facilities (ball diamond, playground, picnic tables) but in bad condition.- <i>Donald Cooper</i> |
| 3 | Wade Johnson | D | |
| 3 | Willow Mini | D | Users report bathrooms cleaned daily but that missing play structure/grills are years-old problems.- <i>Elizabeth Brandon</i> |
| 5 | Central Reservoir | D | The two main draws of this park are the playing field and basketball court. Both are in poor condition.- <i>Terry Boom</i> |
| 5 | Union Point | F | Outstanding park that is completely unusable- <i>Kate Klingensmith</i> |
| 7 | Hellman | D | This appears to be a forgotten little park behind a school. In fact, the lack of a park sign on the road and then the long path to the park makes one wonder if anybody knows it's there. The field is so marshy in autumn, before the rains, one wonders what it is like during the rainy season. Tiny play area with some play equipment that seems to have no purpose.- <i>Ken Lupoff</i> |
| 7 | Columbian Gardens | D | This park is very forlorn, neglected, and depressing. - <i>Barry Miller</i> |

Five of the ten parks in jeopardy are located in Council District 3, which includes West Oakland and much of Downtown. This area has been particularly hard hit by the recent housing crisis, with some of the most rapid increases in housing prices and rents in the Bay Area and a growing number of unsheltered residents. The parks have become a place of refuge for displaced Oaklanders, with recurring homeless encampments in Jefferson and Lafayette Squares, Mosswood Park, and other neighborhood and community parks. In some cases, unsheltered residents have converted tot lots and other park facilities into lean-tos, making these facilities unusable for children. Once this takes place, the park begins to feel unwelcome to many user groups. Park amenities such as restrooms and picnic areas can quickly become compromised as they are used beyond their capacity by park residents.

Even where there is not a visible homeless presence, some parks convey a sense of neglect or even despair. For example, the swings and climbing equipment at Columbian Gardens Park in East Oakland were vandalized years ago and have never been replaced. There is evidence of illegal dumping and the picnic facilities are unusable. Likewise, Wade Johnson Park abuts a recycling center, with illegal dumping on the perimeter. These are not welcoming spaces, but they are the public face of the neighborhood.

The photographs and summaries below illustrate the extent of the problems at the “parks in jeopardy.”

Grove Shafter (CD1) is a segmented park, one area on 34th Street and MLK, the other part on MLK and 36th Street. The section on 34th Street has long been closed to the general public. The 36th Street section has four basketball practice areas, all with nets and decent surfacing. It also has a dog run. However, the park perimeter is a dump site and homeless tents populate the areas across the street and under the freeway. The park is now the gathering place for the homeless living on MLK. On the day it was surveyed it was strewn with litter, needles were found and the park benches were in very poor condition. It is, as the surveyor wrote, “disconnected from the residential neighborhood,” but, has become its own residential area for the unhoused.





Willow Mini (CD 3/between 13th and 14th Streets at Willow): Here you will find an occasional pick-up basketball game in the half court and not much else healthy activity. Several years ago a fire destroyed the play area. The safety padding under the swings which sports a giant hole still hasn't been patched or replaced.

Wade Johnson (CD3/12th Street and Poplar) is located in an industrial area, right next to a recycling company and its perimeter is a dump site. Both Wade Johnson and Marsten Campbell have expansive fields that would be suitable for sports if they were in better condition.



Marsten Campbell (CD3/Market, between 16th-17th Streets) The picnic furniture-tables and benches-are broken and splintery, in desperate need of refurbishing and unsafe for use.



Lafayette Square



Jefferson Square

Lafayette and Jefferson Squares (CD3) are in Downtown Oakland. Hundreds of new homes have been built in this area in the last few years, and thousands of office workers are a few blocks away. At Lafayette Park, new neighbors are conflicted about taking their children to the attractive new play area because of the homeless people who occupy much of the park, even after the tent encampment was closed in late October. The neighborhood group organizes park cleanups and even engages some of the homeless in the task. However, their efforts have not transformed the park enough to make it a safe place. At Jefferson Square, the children’s play area and dog run have been colonized with tents and personal belongings. The baseball field and half basketball court are the only elements of the park unclaimed by the homeless.

Union Point (CD5): This park is located at 2311 Embarcadero. It was dedicated in 2005. Here’s what Waterfront Action wrote about the new park.

*Union Point Park is an exciting new nine-acre waterfront venue located near Coast Guard Island, just south of the [Embarcadero area shoreline](#). The park offers waterfront access, park activities, and attractive open space in an area of Oakland that has lacked such opportunities. It is owned and operated by the City of Oakland. [and] reflects the vision and collective efforts of a broad range of community groups, agencies, and individuals.*¹⁴



A little more than a decade later, the park is unusable for recreation.



¹⁴ <http://www.waterfrontaction.org/learn/parks/up.htm>

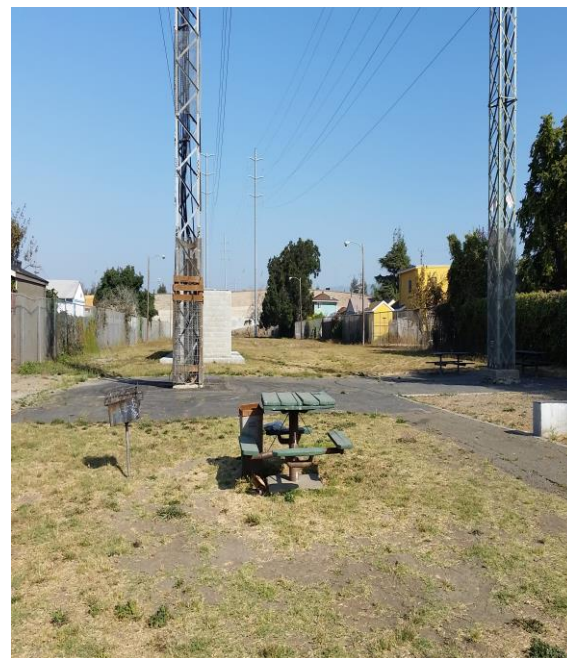


Central Reservoir Recreation Area (CD5):

This park is located next to the reservoir of the same name just off Highway 580 at Sheffield Avenue and 29th Street. It sports a playing field which has no grass, is rutted and uneven. The asphalt on the basketball court is covered with cracks.

Columbian Gardens (CD7): Located just off 880 and 98th Avenue, by all accounts it looks as though this park is closed although there is no signage to that effect. “

This park is very forlorn, neglected, and depressing. It looks more like a vacant lot (or the site of a future freeway) than a park. There are no facilities at all, and the grass is just weeds. The individual who surveyed this park reported “I almost gave this an “F” but chose “D” because there aren't enough facilities to rate.”



VII. Recommendations

Find a new stream of Funding for Maintenance of Existing Parks. We can no longer depend on the same four funding sources that have paid for park maintenance for decades.¹⁵ The City must increase resources dedicated to park maintenance and should consider a “portfolio” approach with multiple sources. We recommend the following specific actions:

- Pursue a dedicated ballot measure for park maintenance, ideally in 2020
- Expand and improve volunteerism and the Adopt-a-Park program
- Update and formalize the donor recognition process
- Explore other non-traditional funding opportunities, including equity-based grants through recent state bond measures.

Homelessness. The Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation believes that parks are for everybody—those with homes as well as those without homes. **All** Oaklanders deserve safe and easy access to our parks. Our annual survey revealed at least a half-dozen locations where the balance has tipped to the point where unsheltered residents have overwhelmed a neighborhood or community park. In some cases, other members of the general public are no longer able to access such spaces and the parks are no longer serving their intended function as places of recreation, beauty, environmental health, and neighborhood well-being.

Our organization urges the City to continue doing everything its power to alleviate the causes of homelessness and assist those in need. However, parks must not be the solution to the problem. They were not designed as overnight shelters or campgrounds and should not be reimaged as such. Healthy communities need healthy parks where people of all abilities and backgrounds can safely gather, relax, and play. In many parts of Oakland, this is not currently possible and thousands of Oaklanders are losing out as a result.

Increase Staffing and Fill Current Vacancies for Gardeners. Public Works has slowly swapped Gardener positions for part-time positions over the last 20 years until current staffing for part-timers exceeds that for gardeners. Only trained gardeners have the skills and the experience to apply the practices that can prevent loss of landscaping and teach them to crew members. They are precious guides and teachers who know best how to

¹⁵ Funds: 2310-Landscaping and Lighting Assessment District, 172-Comprehensive Clean-Up, 1010-General Purpose, 4400-City Facilities

protect our parks by implementing a more rigorous schedule of preventive plant maintenance, which will save time and money in the long run.

Keep Restrooms Clean and Functional. Open, clean, functional and well-supplied restroom conditions are essential to the quality of the park experience. We strongly recommend increasing staffing by two FTEs which would enable the closing of restrooms at night when much of the damage is done to them. With extra staffing restrooms could be kept cleaner and well-supplied on weekends when park use is the highest.

Improve Sports Field Maintenance and Playground Repair. This will attract more Oaklanders to use our facilities and this will foster increased volunteerism.

Improve Park Safety and Security. Vandalism and unlawful behavior continue to be a problem in some of our parks. We urge the City to explore solutions such as bringing back the park rangers or creating a special unit of OPD trained in park culture and protocol, and addressing the physical design of parks to make them safer or more vandal resistant. We would welcome the chance to be part of a community dialogue that considers the options.

VIII. Conclusion

We wish we could be more sanguine about park conditions. After all, the results of this year's survey compared to 2016 were slightly improved. OPW Park Services Manager Brian Carthan attributes that improvement, in part, to the transfer of homeless encampment responsibilities to KOCB and thus, the freeing up of hours that can now be dedicated to gardening and landscape care. However, we remain deeply concerned about the entire park system.

We feel that the improvement in the ratings belies the actual condition of our parks. Is it possible that we have become so used to the dry conditions, poor playing fields and courts and park disrepair that we are now accepting a diminished level of maintenance that would have been anathema years ago? We know, with certainty, that increasingly inadequate resources for park maintenance have negatively impacted our parks. Has this just become the status quo?

Of course, the problems we presently encounter in our parks are not solely the outcome of diminished maintenance resources. The homeless crisis now looms large over the entire park network. We see that since our 2016 survey the small encampments in some parks have spread to take over those parks. Where there were no encampments just two years ago entire parks have become parking lots for tents, with park perimeters converted to dump sites.

We also acknowledge that many years of drought have wreaked permanent damage on the landscape of many of our parks. Yet, we see parks in other nearby cities that are in better condition than ours which leads us to believe that funding for park maintenance has not received the attention it urgently needs. If that is indeed the case, we implore City officials to rethink budget priorities and begin to allocate the much needed resources to making our park system a source of universal civic pride.

Thank you!

We wish to thank all those who participated in our survey and in the writing of this report—our stewards, our surveyors, our Foundation editors and our Oakland Public Works advisors. We prepare this report and the subsequent Power Point presentation in a quest to shed light on the problems associated with our parks and bring resolution to those issues.

Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation is dedicated to making our park system outstanding through its work in obtaining capital improvement grants, providing scholarships for programming, providing financial support for park groups and lobbying for much needed resources for park maintenance. We know that functional and well-maintained parks help to create healthy and happy future citizens and provide peaceful retreats from the bustle of city life. We ask the readers of this report to do their part to help make our parks the best that they can be.

APPENDIX

Surveyed Parks

| District 1 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Bushrod Park | CP | A/B | 1 |
| Chabot Park | NP | B/B | 1 |
| Golden Gate Park | NP | B/A | 1 |
| Grove Shafter Park | NP | B/D | 2 |
| Hardy Park | NP | C/A | 1 |
| District 2 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
| Athol Plaza Park | NP | C/C | 2 |
| Bella Vista Park | NP | B/B | 2 |
| Clinton Square Park | NP | A/B | 2 |
| Eastshore Park (Embarcadero & Astro Park) | NP | C/A | 1 |
| FM Smith Park | NP | B/B | 1 |
| Franklin Park | NP | C/A | 1 |
| Garfield Ball Field | NP | C/A | 2 |
| Lincoln Square Park | NP | B/B | 1 |
| San Antonio Park | CP | D/C | 1 |
| District 3 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
| DeFremery Park | CP | B/B | 1 |
| Jefferson Square Park | NP | B/D | 2 |
| Lafayette Square Park | SU | C/D | 2 |
| Lowell Park | NP | B/C | 1 |
| Marston Campbell Park | NP | C/D | 2 |
| Mosswood Park | CP | A/B | 1 |
| Poplar Park /Willie Keyes Rec Ctr | NP | B/B | 1 |
| Snow Park * | NP | B/ | 2 |
| South Prescott Park | NP | D/B | 2 |
| Wade Johnson Park [aka Cole] | NP | C/D | 2 |
| Willow Mini Park | NP | D/D | 2 |

*Snow, Rainbow and Stonehurst were not surveyed in 2018 as they were closed, inaccessible, or under construction on the day of the survey.

| District 4 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Allendale Park | NP | A/B | 1 |
| Avenue Terrace Park | NP | B/A | 2 |
| Brookdale Park | CP | B/B | 1 |
| Dimond Park | CP | B/A | 1 |
| Montclair Park (RC) | CP | B/B | 1 |
| Redwood Heights Park | NP | A/A | 1 |
| Shepherd Canyon Park | NP/RCA | A/A | 1 |
| District 5 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
| Central Reservoir Recreation Area | NP | B/D | 2 |
| Cesar Chavez Park | NP | B/B | 2 |
| Josie De La Cruz Park | NP | B/A | 1 |
| Manzanita Park | NP | C/B | 1 |
| Union Point Park | NP | F/F | 2 |
| William Wood Park | NP | C/C | 2 |
| District 6 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
| Arroyo Viejo Park | CP | B/C | 1 |
| Burckhalter Park | NP | B/B | 1 |
| Concordia Park | NP | C/C | 1 |
| Lion's Creek Crossing (formerly Coliseum Gardens) | NP | C/B | 2 |
| Maxwell Park | NP | B/B | 2 |
| Owen Jones/Pinto Park | NP | B/A | 1 |
| Rainbow Park | NP | D/F | 1 |
| District 7 | OSCAR Codes | Park Overall Rating 2016/18 | Service Level |
| Brookfield Park/Ira Jinkins | CP | B/C | 1 |
| Columbian Gardens Park | NP | F/D | 3 |
| Hellman Park | NP | A/D | 2 |
| Officer Willie Wilkins Park | NP | D/C | 2 |
| Sheffield Village Park | NP | A/B | 1 |
| Sobrante Park | NP | C/C | 1 |
| Stonchurst Park | NP | A/F | 2 |
| Tassafaronga Park | NP | B/B | 1 |
| Verdese Carter Park | NP | C/B | 2 |



2018 LOVE YOUR PARKS DAY SURVEY

** Please circle or check only one choice for each item except where noted otherwise. (A=Excellent, F=Failure)*

Category/Question numbers correspond to Survey Monkey numbering.

9. LITTER

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| a. Are the grounds free of litter? | A | B | C | D | F | |
| b. Are trash receptacles available? | A | B | C | D | F | |
| c. Are trash receptacles relatively empty? | A | B | C | D | F | |

10. GREENERY

GRASS & GROUND COVER

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| a. Is the grass mowed? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| b. Is the grass edged? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| c. Is the grass/ground cover free of animal/bird droppings? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| d. Is the ground cover/grass free of bare spots? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |

FLOWERS & SHRUBS (No flowers or shrubs? Choose N/A)

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| e. Are the planted areas free of weeds? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| f. Condition of shrubs or flowers? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| g. Are shrubs pruned? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |

TREES

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| h. Condition of trees? (any dead branches, etc.?) | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| i. Are trees pruned? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |

11. RESTROOMS Freestanding Only (NOT in Rec Centers, NOT porta-potties) No freestanding restroom?--circle N/A for all.

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| a. Accessibility of restroom (open=A, locked=F, one open, one locked=C) | A | | C | | F | N/A |
| b. Are toilets clean & working? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| c. Are sinks clean & working? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| d. Availability of trash receptacles? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| e. Cleanliness of restroom? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| f. Are doors on stalls & do locks work? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| g. Availability of supplies (soap, paper towels or dryers, toilet paper, etc.) | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| h. Are restrooms free of odor? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|-----|
| 12. OUTDOOR SPORTS AREAS | | | | | | |
| a. Condition of turf/grass (sports fields only)? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| b. Condition of court (tennis or basketball) surfaces? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| c. Condition/existence of netting (tennis or basketball)? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| d. Condition of court lines (tennis or basketball)? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| e. Condition of bleachers? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| 13. HARDSCAPE, FURNITURE, SIGNAGE | | | | | | |
| a. Condition of fencing or gates? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| b. Condition of benches/seating areas? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| c. Condition of walkways? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| d. Condition of park signs? (No sign?=F) | A | B | C | D | F | |
| 14. GOPHER/RAT HOLES AND MOUNDS [No turf/grass? Choose N/A] | | | | | | |
| Is the grass/turf free of gopher/rat holes & mounds? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| 15. OUTDOOR CHILDREN'S PLAY AREAS | | | | | | |
| a. Cleanliness of sand or fibar under play structures? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| b. Condition of play equipment? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| c. Condition of safety padding under play structures? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| d. Condition of seating for parents? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| 16. PICNIC AREAS (Picnic areas are designated by picnic tables with benches) | | | | | | |
| a. Availability and condition of trash receptacles in the picnic area? | A | B | C | D | F | |
| b. Condition of barbecue grills (no grills? N/A)? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| c. Condition of picnic benches & tables? | A | B | C | D | F | N/A |
| WATER FOUNTAINS | | | | | | |
| 17. Are all water fountains in this park working? (No water fountains? Check N/A) | G Yes | | G No | | G N/A | |
| 18. If you answered NO check the areas below where they are not working. | | | | | | |
| G Children's play areas | G Picnic Areas | G Restrooms | G Sports Fields or Courts | G N/A | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--------------|-------|--------------|---------|------|
| PARK USER IMPACT | | | | | | | | | | |
| GRAFFITI | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Is the park generally free of graffiti? | | | | | | A | B | C | D | F |
| 20. If you found graffiti in this park where was most of it? (check 1-2 only.) | | | | | | | | | | |
| G Play equipment G Tables/benches G Restrooms G Sports courts G Signs G Fences or walls | | | | | | | | | | |
| PUBLIC HEALTH/NEEDLES | | | | | | | | | | |
| 21. Did you find needles in this park? | | | | | | G Yes, a lot | | G Yes, a few | | G No |
| DUMPING | | | | | | | | | | |
| 22. If there is a creek in this park is there dumping in the creek? | | | | | | | G Yes | | G No | G |
| HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS | | | | | | | | | | |
| 23. Estimate the number of homeless tents/shelters you see in this park. | | | | | | 0 | 1-5 | 6-10 | 11+ | |
| 24. Is there any dumping at the site of the tents or shelters? | | | | | | A lot | Some | None | N/A | |
| 25. Are people living in their RVs/vans/cars around the perimeter of the park? | | | | | | G Yes | | G No | G Maybe | |
| 26. PLEASE CIRCLE AN <u>OVERALL RATING FOR THIS PARK.</u> | | | | | | A | B | C | D | F |

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Many thanks to the individuals who contributed most importantly to this report with their park surveys and photos.